

TODAY'S ZAMAN

ALEXANDRA IVANOFF **'New Sounds of İstanbul and Berlin' builds bridges with music and dance**

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Berlin and İstanbul, despite being major centers of historically different cultures, have much in common these days.

The mid-20th century saw tens of thousands of guest workers from Turkey resettling in Germany, and by the 21st century, these two cities had inevitably evolved into cultural melting pots. One of the latest factors that denote this metamorphosis is the unique music series called "New Sounds of İstanbul and Berlin."

Held alternately in both cities through the auspices of İstanbul's Borusan Music House and Berlin's Radialsystem V, the series presented its third edition in Berlin on March 14.

Curated by the German-Turkish DJ and producer İpek İpekçioğlu, who also functions as its multilingual onstage host, the collaboration's resulting benefit is that the kaleidoscope of Turkish music is no longer foreign to German ears and the German-inspired collaborative innovation is welcomed in Turkey.

Radialsystem, a former pumping station for Berlin Water Services and recently renovated into a performing arts venue, uses an open-door policy for their genial stylistic mix of programming, during which people are free to wander among the extended banquet of performances. The building's two interior concert spaces were used alternatively for this event, subtitled "Bridging Times -- Lange Nacht im Radialsystem V." And "Lange Nacht" (Long Night) meant that it would continue into the wee hours with a post-midnight after-party.

'Lange Nacht's' four ensembles and a reimagined Sema

Four ensembles (Islak Köpek & Nora Krahl, Urban Folk Core & Alcalica, Seni Görmem İmkansız, sa.ne.na & Korhan Erel) and solo dancer Ziya Azazi provided a six-hour crazy-quilt of avant-garde, international folk, electro-wave, percussion, and Sufi-inspired music and dance.

First up was İstanbul's free-improvisation group Islak Köpek (guitarists Şevket Akıncı and Giray Gürkal, saxophonist Robert Reigle and Korhan Erel on computer) and Berlin cellist Krahl. They bathed listeners with waves of sound from dreamy to dissonant, starting with a single electronic note that crescendoed into a cacophonous symphony punctuated by well-placed percussive

punctuation. These master improvisers know their stuff. It's not about indulging in vehement or gratuitous chaos; on the contrary, they simultaneously created a continuously changing texture with exquisite sensitivity to each other. For the listener, it requires a new way of perceiving musical conversation -- and one that can include as many effects as notes.

The electro-wave duo *Seni Görmem İmkansız* (Gaye Su Akyol and Tuğçe Şenoğul) had an important set-up even before they took the stage: DJs played examples of classic Turkish songs performed by Müzeyyen Senar, Mediha Sancakoğlu and Behiye Aksoy, singers from previous generations. This material was the source for the duo's reductionist tribute to women's songs of yore. Their minimalist treatment, using spare elements like repetitive electro-bass lines, a tonette, and one-finger melodies on mini-keyboards, engendered a loosely woven affair with spontaneous talk and retro vocal inflections. Their charming off-handedness and musical originality (especially in "Düşlerin Uçuyor" -- Your Dream is Flying) wins praise from this listener, but their consistently inept attempts to sing in unison were disappointing.

Azazi, who had hosted a workshop titled "Dervish in Progress -- Sen de Gel" on the premises the previous day, provided a dramatic solo dance, which he dedicated to the 2013 Gezi Park protests, using as his accompaniment a remixed version of Mercan Dede's Sufi-infused music tracks. Initially clad in the traditional "sema" (Sufi ceremony) clothing, he progressively peeled off several layers as he danced. Azazi spun non-stop for over 30 minutes, building an increasing tension and ecstasy until his red billowing skirt morphed into blood flying around the room -- and ultimately became a lumpy *Pilobolus* tent that enshrouded him just before a sudden blackout. By going beyond what sema dancers typically do, certainly in terms of tempo, Azazi's strenuous and demanding dance-to-the-death is a dynamic symbol of the human spirit's powerful instinct to push through invisible boundaries.

Brenda MacCrimmon, the Canadian singer who is well-known to Turks for her renditions of countless Turkish folk song concerts and recordings and who was featured in the film "Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of İstanbul," annexed a group of Greek-German musicians called *Alcalica* for her global music set as *Urban Folk Core*. From Ladino to Anglo-Irish with plenty of Turkish in between, the team (with violinist Stefanos Filos, singer Julie Loi, and Leonidas Danezos on santur and electronics) used a pulsing drum-and-bass track to glue the elements together for a satisfying, if a bit over-long (by an hour), performance. The grand finale was İstanbul's percussion trio *sa.ne.na.* (Amy Salsgiver-Dorsay, Kerem Öktem and Seçil Kuran) with Erel performing on a computer. With Erel's original electronic arrangements providing the underpinnings throughout, the group performed six original songs and their dance-beat arrangement of "Coming Together" by the radical American composer Frederic Rzewski. The ensemble's back-to-back set of selections layered shifting percussion patterns using unpredictable rhythms and a wide spectrum of tonal elements over the relatively steadfast bass, creating a compelling and multi-textured overall experience.

İpekçioğlu's governance and adroit hostess presence on this edition (previous versions were in January in İstanbul and October in Berlin) functioned as a friendly guide through musical territory encompassing the familiar to the unknown. Judging by the sold-out audience's response, the sounds of İstanbul -- old or new -- are happily now part of the fabric of Berlin life.

As MacCrimmon said onstage, "They always saw İstanbul as the 'crossroads of East and West,' but Berlin is one heck of a crossroads too. Yaşasın Berlin!"

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