



Anjelika Akbar: I'm trying hard not to break down and cry at the concert

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Well-known pianist and composer Anjelika Akbar is busy these days with final preparations for a concert that will be a different sort of experience for music lovers in Istanbul. Within the framework of the "Russian Year" in Turkey this year, there will be a Russian music concert called "Songs We Have Brought Along" on Jan. 19 at Istanbul's Enka Auditorium. The numerous well-known Russian songs in the program, from "Kalinka" to "Moscow Evenings," "Kazachok" and "Ochi Chornye," will make up an extensive repertoire aimed not only at Russian citizens in Istanbul, but Turkish listeners as well. Akbar will be both singing and playing the piano at this concert.

We spoke to Akbar while she was in the midst preparations for this concert and she told us more about the repertoire, noting that it will include not only classic Russian music, but also pieces from popular movies, TV shows and dance music from the Soviet era. What's more, the audience will join in on the concert by singing along with Akbar from lyric sheets to be distributed ahead of the show. Akbar will be accompanied by Aleksander Petuhov on the balalaika, Edward Aris on the accordion and Murat Gürol on the violin during the performance.

Akbar was born in 1969 in Kazakhstan, where she spent 11 years getting piano and composition education at Tashkent State Uspensky Music School. After this, she spent five years at the Tashkent State Conservatory. She completed her master's degree in music at Ankara's Hacettepe State Conservatory and in 1993 became a Turkish citizen.

At the basis of this interesting project is not only Akbar's love for Russian songs, but also the desire to give a gift to the Russians living in Turkey. She says "For years now I have lived in Turkey, but I can never forget the music I so loved to listen to as I was growing up. ... This project allows me to embrace these memories."

Pointing to all Uzbeks, Azeris and Khazaks who now live in Turkey, Akbar says: "I thought about it and realized that there are many former citizens of the Soviet republics now living in Turkey. They might not have as many chances as I do to listen to music that they used to love to hear. Which is why I decided to stage this concert."

She hopes that on the occasion of her concert, many of these people will come to-

gether again in their new homeland. As far as Turks are concerned, Akbar is confident that the offerings of this concert will also be very interesting for them. She says that though the songs and music to be featured in the program are not Turkish, they won't seem entirely foreign either to Turkish listeners.

Akbar adds that she expects the atmosphere at the concert to be quite emotional. She explains that even during rehearsals, she got extremely emotional and even began crying. "Yes, it will be a very charged atmosphere with the songs that so many Russian citizens and former residents of the Soviet Union have kept in their hearts for so long finally being sung here. I can't hold myself back from crying, especially

during the vocal pieces. I'm sure that quite a few people who come to the concert will literally be weeping. I've been trying to prepare myself at home not to cry during the concert."

'Russian life appears as mysterious as a black box'

Akbar also asserts that the upcoming concert will be an important opportunity for two cultures to get to know one another better. She says that due to its long-standing regime, Russia was never really understood enough in either Turkey or the world at large and that when the life lived there by so many is viewed from far away, like in Turkey, it appears as mysterious as an airplane's black box to most. Akbar does however maintain that there are many shared characteristics between Turks and Russians, commenting, "No matter how Western they may actually appear, Russians' hearts are actually completely Eastern -- which is why they are particularly inclined to spiritual things. And despite their outwardly colder appearances, Russians resemble Turks in terms of the warmth of their hearts."

Another detail worth mentioning about this concert is that it will feature the most songs Akbar has ever sung live on stage. The repertoire has been carefully selected to include songs with which most everyone is familiar. In 12 of the songs, there will be accompaniments by piano, balalaika and accordion. There will also be some surprise potpourri selections. In addition to the melding together of cultures, and the embrace of memories from old times, Akbar is also expecting something else quite important from this concert: the chance to be able to contribute, if only in some small way, to the spirits of Istanbul listeners.



Pianist and composer Anjelika Akbar performs during a concert in Istanbul in 2003.

PHOTO: DANTEN KAYA