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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF TURKISH MUSIC**

As it would be quite misleading to explain the life of the national communities which constitute humanity in terms of historical necessity, it would also be wrong to attribute the advances achieved in the civilized world to mere chance. In fact the hardest thing in judging historical facts is to find a *via media* between the contrasts of a hard determination and a complacent fatalism. Then, are the results achieved in modern Turkish art to be explained as a historical and natural development or regarded as merely incidental? Various answers could be given to this question, but there is one certainty: all the developments that can be observed in Turkish thought and art, as in other activities of a similar kind, are determined by a historical design as well as by a natural necessity.

No doubt Turkish art since the ***Tanzimat*** (The Ottoman Reform Movement of 1839) has followed a natural course of development. I do not know whether the hackneyed “Westernization” expresses what is meant by the Tanzimat. If it means turning towards an area where civilization has been intensely localized since the Renaissance, would it not be necessary to alter the word in other languages according to the geographical position of each country? Western civilization is in fact just as important for us as it is for all other nations who have turned towards Europe. The ease with which Turkey, a natural bridge between East and West for centuries, accommodated herself to contemporary civilization would have been an impossibility in a country not endowed with the same geographical position. Therefore one can say that the reform movements which have been taking place since the end of the eighteenth century have followed a natural pattern of development, and the various revolutionary changes have afforded the necessary stimulus in this direction. If we look at this natural evolution in the light of the intellectual and artistic movement which has been going on for one hundred and fifty years, we can at once see the real significance of the reform movements in Turkey. Thus we can discover that the change which came about in Turkey as a result of the intellectual and artistic contacts with Europe preceded the reforms of Abdul Mecit (1839). The declaration the the Tanzimat reform movement by Abdul Mecit in 1839 was a natural step resulting from Turkey’s growing consciousness of her position as a member of the European community of nations. Between 1453 and 1839, reforms in all directions were carried out, bringing Turkey more into line with her western neighbours.

In comparison with literature and the plastic arts, Turkish music was relatively late in its development, and only since the Tanzimat did it acquire its form and technique, and the possibility of a systematic development.[[1]](#endnote-1) In connection with the exchange of ideas between Turkey and Europe, one should consider music from two angles. Long before Abdul Mecit improved the Turkish army and introduced the brass band into its organization, both **Mozart** and **Beethoven** took a fancy to composing a Turkish march. Although quite interesting from the point of view of instruments chosen on account of their special appeal to European tastes and for their exotic character, they gave neither West nor East the impression of real Turkish music; but none the less such attempts were a sufficient indication of an idea of exchange and a feeling of mutual sympathy. The fruits of those attempts were collected in the 9th Symphony, which is the greatest and maturest work Beethoven ever produced. When he was working on the sketches of this great work, he scribbled down on the manuscript the words: “Here there will be a choir with a Turkish song”. And he was convinced that he had composed a particular section in the last part of the 9th Symphony only in the atmosphere of triumph that a Turkish march could produce. Beethoven no doubt had been influenced by the military bands which were being incorporated into the Army at that time, and by the Turkish “Mehter” Unit which had set an example for all the European armies. Beethoven’s aim was to establish a triumphant atmosphere at the end of the symphony, which tries to express a human conflict.

None of these ventures was, however, as effective as the substitution of the modern band in place of Mehter by Mahmud II in 1828. This innovation did much to establish cultural relations between Europe and Turkey. These good relations made it possible for this country to derive benefit from the musical technique of the civilized world as a whole. By adopting the technique and the instruments required by western music, it was possible to disseminate Turkish music (now of course written in the western idiom) throughout the centres of international art. National feeling and thought should be combined with a common international technique so as to be of service to mankind. Art created in this way will not be confined to one particular corner of the world but will be distributed far and wide and cover all the civilized communities, thus acquiring an international value.

Generally speaking there are three requirements for this kind of music:

1. A common system of symbols, i.e. notation,
2. Standardized instruments to facilitate international exchange,
3. A common principle of form and aesthetics, and a theory of composition and harmony which forms the basis of modern polyphonic music.

Since these requisites would also be looked for in plastic art, it would be interesting to see how we stand in that respect. I can say that our position in this branch is about the same as in music. The old Turkish painting, which was without perspective and mostly in the nature of miniatures, gave place about a hundred years ago to the new Turkish painting, which is modern in spirit and technique. For about a century the Turkish art-lover has been decorating his walls with modern perspective paintings because his taste has been considerably refined. While works of miniature are still kept in museums as immortal historical documents, our interests have turned towards a new world of painting. The same can be said of literature and architecture. We have a great admiration for **Sinan** and **Nedim**, for the standards that these two men set provide a source of inspiration for our advance, but we never think of imitating them because the laws of nature press us forward, not backwards. The new Turkish painting, music, literature and architecture are undergoing a natural process of metamorphosis. It is, however, obvious that these art forms do not show the same degree of advancement everywhere at one particular time.

For instance, since the Tanzimat, Turkish literature, architecture and painting have almost kept pace with each another, whereas music, for certain reasons, has fallen behind. We observe the same trend in fifteenth century Renaissance Italy. While painting, sculpture and architecture reached the highest degree of perfection with **Leonardo da Vinci**, **Raphael** and **Michelangelo**, music did not even take a single step forward. But one day the forces of natural evolution exercised their power, and music began to be influenced by the general atmosphere of the times; but it could achieve its revival only sixty or seventy years later than the plastic arts, under the great stimulus it received from **Palestrina** in the middle of the sixteenth century. This delay was due to the intangibility of its medium. In the case of Turkish music, social factors should also be taken into consideration. Finally Turkish music also adapted itself to the requirements of the times. Consequently the truth in **Ziya Gökalp**’s saying ***“Every age has to state its own spiritual problems to which every language must conform”[[2]](#endnote-2)*** is also exemplified in polyphonic Turkish music. Thus we have now music which has developed along the same lines as western music, and is capable of deriving benefit from both native and foreign influences.

The music reforms carried out by **Mahmud II** and **Abdul Mecit**, introduction of military bands into the Army and their organisation by **Guiseppe Donizetti** were not motivated by mere fancy or forcible compulsion, but by a genuine need as already expressed. As a result of these reforms, new instruments were gradually making their appearance along with purely national and local ones. For instance, the piano attracted so much attention, even in the early stages of its use, that composers of classical Turkish music were not long in appreciating its possibilities. The following advertisement appeared in 1845 in an edition of the daily newspaper ***“Ceride-i Havadis”*** which illustrates this: ***“A genuine European woman teaches the piano, which is an instrument similar to the Kanun. Those interested should apply to her office”***.

On the other hand, along with the twenty-four unequal intervals of the classical and traditional Turkish scale, twelve equal semi-tones employed by **Johann Sebastian Bach** were incorporated into Turkish music. The significance of these developments is not as simple as it looks. As a fixed keyboard instrument, the piano immediately attracted the attention of lady music-lovers, but nobody understood the acoustical illusion that this instrument perpetrated. On the piano it was impossible to reproduce the 24 unequal degrees of the Turkish octave, and it was only possible to play a scale of 12 equal degrees. The cultured amateurs of the time were not only robbing their own traditional modes, but they were also trying to acclimatize themselves to well-tempered scales. National works of music with the international value, when played on the piano or by an orchestra or band, were tending to direct Turkish taste an expression symbolizing the ideas of the century. According to **Ziya Gökalp**: ***“Life obeys the creative evolution and culture contributes to the development of the civilized way of life”***. Such evolution is historical as well as natural, and can be explained as the fusion of culture and civilization.

And so the years passed by. The bands and orchestras organized by **Donizetti** yielded their first fruits in Turkish music created in the Western style. Early Turkish artists were able to play various standard wind instruments as skilfully as their European colleagues, and were engaged in orchestras accompanying the Italian opera companies visiting Istanbul. Then **Franz Liszt** visited Turkey in June 1847, and gave concerts in Istanbul which introduced **Chopin** in particular to the Turkish public. Operas of **Verdi** were also played, and Italian opera thus became popular. At last we had pianists -**Necip Paşa**, **Leyla Hanım** and **Tevfik Bey**- who were the pioneers responsible for developing in Turkey a modern aesthetic conception of music. National and international elements, fused in the beginning, naturally brought about a duality which can be attributed to the Tanzimat. The constitutional governments of 1876 and 1908, however, eliminated this duality, and Turkish music began to make advances in bridging the gap between itself and other arts. The positive results of all these efforts were realised during **Atatürk**’s republican regime, which was certainly the most energetic reform carried out since Selim III.

In 1923 Turkey was advancing in all fields, and a conscious revival of the Arts was embarked on. The development of Turkish music during the past 25 years can be summed up as follows: The century old State Orchestra has now become two orchestras –the Presidential Symphony Orchestra in Istanbul, and the Presidential Philharmonic Orchestra in Ankara. During the past 25 years, many of our composers have returned home after completing their music studies in the art centres of Europe, and begun creative work. National and polyphonic compositions have been included in the international repertory as representing the modern Turkish conception of music. Thus a vigorous exchange with other nations of the civilized world was set in motion. At last the State Conservatoire was established in 1934 and 1935, through the valuable assistance given by Professor **Paul Hindemith**, Professor **Carl Ebert**, and Dr. **Ernst Praetorius**, as well as numerous other European and Turkish experts. Since that date many musicians have been trained, some of whom have been sent abroad for further training under famous teachers. The State conservatoire, though only fifteen years old, has produced some of the greatest operas and given performances of Turkish orchestral and chamber music in other countries, as well as in Turkey. The works of Turkish composers have won recognition in most music centres of the world, and have been incorporated in the international repertory. Many of these works have been published by well-known European publishers. Turkish musicians have been invited to become members of international music societies. Turkish conductors and virtuosi have made tours abroad and performed both Turkish and European works. The radio has also played a role in these activities, broadcasting modern works both in its home and overseas services, and has “exchanged” programmes with other broadcasting systems. Keeping space with these developments, musical literature and criticism has also been making progress.

From all this activity one can see that a genuine Turkish school of music is being born, and undergoing a metamorphosis to meet the demands of modern aesthetic standards. It would be absurd to regard this new school as alien to our musical traditions. These traditions are fed from the same sources which nourished the national schools set up with the coming of the nineteenth century romanticism, sources which are themselves nothing but deep-rooted national traits. Both the spirit and matter of art are taken from these fountain heads, and the more they are elaborated by modern technique, the fresher and better they become. **Ziya Gökalp**, speaking of the sterile, immutable traditional forces which inhibit development, says: ***“Customs which are independent and absolute worlds in themselves remain static. Nothing can be expected from them. Tradition on the other hand implies creation and progress, because it has the power of perpetuating the past in such a way as to ensure development. Although tradition is productive and creative in itself, it thrives on new ideas. In this way it is immune to the fatal blow of time, and does not fade as common imitations do”***. This statement implies that the deep-rooted element of Turkish music, which is cultural and national, is to be found in the concepts on which it is based.

Modern civilization has made the envigoration of Turkish music by foreign influence a necessity –that is to say its own characteristics had to be developed on modern polyphonic lines. We have therefore to consider two different entities –the spirit of music, and the technique. It is certain that tradition will flourish under the stimulus spirit gets from technique. Therefore traditionally minded Turkish composers, like the composers of other civilized nations, draw the theme and the spirit of their works, to use Ziya Gökalp’s own words, “from folk traditions, as in our national poetry and literature”. Whereas in harmony the development was aided by modern technique, or “modern civilization”, as Ziya Gökalp puts it. The modern Turkish composer therefore is using modern instruments, so as to be able to achieve a national music with international merits. He is using Bach’s well-tempered system which is the basis of performance on these instruments, disregarding the common tonal technique of the West which is known as the major and minor system. Only thus will Turkish music free itself from the old system –impossible to develop, and a continuous hindrance to progress, again quoting **Ziya Gökalp**: “striving at a high level of development, so as not to be overtaken by any nation in the race for learning and art”. This means that no work can be called a work of art unless it is an attempt to express the high complexity and richness of the Turkish soul in the light of a three-dimensional perspective, and unless it uses standard instruments according to the well-tempered system and benefits from the technique of composition and form in a new conception of art. Therefore, developing along these lines, Turkish music cannot use some of the intervals of the classical Turkish scales which are based on various modal systems, themselves having a more theoretical than practical value. Some of the 24 unequal intervals are loft out; but in turn with the melodic and harmonic structure that remains, it becomes possible to express the local colour of folk songs more clearly than ever. All the traditional rythmical characteristics can be thrown into bold relief by the use of modern instruments. Finally it must be noted that in modern compositions created with the help of modern technique, there is a definite consciousness of perspective and strong light and shade contrasts.

Some of our modern composers fired by the inspiration they get from the old traditional scales and tunes, are creating new works with a modern conception. In this way, the modern Turkish musical repertory is gaining new works and thus contributing to the international repertory. Among the Turkish composers who have attracted attention in musical circles and institutions since the beginning of the Turkish Republic are pianist-composer **Cemal Reşit Rey**, **Necil Kâzım Akses**, **Ahmet Adnan Saygun**, **Ulvi Cemal Erkin** and **Ferit Alnar**, whose works have been performed since 1927 in most large cities of Turkey and Europe, thus spreading Turkish music far and wide over the civilised world. In a programme which I have, dated 5th May 1931, for a concert in Musikverein Hall, I see side by side with the names of Max Reger, Scriabin and Schönberg, the names of Cemal Reşit Rey, Necil Kâzım Akses and Ferit Alnar. Again, together with the works of these composers, compositions of Adnan Saygun and Ulvi cemal Erkin have been performed at different times in concerts and festivals in Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna, Rome and Prague.

Among the overgrowing works of the Turkish national repertory we may mention **Cemal Reşit Rey**’s “Symphonic Poem Initiation”, “Piano Concerto”, “Violin Concerto”, “Symphony”, “Karagöz Symphonic Poem”, all orchestral works, “Quartet”, “Sextet” and “Piano Quartet”; **Necil Kâzım Akses**’ “Ankara Castle”, “Bayönder Suite”, “Çifte Telli”, “Cello Poem”, “Ballad”, all symphonic works, and his “String Quartet”; **Ahmet Adnan Saygun**’s “Inci’s Book”, “A Forest Tale”, “Divertimento”, “Magic Dance”, “Orchestral Suite”, “Yunus Emre Oratorio”, “Piano Violin Sonata”, “Piano Cello Sonata”, “Quartet”; **Ulvi Cemal Erkin**’s “Piano Concerto”, “Köçekçe Suite”, “Piano String Quartet”, “String Quartet” and “1st and 2nd Symphonies”; and **Ferit Alnar**’s “Cello Concerto” and “Prelude and Two Dances”.

One may conclude from a study of these works that Turkish composers have been making use of the formal and thematic developments found in the Viennese Classics as well as Debussy’s impressionistic technique. In the realisation of this development, all Turkish musicians, music teachers and students are cooperating under the roofs of the State Conservatoire and similar institutions.

I have tried to show the enormous strides taken in the development of Turkish music in a work which I published[[3]](#endnote-3) in 1946, analysing the four movements of Ulvi Cemal Erkin’s String Quartets. In this book, I tried to make clear how the new Turkish music has been born -music written with modern technique enhancing the expression of national and local rhythmic forms, adhering to the same atmosphere found in old Turkish classical works.

As is seen from the reasons I have now given you, we are proud of our immortal musical and folklore traditions which are giving a new value to cultural life. We are pleased when we see these achievements –steps on the road to our ultimate goal.

I should like to end my talk with this age-old truism: ***“That work of art which is most national is that which has a most international value”***.

1. “Chopin in Turkey” by Cevad Memduh Altar, Ulus, 20 & 23 October 1949. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This and other quotations in the text taken from “Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak” by Ziya Gökalp. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Article from Radio Review -1st March 1946- by Cevad Memduh Altar “On a Concert”. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)