



Album: *Next Spring*

Artists: The Mehmet Polat Trio

"Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us."

- Martin Luther

Once winter has commenced, it's never too early to allow one's mind to leap ahead to next spring—it's a great way to stave off the winter blues—and so this CD was released just in time and with just the right moniker.

If you divide your music tracks into lists under such pragmatic headings as "Workout," "Motivation," or "Get Out of Bed NOW, Ya Lazy Slug," I suggest you file *Next Spring* under "Cramming." Why? Because it's great music to study to—beautiful but unobtrusive, advanced and rich in mental stimulation without jumping up and down for your attention.

Mehmet Polat is an accomplished composer and master of the *oud* (the Arabic lute), noted for having taken on a particularly exacting program of musical study from an early age, for developing new techniques in his playing, and for mixing different traditions (Turkish, Arabic, Azerbaijan, Persian, Indian, Flamenco, and Jazz, to name a few) in his compositions. Born in Urfa, Turkey, the seat of ancient Anotolia, a region of mostly Kurdish and Arab inhabitants, he studied Ottoman music in Istanbul. It appears that this unique background was the perfect foundation for unique achievement.

It took years, but Polat invented a new left hand technique and designed an *oud* with two extra bass strings, both of which developments allowed him to perform a wider variety of scores.

In 2007 he found himself in Amsterdam where he met Mali's Zoumana Diarra (also known as "Would"), master of the *kora* (an African harp). Diarra came from a family of *griots*—Malian storytellers who recount the history of their people. In addition to the *kora* Diarra could also play guitar, *ngoni*, *balafon*, *djembe*, and saxophone, and build his own instruments. Obligated to provide for himself from an early age, he'd been forced into ingenuity by necessity (he'd built his first guitar from a tin can and some fishing line).

Polat met the third member of the trio, Sinan Arat, at an *Alevi* (a mystical branch of Islam) ceremony in Rotterdam in 2012. In addition to possessing deep spiritual insight, Arat was a master of the *ney* (a Turkish flute).

All three of these musicians have created milestones in the histories of their respective instruments. Zoumana added semi-tone tuning clips to the *kora*'s strings to create a new sound. Sinan has opened himself to every culture he's visited to enrich the style of his *ney* playing.

Polat composed all the pieces for this album, but improvisation is a salient part of the mix, and although the music is couched inside several very old musical traditions, the chemistry between these players and their respective traditions ensures the kind of call and response synergy that makes for some original sounds.

It's a bit rare to find a musician who is both true to the pure traditions of his instrument and equally devoted to originality, but Polat has often been credited with creating what might be called a particularly well-informed innovation, rooted in the long memory of the *oud* itself.

It's worth checking him out on Youtube. Be sure to have a look at his interpretations of Paganini.

Next Spring manifests three of the Mindful Bard's **criteria** for music well worth a listen.

- It's authentic, original, and delightful.
- It provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavor.
- It inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation.