

The "Pavlovskis Balalaika Orchestra" celebrates its 80 year anniversary

On 9 of April one of the world oldest balalaika orchestras celebrated 80 year anniversary in the "Queen's Hall" - the concert hall in the Danish Royal Library - building also called the "Black Diamond".



The hall was completely full, despite the fact that additional rows have been added. The concert was a great success.

For 80 years the orchestra has of course a huge repertoire of over 350 musical pieces. Therefore anniversary concert included works of completely different genres, with Russian folk and gypsy songs, works by composers such as Andreev, Shostakovich, Sviridov, Shishakov, and Astor Piazzolla.



The first part of the concert was performed under the leadership of conductor Flemming Kejs, and Andy Sundstrøm conducted orchestra in the second part. Jurij Pavlovski, Nina Pavlovski and Guido Paevatalu pleased the audience with their vocals.

The orchestra opened the concert with "Oriental Festival March" by Carl Nielsen from the play "Aladdin", and why? Because it is one of the pieces of music by Danish origin, the orchestra will take with them the next time they have to perform in Russia. Then followed waltz: "Memories of Gatchina" and "Meteor", the last composed and named after the huge meteor that fell down in Siberia in 1906.

And then it continued with "hit" after "hit"; the 1st movement of Shisjakovs "Concert for balalaika and orchestra" from 1953, "Evening on the roads" - a monumental farewell song about soldiers going to war sung by Yuri Pavlovski and Guido Paevatalu - "Legend of Lake Baikal", "The lonely linden", and Sviridovs rousing "Troika".

As a musical interlude song "Svetit Mesjac" was presented by the Youth Orchestra, led by Igor Panitch and opera singer Valeri Likhatchev.

The concert's second part started with "Ivushka" - sung by Randi Pavlovski. Guido Paevatalu whooped it up with a Danish song "Bissekræmmerne", followed by accordionist Kirsten Stenkilde as soloist in Piazzolla's tango "Oblivion". Nina Pavlovski started very early to sing and play in the orchestra and was later at the Opera Academy. Later she was given lessons by the famous Russian soprano Galina Visnevskaja and has sung both in the Danish Royal Opera, as well as many opera stages in Russia and Europe. She sang two newly arranged songs, the cheerful "By no why?" and the romance "Wailing arrows dream".

The concert ended with a song from 1948 "So far, so far", a wistful sigh about the distance to the beloved and the homeland, sung by Yuri Pavlovski.

Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna played a small part in the history of orchestra' creation and this was as usually commemorated in their anniversary concerts, when the Grand Duchess' granddaughter Xenia Gurieva is greeted with a toast (vodka shot) by a balalaika fanfare.

The orchestra received musical congratulations on the anniversary - A balalaika duo from Berlin, came to congratulate the Pavlovski Orchestra. The director of "Russian House" Valery Likhachev made a speech.



Xenia Gurieva Kulikovsky Nielsen and Randi Pavlovski





The seductive sound of a balalaika

In the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917 millions of Russians fled and migrated from their strife-torn homeland. In search of protection and new livelihoods they spread over most countries in Europe, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. One of the many was Evgeni Pavlovski (1912-1985), who after years of flight ended in Denmark, where in 1936 he founded his own balalaika orchestra.



Evgeni Pavlovski came from Troiskosavs-Kiakta, a medium-sized city in Siberia, not far from the border with Mongolia. His mother was a dance teacher and his father an officer in the army. The young Evgeni grew up close to the magnificent Siberian landscape, amid a period of violent domestic tensions.

At the outbreak of the revolution his father was lieutenant general in the Imperial army, and fought actively against the revolutionary Red Army. He never returned from his last military mission. After months of waiting, where conditions deteriorated day by day, the family fled, 18 people, including uncles, aunts, cousins across the border to Ulan Bator in Mongolia, where they found temporary asylum.

The mother of Evgeni Pavlovski married a Danish telegraphist and traveled with Evgeni's sister to Denmark, while Evgeni graduated at school in Harbin. At the right time his mother sent money from Denmark and he traveled all the way to Shanghai in China to board a ship for Denmark.

In Denmark in 1928, he worked on farms in the province, at the time the only work an immigrant could expect. Gradually he became involved with the Russian immigrant community. Growing up in a music-loving family, he learned to sing and recite a seemingly infinite number of folk songs and fairy tales. He was overwhelming musical, self-taught on the balalaika and gifted with a beautiful, expressive tenor, making him an interesting personality in his new country. He began playing in Tjufarins balalaika orchestra, the first in Denmark, until in 1936 he formed his own orchestra.

The original members were all Russian immigrants. Grand Duchess Olga, sister of Emperor Nicholas II, made a piece of land available at her farm near Ballerup, a Copenhagen suburb, where they grew vegetables for their own consumption and built a cabin, which they used for practice room. That same year, 1936, the orchestra appeared for the first time in "Danmarks Radio". (Danish National Radio)

In 1939 Evgeni Pavlovski also sang in the world-famous choir of Don Cossacks, but when the choir at the beginning of 2nd World War was granted asylum in the United States, he left it. During the years of occupation in Denmark, the orchestra obviously kept a very low profile. In the years following 1945 to 1964, he performed as a singer and balalaika virtuoso and worked during the summer months with 'The Riding Don Cossacks', a traveling Russian circus with horses, where he was responsible for the musical performances.

Pavlovski Balalaika Orchestra became a permanent part of the Copenhagen music scene with annual concerts at the Odd Fellow Palace main hall and appearances at the large Russian festivals, bazaars and secular celebrations.

Especially in the fifties and sixties the orchestra often appeared in the Danish Radio and Television. In Russia, the orchestra was "discovered" by the Russian musicologist Anatoly Ivanovich Peresada who later wrote a chapter on the orchestra in his book (1985) about the orchestras of Russian folk instruments outside Russia. He wrote among others: "I am impressed with how Pavlovski Balalaika Orchestra has been able to maintain the genuine popular in music - something like the Great Russian orchestras almost forgot."



In the mid-1950s as the original musicians grew older, Evgeni established a boy's orchestra, and later - a girl orchestra. They are the ones who now lead the orchestra on. Although the orchestra mainly appeared in Denmark, it has also been on several trips to Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany.

In 1950 Evgeni Pavlovski married Randi Houmann, they had a daughter Nina and son Jurij Pavlovski.

Evgeni Pavlovski worked tirelessly to bring the orchestra new works and spreading the Russian and Ukrainian folk music. Through a network of visiting musician's connections to immigrant orchestras and a backdoor through Finland, he managed constantly to update the repertoire with music of high quality, with new numbers every season. At his death he left about 300 compositions for the orchestra's library - all in handwriting.



The orchestra came out in an existential crisis by Evgeni Pavlovski death in 1985. An abandonment of the orchestra was considered, but it was rejected by the then approximately 25 members. In the first difficult period the trio Nina Pavlovski, Guido Paevatalu and Jurij Pavlovski tried to keep the strings, but had to withdraw in order to pursue their own careers.

A longstanding band member, Alex Sundstrøm, undertook the task. His efforts probably saved the band from disintegration. He directed and conducted the orchestra and added new tracks - a task that at times required full-time attention.

Alex Sundstrøm stood in front of the orchestra for 20 years. In 2006 after its 50th anniversary, he gave the task on to his brother, Andy Sundstrøm, who joined the orchestra in 1955.

In September 2010 plans to arrange a trip to Russia came into reality through cooperation with the Danish Cultural Institute in St. Petersburg and its leader, Rikke Helms. The orchestra played

concerts at schools and music academics, and a joint concert with the large Andreief Balalaika Orchestra, the world oldest. The reactions were overwhelming.

In May 2011, the Pavlovski Balalaika Orchestra was invited to a music festival in Yaroslavl on the Volga River as the only non-Russian ensemble and experienced the same strong reception from the Russian audience.

In June 2013 the orchestra again went to Saint Petersburg, where played two concerts - in Saint Petersburg and Pavlovsk.

The orchestra has been called the "Nation's Heroes" and been thanked for preservation of Old Russian culture.

Pavlovski Balalaika Orchestra has changed status from being an ensemble of Russian immigrants. Now it consists mostly of Danes, several have Russian ancestry, and even more with family related to the first Danish members. Although the approach over the years has been volatile, the orchestra at the big concerts is bigger than ever, with about 36 members.

The Pavlovski Balalaika Orchestra captures the strong attraction of the Russian folk music and Russian music in general, with its seductive sound of a balalaika, which calls for the adventure, humor and nostalgia.



A standing ovation after the 80 years anniversary concert to the Pavlovski Balalaika Orchestra