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30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Oratorio Celebrates 20 Years

By D. Garrison Golubock

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The choir welcomes amateur singers of all ages and backgrounds. **D. Garrison Golubock**

In September 1993, an advertisement was placed in The Moscow Times' community section requesting singers for an amateur choir to sing Handel's "Messiah," a work traditionally sung in Britain around Christmas time.

A group of about 50 singers answered the call and held their first concert in St. Andrew's Church, providing the foundation for what came to be called the Moscow Oratorio.

Twenty years later, the amateur group that came together for that first concert is still going strong, and the Moscow Oratorio will hold their 20th anniversary concert of Handel's "Messiah" on Saturday, Dec. 14 at the Moscow International House of Music at 1 p.m.

The Moscow Times spoke with Andrew Walker, the only member of the original group still actively participating in the Oratorio, who spoke about the changes the group has seen over the years.

At the first performance "it was mostly expats, there were a few Russians, but it was a very new thing — we think it was the first performance of the "Messiah" in Russia ... it was not the sort of thing that the Soviet Union would have put up with."

Shortly following that first concert, the Moscow Oratorio came under the leadership of conductor Alexander Tsalyuk, also the director of the Moscow Hasidic Capella and an instructor at the Maimonides State Classical Academy, who has led the group ever since.

In his long tenure, Tsalyuk has brought numerous Russians into the group, bringing the tradition of choral singing to Russians young and old. While the group currently has many students, it includes people of all ages and backgrounds and still has an expat contingent.

While the singers are amateurs, they often perform with backup from some more professional soloists, and also use a paid orchestra in their performances.

The Oratorio has expanded beyond their original focus on the "Messiah" and now holds two concerts a year: a December concert that always includes something Christmassy — though not necessarily Handel — and a Spring concert with an open theme.

The Moscow Oratorio is always looking for new members, so check out their anniversary concert to get into the seasonal spirit, and perhaps you will be inspired to sing yourself.

The Moscow Oratorio will perform Handel's Messiah on Saturday, Dec. 14 at 1 p.m. at the Moscow International House of Music, 52 Kosmodamianskaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 8. Metro Taganskaya. For more information on the Moscow Oratorio, see the group's website: moscoworatorio.ru

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