

THE STRING QUARTETS OF NECİL KAZIM AKSES OF THE TURKISH FIVE*

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Abstract

This research aims to provide a source for string students who study the string quartets of Turkish composers in chamber music courses. In addition to this the study will be an opportunity for the teachers of music schools around the world and the professional string quartet musicians to get acquainted with these pieces. The research is limited to the string quartets of Necil Kazım Akses, one of the modern composers known as “the Turkish Five”. The name Turkish Five that was first used by the Turkish writer and teacher Halil Bedii Yönetken stems from the fact that these musicians were the first Turkish musicians who have received formal Music education in Europe. Necil Kazım Akses is the youngest of “The Turkish Five”. He has an innovative approach in his composing. This approach transforms Akses’s music into an intense, complex and from time to time atonal piece. The rhythmic and musical characteristics of Turkish traditional music is wed in an aleatoric approach. Along the scope of the study, information about their first performances, sound recordings, the lengths of the pieces and their structures are given. An evaluation about the string instruments technique are also given. This article is of importance to musicians who carry out studies about chamber music.

Keywords: Necil Kazım Akses, String Quartets, The Turkish Five

INTRODUCTION

It is almost impossible both for professional string groups and the groups consisted of students who study chamber music to find a reliable source for the quartets of the Turkish composers. The only possible way for someone who is interested in the subject is to try to create a repertoire through a few notes they can find in the libraries and the archives of other interpreters. This method in falls short in terms of enriching performers’ repertoire in an appropriate technique and musicality, and acquisition of the knowledge on the pieces.

The purpose of the research in this context is to provide a detailed source to the interpreters and groups who want to play the string quartets of the Turkish composers and to archive all the obtained notes of Necil Kazım Akses, one of the first-generation composers. This archive will also be useful for teachers in their studies about the Turkish composers.

In the process of collecting a list of the string quartets by Necil Kazım Akses two books, namely “The Work Catalogue of Turkish Composers” by Ersin Antep and “71 Turkish Composers” of Evin İlyasoğlu have been important and comprehensive sources.

In order to provide detailed information about these pieces, it has been aimed to find the partitions and parts. Though some of the works’ individual parts are missing. The names of the sections, their lengths and structure are given in the study and by adding the first stanza a visual idea is intended.

The grim picture due to the lack of professional sound recordings reflects the scarcity of string quartets and the sound recordings that would provide with an example to young musicians. In a sense the lack of sources has stalled the study being made.

NECİL KAZIM AKSES (1908-1999)

Having started his musical studies by taking viola and cello lessons from Mesut Cemil, Akses studied harmony at İstanbul Municipal Conservatory during his high school education together with Cemal Reşit Rey. After having received cello training from Kleinecke, and harmony, counterpoint and fugue

* Some parts of this study have been derived from the author’s proficiency in art thesis.

from Joseph Marx at Vienna Music Academy in 1926, he studied composition with Joseph Suk and microphone technique with Alois Haba at Prague State Conservatory. When he came back to Ankara in 1933, he worked as Paul Hindemith's assistant during the establishment of the conservatory and became one of the first composition teachers. Mr. Akses was assigned as the head of the conservatory in 1949 which was followed by his posting as the director general of fine arts. He became the cultural attaché for Bern in 1954, and then for Bonn in 1955, and finally was assigned as the director of Ankara State Opera in 1958. With his numerous pieces, which attracted great attention abroad, he received medals from several countries such as Germany, Italy, and Tunisia.

According to Aydın (2011, p. 152) who comments on Necil Kazım Akses's compositions: *"In general, Akses is the composer of grandiose symphonic works and also is the most receptive to innovations among his contemporaries. He has studied over seven years to become a composer. During this time period he has learned different composition techniques from Joseph Marx, Josef Suk and Alois Haba and made use of these techniques in his career. Long sentences, rich harmonies are some of the aspects that reflect the works of Akses. He takes great care as a composer that the core idea doesn't persist in a single line. Therefore, when his music is heard the first time, it might give an impression of disorder."*

According to Önder Kütahyalı: *"In his works one can stumble upon an intense chromatic structure that leaves an impression of dark orchestral colors and atonality. In his latest works his clear and soft expression stands out. These works involve "aleatoric" qualities."* (Aydın, 2011, p. 153).

Intro and Fugue for String Quartet (1930-1931)

Scores of the piece could not be reached.

First Performance: Das Rothschild Quartett, 1931, Vienna.

Recording: None.

String Quartet No.1 (1946)

Allegro - Allegretto-Andante quasi adagio - Allegro con fuoco

First performance: 1946, Ankara.

Recording: İlhan Özsoy, Ersan Alper, Ruşen Güneş, Aziz Gürerk, 1967 (tape) and Yücelen String Quartet, 1991 (CD).

The harmonic structure of the quartet was achieved by means of combining the tonal system of western music and modality of Turkish music.

Necil Kazım Akses has said these words about his 1st String Quartet: *"I have composed the 1st String Quartet during the years of 1945 and 1946. The tonal structure of the quartet is a mixture of the tonal structure of polyphony and the modal structure of monophony that is used in local music. The first part of the quartet is in sonata form. The second part is an intermezzo and connects to a double themed fugue as an attacca. The third part is a form that resembles rondo in an idea of lied composed of three parts."* (Aydın, 2011, p.157).

Allegro

Approximately 12 minutes.

Being in the form of sonata, the movement starts with the triplet of the second violin and viola which is followed by the theme played by the first violin. The movement alternately gives place for 6/4 and 9/8 rhythms, where the solos of the first violin are occasionally handed over to cello. Triplet, tremolo and accented trill techniques allow different timbres and serve as basis during accompanying parties (Figure 1).



Figure 1. N.K. Akses- String Quartet, No.1, Allegro

Allegretto-Andante quasi adagio

Approximately 11 minutes.

Allegretto and *Andante quasi adagio* are the two movements that reflect opposite characteristics. Being *Intermezzo*, *Allegretto* is dynamic and lively due to its triad chords which give the impact of a Spanish music. Combined with *Attacca*, *Andante quasi adagio*, on the other hand, is a double-themed fugue composed of a rather calm, sad, and horizontal melody. Akses made the following clarification for the maqams he used in this movement: “The tone of the fugue’s antecedent is in Sabâ, which can be regarded as a modal tone. The consequent, on the other hand, is in Bestenigâr, which is the transition from Sabâ tone” (Aktüze, 2004, p.10). The *fugue* starts with the cello and continues with the participation of other parts. The 3/8 and 5/8 rhythms in *Allegretto* are replaced with 4/4 in *fugue* (Figure 2).



Figure 2. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.1, Allegretto-Andante quasi adagio

Allegro con fuoco

Approximately 13 minutes.

The 2/2 unison intro and outro are sharp and passionate. Akses provides an explanation for the structure of this movement by stating: “It is a form that reminds a rondo within the sense of a three-part *Lied* form. The part *un poco largamente* in the middle of this movement is the expanded version of the second theme group in the first part” (Aktüze, 2004, p.10). Therefore, it can be observed that the western music forms were, as in every other movement of the piece, applied into this movement, too. The middle of the movement is more static, and the instruments are given long individual or doubled solos, except for the first violin. These doubled solos are achieved by combining violin + cello and second violin + viola (Figure 3).



Figure 3. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.1, Allegro con fuoco

2.3 String Quartet No.2 “Requiem Quartet” (1971)

Prologo-Larghetto pensieroso - Una fantasia-Adagio lamentoso - Epilogo-Andante moderato

First performance: Vienna Soloists and Sevim Çıdamlı, 1974, İstanbul.

Recording: None.

Prologo-Larghetto pensieroso

Approximately 15 minutes.

Consisting of two parts, *Prologo-Larghetto pensieroso* starts with a long intro in 2/2, and continues with the second violin introducing the theme, which is followed by the participation of other instruments. Covering the majority of the movement and introduced in the 101st measure, the $\frac{3}{4}$ *Allegro energico* is a double-motived and dynamic movement. With its rhythmic structure, the first motive consists of triplets and due to the accents, that are required to be played in different times, it does not sound monotonous. Besides, it is a rather intense and dynamic part that requires attention in terms of intonation. The second motive appearing in the 201st measure is a rather peaceful part based on a melody. The movement is concluded with the development of these two motives, which were composed in a makam perspective, and playing of the first motive (Figure 4).



Figure 4. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.2, Prologo-Larghetto pensieroso

Una fantasia-Adagio lamentoso

Approximately 13 minutes.

Based on a maqam approach, the movement consists of one slow and one fast motive. The 4/4 *Adagio lamentoso* and syncopated *Allegretto scherzando* are alternately introduced twice. With its repeating melody on the same note, the viola solo heard together with the *flageolette* chords and throughout the movement, reveals a persistent attitude. The gradually intensifying music reaches to different colors thanks to the *glissando* used in different timings. *Allegretto scherzando* is a dynamic movement with full of diversions, which is exposed to canon-like movements following the introduction of the first theme as unison (Figure 5).

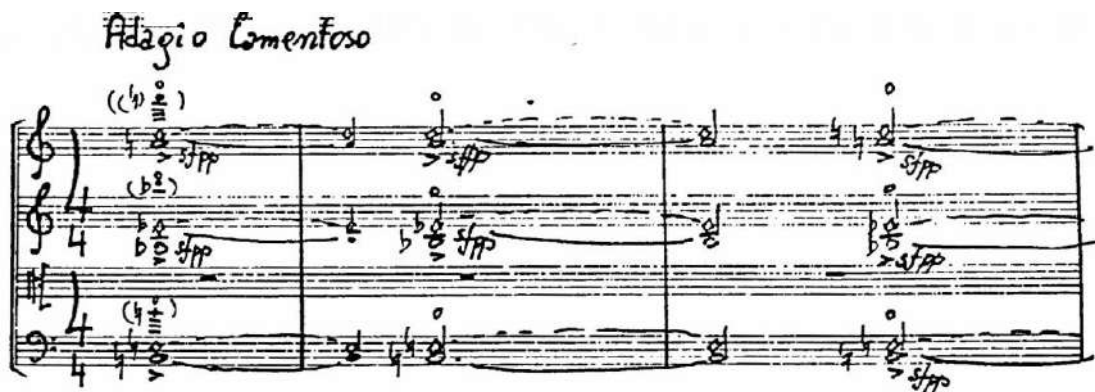


Figure 5. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.2, Una Fantasia-Adagio lamentoso

Epilogo-Andante moderato

Approximately 3 minutes.

In the 4/4 movement where second, fourth, and seventh intervals are used, there is also an addition of a vocal partition, which is rarely seen in quartets. *Epilogo* is written for a tenor or a soprano and is dark and depressive. The melody of viola which sounds like crying and is composed of second intervals; and *sfz tremolo* accompaniments of other partitions in *pp* creates an atmosphere of a requiem. With the pace it brings to the tempo and the rhythmic progress of the accompanying partitions, *poco piu mosso* in the midsection reveals a rebellion-like approach. The movement ends with by repeating the intro (Figure 6).



Figure 6. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.2, Epilogo-Andante Moderato

2.4 String Quartet No.3 (1979)

Allegro affrettando - Allegretto - Lento - Allegro

First Performance: Yücelen String Quartet, 1979, Ankara.

Recording: None.

There are aleatoric approaches in the quartet, which was created by means of melting the unison within modal music in the same pot as the atonality technique.

Allegro affrettando

Approximately 13 minutes.

Opening with the dissonance created by small second intervals and gaining energy with the semi-quavers, the $\frac{3}{4}$ movement is enriched by the harmony of fast and slow motives, rhythm changes, and occasional counterpoints. The duplets used against the triplets in the $\frac{4}{4}$ movement remind of a syncopated rhythm. In the $\frac{3}{4}$ *Moderato*, where the tempo slows down, the unison solo which sounds like mevlevi music as a result of the first violin and viola accompanied by tremolo, is also heard twice in the violin and cello accompaniment. The movement finishes with the repeating of the melodic and rhythmic structure in the intro (Figure 7).



Figure 7. N.K. Akse – String Quartet, No.3, Allegro affrettando

Allegretto

Approximately 12 minutes.

The $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{8}{8}$ movement is composed of two motives and three parts. The part where dissonances are heard as a result of second, fourth and seventh intervals is played in a swift tempo. The rhythm slows down in the second part which is in $\frac{8}{8}$, and the movement develops with the involvement of other instruments in order of partition, led by cello. It is possible to see the aleatoric technique during this development, where the first violin and cello are given individual solos accompanied by other instruments (Figure 8).



Figure 8. N.K. Akse – String Quartet, No.3, Allegretto

Lento

Approximately 9 minutes.

Being in 4/4 measure form, the movement embodies occasional polyphonic movements, where an aleatoric pattern can also be observed. The unsettled atmosphere created by the *sfz* dissonant chord within *pp*, where instruments participate one by one, remains throughout the movement despite the theme's introduction by cello. The rhythmic movements of the accompanying parties consisting of two semiquavers and quaver stand out and are played in a way that supports the gloomy feeling of the music. Lento, which can be regarded as a movement written for solos, is achieved by the sharing of one or two instruments. The high-pitched solo of the first violin enables the transition to the part where aleatoric pattern is used and is followed by the introduction of the second violin-viola as unison. After the first violin is heard together with the tremolo accompaniment for the last time, the final movement is introduced with *attacca* (Figure 9).



Figure 9. N.K. Akse – String Quartet, No.3, Lento

Allegro

Approximately 4 minutes.

Being in 3/4 measure fugue form, the movement starts with the introduction of a makam theme by the viola, enriched with a syncopated intro. Different timbres are added to the theme, which is developed with its rhythmic and sequential characteristic in the middle, by means of certain playing techniques, such as *pizzicato* and *ponticello*. The movement ends with instruments repeating the theme (Figure 10).

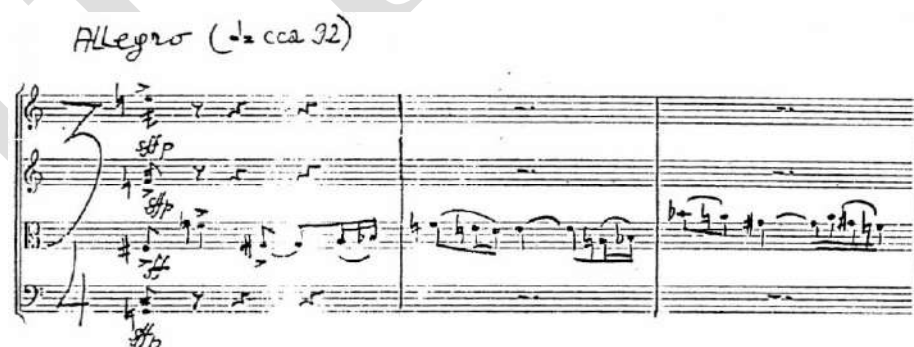


Figure 10. N.K. Akse – String Quartet, No.3, Allegro

2.5 String Quartet No.4 (1990)

Capriccio-Allegro energico, moderato - Moto perpetuo-Vivo - Elegia-Mesto - Ritorno-Vivace

First Performance: Yücelen String Quartet, 1991, Hungary.

Recording: Yücelen String Quartet, 1991, Hungary (CD).

Dedicated to Yücelen String Quartet, the piece includes an aleatoric pattern together with the second, fourth and seventh chords, within the understanding of the 20th century atonal technique.

Capriccio-Allegro energico-moderato

Approximately 8 minutes.

Being in 3/4 and free form, the movement starts with a series of notes descending from high pitched sounds. The intro, which involves all four instruments, is *ff* and energetic. The *sfz p* trills following the intro create an atmosphere that paves the way for the rhythmic solo of the cello. A short-term aleatoric expression is observed during the movement, together with the tempo and rhythm changes used in the following measures. The movement ends with the quintuplet rhythm that follows the semiquaver played by all four parties, at a point where they reach *molto crescendo* (Figure 11)



Figure 11. N.K. Akseş – String Quartet, No.4, Capriccio-Allegro energico, moderato

Moto perpetuo-Vivo

Approximately 3 minutes.

The 7/8 measure syncopated movement is formed within a repeated rhythm, as understood from *Moto perpetuo*. Evolving into a traditional dance music, the first indicator of the movement is the viola which enters rapturously. The movement, which escalates with the repeating of the intro after the progress in the middle composed of long sounds and with *ff crescendo* in the last measure, ends with a dissonant timbre (Figure 12).



Figure 11. N.K. Akseş – String Quartet, No.4, Moto perpetuo-Vivo

Elegia-Mesto

Approximately 6 minutes.

Being in 3/4 time signature, the movement starts with a dark atmosphere created by *sourdine*, where the first violin enters on the double stops of the accompanying parties, giving a desperate and exhausted impression. The trill and tremolo accompaniments during the participation of other parties in this atmosphere one by one, supports and strengthens the party playing the melody. There is a solo for the cello in the aleatoric part which provides a liberating environment for the performer. This is then followed by the melancholic performance of the first violin and cello in unison, which ends the movement (Figure 13).



Figure 13. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.4, Elegia-Mesto

Ritorno-Vivace

Approximately 3 minutes.

The 12/8 measure movement is a double-themed fugue that starts under the leadership of the viola. The idea of *Ritorno*, which means return, pertains to the form. Based on the quaver figures, the second theme of the fugue comes at the 41st measure. Aleatoric parts are heard much less when compared to previous ones and are only applied for rhythmic purposes (Figure 14).



Figure 14. N.K. Akses – String Quartet, No.4, Ritorno-Vivace

CONCLUSION

This study that aims to fill a gap about the lack of information on the string quartets is designed as a beneficial and comprehensive source.

In this context the string quartets of Necil Kazım Akses one of the first-generation composers of the country were picked. Four of the five works he composed during different periods of his life have been reached. In his works we can recall the tonal structure of Western music, the Turkish maqams and contemporary touches. Among these quartets which were composed in 1930, 1946, 1971, 1979 and 1990, one is missing, namely “Introduction and Fugue for String Quartet”. In his works which were composed in 1946 and 1971 one can hear the tonality of the Western music and the maqam structure of the Turkish music. In his 1971 work of String Quartet No.2 a singing part was added which was unusual. In his quartets composed in 1979 and 1990, the aleatoric structure is on the fore front.

This study aims for the inclusion of the works of contemporary Turkish composers in the curricula in conservatories and music schools and in chamber classes where the experience of collective music making is gained. Another possibility for the pieces of contemporary Turkish composers to be performed is that the groups consisted of state orchestra performers or teachers in conservatories undertake this duty and present an example to the students.

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