

Russian Duo to appear on John Knox Performance Series

by Mike Telin



“[Russian Duo](#) is an international project, and this program will show that,” balalaika virtuoso Oleg Kruglyakov said during a recent telephone conversation along with his longtime artistic partner, pianist Terry Boyarsky. On Friday, April 28 at 7:00 pm at John Knox Presbyterian Church in North Olmsted, Russian Duo will present a concert that features Russian folk music, romances, classical music, gypsy melodies, bluegrass, ragtime, tango, film scores, and Soviet songs.

The free concert is part of the John Knox Performance Series.

“In this program audiences will hear everything from Handel to tango. It also shows the range and versatility of this school of Russian composers. As always, we’ll tell stories about the music so the audience can feel a part of the history and musical journey.”

The Duo pointed out that Nicolai Budashkin’s *Mail Troika* is dedicated to legendary violinist Ivan Khandoshkin, who is considered by many to be the finest violinist of the 18th century. A student of Tartini, Khandoshkin is part of the lineage that produced Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz. “He was also known for his performances of well-known classical pieces on the balalaika, and for his Classical Italian-style arrangements of Russian folk songs,” Kruglyakov said.

Boyarsky noted that two works that have close ties to Russian Duo are Natan Shulman’s *Serenade* and *Bolero*. “Shulman was the pianist for Oleg’s teacher. He wrote many pieces for piano and balalaika, and both of these are wonderful.”

A new piece to their repertoire is Alexander Shalov’s Concert Variations on *Valenki*. “It is a set of virtuosic variations on a Soviet-era folk song that was popular during WWII,” Kruglyakov said.

Music by Jewish composers will be an important part of the evening. “We’ll sing Matvei Blanter’s *Katusha*, which is a very famous song,” Boyarsky said. “We’ll also play our arrangement of Andrey Petrov’s 1962 film score to *Amphibian Man*.” In addition to that film, Petrov also composed music for such classic Soviet films as *I Step Through Moscow*, *Beware of the Car*, and *Office Romance*.

Friday’s program will also include George Cobb’s *Russian Rag*, the traditional Russian song *Vanyusha*, Roland Dyens’ *Sky Tango*, Boris Troyanovsky’s *Blooming Flowers*, a passacaglia by Handel, and a polonaise by Michael Ogiński.

To close our conversation, Kruglyakov said to remind readers that the 23rd of June is the International Day of the Balalaika. “Last year we played for one of the celebrations. They take place all over the world.” Perhaps Russian Duo should create one in Cleveland.

How did Terry Boyarsky and Oleg Kruglyakov come to form Russian Duo? In a 2011 interview, Kruglyakov told us that while searching the web for possible collaborators, “I found Terry on the Ohio Arts Council website. I saw that she was a collaborative pianist and an ethnomusicologist. I thought she might be interested in the balalaika, so I sent her an email with a sample of my music.”

What did Boyarsky think when she received an email from a balalaika player? “My first thought was that I had played chamber music with just about every instrument, including double bass, harp, and trombone. But the balalaika? While it sounded intriguing, I wondered, ‘What could possibly be there, repertoire-wise, for piano and balalaika?’ So I thought I would do it for fun. I did go to his YouTube videos and listened to him, and I was very impressed with his virtuosity. But when he arrived and explained exactly how much music was written for piano and balalaika, I was blown away...It has been a great learning experience.”

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