

MUSICAL BRIDGES INC.

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Newsletter No. 2 -- June 24, 1995

Dear friends,

It is with great pride and heartfelt thanks to all contributors that we report the successful launch of Musical Bridges, Inc. Donations to date are \$14,023.01 and we are grateful for every penny!

Thank you to the following contributors:

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In addition to monetary contributions, thanks go to all those individuals who volunteered their time and ideas. We would particularly like to acknowledge, extol and most heartily thank our chief volunteer and cheerleader, Jean Dickinson. She has been, and continues to be, a constant and consistent source of support and dogged determination to move forward on all projects. And we have.

Tom's letter from Siberia (enclosed with this newsletter) provides a first hand update on the inaugural projects. As you can see, significant progress has been made. As a footnote, along with the magazine subscriptions provided to the Pedagogical Institute by Musical Bridges, Paul Best generously donated and shipped a large bag of books to the Institute. We hope to confirm its arrival soon. Marilyn Lund also provided several books useful for teaching English as a second language.

The Musical Bridges organization itself has evolved and progressed also.


Deborah Smith, who has been instrumental in launching Musical Bridges, has moved to the Advisory Board. We are deeply grateful for her efforts and expertise in getting the corporation established and we look forward to her continuing support and advice as we continue to evolve and grow. I am pleased to announce that Eileen Ogle has joined us as Vice President. Eileen brings to the organization a wealth of relevant experience as you can see from her biographical sketch included in our latest brochure.

In other news that is made possible by the fact of Musical Bridges, I am excited to report that my brother Joe, his wife Karen, children Dan and Allison and I will be journeying to Chita this summer. While this is a private trip, it would not have even been dreamt of as a possibility in the past. We will travel first to China for two weeks, then on to Chita to visit Tom and all of his new friends for another two weeks. In addition, Eileen Ogle is planning to spend time in Chita and other parts of Russia as well. We all look forward to meeting new friends and learning more about our neighbors across the globe.

And so we are under way. There is much to be done and the possibilities for cultural exchange and greater understanding throughout the world are unlimited. Even as this newsletter goes to press, we are working with the Chita State Polytechnical Institute to determine how Musical Bridges can help to develop a business focused Humanities Faculty at the Institute. Development in part will be through the establishment of relationships with similar American universities who can provide materials and lend advice on departmental organization, curriculum development, joint scientific studies and arranging guest speakers to teach and advise. This has huge potential for the economic development in the Chita region, is an enormous undertaking and we believe Musical Bridges can help, with your help.

Thank you for making the Musical Bridges groundbreaking a success! Your continued support is critical as we build the foundation, adding brick by brick to the bridge in a way that facilitates cross cultural exchange and understanding. Tax-deductible donations are key, as are your ideas and suggestions. Let us know what you're thinking and how you might help!

Sincerely,



Anne L. Dickinson
President

Letter from Siberia—April 11, 1995

Greetings from Chita! It's good to be back! It feels especially good to know that I am here sponsored by Musical Bridges which includes those of you who supported its direction and projects and donated generously. Thank you!

Though it has only been two years since I was last here, many things have changed. For starters, I came by way of Seoul and Khabarovsk which was impossible less than a year ago, and making travel arrangements and arranging for the visa went very smoothly compared with working on these details for my three previous visits. I was even able to make arrangements with the hotel in Khabarovsk directly from the U.S. without going through Intourist! In Chita, some changes struck me immediately: the old, Stalin-era terminal at the airport has been spruced up and turned into the international terminal, and the main runway was extended to accommodate 747s (with flights already to China and plans for direct flights to the U.S., there are hopes of making Chita and "eastern hub" for Russian air travel); there are more cars on the road, and many of them are Japanese; new apartment buildings sprang up, many less blocky and colorless than the norm—in fact, there seems to be a lot of new construction underway; and there are many more shops now, some with bright advertising. The whole city seems just a little less grey.

However, only one friend, of all the ones to whom I put the question, was willing to declare that things were better than two years ago overall, and even she qualified it: the main problems two years ago were money, crime and availability of goods. Now the availability of goods was no longer a problem, though the other two problems remained. But, she said, most importantly, *things were moving*; the dependence on the government had been broken. Now they were in the midst of a long and tiring period of adjustment and growth. Most importantly to her, she was pleased that though her income was only \$3,000 a year, she was able—and allowed—to send her 13 year old daughter abroad for summer study.

Other friends though, put much more emphasis on the money problem—a professor's salary has *one-fifth* the hard currency value it had two years ago; taxation is so high it is jokingly said it is at 105%; 90% of income generally goes toward groceries alone; and the crime problem—no one walks alone after dark, and extortion ("protection money") is commonplace. I was told that of the large manufacturing businesses in Chita, only one is clean, and it is owned by a German. The police here often travel in groups of four and sometimes carry machine guns.

Having said all that: I don't go out after dark—and it doesn't get dark until 10pm now—except with others in a car, and I am not in business, so don't worry, I am not in any particular danger!

I live a 25 minute walk from work, in a good-sized, one room apartment on the 7th floor of a new building. I share a big steel security door with my neighbors' five room apartment. The view over the balcony is of the southwest hills beyond the city and a variety of smokestacks in the foreground. The sunsets have been very nice, thanks in part to Chita's ever present smog.

As for my work here: I teach six classes of English "Oral Skills" (I talk alot and try to get the students to talk alot, too) at the Pedagogical Institute, and three elective classes at the Music College where the emphasis is on performance skills. In addition, I have private English, piano and computer students, my own Russian tutoring, plus my own piano practice and composing. I am kept busy!

I am very pleased to say that the English Department has begun to receive Newsweek magazine on a subscription arranged by Musical Bridges, and the teachers and students seemed rather taken aback by this sudden wealth. Previously, the only American or Western magazines they could get were ones left by travellers passing through. It was also good to learn that more people from the English Department have had the opportunity to visit America, though still only one student has gone there to study. However, one teacher will go in September for three months of research at Bucknell University (if anyone lives in the vicinity and would like to show her a little American hospitality, drop a line and Musical Bridges can tell you how to get in touch with her). After I left two years ago, many students did take my suggestion and wrote to see about studying in the U.S., but had no success with their letter campaign. I take the blame for this, because I hadn't explained "networking" to them, nor that Americans often have great intentions, but we can be rather lazy about getting replies in the mail. This time we will move on to lessons Two and Three: Networking and Followup! If there is any way you can help—contacts with universities, help finding scholarships, help with housing or hospitality when some of these students finally come to the U.S.—please let us know.

There have been several offers to me of piano performance opportunities, and come summer, I may well be touring from Omsk to Khabarovsk, and possibly northeast China, too. I have seen and heard the Budashkin Ensemble already several times, and we hope to work together in the not too distant future. I wrote a piece for the Ensemble with Guest Pianist (now, who might that be?) and gave them two songs of mine, and their arranger wants to work with me on arranging some of my pieces for the group.

I am told it has been a warm winter, and during February, it was usually in the 20's during the days. The March winds which seemed bitterly cold, have given way to the less frequent April winds which are not quite so vehement. Though it still freezes overnight, in the daytime the temperature climbs into sweater weather and nearly all the ice and snow are finally gone. My students and friends remind me that late June through early August are hot and sunny and wonderful; I think they tell me as much for my information as to remind themselves there *is* an end to all this! I have been invited for a day in the country at the end of the month to see the rhododendrons bloom. Many people have cuttings from this bush in their homes and the forced blooms are delicate and, frankly, encouraging. And my window sills are filled with my neighbor's tomato and pepper plants started from seed a month ago, to be transplanted to their garden at their dacha in late May.

Even at this early stage, it is clear that my being here as strongly desired by my hosts and helpful to them, despite the hardships and hassles such an invitation entails. It is also clear to me that all my watching of news and goings-on in Moscow alone could not give a very good idea of the enormous and painful changes this great country is going through.

In a recent class with a group of young English teachers I was asked what was my impression of Russians. I said first it was the warmth and intensity of friendships, but the downside of this was that people did not seem to trust anyone who was not a friend. And also, that people don't smile in public very much. The teachers agreed with these points and said perhaps they were all related. They said their history taught them to be very wary and so to value real friendships.

But then I said perhaps what strikes me most seeing my neighbors, friends and students cope and occasionally thrive in this old and far-off city should not surprise me at all: it is that *Russian-ness* and market economy and cold and remoteness and pollution and crime and change are all secondary to the everyday business of just being human, which goes on every day, everywhere. How else could I feel so at home in a place that one could easily dismiss as a very depressing place, and when my command of the language and understanding of custom and manner is still so limited? The result for me, the eternal, but tempered, optimist, is to realize that Chita, despite the moanings of many of my friends, does have a brighter future. It may not happen fast, and not without real hardship, but with people like this—warm, hard-working, imaginative people—trying to make the best for themselves and their children, things can't help but improve—and trust can be relearned, and careless smiles can return to the streets of the city.

Musical Bridges can't do anything about the cold, pollution, crime or the painfulness of change, but we can do something about remoteness. The more contact we make, the less isolated and more encouraged people will feel; and we all work better knowing we have neighbors. By way of example, I am struck by the warmth with which my father, who accompanied me on the 1991 tour, is remembered. We were here only six days, but he made a very strong impression, and I think he was liked in part simply because he was here and was so interested.

In concrete terms, I hope you will help Musical Bridges through monetary contributions which will help bring us to a point where we can comfortably work on current projects and plan and dream for the future. As for my teaching here, right now, I would love to be able to share letters and stories of ordinary American lives, how *you* live, how you spend your money (pie chart would do), what your aspirations are, etc., with my English students. Also, I'd like to be able to give the Music College's library some of the great American solo piano and song literature. In addition, my host organization in Chita of two years ago, the Children's Aesthetic Center, a private pre-school and afterschool which teaches dance, music, art, Russian and English, can use some very simple books (few words, lots of pictures) for 6 - 8 year olds just learning English, as well as audio and video (PAL format) cassettes in English for children. Feel free to send letters and whatever to my address here, or to Musical Bridges' address in Vermont. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,



P.S. June 16, 1995

Hearing from our President that a newsletter is imminent, I asked if I might add a few words to my previous notes from Chita.

It is now June; spring came and went fast and furiously and now it is shorts, sandals and sunburn weather. The sun sets after 10:30 pm, planting is finished at the dachas and I've already been to two Sunday picnics. Classes are over and it's time to enjoy the beautiful, if all too brief, summer. I will be spending it practicing for recital in the Fall and composing in preparation for a joint concert with the Budashkin Ensemble in September, which is scheduled to include some of my own pieces. I have several private English students this summer and will soon begin giving many of my graduating senior English students their first lessons in using a computer.

Of course I am pleased, too, that our President, Anne Dickinson, and our new Vice President, Eileen Ogle, will be coming to visit in August. Anne's and my brother, Joe, and his family will be coming too, making history as the first American family to visit Chita as tourists in 70 some years. This may seem a small thing, but I think it is important. Few Americans come through here, let alone a family on vacation. Maybe the fact of this visit will make this far off place seem a little less remote to some of us, and the visit will give some people here in Chita a chance to meet a family—American style—that central unit that is essential to America's—and Russia's—strength and character. (Now that I've said that, they better not get over here and start littering or something!) Though their visits are not Musical Bridges' undertakings, Musical Bridges can be credited with providing them with their Russian destination, and my work here will undoubtedly benefit when some of my students meet a few other Americans and find out, contrary to what they might think (and I might say!) that I am not the model on which all Americans are based! Being only one of two Americans here, the burden of representing all things and thoughts American gets to be rather heavy on occasion, so a few more examples will be welcome!

Have a wonderful summer, and feel free to write. My address is easy, even in Russian (remember to write the address items in reverse order!).

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