

TURKISH RHAPSODY

Hakan Ali Toker

"It is essential to pick noble expressions that reflect the graceful feelings and thoughts of our nation; and work on them at once with universal and modern techniques of music. Only thus can Turkish national music rise and take its place in universal music."

H. Ali Toker





A milestone in music history...

Many interesting forms of fusion have been created ever since Eastern and Western musical cultures started to mingle. Almost all nations of the East have ensembles and symphony orchestras comprised of Western-style-trained musicians, playing Western classical music. In addition, all these nations have composers that create classical music that draws on their national heritage. Such works employ Eastern scales, rhythms, tunes and forms enriched by Western harmony, polyphony and instrumentation. All of the above is playable by classical musicians, no matter their nationality.

Yet, there is one Eastern element NOT playable by classical musicians, even if they are natives of the East -if they are solely classically trained-: microtones. The Turkish / Greek microtonal system for instance, being perhaps the most complex of all such systems, requires a separate training that also includes improvisation.

Many projects do exist, bringing together traditional musicians who can play these microtones, to play melodies to be accompanied by classical musicians, using the Western equal-tempered system. But this is a limited approach.

On May 17, 2022, a unique concert took place at the CRR Concert Hall in Istanbul. For the first time in history, 34 musicians got together, each being doubly trained in both Western classical and Turkish traditional music to form a symphony orchestra that can execute advanced polyphonic music using the Turkish microtonal system in all layers.

The **Turkish Rhapsody** for 4 Microtonally Tuned Pianos and Microtonal Symphony Orchestra was composed by Hakan A. Toker for this orchestra. Toker was the soloist of the concert, playing all 4 pianos himself, each piano being tuned differently.





"One of the unforgettable moments of the work was seeing Toker amidst grand pianos placed like the petals of a flower; switching, either on foot or from bench to bench, from one piano to the other; fitting all kinds of scales within just a few measures of music; creating chains of tonal contrast..."

*The words **'Mesmerizing! I fell in love with Turkey all over again'** exclaimed by a foreign friend who had joined me for the concert summarizes [...] the unforgettableness of the evening."*

Melis Kanik
Konser Arkası
Classical Music Magazine

"As you know, some notes in Turkish scales aren't playable on well-tempered, polyphonic grounds. That's why a dispute upon how Turkish music should be harmonized has been going on for many years. This work is one of the best answers towards resolving this dispute; as well as one of the best contributions towards the art of harmonization approached from a very different perspective."

H. Bekir Kurşunet, Musicologist
Andante
Classical Music Magazine

The project itself consists of a 2-part, 2 hour-long concert program, with intermission. The Rhapsody lasts over 40 minutes and takes-up the first half of the concert. The second half consists of traditional songs by other Turkish composers, arranged for voice, piano and strings by Toker, who conducts the orchestra himself, besides playing. The wind and percussion players join the strings at the end for one last song composed by Toker himself, again based on a Turkish microtonal scale.

► [Excerpts from the premier](#)



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TÜRK RAPŞODİSİ'YLE BİR İLK

MÜZİSYEN HAKAN ALİ TOKER 4 AYRI PİYANO ÇALARAK BİR İLKE İMZA ATTI

#EyTürkGençliği

CREW, EQUIPMENT & COLLABORATION

Crew

- Pianos, Hakan Ali Toker
- Vocals, Bora Uymaz
- Orchestra:
 - 3 clarinets
 - 2 trumpets
 - 2 trombones
 - 3 percussionists, including timpani
 - Strings (1st and 2nd violins, violas, cellos, basses)

Required Equipment

- 4 acoustic grand pianos
- 2 piano benches
- 3 double-basses
- 4 timpani
- Triangle, with stand
- Cymbals, with stand
- Gong
- 3 toms
- A soft carpet to place the traditional percussion instruments to be brought by the orchestra
- 30 music stands
- 4 high stools (for the basses and timpani player)
- Sound system: might be required, depending on the acoustics of the hall, for the musicians to hear each other. 1 wireless speech mic, mics for each group and 8 monitors.

Optional collaboration with local artists / schools

One song in the second half features a countertenor or soprano, along with Turkish traditional instruments such as the *ud*, *kanun*, *klasik kemençe*, *tambur*, and *ney*. These musicians may be selected locally to join the visiting orchestra as guest artists on this piece.

BUDGET

Fees

- **8,000 €**
- +500€ if we bring our own piano tuner from Istanbul.

Travel & Lodging

- 38 two-way plane tickets; most from Istanbul, a few from other towns in Turkey
- 2 nights stay (one full day for rehearsal, the other for dress rehearsal and concert)

Tuning

3 of the 4 pianos will be tuned unconventionally, according to a chart to be provided by Mr. Toker for the piano tuner. Some pitches on the pianos will be untouched, others will be tuned microtonally; less than a half-step below or above the original note.

HAKAN ALİ TOKER



Hakan A. Toker was born in 1976, Turkey. After studying music in two different conservatories in Turkey (IUDK and Bilkent), he completed his studies in the USA at Indiana University School of Music, double majoring in piano and composition (BM 2000). Along his formal education, he taught himself to improvise in many different styles and to play jazz and Turkish music.

While living in the USA (1997-2006) he worked with Midwest-based world music bands Salaam, Silk Road and Orquesta Son; recording, concertizing and teaching with them. He also continued his solo activities playing regular classical and improvised recitals, music for silent films and taking part in many unique collaborations.

In 2006 he went back to his homeland and continued to concertize and record with various new bands as well as solo and with orchestras.

In 2013 he was given "Our Living Values" award in his hometown, by the Mersin Cultural Festival committee.

Toker has been well acclaimed for his outstanding achievements in several fields: He has brought the level of piano playing in Turkish music to a peak never reached before; which is exemplified in his albums **Turkish Music on Piano** (2005) and **Alla Turca Alla Toker** (2012), in the recordings he made for TRT (Turkish State Radio Television), his book **Piyano için Geleneksel Türk Müziği** featuring his arrangements, as well as numerous YouTube videos and concerts he gave around the world.

In 2011 he gave the first solo recital ever, featuring

a piano microtonally tuned specifically to accommodate Turkish traditional scales.

He has been praised by critics for his work in the field of World Music, fusing ethnic elements with jazz and classical music; which is evident in his albums **Şehir Hayatı** (2018), **Taurus Mountains** (2020, Global Music Awards winner) as well as numerous YouTube videos and concerts he gave with his own bands such as Toker Trio.

He is one of few classical pianists today who successfully carry-on the 19th century art of classical improvisation; which is evident in numerous concerts he gave around the world -some of which are available on YouTube-, and his albums **Transformations** (2003), **Toker Messing Around...with the classics;** (2019 Global Music Awards winner) and the album/single series **Classics Deconstructed** (2020-2021).

His output as a composer and arranger encompasses over 500 works (as of 2022) in many styles including Western classical, jazz, Turkish and electronic music as well as eclectic works combining these styles into unique concoctions; written for all kinds of media ranging from solo instruments to symphonic orchestras and stage music.



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