

Novosti

Balalaika
NEWS

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SBO – WE'RE BACK IN TUNE!

Bzzzzz.... a beetle rockets in to the SBO rehearsal room, zooming toward the light. It is 7:45pm on Wednesday night; the tempo of arrivals accelerates. One by one, musicians sign in, greeting each other like long lost relatives. The 'clean' and 'used' pen jars have given way to the QR code; our masks have at last come off. We are starting to feel like 2021 might be full of music again.

As we set up our stands and chairs, the beetle settles on the wall, eyeing the open door to ensure there's still a way out. A cool breeze flows through the mesh of the wide, open windows, mingling with our chatter. Victor checks his phone. 'Richard will be late,' he announces. Yuri is back after a two year absence, sporting his trademark, mischievous smile.



Yuri Halay, back after a two year break

Everyone has a pandemic story. Bayan-player, George, doubled his part-time shifts at Bunnings with the surge of DIY in Sydney! American domrist, Patrick, kept up with his US legal practice remotely, being grounded. Some started new jobs, some looked after frail parents, took on more baby-sitting of grandchildren – one player even finished writing her first novel in the shut-down. Domrist, Matt, took a leaf out of his

pet turtle's book: Torquill, the Eastern Snake-necked Turtle, knows how to hibernate while staying balanced and calm.....



Torquill

As the guitars tune up and the balalaikas purr, Mitzi spies the beetle with her well-trained eye, and shudders. 'Do you think we can shut the door?' she asks. Victor raises his right hand and scans the room. The door is gently closed. 'Are we ready?

Can I have an 'A?' he requests. Mitzi presses the key, extends her bellows, and Petar tunes up. 'Ready?' Victor smiles. We are back.

'Let's start with the Tale of Lake Baikal.'

'TALE OF LAKE BAIKAL'

This is one of the great orchestral pieces played by the SBO. It was arranged by the Soviet composer, Nikolai Budashkin, who was inspired by one of the many legends that exist around this gigantic lake. Lake Baikal is the largest freshwater lake in the world (by volume) and at 20-30 million years, is considered one of the world's oldest lakes.

There are many legends about how it came to be there. One concerns a rich man whose daughter, Angara, fell in love with someone not to her father's liking. When she escaped her father was grief-stricken. He could not stop weeping and his tears filled the lake. Angara lives on and is the name of the only river to flow out of Lake Baikal.

There are many other legends, some involving Bermuda-style triangles, others concern UFOs, but the best is an old Buryat legend of earthquakes, volcanoes and fire coming up from the



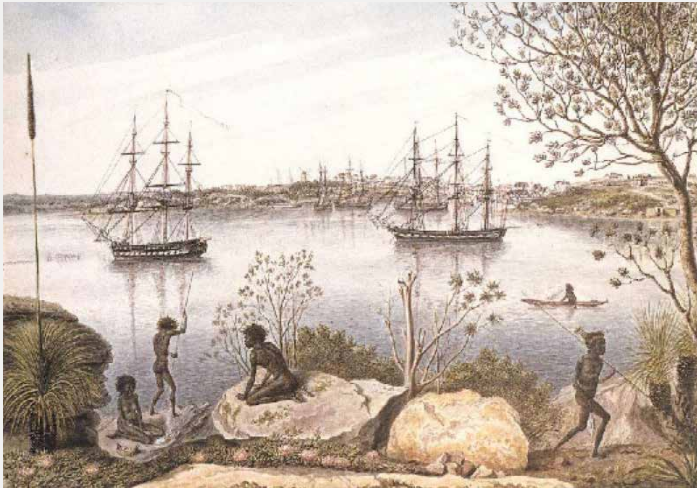
For more details please refer to our website
www.balalaika.com.au



deep. Eventually the people cried: 'Bai gal' (Fire Stop!). The fire stopped and the result was the lake; and actually it isn't too far from the truth. Lake Baikal is the result of a tectonic rift that is slowly tearing Siberia apart. It is 1,642 metres deep – the world's deepest freshwater lake. It's no wonder Budashkin was inspired.

The **Tale of Lake Baikal**, along with other magnificent orchestral and vocal pieces, will feature in the SBO's forthcoming CD.

SYDNEY BALALAIKA ORCHESTRA REMEMBERS MORE THAN TWO CENTURIES OF RUSSIAN NAVAL CONTACT WITH AUSTRALIA



View of Vostok and Mirny in Sydney Harbour (1820)

Two hundred years ago, two Russian ships under the overall command of Admiral Bellingshausen visited Sydney Harbour. They were part of a voyage of discovery that took them round Antarctica.

The Vostok (Восток) and the Mirny (Мирный, commanded by Admiral Lazarev) used Sydney as a base for almost a year.

Sydney was a convenient stop for ships en route to Russia's far eastern colonies, like Russian America (Alaska and California), as well as her Pacific fortresses in Hawaii. While here, they based themselves just opposite Sydney Cove on what came to be known as 'Russian Point', now Kirribilli Point. There would be many more Russian naval visits to Sydney in the coming years.

In January 1888, with Russian and Australian relationships none too cosy, a Russian corvette, the Rynda, sailed into Sydney Harbour. This time the visit coincided with Australia's centennial celebrations. After years of press stories about

an imminent Russian invasion, the Rynda's visit became yet another chapter in what came to be called the 'Russian Scare'. Why had Russians been allowed to inspect Newcastle's defences and coal facilities? Why had this warship been let into Sydney Harbour at all? – some of the public asked.

But the mood changed when one of the young officers on the ship was revealed to be a Romanov – Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, no less. There were now reports of Sydney's ladies going weak at the knees at the sight of a real live Grand Duke. And he was polite, and spoke excellent English. He charmed everyone – so the papers wrote – particularly, it seems, the Governor's wife, Lady Carrington. He may also have been the first Russian to set foot in New South Wales who could play a balalaika!



Once back in Russia, the Grand Duke married the Tsar's sister, Grand Duchess Xenia. Here he is (second from right) playing the balalaika in his household orchestra. Seated next to him is his wife, the Tsar's sister, Xenia, also holding a balalaika.

But there is another Australian connection in this photograph. Seated cross-legged on the floor, just to the left of his mother, is a young boy, the future Prince Andrei Romanov. His son,



Prince Michael, would settle in Sydney after being stationed here during WWII. He died in 2008 and is buried in the Russian Orthodox cemetery at Matraville.

He, too, played the balalaika.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

Sunday, 23 May 2021, 2pm – Galston Uniting Church
11 School Rd Galston NSW For enquiries: Robert Harris 0428 248 348

Sunday, 30 May 2021, 2pm – Panthers North Richmond
33 Beaumont Ave North Richmond NSW
For enquiries: Brian Fallon 4024 4033

Sunday, 1 August 2021, 2pm – Russian Club
7 Albert Rd Strathfield NSW For enquiries: 8850 3623

Sunday, 24th October 2021, 2pm - Gerringong Town Hall
106 Fern St Gerringong NSW For enquiries: 0413 967 385

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.**

