

The Establishment Of Turkish Ballet And First Original Works (1940-1970)

Türk Balesi'nin Kuruluşu ve İlk Özgün Eserler (1940-1970)

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Özet

Yeşilköy Bale Okulu, 1948 yılında İngiliz Kraliyet Bale Okulu ve Bale Topluluğu'nun da kurucusu olan Dame Ninette de Valois (1898-2019) tarafından Türk Hükümeti işbirliği ile kurulmuştur. De Valois, bakanlık ve bale gruplarına danışman olarak yirmi yıldan fazla bir süre kalmıştır. Repertuarı oluşturmuş ve Londra Kraliyet Balesi'nden öğretmenler atamıştır. Konservatuarın İngiliz öğretmenler tarafından yetiştirilen bale öğrencilerinin ilk gösterisi, Ulvi Cemal Erkin'in bestelediği, koreografisini Ninette de Valois'nın yaptığı "Keloğlan"dır. "Keloğlan" geleneksel Türk halk oyunları adımlarına dayanan dramatik bir baleydi.

De Valois, yerli dansları ve Türk bestecilerin müziğini kullanarak Türk koreograflarını teşvik etmek istemiştir. Özgün Türk balesinin doğuşu için klasik bale eğitimi almış bireylerin bu ülkenin milli danslarından ve folklorundan yararlanmaları gerekmektedir. Bazı Türk koreografların ülkenin dans biçimini klasik baleyle ilişkilendirdiğinde beklenen gelişme ortaya çıkacaktır. Batı klasik dans tarzı zaten sağlam bir şekilde yerleşmiş olsa da, genç koreograflar yeni bir Türk hareket biçimi aramaktaydılar. Türk Opera ve Balesi için hazırlanan özgün bale eserleri, klasik bale eğitimi sonrasında ülkenin milli danslarının ve folklorunun üslup ve ritimleriyle oluşturulan koreografik bir fantezi olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bale, Koreografi, Dans

Abstract

Yeşilköy Ballet School was founded in 1948 by Dame Ninette de Valois (1898-2019) who was also the founder of English Royal Ballet School and the Ballet Company with the cooperation of Turkish Government. De Valois remained involved for more than twenty years as a consultant to the ministry and the ballet companies. She established the repertoire and appointed the teachers from Royal Ballet London. The first performance to be given by the conservatory's ballet students trained under British teachers was "Keloğlan", composed by Ulvi Cemal Erkin and choreographed by Ninette de Valois. "Keloğlan" was a dramatic ballet based on traditional Turkish folk dance steps.

De Valois desired to encourage Turkish choreographers, using indigenous dances and Turkish composers' music. For the authentic Turkish ballet to be born it is necessary for individuals who received classical ballet training to get benefit from this country's national dances and folklore. When some Turkish choreographers associate this country's dance style with classical ballet, the expected development will arise. Even though the western classical dance style was already firmly established, young choreographers were searching for a new Turkish way of moving. The original ballet work which is prepared for the Turkish Opera and Ballet is a choreographically fantasy created with the help of style and rhythms of the country's national dances and folklore after classical ballet training.

Keywords: Ballet, Choreography, Dance

The art of a nation can be considered as the public's art only if it is based on its own values such as the character of the nation, ambiances, games, motifs and poems that are filtered throughout centuries. This means that the nation is united in terms of common feelings, behavior and progress and its development will be constant. Therefore, every civilized nation is equally advanced in art branches and formed its own unique art ecole.

Music and dance in Turkish Theater, with the exception of some Anatolian folk songs, developed as part of comedic devices which also included mime and impersonation. Linguistic

evidence has proven that the origins dance in Turkish can be traced back to the shamanistic rituals of central Asia. The Shaman who has the power to the exorcise (an action that requires a great deal of dance) is called "oyun" a term which in modern Turkish means to "play", "theater", "game" or "dance". The imitation of animals through dance is another eastern influence that can be still found in various Anatolian folk dances (Rubin, Nagy and Rouyer 2001).

Before the end of the 1940s, the field of dance in Turkey mostly consisted of traditional styles of folk dance and ritualistic practices belonging to the religious domain, except for very few Western style dance performances among the social dances, staged in urban settings such as at Republican Balls. Stating that, however, it has to be mentioned that in Istanbul the entertainment and performing arts culture of minorities constituted a noteworthy environment for social dances throughout the nineteenth century and onwards. They also served a considerable mission in audience-building, also including the Muslim population of the city. Yet, after World War I, the Turkish population also started to visit them. At first the performers were mostly European 'revue' artists. Later Russian ballet artists became regular visitors and performed ballet pieces in these clubs. It is quite interesting to note that although, when compared to other artistic fields such as music and theatre, the establishment of systematized Western dance education emerged rather late, there was already an established social and cultural environment for dance in the city of Istanbul (Dutch Center, Günsur, E.T. 10.08.20).

Immediately after the end of independence war in 1923, the recreation of the public as a modern, productive and art-lover nation was an important aim. Together with the political and economic revolutions, the basis of cultural and art developments were also prepared under the influence of these changes. Ataturk clearly defined the musical policy of the state after the foundation of the Republic.

The thought of establishing a state ballet school and a company was also part of the early Republican approach, strongly connected to the mission of creating a national culture in modern Turkey. Ataturk quoted that "the basis of Turkish Republic is culture" and under his guidance, revolutionary steps had been performed and some serious work was achieved in the fields of fine art and music. The first steps of these work was done in Ankara State Conservatory of which was based on Musical Teacher's School.

A law was put into practice on the May 8, 1940. The conservatory which was founded inside the Musiki Muallim Mektebi was separated to become an entity of its own. This newly established "State Conservatory" consisted of music, opera, ballet, and theatre departments. According to this law, a new foundation which will cover all fields of music and every aspect of musical needs should be established and this foundation could be named as State Musical Conservatory or Theater Academy. It was determined that this foundation should cover a school providing free musical education, another musical school for education of musical teachers and finally a theater school. The musical classes were supervised by Hindemith while the governor of the acting classes was German theater player Carl Ebert (1887-1980).

As time went by, the Turkish dancers and teachers who were raised from the first institutions became important actors in the development of classical ballet and modern dance in Turkey. Some young choreographers approach their work differently.

After the proclamation of the Republic, an institution called Music School was launched for the first time in order to train music teachers. This school continued to operate as a branch of the National Music and Representation Academy in 1934 and as part of the Veterans Training Institute in 1937. The present study was generated within the framework of the knowledge and information provided by



copyright works, state statistics and regulations, and document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used as a method of analysis (Tangülü and Becerikli, 2020, 1).

Although it was planned for the Conservatory to include a ballet department, that particular desire did not materialize until 1950. However, there are records of Sergei Lifar receiving an invitation from Ataturk in 1937, to take steps towards establishment to a ballet school.

Yıldız Alpar, (ballet student of Madam Arzumanova) also mentioned about a letter from Atatürk to Sergei Lifar asking him his recommendations about this new ballet school of Turkey. However, this project could not be implemented due to Atatürk's increasingly deteriorating health status (Cumhuriyet, O'brien, E.T. 20.10.20).

Turkish Community Centers were founded in 1935 in order to introduce the republic ideology and educate public as official supportive education institutions were ideal for the ballet classes which eventually provided that the art of ballet directly reached Turkish community, not only minorities. As the facilities of Istanbul Municipality Conservatory in Tepebaşı were not adequate, Arzumanova's ballet lessons were performed in Eminönü Community Center under the name of "Bedi-i Raks Grubu" (Cumhuriyet, Deleon, E.T. 15.09.20).

It was with the proclamation of the Republic that ballet became an academic subject and an institution. Lydia Krassa Arzumanova, a ballet teacher who migrated to Turkey with her other fellow White Russians after the 1917 revolution in Soviet Russia, opened a ballet studio in Istanbul in 1921. She realized her first demonstration with the dancers that she had so far trained, in the theatre "Casa d'Italia" at Tepebaşı, in 1931 (Core, Oral, E.T. 15.09.20).

Immediately after World War II, steps were activated to initiate State Ballet. New visions were evaluated in order to establish an academic ballet department within State Conservatory. In 1947, the founder of the British Royal Ballet and also one of the most outstanding figures of contemporary ballet, Dame Ninette de Valois, was officially invited to Turkey aiming at establishing the Turkish Ballet.

When Ninette de Valois accepted an invitation in 1947 to come to Turkey to see about setting up a national ballet company, those who knew her well were probably confident that she could succeed, as she had in Britain, in creating a ballet company from scratch where there was no previous tradition. She was famous, indeed notorious, for her discipline, grit and determination, as much as for her greatness as an artist and teacher, and known as something of a martinet in what was then Sadler's Wells Ballet, later to become the Royal Ballet. But surely no one could have anticipated the extent of her success and, more, the profound mutual affection which would develop between her and "Madam's Turks" as her protégés came to be called (Cornucopia, Baker and Burrows, E.T. 08.08.2020).



Figure 1 Turkish ballet's first students in 1948 (Cornucopia, Baker and Burrows, E.T. 02.09.20)

Yeşilköy Ballet School was founded in 1948 by Dame Ninette de Valois (1898-2019) who was also the founder of English Royal Ballet School and the Ballet Company with the cooperation of Turkish Government and English Cultural Board.

The results which she attained at the end of her work were concentrated on two facts; the superb ability of the Turkish children for ballet and her deep conviction for the creativity of the Turkish artists. In line with this conviction, she opened the first official ballet school with an academic basis, on January 6, 1948 at Yeşilköy, Istanbul. At the end of the examination, 11 boys and 18 girls were admitted to the school as its first students and Joy Newton and Audrey Knight of the Saddler's Wells Ballet were invited from England for their training. The school moved to Ankara in 1950 and became a division of the State Conservatory (Çakar, 2015, 22).

Beatrice Appleyard, Lorna Munsford and Robert Lunnan followed Joy Newton in Ankara. After 1954 the education was carried out by English teachers, Travis Kemp and Molly Lake, who were considered to be the best of this field. The ballet department run by Dame Ninette de Valois was modeled according to that of the Sadler's Wells School in London (Başar, 2018, 6).

De Valois remained involved for more than twenty years as a consultant to the ministry and the ballet companies. She established the repertoire and appointed the teachers, which included dancers like Beatrice Appleyard, an original member and soloist of the Royal Ballet who remained in Turkey her whole life, and Molly Lake, a student and examiner of the Cechetti Society and a member of Pavlova's company, who taught with her husband Travis Kemph for nineteen years. There was also the English-trained South African, Dudley Tomlinson, who directed in Ankara during the 1960s.

The first performance to be given by the conservatory's ballet students trained under British teachers was "Keloğlan", composed by Ulvi Cemal Erkin and choreographed by Ninette de Valois. "Keloğlan" was a dramatic ballet based on traditional Turkish folk dance steps (Başar, 2018, 29).

After nine years of training, the first pupils of the school had the good fortune to be able to perform with a number of guest stars. In a short time ballet has become a truly indigenous art (Turkish Cultural Foundation, And, E.T. 07.09.20).

In 1956, the first students graduated and a corps of fourty dancers was established and danced in operets, opera and ballet performances. Together with the dancers of the newly gradates of Conservatory, the technical staff were also spontaneously formed.

While Madame invited choreographers, composers, choreologists, conductors, set designers who would potentially improve Turkish Ballet, she also attempted to arise Turkish instructors and



creative staff. For example, first generation representatives were sent to England by British Council scholarships for having education on ballet set and costume design as well as preparing "ballet tutu".

The first group of dancers graduated in 1957 and together with dancers from Arzumanova's school formed the initial line-up of the Ballet Department of the State Theatre. The Department made its debut when it performed in the opera 'Salome' and the accompanying one-act play 'El Amor Bruno'. The dancers went on to adorn various other stage shows until, in 1961, the first entire ballet, 'Coppelia', was performed. Another stride was taken in 1965 with the staging of the first indigenous full-scale ballet, 'Çeşmebaşı'. The show, inspired by Turkish folklore, was created by Ninette de Valois and composed by Ferit Tüzün.

During 1964-65 art season, attempts were made to create original pieces with Turkish motifs based on classical ballet technique. The highlight of the 1965 ballet season was undoubtedly a new work choreographed especially for the company by Dame Ninette de Valois. The ballet, called "Çeşmebaşı" which translates as, "At The Fountainhead" referring to the fountain found in the centre of the village square of every Turkish village was the first large scale attempt to create a ballet with music composed by a Turkish musician, which had elements of Turkish folk dance music. It is a truly Turkish ballet.

In the choreography of Turkish folk dances Ninette de Valois had the help of her former students, particularly twin sisters Rezzan and Ümran Ürey from the Ankara State Ballet Company. The Ürey sisters were well trained in traditional Anatolian dances. According to Yüceil, when "the guidance of twin sisters had helped de Valois in finding a balance between an outsider's view and an original approach with respect to the implementation of Turkish images and cultural codes" (Yüceil, 2007, 172).

The improvements of Turkish choreography and original dance styles had eventually created its own ecole. Besides stories of European origin, many librettos belonging to Turkish history, mythology, literature and culture were converted to ballet and dance works.

Young Turkish dancers who had left for Europe and America - students of Merce Cunningham and followers of the technique of Martha Graham - returned back to Turkey and began to establish a Turkish modern dance scene in the late 1970s. Geyvan McMillan, Beyhan Murphy and Aydın Teker, were one generation of pioneers in modern dance, also establishing the first modern dance departments in universities and modern dance companies inside State Opera and Ballet Houses.

Star dancers such as Hüsnü Sunal, Ferit Akın, Binay Okurer, Sait Sökmen, Gülcan Tunççekic, Ayla Önal, Meriç Sümen, Oytun Turfanda, Güloya Arioba, Özkan Aslan and Mehmet Balkan won accolades at home and abroad. The ballet 'Çark' (The Wheel) by Sait Sökmen was the first work to be choreographed by a Turk. It was followed by performances choreographed by Duygu Aykal, Oytun Turfanda, Güloya Arioba and others who combined local colors with international standards.

In 1960s and 1970s, native work in musical composition for ballet and choreography flourished. One of the earliest choreographers was Sait Sökmen (b.1942), a student of Dame Ninette and a celebrated dancer, choreographed one act ballet piece "The Wheel" which was based on Maurice Ravel's F Major Quartet in Ankara State Opera and Ballet stage during the 1968-1969 art season which was supervised by Dame Ninette de Valois as the art director. This was the first work which was choreographed by a Turkish ballet dancer since the foundation of State Opera and Ballet.



Figure 2 Sait Sökmen and Dame Ninette de Valois, (Cornucopia, Baker and Burrows, E.T. 02.09.20)

Duygu Aykal, after her graduation from conservatory in 1963, had worked on modern ballet in Essen Folkwang Dance Department with the scholarship of German government. She returned to dancing in State Ballet after one year. When she received state scholarship for choreography education in London, she also became the assistant of Massine.

As Glasstone writes: "this was eventually to equip Duygu for the more analytical approach to choreography, which was to underpin her seminal work as the pioneer of new dance in Turkey, with its focus on subjects such as problems of urban life" (Glasstone, 2012, 145).

Duygu Aykal became the frontier choreographer/dancer who launched the modern ballet movement in Turkey and carved a niche for modern dance in rigid structure of Turkish State Ballet. Aykal's work is described as follows in Levent Kumrulu's documentary: Assimilating folk traditions into ballet, eventually creating a more abstract form of modern dance, not only made it more acceptable to the Turkish public but also disguised without entirely dissipating their antiestablishment potential, which in other contexts lead to suppression and censorship. This eventually led to a very politically conscious, indigenous modern dance scene (Kumrulu, 2011, 20).

Duygu Aykal (1943-88) served as the lead choreographer of the State Ballet. She preferred on relatively short pieces in which she emphasized concerning human existence in the universe and social pressures upon individual freedom. Her most produced works include "Çoğul" (Plural), "Oluşum" (Formation), "Bulutlar Nereye Gider?" (Where Do The Clouds Go?), "İnsan... İnsan" (Man... Man), "Biz, Siz, Onlar" (We, You, They), and "İnsancık" (The Little Creature: Man) all created in 1970s and 1980s in a poetic style which combined modern dance and classical ballet.

"Çoğul (Plural)" ballet was her first big choreography. The subject of the ballet which was composed by Cengiz Tanç, emphasizes the importance and positive effects of communication with people other than the bilateral world. The subject involves the power of communication and unity surpassing the most monotonous situations in a relation. The piece is a modern ballet based on twenty dancers. In 1965 with the staging of the first indigenous full-scale ballet, inspired by Turkish folklore, 'Çeşmebaşı' (At The Fountainhead) Turkish ballet has matured rapidly.



Conclusion

The tradition of classical ballet in Turkey is relatively young compared to other European countries, although in the Ottoman times, in the 19th century, foreign dance troupes occasionally visited Istanbul and instruction in dancing was briefly given at the sultan's Imperial Military Music School. It wasn't until the 1940's, however, when Ninette de Valois was invited to form the first official ballet school in Istanbul which then became the foundation for the Turkish State Ballet, that classical ballet began to take root in Turkey. In early 1960s the Turkish ballet conservatoire graduates had been trained with the "classical repertoire" in the Turkish State Ballet.

Comments of Dame Ninette de Valois and her thoughts on the future of Turkish Ballet: "This piece does not aim to bring Turkish folk dances and its forms together. Also it cannot be considered as a master show for peasant dances. Keeping these in mind, the choreography has been enriched by the representation of some of Turkish dance steps and moves. The ballet which is prepared for the Turkish theatre is a choreographical fantasy created with the help of style and rhythms of Turkish dancers. De Valois's own style was focusing on transformative inner exploration of dancers and aimed towards creating atmospheres on the stage in non-narrative contexts.

De Valois desired to encourage Turkish choreographers, using indigenous dances and Turkish composers' music. Authentic Turkish ballet will be born soon. For the authentic Turkish ballet to be born it is necessary for individuals who received classical ballet training to get benefit from this country's national dances and folklore. When some Turkish choreographers associate this country's dance style with classical ballet, the expected development will arise.

Çeşmebaşı was a turning point for the Turkish Ballet. There were many conversations that happened within the ballet community and broader artistic community of Turkey after the premier of Çeşmebaşı which were partly documented by Metin And. The first question was about how "Turkish" the ballet was: the music, the design, dancers and themes were all Turkish and the audiences loved the performance but the choreographer was not Turkish and even though she spend extensive amounts of time in Turkey and invested a lot in making a Turkish ballet scene, her approach would inevitably be an outsider's approach. The second aspect was that (according to And again) Çeşmebaşı was a proof that focusing on folklore was not the only way to establish a national ballet but only one of the sources to use (Yüceil, 2007, 171).

Ever since many classical works from the repertoire have been staged, including original ballets by Turkish composers. Although Turkey is a country where there is no tradition of classical ballet, and little knowledge of it, much has been achieved in the past few years in this field. Today, the Turkish State Opera and Ballet has established regularly operating stages in Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Antalya and Samsun. There is also a general interest in modern dance and several modern dance groups have been formed. It's presented various styles of ballet productions in the State Ballet Companies.

As time went by, the Turkish dancers and teachers who were raised from the first institutions became important actors in the development of classical ballet and modern dance in Turkey. Some young choreographers approach their work differently. Instead of obtaining their material from folk traditions, legends and Turkish history, they have created ballets in modern international idiom and the music they have chosen is also in this style.

Turkish born choreographers original classical and modern ballet choreographies are giving a hint for later modern dance pieces. They are experimenting more with Turkish symbols, stories, music, and, to a lesser degree, with movement originating from the Turkish bodies rather than with a dictated western classical style.



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Geniş Özet

Yeşilköy Bale Okulu, 1948 yılında İngiliz Kraliyet Bale Okulu ve Bale Topluluğu'nun da kurucusu olan Dame Ninette de Valois (1898-2019) tarafından Türk Hükümeti işbirliği ile kurulmuştur. De Valois, bakanlık ve bale gruplarına danışman olarak yirmi yıldan fazla bir süre kalarak repertuarı oluşturmuş ve Londra Kraliyet Balesi'nden öğretmenler atamıştır. Konservatuarın İngiliz öğretmenler tarafından yetiştirilen bale öğrencilerinin ilk gösterisi, Ulvi Cemal Erkin'in bestelediği, koreografisini Ninette de Valois'nın yaptığı "Keloğlan"dır. "Keloğlan" geleneksel Türk halk oyunları adımlarına dayalı dramatik bir baleydi.

1960'larda ve 1970'lerde, bale ve koreografi için müzik bestelerinde yerel çalışmalar gelişir. 1964-65 sanat sezonunda, klasik bale tekniğine dayalı Türk motifli özgün parçalar yaratılmaya çalışılmıştır. 1965 bale sezonunun en önemli özelliği şüphesiz Dame Ninette de Valois tarafından topluluk için özel olarak hazırlan yeni bir çalışmaydı. Her Türk köyünün köy meydanının ortasındaki çeşmeye atıfta bulunan "Çeşmebaşı" adlı bale, bir Türk müzisyenin bestelediği müziklerle bir bale yaratılmasına yönelik ilk büyük ölçekli girişimdi. Türk halk dansları müziği unsurlarını barındıran bir eserdir. Gerçek bir Türk balesidir. Türk koreografisi ve özgün dans stillerinin gelişmeleri sonucunda kendi ekolünü yaratmıştır.

De Valois, yerli dansları ve Türk bestecilerin müziğini kullanarak Türk koreograflarını teşvik etmek istemiştir. Otantik Türk balesi yakında doğacaktır. Özgün Türk balesinin doğuşu için klasik bale



eğitimi almış bireylerin bu ülkenin milli danslarından ve folklorundan yararlanmaları gerekmektedir. Bazı Türk koreografların ülkenin dans biçimini klasik baleyle ilişkilendirdiğinde beklenen gelişme ortaya çıkacaktır.

Batı klasik dans tarzı zaten sağlam bir şekilde yerleşmiş olsa da, genç koreograflar yeni bir Türk hareket biçimi aramaktaydılar. Türk Opera ve Balesi için hazırlanan özgün bale eserleri, klasik bale eğitimi sonrasında ülkenin milli danslarının ve folklorunun üslup ve ritimleriyle oluşturulan koreografik bir fantezidir.

Bugün Devlet Opera ve Balesi, Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, Antalya ve Samsun'da düzenli olarak faaliyet gösteren sahnelerini açmıştır. Ayrıca modern dansa genel bir ilgi vardır ve birkaç modern dans grubu da kurulmuştur. Devlet bale gruplarında çeşitli tarzlarda bale prodüksiyonları sunulmaktadır.

Zamanla ilk kurumlardan yetişen Türk dansçı ve öğretmenler, Türkiye'de klasik bale ve modern dansın gelişiminde önemli aktörleri olmuşlardır. Bazı genç koreograflar da farklı yöntemler geliştirmişlerdir.

Çatışma Beyanı

Bu makalenin herhangi bir aşamasında maddi veya manevi çıkar sağlanmamıştır.

Yayın Etiği Beyanı

Bu makalenin planlanmasından, uygulanmasına, verilerin toplanmasından verilerin analizine kadar olan tüm süreçte "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan "Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler" başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir. Bu araştırmanın yazım sürecinde bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş; toplanan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmamıştır. Bu çalışma herhangi başka bir akademik yayın ortamına değerlendirme için gönderilmemiştir.

