

# **We remember them in our hearts! Remembering members of the Alexandrov Ensemble who lost their lives in a tragic plane crash**

*Alexander Solovjev, Artistic Director of the Chamber Choir of the Moscow Conservatory*

The Alexandrov Song and Dance Ensemble, one of the most renowned Russian groups, was formed in 1928 by outstanding Russian musician, Alexander Vasilyevich Alexandrov, who was also a professor at the Moscow Conservatory and is the composer of today's Russian National Anthem. The Alexandrov Ensemble became famous in 1937 at the World Exhibition in Paris. Furthermore, the Ensemble's song "The Sacred War", written during World War II, has become one of the most famous Soviet songs. In fact, Alexandrov himself described this song to be as powerful as a weapon.



Valery Khalilov, the conductor of the Alexandrov Ensemble Red Army Choir



Alexander Vasilyevich Alexandrov, the founder of the Alexandrov Ensemble, who wrote the music for the national

## anthem of the Soviet Union

The Ensemble has successfully toured the world for 85 years and has been conducted by the most outstanding choir directors, such as Boris Alexandrov, Igorj Agafonnikov, Victor Fedorov, Vyacheslav Korobko, Leonid Malev, Igor Raevskiy, and others. Unfortunately, on 25 December 2016, most of the Ensemble members and its Artistic Director, Valery Khalilov, died in a tragic plane crash while heading to one of Russia's bases in Syria to entertain the troops for New Year's celebrations. We pay tribute to General Valery Khalilov, remembering his incredible capacity to be open-minded and ready to undertake the most difficult projects, which could challenge his professional skills. He is a vivid example of an accomplished musician and personality who was instrumental to the development of Russia's musical culture.

I was lucky to have known Khalilov personally, and I shall remember him as an outstanding conductor, talented composer, brilliant manager and amazingly capable musician. Khalilov also organised many festive events on Red Square, such as Choir Festivals dedicated to Slavic Writing, and the International Military Music Festival 'Spasskaya Tower', where he brilliantly demonstrated his organisational skills. As head of the Russian Army Ensemble, Khalilov introduced modern arrangements for some of the songs in the Choir's classic repertoire, such as 'Sacred Fire' and 'Aliosha' (arranged by A. Stepanov). In October 2016, the Ensemble performed the opera 'Babiy Yar' by D. Krivitskiy, dedicated to the tragic events of World War II. This performance was a symbolic representation of the uninterrupted flow of life and never-ending memories of this sorrowful period. I remember the Alexandrov Ensemble's inspiring concert programme for their participation in the 2014 International Open Festival, 'Dedicated to Victory Day' prepared by Gennadiy Sachenyuk and organised by the Moscow Conservatory. Sachenyuk, a brilliant

musician, was trusted to bring the renowned Ensemble back to life. He also conducted the newly formed Ensemble in its first performance on February 16th, 2017, less than 2 months after the tragic loss of the late Artistic Director and members.

In memory of the lost members of the Alexandrov Ensemble! The story of the Russian Army Ensemble will live on! Finally, I can do nothing else but cite a few lines from the famous poem by Robert Rozhdestvensky: "Let us remember all by name/remember their grief.../This is necessary – not dead/ It should be – alive!"



*Alexander Solovyev was born in Moscow in 1978. He graduated from the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory where he was taught by Prof. Boris Tevlin. Furthermore, he took Master's classes led by Prof. Kuno Areng (Estonia) and Prof. Eric Ericson (Sweden). He is the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Chamber Choir of the Moscow Conservatory and Associate Professor at the Contemporary Choral Performing Art Department. He is also conductor at the Lenkom Moscow Theater. Moreover, he was Chief Guest Conductor of the 'Educational Bridge' Project Festival Choir in Boston (USA) and Guest Conductor of the Taipei Philharmonic Chorus (Taiwan). In addition, he is Artistic Director of the Moscow Conservatory's Autumn Choral Festival and International Open Festival of Arts 'Dedicated to the Victory Day'. Since December 2013, Alexander Solovyev has been the 'Dean of the Office for Foreign Students Affairs' at the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory. Moreover, he became Artistic Director of the State Chorus of Tula last January. He also became Artistic Director of the Concert Chorus of State Institute under Alfred Shnittke last September. In 2016, Alexander Solovyev was awarded the Prize*

*of the Government of Moscow in the field of Arts and Literature. At the beginning of 2017, Alexander Solovyev became a professor at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Email: avsol1@yandex.ru*

*Translated from the Russian by Natasha Fantini, edited by Shanae Ennis-Melhado and Claire Storey, UK*