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Ottoman Elites and Their Musics: Music and Music-Making in the Nineteenth-Century Istanbul

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At the beginning of the 19th century, two traditions of music existed side by side in the Ottoman Empire: the music of the peasants and the traditional art music. The traditional art music was – at least for the last four centuries – the most developed and most influential school of Near Eastern art music. Of its original six branches,¹ the music of the traditional Ottoman military band, today called as *mehter musikisi*, had already ceased to exist in the middle of the 19th century, as a result of the disbanding of the Janissary troops. Western music was adopted as a substitute for the military music of the Janissaries. By the end of the century, Western music was represented not only by military, operatic, dance and entertainment music, but also by classical and romantic masterworks like the symphonies of Beethoven.

The first official move towards Western music was initiated by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826, after he had disbanded the Janissary Corps in the same year. In place of *zurna* (shawm), *boru* (trumpet), *zil* (cymbal) and *kös* (large kettledrum), he decided to set up a military band in the European style. The Sardinian minister in Istanbul was approached for help in obtaining suitable musical instruments and a bandmaster to train the army musicians. As a

¹ Traditional Ottoman-Turkish Art Music in Istanbul was comprised of 1. Ottoman military music (known as *Mehter musikisi*), 2. the sacred music of the dervish (especially the Mevlevi, Kadiri and Gülşeni) orders, 3. the religious music of the mosque (orthodox Islam), 4. indoor art music (called *ince saz* or *fasıl musikisi*), 5. recreational or “light” music (at the end of the 19th-century known as *piyasa musikisi*), 6. urban folk music.

result, Giuseppe Donizetti, brother of the famous opera composer Gaetano Donizetti, came to Istanbul in 1828, where he organized and conducted the newly-formed military band. Later he became the first director of the Imperial Ottoman School of Music and trained the musicians of the bands of the Sultan's new-style army. Within a year Donizetti succeeded in training a sufficient number of musicians who could read European music and play it well enough to form more than one band. Donizetti is recorded as saying that the Ottomans are naturally musical, and even in Italy such aptitude for learning would have been remarkable (see Aracı 2006).

It appears from the accounts of foreign travelers to Turkey that Donizetti achieved good results in a very short time. In 1832, an English visitor to Istanbul was surprised to hear the music of Rossini admirably played by a band formed from the royal pages for the Sultan's amusement. They were also taught by Donizetti, and their musical skills were remarkable because, according to the Ottoman custom, their education was principally directed to training them to become state administrators. The British naval officer Sir Adolphus Slade stated:

Presently, the songs of a party of Greek boatmen, which had enlivened our dessert, gave way to the strains of a military band, and, unexpected treat to me on the banks of the Bosphorus, we heard Rossini's music, executed in a manner very creditable to Professor Signor Donizetti. We rose and went down to the palace quay, on which the band was playing. I was surprised at the youth of the performers . . . and still more surprised on finding that they were the royal pages, thus instructed for the Sultan's amusement. Their aptitude in learning, which Donizetti informed me would have been remarkable even in Italy, showed that the Turks are naturally musical. (Slade 1833: 135)

A similar entry can also be found among the recollections of Hans Christian Andersen, who visited Istanbul in the 1840's:

Bands of music had been posted at different points, and relieved each other at intervals. In general, pieces from Rossini's *William Tell* were played, but suddenly they were broken off, and the strains of the young Sultan's favorite march were heard. This march had been composed by the brother of Donizetti, who has been appointed band-master here. (Andersen 1889: 835)

The Muzika-i Hümayun was the imperial orchestra, band and chorus. Apart from the activities of the Muzika-i Hümayun many Ottoman and Levantine soloists and music teachers had developed a lively musical scene, which was enriched by visiting artists² and even Italian operatic ensembles (see Gazimihal 1939; And 1989).

Donizetti was given the rank of pasha. Years later his successor taught and conducted an orchestra of women of the royal harem for the entertainment of Sultan Abdulhamid II. After Giuseppe Donizetti's death in 1856, the Muzika-i Hümayun, the Imperial Orchestra was conducted by Callisto Guatelli or Guatelli Paşa, Bartolomeo Pisani, Dussep Paşa, Fernando de Aranda Paşa, Saffet Atabinen, Mehmet Zati Arca and Osman Zeki Üngör.

Rossini, Johann Strauss, Gaetano Donizetti and others were among the famous composers to write ceremonial marches for the Ottoman Sultans. After Donizetti Pasha, during the reign of Sultan Abdulaziz, another Italian, Callisto Guatelli, became the Sultan's Master of Music. Likewise given the title of Pasha, he was originally the conductor of an Italian opera group in Istanbul. As well as composing many popular marches, Guatelli harmonized traditional examples of Turkish music. Callisto Guatelli Paşa took over Donizetti's position upon his death in 1856. The Italian influence on musical life continued only for a short period, which was replaced by the French and German influences over time. An orchestra, founded and conducted by a German named Paul Lange, performed symphony concerts outside the palace.

The first two generations of Ottoman composers in the Western idiom – like Yesarioğlu Ahmet Necip Paşa (1815-1883), Dikran Çuhacıyan (1836-1898), Mehmet Ali Bey (1840-1895), Notacı Hacı Emin (1845-1907), Macar Tevfik Bey (Alessandro Voltan/1850-1941), Saffet Atabinen (1858-1939), Mehmet Zati Arca (1863-1951), Faik Daim (1870-1910), Edgar Manas (1875-1964), Mustafa Rahmi Otman (1877-1941), Ismail Zühdü Kuşçuoğlu (1877-1924), and Osman Zeki Üngör (1880-1958) – had emerged. Not all the composers of the Ottoman Empire were men. There were also women writing in the European style, most notably Fehime Sultan (1875-1929) and Behice Sultan (1848-1876) (see Oransay 1965).

² Franz Liszt (in 1847), the Austrian pianist Leopold de Meyer (in 1842-1857), the Belgian violonist and composer Henry Vieuxtemps (in 1848), the French hornist Eugène Léon Vivier (in 1852-1855), the Italian conductors and composers Angelo Mariani (in 1848-1852) and Luigi Arditi (in 1857), the Italian/Croatian violinist August Ritter von Adelburg (in 1858), the Belgian pianist Leopold Brassin (?-1890), the Hungarian violinist Leopold Auer (?), the German composer and conductor Paul Lange (1888-1905).

Among the Ottoman composers, Yesarioğlu Necip Paşa, a student of Donizetti, is known in Turkey as a composer of salon musics such as polka and mazurka for piano. Macar Tevfik Bey (Alessandro Voltan) became the piano instructor of a Romanian princess in the Bucharest Palace who later succeeded to the crown. An operetta, *Leblebici Ağa*, written by the Ottoman-Armenian composer Dikran Çuhacıyan, was first staged in 1875 at the French Theater in Beyoğlu. Since then, it has been the most frequently staged and enjoyed operetta in Turkey. It has been translated to French, German and Greek.

Opera and ballet troupes, many of which came from Italy, performed in Beyoğlu and thereby led members of the palace and statesmen become familiar with Western art (see Sevensil 1959). A considerable number of princes, sultan's sons and wives, statesmen and wealthy people started to learn an instrument, like the piano, violin and cello by taking lessons from music masters, many of whom were Italians. In the 19th century, three hundred pianos were imported yearly and about two thousand numbers of sheet music were published.

Apart from composing popular marches dedicated to Sultans Mahmud II and Abdulmecid, Donizetti also taught the members of the Sultan's family and he was instrumental in organizing the visits of important musicians to Turkey. During his well-advertised stay in 1847, Liszt heard Donizetti's *Mecidiye March* and composed and played a solo piece based on its themes which he called *Grand Marche Paraphrase*. The fact that a celebrated virtuoso like Franz Liszt was invited to Istanbul to give a series of concerts at court is an important indicator of the growing popularity of European music in the Ottoman household.

While Turkey was almost totally isolated from cultural developments in the West, it appears to have been only in the early 19th century that Western music, including common practice harmony, became widely familiar in urban music circles of Turkey. Interspersed throughout Giuseppe Donizetti's manuscripts are traditional art music harmonizations as well as European dance music and marches, which were introduced to the palace by Donizetti and his contemporaries. These works are examples of entertainment music rather than art music. However, they accord with the repertoire of the military bands at the same time.

Some of the Ottoman Sultans were very interested in music and they composed many musical pieces. Murad V was probably the most accomplished composer of European music among the Ottoman Sultans. His unpublished works – written principally for the piano in the popular dance forms of the 19th century, the polkas, polka-mazurka, waltz, quadrille and schottische as well as military marches – run to hundreds of pages. After his brief three-

month sultanate in 1876, Murad was imprisoned in the Palace of Çırağan, where for the rest of his life, until his death in 1904, he continued to play the piano and composed music.

Deprived of its exclusive position as the art music of the Ottomans since the introduction of Western music in 1826, and challenged by a difficult struggle to hold its ground in a quickly changing society, traditional art music was no longer able to continue with the time-honored forms and idioms and had lost some of its vigor. The open-air music of the traditional military band (*mehter musikisi*) had fallen into oblivion in the first half of the 19th century not only in Istanbul but also in the Balkans. For example, the Ottoman military band ceased to exist in Bucharest around 1836 (Tansuğ 2019). Turkish ceremonial and military ensembles were in regular use in Romania. Thus, deprived of one of its six branches, traditional art music was further suppressed during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II.

The Italian musicians brought with them such Italian terms as “*alla franca*” and “*alla turca*” (in the Turkish style, or in the style of Janissary music) which sparked a debate among some Palace musicians, a conflict that still continues today in Turkey. Used mostly by the Europeans in the 19th century, “*alla turca*” denoted a pejorative term for *fasıl musikisi*, performed in suites (*fasıl*), made up of instrumental *taksim*, *peşrev*, *sazsemaisi* and vocal *kâr-ı nâtik*, *kâr*, *beste*, *ağır semai*, *yürük semai* and *şarkı*. It was one of the six branches of the traditional art music.

The Ottoman Palace in Istanbul took measures to promote only Western music. But a strong reaction immediately set in by the traditional elites: neglect of the traditional art music offended some like Dede Efendi, Şakir Ağa, Emin Ağa and others. Among them, Hamamcıoğlu Ismail Dede Efendi (1778-1846), the most famous traditional art music composer and performer in the Ottoman Palace, was a member of the Mevlevi order.³ He was a highly esteemed composer of both instrumental and vocal works and some of his compositions lend themselves today well to incorporation into Western music format.

Many traditional Turkish art music genres do not lend themselves well to incorporation into Western music format. Most prominent among those that do admit harmonization are the *şarkı* category of songs. The term *şarkı*, in a general sense, denotes any Turkish urban art song, flourishing from the early 19th century. Based upon *aruz*, the quantitative, Arabic-derived system

³ During the Republican era, the liturgical music of the dervishes was extinguished as a result of the interdiction of their orders in 1925 and the closing of their monasteries (*tekke*) (Oransay 1986).

of metrical prosody, *şarkı* is a metered, secular vocal song, with instrumental accompaniment, solidly grounded in *makam* (mode).

Among the various aspects of traditional Turkish art music, the most relevant here is the use of *makam* (Turk. plural *makamlar*). Turkish *makam* theory and practice, and many of the *makamlar* themselves, bear close affinities with Arab counterparts, and, indeed, their evolutions were closely linked for centuries. Thus, for example, the Turkish *makam hicaz* (*humayun* sub-category) closely resembles its Arab namesake (*hijaz*). This mode has also played an important role in the development of modal harmony in the Balkans since the *makam hicaz* and related *makamlar* accommodate chordal harmonies more easily than do most of the other basic Turkish modes. It is also significant that modulation – involving either change of scale type or transposition of tonic, or both – is a central feature in Turkish performance practice of traditional art music. The *hicaz*-type scale is of particular relevance here, as it achieved such popularity in Turkish traditional art music. Although not widely used in Turkish music before the 18th century, by the early 19th century *hicaz* had become widespread in traditional Turkish art music.

Dede Efendi employed such Turkish modes – especially *acemaşiran*, *ferahfeza*, *rast*, and above all, *hicaz* – to make his compositions sound more Western. He wrote a variety of *şarkılar* and *köçekçeler* in *makam hicaz* as “Baharın zamanı geldi”, “Bir sevda geldi başıma”, “Güzel gel aklımı aldın”, “Şu karşığı dağda bir yeşil çadır”, and “Yine yeşillendi dağlar çemeni” (*hicaz aksak köçekçe*), “Ey çeşmi ahu, hicr ile tenhalara saldın beni” (*hicaz ağır düyek beste*), “İndim yarin bahçesine gülden geçilmez” (*hicaz aksak şarkı*), “Ey büt-i nev eda olmuşum müptela” (*hicaz semai şarkı*), “Seyr-i gülşen edelim ey şivekar” (*hicaz ağır düyek şarkı*), “Mah yüzüne aşıkânım” (*hicaz evfer aksak şarkı*), “Aşkınla ben ey nazenin” (*hicaz düyek şarkı*), “Yine neş'e-i muhabbet” (*hicaz yürük semai*).

In *makam rast*, chord progressions, when present, tend to follow simple Western conventions to a greater extent than in other *makamlar*, perhaps because it is more diatonic than the *hicaz*-type modes common in other *şarkı* genres. Written by Dede Efendi, “Yine bir gülnihal” [Once again a young rose] is the most popular song in *makam rast*. The Ottoman Palace was quite unfamiliar with waltzes in 3/4 meters before Dede Efendi wrote this piece, the first Turkish waltz. There is a European inspiration in this still popular *rast* song, which he composed under the influence of Western atmosphere. Apparently, Dede Efendi tried to demonstrate that the palace musicians of traditional art music were also adept in writing art songs in European style. His songs in *makam rast* also include “Dil bir güzele meyl etti hele”, “Üftadenim ey bi-vefa” and “Yüzündür cihanı münevver eden”. Other pieces by Dede Efendi in

makam rast are *Rast Kar-ı Natik* “Rast getirip fend ile seyretti hümayı”, *Rast Kar-ı Müşterek* “Aşk-ı tü nihâl-i hayret amed”, and *Rast Kar-ı Nev* (the new *kar* in *makam rast*) “Gözümde daim hayali cana”.

Other *makamlar* include modes with prominent neutral intervals and chromatic scales (e.g., *Saba*, *Segah*) which do not lend themselves to accompaniment with major and minor triads. Dede Efendi, however, wrote some other vocal and instrumental pieces influenced by Western idioms in various *makamlar*: a *peşrev*⁴ and a *semâi*⁵ in *makam acemaşiran*, a *şarkı* “Hoş yaratmış bari ezel”, a *mevlevî ayin*⁶ in *makam ferahfeza*, a few songs in the same *makam* “Bir verd-i rana ettim temaşa” [A lovely rose], “Bülbül-i hoş neva” [Beautifully singing nightingale], “El benim çün seni sarmış biliyor”, “Bu gece ben yine bülbülleri hamuş ettim” (*yürük semâi*), “Ey kaşı keman” (*firengifer beste*), “Bir dilber-i nafide” (*nakış ağırsemâi*), and a *muhammes kar* “Kasr-ı cennet, havz-ı kevser” in *makam ferahfeza*.

In order to harmonize these songs, the neutral intervals employed in *hicaz* and other traditional modes are generally adjusted to more diatonic pitches when combined with major-minor harmonies. Other *makamlar* lend themselves less well to harmonization than does the *acemaşiran*, *ferahfeza*, *rast* or *hicaz*-type scales. Dede Efendi’s aforementioned monophonic or heterophonic songs in these *makamlar* could facilitate the incorporation of chordal accompaniment today.⁷

Turkish music retains the neutral intervals and chromatic modes that were generally sacrificed in order to facilitate chordal accompaniment. The use of harmony in Turkish music today could not be called functional in the Western sense, since the vocabulary of chords and progressions derive not from European common practice but from the tonal resources of the modes used. Thus, for instance, a song set to the familiar *hicaz* mode, with its characteristic flatted second and sharpened sixth degrees on the ascending scale, would employ major triads built on the tonic, the lowered second and the fourth degrees, along with minor triads on the sixth and seventh degrees. Nevertheless, there are no definitive cadences. With the characteristic aug-

⁴ Longer instrumental composition in three to five sections and ritornello, usually performed as prelude or finale (*son peşrev*).

⁵ Short vocal or instrumental piece, in which the meter is selected from a specified group of dance meters.

⁶ Traditional vocal and instrumental genre of the Mevlevîs, consists of four movements called *selâm*.

⁷ For some of the harmonized pieces of Dede Efendi, see the compact disc *The Waltz: Ecstasy and Mysticism* by Concerto Köln and Sarband directed by Vladimir Ivanoff (Deutsche Grammophon GmbH 00289 477 5420, 2005).

mented second between the second and third scalar degrees, the *makam hicaz* figure predominantly in Dede Efendi's songs.

Even today Dede Efendi continues to be regarded as one of the leading exponents of traditional art music. Despite the efforts of traditional art music composers for the revival of the traditional forms of music in the 19th century, out of the original six branches of traditional Ottoman-Turkish art music, only entertainment music, consisting solely of popular songs (*şarkı*) and a few dance tunes (*oyun havası, köçekçe*) was flourishing. Müezzınbaşı Rifat Bey (d. ca. 1895), Hacı Arif Bey (1831-1885) and Şevki Bey (1860-1891) were the most famous popular song writers (*şarkı*) of the period. Some forms of international salon dances such as tango, rumba, mazurka and waltz became also very popular as urban entertainment music in Istanbul. The interest in indoor art music (*fasıl musikisi* or what the Italian musicians named "alla turca") was quickly vanishing.

However, in 1861 Abdulaziz succeeded to the throne and taste for music in the palace shifted to the other side. Sultan Abdulaziz disdained the Western music ensemble and called it "mere clamor" which led Western music to fall into disesteem. He was not so keen on Western music and opera like some former sultans.

Although the influence of Western music is apparent during the Ottoman period, there has emerged no national musical trend as it was in the case of Russia or East European countries in the 19th century. Furthermore, this music has by and large remained restricted to the palace and its surroundings. Western music made little impact on the general public in Turkey till the Republican era. When studying the development of the arts during Turkey's westernization, which began early in the 19th century and accelerated in the Republican era, one can discern two separate strands: modernism and nationalism. Ever since their earliest contacts with the West, Turkish musicians, traditional elites and Western elites have been ambivalent concerning the traditional (*alla turca*) versus the modern (*alla franca*): questions have remained unclear regarding how to maintain a balance between traditional and contemporary society, each of which has its own demands (see also And 1987, Oransay 1976, Oransay 1977).

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