

STUDY GUIDE



Russian Duo

Oleg Kruglyakov & Terry Boyarsky

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE:

1. Ask students to brainstorm what they know about Russia and her people.
2. Review the attached vocabulary lists about Russia and music.
3. Talking points for music class: chorus/verse, solo/duo, steady beat/accelerando.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE:

1. Oleg and Terry performed traditional music. What instruments did you hear? Describe the sound qualities of each instrument. What is the difference between folk music and composed music?
2. Some of the music was instrumental, some vocal (songs in Russian and English). How does music convey emotion even when you don't understand the words?
3. How does an ensemble (duo) play together? How do the performers use body language, eye contact, movement and facial expression to know what to do? What gestures do we use every day to communicate with others?

Song of the Volga Boatmen

The Volga Boatmen, who worked as human beasts of burden hauling barges along Russia's rivers between the 17th and 20th centuries, eventually became folk icons, portrayed in literature, music and painting as heroic symbols of the Russian soul. They were called *Burlaks* or *Burlaki* and were hired out to pull heavy barges against the current of the Volga.

We sing about the birch tree in the first verse because birch wood was used to make the harnesses for the teams of men, and often they made sandals out of the bark.

The second verse is about uniting their power into a team,

and about the Russian Sun, "Ra," or "Yar," which before Christianity was worshipped as a God.

The third verse sings about the Volga, which is considered to be the Mother of all rivers.

In the chorus you can hear the doggedness of the men who struggle forward step by step and the verses which help them keep time and keep their spirits up: "Once more, once and again!" In singing "Ay-da-da, Ay-da" one hears the strenuous effort and power needed to pull the huge ships.

“Где хотенье,
там и умение”

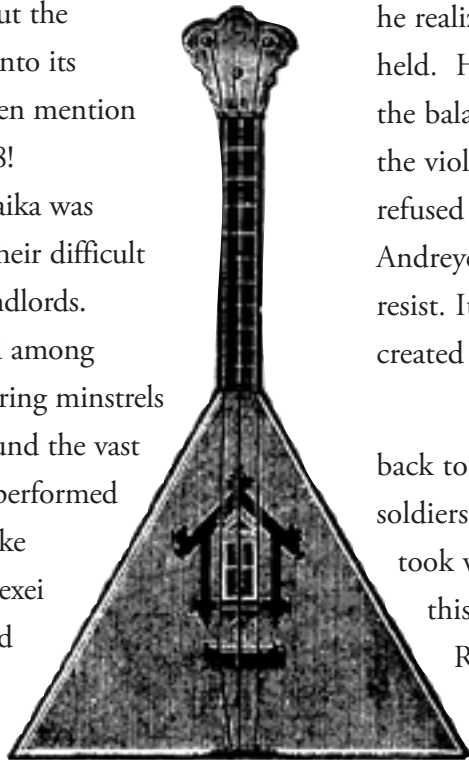
The Balalaika

The balalaika is a wooden, three-stringed instrument with a characteristic triangular body. The balalaika is played by strumming and plucking with the fingers of the right hand. An important part of balalaika technique is the use of the left thumb to fret notes on the bottom string, where it is often used to form chords.

There are many theories about the balalaika and how it developed into its triangular shape. The first written mention was in a police report from 1688!

One version is that the balalaika was invented by peasants to relieve their difficult living conditions under cruel landlords. Gradually the instrument spread among peasants and *skomorokhi* (wandering minstrels and jesters) who traveled all around the vast expanses of Russia. *Skomorokhi* performed at fairs, using their ballads to poke fun at church and state. Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich became so annoyed by the ridicule that in 1648 he issued an order to burn all balalaikas and other musical instruments, or punish those who would not yield.

Although the repressions ended with the Tzar's death, balalaikas did not achieve their former popularity until the mid 19th century, with Vassily Andreyev, a violinist, composer and arranger.



One day as Vassily Andreyev, a young nobleman, was walking in his estate he heard his peasant playing the balalaika. He was astonished at the unusual sounds of the instrument as he considered himself a connoisseur of Russian folk instruments. As he began to learn how to play it he realized how much potential the instrument held. He set to work perfecting and standardizing the balalaika and even went to St. Petersburg to ask the violin master Ivanov for advice. At first Ivanov refused to make a balalaika, but after listening to Andreyev's masterful performance, he could not resist. It was long, hard work but eventually they created an improved balalaika.

Andreyev's vision was to bring the balalaika back to the folk. On his initiative, all interested soldiers in the army were given balalaikas which they took with them after retiring from the service. In this way the balalaika again spread all around Russia and became a popular instrument.

With the help of other master instrument makers, Vassily Andreyev created a family of balalaikas, like in a string quartet. There are six sizes - piccolo, descant, prima, secondary, alto, bass, and contrabass. These instruments formed the basis of the Great Russian Orchestra, which later toured in many countries of the world to glorify the balalaika and Russian culture.

Vocabulary

Tsar - (also spelled czar) the Russian word for ruler or emperor.

Serf - an agricultural laborer bound under the feudal system to work on his lord's estate.

Cyrillic - alphabet for the Russian language created by Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century.

Russian Orthodox Church - Christian church dominant in Eastern Europe and Western Asia.

Steppes - a large area of flat unforested grassland in Southeastern Europe or Siberia.

Troika - a type of sleigh pulled by 3 horses.

Old Russia

Oleg is from Siberia and studied at the prestigious Ekaterinburg Conservatory. He has performed all over Russia, Europe, Canada, and 45 of the United States!

Some facts about Russia

Geography

Russia is a country that is partly in Europe and partly in Asia. Some of the large bodies of water are the Black, Caspian, and Baltic seas. Some famous mountain ranges are the Urals and the Caucasus. The Volga and Don are famous rivers. Moscow and St. Petersburg are the most famous cities. Lake Baikal is the biggest, deepest, purest freshwater lake in the world.

Culture

There are 160 different ethnic groups in Russia.

Population & Area

Russia has almost half the number of people as the USA and about twice the amount of land.

Language

Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet.

Some Russian Words

Privyet - привет = hi

Paka - пока = bye

Spaciba - спасибо = thank you

Pazhalusta - пожалуйста = please

Balalaika - балалаика

Da - да = yes

Nyet - нет = no

Musical Vocabulary

- ✓ *A capella* - to sing without accompaniment.
- ✓ *Accompaniment* - a musical term referring to a musical part supporting a vocal part or solo instrumental line.
- ✓ *Accerlerando* - with a gradual increase in speed.
- ✓ *Verse* - a group of lines that form a unit in a poem or song, a stanza, typically with a rhyme scheme.
- ✓ *Chorus* - a part of the song that is repeated after each verse.
- ✓ *Pentatonic* - using only five out of the seven possible notes of the musical scale.
- ✓ *Repertoire* - the stock of songs that a musician or singer is prepared to perform.
- ✓ *Forte* - an Italian word meaning "loud."
- ✓ *Piano* - an Italian word meaning "soft."

Extensions

The "Song of the Volga Boatmen" is related to a beautiful painting by the famous Russian painter Ilya Repin. You can find an image of "Burlaks on the Volga" at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilya_Repin.

Compare it with this image of horses pulling a barge down the Erie Canal: <http://freepages.folklore.rootsweb.com/~holcomb/imageerie002.jpg>.

Here is a famous song by the same name: <http://sniff.numachi.com/pages/tiERICANL;ttERICANL.html>.



Russian Duo

www.russianduo.com

russianduo@hotmail.com

216-932-5825