

Kurdi Peşrev

Performed by the “Korkut Ensemble”

The piece, Kurdi Peşrev, comes to us from late 15th century Turkey during the time of the Ottoman Empire. It is attributed to Prince Korkut (1481 – 1513), son of Sultan Beyezid II (1467 – 1512), who is recognized as one of the most notable Ottoman Royal Musicians. There are eight pieces attributed to Prince Korkut, of which the Kurdi Peşrev is recognized as the most likely to be authentic. Prince Korkut underwent a broad education and had a tendency toward Sufi mysticism. He was a scholar and patron of the arts, as well as being a calligrapher. He was fluent and researched in Arabic and wrote books in both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish.

The young Prince fought against his father for a long time and upon his father's death became Sultan. Unfortunately, he was strangled to death only 17 days later. Upon his death Ottoman music went dormant for most of the 16th century, as later rulers such as Selim “The Grim” (d. 1525) and Suleyman “The Magnificent” had no interest in music.

Dimitrie Cantemir (1673 – 1723) transcribed the music of Prince Korkut in the late 17th century using a form of notation that Cantemir invented. An example of it may be seen in Figure 1 along with a modern re-transcription of the same music. Cantemir used the notations of early music that were created by Ali Ufki fifty years before him, as well as his own research into musical notation.

Ali Ufki, a prisoner of war captured in Poland and then brought to Istanbul, was well learned in various western languages. He converted to Islam, learned Turkish, and became enamored of Ottoman music. Ufki spent much time learning the various instruments, methods of playing, and in particular learning the subtle nuances that give Ottoman music its distinctive sound. Ufki and Cantemir are the primary documenters of most of the known early Ottoman music.

Owen Wright published more recent transcriptions of early Ottoman music in 1992. Wright studied Cantemir's transcriptions and produced new ones in contemporary Turkish notation. Not being able to acquire Wright's transcription of Kurdi Peşrev, if it even exists, I (Rajid) have transcribed the piece myself from a recording produced by *The Lalezar Ensemble*, on their album titled *Music of the Sultans, Sufis & Seraglio – Volume 1, Sultan Composers*.

This Kurdi Peşrev is played in the Turkish musical mode (*makam*) of *Kurdi / Huseyni* with a tonic of D and the notes of D, E flat (“Eb”), F, G, A, B flat (“Bb”), and C. The Turkish makam system splits a whole tone into 9 parts, called *commas*. See Figure 2 for a diagram showing the relationships between different Turkish notes.

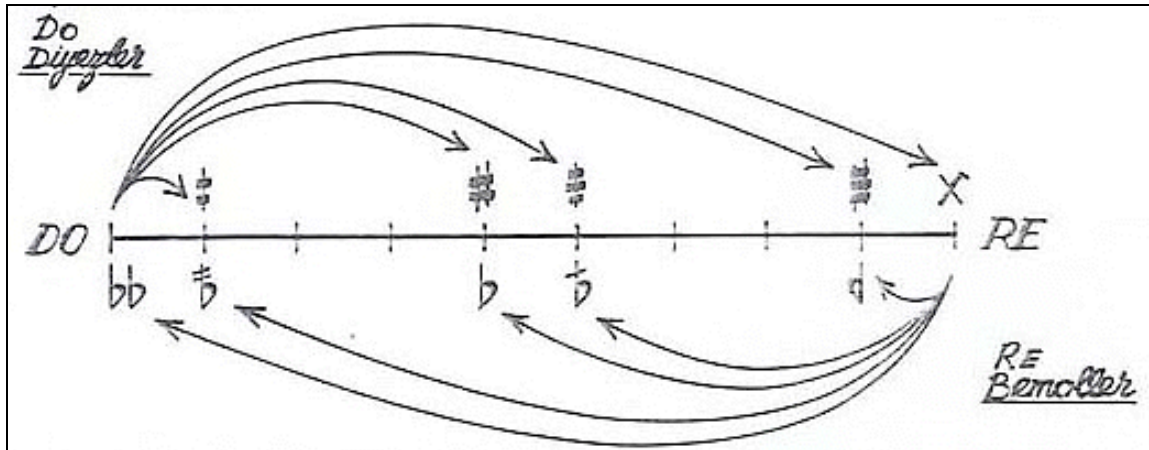


Figure 2.

Turkish music doesn't have the true "half flat" of Arabic music. (Arabic *maqam* doesn't actually keep to a true half flat in practice. Many Arabic musicians will tell you that "the *maqam Bayyati* has a 'slightly lower' E half flat than that of *maqam Rast*. We can see that Turkish makam theory is simply allowing for a more precise statement of the actual note than Arabic *maqam* theory.) As is typical of many Turkish makams, Kurdi tends to use the notes "E one comma flat" and "B one comma flat" when rising and the method of playing Ottoman music is such that a falling melody will many times produce a sliding tone from E one comma flat down to the lower E flat. This may be heard in the way in which the Middle Eastern reed flute (*ney*) plays the piece. This particular form of the makam Kurdi also has an emphasis on the fourth tone ("G") and usually will progress down to the sub-tonic ("C") as well. This can be clearly heard in the piece.

The rhythm of the piece is a fourteen beat rhythmic cycle (*usûl*) known as *devr-ı kebîr*. The fourteen beats are generally split in the form of 3-2-2-3-2-2 forming a natural grouping of two seven-beat cycles put together to form the full fourteen beat measure. The type of drum used in Ottoman music was a frame drum, called the *daire*. Ottoman music used "short cycles" of 6, 8, 9, or 14 beats and "long cycles" which might have 16, 24, or even up to 88 beats. The Ottoman musical aesthetic was that percussion should be relatively restrained, with only a small number of rhythmic variations allowed. Theoreticians believed that the full complexity of the interaction between the rhythm and the music could be more easily heard and appreciated if rhythmic cycles were performed clearly and precisely, without much personal interpretation by the percussionist. This is a major difference between Turkish art music as opposed to other Middle

Eastern music. In our performance we will use a frame drum because it is most like the drums used in the Ottoman court.

The melody, however, varies its timing, quite often shifting the emphasis to off-beats thus producing syncopation. This makes the piece particularly hard to play against a rhythm that emphasizes a different beat than where one would “naturally” place it in the melody. This shifting of emphasis has proven to be, by far, the greatest difficulty in learning to play the piece, requiring many hours of playing one section at a time in order to get accustomed to the timing.

The piece is split into the basic parts typical of a Peşrev; first, second, and third *hanas*, each followed by the *mülâzime*. The *mülâzime* is somewhat akin to a western *refrain* and each hana is somewhat akin to a western *verse*. The older way of performing a Peşrev repeats each hana and each *mülâzime*, although this performance style is not done as often today. We will be performing the piece in the older style typical of the period when it was written. Also, as is typical of a Peşrev, the first hana generally defines the makam and each successive hana ventures a little away from it, progressing farther upward and even into neighboring makams, but always returning to the starting makam in the restatement of the *mülâzime*.

The rhythm of the melody is such that the first hana stays mostly on the beat, only venturing slightly off in the third measure. The *mülâzime*, however, ventures far off of the beat and then returns. The second hana follows the lead of the *mülâzime* and continues the off-beat melody, and finally the third hana shifts even more off-beat than the preceding parts of the piece. As is typical of Ottoman court music, we will first present a short, un-metered nay improvisation (*taksim*) in the makam Kurdi to present the mode, followed by the Peşrev itself.

During the piece you will hear characteristic elements of Ottoman music as well as elements of Turkish music in general. Turkish music is described best by the term *heterophony*, “the simultaneous performance of the same melodic line, with slight individual variations, by two or more performers.” Each performer can make small shifts in notes to add his or her own ornamentation in order to show his or her own interpretation of a given composition, thus creating a sphere of liberty around the piece. In Ottoman music, as is true of Turkish music in general even today, standardized performance was/is abhorred.

The very typical sliding of the third tone of the scale (“E”) down into a flat on descending passages has already been mentioned above. Also, longer strings of descending notes are usually played with a very quick reference on each note to the note above. The very “breathy” sound of the Middle Eastern flute (*nay*) is cherished by all Turkish music, especially Sufi, even today and in the lower part of the octave many times the musician will bring out some of the lower octave below as well (this, however, can only be

accomplished in the lower notes due to the physics of the instrument). The nay, in different forms, has been a part of Turkish, as well as Arabic and Persian, music for many hundreds of years and primitive versions of the instrument may be found in Egyptian paintings inside the pyramids. The particular nay being played here is an Arabic version, however it will be played more in the Turkish fashion. The Turkish nay differs only in that it has a mouthpiece that doesn't materially affect the sound.

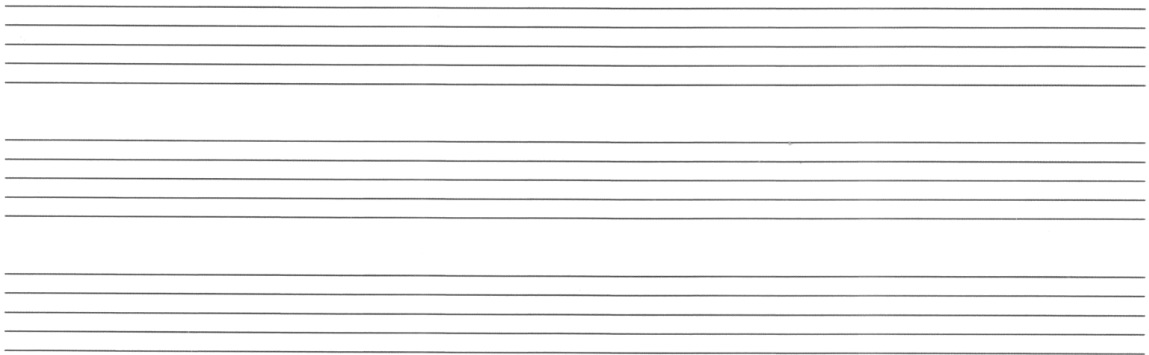
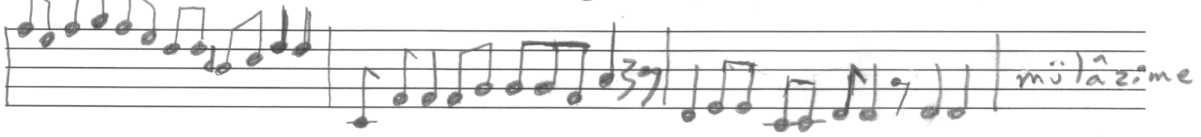
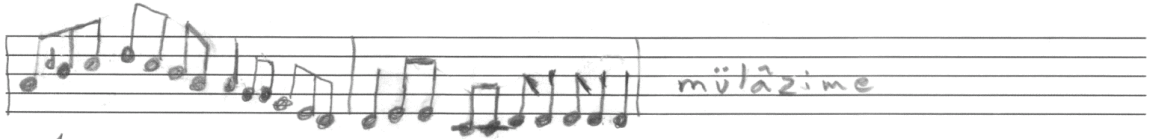
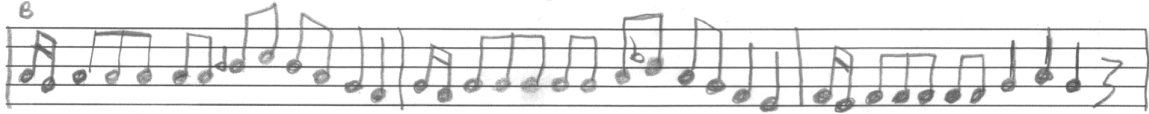
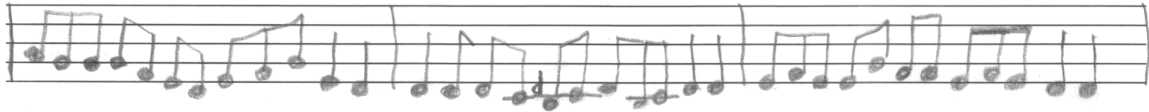
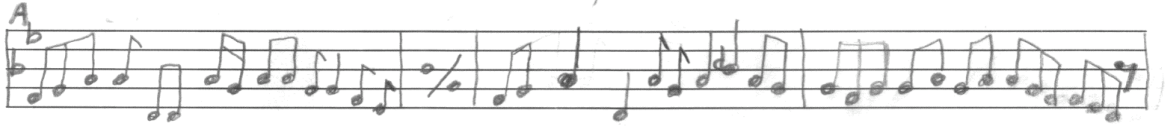
The large zither-like instrument, the *kanun*, has also existed in Turkish music for many hundreds of years and early versions of it may be found in paintings and documents from the period of this Peşrev and earlier. Some sources attribute the invention of the kanun to the renowned Islamic scholar Farabi, who lived in Turkistan in the 10th century, as he was one of the first to document it. Still other sources attribute it the Turks or the Arabs. Finally, other evidence points to very ancient origins. Early versions of the instrument are thought to have been smaller, having only 1 to 1½ octaves. Modern instruments tend to have on the order of 3½ octaves. It is unclear whether early kanuns had the sharpening levers, called *mandals*. Some sources claim that before mandals were invented the musician had to press on the strings using the nail of the left thumb while still playing with the right hand. Nevertheless, all modern kanuns today have mandals, and current makers continue to add to them.

Kanun technique requires the musician to change these mandals while simultaneously playing if the music has a note outside of the basic makam. This piece does not have many such notes, however there is a "Bb" in the second hana. The kanun, just like the nay, can also produce the quick lifts on each note in a descent by explicitly playing the strings above with the other hand.

Kurdi/Huseyni

Tr. Rajid

Kurdi Peşrev



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