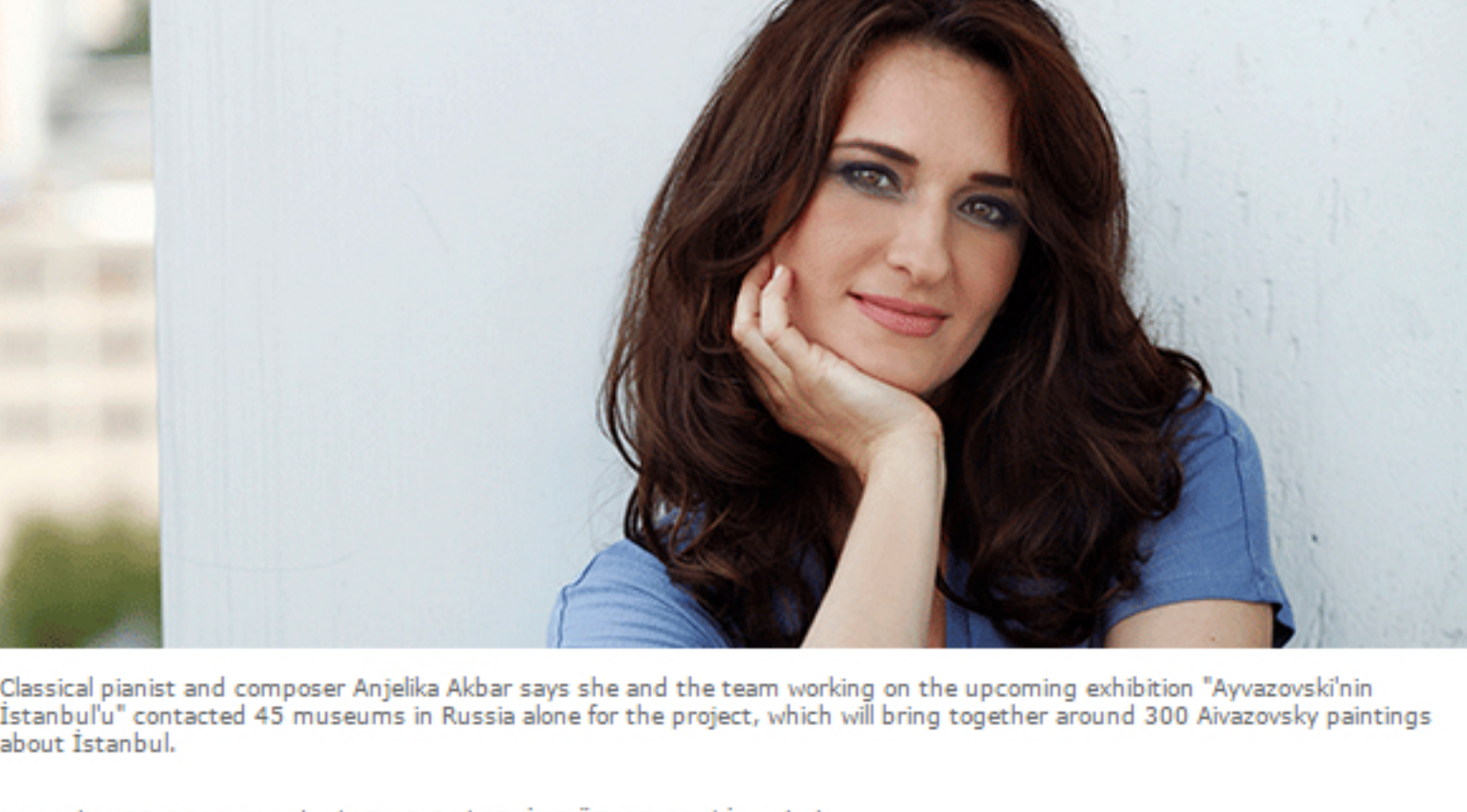


Pianist Anjelika Akbar composing music for Aivazovsky's İstanbul



Classical pianist and composer Anjelika Akbar says she and the team working on the upcoming exhibition "Ayvazovski'nin İstanbul'u" contacted 45 museums in Russia alone for the project, which will bring together around 300 Aivazovsky paintings about İstanbul.

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Classical pianist-composer **Anjelika Akbar** is currently working on a project that bridges music and art, writing and performing music over paintings by Ivan Konstantinovich **aivazovsky**, the 19th-century Russian painter known for his realistic depictions of the sea and scenes from life in Ottoman-era İstanbul.

A joint effort between Turkey's Boyut Publications and the National Museum of Kazakhstan in Astana, the project will digitize a selection of İstanbul paintings by Aivazovsky and will then animate those pictures and add ambient sounds to accompany the scenes.

In a recent interview with Today's Zaman, Akbar, who is also part of the team overseeing the project, spoke about Aivazovsky, the details of the project and how she combines music with the 19th-century artist's work.

How did this project come about?

Around a year ago I was having a meeting with [representatives from] Boyut Publishing House for the publication of one of my books. Their artistic director Murat Öneş had told me then that they were working on a book of masterpieces by Aivazovsky. He also said the book would be accompanied by a digital **exhibition** in which the artist's İstanbul landscapes would be animated. So the paintings will be projected onto a huge wall and they will then be animated.

Tell us more about the “animation” process. Will it make use of ambient sounds to match the landscapes depicted in the paintings?

Yes, that's right. For instance, if the painting depicts a swell in the sea, the water [in the digitized image] will also move; likewise, if there's a fire depicted in the painting, you'll hear the crackling of the wood. [Ambient] sounds such as the sea, birds, people speaking; for example, in the animated version of his painting of the Ortaköy Mosque you'll hear the Muslim call to prayer, and his well-known painting “The Ninth Wave” will be accompanied by the sound of a thunderstorm.

I was incredibly excited about the project [when I was first told about it].

Can you tell us more about the specifics?

The overall project is titled “Ayvazovski'nin İstanbul'u” [Aivazovsky's İstanbul] and it's subtitled “The Cities and Seas of Aivazovsky.”

Aivazovsky visited İstanbul eight times over a long period of time, during which the Ottoman Empire had three different sultans. The painter had close ties with all three sultans. Also, the Ottoman court had bestowed upon him several orders of merit. Aivazovsky had fallen in love with İstanbul. [Historical sources say] this artist, who has traveled all around the world, used to tell his fellow Russians that İstanbul overshadowed even the most beautiful cities of the world.

How many paintings did Aivazovsky create, and how many of them are about İstanbul?

A thousand paintings are registered to his name. But in reality he painted around 6,000 canvases. His most beautiful and most expensive works are those that depict İstanbul. I know that in a recent auction abroad, one of his paintings of İstanbul was sold for 5 million pounds.

Which museums have you contacted for this project?

We contacted 45 museums in Russia alone. Among them, the Peterhof Palace and the Russian Museum [in St. Petersburg], the Tretyakov State Gallery [in Moscow] and the Naval Museum in St. Petersburg are institutions that have the largest collections of Aivazovsky throughout the world. We are conducting talks with a total of 60 museums worldwide and in the exhibition there will be around 300 Aivazovsky paintings about İstanbul. Around 50 of his works are [in the permanent collections of various art institutions] in Turkey.

How do you connect the paintings with music?

I am composing original music for the digitized paintings, but I will also be performing samples from Russian and Turkish [classical] music from Aivazovsky's time. I'm working on a set of compositions that will depict the Turkish musical landscape of the time when Aivazovsky visited Turkey.

Did you make new discoveries about Aivazovsky while working on the music?

Of course! One of the biggest surprises was finding out about his close connection with Mikhail Glinka, who is considered one of the founding fathers of Russian [classical] music. Aivazovsky was not just a painter but also a traveler. And he had an interest in all the fields of the arts. For instance, he used to play the violin, and since Glinka was one of his best friends, Aivazovsky used to play the melodies he had heard in Feodosia in Crimea, his birthplace, to Glinka, who in return would use those melodies as inspiration for the Eastern motifs in his music, such as the world-famous opera “Ruslan and Lyudmila.” Today we consider those melodies to be Glinka's melodies, but their source is actually Aivazovsky.

What aspects of Aivazovsky's world are reflected in your compositions?

The music of the Russians and Crimean Tatars, which Aivazovsky grew up hearing; a lot of Georgian and Armenian music, which he encountered during his time in Caucasia; classical styles from Italy, France and England from his time in Europe; the folk songs, religious music and court music he heard in the Ottoman territory ... all these coming together with my original compositions create an “Aivazovsky Rhapsody.”

When will the project go on display?

We are currently in the process of choosing the venue at which to launch the exhibition [from among options that include museums in Astana, Feodosya, St. Petersburg and İstanbul]. ... Technically speaking, the exhibition will be ready for showcase by the end of January 2015.

Keywords: Anjelika Akbar , aivazovsky , exhibition , İstanbul

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