

## Oh Yeah, I Got Tuva on My Mind...

August 2008



In June, Robin and I led an eight-person Heart Sounds International (HSI) team to Tuva, Siberia at the invitation of InterAct Ministries. Our team had musicians, worship leaders, a sound recording engineer, and an ethnomusicology intern.

InterAct assured us that Tuvan churches were really in need of our services and they were right – we were welcomed with great enthusiasm and hospitality!



For us as team leaders, it was the fulfillment of a long held dream to develop our partnership with InterAct Ministries, an organization we had formerly worked in for over two decades.

The trip had significant outcomes:

In **Abakan** we met with a group of indigenous Christian musicians. We were particularly intrigued by a Christian Khakass woman named Ludmila. She and her husband want to capitalize on her skills in teaching people to play folk instruments by forming an evangelistic traveling Christian folk music ensemble. This will be a very effective and culturally relevant ministry. Pray that they will find funding to buy music instruments and costumes for this exciting new outreach.

For the Tuvan churches, it was the first time they'd ever met ethnodoxologists!

In city of **Kyzyl**, one of our musician contacts in the city discovered a rare performance by a local Tuvan folk orchestra.

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This performance was one of the most amazing ones that we experienced while we were there; it also led to our being introduced to some significant musicians and Tuvan instrument makers. Our group bought two Tuvan string instruments, which later played a key role in our ministry time in Tuva.

One of the real needs in Kyzyl is for greater cooperation between the evangelical churches. We were delighted that a recording session we did drew together musicians from at least four of the churches in Kyzyl! Our Tuvan host, Raiesa Ivanovna, is now making plans for an inter-church Tuvan new songs festival in August 2009.

This festival will include various evangelical churches from all over Tuva. It will feature teaching on a biblical theology of worship and a concert of new Christian Tuvan songs. HSI has been asked to prepare video clips and stories to share an “around the world in 60 minutes” sample of Christian worship among the nations. The goal of this overview is to inspire Tuvans in their understanding of using culturally-appropriate music and arts in the ministries of Tuvan churches.

In **Ak-Dovytrak**, they asked us to play the instruments that we had with us (both Tuvan and Western). After hearing us play, one Tuvan man expressed his grief that they had not learned their own Tuvan instruments. He



said, “We are in danger of raising a whole generation of children who won’t know how to play our national instruments!” Now they want to get instruments and learn to play them. This was one of the outcomes that we had been praying for! If you want to partner with us to help provide music instruments for Tuvan churches, please write us.

**Suk-Pak**: In this small community on the outskirts of Kyzyl, we gathered together musicians and poets from four churches in the



area and recorded them in a Tuvan round building called a *yurt*. It was recently built by InterAct Ministries. Acoustics in the yurt were great for recording (though we often stopped for passing traffic and mooing cows).

In addition to the recording, 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 Tuvan throat-singing and playing their national styles. We were pleased to see that our modeling of musical creativity and involvement did not cause them



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to imitate our Western styles, but rather, inspired them toward using their own national instruments and styles in creative expression.

**Krasnoyarsk:** We spent a few days with the Gospel Recordings/Every Nation team in Krasnoyarsk, an international team dedicated to encouraging reproducing churches in all of the small people groups of Siberia. They are currently struggling because of the increasing difficulty of getting Russian visas. At their request, our team facilitated a “heart music” worship time for them.

We thank the Lord for his blessing on this first HSI trip to Tuva! Throughout the trip, our team relationships were very warm and tension-free. Our team members remarked that from a morale standpoint it was the best short-term trip they had ever taken.

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The [Introduction to Ethnodoxology](#) course that ICE taught at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) was a huge success! Here are a few comments from the students:



•“The Ethnodoxology course is perfect for pastors, mission committee members, worship leaders and coordinators of mission trips. It has definitely broadened my horizons while equipping me better for ministry here in my local home church as well as cross-culturally.”

•“My excitement over the class has not waned. My new phrase is ‘Something I learned from my class last week was...’ Thanks again.”

Dr. Thomas Bolton, Dean of the School of Church Music and Worship, said: “I have

heard nothing but rave reviews from this class, and I hope and pray this was but the first of many such collaborations. I would like to see SBTS at the forefront of an ethnodoxology movement. God bless you as you continue your work.”



To read some articles published about the course and listen to a podcast/interview with one of our students (a worship leader/song writer), check out the links at Robin’s blog – [www.billandrobinharris.com/news](http://www.billandrobinharris.com/news). Thanks so much for praying for these projects!

**We praise the Lord for His blessings on:**

- the HSI trip to Tuva
  - the Ethnodoxology course at Southern
- Please pray for:**
- national instruments for use by Tuvan churches and their evangelistic teams

We’re grateful for our faithful team of giving and praying partners. You serve us and make these projects and trips not only possible, but a blessing from beginning to end!

Yours in Him,

*Bill and Robin*

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