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Russian Duo Dazzles Audience at Stone Church Arts

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The Russian Duo performs at the Stone Church in Bellow s Falls, VT.

By Donna Allen

BELLOWS FALLS, VT – What a thrill it was to witness the vibrant concert at The Stone Church in Bellows Falls on Saturday night! Feet tapped to the explosive talents of Oleg Kruglyako, ballaika virtuoso and Terry Boyarsky, pianist extraordinaire as we were transported from classical music to gypsy melodies to Russian folk songs.

What is a Balalaika you ask? According to Oleg, the balalaika is a wooden, three-stringed instrument of Russian origin, with a characteristic triangular body. The balalaika is played by strumming and plucking with the fingers of the right hand. An important

part of balalaika technique is the use of the left thumb to fret notes on the bottom string, where it is often used to form chords.

“The balalaika was invented by peasant serfs to relieve their hard living under cruel landlords in around 1644,” commented Oleg as he explained the history of not only the Balalaika but his Russian culture.

“Gradually the instrument spread among peasants and skomorokhi (wandering minstrels and jesters) who traveled all around the vast expanses of Russia. Skomorokhi performed at fairs, using their ballads to poke fun at church and state.

“Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich issued an order to burn all balalaikas, domras, horns and guslis, or punish those who would not yield,” smiles Oleg.

The Duo continues with more rollicking music and then Oleg carries on his history lesson with smiles, smirks and pauses as the audience catches on to his humor.

Although the repressions ended with the Tzar’s death, balalaikas did not achieve their former popularity until the mid 19th century, with Vassily Andreyev, a violinist, composer and arranger. One day as Vassily Andreyev, a young nobleman, was walking in his estate he heard his house-serf playing the balalaika.

He was astonished at the unusual sounds of the instrument as he considered himself a connoisseur of Russian folk instruments. He began to learn how to play it and realized how much potential the instrument held. He set to work perfecting and standardizing the balalaika and even went to St. Petersburg to ask the violin master Ivanov for advice.

At first Ivanov refused to make a balalaika, but after listening to Andreyev’s masterful performance, he could not resist. It was long, hard work but eventually they created an improved balalaika. Andreyev’s vision was to bring the balalaika back to the folk and popularize it. On his initiative all the soldiers serving the army were given balalaikas which they took with them after retiring from the army. In this way balalaika again spread all around Russia and became a popular instrument.

With the help of master instrument makers, Vassily Andreyev created a family of balalaikas, like in a string quartet. There are six sizes - piccolo, descant, prima, secondary, alto, bass, and contrabass. These instruments formed the basis of the Great Russian Orchestra, which later toured in many countries of the world to glorify the balalaika and Russian culture. (from their website)

The audience was enthralled as the music slid from exuberance of joy and anger to whispers of love and crying so faint you could have heard a pin drop.

“Beautiful.” “Incredible,” “Wow.” and “He is making the balalaika cry,” were heard as the audience listened intently.

Oleg was born in 1966 in Omsk City, Siberia, Russia and grew up singing with his family. He began playing the balalaika at the age of seven. After studying at the renowned Ekaterinburg Conservatory and performing with many Russian groups he moved to the U.S. as part of “Moscow Nights” in 1998. In 2007 he formed the International Project “Russian Duo” with Terry Boyarsky, an American with a Russian heritage.

The exuberant performance of soulful, passionate performance of Russian Duo was a concert not to be missed. One would hope that the schools in the area would want to book them for a concert/ and dance lessons in the



future. Then we all would have a second chance to hear the Mysterious and beautiful sounds of the balalaika once again.

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