

Russian Group Plays American Country

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| Author | Nancy Steinbach and Paul Thompson |
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Pre-Text Activity

1. Listening Short Take

You're going to read about a group of Russian musicians living in the US. First [listen to this short take](#) and supply the missing words.

Natasha Borzilova says living and (1) _____ in the United States (2) _____ been difficult for the band members. They (3) _____ their families in Russia. And at times she (4) _____ just like to (5) _____ everyone in America to speak Russian.

Sometimes the band (6) _____ just that during (7) _____ performances. They sing a Russian (8) _____ song to the (9) _____ of American blue grass country music. We (10) _____ you now with that song, “Porushka-Paranya.”

Country Music played by... a Russian Group



Written by Nancy Steinbach and Paul Thompson

American Mosaic, Voice of America, November 24, 2004

About 300 words. [Listen to reduced speed audio](#) (6:06)

HOST: American music is very popular around the world. In almost any country you can find people who love jazz, blues, hip-hop, rap, blue grass and country and western music. Phoebe Zimmermann tells how one kind of American music affected six young people from Russia.

ANNCR: The two women and four men are members of the band called Bering Strait. They were all born in the city of Obninsk, Russia.

Natasha Borzilova is the band's lead singer. She says the group members began playing country and western songs when they were children because they loved that kind of music. They became very good musicians. Listen to their recording of “Jagged Edge of a Broken Heart.”

In the early nineteen-nineties, the members of Bering Strait visited Nashville, Tennessee, the center of American country and western music. They worked on their music for five years in the United States before a major record company wanted to record them. They finally released their first album last year.



Bering Strait

One song on that album was recently nominated for a Grammy Award for best country instrumental performance. The song is “Bearing Straight.”

Natasha Borzilova says living and working in the United States has been difficult for the band members. They miss their families in Russia. And at times she would just like to tell everyone in America to speak Russian.

Sometimes the band does just that during live performances. They sing a Russian folk song to the rhythm of American blue grass country music. We leave you now with that song, “Porushka-Paranya.”

HOST: This is Doug Johnson. I hope you enjoyed our program today. Join us again next week for AMERICAN MOSAIC.

Post-Text Activities

4. Further Research: A History of Bering Strait

There are a lot of questions about the group Bering Strait that this brief article does not go into. First, discuss the questions below in class. You may speculate on the answers. Then look to the Internet and see what answers you can find. Students will compare the information found when they return to class.

1. Why and how did these five people come to America? The article says they “visited” Tennessee then “worked on their music for five years.” What kind of visit was this?
2. Were they originally students? Of what?
3. How did they hear country music in Obninsk?
4. Do they plan to live always in the USA or will they return to Russia?
5. Bering Strait has two albums, but they only sing one song in Russian. Why? Do you think they should sing more in Russian?

4. Writing: Reversing the Scenario

Here’s the story: Five Russians musicians come to America, and “make it” (succeed) playing home-style American music for American audiences. That’s Bering Strait. Their name suggests Russia a little, but if you heard them on the radio you would never think they were not American.

Let’s reverse the scenario and say a group of five Americans moved to Russian and sang traditional Russian music.

Your task in this writing assignment is to compare the scenarios. What would be different? What would people in Russia think? Would they be proud of these Americans? Would they wonder why these Americans loved Russian music or

wanted to come to Russia? Would they rather have these Americans sing in English? Would Russians accept them? Is it even possible that Americans could play Russian music that sounds really Russian and sing Russian language that didn't sound funny?

Imagine this scenario. Is it possible? Write one page (300 words) in which you answer some or all of the above questions.

4. Talk Show Role Play

Let's continue to explore the scenario of a musical group moving to another country, this time in a role play. You'll work in groups of four or five. One person will be the interviewer, or talk show host. You can make up a name, or be somebody famous like David Letterman, Oprah Winfrey, Andrey Malakhov, Lolita Milyavskaya, Tina Kondelaki, or Svetlana Sorokina.

Preparing: Make a name for your group, a style of music, a history. Then make a list of questions that the interviewer will ask. You may use questions from the above activities, but add some of your own too.

Performing: The band and the interviewer will go on stage (i.e. the front of the class). The interviewer will ask questions; the band members will answer. Allow four to five minutes. Then, just as in a real talk show, the interviewer may open up questions to the audience.



КМ, an American musician in Russia. [Click to hear his «Ежик» song](#), recorded in an Ufa hotel room at 2:00 a.m.

Answers & Extras

Answers to Listening Short Take

1. working
2. has
3. miss
4. would
5. tell
6. does
7. live
8. folk
9. rythmn
10. leave