

Meeting Point Berlin

Hundreds of Fulbrighters gathered in Germany's creative capital to attend the 53rd Annual Fulbright Berlin Seminar



What do klezmer reggae in Berlin and making furniture from fishing poles have in common? These were just some of the topics covered at the 53rd Annual Fulbright Berlin Seminar this past March. More than 300 American Fulbright professors, teachers, teaching assistants and young journalists gathered for three days to exchange ideas and experiences, participate in workshops and explore the capital city.

Among those present was Katherine Wilson, currently a Fulbright fellow in Finland, who gave a presentation on rustic furniture. That's right, rustic furniture. She explained, "Rustic furniture is made using natural materials such as sticks, branches, trees, logs, bark, roots, etc." She added that rustic furniture makers are people who "take their natural materials and build a new object which retains some of the original character of the tree, but also embodies something of the character of the builder." Having visited Berlin during her college days, Katherine was excited to return ten years later as a trained architect. She became intensely aware of the many wonderful buildings and public spaces designed and built in the intervening years.

She feels Berlin provides a fascinating mix of contemporary architecture alongside historical landmarks, and enjoyed exploring the different neighborhoods in the company of local Berliners. "I spent an entire afternoon walking around Prenzlauer Berg, visiting the markets and learning about the lively community," said Katherine.

And the Prenzlauer Berg is just one of the many places in Berlin, where you can hear the sound of klezmer music. "Many people feel Berlin is the klezmer capital of the world, and just about every week you can catch a live concert somewhere in the city," said Rachel Weiss, a Fulbright fellow currently living in Berlin, who delivered a presentation on the Berlin klezmer scene. She is exploring the range of the klezmer since its evolution started in Europe during the 1970s. During her presentation on klezmer, she noted that many people have the misconception that it is appreciated by only Jewish audiences. Rachel explained, however, that not only is the majority of klezmer music today played by non-Jews, but fusion music such as punk, hard core and even reggae klezmer were also gaining in popularity.

The seminar was, however, not all work and no play. Social events were planned, including a music gala that featured Fulbright musicians. The seminar was a great chance for people to discover, and for some to rediscover, the dynamic city of Berlin. A klezmer concert anyone?

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