

Yet Another Haunting, Exhilarating Album From Oud Master Mehmet Polat

by delarue

Oudist [Mehmet Polat](#) hails from the Urfa region of Turkey, a hotspot for cultural cross-pollination for centuries. So it's hardly a surprise to hear how individualistically he blends traditional Turkish sounds with Arabic, African and Andalucian music in addition to American jazz rhythms. Every year, he seems to put out a new record that always ends up on the best albums of the year page here. The latest one, *The Promise* – streaming at [Bandcamp](#) – will definitely be on the best of 2020 list here next month. In general, it's Polat's at his most upbeat and optimistic.

While Polat's custom-made oud has a couple of extra bass strings, the electrifying opening track here, *Firefighters* is more of an exploration of the upper registers, peaking out with a series of incisive chords after a long build through enigmatic Balkan-tinged modes over Daniel van Huffelen's bass and Joan Terol Amigo's drums.

Polat builds an almost teasing, unresolved suspense in the second track, *Nature Hits Back*, before spiraling and then descending to the depths over percussionist Ruven Ruppik's many textures and shifting rhythms. *Pathfinder* is a catchy, anthemic, dynamically vamping number over elegantly syncopated, boomy frame drum by Alper Kekeç.

Polat teams up with Sinan Arat on ney flute and Kekeç on frame drum again for *Footprints*, a hypnotically pulsing, mysterious, mostly one-chord jam. Then he completely flips the script with the spare, funky *Permission*, featuring a starkly melismatic solo from kamancheh fiddle player Elnur Mikayılov.

Polat and the opening track's rhythm section hint that they're going into qawwali as *Swinging in Hands* gets underway, but instead they go off on a bouncy West African kora-inspired tangent and end with a spacious bass solo. The undulating *Fidelity to İstanbul* makes a good, upbeat segue.

Guest Shwan Sulaiman contributes an expressive, dramatic vocal in *Being the Voice* over a scampering backdrop with echoes of North African rai music. Polat breaks out his loop and distortion pedals for *Symbolizations*, the most overtly psychedelic track here.

The real stunner here is *Neterseno*, with haunting clarinet and defiantly populist vocals from Mikail Aslan and trebly tenbur lute by Cemil Qocgiri, picking up with a fiery flamenco groove before coming full circle. Polat plays a darkly incisive, melancholy solo over a drone in the lament *Nothing Is Yours* and closes with *My Cultural Womb*, a syncopated, edgily modal number reflecting influences from Turkey to Egypt.