



*“Rule three:
Please enjoy
yourself,
but try not to
break anything;
spoil anything,
or chew
anything.”*

Rules for visitors entering
the Little Hermitage -
Catherine the Great
(1729 – 1796)

The social season in Imperial St Petersburg began in autumn and ended with the coming of Lent in March. If you know your Tolstoy then you will remember that it was a blinding social whirl, but one in which some occasions could not be missed – a new opera at the Mariinsky, a ball at which absolutely everybody who was anybody would be, a concert at the Philharmonia. No matter which writer you read, it was always taking place when there was deep snow outside in the street, the whiteness of which only further illuminated the brilliant scene within. Well, you can put your book down, come with us and

*live for a little while
the lives of the Rostovs,
the Stroganovs, the Yusupovs
and the Sheremetevs,*

because although the fashions have changed and the carriages are now in the museums, the season in St Petersburg still very much exists. There is opera at the Mariinsky, there are concerts at the Philharmonia, and there are balls at which a tiara is a must.