



# SIMON SAYS...

Simon Broughton visits Budapest for the annual celebration of Hungarian and Romanian *táncház*, or dance house music

The Budapest Sports Arena is like a flying saucer that's landed in the Hungarian capital. It generally hosts basketball, ice hockey and pop concerts, but every April there's the annual *Táncháztalálkozó* (Dance House Festival) when thousands of enthusiasts come primarily to dance to the best authentic folk music from the Carpathian Basin.

What's known as the *táncház* movement began in Hungary in the early 1970s as a grassroots reaction against the official folklore ensembles and their choreographed routines. It became a celebration of traditional music and dance which they rediscovered in the countryside – particularly in Transylvania in neighbouring Romania.

The stadium festival was first held in 1982 as a one-day event, but since the fall of communism it's expanded to Saturday and Sunday. There is dance instruction in the arena all day, big showcases in the evening and smaller concerts in other rooms around the building. There's also a market for traditional costume with grannies selling off their family heirlooms, a crafts fair and excellent recordings on sale.

One of the showcases features the excellent band *Tázló*, who play music from northern Moldavia. With singer Ágnes Enyedi, the four-piece group play violin, flutes, *koboz* (lute) and percussion. Coming from over the Carpathians in north-east Romania, the music is sinewy and lean, but without the rich harmonies of Hungary or Transylvania. *Tázló* draw on traditional tunes, but "fire them up a bit," as *koboz* player László Németh puts it. They are a real *táncház* band with a regular dance house in Budapest.



Simon Broughton

It's certainly true that Transylvanian music is still at the heart of the festival. When the movement started in the 1970s, the musicians and dancers had to go on difficult trips to Romania to learn the music first hand. Now with both countries in the EU, Transylvanian bands are visiting Hungary all the time and some of the very best – from *Palatka* and *Szaszcávás* – were playing on stage in the arena. There's a spring in the rhythms and a crunchiness in the harmony that is unlike any other music in Europe. I can understand why it's become such a firm part of the Hungarian music scene. And I can't think of anywhere else where a knowledge and appreciation of traditional music and dance is so strong.

The Saturday night show is spectacular – incredibly well organised with one ensemble picking up from another and hundreds

of costumed dancers on stage. Whoever is responsible deserves a medal. But what's curious is these choreographed routines seem exactly what the *táncház* movement was reacting against when it started.

The real spirit of the *táncház* is to be found in the Folk Pub (pictured) in the unlovely car park on the edge of the arena. Here, among a haze of cigarette smoke and temporary food and drink stalls, is the *Erdőfű* band, probably the best dance house band in Hungary with Andor Maruzsenszki on lead violin. People are swirling around the concrete pillars with all the spontaneity the music demands. And whenever they can, they and their friends head off to the *Rácskert* dance house – a much more atmospheric place in the ruin-pub area of town where the real *táncház* spirit thrives the year round. ♦

## Next Issue...

July 2018 issue (#139)

On sale June 15 2018

**Fatoumata Diawara (pictured)** – We catch up with the Malian singer, who has just released her much-anticipated second album  
**I'm Not Here to Hunt Rabbits** – We take a look at the myriad guitar and folk music styles from Botswana

**Michael McGoldrick** – A Beginner's Guide to the Irish flute and whistles supreme

**Aita Anthology** – Preserving Morocco's unique musical heritage

**An Occupation of Loss** – An examination of Taryn Simon's latest installation, which considers the rituals of grief across the world  
**Dispatch from Cuba** – Percussionist Bernhard Schimpelsberger reports from the Caribbean island in search of rhythms



Aida Mulinah