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MUSIC FESTIVALS IN TURKEY

Music life in Turkey intensifies with the arrival of spring and summer which is also manifested in numerous festivals that obviously count on cultural tourism. This period begins in April with the Ankara Festival, continues with the considerably more famous Istanbul Festival in June, which is shortly followed by *Aspendos*, the Opera and Ballet Festival which is held for the twelfth time in the ancient amphitheatre on the Mediterranean coast. In addition to three domestic opera and ballet houses (Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir), this year's *Aspendos* Festival was also attended by the Rome Opera and the Kirov Opera of the Mariinsky Theatre under the direction of Georgiev.

In addition to the abovementioned festivals, several larger and smaller music events take place in Turkey around the same time, some of which will be discussed in this paper.

The twenty-second Festival in Ankara (April 4th-30th) – which, significantly, is not financed by the state but by sponsors – consisted of twenty-one programme events. It was opened by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Fedor Glushenko and closed by the Borusan Philharmonic Orchestra from Istanbul conducted by Gürer Aykal, who is highly esteemed in Turkey. The real star of this final concert was Fazıl Say, one of the most famous names of the broad and diversified Turkish performing, especially pianistic, scene. Although he already made his name as a pianist in Western Europe and America, pianist Fazıl Say has lately become increasingly oriented towards composing. As a pianist, he is an eccentric who disturbs tradition and refuses to observe the stylistic laws of the epochs he interprets, a sort of “enfant terrible”. As a composer, he is a passionate advocate of the ethnic musical style. Specifically, he undoubtedly quotes or bases his invention on the oriental tradition, whose richly employed parameters include strong rhythm and an extremely ornamented melodic line flavoured with a necessary measure of virtuosity of the solo instrument with an almost rudimentary use of the orchestra. This work, whose movements are entitled *The Silence of Anatolia*, *Obstinacy* and *11 September 2002 – An Elegy*, easily captures the domestic audience not only by the author's unequivocal musicality, but also by a high degree of “recognition” that flows between the audience and the performer. Fazıl Say is a paradigmatic phenomenon for the current Turkish music scene. He epitomizes the strong local need for the national and, at the same time, for the

inevitable and desirable European. When his massive vocal-instrumental composition *Nazim* was performed at the prestigious and very commercial Festival in Aspendos, Say once again confirmed the European-Minor Asian cultural code that he capitalizes on.

In addition to the already mentioned Philharmonic Orchestra from Moscow, other large performing ensembles at the Ankara Festival included the St. Petersburg Mussorgsky State Academic Opera and Ballet, the Slovak Sinfonietta orchestra and the Bilkent Academic Symphony Orchestra from Ankara, whose members are mainly musicians from former countries of the Soviet Union and whose chief conductor for the past few seasons has been Emil Tabakov. The remainder of the programme of the Ankara Festival was taken up by the *Mozart* Quartet, Madrigalisti di Venezia, Emma Kirkby and the London Baroque, and Ars Antiqua from Paris, while the most interesting performance, from the perspective of the Turkish cultural ambience, was that of the Boys Choir of Harlem, which had been eagerly “awaited” by the Festival’s organizers for several years. Two programme evenings were dedicated to them and this was not only a musical event, but also a valuable social one. What makes this choir special is the fact that the boys who sing in it are “regular boys from the neighbourhood” whose voices are neither “angelic” nor perfectly polished. These boys are graced with honesty, especially when interpreting Black sacred or gospel music which is dominated by the thematics of Christian hope. And regardless of the supposed cultural distance, this type of concert was extremely appealing to the domestic audience. Even though the tradition of not only singing but also listening to choral music in Turkey is only a few decades long, there is great interest in choral art. Another segment of the programme can also be said to be part of a “short tradition” in this country. The selection and the space devoted to dance at the Ankara Festival is based on the surprisingly developed, for those less informed, ballet life in Turkey, which particularly refers to modern dance. Two out of the three dance ensembles at the Festival attracted special attention. The first is the young Israeli ensemble *Tararam*, where the dance force and enthusiasm, as well as an unusual, almost aggressive dance temperament are easily transformed into grotesque and irony. The second is a non-standard dance ensemble from Great Britain which, in the exciting choreodrama *Motions – Joy of Living – Dance Show*, equally consists of persons who are handicapped and those who are not.

If we bear in mind the fact that the public scene (TV, numerous concerts in the open) is surfeited with all forms of traditional music and that music in general, both secular and sacred, is mostly monodic and monophonic, the cultural interest of the European, secularized Turkish society in both choral music and modern dance deserves to be emphasized.

The abovementioned Turkish secularism is primarily linked with the name of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his comprehensive political and social reform from the mid-1920's, an important segment of which was connected with the role of music in the transformation of society. Atatürk believed that European, polyphonic, that is, multivoiced music tradition should be implemented in the new Turkish society and he attached unusually great importance to it. In addition to removing the fez or changing the alphabet, this was another attitude by which Atatürk established a cultural alternative to the centuries folkloric tradition. This shift implied a significant and far-reaching expansion of the cultural range, rather than a negation or challenging of tradition and heritage.

It is there that one should find the reason for the great interest in Western, modern and classical music culture in general, the interest in multivoiced choirs and even the existence of the Ankara Society for Polyphonic Music which, from May 6th to 9th, organized one of the many choir festivals.

In addition to the hosts, choirs from Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro also participated in the abovementioned competition. The academic choir *Divina armonie* from Bucharest with choir-master Marius Christian Firca (first prize complementing the large number of previously won awards in Italy, Greece and Romania) and the Vocal Ensemble *Oktoih* from Serbia and Montenegro under the direction of Aleksandar Spasić (second prize) were among the best in the category of mixed choirs. Besides prizes and awards, this competition was dominated by a spirit of choral enthusiasm, the cheerfulness of the contestants, a lively group of very young participants (*Ellerhein*, the female choir from Talin), as well as a choir with older members (the male choir *Gusla* from Bulgaria), with a noticeably larger number of female choir-masters (two from Estonia, three from Bulgaria and one from Turkey).

One choir, however, deserves to be mentioned in particular. It is the chamber choir *Odeon* whose singers are in a way "deprived" or "disadvantaged". Namely, it mostly consists of persons with impaired vision. Even though its achievement does not rank it among the best in this competition, the performance of this choir and the courage with which it successfully struggled with the difficult singing tasks were very exciting. The audience could not work out how the blind singers and the blind choir-master Onur Yilmaz were able to "see" each other, but it could hear the passionate performance of Monteverdi's compositions.

The programme that the choirs performed in the two parts of the competition consisted of serious and demanding compositions of older masters, the obligatory composition of the contemporary Turkish composer T. Erdener *Ninni* as well as compositions of authors from the

choir's country of origin. The choir *Oktoih* representing Serbia and Montenegro successfully performed works by Monteverdi, Mokranjac and Aleksandar Spasić and was rightfully awarded for its performance in the face of keen competition.

The music and music life of Turkey are rich and complex. They deserve to be seriously observed and followed, because music is a litmus paper for phenomena with wider social meaning. Just like the Father of the Turks, Mustafa Kemal, once introduced “polyphonic music” into Turkish society, which then accepted and adopted it, certain different phenomena, trends and developments can be observed through music today. Even though the diffusion of choral singing is still very wide and even though classical and modern dance are still a subject of widespread cultivation and interest, one can also observe other trends, a certain strengthening of the ethnic and other local traditions along with the restoration of “monophony”.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić