

Festival Review

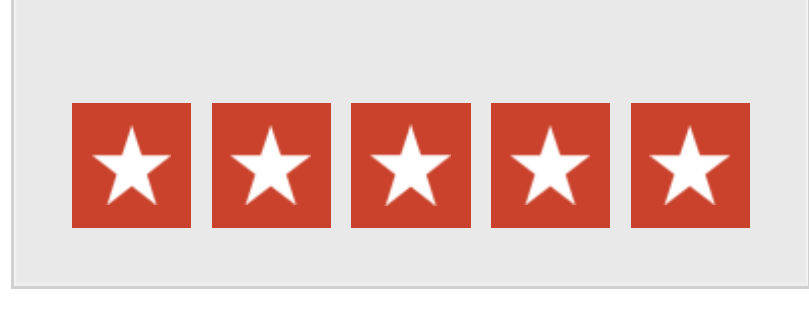
Standing solid with Selda

The Turkish singer-songwriter was the ideal headliner for a festival celebrating social and political unity, says TIM WELLS



MS Selda Bagcan on stage during the Daymer festival last Sunday *Photo: Emrah Sahbaz*

RUN for and by Turkish and Kurdish people in London to help them solve their problems and promote their cultural, economic, social and democratic rights and to strengthen solidarity among themselves as well as local people, this year's 30th annual Day-Mer Festival in north London's Clissold Park was headlined by Turkish psych-folk singer Selda Bagcan.



Also known simply as Selda, her first album came out in 1976 and her mix of folk and psyched-up backing music, as well as powerful lyrics speaking out on working-class struggles, have made her popular but less so, as you'd expect, with those in power.

She's been jailed three times since the Turkish military coup in 1980. "A pop singer going to jail was unheard of at that time," she has said. "It was because of my lyrics, not because I was a terrorist. But I did share a cell with terrorists."

Bagcan's passionate and distinctive voice has many fans. One of them, Thurston Moore, told me: "I kept hearing a lot about Selda. I went on a road trip through Italy and the three of us only had one CD, her first album Selda.

"It's since been reissued by Finders Keepers and I snapped it up. Hearing a Turkish saz [a Turkish stringed instrument] going through an effects pedal was exciting and the lyrics were about challenging oppression, which can be dangerous.

"She became a folk hero, as you can see here today. Selda is like the Turkish Bob Dylan. I knew about Erkin Koray, who was a psychedelic Turkish guitarist, and thought he was great but Selda had an edge with her lyrics and voice."

Last year Selda told The Wire that she never felt that being a woman was a disadvantage in music because "having a distinctive voice meant that I actually benefited from it. I never needed to fight for recognition.

"Two weeks after I released my first album I was instantly famous and I parachuted right into the middle of the music industry. A lot of people approach Turkey with an orientalist viewpoint and think that we all go around wearing a fez on our heads, which is not true.

"Women got the right to vote in Turkey before they did in Switzerland. Conservative governments will come and go but secularism will never go away in Turkey."

The large crowd knew Selda's songs and joined in. Day-Mer banners stood throughout the festival with slogans such as "Free Education" and "Decent Jobs." Reasonable demands, and it's invigorating to see expectations of the future so big a part of this cultural festival. The TUC was represented and there were books, a lot of them, available too.

Day-Mer really does build a strong and supportive community. Big respect to the huge grill that kept a lot of hungry people fed. As you'd expect with Turkish food in Stoke Newington, it was good eating.

With Selda having been jailed for her songs, and Turkey in so much turmoil, it was validating to see her singing to a happy, organised and thriving "home" crowd. People loved her music, and her lyrics here in London, even people like me who don't speak Turkish but feel the potential of all she brings.

Throughout Selda's set, large circles of women were dancing hand in hand — grandmothers, mothers, children, even pregnant women. The struggle, and the joy, are passed on.

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