

# The U. vic. Chamber Singer's Excellent Adventure



in the Soviet Union.

April 25 - May 14, 1991

(or- "Look what happens any time I take these Yahoos to a foreign country!")



#### APRIL 25 - WE LEAVE.

What is this - a !?##!/? time warp?

*Joe Funk*

(Thank you Ian for that insightful, yet passionate assessment of April 25 -Ed.)

#### APRIL 26 - HELSINKI

'Twas our first day in Europe  
When all through the choir,  
We were jet-lagged and rumpled  
In our travelling attire.  
Greeted by Akti

And Sean the Russian-Brit,  
We were told to change

some money,  
Actually, quite a bit.

We climbed on the bus  
And got ready to start,  
When Jen H. yells out,  
"Hey, that sign says  
FART!"

She quickly snapped a picture  
Then hopped back on,

And we headed on our journey  
To the unknown beyond.

The group was still excited,  
And punctual, and keen,  
The hangovers, and whining,

Had not yet been seen.  
We all met our billets  
And headed on our way,

While some of us went  
To a hotel for our stay.

After a nice hot shower,  
A quick shop for some beer,

We settled in the lounge  
To enjoy some evening cheer.

The staff was so friendly,  
The sauna real hot,

But soon we grew sleepy,  
Time change affecting us a lot.

So as we lay nestled  
All snug in our beds,

While visions of Scandinavian blondes  
Danced in our (well, my) heads.

The day was now over,  
The adventure continues at morn light,

A great tour to all,  
And to all, good night.

*Karen Willse*

#### APRIL 27 - HELSINKI

For the group residing in Hotel Kuninkantie, breakfast was a western luxury. Bruce had returned from his athletic excursion, undoubtedly inspired by the newly formed Tour Jogging Club (founded April 26, 1991 by Jennifer H. and Justin G)

Achtie and a taxi delivered us to the Tapiola church for rehearsal at 10 am. This church can only be described as square, cement, and for me, spiritually neutral.

For the afternoon we bussed into Helsinki and gazed in tourist-like awe at the first of many large stone buildings.

after the concert and we finally got to meet some natives (actually Karen had met her "Nordic God" the night before.) It was Marion's birthday on the 27th, and four of the host men sang to her at dinner-a charming serenade outside the bathroom doors!

What a great day! Kimmo bid me a sweet adieu.

*Jennifer Harvey*

#### APRIL 28 - LENINGRAD

We arrived in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) by train at 7:30 pm. The buildings are

attached to one another creating a wall of living space. Crumbling, dirty, grey and brown - but some are magnificent. From the windows of our bus it was very exciting. Our hotel was changed to the Hotel Kiev. Our dinner was cancelled and we were given plastic bag lunches consisting of: 1 piece of cheese, 1 bun, 2 small pieces of dark bread, 1 chicken thigh and 1 hard boiled egg. I'm glad I have my peanut butter. Lisa and I went to RM.. 245 - up through the smoky halls to stairways - unlit. The bathroom created quite a stir because the toilet lacked a seat and the shower head simply pokes out of the bathroom wall with the water running down a central drain situated near the

toilet. I'm happy to say that our toilet does flush unlike Ann and Lynda's. Our room seems clean enough - we do not have cockroaches again, unlike Ann and Lynda's. To counteract the strangeness of the rooms and this experience I am burning many sticks of Japanese incense, which to me is a homey smell but to others on the tour is only a nice change from the smoke/urine smell of the hotel.

At 9:15pm a large group of us left the hotel to ride the metro and do some exploring. It is quite cold outside - more like February than late April. There are many people out tonight - people of all ages. We hopped a streetcar and im-



**Espoossa tapahtuu**

**la 27.4. klo 19.00**  
**Tapiolan kirkko**

**EOL:n ja Dominanten**  
**vieraana kanadalainen**  
**kamarikuoro**

**CHAMBER SINGERS,**  
**UNIVERSITY OF**  
**VICTORIA**

**joht. Bruce E. More**  
**Ohjelmat 40 mk ja 20 mk**

Cheese and bread was still a novelty.

Our concert went very well, as we managed to impress the few but important people in the audience, namely the conductor of the Tapiola Children's Choir.

Everyone had wonderful things to say about their billets and thoroughly enjoyed the Finnish saunas. Carolyn and I, in search of a Helsinki memoir, were flabbergasted by the expensive goods in this city (statistically the most expensive city in the world.) A small Christmas ornament was all we acquired.

The host choir joined us for a late dinner



mediately hopped off as Sean had seen a red M - the Metro. We each got on the metro for one kopeks and then descended into the deepest subway system (not to mention the steepest escalator) I have ever been inside of. Inside the metro is where lots of young people hang out. Lots and lots of people. All of us have been asked to change dollars for roubles, but it seems we are all waiting for daylight to make the switch. Got off the metro and walked to Nevsky Prospect - a rich avenue. Saw the Literature Cafe that I read about in the Times Colonist. Some rather wealthy people, furred and jewelled people exited the restaurant as we stood around. We then walked to the winter palace of the Czars. Beautiful, - if only it were a little earlier I would walk the entire square. A man approached us and sold Bruce a Russian watch, Chris M. a rabbit fur hat and Tammy a clock. We are all freezing now, so after looking at the River Niva we hailed taxis (quite the ride). Climbed into bed, happily to sleep.

*Kelly Dodds*

#### APRIL 29 - LENINGRAD

Had a wonderful breakfast consisting of stale bread, cheese, a sour milk substance and cucumber - ah, Leningrad! Went to the Intourist hotel to slum with the American tourists and to compare cockroaches. Changed a few dollars into a few million roubles. Spent hard currency on diet coke and vodka in the Berioska. Some saw Tchaikovsky's grave clearly recognized by Doug from a picture in a textbook. Took a guided tour after a lunch of soup, meat(?), a lovely green liquid and cucumbers. Saw a church, another church, went a few blocks and ran into a church. Passed a monument, saw a square, checked out a church, and visited the prison. Oh yes, we took in some spectacular churches.

Had some free time, so some took the Leningrad transit. Jen "Snarfqueen" Harvey got caught by the KJB and had to pay a fine for not buying a bus ticket for a measly 20 kopeks. Nice job, Jen! The fine of 15 roubles was paid and the KGB let Jen go, but not without warning! Jennifer Harvey, once an innocent tourist, took yet another risk and bartered for ballet tickets with a Blackmarketeer. Will this trend for Jen continue...?

An evening highlight was the vodka and Pepsi available at the bar by the bottle. Needless to say, the U. Vic Teetotaler Tour was buried and U. Vic chamber chuggers took over. But no one got drunk of course.

ELVIS LIVES AND HAS TWO FRIENDS. Long live the traders and Mark B for finding them. Some of us are more indebted than others...

While the party went on in the bar, another party was taking place upstairs. Mark W, Lisa, Avery, and Pam decided it would be fun to have a vodka moment! "Burp-oops" was born and yes, with the Comedy King, there was ne'er a jokeless moment. Heads bounced off the walls like basketballs and champagne corks flew.

Well, much saliva was exchanged, and many new friends were forged, but the questions still remain:

Is Jen Harvey's KGB record clean?

Is Elvis really dead?

Did the bass player at the ballet really fake his lick or did he think it was in the opera?

And, who was the Russian houseguest who spent the night on the floor of the room of two sweet young chamber singers - AND WHO INVITED HIM?

*Carolyn Howe & Pam Kerr*

#### APRIL 30 - LENINGRAD

Awoke early - slightly the worse for wear, with a snoring black marketeer dead to the world on my hotel floor. We smuggled him out safely and went down to breakfast (see yesterday's description). Spent the morning at The Hermitage. I was in awe of the Rodin's, Renoir's, Picasso's, and Monet's, but there was just too much to see and too little time. Chris M. kept us all entertained by pointing to items of worth available for only "Five American Dollars." Some left the hermitage early on the hunt for last minute Leningrad bargains. I guess there's a bit of Bruce in all of us.

Returned for lunch at hotel to find Elvis waiting for Jennifer. She was taken to his house to meet his family! Things were getting serious - for her and for me - when she still hadn't returned to the hotel 5 minutes before departure time. Three minutes before we were due to leave I started throwing things frantically into her bag. With one minute to spare she showed up starry eyed hum-

ming "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" Meanwhile, down the hall things were just getting heated up. Where was Karen's camera? We had all boarded the bus before the KGB finally showed up. Desperately trying to keep law and order in mind, Sean translated in the name of justice. Bryn helpfully interjected "let him burn" at appropriate intervals. Finally, a compromise was struck. The accused gave Karen all the money he had on him (approx. 300 rubles), the case was dropped and we were on our way to the Glinka Capella.



The concert was a hit! The venue was terrific, the audience was terrific and naturellement, we were terrific. I don't know about you, but I thought it was one of the musical highlights of the tour. Unfortunately, Pam's voice gave out halfway through, so we had one less comrade on stage and one more cheering supporter out front. Lisa's vocal gymnastics on Mountain Nights and Epitaph were greatly appreciated. Although we limited our comedy numbers, Yuri, Igor, and Elvis still found much to chuckle over. I think we were all touched they showed up.

After the concert and after sad farewells with our trader friends, we headed to the train, roses in hand. Anne impressed us all by downing Russian beer (tasting vaguely of cigarette butts) before we even reached the train station. Little did she know the continued relationship she would share with that fateful drink later in the evening.

After a gruelling walk of approx. 3 km, we boarded the train. While a tuneful vocal jazz singalong was taking place in cabin 3, down in cabin 10, Lynda, Ann, Kelly, and Lisa were distinguishing themselves by throwing a rip snorter. It's impressive how many can fit in those 4 sleepers. Chris M. told Catholic jokes in a vaguely familiar Eastern accent, Ian and I gnashed teeth, but most significantly Mark Bell introduced the Cham-



ber Singers to what would soon become "Tour Song."  
The rest is history.... Valdi, Valdi, Valdi...

*Carolyn Howe*

## MAY 1 - TALLINN

6:41 a.m. "The trains leaving.... get the fuck out!"

Those words caught the Chamber Singers piling out of the night train from Leningrad. Bleert and blin, barely alive, fighting and dragging suitcases stuffed with sleight-of-hand American dollar goodies, we boarded our bus that took us to downtown Tallinn and the Hotel Olympia.

Most of us that is... it seemed like Justin, Bryn, and Marion were eager to see more of the train station and decided to stay on for a bit. They reappeared, rather shaken, fifteen minutes later. Seen through the dim fog of cheap vodka, (thank goodness for plastic bags

Ann!) Tallinn seemed peaceful, remote, and best of all, clean. An aggressive North Sea driven wind propelled us along our first Northern European beach. We tried our best, but we found no hot dog stands. After the beach we were driven to an open air amphitheatre, the site of the largest choral festival in the world. Depending on who was speaking, anywhere from 2,000 to 200,000 singers participate each year to produce a great stew of vocal melodies and harmonies. We tried our best with a rousing (considering the overhung circumstances) rendition of "Lord I Know I Been Changed."

Our morning exercise finished, we spent the rest of the afternoon in a lazy walk from our rooms to the dining room. The food at the hotel was a welcome relief from the "fat surprise with noodles", and "anyone's guess... have you seen that cat lately? soup, that was washed down with green Kool-Aid at the Kievskaya Hotel in Leningrad.

At lunch in Tallinn all of us splurged and

bought tickets for the "big dance" that was to take place that evening. The tickets cost fifteen roubles each - the equivalent of about 75 cents.

Only six of us made it.

Myself, Justin, Dave, Marion, Doug, and Mr. Ramapoodla... (how do you spell that?), were all privileged enough to witness a genuine Estonian social function.

Boy oh boy!

The delightful band was playing a strange blend of rock 'n roll and polkas. We started out gently, drinking that god-awful slightly cool champagnski, and quietly munching our rice and chicken salads. Before long the spirit had us and champagne found its way onto peoples heads, legs, and or best-not-mentioned-here parts. Poor Justin suffered a mild case of paranoia, thinking that he was being singled out for torture by some crazed ice-throwing Estonian.

Chris, acting like a rich Texan, and sending champagne to almost every table in the house, met two ladies who he proceeded to "get to know" (wink, wink, nudge, nudge). I decided to give him a hand and was immediately introduced as his friend from Scotland.

Of course I couldn't let him down, so I did my best to keep up an honourable brogue for the rest of the evening. Chris did manage to empty an entire pack of Dunhill cigarettes onto the table as he tried (oh so suavely) to copy a phone number.

We did do our best to stir up some activity, but I think that the train ride from the night before, (where a privileged and drunken dozen were witness to the birth of the two East Indian twins of different mothers...) had taken its toll. All of us piece by bit and bit by drink, (and unfortunately one by one) slowly filed out of the "dance hall) and went back to our beds to prepare for the assault on the shopping section of town. So endeth another day.

*Mark Bell*

## MAY 2 - TALLINN

It's a very rainy day today. We were supposed to have a walking tour of the old town, but some people didn't want to walk around in the rain, so only a few people went. We had lunch at a restaurant in the old

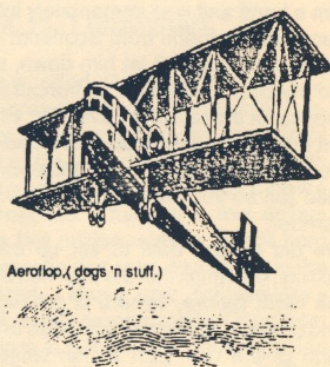




town called "Groom." We had our first taste of European french fries since we left Canada. At least, I think that's what they were. They were strips of oil-soaked, half-cooked potatoes. There are many places to shop around the old town and many people bought Estonian flags. Bruce was quite excited with his pitch pipe finds. One had the Russian Solfege on it and he was struggling to give us our pitches. He was even more excited with his other pipe, which gave major and minor chords. Singing in the church was an incredible experience, and the concert went really well. Afterwards, a few members of the Estonian choir invited us back to their "choir house." It was an incredible building and they were really friendly. Unfortunately, a lot of people are feeling very sick. And, I'm sure the hotel elevator didn't help much. Tallinn is a very beautiful city.

*Jennifer White*

### MAY 3 - TALLINN TO KIEV



Well...yes I am writing this on the flight home, but I have a good excuse. You see... I thought it would be really clever to write my assigned diary entry on the complimentary "writing paper" provided in the hotel. Unfortunately, as these pieces of paper are very small, I threw it out with a pocketful of other slightly less important papers (like 5 ruble bills). But I think if I concentrate really hard, maybe I can remember-  
I'm sitting at a little desk in our hotel room chilling out with my trusty bottle of port; it's been a long day. As I recall we left the hotel Olympia at around 5am this morning. It was a miserable morning (weather-wise and otherwise) when

we got to the airport, but once we got above the clouds in our funky AEROFLOT plane we all got into a much better mood. It was quite a nice flight actually. Our hotel here is not quite as nice as the Olympia but it does seem a bit more Russian, which is cool (but not in the literal sense - it's damn hot!)

I was one of the first people to be attacked by the "3 foot muggers" at the stadium today. I felt quite sorry for them at first but my patience wore thin REAL FAST when Sean told us that they bring in more than the average worker in a month (though they probably don't get to hang on to it for long). Some of us seemed

a bit shocked when Sean gave one of them a good kick.

Natasha seems quite glad to be home. I can understand why, this is a VERY beautiful city.

Oh yes! I almost forgot. In places here the roads are PINK.

*Tracy Topnick*

### MAY 4 - KIEV

Wow! What a day. What a city. What a group. What a night! The day was spent trooping around Kiev (what a fabulous, beautiful old city) but the night is really what I'm here to write about.

The evening began with Doug, Mark B, Chris M, Bryn, Marion, Karen, Justin and others sitting on the 13th story balcony enjoying the sunset, revelling in the price of Soviet champagne (\$1.80 per bottle) and trying to shoot down aeroplanes with flying corks. These and other activities seemed to pose a dilemma for the hotel security team, as apparently their phrasebook had no translation for "Please stop throwing water-filled condoms off the 13th story balcony."

Shortly thereafter, however, we were drawn off the balcony by the arrival of some friends - members of one of the Kiev choirs we had had a joint concert with. They coralled us into the lobby area on our floor, and produced a clarinet, tuba, guitar, and accordion, and copious quantities of Vodka. Wooowee!

To the sweet melodies of dixieland jazz we partied the night away. Boy, did we party the night away... Alexi pulling his clarinet apart, one piece at a time, still

soloing, until he was happily playing away with just a mouthpiece! Incredible!

*Doug Green*

### MAY 5 - KIEV

Last day in the USSR; many promises to return. Even the hotel entices, with an attempted egg souffle breakfast, and the expresso in the bar is twice normal strength. The news stand in the lobby opens for the first time, filled with newspapers announcing events we have no more time to see.

This morning the souvenir salesman by the front door has sold more junk to chamber singers than he'd peddle in a month; eastern culture is looking good but western bucks look even better. Ukrainian Folk Architecture and Household Museum:

Rolling green hills dotted with thatched-roof homes, windmills, and church domes remind some of Albertan summers and of Mennonite roots.

Lunch at the hotel: almost beefsteak and ice cream. I'll be back in the USSR for sure.

The afternoon is free to shop for last minute music, monuments, and mementos and to experience the frustrations of buying back bucks with roubles: sorry but you'll have to wait for the border crossing. Kretashatik is busier than ever with chamber singers hording bread, cheese, and greasy salami sausage to ease the approaching pissup on "the midnight train to LVOV."

The three lineups for butter are especially frustrating but Doug explains they are necessary: A line-up to discover that you're in the wrong line-up, a lineup to pay with cash and coupons, and a lineup to celebrate completing the purchase with a ceremony which includes cutting the slab, weighing the slab, wrapping it, realizing how great rye bread is without butter, and dispensing the blessed cholesterol glob to the customer who is now, thankfully, late for dinner.

The taxi ride back to the hotel efficiently extinguishes any remaining pangs of hunger. As a matter of fact, one particularly perky driver during the rush-hour entertained some lovely female chamber singers by spotting pedestrians in the crosswalks, aiming for them, shutting his eyes, and then slamming his