

McFaul Tears Up Dance Floor at Spaso Hootenanny

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

March 28, 2012



U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul dancing with his wife, Donna Norton, as Wylie and the Wild West perform at Spaso House on Tuesday evening. **Kemal Tarba**

U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul wowed guests with his polka steps at a country-western bash at his sumptuous residence on Tuesday night that featured a yodeler flown in from McFaul's native Montana.

The ambassador and his wife, Donna Norton, drew applause for their enthusiasm and stamina, out-twisting and two-stepping all but a few of the several hundred guests, who included at least one magazine editor and several prominent political analysts.

"He's a master of his work and of the dance," said Antonina Soshnikova, 25, a project coordinator for Project Harmony, an organization established in 1985 to build community ties between the United States and Soviet Union. "When the ambassador dances, everybody wants to dance."

Indeed the guests assembled at Spaso House could not resist dancing to tunes like "High Line Polka," and singing along as yodeler Wylie Gustafson howled, "Hey buffalo girl, won't you come out tonight and dance by the light of the moon?"

The festive mood was infectious, and at least one guest even found it restorative.

"I was nursing a lower back injury. But after meeting all these elegant people, I've somehow been miraculously cured!" said Osh Ghanimah, 28, a Harvard acting student currently studying at the Moscow Art Theater School.

"It's amazing what good energy can do to the psychological condition," he said.

Among those spotted on the dance floor as Wylie and the Wild West performed was newly minted GQ Russia editor Michael Idov, who twirled his wife, Lily, and Kremlin-friendly sociologist Olga Kryshatanovskaya, looking radiant in a dark-blue dress and her signature black horn-rimmed glasses.

Internet wiz Anton Nossik, dressed in a plaid shirt and sailor's cap, bustled around the periphery, snapping photos with his iPhone, evidently too busy to dance.

"I bet people are having more fun here than they've ever had at the embassy," said Paul Zarzyski, 51, a poet who performs with the band.

"It's 200-proof pure joy," he said, a grin peaking out from under his bushy mustache.

Wylie and the Wild West has performed — in cowboy hats and boots, of course — at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center and other prestigious venues.

Wylie, a virtuoso yodeler, is the man behind the iconic yelp heard in commercials for the Internet company Yahoo!

The quartet was the second of four musical groups to perform in Russia this spring as part of American Seasons in Russia, a bilateral government program aimed at exposing Russians to the diversity of U.S. culture.

Wylie and the Wild West played in St. Petersburg and Arkhangelsk before the show at the ambassador's residence, and afterward, they were scheduled to take the stage in Kazan and Nizhny Novgorod.

"Yodeling is the universal music," Wylie told the crowd, adding that he was glad to have found Russia to be "yodel-friendly."

Next month, American Seasons will see the gospel quintet The Brotherhood Sisters and the Native American trio P. Karlos Nakai perform in St. Petersburg, Moscow and elsewhere.

For more information about upcoming events connected with American Seasons in Russia, visit the website www.americanseasons.ru.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/03/28/mcfaul-tears-up-dance-floor-at-spaso-hootenanny-a13646>