

## SACRAMENTO: LENINGRADSKI OCTET



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ALLEN QUINN

From left, Leningradskis Alexander Usyskin, Vladimir Voronin, Boris Ershov and Oleg Kuvaitsev.

## JAZZ REVIEW

## RED-HOT DIXIELAND BY RUSSIAN OCTET

By LEONARD FEATHER

**S**ACRAMENTO—To look at them in their white T-shirts and slacks, or to listen as they cruised through "Royal Garden Blues" and "Sweet Georgia Brown," you would swear they were one of those true-to-tradition bands from San Francisco or Stockton or Vero Beach, Fla. Only the bilingual logos on their shirts gave them away: This was the Leningradski Dixieland Ensemble, making its American debut.

The scene was the big outdoor arena at 4th and J streets during Friday's opening salvo of the 14th annual Sacramento Dixieland Jubilee.

Despite the 20-hour flight from Leningrad, the eight men showed no signs of diminished vigor. However, as he faced the crowd of trad fans, television cameras and tape recorders, trumpeter Vladimir Voronin confessed: "I am nervous." There was no cause for concern; this typical, mainly middle-aged audience could hardly have been more receptive.

When the drummer, Alexander Ivanovich Skrypnik, sang his phonetically learned vocal on "It's Been a Long, Long Time," a standing ovation erupted. But the real showstopper was "Dark Town Strutters' Ball," complete with banjo solo by Boris Ivanovich Ershov (who later said that he ad-

mires Chet Atkins, Roy Clark and Eddie Peabody), followed by a chorus in which the leader, alto saxophonist Oleg Grigoriyevich Kuvaitsev, joined with Voronin and the first-rate trombonist, Anatoly Chimiris, for a unison vocal.

"Spasibo!" cried someone in the front row, whose knowledge of the Russian word for "thank you" probably put him on a level with the Soviet jazzmen, whose English is minimal to zero.

During its four-day stay here on the first leg of a tour that will wind up June 14 at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (it will play in Los Angeles Thursday and Friday), the band varied its reper-

Please see SACRAMENTO, Page 4

Continued from Page 3

toire from set to set. Although "Midnight in Moscow," the Russian song that became a U.S.A. hit in 1961, was performed at a press conference, tried and true American standards are the octet's diet for the most part.

A trio number during an indoor performance at Kenny Music Hall showcased the band's youngest member, the 29-year-old pianist, Constantin Ivanovich Dyubenko, in a "Honeysuckle Rose" that mixed stride and swing with touches of Earl Hines, well supported by the bassist, Yuri Borisovich Miroscnichenko, the group's senior citizen at 51.

Between sets, aided by an interpreter, Kuvaitsev told The Times: "Most of us played in big bands, and did much studio work, before we organized this group in 1980. We won awards at festivals in Tallinn, Leningrad and Prague. We have been on many TV and radio programs, and played all over Eastern Europe; we make albums in U.S.S.R. and other countries."

Voronin, looking around in wonderment, said, in halting English, "I never in my life thought I would meet these men like Dick Cary, Abe Most, George Van Eps. I know their records. I hear them on Voice of America, now I hear them in person! Is hard to believe! This trombonist, Rex Allen—he plays in true spirit of Jack Teagarden!"

At the music hall, some of the men recognized Dick Hyman, the pianist who toured the Soviet Union with a "Salute to Satchmo" show in 1975. Perhaps coincidentally, after Hyman finished his set of Jelly Roll Morton compositions, the Leningrad men opened with a spirited version of "I Ain't Gonna Give Nobody None of My Jelly Roll," with an authentic 1920s-style chorus by the blind clarinetist, Alexander Usyskin.

Why do these men cling to tradition? Perhaps for the same reason that motivated the Ganelin



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Leningradski Dixieland Ensemble leader Oleg Kuvaitsev.

Trio, an avant-garde Soviet group that toured this country last summer, to play its exploratory music: They have heard their U.S. counterparts on records, cassettes and broadcasts, and found their source of inspiration.

"Ours is a democratic music that brings all of us close together," said Kuvaitsev. "There are many other bands like this in Soviet Union."

"Is another band in Leningrad," said Voronin, "with leader who plays soprano sax, Vitaly Smirnov. Perhaps even better than our band!"

While Smirnov clings to his gig in a Leningrad restaurant, the Leningradskis swing ahead, expressing themselves in the universal language that enables its listeners to forget international tensions.

The band will arrive in Los Angeles Thursday for a date that evening at the Airport Marriott Hotel, sharing the bill with Jacques Gauthier's Creole Rice Band. Friday at 8 p.m. it will give a more intimate show at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel's Cinegrill, splitting the show

with Gauthier and Nellie Lucher, in a benefit for the annual Los Angeles Classic Jazz Festival, which will be held Labor Day weekend. The Cinegrill's \$125 ticket price will, of course, include vodka.

The Sacramento Jubilee, which ends today, has played host this year to some 100 bands, including groups from West Germany, Liverpool, Stockholm, Poland—among them, at last, a black unit from New Orleans, Harold Dejan's Olympia Brass Band. Judging by the enthusiasm and attendance, the nostalgia-and-straw-hats circuit is stronger than ever. To the credit of the Leningradskis, they appeared bare-headed.