

Few cities
have been
sung
and
praised

so highly, so often and so enthusiastically as Istanbul. Few have inspired so many poets and composers. Both in verse and music, a very particular repertoire has developed of poems and songs concerning "The City".

A recent list of songs honouring Istanbul, for instance, contains no less than 154 items. Most of these are pieces put to music by twentieth century composers [Aksüt, 1994]. Another anthology boasts of 130 poems referring, in one way or another, to the capital city of the Ottoman Empire [Sairlerin İstanbul'u, 1988].

That traditional Turkish music has come to penetrate the life of this city is no surprise. The process, however, was neither simple nor straightforward, but colourful and multi-faceted. Istanbul is sung, yes, but the song itself was born in and by Istanbul. This extraordinary city is the cradle of a whole musical tradition which, in turn, chose it as one of its favourite themes.

The earliest poems in Turkish in praise of Istanbul were written at the time of its conquest. The earliest two songs (sarki), however, date from the early eighteenth century. Some of the Istanbul songs are anonymous *Ğand* we would rather then call them Istanbul *Türkü*sü – but these two are not. These two



Rhythm: Halting
Lyrics: Tanburi Mustafa Çavuş
Air: Şehnazbuselik

I met you in Küçüksu the other day
I knew it was you from your eyes
I won't deny that I'm in love with you
Whatever tortures you might inflict upon me
My heart will never ever leave you.

Until I hold that delicate waist of yours
Until I pick the rosebud on your lips
Until the day you or I leave this world
Whatever tortures you might inflict upon me
My heart will never ever leave you.



Lyrics: Yahya Kemal

Air: Hicaz

Translated into English by S. Behlül Toygar

FROM ANOTHER HILL

*I saw you dear Istanbul from another hill,
I found not a spot I loved without thrill.
As long as I live be at ease on heart's throne.
'Tis worth a whole life to enjoy a single part alone.*

CEM BEHAR

Üsküdar, Üsküdar

The image displays a page of musical notation for the piece "Üsküdar, Üsküdar" by Cem Behar. The notation is arranged in 12 staves, all within a single system. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is a single melodic line. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as "f" and "p". The music is a single melodic line.

compositions are by Tanburi Mustafa Çavus (died approx. 1740) and are still very popular. One is in the makam Bayati. Its refrain is: "Yaniyor âşık-ı biçare/Tarabyalı bir civane" (The poor lover is burning/For a youngster from Tarabya). The second song, in the makam Şehnaz Bûselik goes: "Küçüksu'da gördüm seni/Gözlerinden bildim seni" (I saw you in Küçüksu/I recognised your eyes).

These two *şarkıs* by Tanburi Mustafa Çavus started the use of various parts of Istanbul (Tarabya, Kandilli, Kalamis, Küçüksu) as settings for various songs. And Istanbul is a large city. Place names, districts, areas, neighbourhoods, quarters abound. The most frequently-occurring place names are those of villages on the Bosphorus, of course: Göksu, Kanlıca, Küçüksu.

Üsküdar is another case in point. What is perhaps the most famous of all the songs about Istanbul talks of a Tanzimat bureaucrat ("kâtip") going to Üsküdar: "Üsküdar'a gider iken/Aldı da bir yağmur". This piece probably dates from around the middle of the nineteenth century and was first notated and published in 1904. Eartha Kitt made it internationally famous by singing "Üsküdar is the name of a town in Istanbul".

Beyoğlu, Kâğıthane and the Princes Islands are also well represented in the songs. But not all geographical settings in Istanbul are on the tourist beat. A good instance is the song by Yalçın Tura: "Kasımpaşa kıyıları tersane/Bir yâr sevdim, alim Allah bir tane" (Shipyards on the shores of Kasımpaşa/I have one lover, God knows she is unique). The words of a song by Ünal Narçm, then, sound much like a catalogue of Istanbul neighbourhoods. "Kız sen İstanbul'un neresindensin?" (Girl, which part of Istanbul are you from?" goes the song's refrain, and the text lists, in six stanzas, the names of no less than twenty different areas of Istanbul, from Ortaköy to Florya, and from Esentepe to Kadıköy.

Songs use and abundantly cite Istanbul. But Istanbul has fostered and bred the musical tradition within which all these songs were produced. *Istanbul and the Civilisation of the Ottoman Empire*, the book by Bernard Lewis, accurately reflects the scope in its title.

The whole tradition of Turkish classical music in fact took shape in Istanbul, and set an example for the other cities of the

Empire. What the dominant Turkish musical tradition was before the conquest of Constantinople, we do not really know. The Ottoman tradition, however, as historical sources and documents tell us, took shape in the new capital of the Empire and, integrating elements from many antecedent traditions, attained an original synthesis during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent.

The music was not of the Palace alone, as some have suggested, but that of the whole city. Indeed, it appealed to and was performed by people coming from all classes, rich or poor, Muslim, Christian or Jewish. We have here a truly urban musical tradition, rich and varied, with distinct musical forms, genres and performance styles.

Turkish traditional music, therefore, bears the unmistakable stamp of Istanbul. For that was where the Ottoman arts and general aesthetic outlook reached their heights. The city fostered the music and the musicians sang the city. The symbiotic relationship has been going on for almost five centuries.

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