

SARAJEVO

SOUNDING OUT

Local resident Radoslav Baya Corlija highlights the cultural hotspots in this capital city experiencing a revival after its recent war-ravaged history

Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia Herzegovina, is a surprisingly relaxed and handsome place when you consider that its most immediate associations are with war. The brutal Siege of Sarajevo, with thousands of (mainly civilian) casualties, lasted nearly five years from 1992-96. Prior to that it was famous as the site of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914, which led to the outbreak of World War I.

It's no coincidence that both of these wars are connected with Sarajevo's position on a historical fault line where the tectonic plates of West and East meet, and where Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish sites jostle in close proximity. In Sarajevo there are Orthodox and Catholic churches and cathedrals, mosques and a synagogue all in use today. It's in this cultural diversity – and the music that comes from it – that the charm of Sarajevo lies.

The city's heyday was in the 16th and 17th centuries when, after Istanbul, it was the biggest city in the Balkans with 100 mosques. The beautiful Gazi Husrev-beg and Emperor's mosque, both restored after the Bosnian war, date back to this time. At Sarajevo's heart is the Baščaršija, the old

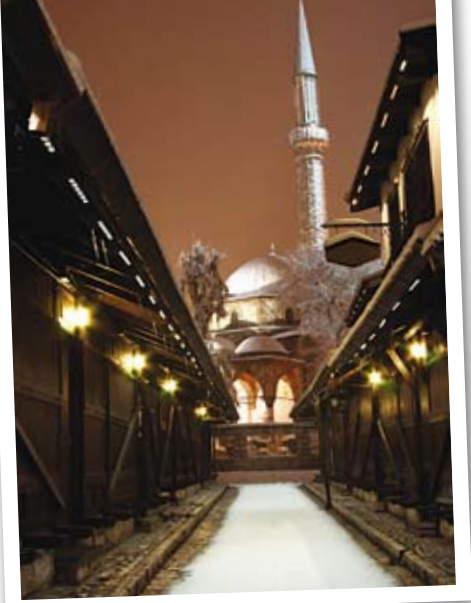
Turkish bazaar with craft shops, coffee houses, bars, restaurants and shopping opportunities. Like the wooden, Ottoman-style fountain at its heart, the Baščaršija is the centre of any visit. Café culture is something that the Oriental world brought to the West.

The quintessential Bosnian musical form is *sevdah* – the (usually) sad love songs made famous in recent years by Mostar Sevdah Reunion and singer Amira Medunjanin. Sevdah comes from Turkish roots – both the name and the music, which is nowadays accompanied by accordion or a small ensemble, but in its traditional form was just voice and Turkish *saz* (pear-shaped stringed instrument). Sarajevo is a place which reflects its history in its music, architecture and ambience. Jewish Sephardic and Muslim Sufi music also has its historical place here. In more contemporary music, Sarajevo was home to Goran Bregović and the hugely popular group Bijelo Dugme (White Button) – the local equivalent to The Beatles or Rolling Stones in 70s Yugoslavia. The city was also host to the Winter Olympics in 1984, after which there was a significant tourist boom,

until the disintegration of Yugoslavia intervened.

Since the Dayton Accords of 1995 and the end of the war, Sarajevo has been rebuilt and restored to become a dynamic cultural city – with internationally recognised film and jazz festivals. Its local musicians include singer Amira, pianist and composer Samir Fejzic, the Damir Imamovic Trio, playing a sort of sevdah jazz, and the Winds of Change (WoC) ensemble, an international group bringing together Balkan, jazz and classical sounds. "What a city!" wrote Ivo Andrić, the Yugoslav writer who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1961, "a city passing away and dying to rise reborn and transfigured." In many ways Sarajevo now has.

Baščaršija, in the heart of Sarajevo, on a winter's night



An evening view over Sarajevo – a laidback and picturesque city, despite its recent associations with war

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VENUES

City Pub

The City Pub is a popular gathering place for people of all ages hosting what it calls the Mala Otvorena Kulturna Scena (Small Open Cultural Scene). As the name suggests, it's a meeting place for cultural events, exhibitions, concerts and performances by artists from all over the world. Performers have included Mostar Sevdah Reunion, Čerkez Karasevdah Band, Tamara Obrovac, Fatima Spar and the Freedom Fries and many others.

**Mala Otvorena Kulturna Scena, Despićeva bb,
71000 Sarajevo, +387 33 209 789,
www.citypub.co.ba**



The City Pub in Sarajevo is a cafe-bar that turns into a popular music venue in the evenings

Sevdah Art House

The Sevdah Art House is located in Baščaršija, in the heart of Sarajevo. Within a multi-media environment, there is an exhibition dedicated to the history of sevdah, plus a performance space, which has seen many of the veteran stars and new names. There are sevdah performances with accompaniment on saz every Thursday evening from Trako Šukrija.

**Halaci br 5, 71000 Sarajevo, +387 33 23 99 43,
www.artkucasevdaha.ba**



The Sevdah Art House – located in Baščaršija – has an exhibition dedicated to sevdah, in addition to its performance space



The 16th century Mostar bridge was symbolically destroyed during the Bosnian war in 1993. It was rebuilt in 2004

FESTIVALS

Jazz Fest Sarajevo

The jazz festival started in 1997 and has grown into the most respected festival in the region. Although it is nominally a jazz festival, there are usually local performers from the region. The 2010 edition was opened by Burhan Öçal, the great Thracian percussionist, with his Trakya All Stars. Other guests included French violinist Didier Lockwood, the John Scofield Trio, flamenco from Gerardo Núñez, and Turkish musician Mercan Dede.

**Prusakova 2; Sarajevo, +387 33 550 480,
www.jazzfest.ba**

Baščaršija Nights

The main summer festival in Sarajevo, organised by the Sarajevo Arts Agency, takes place in July and includes everything from visiting orchestras to local groups. There is usually Bosnian sevdah included in the programme. A central stage is erected opposite the town hall with other stages dotted around the historic centre.

**Čemaluša 1/2, 71000 Sarajevo, +387 33 207 921,
www.sarajevoarts.ba**

Mostar World Music Festival

The small town of Mostar with its magnificent bridge (rebuilt after its destruction in the war) is a two-and-a-half hour road journey from Sarajevo through spectacular scenery. It's well worth a visit in its own right, but it also hosts the Mostar World Music Festival in July, with most of the artists from former Yugoslavia. Some of the concerts are dramatically staged beneath the bridge (pictured above).

Kralja Zvonimira 17, 88000 Mostar, +387/62 156 421, www.worldmusic.ba



Turkish musician Burhan Öçal and The Trakya All Stars opened the 14th Jazz Fest in Sarajevo this year

SUFI MUSIC

Sufi music has existed in Sarajevo since its Ottoman heyday, although being religious music it was 'underground' during the communist period (1946-1990) and only really revived after the war in 1995. The Ensemble Nešidu-i-Huda, founded in 1985, are based at the Tabački Mosque where they hold weekly performances (although, as spiritual occasions, they don't publicly promote them). They sing *ilahija* (songs glorifying God of Turkish origin) and *kasida* (an Arabic form in praise of Mohammed and his companions). These are performed with male voices accompanied by frame drums and *ney* (flute). Nešidu-i-Huda have recorded for the AIMP/VDE Gallo label in Geneva. The choir of the Gazi Husrev Bey Medresa (Islamic school) also perform *ilahija* and *kasida* in the Olympic Hall 'Zetra' during Ramadan.

Tabački Mesdžid, Halaci 9, Sarajevo, www.tabacki.com