

Get a taste of Turkey at Ryles

By BOB YOUNG

"I Will Survive" in Turkish? A lute slicing through a funk tune? Armenian rap?

Get ready for Middle Eastern Rap, Funk and Disco Night at Ryles in Cambridge tonight.

"We try to show all kinds of world cultures next to each other,"

Music

said Mehmet Ali Sanlikol about the organization he founded, Dunya, and the shows it presents. "I choose to use a Turkish lens, not a Western lens."

"Have you heard Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' in Turkish? It was a big hit in Turkey. I'd never heard an English version. We all thought it was a Turkish song."

Sanlikol, who sings and plays keyboards, grew up in Bursa, a

Boston-size city located as far from Istanbul as the Hub is from New York. With a mother who taught Western classical music and a father who dug bossa nova, his wasn't your typical Turkish household.

But Sanlikol's taste also was formed by the disco, funk, rap and Turkish pop he heard on the radio as a teenager in the late '80s.

"It was quite a weird combination I grew up with," he said. "You can tell that from the stuff I do now."

After moving to Boston in 1993 and attending Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory, where he earned his doctorate, Sanlikol decided the city was ready for something offbeat enough to include Ottoman classical and Sufi devotional music and Middle Eastern jazz and pop.

And Turkish funk and disco, of course.

"The disco stuff was as big there in the 70s and '80s as anywhere," he said. "Turkish funk is a little different, but in character it's very much the same (as American funk)."

"There's a newer dimension to funk that's happening all over, but mostly with Arabs, Greeks, Armenians and Turks. We take our traditional instruments (to create) some really funky grooves and melodies, and have them solo next to a saxophone."

"So we play both old classic stuff and '90s funk with a Turkish feel. We have a Greek violinist, an Armenian *doumbek* (hand percussion) player, another percussionist, and I play keyboards and a traditional double reed instrument called the *zurna*. And we'll have a musician playing the *saz*, which is a long-necked lute that has an

Rap is as big in the Middle East as in the United States, Sanlikol said.

"My little cousin in Turkey can recite whole 50 Cent songs by heart even though he doesn't even know English," said Sanlikol. "But to me it is a little empty. It's really commercialized over there like it is here."

So Sanlikol and company present their own takes on 21st century rap.

"We have an Armenian guy who can really rap in both English and Armenian," he said. "And I'm going to join him."

Dunya's next two concerts couldn't be more different than the Ryles gig. On Nov. 26, Sanlikol leads an ensemble of Turkish classical and folk music at the Zeitgeist Gallery in Cambridge. On Dec. 4, he appears at Temple Beth Zion in Brookline for a sacred music event.

Whatever Sanlikol does, he makes sure it's well-seasoned with spices of his own choosing.

"I don't want just a little accent."



MEHMET ALI SANLIKOL brings a mix of Middle Eastern rap, funk and disco to Ryles.

he said. "I have my own accent."

Middle Eastern Rap, Funk and Disco Night takes place tonight at Ryles at 9. Tickets are \$15. Go to www.rylesjazz.com or www.dunya-inc.org