

# Olympics offers musicians missional moments

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SOCHI (BP)—Trembling, a Russian teenager walked down the aisle of a Russian Baptist Church to respond to the gospel message proclaimed through the music of the [Singing Men of Oklahoma](#) and an invitation from Russian and American pastors to follow Christ.



Two Russian women read the Engage Sochi gospel pamphlet while one records the Singing Men of Oklahoma in concert in Sochi, Russia. (BP Photo by Byron Stacey)“I couldn’t see him well from where I was, but I could hear him sobbing,” said Ken Bartholomew, a member of the Oklahoma choir. “That seemed just a genuine, heartfelt repentance, and he wanted to give his life to the Lord. It was a remarkable experience just to be there and be a part of that.”

Apart from the church concert, the Singing Men, made up of more than 80 members, split into four groups and scattered throughout Sochi, occasionally harmonizing old Gospel tunes and their state song, “Oklahoma.”

As crowds gathered and the group sang two or three songs, the Singing Men met people, exchanged contact information and distributed commemorative pins from [Engage Sochi](#), an effort driven by Southern Baptists to make a positive impact for Christ during the Olympic Games.



The Singing Men of Oklahoma perform at a Baptist church in Sochi, Russia, singing in both English and Russian. (BP Photo by William Bagsby) “They did exactly what we asked them to do, and that was to come, break up into small groups, use their music to draw a crowd and use that to engage people,” said Marc Hooks, co-director of Engage Sochi. “They really did make relationships, and that’s what they were here to do.”

The Singing Men sang along walkways and as they traveled on trains and buses from one part of Sochi to another.

“There were 25 to 30 of them all on one car of the train, so they started singing and ... the atmosphere of the train changed instantly,” Hooks said. “It was like a party afterwards. Then, they were able to share the gospel pins, and Russians were giving them hats and all sorts of stuff. By the end of the whole thing, people were coming from other parts of the train to get one of their pins. So, rather than trying to give pins away, people were coming to them asking for them.”

Since the opening of the Olympics, the openness of Russians to the gospel made a deep impression on Hooks, who has ministered in Russia seven years and spent the last four years preparing for the [Sochi Olympics](#).

“Sochi today, since the Olympics started, is 180 degrees different than Sochi in January 2010,” he said. “Never have I seen Russians so open. This openness has led to opportunities for relationships, which leads to opportunities to share the gospel.”