

Cultural affairs to remember

After the hype of the European Culture Capital in 2010, you would think Istanbul would take a cultural breather. When **Casey Marriot** sits down to chat with the people who officially have their fingers on the cultural pulse of the city - the international Cultural Attachés of Istanbul - it becomes apparent that the arts scene is still feeling the tingle of last year's energy. The lasting high is pushing a new cultural agenda, which promises Istanbul a jam-packed year of artistic spirit ahead.

Kimberly Scriver

Cultural Attaché at the U.S. Consulate General

Spectacle How long have you been with the foreign service?

This is actually my first appointment. I only began last year in Washington D.C. with the U.S. foreign service. I was with 100 other new foreign officers at the time, as we all were given our first posts. I got my first choice, so I was very lucky. I had come 2 years before and fell in love with Istanbul.

What do you focus on in your work?

We're really focused on the cultural side of public affairs. One aspect is exchanges between Turkish and American youth and scholars, mostly high school and university students. The study program focuses on entrepreneurship. We've sent some 40 Turkish high school students to the U.S. for one academic year. Our Nestlé Program for U.S. students also brought two

groups of 20 students to Turkey. There's been a rise of Americans wanting to come to Turkey to study and learn the language, so the U.S. have started new youth initiative programs that are fully funded.

What do you hope to achieve in Istanbul?

We hope to educate Americans, particularly youth, about Turkey. Turkey is very significant for its imprints, as it's an important region between Europe and the Middle East. We want to encourage U.S. youth to learn foreign languages and have a more global outlook to understand that the world extends beyond the U.S. borders.

What other projects have you been busy with over the last year?

We are bringing U.S. artists, musicians, speakers and experts to Istanbul so that Turks can see and experience U.S. culture. For

example, we organised [an event that had the] Chicago Trio perform classic American jazz blues in the Esenler Municipality Culture Centre for 6 different high school groups. It was great to see their enthusiasm for this distinct American culture as they clapped and cheered. Last year, we also brought well-known ethnomusicologist Robert Garfias, who is a specialist in Ottoman music. He gave speeches on how Ottoman music influenced American music, for example, how marching bands came from the Ottomans. We also organized a performance in a Byzantine archaeological site in Küçüyalı, Maltepe. We brought the Yale University women's *a capella* group Whim'N' rhythm to perform American popular classics to a crowd of about 200. It was a free performance in the ruins of an old church, so all the neighbours came out to enjoy this memorable setting.

What are your goals for the near future?

We want to reach different audiences, so we're trying to come up with new and unique ideas. We have African-American culinary artist Rachel Finn coming to present workshops on American southern food to culinary schools from March 2-4, as well as presenting a television show. We're also bringing hip-hop artist Gina Loring,



What do you love about Istanbul?

I enjoy walking around neighbourhoods and finding new cafés. I spent the first several weekends in Sultanahmet's alleys discovering new cafés, especially in the sunken gardens in Süleymaniye. Everywhere you turn, there is a beautiful mosaic or tile. After growing up in Las Vegas, with its very different kind of 'almost-fake lifestyle,' I find it amazing to find hundreds, if not thousands, of years of history on every street. There's real beauty everywhere.

want to fit in with Western culture and literature, but I guess they don't really want to fit in with the East, either. So they're very distinct and take pride in their own style. I think that's why the rest of the world looks to Istanbul as this kind of icon. It was the beginning of Western cultures, in some sense; now it has a distinct individuality. This is the

destination where U.S. artists and musicians want to come. They see the value of Istanbul and the culture

Your favourite hobbies?

Going on new walks and discovering new areas. I often come across beautiful parks and interesting cemeteries. I know that sounds odd, but encountering a random cemetery is just a really historical and touching aspect of [Turkish] history



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that is hidden away. Sultanahmet's historical art stands on its own, but I also love to get a baked potato and a waffle in Ortaköy and just sit with other Turkish families. You do what the Turks do, you fall into the habit when you're here.

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enthusiasm for the youth, and the value of family and friendship. They are very sincere and I'd hope to say that Americans, in general, are the same way

What are the obstacles you face in your job?

In general, I've found [Turks] very open to us coming into their world and sharing it with them. Like in Esenler, I introduced the group in Turkish, which caused the students to erupt in cheers. They were so excited that someone was trying to speak their language; they've been incredibly positive.

How would you describe the Turkish art scene?

Turkish culture, literature and art are distinct. I think [Turks] value that they don't necessarily

who will present workshops culminating in a public performance from March 17-20. We sponsor a visual art exhibition called 'Paradise Lost' at Istanbul Modern. It will feature 7 American artists, among other international artists, from March 23 to July 24.

What are your initiatives as the U.S. cultural attaché?

The key phrase is 'people-to-people interaction.' I want people to see how we really are, whether through exchange or just watching an artist. I think overall perception can improve if [Turks] can see an American and hear our experiences first-hand.

Do you see any similarities between U.S. and Turkish culture?

They love family and children. You see their