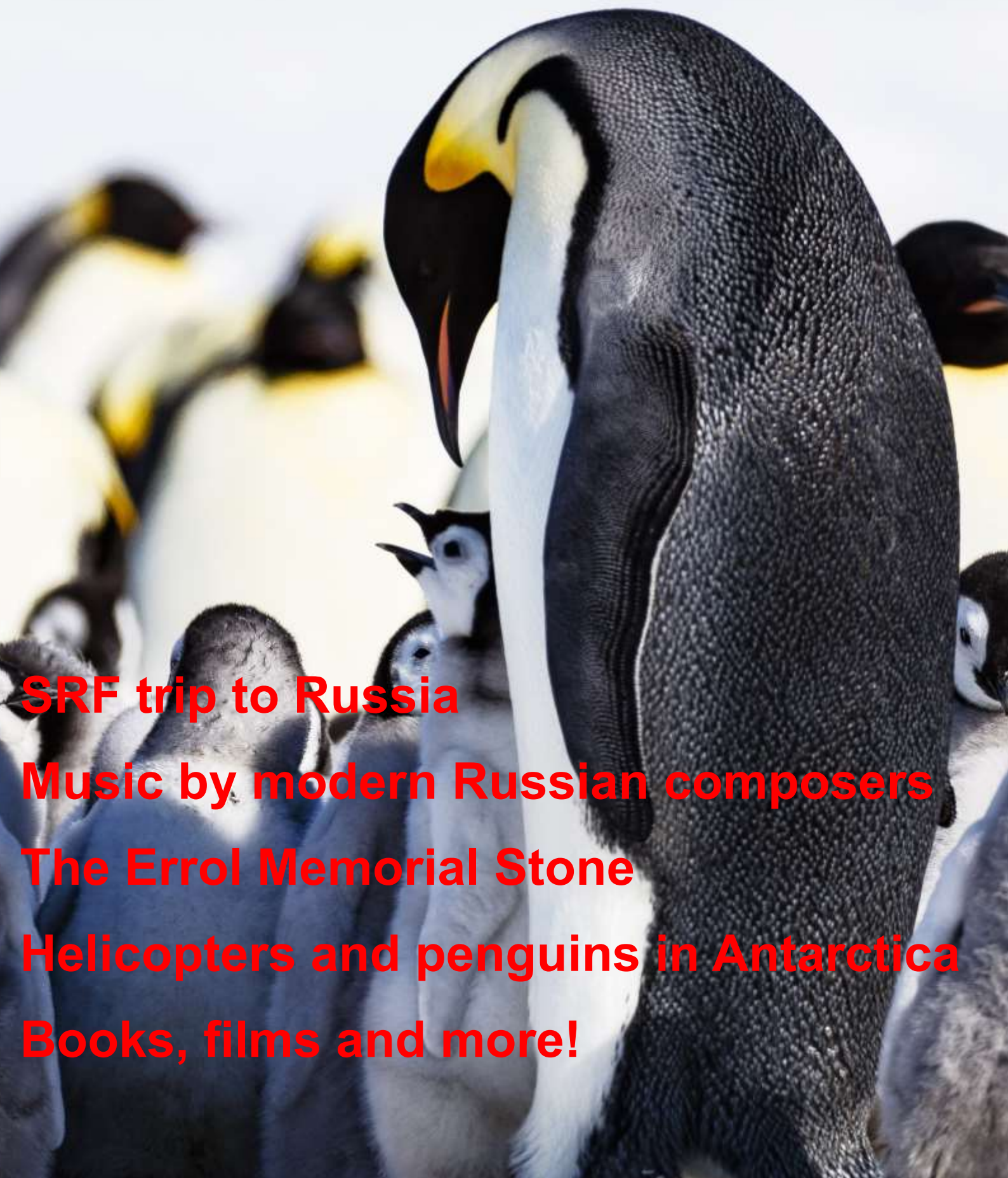


# The FORUM

The Scotland-Russia Forum magazine. No. 44, Winter 2020-21



**SRF trip to Russia**

**Music by modern Russian composers**

**The Errol Memorial Stone**

**Helicopters and penguins in Antarctica**

**Books, films and more!**

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# From the Editor

Dear Readers

We go to print as the cold spell comes to an end and spring is in sight, and we hope this issue of The Forum finds you in good health and good spirits.

If you're tired of lockdown and hoping to be able to travel again soon, have a look at page 2. Our Treasurer, Peter Harvey, has long been planning to organise a social trip to Russia for members and partners, and we hope you are tempted by his itinerary. Please contact him directly if you're interested in joining the tour.

Anna Belorusova is the granddaughter of Pyotr Kolesnikov, one of the airmen who came to Scotland for top-secret training at RAF Errol in Perthshire during the Second World War. Their heroism was commemorated in Errol on Remembrance Day last year. Anna tells us their fascinating story on page 3.

Have you been missing going to live concerts? Yulia Savikovskaya, who lives in St Petersburg, is a music expert who is lucky enough to have attended some wonderful concerts at the Mariinsky while most of Europe was in lockdown. She tells us about two performances of works by living Russian composers.

Our feature article is by Colin Souness, an intrepid man of many parts, whose work for the last nine years has taken him to the Polar regions. He describes for us what it's like to fly helicopters in Antarctica in the chilliest conditions imaginable. It's all about penguins, in case you hadn't guessed — which explains the image on our front cover, taken by Colin's wife Nicky.

Returning to culture, on page 10 we bring you an update on the Kino Klassika Foundation, which this month launches a new online cinema platform 'Klassiki'. It's well worth checking out, if you haven't done so already. Films are free to watch until April, so don't miss the opportunity.

Our book section includes an interview with Sergei Medvedev, winner of last year's Pushkin House Book Prize, and reviews of books about pianos and jewellery. We expect to resume a fuller round of book reviews starting with our next issue.

As usual, if you'd like to contribute an article to The Forum, or if you have any suggestions, do get in touch.

Very best wishes,

*Sheila Sim*

*info@scotlandrussiaforum.org*

*February 2021*

## The FORUM

Jan/Feb 2021. Published on behalf of the Scotland-Russia Forum. Available online and in print.

All opinions expressed are those of the contributors, and don't necessarily coincide with those of the trustees or the editors.

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*The aim of the **Scotland-Russia Forum** is to promote interest in Russia and its neighbours in order to improve understanding of those countries in Scotland.*

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# SRF trip to Russia, June 2021—will you join us?

**Peter Harvey**

Dear SRF members and friends

After a long delay since March 2020, we are now in a position to give you the proposal for a visit to Russia in June 2021. The general idea is for an SRF group, with an interest and knowledge of Russia and the Russians, to have a holiday, see parts of old, traditional Russia and refresh their opinions and ideas of modern Russia as shown in the new Moscow.

The trip will include a classical music event, perhaps at the Bolshoi Theatre depending on their summer programme. We will visit some of Moscow's lovely new and old parks and hope to attend open air concerts of popular and traditional Russian music which attract crowds of young and old Muscovites. The visit will be targeted around Russia Day on 12th June - the holiday with many kinds of street attractions. The long June days add to the festival feeling.

Duration: 13 nights, comprising: 3 nights in Moscow, 3 nights in Yaroslavl, 3 nights in Suzdal, 4 nights in Moscow.

## Itinerary

02 JUNE Edinburg to Moscow via Amsterdam. Transfer from Airport to Izmailovo Delta Hotel, Moscow for a 3 night stay. Welcome dinner at the hotel or at Izmalovsky Kremlin restaurant.

03 JUNE Tour of Moscow Kremlin and Armory. The afternoon and evening will be free for sightseeing.

04 JUNE Visit to Kolomna, Kremlin and Local Pastila products with the afternoon/evening free.

05 JUNE Checkout of hotel and travel by coach to the Golden Ring with a Visit to Rostov the Great Kremlin before check-in at the Park Inn Yaroslavl hotel for a 3 night stay. Dinner at the hotel.

06 JUNE Tour Yaroslavl, Kremlin, Saviour Transfiguration Monastery and St Iliia church. Afternoon/Evening free.

07 JUNE Visit Kostroma and the Ipatiev Monastery with time in the afternoon/evening to enjoy Yaroslavl.

08 JUNE Checkout of hotel and travel by coach to the Tour Centre Hotel in Suzdal for a 3 night stay.

09 JUNE City tour of Suzdal, Kremlin, Intercession Cathedral and Saviour Ethimy Monastery. Afternoon/Evening free.

10 JUNE Visit Vladimir & Bogolubovo, St Demetrius and Assumption Cathedrals and Golden gates museum. Evening free.

11 JUNE Checkout of hotel and travel by coach back to Moscow for a 4 night stay at the Izmailovo Delta Hotel. Dinner at the hotel.

12 JUNE Today is Russia Day so you will have the day to enjoy Moscow and what Russia Day offers.

13 JUNE Visit the Tretyakov Gallery and then have the afternoon/evening free.

14 JUNE This will be the tours last full day in Russia to do some sightseeing or browse the local shops. Farewell Dinner at the Silver Age Restaurant.

15 JUNE Checkout of the hotel and transfer to airport for flight home.

15 JUNE Moscow to Edinburg via Amsterdam

## Prices

£ 2,415 pp on a Twin/ Double room (supplement for a single room is £450 pp). Costings are based on 20 participants.

The total tour cost includes Russian visa , flights with KLM from Edinburg to Moscow, all hotels mentioned on Bed and Breakfast basis, 5 dinners as stated in itinerary, return airport transfers in Moscow and the coach/ tour guide throughout the Itinerary, entry charges to museums, churches.

The tour is a good mixture of the old, Golden Ring, and the bustling new Moscow. You should have plenty of opportunities to speak to Muscovites old and new and brush up your Russian if you so wish.

I hope many members and their friends will come.

To register your interest, or for more information, please contact Peter Harvey. Email [peterjameshavey43@gmail.com](mailto:peterjameshavey43@gmail.com) or phone 07508 606540

*Peter Harvey is the Treasurer of the SRF*



*Rostov the Great—one of the many delights that awaits you in Russia!*



# The Errol Memorial Stone

by Anna Belorusova

A memorial dedicated to the Russian airman who came to Britain on a top-secret mission at the height of World War II was installed at Errol in Perthshire on Remembrance Day 2020.



*A group of Russian airmen arriving in Scotland in March 1943. (From family archive)*

The memorial stone, which travelled to Britain by sea, is a rare crimson Shoksha quartzite rock, mined in Karelia in the north west of Russia. It is the same stone with which the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier by the wall of the Moscow Kremlin is lined.

The Russian airmen were part of the elite Moscow Special Assignment Airgroup, formed in the first days of Hitler's invasion from the country's very best civil aviators to undertake crucial tasks for the High Command. Flying passenger DC-3s equipped with gun-turrets, they delivered food to besieged Leningrad, dropped thousands of para-



*Foundry workers with sculptor Aleksandr Kim (right). Photo courtesy Petrozavodsk Foundry*

chute troops behind the enemy lines to defend Moscow, flew in supplies to the armies trapped inside the enemy circle, evacuated the wounded under direct artillery fire in the last days of the Defence of Sevastopol, and brought help to the Resistance hiding in dense woods.

In early 1943, when the shortage of transport aircraft became acute, Britain gave the Russian allies one hundred modified Albemarle bombers. This twin-engine aircraft was too big to be carried on the Arctic Convoy ships which were delivering fighter planes to the Red Army Air Force. Albemarles had to be flown at night across the North Sea and enemy-occupied territories. Attempting this dangerous air-route controlled by enemy fighters needed the skills and bravery of the hand-picked pilots of the Moscow Airgroup.

The Allied ferrying was classified as top secret, with all reports going straight to the desks of the two Heads of State. RAF Command designed a special training course for the Russian aircrews who would fly the Albemarles, each comprising a pilot-commander, navigator, flight-engineer and radio-operator. RAF Errol in Perthshire was designated as the base for the operation.

Arriving straight from the heat of battle and still in their combat dress, the Russian airmen were covertly flown in small groups to Scotland. There they joined the specially formed top secret 305 Ferry Training Unit, Royal Air Force, to learn to operate the aircraft.

The Russian strength at RAF Errol was 70-80 people – all of them high ranking officers decorated for their bravery in action. A Dundee tailor made new Soviet uniforms for them. They took English grammar lessons and made good friends with the RAF airmen. They watched Rangers FC winning the Scottish Cup Final and were entertained by the aristocracy. They came to dances at Errol Mason Hall and bought groceries from the local shop to carry with them on the ferried planes to Moscow.

Eleven Russian airmen were to die in the Albemarle operation. Two planes were lost over the North Sea on the way to Moscow. The third crew was killed during a training flight, which crashed just outside Fearnan village on Loch Tay; the crew managed, in the last seconds of their lives, to steer clear of the village. In May 2019 a memorial stone in their honor was unveiled and a tree was planted on the site at a joint ceremony

On Remembrance Day 2020, the 75th Anniversary year of



Above: the stone being installed in Errol in November 2020, and local residents Morris Leslie and Ron Gillies on Remembrance Day. Photos courtesy Angus Forbes.

the end of WWII, a Memorial Stone shipped from Russia by sea was installed beside Errol Parish Church to honour the Russian Airmen and the two countries' allied bond. The site was suggested by an old postcard featuring the church and brought home by Pilot Commander Pyotr Kolesnikov, my grandfather.

The Errol Stone is a work by Aleksandr Kim, a renowned Karelian sculptor, who kept the natural form of the rock whilst suggesting a symbolic shape of a wing or the eternal flame to the viewer. The stone's plaque, which bears a dedication to the Airmen and their allied mission, was cast after a design by Ivan Yudinkov, the grandson of one of the Airmen, at the Petrozavodsk Foundry.

The historic Petrozavodsk ironworks, originally established by Peter the Great, underwent revolutionary modernisation in the late 18th Century by the great Scottish metallurgist, Charles Gascoigne, to become the leading ironworks in Russia of the time. [Ed: The foundry is Petrozavodsk is very keen to establish some Gascoigne connections, so if readers have any information please let us know!]



Due to the lockdown restrictions the official unveiling ceremony was postponed, but the Errol Memorial Stone will now become a permanent place for the annual British-Russian commemorations. To showcase the connection, on the same day, 11th November 2020, the Pyotr Kolesnikov Memorial Museum opened on Remembrance Day in his native village of Mitrofanovka, in the Voronezh region of southern Russia. One of the museum boards about the hero-pilots is dedicated to Errol.

On 15 September 2020 a 'sister' memorial stone of similar red quartzite with a Petrozavodsk-cast plaque was unveiled in Khvoinaya village, Novgorod region. The Moscow Air Group airmen were based there in autumn-winter of 1941 delivering food and evacuating starving civilians during the hardest period of the Leningrad siege, when the air remained the only route to the encircled city.

Alongside with the Errol Memorial Stone it will be a site of annual commemorations in their honour.



Above: the 'sister' memorial stone in the village of Khvoinaya, and the opening of the memorial museum in Mitrofanovka. Photos courtesy of Khvoinaya and Mitrofanovka villages

Anna Belorusova is the granddaughter of Pilot Commander Pyotr Kolesnikov (1906-1948). She was the first to uncover the top secret allied operation in her book about the history of her grandfather's legendary air unit, published to wide acclaim in Moscow in 2019. She lives in St Petersburg.





# Musical feasts by modern Russian composers

**Yulia Savikovskaya**

*Musical feasts of emotions that bind people together: new works by Rodion Shchedrin and Sofia Gubaidulina are performed at the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg.*

While the rest of Europe was undergoing a string of second lockdowns, the Mariinsky Theatre continued to arrange a daily repertoire of ballet, opera and orchestral music for its three spaces (Mariinsky-1, Mariinsky-2 and Concert Hall) throughout the autumn season. Never before had St Petersburg residents had the chance to see such a constant flow of Russian opera and ballet stars, as many of the artists could only perform in their own country during this time.



*The Mariinsky Concert Hall, St Petersburg. Photo: Yulia Savikovskaya*

The energy and leadership of the Artistic Director, Maestro Valery Gergiev, was behind this buzzing activity.

Two performances of works by living Russian composers who have already established themselves as classics of contemporary music stand out from the array of other events. On the evening of 22 November an oratorio ‘Über Liebe und Hass’ (‘On Love and Hatred’) by Berlin-based Sofia Gubaidulina (who will celebrate her 90th birthday in 2021) was performed. It had received its premiere in Mariinsky Concert Hall in 2018, so this was only the second time it was performed in St Petersburg.

‘On Love and Hatred’ is quite an unusual work - one that definitely speaks directly to these uneasy times. It was written after the composer had read the text of a prayer in an Irish collection found in a Benedictine monastery. Although it was first published in German in 1912 (with anonymous author), it is traditionally believed that its au-

thor was Francis de Assisi. The oratorio comprises different layers of human emotion: hatred, despair, devotion, erotic passion, human love, love of God. For Gubaidulina, the mission of the artist is in forming a direct link between the human soul and heaven: she wishes to create a ‘legato’, a sustained connection between our lives and high moral and religious aspirations. Gubaidulina leaves freedom for interpretation, indicating that the texts could be performed in German, Italian, French or otherwise (Russian), as she herself also compiled her oratorio from different sources.

The work consists of 15 different extracts linked into a certain thread (leading from agony to enlightenment) and features soloists, a mixed choir and an extended orchestra that allows us to physically feel the massive proportions of the composer’s appeal. German texts make us imagine that we are present in a Catholic cathedral, while Russian texts lead towards emotions that we could experience during a Russian Orthodox service. An overall sense of poignancy inspired by the importance of the composer’s message fills the viewer during the evening. The mixed choir is positioned at the special choir seats that are part of Concert Hall’s design, while the soloists – bass Mikhail Petrenko, baritone Vladimir Moroz, tenor Mikhail Vekua and soprano Irina Churilova – are based in the left corner of the stage.



*Valery Gergiev and the orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre at the end of the performance of Gubaidulina’s ‘On Love and Hatred’. Photo: Yulia Savikovskaya*

The majority of the oratorio’s episodes are written for each respective soloist (joined by the choir and orchestra), while ‘Aus dem Hohelied’ (‘Out of The Songs of Songs’) has a duet of lovers expressing their earthly passion. The

oratorio is indeed a powerful, unforgettable, almost ritualistic ride through the gamut of human emotions, allowing us to observe them, to comprehend them better and also to immerse ourselves in the cathedrals of human longings. Valery Gergiev showed an outstanding mastery and understanding of Gubaidulina's intentions in leading the Mar-



*Polina Malikova-Tolstun narrates Rodion Shchedrin's 'The Adventures of an Ape', with Valery Gergiev and Mariinsky orchestra. Photo: Natasha Razina*

iinsky Symphony Orchestra, its choir and soloists – and most importantly – the audiences – through this revealing, overwhelming, encompassing journey.

The second work by a living Russian composer was performed just two days after the first concert, on November 24. It was a world premiere of a new work for soloists, reader and orchestra by a famous resident of St Petersburg – the 88-year-old Rodion Shchedrin. The composer's new work is called 'The Adventures of an Ape' and is based on a short story by Mikhail Zoshchenko. Although intended for schoolchildren, at the time it caused its author a lot of trouble, as it was accused of being a negative presentation of Soviet life. In the story, a little monkey escapes the zoo after bombing in the Second World War and starts marching through the town in search for food, with a succession of different people claiming it as theirs. Finally, the pioneer Alyosha Popov is given the right to take the monkey home, as he is the one who truly loves it, while the monkey eventually learns human rules of behaviour and stops stealing candy from his Grandma.

The sparkling invention of Zoshchenko finds its rival in the imagination of Rodion Shchedrin. He allows us to feel the atmosphere of the walk and the town through introducing orchestral effects that resemble different everyday sounds, and thus percussion plays a particularly important

role during the evening. Moreover, each character (a man from the public banya, a pioneer, onlookers on the street, the monkey) get their own leitmotifs performed in a virtuoso style by Mariinsky Orchestra instrumental soloists on flute, harp, trumpet and horn respectively. The most unusual discovery of the evening was the reader who brought the full story alive – the actress Polina Malikova-Tolstun, who managed to deliver every small nuance of the narration, making it tangible, almost visualised and somehow very modern, intended for all of us who live now.

These two evenings, so different from each other, paradoxically showed us how art that relates experiences that might be so different from our own and that are so far apart from each other (the adventures of a monkey in the middle of the 20th century and Biblical passions and human tragedy) speak to us as powerfully as though they were intended for today. It is as though we have lost our thick skins during 2020 and have suddenly become attuned both to expressions of hatred and love, and to naughty, boisterous world of a traveling monkey in search for happiness. Are not we all eternal wanderers doing the same?

Attending these two evenings made one want to connect with others, to breathe and feel again. The atmosphere of unity during these two nights made me think of all other difficult moments the city might have lived through. It is at these moments that one truly begins to appreciate the power of art and music. Hopefully readers from all over the world will also be able to appreciate the concerts at Mariinsky in person, and in the meanwhile I send you musical festive greetings from the city!



*Yulia Savikovskaya is an anthropologist, playwright, theatre and music critic. She graduated from Oxford University with a DPhil in Anthropology. She is the author of ten plays, 200 publications on theatre and music, and has translated a monography on Evgeny Zamyatin. She is currently collecting interviews for her website [YuliaSavikovskaya.com](http://YuliaSavikovskaya.com) for a future book on anthropology of music. She lives in St Petersburg.*



# Working in the chill? Better fly Mil!

by Colin Souness

Antarctica is a land of stark monochrome. White, white, and more white, punctuated by dark, geological hues. Occasionally, spectacular cries of blue emanate from within the ice, often with unexpected intensity. A colour that isn't typically synonymous with the 'deep south', however, is red. Thanks to this particular sunrise though, as I woke aboard the icebreaker *Kapitan Khlebnikov*, beset by ice in the Weddell Sea, red was the colour of the moment, blazing across the other worldly vista of James Ross Island. More distantly, the 'Forbidden Plateau' of the Antarctic Peninsula's east coast stretched away before me, marching southwards to a crimson chorus towards the Larsen Ice Shelf and beyond.

It was cold. Very cold. I had never, even in seven years of Antarctic work, visited this most remote of continents so early in the season. It was the start of October and winter still hung in the air, barking and biting as it retreated like a dog being dragged on a leash. The air was still, and overnight the sea ice, broken from our passage of the previous day, had begun to re-freeze around us. Those few remaining patches of open water still visible steamed like hot springs in the fiercely cold air. Now, as the sun approached the threshold of the day, casting rosy hues across the stark desolation of the Weddell Sea, the outside air temperature hung at a cool minus twenty-five degrees Celsius. To me as a Scot – even one who works in the Polar Regions for a living – this was startlingly cold. But to the Russian crew of the *Kapitan Khlebnikov* ('KK' to those who know her), all natives of Vladivostok, this was nothing too out of the ordinary – only slightly chillier than an average January day back home on the Peter the Great Gulf. Okay, so the view was a little different to home, but cold was just part of life's road to them.

With a breakfast of bread and kolbasa still sitting rather heavily in my stomach I donned my ample work gear and left the ship's warm, comfortable interior, descending the multiple decks of external gantry that led from my cabin to the ship's helideck. This was located at the stern of the vessel. All around the ship the solid, frozen ocean sparkled as a million frost flowers, formed from crystallised water vapour, caught the morning's emergent rays.

As I reached the KK's main working deck (deck zero) I entered something of an icy winter wonderland. Ventilation



Colin arrives for work wearing appropriate headgear in temperatures of minus 25 degrees C. Photo: Jake Morrison



When you need to get a helicopter in or out of a hangar the most reliable way to do it is by hand. Just watch those icy decks! Photo: Nicky Souness

ducts, cooling vents and other miscellaneous outlets which had all been emitting warm, humid air overnight were coated in ice. Long, rounded icicles hung from these metal protrusions, cascading onto the deck and coating the ship in a deadly, low traction carpet. It all added a beautiful, almost organic curvaceousness to the otherwise angular, utilitarian, steel aesthetic of this old, Soviet-era workhorse of a ship. Stunning. But, slippery also! It was therefore with caution that I climbed the short series of steps onto the helideck.

The scene I came upon could have been taken straight from my imaginings of what a Russian helicopter operation in the depths of Antarctica might have looked like. The previous day I had helped the pilots and engineers push our two Mi-2 aircraft out of the small hangar before then fitting the three rotor blades to each machine (that's industry





*The glaciated coast of Snow Hill Island, beset with patterned sea ice. (Photo above by Colin, and right by Nicky Souness)*



*Landing on sea ice only a foot and a half thick a challenge for even the most experienced pilots. For the marshaller (here, Colin) the wind chill under the rotors can be fierce*

shorthand for helicopter). I'd reported at the same time today, more or less, but the low temperatures had evidently compelled the Vladivostok team to rise early and I arrived to find them already up a ladder by one of the machines. They had the engine cowlings open and were holding a propane heater between them, pointing its blue, roaring flame at the aircraft's transmission box (where the horizontal drive shaft turned by the two engines meets the vertical 'mast' upon which the main rotor is mounted). The biting temperatures overnight had cooled the transmission lubricant well below its safe operating limits, making it too viscous to protect the moving parts that would drive the helicopter's blades. And so, some properly Russian ingenuity was required. Cue: propane and naked flames!

Soon enough the lads were satisfied. The engine covers were lifted back into place and, with all our expedition gear loaded into the back of the two aircraft (and a few staff members draped over and amongst it all) the Mi-2's twin Klimov GTD 350 turboshaft engines were fired up in succession.

A fine mist of ice particles lifted from the deck as the pilot began to raise the 'collective' lever ('obshe' in Russian). As the blades began to change pitch the air pressure around them was altered and small pearlescent vortices appeared around their tips, as what little atmospheric moisture was present found itself forced into the dew point. Misty, twisting streamers danced from the blade tips in the dry, razor-sharp air as the helicopter lifted gingerly from the ship.

The day had begun. And what was it all for, you might ask? Why were we here, beset off Snow Hill Island, blow torching helicopters in the cold? Well, it was all about penguins. Emperor penguins.

I work for a Polar Regions expedition tour company as a helicopter operations manager. Sometimes that means orchestrating staff on the helideck so as to get guests on and off the aircraft safely. Sometimes it means marshalling helicopters into awkward landing spots in the 'field' (in this case the 'field' was old sea ice, pocked with trapped icebergs and covered in dry, blowing snow). Typically, on 99% of our trips, we disembark the ship for our daily excursions by inflatable 'Zodiac' watercraft. But on this expedition, boats were not an option. Emperor penguins breed on stable, stationary 'fast ice', named 'fast' ice, because it is still frozen fast to shore. We were on an icebreaker, but couldn't risk approaching the colony by ship for fear of breaking the ice apart. Nor could we risk moving our clients over many miles of frozen ocean on foot. That doesn't leave many options for getting to the colony. Enter: the helicopter.

Needless to say, I enjoy my job. In my own life back home I'm also a helicopter pilot, and between my own flying and work in the expedition industry I've worked in and around quite a variety of helicopter types. I love them all. But, if I'm to be honest, I have a special place in my heart for machines designed by the famous Mikhail Mil, founder and general designer for the Moscow Mil helicopter plant.

A colleague once described Russian Mil helicopters as "the Massey Ferguson tractors of the sky". I think he was spot on. And my favourite amongst those sky tractors: the chunky little Mi-2 'Hoplite'. I say 'little' with my tongue partly in my cheek, as the Mi-2 weighs considerably more than most aircraft in its size class (2372 kg vs the Eurocopter 'squirrel's' 1241 kg), boasts none of the smooth, sleek aesthetics of its more modern western counterparts and gets about the same mileage to every gallon of Jet A1 as the famous Vietnam-era UH1 'Huey' - that is, a rather shocking 1.3 miles per US gallon. But I love them nonetheless.

The Mi-2 is no longer in production. They were virtually all built in Poland (under the Warsaw Pact) between 1965 and 1999, and in that time the basic design changed very little. However, despite its age, and the vintage of her specifications, I've always found the Mi-2 to be a reliable and robust machine. And there have certainly been days when we've pushed her limits.

Every Russian pilot I've ever worked with has been a model of professionalism, at least when it comes to flight style. We lift, and fly from point A to point B. No tricks and no stunts. Russian pilots very rarely show off. Perhaps it's because the majority of older Russian pilots come from a military background. Perhaps it's because most of our guys have logged upwards of 6,000 hours in their careers. Whatever the reason, they fly well, but without frills. That said, they do know when to ignore the rulebook.

The final day of our first emperor penguin expedition was one such day. With all one hundred or so guests safely back aboard the ship and our field camp collapsed and packed away, the last of our expedition team sat on the cold sea ice, eagerly awaiting a ride home on one of the day's last few flights. That handful of shuttles quickly turned into one single flight, however, when suddenly and without warning, as the sun dipped low and the temperature dropped again, a thin mist began to form in the air around us. I marshalled the helicopter in, waited for the pilot to give the 'all clear' nod, and started, alongside my colleagues, loading gear into the back. We'd planned on sending only a few items and a handful of our personnel on this flight, but the pilot, Andrey, - a slim, greyish skinned fellow who smiled easily and looked to be in his sixties, but might've been younger - turned around to us and waved his hand in a 'come on' gesture. He wanted us all in the back, with all of the gear. Who were we to argue?

We rapidly and clumsily piled the kit into the back: two weather haven tents, several duffels full of sleeping bags and associated emergency kit, ice axes, a full set of ropes and crevasse rescue gear, a couple of empty soup jerries, a wind flag with steel tripod and numerous other bags of heavy gubbins. And onto the gear pile we draped ourselves, completely filling the aircraft with bodies and bags.

The moment the door was secure we were in the air and moving. As we flew the view became more and more opaque. The thin mist turned slowly to fog and alarmingly soon the icebergs below us were almost indistinguishable from the sea ice that held them.



*Emperor penguins breed in the winter, so any expedition to see them needs to come very early in the season'. Photos by Nicky Souness.*

It was onto an almost invisible ship that we landed, not a moment too soon, as Antarctica vanished behind a veil of freezing fog.

That may not have been the safest flight of my life. But, had Andrey not bundled us all into the helicopter some of us might have been facing a very difficult, very cold stay on the ice, for when fog settles in low wind it can remain in place for a long time, especially over a cold surface like ice.

Once again, this time under the watchful gaze of many hundreds of less aerially endowed birds, the Mi-2 had saved our collective bacon, something Andrey reminded me of as we celebrated his birthday over cold meats and vodka in the Drake Passage three nights later.

There were many toasts that night, but at least one of them was to Mikhail Mil and his brilliantly robust helicopters.

*Colin Souness entered the Polar Regions expedition industry as a glaciologist and boat handler, later qualifying as a commercial helicopter pilot. He speaks Russian and has grown to specialise in the Russian north and contracts aboard Russian vessels. 2021 will mark his ninth year working at the Poles.*



# Russian cinema online—the launch of Klassiki

In February 2021, Kino Klassika Foundation launches **Klassiki**, the world's first ever video-on-demand platform dedicated to classic cinema from Russia and the region. Klassiki will host a curated permanent collection of over 60 films which represent the breadth and depth of the best filmmaking from Russia and beyond.

Each week audiences will have time-limited access to contemporary titles selected by the Klassiki team, and specialist film seasons will be added to the platform regularly, many of which spotlight rare gems, unlikely to have been seen in the UK before.

Justine Waddell, founder of Kino Klassika Foundation says, “When cinemas went dark, we were, like so many, forced to rethink how we could continue to serve our audience. We took a chance, and started a weekly online film season, free to audiences in the UK. We bet on the idea that online viewers would be interested in this rare and hard to find content.” She was right. “Thousands of people have tuned in to watch our weekly films, and so the idea for Klassiki, the first-ever video-on-demand platform dedicated to classic films from Russia and beyond, was born.”

The platform is supported by the National Lottery and will be free of charge until 4 April 2021, after which a monthly fee will apply (with discounts available for students), which will entitle subscribers to:

- A brand-new “Pick of the Week” contemporary title – selected by the curatorial team at Klassiki
- A permanent collection of 60+ films which provides a highly curated introduction to the best in cinema from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia
- Exclusive content including blog posts, essays and live online interviews with top filmmakers.

Olga Doletskaya is Klassiki's season manager. She lives in Edinburgh. She tells *The Forum*, “My involvement with Kino started as pure luck. I was looking for volunteering positions after finishing a master's degree at the University of Edinburgh in the middle of a pandemic and struggling to find anything to do. A Russian friend of mine sent me a link to Kino's 'looking for volunteers' page. As I've always been interested in film and worked at the Moscow Film Festival for quite a few summers when I was younger, I decided to go for it. I started as a volunteer, which evolved into research and curation of films.

It's increasingly important for people to have local opportunities to connect with culture without having to travel down to London. Here in Edinburgh we really need to step up our game and klassiki.online can be a small step in that direction. Hopefully once the pandemic is more at bay, Kino can organize more offline events and film screenings in Scotland.”

Justine hopes that Klassiki will raise the ghosts of some near-forgotten films and filmmakers, “like the great Evgenii Bauer for instance, Russia's pre-Revolutionary master, and bring them to life for English speaking audiences. It will introduce us to filmmakers and film traditions we've never seen or heard of. There are the hidden voices of great female filmmakers like Dinara Asanova and Tatiana Lioznova or the wonderful films of Ali Khamraev. Through the magic lantern of film we can travel to Kyrgyzstan and the beautiful films of Aktan Abykadylov or to Kazakhstan where Darejan Omirbaev has been creating cinema for 40 years. Klassiki is a place where we hope you will discover a film landscape you never knew existed or re-connect with the precious film traditions of your childhood.”

**Explore Klassiki at: [www.klassiki.online](http://www.klassiki.online)**



*Autumn Marathon (Осенний марафон), 1979*



*I Walk Around Moscow (Я шагаю по Москве), 1964*

# Books

## Interview with Sergei Medvedev, author of ‘The Return of the Russian Leviathan’ - winner of the 2020 Pushkin House Book Prize



The Pushkin House Russian Book Prize is an annual book prize, awarded to the best non-fiction writing on Russia in the English language. It celebrates books which combine excellence in research with readability.

In October 2020 Pushkin House announced that Sergei Medvedev is this year's winner of the 2020 Prize for his collection of essays called in English “The Return of the Russian Leviathan” (translated by Stephen Dalziel). The prize, which carries a monetary award of £10,000, is given every year for the best non-fiction book in English on Russia or the Russian speaking world. It is the only award in the world that recognizes non-fiction from and about Russia. This was the first time the prize had been awarded to an author who lives and works in Russia.

Pushkin House describes it as a “sharp and insightful book, full of irony and humour, [which] shows how the archaic forces of imperial revanchism have been brought back to life, shaking Russian society and threatening the outside world. It will be of great interest to anyone trying to understand the forces shaping Russian politics and society today.” With thanks to Pushkin House, we are able to reproduce an interview with the author Sergei Medvedev conducted for their blog by Andrew Jack.

How did this book come about?

My academic work concerns the triangle between history, politics and sociology. I write on Russian political history, theories of modernity, biopolitics, and environmental studies. But I also have a popular daily blog on Facebook. Those sometimes inspire my weekly columns in various Russian periodicals linked to current affairs, including in Russian Forbes, Slon (now called Republic) and Vedomosti. I rearranged those into a collection, re-wrote quite a few, and added some new texts. When put together, these texts turned out to have a much stronger critical appeal, as a systemic deconstruction of the current political regime in Russia. Therefore, it was quite difficult to produce the book. Two different major publishers were going to produce it and then stopped printing on the order of the owners. They simply didn't want to take the political risk. But then, a small independent publisher appeared, called Individuum, and produced the book quickly, to some success – the book had five prints in Russia and was translated into eight languages.

What was the reaction in Russia?

Those who were expected to be unhappy were unhappy, since I have quite a reputation for critical thinking. There were positive reviews in the liberal media, and I also had a book tour across Russia and the neighboring countries, from Irkutsk and Novosibirsk to Vilnius and Tbilisi, receiving much interest and support from the readers.

### What about the government's reaction?

The authorities are sensitive to what I write, which is quite surprising. I don't think my weekly columns or Facebook posts can seriously challenge power because it is quite consolidated. This is rather an old Russian tradition of sensitivity of the authorities to texts— power in Russia is literature-centric. And there are new laws almost every month to criminalise words and thoughts, which can lead to a sizeable fine, or even imprisonment. There is a permanent danger looming.

Are you more cautious in your writing as a result?

I try to be as outspoken as I can but I have to weigh every word for the risk of criminal prosecution. That's a very interesting stylistic task. I still say what I think and what I want. But I am more analytical than emotional in my choice of words which in the end only reinforces my message. Living under censorship is a venerable Russian tradition from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. Public speech is like a conflict zone, a high tension area. There is lots of animosity,



agitation and hate speech across the entire public discourse. But you get used to it.

Do you have any desire to emigrate?

That's always an option, but there has to be a clear and present danger to my safety and freedom which I haven't yet detected. For me, it's a personal choice to stay in Russia and to observe, to comment and to try and change minds around me. Emigration has always been a part of the Russian story. Many fellow journalists and intellectuals have moved to Riga, Vilnius, Prague, Kiev, Berlin. I lived in the west for fifteen years, but in 2003 I made a conscious decision to relocate back and to make a new life in Russia, to build my small universe of various jobs, human connections, and, most of all, words. This is what I cherish and I won't give it up so easily.

Do your students share your views?

At the Higher School of Economics, we have a very select audience. Ninety per cent are like-minded people. They may think the same but most of them don't want to stage any political protest. Maybe 10 per cent sign on-line petitions and go on opposition rallies. The others understand but they have lives, careers, their future to think about. Very few of my students will go on a demonstration, but people of my age, in their 40s and 50s, will. We had this period of openness and freedom, the idea that people can change things. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, my generation was demonstrating against the Communist rule, and then on the barricades around the White House in 1991. But we were the Last of the Mohicans, we were quite idealistic and believed that the world can be a better place. And these young people were born under Putin. They don't even understand that there can be free presidential elections, an alternative to Putin. There is a mental shift, and the arrival of a new, pragmatic, generation.

What is your view on Russia today?

Russia cannot come to terms with its own past. That is a symptom of a profoundly disoriented society with no idea of the future, no link to the present day, and only the delusion of past greatness. It's a very infantalistic society stuck in the past. Yeltsin did not break the perennial structures of the Russian empire of the last 500 years. The state made by Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century is still there. These are very old structures of the authoritarian state which Putin has inherited and reinforced, supported by oil revenues. In a secular perspective, it is doomed. Russia is an empire in an age when empires have gone. This can't continue forever. Russian Empire had major breakdowns, in 1917 and 1991. The third one is to come, and Russia has yet to convert from an Empire to a normal nation-state.

Was it inevitable that Putin would end up taking the direction he did?

I don't have a ready answer. I saw the change inside the man. I have to confess that at the time I made my decision to relocate back to Russia in 2003, I was quite optimistic about Russia. It seemed the country was on an irreversible course to normalcy, with modernised institutions, a web of economic dependency with the West, a globalised elite, an open society and a relatively free press. Then I saw this death by a million cuts. It started with Yukos affair in 2003, the reaction to terrorist act in Beslan in 2004, and the first Maidan in Ukraine later the same year, Putin's Munich speech in 2007, and the invasion of Georgia in 2008... Probably these were the inevitable last acts of the ailing Russian Empire before it had totally outlived itself.

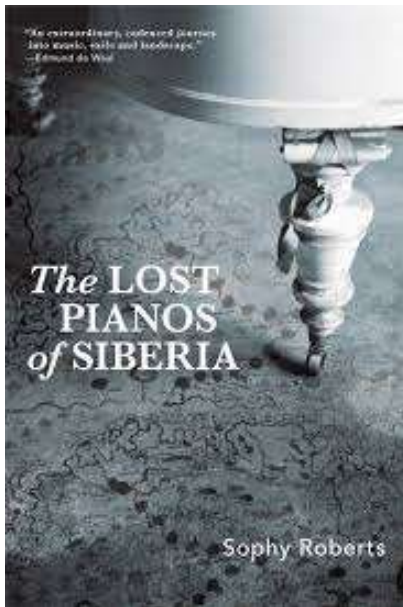
Are you optimistic about the future?

I hope in my lifetime that I will see the demise of this regime. I don't know how long it will take, especially since the rules of the game are permanently changing. Most likely, change will not come from within the country, from the social pressure or political turmoil. In Russian history, it always came from outside. I don't see political activity breaking the regime, but it's important that it continues so there are figures to take over if and when the system weakens. Six months ago, I thought the whole story was sealed for the next decade, with no change likely till the early 2030s. Suddenly the game is wide open, with the virus and the global lockdown, especially with low oil prices, with dwindling financial reserves, collapsing businesses, hesitant elites and Putin in hiding. I cannot say that change will occur in the near future but the range of scenarios is now much broader, and the future is wide open.

*Worth £10,000 to the winner, the Pushkin House Russian Book Prize was created to encourage public understanding and intelligent debate about the Russian-speaking world. Thanks to Pushkin House ([www.pushkinhouse.org](http://www.pushkinhouse.org)) for permission to reproduce this interview.*

# The Lost Pianos of Siberia by Sophy Roberts

Reviewed by Helen Molchanoff



This is a most attractive book and an inspiring read. It's a collection of 50 If pianos symbolise the best of 19th and 20th century civilisation, Siberia must represent the worst of those centuries. It is the place where some of mankind's greatest horrors were perpetrated, horrors against people, horrors against nature.

Sophy Roberts takes us on an extraordinary journey in search of lost pianos to places which even the initiated might never have heard. Siberian piano tuners act as her guide. We discover that the great pianos produced by Bechstein, Blüthner, Broadwood, Steinway, Diederich, Pleyel, Rönisch, Schröder, Grotrian-Steinweg, Yamaha have surprisingly made their way to Siberia. Much can be gleaned about a piano's history from its serial number hidden in the body of its frame.

Sophy Roberts in her piano quest finds customs papers in the Russian state naval archives in St Petersburg dating back to 1730, documenting Anna Bering's clavichord's journey from St Petersburg to the Sea of Okhotsk and then a further six thousand miles home "on a magnificent transcontinental journey of exploration using only sleighs, boats and horses. Anna was married to Vitus Bering, a Danish-born sea captain in the service of Peter the Great.

Known as the "Russian Columbus", Bering's job was to establish a postal route across Siberia and penetrate the American Northwest. Anna, along with her clavichord, accompanied him. Even today, with modern transport, such a journey in the winter with a piano is quite a feat, as illustrated by Michael Turek's vivid contemporary photographs taken for this epic journey (some of which are in the book and more are to be found online: [www.lostpianosofsiberia.com](http://www.lostpianosofsiberia.com)).

Fascinating detail sometimes distracts the narrator from her search. Who knew, for example, that the musical obses-

sions of Potemkin, Catherine the Great's lover, "ran so deep that he would send his courier to Milan to fetch a piece of sheet music?"

What we learn about Siberia is as eye-opening as what we learn about pianos. In December 1825 a group of officers commanding about 3,000 men refused to swear allegiance to the new tsar. Their subsequent exile to Siberia is veiled in romance. These Decembrists were an educated class who brought 19th century civilization to Siberia, some wives followed their husbands and some pianos followed their wives.

Once we reach the Soviet period the stories are more frightening and haunting with incomprehensible persecution of talented artists. The outstanding pianist Vera Lotar Shevchenko travelled to a gulag to protest her husband's innocence: he was accused of being a foreign spy. She in turn was sentenced for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" and sent to a labour camp. Her fellow prisoners carved a keyboard into her wooden bunk with a kitchen knife so she could practice silently at night. When she was finally released, she walked straight to a music school, still wearing her convict's coat, and played Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven – all note perfect. Teachers and students were transfixed.

The journey goes full circle from Mongolia and back, culminating with the delivery of a promised piano to a yurt in the wilderness. There are lights in the deepest of dark-nesses.

**The Lost Pianos of Siberia is published in paperback on 28 Jan 2021 by Penguin / Black Swan**

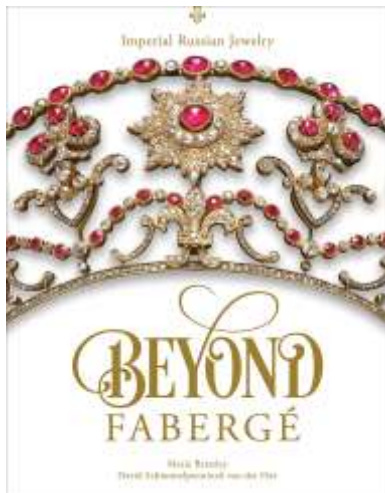
**ISBN: 9781784162849**

*An 18th century Broadwood forte piano being played at an 18th century music concert in Brazil aroused Helen Molchanoff's interest in piano history. The Broadwood came from her home - Fingask Castle, where her husband's family, the Threiplands, have been living since the 17th century. This interest inspired Helen Molchanoff's enthusiasm to write this review for SRF.*



# ***Beyond Fabergé: Imperial Russian Jewelry* by Marie Betteley & David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye**

Reviewed by Sophie Law



The title of this sumptuous book is Marie Betteley's invitation to step into the unknown: go 'Beyond Fabergé' she dares. The rewards for doing so are plenty. Through this scholarly survey of pre-Revolutionary Russian jewellery artisans and houses, we are granted

access to a world we might only have seen through the prism of Fabergé. At least 40 jewellers in Russia held the Romanov warrant during Fabergé's time and many of them were renowned for their distinctive styles, but it is Fabergé who looms large in the public consciousness.

Fabergé's place in the global pantheon of jewellers is, of course, richly deserved and the book includes a chapter on the visionary craftsman, but Betteley expertly pleads the ingenuity of other jewellers who supplied the Russian court. Fabergé, the author argues, is one of many jewels in the glittering history of Russian decorative arts, but not its crowning one.

Many will be familiar with the work of one of these Russian master jewellers, possibly without even knowing it: the staggering Vladimir tiara with pendant pearls often worn by the Queen and thought to be one of her favourites, was made for the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna by the House of Bolin. Bolin, Betteley explains in the chapter on the jeweller, was a 'powerhouse' surpassing all others and the jeweller of choice of Russia's upper classes. Where Fabergé served two of Russia's tsars, Bolin supplied jewels and silver for no less than five consecutive sovereigns over the course of the 19th century.

Betteley is well placed to make the case for Russian genius in the field, having lived as a teenager at the Hillwood Museum in Washington DC, home of the late Marjorie Merriweather Post and the largest known private collection of Russian decorative arts outside Russia where her father was director. Surrounded at the museum by treasures

from imperial Russia, Betteley was hooked and her passion for Russian jewellery took her to Christie's where she began as a gemologist, later running the auction house's Russian Department in New York.

Divided into two parts: 'history' and 'market', 'Beyond Fabergé' mines the rich seam of the history of Russian jewellery with the aid of splendid illustrations. The historical sweep of the book takes us on a journey from Scythian gold treasure and the crafts of Kievan Rus via the Romanov dynasty's 300 years of passion for jewels. We marvel at the magnificence of the 18th century court jewels and the culmination of the craft's swan song before the Revolution.

The chapters on the artisans who supplied the Russian imperial court have been painstakingly researched by Betteley and her historian husband, the co-author. For over seven years the writers consulted Russian archives and other sources to gather material for the book and to detail the invariably dramatic rise to fame of the jewellers who dominated the field. The story of Jérémie Pauzié, favourite of the Empress Elizabeth, is gripping. One of Russia's finest 18th century jewellers, Pauzié had a business genius to rival that of Fabergé and his exquisite gem-set bouquets undoubtedly inspired the latter's hardstone flowers. Subsequent chapters are dedicated to other notable master jewellers such as Tillander, Kurliukov, Ovchinnikov and Sazikov.

'Beyond Fabergé' is essential reading for art world professionals and anyone interested in the history of Russian decorative art.

**Beyond Fabergé: Imperial Russian Jewelry by Marie Betteley & David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye**

**Published December 2020 by Schiffer Publishing Ltd**

**ISBN 978-0-7643-6043-5**

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