

- Lowland Piping Around the World-

Cauld-wind from the Steppes

The LBPS has members across the world, including two in Russia. We invited them to tell us about bellows-piping in the Russian Federation

According to musician Pavel Stepanov, who both studies Russian musical traditions and makes and teaches Russian bagpipes, "Russians played the bagpipe the most often under Ivan the Terrible. The Tsar



Volynka made by Pavel Stepanov

ordered the construction of a settlement specifically for bagpipers. The bagpipe grew still more important under Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich Romanov. Musicians were invariably invited to the entertainment rooms to play music, and were paid for their work. But the situation made a U-turn, once Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich ascended the throne [in 1645]. He was western-minded, liked European classical music, but could barely stand the Russian folk instrument bagpipe. So he banned the bagpipe throughout the country. Bagpipes were brought to the Moskva-river by cartloads and burnt down. A whole cultural stratum was thus destroyed in Russia."

However, it is clear that during the last ten years enthusiasm has been growing in Russia for Scottish piping; both St Petersburg and Moscow have Pipe and Drum bands; in September of 2009 the Moscow band took part in a festival of military music in Red Square, Moscow. More surprising, however, and rather more exclusive, is the small group of players of bellows pipes.

Sergey Romanenkov has been a Society member since January 2008; he described to me his experience of Russian piping:

"The most people in the Russia very likes celtic music- Scottish, Irish, but our celtic scene develop only 10 years (or so) ago. I think it was a "Fresh wind from the West" :-) and now, we have a lot of the Scottish Festivals every year, such as Burns' Supper and St. Andrews Day. In Moscow there are several Scottish Dance Schools.

"During this time, in the big cities there began to appear celtic-folk groups and pipers. Most pipers first played only the GHB (and me too). Sometime later, some of us buy the smallpipes. But we don't know about Scottish Lowland piping tradition and play on them highland and Irish tunes with other instruments. Some pipers in Russia play the Gaita and

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uilleann pipes. In the Belarus are more pipers, playing the 'duda' and this tradition is still alive there. Today I don't play the GHB regularly, I concentrate on the Scottish smallpipes -my main and favourite instrument and I play on them lowland repertoire regularly, travelling to the Russian towns and playing with fiddler and bodhran player.

Sometimes to Moscow come folk bands from the Scotland and Ireland-Anna Murray, Burach, Solas, Paddy Keenan, Paul Martin and many more. I think is great and very interesting for Russian people who loves Scottish mu-

sic and piping. And I hope, what the more and more greatest musicians from Scotland will comes to Russia and will take pleasure of our friendship and Russian grateful listeners!

I playing on the pipes made by Ian Kinnear A/D combo set, blackwood and cocobolla. Maybe the next year, I'll come to Scotland on the master class. Thank you for your interest and sorry for my english! All the best, Sergey."

This summer Sergey was joined on the LBPS eastern wing by Phil Ershov; here's his reply to our enquiry:

"As far as I know - there are 6 players [of bellows pipes] in Russia: 5 in Moscow and one in Saint-Petersburg (this is me). Most of them come to bellows-pipes from great highland pipes. Two of them have grade certificates of College of Piping. First, Anatoly Isaev; he is holder of the Senior Certificate of the College of Piping. He also plays on smallpipes and border pipes, but he prefers highland style, even on these pipes. He plays in the Tin Thistle Ceilidh Band. Also he teaches the bagpipes - the great highland bagpipes, and the smallpipes. Recently however he has played the button accordion more than the pipes. Second is Sergey Kovalev. He has 3rd Grade Certificate. He also plays the smallpipes as well as the highland pipes. He is the founder member of The White Heather Band. Third of the Moscow pipers is Sergey Romanenkov. I can't say anything about the other two.



Sergey Ramanenkov at the 2010 Moscow Bagpipe Fest. |

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I began learning in highland tradition too, but I'm interested in lowland tradition and dance music. I played the shuttle-pipe until recently, but about week ago I received a set of smallpipes from Ian Kinnear and begin learning to play bellows-blown pipes. My general instrument is the fiddle. I play in an Irish traditional music band, called "The Sloggers". We play some Scottish tunes too, but in the band I play only on the fiddle now. We play dance tunes and slow airs and some ballads (mostly because of my love to Phil Cunningham, Aly Bain and Battlefield Band), but I think about playing Scottish dance tunes too.

Here in St Petersburg we have the Bagpipes & Drums of Saint-Petersburg Band, but there isn't any other piper, except me, who is interested in bellows-blown pipes now. But I think that when I will play the smallpipes, there will be

musicians interested in this amazing music.

I came to Irish and Scottish Music from dances. Firstly I've discovered dances and then I thought about playing for dancers. All musicians in my band also began from dances, but it is exception in the Russia. Most of the musicians, who play trad. music, don't know dances. Irish and Scottish dances are popular in Russia - most of our bands play for dancers. Our bands often play in two or more traditions - Scottish and Irish or Irish and Breton. But White Heather Band play only Scottish tunes and Slua Si (one of the oldest and most popular band in the Russia) play only Irish music and songs. Tin Thistle generally play Scottish tunes and songs, but also they have some Irish and Cape Breton tunes in their repertoire.



Anatoly Isaev, piper with the Tin Thistle Ceilidh Band

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The Lowland piping tradition is almost unknown in Russia. Russian pipers know that it exists, but don't know much about it. We all play in highland fingering style - almost all pipers play highland pipes first. I didn't play highland, but I learn piping from the College of Piping Tutor. And we play with the drone over the bellows arm too. By the way, many of our musicians, who play Irish and Scottish music aren't professional musicians. They have some kind of the job and play music as a hobby. But sometimes this hobby takes much more time and energy than a job.

I know of only two pipers who play the border pipes in bands: Anatoly Isaev plays the border pipes made by Nate Banton which he has had since the beginning of the autumn. And Alexander Anistratov plays the border pipes of his own make.”

Informed by Sergey and Philip we investigated a little more and learnt that Sergey Kovalev, founder last autumn of the White Heather Band, started his bagpipes studies in 2006 in Moscow, class of Anatoly Isayev. In 2008 he came to the College of Piping in Glasgow, class of PM Joe Wilson where he got his Level 3 Piping Certificate. In June 2010 he participated in the 1st Moscow International Piper Festival and became the Laureate of the first Russian Piper Contest. His band plays mostly Scottish traditional songs and dancing sets of jigs, reels, strathspeys, waltzes and polkas and co-operates with leading Moscow schools of Scottish traditional dance,

such as Tartan Dreams and Moscow School of Scottish Dance.



Sergey Kovalev, piper with the White Heather Band

Pipe-making

Sergey Ramonenkov put us in touch with Alexandre Anistratov, known not only in Moscow, but also in many other cities of Russia as a musician playing a variety of “celtic” instruments of modern and ancient music. He sent this response to our interest in his pipe-making:

“I started to paint and sculpt around 2 years old, because my father is a famous

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Russian sculptor. Partly my choice of profession was predestined. I use to try many materials everyday which gave me the right feeling for the materials I work with now. At 6 years old I started to play a recorder, it has shown that I have a talent for music. Afterwards I play a bagpipe and make it nowadays.

It is curious that at the end of my studies, inspired by some pictures for a story from the middle-ages I even made a sculpture which was named "Bagpipers". However everybody knew nothing about bagpipes at the end of 90's in Russia. I didn't know that there are so many varieties and styles of bagpipes.

Just at the end of 90's I got a chance to listen to a concert of Vladimir Lazerson and his band. Vladimir Lazerson is a patriarch of bagpipe music in Russia. At that moment he was the only one to play a bagpipe in Russia. There are rumors that he had started playing on an oxygen bag. After this concert my conception has changed totally. I couldn't think about anything except for the bagpipes and Scottish and Irish folk music. Vladimir Lazerson became my teacher for a long time. He was the one who had shown me such masters as Hamish Moore, Colin Ross, Robert Mathieson, Gordon Duncan, Martyn Bennett, Nigel Richards, Alan MacDonald. Those are whom I follow nowadays. At some sense they are my teachers too.

The Galician gaita was the one I started to study making. Gaitas and dudelzaks became prevalent in our country. Maybe

it is the influence of the ancient music that was present at our conservatories. My second bagpipe was the Scottish smallpipe. That was the first smallpipe with bellows in Russia. So, I've had to study how to play on it by myself. And only afterwards I've learned to play on Highland – usually it happens vice versa.

I had no intention to become a master. I've just started to make a reed for my own instruments because I needed it. Later on I needed to make bags and bellows. I needed to tune up the instruments that I've been taught by Moscow musical master Fedor Nekrasov, an expert of the wind instruments at the museum of Glinka. During my visits to his studio I was watching all his accessories, his engineering tools; step by step I've learnt everything; how it's made, how to work with different materials and so on. Knowledge from that period really has helped me when I started my own workshop.

I had a workplace because I'm a member of Moscow Union of Artists. Little by little I've transformed one half of it to my workspace for bagpipe production. My main tools were bought from the professional manufactories. But some of the tools did not exist at all so I had to invent and to make it by myself. I ordered certain details at the factories. And afterwards I constructed it all myself - from the handles for my chisels to vacuum plant for impregnation of wood.

At this moment I had graduated from the Russian Academy of Painting, Sculp-

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ture, and Architecture as a sculptor. Many hours I've spent studying World history of Art. I spent plenty of time meeting the variety of the bagpipes and their design from different countries and ages. I was interested not only in the bagpipes but all the woodwind instruments. Final conclusion was that such complicated instrument as the small-pipes or border pipes is the harmonic consolidation of lines, shapes and values that make a unique sound for each instrument and it influences the relationship of instrument and its owner. Some of my designs are inspired by my architectural view of plants and also by the designs of baroque and classicism. For example, the design of my border pipes model "Dal Riata" was based on a lithograph of 19th century from The New York Public Library.

I use all range of wood. Most of the exotic wood I get from Germany. My favourite wood is boxwood, which grows not in Europe but in Caucasus. This type of wood has much in common with south English boxwood that was highly rated by the masters of baroque instruments, like Stanesby, for example. Its steadiness and acoustic properties are similar. I take the boxwood 20 years after cutting. And then I keep it for about a year cut by parts. The exterior and the sound could be incomparable if the conditions of drying and other phases were done right.

I use fruit trees such as plum, pear or cherry for the medieval and renaissance instruments, never for the smallpipes.



Alexandre Astrinатов plays his new boxwood reel pipes at a Samhain concert in Krasnodar city

Of course, I prefer to use for my instruments metals such as brass, silver, nickel silver, anodized bronze (golden or silver plated) and natural materials as horn, mammoth ivory (Russia is motherland of the mammoth) and the tooth of the sperm whale.

The instruments are authentic so the materials should be the authentic too. It is also valid for the reeds that I use for my instruments. Certainly I make drone reeds of ebonite and carbon or of ebonite and glass-fibre plastic, chanter reeds of plastic because it is easy to use for the client. But the fact is that the cane reeds have inimitable sound. So, I play only the bagpipes with the cane reeds myself and popularize this way at my master-classes. I am aware that we live in a modern world where everything keeps changing and simplifying, but I never replace the authentic details by modern and easier ones. In my work I try to keep

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an authenticity. This is important, because the fineness and the materials alone keep the tradition living.

I get orders from all over Russia from Vladivostok to Murmansk. Also I have clients from Australia, England, Spain and Germany. Unfortunately most of the potential clients from Russia don't know the difference between types of bagpipes.

I teach master classes and other events to popularize the bagpipes in Russia, and I'm proud of playing for Princess of Kent my own smallpipes D set at the banquet at the opening of a design exhibition.

I try to tell a little bit of history of this instrument at my concerts at different clubs and concert halls such as The Moscow International House of Music. In such concerts border and smallpipes combine their sound with that of lute, harp, baroque guitar and harpsichord. We are working on an album which I hope will be out next year.

Each year more and more people become interested in Lowland bagpipe, buy this kind of instrument and start to play. I hope that our collaboration with LBPS would promote an information support for this music trend, which is new for Russia.”



Alexandre Anistratov at his workbench

Alexandre Anistratov's web site [with an English version] is at [http:// pipesland.com/bagpipes/](http://pipesland.com/bagpipes/).

You can watch a brief video of Sergey playing at the 2010 Moscow Bagpipe festival at <http://il.youtube.com/watch?v=4B74IP5YrKo>.

The Tin Thistle Band can be seen at LBPSoc Youtube channel.

Many thanks to Alexandre and to Sergey and Phil for offering this insight into a select and unexpected corner of lowland piping.