

Turquerie: Ottoman Influence on European Classical Music, Art, and Literature

European fascination with Ottoman culture inspired composers, writers, and artists to incorporate Turkish elements into their works from the 16th through the 19th centuries.

The Ottoman Empire fascinated Europeans. Byzantium, Constantinople, or Istanbul, by any name the cultural crossroads where goods from India and China met European traders in a protected port on the Bosphorus has long held tremendous imaginative appeal. The exotic and relatively unknown culture of the Ottoman ruling class provided new ideas, new non-Christian morality, new forms of dress, and new forms of music. In the 16th to 18th century, a “Turquerie” trend in Western art and culture took hold. Along with the “Chinoiserie” movement of the same period, artists celebrated an imagined the Orient through artistic expression, including music.

European travelers, diplomats, and musicians who visited Ottoman territories brought back musical influences that enriched European classical music. Similarly, during the same period Turkish musicians and ensembles performed in European courts, exposing European audiences to Ottoman-era music. In the 18th century, Mozart incorporated Turkish percussion instruments—bass drum and cymbals—in his opera "The Abduction from the Seraglio". Beethoven put Turkish themes and instrumentation in his Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, particularly the fourth movement, the "Ode to Joy", which features bass drum and triangle, mimicking the Turkish military band Janissary music. Thus the official anthem of the EU prominently features Ottoman instrumentation. Haydn's "Military" Symphony No. 100 in G major, includes percussion effects imitating the sound of Turkish instruments. Liszt

also drew inspiration from Turkish themes. In his "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2," he incorporates elements of Hungarian and Turkish folk music, including fast runs, rhythmic patterns, and melodic fragments reminiscent of the music of Eastern Europe. In the 19th century, Verdi's opera "Il corsaro" Verdi uses Turkish-inspired melodies and rhythms to evoke the exoticism of the Ottoman Empire setting.

An important reason for the Turquerie trend in the works of European artists, musicians, and writers is that the exotic (to Europe, at least) non-Christian beliefs and practices of Turks offer a literary device with a different perspective on English, French, or Italian customs and mores. Turks were different and Mehmed the Conqueror set the standard. The architect of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed left an indelible mark on history through ambitious conquests achieved with uncompromising tactics. His family were Oghuz Turks from Central Asia who had migrated to Anatolia (in modern-day Turkey) in the 13th century, acquiring territory as they went. Born in 1432, Mehmed ascended to the throne at age 12 in a realm of internal strife and external threats. With a thirst for power and territorial expansion, he pitilessly asserted his dominance over others. He famously murdered his own brothers to solidify his grip on the throne. The warrior truism, "no guts, no glory", rang true with Mehmed the Conqueror. Ruthlessly gutting anyone in his way, he became the uncontested ruler of a unified, powerful, glorious empire including the Balkans, Anatolia, extending deep into the Caucasus, and sweeping from the Black Sea, through the Middle East, to Egypt. His crowning achievement came in 1453 when he led an army of Turks, Albanians, Greeks, and Serbs in the historic conquest of Constantinople. With military prowess, strategic planning, and sheer force of will, Mehmed succeeded where others failed, forever altering the course of history

Guts, glory, seraglios, pashas, all with exotic rhythms of music and dance, no wonder Europeans became fascinated with Turquerie! In the literary realm, authors drew inspiration

from Oriental motifs to infuse their works with exoticism, mystery, and non-European morality. Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine the Great", written in the late 16th century, features the great Tatar conqueror decisively defeating Sultan Bayazid I, Mehmed the Conqueror's great grandfather. Shakespeare's "Othello" features a Moorish protagonist, a general in the Venetian army. Othello's ethnicity and outsider status evoke the fears and prejudices surrounding the Ottoman Empire and its perceived threat to Christian Europe during Shakespeare's time. Voltaire's tragedy "Mahomet", written in 1741 and based on the historical figure of Muhammad, calls forth the Islamic world, including the Ottoman Empire, while exploring religious fanaticism, political power, and manipulation. Lord Byron's "The Giaour" (1813) tells the story of a Greek warrior seeking revenge against a Turkish pasha who has seduced his beloved. His "The Siege of Corinth" (1816) is set during the Ottoman siege of Corinth in 1822 and portrays the clash between Greek and Ottoman forces.

Marlowe and Shakespeare reflect a widespread effect on European culture. Imagine a night out with mesmerizing melodies of a Turquerie-themed masked ball that transports you to distant lands with vibrant colors and evocative music. This happened many times. The "Ballo del Granatieri" held in Venice in 1740, organized by the Venetian Republic to celebrate the marriage of Maria Theresa of Austria to Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor, featured elaborate Ottoman-themed costumes and decorations, including tents, palm trees, and Turkish music and dance performances. In 1770, the marriage of Archduchess Maria Antonia of Austria (later known as Marie Antoinette) to Louis-Auguste, the Dauphin of France (later King Louis XVI), was celebrated with a grand masked ball at the Palace of Versailles. The ball, known as the "Ballo della Regina," had an Oriental theme, with attendees dressed in elaborate Turkish and Persian costumes.

Similarly, European composers and librettists were fascinated by Turquerie.

Handel's "Tamerlano" (1724) is based on the battle of Angora in 1402. Timur (Tamerlane), the great Tatar conqueror, defeated Sultan Bayazid I, ruler of the Oghuz Turks. The victory had an impact on Europe since it temporarily stemmed Ottoman expansion. This masterpiece is a tale of ambition, betrayal, and forbidden love after the battle portraying the imprisonment and humiliation endured by Sultan Bayazid (named "Bajazet" in the opera) and his family.

The character of Sultan Bajazet steals the show in this operatic masterpiece. Portrayed with depth and intensity, Bajazet grapples with the weight of his defeat and the indignities he and his family suffer. His remarkable portrayal culminates in a magnificent death scene, where he defiantly chooses to end his life with poison rather than submit to his captor, Timur. This poignant moment serves as Bajazet's crowning achievement. Its tragic beauty and emotional depth resonate.

Turquerie is the key theme of Mozart's "Die Entführung aus dem Serail" ("The Abduction from the Seraglio") that premiered in 1782 at Vienna's Burgtheater. This opera, steeped in cultural ambiguity, tells a story of captivity and rescue. Staged in the country house of a Turkish pasha, the orchestra was augmented with tamburo grande (tamburo turco), cymbals, triangles, and piccolo in order to produce Turkish orchestral sounds. The opening, famed for Turkish-inspired percussion, sets the stage for a tale of moral and cultural complexity. At the opera's heart is an enigmatic character, Pasha Selim. At first he is passionate and infatuated with Konstanze, a young woman in his seraglio. When faced with rejection, Selim's cruelty emerges, confirming a key attribute of a Turkish "pasha" in the Viennese cultural imagination of the time. However Selim's character then deepens. He looks inward and finds vulnerability. Introspection? Vulnerability? Such traits go against the grain of the "pasha" of Mozart's time. Selim's interactions with his captive Konstanze and his servant Osmin play with cultural and power dynamics, question prejudices, and highlight

preconceptions. In the final act Pasha Selim returns to the role of a sympathetic character. First he mulls over cruel punishments for his captives, Konstanze and her lover Belmonte. Then in a marvelous duet, "Welch ein Geschick! O Qual der Seele.... Weh, du soltest für mich sterben" – (What dreadful fate conspires against us.... Woe, you will die because of me) the two lovingly agree torture will be a pleasure if they are tortured and die together. However, the Pasha then decides the best revenge against his enemy Lostados is show mercy by releasing Belmonte and his friends. The opera ends with a song of adoration for the pasha, "Nie werd' ich deine Huld verkennen" (Your noble mercy passes measure). The opera elevates Pasha Selim above his stereotype to a dramatically complex character with a range of emotion.

Composers like Haydn, Beethoven, and Mozart embraced the rhythmic dynamism and exotic allure of Turkish music, incorporating \ motifs and instrumentation into their symphonies, operas, and ballets. Turkish elements added a sense of novelty and excitement to the classical tradition. Their alla turca techniques and noisy percussion led a new spirit of cross-cultural exchange and artistic innovation within the European classical music ration

The integration of Turkish musical elements into European classical composition during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expanded the sonic palette of European orchestras, marking a an evolution in orchestral sound in a broader trend of cultural curiosity and exploration during the era of Enlightenment.