INTERVIEW ON ANDANTE WITH ILKE BORAN, ISSUE FEBRUARY 2013 (1/4)

As I first met Emre Yavuz, he was thirteen. In the winter of 2003 he came to the conservatory with his sister Elif Damla. We were all excited to be witnessing the talent of this young pianist who had been studying under the "Idil Biret Law". What was even more impressive than his stunning musicality was his confidence despite his young age and his serious yet sympathetic attitude. He started his studies with Kamuran Gündemir at an early age and continued abroad, his art and his perspective on the art evolved. Today he is a forward-looking pianist winning first prizes at competitions. We had a chat with Emre about the last five years of his life.

Let's start with a recap of the last five years. What happened since you went to Vienna in the year of 2007?

At that time I was new in Vienna, where I was studying with Roland Batik. It was a difficult period for me, because I was struggling to find my identity as a pianist. And I was alone in a city that I didn't like while going through such an important phase. I was disappointed of being in Vienna. Later I reconciled with Vienna, especially after moving to Hannover I started loving it (laughs). Now when I look back, I see that it was a period of my life that made me the person that I am today and that the roots of behaviours, habits and thoughts that I call "Me" are in Vienna.

What didn't you like about Vienna?

Vienna was boring me. It is indeed a very historical and beautiful city but at some point I wasn't aware of the year I lived in. I had a gloomy life because instead of going to school often, I practiced in my apartment that was always dark. But that didn't keep me from benefiting from the cultural liveliness of Vienna. Every month I went to Musikverein to buy tickets for the whole next month and spent almost the same amount of money as my rent. Outside of home I spent most of my time in concerts. I even made many of my friends in concert halls.

What was the your circle of friends like in Vienna?

Almost none of my friends were musicians. I was friends with architects and doctors, all older than me. This kind of entourage helped me not being stuck in a conservatory building. Even being in Hannover doesn't keep me apart from them now.

Where did the idea of going to Vienna come from?

My teacher in Bilkent, Fazil Say, sent me to Vienna for studying with Roland Batik. I studied with Roland Batik for the whole four years I spent in Vienna and then I decided to go to Hannover and study with Karl-Heinz Kämmerling.

How did this Hannover-Project and the idea of studying with Kämmerling come to life?

I knew Kämmerling before because I had participated in some of his masterclasses. I definitely wanted to be his student and I was looking for the right circumstances. Kämmerling did not give private lessons and it wasn't going to be enough to go to a masterclass every two-three months. So the most reasonable way to study with him was to be an official student in his class. I already spoke German and I wasn't forced to stop studying in Vienna because I was allowed to study in both cities. Thus I moved to Hanover in 2010 and pursued my studies in Vienna at the same time. I didn't want to completely burn the bridges with Vienna. I

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went to Vienna once a month to complete my exams. It was hard, but it worked. I graduated in Vienna and I am almost done in Hanover now.

Can you Compare Hanover and Vienna? In terms of music education.

Hanover is almost a trademark when it comes to piano, which it owes to Vladimir Krainev, Arie Vardi and Kämmerling. Vienna isn't like that. But the downside of Hanover is that the music academy resembles way too much of a kindergarten. It's full of people who have improved themselves by practicing and practicing but have on the other hand failed to grow up socially. For this reason, in Hanover it's harder to live and socialize. Vienna is full of opportunities for you to socialize outsite of the school and to be culturally nourished. Hanover is a city to study in and than leave.

So studying with Kämmerling is a very important turning point in your life.

I went to Kämmerling because I thought that he was the teacher who could address my weaknesses. But I learned a lot more than that from him. He is of course a very good "piano teacher" but he is also a teacher who can provide you a much bigger philosophical and artistic deepness and perspective. Only the ones that have the capacity for that can learn that from him, of course. Kämmerling not only helped me improve myself as a pianist and as a human being, he also made me develop a new perspective on the music and come to a new level of counsciousness about why I make art.

What were your weaknesses when you decided to study with Kämmerling?

I used to play just for myself, in the way I like, which was related to the way I lived in Vienna. But I was aware that Kämmerling would teach me a lot about what it takes to be on the stage and to connect with the audience. I also knew that he was a master of piano technique. And I actually found more than I expected.

You mentioned a phase of becoming more conscious about why you make music. Let's talk about that.

As a matter of fact, not every musician my age is obliged to have a concrete and correct answer to this question but what's important is to be aware of that, to have this concern and to think about it. If you ask me again in five years "why?", I might have a completely different answer which contradicts with what I am saying now but it was still Kämmerling, who made me think about it in the first place.

You graduated in Vienna by breaking a record by recieving the highest points at a graduation recital. Can we have some more details about that?

There were seven jury members, one of them was the head of department and the other one my teacher Roland Batik. These two could not give me points. All of the other five gave 20 out of 20. I was obviously happy about it but I heard later that it was the first time that a student recieved full points from the whole jury.

You sound like it's totally normal but in fact it is a quite big deal. For the first time in the history of the conservatory a student graduates with full points and that is Emre Yavuz (both laugh).

What we did was to go on Kärntner Strasse and pop up a bottle of champagne (laughs).

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You recently won a competition. Let's talk about this competition and about how you came up with the idea of participating. Were you thinking that it was time to do a competition?

There's that, too. I had been staying away from the competitions during my stay in Hanover because I considered Hanover as a work camp. The last competition I did was a viennese Chopin competition in 2010. Having graduated in Vienna and being almost so far in Hanover made it possible for me to have more time to open up again and I was feeling ready and I wanted too. I just came across the website of the competition, it wasn't planned. I knew about it in May and I had six-seven weeks to prepare. There were three rounds. In the first round you play a prelude and fugue by Bach, the first movement of a Beethoven sonata and an etude; in the second round a thirty-minute program that includes a piece by Schubert and an obligatory modern piece; and the third round is a free program of fifty minutes. There were two additional special prizes, one of them was the Schubert prize which I wanted so badly but didn't get (laughs). I just prepared myself because Kämmerling had died recently. The last piece I did with him was the second movement of Schubert's great A-Major sonata. It was our best lesson ever. Both because of the special meaning it had for me and because it symbolized the reinvention I went through in the last two-three years I wanted to play it in the competition. I had great problems with Schubert before but I really wanted to play it and enjoyed it.

Why did you choose this competition?

What the jury members kept telling was that everybody plays the piano very well now. And it is true that there are so many people who play magnificently. They go to competitions and win prizes. But if you can offer something beyond playing well you want to be in an environment where people appreciate this. The first prize of this competition was to be given to an "outstanding artistic personality". How does one show an artistic personality in a competition? If you have a message, you don't need to go on stage and start talking, you can actually say something with the way you play and the way you put the pieces together to make a program. Then you really do something more than playing well and present a personal artistic attitude. I had things to say. And while choosing my pieces, I didn't put several virtuoso pieces one after another, I took risks, closed my eyes, chose the pieces that I had a personal connection with and put out three recitals that had a whole concept and a message. Throughout the competition I had the feeling that I knew what I was doing and thus I enjoyed it very much. It's nice to see that was appreciated.

All this relates to this new consciousness, I guess.

Yes. Playing the piano well is not enough. Because playing well is easy. One of the ways that lead to success is to be able to adapt to the current circumstances, but that is not me. I'm not a person who could spend a whole life trying to master on optimizing himself to the standarts decided by others. That leaves me only one option: setting my own rules against the ones by others. I do this, I do it like that, because I am me, I am not someone else.

So what are you going to do now, since you are done with Hanover?

Now I am studying with Arie Vardi in Tel Aviv, who is one of the greatest piano teachers of our time. The same way I did with Vienna, I will graduate in Hanover while continuing my graduate studies with Prof. Vardi in Tel Aviv.

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What are your other plans, besides the master's degree?

A career without competitions doesn't seem quite possible, although you can't simply win some competitions and hope that this will bring you a long international career. If you don't have anything to say, you're just one of the other 2000-3000 prizewinners. Then how could you expect people to want to listen to you? It's important to make the right choices. For me the main goal is to transmit the things I have to say to as many people as possible. Reaching many people means fame. So yes, I want that but only because I want to contribute to people's lives. I need to work hard and sweat. I'll be glad to.