

Oleg Timofeyev, artistic director, Russian seven-string guitar

Anne Harley, co-director, soprano

Etienne Abelin, baroque violin

TALISMAN was formed in the year 2000 by soprano Anne Harley and guitarist Oleg Timofeyev, the world's leading authority on the Russian guitar tradition. Independently from each other, both founding members were puzzled for years why no Russian music prior to the times of Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky enjoyed any popularity in the West. What musical world corresponds to the so-called 'Golden Age of Russian Poetry', the world of Pushkin and Lermontov? How did the characteristically Russian musical idiom come about starting from the late 18th century? Joining their creative forces with that of Swiss baroque violinist Etienne Abelin, Harley and Timofeyev explore these little-known treasures of Russian musical heritage, bring to Western audience songs and instrumental music from the 18th and 19th centuries, and rediscover the context in which these works were conceived.

Russian Women Composers from the Court of Catherine the Great: *Princesses of St. Petersburg in the 1790s*

Anne Harley, voice Etienne Abelin, baroque violin Oleg Timofeyev, guitar

Winner of the 2001 Noah Greenberg Award for original early music research, TALISMAN's proposed program features the songs and instrumental music written by Russian women composers of the 1790s. Russian women's literature was born around this time, but only very few would know that during the same decade Russian women composers, mostly aristocrats, began to publish music under their own names. This is of particular interest since at that time Russian male aristocrats often concealed their identity when they were publishing songs and instrumental compositions. Set to French or Italian lyrics (in the primarily Francophone court at St. Petersburg), these songs by Princess Kourakine, Countess Golovine, Princess Dolgoruky and the anonymous Mademoiselle *** are full of elegance, wit, and compositional eloquence. Rounding out the selection of aristocratic songs of love and despair is a selection of Russian folk songs attributed to women, and recreated according to chamber music idioms of the time. Featured in every piece is the rarely-heard Russian seven-string guitar, a staple of Russian popular music since the mid-1790s. Timofeyev's instrument dates to the early 1800s.

Silenced in the family albums of the nobility and in mouldering manuscripts through the Soviet era, TALISMAN excavates this music for Western and Russian audiences alike for the first time in hundreds of years. During the performance, the musicians include readings from the 18th and 19th centuries, including Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and from the personal memoirs of the composers themselves, which give intimate details about these pieces, their composers and the function of music in the highest echelons of Russian society, thus creating a rich vision of the Russian salon culture where they were originally performed. Combining their familiarity with Russian language and culture and their acknowledged expertise in historically-informed performance, the artists bring this exquisite repertoire to the modern listener in a compelling and entertaining format.

Early Music of Russian Gypsies

Joint Project with the Romen Gypsy Theater, Moscow, Russia

Anne Harley, voice Etienne Abelin, baroque violin Oleg Timofeyev, Sasha Kolpakov, Vadim Kolpakov, guitars

Starting from the early 1790s, the Gypsy singers, guitarists, and choruses were becoming increasingly popular in Moscow and St. Petersburg. At that time they performed almost exclusively Russian folk songs and romances, but in their own distinctive way: their exuberant ornamentation and passionate improvisation eventually lead to a completely new musical idiom, known as the *romalesca*.

TALISMAN's Russian-Gypsy program recreates a concert of the famous Gypsy singer Stepanida Soldatova (1787-1822). Soldatova, or 'the famous Steshka' as she became known, was the first major Gypsy primadonna in Russia. Dubbed 'the Russian Catalani' by her contemporaries, she trained in the Italian bel canto tradition and it is said that the famous Italian diva Catalani was moved to tears when she heard Steshka's interpretation of Russian songs. Several samples of Steshka's vocal improvisations on Russian folksongs survive in written form, and thanks to our musicological investigations, we are fortunate to have a list of her repertoire. Armed with these archival materials, TALISMAN (Anne Harley, Oleg Timofeyev, and Etienne Abelin) joins forces with the celebrated Gypsy guitarists Alexander Kolpakov and his young nephew Vadim Kolpakov. Both virtuosos in the rare idiom of the Russian seven-string guitar playing, the Gypsy musicians provide an improvised accompaniment full of vitality and unique ethnic character, to which the skillful improviser Anne Harley performs her vocal ornamented versions of Russian songs from Steshka's own repertoire. TALISMAN has also adopted several genuine Gypsy songs from the Kolpakovs to make a program perfectly balanced between the oral and written traditions.

A Treasury of Russian *Romansy*

Anne Harley, soprano Oleg Timofeyev, Russian Seven-String Guitar

Ms. Harley and Mr. Timofeyev decided to structure this project around an 1833 manuscript compiled by Andrei Sychra (1773-1850), the founder of the Russian seven-string guitar tradition. In this newly-found source, Sychra collected some 42 most popular songs and romansy of his time and arranged them with guitar accompaniment. Several of these vocal masterpieces are known to any Russian (“Solovei,” “Sredi doliny rovnyia”), but some others were unjustly forgotten for more than a century. Many are settings of poems by Pushkin and Zhukovsky, both of whom are bright literary stars from Russia’s golden age of poetry and literature. Every piece is expertly adapted for voice and guitar by the most prolific guitarist of the time, creating a pleasant listening for any audience. In addition to the vocal items on the program, Timofeyev supplies some of the most delightful guitar solos by Sychra himself and his students. For this concert, Timofeyev uses the unique early-19th-century Russian guitar from his collection.

The Golden Age of the Russian Guitar

Oleg Timofeyev, Russian Seven-String Guitar

Not many people in the West are aware of the great wealth and magnitude of the Russian guitar tradition in the early 19th century. This tradition was associated with the ‘Russian guitar’, a seven-string instrument in a unique “chordal” tuning, DGBdgbd’. Among the noted early 19th-century composers for this instrument are Andrei Sychra, Mikhail Vysotsky, Semion Aksionov, Vasily Sarenko, Nikolai Alexandrov, and many others. These composers left a substantial number of high-quality guitar compositions distinguished by a unique Russian “flavor”: these works incorporate original Russian folk songs and dance tunes and sound refreshingly different from and yet uncannily similar to their Western-European counterparts.

Guitarist Oleg Timofeyev is the only performer/scholar in the West to bring carefully selected programs of this music into modern concert halls. He performs on rare Russian guitars from his own collection that range from ca. 1800 to ca. 1870. Since 1994, Timofeyev has presented his unique hour-long program that elegantly balances educational aspects of the music with superb and truly “Russian” entertainment. As the author of the first Ph.D. dissertation on the subject (Duke, 1999), Timofeyev complements his virtuosic performances of the repertoire with selected readings from the diaries and memoirs of the time that refer to the Russian guitar.

Previous venues: Duke, USC, Northwestern, Princeton, Wellesley, Indiana University and others. Bloomington Early Music Festival 1999 in Bloomington, IN and Boheme Music 2001 in Moscow, Russia).

Guitar in the Gulag:

Music for the Russian Seven-String Guitar by Matvei Pavlov-Azancheev (1888-1963)

Oleg Timofeyev, Russian seven-string guitar

What happened to the once flourishing Russian guitar tradition after the October Revolution of 1917? The Bolsheviks insisted on associating the Russian seven-string guitar and its music either with the idle classes of the bourgeois past or with their blood enemies, the White Army officers. After Andreas Segovia's 1929 visit to Russia, the Western (or "Spanish") guitar replaced the Russian guitar in the concert halls. The unique Russian guitar tradition associated with the seven-string instrument was abandoned and virtually forgotten.

There was one stunning exception, though: a promising composer and orchestral conductor named Matvei Pavlov (pseudonym "Azancheev," 1888-1963). Fully conscious of his destiny to oppose the foreign six-string tradition and to defend and support the Russian national guitar, this outstanding musician began to write extremely provocative compositions for the instrument from the mid-1920s. In 1941 the composer became a victim of Stalinist repression and until 1951 was kept in one of the small working camps in the south of Russia. The most inspiring fact about his tragic life story is that even in the grim context of the *gulag* he did not abandon his composing. The composer smuggled his music out into the "free world" in his letters to friends. One of these mailings contained an absolute masterpiece—his sonata in four movements entitled "The Great Patriotic War." Provided with descriptive subtitles for the movements (such as "Triumphant March in the Red Square," "First Post-War Stalinist Five-Year Plan," etc.), this work was clearly the composer's attempt to appear a good citizen and ask for pardon. Nevertheless, several musical peculiarities (including the composer's use of popular Soviet tunes and even the Morse code!) disclose Pavlov-Azancheev's real political leanings, which are as far from Socialist Realism as one can imagine.

The renowned advocate of the Russian seven-string guitar and its all-but forgotten tradition, Oleg Timofeyev offers a one-hour long program of Pavlov-Azancheev's music. In the course of the concert, Mr. Timofeyev reads excerpts from the composer's letters from the *gulag*, which in combination with the outstanding quality of the music itself makes the event a truly memorable experience.