

Slavyanka Men's Russian Chorus
109 Minna Street, Suite 558
San Francisco, CA 94105

Change Service Requested

Slavyanka

Internet

Mail

S. V. RACHMANINOV

Vespers

(in the original Slavonic)

Slavyanka

Millennium Chorus
 Gregory A. Smirnov, Director

April 8, 2000, 7:00 PM
 Valley Presbyterian Church
 945 Portola Road
 Portola Valley

April 9, 2000, 7:00 PM
 1st Congregational Church
 2501 Harrison Street
 Oakland

April 16, 2000, 5:30 PM
 Grace Cathedral
 1100 California Street
 San Francisco

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our on-line NewsLetter! This is a new way to communicate information about the Slavyanka Chorus activities and special announcements from time to time. We hope that it is interesting and helpful to you. We have some very exciting Concerts coming up for Millennium 2000. We hope you and your friends can attend.

Многая Лета
Mnogaya L'eta
Many Years
Slavyanka

Financial Information. Slavyanka is a corporation exempt from state and federal taxes (commonly referred to as a "non profit") having received its exemption status in 1984. As such its finances are subject to review by the public at large (though most people are not aware of the fact). Its fiscal year is July 1 through June 30. Below are the unaudited results of the last two fiscal years. If you have any questions about or comments you may address them to chorus President Andy Anderson at 510-540-8096 or E-mail: androssl@ix.netcom.com

	7/97- 6/98	7/98- 6/99	Overall Total
Sources of Funds			
Concert Income	\$ 8,829	\$14,541	\$23,370
Interest income:	545	863	1,409
Donations, Individual:	9,992	18,031	28,023
Donations, Corporate	250	2,350	2,600
Donations, Government	4,700	12,600	17,300
Royalty Income	1,523	1,476	3,000
Services Income*	14,964	0	14,964
Goods Sales:	4,370	4,899	9,270
Total Income**	\$45,176	\$54,762	\$99,938
Uses of Funds			
Rehearsal Expenses:	3,061	1,738	4,799
Concert Costs:	8,388	8,886	17,274
Operations:	1,761	2,909	4,670
Tour Expenses	160	20,401	20,561
Sales tax	0	500	500
Goods Costs:	1,813	1,977	3,791
Recording Costs:	1,450	1,455	2,905
Payroll	18,963	32,037	51,001
Uncategorized Expenses	0	0	0
Total Expenses**	\$35,598.98	\$69,905.11	\$105,504.09
Total Income less Expenses	\$ 9,577.26	\$(15,142.82)	\$(5,565.56)

*Payment for work on Movie *What Dreams May Come*

** Totals may not equal the sum of the items due to rounding.



Yes! We are wired for the New Millennium with our rapidly expanding WEB Site: www.slavyanka.org
 Also, for those of you who provide us with your E-mail addresses, we will be using the Internet more for distribution of our Concert reminders and other timely information.
 You can order tickets for Slavyanka Concerts through:



Click on this logo on our WEB Site or
 Call TicketWeb at : **510-601-TWEB**

SLAVYANKA

SAN FRANCISCO MEN'S RUSSIAN CHORUS

Millennium 2000 Newsletter
Volume I, Spring 2000

Slavyanka Past, Present, and Future

The past 18 months have been very busy. In addition to the normal concert schedule, we had a number of special events. Way back in 1987 we put together an all sacred recording (which by the way has now sold over 40,000 copies), and at the time we said we would also make an all secular recording in the "near" future. Other projects kept getting in the way, but finally in November 1998 we made a recording of secular music and have now licensed it to Dorian Records for release, probably later this spring. It contains a number of the songs we have been performing over the years but which we had not recorded as well as some new pieces. Once it is released, we will have plenty to sell at our concerts.

Spring 1999 marked Slavyanka's twentieth anniversary, and we celebrated with two special projects, an alumni concert and a Russian tour. During April and May fourteen alumni and our founding director, Paul Andrews, worked with the regular chorus in preparing for the alumni concert which was given on May 22nd. It was good seeing and hearing a number of the former members again, and we hope to make an alumni get-together an annual event. Plans now are to get together again next fall, as our spring 2000 schedule is already booked.

Five days after the alumni concert, on May 27th, the chorus headed out on its first tour since 1989. We visited St. Petersburg, Novgorod (one of the oldest and most historic cities in Russia), Pskov (another historic city and the former home of Gregory Smirnov), and Moscow. We sang in concerts, participated in church services, and joined festivities surrounding the 200th anniversary of Alexander Pushkin's birth. We also stayed with families in Pskov that provided a unique opportunity to get a close-up view of Russian life. All in all it was a memorable trip that the participants will long cherish.

After arriving back home we were asked if we would participate in a Pushkin festival in San Francisco. While certainly not the headliners (we received but a single mention in a San Francisco Chronicle review of the concert), we enjoyed the concert both as participants and in listening to others sing Pushkin poetry set to music by some of Russia's best composers. Life then quieted down somewhat, at least as to special projects. Last fall we had only our normal concert schedule.

The highlight was a joint concert at Grace Cathedral with the San Jose State University Chorale. The original plans had been to have the Pskov (Russia) Academic Choir sing with us, but they had to postpone their tour due to a lack of money. With the exception of the Vespers project (described below) our plans this year are a bit more down to earth (and less expensive). We have no tours scheduled, nor are we recording. On the other hand we are continuing the emphasis on improving choral sound and in expanding our repertoire which have brought us many favorable comments in the past two years. If you haven't been to a concert in a while, this spring would be a good time to check out Slavyanka again.

Rachmaninov Vespers

Last spring we were approached by personnel from Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and asked if we would perform the Rachmaninov "Vespers" on Palm Sunday (April 16th) 2000. Even though Slavyanka is a men's chorus and the *Vespers* includes sopranos and altos, the chance to sing this piece again was too much to pass up. Accordingly we put out a call for women and men who would be willing to put in the extra work needed to learn and perform this piece. Though as of this writing the chorus makeup is not fully settled, it appears that we will have at least 50 singers for the performances.

The next step was to determine how many performances to put on and where they should be. We settled on three performances: Saturday, April 8th, at Valley Presbyterian Church in Portola Valley; Sunday, April 9th, at First Congregational Church in Oakland; and Sunday, April 16th at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. There are more details in the Concert Schedule portion of this newsletter and on our Web site (www.slavyanka.org).

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninov (1873-1943) wrote his Opus 37 in 1915 in just two months. This work has often been misnamed *Vespers* (which we continue by using the more familiar term throughout this article), due to a lack of familiarity with Orthodox liturgy. It is, in fact, a setting of the Ordinary portions of the All Night Vigil service (*Vsenoshchnoye Bdeniye*), which includes Vespers, Matins, and First Hour (Prime) and is celebrated on the eve of the great feasts of the Church. The true title reflects the fact that in the traditional church, and in monasteries to this day, the All Night Vigil began at dusk and continued until dawn.

The *Vespers* was written at a time when most Russian choirs consisted of males only, men and boys, and the first performance was by the all male Moscow Synodal Choir in 1915 under the direction of N. M. Danilin.

During the Soviet era the *Vespers* was not performed. In fact sacred music generally, while not outlawed, was officially frowned upon, and therefore not performed. This made it all the more astonishing when in 1965 the most prestigious choir of the time, the USSR Academic Choir under A. Sveshnikov, not only performed the piece but also recorded it on Melodia.

Some years later (possibly as a result of the Sveshnikov recording) it was discovered in America and recorded by America's most prestigious choir, the Robert Shaw Chorale, and it has since then enjoyed an increasing popularity in America. Slavyanka in its expanded form (known as the Slavyanka Millennium Chorus) under Paul Andrew's direction, performed the piece in 1988, and it was through this process that many of us first became familiar with the piece. We put on two performances, one in Grace Cathedral and the other on the Stanford campus as part of the celebration of the Russian Orthodox Millennium (988 to 1988).

The *Vespers* now is fast reaching the status of such stalwarts as the Brahms Requiem and Bach's St. Matthew Passion as one of the most performed pieces in America. Within the Bay Area we are aware of at least two other groups performing it this spring (one with English text). Slavyanka, however, has two advantages that should make our performance especially memorable. We have a Russian director who truly understands the piece in a way that few who have not studied Russian music extensively can. We also have a core of singers who have been singing Russian music for quite a number of years, so the words, harmonies and rhythms are familiar. All in all this should be a special project you will not want to miss. So mark your calendar for April 8th, 9th, and/or 16th, and come hear the Slavyanka Millennium Chorus perform one of the world's greatest choral works.



Slavyanka 20th Anniversary Concert Tour in Russia

Late in 1997 Slavyanka was invited to go to Pskov to help celebrate the 200th anniversary of Alexander Pushkin's birth.... a grand cultural exchange opportunity to tour Russia again since we had not been there since 1989. Will Starr agreed to be the "Tour Czar," and after making all the necessary arrangements, nineteen singers, one director, and 13 family members and friends left for St. Petersburg on Thursday, May 27, 1999. After a lengthy trip (flight to New York, another flight to Helsinki, and a 7 hour bus ride to St. Petersburg) we arrived Friday (May 28th) afternoon to find the city as some of us had remembered it from 1989, though a bit worse for wear, it was apparent that there was not a lot of money available for maintenance. We stayed for three days visiting the main attractions and closed with a concert at the Kapella,



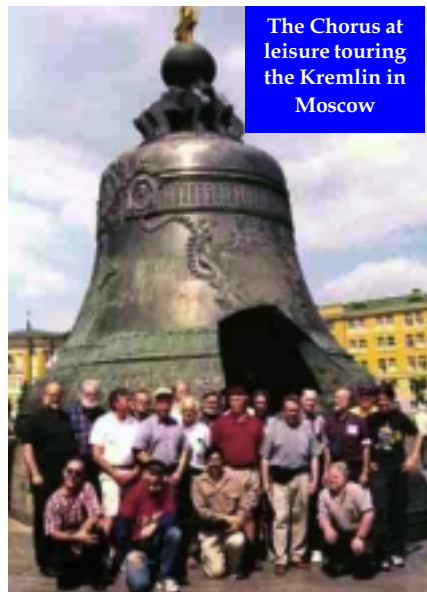
Gregory, leading the tour by bus and train, singing all the way! Our wonderful Russian guide, Olga Yemelyanova, was absolutely the best!

packed with people absolutely delighted to see Gregory again, and we received many standing ovations during the concert. The concert was truly one of the most exciting ever performed by Slavyanka. The next few days were idyllic. We spent time with the host families, saw many of the attractions in this ancient Russian city, listened to and sang with the Pskov Academic Choir, joined in an Orthodox Church service at the historical Alexander Nevsky Church, and participated in the Pushkin 200th Anniversary Festival. Pushkin is buried at Sacred Hills near Pskov and Mikhail Khailovskoye, the family estate. The home stays were particularly memorable as it gave us insights as to Russian life that we could not get from a hotel (we are not so naive as to think we learned all about Russian life from this, only that we got a glimpse few others have had). By Sunday evening (June 6th) it was time to leave. Sadly we said good-bye to our new friends and boarded the overnight train bound for Moscow. We arrived in time for breakfast and from there we went to our hotel which became our home for the next five days. A word about the hotels....The trip was quite



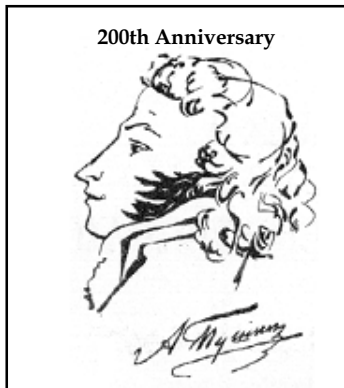
The ancient Holy Dormition Pskovo-Perchersky (Pskov Caves) Monastery, founded in 1473. The Chorus was invited to sing and given a private tour by the Abbot

expensive, made partly so by our voting to spend an extra \$300 per person to stay in first class hotels. The extra cost though was certainly worth it as it made our stay much more comfortable. For those of us who had seen the city previously, Moscow appeared completely transformed from a dark, dreary place with an omnipresent sense of foreboding, to a light and cheerful city full of life. We spent the next five days wandering around seeing the sights both on official tours and on our own. Musically, as we had done in other cities, we sang informally at a number of sights, and had our daily rehearsals. On Friday (June 4th) we gave our official Moscow concert to a rather small but enthusiastic crowd (including prior director Alexei Shipovalnikov's wife,



The Chorus at leisure touring the Kremlin in Moscow

Tatiana Baeva who was visiting Moscow at the time). Two local television stations covered the concert, and the programs were aired later that night, which we saw, and the next day, which we didn't because we were on our way home as of Saturday (June 12th) morning. We arrived home late Saturday (June 12th) afternoon, and had a day to work out the jet lag before going back to work. It was a memorable tour both for those who were seeing Russia for the first time, and for those who had been there in either 1986 and/or 1989 and witnessed the massive changes that had taken place and are continuing. While the cost is almost prohibitive at this point, we still hope that we can again visit Russia in a few years since it is the source of our music.



200th Anniversary

Alexander Pushkin's Grave



Slavyanka sang in the Summer Palace (Peterhof) and the Winter Palace (The Hermitage) while in St. Petersburg



Rehearsal Time! Slavyanka on stage with the Pskov Academic Choir preparing for evening concerts

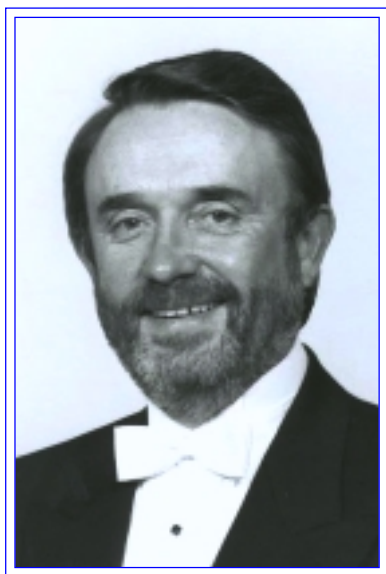


Slavyanka on Stage!
Second concert of the Tour in Pskov



Slavyanka on Stage!
Final concert of the Tour in Moscow at the Russian National Library (formerly the Lenin Library)

Gregory Smirnov, Music Director



In past newsletters we have spoken at length about the chorus and what it is doing but have said little about the members themselves. In this and subsequent issues, we will attempt to acquaint you with some of the members, and we start off with the director.

The technical details are that Gregory A. Smirnov has a Master of Fine Arts in Music specializing in choir conducting, voice coaching, harmony instructing, music education with broad experience conducting, composing, arranging music for major theater and movie companies. Prior to his emigration to the United States in 1992 he directed choirs in Pskov, Russia for over twenty years. In addition to his work with Slavyanka he is the Choral Director, Piano Instructor, and Music Educator for the Nativity of the Holy Virgin Russian Orthodox Church, Menlo Park and has been a guest conductor for the Vocal Arts Ensemble in San Luis Obispo.

Gregory was born and raised in Pskov under communism, and along with thousands of other Orthodox Christians, he was forced to keep his faith a secret, as all forms of religion and religious music were officially frowned on (read banned). In order to preserve the works of such masters as Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov, copies of their music were secretly stored in church vaults. But even this was not safe as the authorities raided many churches and destroyed the music they found. Other music was smuggled out of the country, and still other music was painstakingly memorized and passed on from one generation to the next. As an aside, when Slavyanka toured the USSR in 1986 and sang its sacred repertoire (much of it coming from those who had smuggled it out of Russia), it caused a major stir

In fact there was an article about us in *Pravda* mentioning that we even sang songs like *Blazhen Muzh* which, of course had rarely, if ever, been publicly performed in the past 70 years.

With the advent of glasnost and the subsequent fall of communism, Gregory and others looked forward to being able to sing openly the music that they had risked imprisonment to learn. Yet with the new era came economic chaos - food shortages, job loss, high inflation, and an overall feeling of desperation. By 1991 Gregory became convinced that it would still be many years before he would be able to perform religious music and freely lead a spiritual life. He wanted to immigrate to America where he felt the freedoms he sought existed, but he needed an invitation

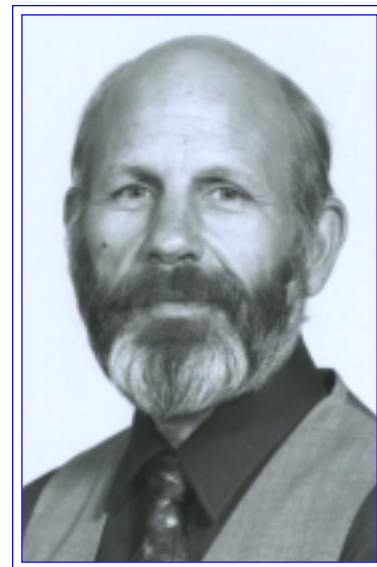
That opportunity came when the Vocal Arts Ensemble of San Luis Obispo toured Russia in Spring 1991. Two of the performers wanted to extend their stay beyond the rest of the group and they wanted to stay in people's homes. The travel agent, which knew of Gregory's plight, arranged for the two to stay with Gregory in Pskov, and the process was begun. As a direct result of the home-stay, Gregory was invited to come to San Luis Obispo, which he did over Christmas 1991. After returning to Russia he became convinced that even though he would have to leave his family behind (a daughter, in her twenties), his future belonged in America. By November 1992 he had made all preparations, and he left Russia for the U.S. With the help of Vocal Arts Ensembles members and friends, he was able to find work as a church choir director, first in Monterey, and then in Menlo Park, a job that he still holds.

Gregory's first contact with Slavyanka came in 1993 when he participated as a guest conductor in an all day workshop. It took only that brief encounter to convince him that one day he would direct the chorus. When Alexei Shipovalnikov decided to step down in 1997, Gregory immediately applied for the job and was chosen from a field of extremely well qualified candidates.

Since joining the chorus Gregory has worked unceasingly to take it to another level. He spends many hours each week both in chorus work and in giving individual voice lessons to anyone in the chorus who wants them. From his vast personal repertoire he has produced many new pieces and has arranged a number of other scores for Slavyanka. Though the job is listed as a part time job, some of us suspect that to him "part time" means the part of the time that he is awake.

Last July, Gregory was sworn in as a U.S. citizen. He lives in San Mateo County with his wife, Elena, whom he met while she was a Stanford Fellow Scientist. He has one grown daughter and one grand child whom he enjoyed seeing during our Russian tour last spring.

Andy Anderson, President



Andy, as our President for the last 5 years has quietly guided the Chorus to its present day position and foundation for the future. He has personally chaired the Board of Directors, the new Director search committee (responsible for finding and hiring Gregory Smirnov from a list of over 12 highly qualified applicants), the Executive Committee (responsible for review of all major chorus policy and financial matters for presentation to the Board), and the Music Committee (responsible for working with the Music Director to review and set directions for the Chorus repertoire, performances, competitions, quality improvement, and recruiting of new singers). His dedicated service, while maintaining his private law practice and family concerns, has contributed in large part to our success. Thanks "a million" Andy!

Board of Directors

Andy Anderson	(President)
Donn Davy	(Vice President)
John Rodgers	(Treasurer)
Charles Dorsett	(Secretary)
Gregory Smirnov	(Music Director)
Bob Raber	(Past President)
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