INTERVIEW WITH ÖYKÜ NUR AKKOL ON SUFFLOR.COM, JANUARY 2012 (1/3)

I heard Emre Yavuz for the first time in 2006 at a concert he gave with Fazil Say in Izmir and I was amazed. I feel lucky that I had the chance of meeting him years later and doing an interview with him. I'm very thankful to him for the time he took to do this comprehensive interview. I hope you'll enjoy reading it.

We met Emre Yavuz upon his return from gym. So the first question had to be about it:
Welcome! You are a musical and a sportive person I see, are there many musicians like that?

Not many, musicians usually have almost nothing to do with sport but I have so many things to do, so I must take good care of myself. I don't want to step back in the future just because I can't physically take it anymore.

I think most people in the audience in Turkey would not notice that a musician's condition is not good. Turkish people aren't that into art, sadly.

That's not a situation, it's consequence. The problem is not not being into art, it's not appreciateing being into art. It's not only about "reaching the folk with our music", one needs to be open to be reached, too. But in Turkey, even building a concert hall or supporting the art is a political thing.

We are going too deep already, I think. I'd say, let's take it from the beginning, like, how did you start playing the piano?

It was a hobby that my family chose when I was six. Later, my teachers started saying that I had talent and that I had this "absolute pitch". Then it all evolved very fast into a professional education. Yes I was very young and it wasn't really my own decision but I didn't do anything unwillingly just to please my family.

Was it a musician family?

Not really, my parents are teachers. Only my sister got into the conservatory and now she's a musicologist. Before her there was no interest in music in the family in a professional sense.

Then you go to Hacettepe, Ankara.

After a couple years in Izmir I went to Ankara in 1998, to study with Kamuran Gündemir.

What were the classes like, did you actually have a class?

Basically you get private lessons with your piano teacher and other classes with other students. But my status as a student was special and there were no other kids my age, so I only had private lessons.

How do you define those years?

A very good foundation. I was aware of that, it never felt too much.

Playing piano is something you just can't do without love, anyway. Requires a lot of practicing.

My piano lessons were intense and challenging enough an on top of that I had to practice a lot. Another kid would be right if it complained.

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Obviously you were very ambitious. You must have had great support. The "Act for Prodigy Children".

It was my family in the first place, of course. And the Act for Prodigy Children, which was inactive for fourty years, gave me the opportunity to go to Ankara.

Later you studied with Fazil Say too.

That was the highschool of Bilkent University. If Hacettepe was the foundation, Bilkent was the superstructure. Bilkent was more about being on a stage and interacting with other instruments. It was very exhausting. I was studying piano, harmony, composition, orchestration and accompanying other instruments and singers.

How did the other students treat you? Like "the special kid"?

No matter where I go, there is this attitude like "who is that, why is he even special?". I don't like emphasising on my special situation when I socialize with people. There is nothing I can do about it.

Was it a competitive environment?

Every music school is competitive. We were three students in Fazil Say's class. I always try to stay away from the kind of competition that harms you.

Don't you ever feel overwhelmed and think "it's too hard, how am I going to make it"?

I do, sometimes. But actually it's dealing with people that sucks your energy out of you, not the piano, not other classes. I am much more efficient when i'm in Izmir for holidays, and I rest very well, too. Holiday means having a cleaner mind for work to me.

I see. After Bilkent you went to Vienna, how did that happen?

It was Fazil Say's idea.

Was it because you thought you couldn't get a good education in Turkey?

Even if that kind of a musical education was possible in Turkey, I would have left.

So what is the main reason?

For a musician, living in Vienna is a very important thing, culturally.

Why did you go to Germany later?

I wanted to study with Karl-Heinz Kämmerling. He is a teacher that you can learn a lot of things from.

You're not giving many concerts and focusing on your studies. What are your plans about the future?

All my plans about the future are based on a musical and artistic level. There are many things I want but it's hard to describe them. If I told you "i want to do this ant that", it would seem too concrete compared to the things I really want. But here's a thing: can you change the world and the people with music? I think you can.

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I'm hearing such great things! Congratulations in advance. Are there pianists and composers that you look up to?

Chopin has been very special for me since the day I started playing the piano. I don't feel so much like myself with any other composer. Sometimes I even feel like i'm telling about my personal life to the audiences. In the last few years Rachmaninoff became very important to me, who is one of my favorite composers and pianists. Besides these I have other non-pianist or non-musician gods like Jacqueline DuPre and Franz Kafka.

Speaking of Kafka, do you like literature?

I love reading. I'm into philosophical books nowadays. I read all books of Kafka and some of them actually changed my life. Now I feel sad that there's nothing else by Kafka that I can read. That's the way I usually read, when I start reading an author I keep reading until there's nothing left by that author. I'm reading Kierkegaard and Camus right now. And I am a fan of the russian literature and especially of Tolstoy, although he's very different than the ones I named.

Besides classical music, what kind of music do you listen to?

Depends on my mode and the occasion. I do listen to pop and electronic dance music like Madonna and I also like things like Portishead, Morcheeba and MGMT.

Thank you for sharing your precious time with me. I hope all your hard work will pay off in the best way.

Thank you too.