

# Around Town

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Ansel Mullins and Dirk Vermeiren

## Open up to Açık Radyo

This past year, the programmers, listeners and supporters of Açık Radyo (94.9 FM) celebrated the radio's 15th anniversary. **Zeynep Özler** spoke with Mahir Ilgaz, Broadcast Coordinator, about the past, present and future of the radio

**A**çık Radyo (Open Radio) has been "open" to the sounds, colours and vibrations of the universe since 1995. It is a collective of 92 partners where the shareholders own "share certificates," composed of marked and numbered lithographs of the late distinguished painter and sculptor, Abidin Dino," Ilgaz declares.

For 15 years, Açık Radyo has summoned the talents and efforts of 984 individuals –from ages 9 to 75 – from all walks of life and a rich variety of professions. Currently, 200 radio hosts contribute with more than 134 different shows each week.

Not only does Ilgaz impress upon us that Açık Radyo's diverse programming ranges from news to classical music, from political debates to jazz, that it also airs programming that appeals to people from many different backgrounds. "Including the guest speakers, every week, more than 250 people occupy the tiny studios and the narrow

corridors of Açık Radyo, contributing to the general "buzz" [in the station]. People of various nationalities: American, Belgian, Brazilian, British, Bulgarian, Canadian, Costa Rican, Dominican, French, German, Greek, Iranian, Lebanese, Spanish, Sudanese and so on - have been contributing [to the success of the stations] since the beginning."

**An example of two foreigners that have come to Istanbul with a love for the culture and language, nicknamed "Istanbul's funky stepsons," are the hosts of the Turkish-language, Soul Syndicate show, Ansel Mullins (USA) and Dirk Vermeiren (Belgium). We got to chat with them about their Saturday show.**

**How did your paths cross and what is the "Soul Syndicate"?**

**Ansel:** We [have been] friends since our first endeavour: [which was] to learn Turkish. We came to Istanbul in

2002, and entered Turkish language classes, where we discovered our common bond: our love of American soul music. Our show began long before we came to Açık Radyo. It started in our living rooms; sitting and playing our favourite music for each other. So the feeling you get [from the show] is two friends playing out their record collection trying to impress one another...

**“You have lots of different people here passionate about what they are doing. It is an interesting mosaic of the cultural life in Istanbul. I don't think there is any other radio [that hosts] such diversity as Açık Radyo [does]!”**

**Dirk:** It is still very personal and laid back. Not trying to teach, just sharing the love we feel for this music.

**Ansel:** They describe [the Soul Syndicate] here at Açık Radyo as *eğlenceli program* (an entertaining program). People listen to have a good time, while they are having their first beers before they go out to dinner. Usually it is an upbeat show. We like to tell jokes, funny stories related to the music, or our own experiences.

**Dirk:** We place it in a Turkish context. For example, we had Joe Mardin, Arif Mardin's son, explaining his father's work, and we also had Hadise on the show twice. She is a [huge] fan of funk music. The ratings for Hadise were tenfold!

**Ansel:** She is the Turkish Beyoncé. We are also going to get Ceza and Allen Iverson on the show. We have big plans for 2011.

**Dirk:** It is also introducing this wonderful heritage of African American music to Turkey because nobody else plays the music we play. People know names like Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, but we go back and play early MJ and artists that influenced him. So we try to open up the whole genre. That is why it is called Syndicate. Join the Soul Syndicate!

**Why did you choose Açık Radyo?**

**Ansel:** It is the only radio that is



"açık" (open) to our kind of thing. Just to give an example of how cool it is: when we first started the show, there was a lady doing a program right before us, and she was reading Dostoyevsky for one hour, in Russian. What other radio station has such esoteric stuff? It's like home. You have lots of different people here passionate about what they are doing. It is an interesting mosaic of the cultural life in İstanbul. I don't think there is any other radio [that hosts] such diversity as Açık Radyo [does]!

**Dirk:** If people want to come over and share their collection, they are welcome. One thing that unites people is music. It has a unique power, and that is what we would like to spread.

#### What about İstanbul? What keeps you living in and loving this city?

**Dirk:** I like to enjoy İstanbul [while] walking and enjoying the seaside, the people, and the colours... Even after 8 years, I enjoy living in this city.

**Ansel:** I am also co-author of a website called İstanbul Eats, a serious eater's guide to the city ([www.istanbuleats.com](http://www.istanbuleats.com)), now the book is out for sale. I cannot do the

*kolbastı* [a local dance craze like the Macarena] and don't know how to play the *saz* [an eastern-style guitar] but I love *köfte* [meat patties] and Turkish food in general. It is a great experience to walk into a small *esnaf lokantası* [hole-in-the-wall local eatery] and sit among people who eat there every day and talk to the chef who is inevitably a big, burly, overworked man. It is a common

ground, like music. Food is another place we can all agree and share cultures. This is where I connect and there are endless places to eat in İstanbul...

**Dirk:** My passion for İstanbul became also my profession. You get inspired by a place and [when] you translate [in] it... you become a crossroads of culture.

**Ansel:** We both chose to live here, and we came here because we were inspired by the city. Everything we do, and enjoy doing has something to do with the city. It is a fun life. I just wish it paid better (laughs)...

**Dirk:** I wish Turks would be more aware of how rich İstanbul is.

**Ansel:** Maybe they take it for granted. One of the nice things about being foreign to a place and [having chosen] it [is that] you are seeing things with fresh eyes. I feel like I can walk down the same street and notice new things every day. I think people who live in İstanbul are very lucky. I envied them until I became one. And now I feel lucky to be here.

**Dirk:** I do [take around] groups of people from Belgium and Holland.

I really love showing the city from my perspective. The city makes you improvise a lot.

**Dirk:** Yes, we are İstanbul fans...

**Ansel:** Yes, we are...

*Soul Syndicate with Ansel Mullins & Dirk Vermeiren, Açık Radyo, 94.9 FM, Saturdays, [www.soulsendikası.com](http://www.soulsendikası.com), [www.acikradyo.com.tr](http://www.acikradyo.com.tr)*

#### Açık Radyo's English-language programming

**Magical Mystery Tour**  
Alfredo Antillón (Costa Rican)  
Thursdays, 21.00

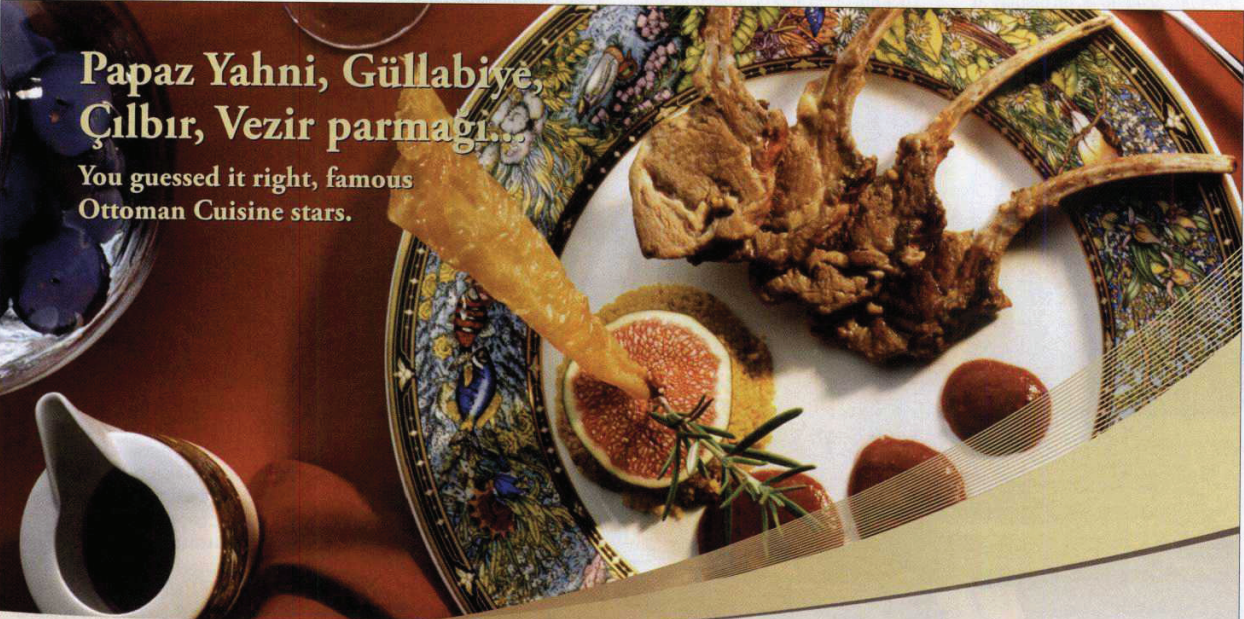
**Connections**  
Tim Hallam (American)  
Saturdays, 17.00

**Tighten Up**  
Simon Johns (British)  
Saturdays, 19.00

**Tempo**  
Rafaella Spinazze (Italian)  
Saturdays, 01.00



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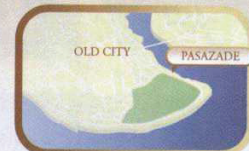


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