

*Learning Mugam with Jeffrey Werbock, or learning to swim in an ocean of notes:*

My first steps into mugam felt like landing into water when you can't swim.

But as I took time to repeat the patterns given by Jeffrey, the meaning of it became clearer and clearer, to the point where I could actually feel what I was doing and finally enjoy it. Before that, I had no idea I could tell so many things with so few notes.

In mugam, everything has to be deliberate, every sound and silence should have a very clear meaning for the one who's playing it.

To me, actually bringing the richness and depth of that music on my instrument was like opening a new, unexplored path.

I was actually waiting for that road to open for years, but couldn't find the right way to do it.

Mugam gave me the opportunity to play modal music on an instrument that has been conceived in a culture where rhythm is the key to music, and melodies are built on rhythms.

So to me, playing mugam on the kora was enlightening on how I can do much more than I do right now.

Jeffrey gave me the confidence and authority to go to the heart of mugam in Baku and play it in front of a very specialised and qualified audience, with only two months of experience in the field.

And that was for me one of the biggest step in my musical career.

Not that I did well, not that I gave a great performance, but the step I made to leave my country, go to Azerbaijan and play mugam from my heart on a stage when everybody is awaiting for greatness into mugam is a great achievement to me.

And I do have to thank Jeffrey to have given me that opportunity to go there, because my recording of mugam taught by him gave me the ticket to participate in that mugam contest.

His words also gave me the strength to play it with confidence.

Even though I didn't win any prize, I am very proud of having taken my first swim with notes with such confidence...

Vincent Wilken

