

RECORDING ARTISTS IN MOSCOW AND ST. PETERSBURG (2)

An Impression of Moscow and its People – The Artists including Cossacks and Sarts – Life of the Artists in St. Petersburg – Other interesting Data.

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The journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg takes only eleven hours, and leaving at night, one is able to enjoy a comfortable night's rest and awake to enjoy coffee and find yourself in St. Petersburg.

The railroad track between the two towns is perfectly straight, and as the train travels at only moderate speed there is little or no oscillation and sleep is easy. When the surveyors of the line laid their proposal before the Emperor Nicholas, they begged him to state which towns he desired the line to touch. The Emperor called for a ruler, which carefully placing on the chart from Moscow to St. Petersburg, he ruled a line straight through, and handing the chart back, to the surveyors remarked, "*That is how I command the line to be constructed,*" and it was. I found it extremely cold and damp, and the difference between the two climates was most marked. I was not sorry to reach the hotel, for the cold, damp winds sweeping over the town from the Baltic were far from pleasant.

After Moscow, I never expected to find this town so up to date. It certainly is not Russian, and appeared to be a copy of several European towns. It has no distinctive features, with the exception, perhaps, of its splendid thoroughfare, the "Nevsky Prospect", which is a mile in length and varies between 80 and 120 feet in width. On both side is an array of large modern shops, and include all nationalities. In one part is the Cathedral of Kazan, a magnificent building. In another part are the large, palatial red buildings of the War Office; it is indeed a grand thoroughfare. At one end is the Royal Palace, and the other the railroad station to Moscow.

I found the river Neva frozen hard, and they had thrown an electric trim [= *train*.?] service across for four months—a remarkable piece of hustling for the Russians.

The difference between Moscow and St. Petersburg does not terminate with their diversities in construction, for in the latter there are many more Europeans of society; the people are far more fashionably dressed; there is a great deal more movement in the streets, which are also better lighted. A conspicuous absence of the Tartar, Armenian and all other south Russian races

is noticeable; the climate is abominable; the theaters are more interesting, and, lastly, the artists are superior for recording purposes. Here I found the best of all Russia.

The Nevsky Prospect is always filled with a bustling populace, including a great many officers of the two services. The naval officers had surprisingly white, pasty countenances, quite the reverse to what one expects of navy men. These men, I learned, are hardly ever at sea, and when they do go it is for the maneuvers, which consist of calling at a number of Baltic ports to enjoy a real good time. One day my wife and I interested ourselves counting the army men we passed in a walk from our hotel to the top of the Nevsky, a distance of half a mile. We counted 27 generals, 18 captains, 33 officers of lesser rank and 8 privates. Generals are as common in the Nevsky as trams in Broadway. When a private spies a general he has to immediately halt, swing around, stand rigid and salute. This sudden salutation happened several times and caused much amusement, for in this crowded sidewalk it was not unusual for a lady to have her hat knocked over, a man's hat knocked off, and in one case a private bowled a man right over into the snow. The soldier nevertheless retained an immobile expression and the general pretended not to have observed the incident, while one or two officers who were passing assumed an expression of "*I'm bored stiff*", the pedestrians at the same time roaring with laughter at the ridiculous discipline which is enforced on the principal and most crowded sidewalk of the town. Almost every man is in some kind of uniform; also the school boys. Even the *iswershics* (cabmen)¹ have to don a regulation dress and headgear.

In my observations I quickly discovered that the Russian, moneyed class exists merely to eat, drink and sleep. They rise at eleven and partake of coffee and roll; breakfast (lunch) at one o'clock, a meal they generally get through in two hours; tea at four, where, incidentally nearly two hours are passed in gossip; dinner at six-thirty, which occupies two hours should they be visiting the theater afterward, otherwise this meal will last any time over five hours, after which they adjourn to a cafe chantant to continue their dissipation until they retire to bed, usually at four a. m.

I must mention one instance of this extraordinary custom of living at the table. On a certain day, while lunching in the hotel restaurant, my attention was attracted by the jocund clash of glasses, and I observed sitting around a table three obvious Russians with their wives. I left the restaurant a little after two o'clock and returned to take tea at five. I noticed the party still sitting at the table and eating what appeared to be cutlets. I returned to the restaurant at seven-thirty for my dinner and sure enough the party was still busy at the table. My curiosity being aroused, I appealed to the waiter to tell me whether the

¹ Извозчик (izvozchik)

party had once left the table; he replied in the negative. They had commenced in the morning at eleven with coffee and rolls and gone through to dinner. On the following morning I interrogated the waiter as to the time the party did eventually bid adieu to the restaurant and was informed that they had been the first to take coffee and the last to leave at two in the morning. The strangest thing of all is in fact that they were all comparatively sober. It was afterward quite a common occurrence for me to have my lunch and dinner and notice a party sit through both my meals without having moved. Between the courses a Russian providing he has the necessary time, will sit and smoke for half an hour, chatting and enjoying his surroundings, especially should there be women present.

A general laziness is noticeable among the people, which is no doubt to be attributed to their strange manner of living. The majority are pale and one seldom encounters a really healthy-looking Russian. This applies especially to women. They are lavish with their money and spend it in a way that would amaze some of your New York "flingers of gold".

In the restaurants one has to be particularly wary that their bills are not fictitious concoctions; a more thieving set of waiters cannot exist in the restaurants and café chantants where the un-educated rich class congregate, abominable scenes are to be witnessed on certain joy days, irresponsible men and women drinking champagne as only Russians do—swilling it—who deny with inexplicable effrontery the commonest rules of etiquette and later the authority of the moral sense. In all its multifarious manifestations Paris has nothing like this, for in Paris there is a certain type of women from whom one expects such behavior and where one has restaurants which are known to those seeking amusement; but here it is a community of pseudo-respectable people who indulge in a manner which almost takes one back to Rome.

The laundries are horrible; the clothes are washed in dirty underground cellars, where the commonest laws of sanitation are neglected. I refer to the laundries outside the radius of a mile from the Royal Palace; those inside are French and are satisfactory. In a later visit to Russia I lived in a boarding house, and during a sojourn of five months lost two shirts, two sets of pajamas and over a dozen handkerchiefs. The girls of the peasant class who deliver the washing are illiterate, and to protest against a loss is a waste of breath.

As regards sport in St. Petersburg, the British colony here is diligently impressing several games into the town and the Russians are now able to play with a certain amount of proficiency football, hockey, cricket and tennis. They are very enthusiastic and no doubt will soon take their place with the nations of the world in athletics. I find the average Russian, after three years' experience of them, is light-hearted and despondent alternatively; philosophical, argumentative, pragmatism in his beliefs, and decidedly intellectual. He is

usually susceptible to the charm of women, is an ardent lover but a failure as a husband. They lavish money about in a manner which is incomprehensible. In financial and business matters (particularly talking machines) he is mercenary careless and a slow-paying creditor; friendly, confidential, sympathizing and a sincere friend when once obtained.

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- *Making Records in St. Petersburg (p. 30)*