

Program Script for Mehmet Selim Baki (Aired on 24 January 2010)

Category: Education

Location: İstanbul

The sound of accordions flows from a basement to fill the streets of Edirnekapı İstanbul.

The little children of Edirnekapı’s neighborhoods are the ones that give life to those sounds...

By touching the keys on the accordion, they bring their fairy tales to life.

This is a basement apartment in Edirnekapı. **In fact 4 years ago this place was totally empty,**

but today it is a lively music studio where children’s dreams are brought to live through the sound of music..

Edirnekapı is a part of İstanbul where the incomes of the families are lower but the rates of birth are high.

And these small children find themselves on the street once they are out of school.

However, for those who want to change their “blind destiny”, there is a chance to take a different path.

Mehmet Selim Baki spent many years in Turkey and Germany signing off on many projects until he decided it was time to retire.

And so, he decided to spend his retirement time on children.

He thought that the flute was not enough as the only instrument schools taught to children.

He thought that it would benefit children of less fortunate families to have a better music education. And then he chose a basement room as the start up of his project “Music for Peace”.

Interview with Mehmet Selim Baki:

Doing something that involved music, peace and children was always a dream of mine.

We’ve been here for over 4 years, we came across this opportunity here.

This really is all for peace. It’s not just a music education program, it carries an ideology.

Peace and justice stand behind our idea and project. That is how we named our project.

Mehmet Selim Baki started his “Music for Peace” project by purchasing accordions.

His purpose was to give children basic musical training so that they can play an instrument that can be played everywhere.

However, even though he had acquired the instruments, it wasn’t easy for him to find the children.

Interview with Mehmet Selim Baki:

I had a dream of forming my own band for peace.

The specialty of the band was that it consisted of instruments that could be carried everywhere and make a lot of sound.

The accordion in some ways is a sample of such an instrument. It has all these characteristics.

You know the accordion, with one hand you control the rhythm with the other you push it in and out, it’s an instrument that can be played anywhere.

It can be carried on the street and that’s very important. The hardest part is starting, and finding a student.

The students have to come from families with low incomes. We made many different attempts to find them.

We seemed to be stuck and then with the help of our friend Yusuf Kulca at the Hope Children Foundation we found this school.

This is the perfect neighborhood for our project. **We started here about 4.5 years ago and today we have activities in 3 different schools.**

Mehmet Selim Baki started giving children music education by turning the school’s basement into a musical workshop.

He has created a healthy atmosphere for music education. He pays for all the expenses including the teachers.

When everything was ready, he whispered the notes into the children’s ears.

(The children would repeat the notes)

Sol fa mi la mi re

The Music for Peace project is currently under way in 3 schools in the Edirnekapi region.

Since its start, **about 300 children have been introduced to the rhythm of music.** The classes are after school hours and it is totally free.

There are four fully paid teachers and many volunteer teachers trying to open new doors to other worlds for these children

Teacher: “You three, start.”

Interview with Turgay Özdemir:

We have classes five days a week. Currently we have classes every day at Ulubatlı Hasan Elementary School.

After school **we try to work till about 5 pm.**

The children are quite comfortable. They are not forced to come every day; they can have their own system.

I try to teach note reading in the simplest form possible. They are immediately introduced to an instrument from the moment they arrive.

Without delay we tell them what the instrument is about and try to connect them to the instrument.

Without delay, we take the notes for the accordion and immediately start the training.

We are really trying to the best we can in the best way we know how.

There are many aspects of the work we do. There is a huge difference in the self confidence of children from the day they arrive until after they’ve completed the classes. I see a major change.

Of course these are only the changes that can be seen. There are others that cannot.

In the end, the children seem to find some sort of mission by coming here and learning to play the accordion.

They know that they are doing this for peace and in time we are attempting to develop their awareness. This in itself is a huge change.

Interview with Hasret İlter:

My friends were coming here and I was curious, I was in the 5th grade when I came for the first time.

I couldn’t get used to it at first; I couldn’t press the buttons of the accordion. But I wanted to try again, because all my friends were here.

Later on I tried again and succeeded.

Currently I am studying at the music conservatory; I play the viola and accordion.

Interview with Mehmet Selim Baki:

We don’t select our students. This is definitely not a project where we search for talent.

We are trying to put “a drop in the ocean”. These children need to have access to their democratic rights, rights to have music education.

Although, we don’t select them by talent per se, there are extremely talented kids who stand out. We try to assess them separately.

With our Music for Peace project we are trying to help children find a path and make important life decisions.

While some children consider music as just a hobby, for some it is more. This project helped them get into academies and be trained professionally.

Interview with Çağrı Kazançkar:

I first came here 4 years ago. I was 10 years old and had started with the accordion.

I have played rhythm instruments since I was 3-4. I like percussion.

I started on my own with the accordion. They taught me how to read notes. A workshop to learn how to read music started at Muallim Naci Elementary School.

Now I give music reading and accordion classes there. Now I have my own students.

Before coming here, we would be on the streets, playing football and doing other things outside...

But now we are quite disciplined. We’ve learned how to work, and plan what might do later on in life.

Life is much better this way...

The change in these children also affects their families. The families were reluctant at first, not really understanding the purpose of the course but now they realize the huge difference it has made in their lives.

Interview with Ayşe Veled:

Nazmi started when he was 10 years old, he’s been coming for about 3-4 years.

We are very happy with the outcome. This is a great opportunity to get them off the streets where they would just hang out and do nothing.

The children are learning good things here. Nazmi is a calm child, very smart but a calm and respectful child.

We would have never thought of him turning out like this, he has changed and now he is studying at the conservatory.

It’s amazing. They had an exam and he got a perfect score, he got 100 points and of course we were extremely happy.

Interview with Hülya Artal:

I remember as a child having a lot of interest in music. I still am very interested, I love music. When I was young, at school recitals I would always sing Turkish Classical Music Songs.

My family wasn’t interested much in the beginning. And now that my daughter is getting this education, what can I say, I’m happy and I see myself in her.

Interviewer: Would you like your child to attend the conservatory in the future?

Hülya Artal: Of course I would. Whichever branch it may be, whichever music type it may be, I would love her to get that education.

Her father and I support her fully. We want her to study at the conservatory and we want her to have access to opportunities that we never had a chance to have.

We are so grateful to Mehmet Baki and the other teachers for giving us such an opportunity.

(The children are rapping)

Until recently these children were on the streets with no sense of being. But now they have paths for their future paved with notes.

By giving life to the instruments they play, they understand that music education is so much more.

Everyone is surprised at this change in children. As for Mehmet Selim Baki, he is continuously surprised at others’ surprise!

(The children are rapping):

“sol mi si la sol, music for peace is starting”

Interview with Mehmet Selim Baki:

For some reason people find it hard to believe that someone could want to do something and not expect anything in return.

I sense that surprise when I tell them what I am doing. Yet I feel that this is the biggest legacy we can pass on to our children.

Instead of having one or two extra homes, I take more pleasure in realizing the project and leaving this legacy behind.

People need to look at it that way. If we want to live in peace, tranquility, we have to do something about it.

I think that everyone in this unjust world has to be able to do something to give back.

Every year, Deutsche Bank in Germany gives an award to the most successful social responsibility projects. This year Mehmet Selim Baki was honored with the “Urban Age Award” from Deutsche Bank.

He however, does not search for those awards from others. He searches for them in the fingers of his little students and doesn’t limit his dreams to just the keys of the accordion.

Interview with Mehmet Selim Baki:

This is the first school we started with. There used to be a music room upstairs, we used to work up there.

Later on when the school changed its heating to natural gas, this coal chamber room became empty, it’s quite big.

So we moved there. We put in small working cabinets, a solfegé class, and repair room.

We have similar set ups in a third school. In the second school such an opportunity was not available, we had no space.

In the third school, the Muallim Naci Elementary School there is a studio just like the one you see here.

Until now, all the expenses have come out of my personal savings.

Hopefully I will be able to establish a foundation soon. After the foundation is established, I do not want the children to be limited. I want all the children to be able to grow as much as they can without any barriers.

My true desire is that instead of donations, for people to share their desire and know how in working in this project.

Our dream is to spread this throughout the country and raise social awareness.

Mehmet Selim Baki chose to live his retirement not slipping away from life but instead helping to bring new lives.

His Music for Peace project brought soul to the children through music. Starting off in a little room in a basement, he has touched the lives of hundreds of children.

He made a huge difference in the lives of children and their families.

Today we had a chance to hear Mehmet Selim Baki’s story.

If you believe there are changemakers around you, in a short while we will tell you how you can participate in Turkey’s Changemakers program.

Dear viewers, we are here in the Seed Room of the Sabancı Museum.

I don’t know if you have ever seen this place but it should be in architecture literature and we have the great pleasure of filming our program from here.

If you believe there are Changemakers close by, please go to our website (www.farkyaranlar.org) and fill out the application form.

Or if you don’t have access to internet, however, **there are over 29 million internet users in Turkey,**

then all you have to do is call us at 0212 249 23 14, our friends will tell you what you need to do to participate.

Until the next episode of “Turkey’s Changemakers”, I’m Cüneyt Özdemir, wishing you a good evening.