

HSI in Siberia Report

Cities: Krasnoyarsk, Abakan, Kyzyl, Ak-Dovyra (debrief/transit in St. Petersburg and Moscow)

Participants: Bill and Robin Harris (HSI team coordinators, Sharpsburg, GA)

Daniel and Janet Charlin (Torrance, CA)

Ben and Meagan Mason (Peachtree City, GA)

John Widman (ethnomusicology intern - Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL)

Jesse Irwin (student - music college in Moscow; third Russian speaker)

Dates: June 15 – July 5, 2008

Local Partners: InterAct Ministries, *Vzaimodestvia*, Gospel Recordings Network, Every Nation, Russian Christian Radio, & OM Russia.

Significant outcomes:

1) **Abakan:** In the city of Abakan (Khakassia) we met with a small group of Christian musicians as well as some of the new believers from **Tashtyp** who were brought in by Wolfgang Stuecher, a Christian worker there. We were particularly intrigued by a Christian Khakass woman (Ludmila Konushev) who is a professional folk instrument teacher. She and her husband (Alexei), are Christian leaders in that area. They have been serving with Andrei Patachakov (a local pastor) to bring the Jesus film to the furthest regions of Khakassia. Unfortunately the Khakassian version of the Jesus video is virtually unusable so they have been using the Russian version instead. Their ministry is in a transitional stage now, as most of the villages have seen the Jesus video; this group said that now something new is needed.

When asked about their vision for future ministry, they said that they want to capitalize on Ludmila's skills in teaching folk instruments by forming a traveling Christian folk ensemble that will be evangelistic in nature. They believe that this will be a very effective and culturally relevant ministry. They need initial funding help to buy instruments and costumes. Ongoing funding is not needed, as they will continue to live on their current support level.

2) **Kyzyl:** We were able to attend some concerts of Tuvan music. One of our musical contacts in the city stumbled across a rare performance by a local Tuvan folk orchestra and called us with an urgent message to "get down to the music college immediately!" This performance was one of the most amazing that we experienced while we were there, and led to our being introduced to some significant Tuvan musicians and instrument makers. We arranged to buy a few instruments, spending hours dickering with them to get a reasonable price (Tuvan instruments are hand-made by skilled masters in the traditional styles; they cost close to \$400/each). These instruments played a key role in the rest of our ministry time in Tuva.

3) One of the felt needs of the musicians in the city of Kyzyl is for greater cooperation between the evangelical churches. We were pleased to see that the arrival of the HSI team in Kyzyl drew together musicians from at least four of the churches there. In addition to the multi-denominational participation in the recording that we made, our local host, Raiesa Ivanovna, head of the Russian arm of InterAct (*Vzaimodestvia*) has a vision now to hold an inter-denominational New Song Festival in August 2009.

This festival will be a collaborative project involving churches of various evangelical denominations from around Tuva (possibly even broader than this) and will include teaching on a biblical theology of worship and a concert of original Christian Tuvan songs. In addition, HSI was

asked to prepare for the participants an “around the world” view (using video clips and stories) of the worship of the nations, with the goal of broadening their horizons and inspiring them in their own journey of using culturally-appropriate music and arts in the ministry of the church.

4) **Ak-Dovyarak:** In Ak-Dovyarak (Tuvan people), the church welcomed us very warmly. When toward the end of our fellowship time together, we began to play on our instruments (we had brought from the USA a trumpet and a violin as well as two Tuvan string instruments purchased in Kyzyl), one Christian leader in the church expressed his grief that they had not been able to learn their own instruments – they were in danger of letting a whole generation of Tuvan Christian children grow up who don’t know how to play their national instruments. They are not happy with this situation; they expressed a strong desire to obtain instruments and learn how to play them. This was one of the outcomes that we had been hoping for! We hope to raise funds to help provide instruments for this church.

5) The young pastor of the church in Ak-Dovyarak (Ayes Oorzhak) is at a crossroads in his ministry. He has been working part-time to support his growing family (a fourth child was recently born) but is not earning enough to survive. I found out after we left that they had very little food in the house (if any) at the time we were there. If he had financial support, he could continue his ministry as a pastor, but since he doesn’t, he is considering going to a full-time job that will enable him to support his family. The minimum survival wage for a family of six (according to Russian government calculations) is \$675/mo.

Ayes is a tremendously gifted pastor with a desire to see the church grow in their expressions of culturally-appropriate worship. We would like to see him continue as the pastor of this vibrant, growing congregation, and are urgently seeking financial partners to this end.

6) **Suk-Pak:** In Suk-Pak, a small town on the outskirts of Kyzyl, we gathered together musicians and poets from four churches in the area and did a recording in a large yurt-shaped building recently built on the initiative of InterAct Ministry’s Russia Field Director Jim Capaldo. The acoustics in the yurt were conducive to recording, although we often had to take breaks due to the sounds of passing traffic and cows mooing in the background.

Bill Harris and Dan Charlin set up the impromptu recording studio in the yurt documented the event with cameras. Ben Mason, our designated sound engineer, recorded ten tracks, including poetry and scripture reading set to music, throat singing (a distinctive national style among the Tuvans), and other original Tuvan songs – some which were sung *a cappella*, some accompanied by guitar or *khomus* (a traditional instrument).

Robin Harris provided Russian-English translation between the performers and the sound engineer; Meagan Mason and Janet Charlin met with the musicians in a house nearby to work with a Tuvan translator on English translations of the songs being recorded. They also prepared lunch for the participants.

7) We sang and spoke in five churches, encouraging people to use their heart music in their worship of the living God. We did this through our own example, sharing some of our own heart music and instruments and learning from them some beginning steps in singing and playing in their national styles. We were pleased to see that our modeling of musical creativity and

involvement did not cause them to imitate our Western styles, but rather inspired them toward using their own instruments and styles in creative expression.

We found it particularly effective to take a “learner” role in such things as throat singing, as it helped local people to overcome their natural shyness and demonstrate their own (superior) abilities; something they have been quite reticent to do up until the present.

Our Moody ethnomusicology intern, John Widman, had been practicing his throat singing for about a month leading up to this trip and was making good initial progress. We found that when he was willing to demonstrate the small steps that he had made, their intimidation vanished and they were quite willing to sing for us (and even improvise) in this amazing style which is so close to the core of Tuvan heart music. If it had not been for John’s humility and willingness to make some really crazy sounds, they would not have had the courage to sing for us.

9) By God’s grace, we were able to begin building good relationships with local people, especially those that hosted us. Because of these relationships, and because we had a third translator (Jesse Irwin), which allowed us to split our group into three smaller groups, we were able to have significant personal ministry in the lives of local people, talking with them about the things that troubled them and encouraging them in the difficult situations that they face. Our hosts also mentioned to us the blessing that they experienced from having musicians live in their homes, as they enjoyed the “free concerts” as the musicians in our group practiced their craft each day.

8) **Krasnoyarsk:** We spent a few days with the Gospel Recordings/Every Nation team in Krasnoyarsk, an amazing international group of people dedicated to seeing a reproducing church in all of the small people groups of Siberia. They are currently struggling with the increasing difficulties in getting Russian visas, and several of the families are being required to leave Russia at this time. Please pray that they are able to eventually get visas that will work for the long term. Humanly speaking, this is looking more and more difficult. At their request, we facilitated a wonderful “heart music” worship time, encouraging the workers there as they focused on the Lord and worshiped Him.

9) **Moscow:** Hospitality for the Moscow portion of the trip was provided by the parents of one of our team members, Jesse Irwin. The Irwins are associated with *Russian Christian Radio*. In addition to blessing us tremendously through their hospitality, it was our joy to put the Irwins in contact with the folks from Gospel Recordings Network in Krasnoyarsk. We are hoping this will result in future collaborations between the two organizations.

We thank the Lord for his blessing on this first HSI recording team to Siberia! Throughout the trip, our team relationships were incredibly close and tension-free; many of the team members remarked that in that regard it was the best short-term trip they had ever taken. We are grateful to the Lord for sending us an incredibly flexible, positive, talented group of servants who made the entire trip a joy. We are also grateful for the faithful team of financial and prayer partners who served us and made this trip not only possible, but blessed from beginning to end.

Robin Harris
 HSI Team Coordinator
 Moscow – July 7, 2008