



## **Chants of Russian Orthodox Church and Folk Songs from Russia.**

**Lyra**, an a cappella group of 5 professional vocalists from St. Petersburg, Russia, will present a concert of Russian Choral music. The first part of the concert—sacred music of Russian Orthodox church, includes ancient songs to works of famous masters and little-known but remarkable Russian composers of 18-20 centuries. The second part of their program is made up of Russian folk songs: comic, lyric, dancing love songs. A unique opportunity to share the enormous Russian musical heritage. Command and enjoy the sounds of Russia as interpreted by real Russians. These artists perform in various professional choirs and opera houses throughout St. Petersburg, Russia.

Although the Russian Orthodox Church has inspired vocal music of incredible beauty, that music doesn't get sung much by stateside ensembles: There's a language barrier, and few singers can navigate complex modal harmonies without accompaniment. The solution? Import a Russian ensemble. Belsville's Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence brought in six members of Lyra, a St. Petersburg-based vocal collective, Saturday night.

Despite the church's flat acoustics, Lyra produced a pure a cappella sound that could both fill the intimate space and drop to an edge-of-your-seat whisper, and the ensemble coordination remained impeccable through even the most complex polyphony. The group's clear harmonies gave a sense of how the unique flavor of Orthodox music persists in both the clean, bright music of 17th-century Dmitri Bortniansky and the aching chromatics of turn-of-the-last-century Pavel Tchesnokov. Dobri Khristov's "Praise the name of the Lord" made the greatest impression of all, though, because it featured a solo by Vladimir Feliauer, one of those force-of-nature Russian basses, whose tone was rock-solid and velvet-smooth no matter how low he went.

After the sampling of intense, elevated Orthodox music, the singers' post-intermission entrance in traditional dress and singing a jaunty folk tune brought everything back to earth. The simpler music offered showcase solos for most of the singers, and lots of broad acting, like Ekaterina Isatchenko's charmingly coquettish posing in "Black-browed, black-eyed fellow", partially made up for the lack of texts and translations. Yet it was the Russian Orthodox music, especially in Lyra's fine performances, that left one wanting more.

--Andrew Lindemann Malone  
Washington Post 8/30/04 Style Section