

A TRIPTYCH OF TRANSCULTURAL OPERAS



MICHAEL ELLISON

BİNBOĞALAR EFSANESİ

LEGEND OF A THOUSAND BULLS

MEVLÂNA

Say I am You

DENİZ KÜSTÜ

THE SEA-CROSSED FISHERMAN

**HEZARFEN
ENSEMBLE**

BİNBOĞALAR EFSANESİ – LEGEND OF A THOUSAND BULLS

A bozlak opera by Michael Ellison, based on Yaşar Kemal's novel of the same name

- Disc 1
1. Legend of a Thousand Bulls: Prelude 2:15
- Episode 1
2. HAYDAR (Bozlak) Aman Dünyada Herşey Var 3:09
 3. NARRATORS: Soluk soluğa geldiler 2:50
 4. HAYDAR (Bozlak) Hay Koca Allah 4:50
 5. NARRATORS: Oba'nın çocukları, korkuyla, kavalcılara bakar 2:02
 6. Dans (semah). DEDE ve KORO: Allah, Allah, Allah... 2:32
- Episode 2
7. NARRATORS Koca Hızır, Kerem'im ben 5:24
 8. CEREN (Bozlak) Güzel yıldız, bir göreyim seni 6:23
 9. Caption (ensemble). Halil'in başı, Çukurova'da kışlak sorunundan kaynaklanan 0:57
- Episode 3
10. DANS Davul-Sipsi. Kışlak Ararken 0:35
 11. NARRATORS: Bu güz Çukura inince 3:11
 12. NARRATORS: Ben Muhtar Fehmi'yim 5:37
 13. HAYDAR (Bozlak) Kalktık Horasan'dan sökün eyledik 2:46
- Episode 4
14. CEREN (Türkü): Duyarım tek tek hepsini 3:00
 15. NARRATORS Ceren'e Oktay Bey Kaç yıldır sevdalı? 6:18
 16. NARRATORS Veririm seni Oktay Bey'e zorla 2:32
 17. CEREN (Bozlak) Ölelim ama, kendimiz gibi 5:09
 18. CEREN Halil'in kanı yere göllenir 2:34
 19. Caption. Halil'in öldüğü haberi gitmiş obaya 2:07
- Episode 5
20. NARRATORS Şimdi herkes düşman 3:45
 21. DANS (a city fanfare) 0:45

22. HAYDAR (Adana Bozlağı); NARRATORS Uzun evler, gecenin içinden heyula gibi	1:29
23. HAYDAR (Bozlak) Aman Çukurova'nın koca beyi	9:24
Disc 2	
1. HAYDAR Herşey deęişir bozulur	0:55
Episode 6	
2. NARRATORS Çadırları saydın mı?	2:13
3. NARRATORS O ölmüş çocuk!	2:18
4. CEREN (Bozlak) Kızlara sevdalanır kara yılan	1:55
5. CEREN (Bozlak) Halil, Halil! Gelmedin	1:54
6. Caption. Ceren kendi gönlünle Oktay Bey'e varmaya karar verir.	1:06
Episode 7	
7. NARRATORS Oktay Bey'in babası	2:45
8. HAYDAR (Bozlak) Tek kaynaktan çıktık	4:59
9. Caption. Halil beyaz atıyla geldi, kırmızı yakut gözlü	0:28
Episode 8	
10. DANS. Açılıştaki yıldız manzarasına/betimlemesine dönüş	0:44
11. NARRATORS Göster bana yıldızını, ya Hızır dileğim...	4:10
12. NARRATORS Kaçsın, kurtulsun	1:22
13. CEREN (Bozlak) Aman! Bu geceyi mi buldunuz?	6:12

Total Playing Time 110:52

Can Okan – conductor

Principal Characters

Fatma Aydoğan (Ceren) bozlak voice
 Erdem Şimsek (Haydar)
 Canan Özgür - Narrator 1
 Feride Büyükdentaş - Narrator 2
 Deniz Güngören (Oktay Bey)
 Canberk Yıldız, Chiara Giorda - dancers

Hezarfen Ensemble

Serkan Şener - kaval
 Ferhat Erdem - sipsi, kaval
 Erdem Şimsek - bağlama
 Cem Önertürk - flute, alto flute
 Kivanc Findikli - clarinet, bass clarinet
 Amy Salsgiver - percussion
 Müge Hendekli - repetiteur
 Özcan Ulucan - violin
 Ulrich Mertin - viola
 Gökhan Bağcı - cello
 Deniz Yurdakul - double bass

THE OPERA

The second of the two operas based on Yaşar Kemal, composed by Ellison and staged by Jones is *Binboğalar Efsanesi* (Legend of A Thousand Bulls), an elegiac novel about the decline and disappearance of the last nomads in Turkey, the Yörük. Steeped in Alevi culture and symbolism, the novel traces the fate of the protagonist Ceren, in love with the exiled Karachullu tribe leader, Halil, who like many a Kemal hero is wanted and has been forced to flee to the mountains.

The choice of novel showing nomads with nowhere to go was underlined by the greatest refugee crisis in the world since 1945, with migrants from war-torn Syria, Africa and other places pouring into Europe, and especially Türkiye, where it is estimated 4 million Syrians migrated and settled. *Binboğalar's* conception as a *bozlak* opera dates from a letter from Kemal's wife, Ayşe Semiha Baban, to the composer in 2017. Here, Baban underscores the (Kurdish) Kemal's admiration ('although they are not Kurdish') for the Alevi Türkmen pastoralists who defied the Ottoman state dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries, as memorialised in *Kalktı Göç Eyledi Avşar Elleri* sung by *bozlak* master Muharrem Ertaş. Already passionate about the Kırşehir *bozlak* of Ertaş and his more widely known son, Neşet Ertaş, the composer determined a form for *Binboğalar Efsanesi* that would be in complete contrast to the magical realism and action of *Deniz Küstü*. Instead, *bozlak* sung by folk musicians would dominate the drama, which would be interspersed by a dyad of narrators: Jones asking for a male and female, but the composer insisting on two females, to create a more unified and powerful diaphony.

Fluid connections between scenes would be replaced by a more number-opera like structure in which *bozlak* and narrations alternated, crafted by Jones into eight Episodes. The (Turkish) libretto involved an intensive process of rewriting novel passages to create folk music-style verses, which the composer did with the help of Yasemin Kuyucaklı. Workshops funded by the European Research Council (the funder of both operas) brought *bozlak* singers, *bağlama* players, plus *sipsi* (yörük) musicians to work with Hezarfen Ensemble at MIAM in Istanbul, where the work gestated. Though finding singers who could also handle contemporary music was a distinct challenge, Istanbul Technical University folk music graduate Fatma Aydoğan joined the project as Ceren, and *bağlama* specialist Erdem Simsek, already in the project, decided he could take on the role of Haydar. Ting Huang (London/Fujian) was brought into do stage and costume design, and Nigel Edwards

lighting, with Evrim Akyay choreographing the two dancers who intertwine with the singers at critical moments. Finding Narrators who could sing in both a contemporary and straight-toned folk style (Canan Özgür and Feride Büyükdenktaş) was also critical to the work's sonic vision. The version of Binboğalar Efsanesi captured here is from two performances recorded June 17, 2023 at Süreyya Opera House in Kadıköy, Istanbul, concluding the 51. Istanbul Music Festival (Efruz Çakırkaya). In her review two days later, Andante Magazine's Hale Tetik captured the flavour of Binboğalar's premiere:

Before the piece began, I kept thinking about the pleasant conversation I'd had with Hezarfen Ensemble, Michael Ellison, Ulrich Mertin and Can Okan. They viewed Yaşar Kemal as a literary figure who spoke for those who had no voice, who could be seen as humanity's voice of conscience. Of special significance was the poeticness of his language, and especially the way he handled the subject of migration. Would we as the audience, however, be able to sense all of this and be able to grasp the essence of the work ourselves? By the end of the piece I had a definitive answer: this musical theatre indeed spoke for those without a voice, drew in the audience in by its poetic potency, and made one think seriously about contemporary issues of migration. Moreover, the use of Anatolian instruments had an impact that far exceeded my expectations. Kaval, sipsi, and the ever-present bağlama merged with violin, viola, and other instruments in a vibrant and superb ensemble. Throughout the work, as audience, we felt deeply Ceren's love for Halil, the oppression and violence visited on the Yörüks, the values and türküs (folk music) we lost in the name of modernisation, and the fact that the extinction of one of us is equal to the death of us all. (Tetik, 2023)

Binboğalar Efsanesi (Legend of A Thousand Bulls) is a bozlak opera in eight episodes (in Turkish) based on the masterpiece novel by Yaşar Kemal, and musically on Bozlak and Alevi music of southeastern Anatolia. Binboğalar Efsanesi traces the demise of the last of the nomadic Yörük tribes in the Çukurova/Adana region of southeastern Turkey as their millennia-old pastoral way of life is destroyed by modernization, the incomprehension of the settled, and simple greed; in a tale full of resonances and parallels to the situation in which humanity finds itself today.

References

Tetik, Hale. Bir Bozlak Operasının Dünya Prömiyeri: Binboğalar Efsanesi [A Bozlak opera's World Premiere: Legend of A Thousand Bulls] June 19, 2023, Istanbul: Andante Türkiye'nin Klasik Müzik Dergisi)

SYNOPSIS

On Hidirelliz night, it is believed that any person who sees the two stars İlyas and Hızır meet, will have his or her wish granted. While the entire Karachullu tribe, (one of the last of the nomadic tribes in southeastern Anatolia) led by the elder blacksmith Haydar, agrees as one to wish for the summer grazing pastures and safe wintering lands; in the end each tribe member who sees the stars meet assumes land will be found and wishes for something closer to their heart. The boy Kerem wishes for a falcon, the maid Ceren for the return of her would-be lover Halil, and so on—with disastrous consequences.

With no places for the tribe to winter or even spend shorter amounts of time, embattled and extorted from every side, Haydar recalls the exquisite Kirmani swords of his ancestors that defied the Ottoman for centuries, and puts his hope in creating the ultimate gift for the Pashas of today—overlooking the fact that those in power have no concern whatsoever anymore with his world, nor any idea of the value and significance of such a gift. Karachullu leader Halil, in trouble with the law because of one of the constant skirmishes with settled villagers, remains in exile in the mountains. In the face of tribal custom, Ceren is forced to consider marrying the suitor Oktay Bey who owns land in nearby Çukurova, yet she holds out hope for her true love Halil's return. Despite the passion of Haydar's work and Ceren's defiance, slowly the tribe around them dissipates, becoming weaker and weaker, until the following Hidirelliz when Halil returns, and those left finally have the chance to wish on Hidirelliz night once more.



CAST

Fatma Aydođan (Ceren)

Fatma was born in 1991 in Gümüşhacıköy, Amasya. Initially receiving piano and music education at Safranbolu İMKB Anatolian Fine Arts High School, the young artist won first place in Turkish Folk Music (THM) singing competitions held in Antalya and Sivas. During her high school years, she participated in many concerts and events, receiving training in oud, viola, and piano. She received repertoire training from Erol Parlak, Can Etilil Ökten, and İsmail Altunsaray. She participated in Aysun Gültekin's masterclass, the TRT Youth Choir, and the "İNŞA" Turkish Folk Music group as a soloist and choir member. During this period, Fatma performed as a soloist in various television and radio programs, and also performed as a soloist in a "Neşet Ertaş Commemoration" event alongside masters such as Gülşen Kutlu, Nuray Hafıtaş, Nazlı Öksüz, Erol Parlak, Hüseyin Turan, and İsmail Altunsay. Fatma performed as a soloist on the Baku Green Theatre stage during the "Azerbaijan Army Day" events organized in collaboration with Ondokuz Mayıs University and Baku Caucasus University. Inspired by wise bards such as Muharrem Ertaş, Neşet Ertaş, Hacı Taşan, and Çekiç Ali, Fatma, with the knowledge she gained at the conservatory, stood a step ahead of her seventies-long followers among the new generation.

Erdem Şimşek (Haydar)

Erdem Şimşek is a virtuoso bağlama player who has performed in Germany, Italy, and throughout Turkey. Founder of the Bengi Bağlama trio and frequent artist on TRT (Turkish Radio Television), Şimşek was influenced by Aşık Süleyman Koçak. He is lecturer of bağlama at the Istanbul State Conservatory in Music (TDMK), Istanbul Technical University. Şimşek performs in national and international projects, and has appeared on numerous albums. His research concerns different tuning systems and instrument design.

Canan Özgür (Narrator 1)

Soprano Canan Özgür (b. 1986) studied at Robert College and Boğaziçi University before completing her Master's degree in Opera (2016) and Proficiency in Opera (2019) at the Istanbul University State Conservatory, later receiving the title of Associate Professor in 2020. She has performed widely across Europe and beyond, appearing in opera productions and concerts in numerous countries. Her competition successes include first prizes at the World Grand Prix International Music Contest and the Vivaldi International Music Competition, as well as a Gold Prize at the World Classical Music Awards. Among her stage

appearances are roles in Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea* and a gala performance of the Queen of the Night in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at the Sofia State Opera.

Since 2015 she has also been a member of the vocal ensemble A Capella Boğaziçi, whose album *Ethnos* and widely viewed music videos have brought the group international recognition, including festival appearances across Europe and Asia. Alongside her performing career, Özgür has pursued an academic path: she holds degrees in Chemical Engineering and Computational Sciences and Engineering from Boğaziçi University and has published research in peer-reviewed journals. She has taught at several universities in Istanbul and, since 2023, has served as Associate Professor at Ankara University of Music and Fine Arts.

Feride Büyükdenktaş (Narrator 2) Mezzo Soprano

Turkish mezzo-soprano Feride Büyükdenktaş is one of the country's brightest classical singers. After winning one of Turkey's most important vocal competitions and being a well-connected member of Istanbul's music scene, her path seemed clear. Following her master's program with Ulf Bästlein and Holger Falk at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria, she has performed in the opera houses of Graz, Klagenfurt and Stuttgart, as well as the Istanbul State Opera. Her operatic roles include Cherubino in Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro", Annio in Mozart's "La Clemenza di Tito", and Bradamante in Händel's "Alcina". Moreover, she has had the privilege to collaborate with prominent conductors and directors such as David Hermann, Eva-Maria Höckmayr, Marco Štorman, Nicholas Carter, Keri-Lynn Wilson, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Christoph Eschenbach, Helmuth Rilling and Fazıl Say. As an artist passionate about art songs she has also given recitals with leading pianists like Julius Drake and Charles Spencer in prestigious venues such as Concertgebouw Amsterdam and Konzerthaus Wien.

In addition to these experiences she has taken part in masterclasses with Brigitte Fassbaender, Roberta Alexander, Christoph Prégardien and Richard Stokes. Feride is a Britten-Pears Young Artist for 2017; winner of the "Nordfriesischen Liedpreis des Landes Schleswig-Holstein"; and also a scholar of the State of Styria.

Deniz Güngören (Oktay Bey)

Deniz Güngören is a composer, songwriter, arranger, and singer from Istanbul. Born in Istanbul in 1987, Deniz Güngören began his musical journey at the age of 11, taking classical

guitar lessons from Serhat Özgöz. In 2016, he participated in the Cologne premiere of his work “Musiquekes,” a collection of short miniatures, at the invitation of the contemporary chamber music ensemble Ensemble Garage. Since 2017, Güngören has performed as a singer in various jazz clubs and festivals across Turkey, presenting a repertoire consisting of his own compositions, arrangements, and jazz standards. In 2020, recordings were released featuring two folk music arrangements that could be considered both jazz and chamber music, performed with Sinan Altıparmak, Apostolos Sideris, Barış Ertürk, and Duru Tuna. In 2019 and 2020, to celebrate May Day, two historically significant workers’ anthems, “The Internationale” and “The Austrian Workers’ Anthem,” arranged for chamber music ensembles and singers, were released. The project of Yürüyen Merdiven, a modern jazz duo consisting of Yiğit Özatalay and Mustafa Kemal Emirel, also continues its work within the scope of the “Songs to Nazım” project, which features musical compositions of Nazım Hikmet’s poems and includes theater artists Orhan Aydın and Tülay Günel. In 2019, he performed as a vocalist in the Turkish premiere of Enis Gümüş’s “The Earth Falls to the Ground,” in 2022 in the world premiere of Yiğit Özatalay’s “Yok Mu Var” under the Bristol New Music Festival, and in 2023 in the world premiere of Michael Ellison’s opera “Binboğalar Efsanesi,” adapted from Yaşar Kemal’s novel of the same name, as part of the IKSVM Istanbul Music Festival. In 2024, he performed with the Hezarfen Ensemble in their commissioned work “Öyle Birisi Yok” and their rearranged version of “Uç Kurt Weill Şarkısı,” as well as in Özkan Manav’s “Müzikli Şiirler.” In 2023, under the musical direction of Sabri Tuluğ Tırpan, he participated as an orchestrator in the musical “1923” and “Pentagram Epic Symphony,” and in 2024, in the “Sibel Can & Hüsnü Şenlendirici Symphonic” project.

Can Okan (conductor)

Can Okan was born in 1986, Istanbul, Turkey. He started to take piano lessons in 1994 with Meliha Doğuduyal. He started his education in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University State Conservatory in 1997 and he continued his piano lessons with prof. Metin Ülkü. He started his orchestra conducting education with Prof. Gürer Aykal in 2005. He gave his first concert as a conductor with Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra in 2007. Okan has conducted all State Symphony orchestras in Turkey, including the Presidential Symphony Orchestra and Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra since 2013. He made his first studio recording, including complete Impromptus of Schubert, released on 2015. Okan conducted the Turkish premiere of Stravinsky’s opera “The Rake’s Progress” with Istanbul State Opera and Ballet in 2017. He also conducted Britten’s “The Turn of the Screw” and “Falstaff” in Istanbul, plus “Die Zauberflöte” and “Rigoletto” in Salzburg within the “Oper im Berg Festival”.

Can Okan completed his doctorate education with Prof. Metin Ülkü in Mimar Sinan Fine

Arts State Conservatory in 2019. In the same year, he conducted a new production of "Aida" by Ankara State Opera and Ballet. He started to get education of master degree for third time at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University which is based on philosophy since 2020. He made two digital concert recordings with Bilkent Symphony Orchestra in 2021. Okan conducted the Turkish premiere of „Sahmeran“ composed by Fazil Say and also performed Mozart with him as a soloist. Okan is working as Associate Professor in the orchestral conducting department, studying philosophy, giving lectures and concerts both as pianist and conductor in Turkey and abroad.



Gökhan Bağcı (cello) and Michael Ellison



Erdem Şimsek (Haydar)



Narrators Feride Büyükdentkas (L) and Canan Özgür (R)



Fatma Aydoğan (Ceren)

Recorded June 14, 2023, Istanbul Süreyya Opera House
Simon Jones –direction and adaptation
Simon Jones, Yasemin Kuyucaklı, M. Ellison – Libretto
Pieter Snapper, İsmail Akkaya – Audio engineers
Laçın Şahin and Öğüz Öz– Audio editing
Edited at MIAM studios, Istanbul Technical University
Editing, Mixing and Mastering by Pieter Snapper at Babajim studios
Ulrich Mertin, Michael Ellison - Ensemble codirectors
Binboğalar Efsanesi production photos by Claire Lacout Özdemir © 2023

With special thanks to Istanbul Music Festival Director Efruz Çakırkaya; Ayşe Semiha Baban; Süreyya Opera House, Aslı Ayhan, Ayşegül Altıok, and Uğur Önür. (çok teşekkür ederiz)

Sponsors

ERC (European Research Council), Istanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı (IKSV), Süreyya Opera, MIAM Centre for Advanced Studies in Music, University of Bristol

* İSTANBUL MÜZİK FESTİVALİ ESER siparişi
commissioned by istanbul music festival
GÖSTERİ EŞ SPONSORLARI
PERFORMANCE CO-SPONSORS
BERRİN ERENGÜL • EVA BARLAS



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's

**The full libretto for *Binboğalar Efsanesi*
(*Legend of A Thousand Bulls*), complete
with translation can be downloaded at:
divineartrecords.com/77401dbook
or scan the QR code for access.**



MEVLÂNA – SAY I AM YOU

An opera by Michael Ellison (2012)

Libretto by Michael Ellison based on the poetry of Rumi

Disc 3

ACT I

1. Tableau 1:	I dreamed of a time (Melike)	10.52
2. Tableau 2:	I've wandered thirsty (Shams)	7.37
3. Tableau 3:	Mevlâna, Mevlâna (Students)	7.33
4. Tableau 4:	Who's at the door? (Shams, Mevlâna)	17.43

ACT II

5. Tableau 5:	The time moves oh, so slowly (Students, Veled)	10.26
6. Tableau 6:	My dear father (Melike)	6.41
7. Tableau 7:	Did you know, Veled's found Shams (Students, Mevlâna)	8.02
8. Tableau 8:	It's been 40 days, like he's in a tomb (Students, Mevlâna)	10.59

Total duration: 79.53

Principal (named) characters:

Arnout Lems (baritone): Mevlâna

Gunnar Brandt-Sigurdsson (tenor) : Shams

Ekaterina Levental (mezzo-soprano): Melike

Tiemo Wang (baritone): Veled

Maciej Straburzyński (bass-baritone): Allaudin

VOCAALLAB : Hezarfen Ensemble

Music Direction: Lucas Vis

THE OPERA

Say I am You (2012), a world premiere co-production between İKSV and Rotterdam Operadagen presented by the Istanbul Music Festival, is a contemporary opera by Michael Ellison presented here with video scenography by Tessa Joosse. It dramatically traces the story of the transformation of Jelaluddin Rumi (*Mevlâna*) from ordinary scholar to ecstatic mystic at the hands of wandering dervish Shams-i Tabriz. Composed for VOCAALLAB and Hezarfen Ensemble, *Say I am You* is groundbreaking on a number of levels. First, there is the instrumentation, which, with its inclusion of Turkish instruments into the ensemble for an hour-plus drama, creates a sonic landscape absolutely unique to this work. Then there is the use of its dynamic vocal ensemble, a rivetingly powerful five-voice unit realized by VOCAALLAB which permeates the musical texture with a wide array of vocal utterances, at times representing voices of the ‘unseen,’ and other times Mevlâna’s students. Then there is the casting of an Azeri style *mugam* voice (Gunnar Brandt-Sirgurdsson) in the role of Shams demanded by the score, which sharply delineates Shams’ character timbrally both from the other soloists Mevlâna (Arnout Lems) and his daughter, Melike (Ekaterina Levantal), and from vocal ensemble, corresponding to the use of *ney* and *kanun* in the ensemble.

Shams is a polarizing figure in *Say I am You*, content to stop at nothing in his quest to provide the right conditions for Mevlâna’s transformation. He arrives in Konya in search of ‘a true friend’, but having done so also quickly finds himself a maligned ‘other’, or outsider when Mevlâna’s months of *sohbet* (spiritual conversation) with Shams behind closed doors pull him away from his students, causing profound resentment. As self-appointed defender of the status quo, Mevlâna’s son Allaudin initiates a plot to expel Shams from the community.

On the inner level, Mevlâna, having understood a profound affinity with Shams, nevertheless cries out that he did not ask for this pain that Shams has brought him: what has he done to deserve such? However, it is precisely because of Mevlana’s sincerity, selflessness and enormous patience that he has been ‘chosen’ by Shams to undergo such trials—to be able to consequently experience divine love.

SYNOPSIS

Act I (Tableaux 1-4)

Mevlâna (Rumi)'s son Allaudin returns to the city from his studies in Damascus, finding a joking welcome from his older brother Veled and then his father, who blesses his return.

Shams-i Tabriz, upon arrival in Konya is led to Mevlâna by his daughter Melike. After challenging him with questions in their first, fateful, encounter, Shams vows to destroy the ties that hold Rumi back. To the indignation of all, he throws all of Mevlâna's precious books away. Mevlâna smarts under Shams' blows, but accepts everything.

Act II (Tableaux 5-8)

With Mevlâna and Shams behind closed doors for six months, Rumi's students become impatient. Veled and Melike distract them with stories, but Allaudin stirs them up to the point that Shams decides to leave. Veled goes to Aleppo to find him, and the students celebrate this return with a *sema* (ecstatic dance).

But then Allaudin expels Shams for good (whether murder or something else, no one knows). Mevlâna, left alone, is devastated. First he mourns, but then eventually realizes that what Shams has given him is inside himself. Emerging at long last to the joy of his students, he forgives them and even Allaudin for their actions against Shams, anointing the goldsmith Salattin Zarkub as Shams' successor.

Seeing their hesitation, Rumi sings of death and his longing for the source of life beyond seen existence, and the opera ends on the theme with which it began: 'Listen to the Reed'.

THE PERFORMERS

VOCAALLAB Nederland

Vocaal**LAB** is an international studio and production house for singers and composers, develops new vocal music in combination with theatre, dance, film, visual art and other art forms. It integrates the activities of training talented singers, research & experiment, and the production of music theatre and educational performances from solo works to chamber operas.

Hezarfen Ensemble

Since its formation in January 2010, Hezarfen Ensemble has had an enormous impact on the contemporary music scene in Istanbul. It has given countless Turkish premieres of works by composers from around the world, in innovative formats, as well as presenting Turkish works to European audiences in Germany and Holland as well as in Turkey itself. Hezarfen has appeared on the Istanbul Music Festival (2011, 2012), Rotterdam Operadagen (2012) and on series at Borusan Music House (2010-2012) Akbank Sanat (2011) the New Music Days Bilkent University Festival (2011) The Institut Francais, and Goethe Institute. Hezarfen has commissioned and premiered new works by Turgut Pöğün, Özkan Manav, Samir Odeh-Tamimi, Onur Türkmen, Ed Bennett, Adrian Hart, Taner Akyol, and Kamran Ince, and has collaborated with ensembles Yurodny (Ireland), Adaptor (Berlin) and Variancés (France) as well as VOCAALLAB Nederland.

Lucas Vis

Lucas Vis (b.1947) is considered a specialist for contemporary music. He has worked with important composers such as John Cage, Mauricio Kagel, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Theo Loevendie, Louis Andriessen and many others.

From 1976 to 1979 he was principal conductor of the 'Nederlands Ballet Orkest', where he conducted performances of both classical and modern ballet; as guest conductor he has led all Dutch orchestras, such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra, and the Noordhollands Philharmonisch Orkest in Haarlem, where he appeared on the podium for works from many different eras. At the Netherlands Opera Lucas has conducted not only operas by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Giacomo Puccini, Ferruccio Busoni, Bruno Maderno and Giuseppe Verdi, but also many premieres by such Dutch composers as Otto Ketting, Theo Loevendie and Guus Jansen.

Studio Production Credits:

Recorded in 2012 by Pieter Snapper and Can Karadoğan at MIAM Studios, Istanbul Mixed by Pieter Snapper at MIAM Studios

Mastered by Pieter Snapper at Babajim Mastering, Istanbul (www.babajim.com) Mastering assistant Mirko d'Agostino

Booklet Photos (The premiere performance):

H. Yılmaz Ulus, Willemijn de Graaff Studio photos: Ayşenur Sarier

All images copyright and used with permission – all rights reserved All musical copyright : Michael Ellison (Copyright Control)

Sections of Say I am You-Mevlâna were composed during a residency in 2006 at Copland House, NY. SAY I AM YOU-MEVLÂNA

PRODUCTION VENUES

June 1, 2012 Rotterdam Operadagen, Rotterdam

June 24, 2012 40th Istanbul Music Festival: Hagia Eirene Church, Topkapi Palace, Istanbul

Say I am You-Mevlâna is a production of Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSVA) in coproduction with DutchCulture, Centre for International Cooperation within the framework of Cultural Exchange Turkey – The Netherlands 2012, Operadagen Rotterdam, Netherlands Consulate General Istanbul & VOCAALLAB Nederland.

The full libretto for *Mevlâna – Say I Am You*, complete with translation can be downloaded at:
divineartrecords.com/77401dbook

or scan the QR code for access.





Hezarfen Ensemble and VOCAALLAB
Hagia Eirene Church, 40th Istanbul Music Festival, June 24, 2012

VOCAALLAB

Arnout Lems, baritone (Mevlâna)
Gunnar Brandt-Sigurdsson, tenor (Shams)
Ekaterina Levental, mezzo-soprano (Melike)
Angela Postweiler, soprano
Els Mondelaers, mezzo-soprano
Fanny Alofs, mezzo-soprano
Tiemo Wang, baritone (Veled)
Maciej Straburzyński, bass-baritone (Allaudin)

Hezarfen Ensemble

Özcan Ulucan, violin
Ulrich Mertin, viola
Gökhan Bağcı, violoncello
Jochen Carls, double bass
Nihan Atalay, piccolo, flute, alto flute
Nusret İspir, clarinet & bass clarinet
Süleyman Yardım, ney
Bassem Alkhouri, kanun
Amy Salsgiver, percussion

Lucas Vis musical direction

DENİZ KÜSTÜ – THE SEA-CROSSED FISHERMAN

Total Music Theatre in Four Scenes

Music by Michael Ellison (2016)

Based on the novel by Yaşar Kemal

Adapted from the novel and libretto by Simon Jones

Disc 4

1. Deniz Küstü –The Sea-Crossed Fisherman: SEA-MUSIC (Instrumental) 0:53

Scene 1

2. VILLAGERS “Murder here! - A dusty blast from the mad south wind” 2:29
3. Blind to the waves crashing over the asphalt road 0:52
4. ZEYNEL, VILLAGERS ‘Bastard!’ Zeynel was crazy! 1:59
5. VILLAGERS Selim! Bastard! Murderer! 2:16
6. NARRATOR Silently, I cursed the whole world 2:40

Scene 2

7. SEA-MUSIC 1:04
8. SELIM It’s a month now I’ve been after him 4:09
9. SELIM, VILLAGERS I had a dolphin friend once... 2:01
10. DOLPHIN DANCE. VILLAGERS There they were, streaming up to him 2:18
11. VILLAGERS “Nobody recalls what year it was when dolphin oil became a precious commodity.” 1:29
12. SELIM, VILLAGERS “Don’t do this! There are many other fish in the sea.” 1:32
13. VILLAGERS, SELIM It was then people gave him the nickname:
Sea-Crossed Selim. 3:13
14. VILLAGERS, SELIM He went mad, poor fisher Selim 1:18
15. VILLAGERS, SELIM In the old days, not now 6:39

Scene 3

16. VILLAGERS 'I killed a man!'- announces Zeynel	2:04
17. VILLAGERS - Who's that? - 'Only a fisherman,' (Zeynel accused of deception)	2:07
18. VILLAGERS 'So what... I killed Ihsan!'	3:42
19. FORTUNE-TELLER Buyurun!	2:26
20. 'Boza!'	1:17
21. VILLAGERS Istanbul police showered with tip-offs	4:15

Scene 4

22. SEA-MUSIC (Selim Builds a House)	0:45
23. SELIM This spring, I'm gonna buy that land	3:15
24. SELIM, ZEYNEL "Zeynel, my child The police are coming"	4:17
25. SELIM Let's build my house at once!	2:03
26. VILLAGERS, SELIM He'll take her from the sea...	1:08
27. VILLAGERS, SELIM Don't you know me, Selim? I'm Süleyman	2:46
28. SELIM, VEZİROĞLU, VILLAGERS: I want to see Halim Bey Veziroğlu!	2:07
29. SELIM It wasn't her!	1:48

Total Playing Time 69:05

Soloists:

Gwion Thomas (SELIM, a fisherman)
Robyn Allegra Parton (MENEKŞE VILLAGER/NARRATOR/CHORUS)
Louise Innes (MENEKŞE VILLAGER/CHORUS)
Damian Thantrey (FISHERMAN/EAGLE'S OWNER/CHORUS)
Adam Green (FISHERMAN/BOATMAN/CHORUS)

Hezarfen Ensemble
Conducted by Michael Rafferty

THE OPERA

Deniz Küstü (The Sea-Crossed Fisherman) is a proto-environmentalist novel, whose narrative is based on an incident that its author, Yaşar Kemal, had witnessed working in the mid-50's as a journalist in Istanbul:

It was the year 1953 or, perhaps 1954. The managing editor of Cumhuriyet, Cevat Fehmi Başkut, called me and told me about two Italian freighters that had anchored off Haydarpaşa port. As Cevat explained, they were paying huge sums of money for dolphin oil. I was curious. I got in a fisher's boat and sailed off to Auva—you see I lived in Florya for 45 years and had many fisher friends as well as fishing boats. There what I had seen was horrible. It is a very sad story. There were schools of dolphins and they were being shot off Auva's shores with rifles. I saw the cauldrons on the shore where dolphins were boiled for their oil, and I smelt the thick dolphin oil in the air.' (Özdağ, 2008)

Though it took Kemal until 1977 to write the novel ('Some can write about cruelty, but not me' [Özdağ, 2008]) in 2013, composer Michael Ellison went to visit Kemal, and his wife Ayşe Semiha Baban, in their house overlooking the Bosphorus on the Asian side of Istanbul. Ellison mentioned a possibility of two operas being funded, and asked for Kemal's advice on which of his novels to adapt. Because of Deniz Küstü's setting in Istanbul, which matched the kemençe, kanun, and ney forces Ellison wished to include, as well as Baban's strong advocacy, the novel was given (in its English translation) to the librettist/director Simon Jones to adapt for the stage. Video designer-performers Nohlab and choreographer Zeynep Tanbay joined the creative team to complete the Total Music Theatre vision of the opera, bringing together visually the richly intertwined narration, with its shocking events (two murders) and environmental repercussions. Video and music shown here are from the Istanbul premiere.

James Imam of Opera Magazine, who travelled to the Istanbul festival premiere in 2016, wrote: "The Sea-Crossed Fisherman is an arresting picture of Istanbul, from its glittering dawns to its seething underbelly, and Kemal navigates a web of 'proto-environmentalist' themes through the intertwining fates of the Fisherman Selim and the adolescent bandit Zeynel.His lyrical prose is a good fit for the American composer Michael Ellison...". Gianluigi Mattiotti of Amadeus magazine, attending from Italy, wrote: ...'Deniz Küstü reflects the creation of a kind of total work of art in which were interwoven music, singing, acting, and

dance, together with the stunningly beautiful videos of Nohlab...Ellison's music played well by alternating, through dramatically compelling means, fantastic episodes and the "noir", in a way that seamlessly integrated contemporary elements and the traditional Turkish instruments.' Local reaction was similarly effusive, with İsmail Hakkı Aksu (Reflections on Art, Istanbul) calling the adaptation of Deniz Küstü 'A masterpiece', that 'showed us how Music Theatre should be done'. Vecdi Sayar, of Taraf (newspaper) commented: 'The realization of Yaşar Kemal's magic permeated every second of the work's ninety minutes, with its elements achieving a spectacular unity[...]. Of a quality rarely seen on our stages....in every way worthy of the masterful Yaşar Kemal.'

Deniz Küstü's portrayal of Istanbul's sea-scape and underbelly provided ample pretence for including the *sanat müziği* (classical makam) instruments ney, kemençe and kanun, along with Hezarfen Ensemble, as well as the structure of Jones' adaptation, in which Scenes 2 and 4 representing dolphins and the very human, 'proto-environmentalist' Fisher Selim, with scenes 1 and especially 3 focusing on the gossiping inhabitants of the fishing village, Menekşe, and the timid orphan, Zeynel Çelik, the skinny boy-turned fearful urban legend who Selim attempts to ferry to safety as the opera reaches its dramatic conclusion.

References

Özdağ, Ufuk. Reading Yaşar Kemal's The Sea-Crossed Fisherman in the Year of the Dolphin. In Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies 34.1 March 2008: 45-74.

SYNOPSIS

Total Music Theatre in Four Scenes

CHARACTERS:

SELİM, a fisherman

FISHERMEN & THEIR WIVES

FORTUNE-TELLER

ZEYNEL (dancer)

VEZİROĞLU (dancer)

SCENE: a coffee-house in Menekşe, a small village outside Istanbul, the Marmara Sea and various locations in Istanbul.

1ST SCENE: THE MURDER OF IHSAN: A coffee-house in the fishing village of Menekşe on the Marmara Sea outside Istanbul. The villagers return from the funeral of the local gangster Ihsan. The village-loner Selim enters, prompting the others to relive Ihsan's traumatic death at the hands of the orphaned street-child Zeynel. Even though Selim tried to intervene, they end up blaming him for Zeynel's actions.

2ND SCENE: SELIM'S DOLPHIN: Selim is fishing for swordfish in his boat. As he struggles to catch a prize specimen, the villagers continue their gossiping, recounting a story of Selim's love for a dolphin. Suddenly, this tale turns into a nightmare as the dolphins are slaughtered and boiled for their oil. Selim is horrified at the violence, but can do nothing to stop it, so he gets drunk, as sea, boat and coffee-house merge into one stormy, drunken dreamscape. Full of self-loathing at his own impotence, Selim accepts a boat-load of dolphin carcasses. Recognizing his own beloved dolphin dead amongst them, he falls asleep in despair and mental exhaustion. As he sleeps, the villagers' gossip becomes malicious and fantastical, recounting how he went insane and fell in love with a mermaid. Finally, Selim wakes as a policeman appears to question him about Ihsan's murder.

3RD SCENE: ZEYNEL'S FLIGHT: The villagers read reports of Zeynel on the run in Istanbul, chased by police through the sights and sounds of the city. Zeynel finds a brief moment of sanctuary amongst the moored boats on the Golden Horn, before the chase starts up again even more frantically. The newspaper headlines become hysterical, building up Zeynel into an all-powerful gangster. In another moment of respite, Zeynel sees a fortune-teller with his eagle, handing out fortunes on slips of paper. The bird's motion whips the crowd into a panicked frenzy of fearful and accusatory speculation, confirming Zeynel's now mythic status. Meanwhile Zeynel himself becomes so desperate he decides to return to Menekşe, just as the crowd recognize him and point him out.

4TH SCENE: SELIM BUILDS A HOUSE: Whilst Selim is dreaming again of the mermaid on his boat, the swordfish reappears. As Selim reels him in, the fish turns out to be Zeynel at the end of the line. Selim promises to smuggle Zeynel abroad to safety. As they journey out to sea, their moods oscillate wildly between fear that the other will murder them, to joy they will survive and escape. Eventually Zeynel's paranoia overwhelms him and he pulls his gun on Selim, who overpowers and kills him. In another extreme mood-swing, Selim

decides to use Zeynel's hoard of stolen cash to build his dream-home for the mermaid to live in. As he hands out wads of banknotes, the villagers enthusiastically help him. Soon the building-work turns into feasting to celebrate the new house, as Selim's mood shifts again and he contemplates suicide. Meanwhile the villagers tell of the arrival of factory ships, run by the new village hard-man, "developer" Vezirođlu. They encourage Selim to give up his traditional fishing and go work on these ships. As Vezirođlu is feted by the villagers, Selim appears to come to a resolution: he approaches the developer and shoots him with Zeynel's gun. Everyone flees, leaving Selim for one last time on his boat out at sea. There he sees a family of dolphins. The world is suddenly clear and bright, the huge open sea blue, blooming like a flower of joy.

Recorded June 16, 2016, Istanbul Süreyya Opera House

Sinan Özçelik - Live Audio Recording

Pieter Snapper - Editing, Mixing and Mastering at MIAM and Babajim studios, Istanbul

Deniz Küstü photos by Tony Judge © 2016

Thanks (teşekkür ediyoruz) to Istanbul Music Festival Director Yeşim Güner, Assistant Director Efruz Çakırkaya, James Black, Mark Kendall, and Peter Hall; Ayşe Semiha Baban and Yaşar Kemal; Hezarfen'den Nermin Kaygusuz, Ahmet Toz, Esra Berkman, Volkan Cosar, Dağhan Dođu ve Çağdaş Engin'e

Sponsors

ERC (European Research Council), Istanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı (İKSV), Süreyya Operası, MIAM Centre for Advanced Studies in Music, University of Bristol

Copyrighted text used by permission of Yaşar Kemal and Aragi, Inc.



The full libretto for *Deniz Küstü –The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, complete with translation can be downloaded at:
<https://divineartrecords.com/77401dbook>
or scan the QR code for access.





MICHAEL ELLISON

The music of Michael Ellison seamlessly integrates contemporary and traditional influences into a unique and personal idiom. In particular his three transcultural operas, beginning with *Mevlâna-Say I am You* (Rotterdam Operadagen and Istanbul Music Festivals, 2012) have broken new ground, achieving an unprecedented level of integration of Turkish traditional instruments into contemporary music—a direction his second opera, *Deniz Küstü* (Istanbul Music Festival, 2016, Jones/Tanbay/NOHlab) extends. *Binboğalar Efsanesi*, (Legend of a Thousand Bulls), premiered on the Istanbul Music Festival in 2023 builds on this in a new direction, incorporating Anatolian instruments with Bozlak voices alongside contemporary ensemble. Ellison has been commissioned and performed by BBC Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Variances, *Acht Brücken* Festival Cologne, Radio France, *Aspects des musiques d'aujourd'hui*, Grenoble Festival, New York Youth Symphony, Siemens Foundation, Nova Chamber Music Series and SoundWorld, amongst many others. Ellison is co-founder and co-director of Turkey's leading contemporary music group, Hezarfen Ensemble. He was also principal Investigator on the European Research Council project *Beyond East and West: Developing and Documenting an Evolving Transcultural Musical Practice* (2015-2023) <https://www.beyondeastandwest.org/>, the PI of AHRC-Istanbul Development Agency supported project *Transtraditional Istanbul*.

SIMON JONES

Simon Jones is a writer and director, founder and co-director of Bodies in Flight (UK), which has to date produced 20 works and numerous documents of performance that have at their heart the encounter between flesh and text, where *words move* and *flesh utters*. He has been visiting scholar at Amsterdam University (Netherlands), visiting artist at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (US) and Banff Arts Centre (Canada). He has published in Contemporary Theatre Review, Entropy Magazine, Live art magazine, *Shattered Anatomies*, *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, Performance Research: *on Beckett* and *on Memento*. He co-edited *Practice as Research in Performance and Screen* (2009) and *Artists in the Archive* (2018) and his work with Bodies in Flight features in Josephine Machon's (*Syn)aesthetics? Towards a Definition of Visceral Performance* (2009). He is currently preparing a book on Bodies in Flight for Intellect (UK). He is Emeritus Professor of Performance at the University of Bristol (UK).

HEZARFEN ENSEMBLE

Hezarfen Ensemble, founded in 2010 by Ulrich Mertin and Michael Ellison, is the leading professional contemporary music ensemble in Turkey. With signature projects ranging from trio to three transcultural chamber operas — *Deniz Küstü* (2016) *Say I am You* (2012) and *Binboğalar Efsanesi* (2023) the impact of Hezarfen on music in Turkey has been profound, changing the face of contemporary music in its home country, while the infectious energy of its performances has brought acclaim for the ensemble in its appearances at festivals across Europe. Through its performances, lectures and workshops, the ensemble aims to energize the contemporary music scene in Istanbul and Turkey, providing an international platform on which Turkish composers can have their music performed at the highest level, and one on which the most important contemporary international composers have their works introduced to Turkey.

Key performances abroad have included Kontinent Dalsland (Sweden, 2023), Bristol New Music (UK, 2022), Eight Bridges Festival (Cologne, 2017), MärzMusik (Berlin, 2013), Rotterdam Operadagen (2012), the Divan project (Berlin and Istanbul, 2018), Klangzeit Festival Münster (2013), Essen Cultural Capital (2010), GHI, Rome (2016), and Trieste Prima festival (2015). At home, Hezarfen has appeared at the Istanbul Music Festival (2011,2012, 2016, 2021), Borusan Music House (2010-2020), BAUART, Yapı Kredi (2018), Akbank Sanat (2011), Boğaziçi University (2013), Bilkent Hezarfen Academy and Bilkent New Music Days (2011-2019), Institut Français (2011), Izmir AASSM (2012), Koç University (2015) and in collaborations with Goethe Institute (2011-2020), Italian, Netherlands and Austrian Cultural Centres (2012 and 2016-17). In 2021 the Ensemble had been invited by the Donaueschinger Musiktage to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the festival with a concert at ARTER(Istanbul) in collaboration with Donaueschinger Musiktage and Goethe Institut Istanbul.

From 2015-2023 Hezarfen was central to the European Research Council (ERC) project *Beyond East and West*, led by Ellison, which facilitates playing with makam musicians and the development of new transcultural ensemble creations. The 2025-26 season is highlighted by 'Recollections of Displacement', a project sponsored by Siemens Foundation between Sweden and Türkiye, with its Turkish premiere in Istanbul at Cemal Resit Rey Concert hall in March, 2025. A follow-up project in 2026 at Cemal Resit Rey Concert hall will celebrate the work of poet Nazim Hikmet and new works by Özalalay and Ellison and İlhan Mimaroglu's String Quartet.



Scene from *Binboğalar Efsanesi* (*Legend of A Thousand Bulls*)

All text, images and devices are copyright, all rights reserved
© & © 2026 Divine Art Ltd
metierrecords.com



WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1 Upper James Street, London, W1R 3HG.



Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No 648810).

LC 15631

