

Sarpay (SharpEye) Ozcagatay: Artist Interview

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Tell us about your background:

I hold a BA degree majoring in classical flute. Starting at the age of 10, I studied at Hacettepe University State Conservatory, majoring in classical flute performance as a part time student. After the graduation from elementary school, I became a full time student at the conservatory and continued my education for middle school, high school and university. I was a good student, I graduated with one of the top 10 highest GPA's that year. In 2009 I came to the US to study at Berklee College of Music majoring in jazz flute performance as a full scholarship student, and graduated as one of the honors list students.

Name pronunciation:

My name is Sarpay Özçağatay (according to google translate, the best pronunciation would be Sarpae Özchaatai). I prefer to be called SharpEye, which is my stage name.

Where are you from? I am from Ankara, Turkey.

What inspired you to learn flute?

When I was 4 years old, I had this little toy keyboard. I was playing/trying little melodies from the radio, I was listening to. There are no professional musicians in my family, but my dad realized that I have an ability for music. As everybody else did, during elementary school, I was learning recorder and I was having so much fun with it and I still do :)

I believe it was the 4th year of elementary school and this young lady who plays flute came to our classroom and played some music for us. I truly enjoyed what I heard and that was the first time I met my future.

When I was nine, my dad asked me if I wanted to study music at the conservatory and I just said yes without knowing what that meant. I had a few lessons/training sessions for the auditions at Hacettepe University State Conservatory. I got accepted and my future began.

When were you introduced to jazz?

This is a very good question. I was never introduced to it. When I started playing flute, improvisation began along with it. Meanwhile, as well as classical music, I was listening to different genres and met with jazz and improvisational music. I was able to improvise on any music intuitively and that was about it. (this also gives the answer for the next question, If I have always improvised jazz)

I always have been composing music or melodies. As you know I released my debut album "Unexpected" in March 2013. Here is the link for that <http://cdbaby.com/cd/sarpayozcagatay>.

"Unexpectedable" is also available on iTunes as well. It can be found under my name.

Who were your greatest influences?

This is a little interesting. I did not listen to many flute players. I always listened to other instrumentalists as well as flute, such as: piano, guitar, bass guitar and so on. To give some names, during my classical education, J.P. Rampal was one of my main influences, however I wasn't relying on only one player. I was always listening to players, to whomever I came across. For the flutists who improvise; Dave Valentine, Steve Kujala, Joe Farrell, Hubert Laws, Herbie Mann would be a few top names in my list.

What are some high points of your career thus far?

This is actually the first time that I am announcing that I am releasing a flute practice method book very soon. I am very excited about it. It has rich content, a lot of exercises for all purposes. I will give more detailed info when it is released, and the release date will probably be before the new year.

As you know, NFA is the biggest flute association worldwide. Last year, I was selected as a winner of the "Jazz Soloist" competition of 2014. This year(2015) I was asked to be a judge for jazz competitions. I also gave a jazz flute clinic. Recently, I also have performed and recorded with Grammy award winning artists that could be another high point of my career.

My practice routine:

Since my formal education was in classical music, I still do those exercises daily; scales, arpeggios, intervals, tone exercises, trills and so on. I have also created a lot of exercises of my own (they will be in my book as well) that helped me efficiently improve my technical agility as well as my musicality and improvisation skills.

How do you work on your improv and compositions?

I don't explicitly work on my improvisation skills as I have been doing it intuitively since I was young. I just hear it in my mind and play as I feel. This makes me the happiest and most free. I do play jazz piano and I usually compose both on flute and piano. Fetch some chords with the melodies I create, and I create the big picture in my mind.

What is the most challenging about jazz flute?

I guess this is all about loving it or not. Does love have a challenge? In my opinion, the answer is, no. I don't necessarily call myself jazz flutist. I call myself a flutist and improviser, as I do play a lot of different styles.

What are some upcoming events?

I have a few shows coming up in November. I have my own band named "SharpEye Project." I will have my own show during November at SharpshifterLab, NYC, and recently, I have recorded this album for an amazing French bassist friend of mine. We just had the CD release party. We will have more shows coming up in November at Rockwood Music Hall, NYC. I have some other bands that I am part of as a side-men, are coming up as well. More info about my schedule can be found at www.sharpeyflute.com.

Studying jazz flute:

You must know who already has played/established jazz flute and currently has been playing it as well. Jazz means history and you must know about it, like your name. Otherwise, in terms of creating your own voice in especially jazz, you may have difficulties.

Advice for people wanting to study abroad:

This is one of the most important and the best point for me, I am glad you asked this question.

I think the most important thing is knowing what you want to do for your life! Without a goal, even you go to the place, you will be lost! You will get lost in the place anyway :) For instance, I wanted to know more about improvisation, jazz history, meet the best musicians, get the best jazz education possible and so on. I have made a plan and started my journey. This is very important. If you don't have a goal regardless of the obstacles nothing happens. You will definitely get lost. I know so many international friends who went back to their home countries since they did not plan. In terms of finances, your GPA, academic accomplishments, and awards will help to get more scholarships. If you work hard and get recognized at your collage, they will never ignore you. They always reward you, like I was back at

Berklee, and they rewarded me with a full scholarship and a few prestigious awards. Every good thing happens upon your love! If you love what you do, nothing will make you distracted from your goal. You work hard with love, do it and achieve them!

Thank you very much for featuring me in the Flute View Magazine. It is an honor to be part of your awesome work!