

DUNYA



DUNYA's Turkish Janissary band ensemble

That line, from Dunya's 2006 concert production of "Wisdom and Turkish Humor," sums up the organization's *raison d'être* and extraordinary appeal. Director Mehmet Ali Sanlikol founded the organization with Robert Labaree in 2004 to "find creative ways to show paradoxes found in parallel, but contradictory, cultures," as Sanlikol puts it. Dunya's primary cultural prism is Turkey, but it makes some surprising connections on related cultures through its creative programming and superb musicianship.

Composer, musician and musicologist Sanlikol, whose doctoral studies led him toward Turkish music, teamed up with ethnomusicologist Labaree to found Dunya. Besides developing a new repertoire, Sanlikol, an Emerson professor, wanted to give Boston's musicians an outlet for performance. "The best music schools in the world are here," he said. "Wouldn't it be helpful for the community of musicians, and make interesting programming, too?"

Dunya, which means "world," has presented an extraordinary range of styles, within and beyond Turkish music. Examples of Turkish music include sacred and spiritual music and Ottoman music of several periods. There's a lot more in the mix: Turkish Tango, Turkish-influenced jazz, Middle Eastern rap and Turkish pop. Its repertoire also includes Arabesk, social protest music from the 1960s and 1970s, Turkey's "classic rock" period.

"What we have just seen is not just theater; it mirrored the world we live in."

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Reaching beyond the comfort zone of a single cultural focus, concert programs have brought together Turkish, Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Western music – and musicians – with no other agenda than to "make beautiful and varied events out of the materials we see in the world at large," Labaree, chair of New England Conservatory's Music History Department, wrote in an email.

Almost all of the current programming concepts are Sanlikol's. Once he has an idea, he discusses it with Labaree, who is director of NEC's Intercultural Institute. "The musicians give the final touches," Sanlikol said. In developing a concert theme, he'll "fasten on history," often creating a musical collage of styles and genres moving across cultures. No connections, musical or otherwise, are ever forced on the listener.

Rather, these concerts are "conversation" projects, in the spirit of "sohbet," the Turkish word for dialogue. The rules of this conversation dictate tolerance for all guests at the table. The musicians and the audience all listen respectfully during the conversation. And musicians have a chance to play without having to "feel apologetic that their music is 'different,'" Labaree wrote.

Hearing a Dunya concert is the only way to get its full impact. In "Wisdom and Turkish Humor," Dunya collaborated with the Mavi Dance Company and



Dr. Mehmet Ali SANLIKOL performing a solo on a Turkish Tenor shawm



Dr. Mehmet Ali SANLIKOL performing a solo on the ud in a recent RUMI program

the PALS children's chorus to examine three comic archetypes in Turkish history. Projecting traditional shadow puppets onto a translucent screen behind the musicians and dancers, the company satirized human foibles with stories from early 20th century Istanbul. Then a mime play set in a 14th century town ruled by a despot examined the nature of power and revenge. The concert ended with a poignant tale of redemption set to original music by Sanlikol.

On September 15, Dunya commemorated the birth of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, a key figure of Islamic Sufi mysticism. "Rumi's Anatolia" juxtaposed music heard in that region during the 13th century, combining Turkish Sufi and secular music, Byzantine (Greek-Orthodox) pieces, Jewish poetry set to Turkish melodies and music of the European crusaders. The room's clean acoustics complemented a program whose rich eclecticism created an elevated musical experience. It ended with a hypnotic chant of the Mevlid-i Serif, which is done on important Turkish occasions.

For information on upcoming Dunya events, including "Songs of The City: Byzantium-Constantinople-Istanbul" featuring Omar Faruk Tekbilek on February 8 and "The Language of Birds" at New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall on March 4, visit dunyainc.org.

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