

WestboroughPatch

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The [First United Methodist Church](#) on West Main Street filled with song last night when a group of Russian children performed for over 200 people. The church altar was transformed into a stage and [Moscow Nights/Golden Gates](#), a group of Russian student musicians and dancers, captivated the hall for almost two hours. The Russian folk culture performances included traditional costume, song, instruments, and dance. The students, ranging in age from 10 to 20, attend Author's Aesthetic Music Secondary School in St. Petersburg, Russia. "[St. Petersburg] is a cultural arts center...children as young as 5 or 6 years old go to the center," said the group's founder, Vitaliy Bezrodnov. "They continue from year to year...they will use their talents and skills as they get older to share the Russian culture."

Bezrodnov's charismatic narrations engaged both the audience and performers, and erased the language barrier between the two. He stressed throughout the show that music has no language barrier. He said that this is a cultural exchange for both countries since the students get to see the United States, and Americans get to enjoy Russian folk music.

Stories of the country's history were woven into the performances, and Bezrodnov explained how each song originated from a different time and place in his expansive country.

Sergey Pudov, a musician in the 3-piece band, entertained the audience with his extraordinary talent playing balalaika. The instrument is triangular shaped with 3 strings and similar to a guitar. Pudov performed a number of songs, including classical and traditional pieces.

The Westborough performance was one stop on the group's 2011 American tour that will take the performers to about 20 cities. This is the fourth year that the group has been coming to the United States. During that time, Bezrodnov said that the children have performed for over 100,000 people.



During the tour, the students are housed with host families. Debbie Hennings, Director of Christian Education at the [First United Methodist Church](#), said that the Graff, Smith, Scharen, Taylor, Witkowski and Hennings families hosted the students during their stay in Westborough. She added that Alice Morrison provided evening meals for the group. Expenses for the tour are paid for by donations. Bezrodnov said that a portion of the donations is given to Music in Mission and Rotary International Children's Fund to be used for Russian orphanages. He estimated that over \$100,000 has been donated over the four years that the group has been touring.

Rev. John Wesley Taylor said that he and his family hosted two of the performers this week. He said his family was able to overcome the language barrier by using a computer program that translated words. "We typed in 'dog' and the computer would say the Russian word for 'dog,'" he laughed.

He also noted that last night's performance was particularly special for the students because it marked the Russian Orthodox Christmas holiday.

After colorful dancing and song, the performers invited members of the audience to the stage to learn instruments and share in dance, moments that provided additional levity to show.

The evening ended with another universally understood communication, a standing ovation.

Information on [Moscow Nights/Golden Gates](#) can be found on its www.RussianFolk.com