



CONVERSATIONS
BETWEEN
THEREMIN
AND SOPRANO

composer DAVID SIDWELL
audio-video JOHN MANDELBERG

THE STORY BEHIND

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEREMIN AND SOPRANO

A Synesthetic Audio-Video Work – John Mandelberg 2015

In 2004, I approached composer David Sidwell to see if he was interested in collaborating on a research project about Synaesthesia. His answer was yes but what is it? I answered him by saying something like, well it's a neurological condition that means that when someone hears a musical note they might see a particular colour, or a colour might connect you with a certain smell, or a word might remind you of a colour. Some of the world's greatest artists have either been "synaesthetes" or utilised these concepts to create works that correlate words, colours and/or music. The physicist Isaac Newton created a colour scale of 7 colours, and related them to musical notes. The writer Vladimir Nabokov saw colours when he wrote words.

In 2007 David and I made a research trip to Russia to study Synaesthesia. In Moscow we met with a range of wonderfully creative musicians, artists, composers, visual creators and inventors. In Kazan we also met with the pioneering Light-Music artist and director of the Prometei Institute, Bulat Galejev to which this work is dedicated. David and I have worked on developing this project since late 2007 in creating the score and the visual images that relate to and interact with the music. He wrote music and I edited together the images that I had filmed in Russia, back and forth I edited as he viewed the edited images to the music, David then re-wrote and I again edited the images, sounds and re-arranged the music as David supplied more musical variations

until we were satisfied with the visual and aural correlation.

We also used the colour theories of Alexander Scriabin, a pioneering 19th Century Russian composer who wrote the first colour symphony for orchestra and light organ. He had created a colour wheel that correlated colours to notes, and we have followed his ideas in our project.

We would like to thank many of the people we met in Russia:

Andrei Smirnov of the Theremin Institute, Sergei Zorin of the Optical Theatre, Stanislav Kreichi, composer and performer on the ANS Synthesiser, the late Bulat Galejev and Irina Vanechkina from the Prometei Institute for their warmth and welcoming support for our research project. Of course there are many more we would like to thank including the WINTEC Research fund who have supported this project for many years.



CONVERSATION BETWEEN THEREMIN AND SOPRANO, the Premiere live performance. Composer, David Sidwell and video production, John Mandelberg - Theremin, Soprano, Piano, Cello, Synthesiser, Video and interactive Light, took place at The Atrium, WINTEC HOUSE, Waikato Institute of Technology, Hamilton, New Zealand on Thursday 18th August 2011 at 7pm.


PERFORMANCE

Lydia Kavina - THEREMIN
Pamela Wallace - SOPRANO
Alexandra Wiltshire - PIANO
Tim Carpenter - CELLO
Debbie Nisbet - SYNTHESIZER

LIGHTING DESIGNER- Aaron Chesham
SOUND DESIGNER-Ben Mannell

'CONVERSATIONS' CD recording on Saturday 20th August 2011, at the Academy of Arts, Waikato University, Hamilton
Recorded and mixed by Ben Mannell.

"CONVERSATION BETWEEN THEREMIN AND SOPRANO"
- Разговор меж терменвоксом и сопрано
An Audio-Video Synaesthetic work by composer David Sidwell and film maker John Mandelberg



LYDIA KAVINA
Playing her
Ether-Wave Music Instrument
Without touching the instrument
the player produces the desired music by definite
hand movements in the air

The Atrium, WINTEC HOUSE
Thursday at 7pm - August 18th 2011

LEON THEREMIN SOVIET FAUST OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Lev Theremin was born at the end of the 19th century and died at the end of the 20th Century at age 97. He is best known for his musical instrument, the Theremin - an instrument that you play without touching, although his electronic research helped protect the Kremlin and spy on the American Embassy in Moscow in the 1950's. In America in the early 30's he became a well-known musical instrument inventor and even sold the rights to RCA Victor to produce his Theremin until 1929 when the stock market crashed.



He became a musical celebrity and mixed with the elite of US society. In returning to Russia before WW2 he disappeared into Stalin's Labour camps to work for the state on secret research. Bulat Galejev's book tells all this in detail and more. How was it possible for an electronics genius (Theremin) to become a new Faust and enter into the trap of a new Mephistopheles?

How was it possible for anyone (Galeyev) with a passion for Electronic Arts to create extraordinary work under a Totalitarian society and still succeed?

Here is just a taste of what Bulat wrote of Leon Theremin's extraordinary life: 'Once, during his last visit to Kazan, I asked Leon Sergejevich, the living Faust, in front of a video camera - and my voice and the microphone were thus trembling slightly with timidity: "In your life you have known everything, more than everything, even. Can you say that you have lived a happy life?" He answered with no delay. Clearly he had given the matter thought before that moment.

"I don't know what happiness is. What I can say is that I have had an interesting life. It has always been interesting to find out how everything is made up, and to contribute my own part to it. Even with a barrow in Kolyma (a notorious Soviet labour camp) it was not terrible for me, because I found it interesting, like watching a new film."

BOOK LAUNCH

In 1997 I received a Russian language copy of SOVIET FAUST about the life of Leon Theremin, from the author Bulat Galejev in exchange for some video and digital audio recordings of 3 works for theremin by the Australian composer Percy Grainger written in the early 1930's.

I had read extracts of roughly translated chapters of the book and was fascinated with the Theremin story which just made me want to find out more. Some quotes from Bulat's book was included in a book on Theremin's life subtitled: "ETHER MUSIC & ESPIONAGE" by Albert Glinsky published in the US in 2000.

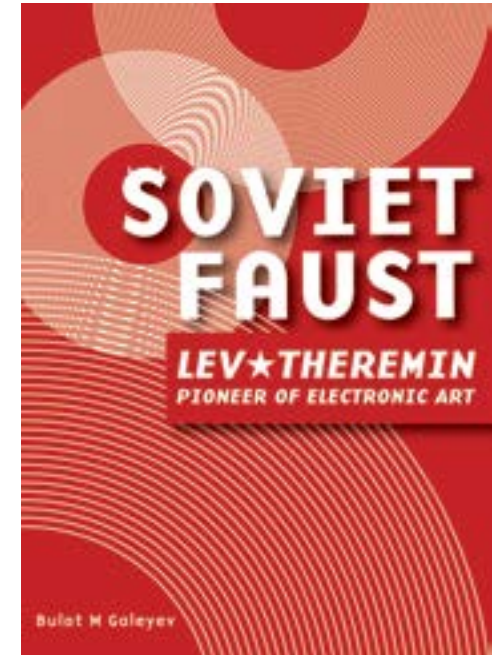
But there was no complete English translation of Bulat's SOVIET FAUST published anywhere in the world.

However in Kazan, Russia in 2007, over dinner with Bulat Galejev he offered us the English language rights to his book SOVIET FAUST, a book he had written about the life of Electronics pioneer Leon Theremin, about someone he had known and admired for the last 25 years of Theremin's life. Bulat told us that he even had an English translation available, so could we find a publisher? I said that I had a friend in Australia and he might be interested in publishing the book.

Well for the next year or so I kept in contact with Bulat, the Australian publisher said he was interested and then I heard nothing until early 2009 when I received an email that Bulat had passed away, although the Prometei Institute still wanted to get the English version of the book published.

Suffice it to say it was a bumpy few years of contractual and copyright negotiations with Irina Vanechkina, his widow and a Kazan-based Russian law firm but finally in late 2011, we had the first complete English translation of Bulat Galejev's SOVIET FAUST.

The translation was made by English playwright Sally Brown and kindly published by my friend and publisher Tom Thompson of ETT Imprint, Australia. I would also like to thank Mark Curtis for the book's wonderful cover design.



David Sidwell

Conversation Between Theremin and Soprano

Разговор меж терменвоксом и сопрано

1. Call to Prayer
Призыв к молитве

2. Little Train to Kazan
Маленький поезд в Казань

3. The Lake
Озеро

4. Hymn
Гимн

5. Finale
Финал

Instrumentation

Theremin
Soprano
Piano
Synthesizer
Cello

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South of the Well Music

The image displays a musical score for the first movement, '1. Call to Prayer'. The score is written for three parts: Theremin, Soprano, and Piano. The title '1. Call to Prayer' is written in a cursive font at the top right, with the Russian translation 'Призыв к молитве' underneath it. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) shows the Theremin and Soprano parts with a 'Piano' dynamic marking. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the Theremin and Soprano parts. The third system (measures 9-12) shows the Piano part with a 'Piano' dynamic marking. The score is set in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The copyright notice at the bottom right reads 'Copyright © David Sidwell 2011 South of the Well Music'.



photo John Mandelberg and David Sidwell together