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### CONCERT REVIEWS

# MEHMET POLAT TRIO PLAY SONGS OF CONNECTION

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Lincoln Center's David Rubenstein Atrium is a cool and welcome relief from the 85F heat of Manhattan. The room is crowded with more than a hundred people waiting for the Mehmet Polat Trio to take the stage. It is a packed house with a line out the door of 30 people waiting to get in, a turn-away crowd. Their performance is part of a weekly free concert series coordinated by Lincoln Center that runs year long.

The trio has an oud player Mehmet Polat, a ngoni player Victor Sams, and a ney player Pelin Başar. They are here at the outset of an almost month long tour across America. Mehmet introduces himself and the trio, he invites the audience to listen, "I am looking for a musical connection from heart to heart. I invite you to open your heart and let the music come through you."

The performance starts with Polat's gentle and languorous solo on the oud – a pear-shaped wooden instrument with strings that sounds like a lute. Mehmet is from Turkey, his family are from an Alevi Sufi musical tradition. But he has studied various musical styles, including

traditional African, Indian, Persian music, and modern jazz. His sound is spare, folk-like, meditative. There are no electronic keyboards here or drum fills.

A silence opens up in the audience. People are rapt in attention, entranced. Mehmet seated center is joined in play by the ney player. The ney is a long and ancient flute. The ngoni, a long-stringed instrument, joins in. And the flute melody weaves in and out the accompanying strings of the other two instruments. There is a grace about this trio, nothing is rushed, time slows down. The audience is invited to relax and to contemplate.

The ngoni player initiates the second song, using his fingers in staccato taps at the base of his instrument. Victor Sams has a beautiful smile that radiates out to the audience. There is a happiness and versatility in his playing: the ngoni is magically transformed into a drum, then back to a stringed instrument, then again to a drum.



*Mehmet Polat Trio*

The ngoni and oud begin a conversation, shadowing each other's sound. The two performers nod to each other as they sit side by side. The notes move round and round one another in call and response. One leads with a few notes and the other answers with a few more. Indeed, Mehmet has confirmed that this dialogue is vital for him, "*The conversation is intended. I am interested in creating connections between different cultures and continents. I want to explore the common language, but also to look at how two different musical languages may correlate or vibrate together.*"

The music is not afraid to breathe, to pause, and to create space in this large atrium. This sense of spaciousness is perhaps one of the trio's greatest strengths. As the performance continues, Mehmet begins to sing. With his eyes closed, you sense his earnestness, his sincerity. He is humble, yet assured in his musicianship. The song includes some words of

Fuzuli, who was a Sufi poet from Azerbaijan. The ney shadows the vocal notes. There is a cyclical sense to the melody, reminiscent of an Indian raga. The audience is pulled in, caught up in the compelling, lulling sound. The audience is transported on a journey of wonder and longing.

For more information about Mehmet Polat Trio's tour, please visit: <http://mehmetpolat.net>



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