

## The Yale Russian Chorus marked its 60th anniversary with a gala concert

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"Oh, the Roads," "Oh You Wide Steppe," "I Shall Go Down into the Valley," "Twelve Brigands " and other pearls of the Russian folk song repertoire were heard on Sunday at one of the most prestigious U.S. universities - Yale. Those songs were, however, not performed by Russians but by Americans. The Yale Russian Chorus, a men's chorus that was established during the height of the "Cold War" in 1953, celebrated its 60th anniversary this evening.

The gala concert was performed by about 140 singers, many of whom were well into their 70s. They are all graduates of Yale University and have become prosperous businessmen, lawyers, scientists, engineers, doctors, etc. Life has scattered these men all over the country, but there is one thing that unites them - the love of Russian songs, which they have cherished through the decades.

The first part of the concert was entirely devoted to Orthodox liturgical choral music. On the stage of the main concert hall at Yale University, Woolsey Hall, the singers performed such classics as "Blessed Is the Man," "Praise the Name of the Lord," "With My Voice I Cried unto the Lord" and "Bless the Lord, oh My Soul." It was striking to witness the extraordinary enthusiasm with which absolutely all the choristers performed. It was clear that everyone poured his heart and soul into the singing, nearly without looking at their scores.

"Only ten percent of those who stood on the stage know the Russian language, but they understand and feel the most important aspect, namely, the Russian soul," said the former president of the Yale Russian Club, George Litton, one of the founders of the Chorus, in talking to this ITAR - TASS correspondent.

And it was impossible to disagree after we heard how emotionally the Chorus performed in the second half "Oh, the Roads", "Borodino", "Oh You Wide Steppe", "It Is not the Wind that Bends the Branch" (also known as "Luchina"), "Beyond the Danube," "At the Smithy" and many other folk, soldier and Cossack songs . Sometimes one forgot that the singers on the stage were not Russian, but an American chorus: although they don't know Russian, the performers sang almost without an accent.

The Chorus was conducted by its "father", Denis Mickiewicz . In 1953, he was a student at the Yale Music School, and it was he whom George Litton asked to teach members of the Russian Club several Russian folk songs . That is how the Russian Chorus was born. Currently, Mickiewicz is an emeritus professor at Duke University, but he remains the soul of the group and has conducted them at all of the most important concerts .

The last song in the program was a Russian folk song "The Twelve Brigands." The audience stood and applauded for a long time and did not want to let the performers go off stage. For encores they sang " Kalinka " and "Hey, Brave Soldiers."

"Some may think that this concert is our swan song . But no, that's not the case. We just received an invitation to perform next year at a major music festival . And so, as the saying goes, 'Many Years'" said George Litton jokingly.

The Chorus has made 16 trips to the Soviet Union and Russia and regularly performs concerts across America, including at the legendary Carnegie Hall, and has recorded 18 albums. Among those who have heard the Chorus are Jimmy Carter, Mikhail Gorbachev and Charles de Gaulle. The Chorus has performed at the Moscow Conservatory and on the stages of London, Paris and Berlin. But the most memorable moment, according to many singers, was the first trip to Moscow in 1958 - right after the signing of the agreement on cultural exchanges between the U.S.A. and the USSR. The young singers preferred live communication with people to formal concerts. They went into the parks and squares of the capital and began to sing American songs. When people approached, the American songs were replaced by Russian ones, which produced indescribable joy in the audience.

"I was the last person to shake hands with Gorbachev during his visit to the U.S.A. in 1987. Our Chorus accompanied him while he was boarding the plane. It was really hard to sing over the noise of engines, but he came over, shook my hand and then immediately went up the boarding ramp," said one of the members of the Chorus, who now lives in San Francisco. Incidentally, there's been an offshoot of the Yale Chorus in that city for over 30 years called the Slavyanka Chorus.

Another group also sang in Sunday's concert, namely, the Yale Slavic Chorus. Fifteen young women gave a brilliant performance of Russian, Georgian, Bulgarian and Macedonian folk songs.

[transl. by HH]