

Activities of Turkey Trip March 2014

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We arrived late on Tuesday night in Istanbul. The Irish delegates all went to a local bar for a few drinks before turning in for the night.

The following morning we explored the old city which included a trip to the Blue Mosque We also visited the Grand Bazaar which was a hive of activity and included a long street with packed store fronts on both sides. Teenagers and men walked alongside us trying to get us to visit their shops or buy their aftershave or jeans with decreasing prices as we walked away.

We then took a tram and ferry to Bursa which is the fourth most populous city in Turkey with a population of almost 2 m.

When we arrived in Bursa we had a few hours before we had to get to the restaurant for dinner with the rest of the delegates so we all relaxed after the journey. Later we took a taxi to get to the restaurant after waiting in our taxi's for each taxi driver to arrive. We learnt that in Turkey the Taxi drivers usually like to travel in packs where possible, so this makes for some waiting around.

The restaurant was situated in the middle of a park and was entirely glass fronted allowing for a beautiful view of the park in the dark. At dinner old friends were reunited and introductions were mad. We ordered food and drinks and learnt that in Turkey a restaurant that serves alcohol is a rarity. We all chatted and grew accustomed to each other at dinner and then the instruments came out! Each delegate had brought their own instruments and the Turkish delegation began the session with a Turkish song on the guitar. Next came an instrument most of us had never seen before which looked like a large bookmark shaped flat harp which we later learned was called a kanun. This had a sound similar to a mix between a harpsichord and a mandolin. The music went around the room with each person and group contributing a piece with fiddles, guitars and mandolins playing and accompanying. Before we knew it the night was over, everyone had sung and drank their fill and our heads were full of unfamiliar melodies.

The next day the business at hand begun with our first meeting. Generously, our hosts Serin and Mustafa had provided local pastries called baklava which were very sweet with many containing pistachio's; they were heavily glazed and delicious.

After our meeting in the afternoon, we went to the music school where Sirin and Mustafa have an involvement we had a presentation about Traditional Turkish instruments and music. There were traditional musicians who had a kudum; bowl like drums played with sticks, a tanbur which had 6 strings with a very long neck attached to a round bowled piece of wood, similar in looks to a larger wooden banjo. A kemence was played, a four stringed instrument similar to a violin that is played upright on the lap with a bow and using nails to fret the strings instead of the tops of fingers as is used for a violin. An ud was also played, this is an instrument similar to a lute which is played with a

long thing plec and is fretless. The final instrument to be played was the previously mentioned kanun, an instrument with 76 strings that is played with both hands using a tortoiseshell plec, the strings tunings can be changed mid song also. This instrument looked remarkably hard to play and was like no western instrument I had seen before.

Each musician described their own instrument, how it was played and the musicians played a few pieces for us. Traditional Turkish Music does not use the typical western scale of music employing half notes instead it employs quarter notes. This meant that much of the music is not appealing to the ear at first listen, indeed before being given an explanation on the quarter notes used in Turkish music I thought the instruments sounded out of tune! Most of the instruments played in unison with mainly the kanun providing harmony. After the presentations we were welcomed to try the instruments for ourselves. I tried the Ud and noticed that it felt much the same as a fretless bass with nylon strings and the tuning was the same as a guitars'. John the fiddle player in the group tried playing the kemence and vowed to buy one on his next trip!

After this experience, we returned to the hotel where some people had Turkish baths (which were located in the Hotel) or massages. Later we all took a taxi to a local restaurant and then on to a local bar where Mustafa had organised for us to play music with some of his friends. There was an electric guitar player, drummer, bass player and percussionist and the musicians were top class. We all had a few drinks and took turns playing with each other, with various delegates helping on violin or switching between guitar and bass and electric guitar. There was plenty of crowd interaction and the musicians were quick to pick up on songs they had never heard before, I was very impressed.

The next day we had our second meeting and afterwards the group split to take time to chill and relax and go to a nearby tree that was massive in height and length and was located in the middle of an outdoor eatery. The group that went had some traditional food which included some food which was like a giant square potato farl with cheese, potato and ham. The tree was indeed gigantic and we all took pictures around it. Later we went back to the hotel before going to a Television station to play some music and be filmed. We all played in a comfy room which looked like a large sitting room, with each delegation providing two or three songs each. Mustafa brought his tanbur and played some traditional songs with his friend who was helping film and we all had a great time playing together.

Afterwards we went to get some food in a local restaurant where we ordered kebabs. The kebabs came with meat on top and bread beneath them but the real twist was when the chefs brought bubbling pans of butter and generously poured it all over the kebabs, the result was delicious and unlike any kebab I had previously had in Dublin. After this we went to see some local rock/pop bands play, the first band was good but not to everyone's liking. We soon left that bar to one right next door and here the band was fantastic. The singer had been a contestant on Turkey's version of "The voice" and it was easy to see why. The band was of the top calibre with a drummer percussionist bass player and guitarist. The band played for three hours plus and Shane from the Irish delegation played a song with them at the end of the night with John the fiddler accompanying and Danai providing harmonies. The night was a success and we all turned in late with some staying up to play music in the hotel lobby until six in the morning!

The next day we had our final meeting and people packed up to leave for Istanbul. We took a taxi to the tram and then a ferry back to Istanbul. It took us an hour in the rain to find our accommodation and we were all glad to sit down when we got there. We organised to meet the French delegation for dinner and found an interesting looking reggae themed restaurant around the corner. We asked the restaurant was there any chance we could play a few songs and we were very happy when they obliged. We all quickly finished our food and got our guitars and mandolins out and the next few hours were full of music. The restaurant very kindly gave us a round of drinks in appreciation of the music and we all played a few requests for them. We chatted to a few local Turks before turning in for the night.

The next day we said our final goodbyes and set off for the airport. The trip was an amazing cultural experience. It was also an amazing opportunity to meet so many like-minded musicians, playing familiar and unfamiliar music and having a chance to learn and play with them. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Andrew Lea

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