Open World, Open Minds

By Mike Tracy as published in the Louisville Jazz Society Newsletter (Fall 2008)

As we look forward to receiving another group of Russian jazz students as part of the Open World Program, it seems appropriate to look back on our involvement with the program and highlight its success. The Open World Program, a project administered by the U. S. Library of Congress, seeks to build mutual understanding between the United States and Russia by establishing lasting relationships with the next generation of Russian leaders and citizens. Since hosting our initial jazz ensemble in October 2004, we've enjoyed many meaningful connections with our new Russian friends. Although we come from very different backgrounds, we share something very important: a love of jazz and a 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 love of jazz and her skills as a performer at the Yaroslavl Jazz Center. During her stay, she often spoke of the Center's director, Igor Gavrilov, and his tireless work to bring jazz and jazz education to the area. Upon returning home Sasha told Igor of our similar interests, and in less than four months Igor and I were able to share our love of jazz firsthand when he invited me to perform at the Yaroslavl Jazz Festival and work with his students and others in the area. I was also able to meet with jazz and music educators during my stay.

Igor is one of the most dedicated and committed individuals I've ever met. His love of life, desire to help others, and passion for jazz are infectious. One of his dreams was to establish a jazz resource room at the Center with books, recordings, and print and electronic publications. He also desperately wanted to publicize the Center so that others could use it and help it grow. When I got back I started working to help him by spreading the word among those who could help make his dream a reality. I sent notes to various jazz publications

– an effort that finally bore fruit in January of 2007 when *Downbeat* ran an article on Igor and the Jazz Center – and contacted my mentor Jamey Aebersold, who gladly provided many boxes of materials for Igor and his students.

I needed to deliver the materials Jamey donated and I wanted my students to see and experience another culture as our Russians visitors had, so I next began organizing a trip from Louisville to Russia. After much planning, a graduate quintet and I visited Yaroslavl, Moscow, and St. Petersburg (along with Tallinn, Estonia and Helsinki, Finland) in March of 2006. Our group was able to connect with our Russian friends in each of the cities, playing together and strengthening our ties. It was a glorious time for everyone and I was able to hand deliver Jamey's materials. Later that year, in the summer of 2006, a quartet from our School of Music visited Perm, Louisville's Sister City, to perform at their Youth Cultural Festival. Our group invited their Open World counterparts to perform with them and they gladly agreed. The Open World musicians then found performing opportunities in Moscow and St. Petersburg for the collective ensemble. The venture was a great success and you can find an accounting and photos of their experience at louisville.edu/music/jazz/permsummer2006.

During recent years, a number of Open World alumni and friends have returned to Louisville to participate in the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops. While they all receive scholarships toward tuition from Mr. Aebersold, they take responsibility for the vast majority of the costs, a demonstration of their commitment to jazz. They have also returned each February to participate in the annual Jazz Fest, and I'm happy to say that February 2009 will be no exception.   Please continue to watch louisville.edu/music/jazz for more details about performances from these fine young musicians. We look forward to receiving these guests, making music with them, and adding to our ever-growing group of Russian friends.