

VB: How did you decide to play cello? Apart from being a classical musician with its demanding schedule and practices you are also open to new ideas and projects; many times you initiate these novelties yourself. Can you tell more about it?

SE: I started my musical education at the age of 6. I passed the audition of the Istanbul municipal conservatory. I took piano classes because until then I always wanted to be a pianist. At the age of 11, I took the entry exam of the Istanbul State Conservatory, and I played piano at the exam. There, they wanted to take me to the piano section but my cello teacher insisted on my continuing with cello. At that time, the audition committee decided on which section you would enter in the conservatory. You certainly tell them your choice but they say the final word by analyzing how your ears hear, how your hands move and other details. At the end, the committee told me that their decision: they decided that I would excel in cello. They said that in any case piano was a must in the musical education; if I really did not want cello, I had the option of switching to another instrument during the same academic year. And that is how cello fully entered my life. I like the instrument a lot; I have never stopped playing it since then. I also continued playing piano. At the age of 17, I went to Paris for further cello education, while studying in the conservatory I gave private piano lessons and that was how I earned my pocket money

VB: You grew up in two countries and for a long time you musically exist in two countries. How did France and Turkey influence and shape your musical journey? While you were playing milonga in Paris a few weeks later you were performing Ottoman music in Ankara. And when we watch your concerts or listen to your music, we notice that you are very relaxed and comfortable in all genres that you contribute to. What kind of Sedef Erçetin did this eclecticism create over the years?

SE: The reason that I perform other genres along with classical music is of course Paris. There, I discovered and experienced the music of so many different cultures that I wanted to be part of each and every genre or style. In Paris, I met musicians from all over the world and I started making music with them. It was incredible. I improvised with my cello for the first time with Carlos Caceres. He took me to his band. He taught me a mixture of tango and jazz. It was just the time that I completed my musical studies. I would either be an orchestra musician or a soloist performing chamber

music. I chose the second option and today I am a solo cellist open to any genre of good music. While working with Argentine musicians, they always wanted me to improvise by making use of traditional Turkish music and I was always adding some kind of *taksim* in my improvisations. On one of the recording sessions with Argentine pianist and composer Gerardo di Giusto, my solo was filled with Turkish motifs. They always said, “ Sedef, you have to reflect your traditional music.” At that time, Turkish music was not my priority because I was thinking that it was already inside me and easy to perform in any case; I was trying to learn new things but as time went by I realized that it was something invaluable. Today I make projects with traditional Turkish instruments such as kanun, kemençe, darbuka etc. Last month, we gave a concert of kanun and cello with Tahir Aydoğdu. In the coming days, I will perform tango, milonga and traditional Argentine folk music with one guitarist and one percussionist from Argentina. These sudden changes give me energy.

With the Greek pianist, Maria Papapetropoulou, we will release our second album of classical music. I appreciate each musical genre separately. Even so, my musical basis is still J. S. Bach. I love and play Bach so much that it made easy for me to perform all other music. When I listen to Bill Evans, I hear the Bach harmonies. So J. S. Bach is in a way a key to music. If you understand and feel Bach, you can hear his harmonies in any music you listen. I am a good listener. I learn something new from every type of music. I never limit myself to genres. I enjoy what I play and I will keep doing that.

VB: For International Women’s Day, you are a significant person because you realize many international projects with women musicians all around the world. You are a part of musical women initiatives from France, Greece, Turkey, and Argentina just to name a few countries. Can you tell us about these projects from a woman’s perspective?

SE: I sincerely believe in the power of women. We are like sisters with the Greek pianist Maria Papapetropoulou whom I work together for a long time. This is indeed a luxury in music. There is a bonding between us and this is reflected on our music. The audience can notice how relaxed we are, together on stage.

There is the legendary American jazz singer Liz McComb. I performed and made recordings with her; she is one of the strongest women I have ever met in my life.

She shared her love and support for me so much that I was the happiest person in the world when I was on stage with her. Let me tell you one unique memory; Liz McComb and I were performing at Salle Gaveau in Paris as a duo of piano/vocal and cello for two consecutive nights. On our repertoire there was a composition of Liz. On the second night, when we were playing this very song, she got up from the piano and knelt down just behind me and went on singing the song without the piano; I continued with my improvisation. She suddenly started crying, I felt weird yet she kept singing and I kept playing. The song ended, she hugged me so tightly that I started crying too; that's how we ended the concert that night. She later told me that the sound of the cello had a strong impact on her. I hope I can be on stage with her again on an international women's day in the future.

VB: Who and what have inspired you so far?

SE: There have been many sources of inspirations in my life. Music is like food and water for me, something indispensable, my sine qua non, and my balance. Protecting this sensitive balance is a big self-sacrifice. Humble musicians generally inspire me; the ones who know how to make the best out of their lives. The character of a musician whom you admire may turn out to be a disappointment for you. And sometimes you meet a great musician who also turns out to be a beautiful personality. The first name that comes to my mind is Mstislav Rostropovitch. He is the person who made me love the cello. He was a friendly and witty person filled with joy of life. When I met him I was just 19 and my hands just disappeared in his big soft hands. He called me "little Turkish delight". I have never forgotten his hands.

Yo Yo Ma is a great cellist, he plays various types of world music apart from classical music; he was definitely an inspiration for me. Similarly, pianist Arthur Rubinstein knew how to enjoy life even though he was a very disciplined professional.

In jazz, my main inspiration is Bill Evans. I can listen to him every day. He is the Bach of jazz for me. And everyday I discover new musicians who inspire me.

VB: What's your plans and expectations for the near future in the age of Covid separation and Zoom unification?

SE: Like everyone else, I hope to see days full of music and art. I have to be both physically and spiritually healthy so that I can play my cello everyday. I have many projects but I don't know which one will materialize. I will participate in a few festivals in France and there make a few recordings. Currently, I participate in a project led by the French saxophonist Stéphane Guillaume, this August we plan to make a recording. I decide to leave the projects to luck. The right time will eventually come. The most important thing is to do everything with love.