



Central Asian Cultural Exchange

## **Central Asian University Residencies Program Kyrgyz Cultural Performances**

### **Participants' Biographies**

#### **Ryspai Isakov, Epic Singer**

At only 30 years of age, Ryspai may be Kyrgyzstan's most renowned virtuoso singer of the *Manas* epic. In October 2005 Ryspai won the Grand Prix in the *Drop All Else and Sing Manas* Competition of *Manas* singers held in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek. This honor is but the most recent in Ryspai's ten-year resume of competitive performances throughout Central Asia and Russia. Last summer Ryspai made his first trip out of former Soviet territory to participate in *Beyond the Border*, the annual international story-telling festival held at the St. Donats Castle in South Wales. Born in the village of Zherenche in the Osh region of southern Kyrgyzstan, Ryspai moved to the capital Bishkek to receive a university degree in Kyrgyz Philology. When he's not performing, Ryspai works as the Managing Director of the Manas Muras Foundation, whose mission is to preserve the *Manas* epic.

#### **Akylbek Kasabolotov, Musician**

Akylbek has been playing with Nurlanbek Nishanov's traditional Kyrgyz folk ensemble *Tengir Too* since 2003. At just 25-years-old, Akylbek epitomizes *Tengir Too*'s mission as a "young group playing old music." He received five years specialized training at the Kyrgyz National Conservatory in Bishkek in five traditional wind instruments – wooden flute (*choor*), clay flute (*chopo chor*), wooden flute with apertures (*sybyzgy*), the iron mouth harp, often called the Jew's harp (*temir oz komuz*), and the wooden mouth harp (*jigach oz komuz*). Akylbek has traveled to Kazakhstan, Hungary, Russia, and Turkey to play concerts with Tengir-Too. He is excited to make his first trip to the US and to have the opportunity to teach American audiences about Kyrgyz music and culture.

#### **Dr. Helen Faller, Creator / Project Manager / Interpreter**

Helen is a cultural anthropologist (Ph.D. 2003, University of Michigan) who has been involved in cultural exchanges with Central Asia since 2002. She has worked with musicians, visual artists, felt and leather artisans, and religious leaders from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Concurrent to her work developing and implementing Kyrgyz Cultural Performances, Helen has been writing a book on social change and sovereignty in Tatarstan, Russia and working as Development Associate for the Hotel Obligado Physical Theatre Collective in Philadelphia. The vision to create Kyrgyz Cultural Performances emerged from Helen's belief that anthropological knowledge should increase cross cultural understanding in ways that influence everyday life. Helen's future plans include starting a Central Asian music record label and doing more exchanges like Kyrgyz Cultural Performances. Please look for her work on [www.cace.us](http://www.cace.us) and [www.hotelobligado.org](http://www.hotelobligado.org) or contact her at [helen@mosaiqa.com](mailto:helen@mosaiqa.com).