



Leona Strang of Anchorage pins a flower on Michael Ossorgin's lapel moments before joining in with his choir, an offshoot of the Mount Edgecumbe chorus which earned fame three decades ago, for a concert. See Page 3.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Choir makes a joyful noise

By BILL HESS

Tundra Times

Hollywood has used the sound to attract viewers to its movies; seamen floundering in a Gulf of Alaska storm have taken courage after hearing its comfort, and have lived to face the seas again. And now the old Mount Edgecumbe High School Choir, which reached the high point of its fame and excellence three decades ago under the direction of Father Michael Ossorgin, sings anew.

Actually, the voices which gathered in the Russian Orthodox Chapel in Anchorage last week belonged not only to Mount Edgecumbe Alumni, but also to other admirers eager to learn under the teaching of a master of music. Although director Ossorgin, who is now a professor of music at St. Johns College in New Mexico, described the concert as a "glorified rehearsal," the enthusiastic audience packing the chapel sang their own praises of the performance.

The choir was formed under a special grant from the Alaska State Council on the Arts, following the Mount Edgecumbe reunion last February, where the choir was reunited under Ossorgin after more than 30 years. The quality of music produced at that gathering convinced those involved that the choir needed to continue on even if in a different form than before.

Ossorgin returned to Alaska in late June and worked with singers in Anchorage. Meanwhile, interested musicians in Southeast Alaska, Nome and



The choir sings.

Galena began their own practice sessions, and those who were able joined in with the Anchorage group for the concert. Among the music performed were songs from the old Russian Orthodox church, traditional Tlingit songs, and Alaska's flag song. Lyrics were sung in English, Russian and Native Alaskan languages.

Between songs, Ossorgin informed viewers of the choir's past. He told of how the

choir had once recorded a Tlingit paddling song for the library of Congress. Shortly after Ossorgin arrived in Alaska this June, he turned on the television and was surprised to hear the Tlingit Paddling Song recording being used as an introduction to the movie, "The Legend of Walks Far Woman," starring Raquel Welch.

A bit strange, perhaps, to have Tlingit music introducing a movie about Great Plains In-

dians, but Hollywood has never worried about such troublesome details.

Anyway, as Ossorgin pointed out, the song had been used by Hollywood before and was so beautiful that who could blame the movie-makers for being taken by it?

"Now, if you run into this music, you know what its origin is," Ossorgin told his listeners, "because at the Library of Congress, they forgot!"

PHOTOS BY BILL HESS

Ossorgin also explained how pieces such as the Tlingit Paddling song made it into the choir's repertoire. When he first arrived in the Sitka area, there was a generation gap, he explained. "The children would not listen to the parents. So I went to the parents, and learned from them. Their children learned from me!"

Perhaps the most amazing thing about a choir get-to- (Continued on Page Ten)



Michael Ossorgin puts the energy which has helped him win the devotion of many students into his conducting.



Elena Lekanoff, wife of assistant director Michael Lekanoff, listens intently.

They'd travel far to sing

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gether with Michael Ossorgin is the devotion his former students still feel toward their instructor of more than 30 years ago. Devotion enough to prompt Eddie Reece, formerly of Metlakatla, to use his vacation time to travel from Las Vegas, Nevada, for an evening of singing in Anchorage.

"It's like a family," Reece explained. "We all call him Father Ossorgin. He always treated us with great respect. Everybody loved him for it."

Beverly Huhndorf did not travel quite so far, but it is still a good trip from Galena to Anchorage, and it is not

cheap. This year's performance was only the first of what is expected to continue on through the next two summers, at least, and Huhndorf plans to participate in each one.

Why? "I get choked up with the beauty of the songs, the way he brings it out from us. He brings out the 'hallelujah' feeling in us."

Michael Lekanoff, Sr., will be Ossorgin's assistant director in Anchorage from now until next summer. Lekanoff will be directing weekly practice sessions in Anchorage.