

MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

INSPIRING TALES FROM THE COAST

Setúbal: Portugal

On Portugal's Atlantic shore, a colourful new festival has taken shape that celebrates its host city's heritage and many charms to the full, as *Jeremy Pound* discovers

'Hmmm,' ponders Ian Ritchie as we admire an impressive sea bass. 'Maybe we could do a fish-ival?' Ritchie is one of those engaging types whose creative cogs never stop whirring – which, given his role of artistic director of the Setúbal Music Festival, is no bad thing. We're discussing ideas for future themes for the festival and on this occasion, it's our soon-to-be-dinner that has sparked his imagination. But, as any visitor to this coastal city about half an hour's drive south of Lisbon will soon discover, sources of thematic inspiration are not exactly in short supply round here.

There's the location itself, for instance – Setúbal Bay is one of UNESCO's 'Most

Beautiful Bays in the World'. And resident in that bay are the dolphins that draw visitors from afar, as does the wildlife of the nearby Arrábida natural park. The fishing industry that netted our sea-bass friend continues to flourish here; likewise the wine-makers whose produce accompanied its final hour. And on a sporting front, the Avenida, or Avenue José Mourinho tells us where football's most charismatic manager was born and raised.

Conversely, culture has been on slow burn here in recent years, with Portugal's faltering

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economy hardly helping matters. But that's where the Setúbal Music Festival aims to do its bit. Now three years old, the festival seeks to bring together world-class musicians and local performers, young and old, over a long weekend in late May. So during my visit, the entertainment ranges from a recital by acclaimed pianist Artur Pizarro to a lively Percussion Parade through the streets by hundreds of school children equipped with all manner of drums, from smart pieces of professional kit to home-adapted paint pots.

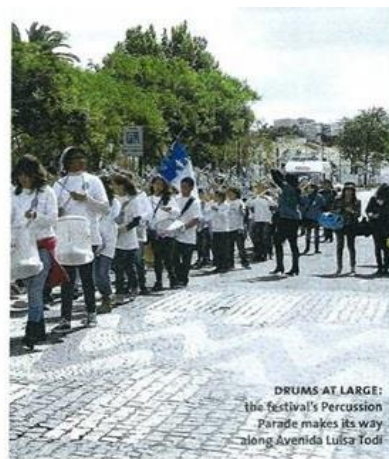
As Ritchie later explains, getting everyone involved is at the core of the venture. 'One of the things the festival is here to do is to generate hopes and aspirations, and prepare the ground for artistic activity throughout the rest of the year. If such activity is going to take proper root, it is not going to survive if



DRUMS AT LARGE: the festival's Percussion Parade makes its way along Avenida Luisa Todi



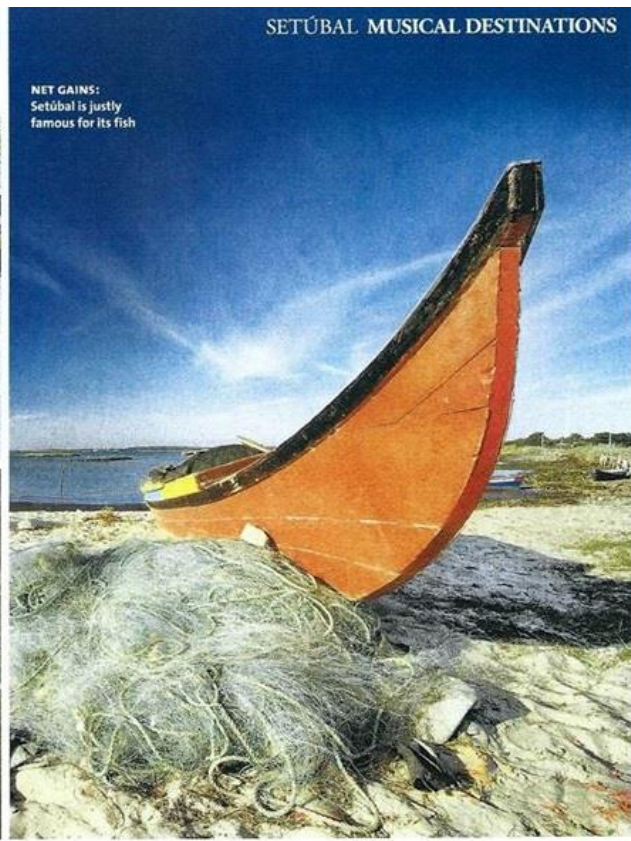
DOLPHIN STREET: a seafront tribute to Setúbal's much-loved maritime residents



DRUMS AT LARGE: the festival's Percussion Parade makes its way along Avenida Luisa Todi



MINE'S A MOSCATEL: the Fonseca winery celebrates its history



SETÚBAL MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

NET GAINS: Setúbal is justly famous for its fish

LOCAL HERO

Luísa Todi



Arguably Portugal's finest ever opera singer, the mezzo-soprano Luísa Todi was born in Setúbal in 1753. After marrying at 16, her husband suggested she take singing lessons, and a glittering career soon followed. That career was largely pursued abroad, firstly in Paris, where she was a star of the French capital's famous Concerts Spirituels, and later in Russia, where she was a personal favourite of Empress Catherine the Great. For all her success overseas, her talent was never fully appreciated in Portugal itself during her lifetime. Today, at least, a monument to her can be found on Setúbal's central Avenida Luisa Todi.

it's based upon the sort of one-off visits that characterise a lot of festivals. If relationships can be struck between professional artists and the local community, that gives you a basis to establish something longer term.'

Part of building such relationships means consulting local people – community leaders, teachers and the like – about what they'd like to see in each year's event. It's a collaborative effort. It also involves helping children make music throughout the year, not least through the purchase of instruments with funds from the Helen Hamlyn Trust. What those children learn, they then get to display at the festival itself. Simple really, but very effective.

A recent boost for the festival, meanwhile, has been the refurbishment and re-opening of the town's main theatre, the Fórum Municipal Luísa Todi, providing a central hub and a suitable stage for larger-scale events. That said, its absence in the Festival's

first two years was by no means disastrous, as Ritchie has an eye for attractive, and sometimes unusual, venues in and out of town. Setúbal's beautiful Baroque churches are ideal for choral music, for instance, and other eye-catching options are aplenty – as I discover when we head out to the Quinta da Bacalhóa estate where we enjoy Bach and Villa-Lobos surrounded by rolling vineyards.

But back to those themes, which are there to provide both a thread through each year's programme and also a creative stimulus to the Festival's participants, not least the hundreds of children who have been inspired to write songs for each year's events. For the first Setúbal Festival in 2011, Ritchie went for 'Nature', in 2012 it was 'Visitors', and for 2013 'Communication' got the nod. As for 2014, a theme of the sea and all who live and work in it is on the cards. That 'fish-ival' pun is not so far from the truth... ■

SETÚBAL 4 MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Setúbal Music Festival
In 2014, the Festival will run from Thursday 29 May to Sunday 1 June. Exact details of the programme have yet to be finalised, but there will be an overall theme of 'The Sea'.
festivalmusicadesetubal.co.pt

Casa da Cultura
Setúbal is rightly proud of this smart new cultural venue, situated just off the Plaza del ayuntamiento. While visual arts occupy the ground floor and feature regular displays, upstairs you'll find a range of performing areas, teaching rooms and even a recording studio, aimed at encouraging and developing young talent. Well worth a visit.
mun-setubal.pt/pt/dossier/casa-da-cultura



Gulbenkian Orchestra
With Lisbon just 30 minutes or so away, attending a concert by Portugal's highest-profile orchestra is an easy trip. The Gulbenkian, which has named Paul McCreesh (left) as its new principal conductor, has a regular concert season at the Grande Auditório Gulbenkian, a venue that also stages opera, chamber, choral and jazz events.
musica.gulbenkian.pt

Orquestra de Câmara Portuguesa
Also based in Lisbon, this young chamber orchestra impressed with its performance of Beethoven and Portuguese composer Bontempo at the 2013 Setúbal Music Festival. It plays regularly at various venues in the capital and beyond.
ocp.org.pt