

A Musical Minefield: Composing the Turkish Nation-State

by Erol Koymen

The University of Texas at Austin

erol.g.koymen@vanderbilt.edu

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“Today, we [in Turkey] are thus confronted with three kinds of music: Eastern, Western, and folk . . . We have already noted that Eastern music is both sick and non-national . . . I submit, therefore, that our national music will be born of a marriage between Western and folk music. Our folk music has given us many melodies. If we collect these and harmonize them in the Western manner, we shall have both a national and a European music.”¹

This quotation from Turkish republican ideologue Ziya Gökalp’s 1923 book *The Principles of Turkism (Türkçülüğün Esasları)* has seemingly been a requirement in any account of the Turkish music reforms carried out in the early decades of the Turkish Republic. These music reforms had as their goal the creation of a new Turkish music that could join the ranks of European art music while remaining distinctly Turkish. Their ostensible culmination was achieved in the “Turkish Five”—the group of first-generation Turkish Republic composers consisting of Necil Kazım Akses, Hasan Ferid Alnar, Ulvi Kemal Erkin, Cemal Reşit Rey, and Ahmed Adnan Saygun. All of these composers studied abroad at major European conservatories and devoted their careers to the composing, teaching, and performing of European-style art music in Turkey. In the limited literature on the “Turkish Five,” the standard model has been to quote Gökalp’s formula, give a bit of historical background, and then note the “Turkish” elements in their works. But was the creation of the new Turkish music as simple as it is often made to seem? How closely did these composers actually follow Gökalp’s formula? In the case of Hasan Ferid Alnar, a background in Ottoman art music, early study with the anti-Gökalp polemicist Hüseyin Saaddettin Arel, and extensive study with the musically conservative composer Joseph Marx in Vienna evidence a more complicated route. An examination of the competing influences on Alnar and an analysis of the use of Turkish *makams* in his first major work—the 1935 *Prelude and Two Dances* for orchestra—will yield new insight into the means by which he sought to compose the new Turkish music.

Turkish Societal and Musical Reforms

For Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923, structural changes to Turkish society were vital to the establishment of a modern, Western national identity for the new nation-state. His reforms affected all areas of Turkish life. He moved the capital from Istanbul to Ankara and abolished the Islamic caliphate. With the 1925 passing of the Law of Maintenance and Order², he banned the fez in favor of a Western-style hat, abolished the Sufi religious orders, re-aligned the calendar along Western lines, and repealed Muslim sharia law in

¹ Ziya Gökalp, *The Principle of Turkism (Türkçülüğün esasları)*. ed. Robert Devereux. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 99.

² Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 39.

favor of an amalgam of European codes.³ Incredibly, in 1928, the state replaced the Ottoman script with the Latin one, which Atatürk traveled around the country to teach.⁴

Music reforms were also part of Turkish nation-state formation from the beginning of the Republican era. The cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire had left various musics in its wake, among them Western art music, Ottoman art music, urban popular art music, religious music of the Mevlevi *tekke*, and the various rural musics found in the remaining territories inherited by the republic. The desire for a distinctly Turkish national music that was simultaneously modern and Western led to a tripartite categorization of the available musical materials, articulated most notably by Ziya Gökalp in his 1923 book. In this conception, the three available musics were Western, Ottoman, and folk. Western music was the modern goal toward which Atatürk wanted to move the nation-state. Ottoman, or Eastern, music, with its associations of decadence and languor, was dismissed as “sick” and hopelessly backward, and was therefore to be removed both from the new national music and the new Turkish nation-state. This was in practice, however, not possible; and Ottoman art music thus underwent a long period of state manipulation and rehabilitation to which Hüseyin Saadetin Arel was a primary contributor.⁵ Given the time-frame that this paper spans (pre- and post-Republic), I will use the term “Ottoman art music” to discuss this music. The “folk” music was conceived out of the various “Anatolian traditions of folk music”, but likewise had to be codified and “rehabilitated” both in order to develop a unified Turkish “national sound” and to downplay ethnic differences which conflicted with the new national identity.^{6 7} Though the initial recipe for a new music for the Turkish nation-state called for the elimination of Ottoman music and the syncretic combination of Turkish folk music and Western music, on the ground a decades-long debate ensued as to which music was truly Turkish and therefore appropriate for the new nation-state.

In the midst of this debate, however, musical reforms were instituted. In 1924, music lessons were made compulsory in all schools, a school for music teachers—from which Turkish music was excluded—was founded in Ankara, and the Ottoman imperial band (founded in 1827) was “renamed the Presidential Symphony Orchestra and moved to [Ankara].”^{8 9} The Ottoman-era *Darülelhan* music school was transformed into the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory in 1927.¹⁰ In the years that followed, Turkish musicians began collecting “folk” melodies from the Anatolian countryside, and the state “began to recruit young talent to study abroad on state scholarships.”¹¹ Beginning in 1932, the state began inviting European musicians such as Béla Bartók, Paul Hindemith, Joseph Marx, Hermann von Schmeidel, and Eduard Zuckmayer to

³ Ahmad, 54, 80.

⁴ Ahmad, 81.

⁵ Walter Feldman, “Cultural Authority and Authenticity in the Turkish Repertoire,” *Asian Music* 22, No. 1 (Autumn, 1990 – Winter, 1991).

⁶ Orhan Tekelioğlu, “The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: the Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (April, 1996): 197.

⁷ Sonia Seeman, “From ‘Çingene’ to ‘Roman’ and Turk: Musical Representations of Ethnicity and Turkishness,” in *Sounding Roman* (in progress), 161.

⁸ Andreas Holzer, “Joseph Marx and Paul Hindemith als “Musikalische Botschafter” in der Türkei,” *ANKLAENGE, Wiener Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* (2009): 198.

⁹ Yılmaz Aydın, *Die Werke der ‘Türkischen Fünf’ im Lichte der musikalischen Wechselbeziehungen zwischen der Türkei und Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002): 220.

¹⁰ Aydın, 12.

¹¹ Metin And, “Atatürk and the Arts with Special Reference to Music and Theatre” in *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey* (Leiden: Jacob M. Landau, E.J. Brill, 1984), 220.

advise fledgling music institutions and collect folk music.¹² In 1934, evidently disappointed with the pace of reforms, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk made a speech before parliament calling for redoubled efforts: “The speed with which a nation can transform itself, is related to how well it can adapt to new styles in music. The kind of music we are hearing today is far from doing any good for the future of our young nation. It is essential to create a musical style rooted in our national heritage. Only after this, can the national music of Turkey be elevated to a universal musical level.”¹³ As Turkey’s “national heritage” was still being codified at this point, draconian steps were taken such as the banning of both Ottoman art and Turkish folk music from the radio and from records for several years to “re-set” the public’s musical taste.¹⁴

Hasan Ferid Alnar’s Educational Background

Hasan Ferid Alnar (1906-1978) was among the future “Turkish Five” composers who were sent abroad for study during the 1920s. He is unique among this group for his extensive knowledge of both Ottoman and Western music. Having begun his Ottoman musical education at age ten on the Ottoman art music instrument, *kanun*, at age twelve he was already counted among the best *kanun* players in Istanbul.¹⁵ At the German school he attended in Istanbul, he began singing in a European-style polyphonic choir at age eight.¹⁶ At age thirteen he began composing monophonic Ottoman music in genres such as operetta and the *saz semai* of Ottoman art music.¹⁷ Continuing to play *Kanun*, he toured and made recordings from age sixteen with the prestigious ensemble of the Istanbul House of Music Lessons.¹⁸ Meanwhile, starting at age seventeen Alnar began taking lessons in harmony with Istanbul musician and polymath Hüseyin Saadettin Arel, for whom he wrote two- and three-voiced polyphonic compositions.¹⁹ One year later, he began a three-year period of study in counterpoint, fugue, and piano with Istanbul composer and pianist Edgar Manas, with the goal of deepening his compositional abilities in polyphonic music.²⁰ Given that this study followed the founding of the Republic, Alnar’s desire to expand his polyphonic compositional capabilities was perhaps a strategic as well as an artistic one.

In 1927, with encouragement from Arel, Alnar began studies at the Wiener Musikakademie, where he took composition lessons with the popular and influential Austrian composer Joseph Marx who several years later was invited to Istanbul as musical advisor to the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory. Alnar earned his diploma in composition and conducting in 1932.²¹ After completing his studies in Vienna, Alnar moved back to Istanbul, where he

¹² And, 220.

¹³ Emre Araci, “The life and works of Ahmed Adnan Saygun” (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1999), 54.

¹⁴ Patrick Bartsch, *Musikpolitik im Kemalismus: Die Zeitschrift Radyo zwischen 1941 und 1949* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2011), 47-48.

¹⁵ Aydın, 51.

¹⁶ Aydın, 53.

¹⁷ Aydın, 53.

¹⁸ Aydın, 54.

¹⁹ Aydın, 54.

²⁰ Aydın, 54: Manas (1875-1964) had himself studied in Italy from 1888.

²¹ Course listing for Hasan Ferid Alnar, 1932. Fachhochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Wien, Archive of the Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Wien, Vienna, Austria.

conducted, taught at the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory, and composed the *Prelude and Two Dances*.²²

Hüseyin Saadettin Arel: a Polemicist Equal to Gökalp

Alnar's early studies with Hüseyin Saadettin Arel place him in enemy territory in terms of Gökalp's framework, as Arel later argued directly against Gökalp's musical views in his 1940 book *Whose is Turkish Music? (Türk Müzikisi Kimindir?)*. According to Walter Feldman, Arel became for Ottoman art music, "a polemicist equal to the task of taking on the ideas of Gökalp."²³ Gökalp saw the dismissal of Ottoman music as necessary for the modernization of Turkish national music because, in addition to finding it "sick" and "non-national," he theorized that it along with other "Eastern" musics had been "borrowed from Byzantium" by seminal Islamic medieval music theorist Al-Farabi.^{24 25} Walter Feldman conjectures that Gökalp's problem with Ottoman music was not that it is Islamic, "but on the contrary that it is Hellenic, and unsuitable for any Muslim people," and certainly by extension unsuitable for the new Turkish nation-state.²⁶ Arel, on the other hand, turned the argument around, claiming that "Arabian and modern Greek liturgical music are derived from Turkish music," which was itself "brought by the Oghuz Turks from Central Asia when they migrated to Anatolia."²⁷ Arel, in other words, wanted to locate the essence of Turkish music in precisely that music which Gökalp saw as antithetical to it.

Prior to the explicit attack on Gökalp's anti-Ottoman views in *Whose is Turkish Music*, the case for the modern possibilities of Ottoman music began to be made. In 1933, Arel's close associate Dr. Suphi Ezgi—also a professor at the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory—published the first volume of what would become a five-volume theoretical codification of Turkish music titled *Turkish Music: Theory and Practice (Türk Musikisi: Nazari ve Ameli)*.²⁸ In this book Ezgi layed out the re-fashioning of Ottoman music theory along Western lines developed by him, Arel, and physicist Salih Murad Uzdilek.²⁹ Ottoman music is constructed melodically out of a collection of *makams*, or scales associated with particular pitches whose intervals are built out of Pythagorean commas of roughly 23.46 cents (the cent is a unit of musical measurement developed to aid in comparing different musical systems; there are 1200 cents in an octave, one Western half step equals 100 cents). The intervals in the *makams*, therefore, do not correspond to Western whole and half steps and are not organized in the manner of Western major and minor scales. Ezgi, Arel, and Uzdilek, however, re-organize the entire system of *makams* around the pitch C and present each *makam* in all possible transpositions—arbitrary in terms of Ottoman music but obviously with significant Western associations. This system of notation is today known as the "Ezgi-Arel-Uzdilek system."³⁰ As Arel's student and as a performer and composer of Ottoman art music who was teaching at the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory at the same time

²² Alnar, 55.

²³ Feldman, 100.

²⁴ Gökalp, 42.

²⁵ Feldman, 101.

²⁶ Feldman, 99.

²⁷ Feldman, 101.

²⁸ Suphi Ezgi, *Türk Musikisi: Nazari ve Ameli* (Istanbul: Milli Mecmua Matbaası, 1933).

²⁹ Ruhi Ayangil, "Western Notation in Turkish Music," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Third Series* 18, no. 4 (Oct., 2008): 425.

³⁰ Ayangil, 425.

as Suphi Ezgi, Alnar would almost certainly have been aware of *Turkish Music: Theory and Practice*. Furthermore, as we will see, his compositional approach reveals an adherence to the Ezgi/Arel/Uzdilek conception of the new Turkish music.

Joseph Marx's Musical Views

Joseph Marx, Alnar's teacher in Vienna, held conservative musical views and had a strong belief in the value of folk music to national identity. These views established a compositional problem for which Alnar had to devise a solution. From early on, Marx's conservative musical views are evident. His 1909 dissertation written at the *Karl Franzens Universität* in Graz sought to prove the "naturalness" of tonality.³¹ Marx held this view, along with its corollary that anything else was "against nature",³² for the rest of his life.³³ In keeping with nationalist musical currents in Austria, he considered folk music to be of primary importance for national music, believing that only through it could a nation achieve timeless music.³⁴ In his article "Music is Ringing Life" ("*Musik ist klingendes Leben*"), written after his visits to the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory as musical advisor between 1932 and 1934,³⁵ Marx lays out a prescription for a new Turkish music, which is nearly identical to Gökalp's: "The foundations of this new art are on the one hand the old Turkish folk music, and on the other hand formal harmonic achievements which are uniquely clear in the timeless works of the Viennese Classic Period. One hopes that out of the union of these two original elements a new musical art will develop."³⁶

In "Music is Ringing Life," Marx indicates an awareness of the *makams* of Ottoman music, describing them as "complicated scales which are different in the upper and lower octaves . . . and contain quarter tones which can be adjusted on the "Turkish Lute" with tuning levers."³⁷ He furthermore notes that the challenge facing him and his Turkish students is to "translate [the *makams*] more or less intact into the tempered system and build a harmony to appropriately accompany the Turkish music."³⁸ Marx does not seem to recognize the distinction between Ottoman art music and Turkish folk music—he extols the value of folk music, yet he is describing the incorporation of the *makams* of Ottoman music into the new Turkish music—the "Turkish Lute" which he describes is the *kanun* of Ottoman art music. His heavily Orientalized description of the music of Turkey throws further doubt on his grasp of the challenges of uniting Western and Turkish music. He writes that "the dark, longing tones of Asia in art, the indescribably secret sounds from the origins of man should keep sounding, also in [this] time, as the most valuable national possession of the *Volk*."³⁹

³¹ Andreas Holzer, "Joseph Marx als Lehrer," in Marjan Kozina: International symposium about Marjan Kozina, on the occasion of the concert performance of his operetta *Majda*, ed. Primož Kuret, 37-42. Slovenia: Novo Mesto Press (2001): 40.

³² All translations are the author's.

³³ Holzer, 40.

³⁴ Anita Mayer-Hirzberger . . . ein Volk von alters her musikbegabt: der Begriff "Musikland Österreich" im Ständestaat (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008): 252.

³⁵ Holzer, "Joseph Marx und Paul Hindemith also "Musikalische Botschafter" in der Türkei," 201.

³⁶ Joseph Marx, "Musik ist klingendes Leben" in *Betrachtungen eines romantischen Realisten*, ed. Oswald Ortner (Vienna: Gerlach und Wiedling, 1947): 11.

³⁷ Marx, 3.

³⁸ Marx, 3.

³⁹ Marx, 9.

Analysis of *Prelude and Two Dances*

Alnar composed *Prelude and Two Dances* immediately after completing his studies with Joseph Marx in 1932, during the period when his colleague at the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory Suphi Ezgi published the Westernized re-formulation of Ottoman music. An analysis of the work indicates that both of these factors had a significant influence on both Alnar's choice of musical material and his approach to it.

Turkish musicologist Yılmaz Aydın discusses Alnar's compositional approach and analyzes selected compositions—including *Prelude and Two Dances*—in his 2002 book *The Works of the Turkish Five in Light of the Musical Exchanges Between Turkey and Europe (Die Werke der Türkischen Fünf im Lichte der musikalischen Wechselbeziehungen zwischen der Türkei und Europa)*.⁴⁰ He notes that, more than those of the other “Turkish Five” composers, Alnar's compositions indicate a deep knowledge of Ottoman art music and exhibit prominent use of *makams*.⁴¹

Alnar's views on the course that Turkish national music should take are made more evident by the manner in which he uses the *makams*. The prelude of the *Prelude and Two Dances* begins with a fanfare-like theme in the trumpets in E Dorian. A variation of this theme is played in measure 10 by the oboe, which Aydın identifies as being in the makam *hicaz* on pitch E (originally C-sharp).^{42 43}

Following the first theme is a transitional theme in the cellos, which Aydın identifies as being derived from *makam karcıgar* on pitch G-sharp (originally A).⁴⁴

The second theme, which appears in measure 22, is identified by Aydın as being in *makam hüseyini* on pitch G (originally on A)⁴⁵ and exhibiting folk-like characteristics. Following the brief return in measure 28 of the transitional theme identified as being in *makam karcıgar* by Aydın, a development section begins in measure 32 in which Aydın does not identify any *makams*. Beginning in measure 52, a melodic dialogue based on the second theme develops between the strings and winds whose *makam* Aydın again identifies as *hicaz* on G. The Prelude concludes with a solo cadenza in the bassoon that leads into a brief recapitulation of the opening figure in the oboe and a soft close in E.⁴⁶

Alnar's preference for the *makams* of Ottoman music over folk melodies as the basis of the prelude places him on the Arel side of the Gökalp/Arel musico-ideological divide. Furthermore, his use of the *makams* in transposition indicates that he was familiar enough with the Ezgi book to put its reforms into practice. However, there is something troubling about both Alnar's use of *makams* and Aydın's analysis of them. As discussed above, the *makams* are built not out of Western major and minor seconds, but rather Pythagorean commas. What Aydın

⁴⁰ Published by Peter Lang, 2002.

⁴¹ Aydın, 57.

⁴² Aydın, 60.

⁴³ Ezgi, 62.

⁴⁴ Ezgi, 125.

⁴⁵ Ezgi, 96.

⁴⁶ Aydın, 62.

presents as “the *makam*,” therefore, is actually a heavily Westernized variant thereof, which completely omits the battery of accidentals that govern the *makams*.

For example, what appears in Aydın’s *hicaz* example to be a half-step between E and F made up of 100 cents is in Ottoman music made up of five commas totaling about 117 cents. The augmented second made up of 300 cents which follows in Aydın’s example and which is added to Alnar’s second iteration of the first theme is in actuality composed of twelve commas totaling roughly 282 cents.

In the transitional theme, the *karcığar* example which Aydın gives indicates a 200 cent whole-step between the first and second degrees of the *makam*, and a 100 cent half step between the second and third degrees. In *karcığar*, however, the second scale degree is flatted by one comma, meaning that the value of the first interval is roughly 177 cents. The minor second is then somewhat expanded to roughly 123 cents. If we look to Alnar’s theme, these intervals would feature prominently were they to be performed in *makam* tuning.

Conclusions

It is certainly understandable, given the challenge of fitting Western harmony to the comma-based *makams* and the musical conservatism of Alnar’s teacher Joseph Marx, that Alnar simply adapted the *makams* wholesale to the Western chromatic system. However, one wonders, given the call for a distinctly Turkish music made by early reformers, whether Alnar’s attempt fell somewhat short of the mark due precisely to his handling of the *makams*. Perhaps tellingly, “Turkish Five” composer Necil Kazım Akses, who studied with Marx during roughly the same period as Alnar, went on after his studies with Marx to Prague where he studied a quarter and sixth-tone harmonic system developed by Alois Hába.⁴⁷ Similarly, Alnar’s student Kemal İlerici attempted in the 1940s to develop a system of harmony specifically suited to Turkish music.⁴⁸ These interests in alternative harmonic approaches perhaps indicate recognition of the excessive ground which Turkish music—either Ottoman or folk—had to cede in order to fit into a European tonal harmonic system. Also noteworthy is a cryptic statement from Marx recounted by Alnar after the premier of *Prelude and Two Dances*: “You are on the way to becoming educated as a national composer, you should be careful that you don’t lose your way under the influences of the Western music style.”⁴⁹ Did even conservative Marx see the problem? Marx likely conflated Ottoman art music and Turkish folk music into one category and thus thought that the *makams* belonged to Turkish folk music. His belief in the importance of folk music perhaps came into conflict with his belief in the “naturalness” of tonality, leading him to judge that the use of fully Westernized, chromatically-conceived *makams* was no route to a distinctly Turkish national music.

I will advance a theory as to why Alnar composed the piece as he did. Evidence indicates that, during the years in Istanbul when he composed *Prelude and Two Dances*, he encountered the reorganization and transposition of the *makams* to correspond to the Western orientation around pitch C presented in *Turkish Music: Theory and Practice (Türk Musikisi: Nazari ve Ameli)*. From his primary composition teacher in Western art music, Joseph Marx, he learned

⁴⁷ Aydın, 150.

⁴⁸ Aydın, 68.

⁴⁹ Aydın, 58.

traditional, tonal compositional techniques and was encouraged to incorporate Turkish music into them. Given his background as a performer of Ottoman music on the *kanun* and the fact that he elected to compose with the *makams* of Ottoman music, Alnar's adherence to Hüseyin Saaddetin Arel's conception of a modern Turkish music that included Ottoman music is evident. Alnar thus saw a more complete reorientation of the *makams*, from comma-based to Western chromatic construction, to be a musical necessity in terms of Marx's tonal practices, a logical next step in the codifications in Ezgi/Arel/Uzdilek, and an expression of his own personal relationship with the music of his country. By using the *makams* as he did, he attempted to demonstrate that Ottoman music was not hopelessly "sick" and "non-national" as Gökalp had claimed, but rather compatible with European compositional techniques.

Based on examinations of Alnar's background in Ottoman music, his contact with Hüseyin Saaddetin Arel and Suphi Ezgi, and his studies with Joseph Marx, it is likely that Alnar's compositional choices in *Prelude and Two Dances* constitute an attempt to mediate among the musical influences he gathered during his studies and the various musics vying for inclusion in the new Turkish national music. A closer examination of his compositions preceding *Prelude and Two Dances* and of his other significant teacher Edgar Manas might yield a more detailed view into his compositional development. Even if this paper cannot deliver final compositional explanations, nonetheless, it demonstrates the need for more nuanced study of the "Turkish Five" composers and the Republican Turkish music reforms in general. Simplistic theories and glossed-over musical differences may make for more digestible stories, but they do disservice to musicians such as Hasan Ferid Alnar, who were not born spouting Turkish folk melodies in perfect four-part harmony, but rather had to navigate a minefield of competing ideologies and musics as they composed the new Turkish nation-state.

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