

EXOTIC SESSION LOCATIONS, chapter 1

Zouki's far-flung network of Irish trad players have reported being present at some pretty weird sessions recently. Here's a sample!

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Location: Gyonggnyongg, Outer Mongolia

Time: Sundays 8 - 12 p.m. (depending on departure schedule of last yak caravan to the suburbs, which in turn depends on desires of the alpha yak either to hang around or to get his bony behind in gear)

Place: Rosie O'Grady's Irish Yurt, 29 G'yonkma'a Avenue; phone 267

Food: dinner served, primarily local specialties like pickled bat dung and broiled filet of mu'lunggyun'g (don't ask). Lots of white grains on your plate - if they don't move, they're rice.

Craic: New session working its way slowly in the direction of greatness. Since local instruments cannot reproduce Western scales with any degree of accuracy, even the chestnuts are barely recognizable. No truth to the rumor that a local temple has recently installed an altar to Joanie Madden (known locally as "Joanie Madden") to promote the intervention of Superior Beings in their ITM attempts. Because O'Neill's 1850 has a yellow cover, locals consider it an unlucky book that must be read upside down to avoid getting into serious trouble with demons. Results for the music can only be imagined, but keeping a sense of humor is always a good idea.

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Location: Plokhizhiznya, Siberia

Time: Mondays sunset to midnight, except when there is no sunset or midnight, then 8 p.m. to 12 p.m.

Place: Rosya O Gradyskaya Pub, 34 Ulitsa Kommisarskaya; phone 617755

Food: Bring your own; they'll heat it up in the pub microwave for a small fee (payable in dollars). Warning: don't stand too close to the machine when they turn it on. Expect to share with the pub staff (including the "security men").

Craic: varies in quality depending on which brand of locally-distilled vodka is being "promoted" by the pub that night. Some really good players turn up from time to time but are usually taken away for questioning by the local FSU (formerly KGB) unit (which still hasn't heard anything from Moscow about the "end of the Cold War"). Chestnuts prevail, mixed in with a few Danu/Lunasa/Dervish gems, some gypsy ballads, and local old favorites like "My Love Is In the Gulag" and "When Suspect Is It Interrogation You Want?" Lots of crying toward the end of the night; suicides have been reported (sometimes involving out-of-towners). Clinical depression is a way of life up here but at least they're trying.

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Location: Wickeltafel, Switzerland

Time: Tuesdays 7 to 10 p.m. Time subject to change depending on local goat-milking requirements.

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Place: Rosie O Grady's Alpenhostel, 67 MarcRich Strasse; phone 8900201

Food: Plenty, all very fattening. One pastry contains more calories than all of sub-Saharan Africa sees in a week. Local beers and wines are excellent. Waitresses are gorgeous and can tell you to "fudge off" in seven languages if you try to touch any part of their bodies.

Craic: usual session contingent consists of seven or eight musicians, however number dwindles considerably if word gets around that Rudi from over in the next valley is intending to show up with his krummhorn. Repertoire is pretty well-rounded, although as beer/liquor consumption increases, local versions of chestnuts become more bizarre (e.g., "Boys of Blue Hill" in six different keys - simultaneously). Locally-manufactured accordions - which also serve as avalanche starters when they have to - have a tendency to increase in volume as the night wears on. A krummhorn - accordion duet on "Boys of Ballisodare" is not something anyone would forget in a big hurry. Lederhosen optional. The blonde fiddler with the violet eyes is married and is an expert at Taekwando. Be warned.

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City - La Paz, Bolivia

There's a neat pub called "The Coca Leaf and the Shamrock" in the Irish neighborhood of La Paz (highest capital city in the world, says Wikipedia). Supposedly there's a session there every third moon phase. Our correspondent attended twice and said the first time it consisted of chewing stuff (tasted like spinach, otherwise unidentified) while listening to Frankie Gavin tapes played at

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double speed. This was followed by an hour or so of nose-flute tootling accompanied by slow mournful drumming. My friend said he thought he heard "The Butterfly" but he isn't sure.

Next time he went, same drill except the headliner was Kevin Burke played at half-speed. Our friend didn't go back once he found out that the locals expected a shot of fermented llama pee mixed in with their Guinness.

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