

Composer **Mehmet Ali Sanlikol** was a child prodigy, writing for large ensembles by age 17 in his native Turkey. And his music, as heard on his latest recording, *Whatsnext* (Dünya), weaves



the rich colors of his homeland into a quite-contemporary-sounding big-band tapestry. The album bears a dedication to Turkish composer Aydin Esen, who had encouraged Sanlikol to come to the United States to further his career. Sanlikol salutes his mentor's influence with a gorgeous version of Esen's "A Violet Longing," in which he plays piano, keyboards and *rebab* (spike fiddle) and provides the prayerlike vocals. Elements of Turkish music also inform tracks such as "Kozan March," an adaptation of a traditional Cypriot melody, and "The Blue Soul of Turkoromero," which highlights the *ney* (an end-blown flute) and melds blues with indigenous folk. On the title track, our selection, Sanlikol revisits a composition he wrote and arranged for a 1998 BMI jazz composers workshop in New York City. The piece begins with a bright and swinging effervescence, truly evoking the hustle of the Big Apple. While the colors and textures grow more nuanced, the energy never wanes. The title of the piece, and the album itself, also reflects Sanlikol's reactions to the events of 2013 in Turkey and Boston, his current home. Citing the Gezi Park protests and the Boston Marathon bombings in the liner notes, the bandleader posits, "What's next?"

# Critics' Choice 2014

## Joe Sample & NDR Big Band *Children of the Sun* (PRA)

This is the final recording from legendary keyboardist Joe Sample. Though best-known as one of the founders of the Jazz Crusaders, his decision to drop the word "Jazz" from the iconic band's name was illustrative of Sample's career as a pioneer who added pop, urban sounds and electric piano to the Crusaders and his own recordings. He also contributed brilliantly to albums by Joni Mitchell, Steely Dan and other popular artists without ever abandoning his jazz roots. This recording was his jazziest of all. —**Michael Fagien**

- ▲ **Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra** *Habitat* (Justin Time)
- ▲ **Randy Ingram** *Sky Lift* (Sunnyside)
- ▲ **Tommy Smith/Brian Kellock** *Whispering of the Stars* (Spartacus)
- ▲ **Mitch Hupers** *Invisible Cities* (Liquid Harmony Music)
- ▲ **Richard Smith** *Tangos* (NBM)
- ▲ **Jeff Richmond & Wayne Johnson** *The Distance* (ITI)
- ▲ **Rudy Royston** *Time Travel* (Greenleaf)
- ▲ **Mehmet Ali Sanlikol** *What's Next* (Dunya)
- ▲ **The Lindsey Blair Project** *A New Dawn* (self-released)

# Mehmet Sanlikol: What's Next?

 [allaboutjazz.com/whats-next-by-jack-bowers.php](http://allaboutjazz.com/whats-next-by-jack-bowers.php)

JACK BOWERS ,  
[43 Recommend It!](#)  
[« Prev Next »](#)

How we rate: our writers tend to review music they like within their preferred genres.

After listing the personnel (which varies on every track) for Turkish-born composer Mehmet Ali Sanlikol's new CD, *What's Next?*, there's scarcely room for a review. Well, perhaps a small one, starting with the fact that Sanlikol, a graduate of the Berklee School of Music and New England Conservatory, first studied classical piano with his mother, Fethiye Sanlikol, and by age five was presenting public recitals in his homeland. After further studies, with Turkish composer / jazz pianist Aydin Esen (to whom the album is dedicated), he earned a scholarship to Berklee and co-founded the electric band AudioFact, with whom he recorded two albums, in 1998 and 2003. More recently, Sanlikol helped found and is president of Dunya, a musicians' collective that "explores a cosmopolitan view of the world through the lens of a wide range of Turkish traditions . . ."



*What's Next?*, Sanlikol writes, was "more than a decade in the making," and indeed eight of its nine pieces were written during the years 1996-2000 (the exception is "Palindrome," commissioned by the American Islamic Congress in 2011). Even though Sanlikol draws on his Turkish heritage to underscore his essentially pleasing themes, the over-all complexion is one of American big-band jazz, well-written and expertly performed by Sanlikol and his colleagues. Certainly that is the case with the dynamic title track, which sounds much like the sort of unbridled flag-waver that would have been quite at home in the libraries of Herman, Basie, Rich or other big-band pacesetters. Even so, the Turkish influence is perceptible, as on "On the Edge of the Impossible," which combines American blues with "the Saba makam shared by Turkish and Arabic music" not to mention the impact of one of Sanlikol's mentors, the late Bob Brookmeyer

Another blues, suitably titled "The Blue Soul of Turkoromero," is leavened by Turkish folk music and the *ney*, which Sanlikol says is "an end-blown flute," and on which he solos. A wordless vocal and expansive piano solo (by Sanlikol) are prominent on the placid "Violet Longing," a warm bow to Esen's tutelage. While the plain-spoken "Kozan March" is derived from Turkish folk music, its rhythmic and harmonic framework is clearly based on the standard jazz idiom. Sanlikol uses a Moog synthesizer to deepen the shadowy spirit on the ballad "N.O.H.A.," which precedes the pulsating finale, "Gone Crazy: A Noir Fantasy," dedicated to Hollywood films of that singular genre. Soloists on every number are unlisted, which is fine, as none rises above the ordinary. On the other hand, everyone is steadfastly bound to Sanlikol's perspective, and the ensemble bends to it task without respite. This is classic American-bred jazz with a slight Turkish accent, bold and refreshing in its own way and well worth hearing.

Track Listing: What's Next?; Better Stay Home; A Violet Longing; Palindrome; On the Edge of the Extreme Possible; The Blue Soul of Turkoromero; Kozan March; N.O.H.A.; Gone Crazy: A Noir Fantasy.

Personnel: Mehmet Ali Sanlikol: composer, arranger, conductor, piano, keyboards, voice. Track 1 — Mike

# The Boston Globe

NOISY NEIGHBORS

## Mehmet Ali Sanlikol, 'whatsnext?'

By **Jon Garelick** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT  
SEPTEMBER 25, 2014



**MEHMET ALI SANLIKOL**

**WHATSNEXT?**

Boston-based Turkish Cypriot composer and multi-instrumentalist Mehmet Ali Sanlikol's "whatsnext?" starts like a typical, very well crafted, post-bop big-band disc: fast swing, burning tenor solo, swirling background figures for brass and reeds. But before long, a Turkish accent has been laced into the music, in both the

"exotic" scales and instrumentation. By the time of the minor-mode blare of horns in "Palindrome" (evoking Ottoman Janissary bands), the transformation is complete: a true fusion of jazz and folkloric Turkish language and colors.

Sanlikol, who came to the United States in 1993 and now holds degrees from both Berklee and New England Conservatory, initially rejected his Turkish musical background in favor of jazz. He eventually circled back to his musical roots, and this collection, written between 1996 and 2000, is both technically accomplished and affectingly personal. He's joined by Boston ringers such as reed players Mark Zaleski and Jared Sims, trumpeters Jerry Sabatini and Mike Peipman, guitarist Phil Sargent, and bassist Fernando Huergo.  
(Out now)

**Essential** "Palindrome"

*Mehmet Ali Sanlikol & whatsnext play Scullers Jazz Club, Double Tree Guest Suites Hotel, Wednesday.*

*Tickets: \$25. 617-562-4111,  
[www.scullersjazz.com](http://www.scullersjazz.com)*



## Latest Stories

# This musical style was once a dividing line in Turkish culture

[PRI's The World](#)

Producer [April Peavey](#)

October 01, 2014 · 2:45 PM EDT



Credit: Marco Werman

Turkish musician Mehmet Ali Sanlikol visits the Nan and Bill Harris Studios at WGBH in Boston, home to The World.

Mehmet Ali Sanlikol, a musician from Bursa, Turkey, lives in Boston these days. But he goes back to Turkey every chance he gets, and on his latest trip last month, he noticed some major changes.

[download](#)

*(This story is based on a radio interview. Listen to the full interview.)*

What struck him the most was the combination of Syrian refugees and Arab tourists flocking into Turkey. This was something new, certainly nothing like the tourists he saw before he left 21 years ago.

Back then, most of the visitors were from Western nations. There was certainly no flood of refugees fleeing a war just across the border. But even then, there were cultural and social divides in the country: rural vs. urban, elite vs. poor.

Not even music was exempt. For example, one of the most "hotly debated topics was this 'Arabesque' music movement. The so-called white Turks were really annoyed" by this music, Sanlikol remembers.

You might think [Turkish Arabesque](#) is a nod to the Arab world, but, as Sanlikol explains, it's much more than that.

"It's actually a true blend of many Anatolian internal Turkish cultures," he says. That includes influences from different backgrounds you might find in the Turkish countryside, including "Turkish, Kurdish, etc. So it really is, in fact, a rich ... type of social phenomenon." He likens the fusion to the racially mixed roots of rock-and-roll in the US.

On his latest CD, called [Whatsnext](#), Sanlikol uses Turkish Arabesque melodies, but he's [also a jazz musician](#). So, on this album he merges both east and west.

This blending of two worlds is most evident in the song "Palindrome."

# RADIO BOSTON

## ‘What’s Next?’ For Jazz Composer Mehmet Ali Sanlikol

September 23, 2014

Radio Boston

### [‘What’s Next?’ For Jazz Composer Mehmet Ali Sanlikol](#)



Mehmet Ali Sanlikol at Futura Productions in Roslindale, Mass. (Tim Skoog/WBUR)

Mehmet Ali Sanlikol is many things — a jazz composer, ethnomusicologist, educator and pianist. He’s a native of Turkey and it was music that brought him to Boston in 1993 when he enrolled at Berklee College of Music. Back then, he set his sights set on becoming a jazz composer.

But within a few years, Sanlikol’s initial enthusiasm for jazz began to ebb, as the scene in Boston decayed from ten major jazz venues to three. That’s when

Sanlikol took a new interest in the music of the Middle East.

We first [featured Sanlikol on our show in 2011](#), at the height of this “Turkish” phase. His multi-talented group, *Dunya*, fuses the music of the Ottoman people — Turkish, Greek and Jewish music. *Dunya* was very successful, giving Sanlikol the recognition and financial footing he needed to return to jazz.

Radio Boston’s Amory Sivertson and Tim Skoog visited Mehmet Ali Sanlikol at his group’s rehearsal at [Futura Productions](#) in Roslindale back in April.

*Sanlikol’s band will be performing at [Scullers Jazz Club](#) Oct. 1.*

## Fuse Jazz Review: Mehmet Ali Sanlikol & whatsnext at Scullers — An Intoxicating Mix

Oct 3, 2014

*There were times during the performance when Mehmet Ali Sanlikol and the band seemed to fully enter the Ottoman empire.*



*Mehmet Ali Sanlikol performing live at Scullers. He and his band combined odd-metered folkloric dance grooves and increasingly Middle Eastern tonalities and colors. Photo: Eric Antoniou*

**By Jon Garelick**

When he came to study at Berklee College of Music in 1993, Turkish Cypriot composer and multi-instrumentalist [Mehmet Ali Sanlikol](#) wanted nothing to do with Turkey or Turkish music. “I literally escaped Turkey,” he said. It was America and jazz all the way. But by the early 2000s, with a bachelors (Berklee) and masters (New England Conservatory) under his belt, he found himself drawn once again to the sounds of his homeland. Now Sanlikol has released *whatsnext*, a collection of his pieces written for big band between 1993 and 2000, and on it you can hear the gradual absorption of Turkey into his music. At Scullers on Wednesday night, he and his band — also called *whatsnext* — played an exciting show that combined all Sanlikol’s influences — and also got the audience screaming.

Sanlikol writes detailed, engaging charts. At NEC (where he eventually received a doctorate) he studied with both George Russell and Bob Brookmeyer, and you can hear their influences too — Russell in the stacked rhythmic grooves and modal “gravity,” Brookmeyer in his overall structures and voicings, and in his strategic deployment of solos.

At Scullers, Sanlikol introduced the first tune with floating chromatic piano lines and then showed his skill at knitting overlapping ensemble figures. The 11-piece band came together in swelling short phrases punctuated by unison stops that pushed everything forward and then found its groove in a big electric bass vamp from Boston veteran Fernando Huergo. The vamp — sustained by Huergo, guitarist Phil Sargent, percussionist George Lernis, and drummer Bertram Lehmann — grew huge. Mark Zaleski stood for an alto solo, fierce and incisive, but at this point he was just one part of an intoxicating mix.

Sanlikol and *whatsnext* did this kind of thing several times over the course of the 100-minute set, combining odd-metered folkloric dance grooves and increasingly Middle Eastern tonalities and colors. Sanlikol evoked those flavors with adept voicings, beautifully matching the piercing, nasal sound of his own double-reed wood zurna with the muted trumpet of Jerry Sabatini, or having Zaleski double on clarinet while baritone saxophonist Jared Sims switched to bass clarinet. Sanlikol also played the end-blown ney wood flute.

But, as he explained from the stage, his most liberating discovery has probably been the electronic Continuum Fingerboard, a flat-surfaced synthesizer that allows him to find the characteristic Middle Eastern microtones and muezzin-like quavers unavailable to him on a standard keyboard (pianist Utar Artun filled in on keyboards when Sanlikol doubled). Occasionally, Sanlikol introduced melodies with his own attractive singing — sometimes wordless, sometimes alternating English and Turkish.



Cover art for the album “*whatsnext*”

At times the music threatened to lapse into generic synthesizer jazz-funk, but Sanlikol generally steered himself out of these moments with his beguiling mix of musical languages and continually inventive charts. The audience response was not conventional either. On Sanlikol’s Sufi-influenced “Dervish Whirl,” his extended vocal improvisation (his most ardent and muezzin-like) drew a spontaneous ovation even as he was still coming out of the final chorus, and his work on zurna was as crowd-inciting as anything a star soprano saxophonist can provoke.

Chalk this up to a healthy turnout from Boston’s Turkish community, if you will, but the mix of Scullers jazz regulars seemed just as caught up in Sanlikol’s whirl. In part, it was those melodies and grooves. But it was also the sound of Sanlikol creating an affecting personal jazz language. In “A Jazzed-Up Devr-i Revan,” the tension between Turkish modes and jazz harmonies, the zurna and modern horns, became quite moving, both languages vying simultaneously for the foreground, a dramatic enactment of Sanlikol’s weaving together of his different selves.

There were times when the band seemed to fully enter the Ottoman empire. The tune “Palindrome,” from the new CD, is about Sanlikol’s journey — beginning in jazz, going back to Turkey, and then returning transformed. By midpoint, the piece was conjuring the slow parade march and blare of a Janissary band. It was chilling, and it was somewhat of a disappointment to hear the keening tune evaporate into the jazz language again. For a bit, we were in the land of the sultans, and I wasn’t ready to leave.