

concise SEO-optimized summary:

Turkish piano virtuoso Idil Biret, trained in Paris under Nadia Boulanger, shaped Turkey's classical music landscape through performances, recordings, and support for fellow musicians.

This 24-word summary captures the key points: Idil Biret's nationality, instrument, training location, teacher, and major contributions, using relevant keywords that would help with SEO optimization.

Idil Biret's Classical Musical Legacy in Turkey: A Personal Reflection on Her Impact

Performances etched in memory

Dr. Aydın Karlibel

IDIL BIRET's legacy remains closely affiliated with musical reforms of the Turkish Republic. Her concerts and solo recitals that I attended in Istanbul were felicitous, extraordinary musical events that shaped my thinking as a composer and my artistry as a pianist. Her live performances of the complete Beethoven sonatas cycle, in seven evening performances, in San Theatre Hall and Macka Maden Hall, her complete Book One of 'Well-Tempered Clavier' recital in St. Irene, and her exquisite live interpretations of Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Schumann, Franck, and Brahms left a fascinating, made indelible impression on my musical imagination.¹

My first impressions of Idil Biret came through the children's magazine *Dogan Kardes* published in the 1960s. She was portrayed wonder child in Paris. She grew up there supported "Idil's Law", a special act of the Turkish parliament—passed when she was seven following an impromptu performance before then President İsmet İnönü and his guests—that enabled her to study at the Conservatoire under Nadia Boulanger. Her first public concert, at the age of eight, was a broadcast by Paris Radio. Such achievements were well-reported in the press, including the truly historic concert in February 1953, when she played Mozart's Two-Piano Concerto in Paris with Wilhelm Kempff at age 11 before an audience of 2,400. As a young child she was already a cultural hero.

¹ Istanbul venues: The San Theater at the Atatürk Culture Center (AKM), Maden Hall at Istanbul Technical University, and St. Irene, the oldest Christian church in Istanbul, dating from the 4th century.

Cemal Resid Rey

My first meeting with Mrs. Biret was two decades after her performance with Kempff, in 1974, in the Philharmonic Society Hall in Tesvikiye², where I was introduced to her by my teacher Cemal Resid Rey.³ She was a rising star of classical piano, a soloist performing with the major symphonies.⁴ I was a teenage admirer, so I was delighted Mr. Rey mentioned my precocious composition for piano entitled "Aquaphonie," inspired by sounds of water. Later in that hall, the seventy-year old master Rey performed Fauré's "Dolly Suite"⁵ with Ms. Biret on the Society's Steinway grand, playing four hands, *prima vista*.

Rey and Biret frequently collaborated. Ms. Biret was soloist for the world premiere of Rey's "Variations on an Old Istanbul Folksong" ("Katibim Variations")⁶ in Vienna with the Tonkünstler Orchestra, directed by the composer, on 25 November 1965. A large-scale concerto infused with a merry popular Turkish folk song, the melody originally imported to Istanbul during the Crimean War by Scottish soldiers. The composer had heard a hotel pianist improvise on this tune during one of his concert tours in Germany and was subsequently asked by his cousin to compose a concerto on this melody. The work is dedicated to Samson François,⁷ who had earlier been soloist with and guest of Rey in Istanbul. The première in Vienna was fanfare by the Austrian press, and the following remark was noted by Rey himself: "Die Türken diesmal um Wien!" (The Turks have now conquered Vienna!)⁸

Following the premiere in Vienna, Ms. Biret performed this work in Bucharest and Cluj again with the composer conducting, and in Paris with the Orchestre National with Jean-Louis Fourestier conducting. Ms. Biret's sparkling interpretation of *Katibim Variations* with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra in Munich in 1981 with Hikmet Simsek conducting is found in the album "Best of Turkish Piano Music", widely available from Spotify, Apple, Amazon. A student at Robert College at the time, I was the celesta player in the 1968 *Katibim Variations* Istanbul premiere.

In 1996, I performed with Ms. Biret at Istanbul's Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall, the first concert hall in Turkey designed for classical music, constructed in 1989 and named to honor one of our greatest composers. The program included three movements from his *Twelve Preludes and Fugues*. We also performed my arrangement for two pianos of Rey's *Tenth Anniversary March*

² A neighborhood on the European side of Istanbul.

³ Cemal Resid Rey (1904-1985) was a pioneer of classical music in Turkey, one of the first generation composers of the Republic. He wrote concertos, symphonic poems and other orchestra works, and founded the Istanbul City Orchestra, which later became the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra.

⁴ From the age of 16 Biret played as a soloist with the London Symphony, the Philharmonia, the London Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Leningrad Philharmonic, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Dresden Staatskapelle, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Tokyo Philharmonic, the Warsaw Philharmonic, the Orchestre National de France, and the Sydney Symphony, as well as with many other orchestras throughout the world.

⁵ Gabriel Fauré Op. 56, six short piano duets, written to mark events in the life of the daughter of the composer's mistress, Emma Bardac.

⁶ "Kâtibim" ("my clerk"), a Turkish folk song about a clerk (kâtip) travelling to Üsküdar.

⁷ Samson Pascal François (1924 – 1970), French pianist and composer.

⁸ Humorous allusion to the Ottoman defeat at Battle of Vienna in 1683 after a two month siege.

of the Republic, 1933. The steady rhythms and rich chords of this piece reflect the pride of the Turkish people in their new nation.⁹

Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Boucourechliev

Mrs. Biret excels as a Liszt interpreter; she recorded the complete Beethoven-Liszt Symphonies, performed in Montpellier. Her Rachmaninoff interpretations are unsurpassed. I attended her Sureyya Hall appearance, performing Liszt preludes after a lecture Gottfried Wagner, grandson of Richard Wagner; duo performances with Michael Ponti (Rachmaninoff and Arensky) in AKM Hall; with Stéphane Blet¹⁰ (Liszt's 'Mazeppa')¹¹ in Fulya; and the Berlioz-Liszt 'Harold en Italie' performance with Rusen Gunes in Sureyya Hall, all extraordinary achievements. Her solo recital in Rumeli Hisari where she played Rachmaninoff was fascinating. Ms. Biret's performances of Boucourechliev's 'Archipel' in the San Theatre were impressive.¹² Sight-reading from a large map-scale score, she exquisitely took full advantage of this composition's exploration of choice and freedom on the part of the performer.

Vedat Kosal

Throughout her career, Idil Biret has always been generous with her support of other musicians. a collective charity concert to raise money for Vedat Kosal's tragic operation ("Twelve Pianists Hand in Hand").¹³ The outstanding musician had often been a guest at Biret's home in Brussels. In 1973, the 50th Anniversary of the Turkish Republic, after a memorable concert was given by

⁹ The first decade of the Turkish Republic (1923-1933) under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk saw sweeping reforms aimed at modernizing and secularizing the country:

Political and Legal Reforms:

- Abolition of the Sultanate (1922) and Caliphate (1924), ending centuries of Ottoman rule and religious authority
- Adoption of a new constitution (1924) establishing Turkey as a secular republic
- Introduction of a new civil code based on Swiss law (1926), replacing Islamic Sharia law
- Granting women the right to vote in municipal elections (1930) and national elections (1934)

Social and Cultural Reforms:

- Adoption of the Latin alphabet (1928), replacing the Arabic script
- Reform of dress codes, including the Hat Law (1925) which banned traditional religious headgear
- Adoption of the Gregorian calendar and international time system (1925)
- Closure of religious schools (madrasas) and unification of education under state control

Economic Reforms:

- Creation of the first national bank (İş Bankası) in 1924
- Development of state-led industrialization policies
- Building of new railway networks to connect major cities
- Land reform initiatives to redistribute former Ottoman properties

Religious Reforms:

- State control over religious affairs through the Directorate of Religious Affairs
- Ban on Sufi orders and religious brotherhoods
- Translation of the Quran and call to prayer into Turkish
- Secularization of state institutions and education system

These "Atatürk reforms" fundamentally transformed Turkish society and laid the groundwork for modern Turkey, codified a decisive break with the Ottoman past, and aimed to align Turkey more closely with Western models of governance and society.

¹⁰ Stéphane Blet (1969 – 2022) was a French classical pianist and composer widely recognized as an extraordinary interpreter of Liszt. His performance at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in February 1987 was applauded for more than thirty minutes, which made the music critic Pierre Petit say: "Stéphane Blet is more than just piano, it's the music itself."

¹¹ "Transcendental Étude No. 4 in D minor", based upon 'Mazeppa', a poem by Victor Hugo.

¹² André Boucourechliev (1925 – 1997), French composer of Bulgarian origin.

¹³ Vedat Kosal (1957 - 2001) was a Turkish pianist, composer and musicologist who suffered a brain tumor and died within months.

Idil Biret performing a Mozart concerto with Aaron Copland in Ankara, a notable meeting took place in Istanbul in Vedat Kosal's apartment in Sisli, uniting Cemal Resid Rey, Aaron Copland, Idil Biret. In honor of Copland, pianists Vedat Kosal and Seher Tanriyar who performed excerpts from Rey's *Twelve Preludes and Fugues* on two pianos.

Ms. Biret's generosity also extended to me. I felt honored by her support on many occasions. She kindly provided her written opinion on my transcription of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor (recorded in the CD album "Transcriptions and Original Works," Kalan Music, 2007). Scores of Turkish musicians also benefitted from her experience and unselfish love for music and musicians.

Idil Biret has certainly been a major force in the development of classical music in Turkey. With her musical ability, deep intelligence, and warm heart, she is widely loved and admired. She and husband Sefik Buyukyüksel hosted annual New Year's Eve's gatherings at their home in Moda. There, we played improvisations with Mrs. Biret on two pianos. Distinguished guests included diplomats, authors, musicians, and historians. Among many others, they welcomed Angelika Akbar, Rahsan Apay, Halil Berktaş, Resit and Evren Buyukburçlu Erol, Ayla Erdoğan, Murat Gürol, Rusen Gunes, Evin İlyasoglu, Cetin İşikozlu, Erhan Karaesmen, the late Cahit Kayra, Ayfer Neyzi, Leyla Pamir, Ates Pars, Nejat and Aysegül Sarica, Fazil Say, Pars Tuglaci, and Judith Ulug.¹⁴

Preparations are underway to inaugurate the Idil Biret Foundation, a center for study and research for young artists in Tesvikiye, Istanbul. I would like hereby to reiterate, with deepest admiration, our collective thanks to Idil Biret and to Sefik Buyukyüksel for tireless effort supporting the sublime and glorious art of classical music.

¹⁴ **Angelika Akbar:** (b. 1969), Russian composer, pianist, and scholar.

Rahşan Apay: (b. 1976?), renowned Turkish cellist

Evren Büyükburç Erol: (b. 1978), Turkish pianist and professor at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University State Conservatory

Ayla Erduran: (b. 1934), Turkish violinist, studied under David Oistrakh at Moscow Conservatory.

Murat Gürol: (b. 1956), Turkish violinist, director, and music program manager.

Ruşen Güneş: (1940 - 2020), Turkish violinist, member of the London String Quartet for 15 years

Cengiz Tanç (1933-1997) Composer

Yalçın Tura: (b. 1934), Turkish composer of contemporary Turkish music known for the film scores.

Evin İlyasoğlu: Turkish music writer, lecturer, radio and television program producer. music critic of Cumhuriyet newspaper and a faculty member of Boğaziçi University

Çetin İşiközü: (b. 1939) Turkish composer and orchestra conductor known for his opera and ballet works.

Erhan Karaesmen (1936-2024) University professor, author of *A Holistic View of Beethoven*.

Cahit Kayra (1917-2021) Member of Parliament, government minister.

Ayfer Neyzi (b 1931?): Researcher and collector of Ottoman cultural artifacts, daughter of Kemal Dogan (1879-1951) heroic military commander and close associate of Atatürk.

Leyla Pamir (1930-2023) Musicologist

Ates Pars (b. 1942) Composer

Ayşe Gül Sarıca (1935-2023) Pianist

Pars Tuglaci (1933-2014) Historian

Judith Ulug (b. 1940) Pianist