

Hasan Uçarsu (b. 1965)

Elif Dedim Be Dedim (1999)

Elif Dedim Be Dedim translates to “I called for Elif.” Elif is a very common female name in Turkey. This piece was originally composed for cello and piano as part of a CD project in 1999. Because of this instrumental arrangement’s popularity, the composer created a version for flute and piano. This piece is based on an Anatolian folk song; however, Uçarsus’ approach to it, which is more similar to the Western style, separates the song from its original musical and social context. In this work, the composer uses a very dramatic approach toward the end of the music. The pianist sings a verse of the song while playing, bringing the song as close as possible to its original and pure state.

The story behind the original song *Elif Dedim Be Dedim* or, I called for Elif, is touching: A young man loves a girl named Elif but has contracted tuberculosis, for which there was no cure in those days, and is admitted to a tuberculosis hospital. Despite their love, the girl’s family refuses to let them marry. Knowing he is dying, the young man sends word for Elif to come to him. The girl’s family even refuses to let her visit the sick boy for one last time. While his coffin lies ready in the hospital– a grim reminder that there will be no recovery from this illness and that the end is near– he writes a poem to Elif, which he hides inside his hat. When his body is returned to his family, they find the poem and turn it into this beautiful *Türkü*, which is a type of Turkish song said to be based on a true story.

—*Program note by Gözde Çakır*

Reference:

Çakır, Gözde. “Interview with Turkish composer Hasan Uçarsu in Istanbul, Turkey.” June 15, 2019.

Lyrics for the original song *Elif Dedim Be Dedim*:

Turkish:

Elif dedim be dedim aman
Kız ben sana ne dedim
Kuş kanedi kalem olsa aman
Ah Yazılmaz benim derdim

Elifim noktalandı aman
Az derdim çokçalandı
Yetiş anam yetiş bubam aman
Ah Mezarım tahtalandı

Anne desem annem yok aman
Baba desem babam yok
Kardeş desem kardeş yok aman
Feryad etsem sesim yok

English translations:

I called for Elif, oh
Girl, what did I tell you?
Even if the bird's wing were a pen,
It couldn't write my misery.

My Elif has been made the period at the end of my life
My troubles that were few have been multiplied.
Help me mother, help me father
Wooden planks were placed in my grave (meaning there is no hope anymore).

If I call for my mother, I have no mother, oh
If I call for my dad, I have no dad
If I call for my siblings, I have no siblings, oh
If I shriek, I have no voice