

Turan, N.S. (2019), *A contribution for pedigree of the arabesk*, *Rast Musicology Journal*, 7(2), s.2149-2151. Doi:<https://doi.org/10.12975/pp2149-2151>

A contribution for pedigree of the arabesk

Namık Sinan Turan*

Corresponding Author:

*İstanbul University Faculty of Economics, Department of Political Science and International Relations

As a musical genre in Turkey, the arabesk has been discussed since the late 1960s in its different ways. While the studies, which address the issue in a musicological and sociologic way or through the lens of anthropology, reveal social and cultural sources living on music, they present interpretations on politics, cultural planning, social action and reaction in Turkey within a historical framework. Especially, Meral Özbek's eye-opening study, specific to the arabesk of Orhan Gencebay, has a look at the arabesk music within the lively dynamics of the relation with this environment without being isolated from social-class atmosphere in which it is produced, performed, listened, appeals to and from the cultural climate and zeitgeist. She reveals that it cannot be reduced to "delaying culture" or "illiberalness", which is articulated in the language of the elite. Another attention grabbing study, which acts along with the awareness that the arabesk is not only a word but a voice as well and examines its forms of handling, is the book titled "The Arabesk Debate" by Martin Stokes.¹ Martin Stokes is an esteemed person who achieved remarkable studies concerning historical course of music within pop culture in Turkey and deals with representation forms of music in the area of performance in addition to music sociology. His study

involves point of view of an expert who aims to carry out sociologic analyze of music during the rapid period of change in the 1980s to address an issue which has remained on the agenda among official and popular music institutions in Turkey since the 1960s. Contrary to the representatives of different ideological approaches on the evaluation of case of the arabesk in Turkey, an external point of view helps him to represent a calmer and an objective approach.

Becoming a classic now, study of Martin Stokes brings a lens to the adventure of Turkish music in the last two centuries. While he evaluates modernization process over its effects to the social and cultural institutions, he points out what kind of cultural reactions are given by the official intervention during the process from closure of janissary band to termination of Turkish music broadcast in the radios. He analyzes the arabesk along with cultural and official process of change. Especially, in the introduction and in the first part titled "Discovery of People and Their Music" include this historical process, which is important in terms of determination of continuity and disengagements. In the same way, influence of the Republic and Ziya Gökalp on the founder staff of the new and volume of transforming influence of the revolutions in social life regime is reinterpreted as music-based. Although what conveyed in this part was pointed

¹ Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*, Clarendon Press Oxford, New York 1992, 265 s.

out in the previous studies, it still provides a consisted framework for the following parts.

The sociologists add weight and their approaches on the sociological basis of music in the studies dealing with the arabesk in Turkey, which may sometimes lead to inadequacies for the analysis of a music genre. However, musical creation is a process that necessitates a technical analysis as well as a sociologic one. The study of Stokes fills a quite significant gap on that sense. The third part comes up with the analysis of modal constructions such as maqam and melodic pattern, and determines boundaries of interaction between folk and classic music while it examines reconstruction of Turkish folk music. Thus, effects of redefinitions forms of individualism in the performance of music are discussed over examples. Based on his observation at the various music sources in İstanbul during the 1990s, Stokes analyses styles based on decorative patterns that can be expressed through traditional instruments such as baglama and beats of spectrum. In this way, analysis of systematized techniques, except for the ones in the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) and the State Conservatory, can be carried out through performance practices. This part has a particularly contributive property to determine relationship between the forms of performance and presentation, which is produced under the market conditions of urban musicianship, and the arabesk.

In the fourth part, in which historical and social sources of music is analyzed, thesis submitted by the literature on the subject is discussed. Reflections of Egyptian music, which gained popularity in Turkish theaters in the 1930s and 1940s, on the urban music are examined in the way of various approaches. Squatting, “dolmuş” culture and pathological indicators emerging from İstanbul’s rapid urbanization, which

is prevalent among liberal-intellectual criticisms, are open to questioning in this part. However, it also draws attention to an explicit political dimension that alienation of the arabesk and its negative effects is associated with religious reaction and policies of the Özal government. Performers of the arabesk music, their relationship with social ties and audience subject are among the subjects discussed in the fourth part. The book of Stokes puts forward thesis that sheds light on change of the audience subject in the 1990s. Noting that association of this music with shanty house is not clarified in an exact sociological way over the producers of the music and its audience, Stokes considers that as a metaphorical allegation. Contrary of this allegation, he underlines that the arabesk is a music genre which is listened by various spheres of the society.

Having a profound academic knowledge about Turkish, Stokes reveals a successful analysis concerning technical characteristics of the arabesk as a music genre. He sheds light on the issue within a wide scope from the studios producing the arabesk to the composers and performers, and from the film sector to the night clubs based on his long field study in the 1980s along with his personal experiences. His findings about quality of the relationship between political culture and the arabesk are remarkable. According to the author, the arabesk is a newly music which should be considered within the scope of its occurrence, technology of recording industry in Turkey and its organization, and its consumption can be understood in the context of a society that jumps into the rapidly urbanized and industrialized world economic system. However, its language is not new. From an external point of view, Stokes highlights that there are obvious continuities between the arabesk and the sema in terms of general syntax of dance and lyrics. The author is aware that this is speculative, though. Therefore, he builds

his thesis on these following parallelisms. First of all, he points out textual similarity between the sema and the arabesk lyrics. Laying emphasis on similarity level of the arabesk and popular Islam inside the hegemony of periphery, Stokes highlights common points between vecd [ectasy] in sema and trance of the arabesk. In my opinion, one of the most remarkable similarities he put forward about the common points on which the arabesk and the sema meet is the feature of expression and reveal of their objection to official discourse on the individual and the society.

Squaring the circle, Martin Stokes evaluates the arabesk under its social and economic background in the network of political relationships. Although he reveals a text on musicology apparently, he analyzes effects of cultural roots of change process of Turkish society in the last two centuries up to date via music.