

## Report Bratislava November 21 – 23 2008

This was our second trip to Slovakia. Slovakia is bordering Hungary and even the Ukraine. This poor little sister of the Czech Republic (for a long time they were one country with the Czech part dominating the Slovakian part) will – unlike the Czech Republic – switch to the Euro in 2009, but the economy is (still?) much different from Western Europe. At the same time you see many hotels being rebuilt to Western standards (like the one we stayed in), lots of new cars: the apparent signs of Capitalism taking over, hand in hand with the inescapable and continuously widening gap between the new rich and the poor.

Poor former East Block countries that have to do in one or two generation what took Western Europe at least two centuries, while 'we' aren't even experienced and build our fortune on the sand castles of the stock market, a very sophisticated pyramid game, based on faith in the God of Growth. We are happy to walk in the footsteps of Murshid Sam and export from the West our more refined culture and spirituality. It may seem not very a strong antidote, but it's the best we have and it is bound to have some effect.

With organizer Blanka we this time agreed on second thought to have the weekend in the capital Bratislava (bordering Vienna and with Vienna and Budapest one of the Danube Capitals of Europe). The non-residential character made sure the price was affordable. The long journey (over 1,200 km) brought us all the way through Austria, but the rain prevented any spectacular views. We hit Vienna in rush hour and with a wrong turn in traffic jam, even ended up in Vienna.

In Bratislava it started to snow. Winter had arrived, a storm hit Europe. With some luck and directions given we managed to find the hotel and soon met with Blanka.

The way back was idyllic, with Austria fully covered in snow, the storm had died.

It is like a Zen practice: before the weekend driving cars and studying maps, after the weekend driving cars and studying maps, but what a difference!

### **The weekend**

Two weeks before the weekend, Blanka wrote us it might not happen: only ten people. We wrote her back we'd come anyway. She needed support on a personal level and we trusted more people would show up, the weekend being non-residential. A week later Blanka wrote us: 15! We ended up with 25 people, with some 8 or 9 new to the dances.

All in all some 25 people showed up and four who only planned to come on Friday, came back on Sunday. One dancer took on Sunday her two teenage girls with her, as they just *had* to experience what Mom was doing. In her quality time, as she was divorced and the girls were not living with her. They loved it.

*Ya Mumin*, sometimes you just have to trust.

The weekend was one of those occasions where all comes together. It was gentle, light and intense at the same time. Some Friday evening people came back on Sunday and all fitted in beautifully. On a technical level, we ached to work on the movements and steps, but that was not the purpose of this weekend. It was for introducing and experiencing the dances, not for putting all dots and commas in the right place.

With everyone into it, we made long hours, giving the group all we had and could give. Remembering a German friend who just had come out of a serious operation and with Ariëne having a cold from the 20<sup>0</sup> centigrade drop from dancing in sunny Portugal and Spain to snowy Bratislava, we did healing for the Saturday evening, using the third line of the Beatitudes for our danced ritual.



We also had an ear for Blanka's requests and led the *Whichita Dance* and *We circle around*. They proved welcome additions to the theme of boundaries and freedom that, as we knew, was very acute for some participants. A welcome addition to our repertoire

As usual, we created space for talks and questions in between. It is our favorite way to introduce the dances, with lovely dynamics keeping you from becoming stale in the talk or walking too often used lanes and it opens for new perspectives. In this case one couple, working with disabled children, was moved to use the dances in their work.

### What's next?

All wanted more and quickly please. Two women from the eco village Zajezka (in the center of Slovakia, see [www.zajezka.sk](http://www.zajezka.sk)) invited us. After consulting Blanka, we decided to go for it on June 18 – 21 2009. Blanka holds her annual Slovak Camp (a small camp for some 20 – 25 people) over there, which after the first camp resulted in weekly dance sessions in the village. With the first trip being sponsored by INDUP, the second one by Oneness, we felt it now was our turn, so we will sponsor this trip ourselves, trusting we'll find a cheap way to get over there.



After that we'll see. Of course we have plans in the back of our heads, but we know from experience reality is in a different league from plans, as plans are human and the final reality is

from a higher source to which we can only bow and surrender.

### Lessons learned

1. We prefer Austria in the snow above Austria in the rain.
2. Slovakia is very far.
3. Keeping a 'beginner's mind' pays off. Dancing the *Whichita Dance* and *We Circle Around* in these circumstances (see above) showed us there are so many dances that we think we know, but don't really *know* or *befriended*. So many more treasures are waiting for us!
4. Be flexible. For a number of reasons we prefer residential weekends, but as non residential had the best options here, we went for it. We missed the morning practices, but for the rest the whole event had a similar feeling as a residential weekend. And it was relatively easy to pick up the energy each morning and weave new comers into the weekend.
5. Capitalism has its downsides. An obvious lesson that needn't be learned, but every time in Eastern Europe we are amazed to see this so much more clearly than at home, even when recession is taking its toll in the West.
6. Communism has its downsides still too: our hotel had 'social central heating' which means there was no way to regulate or turn of: everyone the same heat. No knobs at all, just like in Russia. Not what you would expect in a hotel though. Too hot? Just open the windows and enjoy the traffic noise!
7. We love to do this. It is so amazing to see new faces at the beginning of the weekend and the changes in the faces after a few dances, let alone after the whole weekend. SAM was a genius.
8. We love to do this together and we're grateful being able to. Hotel rooms can be very lonely and boring in the evening. Apart from the social aspect, there is a lot of work to do on weekends like this. It's good to have four ears and eyes and to have each other as sound board and stimulus.

Wali & Ariënné, December 2008