

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



IN CONCERT : Liszt-ian Adventures, and Beyond - The fine Turkish-born, European and American-trained and Santa Barbara-based pianist Zeynep Ucbasaran will give a classical piano recital this Sunday afternoon

BY JOSEF WOODARD, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

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ZEYNEP UCBASARAN

When: 3 p.m. Sunday

Where: Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church, 820 N. Fairview, Goleta

Cost: \$20

Information: 403-2639, songtree.com

When it comes to masterful classical musicians in our midst, who don't necessarily appear in the home town on a regular basis, classical pianist Zeynep Ucbasaran easily comes to mind. She has recorded for Naxos and other labels, and tours the world in various capacities. Occasionally, she makes her musical presence known in her adopted city.

This Sunday afternoon, for instance, Ucbasaran will present a full-bodied and challenging recital at the Live Oak Unitarian Universalist. The performance is part of the still-new classical component of the long-standing "Song Tree" concert series, in the sparkly new chapel of the Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Goleta.

Ucbasaran, a native of Istanbul whose studies included the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, the Freiburg Musik Hochschule in Germany, and USC for her advanced degrees, arrived in Santa Barbara in 1996 (her husband is a computer science professor at UCSB). She recently discussed her upcoming recital, and her musical life in progress.

This is a very interesting program you will perform for the "Song Tree" series. Can you tell me about how you put it together? Was it with the idea of touching on works and composers important to you?

All pieces that I will be performing for the "Song Tree" concert series are my favorite pieces among the piano literature. Usually, when I decide for the repertoire of my programs, I end up choosing very demanding pieces. I think I like playing demanding programs, it suits my nature. For the last two years I have been playing all Chopin programs at my recitals. It looks like in 2011, I will be playing a number of all-Liszt programs.

Well, for this recital I have put together works by Mozart, Schubert, Chopin and Liszt. Not necessarily, all my recitals include my favorite pieces but this time I will enjoy performing each of them. Of course, if the pianist enjoys her pieces, naturally the audience will also have a great time.

You have been associated with Liszt in various ways over the years. Is his music a special passion for you?

Being a graduate student at the Liszt Academy played a big role in my passion for Liszt's music. I always found it very inspiring that the corridors of the Academy were ringing with the music of Liszt.

Liszt's music has tremendous variety. It can be very poetic and very stormy in a few seconds. I love the richness of mood changes in his music. When I perform his music, I feel like a tableaux is appearing in front of my eyes and I start to see the details in it. The Liszt piece that I will be performing (at Song Tree, "Vallee d'Obermann") is one of those pieces that draws a picture in front of you with its notes. I always find it amazing. It is the picture of melancholy and loneliness.

You actually started studying at age 4. So we can say that music was very much a settled path for you from very early on?

That is correct. I was accepted to the conservatory at age 4. I remember being a very active child. I think I was so active that a neighbor recommended my mom to take me to the entrance examinations of the Conservatory in Istanbul. Of course, I was taken to the conservatory not only because of being an active child but I was very much interested in music.

As far as my memory goes back I remember turning on the radio and finding the classical music channel and listening to it. Music was part of our

family. It was not only classical music what I heard at home, we heard variety of genres and styles as well, including Turkish Art Music. I recall listening to everything at high volume.

I see that you have really covered a lot of varied repertoire, and done recordings of traditional repertoire along with some intriguing contemporary music. Has it always been important for you to deal with music from both the old and new perspectives?

I have obviously worked on a classical repertoire more than the contemporary repertoire. I have recorded the complete piano sonatas of Mozart. For example, more recently I have decided to extend my repertoire by adding music of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is good to observe and discover the new ideas of the contemporary composers. There is a large selection of interesting repertoire hidden, and needing to be discovered.

I have started to work on contemporary works after my arrival to the USA. It was a challenge for me to play these pieces with unusual, different harmonies, textures and ideas. Bernstein's "Touches" was a work I really enjoyed working on and recording. Also, the music of Robert Muczynski. His comments on my interpretation of his music were extremely nice. I also developed a certain interest in the music of Turkish composer Adnan Saygun and included his music into my repertoire gradually. His pieces are not very pianistic, and some of them are very difficult to perform. I recorded a CD of Saygun's piano music, which was issued by the Naxos label.

I was intrigued by your recording project of music for three pianos. Can you tell me something about that?

During my research I have noticed that Turkish composer Adnan Saygun had a "Poem" for three piano music. It had never been recorded. I wanted to record it and bring it to life. For this recording project, I have formed a trio with my colleagues whom I knew from Budapest and recorded it.

Since it is very difficult to put three pianos together we wanted to make a whole CD of three piano music, we have found a few more pieces from the repertoire and for the rest of the CD we asked living composers to compose for this project. One of the most interesting pieces among them was by Kamran Ince. It is a five minute piece and three pianos are holding the pedals during the whole time. The texture is based on repetitive and heavily accented notes. The result is amazing. It resembles the sound of middle-eastern string instrument, the Kanun.

I and my friends would love to find the opportunity to perform such a unique program in Santa Barbara. We have already performed in Georgia, South Carolina, and the capital of Turkey in Ankara. The program in Ankara was held at the state radio house studio and was broadcast live.