

# Novosti



## SBO goes Bush!

If you travel to Singleton via the Putty Road, you may miss the Putty turn off. And if you don't, you may still miss the village of Putty itself. Consisting of a hall, a couple of houses & a few cows, Putty is small enough to be described as a 'no-horse' town. Yet every second year SBO gives a concert for the 'locals' & it is amazing how many of them can be squeezed into the tiny Putty hall.

Russian folk music goes down well in the bush. The audiences easily take to the songs, the fiery rhythms & melodies inspired by the vastness of the steppes. And maybe therein lies a link. Despite climatic differences, somehow the distances of both Russia & Australia make for a mutual understanding of each other's sense of place & inspiration. But at our March concert in Putty it was the smallness of the hall & place that made for a more intimate concert where the audience could wine & dine and listen to this unique Russian

folk music. It also gave the largely urban orchestra members a change of scenery.

*Orchestra Virtuoso Lucy Voronova practicing her cimbalom in a rural setting.*

For the last 7 years, the SBO has been making this bi-annual pilgrimage to Putty, as have many audience members; some coming

from as far away as Sydney, and the Hunter Valley, driving two & a half hours there & back, to attend. "We once made a journey to Russia" said John & Cilla McCalmont. "We fell in love with the music there, so it was with great pleasure we found it performed here; & just as well performed as it was in Russia". "I come to every concert" said Bruce Jameson. "Somehow the Putty setting makes for a really intimate evening. The hall is so small, you are so close to the players, that you can almost reach out & touch the instruments".

Putty is well known to both the orchestra players & members of a mandolin orchestra because of our member Martha Babineau, musician & Putty resident. It is her enthusiasm that has inspired Putty's exposure to this sort of music. It is also her hospitality that makes for good musical 'jam-sessions' & 'workshops'.



## SBO to hold Second concert in North Sydney's Independent Theatre

In September 2014 SBO held its first concert in this theatre. The audience responded well to this graceful setting where the auditorium has seating for 300 on two levels. In a city that has lost so many of its old-world theatres, it is great to see that the old "Indy" as it was affectionately termed, has been restored to its former glory.

Built on the site of the old Cable Tram depot, the theatre was originally opened in 1911 as the North Sydney Coliseum. It quickly became known as the leading amateur theatre in Sydney and was home to the Doris Fitton Dramatic Society. But while it was always classed as an amateur theatre it had a very professional face. Such luminaries as Dame Sybil Thorndike once declared it to be "too good to be judged by the standards of the amateur stage". Now the Theatre has been taken over by Wenona Girl's School & restored back to its original Art-Nouveau splendour. A fitting venue to listen to another amateur group which can boast a highly professional performance, the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra.

*On 16 May at 2.30pm, SBO will give its second concert in that grand old theatre of North Sydney; the Independent Theatre at 269 Miller Street. For tickets and enquiries please ring (02) 9955 3000 or go to their web [www.theIndependent.org/#!/may/c1wpx](http://www.theIndependent.org/#!/may/c1wpx)*



## INSTRUMENT SPOTLIGHT

*Big Instrument – Big Ego?*

If there is a certain prestige in playing the biggest instruments, then orchestra president Bruce Barker comes out ahead. He plays the contra-bass balalaika in the SBO. Ingrid Schraner plays a smaller balalaika called a travelling contra-bass. The next biggest instruments are the bass-domras played by Patrick O'Neill & Lazar Stojkov. "I have sometimes been asked if the size of my instrument reflects the size of my ego. Well I am unapologetic! I like big instruments", said Patrick. "But it is the baritone sound of the bass domra rather than its size that I like. It is one of the more expressive instruments in the orchestra. So in a way I suppose it's the instrument that has the ego", he said.

But there is a larger instrument in the domra family, like the contra-bass domra (right). As you can see, because of its bulk, it is not the easiest instrument to play.

And just in case you thought that was as big as these Russian instruments get, there is one that is even bulkier (next page) - so much so that it requires a special stand &



**sydney**balalaika  
orchestra



**Sydney Balalaika Orchestra Inc.**

8 Railside Avenue, Bargo NSW 2574

Ph: +61 2 46 843 667

[enquire@balalaika.com.au](mailto:enquire@balalaika.com.au)

[www.balalaika.com.au](http://www.balalaika.com.au)

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has to be played upright rather like a double bass. "These instruments are so big & so awkward for freight purposes, that it is not very realistic to use them in an orchestra that is sometimes required to travel long distance" says Bruce Barker. "My big contra-

bass balalaika isn't as big as any of these, yet it doesn't even fit through most airport security x-ray machines, as we found out to our cost in China", he said.



So of all bass string instruments are these the biggest ever made? Well actually; no! The biggest stringed bass ever made is a 3 stringed 'Octo-Bass' (left), This colossus requires two musicians. One to stand on a ladder & stop the strings and a second at ground level, to handle the bow! It also has special pads to stop the strings, because the player on the ladder would never have the

strength to hold them down! "This is an instrument with a serious ego problem! It makes my contra-bass balalaika look quite modest" says Bruce. "But it is big enough for me"!

## Vale Ivan Bolesic

It is with great sadness that the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra reports the death of one of its leading domra players Ivan Bolesic. Born in Croatia, Ivan emigrated to Australia following WW2. He played in a number of bands & was an accomplished guitarist, accordion and mandolin player, which is how he came to the notice of the SBO. He was always a cheery and dependable player, mostly in the 2nd prima domras. His playing and cheerful smile will be much missed. He played with the SBO for nearly 20 years and died on 28 March 2015 aged 81.



## SBO thanks Alla and Igor Savitsky

Earlier this year, Igor Savitsky advised Victor that he was resigning his informal role of patron and Travel Manager for the orchestra. Igor and his wife Alla are dedicated fans and friends of the SBO who truly loved our performances. In 2005 Igor, a man of action, used his wide range of Russian contacts and considerable influence to organize SBO's first overseas tour of Far East Russia including Harbin (China). The success resulted in a follow up invitation to Far East Russia in 2007, Moscow and St Petersburg in 2011, a charity concert in NZ in 2012 and a performance tour of Beijing & Tienzin last year. It was also through Igor's continued good relationship with the Russian Embassy in Canberra and Russian Consulate in Sydney, that the SBO was invited to perform at a number of their prestigious events and celebrations. We are indebted to Igor and Alla for their selfless support in promoting the SBO over these last ten years and wish them happiness and good health in their retirement.



## SBO still on the look out for more recruits

The Sydney Balalaika Orchestra is still on the look out for more players. Some of our more successful recent recruits have been mandolin or guitar players and they all successfully transferred to domra playing. So if you would like to join the SBO please get in touch with our Musical Director, Victor Serghie on (02) 9617 0531 or 0409 058 895. We can supply instruments & basic tuition.

## Russian Speakers - not so many in the SBO

The SBO is often thought of as an ethnic Russian musical group. However the number of Russians in the orchestra is not high. While many are descended from Russian emigres, only four members of the orchestra were actually born in Russia. "Vladimir Shvedov, our tenor/baritone singer was born in Moscow, but hearing him speak English you would think he was born in Sydney. Lucy Voronov, our virtuoso cimbalom player, was born in Belarus, & while her first language was Belarus she is to all intents & purposes a native Russian speaker. Our highly talented domra player, Tanya Jephtha was born in Voronezh. So she is another native Russian. Nick Shcherbakov, our talented bayan player was born in Chita and came to Australia as a young boy - and that is about all" said Victor.

There are only 7 Russian speakers in an orchestra, which is made up of people from all over the world. "Our players come from a variety of origins" said musical director Victor Serghie. "We have players of Serbian, Armenian, Chinese, Dutch, Irish, American, Polish and Ukrainian extraction" he said. "But they would all class themselves first and foremost, as Australians. As for me, my mother was Russian, my father was Romanian. I was born in China, so I'm not really sure what I am!" he said.

"We have two common languages in the SBO; English & Music" said SBO President Bruce Barker. "It is not really meaningful to classify us by national origin" he said. "Those who were born of Eastern European parentage may have been exposed to their family culture at home, but they were educated in Australia. They think like Australians and consider themselves first and foremost Australians. The one thing we all have in common is our love for Russian folk music and that is what binds us together", said Bruce.

## Upcoming Events



## Upcoming concerts for your diaries

- Saturday 16 May 2015 2.30pm  
*The Independent Theatre North Sydney*
- Sunday 26 July 2015 2.30pm  
*The Russian Club Strathfield*
- Sunday 1 November 2015 2.30pm (to be confirmed)  
*Town Hall Theatre Campbelltown*

