

interview by Elizabeth Rhodes
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She Past Away

Turkish postpunk duo **She Past Away** have been building momentum in the dark alternative music scene for over a decade. With a sound heavily anchored in the spirit of the 1980s and gothic rock, She Past Away has become a headliner with a following that rivals established musical peers like Drab Majesty, Lebanon Hanover, and Soft Kill. They are currently touring and have played long-awaited shows in the United States, a first for the band. We spoke with members **Volkan Caner** and **Doruk Öztürkcan** to discuss their latest release, *Disko Anksiyete*, and the journey that led She Past away to this moment.

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How did this project get started?

Doruk Öztürkcan : It started as drafts of Volkan's songs in 2006, his own home recordings. Later he composed with İdris Akbulut, the ex-bass-player, and they started performing it live. In 2009 they came to my recording studio to record the first album and that's how things started.

Was there a music scene that you guys knew each other from?

DÖ : We met in the studio but also through friends.

For anyone who has not checked out your band, how do you describe not just the sound but the DNA of *She Past Away*?

DÖ : It's like dark 80s bands, all of them. It's a mixture of influences from this era, not some specific bands but that whole era basically. We have a variety of influences from industrial to goth to postpunk to new romantics too.

Volkan Caner : Italian.

DÖ : Italo-disco.

Some music critics and fans have compared you to Sisters of Mercy and you have noted in previous interviews that you disagree with this notion.

VC : Yes, but we like Sisters of Mercy, especially *First and Last and Always* and before. But I hope people think of more bands than Sisters of Mercy.

You have been connected to Fabrika Records (based in Europe) and now you have Metropolis Records involved. Is this connection to Metropolis helping with distribution in North America and your tour?

DÖ : Not entirely, because we booked a show through our agency. It's more independent, our sort of thing mostly because labels don't get involved so much in the touring process. But having Metropolis was a plus on our visa application because it's an American record company. Another plus is that we can have our vinyl and CDs shipped from the US rather than being shipped from Europe, which could be a little trouble because of costs and shipping prices.

How would you describe the other artists (including Die Selektion, Lebanon Hanover, Petra Flurr, Second Still, and Sally Dige) on the Fabrika label? What's the link that you all have?

DÖ : The link we have is [Fabrika Records co-founders] Joanna and Dimitris, their taste in music and their curation of artists, basically. They are very picky, and they turn down 99% of demo applications. That's why their catalogue is not huge, there's only, what, 27 releases, I think? This is why they're different from other record labels, they're not looking into building a huge catalogue. Otherwise, they go the other way. It's not a commercial way, let's say.

No, but it's the passionate way, right? And that's going to get really good music into people's hands because of the care placed in choosing what to represent.

DÖ : Yeah.

VC : You can trust Fabrika.

Where do you guys call home now?

DÖ : I live in Athens, Greece and Volkan lives in Barcelona, Spain.

How did you end up in Barcelona, Volkan?

VC : I moved to Barcelona because I married.

You're singing in Turkish, so many listeners are unable to follow the lyrics without a translation. With that said, watching your music videos adds an additional layer to understanding the song. How do you conceptualize the videos, and have you found that in making the videos it has changed the song or your view of what the song represents?

DÖ : Indeed it does, I mean we always derive our ideas from the lyrics and the feeling of the song, but it's like writing new lyrics to the song almost. As you say,

it changes, it brings another layer, and not always [does] the story in the video [match] exactly the lyrics, like it's not a translation of the lyrics into video.

How did Drab Majesty get involved in the video for "Soluk"?

DÖ : Andrew [Clinco] was laying over in Athens at the time between touring, and Alex [Nicolau] was luckily also at the time in Athens because they were just going to start to tour the week after we shot the video [in 2018]. We like Drab Majesty already and we offered them to act in it, and they happily did. We had this sort of rough idea about the video and we integrated them, changed over the story a little to fit them in the video, and that's how it happened.

What is the concept for that video?

DÖ : It was one of the most literal videos from the lyrics, because in the lyrics it talks about us being a tribal people and trying to put out that we are aware of what's going on politically in the world and what's going on with the press and how much of it is lies and how much of it is reality. We're trying to point that out in this video. That's why they're reading the newspaper and they get poisoned by the fake news and that's why Andrew turns into this newspaper man. He gets poisoned by these and then he tries to get rid of these, that's the key idea there.

I've seen your lyrics described as minimalist poetry. How do you view the songwriting process? Do you approach writing lyrics with that intention of being haiku-like?

DÖ : You mean the Japanese poetry? Yeah, exactly.

VC : Actually, no.

DÖ : Not that he's aware of it, but that's just his style.

Can you name any influences for your songwriting in general?

VC : Yes, but I think [the greatest influence] is Baudelaire. It's not a minimalist poetry but as for influences, I really like him.

Given that your songs are written and sung in Turkish, do you find that listeners pursue the translation of the lyrics to connect further with the songs or the music itself lends to conveying the feelings expressed in the lyrics, regardless of translation?

VC : I think many people look to translations because they want to know the meanings of songs. People always actually ask me about this, many people.

DÖ : Yeah, that's why we had translations into nine languages so far, including Ukrainian, Polish... because during our tours into these countries, we found enthusiastic people who would volunteer to do it by themselves. We didn't specifically ask them to do it, but they asked, "Would you be interested?" and we said, "Of course!"

VC : We are lucky.

You have spoken about the fact that *She Past Away* is an exception and not the norm in the band's birthplace of Turkey. Is this still true in Turkey and other culturally conservative areas of the world?

DÖ : We still are. I mean, in the last few years, there's a certain following from the artists and musicians in Turkey who got encouraged by our success, let's say, or international recognition. This encourages them but it's still not a mainstream thing. This sort of music was and is still not even a headliner in the underground scene. Metal is big, rock is big, but darkwave, postpunk, this is tiny.

Do you see that changing any time soon with the current political events across the world? It seems like there's a push more than ever for creatives to get out there and use their voice, but is it more and more dangerous to do that right now?

DÖ : I cannot say that it's more dangerous; it's as dangerous as it has been in the past. But what we saw in our last gig in Istanbul was very surprising. We sold out the last venue we played, which is a miracle, basically, because during our time in Istanbul, we never played to more than 200 people. And even that was

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very surprising for us because in our early times there was literally no following. Nearly zero.

So the internet helps.

DÖ : That helps. We liked what we saw, like all these younger people, Turkish youths, feeling very enthusiastic about us. That gives us hope about the next generation in Turkey. But it's hard to tell if it's just temporary fashion or is that a permanent change. We cannot tell and it's too early. We will see in the next ten years.

Is this your first tour in the United States?

DÖ : Yeah. We're surprised with even this, having a sold-out tour. We knew over the internet that there is a big following, but we didn't imagine a sold-out tour. We didn't expect this. It is cool. I don't exactly understand why and how it happens.

I think it's a groundswell. There's a lot of great bands out there right now but not many bands sound as authentic and individual as She Past Away. The music is a translation of what's happening right now in the world and that's in the lyrical content and production. There's an austerity that She Past Away has in visual presentation and the fact that you have a perspective from outside of North America creates the package of the image, the sound, and perhaps being seen as a 'dark horse'. That is why I think you're seeing this interest right now.

DÖ : If there are people who still value alternative over fashion and media coverage then that's awesome. What can I say? We never got any PR campaigns, we never had powerful record labels behind us. Nobody pushed us, we didn't have friends in higher positions, none of that. Whatever happened so far, happened organically. That's miraculous if you ask me.

Well that's more than ten years of hard work and dedication and growing and evolving as an artist. How do fashion and aesthetics factor into your creativity?

DÖ : I think the look is mostly romantic.

VC : Yes. New romantics, 80s. It's not exactly romantic but generally a mixture of 80s is what we like.

And wasn't new romantics the word we used to describe "goths" before we had the word goth?

DÖ : Yeah.

In reference to makeup, do you two like to stay monochromatic or do you ever play with color?

DÖ : Monochromatic. Black and white photos, black makeup, if you ask me, I'm a dead man, that's my makeup. I'm a skull. But [Volkan's] makeup is not that.

VC : Yeah, I'm not that man.

DÖ : I don't know what type [Volkan is]. Almost dead.

What music, films, or visual artists are currently inspiring you?

VC : Creatively, it's too many... I enjoy 70s movies like Dario Argento of course. This period I like. I like old movies, 40s, 50s, 60s, like black and white horror movies.

Are there any bands that you're following and really into?

DÖ : Current bands we like... Drab Majesty, Lebanon Hanover, Selofan... We just met Twin Tribes and that's cool. We like this synthcore style. Bauhaus, T. Rex, David Bowie, all this stuff we like. There's a variety. We were listening to metal to begin with. Doom, death metal.

VC : Inside of metal, extreme metal music. As we grew up, things changed.

DÖ : I was into jazz for a while and I was into world music for a while. I was always interested in metal or goth or synthwave. Little has changed with me.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry?

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VC : Yes, of course, but Red Lorry Yellow Lorry is so unique a sound for me, because it's so in-the-middle of postpunk and gothic music. I don't want to say gothic but it's such a nice mixture.

DÖ : It seems really punky. They had a rockabilly feeling to it. It's all a nice mixture. I always like the Lorries.

VC : Do you like Yello? Even that is an influence on me, to be honest, because I like the abstractness and strangeness of them. This is a duo from the 80s and their story, it's weird, because out of all the bands that we are into, they are rock and roll they are doing drugs, blah blah, these guys are not. It's a completely different story.

What can fans expect to see on this tour?

DÖ : I would like to describe it more like an art show rather than a punk show or a rock show.

VC : I think it is emotional.

DÖ : Yeah, more emotional, definitely.

As far as your stage presentation, I envisioned intense white light basically making you look like you're in black and white with heavy shadows and fog.

DÖ : Yeah, that's what we're like on stage. That's what I tell the lights guy every time. Use darkness, use a lot of fog, use flashes, you know.

You're essentially using chiaroscuro, the Italian word for a technique used by artists since the Renaissance, in your live performances: creating light and form out of darkness and shadows.

DÖ : That's good, yes. That's the sort of attitude we like. Using silence and darkness, it's basically that.

What challenges are musicians facing and what keeps them from growing, especially in the alternative scene?

DÖ : I don't know, I've wondered that myself quite often. I see these bands that I absolutely love, like some of our openers and these guys get nowhere and I wonder why? I don't know.

You were just saying that PR is not something you've had and yet, look at where you are. So maybe it is just a matter of right time, right place?

DÖ : A lot of luck. I think one of the keys is being original. You can imitate your favorite artists and that's how everyone starts doing it. But then you have to go beyond this until it's a mixture of your own, that's original.

What's next on this tour and for you as a band?

DÖ : From here we move to Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. At the end of the year, there's Canada and the States. Which is, like 13 days, November/December period. We're already planning another North America tour let's say, next year September [2020].

You are touring in support of your latest LP, *Disko Anksiyete* [2019]. While touring are you writing music as well?

DÖ : Yeah, we have some recordings already so I suppose we will come with an EP for the next release.

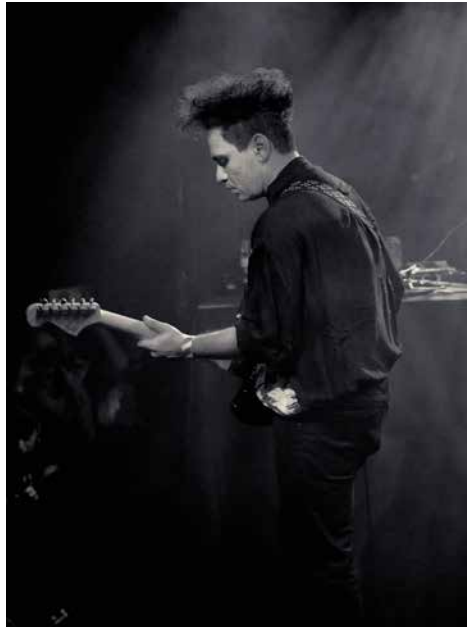
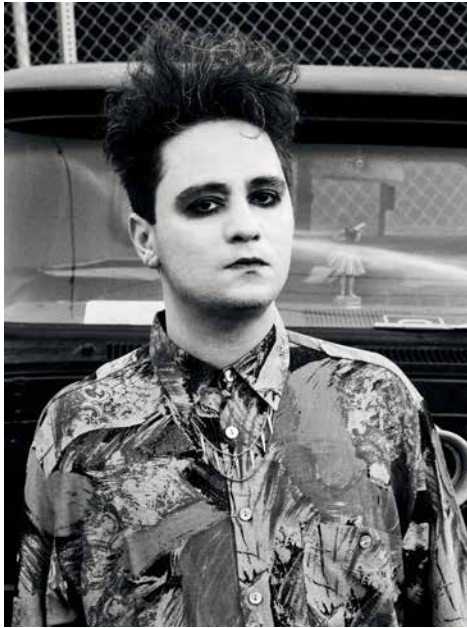
When you started working with Metropolis, did you also reissue the previous two albums [*Belirdi Gece*, 2012 and *Narin Yalnizlik*, 2015] and make any changes to the album artwork or songs?

DÖ : Yeah. There are slight differences in the artwork and there are slight differences in the mix of the first album because I do the production and I was not entirely satisfied with the mix of the first album which was from almost ten years ago, so now I have the chance to go back and correct it.

Is that because you are hearing it differently?

DÖ : No, just sort of my taste liking, in the making of the first album we struggled a lot, finding the exact guitar sound that we want, the exact drums on the exact





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mix, and now because we are, let's say we cooked into this more, I am now more sure of what I'm doing compared to ten years ago. So this was my chance to flatten these little glitches.

How is *Disko Anksiyete* different from previous releases? Reviews of the album concur that it sounds like a progression in sound because *Disko Anksiyete* maintains the gothic rock and postpunk genre associations of previous albums with more club-worthy songs this time around.

DO : I made it darker, actually.
VC : Less dark than our [previous] two albums. For me, maybe less dark than the first album. But you never think about this being more dark or less dark.

DO : I think the [reviews] are talking about the emotion side of it, not the sound. Maybe it's a bit lighter in the



feeling, not as dark. Maybe a touch more poppy, maybe that. That's another big plus for us, being club friendly. DJs play our songs and we are dance floor classics, basically. That's where we owe our success to mostly, in my opinion, because when a DJ plays your music, you get recognition. **A**

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