

## International Education Week (IEW) in Bulgaria November 16-20, 2009

During the tenth annual International Education Week in Bulgaria (November 16-20, 2009), we recognized the benefits of an American education for Bulgarian students. A number of useful activities were carried out attracting the attention of students, professors, high-school teachers, educators, professionals and parents.

A highlight of 2009 IEW in Bulgaria was the participation of PAO and Fulbright Commission Chairman Ken Moskowitz and Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission, in an International Conference at Sofia University dedicated to the 200th Anniversary of Edgar Allan Poe's birth. In addition, over 2200 students and professionals visited the Fulbright stand at the QS World Grad School Fair and the Education Without Borders Fair in Sofia. EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva presented on "Undergraduate Study in the U.S." at the Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center. During and around the IEW, the advising center in Sofia was visited by representatives of two U.S. institutions of higher learning: George Washington University, D.C. and Wellesley College, MA. They presented their institutions and the American educational system to interested students. Milena Mareva,

Admissions Officer of Wellesley College joined EducationUSA Adviser in high school visits to William Shakespeare English Language High School, Sofia High School of Mathematics, and 1st English Language High School in Sofia.



### QS World Grad School Fair

Over 200 students and professionals visited the Fulbright stand at the QS World Grad School Fair at Hilton Hotel, Sofia

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### Education Without Borders Fair

Over 2000 students, parents and professionals visited the Fulbright stand at the Education Without Borders Fair, National Palace of Culture, Sofia



**U.S. University Visits - George Washington University, D.C.** *Kristin S. Williams, Assistant Vice President for Graduate and Special Enrolment Management, conducting an information session on Graduate Study in the U.S. at the Fulbright Language Training Center*



**High School Visits**  
*Visit of EducationUSA Adviser Snezhana Teneva and Milena Mareva, Undergraduate Admissions Officer, Wellesley College, MA, to William Shakespeare English Language High School in Sofia*



**U.S. University Visits - Wellesley College, MA**  
*Milena Mareva, Undergraduate Admissions Officer, presenting on "Opportunities at American Liberal Arts & Sciences Colleges" at the Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center in Sofia*

Over 2400 individuals and representatives of institutions interested in international education and exchange activities (schools, universities, international organizations, businesses, associations, community organizations, etc.) joined in this year's IEW events and got exposed to study opportunities in the United States.

## Bulgarian Fulbright Alumni Association Membership Form



Full name .....

Home address .....

Field, Academic Rank and Degree .....

Present Place and Address of Employment .....

Phone, Fax .....

Type, Year and Duration of Grant .....

Place and Name of Host Institution .....

*Please complete and return to the Fulbright Commission office address.*

## Final Nominations for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 10-11

This year the Commission received 47 applications for Fulbright senior scholar and graduate study grants and Hubert Humphrey fellowships. Non-degree grants for doctoral students were introduced for the first time.

The binational reviewing committees recommended 26 students and 13 scholars for interview. The interviews were conducted on September 29 and 30 and on October 14, 2009. The applicants represented a wide variety of fields and were well qualified and highly motivated.

The following candidates for Fulbright scholarships and Hubert H. Humphrey fellowships in AY 2010-11 were nominated by the Commission Board:

### Senior Scholars

#### Principal candidates:

1. Christo Christov – *chemistry*
2. Oleg Gochev – *art (mural painting)*
3. Svetoslav Bobev – *plant pathology*
4. Alexander Kotsev – *geography*
5. Iliya Iliev – *ethnology*
6. Ognyan Kovachev – *literary theory*

#### Alternate candidate:

1. Orlin Spassov - *journalism*

### Graduate students

#### Principal candidates:

1. Nikolai Mihailov – *social psychology*
2. Atanas Grozdev – *sociology*
3. Gergana Tomova – *political science*
4. Romyana Mihailova – *communications*
5. Irina Galabova – *law*

#### Alternate candidates:

1. Stefan Stoyanov – *business administration*
2. Plamen Peshev – *aerodynamics*
3. Lyubomir Minkov – *business administration*

### Fulbright-Oklahoma Grant

#### Principal candidate:

1. Atanas Mihnev – *business administration*

#### Alternate candidate:

1. Raya Georgieva – *business administration*

### Non-Degree Grants for Doctoral Students

#### Principal candidates:

1. Angel Igov – *literature*
2. Stanimira Krusteva – *molecular biology*
3. Radomir Todorov – *finance*

#### Alternate candidate:

1. Maria Ivancheva – *sociology*

### Hubert Humphrey Fellowships

#### Principal candidates:

1. Hristo Ivanov – *law*
2. Daniel Vankov – *management*

#### Alternate candidate:

1. Dora Ilcheva – *finance*



**Fulbright Interview, September 29-30, 2009**

Members of the nomination committee (from left to right): Geoffrey Dean, Fulbright Board Member; Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission; Maureen Duffy-Lewis, Fulbright lecturer, and Sherry Keneson-Hall, CAO, U.S. Embassy



## Fulbright Office News

### After Three Months in Bulgaria Discussion of U.S. Grantees' Projects for AY 2009-2010

On December 18 the Fulbright Commission staff held a meeting with U.S. grantees to discuss the development of their projects in Bulgaria.

Each of the Fulbrighters reported on their activities during the first three months of their stay in Bulgaria. The topics ranged from the art of oral advocacy in criminal and civil law through open-source e-learning platforms in the academic environment to feasibility research for establishing sub-

stance abuse recovery homes, the economic opportunities inherent in smart resource development, the strategies for prevention of human trafficking and impressions from Bulgarian high schools.

The program concluded with a Christmas party for U.S. grantees, their contact persons and Bulgarian Fulbright alumni.



**Stephanie Schaffner**, English Teaching Assistant, English Language School, Bourgas



**Ronald Harvey**, graduate student, Psychology, National Center for Addictions, Sofia / Sofia Municipal Center for Addictions



**Amanda McArthur** – English Teaching Assistant, German Language School, Sofia



**Iona Sarieva** – Lecturer/researcher, Applied Linguistics, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Department of British and American Studies

## Cultural Enrichment Activities for U.S. Fulbright Grantees

*One-day trip to Koprivstitsa, November 2009*



## Movie Night

*Over 50 students and members of Fulbright Commission staff watched the movie "My Cousin Vinny" on Friday, December 11, 2009 at Sofia University as part of Judge Maureen Duffy-Lewis Fulbright lecturer's class on a murder mock trial.*



## Fulbright Commission / U.S. Embassy Seminar

On December 15, 2009, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy, conducted a one-day seminar for librarians from American Corners/Shelves throughout the country. The seminar was an important part of the ongoing effort to make study opportunities in the US better known and accessible to more potential candidates from underserved regions and diverse social groups.

The following regional libraries were represented at the seminar:

1. **Varna Regional Library** (American Corner)
2. **Razgrad Regional Library** (American Shelf)
3. **Silistra Regional Library** (American Shelf)

4. **Turgovishte Regional Library** (American Shelf)
5. **Shumen Regional Library** (American Shelf)
6. **Russe Regional Library**
7. **Pleven Regional Library** (American Shelf)
8. **Haskovo Regional Library** (American Shelf)
9. **Gotze Delchev Chitalishte Library** (American Shelf)
10. **Dobritsch, Albena College**
11. **Montana Regional Library** (American Shelf)
12. **Sofia City Library** (American Corner)

ED Dr. Julia Stefanova presented on "The Fulbright Program in Bulgaria and Education USA". The staff members of the participating libraries became our good local contacts.





## English Classes for Students at Children's Home "Hristo Raykov" in Gabrovo



Christmas cards drawn by Students at Children's Home "Hristo Raykov" in Gabrovo

Since the beginning of December, the Fulbright Commission has partnered with Step for Bulgaria Foundation to support the implementation of English-language classes at the "Hristo Raykov" children's home in Gabrovo. The classes take place every week for two groups of 10 students each split by age and fluency level.

The course started off with an initial test to determine the fluency level of students in both written and spoken English. Most of the activities in class focus on mastering the new vocabulary and grammar knowledge taught at school, so that the students can progress well with the regular school mate-

rial. Part of the classes is dedicated to helping the students complete their English homework for school and prepare for school examinations.

During the last class before New Year's, the students learned new vocabulary about Christmas and New Year's and practiced it in dialogues on related topics. They greeted each other for a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in English.

The content and exercises in class are adapted to the needs of the students. In the younger group, the students need help learning the vocabulary and correct orthography as well as improving their reading and writing skills. The older students focus practicing correct writing through dictations. So far, all the students come to class excited and ready to learn, which makes the experience a wonderful opportunity for everyone.

Thanks for the Fulbright Commission one dedicated teacher has been secured to lead the classes for both groups. Thanks to the students' enthusiasm and creativity, Step for Bulgaria Foundation has been able to collect additional funding, through selling Christmas cards drawn by the students at a charity event. The funds were used to buy additional exercise books and audio and video training materials for the English classes.

*Submitted by  
Evgenia Peeva, Executive Director, board member  
Step for Bulgaria Foundation  
January 29, 2010*



### БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН "ФУЛБРАЙТ"

#### УЧЕБЕН ЦЕНТЪР КЪМ КОМИСИЯ "ФУЛБРАЙТ"

- Подготовка за тестовете iB TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, IELTS
- Подготовка по английски език за граждани и фирми
- Подготовка по бизнес английски и бизнес кореспонденция
- Компютърна самоподготовка за iB TOEFL, GRE, GMAT
- Справочна библиотека

#### УЧЕБЕН ЦЕНТЪР КЪМ КОМИСИЯ "ФУЛБРАЙТ"

- Разговорен английски с преподаватели от САЩ
- Отстъпки при записване за повече от един курс
- Безплатни 10 часа работа с компютър
- Консултации за обучение в САЩ
- Библиотека с учебна и справочна литература

За информация: София 1504, ул. Панайот Волов 1, етаж II, тел. 944 0441, E-mail: [studycenter@fulbright.bg](mailto:studycenter@fulbright.bg), [www.fulbright.bg](http://www.fulbright.bg)

## БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН

### СТИПЕНДИИ “ФУЛБРАЙТ” И “ХЮБЪРТ ХЪМФРИ” ПРЕЗ УЧЕБНАТА 2011-12 ГОДИНА

Комисия “Фулбрайт” обявява конкурси за следните стипендии през учебната 2011-12 година:

- Стипендии “Фулбрайт” за преподавателска и изследователска дейност (5 месеца)
- Стипендии “Фулбрайт” за магистърски и докторски програми (10 месеца) и специализации (6 месеца)
- Стипендии “Фулбрайт” за докторанти в областта на природо-математическите науки и технологиите (5 години)
- Съвместна стипендия за магистри по бизнес администрация “Фулбрайт – Бизнес колеж Прайс към университета на Оклахома” (2 години)
- Съвместна стипендия за магистърски програми “Фулбрайт – Институт Благодарност към Скандинавия” (10 месеца)
- Стипендия “Хюбърт Хъмфри” за професионалисти в държавния и частния сектор (10 месеца)
- Стипендия за развитие на гражданското общество съвместно с Тръст за гражданско общество в Централна и Източна Европа (3-5 месеца)

#### ИЗИСКВАНИЯ ЗА УЧАСТИЕ В КОНКУРСИТЕ:

- Българско гражданство (лица с двойно гражданство и притежатели на работна виза/зелена карта не могат да кандидатстват)
- Отлично владееене на английски език
- Валидни резултати от американските стандартизирани тестове TOEFL и GRE/GMAT за кандидатите в магистърски и докторски програми
- Валиден резултат от тест TOEFL за кандидатите по програма “Хюбърт Хъмфри” и докторантите, заминаващи на специализация
- Бакалавърска степен за кандидатите в магистърски и докторски програми
- Статут на докторант за кандидатстващите за специализация
- Докторска степен за преподаватели и изследователи
- Добро здравословно състояние
- Възраст под 40 години за кандидатите в магистърски и докторски програми и специализанти
- Възраст под 50 години за кандидатите по програма “Хюбърт Хъмфри”

Не се допускат до участие студенти, които вече се обучават в американски университети.

### Краен срок за подаване на документи: 1 юни, 2010 г.

Представянето на резултати от TOEFL и GRE/GMAT до 1 юни, 2010 г. се счита за предимство при кандидатстване.

Краен срок за представяне на официални резултати от TOEFL и GRE/GMAT: **24 септември, 2010 г.**

#### Информация и формуляри за кандидатстване:

на адрес [www.fulbright.bg](http://www.fulbright.bg) и в Българо-американска комисия за образователен обмен “ФУЛБРАЙТ”  
 Централен офис: София, бул. Ал. Стамболийски № 17, ет. I, стаи 9 и 15, тел: (02) 980 8212 и (02) 981 6830.  
 Приемно време: 14 – 16 ч. всеки работен ден

### Учебен Център към Комисия “Фулбрайт”

предлага подготовка за iBT TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, GMAT, SAT и обучение по английски език на всички нива.

Информация и записване: София 1504, ул. “Панайот Волов” № 1, ет. 2, ап. 6, тел. 944 0441, e-mail: [studycenter@fulbright.bg](mailto:studycenter@fulbright.bg)

**БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН****СТИПЕНДИИ ЗА ДОКТОРАНТИ  
В ОБЛАСТТА НА ПРИРОДО-МАТЕМАТИЧЕСКИТЕ НАУКИ И ТЕХНОЛОГИИТЕ  
ПРЕЗ УЧЕБНАТА 2011-2012 ГОДИНА**

Комисия "Фулбрайт" обявява конкурс за:

**Стипендии за докторанти в областта на  
природо-математическите науки и технологиите (5 години)**

**НАУЧНИ ОБЛАСТИ:** Аеронавтика и астрономия/ Авиоинженерство/ Планетарни науки, Биология, Химия, Компютърни науки, Инженерни науки (електричество, химия, строителство, механика, океанология и петрол), Екология/Геоинженерство/Науки за земята и атмосферата, Агронамство (теоретична насоченост), Информационни науки и системи (инженерна насоченост), Материалознание, Математика, Неврология/ Изучаване на дейността на мозъка и Когнитивни науки, Обществено здравеопазване (теоретична насоченост), Океанография и Физика

**ИЗИСКВАНИЯ ЗА УЧАСТИЕ В КОНКУРСА:**

- Кандидатите трябва да са български граждани. Лица с двойно гражданство и притежатели на зелена карта не могат да кандидатстват.
- Кандидатите трябва да са завършили бакалавърска/магистърска степен преди 1-ви август 2011 г.
- Кандидатите трябва да владеят отлично английски език и да имат валидни резултати от тест iBT TOEFL, най-малко 93 т.(таксата за полагане на теста се възстановява на номинираните кандидати).
- Кандидатите трябва да представят валиден резултат от тест GRE (таксата за полагане на теста се възстановява на номинираните кандидати).

Не се допускат до участие в конкурса лица, които в момента се обучават в САЩ

**Краен срок за подаване на документи: 1 юни, 2010 г.**

**Представянето на резултати от TOEFL и GRE до 1 юни, 2010 г. се счита за предимство при кандидатстване.**

**Краен срок за представяне на официални резултати от TOEFL и GRE: 2 август, 2010 г.**

**Информация и формуляри за кандидатстване:**

**на адрес <http://www.fulbright.bg> и в Българо-американска комисия за образователен обмен "ФУЛБРАЙТ"**

Централен офис: София, бул. Ал. Стамболийски № 17, ет. I, стаи 9 и 15, тел: (02) 980 8212 и (02) 981 6830  
Приемно време: 14 – 16 ч. всеки работен ден



## To Chicago and Back

### Polina Slavcheva



*Polina Slavcheva received her BA degree in Journalism and Mass Communications from the American University in Bulgaria in 2005. Until 2008, she worked as a reporter for various Bulgarian media. In 2007, she won a Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence from the Robert Bosch and ERSTE foundations and visited 9 European countries to research road construction problems between countries formerly split by the Iron Curtain or by mutual warfare. The same year, she won*

*a Fulbright Fellowship and a Thanks to Scandinavia scholarship which allowed her to pursue an MFA degree in Creative Writing at the University of Houston, TX.*

I remember how surprised I was in 2002, the first time I lived in the United States, to learn that Americans had movable houses which could come along with you like caravans from state to state, and that this was in fact a very practical thing, having in mind how often people in the US move. And I was even more surprised to see that Americans persistently built houses out of wood which, I thought, could not last long. Six years later, as I watched Hurricane Ike blow shingles off roofs while I was myself inside an old stucco house that swayed with the wind and looked near collapse, I thought the same. It didn't make sense to me that so many people in the USA, the world's most powerful country, lived in wooden houses, especially in Texas, whose hurricane season begins on June 1 and runs through the end of November! And as I thought about this I figured this could be so because Americans aren't raised on the three piggy story. This is simply not a three piggy story culture, I thought. But I was wrong. Americans do have that story. This utterly surprised me. *The Three Little Pigs* was produced by Walt Disney in 1933 and is still thought the most successful short animated movie ever made. In 2007, the Library of Congress placed it for preservation in the National Film Registry for its cultural and historical significance. *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf*, the song for the movie, became something of an anthem for the Great Depression and was later used to talk of the complacency of the Western world in allowing Hitler to conquer European territories without going to war. Edward Albee also used it to name his 1963 play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The story has so many cultural implications in the US. And still, people in American like wood. Whenever I asked my friends why that was so, the only answers I got were, "It's cheaper" and "People here think short-term." Well, this made sense. For small countries with struggling economies it made sense. Surely not for the United States, though. The thought of movable houses blown away by hurricanes and tornadoes and of wooden houses damaged all the time by natural disasters just did not fit with my idea of what the United States should be like. I guess many Europeans react the same way because I found many blogs dealing with this issue and, funnily enough, discussing the

three piggy story. I guess one can say that Americans and Europeans are mutually surprised by each other's building styles. On coming to Europe, some Americans think us extraordinarily rich when they see us living in our own brick apartments and houses, and Europeans cannot easily understand Americans' predilection for wood. It is difficult to imagine that many in the US cannot afford a brick home. Only the rich neighbourhoods of Houston have brick houses, while all houses in one of the poorest neighborhoods (and the one with highest crime) -- that surrounding the University of Houston campus -- are made of wood. Wood is far cheaper than brick and much easier to come across, and since it does survive hurricanes that are not a direct hit relatively well, many prefer it. But wood has many other virtues that I had never suspected before I talked to an older American friend about all this. He said he had recently seen an astonishingly well preserved wooden house on the Connecticut shore built in 1726! If treated by oil or painted, wood is very durable and provides great insulation in hot climates. And besides, so much depends on the quality of construction that even brick houses may be at danger of damage if improperly built. As my friends and I drove through Houston's neighborhoods after Ike, we saw the brick façade of a house destroyed, while many wooden houses nearby stood untouched. This, coupled with the tradition to build out of wood which -- surprise! -- European settlers themselves began when the continent had no brick kilns at all, explains a lot.

But there were many other things that I needed explained. Things that did not fit with my idea of what the prosperous, democratic US should be like. I wondered why Texas, the state with one of the fastest growing economies, and third in GDP production in the US, did not invest in putting its power lines underground if it keeps losing power for days, weeks, or a whole month after hurricanes, as was the case with Ike. In the long run, losing power must cost the local economy far more than putting power lines underground, I thought. But it did also appear that local electric companies "fix" this problem by restoring electricity to businesses first. Although *The Houston Chronicle*, the local newspaper, carried an article saying that electric companies refused allegations that they first restored electricity to business and rich neighborhoods, there were many indications of the opposite. I saw a fancy restaurant a block away from my apartment community get power two weeks earlier than anyone in the surrounding houses. The more surprising thing for me, though, was that *The Houston Chronicle* ran no investigation into this. In fact, not only investigations but basic information kept missing from the local news. When *The Houston Chronicle* quoted electric company officials saying that power would be restored to the most populated areas first, it never said which those were. The local TV channel was not doing so well in reporting during the day Ike hit either. The anchors kept saying that "if you are from one of those evacuation zip codes" you should "evacuate right now" because the roads are still clear. But they never mentioned what "those evacuation



*Thanks to Scandinavia Reception, New York, NY*

zip codes" were. I, a recent arrival who did not yet have a radio or internet and had not picked up the newspaper at all, did not know what those were and at that moment had no other way of knowing. What if I needed to evacuate? Many hurricanes turn out much weaker than predicted so there is such hurricane fatigue in Texas that even a local could end up unaware that they needed to evacuate before they turned their TV on. Anchors also never said what damage one could expect from a category 2, bordering on a category 3 hurricane, like Ike was. Naturally, Houstonians would know this since they live in a hurricane area, but Houston gets hundreds of new arrivals – immigrants and students -- each year, many of whom have never seen a hurricane. I lived on the first floor of a recently renovated two-floor old apartment complex and wanted to know if my windows would break, if I could expect flooding, if I should move to a safer building. I had many questions, but the channels answered none of those.

So US media is not much better than Bulgarian media when it comes to handling disaster situations, I thought. And I mentioned this to several of my American friends, but they were not upset by the coverage at all. They were entirely satisfied with the information they were getting. And they did not passionately demand that power lines be put underground although they remained without normal food for days because supermarkets were out of power. The thing is, the US have such a strong instinct for self-help that everyone expects and has learned to rely on themselves and on people around them only. So when the local, state and federal agencies of FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, failed to quickly distribute supplies to Ike victims and started blaming one another for it, as they do back home, the local community quickly took over. When I went with friends to help as well, there were two or three people to do a job that required one. This is how enthusiastic everybody was. And this is the huge difference between the US and 'back home'. In Bulgaria, people would not be that efficient. They would most likely stay at home and demand to be informed on why things were going so wrong. And I think so because a Bulgarian railway worker once told me the story of an invalid riding a Bulgarian train who waited for hours to have someone help him reach the platform where his connecting train was leaving because the people responsible for this service were simply on vacation. Nobody else helped him because "it was not their job." So the person just missed his train. No stranger volunteered to help. I don't

think this could never happen in the US. During all three times I lived in the US, I could rely on complete strangers, people I had just met in hostels, on the streets, in my university, to help me with things when I had least expected. When I found out I had to furnish an apartment (in Houston everything you rent comes entirely empty), I got a free TV and chairs from my hostel manager, two tables from a student friend, and a pick-up truck and the strong backs of two guys I met at the hostel where I was staying, to help me haul a huge white couch into my apartment. Then I got plenty of free rides to department stores to buy all the other paraphernalia. When I was shocked to find flying cockroaches in my apartment (huge as those Bulgarians can only see in the National Museum of Natural History on 1 Tzar Osvoboditel Blvd), a German Fulbright alumna offered that I live in her house until I found a new place. Six years earlier, in San Francisco, when I phoned in a hostel to make a reservation, I got a free ride from the airport to the hostel by its front desk clerk after I had told her I doubt I would make the last bus.

People here just know how to be nice to one another in ways that we are still learning about back home. But so many administration-related things are just as imperfect as back home that I have begun to love things in Bulgaria that I had not ever suspected deserve to be loved. Like Bulgarian customer service (not restaurant and cafe customer service, of course) and internet and mobile services. AT&T, the largest US internet and telephone service provider, took a month and a half to get my DSL running, which is something rather normal in the US, in fact. They took a month and a half even though I had payed a \$100 deposit and had stayed on the phone with their representatives for about ten hours – for which I was paying, of course. T-Mobile's phone services were not much better. Their connection sometimes fell apart in central locations and I once had to stay on the phone with them for more than ten minutes before they could begin to explain my plan rates. After struggling with AT&T for hours without achieving anything, at one point I felt I did not exist. Administration was just as uninterested in my being as it was back home. And the only moral to the story was that I had to learn to help myself. I did not know how to, but I had to. So I learned to act as a really mad customer in order to get attention. And I learned to say "Can I speak to the manager?" convincingly, which here almost unmistakably functions as the Arabian fairy-tale's "Open up Sesame."

But the toughest American lesson I am still struggling to learn concerns the US' working ethic. During the flu season many students and professors were coming down with something, but they kept going to classes, as if entirely fueled by positive thinking. After Ike, I came down with some virus myself. I went to the university's health center and asked for an excuse for not attending classes, but the doctor kindly told me she could only do that if I had walked in with a high fever. I went back to school, but the result was that I remained extremely fatigued throughout the semester. Professors would not give me incompletes, empathetic as they were, because they thought that I could "do it." "You did not fly over the Atlantic to be beaten down by some virus," my African American literature professor told me. So I had to go home, lie in bed, and attend to my papers. No one gave me any other choice. The USA's working ethic is just amazing. The German Fulbright alumna that I lived with for a week had gone back to work two weeks after delivering a baby. How many would do that in Bulgaria? I am sure that in three years I will have mastered this working style myself. And then I wonder how people would react to my new style back home.

## Out of America

### Ryan McCormack

*Ryan McCormack holds degrees from West Virginia University and Ohio University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas – Austin. The Fulbright graduate study grant he won for AY 08-09 is funding his research into the history and practices of Bulgarian musicians who play and utilize jazz.*

I've recently reached the 4 ½ month mark of my stay in Bulgaria, which means I am now more than 1/2 of the way through my grant period. Honestly, I can't fathom that I have already been here for this long. My experiences seem to be slightly different from many of my colleagues, since I am here primarily to conduct ethnographic and historical research. Nevertheless, I feel that my perspective keeps within the mission of the Fulbright Program to promote cultural exchange, understanding, and foster new relationships between people from different backgrounds.

For this brief piece, I want to talk about the directions that my work and research have been taking recently since my arrival here in November. The 1/2 mark seems like a good place for such a retrospective, as it gives me a chance to codify my thoughts within my mind as well as communicate them to those of you who have been following what I've been doing for the past year or so. It's kind of a cliché in my discipline to say that your project changes once you have experienced "the field," and there have been many wrinkles that I've added to my ideas since coming here. Originally, I intended to focus mainly on finding some of the origins of jazz practices in Bulgaria in order to gain an idea of how the current environment in which the music exists here was fostered. What I've come to realize since coming here is that what is actually happening and how people (mostly musicians) perceive jazz in post-communist Bulgaria is a far more interesting story in its own way, one that has my attention now and will for long after I return to the United States.

My relationships with musicians such as guitarist Alexander Logozarov, vocalist Lilli Illieva, saxophonist Petr Momchev and several others has peaked my interest in the ways in which ideas about jazz intertwine with the realities of everyday musical labor here in Bulgaria, particularly Sofia. The music industry here, as far as I can tell, operates with virtually no institutional oversight from the government or cultural institutions. It is almost completely driven by the whims of taste and the market. This has led to the



virtual dominance in the local recording industry of one genre of popular music (pop-folk) and has made tourist spots the primary arena of live music performance. Depending on the venue and location, styles often range from Western pop music and Bulgarian pop-folk covers to various incarnations of folk music. Very few musicians that I have met so far transverse between these two styles in their playing, at least professionally. Although there are a few agents that facilitate venue bookings, much of this work is still done by the musicians themselves, making them responsible for negotiating payment, making schedules, bookkeeping, and other business-related activities wholly separate from the playing itself. This is simply the way Bulgaria has been for the last 15 years or so – if you depend on someone else to get something done, chances are nothing will happen.

The environment I have described has had a pronounced effect on musicians who have chosen to stay in Bulgaria. It has essentially created a class of professional musicians who perform music almost solely for its commodity value and devote little time to exploring aesthetic conventions of any kind. Because of the relatively low cost of living in Bulgaria, it is still possible to survive on wages garnered from performance alone, a phenomenon almost extinct now in the United States. So for some of these players, musicmaking exists primarily as a trade or skill.

The constant grind of travel and wearing different stylistic hats seems leave little time for some of these musicians to enact any sort of aesthetic self-awareness. So where does jazz, histori-



cally considered one of the quintessential expressions of musical subjectivity whilst also embodying very little commodity value in Bulgaria, fit into this scheme? Well, I think that at least some of it has to do with the aestheticization of craft and process that I was working on in my writings before I came to Bulgaria. This seems to be common of many of the younger musicians who have stayed in Bulgaria and dabbled with jazz since the early-1990s. The implication here is that the primary impetus in playing jazz is not the desire for connectivity to the West, the United States, or African-Americans (although that is certainly there in some cases). Rather, the very challenge of figuring out the music itself and producing it as a particular subjective expression, and how to use this to engage with other musicians in both practice and performance is of foremost concern. These performances then add to the experiences of the player, which furthers the hones their musical self and allows for many other such participations.

Apart from the methodological aspects of my research, some of my most valuable experiences so far have come simply from playing with other musicians. Bringing my saxophone to Bulgaria with me has proven to be one of the best decisions I have ever made. It has allowed me to connect with the musicians I have been working with in ways that would prove difficult had I chosen to present myself as an academic. By casting myself as a musician as well, one who understands both the daily grind of playing music and the difficulties in establishing a musical self-identity, I feel that I've been able to establish far more engaging relationships than I ever thought possible. The fact that they manage to persevere in the face of it earns them a special kind of respect from me.

This perspective on playing music here, while rather pessimistic in a lot of ways, has proven to be very informative and I continue to make inroads amongst a small circle of players. I saw some of their frustrations first hand at a concert that I sat in on in late-February at the Czech Cultural Club in Sofia. The owner advertised the concert poorly and continued to serve dinner in the space outside of the concert hall where everyone could listen through the door. Because of this, nobody wanted to pay the seven leva (\$4) entrance fee and there were exactly two people in the audience. Afterwards we chatted about how gigs like this are more the exception than the rule when it comes to anything other than pop music. You can tell that these guys enjoy playing quite a bit, and because of this they are trying to resist giving into the idea of looking at music solely as labor skill as some other players do. For many of them, the best thing about playing is both the challenge of the music and the opportunity to play with

as many other musicians as possible. This, in my experience and I think in many of theirs, is the best way to learn and become a better musician – play with as many different people as you can in as many different ways as you can.

This kind of thinking led me to accept an invitation from a friend to play in a local ska-reggae group called Señor Buffo and the Synchronizers ([www.myspace.com/buffosynchronizers](http://www.myspace.com/buffosynchronizers)). Our partnership formed through mutual interest – they needed another horn player who could attend rehearsals once per week and I had never played in a band like this before and was interested. Even though it is technically out of the scope of my research, playing with these guys has provided some valuable perspective nonetheless. First, unlike most of the other musicians I work with, the members of this band are not professionals – they hold various day jobs and only play in their spare time. Their desire to play ska-reggae comes solely from their love of this style of music. As Antoni, the bass player who was my first contact with the group explained to me after the first rehearsal I attended in mid-February, they wanted to add players who were not only interested in playing music with them, but also enjoyed hanging out after rehearsal while drinking beer and listening to music. I played my first gig with these guys on March 26th at the Blue Box, and am looking forward to playing with them more throughout the rest of the spring and summer months.

It will not be possible to go into all of my musical experiences in the space allowed, but I can safely say that all the playing that I have done and all the people that I have met have given something very valuable to me. It is something that adds to the value of their time, their perspectives, and their friendships gathered these past few months. In essence, my time here has rekindled a love of playing that I had thought lost many years ago. Interestingly, it was lost because of exactly the sort of daily, laborious grind that my musician friends face here everyday. I haven't played as much in the last eight years as I could have because this grind of playing gig after gig after gig wore me down to the point where I could not even pick up my horn more than a 2 or 3 days per week. The opportunity to play amongst such wonderful musicians and friends has definitely revitalized my spirit for playing, and I find myself looking forward to taking my horn out of the case at any opportunity. In fact, I have practiced more since I came here than at any time in the last six or seven years. Once again I am interested in honing my craft and finding my voice as a musician, so I can add something to the wonderful polyphony of voices that I have encountered here and give back to the friends and musicians that have, knowingly or not, given so much to me.