



May 2015, Issue 45

Newsletter Nuachtiris

Scoil Chuimsitheach na Pairce Nua



A Dance Journey across Europe

Everything in the universe has a rhythm, everything dances (Maya Angelou)



After two years and travel to four countries (Ireland, Italy, Turkey and Germany), with more than one hundred students and twenty teachers from the participating schools involved, our Comenius Dance project has come to an end. We started in Beerfelden in Germany, then Venice,

Bursa in Turkey and the final trip of the project was in Ireland. Our students and their families were wonderful hosts—their warmth, enthusiasm and hospitality were magnificent.

On Sunday 25th of April our visitors arrived in batches on to be welcomed by their Irish hosts. Monday was our main dancing day. Thanks to the wonderful Jill Doyle (director of NPAS and mother of two of our dancers Molly and Ruby McAlister) we were able to use studio space in *The Factory* on Barrow Street. Each team was provided with rehearsal space and then we came together to showcase our dances.

The idea for this performance was that each team had a theme and the four separate dances would become part of a collaborative



whole. The approach and the style of each team were extremely different. The Italians began with their theme *Solo* and presented a contemplative, moving and fascinating piece of interpretive dance.

Next up were the Turks: their theme was *Coming Together*. They began by using drama to explore love and marriage across cultural divides and culminated with a magnificent Turkish wedding to which we, the audience members, were invited as guests and dancers. It was so much fun and the students revisited the Turkish dances they had learned on the other trips.

A Dance Journey across Europe



The German theme was *Good Vibrations on the European Dancefloor* and they began with a dramatic explosion of colour before moving into their dynamic and energetic dance (the coloured powders from the start joined the confetti from the Turkish wedding—sorry, NPAS).



On Wednesday the morning was spent back in Dublin seeing more of the sights before an afternoon celebration in Newpark GPA with wonderful food and drink supplied by the PTA.

After more dancing and celebration, we said our sad goodbyes for the following day. Anna Johnston

Some thoughts from the students

I really enjoyed the time we had—I only wish it had lasted longer.

Hosting the students who came to Ireland was a really amazing experience—to teach and show them our culture. I'm so happy to have made friends for life and to have learned that you don't even need a lot of words to make a connection with someone.

It was really nice that Irish people weren't the only ones leaping in the bog!

This project also taught me how to be independent without parents and how to communicate with people from foreign countries and how they live.

When the time came for them to go, I wanted them to stay: to be honest I wouldn't have minded them staying for a month! I think it's easily one of the best experiences I've ever had.

It was really nice when we went to the different countries: we were thrown into their culture and weren't treated like tourists. I had so much fun meeting new people and making lifelong friends.



My student was from Germany and she was seventeen. She was older than me but in a way that was better. I got on really well with her and we are planning for her to come and visit us next year. I didn't mind being one of the youngest—we all got along and all the older students were so nice to us.



The Irish were last with the theme of *Freedom*. We had by far the

biggest group of dancers and a wide age-range from Second to Sixth Year as these were the combined students from all of the previous trips. Our dance was a slice of feisty madness incorporating moves from previous dances and some extra mayhem to celebrate!

There was time for some freestyle dancing before we set off for lunch at Grand Canal Dock, a tour



of nearby Facebook HQ (a fascinating and slightly scary glimpse of the life there) and a whistle-stop tour along the Liffey. On the way home we met the Irish Elk in Trinity's Geological museum and took a photo at the campanile—perhaps some of these young people will cross paths again here later in life.

Tuesday saw us on Causey Farm in Meath where our large group was introduced to Irish dancing and playing the bodhrán as well as more earthy pursuits such as bread making, greeting miscellaneous animals and milking a cow! Earthiest of all was the bog jumping: it was difficult to explain the concept of bogs to our visitors, let alone why one might choose to jump into one. Some of our usually dauntless students had cold feet when they heard there would be no showers, but national pride was upheld by the feisty Second Years who leapt into the bog with such delight that they inspired the lads of the Turkish delegation!



How it all began!

Three years ago, Elisabetta Battistel (a teacher from Italy) called into Newpark and ended up asking me to come to a preliminary meeting in Venice for a Comenius European dance project. I could not have imagined what an intriguing and exciting two-year journey would follow. Even after five days of planning in Venice with teachers from Turkey, Italy, Portugal, Germany and Poland I could not have appreciated the extent of the excitement, fun, cultural exchange, new stimulus, and learning for all the participating students.

Now the two year project has finished and we have been so impressed throughout by the commitment and good humour of our dancing students from Newpark. They were always willing to try new things, to take a chance and—most importantly—were kind and thoughtful towards each other at home and abroad. The students in all four countries planned so thoughtfully for their guests outside of the scheduled programme and these times together were probably the most important and interesting part of the project for them.

Many thanks to all our students involved: the team leaders (now in Sixth Year) Mollie and Kate; from Fifth Year Darerca, Paula, Solenn, Abbie (and documentary film-makers Cian and Fionn); Transition Years Emma, Ruby, Megan, Lola, Hannah and Leona; Third Years Pam, Alex, Sean, Charles and Calvin and Second Years Sophie, Georgia, Maja, Luca, Molly, Lucy, Katie and Daniel. Some travelled to Germany, Italy or Turkey or hosted our visitors for the final trip here in Ireland. We have to say a special thanks to Molly McAlister who was our gifted, energetic and creative choreographer. Molly's down-to-earth kindness, commitment and creativity were at the heart of this project and appreciated by all who encountered her.

Thanks also to Mr Lowry and Mr Cookman for their support, interest and enthusiasm: Mr Cookman often popped in to see the practices and—to the delight of the students—even made it to the performance where he could be seen dancing at the Turkish wedding along with Kamil and Roberto (principals from Turkey and Italy).

Thanks so much to the host families and all the staff, students, parents and teachers who helped make our guests feel so welcome and made the project

possible. Molly and Ruby McAlister's parents were extraordinarily kind in allowing us to use rehearsal rooms and the main studio at The Factory—the wonderful base of NPAS. This is where the dancers from each country performed and we all loved the experience of being there. A special thanks to the PTA, Becky Johnston and Claire Hancock provided delicious refreshments for the celebration of the project in the GPA on the last day of the project.

When all is said and done, the new friendships are the most valuable part of this project. The staff involved have made great friends too; and to Conny, Corina and Derya, (from Beerfelden in Germany) Nilhan, Gaye, Selma, Adelet, Kamil and Nazim (from Gemlik in Turkey), Elisabetta, Michaela, Roberto and Laura (from Venice, Italy) we say a heartfelt thank you. What a lovely chance for us to interact with these wonderful people and exchange ideas about the things that really matter to us all in schools across Europe. Of course we are still in touch and like the students, we want to build on our work together and our friendships with whatever possibilities may arise. Watch this space!

Comenius Dance Project Team: Fiona Ni Fhaolain,

Daki Rezic, Janine Brennan, John O'Neill & Anna Johnston

More thoughts from the students

I loved the experience of having a Turkish student staying in my house because I got to learn so much about their country, culture and traditions. I loved having the responsibility of hosting a student and helping him with his English.

The Irish trip was the best as we all became friends and it wasn't divided into each country. All the countries mingled this time—especially the Irish and the Turks.

It was great to see how each country chose to portray their theme—especially the Italians—each time their pieces were so interesting.

The overall experience of the project was just incredible. We got to travel and experience other countries and cultures we would never have discovered for ourselves. We met so many new friends—not only from the other countries but from our own school—and made memories together.