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FRIDAY

YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE
TO ENTERTAINMENT



The world at hand

Snapshots of Chicago's global music scene

By Doug George
Tribune staff reporter

Here are the stories of three area musicians and their gigs.

Sam Valle of Zamandoque Tarahum at La Justicia

Friday night is rock en Espanol night on 26th Street in Pilsen. It's the end-of-the-work-week, kick-back-with-a-beer-and-listen-to-live-music night.

At La Justicia (3901 W. 26th St.; 773-522-0041), Sam Valle gets the stage ready for action. The drummer of the house band Zamandoque Tarahum, he's also the sound engineer for La Justicia, a spot people in the neighborhood know as a Mexican restaurant and young Latinos around the city know as the place to go for rock en Espanol.

The bands that perform here one after another until close—usually three or four bands each Friday night—play straight-ahead, hard-driving rock 'n' roll with Spanish lyrics.

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Try talking "world music" to Chicago's world musicians—Nicolae Feraru, a Romanian Gypsy who plays cymballon, or the amateur bands that light up Pilsen with rock en Espanol on weekend nights—and you get a similar response.

Their eyes sort of glaze over. Call the music what you want. They just want to talk about *their* music. Where it comes from. Why they play *where* the music is going from here.

Just about every immigrant community and ethnic neighborhood in Chicago has musicians who perform music in smaller venues and as part of music scenes overlooked by the rest of the city.

The Friday section is profiling just a few of them, keeping in mind that a story about world music in Chicago is going to be just as inadequate as the label.



Photo for the Tribune by Yvette Marie Dostalni
Issa Boulos on oud (with Serpil Borazan) at University of Chicago.

Photo for the Tribune by Michael Walker
Romanian gypsy Nicolae Feraru on cymballon at Nelly's.



Photo for the Tribune by Michael Walker
Sam Valle of Zamandoque Tarahum on drums at Metro.

The best eats at O'Hare

If you're heading to O'Hare International Airport anytime soon, chances are you'll have a lot of time on your hands.



Terminal One:
Berghoff Café,
Concourse C.
Hefty carved sandwiches, Berghoff beer and a wood-

PART 1

STAGE

Get me rewrite!

That's what Ron Hutchinson does when he's

WORLD: Musicians play for the love of the music

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They don't get paid much, but that's not the point. There's no cover charge, and almost anyone can get a shot at stage time.

"You don't play here for the money," Valle said. "You play here for the love of the music."

By rock en Espanol standards, Zamandoque Tarahum already has made it big. It's been together for five years, writes its own songs and experiments with using the traditional Mexican sounds of Banda, ranchero and mariachi. It often opens for more famous bands in venues such as House of Blues and Metro.

On a recent Friday evening at Justicia, the first band on the bill is a no-show. The air is thick with smoke and chatter, young Latinos have been piling in the door for an hour, but Valle is unfazed.

"Put in another CD," he barks.

The next band arrives and an hour later the place is in full roar.

Valle uses hand signals to work out sound levels with his assistant and sweats through his T-shirt in an effort to keep the amplifiers from overloading. A dozen or so dancers crowd into a semi-circle around the stage, veering between dancing and a moshing.

Valle was born in 1980 in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and lived there until he was 9. He listened to mostly to the Mexican music that his grandparents favored, but upon moving to Chicago with his parents he got an earful of grunge bands such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam.

He got his formal introduction to music at Curie Metropolitan High School, where he studied classical guitar, and after graduation pulled a few band connections and got a place in Zamandoque Tarahum on drums.

Like the other band's members—and like musicians everywhere—Valle works a day job during the week, studying off and on to be a chef and working as an office temp.

"My dream is to live off the music, but I'm a realist," he said.

Last month Zamandoque opened for the popular Mexican band Victimias Del Doctor Cerebro at a Metro show sponsored by Viva 93.5/103.1 FM radio. The mostly Latino crowd included a few "Northsiders" (as Anglos are known), who by all appearances were tagging along with groups of Spanish friends. A red and green Mexican flag draped over Valle's drum riser served as the stage decoration.

"Viva Mexico!" Zamandoque guitarist David Bustos called into his microphone to warm up the crowd. Half-hearted cheers in response.

"Viva Mexico!" he called again.

The first two songs were loud and fast—all distorted guitars and blaring lyrics. Apart from the words, the music was a sound the inside of the Metro has heard plenty of times before. Then Valle launched into a beat straight out of the music he grew up with—Banda, Bustos said after the show, a Mexican style that gets its beat from polka. The guitars joined in with the same upbeat, "one-two" tempo, and the dancers on the floor switched from moshing to kicking up their heels. It was rock, but with a distinctly Mexican flavor.

"There's a very Latin percussion to their music, it definitely has that kind of rhythm," said Mike Lopez of El Guapo, a Chicago rock band. The members of El Guapo are Latin, but have a Budweiser sponsorship and play to mainstream "Northsider" audiences. To Lopez, Latin music and rock music are two different things.

"Zamandoque is a very good band, I like the music, but it's not something I would consider rock," he said.

Spanish rock bands don't set out to make one song sound like Mexican music, another like Nirvana, Bustos said. Musicians just get their sounds from what they know.

"We can't create just rock 'n' roll," he said. "We have to create with the roots we have."

On one hand, many Zamandoque songs are about being from Mexico—in the sounds and styles that influence them, and with lyrics that tell Mexican or immigrant stories. "They're about corruption, justice," Bustos said. "They



Photo for the Tribune by Yvette Marie Dostatni

A full house listens to the Middle East Music Ensemble at the University of Chicago.

A world of music in one city

Rock en Espanol

La Justicia (3901 W. 26th St.; 773-522-0041): Rock en Espanol music Friday nights. All local groups, including Zamandoque Tarahum.

MECA Music Conference & Festival 2004; at the Underground Lounge (952 W. Newport Ave.; 773-327-2739). Popular Spanish rock band El Guapo performs as part of the citywide music festival at 9 p.m. Friday.

Voodoo Nightclub (601 Mall Drive, Schaumburg; 847-969-1602). Spanish rock is on the bill.

Middle Eastern

"The Greater Mysteries: A Pastiche": 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Rockefeller Memorial Chapel at University of Chicago, 5850 S. Woodlawn Ave.: Giant puppets, music and dance enliven the ancient tale from the cosmic section of Genesis. Performers include Melissa Thodos and Dancers and their choreographer Paul Christiano; the Middle East Music Ensemble, arranged by Issa Boulos; and others.

Issa Boulos with the Chicago Immigrant Orchestra: 3:30 p.m. July 18, Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park.

Romanian, Hungarian and Gypsy

Nelly's Saloon (3256 N. Elston Ave.; 773-588-4494): Live Romanian music Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights; Friday: Bazel Cebzan.

Paprikash Hungarian Restaurant (5210 W. Diversey Ave.; 773-736-4949): Live music on Sunday

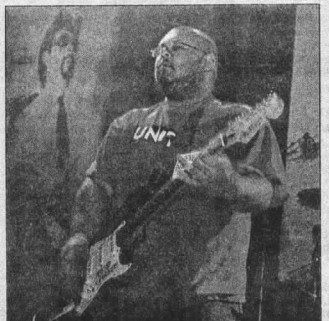


Photo for the Tribune by Michael Walker

David Bustos of Zamandoque Tarahum, which often plays at La Justicia.

nights. See www.paprikashrestaurant.com/calendar.htm for more information.

Continental Cafe (3661 N. Elston Ave.; 773-604-8500): Live Romanian music Thursdays through Sundays, beginning at 8 p.m.; Friday through Sunday; Gypsy music by the band Transylvania.

Chicago SummerDance Festival (Grant Park, Spirit of Music Garden at 601 S. Michigan Ave. 312-742-4007): the Nicolae Feraru Gypsy Orchestra performs at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 12.

take you back. That's what music does."

And on the other, the music is about being an American. The guitars are plugged in. Rock 'n' roll is about revolt.

"We play Spanish rock because we don't want to be our parents," Valle said. "We don't just want to listen to what our parents listened to."

Issa Boulos at University of Chicago

Braving a cold fog, concert-goers streamed into Breasted Hall on the University of Chicago campus on a recent Friday evening, and kept coming—scruffy college students, older, symphony-going types—until every one of the 250-odd seats in the auditorium in the Oriental Institute was taken.

The concert that night was a performance by the university's Middle East Music Ensemble, directed by Issa Boulos. Not a name that screams "sold-out show"—at least not to an audience unfamiliar with Middle Eastern music.

Boulos, a music lecturer at U. of C. as well as a musician and a resident of Hyde Park, is a composer of Arab classical and contemporary music and oud player (the oud is an ancient handheld stringed instrument, the predecessor of the lute).

As much as any musician in Chicago, Boulos most comfortably inhabits the role of "world musician." Musicians from all over the world come to play with him.

Boulos was born in Jerusalem in 1968 and grew up in the West Bank. He had an early love of music, he said, and was forever making up tunes inside his head. His father was a singer and his uncle a noted violinist. He studied music at the Institute of Fine Arts in Ramallah and became the director of several groups by his

West's major and minor keys, only with 300 to choose from.

Under Boulos' direction, the instruments do not overwhelm each other, but follow the path with a single, intricate sound.

His audience—to be sure—was a little on the scholarly side, the sort that might turn out to hear a campus ensemble. But there wasn't a dull, stuffy moment to be heard.

Boulos only performs a few times a year, sometimes with the ensemble, sometimes with his group al-Sharq and sometimes with the Issa Boulos Quartet, that blends Arab music with jazz. A typical Quartet concert turns the music into a series of stories, told around a campfire of candles.

"Some people out there are really seeking to experience music differently," he said, "unlike what they'd hear every day on the radio or in a nightclub."

Nicolae Feraru at Nelly's

Nicolae Feraru has a business card with a photograph of him playing a cymballon, a wooden, table-sized stringed instrument played with thin, delicate hammers. It advertises his services for weddings, birthdays and shows.

Unless you're a part of the Romanian and Hungarian community on the Northwest Side, a neighborhood outlined by its Orthodox and neo-Protestant churches, chances they are not your wedding, birthday or show.

Feraru, a Gypsy by birth, was born in Bucharest and lived in Romania until he was 38. He made his reputation as a cymballon player early, joining his first band at age 9. By the time he was 20, he was playing in the "Ion Vasilescu" Theatre of Bucharest and touring with an orchestra in Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia. He also played with Gheorghe Zamfir, the infamous pan-flute master.

In a few more years he was touring the globe, playing for European audiences in the 1970s, and for Romanian communities in the U.S.

Those were his glory days, and he speaks of them now with a little frustration.

"It's very hard for me now. Nobody understands who I am. I tell them I am Gypsy, a musician, and they think I am a small-time musician."

Feraru currently works in a factory that makes parts for X-ray machines to support himself and his wife. Few outside of his neighborhood have heard him play. He fled Romania for Chicago during a concert tour in 1988 because of increasingly harsh persecution against ethnic Gypsies by the communist government; political asylum for his wife took seven more years.

He currently performs about once a month at Nelly's (3256 N. Elston Ave., 773-588-4494) and the Continental Cafe, both Romanian restaurants, and Paprikash, a Hungarian. Even tastes at those sorts of venues are changing—younger, second-generation Romanians don't want to hear cymballon.

"They don't like Gypsy music, they like electronic music," he said.

But Feraru is far from bitter. With his friends and band mates he is upbeat and gregarious, a natural ringleader. His son, Laurentiu, 24, also knows the cymballon and frequently plays with him.

Last month, he organized a night of Romanian folk music, inviting the whole of the Romanian music community—more than a dozen musicians—to come play with him at Nelly's. It was a sellout crowd of 120 people.

Seated on stage, dressed in a suit and tie, Feraru and his cymballon led an ever-changing cast of musicians through folk songs and eastern European music. Hearts-on-sleeves ballads. Rousing waltzes. Songs that had the room singing along in Romanian.

An accordion usually leads such an orchestra, audience member Carol Olteanu of Skokie volunteered. "Nico" was leading tonight because he's Nico. Olteanu, also from Romania, has listened to his music for years.

"When I hear his music, it takes me back to Romania," he said. "It reminds me this is my life, that it was my past life."

Olteanu and his tablemate then launched into a debate of which of the two accordianists on stage was better.

Feraru works his hammers over the strings of the cymballon. Each lightning-fast strike brought a ringing note not unlike the sound of a harpsichord. His brow shined with sweat but his face showed no effort, as he stared into the middle distance or smiled up at his audience.

"Sometimes when I'm on stage I forget I'm a worker," he said. "I think I'm a musician."