



## **THE MOSCOW BOYS CHOIR®** ***US Tour Support Materials***

### **Suggested Study Guide for the 2009 Tour**

#### **BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE:**

1. Ask the class to brainstorm all they know about Russia and the Russian people.
2. Review the attached vocabulary list or have the students provide definitions and share them with the class.
3. Discuss capitalism and communism as economic systems. What are the pros and cons of each system? Consider the differences in your daily life if the United States were a communist country.
4. Consider the daily lives of members of The Moscow Boys Choir in the new Russia and the old, communist Russia. How do you suppose life would have been better or worse for them under the old regime? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of life for the boys in the current system?
5. Possible talking points for music classes:
  - a. How and why would certain foods affect vocal quality?
  - b. What would be the best things to eat for dinner if you had to sing that evening? Which would be the worst?
  - c. How can the temperature of the things you eat and drink affect your voice?

#### **AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE:**

1. The choir performs traditional as well as contemporary music. Why do you suppose they do this? What kind of effect did the different pieces have on the audience?
2. How does music convey emotion even when you don't understand the words?
3. What does the conductor do in the choir? How does the conductor's body language and gestures let the choir know what to do? What gestures do we use every day to communicate with others?

*\*Please note that this is only a suggested guide. As each group of students differs, instructors may wish to focus on only a few of the proposed topics of discussion or create their own study guide more suited to their particular student group. An original study guide may be derived from the attached background on Russia, the bibliography provided or by using other sources of choice. The Management hopes that the students enjoy this cultural experience that will deepen their understanding of this unique culture!*



## **RUSSIA AND HER PEOPLE**

### **A Brief Overview**

Russia was first inhabited by nomadic tribes, known as the Atavars, during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The name Russia is derived from the Atavar word for “north.” It is thought that the term “Russia” was first coined by Norwegian and Swedish explorers in discovering trade routes. These people traded extensively with the Atavars, who were without a formal written language, and the visiting Vikings used the term “russeeyans” to describe their trading partners. Some of the first towns in what is now known as present-day Russia were built by the Goths, who arrived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Since then, Russia has been home to many different people, not all of them peaceful.

The Russians have had a written language since the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD when the Christian missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, developed a Greek-based alphabet for the Slavic people in order to translate religious texts. In their memory, the Russian alphabet is called Cyrillic and it is still in use today in modified form.

In 882 AD, the Viking leader Oleg founded the Russian state by combining the main trading centers into a state governed by the city of Kiev. In 988 AD, the ruler of Kiev, Vladimir I, converted to Christianity. It is believed that he chose Greek Orthodoxy over Roman Catholicism because of the heavy trading Kiev did with Constantinople, the capitol of the Byzantine Empire. The faith was adapted to become the Russian Orthodox Church. At this time, and for many centuries to follow, Russia’s economy was based on feudalism, an economic and social system in which land worked by serfs was held by vassals or boyars in exchange for military and other services to overlords. There was a vast difference between the quality of life for the upper classes and that of the lower classes. Princes and boyars (or landowners) comprised the upper classes. The boyars were granted land rights by powerful princes and these two groups lived in comparative luxury while the common man lived a difficult and impoverished existence.

Ivan IV reigned as the first czar (pronounced “tzar” and also spelled tsar) from about 1550 AD. The term “czar” is an adaptation from the Roman Empire’s title for their supreme leader – “Caesar.” Ivan IV adapted this title and for many centuries thereafter, the leader of Russia was known as the Czar. Ivan was born in 1530, and is better known as Ivan the Terrible for his fierce temper and habit of torturing and executing those who opposed him, even members of his own family, which is why Ivan had no suitable heir to his throne. Therefore, the lines of succession to the Russian throne were fluid for almost two hundred years. When a Czar died, he was succeeded by the person who held the most power in the government. Czar Paul (1796-1801) brought back the law of primogeniture, in which the right of inheritance is bestowed upon the eldest son.



Czar Alexander II (1855-1881) finally freed the serfs from servitude in 1861. Since the serfs could not own land individually, land titles would be held by the commune, or “mir,” to which the former serfs belonged. By setting up land stewardship in this way, Alexander II unknowingly planted the seeds which grew into modern-day communism.

In January of 1905, the working classes rebelled in what became known historically as “Bloody Sunday” and demanded the abdication of Czar Nicholas II. He and his family were exiled and later executed by the leaders of the rebellion, known as the Bolsheviks. In October of 1917, the October Revolution occurred, which overthrew the Russia went on strike against the Czar and the first Socialist State was formed. These events ushered in the rise of communism in Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin. In 1922, adjacent regions also embraced communism and joined with Russia to form the Soviet Union, or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Thus, Russia became a super-power and a major force in the development socialism and of the communistic form of government.

The Soviet Union was founded on the principles of socialism, where a country’s means of production and distribution is owned by that society rather than by individuals or private companies. Communism is a form of socialism as interpreted by Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx that promotes common ownership of property. Under the communist regime in Russia, the government owned and regulated everything pertaining to the daily life of the people. People were not allowed to speak out against the government, vote, or even leave the country without permission from the Communist Party leaders. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the Soviet leader. Gorbachev wanted to move the Soviet Union into a more democratic, open style of government. This new way of thinking became known as “glasnost,” meaning “openness” and the Russian government adopted the policy of “perestroika,” meaning “reconstruction” or “rebuilding.” In 1991, Gorbachev resigned as head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union officially disbanded.

Today, the Russian government continues to make their transition to democracy and capitalism, the economic system currently in use by the majority of the world’s governments in which the means of production and distribution is privately owned and operated for profit. Their struggle is not an easy one because 70 years of one form of government is not easily erased in just a few years. While it will take time for Russia’s government, and her economy, to evolve into truly democratic and capitalist entities, already Russia has made great inroads in the transition to a democratic, capitalist society. Visitors traveling to Russia today will find modern, European cities replete with stores filled with goods, people in tune with the latest technologies and culture and a bustling commerce. As their rich history has proven, the Russian people are strong and determined, and their hopes and dreams for a prosperous and bright future will be realized through their hard work and the vision of their leaders.



## VOCABULARY LIST

a capella—to sing without accompaniment

accompaniment--a musical term referring to a musical part supporting a vocal part.

alto--the range of a voice between tenor and mezzo-soprano.

audition--a hearing to try out and actor or singer.

baritone--the range of a male voice between tenor and bass.

bass--the lowest range of a male voice.

Bolsheviks--original member of the majority faction that came into power after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

boyers--landowners controlled by royalty in feudal economies.

capitalism--an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately owned and operated for profit.

communism--a type of socialism in which the people are ruled by a central government which controls all the industry

Cyrillic--the alphabet for the Russian language created by Cyril and Methodius in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

feudalism--economic and social system in medieval Europe, in which land, worked by serfs, was held by vassals in exchange for military and other services to overlords.

forte--a musical term meaning loud.

Orthodox Church--the Christian church dominant in Eastern Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa.

perestroika--Russian term for the policy adopted by that government meaning to rebuild or reconstruct.

perseverance--to continue a course of action despite difficulty or opposition.



primogeniture--a social system in which inheritance is bestowed upon the first born of a ruler or landowner.

repertoire--the stock of songs that a singer is prepared to perform.

socialism--a theory by which a country's means of production and distribution are owned by that society rather than by individuals.

soprano--the range of the highest voice of women or boys.

tenor--the highest regular adult male singing voice.

czar--(also spelled tsar) the Russian word for ruler or emperor.



## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE MOSCOW BOYS CHOIR®

Russian children begin attending primary school at the age of 6 or 7 and stay in school until the age of 16. At age 16, they can choose to learn a trade at a technical or professional institute or to stay in school until age 18 where they prepare to take exams for entrance into a University. The Russian school year is the same as the normal school year here in the US, beginning around September 1 and ending in early June.

To become a touring member of the choir takes a lot of talent and perseverance. The boys are chosen from over 400 students in the Moscow Boys Capella, the school they attend in Moscow. In addition to their vocal training, each boy takes a variety of classes and a foreign language (such as English or German), mathematics, and history. They also learn how to play a variety of musical instruments such as the piano to round out their musical training. The boys begin studying music by age 5, but are not allowed to perform publicly until age 9.

Boys between the ages of 9 and 14 comprise the bulk of the touring choir. These young men sing the soprano and alto parts of the songs in the repertoire. When you see the show, you will notice that there are older members in the group. These performers are graduates of the Moscow Boys Capella, and they sing the tenor, baritone, and bass parts of the music.

When they are not in class, the boys live with their parents in Moscow. While at home and on tour, they are always mindful of their voices and therefore observe strict bedtimes and dietary restrictions to stay in top vocal form. You will often find the boys sipping warm or room temperature liquids. This is not only because it is a Russian custom, but because it is relaxing to the throat and aids in the preparation for the night's performance. This is not to say that they don't enjoy an occasional trip to McDonald's or Pizza Hut, which they do as often as possible!

The year 2009 marks the Choir's Eleventh North American tour. On previous tours, they have been invited to perform at Disneyland, Six Flags Over Texas, Dollywood and the Crystal Cathedral in Southern California. They have been seen on television nationally and internationally performing on such programs as Reverend Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" and on the CBS Christmas Eve Holiday Special. In December of 1999, the boys visited the White House where they sang for and met President Bill Clinton, Mrs. Clinton and Chelsea, too! The boys have toured extensively in Europe performing for members of the British Royal Family at The Royal Albert Hall in London, and many prestigious venues in their own country such as Bolshoi Theatre,



the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, and the Kremlin for their Presidents.

A typical day on tour for them consists of early mornings on the bus to drive to the city where they will perform that evening or the next day. Upon arrival, they go to their hotel and get settled into their rooms. Then, they go to the theatre where they prepare for their performance. After the performance, there may be a reception or brief party where the Choir members can meet and greet audience members. After this, it's back to the hotel, where everyone has a good night's sleep before starting all over again the next day. During their time off, they often organize a quick game of European-style football, which we call soccer. They also play video games, go to the cinema, enjoy a swim, read a book, or send e-mail and text messages home to their families. In essence, these youngsters are very much like their American counterparts, only they travel the world sharing their incredible musical gifts.

The boys see a great deal of America while on tour and enjoy meeting people from all walks of life in their travels. When they return home to Moscow, they have a wealth of memories that they eagerly share with their families and friends. Becoming a member of the Moscow Boys Choir means hard work and being far from home for long periods of time, but it also offers benefits such as travel and fun!

*(The above is provided by tour management to enhance the performance the audience will see by THE MOSCOW BOYS CHOIR®. These documents are intended to be used as an introduction to Russian History. Instructors may wish to use the above information as a foundation for further, more intense study of Russia.)*

Updated July 2009.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ***Sources for this Study Guide***

This study guide is intended to enhance the student's enjoyment of THE MOSCOW BOYS CHOIR's performance. Information sources are listed below, but there is so much more to know about Russia and her people. Find out more! For further reading, pay a visit your local public library.

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