

Marmarai

Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907–1991) was the leading Turkish composer of his time. He utilized melodic and rhythmic aspects of traditional Turkish music in large-scale orchestral and chamber works, in the same way as his friend Bartók did with Hungarian folk music. While Saygun's music resembles that of Bartók in such features as rhythmic ostinatos, it is nevertheless quite individual. His early orchestral works display textures that recall the French Impressionists, but his later works move away from all these influences, or rather synthesize them into a personal and identifiable voice. Saygun's five symphonies and his concertos for piano, violin, viola, and cello are all available on disc (thanks to CPO) and comprise a significant and impressive body of work. He also wrote several operas, oratorios, and other vocal works.

This is the first time I have heard one of his string quartets. The first of four, it was composed in 1947 and proves to be a major addition to the repertoire, lasting just under half an hour. The work is in four movements, with the slow movement placed second. The first movement is fairly straightforward and features unison playing (an integral part of Turkish music) before launching into an allegro moderato. Every so often momentum ceases while individual instruments muse on the themes in a quasi-improvisational manner. These sections contain moments of considerable beauty. The slow movement, an Adagio with a poco vivo middle section, is notable for its free counterpoint. In this and the succeeding Allegretto movement, Saygun's themes are obsessively centered around a single tone—also a feature of Turkish music. The third movement is in the form of a stylized classical dance, yet subtle harmonic shifts and melodic contours ensure that it is something more than pastiche. The finale begins solemnly but ends very fast and furious, displaying the composer's skill in contrapuntal imitation. Most importantly, Saygun uses these elements to produce music that says something: There is a yearning quality to the long, high lines of the Adagio, genuine excitement in the bustle of the last movement, and an attractive quirkiness to the Allegretto. I have fallen for this piece absolutely, and would love to hear Saygun's remaining three quartets. CPO has issued all four in a 2-disc set played by the Quatuor Danel, the group who recently completed a survey of Weinberg's quartets. Unfortunately, the Danel's recording of Saygun's quartets seems to have escaped notice in Fanfare.

Now to the other works in this program, and to be blunt it is a hell of a leap. Matthias Pintscher (b. 1971) and Ataç Sezer (b. 1979) are contemporary composers, and their music exists in another world entirely—a world of different aims and expanded instrumental techniques. Pintscher and Sezer could be called avant-garde except that it is a pointless term these days, as there is no accepted garde to be avant, but both use techniques that we associate with certain composers of the late 20th century: glissandos, high harmonics, and the kind of scratchy sounds that string players spend a lot of time learning to avoid.

Pintscher's piece, a 17-minute single-movement study, is deconstruction in reverse (if that makes sense). Silence plays an important part in the early sections, as wisps of sound appear randomly before they begin to coalesce to suggest a form. Sezer, a Turkish composer who was Pintscher's pupil, writes music of greater incident and seems especially attached to the slow glissando. This sound dominates the opening of Flow (the most recent work on the disc, composed in 2010). It

reminded me of the string textures of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Of Sezer's two pieces, each of which lasts around 15 minutes, *Flow* seems the more coherent. Subject is comprised of interesting individual sounds but they do strike one as haphazardly assembled. That, I suppose, is the risk in music that is texture-based. If a composer is going to eschew traditional formal structures and the single aspect of music that defines it for most people—that is, pulse—then he has to replace those things with something substantial. The natural, almost inevitable progress of the changing textures in *Flow* manages it, whereas the other pieces, especially Pintscher's, remain stuck in the realm of experimentation—at least, in my opinion. The contemporary works demand a different mindset, so I would advise anyone purchasing this CD to listen to them and the Saygun quartet on separate occasions.

It only remains to say that the members of the Cologne-based Swiss Asasello Quartet are technically excellent, and bring total commitment and belief to every note they play. © 2014 Fanfare

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GEN 14298

8/20/2014