



After DimitriosKardaras of the World

MAZURKAS OF THE WORLD

A festival full of mazurkas has helped to breathe new life into Poland's folk music. Simon Broughton discovers the joys of the lively Warsaw gathering

It's a late-night club event at the end of the evening. But at Mazurkas of the World, that doesn't mean a DJ. In front of us is the striking figure of Russian musician Marina Kriukova, dressed in a white smock with a red scarf wrapped around her head. Her eyes sparkle. She picks up a violin and starts playing and singing a sort of scat. It's trance-like and captivating. But suddenly she stops. "I feel like a Chinese person playing for Hindus," she says. "Please dance!" At this festival people don't need much persuading and in a moment the floor is full of couples twirling and others doing their own thing. A moment later Janusz Prusinowski joins her on frame drum and the atmosphere becomes even more ecstatic.

This moment is characteristic of Mazurkas of the World in two ways. People are very up

for dancing, and not just mazurkas – which form the main repertoire – but anything, including the Russian round dances Kriukova is playing. And the musicians you encounter here aren't those who regularly pop up at festivals from one end of Europe to the other. I like to think I know a bit about Russian music, but I'd never heard of Kriukova, and what a dynamic character she is. Based in Moscow, she goes out to learn from singers and musicians in European Russia. She's captivating to watch and indeed dance to.

Most of the invited musicians at the six-day event come through the network of the Janusz Prusinowski Trio, who are the festival hosts and have friends and colleagues in the folk revival all across Poland and its eastern neighbours. On the same evening as Kriukova, there had

been other performers from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, including the group Hulaj Horod, who also contributed to Polish punk band R.U.T.A.'s last album *Na Vschod* (Go East).

The Janusz Prusinowski Trio is usually five people these days – Prusinowski on violin, Michał Żak on clarinet or other winds, Szczepan Pospieszalski on trumpet, Piotr Zgorzelski on bass and Piotr Piszczatowski beating out the elusive and always fluid rhythms on various drums. Janusz Prusinowski plays like a man possessed, flinging his head around as if inciting everyone to dance. And he is a man possessed with a passion for Poland's village music and the three-beat rhythms of the mazurka (*mazurek*), *oberek* and *polonaise*. "We started the festival in Chopin's bicentenary year [2010], when there was no public recognition of anything valuable in Polish traditional music. There was no cultural space for the old masters or the younger musicians and singers learning from them. That fantastic world of mazurkas, that musical language and personal experience seemed to have no meaning in their own country."

With that in mind, the impact of the festival has been dramatic. Now there clearly is an urban audience that admires and enjoys this music. And they have also brought in an

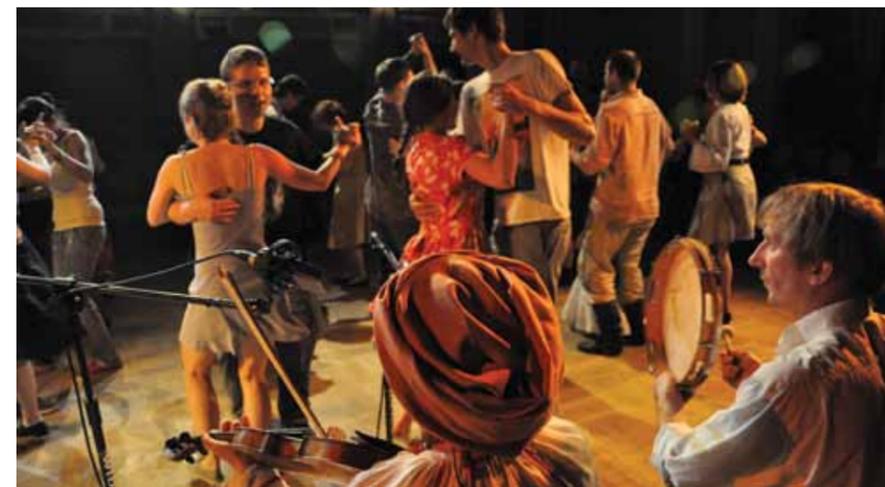
Prusinowski plays like a man possessed... with a passion for Poland's village music



Simon Broughton



Clockwise from left: Janusz Prusinowski on fiddle; accordions for sale in the instrument fair; Russian fiddler Marina Kriukova; Marina Kriukova and Janusz Prusinowski fire the dance



international dimension by inviting overseas guests playing mazurkas or related dances in other traditions – including musicians from Brittany, Louisiana and, last year, Sweden. These included the Nyckelharpa Trio, Nordik Tree and fiddle player Magnus Gustafsson – one of the best players of Swedish *polska* and an expert in the history of the music. The triple-time *polska* is probably the predominant traditional dance form in Sweden and, as its name suggests, is thought to have come from Poland in the 17th century. The Swedish *polska* sounds very different from its Polish antecedents, but the connections were apparent hearing them together in concert and a big dance session.

For the last three years, the festival has held the Old Tradition (Stara Tradycja) competition for young traditional bands. The name is deliberately chosen to mirror that of the New Tradition (Nowa Tradycja) competition organised by Polish Radio since 1998 and the most important for new folk bands.

Prusinowski was keen to start a competition because the traditional village music was being neglected: "I felt it was really important to have a competition for traditional music, because it gives musicians something to strive for and how do you do anything new if you don't know the old stuff?" Ten bands are shortlisted and judged by the following criteria: authenticity, a link to the local tradition, quality of the music, freedom and improvisation in style and expression. "But the music isn't just judged by experts, but by dancers as well," adds Prusinowski, "the playing needs to incite movement."

Last year's winners were the Kapela Maliszów, the band of fiddler Jan Malisz and his children, Kacper (aged 14) on second fiddle and Zuzanna (aged 11) on cello and voice, from the Rzeszów region in the south-east of the country. "They played music from their parents and grandparents (who were also village musicians), and played with an energy that made dancing easy and natural."

Mazurkas of the World also treats the old masters like 'stars,' meaning that an old fiddler like Jan Gaca got a national award and extensive obituaries in the mainstream press when he died in August, which he certainly wouldn't have done a decade ago.

Poland might be at last waking up to its folk culture now, but one of last year's concerts explored the music of German Baroque composer Georg Philipp Telemann who spent a few years in the early 1700s in Poland and became fascinated by the folk music. "One week in Poland could be inspiration for a composer's whole lifetime," he said. With the unlikely line-up of violin, bagpipes, trombone and organ, the Orkiestra Czasów Zarazy (Plague Times Orchestra) played Telemann pieces clearly inspired by mazurkas and obereks.

Alongside the main festival concerts and dances are instrument workshops, demonstrations by instrument makers, and an extraordinary fair of traditional instruments – flutes, bagpipes, hurdy-gurdies, drums, quirky pedal-driven accordions and the new, sculptural instruments created by Andrzej Król. Again it shows the vitality of craftsmanship and tradition under the surface. ♦

✦ **DATES** The 2014 edition will be April 21-27
✦ **ONLINE** www.festivalmazurki.pl