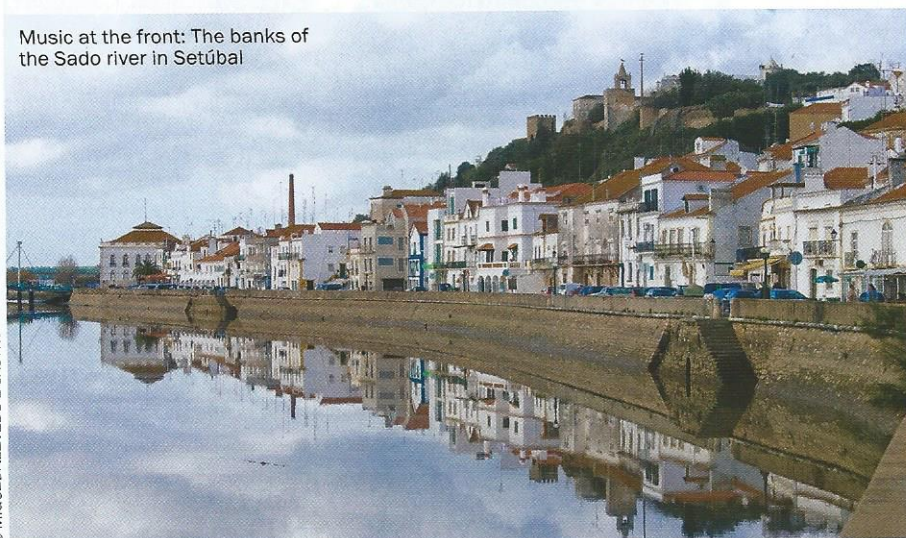


# DRUMMING UP TOURISM

Can you regenerate a town with music? In a sun-kissed corner of Portugal they are trying to find out. Keith Clarke reports

Music at the front: The banks of the Sado river in Setúbal



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If you are trying to put a town back on its feet in a country that is virtually bankrupt, starting a music festival is probably not top of the list of priorities. But Maria das Dores Meira, the communist mayor of Setúbal in Portugal, is one of those rare people who do not just pay lip service to the power of music to transform society – she wants to see it in action. While the country was negotiating a €78bn rescue programme, the mayor made a simple request: she wanted a strategy for the regeneration of the town based on music.

Cue Ian Ritchie. He was director of the City of London Festival from 2005 until last year. His 2010 festival celebrated music and culture from the Portuguese-speaking world, and in its audiences was the philanthropist Lady Helen Hamlyn. She has a particular interest in Portugal and when she was introduced to the mayor of Setúbal and heard of her plan she suggested that Ritchie should fly out and talk about the feasibility of a festival.

If the locals imagined that Ritchie was going to offer an off-the-shelf event that would magically transform the town's fortunes, they were in for a surprise. Instead, he turned up with questions rather than answers, then set about creating something that would meet their needs and be sustainable. 'I didn't want to produce a fireworks display,' he says. 'They are bright events that come and go, then it goes dark and pretty cold. What we wanted was something that could be ignited and burn throughout the year and meet a point of celebration with the festival.'

At his request, he was introduced to the heads of various education and cultural institutions, social inclusion specialists, the department of youth and leading lights of the immigrant associations.

'What the immigrant associations wanted to do was develop rhythmic skills and do drumming, so I thought ok, let's have a whole programme of drumming workshops leading up to the festival and open the festival with a great parade of young

people doing their drumming through the streets.' But we have no instruments, said the locals. No problem, said Ritchie, we'll make everything from recycled materials.

That was how the Setúbal Festival was launched with a bang in 2011. And also with a song: Ritchie spent a few weeks finding the right workshop leaders then launched a song writing project with primary schools. 'We had 300 children writing their songs, a wonderful group of young people with special needs who created their own song cycle set to a local poet. Meanwhile several hundred young people had taken up the drumming workshop. Within a couple of years we had 1,000 of them.'

Ritchie's approach swiftly won support. 'There were institutions within the city which were perhaps anxious of what might be expected of them, keeping themselves to themselves, not tending to collaborate, so we approached it in a spirit of openness and just asked people what they wanted to do. It started the right way.'

'Also crucial was that while building it from the ground up we would come up with some inspirational work from the top



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down, getting great artists to give inspiring performances.' That is not easy on a budget of just €50,000 (£42,000), but Ritchie attracted some of Portugal's leading musicians, who had taken part in the 2010 City of London Festival, along with UK-based artists including Patricia Rozario.

For 2014 the theme is the sea. In just four days from 29 May to 1 June a dozen or so events kick off with a return visit from the London-based

Grand finale: Pedro Carneiro and the Orquestra de Câmara Portuguesa



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Grand Union Orchestra with a new show, connecting different Portuguese and world cultures through the common language of music. After the percussion parade, music in the streets and on the river, chamber, choral and orchestral concerts, Pedro Carneiro brings the festival to a close conducting the Orquestra de Câmara Portuguesa with rising Portuguese opera star soprano Susana Gaspar in a sea-inspired programme by Beethoven, Berlioz, Haydn, Mendelssohn and Mozart.

Ian Ritchie likens the creation of the festival to building a pyramid. 'So far we've built the bottom layer – 1,000 or so kids doing drumming and 300 now doing song writing. The next layer is cementing itself together as different groups are increasingly collaborating.'

The third level is the establishment of a new youth ensemble, with support from the Gulbenkian Foundation. And then? 'The final missing piece, the capstone, would be to get the resources to have at least a semi-permanent associated professional presence of an orchestra which would then be able to ensure that the trickle-down effect wasn't just happening at festival time but all the time. When we see that come to pass we'll have achieved what we set out to do. Setúbal can then see

All together: Grand Union Orchestra with local students



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itself well placed with a vision as a city of music as it redevelops all its buildings and regains its economic vibrancy with more people visiting.'

This last aspect is important, as Setúbal, 30km from Lisbon (and birthplace of Chelsea FC manager José Mourinho) is keen to develop tourism. With wonderful fish, fine wine, beaches and sunshine, it should not be too much of a struggle. If

the festival plays its part in that process, the mayor and the local leaders will be well pleased. But there is a sure sense that whatever the long-term gain, the enrichment of local people's lives has been clearly evident from the start and is seen as a real and lasting legacy. **CM**

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