

Nerudacafé

- Interview with the Founder of the Neruda, Fikret Yakaboylu

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It is not just a café, but what exactly is the Neruda Café?

Fikret: Exactly. The Neruda Kulturcafé is a very special café that was also founded that way. We didn't just want to create a gastronomy, but also thought about: "What can be done differently? What does culture mean anyway? The Neruda is supposed to be a meeting place where artists can meet, perform and rehearse. And everyone who comes here should be able to take part in the events. That includes cultural activities or musical evenings. The artists should feel comfortable here and be able to develop.

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Some established artists from Augsburg have already had their beginnings at the Neruda, such as John Garner. What other well-known artists would be on the list?

Fikret: Yes, there are many artists now, such as the band "Art in Crime". The guys from "Art in Crime" met at the Neruda and founded their band here. Besides "Art in Crime" and "John Garner", there is also "Musique in Aspik". The two musicians were at the Neruda to jam and also formed their band here. Unfortunately, some bands have also broken up, like "Cat with a Beard". Funnily enough, all the bands that were founded here also worked here at one time. There are not only bands here, but also solo artists who have made a name for themselves, like Farhadj Ooyenda. He's an Afghan musician and he's been working at the Neruda for 7 years. And since Corona we have so many new, young musicians that I didn't even know 3 years ago. That's wonderful.

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The Kültürtage have been held at the Neruda for 11 years. What is the relationship/connection between the Neruda and the Kültürtage?

Fikret: The Kültürtage and the Kültürverein originated from Neruda. At that time, I was active in artistic circles myself, but somehow there was a cultural standstill in Augsburg. There was no place to meet other artists or to rehearse and organize artistic events. At that time, the Neruda didn't exist yet, but I always believed in this potential. It was important to me that culture pulsates in this city. The artists have always been there, but they were not noticed by the population. That's why it took something to come together. Something had to be organized where artists with their potential and the longingly awaiting population could come together. And that's when the idea of the Kültürtagen came up. This is an intercultural festival that is supposed to show the colorful Augsburg and its people. This diversity should be supported. And in the Neruda or Kültürverein, this diversity has a free chance to live.

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How did the idea of founding the Neruda Café come about and where does the name come from?

Fikret: Of course, when you start a café, you also need a name. We first thought about naming the café after a great musician, like Beethoven or Mozart. But unfortunately, there is already a Mozart Museum in Augsburg. After a few surveys, we had a lot of trouble finding a name that would connect all the artists. But then I had the idea of naming the café after a poet. Because many poets work with philosophical approaches or social problems. Also, many musicians are inspired by poets in their song lyrics. And so, we decided to use the name of a poet. But there was also a wide range of poets, such as the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, the Spanish poet Federico García and Pablo Neruda from Chile, who wrote wonderful lyrics. After the military coup in Chile in 1973, many artists had to leave the country and Pablo Neruda became a great idol for many people. That's why we chose his name.

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Can any artist, regardless of their background or age, perform at the Neruda?

Fikret: Yes! But it's not just about performing, it's more about meeting other people and artists. And there are no boundaries at all. Meanwhile, artists come from every age group. Neruda is a place where everyone is welcome, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Anyone can come by and continue to make an impact. It's a place without restrictions.

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What is the best thing a visitor can take away after a stay at the Neruda Café?

Fikret: What they can take away is the wonderful beauty of being part of this colorful world. It's nice to be together, it's nice in a small place like the Neruda to hear many different languages and see people with different nationalities. We belong together all over the world. And culture and art support this common life. The best proof is the Neruda Café. Culture brings people together and for me that means peace and harmony.

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How much has Corona influenced the running of the Neruda Café?

Fikret: Well, the Neruda does a lot of activities, but of course all that has to be financed. We also have rent, electricity, staff and many other things that have to be financed. And the Kültürcafé has been doing that for years with just selling drinks and often there is almost nothing left. We are always happy if we can survive. And during Corona we didn't know what to do at first. We suddenly had no more activities; the audience was missing. But we also got a lot of donations and started a to-go sale. Many friends volunteered to help with cooking or shopping so that Neruda can continue to live. I can say that Corona has shown that you can do anything if you come together.

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Will the Kültürtage still take place this year 2021?

Fikret: The Kültürtage work with a certain theme every year. That means that the team meets in April and chooses a theme that each artist then has to work with. This year's theme is "Weibsbilder". But then Corona came along and of course it's a pity to have only 30 spectators instead of 500. That's why we decided to postpone the entire Kültürtage until next year in 2022. This also means that nothing will be lost. And the Kültürtage will perform in front of the public next year with this theme. But of course, we will not let the cultural world down this year, so we have developed an alternative programme. This will be a slightly smaller format.

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Apart from concerts, what other events take place at the Neruda?

Fikret: Concerts are not only our main concept. I believe that artists have an incredibly strong impact for world peace. And since we are an artists' café, we should not close our eyes. We see how many people who were in danger of their lives flee here and come to us. And so we said, "We have to help these people!". Art and culture are also wonderful ways of integrating these people so that they can make friends quickly. That's why we have also founded other smaller organizations in the Neruda, like "Exil im Neruda". The refugees who come from exile are helped here and they are taught German here. Many friends also help. And in the evening, they continue to come here to make friends. We also noticed how many children there are in Augsburg who can't find a place in a kindergarten. And why should we abandon these children? That's why we started with children's campaigns. We met with children once a week and painted together and did many other things. Of course, the parents were very happy about it, but so were we, because the children are our future. And if they don't find kindergartens, then we have to react.

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What is to happen to Neruda? Are there already any plans for the future?

Fikret: Hopefully, Neruda will be able to continue. Sure, there are already many plans for the future, but at the moment we have to wait because many things are just not possible yet. We are happy that small activities can be done, like jam sessions or activities with children.

But before we can go on, the society has to stick together to defeat Corona. I think it's very important to take the situation seriously.