

# LENNUK



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## Photographs

Front Cover: Katariina käik, Tallinn; photograph taken by the editor in November 2008.

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# VIRU

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OF THE BALTIC

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# Editorial

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of Jean-Marie Sanfourche on 9th October 2008. His masterly Survey of Estonian Decorations 1918-1940 had just been published in Volume 2 Number 2 of LENNUK, to much acclaim. I am sure that BEST members will join me in offering our condolences to his widow Tiina and her family.

As has become customary for LENNUK, anniversaries are a feature of this edition; the bicentenary of the A Le Coq company, the centenary of Gustav Ernesaks' birth and the 21st anniversary of the Estonian Heritage Society are all celebrated at some length. Another article traces the lineage of the Estonia Piano Factory back to 1893.

It is a mere 17 years since Estonian independence was restored; Alan Sikk provides readers with a concise guide of how the Estonian party political system has evolved over that period and draws some comparisons with Westminster.

Edmund Dorman, in his own, inimitable style, provides the second instalment of his rip-roaring tales describing the development of business links with Estonia immediately after the restoration of independence in 1991.

The Ehin family, father mother and daughter, are no strangers to the pages of LENNUK; they appear again, this time in relation to daughter Kristiina's poetry festival held last Summer, 'Under a Full Moon', in deepest Raplamaa. Ilmar Lehtpere, award-winning translator of Kristiina's work into English describes the event. For Christopher Moseley, his challenge was rather the reverse of Ilmar's; it was to 'Teach Estonian (and Latvian) in Britain'. His new book *Colloquial Estonian*, published by Routledge, was launched at a meeting of BEST in October. The address he gave at that event is reproduced in this edition of LENNUK. An account by Angus Murray of that and other BEST (and BEST-related) events held during the last six months appears earlier in this journal.

On the sporting front, readers may well be astonished by the outstanding success of the Estonian Cricket Association. James Ramsden reveals all. Better known are Estonia's recent Olympic successes. Statistician and BEST member Nigel James argues that Estonian achievements may often be understated, however. He takes as his example medal successes at the Turin Winter Olympics of 2006.

Many readers may wonder what life is like for passengers on the procession of cruise ships which visit Estonia during the Summer. Alan and Susan Lockyer shed light on this question by sharing their experience of a short visit to Saaremaa after their ship berthed at Ninase last year, one of a very few cruise ships to do so.

This Summer, the Worldwide Estonian Festival, ESTO 2009, will be held in Münster, Germany, immediately before the XXV Estonian Song Festival (and XVIII Dance Festival) are held in Tallinn. Reet Järvik, an organiser of ESTO 2009 describes the event in Münster, to which BEST members are cordially invited.

Reet Rimmel, Cultural Counsellor at the Estonian Embassy in London, concludes this edition, whetting our appetites by listing Estonian cultural events that will take place in the UK this Spring.



*Gwyn Davies, Editor*

# A. Le Coq. What's in a name?

*The editor*

Mention the name **A Le Coq** to any Estonian, and he or she will immediately think of beer and Tartu.



Case of A Le Coq Premium beer

**A Le Coq** is one of the two biggest-selling beer brands in Estonia, **Saku** being the other.

The label on most **A Le Coq** beer brands makes reference to London and Tallinn, as well as to Tartu. What is or was the London connection?

It also makes reference to the date 1807; moreover, in 2007, **A Le Coq** brewed a Jubilee Edition of their **A Le Coq Special** beer as part of a bicentenary celebration. But, what did this bicentenary commemorate?

And, who are or were the **Le Coqs**? The name is hardly Estonian!

To help find an answer to these and other questions, **Alex Claos**, Director of **Brand Independence**, owners of **Viru beer** arranged for me to visit the **A Le Coq**, Tähtvere brewery in Tartu where I met **Ranno Treial**, Export Manager of **AS**

**A Le Coq**, and **Ilmar Kõrgessaar** who was Head Brewer on the Tähtvere site from 1956 to 1999, and is now in charge of the Beer Museum there. I was guided by them through the history of the **A Le Coq** company before being taken on a tour of their very modern brewing and bottling facilities.



Bicentenary, Jubilee edition of A Le Coq Special beer

At the end of my visit I was presented with a copy of the 376 page, bicentenary book, *Õllelinn Tartu, Pühendatud A. Le Coq'i 200. Sünnipäevale*, by Andres



Ranno Treial, Export Manager A le Coq



Ilmar Kõrgessaar, formerly Head Brewer, now responsible for the brewery museum



Sepp published by A Le Coq in 2007. Superbly illustrated, the book is in Estonian but incorporates a short summary in English.



The A Le Coq Bicentenary book by Andreas Sepp

This article draws extensively from the information contained within Sepp's book.

Let us begin by considering the bicentenary.

It celebrated the founding in Prussia, 200 years earlier, of **A. Le Coq & Co.** The **Le Coq** family was descended from Huguenots who fled France in the 17th Century. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, they had established themselves as wine-makers in Bingen, near Darmstadt, where the wine-growing areas of Rheinhessen, Nahe, Mittelrhein and the Rheingau meet. The primary aim of their new company was to trade in wine.

**Albert John Louis (Albert Johann Ludwig) Le Coq** was born in Prussia in 1800. At the age of 30, and five years after his marriage, he moved to London with the aim of developing the British market for the family wines. (Curiously, his signature reads: **A L J Le Coq**).

Soon after his arrival in London, however, he spotted other business opportunities and diversified his activities, bottling and exporting stout, a strong, dark, top-fermented beer. This he did under the **A Le Coq** brand name. His main



A Le Coq Imperial Stout Label ca. 1880

market was Russia. The beer was sourced from the large London breweries where it was specially brewed to satisfy Russian tastes.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, London was renowned for the brewing of porter and stout; demand for these beers was a major factor in the creation of large, commercial breweries owned by the likes of **Samuel Whitbread**.

At one stage, 10 breweries in London produced porter and stout for the export market; the largest of these was **Thrales**, whose **Anchor Brewery** was in Southwark. (**Thrales** was subsequently taken over by **Barclays** and then by **Courage**).

A clever businessman, **Albert Le Coq** generously donated some of his bottled stout to Russian soldiers who had been wounded in the Crimean War (1853-1857). By so doing, he earned the gratitude of the Czar who awarded him an imperial



A Le Coq Imperial Stout Label, "Brewed in Dorpat", ca. 1913

warrant. This allowed Le Coq to brand the beer he exported to Russia as **Imperial Russian Stout!**

Shipping beer from London to Russia was not without its hazards, however. In 1869, for example, a shipment (primarily) of **Barclay's** stout from London destined for Danzig, and onward delivery to Russia, ended up on the Norwegian seabed when the Prussian ship *Oliva* foundered in a storm. Divers exploring the wreck in 1974 recovered many bottles, some of which bore the name **A Le Coq**.

In 1870, at the age of 70, **Albert J.L Le Coq** retired from active participation in the company having recruited an Englishman, **Oscar Hyde Sillem** (1838-1907), as his partner and successor. By a remarkable coincidence, Sillem's wife, Susan Elizabeth née de



*Oscar Hyde Sillem in Tartu ca. 1926*

Chateaurouge, had also been born in Germany of Huguenot stock.

**Albert J.L. Le Coq** died in 1875. Five year's later, the company was bought-out by the **Sillem** family but continued to trade under the **A. Le Coq** name.

Immediately after Albert's death, his son, **Andreas August von Le Coq** (1827-1894), helped run the business with **Sillem**. Though educated and brought up in London, Andreas was not happy with his life in the English capital, and moved back to the family wine business near Darmstadt; he had been a director there since 1856.

Andreas sent his young son, **Albert August von Le Coq** (1860-1930) to London to help transfer the **A. Le Coq** business to the **Sillems**.

Like his father before him, **Albert August** could not adjust to life in London and moved on to the USA. In 1887, he qualified in medicine at the University of Louisville, Kentucky before returning to Darmstadt in order to assist his father. **Andreas August Le Coq** died in 1894 and, six year's later, **Albert August** sold the Darmstadt estate.

Now a wealthy man, he moved to Berlin and enrolled on courses in oriental languages as he



*'Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan' by Albert Le Coq, Oxford University Press, 1985*

followed his dream of becoming an archaeologist. He took an unpaid post as a researcher at the **Berlin Ethnological Museum** before joining, then leading, German expeditions to Central Asia. He obtained financial support for these expeditions

from industrial tycoon **Krupp** and from Kaiser **Wilhelm**. Their goal was to explore the **Turfan** region of **Chinese Turkestan**, to the North East of **Taklaman**, and neighbouring regions close to the **Silk Road**.

**Le Coq** carved and sawed away over 305 cases of artefacts, wall-carvings and precious icons from Buddhist and Manichaeian temples in the area, all of which were subsequently shipped to the **Ethnographical Museum**. Whether **Le Coq**'s activities were acts of vandalism or whether **Le Coq** and his British counterpart, **Aurel Stein**, were archaeological heroes who had saved the artefacts for posterity became the subject of a debate without end.



*Albert August von Le Coq (on the left) during one of his expeditions, from "Foreign Devils on the Silk Road" by Peter Hopkirk, Oxford University Press, 1980*

**Albert August von Le Coq** died in Berlin on 21st April 1930.

During the bombing of Berlin by the Allies at the end of WWII, the **Museum of Ethnology** sustained

seven hits and many of the largest Buddhist frescoes from **Turfan** excavated by **Albert August von Le Coq** were destroyed. This was much to the malicious delight of many Chinese who pointed out that far from preserving these treasures, the adventurer (and other '**foreign devils on the Silk Road**') had caused their destruction.

The greater part of the **von Le Coq** collection was saved, however and is now displayed in the **Silk Road Gallery** of the renovated **Museum of Indian Art** at Dahlem, Berlin.

But what happened to **A. Le Coq and Co.** after the **Sillem** family took control?

At the end of the 1800s, its Russian business faced considerable difficulties as high import duties were imposed by the Russian authorities. Forgery of the **A. Le Coq** trademark also posed problems.

In 1906, to help counter the damaging effect of the high import duties, the company moved its headquarters to St Petersburg and assumed the name **A Le Coq and Co. (Russia) Ltd**. Two years later, it transferred its bottling plant there and embarked on a search for a Russian brewery that they might buy.

The search was successful and, in 1912, **A. Le Coq** purchased the Tartu brewery of **AS Tivoli**. A new company, **A. Le Coq Ltd**, was established in London to oversee development of the business; the Tartu operation traded under the **A. Le Coq** name and operated as the company's Russian subsidiary. The title of '**Russian Imperial Court Supplier**' was also conferred upon it.

**AS Tivoli** was the successor company to the Tartu brewery first established by **Justus Reinhold Schramm**. He previously worked in Tallinn's largest

*A Le Coq's brewery complex on Tähtvere Hill in Tartu*



brewery (which was owned by his mother!) In 1832 he built a new, brewery complex on Rütli Street in Tartu and rented the former gunpowder cellar on Toomemägi as his lager cellar. In 1885, **Schramm** sold his business to **Julius Moritz Friedrich**; eight years later, it was renamed **AS Tivoli**.

It was **Friedrich** who established the magnificent, red brick, brewery complex on Tähtvere Hill which remains, to this day, **A Le Coq's** main operating site.

In 1900, **AS Tivoli** also acquired the oldest beer company in Tartu which had been founded in 1800 by the great grandfather of **Hermann Hesse**, the German-Swiss poet, novelist and painter who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. The **Hesse** family sold the company to **Alexander Diedrich Musso** in 1829 and he built a new brewery behind the town hall, between Jaani Street and Toomemägi! Declared bankrupt in the 1890s, its premises were acquired by **AS Tivoli** who moved their headquarters there.

Soon after the turn of the century, the elderly **Julius Moritz Friedrich**, **AS Tivoli's** major shareholder, decided to withdraw from the business. His only possible successor, nephew **O. Friedrich**, had moved to New York after his marriage. The elderly **Friedrich** therefore decided to sell **AS Tivoli**. It was bought by **A. Le Coq**, successfully concluding their four-year search for a brewery in Russia.

A new department to brew stout was built on Tähtvere hill and an English brewer was appointed to manage it. **A. Le Coq Imperial Extra Double Stout** bottles bore labels proudly proclaiming that the beer was '**Brewed in Dorpat**'. It was shipped by rail to consumers all over the empire, from Poland to Siberia and the Far East.

Within two years, however, the company ran into major difficulties as prohibition, ('**sukhoy zakon**' in Russian, literally translated as 'dry law') was declared across the Russian Empire at the start of WWI. (It remained in place through the turmoil of revolution and civil war, until 1925).

In 1917, with growing unrest in the Russian empire, the Tähtvere brewery was vandalised by anarchist soldiers and, a year later, German

soldiers plundered the equipment that remained.

It was in 1921, three years after the declaration of Estonian independence and one year after Estonia and Bolshevik Russia had ratified the Tartu Peace Treaty, that **A Le Coq Ltd** was able to re-start its operations. But, Estonia's domestic market was now very small and the company faced severe competition from the sale of (cheap) vodka by the state's (monopoly) distilleries.

Yet, **A. Le Coq Ltd** survived. In 1926 a market-sharing contract was agreed between

**A. Le Coq Ltd** and **Saku Õlletehas Ltd.**, **A. Le Coq** being assigned the South Estonia sales zone, and **Saku** that in the North. Most of the smaller breweries became distributors of the two, large companies' products.

The beginning of WWII in 1939 was rapidly followed by the Soviet Union's occupation of Estonia. In 1940, the Soviet authorities nationalised **A. Le Coq**. The company's last director, Englishman **James Herbert Sillem** was forced to leave. (He was a direct descendent of the **Sillems** who purchased the company shortly after the death of **A. J. L. Le Coq** in 1875). The brewing company was re-named the **Tartu Õlletehas**

Between 1941 and 1944, with Estonia under German occupation, the brewery operated as the state-owned **Bierbrauerei**, about 80% of its output being consumed by the German Army.

With restoration of the Soviet régime in 1944, the **Tartu Õlletehas** operated to a state-determined production plan. Benefiting from the employment of staff with a high level of brewing expertise, it became one of the Soviet Union's leading breweries and was further re-named the **Tartu Eksperimentaalõlletehas, (the Tartu Experimental Brewery)**. By the 1980s, output levels were six times higher than in the immediate, pre-war period..

In 1969 the British government compensated **A. Le Coq** shareholders for the losses they incurred after nationalisation of the company in 1940 by the Soviet authorities. It did so through the sale of gold which the pre-war Estonian government had

deposited with the Bank of England. This action was reversed in 1992, a year after the restoration of Estonian independence, when an equal value of gold was returned to Estonia by the British government.

**A. Le Coq Ltd** was liquidated in 1971, (only to re-emerge in 2006!)

In 1995, **Tartu Õlletehas** was privatised and sold to **Magnum Konsumeer Ltd.**, who also bought **Saare Õlu Ltd.**, a small, Saaremaa brewery located in Kuressaare. (which ceased operation in 1999). **Tartu Õlletehas** had restored the **A. Le Coq** beer brand to production in 1992.

Two years after privatisation, in 1997, both breweries were sold to the Finnish beer producer **Olvi Oy**, which had been established 119 years earlier in Iisalmi, Eastern Finland, (to the North of Kuopio). **Olvi Oy** is the last remaining large, independent brewery in Finland.

Within a year, **Olvi Oy** created a new subsidiary company, **A. Le Coq Group Ltd.**, which took responsibility for the Finnish company's operations throughout the Baltic states. **Olvi Oy** also owns the **Cesu Alus Ltd** brewery in, Cesis, Latvia, (the oldest brewery in the Baltic states, dating back to 1451), and the **Ragutis Ltd** brewery in Kaunas, Lithuania. **Olvi Oy** now sells more beer in the Baltic states than in its home market of Finland.

In October 2008, Olvi Oyj took a majority shareholding in Lidskoe Pivo, the 4th largest brewery in Belarus. Located in Lida, 160km West of Minsk it supplies 12% of the Belarussian market.

Five years earlier, in 2003, **Olvi Oy** purchased the Estonian juice and drink producer **Õsel Foods**, whose brands include **Aura** fruit juices. It was merged with their Estonian beer operation, **Tartu Õlletehas**, to create the largest drinks producer in Estonia. Furthermore, the merged operation was named **A. Le Coq Ltd**, a name first used when the company belonged to the **Sillems** in 1912.

The **Le Coq** family ended their involvement in the business when it was sold to the **Sillems** in 1880, but their name lives on, as strongly as ever!

**But, let me leave the reader with a question:**

Who was the **A Le Coq** in whose name A. Le Coq

and Co., the Prussian wine trading company was founded in 1807?

**Albert Jean Louis Le Coq** was a mere seven years old when the company was formed. Perhaps it was named in his honour when he was still a child; or was it named after another member of the **Le Coq** family, as yet unidentified? The **LENNUK** editor would be pleased to hear from anyone who can shed light on this matter

## Viru Beer

**Viru** beer, sold in the UK in its attractive, truncated octagonal cone-shaped bottle, is currently brewed and bottled by **A.**

**Le Coq** in Tartu under licence from the beer brand's owners, the UK company **Brand Independence Ltd.**

(They are corporate members of **BEST** and their advertisement for **Viru** beer appears elsewhere in this journal).



Current Viru beer bottle



Profile of Tallinn's Olavi kirik on the Viru beer label

Originally an **A Le Coq** product, **Viru** beer was bought by **Brand Independence** who have sought, with considerable success, to establish an international market for the 5.0% ABV, pilsner-style beer. Introduced to the British market in 2006, the beer



A Le Coq advertisement ca. 1937. Note the bottle design

has now also been launched in Italy, Switzerland, Sweden and Mozambique.

Negotiations with importers to the USA and Canada are in progress and the company's aim is to open these markets for **Viru** beer in 2009.

Curiously, despite its association with Tartu, an image of Tallinn's Olavi kirik appears on the **Viru** beer label!

BEST is grateful to **Brand Independence Ltd.** for its continuing corporate membership of, and support for, the British Estonian Association.

# The Boys or *'The world's largest Sawmill'*

**Edmund Dorman**

*Ship Owner and Timber Importer*

(This is a sequel to *The Estonian Connection*, by Edmund Dorman, which appeared in the preceding edition of *LENNUK*, Volume 2 Number 2).



By October 1993, two years after the restoration of independence, we had enjoyed three years of business with Estonia. Regular shipments of timber were being made in small vessels which we loaded in Riga, Pärnu and Kopli. (Editor's note: *Kopli harbour is just to the East of central Tallinn*).

Because their country had striven so long and hard for the restoration of its independence, we believed that our Estonian contacts should develop their own businesses, rather than work for 'foreigners',

Our lead supplier in Estonia was 'headed-up' by two fine young men in their early twenties. We sponsored their visits to the UK, and they established a good working knowledge of our timber requirements.

Lithuanian friends, with whom they collaborated, told them of 'the world's largest sawmill', located in Lithuania; they were

assured that they could obtain large, export volumes from there.

This claim to fame always reminds me of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ozymandias*:

*"I met a traveller from an antique land  
who said:*

*Two vast trunkless legs of stone stand  
in the desert.*

*Near them, on the sand, half sunk, a  
shattered visage lies*

*and on the pedestal these words appear:*

*"My name is Ozymandias, king of  
kings:*

*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and  
despair!"*

*Round the decay of that colossal wreck,  
boundless and bare,*

*the lone and level sands stretch far away."*

It was arranged that I would travel to Lithuania and be met at Vilnius airport by the two young Estonians; they were to drive to Vilnius from Estonia, through Latvia. Together, we would visit **'the world's largest sawmill'**, before driving back to Estonia and finalising arrangements for the next ship, which was due to arrive shortly afterwards. This complete, I intended to take my flight home from Tallinn.

I duly arrived in Vilnius at 10.00am, as planned, having taken the 'red eye' London/Copenhagen feeder flight. But, there was nobody there to meet me.

I had no contact numbers, no names, was unable to speak the local language, and had no mobile phone signal!

All I could do was settle down on a prominent wooden bench, in the airport's only lounge and await developments.

At about 4.30pm I saw a man rushing around with a piece of paper on which my name was scrawled. Agitated, flushed and sweating, he gabbled in Russian, Lithuanian and a little English, eventually explaining to me that **The Boys** were delayed and that I should go with him.

*"This was really scary, and who the heck was he anyway?!"*

Together with my luggage, I was packed into a rather decrepit, old red Lada, in which there were already two other people, and we sped off into the countryside.

As the three of them babbled away it became clear that they were in a state of alarm, which was verging on panic.

Several times, brakes squealed as we came to an excited stop; they thought they might have seen **The Boys**. Not so! Each time we sped off again.

Eventually, we arrived in the town where my travelling companions lived; their father explained that **The Boys** had wished to impress me so had borrowed a 7 Series BMW. Not only that but they

had also bought new suits and had got hold of mobile phones. They were travelling with 6,000 German Marks and 3,000 US Dollars, in cash; these were the funds that we had sent to them as payment for timber supplies. I learnt that they had set off from Estonia early the previous day; this meant they were already more than 24 hours late. To make matters worse, there were reports of Mafia-style hijackings in southern Estonia.

By early evening, pandemonium had broken out as people rushed to and fro; phones were continually ringing as a full scale search for **The Boys** was mounted by the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian police.

Eventually, we adjourned to a rather fine hotel in the town centre where I was shown to an elegant suite of rooms; allegedly, in Soviet times, this had been used by visiting KGB bosses. Food and drink arrived, several times, (including a full McDonald's menu). By midnight everyone was overloaded with liquid and solid sustenance as well as panic.

Heavy rain was pouring down the next morning when I was collected and taken to an office where the frenetic activity continued.

I insisted that I needed to get to Estonia as soon as possible. It was essential that I be there to get to grips with the commercial risks we were now clearly exposed to. We had pre-paid substantial sums of money for a cargo of timber that was lying around at several mills, with no prospect of our getting it to port to meet the ship that was due.

Unfortunately, however, there was no direct flight from Vilnius to Tallinn. Neither were there any direct train or bus connections. It might take three days for me to get to Tallinn.

As the long, fruitless, panic-ridden, day went on, it became clear that some form of disaster had befallen **The Boys**. Meanwhile, I had another 'eat-in' at the hotel.

Amidst the turmoil, somehow, I managed to make arrangements that would enable me to

travel to Estonia, with departure planned for the next morning.

At 11.00am, in a continuing deluge of rain, we set off. There were four of us in the little red Lada. A big, burley mechanic sat next to me on the back seat, my luggage squeezed between us, (the boot was full of engine spares in case of breakdown). Two other Lithuanians sat in front, one driving and one navigating.

Soon, we left the asphalt road and were driving on sopping-wet, pot-holed, gravel and mud roads. Visibility was near zero as windows misted up, and as the poor, tired old wipers fought to clear the windscreen.

As we drove through one village a light blue pick-up truck came racing down the main street towards us, a terrified horse on the back of it; only a rope halter kept the rearing animal on board. As the truck passed us, the horse took a giant leap into the air, broke the halter rope and disappeared overboard, leaving the hapless pick-up to continue on its merry way.

*“Strange world!!”*

It was still ‘persisting down’, and the road was getting worse. We came to a ‘Y’ junction and slid to a halt behind a small, dark-blue Skoda. Out leapt a young man wearing a black leather jacket, blue jeans, white trainers and bright yellow driving gloves.

*“This was the ‘relay car’;  
I was about to be passed on,  
like a baton!”*

On this leg of the journey, the luggage went into the boot, whilst I piled into the back seat, yet again. The old, red Lada reversed, turned round, then disappeared into the misty rain.

With the driving seat set well back, his arms outstretched and a fag hanging out of the corner of his mouth, the driver launched the Skoda forward, like an F1 driver in pole position on a starting grid.

The road got worse, the rain increased, the car got covered in brown mud that leaked into the rear seat via a window that would not fully close. The windows fogged up with cigarette smoke and wet air. The co-driver was fully occupied mopping the windows and keeping the windscreen clear.

Meanwhile Whitney Houston sang the complete repertoire of ‘The Bodyguard’. It was all rather incongruous: there was I getting soaked in mud-sodden rain as “I will always love you” and “Jesus loves me” belted out at full volume from massive rear speakers!

Suddenly, careering round a corner, we came across a little old lady in dark blue clothes, a shawl over her head, sitting on a stool -- in the middle of the road -- milking a cow!!!

Skidding to a halt, the driver remonstrated with her, whilst I noticed that an unusually large volume of strange, beige-coloured milk was slopping into her bucket; (muddy rain water was running down the cow’s udder!)

No, she had not seen a 7 series BMW! Did the poor old lady have the faintest idea of what a 7 Series BMW was?

Eventually, we came to the frontier with Latvia; dollars changed hands, my passport acquired a slug of additional stamps, and we sped onwards.

In the middle of nowhere, we came across a small eating-house, windows covered and kerosene lamps burning inside. We entered, smoke and fumes from a log fire clogging the air. Through the dim haze of sweet-smelling Russian-tobacco smoke we realised that the place was full of beer-swilling Latvians. *“This good place, have Coke and Fanta and imported German beers”* We ate pork with potatoes and onion.

My companions interrogated other patrons of the eating-house to discover if they had any news of **The Boys**, but without success.

Onward we drove, the rain outside appearing to be

even heavier, and the fog in the car undiminished! My clothes were soaking and I was getting cold. Fortunately, I managed to get the message across. The heater was put on at full blast!!!

*“Now we were cooking!!”*

After circumnavigating Riga on the fine ring road, we turned North, heading for the frontier with Estonia, and found ourselves, yet again, on gravel and mud.

At the crossing point we were faced with a long queue and when, eventually, we reached its head, discovered that a new law required all cars driving on Estonian roads to have valid Estonian insurance. Here we were, still (just) in Latvia, being driven in a Lithuanian-registered car, seemingly with no insurance at all!!!

It was decided that, as a British passport-holder, I should cross the frontier into Estonia on foot, proceed to the Estonian ‘Portacabin’ where I would buy the necessary car insurance, then return to the car and its passengers, who were still in Latvia. In this way, eventually, we would all be able to cross from Latvia into Estonia by car, and legally!

I duly plodded over to and through the two sets of customs posts, soaked to the skin by the heavy rain. Many more passport stamps later, having exchanged fistfuls of dollars for car insurance in the ‘Portacabin’, and having retraced my steps to Latvia and the car, I discovered that my companions had changed their plans. On the other side of the frontier, in that area, *“Mafia gangs on the loose”*, they had been told. As a result it was decided not to enter Estonia at that crossing point..

A swift, hand-brake turn saw us off into the country, once again, through forests, fields, and villages. An hour or so later, we arrived at a minor frontier crossing, a red and white, horizontal pole barring our way. A lone sentry, complete with Kalashnikov, stood guard. After a lengthy negotiation, a handful of dollars

changed hands, the barrier rose and we were finally in Estonia.

*“It seemed so simple!!”*

I was now in Estonia with a passport that said that I had left Lithuania for Latvia earlier that day, before crossing into Estonia then returning to Latvia, shortly afterwards.

*“So, officially, I was not in Estonia at all!!”*

Our route took us along small, winding, forest roads; eventually, in the fading daylight, we arrived at a junction where we took a left turn. Half an hour later we arrived back at the ‘Portacabin’ still selling cross-border car insurance!

Undaunted, another swift, hand-brake turn, saw us heading off in the correct direction.

Now dark, the rain was easing off and Whitney was still doing her best to keep us relaxed. We passed though many, partly-lit villages and, at about 9.30pm, finally arrived at what I gathered was our destination.

Suddenly, however, and with great excitement, we were off at top speed chasing a silver Volvo, around the streets, up and down alleyways and into an industrial park, finally cornering it against the walls of a large factory. An ashen-faced, terrified driver climbed out of his car, shaking his arms in the air. My companions thought it might have been **The Boys**. But, not so!

Without speaking to the shattered wretch of a Volvo driver, we drove off leaving him to try and make sense of what had happened.

At the hotel we were met by **The Boys’** partners, one of whom spoke excellent English and everyone retired to my room. After sharing much vodka, and to a background of frantic chatter, I had a shower and changed into dry clothes.

**The Boys** had been hijacked and had completely disappeared, I was told. The authorities in all

three countries believed that they had not left Estonia. Their car, the foreign currency they were carrying, their mobile phones and their new suits were worth more than their lives. A psychic had asserted that one of them was dead, the other being still alive. There was danger in the forests.

Their partners remained confident that **The Boys** would be found, safe and sound and wanted us to maintain our business with them. They asked for more money, not only to replace that missing with **The Boys**, but also to pay for the rest of the timber that had been prepared for us.

Profound discussions were followed by a meal of pork, boiled potatoes, onions and gherkins, washed down with beer and punctuated by frantic mobile phone calls.

About midnight the Skoda driver announced that it was time for him to head home and, without any more ado, he left. One of the partners then left for his office to attend to paperwork. The other took me to a nightclub to meet timber suppliers!!!

There, I met the owner of the, now-missing, BMW who wanted me to pay for the car; for some reason, others I met there seemed to think I ought to be organising a supply of American cigarettes for them! A bright young disc jockey also came over to tell me that, on the local radio, he was constantly broadcasting appeals for information about **The (missing) Boys**.

The next morning we visited local sawmills and inspected timber that had been marked up for us, (happily) to our required specifications and quality; afterwards, the partners went to their office to make transport arrangements, and to assure the sawmills of payment.

I still had a problem. How was I going to get to Tallinn, where I planned to catch a homeward flight? The partners had no car, there was no train and nobody knew the bus times. And, when I got to Tallinn, where would I be able to stay overnight?

Then, I recalled that, some weeks earlier, someone had phoned me from a Tallinn street pay-phone. In a deep guttural voice he had said "*You send monies, I send woods: you phone*".

Somehow, I managed to get hold of him by phone, and suggested that if he were to collect me and drive me to Tallinn, we could have a good, long, business discussion.

A rather burley, quiet-spoken man, with few but well-chosen words, duly collected me.

In broken English, interspersed with Swedish and a bit of German, we talked business, and discussed life in general. He booked me into the Viru Hotel where we had dinner and, next morning, he took me to the airport for my flight home.

At the airport, he came with me to the check-in desk and chaperoned me through customs, speaking quietly to the officials.

Once at the departure gate he said: "*I sorry you did bad such terrible trip. Partners, they reliable and honest. Me let you know if any news come about The Boys. Me have fixed with custom man that your passport OK to let you home.*"

All the time he had been aware of the mess that I was in. Many years later he told me the whole shocking, wretched story. Clearly few secrets were kept in that small country!

The partners delivered in full and on time; they repaid all their debts and shipped timber for some years thereafter.

The Lithuanians I met never got anything, (not even a stick), out of the '**world's largest sawmill**', but we set them up as sawmillers and received good supplies from them for many years.

My Tallinn host became the 'star of our show' and 'made' our Estonian business for us. He now has a fine and substantial business of his own.

And, as for the **The Boys**? Unfortunately, no one has seen or heard of them since.

# UNDER A FULL MOON WITH KRISTIINA EHIN



**Ilmar Lehtpere,**  
(photographed in Supilinn, Tartu)

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**Translator**

*"I've long dreamt of organising the poetry festival that I would like to be invited to. A poetry festival that would bring people together in some beautiful place in the countryside, a festival that would naturally unite poetry and song as one and would make Estonians conscious of the fact that by virtue of the existence of Estonian regilaul, we are not only an ancient nation of song, but an ancient nation of poetry as well."*

Kristiina Ehin

Last year Kristiina Ehin, with the help of her parents, the well-known poets and translators Ly Seppel and Andres Ehin, turned her dream into reality and the 1st International Full Moon Poetry Festival (I Rahvusvaheline Täiskuu Luulefestival) was born.

Twenty four poets, singers and songwriters from Estonia and abroad, from as far away as the Shetland Islands to the West and Japan to the East, gathered under a full moon at Luhtre Farm and Haimre Village Hall in Raplamaa county, from the 12th until the 16th of September, in a communal celebration of poetry and song. Among them were such well-known figures as Sujata Bhatt, Viggo Madsen, Mathura, Lauri Sommer, Kauksi Ülle, Andres Ehin, Ly Seppel and Ban'ya Natsuishi, to name but a few. And of course Kristiina Ehin. The festival very clearly bore her signature.

Kristiina was born in Rapla, Estonia in 1977 and went to Tartu University, where she gained an M.A. in Comparative and Estonian Folklore in 2004.

She has published four volumes of poetry in her native Estonia and has won a number of prizes there, including Estonia's most prestigious poetry prize for her most recent volume, written during a year spent as a nature reserve warden on an uninhabited island off Estonia's north coast. A fifth volume of poetry is due to be published soon.

She has also published an Estonian-English volume of selected poems entitled *Noorkuubommik – New Moon Morning* (Huma, 2007), a book of short stories, and has written a play. *The Drums of Silence* (Oleander Press, 2007), a volume of her selected poems in English translation, was awarded the Poetry Society Corneliu M. Popescu Prize for European Poetry in Translation in 2007. (Editor's note: *Ilmar Lehtpere, the author of this article, modestly fails to point out that he was the translator of the work awarded the 2007 Corneliu M. Popescu Prize*).

She is often invited to take part in international arts and literary festivals and her work appears regularly in English translation in leading



Group photograph of most of the authors

British and Irish literary magazines. Two new collections of English translations of her poetry are in preparation, one to be published by Arc in the UK and the other, a trilingual edition in Estonian, English and Irish, by Coiscéim in Ireland. A collection of her work has also appeared in Swedish and a volume of German translations is being published. *Päevaseikaja* (Huma, 2008), a bilingual Estonian-English book of South-Estonian fairy tales, will also be published soon.

Folklore and tradition have always played a central role in Kristiina's very contemporary poetry. There is no contradiction in this. Kristiina's work reflects a strong sense of continuity, a holistic view of the world that treasures Estonia's ancient poetic and musical heritage, indeed folklore and tradition in all its manifestations, and incorporates them in the world we live in. She regards herself as heir to the tradition of Estonian regilaul singer-poets. The Popescu Prize judges, in awarding the most prestigious prize for poetry in translation in the English-speaking world to the *The Drums of Silence*, said that Kristiina's work is "at once shamanic, drawing on deep historical traditions, but at the same time extremely of the moment".

This merging of the traditional and the contemporary, and the melding of poetry, song and music, characterised the whole of the Full Moon Poetry Festival.



Kristiina Ehin and Eliisa Ehin folk dancing at Luhtre farm



*Kristiina Ehin, Sujata Bhatt and Ly Seppel*

The participants all lived together at Luhtre Farm, an old restored farm in Raplamaa. There they started the day together with breakfast in the farm house and from there they set off every day on fascinating excursions devised by Kristiina and her team.

For example, one led to Sillaotsa Farm Museum, where the festival participants learnt about the process of traditional bread making, from grinding grain to the finished product. They baked bread themselves and later did some Estonian folk dancing.

On another day the historian and folklorist Jüri Metssalu took the group on an unforgettable tour of old sacred sites – sacred trees, sacred stones, sacred hills. He spoke very informatively and stirringly about these sites, about their significance and about the need to respect them and protect them. His listeners were visibly moved.

On the following day the road led through Läänemaa to the sea. On the way Ly Seppel shared her poignant childhood memories of the Soviet occupation and the suffering it caused. These were just a few of the many very special moments shared by the festival participants.

The group very quickly bonded into a big family. Throughout the festival there was a lot of fun and laughter, a lot of spontaneous folk music, regilaul, and folk dancing. Although the poets and songwriters were all very 'individual', Kristiina and her parents had invited people who were fundamentally like-minded in their very separate ways and who supported the underlying principles of the festival. As the festival charter states, *"Every festival guest brings*

*along their own poetry together with its roots and branches"*.

The first two full days culminated in poetry and song evenings for the general public at Haimre Village Hall on a stage set designed by Eliisa Ehin. This building is located near Luhtre Farm deep in the Estonian countryside far off the beaten track. And yet the hall was full to bursting – all the seats were taken; some people stood throughout, others sat on carpets laid out on the floor. They came from the surrounding countryside but many also drove for two hours from Tallinn or three hours from Tartu to be part of this remarkable event.

The evenings began with regilaul composed by Kristiina Ehin and sung by Kristiina and Dave Murphy. The poets were introduced by Kristiina and 10-year-old Lõmaš. The poets read from their work in their mother tongues and the readings by the poets from abroad were followed by Estonian translations made by Andres Ehin. The translations were read by Kristiina, Ly Seppel and Andres on the first evening and actress Maria Peterson and Andres on the second evening.

There was a very broad spectrum of poetry offered, ranging from the work of the poets already mentioned, as well as Pär Hansson, Knuts Skujenieks, Martin Vabat, Patrick Cotter,



*Into the forest*

Sayumi Kamakura and Katalin Szlukovényi to the irreverent humour of Contra, the sound poems of Peter Waugh, the songs of Lise Sinclair, Dave Murphy, Siiri Sisask and Jaak Johanson and the traditional singing of Meelika Hainsoo and Lauri Õunapuu.

After the readings, everyone was invited to gather round a bonfire outside where the regilaul singing continued well after midnight. The poets then returned to Luhtre Farm where the music and conversation carried on into the wee hours.

The poets from abroad were absolutely astonished that an audience would happily sit through more than four hours of poetry. They all agreed that such an event would have been impossible in their homelands.

On the final evening there was a reading for the poets at Luhtre Farm. As the readings for the general public had previously been translated only into Estonian, on that last

evening English translations were read along with the originals. For those who did not wish to read in English the translations were read by Sadie Murphy.

Afterwards there was more folk dancing outside led by Kristiina, which then moved indoors and again lasted until the small hours, as no one wanted the festival to end. On the following morning there was a palpable air of sadness as everyone went their own way.

There was an organic unity about the Full Moon Poetry Festival with each activity, each event branching out naturally from the others, creating a living entity.

Trees were a recurring motif on the excursions, and rightly so. Trees are as firmly rooted in the Estonian soul as they are in the Estonian soil. The festival grew with Kristiina's nurturing. Like all of her work, rooted deep in the soil of her homeland, it grew, spreading out, reaching for the sun and the magic of the full moon.

## *FESTIVAL CHARTER*

**TÄISKUU FULL MOON POETRY FESTIVAL** is an international gathering of poets under a full moon at an old farm in Raplamaa amid tall fir trees, a place far away from the tumult of the city. Here the twilight hour is kept, as is customary on Estonian farms. In the silence the ear can hear every rustle, the ear can even hear the inaudible, the eye perceive the invisible...

This, our first poetry festival, is very conscious of traditional culture. Our point of departure is the knowledge that we are an ancient poetic nation whose treasury of folk song, indeed soul, is brimming with pure folk poetry. Only yesterday we lived in a world where the whole of nature was imbued with a soul, and mythology which was full of secret meaning to us. Something of this lives on within us to this very day. Creating poetry was not just some private, personal matter for Estonians, but a communal activity and shared joy of creation full of collective power.

Folklore and tradition speak to us even today. They haven't exhausted their significance. A way of life bowing to the cult of consumerism presents us again and again with new challenges. We have to learn again to hold together, preserve nature and use its gifts wisely.

Ancient wisdom is the wisdom of living roots – where we come from and where we are going. "We come from a land of underground birds and three-coloured dogs, but where are we going?" asks the poet Andres Ehin.

On full moon nights we are all a little moonstruck, a little mad. Then together we dare to ask the right questions that impel us to listen deeply to the answers, so deeply that we don't know if they come from the collective unconscious or from the bottom of our very own hearts. Or even if they are speaking to us about our past, present or future. Every festival guest brings along their own poetry together with its roots and branches.

This somewhat mad communal power at the time of the full moon will help us to hear the inaudible, see the invisible and say what can't be put into words.