

CHAPTER 2: Recital No. 2 Program Notes

This solo recital presents the unaccompanied cello compositions by Turkish composers: Ahmed Adnan Saygun, representing the first generation; İlhan Usmanbaş, representing the second generation; and finally Mehmet Aktuğ and Kamran İnce, representing the third generation of Turkish-Western contemporary music.

Mehmet Aktuğ (1959–2009), *Bis* and *Scherzo*

Mehmet Aktuğ was born in İstanbul and began his music studies as a violin student at the İzmir State Conservatory along with his composition studies in the class of the famous Turkish composer Muhammer Sun. Upon his graduation the young composer made his way to Germany where he enrolled at the Düsseldorf Music Academy. After coming back to Turkey, he was invited to teach harmony, analysis and composition at the State Conservatory in İzmir. I will be playing his compositions *Bis* and *Scherzo* without any break. The composer has a very sweet way of composing for a string instrument; his sound expectation in these two solo cello pieces might have originated from his violin studies since he employs a very high register in a lyrical way. Especially *Bis*, which means encore (composed in 1986) shows a wide use of the cello fingerboard. The composer gives freedom to the performer by indicating *Ad libitum* at the beginning of the piece, though he still indicates a regular meter (4/4) (similar to İlhan Usmanbaş in his work) to prevent the performer from going off the pulse too much. The note C is very important in this work since each gesture ends with this note and connects to the next small section following a comma. I have chosen to open the recital with

this piece instead of using it as an encore, due to its intimate, sweet and also free compositional style.

The *Scherzo*, composed in 1988, has a very furious and lively character in a speedy tempo. The middle part follows a chromatic outline around minor thirds and octaves within several rhythmic gestures, *glissandos* and *tremolos*. The sudden Legato part uses the open D string on the bottom to create a mysterious melody before the vivid section comes back. The composer ends the work by almost quietly disappearing; however, he surprises the audience and uses a very strong *Bartók pizzicato* at the end after a long crescendo.

Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907–1991), *Solo Partita, Op. 31*

The Turkish ‘Five’, encompassing Saygun, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Cemil Reşit Rey, Hasan Ferit Alnar and Yalçın Tura, achieved great success outside Turkey. Ahmet Adnan Saygun was the first advocate of change in musical reforms leading Turkey to embrace Western compositional techniques over Classical Ottoman Turkish composition in the 1920s. Saygun traveled to France after receiving a grant from the Turkish State and studied counterpoint, harmony, orchestration, organ and composition. After his student years in France, French impressionism played a big role in his compositions.

Saygun and Bartók became great friends when Béla Bartók visited Turkey in 1936 for lectures, concerts and a two-week expedition to rural parts of southern Anatolia to make recordings and transcriptions of folk music.¹ Saygun accompanied Bartók and Kodály on their travels around the country, collecting and transcribing folk songs all through Anatolia. Saygun was heavily influenced by Bartók’s music during this period, especially by his string quartets. Saygun also wrote and published many books about teaching music as an

¹ Woodard, Kathryn. “Western Music in Turkey from the Nineteenth Century to the Present.” Accessed April, 2013. <http://www.newmusicon.org/v11n1/v111turkey.html>

ethnomusicologist and a teacher. He greatly influenced the development of western music in Turkey, and helped to establish several new music institutions.

The *Solo Partita, Op. 31*, written in 1954, is a perfect example for Saygun's interest in Western art. The work is comprised of five movements. The first movement, Lento, is based on its first two measures' motives; both rhythmic and intervallic relations introduced at the beginning haunt the whole movement. The open C string sonority is heard continually throughout the movement. The second movement, Vivo, uses different modal scales within various rhythms; 5/8 and 9/8, as very traditional Turkish rhythms, are very dominant in this movement. The Adagio presents a very linear, breathless melody within a modal structure that utilizes pentatonic scales. The thirty-second ascending and descending technical passages still denote the sensitivity and the intensity of this beautiful movement. The Allegretto uses the modal scales in a very original style; the intervallic relation between G and C-flat gives an authentic feeling to this folk song. In the final movement, the materials presented in the first two measures can be heard throughout the movement. There are also references to the first and fourth movements. It prepares the end with the Lento coming back from the beginning of the *Partita* ending the whole work the way it started; as though the C-string sonority never disappeared.

İlhan Usmanbaş (b. 1921), *Music for Solo Cello*

İlhan Usmanbaş is one of the second generation of Turkish composers who came after the 'Five.' He studied composition with Adnan Saygun though his style embraces freedom of form and density, with techniques that include neo-classicism, chance music, twelve tone, serialism, and minimalism. He has won awards including commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the United States. The composer wrote *Music for Solo Cello* in 1994 in memory of Witold Lutosławski. The work represents contemporary compositional technique,

and follows the Pointillist approach employing several techniques on the cello with much dynamic and character contrast. In this piece, even though the composer reminds us to heed the bar lines in the notation (3/8), he invites a free style so that each performance may feature different qualities and interpretation each time it is played. I have experimented in voicing the colors and the unique articulations emphasized by the composer, observing his notation from my perspective.

Kamran İnce (b. 1960), *MKG Variations*

American and Turkish composer Kamran İnce was born in Montana in 1960. After moving to Turkey in 1966, he started his cello and piano studies at the Ankara Conservatory, and took composition lessons from İlhan Baran.

MKG Variations, which had its debut in 1999 by Steven Ross, harbours sonorous qualities of ringing open strings (especially G) on the cello. The first material introduced is very calm and fragile which in its variations exhibits different moods such as: a percussive pizzicato section, furious and expressive lines, ascending scalar motions, and strikingly dark qualities. After having so much to say in a delicate and patient manner, the work closes with a final presentation of the original theme, before dissolving into silence.

The composer explains his piece with his own words:

“MKG Variations for cello is commissioned by Marlene Guzman. The work takes advantage of the sonorous qualities of the open strings on the cello. The piece stems out of a spiritual impulse. The first idea, an idea of calm yet anticipatory stasis, acts as a theme which is then varied in a string of variations. The variations range from a passionate expression of the theme to a percussive one; from an angry one to an extremely delicate one; from one that is somewhat Bach-like to one that is fleeting, but

frozen in time; to one that is more raw and unforgiving. The work closes with a final presentation of the original theme, dissolving into silence, where it once originated from.”²

² İnce, Kamran. “MKG Variations (cello version) (1999).” Accessed April 20, 2013. <http://kamranince.com/html/compositions.php?id=80&page=1>