

VoyageMichigan

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Hidden Gems: Meet Ceren Su Sahin of Zagoda Olive Oil LLC



Today we'd like to introduce you to Ceren Su Sahin

Hi Ceren Su, can you start by introducing yourself? We'd love to learn more about how you got to where you are today?

I was born and raised in Türkiye, where I started studying piano at the age of 4. I decided to pursue piano as my career in middle school and began my studies at the Bilkent University Preparatory School of Music. I continued my education at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, earning my first bachelor's degree in Piano Performance. As part of my studies, I spent a year as an Erasmus exchange student at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw, Poland. After moving to the United States in 2015, I earned a second bachelor's degree in Piano Performance from Florida Gulf Coast University, followed by a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in Piano Performance & Pedagogy at the University of Michigan.

During my studies, I received several performance prizes in Türkiye and Europe, including 1st Prize at the 3rd Mozart International Piano Competition in Rome and 3rd Prize at both the Young Talents 2012 Piano Competition and the 2nd Sergey Rachmaninov Piano Competition. I also received 3rd Prize and the Best Cemal Reşit Rey Interpretation Prize at the 1st National Vedat Kosal Piano Competition. I have participated in numerous masterclasses and festivals across Türkiye and Europe, studying with world-renowned pianists, and I've had the privilege of performing with orchestras like the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, the Mimar Sinan State Symphony Orchestra, and the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra.

Currently, I am a staff teacher at the University of Michigan's Piano Pedagogy Laboratory Program, working with pre-college students in both group classes and private lessons. Also, I am the Vice President of the Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers chapter, where we support piano educators in our community by providing resources, professional development opportunities, and a platform for collaboration. As a chapter, we focus on fostering a vibrant network of piano teachers who share a passion for music education and aim to raise awareness about the importance of piano pedagogy. This role is particularly meaningful to me because it allows me to contribute to the growth of music education, support fellow educators, and enhance the overall quality of piano instruction in our area. Being part of this chapter also enables me to connect with a community that shares my values and commitment to accessible, high-quality music education.

Throughout my musical career, I had a strong passion for accessibility in music, specifically advocating for Ergonomically Scaled Piano Keyboards (ESPK). My doctoral dissertation focused on this topic, aiming to make it possible for more people, regardless of hand size, to enjoy playing the piano. This research has shaped my teaching philosophy and my efforts to raise awareness about the importance of these instruments for players with smaller hands.

Aside from music, I realized that I have an entrepreneurial mind. My father bought land and planted olive trees in Türkiye, eventually starting to make olive oil. This connection to my family's agricultural heritage has been a huge inspiration for me. Later, I founded Zagoda Olive Oil LLC, bringing the high-quality olive oil from my family's farm in Türkiye to the US. Running this business has been an empowering experience, allowing me to

honor my roots and share something unique from my homeland with my new community here in the US. As a first-generation immigrant and a young woman in business, I take great pride in the success of my company, knowing that I'm continuing a family tradition while also building something of my own in this country.

Alright, so let's dig a little deeper into the story – has it been an easy path overall and if not, what were the challenges you've had to overcome?

Moving from Türkiye to the United States brought with it significant cultural and language barriers, requiring me to adapt to an entirely new academic system, professional environment, and social context. The transition involved overcoming challenges in communication and understanding the cultural nuances of life in the US, while trying to build connections in a new community. At the same time, balancing my careers as a pianist, educator, and entrepreneur posed a unique set of obstacles. Juggling multiple roles (performing, teaching, and running a business) demanded careful time management and the ability to stay focused and organized amidst competing priorities. Establishing Zagoda Olive Oil LLC as a first-generation immigrant and woman-owned business in a completely different market added yet another layer of complexity. I had to navigate the intricacies of import regulations, understand the US business landscape, and build a customer base from scratch. All of this required significant perseverance, adaptability, and a deep sense of determination to succeed while continuing to pursue my passion for music.

As you know, we're big fans of Zagoda Olive Oil LLC . For our readers who might not be as familiar what can you tell them about the brand?

Zagoda Olive Oil is a family-run producer of ultra-premium, award-winning extra virgin olive oil, bringing the finest cold-pressed olive oil from our farm in Manisa, Türkiye, to the US. Our olives are hand-harvested early in the season at peak polyphenol levels and cold-pressed within hours at our mill, never exceeding 27°C, never exposed to heat or chemicals. The result is an oil that is vibrant, medicinal in its purity, and unmatched in flavor.

Founded by Ceren Su Sahin, Zagoda is built on precision, tradition, and an uncompromising commitment to quality. Our farm follows Türkiye's Good Agricultural Practices, and our production is certified under ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 22000:2018, ensuring the highest food safety and quality standards. Our olive oil has won top industry awards, proving what we already knew—this is not just olive oil; this is the best of its kind. Zagoda is more than a product; it is a story of heritage, craft, and excellence. From our family's land in Türkiye to your table, this is olive oil at its finest.

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