

Further Research for Turkish Music

The modern Republic of Turkey is in a part of the world that has been home to many groups of people. Coastal Anatolia was home to the ancient city of Troy, the Greek colonies in Ionia, and the Byzantine Empire, also known as the Eastern Roman Empire. At its largest, the Ottoman Empire included parts of North Africa, Eastern Europe, Anatolia, and a large area of the Middle East, including Mecca and Medina in the Arabian Peninsula. Because the Ottomans allowed the different peoples living under the Sultan to keep their culture and Religion, they kept their identities. Because of this, people from all of these areas are still living in modern Turkey. Istanbul, the largest and most cosmopolitan city, has populations of Turks, Greeks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Persians, Roma, and Bulgarians, just to name a few.

Music is an excellent window into the culture and society of a particular people, or in this case a particular area. We can use many of the topics that come up in talking about music to expand our knowledge of the people who play the music in addition to the music itself. Here, we will explore some of the important terms that came up when we looked at a few of the instruments in Turkey.

Some important questions to ask about music and music making:

This list is far from complete. It is a good example of the kinds of questions we can ask about music to learn more about it.

- ❖ **What:** What is the music for?
What does the music sound like?
What do the players and audiences find important about the music?
- ❖ **Who:** Who is playing the music?
Who is listening to the music?
- ❖ **Where:** Where is the music performed?
Where do the musicians sit/stand?
Where do the audience sit/stand?
- ❖ **Why:** Why do they play this music?
Why is the music important?
Why do we find the music interesting/different/similar?
- ❖ **When:** When is the music played?
When is the music not played?
- ❖ **How:** How is the music played?
How do people understand the music?

The answers to these questions not only give us information about the music, they also help explain who plays the music, where they play, why they play it, and why the music is so important.

An excellent example is the *davul*, the bass drum played with a heavy beater and a light switch. The *davul* is a well recognized instrument throughout Turkey, but it is used by a wide range of people and played in many kinds of music. The *davul* almost always accompanies a *zurna*, the double reed instrument. The two instruments form a unit, which means that where there is a *davul* there is usually also a *zurna*. These instruments are so loud they must be played outside. So, these instruments are used to accompany outside events and festivals, such as weddings, village dances, wrestling matches, etc. In these contexts they are usually played by Roma musicians, and so are associated with this ethnic group. Therefore, the *davul* can be considered a Roma instrument and a sign of Roma ethnicity. Because only Roma play *davul and zurna* at weddings, their role in the village hierarchy is established by their place in the festivities. They are paid guests and must play the entire time. In this way, by looking at the *davul* we can see what kinds of music are played, when and where, by whom, and what kind of cultural and social concepts rise to the surface.

However, the *zurna* and *davul* are also played by the Jannisary bands, and so these instruments can also be associated with the old Ottoman empire, and now tourist displays of historic events. Thus, with a different when and where, the *davul* changes meaning and leads us to different answers.

This is an example of how studying the instruments of Turkey can lead us to a great deal of information about Turkey and the people who live there.