

Nihan's Musical World - Worldly Vocal Magic

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Salzburg is an enchanting place for the young mezzo-soprano Nihan Devocioglu to let music carry her out into the world. With strong goals and dedication to the muse, she opens an artistic universe through her voice.

As though a floodgate had been opened, visions, dreams, and projects flow out of this young woman, who, at first meeting, seems restrained, possibly even shy. She lets herself be carried by her enthusiasm and does not restrict her wishes or hopes,

which is why she can captivate her audiences in such a short time—not only with her voice, but also with the content. She euphorically describes the path she wants to take, and the more you listen to her, the more convinced you are that it is no juvenile fancy. Nihan Devocioglu has a goal, and she pursues it entirely on her own terms—as a person, quietly and with restraint, as an artist, emphatically and with confidence.

Her voice is not loud; that is not necessary for the young Turkish singer. Her eyes flicker with passion, and her facial expression commands attention to the center - where she is. Shyness gives way to spellbinding obsession with music and art when she talks about her work: “It is people who are involved with this art, in making music what it is: communicative, capable of touching the heart and soul, without limits, carried by tradition, and open to innovation.” A stream of statements and ideas flows from the artist, but not all are concerned exclusively with the art of forming tones, but rather much more with what music—the presentation, the message of interpreters, composers, and music enthusiast triggers and releases. For Nihan Devocioglu, music reaches out to the world—deep into the past, with intensity in the present, and, in our heads, already into the future. “I wanted to study singing no matter what, but it wasn’t possible in Istanbul.

So, I started with theory first,” she says, reflecting on her young life. She successfully completed her studies in Media and Communication Science, then plunged into a Master’s program in Music Management. But, she missed practical experience and wanted to hear the sound of her voice. “I wasn’t really absolutely confident in myself, but I wanted it, so I applied to the University Mozarteum Salzburg. Incidentally, it was the only music university I auditioned for, and to be completely honest, I was not only happy, but also really surprised when I was accepted!”

UP AND DOWN. Salzburg challenged Nihan from the very first moment. In her reserved way, she gradually became closer to the city and its people. “In the beginning, I only had contact with other foreign students, and I still mostly have friends who aren’t from Salzburg. But, I’ve also come to know and respect very kind people from this region,” she says, offering a glimpse into her private life beyond music, if the two things are even separable. She admits, “without music, life would be unbearably sad for me.” Even during her studies, she often had to clench her teeth. “In the beginning, I sometimes thought my efforts would amount to nothing, and I felt defeated, but I didn’t want to give up my goals so fast.

”Then, Nihan came in contact with Hannelore Leiffolts, her breathing teacher. “To me she is simply brilliant, and we could work so well together. She conveyed to me how I can transform my little voice into a voice with character. Of course, that is still a long process, even after your studies are over. But, thanks to her, I know how to proceed,” says the young artist with gratitude toward the woman who nourished her dreams.

Nihan Devocioglu is about to turn 30. A young, energized woman; a young, strong voice; a singer who found her passion for a very special discipline. “I sing anything there is to sing, and anywhere the opportunity arises. This is the only way for me to train my voice, to meet people, and for them to meet me and my form of expression. But, what especially fascinates me is the blending of different styles,

expressions, and musical directions,” says Nihan, who with her voice and form of expression has already won over audiences at many different productions, including ones with Elisabeth Fuchs and the Junge Philharmonie Salzburg, among others. The intercultural concert “Instant Opera,” at which she performed alongside the great Bobby McFerrin and 20 young soloists, was an important experience for Nihan and a wonderful affirmation of her aspirations. Her Sufi songs were especially well received by the audience at Carnegie Hall.

Ultimately, everything began with a Sufi song, the musical expression of Islam’s esoteric wisdom. She sang it a capella with the Hallein Chamber Orchestra. “I love these songs, and I find that they can be understood very well in the western world.” At this point came the idea of blending the music of both her cultures. The result is a project that the mezzo-soprano developed on her own, thanks to her vast theoretic knowledge of music and its management. It is currently near completion, and Nihan Devecioglu is anxious for July 24, the day of her first intercultural concert in Istanbul. Nihan sought out the venue. “To do that, I took a look at every notable church in Istanbul. I’m thrilled that our first concert will take place in the beautiful Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.” Nihan will be assisted in this endeavor by the federal state of Salzburg’s Kulturelle Sonderprojekte initiative (special cultural projects), where she found a prominent supporter in Professor Alfred Winter. The idea for Nihan’s project is as follows: to honor the work of Johann Michael Haydn, the “Haydn of Salzburg,” who is wrongfully overshadowed by his brother Joseph and many other colleagues. His music, along with works by his predecessors from the court of Salzburg’s Prince-Bishops, will be performed in a very unique way in Istanbul, Salzburg (August 13, Kapuzinerkirche, 7:30 PM), Bayreuth (August 16-18), and Bonn (August 19).

THE CONCERT. The central focus of the concert will be a modern interpretation of a Michael Haydn piece by the three Turkish composers Ahmet Altinel, Burak Tamer, and Barkin Engin. All five artists of the project - singer Nihan, Salzburg organist Christian Rott, and the three composers—are involved with the piece. The second part of the concert will feature an original modern work by the three Istanbul composers, which was written specially for this event and couples the organ with electronic instruments. It is the first time in music history that Turkish composers, inspired by an instrument that is used predominately in western Europe, have written a work for the “church organ” using a modern compositional approach. With this, the opera and concert singer Nihan Devecioglu is making reference to the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue” and, in the process, inspiring the experts, the public, and, not least, herself.

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