

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 started in the late 18th century in Kostantiniyye / Istanbul’s diplomatic circles.

Selim III (r. 1789–1807)

Since its exemplary debut in 1786 in the Swedish Embassy in Pera, opera found the interest of Ottoman Sultans – 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). This gave way, and acted as determinant to the foundation and the flourishing of European opera and theatre in the 19th-century Kostantiniyye / Istanbul,

gradually 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.

Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839)

Giuseppe Donizetti (1788–1856; in Kostantiniyye / Istanbul widely known as ‘Donizetti Paşa’, the famous Gaetano Donizetti’s older brother), served for almost 30 years from 1828 on until his death as the high musical director at the court of Sultan Mahmud II.

The first and oldest theatre building, the *French Theatre* (Fransiz Tiyatrosu), also called ‘*Palais de Cristal*’ (1831–1870) hosted European, mostly French companies, temporarily housing also local Armenian and Turkish troupes.

Abdülmeçid (r. 1839–1861)

The first Istanbul opera houses in the 19th century, the *Bosco Theatre* (Bosco Tiyatrosu, 1840–1844) The librettos of certain European operas staged at the Bosco and Naum theatres were translated into 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.

It was followed by the *Naum Theatre* (Naum Tiyatrosu, 1844–1847; after fire rebuilt in 1848, active until 1870), and were both inaugurated during the reign of Abdülmeçid (r. 1839–1861) and staged European operas. Giuseppe Verdi’s *Macbeth* (libretto by Francesco Maria Piave) was given for the inauguration of the Naum Theatre in 1848, one year after its premiere (Florence, Teatro della Pergola). During this period there were the first ‘local’ operas brought to stage, set to music mostly by Italians residing at the Bosphorus: *L’assedio di Silistria* composed by Giacomo Panizza (Naum Theatre, 1855), *Una notte di terrore* composed by Carlo Duchaliot (1857) and *Giorgio, Il Bandito* composed by Gaetano Foschini (Naum Theatre, 1864), just to name a few.

Furthermore, the interest of Sultan Abdülmeçid resulted in the establishment of Dolmabahçe Court Theatre (Dolmabahçe Saray Tiyatrosu, 1859–1863) The opening programme consisted of two acts from the opera *Un’avventura di Scaramuccia* (1834) by Felice Romani with music by Luigi Ricci (1805–1859), a violin recital, the ballet *Chasse de Diana*, also *La traviata* (Venice, 1853) by Francesco Maria Piave, music by Giuseppe Verdi, and *Maria di Rohan* (Vienna, 1843) by Salvatore Cammarano and Gaetano Donizetti were given later in the same year. The theatre burned down in 1863.

In this era, in today’s Istanbul’s Fatih province, Louis Souillier (1813–1886), director of a French tightrope and circus company, founded in 1860 the *Gedikpaşa Tiyatrosu* (Gedikpaşa Theatre, 1860–1867/1867–1884) where his own company appeared until 1864.

Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876)

In 1866, the *Gedikpaşa Tiyatrosu* was renamed as the *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu* ('the Ottoman Theatre') and housed, among others, the company by the same name, *Osmanlı Tiyatrosu*, 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.

Under Sultan Abdülaziz emerged the first Ottoman opera: *Arif'in Hilesi* (Gedikpaşa Tiyatrosu, 1874) composed by Dikran Çuhacıyan (1837–1898) who, six years before, had written an opera in Armenian language, *Arshak II* (1868).

In 1876, the Sultan himself (like the Brazilian Emperor Pedro II, r. 1831–1887) became a sponsor for the construction of Richard Wagner's Festspielhaus Bayreuth.

Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909)

The Yıldız Palace Theatre (1889–1910) was built by order of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) as a court theatre establishment in the Yıldız Palace, hosting operas, operettas, concerts and theatre performances both by local artists and visiting artists from Europe. After having served as a court theatre for twenty years between 1889 and 1909, the Yıldız Theatre was abandoned the year Abdülhamid was dethroned, hosting for one more year a few performances as part of charity events. The theatre still exists as part of the Yıldız Palace Museum, being the last of its kind as an Ottoman court theatre.

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 this era: appears as one of the two most important theatres of Beyoğlu, together with the Naum Theatre in terms of their longevity.

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.

Mehmet V Reşat (1909–1918)

A third important institution, commonly known as 'Darülbeyaz' (originally Dârü'l-bedâyi-i Osmânî) was founded in 1914 as the first conservatory established in the Ottoman Era in Kostantiniyye / Istanbul, which then gradually was transformed into a theatre company.

Mehmed VI Vahdettin (1918–1922)

IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (in office 1923–1938)

Ankara – from 13 October 1923 the Capital of the Republic of Turkey

In 1924 the Mûsikî Mu'allim Mektebi ('Academy for Music Teachers') was founded by order of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (in office 1923–1938) with the aim of educating music teachers, leading to the foundation processes of the first state conservatory (with a decree issued by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1934) in Ankara. In 1931 the 'Darülbeyaz' 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).

Ankara Halkevi, inaugurated in 1932, being the first house of the Ankara State Opera towards its institutionalisation, 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.

İsmet İnönü (in office 1938–1950)

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 six cities;

- Ankara (Ankara Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Atatürk Bulvarı 20, Ulus Ankara)
- Istanbul (since 1960, Istanbul Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, Mete Cad. 2, Gümüssuyu-Beyoğlu Istanbul / Süreyya Opera Stage, Bahariye Cad. 29 Kadıköy Istanbul),
- Izmir (since 1982, Izmir Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Milli Kütüphane Cad. 37-39 Konak Izmir),
- Mersin (since 1990, Mersin Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Cumhuriyet Alani Eski Halkevi Mersin),
- Antalya (since 1997, Antalya Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Muratpaşa Mah. 604 Sok. 3 Muratpaşa Antalya),
- Samsun (since 2008, Samsun Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Atatürk Bulvarı A.K.M. 1 İlkadım Samsun).

Since 2009 Istanbul hosts an international opera festival, organised by the General Directorate of State Opera and Ballet.

The two-day symposium 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, the relevance and the image 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:

18th-19th Century Ottoman / Turkish Theatre

- *Old traditions' continuation in the 19th until the mid-20th century:*
 - Karagöz (Shadow Show)*
 - Kukla (Puppetry)*
 - Ortaoyunu (,play-in-the-middle')*
 - Meddah (Story Tellers)*
 - Village ('Folk') Performances*
 - Tuluat (Improvisation Theatre)*

19th Century Kostantiniyye / Istanbul

- *European Theatre and Opera in the Ottoman World – A Panorama*
- *Theatres and Opera Houses*
- *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*

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We invite paper proposals of maximum 500 words that approach the abovementioned topics along with a short biography or academic CV, by **15 March 2022** to the Email address:

[symposium2022\(at\)donjuanarchiv.at](mailto:symposium2022@donjuanarchiv.at) .

Conference Convenors:

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