

Western Performing Arts in the Late Ottoman Empire: Accommodation and Formation

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While books such as Larry Wolff's *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage* offer an understanding of the musicological role of Ottoman-Turks in eighteenth-century European operatic traditions and popular culture,¹ the musical influence and significance going the other way is often overlooked, minimised, and misunderstood. In the nineteenth century, Ottoman sultans were establishing theatres in their palaces, cities were hosting theatres and opera houses, and an Ottoman was writing the first Ottoman opera (1874). This article will examine this gap in the history of Western music, including opera, in the Ottoman period, and the slow amalgamation of Western and Ottoman musical elements that arose during the Ottoman Empire. This will enable the reader to gauge the developments that eventually marked the break between the Ottoman era and early twentieth-century modern Turkey. Because even the words 'Ottoman Empire' are enough to create a typical orientalist image, it is important to build a cultural context and address critical blind spots. It is an oft-repeated misunderstanding that Western music was introduced into modern-day Turkey after

¹ Larry Wolff, *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

the proclamation of the Republic in 1923.² As this article will demonstrate, the intercultural interaction gave rise to institutional support, and as Western music became a popular and accepted genre in the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century,³ it influenced political and creative aspirations through the generation of new nationalist music for the Turkish Republic.⁴

Intercultural Interaction: Pre-*Tanzimat* and *İstibdat* Periods, 1828–1908

Although Western music arrived in the Empire in the sixteenth century,⁵ it took almost two and a half centuries to become established. Such an elongated formation renders the terminology used problematic. Over that extended period, European travellers, traders, and emissaries introduced an assortment of musical styles, genres, and practices that circulated in the Ottoman Empire. Although many of these kinds of musics from Western Europe would now be referred to as ‘Western art music’ or ‘Western performing arts,’ some of them were also ‘popular’ musics of their time. Thus, to avoid making definitive categorisations, I will use the generic term ‘Western music,’ denoting the voice classifications, instrumentation, and theoretical systems, including staff notation, associated with Western music today.

Modern scholars classify four mainstream musical categories that existed in the Ottoman Empire prior to the beginning of Western influence: Imperial art music,⁶ Anatolian local folk music(s), religious music of different ethnic communities (*millet*s), and military music. Art music, elite by its nature, belonged to the urban culture of the Empire and never found a home outside of the major urban areas; folk music, on the other hand, was embraced by those in the countryside. These two categories, unlike the others, symbolised mainly high and low cultural elements of the Empire. Even though art music had quite a limited audience, its effects on cultural life were broader. In particular, this genre was heavily influenced by religious music of the urban Sufi groups and vice versa. Even after the entrance of Western music, Ottoman opera composers preferred to combine Ottoman art music structures with Western music elements. Such a synthesis, however, was not embraced by common people. The local folk practices were the only musical practices among peasants and inhabitants of rural areas.

The first significant artistic relationships between the Ottoman Empire and the European West occurred during the reign of Mehmet II (r. 1451–1481), who invited to the Empire famous European architects and painters, although no known musical interactions arose at this point. The first officially recorded musical relationship was in 1543, with the agreement between France and the Ottoman Empire against Spain, in which François I sent many gifts to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, including an ensemble. After three performances, the ensemble was

² For further discussion, see Özgecan Karadağlı, ‘From Empire to Republic: Western Art Music, Nationalism, and the Merging Mediation of Saygun’s Op. 26 *Yunus Emre Oratorio*’ (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 2017).

³ Although Western music was known and performed throughout the Empire, this article’s intent is primarily considering its role in what would now be modern-day Turkey.

⁴ My choice of terminology for this article is complicated by the fact that the official language of the Ottomans was Turkish, and that ‘there was no ethnic or nationalist meaning attributed to the term “Turk” in the modern sense’ (F. Asli Ergul). Europeans tended to refer to anything Ottoman as ‘Turk’, generally pejoratively. I have attempted to be accurate and intend no nationalist reductionism in my use of these terms. On the use of terminology in discussing the Ottoman Empire, see F. Asli Ergul, ‘The Ottoman Identity: Turkish, Muslim or Rum?’ *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 4 (2012): 629–45; Pars Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya* (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1986), 76.

⁵ Specifically, the geographical region of Asia Minor and major cities like Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa.

⁶ Imperial art music refers to traditional Turkish art music, also called *Enderûn* music.

sent back to France because the music was not 'tough' enough for the Ottoman Janissaries,⁷ and authorities were trying to avoid the possibility that their soldiers might soften as a result of this Western music.⁸ Such music clearly contrasted with that offered by the *Mehterhâne*, one of the oldest and most important institutions for Turkish music, which used heavy percussion and reed instruments.⁹ This incident shows both the perceptions of the Ottoman administrators and their limited relations with the West. It also demonstrates that the military was such a focal point of the Empire that the slightest possibility of its weakening could cause musical rejection. However, this interaction inspired two new rhythm cycles: *frenkçin* (12/4) and *frenği feri* (14/4), the former of which is 'considered an alliance, a form of creative borrowing combined with indigenous elaboration.'¹⁰ Another quasi-musical incident occurred in 1599, when Elizabeth I presented Sultan Mehmet III with an organ, though it was later destroyed by his successor Ahmet I.¹¹

In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman sultans invited different music and dance groups from Europe to entertain the public during Imperial wedding ceremonies. Furthermore, they required their non-Muslim palace musicians to perform European musical materials. For instance, in 1562, a special performance was organised for the marriage ceremony of Sultan Murad II's sister Esmâ Sultan and the Sokullu Mehmet Pasha.¹² For this event, specially trained Christian slaves and Sephardic Jewish musicians performed *Moreska* and *Matezina* (*Matassins*) dances and a mythological pantomime telling the story of Diana and Cupid.¹³ Because court members found these performances quite exotic and entertaining, more performances were introduced over time. These ceremonies contributed to the familiarisation with Western music in the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

Another source about musics from Europe for the Imperial elites was the ambassadors' reports, called *sefaretnâme*. These reports had great significance because they presented Western European cultures and arts to the Ottomans. One particularly famous report was published as a book in 1737 by Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmet Efendi, the ambassador of Sultan Ahmet III sent to the French King Louis XV. The ambassador's report dealt with not only political and

⁷ The Janissaries were an elite corps of the Ottoman Empire from the late fourteenth century to 1826. Forcibly or voluntarily 'recruited' mainly from Christian peasant families from the Balkan region, they became a significant political power within the Ottoman Empire. See Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 111–13.

⁸ Praetorius, an unexpected source, mentions this incident in his *Syntagma musicum, ii: De organographia*, see Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum, ii: De organographia*, trans. David Z. Crookes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 6; Emre Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa Osmanlı Sarayının İtalyan Maestrosu* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006), 80–81.

⁹ Contrary to general perception, the *Mehterhâne* was not solely a military group but an open-air orchestra with a very diverse repertoire. The group played forms like *peşrev*, *saz semaisi*, *saz*, *nakış*, *murabba*, and *semai*, as well as many vocal forms.

¹⁰ Owen Wright, 'How French is *frenkçin*?', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 3 (2011): 262.

¹¹ Owen Wright, 'Turning a Deaf Ear,' in *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, ed. Anna Contadini and Claire Norton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 159; Ian Woodfield, 'The Keyboard Recital in Oriental Diplomacy, 1520–1620,' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115, no. 1 (1990): 33–62.

¹² In general, the title *Sultan* in Turkish is used for women and follows the name (for example, Mihrimah Sultan); in the case of its use for men, the title should come before the name (for example, Sultan Süleyman). Usually, the male title is *padişah*.

¹³ *Moreska* is a traditional Croatian sword dance; *Matezina* is a type of war dance and was a part of French ballet during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Hugo Riemann, *Musical Lexicon*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Max Hesses, 1929), 1129; Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Opera Sanatı ile İlk Temaslarımız* (Istanbul: Maarif Basımevi, 1959), 6–7.

diplomatic matters but also provided detailed descriptions of the daily life of the French.¹⁴ In the report, a performance of a Lully opera was described comprehensively:

There was a play peculiar to the city of Paris. They call it Opera. They show all kinds of strange arts in it. All the elite of the city watch it, they even say the King sometimes comes ... In short, they showed so many surprising things that are impossible to describe ... this opera has many patrons. Because it is a quite expensive art, they grant it a large fund.¹⁵

This description attracted a great deal of attention from the Istanbul elites, as Çelebi was the first Ottoman to watch an opera and his report was the first descriptive source.¹⁶ His report opened doors to further meticulous narratives of opera, comedy, and related forms in reports from Austria, Prussia, Berlin, and St. Petersburg. Significantly, however, after the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ambassadors did not mention opera or any performing arts. This was not because they were not interested or did not attend, but because such performing art forms were no longer novel. In fact, Turkish cultural familiarity with aspects of Western music had advanced to the point that in Istanbul it was possible to watch a well-known opera in various opera houses of the city.

If such reports brought Western arts to the attention of the Ottomans, one could make the case that it was Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807) who opened the Imperial doors to Westernisation. Known also as a musician and composer, he created the *makam* ‘Süzidilâra.’¹⁷ According to Karl Signell, Selim was influenced by Western musical qualities, which is why his *makam* sounds ‘suspiciously like the major mode.’¹⁸ This Western impact was so strong that even one of his court composers, İsmail Dede Efendi (1778–1846), despite being opposed to Western styles, wrote the *rast* song ‘Yine Bir Gül Nihal,’ which undeniably follows the waltz tradition. Thus, the Ottoman elites had adopted Western music to the extent that its emulation was now used to celebrate themselves in moments of high court.

¹⁴ Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 47–48.

¹⁵ Yirmisekiz Mehmet Çelebi, *Fransa Seyahatnamesi* (Istanbul: Hayat Tarih Mecmuası Yayınları, 1970), 52. Mehmet Efendi did not know that opera developed in Italy. The report was widely circulated in the Empire and was translated into French after the French government asked for a copy. See Yirmisekiz Mehmet Çelebi and Gilles Veinstein, *Le paradis des infidèles: relation de Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, ambassadeur ottoman en France sous la régence*, trans. Julien-Claude Galland (Paris: François Maspero, 1981), 249–52.

¹⁶ Özgecan Karadağlı, ‘Türkiye’ye Müzikli Sahne Sanatlarının Girişi Dikran Çuhacıyan Öncesi ve Sonrası’ (MA thesis, Mimar Sinan Üniversitesi Devlet Konservatuvarı, 2003), 7–8.

¹⁷ *Makam* is the modal structure of Turkish art music. Unlike major-minor tonalities in the Western tradition, a *makam* combines a tetrachord and a pentachord. There are three types of *makams*: simple, transposed, and compound. Temperament peculiarities make it impossible to create the exact scale when a *makam* is ‘transposed’. A transposed *makam* is compound in nature. *Makams* have three types of melodic structures: ascending, descending, or both ascending and descending. Unlike Western musical scales, a *makam* can be expanded by adding an extra tetrachord or pentachord to either the beginning or end of the main structure. ‘Süzidilâra’ is an example of a compound *makam*. See İsmail Hakkı Özkan, *Türk Musikisi Nazariyatı ve Kudüm Velveleleri* (Istanbul: Ötügen Neşriyat, 2000).

¹⁸ Karl Signell, ‘The Modernization Process in Two Oriental Music Cultures: Turkish and Japanese,’ *Asian Music* 7, no. 2 (1976): 72–102. Sultan Selim’s most important contribution was the notation system for court music. He ordered a cipher system to preserve aurally transmitted court music from Baba Hamparsum Limonciyan (1768–1839). See Signell, ‘The Modernization Process,’ 73. When Donizetti arrived, he learnt *Hamparsum* notation first to teach to the Imperial band because these musicians were trained to perform traditional music. Later, they learnt Western notation from Donizetti. See John Morgan O’Connell, ‘Alabanda: Brass Bands and Musical Methods in Turkey,’ in *Giuseppe Donizetti Pascià: traiettorie musicali e storiche tra Italia e Turchia [Giuseppe Donizetti Pasha: Musical and Historical Trajectories between Italy and Turkey]*, ed. Federico Spinetti (Bergamo: Fondazione Donizetti, 2010), 31; Ruhi Ayangil, ‘Western Notation: A Debatable Matter in Turkish Makam Music Contributed by Giuseppe Donizetti Pasha,’ in *Giuseppe Donizetti Pascià*, 41–43.

At times, Sultan Selim's musical choices converged with larger institutional developments. For example, as an outcome of his institutional reforms, in 1794 he formed the new and separate army Nizam-ı Cedid (the New Order), which then required new sonic imagery, so a brass group was established by the French officers for the army's daily training. The Janissaries—up to this point the Sultan's elite infantry—were rightfully fearful of losing their position. They reacted severely to the reforms, revolting and killing the Sultan, thus putting an end to the reforms and the new army.¹⁹ Although Sultan Selim III's reign was short, his reforms unsuccessful, and his end tragic, he not only influenced the musical tastes of the court with European elements inspiring the classical court music, but he also provided a progressive vision for his successors.

Embracing the very reforms that led to the death of Selim III, Sultan Mahmut II (r. 1808–1839) learned from Selim's mistake; before launching any reforms, he executed, imprisoned, or exiled the Janissary troops after a revolt on 15 June 1826.²⁰ Having disbanded the Janissary army, Mahmut II legislated the planned reforms in education, social life, state institutions, and the military. This led to the establishment of a Western-style army, the Asakir-i Mensure-i Muhammediye (the Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad), as well as a Western-style army band, resulting in the termination of the Janissary corps's *Mehterhâne*. Different from Selim's mostly aesthetic concerns, Mahmut used music as part of his political and military reforms that made Westernisation official, eventually changing the self-perception of the Ottomans.

With the cultural interchange having become normalised with the Palace's embrace of Western music, and reforms having been enacted to moderate the influence of Westernisation, Western music began to find residence in other institutional areas of the Empire. In the early 1800s, for example, Western music even found prestigious institutional support in the Ottoman educational system. Established in June 1826, the musical institution called Muzika-i Hümayûn (the Imperial Musical School) had both Turkish and Western music departments.²¹ This inclusion is significant for two reasons: it institutionalised Western music, and became a model for the future Turkish state.²² Particularly during the first years of the Muzika-i Hümayûn, Mahmut II wanted the young students of the Enderun (the Palace School) trained in Western music.²³ The Sultan's decision not only educated the new generation of aristocrats as skilful musicians but also created a schooled audience in the Palace. Since the Muzika-i Hümayûn was a very new institution, soon after the inauguration it had problems regarding the inexperience and limited repertoire of its band. During the first two years, 1826 to 1828, the musicians were only capable of playing relatively simple tunes for the rhythmic accompaniment of the army. Later,

¹⁹ Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 56.

²⁰ This elite corps had lost discipline since the sixteenth century and become the centre of chaos; the 1826 revolt is known as *Vaka-i Hayriye*, the Auspicious Incident. See Hüseyin G Yurdayın, *Türkiye Tarihi-Osmanlı Devleti* (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 2002), 307.

²¹ Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 76.

²² The Imperial Music School included the Saray Bandosu (Palace Band), the Saray Orkestrasi (Palace Orchestra), and the Muzika-i Hümayûn school, which trained students for the band and orchestra. Later, a *Fastı* (suite form in Turkish art music) ensemble and the Müezzınan Bölüğü (a religious chanting group) were included, forming a basic Turkish music department; thus, the institution split into the *Fast-ı Atik* (Old / Turkish Music Division) and the *Fast-ı Cedid* (New / Western Music Division). During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, opera-operetta, drama, *ortaoyunu* (Turkish open-air theatre), juggling, acrobatics, *Karagöz* (traditional Turkish shadow theatre), and puppetry were established. See Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 76.

²³ The Palace School was for the recruited students or the Janissaries, training for service in managerial, bureaucratic, and military positions.

they created a repertoire from both the musical works of the musicians who came to Istanbul to perform and other Western marches.²⁴

The first full Western style band was established by the students of the Enderun in 1828. Because the instructors' musical knowledge was not sufficient to train a Western-style band, Giuseppe Donizetti (1788–1856), a band conductor in Italy and France, was hired under the title of 'Colonel and Head Master of the Imperial Bands' on 17 September 1828.²⁵ Under Donizetti, the band was able to perform the Imperial march, *Mahmudiye Marşı*, before the Sultan within six months.²⁶ Donizetti's use of mixed styles and traditions is evident in his sketchbook, dated 1832, which contains forty harmonised examples of traditional Turkish pieces. Donizetti used composers' names on some of the songs as titles, such as 'Saat scarki di Etem Aga' (The Clock Song of Etem Aga), 'Bilbul Peshrev di Meisin Aga' (The Nightingale Song of Meisin Aga); he also titled some of the pieces, such as 'Cansona Turcha' or 'Musulmana.' There was even a surprising song, 'Gönlüm ey şuhi Gülizar' (My Heart, Oh My Rose-cheeked Beauty), from Sultan Mahmut II himself. Later, Donizetti sent a copy to Bergamo, dedicated to Baroness Rota-Basoni.²⁷

Demonstrating not only proficiency in Western musicianship but state political prestige, the newly established band accompanied the Sultan wherever he went. In addition, city concerts introduced the band to the public as the modern façade of the Empire. These concerts, it can be argued, symbolised modernity for many elite Ottomans and their self-perception that the Ottoman Empire was a 'Westernised' country. Westernisation attempts during the reigns of Selim III and Mahmut II, and the intensified relationship between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, continued to contribute to the Western style of artistic life in the Empire.

Institutional Growth: The Empire Embraces Western Performing Arts

In addition to state and palace institutions embracing Western music and opera, theatres and opera houses opened primarily in Istanbul but also in other cities in the Empire during the *Tanzimat* period (1839–1876). Although the idea of having extensive rights and freedom was prevalent among elite generations who grew up under various Western influences prior to the reforms, it was the 1839 *Tanzimat* reforms and the elites' desire for modernisation that provided many of these rights and freedom to the citizens of the Empire, indirectly influencing the growth

²⁴ Bülent Aksoy, 'Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Musiki ve Batılılaşma,' in *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: İletişim yayınları, 1985), 199–225.

²⁵ Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 76.

²⁶ Donizetti composed two main Imperial marches that functioned as national anthems: *Mahmudiye Marşı* in 1828, and *Mecidiye Marşı* in 1839. The first reached Sweden and was adopted as the Kingdom of Sweden Military March (*Skånska Dragonregementets Marsch*). The original manuscript, dated 4 November 1839, is in the Swiss Military Music Archive. See Emre Aracı, 'From Napoleon to Mahmud: The Chequered Career of the Other Donizetti,' in *Giuseppe Donizetti Pascià*, 3–16. These marches carried the name of the Sultan throughout his reigns. Other Italian composers who wrote marches for the sultans include Callisto Guatelli, Gioachino Rossini, Italo Selvelli, Luigi Arditi, Angelo Mariani, Henri Furlani, Bartolomeo Pisani, G. Rubele, and Rosario Nava. Johann Strauss and Camille Saint-Saëns also sent their music to Istanbul for the same purpose. See Bülent Aksoy, 'Musical Relationships between Italy and Turkey through Turkish Eyes,' in *Giuseppe Donizetti Pascià*, 68. Franz Liszt, on the other hand, used the theme of Donizetti's *Mecidiye Marşı* to compose his own version of the Imperial march in 1849 in Berlin: *Grande Paraphrase de la marche de J. Donizetti*, op. 87. See Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa*, 163. Liszt's visit also established an important connection as some of his pupils developed links to the Imperial Palace. After five weeks in Istanbul and several concerts (in the Çırağan Palace and the Russian Embassy), Liszt was awarded the Fourth Class Medal (the highest level possible for a non-military achievement), a jewel-studded box, and some money. See Emre Aracı, *Ahmet Adnan Saygun Doğu Batı Arası Müzik Köprüsü* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001), 24.

²⁷ Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa*, 15; Aracı, 'From Napoleon to Mahmud,' 78.

of Western performing arts. After Sultan Abdülmecid I began his reign in 1839, interest in operas, operettas, and musical theatres increased, and more theatres and opera houses opened in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul. In May 1839, the Italian impresario Giovanni Bartolomeo Bosco (1793–1863) was permitted by the Sultan to open an opera house in the Pera district of Istanbul. Bosco's theatre performed dramas and operas for a number of seasons,²⁸ ultimately planting the seeds for the development of Italian opera and drama in the Empire. In addition to entertainment, the theatre provided pamphlets explaining the rules of how to watch a play or other relevant information.²⁹ Such pamphlets may even be viewed to function as conduct manuals, instructing their audiences how to be more 'Western'.

An influential Ottoman newspaper, *Ceride-i Havadis*, also enabled smoother cultural assimilation of the Western art works performed. According to *Ceride-i Havadis*, during the 1841 season, Bellini's *Norma*, *Gemma di Vergy*, *Chi Dura Vince*, Donizetti's *Belisario*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *L'Elisir d'Amore* and Rossini's *Othello* were performed.³⁰ Since these performances were in Italian, the Bosco theatre audience was mostly foreigners and Italian-speaking non-Muslim Ottoman citizens. However, some in the audiences were influenced by the news of *Ceride-i Havadis* and wanted to watch opera but could not understand Italian. To solve the language issue, the newspaper published Turkish translations of Donizetti's *Belisario*. To attract more people, the theatre published and distributed their posters in four languages,³¹ reflecting the multicultural nature of the Empire and the audiences. Bosco's 1841–1842 season ended in June 1842; the newspaper announced that the theatre would re-open in autumn, but Bosco's theatre never opened again because of financial difficulties.³² As the only real theatre in Istanbul showing operas and plays, Bosco's closure disrupted the artistic life for a two-year period.

At the end of the 1844 season, Bosco sold his theatre to Syrian Catholic Ottoman impresario Tütüncüoğlu Mihail Naum, who opened the theatre under his own name after some renovations. The theatre's curtains opened for the first time with Donizetti's *Lucrecia Borgia* on 23 December 1844. The theatre offered five additional operas that season including Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *La gazza ladra*, and Donizetti's *Pariziana*. Annually hosting many Italian opera, drama, and ballet troupes, Naum's theatre contributed greatly to the permeation of Western music—specifically opera—throughout society,³³ historically becoming one of the most important theatres among all the Ottoman Western music institutions.

Naum had to stop these performances for two years because of a catastrophic fire in Beyoğlu in 1846, which destroyed every building in the Galatasaray and Pera neighbourhoods. Naum applied to the Imperial Palace and foreign embassies of Istanbul for credit to re-establish his theatre, with the Sultan himself eventually approving and sealing the request. Committed to opening a real Italian opera house, Naum had the new theatre designed by the architect Gaspare Fossati,³⁴ with the stage and the auditorium fashioned after Italian theatres, and the interior decorations styled by Italian

²⁸ Metin And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), 31–48.

²⁹ Sevengil, *Opera*, 19.

³⁰ Esin Ulu, 'İstanbul'da İlk Opera Etkinlikleri,' *İstanbul Dergisi* 3 (1995): 132–38.

³¹ The major demographic groups of the Empire were Ottoman Turkish, Armenian, Greek, and French.

³² And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*, 92–94.

³³ Although Naum's audience was largely upper class, the theatre had to allocate a certain number of seats for the lower classes.

³⁴ The Fossati brothers were well known for their restorations and rebuilding in Istanbul, particularly that of the Hagia Sophia.

designers.³⁵ The new theatre opened two years later with Verdi's *Macbeth*. Fond of Western music, Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 2 July 1839–2 June 1861) attended operas in Naum's theatre. In addition to sponsoring the theatre after the fire, the Sultan wanted to have operas and operettas in the Palace and ordered Donizetti to teach the musical performing arts to Turkish musicians in the Muzıka-i Hümayûn. Arguably, this decision was one of the most significant contributions to the development of Western music in the Empire.³⁶

From its inauguration until the Great Fire of Pera (now Beyoğlu) in 1870, Naum's theatre had a ten-year state monopoly of showing famous European composers' operas and dramas. Performances of Verdi's operas offer a clear idea of the opera activities of Istanbul. As seen in Table 1, the operas were performed in Turkey relatively soon after their world premiere. This schedule shows the Empire not only embracing Western music but endeavouring perhaps to be seen as a world-class arts centre comparable to Rome or London.

Table 1. European versus Istanbul opera premiere dates, after Cevat Memduh Altar, *Opera Tarihi*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: Pan Yayınları, 2001), 188

Opera	City	Premiere	Istanbul premiere
<i>Ernani</i>	Venice	1844	1846
<i>Nabucco</i>	Milano	1842	1846
<i>Macbeth</i>	Florence	1847	1848
<i>I Lombardi</i>	Milano	1843	1850
<i>I Masnadieri</i>	London	1847	1851
<i>Il Trovatore</i>	Rome	1853	1853
<i>Rigoletto</i>	Venice	1851	1854
<i>La Traviata</i>	Venice	1853	1856
<i>I Vespri Siciliani</i>	Paris	1855	1860
<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i>	Rome	1858	1862
<i>La Forza del Destino</i>	St Petersburg	1862	1876–77
<i>Aida</i>	Cairo	1871	1885

Following the destruction of Naum's theatre by fire in 1870, the state monopoly over musical plays was not extended by the authorities. The situation created an interesting dynamic. On the one hand, it was a big loss for the cultural life of Istanbul, as the theatre was the centre of proper operas and operettas, and Naum's permit up to that point prohibited the establishment of similar organisations. On the other hand, opera houses spread all over Istanbul after 1867 because Naum's permit lost its authority after the fire.³⁷ During the Westernisation period, Naum's theatre had both regular performances for twenty-five years and the support of the Palace, almost becoming an unofficial Imperial theatre.³⁸ The diversity of theatres arising in the wake of the Naum fire demonstrates that, particularly in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, Western music was an established musical style.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Western musics were so dominant in the musical life of Istanbul that the city became one of the cultural centres of the period.³⁹ In this

³⁵ Mustafa Cezar, *XIX. Yüzyıl Beyoğlu'su* (Istanbul: Ak Yayınları Kültür ve Sanat Kitapları, 1991), 387–88.

³⁶ Rauf Tunçay, 'Naum Tiyatrosu,' *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi* (1968): 85–90.

³⁷ The most significant neighbourhoods for new opera houses were Gedikpaşa, Hasköy, Üsküdar, Ortaköy, Beyazıt ve Şehzadebaşı. See Sevengil, *Opera*, 28–29.

³⁸ Metin And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1972), 201.

³⁹ After the fall of Constantinople, the official name changed to Kostantiniyye, which was used until 1923.

period, many European musicians and composers gave concerts—among them the most significant were Franz Liszt (1811–1886), Leopold de Meyer (1816–1883), Henri Vieuxtemps (1820–1881), Eugène Vivier (1821–1900), Luigi Arditi (1822–1903), Angelo Mariani (1821–1873), Leopold Auer (1845–1930), and August Ritter von Adelburg (1830–1873)—and some even stayed several years.⁴⁰ ‘Local Italians’⁴¹ established at least five opera or music societies, the most important one being La Società Operaia Italiana.⁴²

Sultan Abdülmecid’s fondness for Western musical performing arts led him, in 1859, to build a theatre closer to the Dolmabahçe Palace. The establishment of the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre solidified Western arts and art forms as a part of the daily life of the Palace and thus the Empire, which one could argue shows an embrace of modernisation. The architectural project was completed by Jules Diéterle (1811–1889) and Hammond;⁴³ for the inside of the building, the Sultan commissioned Charles Séchan (1803–1874), interior designer of the Paris Opéra. The Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre officially opened on 12 January 1859, with the artists and musicians from Naum’s theatre performing Luigi Ricci’s opera *Scaramuccia*, and the night ending with the ballet *Chasse de Diane*.⁴⁴ After the opening, the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre hosted many Ottoman and foreign troupes, orchestras, and musicians.

The most significant contribution of the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre to Ottoman culture, however, was the patronage of plays. The first Turkish play, İbrahim Şinasi Efendi’s *Şair Evlenmesi* (The Marriage of a Poet), was commissioned for the Theatre.⁴⁵ Surprisingly, since Ottoman theatres were only showing Western performing arts and most Ottoman writers were still writing in traditional forms, Ottoman playwriting advanced little during this period. Even though Şinasi Efendi’s *Şair Evlenmesi* could be considered as a *Molièresque* play and not a product of independent creativity, the play was the catalyst for Ottoman writers’ adaptation of Western forms. Such a domestic cultural development contributed to the future Turkish nationalist movement because the nationalist ideals were disseminated mostly through plays, for which Şinasi Efendi’s was the model.

⁴⁰ Both Arditi and Mariani were engaged by Naum’s theatre. See Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa*, 133.

⁴¹ Historically, a Genoese colony had been established in Constantinople in Galata (Pera) district since the middle of the twelfth century. After the fall of Constantinople, the relationship with the Genoese changed due to their alliance to the Byzantines. However, another Italian city state, the Republic of Venice, placed a permanent ambassador in Constantinople to maintain the good relationship between the Ottomans and Venetians, and to protect the commercial interests of the Republic of Venice.

⁴² La Società Operaia Italiana is still active in Istanbul. The other societies were Ausania, Unione Drammatica di Constantinopoli, and Unione. See Aksoy, ‘Musical Relationships between Italy and Turkey,’ 71.

⁴³ None of the available sources indicate architect Hammond’s first name.

⁴⁴ And, *Başlangıcından 1983’e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*, 26.

⁴⁵ And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 27. The newspaper *Journal de Constantinople* announced the news in its 25 June 1859 issue: ‘Fransa’da uzun müddet tehsilde bulunmuş olan Mecli-i Maarif azası Şinasi Efendi, Racin’den, Lafontain’den, Moliere’den seçilmiş parçalar tercüme edip yayınlıyordu. Bu genç yazar, bu cevherli şair bugün daha iyisini yaptı. Sultan’ın özel tiyatrosu için bir perdelik Türkçe güzel bir komedi yazdı. Piyesin adı, Şair Evlenmesi’dir. Şimdiden analizini yapmayacağız, fakat halkı bundan haberdar ediyor ve bu arada güzel sanatları bilgilice korudukları için Padişahın Başmabeyincisini ve saray eğlencelerini Tertip edenleri tebrik ediyoruz’ (‘a member of the Education Committee, Şinasi Efendi, who lived long years in France and was translating the works of Racine, Lafontaine, and Molière ... this talented young poet wrote a brilliant Turkish comedy for the Sultan’s Theatre: *Şair Evlenmesi*. We are not going to analyse the work, but we wanted to announce it to our public and we wanted to thank the Sultan’s *Başmabeyincisi* (the chief intermediaries) and congratulate the people who organise Palace entertainment’) [author’s translation].

In 1861, Ottoman state musical proclivities took a sudden turn back to the traditional East. After the death of Sultan Abdülmecid, Abdülaziz became the new Sultan. Unlike his predecessors, Abdülaziz was interested in traditional performing arts like *Ortaoyunu*, which has been considered the Turkish *commedia dell'arte*.⁴⁶ Although the Palace Theatre remained active until 1863, Sultan Abdülaziz's personal taste and cultural preference resulted in a decrease in the presence of Western-style plays and performing arts in the Palace. On the other hand, the elite and the public embraced Western-style theatre so much that, even though it was not supported by the Sultanate, Western-style Ottoman theatre enjoyed its golden years outside the Palace.⁴⁷

With its regular Turkish performances, location, and broader audience, the Gedikpaşa Theatre was one of the most important theatres established during the *Tanzimat* period. The theatre hosted performances from the first Muslim-Turkish actors, and famous authors of the period wrote plays to be performed there. The Gedikpaşa Theatre was not located in the Pera district, historically known as a neighbourhood in which mostly foreigners resided; instead, it was towards the sea, midway between Çarşıkapı and Beyazıt, the latter being a centre mostly occupied by local Turks' residences and businesses. This location was quite significant because it shows that the targeted main audience was not only non-Muslim subjects and foreigners but also Muslim-Turkish subjects. This intended audience demonstrates that the theatres not only attracted minority groups, but that the Western performing arts became so popular that theatres were established in even neighbourhoods with high Muslim populations.

After Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) became Sultan, he moved to the Yıldız Palace and wanted to have everything he enjoyed within its confines. Even though he appreciated theatres and operas, he was cautious to attend Beyoğlu theatres like his predecessors Sultans Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz for fear of assassination. After the fire, the condition of the Dolmabahçe Palace Theatre was so bad that it was impossible to use; as a result, Abdülhamid ordered the construction of another theatre in Yıldız Palace (the only Palace theatre that survives today). Though the apparent reason for the construction of this new theatre was the destruction of the one at Dolmabahçe Palace, it seems that Abdülhamid's paranoia about being killed was the main motivation.⁴⁸

As Abdülhamid was fond of Western music, the first performances at the Yıldız Palace Theatre were operas such as *Aida*, *Il Trovatore*, *Carmen*, and *Faust*. The Friday night shows were organised in honour of foreign guests, with the Sultan accepting ambassadors to his lodge for the performances. During the first day of religious festivals, higher officers were invited to the Palace Theatre by the Sultan, and dramas, Turkish art music, and Turkish *Ortaoyunu* were performed. On the second day of the festivals, the same shows were repeated for the Sultan's sons, his siblings and their spouses, and extended family members.⁴⁹ Thus, Western performing arts became part of both the daily life of the dynasty and diplomatic relationships.

Even though theatres were quite active in this period, they were regulated by restrictions and controls. Certain words or references were forbidden in plays due to their dangerous

⁴⁶ According to Metin And, one of the many theories of the history of *Ortaoyunu* is the possibility of the transmission of *commedia dell'arte* through Venetians and Genoese in Anatolia; Turks named these plays as *Arte oyunu*, very similar sounding to *Orta oyunu*. And proposes that the two *Tuluat* characters' names, Paskal and Püsküllü, could be variants of Pasquale, Pasquolino, or Pasquino. See Metin And, *Türk Tiyatrosunun Evreleri* (Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 1983), 113.

⁴⁷ Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Saray Tiyatrosu*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1962), 20.

⁴⁸ Refik Ahmet Sevengil, 'Yıldız Sarayı Tiyatrosu,' *Devlet Tiyatrosu* 13 (1953): 10–11.

⁴⁹ Sevengil, 'Yıldız Sarayı Tiyatrosu,' 11–12.

allusions,⁵⁰ and censorship sometimes even led to the physical destruction of the theatre. In terms of artistic activities, it is useful to compare what occurred during the respective years of the Sultans Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876) and Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). Throughout the reign of the former, the presence of Western-style entertainment and other artistic activities declined in the Palace; however, outside the Palace, Ottoman theatre had the perfect environment in which to thrive. In this period, hundreds of plays were written.⁵¹ On the contrary, during Abdülhamid's reign, theatre and related activities dramatically declined outside the Palace, in Istanbul and other parts of the Empire due to Abdülhamid's oppressive politics. In Abdülhamid's period, playwrights were not writing and publishing works because of strict censorship; the published works tentatively dealt with neutral topics. Outside the Palace, some musical plays, operas, and operettas were banned by the censorship committee. For example, though performed frequently during the *Tanzimat* era, the opera *Leblebici Horhor Efendi* was banned in 1886.⁵²

The *İstibdat* period (the period of strict autocracy from 1878 to 1908) was particularly harsh in this regard. The most significant feature of this period was its extremely strict censorship, practised both in and outside of the Palace. In the Palace Theatre, every play and opera was examined by a censorship committee: if the plot contained any suspicious elements, something even as minor as words or death scenes, the committee changed the storyline or sometimes even banned the performance. Plots concerning death, particularly of a king or member of a royal family, were considered dangerous. In a particularly telling and strange example, Abdülhamid did not want to watch Sarah Bernhardt during her Istanbul tour in 1888, because she could perform death so realistically. In spite of such censorship, the Palace Theatre was hosting all kinds of artistic activities with Turkish and foreign artists and troupes, which it had not done during the reign of Abdülaziz.⁵³

Even though the censorship in Sultan Abdülhamid's period was quite restrictive, the performing arts planted the seeds of Turkish nationalism in plays such as Namık Kemal's *Vatan Yahut Silistre* (*Fatherland or Silistria*),⁵⁴ which propagated ideas of freedom and the fatherland. Sultan Abdülhamid was so fond of the theatre that he did not want to wait to recruit artists to the Palace Theatre; instead, during the first years, Beyoğlu theatre troupes and foreign artists performed at the Palace (action that emphasises the Palace's embrace of Westernisation). Some of these Beyoğlu artists were hired as permanent members of the Palace Theatre. Soon after, an entire Italian opera and operetta troupe joined the Palace Theatre. Other than the opera group, there were others as part of the Muzika-ı Hümayûn, including a *Tûluat* and an *Ortaoyunu* group.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ For example, Yıldız (because of the Yıldız Palace), Cyprus, socialism, Macedonia, war or battle, freedom, strikes, anarchy, fatherland, assassination, controversy, Murat (the name of the prince), explosions, constitution and equity.

⁵¹ And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 219.

⁵² Mustafa Nihat Özün and Baha Dürder, *Türk Tiyatrosu Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1967), 661.

⁵³ And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 219.

⁵⁴ Namık Kemal's *Vatan yahut Silistre* (1872) was the first Turkish nationalist play. The plot takes place during the Crimean War in Silistra (now in Bulgaria). In the story, an Ottoman soldier defends the city against the Russians. Unlike earlier plays, Kemal's work emphasised the idea of loyalty towards the nation.

⁵⁵ As the most famous *Tûluat* performer, the comedian Abdülrezzak was hired by the Palace Theatre, after which the traditional performing arts gained some respect in Palace circles; subsequently, because the Sultan was not fond of *alaturka* forms, these genres were only performed during religious festivals.

Interaction of Politics and Art

Having been embraced, and having found stability and acceptance within Ottoman society, even under the restrictions and controls of the *İstibdat* period, Western music began to take on functions and forms that affected both the political and creative spheres in an intertwining manner. One explanation for this development is that many political ideas (nationalist, separatist, pro-constitutionalist) were disseminated relatively easily in opera and operetta. Thus, the theatres not only satisfied the aesthetic needs of the public, they also functioned as a medium for the distribution of political ideology, mostly nationalist or separatist, or demands for more freedom. The Ottoman elite's efforts to preserve Western arts could be seen as a contradiction, in that, even though the theatres and plays were in a Western style, the content often encouraged nationalist ideology. In this sense, form and function, medium and message were seemingly at odds. In the interlacing of these domains, two Ottoman Armenians were the most important figures.

Tigran Gevorki Chukhajian (1837–1898),⁵⁶ born in Istanbul as the eldest son of the clock master of Sultan Abdülmeçid, was a product of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment of the Empire. Taking piano lessons from a very early age from Italian Mangioni,⁵⁷ in 1862 Chukhajian went to Milan, the opera centre of the period, to study music, allowing him to become familiar with *opera seria* and *opera buffa*.⁵⁸ Although unverified conjecture suggests Chukhajian became a student of Verdi while he was at the Milan Conservatory, Metin And states that this is not true.⁵⁹ His musical style and compositional techniques, however, reflect the influence of Verdi. While in Italy, Chukhajian started composing his four-act opera *Arşak II* on the libretto of Tomas Terziyan, which is based on a story of the ancient Armenian King.⁶⁰ Considered the first Armenian opera, *Arşak II* was banned because of its potential political ramifications. Nevertheless, Chukhajian changed some of the scenes and managed to convince Naum to allow the opera to be performed in his theatre by an Italian opera group known as Olimpia.⁶¹ Significant in terms of the opera's nationalist content, *Arşak II* shows Chukhajian's developing political concerns and a relatively early stage of nationalist ideology among the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. After his return to Istanbul, he established an Armenian music journal and a music society, both called *Knar Haygagan*. Chukhajian was quite prolific during this period, convening conferences, composing marches, choral and orchestral pieces, and conducting his own works in the Şark Theatre.⁶²

Chukhajian's creativity served both Armenian and Turkish nationalism in different ways. On the one hand, as an Ottoman Armenian, Chukhajian composed nationalistic pieces that were performed among the Armenian circles. On the other, he was the first local composer to write operas and operettas, helping to solidify Westernisation through performing arts. Chukhajian was the first Ottoman composer to synthesise European classical forms with Eastern

⁵⁶ There are various spellings of his name, including Dikran Çuhacıyan, Dikran Chouhajian, and Tigran Tchoukhajian.

⁵⁷ Mangioni's first name is not indicated in either Turkish or English sources.

⁵⁸ Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 122.

⁵⁹ Metin And, *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu* (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 1999), 231.

⁶⁰ The sources do not indicate an exact date of composition.

⁶¹ Nikaghos Tahmizyan, 'Dikran Çuhacıyan,' *Sovyet Ermenistan'ı Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 9 (Yerevan: Bilimler Akademisi Yayınları, 1983), 66–67.

⁶² Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 123.

musical structures and motifs, and to harmonise traditional Turkish melodies. In addition to his operettas becoming a model for future compositions,⁶³ Chukhajian's musical innovation served as a strong link between Armenian and Turkish *millet*s in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It could be said that Chukhajian opened a door to the next generation of composers, both Turkish and Armenian, who would use nationalist themes in their operas and operettas.

One of those Ottoman Armenians was Güllü Agop (1840–1902),⁶⁴ who joined the Şark Theatre as an actor in 1861, and took part in Armenian plays under Naum Efendi. After leaving the theatre in 1863, Agop relocated to Izmir, where he became the director of a group that performed in Armenian.⁶⁵ From 1868, he contributed greatly to Turkish operetta by taking over the management of Gedikpaşa Theatre from the Italian G. Razi,⁶⁶ and establishing the Osmanlı group. Agop regularly showed Armenian shows in his theatre, but after 1868 he decided to provide regular Turkish shows. This decision resulted in severe backlash against Agop and his theatre by other drama and musical groups, who performed only in Armenian because of the newly underway Armenian nationalist movement. For some Armenians, Agop's action was tantamount to betrayal of the cause. However, Agop had good relations with the Imperial elite and preferred to stay away from such nationalistic political movements. This proved a wise move when, from 1869 to 1870, the establishment of an Imperial Ottoman Theatre was planned. The initiative failed, however, and with the support of vizier Ali Pasha⁶⁷ the state monopoly to show Turkish plays was given to Agop for ten years.⁶⁸

Immediately after granting Agop's privilege, the state declared an edict, *Ferman-ı Ali*, which allowed the Muslim community to attend theatres. Such action by the state suggests that the theatres had gained official recognition in all aspects, a status that gave them a platform to play a prominent role in the dissemination of nationalist ideologies to both the minorities of the Empire and the Turkish community. Though the minority theatres were already performing plays that promoted ethnic nationalism, after the rise of Turkish nationalism—the origins of which can be traced back to the 1840s—Turkish nationalist playwriting increased exponentially.

Agop's monopoly came with a requirement, however. If he failed to establish these theatres within the designated timeframe, his concession would be cancelled. During the first ten years, he had to increase the number of the plays regardless of the theatre's revenue. Every year, he had to show at least thirty plays in Üsküdar, and at least fifty plays in Galata and the rest of the European side theatres in the city. The last three clauses of the permit regulated the performances for charity, security of the theatre, and the designated ticket

⁶³ Tahmizyan, 'Dikran Çuhacıyan,' 66.

⁶⁴ He was born in Istanbul as Agop Güllüyan but later changed his surname to Vartovyan. See And, *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu*, 31.

⁶⁵ Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, vol. 3: *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Devlet Konservatuarı Yayınları Serisi, 1961), 55.

⁶⁶ During the Ottoman Empire, using a surname was not mandatory; most people only used their titles with their names or used their fathers' names. This tendency probably explains why multiple sources only mention him as 'the Italian Razi'; only Metin And provides the information that the initial of his first name is G. According to And, Razi was a famous dance teacher in his time. See And, *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu*, 35.

⁶⁷ Monopoly dated 16 March 1870, archived as 'General State Permits, no. 777,' Prime Minister's Ottoman Archives, Istanbul.

⁶⁸ Metin And, *100 Soruda Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi* (Istanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1970), 126–27; And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 164.

prices.⁶⁹ These regulations and certain clauses ultimately contributed to the flourishing of these theatres.

In addition to generating this growth, Agop's theatre and his monopoly unintentionally contributed to the birth of both Turkish operetta as a genre, and *Tûluat* (improvisatory theatre) groups.⁷⁰ As Agop's state monopoly did not allow any other group in Istanbul to show Turkish plays, other performance groups found different ways to survive and often flourish. A significant example was Tigran Chukhajian's group Opera Tiyatrosu Topluluğu; in addition, Tomas Fasülyeciyan, after leaving Agop's theatre, established another group to show traditional Turkish performances of *Ortaoyunu* and *Tûluat*.⁷¹ Ironically, under state monopoly and restriction, Turkish music and a separate theatrical genre blossomed at the supposed margins throughout this short era.

The monopoly even set off a sort of spirit-of-the-law versus letter-of-the-law fight in the name of music and theatre. Fasülyeciyan persuaded famous *Ortaoyunu* actor Kavuklu Hamdi and his friends to join him in performing in Galata. Fasülyeciyan's *Tûluat* group argued that—because their performances were not based on a text, were totally improvisatory, and did not use a prompter—these performances did not breach Agop's privilege; however, Hamdi usually performed the improvisatory version of whatever play Agop's group was performing.⁷²

As a link between the Westernised Ottoman Empire and the nationalistic Turkish Republic, operas and operettas developed in an unexpected way. Because of Agop's 1870 privilege, the other theatres showing Turkish plays had to leave Istanbul; however, Chukhajian argued that Agop's monopoly was not valid for musical plays, and he launched an opera group. He started the first Ottoman opera rehearsals in 1874 in Monsieur Adam's concert hall in Haçopulo Gate with a group of thirty students.⁷³ Even these rehearsals bothered Agop enough that he told the press he would go to court to stop Chukhajian's group. The news was published in the 3 July 1874 issue of the *Hayal* newspaper; according to its journalist, Agop had no such rights. The September issue of the same year had the news that Chukhajian received a permit to show musical plays, operas, and operettas.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ And, *100 Soruda Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 26–30.

⁷⁰ See And, *Türk Tiyatrosunun Evreleri*.

⁷¹ Orhan Hançerlioğlu, *Musahipzade Celal'in Bütün Oyunları* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1970), 26.

⁷² Naum's state monopoly to show Turkish plays in Istanbul prevented the success other theatres. One of the first, the French Theatre, survived only briefly. Other theatres in Beyoğlu were the Concordia, the Tepebaşı Theatre (completed in 1881), the Croissant Theatre, the Şark (Eastern) Theatre (or Alcazar Byzantin, also called Petit Alcazar), the Odeon Theatre (or Cinema éclair), and the Elhamra Theatre. In Galata, many small, shed-like theatres, the majority of them called *baloz*, were entertainment places with singers and dancers. Well-known ones included the Apollo, the Amerikan, the Alkazarı, and the Avrupa theatres. See And, *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu*, 192; And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 206; And, *Türk Tiyatrosunun Evreleri*, 176.

⁷³ Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 87; Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 125.

⁷⁴ And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 169–70; Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 87. 'Beyoğlunda Hacopulos çarşısında vaki muzikacı Mösyö Adam'ın salonunda otuz neferden müteceviz şakirdane Türkçe Opera talimiyle meşgul bulunan muzika muallimi Dikran Çuhacıyan Efendinin İstanbulda bir Opera Tiyatrosu tesis ve ihdası hakkında vaki olan istidası üzerine hükümet-i seniye tarafından dahi Türkçe bir Opera tiyatrosu tesisine ruhsat ita buyurulduğu mesmuumuz olmuştur. Bu babdaki tafsilât ileri nüshamızda ita olunacaktır' ('We are informed that the music trainer Tikran Chukhajian Efendi has received a state permit to establish and develop an opera theatre in Istanbul at Beyoğlu Haçopulo gate in Monsieur Adam's concert hall. He has trained thirty students to sing Turkish Opera. Further information will be provided in our future issues') [author's translation].

With the financial support of a wealthy Ottoman Armenian, Chukhajian was able to found the Osmanlı Operet Kumpanyası (The Ottoman Operetta Group) to perform Ottoman and European operas and operettas, sharing the ensemble management with Dikran Kalemciyan.⁷⁵ Because he did not have a theatre, the group rented theatres to perform his operas and operettas (as was the case with the above-mentioned Olimpia). Until the fire in 1870, his ensemble used Naum's theatre; however, after the fire, Chukhajian rented the Harbiye Nezareti binası (the building of the military guest house) in Beyazıt. In the guest house, the group performed Chukhajian's *Mektep Ustası* (The School Master), his music on Şinasi's *Şair Evlenmesi*, and the two-act comic opera *Mekteb Seyri*.⁷⁶

Chukhajian's group performed the first Turkish opera *Arif'in Hilesi* (Arif's Trick) in the Gedikpaşa Theatre. However, Agop argued that *Arif'in Hilesi* was vaudeville, not opera, and subsequently went to the court to stop the performances. This move initiated a heated debate in the press, but the court ultimately decided not to accept Agop's argument. During these discussions, some of Agop's actors joined Chukhajian's Operet Kumpanyası. In return, aiming to change public and press opinion on the matter, Agop published a pamphlet criticising the actors who left his theatre for Chukhajian's ensemble. His group performed musical plays as a further counterattack. Yet, both groups continued to present musical performances during the 1875 season. Agop's ensemble performed Offenbach's three-act opera buffa *La Belle Hélele*, translated by Tekvor Nalyan, while Chukhajian's group performed Chukhajian and Alexandro Alboretto's composition on Karakin Riştuni's libretto *Köse Kâhya*.⁷⁷ These selections demonstrate different cultural preferences. Even though Agop's *La Belle Hélele* was well liked, Chukhajian's operas displayed familiar melodies, characters and values that ensured the popularity of his chosen works. By this period, the Ottomans had developed a taste for opera, and it was an integral part of their social-cultural life.

In January 1876, Chukhajian rented the French Theatre to perform his most important operetta, *Leblebici Horhor Ağa*,⁷⁸ on the first day of Ramadan. Ohannes Hançeryan designed the costumes, Merlo modelled the decors,⁷⁹ and Takvor Nalyan handled the staging.⁸⁰ The premiere was so successful that it was performed every single night during Ramadan, and more than one hundred times during the season.⁸¹ According to the press of the era, the operetta's songs were sung in the homes, streets, and tea houses. Agop had to change his repertoire after the success of *Leblebici Horhor Ağa*, as he realised that the public liked musicals more than dramas and comedies.⁸²

Conclusion

As has been shown, Western performing arts were very well established in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, particularly in the capital Istanbul and other major cities such

⁷⁵ Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 90.

⁷⁶ And, *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu*, 232.

⁷⁷ And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*, 171–72.

⁷⁸ Istanbul State Opera's 1975 production of *Leblebici Horhor Ağa* can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/WAA-XZHuEEk>.

⁷⁹ The sources, including the newspapers of his time, mention him only as Monsieur Merlo.

⁸⁰ Tuğlacı, *Mehterhaneden Bandoya*, 126.

⁸¹ As can be seen in Güllü Agop's pamphlet, the month of Ramadan was the most vivacious and joyful time for artistic life in the Empire.

⁸² Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 92.

as Izmir, Bursa, and Adana. The Western music tradition was adopted so strongly by the dynasty members that multiple generations of sultans, including Abdülmecid I, played the piano. Even though his brother and successor Sultan Abdülaziz was known for his fondness of traditional Turkish arts, his Western-style compositions (*Invitation à la Valse*, *La Gondole Barcarolle*, and *La Harpe Caprice*) were published in Italy by the publisher F. Lucca.⁸³ After the deposition of Abdülaziz, his nephew Sultan Murat V succeeded, and despite reigning only ninety-three days he became known as the most productive Western music composer in the dynasty. When Murat V was dethroned, Sultan Abdülhamid ruled the Empire for thirty-three years. He was well trained in playing the piano and the violin and also composed in Western genres. The Sultan was known for his affection of Richard Wagner and opera in general. The last Khalif of Islam, Abdülmecid, was particularly drawn to Western arts as he was a well-known painter of the late Ottoman period.⁸⁴ He was also a good harpsichord player,⁸⁵ and he tended to compose larger works like concertos, chamber music, and sonatas.⁸⁶ Arguably, his most significant musical contribution was his B-flat major arrangement of Itri's *Tekbir*.⁸⁷

Musical performing arts were so embraced that Ottoman composers fused these Western genres with traditional music. Even someone like İsmail Dede, who did not approve of the influence of Western music, could not help but be inspired by the rhythmic structure of the waltz, and Callisto Guatelli, Giuseppe Donizetti's successor, guided his military band pupils to model the contours and motifs of traditional Turkish music. Callisto himself composed multiple marches using traditional Turkish materials,⁸⁸ and also arranged polyphonic versions of Turkish *makams*.⁸⁹ Yet, this fusion was already established in the compositions of Chukhajian, the first composer to use Western techniques to harmonise traditional Turkish melodies.⁹⁰ Some of the compositions of Leyla Saz (1850–1936), a prominent female composer of traditional music,⁹¹ also represent the fusion of Western and traditional music of nineteenth-century Istanbul, particularly her *Victory March*.⁹² As a result of this synthesis, the *Kanto*, a new form, flourished and became an inseparable part of *Tûluat*.⁹³

⁸³ According to Aracı, the Sultan even donated three thousand *thaler* for Wagner's opera house project in Bayreuth. See Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa*, 27–29, 168.

⁸⁴ Abdülmecid's most famous Parisian style paintings were *Beethoven in the Palace* (or *in the Harem*), *Goethe in the Harem*, and his sketch of Liszt. See Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa*, 153–229.

⁸⁵ Vedat Kosal, *Western Classical Music in the Ottoman Empire*, trans. Ender Gürol (Istanbul: EKO Basım Yayıncılık 1999), 48.

⁸⁶ One of Abdülmecid's most famous compositions is *Elegie for Violin and Piano*. At the Dolmabahçe Palace, he left a significant music library that contains scores of chamber music and symphonic works of major European composers.

⁸⁷ Ayse Taspınar, 'Identity: A Musical Synthesis at the Crossroads of East and West' (DMus thesis, University of California, 2011), 50.

⁸⁸ Aksoy, 'Musical Relationships between Italy and Turkey,' 67–68.

⁸⁹ Taspınar, 'Identity and the Ottoman Empire,' 24.

⁹⁰ Karadağlı, 'Türkiye'ye,' 61.

⁹¹ As the daughter of Hekim İsmail, Chief Surgeon of the Palace, the composer, poet and writer Leyla (Saz) Hanımefendi was raised in the Imperial *Harem*.

⁹² Kathryn Woodard, 'Music in the Imperial Harem and the Life of Ottoman Composer Leyla Saz (1850–1936),' *LAWM Journal* 10, no. 1 (2004): 1–7.

⁹³ Considered the first popular genre, *Kanto* was part of the free concerts given before *Tûluat* plays to attract a greater audience. See Cemal Ünlü, *Direklerinden Pera'ya* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 1998), 5. The genre was quite successful during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Although its popularity has diminished, new *Kanto* recordings have been released as recently as 2017.

Western music, opera, and the operetta tradition of Istanbul continued to flourish during the newly founded Turkish Republic, as seen in the creativity of composers like Cemal Reşit Rey. Even though this tradition was an extension of the entertainment life of nineteenth-century Istanbul, it heavily influenced the music in other parts of the Republic. In Ankara, this music had a different mission than in Istanbul. It helped to shape the cultural identity of the new Republic, and composers such as Ahmet Adnan Saygun worked hard to create a new national music of the Turkish Republic. Thus, when the new Republic was founded, Western music was not arbitrarily chosen by the policy makers. On the contrary, they wanted to layer the new Turkish nationalist music onto a well-established tradition of using Western music.

About the author

Özgecan Karadağlı is an interdisciplinary researcher in music and nationalism, Western art music in the Ottoman Empire, Riemannian and Neo-Riemannian theories, and music theory history. She received her PhD from the University of Alberta in 2017 and has taught aural and keyboard skills and music theory.