

Yale's Touring Chorus Uses Russian to Foster Good Will

A new wrinkle—singing Russian songs—is being used by a group of unofficial “singing ambassadors” to spread international good will.

They are the 30 members of the Yale University Russian Chorus, who sang Tuesday night in Denver and will present a concert Wednesday evening at the University of Colorado in Boulder. They are on a tour of Western states during a two-week spring vacation.

The singing group visited Russia during three consecutive summers starting in 1958 and plans a tour this summer which will include concerts in Paris, London, Geneva, Nice and Stockholm, topped off with another tour of the Soviet Union.

Each member of the chorus has taken classes in Russian, and about half of the singers speak the language fluently.

“The fact that the chorus includes scholars in many areas who speak and sing Russian permitted us to meet our aca-



Denver Post Photo

DENIS MICKIEWICZ

“... sort of ambassadors.”

demic and professional counterparts in the Soviet Union on an informal grassroots level,” their director, Denis Mickiewicz, said Tuesday.

“We did not expect when we first went to Russia that we would turn out to be spokesmen for the American academic world, but the intensity with which the people involved us in conversations turned us into some sort of ambassadors.”

In addition to formal concerts such as one over Radio Moscow, the chorus often sang on street corners. “Usually we had very enthusiastic crowds around us and after the sing-

ing there was always a lot of informal give and take,” Mickiewicz said. “We were quite overwhelmed with the eagerness of the Russians to communicate with us . . .”

One problem has cropped up, however—Russian officials apparently think the “informal give and take” on street corners is going a bit too far. Mickiewicz said their impromptu songfests may be restricted this summer.

Mickiewicz, 33, organized the chorus in the 1953-54 school year when he was a freshman studying in the Yale School of Music. A native of Latvia who is working for a Ph.D. in comparative literature, he received his American citizenship just one week before the chorus made its 1958 Russian trip.

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