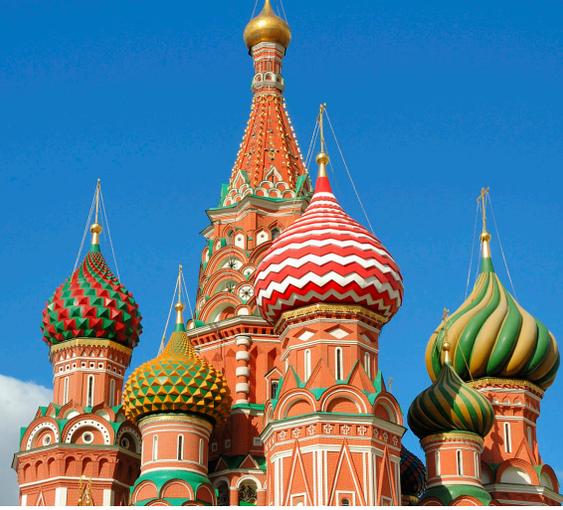


REESNews



Spring 2016 • Volume 5

A Note from the Chair

BY STEPHEN CROWLEY

GREETINGS FROM SUNNY, SPRINGTIME OBERLIN, and best wishes to our friends and alumni. We have been busy as usual, organizing lectures, symposia, and a well-timed mini-course entitled Understanding Crimea. We have also been fortunate to send more students on productive internships to Russia and its environs. The details follow. As always, we would love to hear

from you; feel free to send an update to scrowley@oberlin.edu.

Our special thanks go to Tom Newlin, associate professor of Russian, who is currently enjoying a well-deserved sabbatical leave, after admirably serving as chair of the Russian department for the past four years. Many thanks also to Lujza Demuthová '18 for her thoughtful editing and compiling of this newsletter.

Sounds of East European Nationalism

In April 2015, OCREECAS welcomed speaker Philip Bohlman, the Mary Werkman Distinguished Service Professor of Music and the Humanities in the College at the University of Chicago.

During his hour-long lecture "Borderland and Bloodlands: Music along the Boundaries of East European Nationalism," Bohlman drew upon his new work on music and global nationalism, reflecting on a larger history of music in boundary regions of nations in Eastern Europe.

Bohlman has worked with diverse methods and perspectives in music scholarship to forge an ethnomusicology built upon foundations in ethnography, history, and performance. He is particularly interested in exploring the interstices between music, religion, race, nation, and colonial encounter. The study of Jewish music in modernity has provided a primary focus for his research for 35 years, and, since 1998, the context for his activities as artistic



Philip Bohlman

director of the New Budapest Orpheum Society (a Jewish cabaret and ensemble-in-residence at the Humanities Division). His books include *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (1988), *The Land Where Two Streams Flow: Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel* (1989), *Jewish Music and*

Modernity (2008), and *Hanns Eisler: In der Musik ist es anders* (with Andrea F. Bohlman, 2012). He is writing an introduction to the study of ethnomusicology for Cambridge University Press and a book on music and global nationalisms, for which he received a 2013 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship.

The Art of Synaesthesia

by Polina Dimova

ORGANIZED BY POLINA DIMOVA, visiting assistant professor of Russian, the Synaesthesia Symposium at Oberlin (March 13-14, 2015) celebrated the art and science of synaesthesia: the figurative or physiological mixing of the senses. In a collaboration between college, conservatory, and art museum, students and

faculty across disciplines showcased their research and creative work, reflecting on or evoking multisensory experiences. Students from Dimova's Russian course Synaesthetic Utopias Across the Russian Modernist Arts and seniors from the neuroscience seminar on perception taught by Leslie Kwakye, assistant

The Art of Synaesthesia, *cont.*

professor of neuroscience, participated on par with established scholars on research and creative panels.

Edward Hubbard, assistant professor of neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, gave the Mead-Swing keynote lecture, “Hearing Colors, Tasting Shapes,” on the science of synaesthesia. He convincingly showed that synaesthesia is a real phenomenon that may shed light on human psychology, thought, and creativity. In her Clowes keynote address, “Chaikovsky, Synaesthecized,” Anna Nisnevich, assistant professor of music at the University of Pittsburgh, reflected on the highly individual nature of synaesthesia. She first showed Chaikovsky’s Sugar-Plum Fairy dance from *Fantasia*, which is visually depicted using deep blue hues, but explained that as a synaesthete herself, she saw the E minor key of the music as swirling pinkish-red shapes. Nisnevich then moved to a fascinating presentation on

the exchanges between Russian poetry, opera, and Chaikovsky’s music, mediated by the metaphor of the ballerina’s “poetic back.” Using her own formulation during the following discussion, Dimova suggested that the “poetic back” is a synaesthetic metaphor: a poetic figure that allowed for the exchanges among the arts in late Imperial Russia.

The symposium opened at the Allen Memorial Art Museum, where Leah Barber ’18, a comparative literature major, invited attendees to enter the multi-sensory worlds of two



Virginia Zucchi, 1884. Noted for her supple “poetic back,” Zucchi danced at the Marinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 1885-1888.

AMAM Slavic artworks: *Plans Cosmiques* by Czech avant-garde artist Frank Kupka and *Tête d’un Pierrot* by Russian émigré artist Pavel Tchelitchew. Barber followed her interactive discussion with a theoretical presentation on synaesthesia and ekphrasis on an interdisciplinary research panel. Panelist Adam Jeffreys ’19, a violin major, discussed the unifying aspects of synaesthesia in Socialist Realist literature and visual art, while Claudia Macdonald, professor of music history, traced the associations between music and color during the 20th century.

Important issues concerning synaesthesia, autism, and neurodiversity were discussed during the neuroscience panel by Kwakye, neuroscience major Kathryn Hirabayashi ’15, and Ralph Savarese, professor of English at Grinnell College. On the creative panel, David Savarese ’17, an anthropology and

Synaesthesia Symposium Poster. Image: Frank Kupka “Plans Cosmiques.” Design by Nadya Primak ’13, a Russian and art major.

creative writing major, poignantly contrasted neurodiverse and neuronormative perception in his synaesthetic poem “Swoon”: “My senses always fall in love: / they spin, swoon; / they lose themselves in one / another’s arms. / Your senses live alone / like bachelors.” A non-communicating autistic student with synaesthesia, DJ (David), collaborated with Regina Larre Campuzano ’14, a cinema studies major, who brought DJ’s poem to visual life in her animation. Finally, Sarah Chatta ’17, a Russian and creative writing major, movingly read a nonfiction creative piece that recorded how multimodal perception colored the day-to-day life of an Oberlin friend with synaesthesia.

The symposium culminated in a multimedia concert on Saturday evening. In a mesmerizing performance, Aaron Wolff ’17, a cello and comparative literature major, and Laura Spector ’17, a piano major, played Alexander Scriabin’s Etude, op. 8, N. 11 with colorful lights based on Scriabin’s own synaesthetic associations. Miryam Coppersmith ’15 presented excerpts from her multimedia dance thesis *Render* and discussed the inspiring influence of Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, on her piece, explaining how bodily movements and technology enhance the senses. In his reflections on the symposium, keynote speaker Ed Hubbard commended its “top-notch” quality. In particular, he was “very impressed with how poised, articulate, and confident students were in presenting their work.” Hubbard, who will host the American Synesthesia Association conference at UW-Madison in 2016, encouraged interdisciplinary artists and researchers interested in attending to submit an abstract. The CFP will be available this spring on the SAS site: <http://www.synesthesia.info/call.html>.

The Synaesthesia Symposium was generously sponsored by the Sherman Fairchild Foundation Arts & Technology Initiative, the Mead-Swing Fund, the departments of Neuroscience and Russian, and the Oberlin Media Center. It included a collaboration with TIMARA’s PlayFest, organized by Lyn Goeringer, a TIMARA postdoctoral fellow.

Strolling through the Garden of the Empire

by Lujza Demuthova

Crimea is an island. Not geographically (though one never knows with the rising sea level), but historically. Fought for and passed between different states and cultures, Crimea has never really belonged to the land over the bridge of *Perekopskiy peresheek* [Isthmus of Perekop]. Crimea is a garden whose “exotic coastline and dramatic mountain ranges inspired the imagination of poets and painters” and even numerous rulers, merchants, and travelers. Crimea is so much more than the clash of two states or its most recent annexation. In an effort to take us toward “Understanding Crimea: Garden of the Empire,” visiting scholar Dimiter Kenarov led us through the peninsula from its Ottoman times through all three annexations and up until to its many probable futures.

Kenarov, a native of Bulgaria and an alumnus of Middlebury and UC-Berkeley, is not a professor by profession. He is simply a writer, as his online profile informs us, yet in his case that entails much more than one might think—he is a freelance journalist, poet, literary critic, and translator. Due to Kenarov’s special interest in environmental journalism, Oberlin first encountered him in 2012 when he participated in a discussion on fracking as a part of a reporting project titled “Shale Gas: From Poland to Pennsylvania.” Three years later, Kenarov accepted REES’s invitation to return to Oberlin, this time as a visiting scholar.

Although his initial intention was to offer a course encompassing the entire region of the Black Sea, Kenarov realized early on that he could not do justice to its rich culture and history in the seven weeks of his appointment. Having recently reported from Simferopol, he eventually settled on the Crimean Peninsula, one of the most turbulent areas along the coastline. His firsthand experience and great passion for Crimea’s history, present, and future took Oberlin students far beyond the bounds of a college seminar.

Although he enjoyed putting the course curriculum together, it was not something done easily. Despite there being an entire branch of science (Крымология / “Crimea-logy”) dedicated to the subject, only a few hundred books have been translated to English. Initially seen as a disadvantage, Kenarov admits, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as the scope of readings he could assign for a seven-week course had been naturally limited, and he did not have to make the hard choice himself. As someone who took the seminar, I can confirm that his selection was creative and drew on a great variety of sources: 18th-century travel journals, Tolstoy and Aksyonov, photo essays, Vice dispatches, youtube videos, and a BuzzFeed article.

Staying close to home, Kenarov did not offer only mere facts—he brought stories and experience. When asked what surprised him most during this, his first teaching appointment, he commended his students for their engagement and prior knowledge of Crimea’s past and present.



Dimiter Kenarov

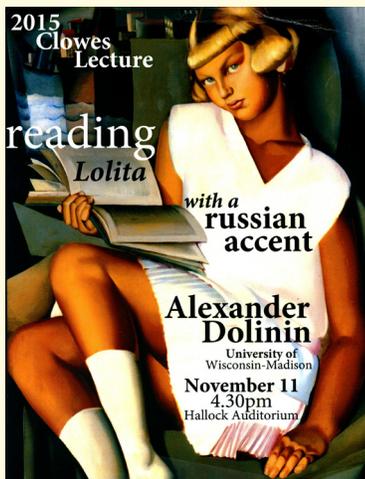
On October 14, Kenarov delivered a talk titled “The Umbrella Murder,” in which he discussed his research and works of the Bulgarian dissident writer Georgi Markov:

At around 6:30 pm on September 7, 1978, [he] felt a slight sting in the back of his right thigh while walking on London’s Waterloo bridge. Markov didn’t know it yet, but he had just been shot by an agent of the Bulgarian State Security Service (SSS) with a 1.52-millimeter platinum-iridium pellet containing a minuscule quantity of highly toxic poison. Four days later, despite the best attempts of British doctors to save him, Georgi Markov was pronounced dead. Thus ended the life of one of Bulgaria’s most talented writers, and began the story of what may be the most lurid assassination of the Cold War era, a case known worldwide as “the umbrella murder.” The political and tabloid uses of the crime, however, have completely overshadowed the subject and ignored the deep complexity and internal contradictions that characterized Markov’s colorful biography and his outstanding literary oeuvre.

Following his short time at Oberlin, Kenarov slipped back into working full time on Georgi Markov’s biography and translating a selection of his essays into English.

When asked if there was another course he could see himself teaching, he reached back to the coasts of the Black Sea. Odessa, an exotic cousin of Saint Petersburg, has captured the eye of many a writer, artist, and traveler, who on her behalf produced, captured, and circulated her stories. We are certain that all of them, together with Kenarov’s passion for Odessa, would amount to another great seminar, and we would certainly love to have him back one day. A traveler-journalist like Dimiter Kenarov does not often wander back to the same old places. But we don’t mind. We know that wherever the winds of the Black Sea take him, he’ll always report back with some new material. In his own words: “The world is wide and interesting and there is a story even in the most boring place.”

Reading *Lolita* with Russian Accent



The Russian department was pleased to host Nabokov expert Alexander Dolinin to campus on December 1, 2015, invited at the initiative of Professor Luke Parker.

Dolinin, a professor of Slavic languages and literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a scholar of Russian literature, renowned for his expertise on the relations between Russian and Anglo-American fiction. He has authored several books, including *Pushkin and England* (2007), *The Real Life of the Writer Sirin: Works on Nabokov* (2004),

and *History Dressed Up as a Novel: Walter Scott and his Readers* (1988).

Dolinin delivered the 2015 Clowes Lecture titled “Reading *Lolita* with a Russian Accent.” Thanks to Bob Peters and the Cooper International Learning Center, you can find a video of the lecture [on YouTube](#) or look it up as *Alexander Dolinin at Oberlin College*.

Apart from the lecture, Dolinin shared his thoughts and time with students of “Nabokov Noir” over lunch, giving them feedback on their final project ideas.

Beyond Oberlin

Thanks to OCREECAS and the support of Maia Solovieva, the main organizer of OCREECAS internships, Oberlin is able to send several students every year to study and intern at various organizations in Russia and the East European region. Not only academically enriching, such a step beyond Oberlin often takes them on a life long journey.

Samantha Celmer '14

Sam is in the second and final year of her MA program in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Since December 2015 she has also been working at the university as the programming and outreach coordinator for the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center (REEEC). Her passion for Russian language and East European culture, however, did not make itself so evident at first.

Russian language and I had a tumultuous beginning. I took Russian 101 and 102 my first year at Oberlin, and although I enjoyed it, I wasn't ready to commit to the difficult language and opted not to take it my second year. However, I couldn't quit completely, so instead I took Russian history one semester and Russian literature the next, and by the end of the year I had been wooed back to the language. By the end of my senior year at Oberlin, I had enough credits to add a REES major onto my history major. What started out as a vague interest in something that was less commonly taught became a passion that Oberlin allowed me to cultivate and prepared me to pursue once I graduated.

Although I didn't take the opportunity to study abroad while at Oberlin, OCREECAS did offer me the amazing opportunity to intern at a language organization in Tver, Russia, the summer after I graduated. The experience was difficult but immensely rewarding, to say the least. In addition to getting the invaluable



Sam with her host family—Sergei, Nastia, and Marusia (on her lap)—during the internship in Tver, Russia

experience of applying for a grant and planning the intricate details of a solo trip abroad, I was able to live in a foreign country halfway across the world for two months, which is an amazing feat for someone coming from a family that has never left the North American continent.

The knowledge I acquired through OCREECAS' opportunities allowed me to get to where I am today, occupying a full-time position as outreach and programming coordinator for the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. At UIUC, I plan events, bring speakers to campus, and find ways to bring the culture and history of the REEE-region to schools and communities that might not know

Beyond Oberlin, *cont.*

much about it. My job involves a lot of creativity and hard work, but I'm so glad I was able to find a path that involves my passion for Russian studies.

Drew Wise '15

Drew, now also an alumnus, has crossed the ocean to study in Russia for the third time, this time as an OCREECAS intern. His most recent journey took him to Saint Petersburg, where he teaches English and constantly makes new discoveries about Russia, its culture, and its people.

Since the end of September, I have been teaching English at a Mathematics and Physics Lyceum in the heart of Saint Petersburg. I work in a beautiful building that dates from the 18th century, and the history is breathtaking: The likes of Joseph Brodsky, Peter Fabergé, and Grigori Perelman have all passed through the halls of the so-called Annenschule. My responsibilities include leading class discussions, giving presentations, directing an English language club, and acting in an English-language theater group (though I am not terrifically theatrical by nature). This work, although interesting and rewarding, can often be quite difficult. Part of the challenge for me, I suppose, lies in the fact that the school is really—for lack of a better word—Russian. Allow me to explain.

In the past I have heard about Russian openness and the strictness of Russian education. An acquaintance from Moscow, for instance, once told me about the so-called “доска позора” (doska pozora/board of shame), where teachers publicly post the grades of underachieving students. Still, I was not prepared for the directness with which teachers share their opinions of their pupils, oftentimes in front of the pupil in question. (Their evaluations, I should add, range from high praise—“I think he is a genius”—to, well, lesser praise—“Frankly, I don't like that student.”) Furthermore, various olimpiadas, or academic tour-



Drew Wise in Russia

naments, figure prominently in school life. Competition among the students is often openly encouraged. Everyone's grades are a matter of public knowledge.

Then there is the theatrical, the poetic, and the simply strange, all aspects of the mysterious Russian soul. Most weeks students and faculty gather in a gorgeous presentation hall for a half-hour “Literary Tuesday”; in this capacity I have watched a production of Dead Souls and a collection of scenes from the life of Pushkin. The school also hosts “Songful Saturdays,” during which an invited artist plays Russian bard songs for the audience. Lastly, a class that might be loosely translated as “Fundamentals of Life Safety,” and which I secretly suspect is a military-oriented Soviet holdover, enters into my “strange” category.

This is now my third trip to Russia, but I can say unequivocally that I have never been this close to actual Russian life before. Nor, for that matter, have I ever felt so decidedly American. With time I am becoming more comfortable, though, and I would highly recommend this school for future OCREECAS interns.

Faculty News and Notes

Stephen Crowley

Professor of Politics, Chair of REES and Peace & Conflict Studies

Stephen Crowley is coeditor of *Working Through the Past: Labor and Authoritarian Legacies in Comparative Perspective* (Cornell University Press, 2015). He also published “The Reemergence of Class in the Wake of the First ‘Classless’ Society” in *East European Politics & Societies*. An article titled “Monotowns and the Political Economy of Industrial Restructuring in Russia,” is forthcoming

in *Post-Soviet Affairs*. In the 2016-17 academic year, Steve will be on research status as Oberlin's Thomas J. Klutznick Fellow, working on a project titled “The Other Russia: Labor Politics and the Putin Regime in Challenging Economic Times.”

Polina Dimova

Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian

Polina Dimova has been hard at work completing her book manuscript *The Synaesthetic Metaphor in European Modernism Across the Arts*. In conjunction with this project, she taught

Synaesthetic Utopias in Russian Modernism (spring 2015) and organized the Synaesthesia Symposium, showcasing the interdisciplinary research and creative experiments of Oberlin students and faculty. She further penned an entry on synaesthesia for *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (REM, 2016), and in September presented a Tuesday Tea Talk, “Synaesthesia, Abstraction, and the Perceiving Body: Wassily Kandinsky and Frank Kupka” at the AMAM as a part of this year's museum theme, The Body. Additionally, Polina published

Faculty News and Notes, *cont.*

an article on Zamiatin's figurations of Skriabin's music in *Ulbandus: The Slavic Review of Columbia University* for the volume *Hearing Texts: The Auditory in Slavic Literature*, which she presented at the AATSEEL national conference in Vancouver. Her work on Zamiatin also inspired her to teach a new course, Russian Fantasy and Science Fiction (fall 2015). Finally, she presented a paper, "The Perils of the Visual in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*" at the 2015 ASEES convention in Philadelphia, a topic which she would pursue further when teaching her new seminar, *Adultery and Art in the Russian Novel* (spring 2016).

Arlene Forman

Associate Professor and Chair of Russian

Arlene Forman became chair of the Russian department, taking over from Tom Newlin, who served in the position for four years. Arlene has also been active at publishing: her review of Ella Omel'chenko's debut film *Patients* was published in the October 2015 issue of the journal *Kinokultura*. Along with the renowned Russian film critic Anzhelika Artyukh, Arlene organized a public screening and discussion of the documentary film *Pussy vs. Putin* during winter term 2016.

Luke Parker

Visiting Assistant Professor and Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow

Luke Parker joined the Russian department from Stanford University, where he taught in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric after completing a PhD in Slavic. During his first year as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, he taught *Nabokov Noir: Cinema, Tyranny, Crime, Parody*, and he currently teaches *Russian Exile: The Literature of Displacement*. In April, Luke planned to take students to present alongside faculty at the Midwest Slavic Conference at Ohio State University. During his two years at Oberlin, Luke will be working on a book titled *Nabokov*

Noir: Mass Culture and the Art of Exile, for which he will be carrying out archival research in New York.

Tim Scholl

Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature, OCLC Director

In fall 2015, Tim Scholl became director of the Oberlin Center for Languages and Cultures. In October 2015, he presented a paper titled "Among Empires: Marius Petipa's Responses to Late Nineteenth-Century Russian Nationalisms" at the international symposium *From Bordeaux to St. Petersburg, Marius Petipa and the Russian Ballet in Bordeaux, France*. Only a month later, he presented at another conference at the Finnish National Opera. His paper "Empire and Domesticity" engages notions of late-Imperial Russian foreign policy as reflected in the famous cycle of Petipa/Chaikovsky ballets (*Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Nutcracker*). He also authored a chapter "Student Interactions, Race and the Media: The Oberlin College Choir 1964 Tour of the USSR and Romania" in a volume called *Music, Art & Diplomacy*, soon to be published by Ashgate.

Maia Solovieva

Lecturer of Russian and Faculty in Residence

At the end of the summer 2015, Maia Solovieva had the proofs of her article "Reading Chekhov's Short Fiction: the Invisible Language of Culture" sent to the publisher. This was a collaborative work with Brian Baer, professor of Russian and translation studies at Kent State University, and will be published in *The Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, the MLA edition. Maia loves incorporating Chekhov's works into her language classes and sees his life and work as one of the best expressions of Russian culture. In the late spring 2015, Maia, together with Alla Epstein (Wellesley College), started a project on extracurricular activities at Russian departments in the U.S. They

collected 48 responses from different institutions and found that such activities have been transforming into "home immersion" environments across America's college campuses. Their article is currently under review, and they are looking forward to working on the issue of benefits and challenges of extracurricular activities. Maia runs the internship program for students interested in studying or interning in Russia. Despite the recent turbulence between Russia and the U.S., Oberlin still manages to offer students many opportunities, each leading to a rich and rewarding experience.

Veljko Vujačić

Professor of Sociology

From his foreign appointment Veljko Vujačić writes: "The last year has been a most exciting one for me. My book *Nationalism, Myth and the State in Russia and Serbia: Antecedents of the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* came out with Cambridge University Press in March 2015. Next, I was appointed as provost of the European University at St. Petersburg for three years (2015-2018). I want to work on deepening the cooperation between Oberlin and the EUSP in the near future. Russia is a hot topic in the news these days, and all I can say is that things look very different here from what they seem to be in newspapers and blogs. The scene is lively, the people are really nice (unless they are really rude, but America's God invented New York as well!), the high culture is spectacular, and the pirozhki are just that, no more and no less than pirozhki. And, man, Putin is just an awesome dude (don't listen to the Western media)! True, he could use a dose of Oberlin political correctness, but he is tired of "correct the party line." If you don't know what that is, you missed my class, which is a pity, but I am sure my colleagues will explain. Come by; I will show you hipster bars in St. Peter. Are you ready for that fateful encounter? Don't worry, Russians know both how to live and (let) die."