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Sherri Weiler



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AS WE BEGIN VOLUME 72 OF the *Journal of Singing*, I beg the reader's permission to depart from my customary academic approach to writing about art song, and embark on a more specific, ethnomusical journey during this publication cycle. Many fine articles on the songs of world cultures other than those of Germany, France, and Italy have been submitted recently to the *Journal*, and I requested that our editor, Dr. Richard Sjoerdsma, allow me to highlight these in this column. He has agreed, and in this cycle you will find excellent articles on little known Norwegian songs by Dr. Anna Hersey, a two-part series on Irish art song suitable for the beginning singer by Dr. Conor Angell, and the rich heritage of Brazilian song by Dr. Marcía Porter. Because I was invited by the Atlantic Institute/Istanbul Cultural Center to tour Turkey in June 2014, this first article will deal with the past and present musical environment of the former Ottoman Empire. The more I learned about modern-day Turkey, the more enthused I became about delving into the rich musical traditions of this ancient culture, which some musicologists claim dates back at least 6,000 years.

LEGACY OF BYZANTIUM

İstanbul, Turkey's principal city, is a metropolis of some 16 million inhabitants that sits divided between Europe and Asia on the Bosphorus, the strait connecting the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, and beyond it through the Dardanelles to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. The western termination of the Silk Road lies south of the Asian side of İstanbul in the Aegean port city of İzmir, the Biblical Smyrna, which dates back to at least 475 BC, according to the Greek historian Herodotus. The city of Byzantium, itself dating to 657 BC, was renamed Constantinople in 330 AD by the Christian emperor Constantine, and finally named İstanbul with the subjugation of the area by the Islamic conqueror Mehmed II in 1453. Biblical literati will note that several Old Testament peoples—Mesopotamians, Hittites, and Assyrians—all originated from ancient Anatolia, today's modern Turkey. Because of Turkey's strategic location on the Silk Road, its music is imbued with the ethnic influence of many culturally diverse peoples. Original Turkish musical instruments were of necessity small and portable; the most portable instrument of all, the human voice, therefore took on immense importance. Most musicologists describe pre-Islamic Turkish music as "lyrical," which here means that its primary focus was to unite literature with music. The role of instrumental music was to accompany the telling of epic tales in order to

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make them more moving and emotionally accessible to the listener. Ancient Turkish tribes had a vast repertoire of oral literature at their disposal, and even when they had a written language, these traditions persisted, helping to inculcate social unity among heterogeneous peoples and establishing a tie between generations.

Classical Turkish compositions (before a great deal of Western influence) usually included seven sections: instrumental prelude—song—interlude—song—interlude—song—instrumental postlude. The music took on its own structure, without a formal theory system, and was modal in nature, reflecting the “natural” tones the instruments themselves could produce. (Remember that the Phrygian mode was named for that eponymous ancient region of Anatolia.) These modes are called *makams*. An extremely interesting sidebar: the Sufi Turks were among the first known music therapists. According to Dr. Pinar Somakçi in her online article “Music Therapy in Islamic Culture,” during the 10th-11th centuries, Islamic doctors established scientific principles concerning musical treatment for various disorders, particularly psychological disorders. They assigned each *makam* an inherent mood, usually the mood induced by hearing it; a time of day to best hear it; and the condition it was meant to relieve. As an example, the *Isfahan makam* (remember Fauré’s beautiful setting of “Les roses d’Ispahan”? It’s the same place) should clear the mind and protect against colds and fevers, bringing a person the capacity of action, and a sense of security; it is best heard at sunset. Some later practitioners even assigned *makams* to particular signs of the zodiac and delineated specific nationalities with which they were most successful.

ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

Islam came to Turkey during the 9th century, bringing with it the Koranic statement that all things which are not leading one toward Allah must be eschewed.

And of mankind is he who payeth for mere pastime of discourse, that he may mislead from Allah’s way without knowledge, and maketh it the butt of mockery. For such there is a shameful doom. (Koran 31:6—from the surah of Luqman.)

Several Muslim scholars attribute this verse to apply to all music, both singing and instrumental, yet many

others do not. Islam shares with both Christianity and Judaism the fact that the written word can be interpreted in extremely divergent ways. Most Turkish Muslims seem to follow the more liberal interpretation, that as long as the music does not encourage anything of a sinful nature, it is permissible. The more restrictive interpretation would restrict “music” to the call to prayer (*azaan*) and chanted recitation of the Koran (*tajwid*). If you have never heard the call to prayer, which broadcasts five times daily throughout Islamic Turkey, you have missed one of the most fundamentally stirring sounds of the Middle East. Some head to the mosque for prayer and others totally ignore it, going about their business; but its call, emanating from the towers of the mosques by the muezzin, is unmistakably commanding.¹

In the realm of Sufism, music impels a person to seek the spiritual world. Both vocal and instrumental forms are employed with the sole purpose to bring one into a greater understanding of his relationship to the Infinite. Sufism is defined as the inner, mystic division of Islam, and practitioners consider themselves to be the true proponents of the original, pure Islam. As one may well imagine, this is controversial: Sufism has been banned in Iran as being inauthentic and incompatible with the Shi’ite form of Islam practiced there. In Turkey, 98% of Muslims are Sunni, and the most famous Sufi poet in Islam, Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), made his home there, in Konya, in the mid-13th century. His poetry has been set to music in many languages, mostly by lesser known composers. One major exception is the inclusion of Rumi’s “Song of the Night” as set by Polish composer Karol Szymanowski in his Symphony No. 3, featuring tenor and chorus. I was privileged to visit Rumi’s tomb, which is an Islamic pilgrimage site. There are wonderful displays of the ascetic life of a Sufi practitioner, including the many musical instruments used to create the songs of devotion common in Sufism.

The Janissary bands of the Ottoman military had much influence over European composers; Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, K. 384, and his Piano Sonata No. 11, K. 331, with its *alla turca* third movement, were both highly influenced by Turkish music. This was a result of the “Turkish trend” that was in fashion in Europe in general, and Vienna in particular, during the late 18th century. Beethoven’s Op. 113 *Turkish March*, Johannes Brahms’s Op. 64 *Three Quartets for Mixed*

Voices ("Fragen" movement), and Mussorgsky's *Capture of Kars* ("Solemn March") all reflect Turkey's musical influence on Europe. Contemporary Turkish vocal music is a fusion of Western art song, folk songs, and Islamic hymns. Art song from a traditional, European perspective did not exist there before the 20th century. In 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk assumed power, Atatürk instituted many cultural, language, and religious reforms. A primary musical example is Cemal Reşit Rey's *Douze Chants d'Anatolie* (Twelve Anatolian Songs), written in 1925–26 for soprano and piano. This collection of a dozen native, Westernized songs employed Turkish folksong within the European musical structure prevalent in the early 20th century. They were set in both French and Turkish, probably because they were premiered in Paris and because Reşit Rey (1904–1985) had been a student of Gabriel Fauré. Reşit Rey also wrote a series of successful, popular Turkish-language operettas, with his brother Ekrem serving as librettist.² Singers interested in these songs would be well served by looking into Dr. Eric Jenkins's doctoral treatise on the *Douze Chants*; he provides the text in both French and Turkish, with a phonetic Turkish transliteration aimed to help the singer pronounce the sounds of the Turkish language.³ To further aid the aspiring singer of Turkish, Leslie De'Ath wrote an article for this periodical in which he lists two excellent pronunciation dictionaries for the Turkish language.⁴

Other Turkish classical composers aside from Reşit Rey have ventured into the vocal world as well. Nazife Güran (1921–1993) was born in Vienna, the daughter of a Turkish diplomat; she finished primary school in Ankara and high school in İstanbul before studying music formally at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. Following her 1952 marriage and the birth of a son the following year, she pursued advanced composition studies in Cologne, returning to Turkey in 1969 to teach music at the Çemberlitaş Girls' High School. A woman culturally ahead of her time, Güran wrote over 1000 pieces in various music genres, but her most well known composition is the beautiful 12-song set for soprano and piano, *Nurdan Bir Hale* (Light from a Halo). The music is not currently available in the U.S., but may be available from German publishing houses or private collections.

A Turkish folk song arranger with a classical background is İlhan Baran (b. 1934). Baran studied double

bass and composition at the Ankara State Conservatory, then continued his studies in Paris at the École Normale de Musique with both Henri Dutilleux and Maurice Ohana. He returned to Turkey in 1964 and taught at the Ankara State Conservatory until 2000; he currently teaches in the Bilkent University Faculty of Music and Performing Arts. Baran uses Turkish harmonic and rhythmic techniques blended with 20th century writing styles, creating a unique musical language with a touch of Asian flavor. His folk song arrangements are largely unknown outside of Turkey.

A most contemporary Turkish vocal composer is Selman Ada (b. 1953). Ada is very well known in Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa for his operas, which have been translated into English, German, Flemish, and French. His earliest opera, *Ali Baba & The Forty Thieves*, was written in 1968, though not widely published until 1990. His latest opera, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, premiered in 2000 in Mersin, Turkey, and was published in 2002; all of his music is now published by Strube Verlag München-Berlin and is readily available. In addition to the operas, there are two oratorios and a fairly large output of works for solo voice with piano. Among these are *Ottoman Songs (Dök Zülfünü Meydâne Gel)* (1977) for baritone or bass and piano; *Türküler Şarkılar*, an album for piano and singing (1977–2001); *5 Mozaik-Nağme* for baritone and piano (2000) (poems by Tarık Günersel); *Opera-Aria* for singer and piano (2003); and *A Practice Book for Singers* with piano accompaniment (2003).

STATE OF THE VOCAL ARTS

Classical singing in Turkey is alive and well. I was delighted to spend an afternoon with Dr. Şebnem Ünal, chair of the voice department at the Conservatory of the University of İstanbul. Founded in 1453, with the beginning of the Ottoman Empire under Mehmed II, the conservatory is a division of the University. Her studio is on the Asian side of İstanbul, overlooks the Bosphorus, and faces Europe; a more beautiful setting is difficult to imagine. Three of her students sang for me that day, all mezzo sopranos, and I can say that they are as well trained as any voice students anywhere in the world. The first singer, Feride Büyükdenktaş, sang "The World Is Dusty" from Aaron Copland's *Twelve Songs of Emily Dickinson*, in order to improve her English diction. Feride had studied

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in an American summer program in Minnesota and her English was quite good. A doctoral student, baritone Erdem Nusret Karakas spent an hour talking with me about voice study and singing opportunities in Turkey. Erdem had studied at the Moscow Conservatory while living in Russia with his family, had completed a bachelor's degree at the Venice State Conservatory, and had completed his master's degree in İstanbul. There are six or so major opera houses in Turkey, which operate under the state supported European system: İstanbul, Ankara, Mersin, İzmir, Samsun, and Antalya. As in the U.S., Turkish singers would love to be hired by these houses, but the houses prefer "big names" from Europe. Dr. Ünal told me that voice study begins with the Italian masters and English Baroque, very much like what we do here, and that they progress to arias perhaps during the second or third year of study. A BM equivalent degree takes five years, while an MM takes the same two years it generally takes here. The doctorate in music requires three to six years.

Questions about the advantages and disadvantages of being a Turkish singer revealed some surprises. The singers all felt Turkey was a wonderful place to study because the world renowned singers like to perform there, exposing student singers to great singing on a consistent basis. However—and this truly surprised me—they feel they are too far from Europe to participate in all the myriad opportunities offered there. Lastly, they mentioned the Middle Eastern culture of self-deprecation and lack of discipline in music as difficulties often encountered when working with other Turkish singers in a production. This poor work ethic, especially, seems fairly worldwide to me, at least based on the conversations I've had with American and European voice teachers.

My Turkish journey came full circle when I attended the 2014 NATS National Conference in Boston. I encountered İstanbul attendee Ümit Daşdoğan and was able to spend two fascinating hours sharing musical insights from Turkey. Ümit is a tenor in his late 30s who graduated from the İstanbul Conservatory in 2005, and studied with Prof. Sebastian Vittucci at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna for his master's degree, during which he sang three years as a full-time chorus member of the Vienna *Staatsoper*. Ümit also sang two seasons at the Salzburg Festival. In 2009 Ümit returned to İstanbul to begin work on a second master's

degree in a combination of what we would call voice pedagogy, voice science, and voice therapy. This master's degree focused on the functional efficiency of the singing voice while working with patients under the supervision of a medical doctor; Ümit worked at a hospital in this capacity while simultaneously appearing in some 600 chorus performances with the Municipal Theatre of İstanbul. He was in the U.S. from May through August 2014 as a visiting fellow in the Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the Drexel University College of Medicine, where he studied with both Dr. Robert Sataloff and Margaret Baroody. Ümit will return to the U.S. as he is able in order to continue his studies; I have no doubt that one day he will be a leading light in improving voice disorders in Turkish singers.

Turkey sits at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and as such has withstood centuries of onslaught from nearby nations, who leave a bit of themselves behind while taking elsewhere what they can carry from Turkey. Turkey is culturally rich, and has much to offer those who seek her treasures. She's a country, a century later, still in the throes of becoming a European nation while leaving an empire behind. She is well worth the time spent to discover her.

NOTES

A stirring example may be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX3U-BGDedc>. In what is undoubtedly an interdenominational service, this YouTube video of the call to prayer (also *adaan* or *athan*) is strikingly beautiful and unmistakably holy.

1. Short examples of each song in the *Douze Chants* set can be heard in a 2004 recording at <http://www.tulumba.com/storeItem.asp?ic=MU9398919JS0010>.
2. Leslie De'Ath, "Dictionaries of Pronunciation: A Bibliographic Guide for Musicians—Part II (Languages Other than English)," *Journal of Singing* 55, no. 4 (March/April 1999): 16.
3. Eric Michael Jenkins, "An Annotated Survey of Douze Chants d'Anatolie of Cemal Reşit Rey: a Practical Performance Companion to Understanding the Origin and Context of Turkish Art Song in the Twentieth Century" (2013), *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations*, Paper 8574.

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Dr. Sherri Weiler was Associate Professor of Music at Shorter University in Rome, GA, teaching voice and voice pedagogy from 2004–2012. She received both the BA and MEd degrees from Clemson University, the MM degree from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, and the DM degree from Florida State University. Dr. Weiler has taught voice at Alaska Pacific University, University of Alaska Anchorage, Florida A&M University, and most recently at Florida State University. Her professional publications include two articles for the *Journal of Singing* on the songs of Berlioz and Wagner; professional presentations include a lecture recital on Russian art song performed for both the Southern chapter and the 47th national conference of the College Music Society.

Dr. Weiler was a featured chamber music performer at the 2004 national conference of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, and has served in the Alaska and Georgia chapters as president, membership chair, registrar, and secretary. She was selected to present a poster paper on the development of 19th century Russian art song at the 2006 NATS national conference in Minneapolis, and currently serves on the Editorial Board for the *Journal of Singing*, a post she has held since 2008. Dr. Weiler has also written several articles for *Classical Singer* magazine.

In 1992 Weiler represented the Municipality of Anchorage on a cultural exchange to Magadan, Russia, and was subsequently selected by Mstislav Rostropovich to sing the mezzo soprano solo in Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* with the National Symphony later that year. The singer coached Russian language and song literature for twelve years with Svetlana Velichko, a graduate of and former piano professor at the Moscow Conservatory; the two have a CD of 19th century Russian vocal literature on the Centaur label, *Russia: Golden Century of Song*. Weiler's website is www.sherriweiler.com, and she can be contacted at afsmw516@yahoo.com.

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