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Photos by JOHN CARTER/Staff

A Russian folk troupe performs for students at the LaVilla School of the Arts during a cultural exchange event Monday.

Three corners of the world converge

Watching each other:
Russian, Korean
and American

By JOHN CARTER
Staff writer

It was truly an international affair at a downtown arts school Monday.

A Russian music troupe performed traditional folk songs for an enraptured audience that included a couple of dozen middle and high school students from Jacksonville's "Sister City" in South Korea — while the American students observed it all.

"Our students enjoyed the unique event immensely," said Connie Rink, activities director of LaVilla School of the Arts, a middle school. "As creative people, they are fascinated by other cultures and foreign languages, so it was just wonderful to watch the Koreans watching the Russians while our kids got to interact with it all. It was quite a banner day for us."

The Russian musicians were from a troupe called the Moscow Nights, headed by Vitaliy Bezrodnor, who plays the Bayan ("Russian") accordion. He founded the group in the

late 1980s while attending music college in Kaluga, Russia. The group, which later moved to Cleveland, regularly tours the United States. Oleg Kruglyakov, a virtuoso from Siberia, plays the prima balalaika and is considered one of the best practitioners of the three-stringed instrument in the world.

The Russian troupe's visit was sponsored by TheatreWorks and Rotary clubs in Ponte Vedra Beach, Deerwood and Arlington.

"We're always thrilled to do what we can to provide theatrical, musical and cultural experiences for young people," said Rita Kent, TheatreWorks director. "And providing multicultural experience for students teaches them an important lesson — we may speak different languages but we're the same at heart."

The Asian students at the LaVilla performance were visiting from Masan, South Korea, one of Jacksonville's Sister Cities.

Rink said that prior to the Russian folk performance, the Korean students toured the performing arts school, watching the jazz band and orchestra perform, watching dancing students and talking with visual arts students.

On following days, the Korean



Vitaliy Bezrodnor talks to students about Russian folk music.

students visited several other schools throughout Jacksonville.

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