



The Voice of Orpheus

A Newsletter of Sons of Orpheus - The Male Choir of Tucson

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Grayson Hirst, Founder/Artistic Director



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**To Join
Sons of Orpheus
Call Grayson Hirst
at 621-1649**



The year begins for Orpheus on the final Wednesday in August when we gather after our summer break. We start with music we won't perform till spring. About halfway through October we put the spring program aside and get to work on Christmas music. In February, after the Russian concert (see "Tucson Meet Yourself"), we settle down to the business of trying to remember what we learned in the fall.

This system works well for our snowbirds because it allows them to come back late, guilt-free, knowing they have not missed anything they

won't be able to pick up when the going gets tough. They'll be singing with men who have already knocked the rough edges off. The same holds true for late recruits who drift in—newcomers to Tucson, or men who had been thinking about joining but had trouble making up their minds.

We customarily begin our spring concerts with a bang from the world of opera. For this year the choir's founder/director, Grayson Hirst, has chosen two well-known works: the chorus and finale from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and the "Easter Hymn" from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Among the other pieces our librarian, Jeff Handt, had ready for us on the first night was Edward Lear's famous nonsense poem "The Owl and the Pussycat," set to music by Reginald de Koven.



Edward Lear

Edward Lear (1812-1888) was a self-taught artist who set out to rival the work of John James Audubon. Lear's first book, *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots*, was published when he was just nineteen. Lear had a good eye and a steady hand, but he had a funnybone too.

Continued on page 2 →

Our Concert Schedule for the 1st Half of the 2009/2010 Season

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p>Sat., October 10 at 1:00 p.m. Sons of Orpheus and the Arizona Balalaika Orchestra</p> <p>Part of Tucson Meet Yourself in Downtown Tucson, Main stage</p> <p>Free admission. Information: 520-792-4806</p> | <p>Sun., November 8 at 3:00 p.m. Fall Concert at Tucson Estates Multi-purpose Bldg. 5900 W Western Way Circle</p> <p>Ticket information: Nancy Smith at 520-578-0335</p> | <p>Wed., November 11 at 2:00 p.m. Veterans Day Observance. Southern Arizona VA Hospital 3601 S 6th Avenue Center Courtyard</p> <p>Free admission. For information call Deborah Brookshire at 520-629-1822</p> | <p>Tues., December 8 Wed., December 9 Thur., December 10 "Christmas at San Xavier" with the Tucson Arizona Boys Chorus at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.</p> <p>For information contact Vern Lamplott at 520-407-6130</p> | <p>Wed., December 16 at 7:00 p.m. 12th Annual Holiday Benefit Concert for the Community Food Bank with the stu- dents of the Arizona State School for the Deaf and the Blind. Berger Performing Arts Center 1200 W Speedway Free with non- perishable food items</p> |
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Happy New Year, from p. 1

He amused himself by writing and illustrating nonsense poems and limericks which he collected for his *Book of Nonsense* published in 1846. Perhaps this en-



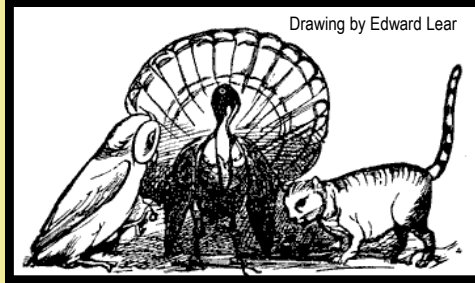
Drawing by Edward Lear

"The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to Sea"

deavor was a palliative for his epilepsy, a condition considered shameful in those days among people who

thought that it was the result of demonic possession. Certainly there was not much to laugh about in his early years. He was the 21st child in a poor family. He was raised in miserable circumstances by his eldest sister, who went on to care for him until her death when he was 50. Whatever the impetus for his sense of humor, Lear is more widely known today for his hobby than for his vocation.

In the final stanza of a self-portrait written in verse and published posthumously, Lear made reference to his



Drawing by Edward Lear

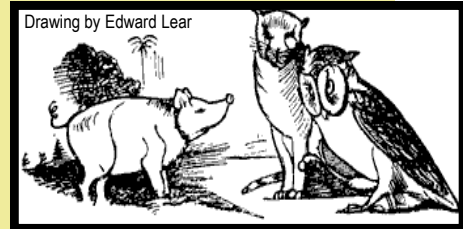
"Pussy said to the Owl: You Elegant Fowl . . ."

own mortality:

He reads but he cannot speak Spanish,
He cannot abide gingerbeer;
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,
How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!

Reginald de Koven (1859-1920) was an Ameri-

can composer best known for the light operas he fashioned after Gilbert and Sullivan. In addition, de Koven set to music the works of such literary lights as Heinrich Heine, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and—fortunately for us—Edward Lear. De Koven has given us a musical way of understanding



Drawing by Edward Lear

"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling your ring?"

how pleasant it would have been to know Mr. Lear.

My Brain on Music

(Between the Editor's Ears)

Because I need a break after a season with Orpheus, I don't sing in the summer except in the shower or the car. But my summertime venues can be problematic. Out on the road, under the spell of "Why do the nations so furiously rage together" from *Messiah*, or ZZ Top's "Sharp Dressed Man," I sometimes sense perturbation emanating from a car stopped next to me and turn to see a nervous stare. Nobody wants to be side by side with a driver who's gone barking mad. And in full voice I am no less a danger on the streets than a texting

teenager. As to the shower, my wife is likely to barge into our bathroom to shout that she's **trying to talk on the darned phone for heaven's sake!**

My voice has been rusty for the first rehearsals, but I did learn something about music last summer. Two PBS programs, "The Music Instinct: Science and Song," and Nova's "The Musical Mind," emphasized the neurology of musical enjoyment. Oliver Sacks, for example, his scalp wired for a brain scan, displayed a bland reaction to Beethoven, the synapses flickering here and there like fireflies on the monitor. Bach, however, lit him up like Las Vegas.

I was glad for this scientific approach because it helped me to understand why I react so emotionally to music, a circumstance that can be a curse during a performance. Now and then, up on the risers, just when the

good part gets going, my throat clangs shut. Shivers run up my back, and I mouth the words so I won't appear to have turned to stone. I now understand that the music has set my brain on fire.

I like choral music in general, but for me there is something especially moving about the sound of male voices in song. I discovered this as a kid when the Community Concerts Association sent the Don Cossack Choir and, a year later, the Leonard DePaur Infantry Chorus to my little high-desert town east of the Cascades. My mother was the treasurer of the local Community Concerts affiliate, so I got to hear a lot of big hitters in those days. Sometimes they came to our home after the concert for food and drink to brace themselves for the perilous road back over the mountains to Portland next day, a trip they would make trying to repress thoughts of the

Donner party.

Perhaps the most famous personage who came to town was the pianist Eugene Istomin. He was so elegant on stage, but when he showed up in our living room, I noticed he was wearing a wig. The netting that glued it to his pate was tattered and stained. Sometimes it's best not to get too close to famous people.

But of all the great music I heard back then, the Cossacks and the Infantry were what, quite literally it seems, turned me on. Despite what I learned last summer, I can't explain what it is about a men's choir that appeals so powerfully to me. Perhaps it's as fundamental and visceral as my Welsh coal miner ancestry, if such is true as depicted in John Ford's "How Green Was My Valley," the grimy miners struggling home from the

My Brain, from p. 2

colliery against a darkening sky, singing in four-part harmony. Anyway, I recall sitting in the dark and listening to the voices up there on that glowing stage, thinking, "I'm going to sing in a men's choir someday." And so I have. I'm looking forward to my 13th year with Orpheus.

As the choir heads into its 19th season, we are hopeful that you'll check our schedule and make plans to hear us. Maybe you can explain what it is about men singing that excites your frontal cortex. Would you bring your family, your friends and neighbors, indeed your whole subdivision? A large sample makes for a more scientific conclusion.

NM

Our Board Members Are Recruiting

We think the readership of our newsletter might be fertile ground. If you'd like a leadership role with an active organization, one that does good things for the community, Orpheus wants to talk to you. Board meetings are the first Monday of the month at 4:30 p.m. at the Arizona Inn. Interested? Please contact Grayson Hirst at 621-1649.

Dr. Larry Ross, board president, happens also to be a member of our second tenor section. Larry had a more exciting flight to New

York last spring than he was expecting. Before his plane landed in Dallas, he became ill. He was taken by ambulance to the Baylor University Medical Center where surgeons removed his balky gallbladder. Larry is the kind of guy who stays in shape, so his speedy recovery was not surprising. We are glad to have him back at the helm.

(What follows is a somewhat less factual account of Larry's adventure:)

Second Tenor Has Bladder Problem

Dr. Larry Ross's medical training came in handy on a

recent flight from Tucson to his summer residence in Manhattan. Soon after takeoff, he began experiencing abdominal discomfort. Dr. Ross is a cardiologist, but he recalled his days as an intern and pinpointed the source of the problem. Within minutes the pain was so acute he knew he'd have to remove his own gallbladder.

After asking the stewardess to boil up a shoehorn, he ordered six martinis, drank five and swabbed his abdomen with the sixth. He stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth so his cries would not interrupt the in-flight movie and set to work. When the offending

organ was out and neatly stored in an airsickness bag, he ordered another martini to pour into the wound, which he then sealed by pinning the edges together with United Airlines badges.

Dr. Ross slept the rest of the way to New York and walked off the plane without assistance. His wife reports that he sang "Vesti la giubba" to the cabby during the drive home.

Larry adds, "You left out that I sent Medicare a bill for my services and offered my gall bladder for sale for an organ transplant on E-Bay!" Now who wouldn't want to serve on a board with a guy like that?

Board Member Emily Minerich

By Barbara Katz,
Board Secretary/Treasurer

Sons of Orpheus has lost a very special member of our Board of Directors. Emily Minerich, who passed away on July 17, 2009, was the epitome of a beautiful, classy, thoughtful, generous lady and a consummate hostess.

When she joined our Board in September 2005, she immediately offered to host our monthly meetings in her lovely home. It didn't take us more than a minute to accept – for two years we had been meeting almost under a waterfall in the lobby of the Marriott Hotel. Her first question to me



after making this generous offer was, "What kind of wine do all of you like to drink?" I assured her that water would be just lovely. She, on the other hand, would set her dining room table with placemats, ice water, silver candy dishes filled with nuts, and an offer of wine. The "hostess" in her personality was not to be denied. For three and a half years, we were the fortunate recipients of her largesse.

As if Emily had not been doing enough for us, she also hosted a marvelous end-of-the-year picnic for all of the Sons of Orpheus and many of their families after the final Spring Concert on May 21, 2006.

Our hearts and condolences go out to her family, her colleagues at Long Realty, and her many friends throughout the country.

From Our Director



Grayson Hirst
Photo by Tom Wentzel

It is with sadness that I write of the loss of one of our founding members. Our friend and colleague, Arlyn Peterson, passed away June 30th at the age of 82.

Arlyn taught music and history at Mansfield Junior High School from 1963 until he retired in 1989. He was men's choir director, chancel choir singer, and soloist at

Northminster Presbyterian Church; and choir singer and baritone soloist before that at Catalina United Methodist Church.

Music and singing were Arlyn's passion. Beginning in the 1960s he studied voice with the baritone Eugene Conley, a former U of A professor. He sang with Orpheus from our first season in 1991. During those years he played a central role in the life of our young choir. In those days I was still concertizing out of town. Often I turned to Arlyn, entrusting him with rehearsing Orpheus in my absence. I respected his musicianship and I valued his friendship.

Arlyn cherished his time with Orpheus. His dedication to our choir was unwavering. A soft-spoken gentleman with an open personality and cheerful disposition, Arlyn had a ready smile, an easy laugh, and a kind word for everyone, all of which belied

the depth of seriousness he brought to his music. Many of the choral works Arlyn arranged for Orpheus we



Arlyn H. Petersen 1927 - 2009

regularly perform to this day. Several are scheduled to appear on this season's programs.

Orpheus has a rich history that we must not forget. Choir members to come, as well as our own children and grandchildren need to know what the choir means to us. Our Orpheus banner is an elaborate expression of the choir's identity, a potent connection with the past. It serves as a reminder of our great musical and fraternal legacy. In tribute to his memory, our banner will bear Arlyn's name.

We bid Arlyn a fond farewell. He will be missed.

He will be remembered. To his wife, Pat, and son, Eric, we send our heartfelt condolences. GH

ALMOST

GONE WITH THE WIND



Our April 25th concert at Sahuarita will go down in the choir's history as one of the most ... what shall I say? Challenging.

We were particularly interested in the weather report for that day be-

cause our venue was a large, three-sided tent in the parking lot of the town's new mall. The weatherman had predicted steady winds of 20 to 30 miles an hour with gusts to 40. Turned out he might have been a bit on the low side.

Even before we started our warm-up, we knew things were going to be difficult. I wondered if the wind might blow our voices back down our throats and out the other end, producing a muffled and belated version of the program.

Grayson Hirst, our founder/director, faced with aplomb the problem of keeping his pages open to the right place. He deftly secured his score with clothes pins, directing with his head during the page turns. At one point, those few of us who were watching him were somewhat discomposed when a blast that seemed about to rip the top off the tent caused him to freeze for a measure or two.

Fortunately for Brent Burmeister, our accompanist, a couple of our songs required four hands at the piano, so he had a built-in page turner and holder in Marco Jimenez. How they managed when they were both playing I do not know. I was busy keeping my own pages open to at least the same song we were singing if not always the same page.

Thank goodness the producers of the event were well prepared. They had the tent supports tied down with enough rope to outfit a schooner. Still, the tent fabric flapped so violently that some of the men in the top row suffered scalp burns. But we're troupers. We sang the full concert to an appreciative audience that sometimes outnumbered us. In a nearby bar afterwards, all agreed it had been a good experience. Still, if we are wanted back someday, we hope the town fathers can find a cozy place inside an actual building.

Profiling Woon-Yin Wong



Photo by Iván Berger

There are sixty million Wongs in the world, but only one of them sings for Orpheus. That's Woon-Yin, a member of our bass section.

Woon-Yin's ancestors had lived in Canton, China, for many generations until the communist takeover in 1949 when membership in the landowning class made life there very dangerous. The Wongs fled to Hong Kong, taking their servants and some family treasures with them. Woon-Yin's father believed the revolution wouldn't last long, so he chose not to sell his property before fleeing. It was a decision that cost his family dearly as the years went by. They moved from a large

apartment to smaller and smaller ones. Their servants left except for the cook, who stayed on, having no other place to go. Eventually the sale of their antiques sustained them until Woon-Yin's father found a position as a Chinese literature teacher.

After Woon-Yin graduated from high school in Hong Kong in 1955, he enrolled at the National University of Taiwan to study engineering, majoring in hydraulics. After graduation he stayed in Taiwan for a year to work and to apply for graduate schools in America.

In October of 1960 Woon-Yin headed west, bound for Virginia Polytechnic Institute (known as Virginia Tech since 1970) in Blacksburg, a place about as far away from China in every respect as he could have imagined. Remembering some eye-opening experiences, he tells a story about the owners of the house where he boarded. They saw him at church and invited him to come to their living room for a chat. There they warned him not to believe every-

thing he was taught in school and showed him a Biblical passage indicating that the earth is flat. Woon-Yin was astonished that anyone in America could believe such a thing.

On another occasion, he stopped at a campus restroom with a sign over one door that read "White" and a sign over another that read "Colored." He thought, "Well, I'm colored," so he stepped in to that one, only to be dragged out by a white man who had seen him enter. The man explained the facts of life in Blacksburg, but Woon-Yin later heard of a Chinese who had gone into a "White" restroom and been thrown out.

Woon-Yin ran short of funds before finishing at Virginia Polytechnic, so he

left for New York City to find a job. He needed money not only to live but to send back to his family in Hong Kong. An engineering firm hired him to design highways, during which time he completed a Master's degree in mechanical engineering at City College of New York. The firm sponsored his American citizenship.

Woon-Yin had written his Master's thesis on the arcane subject of the mathematical optimization of rigid frame structures. This turned out to be a fortunate choice because in 1967 he was hired by a radio astronomer who needed to optimize the structural design of a 100-meter telescope.

Back to Old Virginny went Woon-Yin, this time to the University of Virginia and the lawns where Thomas Jefferson had wandered, a wonderful place to start his life as an American. And that's where he found a German girl, Brigitte, the love of his life. He laughs when he wonders how many Chinese men have won the heart of a German woman by teaching her how to ski.

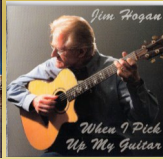
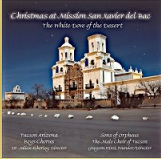
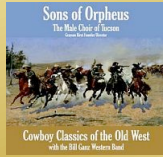
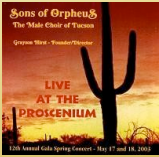
In 1982 the Wongs and their son Michael and daughter Caroline left Virginia for the University of Texas in Austin where Woon-Yin worked for three years as an engineer on an optical telescope project. After that he took a position with the National Optical Astronomy Observatory in Tucson where he remained until his retirement.

Woon-Yin stays busy working around the house, tutoring in math at Job Corps, riding his bike, traveling, and singing with Orpheus. He has also sung with the Masterworks Choral and the University Community Chorus. In 2007 he was attending a concert at the University of Arizona's Crowder Hall when he found a flyer in the program that announced plans for an Orpheus concert tour in Austria and Germany. He was hooked.

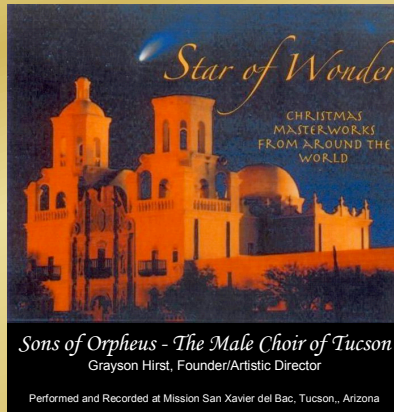
Amazingly, the very next day our director cracked open a fortune cookie to find a message that read, "Your choir is about to get a valuable recruit, one that everybody will like."



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VA Hospital Concert

For the past several years Orpheus has been privileged to participate in the Veterans Day concert at the Tucson Veterans Administration hospital. Surrounded by the magnificent pink buildings that form one of Tucson's finest landmarks, hundreds of people, many in uniform, join the patients in comfortable chairs in the grassy central courtyard to watch the show,

The distinctive building complex on South Sixth Avenue is headquarters for the Southern Arizona Health Care System, but it is not Tucson's first V.A. hospital. The original was located north

of town on the way to Oracle. After World War One, most of its patients were men who were suffering the ravages of mustard gas poisoning. When their numbers overburdened the hospital, businessman Albert Steinfeld donated 116 acres south of town for a new site. Community leaders and such organizations as the American Legion Morgan McDermott Post #7, the Disabled American Veterans, and the Chamber of Commerce sought approval for the site from Congress. The groundbreaking took place October 4, 1927. On August 28, 1928, Veterans Hospital #51 opened its doors.

We like to think that we're the main attraction, but we must admit that other performers do a fine job too. The best



known has been Dolan Ellis, Arizona's Official State Balladeer. He's a great entertainer in the Western mode. Last year he heard us rehearsing and stopped in to listen. When we finished the National Anthem, he said

"Wow!" High praise!

It's always a flags-snapping-in-the-breeze kind of afternoon in Tucson's most perfect month; the patriotic music stirs the hearts of singers and listeners alike. All this and cookies and lemonade too! It must be the best way to celebrate Veterans Day. The show starts at two o'clock on November 11th. Admission is free.

A Tip of the Stetson to Jim Hogan



Photo by Gary Smyth

Jim has served as chairman of the choir's Executive Committee for longer than he cares to remember. Busi-

ness has caused him to step away from that position, but he has agreed to continue as choir wrangler. If you ar-

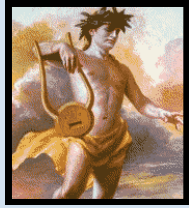
rive early enough, you will see Jim wandering among the empty seats while we warm up, checking sound levels and calling to this man or that to move slightly for a better line of sight from the director and the audience.

Jim gives great pep talks, and he is a man so respected that we'll shut up for him so he can line us up correctly: basses on the right end, baritones next, second tenors next, and first tenors on the left end. This is important! There is nothing

worse than finding yourself standing on the risers with some men you've never seen before, men who are singing notes you've never heard. You may look around longingly for some familiar faces, but you are stuck in the wrong crowd until the choir walks off the stage.

The Executive Committee will miss Jim, but the choir will still have his leadership and, just as valuable, his voice!

Who Was



Orpheus, Anyway?



By John Kamper

(Editor's note)

Over the past ten years the newsletter has told the Orpheus story in various ways. (See February, 2004 and January 2006 in the newsletter section of sonsoforpheus.org for stories with pictures.) We do this because now and then someone approaches us after a concert to ask about the choir's name. We forget that

sometimes the singers are puzzled too. John Kamper is beginning his second season with the choir. He submitted the following:

"Sons of Who?" That's the grammatically incorrect question I asked Donna, my wife.

"Orpheus," she replied. She had been telling me of a men's choir she had heard about from our friend, Tom McGorray, who happens to be an Orpheus first tenor. Neither the choir nor the man for whom it was named were familiar to me, so with prompting from Donna I looked into both. I liked the choir and joined it last January. I liked the Orpheus story too.

According to Greek myth, Orpheus was the greatest musician and poet of all time. (Move over Michael Jackson.) He was the son of the god Apollo and the muse Calliope. Apollo gave Orpheus a golden lyre which the young man mastered. When he sang, streams and rivers would change their courses in rhapsody. Trees

would uproot themselves and dance. Rocks would, well, rock!

Orpheus was a member of the Argonauts. Led by Jason, they were the heroes in search of the Golden Fleece. On their adventures they encountered the Sirens, whose music compelled sailors to steer their ships onto the shore. (Odysseus also ran afoul of them.) In order to avoid disaster, Orpheus played his lyre and sang so beautifully that he overcame the Sirens' enchantment and saved his compatriots.

As usual with myths, not all ended well. His beautiful wife, Eurydice, was bitten by a snake and died.

Orpheus traveled to the underworld and with his music moved Hades to release Eurydice. There was a catch—neither Orpheus nor his wife could look back until they returned to

the land of the living. Orpheus led the way. At the exit he turned to see where Eurydice was. Too soon!



Eurydice vanished forever. You can find more of the Orpheus myth on the Internet, including the grisly conclusion which we prefer not to think about.

Orpheus is the name of many men's choirs in Europe and the United States. Our distinguished director, Grayson Hirst, chose it because he thought it would be a pleasure and a challenge to emulate the mythical singer.

The music we produce is excellent, although we're still working on getting those trees to dance.



The choir's Executive Committee has recommended that we begin to build a database of e-mail addresses so

our readers can catch us online. It's a good deal for you. The online newsletter is in color, and you won't need to bother throwing it away when you're finished with it. It's good for us too. It saves us printing and mailing costs and makes us part of the green revolution. It also allows us to contact you with timely information.

One of our newest members, Ken Bosma, has volunteered to begin collecting e-mail addresses in preparation for a new electronic version of "The Voice of Orpheus." If you would like to jump on board early and help test the new system, we invite you to sign up. Simply submit an e-mail to Ken (ken.jen.bosma@gmail.com). In the winter print edi-



tion we'll bring you a status update on this project.

This edition will be available on sonsoforpheus.org at about the same time you have it in your hands. Please take a look at it online to see if reading it that way appeals to you. If you like to feel the paper in your hands, smell the ink, hear the rustle of the pages, the newsletter will still come to you through the mail.

About the Envelope: The envelope you find herein may be used to order CDs (see p. 6). Send us a check and tell us what you'd like to have. CDs are \$15 each. Add \$4 for shipping and handling. It may also be used to send a donation. To help our U. of A. scholarship students, indicate "scholarship" on the memo line of your check. To add to the endowment established for Orpheus by the Magee family and managed by the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona, indicate "endowment." You may also contribute to our general operating expenses fund. We're a 501 (c) 3 not for profit organization, and we are grateful for your assistance. We'll thank you formally by mail to prove it.



The Voice of Orpheus



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Tucson



Meet Yourself

Russian blood may not course through the veins of every man in the choir, but our long association with the Arizona Balalaika Orchestra has enabled Mother Russia to find a place in our

souls. Although we don't usually don our rubashkas (belted peasant shirts) until our annual appearance with the Balalaikas in February, this year we need to be ready to perform with them for the Tucson Meet Yourself festival in October.

TMY has four basic components: performances, folk arts demonstrations, ethnic food presentation, and special theme areas. The festival goes from 11 in morning

to 10 in the evening Friday and Saturday, October 9 and 10, and from 11 to 6 on Sunday, October 11. We perform Saturday at 1:00 o'clock on the main stage.

Although only the Russian and Ukrainian members of our audience will understand the words, the tunes are lively and beautiful, a treat for one and all. The music, the instruments, and the costumes are authentic. You'll think we just crossed the Bering

Strait, had lunch at Sarah Palin's house, and flew on down to Tucson.

During the three-day festival, the Tucson Meet Yourself organizers will present 5000 participants to an expected 100,000 wanderers. Things to eat, things to hear, things to see, things to do. It's going to be quite a party!

See the Tucson Meet Yourself website for further information.



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