

Music Mediating Politics in Turkey: The Case of Ahmed Adnan Saygun

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As a proponent of musical reforms following the founding of the republic in 1923, Ahmed Adnan Saygun became a figurehead of Turkish nationalism, and his music came to represent the reform-era political ideology that sought closer ties with Europe. In conjunction with compositional strategies that reflected reform rhetoric, performances of his music at several high-profile venues served to mediate political alliances with and beyond Europe. In this essay I discuss the contexts of four performances, two of the opera *Özsoy* and two of the oratorio *Yunus Emre*, and how they enable Saygun's music to establish or solidify alliances with Iran, the post-Soviet republics of central Asia, the United Nations (UN), and the Vatican. By contextualizing Saygun's compositional style, particularly the practice of pastiche, and by analyzing the presenting, promoting, and reviewing strategies for the performances, I establish a framework for considering the role that music, specifically music performance, plays in mediating politics in Turkey.

Music played an important role in the implementation of reforms during the early years of the Turkish Republic. Along with social and language reforms, musical reforms were intended to ally the new secular, democratic nation with Europe while supporting Turkish cultural roots as distinct from the region's Ottoman history. Because the musical reforms were so closely tied to the project of nation building in Turkey, all facets of musical life became contexts for mediating political meaning in the new republic. From the founding of new institutions, such as the Ankara State Conservatory in 1935, which offered instruction only in Western art music, to the banning of radio broadcasts of Ottoman classical music in 1934, musical reform policies were indicative of the overt political strategy of situating the Ottoman past in opposition to the bright future of an alliance with Europe. By infusing music with such political overtones, reform-period policies and rhetoric continue to influence the perception of music such that the analysis of any public event featuring music from Turkey calls for a consideration of political meaning. In fact, the results of reforms, which were directed specifically at allying Turkey's musical culture with Europe, functioned in many cases to represent shifting alliances with a wide range of nations and political entities.

In my essay I address the subject of this special section of the journal issue by examining prominent performances of compositions by Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907–91) as mediations of Turkey's political alliances. Saygun came of age in the early years of the republic and is upheld as one of the main proponents of a national style of music in Turkey. The two works discussed here, the opera *Özsoy* and the oratorio *Yunus Emre*, demonstrate Saygun's multifaceted approach to reform strategies for composition, and the high-profile performances of each work, along with documentation of the events, illustrate the overtly political contexts for his music that establish, and even privilege, his role as a political figure in Turkey.

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The Rhetoric of Reform

Guidelines for creating music that fit the reform ideology came from the influential sociologist, philosopher, and ideologue Ziya Gökalp. In *Principles of Turkism* he devised the following formula for a new national music: “Our national music . . . is to be born from a synthesis of our folk music and Western music. Our folk music provides us with a rich treasury of melodies. By collecting them and arranging them on the basis of Western musical techniques, we shall have both a national and modern music.”¹ Gökalp’s strategy was in line with musical trends in Europe since the middle of the nineteenth century when nationalist composers sought to link art music with folk music of a particular region. What sets his formulation apart is the reference to “Western” music, which presupposes an absent “Eastern” music. Turkey’s historical role as a crossroads of communication and exchange resulted in its engagement with multiple styles of music, including both European and Ottoman traditions of art music. Rather than the simple equation of combining art and folk traditions as in Europe, Gökalp acknowledges three styles of music as representative of musical life in Turkey. “Today we are faced with three kinds of music: Eastern music, Western music, folk music. Which one of them is ours? Eastern music is a morbid music and non-national. Folk music represents our culture. Western music is the music of our new civilization.”²

In order to establish national musical boundaries Gökalp formulates the art traditions as oppositional through the terms *East* and *West* with the implication of forcing a choice between European classical music and Ottoman classical music with its strong ties to Persian and Arabic musical traditions. Such “Eastern” influences are rejected in favor of a clear alliance with the “West.” With folk music presented as a

third, separate category, the close connections between classical and folk traditions in Turkey are also forced apart, and the accepted binary between folk and art music within European discourse is established, which in turn allows for the notion of combining Turkish cultural identity with Western civilization to create a new national consciousness.

The actuality of musical experience is more difficult to codify. Growing up in the Aegean coastal city of Izmir in the final years of the Ottoman Empire (ca. 1920), Saygun was exposed to musical styles and experiences indicative of the pluralistic nature of Ottoman society. He learned the piano from an Italian resident of Izmir, Rosati; took lessons on the *ud*, the Middle Eastern lute; and attended performances at *gazinos*, or Ottoman nightclubs, where populations and musical styles coexisted and combinations of instruments, such as the clarinet with the *kençe*, a three-stringed fiddle, or the violin with the *kanun*, a plucked zither, were featured.³ It was this pluralistic atmosphere that the musical reforms attempted to carve into distinct categories.

In fact, the categorization of music into oppositional styles has a history older than republican reform politics with roots in earlier periods of Ottoman reform in the nineteenth century. Curiously, the republican strategy of rejecting the Ottoman past applies even to this facet of history, and few, if any, parallels were drawn during the reform period between earlier Ottoman reforms and republican policies. However, acknowledging previous moves toward assimilating Western music into Turkish culture would have certainly weakened the revolutionary stance of reform rhetoric, and the strategy of forgetting earlier Ottoman models for reform follows a powerful logic. As Ernst Renan stated in his seminal essay “What Is a Nation?”: “For-

1. Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gökalp*, trans. Niyazi Berkes (1922; repr., Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1959), 300.

2. Ibid. The original translation by Berkes uses “non-rational” instead of “non-national” for *gayrimillî* in the Turkish (presumably a typographical error). Although Gökalp’s original from 1922 predates the switch to Latin script in Turkey, this and other entries on music are transliterated in Cem Behar, *Klasik türk musikisi üzerine denemeler* (Ankara: Bağlam Yayınları, 1987), 94.

3. The most extensive biographical source for Saygun is Emre Aracı, *Ahmed Adnan Saygun: doğu-batı arası müzik köprüsü* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001).

getting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle] of nationality.”⁴

Pastiche, Persona, and Performance as Mediators

Although Saygun embraced the call for musical reforms and benefited from many policies during the 1920s and 1930s, his approach to composition also resisted to some degree the rhetoric of reforms. With a broad range of styles represented along with unique interpretations for synthesizing musical elements, Saygun’s music is best described and analyzed from the perspective of pastiche, which allowed him to assert multiple influences and resist Gökalp’s oppositional categories. It is easy to judge Saygun’s compositions aesthetically from the standpoint of European models and to find the lack of a coherent stylistic language problematic. However, the multiple references inherent in Saygun’s pastiche style serve to create complex meanings that reflect his unique musical background and the shifting cultural and political landscape of the republic at various stages. In fact, given the current trend toward uses of pastiche in music and other arts, Saygun’s early exploration of multiple references can be interpreted as a foray into postmodernism *avant la lettre*, resulting from the unique circumstances in Turkey that called for a synthesis of styles. Ingeborg Hoesterey in her study of pastiche in art, film, and literature states that postmodern pastiche is “about cultural memory and the merging of horizons past and present.”⁵ Applied to Saygun’s pastiche style, this assessment creates a context for understanding the multiple styles and compositional approaches that surface in his

music. These do not fit a modernist European aesthetic, but they do serve specific purposes for creating and constructing cultural and political meaning. Hoesterey also suggests a context for the reception of pastiche by stating the philosopher Arthur C. Danto’s perspective on establishing meaning in the arts: “Art these days has very little to do with aesthetic responses; it has more to do with intellectual responses.”⁶ In the context of reform-period Turkey (and beyond as examples will show), such intellectual responses relate profoundly to political meanings in music and performances.

Saygun’s status as a figurehead of Turkish nationalism contributes significantly to establishing political meaning in his music. His political persona, as it were, was created alongside the trajectory of his career, as it was closely tied to reform policy. In 1928 he received a presidential scholarship to study in Paris for three years at the Schola Cantorum. These scholarships were begun as a way to train the most promising young artists at prestigious European institutions. When he returned to Turkey in 1931 his European education afforded him prominent opportunities as a composer, educator, and music folklorist. However, because he embraced the political ideology of the republic and identified himself as musically in favor of pursuing European models for composition, he was situated in opposition to musicians of the Ottoman art tradition, which was shunned as “non-national” and even banned from radio broadcasts in the early republican years.⁷ This facet of the reforms, which pitted musicians against each other as either Eastern or Western, has had long-term effects on communication and collaboration between camps; it also plays an important, even dominant, role in establishing political meaning in any given performance

4. Originally a lecture given at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882, the essay is translated and annotated by Martin Thom and published in Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 8–22. John Morgan O’Connell has made an important theoretical contribution to the discussion of oppositional terminology in Turkish musical discourse in his article “In the Time of *Alaturka*: Identifying Difference in Musical Discourse,” *Ethnomusicology* 49 (2005): 177–205. By tracing such discourse at four distinct moments in music history, he also establishes historical continuity between Ottoman and republican reform practices.

5. Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), xi.

6. Danto’s statement is part of an invited response to a forum published in the *New York Times*, “Is It Art? Is It Good? And Who Says So?” (12 December 1997); as quoted in Hoesterey, *Pastiche*, x.

7. Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 36.

context. Despite Saygun's attempts to incorporate elements of Ottoman classical music in his works, as I discuss later, this strategy did not succeed in bridging ideological gaps between camps. On the contrary, such practices actually form the basis for the most contentious debate raised by musicians of Ottoman art music: that the elaborate tuning and performance practices of *makam*, or modal practice, cannot be reconciled with regard to Western equal-tempered tuning and harmony and therefore uses of *makam* scales in works for Western instruments and in Western genres cannot stand as representations of Ottoman tradition or as an appropriate synthesis of contrasting elements.

An important facet of my argument for understanding Saygun's role in Turkey as a mediator of political discourse is the consideration of performances of his music as political events. In contrast to the understanding of musical works in the West, which are studied and assessed most often in terms of compositional aesthetics as a text, that is, a musical score, I argue that the meanings for Saygun's music reside primarily in acts of performance. An opera (*Özsoy*) in honor of the visiting shah of Iran in 1934 and an oratorio (*Yunus Emre*) at the UN in 1958 are two examples of political contexts that were served, but also established, by Saygun's music in performance. Of course, this is not an unknown context for Western classical or popular music concerts, and comparable examples are found in the performances in Berlin of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 under Leonard Bernstein in 1989 and Pink Floyd's *The Wall* concert in 1990 to mark the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, in these cases the musical work has a shared meaning among specific groups prior to and separate from a particular performance, and therefore, the work assists in ascribing meaning to the event. In the case of Saygun, a performance ascribes meaning to the work to a much greater degree than vice versa. Audiences are drawn to these occasions for their political meaning without prior knowledge (for the most part) of the

works to be performed. In fact, the audience members are an active part of staging the political event by stating a particular alliance with their presence.⁸ Such performances then demonstrate examples of mediated politics in Turkey, and indeed beyond, as Turkey establishes cultural and political allies abroad.

Operatic Politics I: A Premiere in Ankara

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic, commissioned Saygun to write his first opera in 1934. Atatürk planned the premiere to coincide with the first visit of Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran to the republic, and the performance took place in Ankara at the Halkevi (People's House) on 19 June 1934. Saygun's work was intended to demonstrate the forward-looking reforms of the secular, democratic nation and at the same time to strengthen an alliance with Iran. The libretto by Münir Hayri Egeli was based on the Persian epic *Shahname* by Firdawsi (ca. 1100) clearly as a gesture to the visiting ruler and as an act of political alliance. Titled *Özsoy* (*Original Lineage*, or alternately *Pure Race*), Egeli set parts of the epic that portrayed the founding of Iran and Turan, the names of regions that historically represent Persian and Turkic cultures, respectively. While Turan designates mostly territory in central Asia where nomadic Turkic peoples lived, in nationalist circles in Turkey the name was used broadly to invoke the origins of the Turks and an authentic Turkish culture. Setting this story in the opera then provided Egeli with the opportunity to draw a direct comparison at the end of the opera between the first rulers of Iran and Turan and Reza Shah and Atatürk, thereby solidifying a nascent alliance through operatic performance.⁹

The choice of opera for such an occasion, in fact, provides for multiple interpretations of political meaning. The genre of opera clearly represents the aims of the republican musical reforms to ally Turkish musical life with European practices. In the context of *Özsoy*'s premiere, the

8. The audiences for the events discussed here inevitably vary based on the periods and locations. However, generally, performances of Saygun's music in Turkey today draw audiences from a secular-minded elite, which strongly supports the implications of reform politics for the republic.

9. A more complete historical account of Saygun's opera is offered by John Morgan O'Connell, "Staging an Alliance" (paper presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology National Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 2005); forthcoming as an article coauthored with Emre Araci in *World of Music* 49.

genre would seem to contradict the purpose of the performance, to stage an alliance between Turkey and Iran, which musically could be as easily served by performances of Ottoman and Persian classical music, as these styles are intimately and substantially linked by centuries-old traditions of modal practice, namely, *makam* in Turkey and *dastgah* in Iran. However, an additional purpose of the work was to demonstrate to Reza Shah the extent to which Turkey had made the transition to a secular, democratic nation in the European model. While the embrace of Iran as an ally even seems to contradict Gökalp's view that the East be shunned in favor of the West, Atatürk recognized the importance and pragmatism of reaching out to an Eastern ally, all the while performing a secular, Western identity. At the same time the subject of the opera and the use of Firdawsi's text complicate the notion of the work as Western based solely on its genre.

Saygun's music serves as an additional mediation of political meaning as it provides an example of the composer's fluctuation between styles that clearly draw from earlier models, such as the tonal harmony of eighteenth-century classicism, the post-tonal harmony of French romanticism, and Wagnerian chromaticism.¹⁰ On the one hand the mix of musical styles in *Özsoy* can be attributed to the short amount of time Saygun was given to complete the opera—a month before Reza Shah's scheduled visit. On the other hand no matter what circumstances may have played a role in Saygun's compositional approach, his use of pastiche is a means for creating cultural meaning and musical alliances within the context of a new national consciousness. Charged with composing the "republic's first opera," as it was dubbed, Saygun had the burden of choosing

a musical language that would put forth the ideals and context of republican Turkey. Having completed his three-year period of study in Paris in 1931, he was awash in musical impressions both from the current musical life of Paris and from his studies of influential earlier styles. Such a sudden and drastic immersion into European musical life comes to the fore in Saygun's opera and is performed as a public statement of musical identity. From this perspective *Özsoy* shows a complex interpretation of the multiple influences and alliances that swayed Turkey as it forged a national identity.

As the first opera composed in the Republic of Turkey, *Özsoy* garnered much attention for Saygun. Of particular note is the commentary provided by the German composer Paul Hindemith, who was invited to Ankara in the mid-1930s to assist in establishing the Ankara State Conservatory. In a volume titled *Suggestions for the Development of Turkish Musical Life* published following several trips to Turkey, Hindemith refers to "an attempt" at composing a Turkish opera without naming the composer and laments generally that "among all the examples of works I have heard, none stands as a satisfactory solution [to creating a national Turkish style]."¹¹ In a section describing such "Attempts Thus Far" followed by suggestions in "What Should Be Done?" Hindemith lays out prescriptions for attaining a truly national style exhibiting Turkish musical consciousness. While he expects even the most European-minded composer to avoid "slavish dependence on foreign influence," somehow his own suggestions, as a foreigner, for the development of a Turkish national style should be heeded. Through his suggestions, he essentializes both what a Turkish composer is capable of achieving within the rubric of "European" music and what should

10. For my impressions I relied on a recording of *Özsoy* performed by the Ankara State Opera and Ballet in 1982 included with the book by Gülper Refig, *Atatürk ve Adnan Saygun: Özsoy Operası* (Istanbul: Boyut Yayın Grubu, 1998). Refig's approach to describing Saygun's life and work provides a striking example of the discursive practice inherent in creating authoritative personae in Turkey. The practice was a significant part of Atatürk's autocratic rule, but it also contributed to the reception of figures such as Saygun. In Refig's book, Saygun's persona as a republican figurehead is created primarily through

his links to Atatürk, and *Özsoy* is an important link in that process. It is important to note that the recording accompanying the book includes music not performed at the premiere, as Saygun reworked the score in 1981. Araci and O'Connell's forthcoming article (see previous note) establishes a historiography of the score in its different forms.

11. Paul Hindemith, *Vorschlaege für den Aufbau des türkischen Musiklebens 1935/36* (İzmir, Turkey: Küğ Yayını, 1983), 100. Translations into English are by the author.

be expected from Turkish national music, that is, a clear reflection of Turkish musical identity based on music of “the folk.” Such notions follow closely the rhetoric of musical nationalism in the 1930s in Europe and beyond. They also fall in line with Gökalp’s precepts concerning musical reforms. What Hindemith’s commentary makes clear, however, is the contentious dialogue concerning Turkey’s desired alliance with Europe even as it played out in musical politics. As Hindemith states in his commentary, “Even the most capable Turkish composer will never be completely European in musical thought and feeling.”¹²

In light of Hindemith’s views, *Özsoy*, with its heavy reliance on pastiche references to European styles, does not satisfy European expectations for Turkish nationalism, creating a paradoxical mediation of a failed musical alliance with Europe even as its premiere mediated a political alliance with Iran. Indeed, Hindemith’s estimation and European aesthetic expectations do not detract from the role that the work continues to play in mediating political alliances.

Operatic Politics II: An Encore Performance

While the premiere of *Özsoy* established Saygun’s music as a means for mediating politics in Turkey, subsequent performances created additional political contexts for his music in response to shifting political climates. One such performance occurred on 29 October 1998 when *Özsoy* was staged at Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall in Istanbul to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the republic. However, the opera did not stand alone as sufficient representation of the republic’s musical life but was again called on to enact an alliance, this time with the newly founded central Asian autonomous republics of the former Soviet Union. The event dubbed “An Evening of Opera from the Turkic World,” which I attended, presented works from Azerbaijan, Ta-

tarstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan in addition to excerpts from *Özsoy* by Saygun.¹³

In contrast to the premiere of *Özsoy*, which performed an alliance between the opposed identities of Iran and Turan, this performance sought to establish alliances among representative nations of the Turkic world linked by language, ethnicity, and shared cultural roots. All but one of the central Asian works were composed during Soviet times and presented operatic interpretations of epics and/or historical legends from each region. These compositions were created in response to Soviet policies that propagated the need for creating national identities within the Soviet states based on the unique heritage of each region but also firmly rooted in Western cultural forms. With obvious similarities to republican musical reforms and the rhetoric of Ziya Gökalp, such Soviet works provided easy links between nations of the Turkic world including Turkey.

Despite the apparent irony of linking Turkic nations through opera, the significance of the genre for an event celebrating the founding of the republic is made explicit by considering a concert of Ottoman classical music that occurred on 23 October, a week prior to the evening of operas and a day before the music festival commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary began. The concert was billed as contributing to the anniversary festivities with the title “From the Ottomans to the Republic,” and the conductor of the ensemble, Riza Rit, attempted to create a context for such an event by linking the seven hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Ottoman Empire (in 1299) and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the republic. He also brought a broader historical awareness to music in Istanbul by referring in the program notes to the Enderun Musical School at Topkapı Palace as a precursor to the State Conservatory of Turkish Music. Although

12. Perhaps because of Hindemith’s heavy-handed commentary, Saygun chose to ally himself with the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok, who visited Turkey in 1936 in order to conduct fieldwork in Anatolian folk music and to demonstrate his methods to Turkish musicians. Saygun served as his assistant and interpreter during his brief but influential stay in Turkey.

13. The operas’ titles, taken from the program, are in Turkish: *Leyla ile Mecnun* by Üzeyir Hacıbeyli (Azerbaijan); *Manas* by Ayli Tokombayev and Kubinicbek Melikov (Kyrgyzstan); *Shahsenem ile Aşık Garip* by Danatar Avazov and Adrian Saposnikov (Turkmenistan); *Abay* by Ahmet Jubanov and Latif Hamidi (Kazakhstan); *Muhtesem Timur* by Ali Shir Ikramov (Uzbekistan); and *Altınsaç* from Tataristan, no composer or librettist given.

the concert took place in the same location as the festival, the Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall, the advertising campaign for the events clearly demarcated the Ottoman concert from the festival called “‘Yaşasın Cumhuriyet’ Konserleri” (“‘Long Live the Republic’ Concerts”).¹⁴ In spite of Rıza Rit’s attempts to create links to the Ottoman musical past as relevant to Turkish national history, the reform ideology of rejecting the Ottoman music with its Persian and Arabic influences proved more powerful than the desire to establish and reformulate a shared musical history. In fact, the Ottoman concert could have equally contributed to the pan-Turkic agenda of the republican celebration by establishing links between Turkish musical practices and those of Turkic regions, such as Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, with their own modal traditions. In light of this possibility, reasons for embracing opera as a suitable genre for presenting pan-Turkic musical and political connections can only (or at least most convincingly) be tied to the rhetoric of reform, which is still highly influential in current musical discourse and calls for privileging Western musical models over those with Ottoman influence.

Perhaps the most striking irony of staging six operas from Turkic nations in Istanbul in 1998 is that it links republican reform policy to early Soviet cultural policies at a time when the Soviet collapse signaled an end to such heavy-handed policies in the central Asian nations. However, the political meaning of the event is found precisely in Turkey’s desire to play a leadership role in the central Asian region as a substitute for Soviet presence with regard to cultural policy. Additional evidence for such a stance is the founding of Turkish institutions in cooperation with central Asian nations, such as the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University established in 1995 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, with instruction in Turkish and a center for Turkic civilization studies.¹⁵ While several subsequent cultural initiatives within the central Asian republics have focused on revitalizing traditions that had been

subverted during Soviet times, the existence of cultural and institutional practices similar to those of republican-era Turkey provided an easy foray into creating alliances with the region, as “An Evening of Opera from the Turkic World” demonstrated.

The Politics of Turkish Mysticism at the UN

Performances of the *Yunus Emre Oratorio* at the UN in 1958 and at the Vatican in 1991 provide additional examples both of Saygun’s music serving to mediate political alliances and of performance contexts ascribing meaning to Saygun and his music. Completed in 1942, the work sets to music Turkish poetry of the Sufi mystic Yunus Emre, who lived in Anatolia from the middle of the thirteenth century to 1321. The oratorio as a genre had its origins in setting religious texts for more secular settings as a sacred music drama. By the twentieth century the genre of oratorio became increasingly secularized and was used for a wide variety of subjects, as in Arnold Schoenberg’s *Die Jakobsleiter* (1922), Igor Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* (an opera-oratorio from 1927), and Michael Tippett’s *A Child of Our Time* (1941). The oratorio also became useful in the Soviet Union as a means for political propaganda and expressing patriotic sentiment, as in Dmitri Kabalevsky’s *The Mighty Homeland*. In light of these trends, Saygun’s *Yunus Emre Oratorio* can be experienced as a spiritually motivated work, performed almost exclusively in secular contexts with strong political overtones.

In fact, Saygun’s choice to set Sufi poetry, specifically of Yunus Emre, had profound importance in establishing political meanings for the work. In the early decades of the twentieth century Yunus Emre came to represent the roots of Turkish culture and literature in Anatolia, particularly following the publication of *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature* by Mehmed Fuad Köprülü in 1918.¹⁶ With over half of the book devoted to the life and work of Yunus Emre, it is a seminal study of the emergence of Turkish identity in Anatolia and pivotal to the discourse on Turkish na-

14. Although the season program for the Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall (1998–99) included both the Ottoman concert and the festival events under “Special Events,” the Ottoman concert was not announced on special posters and flyers designed for the festival and widely distributed.

15. The university’s Web site is www.manas.kg.

16. Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, trans., ed., and with an introduction by Gary Leiser and Robert Dankoff (London: Routledge, 2006).

tionalism at the time of the republic's founding. Köprülü became a leading authority in Turkish studies internationally and played several roles in Turkish politics as well, serving as minister of foreign affairs from 1950 to 1956 and briefly as deputy prime minister in 1956. Saygun was undoubtedly familiar with Yunus Emre's poetry through Köprülü's study. He embraced the ideals of the poetry and their reflection of Turkish identity and took the opportunity to set them to music within the context of nationalist reforms. However, in light of the persecution of the Sufi orders historically associated with Yunus Emre, such as the Bektashi, whose *tekkes* (lodges) were closed and religious services banned during a period of radical reform, Saygun's oratorio can be seen as appropriation of the poetry with no consideration for the original context of their performance as Sufi hymns and with the intent of serving a political purpose, to propagate the value of secularization in Turkish society.

Saygun enjoyed significant recognition for the *Yunus Emre Oratorio* both in Turkey and internationally. Shortly after the work's premiere in 1946 he received an invitation to teach composition at the Ankara State Conservatory, signaling a new period in his career as a composer.¹⁷ The Paris premiere of *Yunus Emre* was performed on 1 April 1947 at the Salle Pleyel in conjunction with a conference on Turkish music. Correspondence with Michael Tippett and Leopold Stokowski led to opportunities to present his music in London and the United States. Following an unsuccessful attempt to program the work at Carnegie Hall under the baton of Stokowski in 1955, Saygun stayed in correspondence with the conductor until the opportunity arose to perform the oratorio in the UN General Assembly

Hall, with Stokowski conducting the "Symphony of the Air" and the Crane Chorus of the New York State Teachers College at Potsdam.¹⁸

According to reviews by Harold Taubman for the *New York Times* and Franklin Zimmerman for the *Musical Times* of London, the Turkish government sponsored the event in conjunction with a reception for delegates and guests given by UN president Charles Malik and Mrs. Malik, with the secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld.¹⁹ Saygun and his oratorio then served as a means to heighten dignitaries' awareness of Turkish culture and to present a specific model of Turkish music, one that clearly drew from European sources and demonstrated the country's policies for modernization and secularization. While the poetry by Yunus Emre would seem to necessitate a consideration of Islam in the work and in Turkish society, neither review of the concert makes any reference to "Islam," "Muslim," or "Sufi," giving a clue as to how the oratorio and the text were contextualized for the audience at the performance. Both reviews follow very similar trajectories in their descriptions of the work. Because Zimmerman's is more detailed and touches on additional facets of Saygun's compositional background, I use it to illustrate the reception and analysis of the work.

Describing how the work "illustrates the 'Mystic Way,'" Zimmerman refers to the three sections of the oratorio, which dramatize "the progress of the soul through its dark night of separation from the Almighty, through its quest for illumination, and finally, to reunion with the Creator." Yunus Emre is heralded as "a highly original poet of ancient Turkey, who was the first to attempt classical poetry in the

17. In the years between *Özsoy* and *Yunus Emre*, Saygun continued to compose but received less public acclaim as he engaged in fieldwork research, traveling to various regions of Anatolia to collect and study folk music following his work with Bartok. As noted earlier, his alliance to Bartok set him in direct conflict with Hindemith, contributing to his lack of a prominent teaching position, as Hindemith played an influential role in the founding of the Ankara State Conservatory in 1935. However, this institution is where Saygun was eventually employed in 1946 following the successes of *Yunus Emre*.

18. Excerpts from the correspondence and Saygun's remarks on the concerts are found in Emre Aracı, "Yurtdışına açılış," chap. 6 of *Saygun*, 129–51.

19. Howard Taubman, "Turkish Works: Stokowski Conducts Concert at U.N.," *New York Times*, 26 November 1958; and Franklin B. Zimmerman, "Reports from Abroad—New York: Turkish Music at the U.N.," *Musical Times* 100 (1959): 99. Zimmerman also wrote a review of the performance for *Musical Quarterly* 45 (1959): 91–95. He offers slightly more musical detail in *Musical Quarterly*, but the rhetorical points that I emphasize and quote are essentially identical in the two reviews.

Turkish language in his *Divan* (collection) of mystic poems.²⁰ Assuming the music reviewer's descriptions of a medieval Turkish poet are coming from a source, such as program notes provided by the presenter (the Turkish government), the lack of any reference to Islam or Sufism becomes a statement of political ideology. Whether it represents Saygun's views of his own work or not, such a presentation clearly appropriates Sufi mysticism to serve the agenda of Turkish politics, in this case to ally Turkish culture with so-called universal values.

Zimmerman goes on to describe facets of Saygun's music language and discerns its multiple styles: "Bach-like chorale," "quasi-oriental pentatonic charm," "post-romantic music." He also mentions that "Yunus Emre's poems have been sung to certain melodies . . . handed down from generation to generation" and that Saygun "has come by these at first hand . . . [as] a recognized authority on folk-music of the Middle East." He includes a musical notation of the "ancient thirteen-note scale upon which the composer has based his composition," clearly suggesting consultation with Saygun as to how to describe his work. Zimmerman also refers to Saygun's work with the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok during his trip to Turkey in 1936, but sets Saygun apart from the composer's influence with the following: "In *Yunus Emre* there is neither the intense musical nationalism, nor the forging of a new idiom through synthesis of the old, which are manifestations in Bartok's music of his preoccupation with the folk-music of Hungary." One wonders if such a slight against Bartok did not also come from Saygun, who through Zimmerman expressed the desire to ally and at the same time to distance himself from the composer, who was so influential in his own approach to composition but who also overshadowed him as the more renowned composer. Ironically, the musical traits that Zimmerman takes issue with in Bartok's music are exactly those prized by reform rhetoric, which Saygun openly espoused and strove for in his music. However, Zimmerman's next sentence further establishes the new political ideology of

the 1958 performance and connects it to one of the styles found in *Yunus Emre*: "Rather, there is a more universal style . . . associated with that of post-romantic music."²¹

"Universal" in this context is a euphemism for "European," with roots in colonialist rhetoric that legitimized the propagation of European culture (such as postromantic music and other styles) by ascribing to it universal understanding and value. Zimmerman's statement then is yet another example of how meaning is ascribed to Saygun's music through performance contexts and how his pastiche style serves to mediate political stances. In this case, one specific style is foregrounded in order to link Saygun's music to the political purpose of the event, that is, to establish simultaneously alliances with Europe and the United States as the dominant powers within the global alliance of nations that is the UN. However, the foregrounding would not have happened so explicitly, or so permanently, without the aid of the published review. Indeed, the intersections of performance, public discourse, and critical review play complex inter-related roles in establishing meaning, political or otherwise, for musical works.

The Politics of Turkish Mysticism at the Vatican

In contrast to *Yunus Emre*'s presentation and reception at the UN, the oratorio was performed at the Vatican in 1991 as an explicit means for fostering interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and Islam. The performance by the Ankara State Opera and Ballet took place in the courtyard of the Papal Palace in Castel Gandolfo with Pope John Paul II in attendance. The oratorio was performed in conjunction with a seminar on Yunus Emre at the Pontifical Gregorian University to commemorate 1991 as "The Year of Yunus Emre" as designated by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Selcuk Korkud submitted a report on the event to the *Journal of International Affairs*, published by the Center for Strategic Research within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Turkey.²² He provides a historical context for interreligious dialogue between Christianity and

20. Zimmerman, "Reports from Abroad," 99.

21. Ibid.

22. Selcuk Korkud, "Inter-Religious Dialogue: Pope John Paul II and Yunus Emre," *Journal of International Affairs* (Center for Strategic Research, Ministry of

Islam by referring to the Second Vatican Council, which was the first occasion for the Church to address followers of Islam and to establish “a new era of co-operation.”

The council, with its sweeping changes to the Church, including its openness to non-Christian religions, was convened by Pope John XXIII, who had resided in Istanbul for ten years, from 1935 to 1945, as the Vatican’s apostolic vicar. Diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Turkey were also established during Pope John XXIII’s reign. Korkud draws a connection between the Pope’s experiences in Turkey and his openness to interreligious dialogue, mentioning both the “tradition of tolerance” that demonstrates the Ottomans’ embrace of multiple religious communities and the reforms of Atatürk that transformed Turkish society and “updated our attitudes towards religion.”²³ While Korkud is not explicit as to what such an “update” meant, Saygun’s oratorio offers one example of engaging with religion during the reform period. Its performance at the Vatican provides yet another context for the role that Saygun’s music plays in mediating political alliances. For, as the recent controversy (in September 2006) surrounding Pope Benedict XVI’s remarks on Islam demonstrates, interreligious dialogue with the Vatican concerns not only the matter of religious belief but also carries with it extensive political implications and consequences.²⁴

The seminar on Yunus Emre in 1991 and the accompanying performance of Saygun’s oratorio demonstrated Pope John Paul II’s desire to continue dialogue and close relations with Tur-

key. An excerpt of the pope’s speech at the concert provides a glimpse of the ecumenical rhetoric employed for the occasion: “Yunus Emre was filled with an awareness of the loving presence of God in the midst of creation. He sang of the universal brotherhood of all human beings and of the power of love to transform human life into a hymn of praise to God. . . . The Oratorio has been a moment of profound encounter, of mutual understanding and friendship. May you continue to proclaim the glory of God through your artistry.”²⁵ What is striking is the pontiff’s use of “sang” and “hymn,” which indicates his knowledge of the original context of the poetry: texts of *ilahi*, or hymns, sung at religious gatherings of Sufi orders, such as the Bektashi, who embraced Yunus Emre as a spiritual leader. However, the Bektashi, or other present-day practitioners of *ilahi*, were not invited to the Vatican to perform the hymns in traditional settings with Turkish instruments and in the modal practice of *makam*. Rather, the “universal” from the pope’s remarks is again expressed through the overtly European interpretation of Yunus Emre’s hymns in Saygun’s oratorio. Even the musical elements that point to Turkish influence do not negate its predominantly European context. The musical scale mentioned by Zimmerman and found at pivotal, striking moments in the oratorio can be read as an approximation of *bestenigar makam* (or a specific mode in Ottoman classical music) with its characteristic interval of a tritone between the first and fifth scale degrees—F-sharp, G, A, B, C.²⁶ However, Saygun’s use of this set of pitches in Western equal temperament is not enough to establish

Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey), December 1996–February 1997, www.sam.gov.tr/perceptions/Volume1/Dec1996–Feb1997/INTERRELIGIOUSDIALOGUE.pdf (accessed 25 September 2006).

23. Ibid.

24. On 12 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a speech at Regensburg University in which he quoted a fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor: “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” The quotation of such a sentiment sparked furor worldwide among Muslims. The statement and initial reactions to it are found in Ian Fisher, “Muslims Condemn Pope’s Remarks on Islam,” *New York Times*, 15 September 2006. In response, the pope offered rare public apologies and made efforts

to explain the context of his remarks. Many subsequent commentaries on the issue referred to a statement made by the pontiff in a 2004 interview with *Le Figaro* concerning Turkey’s bid for membership in the European Union; reported in “Ratzinger on Turkey in EU, European Secularism,” *Catholic World News*, 11 August 2004, www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=31436. At that time as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he proclaimed Turkey to be “in permanent contrast to Europe” as a predominantly Muslim country, drawing a clear connection between religious belief and political alliance and also rejecting the close ties cultivated by Pope John Paul II and Pope John XXIII. However, in November 2006 the pope traveled to Turkey—the first visit to a Muslim country of his papacy—as a gesture of diplomacy with the Muslim world following the controversy over his earlier remarks.

25. Korkud, “Inter-Religious Dialogue.”

26. Saygun’s use of *makam* approximations, including *bestenigar*, is discussed in Kathryn Woodard, “Creating a National Music in Turkey: The Solo Piano Works of Ahmed Adnan Saygun” (DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1999), 44. The piano reduction of Saygun’s score for *Yunus Emre Oratorio* is available for purchase from Peermusic Classical, www.peermusicclassical.com.

the modal practice of *makam*, which defines the tradition of *ilahi* singing and relies on a different tuning system. Instead, it is only a superficial representation of Turkish musical elements, with a similar effect as the orientalisms heard in Özsoy. Saygun states in his own words, “*Makam* is for me only a color,” thus confirming a marked distinction between *makam* as modal practice and the use of *makam* scales for coloristic effect, as in *Yunus Emre Oratorio*.²⁷

The decision to present Saygun’s oratorio rather than *ilahi* at Castel Gandolfo in 1991 does not necessarily reflect the musical or political interests of the Vatican. An important precursor that points to a Turkish initiative in staging the oratorio in conjunction with the seminar was an agreement between the University of Ankara and the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1988, which allowed for exchanges of scholars and the organization of joint conferences, including the seminar on Yunus Emre. With Turkey’s side of the agreement represented by a state educational institution, there would have been only a remote possibility for a performance of Sufi *ilahi* to represent an interreligious dialogue with the Vatican. Even with the involvement of scholars who recognized the historical and musical context of Yunus Emre’s poetry, the interests of the Turkish state in maintaining an alliance with the Vatican are best represented by Saygun’s oratorio, which serves as an example of the nation’s embrace of European social and cultural ideals and its “updated” attitude toward religion.

Conclusion

Through the discussion of performances of Saygun’s music, I have sought to illustrate the link between musical reforms and political discourse in Turkey, specifically how music performance came to mediate political alliances for Turkey. Whereas Saygun’s compositional embrace of Western genres led to his acceptance as a figurehead of Turkish nationalism within music circles, which in turn established political contexts for his music, performances of his works serve as the primary means for ascribing political meaning to his music. By framing each performance

through various media, including the venue, staging, promotional materials, and eventually the reviews, the presenters of the performances discussed here establish contexts that allow Saygun’s music to mediate political alliances with entities as varied as Iran, post-Soviet central Asian republics, the UN, and the Vatican. The performances clearly demonstrate the continuing reliance on reform-period strategies to negotiate Turkish identity and thereby to position Turkey in relation to its allies. Ironically, Saygun’s pastiche style, aesthetically distant from Europe in the 1930s and therefore seemingly contrary to reform purposes, enables his music to mediate alliances with Europe and beyond by creating references to shared musical meanings among allies. However, these meanings are only established overtly through performance and through the multiple sites of discourse that surround and result from performance. Such examples then broaden the consideration of sites for political discourse in Turkey and contribute to an understanding of the process for mediating politics through music. §

27. Quoted in Sayram Akdil, “Besteci Ahmed Adnan Saygun,” in *Ahmed Adnan Saygun semineri bildirileri*, ed. Tuğrul Göğüs (İzmir, Turkey: İzmir Filarmoni Derneği Yayınları, 1987), 26; my translation.