

REESNews

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Greetings from the Director

by Ian MacMillen

GREETINGS STUDENTS, ALUMS, STAFF, FACULTY, COLLEAGUES, AND FRIENDS OF REES! Spring weather—though hailed back in February with the annual burning of the Russian Lady Maslenitsa effigy on Tappan Square—is now finally starting to settle in Oberlin, and as we come to the end of another busy academic year, it is with pleasure that we share information about events and courses that we have held on (and off) campus since last spring's newsletter. Professor of Politics Steve Crowley, who for several years chaired REES and directed Oberlin's Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies (OCREECAS), has spent the academic year as a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C.—a well-earned sabbatical. As a former OCREECAS postdoctoral fellow, I was happy to return to Oberlin from Whitman College this year to step into the director's role and work with our committed faculty and staff on the many programs instituted and/or developed during Steve's tenure here. Here is a brief summary of what we've been up to (most of which are detailed in the articles that follow).

Our scholar-in-residence program, initiated last year with a stint by Bulgarian environmental journalist Dimiter Kenarov, continued this spring with a visit and module-length course taught by Russian-born author, activist, and *New York Times* journalist Masha Gessen. Gessen's residency was well timed, as her ongoing writing on dissidence and democracy and her Oberlin talks fit nicely into our two years of programs dedicated to the topic of socialism and revolution. Events on this theme are building to a culmination in fall 2017 with the centennial commemoration of Russia's October Revolution; for this we have worked with the Oberlin Allen Memorial Art Museum to organize a public First Thursday lecture by Russian literature scholar Edith Clowes '73 on the revolution's impact across Russia's arts. Other ongoing programs include our OCREECAS internships, which, under the guidance of Russian Faculty in Residence Maia Solovieva this year, saw several successfully completed placements in Russian organizations and new awards for summer 2017 internships.

This year also brought several goodbyes for our OCREECAS community. In addition to Steve Crowley commencing an extended leave, Professor of Sociology Veljko Vujačić continuing a three-year post as provost of the European University at St. Petersburg, Masha Gessen returning to New York City after concluding her residency, and many students nearing the end of their Oberlin careers, two visiting members of our faculty in Russian are moving on to other places and opportunities. Our 2016-17 Fulbright language teaching assistant, Maria Tsedrik, will soon complete her year-long post at Oberlin. We are also preparing to say goodbye to Luke Parker, our Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Russian. Since arriving at Oberlin in fall 2015, Luke has taught courses on topics ranging from Russian poetry to Nabakov and other Russian exile writers, and, together with Maria Tsedrik, led a 2017 winter-term trip to St. Petersburg and Moscow. Luke has also been an active scholar while at Oberlin; his publications include a 2016 analysis and translation in the *Times Literary Supplement* of Nabakov's 1926 talk, "On Generalities," and an article forthcoming in *Russian Review*, "The Gambit: Chess and the Art of Competition in The Luzhin Defense." We wish Luke, Maria, and our graduating seniors much success as they head toward new horizons.



Students from the Russian, German, and Spanish departments prepare to set up a bonfire in February to burn Lady Maslenitsa, which, according to Russian tradition, speeds up the arrival of spring. (Photo by Pang Fei Chiang '19)

Russian Talks in 2016

2016 SAW A HOST OF RENOWNED EXPERTS VISITING FROM AFAR TO GIVE LECTURES ON RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND MEMBERS OF OUR OWN RANKS POOLING TOGETHER TO SPEAK ON CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN SOCIETY.

LIFE IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

Steve Crowley (politics), Luke Parker (Russian), Chris Stolarski (history), and Drew Wise '15 (OCREECAS intern in St. Petersburg) participated in a panel discussion in March to share their personal perspectives living, researching, and working in Russia under Vladimir Putin's administration.

GOSPEL RAPE: SEX AND TEXT IN CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Eric Naiman, professor of comparative literature and chair of Slavic languages and literatures at U.C. Berkeley, delivered the 2015-16 Clowes Lecture on the topic of sex in Dostoyevsky's celebrated novel. His March lecture and visit were coordinated with Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian Polina Dimova's course Adultery and Art in the Russian Novel.

THE OBERLIN COLLEGE TRANSLATION SYMPOSIUM, WITH KEYNOTE BY BENJAMIN PALOFF



A side portrait of the Benjamin Paloff

Oberlin's annual Translation Symposium in April 2016 showcased students' literary translations from a range of

languages. It also featured a keynote address by Benjamin Paloff, associate professor of Slavic literatures and languages at the University of Michigan and a distinguished translator of Polish, Czech, and Russian. Paloff's lecture, "The Universal Translator," explored the value and purpose of literary translation in the eventual scenario that computational technology will render interlingual translation obsolete.

WRITTEN IN THE DARK: THE LIFE AND CULTURE OF BESIEGED LENINGRAD (1941-1944)

Polina Barskova, associate professor of Russian literature at Hampshire College, delivered the 2016-17 Clowes Lecture on the siege of Leningrad. A prolific poet in Russian and in English translation and a literary scholar, Barskova's lecture in October engaged both the poetry and the poetics of remembering (and understanding historically) the second world war in Russia.

Bulgarika: A Quintet Performing Traditional Bulgarian Music

The lauded ensemble of Donka Koleva (vocals) and Nikolay Kolev (gadulka, an upright Bulgarian folk fiddle) stopped in Oberlin in September as part of its fall 2016 tour from the musicians' home base in Washington, D.C. Joining in this iteration of the ensemble were Temelko Ivanov (kaval, an end-blown flute) and Nikolay Kodzhabashev (tambura, a lute-like chordophone); together they performed traditional Bulgarian songs and dances that had students, staff, faculty, and community members up and reeling in traditional circular horo dances. Dances were led by OCREECAS director Ian MacMillen and students of Holly Handman-Lopez's advanced contemporary dance class, who had studied horo with MacMillen earlier in the day. The event was organized by Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology Jennifer Fraser, with sponsorship from the musicology department, OCREECAS, and Student Assemblies.



Bulgarika at the 'Sco, Oberlin College. (photo by Ian MacMillen)

Communist Revolutions Then and Now: Mid-Century Takeovers and the Arts of Cultural Memory in Bulgaria, Cuba, and China



Ian MacMillen presents on music tourism and the legacy of Bulgaria's Communist coup. (photo by Liliana Milkova)

A little more than 70 years ago, on October 27, 1946, Bulgaria elected a new Grand National Assembly, and the Communist Party came to power. A few days after the 70th anniversary, panelists gathered for a chance to reflect not only on this communist revolution but also on those with major anniversaries in Cuba and China. Sixty years ago this past December, Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, and Che Guevara landed the yacht Granma in Cuba to start the revolution. Fifty years ago this last May, Mao's Cultural Revolution commenced in China. Our November 2 panel examined the role that the arts play in standardizing or challenging national myths during times of revolution and how they help us to remember and understand those revolts decades later. At the moment of their respective anniversaries, it commemorated mid-20th-century communist revolutions by examining the ways in which music, theater, and film have served to construct such cultural memories.

These anniversaries commemorate different moments, however. In Bulgaria, 1946 saw the final electoral stroke in a process that had commenced years earlier with a military coup d'état. In Cuba, 1956 marked an initial moment of revolt in a military struggle that would last for years. In China, the Cultural Revolution began nearly two decades after the

establishment of a communist government, but at a moment of significant reform and upheaval. Accordingly, none of the three presentations treated revolution as merely a moment or an event, but rather considered development and change over periods of time. The afternoon panel similarly constitutes part of a longer period of reflection that will develop over multiple years. Our series on Revolutions is building up to the centennial commemoration next fall of Russia's October Revolution of 1917.

TOPICS AND SPEAKERS:

Authentic or Revolutionary? Musical Fascination and Tourism at Bulgarian Traditional Music Festivals, Ian MacMillen, director of OCREECAS at Oberlin College

How to Sing a Revolution? Cuba, the Protest Song, and the Case of Silvio Rodríguez, Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón, visiting assistant professor of Hispanic studies at Oberlin College

Retaking Tiger Mountain: Revolutionary Art in Contemporary China, Lauren Parker, PhD candidate in comparative literature at Stanford University

Winter Term in Moscow and St. Petersburg

by Annika Krafcik

This past winter term, I joined a group of students who were studying Russian theater or Russian language on a journey to St. Petersburg and Moscow. Led by visiting assistant professor of Russian Luke Parker and teaching assistant Masha Tserdrik, the trip focused on Russian theater and featured seven excursions to historic Russian theaters in both cities, including the Mariinskii, the Alexandrinskii, the Bolshoi, and the Stanislavsky Electrotheater. When not seeing shows, we hit the streets, visiting the St. Petersburg metro, the Bronze Horseman, the Hermitage, the Museum of Political History, and the Russian museum in St. Petersburg, and the Kremlin, the Lenin Masoleum, the Tretyakov Gallery, and many cathedrals in Moscow.

A student who has studied Latin and Russian, I have had very little experience putting my classroom language-learning into practice with native speakers. In fact, my first time speaking Russian outside of the classroom was during my Aeroflot flight to Russia—while ordering water and my meal—and the experience was exhilarating. The rest of the trip followed suit. I strained to understand every word the Russian tour guide told us (before the translator beat me to it), and I aimed in coffee shops and groceries to avoid speaking English at all costs. In fact, one of my favorite moments on the trip was a short conversation I had with a woman working at the Anna Akhmatova museum. Having spotted many cats roaming around the exhibit, I asked her in Russian, “Why do you have so many cats?” She responded, “I don’t know. We just love cats.”



I hope to go back to Russia one day, when my Russian has expanded past coffee shop- and cat-related vocabulary, but until then, I am thankful for how this trip has shown me the relevancy of my Russian studies and inspired me to continue studying a language that stubbornly has six declensions.

Masha Gessen Returns to Oberlin!

Oberlin launched the centenary of the 1917 revolutions with a provocative voice from the 21st century. Renowned journalist, author, and LGBTQ activist Masha Gessen returned to Oberlin as our OCREECAS scholar-in-residence. During the first module of the spring 2017 semester, she taught *Never Remember: Reckoning with Stalin’s Great Terror*. The prolific Gessen, who publishes in such major periodicals as *The New Yorker*, *Washington Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, and *Vanity Fair*, structured the course upon her recent research, which will appear this fall in *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia*.

Gessen shared her impressions of the present political climate with the larger college community. On February 16 she delivered the talk “Uncertain Correspondence: What We Can and Cannot Learn about Donald Trump by Looking at Vladimir Putin” to a packed audience in Dye Lecture Hall. In the lively Q&A that followed her remarks, Gessen shared some of her personal experiences defying Putin’s regime and stressed the importance of interpreting the Trump administration’s ties with

Russia without engaging in conspiracy-thinking.

On February 22, the Apollo Theatre featured a free screening of *Pussy vs. Putin*, a 2013 documentary by Gogol’s Wives that features an inside look at the group Pussy Riot. When Gessen first visited Oberlin in spring 2014, she spoke about the punk rockers, which was the focus of her book *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot* (2014). During this year’s post-screening discussion, Gessen recalled how she first met the two directors, the conditions under which she wrote *Words Will Break Cement* and how time has cast a different light on both the group and the film itself.

Gessen’s most recent books include *The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy* (2015)—a study of the Boston Marathon bombers, the Tsarnaevs—and *Where the Jews Aren’t: The Sad and Absurd Story of Birobidzhan, Russia’s Jewish Autonomous Region* (2016). Gessen’s on-campus presence invigorated both students and faculty alike. Russian and REES faculty wish to thank Masha for lively discussions—on a myriad of topics—with a vigorous and rigorous mind.

Faculty and Staff Updates

LILIANA MILKOVA

Photos courtesy of the Allen Memorial Art Museum

Liliana Milkova continues to serve as curator of academic programs at the Allen Memorial Art Museum. In this capacity, Milkova participated in two panels last fall at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) in Washington, D.C. One, chaired by Oberlin College Visiting Assistant Professor of History Christopher Stolarski, addressed best practices for object-based learning in the Russian and East European studies curriculum and included a presentation from Molly Thomasy Blasing, assistant professor of Russian studies at the University of Kentucky and formerly a visiting instructor in Oberlin’s Russian department. Milkova’s presentation addressed the multiple possibilities of effectively teaching language and culture through interactions with original works of art. Milkova presented also at a panel

on the 20th-century Russian reader and viewer. Drawing from her research on underground artistic practices in the late Soviet period, she focused on the phenomenological experience of viewing and reading as elicited by Soviet non-conformist artist Erik Bulatov’s 1970s and 1980s “word-paintings.”

Milkova also oversaw the introduction of new Russian and East European artworks into the curriculum. Courses in Russian East Europeana studies, German language and literatures, and the First-Year Seminar Program recently utilized prints from American artist Jim Dine’s portfolio *A History of Communism* (2012) as a vehicle for the discussion of life and culture behind the Iron Curtain. Dine’s portfolio, which is in the collection of Oberlin College’s Allen Memorial Art Museum, draws from an archive of 100 lithographic stones made between 1946 and 1989 by anonymous students of a Socialist art academy in former East Germany. Dine selected 45 of them to reactivate and add to using his signature visual vocabulary of saws, hammers, pliers, scissors and other tools rendered in black ink. “I wanted a black view of the image and a sense of Berlin in the East as I knew it when the horrible wall was still up,” explains the artist.

Other recent museum acquisitions that might be of interest to REES faculty and students include a 1979 portrait of Anna Akhmatova by Dine; a 1988 photographic still-life by two of the founders of the Soviet conceptual art movement Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin; a 1958



David Burliuk, Ukrainian, 1882–1967; *The Bridge*, 1921; Oil on canvas; Gift of the Louis and Annette Kaufman Trust, 2016.36.29



Jim Dine, American, b. 1935; *Untitled*, no. 28 from the series *A History of Communism*, 2012; Stone lithograph with additional etching; Gift of the artist to commemorate his long friendship with Douglas Baxter ’72, 2015.32.28



Jim Dine, American, b. 1935; *Untitled*, no. 28 from the series *A History of Communism*, 2012; Stone lithograph with additional etching; Gift of the artist to commemorate his long friendship with Douglas Baxter ’72, 2015.32.28



Rimma Gerlovina, American, born in Russia, 1951; Valeriy Gerlovin, American, born in Russia, 1945; Mark Berghash, American, b. 1935; *Still-A-Life*, 1988; Gift of Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz, 2016.19.25

Faculty and Staff Updates, *cont.*

photograph of the Bolshoi Ballet School in Moscow by the renowned Hungarian-born photojournalist Cornell Capa; and a dynamic and colorful painting, *The Bridge* (1921), by the Ukraining avant-garde artist David Burliuk.

STILIANA MILKOVA

Stiliana Milkova, assistant professor of comparative literature, published five peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on Russian and Italian literature. She also translated and published four literary texts from Italian. Her review of Jovanka Živanović's *Fragile Travelers*, translated from Serbo-Croatian by Jovanka Kalaba,

appeared in the international journal for literary translation *Asymptote* (July 2016). Stiliana presented a paper on E. A. Poe and Nikolai Karamzin at the annual convention of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) at Harvard University in March 2016. Stiliana also helped organize the annual Oberlin College Translation Symposium in spring 2016 which featured Oberlin students' literary translation along with keynote speaker Benjamin Paloff, associate professor of Slavic literatures and languages at the University of Michigan. In fall 2016, while on faculty leave, Stiliana traveled to Switzerland on a Powers Travel

Grant to research Fyodor Dostoevsky's sojourn there in the late 1860s.

IAN MACMILLEN

Ian MacMillen rejoined the Oberlin faculty in fall 2016 to teach in the Russian & East European Studies program and direct OCREECAS, where he previously held a postdoctoral fellowship before taking the post of assistant professor of ethnomusicology at Whitman College. He is currently completing a book entitled *Playing It Dangerously: Race, Affective Block, and Tambura Bands in Croatia and Its Intimates*.

Student and Recent Graduate Updates

This past year, several seniors and recent graduates traveled to Russia to hold internships or to conduct research for honors theses under the aegis of Oberlin grants or study abroad programs. In 2016, Jenny Bird '16 and Will Watkins '15 were awarded OCREECAS internships and placed at the European University at St. Petersburg. With the recently redoubled and seemingly successful efforts of Russia's Federal Service for the Supervision of Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor) to force the closure of the liberal graduate university—a move that many at the university and at allied institutions in the European Union have characterized as a politically motivated trumping up of violation notices—it is unclear whether we will be able to place graduates at this university again. Jenny and Will's experiences there could, sadly, provide them with a rare inside look at the late days of an academic administration under attack from members of the Russian Parliament. We will look forward to hearing more from Jenny and Will, as well as from Professor of Sociology Veljko Vujačić (currently provost of the European University at St. Petersburg), in the future. In the meantime, we have been able to proceed with numerous other internship and research placements elsewhere in Russia, four of which are detailed below.

SARAH CHATTA: HONORS THESIS RESEARCH IN MOSCOW

In the fall of 2016, I studied on the Middlebury Schools Abroad program in Moscow, where I did research for my honors thesis on the popularity of Bollywood Cinema in the USSR. Oral interviews made up a substantial part of my research, and at first, this task seemed daunting. I asked myself—where was I

going to meet people? And, with my laughable Russian, would they take me seriously? In early September I gathered my confidence and headed to the Indian Consulate in Moscow for a screening of *True Light*, a documentary about gold in India. At the security checkpoint, I was putting away my passport when I overheard a woman speaking Urdu to the guard behind me.



Guild of Cinematographers “Dom Kino” Building, Moscow.
(Photo by Sarah Chatta)

Student and Recent Graduate Updates, *cont.*

I turned around, and an elderly Russian woman met my gaze with a large smile. In Russian, I asked her how she knew Urdu. She told me she had spent her life working for a radio station in Moscow that broadcasted news in Urdu. When I asked her about Bollywood cinema, her face lit up. She led me inside and pointed to other people in the room who she thought might grant me an interview for my project, and then she handed me her own telephone number. That night I arranged interviews with four people whose testimonies proved significant to my thesis later on. I continued attending film festivals and movie screenings advertised by the Indian Consulate, which took me all over Moscow, and this haphazard approach acquainted me with the city and its diverse people. Memories of Bollywood cinema were, perhaps, the richest material I collected, but nevertheless I tried other methods as well. It was not difficult to gain access to the Library of Cinema-art in the name of Eisenstein or the Russian State Library in the name of Lenin. However, I was a complete novice in these labyrinths of possible information, and again, I was forced to rely on the kindness and generosity of strangers; in the library this meant librarians and research assistants who were not always so keen to help me. My experience can be summed up with this anecdote: One day, on a whim, I walked into the Guild of Cinematographers in the heart of Moscow. The guard had no desire to assist me, but by chance, a secretary walked by just as he was refusing me. She hugged me, asked me what my name was, and led me to her office. A couple of phone calls later, I was sitting in front of two other people, a man and a woman, who had the names and contact information of every important film critic in the Moscow area. It was determined that



Moscow. (Photo by Sarah Chatta)

two of these film critics were relevant to me. On the way out, as I was putting on my coat, the secretary from before stopped me and asked me to open my backpack. I was startled by this request, but quickly obliged her. She began to shove dozens of apples inside my gaping backpack, the last fresh apples, she said, from her dacha.

IAN GILCHRIST '17: ARCHIVAL RESEARCH IN ST. PETERSBURG

In January of this year I traveled to St. Petersburg for 12 days to do archival research for a senior honors thesis. My thesis examines the city's metro system, looking beyond its role as a system of transportation to understanding its symbolic significance as a means of representing the Soviet state. I traveled to St. Petersburg to look mostly at state documents that would reveal official attitudes towards the metro outside of what appeared in mass media.

During my research, I primarily visited the State Archive of Historico-Political Documents (TsGAIPD), to look at meeting minutes and other documents issued by the party committee that oversaw the metro. These documents provided valuable insights into my work. Amidst the minutia and administrative tedium, these documents held interesting conversations about maintaining public behavior in the metro, as well as descriptions of construction and the incorporation of modern technology while digging tunnels. I also conducted research in the Russian National Library, looking at children's books and tourist guides on the metro. Just before leaving, I was able to visit the St. Petersburg Metro Museum which, while it keeps strange hours and features rather kitschy models of station interiors, maintains an interesting collection of documents and memorabilia.

My visit was a short one, and my language abilities taxed the efficiency of my work. Gaining access to the archives and the library was a master class in the much-stereotyped Russian bureaucracy. Despite this, I was struck by the patience and enthusiasm that the archivists and librarians showed me. Ultimately, I left Russia encouraged that as an undergrad studying third-year Russian I could, albeit stumblingly, navigate the system and conduct useful research.

LILY POSNER '17: OLGA BERGGOLTS AND A TRIP TO THE SOVIET ARCHIVES

I am a fourth-year history and Russian & Eastern European studies major. I've been studying Russian since my first year at Oberlin, and I wanted to put it to use, which is how I ended up writing my senior Honors thesis on the Soviet poet and propagandist Olga Berggolts, and travelling to Russia to find out more about her. Berggolts made a name for herself in World War II as the “voice of Leningrad,” broadcasting her poems over the radio to the Blockaded city to inspire hope and resolve

Student and Recent Graduate Updates, *cont.*



Lily Posner with a Statue of Olga Berggolts at the Site of the Latter's Rebuilt House in St. Petersburg. (Photo by Ivan Samuilov)

in the starving people. My project looks at her poetry and diaries after the war, looking specifically at how she balanced her intense faith in the Soviet Union with her deep misgivings about Stalinism. With the help of an Artz grant, I was able to travel to St. Petersburg, formerly Leningrad, to the Central State Archive of Literature and Art, where I had the pleasure of reading her letters and drafts, paging through transcripts of radio broadcasts, deciphering her handwriting, the comments and cross-outs of literary censors. While I had read plenty about her before the trip, it's quite another thing to hold an object and know that the 'D' key on her typewriter stuck, and all the 'Ds' had to be written in purple ink. Moreover, trying to navigate Russian bureaucracy was really good language practice. I presented "And There in the Postwar Silence": Olga Berggolts and Soviet Subjectivity, 1945-1954 at the Senior Symposium this May.

DREW WISE '15: INTERNSHIP AT LYCEUM 239 IN ST. PETERSBURG

I spent most of the 2015-16 school year as an intern teacher of English at school 239 in Saint Petersburg. The school—or lyceum, as they prefer to call it—is specialized in math and physics, with both subjects taught at an impressively high level. It is well known that Russians do not take their hard sciences lightly, and at 239 (as the school is affectionately known), all students take two years of rigorous calculus and coursework in

optics and quantum physics. The school has an impressive list of alumni, including Grigori Perelman, who might be the most stereotypically brilliant and insane mathematician alive.

I saw a list of some of 239's most successful alumni when I first arrived at the school. On my first day, my main supervisor, a sharp old English teacher named Sergei Petrovich, showed me around the school's main building. Speaking perfect English, Sergei Petrovich pointed out a series of white plaques on the walls, each covered with names written in gold lettering. These, he explained, were students who had won academic prizes at the All-Russian, All-Union, and international levels—some of the country's best and brightest. As Sergei Petrovich tells it, these names can be a headache when government officials visit the school. The inquisitive official will ask about the high achievers, and school administrators will tip-toe around the fact that many of them have long since left for the U.S., the UK, Israel, and so on. The punch line: "Tell me, sir, does your school educate Russians, or only foreigners?"

As far as I can remember, the first Russians I ever encountered were the grandparents of Tommy Pickles on *The Rugrats*. Boris and Minka Kropotkin were the quintessential immigrants: accented, eccentric, stuck in "old country" ways. Although Boris and Minka were probably more Jewish than Russian with regards to their identity, they inspired in me a fascination for the Russian diaspora, a subject I meditated on during my time at 239. The people I met there were intensely proud of their country and city; at the same time, many had lived abroad or had relatives abroad, and no one was ignorant of the possibilities outside of Russia. The tension between staying in Russia and leaving for green, English-speaking pastures is felt keenly at a place where talent is concentrated as heavily as it is at 239.



Drew Wise in front of the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo outside of St. Petersburg.