

[Live \(/live/\)](#) / [Live reviews \(/live/live-reviews/\)](#) / [25th Istanbul Jazz Festival review](#)

10 JULY 2018

25TH ISTANBUL JAZZ FESTIVAL REVIEW

By [Charlotte Algar \(/authors/charlotte-algar/\)](#)

In its 25th year, the festival has gone from strength to strength, bringing together the brightest Turkish talent and sourcing quality acts from across the globe.



Erkan Ogur tuning his cura saz @Kalan

25th Istanbul Jazz Festival,

June 26-July 17

This year's Istanbul Jazz Festival was brim-full with varied and accomplished performers. From the Erkan Ogur Quartet, headed by the *saz* player and master of fretless classical guitar (pictured above), to rapper Ozoyo, there really was something for everyone. Despite being branded as a jazz festival, the programme was populated with world musicians, indie-pop groups, rappers, and rock'n'roll groups, spread across an equally eclectic array of venues. I found myself tucked into quaint bars and jostling clubs, in ancient churches and fancy concert halls – all within a short walk or taxi ride of

each other. Most of the venues were in and around Kadıköy, on the eastern side of the Bosphorus, which is a picturesque area with a surprisingly prominent feline population and amazing food. There's even a street food market near the festival's outdoor stage.

The array of venues included some gems, with the Istanbul skyline and the Bosphorus providing a backdrop to the festivities. Moda Kayikhane has a tranquil *al fresco* café and bar area looking out over the Marmara sea and, behind a deceptively mundane set of doors, a spacious concert venue with impeccable sound and an upstairs viewing gallery. The festival also brought me to the Moda Sahnesi, a theatre and cinema complex with a fully functioning club in the basement, and KargArt, a quaint, old-fashioned bar spread over four floors, with a music venue right at the very top – this incentive is definitely required to encourage visitors up the numerous flights of stairs.

Particular musical highlights this year included Ta-Ki-Dum, an *oud*, bass and percussion ensemble, who performed at Moda Kayikhane. Their humorous on-stage banter made it clear that they're obviously the best of friends. The performance had an unrehearsed haphazardness to it, but this only added to the energy with which they powered through a plethora of musical styles, with influences from the Jewish, Indian and of course Turkish music apparent in their repertoire. Rapid scalic passages played in impressively speedy unison defined sections of pieces. Solos were passed around, each musician demonstrating their skill on instruments including, but not limited to, oud, fretless bass guitar and *dumbek*.

Islandman performed in the club basement of Moda Sahnesi. Their drummer, standing amid a crowded set up of frame drums, spiral cymbals and pads, provided grooves that slowly transformed to complement the synth and electric guitar-led melodies of his bandmates. Vocals also entered the melee, looped and mixed on-stage by Tolga Buyuk, whose solo project sparked the creation of the band. World-beat samples and brand-new creations, improvised live on the night, delighted a diverse audience of varying age groups, a rare sight in a club-like setting.

Dub Again's performance at KargArt was humid and close, completely fitting with the musical style. Due to the altitude of the venue, no evidence of the gig could be heard on the street, but the crunchy bubble and skank was all-encompassing once I took my place in the crowd about three feet from the band. The group take pride in remaining authentic and respecting the roots of dub, and they certainly deliver a nostalgic sound. The no-nonsense drummer smashed out characteristically lilting patterns, while bass, guitar and carefully placed toasting samples warbled contentedly underneath.

Throughout my time at the festival, it struck me how thoughtfully the artists had been paired with their venues. This might seem a small detail, but each gig had an authenticity about it that made you feel that the music belonged then and there, and had

not been fleetingly borrowed from different parts of Turkey, or the world. The programme had been created such that artists of the same genre did not coincide, to allow specific jazz, world, or other sorts of fans to avoid missing acts they'd be interested in. The festival even offered a special *vitrin* (meaning 'showcase' in Turkish) where some of the festival's most promising acts played for a collection of music industry buffs. The festival clearly aims to raise the profile of jazz in Turkey, and this creation of new opportunities allows the festival a lasting effect on the local scene.

There was a palpable buzz on the streets surrounding the festival venues – from students to families – coming to enjoy the music. With such a packed programme and a fascinating city to explore, it's lucky the bars in Istanbul open late!