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THE AESTHETICS
OF
IMPERFECTION
AND
HYBRIDIZATION
:
WHAT IS
SO INTERESTING
ABOUT
TURKISH FUNK
AND
POP MUSIC OF
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?

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"The Aesthetics of Imperfection and Hybridization:

What Is so Interesting about

Turkish Funk and Pop Music of the 1960s and 1970s?"

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Turkish funk and pop music of the 1960s and 1970s is very little known outside Turkey, though its special character makes it worthy of consideration. For example, Moğollar's "Çığrık" (1972) offers an initial insight into what this music sounds like. Not much research has been done on the subject (Van Waes no date; Reier 2009; Aya 2001), and this paper, while imperfect, is a small attempt to take things a step further.

Today, the periphery is the new center, and B-music (following Andy Votel's term¹) has become the new A-music—just think, for example, of genres like *cumbia digital* or *favela funk*. More and more people are focusing on phenomena of hybridization, where the former periphery (non-Western cultures) and the former center (Western culture) have come to intersect. Ex-B-music is now regarded as a model for a future A-music, and reissues and compilations are coming out constantly to prove this development, especially over the last two or three years.²

I am a white middle-class German—how did I get in touch with Turkish music? In 2006, the L.A. record label Stones Throw put the *Stones Throw Podcast #12* online, called "Turkish Funk Mix" by beat producer Egon (Egon 2006), and in 2007 they followed up with a proper release, the hip-hop-style double album *Dr. No's Oexperiment* by DJ and producer Oh No, which was based exclusively on Turkish funk and pop music samples.

Hip-hop producers and beat creators are continuously searching for new beats, finding fresh material in the former periphery. As an example, one could mention DJ not-I, who has worked with the track mentioned above, Moğollar's "Çığrık." His mashup of "Touch It Çığrık" (feat. Busta Rhymes and Moğollar) was released online only as a digital file in 2008.³

But what is so special about Turkish funk and pop music? Simplifying things a little, one could say that Turkish funk and pop music developed its specific aesthetic through imperfection and hybridization.

The term imperfection has to be put into relation. Imperfect—compared to what? Here the standard of comparison is the sound of Western pop music produced in technologically well-equipped Western studios with all the means of high fidelity, effects, filters, equalization, and so on.

The term hybridization is used in its biological sense, meaning something which is a product of two different species that have been crossbred. A hybrid is something consisting of different origins, transgressing the old order of the former species to build up something new.

Unless stated otherwise, all online sources in this text were accessed on April 29, 2026.

1 Andy Votel is part of the worldwide network and record label Finders Keepers. Here, he released three various-artist compilations called *B-MUSIC—Cross Continental Record Raid Road Trip* (2007), *B-MUSIC—DRIVE IN, TURN ON, FREAK OUT* (2008), and *B-Music—Radio Galaxia* (2010).

2 See the releases of the already mentioned Finders Keepers or releases of record labels like Academy, Analog Africa, Now Again, Numero Group, Soul Jazz, Soundway, Strut, World Psychedelic Funk Classics, and many more.

3 See <https://freelistenonline.com/artist/dj+Not-I>, Track 62.

Coming back to Turkish pop music: Where did it all begin? In 1965, the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* held the first edition of an annual music contest. First attempts of imitating Western pop music had been undertaken since the start of the 1960s, but the language barrier was hard to overcome. Accordingly, the most estimated band in Turkey was not The Beatles, but rather The Shadows or The Ventures, whose instrumental music did not pose the problem of incomprehensible words. At this point, *Hürriyet* had an idea: the lyrics of the pop tunes should be written in Turkish, or traditional songs should be rearranged in the style of Western pop music, with electric instruments.

What did this music sound like? One of the winners of 1967 was *Yabancılar* with "Ağıt." The song brings up a psychedelic feeling and some Ventures style by combining traditional elements with an electric instrumentation. The inconstant dynamics, swelling up and going down, are on the original vinyl itself.

The contest organized by *Hürriyet* became so important because the newspaper released the music on vinyl and made the bands tour the country, laying the foundations for a distinctively Turkish pop and funk music.

What are its characteristics? Imperfection and hybridization, as stated before. Imperfection had to do with the technology used in the studios, with the instruments the musicians were playing, as well as with sound and mixing. Till the mid-1970s, some sources say even until the end of the 1970s, no studio existed in the country that would have measured up to the Western standard. Electronic instruments were new to the Turkish musicians; encouraged by the *Hürriyet* contest, they electrified their own traditional instruments like the *saz* and burst into the low-end 'studios' they had, where they went under the treatment of sound engineers and producers who often learned their craft through the experience. BUT: This was not a disadvantage, on the contrary. It makes the music rough, mysterious, psychedelic, unpredictable, and surprising, full of exciting energy, and did not smooth things down by a too professional-sounding technology and too clever producers, like Phil Spector's so-called Wall of Sound did with The Beatles. Another, rather jazzy example of that energy delivers Emin Fındıkoğlu's instrumental "Çeçen Kızı" (1973), which combines e-*saz* sounds on a rare groove setting.

The sound technology used often provides a life of its own, some sort of 'arte povera' sound with lots of reverb especially on the voices, a thin drum sound, and a bass ranging more in the middle. Often the sound engineers pushed a certain instrument or a voice drastically to the fore- or the back-ground, volume levels are therefore very disruptive and inconstant, sounding strange to Western ears. This can be observed in some of the following listening examples.

The interest of the musicians in both following the tradition and making experiments at the same time led to the phenomenon of hybridization. Turkish musicians and producers built up something extraordinary, blending Western and Turkish cultures in a special way.

Again, it was *Hürriyet* that promoted the idea. New interpretations of traditional Turkish music were allowed in the contest, as long as they were electrified. That rule was the definitive starting point for blending Western music, which was based on its media technology, and Turkish music culture, based on its structures as well as on its instruments.

The next three examples offer different approaches of blending traditional and Western music, ranging from more traditional to more funky interpretations of the Turkish folk tune “Zühtü.”

Sevda Alpay’s “Şu Samsunun Evleri” (1975) is a version of a very similar tune and done in a belly dance-orchestra style, but the saz is electrified. Note the volume fluctuations of the band in relation to the voice.

Oya’s “Zühtü” (1976) has more Western instruments, although in the whole it is not too far away from the Sevda Alpay example before.

And Esin Afsar’s “Zühtü” (1976) is played mainly on Western instruments, only a flanged electric saz remains, and it is a funkier interpretation.

These three examples show the whole range of possible references from traditional to Western music.

It seems as if Turkish music had just been waiting for electrification, so easily could its structure, instruments, and compositions be transferred to a new Turkish pop and funk music. This can be shown in the numerous in-between tunes, which move on a gradual scale between traditional folk and new Turkish pop music. Bedia Akartürk’s “Yaylanın Çimenine” (1970s) is an example of traditional Turkish music, already sounding a little proto-funky. Some traditional tunes integrate a drum set or an electrified saz, but stay more or less traditional in composition and vocal melody, like Arif Sağ’s “Bizim Şarkımız” (1974).

Other tunes are made with pop instruments—electric bass, electric guitar or saz, organ, and drum set—but still remain traditional in composition and vocal melody, like Hakkı Bulut’s “Ben Köylüyüm” (1975). And some tunes are based on Western pop music structures but are played with a mainly Turkish instrumental setting as Fikret Kızılok’s “Söyle Sazım” (1970).

There seem to have been no restrictions; many musical concepts were developed between traditional and Western pop music, mixing them, changing them, building hybrids. A special hybrid is realized by Sevil and Ayla’s “Bebek.” In 1974, Sevil and Ayla took Led Zeppelin’s “Whole Lotta Love” from 1969 and blended it with Barış Manço’s “Bebek” from 1968, which was a really clever idea. Here, Manço’s “Bebek” was plugged onto Led Zeppelin’s “Whole Lotta Love” both in terms of melody and lyrics, producing a hybrid that covers two numbers in one.

Summing up, one could say that an imperfect, low-end media technology—right the opposite of today's normative autotune—and individuals handling it in an imperfect way, can be of great value for the music. Whereas a too-perfect production can strangle the music it aims to enhance.

Setenay Gültekin has recently shown that modifications like the electrification of the saz were completed by modifications of guitar effect pedals. The musician Elektro Hafız had told, that “in electronic stores in Ankara, where they were selling a pedal called ‘nesli,’ a version of the pedal that they rearranged from Leslie pedals: ‘Everything connects in reversed ways. You cannot do it right. When you ask them why they are made like this, they say it is much easier for bağlama players, and the sound is also explicitly designed for bağlama with a unique texture’” (Gültekin 2025). Gültekin continues: “Other examples of new types of instruments, such as çağlama, microtonal guitar, and pedal inventions to catch Neşet Ertaş tone, should be mentioned at this point” (ibid.) (see fig. 1). The Neşet Ertaş Tone Pedal shows that the distinctive sound of the early e-saz serves as a reference and model for today's sound expression.



Fig. 1: Neşet Ertaş Tone Pedal.
Source: Gültekin 2025: 470.



Fig. 2: Bojidar's Alaturka Ritm-Box (RB1200), Istanbul 1970s. Source: Hainbach 2025. A big thank you to

Here, one should also mention inventions like the DIY-based Bojidar Alaturka Ritm-Box (RB1200, see fig. 2), which allows to cope with standard non-Western rhythms used in Turkey and with special sounds needed for them like the wooden spoon sound (*kaşık*).

Savio Banholzer for pointing this out to me.

The imperfect production of music was also the choice method of operation in other 'B-music' countries like Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Senegal, to name just a few, at the same period of time. But it seems none of these non-Western countries could provide such a strong musical identity and such a quantity and quality of music productions—except for India's Bollywood music production. The special manner of hybridization, following the *Hürriyet* principles, surely has to do with that. Looking at the cultural situation, some other aspects play a role, like the Atatürk spirit of modernization, the long democratic period in Turkey from 1961 till the end of the 1970s, the socio-economic development enabling both music production and consumption.

To conclude: the recognizable aesthetic of imperfection is not a result of a Kittlerian idea of misuse of media technology (Kittler 2014/1988), but more the point of a non-intentional intersection where low-end technology and limited know-how came together with the necessary enthusiasm for a new way of expression and self-definition (Gültekin 2025: 470), open to build hybrids not as a way of cultural clashes but of cultural mashes. This makes the Turkish pop and funk music so adoptable and interesting, even for a white middle-class German.

Following Byung-Chul Han's concept of hybrid culture, based on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, the voice of the 'Other' is already present in the self, as identity is based on difference (Han 2022/2005). According to Bhabha, hybridity "reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter [...] the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1994: 114). Perhaps we can hear Turkish pop and funk music of the 1960s and 1970s as both: Western music through Turkish music and Turkish music through Western music. And sometimes, and that is interesting, no one's the boss, hierarchies are melting down—which could also become interesting for the future of music, since the future always lies in the past. Perhaps, as Byung-Chul Han says, we are today "approaching a culture [...] that, expressed in acoustic terms, has become a boundless, even site-less hypercultural acoustic space in which the most diverse sounds are jammed together side by side" (Han 2022/2005: 13), a hypercultural condition of juxtaposition, simultaneity, and coexistence. And perhaps Turkish funk and pop music could be regarded as such a hypercultural sonic space—a space we could learn from.

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