Russian Garden Gazette

A Digital Journal of the Russian Cultural Garden, Cleveland

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Three's Not a Crowd

Nikolai Rezanov · Rozanov, Erofeev, Dovlatov · Galina Vishnevskaya · Coming Next

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Three’s Not a Crowd

They say three's a crowd. But in the stories of this issue, it is the third character who unexpectedly changes everything. The three loves of Nikolai Rezanov; three writers separated by time; and three people thanks to whom Cleveland became part of a great chapter in music history. And finally, the promise of another meeting — this time with three doctors.

Svetlana Stolyarova

Editor, Russian Garden Gazette

The Three Loves of Nikolai Rezanov

The story behind the legend of "Juno and Avos"

October 27 marks the 82nd anniversary of the birth of Nikolai Karachentsov — an actor whose voice, temperament and extraordinary stage energy remain in the memory of several generations of audiences.

Among the many roles he created, one holds a special place: Count Rezanov in the legendary rock opera *Juno and Avos*, staged by Mark Zakharov at Moscow's Lenkom Theatre in 1981, with music by Alexei Rybnikov and lyrics by Andrei Voznesensky.

Some melodies cannot be separated from a human voice. Hear the first notes of the romance "I Will Never Forget You," and Karachentsov appears before your eyes — his Rezanov, his love, his despair.

"I Will Never Forget You," from the rock opera Juno and Avos, Lenkom Theatre. (youtube.com/watch?v=zLjIKdrq2wE)

For generations of theatregoers, this is how Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov remains: a romantic hero who fell in love with the young Spanish girl Conchita on a distant Californian shore and was parted from her forever by death.

But the real Rezanov was a far more complicated man. Diplomat, statesman, one of the founders of the Russian-American Company, participant in the first Russian voyage around the world — he lived in a world where personal feeling constantly collided with duty to the state.

And there were not two loves in his life, but three.

The First Love: Anna

In 1795 Nikolai Rezanov married Anna Grigorievna Shelikhova, daughter of the merchant and explorer Grigory Shelikhov, who played a major role in the development of Russian America.

Their marriage was brief. In 1802 Anna died, leaving her husband with two small children.

Her death was a heavy blow. Ahead lay the voyage around the world, a diplomatic mission to Japan, travels through Russian America and California. But neither years nor distance could displace Anna from his heart.

We know this not from romantic legend, but from a letter Rezanov himself wrote shortly before his death.

We will return to it.

The Second Love: Conchita

In the spring of 1806 Rezanov arrived in Spanish California. The Russian settlements in Alaska were in serious difficulty with supplies, and one of his tasks was to obtain food and establish trade with the Spanish.

In San Francisco he met the family of the presidio's commandant, José Darío Argüello. His daughter María Concepción, known as Conchita, was young, beautiful and — judging by Rezanov's own observations — of independent character.

The acquaintance ended in an engagement.

This is where the story later made famous by *Juno and Avos* begins.

But what really happened?

In a letter to Count Nikolai Rumyantsev dated June 17 (29), 1806, Rezanov gave a detailed account of his stay in California. And his description of courting Conchita looks nothing like a sudden romantic passion.

"Courting the Spanish beauty daily, I noticed her enterprising character, her boundless ambition..."

Rezanov describes how he gradually won the girl over, having noticed her longing to see the world beyond the Spanish colony.

"...and at last, imperceptibly, I instilled in her such impatience to hear something more serious from me that no sooner had I offered her my hand than I received her consent."

What we see here is less a romantic in love than an experienced diplomat who understands perfectly the influence he might gain through kinship with the commandant's family.

Yet the story does not end there.

The historian A. A. Istomin discovered that two versions of the letter to Rumyantsev, both in Rezanov's hand, have survived. In the earlier version he describes the relationship quite differently:

"The lovely Concepción grew more gracious toward me with every passing day..."

He goes on to admit that her sincerity and attention had begun to fill the emptiness in his heart.

In the later version this emotional side almost disappears. In its place is an account of a calculated courtship, prompted by the difficulties of the diplomatic mission.

Why did Rezanov change the text?

Istomin suggests he wished to present his actions in the most favourable light for a statesman, and to rule out any suspicion that personal feelings might have affected the performance of his duty.

The result is remarkable: one and the same man, telling one and the same story, leaves us two substantially different explanations of his actions.

And both belong to Rezanov himself.

The Third Love: The Fatherland

To understand Rezanov, one must hear another voice in his letters — the voice of a man for whom serving Russia was not merely an obligation, but part of his very sense of dignity.

Today that tone seems almost forgotten. In Rezanov's letters to statesmen, in his reflections on trade, diplomacy and the condition of the Russian settlements, the thought of the good of the Fatherland is ever present.

Rezanov belonged to an era when state service could be felt as a personal calling, and a man's honour and standing were inseparable from the fulfilment of duty.

But we should not imagine him a flawless hero.

During the first Russian circumnavigation aboard the sloop *Nadezhda*, a bitter conflict broke out between Rezanov and the ship's commander, Ivan Krusenstern. They sailed on the same vessel, yet disagreed so sharply over who held authority that at times they communicated through written notes.

Rezanov considered himself vested with high powers and demanded to be treated accordingly. Krusenstern, responsible for the ship and its crew, defended his authority as captain. In the letters and reports of both sides one hears resentment, pride, irritation, concern for one's own dignity — and each side's certainty that it was right.

In Kamchatka in 1804, General Pavel Koshelev helped bring about a reconciliation, and the *Nadezhda* continued on to Japan.

It was after this reconciliation, on September 10, 1804, as they approached Japan, that Rezanov wrote to Krusenstern about how to conduct themselves with the Japanese: "...without any humiliation, yet by modest and indulgent manners, one may win the affection and love of this people..."

These words combine diplomatic tact with a sense of personal dignity. Rezanov sees no contradiction between respect for foreign customs and an awareness of his high standing as a representative of the Russian Empire.

The Krusenstern affair deserves a story of its own. It shows that Rezanov's ideas of honour and service did not always coincide with those of others equally devoted to their cause.

And yet his ambitions for the state were entirely real. He pursued the growth of trade, sought ways to supply the Russian colonies, and tried to open new possibilities for Russia's presence in the Pacific.

In California, his diplomatic mission and his personal fate became unexpectedly intertwined.

A Confession from Irkutsk

On January 24, 1807 (Old Style), in Irkutsk, Rezanov wrote to Mikhail Buldakov, husband of his late wife's sister.

He had less than two months to live.

He returned to the story of his Californian engagement, as if trying to explain to someone close what he could not say in an official report.

> *"Do not judge me, my friend, a fickle man from my Californian report. My love lies with you, in the Nevsky, beneath a piece of marble; and what happened here is the fruit of enthusiasm and a new sacrifice to the Fatherland."*

His love still belonged to Anna.

But then comes a confession that undoes any simple explanation of the engagement to Conchita as pure state calculation:

> *"Concepción is sweet as an angel, beautiful, kind-hearted; she loves me, I love her, and I weep that there is no place for her in my heart..."*

He ends by asking that this confession be kept secret.

Here, then, are the three loves of Nikolai Rezanov.

Love for the wife he had lost and could not forget.

Love for the young Conchita, to whom he could not give his whole heart.

And love for the Fatherland, by which he tried to explain even his most personal decisions.

But can these feelings be separated at all?

Perhaps their inseparable entanglement is the true tragedy of Rezanov.

Conchita: A Life After the Legend

Rezanov left California intending to return once he had obtained the permissions needed for the marriage.

He never returned.

In March 1807 he died in Krasnoyarsk, without ever reaching St. Petersburg.

Conchita learned of his death only later.

She never married. In the years that followed she devoted herself to charity and religious life, and in her later years joined the Dominican order. She died in 1857.

Can we say that her whole life was devoted to Rezanov's memory?

The historical record does not allow us to answer with certainty. Her decision not to marry may have had many reasons, and we have no right to reduce the long life of an independent woman to a single romantic story.

But one fact cannot be set aside: Conchita never became anyone's wife.

And here two destinies echo each other.

Rezanov kept his love for the woman he had lost to the end of his days.

Conchita outlived Rezanov by half a century. She never married — but what passed in her heart through all those years, we can only guess.

Their stories were not mirror images of each other. And yet in both there remained a love that was not destined to be fulfilled as they had once hoped.

The White Wild Rose



White wild rose. Photograph by Liliya Tsibizova, Moscow.

The philosopher Vasily Rozanov once wrote of the woman he loved: "The 'bouquet' will vanish from the wine, and only water will remain."

He was speaking of what happens to a human life when the person who gave it its unique meaning is gone.

Perhaps this thought helps us understand both Rezanov and Conchita — though each lived through their loss in their own way.

The theatre turned their story into legend. The documents preserved contradictions, doubts, calculations, confessions and things left unsaid.

And yet, returning to *Juno and Avos*, we do not feel deceived.

Art is not obliged to reproduce history literally. Sometimes it finds for a human fate a voice that the archives could not preserve.

Let us listen to the romance "The White Wild Rose."

Now we know a little more about the people whose story inspired its creators.

“The White Wild Rose,” from Juno and Avos. (youtube.com/watch?v=IEBKBAVVa1A)

Arm in Arm with My Reactionary

Rozanov, Erofeev, Dovlatov: three writers and two literary recognitions

October 24 marked the 88th anniversary of the birth of Venedikt Erofeev. His name usually brings to mind *Moscow–Petushki*, Venichka with his famous little suitcase, and a journey in which ordinary railway stations conceal an entire universe.

But today we will remember another of Erofeev's works — "Vasily Rozanov Through the Eyes of an Eccentric." And two more writers without whom this story would be incomplete.

Vasily Rozanov died nineteen years before Erofeev was born. Sergei Dovlatov was Erofeev's contemporary, but belonged to an entirely different literary world.

And yet a remarkable kinship arose between them. First Erofeev found his writer in Rozanov. Then Dovlatov recognized in Erofeev one of the authors closest to his heart.

Three writers. Three utterly different lives. And one rare gift — the ability to speak about the most serious things without the slightest solemnity.

Three Pistols and a Little Bottle of Hemlock

In 1973 a short piece by Venedikt Erofeev, "Vasily Rozanov Through the Eyes of an Eccentric," appeared in the samizdat journal *Veche*.

It began in a manner entirely unbecoming to a work of literary scholarship:

"I left the house, taking three pistols with me."

The hero tucks one pistol inside his coat, sends the second after it, and can no longer remember where he put the third.

He is utterly sick of life. The woman he loves has left him, the world has been rejected by God, philosophers are no help, and his attempts to end it all invariably fail.

One last resort remains — poison.

The hero goes to his acquaintance Pavlik, a pharmacist, who supplies him with hemlock. But along the way it turns out that Pavlik owns three volumes of Vasily Rozanov.

And here everything changes.

Before us is a man with absolutely nothing to lose. But curiosity proves stronger than despair.

He begins to read.

Two Literary Hooligans

Why Rozanov, of all people?

What could a religious philosopher, customarily placed in the conservative camp, have in common with the author of *Moscow–Petushki*?

A great deal, as it turns out.

First of all, an extraordinary rigor of thought, at times bordering on cruelty. Both can drive a thought to its most uncomfortable conclusion without

softening it for the reader's sake.

Both possess merciless self-irony. Both ignore literary decorum and take obvious pleasure in breaking it.

And both are first-class intellectual hooligans.

Rozanov can begin with the fate of Christianity, move on to the structure of the universe, and suddenly end with a remark that occurred to him over tea.

Erofeev, with the same composure, combines theology, world literature, hangovers and conversations on a commuter train.

But this is by no means unsystematic thinking.

On the contrary: behind the apparent disorder lies an almost merciless logic. They do not so much destroy the lofty as free it from compulsory solemnity.

Human life is too complex to be divided into the sublime and the base, the decent and the indecent, the worthy of philosophy and the unworthy.

This is exactly what Erofeev recognizes in Rozanov.



Vasily Rozanov. Photograph taken before 1917, photographer unknown. Public domain.

Fallen Leaves

Rozanov created one of the most unusual genres in Russian literature.

His *Fallen Leaves* is a collection of thoughts, confessions, irritable remarks, memories and chance observations.

He jots them down at home, on the road, at the table — and often notes the circumstances in which a thought came to him.

Philosophy that hasn't had time to put on its Sunday best.

Among his sharp and sometimes cruel judgments, one suddenly comes upon a confession:

"My fundamental attitude to the world is, perhaps, tenderness and sorrow."

What an unexpected self-portrait from a man his contemporaries accused of every intellectual and moral sin imaginable!

But isn't the same true of Erofeev?

Behind his merciless humor, his open clowning and his indecencies lies an astonishing sensitivity to human suffering.

Both can laugh at sentimentality — and both are far more sentimental than many acknowledged bards of tender feeling.

Their self-irony does not prevent them from being stern moralists. On the contrary, it makes that sternness all the more convincing: they do not exempt even themselves from judgment.

Arm in Arm with a Reactionary

For Erofeev, reading Rozanov turns into a true adventure.

The philosopher steps out of the pages of the book and becomes a living companion.

He sings "God Save the Tsar," goes off to church, behaves in the most unexpected ways. Then he returns to the hero, and a conversation begins.

Erofeev tells Rozanov about the world he did not live to see: the revolution, Soviet reality, the catastrophes of the twentieth century.

Rozanov answers with his thoughts on faith, human nature, sin and compassion.

There is more to this fantastic encounter than literary mischief.

There is something far more serious: two men, separated by history, discover that they understand each other.

Not because they agree on everything.

But because they think with the same irreverence and the same exacting demands on themselves and on the world.

Enter Dovlatov

Now let us move forward several decades.

Sergei Dovlatov tells of his first encounter with *Moscow–Petushki*.

At first he was prejudiced against the book. But reading it changed his mind so completely that Erofeev became for him one of the closest, most kindred of writers.

This is all the more interesting given how different their works are.

Dovlatov is a master of the short sentence, the precise detail, the almost invisible authorial irony.

Erofeev is the creator of dizzying verbal constructions in which philosophy, theology, Soviet slogans and colloquial speech collide with incredible energy.

But Dovlatov notices the essential thing.

Humor. Simplicity. Concision.

Erofeev's simplicity? The concision of the author of *Moscow–Petushki*?

At first glance, it is almost a paradox.

But Dovlatov understood perfectly well that literary simplicity is not measured by the number of words, nor concision by the length of a sentence.

The art lies in finding the one possible intonation.

Erofeev found it with astonishing precision.

Try Translating "Eeny, Meeny"

Speaking of the difficulties of translating *Moscow–Petushki*, Dovlatov unexpectedly recalls James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

And then — a children's counting rhyme.

Try translating "Eniki-beniki"!

What exactly is there to translate? The words? The sounds? The rhythm? A memory of childhood?

Erofeev's language works in the same whimsical way.

A biblical cadence suddenly turns into a conversation on a commuter train. A philosophical thought turns into an absurd joke. The most ordinary phrase takes on a tragic ring.

And all of it rests not only on the meaning of the words, but on their sound, their cultural associations, their rhythm, on the barely perceptible movement of the author's voice.

Dovlatov, himself a virtuoso of precise intonation, sensed this quality in Erofeev with rare insight.

And here we return once more to Rozanov.

Try retelling *Fallen Leaves* while removing the sudden shifts from philosophy to domestic trifles, from cruelty to tenderness, from paradox to confession.

You will end up with a completely different writer.

All three knew very well that sometimes a single, perfectly found intonation is worth an entire philosophical treatise.

Iron Ideas and Tender Ideas

There are words in *Fallen Leaves* that one especially wants to recall after talking about these three writers:

"Believe, people, in tender ideas."

Rozanov sets them against iron ideas, which promise to arrange the world according to a strict plan but all too often forget the living human being.

And this, perhaps, is one more unexpected resemblance.

Rozanov, Erofeev and Dovlatov were not sentimental comforters of humanity.

They could be cruel in judgment, merciless in mockery, utterly irreverent toward authority.

But all three sensed human vulnerability with remarkable precision.

And perhaps that is why their humor does not age.

It is born not of superiority over people, but of knowing human nature all too well.

Three's Not a Crowd

Rozanov died in 1919. Erofeev in 1990. Dovlatov outlived him by only a few months.

Three writers, three eras, three different literary worlds.

Rozanov turned philosophy into an intimate conversation with the reader.

Erofeev joined that conversation to the tragicomedy of Soviet life.

Dovlatov recognized in Erofeev a kindred writer — a master of humor, simplicity and concision.

What unites them is not only a gift for making us laugh, but a rare ability to think rigorously, speak freely and spare not even themselves.

They left us no convenient answers.

Instead, they left us the chance to carry on the conversation.

And that, perhaps, is far more interesting.

Sergei Dovlatov on Venedikt Erofeev and his Moscow–Petushki. Radio Liberty, "Ex Libris" program, January 29, 1989. (youtube.com/watch?v=1kpXzCnAwgI)

Galina Vishnevskaya: The Voice Cleveland Heard

For the centenary of the great soprano. November 1965, Mstislav Rostropovich, Sol Hurok, and remarkable encounters preserved in the pages of American newspapers.

October 25, 2026 marked one hundred years since the birth of Galina Vishnevskaya — the great Russian soprano, prima donna of the Bolshoi, a woman of extraordinary talent, courage and character.

Her voice was heard on the finest opera stages of the world. Her partners were the outstanding musicians of the twentieth century. With Mstislav Rostropovich she formed one of the most celebrated married couples in the history of music.



Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya, New York. Public domain.

But today we want to remember more than the world-famous artist. We want to tell the story of the Galina Vishnevskaya whom Cleveland welcomed in the autumn of 1965.

And we will tell it not through later memoirs, but through the actual newspaper reports of those days.

They preserve a remarkable amount: the raves and reservations of music critics, society receptions, gatherings of friends, the adventures of famous musicians — and even the tale of how the great American impresario Sol Hurok managed to lose two of his most precious artists.

A tribute to Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya: photographs brought to life. (youtube.com/watch?v=Doec8viewF8)

November 1965: A Russian Voice at Severance Hall

On November 11, 1965, Galina Vishnevskaya stepped onto the stage of Severance Hall with the Cleveland Orchestra under Louis Lane.

She was thirty-nine. She was already one of the leading singers of the Bolshoi and known to American audiences from earlier tours.

Cleveland newspapers announced her two appearances in advance — November 11 and 13. The program listed arias from Tchaikovsky operas, including *Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades* and *The Enchantress*.



NOV - 6 1965

Soviet Soprano and Moscow Philharmonic Will Be Heard in the Coming Week

Soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, prima donna of the Bolshoi Opera in Moscow, will make her debut with the Cleveland Orchestra, Louis Lane conducting, on Thursday and Saturday evenings at Severance Hall.

Miss Vishnevskaya first appeared in the United States as a soloist with the Moscow State Symphony at Carnegie Hall in 1960. The next season she made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera. The Moscow-born artist began studying singing at 16, and after a year, joined the Leningrad Operetta Theater. This led to an invitation to join the Bolshoi. Since that time she has performed in France, Yugoslavia and England.

In her appearance here she will sing Tchaikovsky operatic arias from "Eugene Onegin," "Pique Dame" ("The Queen of Spades") and "The Sorceress."

OHIO COMPOSER Donald Erb will be represented in the program when Lane presents the Cleveland premier of the "Symphony of Overtures." This composition was given its world premier earlier this year by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. It is based on the plays "The Blacks" and "The Maids" by Jean Genet, "Endgame" by Samuel Beckett and "Rhinoceros" by Eugene Ionesco.

Standing room only is available for both concerts.

Moscow Philharmonic:

The Cleveland Opera Assn. will present the first Cleveland appearance of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra on Sunday, Nov. 14, at 3 p. m. in Music Hall. Organized in 1947, the orchestra is making its first tour of the United States. Its conductor is Kiril Kondrashin.

Brahm's Violin Concerto will feature soloist Igor Oistrakh. Mahler's Symphony No. 9 is also on the program.

BUDAPEST CHILDREN'S CHOIR: The 35-member Budapest Children's Choir will make its Cleveland debut at Music Hall Tuesday evening. The choir is making its first tour of the United States.

UNIVERSITY CIRCLE RECITAL: Harpsichordist Rafael Puyana, native of Bogota, Colombia, will be presented in recital tomorrow at 8:15 p. m. in Severance Chamber Music Hall by the University Circle Recital Assn.

COMPOSERS' GUILD: Michael Charry will conduct the Koch String Quartet — Joseph Koch, Samuel Epstein, William Kiraly and Donald White, percussionists Richard Weiner, Joseph Adato and Robert Matson and Michael Burke, piano and celesta, in a performance of Donald Erb's "Antipodes" at the Music School Settlement, 11125 Magnolia Dr., Tuesday evening.

Also at this concert presented by the Composers' Guild of the Fortnightly Music Club, Four Songs for Soprano and Piano by Linda Muhlert Frumker will be sung by Jo Ann Lanier with the composer assisting at the piano. Miss Lanier and Diana Hoagland, soprano, with Phyllis Orr at piano, will perform a composition by Wilding-White.

SHAKER SYMPHONY: Robert Farriss will conduct the Shaker Symphony Orchestra in the opening concert of its 26th season Sunday, Nov. 14, at 4 p.m. in the John Carroll University auditorium.

Jeanne Doutliet Benjamin, Cleveland-born violinist from the Juilliard School of Music, will be featured. Works by Mozart, Beethoven, Sibelius and Brahms will be presented.

ROCKY RIVER CHAMBER MUSIC: The Unitarian Church, 20401 Hilliard Rd., Rocky River.

Compositions by Reicha, Mozart and Spohr will be played by the Symphonia String Quartet and the Cleveland Woodwind Quintet.

Music at Oberlin: The Oberlin College Music Conservatory will present a student woodwind ensemble concert at 4 p. m. tomorrow in Kulas Recital Hall at Oberlin.

The Cleveland Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Shaw directing, will present the third of eight Artist Recitals in Series B at 8 p. m. Friday in Oberlin College Finney Chapel.

The Oberlin Baroque Ensemble will present the music of Pepusch, Telemann, Loeillet and Couperin in concert Tuesday at 8 p. m. in Oberlin's Warner Concert Hall.

In celebration of the 70th anniversary of Hindemith's birth, the Oberlin College Opera Theater will present one-act operas "Angelique" by Ibert and "The Long Christmas Dinner" by Hindemith, Thursday and Saturday evenings in Hall Auditorium at Oberlin.

Music at BW: George Poinar will conduct the Baldwin-Wallace Symphony Orchestra in concert tomorrow at 4 p. m. in Kulas Musical Arts Bldg. at Baldwin-Wallace. Norman Luboff, violinist, will be soloist in a performance of a work by Saint-Saens.

MUSIC NOTES: Walter Blodgett, curator of musical arts at the Art Museum, will present an organ recital tomorrow at 5 p. m. at the museum. He has scheduled works by Purcell, Noehren, Gullian and Sowerby. He will also present a recital Wednesday at 8:15 p. m. and will perform works by Stanley, Martini, Mendelsshon and Langlais.

Brahm's "German Requiem" will be sung by the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral Choir tomorrow at 3 p. m. at the cathedral, E. 22d St. and Euclid Ave.

Phi Omicron chapter of Mu Phi Epsilon, international and honorary music sorority, will conduct Madge Gerke, governor of the Great Lakes Province, on an inspection visit today.

The Cleveland Press, November 6, 1965.



With Orchestra

Soviet Soprano to Be Soloist

By Ethel Boros

The flavor of opera will permeate the Cleveland Orchestra programs this Thursday and Saturday evenings under Louis Lane's baton. Soviet soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, star of the Bolshoi opera, will be the soloist.

For her first Cleveland appearances she will sing three operatic arias by Tschaikovsky: excerpts from "Eugene Onegin," "Pique Dame" and "The Sorceress."

These will be preceded by the Cleveland premiere of Donald Erb's "Symphony of Overtures," and Mozart's Divertimento in D major for Strings and Two Horns, K. 334. The concert will close with "Ravel's "La Valse." Both performances are sold out except for standing room.

Miss Vishnevskaya was first heard in this country in 1960. She has since appeared with the Metropolitan Opera Company. She is married to cellist Mstislav Rostropovich.

Music Today

The Cleveland Orchestra, Robert Shaw conducting, performs at 3:30 p.m. in Severance Hall. Works by Martinu, Dvorak and Janacek are programmed.

* * *

Rafael Puyana, harpsichordist, will play works by Frescobaldi, Couperin, Scarlatti and Bach at 8:15 p.m. in Severance Chamber Music Hall. The concert is sponsored by the University Circle Recital Association.

* * *

Haskell Thomson, organist, assisted by Oberlin College musicians will give an all-Bach program at the West Shore Unitarian Church at 8 p.m. Programmed are the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, Trio Sonata No. 5 in C, Chorale-Prelude "O Mensch bewein dein Sunde Gross;" Solo Cantata 51, "Jauchzet Gott," and Prelude and Fugue in C.

* * *

First Baptist Church of

The Plain Dealer, November 7, 1965: Ethel Boros, "Soviet Soprano to Be Soloist."

The day after the first concert, The Cleveland Press published a review by music critic Robert Finn: "Russian Soprano Proves Gifts of Gorgeous Tone."

The headline spoke for itself.

What is especially interesting is that this was not routine enthusiasm for a famous foreign guest, but a careful professional assessment.

Finn noted Vishnevskaya's pronounced vibrato, which nevertheless never turned into an unattractive wobble. He was particularly impressed by her ability, at the right moment, to shift to a pure, rich sound of remarkable beauty.

The critic did not hide his reservations either — which makes his testimony all the more valuable. We hear not a legend formed decades later, but the immediate reaction of someone who was in the hall.

The review also reveals a curious detail: in place of the originally announced aria from *The Queen of Spades*, Vishnevskaya sang an aria from *The Enchantress*. Music from *Eugene Onegin* was heard as well.

The evening was not only about singing. Cleveland audiences also heard contemporary American music — Donald Erb's *Symphony of Overtures*.

So on a single stage, the Russian operatic tradition, new American music and one of the world's finest orchestras met.

"Soviet Diva Here Warm, Human"

That was the headline over Ethel Boros's article in The Plain Dealer on November 12.

It captures remarkably well the other side of Vishnevskaya's Cleveland visit.

The newspapers wrote not only about her voice, but about the woman offstage.



THE PLAIN DEAL

Soviet Diva H

By ETHEL BOROS

Star of the Bolshoi Opera Theater in Moscov Soviet Union's leading female singer, Galina Vishr who is making her first appearance with the Orchestra this week, is not the least bit tempe

Miss Vishnevskaya is a small, slightly plu feminine woman—quite pretty and warmly hum pink and white complexion neither needs no makeup.

In an interview at Severance Hall, with Cl violinist-surgeon, Dr. Jerome Gross, acting as int Miss Vishnevskaya said her famed cellist husban lav Rostropovich, will join her here tomorrow ni performed in Pittsburgh this week and will play i next week. This is their third U.S. tour.

MISS VISHNEVSKAYA has beautiful taperin wears pearlescent nail polish and a plain gold band next to a huge diamond solitaire, which she very old Russian diamond and was a gift from band.

When Dr. Gross left the room to answer a ph Miss Vishnevskaya was able to continue the con in halting but acceptable English. She spoke of dren, Olga, 10, and Elena, 7, who are receiving a education in a special school.

She and her husband will join the children in for the New Year celebration (Jan. 1-10) when the have a vacation. There will be presents and a huge stockings for the children. The holiday isn Christmas, she said, and only the old people still c it as a religious holiday.

IN DECEMBER the Rostropoviches will sto London to make recordings. Benjamin Britten has

Soviet soprano Galina Vishnevskaya gets in a bit of practice at the home of her Cleveland host, Dr. Jerome Gross, 10300 Lake Shore Boulevard, Bratenahl.

Plain Dealer Photo (Richard J. Mieth)

The Plain Dealer, November 12, 1965: Ethel Boros, "Soviet Diva Here Warm, Human." The photo shows Vishnevskaya practicing at the home of her Cleveland host, Dr. Jerome Gross, 10000 Lake Shore Boulevard, Bratenahl. Cleveland Public Library.

During her visit Vishnevskaya stayed with Dr. Jerome Gross and his wife at their home on Lake Shore Boulevard in Bratenahl. Dr. Gross — a physician and violinist, and a close friend of Rostropovich — served as her interpreter, since the singer knew only a few phrases of English. "They are wonderful people," he said of the couple. "They are truly ambassadors of good will through their music." Rostropovich, he believed, was "the greatest living cellist."



Dr. Jerome Gross. Cleveland Public Library.

After the first concert, as Cleveland Press society columnist Marjorie Alge put it, "the bravos trailed" Vishnevskaya from Severance Hall to Shaker Heights — to a supper party in her honor given by Mr. and Mrs. Marvin D. Hicks at their home on South Woodland Road. There were more than sixty guests, and the singer kept saying, with a slightly British accent, "Thank you very much, thank you very much." "She didn't need much," Alge wrote. "Her smile was enough."



"Reminiscing over photos of Russia": Mrs. Marvin D. Hicks, Mr. Hicks, Galina Vishnevskaya and Dr. Jerome Gross at a Cleveland Orchestra rehearsal. The Cleveland Press, November 12, 1965. Cleveland Public Library.



Marjorie Alge, Social Scene column. The Cleveland Press, November 12, 1965. Cleveland Public Library.

That supper had a backstory.

In the spring of 1965 the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell toured the Soviet Union. In Moscow, U.S. Ambassador Foy D. Kohler gave a reception in the orchestra's honor. Among the Soviet guests were Rostropovich and Kondrashin; Vishnevskaya was not there.

Nor were the Hickses themselves — devoted followers of the Cleveland Orchestra. They heard about the Moscow evening through friends in Maine whose daughter was the ambassador's personal secretary. And now, in the autumn, the supper in Shaker Heights became a kind of thank-you: the American friends were hosting the guests from Moscow.

Behind the official concert posters a world of personal acquaintance and friendship opens up — a world in which musicians found a common language far more easily than politicians.

How Sol Hurok Lost Two Great Musicians

Now let us go back a month, to New York.

On October 14, 1965, the famous American impresario Sol Hurok invited his Soviet guests to lunch at Le Pavillon, an elegant French restaurant on East 57th Street.

An extraordinary company gathered at the table: David Oistrakh and his wife, Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya, and the conductor Kirill Kondrashin.

The next day the Moscow Philharmonic was to open a six-week American tour at Carnegie Hall.

After lunch Hurok put the ladies in his limousine and headed for his office on Fifth Avenue. He was sure Kondrashin and an agency staffer would walk Oistrakh and Rostropovich over.

Kondrashin, for his part, assumed both musicians had left with Hurok.

Oistrakh and Rostropovich, meanwhile, finding themselves unescorted, went off to look at New York's shop windows.

Forty minutes later everyone was finally reunited at the impresario's office.

The next day The New York Times reported the incident under the headline "Hurok Misplaces 2 Stars Briefly."

Fortunately, the tour was never in danger.

What is more, all eleven Carnegie Hall concerts were already sold out, and Hurok announced an additional performance at Madison Square Garden on November 8.

The same article preserved the lunch-table conversation.

Kondrashin spoke of the remarkable growth of musical life in the Soviet Union — new concert halls, conservatories and symphony orchestras, including in Siberia.

And Vishnevskaya remarked that opera at home was in such enormous demand that singers sometimes found it hard to expand their repertoire: audiences wanted above all to hear their beloved Russian and Italian works.

This small detail says a great deal about her. Even at a festive lunch in New York, she was still thinking about the theatre, the repertoire and her audience.

Seventeen Floors Without an Elevator

The 1965 American tour was full of adventures.

On November 9, New York was plunged into darkness by the famous Northeast blackout.

Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya were on the seventeenth floor of the Warwick Hotel.

The elevators stopped. The musicians had to walk down the stairs, carrying their luggage — and the cello.

Later, with his characteristic humor, Rostropovich told Dr. Gross about it over the phone, in Russian: "It was so dark I couldn't even see my wife."

Two days later Vishnevskaya was singing at Severance Hall.

And it is hard to imagine that anyone in the hall, listening to her Tchaikovsky, suspected what the singer and her husband had just been through.

Another Russian Concert in Cleveland

On Sunday, November 14, 1965, Cleveland witnessed another major musical event.

At Music Hall, part of the Cleveland Public Auditorium complex, the Moscow Philharmonic performed under Kirill Kondrashin.

The soloist was Igor Oistrakh — son of David Oistrakh, whom Hurok had briefly lost in New York a month earlier. That weekend Igor Oistrakh and his wife Natasha also stayed with the Grosses, where Rostropovich joined them.

Father and son both took part in the American tour, appearing in different cities and programs.

Cleveland heard the Brahms Violin Concerto, Olivier Messiaen's *Les Offrandes oubliées* and Mahler's Ninth Symphony.

The next day critic Frank Hruby published his review in The Cleveland Press: "Moscow Orchestra Rates Praise Here."

He praised the Moscow ensemble's mastery and Igor Oistrakh's playing, though the Mahler Ninth drew a more reserved response.

Within a few November days, Cleveland heard Galina Vishnevskaya, Kirill Kondrashin, Igor Oistrakh and the Moscow Philharmonic.

And all this happened in the very year the Cleveland Orchestra made its historic tour of the Soviet Union.

The musical exchange went both ways — and was astonishingly rich.

An Unexpected Meeting with Isadora Duncan

But the story turned out to have one more, entirely unexpected sequel.

Who was Sol Hurok, the man who organized the Soviet musicians' American tour?

He was born in the Russian Empire as Solomon Gurkov, emigrated to the United States, and became one of the most influential impresarios of the twentieth century.

Among the artists he worked with were Anna Pavlova, Isadora Duncan and many other great performers.

And here we suddenly return to a story we recently told readers of the Russian Garden Gazette.

On December 10, 1922, Isadora Duncan performed at the Cleveland Public Auditorium.

She had come to America with her young husband, the Russian poet Sergei Yesenin.

The performance drew some nine thousand people. Among the witnesses that evening was the young American poet Hart Crane.

Duncan's American tour was managed by Sol Hurok.

The very man who, forty-three years later, invited Galina Vishnevskaya, Rostropovich, Oistrakh and Kondrashin to lunch.

This is where our two stories unexpectedly meet.

In 1922 Hurok brought to America Isadora Duncan, the artist who overturned ideas about dance.

In 1965 he presented outstanding Soviet musicians, among them Galina Vishnevskaya.

And both tours passed through Cleveland.

Music That Keeps Bringing People Together

The Cleveland connections did not end there.

In May 1969 Mstislav Rostropovich and David Oistrakh recorded the Brahms Double Concerto with the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell.

That recording became one of the remarkable pages in the orchestra's history.

And the friendship of Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya with their American acquaintances continued beyond the concert hall.

In December 1965 they gave an unusual private recital in New Jersey to thank two dentists who had helped them. Among the guests was Cleveland's own Dr. Jerome Gross.

The New York Times reported on this intimate evening for about sixty listeners.

How many more such stories lie hidden in old newspapers, letters and family archives?

We began our research with a simple wish: to mark Galina Vishnevskaya's centenary and remember her performances in Cleveland.

Instead we discovered a whole world — a world where music connected people across oceans and borders, where great artists befriended doctors, conductors met American colleagues, and a famous impresario occasionally lost his stars in the middle of New York.

But at the heart of this story remains Galina Vishnevskaya.

A woman who survived the Siege of Leningrad, reached the summit of operatic art, shared with Rostropovich years of fame, trial and exile, and kept her dignity and her convictions.

In November 1965 her voice filled Severance Hall.

Today, sixty-one years later, we return to that evening thanks to the people who heard her, wrote about her and preserved their impressions on the pages of newspapers.

And perhaps this is the best way to mark a great singer's centenary — not simply to repeat the familiar facts of her biography, but to bring back to life one of the evenings when her art became part of our city's history.

Happy birthday, Galina Pavlovna!

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Newspaper clippings and the photograph of Dr. Jerome Gross courtesy of Cleveland Public Library. Photograph of G. Vishnevskaya and M. Rostropovich: public domain.

We would be grateful to readers who can help us find more photographs, concert programs and memories of Galina Vishnevskaya's and Mstislav Rostropovich's visits to Cleveland.

COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES

The Garden’s New Entrance Plaza

Construction of the Russian Cultural Garden’s new entrance plaza is nearing completion: the work is expected to be finished by November 5, weather permitting. As soon as the plaza is ready, we will show how the Garden has been transformed and tell you about the people who made this project a reality.



The new entrance plaza under construction, October 2026. Gazette photo.

Three Doctors and Music

What do science, medicine and the art of music have in common? We will tell the stories of people for whom music became an essential part of life, even though their professional paths led in very different directions. Among the heroes of our coming story are Cleveland physicians and scientists — and perhaps a conversation partner from Chicago. Unexpected encounters, memories and discoveries await.

Yuri Ivask: The Poet Who Brings Us Back to Rozanov

A Russian poet and literary scholar who spent much of his life in America, Ivask left a poetic legacy of his own and helped preserve the works of Vasily Rozanov for new generations of readers. In a future issue we will get to know, above all, his poetry — and continue the literary conversation begun today.

Support the Russian Cultural Garden

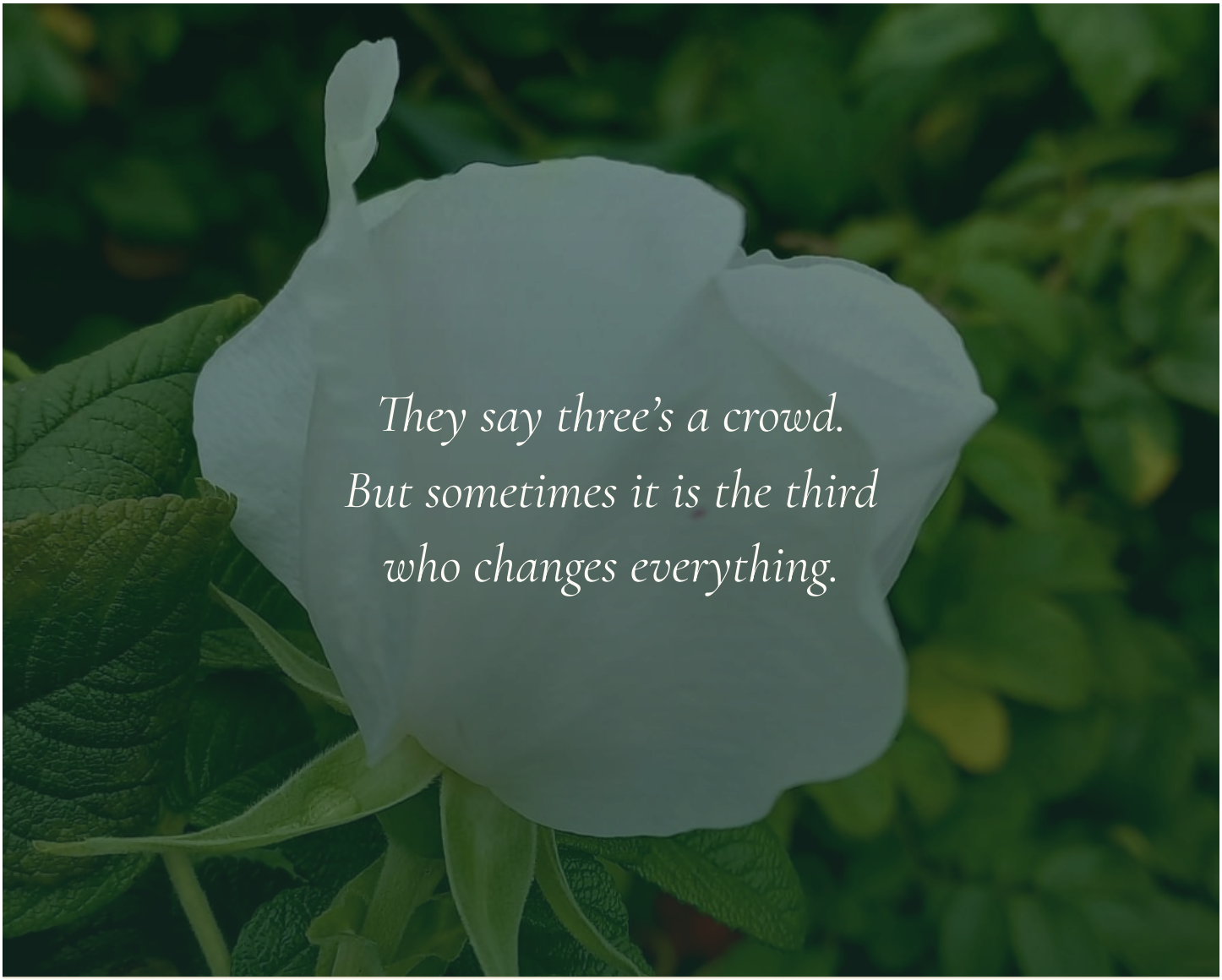
The Garden lives thanks to its friends. Your gift helps us care for the Garden, extend the Walk of Fame, build the Rachmaninoff Music Corner and publish the Gazette. Every amount matters: $10, $25 or $100 — each gift helps the Garden grow.

To place a name on the Walk of Fame, the suggested gift is **$250**. Sponsors are listed at RussianGarden.org. A gift may be made in honor or in memory of someone dear to you.

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RUSSIAN Cultural Garden

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