

Urban cities and a cultural divers urban music scene in Ghent-Belgium

In addition to the emancipatory effect music can have on the life of the migrant population as stated by Ursula Hemetek, I would like to put an emphasis on the value of developing cultural competence as well for the audiences as the musicians of both the migrant and non migrant population.

I will give a brief outline of the migrant population of Ghent – and I will limit myself to the Turkish community which is the largest group. 45% of all immigrants living in Ghent have Turkish roots and represent approx. 17.000 people.

The Turkish community living in Ghent is part of a historical migration which took place in the 60ies. Most of the Turkish people living in Ghent come from a rural town in Central Anatolia called Emirdag. It's a small town with 21.000 inhabitants. Some parts of that town and surrounding villages have almost completely moved to Ghent, settling in specific areas and creating quarters which have become predominantly Turkish.

Emirdag is not an urban city. It's a small, rather conservative town. The Turkish people that have migrated to Ghent hold on to certain traditional values. For example their children still have to deal with arranged marriages. Usually they marry within the family. Second and third generation young Turks still marry with youngsters from Emirdag and other rural towns in Anatolia, preventing them from easily mingling with the local Ghent population.

Due to satellite television the Turkish community can watch the same TV programs in Ghent as they would in Turkey.

These aspects create a certain inertia within that community.

The Turkish immigrant music scene in Ghent is characterized by the same features. There are a lot of talented musicians – but they are talented in a limited musical spectrum. They play at weddings and other parties and earn good money that way, which makes them stick to that specific repertoire.

If you would use the categories Ursula Hemetek has used in her opening speech, you would define the larger part of the Turkish music scene as Interntal Practice and Public Ghetto.

So there is work to be done to involve this community into the broader cultural life of the city and vice versa to involve the 'original' population into the world of the Turkish community and develop cultural competence in both communities.

That is why the city has founded De Centrale which is dedicating itself to the task of bringing both communities closer to one another. De Centrale –presents an amazing series of concerts – mostly Turkish but also from the Maghreb region, Central Africa and the Balkan countries. They program concerts that are favored by the Turkish community – folk and traditional music from Anatolia. But

they also program more progressive music or Ottoman classical music which are mainly attended by a non-Turkish audience. They sometimes put on double bills of a popular Belgian band with a popular Turkish band, attended by a mixed audience of Turkish and non-Turkish people.

Another important aspect of the work De Centrale is a close collaboration with an important cultural institution in Ghent –De Bijloke Music Centre. De Bijloke is the main venue for classical music. It is of great value that a more prestigious concert venue does not restrict its program to the canon of the Western classical music, but also confronts its audience with non western classical music from other parts of the world.

De Centrale is also closely collaborating with Arts Centre Vooruit of which I am the music programmer. Together we organize the Istanbul Ekspres festival (3rd edition happening 1-10 December 2010). During the Istanbul Ekspres festival we try to challenge the Turkish and non Turkish population by presenting a daring program of popular and progressive music. By presenting double bills we try to seduce and mix the audience. In the last edition we put the Taksim trio (with the famous clarinet player Hüsni Şenlendirici who is very popular amongst the Turkish community) next to Mercan Dede (electronic trance-dance music) and very popular amongst the local world music lovers. It resulted into a 50/50% mixed audience of Turkish and non-Turkish people.

We also challenge the audience by programming very specific musical acts such as Baba Zula – a pseudo exotic mixture of punk, dub and traditional music featuring a belly dancer and a live graphic designer. The graphic designer Ceren Oykut is a young woman who draws amazing pictures on a computer pad, evolving one picture into the other. She can be quiet provocative and is producing strong political cartoons on issues that affect Turkish society.

The most interesting part of the festival though are the musical collaborations between Turkish and local musicians – that is where cultural competence between musicians is developed .

Vooruit has gained a lot of expertise in setting up collaborations and making different cultures meet over the past decade. We organized a project where Senegalese percussion master Doudou N'Diaye Rose and 10 young Senegalese boys worked together with 40 school children resulting in an amazing concert.

We set up a meeting between Inuit throat singers and a local folk punk band Think of One (this production toured internationally), and we had a famous local dj –Dj Grazzhoppa, work with young dj's in Nuuk Groenland and doing a show with the local hip hop band Nuuk Posse. Just to name a few.

For the next edition of Istanbul Ekspres (December 2010) we have set up no less that 7 international collaborations between Turkish and local musicians. A lot of these musicians will travel to Istanbul to work there and be introduced to new harmonic scales, weird rhythms, special melodies – thus developing their skills to tackle a new repertoire.

This is a way to involve the local Turkish music scene into the urban music scene of Istanbul, striving for a more intensive interaction between these musicians and those of Istanbul and Ghent.

I am sure the fact that Ghent is now part of the Unesco Creative City of Music network will help to develop new policies regarding this topic.

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