

Alaska Performing Artists for Peace to tour Siberia

JUNEAU — Alaska Performing Artists for Peace (APAP), an association of Eskimo and Alaskan performing artists, has announced plans for a Siberia-Alaska Cultural Exchange program. The program will mark the first official contact between Alaskan and Soviet native people in 27 years. Prior to 1959, Eskimos frequently traveled between Alaska and Siberia, a distance of less than 100 miles across the Bering Sea.

Chuna McIntyre, an Alaskan Yup'ik Eskimo who is helping to plan the program views the exchange as a important means for building peace between the United States and the Soviet Union. In a formal statement issued to Soviet cultural authorities, the Eskimo artist and dancer writes: "We (Eskimos) are members of two great nations, both of which maintain powerful weapons on our ancestral lands pointed at the other's land and people. We share the same language, the same culture, and even, for some of us, the same grandparents...Over hundreds of years we have successfully achieved peace among our people. We may be able to help achieve peace between our nations."

The first performing tour in the Siberia-Alaska series is scheduled for August, 1986 when 50 Alaskan performing artists will travel to Moscow and Siberia. Among the performers are three Eskimo troupes from villages along the Bering Coast and a folk singing group from Juneau. The program includes Yup'ik Eskimo song, dance

and mime interwoven with American folk music and soviet and American peace songs.

Author James Michener, currently researching a novel about Alaska, will accompany the August tour. Former Alaska Governor Jay Hammond and his wife Bella, who is half Yup'ik Eskimo, will also travel with the group.

Academy award winning film maker, Terry Sanders and a film crew composed of Alaskans, Soviets and Californians will accompany the group to create a documentary film for Public Broadcasting Stations, part of which will be narrated by Michener.

As a prelude to the August tour, the Alaskan performers produced a half-hour New Year's Eve television special which was shown live throughout Alaska and will be shown on Soviet television. The program has been offered to public television stations throughout the United States.

APAP was created to demonstrate the common heritage of Alaskans and Soviets, particularly Alaskan and Siberian Eskimos who are culturally the same people. Alaska, which was a Russian territory until 1867, still displays a strong Russian influence.

The Siberia-Alaska Cultural Exchange Program has been endorsed by many Alaskan dignitaries including Governor Bill Sheffield, Alaska U.S.

Senators Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens, Alaska U.S. Congressman Don Young, and former Governor Jay Hammond. Although initial planning for the exchange began eight months ago, project activities have gained momentum since the recent Geneva Conference which sanctioned US-USSR cultural exchanges.

Initial funding for APAP's August tour has been provided by Alaska Airlines, Alascom, private donations and benefit concerts. Additional funds are being sought to finance the filming of the August Siberia Tour.

Alaska Performing Artists for Peace is a non-partisan, non-profit organization headquartered in Juneau, Alaska.