

MEHMET OKONŞAR

Biography

Mehmet Okonşar was born in October 20, 1961 in Istanbul, Turkey.

After his primary education in Paris, he entered the National Conservatory of Ankara for a short period and then he became a pupil of the great Belgian pianist Jean-Claude Vanden Eynden at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels and he further studied with the living legend of the piano Alexis Weissenberg in Switzerland.

He graduated from the Royal Conservatory of Brussels: Diplome Supérieur de Piano Avec La Plus Grande Distinction-Premier Nommé performing the Concerto for piano op.42 by A. Schoenberg.

Aiming for complete musicianship Mr. Okonşar pursued his studies in the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, for musical composition and orchestration with Madame Jacqueline Fontyn.

Mehmet Okonşar gave his first recital at the age of 16 performing works by Messiaen, Mussorgsky and Chopin.

During his studies at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, he was selected as one of only four students among the entire Conservatory of Brussels, for advanced and intensive training at the Centre Européen Des Hautes Etudes Musicales, an institution created by Vanden Eynden for the education of concert pianists from exceptionally gifted students. This institution is now known as Ecole Eduardo del Pueyo.

He won the prestigious Grand Prix Young Virtuoses in Antwerp at the age of 20. This led to his orchestral debut, performing the Third Piano Concerto by Rachmaninoff in the de Singel Concert Hall of the same city.

Mehmet Okonşar is included in the International Biographical Reference book: 2000 Outstanding Musicians of the 20th. Century published by the International Biographical Centre, Cambridge UK (Melrose Publications).

After winning the Sixth Prize in the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition, Salt Lake City Utah, 1991 Mehmet Okonşar is pursuing a busy international concert pianist activity. His other nominations and awards include: J. S. Bach, Second Prize, Paris (1989), Gold Medalist of the Premio Etruria, Rome (1991) and of the Académie Internationale Des Arts Contemporains, Enghien (Belgium, 1991).

Mr. Okonşar performed in major concert halls in Europe, North America and Japan including Royal Opera House, London; Salle Gaveau (Paris); Concertgebouw (Amsterdam); Bösendorfer Saal (Vienna); Jack Singer Concert Hall (Calgary); Symphony Hall (Salt Lake City).

He performed, among many others, with the following orchestras and conductors: Utah Symphony, Poznan and Lublin Philharmonic Orchestras, Brussels Opera Orchestra (La Monnaie), Antwerp Philharmonic, Presidential Symphony (Ankara), Istanbul State Symphony, Izmir State Symphony; Joseph Silverstein, Charles Dutoit, Sylvain Cambrelin, Christof Escher, Alexander Schwink, Lucas Pfaff.

He was special guest judge for the National Piano Competition of Japan (1999).

While living in Belgium and having Turkish and Belgian dual citizenship, on the request of former President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Suleyman

Demirel, Mehmet Okonşar was nominated “State Artist” of the Turkish Government and settled in Ankara with his wife, Lale, artist painter.

Mr. Okonşar artistically supervised the establishment of the Antalya Cultural Centre and directed its Opening Ceremony-Festival under the auspices of the President Demirel in 1996.

His researches in music related technologies were broadcast in a series of documentaries presented by Mehmet Okonşar himself on the National Broadcast of Turkey (TRT).

Mr. Okonşar is a prolific composer of published, performed and commissioned orchestral, chamber, choral and piano music. His composing line is highly avant-garde and complex.

Also a musicologist, writer and lecturer, Mr. Okonşar's writings are published in several Turkish language music and related publications. His essays and analyses are offered in English and French and he is regularly invited for lectures in Universities on many subjects, mainly Music, Composing and Technology.

His recital programs are usually highly eclectic and often thematic : the two last sonatas by Schubert, the complete piano music by Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern, “The path to Atonality” with works by Chopin, Liszt, Berg, Schoenberg and Stockhausen, a recital of Valses: Chopin, Brahms, Hindemith, Schoenberg, the complete works for piano by Gershwin. Mehmet Okonşar often distinguishes himself with this unusual programming, often mixing works by A. Webern, A. Berg, I. Stravinsky, K. Stockhausen, P. Boulez and L. Berio with the more traditional piano repertoire.

His discography includes the four greatest works by J. S. BACH: Die Kunst Der Fugue, Das Wohltemperierte Klavier, Die Goldberg Variationen and Musikalisches Opfer.

His other recordings: Live Salt Lake City, a live recorded recital with F. Liszt, W. A. Mozart, G. Fauré, A. Scriabin and J. P. Rameau. Tango is made of A. Piazzolla's best Tangos arranged for the piano solo by Okonşar himself. Okonşar Plays Gershwin includes all solo piano original works and many transcriptions from the composer.

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