

Make Music, Not War

Victoria Tevis

A trumpet can be heard dancing through warm-up exercises, a timpani drum rumbles. It is time for the members of the all-Bosnian wind ensemble *Winds of Change* to begin rehearsing again for their next concert tour. The group, based in Sarajevo, is only in its second year of existence but has already performed all over Bosnia and in the Netherlands. This November (2008), they will make their way to the neighboring countries of Croatia and Montenegro to share their unique music and vision for the people of ex-Yugoslavia.

The group was originally conceived by Dutch musician and composer Prof. Willem van Merwijk with the help of his friend Prof. Adnan Cico of Sarajevo. Willem was visiting Bosnia-Herzegovina to perform in the summer festival, BašDaršiske NoĐi, and realized how powerful the creation of an intercultural Bosnian ensemble could be. He explained to Adnan his vision to bring together Serb, Croat, and Bosniak music students in one group to foster unity among the three. Adnan's wry response was, "It's impossible. But I will help you do it." And so they did.

The *Winds of Change* has performed four tours since April 2007, all featuring a combination of contemporary western influences, European classical music, and traditional Balkan pieces. This unique blend emphasizes both the region's connections with the rest of the world, and its own unique heritage. Maintaining the group and keeping things running smoothly has not been a simple task, with many twists and set-backs along the way. However, the growth, the friendships, and the music have all made the journey more than worthwhile. The group is composed mostly of students from the Sarajevo Music High School and Sarajevo Music Academy, but has also incorporated members of the Banja Luka



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Music Academy and professionals from other parts of the country. All three cultural groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina are represented among the members. Besides the international presence of Willem van Merwijk, the group boasts Spanish trombonist Jaume Gavilán Agulló. The inclusion of members from so many different cultures has given all involved the opportunity to grow and expand.

This past spring *Winds of Change* had the opportunity to perform in Amsterdam with the famed Netherlands Blazers Ensemble (NBE). However, there was a catch – they had to travel from Bosnia-Herzegovina to the Netherlands by bus. It was a long journey, but deemed to be worth it by all involved. The time spent traveling was a great (if long) bonding experience, and the week together in the Netherlands was also excellent. If you ever need to spend some time bonding with someone, try taking a cross-continental bus-ride. It's hard to avoid becoming close.

The act of practicing and performing together is the basic glue uniting the group across their cultural divides. While the three primary groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina often choose to stick to themselves, emphasize their differences and avoid interaction with the others, playing in a mixed group makes it impossible to do so. Late night rehearsals and last minute changes to repertoire are all stressors which ultimately unite the group. For concerts, their families are also brought together to support their loved ones, despite any prior divisions.

The seeds for greater understanding and peace are sown among these young musicians and continue to grow each time their music brings the people of ex-Yugoslavia together. It is now fifteen years since the country dissolved in war and genocide and many initiatives have taken place in an attempt to heal the region's wounds. *Winds of Change* offers a unique example of how music and culture can be particularly powerful and effective tools for finding common ground.

For more information about *Winds of Change* please go to www.see-mwb.org

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