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## Research Article

# Music, technology, and humanity: Asempayetsia as a compositional-analytical framework for reframing African indigenous knowledge in music theory<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Contemporary music theory continues to be largely shaped by Euro-American analytical frameworks, which often limit the recognition of alternative systems of musical organisation rooted in Indigenous knowledge. This paper addresses this gap by proposing Asempayetsia as a compositional-analytical framework grounded in Akan-Mfantse epistemologies. Developed through practice-led artistic research, the framework translates the narrative and symbolic logic of Kodzi, a Ghanaian oral storytelling tradition, into musical structure through a triadic process of cultural excavation, compositional translation, and audiovisual reinscription. Using the case study Pɛrpl Greyps, the study demonstrates how Indigenous knowledge systems can generate music-theoretical structures. The analysis shows how cyclical temporality informs formal organisation, how loop-based processes shape rhythmic structure, how fixed motifs function as symbolic anchors, and how audiovisual integration extends musical form beyond sound. These features collectively propose an alternative model of musical organisation that departs from linear and hierarchical paradigms commonly associated with Western art music. By positioning composition as a site of theory-making, the paper contributes to ongoing debates in transcultural and postcolonial music theory. It argues that Indigenous epistemologies can serve as cultural content and generative systems for analytical and compositional thought. In this context, digital technologies are regarded as mediating tools that enhance, rather than replace, culturally grounded musical logic. The study ultimately shows how artistic research can broaden the epistemological scope of music theory while maintaining the continuity of intangible cultural heritage.

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## Introduction

Contemporary music discourse increasingly reflects the interconnection of sound, technology, and human experience, particularly within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Developments in digital composition, sound art, and algorithmic processes have broadened both the tools for musical creation and the conceptual limits of what constitutes musical knowledge. However, despite this expansion, dominant frameworks within music scholarship, and especially within music theory, remain largely influenced by Euro-American epistemologies, often marginalising alternative systems of musical thought rooted in Indigenous and non-Western traditions (Agawu, 2003; Mignolo, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This imbalance is both institutional and conceptual. It influences how musical structure, form, and meaning are theorised, analysed, and taught. While ethnomusicology has contributed significantly to documenting

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diverse musical practices, fewer models have been developed that translate Indigenous epistemologies into music-theoretical frameworks capable of generating compositional and analytical insights. This gap prompts an important question: how might music theory itself be reconfigured when Indigenous systems of knowledge are treated not merely as cultural data, but as sources of theory?

This paper addresses that question by developing *Asempayetsia*<sup>3</sup> (Dawson, 2023), a compositional framework grounded in Akan-Mfantse epistemologies. Originally developed in my doctoral research through engagement with *Kodzi*<sup>4</sup>, a narrative-poetic storytelling tradition, the framework translates oral, performative, and symbolic logics into musical and audiovisual form. *Asempayetsia* is structured through a triadic process of cultural excavation, compositional translation, and audiovisual reinscription, through which ancestral knowledge is rearticulated within contemporary creative practice. Crucially, this paper positions *Asempayetsia* not only as an artistic methodology but as a compositional-analytical framework within music theory. It proposes a model in which musical structure and meaning emerge from Indigenous epistemic logics rather than from inherited Western tonal or formal systems. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing discussions in postcolonial and transcultural music theory by foregrounding composition as a site of theory-making. Methodologically, the study adopts a practice-led artistic research approach, in which composition functions both as a method of inquiry and as a research outcome. The framework is demonstrated through the case study *Perpl Greyys* (2023), which reinterprets Akan storytelling structures through cyclical form, rhythmic interaction, and symbolic audiovisual design. Particular attention is given to how *Kodzi* logic informs compositional parameters such as form, texture, and temporal organisation. While the study engages with broader decolonial discourse (Mignolo, 2009; Dei, 2009), its primary focus is analytical rather than rhetorical. It seeks to show, in concrete terms, how Indigenous knowledge systems can generate music-theoretical structures, rather than critique existing ones. In this sense, the paper's contribution lies in extending music theory beyond its conventional epistemic boundaries through practice-based articulation.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 situates the study within relevant theoretical and music-theoretical debates, including decolonial thought, artistic research, and transcultural composition. Section 3 outlines the methodological framework. Section 4 presents a detailed analytical case study demonstrating the application of *Asempayetsia*. Section 5 discusses the implications for music theory, technology, and cultural continuity. The paper concludes by reflecting on the role of artistic research in expanding the epistemological scope of music theory.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

### Epistemic Disobedience and Music-Theoretical Repositioning

The concept of epistemic disobedience, as articulated by Mignolo (2009), calls for a deliberate disengagement from dominant Western epistemological frameworks in order to make space for plural systems of knowledge. While this concept has been widely applied within decolonial studies, its implications for music theory remain underexplored. Music theory, as a discipline, has historically been grounded in analytical systems derived from European art music, often privileging tonal harmony, formal development, and notation-based abstraction as universal standards (Ewell, 2023, 2021; Deruty & Lattner, 2023; Agawu, 2003; Tagg, 1982). In this context, epistemic disobedience becomes not only a philosophical stance but also a music-theoretical intervention. It raises the question of how musical structure, form, and meaning might be theorised differently when approached from Indigenous epistemologies rather than from inherited analytical models. Rather than treating African musical traditions as objects of ethnographic study, this perspective positions them as sources of theoretical knowledge that can generate compositional and analytical frameworks (Hesselink, 2021; Nikolsky & Perlovsky, 2020; Emielu, 2018; Rice, 2017; Agawu, 2016)

Within African scholarship, this repositioning aligns with broader efforts to centre Indigenous knowledge systems as valid epistemologies (Adjei & Dei, 2025; Dei, 2020, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Oral traditions, embodied performance practices, and communal modes of meaning-making are not merely cultural expressions; they are structured systems of thought with their own internal logics. The implication for music theory is significant: analysis need not begin

<sup>3</sup> *Asempayetsia* (Mfantse: "concise are words of worth")

<sup>4</sup> *Kodzi* (Akan-Mfantse storytelling tradition)

from external categories imposed on sound, but can emerge from within the epistemic conditions of the musical culture itself. In this paper, Asempayetsia is situated within this shift. It is presented as a framework that enacts epistemic disobedience at the level of composition and analysis, proposing that Indigenous sonic logics can function as the basis for music-theoretical modelling rather than as supplementary material to existing paradigms.

### **Artistic Research as Music-Theoretical Methodology**

Artistic research has increasingly been recognised as a legitimate mode of knowledge production within the arts, particularly in contexts where creative practice itself generates theoretical insight (Borgdorff, 2012; Candy & Edmonds, 2018). In contrast to traditional musicology or ethnomusicology, which often separate analysis from creation, artistic research positions compositional practice as both method and outcome. For music theory, this approach introduces an important methodological shift. Rather than analysing pre-existing works through established frameworks, theory can emerge through the act of composition itself. In this sense, compositional decisions, relating to form, rhythm, texture, and sonic organisation, become sites of theoretical articulation. This study adopts a practice-led artistic research methodology, in which the compositional process functions as a primary mode of inquiry. The framework of Asempayetsia was developed through iterative cycles of creation, reflection, and refinement, where each compositional stage generated insights into how Indigenous epistemologies can shape musical structure. The accompanying exegesis serves as meta-documentation, articulating the conceptual and analytical implications of these processes. Within this methodological orientation, knowledge claims are not validated through external analytical systems alone, but through the internal coherence of the compositional logic, the consistency of translation between cultural source and musical form, and the reflective articulation of process. Artistic research thus expands the scope of music theory by enabling its development through practice rather than solely through abstraction.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Musical Translation**

The Akan-Mfantse cultural context provides a rich foundation for examining how Indigenous knowledge systems can inform musical structure. Within this environment, knowledge is transmitted through oral narratives, performance practices, symbolic systems, and communal participation. The Kodzi tradition, in particular, integrates storytelling, rhythm, and social interaction, functioning as both an artistic form and a mode of cultural reasoning. Engaging with such material through composition requires a rethinking of translation. Rather than mapping Indigenous elements onto Western compositional frameworks, translation is approached here as a process of structural transformation, in which the underlying logics of the source tradition inform musical organisation. This includes principles such as cyclical temporality, call-and-response interaction, symbolic condensation, and communal orientation. In this study, translation operates through three interconnected processes: cultural excavation, compositional translation, and audiovisual reinscription. These processes do not simply preserve cultural material but rearticulate it within new creative contexts. Importantly, the focus is not on reproducing traditional forms, but on allowing their epistemic structures to generate new musical configurations. This approach resonates with existing work in African art music and intercultural composition, in which composers such as Euba (1989) have explored integrating Indigenous musical paradigms into contemporary compositional practice. However, the present study extends this trajectory by framing such integration explicitly as a music-theoretical operation, in which Indigenous knowledge systems function as generative models for compositional structure and analytical interpretation. By situating musical translation within Indigenous epistemologies, the study proposes an expanded understanding of music theory, one that accommodates multiple systems of logic, temporality, and meaning-making, and that recognises composition as a site where these systems can be articulated, tested, and refined.

### **The Asempayetsia Framework**

#### **Overview of the Framework**

Asempayetsia, an Mfantse expression meaning “concise are words of worth,” is proposed here as both a philosophical orientation and a compositional-analytical framework within music theory. Developed through my doctoral research, it emerged from sustained engagement with the Akan-Mfantse oral tradition of Kodzi and from the challenge of

composing within Indigenous epistemologies while operating in institutional contexts shaped by Western art-music paradigms. While existing approaches to intercultural composition have explored the integration of African musical elements into contemporary practice (Euba, 1989; Agawu, 2003), Asempayetsia advances this trajectory by foregrounding Indigenous epistemology as a generative basis for musical structure itself, rather than as source material to be adapted. In this sense, the framework proposes that compositional organisation—rhythmic, formal, and symbolic—can emerge from culturally embedded logics. At its core, Asempayetsia treats composition as an act of distillation, in which sound carries cultural, ethical, and symbolic weight. This principle reflects Akan philosophies of language, where meaning is often condensed through metaphor, brevity, and layered expression (Dei, 2009, 2020). Translated into musical terms, this orientation prioritises economy of material, relational structuring, and symbolic density, shaping how motifs, textures, and formal processes unfold. The framework operates through a triadic process—Cultural Excavation, Compositional Translation, and Audiovisual Reinscription—understood not as a linear sequence but as a cyclical system. This cyclical orientation reflects Indigenous temporal logics in which repetition, return, and variation function as organising principles (Onyeji, 2019). As such, Asempayetsia offers a model in which musical form is not driven by teleological development, but by recursive interaction and recontextualisation.

### **Cultural Excavation**

Cultural Excavation (*situated listening, ethical co-presence, and elder-centred knowledge*) involves engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems as sources of compositional logic. This process extends beyond documentation to what may be described as situated listening, where meaning emerges through relational engagement with elders, performers, and cultural contexts. Drawing on Dei's (2009; 2020) concept of *ElderCrit*, this stage recognises elders not as informants but as theorists whose knowledge structures inform artistic decision-making. The composer engages with proverbs, narrative forms, rhythmic practices, and symbolic systems as analytical frameworks in their own right. From a music-theoretical perspective, this stage establishes the epistemic basis of structure. Rather than beginning with abstract musical parameters, compositional thinking is grounded in culturally embedded concepts such as cyclical temporality, communal interaction, and symbolic condensation. These principles later inform rhythmic organisation, formal design, and textural relationships.

### **Compositional Translation**

Compositional Translation (*sonic autoethnography and negotiation with institutional musical forms*) transforms cultural knowledge into musical structure. This process is not representational but generative: Indigenous epistemic principles are translated into rhythmic patterns, formal processes, and sonic relationships. Informed by Agawu's (2003) argument that African music operates through relational rather than reductionist logic, this stage treats musical elements—rhythm, timbre, text, and gesture—as interdependent. Translation, therefore, involves structural negotiation, where compositional decisions emerge through a dialogue between Indigenous logics and contemporary musical resources. This process may be understood as a form of sonic autoethnography, in which the composer's positionality informs the interpretation and transformation of cultural knowledge. At the same time, it involves negotiation with institutional musical forms, including Western compositional techniques and digital production systems. The resulting structures are neither purely traditional nor fully assimilated, but operate within a hybrid yet internally coherent logic. From a music-theoretical standpoint, this stage is where Indigenous knowledge becomes audible as structure—manifesting in cyclical form, layered rhythmic interaction, and symbolic organisation of sound.

### **Audiovisual Reinscription**

Audiovisual Reinscription (*digital revitalisation, archival mediation, and pedagogical dissemination*) situates the composition within contemporary technological environments. Through digital audio workstations, visual media, and spatial audio techniques, the work is extended into a multisensory domain. Rather than treating technology as a neutral tool, this stage involves critical mediation, where digital systems are adapted to align with Indigenous sonic logic. For example, temporal grids may be reconfigured to accommodate cyclical rhythm, and spatialisation may reflect communal listening environments rather than individualised stereo perception. From a theoretical perspective, this stage expands

music theory into the audiovisual domain, where structure is not only sonic but also visual and spatial. It introduces a model of digital musical form in which temporal, visual, and symbolic elements interact as a unified system. Through this process, composition becomes a form of knowledge production in which Indigenous epistemologies are not only preserved but also rearticulated within contemporary media systems.

### **Theoretical Inspirations**

The Audiovisual Reinscription stage is closely aligned with developments associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterised by the integration of digital technologies into creative practice (Schwab, 2016). Within Asempayetsia, these technologies are not treated as generative agents but as mediating infrastructures that extend Indigenous knowledge into new representational forms. Three key functions can be identified:

- Digital preservation, where recording and archiving support continuity of oral traditions
- Multimedia representation, where sound, image, and interaction expand the perceptual scope of musical form
- Dissemination, where digital platforms enable broader circulation without detaching knowledge from its epistemic grounding.

While these functions resonate with frameworks such as UNESCO (2003), AU Agenda 2063, and WIPO (2001), their role within this study is primarily contextual rather than central. The focus remains on how technological mediation affects musical structure and perception, rather than on policy alignment.

### **Distinguishing Features**

Asempayetsia differs from Western compositional and analytical frameworks in its epistemic foundation and structural orientation. Whereas programmatic composition often translates narrative into music within established tonal or formal systems, and ethnographic approaches tend to document musical practices externally, Asempayetsia operates from within the epistemic logic of the source culture. Its distinguishing features include:

- Cyclical formal organisation rather than linear development
- Relational structuring of musical elements, where rhythm, text, and gesture function interdependently
- Symbolic density, where sound carries layered cultural meaning
- Communal orientation, reflected in call-and-response interaction and participatory logic

These characteristics position Asempayetsia as a framework that redefines compositional authorship and analytical perspective. The composer operates not as an isolated creator but as a mediator of cultural knowledge, and musical structure emerges through relational processes rather than abstract formal design. In this way, the framework contributes to music theory by proposing an alternative model for conceptualising, analysing, and generating musical organisation—one grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and articulated through contemporary creative practice.

### **Application: Translating the *Kodzi***

#### **Context of the Case Study**

My doctoral project, *Perpl Greypts: Kodzi in 3re Beatz* (2023), emerged from a compositional impasse shaped by the tension between institutional expectations and Indigenous sonic identity. The prevailing academic emphasis on Euro-American models of “advanced” composition prompted a critical return to formative cultural experiences, particularly the Akan-Mfantse storytelling tradition of Kodzi. Kodzi encompasses multiple narrative forms, including mythic or patriotic storytelling (*kodzi*), moral instruction (*anansesem*), history (*abakosem*) and comic performance (*tooli*), all of which contribute to ethical formation, communal identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. In response to the decline of these forms within contemporary media environments, this project sought not to document Kodzi but to reactivate it as a compositional system through the Asempayetsia framework. The resulting work presents a narrative centred on conflict and reconciliation, symbolised through the visual and sonic interplay of “*Perpl* (purple)” (unrest) and “*Greypts* (grapes)” (restored harmony). The hybrid title itself reflects a broader compositional logic of ‘cultural convergence’ rather than fragmentation (Kim, 2017; Bhabha, 2012; Euba, 1993).

#### **Cultural Excavation: Situated Listening and Sonic Grounding**

The Cultural Excavation stage involved engaging Kodzi as an epistemic system through fieldwork, oral interviews, and embodied listening practices. Due to limited archival documentation, knowledge was accessed through community interaction, including discussions with traditional practitioners, linguists, and cultural historians. A key outcome of this process was the recognition of Kodzi as a rhythmic and narrative logic, rather than only a storytelling form. Its structuring principles—repetition, variation, metaphor, and communal interaction—became foundational to subsequent compositional decisions. Field recordings collected during this stage, including ambient community sounds, children’s play, and musical fragments from social spaces, were incorporated directly into the composition. These materials function not as background elements but as primary structural components, establishing the sonic environment from which the work emerges. The sonic material was derived from recordings across key environments (see Photo 1–3; Audio Examples 1–3).



**Photo 1.** Seashore environment used as a primary source



**Photo 2.** Community soundscape (daily activity and social interaction) used for field recording.



**Photo 3.** Forest environment as symbolic and narrative sonic space

### Audio Examples:

Audio Example 1. [Seashore environment recording](#)

Audio Example 2. [Community soundscape recording](#)

Audio Example 3. [Forest environment recording](#)

### Compositional Translation: Structural and Sonic Realisation

The Compositional Translation stage transformed cultural material into musical structure through a hybrid approach combining programme music, cinematic composition, electroacoustic practice, and Indigenous rhythmic logic. This process involved the generation of what may be described as “fixed ideas”—recurring sonic motifs associated with narrative elements and character identities.

### Formal Organisation: Ternary Structure and Narrative Cyclicity

The work adopts a ternary (ABA) formal structure, reinterpreted through Kodzi storytelling principles:

**A (Opening / Community):** environmental soundscape and initial setting

**B (Dream / Conflict–Resolution):** central narrative of tension, ancestral intervention, and reconciliation

**A' (Return):** re-entry into the original environment, transformed through narrative experience

This structure departs from Western teleological development by emphasising cyclical return and transformation, where the closing section recontextualises earlier material rather than simply repeating it.

### Sectional Design: “Beats” as Modular Units

Within the broader ternary (ABA) structure, the composition unfolds as a continuous scene articulated through three major **beats**, each comprising smaller sectional units that correspond to narrative shifts.

#### Beat 1 — Establishment (A: Opening / Reality)

- Introductory sonic space (cinematic textures)
- Community soundscape (field recordings)
- Interior domestic scene

This opening beat establishes the sonic and spatial context, grounding the work in environmental sound and everyday life.

#### Beat 2 — Disruption and Transformation (B: Dream / Conflict–Resolution)

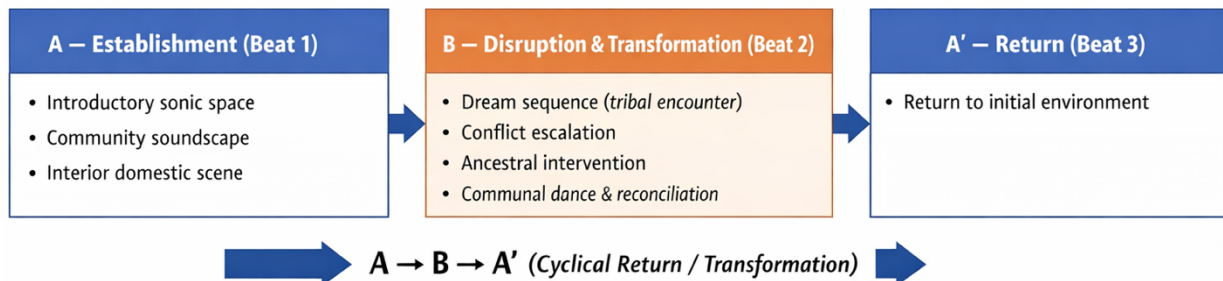
- Dream sequence (tribal encounter)
- Conflict escalation
- Ancestral intervention
- Communal dance and reconciliation

This central beat functions as the structural and narrative core, where tension, interaction, and eventual resolution unfold through intensified rhythmic, textural, and motivic activity.

### Beat 3- Return (A': Re-entry / Transformation)

Return to the initial environment

The final beat reintroduces the opening environment, now transformed through the preceding events, completing the cyclical formal logic. Together, these beats operate as modular formal units, enabling flexible transitions, layered development, and recursive structuring rather than linear progression.



**Figure 1.** Structural diagram showing ternary (ABA) form and beat-based segmentation of *Perpl Greypts*

The structure reflects a cyclical reinterpretation of ternary form, where return is understood as transformation rather than repetition.

### Sonic Material: Environmental and Composed Integration

The work integrates acousmatic (environmental) sound with composed musical material. Field recordings provide an initial sonic grounding, while composed elements—loops, synthetic textures, and instrumental gestures—gradually introduce abstraction. This creates a continuum between documentary sound and compositional intervention, reflecting the transition from lived experience to symbolic representation.

### Rhythmic Organisation and Loop-Based Processes

Rhythmic structure is governed by loop-based organisation, reflecting cyclical principles found in Kodzi performance. Repetition functions as a stabilising force, while variation and layering introduce complexity. Aleatoric techniques are employed through controlled indeterminacy, allowing certain layers to interact flexibly. This results in a dynamic rhythmic field characterised by shifting alignment and temporal fluidity rather than fixed metric hierarchy.

### Motivic System: Fixed Ideas and Narrative Mapping

Motivic organisation is structured through fixed ideas, functioning analogously to leitmotifs. Distinct sonic gestures are associated with different narrative entities (e.g., tribal identities, conflict, resolution).

- Fragmented motifs signal tension and instability
- Recurring choral-derived material functions as a moral anchor
- Converging motifs articulate reconciliation

Rather than undergoing traditional thematic development, these motifs are recontextualised across sections, allowing meaning to emerge through interaction. This is particularly evident in the ancestral motif, which serves as a symbolic convergence point within the work (see Audio Example 4).

**Audio Example 4:** [Ancestral motif illustrating symbolic and structural convergence.](#)

### Textural Development: From Fragmentation to Convergence

Texture articulates the narrative trajectory. Early sections are marked by fragmentation and discontinuity, while later sections exhibit layered cohesion and density. This shift from dispersion to convergence mirrors the movement from conflict to unity, reinforcing narrative meaning through sonic organisation.

### Audiovisual Reinscription: Visual Score and Digital Mediation

The Audiovisual Reinscription stage extends the composition into a visual domain using Cubase, Premiere Pro, and After Effects. The resulting work functions as both an audiovisual artefact and a visual score, where imagery and motion contribute to structural perception. Visual elements are synchronised with musical transitions, reinforcing sectional

boundaries and narrative progression. Minimalist design and symbolic colour (e.g., purple for unrest, grapes for harmony) provide non-verbal cues aligned with sonic transformation. Digital tools are not treated as neutral but are adapted to reflect Indigenous temporal and spatial logics. Cyclical time is embedded in editing structures, and spatial audio reflects communal listening environments rather than individualised perception. The audiovisual dimension of the work reinforces structural and symbolic transformation (see Figure 5; Video Example 1).



**Photo 4.** Still images from *Perpl Greyps* showing symbolic colour mapping (purple—conflict; grapes—unity) aligned with structural transformation in the audiovisual composition.



**Video Example 1.** *Perpl Greyps* (Web 1)

### **Aesthetic and Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the process, compositional decisions were guided by Mfantse sonic logic and ethical considerations of representation. Western musical elements were incorporated selectively, ensuring that they did not override Indigenous structural principles. The work does not aim to reproduce traditional forms but to engage them through dialogic transformation. While fictionalisation was necessary, care was taken to maintain cultural integrity through transparency and reflective practice. Although practical constraints limited community feedback, future iterations aim to incorporate collaborative engagement and local dissemination. In this sense, the work remains an evolving project of cultural mediation rather than a fixed artefact.

## **Discussion**

### **Music, Technology, and Humanity**

The Asempayetsia framework shows how Indigenous epistemologies can influence not only artistic practice but also music-theoretical thinking within technologically mediated contexts. Instead of viewing decoloniality as an abstract critique, this study has demonstrated, through compositional analysis, how musical structure, form, and meaning can originate from culturally rooted logics. This section considers three main implications: the positioning of African knowledge within technological systems, the relationship between preservation and transformation, and the role of artistic research in reshaping analytical approaches in music studies.

### **African Knowledge in Technological Contexts**

The integration of digital tools within *Perpl Greyeps* demonstrates how Indigenous epistemologies can function within modern technological settings without being overridden by them. Instead of viewing technology as a neutral framework, the compositional process adapts digital systems, such as sequencing grids, audiovisual synchronisation, and spatialisation, to fit cyclical temporality and relational structures rooted in Kodzi logic. From a music-theoretical perspective, this indicates that technological mediation does not necessarily enforce external structure but can be reconfigured to support alternative organisational principles. For instance, the use of loop-based sequencing in the work reflects cyclical rhythmic logic rather than metric regularity. At the same time, audiovisual alignment emphasises sectional form through narrative cues rather than abstract formal markers. In this sense, Asempayetsia contributes to emerging discussions on digital music theory by illustrating how non-Western temporal and structural models can be articulated within digital compositional environments. Technology becomes a mediating layer through which Indigenous musical logics are extended, rather than replaced.

### **Preservation and Transformation as Structural Processes**

The relationship between preservation and transformation, often seen as a conceptual tension, is demonstrated in this study as a structural and compositional process. Instead of simply preserving Kodzi through documentation, the framework interprets its organising principles—such as repetition, variation, and communal interaction—by translating them into new musical forms. As demonstrated in the case study, cyclical form, loop-based rhythm, and motivic recontextualisation serve as mechanisms of continuity. These elements do not imitate traditional performance but rearticulate its underlying logic within a new medium. In this sense, preservation occurs not at the level of surface material but at the level of structural organisation. This aligns with Nketia's (1974) notion of "continuity through creativity," but broadens it into a music-theoretical context by illustrating how continuity can be traced through formal design, rhythmic processes, and textural development. Transformation, therefore, is not a break from tradition but a way in which its internal logic remains active.

### **The Human Dimension in Musical Structure**

The human aspect of the framework is expressed not only through thematic content but also through structural and sonic choices. For example, the use of environmental recordings places the composition within real sonic environments, while the gradual move from fragmentation to textural unity mirrors processes of social negotiation and reconciliation. From an analytical standpoint, this suggests that musical structure can incorporate relational and ethical elements, rather than functioning solely as formal abstraction. The organisation of sound in *Perpl Greyeps*, particularly the shift from disjunction to convergence, acts as both a compositional and conceptual representation of communal renewal. In technologically mediated contexts, where algorithmic processes increasingly influence musical creation, this focus on relational structure provides an alternative to purely data-driven models. It highlights the potential for a human-centred organisation, in which musical meaning arises from interaction, memory, and symbolic association.

### **Artistic Research and the Reconfiguration of Analysis**

One of the main contributions of this study is its framing of artistic research as a form of music-theoretical creation. Instead of analysing an existing piece through external frameworks, the compositional process itself produces analytical insights. This approach challenges conventional distinctions between composition and analysis. In *Perpl Greyeps*, structural decisions—such as the use of ternary form, loop-based rhythm, and leitmotivic mapping—are not only compositional strategies but also analytical propositions about how music can be organised. In this sense, Asempayetsia contributes to a broader reconfiguration of music theory, where knowledge is not solely derived from abstract systems but can emerge through practice-based articulation. This aligns with Borgdorff's (2012) understanding of artistic research, while extending it into a specifically music-theoretical context.

### **Toward a Structurally Grounded Digital Humanism**

The findings of this study suggest that the relationship between music, technology, and humanity can be understood through the lens of structural mediation. Rather than opposing technological systems, the Asempayetsia framework

demonstrates how they can be adapted to support culturally grounded forms of musical organisation. This results in a form of digital practice in which:

- cyclical temporality replaces linear progression
- relational structuring replaces hierarchical organisation
- symbolic density complements sonic abstraction

Within this model, music functions as a site where technological processes and human experience intersect through structure. The integration of Indigenous epistemologies into compositional design offers a way to expand music theory beyond its traditional boundaries, while maintaining analytical clarity.

### **Conclusion**

This study positions Asempayetsia as a compositional-analytical framework within music theory, grounded in Akan-Mfantse epistemologies and expressed through artistic research. By converting Kodzi's narrative logic into musical structure, the framework shows how Indigenous knowledge systems can influence form, rhythm, texture, and audiovisual organisation. Through the case study *Perpl Greyps*, the paper has shown that:

- cyclical temporality can function as an organising principle in formal design
- loop-based rhythmic processes can replace linear metric hierarchies
- symbolic motifs can operate as structural anchors within narrative composition
- audiovisual integration can extend musical form beyond sound into visual and spatial domains

These findings advance music theory by proposing an alternative model where structure arises from culturally embedded logics rather than inherited analytical frameworks (Komabu & Dawson, 2024). In this context, Asempayetsia does not dismiss existing systems but broadens the field by introducing additional modes of organisation and interpretation. More broadly, the study demonstrates that artistic research can serve as a method of theoretical production, in which compositional practice generates analytical insight. This reconfiguration of the relationship between making and theorising opens new possibilities for how music theory can be defined, taught, and developed. To reinscribe heritage, then, is not simply to preserve the past, but to allow it to operate within contemporary forms of knowledge. In Asempayetsia, this process unfolds through sound, structure, and media—where Indigenous epistemologies continue to shape musical thought in the present.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

The Asempayetsia framework goes beyond compositional practice into teaching, technological design, and research methods. Its main contribution is showing how Indigenous epistemologies can inform not only artistic creation but also music theory, curriculum planning, and digital mediation.

#### **Educational Implications: Reframing Music-Theoretical Pedagogy**

Asempayetsia provides a model for rethinking music education by positioning composition as a space for theory development rather than as the application of pre-existing analytical systems. Many formal curricula remain centred on Western tonal frameworks, notation-based analysis, and historical musicology, often marginalising oral, improvisational, and embodied knowledge systems. Integrating Asempayetsia into pedagogy would enable students to explore musical structure through cultural excavation, compositional translation, and audiovisual realisation. In this approach, theoretical understanding develops through practice: rhythmic organisation, formal design, and symbolic structuring are examined as results of culturally grounded processes. This shift redefines music theory as a plural field, where analytical models are adaptable and stem from varied epistemic contexts. It also supports broader educational aims that emphasise cultural continuity and knowledge transfer, all while upholding analytical rigour.

#### **Technological Implications: Structuring Digital Tools Through Indigenous Logic**

The framework also suggests new directions for the use of digital technologies in music. Rather than adapting cultural material to fit existing technological systems, Asempayetsia demonstrates how tools such as digital audio workstations, audiovisual editing platforms, and algorithmic processes can be reconfigured to support alternative structural logics. In

the case study, loop-based sequencing, audiovisual synchronisation, and spatial design were adapted to reflect cyclical temporality and relational organisation. This suggests that digital environments are not inherently linked to Western compositional models, but can support multiple approaches to musical structure. Future applications may include the development of AI systems trained on Indigenous rhythmic and narrative patterns, immersive environments that simulate participatory musical spaces, and digital archives organised according to culturally specific ontologies. These directions point toward a model of technological engagement grounded in structural adaptability rather than standardisation.

### Research Implications: Expanding Music-Theoretical Inquiry

Asempayetsia adds to a growing body of work that broadens music theory beyond traditional limits. By showing how compositional practice can yield analytical understanding, the framework supports a research model in which theory develops through creation. Future research might investigate comparative applications of similar methods across different cultural contexts, exploring how Indigenous epistemologies shape musical structure within various traditions. Such work would enhance a broader transcultural understanding of music theory, where multiple systems of organisation coexist and interact. Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration among composers, theorists, technologists, and cultural practitioners can further develop methods for analysing and producing music that operates outside conventional analytical frameworks. In this regard, Asempayetsia offers not only a model but also a starting point for wider methodological exploration.

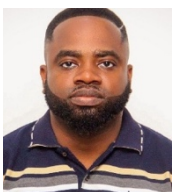
### Summary of Implications

Taken together, these implications suggest that Asempayetsia functions as:

- a pedagogical model for practice-based theory learning
- a technological approach to structuring digital musical environments
- a research framework for expanding music-theoretical discourse

Its significance lies in demonstrating that Indigenous knowledge systems can generate not only artistic content, but also analytical frameworks and compositional models.

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## Research Article

# Pedagogical approach and performance methods in Kamil Ahmadov's mugham school

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### Abstract

This study was dedicated to the investigation of the unique characteristics and styles of the tar playing of Kamil Alisattar oglu Ahmadov, one of the artists who made exceptional contributions to the history of Azerbaijani mugham art in the 20th century, Honored cultural worker, tar player, and mugham connoisseur. The purpose of this study is to analyze preserving the traditions of Azerbaijani mugham performance, ensuring that the performance is easily perceived by the listener, leaving a deep emotional impact on them, and for this, delivering the elements and elements of artistic performance with technical mastery were among the tasks set by teacher Kamil during the teaching process. Kamil Ahmadov both restored sections called bardashts, which were performed at the beginning of the Azerbaijani mugham tradition, and composed new bardashts. This is one of the innovations he introduced to the instrumental performance of mugham. He also incorporated sections that had been forgotten and not performed in some mughams. In this article these sections are analyzed for the first time in musical notation. Furthermore, the study addresses the use of correct stroke and mizrab techniques in tar performance, which is characteristic of Kamil's teaching style, with the goal of making mugham performance more artistic and aesthetic. In this study, along with Kamil Ahmadov's work, the innovations he introduced to mugham performance were analyzed both theoretically and through documentary analysis. Examples of musical notation are included in the article. The development of a new mugham teaching program, the changes he made to the mugham teaching methods, as well as the organization of mugham performance according to the academic year and the inclusion of mugham percussion instruments in the performance are some of the innovations he brought to mugham performance.

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## Introduction

The culture, art and artistic heritage of the Azerbaijani people have a centuries-old history. The musical art of our people has improved over the centuries, has passed a unique historical development path and reached the level of our modern times. It should be noted that, along with various types of our folk music, professional musical creativity based on oral tradition has become even richer and has taken its rightful place among universal values.

Mugham is a professional musical genre of the Azerbaijani people with an oral tradition, perceived through hearing, transmitted through memory from master to student, from singer to singer, from performer to performer. However,

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during these processes, it was an essential condition that the subtle nuances and unique features of mugham were preserved (Hajibeyli, U. 1965).

Mugham is the general name for the largest genre of traditional Azerbaijani music, covering all types of mugham forms, although each of them has its own separate name. The main musical forms representing this genre are desgah (vocal-instrumental or purely instrumental types), mugham (vocal-instrumental, solo-instrumental and solo-vocal types) and zerbi-mugham. There are 7 main and 3 auxiliary mughams in Azerbaijan. The main mughams are “Rast”, “Shur”, “Segah”, “Chahargah”, “Bayati-Shiraz”, “Shüşter” and “Humayun”, and the auxiliary mughams are “Shahnaz”, “Saranj” and “2nd type Chahargah” (Akhundov, I. 2015).

Although mughams are called dastgah in Iran, mugham, dastgah in Azerbaijan, maqam in Arabia and Turkey, istikhbar and nuba in North Africa, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, raga in India, khayyal in Pakistan, makom in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, kyi in Kazakhstan, and muqam in Turkmenistan and western China (Uyghurs), they are all the same type of music in terms of genre. They only differ in form, level of development, direction and emotional impact (Imrani R. 1998).

As we have noted, it was difficult to obtain notation, taking into account the richness of the musicality inherent in mughams, as well as the nuances of performance specific to each mugham. In connection with the application of the European notation system adopted in the 20th century in Azerbaijani music, composers and musicologists operating after the 1930s put into notation and published mugham dastgahs, zerbi-mugams, tasnifs and rengs (Zöhrabov R. 1991).

If we look at the sources related to the notation of mughams, we will see that the ancient “nevma” notation, “menzural notation”, the Russian “znamya”, “kryuk” notations, and tablature tables of different peoples are known from history. Many scholars in the Middle East have also put forward different methods and rules of notation. Among them are Khalil Ibn-Ahmadi, Al-Kindi, Mousilli Ibrahim, Abu al-Faraj Isfahani, Abu Nasir al-Farabi. However, the tablature created by Safiaddin Urmavi was considered more perfect and more accurate. This notation was used in the Middle East until the 16th century. Therefore, it was Safiaddin Urmavi who created the first notation in Azerbaijan. Urmavi recorded each note of the melody with symbols that follow the order of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. His notation was based on the combination of letters of the alphabet and mathematical numbers (Gulamova, 2021).

U. Hajibeyli laid the foundation stone of the theory of maqam in the Azerbaijani musicology of the 20th century. A comprehensive study of his treatises of the medieval period led to an understanding of the main directions of the development of musical culture. It was these that became the fundamental themes of new scientific research. The emergence of U. Hajibeyli's fundamental scientific work "Fundamentals of Azerbaijani folk music" opened a new page in Azerbaijani musicology.

Azerbaijani musicologists, based on the teachings of the great Uzeyir Bey, our prominent literary and artistic figures have repeatedly spoken about the importance of the mugham genre and the valuable examples created in this genre. It is interesting that our mughams, which are the high artistic thinking of the people, are still in the focus of attention of our creative intellectuals and have become the object of research. Each time, the shades of meaning, artistic and aesthetic qualities of mughams are revealed with deep love and inspiration (Khalilov, 1982)

Critic Asif Efendiyev, candidate of philosophical sciences, writes: “Mugham is a dialectical art in terms of its artistic and aesthetic content and form. Each mugham is a philosophical concept. Here the deep philosophical essence of life finds its expression. Because the melodies of mughams have an extraordinary ability to generalize. They reflect a very wide range of life events, moral qualities, thoughts, and passions. Musical images expressing feelings such as love, joy, ecstasy, amazement, anger, and grief create a very multifaceted flow of associations. While listening to mughams, various events come and go before a person's eyes. However, they are unified in our imagination and heart through a single melody. Musical images create a strong connection between very diverse, colorful life events (Khalilov, 1982).

It is necessary to specially note the services of our artists, who have brought our mugham art, which is a part of our national spiritual values, from time to time through the vicissitudes of history to our modern times, enriching them with their own artistic and creative thoughts, and at the same time, in the formation of a new generation of musical and artistic figures. There have been many such talented artists in the history of musical culture. Among these artists are Jabbar

Qaryagdioglu, Khan Shushinski, Seyid Shushinski from our families, and our instrumental tar players Mirza Mansur Mansurov, Gurban Primov, Mammadkhan Bakikhanov and others. One of those who worthily kept alive the creative heritage of these artists was a valuable person, an experienced teacher, a skilled tar player and mugham connoisseur, Honored Worker of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan Kamil Alisattar oglu Ahmadov.

Professor, musicologist R. Zohrabov (1991) has repeatedly noted that he benefited from the art of Kamil teacher throughout his scientific work. He always invited K. Ahmadov as a consultant to his series of programs "From the Treasury of Folk Music" on Azerbaijani television in the 1970s. In these programs, K. Ahmadov would talk with pleasure about famous master tar players, singers, as well as mugham connoisseurs Mirza Mansur, Ahmad Bakikhanov, and S. Shushinsky, about their mastery and the services they rendered to our musical culture. Musicologists from Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan constantly turned to K. Ahmadov for scientific research on mughams.

When writing the poem "Mugham", the national poet B. Vahabzadeh admitted that without my meeting with teacher Kamil, his conversations about mugham, explanations, and the information he gave me, this poem would not have been written. He said: "In the creation of "Mugham", the first person to hold my hand and lead me into that world of secrets, the world of magic, was Kamil Ahmadov" (Babayev, G. 1981).

### **About Kamil Ahmadov**



**Photo 1.** Kamil Ahmadov (1920-1996)

Kamil Ahmadov was born on April 3, 1920 in Baku into a family of craftsmen and jewelers. Since childhood, Kamil, who envied his older brother's playing of the tar, in 1934, contrary to the wishes of his parents, who wanted him to become a jeweler, submitted his documents to the tar class of the Baku Music School. Noticing Kamil's innate talent and also taking into account that Azerbaijani children showed little interest in the violin class, the chairman of the examination commission, the genius Uzeyir Hajibeyli, offered him to study in the violin class and instructed him to bring his parents to school in this regard. However, knowing in advance the opinion of the people at home, he quietly left and did not say a word to anyone, but he did not get rid of the idea of becoming a tar player. This desire led him to the amateur club of the 26 Baku Commissars' House of Culture, where he began to study under the leadership of the tar player Amirulla Mammadbeyli.

After working in the club for a while, in 1936 he achieved his dream. He was accepted into the tar class of the music school. He took lessons from the famous tar players of his time, Mirza Mansur and Ahmadkhan Bakikhanov, became interested in the work of famous singers such as Seyid Shushinsky, studied with master artists, and improved his own style of performance.

K. Ahmadov, who studied in the specialty and mugham classes at the Baku Secondary Specialized Music School named after A. Zeynalli under the guidance of prominent tar players Mirza Mansur, Ahmad Bakikhanov, Amirulla Mammadbayli, and other famous artists of his time, was invited to work in the State Oriental Orchestra in 1937 at the age of 17. Here he worked shoulder to shoulder with already famous tar players Gurban Primov, Amirulla Mammadbayli, Pasha Aliyev, and many other musicians.

A five-year period of Kamil's creative activity was connected with the city of Sumgayit. In 1965-66, with the aim of further improving the teaching of folk musical instruments in Sumgayit, he began working at the only children's music school in the city, upon the order of the Ministry of Culture.

Kamil Muallim also had special attendance in the pedagogical field. Thus, among the dozens of tar players and performers and educators who are currently serving our musical culture and have been awarded honorary titles.

The publicist, writer Gismet Babayev published a book called “Tarzan Kamil Ahmadov” in 1981. I remember that Kamil was talking about, “after this book was published, I sent him a copy of the book as a sign of respect, knowing that the great attention and sympathy of the Great Leader Heydar Aliyev, who was the First Secretary of the Central Committee at that time, was paid to our music and culture. A few days later, the Central Committee called me home and said that Heydar Aliyev wanted to talk to me. I was excited at first because I did not expect this, but then I pulled myself together and answered the call. Heydar Aliyev said that he had received my book and was very satisfied, thanked me and wished me success. I, for my part, thanked him for his great attention and care for our musical culture” (Babayev, 1981).

Since 1982, the mugham program and recommendations compiled by Kamil for the tar class have been used as teaching aids in all secondary specialized music schools. Many forgotten, erased from memory, and unperformed sections have been included in the program thanks to his hard work and research.

Famous literary and cultural figures were also fascinated by Kamil Ahmadov's mugham world. People's poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh said in one of his impressions that “One of the great scholars said beautifully: ‘If a thousand years after my death they whispered in my ear and asked me, “Do you want to live again?” Then I would say: if there is still music and poetry on earth, it is worth living a second time” (Babayev, 1981).

K. Akhmedov was the first teacher in Azerbaijan who decorated almost every one of our folk instruments with such exquisite taste and skill that one could not hide his admiration for such manual skill. Historically, our national wind instruments - balaban, tutek, zurna and ney - have never been decorated with mother-of-pearl. However, Kamil Ahmadov decorated these instruments with mother-of-pearl, giving them a unique charm. These musical instruments, which he made and decorated with mother-of-pearl, were demonstrated at various international and republican exhibitions and achieved great success.



**Photo 2.** National musical instruments decorated with mother-of-pearl by K. Ahmadov

Currently, Kamil Ahmadov's students in various regions of our republic continue his artistic heritage with dignity. For an artist, true immortality is to gain the love of the people, to live in memories. This great love cannot be compared with anything. His regular appearances in the mass media, his scientific and methodological recommendations to musicologists, and his provision of rich experimental, theoretical and historical information to specialists conducting research on mugham studies can be examples of the above.

### **Research Problem**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the unique features of the Kamil Akhmadov school of mugham in the context of playing the instrumental tar. Another aim of the research is to analyze the innovations he brought to instrumental tar playing that characterized the mugham school (restoration of mugham sections and additions to mugham, use of mizrab,

etc.). The main problem of this research is the notated analysis of Kamil Ahmadov's instrumental tar playing techniques and the restored and forgotten mugham sections of some mughams, which were added back to the mugham.

### Method

In the study, the materials were notated and analyzed based on Kamil Ahmadov's mugham performance on the tar instrument. Here, note samples are also presented in the lower clef to visually see the use of the mizrab on the tar instrument in mugham performance. In addition, these note samples are presented in the treble clef, which ensures appropriate performance on the piano instrument. We have used theoretical and practical methods related to instrumental performance techniques, based on the categories of form and content.

### Data Collection and Analysis

In the study, Kamil Ahmadov's unique mugham performance art, the innovations he brought to mugham performance, and the performance characteristics were considered, allowing for reliable results of a clear analysis. The fact that K. Ahmadov's mugham performance creativity was not previously investigated in connection with the analysis of mugham parts (including forgotten mugham sections and bardashts which written for mughams) recorded in another study was also a factor in his selection.

A review of the literature on K. Ahmadov's school of mugham performance was conducted and it was determined that, based on classical traditions, he continued the instrumental performance path of master artists who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and was able to create his own style throughout his creativity. The method of "Defining the Pedagogical Method" by A.Badalbeyli (Badalbeyli, A. 1969) and R.Zohrabov (Zohrabov, R. 1991) was used to determine how his unique pedagogical method was built and what teaching methods he used.

Four criteria have been identified to analyze K. Ahmadov's school of tar playing and pedagogical method. These criteria are presented in the form of a list below:

- Establishment and preservation of classical traditions in instrumental mugham playing
- Reintroduction of forgotten mugham sections and corners into mugham teaching
- Writing bardasht for mughams without an introduction (bardasht) based on vocal-instrumental mugham playing
- Instructions on the use of mizrab technique in tar playing

### Findings

#### The mizrabs using in the tar instrument

It is known that mughams are studied and performed in two directions: instrumental and vocal instrumental. The tar musical instrument has a special place in the instrumental performance of mugham. Playing the tar has its own special features (mizrab strokes, mute finger, khum verma, finger sliding, etc.).

One of the features characteristic of K. Ahmadov's pedagogical method is the use of mizrab in performance. In the notation of Akram Mammadli (2010), he uses the unique mugham tones of the tar instrument and shows its characteristic strokes on the note as they appear, and thus we can clearly observe Kamil Ahmadov's playing style. The strokes used by the mugham expert Kamil muallim embody various sequences of Santur mizrab, Chahar mizrab, Doyma mizrab, Alif mizrab, and Gosha mizrab.

He used certain strokes and mizrabs to make the mugham performance more artistic, aesthetic and meaningful. For example, he called the technically difficult phrase in the Bayati-Isfahan section of the "Bayati-Shiraz" mugham "Feli ravan". In addition, he named a technically difficult performance in the compound phrases in the "Segah" and "Bayat-Shiraz" mughams "Hamla" (Attaca). He learned this from his master Mirza Mansur.

Another interesting use of the mizrab is found in the "Zangi Shotur" corner of the "Cahargah" mugham. This was called the Cahar mizrab.



**Figure 1.** Notation of the Cahar mizrab

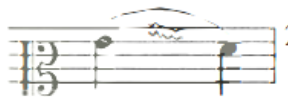
He used the mizrab movement to create a harmonic sound with open and closed strings in the Maye of the "Mahur Hindi" mugham. In teaching mugham, he paid special attention to the methods of using mizrabs, the correct application of strokes, and the rules for tuning the tar. For the clarity of mugham expression, he strictly prohibited incorrect performance methods such as upper mizrab instead of lower mizrab, tremola instead of right-left mizrab, etc.



**Figure 2.** Finger swipe symbol in notation



**Figure 3.** Two-way (up, down) finger swipe



**Figure 4.** Tremola slide sign in music notation



**Figure 5.** Khum (xum) mizrab

You press the bowl of the tar to your chest and pull your arm slightly towards you. After this movement, a resonance occurs in the tar, which is also called a khum (xum). This is one of the interesting and famous use of mizrab technique in the tar playing. He considered it a positive thing to use a means of expression called "khum" to create an additional sounding timbre effect. In this case, the tar is pressed to the chest from the pelvic part through the right wrist, and the arm part is slightly pulled back with the left hand, bringing the strings into harmony, which creates a harmonious effect in mugham performance.

### **The innovation brought by K. Ahmadov to tar playing**

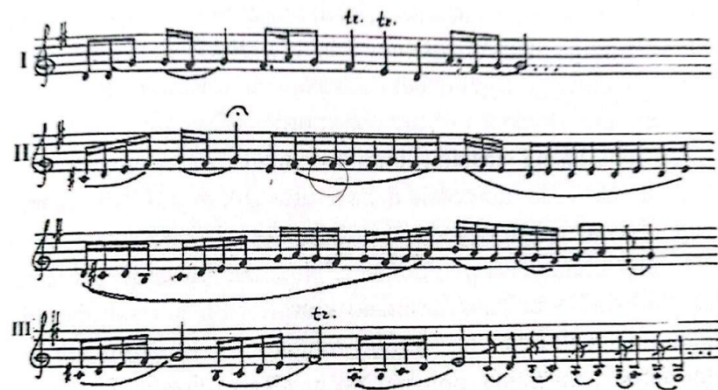
The study identifies K. Ahmadov's school of tar playing and the innovations and pedagogical methods he brought to it. Among the innovations he brought to instrumental tar playing are the use of the mizrab technique in the performance of mughams and the teaching of mughams based on classical traditions.

Talking about the innovation that Kamil Ahmadov brought to tar the playing, it would be appropriate to provide information about that, he has revived many forgotten mugham sections by playing them. In order to prevent these mugham sections from being forgotten, he combined the "Khojesta", ancient "Vilayeti" and new "Vilayeti-Dilkesh" sections in "Rast". He has worked the "Qarai", which is used as "ayaq" in "Rast", into a full section based on the mugham breaths of Seyid Shushinsky (Ganiyev T., Ganiyeva A. 2023).

He also played and recorded the sections such as "Takhdigah" in "Segah", "Jidayi" and "Kurd" in "Bayati-Kurd", and "Zamin-khara", "Dugah", "Maverannahr", and "Shah Khatai" in "Bayati-Qajar".

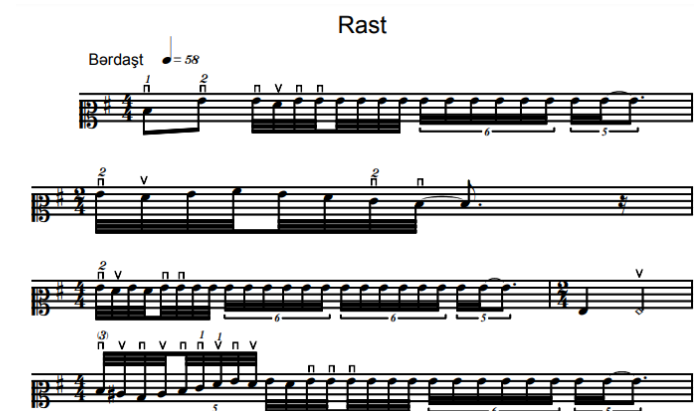
One of the innovations that K. Ahmadov brought to tar playing is related to the teaching of the "Rast" mugham. First of all, we should note that in medieval musicology, "Rast" is considered the first and the basis of all other mughams. Musicologists have called "Rast" the "Mother of Mughams". Uzeyir Hajibeyov says in his book "Fundamentals of Azerbaijani Folk Music" (Hajibeyov, U. 1985) that mughams have undergone changes. He called Rast "the only mugham that has stood firm against the convulsive influence of time and events." This mugham has managed to preserve to this day not only its name and basic intonation, but even its tonic (base).

During the lesson, K. Akhmedov performed the "Bardasht" section of the "Rast" mugham in three variations. He restored the ancient Bardasht of the Rast mugham.



**Figure 6.** "Bardasht" section from the "Rast" mugham in three versions

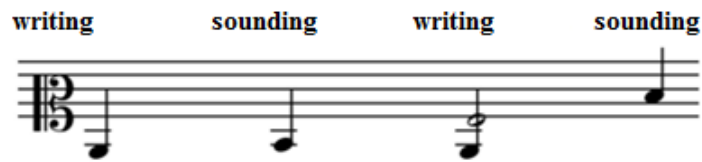
The presented Bardasht is notated in the treble clef (or G clef). This ensures convenient performance of the mugham on the piano.



**Figure 7.** One piece from the Bardasht section of the Rast mugham, performed by K. Ahmadov, notated by A. Mammadli

It should be noted that the mezzo-soprano clef is used for playing notes on the tar instrument. The example above presents the recording of the Bardasht section in the mezzo-soprano clef. The example presented shows the use of the mizrab on the notes. The use of the lower and upper mizrab that has been given in the musical example, allows us to describe the character of the mugham. On the other hand in the beginning of the section upper mizrabs (II) in eighth notes and the application at this time, and the continuous recording of the strokes in thirty-second and sixteenth notes in the zil majid until the end, are methodologically very helpful to the student in learning mugham.

When playing the "Rast" mugham, the first root string of the tar and the white string next to it are tuned to "d", and the second root string is tuned to "g". The notation below gives the spelling and pronunciation of the first root string and the white string next to it:



**Figure 8.** Strings positions in the Rast mugham

One of the innovations that K. Ahmadov brought to instrumental mugham performance was the addition of Bardasht (Bazmigah) to the mugham "Mahur-hindi". This part was taken from K. Ahmadov's performance and notated by T. Ganiyev. This part was presented in both musical keys.

**"Mahur-hindi" mugham Bardasht section**

**Figure 9.** The use of the mizrab was recommended to students by teacher Kamil.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the from the beginning of the 20th century Bardasht (introduction) part was not performed in the mughams "Humayun" and "Bayati-shiraz" until Kamil teacher started performing of its. However, first he wrote Bardash for these mughams based on the mugham performance of the singer S. Shushinsky. And two of these mughams mentioned up to the present time begin with the bardasht written by K.Ahmadov.

It should also be noted that a section called "Huzzal" was previously performed in Humayun mugham. However, then K.Ahmadov included the section "Bidad" in Humayun instead of this section, and it is still performed as part of this mugham.

**“Humayun” mugham, Bidad section**

**Figure 12.** This notation belongs to A.Ganiyeva from the performance of K.Ahmadov

Another element that Kamil Ahmadov introduced into the teaching of instrumental mughams was the addition of the “Dilruba” section to the “Bayatı-Shiraz” mugham. Previously, the “Dilruba” section was performed in a different character in the “Dügah” mugham. However, later he restored this section with absolutely unlike character and included it in the “Bayatı-Shiraz” mugham. The singer S. Shushinsky also approved of this at the time. It should be noted that K. Ahmadov worked as a concertmaster in S. Shushinsky’s class for more than 20 years.

**“Bayatı-Shiraz” mugham, Dilruba section**

**Figure 13.** Notation of Dilruba part belongs to Abdul Hashimov who was the student of K.Ahmadov

While explaining the philosophical meaning of mughams, Kamil Muallim linked and analyzed the Eastern philosophical worldviews and ideology that existed during the period when mugham was formed with the content and structures of mughams. For example, he linked the fact that existence consists of 4 elements and is called composition (earth, air, water, fire) in Eastern philosophy with the “Terkib” (Composition) section in the “Humayun” and “Shushtar” mughams, and also showed the expression of these elements in the instrument very beautifully. According to his religious worldview, the unity of God, the creation of man by his will, the bitter-sweet, good-evil, struggle-and-

heroic life of man, reflected in the sections and corners of mugham, he explained in detail the connection between mizrab performance methods, the effect on the intonation of voices, and their movement (Ganiyev and Ganiyeva, 2023).

In order to perfectly understand and remember mugham, and to create an abundance of mugham material in the student's mind, teacher Kamil recommended devoting part of the lesson to listening to mugham.

Kamil teacher also paid more attention to preserving the classical traditions of mugham performance and was more demanding in this regard. For this reason, he considered it advisable not to rush during the performance, and not to allow performance methods, the use of strokes, or the use of mizrab that were alien to the character and essence of the mugham being performed. He constantly instilled in his students that there is a dramaturgical development in every mugham and that this principle should be observed during performance, and explained that this development also exists between sections and phrases.

### **Conclusion**

K. Ahmadov was also a virtuoso tar player and performer. He created his own mugham school during his lifetime. Today, hundreds of Kamil's students continue his principles and traditions in performing and teaching our mughams with dignity. He skillfully applied the performance elements and elements of the Seyid Shushinsky school of khanande to instrumental teaching. Whenever possible, he himself studied the qusha, bazhaz, and zengulas used in khanande and taught them to his students. He masterfully handled each of the performing and pedagogical areas of the tar. He did not let go of the tar until the end of his life, and 57 years of pedagogical and performing activities constituted the goal of his meaningful life.

Preserving the most beautiful traditions of the Azerbaijani tar-mugham school, on this basis, making the performance easily perceived by the listener, leaving a deep sensory-emotional impact on him, and for this, delivering the elements and elements of artistic performance with technical mastery were among the tasks set by Kamil during the teaching process. Here, he paid very serious attention to using the synchronous movement of the right wrist and fingers of the left hand as a means of artistic expression from technical shades and the correct selection of the application. K. Ahmadov advised the correct use of darmads and colors, dirings and tasnifs in their place during accompaniment, depending on the nature of the mugham dastgahs. Currently, the basis of mugham teaching in music educational institutions of our republic is the traditions of the Kamil Ahmadov mugham school, which is distinguished by its specific features.

The study, which includes an analysis of the innovations brought by Kamil Ahmadov to mugham performance, reveals that:

- Kamil Ahmadov is a teacher who remains faithful to the classical traditions of mugham and considers it his priority to pass these traditions on to future generations.
- He has a unique style of performing mugham, based on classical traditions.
- His teaching approach is different from other teachers. He approaches each student individually.
- K. Ahmadov was closely involved not only in the practical issues of mugham art, but also in its historical-theoretical, socio-philosophical problems, and made scientific and practical contributions to this field
- The main thing that distinguished teacher Kamil from other performers and tar players was his innovative approach to teaching mugham and his deep knowledge of its teaching methodology.
- Along with his pedagogical activities, teacher Kamil also served our national musical culture with his extensive educational activities in the field of mugham art

The results indicate that with the findings of this study, the importance of The multifaceted development paths of Kamil Ahmadov's life and creativity, his main characteristics, the original, unique performance styles and repertoire he brought to Azerbaijani mugham teaching and performance, his loyalty to classical heritage and tradition, and the analysis of the national and spiritual values brought to our musical history by the work associations that turned into an art school during his communication with the prominent singer Seyid Shushinsky are reflected.

The study of Kamil Ahmadov's rich mugham legacy, his notation, and the analysis of his mughams are relevant and important issues. Further research in this area is warranted.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the limitations of this study, the relatively short time frame presented by the author, the chosen study design provides recommendations for future research.

- This article presents the most comprehensive study of Azerbaijani tar players and tar playing in English, written by Kamil Ahmadov. From a similar perspective, one can also look at his other works written in the field of Azerbaijani instrument studies.
- Comparisons can be made by analyzing instrumental players in Azerbaijan based on their inimitable playing styles.

### Recommendations for Practitioners

This research is at a fundamental stage and contains information about the existence and use of mugham intonations in ghazal romances. The results of this study are referenced by those who work in the field of instrumental mugham performance. Musicologists, instrumentalists and art historians may also refer to this study. However, researchers interested in the use of mugham in the tar playing, as well as the individual approach methods will be an interesting resource for academic readers and may find this study fundamental. This study still needs to develop more comprehensive data as a reliable basis for future research in the applied stages.

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## Research Article

# The transformation of the song genre in Turkish makam music and the influence of Egyptian films: the example of the film "Harun al-Rashid's Favorite"

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Sadettin Kaynak

Turkish makam music

### Abstract

The Egyptian film we are discussing, originally titled 'Denanir' and released in Turkey in 1941 under the name 'Harun Reşid'n Gözdesi' (Harun al-Rashid's Favourite) in İpek cinemas, was directed by Egyptian director Ahmed Bedirhan (1909-1959) on 29 September 1940. In line with the "nationalisation" or "indigenisation" policies of the period, Sadettin Kaynak, who created Turkish "adapted songs" instead of the film's original Arabic songs, opened up an important field in Turkish classical music composition. In our study, the original songs and the adapted Turkish songs in the film *Harun Reşid'in Gözdesi* were analysed comparatively in terms of form, and their effects on song form were examined in the context of the interaction between Egyptian music and Turkish classical music. The interaction between Turks and Arabs since the Ottoman period can be seen both in social life and in music. Although this exchange weakened politically during the Republican period, it continued in the cultural and social spheres. As a result, this interaction, which became widespread with the cinema sector, affected Turkish makam music in terms of form, instrument and makam usage, especially within the framework of Sadettin Kaynak's composition. In addition to discussing these issues in our study, suggestions are presented in line with the common points of the two music in the corpus, which we can call 'makam geography' as a common culture. For example, works composed by Sadettin Kaynak that do not conform to the song form can be considered as 'kaside song' or 'cycle song' in line with their structures, instead of collecting them under the name of 'fantezi song'. These suggestions are of course open to discussion. They can be varied as a result of new propositions and can be used for analyses when a common consensus is reached.

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## Introduction

The song form has been present in sources since the 17th century. In Ali Ufki Bey's work *Mecmua i Saz ü Söz*, four types of song are seen, two in the Hüseyini makam and two in the Segâh makam. The type of song in the collection is structurally the same as the folk song (Cevher, 1995: 51). Although the song form in Ali Ufki Bey resembles the folk song, in the Hafız Post Collection, written in the same century, songs with similar lyrics and aruz meters are encountered (Doğrusöz, 1993).

In the 18th century, Kantemiroğlu describes the song form as follows: "A song can have six or eight couplets. It is only composed with the Devr-i Revan and Sofyan rhythms. One couplet of the song forms the ground, another couplet forms

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the middle section. The third couplet has the same compositional structure as the first couplet" (Tura, 2001: 186). According to this classification, the form structure is as follows: ABA. According to the 18th-century form of the song, the first and third lines correspond to what we now call the 'refrain'. In the same century, 551 different song types in various makams are found in the lyrics collection of Hekimbaşı Abdülaziz Efendi (Kılıç, 2023: 1904).

The song genre, first named by Yahya Kemal Beyatlı and beginning with the Treaty of Pasarofça signed with Austria and its ally Venice in 1718, spread to a wide audience during the 'Tulip Era'. The most important song composer of this period is considered to be Tanburi Mustafa Çavuş. During the Tulip Era, many songs were composed by composers such as İbrahim Ağa, Şakir Ağa, Tahir Ağa, and Nikoğas Ağa (Akgün, Giray, 2023: 159). However, the form structure of the ensemble shows considerable diversity during this period. For example, although Kantemiroğlu states that no songs were composed outside of the Devr-i Revan and Sofyan styles, songs composed in styles such as Evsat, Ağır Düyek, Çifte Sofyan, etc., can be found during this period. For instance, İbrahim Ağa's song "Sabah Olsun Ben Şu Yerden Gideyim" is in the Evsat style, and its form is as follows (Figure 1).

EMİN ONGAN  
ÜSKÜDAR MÜSİKİ  
CEMİYETİ NEŞRİYATI

Rep. no.: 9000

**MAHUR ŞARKI**

"Sabah olsun ben şu yerden gideyim" Beste : İbrahim AĞA  
Güfte : Karacaoğlan

Usül : Evsat

(A) Ah Sa bah ol sun ben şu yer den  
gi de yim a man gi de yim câ nım

(B) Ga rip bül bül gi bi fer yâd  
e de yim a man e de yim câ nım

(A) Sen du rur ken ya ben ki me  
gi de yim a man gi de yim câ nım

(B) Nakarat Şa kı bül bül var u yan dır dır  
Ben kı ya mam sen u yan dır dır

yâ ri mi a man yâ ri mi câ nım  
e ş i mi a man e ş i mi câ nım

Dr.Semra Özgin  
Temmuz-2004

Sabah olsun ben şu yerden gideyim  
Garip bülbül gibi feryâd edeyim  
Sen dururken ya ben kime gideyim  
Şakı bülbül var uyandır yârimi  
Ben kıyamam sen uyandır eşimi ..

Sabah oldu tan yerleri atıyor  
Cümle kuşlar destur olmuş ötüyor  
İki hasret sarılmışlar yatıyor  
Şakı bülbül var uyandır yârimi  
Ben kıyamam sen uyandır eşimi ...

**Figure 1.** Form structure of the song "Sabah Olsun Ben Şu Yerden Gideyim"

As seen in Figure 1, İbrahim Ağa's song is structured as ABAB (Chorus) and has a double-structured form. However, the repeating B part is also used in what we call a chorus today. The Buselik song "Zülfünder Benim Baht-ı Siyahım," which is considered the first composition of Hammamizâde Dede Efendi, the most important composer of makam music of the same period, and which played an important role in his fame, also contains the murabba structure in the classical fasıl (Figure 2).

EMİN ONGAN  
ÜSKÜDAR MÜSİKİ  
CEMİYETİ NESRİYATI

Rep. no.: 11725

**BÜSELİK ŞARKI**  
"Zülfündedir benim baht-ı siyahım"

Usûl : Ağır Aksaksemâi

Beste : Hammamizâde İsmâil Dede Ef.  
Güfte : Keçecizade İzzet Molla

(A)

Ah Zül fün de dir be be nim  
bah ti si yâ hım ce nan ey

(A1)

Sen de kal dı ge ge ce  
gün düz ni gâ hım ce nan ey  
a man be li yâ  
rim a man a

(B)

man in ci tir miş se ni  
me ğer ki â hı hım  
me ğer ki â

(A1)

hı hım ce nan ey Se ni sev dım  
o o dur be nim gü nâ  
hım ce nan ey a man be li yâ  
rim

Dr.Semra Özgün  
Ağustos-2019  
Kaynak : C.Kosal

**Figure 2.** The form of the song "Zülfündedir Benim Baht-ı Siyahım"

As seen in Figure 2, the song "Zülfündedir Benim Baht-ı Siyahım" was composed by Dede Efendi in the Ağır Aksak Semai rhythm and in the murabba form, AA1BA1. Works of this type are examples of the diversification of the song genre's identity, and especially in the 19th century, many forms of the form were seen in the works of composers such as Hacı Arif Bey and Şevki Bey.

In the 19th century, the song form was mostly composed in a four-line form in terms of lyrics, and the form ABCB, meaning ground-refrain-middle-refrain, became widespread. However, new lines called 'nev zemin' were added to these four lines, and in addition to murabba (four-line) songs, lyrics with five, six, seven, and eight lines were also composed. While the murabba song has four lines, the muhammes song has five lines and its form is as follows: ABCDB1. The addition of new verses became widespread with Hacı Arif Bey, and works known as songs with "tavern" in their titles exemplify this new understanding. "Sayd Eyledi Bu Gönlümü Bir Gözleri Ahu" is an example of this form.

The müseddes song consists of six verses and its form is ABCDEB1. Hacı Arif Bey's "Meyhaneyi Seyrettim Uşşaka Mutaf Olmuş" can be given as an example of this form.

The musabba song consists of seven verses and its form is ABCDEFB1. The song "Meyhane mi Bu Bezm-i Tarap?" is an example.

Finally, the müsemmen song has eight verses and its form is ABCDEFGB1. The song "Meyhane Değil Meclis-i Rindane i Cemdir" is an example of this form.

Based on all this information, it is clear that the song genre or form has undergone changes over the centuries and that one cannot speak of only one form. The song genre, both in terms of lyrics and form, changed in parallel with the social and cultural events of the mid-18th century, known as the Tulip Era (Lale Devri). Indeed, the entertainment in the drinking parties that became widespread during this period led the public to gravitate towards the smaller song form, rather than the classical genres like kâr, beste, and yürük semai, thus contributing to its widespread popularity. This spread can be observed through the lyric collections and musical notation publications of the period.

This study historically investigates the transformation of the song form into fantasy song, and the influence of Sadettin Kaynak's adapted songs for Egyptian films in the 1940s on the form's structure is exemplified through the film "Harun al-Rashid's Favorite (Denanir)".

### **Fantasy Song Form**

While almost all composers created works in the song form from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, according to Gökalp, alongside the classical form of songs, which rapidly increased in number from the 20th century onwards, especially starting from the 1930s, works that did not conform to the classical song form, or even deviated from the song form in terms of poetry, began to be composed, and these types of works were called fantasy songs (Özalp, 1992: 22).

We can say that Ali Rifat Çağatay is one of the foremost composers who first gave examples of the fantasy song genre. In his work at the Oriental Music Society, Çağatay composed the poems "Bülbül" and "Darüssıla," which he selected from Mehmet Akif and Süleyman Nazif, in the form of fantasy songs, and this genre became widespread. Simultaneously, Münir Nurettin composed Tevfik Fikret's poem "Bahar-ı Teranedar" as a fantasy song, and Kemal Niyazi Seyhun composed Yahya Kemal's poem "Nazar" as a fantasy song (Kiyak, 2025: 21). In this context, it can be said that fantasy songs have a structure that does not have to conform to the ground-refrain-middle-refrain pattern composed from the poem. In line with the meaning of the poem, the composer can make more free and descriptive melodic discoveries, apply modal and rhythmic transitions, and tell a story with music. Indeed, Yahya Kemal's poem "Nazar," composed by Niyazi Seyhun, tells the story of a woman affected by the evil eye. This free composition style introduced a style to modal music at the beginning of the 20th century, before Egyptian films, and perhaps formed the basis of film songs.

Moortele defines musical genres as codes of norms and traditions that enable individual analytical interpretation (Moortele, 2017: 1). Indeed, musical genres possess traditional codes and forms. This can be seen as a guide that facilitates understanding and analyzing music. Even before the 20th century, in 1875, Ouseley, in his book on Western musical forms, discusses new types of composition that were not found in the classical or romantic periods and possessed their own unique structures. Stating that some authors define these types as 'Coupe de Fantaisie' or 'fantasy form,' Ouseley argues that it is more accurate to view these works as individual attempts to invent new forms (Ouseley, 1875: 61). According to Ouseley, works that do not conform to previous form structures are grouped under the umbrella of fantasy. However, as Özalp also states, the concept of free composition in Turkish maqam music most likely began in the 20th century with composers such as Ali Rifat Çağatay. Kaynak, who composed works to replace Egyptian film soundtracks in the 1940s, was also a composer with this understanding; however, the most important factor that compelled him to produce works within a specific timeframe and pattern was the form and duration of the original song.

Indeed, Kaynak describes what he pays attention to when composing music for films as follows: "The space a song will occupy in a film is measured with a stopwatch. There are 52 frames of image in one meter. A film shows 24 images in one second. For example, I am working on a song that will last 1 minute and 40 seconds for the film. A stopwatch clock is in front of me..." (Şen, 2003: 229). As can be understood from these statements, Kaynak prioritizes image and

duration when composing music for these films and adjusts the duration of the songs accordingly. In fact, the songs he composed to replace the long or multi-part songs in the film “The Favorite of Harun al-Rashid (Denanir)” were also composed in accordance with these patterns. Therefore, we can say that these songs did not come from the composer’s free repertoire, but from the patterns of the original songs. One of the suggestions of this study is that instead of defining these songs as fantasy songs or film songs, the term ‘qasida song,’ which already exists in Egyptian music, could be used. Furthermore, referring to the history of maqam music theory, the expression “cycle song” for songs with multiple sections and divisions, and those described as rondos in Western music, is presented as another point of contention.

### Method

This study is based on qualitative research methods, specifically musical analysis and comparative music analysis approaches. The film Denanir, shot in Egypt in 1939 and released in Turkey under the title “Harun al-Rashid's Favorite,” is used as a case study.

The dataset of the study consists of: the film’s original Arabic songs, Turkish adaptations composed by Sadettin Kaynak, audio recordings of these works, sheet music samples, and their contextual use within the film. During the research process, conceptual proposals were developed regarding the possibility of redefining certain works considered under the headings of “fantasy song” or “film song” in Turkish maqam music according to their structural characteristics (e.g., qasida song, *devir*-cycle song).

Accordingly, one song each from the film was selected for the qasida song and devir song proposals, and the formal structures of the songs were shown in tables. Recordings of the original songs sung by Umm Kulthum and the adapted songs sung by Müzeyyen Senar were obtained online and analyzed. The analyses show the minute correspondence between the instrumental and vocal parts in the sections and divisions of the songs. The melodic and rhythmic transitions have also been identified. The sections of the songs are given with Roman numerals (I, II, III...), and the divisions are given as A, B, C.... Repetitions within a section or division are indicated as A', I' etc. Multiple repetitions of the same section or division are indicated as A'', A''', I'', I''' etc.

### Findings

The original and adapted songs from the film “The Favorite of Harun al-Rashid (Denanir)”, which serves as the example for our study, along with information on the modes, styles, and lyricists used, are given in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1.** The original songs of the movie

Original Song	Composer	Makam	Usul (Rhythm Cycle)	Poet	Form
<b>Tabin Nesim</b> (طاب النسيم)	Muhammed Kasabji	Bayati (Uşşak) -Hicaz	Mutellet (Düyek)	Ahmed Rami	Kaside
<b>Enşudet Bağdad</b> (أنشودة بغداد)	Riyad El Sunbati	Buselik- Bayati (Uşşak)	Vahde (Sofyan)	Ahmed Rami	Enşudet
<b>Ya Fuadi Ganni</b> (يا فوادي غني ألحان)	Muhammed Kasabji	Nihavend- Neva'da Bayati (Uşşak)	Vahde (Sofyan)	Ahmed Rami	Ugniyye
<b>Ya lilit Aid</b> (يا ليلة العيد)	Riyad El Sunbati	Bayati (Hüseyni)	Vahde (Sofyan)	Ahmed Rami	Ugniyye
<b>Ulili Atayfik</b> (قولى لطيفك)	Zekeriya Ahmed	Segâh-Hüzzam- Karcıgar- Hüseyni'de Saba	Malfuf (Nim Sofyan)	Ahmed Rami	Kaside
<b>Bukra Safar</b> (بكرة السفر)	Zekeriya Ahmed	Bayati (Muhayyer- Hüseyni)	Malfuf (Nim Sofyan)	Ahmed Rami	Taktuka
<b>Rahalet Anke</b> (رحلت عنك)	Zekeriya Ahmed	Nihavend	Vahde (Sofyan)	Ahmed Rami	Kaside

**Table 2.** The adapted songs of the movie

Adapted Song	Composer	Makam	Usul (Rhythm Cycle)	Poet	Form
<b>Enginde</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Hicaz	Düyek	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Yavaş Yavaş</b>					
<b>Yurt Türküsü</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Rast	Sofyan	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Derman Kâr</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Segâh	Sofyan	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Eylemez</b>					
<b>Bayram</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Mahur	Sofyan	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Gecesi</b>					
<b>Söyle Kuzum- Çiçeklerin Gülüyor</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Rast- Nihavend, Hicazkâr	Nim Sofyan- Sofyan, Düyek	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Yolculuk Var</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Muhayyer	Sofyan	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Bu Yerler Ne füsunkârdı</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Hicaz	Düyek	Vecdi Bingöl	Fantasy Song
<b>Uvertür</b>	Sadettin Kaynak	Rast	?	Enstrumantal	Instrumental

As seen in Table 1, the most frequently used maqam in the songs in the film is the Bayati maqam. However, the maqams of some songs correspond melodically to the Uşşak, Hüseyini, and Muhayyer maqams in Turkish maqam music. This is because the Uşşak, Hüseyini, or Muhayyer maqams do not exist in Arabic music. In addition, the Segâh, Hüzam, Buselik, Nihavend, Karcıgar, and, in a transposed form, the Bayati maqam in the Neva pitch and the Saba maqam in the Hüseyini pitch are also seen. The Vahde rhythm is used most frequently in the works. This rhythm corresponds to the Sofyan rhythm in Turkish maqam music. Three works are in the form of a qasida, two in the form of an ugniyye, one in the form of an enşudet, and one in the form of a taktuka.

Table 2 shows that the most common modes in Kaynak's adapted songs are Rast and Hicaz. In addition, Muhayyer, Segâh, Nihavend, Hicazkâr, and Mahur modes are also used. The most frequently used rhythm is sofyan. Düyek and nim sofyan rhythms also appear. Except for the overture, which can be considered an instrumental piece, all the songs are categorized as fantasy songs within Turkish modal music.

A comparative examination of the two tables clearly shows that Kaynak composed his works in modes, rhythms, and structures appropriate to the songs in the film. This demonstrates that the interaction between the two musical styles intensified from 1940 onwards, centered around films, and shows its influence on the musical materials and forms used. Therefore, our suggestion of "kaside song" and "devir song" can be considered in light of this interaction. Indeed, the kaside exists in both cultures. "Devir song," on the other hand, can be considered a term that could replace the rondo form in Western music.

### The Influence of Egyptian Films on Song Form

The interaction between Arabic and Turkish music continued throughout almost every period of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is known that many music composers from Istanbul went to Egypt towards the end of the 19th century (Özyıldırım, 2013: 77).

Mustafa Fazıl Pasha (1829 Cairo-1875 Istanbul), the grandson of Muhammad Ali Pasha and the Minister of Finance and Education in the Ottoman Empire, went to Egypt and took Zekai Dede Efendi, who was under his patronage, with him. Zekai Efendi, who could not escape being a researcher wherever he was, who did not hesitate to be a guide for himself and who took spiritual pleasure from his work in this field, did not miss the opportunity to conduct personal research on (Arabic music), an important cornerstone of Eastern music, by taking advantage of his residence in Egypt; Because he had heard from Dede Efendi in his very first lessons that one cannot be considered to have completed music education without possessing the artistic and scientific knowledge of Arabic music, and since then he had set his mind on acquiring knowledge of rhyme in this music, the fact that he lived in Egypt, which is the broadest area of Arabic music, was an indescribable beauty for the master (Yüksel, 2001: 39,41).

In his book, *The 20th Century Coexistence of Arabic and Turkish Music*, Murat Özyıldırım mentions Prof. Dr. Quoting from Ali Jihad Racy's book, he states: "...Musicians from Istanbul, Damascus, and Aleppo frequently

performed in Egypt, and famous Egyptian artists also went to Istanbul to perform their art. For example, it is said that the famous singer Sheikh Yusuf al-Menyelawi (1847-1911) once sang in the presence of the Sultan. Khedive Ismail, on some of his visits to Istanbul, brought along the singer and composer Abdul al-Hamouli (1841-1901) and asked this artist to borrow elements of Turkish classical music that would suit Egyptian tastes..." (Racy, 2007: 15). The inclusion of Mevlevi music at the 'Arab Music Congress' held in Cairo in 1932 (Tanrıkorur 2004: 587) indicates that the Mevlevi lodge was still an important cultural and artistic center for the interaction of Turkish and Arabic music at that time (Yazıcı, 2009: 216). The organization of this congress revealed the extent of shared musical heritage between Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. While these developments were taking place in the newly established Republic of Turkey, the film industry in Egypt began to produce its first works. During these years, public interest in cinema was also increasing in Turkey. The number of both cinemas and film magazines was growing. In addition to the numerous cinemas in Istanbul, cinemas were opening one after another in provincial cities due to public interest. Egyptian films, which were first translated, began to be shown in Turkey in 1936. Özyıldırım states that by 1948, a total of 130 Egyptian films had been screened in Turkey. However, Özön, comparing the number of Turkish and Egyptian films between 1938 and 1944 alone, notes that 16 Egyptian films were shown in Turkish cinemas compared to 17 Turkish films. The Egyptian films screened in Turkey, along with their directors and release years, are as follows:

*Damu'al Hubb = Tears of Love (Muhammad Karim - 1936), Leyla bint el Sabra = Beauty of the Sabara (Behice Hafiz - 1937), Laylat Mumtara = The Stained Woman (Togo Mizrabi - 1939), Kays and Leyla = Leyla and Majnun (Ibrahim Lama - 1939), Elf Layla and Layla = One Thousand and One Nights (Togo Mizrabi), Dananir = Harun al-Rashid's Favorite (Ahmed Bedirhan - 1940), Intisar el Shabab = Andalusian Nights (Ahmed Bedirhan - 1940), Leyla = Sad Hearts (Togo Mizrabi - 1941), Leyla binti Madaris = Secret Love (Togo Mizrabi - 1941), Masna'al Zavacat = The Club of Dandies (Niyazi Mustafa (1941), Saladin (Ibrahim Lama-1942), Ahlam el Shabab (Kemal Selim-1942), Ala Masrah el Hayat (Ahmed Bedirhan-1942), Ali Baba and Arba'in Harami (Togo Mizrabi-1943), El Buassa (Kemal Selim-1943), Hubb min es Sema (Abdulfattah Hasan-1943), (Özyıldırım, 2013: 141-149).*

The Egyptian film Denanir, which is the subject of our discussion, was shot on September 29, 1940, by the Egyptian director Ahmed Bedirhan (1909-1959). In 1941, the film "Harun al-Rashid's Favorite" (Dananir) was released in Turkey at the İpek Cinemas. In line with the 'nationalization' policies of the time, the original Arabic songs were replaced with Turkish 'adapted songs' composed by Sadettin Kaynak. The lyrics were written by Vecdi Bingöl, one of Kaynak's lyricists. As seen in newspaper advertisements, the film was released in 1941 in two versions Arabic and Turkish at the İpek and Saray Cinemas, located close to each other on İstiklal Street in Beyoğlu (Özdemir, 2009: 249). One of the film's screening posters is shown below (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Poster for the film "Harun al-Rashid's Favorite," Akşam Newspaper, November 27, 1941 (Özdemir, 2009: 249).

In the original version of the film, all the lyrics were written by the famous Egyptian poet Ahmed Rami. For the music, three prominent composers of the time were featured: Riyad al-Sunbati, Zakariya Ahmed, and Muhammed Kasabji. For the lyrics of the adapted versions of the Turkish songs in the film, the famous lyricist of the time, Vecdi

Bingöl, was chosen. While three composers were used in the original film, all the Turkish songs were composed by Sadettin Kaynak.

Before analyzing the songs, it should be noted that the concept of "song" does not exist in Arabic music as it does in Turkish maqam music. However, it can be said that the term *ugniyye* (أغنية) is generally used in Arabic music as the equivalent of the term "song" in Turkish maqam music. In Arabic music, songs are defined according to the forms in which they are composed. The most prominent forms in Arabic music are as follows: *qasida* (قصيدة)<sup>2</sup>, *mawwal* (موال)<sup>3</sup>, *muwashshah* (موشح)<sup>4</sup>, *davr* (دور)<sup>5</sup>, and *taktuqa* (طقطوقة)<sup>6</sup>. Of course, other forms also exist, but the Arabic music forms that we particularly associate with film soundtracks can be shown in this way. Therefore, in our study, the term "song" has been examined within the framework of Turkish maqam music. However, the terms we propose have been made by comparing them with the forms in Arabic music.

### Original and Adapted Songs in the Movie

In this study, two examples of original and adapted songs from the film are considered for the term suggestions of *qasida* and *devir* song. These songs are: *Tabin Nesim-Enginde Yavaş Yavaş* and *Yeltiltil Aid - Bayram Gecesi*.

The work titled *Tabin Nesim*, composed by Muhammed Kasabji, is in the *Bayati* maqam in Arabic music and is the first song sung by Umm Kulthum (Denanir) in the film. Its form is in the structure that Arabs call a *qasida*<sup>7</sup>.

The adapted song titled *Enginde Yavaş Yavaş*, composed by Hafız Sadettin Kaynak, is in the *Hicaz* maqam and is in the musical form called *Fantasy* song in Turkish maqam music. The song does not contain a repetition section except for the parts that we can call the chorus, 'today it is evening again'. Although this type is considered *fantasy*, it is composed with an uninterrupted flow that can be defined as a *qasida* song (Figure 4) within the framework of common musical culture.

A            B            C            D            E            F...

**Figure 4.** Model of *Qasida* song composed with free flow

Although composed in a free-flowing style, the song "*Tabin Nesim*" contains some repeated sections. The repeating sections are indicated as 'A'. Accordingly, the structural form of the song is as follows (Table 3).

<sup>2</sup> In Arabic music, it is a form of poetry containing 10 or more lines. In ancient times, the *qasida* was performed improvisationally, like the *mawwal*; however, Abdul Hamuli constructed it in 4/4 time signature (Mostafa2018: 50).

<sup>3</sup> It is a genre sung in popular Arabic folk music, and its lyrics are usually written in 'street language'. It is generally performed not in a rhythmic manner, but in a structure that allows the singer to showcase their artistic abilities (Mostafa, 2018: 50).

<sup>4</sup> Although it is a type of Arabic poetry, it is a highly artistic genre. Until the beginning of the 20th century, there were three types of *muwashshah*, which had choral and solo sections: the first consists of one stanza, where the words change but the music remains the same. The second type consists of two stanzas. The last type is the *makamr* style invented by the Egyptian composer Muhammad Osman (Abul Samie, 1999: 10-12).

<sup>5</sup> *Devir* is an Egyptian poetic form recited in the *makams* of Arabic music. It first appeared anonymously in the early 19th century, and due to the scarcity of historical sources, its inventor is unknown. *Devirs* are generally performed for an hour or more, featuring a soloist and choir. While they frequently incorporate transitions between *makams*, they return to the starting *makam* at the end. Furthermore, during the reign of Khedive Ismail in Egypt, Turkish *makams* were also incorporated into works of the *Devir* genre, and compositions were created using *makams* such as *Hicazkar* and *Nihavend* (Mostafa, 2018: 51).

<sup>6</sup> It is a genre that became popular in Arabic music in the 20th century and consists of sections. After each section repeated by the choir, the soloist performs a section with different melodies (Mostafa, 2018: 52), and structurally it corresponds to the *rondo* form in Western music.

<sup>7</sup> The *qasida* is a type of poetry found in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian literature. Some sources refer to it as a type of poetry, while others define it as a type of music. Onur Akdoğan, in his book on genres in Turkish music, defines the *qasida* as a genre with irregular and improvised melodies (Uslu, 2014: 2). However, the *ghazal*, present in both Turkish and Arabic cultures, with its long structure and narrative style (whether religious or secular), has also influenced musical forms. Thus, free-flowing songs are defined as *qasida* songs in Arabic music. In short, it can be said that this is due to its structural relationship with poetry.

**Table 3.** Form structure of Tabin Nesim (طاب النسيم)

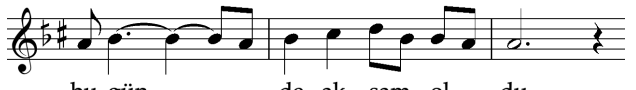


(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9WuFVJRrXo&amp;list=RDp9WuFVJRrXo&amp;start\_radio=1)

Section Group	Section	Clock Time	Description	
I (Bayati-Uşşak)	A (intro)	0:01	Instrumental section	
	B	0:31	“Tabin nesim... (طاب النسيم)”	
	A'	0:48	Instrumental section	
	B'	0:58	“Tabin nesim... (طاب النسيم)”	
	A''	1:14	Instrumental section	
	C	1:25	“Ve mayya... (والميه)”	
II III (Hicaz)	A'''	1:47	Instrumental section	
	D	1:53	“Yelli... (ياللي)”	
	E	2:32	Instrumental section	
	F	2:44	“Ya genne... (يا جنة)”	
	E'	3:01	Instrumental section	
	F'	3:06	“Ve malitil... (ومالنت)”	
IV	G	3:22	Instrumental section (Nay solo)	
	H	3:35	“Zillik ra ali... (ظلك رعاني)”	
	G'	3:58	Instrumental section (Nay solo)	
	H'	4:09	“Vil urbi... (والقرب)”	
	III'	F''	4:29	“Ya genne... (يا جنة)”
	F'''	4:48	“Ve malitil... (ومالنت)”	
(Bayati-Uşşak)	I	5:06	Instrumental section (Nay solo) transition	
II'	D'	5:19-6:01	“Yelli... (ياللي)”	

As seen in Table 3, although the long song Tabin Nesim appears to be composed in a free-flowing style, some instrumental parts are repeated. Furthermore, at the end of the song, section II is re-performed with a slightly longer tempo than the beginning of the song and without the instrumental part. The song's sections are as follows: A (intro)-B-A'-B'-A''-C-A'''-D-E-F-E'-F'-G-H-G'-H'-F''-F'''- I-D'. The makams used in the sections can be shown as follows: I (Bayati-Uşşak)-II-III (Hicaz)-IV-III'-II' (Bayati-Uşşak). In this respect, we can say that the work, which has a four-part structure, has transformed into another expression of a free-flowing composition with the repetition of two sections. The structural form of the adapted song “Enginde Yavaş Yavaş” composed in place of the original song by Tabin Nesim, is as follows, based on Müzeyyen Senar's vinyl record recording (Table 4):

**Table 4.** Form structure of Enginde Yavaş Yavaş

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KupnRQKx4ps&amp;list=RDKupnRQKx4ps&amp;start\_radio=1)

Section Group	Section	Clock Time	Description
I (Hümayûn)	A (intro)	0:01	Instrumental section
(Uzzal)	B	0:44	“Enginde yavaş yavaş...”
(Hümayûn)	C	1.06	Instrumental section
	D	1.19	“Derdim bana arkadaş...” 
II (Zirgüleli Hicaz)	E	1:37	Instrumental section
	F	1:50	“Gölgeler indi suya...” 
III (Hüseyni'de Uşşak)	G	2:20	Instrumental section
(Uzzal-Hicaz)	H	2:30	“Su yürür...” 

As seen in Table 4, the structure of the adapted song “Enginde Yavaş Yavaş” is closer to a free-flowing compositional approach than the song “Tabin Nesim”. However, the repetition of the phrase “today too, evening has fallen” in sections D, F, and H gives the form a new interpretation. All the makams of the Hijaz family (Hicaz, Humayun, Uzzal, Zirgüleli Hijaz) are used in the song, and there is no transition to another makam throughout the entirety of the song. The three sections of the song are as follows: A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H.

Accordingly, while the first song of the film, “Tabin Nesim,” and the work composed in its place, “Enginde Yavaş Yavaş,” do not resemble each other in terms of makam usage or melody, they both have structures with multiple sections. However, some of these sections are repeated in “Tabin Nesim,” and makam transitions are observed.

The film's original song, Yalıltil Aid, composed by Riyad el Sunbati, and the song Bayram Gecesi (the title has the same meaning), composed by Sadettin Kaynak, both belong to the musical form known as Taktuka in Arabic music. Yalıltil Aid consists of six sections, including a repeating A (chorus), while Bayram Gecesi consists of four sections, including the A section. The structure of the adapted song composed by Kaynak is similar to the rondo form in Western music, consisting of a repeating section after each section. The structural form of the song Yalıltil Aid is as follows (Table 5):

**Table 5.** Form structure of Yaliltil Aid (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQx-vyB6ziM>)

Section Group	Section	Clock Time	Description
I (Bayati)	A (intro)	0:01	Instrumental section
	B	0:12	“Yeliltil aid... (يا ليلة العيد)”
II	C	0:40	“Hilelek... (هلالك)”
	B’	1:17	“Yeliltil aid... (يا ليلة العيد)”
III	D	1:31	“Gematil... (جمعت الأنس)”
	B”	2:12	“Yeliltil aid... (يا ليلة العيد)”
IV (Neva’da Hicaz ve Karcıgar)	E	2:26	“Habibi... (حبيبي)”
	B””	3:01	“Yeliltil aid... (يا ليلة العيد)”
V (Neva’da Hicaz and Karcıgar)	F	3:16	“Ya nur... (يا نور)”
	B”””	3:51	“Yeliltil aid... (يا ليلة العيد)”
VI (Evç’te Segâh and Bayati)	G	4:05	“Ya nilne... (يا نيلنا)”
	B””””	4:41-4:53	“Yeliltil aid... (يا ليلة العيد)”

As seen in Table 5, the form of the song "Yaliltil Aid" resembles a rondo form with a repeating B section. Accordingly, the form of the six-part song is as follows: A(intro)-B-C-B'-D-B"-E-B"-F-B"-G-B"-". According to the performance we determined from Umm Kulthum's recording, the first B section in the song is performed solo, while the other B sections are performed by a women's ensemble.

The form of the adapted song "Bayram Gecesi," composed in place of "Yaliltil Aid," according to Müzyen Senar's record, is as follows (Table 6):

**Table 6.** Form structure of Bayram Gecesi ([Web 1](#))

Section Group	Section	Clock Time	Description
I (Mahur-Düyek or Sofyan)	A (intro)	0:01	Instrumental section
	B	0:18	“Hoş geldin...”
II	C	0:31	“Altın hilal...”
	B’	0:59	“Hoş geldin...”
III	D	1:12	“Söz yok...”
	B”	1:41	“Hoş geldin...”
IV (Nihavend-Nim Sofyan)	E	1:53	Instrumental section
	F	2:04	“Neşe gibi...”
	F’	2:15	Instrumental section transition
	F”	2:21	“Her engeli...”
	F””	2:31	Instrumental section transition
	F”””	2:36	“Gel...”
V (Mahur, Düyek or Sofyan)	B””””	2:55-3:22	“Hoş geldin...”

As seen in Table 6, the song "Bayram Gecesi" (Aid Night), like the song "Yeliltil Aid," contains a multi-part structure with a repeating B section. The song is composed in a style consistent with the original song in the film. The five-part section of the song is as follows: A (intro)-B-C-B'-D-B''-E-F-F'-F''-F'''-F''''-B''. The song begins in the Mahur makam in the Düyek or Sofyan style, and in the fourth section, a transition is made to the Nihavend makam in the Nim Sofyan style. Then, in the final fifth section, it returns to the Düyek-Sofyan and Mahur makams.

When we compare these two songs, it is seen that they both have a repeating section. This structure resembles the rondo form, but in Turkish maqam music, it is defined as a fantasy song or film song. Accordingly, we suggest that songs of this type be called "devir şarkı" (cycle song). Indeed, the repetition of a section within a song after each subsequent section can be defined as a cycle. Furthermore, the word "cycle" (devir) is a concept that has existed in the tradition of maqam music since the 13th century. The fact that older theoretical sources used the method of showing maqams and rhythms within cycles is an indication of this. Therefore, this term can be used within formal structures in terms of its meaning. We can show the cycle song makaml as follows (Figure):

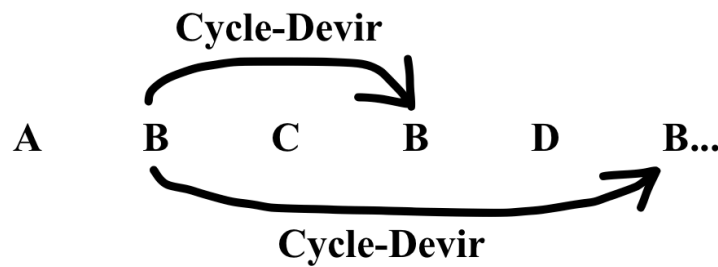


Figure 5. Cyclic Song Model

As shown in Figure 5, in the looping song model, section B continuously repeats, it cycles. Therefore, songs with this structure can be defined as looping songs.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Sadettin Kaynak undertook a difficult task by adapting music and songs for previously made films, but he accomplished this in a highly original way. While there are similarities in terms of makam (makam), usul (rhythm), style, orchestration, and form in some parts of the original and adapted songs we examined, such as the use of lyrics, instruments, and cadences, it is evident that Kaynak's songs are more faithful to the modal structure and preserve the melodies of Turkish music, unlike the originals. Indeed, in the years when Sadettin Kaynak began composing songs for Egyptian films, the "Turkish style of performance" continued in Arabic music until the 1940s, due to the Ottoman Empire's rule over Arab lands. Therefore, the performance style in the film 'The Favorite of Harun al-Rashid (Denanir)' is also seen as "Turkish style of performance" in many aspects.

The original song from the film, Tabin Nesim, has the following form: A (intro)-B-A'-B'-A''-C-A'''-D-E-F-E'-F'-G-H-G'-H'-F''-F'''-I-D'. The song, consisting of four sections, utilizes the Bayati-Uşşak and Hicaz makams. The song composed in place of Tabin Nesim, titled Enginde Yavaş Yavaş, consists of three sections. Its form is as follows: A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H. While similar in composition to the original song, it uses the Hicaz family of makams (Hümayûn, Uzzal, Zırgüleli Hicaz, Hicaz) and the Uşşak flavor in the Hüseyini scale. Although there is no melodic similarity between the two songs, their forms are quite close. In Arabic music, these types of long songs are called 'qasida songs', while in Turkish maqam music they are called 'fantasy songs' or 'film songs'. The adapted song composed by Sadettin Kaynak, based on the original song, can be classified as a qasida song in terms of its formal structure.

In Arabic music, the original song Yeliltil Aid, composed in the Bayati makam, and its adapted version, Bayram Gecesi, in the Mahur makam, are both multi-part and segmented in form. While the titles of the songs have the same meaning, Yeliltil Aid means "Bayram Gecesi" (Night of Eid). The form of the six-part song Yeliltil Aid is A(intro)-B-C-B'-D-B''-E-B'''-F-B''''-G-B'''''. As can be seen, the B segment repeats after each section. The song utilizes the Bayati, Neva, Hicaz, and Karcıgar makams. Songs in this form are called "taktuka" in Arabic music. The adapted song Bayram Gecesi, composed in place of the original song, has a similar structure to Yeliltil Aid and consists of five sections: A (intro)-B-C-B'-D-B''-E-F-F'-F''-F'''-F''''-B''. The song utilizes the Mahur and Nihavend makams, along with the Düyek-

Sofyan and Nim Sofyan rhythms. Such songs, with multiple sections and one section repeating after each subsequent section, can be described as cyclical songs. This term, which can be considered a reference to modal music theory, helps in better understanding the song's form.

In conclusion, the interaction between Turkish and Arabic cultures, dating back to the Ottoman era, has manifested itself in social life and traditions, as well as in art and music. This interaction has given composers from both cultures a new perspective. In particular, the exchange of performance styles, makams, and forms has continued for centuries. In this context, instead of categorizing Sadettin Kaynak's songs for Egyptian films under the heading of "fantasy," the genres resulting from this exchange could be re-named. Indeed, the qasida exists in Turkish music and literature. Therefore, it would be more descriptive to call long, free-flowing songs like "Enginde Yavaş Yavaş" "qasida songs" within the framework of a shared modal music culture. Furthermore, songs with multiple sections (ABCDBD...) and repeating sections could be called "devir songs," referring to the use of "devir" in modal music theory books. In short, musical works resulting from cultural and musical interactions can be redefined and named to better understand their formal structure.

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Dr. **Orkun Zafer Özgelen** began his musical education by playing the bağlama. In 2000, he was admitted to the Instrument Training Department of the Turkish Music State Conservatory at Istanbul Technical University (ITU) during his high school education, and in 2004, he entered the Composition Department of the same conservatory for his undergraduate studies. He studied repertoire with Erol Sayan; piano, composition, and theory with Faris Akarsu; harmony and theory with Nail Yavuzoğlu; composition with Oğuzhan Balcı; Turkish makam music with Feridun Öney; and musical form with Neşe Yeşim Altınel Çoban. In 2008, he received an Erasmus scholarship and studied Orchestration and Composition for two years at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Italy. In 2010, he founded the ITU Musical Ensemble, organizing numerous festivals, events, and concerts during this period. After serving as the founding conductor of the ensemble, he was invited by the Koç University Musical Ensemble in 2015, where he worked for one year as music director and instructor. He arranged and served as music director for *Dorian*, a musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In 2021, the book *Türk Makam Müziğinin Seyir Defteri I (The Seyir Notebook of the Turkish Makam Musician I)*, which he co-authored with Associate Professor Şerife Güvençoğlu, was published by Pan Publishing. In 2023, he participated as arranger and pianist in the album *Türk Makam Müziği'nden Esintiler (Reflections from Turkish Makam Music)*, released with Assistant Professor Funda Esin. In the same year, he composed the music for the musical *The Diva*, written by Nebi Birgi. In February 2024, he received his Ph.D. degree from the Musicology and Music Theory Program at Istanbul Technical University. In 2025, his book *Hüseyin Sadeddin Arel ve Bir Musiki Masalı (Hüseyin Sadeddin Arel and a Musical Tale)* was published by Eğitim Publishing. He is currently serving as an academic at the Turkish Music State Conservatory of Istanbul Technical University.

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## Research Article

# Do we still need harmony? personal reflections on the crisis of contemporary studies of music harmony

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### Abstract

Recent trends indicate that the research-based study of music is receiving decreasing support at universities with music programs. More specifically, we are increasingly hearing reports of the closure of such academic departments. When we narrow our focus to the field of music theory, the picture becomes even more discouraging. Globally, relatively few specialized university departments and institutes are dedicated to this area. At the same time, while the humanities more broadly are facing a certain degree of disregard, studies on music harmony are experiencing their own crisis of meaning, which is not of recent origin. The transformation of its referential language, already about a century ago, caused harmony to lose its status as a "necessary craft foundation" for composers. Today, it is primarily used as a tool for analyzing classical music, and, though to a lesser extent, popular genres. Particularly concerning is the fact that such responsibilities are increasingly being assigned to inadequately trained personnel whose competence in harmony is, at the very least, questionable. However, with the emergence of more recent methodologies – such as Schenkerian analysis, neo-Riemannian theory, and others—the question arises: Do we still need harmony? Are we approaching a time when it will be entirely sufficient to feed any composition into a computer system, which, using artificial intelligence, will provide all the necessary answers about a given piece? Has that time, perhaps, already arrived, rendering any form of human analysis obsolete? This paper aims to offer several possible answers to this question, ranging from a nihilistic stance ("harmony is definitely no longer needed") to a call for a return to the roots (i.e., the renewed practice of methods conventionally regarded as outdated), to the possibility that the truth lies somewhere in between.

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## Introduction

This study examines the changing position of harmony in contemporary music theory and the methodological issues arising from this transformation. Therefore, it is first necessary to consider the current state of the discipline and its main areas of debate.

### State of affairs and methodological questions

The following text presents a brief musicological study on the current state of affairs concerning the status of musical harmony (within the humanities) as a discipline. The aim is to address the pressing question of whether, in the context of the disciplinary transformations of the third decade of the twenty-first century, we still require a "traditional" discipline that has existed in its current form since the early modern era and traces its roots back to antiquity. Therefore, I explore

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the historical development of harmony as a discipline and examine how it ultimately culminated in a crisis, marked by the emergence of new methods intended to replace it.

Some of the key questions I intend to address are:

- How relevant is harmony in the contemporary context?
- Do the new methodologies offer satisfactory alternatives to the traditional discipline?
- If harmony is to continue to exist in the future, what might its role entail?

To address these issues, I will draw on some of the most notable historical and contemporary sources, including Heinrich Schenker's *Der freie Satz*, Nicholas Cook's *A Guide to Musical Analysis*, and Allen Forte's *The Structure of Atonal Music*, etc., as well as my own insights and interviews with practitioners and observers of the current state of affairs.

### **The age of crisis**

It is no longer news that the humanities are in a state of crisis. With the rise of highly practical disciplines, foremost among them information technology, which offer greater commercial applicability than ever before, interest in the humanities and the arts (to some extent included within them) has reached a historical low. At the same time, governments and endowments across the Western world increasingly view these fields as unprofitable losses rather than as investments in the enduring legacy of civilizational heritage. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the humanities are in a much better position today in countries that have not succumbed to the philosophy of expecting a quick return on every penny invested.

The situation in musicology is no better in the term's broadest sense. On the contrary, it is arguably even more challenging than in other branches of the humanities. Scholars are confronted with the choice of pursuing "applied musicology" (whatever that may entail) or venturing into various forms of multidisciplinary, for which they are often inadequately trained. Both paths offer limited opportunities, typically favoring candidates with social suitability over personal merit; otherwise, scholars are often forced to consider a career change.

Music harmony has, somewhat paradoxically, been in a state of crisis for so long that its current condition is not as bleak as that of other branches. With this statement, I am not suggesting that the general crisis of the humanities does not affect harmony – it certainly does and will – but rather that nearly a century of ontological questioning within the discipline has made it somewhat resilient.

On the other hand, the crisis of harmony has its own distinct history, which I will address in the following sections of this paper.

### **Challenges: Losing the ground underfoot**

In its traditional role, harmony as a discipline serves three primary purposes:

- It originally emerged as a craft primarily intended to help composers master foundational skills during the common-practice period. It was used both to learn specific rules and to analyze the works of other composers.
- Over time, it also became important for performers, who increasingly sought to grasp the deeper essence of the works they interpret.
- Finally, harmonic analysis found its most favored stronghold among theorists and musicologists, who, through the insights it provided, have made numerous scholarly contributions to the world.

But what is the state of the art now? Perhaps nothing better captures the contemporary state of music harmony as a discipline than an interview with the composer Rajko Maksimović (1935–2024), who, as a professor of composition in Belgrade, witnessed an instructive moment with his students in 1995. He remarked:

*Just recently, during the winter break, I worked on basic harmony with two students. They have that subject at the Academy, but I could see that something wasn't working. And harmony must be known! Let them disregard it later, let them not use a single thing from it—but they still have to know it! First of all, they're going to teach it, and they'll make a living from it. As composers, they have the right to*

*teach harmony, and they will teach it. No one will make a living from composing. And form, polyphony, and orchestration – the craft they must master. (Вуксановић, 1995, p. 14)*

To provide some additional context: In earlier times, all the "craft" subjects were integrated into the main composition curriculum and taught by a trained composer.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, students from other departments – such as musicology, pedagogy, conducting, and, more recently, music theory – have taken all those subjects separately and, ironically, often become more proficient in them than their colleagues in the composition department. Despite this, until recently, legal regulations (as indicated in the previous quote) broadly favored composers in hiring staff to teach theoretical subjects in public music schools. That system had its advantages and limitations, as does the current arrangement. By the time of Maksimović's interview, composition students had long been studying harmony as a separate subject, just as their colleagues in other departments. Even after the craft disciplines were introduced, they were often met with mutual disinterest from both composition students and lecturers.<sup>3</sup>

From what I have mentioned, it should be clear that, at least in some academic circles, there is an awareness that harmony remains an important foundation – even for those who may choose not to employ its core principles, whether in their creative language or in the repertoire they analyze. When I refer to core principles, I think primarily of two fundamental components of common-practice harmony: (1) tonality and (2) chord. As we know, both of these have been increasingly relativized – or even entirely deconstructed throughout the 20th century.

It is difficult to deny that, during the common-practice era, and even into the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the traditional study of harmony provided a necessary and solid foundation for the study of composition. Along with certain other disciplines, it was a useful – and sometimes even essential – tool for performers. However, that situation was about to change with the rise of modernist aesthetics.

A greatly simplified history of modern music claims that everything began to shift with the "unusual" experiments of the late Romanticists. This trend continued with Debussy's even bolder innovations in musical language, culminating in the definitive blow to common practice delivered by the Second Viennese school, led by Arnold Schönberg.

As with any joke, there is a part of truth in it – but to play with words, such a history is only a partial truth.

The Romanticists did not begin deconstructing tonality out of deliberate intent, but rather because their musical language – already heavily chromatic – left little room for further creative expansion.

Anyone familiar with the development of French compositional techniques and practices knows Debussy was less revolutionary than an evolutionary figure. This is especially true given that the understanding of harmony in that cultural sphere differed significantly from that which developed in, for example, the Germanic countries. (cf. Groth, 1983)

Finally, regarding the Second Viennese school, we must not forget that Schönberg was a master of harmony, so much so that he authored one of the most influential textbooks on the subject. (Schönberg, 1922) It was precisely his deep understanding of the state of the art that led him to develop a systematic anti-language – the twelve-tone system – to demonstrate that music could exist outside the confines of the familiar tonal framework.

After World War I, as modernist aesthetics gained ground – not only through the twelve-tone technique but also through free atonality and neoclassical "tonicity" – harmony continued to be regarded as a necessary part of the music curriculum. It was regarded as a foundation for many aspects that could still inform the development of one's musical

<sup>2</sup> In the immediate post-World War II period, due to a lack of qualified staff, theoretical training was incorporated into the main composition course. Somewhat later, it was separated into standalone subjects, but they were still taught by composers rather than theorists (who, truth be told, didn't yet exist at the Belgrade Academy) or musicologists.

One of the most notable teachers of theoretical subjects for composition students was the renowned Serbian woman composer, Ljubica Marić (1909–2003). In the following decades, theoretical instruction for composition students became more aligned with that provided to music educators, theorists, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and even organists.

Composers themselves made up the majority of the theory faculty until relatively recently.

With the establishment of an independent theory department, this practice gradually began to fade; however, the current arrangement (as of 2026) is such that composition students are once again being taught theoretical subjects by composers.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, when a friend of mine, who holds an MA degree in composition, recently approached me asking how he could improve his knowledge of harmony, I was not surprised, and advised him to get the textbook *Harmony with harmonic analysis* by Professor Dejan Despić (Despić, 2002), read it cover to cover, and, in addition, practice analysis and four-part writing.

language (at least in the sense of something to reject, as Maksimović put it), as well as a tool for studying most works that remained in the repertoire.

It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that the first major blow to harmonic analysis came from a tool designed to study the purest tonal repertoire: Schenkerian analysis. The "tool" developed by Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) initially aimed to universalize and simplify the analysis of the entire tonal repertoire – if by "entire," we primarily mean Germanic music composed between the early 1700s and the mid-1800s. (cf. Schenker, 1935) (Cook, 1987, pp. 57-58) The stratification of structural and non-structural elements soon led to the reduction of many works to the so-called *Urfinie* or *Ursatz*, rendering both traditional harmonic analysis and *Formenlehre* largely superfluous. However, before World War II, it was precisely this lack of repertoire breadth that, in a way, still protected classical harmonic analysis from being declared obsolete.

After World War II, the method continued to develop primarily through the work of Anglo-American Schenkerians and gradually gained traction across broader segments of the repertoire. (Cook, 1987, pp. 215-224)

Many performers also adopted reductionist approaches to better understand the compositions they performed.

At the same time, American theorists finally turned their attention to atonal music, with Allen Forte (1926–2014) arguably being the most successful in this regard. By employing mathematical methods (set theory) – some of which had been developed even earlier – he created a logical reasoning system for analyzing the 20th-century repertoire. (cf. Forte, 1973)

While the future of harmony appeared increasingly bleak in Western countries, it was, in a sense, fortunate that this coincided with the Cold War era, during which the Eastern Bloc – and other ideologically aligned countries – largely rejected modernist aesthetics as decadent.

Ironically, just as many Western musicologists were "declaring" harmony obsolete, their Eastern counterparts were producing some of the discipline's most significant contributions. For instance, the Soviet theorist Yuri Tyulin articulated a theory of tonality in the 1960s that continues to resonate even within the Anglo-American academic world. (cf. Tyulin, 1966; Despić, 1971, p. 9)

Between the 1970s and 1990s, new methods and approaches intended to "replace" traditional harmony emerged in rapid succession, and young scholars embraced them with the same enthusiasm as children for new toys. Let us mention neo-Riemannian theory, tonal pitch space, and Tonfelder theory, to name just a few. (cf. Cohn, 1998; Lerdahl, 1988; Haas, 2004)

Given that computers have played an increasingly prominent role in music analysis since the late 20th century (Cook, 1987, p. 183) – not to mention recent developments in AI – does this signal the final blow to harmonic analysis, or even to any form of human-developed traditional approach to musical creation? Let us attempt to offer some answers.

### **Three stances on the future of harmony**

I recognize three different stances regarding current views on the future of harmony.

The first might be dubbed *nihilistic* or even maybe *cynical*. An ever-increasing number of scholars now question whether we even need to study counterpoint – particularly Renaissance counterpoint – since we rarely listen to Palestrina or Lassus and even more rarely attempt to perform their works. According to that logic, teaching and learning these old techniques should be reserved for specialized ensembles and enthusiasts.

While there may not be many explicit calls to abolish harmony as a discipline, the increasing insistence on applying "newer" analytical techniques to repertoire for which harmony – that legacy of 17th- and 18th-century music theory – is perfectly suitable, leads me to conclude that I wouldn't be surprised if someone has already proposed removing the discipline entirely from future curricula.

The second view may be understood as *historicist* or *anachronistic*. Many music theorists do not seek a solution to the "harmonic crisis" in pursuing new harmonic systems, but rather in the distant past.

Harmony as a discipline has never been entirely homogeneous across cultural contexts and has undergone numerous developmental stages over its 400-year history. Some scholars now see a possible way forward in reviving once-discarded branches of tradition.

Quite recently, I had the opportunity to exchange views with individuals advocating for a return to partimento theory and even for the renewed application of hexachordal principles – both of which were largely abandoned by the mid-18th century. From my perspective, I would be quite cautious about the applicability of such ideas.

Perhaps the strongest advocacy today is for the revival of practical harmony. This branch never truly disappeared, but it is far less prominent than in the first half of the 20th century (let us recall Nadia Boulanger), to say nothing of earlier centuries. In this case, my stance is largely supportive, particularly when fostering a practical understanding of harmonic fundamentals. However, I remain cautious about how such skills can be extended into more scientifically rigorous domains.

Finally, there is a *midway view*. It is based on a fact that is a key weakness across all (post-)modern approaches to music analysis. Namely, the more methodologies there are, the fewer people can understand them.

Occam's razor teaches us that the solution requiring the fewest assumptions is usually the best. When it comes to classical harmony, an analyst quickly acquires enough tools to engage with most of the repertoire.

It is essential to identify the initial key, know a dozen chord types and their scale degrees or functions, and recognize modulations, sequences, and non-chord tones. Of course, this requires some practice, but once acquired, these tools can be readily adapted to the common-practice-period repertoire and to popular and folk genres.

If, for practical purposes, someone ventures into writing four-part harmony, they must face several "prohibitions" and limitations. However, once they do, they have mastered the craft – and then (as Professor Maksimović observed) they truly have the right to break and override the rules.

All remaining methods – such as Schenkerian analysis, neo-Riemannian theory (NRT), and others – require numerous additional assumptions. In this regard, Schenkerians may even hold a certain advantage, since nothing is easier than simply distinguishing between structural and non-structural tones – although even this often leads to disagreements among analysts (not that classical harmonic analysis is free from such disputes). Nonetheless, this principle underpins many other contemporary methods. Of course, many modern analytical approaches (for both tonal and atonal music) require a solid understanding of mathematics, which many, myself included, often struggle to meet.

By no means do I intend to discourage those who wish to analyze certain repertoires using one of the contemporary methods – on the contrary, I do so myself regularly, because new methods can indeed offer insights that classical harmonic analysis cannot.

However, for the sake of comparison, let us consider the difference between a "classical" harmonic approach and a reductionist one with a short thought experiment of, for example, a symphonic poem by Liszt.

In a reductionist analysis, we will likely uncover the *Uralinie* of the entire work rather quickly, revealing its tonal framework. Building on this, as the basis for NRT, we will identify how the transformations between structural chords function. (c.f. Cohn, 1998) If we apply Tonfeldertheorie, we will also learn which tonal fields the piece moves through. (c.f. Haas, 2004) All of these approaches are reasonable.

Yet harmonic analysis, although it may challenge us to identify specific chords and distinguish them from non-chord tones, still forms the foundation for all of these methods. Very few analysts would dare to engage in Schenkerian analysis without conducting a basic harmonic analysis.

But beyond that, it reveals something else: we often miss the forest for the trees. Isn't the beauty of Liszt's harmonic language precisely in all those chromatic passing tones that we are so eager to "trim away" or "cut out"? In traditional harmonic analysis, we put those harmonies in parentheses, and we might comment upon them; in reductionist methods, we often eliminate them on the first level.

## Conclusion

In the concluding part, I would like to reflect on possible answers to the methodological questions posed at the beginning. How relevant is harmony in the contemporary context? It remains highly relevant, despite the emergence of alternative contemporary methodologies. More precisely, it is questionable whether these methodologies would exist at all without the foundational presence of harmony, as their analytical frameworks have developed from earlier harmonic

principles. Do the new methodologies offer satisfactory alternatives to the traditional discipline? To a certain extent, they do. However, they are not without limitations, and it is often necessary for the analyst to return to classical harmony in order to obtain more precise answers to questions that might otherwise remain insufficiently addressed. If harmony is to continue to exist in the future, what might its role entail? Harmony will continue to serve as a fundamental basis for both contemporary and future methodologies. To become a fully competent analyst, one must possess a solid grounding in the core theoretical disciplines, including harmony.

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### Biodata of Author



**Nikola Komatović** concluded Ph.D. at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna under the mentorship of Prof. Dr. Gesine Schröder (his thesis focused on the harmonic language of César Franck) in 2018. He previously completed his Bachelors in Music Theory (2011) and Master's (2012) studies at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Komatović researches historical theories (in the first line, historical theories of tonality and harmony in France), the development of methodology in Eastern Europe (the Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia) and China, popular music, and certain aspects of modern and postmodern music (heritage of Ancient Greek and Byzantine music). In 2023, the Home Board of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts granted him the title of Independent Research Associate.

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## Research Article

# Theoretical analysis of *seyir* dynamics in tanbur taksims: The example of Uşşak taksims by Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte

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### Abstract

When the earliest known recordings in the tanbur performance tradition are examined, it can be observed that tanbur performance developed mainly around two approaches. The first is the classical style, which is thought to have begun with Tanburi İsak, and the second is the Cemil Bey style, which is thought to have begun with Cemil Bey. As followers of this style, Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte appear as two performers who played an important role in the tanbur performance tradition of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This study examines, from a modal perspective, the taksims performed in the Uşşak makam by two representatives of different styles within the twentieth-century generation of tanbur performance, one of the deep-rooted instruments of Turkish music. The aim of examining these taksims is to discuss the differences in the approaches of these performers, who lived in the same period and were nourished by similar sources in many respects, toward the same makam. In the analysis of these taksims, the Arel-Ezgi-Uzdilek theoretical system was taken as a reference. In the study, the recordings of both performers were notated through transcription technique. Since the taksim form is generally performed in free rhythm in terms of *usul*, the transcriptions were also notated in free rhythm. Based on the data obtained from this study, it was understood that Necdet Yaşar adopted a more innovative performance approach, foregrounded plectrum strokes more prominently, and employed a modal progression that moved beyond conventional makam rules. As a result of the same analyses, it was determined that İzzettin Ökte adopted a calmer performance style, placing more notes within fewer plectrum strokes and giving greater priority to makam rules.

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## Introduction

Turkish music possesses a wide range of *usul* and *makam* varieties. Among the principal forms of instrumental music, *taksim* stands out as one of the genres in which the greatest number of works has been produced. The tradition of *taksim* performance, which began with Tanburi Cemil Bey, gradually evolved over time and led to the emergence of new performance styles. The *tanbur*, which occupies an exceptional place in the history of Turkish music, played an active role in the developmental process of this musical tradition. Cem Behar states that the true rise of the *tanbur* instrument began in the second half of the seventeenth century (Behar, 2015:36).

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The fact that many of the composers and performers who contributed to the formation of the instrumental repertoire were *tanburis* demonstrates the significance of this instrument not only in theoretical but also in practical terms. As the *tanbur* continued to develop through performance practice, new approaches identified as “schools” or “styles” gradually emerged. When the origins of these schools are examined, two principal traditions become evident: the classical style associated with Tanburi İsak and the Cemil Bey style associated with Tanburi Cemil Bey.

In the classical style attributed to Tanburi İsak, multiple tones are produced within a single plectrum stroke, whereas the Cemil Bey style is characterized by the use of multiple plectrum strokes on a single note. Within this tradition, İzzettin Ökte and Necdet Yaşar stand out as two major figures who left a lasting mark on the twentieth century. Although they were contemporaries, these two masters adopted distinctly different performance approaches. These differences were also reflected in their understanding of *makam*. İzzettin Ökte exhibited a plain and restrained performance style closely adhering to classical practice and *makam* rules, while Necdet Yaşar embraced the Cemil Bey style through dense plectrum strokes, rich ornamentations, and musical phrases requiring high agility in *tanbur* performance.

### Theoretical Framework

In this study, relevant articles and thesis studies concerning the theory of Turkish *makam* music will be reviewed, and the obtained data will be used to construct the literature overview of the study.

Within the theoretical background, the analyses will be conducted based on the Arel-Ezgi-Uzdilek theoretical system and the understanding of *makam* described in İsmail Hakkı Özkan’s work *Türk Musikisi Nazariyatı ve Kudüm Velveleleri*. The obtained findings will be compared within this framework.

### The *Taksim* Form

The *taksim* form is a musical form that demonstrates a performer’s accumulation of knowledge regarding the instrument and their mastery over it. In some sources, *taksim* is also referred to as improvisation, and within Turkish music it appears as one of the most important forms of improvisatory performance. In deeply rooted musical traditions such as Turkish music, which emerged and developed through the *mesk* system, the *taksim* form did not remain limited to a single category; rather, various subtypes emerged over time. Musicologist Ahmet Say defines the concept of *taksim* as “the name given to the entirety of melodic phrases improvised spontaneously (without prior composition) by an instrumental performer” (Say, 1985).

Considered one of the most difficult forms to perform in Turkish music, *taksim* is an improvised composition shaped by the performer’s advanced *makam* knowledge, compositional ability, and command of timing. Referring to Kantemiroğlu, Tura (2001) defines *taksim* as a pleasant melody performed independently of *usûl*, in the *makam* of the composition to be performed, and presented before the composition itself (p.172). Structurally, the form consists of introduction, development, and conclusion sections. Initially, the *seyir* characteristics of the *makam* are displayed; this is followed by a development section enriched through modulations and different pitch regions depending on the performer’s mastery, and finally the *taksim* concludes by returning to the principal *makam*.

Cinuçen Tanrıkorur categorizes *taksims* into three main groups according to their functions: “concert,” “opening/introduction” (before *fasıl* or Mevlevi rituals), and “transition” *taksims*, while those performed for resting purposes are termed “interlude *taksims*.” Functionally, *taksims* are also divided into types such as Opening, Closing, Introduction, Interlude, Transition, Accompanied, Mixed/Joint, and Catalogue *Taksims* (Tanrıkorur, 2016:51).

The *taksim* form may be performed in various ways. It can sometimes be performed within a single *makam* or across several different *makams*. In Turkish music, *taksim* is not merely a single form but consists of several types. Among these are Introduction *Taksim*, Interlude *Taksim*, Final *Taksim*, Transition *Taksim*, Catalogue *Taksim*, Joint *Taksim*, and Rhythmic *Taksim*. There is no fixed duration for *taksims*. Yılmaz Öztuna explains this matter as follows: “A *taksim* may last less than half a minute or longer than an hour. It is not bound by time. Its duration depends on the abilities of the performer, the beauty of the voice or instrument, and the degree to which the listener’s interest is maintained” (Öztuna, 1976:298). Similarly, İhsan Özgen defines the *taksim* form in the following way:

“...*taksim* should be considered among the compositional values of Turkish music. Whether in classical or romantic *taksim* forms, it requires not only mature performance ability but also talents such as composition and creativity...” (Özgen, 2025).

### Uşşak Makam

Uşşak makam is one of the simple makams characterized by an ascending *seyir* and concluding on the *dügâh* pitch. As one of the principal makams widely used throughout history, the scale of Uşşak makam is formed by adding a *bûselik* pentachord on the *nevâ* pitch to a *uşşak* tetrachord on the *dügâh* pitch.



**Figure 1.** The Scale of Uşşak Makam in Its Original Position

The dominant tone (*güçlü*) of the makam is the *nevâ* pitch, and the half cadence is performed on this pitch with a *bûselik* flavor. The pitches forming the scale, from low to high register, are *dügâh*, *segâh*, *çârgâh*, *nevâ*, *büseynî*, *acem*, *gerdâniye*, and *muhayyer*. In its key signature, only the *si* note carries a comma flat, and the leading tone (*yeden*) of the makam is the *rast* pitch. Uşşak makam is rich in suspended cadences (*asma kararlar*), among which the most important pitch is *segâh*. On this pitch, suspended cadences are performed with *segâh* and *ferahnâk* flavors. However, in order to perform a suspended cadence on *segâh* with the *segâh* flavor, a one-comma flat must be added to the *büseynî* pitch.



**Figure 2.** The *Segâh* Flavor on the *Segâh* Pitch

In Uşşak makam, the *segâh* pitch possesses a distinct characteristic; namely, during descending melodic progression (*inici seyir*), this pitch should be performed 1–2 commas flatter, rather than only during suspended cadences (*asma karar*). However, since there is no accidental sign (flat) in Turkish music notation corresponding to this alteration, the pitch is still indicated with a comma flat in notation, although it is performed flatter in descending progressions. This characteristic becomes evident in all makams containing the Uşşak flavor or makam, regardless of the pitch on which it appears. When the *segâh* pitch is thus flattened, an interval of approximately 6–7 commas remains between *dügâh* and *segâh*, which is referred to as the “incomplete major mücennep interval.” Regarding the other suspended cadences of the makam, it is known that a *tanîni* interval exists between the Uşşak and Rast flavors. During the melodic progression of Uşşak makam, if the melody descends to the *rast* pitch, suspended cadences with the Rast flavor are occasionally performed on this pitch as well:



**Figure 3.** The Rast Pentachord in Its Original Position

In the makam, which principally expands downward by taking a Rast pentachord on the *yegâh* pitch in the lower register, if the melodic progression descends to the *yegâh* pitch, a suspended cadence with the Rast flavor is also performed on this pitch:



**Figure 4.** The Rast Pentachord on the *Yegâh* Pitch

Uşşak *makam* essentially expands downward from the lower register of the tonic pitch by taking a Rast pentachord on the *yegâh* pitch:



**Figure 5.** The Rast Scale on the *Yegâh* Pitch

In Uşşak *makam*, which consistently expands toward the lower register and almost never lingers around the upper tonic, melodic phrases may occasionally exceed the upper tonic *muhayyer* pitch; however, even in such cases, the melody does not remain on the *muhayyer* pitch. In this situation, it becomes necessary, at least theoretically, to determine which pitches may be used. This expansion toward the upper register may occur in two ways:

The Uşşak tetrachord in its original position may be transposed symmetrically onto the upper tonic *muhayyer* pitch:



**Figure 6.** The Expansion of the Uşşak Scale in Its Original Position onto the *Muhayyer* Pitch

A *kürdî* tetrachord may be added on the *muhayyer* pitch to the *büselik* pentachord located on the dominant *nevâ* pitch. Through this expansion, a *büselik* scale is formed on the *nevâ* pitch:



**Figure 7.** The Uşşak Scale in Its Original Position and the *Büselik* Scale on the *Nevâ* Pitch

These expansions toward the upper register are also entirely theoretical and correspond to the expansions of the *Bayâtî makam*, which is very closely related to Uşşak. When suspended cadences with the *çârgâh* flavor are frequently performed on the *çârgâh* pitch in Uşşak *makam*, the Uşşak Hûzî *makam* emerges. The melodic progression (*seyir*) of Uşşak *makam* begins from the tonic pitch, from pitches surrounding the tonic, or from the pitches belonging to the expanded lower register. After moving around the pitches of the Uşşak tetrachord on the tonic, the melody circulates throughout both sides of the scale, especially around the dominant pitch, and then performs a half cadence on the *nevâ* pitch. During this process, the necessary suspended cadences and other characteristic features are displayed. Finally, after navigating throughout the entire scale and the expanded register, the *makam* concludes with a full cadence featuring the Uşşak flavor on the *dügâh* pitch.

### The Classical Style and the Cemil Bey Style in Tanbur Performance

Throughout history, the *tanbur* instrument has played a significant role in Turkish music both in expressing theoretical structures and in developing the performance tradition. This process, which began to develop especially from the eighteenth century onward, can be better understood through the words of Cem Behar:

“According to Kantemir, both the form of the *tanbur* and the details of its performance style were in complete harmony in every respect with the Ottoman/Turkish music system whose theory he attempted to construct. ... This elevated the instrument, much like the *ud*, almost to the status of a ‘foundational instrument.’ For in Kantemiroğlu’s *edvâr*, both theory and performance were built upon this instrument.” (Behar, 2017:172)

In her book *Sources of 18th Century Music*, published in 2000, Eugenia P. Judetz (1925–2011) tabulated the pitches found in eighteenth-century musical sources (Judetz, 2000:144–145).

Although *tanbur* performance became enriched through the styles of different performers, interpreting this diversity through two principal poles and the styles derived from them enables a clearer understanding and interpretation of each stage.

The first of these poles is the classical style, whose foundations are associated with Tanburi İsak. This Tanburi İsak-centered style exhibits a calm performance characteristic grounded in the natural resonance of the *tanbur*, prioritizing connected phrase structures and sparse plectrum strokes. In the classical style, melodic movements proceed in a more static manner, while wide intervallic leaps are consciously avoided. However, the absence of audio recordings from this period and the limited number of written sources cause analyses of this style to rely on restricted findings.

In contrast, the Cemil Bey Style, which emerged through Tanburi Cemil Bey and pushed the technical boundaries of the instrument, transformed the static nature of the classical style by introducing virtuoso-level dynamism into performance. This style, which has survived to the present day through richer audio and written sources compared to the classical style, developed its own character through intensive agility, dynamic and forceful plectrum strokes, grace-note ornamentations, and leaps to distant pitches.

### Biographical Information on Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte and Their Place and Importance in Tanbur Performance

#### Necdet Yaşar

Born in Gaziantep in 1930, Necdet Yaşar internalized the Tanburi Cemil Bey school through the instruction of Mesut Cemil Bey, Cemil Bey’s son. Reinterpreting the Cemil Bey style through his own unique vision, he introduced a new performance style in *tanbur* playing associated with his own name. He was accepted as a *tanbur* performer into the performance ensemble directed by Münir Nurettin Selçuk (Tokuz, 2009).

In the United States, at the University of Washington, he conducted studies on the tonal system of Turkish music together with Karl Signell. In addition, by teaching courses on Turkish music, he carried the *tanbur* onto the international academic platform. Through the İstanbul State Turkish Music Ensemble, which he founded in 1987, he played a pioneering role in transmitting the classical performance tradition to future generations. Necdet Yaşar, who was awarded the title of State Artist in 2007, passed away in 2017. He composed *saz semais* in the *Kürdilibicazkar*, *Segâh*, *Nev’ eser*, and *Nevruz* makams.

#### İzzettin Ökte

Born in İstanbul in 1910, İzzettin Ökte was one of the authentic representatives of the classical style. By carrying the classical style into the present through his own interpretation, he effectively served as a bridge between traditions. İzzettin Ökte’s performance style was based more on emotional depth than technical display. In contrast to Necdet Yaşar’s bright and clear tone, he achieved a more misty, muted, and *davudî* (deep) tone quality. His plectrum strokes were soft, and in his left-hand technique he frequently employed glissando movements.

Ökte introduced a new technical approach by performing the *tanbur*, which had previously also been played with 17 frets, using a 43-fret system. In order to obtain a fuller tone, he preferred using a relatively thicker plectrum suitable for horizontal strokes rather than the conventional plectrum dimensions designed for vertical strokes. Furthermore, it is

known that in the bowed *tanbur*, whose lower strings had previously remained separate, the lower strings were first combined by İzzettin Ökte (Gülaçar, 2024).

İzzettin Ökte worked for many years at the İstanbul Municipal Conservatory and İstanbul Radio. He also performed in classical choirs directed by Mesut Cemil Bey and passed away in 1991. Primarily known for his *taksim* performances, İzzettin Ökte is also known to have composed a *sırto* in the *Nikriz makam*.

### Aim of the Study

This study compares the differing understandings of *makam* and *seyir* adopted by two performers who lived during the same period in the traditions of *tanbur* and *taksim* performance. Research problems are;

- What kind of *seyir* understanding did Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte adopt?
- To what extent does the *seyir* structure correspond with existing modal descriptions and theoretical frameworks?
- What do the obtained findings indicate regarding the practical reflection of Turkish *makam* music theory in performance?

### Method

In this study, an analytical case study design was employed within the framework of the qualitative research approach. In addition, the research is based on a comparative analysis method grounded in *makam* theory. Within the context of the sample, two *tanburis* who lived during the same period but preferred different performance styles and understandings of *seyir* were selected. In order to understand the differences in their approaches, the *taksims* performed by both musicians in the *Uşşak makam* were selected for analysis. These selected *taksims* were obtained from digital platforms such as the TRT archive and YouTube. Each of these recordings was transcribed using the Finale music notation software and transformed into an analysis form through the method of musical transcription.

### Results

#### Necdet Yaşar – Uşşak *Taksim*



**Figure 8.** The Uşşak Flavor on the Dügâh Pitch Throughout the First Five Lines

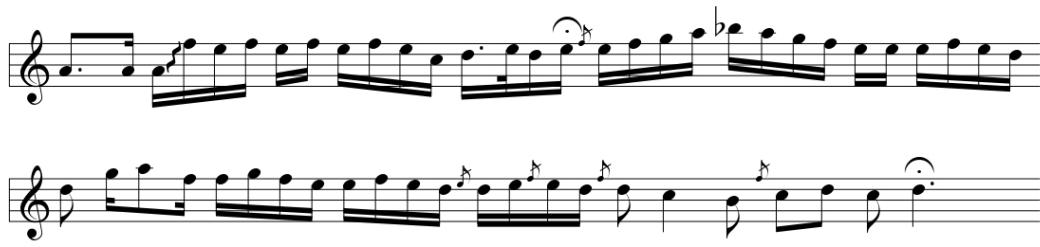


Figure 9. The *Bâselik* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch Continuing Throughout the First Two Measures



Figure 10. Suspended Cadence with the *Çârgâh* Flavor on the *Çârgâh* Pitch

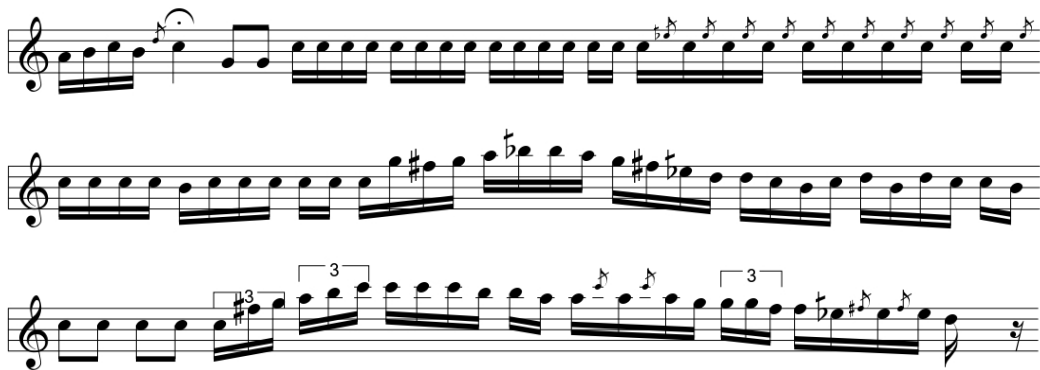


Figure 11. Suspended Cadence with the *Hicaz* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch Beginning in the First Measure of the First Line and Concluding at the End of the Line



Figure 12. Suspended Cadence with the *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch Continuing Throughout the First Two Measures



Figure 13. Suspended Cadence with the *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



Figure 14. Suspended Cadence with the *Bâselik* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch Within the Musical Line

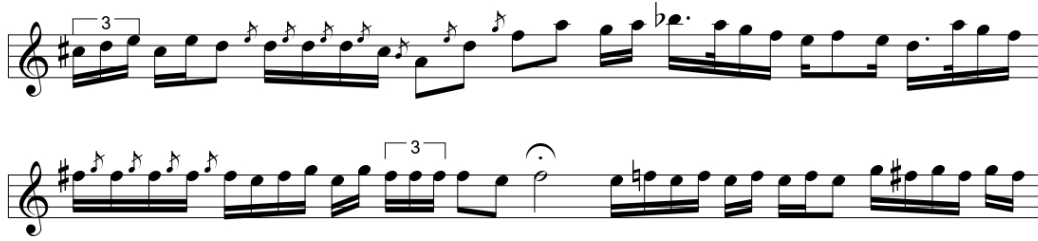


Figure 15. Suspended Cadence with the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Eviç* Pitch

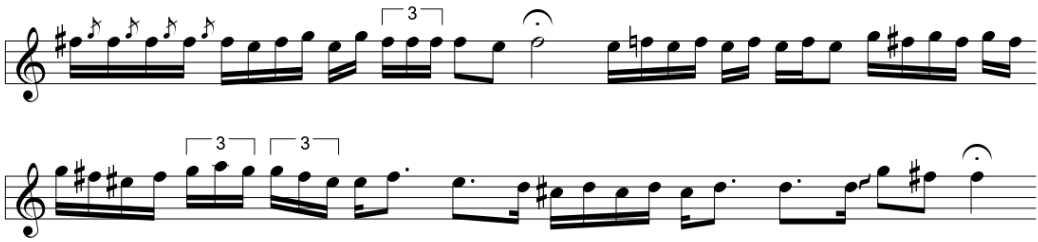


Figure 16. Suspended Cadence with the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Eviç* Pitch



Figure 17. Suspended Cadence with the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Eviç* Pitch Beginning at the Start of the Line and Concluding at the End of the Figure



Figure 18. Suspended Cadence with the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Irak* Pitch

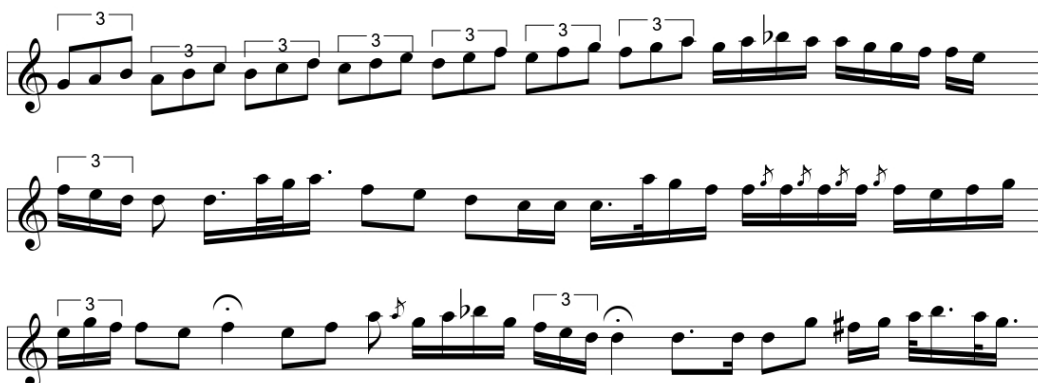


Figure 19. Suspended Cadence with the *Çârgâh* Flavor on the *Acem* Pitch



Figure 20. Suspended Cadence with the *Bûselik* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch



Figure 21. Suspended Cadence with the *Çârgâh* Flavor on the *Çârgâh* Pitch

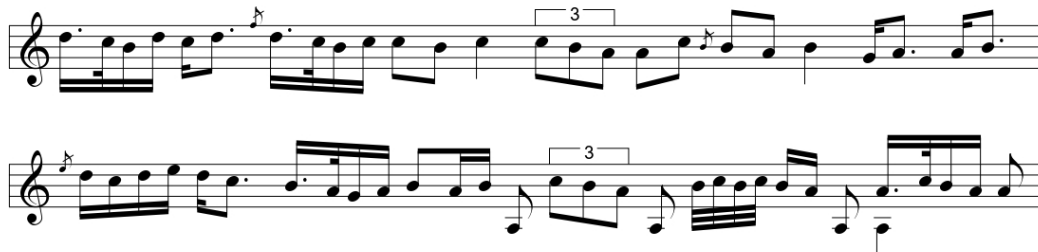


Figure 22. Suspended Cadence with the *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



Figure 23. The *Taksim* Concludes with a Suspended Cadence Featuring the *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch

### İzzettin Ökte – *Uşşak Taksim*



Figure 24. The *Taksim* Begins with a Suspended Cadence Featuring the *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



Figure 25. Musical Phrases Were Formed through a Suspended Cadence Featuring the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Segâh* Pitch



Figure 26. Suspended Cadence with the *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



Figure 27. Suspended Cadence with the *Bûselik* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch



Figure 28. Suspended Cadence with the *Bûselik* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch, Similar to the Phrase in Figure 27



Figure 29. The *Karcığar Makam* Scale Formed through the Use of the *Hicaz* Scale on *Nevâ* and the *Uşşak* Scale on *Dügâh*



Figure 30. The *Rast* Flavor on the *Rast* Pitch

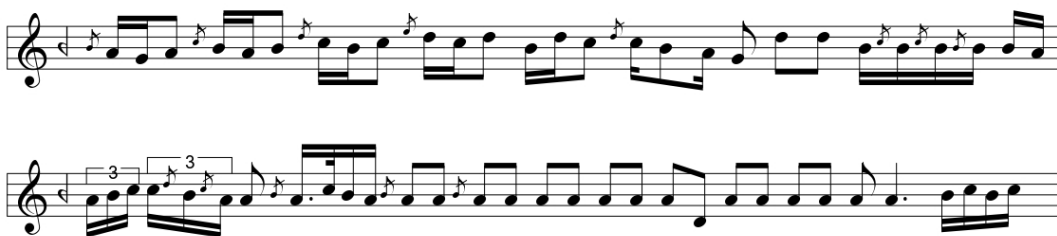


Figure 31. The *Uşşak* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



Figure 32. The *Hicaz* Flavor on the *Çârgâh* Pitch



Figure 33. Suspended Cadence without a Specific Flavor on the *Hisar* Pitch



Figure 34. Suspended Cadence with the *Hicaz* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch



Figure 35. Suspended Cadence Formed through Musical Phrases Belonging to the *Hüzzam Makam* on the *Segâh* Pitch



Figure 36. Cadential Rest with the *Zirgüleli Hicaz* Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



Figure 37. Suspended Cadence with the *Nikriz* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch

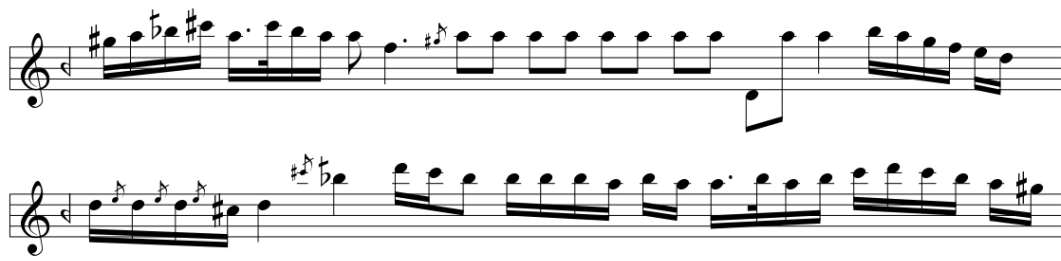


Figure 38. Suspended Cadence with the *Nikriz* Flavor on the *Nevâ* Pitch



Figure 39. Suspended Cadence with the *Büselik* Flavor on the *Hüseyinî* Pitch



Figure 40. Suspended Cadence with the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Segâh* Pitch



Figure 41. Suspended Cadence with the *Büselik* Flavor on the *Hüseyinî* Pitch

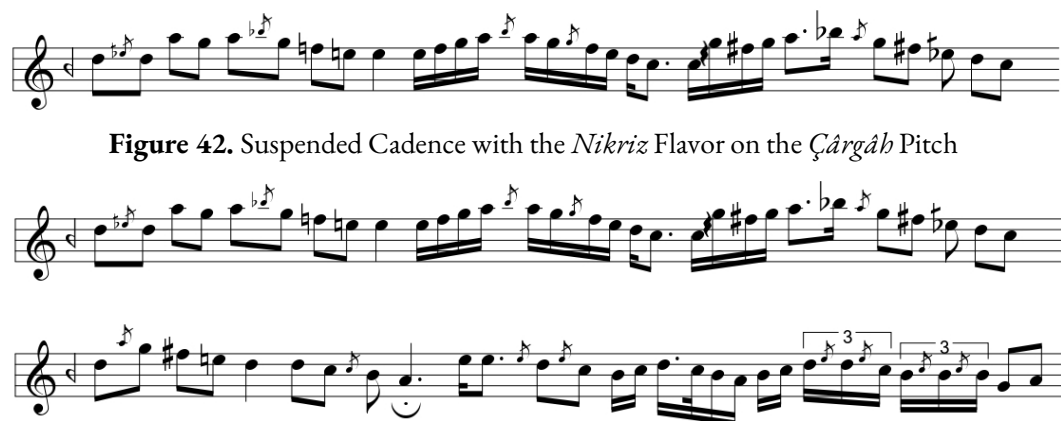
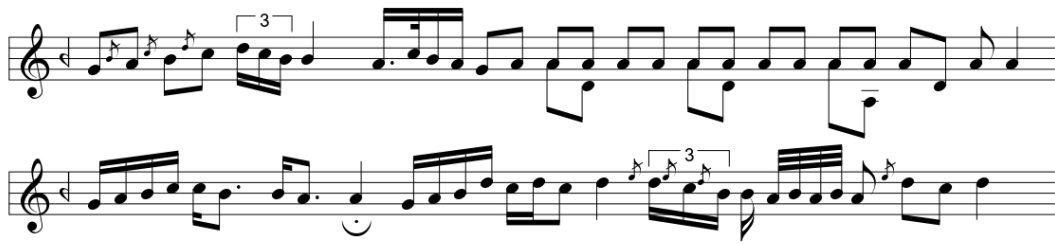


Figure 42. Suspended Cadence with the *Nikriz* Flavor on the *Çârgâh* Pitch

Figure 43. Suspended Cadence Formed through Musical Phrases Based on the *Karcığar* Scale on the *Dügâh* Pitch



**Figure 44.** Suspended Cadence with the Uşşak Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch



**Figure 45.** Suspended Cadence with the *Segâh* Flavor on the *Segâh* Pitch



**Figure 46.** Suspended Cadence with the Uşşak Flavor on the *Dügâh* Pitch

The findings from the comparative analyses conducted so far can be summarized as follows: Although Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte draw from the same musical tradition and perform within the same makam (mode), they exhibit quite different understandings of melodic progression, tone production, and instrumental expression. Transcription analyses show that in Turkish music performance, melodic progression is not merely a technical difference, but a multi-dimensional aesthetic orientation that shapes the melodic structure, modal transitions, rhythmic organization, and expressive character. In this context, Necdet Yaşar's performance reflects a more dynamic, virtuoso, and extroverted interpretation based on intensive pick use, rapid ornamentation passages, and extended modal expressions, while İzzettin Ökte's performance is based on a more restricted, introverted, and makam-centered aesthetic relying on legato articulation, subtle melodic continuity, and tonal depth. These differences demonstrate that the same makam can acquire completely different expressive identities depending on the performer's stylistic priorities and artistic perception. Furthermore, analyses reveal that theoretical definitions of makam (mode) alone are insufficient to fully explain performance practice in Turkish music; performers' personal interpretations, tonal preferences, expressive strategies, and approaches to suspended cadences significantly reshape the practical application of theoretical structures. Accordingly, the findings emphasize that Turkish makam music should be evaluated not only through theoretical systems but also through performance-centered analytical perspectives.

## Conclusion

As a result of the analyses conducted, it has been determined that Necdet Yaşar's performance style represents the continuation of the innovative and virtuosity-centered approach whose foundations were established by Tanburi Cemil Bey. In Yaşar's Uşşak *taksim*, the numerical density of plectrum strokes and the dynamic structure created by these strokes emerge as prominent elements. It is understood that the performer tended toward melodic expansions extending beyond the traditional boundaries of the *makam*; particularly around the *Nevâ* pitch, he enriched the expressive possibilities of the *makam* through flavors such as *Bûselik* and *Hicaz*. Prioritizing agility and technical proficiency within the structure of the *taksim*, Necdet Yaşar treated plectrum strokes not merely as technical elements but also as rhythmic and structural components of melodic flow, presenting an extroverted and brilliant performance style supported by ornamentations and grace notes.

In contrast, it has been concluded that İzzettin Ökte's performance style represents one of the most accomplished and refined twentieth-century representatives of the "Classical Style," whose roots extend back to Tanburi İsak. When Ökte's Uşşak *taksim* is examined, it becomes evident that, unlike Necdet Yaşar's approach, he adopted a legato-based performance style aimed at achieving a broad sonic range through a limited number of plectrum strokes. By adhering meticulously to the traditional *seyir* characteristics of the *makam*, the performer prioritized a calm, introspective, and "davudî" tonal ideal, far removed from technical display. Transcription analyses reveal that Ökte constructed a profound and balanced melodic structure within the dignified aesthetic framework of the classical style by employing flavors such as *Karcığar*, *Nikriz*, and *Zirgüleli Hicaz* in his modal transitions. In Ökte's performance, expressive power was observed to emerge not primarily through plectrum strokes but through the sliding, pressure variations, and nuanced articulations of the left hand on the fingerboard.

As a result, through the examples of Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte, it has been demonstrated that the concept of *tavir* in *tanbur* performance is not limited merely to technical mastery of the instrument, but rather constitutes a fundamental aesthetic preference shaping the treatment, formation, and expression of the *makam*. While Yaşar positioned the *tanbur* as a modern, dynamic, and expressive instrument of musical narration, Ökte regarded the instrument as a carrier of traditional musical memory and emotional depth. The interpretations of these two master performers on the Uşşak *makam* clearly demonstrate how even a principal *makam* can acquire highly distinct identities depending on the performer's stylistic and aesthetic orientation.

## Recommendations

In line with the findings obtained from this study, the following recommendations have been developed for future research in the fields of Turkish music theory and performance education:

*Expansion of the Repertoire:* The comparative analysis method limited to the Uşşak *makam* in this study may also be applied to *taksims* in other principal *makams* of Turkish music, thereby enabling a more comprehensive evaluation of performers' stylistic continuities and divergences.

*Integration into Educational Curricula:* It is recommended that *tanbur* education programs in conservatories encourage students not only to focus on technical studies but also to analyze and perform transcriptions belonging to representatives of different *tavirs* (for example, the *taksim* transcriptions of Necdet Yaşar and İzzettin Ökte). This approach would particularly contribute to conservatory students' development of stylistic awareness and individual modes of musical expression.

*Interdisciplinary Approaches:* Conducting interdisciplinary studies focusing on music sociology and music psychology to examine the influence of performers' individual psychological characteristics and the socio-cultural conditions of the period on the formation of performance styles (*tavir*) would make significant contributions toward a more holistic and in-depth understanding of the concept of *tavir*.

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Appendix 1. Musical Transcription of the Uşşak Taksim Performed by Necdet Yaşar

UŞŞAK TAKSİM

Necdet YAŞAR

The image displays a musical transcription of a Uşşak Taksim, a traditional Turkish instrumental piece. The transcription is presented in ten staves of music, all written in treble clef. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and performance markings. A 'Port' marking is visible on the third staff. The piece begins with a simple melodic line on the first staff, followed by more complex rhythmic patterns and melodic developments in the subsequent staves. The notation includes a triplet in the second staff and a fermata in the fifth staff. The piece concludes with a final melodic phrase on the tenth staff.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM  
2

Necdet YAŞAR

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "UŞŞAK TAKSİM" by Necdet YAŞAR. The score is written on ten staves of music, each containing a single melodic line. The notation includes various rhythmic values, such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Several measures feature triplets, indicated by a bracket with the number "3" above the notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 2/4. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format, typical of a printed musical manuscript.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM  
3

Necdet YAŞAR

The musical score consists of ten staves of notation in treble clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piece is titled 'UŞŞAK TAKSİM' and is numbered '3'. The composer is 'Necdet YAŞAR'. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above a bracket). The piece concludes with a final cadence.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM  
4

Necdet YAŞAR

The musical score consists of five staves of notation. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' above the staff. The second staff continues the melodic line with similar rhythmic patterns and another triplet. The third staff is characterized by a dense sequence of sixteenth notes, with two triplets of eighth notes marked with '3' above the staff. The fourth and fifth staves conclude the piece with more melodic lines, including a final triplet of eighth notes. The score ends with a double bar line.

## Appendix 2. Musical Transcription of the Uşşak Taksim Performed by İzzettin Ökte



## UŞŞAK TAKSİM

İzzettin ÖKTE

The musical transcription is presented in ten staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (E-flat major), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a fermata over the final note. The second staff continues the melody, featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff shows a more complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth notes and a triplet. The fourth staff includes a triplet of eighth notes and a fermata. The fifth staff features a series of eighth notes and a fermata. The sixth staff is a dense passage of sixteenth notes with a sharp sign indicating a key change. The seventh staff continues with sixteenth notes and a triplet. The eighth staff features a series of eighth notes and a fermata. The ninth staff shows a series of eighth notes and a triplet. The tenth staff concludes the piece with a series of eighth notes and a triplet.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM

2

İzzettin ÖKTE

The musical score for Uşşak Taksim is presented in ten staves of treble clef notation. The piece is in 2/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic and melodic patterns. The first staff begins with a melodic line that includes a sharp sign (F#) and a fermata. The second staff contains a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff features several triplet markings over eighth notes. The fourth staff shows a melodic line with a sharp sign (F#) and a fermata. The fifth staff continues the melodic development with a sharp sign (F#) and a fermata. The sixth staff includes a triplet of eighth notes. The seventh staff shows a melodic line with a sharp sign (F#) and a fermata. The eighth staff features a melodic line with a sharp sign (F#) and a fermata. The ninth staff continues the melodic development with a sharp sign (F#) and a fermata. The tenth staff concludes the piece with a melodic line and a fermata.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM  
3

İzzettin ÖKTE

The musical score consists of ten staves of notation. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/4 time signature. The music is written in a single melodic line. The score includes several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above a bracket) and various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes. The notation is complex, with many beamed notes and rests. The piece concludes with a 'Port' marking above a final note.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM  
4

Izzettin ÖKTE

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "UŞŞAK TAKSİM" by Izzettin ÖKTE. The score is written in a single system with ten staves, all using a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The music is characterized by intricate melodic lines and complex rhythmic patterns. Key features include:   
 - Frequent use of eighth and sixteenth notes, often in beamed groups.   
 - Several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above a bracket) across various staves.   
 - A "Port" marking (portamento) above a slur in the final staff, indicating a smooth transition between notes.   
 - A variety of accidentals, including flats and sharps, throughout the piece.   
 - The score concludes with a final note in the tenth staff.

UŞŞAK TAKSİM

5

İzzettin ÖKTE

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a quarter rest followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff continues the melodic line with various rhythmic patterns, including a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff concludes the piece with a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note and a final double bar line.

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