

Erkem Zeki Ün (1910-1987)

Ekrem Zeki Ün was not only a violinist and conductor, but also an important Turkish composer. He first took music lessons from his father Osman Zeki Üngör who was the composer of the Turkish National anthem “İstiklâl Marşı.” His father was the first Turkish violinist to play Western Classical repertoire on the violin, and was raised in the Ottoman palace. While Ün’s formal music education began in Turkey, in 1910 he earned a scholarship from the Turkish government to study at *Ecole Normale de Musique*, in Paris. Six years after his studies, he returned to Turkey and became the concertmaster of the Cumhurbaşkanlığı Senfoni Orkestrası. His compositional style has influences not only from Anatolian melodies, Turkish folk music, and classical Turkish music, but also by the works of impressionist composers he encountered during his studies in Paris, including Ravel, Debussy, and Fauré. Ün’s output includes works for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, orchestra, solo voice, and choir.

Yunus'un Mezarında (At the Tomb of Yunus) (1933)

Yunus'un Mezarında is one of Ün’s most famous works. The title translates to “at the tomb of Yunus” who is a well-known Turkish folk poet. With this composition, Ün commemorates Yunus. The piece starts as *Lento* and *ad libitum* for almost one page, creating the effect of mourning and crying at a funeral. In Turkish culture, after a death, people sob and sing at the same time to cope with their emotions. Even though *Yunus'un Mezarında* demonstrates great Turkish influence, it also contains traces of Western Classical tradition and 20th century compositions, in terms of form and harmony. The piece is in ABA form, there is frequent chromaticism and influence of *makam* music from Turkey. In some of his works, including *Yunus'un Mezarında*, the composer explores the connection between monophonic and polyphonic music.

—Program note by Gözde Çakır

Reference:

Beken, Münir Nurettin. “Ekrem Zeki Ün.” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, accessed on May 24, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.52886>