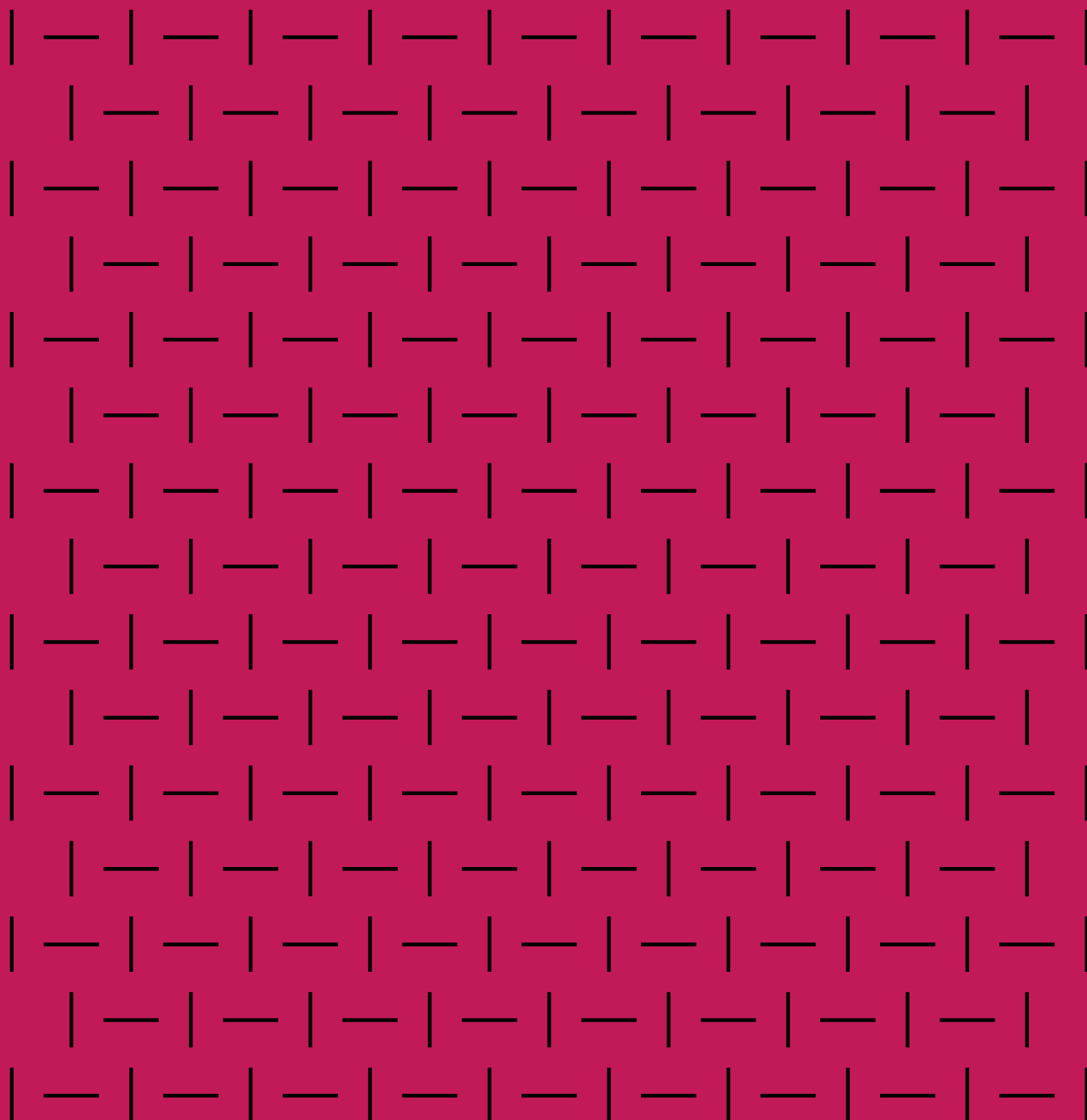


# Dance in Turkey

Version 2019  
Written by Zeynep Günsür



# Dance in Turkey

Version 2019

In 2011, SICA (the predecessor of DutchCulture) produced a comprehensive mapping of the Turkish cultural field. This mapping was written by local experts and edited by Teike Asselbergs and Chantal Hamelinck. The mapping was produced as a means to promote cultural exchange between the Netherlands and Turkey and as a starting point of the year 2012, which marked 400 years of Dutch – Turkish diplomatic relations. The mapping was supported and produced in close co-operation with the Dutch public funds.

An update of these mappings was commissioned in 2018 by DutchCulture while working with the same editors. The existing mappings were revised and several new mappings were added. The updated mappings are focusing more on giving Dutch cultural practitioners an insight into the Turkish cultural field and its infrastructure, and helping them get in contact with colleagues.

*This mapping is supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands.*

## Acknowledgements

Written by Zeynep Günsür

Edited by Chantal Hamelinck and Teike Asselbergs.  
Proofread by Natasha Hay.

Commissioned by DutchCulture, centre for international cooperation.

Supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands.

# Contents

Summary	4
Introduction	5
Short History	6
Main trends and topics	10
Popular	16
Audiences	17
Sub-disciplines	18
Professional groups and organisations	20
Educational institutions	21
Non-professional	23
Youth and dance	24
Venues	25
Festivals and events	26
Prizes and grants	27
Financial situation	28
Critics and researchers	29
(Social) Media and photography	30
Resources	31
Facilities	32

# | Summary

There are roughly four different scenes in the dance field: traditional Turkish dance (folk, belly dance, whirling dervishes), Latin dance (Turkish tango and other Latin dances), the small but friendly contemporary dance scene, and the hip hop, youth and urban dance scene (often in parts of cities that are not considered artistic centres).

The traditional dance scene is well supported by the government, has strongholds in numerous Turkish universities and conservatories and has an extremely good network throughout the country. Due to the influence of academia, there are innovative people in this scene. It could be said that the contemporary dance scene views folk dance as the terrain of traditional, but not necessarily Islamist people. There is not much overlap with the different scenes. The Latin scene is more commercial as its dancers mostly survive by teaching classes to amateurs, and the scene revolves around commercial dance studios that cater to this kind of public.

None of these three dance scenes has much contact with youth, who are more into hip hop. One of the reasons is due to social-economic differences and the fact that youth are not formally organised (although they reportedly have very good studio spaces that they built themselves in the basements of apartment blocks). They also live in areas rarely visited by members of the first three scenes. In the second half of the 2010s, brands such as Nike and Adidas started to organise various events that included street dance genres. This shows that the urban dance scene has evolved from its confined spaces in the big cities.

[https://www.nike.com/tr/tr\\_tr/e/cities/istanbul](https://www.nike.com/tr/tr_tr/e/cities/istanbul), <https://shop.adidas.com.tr/originals-istanbul#program>

It can also be argued that, since 2015, a stronger link has been established between the contemporary visual arts and the performing arts. There are a number of dance artists who create works while inspired by visual art pieces and the performance art genre. The interdisciplinary approach is getting more entrenched as a result of an increase in the number of young dance artists who are educated in different disciplines, such as the social sciences, architecture, design, visual arts, philosophy and engineering.

# | Introduction

## **Popular dance genres**

Dance is a very popular form of entertainment in Turkey. Various styles of belly dancing and folk dances are performed, and there is an increasing interest, especially in cities, in learning all kinds of Latin dances. Greek dances are also considered to be a new form of dance that has attracted the interest of the middle and upper middle classes. Hip hop and break dance have become quite popular among younger generations in the outskirts of big cities.

## **Contemporary/modern dance**

In the past 25 years, the contemporary/modern dance field, although confined to relatively small circles in Istanbul and Ankara, has managed to produce original works within a very interesting aesthetic and political framework. Having said this, after 2010, there was a downward trend for almost five years, but since 2015 a new generation of young dance artists has started to emerge with powerful works. Some artists moved to different cities such as Izmir where they started to organise workshops and performances. Sadly, the same is not true for festivals and networks. Since 2010, the few existing independent contemporary dance festivals, events and networks have gradually ceased to exist due to political and economic factors.

## **Isolation of genres**

In general, the entire dance scene has one basic problem: isolation. For instance, neither folk dance practitioners nor contemporary dancers mix with each other. Latin dancers, who have many studios, clubs, performance spaces and competitions, do not interact with other dance practitioners, and the folk dance field has a vast geography of its own that is completely isolated from other dance genres. Although the pressure of popular culture has encouraged these genres to come together, it is generally only a superficial attempt with no real resonance in the aesthetic, political or cultural fields. Yet, the Turkish dance arena, full of rich and fertile prospects, awaits active collaboration both inside and outside Turkey.

# Short history

## **Before the 1950s**

Before the end of the 1940s, dance in Turkey mostly consisted of traditional styles of folk dance and ritualistic practices belonging to the religious domain, except for a few Western-style dance performances, staged in urban settings such as at Republican balls. However, it must be mentioned that, in Istanbul, the entertainment and performing arts culture of minorities constituted a noteworthy environment for social dances throughout the 19th century and onwards. These social dances also were influential in building audiences, which included the Muslim population of the city.<sup>1</sup>

## **Foreign dancers in social clubs and embassies**

Social clubs, particularly in the Galata and Pera districts of Istanbul, as well as the cultural centres of the embassies, were spaces for social gathering. There were also performances by both local artists and foreign travelling groups. Among these, the Societa Operaja (Italian), Union Française (French) and Teutonia (German) were the most active institutions in organising concerts, theatre and dance performances, conferences and balls. Charity balls were also very popular among the minorities. At first, they mainly appealed to minorities only, especially Levantines and foreigners. Then, after World War I, the Turkish population also started to attend them. At that time, the performers were mostly European “revue” artists. Later, Russian ballet artists regularly performed ballet pieces at these clubs. It is quite interesting to note that although, when compared to other arts such as music and theatre, the establishment of formal Western dance education emerged rather late, there was already an established social and cultural environment for dance in the city of Istanbul. Nevertheless, the scope of this scene did not expand to a larger society.

## **Increasing visibility of women in public life**

The Turkish Republic was established in 1923, following World War I, and the Republican revolution in the social, cultural and political spheres had taken place with great passion. One of the most encouraging features of this huge social transformation was to increase the visibility of women in public life. For folk dance, state-controlled cultural institutions such as the People’s Houses (Halk Evleri) or state television (TRT) encouraged the participation of women, whereas informal entertainment settings such as the “pavyon” or “gazino” (the equivalent of night clubs and cabarets in Europe) were perceived as male domains and dancing in such spaces was not considered appropriate.

1

It is estimated that there are 60,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 20,000 Jews and 2,000-3,000 Greek Orthodox Christians resident in Turkey. These are the only groups recognised as “non-Muslim minorities”. There are also 15,000-20,000 Syriac Orthodox Christians and 5,000-7,000 Yazidis. In addition, there are Muslim religious minorities, in particular, the large Alevi community, whose population is estimated at 12-15 million. – Minorities in Turkey – Submission to the European Union and the Government of Turkey, By Nurcan Kaya and Clive Baldwin-MinorityRightsGroupInternational. [http://www.rightsagenda.org/attachments/313\\_minorities\\_in\\_turkey.doc](http://www.rightsagenda.org/attachments/313_minorities_in_turkey.doc)

### **Institutionalisation of the Western Classical Dance Tradition**

Atatürk, the first president of the Turkish Republic, clearly defined the music policy of the state after the foundation of the republic. In his view, it was necessary to establish a new type of music by having the basis in Turkish folk music and adding to it the polyphonic techniques and methods of Western music. Establishing a state ballet school and a state ballet company was also part of this early Republican approach, strongly connected to the mission of creating a national culture in modern Turkey. Resulting from the wish of establishing a ballet school, the new directors of the opera and theatre conservatory, Paul Hindemith and Carl Ebert, seriously considered opening a ballet section in the conservatory. They even designed an educational programme, consisting of three periods, a total duration of 10 years. In the end, however, this project was not realised. Towards the end of the 1940s, the People's Houses (Halk Evleri), an important Republican project, were closed as well.

### **The first state conservatory**

A law was put into practice on May 16, 1940, which resulted in the separation of the conservatory that was founded inside the Musiki Muallim Mektebi (established in 1924, the first organisation in Turkey to educate music teachers) to become an entity of its own. This newly established "State Conservatory" consisted of music, opera, ballet and theatre departments. Although music, opera and theatre were there from the beginning, the ballet department was not opened until 1948. Prior to that, several attempts have been made to set up a ballet department. It was even considered to get in touch with the Russian authorities, but without success. Metin And<sup>2</sup> informs us that investigations had been made to send ballet students to Russia in 1935, and this had been reconsidered in 1936, but in the end didn't happen.

### **Turkish state-sponsored ballet**

The idea of a Turkish state-sponsored ballet was born in the 1940s. The founder of the English Royal Ballet, Dame Ninette de Valois, was invited to establish the Turkish State Ballet Conservatory in 1948 in Istanbul. In 1950, this conservatory was moved to Ankara. This was also the year when Turkey saw the transition to a multi-party political system. Therefore, as the second phase of the Republican nation-state, ballet institutions were situated in a more complex social context with the democratic reforms followed by a reallocation of political power. The ballet institutions were entirely sponsored by the state and in the beginning employed British staff.

### **The first generation**

As time went by, the Turkish dancers and teachers who were raised from the first dance institutions became important actors in the development of classical ballet and modern dance in Turkey. Yet, they were only practising inside the state institutions. In 1965, Dame Ninette de Valois choreographed, ironically, the first "Turkish" ballet piece called Çeşmebaşı/The Fountain. In 1968, the first Turkish-born choreographer, Sait Sökmen, staged his Çark/Grindstone and was followed by Duygu Aykal, Oytun Turfanda and Geyvan McMillen's original modern ballet choreographies, giving a hint of later modern dance pieces. They were experimenting more with Turkish symbols, stories, music and, to a lesser degree, with movement originating from Turkish bodies rather than with a dictated Western classical style.

### **Establishment of the Turkish modern dance scene**

While the Western classical dance style was already firmly established, young choreographers were searching for a new Turkish style of movement. There was also tension between the classical and modern styles of dancing. In fact, young Turkish dancers

<sup>2</sup> And, Metin. A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing: From Folk Dancing to Whirling Dervishes, Belly Dancing to Ballet; Ankara: Dost Yayınları, 1976.

who had left for Europe and America – students of Merce Cunningham and followers of the technique of Martha Graham – returned to Turkey and began to establish a Turkish modern dance scene in the late 1970s. Geyvan McMillen, Beyhan Murphy and Aydın Teker were pioneers in modern dance, also establishing the first modern dance departments in universities and modern dance companies inside the state opera and ballet houses. Until the late 1980s, dance as it was practised in the Western form of ballet and modern dance, had always been sponsored by state institutions and there were no independent dance companies. Therefore, choreographers were always confined to a state institution. Nowadays, the only national modern dance companies are located in the Ankara State Opera and Ballet and the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet Houses called MDT/Modern Dance Company. MDT/Ankara was founded in 1992 and MDT/Istanbul in 2011.

### **Independent contemporary/modern dance scene**

It has been a long journey from classical ballet to modern dance in Turkey, especially since there was less support for original works and for choreographers and teachers to establish themselves; rather, there was much enthusiasm for foreign and especially Western imports. Maybe one of the weaknesses of the Westernisation ideology was this great enthusiasm for importing Western culture, while at the same time there was a lack of development of Turkey's own dance resources along the way. In order to blend native traditions and Western modernism harmoniously, Turkey should have focused on its own culture more enthusiastically and with far less prejudice. However, following the collapse of the empire and its traditions, combined with radical changes on a societal level, introducing an evolutionary ideology (after 1923 there were many new policies concerning religious practices, written language, clothes, state laws and regulations) did not create the ideal circumstances for less prejudice about traditional sources and their transformation into something contemporary and original.

### **Independent artists in contemporary dance**

It is not a coincidence that only after the 1980s independent artists began to flourish in the contemporary dance field. After the military intervention in 1980, the democratisation process went hand in hand with privatisation and a lessening of state control in economy-related matters. This had the expected effects on the civil life of Turkish citizens, most visibly in the cultural field. An independent cultural and artistic field began to develop with the foundation of private media and increased communication tools in popular culture. The only independent company for classical ballet was founded by Cem Ertekin in 1972, which continues to perform today. The first modern dance company was founded by Geyvan McMillen inside a state institution, Ankara State Opera and Ballet. Following in McMillen's footsteps, Sait Sökmen started to work outside of the institutions, choreographing for television. The first independent professional modern dance company was the Türkuaz Modern Dance Company (1989-1994) inaugurated by Aysun Aslan and İzzet Öz. Although the lifespan of the company was short (only five years), it was very important in fostering a younger dance audience.

### **Establishment of modern dance clubs**

The 1980s were also an important decade for witnessing the establishment of modern dance clubs at two universities, namely, Bosphorus University in Istanbul and Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. The students who were involved in movement research and dance usually came from a variety of disciplines such as engineering, the social sciences, literature or architecture. They began their first choreographic experiments in university clubs and upon graduation in the 1990s they went on to form independent companies such as Green Grapes, Kumpanya Ballet



Türk, Ballet Modern Ankara, Dans Fabrikası and Contemporary Dance Workshop (Çağdaş Dans Topluluğu). These establishments gave way to a more interdisciplinary approach in the 2000s. Some names that are important in this context are Aydın Teker, who was one of the university professors who started to choreograph site-specific works; Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sızanlı (Taldans); Zeynep Günsür (Movement Atelier); Handan Ergiydiren Özer (22/11 Project Ensemble); Şafak Uysal (Laboratu- ar- Performance Art Research and Project Laboratory); Tuğçe Ulugün (REM Dance Company and later Tuğçe Tuna Projects); Bare Feet Company; İlyas Odman (Undern- ine Dance and Movement Project); Emre Koyuncuoğlu (Emre Koyuncuoğlu Project); Talin Büyükkürkciyan (Prospero Company); Aydin Ersöz, İDT+ Tork Dance Company; and Korhan Başaran; with solo works such as Ziya Azazi Dance Project; Ayşe Orhon; Özlem Alkış; Sevi Algan; Aytül Hasaltun and Bedirhan Dehmen; and younger dancers/ choreographers such as Begüm Erciyas; Aslı Bostancı; Esra Yurttut; Erdem Gündüz; Lerna Babikyan; Ufuk Şenel; Fırat Kuşçu; Alper Marangoz; Sezen Tonguz; Evrim Akyay; Asli Öztürk; Gizem Bilgen; Ebru Cansız; Canan Yücel Pekiçten; Beliz Demircioğlu; İdil Kemer; Cansu Ergin; Seçil Demircan; Metehan Kayan; Ezgi Bilgin; Bengi Sevim; Safak Ersözlü; Seçil Demircan; Ekin Tunceli; and Cemal Acet; and companies such as Da- dans (Dila Yumurtacı, Melek Nur Dudu, Merve Uzunosman) and Mezopotamya Dans.

# | Main trends and topics

## **Emerging from oppression**

When considering the unstable political life of the country after facing several military interventions in a timespan of 30 years, one may argue that freedom of expression in general was not easily gained in Turkey. Towards the end of the 1980s, however, with new generations who had not been subjected to military interventions or to foreign/Orientalist impositions, Turkish contemporary dance began to emerge from the ruins of “castrated bodily practices”, meaning that citizens who had been silenced and made passive in terms of human interaction and freedom of expression slowly started to gain confidence and the need to express themselves through their bodies and various movement practices.

## **A strong interdisciplinary approach**

Today the Turkish contemporary dance scene, though very small and limited to Istanbul and Ankara and recently to Izmir, has a promising outlook. After half a century, the younger generation of dancers and choreographers, and also the students of Turkish modern dance pioneers, are beginning to create works that are genuinely in touch with their culture. They also propose new ways of movement. Original dance research is being supported by conceptual background and probably for the first time political opposition can be detected in the early works of these choreographers. The younger generation has begun to rediscover the shamanic influences in Turkish Islamic culture, evident in Mevleviya with its whirling dervishes or in the “Ayin-i Cem” of the Bektaşi/Alevi communities. They have used a Western academic style of techniques and combined it with an individual approach to movement, and their own original techniques acquired from various sources including folk dances of Turkey. The interdisciplinary approach is also getting more deeply entrenched, since the generation of dance artists who are educated in different disciplines such as social sciences, architecture, design, visual arts, philosophy and engineering is increasing in numbers.



### **Greater self-confidence**

Susan Bauer, an American scholar who visited Turkey several times to conduct research on Turkish modern dance, agrees with the ideas mentioned above. She wrote a report in 2005 as part of her sabbatical project, stating that Turkey has gained “self-confidence in its own work without the need of drawing on material from Euro-Western sources”, and that there is also a “greater acceptance of the traditional folk dance forms and a greater sense of openness to discuss and present political and social issues in dance pieces”.<sup>3</sup>

### **Increased political engagement in dance**

Over the past 15 years, it can be observed that the political engagement in dance has become stronger, and the questioning of certain historical, ideological and gender positions is becoming more visible in the performances of contemporary dance and movement theatre. Some contemporary dance artists are reinterpreting ritualistic body movements, particularly experimenting with whirling, for example. Since 2015, there has been a stronger link to contemporary visual arts and performance art, and there are a number of dance artists who create performance art works while “conversing” with visual art pieces.

3

Bauer, Susan. Dance Report, St. Olaf College, Northfield MN 55057-1098. U.S.A

Recent examples of contemporary dance and physical theatre

#### **Hallo!/Aydın Teker**

Developed and performed by the dancer-choreographer Gizem Aksu. The performer walking and running on a treadmill, saying and shouting "Hallo!", is perhaps searching for real contact with the viewer-audience where there is no hearing or being heard. Performed from 2015-2018. [www.aydinteker.com](http://www.aydinteker.com)

#### **Nothing Is in the Right Place/Bare Feet Company**

A project developed in the context of academic research by Dr. Ulrike M. Vieten, Senator George J Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice & School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, 2017. [www.ciplakayaklar.com](http://www.ciplakayaklar.com)

#### **Body Drops/Tuğçe Tuna Project**

First staged during the 15th International Istanbul Biennale Festival, [www.iksv.org](http://www.iksv.org), 2017. [www.tunatuğce.blogspot.com](http://www.tunatuğce.blogspot.com)

45'lik is Tuğçe Tuna's most recent work, which was performed in 2018. Tuna combines stories with the revelations of kinaesthetic memory and numerology in her piece in which she attempts to embody the illusions based on the uniqueness of the body.

Number, Sight, Illusion, Sound, Remedy. This piece was performed in a unique venue in Sultanahmet, Abud Efendi Mansion.

#### **Victory Over the Sun/TAL Dance Company (Taldans)**

A joint project of choreographers Kaplan & Sızanlı, who are trying to

infiltrate the vocal and imaginative content of the first Russian futuristic opera with a choreographing sequence with an emphasis on the vocal material and composing a new spelling book through searching the movement of the sound. First staged during the 21st International Istanbul Theatre Festival, [www.iksv.org](http://www.iksv.org), 2017

The most recent work of Taldans is DO KU MAN, which was staged at the 22nd Istanbul International Theatre Festival. It was born 10 years ago when Taldans transformed the workings of a textile factory in Linz into movement, sound and rhythm. This time around, DO KU MAN is staged with a larger cast and a fresh interpretation. [www.taldans.com](http://www.taldans.com)

#### **SeS/Ayşe Orhon**

Considering today's body as a geography, where multiple meanings and subjectivities work in opposition, SeS aims to delve thoroughly into the territories of human sound in relation to movement and sight. This is an intimate and fragile expedition where viewers become the explorers of complex geographies. Staged in Berlin, 2018.

#### **Happy Happy Together/Ilyas Odman**

A performative interpretation of Wong Kar Wai's film "Happy Together". Two men who are bound together by earrings try to regain their independence. Odman combines contemporary dance with acrobatics and mime. This piece has been performed since 2015. Ilyas Odman has been creating works for the company Copycats based in Netherlands since 2012. They define Copycats as a gang of partners in crime from different parts of the

planet who share a global sadness. Their latest work is Dreams Dramas Diamonds. Copycats are Christina Flick, Kimmy Ligtvoet, Ilyas Odman and Ata Guner. <http://www.productiehuisrotterdam.nl/producties/dreams.-dramas.-diamonds>, 2018.

#### **Cind-Woman/Movement Atelier Company**

A reinterpretation of the Cinderella story, told by eight women aged from 34 to 78 years. The project aims to reconstruct the tale through a female psyche, anthropological analysis and new ways of storytelling practices. It was performed from 2015 until 2018. The most recent works by Movement Atelier are Hand Made created for and performed at A Corner in the World Festival, Bomonti Alt, 2018, [www.acornerintheworld.com](http://www.acornerintheworld.com) and Mrs. Spirit, which was performed at the 22nd Istanbul International Theatre Festival, December, 2018. Mrs. Spirit invites us to leave behind our confining routines and step into a "parallel universe". As performers study an unknown feminine entity, they speak with the language of their imagined universe. [www.hareketatolyesitoplulugu.blogspot.com](http://www.hareketatolyesitoplulugu.blogspot.com)

#### **Epimeleia Heatou/Ayrin Ersöz**

Staged as a parallel event during the 20th International Istanbul Theatre Festival, 2016. Their most recent works are Aşk; Afra Tafra; Gitti, performed by the DNA Company Dream project at Zorlu Performing Arts Centre, PSM, Istanbul, in 2017.

**A Woman, A Man, A Chair/Talin Büyükkürkciyan**

A woman trying to grow up in between her traumas. Trying to cure them through her relationship. Trying to be loyal to her lover. She has an empty space, an emptiness of father love. First staged during A Corner in the World Festival, BomontiAlt, 2018, [www.acornerintheworld.com](http://www.acornerintheworld.com), [www.talinbuyukkurkciyan.blogspot.com](http://www.talinbuyukkurkciyan.blogspot.com)

**YU/Gizem Aksu**

YU is an expanded performance on the research for organic wisdom by fasci(a)nated attention in a visceral garden. This research is not about what visceral organs are, but about the complex correlations of organs to life. Organic wisdom is about the sensation of life with reference to the existence of visceral organs. Istanbul, 2017 [www.gzmaksu.com](http://www.gzmaksu.com). Gizem Aksu also created a work for the 4th Mardin Biennale called Barinak, Barikat, Tabiat, Mardin, May, 2018.

**Calling Vaikhari/Asli Bostanci**

The focal point of Calling Vaikhari is the expansion of the body's density and creating a unified performance field through the body's motional vibrations supported by vocal vibrations. The work won the "best one square metre" prize from the 12th International Theatre and Performing Arts Festival Yerevan, Armenia, 2017. [www.aslibostanci.com](http://www.aslibostanci.com)

**Voicing Pieces/Begüm Erciyas**

In Voicing Pieces, one's own voice is staged to become the protagonist. In the intimacy of an isolated sound booth, guided by a simple score, the audience becomes the spectator of their own voice. The act of speaking

and simultaneously hearing one's own voice turns into a theatrical and choreographic experience, sculpted anew with each individual interpretation of the score. The voice becomes a place for action, a spectacle or a surprise. Staged since 2016. Also staged in the Het Theatre Festival, Antwerp, September 7-9, 2018. [www.begumerciyas.com](http://www.begumerciyas.com)

**Ballerina/Bedirhan Dehmen**

Created with Ilke Kodal, one of the prima ballerinas of the Istanbul State Ballet Company. A dance theatre work that rejects the death of female characters by criticising the gendered gaze and hegemony of the male made visible through the acting roles of a ballerina. Co-produced with Moda Sahnesi and supervised by project advisor Kemal Aydoğan. Staged at Moda Sahnesi, Istanbul, 2018.

**All About the Heart/Canan Yücel Pekikten**

This work opens the doors for the audience to get in touch with three women's intimate selves as the artist brings her unconventional take on three female characters from three different operas to the stage. The Queen of Der Zwerg Lied, Cio-Cio-San of Madame Butterfly and the title character from the first opera written in Finnish, Pohjan Neito are given new life through a female-centric performance. With these three solo pieces, we witness the metamorphosis of three female characters that were created by a sexist point of view. Created with the support of the Kone Foundation, The Swedish Arts Grants Committee, 2017-18. [www.cananyucelpekikten.com](http://www.cananyucelpekikten.com)

**The Well/Cansu Ergin**

Izmir-based choreographer and dancer who won the third prize with her work The Well in New Europe Dance Festival, in 2017. Jarmila Jerabkova Award, Prag. [www.cansuergin.com](http://www.cansuergin.com)

**Mut/Bengi Sevim Yörük**

A work of research on the idea of "Can an algorithm of happiness be designed?" A quest to find a mathematical system where moving bodies with various physical frequencies search for happiness. Staged at Aksanat, Akbank Sanat, Istanbul, 2018.

**Dislocation/Gizem Bilgen**

A work created by Gizem Bilgen with the dramaturg Anne-Marije van den Bersselaar. The motion choir is not only articulated in the choreographic structure on the stage, but also transforms the stage design into a component of living bodies, describing the quartet's motion fields, boundaries and transformations. The choreographic language is constructed through the abstraction of gestures and the creation of some static images during flow and redistribution. Staged at Aksanat, Akbank Sanat, Istanbul, 2018.

### **Dialog Project/Tan Temel-Sernaz Demirel – Turk Dance Company**

Dialog Project is the story of a journey: what they have experienced, old stories within their bodies, people, creatures, plants and everything they encounter that guides them in this spiritual journey. This "Dialog" is open to the creation of new projects by various artists, in various places at different times. The book "Dialog – On a Choreography" by the artists, including the unfolding process of the Dialog series, has been published and their choreographies Dialog #1 and Dialog #2 have been staged recently. The Project, which is open to new transformations in diverse forms, proceeds with its journey. The first Dialog was staged in 2017.

### **So' Hum/Asli Öztürk**

So' Hum is a Sanskrit mantra that has been used since ancient times. It means "I am that" where "that" means the creator as the essence of being, the whole universe or the ultimate reality. Istanbul, 2018.  
[www.asliozturk.com](http://www.asliozturk.com)

### **One by One/Evrin Akyay**

A short story of a relationship, searching for the pieces of a puzzle. Staged at Aksanat, Akbank Sanat, Istanbul, in 2017. Evrim Akyay's latest work Hadi was staged in the context of MDT's recent programme called Elektronika in December, 2018.  
<https://www.facebook.com/MDTistanbul/videos/305487860104105/>

### **Vortex/Ebru Cansiz**

Inspired by "Massive Ghosts" by Ömer Kanipak, Vortex searches for obstacles, and situations appear while life flows. Mimar Sinan University, Bomonti Stage, 2018.

### **Camp Europe/Safak Ersözlü with Marilli Mastrantoni**

One of the performances created as part of Camp Europe, a project by Marilli Mastrantoni, director of Entropia Theatre (Greece), and Şafak Ersözlü, the artistic director of Açık Stüdyo, who worked together with a group of artists from Greece and Turkey. Staged at the Theatre HYTLRION, Athens, Greece, 2018.

### **Let Me Be/Berrak Yedek – Beliz Demircioğlu**

Let Me Be is a ritual where a dancer, a choreographer and a lighting designer come together to have a deep conversation, each in their respective language, about the secret poetry of their lives. The dance is the main visual language, in dialogue with the light, and finalising its journey with a heavenly composition of Vivaldi. Performer Beliz Demircioğlu, lighting designer Jan Komárek and choreographer Berrak Yedek invite us to this ritual that takes us through the mysterious paths of a dancer's inner poetry. 2018.  
[www.belizd.com](http://www.belizd.com)

### **And, But/Dadans**

And, But is about life cycles that we simply can't give up, yet we want to break free from. It asks questions related to the situations we are in, happenings, feelings that are all rotating, repeating themselves: Can this cycle actually be a game in which we're a player for our entire lifetime, a game whose rules we ourselves define? Concept: Melek Nur Dudu, Performers: Melek Nur Dudu, Dila Yumurtacı, Merve Uzunosman  
[www.dadans.com](http://www.dadans.com)

### **4 Doors 40 Makams/Mezopotamya Dans**

Choreography by Yesim Coskun.

### **Shariat, Tariqat, Gifted and Truth.**

The gateways are making man's self-virtue and mankind. All the authorities that are based on learning science (shariah), being a sign (tarikah), being a sage (ingenuity) and knowing the meaning (truth) are essential. Staged in Istanbul and Diyarbakir, 2017.

### **Ziya Azazi**

He creates solo works where he continuously researches the act of transcending the body using whirling rituals belonging to Sufi traditions. His reinterpretations of whirling travel abroad widely, much more than inside Turkey.  
[www.ziyazazi.com](http://www.ziyazazi.com)

There are other young choreographers such as Seçil Demircan (disconnection, knotted, etüt:sözsüz oyun I), Ezgi Bilgin (geçici körlük – work in progress), Ekin Tunceli (selfie), Cemal Acet (ön arkam sagim solum), Metehan Kayan (angry man, dikine) and established choreographers such as Korhan Basaran who perform irregularly in various spaces mainly in Istanbul.

### **Self-Orientalisation**

Despite the interest in one's own cultural issues, one has to pay much attention to "self-Orientalisation" tendencies. Since there is more recognition abroad for dance and fewer chances to show work in Turkey, it is always a challenge for Turkish artists to be persistent in their own original interests and concerns since there has been a long history of "perceiving and reaffirming selves through the eyes of the foreigner" – in this case, the "Westerner".

## Media Coverage

Dance artists have more chances to perform abroad than in their local context. Finding studio spaces to rehearse is a big problem and renting spaces to perform costs much more than the artists can afford. Media coverage for contemporary dance is negligible. Only a few magazines such as Milliyet Sanat, Art Unlimited or OYUN provide space for one critical review of contemporary dance at best. Newspapers such as Cumhuriyet, Birgün and internet media sites such as Mimesis also provide reviews and criticism. There used to be one dance magazine called Sempatik Dans/Sympathetic Dance, which covered mostly Latin or Greek dances, along with some information on modern/contemporary dance. It stopped publishing after two years. Garajistanbul's Gist magazine published only three times (in 2009 and 2010). They have tried to publish as many articles as possible on contemporary dance in Turkey. Under these conditions it is hard to connect with a larger audience, especially since there is no continuity of shows, either. The associations and networks try to develop a non-existent infrastructure by publishing programmes and combining several calendars of shows at different venues.<sup>4</sup> In fact, there have been a lot of small venues established after 2013, mainly in the Kadıköy area but only a few of them host dance or physical theatre performances. Sainte-Pulcherie high school in Beyoğlu also started to schedule dance and theatre performances at its venue as Sahne Pulcherie.

4

Several independent venues such as Moda Sahnesi, DasDas, İkinci Kat, Theatron, Emek Sahnesi, Kumbaracı50, Toy Istanbul, Tasra Kabare, NoAct Sahne and Şişli Blackout Sahnesi have been established in Istanbul.

# | Popular

Folk dances are practised in the daily life of Turkish citizens, in events ranging from school contests to international festivals, but also at weddings and at all sorts of entertainment activities. People also use folk dances to try to preserve their ethnic identities and cultural traditions. Greek and Latin dances mostly attract the interest of the middle and upper middle classes, perhaps because the environment in which these dances are performed can be seen as attractive to such social and economic classes. This audience has generally been educated at foreign high schools with Western origins, such as German, English, Italian and Austrian schools, and as a result they have always looked up to European aesthetics and lifestyle. Hip hop and break dance are popular among younger generations in the outskirts of big cities.

With regards to the popularisation over the past 10 to 15 years of Turkish television soap operas, the use of dance in these TV series is still quite poor in terms of representation. The ones that depict Anatolian village life mostly use traditional folk dances, such as during wedding scenes or other celebrations. The series reflecting big city life generally use dance practices such as tango, which is related to a more Westernised lifestyle. There has been only one soap opera, *Fi*, which drew upon the modern dance genre. The reason was that one of the main characters was a modern dance artist. All in all, we can state that dance is not considered to be of importance in Turkish TV series.



# | Audiences

Turkish people are arguably more interested both as spectators and as practitioners in traditional dance genres such as belly dancing and folk dances. Although there seems to be an ever-growing number of Latin dance practices in big cities and festivals, there is no statistical research available on dance audiences or data on dance lessons and performances. The modern or contemporary dance scene is rather small and there are very few centres that provide dance lessons and workshops. In Istanbul, for example, there aren't more than five centres providing contemporary dance workshops. The only contemporary dance school offering a BA degree at a university is Mimar Sinan University. Shows by their dance department's students are always sold out and they generally add more performance nights to accommodate the audiences. MDT shows in Istanbul and Ankara, which are the only state-sponsored companies, usually attract large audiences. When there is a continuity of performances, the dance audience grows spontaneously. Unfortunately, since there is not any continuity, the development of a dance audience is still very slow.

# Sub-disciplines

## Contemporary dance in Turkey

Most of the artists and companies have begun to gain international recognition since 2000, yet only few of them can sustain themselves financially.

Aydın Teker was one of the teachers at Mimar Sinan University (she retired in 2015) who influenced many generations with her contemporary dance choreography and realised her pieces outside the confines of the university. She started to create site-specific projects because the university did not permit her to use the spaces of the institution for her own productions. She developed her dance projects based on long-time research, shaped by different environmental conditions. As a result of this deep research in developing alternative movement styles, she now creates some of the most interesting works of Turkish modern dance. In her piece *aKabi*, bodies in specially manufactured shoes of various heights barely able to stand on stage create new relationships with one another while developing interesting architectural and sculptural aesthetics. In *harS*, a human body interconnected with the body of a harp creates duet resonances with the sound of each body ([www.aydinteker.com](http://www.aydinteker.com)).

Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sızanlı (Taldans) turned their long-time research at TAL (Tiyatro Araştırma Laboratuvarı/Theatre Research Laboratory, Istanbul Municipal Theatre) into a collaborative company. They started to create solo works and combined these solos into duets, also working with other artists including sound designers, to create contemporary dance works. Mustafa Kaplan has an engineering

background and Filiz Sızanlı is an architect. They use their knowledge to develop original bodily aesthetics in a very different way from people who have been educated in modern dance techniques. ([www.taldans.com](http://www.taldans.com)).

Two artists who had a formal modern dance education are Tuğçe Ulugün ([www.tunatugce.blogspot.com](http://www.tunatugce.blogspot.com)) and Mihran Tomasyan (Bare Feet Company [www.ciplakayaklar.com](http://www.ciplakayaklar.com)). Tomasyan and his dancer friends (Aslı Öztürk, Duygu Güngör, Melih Kırac) work on movement research while incorporating their oppositional political views into their work. Among the younger generation of choreographers, Gizem Aksu is teaching at Mimar Sinan University. In recent years she choreographed several dance works, and is also very engaged with gender issues ([www.gzmaksu.com](http://www.gzmaksu.com)). Aslı Bostancı also teaches at Mimar Sinan University and choreographs dances. Recently, she has been more interested in sound and the movement of sound. ([www.aslibostanci.com](http://www.aslibostanci.com))

At Movement Atelier Company, Zeynep Günsür works with older non-dancers, as well as young dancers and actors. One of the company's main research interests lies in creating devised works. Together with the company members, she looks for alternative ways of relating to our bodies and creating movement theatre works with a strong emphasis on social and political issues in Turkey. ([www.hareketatolyesitoplulugu.blogspot.com](http://www.hareketatolyesitoplulugu.blogspot.com))

İlyas Odman creates performative dance pieces that deal more

with gender issues, trans-gender realities and sexual politics ([www.ilyas-odman.blogspot.com](http://www.ilyas-odman.blogspot.com)). Talin Büyükkürkciyan, who was educated in the Netherlands (European Dance Development Centre and ARTEZ), also conducts research on performative body politics ([www.talinbuyukkurkciyan.blogspot.com](http://www.talinbuyukkurkciyan.blogspot.com)). Ayşe Orhon, who is also a researcher on performative body politics, has moved to Berlin and continues to create and perform there ([www.ayseorhon.com/recent](http://www.ayseorhon.com/recent)). Ayrin Ersöz graduated from Yıldız Technical University in Istanbul and became head of the Dance Department there. She is also interested in identity politics. As a Turkish-Bulgarian immigrant, she looks at history using text and movement.

İDT+ was founded by one of the modern dance pioneers, Geyvan McMullen, and continues to stage works by Tan Temel and Sernaz Demirel. The name was changed to Tork Dance Company ([www.torkdance.com](http://www.torkdance.com)). Emre Koyuncuoğlu (Emre Koyuncuoğlu Project) is a theatre director who also works with movement. He develops pieces that are on the intersection of theatre and dance theatre. Berrak Yedek, the founder of Kumpanya Ballet Turk in the 1990s in Istanbul, currently lives in Prague and teaches at the Duncan Centre Conservatory. Since 2000, she has been working in the field of belly dancing, specifically focusing on ancient Turkish belly dancing ([www.iam.cz](http://www.iam.cz)).

There are also choreographers who only create solo works, such as Ziya Azazi (Ziya Azazi Dance Project [www.ziyazazi.com](http://www.ziyazazi.com)). Younger dancers and choreographers who stage their own works are Begüm Erciyas,

Canan Yücel Pekicтен, Aslı Öztürk, Bengi Sevim Yörük, Gizem Bilgen, Cansu Ergin, Ebru Cansız, Evrim Akyay, Secil Demircan, Ufuk Şenel, Alper Marangoz and Safak Ersozlu.

## Folk dance

The Turkish folk dance scene has developed in parallel with the national ideology of the Republic, so the stylisation of folk dance choreography began to develop since the 1920s. Turkey is divided into various cultural regions, each of which has its own distinctive folk dance style. Over the years, these styles have been categorised and re-arranged choreographically in order to adapt them for stage presentations. At first, this was done by the People's Houses (Halk Evleri) and then by the State Folk Dance Company ([www.kultur.gov.tr](http://www.kultur.gov.tr)). Later, with an increasing migration rate towards the cities, many folk dance associations were formed by the migrated locals.

## Folk dance and nationalism

Folk dance in Turkey provides a very rich resource: It is estimated that there are more than 4,000 different kinds of dances, most of which are not completely categorised. Folk dances try to preserve ethnic identities and cultural traditions. The Turkish Folklore Institution ([www.folklorurumu.org](http://www.folklorurumu.org)), founded in 1964, is the central institution that conducts research, forms folk dance groups, gives courses and also works in the fields of folk theatre and music, and even handicrafts. In the 2000s, a new approach towards folk dance began to emerge in the form of commercial-artistic folk dance projects and companies. Examples are Fire of Anatolia ([www.anadoluatesi.com](http://www.anadoluatesi.com)) and Shaman Dance Theatre

([www.shamandancetheatre.com](http://www.shamandancetheatre.com)), a kind of Turkish equivalent of River Dance. These companies often travel abroad and are supported by the Ministry of Culture, which views these companies as the best representatives of Turkish dance culture. This idea has been widely criticised by all other dance professionals (especially by contemporary dance artists). Another approach to folk dance can be found in a university-originated company (Boğaziçi University/ Music and Folk Dance Clubs) named BGST ([www.bgst.org](http://www.bgst.org)). This company favours a certain anthropological approach to folk dance by doing field research, and by opposing the “nationalisation” tendencies, they emphasise the regional-ethnic and cultural diversity of folk dances.

#### **Popular dance & clubs and dance**

Popular dance genres in Turkey are mostly traditional (folk) dances and oriental dances for entertainment. In the past 10 years, Latin dances such as merengue, salsa and tango have also gained a huge popularity. Some dancers also pursue flamenco and sirtaki. There are many workshops, courses and clubs for various Latin dances, as well as many Latin dance competitions. There are hundreds of Latin dance spaces in Istanbul, such as Murphy's Dance Bar in the Kalamış area, Gossip Bar in the Hyatt Regency Hotel, New Yorker Balo Stage and Baila Tango in Beyoğlu, Caliente, Manestra World Music Club and Dansorium. (More information can be found on [www.salsaturk.com](http://www.salsaturk.com), [www.danskurslari.org](http://www.danskurslari.org), [www.academideltangoistanbul.com](http://www.academideltangoistanbul.com), [www.tangoist.com](http://www.tangoist.com))

Because there are so many Latin

dance spaces and events, it is nearly impossible to give an exact description of the scene. A good idea is to check the different websites for news and events.

On the European side of Istanbul, the dance club culture used to be centred on the Beyoğlu area. But since 2013, nightclubs have no longer been concentrated in one location. There are numerous venues spread out over Nişantaşı in the Şişli district, Ortaköy in the Beşiktaş district or Taksim, Istiklal Street and Nevizade in the Beyoğlu district. In Beyoğlu, there are many dance clubs. Opened in 1995, Roxy Club is one of the oldest ([www.roxy.com.tr](http://www.roxy.com.tr)). In this club they play all kinds of music, but also host theme nights and concerts. Babylon, which moved to the Bomonti area in Sisli, is mostly known as a concert venue ([www.babylon.com.tr](http://www.babylon.com.tr)). On the Asian side in the Kadıköy district, Caddebostan “barlar sokağı”, a street of pubs on Iskele Street and Kadife Street offer a host of venues.

#### **Ballet & classical dance**

Ballet was introduced to Turkey in 1948 and from the beginning, it was institutionalised and given state support. Nowadays, there are a total of six state ballet companies in Ankara, Istanbul, Antalya, Mersin, Izmir and Samsun (<http://secure.dobgm.gov.tr>). Their programmes range from classical pieces such as Swan Lake and Romeo and Juliet to contemporary ballets by William Forsythe, Cristopher D'Amboise, Jose Martinez and Patrick DeBana. The Istanbul State Ballet Company has been more active in the past three or four years than the other companies, premiering many new ballet pieces ([www.idobale.com](http://www.idobale.com)).

Apart from the state companies, there is one independent ballet company, Çağdaş Bale Topluluğu/ Contemporary Ballet Company, which was founded by Cem Ertekin in 1972. It is the only non-state-sponsored ballet company that has been established. ([www.cagdasbalettoplulugu.com](http://www.cagdasbalettoplulugu.com)).

#### **Youth dance & street dance**

The first appearance of break dance in Turkey can be traced back to Istanbul in the early 1990s. A young population who migrated from Germany set up Istanbul City Breakers, which gave way to various other groups such as Lordz of Istanbul in the Bakırköy district, or Takım 34 and Istanbul Street-B Boys in the Kadıköy district, and the venue called Satranç in the Ataköy area. These were followed in other cities by groups such as the Young Energy Crew in Izmir – [www.youngenergycrew.com](http://www.youngenergycrew.com) and the venue called Kareler, Ankara Bboy's in Ankara and Bursa City B-Boys in Bursa. In 1998, one of the biggest parties of the 1990s was organised by Takım 34 and S2K called The Apocalypse Day. Nearly 1,500 local people joined the party and various foreign b-boys and graffiti artists attended. At that time, Kadıköy was the main district for various parties. The youth journal Blue Jean contributed a lot to the popularity of the Turkish break dance scene.

Again, break dance groups face the problem of a lack of support from the private sector or state institutions. Another problem is that it is impossible to find rehearsal spaces, and thus many groups practise on the streets. In addition, society's regard for street dance has not improved much, and as a result

young people tend to feel alienated in public spheres. There still is not much recognition and appreciation for this artform.

For more detailed info: [www.hiphopdance-breakdance.com](http://www.hiphopdance-breakdance.com), [www.dansakademi.com.tr](http://www.dansakademi.com.tr), [www.redbull.com/tr-tr/turkiye-de-breakdans](http://www.redbull.com/tr-tr/turkiye-de-breakdans)

# Professional groups and organisations

Unfortunately, since 2010 the number of professional organisations has diminished. The one important association left is CATI (Independent Dance Artists Association. Facebook page: ÇATI Çağdaş Dans Sanatçıları Derneği)

The common mail group of dance artists ([danslistesi@yahoo.com](mailto:danslistesi@yahoo.com)) had a major impact on the exchange of information and ideas, and functioned as a discussion platform. However, it has ceased these functions and continues to exist only by listing upcoming events and shows. Nowadays, there are various Facebook and Instagram platforms whose main function is to announce upcoming performances.

Some of these pages can be found by typing in the keywords: Gosteri Sanatları and Performans Sanati

# Educational institutions

Together with modern dance clubs, the opening of two departments for dance at universities also fostered the independent scene. The first one opened in 1992 at Mimar Sinan University Istanbul ([www.msgsu.edu.tr](http://www.msgsu.edu.tr)). The second one opened in 1999 at Yıldız Technical University's Art and Design Faculty ([www.yildiz.edu.tr](http://www.yildiz.edu.tr)). Although it has stopped admitting students since 2015, the programme is not officially closed. The existence of these programmes means a lot for the contemporary dance scene, even though there are fewer than 30 students who register each year. In 2007, Bilgi University opened a programme of Performing Arts in the context of Management of Performing Arts, in collaboration with the Duncan Centre Conservatory in Prague. It provides a general education in the field of performing arts with relation to space and technology (<http://map.bilgi.edu.tr>). Along with university education, there are several private studios that offer alternative contemporary dance education through workshops and various technique classes ([www.catidans.org](http://www.catidans.org), [www.dansbulusma.com](http://www.dansbulusma.com), [www.ciplakayaklar.com](http://www.ciplakayaklar.com), [www.galataperform.com](http://www.galataperform.com)). Acik Studyo in Izmir founded by Safak Ersözlü, who moved from Istanbul to Izmir, offers contemporary dance workshops throughout the year. The venue has recently been closed down but the events continue in several spaces. Tiyatro Medresesi is a unique centre established in Sirince, and also offers contemporary dance and physical theatre workshops during the summer. [www.tiyatromedresesi.org](http://www.tiyatromedresesi.org)

Considering the size of Turkey and its cultural diversity, this number is negligible. For ballet training, there are state conservatories, but also hundreds of private ballet courses offer various certificates. The Hacettepe University Ankara State Conservatory ([www.konser.hacettepe.edu.tr](http://www.konser.hacettepe.edu.tr)) offers fulltime primary and secondary education, as well as part-time ballet education. The Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University State Conservatory has a Ballet Department ([www.msgsu.edu.tr](http://www.msgsu.edu.tr)). The first private ballet school was founded by Yıldız Alpar in 1953 and offers an English Royal Academy certificate. It is situated in Kadıköy, Moda, on the Asian side of Istanbul ([www.yildizalpar.com](http://www.yildizalpar.com)). Tan Sığtürk is another dancer who established private ballet schools in several cities, including Izmir and Trabzon ([www.tansagturkakademi.com](http://www.tansagturkakademi.com)). Since 2005, Mavidans Akademi, founded by Ayda Zorlu Nebioğlu and Nurhan Nebioğlu, has offered modern dance, jazz dance and ballet classes ([www.mavidans.com](http://www.mavidans.com)). Recently, they also founded DNA Dance Company ([www.dnadancompanyistanbul.com](http://www.dnadancompanyistanbul.com)).

As for folk dance, there are eight folk dance departments at Turkish universities, either at state conservatories of Turkish music or folklore studies. There is one in Istanbul at Istanbul Technical University ([www.tmdk.itu.edu.tr](http://www.tmdk.itu.edu.tr)).

### **Dancers not formally educated as dancers**

Many contemporary dancers in Turkey have no formal dance education (due to the education system in Turkey), while others started their formal dance training late in life. For some, this may be seen as a limitation, but it can also lead to new and interesting interpretations or solutions. The contemporary dancers who teach are often not formally educated as dancers or dance teachers. Many dancers started to work for themselves as dance teachers due to the various financial crises in the past 20 years. There are groups and individuals that are sufficiently trained in dance such as MDT, Çıplak Ayaklar (Bare Feet Company), Tugce Ulugun Tuna, Gizem Aksu, Asli Bostanci, Canan Yücel Pekiçten, Alper Marangoz, Evrim Akyay, Bengi Sevim Yörük and Gizem Bilgen. They teach at the universities and studios outside of the academic context, yet many dance people voiced their desire to have foreign dancers, choreographers and dance educators come to Turkey and teach in their university departments or work with their dance group.

For international collaborations, especially teaching, bringing in foreign teachers is a good idea as it has a multiplier effect. A lot of networking and knowledge transfer can be achieved this way.

# Non-professional

When the migration towards the cities increased in the 1960s and 1970s, many folk dance associations were formed in Turkish cities as a result. These folk dancers performed in various contexts such as regional festivals, contests, weddings and local gatherings. Among the Turkish diaspora abroad there were also many folk dance groups. People who participated in these gatherings of associations were mostly amateurs. More visibility of Turkish diaspora folk dancers in Turkey would help to increase international collaborations in this field. When the more innovation-minded professionals from Turkey are invited to countries with a sizable Turkish diaspora, Turkish folk dance groups outside of Turkey may develop more quickly. Normally, diaspora folk dance groups adopt new insights (if at all) with a few years' delay compared to their counterparts in Turkey. In Turkey, attendees of the emerging Latin and Greek dance spaces have also been populated with mostly non-dance professionals.

## **Amateurs or not?**

In terms of financial matters, most of the dance companies and artists in Turkey cannot survive with their work alone, unlike their European counterparts. Turkey doesn't have a subsidy system through which individual dance artists can find financial support for their projects. There is no kind of state or public funds available for dance artists. Therefore, they create via their own means, which generally are barely sufficient means for production.

On the other hand, when considering artistic standards and professional experience, almost all dance artists

and companies who perform for a certain time can be categorised as professionals. Thus, in Turkey, only the youngest artists and perhaps the ones who performed their first pieces can be categorised as amateurs. Universities have dance clubs, which are categorised as amateur clubs, but sometimes they work on a semi-professional level.

# Youth and dance

Student groups mainly in primary and secondary schools perform folk dances on many occasions, but there are no (contemporary) dance performances made especially for children or young people. The situation is similar to youth theatre, only worse. The reason is that it is too expensive for schools to take their classes to commercial performances and there is no state support for contemporary or youth dance. Schools need to be informed first about the benefits to take their students to dance performances and this takes time and coordination, which is difficult to organise with the current capacity of the contemporary dance scene.



# Venues

## State venues

In Ankara, there are three venues for state dance companies: Opera Stage on Atatürk Bulvarı, Operet Stage inside the Museum of Visual Arts (Resim ve Heykel Müzesi) on Talatpaşa Bulvarı and Leyla Gencer Stage on Bağdat Street. In Istanbul, there are only the Süreyya Stage in Kadıköy and the recently opened Fulya stage in Beşiktaş, since the main venue, Atatürk Cultural Centre, has been demolished. Aya İrini can also be used but mostly for music concerts. In Izmir, there is Elhamra Stage; in Mersin and Antalya there are no permanent stages, but venues can be rented from the municipality. In Samsun, there is another Atatürk Cultural Centre, which is also rented from the municipality.

## Municipality venues

On the Asian side of Istanbul, there are Kadıköy Haldun Taner Stage, Ümraniye Stage, Üsküdar Musa-hipzade Celal Stage and Üsküdar Kerem Yilmazer Stage. On the European side, there are Harbiye Muhsin Ertuğrul Stage, Fatih Reşat Nuri Stage, Kağıthane Sadabat Stage, Kağıthane Küçük Kemal Children Theatre Stage, Gaziosmanpaşa Stage, Gaziosmanpaşa Ferih Egemen Children Theatre Stage and Küçükçekmece Sefaköy Stage (more info: [www.ibb.gov.tr](http://www.ibb.gov.tr)). In order to make contact with these venues, one has to find individual contacts. Istanbul State Ballet Company's artistic director is Aysem Sunal Savaskurt. For municipality venues, the general artistic director is Süha Uygur.

## Independent venues

There are very few independent venues for dance performances. The two comparatively bigger venues are

in commercial centres such as the Zorlu Performing Arts Centre PSM in the Zorlu AVM shopping mall and Uniq Istanbul. Although they do not commission dance performances regularly, they open their stages to dance from time to time.

The venue Kumbaracı 50, which was founded by a theatre company called Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro/Theatre After Six, can host dance performances, even though the space is quite small ([www.kumbaraci50.com](http://www.kumbaraci50.com)). Located on the second floor of an old apartment in one of the historic districts of Istanbul, GalataPerform had been active since 2003. Consisting of an informal café and a performing studio, it was the production space and main stage of the VeDST Theatre Company and open to artists and audiences of different disciplines ([www.galataperform.com](http://www.galataperform.com)) Although this venue has recently closed down, it is possible it will continue its events in various alternative spaces. The studio of the Barefeet Company is also used as a performance space ([www.ciplakayklar.com](http://www.ciplakayklar.com)). The Aksanat dance studio of Akbank, which was the dance studio of the Zeynep Tanbay Dance Company/ ZTDC, is also used for some studio performances ([www.akbanksanat.com](http://www.akbanksanat.com)). Oyun Atolyesi is on the Anatolian side in Kadıköy, Moda. It is a private theatre venue that from time to time opens its stage to contemporary dance ([www.oyunatolyesi.com](http://www.oyunatolyesi.com)). Moda Sahnesi is another private theatre venue that hosts dance performances ([www.modasahnesi.com](http://www.modasahnesi.com)). In many of the larger cities, there are studio spaces for Latin dances, tango, flamenco, sirtaki and break dance that are also used as performance venues (more info at [www.danskurslari.org](http://www.danskurslari.org)).

# Festivals and events

There is only one festival that stages contemporary dance in Istanbul: the IKSU International Theatre Festival is held annually ([www.iksv.org](http://www.iksv.org)).

However, in September 2019, a new festival will be organised, named Fringe Istanbul, focusing on contemporary dance and theatre (<https://www.fringeistanbul.com/eng/about>)

The METU/ODTU Contemporary Dance Festival ([www.cdt.metu.edu.tr](http://www.cdt.metu.edu.tr)) has been held every year for the past 15 years in Ankara. It is a special platform that came into being thanks to the efforts of university students at the METU contemporary dance club. Apart from these, there are no regular festivals that stage contemporary dance.

There are two international ballet festivals in Antalya and Bodrum, organised by the Ministry of Culture Directorate General of State Opera and Ballet. The International Aspendos Opera and Ballet Festival ([www.aspendosfestival.gov.tr](http://www.aspendosfestival.gov.tr)) takes place in Antalya and the International Bodrum Ballet Festival ([www.bodruballetfestival.gov.tr](http://www.bodruballetfestival.gov.tr)) is held in Bodrum. In addition, there has been an international ballet competition held in Istanbul for the past two years: Istanbul International Ballet Competition ([www.istanbulballetcompetition.gov.tr](http://www.istanbulballetcompetition.gov.tr))

**The 8th Street Dance Carnival** was held at the Zorlu Centre PSM in March and April 2018. Every year, ISDC brings dancers who demonstrate the diversity and empowerment fostered through this American art form. Throughout the event, there are dance shows, DJ performances, Q/As with judges,

and workshops for street kids and disadvantaged youth in Turkey. ([www.streetdancecarnival.com](http://www.streetdancecarnival.com))

The Istanbul Latin Dance Festival is considered one of the most popular Latin dance festivals around the world with more than 5,000 social dancers from more than 80 countries. The 8th Istanbul International Dance Festival (IIDF) is set to be held between March 27 and April 1 2019.

(<http://www.istanbuldance.org>)

The Istanbul International Dance Festival (IIDF) has been organised since 2011 and takes place in March and April. It is considered as one of the foremost gatherings for dance lovers. This festival hosts nearly 4,000 dance lovers annually from more than 80 countries. ([www.istanbuldance.org](http://www.istanbuldance.org))

The International Dance Festival of Antalya featuring salsa was held in May, 2018 ([www.dansfestivali.com](http://www.dansfestivali.com))

Another dance festival that features tango, hip hop and salsa is the ITÜ Dance Festival ([www.etkinlik.itu.edu.tr](http://www.etkinlik.itu.edu.tr)) ([www.danskurslari.org](http://www.danskurslari.org))

# | Prizes and grants

There is only one talent contest in the ballet field. The first one was organised by the State Opera and Ballet General Directorate in 2008. Ballet students in Turkey may also apply to foreign ballet contests all over the world. There aren't any talent contests for the contemporary dance scene in Turkey.

# Financial situation

Most of the dance artists and companies have begun to gain international recognition in the past 20 years, yet very few can sustain themselves financially. They largely depend on festivals and international touring, since there is no financial support in Turkey.

The field of dance is vast and full of possibilities, although the basic foundations for it are still very weak. The dance scene is still relatively small and confined mostly to Istanbul. There is no support whatsoever from local authorities and, with a few exceptions, private sponsorship does not exist. The Turkish Ministry of Culture does not give financial support to the contemporary or modern dance field, apart from the support to festivals in general and certain events realised in foreign countries.

For dancers who can work for one of the two state-sponsored dance companies, namely MDT Istanbul and Ankara, the average income is equal to the average state employee artist's income per month in Turkey, approximately 6,000 TL. Since very few dancers can be state employees, others generally teach in various educational institutions ranging from kindergartens to higher education institutions to earn their monthly income. Unfortunately, there is no regular budget for groups and companies since they are project-based performances. Although most of the time, project groups or companies try to use already existing spaces in various institutions such as universities or artistic platforms without paying any rent, they may occasionally rent studios for rehearsals paying a range of rents depending on the landlord or simply on the agreement to perform at the same venue.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to talk about an entire sector of modern/contemporary dance in Turkey, let alone any regional differences because in most of the cities there is not even a modern or contemporary dance course.

# Critics and researchers

Because modern dance and contemporary performance is such a recent phenomenon in Turkey, there are very few critics and scholars who are experts in the field. Prof. Arzu Öztürkmen is one of the major figures and a teacher of many younger theorists. She has a PhD in folklore studies and is one of the first researchers of modern dance in Turkey. She has conducted extensive research on folk dance institutions and the early Republican dance scene. She currently teaches at the History Department at Bosphorus University, Istanbul.

<http://arzuozturkmen.blogspot.com>

Prof. Sebnem Aksan, the founder of Mimar Sinan University's Modern Dance Department, writes on dance in various journals and newspapers as a critic. Geyvan Mcmillen, the founder of the Yıldız Teknik University Modern Dance Department, has retired. Gurur Ertem, the artistic director of the iDANS Festival (which ceased in 2014), is also a dance scholar and writes more in English than in Turkish (<https://www.gurur-erterem.info/>). She recently edited a book called Bodies of Evidence Ethics, Aesthetics, and Politics of Movement [www.passagen.at](http://www.passagen.at)

Aylin Kalem, the director of the Management of Performing Arts Programme at Bilgi University, has a blog and writes regularly in journals and newspapers. She is the dance editor of Time Out Istanbul magazine ([www.aylinkalem.blogspot.com](http://www.aylinkalem.blogspot.com)). Ayse Draz is the editor of the dance events in Art Unlimited magazine. The writer of this report, Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Günsür, was head of Modern Dance Department at Yıldız Technical University between 2009

and 2010, and since 2017 has been head of the Theatre Department at Kadir Has University. She is also the founder of the Movement Atelier Company and writes in certain Turkish journals, as well as for foreign publications. Some of her publications are cited in the footnotes of this report [www.hareketatolyesi.blogspot.com](http://www.hareketatolyesi.blogspot.com)

Among the younger generation, Berna Kurt writes texts both as a critic and as a scholar mostly in the Mimesis journal (<http://mimesis-dergi.org>). There are various artists, mostly from theatre, who occasionally write on contemporary dance and performance, such as Şule Ateş, Yeşim Özsoy and Nihal Koldaş.

In folklore studies, there are a few critics/scholars who are also interested in contemporary performance. Prof. Arzu Öztürkmen is one of them. Another is Serpil Murtezaoğlu, who is currently an assistant professor of the ITU Turkish Music State Conservatory. She studied folk dance and folk theatre, graduating from the Department of Turkish Folk Dances at the ITU Turkish Music State Conservatory. She took her master's degree in the Turkish Folk Dances Programme and her doctorate degree in Turkish folk music and became assistant professor in 2006 ([www.cihangirlink.org](http://www.cihangirlink.org)). Some good critical texts on folk dance in general can be found in: <http://dansyazilari.blogspot.com/2010/04/altin-adimlar-halk-oyunlari-cephesinde.html> [http://dansyazilari.blogspot.com/2010\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://dansyazilari.blogspot.com/2010_07_01_archive.html)

# (Social) media and photography

The common mail group of dance artists ([danslistesi@yahoo.com](mailto:danslistesi@yahoo.com)) used to have an important impact on the exchange of information and ideas, and also functioned as a discussion platform. But it has ceased in this role.

Nowadays, there are various Facebook and Instagram platforms whose main function is to announce upcoming performances. Some of these are:

CATI (Independent Dance Artists Assoc.- Facebook page: [ÇATI Çağdaş Dans Sanatçıları Derneği](https://www.facebook.com/ÇATI))

Facebook: [Gosteri Sanatları – Performing Arts](https://www.facebook.com/GosteriSanatları)

Performans Sanatı  
<https://www.facebook.com/performansistanbul>

PERFORMANS SANATI  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/903303149753713/about/>

The website of Mimesis journal:  
<http://www.mimesis-dergi.org>

iDANS blog is where you can find many articles and criticism on the events of the iDANS festival:  
<https://idansblog.org/category/dil-secenegi-language-selection/english/>

There are also individual blogs and websites:  
Gurur Ertem, co-founder of iDANS, has a site:  
<https://www.gururerterem.info/>

Berna Kurt writes a dance blog  
<http://dansyazilari.blogspot.com/>

Mehmet Kerem Özel, an architect and academic at Mimar Sinan University, also writes on dance and theatre:  
<https://danzon2017.blogspot.com> (Eng.) and <https://danzon2008.blogspot.com>

Aylin Kalem, a dancer and academic at Bilgi University, wrote on dance between 2006 and 2010: both on <http://www.dance-tech.net> and <http://aylinkalem.blogspot.com/>

Elif Daç, a dancer, wrote on dance between 2010 and 2011.  
<http://elifdac.blogspot.com/2011/9>

Graduates of Bosphorus University, Gizem and Salim have a website on dance and travel:  
<http://www.yoldakidansci.com>

Alper Akçay is a trance dancer and a dervish who shares mystical dance news on:  
[www.alperakcay.com](http://www.alperakcay.com)

# Resources

There is a Vimeo archive founded by dancer/choreographer Secil Demircan in 2011:

<https://vimeo.com/channels/218351>

There are currently 61 full-length videos, all from Turkish artists.

Photographer Murat Dürüm, who specialises in dance photography, can be followed through his Instagram address:

<https://www.instagram.com/muramaturg>

# Facilities

For modern and contemporary dance, costumes are generally specially tailored for each project. There are a few shops that sell ballet paraphernalia, such as:

<http://www.fuathayat.com/>

[www.funkidkostum.com](http://www.funkidkostum.com)

<http://www.carmenbale.com/>

Tayfun Bale Giysileri (Address:  
Meşrutiyet Mahallesi, Vali Konağı  
Cad./Konak Çarşısı No:109 D:47,  
34363 Şişli/İstanbul; phone: (0212)  
231 41 34)

For folk dance costumes, there are thousands of different shops on the internet; search using keywords such as "halk dans kostümleri" or "halk oyunları kostümleri".



# DutchCu | ture

Centre for international  
cooperation

Herengracht 474  
1017 CA Amsterdam  
T +31 (0)20 616 4225

[dutchculture.nl](http://dutchculture.nl)