

**Enriching the repertory of younger pianist: A study of  
solo iano compositions of Turkish composers  
from Intermediate to early advanced level**

Emine Serdaroglu

Bogazici University  
serdare@boun.edu.tr

**Abstract**

Learning a variety of piano compositions from different cultures besides the standard piano repertoire primarily formed of works of European composers is beneficial for musical and technical development of intermediate to early advance level piano students. Piano compositions of Turkish composers born in early 20<sup>th</sup> century may be considered as a good source of such repertoire because they incorporate Turkish folkloric medium and European compositional style. In the following paper, selected compositions by Ekrem Zeki Un (1910-1987), Ulvi Cemal Erkin (1906-1972), Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907-1991) and Yuksel Koptagel (1931- ) will be discussed regarding their pedagogical aspects. Information about performance practice and life of composers will also be provided.

Keywords: Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Ekrem Zeki Un, Ahmed Adnan Saygun, Yuksel Koptagel, piano repertoire.

The modern pianist is expected to have a large repertoire, to quickly prepare new pieces for performance and be flexible enough to successfully perform modern repertoire or works of composers from various parts of the world. Thus, it is important for the younger student to be introduced to a wide range of compositions presenting different styles from earlier ages onward. Intermediate to early advanced level piano students are required to learn a standard repertoire primarily formed of works of European composers. In addition to this repertoire, learning a variety of piano compositions from different cultures is beneficial for musical, technical and analytical development of younger pianists.

Piano compositions of Turkish composers born in early 20th century may be considered as a good source since they incorporate Turkish folkloric medium with European compositional style.

In this paper, selected piano compositions of Ekrem Zeki Un (1910-1987), Ulvi Cemal Erkin (1906-1972), Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907-1991) and Yuksel Koptagel (1931- ) will be discussed from a pedagogical point of view. The chosen compositions will range from early intermediate to more advanced works. Guidelines for performance practice and information about composers will be provided.

Ekrem Zeki Un (1910-1987) is known as a composer, violinist, conductor and pedagogue. He started his music lessons with his father Osman Zeki Ungor who was also a composer. In 1924, receiving a state scholarship from Turkish government, he enrolled in Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris and studied violin with Line Talluel, Marcel Chailley, Jacques Thibaut, composition with Georges Dandelot and harmony with Alexandre Cellier. In 1930, after returning to Ankara (Turkey), he was appointed as a violin teacher at Music Teachers School<sup>1</sup> and became a member of the Presidential Symphony Orchestra. In 1934, He moved to Istanbul and started teaching at the Institute of Education in Istanbul. In 1945, he became a violin and viola instructor at Istanbul Municipal Conservatory. He was also the conductor of the Conservatory Orchestra for which he composed many works. He continued composing and teaching even after his retirement of age (Ilyasoglu 2007: 75).

Ekrem Zeki Un, as a composer published many music education books for use in elementary, secondary and high schools. He also composed a variety of pieces for piano students. His compositions, *Small Pieces for Piano* is intended for beginners, *Guzelleme*, *Yigitleme* and *Koccekce* can be interesting additions to the repertory of late intermediate and early advanced piano students. *Guzelleme*<sup>2</sup> and *Yigitleme*<sup>3</sup> composed in 1962 were first published together under the title of *Two Dances* by Remzi Kitapevi in 1969. These two dance pieces were dedicated to the composer's daughter Nevin (Dr. Nevin Un-Or).

---

<sup>1</sup> *Musiki Muallim Mektebi* was a school established for educating music teachers, in Ankara, Turkey. Later it was modernized as Ankara State Conservatory.

<sup>2</sup> A traditional Turkish song about beauty

<sup>3</sup> A traditional Turkish song about heroism

*Guzelleme*, marked *allegro moderato con grazia*, is the slower and technically easier one of *Two Dances*. Like many of the Turkish folk songs, the piece is based on an irregular meter marked as 4+5/8. Meters such as 5/8, 7/8 and 9/8 are very commonly used in Turkish folk music. The 9/8 meter which is a compound triple meter in European tradition, is used with an irregular division in Turkish folk music. Consequently, in *Guzelleme*, 4+5/8 meter should be felt as 2+2+2+3/8. In this piece, simple and repetitive rhythmic motives are used in both hands. The eighth note is the shortest note value used in the right hand part. Similarly, in the left hand part, rhythmic patterns formed of half, quarter and dotted-quarter notes are repeated several times without any change.<sup>4</sup> Since the rhythmic patterns remain simple, this is a good composition which familiarizes the piano student with complex meters. Regarding the technique, the jumps in the left hand would provide some challenge. The student should not play the melodic line in an overtly romantic manner and avoid the use of *rubato* keeping the rhythmic structure of the composition intact.

*Yigitleme* is the faster piece of *Two Dances*. The tempo was marked as *avec fougue, trepident*<sup>5</sup>. Similar to *Guzelleme*, *Yigitleme* is also based on an irregular metric structure. The composition is mainly based on 7/8 meter which should be felt as 2+2+3/8. Sudden metric changes are introduced throughout the composition<sup>6</sup>. Because of the fast tempo and sudden metric changes, it may be more challenging for the piano student to conquer the feel of irregular metric patterns. The piece requires mainly a *staccato* articulation. It would also be a good practice for practicing the crisp staccato touch.

*Kocekce*<sup>7</sup>, composed in the same year as the other two compositions was published earlier, in 1964, by Remzi Kitapevi. This composition is dedicated to Turkish pianist Hulya Saydam. As a composition, it has many common features with previous two dances. It is based on the irregular meter of 7/8 with brief meter changes. The tempo is faster than *Guzelleme* and slower than *Yigitleme*. A slightly complicated three part form is used. The melodic and rhythmic ideas

---

<sup>4</sup> The first rhythmic pattern in the left hand part (measure 1) is repeated 8 times, the second pattern (m.9) is repeated 4 times, the third pattern (m.13) is repeated 10 times before the first pattern returns.

<sup>5</sup> *With fire, agitato*

<sup>6</sup> 1 / 4 (m.1, m.6, m.33, m.36, m.41), 4 / 8 (m.23), 5 / 8 (m. 35, m.53)

<sup>7</sup> *Kocekce* is a type of traditional dance used to accompany performance of male dancers dressed as female.

presented at the beginning are used throughout the composition. Piano student should be encouraged to analyze the rhythmic and melodic structure in order to develop a better understanding of the form. Technically, jumps in the left hand and presence of complicated chord structures may be challenging for the piano student. The rhythmic structure should remain intact while following the marked tempo changes. With their memorable melodies and interesting metric structures, these three compositions are good additions to the late intermediate and early advanced piano student's repertoire.

Ulvi Cemal Erkin (1906-1972) is one of the Turkish composers whose works have been nationally and internationally performed and recorded. He started his first piano lessons with his mother and later continued with Adinolfi in Istanbul. Like E. Z. Un, U. C. Erkin received a scholarship from Turkish government and went to Paris In 1925. He studied piano with Camille de Creus and Isidor Philipp in Paris Conservatory and composition with Nadia Boulanger in Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. He returned to Turkey in 1930 and started working in Music Teachers School as piano and composition teacher. In 1936, he became a member of newly established Ankara State Conservatory where he continued to work until his death. (Ilyasoglu 2007: 41).

Ulvi Cemal Erkin composed *Duyuslar-Impressions* in 1937 when he was in Ankara. *Duyuslar* is formed of eleven pieces for solo piano, each with descriptive titles.<sup>8</sup> This work was premiered ten years later by Ferhunde Erkin, a famous Turkish pianist and wife of Ulvi Cemal. The composition was printed by Ankara State Conservatory and it was not distributed for general sale. It was re-published in 2006 by Sun Yayincilik. Although it was not distributed properly, *Duyuslar* has been popular among pianists, piano teachers and students. It has been recorded and distributed by Turkish and international labels (Pepperland Recordings 1994, Hungaraton 1995, Kalan Muzik 2008).

In *Duyuslar*, each piece has a different character and each piece provides a range of technical and musical challenges. Depending on the level of the student, one piece may be chosen or it can be performed as a complete group.

---

<sup>8</sup> Oyun (Game), Kucuk Coban (The Little Shepard), Dere (Brook), Kagni (Plough), Oyun (Game), Mars (March), Saka (Joke), Ucuslar (Flights), Oyun (Game), Aglama Yar Aglama (Turkish Folk Song), Zeybek (Turkish Folk Dance)

Two of the pieces from this group *The Little Shepard* and *Zeybek*<sup>9</sup> are especially popular. Quoting Fazil Say, an internationally renowned pianist: “Left hand repeats one pitch in a sorrowful, tired and pained manner... as a bare and profound *kaval*<sup>10</sup> melody arises from the right hand. *The Little Shepard* is a music filled with magic” (2001: 117). This short little piece is technically very simple. It is composed without a meter and notated without bar lines. It should be performed in an improvisatory manner. The student should feel the soul behind the notes and try to perform accordingly. *Zeybek*, the last piece in *Duyuslar*, is marked *allegro moderato*. Considering the heroic and solemn character of the dance, the student should restrain from playing it too fast. Following the dance tradition, an irregular meter 4+5/8 is used throughout the composition. The form is based on the repetition of A section<sup>11</sup>. The introduction and the main A section reflects the character of the dance with *forte* and *fortissimo* dynamic level. They should be played in a stately manner. In these sections, playing chords that are made of four notes in open hand position may be challenging for a student with smaller hands. The contrasting sections represent softer melodic lines. In these sections, playing the melody in a musical manner without using *rubato* and playing broken chords in left hand part is also challenging. *Zeybek*, with its epic style would be a good addition to the late intermediate piano repertoire.

Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907-1991) is a composer and also an ethnomusicologist. His works have been performed in Europe and USA receiving high acclaim. A. A. Saygun started his first musical training in Izmir with Ismail Zuhdu and he continued with Macar Tevfik Bey<sup>12</sup>. He also studied piano with Monsieur Rosati (Araci 2001: 38, 41). As previously mentioned composers, he received a scholarship from Turkish government. In 1928, he went to Paris to study with Eugene Borrel, Vincent d'Indy and Paul Le Flem at Schola Cantorum. After returning to Ankara in 1931, he started teaching music theory and counterpoint at Music Teachers School. Throughout his life, he worked as member of the academic staff of Istanbul Conservatory, Ankara

---

<sup>9</sup> Zeybek is a heroic folk dance from the Aegean coast of Turkey.

<sup>10</sup> Traditional Turkish woodwind instrument associated with mountain shepherds.

<sup>11</sup> Form: Intro- AA- BB- A- CC- A

<sup>12</sup> Alessandro Voltan from Hungary

State Conservatory and Istanbul State Conservatory<sup>13</sup>. He held many administrative positions and conducted several orchestras including the Presidential Symphony Orchestra. He worked with Bela Bartok during his visit to Turkey, in the collection of folk songs (Ilyasoglu 2007: 48-49).

In 1934, when he was in Istanbul, A. A. Saygun composed *Inci's Book* for Inci, daughter of his friends Prof. Veli Saltik. He dedicated it to Mme. Eugene Borrel, his theory and counterpoint teacher in Paris (Araci 2001: 222). The work has been published in the United States by Southern Music Publishing Co. A year later, it was categorized by *Piano Quarterly News* as one of the best pieces composed for younger pianists (Araci 2001:103). A recording of *Inci's Book* has been released by Naxos in 2008.

*Inci's Book* contains seven little pieces<sup>14</sup>. They are intended for the early intermediate student. Each piece has a different character and provides the student with the opportunity to work on a different musical or technical aspect. In the first piece, *Inci*, the piano student practices to play right hand melody over a left hand formed of successive eighth notes. In *Playful Kitten*, the student studies finger turns. In the slow and mysterious third piece, *Tale*, the use of symmetrical and asymmetrical metric structures along with more complicated rhythmic patterns is introduced to the student. *The Giant Doll* begins with both hands playing the same melody and is good for synchronization of both hands. It also introduces use of a larger range in the left hand. In *A Joke*, frequent meter changes between duple, triple and quadruple meters and use of moving melodic lines in both right and left hands are noteworthy. In *Lullaby*, the left hand part is beneficial for working on finger turns and octave stretches. *Dream* also provides a good left hand exercise with its broken chords larger than an octave. In *Inci's Book*, Turkish folkloric elements are not as noticeable as in the previously discussed compositions, but, A. A. Saygun uses pentatonic scales which are strongly rooted in Turkish folk songs, thus giving a different flavor to each composition. With their different but appealing sound, these short pieces are certainly good additions to the repertory of the younger pianist.

---

<sup>13</sup> Istanbul State Conservatory became part of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in July 20, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> 1. *Inci* (calme), 2. *Afacan Kedi-Playful Kitten* (giocoso), 3. *Masal-Tale* (misterioso), 4. *Kocaman Bebek-The Giant Puppet* (animato), 5. *Oyun-A Joke* (animato), 6. *Ninni-Lullaby* (tranquillo), 7. *Ruya-Dream* (calme)

Yuksel Koptagel (1931- ) is a pianist who performed and toured internationally as well as a composer whose compositions have received international acclaim. She started her piano studies with Rana Erksan at a very early age, later became student of Cemal Resit Rey, with whom, she studied piano, harmony and counterpoint. In 1955, receiving a grant from Spanish government, she enrolled in Madrid Royal Conservatory where she studied with Jose Cubiles and Joaquin Rodrigo. At the end of the same year, Y. Koptagel went to Paris to study piano with Lazare Levy and composition with Daniel Lesur at Schola Cantorum. She also studied composition with Toany Aubin at Paris Conservatory. Later, she continued her performance studies with Lazare Levy and attended classes with Alicia de Larrocha and Alexzandre Tansman. (Ilyasoglu 2007: 127).

Y. Koptagel composed several pieces for solo piano. They were published by Editions Max Eschig and Bote & Bock and are easily accessible. *Little Brian's Diary* is intended for younger pianists. *Epitafio* inspired by Spanish music is well liked by late intermediate piano students. *Toccata*, which received the Best Piano Composition Award of Radio Paris in 1959 (Ilyasoglu 2007: 127) would enrich the repertory of a more advance pianist. *Toccata*, marked *energico / con bravura*, is an energetic and lively composition. Similar to previously discussed compositions, it employs irregular meters inspired by Turkish folk music. The metric structure initially marked as 5/8 + 4/8 changes frequently. The division of the meter also varies. 5/8 meter is used with 2+3 and 3+2 division<sup>15</sup>. 6/8 meter, a traditionally symmetrical meter, is also used with irregular division of 2+4. Although the metric structure seems complicated, the rhythms which are dominated by eighth notes are very simple. Melodic structures are also influenced by Turkish folk melodies. The form is mainly based on the repetition of A section separated by B and C sections<sup>16</sup>. The first two repetitions of A are exactly the same. The last return of A is a more difficult variation. *Toccata* provides technical challenges for the student. Octaves and octave jumps are frequently used in the left hand. Use of successive octaves by right hand can be seen in the last return of A section. Passages where hands cross and overlap

---

<sup>15</sup> Measure 1 is felt as 2+3; m. 3 as 3+2. The frequent change is apparent throughout the composition.

<sup>16</sup> Formal structure: A (m. 1-32) B (m. 33-56) A (m. 58-87) C (m. 88-131) A' (m. 132- 163) Codetta (m.164-174)

can also be challenging and use of repetitive four note chords in fast tempo can be difficult to play for students with smaller hands. *Toccata* with its fiery temperament would be a good addition to a more advanced piano student's repertoire.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, a selection of compositions by Ekrem Zeki Un, Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Ahmed Adnan Saygun and Yuksel Koptagel have been discussed from a pedagogical point of view. These pieces may be combined with works from standard piano repertoire to help technical, musical and analytical development of the piano student. *Inci's Book* by A. A. Saygun may be studied along with pieces from *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*. Easier pieces from *Duyuslar* by U. C. Erkin and *Guzelleme* by E. Z. Un may be paired with *Inventions and Sinfonias* by J. S. Bach and sonatinas by M. Clementi. A more difficult selection from *Duyuslar* along with *Yigitleme* and *Kocekce* by E. Z. Un may be studied alongside of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by J. S. Bach, piano sonatas by W. A. Mozart and mazurkas by F. Chopin.

Y. Koptagel's *Toccata* may be practiced along with F. Chopin's waltzes, W. A. Mozart's and L. van Beethoven's piano sonatas. Other pieces may be chosen from a sufficiently large repertoire of piano compositions by Turkish composers. Practicing works of composers from different cultures enriches piano student's repertoire. It may inspire curiosity and motivate the student to learn about other cultures thus helping the development of the piano student not only as a musician but also as an intellectual.

### **References**

1. Araci, Emre (2001) *Ahmed Adnan Saygun: Dogu-Bati Arasi Muzik Koprusu*. Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Kultur Sanat Yayıncılık Ticaret ve Sanayi A. S.
2. Erkin, Ulvi Cemal (2006) *Duyuslar-Impressions*. Ankara: Sun Yayınevi
3. Ilyasoglu, Evin (2007) *71 Turkish Composers*. Istanbul: Pan Yayıncılık
4. Un, Ekrem Zeki (1976) *İki Oyun Havası-Two Dances-Deux Dances*. Istanbul: Remzi Kitapevi



5. Un, Ekrem Zeki (?) *Kocekce*. Istanbul: Remzi Kitapevi
6. Un, Ekrem Zeki (1964) *Piyano için Kuçuk Parçalar- Small Pieces for Piano*. Istanbul: Remzi Kitapevi
7. Koptagel, Yuksel (1960) *Epitafio*. Berlin: Bote & Bock
8. Koptagel, Yuksel (?) *Le Carnet du Petit Brian; Little Brian's Diary*. Paris: Editions Max Eschig
9. Koptagel, Yuksel (1960) *Toccata pour piano*. Paris: Editions Max Eschig
10. Say, Fazil (2001) *Ucak Notlari*. Ankara: Muzik Ansiklopedisi Yayinlari
11. Saygun, Ahmed Adnan (?) *Inci'nin Kitabı Piano için 7 Parça Op. 10*. Istanbul: Jorj. D. Papajorjiu
12. Saygun, Ahmed Adnan (1957) *Inci'nin Kitabı. Inci's Book for Piano*. New York: Southern Music Publishing. Co.

#### **Recordings:**

1. Ahmet Adnan Saygun Piano Music: From Anatolia, Twelve Preludes, Inci's Book, Ten Sketches, Sonatina (2008) Pianist: Zeynep Ucbasaran. CD. Naxos
2. Ulvi Cemal Erkin Complete Works for Solo Piano. (2008) Pianist: Hande Dalkilic. CD. Kalan Musik
3. Ulvi Cemal Erkin Duyuşlar (1994) Pianist: Kamerhan Turan. CD. Pepperland Recordings
4. Ulvi Cemal Erkin Quintet for Piano and String Quartet; Nevit Kodalli: Quintet for Piano and String Quartet, Duyuslar. (1995) Pianist: Deniz Arman Gelenbe. CD. Hungaroton

#### **Author's biography**

Emine Serdaroglu started her piano studies at a young age. She received her BM degree from Illinois Wesleyan University (USA), her MM degree from University of Texas at Austin (USA). She completed her PhD in Musicology at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University (Istanbul, Turkey). She is a full-time instructor at Bogazici University Fine Arts Department (Istanbul, Turkey) and she continues to perform.

The Piano Repertoire books encompass early elementary to early intermediate levels (Preparatory to 4); intermediate to late intermediate levels (5 to 7); and early advanced to advanced levels (8 to 10). The repertoire comprises a carefully selected grouping of pieces from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, 20th-, and 21st-century style periods. Piano Studies/Etudes books present compositions especially suited for building the technique and musicality relevant to the repertoire of each level. Student Workbooks and the corresponding Answer Book (Preparatory to 8), as well as the outstanding record The composer Sergei Rachmaninoff produced a number of solo piano pieces that were either lost, unpublished, or not assigned an opus number. While often disregarded in the concert repertoire, they are nevertheless part of his oeuvre. Sixteen of these pieces are extant; all others are lost. Ten of these pieces were composed before he completed his Piano Concerto No. 1, his first opus, and the rest interspersed throughout his later life. In these casual works, he draws upon the influence of other