

UNDER AURORA BOREALIS LIGHT

Baltic region poets will be soon networked with translators, publishers and historians to acquaint the readers with most interesting poetic works in Russia, Finland, and Sweden. The festival of modern poetry, translation and publishing business Aurora Borealis will promote that. It is held in Helsinki for the second year.

Festival organizer Tatyana Pertseva who heads the Litera creative youth organization told the Amber Bridge about the new Russian-Finnish tradition and prospects for cultural relations opened by the festival devoted to an outstanding historical personality of Finland - Aurora Stjernvall-Demidova-Karamzina.

What is Aurora Borealis festival, how did it emerge and how is it related to Aurora Karamzina?

The festival began in 2012 as a continuation of Christmas Candle Meetings project which the Litera studio has been organizing for five years jointly with ITAR-TASS bureau and bringing poets from Russia, Baltic countries and Northern Europe together. All the five years it was only enthusiasm but the project succeeded. In 2012 it was decided to change the format of Christmas Meetings into a festival and unite under its banner not only poets, but also playwrights, scientists, translators, and journalists. The project is implemented with the support of the Fund of Social-Economic

Programs and personal support of S. A. Filatov. The organizers of the Aurora Borealis festival comprise the Russian Cultural-Democratic Union, the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Helsinki, the Litera Society, and the Runo bar-studio.

The idea enjoyed support in creative circles of Russia and Finland and has been successfully implemented for two years. In January 2012 our festival was attended by famous poets and writers from Ukraine, Russia, Finland, and Sweden. In 2013, besides winter events, the festival Aurora Borealis with participation of poet and translator E. Ioffe, bilingual writer A. Perttu, poet and translator K. Korto, Editor-in-Chief of Other Shores magazine O. Pussinen, as well as scientist and poet N. Perevezentseva from St. Petersburg held poetic evenings, literary seminars and master classes. Participants included V. Mesyats (Moscow), A. Korovin (Moscow) A. Gritsman (New York), N. Reznik (Colorado), A. Ostudin (Kazan), M. Garber (Luxembourg), A. Melnik (Liege), A. Radashkevich and G. Pogozheva (Paris) and other distinguished writers, translators and scientists from the whole world.

We decided to devote the festival to Aurora Karamzina and called it Aurora Borealis as Polar lights are also called. The name presupposes northern realities and simultaneously associates with Aurora Karamzina, an outstanding beauty of the XIX century to whom Pushkin, Baratynsky, and other poets devoted verses. For organizers the role of Aurora Karamzina as public figure is also important. She was a maid of honor at the empress and advocated Finnish interests

in the Royal Court and helped Finland join the Russian Empire as a Grand Duchy. She was a woman who did a lot for the country politically and as a charity provider.

We emphasize historic moments related to the history of Sweden, Russia, and Finland in order to deeply study historic processes and better comprehend modern facts.

Does the festival signify the beginning of major and long work?

Yes, we have big plans. On May 24-25 Helsinki will host a seminar of translators, publishers, historians from Russia, Finland, and Sweden. We want to create a network of translators, writers, publishers and historians. We want to promote cultural aspects which will help overcome intercultural stereotypes. It is not only belles lettres, but also essays, research, etc.

We need a network of contacts which will help people better understand each other. We plan to plug organizations into the network which are experienced in the sphere, such as



the Finnish literature fund (FiLi), Russian publishing houses interested in translations of Russian literature into the Finnish language and vice versa. We would like not only to unite all people engaged in the process but also to act as intermediaries between them and carry out both cultural and educational projects. The Russian side represented by Moscow project coordinator Yevgenya Dobrovoi helps us a lot as it is already launching its own educational programs in Russia and Poland. Our task is to raise the awareness of the Finnish public about modern Russian literature and introduce interesting modern Finnish poetry to Russians. Our days are the time of flourishing poetry in Finland and its golden age.

STILL FRAME: Aurora Charlotta Karamzina (1808-1902, full name — Eva Aurora Charlotta Stjernvall, a daughter of Swedish nobleman Lord Carl Johan Stjernvall and Baroness Eva Gustava von Willebrand, came down in history as public figure and founder and supporter of various charities. She was a granddaughter of the last governor of Finland. From 1836 she had the surname of Demidova and from 1846 - Karamzina. In 1836 Aurora Charlotta became a maid of honor of Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. Together with sister Emily and Countess Musina-Pushkina she was considered the first beauty in the Royal Court in Petersburg. As a maid of honor Aurora was very influential and was among those who convinced Alexander III not to make Finland a province of the Russian Empire but preserve autonomy rights with it. Alexander, who as the crown prince stayed in the Finnish mansion of Aurora Charlotta, in the final end adhered to her advice and other supporters of Finnish autonomy and decided to create a commission for the convocation of Finnish Sejm and grant the duchy a wide autonomy and laws to ensure its financial independence.

A warship fighting in the Crimean War was named after her. It was sunk by the English and the name went over to the legendary Aurora cruiser. She had a reputation of femme fatale as her three lovers and the only son Pavel Demidov died. Aurora

was the muse of many poets and artists. Pushkin and Baratynsky devoted poems to her and portraits were painted by Brullov and Gau. She was twice married. In 1836 she married one of the richest Russian men - Pavel Demidov, the co-owner of Ural enterprises, actual state counselor, and Royal master of the hunt. Legends claim wedding gifts to Aurora included not only the famous Sancy diamond but also a scarf which belonged to Napoleon's wife Josephina Bogarne. Demidov died a sudden death in 1840 and left Aurora with a child. She got married again in 1846. The husband was Andrei, the son of distinguished historian Nikolai Karamzin. He was an outstanding officer who was considered a prototype of Mikhail Lermontov's hero Pechorin. After eight years of a happy life Aurora again became a widow as Colonel Karamzin was killed in the Crimean campaign in 1854. After that she fully devoted herself to charities.

She went down in Finland's history as a public and charity figure who created nursing homes, orphanages, and hospices. She donated practically all her income from Demidov's mining enterprises to the poor. In Gelsingforce Aurora Charlotta Karamzina created a permanent nursing service. The Evangelic society of nurses which she founded yet in 1867 still exists. Aurora also opened hospices and hospitals. Children's Home Street has been preserved in modern Helsinki.

By developing the ties we want to operate not on amateur but professional basis and produce high quality anthologies, as proof-readers say - very copy-read anthologies. We include into them only the names which are legends of the poetry of the XX-XXI centuries. We assess the authors by the text and everybody knows we shall reject bad texts.

Our festival is expanding. We now have partners in St. Petersburg and Stockholm. The Swedish friends we got



thanks to Yevgenya Dobrovoi asked us to address the Swedish-language cultural center in March. St. Petersburg proposed to join the festival Petersburg Bridges in late May this year. Natalya Perevezentseva, the second Russian coordinator of the project, helps us maintain contacts with colleagues in Petersburg.

The main idea of the festival is to create international cultural space to develop projects related to translation and publishing. It also promotes preservation of the Russian language and literature abroad.

Interviewed by Yulia Andreeva,
for Amber Bridge