

Study of Ahmed Adnan Saygun's Life, Musical Approaches and Symphonies

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Abstract

In the early years of the republic founded in Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, one of the most important issues was art. One of the most important areas of art was music. Although the country had a deeply rooted musical culture from the past, it was unfortunately not possible at that time to institutionalize this culture in an academic way. The young talents who were sent abroad to study music aimed to ensure this institutionalisation. The Turkish Five, known as the first composers of modern Turkey, were pioneers and educators of institutionalisation efforts as well as composers identified with Atatürk's breakthroughs in the field of music. The composers of the Turkish Five are Cemal Reşit Rey, Hasan Ferid Alnar, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Ahmed Adnan Saygun and Necil Kazım Akses. These are the composers who kept up with the civilised world and made themselves known and accepted with their compositions. The reason why Ahmed Adnan Saygun occupies an important place in the development of Turkish music is the fact that the composer has written works in many different genres. He has important works in forms such as solo, piano, chamber music, opera, sonata and concerto. He pushed the boundaries of his music especially in his symphonic works written during his middle-aged. He used the maqam scale as a colour in his works and showed this in his orchestral language. Based on this importance, the aim of this study is to present information on the life, musical approaches and five symphonies of Ahmed Adnan Saygun, who is one of the Turkish Five and who introduced Turkish music to the next generations both as an educator and as a composer.

Keywords: Saygun, Symphony, Turkish Five, Turkish music, Music

DOI: 10.7176/ADS/106-04

Publication date: August 31st 2023

1. Introduction

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk became the founder and new leader of the Republic of Turkey. He attached as much importance to polyphonic music as he did to Turkish music. Based on the importance he attached to culture and art, Atatürk ensured that many studies were carried out in the field of music (İlyasoğlu 1998). The new cultural thought of Turkey, the foundations of which he laid, aimed at a development based on national culture. The basis of the revolutions is also based on this goal (Yöre 2010). The first composers in Turkey to write in polyphonic techniques began to produce works in the mid-19th century. On the one hand, the serious training provided by Muzika-i Humayun and, on the other hand, the awareness of the innovations brought by music ensembles from abroad gave composers the opportunity to set guiding goals (Say 1998). Polyphonic works were also created in this pre-Republican period. However, the first academically based polyphonic musical works were realised by young musicians who were sent to different countries with the establishment of the Republic (Selanik 1996).

The first musicians to devote themselves to composing, in other words, to composing as a "profession", are known as the Turkish Five. The term was first coined and adopted by Halil Bedii Yönetken, a music critic and teacher. The term is seen as an imitation of the Russian Five and the French Six, but the composers' commonalities and independent artistic lives dispel this notion. The only common starting point of the Turkish Five was their nationalist outlook. On the one hand, they used the maqam and rhythmic systems of folk music. On the other hand, they created their own originality by observing the centuries-long development of western music, its movements and contemporary techniques. These composers, who grew up in the difficult conditions of Turkey, fulfilled their duties with the best possible sense of responsibility. Each of them incorporated traditional music in a different way and naturally created works in different styles (Say 1998).

These composers are Cemal Reşit Rey (1904-1985), Hasan Ferit Alnar (1906-1978), Ulvi Cemal Erkin (1906-1972), Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907-1991) and Necil Kazım Akses (1908-1999). Ahmed Adnan Saygun was one of the composers who became the musical symbols of the Republic (İlyasoğlu 2007). Saygun's compositions were highly acclaimed both at home and abroad. On 15 January 1991, The Times newspaper stated that Ahmed Adnan Saygun is to Turkey what Sibelius is to Finland and De Falla is to Spain. Gramophone magazine described him as the first Turkish composer of the 20th century (Usta 2018).

2. The life of Ahmed Adnan Saygun

Saygun was born in Izmir in 1907 and was the son of a father who was a mathematics teacher. He began his

musical education with choir practice at the Union and Progress School. He took piano lessons from Rosatti at the age of 13 and from the Hungarian Tevfik Bey in 1922. He began to study harmony and counterpoint from French books. These books were very helpful in his self-development (Aktüze 2007). He started his career as a primary school music teacher in 1924-25. In the following years, he continued his career as a music teacher by working at Izmir High School. In 1928, he won the Ministry of National Education exam and was sent to Paris for education (İlyasoğlu 2007). He became a student of Nadia Boulanger at the Ecole Normale de Musique, where he started his education (Say 1998). Later he studied harmony, fugue and counterpoint with Eugene Borrel and composition with Vincent d'Indy and Paul La Flem at the Scola Cantorum, another school in Paris. He also studied organ music with Edouar Sourbebielle and Gregorian melodies with Amedee Gastoue (İlyasoğlu 1989).

In 1931, he returned home and began teaching theory and counterpoint at the Musik-i Muallim Mektebi in Ankara. For a year he conducted the Riyaset-i Cumhuriyet Orchestra. After conducting the orchestra in 1934, he returned to teaching in 1936 and taught theory for 3 years. When the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok came to Turkey in 1936, he studied the music of different regions of the country with him and wrote down the folk melodies of these regions. In the association he founded in 1940, he organised choral concerts of Turkish works. He was a founding member of the Folklore Research Association in Ankara. He taught at the Ankara State Conservatory between 1946 and 1972 and later at the Mimar Sinan University State Conservatory until his death (İlyasoğlu 2007). As can be seen, Saygun was not only an important composer and ethnomusicologist, but also one of Turkey's first music educators. The fact that he participated in the establishment of many music schools and gave lectures shows how much importance he attached to the education of the generations that came after him. The books he wrote on polyphonic music education are evidence of his efforts to spread the new music of Turkey (Yöre 2010).

The composer's active work on international platforms began in 1947 with the performance of the famous Yunus Emre Oratorio in Paris. He himself conducted this concert with the Choir of Saint-Eustache and the Lamoureux Orchestra. The same work was performed in 1958 by the Synchrony of the Air Orchestra and the New York University Crane Choir at the United Nations ceremony in the United States, with the text translated into English. The composer, who received numerous national and international medals, orders and awards for his music, was awarded the title of State Artist in 1971 and a professorship in 1985 (Selanik 1996). The composer, whose ethnomusicological studies focused mainly on makam music, aimed to help the next generations with these studies. The performance rights of his works belong to SACEM, and the copyrights of some of his works belong to Southern Music Publishing in New York and Peer Musikverlag in Hamburg (Say 1998).

3. His Musical Approaches

Among the most prominent features of Saygun's nationalist approach to music are his efforts to create a unique music in which different colours of folkloric musical elements are skilfully used, traditional music is blended with polyphonic music, and he respects his roots. Saygun's point of view is of great importance for both European and Turkish polyphonic music. As a necessity of nationalism, Saygun believed that the roots of the work created should be based on local and national sources. The cultural resources of each country that can be reflected in its art are, of course, local and national. In this context, according to Saygun, a Turkish composer should produce polyphonic music based on his own local sources, while a French composer should produce polyphonic music based on French folk sources (Yöre 2010). Saygun's view on polyphonic music education also includes the same ideas. He believes that people need polyphonic music education based on their own sources, in short, polyphonic music education that includes the musical language they know. It is very important for him that the characteristic music of the country should not be distorted, and the best polyphonic music education is the polyphonic use of folk songs with folk instruments.

Saygun first analysed traditional maqams as the basic melodic material by comparing them with Iranian and Greek maqams. He analysed the pentatonic structure also found in Asian folk songs and Hungarian and Finnish folk music, where Anatolian music has its roots (Say 1998). He intertwined the maqams used in Middle Eastern and Turkish music and the pentatonic scales within the framework of a national understanding of music and used them in a unique way. Sometimes in an overtly nationalist way, sometimes in an invisible way. In general, the use of maqams is a colour added to the music for Saygun and he uses maqams in his works with his own interpretation. As a rhythmic material in his works, it can be observed that he uses the accented rhythms often used in Turkish music (Yalçın 2020).

During his research on pentatonism, the composer thought that pentatonism was inherent in Turkish folk music and argued that traditional Turkish art music originated from pentatonism. Soon after, he stated that his thought was wrong and gave up this view of pentatonism (Aydn 2003). In his later researches, he defended the idea that tetratonism is the centre of maqamal music and said that this kind of music should be explained with tetrachordal structures. The counterpoint technique used in Saygun's works involves the use of three-, four- and five-part scales together and separately to create new modal scales. In his works, he often used the Karcıgar five

in traditional music and the Hüzam four, which is called the "Saygun motif". As mentioned above, Saygun preferred to use the elements of maqam scales in such a way that only the basic elements of maqam are covered. The composer creates his harmony by using maqam structures and modal timbres in counterpoint writing.

Another element in Saygun's music is his emphasis on continuously expanding phrases and increasing textural passages. This shows that the composer had a bicultural attitude (Kuterdem 2014). In his own explanations, he defined the use of maqam as a colour and a tool, and stated that he used these modes freely within the western twelve-tone system (Yöre 2010). This idea is linked to his time at the Schola Cantorum in Paris, which had a nationalist educational system. The education he received in the tradition and forms of European music also brought Saygun closer to his own musical culture. The music of the great composers he studied at this school, which reflected their own cultures, was one of the most important factors influencing the composer. The composer adopted the idea that the future of Turkish music lay in the foundations of the folk music tradition (Aracı 1999). To sum up Saygun's approach of music, he is one of the first Turkish composers who processed Turkish music and Turkish culture with western techniques, synthesised western and eastern cultures, and took firm steps forward on this path by crossing borders (Usta 20).

4. Saygun's Symphonies

There is a change observed in Saygun's works in the 1940s. The symphonies and quartets for string instruments written during this period, in which he adopted a different technique and understanding, are considered masterpieces. Saygun interpreted the sonata form often used in symphonies within his own logical framework and with a philosophical understanding. In his works, he generally used chords and harmonies selected from the series of modes (Kuterdem 2014). What makes Saygun so special are the aforementioned characteristics. During his lifetime, Saygun composed five symphonies for orchestra. These works were received with great interest by both performers and listeners. The composer, who waited for a certain period of time to be ready to compose a symphony, completed his first symphony at the age of 46.

4.1 *Symphony No.1, Op.29*

The first symphony was completed in a short period of four months at the request of Franz Litschauer, the conductor of the Vienna Tonkünstler Orchestra. The first performance took place on Vienna Radio in 1953, the same year as the completion of the work (Küçük Kaplan 2022). In November 1954, it was performed for the first time in Turkey with the interpretation of the Ankara Presidential Symphony Orchestra. Both concerts were conducted by Franz Litschauer. The work was published by Southern Music Publishing. It is one of the most performed Turkish works in Europe. It was performed by the famous Turkish conductor Hikmet Şimşek at the radio concert of the Paris Radio and Television Orchestra in 1966. A later tape recording was made at the Bremen Radio. The CD recording was made in 1998 with the Northern Sinfonia conducted by Howard Griffiths (Aktüze 2007).

The composer stated in his notes that he wrote this work in a classical style. He wanted to compose a work that was the opposite of the mystical and dark musical expression of his String Quartet No. 1, composed in 1947. Therefore, he used a pastoral and lighter language in his first symphony (Küçük Kaplan 2022). The first movement of the four-movement work is in sonata form and in Allegro tempo. The first of the movement's two main themes is played by the horn, while the other theme is played by the oboe, clarinet and flute respectively. The second movement is in Adagio tempo. The main motif and the six themes arising from its development are played at different times by the strings and wind instruments. This movement requires mastery of the counterpoint technique. Later in the movement, the themes merge into a single theme with a lively Scherzo. The third movement, in Allegretto tempo, is reminiscent of a menuet dance. The Turkish rhythms used to enhance the effect of the fourth movement begin in this section. The fourth movement is a section of accented and changing rhythms. The tempo of the movement is Allegro assai. The total length of the piece is about twenty-five minutes (Aktüze 2007).

4.2 *Symphony No.2, Op.30*

The second symphony was completed in 1958, the same year in which the composer's other major works were performed. It was first performed, with some delay, by the Presidential Symphony Orchestra in Ankara in 1970. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was the conductor of the concert held in April. This symphony, which has a very high level of difficulty, was performed a year later with the same orchestra conducted by Miklos Erdelyi. The next performance was by the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Mircea Basarab in April 1977 (Aktüze 2007).

The composer, who wrote his first symphony for chamber orchestra because it was a commission, wrote his second symphony for full orchestra and created a large percussion ensemble in his work. This work was an important turning point in the composer's understanding of orchestration. It is a bridge between his first symphony and his other works (Küçük Kaplan 2022). The first movement of the work, which has an Allegro vivo

tempo, is characterised by high excitement and tension, with the strings and woodwinds playing in an upbeat rhythm. The second movement, like its title, has a calm, in Calmo tempo. It is in stark contrast to the first movement. The melody, played by the horn as if from a distant place, is calm but insistent at the same time. Another theme is a lament for the strings. The movement ends with the meeting of these two themes. The third movement, in moderato tempo, is written in a neoclassical style. It is a siciliano reminiscent of the baroque composer Francois Couperin. As this movement has a very different character from the other movements, it sounds like a different work. It has the character of a relaxing bridge. The Allegro-tempo fourth movement is colourful and exciting. In this movement, the composer skilfully uses the instruments in the orchestra and maintains the tension until the end of the piece. The total duration of the piece is about twenty-nine minutes (Aktüze 2007).

4.3 Symphony No.3, Op.39

The composer completed his third symphony in 1960. This work was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation in America, named after the famous composer and artist. It was first performed under his baton in Baku in 1963. A few days after this performance, it was played with the Soviet State Cinema Symphony Orchestra conducted by Niyazi Tagizade, and the first part was recorded on vinyl with the means available at that time (Aktüze 2007).

The first movement in lento tempo lasts fourteen minutes. It begins with a slow and broad theme in modal style played by the strings. This theme contains all the motifs of the work. The slow introduction leads into the second part in Allegro tempo. The second part of the movement, Allegro, consists of two main themes. The rhythmic first theme is quieted by the second theme in canonic form. The second movement is entitled Sostenuto, followed by Lento and Poco vivo. The third movement is a Scherzo. It begins with a quiet vigour, then revives and reaches the codas. The fourth movement, called Commodo, is like a summary of the whole symphony. A short melody develops with variations. In this symphony, the composer wanted to present the dramatic events of life in a philosophical way, and each movement is related to the others. The total duration of the work is about forty minutes (Aktüze 2007).

4.4 Symphony No.4, Op.53

The composer completed his fourth symphony in 1974. It was premiered two years later by the famous Turkish conductor Güler Aykal with the Presidential Symphony Orchestra. The first performance in Istanbul was by the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra with the same conductor (Aktüze 2007). He wrote the work at the request of G.E. Lessing, who had previously performed his Second Symphony, and dedicated it to him (Küçük Kaplan 2022). The first movement is called Deciso, with constantly changing themes that are also found in the other movements. The second movement is in Animato tempo. In this movement, as in the second symphony, there is a form with a neoclassical expression. This form is the Passaglia. This heavy dance is repeated throughout the movement in different tones. The third movement in Poco largo tempo is very slow, the motives of the movement have a very calm structure. The fourth movement, Con anima e molto deciso, is majestic with a lively determination. In this work, Saygun has also skilfully used traditional and folk music motifs from Anatolia, resulting in a colourful and characteristic use of the orchestra. The average length of the work is twenty-five minutes (Aktüze 2007).

4.5 Symphony No.5, Op.70

The work was completed in 1985 and premiered in 1986. It was performed by the Presidential Symphony Orchestra conducted by Hikmet Şimşek (Küçük Kaplan 2022).

The symphony begins with a slow introduction and then continues in Allegro tempo. There is a constant movement in the work and this movement develops with syncopated rhythms and reaches its climax at the end of the movement. The second movement is a scherzo entitled Vivo. It begins like a fugue and develops in this way. The third movement, entitled Tranquillo, begins with a quiet tempo, accelerating as the bars get smaller and becoming more dynamic. This movement leads into the fourth movement. The fourth movement, in Allegro tempo, is a real finale. Like the second symphony, it ends in a mystical atmosphere. This work belongs to the middle-aged period of the composer Saygun. The unity between the movements is achieved through the colourful treatment of rhythmic and melodic connections. The total duration of the piece is about thirty minutes (Aktüze 2007).

5. List of Other Works

Ahmed Adnan Saygun, who had a versatile personality, had seventy-seven works with opus numbers. These are;
-Operas: Özsoy Op.9 (1934), Taşbebek Op.11 (1934), Kerem Op.28 (1947-52), Köroğlu Op.52 (1973), Gilgamesh Op.65 (1962-83).

-Oratorio: Yunus Emre Op.26 (1942).

- Ballets: A Forest Tale Op.17 (1939-43), A Dove Tale Op.75 (1986-90).
-Orchestra: Divertimento Op.1 (1930), İnci's Book Op.10/b (1944), Magic Dance Op.13 (1934), Suite Op.14 (1936), Halay Op.24 (1943), Ritual Dance Op.57 (1975), Orchestra Variations Op.72 (1985).
-Voice and Orchestra: Manastır Song Op.5 (1933), Kızılırmak Song Op.6 (1933), Lied Op.16 (1940), Cantata in the Old Style Op.19 (1941), Geçen Dakikalarım Op.21 (1941), Four Folk Songs Op.23 (1945), Ten Folk Songs Op.41 (1968), Mediation on Men I Op.60 (1977), Mediation on Men II Op.61 (1977), Mediation on Men III Op.63 (1983), Mediation on Men Op.64 (1978), Mediation on Men V Op.66 (1978), Epics on Atatürk and Anatolia Op.67 (1981), Mediation on Men VI Op.69 (1984).
-Concertos: Concerto for Piano No.1 Op.34 (1952-58), Concerto for Violin Op.44 (1967), Concerto for Viola Op.59 (1977), Concerto for Piano No.2 Op.71 (1985), Concerto for Cello Op.74 (1987).
-Chamber Music: Intuitions Op.4 (1933), Percussion Quartet Op.8 (1933), Sonata for Cello and Piano Op.12 (1935), Sonata for Violin and Piano Op.20 (1941), String Quartet No.1 Op.27 (1947), Suite for Violin and Piano Op.33 (1955), String Quartet No.2 Op.35 (1957), Trio Op.37 (1966), String Quartet No.3 Op.43 (1966), Quintet for Wind Instruments Op.46 (1968), Dictum for Strings Op.49 (1970), Three Preludes Op.50 (1971), Trio Op.55 (1975), Concerto da Camera Op.62 (1978), Three Folk Songs for four Harps Op.68 (1983), String Quartet No.4 Op.77 (1990).
-Chorus: Laments Book I Op.3 (1932), Shepherd's Gift Op.7 (1933), From the Mountains and the Plains Op.18 (1939), A Pinch of Thyme Op.22 (1943), Impressions Op.42 (1935), Laments Book II Op.54 (1974).
-Voice and Piano: Three Ballads Op.32 (1955), Four Melodies Op.48 (1977).
-Partitas: Partita for Cello Op.31 (1954), Partita for Violin Op.36 (1961).
-Piano: Suite Op.2 (1931), İnci's Book Op.10/a (1934), Sonatina Op.15 (1938), From Anatolia Op.25 (1945), Small Pieces Op.42 (1950-52), Ten Etudes on Aksak Rhythms Op.38 (1964), Twelve Preludes on Aksak Rhythms Op.45 (1967), Fifteen Pieces on Aksak Rhythms Op.47 (1971), Ten Sketches on Aksak Rhythms Op.58 (1976), Ballade Op.56 (1975), Poem Op.73 (1986), Piano Sonate Op.76 (1990).
-Books: Pentatonicism in Turkish Folk Music (1936), Some Local Instruments and Folk Dances (1937), Seven Folk Songs and a Folk Dance from the Black Sea (1938), Karacaoğlan (1952), La Musique Turque (1960), La Genie de la Melodie (1962), Folk Music Research in Turkey (1976), Studies on Turkish and Hungarian Music (1964).
-Works About Music Instruction: Theories of Music I-II-III-IV (1958-66), Solfeggio I-II (1967-68), Traditional Music (1967), Music in Halkevleri (1940), Chats about Art (1945), Music Book for Lycee I-II-III (1955), Atatürk and Music (1981) (İlyasoğlu 2007).

6. Conclusion

The Turkish Five, which brought a breath of fresh air to Turkey's understanding of music, occupy a very special and valuable place in the history of music. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties of the time they lived in, they did justice to the education they received abroad and produced works with their own unique styles. The main theme of this study, Ahmed Adnan Saygun's opening sentence, is that the future cannot be created without tradition. Saygun's general musical language is to synthesise Turkish folk music and traditional Turkish art music under the umbrella of western music. It is a fact that the composer's music is of high quality under the conditions of the time. In addition to the composer's achievements, this study discusses his philosophical approach to the different areas of life and art, as well as the musical language he developed with the idea of responsibility and the sense of duty brought about by the times in which he lived. In his symphonies, as in his other works, the composer demonstrated a very different and versatile compositional technique. The composer, who wrote his symphonies during the period of his maturity, which was the high point of his musical life, used themes, makam approaches, pentatonic structures and Turkish rhythms very skilfully in his works. This period, which includes masterpieces such as symphonies and string quartets, is also a bridge to his last period. Not only did he contribute a great deal to the music of the country, but his educational and pioneering personality also served as an example to the generations that followed him. He was an important role model for them. Many of his written sources in the fields of music theory, music philosophy and ethnomusicology are still in use. His works, which he introduced into the musical repertoire, are still popularly performed at home and abroad.

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