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A Distinctive Album in Turkey: Bülent Ortaçgil's *Benimle Oynar Mısın*¹

ABSTRACT

In this study, we aimed to explore prominent musician Bülent Ortaçgil's album *Benimle Oynar Mısın* (1974). Built upon a musicological and sociological analysis, our main goal is to investigate the effects of this album, which did not attract attention when it was first published, but gained visibility in the following years. This album, which arguably had a protest structure, emerged in the period when the Anatolian Pop movement was dominant, yet showed very different features from this genre. In this investigation, in which we also conducted an analysis considering the concepts of 'protest music' and 'protest musician', we focused on the features of the album that differed from the early musical examples of the Anatolian Pop movement, which also exemplifies the 1970s protest music in Turkey. We utilized Howard Becker's "art worlds" approach to discuss how this album, which has different musical elements and unusual lyrics for the time period when it was released, has become a milestone for music production in Turkey over the years. Then, we examined how divisions of labor occurred in the art worlds in which Ortaçgil positioned himself. One of the most important findings of this study is that, starting from his first album, Ortaçgil's positioning in the various art worlds in Turkey, in relation to the most prominent artists from Turkey, increased his opportunities to make his album and other songs recognizable over years.

KEYWORDS

Bülent Ortaçgil

Art Worlds

Turkish pop music

Protest music

Benimle Oynar Mısın

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Introduction

In this study, we conducted a sociological and musical analysis of *Benimle Oynar Mısın*² (1974), an album by one of Turkey's leading musicians, Bülent Ortaçgil. This album has a distinctive character in the music market, when considered with regard to its period. However, despite being very unpopular at the time of its release, this work has become a milestone for music production in Turkey over the years. In the 1970s, when protest music was on the rise with the Anatolian Pop movement, the appearance of such an album with internal interrogations and ontological concerns reflected in the lyrics raises questions about the conditions of the period and Ortaçgil's entry into the music field as a songwriter. It is also important to recognize how Ortaçgil, who followed the footsteps of musicians influenced by the Beat generation, such as Bob Dylan, positioned himself in the Beat generation of the early 1960s and the global field of protest music in the 1970s. In order to clarify the musical style, artistic preferences and tendencies, intellectual roots, and the positioning of Ortaçgil in the musical field, we conducted an in-depth interview with the artist on 17 February 2021.³

Although there are various articles and books on Ortaçgil, to date there is no scholarship focusing on the *Benimle Oynar Mısın* album and its position in the musical field in a holistic framework bringing together musicological and sociological perspectives. Therefore, this study is also an attempt to make a valuable contribution to interdisciplinary studies in Turkey.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, we first briefly discuss the concepts of 'protest music' and 'musician'. Discussions of protest music with respect to function and form shape the first conceptual framework. Then, we explain Howard S. Becker's "art worlds" approach, which forms the basic theoretical framework of this study. In this framework, the concepts that we mainly focus on are cooperative links, conventions, and the appreciation of art. In the next section, we analyze the origins of Ortaçgil's musical taste and background of the first album. Then, we explain Ortaçgil's positioning in the 1970s musical field in Turkey. Finally, after the general analysis of the album, we concentrate on the revival and

² In English: Will You Play With Me.

³ When we applied for an ethics committee approval at Maltepe University for an interview with Ortaçgil, we received feedback that there was no need for approval for this interview.

reception of the album. In these parts, we employ a musical analysis of *Benimle Oynar Mısın* and look at how musical elements, such as melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and Ortaçgil's vocal range are primarily used. Along with these elements, we consider instrumentation and timbral qualities of songs that build the unity of the album. Through close examination of the music and lyrical materials of the album and comparison with Anatolian Pop, the structural position of music production in the period forms another pillar of this musicological evaluation.

Discussing Protest Music and Musicians

In his prominent book *Noise*, Jacques Attali examines the development of music from a historical perspective; he discusses music in relation to the economic and political conditions, in which it has been shaped:

“For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible... Now we must learn to judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festivals, than by its statistics” (Attali, 1985: 3).

On the other hand, while the meanings attributed to the music we listen to change historically and contextually, the meanings given to music categories can also mutate. Therefore, the definitions of ‘protest music’ and ‘protest musician’ cannot be taken for granted. For instance, music that used to be considered protest music may no longer have a protest character. Moreover, someone who is a protest musician may not be a real pioneer of protest music. “For instance, Ludwig Van Beethoven, one of the pioneers of classical music, was a musician who broke with tradition, while Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart came to the fore with his protest attitudes” (Eren, 2018: 135). However, it is possible to talk about the pioneering effects of certain types of music in certain continents in the development of protest music. For instance, folk music had a great influence on the development of protest music in the Anglo-American world in the 20th century. Many of the first figures that come to mind when talking about 20th century protest music, such as Joe Hill, Lead Belly, Woodrow Wilson Guthrie, and Pete Seeger prove this statement. Regarding Turkey, in addition to folk music, the minstrel tradition has had a great influence on the development of protest music. For instance, the Anatolian Pop

movement, which emerged in the late 1960s, was intrinsically protest music in its character, since it was highly influenced by the minstrel tradition.

“Cooperative Links”, “Conventions” and the Appreciation of Art

As the research subject in this study is a musician, it is important to make sense of the “art worlds” shaped around him. Therefore, based on Howard Becker’s ideas, clarifying concepts such as “cooperative links,” “conventions,” and the appreciation of art is a crucial step before going further in the analysis of this research.

It is widely believed that the main factors in the creation of works of art are the special talents of the artists. If someone has more talent than others do, that person is considered to be more advantageously positioned to appeal to large audiences. However, this approach prevents us from observing the artistic production in a holistic way. According to Becker, as discussed in his prominent book *Art Worlds* (1982), there are many visible and invisible people in the artistic production process. “Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art” (Becker, 1982: 34). At this point, Becker emphasizes the importance of support personnel in addition to the artist. This is also related to the organization of the division of labor. For this reason, to Becker, art is considered as a cooperative activity of many people engaged in the creation of the artistic production process. From this point of view, an artistic product is shaped by the combination of different talents, efforts and opportunities. If the position of individuals in the artistic production process changes, the nature of the artistic product can also change. Therefore, different dynamics occur based on new artists and support personnel. To clarify this, Becker posits examples of different ‘Mona Lisa’ paintings. He claims that

“Marcel Duchamp outraged many people by insisting that he created a valid work of art when he signed a commercially produced snow shovel or signed a reproduction of the Mona Lisa on which he had drawn a mustache, thus classifying Leonardo as support personnel along with the snow shovel’s designer and manufacturer” (Becker, 1974: 769).

On the other hand, “people who cooperate to produce a work of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, they rely on earlier agreements...” (Becker, 1982: 29.) This is the very basic idea behind what Becker calls “conventions”. “Conventions make collective activity simpler and less costly in time, energy, and other resources...” (Becker, 1982: 35).

They form the basis for a common language. Just as ‘culture shock’, a feeling of disorientation, is experienced while adapting to an unaccustomed culture, artists or supporting personnel also experience art shock.⁴

It is also notable that Becker employs a historical, contextual, and sociocultural analysis of the art worlds taking shape under different conditions. This analysis is evident in the example of a symphony orchestra illustrated in the beginning of his book. When Becker talks about a long chain of artistic production and presentation, he mentions the imperatives, such as the invention of instruments, devised notation, skilled musicians to play the notated notes, rehearsals, arrangement of a concert hall, publicity and tickets sold, and an audience capable of listening to and appreciating the performance (Becker, 1982: 2).⁵

In order to discuss and understand how Ortaçgil positioned himself in the musical field, in the next section we focus on the origins of Ortaçgil’s musical taste and the background of the first album.

The origins of Ortaçgil’s Musical Taste and the Background of the First Album

Bülent Ortaçgil was not born into a family of musicians, but his father was a keen music-lover who introduced him to classical and popular music at home. One of the important factors that made a crucial impact on the development of Ortaçgil's musical taste was his experience in the US, where he moved in 1959 when he was nine years old due to his father's work.⁶ Ortaçgil lived in Washington, D.C., for one year, where the opportunity to watch singers and groups such as Elvis Presley, Paul Anka, Pery Como, Dean Martin, and The Platters on TV sparked his musical interest. When the Beatles began performing in 1963, Ortaçgil, who was then 13 years old, became a great fan of the band. His interactions with young foreign teachers while studying at Kadikoy Maarif College⁷ also had a

⁴ From another perspective, it is possible to relate Becker’s “convention” to Bourdieu’s “embodied cultural capital”. Just as long-term accumulation of knowledge has an effect on the creation of traditions, embodied cultural capital formulates itself as long-lasting dispositions.

⁵ This situation, an audience capable of listening to and appreciate the performance, can be evaluated through different explanations in the perception of different music genres. One explanation relates the reception of popular music and “ontological security in its listeners”. By exploring Adorno’s ideas, Tia DeNora states that “popular music, with its ‘pseudomorphism of painting’ (1973: 191) and its stock patterns of presentation geared for effect, reinforced the known... For this reason, such music instilled a form of certainty and, ontological security in its listener.” (DeNora, 2003: 74)

⁶ His father was a doctor.

⁷ That was the name of the school those years. It was later named Kadıköy Anatolian High School.

substantial effect on him. Ortaçgil heard of singers such as Bob Dylan from them, and, as he states in an interview with the *Birgün Pazar*, he was influenced not only by Dylan's music, but also by his protest attitude (Abatay, 2017). He later became a fan of other groups and artists, such as Leonard Cohen, The Rolling Stones, The Animals, Led Zeppelin, who mostly performed guitar-based music. He took singing lessons, played the guitar and drums, and performed in music groups, until graduating high school in 1968. In this period, songwriters, guitar music, and singing with guitar accompaniment began to come to prominence all around the world. At home, Ortaçgil listened to LPs, which his father brought from the US — mostly music by Frank Sinatra, Paul Anka, the McGuire Sisters, and Frankie Laine, as well as classical music. He explains that the foreign music broadcast by Turkish radio stations tended to be in the style of Italian and French popular musics, which did not match his taste. His musical taste was fundamentally shaped by Anglo-Saxon culture, and he did not show any interest in music that was produced in Turkey in the 1960s (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021).⁸ Thus, Ortaçgil's musical taste was shaped by a very different field, compared to that of Turkey's popular music scene at that time. In other words, different musical patterns, which are the extensions of different conventions, influenced Ortaçgil. It is difficult for a person who has not grown up with Western music to appreciate Western music, and vice versa. When Becker exemplifies this situation through some musical patterns, he refers to “conventions”: “...We know these patterns — the diatonic scale and the major triad — because anyone who has grown up in any Western country, lived as a child here, and, especially, gone to its schools, will know them” (Becker, 1982: 41).

In 1971, Ortaçgil released his first singles (45 rpm), *Anlamsız* and *Yüzünü Dökme Küçük Kız*, from the Disco Record Company. The album did not attract much attention, nor did it achieve any commercial success. Ortaçgil was aware that his music was not in accordance with the taste of the masses, and that his efforts had not been truly appreciated. Having no expectation of earning his living from music, he started his undergraduate education in chemical engineering.⁹ Nevertheless, he continued to make music while studying at the university. In 1973, Ali Kocatepe, one of the supporters of Ortaçgil during the production of his first single, launched his own record company, *Bir*

⁸ Ortaçgil stated in the interview as “I come from Anglo-Saxon culture” (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021).

⁹ He worked as engineer at two companies for seven years after his graduation.

Numara Plakçılık. As the first recording, Kocatepe wanted to release an album by Ortaçgil. Even though they both knew that the recording would not have commercial success, Kocatepe had to persuade Ortaçgil to make an album.¹⁰ This is an important indicator that shows how Ali Kocatepe's musical taste was orientated similarly to Ortaçgil's.¹¹ We can also interpret this situation through familiarity with similar musical patterns, and hence, conventions. Produced by Kocatepe, the album featured skilled musicians, some of whom would later become notable names in Turkish popular music: Onno Tunç (arrangements), Ergun Pekakçan (piano), Atilla Özdemiroğlu (vibraphone, flute, and trombone), Cezmi Başeğmez (drums), and Nükhet Ruacan (back vocals). The combination of these musicians, who were familiar with similar musical traditions, around the same “art worlds,” enabled them to establish a common musical language. On the other hand, it is possible to state that the distinction between the core and the support personnel is very clear, as the artist, Ortaçgil, has sought to exist as a singular musician and core personnel from the beginning. In addition, one of the most important things about the album, as Ortaçgil has also stated, is that the producer does not interfere with Ortaçgil's music (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021). In this context, allowing the autonomy of the artist provided free expression possibilities and facilitated the formation of “art worlds” with their own original and inner dynamics.

Although all songs in the album were produced by Ortaçgil, his brother Ercüment Ortaçgil, and Ergun Pekakçan in three years, the recordings of *Benimle Oynar Mısın* were finished in two months. It was made without any commercial concerns and shaped entirely by the aesthetic taste of Ortaçgil and the support personnel. It did not achieve commercial success, and, according to Ortaçgil, only 2000 copies were sold (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021). The album did not fit the trend of the music market, as it did not include the necessary features that an album required for commercial success in the 1970s.¹² Kocatepe states that the album was not taken

¹⁰ Ortaçgil states that if Kocatepe did not ask him to record his songs, the album would never exist (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021).

¹¹ Kocatepe seems to give his support to Ortaçgil in any way he could. At his column in *Yeni Asır Newspaper* dated July 25, 2010, he mentions that he and his producer friends became fans of Ortaçgil after his first 45th rpm. By their support, Ortaçgil was invited to Izmir to make interviews, his songs were broadcasted on the radio and found a job for in Mogambo in Kültürpark which last very soon (Kocatepe, 2010).

¹² In the 1970s, Anatolian Pop was one of the most demanded music styles in Turkey.

seriously in the *Plakçılar Çarşısı*,¹³ which was the heart of the music market at that time (Kocatepe, 2010).¹⁴ Nevertheless, *Benimle Oynar Mısın* has since turned into a cult recording with stable sales figures over the years.

Undoubtedly, in Ortaçgil's music, it is quite possible to see the influences of the Beatles and Bob Dylan, who also deeply affected the global music markets in the 60s and early 70s, as well as other representatives of Anglo-American musical culture such as Cat Stevens, Jethro Tull, Donovan, Nick Drake, Joan Baez, Juddy Collins, Peter-Paul and Mary, and Phil Ochs.¹⁵ These representatives of Anglo-American music demonstrated the stance on political developments and social problems of the period by turning to folk culture. In their music, they were inspired by the motifs and various elements of traditional folk songs.¹⁶ In Ortaçgil's case, he has positioned his musical manner "...in relation to the American protest music tradition and the American singer/songwriter type" (Çerezciöglü, 2010: 256). But unlike the representatives of Anglo-American music, Ortaçgil does not demonstrate a political tendency in his lyrics, even though he was, as mentioned above, impressed by such expressions of protest attitudes.

Ortaçgil's Positioning in the 1970s Musical Field in Turkey

Ortaçgil's first album, released in 1974, carried him to the present and solidified his place in music history. As such, it is useful to briefly look at the internal dynamics of the music field of Turkey in this period and the 1960s.

¹³ *Plakçılar Çarşısı* which was the base of many music producers, is a business center located in Unkapanı, İstanbul. Until the recent years it was the heart of the music market in Turkey where musicians all over the country who were coming to make records. But with digitilazation process of music industry it has lost its significance in the market.

¹⁴ "Nobody took this album seriously at the *Plakçılar Çarşısı*... However, the album, which has low but stable sales for years, never came down from the showcases, and has not lost this feature to another album... It is the only album that still maintains its place in the music markets from 1973 to 2010 and it is a masterpiece" (Kocatepe, 2010).

¹⁵ In fact, it is quite normal for an artist to be influenced by Bob Dylan and the Beatles in those years. Because the above-mentioned artists inspired too many singers and groups all over the world during their active years and later as well. According to AllMusic's top 100 artists, they are in the first two places, in which Beatles has influenced 1230 artists and Bob Dylan has influenced 669 artists. See. <https://theatlas.com/charts/S1QdKOZ3->

¹⁶ The term folk music is often used to refer to American and British music that has been passed down through generations of oral tradition. This music, which is simple and acoustic based, is mostly anonymous. While the first recordings were made with only anonymous songs, later singers such as Weavers and Pete Seeger began to include original written songs right alongside anonymous songs to thier recording. Bob Dylan, one of the most popular names of the genre, released his second album *The Freewheelin* with only original music composed in this genre and started the modern folk age, in which many artists sing their own songs.

In the 1960s, the most important musical development was the emergence of the Anatolian Pop movement, which formed the foundation for a new protest music specific to Turkey. On the other hand, the birth of this new trend did not develop independently from the developments in the political field: “The political climate in Turkey in the 1960s was essentially characterized by its libertarian stance. As a result, Turkish music came to be influenced by foreign music to a certain extent” (Eren, 2018: 133). While the 1960s were characterized as a period in which the field of cultural production was more autonomous than it was in the 1950s, the Turkish government's attitude towards local music in this period has also contributed to the development of the Anatolian Pop music (Eren, 2018: 134). It is also important to note that there were different genres such as arabesk music, which has Middle Eastern influences, but also incorporated Turkish folk music elements. However, it is not our focus within the scope of this study.

In the 1970s, it seemed that the state did not have a stable music policy; rather, policies varied according to different governments (Eren, 2017: 113). The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)'s harsh attitude towards musicians was effective in this period: many songs were banned, adversely affecting musicians. However, “ironically, artists tried to express themselves in a political manner in this period when restrictions in the cultural field are increasing” (Eren, 2017: 119). In this period, the common protest music genres can be mainly classified as “Anatolian Pop, political pop, the tradition of minstrelsy, and labor songs that interact with the political field” (Eren, 2017: 119).

Considering the conditions of the music field of the 1960s and 1970s, it is useful to take a closer look at the conditions, in which Ortaçgil's first album was released. “The year Ortaçgil released *Benimle Oynar Mısın* corresponds to a period where Anatolian Pop and protest music — which will be remembered with this movement — spread, following the arrangement (music) period in Turkey's popular music life” (Çerezcioglu, 2010: 255). To understand where the recording was positioned in the market during this period and determine the distinct elements that differentiated it from the prevailing music genres, one has to look at the general musical tastes and trends in Turkey in the above-mentioned years. Philipp Tagg (1982: 48-49) states that the difficulty of expressing a musical object, which is the product of a symbolic system that does not rely on words, can only be turned into an advantage by replacing words with other music. To do this, he uses the concept of “interobjective comparison,” meaning describing particular music through other music,

and suggests comparing the considered music with other music in a relevant style and with similar functions. From this point of view, instead of just examining the album's musical qualities, revealing the similarities and differences of the album using the prevailing music genres in this period allows us to clarify the basic question of the study.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the Western-based music genres that steered the Turkish music market were arrangement music and Anatolian Pop. Arrangement music was a musical trend, wherein Turkish words were written to popular foreign songs, while keeping their melodic and formal structures.¹⁷ It emerged in the beginning of the 1960s and played an important role in spreading light Western music in Turkey. Many singers, including Ajda Pekkan, Nesrin Siphayi, Ayla Dikmen, Nilüfer, and Selçuk Ural, became very popular within this genre. But at the end of the 1960s, arrangement music came to a critical crossroads. With the knowledge of the genre's repertoire, original Turkish songs in the western style started to be composed. During the 1970s, arrangement music slowly faded away from the market, while 'Turkish light music' came into prominence with singers as such as Hümeýra, Timur Selçuk, Alpay, and Tanju Okan, marking an important change in the market.

On the other hand, Anatolian Pop emerged as a reaction to arrangement music, and since the beginning of the '70s, started to become the prevailing genre on the market, featuring leading artists such as Moğollar, Cem Karaca, Fikret Kızılok, Selda Bağcan, and Barış Manço. In Anatolian Pop "... the melodic and rhythmic motifs of traditional Turkish folk music and its instruments are blended with the technique and instruments of western music; it comes out as a synthesis musical genre where Anatolian and Western music cultures meet" (Camgöz, 2020: 1493). In their musical backgrounds, the performers of this genre are influenced by the representatives of Anglo-American popular music. But the genre, deriving its inspiration from Anatolian folk culture, is also strongly affected by the "Psychedelic Rock influential instrumental genre" as well (Kutluk, 2018: 129). In addition to the names above, some other prominent artists and groups that contributed to the popularization of the genre were: Modern Folk Üçlüsü, Edip Akbayram, Dadaşlar, Atilla Özdemiroğlu, Üç Hürel, and İstanbul Gelişim. Considering the Anatolian Pop movement's early development, by "utilizing Edward Said's distinction between filiation

¹⁷ The original versions of these songs were usually pop songs with French, Spanish, English or Italian lyrics.

and affiliation” (Karahasanoğlu & Skoog, 2009: 52), Songül Karahasanoğlu and Gabriel Skoog claim that “when Cem Karaca and his contemporaries performed Anadolu Rock in the 1960s, they were enacting a gesture of affiliation in linking their performance to American and European styles” (Karahasanoğlu, 2009: 69). According to Said, “the filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and ‘life,’ whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society” (Said, 1983: 20).

While there are various approaches to characterizing the interaction of Anatolian Pop with folk music, two main approaches exist in practice: “(i) performing folk songs without making any changes to melody, rhythm, and words, only with harmonic accompaniment, in ‘homophonic texture’, (ii) composing popular songs inspired by folk songs and even local expressions and proverbs, in a manner that takes them as a model or by imitating them” (Öztürk, 2020: 286). In the first of these approaches, we see that anonymous folk songs are primarily used. The first implementation of this approach is *Burçak Tarlası*, an arrangement sung by Tülay German in 1964. Accepted as the first recording of Anatolian Pop, and thus marking the beginning of the genre, the arrangement was performed with Western instruments and was completely faithful to the original melody. Although entering the music market in the beginning of the 1960s with rock’n roll songs written in English, Erol Büyükburç became one of the artists who continued this approach in later years with the folk songs he modernized. According to Camgöz (2020: 1496), in the following years “a tendency in Anatolian Pop where poems of folk poets/minstrels are performed with western instruments and forms while bringing into the front a protest/political manner” occurred at the same time.

“In the 1970s, artists such as Cem Karaca, Selda, Edip Akbayram who undertook a political mission sang folk songs of Mahsuni Şerif while artist such as Barış Manço, Tülay, Neşe Karaböcek sang folk songs of Neşet Ertaş” (Çanlı, 2018). The most well-known example of the second approach is Barış Manço’s *Dağlar Dağlar*, a “composition in the style of folk song with harmonic accompaniment” (Öztürk, 2020: 286).

In summary, as the Anatolian Pop movement achieved a strong position in Turkey in the 1970s, the music industry gained power through this newly emergent protest music. However, there are also rare artists like Ortaçgil who have produced different kinds of protest music, other than mainstream protest music. In the interview conducted with Ortaçgil, the artist also states that *Benimle Oynar Mısın* has a protest character (Bülent

Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021). At this point, a general analysis of the album is required, in order to better understand the album and discuss it from a musicological and sociological perspective.

General Analysis of the Album and Comparison with Anatolian Pop

In a period when Anatolian Pop created its own *clichés* in terms of textual and musical aspects, Ortaçgil entered the music market as a singer who wrote his own lyrics and music at the age of 24 — a distinguishing feature for a singer at that time (Çerezciöđlü, 2007: 17). When we look at the musical and textual characteristics of *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, we see that it has qualities and characteristics different from those of Anatolian Pop and other genres in the field. In the next section, we introduce the basic similarities and differences between Anatolian Pop and *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, particularly regarding its instrumentation, melodic structure, sound and lyrics, and shed light on the album's position in the market.

The album *Benimle Oynar Mısın* mainly features acoustic instrumentation; while acoustic guitar and piano stand out, drums, bass, brass instruments (trumpet, trombone, electro tenor saxophone) are occasionally used. Flute, vibraphone, and strings are other instruments that are used sparingly on the album. While the guitar and the piano alternatively come into prominence, the album also includes back vocals. With some exceptions, the instrumental texture and intensity throughout the album remain quite simple: the vocal line is accompanied by two guitars and a vibraphone in *Kediler*; guitar in the *Anlamsız ve Yüzünü Dökme Küçük Kız*; guitar and piano in *Bahar Türküsü*; piano, guitar, and back vocals in *Yağmur*. The song that gives the album its name, *Benimle Oynar Mısın* is one of the exceptions in terms of instrumentation, due to its use of strings. The use of wind instruments is generally limited; the solo flute is heard in *Her Şey Sevgiyle Başlar*, and *Şık Latife* is accompanied by brass instruments. The solo trumpet is heard once in *Günaydın*. In the relatively more fast-paced songs of the album, *Olmalı Mı Olmamalı Mı*, *Sen Varsın*, *Şık Latife*, the bass guitar, which is the only non-acoustic instrument on the album, is used in addition to the brass and drum. As we can see, Anatolian Pop, on the other hand, tends to use different instrumentation, which typically consists of electric guitar, bass, drums, and synthesizer.¹⁸ While Western instruments

¹⁸ In this genre, there are also musicians who prefer mostly acoustic sounds, such as Selda Bağcan.

provide a basis for instrumentation in Anatolian Pop, various Turkish folk instruments such as *bendir*, *kabak kemane*, *bağlama*, *ney*, *zurna*, *asma davul* are also used in parallel due to their melodic and timbre characteristics. These instruments, as mentioned by Baysal (2018: 210), were also used to provide drone sounds, a practice that is never seen in Ortaçgil's music. In addition to the use of folk music instruments, the rhythmic, timbre, and melodic characters of these folk instruments may also be evoked by using western instruments.¹⁹ Ortaçgil, in contrast, intentionally avoids the use of folk music elements in his music. Practices such as the use of folk music instruments or evoking folk musical idioms with Western instruments do not exist in Ortaçgil's music. In the interview, Ortaçgil states that he never aspired to use traditional instruments and did not have an affinity for Turkish traditional music from his childhood. He added that it is single-minded to make a kind of music just to be admired or sought after by the masses. Therefore, he refused to be a part of this trend and created and performed his music the way he loved. "Because I did not want to build what I wanted to say on something I didn't know," (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021) he says, and adds that folkloric themes are generally restrictive for songwriters. For him, folklore means keeping the old alive.

Four of the songs (*Olmalı Mı Olmamalı Mı*, *Şık Latife*, *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, *Sen Varsın*) in the album were arranged by Onno Tunç, who was just at the beginning of his career at that time. But even though the sound palette of the album was partly enriched by Onno Tunç's arrangements, *Benimle Oynar Mısın* fundamentally contains the timbral codes of American protest music. One of the main differences that distinguishes the album from Anatolian Pop in terms of instrumentation is undoubtedly the timbral absence of electric guitar. Unlike in Anatolian Pop, where solos are mostly played by electric guitar and synthesizer, the solos are usually performed by piano or wind instruments. Thus, *Benimle Oynar Mısın* obviously differs from the Anatolian Pop genre in terms of instrumentation preferences.

¹⁹ In songs of Cem Karaca's *Zeyno* (1969) and Cem Karaca&Moğollar's *Obur Dünya* (1973), we see that zurna and davul are alluded to using electric guitar and drums. In Moğollar's song *Dağ ve Çocuk*, the keyboard evokes the zurna both melodically and timbrally. Barış Manço alludes to Black Sea kamanche with the electric guitar in *Derule*. On the other hand, davul is used instead of drums in Moğollar's *Garip Çoban* and Cem Karaca&Moğollar's *Obur Dünya*.

The vocal style of Ortaçgil undoubtedly has a great influence on the soft sound of the album, which has an acoustic atmosphere exempted from distortion sounds. Ortaçgil's docile, soft, calm, childish, sincere vocal tone is also in harmony with the character of the songs. Ortaçgil's vocal tone is more naïve and has less diversity compared to the leading artists of the Anatolian Pop such as Cem Karaca, whose dramatic singing style is "ranging from warm and clean vocals, to aggressive guttural sounds, to humorous theatricality and epic narrative style" (Baysal, 2018: 211). Anatolian Pop is generally oriented towards complex and loud sounds. "Long solos played by guitar or synthesizer on short themes that bass guitar repeats periodically, repeating rhythmic structures, improvisations, complex and loud timbre, high-emphasis performances" are among the qualities that differentiate Anatolian Pop from the album at hand (Camgöz, 2019: 115, as cited in Çerezcioglu, 2017). In *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, there is a style similar to that of American protest music, in which the soft vocal style is accompanied with acoustic guitar, and guitar and vocals dominate the music. Therefore, the sound of the album is closer to American folk music, rather than rock music.

Ortaçgil's singing also features a 'calm' and speech-like quality, which is frequently seen in the American folk music tradition (Çerezcioglu, 2007: 36). Ortaçgil's vocal line is mostly made up of repeated melodies and steps. There are rarely intervallic leaps of fourths or fifths, and the vocal melody always remains within the scope of tonality. We observe that in Anatolian Pop, the vocal line may go beyond the tonal sequence due to the modal qualities of the folk songs, on which the songs are based. Harmonically, the album uses the chord structures seen in Anglo-American popular music. Notably, the chord progression in *Olmalı mı Olmamalı Mı* and piano solo in *Benimle Oynar Mısın* allude to the Beatles. Although the prevailing harmonic palette in the album consists of triads, chords with added sixths, ninths, elevenths, and suspended fourths are also used. The use of cyclical chord progression, borrowed chords, and tonic-subdominant-dominant relations, which demonstrates a strong affinity with Western music harmonic idiom, are some of the other features seen in the album. In Anatolian Pop, besides Anglo-American popular music harmonic idioms, the chord progressions are mostly shaped by the Turkish folk music tunes, on which the songs are based (either in style or directly through arrangement). Additionally, "the ways of harmonizing were also experimented with in relation to the modal content most of the pieces contained," wherein a variety of

strategies were applied by artists, “including avoiding the dominant chord (V), especially in the cadences, and relying more on the subdominant chord (IV or iv), as well as occasionally using median relationships (both upper and lower thirds) to prolong tonic chord progressions” (Baysal, 2018: 210). In *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, integrity is notable between the harmony and melody throughout the album. Besides that, Ortaçgil uses the musical material succinctly and makes very few repetitions of sections in his songs. In terms of dynamics, there is not much variety in the songs. In Anatolian Pop, on the other hand, more dynamic features are generally seen in this respect.

All the songs on the album were composed by Ortaçgil. Therefore, Ortaçgil parallels the Anglo-American singer-songwriter tradition, not only because of his musical style, but also because he is the creator of the music he performs. Ortaçgil also wrote all the song lyrics, with the exception of *Yağmur*.²⁰ The lyrics are very introverted, displaying an individual, rather than social approach. In an interview with *Hürriyet Kelebek* in 2015, Ortaçgil states that he was one of the first musicians to do so (Arslan, 2015).²¹ He states that, on the other hand, the individuality in his songs is not an isolated individuality from sociality. He explains that he wrote many songs that could be regarded as ‘political’, referring to the values and morals of the society at that time, and yet admits that they were not ‘up-to-date politically’. According to him, politics does not mean up-to-dateness (Abatay, 2017). Although the album was lyrically very understated and gentle for its time, it was not far from the worldview of the ‘68 generation. “There is a lot of hope, it is a hopeful album,” he says, and points out the protest quality of the album in this manner (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021). But beyond that, he distances himself from current politics, and therefore does not define himself as an activist or protest musician. In his opinion, the aesthetics of music and speech should always be at the forefront, rather than giving a message. “According to him, aiming to say something explicitly in songs should not get ahead of creating song aesthetics” (Çerezcioglu, 2007: 18).

The lyrics of the songs reflect the solitude of urban life —including human landscapes—, make ontological inquiries, and give implicit messages. It is possible to define him as an urban storyteller due to the subjects he deals with in his songs. What we see in Anatolian

²⁰ The lyrics for this song are from the poem by Swedish poet and writer Artur Lundkvist.

²¹ “I am one of the first of those who make the music of individual thoughts”.

Pop, on the other hand, are lyrics that are generally extroverted, reflecting nature and the countryside. These lyrics are protest, political, antagonistic, experimental, societal, explicit, and related to the working class, freedom, and equality themes. In addition to the frequent use of folk expressions and proverbs, lyrics evoke Anatolia through the use of local dialects and accents. These practices are never seen in Ortaçgil's lyrics. He, in fact, prefers an indirect expressive manner. Instead of clear and direct expressions, he uses a more observant, descriptive, and subtly interrogative style. This is one of the other basic elements that distinguish his music from Anatolian Pop music. "The narrativeness of what he tells within the framework of various symbols is a distinctive feature of Ortaçgil songs" (Çerezciöđlu, 2007: 38). Ortaçgil thinks that the audience should actively participate in the process of listening to music.²² He writes lyrics that are "avoiding unidimensionality, giving everyone the chance to enjoy as much as they participate, a little abstract, a little unconventional but multi-layered" (Ortaçgil, n.d.). Therefore, Ortaçgil's audience mostly consists of "intellectuals, university students, and urban people, just like protest music singers in the American protest music tradition" (Çerezciöđlu, 2007: 20).

The soundscape heard at the end of the recording acoustically concretizes the theme of urban people and city life, to which the lyrics refer. The recording opens with the first song *Günaydın* and closes with another version of the same track, in which the music ending with a fade-out blends with the urban buzzings. This marks an unprecedented practice in Turkish popular music. In addition, the theme of loneliness that pervades the fourteen songs of the album is one of the features that renders it a concept album.

Reception & Revival

Although *Benimle Oynar Mısın* is considered one of the cornerstones of Turkish popular music today, it did not resonate with a large audience at the time it was released. Because the Turkish audience was not familiar with the musical codes of the album. One of the last factors in the shaping of "art worlds" that determines its success is the reactions of the receivers. As Becker emphasized, "someone must respond to the work once it is done, have an emotional or intellectual reaction to it, 'see something in it,' appreciate it"

²² This perspective also resembles Adorno's ideas about audiences (Adorno, 1941: 17-48).

(Becker, 1982: 4). However, as mentioned earlier, the appreciation of cultural products requires knowledge and experience, shaping long-lasting dispositions.

When the album was released, Turkish popular music listeners were not yet accustomed to Anglo-American music codes. According to Ortaçgil, the general listener of those times was very conservative (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021). The interaction of Anatolian Pop with folk music eased the reception of that genre. Moreover, arrangement music made it easy for Turkish listeners to appreciate Western light music styles at that time. Additionally, artists such as Hümeýra may have appealed to the masses with original pieces with lyrics taken from folk poets. However, Ortaçgil's music was far from all of these genres. The traces of the existentialist poets and writers he read in his youth, and who inspired his lyrics, caused Ortaçgil to be perceived as 'over western' (Çerezcioğlu, 2007: 17). Orhan Kahyaoğlu also states that *Benimle Oynar Mısın* has an extremely avant-garde identity, when one looks at the pop average of the period (Kahyaoğlu, n.d.). Needless to say, Ortaçgil was one of the first artists entering the music market of the 1970s to write their own lyrics and music. Therefore, listeners of Ortaçgil tended to be urban people who were university-educated, or at least people considered to be from intellectual/semi-intellectual status, who followed foreign music (Çerezcioğlu, 2007: 31). The album might have been an appealing alternative for intellectuals who were looking for something other than the standardized patterns of arrangement music and the stereotypical discourse of Anatolian Pop.

Ortaçgil intentionally did not get involved in any of the prevailing trends of the period (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021). He always reaffirms his statement regarding his choice of music-making: the music that makes sense for him. Therefore, from this point of view, it is clear that the album was not motivated by any expectation of commercial success. Producer Kocatepe also shared this view, as Ortaçgil mentioned that Kocatepe did not interfere with the process. "Therefore, I was able to release an original product. This was a big chance and something that could not happen to everyone" (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021).

In a time when people were increasingly politicized due to political events, expectation from music was also in the same direction. However, when we look at Ortaçgil's songs, they seem to belong to a different world from the predominant spirit of the period, both

in terms of music and text. In comparison to Anatolian Pop, they present a soft and naive character and do not reflect any existing ideology of the period. While having no explicit relation to current politics, the album, with its musical and implicit critical qualities, is more closely comparable to American protest songs.

Although it did not appeal to the general taste of the masses and did not reflect the ideological tendencies of the period, *Benimle Oynar Mısın* never fell out of favor on the market in the long term, due to its musical and textual qualities and depth, and was always followed by a certain audience. If we look at the reasons why this album, which was not widely visible in the 1970s, gained great importance at the end of the 1990s and onwards, we can list the following factors with direct or indirect effects:

- i. Those who took part in the album in 1974 as support personnel were the most influential artists of the period.
- ii. His friend from university, and later his producer, Mustafa Kaynakçı played a major role in the visibility of Ortaçgil and his *Benimle Oynar Mısın* album.²³ In the 1980s, before copyright laws were implemented, Kaynakçı used to make compilation albums. He made Ortaçgil's songs from *Benimle Oynar Mısın* visible by adding them to many compilation albums (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021).
- iii. In the following years, Ortaçgil worked with prominent Turkish musicians, including Gürol Ağırbaş, Baki Duyarlar, and Erkan Oğur, for many years. This collaboration made the artist known to a wide audience with his new sound.
- iv. Ortaçgil reinterpreted his songs titled *Olmalı Mı Olmamalı Mı*, *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, *Yağmur* and *Şık Latife* in the album *Eski Defterler* (1999) and thus reintroduced the 1974 album.
- v. The album *Şarkılar Bir Oyundur - Bülent Ortaçgil için Söylenmiş Bülent Ortaçgil Şarkıları* (2000) had a great impact on Ortaçgil's reputation: his songs were sung by 22 artists, including prominent musicians of Turkish pop music, such

²³ Kaynakçı used to work at Piccatura Music Company.

as Sezen Aksu, Gürol Ağırbaş, Feridun Düzağaç, Yaşar, Haluk Levent, and Teoman.

- vi. Two books were published discussing Ortaçgil as an artist.²⁴
- vii. Publishing *The Song Book* (Ortaçgil, 2002) with notated scores of the tracks in the album, made the music more accessible to amateur performers.
- viii. Interpretation of Ortaçgil's *Sensiz Olmaz* by prominent arabesque musician Müslüm Gürses in the soundtrack album (Saltık, 2004) of the movie titled *Neredesin Firuze?* increased Ortaçgil's fame.
- ix. Reissues of the recordings made Ortaçgil more recognized. In 2000, the album was released in CD format by the Istanbul-based Piccatura record label, and in 2004 by the South Korean label, World Psychedelia Ltd. In 2008, as a result of the revival of the vinyl, the Spanish record label Wah-Wah Records released 1000 copies of the album in LP format, which also brought more visibility abroad. In 2015, 41 years since its debut, it was released once again on LP by Rainbow45 Records in Turkey.

Of course, this list of reasons that made this album a milestone in Turkey and brought it to the masses is not exhaustive. However, the aforementioned factors appear as basic factors. We may also observe that, since the 1990s, the potential audience that could appreciate the recording also gradually increased due to wider consumption of foreign music based on Anglo-American popular music such as hard rock and its derivatives. Lastly, we can also say that after his period of working as an engineer, Ortaçgil's consistent musical production since the 1980s made him more visible in the 2000s. Fulfilling his duty as a creative artist (and core personnel) with the same devotion also supported this stability. Becker states that

“Another difficulty arises when someone claiming to be an artist does not do some of what is regarded as the irreducible core of what an artist must do. Since the definition of the core activity changes over time, the division of labor between artist and support personnel also changes, leading to difficulties.”
(Becker, 1982: 19)

²⁴ Çınar (2018); Kahyaoglu (2002)

Ortaçgil, who has been performing with Gürol Ağırbaş (bass guitar), Cem Aksel (drums) and Erkan Oğur (guitar) since the 1990s, seems to have long-established the division of labor.²⁵ Although the musicians he worked with changed over the years, his central role in the production process has not changed: he continued his core personnel role as vocalist, songwriter, and composer. It is also noteworthy that Ortaçgil mentioned the importance of the collective approval process in the formation of his music, referring to his work as "our music" in the in-depth interview. This demonstrates that he considers his musical production a collective action, similar to Becker's claims. Besides, starting from the album *Benimle Oynar Mısın*, it seems that Ortaçgil established a division of labor that develops in its natural flow, not by force (Bülent Ortaçgil, personal communication, February 17, 2021).

Conclusion

In this study, in which we conducted a musicological and sociological analysis with reference to historical conditions, we focused on Ortaçgil's first album *Benimle Oynar Mısın*. Having a protest character that is not derived from a political stance and demonstrating a musical style that did not resonate with the musical conditions of the period in which it was produced, the album did not reach a wide audience in its time. This is mainly related to the inability of the listeners to appreciate that music and the lack of opportunities to make the album gain more recognition. The album did not draw upon the features of the prevailing genres of its period. Ortaçgil wrote his lyrics, which display a highly individual quality and observation of urban life, without any direct inspiration from sources such as folk culture. While the melodic base of his music draws upon Anglo-American musical codes, the musical and textual elements are also completely free of Turkish folk music. In terms of sound, the album is built on an acoustic atmosphere that matched the character of its stylistic influences and departed from electronic and synthesized timbres of mainstream Anatolian pop music.

The difference of the musical patterns in Ortaçgil's work versus the prevailing 1970's patterns also prevented the album from gaining the appreciation of the audience at that time. This is also related to "conventions" in the formation of "art worlds." When the last link in the formation of "art worlds" could not be achieved, large masses could not

²⁵ In recent years, Akın Eldes has started to accompany Ortaçgil instead of Oğur.

understand the value of the artist in the 1970s. This is what Becker emphasized as “an audience capable of listening to and appreciate the performance” (Becker, 1982: 2). On the other hand, although the support personnel have changed, Ortaçgil’s regular participation in his own musical production as the core personnel has made the artist and his first album more visible over the years. Starting from his first album, Ortaçgil’s positioning in the art world of Turkey, consisting of the most prominent artists, also increased his opportunities to make his album and other songs achieve recognition over the years.

Lastly, the fact that the artist gained more visibility and that his first album thus reached more listeners today is also related to various opportunities, such as the effect of compilation albums, the influence of sponsors and individual supporters, the effect of books exploring Ortaçgil’s music, and the usage of his songs as soundtracks in some movies.

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