

## Trading places: Boston, Paris teens experience others' culture via arts exchange program

By Tenley Woodman

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Paris and Boston may be thousands of miles apart, but the Cloud Place on Boylston Street works to bring them closer.

The teen theater troupe Les Bergers from Ivry-sur-Seine, a small city on the outskirts of Paris, visited Boston last week thanks to Cloud Place's cross-cultural exchange program.

Each summer a group of young artists from Boston visits Nuage, the Cloud Place's sister program in Paris, to meet French peers and participate in workshops. In the fall, their French counterparts visit Boston.

For the teen thespians in Les Bergers, the visit marked the first time any of them had been to the United States.

"The buildings are similar to home," said Fehiti Benqueddach, 17. "And the cobblestone streets."

"And H&M," said Linda Belkadi, 18.

Belkadi, who thought Americans would dress differently, said she was surprised to see the styles were the same.

With the political disputes between America and France, the students anticipated a cold reception.

"They've been very sweet," Benqueddach said about Bostonians.

During their weeklong visit, troupe members visited with students at Boston Arts Academy and Josiah Quincy School.

"The school is fantastic," said Mumou Traorefemale, 18, about the visit to the arts academy. "It is great they have lockers. They call their teachers by their first names. They were very welcoming."

"When we went to Boston Arts Academy, we (Les Bergers and the American students) didn't understand each other," Benqueddach said. "But we hit it off. We felt like friends."

As for Josiah Quincy School, the students said it looked like American schools on TV.

"There was a chemistry with teachers and students that is different from Ivry," Benqueddach said.

Though none of the Ivry students are fluent in English, the troupe prepared a 20-minute, English language skit for Cloud Place's annual Fall Open House.

The piece reflected the French students' perceptions of Boston before their visit and how those ideas changed once they arrived.

"Now that I've seen Boston I have another point of view from the stereotypes on TV," Benqueddach said.



Farida Amied and Maryne Chantreau.  
(Staff Photo by Mark Garfinkel)