The Russians Are Coming!

Aleksandr Chernyak
Specialist in Russian Folk Music
Sunday, September 12, 1993
2:00 pm
School of Music Recital Hall

The Balalaika... The domra... The beauty and exotic sounds of Russian folk music are coming to the University of Michigan! Aleksandr Chernyak, a leading expert in Russian folk music, will take us on a fascinating journey through Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia, focusing on the musical cultures of these areas. Chernyak, a graduate of the Russian State University of Culture in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), gained recognition as the director and lead singer of the Balalaika Transit. He will share his knowledge and love of his music by demonstrating various Russian folk songs from the 17th to the 20th centuries. This is one Virginia Martin Howard Lecture that you won’t want to miss!

Malm is Going...

"The Magic of Japanese Drums"
Sunday, October 10, 1993
2:00 pm
School of Music Recital Hall

After 33 years of activity at the University of Michigan, The Stearns director, Prof. William P. Malm, is retiring. When he became The Stearns’s director in 1981 he inherited a fine tradition of care from the former director, Prof. Robert Wagner. Since then he has enjoyed seeing the collection not only improve but also move to galleries within the School of Music. The endowment of the lecture series by Virginia Martin Howard is a clear example of his ultimate goal, a fund that will guarantee permanency in the maintenance and service of The Stearns. In honor of the collection he loves, and of the specific music tradition he has studied for forty years, Prof. Malm will give a sayonara lecture as part of the Virginia Martin Howard series on “The Magic of Japanese Drums”.

As Malm ends his term at Michigan he does not want a gold watch; just write a check to The Stearns Endowment Fund. Then he can leave happy, knowing that The Stearns will stay at Michigan for future generations to enjoy.
The Virginia Ehrlicher Hand Bells Ring On

During the era in America of Chautauqua tours, Sunday Evening Lecture Clubs and church concerts, one common musical event was an ensemble of so-called Swiss Bell Ringers. Community concert series and vaudeville also found the sounds and energetic actions of such performers culturally rewarding, technically intriguing and sonically pleasing. That must have been the case for George Ringchrist (1891-1968). Born in Athol, Massachusetts of Swedish parents and educated in fine regional academies, Mr. Ringchrist demonstrated talent for business. His skills were applied in large companies like Westinghouse and in his own enterprises. This continual interest in new challenges was clearly demonstrated in the 1920’s when he became fascinated in bell ringing. Libraries did not satisfy his quest for information on bell structure and playing methods so he went directly to sources in Europe. At the famous White Chapel Bell foundry in England he was introduced not only to the methods of bell making but also to the concept of music traditions that were passed on orally in families or communal groups. To learn such a tradition he next studied in Sweden with the Scandinavian Bell Ringers (Norrlandska Klockspelarna). He then began a new career as the group’s manager while they toured Europe and North America. A typical concert announcement read as follows:

THE MUSICAL SENSATION
OF THE TIME

The Scandinavian Bell Ringers

Playing the largest collection of musical bells in the world.

Three sets of three different tunes, totaling 421 bells.

Hear them on Victor Records

On recordings they were called the Temple Carillon Players. The photos show that they played considerably less than 421 bells on stage. Still the group was successful across the U.S. until the hard financial times of 1929 brought their career to an end. One member stayed in America while the others returned to Sweden. Their bells stayed with Mr. Ringchrist. He passed on the tradition to his family, teaching his granddaughter, Bette Spencer, to perform in the old way. While abroad in 1964 hers and June Spencer, helped maintain the tradition by going to the White Chapel foundry in order to replace two bells from the place of the set’s origin. Mr. Ringchrist continued to give solo concerts accompanied by his wife at the piano into the 1960’s. His daughter, Dr. Virginia Ehrlicher, received 118 of the original set. In 1991 Dr. Ehrlicher gave 69 bells to the Steam Collection in order that Margo Halsted, the University of Michigan carillonneur, could develop a new hand bell choir tradition. To insure its quality and continuity Dr. Ehrlicher also funded the restoration of the bells and their leather handles plus carrying cases. Thus the tradition so loved by her father can continue to sound, not only in Burton Tower but also in the concert halls and churches of America.

What pieces did the Swedish ‘Swiss’ bell ringers play? Who were they? We know that the two men to the left are father and son and the large bell player on the right might be the Swede who stayed in America, but little else. Dr. Ehrlicher has given us not only valuable instruments and, through Prof. Halsted, lovely musical events, but also fascinating historical and sociological puzzles yet to be solved. There is always something new to learn at The Steams!
Music Instrument Docent Program Begins

September 14th the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments begins a special training course for persons wishing to become docents. The tour, outreach and display possibilities for docents are great as The Stearns is a collection of over 2,000 instruments from all over the world. Its galleries are in the School of Music. Persons interested in this unusual opportunity should enroll now as the course size is limited. Request the application forms by mail or by leaving your name and phone number at (313) 763-4389.

Endowment News!

Without endowment funds a museum can make no long term plans. Thanks to the $300,000 pledge of Ms. Gail Richardson, The Stearns has at last established a general endowment fund. Readers of the newsletter may recall (Vol. 2, No. 1, 1987) that Ms. Richardson was the donor of her sister’s theremin. It was this instrument and her continued support that made it possible for us to create our valuable electronic musical instrument collection. Parts of it can be seen in the Vera Mills gallery exhibit of the collection. Ms. Richardson’s generous gift has inspired others to create challenge gifts that, by matching, have brought over $10,000 additional support to this essential fund. With such enlightened gifts we may be able to meet our million dollar endowment before 1994. It’s all up to you.

BECOME A FRIEND OF THE STEARNS

With your help, additional instruments may be restored, played, displayed, and appreciated by the musical public. Friends receive The Stearns Newsletter, invitations to the Virginia Martin Howard Lectures and announcements of upcoming exhibits and performances. Your tax deductible contribution will help support all activities of The Stearns Collection.

Membership in the Friends of the Stearns is available in the following categories:

- **Benefactor** $1,000
- **Patron** $500
- **Sustaining** $100
- **Friend** $30
- **Student / Senior Citizen / Beyond 200 miles** $15

I (We) want to support The Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments.

I (We) enclose a/my/our check for $__________ made payable to: The University of Michigan Stearns Collection.

Mr. / Mrs. / Dr. / Miss / Ms. ____________________________

Please circle title(s) and print your name above as you would like it to appear on donor lists.

( )

Phone number

Spouse’s/Partner’s name if not given above

Street

City

State

Zip Code

Please mail this form with your check to : Friends of the Stearns, The University of Michigan School of Music, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.
What’s New At The Stearns?

The vitality of a museum can be judged by its activity. Here are some of our recent actions. In response to a major harp conference at the School of Music last June, The Stearns mounted a special exhibit on harp actions in the main lobby of the school. It demonstrates the development of methods for changing harp string pitches from hand operated hooks to single and double pedal actions. Take a look. It will remain on exhibit this fall. The handsome instruments on display are derived from the original Stearns collection of 1899.

In the Music Library you can see Ghitalla Brass. When Armando Ghitalla retired this year as Professor of Trumpet at Michigan, he generously gave The Stearns 24 brass instruments from his excellent personal collection. They include instruments custom made by the Martin Company for his use as well as an Italian made piccolo trumpet and instruments from the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. They are on display in the especially design case made possible by funding from Virginia Martin Howard (see Newsletter Vol. 4, No. 1, 1989).

Newsletter subscribers will recall that Vida Chenoweth has been active in the improvement of our Oceanic collection for many years (see Newsletters Vol. 3, No. 1, 1988 & Vol. 6, No. 3, 1992). This year she has agreed to sell us the rest of her rare holdings in New Guinean and Maori materials. Check future newsletters for the content of such exotic acquisitions.

Friends Members: Important Notice

The annual business meeting of Friends of the Stearns Collection will be held at 1:30 PM on September 12 in the School of Music Recital Hall just before the Chernyak lecture. Members will receive a financial report as well as results of the board election. It’s your chance to learn about The Stearns directly from the persons who manage it and to ask questions about its past, present and future.