



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

THE PRINCESS DASHKOVA RUSSIAN CENTRE

FEBRUARY 2015 NEWSLETTER

14 Buccleuch Place, EH8 9LN, Edinburgh, Tel: 0131 650 99 02

28 January 2015, Issue 1

November and December 2014 Events

Friday 12th-Saturday 13th
December
International Conference,
'Giving Voice to Cultures:
Practices of Russia-Britain
Cross-Cultural
Communication in the 21st
Century'

Thursday, 11th December
Russkaya Cappella –
Russian Choir Concert

Thursday, 27th November
Prof Svetlana Adonieva,
'Remembering Rituals and
Social Cohesion: Russian
Traditions 20-21st
centuries'

February 2015 Events

Thursday, 5th February
Dr Rose France, 'An
Aesopian interpretation of
Zoshchenko's
'Retribution''

Wednesday, 11th February
Premiere Screening of
Kirill Sokolov
Documentary,
accompanied by Lecture by
Prof Avril Pyman on 'The
Concept of Tragedy in
Russian Silver Age
Thought'.

Thursday, 26th February
Dr Nick Baron,
'Cartography and Cultural
Revolution: Maps,
Modernity and the New
Soviet Man'

Dear colleagues and subscribers,

welcome to the new February 2015 issue of the Princess Dashkova Russian Centre's Newsletter. We are delighted to introduce a new format of our Newsletter to ensure we keep you up-to-date with the latest news.



Reporting on our November and December 2014 Events

'Giving Voice to Cultures: Practices of Russia-Britain Cross-Cultural Communication in the 21st Century'

On 12-13 December, the Centre held an international conference: 'Giving Voice to Cultures: Practices of Russia-Britain Cross-Cultural Communication in the 21st Century'. Amongst conference participants were Russian, UK and European scholars from various humanities disciplines, including sociolinguistics, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, sociology of culture, literary and media studies. In addition, the conference had a strong knowledge transfer agenda and included two roundtables with practitioners from culture industries directly involved in the process of mutual representation of the British and the Russians through literature, theatre, photography, cinema and design.

Rather than focusing on the history of UK-Russia relations – a theme that has been broadly discussed, the conference explored the forms of intercultural communication that exist today.



Professor Stephen Hutchings

In his keynote talk entitled *Nasha Russia* and the Intercultural Modalisation of Prejudice in Russian Television Comedy, Professor Stephen Hutchings (Manchester University) analysed the case of the Russian controversial TV project *Nasha Russia*, modelled on the BBC series *Little Britain*. *Nasha Russia* engages in play with ethnic and gender stereotypes to create comic effect. However, despite its professed aim to mock xenophobia in the Russian society, it fails to establish a distance from the nationalist and xenophobic discourse. Therefore, embedded in the pre-political correctness conditions, *Nasha Russia*, unlike its British prototype, runs a risk of mobilising rather than modalising prejudice that exists in Russian society.

Esther Ruth Harper: 'Travelogue accounts of Russia are many and varied, and are a decisive player when establishing an understanding of the country. With the understanding of the country at stake, the person behind each account is a vital factor.'

One of the conference themes was the issue of the relationship between media and the experiential knowledge of individuals who travel to foreign countries. We live in a culture of all-pervasive media, such as television, internet, social networking sites, blogs, and discussion forums. The average user of media can access an endless number of circulating images representing a different country and culture. These images with their old and new stereotypes, associations, aesthetic and moral evaluations, and with a variety of stories form a 'map of pre-knowledge' of Britain and Russia, and thus mediate the personal experiences of individuals visiting these countries.

Why is it, however, that these stereotypes are still slow to alter even during the digital era, despite the rapid replenishment of the "bank" of images and ideas? How can new social practices (for example, unhurried individual travel through countries, or work-related temporary residence) affect popular ideas about the Russians and the British?



Diasporas were another prominent subject of the conference. Participants of the panel 'Russian migrants in the UK: a matter of visibility' Vlad Strukov (University of Leeds), Anna Pechurina (Leeds Beckett University) and Oxana Morgunova (International Migration and Gender Studies Institute, Brussels) discussed representations of immigrants from Russia and former Soviet Union countries in the British media and strategies of their inclusion into the UK society. Under what conditions can a Russian-speaking diaspora become noticeable and visible to the British? It is only in the case of wasteful consumption of the super-rich (as illustrated by the English reality TV series about wealthy Russians in London, *Meet the Russians*), or are there any other representations of Russian immigrants? Can Russian expats adjust and select 'visibility' levels, or fully integrate into British society?

Culture as a mediator was a constant as well as a poignant issue discussed at the conference. There is a widespread view that during political crises cultural texts, such as books, films, plays, etc. undertake an intermediary role in communication (hence the idea of a dialogue of cultures). How, though, does this tie in with the aim of contemporary culture to challenge, to ask provocative questions, and to express current social problems and contradictions through uncompromising art forms? To what extent can literature, music and performances which express such ideas help overcome political differences and serve the purpose of ‘cultural diplomacy’, and in what instances do they deliberately emphasize contradictions in order to find solutions in a more determined manner?

Svetlana Adjoubei highlighted the importance of establishing a networking structure focused on exploring cultural diplomacy between Russia and the UK.



The roundtable discussions ‘Cultural exchanges’ brought together practitioners from different cultural industries, and gave an insight into some of the many new joint projects being implemented in intercultural communications between Britain and Russia. It is notable that such joint projects go far beyond London and Moscow. Thus, among participants were colleagues from the University of Edinburgh involved in high-profile joint projects with Russian partners. Examples were the playwright and director Dr Nicola McCartney, who has devoted a lot of time to the Class Act project in Russia, and set up a major theatrical project involving disadvantaged teenagers, orphans, the disabled and those in need of rehabilitation; and Professor of Architecture Karen Forbes (College of Art at the University of Edinburgh) who designed the Evolution Tower for Moscow City International Business Centre.



The Princess Dashkova Centre is very pleased that such a meaningful discussion took place and attracted the attention of both humanities scholars and practitioners in the field of culture. However, in order to successfully develop cultural ties between the two countries, it is not enough simply to ensue mutual interest between individuals. This task requires focused efforts, work on improving the infrastructure of the cultural industry, as well as financial involvement by businesses and companies capable of supporting non-profit initiatives in the interest of education and cultural transfer. It is a considerable challenge, which will bring rewards primarily not in the form the immediate financial profit, but in improved methods of knowledge exchange, which can, in turn, bring about changes in the social environment and cultural landscape.

*Natasha Perova:
“Western influences on young
Russian authors concern the form
and method rather than the
contents and ideology. Authors
reflect the Russian condition and
use local material, and thus their
works remain uniquely Russian in
spirit and style.”*

For Russia and Britain, it is important to invest money and effort into publishing timely translations of contemporary prose and poetry, awarding literary prizes for outstanding translations, and producing relevant books from which readers will be able learn about the values that are currently important to other cultures. It is vital to organize regular joint film and theatre festivals,



exhibitions, and concerts not only in the capitals but also in the regions; as well as to support not only popular performances, but also those that reflect contemporary cultural shifts, etc.

On the one hand, it could be said that this work is already being carried out in some measure. At the conference we heard from a number of successful projects and initiatives which are currently underway. These included [Academia Rossica](#) (which develops intellectual and cultural ties between Russia and Britain and organises public appearances by Russian writers and cultural figures in Britain, festivals of Russian cinema, and many other projects), [CoolConnections](#) (which arranges screenings of British performances in Russia), [Glas New Russian Writing](#) publishing house (which promotes the translation into English and overseas distribution of Russian literature), the [Society for the Promotion in Russian and Soviet studies](#) (SCRSS), and others.

On the other hand, the Russian-British cultural scene could certainly be a lot more vibrant. For example, London-based Calvert-22 Foundation publishes an [online magazine](#) in English on the creative industries in Russia, such as ‘young’ art, fashion, architecture, urban projects, etc. In his presentation on the Calvert Journal, James Rann discussed strategies to promote a greater diversity of perspectives in representing Russia abroad. The Calvert Journal assumes that its English-speaking readers are interested in Russian life and cultural processes, and the journal sees its readers as individuals who, while they may not plan to visit Russia, would like to find out about the cultural developments taking place in Voronezh and Kazan, about art prizes awarded in Russia this season, about how Moscow hipsters are different from their London counterparts, and much more. The journal aims to create a digital environment, in which multiple manifestations of Russian culture can be discussed from various perspectives. This is an extremely important project to make Russian culture more visible in the UK.

However, there are still not enough such initiatives. Can similar publications be said to exist in Russia, acquainting readers on a daily basis on the cultural life of the British people, new trends in photography, contemporary art, design and music projects, not-for-profit and theatrical productions? The conference revealed that Russians are much more familiar with the England of ‘gentlemen, fogs and the 5 o’clock teas’ (as Elena Goodwin’s paper illustrated), than with the real everyday diversity of British cities and small towns, or with the current culture of Scotland and Wales. In other words, while there are no insurmountable obstacles in the field of cultural communication between Russia and the UK, there is still ample scope for consistent joint work and for mutual recognition between the two cultures.

The conference was held within the scope of the UK-Russia Year of Culture. We are grateful to the Russkiy Mir Foundation for a generous conference grant.

Russkaya Cappella: Russian Choral Music with Christmas Flavour



The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre was pleased to have Russkaya Cappella perform for an audience of almost three hundred at the Opening Event of ‘Giving Voice to Cultures’ international conference. Russkaya Cappella is a mixed-voice chamber choir that performs Russian music. Founded in 2009 in Glasgow, it is the only Russian choir in Scotland and one of a very few choirs in Britain specialising in Russian choral music.

The first part of the concert presented a brief anthology of Russian liturgical music. Russkaya Cappella’s programme ranged from ancient chant (*znamenny* – notated in signs), to compositions from the high point of the Court Kapella (Bortniansky), to works from the ‘New Direction’ taken by the Synodal School of Church Music and its choir in Moscow in the

late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Kastalsky, Rachmaninoff). Composers from the Russian Emigration were also represented. The second part of the programme concentrated exclusively on Christmastide. This season – *Sviatki* – is the main winter festival in the Russian calendar, lasting from the Nativity of Christ until his Baptism. The Nativity is preceded by a 40-day period of reflection supported by the observance of a restricted dietary regime known as the Philip Fast (because it begins on the day observed for the Apostle Philip in the Eastern Church). Between the two church festivals the New Year is celebrated. But the season has prompted multiple celebrations outside the church as well. It was great to see the Reid Hall full to capacity for the concert.

The audience was varied – from students to members of local choirs, councils, religious and community groups – but unanimously enthusiastic, and Russkaya Cappella performed several encores. The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre would like to thank Stuart Campbell and Svetlana Zvereva, joint directors and conductors of Russkaya Cappella, for making this fantastic event possible, and we are looking forward to arranging another large-scale musical event in 2015.

For more information on Russkaya Cappella and its concert schedule visit <http://www.russkayacappella.org/>



Dashkova Open Research Seminar

Professor Svetlana Adonieva, Saint Petersburg State University
Remembering Rituals and Social Cohesion: Russian Traditions 20-21st centuries



Graveside lamentation is an instrument that enables dialogue with the dead. One can engage in a talk with them. We can observe this type of experience in rural settlements... Despite being gone, the dead can perform the role of partners in conversation with the living, making it possible for the living to share their experience and their grief.

Svetlana Adonieva, a Folklorist and Anthropologist, Professor at the Department of the History of Russian Literature of Saint Petersburg State University, visited the Russian Section (DELC) and the Dashkova Centre during November. She gave a talk at Dashkova research seminar on the Rituals of Commemoration in Russian Culture. The act of remembering the dead can be seen as one of the main rituals that help to create social cohesion in rural community. Professor Adonieva covered a variety of topics, such as the understanding of social rules and common values in Russian village communities, the position of graveyards in village infrastructure, and special burial rituals for those who have died a so-called ‘bad death’.

Unlike urban communities, which exhibit no social cohesion rituals related to death, rural communities consider it a public matter and involve all their members in observing such rituals as ‘ancestor days’, when all villagers come together for a shared meal at a graveside to commemorate

and commune with the diseased and to re-incorporate them into the community of the living. It is also notable that those residing in Russian villages start preparing for their own death in advance, for death is accepted as part of daily life and is considered a difficult but important experience.



Professor Svetlana Adonieva

The modern Russian practice of remembering the dead is observed as a duty of the living to perform for their deceased relatives, and communion with one’s ancestors is one of the ways in which rural dwellers are able to express their relatedness to one another.

February 2015 Events

Dashkova Open Research Seminar

Dr Rose France, University of Edinburgh

'An Aesopian interpretation of Zoshchenko's «Retribution»'

Date: Thursday, 5th February, 5:10pm

Venue: The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre



It is well known that throughout the later Soviet period, many Soviet intellectuals became skilled in the use of Aesopian language: writing or speaking in code to evade the censor; using allegories and hidden allusions to communicate a secret message to the reader or listener.

This paper is an attempt at an 'Aesopian' interpretation of generally neglected work by the writer Mikhail Zoshchenko, a fictional Civil War memoir, *Retribution*. *Retribution* is one of a number of works that Zoshchenko produced in the late 1930s which appeared to toe the Party line, to eschew 'formalism' and to observe the requirements of Socialist Realism. However, a deeper knowledge of Zoshchenko's own work and history, the political climate at the time, and the typical devices of Aesopian language enable a different interpretation of the story, which suggests a deeper meaning lying beneath the surface.

Dr Rose France is a tutor in Russian language and literature at the University of Edinburgh and a freelance interpreter and translator. She completed her PhD in Russian 20th century Literature and Literary Translation in Glasgow University in 2001. Her research interests include the works of Mikhail Zoshchenko, literary translation and 19th and 20th century Russian literature

Dr Nick Baron, University of Nottingham

Cartography and Cultural Revolution: Maps, Modernity and the New Soviet Man

Date: Thursday, 26th February, 5:10pm

Venue: The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre



This paper will explore the role and meaning of cartography in early Soviet culture, with a particular focus on the Stalin period. With reference to the depiction of maps and mapping in film and the visual arts, it argues that Soviet cartography was an important element of the revolutionary project to create the 'New Soviet Man', operating as a model, metaphor and means of social transformation.

Dr Nick Baron is an Associate Professor in the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of a monograph on Soviet

history, a popular history book (both of which have been republished in Russian language editions) and four co-edited volumes, as well as numerous articles in leading journals in areas studies, history and historical geography. His research focuses on 20th century Russian/Soviet and East European political, cultural and social history and historical geography.

Kirill Sokolov Documentary Screening and a Lecture by Professor Avril Pyman



The Dashkova Centre in partnership with the Sutton Gallery
Premiere Screening of a documentary about the artist Kirill Sokolov (1930 - 2004) by Benjamin Sadd, accompanied by lecture by Prof Avril Pyman on ‘The Concept of Tragedy in Russian Silver Age Thought’

Date: Wednesday, 11th February, 6:30-8:30pm

Venue: Project Room, 50 George Square, University of Edinburgh, EH8 9JU

The event is free but booking is essential. Please e-mail Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk to book a place.

Benjamin Sadd’s new documentary presents the life and work of the major contemporary Russian artist Kirill Sokolov (1930 - 2004). Filmed in 2013 and 2014, this is the first documentary to look at his work in depth, from his early life in Russia to his emigration to Berwick upon Tweed and then Durham in the 1970s.

The film will be accompanied by a lecture on ‘The Concept of Tragedy in Russian Silver Age Thought’ by Prof Avril Pyman. A leading translator of Russian poetry into English and a biographer of Aleksandr Blok and Pavel Florensky, Pyman has also written the major text on the Russian symbolist movement, *A History of Russian Symbolism*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2006. She is a fellow of the British Academy.

Future Highlights

We are delighted to announce that Andrei Zorin, Professor at the University of Oxford, is coming to the Princess Dashkova Russian Centre with a Dashkova Honorary lecture on Thursday the 12th of March. More details to follow.

We’re on the Web!

Follow us on Facebook for regular updates of news and events.

<https://www.facebook.com/DashkovaCentre>



The Dashkova Centre is on Twitter! You can follow us on [@DashkovaCentre](https://twitter.com/DashkovaCentre)

To become a friend of the Dashkova Centre please contact
Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk

The Princess Dashkova Russian Centre

The University of Edinburgh

14 Buccleuch Place, EH8 9LN, Edinburgh, Tel: 0131 650 99 02, Email: Dashkova.Centre@ed.ac.uk.