

# Art Songs of Early Republican Composers in Türkiye: Ahmet Samim Bilgen's 'Merdiven' in Terms of Vocal Technique and Composition

*Türkiye'de Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Bestecilerinin Sanat Şarkıları Çerçeveşinde  
Ahmet Samim Bilgen'in 'Merdiven' Adlı Eserinin Vokal Tekniği ve Bestelemeye  
Açısından İncelenmesi*

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## Abstract

The presence of art song in Türkiye can be traced back to the Ottoman State, before the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Indeed, all the education and performances had largely taken place in Istanbul, as it was the capital of the Ottoman State. Therefore, it can be said that this art basically flourished in a city-based manner. However, it spread all over the country after the republic was established. As part of the cultural reform, the integration of the genres and norms of the Western classical music into the culture of the country appeared on the agenda. Thus, talented students were sent to Europe to study composition. After the completion of their studies, these early republican composers returned to Türkiye and started composing in several forms of Western classical music, one of which is art song. Thus, they created the first repertory of Turkish art song.

Most sources usually mention the Turkish Five as the early republican Turkish composers. In fact, at the time, there were also other composers who wrote music in Western classical form. Ahmet Samim Bilgen was one of these composers. He played in the first violin group at Şehir Orkestrası (founded by Cemal Reşid Rey and the only orchestra in Istanbul at the time). At the same time, he was a student at the faculty of law at Istanbul University. Since he built his career on law after completing his education and thus little is known about him, his name is rarely mentioned in the sources regarding music in the early republican period. In fact, he never quit music. He was a remarkable figure in the music scene of the period due to both his compositions and the success of his musical plays and marches. He was also in close contact with his peers in music throughout his life. Moreover, he was a member of the Sevda - Cenap And Music Foundation and Ankara Polyphonic Music Foundation.

Based on oral history and manuscripts of the composer in addition to relevant books and journals, this study aims to bring forward Ahmet Samim Bilgen as a composer through the first art song he composed for the soprano voice in addition to revealing his autobiography for the first time. In addition, the performability of this art song is analyzed through certain properties of the vocal technique of the soprano voice. Therefore, these properties are also explained in the study.

**Keywords:** Ahmet Samim Bilgen, Turkish art song, Soprano voice, Early republican Turkish composers, Vocal technique.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the new government worked towards a cultural revolution in several areas, the most prominent one of which was music. There was intense work in educating musicians, encouraging them to write music with national features and establishing conservatories. This mainly took place in the early republican era, which is asserted by Balkılıç to last until 1952 (2009, p. 15). This era includes the period when Atatürk's principles were set and applied in all fields and marks the most profound time in music revolution. One of the aims of this revolution was to raise composers so that they would produce works in the form of Western classical music that reflect the cultural and folkloric characteristics of the country. Since there was very limited opportunity to receive music education in 1920s, the Ministry of Education organized auditions to choose talented students and give them scholarship so that they could study at European conservatories. Consequently, several early republican composers were sent to European institutions (Paçacı cited by Balkılıç, 2009, p. 80) and returned to Türkiye to accomplish the aim of this cultural movement. However, Ahmet Samim Bilgen had a rather different path as being mostly a self-taught musician and later studying music at the conservatory. In his childhood, he started playing the piano under the guidance of his mother. Then, he had a private tutor. During his high school years, he learnt harmony and counterpoint on his own from Richter's three books. Later, he studied with Seyfettin Asal at the Municipal Conservatory of Istanbul.

In 1935, he applied to the piano composition competition for the piano organized by the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. The jury consisted of Paul Hindemith, Dmitri Schostakovich, M. Vlach, Necil Kazım Akses, Yusuf Ziya, Nimet Vahid and Muhittin Sadık (Cumhuriyet, 1935, p. 1). Seven out of 57 works were chosen for the final round, two of which belonged to Bilgen. He played "Kayseri Türküsü" and "Türkü" on the piano (Cumhuriyet, 1935, p. 1). A copy of that day's newspaper still exists among his personal belongings.

He contributed to the musical life of the period by playing in the first violin group at the conservatory orchestra conducted by Cemal Reşit Rey and giving chamber music recitals while he was studying law at university. As Bilgen himself indicated in his autobiography, at the time, the conservatory orchestra was the first and the only local orchestra that played Western classical music in Istanbul after the establishment of the republic. After he started building up his career in law, he did not quit music. Moreover, he contributed to the two outstanding music foundations. Indeed, he was a member of the advisory board of Sevda - Cenap And Music Foundation and one of the founding members of the Ankara Polyphonic Music Foundation.

In addition to composing songs/marches and arranging folk songs, he also wrote music for theatre plays and musicals. Unfortunately, much of this repertory is lost now. Some of his folk song arrangements were printed by the local edition of Andre Georgeovich in 1940. Namely, these are "Su Testisi Elinde", "Urfaliyım, Bahçeliyım, Bağlıyım", "Yürüük Yaylasında Yaylayamadım", "Gidin Bulutlar Gidin", "Efe Türküsü", "Odasına Girdim Fincan Elinde", "Evlerinin Önünde Lale", "Altın Yüzük", "Giderim Buradan Artık", and "Fadime".

It was after his retirement that he printed ten more of these arrangements at Eser Matbaacılık. The copyist was Serdar İnözü. Bilgen also added a foreword to this edition, describing his point of view on the harmonization of folk songs. He also printed two of his art songs, Merdiven and Dalgalar; however, they exist just as a printout. According to his son Semih Bilgen, the date of this edition goes back probably to the beginning of 1990s (personal interview, July, 29, 2018). Later, six of his small-scale works were published by Sevda-Cenap And Music Foundation in 2000 with the title "*Altı Damla: Çağdaş Çoksesli Türk Müziği Örnekleri*". In this scorebook, there are six short works and arrangements: "Prelüd ve Türkü", "Güzel Yar (Folk song)", "Hey Dağlar (Folk song)", "Senin Bahçende", "Masal Müziği", and "Ağıt". Other than these printed materials, only a few songs, a quartet and a piano piece remain in the form of sketches. Even from this little portion of works that remain, it is possible to see his talent in creating melodies with prosodic integrity and composing in a

vocally-friendly style for the singer. The meaning of vocally-friendly style will be explained under "Vocal features of the soprano voice".<sup>1</sup>

## 2. BİLGEN'S BIOGRAPHY BASED ON HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This biography is based on the type-written autobiography kindly provided by Bilgen's son, Semih Bilgen. Ahmet Samim Bilgen had written about his life in six pages. The author translated a shortened version of this autobiography to English, mentioning the significant details in his musicianship.

Being the elder son of Dr. Mehmet Emin Bey and Seniye Hidayet Hanım, he was born in Thessaloniki on April 12, 1910. After the Ottoman Empire lost Thessaloniki, his family moved to Istanbul in 1912 and he was registered as being born in Istanbul. He lived in Istanbul until 1935 except the years 1917-1918 due to his father's duty in Kayseri. After his military duty, he settled in Ankara because of his career in law.

His first music teacher was his mother, who used to take piano lessons. Then, at the age of 11, he started playing the violin under the tutorship of a Russian violinist who played the violin at *Erenköy* Cinema in the silent movie period. After he became a boarding student, he continued to study on his own. His studentship at *Kabataş* High School had significant effects on his musicianship because composer Ahmet Yekta Madran, violinist and composer Seyfettin Asal and cellist Ruşen Kam were all music teachers in that school. With his two other friends keen on music, they gave chamber music recitals not only in their school but also at other schools with the help of their philosophy teacher Servet Berkın. He also studied music theory on his own through Richter's three-volume book of harmony, fugue and counterpoint. The marches and songs he composed in those years were appreciated by his teachers and friends, which motivated him to do more in the field of composition. His will to study music in Paris was rejected by his father. Upon his graduation from high school in 1929, he was enrolled in the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University in addition to his enrollment at the Municipal Conservatory of Istanbul as the student of Seyfettin Asal. In the following year, he started to play the violin within the first violin group in the conservatory orchestra conducted by Cemal Reşit Rey. In those years, this was the only symphonic orchestra in the city, performing weekly at the old French Theatre. He also played the violin and the piano to accompany silent movies at *Kadıköy Süreyya Sineması* (*Berovich Quartet*) and *Üsküdar Hale Sineması* until 1931. Afterwards, he became a member of the orchestra of Muhlis Sabahattin Operetta Company and the orchestra of Istanbul City Theater conducted by H. Ferit Alnar and Ferdi Statzer. This was a time when operettas were popular among audiences and many operettas were being written by Rey Brothers (Cemal Reşit and Ekrem Reşit Rey) and Muhlis Sabahattin. In the 1931-1932 academic year, he taught music at *İnkılâp* Private High School and staged his musical "*Merih'ten Gelen Telsiz*" with his students. In the same year, he played the violin in the recording sessions of Kaptanzade Ali Rıza's popular songs. In 1933, he staged his musical comedy Othello in Ankara Public House, where Atatürk was also among the spectators. He appreciated Bilgen and had him repeat the rendition for villages nearby. Two school musicals ("*Ilgaz*" and "*Köye Dönüş*") followed this success. The main track of the musical, "*Ilgaz*", became a universal tune and was even used as a canon by Necil Kazım Akses, one of the remarkable early republican composers, in one of his symphonies.

Before his career shifted to law, he took part in the activities of a musical society which transformed into a public culture house (*Halkevi*) and which had previously been titled as *Kadıköy Eski Şark Müziği Cemiyeti* [Kadıköy Old Eastern Music Society]. He founded *Kadıköy Halkevi Kuvartet* [Kadıköy Public House Quartet] with Zeki Berküren (viola) and Şeref Yenen (cello). In 1935, his two songs "*Ilgaz*" and "*Köye Dönüş*", which he arranged for four-voice choir, were published by the choir conductor of the public house, Hulusi Ökten, in his book "*Okullara Müzik*" [Music for Schools].

1 For a full list of Bilgen's works, see Appendix 2.

Following his graduation from *Kabataş* High School, he attended Istanbul University, Faculty of Law and graduated in 1931. In 1961-62, Bilgen studied international law at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, USA.

He was self-taught in music. While his mother taught him to play the piano, he studied music theory by himself in addition to the violin. Then, he attended Seyfeddin Asal's violin classes in Istanbul Municipal Conservatory. During his education at Istanbul University, he became a professional violin player at Istanbul City Orchestra directed by the well-known Turkish composer Hasan Ferid Alnar. Later, he played the first violin at Istanbul Conservatory Orchestra directed by Cemal Reşit Rey during the years 1930-1935.

In 1933, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk attended a performance of Bilgen's operetta "*Othello*", which was staged in Ankara, and expressed his admiration for the work.

In 1935, he received prizes for two of his folk song arrangements in a contest organized by the daily newspaper "*Cumhuriyet*". Dmitri Shostakovich and Paul Hindemith were among the audience on the day they were performed at *Beyoğlu Saray Sineması* with five other selected folk song arrangements.

Between the years 1936 and 1985, he worked in the field of law under different titles: reporter at the State Council, chancellor of Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of Finance, Legal Advisory and lawyer. In the meantime, he wrote operettas and music for several theatre plays besides songs and folk song arrangements for voice and piano. He worked for enhancing the popularity of polyphonic music all his life, which can be seen in his memberships of two organizations: Sevda Cenap And Music Foundation and Ankara Polyphonic Music Foundation. Ahmet Samim Bilgen passed away in 2005.

### 3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURKISH ART SONG

#### 3.1. Definition of Art Song

Before delving into the history of Turkish art song, it might be necessary to explain art song. It is a musical work within the Western vocal music composition written for one voice and piano accompaniment. It combines two separate art forms in itself: music and poetry, which makes it a compound musical form. The lyrics are taken from a (contemporary) poem; thus, they have literary value because their primary existence lies in poetry rather than the lyrics of an art song. The musical language of the composer affects the framework of an art song. In a strophic song, all the verses of its poem are set to the same music. Meister maintains that strophic songs are generally observed in the folk song repertory and she further states, "there are exceptional cases in which the musical repetition provides dramatic irony for the changing text, or where an almost hypnotic monotony is desired" (1980, p. 15). Depending on this statement, it is possible to mention that art songs are usually through-composed (Each verse has its own melody).

Besides, there is no consideration of being set to music at the time the poem is written. Bayraşa states that this is a cause of aesthetic considerations on the composer's side (n.d.). On the basis of this perspective, it is possible to mention that a composer should be skillful in concise expressions in music and have competence in literature.

The style of composing differentiates an art song from a traditional or popular song. In the art song, there is more complex harmony and more modulations than popular songs. Furthermore, the function of the 7<sup>th</sup> chords is different. In contrast, in popular/traditional songs, the accompaniment does not need virtuosity because it can be accomplished with a few chords.

Art songs are usually accompanied by a piano. In fact, as Uçman Karaçalı asserts, this accompaniment is more like a complement of the vocal melody similar to a duet. Voice and piano form the texture of the art song together (2016, p. 101). Moreover, Dickinson et al. stated, "The pianoforte part (simple or highly elaborate) is more than a mere accompaniment, and, as much as the vocal part, demands artistic interpretation" (2013). This shows that the piano accompaniment plays a significant role in the elaboration of the art song.

### **3.2. History of Turkish Art Song**

In this study, the term Turkish art song is used for art songs with Turkish lyrics. The history of Turkish art song is relatively new compared to the Western art song. As Sevengil cited by Yöre indicates, traces of the primary appearances of Western vocal music go back to the Ottoman period, specifically to 1797, when the first known opera performance took place in the Ottoman Palace in Istanbul during the reign of Selim III (2011, p. 57). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the involvement of Western vocal music in the Ottoman territory expanded with the interest of the sultans. For instance, among the reforms of Sultan Mahmud II was to replace the traditional janissary band, Mehter, with a modern, European-style military band. As Kutlay-Baydar asserts, military music was dominant performance-wise and production-wise; therefore, transformation to polyphonic music started in this genre (2010, p. xiii). To realize this purpose, Giuseppe Donizetti was invited to the Ottoman palace to train musicians in 1828. He worked in the palace as the general director of the Ottoman military until 1856. Altar mentions that the first opera trials were possible with the musicians who were pupils of Donizetti (2001, p. 189). He not only taught music but also composed works in several genres, one of which was *şarkı-i cedid* (new song). Araci states that Donizetti composed two art songs under the name “Şarkı-i Cedid”: Şarkı-i cedid der sitayış-i Hazreti Sultan Abdülmecid” and “Şarkı-i cedid der vasp-ı Hazreti Valide-i Sultan Abdülmecid”. As the titles suggest, the former was written for the Ottoman sultan of the time, and the latter was written for his mother (2006, p. 127). The beginning of this second art song can be seen in Figure 1. This figure demonstrates that the work was composed in lied (art song) form. Araci further asserts, “The front lines of Atatürk's perspective of polyphony in music were drawn with these art songs” (2006, p. 132). Consequently, the search for the “new” in Turkish music can be said to have started with these art songs. However, there are no other known *şarkı-i cedid* works belonging to either Giuseppe Donizetti or other composers.



Figure 1. The first ten measures of Donizetti's art song (*Şarkı-i Cedid*) with the title “*Şarkı-i cedid der vasf-ı Hazreti Valide-i Sultan Abdülmecid*” (Aracı, 2006, p. 130).

Here, it should be mentioned that only the works of early republican Turkish composers are chronologically listed because of the fact that the complete repertory of Turkish art songs needs a separate study.

After these first art song examples, “Üç Melodi” composed by Cemal Reşid Rey in 1920 is most probably the second early example of Turkish art song (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 29). “Sözsüz Romans” was composed by Hasan Ferid Alnar in 1923 (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 37). Unfortunately, neither this work nor “Üç Melodi” is accessible.

Alnar's other art songs "Vokal Fügler" (1925-1927) and "Lied" (1940-1942) could not be accessed, either. Later, "Merdiven", which was composed by Samim Bilgen in 1926, followed. In 1930, Rey composed "Vatan" (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 29). The score of this art song could not be accessed, either. In the same period, Ferit Hilmi Atrek and Faik Canselen, who both studied music in Europe with governmental scholarships, composed several art songs. In 1940, Atrek published his first art song sheet music with the title "Piyano Eşliği ile 12 Melodi". In 1955, Rey composed four art songs with the title "İşaret".<sup>2</sup> In the same year, Adnan Saygun's first art songs, "Masal" and "Geçen dakikalarım", were published by Ankara State Conservatory for voice and piano. In fact, they were composed in 1940 and 1941 respectively (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 51). It should also be noted that these works were originally composed for voice (baritone) and orchestra. Meanwhile, Saygun composed "Üç Ballad" (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 52).

In 1964, Necil Kazım Akses published his first song cycle with the title "Portreler - I"<sup>3</sup>; moreover, the second volume of this song cycle came in 1975 with the title "Portreler - II" (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 65). Between the years 1977-1984, Saygun composed "İnsan Üzerine Deyişler I-VI" for voice and piano.<sup>4</sup> Although these song cycles are mentioned to have been composed for voice and orchestra in İlyasoğlu's book "71 Turkish Composers" (2007), Giray indicates that they were originally written for voice and piano, and that they were later orchestrated (2002, pp. 63-64). In 1988, Akses composed "Hayır mı, Evet mi?" (İlyasoğlu, 2007, p. 65). This is the last work of the early republican Turkish composers in art-song form.

#### 4. VOCAL FEATURES OF THE SOPRANO VOICE

The human voice might perhaps be the most unique instrument in the world. Nevertheless, it is still possible to classify it according to certain common features. Soprano voice is one of these classifications. Despite its various sub-categories, in general, it can be stated that a female voice that has a range of G<sub>2</sub>-C<sub>5</sub> and that can sing through these pitches with ease and agility is labeled as soprano (See Figure 2) (Brailey, 2021, p. 14). The whistle tones in the diagram below are not typical of each soprano voice. Therefore, they are not included here in the range of a standard soprano voice.

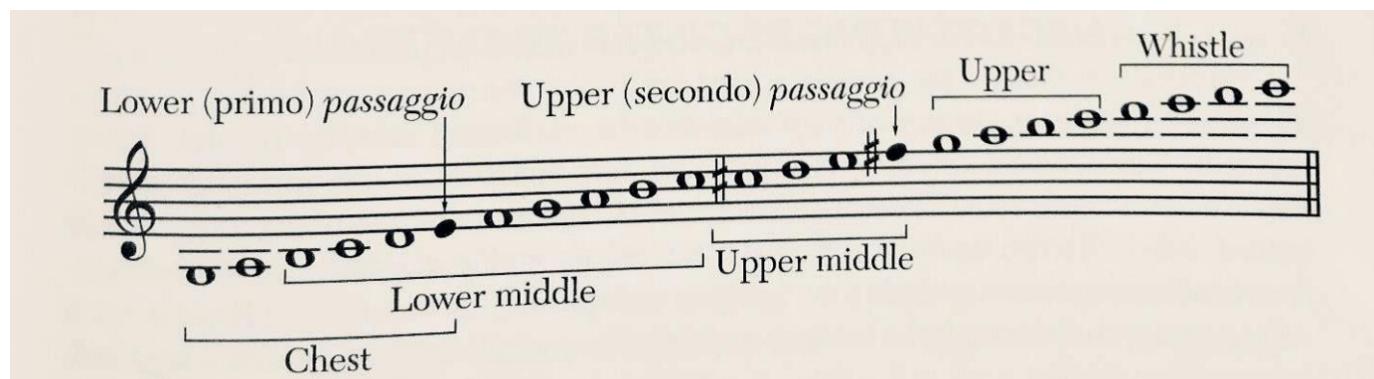


Figure 2. Richard Miller's diagram of soprano passaggi and register tones.

In music history, there are varying divisions of the voice. Some theorists such as Mancini and Caccini divided the voice into two as chest voice and head voice. However, today, Manuel Garcia's division is quite common. He divides the voice into three registers as chest, mixed, and head. In Miller's diagram in Figure 2, the chest

2 This work was not published; yet, with the kind help of Aydin Karlibel, who is Rey's former student, it was possible to reach its score.

3 It is possible to listen to these art songs from soprano Özgül Tanyeri, who first performed them, via [www.ozgultanyeri.com](http://www.ozgultanyeri.com)

4 A copy of the first three books was accessed with the kind help of Şebnem Ünal. However, Book 4, Book 5, and Book 6 could not be accessed.

register is also labeled as *primo passaggio*; the mixed register is labeled as *secondo passaggio*; and the head register is labeled as the upper register.

#### 4.1. Movement Among Registers

First and foremost, the way a soprano moves among these registers affects performability. It takes training and experience for a singer to shift smoothly among these registers. This also greatly depends on the composition, i.e., the way how notes follow one another while shifting among the registers and how the pitches that lie between each two register transition points are treated by the composer. These transition points should be treated with care by composers because a phrase that continually moves around these pitches will cause fatigue in the voice. Nevertheless, exploiting these transition points -within limits- can be accepted as a compositional tool to create drama. Effective use of registration can lead to a strong dramatic effect. For instance, soprano Maria Callas was well-known for applying this in her style.

It is important to write sensitively for the soprano passaggi to provide a comfortable performance for the singer. Most singers prefer not to stay in the middle or upper register of their voice for a sustained period. The reason for this is that the voice shines on variety and will respond better in music that fluctuates in and out of the upper range. As Ware indicates, laryngeal muscles will fatigue under stress as any other muscle in the body and prolonged stress will cause swelling and probably more damaging physiological symptoms (Brailey, 2021, p. 15). Furthermore, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing states, "A song/aria that spends 30% of its time in 20% of a singer's range will be difficult to sustain" (2007). Thus, it can be maintained that, in a vocal work, correct treatment of the melodic line requires frequent movement among registers.

#### 4.2. Breath

Another issue that affects performability is breath. Although singers develop their breathing techniques during vocal training, there is a standard time limit for the length of a vocal phrase. This is usually 10 seconds the most. In fact, the number and configuration of open/close vowels and consonants also have an impact on this length. Therefore, pitch onset should be adjusted to breathing. The American Academy of Teachers of Singing maintains, "The composer should avoid a leap within a single word or between two strong word forms or should avoid a situation that demands absolute continuity in approaching the high note or absolutely requires a breath before a high note" (2007). Consequently, a composer should also take issues of breathing into consideration while composing a vocal work.

#### 4.3. Timbre

The final point which influences performability is timbre. Vowels and consonants constitute the two ends of the line regarding timbre. However, as usually vowels resonate in singing, treatment of vowels gains more importance compared to treatment of consonants. Indeed, intentional modification of vowels is a common practice in sopranos at higher and lower ends of their range. For instance, if the sung pitch is above the first formant<sup>5</sup> of a vowel, the outcome of that vowel will not be so clear. In this case, the standard act would be tuning to the second formant. Unfortunately, this will increase the level of modification of the vowel. Hence, the composer should pay attention to selecting the vowels at high ranges for achieving text intelligibility. Especially in the Turkish language, the vowels "ı", "e" and "ü" are challenging to sing at high range. As the American Academy of Teachers of Singing asserts, clarity will probably be sacrificed if the word at the high note is vowel-dependent. Hence, some singers may use their initiative for emphasizing pronunciation, taking synchronous vocal risks (2007). On the other hand, there are fewer problems regarding the treatment of consonants as aforementioned. Clusters and glottal consonants should be treated carefully in setting the text

5 Formant is the range of frequency amplified by the shape of the vocal tract. It also gives the voice its distinct characteristics.

into music. Obviously, note value is important in this manner. If there is enough time for taking a breath, then the cluster will not create such a complication.

Therefore, as seen above, there are several criteria for composers to take into consideration, which will definitely affect their choice of text/poetry and composing techniques. As a consequence, performers will probably be exposed to vocally friendly works which will enable them to use their voice to its fullest and watch their well-being during performance at the same time. The term "vocally friendly" has been brought forward by Brailey in her dissertation (2021). It seems to be a suitable expression since a vocal work which has all the qualities stated above will not exhaust the vocal chords during performance and therefore, will provide a comfortable vocal tract for the singer.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF BİLGEN'S ART SONG MERDİVEN

This art song was composed in 1926 (Semih Bilgen, personal interview, 2018). The lyrics of this art song are based on *Merdiven* [Stairway]<sup>6</sup> by Ahmet Haşim.<sup>7</sup>

This poem has traces of impressionism in its lines. It depicts the phases of human life through the metaphor of a stairway. This depiction can also be observed in Bilgen's composition in the style of word painting. As seen in Figure 3, he starts the melody in E4 and follows ascending chromatic movement to G4 while setting the first two lines to music ("Slowly you will mount this stairway/ A heap of sun-tinged leaves upon your skirts"). Furthermore, in each measure, he uses a strong musical accent –either a dotted quarter note or a half note. This gives the listener a feeling that a person is slowly climbing up the stairs because in this action, movement of the foot in the first step on the new stair is slower. On the other hand, the first two lines of the second verse do not reflect the meaning of the word painting in the melody. However, they have the same melody due to the strophic form of this art song.

Figure 3. The vocal line of the first 12 measures of Merdiven.

In terms of accent, In terms of accent, it can be stated that the accent in music is often in accordance with the accent of the words. In Figure 3, regarding the first line of lyrics, there are four instances where this parallelism is not accomplished. The first one is the “-ğır” syllable in measure 5. It is accented in this measure whereas the accent is on the second syllable of the first “ağır” in speech. The second instance is in measure 6. In speech, the accent of the word “çıkacaksın” falls on the third syllable “-cak”; however, Bilgen seems to have

<sup>6</sup> For the translation of the poem, see Appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmet Haşim (1887-1933) was a renowned poet of the 1920s in Türkiye. He masterfully depicted nature, color and light mixtures, loneliness and nostalgia in an impressionistic style.

moved it to the last syllable “-sin”. The third one is in measure 9. In speech, the accent is on the last syllable of “eteklerinde”. Yet, in the score, it is observed to be on the third syllable “-rin”. The final instance is also in measure 9. In speech, the word “güneş” has the accent on the second syllable but, in music, there is no accent. There are two instances of inaccurate accents in the second verse as well. First of all, the accent is on the first syllable of “arza” in measure 5. Nevertheless, in speech, it is on the second syllable. Secondly, in measure 10, the musical accent is on the first syllable of the word “kanlı” whereas in speech, it is on the second syllable. Consequently, it seems that Bilgen preferred to set a musical image by the word-painting technique and therefore did not start composing by setting the rhythmic frame first. Taking this preference into consideration, most of these differences in musical accents might be tolerated. Alnar states that, in works of vocal music, if the musical accent does not match with the spoken accent, the unusual pronunciation of the words will destroy their understandability (1938, p. 11). In the case of “Merdiven”, the infrequent differences between musical accent and spoken accent do not create such a problem, which is another support for this tolerance.

In the following measures (13-20), word-painting continues with standing on the dominant (B4) for four measures and then moving to the tonic in the upper octave (E5). This ascending melody is supported with crescendo before it falls to G#4 in measure 20, which acts as a bridge between this first melodic A minor part and the following A major part of the art song (see Figure 4).

The musical score consists of two staves of music. The top staff shows a vocal line with lyrics in Turkish: "Ve bir za-man ba-ka-cak- sin se-ma-ya ağ li-ya- Su-iar mi-yun di ne-den tun-ca ben zi-yor mer-". The bottom staff shows a continuation of the vocal line with lyrics: "Ve bir-za-man ba-ka-cak-sin se-ma-ye ağ li-ya-rah... Su-iar mi-yan di ne-den tun-cu ben zi-yor mer-mer-". The music includes dynamic markings like 'a tempo', 'rak', 'ler', 'cresc.', and 'mer'.

Figure 4. The vocal line of measures 12-20 of Merdiven.

Contrary to the melodic line of the first part, the melodic line of the second part is full of major 6<sup>th</sup> and minor 7<sup>th</sup> intervals. Each time these intervals appear, the following notes descend smoothly either to the starting note or a perfect fourth. These ascending large intervals may create a brief tension in the vocal tract but the smooth descents following right afterwards resolve this brief tension; in addition, the dotted half notes at the end of these resolutions give the singer enough time to prepare for the next ascent (see Figure 5).

The musical score consists of two staves of music. The top staff shows a vocal line with lyrics in Turkish: "Su-lar Bu bir ka-rar-di yü-zün perde per de sol-nak-la ki- li-sc-ni-na-fi-dir ki ru ha-dır-nak-la ki-". The bottom staff shows a continuation of the vocal line with lyrics: "zil hava-la-ri sey-ret ki ak sam-ıl-mak-la... zil hava-la-ri sey-ret ki ak sam-ıl-muk-la...". The music includes dynamic markings like 'poco rit.', 'mf', 'un poco più lento e espressivo', and 'p'.

Figure 5. The vocal line of measures 21-29 of Merdiven.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, being one of the early republican Turkish composers, Ahmet Samim Bilgen contributed to the music scene of the period not only as a violinist/pianist but also as a composer. Primarily, this study reveals his contributions especially via his autobiography which is brought forward probably for first time. Furthermore, it presents an extensive framework of the history of the Turkish art song. Finally, it analyzes one of his two remaining art songs titled as "Merdiven" in terms of certain parameters in the vocal technique of soprano voices and shows that it is vocally friendly.

Despite the inaccessibility of much of Bilgen's output, his competence in composing shows itself even in a small-scale form such as this art song. Written in 1926, it is by far the oldest accessible Turkish art song of the period of the early republican Turkish composers.

In terms of the movement of the melodic line among registers, its timbre, and breath issues in its performance, "Merdiven" can be claimed as vocally friendly for singers. It is a subtle example of the cultural attitude of its time in terms of both its choice of poetry and its melodic movement. Moreover, its features that make it vocally friendly enhance its performability as a consequence. Due to all these reasons, this art song needs to be part of Turkish music repertory studied in departments of vocal performance. In addition, as one of the early republican Turkish composers with works consisting of several musicals, art songs, folk song arrangements and a quintet, Ahmet Samim Bilgen needs to be included in the sources related to the history of Turkish music. As a final word, it must be noted that further studies need to be conducted on this remarkable composer to shed more light on the musical output of the early republican period in Turkey. It is hoped that this study will be their spark.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDICE 1:

#### STAIRWAY

Slowly you will mount this stairway

--A heap of sun-tinged leaves upon your skirts-

And for a while gaze weeping at the sky...

The waters darken and your face grows pale,

Look at the scarlet air, for the evening.

Bowed towards the earth, the roses endlessly glow,

Bloody nightingales sit upon the flame-like boughs;

Have waters burned? Why does marble resemble bronze?

This is a secret language that fills the soul

Look at the scarlet air, for the evening.

### APPENDICE 2:

#### Operettas and theater music

1. "Kadınlar mı, erkekler mi", (operetta). For piano, flute, clarinet, two violins and a violoncello, 1932.
2. "Bu yaz böyle geçti", (operetta). For orchestra, 1935.
3. "Othello", (theater music). For violin, violoncello, piano and strings, 1930.
4. "Merihen gelen telsiz", (theater music). For violin, piano and violoncello, 1930.
5. "Ilgaz", (theater music). For chamber orchestra, 1931.
6. "Köye Dönüş", (theater music). For chamber orchestra, 1932.

#### Works for voice and piano

1. "Türk Halk Havaları", 1935.
2. "Beş Türkü", 1939.
3. "On Halk Şarkısı", 1960-1980
4. "Anılar", 1930-1935.
5. "Nocturne", (solo piano), 1980.
6. "Ballade", (solo piano), 1980.

#### Published works

1. "Anılar" (three pieces for the piano), Ilgaz; Köye Dönüş; Kadınlar mı Erkekler mi.
2. "İki piyano parçası", Nocturne and Ballade.
3. "Türk Halk Şarkıları", Su Testisi; Urfalıylim; Yörük Yaylası; Gidin Bulutlar; Efe Türküsü.
4. "Dünden Yarına Türküler". Nevruz Gelin; Gökte Yıldız; Evlerinin Önü; Giresun Kayıkları; Duriye.
5. "Marşlar", Vatanım; Gençlik Marşı; Okul Gençliğine Sesleniş; 8. Tümén Marşı.
6. "İki Lied", Merdiven; Dalgalar.