

Relationships and Open World

Mike Tracy, 2008

Too often in today's world the word relationship is often used in a cavalier manner, encompassing all types of personal interactions. A dictionary definition might go something like: the way in which two or more people or things are connected, or the state of being connected and the way in which two or more people or groups regard and behave towards each other. I can safely say that the relationships which have developed through my involvement, and my students, with the Open World Leadership's Cultural Program have been significant and lasting. Since hosting our initial jazz ensemble in October 2004 (now five in total and with a sixth on the way), numerous opportunities have occurred to keep us and our Russian friends connected and engaged. I would like to highlight three diverse examples, one in length and two other briefly, which have the common thread - our love of jazz and desire to share that love with others.

Participating in our first Open World group was a talented drummer, Alexandra "Sasha" Mogilevich. Sasha came from Yaroslavl, having developed her skills as a performer and love of jazz at the Yaroslavl Jazz Center. During her stay, she would tell me of the Center's director, Igor Gavrilov, and his tireless work to bring jazz and jazz education to the area. Upon returning home, Sasha shared with Igor our similar interests and in less than four months Igor and I were able to share our love of jazz firsthand in Yaroslavl. Igor had invited me to perform at the Yaroslavl Jazz Festival, to work with his students and others in the area. I was also able to meet with jazz and music educators during my stay as well as see a beautiful old Russian city that I never knew existed.

Igor is without question one of the most dedicated and committed individuals I have ever met. His love of life, helping others and jazz is infectious. One of his dreams was to establish a jazz resource room at the Center with books, recordings, print and electronic publications. He also desperately wanted others to know of the Center - to use and help it grow. I knew that others in the States who would help him fulfill those dreams. I immediately contacted my mentor Jamey Aebersold, the world's leading jazz educator and publisher. Jamey had worked with Sasha and her group during their visit to Louisville and had given them countless jazz CDs and publications. Sasha had also told Jamey of Igor and the Jazz Center. Jamey gladly provided boxes and boxes of materials that Igor and his students could use. I next sent notes to my contacts at various jazz publications knowing they look for great human-interest stories. The editors at Downbeat, the world's leading jazz publication, agreed and an article on Igor and the Jazz Center appeared in their January 2007 edition. Now I had to get Jamey's materials to Igor.

There is of course great value in Russian jazz musicians visiting the States; however, I viewed that as only one part of the equation. I wanted my students to visit our new Russian friends, to see and experience another culture as our Russian visitors had. I also wanted them to play with together once again but this time in their homeland. This first occurred during March 2006 when a graduate quintet and I visited Yaroslavl, Moscow and St. Petersburg (along with Tallinn, Estonia and Helsinki, Finland). Our group was able to connect with our Russian friends in each of the cities, playing together and thus strengthening our ties. The majority of our time was spent in Yaroslavl playing at the Jazz Center and in area schools. It was a glorious time for everyone, even with knee high snow, and I was able to hand deliver Jamey's materials to Igor. All had come full circle. By the way, Sasha is now living in the States and performs for a living.

Another connection occurred during the Summer 2006 when a quartet for our School of Music visited Perm, Louisville's Sister City, to perform at their Youth Cultural Festival. Our group remembered their Open World counterparts and invited them to join their group, which they did. The Open World musicians then found performing opportunities for the collective ensemble in Moscow and St. Petersburg. They remain in contact, and you can find an accounting and photos of their experience at <http://louisville.edu/music/jazz/permsummer2006.html>.

Finally, the School of Music annually host the prestigious Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops. During the past two years a number of Open World alumni and friends, eight total, have made a trip back to Louisville to participate. While they all received a scholarship toward tuition from Mr. Aebersold, they each had to pay for the vast majority of the costs, quite a commitment to their education. Many stayed with the same host families they had met during their initial visit, thus continuing relationships often begun years prior.

As you can see by these three examples, true relationships and connections have grown from the seeds planted through the support of the Open World Cultural Program. I know that I have personally grown greatly from interacting with my now friends from Russia. There is no way this could have happened without Open World and the willingness of everyone to reach out to one another. Just think, this is only the beginning.

