

TURKISH MUSICAL CULTURE IN TORONTO

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Turks form a relatively small section of Canada's multicultural mosaic. They are primarily first-generation immigrants from large urban centres (mainly Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir) who arrived in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s. About 5,000 live in the Toronto area, with smaller communities in Montreal and Ottawa. Unlike many first-generation immigrants to Toronto, the Turks are not concentrated in a particular area; rather, they are scattered throughout the city, thereby increasing their isolation from each other and decreasing their visibility in Toronto's multicultural milieu.

An important demographic characteristic is the significant division which exists between white-collar professionals and less educated blue-collar workers. Because of this split, an already small community is further fragmented.

I began to observe activities of the Turkish community in Toronto in January 1978.¹ Quite accidentally, the period from January 1978 to August 1979 turned out to be crucial for the community: for the first time the Turks began to present aspects of their culture to a large Canadian audience. Based on my observations over a three-year period, I have arrived at a three-part model which capsulizes the cultural events in the community:

1. informal social gatherings within the community which provide occasions for spontaneous entertainment with little distinction between performers and audience;
2. organized social gatherings within the community which provide entertainment for a larger audience with more distinction between performers and spectators;
3. organized events which reach beyond the community to a large Canadian audience.

Each of the three events in the model is influenced by demographic factors and cultural values. The three main genres of Turkish music — folk, popular, and classical — each have a particular cultural value and appeal to a specific audience. Turkish popular music is western-influenced, with harmony, tonality, and western instrumentation, and appeals to the younger urban-centred population. It is a popular genre with the mainly urban, youthful population in Canada and crosses class boundaries. Folk music (*halk musikisi*) has been actively promoted in Turkey since the establishment of the republic in 1923. Considered by Atatürk to be the true Turkish music, it has been rapidly urbanized and now provides a common cultural base for all Turks, including those in the diaspora. The collection and transcription of folk material has been

followed by widely disseminated performances at both the amateur and professional levels. The broad base of appeal of folk and urbanized folk music is reflected in the choice of music for Turkish events in Canada. Turkish classical music, on the other hand, associated with the pre-republic Ottoman courts, has not been actively encouraged by the government. As it traditionally interested an elite minority, so today it remains the focus of a small group in both Turkey and Canada. Popularized performances of some classical repertoire, using western instruments and short works in simple *makams* (modes), have a larger audience.

Category I of the model — informal social occasions for Turkish conversation, food, and music — originally provided the only cultural outlet for Turks in Toronto. Informal music-making has always been a part of Turkish culture. Several informants expressed surprise and disappointment that virtually no spontaneous music-making occurs at similar gatherings of Canadians. Typically, someone in the group plays *saz* (long-necked plucked lute) or accordion and everyone joins in singing folk songs and popular love songs (*sarki*). Occasionally Turkish marches, tangos, and the National Anthem were sung; very rarely, pieces from the classical repertoire occur. At these small gatherings that are not necessarily homogeneous in terms of occupational or social status, folk music and urban popular music provide the most common base for recreating aspects of Turkish culture, allowing an outlet for nostalgia and an occasion for pride in their cultural heritage.

Category 2 of the model — events organized for a large Turkish audience — includes the popular “Turkish Nights.” Because the majority of Turks immigrated to Canada after 1960, no opportunities for organizing formal events existed until then. In 1962, the Turkish Canadian Friendship Association was founded to organize social events for the community, bringing entertainers from Turkey if possible, and supporting temporary amateur folk dance groups for performances at annual “Turkish Nights.” However, conflict between blue- and white-collar workers prevented the society from running effectively and even caused its closure for some years. If a white-collar president was elected, blue-collar workers felt alienated and withdrew their support, and vice versa. This lack of cooperation between the two groups was exacerbated by the inability to find a president who could relate well to both groups.² However, the society managed to organize entertainment for the community, directing its energy towards two or three yearly events.

“Turkish Nights” are of two types: those with entertainment provided by local amateur musicians and dancers, and those with professional entertainers brought from the United States or Turkey (often in conjunction with New York, which has a large Turkish community). Twice during the study period, a popular nightclub singer, Nese Karaböcek, was scheduled to appear. Her style has wide appeal for urban audiences; she performs popular love songs

with a strong western influence. Her singing often has a breathy quality and she may interject spoken lines of text. She encourages her audiences to enjoy themselves and to participate, often through dancing, in her music. At the last moment, however, she was replaced by less popular entertainers, including Mustafa Sagyasar, a singer of semi-classical Turkish music. His audience is limited; his repertoire, composed songs in the *makam* system, does not contain current popular hits, and his accompanying small ensemble consisted of *kanun* (plucked zither), *darbukka* (goblet-shaped drum), and clarinet, instead of a larger group with electric guitar, piano, and violins used by Miss Karaböcek. Throughout the evening he remained on the stage and attempted to maintain a concert atmosphere rather than moving among the tables as Miss Karaböcek would have. This situation created an unusual audience response. No model exists in Turkey for dancing to semi-classical or classical music; however, most of the audience, who had hoped to dance during Miss Karaböcek's performance, began to do so while he sang. The performer's inability to meet requests for popular songs, coupled with a lengthy *kanun* improvisation, further isolated the performers from the majority of the audience. Clearly, most of the Toronto Turks could not relate to a performance of semi-classical music and their dancing was an attempt to make the music more relevant. Most informants agreed a more popular entertainer who would have encouraged audience participation should have been chosen.

In contrast to this situation, organized events with entertainment provided by local members of the community appear to bring together the varied interests of the group. Two such "Turkish Nights" in 1978 included performances of folk songs and dances by members of the community. The ensemble of musicians included a taxi driver playing *saz*, two engineers playing *deff* (tambourine) and accordion, a young seaman seeking refugee status in Canada on *darbukka* and a psychiatrist on *kaval* (whistle flute). Such a heterogeneous group of musicians would be highly improbable in Turkey; yet in a small community in the diaspora, this breaching of social and educational gaps became a necessity. From an audience perspective, folk music is enjoyed by everyone, reflecting the widespread urbanization of *halk musikisi* in Turkey today and Atatürk's encouragement of it. The performance of folk music appeals to a wide audience and serves to unify a heterogeneous community, in terms of both audience and performers.

The first step towards organizing events for a non-Turkish audience, Category 3 of the model, occurred in 1976. A small group of Turks, mainly white-collar professionals, decided to split from the older society to form a separate association that would organize more intellectual activities and present aspects of Turkish culture to Canadian audiences. The Turkish Culture and Folklore Society established language classes for children and a permanent folk

dance group, which performed at several Toronto shopping plazas. In November 1978 the society presented a Turkish translation of a Gogol play. It appeared that the formation of two societies, each with separate goals, could resolve some of the worker-intellectual conflict in the older group.³

However, simultaneously with the establishment of this new organization and its new goal of cultural outreach, a new leader was elected president of the older association. Although a professional engineer, he managed to win the support of the blue-collar workers. He also established as one of his goals the presentation of Turkish culture to Canadians, and in June 1978 he organized a pavilion at Caravan, Toronto's annual ethnic festival, where Turkish cuisine, folk dances, music and fashion were presented to over 30,000 Torontonians during a ten-day period. Ironically, the original differences between the two organizations were virtually eliminated and the new society was overshadowed by the achievements of the older organization.

This first Turkish pavilion was remarkable from several points of view:

1. this was the first time the Turks made an outreach to such a wide audience;
2. the event brought together Turks from all over the city and surrounding areas, from both organizations, and from all social levels;
3. both Turkish organizations received financial rewards.

Local amateurs provided folk dances accompanied by *saz* and *davul* (double-bodied bass drum), accordion, or recorded *zurna* (predecessor of the oboe) and *davul*. An exhibition of Turkish costumes, tapestries, embroidery, and musical instruments was organized. A fashion show of contemporary Turkish clothing with recorded popular Turkish music as background emphasized the fact that urban Turkish women are very aware of European tastes. Westerners have come to expect belly-dancing as part of Middle Eastern culture and the Turkish organizers were well aware of this. Their belly dancer attracted much TV and newspaper publicity.

Multicultural policy in Toronto has influenced the attitudes of many ethnic groups. Funding, publicity, and opportunities for performance before large Canadian audiences are now available. A multicultural television channel, multilanguage radio, and the annual Caravan provide a tremendous incentive to ethnic communities. However, the communities must have working organizations to initiate programs with these institutions. The main impetus for the Turkish pavilion at Caravan came from the president of the Turkish Canadian Friendship Association, who united white- and blue-collar workers to form a stable organization representing a variety of interests. Because the Turkish population in Toronto was relatively stable (due to new immigration policies) and those who had immigrated during the 1960s and achieved relative financial

security, an ideal climate existed for such activity.

The three-stage model of events grew out of my observations of the Turkish community over an extended period of time. Ideally, all three types of events occur during any given time frame. However, collapse of organized activities may occur, especially if the community relies heavily on one individual to provide leadership. The man who had so galvanized the Turkish community in 1978 lost his support when he refused to publish financial statements, and the Turkish Canadian Friendship Association is still attempting to recover from the ensuing monetary and leadership crisis.

Despite the community's internal problems, the desire to reach a large audience remains. A small festival was mounted by the two societies in the summer of 1982 and they hope to have a full pavilion at Caravan next year. Particular demographic features (the small size of the community, its recent appearance on the Canadian scene, and the division between white- and blue-collar workers) have contributed to a situation that makes such outreach difficult. However, a common cultural base has counterbalanced these divisive factors.

The developmental model which I have proposed applies to the Turkish community in Toronto. The community's first types of social activities were informal and spontaneous, and change, in the form of more organized events, occurred as the community became larger, more affluent, and stable, and as the social and political climate in Toronto began to encourage multicultural activities. I hope this model of the Turkish community will encourage others to create similar models of musical culture change for other communities in Canada. It would then be possible to compare these models to generate more general theories of musical-culture change in multicultural societies.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the 1979 annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Montreal. I gratefully acknowledge the advice of Professor Timothy Rice and Dr İlhami Gökçen.
- 2 In 1975 a clubhouse was purchased by the blue-collar workers as a meeting place, especially for those who were taxi drivers. The building, situated in a rather undesirable area of the city, was purchased with a small down payment and high mortgage. Its purchase was opposed by white-collar workers, who were not consulted. After steadily losing money, the building was eventually sold.
- 3 Two other societies have since been formed, but they appeal to very specific groups — one is a Moslem Turkish Association, the other for Turkish Cypriots.

Résumé: Commentant la culture musicale turque à Toronto, Leslie Hall souligne que les Turques forment un groupe relativement restreint dans la mosaïque multi-culturelle du Canada et qu'une division entre cols-blancs professionnels et cols-bleus ouvriers fragmente encore plus cette communauté. Cependant, son étude a permis de mettre en lumière trois types d'événements comportant des manifestations musicales: les réunions sociales informelles, les rencontres sociales organisées et les événements culturels de grande envergure dont la portée dépasse les limites de la petite communauté.