FA 366 – Music of Ottoman İstanbul

Lectures:
Wednesday – 6789 – NBZ 12
Thursday – 6789 – NBZ 12

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Course Description

This course explores the musical culture of Istanbul from the Ottoman era to the early Republican period within its historical and social contexts. In addition to classical, Sufi, and military traditions, the course examines the music of the city's diverse communities—including Greek, Armenian, and Jewish—as well as a variety of local/folk genres. Through these perspectives, students will investigate the multilayered functions of music in Ottoman society.

Course Objectives

- To enable students to analyze the cultural structure of Ottoman Istanbul through the lens of music.
- To introduce fundamental concepts of Turkish music theory (such as makam and usul) to support conscious engagement with musical examples.
- To familiarize students with major traditions, composers, and styles of Ottoman/Turkish music through selected recordings.
- To cultivate both a historical and auditory awareness of the city's diverse musical heritage.

Grading

- Response Paper (1000 words) – 15%
- Mid-term Exam – 30%
- Final Creative Assignment – 40%
- Attendance and Participation – 15%

Response Paper (15%)
Students are required to attend musical events relevant to the course throughout the semester. One event must be a concert, and the other a religious ceremony that incorporates musical performance (e.g., in a mosque, church, or Sufi lodge). Each paper must include:

- A brief interview with the performer(s) about the event,
- An analysis of the musical context and content,
- Personal reflections on the experience.

Mid-term Exam (30%)
The mid-term exam will be held in class and will cover the reading and listening materials available on Moodle. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings by the exam date. During the exam, listening examples will be played, and students will identify details such as title, makam, rhythmic properties, performer, and composer.

Final Creative Assignment (40%)
For the final project, students will combine historical knowledge with creative imagination by producing a 2–4 minute short film using AI text-to-animation tools. The assignment requires:

- Creating a fictional character (e.g., merchant, barkeeper, Sufi dervish, monk, soldier, musician),
- Choosing a period (e.g., 18th century),
- Selecting a relevant setting (e.g., neighborhood, religious site).

The film should take the form of a fictional memoir, integrating at least one significant musical figure from Istanbul and a musical work connected to that figure. While the narrative is fictional, all factual information must be supported by scholarly resources, with proper citations included in the film's role captions.

Films will be presented during the final class session. Students must also upload the written text used to generate the animation, along with the film, to the moodle page. Scenarios must be uploaded to course moodle page for approval two weeks prior to final presentation.
*Final projects can be done individually or as a group of two. (Please consult the instructor for further details.)

Attendance and Participation (15%)
Attendance is crucial for fulfilling the course requirements. In-class group activities, listening sessions, and the interactive nature of the course help students develop an understanding of the music and culture of Istanbul. The knowledge and insights gained during class sessions will be beneficial for both the midterm exam and the final project. Failing to attend at least 50% of the class sessions will result in failing the course.

All readings will be uploaded to the Moodle course page, and students are expected to complete the readings in advance of each class.

Tentative Course Outline

1. Introduction to the course and basics of staff notation
2. Music notations of Istanbul
3. Resources and fieldwork
4. Istanbul as a cultural hub
5. Courtly music
6. Entertainment music
7. Sufi music
8. Mid-term exam (TBD)
9. Military music
10. Religious and cultural diversity (Greek community)
11. Religious and cultural diversity (Armenian and Jewish communities)
12. Westernization period
13. Final presentations