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When setting off for my Burch

Fellowship summer, I decided to take a hint from the other Burch Fellows. Every speech and conversation I had reassured me that nothing about my trip would go according to plan. I set off for a European summer with a long list of conflicting festival dates and a willingness to go anywhere.

My plans diverged immediately when I heard about a theater group working in Croatia that peaked my interest. They were using radical theater techniques that I had studied and taught at UNC to talk about issues of queer youth in the Balkans.

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FESTOONING: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF QUEER FESTIVALS IN EUROPE

My next stop was Ljubljana, Slovenia. I found myself in a huge army bunker turned autonomous art space where we met our new friends as they were busily painting signs for the pride parade that weekend.



I got all dressed up and shared my glitter with the crowd and celebrated in spite of bad news from the night before. Two days before the pride parade, fascists had attacked one of the parades' organizing meetings at the local queer cafe. They smashed the windows of 'Café Open' and left one of the organizers with a fairly severe head injury. After the wonderful performances of the parade we gathered at the café under a sign that read "Samo Se bolj open" Now we're just more open. It was decided that now with a 24-hour police guard we needed to take our space back. Since I am after all, a performer, I stepped up to perform a drag musical to entertain the crowd. The weeks worth of events got the queers of Ljubljana back in their space and our show was a hit.

I then headed to the Performance Studies International Conference in Zagreb for the scholarly part of the trip. After lots of scholarly discussion, I tracked down a group called "Queer Beograd"

in Belgrade, Serbia. Their work on queer organizing in a highly restrictive environment is legendary. I got to interview them about their conference and learned a lot about the way they organize despite great adversity. They have been able to strategically use the word queer to organize under the radar because most people in Serbia are familiar with the word "gay" but have no context for "queer."

It was finally time to leave the Balkans behind and I took a train away from the gorgeous vistas and the best food I've ever had and headed for Berlin. I attended the Lady Fest and went to numerous workshops and performances around the city before heading up to Copenhagen.



The Copenhagen Queerfest was a great high note on which to end my Burch Fellowship summer. All I knew about the festival before hand was a date and a place and it was a great surprise. I got off a bus from the train station and followed big arrows drawn in chalk to a clown school that houses the festival during their summer break. The festival consisted of a week of workshops, performances and meeting amazing people from all over the world. One of the highlights was teaching dance classes, which were so popular that I

had to teach three of them. I also enjoyed interviewing queers from Finland to Australia and made some great friends.

After returning to the US, I put my interviews into my final thesis show "Hard as Diamonds". The show



was a political exploration of queer performance and representations of femininity and was full of images from my experiences in Europe. My favorite was the lime green upright piano that stood in for the lime green grand piano in the ballroom of the clown school in Copenhagen. I will be singing songs on this piano again when I return to Copenhagen and Berlin this summer to follow up with the people I met and perform parts of my performance back for them. It was an unplanned whirlwind and I am deeply grateful for the chance to follow my heart around the world and meet all the amazing people who will surely inspire me my whole life.

