



MUSIC

Heavenly strings

Şirin Pancaroğlu and Şimdi Ensemble

Photo by Utku Dervent

For many of us, the sound of the harp recalls images of cherubs in heavenly clouds, or classical concert halls. But Turkey's foremost harpist Şirin Pancaroğlu takes the sound both forward and backward in time, using an Ottoman harp in her album *Çengname* and also collaborating with electronic composer Erdem Helvacıoğlu.

Though she entered the classical conservatory at age 11, Pancaroğlu did not turn to Turkish tradition until later in life. "At first it felt like going back to primary school. I began with very accomplished musicians, and I couldn't do anything but watch with my mouth open," she told *The Guide Istanbul*. "But in Turkish music there is a concept called *meşk*, which means learning by playing with masters. It's a bit like learning to cook – you have to follow the cook carefully and

then try for yourself." With the help of traditional musicians, she soon adapted to the spirit, even performing a 45-minute improvisation with cellist Rebecca Foon at the Cappadox Festival.

In her decades with the harp, Pancaroğlu has discovered its various version across continents. The Ottoman harp, or *çeng*, can be seen depicted in Ottoman miniatures from the 16th century. However, Ottoman craftsmen stopped making the *çeng* around 500 years ago. It was not until the early 2000s that one was reconstructed for Pancaroğlu, making her one of the very few musicians today to take on the ancient instrument.

One guest musician on the latest Şimdi Ensemble album, *Eternal Love*, is French tuba player Michel Godard, whose jazz virtuosity blends with the Turkish ensemble

surprisingly well. Composer and vocalist Bora Uymaz gives intense interpretations of the Sufi lyrics, some of which date from the 13th century. Behind it all, Volkan Ergen's percussion creates swishing caravans and throbbing veins of mystical meaning. As Pancaroğlu explains, "We weren't trying to do very traditional Sufi music in that group. TRT [the national television channel] sometimes plays Sufi music when there is a tragic event in the country, so the music can seem very heavy and mournful. But there are ancient lessons in the lyrics of this music, and we decided to protect that while giving the music a new form." Her next project is a solo album of Ottoman and Turkish classical music to be recorded this year. *Stay up to date with upcoming concerts at www.sirinpancaroglu.com*