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2010-06-15: An ambassador with a cultural portfolio

Samantha Fodrowski
Northeastern University

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An ambassador with a cultural portfolio



Demetrius Spaneas was sponsored by the U.S. State Department to conduct workshops with students of local schools in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Latvia.

Courtesy photo

June 15, 2010

Music is a global and cultural unifier. With this belief in mind, the U.S. State Department recently sponsored Demetrius Spaneas, arts administrator for **Northeastern University's music department**, to conduct a series of workshops with students of local music schools in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Latvia.

Spaneas' work focuses on the creation of artistic dialogue and the promotion of American music and culture abroad, with particular emphasis on the former Soviet republics and Eastern Europe.

"With this goal, I have traveled from Serbia to Kyrgyzstan," said Spaneas, "giving concerts, teaching at local colleges and conservatories, reached out to remote areas to interact with and teach children and adults, and collaborated with local musicians and visual artists."

In Tajikistan, Spaneas collaborated with the Tajik traditional ensemble Mizrob and composed new music for the Second Dushanbe Jazz Festival, for which he was the 2010 artist-in-residence. The festival promoted the mixing of traditional Tajik music with jazz and Spaneas worked closely with students, teaching them about jazz as a traditional American music.

Following the festival, Spaneas engaged in outreach programs sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe, traveling to the Pamir mountain region and the Afghan border.

"The goal of this outreach was not only to meet villagers and musicians, but most importantly, to stimulate diplomacy through cultural connections and learning," he said.

During his time in Azerbaijan, Spaneas collaborated with the U.S. Embassy in Baku, the Azerbaijan Ministry of Culture and the Peace Corps to give concerts and lectures throughout the country. Spaneas noted that he was the first American musician to ever travel to some remote areas of Azerbaijan.

Before returning to the United States, he spent time in Riga, Latvia, giving special presentations and performing a concert for the U.S. Embassy there.

As a result of his work and success at the 2010 jazz festival in Dushanbe, Spaneas was invited to be the artistic director of the 2011 festival, and plans to expand the event to include musicians from Iran and Afghanistan.

For more information, please contact Samantha Fodrowski at 617-373-5427 or at s.fodrowski@neu.edu.

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