



Scotland-Russia

# REVIEW

No. 30 | Spring 2014



UK-Russian Year of Culture 2014





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# Cover



Collage  
'Russia in Britain'

# Editorial

“ Dear readers,

I am excited to present you with the current issue of the Review, which is dedicated to the 2014 UK-Russia Year of Culture. The project has been long awaited by both sides. Not only will it encourage a better cultural understanding between the two nations, but, many believe, will have a significant impact on other aspects of the UK-Russia relations. Throughout the country a vast number of events will be taking place, bringing all the elements of rich Russian culture closer to the UK public. There will be something for absolutely everyone - whether it is literature, art, music, theatre or dance, all will be represented in their many forms!

Promoting Russian culture has always been the primary and invariable mission of Scotland-Russia Forum, and all of us are particularly happy to see so many great events lined up to take part in Scotland in 2014. First and foremost, the annual International Festival in Edinburgh will welcome several internationally acclaimed Russian acts. For those looking for a more personal experience, the students of St. Andrews University are planning a Russian Week, which will include an intimate evening with an acoustic guitar and communal singing, an exhibition of pictures

taken by Scottish students in Russia, lectures, debates and a real Russian Ball. For an academic insight, visit a conference to be held at Glasgow University, which will be dedicated to the development of Russian teaching in Scotland. In addition, 2014 will mark 200 years since the birth of Lermontov, the great Russian with Scottish roots. Such an anniversary could not go unnoticed, and several events will be held to commemorate the famous poet. Information on the majority of these events is in the current issue, but do follow our website for regular updates on what's on! Similarly, get in touch if you have anything planned, and we will be happy to support and promote your event!

In the publication, you will also find an interview with Theodora Clarke, who is playing a major role in promoting the 2014 UK-Russia Culture Year in the UK. We have an account of Russkaya Capella, one of two Russian choirs in Scotland, who also have an extensive programme for the next year! And of course, we have prepared some great book reviews as well as the piece written for us by the Edinburgh Film Guild's Marc David Jacobs.

Enjoy ! ”

Varvara Bashkirova  
*Editor-in-chief*



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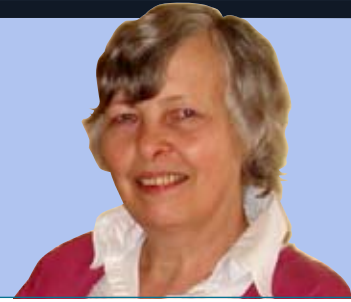
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# Scotland-Russia Forum **Chair's report**

## Jenny Carr



“ *The Scotland-Russia Forum was established to promote understanding of Russia and her neighbours in Scotland and of Scotland in those countries. Our main emphasis has been on the former.* ”

### ***How is the understanding of Russia and her neighbours getting on?***

The first thing to say is that there is much to be done. The lack of Russian in schools, both independent and maintained, signals and reinforces to the widest possible audience the perceived lack of importance of Russian affairs to Scottish society. Russia is also largely absent from our news media. The Scottish Government seems to place a low priority on Russia and its neighbours, although they might be more interested in the Year of Russian Culture in 2014 and we look forward to the Culture Minister's forthcoming statement on that.

### ***What are we doing and are we making any impact at all?***

We are trying to raise the profile of the area through publicity of relevant events. To compensate for the closure of the Scotland-Russia Institute, with its 3000+ visitors a year, we have increased our online presence, and the print run of this magazine, in order to continue to reach as wide a spectrum of society as possible. Takeup of all these media is gradually rising: email bulletins (1070 addressees), Facebook (630 followers), the magazine (500 copies printed and distributed, online version too), Twitter (240 followers).

We are trying to get Russian back into schools. Second language teaching will start at the beginning of primary school in future (the Scottish Government "1+2" programme), with another language taught from the age of 10. Our immediate aim is to interest schools in Russian in order to persuade some to consider introducing Russian at this stage. We have worked successfully with RCS Haven to establish weekly Russian clubs in 3 Glasgow schools but have been less successful in Edinburgh, with

a recent mailing to Edinburgh primary schools resulting in only one positive response. We participate actively in the COALA group, a meeting of all the cultural organisations, local authority and government representatives and others concerned with language teaching in schools - and this helps keep the issue of Russian alive. This is an area which should really be addressed by a Russian government agency, not a small voluntary organisation!

We collaborate with as many related organisations as possible, in Scotland and the UK as a whole. We also have a huge postbag, and deal with a wide variety of enquiries on Russian language teaching, requests for publicity, and many other Russia-related issues.

### ***How can you, our members and readers, help?***

We are always keen to hear from energetic, committed members willing to plan and organise events, or run any other aspect of our work, including anyone with the time to take responsibility for our administration and correspondence. Even if you don't have time to help but have ideas for the improved efficacy of our work please let us have them. And - not least - please continue to support our work financially through your annual subscription. Although we do not employ anyone we have rent and other costs to find and very much appreciate and rely on the support of our members.

### **Thanks and Farewells**

Particular thanks to Ian McGowan, one of the SRF's three founders. Ian is stepping down from the Treasurer position he has held since our foundation in 2003. He has done far more than

the accounts and will be much missed. Thanks also to: Varvara Bashkirova, hard working and resourceful editor of the Review; Joe Wake, for his successful programme recruiting English Language Assistants for Russian universities; Helen Williams for creating and maintaining our excellent small library; Sheila Sim, our most efficient committee secretary who will be taking on some of Ian's responsibilities in future; other committee members; members who have generously given us extra donations this year.

Apart from Ian we are losing Andrei Rogatchevsky from the committee as he leaves Scotland for a professorship in Norway - congratulations and thanks, Andrei. In January we will also say goodbye to a good friend of the SRF, the outgoing Russian Consul General Sergei Krutikov, and we wish him well.

**JENNY CARR**  
*SRF Chairperson*

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## **Glasgow University marks the Russian-British Year of Culture, 2014**

Glasgow University is going to mark 2014 Russia-British Year of Culture on March 5th with a one-day Conference entitled "The Teaching of Russian - from 1917 to 2014". Dr. John Dunn will give a key-note address, followed by reception and an evening event. Staff from Tver State University, Russia, will also take part, and Glasgow University students have plans for 2 outreach events in the city of Glasgow.



# Interview with Theodora Clarke

**Theodora Clarke** is an art historian and critic, who became a new face of the Russian Art in Britain over the last couple of years. The founder of the Russian Art and Culture website and organiser of the biannual Russian Art Week in London, she fell in love with Russian art at the age of 16, after her first visit to Saint Petersburg. During the Year of Russian Culture 2014, Theodora Clarke will be largely involved in organisation and coordination of cultural events. She is talking to the Review about the highlights of the upcoming year.



**Review (R): How and why, in your opinion, was the idea of the Year of Russian Culture born?**

Theodora Clarke (TC): The UK-Russia Year of Culture 2014 follows a tradition of bi-lateral years where Russia has worked in partnership with other countries. For example, 2013 is the equivalent project in the Netherlands. The idea is to build relationships between our two countries using culture as a platform. Of course, there have been ups and downs with the political relationship between UK and Russia but this year is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship and to deepen our cultural ties.

**R: Is Russian Art and Culture involved in the project in any way?**

TC: As the Editor of the largest website on Russian cultural events in the UK, then Russian Art & Culture of course will be supporting the year. We are working closely with the Russian Embassy here in London and the British Council to support the events in 2014. The official programme has now been announced and a number of high profile institutions will be hosting cultural projects throughout the year from Tate Modern to the Edinburgh International Festival. In conjunction with Russian Mind, I have produced a magazine with a preview of events which includes art, music, literature, ballet and film and features interviews with some of the leading curators and directors.

**R: Who is now responsible for organising events in Russia and the UK?**

TC: The British Council are responsible for organising events in Russia and the Russian Embassy are responsible for organising events here in the UK. They are supported by the leadership of Russian Minister Mikhail Svitkoi and British Council Russia's Director Paul de Quincey. On a political level, the agreement was signed between the two Governments by the respective Foreign Ministers William Hague and Sergei Lavrov. So this is collaboration on all levels from the State to museum curators working together on shared projects. For example, the V&A is working with the Bakhrushkin Museum in Moscow on a major exhibition of Russian avant-garde theatre design which showcases the collections in both museums.

**R: How was the official logo designed?**

Boris Cherkov: Russian Men, 1972. Oil on Canvas. Courtesy of Pushkin Gallery.



TC: The joint logo for the Year of Culture was commissioned and developed by two design companies – one Russian and one from the UK – as a sign of that the year is very much focused on partnership. The official website will go live on 1 January 2014 and will include the main events in the early part of the year.

**R: How, in your opinion, will the Year of Russian culture be received in Britain?**

TC: I think there is enormous interest in the year. This project is a fantastic opportunity for British cultural institutions to build links with their Russian counterparts. Also it is a great way for the UK to showcase our huge tradition of culture abroad. The range of events on offer include celebrating the best of design from James Bond to a major retrospective of the YBA movement in British art such as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. Several UK theatres are also taking a programme to Russian cities such as the RSC and the Young Vic. There is a such a range of cultural events being presented in the programme that hopefully there is something that will appeal to everyone. The programme is very diverse and includes art, design, theatre, film, ballet, music and science so Russian audiences will have plenty to choose from.

**R: The bi-annual Russian Art Weeks will take place in 2014 as well. Will they be in any way different from the previous ones?**

TC: Russian Art Week takes place every year but of course, as 2014 is a UK-Russia Year of

Culture, we are working to make our event even bigger. I am in discussion with several Russian organisations about bringing a series of Russian exhibitions to take part in our Russian Art Week programme here. One of the aims of the year is to build links between British and Russian cultural institutions and Russian Art Week will be a great opportunity for Russian galleries and artists to exhibit in London.

**R: For you personally, what are the highlights of the next year?**

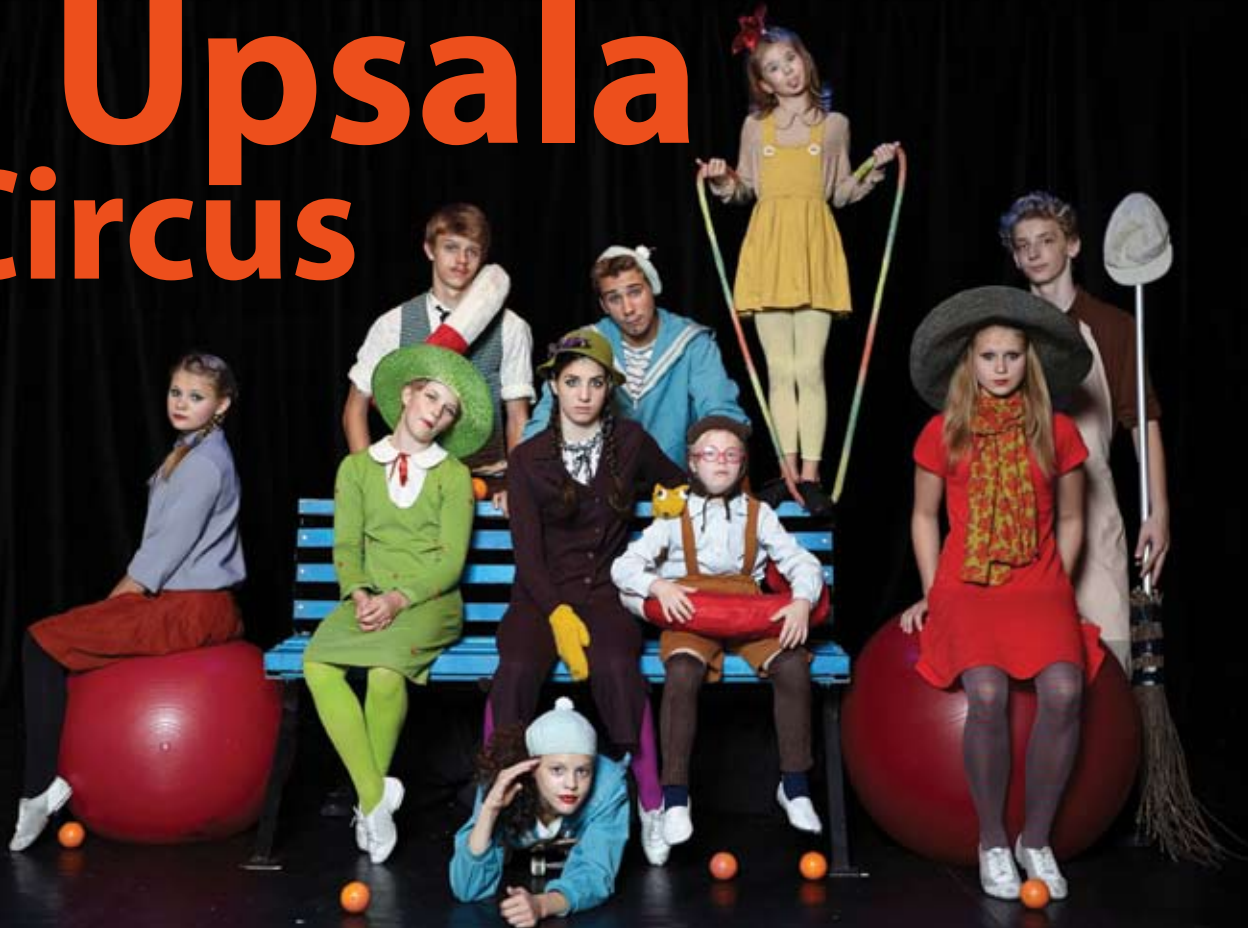
TC: I am looking forward to the major retrospective of Kazimir Malevich and the Russian avant-garde at Tate Modern which opens in the summer and the major Russian space exhibition at the Science Museum. Also there are some big Russian festivals, such as Maslenitsa in Trafalgar Square, and the Russia theatre season of Chekhov and Nabokov. We are almost spoilt for choice as there are so many excellent cultural events planned!

**R: Sometimes it may seem that the Western public still thinks of Russia as being stuck in the past. Could the Year of Russian Culture 2014 change public opinion? Overall, what do you think the project can do for the image of Russia and its culture in the UK?**

TC: Of course there are stereotypes about Russia. One of the aims of my projects, with Russian Art and Culture and Russian Art Week, was to challenge Western preconceptions of Russia and introduce the general public to the wealth of cultural traditions that the country has. Russia has made a huge contribution culturally throughout history. Figures such as Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy and Kandinsky are very famous but there are a huge number of other cultural figures who perhaps are less well known in the UK. I think the cultural year is a great way to introduce British audiences to Russian culture, as well for us to promote British culture abroad. So this idea for a cross-cultural dialogue between our two countries is a great one. We are delighted to support the project in any way we can to help make the year a great success.

[russianartandculture.com](http://russianartandculture.com)

# Upsala Circus



*When thinking about Russian culture, what may be first to spring to mind for many are the Bolshoi Ballet, Tchaikovsky, Dostoevsky and so on. These are undeniably awe-inspiring and an essential part of the culture. However, it is as important to look at the work created day to day by people whom one might be excused for not recognising if passed by on the street, but who, at the same time, create art that makes a difference. Such is Upsala Circus, a circus troupe of street children in Saint Petersburg. Signe Akmenkalne spoke to Larisa Afanasieva, the Artistic Director of Upsala Circus.*

First things first, what is Upsala Circus and what does it do? It is a social project that was set up in Saint Petersburg back in 2000 by Astrid Schorn, a German social worker, and Larisa herself. It is a space for children from social risk groups to come together and create plays and performances that are a fusion of acrobatics, pantomime and even contemporary dance. It takes the energy they have but that otherwise could turn them wayward, gathering it and letting it explode into beautiful and touching performances.

Being the only project of its kind, you would expect the Circus to be received by with enthusiasm and encouragement. "When we went to these kids, we weren't approaching them as serious adult social workers who were there to solve problems," says Larisa, "we approached them with the idea of creating a circus. For them it was great news, something absolutely new and exciting." However,

not everyone gave them such a warm welcome. For those in high places with a more economical or political agenda it seemed rather odd. By many they were viewed with great scepticism, or even bewilderment. So one of the first challenges of Upsala Circus was to prove that they really can and will achieve great things. The attitude towards them from the general public changed when they changed their attitude towards themselves. "We worked a lot with our kids, created all sorts of projects. Now, when people come to see our shows, they don't think of us as street hooligans, they come to see a circus performance."

Children come to them from a variety of places, such as crisis centres, care homes and others. They practise five days a week, two to three hours per session. As Larisa says, "Attendance is not compulsory, like in school, or prison. They come here of their own free will." This attitude is often a completely new experience for kids who

may have had problems with discipline. Their attendance is proof not only of their commitment but also of their love for the circus. In addition in Saint Petersburg, a city of over 5 million inhabitants, some of the 60 children have to commute up to two hours in one direction to get to their training.

The kids are not the only ones enjoying it. "We call Upsala Circus our golden ticket. Not only for the kids, but for the staff too. We have been given this unique opportunity and space."

Apart from creating circus performances, in 2008 they also organised the very first international children circus festival "Flying Circus". They also take part in other competitions and festivals, including an annual trip to Europe, which for the children is the event of a lifetime.

However rewarding, things are not always easy. Often the greatest obstacles





boil down to cynical realities. Receiving minimal funding from the government, they have to seek support from private businesses and European funds. "Over eight years," says Larisa, "we moved ten times. We wanted to create a wonderful place where children could come and practise without being disturbed. We had to survive amidst all the uncertainty, so our aim was to find a home for the circus." Finally, thanks to support from a local business, they have settled down as they've been given facilities in a beautiful part of Saint Petersburg. "Come and visit us when you're in Petersburg!" Larisa says in a bright voice. "I don't know how stable anything is in Russia, but finally it feels like we've found home." Times might have been hard but there

isn't a shade of complaint, "I believe people have to undergo struggle in their way towards their aims in order to have a real appreciation for what they have."

"Contemporary circus isn't just doing tricks with hula-hoops to the music of Boney M in a shiny costume. It's contemporary dance, capoeira, ballet, it's a fusion of so many forms of art." Working with hooligans may be more of an advantage than one might think, "We try to do it with the energy of street life culture. There's great potential and a lot to learn from that. We can learn a great deal from the teenagers too."

When Larisa started to work with the newly created Upsala Circus in 2000, she was 24 years old. "It was my first and,

hopefully, my last job." After graduating from university with a degree in theatre directing, she started work in Upsala Circus. Right from the beginning, she knew she didn't want to do social work in the traditional sense. Instead, she wanted to create colourful and bright performances for these children, by these children.

It has become part of their system that kids who have been with them for a while, can volunteer, as they progress, to teach the younger ones. "It has great potential in giving them the chance to help others, to be of use in other words." In fact some of them have grown up and become Larisa's colleagues as members of staff. ■

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# Russkaya Cappella

*At first sight it's surprising that Russian choral music brings over a score of people through rain and traffic to the centre of Glasgow each Thursday. From East Kilbride, Kilmarnock, Stirling they come, and out to Edinburgh, Leeds and Paisley the finished product goes. And on YouTube – well, who knows where?*



In August 2009 a group of people who enjoyed singing Russian music approached Svetlana Zvereva and Stuart Campbell seeking musical direction. Svetlana is a leading scholar in Russian church music, with expertise in the medieval and modern periods, within Russia and the diaspora; she works for the State Institute for the Study of the Arts and teaches at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Stuart has also published books and articles about Russian music, and as Director of Music in Glasgow University Memorial Chapel from 1975 to 2000 has experience of working with choirs.

It was not without hesitation that Svetlana and Stuart accepted this challenge. The first cohort of what became Russkaya Cappella was made up of British people with a variety of strengths – in music, singing, and matters Russian. Could this diverse group form the nucleus of a viable choir? History has demonstrated that it could. The model has proved popular and it has not been altered radically so far. We have gradually added singers to reach our present strength of about thirty, attracting in particular a growing number of Russians living in Scotland. As we sing almost everything in the original language (chiefly Russian or Church-Slavonic), native speakers or second-language users are very useful. Another aspect of the authenticity to which we aspire is that most of our singing is without instrumental support.

We give public concerts; we take part in community events (such as the Glasgow Russian School's Shrovetide celebrations or the commemoration of Glasgow's patron St Mungo); we sing each year for two Orthodox Liturgies: those for Christmas and Easter, and occasionally also for private functions.

Accordingly, we sing music of several

kinds: compositions by Russia's classic composers, folksong, and Russian Orthodox liturgical music from ancient to modern. Each programme has a thread running through it. For instance, in 2013 we marked the 400th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty. We sang the closing patriotic chorus (Slav'sya) from Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar*; the life in the title is that of the peasant Ivan Susanin who died to enable the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail, to assume the throne and strengthen Rus'. Several later Romanovs paid close attention to what their Court Chapel Choir (Pridvornaya Pevcheskaya Kapella) sang, and it was natural to include works by musicians associated with the Kapella (Bortnyansky, L'vov, Rimsky-Korsakov and again Glinka) in the programme. Two national hymns were appropriate: Bortnyansky's 'How great is our God in Sion' and L'vov's 'God protect the Tsar'. Nicholas II felt a special affection for Tchaikovsky's *Legend* ('The young child Jesus had a garden'), since the 'drops of blood' caused by Christ's crown of thorns reminded the tsar of his haemophiliac son Aleksey, so it too found a place. The 'New Direction' in church music taken by the Synod School in Moscow in the late imperial period likewise enjoyed the tsars' support, and one of its lead-





ing champions was Kastal'sky. For the dynastic celebrations in 1913 he wrote a piece entitled Three Hundred Years, and we performed it – conceivably the first people to do so in a century. Rachmaninoff's two liturgical cycles also follow this 'Direction', and one movement figured in our Romanov programme.

There is a boundless wealth of Russian music for choir, so there is no problem finding repertoire. Concerts devoted to a city, the seasons – whether of the year or the agricultural cycle, the church calendar, the poetry of a single Russian literary giant – who knows what strands might appear in future Russkaya Cappella programmes? We pay tribute to significant anniversaries: those of Grechaninov and the start of the First World War in 2014; that of Lermontov – after St Andrew the pre-eminent symbol of the connection between Scotland and Russia – in the same year; the composer Sviridov in 2015.

Many of our concerts take place in churches. We have sung in several of central Scotland's historic churches (St Giles Cathedral, Glasgow Cathedral, the Church of the Holy Rude in Stirling) as

well as more recent foundations (e.g. St Andrew's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Glasgow, the Romanian Orthodox Church in Shettleston). But as a choir we are not associated with any church or denomination; our singers as individuals are adherents of several denominations and none. Because of the significance of church music in the history of Russian music, Orthodox music forms a large part of our repertoire.

We enjoy singing in secular buildings, and have appeared in the National Museum of Scotland (in conjunction with a Catherine the Great Exhibition drawn from The Hermitage) and in the Kelvin-grove Art Gallery and Museum.

For a number of years we have had the signal honour of singing for the Russian Consul-General's Russia Day reception. We have contributed to Glasgow's West End Festival and the Paisley Choral Festival. We have sung for the Princess Dashkova Centre in the University of Edinburgh and the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies in the University of Glasgow.

Under Svetlana Zvereva's direction a

Children's Singing Studio has been established. The Studio is under the auspices of Glasgow Russian Orthodox School and works in association with Russkaya Cappella, members of the senior group of children joining the grown-ups in certain items in some concerts. A pool of young singers is being formed from which the adult choir can draw in the future. Even now, the junior artistes contribute on occasion a welcome additional element of action and drama, inclining towards dance, through folk rituals and processions, something Russkaya Cappella itself has not yet tackled.

When you consider the historical and geographical range of Russian music for choir, the spectrum extending from public magnificence and solemnity to exuberant vitality in a more intimate setting, and to the profoundly moving quality of much of the ecclesiastical music, maybe it's not surprising after all to discover it has so many devotees.

*For more information, please turn to [www.russkayacappella.com](http://www.russkayacappella.com)*

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# 'Lermontov the Rhymer'

Will 2014 see the return of the Russian poet to his Scottish spiritual homeland?



*The Russian poet Mikhail Yuryevitch Lermontov (1814-1841) will be 200 next year. Russian bicentenary celebrations of this towering figure of Russian culture will centre on the Serednikovo estate, where he spent several years of his atrociously truncated life. It was here in July 1831 that he wrote the poem Yearning in which he describes his desire to transform into a bird and fly west to Scotland in order to view his ancestral lands. Serednikovo is also where he wrote Ossian's Grave in which he also refers to Scotland as his spiritual homeland, expressing the possibility – or intention – of being reincarnated there.*



Lermontov never did travel to Scotland. On the tragic death of Pushkin in a duel in 1837, he wrote a poem entitled *Death of the Poet* in which he accused Russian high society of complicity in Pushkin's senseless slaughter. For his insolence he was banished to the Caucasus, where he drew inspiration for many of the works for which he is most famous, including the Byron-influenced novel *Hero of our Time*.

The Russian name Lermontov has Scottish origins. One of Mikhail Yuryevitch's ancestors, a Captain George Learmonth, moved to Russia in 1613, just ten years after the accession of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England. The coronation of James I had effectively united the two crowns and brought a respite to 317 years of almost incessant warfare, both within Scotland itself and between Scotland and its dominant southern neighbour.

The scion of a military family, George Learmonth may have felt that the Union of the Crowns did not augur well for his future job prospects! Following a short period spent fighting for Poland and capture by the Russians, George Learmonth became Yuri Lermontov, founding a new dynasty in Russia.

It is not known how much the poet Lermontov knew about his Scottish family history. However, he seems to have felt that his spiritual roots were connected with Scotland and the bardic tradition. In Scottish literature, there is no figure more foundational than the 13th century bard and prophet Thomas "the Rhymer" Learmonth. A contemporary of William Wallace, Thomas lived close to the modern day Borders village of Earlston. In those days Erceldoune was a significant settlement, a centre around which early Scotland's Brythonic, Saxon, Gaelic and Pictish influences were beginning to coalesce into an early sense of nationhood.

By Thomas' time, the Brythonic kingdom of Strathclyde was already being encroached upon from the west by the Gaelic kingdom of Dalriada and from the south by the Saxon Northumbrians. However, according to Professor Ronald Black, there would still have been some who spoke the indigenous Brythonic language and who recounted the ancient Arthurian legends. Sir Walter Scott believed Thomas of Erceldoune to have been the author of one of the earliest versions of the famous *Romance of Sir Tristrem*. Whether true or not, we may suppose Thomas to have been a translator-poet, who saw one of his roles as adapting ancient Brythonic lore to

be comprehensible by his Anglic- and Gaelic-speaking contemporaries.

The *Romance of Thomas the Rhymer* – in which the poet meets his muse in the form of the Faerie Queen, woos her, is carried off by her to Tir nan Og (the land of the Faeries) and, on his return to "middle earth", receives from her the gift of prophecy – can be understood as a poetic work that unites many earlier themes into a contemporary mediaeval genre. Thomas' story takes a great many forms throughout the course of Scottish literature, both oral and written. The figure of Thomas the Rhymer (Tomas Reumhair) unites both Anglic and Gaelic cultures and can be said to be central to a sense of what it means to be Scottish today.

Having received the gift of prophecy, Thomas becomes the prototypical Scottish seer who predicts the next several hundred years of Scottish history, beginning with the death of the last Gaelic king Alexander III and culminating with the uniting of the crowns of Scotland and England with the "blood of Bruce".

Lermontov also felt that his gift was tinged with the art of prophecy. In his *Prophecy* he develops a dark mood that many see as predicting the Russian revolution and the fall of the Romanov





dynasty.  
While Serednikovo and Lermontov's

contributions to Russian literature will form the centre of the commemoration in Russia, it is fitting that the story of his Scottish poet-prophet ancestor will form a significant backdrop to the international bicentenary celebrations. Like many Russians, the present-day Lermontov family – headed by the present day Mikhail Yuryevitch – feels a strong cultural affinity with Scotland.

The UK-Russia Year of Culture, which also takes place in 2014, was established

as a means for the UK and Russia to improve their patchy diplomatic relationship by focusing on areas of cultural affinity. It is hard to imagine a more powerful example of cultural affinity than the spiritual relationship between the poetic figures of Mikhail Yuryevitch Lermontov and his legendary forbear Thomas the Rhymer.

*See the full article at the SCO-RUS website: [www.sco-rus.org](http://www.sco-rus.org)*

## Translation Transformed

*Elizabeth Roberts from Moffat Book Events told The Review of the success of 2013 translation conference, and revealed some of the plans for the upcoming Year of Culture.*

A galaxy of Russian literary stars – editors, authors and translators – descended on the historic spa town of Moffat in the south of Scotland for a translation conference organized by Scottish charity Moffat Book Events in September 2013. Among many highlights of the conference were Alan Riach, reading his inspired translations from the Gaelic into Scots, Chris Brookmyre on hilariously alarming exchanges with inept translators of his best-selling crime novels, Alexei Varlamov on his literary inspiration (based on a Soviet childhood), Natalya Ivanova on contemporary Russian fiction... the list could go on. The Russian delegation made several visits to Scottish literary destinations, including Robert Burns Centre in Alloway and the

magnificent newly -renovated home of Sir Walter Scott in Abbotsford.

During the conference, important preparations were made for 2014 events to mark the UK Year of Russian Culture, including a Moscow exhibition of photographs of Moffat people and places by Maria Buylova, a conference on Lermontov in Moffat and a Russian strand in Dumfries and Galloway Arts Festival and at other Scottish literary festivals . An exhibition of the series of paintings by Richard Demarco of Scotland's rural roads 'The Road to Meikle Seggie' will open in Moscow in June 2014.

2014 is the bicentenary of the birth of Lermontov, whose Lermont ancestors

came from Scotland. Artefacts and garments made from a bolt of Lermontov tartan were ordered from Moffat Mill, an outlet of the pan-British firm Edinburgh Woollen Mill for this year of celebration, to be sold at Lermontov museums and events in Russia and elsewhere. Other Moffat products such as Moffat Toffee and Uncle Roy's condiments, local cheese and smoked fish , pottery and other crafts will be in the exhibition which is intended to show Moffat as a microcosm of rural Scotland today.

*Elizabeth Roberts  
Moffat Book Events  
[www.moffatbookevents.co.uk](http://www.moffatbookevents.co.uk)*

## Russia Week 2014

*Mid-February 2014 will be marked by promotion of Russian culture on the East Coast of Fife, as students of the University of St Andrews are putting up a series of events dedicated to Russia and the Post-Soviet Space for the third year in a row.*

The Russian Society of the University promotes Russian culture throughout the academic year. In February they will collaborate with other societies and UK Organizations to organise an intense cluster of events with something for absolutely everyone. The aim is to show Russian culture from different perspectives, thus the events will range from formal lectures and concerts to friendly, relaxing cultural evenings and exhibitions.

The exhibition will feature photographs of Russia and the Post-Soviet countries that St. Andrews students took while travelling or at their academic years

abroad. It provides a unique opportunity to encompass environment, the beauty of nature, people, culture and daily life, of several former USSR Republics, as seen by both native Russians and foreigners in a single venue.

The Cultural Evening is one of the most vibrant and heartfelt events of Russia Week. Hosted in a bar, it gathers a crowd of people who come to listen and participate in reciting poems by great Russian and Soviet authors and singing traditional and folk songs accompanied by live music. It is equally popular with Russians, who get a chance to relive traditional gatherings with a guitar, with

students and with anyone interested in Russian culture, literature and music. This is a great opportunity to grasp the essence of the Russian Soul. Translations and explanations of songs and poems are always provided.

Guests will also have the opportunity to attend a film screening of a documentary, which will introduce national minorities of the Russian Federation and their traditional lifestyle in the severe climate of Northern Russia.

The events will run from 17th to 23rd February. Tickets will be released in the beginning of February.

# Books

## THE SPECTRE OF ALEXANDER WOLF

by Gaito Gazdanov

In November 2013, Pushkin Press published a new paperback edition of *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf*, priced £7.99 (9781782270720).

On November 23rd, to mark the 110th anniversary of the author's birth, the publisher released a free pdf. of the short story, *Hotel of the Future*: <http://pushkinpress.com/read-an-exclusive-story-by-gaito-gazdanov/#more-7421>

An unnamed protagonist encounters by chance a short story describing the wartime killing he committed as a youth – from the perspective of his victim. Haunted by the possibility of the story's author, our narrator broods on his life's adventures, lived on borrowed, if not stolen time.

First published in parts in New York's *Novyi Zhurnal* up to 1948, this short novel was a mid-career success for its émigré author. In 1950 it was translated into French and English and in the same year a screen adaptation even made it to Hollywood in the form of a classic television serial. Despite Gazdanov's revival in Russia post-1990, English transla-



tions stayed out of print. Bryan Karetnyk's new translation for Pushkin Press is the first since Nicholas Wreden's six decades ago. From the opening recollections of the Russian Civil War (in which the young

Gazdanov himself was a combatant) we are transported to the noisier environs of Paris, where Russian exiles inevitably converge. The narrator's quest for Wolf's identity drives him to intense meditations on memory and mortality. In contrast, the weight of the story is to be found in a sudden love affair dissected in keen detail. Dancing between themes, Gazdanov's plain and poised sentences proceed always at their own unhurried pace. It would be easy to position this novella in a certain twentieth-century tradition, though one which goes without a viable genre term. Since 'metaphysical thriller' is of doubt-

ful coinage, you might call it an existential detective story, a form originating in the imaginations of Kafka or Poe (who is referenced in the story). Readers might recognise Gazdanov's particular style carried to extremes in Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* or Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*. With the publication of *The Buddha's Return* scheduled for 2014 (also translated by Karetnyk) and *An Evening at Claire's* also rumoured, Gazdanov's resuscitation is apparently imminent, though with Alexander Wolf as evidence, he deserves better than to be marketed as the near-miss Nabokov. In 1998, László Dienes described Gazdanov's Russian style as 'translucent' in its simplicity: "His prose has to be recomposed into the chamber music of English. We are still waiting for the poet who will be up to the task." Fortunately, Bryan Karetnyk's translation makes this English prose sound less like the stuffy recital of the music room and more like the cool musicianship of vintage jazz. Something shines through it.

*Review by Robin Davis, a bookseller who holds an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow*

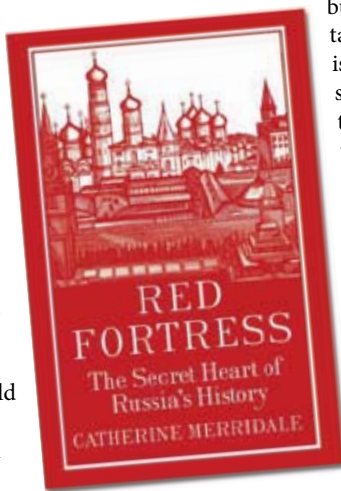
## RED FORTRESS

### The Secret Heart of Russia's History

by Catherine Merridale

(London: Allen Lane, 2013) pp. xvii & 506 illustrations, maps, notes, acknowledgements, index

After the Time of Troubles, when Tsar Mikhail had established the new Romanov dynasty which would rule Russia for over three hundred years, the Scottish engineer Christopher Galloway arrived in Moscow to modernise the Kremlin. In 1633 he installed a water-pumping system so that water from the Moscow River could be used both to supply the state apartments and to irrigate the ponds in the upper courtyards, where some years later Peter the Great would sail his toy boats and dream of western expansion. Galloway, who also built the first clock in the Kremlin's iconic Saviour Tower, was just one of the myriad of foreign experts brought in by Russia's rulers to first build and then repeatedly reconstruct the Kremlin. Merridale's account of the Kremlin has travellers' tales marvelling at the luxury, discomfort and intrigue of the Tsarist court, evocative descriptions of icons and their symbolism, and reproductions of maps and paintings;



but this is far from being a coffee table study. Merridale's purpose is clear: she sees the Kremlin as a symbol of power through which to study the political culture of the Russian State; "from monks to court scribes and from Soviet propagandists to Putin's favourite textbook writers, there is nothing unusual in the idea that Russian courtiers should edit entire chapters of the past", she writes. When the Kremlin was first constructed, it had to spell out a clear political message: Moscow was the true inheritor of the glory of Kiev Rus and on that

lay its claim to be a Third Rome; that message was repeated two centuries later in the reign of Aleksei Mikhailovich, when the great icon painter Simon Ushakov painted the Tree of the State of Muscovy in 1668. Although Peter the Great's decision to move the capital to St Petersburg might have spelled the end of the Kremlin's significance, Nicholas I liked Moscow and in 1849 work was completed on the Grand Kremlin Palace, which managed to incorporate within it some of the Kremlin's oldest structures. When Nicholas II celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty in 1913, "the Kremlin's image as short hand for Holy Russia" was complete.

The Bolsheviks needed the Kremlin's association with power and authority, without

the connotations of Holy Russia. Between 1928-33 two monasteries and several churches were demolished, while the Grand Kremlin Palace was reconstructed to create the Sverdlov Hall. But even Stalin appreciated the power of patriotism and at the end of the Second World War an expensive restoration programme began, while modernisation continued under Khrushchev, whose Palace of Congresses destroyed 19th century rather than ancient buildings. Under Brezhnev, association with the Kremlin made the Politburo "a ruling caste as influential and as ritualised as any council of boyars".

The collapse of the Soviet Union could have resulted in the emergence of a democratic Russia, but Yeltsin opted for authoritarian rule, and as he did so his enthusiasm for reconstructing the Kremlin grew. The Grand Kremlin Palace was restored, while the demolished Red Stairs were reconstructed. Putin benefited from all this and, unsurprisingly, "set out to harness the aura of the red fortress". Visitors to today's Kremlin, Merridale concludes, should be aware that "despite all the romance and gilded domes, the state whose flag is flying here is yet another new invented thing, the choice of living individuals rather than timeless fate". Yet if the Kremlin's history is properly understood, it "need no longer seem the prop of tyrants".

*Review by Professor Geoff Swain, Alec Nove Chair in Russian and East European Studies at University of Glasgow*



## FRAGILE EMPIRE

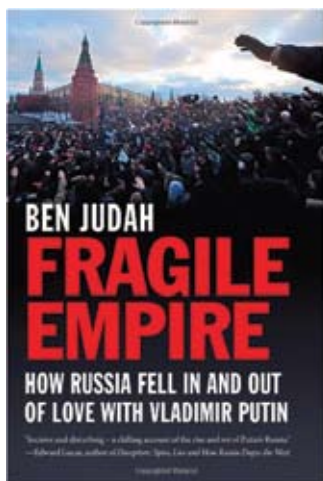
by Ben Judah

Yale University Press, 2013.  
ISBN 9780300181210. Pa-  
perback will be published 28  
February 2014, £9.99

Ben Judah's new e-book: *The Yeti Hunts: Travels Through Russia and Central Asia*. Articles first published in *Standpoint*. Kindle ebook, 2013, £11.88

Ben Judah, despite his seemingly young age, has already left his mark in his field, one that makes his fellow journalists ache with envy. He has reported for Reuters in Moscow, written for *Foreign Policy*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and joined the European Council on Foreign Relations in London as a Russia analyst. The list goes on. So it is not much of a surprise that *Fragile Empire*, his book on the politics of Putin's Russia, made it into *Foreign Policy's* Top 25 Books To Read in 2013. So we read it too, and, indeed, we were not let down.

*Fragile Empire* covers topics almost as broad as the geography of Russia itself. It starts off with introducing Putin, but not quite the Putin we are accustomed to see in reports from



G8 Summit or on the BBC. Instead, Judah gives us an insight into Putin's childhood and youth, his background and what (and who) shaped the world view of the then aspiring yet otherwise unremarkable chinovnik he was before working his way into Kremlin and 'the Family'.

Judah dissembles the myth and cult of personality that embodies Putin's rule. Anything that could threaten Putin's power – the media, political opposition, free elections, free market access to the country's vast

material resources – was distorted and turned into tools of rule. This should have ended in 2008, at the completion of his second term. Yet, in 2012, Putin took back his presidential seat, kept warm by his minion Medvedev during his absence. The notion of consent to rule was swept away by the very act of reclaiming the throne.

If this book has one keyword, it would be 'context'. It was easy for many to fall in love with the self-proclaimed opposition leader, Alexei Navalny. However, Judah takes a closer look and shows a man who, ironically enough, is not all that different from Putin himself.

In looking at the power elite, Judah also explains why the opposition, should it remain unchanged, will not succeed, due to a series of unfortunate yet glaring truths about its composition that have so far gone unnoticed by a wider public.

Judah is sharp and clear in his analysis of the current state of Russia. He untangles many of the seemingly unrelated but intrinsically interwoven elements that shape the country today, from the Khodorkovsky trial to Central Asian immigrants and Russia's forgotten citizens, and the country's reliance on raw materials (wonderful while it lasts, but a ticking time bomb should it run out or the markets implode).

*Fragile Empire* paints a bleak but honest image of Russia. Its worth is in the way it fills in the gaps for a more complete understanding of this vast and paradoxical country. A surprisingly gripping read for a piece of non-fiction, and for anyone interested in Russian politics, *Fragile Empire* is the book of the year, if not years to come.

Review by Signe Akmenkalne  
Signe is a journalism student at Edinburgh Napier University

## RUSSIA IN BRITAIN, 1880-1940

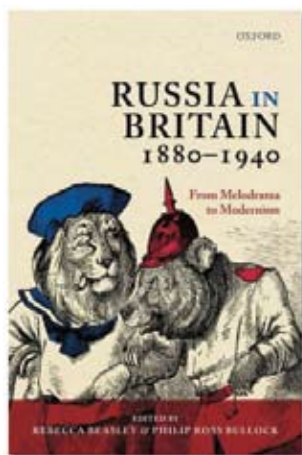
From Melodrama to Modernism

by Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock,

Oxford University Press, 2013.  
xv+309pp. Illustrations, Bibliography, Index. ISBN 978-0-19-966086-5

At first glance, this is not a book for non-specialists, comprising thirteen learned contributions in addition to an Introduction and Afterword, all replete with footnotes. However, appearances are deceptive, for there is much here to interest and inform anybody interested in Russian culture in the period under consideration.

Who, for example, could resist a description and analysis of Oscar Wilde's play based on the story of the nihilist Vera Zaslulich, but with more than a glance in the direction of the Irish Fenians? But it was no doubt just as



well that the work was never produced in Britain, judging by the scathing reviews it received in New York. There are vivid accounts of Russians on the British stage as well as on the reception of Russian and Soviet drama. We learn much of the Tolstoyan movement in Croydon, Purleigh and elsewhere, of the Free Russian Library in Whitechapel, of which there is an evocative illustration.

The popularity of Russian music in early 'promenade' concerts was the result of

much more than Henry Wood's marriage to a Russian singer and Thomas Beecham's investment from his large pharmaceutical fortune. The appeal of the 'descriptive' compositions of Tchaikovsky and his contemporaries presented a formidable challenge to the 'pure' and 'absolute' Austro-German tradition, especially after the outbreak of the First World War. But some critics drew the line at Skryabin's *The Poem of Ecstasy*, while the shock

of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* and of Nizhinsky's accompanying choreography was too much for many of them. On the other hand, a considerable number of enthusiasts welcomed modernism in music and in the art of Kandinsky with their own distinctive colours and rhythms.

There are chapters of special interest to those of us who have been involved in Russian studies both in the original and in translation, confronting the question of how much of the new Soviet culture should be included in the canon, a question partly prompted by the discussions of H.G. Wells with Stalin.

The 'tenth muse' of the cinema in particular presented great challenges but also had enormous influence, on the documentary film-maker John Grierson among others, his *Drifters* owing much to Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* for example.

Beyond first glance, then, a rich collection of wide appeal.

Review by Professor Paul Dukes, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Aberdeen

## The Soviet Influence

In 2011 and 2012, the British Film Institute (BFI) released its two DVD/Blu-ray volumes entitled *The Soviet Influence*. Whilst other celebrated retailers almost always continue to construct their releases around specific films or directors, *The Soviet Influence* was instead concerned with taking an in-depth, scholarly - indeed, almost pedagogical - approach to the inter-relation of a number of seemingly disparate films, seeing each of them as of equal importance in contributing to an understanding of the international influences which characterised the early years of filmmaking, specifically in the first years of the British documentary movement.

Each volume presents two key documentaries, one Soviet and one British, and a selection of short British documentaries to accompany them. It is around this apparently straightforward structure that the BFI stakes out its distinctive territory. In an interview for the SRF Review, Sam Dunn, Head of Video Publishing for the BFI, said that the format was conceived with a number of aims in mind, including (quite naturally) the wish to bring what were seen as 'important, yet neglected films' - both British and Soviet - to DVD and Blu-ray. But perhaps the most significant of their stated goals was that of wishing 'to tell an important story about the history and evolution of British documentary filmmaking [in which] Soviet cinema was going to form the essential component.'

### From Turksib to Night Mail (2011)



This distinctive dialogue between separate countries, films and filmmakers is perhaps best characterised by the first of the two volumes, subtitled 'From Turksib to Night Mail'. A wonderfully esoteric and absolutely remarkable collection of seven films spanning seven years and two countries, it may well be the most ambitious volume the BFI has yet released, certainly in terms of tracing one particular thread of influence through a number of previously-unconnected works. If nothing else, its significance is ensured by its fascinating selection of early works by key directors like Paul Rotha, Basil Wright and Arthur Elton, which collectively give the best glimpse to date into the workaday output of the formative Empire Marketing Board (EMB) Film Unit, the progenitor body which effectively gave birth to the British documentary movement, yet one whose output is as yet all but entirely absent from other DVD releases.

As its title and subtitle imply, this volume's specific goal is to trace the influences on British cinema of what the

BFI refers to as the 'classic, but little-seen' *Turksib*, a documentary feature about the building of the Turkestan-Siberian railway, directed by Viktor Turin in 1929. But despite the seemingly obvious connection between this and *Night Mail* - the former about building a railway and the latter on the transportation of mail by train from England to Scotland - this is not about one 'train film' influencing another. Indeed, one could hardly imagine a greater difference between their approaches to the common subject, not least of all given that *Turksib*, a silent film, relies entirely on images (and its famously 'epileptic' intertitles, as HG Wells referred to them) to convey its messages, whilst *Night Mail* (a 1936 production made by the EMB Film Unit's successor, the General Post Office [GPO] Film Unit) is, of course, celebrated most of all for its concluding poem written by WH Auden (and set to music by the young Benjamin Britten), beginning 'This is the *Night Mail* crossing the border / Bringing the cheque and the postal order'.

Instead, by use of archival documents

and published (but often little-known) sources, programme notes writer Henry K Miller - who collaborated closely with DVD producer Upekha Bandaranayake on both *Soviet Influence* releases - shows that the strongest effects *Turksib* had on British filmmakers were about much more than tracks and trains. Following his source materials carefully, he reveals a wealth of varied reactions from those who were marked by the film, mainly drawn from evocative contemporary accounts. But perhaps it is a retrospective essay written in 1967 by Basil Wright (co-director and co-writer of *Night Mail* with the Edinburgh-born Harry Watt) which best sums up the film's significance. Wright wrote that '*Turksib*, with a remarkable range of dramatic perception and imaginative cutting, made us intimately participate in a social and economic (and therefore human) problem - to feel the toil, and to triumph in the solution'. In some ways, then, this single Soviet film might even be said to have loosely informed, through its initial acolytes, the entire thread of British social realism lasting to this day. ■



## Battleship Potemkin and Drifters (2012)



In contrast to the neglected *Turksib*, it is hard to imagine any single Russian or Soviet film considered of greater formative significance than Sergei Eisenstein's monumental *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). But, as Sam Dunn says, the BFI's release of the film (a public domain work readily available in the UK, albeit only in poor-quality editions) as part of the Soviet Influence series had ulterior motives. 'With the *Potemkin* volume in particular, we had hoped to create a kind of "Trojan horse": something which would probably appeal to most due to the inclusion of *Potemkin*, but which might alert them to some lesser-known, even neglected, gems from the history of British documentary filmmaking.'

Chief amongst these gems was John Grierson's *Drifters* (1929), generally considered the first significant Scottish feature film and the one which effectively gave birth to British documentary as we now know it. Grierson (who was born in Deanston, Stirling, in 1898) is undoubtedly one of the pioneering figures in the

history of world documentary - indeed, he even coined the word 'documentary' itself, in an article of 1926. And, more than any other single figure, his presence can be felt in all of the films, feature-length or short, released within both Soviet Influence volumes: apart from being the head of both the EMB and GPO Film Units which created the British films (two of which he directed himself), he even created the English-titled versions of both *Battleship Potemkin* and *Turksib*, working directly with Viktor Turin on the latter.

Given both Grierson's and *Drifters*' crucial importance, it could therefore seem surprising that the film should be, as it were, piggybacked onto the release of a film like *Potemkin*. But, as Dunn admits, the BFI had 'long wanted to do something of significance with *Drifters* - an EMB set was much discussed, for instance - but we felt that pairing it with *Potemkin* gave us a good excuse to elevate it, if you will, to Blu-ray and to speak to the very real ways in which its

production was informed by Eisenstein's thought and practice.'

And so this second Soviet Influence volume came about, this time based not only around this debt of one filmmaker to another, but also around an even more literal historic connection between the key features: the 33rd performance of the London Film Society, given on 10th November 1929, which saw *Battleship Potemkin* (in its UK premiere) paired with *Drifters* (in its world premiere), in what is referred to by the BFI as 'the most celebrated double-bill in film history'. Although not recreating the entire of this landmark programme in full (which, incredibly, saw these two most earnest films separated by nothing less than Mickey Mouse cartoon *The Barn Dance*), the set's accompanying essays give incredible insights into the importance of this screening, not least of all for being given at a time when *Potemkin* was still banned for public viewing in Britain - a status it would continue to hold until as late as 1954. ■

### The End (?)

Sam Dunn: 'Unfortunately, it is the case that there are currently no plans for more Soviet Influence volumes. It's really a question of priorities, and - as happy as we were with the two volumes already published - it's not likely that planning a third will take priority over projects already in the pipeline.'

Given the intensely esoteric nature of this series, it is perhaps fitting that there is to be no further activity planned for it - one can only delve so deep into such a restricted subject, no matter how interesting the results, without a risk of repeating (or, worse, overstating) oneself. However, if the films included within the series themselves have taught anything, it is perhaps that work of a pioneering and idiosyncratic nature may often have far-reaching and unintended effects. One hopes that such BFI releases as *The Soviet Influence* - or its miraculous three-volume edition of *The Complete Humphrey Jennings*, also launched in 2011 - may ultimately convince other prospective DVD retailers to take yet more adventurous and imaginative approaches to their programming in years to come.

*Marc David Jacobs*

To purchase BFI releases, visit <http://filmstore.bfi.org.uk/>. For more information on John Grierson, the EMB and GPO Film Units and the early British documentary movement, visit the BFI's Screenonline resource at <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/>.

# Year of Russian Culture in the UK: must-see events

“The year of 2014 is promising to be extremely eventful. The best of Russian music, theatre, literature, dance and cinema will be showcased in a number of events across the country. Review picked some of the top ones not to be missed.”

1

Russian State Ballet: Bizet's Carmen  
WHERE: Cadogan Hall  
WHEN: 28.02  
TICKETS: £27-£37  
cadoganhall.com



2

Maslenitsa Festival  
WHERE: Across London; Trafalgar Square  
WHEN: March  
maslenitsa.co.uk

5

International Chekhov Festival  
WHERE: London and Edinburgh  
WHEN: tbc  
britishcouncil.com

6

Andrei Konchalovsky and Moscow State Theatre: Three Sisters and Uncle Vanya  
WHERE: Wyndham Theatre  
WHEN: 23 April - 3 May  
pc.konchalovsky.ru/theatre

7

Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and Julian Lloyd Webber  
WHERE: Cadogan Hall  
WHEN: 8 May  
TICKETS: £18-£40  
concert-diary.com



8

Art: Kazimir Malevitch and Russian avant-garde  
WHERE: TATE Modern  
WHEN: 17 July - 26 October  
tate.org.uk



3

Book Launch: New Lermontov. Translations by six Scottish poets  
WHERE: Russian Embassy  
WHEN: March  
carcanet.co.uk

4

St. Andrews University Russia Week  
WHERE: East Coast Fife  
WHEN: 17 - 23 February

St. Andrews University Russia, 2013



10

Russian Space Exhibition: Cosmonauts  
WHERE: Science Museum, London  
WHEN: October  
sciencemuseum.org.uk



9

Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra  
WHERE: London, Edinburgh, Cambridge and others  
WHEN: 3-19 October  
tchaikovsky.bso.ru

11

8th Russian Film Festival  
WHERE: London, various venues  
WHEN: November  
academia-rossica.org

Valentina Tereshkova: the first woman cosmonaut in space. © RIA Novosti

Russian Winter Festival 2013.  
© Copyright 2013 RBCA.

12

Russian Winter Festival  
WHERE: Kensington Olympia  
WHEN: December  
rbca.info

