

# All the News ...

## THE ARIZONA BALALAIKA ORCHESTRA AN INSIDE LOOK

by Richard Holden, Choreographer, Kalinka Russian Dancers.

This was our 26<sup>th</sup> annual Russian Winter Festival which the immense Phoenix based Arizona Russian Club characterizes as the largest Russian music and dance performance in Arizona, featuring the Arizona Balalaika Orchestra, the Kalinka Russian Dancers and the Sons Of Orpheus men's chorus. Our program cover pictured the snow maiden, Snegurochka, inviting our audience to imagine riding across the 'snowy steppes' of Southern Arizona!

Appearing as our guests for the first time in Tucson were the talented Russian-trained virtuoso Sergey Vashchenko, performing the balalaika and Vladimir Kaliazine, bayan virtuoso. The two musical artists met in Latvia over twenty years ago and now live in Texas. They both made an outstanding contribution to our concert.



Last Spring, when we were discussing what to do for this February, I suggested the Polovetsian Dances from Alexander Borodin's opera "Prince Igor". This turned out to be a huge and challenging undertaking and a large amount of work went into preparing it. Musical Director Mia Gay, with the aid of Sibelius music notation software, spent all summer orchestrating it for balalaika and domra orchestra while I started translating and transliterating the choral parts for the Sons Of Orpheus men's chorus.

As a young man I danced in the Metropolitan Opera production of this choreographic masterpiece of Michel Fokine and remembered most of the steps. Of course I had to adjust some of it suit our limited amount of dancers. Instead of 20 Polovetsian Harem girls we had 4. Instead of 20 Tartar warriors we had one. Guest dancer, Gary McKenzie danced the warrior Chieftain with style and energy. With our stage filled with over 30 orchestra players plus 50 men singers there was hardly room for more anyway.

Dr. Alexander Tenser conducted. Opening the show was Russkaya Smes with dancers, comics and boy dancers doing the usual Russian tricks. This was followed by Tchaikovsky's fast paced Dance Of The Buffoons. Fingers were flying for this one!

The Sons Of Orpheus men's chorus began with the well known Soviet marching song, V Put' and the rousing Russian National Anthem

Our Executive Officer, Dan Nicolini, is a Prosecuting Attorney in real life and had a murder case coming up directly after our performances. Fortunately, the defendant plea bargained and the trial was cancelled, leaving Dan happily free to devote more of his valuable time to our concert. Eight guest performers from various points had to be transported and found living space while staying here with us in Tucson. No easy task for Dan to oversee plus the many other jobs involved in putting it all together. Our amazing Mia Hansen as stage manager also kept the show running smoothly. Unfortunately she was unable to dance due to hip injuries. We hope to have her back dancing very soon..

A new Khorovod [women's round dance] opened the second act. The ladies move in swift patterns across the stage in floor length dresses [sarafans] giving the effect of skating. In fact, I'm often asked if they are wearing roller skates! The

answer is "only the choreographer knows". They also maneuver colorful Russian shawls while skimming in couples, trios, circles. Actually, you can see a video of one Khorovod that I choreographed on my web site: [www.richka.com](http://www.richka.com)

The comical puppet, Boris and Ludmilla, [two figures with one

dancer inside] which Mia Hansen has always performed to the audience's delight was this time performed by new dancer, Carly Greenan, to no less audience enjoyment. The Ural Mountain Dance has been performed very frequently since 1990. It is one of our audience's favorites. It is a difficult dance to perform, especially for male dancers with all of it's flashy tricks. It's always been danced by adult dancers but, due to the departure of Steve Andrusyszyn [who, under my training had danced with us since 1989] to marry and move to Vancouver it was danced for the first time by our 'new generation' of children. Christopher Garcia (12) and his sister, Kaylene (9) gave a charming presentation of this challenging dance to the audience's surprise and delight.

Our own Nina Tritenichenko sang the haunting Chrysanthemum and later, Ivan Berger stepped out of the chorus to sing with Nina the comic duet, "Ty zh mene pidmanula" Sergei and Vladimir played some of their own selections. Vladimir gave us his rendition of well known "The Nightingale", amusingly imitating the bird on the bayan and Sergei "Vinyat Menya V Narodye". Sergei also joined our own Dan Nicolini for "Pri Dolinushke". The "Polovetsian Dances" ended the concert with the Sons Of Orpheus and guest dancer Gary McKensey dancing the Warrior Chieftain.