

Yaroslavl Jazz Center Unites Russian Musicians, Educators

At first sight, Yaroslavl doesn't appear to be a jazz hotbed. This Russian industrial town of 600,000 largely eschews the European influence that has become so prominent in larger cities. Still, its large student population and thriving cultural scene hint that there is more here than meets the eye.

This is what University of Louisville professor of music Michael Tracy recalls. He met Yaroslavl Jazz Center Director Igor Gavrilov through the Library of Congress' Open World Leadership Council after five students from Yaroslavl came to the University of Louisville as part of the program's first exchange. After the students returned to Russia, Tracy received an e-mail from Gavrilov inviting him to come and play with the students at the Jazz Over the Volga River Festival.

"I was met at the airport in Moscow and driven 10 hours in blinding snow," Tracy said. "I got there to see this huge jazz festival that's Igor's brainchild. I played with his group and did a workshop or two, and I was amazed to see



that the level of musicianship is exceptionally high and easily equals that of the more popular Western festivals. Jam sessions at the Jazz Center lasted well into the early morning."

As for the center itself, Gavrilov (through an interpreter) described it as "an establishment completely dedicated to jazz, with a cozy music hall for 80–100 people and a library with books and other media. Local jazz musicians are wel-

come here, and a number of rehearsal rooms are at their disposal."

The facility also includes a small recording studio.

Asked about how he hopes the center will affect the Russian jazz scene, Gavrilov said, "One of our aims is to create a circle of professional musicians, and to help them find engagements in the vicinity. Also, we want it to provide young musicians with rehearsal opportunities and communication with professionals."

The Jazz Over the Volga River Festival includes a jazz competition that showcases young jazz ensembles from throughout the area—piano trios, quintets, big bands and vocal ensembles—performing styles that range from dixieland to contemporary jazz.

Gavrilov stressed that the library is one of the center's most important projects, offering hundreds of books, CDs, vinyl records, cassettes and DVDs. "We would be so grateful to jazz lovers who could donate media, books or whatever they can to the library," Gavrilov said.

—Bret Love