



MUSICAL BRIDGES, INC.

*Access, opportunity and good neighbors
through cultural exchange*

A non-profit organization dedicated to bringing access and opportunity to isolated communities in Siberia and Russia's Far East
604 Rood Pond Rd., Williamstown, VT 05679 - E-mail: alina@musicalbridges.org - Web site: www.musicalbridges.org

Poetry in the Classroom

*Kevin Magee, Poet and Professor of English
2001 Teacher Fellow*

Osip Mandelstam is a difficult and demanding poet, and several of my students have expressed surprise that I have read him in translation. One of the few books I brought with me to Chita is *The Complete Critical Prose and Letters*, and one of the weekly lectures which I give for University faculty and community members was devoted to this collection of essays and reviews by one of Russia's greatest modern poets.

He may not be a poet for use in the classroom, except perhaps for an advanced seminar in Russian literary history, but his life story offers powerful lessons which can be appreciated by a broader audience. A story is slowly developing here around Nadezhda Mandelstam, the wife of the poet and the author of two books about their life: *Hope Against Hope*, and *Hope Abandoned*. She taught at Zabaikalsky State Pedagogical University from 1953 to 1955, and I have met one teacher, since retired, who remembers working with her.

The story deepens. Apparently she came to teach here with a directive from the Deputy Minister of Education, so that her presence in Chita was not accidental. She was retracing the steps of her husband, who died in Vladivostok at the end of 1938. Perhaps she even wrote some of the chapters of her autobiography here. The story of her husband's arrest has been the subject of biographers, and what appears most important to me is that he was denounced by other writers, not as a political person, but as a tragic consequence of the contention between writers and their often conflicting conceptions of the value of one another's contributions to history and culture.

I'm looking forward to continuing conversations with former teachers and students here about Nadezhda Mandelstam. I believe the story of her coming here not only to teach, but to write and imagine has the potential to increase interest not only in a great Russian poet, but in the theme of translation between cultures. The story of Nadezhda's teaching in Chita has the character of a narrative of love and devotion, and one much deeper and more serious than the film all of my students in Cleveland and Chita have seen, *The Titanic*. Nadezhda's story may provide that bridge between popular and literary culture which every teacher of poetry seeks and seldom finds.

Kevin Magee's Wish List:

Inexpensive paperback editions in English of the classics of American and British literature. For shipping information, e-mail Kevin at hypobololemaioi@multiverse.com



Children at the regional high school in Dul'Durga preparing for a classroom presentation.

Letter from Zabaikal

by Alina Simone, Executive Director

I think it was the moment when the train pulled away from the station in Irkutsk, and we began to surge slowly forward through countless miles of birch trees and taiga, that I finally felt the sheer physical vastness of Siberia, that sense of otherworldly isolation that I had read about, but never myself experienced. Here in the United States, it is rare to feel so cast adrift. In the villages of the Zabaikal region, winter sets in, families feed the wood-burning stove, and the few, frozen wires that stretch across the plains maintain a tremulous and inconsistent communication with the rest of the world.

I came to Chita, barely one month after September 11th, to reaffirm connections with our educational partners, lay the groundwork for new programs, and to see for myself the results of our work after six months of administering Musical Bridges from afar.

The impact of our programs within the educational community here is immediately obvious – in the gratitude of students and teachers who stopped me on the street, the letters from libraries and village schools, the popularity of public forums where our teachers serve as guest speakers. But I was more struck by the results of our long-term investment in Chita, how our commitment to this region is stimulating growth, encouraging initiative, and providing a valuable window to the world for a community still isolated from international contact.

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Bringing a World of Music to Russia's Far East

Classes at Nakhodka College of Music began in the second week of September and, as I knew would be the case, the classes I imagined I would be teaching had been changed. At the request of the students and administration, I was asked to teach an improvisation class. The music students here have had no prior introduction to improvisation. It was no small surprise to find out that their musical upbringing has stressed memorization of written music over personal expression. I teach improvisation as 80% rhythm and 20% melody, and then 100% listening and another 100% emotion. I also use the idea of mimicking, call and response, and have begun to use drumming to help the students communicate rhythmically without much forethought. I love what I am doing – the magic happens when I see the light bulb going on in the head of my student.

The *Musical Bridges World Music Radio* program debuted in October, airing on Tuesday nights from 9 -10pm on Radio Free Nakhodka. We play music Russians have most likely never heard. So far themes have included: Soul, Funk and Dance music; The Roots of Brazilian Music through Today; Technology influenced Rock; Jam Bands, and Reggae. We are always interested in new ideas and themes to make this show as expansive and successful as possible.

Always busy, always having fun and always learning.

*Jason Armstrong Baker, 2001 Teacher Fellow
Jazz percussionist and graduate of the Berklee School of Music*

Jason Baker's Wish List:

- Drum heads, drum sticks and xylophone mallets
- Saxophone reeds
- Bass and guitar amplifiers
- Xylophone written and recorded music
- Double bass/ Upright bass - leg stand and string
- Written and recorded music
- Jazz chord voicing books for piano and guitar scores

If you are able to donate any of these materials contact Jason directly at jabaker75@yahoo.com

OTHER TEACHER NEWS

• **David Balan** has served as a Teacher Fellow since September 2000, when he first joined Musical Bridges. Over this past summer, David established a relationship with a school in Olathe, Kansas, where his parents live. Now his students in Dul'durga are matched with "virtual" American pen-pals. A lively e-mail exchange is already underway. David has also created a Web site dedicated to tourism in the Buryat Autonomous District. His effort to bring the world to Dul'Durga's doorstep is online at www.duldurga.8m.com

• **Jennifer Mordes** has clearly embraced life in Chita City. She manages a full teaching load at Chita State Technical University and provides ample assistance to students outside of class. Aside from having somehow gained the unwavering devotion of the English department at Technical University, she has plunged into a number of extracurricular activities including (but not limited to): weightlifting, horseback riding, and playing piano at the local music school, all of which have helped establish her as a fixture in the community.

• **Jessica Jacobson** is making her way back to Chita after having her visa reissued. In January she will begin teaching at the regional magnet school for gifted children in Aginsk, capital of the Buryat Autonomous District.

For more information about our programs as well as recent Teacher Fellow updates, please consult our Web site:

WWW.MUSICALBRIDGES.ORG



Jennifer Mordes, pictured center with fellow English teachers, at Chita State Technical University

2001 Accomplishments

- This year we are sponsoring more Teacher Fellows than ever before, enriching the lives of hundreds of students with curriculums that range from Music to Literature to International Affairs. Our program has expanded beyond Chita into new regions within the Buryat Autonomous District as well as Russia's Far East.
- We have expanded our material outreach efforts to address the digital divide. Most recently, we donated 12 computers to help establish a computer learning center at the high school in Vershuna-Darsana, a deeply depressed region where the gold mining industry has collapsed. Prior to our donation the students in Vershuna-Darsana had no access to computers.
- The educational resources included in our recent shipment have spread from Chita to Irkutsk. We have added more than 3,000 English books to the stacks at Chita Province's main library, the Pushkin Library in Chita City. Our recent shipment established an English language library at Chita State Technical University, and brought material resources to dozens of institutions.

Our teachers have boundless energy, but limited resources. Help offset the cost of shipping educational materials to the schools we serve by making a donation to Musical Bridges. If you would like to join our effort to bring material, educational supplies to needy schools in Russia, please contact Alina Simone at alina@musicalbridges.org

EXPERIENCE SIBERIA

Musical Bridges is currently recruiting teachers of English for the 2002 -2003 academic year. Placements are available at the University level within Chita City, and at the high school level at village schools within the Zabaikal (translated as 'near Lake Baikal') region and the Buryat Autonomous District. Full-year, semester, and summer teaching opportunities are all available. Through our partnerships with non-profit organizations in the Zabaikal region, Musical Bridges can also offer volunteer internship programs focusing on Environmental Issues, Human Rights (with an emphasis on indigenous populations), Journalism and At-Risk-Youth Outreach, Please refer to our Web site, www.musicalbridges.org, for detailed information regarding available positions and application procedures.

Be sure to check our Web site in January for upcoming Eco-tourism opportunities!

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During my visit, the Oblast administration agreed to provide funding for an English Language Resource Center, an idea which was first floated by Teacher Fellow alumni **Stacy Neterer Borisov** in 1997. Now, four years later, the Province's Educational Department has allocated start-up funds for accommodations, utilities, Internet access, office equipment and four salaried staff positions. The center will provide critical English language resources – books, videos, internet access, refresher classes – to the general public, with a special emphasis on serving the needs of village school teachers.

A major goal of my trip was to establish a foundation for a summer teaching program. We have received many requests from Americans interested in summer teaching opportunities in the Zabaikal region, however Russian schools do not offer a summer term. Working with our educational partners to address this challenge produced promising results. The Province's Department of Education has offered to establish a camp for gifted children on the banks of Lake Areklay if we can provide American teachers; the Teacher Refresher Institute agreed to provide accommodations and salary for three instructors, and both state universities in Chita offered dorm space and logistical assistance. We are hopeful that these commitments will enable us to establish a 2002 summer program.

The seismic events of September 11th attest to the interconnectedness of our global interests and to the unfortunate fragility of some of those bonds. We are reminded how important it is for Americans, now more than ever, to reach out to people of the world with whom we have had a difficult history. Your support for Musical Bridges is a testament to the value you place on this mission.

Despite the many successes, this trip was not without its difficulties. Keeping open the lines of communication is always a challenge. A breakdown in communications resulted in a world of visa hassles for one of our Teacher Fellows - the unsinkable Jessica Jacobson. But working to solve problems also affords us the opportunity to step back and assess our work and to strengthen the foundation our programs rest upon. The Board of Directors is currently in the midst of a re-envisioning process as a result of my visit to Chita. One of the biggest changes on the horizon is a new name, one that better reflects the broad social and educational mission of our program in Russia. Now, more than ever, we welcome the support and participation of our members, partners and colleagues, in building the bridges that bind East and West.

(top right) Students in the village of Dul'Durga where Teacher Fellow David Balan lives and works , (middle) A new, Russian Orthodox chapel overlooking Chita City, (bottom right) Schoolchildren sing a traditional Buryat song for American guests.



Remember, you can donate to Musical Bridges using your credit card online by going to www.musicalbridges.org and clicking "Donate."

Help us Build a Scholarship Fund for the Teacher Fellowship Program...

Musical Bridges extends appreciation to the following Members:

Mrs. Robert Anderson, Dr. & Mrs. Elisha Atkins, Nancy Barrer, John Cort-DesRochers, Doris Cotton, Donald Currier, Anne L. Dickinson, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dickinson, Joe Dickinson, Thomas G Dickinson, Karen Dietrich, David Gehrenbeck, Louise Goss, Dixie Grossman, Tara Harter, Betsy Jacobson, Ginger Jones, Chris Krahn, Whitney Lawton, Steve Margolin, Charles Pfund, Nancy Pfund, Susan Pfund, Bill Scheel, Karen Schleske, Doris Senstad, James Sinclair, Bruce St. John, Sharon Sultzner, Arthur W. Sweeton, Heidi Syropoulos, Art Vawter, Marion Wagner, Sue Wilcox

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Musical Bridges is establishing a scholarship fund to support the efforts of exceptionally qualified educators willing to devote a year to serving communities in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

It costs less than \$5,000 to send and support a well-qualified American teacher for one year - a small sum given the immeasurable benefits, but one that must be raised entirely by private donations. 100% of your contribution will go directly towards the Scholarship Fund.

Your Contributions are vital to the success of this program!

Round trip Airfare:	\$1800
Health Insurance:	\$600 - \$800
Stipend:	\$1200 - \$1500
Visa:	\$80
Teaching Supplies:	\$100

