NEWS RELEASE

NEW JERSEY FOLK FESTIVAL CELEBRATES 35TH ANNIVERSARY

Fans of all ages can enjoy traditional folk dancing, music, storytelling, and much more at the 37th annual New Jersey Folk Festival on Saturday, April 30, 2011, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., rain or shine. Admission is free for this all-day family event held on the lawn of the Eagleton Institute, George Street and Ryders Lane, on the Douglass Campus of Rutgers, the State University, in New Brunswick.

The New Jersey Folk Festival will be celebrating its 37th Anniversary this year showcasing various heritages and traditions through an array of music, art, food, and crafts demonstrations, while also honoring renowned Gordon Bok with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the festival and Venerable Erdne Ombadykow Telo Tulku Rinpoche as Honorary Festival Chair. Gordon Bok is being given this honor for his tremendous contributions to the folk music community; he has recorded no less than thirty four original compositions as well as traditional and contemporary folk songs from around the world.

Gordon was born and raised in Camden, Maine in 1939, and grew up listening to Scottish, German, Italian, Austrian and American traditional songs with his family, inspiring him to write his own music at a very young age. Mr. Bok has been an encouraging force behind other singers in their efforts to record their own music and launch their own musical careers. Especially pertinent to this year’s Festival, Mr. Bok has been a singer and caretaker of the music and liturgy of the Kalmyks – this Festival’s highlighted cultural theme - maintaining and circulating an extensive collection of their surviving music among their descendants and sharing it with the rest of the nation by donating the works he has amassed to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Our honorary chair Telo Tulku Rinpoche was born in a Kalmyk family in the United States. As a four year old boy, he expressed his wishes to be a Buddhist monk and at the age of 6, in 1979, he had the chance to meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New York who recommended sending him to Drepung Gomang Monastery in India. He spent 13 years there studying Buddhist philosophy. In the late 1980’s, while still studying, he was recognized as the reincarnation of the great Indian saint Tilopa. In 1992 he was elected as “Sahdjin Lama” (Head Lama) of Kalmykia by the Kalmyk people and was entrusted to lead the process of spiritual restoration of one of the three Buddhist regions in Russia. Since then, he has supervised the re-construction of over 27 Buddhist temples that had been destroyed during the communist era in Russia, including the largest Buddhist temple in Russia and the whole of Europe – The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni. Over the years, he has made special efforts to strengthen religious and cultural ties between traditional Buddhists in Russia and the Tibetan community led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In 2007 he initiated the first ever Mongolian and Russian Buddhist Festival in Dharamsala, India.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is proud to present the culture of the Kalymk peoples as this year’s heritage

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spotlight. The Kalmyks are a group of Buddhist peoples descended from Western Mongolia, who came to Russia beginning in 1609 and lived there since as political and military allies. World War II proved to be a tragic moment in time for the Kalmyks, as it was for much of the world. In December, 1943, after the Red Army had re-taken Russia, the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic was dissolved and its people were deported to internment camps in Siberia. They languished in those camps until 1951 when the majority of Kalmyks were able to immigrate to the United States. Nearly 600 Kalmyks immigrated in the period between 1951 and 1952 despite the Immigration Act of 1924. This law, which was in force until 1965, specifically barred “non-whites” from immigrating to the U.S. The Kalmyks, as Mongols, were initially refused entry under its provisions but, a successful argument that because of their nearly 400-year residency in European Russia made them “white,” led to the reversal of the initial negative ruling of the Immigration Board. Thanks to that ruling, significant populations of Kalmyk people have founded communities in Howell, NJ and Philadelphia, PA. Today, they inhabit the Republic of Kalmykia which is part of the Russian Federation. It is the only region in Europe with an ethnic Mongol majority and Buddhism as its official religious doctrine.

As a part of this year’s heritage theme we will be presenting a number of performers emblematic of the Kalmyk culture. Direct from Kalmykia we present the Lotus Dance Troupe. “Lotus”, the State People’s Dance Ensemble of the Republic of Kalmykia, under the direction of Valeri Erdeniyev. The ensemble is an original creative laboratory of national art that conducts active research in the fields of choreography, folk costume and music. Their performances feature dazzling dances and throat-singing accompanied by traditional instruments that have enchanted audiences in Kalmykia and Russia, as well as India, China, and the United States.

Also representing the Kalmyk theme is The Orn Nutg Dance Troupe. Founded in 2001 with the idea to preserve the heritage and culture of the Kalmyk people – Orn Nutg is comprised of former members of the Kalmyk State Song and Dance Ensemble “Tulpan”, the State Dance Theater of “Oiraty”, the National Orchestra of Kalmykia, the State Symphony Orchestra of Kalmykia and graduates of the College of Arts in Elista. The dance troupe performs both public and private shows throughout the year and participates in cultural programs throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Tsereyndorj Amarhanov is an Oirat (Kalmyk) folk musician, multi-instrumentalist, composer and throat singer. Born in Philadelphia in 1980, he left America at the age of 17 and lived in both the Republic of Kalmykia and Mongolia before returning to the States at age 21. He has toured with the folk ensemble Chirgilchin and performed with Alash. He has facilitated “throat-singing” workshops throughout the United States and is currently the Cultural Director of the Kalmyk Brotherhood Society. Among his performances at the festival will be an “abridged” recitation of the Kalmyk epic story the “Jangar.” Apart from traditional Kalmyk music, Tserendorj has played in ambient, electronic, rock, dub-reggae, grunge, alternative, punk and jam-bands since he was in his youth.

In addition is Hadglsan Zoera – a children’s group preserving the Kalmyk culture through dance, song, music and costumes. Meaning “preserved jewels” Hadglsan Zoera is part of a non-profit organization and is taught by Lyudmila Schowgurow, a former elementary school teacher in Elista, Russia. The school specialized in teaching the Kalmyk language through immersion. In the spring of 2000, she started to teach a few of the Kalmyk children how to play the dombr (two-stringed lute). Since then, children have gathered to regularly play, sing and enjoy traditional Kalmyk music. Rooted in the Philadelphia community, they are a part of a non-profit organization and perform in cultural events in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Also performing at this year’s festival is the Beth Coleman Band. The band’s members initially met a local radio show in the early 2000’s, each of them doing their own thing on the live broadcast that still airs today on WDVR-FM 89.7.
There was a common love of bluegrass music between all involved and so a band was born. One of the best things about the Beth Coleman Band, besides their great music, is the mutual respect for one another’s talents and the camaraderie between the members of the band. Each member brings their unique personality and talent to each performance and that is evident when they are on stage in front of an audience. We invite you to come and see for yourself! The band’s album Back Home to Galaxy was released in 2008.

Jackie Tice is an award-winning songwriter in Native American, Folk and Pop genres. Jackie’s original compositions for guitar range from acoustic folk to world rock rhythms, while her lyrical content spans the call of coyotes, global harmony, hope and empowerment, human relations and life-story songs. Ms. Tice communicates an inclusive global outlook through her mixed indigenous Cherokee and Eastern European roots and her unique Acoustic World Folk rhythms have solidified her reputation as an international artist bridging the relationship of Nature and Human Nature through her music. Ms. Tice is the founder and artistic director of All Nations Peace, an international gathering of indigenous musicians presenting concerts together as the "World Tribal Peace Council”.

Organized jam sessions – in the form of bluegrass, old-timey, and traditional Irish seisuns – will be held on the festival’s Shore Stage, which will then transform into the Singer-Songwriter Showcase. There, each of the six contest winners chosen from a pool of over 100 qualified applicants will be given a chance to perform their original songs in 25-minute sets.

In addition to the four stages of music, dance, workshops, and both American and ethnic food vendors, the festival offers a diverse craft market of approximately 75 booths, craft demonstrators and a folk marketplace where performer CDs and information on area folk organizations are available. For children, there is a designated activities area with games, a clown, and free crafts to make and take. The New Jersey Folk Festival is the oldest and largest continuously-held festival of its kind in the state. Wheelchair accessible, it offers selected programs with ASL interpretation; large-print program books and audio assists are also available.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is proud to be a key component of Rutgers Day, a day of learning, exploration, and fun at New Jersey’s State University. The Folk Festival is the main attraction of Rutgers Day on the Douglass Campus, but visitors are encouraged to check out the many workshops and live performances at the other Rutgers campuses throughout the day—all designed to demonstrate the impact and value of our world-class university. Admission, parking, and on-campus bus shuttles are all free. For further details, including stage schedules and directions, visit the web at http://njfolkfest.rutgers.edu or call the festival office at (732)-932-5775 or Rutgers Campus Info Services at (732)-445-INFO.

The 2011 New Jersey Folk Festival is presented by Rutgers University and Douglass Residential College. It is sponsored in part by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Additional sponsorship is provided by The Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs of Rutgers, Picture-It Awards, Inc., the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, and the City of New Brunswick Department of Parks. The festival is produced by the Department of American Studies at Rutgers, The State University, under the technical direction of Angus K. Gillespie and Erin Clarke.