Acclaimed musician Jeffrey Werbock presented a program of instrumental solo improvisations based on traditional Azerbaijani mugham, played on a variety of authentic instruments, at two Urbana elementary schools and the University of Illinois. Mr. Werbock has given presentations for more than 30 years and has performed at Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History, Asia Society, and World Music Institute. The Robert E. Brown Center for World Music and the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center co-sponsored his visit. On Tuesday, April 21, Mr. Werbock visited Wiley Elementary School and the after-school program at Leal Elementary School. On Wednesday, April 22, he visited Prof. Bridget Sweet’s MUS 240 (Orientation to Music Teaching and Learning, Kindergarten-High School) course and Dr. Lillie Gordon’s MUS 133 (Introduction to World Music) lecture. He also gave a public performance in the Music Building Auditorium on the University of Illinois campus.

For each of the four classroom presentations, Mr. Werbock performed Azerbaijani mugham on ud, tar and kemancha. He started each session by describing how the music was related to a standard musical scale. However, he noted that in this type of music, part of the art was suspending the resolution of the octave with melodic ornamentation. He provided geographical maps for the elementary students and enjoyed the variety of insightful questions they offered. Mr. Werbock favorably compared his experience with the elementary school children here with his experience at home in a message after his visit: “The kids in the grade schools [in Urbana] spoiled me; now I expect everyone to ask many questions with burning enthusiasm. The Lindenwood crowd was nice, but getting questions out of them was more a chore than anything.”

In his PowerPoint presentation for university students, Mr. Werbock extended the details to include the music’s characteristics. His public performance was slightly different in that he performed a different order of instrumentation than the other programs and used less of his slides.

In addition to these engagements, Mr. Werbock had a lunch meeting with Professor Emeritus Bruno Nettl, three graduate students (Jon Hollis, Lucas Henry, Ben Wheeler), and me. Mr. Werbock invited Bruno Nettl over for an extended meeting and personal performance on Tuesday evening. He also enjoyed meeting a group of Azerbaijanis who attended his concert and having dinner with them that evening.

Overall, it was a very successful engagement with a total of over 500 attendees for all of Mr. Werbock’s events.