

Bridge Builder Rahmi Oruc Güvenc

Rahmi Oruc Güvenc was born in 1948 in the Anatolian town of Tavsanlı in the province of Kütahya. His parents came from both sides of Tatar families who had to leave their homeland in the tumult of the 19th century and fled to the Ottoman Empire and present-day Turkey. This "Great Migration" and his descent from Central Asia (an ancestor was the Grand Mufti of Kazan) were experiences in his family that accompanied him throughout his life. He dedicated himself continuously to the exploration of the traditions of the Muslim and shamanistic traditions of the peoples of Central Asia. He was later authorized by a Bakshi healer from the Altai Mountains to practice and pass on certain music and traditions.

At the age of twelve, Oruc had a dream: a man handed him a violin and asked him to play. In the dream, young Oruc said he couldn't, but the stranger insisted, and Oruc followed his instructions. To his surprise, he could play the violin in the dream. The next day, Oruc told his father about this dream. His father, despite being a printer by profession, was well aware of the significance of intuition and dreams, and he managed to find a child-sized violin for his son. This marked the beginning of Oruc's lifelong engagement with music, leading him to become the composer of numerous classical Turkish music pieces, *Ilahis*, and his own Turkish-Ottoman *Makam*.

Another formative and ultimately life-determining constant was his involvement with the traditions of *Tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). He met his first teacher in his hometown, and his life and professional paths led him, as a spiritual student, to teachers in Istanbul. By his thirties, he received teaching permits from six Sufi orders. The author of these lines became aware of the vast range of his activities in these paths when, 21 years ago in Ankara near the tomb of *Haci Bayram*, an old Dervish said of Oruc Güvenc, "Oruc, the last of the old *Mevlevi*!" The Dervish handed a photo of himself to the author to pass on to Oruc Güvenc. A few days later in *Hacıbektaş*, the home of the *Bektashi* Sufi order, during a conversation with the owner of a souvenir shop, the *Dede* of *Hacıbektaş* entered the shop and joined the conversation. When the talk turned to Oruc Güvenc, the old man remarked, "There are few who know as much about *Haci Bektash* and the *Bektashis* as Oruc!"

For his doctoral thesis at Istanbul University, Oruc Güvenc chose the ancient method of music therapy, originally developed during the golden age of Islamic civilization by figures like *Ibn Sina* and *al-Farabi*. This method, rooted in humoral medicine with origins in ancient Indian and Prophetic medicine, was already used as a regular treatment with music in hospitals during that time. His research and engagement with this music therapy eventually led to the development of today's "Ancient Oriental Music Therapy." He started teaching this approach at Istanbul University Hospital and later in Austria, Germany, and other European countries, as well as in his own international university course. As a psychologist and musician with knowledge of historical backgrounds and traditions, he was the right person placed by history in this position. He also advocated for the establishment of the museum in the *Bayazit II Foundation* in *Edirne*, which now serves as documentation for these ancient healing methods.

Simultaneously with music therapy, Turkish-Ottoman *Makam* music, pentatonic music of Central Asia, and the associated instruments, Oruc also began exercising his teaching authority as a Sufi Sheikh in Europe. This happened in Europe because, at that time, it was very risky to do so in Turkey due to the prevailing prohibition and his position as a state employee at the university. Thus, he became one of the most attended seminar and workshop leaders on Islamic mysticism, *Tasawwuf*, and Islam in Europe during the 1980s and 1990s. He reached out especially to people in the spiritually seeking milieu during those decades, opening a path for many towards Islamic religion, a deeper understanding of Islam, or

simply a respectful and appreciative view of it. Collaborations with Annemarie Schimmel, Ingrid Shah, and others made him a bridge builder between people in Europe and Turkey, making the understanding and beauty of the deeper meaning of Islam accessible to many. He emphasized the commonalities, both within Islamic paths and among religions, without producing syncretism but rather preserving the proper value and respect for each tradition. He exemplified the connection of great teachers through figures like Ibn Arabi, who traveled from Spain over North Africa, the Levant, and finally to Konya in Anatolia, handing his jacket for Mevlana Rumi to the son of his wife, Sadrettin Konevvi, in the process.

Oruc Güvenc was likely one of the first to make the tradition of Halvet, in its simple but strict form, accessible to students in Europe. He taught the old traditions of ritual Dhikr and various Sema and Semah traditions, which he could only learn in utmost secrecy and limitation in Turkey itself. He said, "The Sufi goes wherever it is necessary for people to learn about it." This was everywhere where Islam was not being lived, but the potential for it existed among the people. He never emphasized what separates, both within Islamic paths and among religions, but rather the commonalities. Still, he always strictly avoided producing syncretism and instead maintained the proper value and respect for each tradition. He showed the connectedness of great teachers, exemplified by the person of Ibn Arabi, who traveled extensively and handed down his jacket for Mevlana Rumi.

His research into and rediscovery of ancient musical instruments led, among other things, to an Ottoman harp model, which also appeared in the well-known Turkish television series "Süleyman." Besides the instruments Ud and Ney, he masterfully played the "Rebab." This instrument, a precursor to the modern violin, was already endangered, but due to Oruc's efforts, it reappeared in recent years in the state orchestras of Turkey. Interestingly, the only old documented instrument is in the collection of the Society of Music Lovers in Vienna, where the author of these lines discovered it at an exhibition, albeit with a different name.

Privately, in his second marriage, Oruc Güvenc also built a bridge with his wife Andrea Azize, who hailed from Germany and supported him in his work. They published two books in German together. His first book on Mevlana Rumi was translated into English and published by the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation and is now being reissued in Austria in German.

His teaching travels eventually extended worldwide. Concerts and seminars took him to the King of Malaysia, London, or the USA, where his most famous CD, "Ocean of Remembrance," was released, making him globally known as a leading representative of Sufi music. Numerous other CD recordings on music therapy, Sufi music, and the music of the peoples of Central Asia document his musical work, which, especially during live concerts, was said to "bring listeners closer to God," as visitors expressed