

A World of Accordions Museum

May, 2006

Newsletter for Members

Editor, Helmi Strahl Harrington, Ph.D.

My Note to Members

Adjudicating at the **Kubok Severa VI** (“Cup of the North VI”) in Cherepovets, Russia, was the experience of a lifetime! It is said to be the largest competition for folk instruments in the Russian Federation. 118 competitors (for money and prestige) were listed in the competition book along with titles for the three rounds of music each hoped to play. Each round required specific styles of music comprising 15-30 minutes; some performers were eliminated with each round. For ten days I was among 24 adjudicators divided into two groups, one for accordion and bayan, the other for string instruments (zither/timbale, guitar, domra, mandolin, balalaika). My group included Professors Vladimir Soloviev, Chairman (Rector of the Glazunov Music Conservatory, Petrozavodsk), Boris Egorov (Russian Academy of Music, Moscow), Victor Vlasov (Ukraine), Nikolay Kraftsov (Academy of Music, St. Petersburg), Li Wei Ming (China), Albin Repnikov (noted composer/teacher from Petrozavodsk), and performers Jukka Kuucela Pecca (Finland), Ludo Marien (Belgium), and composer-performer Vladimir Zubitsky (Italy). We had some pretty lively discussions in the conference room between rounds, during which times I learned a great deal about the process of adjudication at the international level, about the Russian concert repertory and its performance styles, and surprisingly, about the frailty of concert instruments. (Various accordions jammed during shift changes or had mechanical problems of assorted types and severities.) We adjudicated students of Semyonov, Lips, Sharov, Soloviev and other performer/teachers I have admired for years. Here I saw firsthand the teaching methods and expectations of the system. It was enlightening while also posing observations about which I will long reflect and conjecture.

The Cherepovets School of Arts and Crafts named after V.V.Vereshchagin and the Governor of the Vologda region sponsored the competition. Director of the Academy, Evgeny Pokotilov is a most exceptional personality with ability to manage diverse administrative tasks. I presented him with a special-edition view-book of Harts and AWAM along with various memorabilia, which he showed to many dignitaries dropping in on the competition. He chose me to speak on TV, radio, newspaper interviews, which I found very flattering. Later, we signed a Protocol of Intent for future cooperation. It is our hope that we can enhance cultural exchanges on a person-to-person basis.

It is one thing to play such a competition, and something altogether different to adjudicate it. I feel so very fortunate to have experienced both sides, one in my youth, and the other using the insights provided by years of teaching and handling accordions. The latter is important because I can evaluate the nearly invisible relationship between instrument capacity and performer’s techniques with acuity provided by museum-instruments studies and the hundreds of students I have mentored to proficiency. It is an unique package I would wish for others.

Full days of adjudication were completed by evening concerts—among the best I’ve ever heard. Great music was played on “folk instruments” by artists whose caliber of proficiency I’ve not experienced on this continent. We could change that at HARTS. Are any donors reading this newsletter willing to contribute monetary resources to bring soloists and groups to our land?

I was housed at the Hotel Leningrad, in a three-room suite that included ample furniture, refrigerator, and TV (offering at least three English-speaking networks). I could keep up with world events, though most evenings I was too tired to turn on the set. During the day, I was fortunate to have a translator assigned to me. Irena Sotskova was delightful and informative, as well as highly competent. We strolled through town to see memorials and attractions, including the “Municipal Music Theatre for Children” run by Alexey Ustinov and his wife. These are remarkable people of insight. Mr. Ustinov’s work with the Rotary Club included a visit to the USA and an exchange of student art works, the American side of which is on permanent display at the Theatre. We enjoyed a surprisingly wide-ranging concert at the music school named for E.A.Kolesnikova for 9-13-year-old students. I took many pictures showing students with proper stage-manners and confidence in performance. We were taken to see a special one-woman art exhibit for Elena Loginova. You will see one of her pieces in our new Russian display. At an art school for 4-16-year-olds I was given—for the Museum—a marvelous art-weaving, of a type I never had seen. It was taken from their special collection slated for permanent display at the school’s museum, and is now shown with pride at AWAM. I was formally introduced to the director of the

National Museums of Cherepovets, Tatiana Smirnova, who toured us through their various buildings and exhibits, including their early-musical-instruments collection.

I am very impressed by a new accordion. Prof. Nikoli Kravtsov (Academy of Music, St. Petersburg) invented a treble section organization that takes as its starting point the piano keyboard. His innovative reorganization provides the advantages of the button chromatic keyboard while retaining the advantages and experiences of piano keyboard thinking. He says it takes only a few weeks to convert from proficiency on one to the other, and his students seem to bear out that claim. No longer would a complex relearning process to chromatic button instruments be necessary in order to play bayanists' concert repertory. I have said often enough, with tongue in cheek and irony of tone, that what the world needs is one more keyboard-type. But here is one that is needed! Now I look forward to acquiring such an instrument, which is likely to happen in the next few years as manufacture moves toward mass production.

Fully by surprise, one of my cherished hopes came true—the opportunity to see the Dyonisian frescos that inspired Solotariev's composition "The Monastery of Ferraponte." On our day off, the Accordion and Bayan Jury piled into a bus and drove to the monasteries of Kirillov and Ferraponte, an experience I had not even considered as a benefit of this trip. Again, Irena facilitated special attentions for me in viewing rooms generally off limits! Fortunately, this trip was included on the DVDs produced for us as documentation of our multifaceted activities.

One of the things everyone must consider about Russian publications is the need to acquire when available: once a run is sold out, there may be no reprint. I did bring home some wonderful books, music, and recordings; a few were gifts from folks who wanted to assure that the USA has access to rarities through our Accordion Resource Center libraries.

Among the results of this event were: an invitation to lecture at the St. Petersburg Music Academy in November, to perform with Vladimir Zubitsky in Italy in October, to adjudicate again at the Kubok Severa VII in 2008 or 2009, and through my new friend Prof. Li Wei Ming, to adjudicate in China in 2007. As exciting as these invitations are, I may not be able to accept them all—I do have obligations here! However, it's marvelous to find myself on this important track at this point in my life. Do something accordion—and see the world (my new slogan).



The semi-tone accordion I promised the *Alfred Mirek Russian Accordion Museum*, reciprocation for their gift during my December visit, was delivered by to Moscow by Prof. Egorov. We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of donors Mort and Cressida Herold for making it possible.

The train ride from St. Petersburg to Cherepovets (and in reverse on the way home) was the only grueling element of the trip. Even if the 10-hour over-night train ride was made comfortable in sleeping compartments, additional transit time was fatiguing. I spent two days in St. Petersburg before my flight home. There Prof. Kravtsov showed me the extraordinary sights of this city considered one of the world's most beautiful, including a visit to the Musical Instruments Museum with personal tour by the curator Vladimir

Koshelev. Further, Prof. Kravtsov saw to it that his students spent many hours adding to my memories of Russia.

By the way, my son Charlie booked me into a most charming hotel for my over-night in Amsterdam--Hotel Zwanenburg. My room included a Jacuzzi that was an exquisite refresher between long trip segments.

Member News



Congratulations to Clare Hansen, who completed her Senior year of high school at UM/D. Clare has performed with us at the Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra New Years Eve Gala, was featured in television interview with "On the Road" correspondent Jason Davis, and has made the news on several other occasions. Clare and her family made the long trip from Tofte, MN, to my studios an adventure since she was five years old. Clare is not only beautiful and intelligent but also a centered, confident young woman who plans to continue her education at the University of Montana in Missoula.

Congratulations go also to Benjamin Lang of Holmen, WI, who performed with us at Polkafest and several international competitions. Ben volunteered at the Museum last summer while studying accordion repair. His accomplishments are manifold as he strives to prepare with our friend Stas Venglevski for accordion studies in Russia.



New Acquisitions

We are grateful for the donations of Alan and Lorraine Warren of Downington, PA, who sent us two boxes of accordion related periodicals going back to the 1930s. It surprises me that we had NO examples of “Accordion News,” in fact, I didn’t know the publication existed. Now we have a significant sequence of them along with additional “Accordion World” and “Accordion and Guitar News” magazines. A few miscellaneous items completed the shipment. Thank you. We are grateful.

Our Concert Hall stage center has been enhanced by the addition of a rosewood square grand piano donated by Wally and Mary Mahnke (Duluth). While it is not playable at present, its grace and heritage contributes to the ambience of the hall.

Upcoming Events

May 23: “Chulrua” and “McInnis Kitchen” bands playing Irish traditional music and Newfoundland/Cape Breton-with-a-touch-of-Canadian-Maritime styles. Featured are Paddy O’Brien, Sue Spencer and Jim Ofsthun, along with their compatriots. Look at our website for further details, and do consult www.chulrua.com and www.mcinniskitchen.com.

June 10: “Sound of Strings” concert directed by Michelle Gribbon. It will be our final pre-European-tour performance. Yes, I’m participating along with 19 strings, guitars, piano, and cello.



June 23-25: *Polkafest* at Ironworld Discovery Center, Chisholm, MN. We will present the AWAM Traveling Museum and many performers in the Interpretive center Theater. I’ll be helped this year by my daughter Hanni (son Charles and friend Krystal Wolfe) and Audrey Meitzner, who will take over first-day events. (I’ll be arriving back to Minneapolis that Friday after the Austria-Germany tour, and will take over demonstrations and performances by Saturday). Featured guest this year is Dan Fiskum, a renowned ragtime and rock pianist and recording artist. Watch our website for the full schedule.

July 2: *Museum Day* for *Accordionists and Teachers Guild National Competition and Festival* attendees.

August 12-13: *Second Annual Mid-West Regional Free-Reed Festival*. Two days in which we will host a full slate of workshops, concerts, jam-sessions and accordion-related FUN! Don’t miss this one. Watch our website for scheduled events.

September 24: *Friedrich Lips* (Moscow) in concert. If you heard him before, you’ll never want to miss an opportunity to hear him again. If you don’t know him, your concepts of music-making will be forever changed after this concert. Lips is one of the world’s foremost performers and interpreters—I can’t say enough! Consider this a “MUST ATTEND” event.

September 28-October 12: *Deutsches Akkordeon und Harmonika Museum Travelling Exhibits* at HARTS. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view part of a great accordion collection from Germany, and perhaps to speak with Dr. Martin Haeffner, curator and accordion expert.

October 1: “Forro for All” troupe from Brazil. Singers, dancers, and musicians offering our region a most delightful and informative show. We are grateful again to Jose Curbelo for bringing South American artists to our area.

Harrington Arts Center Publications

Charles Magnante: America’s Great Accordionist, Third Edition. Second Printing. CD of 21 pieces included.

\$40.00.

Helmi's Handouts (2004). ca. 150 p. with indexed divisions. \$25.00. Music, exercises, learning helps.

Selected Favorites for Free-Bass Accordion: Quint- Converter Edition (2004). 17 pieces, 33 p. \$15.00.

Christmas Carol Favorites for Quint Converter (2004). 19 pieces, 33+ p. \$15.00.

Bohemian and Viennese Button Diatonic Method, Book One (2005). ca. 36 p. \$12.00

Bohemian and Viennese Button Diatonic Method, Book Two (2005). ca. 35p. \$12.00

Bohemian and Viennese Button Diatonic Method, Book Three (2005). ca. 35p. \$12.00

Bohemian and Viennese Button Diatonic Method, Book Four (2006). ca. 35p. \$12.00

Club System Button Diatonic Method. Book One (2006). ca, 35 p. \$12.00

Watch www.accordionworld.org for new announcements !