

EUROPE AND EUROPEANS ON THE OTTOMAN / TURKISH STAGE
AND
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OPERA IN TURKEY
FROM THE 19TH UNTIL THE MID-20TH CENTURY

An International Symposium

by

Don Juan Archiv Wien

In cooperation with

Theatre Foundation of Turkey
Vienna School of International Studies
Pera Museum
iTi - International Theatre Institute of UNESCO Centre Austria

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Don Juan Archiv Wien
Trautsongasse 6/6, 1080 Vienna - Austria

CALL FOR PAPERS

A series of international symposia entitled “Ottoman Empire & European Theatre” inaugurated in 2008 and since then organized by Don Juan Archiv Wien in Vienna, Istanbul, Salzburg and Passau has been dedicated to the cultural transfers between the Ottoman Empire and Europe with a focus on performing arts, essentially on the ‘Turkish’ subject in European theatre history – the results of this manifold investigation have been published in Don Juan Archiv Wien’s book series of the same title.

For 2022, Don Juan Archiv Wien takes a shift of perspective and investigates the perception of the European culture on the Turkish stage, especially in the field of opera which, since its exemplary debut in 1786 in the Swedish Embassy in Pera, found the interest of Ottoman Sultans – as Selim III, Mahmud II, Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz, which did continue, once could say grew further. This gave way, and acted as determinant to the flourishing and the foundation of European opera and theatre in the 19th-century Kostantiniyye, gradually becoming established as an institution throughout the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire and since 1923 in the Turkish Republic, leading to the foundation and institutionalisation of Turkish State Opera.

The first Istanbul opera houses in the 19th century, especially such as the Bosco Theatre (1840–1844) and Naum Theatre (1844–1847; after fire rebuilt in 1848, active until 1870) were both inaugurated during Abdülmecid (r. 1839–1861) and staged European operas. Furthermore, the interest of Ottoman Sultans such

as Selim III (r. 1789–1807) who was a poet and composer himself, Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839), Abdülmecid (r. 1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876) in European music, resulted in the establishment of Dolmabahçe Court Theatre (1859–1863) by Abdülmecid, and of Yıldız Palace Theatre (1889–1910) by Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth* (libretto by Francesco Maria Piave) was staged in Kostantiniyye's Naum Theatre in 1848 merely a year after its premiere in Florence (Teatro della Pergola, 1847), hence the second Naum Theatre was on for more than 20 years to see the birth of the first Imperial opera house. Giuseppe Donizetti (the more famous Gaetano's the older brother), in Kostantiniyye widely known as 'Donizetti Paşa', served for almost 30 years from 1828 on until his death in 1856 as the high musical director at the court of Sultan Mahmud II; and in 1876, Sultan Abdülaziz (like the Brazilian Emperor Pedro II, r. 1831–1887) became a sponsor for the construction of Richard Wagner's Festspielhaus Bayreuth – all these to name but a very few highlights of the era.

The librettos of certain European operas staged in the Bosco and Naum theatres were translated to and performed in Turkish – the first one translated into and printed in Turkish in 1842 was Gaetano Donizetti's *Belisario* (Naples, 1836) whose scene is set mostly in Byzantium, i. e. Kostantiniyye. It was also in the 19th century Kostantiniyye that there were even operas created in Turkey, written and composed mostly by Italians who were Istanbul-residents for generations. It was in Naum Theatre that such Italian operas composed in Istanbul premiered, as, for instance *L'assedio di Silistria* composed by Giacomo Panizza (Naum Theatre, 1855), *Una notte di terrore* composed by Carlo Duchalot (1857) and *Giorgio, Il Bandito* composed by Gaetano Foschini (Naum Theatre, 1864). This era also witnessed the emergence of the first Ottoman opera: *Arif'in Hilesi* (1874) composed by Dikran Çuhacıyan (1837–1898) who had also written an opera in Armenian language six years before: *Arshak II* (1868).

As for the theatre life of Ottoman Istanbul in the 19th century and early 20th century, several theatres and formations appear as the most significant highlights which marked the this era: The French Theatre (also called as 'Palais de Cristal', 1831–1870) appears as one of the two most important theatres of Beyoğlu, together with the Naum Theatre in terms of their longevity, which hosted mostly European, and specifically French companies, and also temporarily housing local Armenian and Turkish troupes. Furthermore in this era, the Gedikpaşa Theatre (1860–1867/1867–1884) was founded by a French tightrope and circus company director named Louis Souillier (1813–1886) and housed Souillier's company from 1860 to 1864. The Gedikpaşa Theatre was renamed in 1866 as the Osmanlı Tiyatrosu ('the Ottoman Theatre') and housed, among others, the company by the same name founded by the Ottoman-Armenian Güllü Agop (1840–1902), established as the most essential cultural institution of the Tanzimat Era (1839–1876) under the reigns of Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz, and marked by a movement of Westernization – also in theatre, characterized as the 'Tanzimat Theatre' – during which theatres also in several Anatolian cities were established.

Another milieu, known as 'Direklerarası', appears from 1880s as one of the most important centres of the 19th century Istanbul for arts and entertainment, having hosted both performances of traditions as *Ortaoyunu*, *Meddah* and *Karagöz* and quartered several companies of the time, such as Temâşâhâne-i Osmânî, Osmanlı Dram Kumpanyası, Hayalhâne-i Osmânî, Eğlence-i Osmânî.

A third important institution, commonly known as 'Darülbedayi' (originally Dârü'l-bedâyi-i Osmânî) was founded in 1914 as the first conservatory established in the Ottoman Era in Istanbul, which then gradually was transformed into a theatre company. In 1931 the institution was renamed as Şehir Tiyatrosu ('the City Theatre'), having greatly influenced the flourishing of theatre in European sense; today, it is the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipal Theatres (Istanbul City Theatres).

This process of 'Plantatio Operæ' continued into the 20th century, resulting in 1924 in the establishment of the Mûsikî Mu'allim Mektebi ('Academy for Music Teachers') on order of Atatürk (in office 1923–1938) with the aim of educating music teachers, leading then to the foundation processes of the first state conservatory (with a decree issued by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1934) in Ankara – from 13 October 1923 the Capital of the Republic of Turkey – as well as the institutionalisation of the Turkish State Opera. Ankara Halkevi, inaugurated in 1932, was considered to be the first opera stage of the then young Republic and where the earliest performances were given until 1948. In 1934, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk commissioned to composer Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907–1991) the Republic of Turkey's first 'national' opera in Turkish language, composed at Atatürk's request, *Özsoy*, with the libretto by Münir Hayri Egeli (1903–1970). *Özsoy* premiered on 19 June 1934 in Atatürk's presence on the occasion of the state visit of Reza Shah of Iran (r. 1925–1941) in Ankara Halkevi. A foremost highlight of said era in the Ankara Halkevi was the performance of Wolfgang Amadé Mozart's singspiel *Bastien und Bastienne* in 1939 with a Turkish translation of the libretto: this was the first performance of a European opera, given by the then young singers Süleyman Güler (*Bastien*), Rabia Erler (*Bastienne*) and Ruhi Su (*Colas*) of the Ankara State Conservatory in Turkey's early Republican era (1923–1943). Today, Turkish State Operas are active in five cities; Ankara, Istanbul (since 1960), Izmir (since 1982), Mersin (1990), Antalya (since 1997) and Samsun (since 2008); and since 2009 Istanbul hosts an international opera festival, organised by the General Directorate of State Opera and Ballet.

The two-day symposium – envisaged to be combined with a thematic concert if it is possible next year – will be dedicated to this subject, and will be held in the premises of the Don Juan Archiv Wien on 9–10 June 2022. The symposium addresses mainly the interrelated fields of cultural transfer and history of performing arts, in particular the reflections of European subjects and influence of Europe and Europeans on Ottoman / Turkish Stage.

We invite scholars, artists and cultural managers researching and working in this field that approach the symposium's main topic to explore the history of theatrical, operatic and musical performance in the 19th-century Ottoman Empire until the mid-20th century in the Republic of Turkey, emanating from the following points:

Ottoman / Turkish Theatre

- *Old traditions' continuation in the 19th until the mid-20th century:*
Karagöz (Shadow Show)

Kukla (Puppetry)
Ortaoyunu
Meddah (Story Tellers)
Village ('Folk') Performances
Tuluat (Improvisation Theatre)

19th Century Kostantiniyye

- *European Theatre and Opera in the Ottoman World – A Panorama*
- *Theatres and Opera Houses in Kostantiniyye*
- *Impresario – Repertoire – Audience – Reception (both in traditional Turkish theatre and theatre in European sense)*
- *Architecture, stage & costume design*
- *European Stage Companies and Artists on Tour in the Ottoman Empire*

Until the Mid-20th Century

- *The Turkish State Opera and Theatre – The Foundation*
- *The Creation of the Turkish Opera*
- *The Foundation and institutionalisation era of the Turkish State Opera and Theatre*

We invite paper proposals of maximum 500 words that approach the abovementioned topics along with a short biography or academic CV, by **28 February 2022** to the Email address: **[symposium2022\(at\)donjuanarchiv.at](mailto:symposium2022(at)donjuanarchiv.at)**.

Conference Convenors:

Suna Suner (Don Juan Archiv Wien)

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