

PIANIST ANJELIKA AKBAR

composing music for Aivazovsky's Istanbul

"Constantinople: Galata and The Golden Horn," an 1846 painting by Ivan Aivazovsky, is among works that are being digitized for "Ayvazovski'nin İstanbul'u."



SEVİNÇ ÖZARSLAN İSTANBUL

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 Istanbul.

A joint effort between Turkey's Boyut Publications and the National Museum of Kazakhstan in Astana, the project will digitize a selection of Istanbul 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 Istanbul 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 Istanbul] and it's subtitled "The Cities and Seas of Aivazovsky."

Aivazovsky visited Istanbul 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 Istanbul. [Historical sources say] this artist, who has traveled all around the world, used to tell his fellow Russians that Istanbul overshadowed even the most beautiful cities of the world.

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

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 Istanbul. I know that in a recent auction abroad, one of his paintings of Istanbul 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 Istanbul. 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 Caucasus; 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."

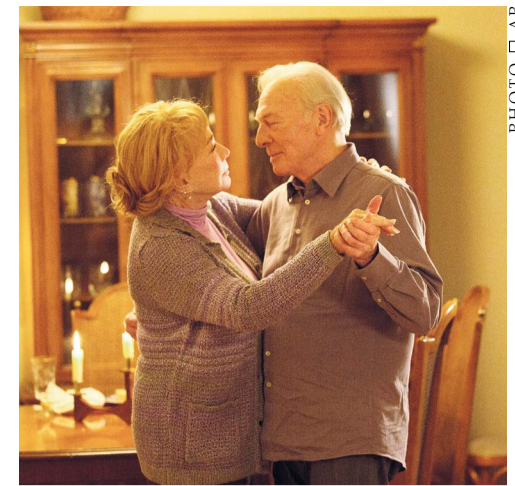
When will the project go on display?

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 Istanbul]. ... Technically speaking, the exhibition will be ready for showcase by the end of January 2015.

Akbar and the team working on 'Ayvazovski'nin İstanbul'u' contacted 45 museums in Russia alone for the project, which will bring together 300 Aivazovsky paintings about Istanbul



Anjelika Akbar



Shirley MacLaine (L) and Christopher Plummer are shown in a scene from the new film "Elsa & Fred."

At 80, MacLaine comes to terms with work, life

Shirley MacLaine pulled no punches when asked about her take on life at age 80. "Well, I'm a lot closer to dying," she said, with a chuckle. Maybe so, but there still seems to be a lot of life left for both the vibrant woman and her Oscar-winning career.

MacLaine is among the very few octogenarians who still get name-above-the-title billing, which she shares with 84-year-old co-star Christopher Plummer in the big-screen dramedy "Elsa & Fred," the upcoming American remake of the 2005 foreign-language favorite.

"I had seen the Argentinean film," MacLaine said in a recent interview. "Loved it," she continued. "Loved the relationship between the two. Older people falling in love was really attractive to me."

At first glance, MacLaine's Elsa is merely the nutty neighbor to Plummer's Fred, who has pretty much given up on living in the wake of his wife's recent passing. But there's a lot more to Elsa than Fred, or the film's viewers, see coming. Getting specific would spoil the surprises, but it's safe to say that moviegoers should take what Elsa says with a grain of salt. "She really did lie about everything," MacLaine revealed.

But little matter, as it's what Elsa does that's of greater importance, as it re-introduces Fred to "La Dolce Vita" -- both the classic Fellini movie, and, for real, its English translation, "the sweet life."

No doubt, the character looming largest over MacLaine's career and persona is the feisty, fiercely protective Aurora Greenway from the 1983 blockbuster "Terms of Endearment."

"Adore her," MacLaine said. "Would like her on my tombstone. Loved her. My favorite part."

It's ironic that, after more than a quarter-century making movies, playing Aurora finally earned her the best-actress Oscar because, MacLaine said, it wasn't really acting. "I'm kind of like her," she explained. "That's the closest I've come to being like a character. I mean, I don't know, frankly, how difficult it was to play her. I think I just played myself."

When asked if she's had la dolce vita, MacLaine said, "I can't imagine a better life. I've sat back and looked at it and thought, 'Oh, my. What haven't I done?'"

"Elsa & Fred" opens in US theaters on Nov. 7. Los Angeles AP

DT says 'Macbeth' not removed from Ankara program

Turkey's State Theaters (DT) General Directorate on Monday issued a written statement in which it rejected claims made by the media on Sunday that an Ankara State Theater production of "Macbeth" had been removed from the company's November slate.

Billing Sunday's news about the Shakespeare tragedy "speculative" and "misleading," the DT said in their statement that the play, which has been in their repertoire for many years, has in no way been removed from the program.

"Because the décor for this play, which was listed in the tentative draft for the November schedule, were posing a technical obstacle for the rehearsals for another Shakespeare piece that is set to have its Turkish premiere on the same stage, 'Macbeth' has been [rescheduled] for two additional weeks [of performances] in the December program," the DT statement read.

For such a change, which was brought about for purely technical reasons, to be falsely reported as though a play was removed from the November program in an attempt to create an impression of 'censorship' in public opinion is the product of an evil-minded approach," the statement added.

Ankara DT's production of "Macbeth" was originally scheduled for five performances from Nov. 11 to 15. It was replaced with the Turkish play "Calıkuşu" (The Wren), although tickets for "Macbeth" were already on sale, the Cumhuriyet daily reported on Sunday. The change in the program came after a group of Culture and Tourism Ministry officials watched the play last Tuesday. Cumhuriyet claimed, adding that the officials who watched the performance were said to have left the theater without applauding at the end. The same story had also quoted DT representatives who told the newspaper that the reason behind the cancellation was a technical one involving the play's décor. Istanbul Today's Zaman

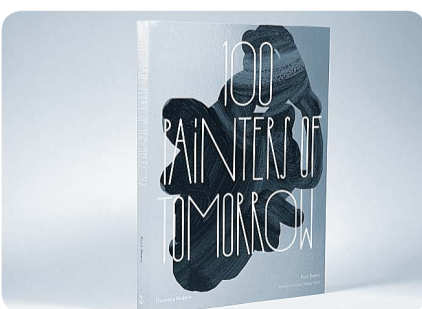
FILM PROGRAM

Contemporary Turkish films at Istanbul Modern

The Istanbul Modern will host a 13-piece selection of recent Turkish films in the third edition of its annual programs that focus on contemporary cinema in Turkey. Films from 2013 and 2014 that won awards at festivals but had little exposure during their commercial release, including "Gözümün Nuru" (Eye Am), "Balık" (Fish), "Kusursuzlar" (The Impeccables) and "Ben O Değilim" (I Am Not Him), will be shown in the program, titled "Count Us In!" and set to run from Nov. 6 through 20 at Istanbul Modern Cinema.



"Gözümün Nuru"



ART

Evren Sungur among 100 painters of tomorrow

Turkish artist Evren Sungur has been featured in "100 Painters of Tomorrow," a new book about largely unknown artists from around the world, written by Kurt Beers, director of the London gallery Beers Contemporary, and published by Thames & Hudson. The artists featured in the book have been selected by an international panel featuring prominent names in contemporary art, including the painter Cecily Brown, curators Tony Godfrey, Yuko Hasegawa and Gregor Muir, from among more than 4,300 submissions.

EXHIBITION

Turkey's modernist approach in the spotlight

Artist Özge Topçu currently showcases her first-ever solo exhibition in Istanbul, presenting a collection titled "Alteration Depression," in which she questions the artificial structure of modernism. Set to run until Dec. 18 at Hush Gallery in Kadıköy, the exhibition holds up a mirror to the often stunning examples of architecture during the simultaneous establishment of the Turkish Republic and the adoption of modernism. The exhibition is named after the phrase used by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu in his 1934 novel "Ankara."

