



PERM NEWS

Оксфорд и Пермь — города-побратимы

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter May 2016

My Perm – A Sentimental Journey An Honourable Citizen of Perm: Evgeny Shirokov



No visit to Perm is quite complete for me without paying homage to the Perm State Art Gallery. Especially now, when the plans for its relocation are almost certain and in a couple years (all being well) it will leave its home of many decades in the elegant and imposing building of Perm Cathedral. This time I had a special reason to go to the gallery – an opening night of a new exhibition I was invited to by the Gallery Director and my name-sake Yulia Borisovna Tavrizian.

Once the new exhibition was opened, all the guests still crowded in the exhibition hall upstairs, I could not resist a temptation to walk alone through the old rooms of the gallery on the ground floor, familiar to me since my very early childhood. With the light of day gradually extinguishing outside the windows, the space inside was becoming more and more cosy and magical – the warm glow of the lamps above the paintings, young artists setting up their easels to copy the masters' works. I enjoyed this atmosphere of an enclosed, timeless world dedicated to art and beauty. When I thought I had quite finished my tour, one of the attendants pointed out for me a narrow passage to another room and said: "Don't miss Shirokov."

Shirokov? The name was another blast from the past. Perhaps the most prominent artist in Perm in the years of my youth, and certainly THE best portraitist, Evgeny Shirokov painted portraits of all the famous figures in the cultural elite in Perm and beyond. Indeed, he was one of those artists who completely demolished the notion of the capital-province cultural divide. No surprise that Shirokov together with Sergey Diaghilev was included in the list of Permians "who created their time". Evgeny Shirokov is an Honourable Citizen of Perm, the People's artist of the USSR, the Stroganov Premium winner of the nomination "For outstanding achievements in art and culture."

I stepped through the door and was surrounded by faces as familiar as those of old friends. Composer Dmitry Kabalevsky - he once conducted our music school choir at one of the city celebrations; actor Evgeny Lebedev in his role of Kholstomer in the seminal play "The Story of a Horse". I remember how difficult it was to get a ticket to see it when their theatre came to Perm from Leningrad; and, of course, young Nadya Pavlova, an amazing ballet dancer, a sweetheart of the whole city of



Perm in her youth, loved and adored here as nowhere else, and not least – by yours truly. The exhibition was timed for the 85th jubilee of Evgeny Shirokov. It represented the outstanding body of his work truly and thoroughly. The paintings by Shirokov are exhibited in more than 15 museums in Russia, including the State Tretyakov Gallery, but Perm holds the most complete collection of the Master's work. Well worth seeing.

Julia Budnik – Grantham

Vsevolodo-Vilva – a celebration

In January 1916 Boris Pasternak on the advice of friends and family set off for Vsevolodo-Vilva, a small town in the north-east of Perm Region. Boris was 26 and wavering between devoting his creative energies to music and to literature. His friends thought that a long stay in a distant place might concentrate his mind – and also help him to avoid conscription. (He had originally been rejected as unfit for a soldier, but two years into the war the rules might be less stringent.)

The town had a chemical works which produced acetic acid and chloroform using local mineral resources. The manager of the plant was a friend of a friend, so Boris was found an office job which allowed him plenty of time to write or alternatively to compose at the home of his host who lived in a big wooden house near the factory. He did manage over a period of six months to write poems and prose fragments, and he also visited mines, explored the Solikamsk salt works, travelled down the Kama to Perm, and tried to describe what he thought of as a 'non-Russian landscape'. These were the experiences which, four decades later, he incorporated into *Dr Zhivago*.

One hundred years after this visit of young Boris, a group of enthusiasts in Perm Region decided to celebrate the great poet. (In Russia Pasternak is recognised as a poet above all, as a translator of Shakespeare, and then as a prose writer.) And so it was that I found myself, somewhat bemused, on a bus leaving Perm at 8 a.m. one Saturday in April this year. The bus was half full of teenagers, one of whom, a precocious but charming sixteen-year-old, spent most of the journey telling me (in English) his thoughts about philosophy, Dostoevsky and the correct direction for Russia to develop. At Berezniki we were joined by twenty more teenagers and their teachers. The bus turned east, heaved itself out of each forested valley and lurched down to the next with no sign of habitation for miles and miles. This is Urals country. Sometimes we were crossing high open land, bounded by dim lines of receding forested ridges. Finally, after more than four hours, we came out into an area of level grassy ground with what seemed to be a disused factory at one end. Vsevolodo-Vilva was hardly a village. It had no centre, merely lanes which crossed at right angles, sporadically populated with little fences, old wooden houses, burnt-out wooden houses and (surprisingly) new wooden houses. By English standards it seemed a curiously pointless place; so much space, so little used, nothing seemingly built in relation to anything else. Why were we here?

At this point I experienced the kind of up-turning of emotions and impressions which is so typical of what Russia offers. We turned a corner and were confronted with what seemed to be the only brick building in the territory of the village, a two-storied substantial school, noisy with children from four or five 'local towns' – i.e. within a 3-hour bus journey. Inside the school we were directed first to buns and pies and fruit – and then to the assembly hall where there was a huge picture of Pasternak, much bunting, and an opening ceremony. This was followed by an acting troupe from Perm who performed something that would have been striking had it not been drowned by the amplified music of the guitarist. (Visitors to some Perm restaurants will know what I mean.) Then the children and teenagers were divided into groups according to their age, and sent off to classrooms.

For an hour or more I sat at the back of a class of twenty-four 15 and 16-years olds from the six different localities. In turn they came out to the front and recited by heart one of Pasternak's poems. There were as many boys as girls, all of them very intense, concentrating, committed. And, without exception, they recited beautifully. One or two used music, one projected three of Leonid Pasternak's

paintings onto a screen in front of the class, and one boy acted with highly dramatic gestures. But most of them simply spoke aloud the poems which they had chosen. Two teachers acted as jury.

Russian children have to learn by heart from an early age; and they are taught to recite poetry. Their culture encourages them to love poetry as a natural pleasure to which they are entitled, but at the same time one which is too important to treat casually. I thought some of the boys might swagger out to the front, half-embarrassed, half-defiant. But no; they were all listening to each other and preparing for their own piece, nervous, articulate, delighted. There was no embarrassment, no self-protective irony such as you would find among English teenagers, even enthusiasts.

I was utterly enchanted. Here we were, pretty much in the middle of nowhere even by Perm standards, with children from some of the poorest towns (closed mines, dwindling iron production) and from villages where the climate made any agriculture a struggle, all coming together to share great lyric poetry because poetry was important.

The chemical works in Vsevolodo-Vilva was closed down long ago; the 'village' has no prospects except education, and even then for their last two years the students go to the nearest small town which has the equivalent of a comprehensive sixth-form college. Their parents do whatever they can on their land or in some kind of improvised mini-business. But this apparent mismatch between the place and the activity seemed to strike no-one except me, an English woman used to the small-scale and the pastoral as an accompaniment to poetry. What was clear at this celebration was the devotion and professionalism of the teachers in these depressed industrial towns many hours from Perm. They were funny, lucid and admired. There were genuine cheers and shouts from the audience as 'their' schoolmate or teacher was mentioned in the closing ceremony. The organiser explained that in two days there would be another kind of festival for adults – and then yet another event later in the month. More buses arriving, more celebrations, more poetry.

As we left, the sun was setting far to the west over the distant Kama while behind us stretched the endless rising and dipping of the Urals. Slowly the light dimmed. Two hours later we stopped on an area of concrete wasteland where enormous lorries, bigger than any of our juggernauts, were parked. We stood, shivering slightly, while Igor Volkin (he of the canoeing trips on the Silva) brewed his fine Turkish coffee laced with Russian cognac and the feral dogs inspected our offerings of dried sausage and bread. I hope Pasternak's spirit enjoyed it.

Karen Hewitt

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Newsletter and web site

Newsletter articles, book reviews, letters are always welcome for this Newsletter. **The submission deadline for the autumn issue is 15th September** but it greatly assists planning if you let the editor David Roulston know if you plan to submit an item or to discuss an idea for the newsletter or web site www.oxfordperm-assoc.org. This is currently being updated - see 'History of the Links' section and 'Window on Oxford' links on the home page. **Reminder:** the web site contains all copies of Perm News from 2001 to the last issue, with a complete 'Contents' of all articles to facilitate searches.

Forthcoming Events

(1) **Tuesday, 21st June, Dr Tina Jennings of St Antony's College: 'What's going on in Russia - Penetrating through the Haze of Western Propaganda'**. This will take place in St Antony's College, starting at 5.30. Tina will talk about the stereotyping of Russia in western media since the start of the Ukraine crisis..

(2) **Thursday, 30th June Rip Bulkeley, an Association member, poet and writer, will give a talk on 'Bellingshausen, Antarctica and Global Warming, 1819 -- 2048'**. It will be held at Rewley House, Wellington Square, starting at 5.30.

The Bellingshausen expedition to the Southern Ice Ocean in 1819-21 'made an outstanding contribution to geographical discovery and furthered the development of many branches of science'. Despite this, almost no original historical research into the expedition has appeared in Russia since the late 1960s, and Bellingshausen's reports from the voyage have never been published in full. This is a talk for those interested in Russia, expeditions, science, murky dealings and silences and... climate change! So something for everyone. Rip was awarded the Anderson Medal in 2014 for his book of the same title as the talk.

(3) **October** - date to be confirmed - **Professor Julia Mannherz will talk about Perm and music, particularly traditional music of the region**. Last year Professor Mannherz spent some time in Perm researching folk music and Russian traditions.

(4) **Summer Garden Party** – Friday 8 July at 5 p.m. till 8 pm. at Karen's house, 6 Rawlinson Road. This year the party will have a more active format with some surprises which we expect you will enjoy and which we hope will raise money. So please bring your friends.

We will be sending round a leaflet at the beginning of June - meanwhile do make a note of the dates - and invite your friends to come too.

News from other links

This year Leiden is celebrating its sixtieth year of twinning and Leon is celebrating its thirtieth year. You can find details on the Oxford city website. This Leon event is not very distant. Monday 4th July, 4.00 - 7.00pm. Hinksey Pool, Abingdon Road, Oxford OX1 4RP. Our annual sponsored swim is our main fund-raising event and funds water projects in the Department of León. It is a lovely community event and the aim is to raise money so you are welcome to do as many or as few lengths as you like. Swimmers needed. If you don't swim, you can help in other ways - or sponsor the event.

Hogwarts in Perm

Hello, friends! Are you still studying at the University or a graduate already? Have you ever dreamt about studying at the most brilliant, magical and fantastic University from J.K.Rowling's book? Yes, it's Hogwarts! And I can honestly say that I know the wizard school near by Ural mountains in pretty city – Perm. My Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry is **Perm State University**. Do you believe me? Let's go with me and my friends there between mysterious buildings, in basements and laboratories, in the solemn dining halls and under the water in our favorite fountain. I'll show you the real Hogwarts...

The ordinary day begins with the students' Sorting Ceremony. We have 12 Departments so students hurry up to their building. The Maths Faculty is the oldest, so freshmen usually lost in many corridors, stairs and dead ends. If we see a modest girl or boy with unforgettable giant eyes – we know that they need our help. Do University stairs move? Nobody knows, but sometimes you want go to the Physic faculty but come

to the Law faculty.

I start my week with the History of Magic. Yes, we learn unreal things! Have you ever synthesized the smallest gold pieces in the test-tube? Have you grown algae in the glass for a minute? You may say it is the nonsense. But it is not, it is just chemistry. My dearest department has robes! Every student and professor in PSU knows our sign. No, we don't put to each arm the Dark mark like Lord Voldemort, we just wear white coats! White is our colour! Or, I should be fair, white with signs of alchemical experiments!

Probably it still does not seem like Hogwarts. I'll try to change your mind. Let's remember more Hogwarts subjects.

Herbology. Oh, we have the biggest Botanical Garden for it. I believe there can live owls.

Flying lessons (on broomsticks). Why not? Each spring and autumn we have a special territory cleaning hour, and I see pictures of girls flying on broomsticks (young witches).

Potions. That's my life. Fortunately, I don't have such sullen teachers as Severus Snape, but all of them wise and caring, true highest level wizards.

Defence Against the Dark Arts. Which kind of dark? The University helps me to avoid the lazy, routine life! There are hobby clubs in the evening and fascinating laboratory jobs during the day.

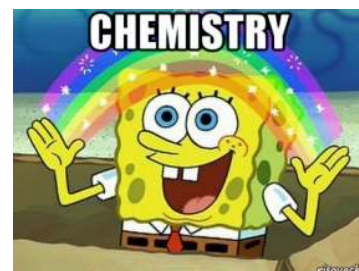


Yeah, laboratories are the most important life of chemical faculty. We make their magic almost every day, but our actions are secret. I'm just kidding, but you have to pass an initiation ceremony and swear allegiance holding a round-bottomed flask. Furthermore, we have a competition between departments through the year. We get points for achievements in sports, theatre and for science contributions. "What about school uniform?" - you ask. I tell you - everything is written on our branded jackets! We're from PSU, chemistry department (for example). We can always recognize each other outside. And we have a lot of 'Dobby' before exams. We throw a coin into the fountain for luck, someone lives in the library and someone wants to hide in the basement. The loveliest phrase after everything ends is "Dobby is free". Free for doing more and more cool things in our Hogwarts!

Can it all happen in ONE week? Certainly, it's my second home and I want trying everything.

Welcome to our Perm State University! Perhaps you'll be the lucky man, who'll get the precious envelope from botanical garden owl. P.S. Sometimes you can meet the cat. Don't worry, just animagus.

Daria Shemiakina Andreyevna
Perm State University
Perm, Russia



Modern Art in Perm

Anyone who has visited Perm is sure to know Perm State Art Gallery, with its fine collection of art and remarkable collection of wooden sculptures. But what about modern art? This time, my second visit, I had the good fortune to see two wonderful modern art exhibitions, both interesting, thought provoking, and entertaining, yet very different.

The first exhibition was held in the Museum of Soviet Naïve. This private museum was set up in September 2012 on the initiative of two Perm art collectors and patrons – Nadezhda and Andrei Agishev. Although having the prominent address of 1, Komsomolskiy Prospect, and being situated immediately opposite the State Art Gallery, it is not so easy to find – it is in a business building on (I

think) the 6th floor. In some ways, I like that: instead of ART to be venerated and revered, it is part and parcel of everyday life, sandwiched between working offices.



The location complemented the exhibition I saw there of street artist, В U Kashkin (Б.У. Кашкину, real name Evgeny Malahin, 1938-2005). В U Kashkin (also known as Old Man Bukashkin) was a soviet era, but not state endorsed, artist. He lived a bohemian life in Yekaterinburg, though an engineer by profession. He started by painting city concrete fences and rubbish containers. Together with his friends, he founded the non-governmental “Kartinnik” art society. As well as paintings, he wrote short verses and prose, appeared in rock concerts, creating a form of modern folk art. For the exhibition I saw, you needed to be a Russian speaker or, as was my case, have someone who could translate for you, as much of the art relied on the prose

accompanying it. There was a wide variety of exhibits, examining different aspects of modern life: anti-alcohol posters, using humour rather than the usual exhortation; montages of the artist with famous people mounted on cardboard with advice he had given them, or what they had said to him; ceramics; and strange juxtapositions of everyday objects. As for any art, it is difficult to convey in words the impact of the work – some were very moving, some had us howling with laughter and some left us bemused, but we left the exhibition feeling that here was an artist who communicated directly with the public, and at a time of state direction, was wildly independent.

The second exhibition I visited was at the Perm Museum of Contemporary Art, located at b-r Gagarina 24. It was entitled “Art for the People” and put on by two young artists who live and work in Moscow and together are called the Electroboutique Art Collective. They have exhibited widely in Russia and abroad. This exhibition was a critique of the relationship between society and new technologies – its dangers and its uses, while at the same time using technology to make the point. As the exhibits were mostly interactive, again it is difficult to express their impact. For example, in Commercial Protest, the outline of the viewer was shown moving on the screen, but formed of logos of well-known international brands. A criticism of capitalism, while at the same time accepting that we are part of a capitalist society and formed by it. The supermarket trolley containing the screen emphasises the ugliness of the consumerist world.



Artomat.Pro is a system of automated production of art. It plays with the idea that modern art works with a limited selection of possibilities, and then invited visitors to choose from these different possibilities to create their own “modern art”. In this case, a familiar object is magnified, turned upside down, set against an “inappropriate” setting and put on a pedestal. Is it art? Does it mean anything?

What impressed me so much about these two exhibitions was their dynamic interaction with modern society to raise questions about that very society, and yet at the same time being unpretentious and funny. We know that Perm is has long standing connections with art, literature, ballet, music. It was wonderful to see in these exhibitions, Perm embracing new, challenging forms based on radicalism and innovation.



Alison Watt