

Novosti

Balalaika
NEWS

July
2023

Issue No 44/2023

SARDINES IN PUTTY AND PIROZHKI AT THE STRATHFIELD RUSSIAN CLUB

The Sydney Balalaika Orchestra had the pleasure of performing two concerts in May and June. The concert on 20 May, in Putty, resumed an old tradition. Since the Covid lockdowns disrupted our concert schedules, it had been three years since we had given a concert in our favourite bush setting. Most people have never heard of Putty. It is hidden away in a little valley about an hour and a half's drive from Sydney on the Windsor-Singleton road. This nano-metropolis boasts a couple of cottages and one tiny little hall where our concert was held.



Traditionally our Putty concerts have been well attended, prompting the question, where does everyone come from? A quick glance outside gives a clue. Just beside the hall is a line of country post boxes, revealing a bush population of city escapees, artistic hermits, nature lovers and hobby farmers, among whom is one of our longer serving musicians, Martha Babineau.

'These concerts have been some of our more popular events,' said



Martha. 'It has become quite a tradition here. There's a bar, we put on a meal, so players and audience can inter-mingle. Sometimes we even put on a barbeque and a bonfire afterwards. It's all very informal. It's nice to be back to our annual SBO concert after the covid interruption.'

Another advantage of the SBO's Putty concert is that because the hall is so small, there is no need for much amplification. 'In these days of wailing electric guitars and synthesised key-boards, the pure sound of

these lovely Russian folk instruments can be so sweet on the ears,' said bass-domra player Patrick O'Neill. But it was quite a crush. 'Squeezing 20 musicians onto this tiny stage was not easy,' said musical director, Victor Serghie. 'Even sardines would have had more wriggle-room.'



And there was no room for me. I had to perch up on top of some very rickety steps. One mis-step backwards could have added interesting percussion and other sound effects!'

Holding a Putty concert on a May afternoon had one distinct advantage. No moths! In pre-covid days, these concerts were held in April at night.

At that time of year the Putty valley is often invaded by a host of giant wood-moths attracted by the lights and commotion. Though harmless, they flutter in our faces and generally terrorise those audience members unused to Putty's insect residents. As these are some of the biggest moths in the world, they are hard to ignore!



On Sunday, 25 June the SBO played to a large and enthusiastic audience at the Strathfield Russian Club. There is a tradition that these ticket sales are usually made at the door. Still, before the event, there were only 40 pre-concert ticket sales! Would anyone turn up?

We needn't have worried. It was a full house again! The concert started with an old Russian favourite *Birch Tree in the Field*,



For more details please refer to our website

www.balalaika.com.au



leading into Dmitri Kuevda's vocal romance *I Met You* (Я Встретил Вас) based on a poem by Fyodor Tyutchev. It is one of the most famous Russian love songs, met with appreciative applause.



Other vocal highlights included *Once upon a December* sung by Natasha Tatarinoff, and both singers came together for the popular duet: *Tbilisi*. 'Natasha, who is emerging as a real success story, is adding to another of our SBO dynasties. Her father Andrew plays second domra!' said Victor. 'Petar Stojkov has a son and daughter also playing with us. We are a family business,' he said. Apart from the usual instrumental solos, the SBO quartet also performed *Midnight Express*. This is where

the orchestra's most spectacular instrument, the big contra-bass balalaika has a chance to boom out its dominating bass line under the giant leather plectrum of Adrian Lee.



After the first half, players and audience intermingled and ate tasty pirozhki in the foyer: fragrant Russian fried pies filled with mushroom or savoury mince. Pie in hand, one SBO habitué told us in no uncertain terms that there was something missing. 'Where was Victor's usual explanation of all the instruments?' she asked. 'They're all such funny shapes,' said another. 'We want to know all about them!'

This was quickly relayed to Victor Serghie. So at the beginning of the second half, he did his show-and-tell. 'They usually tell me I talk too much,' joked Victor as he ran through the round shaped domras and the triangular balalaikas. And still the audience wanted more. One bass guitar player in the audience, asked if he could come up and actually try and play the contra-bass balalaika after the concert! 'I need to tell you we are always looking to recruit more players,' said Victor, 'So if you are interested in playing one of them, talk to me afterwards!'



up another of SBO dynasties, as Michael is our mandola player Martha Babineau's brother. We wish him well in his retirement.

The other who played her last concert was one of our newer players. Midori Aoki. Midori is from Japan and plays alto domra and balalaika. 'Midori is not only a good musician, but she speaks and writes fluently in Russian,' said Victor. 'We shall miss her in the front row and we wish her well back in Japan. But maybe we can go up and play with her again one day,' he said. 'We have never done a concert tour of Japan!' Midori has been in Australia as correspondent and bureau chief for NHK, Japan's Broadcasting Corporation. After three years in Sydney, her posting is over and she has been recalled to Japan.

And there was meaning behind that remark. It was a sad day indeed for the SBO who after this concert had to say goodbye to two of our players. One was leader of the guitar section Michael den Boer, who is emigrating to North Queensland. '25 years ago I first heard this orchestra play. I found the music intoxicating. So I have been playing with it for a quarter of a century now. But it's time to retire,' he said sadly. This breaks



SAVE THE DATE – SUNDAY 15 OCTOBER IN RICHMOND.

A joint concert with Chorella Choir

We are excited to announce a joint concert with Chorella Choir in Richmond Club Ltd. on Sunday 15 October. The Chorella Choir usually sings acapella, and performs Renaissance madrigals, gospel, world and folk music. A shared interest in Georgian and Russian folk music has brought us together for this rare treat. The Chorella Choir performs under the artistic direction of Dr Anthony Linden Jones md.

When: Sunday 15 October, 2pm Richmond Club Ltd

Where: Corner of East Market and Francis Streets Richmond

Enquiries: TBA

CAN YOU HELP?

The SBO is always seeking to perform at new venues. Maybe you know a venue where we can introduce our beautiful Russian folk music to a new audience. We also need additional musicians, so if you come up with any ideas please contact our Musical Director,

Victor Serghie on 0409 058 895 or

our President, **Richard She on 0402 179 098.**

