

# Russian folk music presented at Methodist church

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WEST SPRINGFIELD — Members of the Mittineague United Methodist Church on Amostown Road were treated to an evening of Russian culture recently.

The church was the first stop on a nationwide tour for St. Petersburg's Golden Gates/Moscow Nights folk music and dance groups, sponsored by Rotary International. The young performers, who range in age from 8-18, have been introducing Russian folk culture to Europe and the United States since 1993.

While most of the audience arrived heavily bundled against the New England winter, Vitaliy V. Bezrodnov, who plays Russian accordion with the Moscow Nights, was unimpressed.

"In weather like this," Bezrodnov said, indicating the cold evening beyond the church's windows with a sweep of his arm, "Russians go out for a sun-tan."

Introducing the group, Rev. Dr. John Grenfell said, "I know you'll all be pleasantly surprised by the energy and fun of these performers."

He wasn't kidding. From their first song, a deceptively lively tune about a young girl who is very depressed because she feels she's too short to be pretty, the kids had the audience bouncing in their seats and tapping their toes.

The music was so good that it was almost possible to overlook the colorful and elaborately or-



namented costumes the children wore, which they made themselves after extensive research.

"Each year they study a different region," Bezrodnov said. "They study the traditions, collect the songs and make the costumes."

"The people had to preserve these traditions themselves, because the government didn't always support it," Bezrodnov said. "But they were a part of life and the people couldn't imagine how they could live without them."

The sharing of cultures went both ways for the young visitors. Irina Kazakova, 15, said she enjoys having the opportunity to meet and speak with Americans, while Simon Ioffe, 15, said he's always wanted to visit another country.

"I like to speak English and share Russian culture," said Ioffe, who plays Balalaika. "I've always wanted to visit America. It's a beautiful and good coun-



Photos by **KARL M. REXER**

**Members of the children's folk group St. Petersburg's Golden Gates/Moscow Nights perform at Mittineague United Methodist Church in West Springfield recently.**

try."

The performance was free, but donations were accepted afterward to help support orphanages in St. Petersburg.