

Dear Friends,

We are now in a position officially to launch our campaign to save Chekhov's House-Museum in Yalta, and are writing to update you on what's been achieved so far, and to invite you to a fundraising party on 13 November at Pushkin House.

The purpose of our campaign is to draw people's attention to the problems that threaten this unique historical and literary landmark, and to raise money to secure the future of both the "House-Museum" and the garden which Chekhov planted and nurtured. Michael Frayn and Sir Tom Stoppard have kindly agreed to support our campaign by becoming our Patrons: we are very grateful to them.

We are hoping that Chekhov's many admirers in the UK will respond generously, so that the 150th anniversary of his birth in January 2010 will be a true cause for celebration.

Action in London

After setting up a website (*www.yaltachekhov.org*) and an email address (*yaltachekhov@gmail.com*), our first task was to organise a bank account so that we can receive donations in the UK. Here are the details for those wishing to make a transfer:

Bank	Lloyds TSB
Account name	Yalta Chekhov Campaign
Sort Code	309807
Branch	Edgware
Account number	03297209

We also have a paypal facility for credit/debit card donations on our website: *www.yaltachekhov.org/help.html*. In addition, we now have a postal address for those wishing to send donations. Cheques should be made payable to the 'Yalta Chekhov Campaign' and mailed to 5a Bloomsbury Square, London, WC1A 2TA.

We have begun talking to journalists about the plight of the House-Museum, caused by the reluctance of the Ukrainian and Russian governments to provide adequate funding for its upkeep. Following the publication of an article by Michel Krielaars, Moscow correspondent for the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* ("Tsjechovs toverpaleis", 18 July 2008), we have received a number of very welcome donations from the Netherlands. We have also been spreading the word on a more informal basis, and have been very pleased to receive donations from as far away as Australia. In September members of the Australian Decorative & Fine Arts Society in Mornington Peninsula organised three performances of Chekhov's *The Proposal* accompanied by a recital of Russian Music, raising £2000 for the Chekhov House-Museum in Yalta. We are also glad to report that Alexander Walsh has recently joined our campaign team. He brings experience in the field of charitable foundations and campaign organisations.

Action in Yalta

The summer of 2008 has seen many positive developments. Some of the most urgently needed repairs to Chekhov's house are now being carried out thanks to the generous support of the Russian banker and politician Alexander Lebedev, who previously arranged for the restoration of the Yalta Theatre together with his colleague in the Ukraine Vyacheslav Yutkin (of the NRB-Ukraine company).



With their help, it has been possible to begin renovating the rooms on the first floor, which had been previously closed because of their dangerous condition. They include Chekhov's study – the most important room in the house. Windows have been replaced, and floors, walls and ceilings have been cleaned of mould. A new stainless steel roof now also shines over the House-Museum. These works are being carried out by the Crimean Restoration Company (Krimrestavratsiya) with the approval of the State Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Kiev.

Further help has come from the municipal administration of Chekhov's namesake town in Russia south of Moscow, close to his Melikhovo country estate. They commissioned replica wallpaper based on original samples to be custom made at a Penza paper factory. Volunteers from the town delivered the new wallpaper in person to the House-Museum in June 2008. With the recent completion of these most urgent repairs, the memorial rooms on the first floor of the House-Museum are finally ready to receive visitors again. Major problems remain however:

1. The house is in urgent need of a central heating system, without which the effects of winter will reverse all the good work carried out this summer.
2. The lack of any kind of museum-quality climate control system poses a serious threat to the permanent exhibitions and priceless archive materials.
3. The constant accumulation of water under the house causes repeated flooding, which will only be eradicated by effective drainage works.

Museum director Alla Golovacheva, a respected Chekhov scholar who has been on the staff since 1980, has been working tirelessly to raise money. Due to her efforts, earlier this year the Ministry of Culture and Arts of the Autonomous Crimean Republic announced an allocation of €90,000 / 650,000 UAH to the museum as part of its pre-anniversary plans. Sadly, however, the Ukrainian state budget refused to part with this sum - although the Ukrainian government did become involved when its Minister of Culture reprimanded Alla Golovacheva for being too vocal about the Museum's problems in public! There is no sign that the Ukrainian government is going to step in and help in any way, even with the smaller repairs. It seems that the Russian government is similarly uninterested in helping.

This is why our Yalta Chekhov Campaign is so important. Your help is very much needed and appreciated by the Museum's staff and by us. Alla Golovacheva has recently set up a dedicated sponsorship account for the Museum for the purpose of receiving foreign donations, and it is under her personal jurisdiction. We are confident of being able to make direct and safe transfers.

Future Plans

The Yalta Chekhov Campaign will be launched formally at the party we are organising on 13 November 2008 at Pushkin House, when we will also be celebrating the publication of Rosamund's new Chekhov anthology, *The Exclamation Mark* (Hesperus Press). Guests will be entertained to a reading by Lynne Truss from the title story, and will have the chance to hear more about Chekhov's life in Yalta and about the Museum's plight, over drinks. We hope that you will come along to help us launch the campaign, and ask only that you contact us (at yaltachekhov@gmail.com) so that we may send you an invitation.

Meanwhile, we would be delighted if you would like to make a contribution to the campaign, would like to do some fund-raising on behalf of the campaign, or raise publicity. And please let us know if you have any good ideas for fund-raising! We also hope that you might one day be able to visit Chekhov's House-Museum in Yalta yourself, perhaps on the special Chekhov tour that is being arranged by *Exeter International* in April 2009 - details will soon be available on our website, and at our launch party.

In the meantime, we thank you for your continuing interest in our campaign and hope we may look forward to seeing you on 13 November.

With best wishes,

Rosamund Bartlett, Elena Michajlowska and Alexander Walsh.

