



CD Review: Russian Duo 3/31/10

Russian Duo

Even before the days of the Czars and Czaritzas, the piano/balalaika duo was a very popular combination for home entertainment. Like many things, however, it sort of fell out of favor, but how wonderful that it's been restored again. And right here in Cleveland, Ohio, of all places! **Oleg Kruglyakov** was born in Russia, while his partner, pianist **Terry Boyarsky** was born in Germany. Now, after similar training and experiences, they're headquartered right here in Cleveland. Each of them is a versatile and multi-talented musician, and the two instruments complement each other remarkably well.

The Rondo from Mozart's Haffner Serenade works so well for the balalaika that one can easily imagine Mozart chuckling to himself as he wrote it. (Okay, so he probably didn't do that, but some years later, he did, after all, write an extended mandolin solo in his opera Don Giovanni.) He may very well have been acquainted with the instrument, considering how much traveling he did in his short life. This rendition easily displays not only the duo's musicality, but also how well the balalaika encourages virtuosity from the performer. The duo supplies splendid attention to dynamics and tempos.

About 98% of this CD will readily dispel any thoughts about 'dour Russians' as it's decidedly up-beat and happy music throughout. Only two of the thirteen selection touch on the gloomy side of things, and then for only brief periods. I Met You (an Old Russian Romance) arranged by Mikhail Roshkov is very Russian in sound, and perhaps reflects the sadness of two lovers parting. The other is an arrangement by Boris Troyanovsky of two traditional Russian songs – Blooming Flowers and Ach! You Birch Tree; the first leans toward the melancholy while the latter is a bit more frisky in outlook. But overall, the 13 tracks on the CD illuminate the many faces of Russia.

The Balalaika Waltz by Vasily Vasilievich Andreyev is a gorgeous showpiece for the named instrument. Not a truly sensuous waltz, it is still very danceable, at least in this version, nimbly tossed off by Mr. Kruglyakov. The composer is frequently referred to as the 'father' of the balalaika in modern dress. This is but one of many pieces he composed for it.

Granted a majority of the CD is traditional music. However, in addition to Mozart, two other classical composers are happily represented: Franz Schubert by his Ständchen or Serenade, D 957, No. 4 – (well-known to every young piano student) and the Slavonic Dance in e minor Op. 46, No.2 of Antonín Dvořák.

The latter is particularly well-served by this arrangement which only adds to the winsomeness of the original.

Another ethnic dance tune is the Czárdás of Vittorio Monti. The dance is Hungarian, but he is Italian. So why not a fabulous performance on a Russian instrument? The music is languid one moment, and frenetic the next, but always enjoyable. Actually, this disc is a short trip through many countries. Imagine the Brazilian Tico Tico (by Zequinha de Abreu) on the balalaika. It's pure delight. For some reason, the image of Carmen Miranda kept popping into my head! Olé!

Of course, there are a few Russian pieces here, too: Volinka (Play my bagpipe) a traditional tune also arranged by Troyanovsky—charming, if not exactly what you'd expect from the word 'bagpipe'; Banyá (Steam Bath) arranged by Alexander Shalov – a quickstep (possibly to escape the steam?) and Russian Rag by the non-Russian named George L. Cobb. The performers did the arrangement which is a bit like Rachmaninoff meets Vaudeville, with a snippet of Yankee Doodle Dandy thrown in for good measure! Parts of it could absolutely provide a soundtrack for the Keystone Kops. Guaranteed to bring a smile or two to your face as you listen.

Two extremely virtuosic pieces end the CD: Kalinka Concert Variations by Vera Gorodovskaya and Devitsa (Evening Star) arranged by Alexander Shalov. Both are traditional pieces, but put into formal dress. The latter is somewhat in the nature of a mini-concerto in which the two instruments take turns leading the other in a delightful game of musical tag.

The CD was recorded locally at Audio Recording Studio by **Bruce Gigax**, who merits kudos for the clarity of the sound. The **Russian Duo** has a web-site: <http://www.russianduo.com/> from which you can purchase the CD, but which also offers more information about their performances and capabilities. **Oleg and Terry** also sing during live presentations, and promise that their next CD will include this feature of their music. This is a great CD to listen to if you're a bit down in the dumps. It will soon lift your spirits to a much higher plane. This is seriously happy music, enjoyable by any and everyone.

From Cool Cleveland contributor Kelly Ferjutz, who writes: My most recently published book is Ardenwycke



Unveiled ([e-book](#) and [trade paper](#)). Cerridwen has another contemporary romance from me, *But Not For Love*, currently available only as an [e-book](#), but perhaps will be in print later this year. I hope to soon get around to completing some of the 30+ incomplete books in my computer!

By the way, Cerridwen has also accepted two of my short stories for their Scintillating Samples (complimentary reads) area: [Song of the Swan](#) and [Unexpected Comfort](#). I love photography as well, as you can see [here](#). Occasionally I teach writing workshops and sometimes do editing or ghostwriting on a free-lance basis. But over and above everything else, there's always been the writing. I can't imagine my life without it.