

SOUNDING OUT...

ISTANBUL

The worlds of East and West are meeting across the Bosphorus in increasingly diverse ways. Andy Footner seeks sounds old and new

Istanbul, a city spanning two continents and many centuries, is blessed with huge variety and its musical heritage is a great shortcut to discovering this cultural richness. A former capital of two empires, the city has a history of collecting, absorbing and propagating cultural and fiscal wealth from the wider region. Now it's an internationally tipped 'hot destination' but there are still plenty of places to find heartfelt and unadulterated local music shoulder-to-shoulder with manufactured pop and visiting stars from the international scene.

The population of Istanbul has exploded in the last few decades as the gap in living standards widens between it and the rest of the country and music from each region of Turkey is well represented. In the last few years there's also a growing platform for music from the rest of the world. Most of the city's cultural life is concentrated in the area north of the Golden Horn known as Beyoğlu, and particularly on the sidestreets of the bustling pedestrian thoroughfare İstiklâl Caddesi, which leads from Taksim to Tünel.

A key conduit to discovering Turkish music is the Pozitif organisation (www.pozitif-ist.com). Its roots in a love of jazz have spread to fill the gap in the market for quality representation of local music for an outside audience. Through its Doublemoon record label, its festivals or the flagship Babylon performance venue in Tünel, they've created an important outlet for contemporary Turkish music outside the overtly mainstream and an easy way to find out what's going on.

LISTINGS

Biletix

Ticketing service for many concerts and events. Has full information in English at www.biletix.com

Time Out Istanbul

Monthly magazine in English available from most newsstands, the listings concentrate on



The Büyük Mecidiye mosque and Bosphorus Bridge, Ortaköy

events rather than regular features, but well worth checking. www.timeoutistanbul.com

Zip Istanbul

Fortnightly free listings paper in Turkish.

VENUES

Babylon

Undoubtedly the best run venue in the city specialising in jazz and world music from all over the world. Here you can also find Doublemoon artists like Hüsnü Şenlendirici [see review in Middle East section], Orient Expressions and Burhan Öçal and the recently relocated Algerian/French musician Smadj (Seybender Sokak, Tünel, +90 (0)212 292 7368, www.babylon-ist.com).

Badehane

An informal beer haven just around the corner from Babylon towards Tünel frequented by expats and bohemians where Gypsy maestro Selim Sesler strikes up with his band each Wednesday evening (General Yazgan Sokak 5, Tünel, +90 (0)212 249 0550).

Bağlama bars

Needing less planning, there's magnificent *türkü* music from 3pm till 3am everyday of the

week in a whole bunch of *bağlama* bars around Hasnun Galip Sokak (which runs parallel to İstiklâl Caddesi). Young musicians play rousing electro-acoustic sets led by a singer strumming a long-necked bağlama (also known as the *saz*), with accompaniment on some combination of drums, keyboards and electric guitars. The quality of performances in **Munzur** (Hasnun Galip Sokak 21A, +90 (0)212 245 4669), even when the small bar is half empty, is remarkable. Just a few doors down the street is **Havar** (Hasnun Galip Sokak 28, +90 (0)212 251 3359), where the musicians always manage to provoke a riotous chain of dancers that bounce around the too-small space between the tables.

Nightclubs

For a more surreal atmosphere at the end of the night, there are some dodgy nightclubs where old showmen sing Turkish standards to the accompaniment of pre-set keyboards. Many of these will try to cheat you of money, so be very careful about whose drinks go on your bill and at what price, but if you find an honest place like **Dogus** they can be great fun (on a corner of Asmalimescit Sokak).

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TURKISH CULTURE & TOURISM OFFICE



SNOWN BROUGHTON



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Top: Istiklâl Caddesi – Beyoğlu's main thoroughfare
Middle: Istanbul Music Centre, Galip Dede Caddesi 21
Bottom: The Kurdish bağlama bar Munzur

Concert Halls

Classical music concert halls such as **Is Sanat** (Is Kulesi, Maslak, www.iskultursanat.com.tr) and **Cemal Resit Rey** (Harbiye, www.crrks.org) have occasional shows of Turkish classical *sanat muzik* and formal performances of other local specialities.

Whirling Dervishes

A memorable experience is the *sema* demonstration of whirling dervishes, which can be caught at the **Galata Dervish Lodge** (Galip Dede Caddesi, Tünel) and in a waiting room in Sirkeci train station. To experience the *sema* for real, venture down to the **Cerrahi Tekkesi** (Nurettin Tekkesi Sokak, Karagömrük) on Monday nights around 10pm. In the same place you should also sit in on a *zikir* ceremony on Thursday evenings – an act of worship that is technically outlawed in Turkey, though it is tolerated. The *zikir* involves a rousing chorus of Sufis locked together in concentric dancing circles around a solo singer and a drummer, with sometimes a whirling dervish at the centre. Affecting stuff.



POZITIF

Babylon – Istanbul's best run world music venue

MEYHANE

Turks love their food, and most Turkish music goes best with food. The best place to take advantage of this is a *meyhane* (tavern), which provides the scene for the perfect way to enjoy *fasil* music. Usually for a set price, there's food, drink and a group of musicians in the corner who progressively raise the volume as the evening unravels. On a good night fellow diners will join in with the singing. There are many *meyhanes* to choose from in Beyoğlu, two of the most recommended are **Gallavi** (Kallavi Sokak 20, Beyoğlu, +90 (0)212 251 1010) and the **Gazeteci Derneği Lokal** (Istiklâl Caddesi 42/1, Beyoğlu, +90 (0)212 292 4167). Also worth trying are the many restaurants piled in and around Nevizade Sokak (reached via the fish market opposite the Galatasaray High School on Istiklâl Caddesi). The warren of streets in the district of Kumkapi on the shores of the Marmara are more touristy, so ask first whether the musicians will play a full set in the restaurant or just be passing through.

SHOPS

For an impromptu guide to different music styles, you could do worse than pay a visit to **Galip Dede Caddesi**, a street of musical instrument shops leading from Tünel to the Galata tower, where the salesmen are happy to demonstrate the different instruments and their genres.

The best way to sample current Turkish music is on cassette from vendors pushing carts of tapes and CDs around the quays and markets of Eminonu. If none are passing, there's a small booth on the corner of the Kadikoy ferry quay with a lively selection of pop, Arabesk and regional music. For world music and jazz CDs try the long-established **Lale Plak** in Tünel Meydani (Galip Dede Caddesi 1, +90 (0)212

293 7739). For vinyl, it's the **Sahaf Pasaji** opposite the British Consulate, a treasure trove of shops selling dusty books, battered vinyl and CDs and some wonderfully garish film posters. Just across Istiklâl Caddesi in the Atlas Pasaji, **Deform Müsik** (Istiklâl Caddesi, Atlas Pasaji 16, +90 (0)212 244 2422) sells a huge range of secondhand music, and has owners with encyclopedic knowledge of past Turkish greats. For everything else, try book and music shops such as **Mephisto** (Istiklâl Caddesi 197, Beyoğlu).

LABELS

Doublemoon is the label of the Pozitif organisation that run Babylon and many of Istanbul's better events. The roster includes jazz and hip-hop but their main strength is contemporary reworkings of traditional Turkish music (www.doublemoon.com.tr).

Kalan is an exceptional label committed to releasing historical and contemporary Turkish music in an orderly and informed manner (www.kalan.com).

Most Turkish labels have wholesale outlets in the IMC buildings in Unkapani, opposite the Tekel building on the way to the Aqueduct of Valens. A stroll through here will quickly update you to what's current.

FESTIVALS

The Istanbul Jazz Festival takes place in July and past performers have included Goran Bregovic, Paco de Lucia and Mercedes Sosa. Concerts are held at numerous venues across the city such as the Cemil Topuzlu Open Air Theatre and Babylon, plus there's the traditional 'jazz boat' which sails along the Bosphorus. www.iksv.org. Check out www.kazum.co.uk for a specially arranged music holiday to the Istanbul Jazz Festival. |

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