

MacCulloch Dancers in Russia 2007



Members of our group were directors, Rae MacCulloch and Heather Forbes, musicians, James Forbes, Dave McCormick, Darrel MacLeod, and dancers, Chris Bergeron, Charlotte Bradley, Amelia Brooker, Rhianon Cowley-Owen, Victoria Ellam, Heather Godsoe, Kristen Hooker, Angelia Hughes, Sophie Jeurond, Amelia Johnston, Dana MacDonald, Meaghan MacDougall, Brenna MacNaughton-Seguin, Darlene McLeod, Chanel McCartney, Elizabeth Muggleton, Kristina Thompson.

Upon our arrival at the Sheremetyevo in Moscow we were greeted by our first Moscow International Folklore Festival representative, Oxanna. Her first task was to come to the aid of our fiddler, Darrel MacLeod who required certification papers for his fiddle before entering Russia. Soon we were on our way to the “Rescuer” hostel located south of Moscow. The Sheremetyevo airport is located 29km northwest of Moscow. Our long journey on the outer ring of Moscow’s circular highway grid, in stop and go traffic, took five hours. Recent years have seen immense growth in the number of cars on Moscow’s highways causing traffic jams to become a major problem.



We observed our surroundings with great anticipation as we exited the city limits and found ourselves motoring along narrow roads encased in dense bush. The end of the road brought us to iron gates guarded by soldiers dressed in camouflage. One of the dancers commented that she had seen this in movies and it never ended well. But alas upon entrance we found ourselves on inviting landscaped grounds surrounded by large white boarding houses trimmed in brilliant primary colours. Our kind festival organizer Yury Gur’yanov invited us to the dining hall and we ate our first Russian meal of mashed potatoes and beef.

Other countries performing in the International Folklore Festival of Moscow included Austria, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Buryatia - Bauntovsky District, Republic Saha (Yakutia) – Ust-Yansky District, Amur Region – Tyndinsky District, Nenetsky Autonomous Area – Arkhangwlsk Region and Yamalo-Nenetsky Autonomous Area – City of Salekhard..

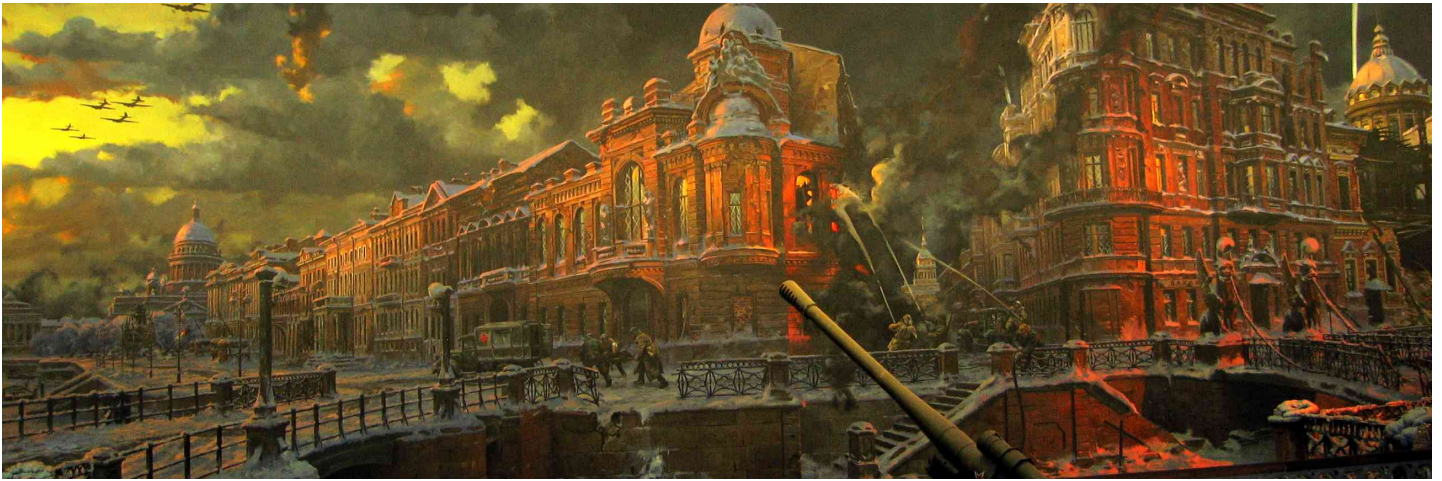
In the evenings dancers and musicians shared their music and dance, teaching our dances and learning the games and dances of fellow international performers. In the main hall teens of many cultural roots danced to the familiar rhythms of the discothèque. Back at the boarding house directors and students alike were entertained by the reenactment of scenes from “Monty Python”, performed by our troupe members, Darrel MacLeod, Dave McCormick and Elizabeth Muggleton.



Our first excursion brought us to the Vorib’evykh (Sparrows) Mountain with an observation platform which provided a fantastic panoramic view of Moscow. Several Russian brides and grooms posed for photos as this is a popular venue for wedding pictures.

We were then off to our first performance at the Red Square Folklore Festival Stage near the Kremlin. Crowds filled the streets in celebration of Moscow’s 860th birthday, as our international cast opened Moscow’s International Festival of Folklore. Following our performance our young Canadians passed out Canadian flags in the streets of Moscow. Even the Russian guards could not resist smiling at our most enthusiastic young Canadian ambassadors.





The artists' sculptures and paintings viewed at the Central Museum of Great Patriotic War 1941 – 1945 were awe inspiring. Six dioramas present realistic visual views of the most dramatic battles of the Great Patriotic War. The Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War, opened on May 9, 1995 and is located in the base of the Memorial Victory Complex on Poklonnaya Hill. This massive museum covers more than 48.000 square meters, show-casing over 110,000 items of authentic weapons, military vehicles, uniforms, medals, photos, documentary films, letters from the battlefield and works of art.



It was here on Poklonnaya Mountain that we presented our second performance. The camaraderie of the backstage area was ever increasing as musicians and dancers came together to produce a high energy showcase of international traditions.



The musical blends of folk music from around the world brought to mind the excitement of the international alliance so typical of international folklore festivals. Our young Canadian moved from group to group posing for photos with new found global friends.



On our fourth day in Moscow we enjoyed a full day of sight seeing. There was great excitement in the group as President Putin’s motorcade raced by while we strolled along the roadways of the Kremlin. In addition to the President’s official residence, we viewed four palaces, four cathedrals, and the enclosing Kremlin Wall with Kremlin towers. Of particular interest were the Tsar Cannon and Bell, both being among the largest of their kind in the world, weighing in at 40-tons and 130 tons respectively.



After leaving the Kremlin, we walked along the Big Stone Bridge to river quay “Variety Theatre”, then rode along Moscow River in a motorboat. We were surrounded by photo opportunities, as we were taken in by the beautiful architecture of Moscow city.

At the end of the day Rae MacCulloch, Heather Forbes and Jim Forbes attended an official reception in the State Russian House of Folk Arts.





More excitement was yet to come as we left Moscow and headed for the Village of Yakovlevskoe.

The Village of Yakovlevskoe



Principal Lyudmila Belyanicheva lead us to the school entrance where we were greeted by the smiling faces and beautiful voices of the young Russian children. They were dressed in traditional Russian costume and formed an honour guard as we entered the school. We were introduced to a local reporter and camera man who would follow and interview us throughout the day.

The children entertained us expertly with song and dance. We shared home made bread and salt as is the custom in Russia.



We were then lead to the official offices of the Head of Administration for Yakovlevskoe, Pihooya Yevgency and Sport & Cultural Director, Dolhih Sergey. Mr.Yevgency and Mr. Sergey addressed our group, welcoming us to their village and presenting us with traditional Russian crafts and chocolate. Rae MacCulloch was honoured with an official certificate from the village of Yakovlevskoe.

The television camera followed us as we visited local markets for some shopping. Matryoshka dolls were by far the most popular item.



The local dancers and singers were of similar ages to our dancers. Together we presented a Cultural Performance for the people of Yakovlevskoe Village.



The following day our group presented a master class in Canadian Step Dancing for the students. In turn, the Keades - Razboyenva Tatyana and Ursckov Slava trained our group in the techniques of Russian song and dance.



In the evening while our young dancers enjoyed their host families, the adult members of our group met with village officials. We enjoyed exquisite Russian cuisine and of course vodka. We toasted our most gracious hosts as they did us, enjoying the company of our new Russian friends. The Head of Administration for Yakovlevskoe, Pihooya Yevgency commented on Russia-Canadian relations referring to the need for positive relations such as we were experiencing in this room. The Sport & Cultural Director, Dolhih Sergey commented on the simplicity of this delegation as opposed to previous more controlled delegations. We were honoured for promoting friendship between our nations and appreciated for bringing such well-wishes from so far.



We visited a new Russian High School which had opened three days earlier. The school principal proudly gave us a tour of this magnificent high school which featured a play ground with a full soccer court and obstacle training course, a full size Gymnasium, well equipped sewing, computer and laboratory classrooms, and a full sized swimming pool. We also noted that school dining halls had rows of sinks at their entrances allowing easy access for hand washing before meals. Our students quickly engaged in trying out the gym and playground equipment, running a relay race through the obstacle course and sharing in a game of Red Rover with their Russian comrades.

It was our final day in Russia and a great honour was about to be bestowed upon us. Before leaving Russia we were to become the first and only international performing troupe to perform for President Vladimir Putin's Secret Service soldiers. We received a guided tour of the military base – viewing the Barracks, the Medical Floor where soldiers received medical treatment including dentistry and surgery, and the dining hall. We ate soldier food made with a buck wheat base with the Commander's wish that it give us fortified strength.

The soldiers responded to our performance with cheers and enthusiastic applause. The dancers walked through the audience presenting Canadian Flags and RCMP pins to the soldiers.

The Commander expressed his gratitude for this very special performance and visit. He told us that there was no doubt that the Generals, Officers, Soldiers and Technicians would hold this memory in their hearts forever. Heather (MacCulloch) Forbes spoke about the pride our group felt in having the most prestigious honour of performing for the soldiers. Rae MacCulloch expressed her joy for having the opportunity to visit Russia and its wonderful people.

Heather (MacCulloch) Forbes

