The Impact of Asia Minor (Anatolian) Folk Music on Classical Guitar Repertoire

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Introduction

Today, classical guitar music in Turkey is a lively area compared to the period before the 1980s. There are many universities and conservatories that have classical guitar departments as well as private institutions offering classical guitar courses. In this musical climate, while some guitarists launch a performance career on standard repertoire, others choose to create their own music by incorporating influences from Anatolian music.¹

These compositions/arrangements are generally based on Anatolian themes, motives or forms. The idea of composing/arranging this fusion with an equally-tempered Western instrument is not a phenomenon of the last twenty years in Turkey. The history of what is mostly referred to as “East-West” synthesis in culture, had already begun in the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century and reached its peak after the foundation of the Turkish Republic (1923). Thus, this idea covers a period of almost 180 years.

In this article, major classical guitarists and composers in Turkey will be introduced and their approaches to arrangements and compositions of synthesis pieces will be categorized. Two case studies of works by classical guitarists Bekir Küçükay and Ricardo Moyano will be presented in the last part of the paper in order to answer the question, “How do they compose/arrange these makam-based² Anatolian folk themes so as to be played on an equally-tempered Western instrument, such as classical guitar?”

“East-West” Synthesis Experiments in Turkish Classical Guitar Repertoire

The number of pieces written for classical guitar in a Western and Eastern style increased after the 80s. These works can be classified according to the

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¹ Throughout the text, the term “Anatolian Music” refers to the music in the multi-cultural Anatolian region of Turkey that was for ages comprised of Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Greek, Circassian, Laz and many other cultures.

² Makam is a complex modal system used in Turkish art music and Anatolian folk music. It can be described superficially as “the organization of pitches in a hierarchal order to define a musical center”. There are more than 500 makams.
composer/arranger: The first group\textsuperscript{1} comprises of guitarist composers/arrangers, namely Bekir Küçükyay, Ahmet Kanneci, Doğan Canku, Hasan Cihat Örter, Melih Güzel, Ricardo Moyano, Carlo Domeniconi, Erkan Oğur, Mutlu Torun, Mesut Özgen, Kemal Belevi, Cem Küçümen, Sefa Yerpem and Savaş Çekirge. The second group (non-guitarist composers/arrangers) includes Ekrem Zeki Ün, Ertuğrul Bayraktar, Turgay Erdener, Ertuğ Korkmaz, İstemihan Taviloğlu and Nejat Başeğmezler.

Furthermore, the works belonging to the composers/arrangers listed above can be divided into two main categories with respect to their compositional context:

1) Works involving the harmonization of a folk melody

Almost all composers/arrangers cited above have written pieces that match the first method of Bela Bartók: “take over a peasant melody unchanged or only slightly varied, write an accompaniment to it and possibly some opening and concluding phrases” (Woodard 1999: 37-38).

2) Compositions with Western and Anatolian characteristics

In this category, rather than a direct reference to a folk melody, Anatolian forms, ornamentations, motives, rhythms or modes provide the Anatolian characteristics of the piece.

Two Different Case Studies
a) \textit{Kara Toprak}, arranged by Ricardo Moyano

This particular song is an arrangement of \textit{Aşık} Veysel’s\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Kara Toprak} (Black Earth) by the Turkey-based Argentinean guitarist/composer Ricardo Moyano.

Ricardo Moyano requires a different tuning system in this piece (see Figure 1).

\textbf{Figure 1.} \textit{Kara Toprak}: Tuning System

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{3} This list was prepared in consideration of composers/arrangers whose works are published in audio or score format.

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Aşık} refers to the poet-musicians in Anatolia. Veysel Şatıroğlu (1894-1973) was one of the most well-known \textit{aşıks} in Turkey.
This tuning system has some similarities with Bekir Küçükay’s chords in Ağt, which will be discussed in the next case study. Since F-sharp is the root, the constructed chord includes the 5th (C-sharp), 7th (E) and 11th (B) chordal members.

Moyano’s tuning system allows the performer to play the melody of the song with continuous arpeggios from different strings. For example the F-sharp at the beginning of the melody (see Figure 2) is intended to imitate the sound of a pedal point in bağlama. To achieve this, he requires that each F-sharp be played on a different string, which is challenging in the standard tuning system of the classical guitar.

Figure 2. Kara Toprak: Beginning of the Melody

The introduction is worth-mentioning in this arrangement: It functions as a taksim\(^5\) which is a characteristic feature of Anatolian music. Here Moyano makes use of various ornamentations, which evoke the feeling of bağlama (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Kara Toprak: Introduction (opening)

\(^5\) *Taksim* refers to a form of Turkish art music which is impravizatory and non-rhythmic.
In the second line of the excerpt in Figure 3, we encounter a G which has a koma accidental. This one-ninth koma is derived from the Hüseyni makam of Kara Toprak (see Figure 4).

Since the tonal center of the melody is F-sharp, the koma is on the second scale degree, i.e. G-sharp. This koma makes the G-sharp lower than its value. The actual performance of that note requires a little bend in the G. This koma is also encountered several times later in the melody.

The final section of the song consists of up-and-down strokes to all strings, another characteristic feature of bağlama playing. The melody of the final section of the song is elaborated with this technique (see Figure 6).
b) Anadolu Süüti (Anatolian Suite) by Bekir Küçükay

Bekir Küçükay composed Anadolu Süüti in 1983. This piece can be categorized under the compositions that have Western and Anatolian characteristics. It is in four movements: Ağıt, Oyun, Şarkı and Halay. He has given the English translation of these words as Elegio, Folk Dance, Song and again Folk Dance. Each movement represents one of the major forms of Anatolian music culture. In this section two of these forms (Ağıt and Halay) will be examined by giving the definitions and identifying the characteristics.

1. Ağıt (Elegio)

A harmonic analysis reveals that the song has a particular modal characteristic which is close to E Phrygian mode. The Phrygian mode is significant for composers who are influenced by Anatolian music, because it has some similarities to the Kürdi makam, which is one of the major makams found in Anatolian music (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). Hence, the Phrygian mode is used in many composers’ pieces.

Figure 7. E Phrygian Mode

Figure 8. Kürdi Makam scale
The beginning of the piece is rhythmically free. The opening chords reveal one more characteristic: The composer omits the chordal third. This is a common technique used for avoiding conventional triadic sonorities. For instance, the chords in measures 1, 4 and 7 have 5th, 7th and 11th chordal members, i.e. B, D and A respectively (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Ağıt: Chords

![Figure 9. Ağıt: Chords](image)

In the middle section, Küçükay creates an atmosphere of a lament with rapid double arpeggios of 32nd notes (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Ağıt: Middle Section

![Figure 10. Ağıt: Middle Section](image)

This kind of arpeggio can also be seen in the works of the famous Brazilian composer/guitarist Heitor Villa-Lobos, especially in his well-known Etude No. 11.
2. *Halay* (Folk Dance)

The word *halay* refers to a kind of traditional folk dance that is performed with at least three people (Baykurt 1976: 92). This dance is frequently associated with the East and Southeast regions of Anatolia. Bekir Küçükay chooses a fast *halay* and expresses this with rapidly rising 16th notes.

Generally in Anatolian songs, half-tone trills are used. Instead of playing this trill with the legato technique as played on *bağlama*, Küçükay uses arpeggio technique to ornate the trill (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11. Halay: Opening](image)

When the melody is analyzed, an augmented 2nd interval can be observed between F and G sharp. This interval is a typical feature, especially of the *Hicaz* makam. Bekir Küçükay uses this interval to impart a flavor of this makam.

Conclusion

The lack of research on pieces by Turkish classical guitarists/composers inspired me to write this paper. The issue becomes more interesting when we live in a country which links the continents of Asia and Europe, i.e. East and West. The Westernization objective and the resulting “East-West” syntheses in both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, bring in their harmony and conflicts. Analyzing these two issues will help the new generation of guitarist composers and non-guitarist composers to create their avant-garde works.

Bibliography

Books and Articles


Recordings


