

Emese Toth

College

Cuyahoga Community College

Lessons of the Red, White, and Blue

The clack of ladles and sizzle of paprika and onions dance in the air. These sounds bounce off the kitchen walls, in harmony with the thunder of my mother's laugh as she recounts stories of old. The world those stories grew from, of backs bent learning Russian in school and the illicit taste of American-imported chocolate, is not the one I was familiar with. And yet, it also cooked inside that pot, stirred gingerly.

This world clashed with my own, imprinting itself in my name: Emese. Eh-meh-sheh, its sounds unfamiliar to the shaved tongue. Welcome inside my home, it labeled me as a stranger outside of it.

Sounds have always sprung off of me - from the snickering towards my accent to the whisper of tension felt by my family inhabiting a world different from the dream that was sold to them. A tension that hasn't ceased.

And yet, outside of our house, the sway of multi-layered skirts and soaring folk songs called. Along with learning the movements of my heritage, I also made the sounds that composed them. The clap of feet in the *csárdás* dance and rising notes relaying the Danube's breeze provided a new mode of communication. With every step, what was a ridge slowly became a bridge.

On the Lorain International Festival and Palace stage, not only a synthesis of cultural identity happened, but sharing. My worlds, battling for dominance, become one.

I still find myself lost in the wider macrocosm of America, and my generation is not alone. The brag of the old heart rings, and is ever more pressing; we have to involve ourselves to make differences that are wide-reaching.

We are a collective, and our stories will be told - one dance, one song, and one bowl at a time.