

## The Unique Trajectory of Cemal Reşit Rey within Musical Landscape of Early Republican Türkiye *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye'sinin Müzikal Manzarasındaki Cemal Reşit Rey'in Özgün Yörüngesi*

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### Öz

Yirminci yüzyıl, ulus-devletlerin yükselişi, ulusal kültürlerin bilinçli olarak inşası ve kültürel ayrımların belirginleşmesiyle tanımlanan dönüştürücü bir çağ olmuştur. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşuyla birlikte müzik, ulusal kimliğin temel bir direği olarak yeniden kavramsallaştırılmış ve “muasır medeniyet” paradigmatlarıyla uyumlu hâle getirilmek üzere yeniden yapılandırılmıştır. “Türk Beşleri”nin seçkin bir üyesi ve bu dönüşümün başlıca mimarlarından biri olan Cemal Reşit Rey, İstanbul'da ikamet etme kararıyla Ankara merkezli müzik politikalarına karşı çevresel bir konum benimseyerek kendini bu grubun diğer üyelerinden ayırmıştır. Bu çalışma, Cemal Reşit Rey'in Orkestra dergisinde yayımlanan ve daha sonra Cemal Reşit Rey – Orkestra Yazıları (1960'lar–1980'ler) adlı kitapta derlenen makalelerinin söylem analizi aracılığıyla, bestecinin Cumhuriyet dönemi kültür politikaları ve toplumsal modernleşme süreçlerine ilişkin görüşlerini aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Belge analizi ve söylem analizine dayanan nitel bir araştırma paradigmasını benimseyen bu çalışma, Rey'in yazdıklarını tematik ve retorik bir incelemeye tabi tutmaktadır. Bulguların güvenilirliğini artırmak için, çağdaş kaynakları ve mesleki çevresinden sözlü tarihleri içeren bir veri üçgenleme stratejisi uygulamaktadır. Bulgular, Rey'in kariyer yörüngesinin üç belirleyici etken tarafından şekillendirildiğini ortaya koymaktadır: devlet destekli yurt dışı eğitiminden yoksun olması, diğer Türk Beşleri üyelerinin mentorluğunu üstlenmesi ve başkentten coğrafi uzaklığı. Bu uzaklık, Devlet Sanatçısı ünvanını genç çağdaşlarına kıyasla daha geç almasına neden olmuş olsa da, onu İstanbul'un senfonik müzik yaşamının kurumsallaşmasında öncü figür konumuna taşımıştır. Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, Cumhuriyet dönemi kültür politikalarının tek bir sanatçı tipolojisi üretmediğini göstermekte ve Türk Beşleri'ni birleşik bir hareket olmaktan ziyade heterojen bir topluluk olarak ortaya koymaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

müzikoloji, cemal reşit rey, orkestra dergisi, cumhuriyet dönemi müzik politikaları, Türk beşlisi.

### Öne Çıkanlar

- Bu çalışma, Cumhuriyet kültür politikalarının monolitik bir sanatçı tipolojisi üretmediğini ortaya koymakta ve Türk Beşlisi'ni homojen bir topluluk yerine heterojen bir kolektif olarak açığa vurmaktadır.
- Cemal Reşit Rey'in kariyer yörüngesi üç temel faktör tarafından belirlenmiştir: devlet destekli yurtdışı eğitimi almaması, diğer Türk Beşlisi üyelerine mentorluk yapması ve başkentten coğrafi kopukluğu.
- Rey'in Ankara yerine İstanbul'da ikamet etme kararı, onu merkezi müzik politikalarına karşı periferik bir konuma yerleştirmiş ve Devlet Sanatçısı ünvanını yaşça daha genç çağdaşlarına kıyasla on yıl gecikmeli almasına neden olmuştur.
- Kurumsal dezavantajlara rağmen Rey'in İstanbul merkezli kariyeri, onu şehrin senfonik manzarasını kurumsallaştırmada—İstanbul Şehir Orkestrası'nın kurulması dahil—önde gelen figür olarak konumlandırmıştır.
- Rey'in ikili kültürel kimliği—Osmanlı kozmopolitanizmi ile Cumhuriyet modernleşme ideallerini birleştiren yapısı—Fransız İzenimciliği'nden Anadolu halk ezgilerine ve İslam tasavvufuna kadar çeşitli müzikal kaynakları sentezlemesine olanak tanımıştır.

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This study does not require ethical committee approval, and the data used were obtained from literature reviews/published sources. It is hereby declared that scientific and ethical principles were adhered to during the preparation of this study and that all studies used are cited in the references. Burak Eker

**Use of Artificial Intelligence**

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**Abstract**

The twentieth century marked a transformative era defined by the rise of nation-states, the deliberate construction of national cultures, and the crystallization of cultural distinctions. Upon the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, music was reconceptualized as a foundational pillar of national identity and restructured to align with the prevailing paradigms of “contemporary civilization.” Cemal Reşit Rey, a distinguished member of the “Turkish Five” and one of the main architects of this transformation, distinguished himself from the other members of the group by deciding to reside in Istanbul, thereby adopting a peripheral position in relation to Ankara-centered music policies. Through a discourse analysis of Cemal Reşit Rey’s articles originally published in the journal *Orkestra* and subsequently compiled in the volume *Cemal Reşit Rey – Orkestra Yazıları* (1960s–1980s), this study aims to illuminate the composer’s perspectives on Republican cultural policies and processes of social modernization. Adopting a qualitative research paradigm grounded in document analysis and discourse analysis, this study subjects Rey’s writings to thematic and rhetorical examination, while implementing a data triangulation strategy that incorporates contemporaneous sources and oral histories from his professional milieu to enhance the credibility of the findings. Findings suggest that Rey’s career trajectory was determined by three pivotal factors: his lack of state-sponsored overseas education, his mentorship of other Turkish Five members, and his geographical detachment from the capital. While this detachment delayed his receipt of the State Artist title compared to his younger contemporaries, it uniquely positioned him as the preeminent figure in institutionalizing Istanbul’s symphonic landscape. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that Republican cultural policies did not produce a monolithic artist typology, revealing the Turkish Five as a heterogeneous collective rather than a unified movement.

**Keywords**

musicology, cemel reşit rey, orkestra magazine, republican era music policies, turkish five.

**Highlights**

- This study argues that Republican cultural policies did not produce a monolithic artist typology, revealing the Turkish Five as a heterogeneous collective rather than a unified movement.
- Cemal Reşit Rey’s career trajectory was determined by three pivotal factors: his lack of state-sponsored overseas education, his mentorship of other Turkish Five members, and his geographical detachment from Ankara.
- Rey’s decision to reside in Istanbul rather than the capital positioned him peripherally to centralized music policies, resulting in a decade-long delay in receiving the State Artist title compared to his younger contemporaries.
- Despite institutional disadvantages, Rey’s Istanbul-centered career enabled him to become the preeminent figure in institutionalizing the city’s symphonic landscape, including the establishment of the Istanbul City Orchestra.
- Rey’s dual cultural identity—combining Ottoman cosmopolitanism with Republican modernization ideals—allowed him to synthesize diverse musical sources from French Impressionism to Anatolian folk melodies and Islamic mysticism.

## Introduction

The twentieth century is defined by the consolidation of nation-states, a process in which cultural distinctiveness was systematically emphasized to construct coherent national identities. This geopolitical transformation, precipitated by the aftermath of World War I, led to the dissolution of imperial multiculturalism and the subsequent rise of homogeneous national structures. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye represent a paradigmatic instance of this transition. Within this historical context, music served as a primary instrument for cultivating a national culture and articulating the nation-state ideology. In Türkiye, musical reforms were implemented to align with foundational modernization paradigms, restructuring Turkish music—a core element of national identity—in accordance with the norms of Western art music, then conceptualized as “civilized music.”

Cemal Reşit Rey, a prominent member of the “Turkish Five,” was a pioneering figure in these reforms. However, despite his significant influence on the era’s decision-making processes and his introduction of numerous innovations, Rey distinguished himself from his contemporaries through a unique career trajectory. Specifically, his decision to reside in Istanbul rather than relocating to the new administrative center, Ankara, positioned him at a spatial and ideological distance from the centralized cultural policies of the early Republic.

As a prolific composer, conductor, and educator, Rey occupies a distinctive position in Turkish music history, characterized by his representation of the country in Europe and an identity intrinsically linked to Istanbul’s cultural fabric. As noted by Usmanbaş (cited in İlyasoğlu, 2005, p. 49), Rey was “an enthusiastic, perpetually creative musician,” whose fervent initiatives garnered attention as early as age nineteen. For over six decades, he remained active across composition, performance, and education, playing a decisive role in establishing the institutional framework of symphonic music in Istanbul.

This study investigates Rey’s perspectives on the music policies of the nascent state and his engagement with the modernization project, utilizing his articles published in *Orkestra* magazine (1960s–1980s) as the primary dataset. By situating Cemal Reşit Rey’s writings within the broader framework of contemporaneous sources and oral testimonies from his professional circle, this study seeks to illuminate the composer’s perspectives on Republican-era cultural policies and his distinctive position within that milieu. The research holds particular significance for its contribution to the historiography of Turkish music, challenging the prevailing notion of a homogeneous Republican artist model and revealing the Turkish Five as a diverse constellation of individual trajectories. The covers of the journal *Orkestra* is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Covers of issues 376, 377, and 378 of *Orkestra* magazine (Personal Archive)**

The study initially delineates Rey's biography and musical formation before exploring his divergent position within 'The Turkish Five.' In this context, it evaluates how his career was shaped by three critical factors: his non-participation in state-sponsored study abroad programs, his role as an instructor to other members of the group, and his choice to remain in Istanbul. Furthermore, the study addresses the musical reforms of the Republic, Rey's specific role in this process, and the composer's musical philosophy and compositional style.

### **Method**

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, employing document analysis as its primary methodological approach. The dataset consists of Cemal Reşit Rey's contributions to the journal *Orkestra*, written between the 1960s and 1980s and subsequently collected in the volume *Cemal Reşit Rey – Orkestra Yazıları*, representing a period of mature reflection on Republican-era music policies. The collected texts were subjected to discourse analysis to identify recurring themes, rhetorical strategies, and ideological positions, complemented by descriptive analysis to systematically present Rey's perspectives. To ensure validity and reliability, a data triangulation strategy was implemented: the composer's writings were comparatively analyzed alongside contemporaneous publications, biographical accounts, and oral testimonies from his professional milieu, enabling cross-verification of claims and enhancing the credibility of the findings.

### **Findings**

#### **1. Into the Twentieth Century**

Scholarly investigations examining the modernization trajectory in Turkish music history have predominantly concentrated on the cultural transformation policies of the Republican era and their manifestations within the artistic domain. Among the most salient indicators of this transformation is the institutionalization of polyphonic Western music in Türkiye, accompanied by an attendant pursuit of an original synthesis. Within this process, Cemal Reşit Rey occupies a distinctive position, functioning simultaneously as a composer and as a cultural intermediary. Rey's artistic biography merits consideration not merely as an individual career narrative but as an exemplary case study embodying the dynamics of musical modernization during the transitional period from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. The East-West synthesis evident in the composer's oeuvre bears a direct relationship to contemporaneous debates concerning the construction of national identity. Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of Rey's life and works necessitates preliminary evaluation of the historical period into which he was born and its positioning within the global musical landscape.

İlyasoğlu (2005, p. 21) contextualizes this period with reference to the composer's birth. When Cemal Reşit Rey was born in Jerusalem on October 25, 1904, European art music was undergoing significant transformation, with Impressionism, Post-Romanticism, and emerging national schools reshaping the musical landscape.

During the terminal period of the Ottoman Empire, elite families regarded music education, foreign language proficiency, and engagement with the fine arts as essential markers of cultural capital and class identity.

İlyasoğlu (2005, p. 49) observes that among upper-class families in late Ottoman Istanbul, providing musical instruction to children was considered as fundamental as teaching literacy. Whereas instruments such as the *ud* and *kanun* had formerly been indispensable household accoutrements, the Westernization movement precipitated their displacement by pianos, resulting in the importation of high-quality German and Austrian pianos to Istanbul at the turn of the twentieth century. Beyond piano proficiency, competence in a foreign language (typically French), familiarity with poetry, engagement with Greek classical drama, participation in the fine arts, and cultivation of artistic expression—both written and oral—constituted prerequisites for membership in cultivated society.

The Rey family exemplified the cosmopolitan households of the final Ottoman period. Foreign governesses, predominantly of German and Austrian origin, immersed Rey in a multi-layered musical environment from infancy, wherein traditional Turkish lullabies coexisted with Central European folk songs—the fertile terrain for his subsequent East-West synthesis. Rey's early experiences, articulated in his own words in an article published in the 166th issue of *Orkestra* magazine (1987), provide significant insight into the formation of his musical memory:

“Immediately following the breastfeeding period, foreign nannies were engaged for both of us. These nannies were predominantly Fräuleins from Germany or Austria. They would sing folk songs from their native countries or perform them on the piano. I therefore assume that even at the age of one month, my ears must have internalized the melodies of our ‘ninni’ [lullaby] alongside ‘O Tannenbaum’” (Rey, 2007, p. 96).

The Rey family's relocation to Paris constituted a decisive turning point in Cemal Reşit's musical formation. This exile, occasioned by his father Ahmed Reşit's position within Ottoman political circles, was transmuted from a potential disadvantage into an exceptional opportunity through the family's diplomatic connections and intellectual capital. At the turn of the twentieth century, Paris had established itself as the uncontested musical capital of Europe and the destination of aspiring young talents, while the Paris Conservatoire ranked among the continent's most prestigious institutions for musical education. Rey recounted his arrival at the Conservatoire and his encounter with Fauré in the following terms:

“Fauré had me perform at the piano, then stated: ‘This child can only pursue music in life, and only Marguerite Long can train him,’ whereupon he immediately arranged an appointment with Long” (Rey, 2007, p. 44).

İlyasoğlu (2005, p. 64) notes that under Fauré's guidance, Cemal Reşit Rey commenced systematic musical training under the tutelage of Marguerite Long, one of the most distinguished representatives of the French piano school. However, this period of study was disrupted by the tumultuous circumstances precipitated by the outbreak of World War I in 1914. During the years of European conflagration, the Rey family sought refuge in

Geneva, Switzerland, a neutral state, where the young composer continued his education. Following the cessation of hostilities, Rey returned to Paris and was admitted to Marguerite Long's class at the Paris Conservatoire. Kolçak (2006, p. 19) observes that during this period, Rey's studies extended beyond piano instruction to encompass composition with Raoul Laparra, musical aesthetics with Gabriel Fauré, and orchestral conducting with Henri Defosse, thereby acquiring a multifaceted musical identity. While Rey was receiving this comprehensive education in the European musical capital, significant institutional developments were transpiring in the Ottoman capital regarding the systematization of music education.

Duygulu (2024, p. 24) documents that a new arts institution designated Dârülelhan was established in 1916. This institution, which would subsequently shape the musical developments of Republican history and generate considerable scholarly debate, structured its activities around both Eastern and Western musical traditions, eventually assuming a pioneering role in musicological research in addition to pedagogical functions.

The year 1923 constitutes a pivotal juncture both in Turkish national history and in Cemal Reşit Rey's personal trajectory. The nascent nation-state implemented a comprehensive cultural modernization program, extending the Westernization ideal beyond political and juridical reforms. Institutional restructuring in the musical domain represented one of the principal pillars of this program. The decision to establish a Western music department within Dârülelhan exemplifies the concrete measures undertaken in this restructuring process. However, the institutionalization of polyphonic Western music in Türkiye necessitated trained personnel, a requirement that compelled the repatriation of young Turkish musicians educated abroad. It was at this precise conjuncture that nineteen-year-old Cemal Reşit Rey, having recently completed his Parisian studies, confronted a critical decision at the intersection of personal career aspirations and national cultural imperatives. Rey recounted this summons and the responses it elicited in the 112th issue of *Orkestra* magazine (1973):

“In 1923, I received a telegram from Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil: ‘Western music has been incorporated into the Dârülelhan curriculum; you have been appointed as instructor; come to Istanbul immediately.’ My teachers in Paris opposed this: ‘A nineteen-year-old cannot devote himself to pedagogy’” (Rey, 2007, p. 59).

Upon his return to Istanbul in 1923, Cemal Reşit Rey encountered a musical landscape fundamentally divergent from the cosmopolitan, pluralistic milieu of Paris. In the Ottoman capital, polyphonic Western music had not yet penetrated beyond court circles and minority communities to reach the broader public. Within this environment, dominated by the monophonic modal tradition, Rey observed that polyphonic music performance was not only rare but that audience familiarity with this genre was extremely circumscribed. In such a context, Rey found himself positioned not merely as an educator and composer but as the musical vanguard of a comprehensive social transformation. Among Rey's initial undertakings was the presentation of polyphony as a practical experience rather than as merely theoretical knowledge. The young musician described his pioneering initiatives and the challenges encountered in the 120th issue of *Orkestra* magazine (1983):

“I immediately organized a choir with the objective of training ears for polyphony. I assembled a choir comprising veiled women, young girls, and boys aged sixteen to seventeen, and with audacious determination, I prepared Mozart's *Requiem*. Naturally, I eliminated the text and conducted using solfège—that is, having them sing only the notes... This work was performed without interruption at a concert, accompanied by piano. Everyone was astonished. I shall never forget it... A choir was formed with young people who had never sung polyphonic music and whose ears had scarcely ever heard

polyphonic music, and this choir performed Mozart's *Requiem*. The significance of this... It represents an insignificant period of fifty to sixty years in music history, yet during this period, the country underwent an unimaginable transformation" (Rey, 2007, p. 75).

The 1930s emerged as the period of most intensive implementation of the Republic of Türkiye's cultural modernization policies. During this decade, the state adopted the widespread dissemination of polyphonic Western music as a systematic cultural policy and accelerated the construction of requisite institutional infrastructure. The reorganization of conservatories, the establishment of state orchestras, the creation of opera and ballet companies, and the deployment of radio broadcasting as an instrument of music education constituted the principal cultural initiatives of this period. Radio, in particular, was regarded as the most efficacious medium for reaching mass audiences in a society characterized by low literacy rates. This comprehensive transformation program necessitated qualified personnel for institutional administration. During this period, Cemal Reşit Rey assumed a pivotal role in addressing this requirement through his multifaceted musical expertise. Rey's activities in the 1930s were not confined to a singular domain but encompassed virtually every dimension of Turkish musical life.

İlyasoğlu (2020) emphasizes that Rey's conservatory piano instruction, together with his "Musical Analysis" courses—which examined operatic works while providing comprehensive information regarding composers' biographies, structural analyses, and historical contexts—were open to the public and consequently attracted considerable interest. Cevat Memduh Altar documents that Rey was invited to Ankara in 1938 (Rey, 2007, p. 118), where he assumed directorship of the music broadcasting department at Turkish Radio, which had recently commenced operations in the capital. He maintained this position until 1940, subsequently returning to Istanbul. There, he engaged in composition, chamber music, and symphonic administration, in addition to various organizational activities. He played an instrumental role in the transformation of the Istanbul City Orchestra into the State Symphony Orchestra, achieving notable success in this endeavor.

Windhager (2011, p. 88) observes that Rey's final significant institutional engagement was his collaboration with Turkish State Radio in Ankara, where he served as Head of Western Music Broadcasting between 1938 and 1940. Having grown weary of Ankara's subdued cultural atmosphere, he relocated to Istanbul in 1940, where he resumed collaboration with State Radio and served as Head of Music Broadcasting at Istanbul Radio for two years before electing to pursue a career as an orchestral conductor.

In evaluating Cemal Reşit Rey's multifarious activities in Türkiye, it is essential to recognize that this diversity was not merely a response to local exigencies but corresponded to an ideal typology prevalent in the international musical world of the period. During his European education, Rey established direct contact with numerous figures who embodied this ideal, acquiring opportunities to observe their professional practices at close range. This experience proved determinative in shaping his identity as a musician. Significantly, Rey did not sever his European connections upon returning to Türkiye but maintained an active presence on the international musical stage. The composer's works were performed by leading European orchestras during the 1920s and 1930s, attracting the attention of international critics. This circumstance indicates that Rey should be positioned not only as a pioneering figure in Turkish musical life but also as a composer recognized within the European musical community of his era.

"At the commencement of the twentieth century, the paradigm of the 'complete musician' prevailed. During Cemal Reşit's formative years, every prominent musician in Paris and Geneva engaged

simultaneously in composition, orchestral conducting, and virtuoso performance on their instrument—exemplified by figures such as Alfred Cortot. Cemal Reşit Rey maintained visibility on the European stage for nearly two decades as composer, pianist, and conductor. Numerous celebrated conductors who have achieved historical prominence in European music directed performances of his works with the most distinguished orchestras between 1927 and 1940” (İlyasoğlu, 2020).

Cemal Reşit Rey’s international presence extended beyond the performance of his works by European orchestras. He also cultivated an international career as an orchestral conductor, appearing on prestigious European podiums in this capacity—an exceptional achievement among Turkish musicians of the period. Western musical institutions maintained considerable conservatism regarding the admission of conductors from outside their established traditions. Rey’s capacity to transcend this resistance and secure conducting opportunities with Europe’s foremost orchestras demonstrates the international prestige he attained as a musician. Moreover, these concerts served a strategic function beyond individual career advancement, promoting Turkish polyphonic music on international platforms. The composer incorporated his own works into concert programs, addressing Western audiences as a contemporary representative of Turkish music. Music historian Cevat Memduh Altar summarizes Rey’s international activities during this period:

“Rey received invitations from major Western symphony orchestras, appearing as guest conductor with the Vienna Philharmonic, the French National Orchestra, and orchestras across Europe. By incorporating his own compositions, he introduced Turkish art music to Western cultural circles” (Rey, 2007, p. 120).

According to Windhager (2011, p. 88), Rey organized the first public concert in Türkiye in 1926 but recognized that performing classical music domestically was insufficient. Perceiving the necessity of promoting Turkish classical music internationally, he resolved to pursue a career as guest conductor worldwide. This accomplished yet relatively unknown musician commenced his international conducting career in 1949 and, over the subsequent two decades, served regularly as guest conductor with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the French National Orchestra, the Santa Cecilia Symphony Orchestra, the Athens Philharmonic Orchestra, and various state orchestras in Eastern Europe, including those of Warsaw, Sofia, and Belgrade.

Cemal Reşit Rey’s cultural identity exhibits a dualistic structure embodying the values of two distinct historical epochs. Born during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and raised within a distinguished family, Rey assimilated the aesthetic sensibilities and lifestyle practices characteristic of this milieu. Simultaneously, he positioned himself as one of the most effective implementers of the young Republic’s cultural modernization program, dedicating himself unreservedly to its realization. Rey’s 1964 article articulates this sense of mission:

“Those who are created to fulfill a specific duty in life, the chosen ones of fate, bear the burden of this duty together with its honor from an early age. It is a heavy burden, for it is natural that exceptional individuals must also compel their contemporaries to attend to them. However, those destined for such a duty must serve as guides for future generations, for their natural obligation is to ensure progress in their domain—that is, to open new horizons for people, to communicate what they have not yet heard, to reveal what they have not yet seen!” (Rey, 2007, p. 22–23).

Musicologist Filiz Ali assesses this contradictory aspect of the composer’s identity with the following words:

“Cemal Reşit never relinquished his Ottoman identity, yet he was also a committed Republican who believed in all the principles of the Republic and worked within those principles, yet at the same time remained profoundly Ottoman” (Ersel et al., 2014, p. 334).

Rey’s dual identity also determined the character of his contribution to Turkish musical life. The cultural capital inherited from Ottoman elitism, conjoined with his commitment to the Republic’s modernization ideal, positioned him beyond his role as a composer and performer, Rey also functioned as an institution builder and cultural leader. The multifaceted roles Rey assumed throughout his musical career spanning more than sixty years elicited admiration from contemporaries. Composer Bülent Tarcan evaluates Rey’s extraordinary work ethic and dedication:

“Indeed, even at the age of nineteen, he labored day and night to transform Dârülelhan into a modern conservatory. He achieved mastery across the entire spectrum of musical disciplines—from foundational knowledge, principally piano pedagogy, to choral and orchestral conducting, chamber music, and composition. He demonstrated an unprecedented commitment to his work. In so doing, he rescued authentic art from ignorance and dilettantism, establishing it as the ideal of every young person who cherishes art, irrespective of their level of accomplishment” (Rey, 2007, p. 126).

## 2. Peripherality in the Turkish Five

The formation process of the compositional collective known as the “Turkish Five” in Turkish music historiography—a group that became symbolic of the Republic’s polyphonic music policy—was shaped by a selection mechanism in which Cemal Reşit Rey was directly implicated. In 1924–25, Rey served as a jury member in a government-sponsored competition designed to select music students for study in Europe, thereby playing an instrumental role in identifying candidates who would subsequently become the preeminent figures of Turkish music. Rey recounts this period:

“I do not recall whose initiative it was in 1924 or 1925—perhaps it was Governor Ali Haydar Yuluğ’s—but the government launched a competition to send students to Europe for musical studies. The jury comprised my colleagues, whose names I mentioned previously, and myself. Hasan Ferit Alnar, a young man named Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Cezmi Erinç, and Afif Köprülü were successful in that competition. Hasan Ferit Alnar was dispatched to Vienna, Afif Köprülü to Germany, and the others to France” (Rey, 2007, p. 61).

“Meanwhile, the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory developed at an extraordinary pace. Many of our distinguished contemporary composers and musicians received their training at that institution. Among my students, for instance, were Necil Kazım Akses and İlhan Usmanbaş” (Rey, 2007, p. 62).

Rey’s dual role—as a jury member selecting students for European study and as an instructor to figures such as Necil Kazım Akses at the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory—reveals the multidimensional character of his relationship with the founding figures of Republican-era Turkish music. This circumstance also illuminates the complexity of Rey’s position within the formation process of the collective that would subsequently be designated the “Turkish Five.” Indeed, Rey maintained considerable distance from this appellation, finding it problematic from both chronological and pedagogical perspectives to be categorized alongside his own students. Furthermore, the concept of the “Turkish Five” itself constitutes a retrospectively constructed category that does not fully correspond to historical actuality.

Duygulu (2024, pp. 229–230) documents that the proposal to select five exemplary composers from among the first generation educated in Europe and designate them as pioneers of a movement was initially advanced by Halil Bedii Yönetken in 1939. He emphasizes that the compositional collective termed the Turkish Five, notwithstanding its nominal inspiration from the Russian Five, bears minimal resemblance to the latter’s organizational structure. The Turkish Five—comprising Cemal Reşit Rey, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Ahmet Adnan Saygun, Hasan Ferit Alnar, and Necil Kazım Akses—did not constitute members of a comparable association, nor did they represent adherents of a unified school; rather, they were simply composers engaged in the common endeavor of creating contemporary Turkish music. İlyasoğlu (2005, p. 124) observes that Rey served as instructor to Saygun and Akses from within the Turkish Five, as well as to numerous composers from his own generation and subsequent generations beyond the “Five” (including Kemal İlerici, Nuri Sami Koral, Bülent Tarcan, İlhan Usmanbaş, Kemal Sünder, and Yalçın Tura). Erol articulates the broader ideological context:

“As a matter of ideological principle, the aim of the music reforms was the creation of a national cultural identity. Turkish pupils went to Europe in order to learn western music. Upon returning to Türkiye they began to construct ‘Contemporary Turkish art music’ as a kind of ‘musical syncretism’, combining folk music and western musical techniques” (Erol, 2012, p. 43).

Rey’s determinative role in cultivating composers across multiple generations, including certain members of the Turkish Five, established him as one of the most influential figures in Republican-era Turkish music. Nevertheless, despite this status, Rey’s relationship with Ankara became increasingly complicated. Although he numbered among the most active implementers of the Republic’s cultural modernization project, Rey elected to remain in Istanbul throughout his life. This preference reflects, on one hand, his sensitivity toward preserving the autonomy of his artistic identity and, on the other, his profound attachment to Istanbul as the inheritor of Ottoman cosmopolitanism. According to Bourdieu’s (2023, p. 53) theoretical framework, the field of cultural production exhibits bipolar characteristics: one pole is “heteronomous,” dependent upon political and economic power; the opposing pole is “autonomous,” governed by the principle of “art for art’s sake.” Rey distanced himself from Ankara—the heteronomous pole representing the state’s official artistic apparatus—and sought to preserve an autonomous space in Istanbul.

Windhager (2011, p. 89) observes that Rey, the foremost composer of the nascent Turkish Republic, maintained deep connections to the Ottoman imperial heritage. He resided in Istanbul for virtually his entire life and remained distant from Ankara. His detachment from the political center reflected partly the disposition characteristic of artist-intellectuals and partly his inability to participate in post-Ottoman political structures. Certain of Rey’s works offer realistic and critical reflections on Ottoman history, yet these have not received substantial scholarly attention within his native country.

Rey’s decision to remain in Istanbul may be interpreted not merely as a personal preference but as a deliberate distancing from the center of contemporary cultural policy formation. Following the establishment of the Republic, Ankara emerged as the focal point of the cultural modernization project; institutions including the state conservatory, opera, and symphony orchestra were established in the capital. This centralization afforded various institutional opportunities to Ankara-based artists, advantages not similarly available to those who remained in Istanbul.

Aktüze (2007, p. 1860) notes that unlike his fellow members of the Turkish Five—Akses, Erkin, and Alnar, recognized as pioneering composers of Atatürk’s musical reforms who benefited from opportunities available in the capital—Cemal Reşit Rey remained in Istanbul. Consequently, Rey’s work produced after age sixty-five did not receive cabinet approval, and his conferral of the State Artist title was delayed by a decade, occurring only in 1981. Panayot Abacı elucidates this situation:

“The composers known as the Turkish Five based in Ankara had been awarded ‘State Artist’ years earlier; Cemal Reşit was excluded. He took considerable offense at the designation ‘Turkish Five’—there existed no consensus nor similarity among these composers” (Rey, 2007, p. 9).

The ramifications of Rey’s geographical choice on his career have been subject to varied interpretations. While his Ankara-based colleagues operated with state support, Rey’s struggle with comparatively limited resources in Istanbul exerted discernible effects on his artistic trajectory. Conversely, this circumstance also enabled Rey to establish himself as the undisputed authority within Istanbul’s musical milieu. Pertev Apaydın, one of the composer’s students, evaluates his teacher’s position during the 1940s and 1950s:

“Compared to the composers in Ankara, Cemal Reşit was disadvantaged; though he was directing the music scene in Istanbul single-handedly” (Ali, 1996, p. 39).

Notwithstanding the “bitterness” identified by Apaydın, Rey’s relationship with his colleagues was characterized by support rather than competition. Rey mobilized his international connections and prestige not solely for personal career advancement but also for the promotion of Turkish polyphonic music more broadly. His student Vedat Kosal describes Rey’s disposition:

“Certainly, he regarded them with a degree of condescension and maintained his distance, yet he nonetheless promoted their works both in Türkiye and throughout Europe. It was Cemal Reşit who organized concerts at the Union Française to introduce the early works of Ulvi Cemal, Necil Kazım, and Ferit Alnar. He was also the first to conduct their orchestral works in Türkiye. He facilitated the publication of these works in Europe, recommended them to Universal Edition, and promoted Turkish compositions through the same channels where his own works were published. None of them, with the exception of Hasan Ferit Alnar, would have reciprocated such efforts. They were not grateful” (Ali, 1996, p. 39).

Rey’s supportive orientation toward his colleagues is equally evident in his own published statements. Concerts featuring works by Turkish composers on international platforms held significance for Rey not only as vehicles for promoting national music but also as sources of personal gratification. A concert in Vienna featuring works by Turkish composers exemplifies this attitude. Rey conveyed his experience and his sentiments regarding his colleagues’ success in an article published in the 34th issue of the magazine (1966):

“Under the direction of Ulvi Cemal Erkin, his Second Symphony and Necil’s Ballad soared to the heavens... When the pieces concluded and the applause erupted, my joy was commingled with admiration” (Rey, 2007, p. 43).

Rey’s unfeigned delight in his colleagues’ accomplishments further accentuates his distinctive position within the Turkish Five. This distinctiveness derives from Rey’s fundamentally different biographical trajectory and professional formation relative to the other members of the collective. These differences extended beyond career decisions to encompass a broad spectrum of factors, including childhood experiences, educational

background, family structure, and relations with the state apparatus. Musicologist Filiz Ali evaluates Rey's position within the Turkish Five:

“In my assessment, Cemal Reşit suffered this misfortune: unlike the other four members of the Turkish Five, he was not a composer sent abroad by the state. His family was a prominent Ottoman family, and he experienced a form of exile at a very young age. First they went to Paris, then they resided in Switzerland. Cemal Reşit's childhood was spent in France and Geneva. Consequently, he did not spend his formative years in Istanbul either. He was already a young adult when he arrived in Türkiye. For this reason, there was never complete rapport between Cemal Reşit and the other members. He was not close to the composers who implemented the musical revolution of the Republican era in Ankara. Perhaps this accounts for the relative paucity of information available about him. One might question how such a pronounced difference could exist between Ankara and Istanbul today, but that was the reality of the period” (Ersel et al., 2014, p. 326).

In light of the foregoing analysis, Cemal Reşit Rey's inclusion among the Turkish Five may be regarded as the most significant indicator that the composers subsumed under this designation do not reflect a uniform typology. It becomes evident that the sole unifying element among these composers—who differed substantially across multiple dimensions—was their shared commitment to the Republican ideal and, correspondingly, their dedication to elevating national music to the standards of contemporary civilization.

### 3. Republic's Music Reforms and Rey

The cultural revolutions following the proclamation of the Republic anticipated fundamental transformations in critical domains of social change, including music education and terminology. The renaming of institutions during this process, while ostensibly superficial, functioned as an unambiguous declaration of the adopted cultural orientation. Similarly, the transition from modal terminology to Western music-based nomenclature should be understood not merely as a technical preference but as the manifestation of an ideological orientation in pedagogical practice. Cemal Reşit Rey assumed an active role in this transformation process, contributing directly to the formulation of institutional reforms. Rey recounted his initiatives during this period in an article published in the 112th issue of *Orkestra* magazine (1973):

“Together with Musa Süreyya, we prepared a proposal and submitted it to the council. This was a historic proposal. We recommended that the designation Dârülelhan be abolished and replaced with ‘conservatory,’ and that music education in all schools under the Ministry of Education be conducted using the solfège method—that is, ‘do re mi fa sol’—rather than the traditional system known as ‘yegâh, dügâh, segâh, düm tekâdüm tek.’ Our proposal was accepted, and from that day forward, the name Dârülelhan was discontinued and replaced with conservatory” (Rey, 2007, p. 61).

The transformation Rey describes represents only one dimension of the Republic's music policy. While the musical policy of the period envisaged the adoption of Western polyphonic music, this did not entail the complete abandonment of traditional Turkish musical heritage. On the contrary, the systematic collection, documentation, and scientific investigation of this heritage constituted an essential component of contemporary cultural policy. Within this framework, the Musiki Encümeni (Music Council) and Dârülelhan were assigned the critical responsibility of preserving the traditional repertoire and transmitting it to subsequent generations. Official documents of the period articulated this mandate:

Official documents from the period assigned the Music Council and Dârülelhan the critical responsibility of preserving the traditional repertoire and transmitting it to subsequent generations through scientific methods, training qualified instructors, and ensuring the transition of Turkish music from oral to written culture (Taşdelen et al., 2021, p. 827).

However, the Republic's music policy extended beyond efforts to document traditional music, encompassing a process that included certain radical decisions. In 1926, the Fine Arts Committee, convened under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, rendered decisive determinations regarding the future of music education in schools. The most consequential of these decisions was the elimination of traditional Turkish music instruction from school curricula. Cemal Reşit Rey, who participated in the committee's deliberations, described this process in an article published in the 19th issue of the magazine (1963):

"In August 1926, Minister of Education Mustafa Necati Uğural convened a Fine Arts Committee and invited me to participate. It was at that committee meeting that the decision was made to remove traditional Turkish music instruction from schools. I witnessed that, alongside such sound decisions, they were also on the verge of implementing certain overly audacious measures" (Rey, 2007, pp. 17–18).

Rey's reference to "sound decisions" juxtaposed with initiatives he characterized as "audacious" may be interpreted as an indication of the controversial nature of decisions made in accordance with contemporary music policies. Throughout this process—which ranged from restricting the presence of traditional music in public spaces to prohibiting it on radio broadcasts—numerous issues pertaining to music reform were intensely contested. At the core of these debates lay questions concerning the role music should assume in constructing national identity and how a "contemporary" music culture should be defined.

As Duygulu (2024, p. 143) observes, proponents of musical revolution regarded the possession of contemporary music as a prerequisite for constituting a contemporary society. The foremost criterion for modernity in music was the cultivation of a musical culture equipped with Western techniques. The conception that polyphony represented the most fundamental distinction between Western and Eastern music constituted the predominant view of the period.

Within this context, music education institutions were charged with the mission of spearheading a social and cultural transformation extending beyond the mere transmission of technical competencies. However, according to Cemal Reşit Rey, achieving this transformation was not possible through curricular modifications or institutional reforms alone. What was genuinely requisite was a profound transformation in the mental and spiritual orientation of young people receiving music education. Rey maintained that the path to improving conservatory education lay primarily in instilling an ideal and conviction in students. He articulated these views in the 53rd issue of the magazine (1967):

"The conservatory can be reformed first and foremost through spiritual development. Students attending the conservatory must believe in music—or rather, they must be made to believe in it. They must believe in culture; they must believe in the great city of Istanbul. They must believe in intellectual life and intellectual Türkiye. They must arrive at the conclusion that there exist higher duties far superior to pecuniary gain..." (Rey, 2007, p. 56).

Rey's approach may be understood in connection with the broader question: "What shall constitute the music of the New Türkiye?" During this period, the Republic's cultural modernization project in the musical domain was not confined to institutional restructuring and educational reforms but also engaged one of the most contested issues of the era: the definition of national musical identity. These debates were framed within the context of determining the place of musical heritage inherited from the Ottoman Empire within the new nation-state project.

Duygulu (2024, p. 47) notes that throughout years of deliberation, establishing the relationship between the music designated "alaturka"—inherited from the Ottoman Empire—and local folk music proved problematic. In certain debates, the position was advanced that Ottoman Turkish music now constituted historical music within modern Turkish musical activities and that contemporary practice could not be constructed upon or parallel to it. This conception, frequently articulated since Ziya Gökalp, the ideological architect of Turkish nationalism, was predicated on the principle of collecting local folk music and harmonizing it within the system of European music.

These intellectual debates resonated not only within musical circles but also among the political decision-makers of the era. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who exercised a determinative influence in shaping the Republic's cultural policies, maintained particular interest in musical matters, regarding reforms in this domain as integral to the modernization project. Atatürk's approach to music was informed by the intellectual climate of the period while simultaneously exhibiting distinctive characteristics. Duygulu (2024, p. 102) observes that although Atatürk was not a musician, he had internalized the significance of cultural revolution and music reforms based on the technical characteristics of music from his early youth. Duygulu offers the perspicacious observation that Atatürk's ideas and actions were grounded in positivism and rationalism, characterized by a duality wherein "when reason prevailed, his Western orientation came to the fore; when emotion and taste prevailed, his Eastern orientation emerged." Cemal Reşit Rey similarly recounted this phenomenon in his 1963 article sharing his reminiscences of Atatürk:

"We commenced playing César Franck's quintet. The introduction had scarcely concluded when Atatürk became absorbed in conversation with his guests, and we deemed it appropriate to curtail our concert. That day, I discerned that he was not particularly drawn to classical Western music. It is precisely for this reason that his efforts to introduce polyphonic music to the country augmented my admiration for him even further. Not loving or comprehending music is not a deficiency; many great individuals, even artists—Victor Hugo, for instance—did not particularly appreciate music" (Rey, 2007, pp. 16–17).

Rey's account of this reminiscence illuminates a significant distinction in Atatürk's approach to music reform: the differentiation between personal predilection and state policy. Although Atatürk personally maintained distance from classical Western music, he regarded the institutionalization of polyphonic music in Türkiye as an indispensable element of the modernization project. This disposition demonstrates that he formulated cultural policies within a rational framework, independent of personal aesthetic preferences. Indeed, Atatürk articulated his views on music reform as official doctrine in his address at the opening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1934:

"Friends, I am cognizant of what manner of progress you desire for the nation's youth in all the fine arts. This is being accomplished. However, Turkish music is that which requires the most expeditious and prominent advancement. The measure of a nation's transformation is its capacity to accept and comprehend change in music... It is necessary to collect the elevated expressions and utterances

conveying the nation's subtle feelings and thoughts, and to process them according to general musical principles without delay" (İlyasoğlu, 2005, p. 125).

Atatürk's pronouncements did not remain merely declarative; they were promptly translated into concrete measures. The decision was taken to assemble the preeminent musical authorities of the period to establish a systematic program for the Republic's music policy. This convocation aimed to determine the fundamental principles governing the future of Turkish music and to formulate a national musical strategy. Aytüre (2017, p. 21) documents that on November 26, 1934, by Atatürk's directive, the nation's leading musicians assembled in Ankara under the chairmanship of Abidin Özmen, the contemporary Minister of National Education. Professor Cevat Memduh Altar, a commission member, emphasized the significance of this meeting:

"Among those who participated were Minister of Education Abidin Özmen and our colleagues, known as the Five, whom I also characterize as the Pioneers. Each of them acquired the common international techniques of the discipline from the great masters in the West. Their objective was to create the Turkish music of the era by combining the spirit derived from national sources with the contemporary techniques of the day."

Atatürk's resolute position on music reform necessitated the establishment of an institutional framework for the music policies of the period. The principles enunciated in Parliament did not remain merely rhetorical but expeditiously provided the foundation for new institutional structures. The objective in this process was to establish specialized institutions capable of achieving the modernization objectives of Turkish music and to define a strategic vision guiding institutional activities. Duygulu (2024, p. 210) documents that by 1934, a new institution designated the National Academy of Music and Performing Arts had been established. The Music Commission, constituted as a sub-unit of this formation, commenced its activities on November 26, 1934. Prominent musicians of the period—including Veli Kanık, Ahmed Adnan Saygun, Cemal Reşit Rey, Necil Kazım Akses, Hasan Ferit Alnar, Mahmut Ragıp Gazimihal, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Halil Bedii Yönetken, Nurullah Şevket Taşkıran, and Cevat Memduh Altar—numbered among the commission's members.

The Commission's deliberations brought numerous issues pertaining to the practical implementation of music reform to the agenda. However, proposals that were occasionally questionable in terms of feasibility—indeed, sometimes extreme—were also voiced during meetings. This circumstance demonstrates that the reformist enthusiasm of the period could occasionally engender proposals that exceeded the boundaries of pragmatic implementation. Commission member Cemal Reşit Rey described the atmosphere at these meetings and the remarkable proposals he encountered:

"A congress convened in 1934 at Atatürk's directive... When the Minister of Education, in his distinctive accent, inquired of us, 'Well, we are going to effect a musical revolution—how shall we accomplish this?', a wave of perplexity swept through the congress... Finally, someone whose identity I cannot recall proposed 'prohibiting the singing of monophonic songs throughout the country.' Upon this, I rose and stated: 'Suppose a shepherd feels the inclination to sing while tending his flock. Should he proceed to the village, locate a second shepherd, and say, 'Come, brother, devise a second voice and sing with me?' And thus the congress dispersed" (İlyasoğlu, 2005, p. 236).

While deliberations on this dimension of the planned music reform proceeded, musical institutions in Istanbul continued their activities under considerably more modest circumstances. The redirection of the Republic's cultural policy focus toward the capital resulted in limited resource allocation to Istanbul's musical

institutions. While prestigious establishments such as the state conservatory, opera, and symphony orchestra were being founded in Ankara, musicians in Istanbul were compelled to operate within existing constraints. The Istanbul musical scene, shaped under Rey's leadership, struggled to survive during this period notwithstanding the absence of adequate physical infrastructure. Rey described these challenging conditions in an article published in the 31st issue of the magazine (1967):

“Prior to becoming a symphony orchestra, we functioned as a string ensemble. Rehearsals occurred in the attic of the conservatory building or in the coal cellar—we lacked a civilized venue. Even following the establishment of the symphony orchestra, we attempted to accommodate sixty individuals rather than twenty in the same spaces” (Rey, 2007, p. 38).

Despite these adverse circumstances, Rey did not abandon his efforts to revitalize symphonic musical life in Istanbul. In 1944, through his initiative, a string orchestra was established within the conservatory and commenced regular concert programming. One of these concerts marked an unanticipated turning point in Istanbul's musical history. Attended by the incumbent President İsmet İnönü, this concert afforded an opportunity to raise the orchestra's funding requirements at the highest governmental level. Panayot Abacı recounts this critical juncture:

“In 1944, under the initiative and direction of Cemal Reşit, a conservatory string orchestra was established. The orchestra presented a series of concerts over the course of a year. İsmet İnönü attended the final concert. At its conclusion, İnönü invited Cemal Reşit to his loge. The professor brought several orchestra musicians with him to İnönü's box. İnönü expressed words of commendation. At one point, half-seriously, half-jokingly, he inquired, ‘Professor, where are your orchestra's wind instruments?’ The conservatory's assistant director responded: ‘Sir, this is a budgetary matter; our budget is insufficient to establish a symphony orchestra.’ İnönü departed the concert hall appearing somewhat contemplative. However, two months later, the Municipal City Orchestra was established with a complement of sixty-eight members” (Rey, 2007, p. 8).

The Municipal City Orchestra, established under İnönü's influence, inaugurated a new epoch in Istanbul's symphonic musical life. However, Rey's contributions to Istanbul's musical landscape extended beyond the orchestra's foundation. The composer undertook various initiatives to establish chamber music traditions, invite international artists to Istanbul, and create regular concert programming alongside symphonic activities. These endeavors contributed significantly to Istanbul's development of its own musical identity independent of Ankara's shadow.

İlyasoğlu (2020) explains that Rey, as founder of the Philharmonic Society, provided financial support to bring luminaries of the classical music world to Türkiye, and that his efforts resulted in the establishment of a weekly concert tradition in Istanbul. Rey created a chamber music culture in Istanbul comparable to that prevalent in Western societies. He first formed a trio, subsequently a quartet, followed by a chamber orchestra and ultimately a symphony orchestra. The orchestra, founded in 1943, initially assembled conservatory students and volunteer musicians; this ensemble subsequently became affiliated with the Istanbul Municipality and adopted the designation “City Orchestra.” After 1972, it attained State Orchestra status through the recruitment of state-employed artists.

Founded and developed under Rey's leadership, the Istanbul City Orchestra became an indispensable component of Istanbul's cultural life over the ensuing decades. Despite challenging initial conditions, the orchestra

maintained uninterrupted activity and assumed a pivotal role in shaping the city's musical identity. Rey, who personally experienced this extended trajectory and witnessed every stage of the orchestra's development, wrote the following in his 1966 article evaluating the orchestra's twenty-second year:

"Twenty-two years... Approximately a quarter century... I wish to congratulate our orchestra, which has traversed this period with enthusiasm. The most authentic progress our country has achieved in the past twenty-five years is indubitably in the domain of music" (Rey, 2007, p. 52).

Rey's assessment indicates not only the orchestra's institutional success but also the social impact of the musical environment created in Istanbul. Two decades of regular concerts did not remain merely an artistic endeavor; they also facilitated the establishment of a concert-going culture in the city and the formation of an audience that embraced this cultural practice. Rey addressed the outcome of this sustained effort in 1966 with considerable optimism:

"We cultivated a generation that loves and comprehends music. Our situation is excellent. Our future is even more promising" (Rey, 2007, p. 53).

Rey's optimism confronted a divergent reality in the 1980s. Despite the concrete achievements of the Republic's cultural modernization project, the financial sustainability of the institutions embodying these achievements emerged as a critical problem. The Philharmonic Society, founded by Rey, and Orkestra magazine, which publicized Istanbul's musical life, were compelled to contend with financial difficulties during this period. Rey described this situation in the 115th issue of Orkestra magazine (1983):

"After twelve years of publication, Orkestra magazine unfortunately had to cease operations. Daily increasing financial difficulties prevented the magazine from remaining viable. Seven years have elapsed since then, and efforts have been made to revive the magazine... However, the most gratifying news to share with the public is the success of the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra and, consequently, the Philharmonic Society in their concerts. Unfortunately, we are unable to adequately communicate these successes to the external world, or even to our own country, to our Istanbul" (Rey, 2007, p. 66).

Rey's distance from Ankara impelled him to seek alternative sources for the sustainability of his musical endeavors. Within this context, reviving the tradition of philanthropic patronage inherited from the Ottoman period assumed particular significance for the composer. Rey regarded the support provided by affluent businesspeople for the cultivation of young talent not merely as individual benevolence but as a cultural responsibility. In his writings from 1965 to 1984, Rey (2007, p. 33) praised wealthy philanthropists such as Nejat Eczacıbaşı, who supported the education of young musicians abroad, and viewed such gestures as a continuation of "a venerable Turkish tradition."

#### 4. Rey's Compositional Imagery

Cemal Reşit Rey's career as a composer merits separate examination and evaluation specifically within the context of twentieth-century musical developments. Rey's compositional style appears to have been shaped by the confluence of the multi-layered cultural environment in which he matured, his educational experience in Europe, and his musical explorations in Türkiye. To comprehend the composer's oeuvre, it is first necessary to evaluate the historical background of the Western music tradition in Türkiye and Rey's positioning within this tradition. Mimaroglu (2006, pp. 179–180) observes that since the Tanzimat period (1839), an era of comprehensive Ottoman modernization reforms, a well-intentioned interest in Western art music had existed,

particularly among intellectual circles in Türkiye, though this interest remained largely superficial. He notes that prior to the Atatürk revolution (1923), no institution provided music education in accordance with Western methodologies; chamber orchestras established in the palace were divided into harem and selamlık sections—the traditional Ottoman system of gender segregation separating female and male quarters—with the harem orchestra and its conductor constituting an exclusively female ensemble. He emphasizes that until the revolution, not a single composer of significance had emerged in Türkiye who composed within the framework of Western art music.

The developments accompanying the proclamation of the Republic precipitated a radical transformation in this landscape. With the establishment of conservatories, the dispatch of students abroad, and the expansion of music education, a generation of composers proficient in Western musical techniques began to emerge. However, these composers were compelled to work in an environment where the infrastructure for performing their works remained in its formative stages. Rey and his contemporaries, while striving to produce works of international caliber, also contributed personally to establishing the institutional foundations necessary for the performance of these works. Duygulu (2024, p. 228) draws attention to the conditions of that period: composing works in large forms—every composer’s aspiration—and securing their performance became nearly impossible given contemporary circumstances. Orchestras, choirs, and soloists were only beginning to be trained, and personnel remained insufficient; furthermore, concert halls were also in the initial stages of establishment. Emphasizing that this generation of composers nevertheless succeeded in producing works in forms such as opera, symphony, oratorio, and concerto despite these impossibilities, he underscores that such professional dedication—withstanding the absence of social response—can be attributed to the spirit of the era engendered by Westernization and modernism, and to their commitment to the Republic.

Rey numbers among the composers who created an extensive catalog of works despite these challenging circumstances. Having produced compositions in numerous forms—from opera to symphony, from concerto to chamber music—the composer pursued diverse stylistic approaches throughout a compositional career spanning more than half a century. This trajectory assumed shape in phases reflecting the composer’s artistic development and the evolving aesthetic sensibilities of the period, rather than following a static course. Say (2005, p. 144) posits that Rey’s creative process may be delineated into four distinct periods. Uyar (2016, pp. 357–358) characterizes Cemal Reşit Rey’s compositional output across four distinct phases: the first period (1919–1926) comprises songs composed in French, which may be considered an extension of his student years; the second period, commencing in 1926, marked a new orientation with his *12 Anatolian Folk Songs*, which drew upon folk music motifs; the third period, beginning in 1931, witnessed the composition of the orchestral work *Enstantaneler* (Snapshots), which, in addition to its original melodic structure, bore the luminosity of Impressionism. Also during the 1930s, he composed operettas and musicals with libretti by his brother Ekrem Reşit Rey; with their appealing melodies, these stage works facilitated public affinity for polyphonic music and were repeatedly staged over many years. In the fourth period, extending through the 1950s, national colors manifested themselves not merely as “quotation” but as an “essence” that also conditioned stylistic and harmonic texture.

Rey’s development during this period is directly related to the diversity of influences that shaped the composer’s musical identity. Having spent his childhood and youth in France and Switzerland exposed him to the direct influence of contemporary French musical aesthetics, particularly Impressionism. However, this Western

education did not impede Rey's interest in Turkish musical sources; on the contrary, his quest to process this material using contemporary techniques constituted the fundamental characteristic of the composer's distinctive style. Music critic Faruk Yener evaluates Rey's multi-layered musical identity:

“Cemal Reşit Rey was exposed to French culture at a young age, and continuing his education in the same country constituted a significant factor in this influence. The artist spent his early youth in the same milieu during the period when Impressionism was proliferating, and he retained the influence of this movement's ideas and style... Despite his musicography initially presenting a cosmopolitan image, Rey turned to Turkish folklore and monophonic art music with his profound knowledge and discernment, establishing exemplary models such as the harmonization of folk songs” (İlyasoğlu, 2005, p. 105).

The influences that shaped Rey's musical language were not confined to Impressionism. The composer attentively followed the various innovations occurring on the European musical scene at the turn of the twentieth century and assimilated those consonant with his own style. Experimental approaches, particularly in the harmonic domain, captured Rey's attention, and he sought to combine these techniques with Turkish musical material in his works. His brother-in-law, Semih Argeşo, describes Rey's multifaceted influences:

“Cemal Reşit was a student of Gabriel Fauré's musical aesthetics during the years when Fauré served as both director of the Paris Conservatoire and composition instructor. Consequently, as a composer, he was substantially influenced by Fauré. However, Stravinsky's *Petrushka* had profoundly unsettled him. In particular, Stravinsky's simultaneous deployment of the C major chord and the F-sharp major chord in this work captured Cemal Reşit's attention. He also employed elements of polytonality in *Scènes Turques* and *12 Chants d'Anatolie*, published in Paris, working with Turkish motifs more in alignment with Stravinsky's approach than Bartók's. Like Mussorgsky, he utilized block harmonies and composed extended melodies, but he was particularly fond of superimposed harmonies” (Ali, 1996, pp. 33–34).

Rey's turn toward Turkish musical sources was not merely an individual predilection but also a reflection of international musical trends of the period. During the composer's formative years, the pursuit of national musical identity intensified throughout Europe, and numerous composers produced works inspired by their countries' traditional musical heritage. Within this context, Rey's efforts to process local material using contemporary techniques followed a parallel trajectory with similar endeavors across Europe. Güner (2000, p. 8) observes that as the nineteenth century transitioned into the twentieth, two new movements in the musical world influenced all European composers: Post-Romanticism and the Nationalist movement, which emerged as composers transformed the local melodies of their countries into polyphonic forms employing harmonic techniques.

The reflection of this nationalist movement in Türkiye coincided with the Republic's cultural modernization program. The discovery and documentation of Anatolia's musical richness during the construction of the new nation-state carried not only artistic but also ideological significance. In this context, folk music collections were regarded both as a source forming the musical foundations of national identity for Republican-era composers and as raw material awaiting processing with contemporary Western techniques. Helvacı (2012, p. 2633) observes that the collection, notation, study, and evaluation of folk melodies constituted an important resource for the first generation of composers, noting that this initiative resulted from the trend toward national values evident in many European countries during the late nineteenth century, and that the modal character and

irregular rhythmic structure of Turkish folk melodies and traditional classical music gradually attracted the interest not only of Turkish composers but also of performers from diverse regions worldwide.

Rey's exposure to nationalist movements manifested itself in concrete works immediately following his return to Türkiye. The composer commenced producing compositions that demonstrated both his commitment to local heritage and the technical proficiency he had acquired in Europe, processing Anatolian folk melodies with contemporary harmonic techniques. The fact that these works attracted attention not only domestically but also on international platforms attested to the success of Rey's efforts to transform national material into a universal language. Babacan elucidates this development:

"In Cemal Reşit Rey's early years in Türkiye, it was not a person but a song that guided him. In 1926, he composed *12 Anatolian Songs* for voice and piano. When Rey traveled to Paris to meet Raoul Laparra, to whom he dedicated the work, he both sang and played the piano before eminent musicians. The songs were enthusiastically received, and Albert Wolff, the celebrated conductor of the period, requested the orchestration from Rey. Subsequently, three thousand auditors filling the Théâtre Mogador were captivated by the music performed by the Padeloup Orchestra under Wolff's direction, following French texts published with Ekrem Reşit Rey's translation. After returning from Paris, Cemal Reşit Rey performed his piano work titled *Türk Sahneleri* (Turkish Scenes), composed based on folk songs. The manuscript, completed in 1928, was published by Heugel. He later orchestrated four movements, some of which were adapted for choir" (Babacan, 2023, p. 1727).

Rey's approach to polyphonic arrangements of folk melodies diverged from that of other composers of the period. Rather than imposing Anatolian melodies upon Western harmonic patterns, the composer elected to evaluate the possibilities inherent in the internal structure of these melodies. This technical choice reflects both Rey's respect for the original character of traditional material and his contrapuntal knowledge acquired in Europe. Musicologist and composer Yalçın Tura evaluates Rey's approach:

"Cemal Reşit preferred polyphony by layering motifs found within folk themes—emphasizing counterpoint rather than traditional harmonization—achieving considerable success through canons and imitations" (Ersel et al., 2014, p. 143).

The modal structure and melodic character of Turkish melodies are not readily amenable to adaptation within the triadic chord system of classical Western harmony. This circumstance impelled Rey to seek alternative polyphonic methods beyond traditional harmonic patterns. The composer explicates this technical quest and the solutions he discovered:

"As you know, the main chord of Western composers from classical times to the present day is the three-note chord known as do-mi-sol. Now, adding this to one of our Turkish folk songs in the form of do-mi-sol is a bit difficult. I wrote a piece for a choir called *Çayır İnce Biçemedim* (I Couldn't Mow the Meadow). There, I used a chord called a double fifth. That is, si-fa: the fifth is si, do, re, mi, fa. One, two, three, four, five. This is called a fifth. Then there is another fifth, fa sol la si do, both together, which is called this sound. Now, the folk song starts with the third of the chord. Since the root note of the chord is si, the third is re. Si do re. Now it goes like this (plays the folk song). This is the door that our Turkish folk songs, that is, our unique Turkish music, folk songs, dance tunes, whatever they may be, have opened to enter into polyphony" (İlyasoğlu, 2005).

Rey's approach to processing folk music material is evident not only in small forms but also in large-scale orchestral works. The composer created an original repertoire by combining Anatolian local narratives and legends with symphonic forms. In these works, Rey drew upon various styles influential in contemporary Europe to forge his own synthesis. Güner (2000, p. 12) notes that Rey's symphonic poem titled *Bebek*—which has never been performed in Türkiye and whose orchestral score has been lost—was composed employing the program music method characteristic of the Post-Romantic movement. He assesses that the composer organized the narrative into three sections and that his decision to utilize a folk legend like the *Bebek* narrative was likely influenced by Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. He observes that Rey approximated Béla Bartók in rhythmic treatment and that Maurice Ravel's influence was evident in his orchestral colorations. İlyasoğlu (2005, pp. 115–116) similarly emphasizes that Rey drew upon contemporary approaches and methods, noting that the composer employed program music—the art of depicting an event through musical means—characteristic of the Post-Romantic movement. Primitive legends and folk tales, which achieved prominence through Stravinsky, are reflected in Rey's music in terms of subject matter, melody, and rhythmic vitality, paralleling Stravinsky's works such as *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces*.

Rey's works based on folk melodies represent only one dimension of the composer's orientation toward Turkish musical sources. Toward the close of the 1920s, Rey's field of interest expanded, and Ottoman urban music traditions began to occupy a position in his works alongside Anatolian village music. This transition demonstrates that the composer diversified his musical sources and continued to explore different Turkish musical traditions. Halil Bedii Yönetken characterized Rey's evolution during this period:

“Cemal Reşit Rey's work on folk melodies spans the period between 1923 and 1930. In the subsequent period, the composer appears to have been influenced by traditional Turkish art music in certain of his works” (Rey, 2007, p. 114).

The transitional period indicated by Yönetken represents a significant stage in Rey's artistic maturation. From the 1930s onwards, the composer transformed not only his musical material but also his general aesthetic approach. The vivacious rhythms and melodic simplicity of folk tunes yielded to a pursuit of more internal, intellectual expression. In this new orientation, the tradition of Ottoman court music, Islamic Sufism, and Eastern philosophy became the composer's sources of inspiration. İlyasoğlu (2005, p. 124) observes that the composer produced works inspired by Turkish folklore between 1926 and 1931, but in subsequent works, the exuberant joy of folklore and the childlike vivacity of rhythms gave way to a more introspective environment oriented toward profound contemplation:

“Cemal Reşit incorporated French values into Ottoman values, combined Western standards with Anatolian inspiration, and by the 1930s had achieved a synthesis. This synthesis represents the fusion of French form with Anatolian colors and *divan* music” (İlyasoğlu, 2005, p. 157).

“It is as though he had displayed a cheerful, witty childhood until the age of thirty, and after thirty entered a period he himself characterized as ‘mystical’ and mysterious. The instruments he employed to reflect this mystery were the materials of Turkish art music, Islamic philosophy, and Eastern colorations. His symphonic poem *Initiation*, composed in 1935, exemplifies this style” (İlyasoğlu, 2005, p. 124).

Rey's transformation during this period was not merely a retrospective classification imposed by music historians. When the composer himself reflected upon his career, he recognized that the works in which he directly

employed folk music material were confined to a specific period. Rey described these early works and the subsequent stylistic transformation:

“I utilized folk songs and folk motifs in three or four scores—namely *12 Anatolian Folk Songs*, then *Turkish Landscapes*, *Karagöz*, and what else was there... I cannot quite recall now... the *Bebek Symphony*. The direct presence of Turkish motifs in these is clearly visible, audible, and palpable. Turkish motifs are taken precisely as they are, and naturally, for example, in the *Bebek Symphony*, there exists a legend concerning the ‘Bebek’ folk song. The legend unfolds in the manner of a symphonic poem, and finally, the ‘Bebek’ folk song appears in the finale. For instance, let me provide an example: there are Laz melodies in *Karagöz*, because the Laz character is one of *Karagöz*’s personages. As for *Turkish Landscapes*, they are pieces composed directly for piano, occasionally orchestrated. I believe this first stage of my life and the necessity of directly referencing folk motifs has passed” (İlyasoğlu, 2005).

Rey’s departure from folk music material did not signify abandonment but rather a redirection of his musical quest toward a different medium. The composer evolved from the dynamic and extroverted expression of Anatolian village culture to the more refined and introspective world of Ottoman urban culture. During this second period, Istanbul’s historical atmosphere, Islamic Sufism, and Mevlâna’s poetic universe became Rey’s principal sources of inspiration. Retrospectively, the composer evaluated these different stages of his career and his entire artistic trajectory:

“In this second phase, I distanced myself from Anatolian folk songs and, over the course of several years, developed an affinity for what you might term our old Turkish Art Music, Palace Music, or whatever designation you prefer, which originated in Istanbul. Certain pieces that celebrated Istanbul came into being during that period—in brief, *Enstantaneler* (Snapshots). Alfred Cortot had requested such a piece from me. We were conducting an orchestra in Paris, the École Normale Orchestra. I composed these pieces for that ensemble. They include *Eyüp Pigeons*, *Bayram*, *The Beggar Woman*, *Fishermen Hauling Their Nets*, and similar subjects. Islamic culture and Sufism exerted a profound influence upon me for an extended period. And, for instance, the quatrains of Hazret-i Mevlâna. I set some of these to music, in the compositional process, with the Turkish text and a French translation, and I titled this work *Mystic*. I also composed a chamber music piece—if I recall correctly, for string quartet, piano, and voice. This was likewise based on the quatrains of Hazret-i Mevlâna. Then there is *Çağrılış* (The Calling), another of our ancient Sufi legends—a most appealing narrative. I composed a symphonic work based on it. This was performed in Paris by the National Orchestra under my direction. I do not recall the precise date, but it was probably circa 1955. Then there exists one additional orchestral piece of this musical character—a one-movement symphony. However, although completed, the parts were never extracted and it has never been performed. That period concluded in this manner. Now, I believe I possess the general contours in my mind. One cannot be one’s own critic; one cannot approach matters unilaterally, of course. But all these intermissions I have taken have brought me to the Second Symphony performed the other day. The *Second Symphony* may be considered the culmination of my life—although it is not the final work I composed” (İlyasoğlu, 2005).

Rey’s comprehensive self-assessment enables an understanding of his artistic evolution from his own perspective. However, consulting the observations of those in his immediate circle also illuminates the composer’s creative process and compositional methods. Rey’s students and colleagues offer valuable testimony regarding his working practices. His student Vedat Kosal characterized Rey’s creative process:

“A melody would occur to him, and then he would labor on that theme for months. Inspiration would visit him, and that inspiration was simply a melody. Cemal Reşit never composed a piece without a melody, and he would declare, ‘For me, it assumes primacy’” (Ali, 1996, p. 34).

This melody-centered approach to creation, as articulated by Kosal, constitutes one of the distinctive characteristics of Rey’s works. The meticulous crafting of melodies inspired by intuition reflects a working discipline evident in the composer’s works, both those rooted in folk music and his symphonic compositions. This method did not preclude Rey from producing a diverse range of works; on the contrary, it enabled him to establish a consistent musical identity across different forms. Güleç and Güleç (2020, pp. 57–58) observe that the composer maintained presence on the agenda of European art centers with his works from 1927 through the 1940s, attributing the acceptance of his works in the West to the composer’s adroit incorporation of local colorations into this fabric. Rey produced works in both genres without preference during the subsequent decade, creating compositions in various forms—from operettas to symphonies, concertos to marches, revues, chamber music to piano pieces and operas—from 1931 through the 1950s, though the identities of these works did not overlap.

Rey’s multifaceted productivity has defined his singular position in Turkish music history. As a composer, he produced works capable of reaching broad audiences by incorporating folk melodies while simultaneously creating symphonic works of international standard. This dual capacity rendered Rey one of the rare composers who achieved success both domestically and internationally. Güner (2000, p. 20) observes that Cemal Reşit Rey masterfully blended the traditional colorations of folk melodies with polyphonic textures, succeeding in speaking the language of the populace, and that he was a composer who appealed to diverse tastes with his marches and dance compositions. He notes that Rey’s symphonic works possess an international idiom and that his compositions, performed throughout Europe, garnered the admiration of renowned musicians. Domestically, he emphasizes that Rey pioneered the emergence of Contemporary Turkish Music through his harmonization of folk songs.

Rey’s catalog, compiled over his compositional career spanning more than half a century, represents one of the most comprehensive individual contributions to Turkish music during the Republican era. The composer achieved a distinctive synthesis through his mastery of processing local sources with universal techniques, and this synthesis contributed to the formation of a school recognized internationally as “Turkish Music.” Rey summarized his artistic trajectory and the works he produced:

“The works exist. Our objective was to harmonize our folk songs employing all the possibilities of modern music. We appropriated everything from the past, applied modern techniques, and created our own distinctive style” (Tuncay, 2010, p. 45).

Rey’s evaluation of his own artistic journey is corroborated by his contemporaries and colleagues. Rey’s distinctive position among the founding figures of Turkish music in the Republican era has frequently been emphasized by witnesses of the period. The composer’s chronological precedence and multifaceted contributions positioned him as the natural leader of this generation. Ahmet Adnan Saygun, one of the preeminent figures of the Turkish Five, confirms Rey’s pioneering status:

“The first generation of composers, born in the early years of our century, charted a new course for Turkish music. In terms of age and the commencement of compositional activity, the eldest among them was the ‘doyen’” (Rey, 2007, p. 124).

## Conclusion

This study has examined Cemal Reşit Rey's articles published in *Orkestra* magazine alongside testimonial accounts from contemporaneous sources to elucidate the composer's perspective on Republican-era music policies and his distinctive position within Turkish musical life. The research findings reveal that, notwithstanding his nominal inclusion within the Turkish Five, Rey diverged from this collective in numerous substantive respects.

Rey's most salient distinction lies in the circumstance that, unlike the other four composers, he was not dispatched abroad under state sponsorship but rather completed his education independently during the years of exile with his family. This situation positioned him as an autonomous figure who contributed to the formulation of the Republic's music policies rather than emerging as a direct product thereof. Indeed, the composer served as a jury member in the selection of students for European study and was the personal instructor of Necil Kazım Akses, himself a member of the Turkish Five.

Among the study's principal findings is the impact of Rey's decision to maintain residence in Istanbul upon his professional trajectory. While his colleagues who established themselves in Ankara benefited from opportunities afforded by state institutions, Rey was compelled to operate with comparatively circumscribed resources in Istanbul. This circumstance resulted in the composer's conferral of the State Artist title occurring substantially later than his contemporaries. Conversely, this same geographical choice enabled Rey to establish himself as the preeminent authority within Istanbul's musical milieu and to assume a determinative role in constructing the city's symphonic music infrastructure.

Rey's cultural identity exhibits a multi-layered structure encompassing both the cosmopolitan values of Ottoman elitism and the modernization ideals of the Republic. This dual affiliation enabled the composer to synthesize an extensive range of sources in his works—from French Impressionism to Anatolian folk melodies, from Ottoman court music to Islamic mysticism. Rey's compositional style successfully transformed this diversity into a coherent musical identity, contributing to the formation of a school recognized internationally as "Turkish Music."

In conclusion, the case of Cemal Reşit Rey demonstrates that the cultural policies of the Republican era did not engender a uniform artist typology. The collective designated as the Turkish Five evidently did not constitute a homogeneous structure; rather, divergent biographical backgrounds, geographical preferences, and institutional relationships resulted in composers active during the same period experiencing markedly distinct trajectories. The fundamental element uniting these composers was their shared commitment to elevating national music to contemporary international standards. Rey fulfilled a multifaceted role in realizing this ideal—as composer, educator, orchestral conductor, and institution builder—thereby securing his position as one of the most consequential figures in Turkish music history.

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