

# HEAR THE



# KOLOKOLA RING

By Erin K. Schonauer & Jamie C. Schonauer

## STANDING HIGH IN THE BELFRY,

towering above Russia, a music maker resides. Kolokola (kah-loo-kah-la) or Russian bells, surround him. Moving his arms like a puppeteer, with ropes attached to his hands and each bronze bell, he clinks and clanks the instruments in intricate patterns to produce beautiful melodies. This is the ancient art of Russian bell-ringing.

The sounds of the kolokola are significant to Russian national culture. They are celebrated throughout the country during various festivals such as Festival Proobrazhenie in Yaroslavl. Here, top bell-ringers are invited to perform as they pay homage to Russian bell-ringing. There are even special schools dedicated to helping young students learn this traditional music and keep the art of bell-ringing alive.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, bell ringing began to thrive in Russia. It originated as a way to warn villagers of fires and enemies, guide travelers in snowstorms, ring in the hours, and summon for worship. Each signal had its own tone or musical quality so citizens knew what each bell meant.

Bell ringing was also common in Russian churches. The advent of Christianity brought bell-ringing to the forefront in church ceremonies. As there were no organs in Russian churches, as there were in other parts of Europe, Russians used church bells to convey their spirituality.

By the late 1920s, silence struck Russia. The Soviet government ordered that all bell-ringing stop and all bells be removed from church bellfries. According to Communist rule, the metal from

the bells was needed to aid in the Industrial Revolution. The bells were thrown from bell towers, and destroyed using sledge hammers. In 1991, the Soviet Union fell apart and so did the ban against bell-ringing. Soon after the ban was lifted, after more than seven decades of silence, bell ringing began its revival.

Today, the kolokola beckon across Russia's landscape. To make music, bell-ringers, or *zvonari* (z-voin-ah-ree), use the clapper or tongue, which hangs from the middle of the bell, to strike its sides. Some musicians push the clapper with their hands. Others use ropes, which are tied around the clapper, to ring the bell. Sometimes the ropes are attached to the bell-ringers' hands, feet, and arms so they can ring many bells at once. If the bell is too heavy, more than one bell-ringer is needed. When rung, the bell itself is never swung. Instead, the clapper moves freely. This technique is unique to Russia and allows bell-ringers to create an abundant array of rhythms and arrangements.

The sound, or *zvon*, of the Russian bell comes in many varieties. The powerful and lyrical sound of festive bell music is popular among Russians. This music is produced often using large bells and resembles the cheerful spirit of Russian life. It is heard during holiday celebrations. Another type of festive music is the upbeat, joyful sound of red bell music. This red or "beautiful" music is performed by one bell-ringer who uses either five or seven bells. Its purpose is to lift people's spirits and provide them merriment.

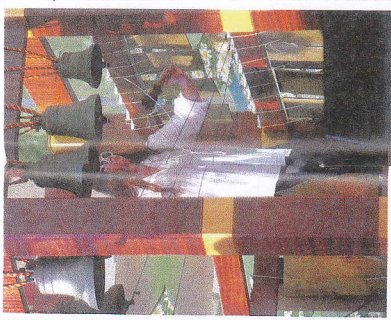
You can also hear other sounds like celebratory

**RINGING THE BELL IN CELEBRATION**  
A Russian bell ringer performs his duties for Epiphany, a religious holiday.

Swan, Bear, and Sheep are names given to Russian bells. Each name resembles the bell's sound — a swan's squall, a bear's deep roar, and a sheep's rough bellow.



**SILENT NO MORE.** Since the fall of communism, traditional bell ringing has made a comeback.



# FAST FACTS

According to ancient Russian superstition, if a bell was heard before starting work, it was said to bring good luck. If a bell suddenly rang on its own, it meant trouble.



A monk rings the bells of Assumption Cathedral in Yaroslavl, Russia.

**241** Kolokola come in all shapes and sizes.

wedding music, somber funeral bells, or peaceful everyday bells where many small-sized bells are rung during the week.

It takes kolokola of all sizes to make an abundance of sounds. The Blagovestnik Bell which means "bearer of good news" rings out with the voice of a bass. These large bells are rung at the start of church services and can weigh from hundreds of pounds to several thousand. Podzvonny (pod-zvohn-neigh) are mid-sized bells weighing about 50 to 300 pounds and have an alto voice. Small bells or Zazvonny (zah-zvohn-neigh) usually weigh less than 50 pounds and sing like a soprano.

Each bell is made so that it has its own tone or voice. This is done through a process called casting. Here, the bell comes to life. Casting

usually takes place in the ground or in a melting furnace. Molten hot bronze is poured into a mold or core. Bronze is used because it allows for a rich, deep sound. After cooling and curing, which can take from one week to many months, the bell is ready. It's cleaned and polished, sometimes using a patina coating. The bell is decorated with cast relief designs, which include pictures of saints, inscriptions of the cast date, and name of foundry.

To ensure the bells will be successful, a prayer is held during the casting. All hopeful, the kolokola will ring for years to come.

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# WHERE IN the WORLD?

Do you know where this reader is enjoying her copy of **FACES**?

Here is a hint: Although it's not a traditional castle, a "king" once lived here.

The answer is on page 48.

