

REINVENTING THE WHEEL

For renowned DJ Ipek Ipekçioğlu, music transcends the boundaries of nations, languages and religion

TEXT BY PRACHI MEHROTRA

Ipek Ipekçioğlu is known internationally for her Berlin-style electro and minimal sets. Based out of Berlin and Istanbul, the Turkish Djane was named a musical visionary by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and in 2014 invited to perform in Istanbul as Berlin and Istanbul celebrated 25th anniversary of the sister-city-agreement.

A winner of German Record Critics Award, DJ Ipek has been working continuously to promote transcultural clubbing, as she says, "Instead of putting myself into a ghetto, I'd rather prefer to change the world and make it a better place for me to live."

» You have been named one of Berlin's most important cultural contributors. Can you elaborate on how your musical journey began?

One night at a club in Berlin, a promoter came up to me and asked if I could be a DJ for their very first queer-oriental party. I said, I have never done it and I don't know how to be a DJ. The guy at the club said, "Bring you tapes or CDs and just become a DJ."

To my surprise, people loved my Middle Eastern, South Asian, Turkish-Kurdish traditional, folk and dance music. This is how I started DJing almost 20 years back. I was basically one of the first DJs in Berlin who started to spin in German clubs and in the Middle East - Balkan and South Asian tunes spiced up with some European electronic sound.

At that time I was studying social work. Later, I quit my job at the German Red Cross as project director and became a professional DJ.

» How do you promote music?

Besides DJing, I have always been trying to experiment with different styles of music from Turkey and the Middle East. I released compilations like *Beyond Istanbul* and *Import Export a la Turka - Turkish sounds from Germany* by the label *Trikont*, along with a booklet in English, German and Turkish language. These books explain the socio-cultural background of the tracks, artists and lyrics. I have also been organising concert series *Beyond Istanbul* since 2010, and as a part of SubOrient Productions, put together a festival on the occasion of 25 years of Berlin-Istanbul city partnership.

I am a board member of radio station Reboot FM and a member of female electronic musicians network titled *female:pressure*. I am also a patron of the *Schools without racism, Schools with courage* initiative in Berlin, and lead workshops and lectures about transcultural clubbing.

» Can you elaborate on some of your new projects?

I am always working on new tracks. At the moment, I am looking forward to the release of my remix for German band // *Civetto* at Eastblok label. This boyband started making music in the Berlin subway. They do gypsy, swing, folk and world music. For one remix track for them, I used my Turkish Istanbul background, put some street noises in it and used traditional instruments Zurna and Davul. I have created *Moombahton* beat, a fusion of house music and reggaeton.

I will also be performing at the BASF

festival in Ludwigshafen with baroque orchestra *Elbipolis*. Currently, I am conceptually organising the festival - *Myfest* and alternative exchange between Berlin and Istanbul with contemporary classical and experimental folk music and performances at Radialsystem, a popular performance space in Berlin.

» What keeps you busy apart from music performances?

I conduct DJ workshops for girls. Most of the DJs are males. Many women do not dare to deal with technical equipment. But if you show them how it works, how you can fix it and if you let them carry a nine kg turntable or give them a CD-player which is worth EUR 2000 and let them work with it, they become self-confident.

I just published one of my writings in the book *S036 - 1978 till today* - a book about one of the most important venues of Berlin, also from where I started as a DJ. I have recently also contributed to *Comfort Zone - Berlin Cookbook* where I talked about Turkish cooking.

» What are the films you are currently working on?

While I have been associated with a number of films earlier, I don't have any new film coming up at the moment. However, I am shooting my first videoclip. It will be called *Uyan Uyan Nachtigall* (Wake up nightingale). 🎧

Opposite page: Besides DJing, Ipek has been trying to experiment with different genres of music from Turkey and the Middle East



INTERVIEW