

EU Dance Project heads East to Turkey

Newpark students are heading off on the third international trip in the EU *Lets Dance* project. This time eight students and accompanying teachers Fiona ní Fhaolain and Anna Johnston are heading to Bursa in Turkey for five days with our partner schools from Germany, Italy and Turkey. The trip promises to be a rich cultural experience including a chance to watch whirling dervishes, visits to the Great Mosque and the covered bazaar in Bursa and the ancient settlement of Iznik as well as plenty of dance workshops.

Four of the students were on the magnificent Venice trip last year but for the other four this is their first experience of the dance project. Sixth Years Molly McAlister and Kate Whelan have been great leaders in this talented and committed group. Kate has taken on the design work for the project. We decided on *We are One* as our central message and Kate designed and stencilled this onto big black T-shirts. Our dancers' clothes for their dance are very simple: black leggings, coloured docs and these T-shirts.

We considered using either seanfhocail or an Irish myth as the starting point for the new dance piece. In the end, we liked the simplicity and openness offered by the seanfhocail. We looked at lots of them and chose a selection that seemed to lend themselves both to dance and to this international project.

Is fearr obair ná caint (Work is better than talk)

Maireann na daoine ar scáth a chéile

(We live in each other's shadows)

Giorraíonn beirt bóthar

(Two people shorten the road)

Ní heart go cur le chéile

(There is no strength without coming together)

Bíonn siúlach scéalach (Travellers have tales to tell)

The first one might sound a bit curt, but it really appealed to the dancers because we thought of dance as harnessing physical effort and energy in a creative way that could be used to communicate more effectively than words. That simple idea got us all very excited and we decided to throw all our energies into a dance that came from that.

Molly McAlister has developed and choreographed a dance performance in three parts. The first part is powerful, focused and earthy: the

dancers use their hands and feet as percussion to create the rhythm without using music ("Let's make noise: lots and lots of noise!" suggested Ms ní Fhaolain delightedly at the first session). In the hiphop section the music kicks in and the dancers become more interactive, combining and unravelling in interesting ways. The salsa part of the dance (in honour of Newpark's longstanding love affair with salsa) lets the fluid movement in pairs and the sheer beautiful fun of it speak for itself. There's a growing awareness and engagement with the other dancers during the piece and a sense of their united strength at the end. In Venice the Newparkers were asked to teach everyone their dance: you can see this piece reaching out and inviting people in too. *We are One*—as it says on the T-shirts!

They have been working extremely hard developing their dance performance over the past months. It's been work rather than talk right enough. The dancers were regularly spotted rehearsing in the Home Economics kitchen—hard to find a big enough space in school at the moment! Over mid-term, they had access to proper dance studio space at *The Factory* (many thanks to Molly's parents and IMDS) to finalise their performance. Tony Oscar, Cuban musician, dancer and regular visiting teacher in Newpark, joined them to add a street-style Cuban ingredient to the dance.

Over the three trips twenty-three students from First to Sixth Year and five staff members have travelled abroad and all look forward to hosting the other schools in Dublin on the final leg of the programme in the spring. They have brought Newpark on a fantastic cultural journey over the past two years: so where should we bring our visitors and what should we show them of Ireland? Contact organisers John O'Neill and Fiona ní Fhaolain if you have suggestions or would like to get involved. In the meantime, off we go to a place where East meets West. Our wonderful dancers have worked so well together, looked after each other and will be great representatives both for Newpark and Ireland. And as Ms ní Fhaolain says: "We will be back full of Turkish delight!"

Anna Johnston