



SIMON SAYS...

The first Budapest Ritmo Festival was launched in Hungary this October. **Simon Broughton** pays a visit to the regional showcase

A Hungarian, they say, is someone who gets into a revolving door behind you, but comes out in front. I can see where this reputation comes from after visiting the first Budapest Ritmo festival in the Hungarian capital. Last year Budapest hosted WOMEX, the biggest world music trade fair, and they have capitalised on that to create a regional showcase event for Central Europe and the Balkans. On four stages in the Palace of Arts (MŰPA) there were 28 concerts with artists from 25 countries.

Some of the events could only happen in Budapest. *Songlines* favourites Tarek Abdallah on *oud* and Adel Shams El-Din on brilliantly precise *riqq* (tambourine) were joined for a couple of numbers by *cimbalom* duo Kálmán Balogh and Miklós Lukács. You won't find two such *cimbalom* players anywhere else in Europe and the textures blended superbly together. A packed-out concert featured electric guitarist Miklós Both who has been working with two female choirs from Ukraine. Miklós Both weaved delicate guitar solos over the dense vocal harmony of the ladies in their headscarfs and aprons. It was at times very moving with its references to the Chernobyl disaster.

Last issue's cover star Noura Mint Seymali gave a stunning set, but it was two *capella* groups that made the strongest impression. From Split in Croatia, the group Klapa Reful sing traditional *klapa*, a local singing style that is not percussive as the name perhaps suggests, but deeply sonorous and heartfelt. There are six male voices – think Corsican or Sardinian, but much more harmonious. And Tuuletär are four young Finnish girls named after the goddess of the wind. They describe



Finnish group Tuuletär at the Budapest Ritmo Festival in October

Sara Kerek

their music as 'vocal folk hop' and leader Venla Ilona Blom is an impressive beatboxer, but there are rich vocal harmonies as well as otherworldly breathing and gargling effects. They are talented, original and energetic.

Budapest Ritmo is part of a bigger CAFe Budapest (Contemporary Arts) Festival that ran for two weeks in October. A recurring theme throughout the festival was Hungary's greatest composer Béla Bartók. The copyright on his works ran out this year, which means that musicians no longer need approval from his estate for any arrangements they want to do of his music, so there were new classical, jazz and electronic versions of his works. Budapest Ritmo opened with a show

featuring leading folk musicians playing the source music that inspired some of his classical works. Pieces like the *Romanian Dances*, the *Sonatina for Piano* and the *Rhapsody for Violin and Piano No 1* are all based on folk tunes that Bartók collected and recorded in Transylvania in the early years of the 20th century. So these were juxtaposed with performances by the brilliant *tambura* bands Söndörgő and Vujicsics, the Buda Folk Band, singer Szilvia Bognár and the Ifjú Szívek Dance Theatre from Slovakia. As well as showing the music that inspired the composer, it was a fitting tribute as it's largely thanks to him that there's such a lively folk scene in Hungary today. ♦

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Best albums of 2016 – We select our list of the top ten albums of the year.

George Monbiot – The British writer and political activist puts together a playlist.

Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali – The Pakistani *qawwali* group, led by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's nephews, return to the UK in March.

Ravi Shankar's Sukanya – The late *sitar* maestro's unfinished opera is set to have its world premiere and go on tour in May.

Derek Gripper – The South African guitarist talks about his instrument, prior to his Making Tracks tour in February.

PLUS! Bonus CD – WOMADelaide festival 25th anniversary compilation (right), featuring an array of artists who have performed over the last 25 years.

