

# The Gazette

OF MUSIC MISSION KIEV

Music/Widows/Orphans and Children/Church/Victims of War

## MESSIAH IN THE HALLS OF GOVERNMENT



*This article is written by Yuri Polakiwsky, a member of the Association of Ukrainian Writers and Poets in Kyiv, Ukraine. He is the author of the book, "Ukraine - A Lament of a Promise" and his writing appears in newspapers such as Kyiv Post.*

On the right bank of the Dnipro river in Kyiv stands a statue of Volodymyr the Great. In his hand, he holds a big, simple cross. To all Ukrainians, it is a symbol of the acceptance of Christianity unto their land which occurred in the year of 988.

Today, over a thousand years later, and less than two kilometers away from that landmark, on a cold Monday evening in February in the main council chamber of the Kyiv municipal government, almost 750 people gathered. Many had to stand, or find space to sit on window sills and tables, to hear God's message of hope through song.

In what has already become a tradition in this historic city, the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, in partnership with the Verovka Choir, the preeminent, and world renowned folklore choir of Ukraine, have garnered a reputation for presenting concerts that not only appeal to the high standards of musicianship expected by Ukrainian audiences, but for music that also seeks to satiate the spiritual hunger of a people, who still, after decades of independence, seek the meaning and true understanding of the freedom of the soul.



**Wes Janzen: After the concert I personally gave a Bible and blessing to well over 100 individuals who did not have a Bible. The response was simply overwhelming.**



**Distributing Bibles**

"We are a people of song," says Maestro Zenovii Korinets, the artistic director of Verovka. "We sing at birth, we sing when we protect, we sing when we celebrate, we sing when we pray."

"Our partnership with the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus is therefore, a natural one," he continues. "Wes and I agree, that bringing sacred music to the people, especially

the poor, the elderly, the widow, and especially the magnificent works of Bach, Mozart, and of course, Handel, has the power to transform individual hearts, and ultimately, the way we think and act in our society."

"This concert was a first step towards a full joint performance of *Messiah*," says Wes Janzen, KSOC artistic director. "For the finale, we performed three major highlights from *Messiah* together and Verovka is now learning the rest of *Messiah*. It's a major undertaking, and they love it. The musicians of Verovka have never learned *Messiah* until now, and they want to perform the entire composition with us, with a shared sense of purpose that is deeply rooted in Christian faith."

Ukraine is part of a centuries tradition of sacred music, especially through its Orthodox and Catholic liturgies, but it has only been in the last decades, after the demise of communism and its oppression of religious and artistic expression, where Ukrainians have been introduced to the choral traditions of Europe and North America. But what is now clearly evident is that as Ukraine gravitates towards the example of Europe's political traditions, it is also becoming inherently cognizant of the essential spiritual foundations that enabled the respect of freedom, and from that, the respect for individual dignity that emanated through the spiritual power and principles of the Reformation. Such growing interest in these expressions, which, hitherto, had not been widely known and experienced in Ukraine, are becoming a source of renewed spiritual inspiration, knowledge and sustenance.

This particular evening was but another example of the articulation of the essential Christian mission - the proclamation of hope through song and the expression of generosity.

Introducing the evening, Janzen, in his kind and affecting manner, introduced

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# The White House



As central Kyiv still slumbers on Saturday morning, close to five hundred widows and pensioners gather.

To all who gather, it's known as the "White House", where, from nine to noon every Saturday morning, widows from around Kyiv, a city of over 4 million, gather in shifts, for extensive Bible study, to have an opportunity to participate in a choir practice with their friends, are offered the services of a doctor, and to finally, receive a food package that will supplement their meager, government pension.

But perhaps most important, the life at the "White House" has been transformed into a thriving and vibrant community where numerous volunteers and scores of widows have created a place of solace in an enormous city, and where hundreds are provided with a place of belonging and acceptance, an awareness that no one is to be forgotten and that everyone should experience the feeling that they are cared for.

Begun in 1993, the work was started by the husband and wife team of Roger and Diane McMurrin, who were inspired to come and bring sacred music to Ukraine, and second, to fulfill the biblical mandate of caring for widows, the poor and those in most dire need.

Now, under the leadership of Wes Janzen, a leading conductor of orchestral/choral music and Professor Emeritus at Trinity Western University, and his wife, Kim, the White House not only remains the first ministry of its kind in the country, but is seen, and is reputed in political, social and diplomatic circles, to be an effectual and smoothly operating model that has consistently proven to directly meet the spiritual, medical and physical needs of hundreds of widows every week with caring compassion.

But then, how does a choir and orchestra which specializes in performing sacred musical masterpieces connect to serving and working with widows?

"Our musicians live a challenging life," Janzen begins, once more having to explain the relationship, "What our young musicians have done is translated their own life experience and knowledge to apply the biblical injunction to care for widows and the poor."

"Our goal is a simple one," he adds. "It is to provide widows with dignity. Many are alone; some have been forgotten by their families. And with the government overrun with so many problems, it can't possibly meet some of the fundamental needs of these individuals."

"Most simply, we are attempting to fulfill the Scriptural mandate of taking care of widows and providing them and our neighbors and friends with an example of 'transcendent dignity'."

The principle of individual dignity is an important one in Ukraine as it attempts to transcend beyond the continuing tyranny of soviet-communist thinking. Almost all refer to the events in early 2014, as a "Revolution of Dignity." This was not only a clarion call to rid the country of a corrupt regime and the practice of widespread corruption

throughout society, but it was a societal statement that wanted to assert the principle that societal institutions, and life in general, must be based on the sacred dignity and respect of human life, and that people, and the promise of their individual lives matter.

An important mandate of the work of Music Mission Kiev is to provide a biblical example to Ukraine's society in its determined breakaway from the values of atheistic materialism, to values of caring and compassion while defining what it means to love one's neighbor.

"We provide medicines that our widows could not possibly afford," says Wes. "We know we have a direct effect on their quality of life. Many would have to choose between medicine and food."

With the presence of the Mission's Dr. Vadym, up to 20 widows can be medically examined every Saturday morning. This has resulted in: providing the means for major eye operations, financing post-operative "after-care", prescribing and paying for over 300 pairs of glasses, the conduction of numerous tests regarding, cardio problems, kidney ailments, blood pressure and cancer diagnosis, and providing access to medical specialists which would, without the Mission, be impossible for the widows to access, let alone pay for.

As Janzen explains, "Many would never even imagine having access to fundamental diagnostic care, let alone specialist care".

Walking from one floor to another to monitor the various activities, he can't walk more than a few steps before he is stopped yet again by another widow, who wants to express her gratitude: "Mr. Wes, thank you so much for everything. God bless you!"

Many times they speak in Ukrainian, but often in English. He always smiles, shakes hands while returning an appreciative embrace. He says, "Recently I was told by one long time Kyiv resident that in all his years in the city, he never saw so many people smile in one place".

As the morning events on the upper floors near completion, a line that winds up almost four floors now reaches the ground floor. Near the buildings entrance, a small anteroom is full of food packages that have been prepared for them. And as each widow presents her ticket, she receives a food package.

"We want to provide a healthy food package that will supplement the low buying power of their very meager pensions," Wes says. "We make a deliberate effort to include healthy food choices and staples. Approximately 100 "shut in" widows also receive food packages. They are brought to them by other widows."

And so, as the noon hour is reached, hundreds of widows re-enter one of Kyiv's now busy boulevards, having experienced an intimate form of community fellowship amongst their own "widow sisters." They've been spiritually fed, they have sung in their choir, they have had the opportunity to see a doctor and they have been provided with food till they come back again the next week.





# Katerina: Forsaking Communism to Follow Christ

by Yuri Polakiwsky

It's often said that one event can change the direction of a life in a way that can never be imagined. Katerina has experienced just that.

In 1974, Katerina Bishevskaya was a secretary of a Komsomol, a preparatory youth organization for entrance into the communist party of the Soviet Union.

Her job was a comfortable one: she acted as an inspector and manager at various job sites. On a daily basis, she travelled comfortably from place to place, overseeing the progress of work sites and preparing reports. The job wasn't arduous, and in terms of daily material needs, she lacked nothing. She had a comfortable apartment, access to quality food stuffs and products.

Very quickly, she had established her competence in the eyes of Party leadership. Katerina was full of leadership qualities; strong, determined and willful. Her future career in serving the Communist party seemed assured.

As required, she was recommended to become a member of the Communist party, easily and effortlessly obtaining two sponsors who took the responsibility to vouch for her.

She had already married Vladimir, who, ironically, was a church restorer, and they soon had a child.

As she was brought up in the village of Dobranichka just outside of Kyiv, in the knowledge of the Christian faith, and there was no question but that she must christen their child. Nonetheless, she knew she had to be careful.

"On the Friday before the christening, I took a day off to prepare for the Sunday event. When Sunday morning arrived, I carefully wrapped my head in a scarf. Of course, I wasn't ashamed of my faith, but it's just that I didn't want any trouble. Even as a member of the Komsomol and a candidate for membership in the communist party, I didn't see anything wrong with christening my child; many other communist members secretly did this, and I just did what the others did.

Believing that the scarf would hide my face, and make me unrecognizable, I went to St Volodymyr's Cathedral in central Kyiv to christen my son. All went well."

"What did you think you were doing?' my superior bellowed at me when I walked into his office on Monday morning. 'Where were you yesterday?'

"I christened my son,' I said simply, not denying, nor being ashamed of what I had done. But I now knew that I had been found out. I had tried to be cautious.

"As if to further prove his case, he then showed pictures of me and the ceremony in the church. As he continued to berate me, I not only heard his anger, but could feel his rage at having put him at risk due to his recommendation of me. I knew that I was in grave trouble.

"The next day, a meeting was called. My immediate superior/sponsor was present, along with the Party's representative and a few others."

At this time, the panel questioned her aggressively, taking her to task. Decades later, she still remembers the ordeal, but after so many years, the one detail that Katerina still remembers is a single sentence spoken by the Party representative, "Why did you do this evil?"

As a result, Katerina's comfortable position was taken away, and eventually her residence.

"I was being punished for being disobedient," she still says with emphasis. "My life changed because as a believer, I had christened my son, and wouldn't deny it.

"I became a widow when I was 37 years old. And not long after losing my job, I became homeless. I sought work wherever I could find it. Eventually, I found a job as a construction worker.

"I plastered walls. I worked with insulation materials, without a mask, and more often than not, outside in the cold winters. For the longest time, I was forced to live in a cold shack adjacent to the construction office at work. Throughout the cold winter months, I would often travel on city buses just to keep warm. Such was my life.

"Of course, I wasn't aware of the risks working with insulation. None of us wore masks to protect us from the asbestos, and as the years went by, I got sick. I developed severe breathing problems. I developed three ulcers on my lungs. I needed numerous blood transfusions, and I had developed a form of cancer. I knew I was going to die.

"But it was while I was in the hospital that the Lord showed me an example of what my life's work was to be.

"As I lay suffering and dying, people came to visit me. Many prayed for me. Many came just to comfort me. Eventually, with the help of so many, I experienced the healing hand of God.

"It was at that time that I knew then that my life's suffering, my experience of homelessness, the experience of dejection and depressions, the fear of not knowing what would happen to me next, the example of compassion shown me by others, was to be the foundation of my understanding of my life's work."

"This experience, and what I was taught as a child by my father had clarified my life's course for me. He said, 'Katia, live by the commandments and care of your neighbor.'

"Even now, as a widow, working with other widows at the mission, and the poor, I believe strongly that this is the reason I've made it through my life.

"I know why I experienced these things in my life. It was to reveal to me what the Lord had planned for me to do with my life: to be a helper, and to take care of the sick.

"Many don't understand this. Like my friend who I took once to a hospital to show her what I do. The next day, the friend said, 'I can't go again, I couldn't sleep.'

"But I answered my friend in the only way I knew. They wait for me to come. I serve them, I bring them water, I hold their hand, I comb their hair, I comfort them, I read the Bible to them.

"My friend didn't understand. But that doesn't really matter because I know what my gift is: my gift to take care of the sick."

And so, inspired by one event, Katerina, a young, highly skilled and talented woman, who was lost to the Communist Party, became a leader who, even into elderly life, pursues the fulfillment of the principles of the kingdom of heaven.



Katerina takes attendance at church



# The 2018 American Tour (September 5 - October 22)

Please pray for the upcoming KSOC tour and the concert venues. If you live in these cities, perhaps you would like to volunteer for housing. More information will follow.



- Sept. 5 - Ukrainians arrive in Chicago and travel to Monticello, IA for housing
- Sept. 6 - Monticello, IA - Community Dinner
- Sept. 7 - Monticello, IA \*Concert & location pending\*
- Sept. 8 - Minnesota - To be Determined
- Sept. 9 - Minnesota or Wisconsin - To be Determined
- Sept. 10 - Sioux City, IA - Concert at Morningside Lutheran Church
- Sept. 11 - Sioux City, IA - \*Dordt College\*
- Sept. 12 - Mitchell, SD - \*Harvest Community Church\*
- Sept. 13 - North or South Dakota - To Be Determined
- Sept. 14 - North or South Dakota - To Be Determined
- Sept. 15 - North or South Dakota - To Be Determined
- Sept. 16 - Rapid City, SD - \*Calvary Lutheran Church\*
- Sept. 17 - Day Off with sightseeing to the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore
- Sept. 18 - Scottsbluff, NE - \*First United Methodist Church\*
- Sept. 19 - Cheyenne, WY - \*Concert & location pending\*
- Sept. 20 - Colorado - To Be Determined
- Sept. 21 - Denver, CO - \*Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church\*
- Sept. 22 - Fort Collins, CO - Concert at Faith Evangelical Free Church
- Sept. 23 - Colorado Springs - \*Concert & location pending\*
- Sept. 24 - Dodge City, KS - To Be Determined
- Sept. 25 - Oklaholmas City, OK - To Be Determined
- Sept. 26 - To Be Determined
- Sept. 27 - Grandbury, TX - \*Acton United Methodist Church\*
- Sept. 28 - Dallas or Fort Worth TX - To Be Determined
- Sept. 29 - Richardson, TX - To Be Determined
- Sept. 30 - Southlake, TX - Concert at Countryside Bible Church

- Oct. 1 - Dallas/Fort Worth or San Antonio, TX - To Be Determined
- Oct. 2 - San Antonio, TX - \*Hosted by Village Parkway Baptist Church\*
- Oct. 3 - San Antonio, TX - \*Village Parkway Baptist Church\*
- Oct. 4 - San Antonio, TX - To Be Determined
- Oct. 5 - Georgetown, TX - Concert at The Worship Place
- Oct. 6 - Austin, TX - \*Redeemer Presbyterian Church\*
- Oct. 7 - Round Rock, TX - Concert at United Methodist Church
- Oct. 8 - 10 Houston, TX -To Be Determined
- Oct. 11 - Jackson, MS - To Be Determined
- Oct. 12 - Jackson MS or Memphis TN - To Be Determined
- Oct. 13 - Memphis, TN - To Be Determined
- Oct. 14 - Memphis, TN - Concert at First Evangelical Church
- Oct. 15 - Springfield, MO - To Be Determined
- Oct. 16 - Kansas City, MO - To Be Determined
- Oct. 17 - Jefferson City, MO - \*First United Methodist Church\*
- Oct. 18 - Saint Louis, MO - To Be Determined
- Oct. 19 - Clayton, MO - \*Central Presbyterian Church\*
- Oct. 20 - Springfield, Rockford, or Chicago, IL - To Be Determined
- Oct. 21 - Chicago, IL - To Be Determined
- Oct. 22 - DEPART for KYIV

\*Concert pending, awaiting final approval\*

If you can help in filling out our schedule, contact Bob Stoecker: [BobStoecker.mmk@att.net](mailto:BobStoecker.mmk@att.net)



*Continued from page 1*

these themes that seemed so applicable due to the presence of war widows and the children of those men who had sacrificed their lives in the war with Russia.

“Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we also find the example of giving,” Janzen began, continuing this theme throughout the evening. “We gain hope through the work of Christ and this example inspires us to give.”

Beginning with the performance of some African-American spirituals in English, the audience following the words by way of Ukrainian translation, they were made keenly aware of the universal yearning for freedom and the innate hope that such a yearning inspires within the human soul. Later, they would be reminded by the Verovka ensemble of how these spiritual yearnings are depicted and understood within the context of ordinary Ukrainian village life. Thus, both groups, in combining their choices of repertoire, succeeded in uniting a sacred musical response of the meaning of hope in traditional Ukrainian culture. But even more, they were able to convey the meaning of hope, not only in its intellectual depiction, but perhaps more importantly, in the emotional resonance of the soul, that oftentimes can only be accessed through music.

Nonetheless, these earlier selections were an introduction and preparation to performing three movements of Handel's *Messiah*.

Although performed in Ukraine before to small and limited audiences, there has been discussion that Handel's *Messiah* has yet to be performed and experienced within Ukraine's society in all its resplendent glory.

The choirs, now combined into one powerful chorus, began, almost immediately transfixing the faces of the audience as they sang of the glory of God and of the hope contained within the work of Christ in the world. And as a few audience members even joined in the singing of “Hallelujah,” though all were standing, one could not but imagine what such song would mean being heard by the ears of God in the Ukrainian language.

As the choir and orchestra finished with “Worthy is the Lamb,” the audience again rose to give a three-minute standing ovation, with cries of “Bravo” being heard throughout the crowd.

As Canada's Ambassador to Ukraine, Roman Washuck, a constant and faithful attendee of these concerts said, “The work of the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra and Chorus has been exceptional in Ukraine. Its example of working with widows, the poor, is an example for all how the dignity of individuals is to be respected. This, coupled with their musical prowess, makes them true cultural ambassadors, appreciated by tens of thousands around the world.”

*Yuri Polakiwsky*

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORT!

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