

February 5, 2009

Turkish fusion bassist opens LPAC's Jazz Jam Series

BY AARON DAVIS

The Jazz Jam Series at LaGuardia Community College has been for many years an important calendar event for jazz lovers in Queens. In addition to the appreciation of jazz, it has been an important chance for established musicians to connect with aspiring jazz artists. Starting Feb. 6 at 8 p.m., the LaGuardia Performing Arts Center will kick off the latest season of the jazz series with headliners The Alper Yilmaz Project.

Before the show, amateur musicians are encouraged to sign up and perform, and the last third of the show is a jam session with Alper. It is a chance for aspiring musicians to share the stage with their professional heroes.

Headliners The Alper Yilmaz Project will be mostly playing tunes from their as-of-yet-untitled

album, which will be recorded this month and released mid-April. The band is composed of Yilmaz on bass, accompanied by some familiar faces in the alternative jazz scene, including saxophonists Michael McGinnis, Nick Kadajski and David Binney, pianist Jon Davis and Turkish drummer Volkan Öktem.

Yilmaz, who emerged onto the Turkish jazz scene in the 1990s when he replaced a sick upright bass player in Tuna Otenel's group, said of jazz in his homeland, "It is quite difficult for me to speak of a unique jazz sound coming out of Turkey. There is a generation of musicians who grew up listening to and playing mainstream jazz revolved around swing and bebop styles. The younger generation is more into funk/fusion styles. Apart from that there are musicians



ALPER YILMAZ

who have efforts on fusing Turkish music's microtones and modes with jazz."

In the group with Tuna Otenel and Polish pianist Janusz Szprot, Alper played the fretless bass and was on some of Tuna's recordings for the 1995 record "Sometimes." It was at this point he formed a band with Yahya Dai and

Volkan Öktem and played jazz standards. During this time he also hosted a radio show named "Jam Session" on Radio METU in Ankara, Turkey.

Yilmaz is described by Jonathan Herrera of Bass Player magazine as a "smart composer, writing many a clever odd-time vamp, often anchoring contrapuntal small horn-

ensemble arrangements latched onto chunky harmonies and serpentine melodies. His playing, too, is sophisticated, with enough Eastern influence to make it uniquely exotic in a modern jazz setting."

After a Ph.D. in economics from UC-Davis and stints playing with Mike McMullen and John Tchicai, Yilmaz moved to New York and worked as a freelance jazz musician and formed The Alper Yilmaz Project. The group's first album, "Clashes," was released in 2007.

"My style is closer to the rock-influenced fusion jazz of the '70s," said Yilmaz. "Around the time my album came out, some critics even considered the album as a great tribute to the late Joe Zawinul of the Weather Report (he had passed away around the same time the album was released), even though I did not listen to Weather

Report's music much!"

Part open-mic, part speak-easy, "The Jazz Jam Series" is the unique event that allows up-and-coming local performers to share stage time with professional musicians. All talent levels are welcome; come in early to sign up for an opportunity to join the featured performer of the night and the Jazz Jam house band.

IF YOU GO

**Jazz Jam Series with
The Alper Yilmaz Project**

When: Feb. 5, 8 p.m.

Where: LPAC's Little Theatre, 47th Avenue and Van Dam Street, Long Island City.

Cost: \$13; \$10 for students.

For More: Box office, 718-482-5151 or go to www.laguardiaperformingarts.com.