

International Dialogue



Dialogue of Cultures

Vienna Opera Ball

Outlook on Russia from Abroad

Business Today



Genius of the birthplace Music Festival

International dialogue

PUBLIC INITIATIVE MAGAZINE
«RUSSIAN CULTURE VIEWED FROM ABROAD»

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Editor's Letter



Dear readers

It's spring, and 2024 is already in full swing, but let us remember how it started for our initiative «Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad».

It was a promising start.

In one of the best hotels in St. Petersburg, the Ambassador Hotel, together with the Moscow Youth Chamber Orchestra, whose founder and artistic director is the well-known musician and public figure Valery Vorona, we celebrated the Russian Old New Year and invited friends and colleagues to this celebration.

The recognition of the initiative by the State Duma deputy Nikolai Burlyaev, People's Artist of the Russian Federation, whom I personally met during my regular trip to Moscow and who agreed to the publication in the «International Dialogue», was very important.

Nikolai Burlyaev believes that culture should be based on moral and ethical codes and spiritual categories, including those of Russian culture, as embodied in the life and work of the great Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose 180th anniversary is celebrated this year. This is the theme of «The Golden Fund of Russian Culture».

The section «Dialogue of Cultures» features an exclusive interview with one of the most active participants of this dialogue — conductor and producer Konstantin Orbelyan and presents the International Music Festival founded by him — Palaces of St Petersburg, which has been headed by Maria Safaryants, his wife, for nearly thirty years.

A significant event took place not so long ago at the Second St. Petersburg Gymnasium — the presentation of our project's debut novel «Dostoevsky's Venetian Mystery» by the famous Austrian actor and writer Michael Dangl, which was attended by the author.

I carefully follow cultural trends abroad and feel pleased when I notice positive, albeit still small, changes in restoring cultural dialogue with Russia.

An example of the first steps in this area was demonstrated at the world-famous Vienna Opera Ball, where Tchaikovsky's music was played — a fact that is not a matter of course these days.

The celebration of International Women's Day on the 8th of March in Vienna has also become truly international, which you can also read about in this issue.

Of course, we seek contacts with people from different countries who remain genuinely sympathetic and respectful of Russia, and we introduce them to our readers. For example, for Austrian sculptor Alexander Laabmair, who created the portrait bust of Vladimir Putin, the Russian president is an envoy, a link between East and West, while Peter Reissegger, a Doctor of Research Medicine, is convinced that Russian culture embodies enduring values.

The magazine opens with the section «News of Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry», the «International Dialogue» magazine being its information partner. This issue features information from Leonid Terekhov about the «Choose Your Own» project, which he is coordinating regionally, and an interview with Sergei Abramov, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The project «Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad» is run in close cooperation with the Society for Friendship with Austria, and you will also learn about its key activities.

Enjoy reading!

Yours,
Natalia Holzmüller

International initiative «Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad» Publishing book series



There are many people of goodwill in the world who not only love Russian literature, music, cinema, and ballet, but are also engaged in the most important work – building bridges of understanding and mutual respect between cultures and peoples. This new series aims to introduce Russian readers to the work of such people – true humanists who stand up for true, universal values.

«International Dialogue» magazine



The «International Dialogue» magazine was established to provide unbiased coverage of cultural and economic processes and events taking place in Russia and around the world.

The magazine focuses on informational and educational purposes. It is published quarterly, with separate issues in Russian and English.

«International Dialogue» magazine is an information partner of the Russianan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

YouTube channel «Bridge of Love» https://www.youtube.com/@Bridge_Of_Love



The «Bridge of Love» channel is one of the few sources of unbiased information about Russia beyond its borders, a kind of window to Russia.

The videos explore the interpenetration of cultures and traditions, the stories of those who are ready for dialogue and recognize the role of culture in improving the international situation.

Welcome to take part in our initiative!

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Sergey Katyrin, President of Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on new ways of business development



This year, Russia is chairing the BRICS international association. The Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is a member of its Business Council.

On January 1, new countries joined BRICS. Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Brazil were joined by Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia. The BRICS Business Council includes nine working groups in various areas: from infrastructure, manufacturing and financial sectors, vocational training, energy and green economy to agribusiness, deregulation, regional aviation and digital economy.

Sergey Katyrin:

«Now it is necessary not only to establish business councils in each new country, but also to set up nine working groups so that they get involved as soon as possible.

The BRICS Business Forum will be held, bringing together entrepreneurs from all ten countries of the organisation. For businesses,

this is undoubtedly a new opportunity for communication and networking, which fosters trusting and friendly relations. It is easier to solve any issues, including business problems, in such an environment. For example, we need to harmonise standards as much as possible, simplify passport, visa and customs procedures so that companies from different countries can develop together. Meetings of ministers of transport, economy and finance are also very important within BRICS. They discuss pressing issues. After all, there are always a lot of questions in each area.

The Russian Federation initiated new opportunities for companies from the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Starting this year, the EAEU will financially support co-operation projects involving enterprises from several countries —

a minimum of three. The Union will compensate companies for the interest rate on loans in the amount of the Central Bank key rate of the borrowing country».

Sergey Katyrin on changes in Russian business:

«The major change is that businesses adapted to the current context posed by sanctions: both in terms of components and other imports, logistics, financial flows, mutual settlements, and so on.

Naturally, there are still difficulties in certain industries and companies. But on the whole, statistics proves the adaptation. The economy is growing.

We should pay tribute to the government, which has taken measures to make the core industries work effectively in the face of sanctions. The volume of industrial production grew by 3.5 per cent over the year, with the manufacturing sector adding 7.5 per cent.



The aviation industry is already achieving good volumes. There is a strong demand to build 600 aircraft by 2030. This includes virtually the entire range, from small aircraft to IL-96. We have built our own engine, the PD-14, and it is already being placed on the MS-21. And not only our engine is made domestically, but everything else is basically 100 per cent domestic.

At first, the car industry failed under the sanctions because all our former partners left. But today Moskvich, KamAZ and GAZ have launched assembly lines, and car plants in St. Petersburg and Kaluga have resumed operations. Just a bit more time, and our car industry will

regain its former capacity. And then, by and by, it will exceed it.

We need to systematically train young people in professions that the country needs, and train professionals ready to on-board at production sites in the shortest possible time.

A few years ago, the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Republican Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Chuvashia, together with the regional authorities, did a research on what professions were being trained there and what specialists were needed? The gap turned out to be huge. At that time, restaurants were being actively opened up in the republic, hotels and other new businesses appeared. And there were no professionals trained for them: neither waiters, nor operators in the travel industry. But specialists for enterprises, many of which had already ceased to exist at that time, were still being actively trained.

This problem is still pressing in many regions. The labour market has seriously changed, but training has not necessarily transformed.

After the research in Chuvashia, we developed a special project — Turnkey Workforce, and the Perm Chamber of Commerce and Industry was the first to launch it. The region started to match the interests of businesses, educational institutions, the regional administration and the local education system — those who demand a specific specialist with those who train them. This means not only ordering a professional. A future employer would arrange an internship program for a student and guarantee employment immediately after graduation or military service.

The challenge for any growing business is finances. It needs long cheap money, and for this it needs to keep inflation low.

Now I have high expectations of the long-term savings program recently announced by the president. People will save under a special program: their own contributions will be complemented by the state. This instrument may well become an additional source of long money».

tpprf.ru



Special Guests

Premiere on CCI-Inform video channel

The official video channel of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry launched a new series, «Special Guests».

The first guests were People's Artist of Russia Nikas Safronov and the author of the Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad project, Natalia Holzmüller.

The discussion covered the topic of how culture and art help to strengthen international ties.

When asked whether cultural dialogue should be restored, Natalia Holzmüller replied:

«Cultural dialogue should certainly be restored. Russian artists and painters are so popular that the audience goes to see exactly them: Nikas Safronov's exhibitions, Valery Gergiev, Ildar Abdrazakov... People still love Russian culture, and we should help to bring the current absurd situation around as soon as possible».

Talking about the current situation in the world, Nikas resorts to a metaphor: «Imagine you live on an island, and your parents, sisters, brothers and friends live and prosper around you, then you are very comfortable. You are alone, in a state of nirvana... But if suddenly the world around you is destroyed and there are no relatives, no friends, no country left, you will begin to grieve and, I believe, you won't last long... So far, people don't notice much, they live their lives knowing that there is Russia somewhere, thinking: «Well, let us keep it away for now, but nothing will be lost...» They know Pushkin, they have read or are about to read Dostoevsky and Chekhov.

And we need Maupassant, Balzac, Verdi and we don't want them taken away from us.

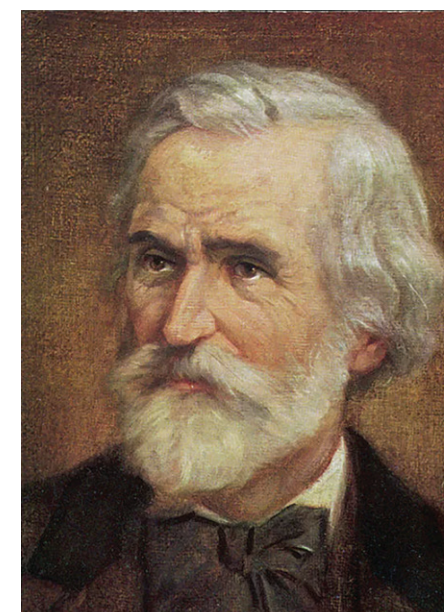
Russia has presented the world with cultural treasures.

The 19th century was the golden age of Russian culture, similar to the Renaissance in Italy. It is Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky, Glinka, Mussorgsky, Pavlov, Mendeleev, Surikov, Repin. This is a mighty, rich, fruitful Russia.

People want to live in peace and friendship, to feel positive emotions, so we should continue to go our own way. Everyone should do what they can».

The conversation also touched upon the novel by the famous Austrian actor and writer Michael Dangel, «Dostoevsky's Venetian Mystery», recently published in Russia.

Natalia emphasised that the novel was illustrated by Nikas Safronov, which contributed to the popularity of the book. She shared that the author of the book is married to Maria Fedotova, the soloist of the Mariinsky Theatre



Giuseppe Verdi

Orchestra, but he had fallen in love with Russia long before he met the love of his life: «A cultural landscape is impossible without Russian culture, you hear it in different countries».

When asked what it means for Nikas to be a Russian artist, he replied:

«First of all, through painting, to create works of art that speak for themselves. If art is distorted, it requires creating certain trends to popularise it. Thank God, I don't need it.

Russian culture is very cohesive. We learned from the noble examples of Russian literary classics, where honour, decency, love for the Motherland were honoured. We looked up to high ideals, and this helped us to become what we are.

The West learnt from this as well, that is why Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov are so popular there.

The conversation touched upon the lack of proper information about Russia, which prevents people from comparing different sources and forming their own opinions.

In conclusion, the question was asked: «What can the guests of CCI-Inform wish for Russian business?»

Nikas:

«Invest in our national culture, in our country, in our sports, in our medicine. We need to help the poor and sick as well as healthy and talented children, to help teachers who give them a chance to grow and develop».

Natalia:

«I wish Russian business to prosper, and this is absolutely real. During my regular visits to Russia, I go to shops and see abundance there.

Before, there was no need to produce quality goods in Russia because it was thought that everything from the West was better. That turned out to be a myth. The Russian people are one of the most talented, and Russian people can make everything domestically — cheese, sausages and beautiful clothes.

Until now, many people thought that everything was fine abroad. But, as they say, the grass is always greener at the other side of the fence...

Now life is in full swing in Russia, people are striving for something real, realising that you have to live a natural life.

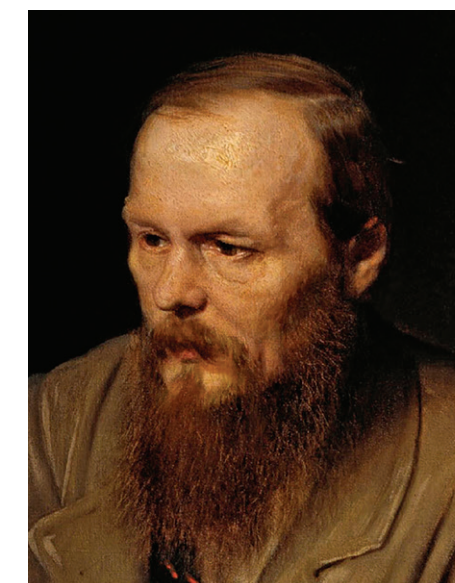
Summary of the discussion:

The challenge is to restore sanity to the world. This is an opportunity to rethink the questions — which side are you on, which moral truth do you prefer?

We must take the best from others, preserving our own values and thereby enriching each other.



Anton Chekhov



Fyodor Dostoevsky



Alexander Pushkin



Meetings in the CCI-Inform studio. Natalia Holzmüller and Nikas Safronov

Nikolai Burlyaeв:

«All cultures have similar aspirations.
They take different paths to God, but they have
the same aspirations»



NH:

While in Moscow, I had a personal meeting with a State Duma deputy, People's Artist of the Russian Federation Nikolai Burlyaeв, whom I knew and appreciated from his filmography. I particularly remembered the roles of Christ in *The Master and Margarita* and in Tarkovsky's film *Andrei Rublev* — of Boriska, who cast the bell on a whim, with God's help.

«FOR MORAL AND CHRISTIAN IDEALS, FOR SPIRITUALIZATION OF A HUMAN»



Years later, Nikolai Burlyaeв cast the first bell of the Golden Knight Film Forum, which he founded in 1991 and which is now called the International Slavic Arts Forum, where literature, music and fine arts are also represented.

Nikolai Burlyaeв is a multi-talented man. He is an actor, director, scriptwriter, writer and poet. His talents, his faith and beliefs become the core of his public activities. In 2022, on his initiative, a public movement «Russian Cultural Front» was established. The headquarters team, lead by Nikolai Burlyaeв, included such well-known cultural

and artistic figures as Valery Gergiev, Yuri Bashmet, Pyotr Tolstoy, and Karen Shakhnazarov. According to Burlyaeв, this is an independent public movement that unites «all normal, positive people of different nationalities who work for the glory of God and the Fatherland and are committed to traditional spiritual and moral values in Russia».





Nikolai Burlyaev considers people of any nationality who live in Russia and love their homeland to be Russians. For 30 years, he has been stubbornly working to ensure that Russia has a clear and non-destructive cultural policy. In 2014, at the Patriarchal Council for Culture, he raised this issue, and later the Patriarch proposed it to President Vladimir Putin. Following this, Putin signed a decree «On Approval of Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy». No other president in the world has ever issued such a decree, and, of course, Nikolai Burlyaev can be proud of this achievement:

«Culture should be based on moral and ethical norms and spiritual categories of Russian culture and the culture of all peoples living in the Russian Federation, because all cultures, in principle, have similar aspirations. They take different paths to God, but have the same aspirations. As the great Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin said, we must learn to measure everything by the measure of Christ».

Nikolai Burlyaev also commented on the attempts to destroy international cultural ties and the prospects of isolated development of Russian culture:

«Russia has a completely different path. We have already said that saving Russia means saving the world. The West understands this.

Once a teacher was asked, «Teacher, what can be done to fight such a powerful line of evil in this world?» He replied that it should not be fought with fists. If there is such a line of evil, then a powerful line of good should be drawn over it, unattainable for evil.

And the whole world will look at Russia with amazement: it turned out that they can live there, it turned out that they had put a block in the way of LGBT — the movement that is killing the world. In the Duma, we have passed the most important historical law banning the propaganda of non-traditional values.

We will do our job, we will sing the song of the mysterious Russian soul. Why is it mysterious to the Western world? Let me explain. The Western world lives by human rights, by self-assertion, but we live by self-giving, by love, and that's why our soul is mysterious to them».

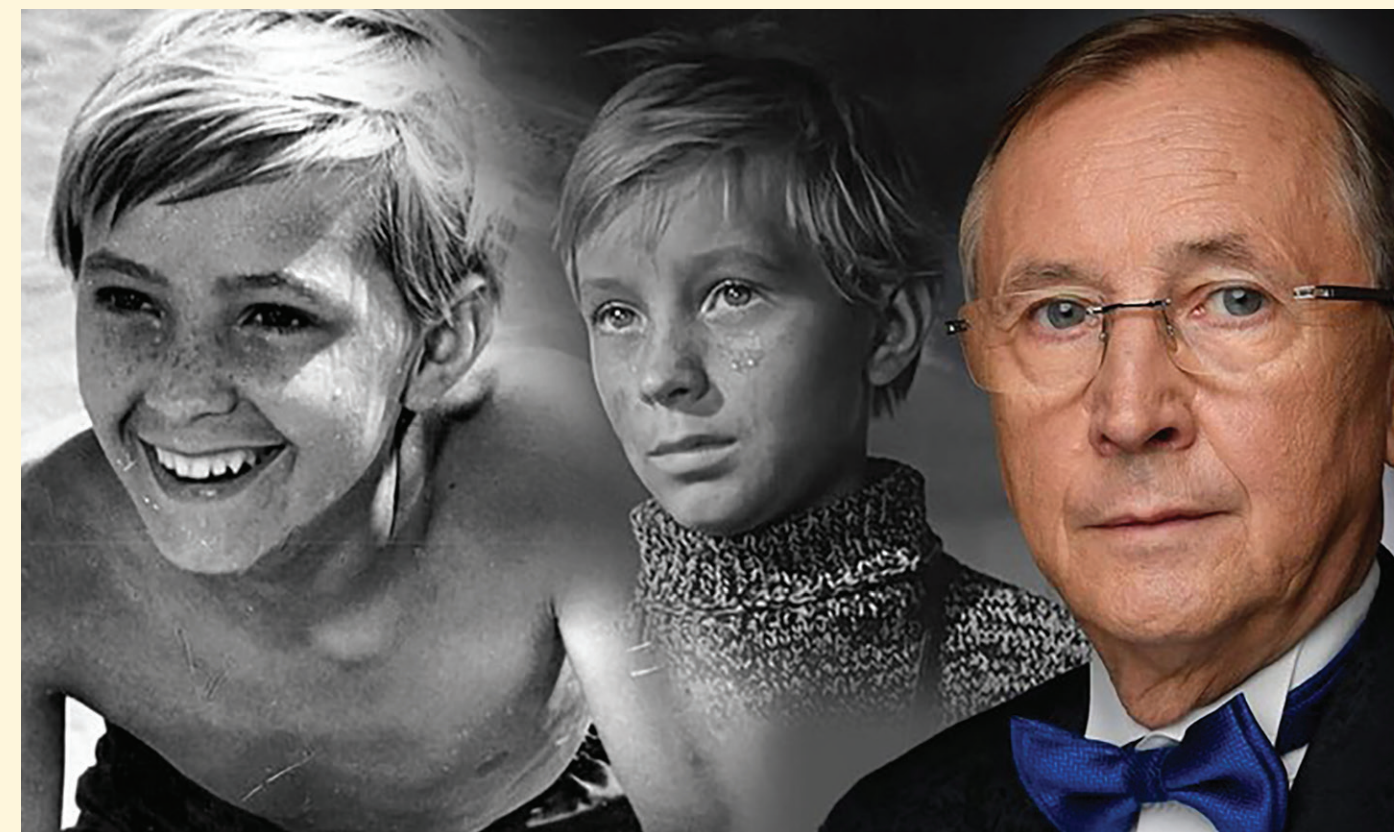
This echoes Vladimir Putin's words in an interview with the American journalist Tucker Carlson that Russian culture is «human-centered», that Russians think about eternity, about values, about morality and ethics, and that this is one of the mysteries of the Russian soul, which, as the Russian president said, is consolidated by the Russian Orthodox Church and which no one can split. As an artist and public figure, Nikolai Burlyaev sees his task as protecting culture from decay and insipidity:

«As Lermontov put it: "There is a sense of truth in a human heart". We try to keep that sense of truth».



Acting a part of Lermontov

A long and successful artistic journey helped Nikolai Burlyaev to know the value and meaning of high art and to be convinced of its undeniable importance.



The Golden Sun of Russian Culture

Nikolai Andreevich Rimsky-Korsakov

This year marks the 180th anniversary of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a great composer and teacher, conductor and public music figure.



Rimsky-Korsakov

In a letter to the famous music critic Vladimir Stasov written in 1905, Rimsky-Korsakov wrote among other things: «Well, as long as you live, you must live and you must love life».

And so he did. He created masterpieces, educated about 200 composers, conductors and music scholars, including the future Russian classics Alexander Glazunov, Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev, conducted, engaged in public activities and loved his wife – pianist Nadezhda Purgold – until the end of his life. They were a model of an ideal family relationship..

Rimsky-Korsakov's compositions – operas, symphonic works and romances – made his name famous throughout the world.



Rimsky-Korsakov in his youth

The future genius was born in 1844 into a noble family. Music attracted him from the early childhood, but travelling to other countries also beckoned. At the age of 12 he began composing his first musical works, and at the age of twelve Nikolai was sent to the Naval Cadet Corps, where he stayed until the age of 18 and, having graduated with honours, went on a three-year round-the-world voyage on the military training clipper Almaz, which took part in an expedition to the North America. Thanks to this he visited a number of countries – England, Norway, Poland, France, Italy, Spain, the USA and Brazil. Impressions of sea life were later embodied in seascape, which the composer managed to capture in his works with orchestral colours. The symphonic suite Scheherazade, based on the oriental fairy tales of 1001 Nights, became particularly popular.

The ballet Scheherazade to this music, choreographed by Mikhail Fokin and performed in Paris in 1910 during the Russian Seasons, caused a sensation.

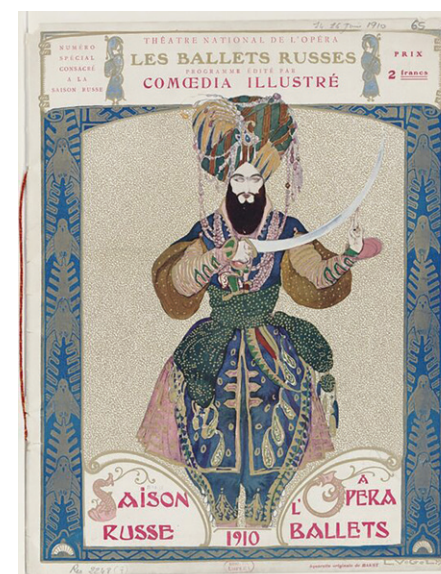
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was a member of the circle founded by Mily Balakirev, which later became known as the Mighty Five, which also included Caesar Cui and Modest Mussorgsky.

At the age of 27 Rimsky-Korsakov became a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, which now bears his name.

Rimsky-Korsakov's teaching and educational work was admired by Tchaikovsky, who wrote in his letter: «But you did not want to be content with composing alone. You have become a musical professor, and a whole phalanx of young Russian musicians, growing up under your guidance, will, of course, pass on to future generations the results of your work».



Rimsky-Korsakov's wife Nadezhda Purgold



«Scheherazade» poster in Paris. (1910)

Igor Stravinsky spoke of his teacher's educational work: «There is one great advantage in my musical education – I was trained with Rimsky-Korsakov. He was an absolutely remarkable teacher, extremely attentive and thorough, wise and witty. When he made a remark, he put it in such a form that it was almost impossible to forget it. One detail Rimsky-Korsakov's students will always remember – he never praised. A student expecting an approving pat on the shoulder would be disappointed in Rimsky-Korsakov. On the contrary, he could be ruthlessly harsh in his criticism.»

Rimsky-Korsakov also had an active and resolute public stance, typical of the best representatives of the enlightened Russian society of the time, which is evidenced by his reaction to the event of 1905 – the so-called «Bloody Sunday», when the troops and police in the capital engaged weapons to disperse a peaceful procession of workers who were on their way to petition the Tsar.

In response to this crime, a wave of strikes swept across Russia, involving students of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. After the police and mounted Cossacks used lashes against the striking students, the Moscow newspaper «Russkiye Vedomosti» published an open letter by Rimsky-Korsakov. This letter

was discussed at a meeting of the Russian Musical Society (RMO), chaired by Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich.

The Grand Duke wrote in his diary: «We decided... to dismiss Professor Rimsky-Korsakov (the primary driver of the strike) for his impertinent, printed expression of criticism of the directorate's actions and opposition to its efforts to resume classes.»

Upon learning of this decision, Professors Alexander Glazunov and Alexander Liadov, the renowned pianist Anna Esipova, conductor Felix Blumenfeld and cellist Alexander Verzhbilovich left the Conservatoire in protest. Some 200 students also left the Conservatoire, including those who had not previously supported the strike. The scandal took on a European scale. French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, Belgian violinist and composer Eugène Izayi, and Hungarian violinist and composer Joseph Joachim refused to become honorary members of the RMO. Russian and foreign musicians boycotted performances in the RMO concerts. The directorate tried to mitigate the

conflict, but Rimsky-Korsakov did not agree to a compromise.

The St. Petersburg governor-general Dmitry Trepov, who called the composer a «dangerous revolutionary», ordered him under secret police surveillance and forbade the performance of his musical works in the capital. Then a tradition was born in other cities to listen to his compositions standing up.

The newspaper Russkoye Slovo wrote: «N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov rejected all offers made to him by foreign higher educational institutions to take up the post of professor there, and in some places even the head of these institutions...». Indirectly, was his principled and uncompromising view that caused the early passing of this amazing composer and person. The last and one of his favorite of fifteen operas – «The Golden Cockerel» after Pushkin's fairy tale was banned for staging by the Tsarist censorship. This news struck the composer, and during a strong summer thunderstorm at his summer cottage near Luga he had a heart attack, which led to his imminent death. The musical genius was only 64 years old...



«The Golden Cockerel». By Natalia Goncharova



The flat of Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg where he spent the last 15 years of his life, from 1893 to 1908, and composed 11 of his 15 operas, including Sadko, The Tale of Tsar Saltan, The Tsar's Bride, Kashchei the Immortal and The Golden Cockerel, has a special place among memorials in Russia.

After the death of the composer and his wife, the flat was communal for 50 years, but all authentic items and furniture were carefully kept by the composer's descendants. On 27 December 1971, on their initiative, a memorial museum was opened in the flat on Zagorodny Avenue. In terms of authentic interiors, the museum is on a par with the largest composers' museums in Russia: Pyotr Tchaikovsky's Memorial House in Klin and Alexander Scriabin Memorial Flat in Moscow.

The museum recreates not only the external appearance of the Rimsky-Korsakovs' flat, but also the creative atmosphere that prevailed there. For many years this house was one of the cultural hubs of St. Petersburg. Rimsky-Korsakov's guests – composers Glazunov and Lyadov, Rachmaninov and Taneyev, painters Serov and Repin, singers Chaliapin and Zabela-Vrubel - took an active part in musical soirées, called «Korsakov Wednesdays». When Fyodor Chaliapin came here, sometimes up to 100 guests gathered in the living room, and neighbouring children who lived upstairs even used to lie down on the floor trying to hear the famous singer's voice.

Thanks to the dedicated workers in memorial museums, the lives of those to whom they are dedicated go on....



Rimsky-Korsakov in his study



«Grad Kitezh». By Ilya Glazunov



«The Snow Maiden». Mizgir. By Victor Vasnetsov



«The Snow Maiden». By Viktor Vasnetsov



Ida Rubinstein. «Scheherazade»



«Sadko». Mariinsky Theatre



«The Snow Maiden». Bashkir Opera and Ballet Theatre



«Scheherazade». Mariinsky Theatre



Vaslav Nijinsky. «Scheherazade»



«The Tsar's Bride». Mariinsky Theatre

VIENNA OPERA BALL



From left to right: Elina Garanča, Bertrand de Billy, Serena Saenz, Alexei Ratmanský, Piotr Beczala and Vienna State Opera Director Bogdan Roščić

The Vienna Opera Ball is the crown jewel of the ball season, which in Austria begins with the New Year Ball and ends on the eve of Ash Wednesday, i.e. Lent.

The tradition of the Opera Ball originated during the Congress of Vienna, which took place from 1814 to 1815, at the end of which the artists and musicians of the Court Opera arranged a ball for the guests and participants of the Congress.

On 11 December 1877, the Vienna Opera House hosted its first charity party, where the orchestra was conducted by the brothers Johann and Eduard Strauss. Despite Emperor Franz Joseph's reluctance to have dancing, after the performance of Eduard Strauss's polka, the audience pushed their chairs against the walls and began to dance.

The name «Opera Ball» dates back to 1935, when a charity ball was held under the patronage of Federal Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg to help needy citizens. Since then, balls have been held annually on the last Thursday of Carnival at the Vienna State Opera House. The «ball break» lasted from 1939 to



1955 and only ended on 9 February 1956, when the abandoned tradition was resumed.

On 8 February this year, the Vienna Opera Ball was held for the 66th time.

One of journalists compared the ball atmosphere to a jungle because of the splendour of colours. The bright dresses of ladies, many of which were complemented by multi-coloured feather boas, and garlands of roses in the colour pink prompted him to make this comparison. In Russian, the word 'pink', known due to the famous British rock band Pink Floyd, translates as 'daisy'.

Everyone always looks forward to the festive «overture» of the Opera Ball, which begins to the sounds of the brass of the Vienna State Opera's stage orchestra.

The Opera Ball has the status of a state reception, which is serviced by around 1.000 people, including the performers.

Traditionally attended by the President of the Republic of Austria, the Federal Chancellor and members of the government, as well as foreign politicians invited by them, the Austrian National Anthem is followed by the European Anthem – a fragment from the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in which the composer used Schiller's «Ode to Joy» – «Embrace, millions!», something the European Union would do well to think about....

The 144 pairs of debutantes realised their dream by opening the solemn procession to the sound of the Fächerpolonaise – «Polonaise with fans» by Austrian composer Karl Michael Zierer.

The Vienna State Opera Orchestra was conducted by the famous French conductor Bertrand de Billy. The soloists were Elina Garanča and Piotr Beczala, whose names are familiar to music lovers, and the Spanish soprano Serena Saenz, who has been called the brightest star of modern bel canto.

Especially spectacular performance was the singing and dancing duet of Elina Garanča and Piotr Beczala in the famous «Granada» by Augustin Lara, which many people have heard performed by three tenors - Plácido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti and José Carreras.

An integral part of the Opera Ball's opening programme is a performance by the Vienna State Ballet.



This year, eight couples danced to the music of Nikolai Lysenko's waltz «Séparation» choreographed by Alexei Ratmanský, which, according to his idea, was meant to express the desire for peace on earth.



Serena Saenz



Elina Garanča and Piotr Beczala

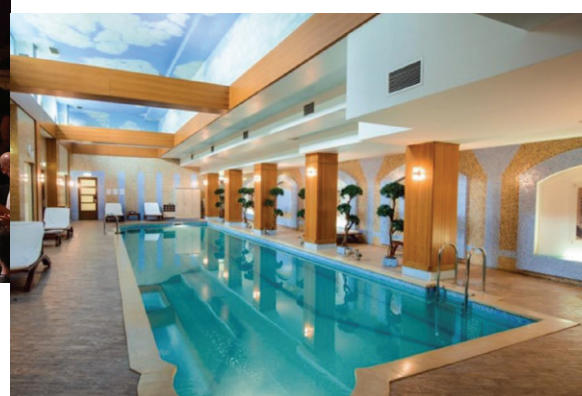
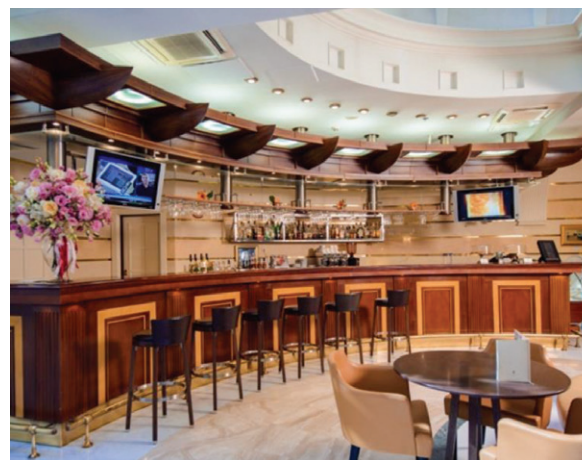
Mykola Lysenko's work was of interest to Pyotr Tchaikovsky, who, while in Kiev in 1890, visited Lysenko and the latter showed him his newly completed opera Taras Bulba, which Tchaikovsky liked very much.



After the debutants performed Strauss' waltz «The Blue Danube» and the words «Alles Walzer!» followed, which loosely translated mean «Everybody dance!», a breathtaking ball night that lasted until dawn began for the five thousand guests. We hope that this is a step towards restoring international cultural dialogue.



It is probably no coincidence that immediately after the end of «La Séparation» the elev and elevin of the Academy of Ballet of the Vienna State Opera danced an ecosais from «Eugene Onegin», choreographed by the director of the Academy Christiana Stefanu, and the orchestra conducted by Bertrand de Billy performed a polonaise from this opera.



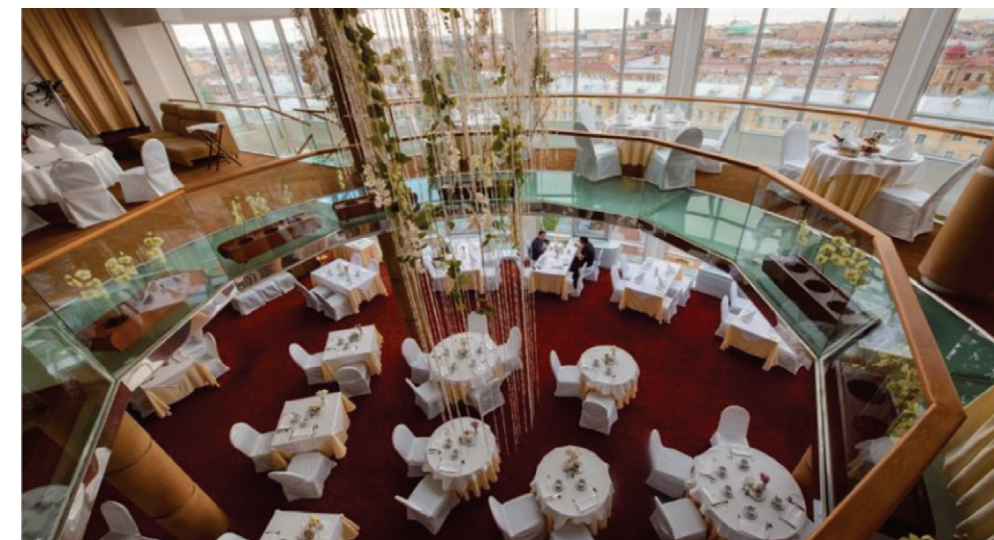
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Old New Year at the Ambassador Hotel

This holiday has always been loved especially by artists and musicians, who on 31 December have to entertain others, and on 13 January can entertain themselves, and this is one of the beautiful Russian national traditions.

There are many wonderful hotels in St Petersburg, but there is one special one among them. This is the «Ambassador», located in the historical centre of the city, not far from the Mariinsky Theatre. On the Mariinsky staff's recommendation, I once stayed here and have been loyal to this wonderful place ever since. Representatives of the artistic intelligentsia, both Russian and foreign, like to stay at the «Ambassador» Hotel. There is something elusive in its atmosphere,



Natalia Holzmüller and Evgeny Kuzminsky

which creates a feeling of cosy comfort.

I had long dreamed of launching an international cultural project here, and I shared my thoughts with Leonid Terekhov, CEO. Eventually everything worked out, and we decided to celebrate the Old New Year at the hotel. However, the musicians had no time to rest at this celebration. The Moscow Youth Chamber Orchestra, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, graced the night with its wonderful skills. A special New Year's programme was prepared, including works by Mozart, Kreisler and Strauss, which emphasised the permanent pertinence of international cultural dialogue. The Moscow Youth Chamber Orchestra is distinguished not only by the highest level of mastery, but also by its unique, often theatrical manner of performance, which invariably enthralls the audience. During Strauss's famous Pizzicato Polka, which is played at almost every world-famous New Year's concert at Vienna's Musikverein, I caught myself thinking that Russians, perhaps more than others, are characterised by the «world responsiveness» that Dostoevsky wrote about, i.e. the ability to grasp the spirit of other cultures and to embody it.

This was the theme of the night at the «Ambassador». The musicians' performance was preceded by a talk about two new artistic initiatives. I presented the project Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad, which is being

brought to life thanks to enthusiasm, optimism and patriotism.

The idea of the project belongs to Evgeny Kuzminsky, Director of the St. Petersburg-based DEAN Publishing House, who responded to a request from the artist Nikas Safronov to publish a novel about Dostoevsky by Michael Dangel, an actor and writer recognised and sought-after in Austria but unknown in Russia. The novel, illustrated by Nikas, came out in May last year and was translated into Russian as «Dostoevsky's Venetian Mystery».

The novel has been favourably received by connoisseurs of the great Russian writer's work and the fascinating world of his writings.



Valery Vorona

The series continues with a book on Rachmaninov by the German writer and publicist Meinhard Zarembo, dedicated mainly to the foreign period of the life of Rachmaninov, which is not so widely covered in Russia.

The project also includes the YouTube channel «Bridge of Love» and the publication of the «International Dialogue» magazine, which is published four times a year in Russian and English and is an information partner of the

Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Professor Valery Vorona, Honoured Artist of Russia, Rector of the Ippolitov-Ivanov State Music and Pedagogical Institute, presented his ambitious project «Russia - a Musical





Superpower», which aims to set new benchmarks in the development of Russian culture and education.

Valery Vorona is a man with bright and multifaceted talents and indomitable creative energy, thanks to which he manages to implement the most daring projects and make the seemingly impossible possible.

The example of the Old New Year celebration at the «Ambassador» convinced me of this. Leonid Terekhov provided the venue and expressed his willingness to support the event as best he could.

As the initiative came from me, it was up to me to make sure that the event will be organised to a decent standard. I have known Valery Vorona for a long time. We are friends and we share our plans for cultural exchanges. When I told him about an upcoming soirée at the «Ambassador», Valery immediately responded and said that he will try to bring to St. Petersburg the Moscow Youth Chamber Orchestra, of which he is a founder and artistic director. The task was not an easy one, given that the students were still on holidays and no financial support was expected. Nevertheless, everything worked out. Both Valery Vorona and the musicians arrived from Moscow on 13 January in the morning, performed well at the concert and returned home on the night train.

The Old New Year at the «Ambassador» was a great success. The main goal was achieved – to convey the message about the possibility and necessity of international cultural dialogue, thanks to which positive changes will definitely take place throughout the world.

We strongly believe in this and welcome like-minded people to participate in our projects!



Valery Vorona, Natalia Holzmüller and Leonid Terekhov with his wife Jeanne and son Evgeny

«Choose Your Own» in St. Petersburg

Federal political project of the United Russia Party

Leonid Terekhov has recently been appointed regional coordinator of the project, and we asked him to tell our readers why the project is important for Russia:

«Our project has ambitious goals – to help Russia achieve technological and human resources sovereignty.

Three commissions were established within the project: «Produce Russian», «Youth of Russia» and «Live and Work in Russia». Of course, they all operate for the same goal, but their main areas of activity can already be understood by their names.

Often enterprises, when asked how the state can help their industries, reply: «Just stay out of the way». I find this approach to be fundamentally wrong. We need to get away from understanding the state as a cerberus that constantly inspects, trying to find violations. Today, the state is primarily interested in the development of the Russian economy, in making life easier for domestic enterprises.

Over 300 federal and regional support measures are currently in

place in Russia, and all of them are constantly updated based on the changing needs of various industries.

Enterprises working in the field of import substitution are provided with both legal and targeted assistance – in finding new markets for their products both inside and outside Russia, in attracting financing and preferential loans, and much more – for the development of the economy of St. Petersburg and Russia. «Live and Work in Russia» and «Youth of Russia» focus areas include changes in labour legislation, popularisation of working professions and family dynasties, training of qualified personnel, and work with young people.

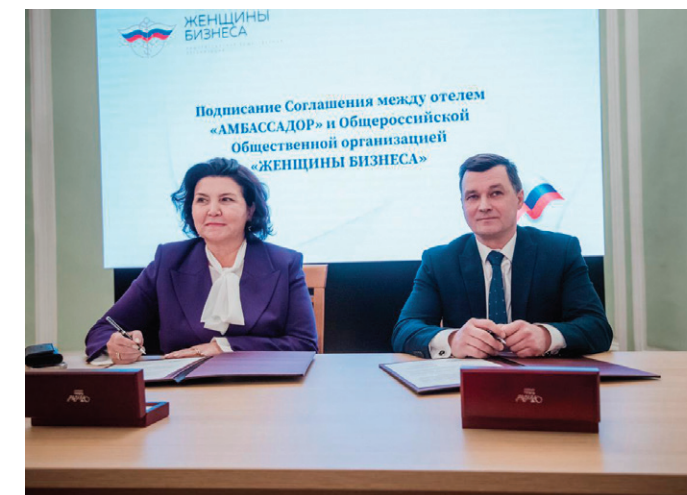
St. Petersburg maintains active interdepartmental cooperation with the My Business Centre, the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Entrepreneurs' Rights, the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the St. Petersburg Committee for Industrial Policy, Innovation and Trade.



Last year, we hosted more than 70 events in St. Petersburg, covering more than 120 small, medium and large companies from various sectors. Of course, we are not going to dwell on what we have achieved and continue our active work, which we describe in the project's Telegram channel

https://t.me/er_choose_spb.

Joint dialogue and constant communication with St. Petersburg enterprises is the key to effective work to achieve our main goals».



Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the cruise business

Interview with Sergei Abramov

The «Caesar Travel» shipping company, which has been operating in the Russian river travel market for two decades, is well known to many cruise tourists for its three-deck motor ships «Ilya Muromets» and «President». A significant number of passengers have also been on board the pleasure vessels «Gzhel» and «Sunny Bay», also belonging to the company's fleet. «Caesar-Travel» is a part of Caesar Club holding, which is also engaged in hotel business. In addition, the association operates the Sunny Bay recreation area, after which the ship was named, and the Khvoyny Bor green parking area at Pirogovsky and Pestovsky water reservoirs near Moscow.

The president of Caesar Club and CEO of the cruise company with the same name is Sergei Abramov. However, few people, even among his colleagues, know about one more of his positions. Sergei is the Chairman of the Tourism Committee and a Board member of the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI). We asked him to talk about these areas, as well as the upcoming cruise season.

Mr Abramov, at the beginning of our conversation, would you please explain what the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry is?

It is a rather strong professional body created primarily to help the capital's business community. It advises entrepreneurs and helps them find the right points of contact with the Moscow City Government. Therefore, taking into account the Chamber's standing among the business community, MCCI members and those who enjoy its support are treated with special trust, which makes it easier and more efficient to get the desired results. It is interesting that in many foreign countries, unlike Russia, chambers of commerce and industry are the main regulator of business activity. In our country, participation in the Chamber is voluntary: businessmen have the opportunity to sign an agreement and, after paying a small fee, receive serious support. The constant growth in the number of members of the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry clearly demonstrates that people correctly understand and really appreciate its advantages and, let's call it that, the level of «patronage».



Sergei Abramov

To what extent does the Chamber cover the tourism business?

This is one of its business lines. As Chairman of the Tourism Committee, within the MCCI, I help establish business contacts and organise trips, including trips abroad. Not so long ago, our delegation travelled to Turkey, where we communicated with members of the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The meetings were held at a rather high level, involving the mayors of Istanbul and Antalya, and a significant number of leading businessmen involved in the tourism sector. The return on such contacts is very high – every second contract concluded at such venues turns out to be quite viable. This includes travel tariffs. On average, we make such trips to countries attractive to Russian tourists five or six times a year. We also regularly host our colleagues.

What are the results of this relationship between the parties?

Thanks to reasonable and attractive prices, the occupancy rate of both foreign and Russian hotels has increased. I have been the head of the Tourism Committee and a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors for ten years now, and a lot has been done over the years. I will give you one, perhaps the most striking example, concerning our appeal to the Russian government. Not so long ago, the MCCI sent a letter signed by me to Mikhail Mishustin on the need to ease visa regimes for friendly countries. And our message did not go unnoticed. We were informed that the issue we raised was being worked on. So, today's developments have taken place not without our participation, and we are, of course, proud of that. After all, the growth of foreign tourism in Russia, especially in the current situation, works to improve the international image of our country as a whole. It is also, of course, an indicator of the Chamber's Tourism Committee's effectiveness.

What business categories are brought together by the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry?

Quite different. Although, of course, the largest companies are clustered in the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP), but medium and small Moscow companies are centred in our association. Nevertheless, the range is quite large, and we also have some very serious players. We try to cover any business audience. Since the tourism

business is not a large one, it is mostly concentrated within the MCCI.

How closely does the Chamber deal with the cruise business?

The conference «Rivers. Cruises. Routes» held at the end of last year and organised by our agents can be a good example. All major Russian river cruise operators took part in it. Both organisers and participants appreciated this new professional event, as they got answers to many pressing questions for the industry. This will help to focus efforts on improving key indicators: opening of new routes, construction and reconstruction of ships and berths, and solving a number of other problems.

As a person directly involved in the river cruise business, does membership in the Chamber provide any real support in your core business?

Access to the widest information network within the MCCI helps, first of all, to draw the right conclusions and steer your business in the right direction. And this is what help is all about – you get the right information, systematise and generalise your knowledge and finally understand where you need to go when planning your cruise operations.

What are your forecasts?

«Caesar-Travel» and our partner companies have already sold more than 50 per cent of vouchers. And both long-haul and short-haul itineraries are purchased, the range is very wide. It is clear that the choice of holiday options for

Russians today is very limited. In part, we are even reverting to the old times, when river cruises were of great interest to Soviet citizens and then Russians.

Operators are channelling their efforts to improve the quality of services, and first of all to improve the passenger ships' comfort. As for our company, we continue scheduled renovation of two of our motor vessels, which we are undertaking at our base in Khvoyny Bor. As always, they will be in good order by the opening of navigation.

What river routes will your vessels be travelling on in 2024 navigation season? What novelties will be offered?

The routes will remain almost the same as they have been for the last few years. So, the motor boat «Ilya Muromets» will once again sail on the 10-day Volga line Moscow – Kazan – Moscow, travelling 5 days one way and the same period back. There are also 11- and 12-day tours on this route, including visits to Sviyazhsk and Elabuga. And «President», also from the capital, will go out mainly on tours from 3 to 5 days – to Myshkin, Uglich, Yaroslavl and a number of other cities. But three voyages of this ship with a visit to Diveyevo are longer: two week cruises to Gorodets and one 11-day cruise to Nizhny Novgorod. I believe that the current cruise programme is the most acceptable for «Caesar-Travel», and we have come to it following twenty years of experience in our business.

Interview by Igor Gornostaev



INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

<<PALACES OF ST. PETERSBURG>>

The International Music Festival «Palaces of St. Petersburg» is one of the first festivals of the new Russia. More than three decades ago, the founding documents for the festival were signed by the President of Russia. The festival has evolved along a difficult path together with the country, while maintaining a high standard of quality and not giving up its noble mission of revealing the richest Russian cultural heritage and world classical culture to the Russian public and representing Russia on the world cultural scene.

The festival essence is to organise classical music concerts featuring leading Russian and foreign performers in the palaces and mansions of St. Petersburg and its suburbs.

Over the years, the Festival's programmes featured outstanding musicians and artists, including Renée Fleming, Michel Legrand, José Cura, Irina Arkhipova, Elena Obraztsova, Dmitry Hvorostovsky, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Vassily Lanovoy, Georgy Taratorkin and Alexei Petrenko.

The festival concerts are held at the Winter Palace, Menshikov Palace, Mikhailovsky Castle, Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo, Pavlovsky Palace and in the mansions of St. Petersburg.

A hallmark of the Palaces of St. Petersburg International Music Festival Foundation is its outstanding music and educational projects in cooperation with such important organisations as Russian Railways, the Presidential

Library, the Palace of Congresses, Vodokanal and many others.

Some of the most interesting joint projects of recent years have been: the annual Musical Seasons in Konstantinovsky (the first season opened the palace to the general public after restoration); a large-scale series of music and educational programmes «Music of Russian Statehood» in the Presidential Library, which won the competition of the Presidential Grants Fund; the International Festival «Palaces of Crimea – Palaces of St. Petersburg», also held with the Presidential Grants Fund support, which caused a great resonance and opened the Republic of Crimea to the European audience; TV music and educational projects «Music and Secrets» and

«Musical Anniversaries of the Year» on the main city TV channel «St. Petersburg».

Festival events are visited by top officials of St. Petersburg and the country, and concerts are often included in the cultural programme of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.



Ekaterina Lekhina (soprano) in the project 'Music of the Sun-King'. *Menshikov Palace*



Mikhail Tatarnikov. *State Hermitage Museum*





Maria Safaryants

The festival owes its success and long life largely to its artistic director and president of the Palaces of St. Petersburg International Music Festival Foundation, Maria Safaryants, Honoured Artist of Russia and renowned violinist.

«The idea of the festival, which combines music and the most beautiful palaces of St. Petersburg, was born in 1991 and belonged to my husband Konstantin Orbelian. I joined the preparatory work a little later, and in 1997 I took the reins in my own hands. I had no entrepreneurial experience, and I took quite a few knocks. But I found like-minded people. Even the largely conservative museum directors supported the project. It was a blessing.

At first we were counting on the white nights period, May-June.

However, over time, the festival grew into an annual event and became permanent.

Why did that happen? I think the reason is that in such a beautiful city as St. Petersburg this festival simply could not fail. It harmoniously blends the beauty of music and the beauty of the palaces

in which it is played. And this is our contribution to the promotion of the city.

Also, we knew from the very beginning that our festival had to have a different programme from the others. I wanted to do something incredibly beautiful, social, exclusive and with new faces.

For the last ten years we have been organising tours of the halls hosting concerts for everyone who wants to attend. And, you know, tickets for the excursion sell out first.

Over time, the festival's own circle of performers has developed, many of whom were previously unknown to the general public. And we are proud that artists already promoted by us are now invited to other events.

We started working with Open City, a joint project of the city department of the National Society for the Protection of Monuments

of History and Culture and the Committee for State Control, Use and Protection of Monuments of History and Culture.

This co-operation helps us to open the doors of the most beautiful mansions, which are not accessible to the public, and organise concerts there.

For example, we have given concerts in the Kelch Mansion, the House of the German Embassy on Isaakiyevskaya Square, and the Pashkov Mansion. People are ready to come, even if the palace has not yet been restored, to be the first to learn something new. This passion for learning is characteristic of St. Petersburg citizens in general.

The audience that we've created is wonderful, and it's constantly expanding. There are people, a few of them, who have been coming to us since the very first festival. There are a lot of new spectators, especially young ones, which makes us happy.



Maria Safaryants and the Governor of St. Petersburg Alexander Beglov. The ceremony of awarding a certificate of honour from the Governor for educational achievements for creating the educational television project «Music and Secrets»

We don't forget our social mission and invite students to the concerts.

We have students from the University of Railways, the Mozhaisky Military Space Academy, the Polytechnic University and St. Petersburg State University, students from the Military Medical Academy, doctors and medical staff from hospitals and clinics. I am very fond of my audience, who listen to every word, appreciate knowledge and can hear music. This is noted by all the artists who take part in the festival. By the way, despite the difficulties of recent years, we have managed to maintain the status of an international festival. Although the participation of international guests is not a goal for us, we and our audience are always happy to see performers from other countries. Of course, there are difficulties, and probably first of all, extremely expensive and uncomfortable logistics, so it happens that our guests are a bit capricious. But no one has increased the fee. They love St. Petersburg very much, they feel very well here and admit that they have nothing like it at home. Our artistic pool has stayed with us and with Russia.



...with a friend of her youth, Maestro Valery Gergiev.

We wish you all happiness!

International Women's Day on **8 March** is celebrated differently in Vienna than in Russia, in a more pragmatic way. There are no men with armfuls of flowers on the streets, and there are no parties in honour of women either.

The emphasis is on equality under the motto of destroying stereotypes about the «weaker sex». On this day, the Vienna Town Hall opens its doors to women. In addition to guided tours, counselling sessions on various topics concerning the place and role of women in society, including in their professional lives, are organised. Various events such as demonstrations, lectures and concerts are arranged in order



Mikhail Chorochev and Natalia Holzmueller



to give a new impetus to women's active self-awareness.

But Russian women are used to something different. They expect flowers, poems and declarations of love from men on this day.

It turns out that this is possible in Vienna. Of course, it is necessary to find men who are ready to fulfil these women's wishes.

The Chairman of the Russian Art and Literature Club of the Vienna State International UN Centre is just such a man. He knows how to bring joy to women of different ages and nationalities, as I was convinced when I attended a party Mikhail hosted in a Viennese restaurant.

Thanks to his experience in event organisation and a wide network of contacts, Mikhail managed to bring together an international audience, including representatives of various professions, who were united in their desire to relax, socialise and have fun.

Although it was the first time I had attended such a celebration of Mikhail Chorochev, I soon got the feeling that I was among my own people.

This is the art of the organiser - to create an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable, albeit in their own way. This is probably Mikhail's natural talent, and the secret of his popularity is not only his proactive life stance, but also the kindness and sincerity he puts into his difficult mission - to make others happy, no matter what. Our life philosophies are similar, and we both realise that in the current context, when the possibilities for international cultural projects in Austria are, to put it mildly, limited to the limit, like-minded people need to stick together in order to survive and continue the cause you believe in, not «thanks to» but «in spite of».



During the party, Mikhail gave me the opportunity to speak about my project «Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad», for which I am deeply grateful.

Despite the fact that the festival was in full swing and that the wonderful groups - the folk ensemble «Kalinka» from Vienna and the ensemble «Russian Soul» from the Czech Republic - had already performed, I was listened to attentively. I caught interested glances and delighted smiles.

The theme of the event was the international dialogue of cultures, which was supported both by the programme and by the conversations that spontaneously took place between people who had not known each other before. For example, a Russian man came up to me and asked me where he could buy Michael Dangel's novel about Dostoevsky, the Russian translation of which I was presenting, in German. He explained that his Austrian wife was not yet fluent enough in Russian to read the novel in Russian without difficulty. After

purchasing the Russian-language version, Vitaly - that was his name - said that he would start reading and interpreting it to his wife Monika while she would expect to receive the book in German shortly afterwards.

I came to the event with a woman from Melitopol with whom I met by fate. She and her daughter left that city for Vienna, where her sister was already living, on the first day of the special operation. Her husband and mother stayed in Melitopol. Tatyana, like all normal people, suffers because of what is happening. Like many people, she has a mixture of different bloods, but she cannot imagine her life without Russian culture, Russian customs, Russian music. Most of the Russian songs that were played at the party were familiar to her, and we both sang along.

Suddenly one of the Kalinka ensemble members announced that she wanted to sing a song dedicated to mother, as no such song had ever been sung before. And she sang Platon Mayboroda's song from the

film «The Young Years» - «My dear mother, you haven't slept through the night...», remembered by many as sung by Dmitry Gnatiuk, People's Artist of the USSR and People's Artist of Ukraine.

Not only Tatiana, but also I knew the words of the song in Ukrainian, because Gnatiuk sang it in this language, and we both, with tears in our eyes, echoed the singer.

Then other Ukrainian songs were sung. Tatiana was stunned and touched to the core. She teaches her 19-year-old daughter, who was torn out of her life, separated from her father and dreams of returning home, to perceive what is happening correctly, convincing her that there is no future without Russia and that it is necessary to understand and respect each other.

The night ended with a joint performance of Stas Namin's song «We Wish You All Happiness». The women were holding mimosas, the symbol of the 8th of March in Russia, and everyone was happy.

May this feeling stay with us all as often as possible..



FROM VENICE TO THE SECOND GYMNASIUM

PRESENTATION OF MICHAEL DANGL'S BOOK «DOSTOEVSKY'S VENETIAN MYSTERY» AT THE SECOND SAINT PETERSBURG GYMNASIUM

Fyodor Dostoevsky did not get to study at the Second Gymnasium, but I believe he would have liked it because of the strong emphasis on languages, literature and history. In 1838 Dostoevsky became a student at the Main Engineering School. He later admitted that this was a mistake. The strict discipline and the abundance of technical knowledge were not appealing to a man who loved to read from childhood and later became a writer.

Recently, the Second Gymnasium welcomed a 21st century writer, an Austrian with a passion for Dostoevsky. Michael Dengl wrote a novel — a literary fantasy about Fyodor Dostoevsky's meeting with Gioacchino Rossini in Venice. This beautiful book has already been described in the pages of the «International Dialogue» magazine.

What happened on 21 February in the gymnasium? Together with Michael and his Russian publisher, we decided to present the novel to high school students.

Of course, St. Petersburg children knows Dostoevsky. In addition, St. Petersburg is commonly referred to as the Venice of the North, which is far from the truth, but both of these facts provide an excellent starting point for the narrative.

The author shared how he came up with the idea for the novel. Michael Dengl loves Venice, and when he learnt that Dostoevsky was also fond of it, he started learning more about it. The work of a writer is both research and artistic endeavour. Of course, when presenting a book, you have to introduce the text. That is why we read an extract from the book, with the help of Anfisa,

Michael's daughter and a student of the Second Gymnasium.

It is important to note that Michael learns Russian, and he read his role in Russian. The word «role», by the way, reminds us of Michael's second, or even first, profession — acting. This was also interesting for the students' audience, first of all because cinema and theatre are fascinating, but also because it confirms that a truly creative person is multifaceted.

The time of a school lesson, 45 minutes, of course goes by quickly, and when it came to questions, we didn't even have time to answer them all. But we appreciate that there were many. Perhaps the best answer is the book itself, which was donated to the school library and to a few students who asked the best questions.

Roman Gerasimov



Evgeny Kuzminsky, Director of DEAN Publishing House



From left to right: Roman Gerasimov, Anfisa and Michael Dengl

On the eve of the first birthday

The first anniversary of «Dostoevsky's Venetian Mystery» publishing in Russian is approaching.

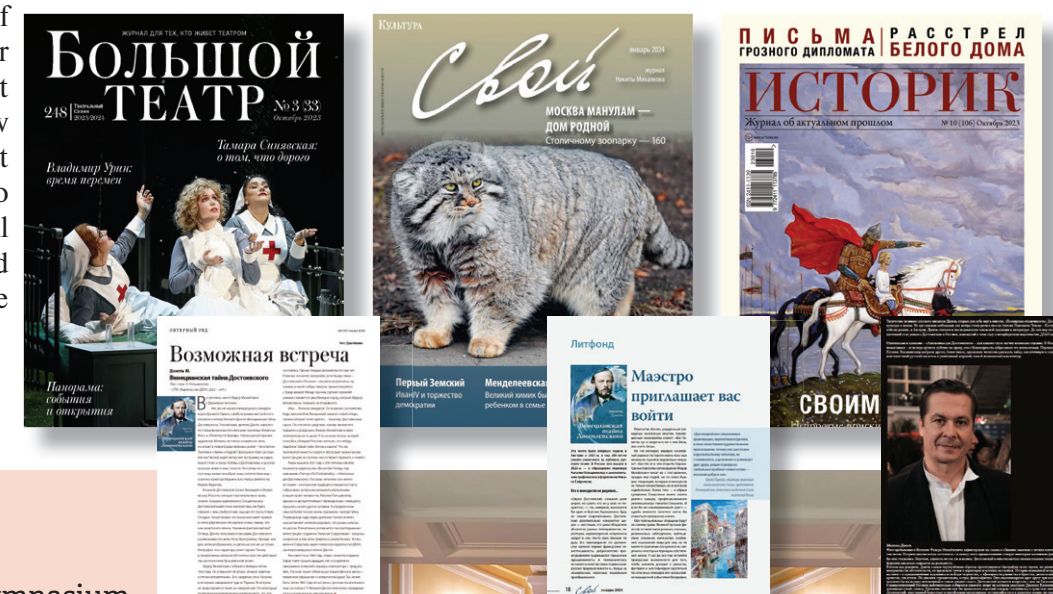
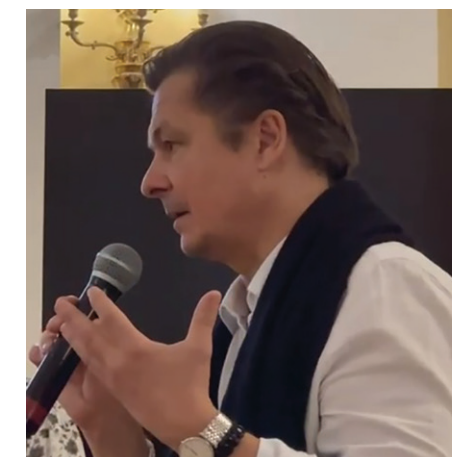
In his speech at the meeting at the Second St. Petersburg Gymnasium, Michael Dengl spoke about the immensity of Dostoevsky's work, the fact that each time you reread his works, you discover something new for yourself, emphasising that through Dostoevsky's writings a person comes closer to God.

One of the main challenges in writing the novel, according to Michael, was to free the image of the great Russian writer and thinker from the clichés especially prevalent in the West. It was important to show that Dostoevsky was not an icon, but a man who suffered himself, who understood and accepted with all his heart the suffering of others, and who nevertheless gave hope for the transformation of the world.

Michael Dengl's novel has received well-deserved acclaim in Russia, as evidenced in particular by the book reviews in such influential periodicals as «Zvezda», Russia's oldest literary and art magazine, «Istorik» and «Bolshoi Theatre» magazines, and Nikita Mikhalkov's magazine «Svoy».

A new edition is forthcoming for the first birthday of «Dostoevsky's Venetian Mystery».

Natalia Holzmüller



The Second St. Petersburg Gymnasium is unique in its history.

It was founded on 7 September 1805 by order of Emperor Alexander I.

The modern education system in Russia is built on the rich traditions of the gymnasium. Among its graduates are the outstanding ethnographer and traveller Nikolai Miklukho-Maclay, the famous lawyer, statesman and public figure Anatoly Kony, the great conductor Yevgeny Mravinsky.



Musical Planet of Konstantin Orbelyan



There are people with whom you feel happiness. Fate has gifted me with many such people, and its generosity never runs out. One of the most recent strong emotional impressions was my encounter with Konstantin Orbelyan.

Of course, I had heard about his busy concert life, about his intense and successful cultural life, but we had never had the chance to talk.

Last year, when the world celebrated the 150th anniversary of Rachmaninoff's birth, Konstantin Orbelyan launched many ambitious projects in his honour, including a gala concert at Carnegie Hall, which we covered in the previous issue of «International Dialogue».

I was very lucky to get in touch with Konstantin in person to ask for an interview. He not only agreed immediately, but the next day he sent me the answers to my questions,

as well as photos. This impressed me a lot.

I know from experience that the more prominent a person is, the easier it is to form relationships, but on the other hand, it is no secret that such people often have more responsibilities on a daily basis than many people do in a year.

Nevertheless, the outstanding musician and musical figure took my request with full responsibility, because he is used to treating his colleagues with respect and helping them as much as possible.

Of course, grandeur of character begins in childhood.

Konstantin Orbelyan belongs to a princely Armenian family. In one of his interviews he spoke about his origins and destiny:



«The call of ancestors and homeland is strong in all of us. My father was Armenian, my mother Vera Voznesenskaya, half Ukrainian, half Russian, was born in Kharkov. We, small ethnicities, Armenians and Jews, are very conscious that we are not so numerous and if we don't do something for ourselves, no one will do it. We have the opportunity to promote our music and do something for our people. My uncle, also named Konstantin Orbelian, is a composer and conductor, People's Artist of the USSR, who led the State Variety Orchestra of Armenia for 36 years. When I was a teenager studying in Armenia, I used to go to the opera theatre with him, every night we listened to operas, watched ballets, went to symphony concerts. At that time, I could not imagine that one day I would be in charge of this giant. So the ways of God are inscrutable: I also did not know that I would be living in the Soviet Union, conducting Moscow orchestras. For an Armenian-American from San Francisco to be appointed head of the USSR State Orchestra - such a thing could not have occurred to any Soviet leader, or indeed to any human being. But it happened.

Pianist, conductor, producer, four-time Grammy Award nominee, General Director and Artistic Director of the Spendiaryov National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre from 2017 to 2021, Principal Conductor of the Kaunas Symphony Orchestra, Music Director and Principal Conductor of the New York City Opera, Konstantin Orbelyan gave an exclusive interview to the «International Dialogue» magazine.

Your life and your work are an endless dialogue of cultures. Which one is particularly close to you?

I suppose every culture has its place – first of all in its country of origin and secondly in the minds and hearts of people all over the world. I grew up in the United States, where



Konstantin Orbelyan with the great chansonnier Charles Aznavour after the first night of the ballet dedicated to him «La bohème» at the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theatre

we watched Leonard Bernstein's «youth concerts» on television, which were broadcast all over the United States. He was an amazingly talented musician and a colourful personality: charismatic, intelligent and educated. Bernstein was one of my main inspirations when growing up in San Francisco.

Your manifold service to the arts encompasses a variety of areas....

Yes, initially I was a concert pianist – I began my studies in San Francisco with a wonderful teacher from Kiev, Alexander Liberman, who was a student of Felix Blumenfeld and studied there at the same time as Vladimir Gorovits. I have always been very interested in Russian music and, of course, in the Russian piano school. Then I travelled for a while to Armenia to study by Jury Hayrapetjan at Conservatoire and every second weekend I flew from Yerevan to Moscow to take classes

with Anaida Sumbatyan, who was the teacher of Vladimir Ashkenazi and Vladimir Krainev. Later I studied at the Juilliard School of Music with Nadezhda Aronovna Reisenberg, a student of Leonid Nikolaev from the St. Petersburg Imperial Conservatoire... So I have always had great respect for the «Russian» school. I also worked with the pianist Nina Svetlanova, who was a student of Heinrich Neuhaus and emigrated to the USA in 1975.

My concert career has spanned many countries and continents.

I was a Columbia Artists Management performer and, since 1980, I've performed more than 100 concerts a year all over the world. My touring took me to the USSR, where I played 25 concerts in 1989, which was a great experience. On the 1st of December 1990, I performed in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. Six weeks after the concert, the orchestra's conductor, the remarkable violinist



Konstantin Orbelyan with the outstanding conductor Yuri Temirkanov

Andrei Korsakov, passed away, and I was offered the position of Artistic Director of and conductor of the orchestra. It opened a new page in my personal musical life, in the development of my musical imagination and in my creative growth.



...with famous Armenian musician and composer Jivan Gasparyan



...with the famous singer Renée Fleming.



My friendship with Dmitri – both musically and personally – was certainly one of the highlights of my career and life.

You have been friends with Dmitri Hvorostovsky for many years. It is also known that vocalists adore you...

Besides taking part in great projects, concerts, recordings, tours and historical concerts, I learnt a lot from him as a musician. He was an absolute perfectionist in the preparation of every piece he sang. I have always been a good concertmaster and partner on the stage, as I learnt a lot from Nina Svetlanova, concertmaster of the famous Zara Doluchanova, but it was Dmitri who gave me the subtleties and laws of vocal accompaniment.

What does internalisation in music mean to you?

I believe that music is an international language. Can we imagine a world without Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff? These are the same geniuses as Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Dostoevsky, Pushkin and many others. So, there should be no boundaries for art, literature or music. It is impossible to imagine how much poorer the world

would be without these people and their incredible art.

Recently, together with the director of St. Petersburg DEAN Publishing House, we founded the project «Russian Culture Viewed from Abroad», which includes publishing books, the «International Dialogue» magazine and the YouTube channel «Bridge of Love». Do you think such an initiative is needed today?

I think people will always be interested in the arts in general and, of course, in music as well as in literature. The influence that Russian music has had on the West and on the world is immeasurable. I recently conducted Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin at the magnificent theatre in Cluj-Napoca, in Romania, and performed a programme

of compositions by Alexander Harutyunyan, Aram Khachaturian and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony at the Bucharest Philharmonic.

What is important to you in life?

Peace, freedom, and the opportunity to do what I want and wherever I want.

How do you envision the future world?

I am not a politician, so it is difficult for me to make predictions about the future. However, I know that normal people want peace for themselves and their families – that's for sure.

Text by: Natalia Holzmüller



Russian culture embodies enduring values

At a themed soirée in Vienna, I met Peter Reisegger, Doctor in Medical Research, an otolaryngologist, and we got engaged in a conversation. I was very pleased to learn that Dr Reisegger was interested in Russia and Russian culture, and I wanted to talk more about it. We met with him again. Dr Reisegger comes from a medical dynasty. His grandfather and father were doctors and he could not imagine any other future. After completing his higher education, he began his professional career and eventually became a respected doctor in Vienna with his own medical practice.

From a young age, Dr Reisegger was keen on dancing. He was particularly attracted to the tango, and thanks to this passion he visited places he might not

otherwise have seen. For example, he once flew to Simferopol and travelled from there to Koktebel, where tango lovers gathered.

Peter Reisegger's range of interests is wide, and history occupies a significant place in it. From a book on the royal Romanov dynasty, he learnt a lot of information that his memory retains. For example, he knew that in the 15th century the coastal towns and the mountainous part of the Crimea became part of the Ottoman Empire, and the Crimean Khanate remained under its protectorate for a long time, which was a source of constant instability on Russia's borders: raids, thousands of captives, and the ruin of lands.

He knows that thanks to military successes during the Russo-Turkish wars, a peace treaty was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire that initiated the accession of Crimea to the Russian Empire, completed at the end of the 18th century, and that Prince Grigory Potemkin, who was appointed governor of Novo-Russia by Empress Catherine II, played a key role in this. Surprisingly, Dr Reisegger is also familiar with the expression «Potemkin villages», an expression that appeared in connection with the Empress's trip to the south of Russia, when on her way Potemkin ordered «the hasty construction of palaces in the Tauride region». The Prince achieved his goal. The Empress



and her companions were amazed by what they had seen, and she gave Potemkin the title «Prince of Tauris», and a medal was minted in honour of the journey, «A Way to Benefit».

Dr Reisegger spent two weeks in Koktebel and gradually got used to it:



«I danced a lot and enjoyed the atmosphere of this trendy holiday destination, where life was buzzing. There were many bars and restaurants where music was played and you could dance more than just the tango, which I did actively. One day I met a girl from Moscow who spoke English and she introduced me to her circle of friends. They were bohemian-looking young people, maybe artists, painters or poets. We spent evenings together and I was surprised that they welcomed me, a stranger, into their company.

After a while I was already familiar with everything in Koktebele and decided to go on a tour to nearby Feodosia. I liked the city, which has largely preserved its historical appearance. Its alleys reminded me of Parisian boulevards. I was very impressed by the Aivazovsky Gallery – I had never heard of this artist before, but later I often saw his works at European auctions. His paintings of Italy and the Bay of Naples in particular were extremely memorable.

After a tour of the museum's collections, I was tired and lay down on a bench and fell asleep. I was awakened by the voice of a policeman who pointed out



GUM, Moscow

that sleeping on benches was not the custom here, from which I concluded that the hippie movement was not popular in Russia. At that time, under the influence of hippies, it was considered quite normal for us to have a good holiday on the plein air.

One day, at the invitation of a friend from Koktebel, I was in Moscow. She showed me Red Square, the Kremlin, GUM. We walked along the beautiful embankments of the Moskva River

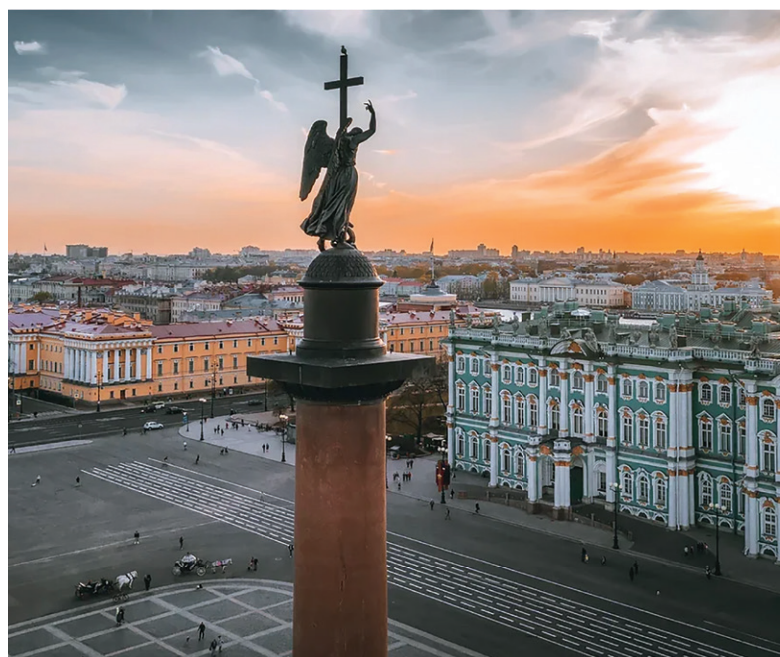
and went to cafes that were popular at the time.

I saw many weddings in Russia, which made me think that family traditions are even more pronounced there than in our country.

I also came to St. Petersburg in relation to tango. It was a cruise with tango lovers. The city impressed me with its magnificent architecture. Russian literature has long fascinated me and it was amazing to see the places described,



Feodosia



Saint Petersburg

among others, by Tolstoy in War and Peace and Anna Karenina.

For me, Russia is the successor of Byzantium. It became the saviour of Europe by defeating Napoleon, and Europe became friends with it, as demonstrated by the Congress of Vienna.

However, the stronger Russia became, the more Europe withdrew from it, fearing competition in the world hierarchy.

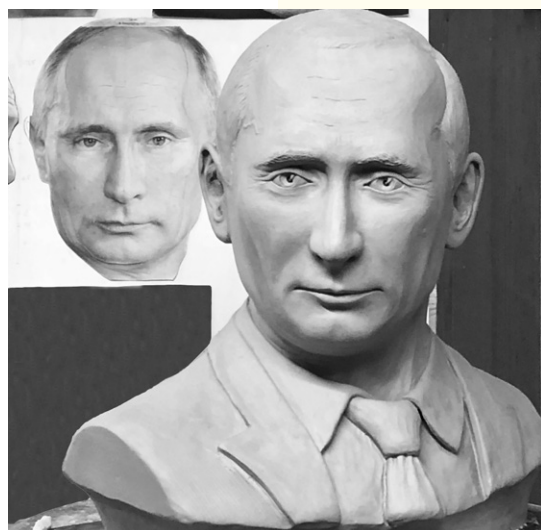
I like Russia and the Russian people. My father was in Stalingrad during the Second World War as a surgeon and he told me that the Russians made a very good impression on him.

Unlike Western culture, Russian culture is less prone to «cultural revolutions» and is on the right path. It seems to me that Russian culture more convincingly embodies enduring values.

Of course, to understand this, one must try to see everything with one's own eyes. As the saying goes, «the perceptions of people who do not know the world are the most dangerous».

When asked which of the Russian cultural figures he particularly appreciates, Dr Peter Reisegger replied: «In literature, this is Tolstoy, Turgenev and Solzhenitsyn; in music, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Shostakovich; in painting – Kandinsky, Javlensky and Malevich».





AUSTRIAN SCULPTOR ALEXANDER LAABMAYR ON THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Alexander Laabmayr creates realistic portrait busts of both prominent personalities and people from his environment. For him, each person is a unique spiritual being with enormous creative potential. Laabmayr's special talent is to penetrate the personality of his models, as can be seen in his works in plaster or cast in bronze. He created a portrait bust of the Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Alexander Laabmayr: «My concept of culture is linked to people's aspirations for development, both materially and spiritually. Every culture is based on knowledge, and it is necessary to use the information inherent in cultural heritage and reinterpret it.

Dark forces are trying to instrumentalise art in the same way as science, technology, medicine, education,



agriculture, politics and economics. The mission of art is to contribute to the healing of the world when it is sick.

Spiritualised art can contribute greatly to better understanding between nations. Common sense can counter dark forces so that they do not drag humanity into the abyss. Everyone must shed their light to make the world a brighter place!

Connecting strands are of great importance in my life. The person and politician Vladimir Putin represents for me a messenger, a link between East and West, which I consider very important — especially in our times.

People are bombarded with a flood of misinformation and fall victim to biased reporting. This generates fear and divides people, minimising the possibility of finding constructive solutions to problems. The time has come to develop a shared critical understanding of moral values and to demand the same from politicians and the media.

I am convinced that there are many people in every country who can make a meaningful contribution to creation rather than destruction».

You can read Alexander Laabmayr's full statement on the role of culture and art in improving mutual understanding between peoples on his official website:

www.alexanderlaabmayr.com

Общество
Дружбы с
Австрией



RUSSISCHE
GESELLSCHAFT
FÜR DIE
FREUNDSCHAFT
MIT
ÖSTERREICH

The regional public organization "Society for Friendship with Austria" (ODA) was established in 2013. Its members include government officials, academicians, prominent scholars and cultural figures, heads of public organizations. The President and the head of the Presidium is Alexander Pronin.

Today the dialogue between Russia and European countries has gained special importance due to the tense political and economic situation in the world, and the role of organizations aimed at maintaining two-way relations with Austria and assisting in holding various international events in both countries can not be overrated.

The Society of Friendship with Austria is a good example of how to build good-neighborly relations.

The USSR-Austria Friendship Society used to be headed by Dmitry Shostakovich, the outstanding composer of our days, and given his sincere civic position, he was doing this out of conviction.

The Honorary President of the Society of Friendship with Austria is Oleg Atkov, the USSR pilot-cosmonaut, Hero of the Soviet Union, cardiologist, scientist and social activist.

ODA streamlines public, youth and cultural ties between Russia and Austria in an effort to foster a positive image of Russia abroad.

Much attention is paid to memorial and patriotic work with compatriots and citizens of the Republic of Austria who advocate the revival of multilateral European cooperation through people's diplomacy, and events are held to preserve in Austria historical heritage associated with the Europe's liberation from the Nazism.

To support the Russian language and culture in Austria and to promote cultural exchanges, international projects, contests and Olympiads are run. Work is underway with foreign schools in Russia and Austrian educational institutions that teach the Russian language.

The ODA mission is to build a bridge of friendship between Russia and Austria.





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