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Neeps, Haggis, Tatties At Burns Supper Night

By Chloe Cranston

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Last year's Burns Supper night in Moscow organized by the St. Andrew Society.

In celebration of the 253rd birthday of Robert Burns, Scottish Muscovites and those with Celtic longings will attend the St. Andrew Society's Burns Supper at the Marriott Royal Aurora on Saturday.

A farmer's son from South Ayrshire, Burns was born Jan. 25, 1759, and became known as Scotland's national poet. Burns suppers are held on or around that date in memory of him.

Burns nights follow a traditional format that includes the saying of a Scottish grace before the meal and the entrance of a haggis usually accompanied by bagpipes.

Despite its perhaps unappetizing makeup, sheep liver and oatmeal cooked in a sheep's stomach is a favorite in Scotland, and Robert Burns enjoyed the meal so much that the poem, "Address to a Haggis," was written as a paean of thanks to it. The ode begins with the words

"Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face / Great chieftain o' the puddin-race!" — sonsie is an old Scottish word for cheerful.

That tradition will be followed at the Aurora with all the traditional Scottish fare: neeps and tatties (yellow turnips and potatoes) as well as haggis. Wee drams of Scottish whisky will, as might be expected, accompany the meal.

Scottish group The Glenhoulachan Midge Band, also known as the "Midgies" will provide entertainment for the night. The group travels around the world performing at ceilidhs and spreading their love of Scottish music.

"Russia has embraced the work of Robert Burns more than any other country in the world with the obvious exception of Scotland," said John MacGregor, who plays the mandolin in the group, in an e-mail interview, "That Burns's work is so revered in a country such as Russia that has so many literary giants of its own is a huge compliment."

On that night, Scottish residents in Moscow will recite Burns's works. "It will give the event a community feeling," said Alan Thompson, chieftain of the St. Andrew Society in Moscow, "and turn it into a real tribute to Robert Burns because the treasure is in the people we are, and how we feel moved enough to share his poetry."

St. Andrew Society Burns Night is on Sat. 6:30 p.m. Tickets are available by request at standrewsocmoscow@gmail.com, priced at 5,500 rubles. Payment must be made by Wednesday. The Royal Aurora Hotel has arranged a special rate for accommodation for the evening. Tel. 937-1000. www.scottishmoscow.org.

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