

# REESNews



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## Любовь в России: A Letter from the Editor

BY COLLEEN CRONIN, OCREECAS INTERN, SPRING 2012

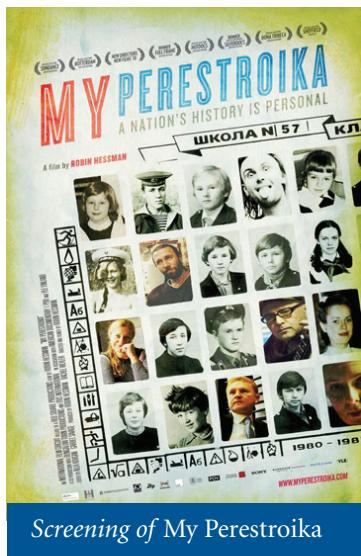
**G**reetings to alumni and friends of Russian and Russian and East European studies (REES) at Oberlin. As many of you know, Oberlin College encourages students to study abroad by offering an array of programs in multiple countries. Russian and REES majors have the opportunity to study in various cities, both in Russia and in other post-soviet countries, an opportunity that was unheard of only 30 years ago! It was on one such program, at Bard-Smolny College in Saint Petersburg, that I met Alex Richardson '12, with whom I fell in love and followed back to the green pastures of rural Ohio.

From Saint Petersburg to Oberlin, we have shared many unique experiences. In Russia we saw icicles as big as people, tutored English at an orphanage, and introduced beer-pong to our native vodka-drinking comrades. Alex was even challenged to a duel by one of my suitors, which thankfully never took place. After returning to Oberlin, our adventures continued, thanks to the hard-working and thoughtful faculty members who welcomed me as one of their own students. Here, we saw a live performance of the Jerry Grcevich Tamburitza Orchestra, taught a Russian winter-term class, and read *Master and Margarita* in the original. Despite the lack of duels, Oberlin College has sponsored many culturally enriching events and has given me the honor of sharing them with you below. I hope you enjoy and appreciate them as much as I have. За Oberlin!

## Remembering Communism: The Poetics and Politics of Nostalgia

In October 2011, Oberlin sponsored a lecture and film series on postcommunist nostalgia, marking the 20th anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

**Week 1** started off the series with a screening of *Goodbye Lenin!* In this German comedy, an ardently Communist mother awakes after a long coma; her loving son, in an effort to prevent a fatal shock, must keep her from discovering that her beloved East Germany has disappeared. The film was followed in the same vein by a Dubravka Ugresic lecture called *Nostalgia, Ostalgia, and the Memory Stick*. Ugresic, a prominent novelist, short storywriter,



Screening of My Perestroika

essayist, and scholar, grew up in the former Yugoslavia. She left in 1993 after harsh media harassment for her strong antiwar and antinationalistic stances. She is recognized as one of contemporary Europe's most incisive and entertaining thinkers and public commentators. Her lecture confronted the contemporary perception of the past and its role in our modern obsessions, and explored both how we become "archivists of our own lives" and whether the treatment of the past is different in post-communist countries.

**Week 2** was introduced by writer, journalist, and translator Susanne Schädlich, who read from and discussed her book *December, Time and Again: The West, the Stasi, the Uncle, and Me*. Schädlich was the Max Kade German Writer-in-Residence at Oberlin during the fall semester 2011. Born in East Germany, she and her family were forced to move to West Germany when she was 12 because her father, a writer, ran afoul of the regime. In the early 1990s, after reunification, she learned that her father's brother had worked for many years as an informant for the East German Secret Police. *December, Time and Again* was an exploration of the complicated histories of her family and of postwar

# Remembering Communism

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Germany, and an autobiographical account of what it meant to come of age in exile, caught in a no man's land between two seemingly similar yet very different cultures.

The week ended with a screening of *My Perestroika*, a documentary following ordinary Russians living in extraordinary times—from their sheltered Soviet childhood, to the collapse of the Soviet Union during their teenage years, to the constantly shifting political landscape of post-Soviet Russia. Together, they paint a complex picture of the dreams and disillusionment of those raised behind the Iron Curtain.

**Week 3**, the last week in the series, consisted of two lectures by Grisha Bruskin, a Moscow-born, New York-based artist who was a prominent figure in the history of the nonconformist art movement in the Soviet Union and Russia. In his first lecture, *I and It*, he showed and discussed various works from his ongoing “Soviet Project” that deal with the theme of “I and It”—the interrelationship and alienation between the individual and the collective, the citizen, and the state.

As an artist, Bruskin has always been interested in the relationship between text and image, and he is deeply concerned with the nature of individual and collective memory. In the last

“**FOR 40 YEARS EAST GERMANY** was a dictatorship. But after 1961, most of its almost 17 million citizens did nothing against it. Today when you remind them of this fact, when you tell the truth, they feel personally attacked. They feel a sense of guilt. That makes it difficult to talk about coercion and cowardice. It also engenders a nostalgia—“Ostalgie”—for the past, and an idealization of the political reality of life in the DDR. We can't deal with history by putting on rose-tinted glasses. We must find the courage to tell the truth.”

—Writer Susanne Schädlich

decade, he has published four books of memoirs that form a vibrant textual and visual collage of his own past, his family's past, and his Jewish roots; these books interpose Bruskin's staccato reminiscences, family photographs, and his art.

Bruskin concluded the series with his second lecture, *Past Imperfect*, during which he read and discussed passages from these memoirs, focusing in particular on his childhood in the Soviet Union.

## A Chronicle of a Turbulent Century: A Conversation with Kati Marton

BY COLLEEN CRONIN, OCREECAS INTERN

In April 2012, journalist, author, and human rights advocate Kati Marton came to Oberlin to discuss her recent work. Born in Hungary, Kati Marton is the daughter of UPI reporter Ilona Marton and award-winning Associated Press reporter Endre Marton. Her parents survived the Holocaust but never spoke of it, and Kati was raised Roman Catholic. After the Hungarian Revolution, her family immigrated to Maryland. With journalism in her blood, Marton went on to contribute as a reporter to ABC News, PBS, NPR, the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, and others.

From 2003 to 2008, she chaired the International Women's Health Coalition, and from 2000 to 2011, she was a member of the board of Human Rights Watch. Marton is currently a director and former chair of the Committee to Protect Journalists. She described her human rights work as being “an outgrowth of fascism and com-

munism,” both of which have left a mark on her history. When Marton was still a child, her parents served nearly two years in prison on false charges of espionage for the United States. “Journalists,” she explained, “are the only remedy to demagogues and dictators.” Journalists ask questions and seek the truth, making their occupation a valuable, yet dangerous one. The importance of her parents’ reporting on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was eventually recognized, and they received many honors, including the George Polk Award.

Since 1980, Marton has published seven books, including *Enemies of the People – My Family's Journey to America*, which was a 2010 finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Prize. Though her Cold War memoir received much acclaim, she spoke of her book, *Wallenberg*, as having a more personal effect on her and leading back to her own life. While interviewing a woman who was among thousands saved by Wallenberg during the Holocaust, Marton discovered that her grandparents had been murdered at Auschwitz and that “Wallenberg arrived too late to help them.” A strong woman and a stubborn seeker of truth, Kati Marton emulates her beliefs: that one person can make a difference, and facts are indeed sacred.



# Jerry Grcevich Tamburitza Orchestra

**O**n April 18-19, 2012, OCREECAS welcomed Croatian-American *tambura* player and composer Jerry Grcevich as its 2012 Artist in Residence at Oberlin College.

Grcevich is one of the leading virtuosi on this traditional string instrument from Southeast Europe and is well known in Croatia and North America for his interpretations of folk music and his new songs and instrumental compositions. The residency began April 18 with a demonstration and discussion of Grcevich's music, attended by students and faculty from the college and the conservatory (pictured here). Moderated by ethnomusicologist Ian MacMillen, the discussion explored the history of the tambura in Croatia and Yugoslavia, regional styles of tambura performance, and Grcevich's rise to popularity in Croatia through his collaborations with popular singer Miroslav Škoro.

Later that evening, Grcevich performed a concert of traditional and neo-traditional tambura music in the Dionysus Disco in Wilder with his band from Pittsburgh, the Jerry Grcevich Tamburitza Orchestra (featuring Jerry Grcevich on *prim* tambura, Mark Stafura and Charlie Falentovich on *brač* tambura, Derek Hohn on *bugarija* tambura, and Brock Belich on tambura bass, or *berda*). Students and faculty met early at the 'Sco to learn traditional Croatian *kolo* dances with MacMillen. Later, following the sets of Croatian ballads that constituted the first half of the concert, they danced to live musical accompaniment along with local dance enthusiasts and Croatian Americans from Cleveland. The concert also featured a set of Russian tunes, which occasioned Russian folk dancing by Fulbright Fellow Liya Zalatdinova and Russian student Reid Palmer as well as sing-alongs with members of Russian House Faculty-in-Residence



Tambura virtuoso Jerry Grcevich with Oberlin students

Maia Solovieva's *Advanced Conversational Russian* class.

Grcevich's Artist Residency at OCREECAS concluded on April 19 with a visit to Visiting Assistant Professor Marko Dumančić's *Genocide in Modern Eurasia* class in the history department. The class had just begun a unit on the Yugoslav conflicts on the 1990s, and students spoke with Grcevich about his patriotic songs, his views on music's relationship to identity in North America and Eastern Europe, and his experiences in pre- and post-war Croatia. Grcevich and his band express their thanks for the opportunity to perform their music at Oberlin and the gratification they received from interacting with students and faculty.

## Recent OCREECAS Interns in Russia

BY MAIA SOLOVIEVA

**B**enjamin Lussier received an OCREECAS grant in the spring of 2010 to work at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg that fall, where he worked with a range of people, from native speakers of Russian to volunteers from around the world. Ben rented his own apartment, successfully met the cultural challenges of a Russian workplace, and made numerous friends, including the famous Russian artists 'Mit'ki'. He also regularly maintained contact with Oberlin via email and Skype, and he shared his experience with students. Keep in mind, future applicants to the OCREECAS grant: since Ben was successful during his first term, the OCREECAS committee awarded him a grant to continue his internship for a second term!

Sam Skove is currently interning in Russia, having started in August 2012. He currently works at "Friends House" in Moscow (<http://friendshousemoscow.org>). The most rewarding

part of his internship, he says, has been his work at the innovative school "Krug," which was organized for special-needs children. At "Krug," teachers use theater and art as therapeutic tools to help rehabilitate special-needs children. As Sam puts it, the work "requires full participation and doesn't let me slack off." Sam will be back on campus at the end of fall 2013. We're looking forward to listening to his stories and reflections of Russia.

The experience that you gain from working and living in Russia can change your view of the world, advance your Russian language skills, and give you an enormous source of personal growth. Read Peter Kutzen's account of his experience with the Great Baikal Trail Project and see for yourself.

Contact me if you are considering applying for an OCREECAS grant ([Maia.Solovieva@oberlin.edu](mailto:Maia.Solovieva@oberlin.edu)) and don't miss Sam Skove's talk on campus at the end of this semester!

# Working on Lake Baikal

BY PETER KUTZEN

In spring of 2011 I received a generous OCREECAS grant from Oberlin, which would fund a two-month summer internship with the Great Baikal Trail Organization (GBT) based in Irkutsk, Russia. On a morning in early June, just a few weeks after the conclusion of the spring semester, I woke up, ate one last hearty American breakfast, and set out the front door with nothing but 40 pounds on my back. It took me the better part of three days—and three flights—to travel halfway around the world, from New York to Irkutsk, Russia. For the next two months I journeyed independently and worked throughout the southern region of Lake Baikal, the oldest, deepest, and perhaps most beautiful lake in the world.

During this time, I lived in a poor remote village outside of Svirsk, where I served as an American cultural ambassador to local school children and helped to cut trees, build fences, paint houses, and dig trenches. I also provided translation support in Great Baikal Trail's Irkutsk office and participated in two GBT field expeditions. The first of these projects was located just off

the southwestern coast of Baikal, where our team built log steps up a cliffside to provide hikers access to ancient cave sites. The second project took place in the jungle of Khamar Daban on the southeastern side of Lake Baikal, where we extended trail through dense forested hills, filled with ravines, waterfalls, and rocky terrain. When I wasn't working with GBT I explored Irkutsk and travelled to neighboring cities including Ulan Ude.

At the close of the summer, I journeyed four days on the trans-Siberian back to Moscow. My time in Siberia was an extraordinary adventure. It provided me not only with an invaluable experience of Russian language and culture in the field, but also opened my eyes to an important part of Russia far away from the western capital. More important than my strides with the language were the deep friendships I formed with so many people in so short a time; these relationships have only continued to grow! I am so grateful to OCREECAS and the entire Oberlin Russian faculty for making such an opportunity as this available and attainable!



Peter Kutzen, Lake Baikal, Russia