

***Nauryz with Roksonaki* Tour of the U.S.
March 4-April 11, 2008
REPORT ON ACTIVITIES**



Roksonaki Perform at Carnegie Institution for Nauryz Gala



John Muir Elementary School (Madison, WI) Enraptured by Roksonaki



Roksonaki after Special Workshop for Adopted Children from Kazakhstan (Ann Arbor, MI)

Introduction

Based on the overwhelming success of *Kyrgyz Cultural Performances* in 2006, which toured Kyrgyz manaschy (epic singer) Rysbai Isakov and folk musician Akylbek Kasabolotov to eight prestigious U.S. universities, Helen M. Faller, Ph.D., Vice President of the Central Asian Cultural Exchange (hereafter CACE) of Washington, DC, proposed a tour of the cutting edge Kazakh musical group Roksonaki to celebrate Nauryz – the Central Asian pre-Islamic New Year’s holiday – in March-April 2008

Called *Nauryz with Roksonaki*, the tour’s programming addressed the ignorance of most Americans about the great cultural and historical diversity that exists among the world’s Muslim populations in general and Central Asia in particular. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, substantially higher numbers of Americans today than before 9/11 believe that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers. They also believe that religion causes war and that Muslims harbor anti-American feelings.

Project Goal

The goal of *Nauryz with Roksonaki* was to increase knowledge about Central Asia among American schoolchildren, undergraduate student bodies, graduate students, university professors, and the general public. With the US fighting two wars in Muslim countries and the unfortunate likelihood that hostilities between America and the so-called Muslim world will persist for the knowable future, it is essential that Americans receive exposure to information about Islam and Muslims that is sensational without being sensationalist. The most effective way to do this is through face-to-face contact with cultural ambassadors from Muslim countries. Music, in particular, provides an effective means for teaching about diversity because it can, without words, depict landscapes and other imagery and convey emotions on a visceral level.

These residencies further cross-cultural understanding between people in the United States and the culturally Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union through exchanges in the arts. Relatively new countries that rarely enjoy media exposure in the US, these regions include, but are not limited to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia, Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, and areas in the Russian Federation where Muslims live.

Project Description

Nauryz with Roksonaki consisted of 12 concerts and 17 workshops on “The Wisdom of Kazakh Folktales,” “The Meaning of Nauryz,” and “Kazakh Traditional Instruments.” The performances reached over 3,700 people in eight U.S cities. Audiences included schoolchildren aged 5 to 18, university students, graduate students, university professors, business executives, two Kazakhstan ambassadors, and members of the general public. During each presentation Dr. Faller provided background on Kazakhstan, Nauryz, and Roksonaki, contextualized each of Roksonaki’s songs culturally and historically, and interpreted the audience’s questions to the artists and the artists’ responses during post-performance talkback sessions. In addition, each hosting institution received for distribution to their respective audiences a packet of educational materials with the following information:

- ◆ Map of Kazakhstan
- ◆ Kazakhstan Country Information Sheet
- ◆ What is Nauryz?

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- ◆ Translations of Roksonaki Song Lyrics
 - Kariya (The Old Man)
 - Ne Jaman (What is Bad?)
- ◆ Brief Descriptions of Three Kazakh Folktales
- ◆ Kazakh Musical Instruments Information
- ◆ Musical Score & Recording of Score: Toiga Sheshu (Gift for the Celebration)
- ◆ Participant Biographies
- ◆ Internet Resources on Kazakh Traditional Music and Folklore
- ◆ Audience Survey

Roksonaki's tour included performances at the following universities, schools, and cultural organizations:

- Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York
- The Asia Society, New York, New York
- Club DROM, New York, New York
- Community High School, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Schoolcraft College, Livonia, Michigan
- Berkshire Middle School, Beverly Hills, Michigan
- The Ann Arbor Public Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Clague Middle School, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Washtenaw Intermediate School District, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Michigan
- John Muir Elementary School, Madison, Wisconsin
- University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison Wisconsin
- The Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Illinois
- Bret Harte Public School, Chicago, Illinois
- University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
- The Lab Schools, Chicago, Illinois
- Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois
- Pasión y Arte Juerga, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Carnegie Institution, Washington, DC
- Georgetown University, Washington, DC
- University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia

For our complete schedule, including the number of audience members at each event, please see the attached calendar.

The highlight of the tour was the Kazakh Nauryz Gala Event at Carnegie Institution in Washington, DC on April 5, 2008 where 420 people, including His Excellency Kazakhstan Ambassador Erlan Idrissov and numerous other dignitaries, were in attendance.

Results

The goal of *Nauryz with Roksonaki* was to increase knowledge about and understanding of Kazakhstan. The audience surveys created to elicit information about the tour's results seem not to have been used by the various institutions involved in the project. However, we received the following unsolicited comments which indicate that we achieved our goal:

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"I learned so much from the experience of hearing a different musical cultural program. They used such a variety of unique instruments! I am now aware of a country I did not know before."

"It was so great to see you and Roksonaki at the Asia Society. Their program is one of the best I've heard. I think it's better than when they played at the Smithsonian. The songs are beautifully constructed and meld traditional with original compositions in an effective manner. I'm increasingly under the impression that Ruslan [Kara] is one of Kazakhstan's most important musical artists (well, I knew this all along, but now I'm convinced). It is from the heart and very moving. Thanks for all your efforts on bringing them on this tour."

"Reinforced the understanding that music is an experience that reaches to a place deep within which is beyond words and transcends language. An experience which is...universal."

"It was a great honor and pleasure to have you on our campus and hear you perform. Your talents and gracious manner have impressed all of us...thank you so much for such beautiful music."

"The performance today... was just fantastic. More than 200 7th graders sat in rapt attention, with smiles and appropriate clapping (during songs) and applause afterwards testifying to the impact and pleasure that Helen and the musicians provided for us."

"It was really cool catching Roksonaki, and I've really enjoyed their CD since then. Hurrah!"

"The concert last night was fantastic. I brought a couple of friends, and they enjoyed it very much too."

"Just wanted to let you know and be sure to tell Roksonaki that it was a real treat to meet them and play with them...Hopefully you will be back next year and there will be time for a second jam session..."

"We are delighted to report that we reached such large and diverse audiences. Not only did we provide a cultural and educational experience for our own faculty, staff, and students and that of Northeastern Illinois University, but we also reached out to elementary, middle school, and high school students and members of the general public. Important to note is the impact that this program had on neighborhood Southside students and teachers, whom CEERES is actively attempting to engage more extensively. The forthcoming podcast at <http://chiasmus.uchicago.edu> will provide the opportunity to reach many more listeners/viewers who are interested in Kazakh music."

In addition to these individuals' comments, Roksonaki's tour garnered a remarkable amount of press coverage. This included seven radio interviews on the following stations:

- RFE/RL (English-Language and Kazakh-Language Services)
- Wisconsin Public Radio (http://www.wpr.org/hereonearth/archive_080326k.cfm)
- WFMU (<http://www.wfmua.org/playlists/shows/26750>)
- WCBN (<http://www.wcbn.org/ryan-playlist/searchplaylist.php?howmany=60&unit=day&keyword=roksonaki>)
- WORT (In Our Backyard, March 19)
- WHPK (2 interviews on Music Around the World, March 25 and April 1)

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We generated at least 30 imprints in print, radio and online media sources in the U.S., the Czech Republic and Central Asia. Beyond this, the Air Astana Newsletter, Kazakh Aul, and the State Department all plan to publish articles about the *Nauryz with Roksonaki* Tour. In the current period of extreme information oversaturation in the U.S. and elsewhere, these results are commendable and noteworthy.

Conclusions

The tremendous success of this tour and the wide appeal of Roksonaki's music to American audiences, who previously knew nothing of Kazakhstan, has inspired Dr. Faller to focus serious energy on launching Mosaika Records, a record label dedicated to promoting the work of Central Eurasia's most talented and innovative traditional artists. Through Mosaika Records Dr. Faller hopes to bring greater attention to the region and teach people in the west about the rich uniqueness of the various cultures of Central Eurasia. Roksonaki is the first group invited to publish on this label. Dr. Faller tentatively plans to organize a second U.S. tour for Roksonaki in Spring 2009.

We would not have been able to achieve this success without the help of our many generous supporters: Air Astana (Official Carrier for Nauryz USA 2008), the Asia Society in Washington, DC, Lancaster Group, the Kazakh-American Business Association, Keleshek Kazakhstan Public Foundation, Turkish Airways, the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United States of America, and our hosting institutions. Their deep generosity is gratefully acknowledged on our collateral and Internet publications.

Selected Media Imprints

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&ct=res&cd=19&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.timesca-europe.com%2Findex.php%3Foption%3Dcom_content%26task%3Dview%26id%3D186108%26Itemid%3D7&ei=LwIWSNqqIZDueYPj_KcC&usg=AFQjCNGTJurTGJ138BmWPr y0FThA92tTJA&sig2=Ti7XoqZZ5ckc0oVmy_KvmQ
<http://silkroadcaravan.blogspot.com/2008/03/nauryz-2008.html>
<http://www.kultur-multur.org/>
<http://silkroadcaravan.blogspot.com/2008/04/roksnaki-on-air.html>
<http://www3.arts.umich.edu/lounge/viewtopic.php?t=92>
<http://www.sbindependent.org/node/2162?PHPSESSID=3778db63b24f948563a65255e01d3d43>
http://aasquared.org/calendar/calendar.pl?month=3&view=Event&event_id=1569
<https://editweb.lsa.umich.edu/umich/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=a090b563b1168110VgnVCM100000a3b1d38dRCRD&vgnnextchannel=08f9e7cc63852110VgnVCM10000096b1d38dRCRD&vgnnextnoice=1>
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/acon-nyc/message/1194>
<http://www.news-jockey.com/news/en/roksnaki>
http://www.asiasociety.org/pressroom/08_roksnaki.html
<http://www.lykos.cz/kultur-multur/?feed=rss2>
<http://sbgso.org/node/1361>
<http://www.today.wisc.edu/events/view/3408>
<http://www.cityguideny.com/viewcolumn.cfm?colid=9516>

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<http://www.manhattanlivingmag.com/viewcolumn.cfm?colid=9516>
<http://blogs.chicagoreader.com/freeshit/tag/Roksonaki/>
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<http://ceeres.blogspot.com/2008/03/nauryz-spring-in-central-asia-roksonaki.html>
<http://www.google.com/calendar/event?eid=c2tzZmJvdTloZHBvcmlscWhpcXZzNjBwdW8gYTQ5dTUxODM1Y2djZHZ0ajByZ3NkOG04YjhAZw>
<https://listhost.uchicago.edu/pipermail/ethnoise/2008-March/000248.html>
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/raicesnews/message/667>
http://www.philadelphiadance.org/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi/ubb/get_topic/f/39/t/000371.html
<http://www.rssmicro.com/?q=mosaiqa>

Some Visual Highlights from the *Nauryz with Roksonaki* Tour



Galymjan Sekeev teaches a student how to play the shan kobyz (Ann Arbor, MI)



With Kazakh diaspora after Asia Society concert (New York, NY)

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Middle School Teachers Learn Kazakh Traditional Dance (Ann Arbor, MI)



Sixth graders at Berkeley Middle School (Beverly Hills, MI)



The future of the Kazakh Diaspora (Washington, DC).

Photo credit: Katherine Vincent.

For more information on the *Nauryz with Roksonaki* Tour and Mosaika Records, please visit www.mosaika.com, <http://mosaikarecordstour.blogspot.com>, www.myspace.com/roksonaki or contact Dr. Faller at helen@mosaika.com.