

## 12 – LENINGRAD

Wednesday, 27 June

After a short sleep we rose at eight o'clock and had breakfast half an hour later. Although the morning began sunny, it quickly clouded over. According to our programme, there was an optional tour of the Russian Museum this morning. Walter had paid for this visit, but I had not. However, I had thought of a cunning plan and was willing to give it a try.

After breakfast, I went to the Beriozka shop, where I bought two more packets of slides: pictures of Petrodvorets and Pushkin. As I had run out of money by now, Walter gave me what I needed. I then set off for the Russian Museum, leaving Walter to wait for the official tour. I travelled in the Metro, armed with a raincoat, a jumper, and a bag of leftovers taken from the breakfast table. I surfaced at Gostiny Dvor, then walked along Nevsky Prospekt back towards our hotel, but stopped at the Public Library opposite Ostrovsky Square. I then turned to the right and made my way to the former Alexandrovsky Theatre, now renamed the Pushkin Theatre. As it began to drizzle rain, I put on my raincoat.

Around the other side of the large theatre, which had been built by Rossi in 1832, I walked along the former Theatre Street, now Architect Rossi Street. With its large stately buildings on both sides, I expected it to look quite impressive, for I had seen a photograph of it. However, it turned out to be something of an anticlimax in the dull light and the rain. Soon I found the spot in Lomonosov Square from where the photograph had been taken; from here the view was quite impressive. Nevertheless, the square failed to please me, despite the fact that it was regarded as being the 'finest architectural complex' of Leningrad.

Disappointed, I now retraced my steps, passing by a group of lethargic workers, two drunks who staggered about, and a large lady with parcels. Once again I noticed that people here did not bother to protect themselves from the rain; they were obviously immune to it!

I hurried back to the Russian Museum and arrived there by 10.40 a.m., just as our group was walking in through the gate. I tagged myself on at the end, telling those near me to take no notice of me. Keeping well out of the guide's sight, I followed them as we passed the queue of people who were waiting to buy tickets and, once inside, lost myself among the crowd. The plan had worked! Taking note of the direction in which our group had taken, I stayed put, then followed them a few minutes later.

The first few magnificent rooms contained collections of icons; I skipped these and, in doing so, passed our group and got in front of them. I then met Walter, who had wandered off on his own, and together we went to the room in which the paintings of Peter the Great's 'fledglings' were displayed. Here we saw a fine portrait of the architect Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli painted by P. Rotan (1707–1782) and a fine statue of Catherine II by Rastrelli. Walter wandered off after a while, and so I was left alone to view the paintings that I wished to see, at my own speed.



Portrait of Ekaterina Nelidova by *Dmitry Levitzky*

First of all I stopped to admire paintings by Dmitry Levitzky (1735–1822), and was very taken with a fine portrait of Ekaterina Nelidova (1773) and a painting of two young ladies, Ekaterina Khrushchova and Princess Ekaterina Khovanskaya (also 1773). After viewing these, I passed through a room full of period furniture, but as I found it all rather heavy and ugly, I did not stay long in it.

In another room I saw a painting that I had seen before, in the Tretyakov Gallery: Catherine II with her little dog by Vladimir Borovikovsky (1757–1825). Was this the original (I wondered), a copy, or a sketch? I saw many other paintings that I had already seen, and so was rather puzzled. Also to be seen were portraits by Orest Kiprensky (1782–1836), including one of Evgraf Vladimirovich Davidov, a major-general of the Russian Empire.

The next room contained paintings of peasant scenes by Alexei Venetsianov (1780–1847) that were pleasant, though a little dull. In another was a small work that attracted my attention: Nikifor Krylov's *Russian Winter*. This artist had lived from 1802 to 1831. Once again I came across a large collection of works by Alexander Ivanov; on a wall was a sketch of his large work, *Christ before the People*.



The Cautious Bride (or The Major's Marriage Proposal) by *Pavel Fedotov*

Next came one of my favourite artists: Pavel Fedotov. I admired his small but very touching portrait of Nadezhda Zhdanovich playing the harpsichord. Included among his pleasant genre paintings, many of them humorous, was another version of *The Cautious Bride* (or *The Major's Marriage Proposal*). In another room was a fine portrait of the novelist Turgenev by Vasily Perov, which was full of character. Next came works by Nikolai Ge, such as a marvellous portrait of Tolstoy at work. There were also some religious works by the artist, and a brighter version of *Peter the Great interrogating his son Alexei*. In a room devoted to the works of Ivan Kramskoi, I admired a portrait of a miller and another of the painter Ivan Shishkin (1832–1898), whose large and gentle landscapes I stopped to look at in another room. I also saw a fine peaceful countryside scene by the painter Andrei Popov.



The Procession of the Cross (or Easter Procession) by Illarion Pryanishnikov

A picture that really caught my eye was the large and striking *Procession of the Cross* by Illarion Pryanishnikov (1840–1894). This work depicted a colourful procession that was taking place on the bank of a river; against the sky in the background was a country church, the cupolas of which shone in the sunshine. Elderly peasants mowing down overgrown grass in a field were depicted in a fine painting by Grigoriy Myasoyedov (1834–1911). In a huge picture painted by Konstantin Savitsky (1845–1905), a crowd of men boarded a train in great confusion, off to war, with colourfully-dressed women in the foreground bidding them farewell.

Up to this point, the paintings had been very well displayed in chronological order. However, when I climbed a staircase to the third floor, it was difficult to know into which room one should go next, for the rooms were numbered in a confusing manner, thereby upsetting the logical order of the paintings. I now found myself going backwards and forwards in time. Because of this, I now started with paintings by Konstantin Yuon (1875–1958). When I had finished admiring his fine and bold landscapes, I looked at a colourful winter scene by Sergei Vinogradov (1869–1938).

I then stopped to admire works by Valentin Serov (1865–1911), some of which were being copied by students; their work looked very good. Here I saw his painting of two children gazing at the sea, his portrait of Princess Zinaida Yusupova, and a spirited depiction of Peter II and Empress Elizabeth Petrovna riding to hounds.



Barge Haulers on the Volga by Ilya Repin

In another room, more students were working away, copying some pictures by Ilya Repin. Once again I was very impressed by their work. Here I found a painting that I had seen reproduced in a book: a very fine portrait of a Byelorussian. A large and vivid work caught my eye: *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, an intense study of men hard at work. There was also an impressive portrait of Vladimir Stasov, a music and art critic, and another version of the *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV*, which I had seen in the Tretyakov. This colourful work was full of life and energy.

As I had seen everything of interest by this stage, I then walked quickly through some rooms dedicated to the modern school, and once again noticed that the Russian people were doing the same; hardly anyone stopped to examine the paintings. I only saw two students copying some works that were relatively pleasing to behold.

I had enjoyed my free tour of the gallery very much. Most of the paintings had been well displayed and carefully labelled, and the caretakers were helpful. When I had emerged from the rooms downstairs earlier, one of the elderly ladies had noticed my momentary confusion, and had directed me upstairs.

I left the museum by a side door at 1.15 p.m. and joined the crowds in Nevsky Prospekt. It was still rather gloomy by now, but at least the rain had eased off. Although I had planned to go to the Summer Garden, I decided that it was now time to eat something. I walked to Palace Square, turned to the right at the Winter Palace, then headed down the side street to the *Bulochnaya*, where Walter and I had eaten before. I was rather annoyed, though somewhat amused, to discover that this shop-cum-restaurant was now 'closed for lunch', though the door was still open. A chair had been placed in the doorway to prevent people entering. As it was now ten to two, and as the shop was due to open again at two o'clock, I walked down to the Neva embankment, passing two drunks, and sat on the wall. Chewing a black bread and meat sandwich, I began to think about how bookish the Russians seemed to be. After I had left the Russian Museum, I had popped into the musty old Dom Knigi (House of Books) for a few moments. It had been packed with people queuing at counters, buying books, none of which seemed to be on display. Buying a book in this way must be very time consuming, I thought. Outside, I had seen a stall displaying English books, which was surrounded by a crowd of people. A short distance away, a man had set up a rough-and-ready stall and was selling Western and Russian sheet music,

which he extracted from a cardboard box. They were selling like hot cakes. As I looked, I could sense a queue forming behind me.

I returned to the *Bulochnaya* at two o'clock and discovered that a queue had already formed inside. When I was eventually served, I bought a cup of sweet coffee and a sticky bun. I demolished these when I sat down at one of the tables and took a welcome rest after spending most of the morning on my feet. People were coming in all the time; some of them sat down for a quick cup of coffee, then left.

I got to my feet shortly afterwards and slowly wandered up to the Summer Garden. At the entrance, I bought an ice cream. Sitting down on a bench beside the neat little Summer Palace, I began to eat it. As I did so, a woman caretaker emerged from the door of the palace, set up a barrier in front of the queue, and sat down for a rest outside. Some of the people beseeched her to let them in, but to no avail, for she would not budge. Obediently, the people gave up and patiently waited until the elderly lady eventually got to her feet, removed the barrier, and began to let them enter.

When I had finished my ice cream, I joined another queue for a ticket. However, while waiting, a large group of schoolchildren arrived, sat down, then began to skip the queue in small groups. The queue that I was in now moved at a snail's pace, and the queue at the entrance had come to a standstill. I soon got fed up waiting and left, feeling rather annoyed. I walked back to the Winter Palace along the embankment and came to the fizzy water machines, some of which were working erratically, and some not at all. When I joined the queue and waited for a drink, I saw the local people kicking and punching the machines, trying to make them work. After I eventually helped myself, a lad approached me and, looking distrustfully at the machine, asked, 'Работает?' ('*Rabótayet?*' – 'Is it working?'), to which I replied, 'Да, работает' ('*Da, rabótayet?*' – 'Yes, it's working').

I then crossed the road and walked to the Maksim Gorky Garden, passing by a kiosk where sweets and kvass were being sold. Nearby some women were trying to sell sticks of lipstick and colourful plastic carrier bags, and an elderly man with no hands was weighing people, for a few kopecks, on an old-fashioned scales that used sliding weights. I presumed that the unfortunate man must have been a victim of the war. So far during this trip we had seen very few deformed people. However, I had seen notices on some of the sliding doors in the metro stations marking an entrance reserved for invalids.

Passing through the garden, I headed for Saint Isaac's Square and began to search for a place that I very much wanted to visit: the Institute for Scientific Research on the Theatre and Music, in which was a museum of musical instruments that had been moved out of the Winter Palace. After I had walked all round the square, I eventually found it, only to discover a notice written on a piece of paper, which stated that the musical instrument section had been closed since the 25th of May. I left feeling rather frustrated.

As the weather began to clear up and the sun began to shine from behind the banks of grey cloud, I walked to Decembrist Square and took some photographs of the equestrian statue of Peter the Great (see Chapter 7) and the surrounding area. As soon as I had finished, the sun went in again.

At half past four I decided to head back to the hotel, and walked to the trolleybus stop at the top of Nevsky Prospekt, where I joined the rush hour crowds. When a bus came along and stopped, the orderly queue completely disintegrated as everyone pushed and shoved their way on to the already crowded vehicle. Once squashed inside, there was no way of moving, and several attempts had to be made to close the

doors, which were obstructed by people standing near them. Inside I was pushed up against pretty girls, sweaty men and elderly women. A young lady standing beside me was laughing with her companion; it was quite possible that I had my hand on her leg or on some other part of her body! A lady with a flimsy cardboard box tied up with string struggled on board and, as the journey progressed, the box became more squashed and distorted.

As I could neither move myself or my arms, I did not pay; it seemed that most of the people in the bus did not pay either. During the journey, a pleasant and smiling oriental couple stood beside me.

I eventually returned to the hotel, footsore and weary, at 5.20 p.m. I went up to my room, where I washed my feet and hair, then went down for dinner, which was very welcome, at six o'clock.

After some last-minute instructions from our Australian friend Anna, Walter and I set off by Metro to the Дворец Культуры имени Горького (*Dvaryéts Kul'túry ímyini Górkava* – The Palace of Culture named after Gorky) for an evening of Ukrainian folk dancing. I was looking forward to this. We travelled the distance of only one stop on the Metro line from the hotel, getting off at the Mayakovskaya station. We then descended a flight of steps to the Vosstaniya Square station, which was on a line that headed south-westwards. This station was older and more conventional for, like the Metro stations in Moscow, it was more decorative, and we could see a blue train approaching the platform.

On this line we travelled five stops and got out at the Narvskaya station. Outside, we found ourselves in the large but rather unimpressive Stachek Square, which was full of wooden hoardings, planks, rubble, and cranes. After searching for a few moments, we found the Palace of Culture – a large uninteresting structure – and made our way around a building site towards it. As we did so, we met a small party from our group who had been afraid of getting lost on the Metro, and so had decided to take a taxi, which had taken longer to get here than expected. Together we entered the theatre, which was not as elaborate as the ones in which we had been, but was quite impressive nonetheless. We were shown to our seats at the back of the theatre; although we had a good view, we were quite far away from the stage.

The evening's performance was due to begin at half past seven, but nothing happened; instead we were treated to some rather syrupy piped music. The time dragged on to eight o'clock and still nothing happened. Eventually a drummer arrived and began to set up his drum kit to mock applause from the impatient audience. Then, one by one, members of a small band began to arrive: two double-bass players, a couple of violinists, an oboist, a clarinettist, and an accordion player. I began to get very suspicious of these very un-Ukrainian instruments, and suspected that we were to be treated to yet another 'tourists' special'.

At last the conductor arrived and was applauded; then, after a pause, we listened to a long announcement in English, followed by translations in French and German. My suspicions were confirmed; this entertainment was strictly for tourists, for I now realized that there were no Russian people present. When the band finally started to play, they fought for volume against the lively drummer, who clearly won. The curtain rose and revealed a collection of colourfully-dressed dancers, who pranced and leaped about. The dancing quickly turned into a spectacular show of acrobatics which, although very skilfully done, became more and more gimmicky, and also very tedious. I found the music quite uninteresting. However, the tourists loved it; at the end of every item, the dancers would bow to their applause and repeat the final

section of the dance, either stopping for more applause or dancing off into the wings. After a while, Walter and I stopped applauding.

During the interval, we were treated to loud Scott Joplin music and voice-overs advertising sights to be seen in Leningrad, which I found quite distasteful. Nobody paid any attention to these; they wandered outside for a drink or some ice cream.

As the second half of the show was just more of the same type of thing, Walter and I were glad to leave at the end.

We escorted our companions back to the hotel on the Metro; however, as I was quite tired by now, my sense of direction failed me twice and I nearly led everyone astray. Fortunately one of the men had come on the Metro and was able to set us right.

We eventually arrived back at the hotel by eleven o'clock, then went to bed at one o'clock.

Thursday, 28 June

A dull and miserable morning. Walter and I had hoped to go photographing parts of the city this morning but, because of the weather, we had to abandon our plan. During breakfast time, Walter was given instructions on how to get to the biggest and best-stocked Beriozka shop in the city, which was situated in the Sovyetskaya Hotel, and so we decided to spend the morning buying some souvenirs.

When ready, we set off and caught one of the Metro trains. We were surprised to see so many people on it at 9.30 a.m., for we thought that most of the people would be at work by now. Sitting beside me, and oblivious to everything around her, was a girl reading chemistry notes that had been written very neatly in a copybook of graph paper. Other people were reading books, and a couple of men were reading the famous *Pravda* newspaper.

At the Mayakovskaya station we changed to the other line, as we had done during the previous evening, and travelled for just four stops, getting out at the Baltiskaya station. This was quite old fashioned, and the ceiling of the circular hall upstairs was decorated with elaborate stucco work. Outside, we found ourselves in a square. It was easy to tell from the surrounding apartment blocks and skyscrapers that we were now in suburbia.

Following the instructions that we had been given, we now walked across the square, crossed a busy road, then went over a bridge that spanned the Obvodny Canal. We then proceeded up Lermontovsky Prospekt to our destination: a tall modern skyscraper, which was the Sovyetskaya Hotel. On our way we passed workers' quarters, ministerial buildings, and a kindergarten (*dyétskiy sad* in Russian: a direct translation from the German *Kindergarten* – 'children's garden').

The Beriozka shop in the hotel was the usual type of store for tourists, full of trinkets and souvenirs. Walter had come here to buy presents for his parents and relatives. I bought a very large and beautifully printed book of photographs taken in Leningrad, which cost 22.20 roubles, two dolls for 3 roubles each, and a tiny ornamental wooden doll that cost 1.50 roubles.

When at last we left, it began to rain. Down by the railway station we saw a woman at a tanker, who was selling kvass to a few people. We joined the queue and bought a glass; Walter polished off a large one that cost him six roubles, and I drank a small one for just three. Although it tasted a little bitter, it was quite good and very refreshing. We were glad that we had at last tried this famous Russian drink. The matronly woman turned the remains of what had been a tap using a spanner; she probably realized that by leaving the tap broken, none of the kvass could be pilfered

in her absence! She had placed our change on a wet sponge on a little metal shelf, where the drinking glasses were.

Escaping from the rain, we went into the railway station in order to have a better look at it. It was a large and rather uninteresting building that was quite Victorian in appearance. In the covered section were ticket booths, kiosks, and large notices showing the train routes, which were placed along the walls. The platforms, however, were out in the open, which struck me as being rather odd. In a kiosk beside us we noticed that maps of the city could be bought for just 50 kopecks. Walter and I bought one each.

We then went down to the Metro station and travelled back to our hotel, arriving there by 12.30 p.m. We whiled away the time until lunch by swigging a bottle of ginger ale and looking through my new book, which was beautifully illustrated.

At lunch, we discovered that some members of our group had gone to Petrodvorets during the morning, and had had a good time. They had also visited the main palace, which had been open today. Sid and Sue told us that the train journey had cost them only 25 kopecks, and a bus journey afterwards, just 5 kopecks. They had travelled by train from the Baltiskaya station, the one that we had been in earlier.

After lunch, Walter and I set out for our photographic expedition as by now the sky had cleared and the sun had come out. After we had shaken off a fellow who had been following us and had asked us for jeans or anything that we could sell him, we hopped on a trolleybus and got off at the end of Nevsky Prospekt. Here we parted company and I hurried on to the Admiralty in order to take some photographs. It looked wonderful in the sunshine.



*The Stroganov Palace by the Moika Canal, Leningrad*

Next, I headed back to Nevsky Prospekt, stopping to take another shot of Palace Square and the Winter Palace. As I walked along the Prospekt, a fellow approached me and began pestering me by asking if I wanted to ‘do a deal’. I eventually got rid of him when I stopped on the bridge over the Moika in order to photograph the Stroganov Palace. While I was doing this, I was aware of another man behind me, waiting for me to finish. When I walked off briskly, I could sense him following me. He eventually caught up with me and, staring at me, pronounced the words ‘chewing gum’ very precisely. I told him that I had no chewing gum and continued walking, leaving him behind.

I then walked into Arts Square, where I photographed the garden, the statue of Pushkin, and the Russian Museum (see Chapter 6). Next, I headed for Architect Rossi Street and the Pushkin Theatre, which looked so much better in the bright sunshine. Here I found another queue for kvass, and photographed it. (Unfortunately I overexposed this shot and had to dump it.) From here I made my way to the Fontanka Canal nearby; I walked along the banks towards Anichkov Bridge, stopping to take pictures of the beautiful buildings by the water's edge. On the bridge, I took shots of the fine statues made by Pyotr Karlovich Klodt but, once again, these shots were not successful, which disappointed me greatly. (Peter Clodt was a German sculptor who had worked in Saint Petersburg for Tsar Nicholas I.)

I had hoped to visit the Smolny Cathedral but, as the time was already 5.15 by now, I decided to head back to the hotel. The afternoon had passed very quickly. I caught the trolleybus and got off at my stop with a lady from our group, who told me that she came from Dublin.

After a good dinner, Walter and I set off for Saint Isaac's Square, where we took photographs of the equestrian statue of Nicholas I in the gentle evening sunlight (See Chapter 7). The square, once again, was almost deserted. Often it was difficult to believe that one was in the second most important city in Russia.

Afterwards, we caught the number 10 trolleybus, which was not very crowded, to Smolny Cathedral, which I had still not managed to get into or see properly. We now viewed it from the front, which took a little bit of finding, in the failing evening light. As it was quite chilly in the large and impersonal Proletarian Dictatorship Square (what a dreadful name!), we left and caught a bus back to our hotel, where we spent the rest of the evening packing our suitcases, for we would be leaving in two days' time.