Reflections on a Summer in Russia

ing out during class and breaks to hop the fence and smoke in the yard.

"All the teachers know it's going on," says Martin, one of the crowd."They just don't do anything about it. Even the alumni, when they come, visit the tree in the yard and smoke a couple cigs there for old time's sake."

The lighthearted approach of the teenagers becomes engaging, as they are open to any whim to keep themselves amused. They hop fences, aimlessly wander Moscow, and play charades in the park. When they go to get food they congratulate whoever has five dollars on them and all mooch off that person's plate, or rest content with their cigarettes. No judgment and no pressure.

When asked if this is their schedule when school is in session, they reply "pretty much."

"We hang out everyday after school; some of us are in a band together so we also practice for gigs. No one really does homework in our school."

As the night continues, I excuse myself and head to my next appointment, with 22-year-old Anton, who has just returned from a year abroad in Czechoslovakia. Just five years ago Anton might have been in the same position as the teenage group I just talked to, as he was a heavy drinker, smoker, and selfproclaimed hooligan.

"It was pathetic," he admitted. "I

Teacher, Composer

plex for its own sake. This concept of an old world and a new world being connected was the pure essence of Mr. Currie's piece.

Over the years Mr. Currie has compiled an impressive resume. He has composed film scores. dances, operas and much more. He draws inspiration from all sources. "I like composers who set the standard to be more independent," concluded Mr. Currie.

would come to school a period late, maybe go to a class or two, then miss a few periods around lunch, and leave a period early. There was a sense that I was missing out on something huge if I stayed in class and didn't go out with my friends. In Russia, there is a sense from a young age that school is necessary but that you're not supposed to enjoy education. Education is only needed to make money, and money

Surprisingly, this disdain for the army and the draft doesn't carry over to disdain for the army's actions in Ukraine

"I don't think anyone will really know what happened there until a hundred years down the road," Anton said. "There is just so much hype and media surrounding the events, all coming from contrasting points of view, that it's hard to get a read on it. I don't trust Western

PHOTO BY SASHA LANDAUER

Lev Povzner's plush soviet-era door with 1940s pins

is the means to enjoy yourself and buy alcohol."

Anton was currently in the process of getting out of the mandatory army draft in Russia. This involved daily trips to the hospital in which corrupt doctors would perform "examinations," and find health problems with whomever bribed them enough.

"I have to take a year of school to help take care of my baby sister," he explained, "and anyone who isn't in university is eligible to get drafted."

media any more than the Russian news."

Seraphima, an 18-year-old design student, was similarly wary of passing judgment on Putin.

"What you describe about sentiment towards Putin in America is the same in Moscow towards Obama," Seraphima said, "Everyone thinks he hates Russia and hired mercenaries to protest against Russia in Ukraine. There are just so many Russians living there who are unhappy. They kill journalists, you

know? We see all these videos of crying women who want to be under Russian rule."

Not everyone was equally withdrawn on the issue of Ukraine. For many, the main source of information was the Ukrainian families of Moscow nannies who were largely on the side of Russia. A small minority of Russians, the intelligentsia, was anti-Putin.

The intelligentsia is an informal Russian group of highly educated. and generally liberal people who put a lot of thought into the current political and social situation. The group originated prior to the First World War as discontent began to brew against the conservative policies of the Russian royalty.

"An intelligent person is one who can put himself in the place of others," said member Yuli Dvornichenko. "There is no way to fake that."

Another such member is poet Helga Olshvang, who was incredulous at the calmness with which people treated the Ukrainian conflict

"Dante has a special place in hell for those who do not choose sides." Olshvang said. "I am sure that there were people in 1936 in Germany who felt that things were not that simple. This is the same situation in which one country defends its border and the other country continuously sends tanks. For the last ten years Russian people have been exposed to Russian governmentcontrolled newspapers that are spewing soviet-style propaganda against Ukraine. The majority of the country does not even have reliable electricity, so of course they are not gathering alternative information from the internet."

This isolation from foreign information and programs may also be responsible for the much more blatant sexism in the country. I first noticed it in the summer camp where I was working. I was inviting four 8-year-old children into the playroom and one particularly rambunctious boy, Peter, was running around and flailing his fists. When he hit the male counselor there was no problem, but as soon as he touched Lida, a woman, uproar en-

"We don't hit girls, Peter!" shouted his mother. "How many times do

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