

FERHAN and FERZAN ÖNDER, piano duo

“Their subtle, searching ensemble playing, their temperament and their virtuoso dexterity are proof of the extraordinary pianistic qualities of the Önders. This is truly fiery music making!”

[Michael Stenger/*Fono Forum*]

There is always a special bond between twins – and Ferhan & Ferzan Önder bring that bond onto the concert platform. They are two individual artists but together they create a new musical identity. Though this might at first seem no more than a cliché, with these sisters it is the key to their activity and the essential characteristic of their expressive intensity, which becomes fully apparent in the way they play, completing each other’s artistic personality.

Born in Tokat (Turkey), they moved to Ankara at the age of seven, following their brother who was already studying at the Conservatory. When they were still only ten, Ferhan & Ferzan Önder began playing the piano. Just four years later, they won the ‘Jury Special Award’ at the Concorso Pianistico Internazionale Alessandro Casagrande in Terni (Italy). After a series of further prizes, Ferhan & Ferzan Önder won First Prize at the International Piano Duo Competition in Hamburg.

Their great talent, combined with a high degree of discipline and support from their family, soon bore fruit. After Ferhan won first prize in a competition in Istanbul that led to a concert in Vienna, the twins decided to move to Austria in 1985. They studied at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna with Noel Flores and Paul Badura-Skoda. Shortly before their final exams they met Alfons Kontarsky, who became their mentor and a close friend until his death.

Ferhan & Ferzan Önder both describe their Turkish roots as of crucial importance for their trenchantly rhythmic playing style, since they have been familiar with the irregular rhythms of traditional music from their earliest childhood. But they say the fact that they are continuing a tradition of Turkish piano duos is merely a coincidence.

Extensive concert tours have taken the pianists throughout Europe, the Far East and America. They have performed among others at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Wigmore Hall in London, the Semperoper in Dresden, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg and the Vienna Musikverein and Konzerthaus, as well as in Zurich, Barcelona, Istanbul, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Taipei, Belgrade, Montpellier and Salzburg.

Ferhan & Ferzan Önder have been invited to perform at such renowned festivals as the Rheingau Musik Festival, Salzburger Festspiele, Beethovenfest Bonn, Wiener Festwochen, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele, Istanbul Festival, Sommets Musicaux de Gstaad, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Musikfest Bremen and Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival. They appear regularly with major orchestras like the Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, the Mozarteum Orchester Salzburg and the Stuttgarter Philharmoniker under such conductors as John Axelrod, Hans Graf, Howard Griffiths, Max Pommer, Hubert Soudant, Stefan Vladar and Hugh Wolff. In 2003, they performed with Sir Peter Ustinov at the Voestival in Linz. Similar musical/literary projects have led to collaborations with Cornelia Froboess, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Friedrich von Thun, Günther Jauch and Roger Willemssen. In 2016, their latest project was premiered: "Anonymous Was a Woman", a literal-musical performance that focuses on women's rights. Six female composers – among them Rachel Grimes, Anna Drubich and Amritha Vaz – contributed compositions to the project. During the performance, their music and texts of female authors alternate.

After releasing several CDs on small labels, they made a breakthrough with their CD "Vivaldi Reflections", which was released on EMI in 2001. This disc also won the coveted ECHO KLASSIK Prize of the German record Academy. Their next CD was "1001 Nights" (EMI, 2003) with arrangements of works by Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Balakirev and Mozart. In 2011 Sony issued a live recording of their concert of Carl Orff's Carmina Burana for choir, soloists, two pianos and percussion at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival.

In recent seasons, Ferhan & Ferzan Önder have played works for two pianos and orchestra by Bach, Mozart and Poulenc, and premiered works by Fazıl Say. In the current season they'll again impress international audiences in performances of music by Bartók, Reich, Say, and Tan Dun with the Austrian multi-percussionist Martin Grubinger. Among their other chamber music partners are Benjamin Schmid, Cyprien Katsaris, Janis Vakarelis and Clemens Hagen.

Ferhan & Ferzan Önder live with their families in Austria. Since 2003 they have been "Goodwill Ambassadors" of UNICEF committed to projects with children.