

A Research Project: Seeing Light, Hearing Music
& the Long Path to SOVIET FAUST, In English

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Throughout the 1970's and 80's I was extremely interested in Electro-acoustic music and the interplay of colour, light and music. This was mostly through music performance and screen projections associated with the songs/musical performances. I was aware of the theremin from its use in 1960's rock music but knew very little of its history, although I did know that the electronics pioneer Leon Theremin was Russian.

In 1988, I started work on a documentary/drama project about the Australian-born composer and pianist Percy Grainger (1882-1961) who popularised English Folk songs by arranging the themes into orchestral, piano, brass band and solo settings. In the 1920's he imagined an instrument that could play gliding tones rather than stepped notes. This led him to compose for the first electronic instrument invented by Leon Theremin (1896-1993), in 1920. I had learnt that Theremin was a Russian/Soviet Engineer and pioneer in the field of electronic music. The Theremin or termenvox/thereminvox was unique among musical instruments in that it is played without physical contact.

Filming of the documentary took place at the Grainger Museum in Melbourne, Australia at the BEAMING THE THEREMIN event, curated by sound artist Dr Ros Bandt². The electro-acoustic musician Jon Drummond played Grainger's "Free Music" #1 and #2 and "Beat-less Music" for Theremin perched on top of the museum building. It was a world premiere performance, as these works had not been played in Australia on a Theremin.

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² Internationally acclaimed sound artist, composer, researcher and scholar. Since 1977 she has pioneered interactive sound installations, sound sculptures, and created sound playgrounds, spatial music systems, and some 40 sound installations worldwide. She has curated many sound performances, exhibitions and events. Her original works are recorded on New Albion Records (USA), Move Records (Melbourne), EMI/ABC, and Wergo (Germany).

By this time I had corresponded with Bulat Galejev, the world expert on Light-Music and author of the book SOVIET FAUST (1995) about the life of Leon Theremin. He sent me some information on Percy Grainger and Theremin, he had also asked for information about some Australian and New Zealand artists working in a similar field eg. Len Lye, innovative animator and film maker.

As director of the Prometei Institute in Kazan, Russia he championed the study and production of Light-Music: the synaesthetic interconnection between Light, Colour and music. I sent him a digital copy of the Grainger Theremin pieces and a video of all the live theremin performances, through a friend who lived in Moscow, and in return he sent me a signed copy of his book SOVIET FAUST.

This was the start of my interest in Bulat's SOVIET FAUST book but also a continuation of my interest in Synaesthesia: a neurologically-based condition in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway eg. "See a colour, hear a musical note".

In 2004, I approached my work colleague, composer David Sidwell³ to see if he was interested in collaborating on a research project about Synaesthesia. His answer was yes but what is It? I answered him by saying something like, well it's a neurological condition that means that when someone hears a musical note they might see a particular colour, or a colour might connect you with a certain smell, or a word might remind you of a colour. Some of the world's greatest artists have either been "synaesthetes" or utilised these concepts to create works or art. The physicist Isaac Newton created a colour scale of 7 colours, and related them to musical notes. The writer Vladimir Nabokov saw colours when he wrote words.

One of our research goals was to develop a Synaesthetic work that included musical composition for Theremin and a video projection which subsequently became the

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audio-video performance piece: CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEREMIN AND SOPRANO.

Later in 2004, we attempted to make the Research trip to Moscow and Kazan but in the middle of that year funding was withdrawn by our institution through a nationwide moratorium on Research Funding. However, in late September 2007, my academic colleague David Sidwell and I visited the Theremin Centre at the Moscow Conservatory, meeting with Andrei Smirnov, the director of the Centre and Stanislaw Kreichi, composer and key exponent of the pioneering Russian electro-acoustic instrument, the ANS Synthesiser. We also visited Sergei Zorin at his Optical Theatre, the Museum House of Alexander Scriabin and the Glinka Museum of Musical Instruments in Moscow. In most places I filmed a series of interviews and the surroundings in which they worked.

However, the main reason for our research trip was to meet with Bulat Galejev, director of the Prometei Institute, Kazan. We spent a week in Kazan and as part of the Mus-Transit music performance in Kazan co-sponsored by the Tatarstan Union of Composers, a performance of David Sidwell's music piece RECUERDE for chamber ensemble was performed, we met with young composers at the Union House screening a documentary film about Contemporary New Zealand composers and hearing some of the composers music, and at the Prometei screening studio presented some films by NZ filmmaker Len Lye, young filmmakers experimental video works and played recordings of NZ Contemporary compositions.

In Kazan on one particular evening we visited Bulat, his wife Irina and sister Sanbul at their flat for dinner. After dinner whilst chatting Bulat said that he had an English translation of SOVIET FAUST written by English auther Sally Brown, and perhaps we might find a publisher for the book in New Zealand? I had already worked with an Australian publisher and told Bulat that I would see what I could do. Previously, I had read snippets of roughly translated chapters of the book on the internet and I was fascinated with the Theremin story and wanted to know more.

Some further quotes from Bulat's book was included in a book on Theremin's life subtitled: "Ether Music & Espionage" by Albert Glinsky (2000). I also corresponded briefly with him about Grainger, Theremin, and subsequent musical performance instruments that Grainger made in the 1950's. But there was no complete English translation of Bulat's SOVIET FAUST published anywhere in the world.

Over the next two years I negotiated with Australian publisher Tom Thompson of ETT Imprint, and Bulat to get the book published. In early 2009, I received a message from Bulat's email address stating that he had regrettably passed away on 5th January, however the Prometei Institute was still interested in the publication and that we could continue our negotiations. From that day on until early November 2010 I negotiated an amicable agreement with Bulat's widow and heir only to have the rights passed onto Bulat's sister Sanbul Makhmudovna Galyavina. Then through the services of a copyright lawyer in Kazan, Natalya of ARTPATENT agency, contracts office at WINTEC and the publisher Tom Thompson, we managed to publish the first complete English language edition of SOVIET FAUST by Bulat Galeyev on 31st November 2010 in Australia. The book is currently available through reputable Australian booksellers and through ETT Imprint's distributor in Melbourne, Australia.

In August, 2011 the world renowned Thereminist, Lydia Kavina, attended our Annual WINTEC MEDIA ARTS SPARK Arts Festival in Hamilton, New Zealand as a guest of the Music department. She presented a presentation on the history of the Theremin with powerpoint illustrated with theremin performances, held a Theremin Workshop and officially launched the SOVIET FAUST book in Australasia. She also performed the theremin part at the Premiere of CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEREMIN AND SOPRANO, composed by David Sidwell and accompanied by a video which I shot directed and edited. She also performed the theremin part in a recording of the music for a CD/DVD release. This work was dedicated to the memory of Bulat Galeyev.

Since late 2007 David and I worked on developing this project, creating the musical score and the visual images that relate to the music. He wrote music pieces and I edited the images which I filmed in Russia together, back and forth I edited these pieces, as David viewed the edited images in relation to the music, he then re-wrote these pieces and I again edited the images, sounds and re-arranged the music as David supplied more musical variations until we were satisfied with the visual and aural correlation.

We also used the colour theories of Russian composer Alexander Scriabin, who pioneered the first colour symphony for orchestra and light organ⁴. His colour wheel correlated colours to notes, and we followed his ideas. In the live performance coloured lights reflecting Scriabin's ideas of music and colour were projected onto hanging white strips of material beside the musicians during the performance.

The performance was to an invited audience at the SPARK 2011 and we received a standing ovation. I introduced the performance piece and Lydia Kavina spoke at the end of the performance and discussed the importance of the publication of SOVIET FAUST. She also told us that CONVERSATIONS was a very good work for Festival performances and that she would be pleased to perform this work again. We were also delighted and pleased that her performance on this work added such skill, ability and nuanced the work impeccably.

We look forward to having CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEREMIN AND SOPRANO performed in Kazan.

⁴ *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, Op. 60 (1910) for piano, orchestra, optional choir, and clavier à lumières.