



DSCH: What's the cost of entering, and what are the prizes?

MS: 300 Rubles for Russian participants, and 25 US dollars for foreign applicants to which you must add travel, lodgings and so on. As for prizes: 1st prize is 6000 Rubles, 2nd place wins 5000, third 4000 plus diplomas.

There are also special prizes for the best interpretations of certain Shostakovich interpretations, musicality etc There is also a Grand Prix - the prize for which is often a special gift - or 7000 Rubles - this for an exceptional performance.

Finally, there's a gala concert in the main hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, which includes a symphony by Shostakovich

DSCH: And the jury?

MS: In 2002 the President will be Karen Khachaturian, a pupil of Shostakovich - for the second time in fact. Co-President will be Sofia Khentova, plus another professor from the Moscow Conservatoire, as well as the director from the Ippolitov-Ivanov Institute. In total 7 jurists, plus representatives from the school.

DSCH: Does the Shostakovich family in Moscow play any role?

MS: Of course, they support it very much.

DSCH: In more general terms now - could you tell our readers of just how you perceive the interest in Shostakovich's music in the lives of young people, given that styles and attitudes evolve so insatiably in Russia, as elsewhere?

MS: It seems clear to me that Shostakovich's music doesn't belong to 'The Past' - indeed, it opens up for these children first and foremost as a piece of music.

DSCH: But you can't disassociate the music from the past - so in this case, how does the kids' perception of the music

change once they learn of the history in which it was composed? After all Shostakovich spent all of his life in the Soviet Union, whereas a new generation of musician is emerging that never knew the USSR.

MS: The children of today know something of the past, although it's generally lacking in detail. For them, this music is pure music, it can exist outside a historical context, like any other music. There is no problem for them. Perhaps some of the older kids lived under the age of Perestroika and Gorbachev, but music and politics remain separate issues for them.

DSCH: If one passes by the school, what says "this is a school dedicated to Shostakovich"?

MS: First of all the music you'll hear! And then there is a large plaque outside the school indicating the presence of our school?

DSCH: Are there special exhibits in the school?

MS: Of course! There's a bust of Shostakovich in the entrance hall and we have a small exhibition too.

Suddenly the doors are flung open to reveal a string trio at the threshold. Our interview is over, the talking ceases and the strains of Borodin were already flooding over us as Madame Nikolayevna presses a Shostakovich School badge into my hand. "Take it, and remember us", she whispers, in broken English. I do, and will.

For more information about the activities of the Shostakovich School in Moscow, as well as the aforementioned Competition, please contact:

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ANNA AKHMATOVA MUSEUM

It's a brisk 10 minutes' walk from the mesmerising phenomenon that is Nevsky Prospekt, but by the time you've failed to find any street indications on Liteyniy Prospekt, have attempted to employ your best sub-High School Russian -

"Gdye Musey Anna Akhmatova pejelsta?" (and, of course, have singularly failed to match the reply to anything appearing in Berlitz's *Pocket Russian*) - well, the unexpected peace of the walled gardens that formerly housed myriad fountains (thus the "Fountain" part of Fountain House - otherwise known as the Sheremetyev Palace) is quite, quite breathtaking. My advice? Attack the museum from the more orthodox entrance on the Fontanka Canal bank - number 34 to be precise.

The somewhat dishevelled state of the gardens isn't reflected in the neighbouring building that houses the Akhmatova Museum: which shouldn't imply that the Web-tuned Western visitor will be grappling with the latest interactive museum gadgetry. Not at all as glass cases and roped-off ante-rooms predominate in an environment which is nonetheless welcoming, informative and most of all highly evocative of the periods through which this great poet lived and worked. After all, this was a mere communal apartment in her time and the place in which much of her inner strife was born.

Akhmatova may have a tremendously international reputation, but her Museum caters, linguistically-speaking, to masters only of



the Russian tongue. Take a native speaker with you and the various rooms and exhibits will open up their stories and secrets to you too.

Further armed with a little of her story, the history of Leningrad and the Arts here in particular and there is plenty to seize everyone's attention, thanks to the painstakingly assembled collection of hundreds of exhibits and artifacts. Little has been changed since her death in the 1960s and much of the furniture and many of the paintings and drawings that adorn this place provide graphic outlines to Akhmatova's verses.

The museum was opened in 1989, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the poet's birth, in the southern garden wing of Sheremetyev Palace which, in spite of the best efforts of the worst kind of Russia's steel grey, icy days remains one of the most beautiful of St. Petersburg's 18th century private residences. This isn't the only place where Akhmatova lived in St. Petersburg (or rather, Leningrad), but she did spend the majority of her life here. It takes only a few steps along the communal corridor for the special aura of the place to seep deeply into even the most hardened of Western sensibilities.

In fact Akhmatova moved into the building in the mid-20s and lived here until 1952. The apartment in which she lived belonged to her husband, the art critic and research scholar at the city's Russian (Art) Museum, Nikolai Nikolaevich Punin. As

my scant printed guide informed me, the museum's collection numbers over 13,000 items of memorabilia as well as another 25,000 miscellaneous items.

A set of stunningly anonymous stairs lead to Akhmatova's living quarters, or rather an expanded version of same, now consisting of a cold, functional corridor (some pictures have been hung there to attempt to break up the stark monotony - but have failed) and six separate rooms - some self-contained, some interlinked (original or not is hard to fathom), but all dripping with evocative objects and writings concerning the elusive poetess.

Personally I began to sense the unmistakable presence of Akhmatova from the third of the rooms on show - where she passed many of her days from 1923 until 1938. Now the room is dedicated to Punin - bureaux and books and easeled sketches depicting the multi-layered talents of her partner. In 1938 she moved along a couple of rooms into a stunningly light, airy study-cum bedroom, maintained in its original textures and furnishings today. A magnificent portrait in oils graces the window's shadows just as her own form would have filled this apartment. I stared out into the garden and found myself in the grip of a



winter - frozen with anguish and lamentation for a lost generation - Stalin's.

Stay there, "with her" for as long as you feel able and these four walls will gradually possess you. See, too, a classic sketch of Akhmatova undertaken in faraway Paris or an elegant, china figurine of the poet,



purportedly sold to buy a train ticket and unearthed much later in a Moscow pawn shop.

The wholly documentary displays that follow through the remaining rooms of the museum seemed to me relatively soulless in comparison, however many chilling moments rise from the light-blanced pages of editions such as *Literaturnaya Gazeta* - State denouncements follow State threats follow accusations of the basest kind as the cold, knurled hand of the Terror slammed into Akhmatova and many of her artistic counterparts - Shostakovich included, of course.

Before leaving the building you might wish to ask the staff for a viewing of one of the many specialised documentary films they hold in their library (some in English, most only in Russian) - I chose a powerful portrait of Josef Brodsky and did not regret the choice, given the strong connotative and biographical links between the two poets.

Back out into the Petersburg morning I feel suddenly more in communion with these streets and as I pass the canalside where so many of Russia's great creative minds have wandered, so often in desperate contemplation, my mind settles inevitably on Akhmatova and on these words from her *Requiem*:

**Lest in blessed death I should forget
The grinding scream of the Black Marias,

The hideous clanging gate, the old
Woman wailing like a wounded beast.

And may the melting snow drop like tears
From my motionless bronze eyelids,

And the prison pigeons coo above me
And the ships sail slowly down the Neva**

