

Music Brings Together Symphony of Sounds

By Irina Klimova, Culture, February 7, 2002

The Volga-Band orchestra gave a performance at the Philharmonic as a part of an international Russian-Canadian project.

A conductor and a soloist represented Canada. The band and the audience represented Russia. The conductor, Stephen Chenette, is very well-known not only in Canada where he has worked for more than 30 years at the Music Department of Toronto University, but also in many European countries. That is why he was elected a vice-president of the International Trumpet Guild.

As for Saratov, our people are very familiar with his work. Stephen has worked with the Volga-Band and put together more than ten concert programs, all of which were a great success.

But the soloist, Peter Stoll, came to Russia for the first time. I would like to tell you more about him. Peter is a friend of Mr. Chenette. He teaches clarinet at Toronto University. He also performs with the Toronto Philharmonia Orchestra and plays with several ensembles of modern music.

He came to Russia a few days before the concert. He seemed happy, curious and eager to start working. However, there were a few obstacles he had to overcome while in our city. First, his clarinet cracked. I do not know what Peter Stoll did to try to repair that crack, but he did show up at the first rehearsal. And when he did, he found out that the hall was unavailable at that time and he had to practice in the foyer where the acoustics are not at all the same. With the cracked clarinet and already with his winning smile, he stood next to the conductor. The orchestra started playing *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* by L. Bernstein. Peter started nodding his head following the rhythm. He turned serious and began playing.

He performed this most difficult piece flawlessly. It seemed that all these difficult musical passages, intricate rhythm, and high register were so easy for him to execute. Fast tempo did not prevent him from hitting all the notes; each musical phrase had its own character. At some point it sounded as if he was arguing with the orchestra, then as if he was asking himself a question and then he was laughing at musical replies of other instruments. After he finished, all musicians started applauding him.

Next pieces were *Summer Dances* by John Hawkins (this piece, composed in 2000, was dedicated to Peter Stoll and Steve Chenette) and *Introduction, Theme and Variations* by G.Rossini. It was a virtuoso performance.

However, what impressed many people were not musical passages performed flawlessly but how Peter used pianissimo nuance in his performance. He made his clarinet sound so quietly that the sound literally vanished into total silence. And most importantly, his clarinet did not make any extra sounds that are almost inevitable when the wind players use this nuance. Peter's sound remained clear as crystal.

Next day Peter gave clinics for the students of the Conservatoire. After his class was over, students and other listeners stayed on. I asked him to tell us more about himself.

"I started playing the recorder. I did not start studying clarinet till I was 14. I studied at the Royal Conservatoire, the Toronto University and the Bloomington University. It is a big institute that has about two thousand students. Now I teach at the University of Toronto and perform."

Q: You described the clarinet sound in a very poetic way. It seems to me that for you clarinet is the best instrument in the world.

A: Some people say that the trumpet is the best instrument, some say clarinet, but they all play together in an orchestra. And it is important to a listener to hear the whole orchestra and not only the clarinet or trumpet. And this is the best way.

Q: What can you say about clarinet players in Saratov?

A: I listened to them yesterday during the rehearsal and today at my clinics. Your students play very complex programs. Their fingers work very well. And I liked the Russian sound.

Q: What do you mean?

A: People play clarinet all over the world. But the sound differs. People have their own national cultural schools and they try to have a consistent sound. This is what I meant by I like the Russian sound.

Q: Did you know anything about Saratov before you came?

A: Yes. My friends musicians told me about it. I also got some info off the Internet. I knew that your Conservatoire is the third in Russia. There were famous teachers here and you have a very good organ. Rachmaninoff was here!!!

Peter stopped and looked around. Right next to him he saw two maintenance workers carrying a door. Down the hall there was a metal pole supporting the ceiling. "Rachmaninoff was here," repeated Peter looking somewhat pensive.

The day of the actual performance came. One hour before the concert, Peter finally got to rehearse the whole program on stage. He wanted to try the acoustics in the hall. Of course, one time was not enough. That is why, when he appeared on stage and took his place next to the conductor, he was somewhat agitated: cracked clarinet, not enough rehearsal time on stage B, all that was enough to affect anybody's performance. But Peter was not going to give up. And his performance was brilliant. Listeners noticed how he can follow and keep the most difficult rhythm, how he hits even the highest notes, how artistic his performance is. And now, together with the band musicians, they were stunned by his clear Canadian sound, which does not lose its beauty even when it disappears into total silence.

The audience was ecstatic. After each piece, the clarinetist received long ovations and was not allowed to leave the stage without flowers. Although not too many people knew what price Peter had to pay for this great performance.