

# A Brief Overview of the Development of Children's and Youth Choirs in Türkiye

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The “westernization” movements of the Ottoman Empire, which began in 1826, laid some foundations for choral music before the Republic, but these developments were limited to the palace and its surroundings. Real progress was made with the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye and its policies that adopt “modernization”.

Faik Canselen, Erdoğan Okyay, Saip Egüz, Ziya Aydınlan, and pioneering educator-composers such as Hikmet Şimşek, Muzafer Arkan, Muammer Sun, Hikmet Şimşek, Muzafer Arkan, Muammer Sun, and Cenân Akın laid the foundations of children's and youth choirs in Türkiye.

The first theoretician of Turkish choral music is the composer, educator and musicologist Ahmed Adnan Saygun. He stated that choral work is the cheapest and fastest way of education in the musical life of the people, and that everyone can sing and that this ability can be developed through education (Adnan: 1940:13-19).

The first youth and children's choir movement funded by the state in Türkiye was started on June 19, 1968 with the “Children's and Youth Choirs Instruction” prepared under the leadership of Muammer Sun, who was a consultant to the Ministry of National Education (Sun, 1969: 227).



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This document, revolutionary both in terms of its historical value and its content, consists of seven chapters regulating the establishment of children's and youth choirs. According to Sun (1969:220), Provincial Directorates of National Education, on behalf of the Ministry of National Education, were in charge of the establishment of choirs, and of operations, concerts, development and meeting the needs of the choirs. It was planned that 80 Children's Choirs and 80 Youth Choirs would be established throughout the country, that each choir would prepare at least two concert programs per year, and that at least 320 concert programs would be presented as a series of at least 10 concerts in schools, in halls and outdoors, to students and the public. In the 1968-1969 academic year, 166 children's and youth choirs were established in many provinces and districts, and these choirs worked and gave concerts with the set goals. Two in-service training sessions were organized for the directors of the choirs, the first in Ankara (1968)

and the second in Sinop (1969). The first national choir movement of our country, which was realized with planned, diligent and devoted efforts and which raised great hopes for the future, was stopped after two years. (Değer, 2012:27)



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Composer and educator Cenan Akın founded the Akbank Children's Choir in 1975, the first children's choir in the private sector in Türkiye. Through this choir, composers were commissioned to write children's songs for the first time, a competition was opened for this purpose, and the songs that were published in a book were distributed to schools free of charge by Akbank upon the recommendation of the Ministry of National Education (İlyasoğlu, 2007: 130, Akbank, 1979: 3).

Until the late 1970s, it can be said that an educational and social foundation was laid and the groundwork was prepared for the establishment of TRT Children's Choirs, which has the most firmly established and permanent place among children's choirs

in our country. The establishment of TRT Children's Choirs started in 1977 and then other children's choirs were established around Türkiye.

Until the 1980s, there were very few "youth choirs" established through choral lessons in music education institutions and/or the initiatives of idealistic choir conductors. However, the first attempt to establish youth choirs with a nationwide impact was the TRT Ankara Radio Youth Choir under the direction of choirmaster Mustafa Apaydın and the TRT İstanbul Radio Youth Choir under the direction of choirmaster Gökçen Koray in 1983. TRT İzmir Radio Youth Choir was established in 1985.



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Because of the state monopoly of radio-television broadcasting, especially until the early 1990s, not only children, but almost all Turkish people listened to children's songs, folk songs, marches and different choral works through

children's and youth choirs. One of the most important contributions of TRT Children's and Youth Choirs to music education is that it encouraged aspiring music educators to establish children's and youth choirs. Some of the members of these choirs have also formed the source of youth choirs within non-governmental organizations.

In 1983, the Ankara State Opera and Ballet Children's Choir was founded under the direction of Sevim Ünal and Saadettin Ünal. The same choir was renamed the State Polyphonic Children's Choir within the Ankara State Polyphonic Choir with a protocol signed by the Ministry of Culture on November 15, 1990 (Yüksel, 1996: 40). Founded in 1989 under the leadership of TRT Ankara Youth Choir conductor Mustafa Apaydın, the Turkish Polyphonic Choirs Association (TPKD) organizes the Türkiye Choirs Festival, the longest-running national choral event in Türkiye.

In 1994, the "Akyurt Children's Choir" was established as part of the Sevda-Cenap And Music Foundation's project to "initiate and popularize music education at a young age".

Founded in 1999, the Association of Music Educators (MÜZED) is the most widespread and the only professional organization that gives special recognition of the importance of the choir in music education, and works with its members to develop and spread choral education.

The second national choir organization in Türkiye was carried out in 2001 by the Ministry of Culture under the leadership of educator and composer Salih Aydoğan. Within the scope of the project called "A Choir for Every Province, A Song for Every Child", children's and youth choirs were established in 29 provinces between 2001 and 2003. The Ministry of Culture organized choral training and management seminars for the directors of these choirs in Ankara (2001) and Antalya (2002).



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In 1968, the Ministry of National Education and in 2001, the Ministry of Culture halted the work that had begun under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education and Culture, respectively.

Choral music, especially children's and youth choirs, became widespread in the 2000s, mostly through individual efforts and the intensive work of universities and non-governmental organizations.

It can be said that the choral tradition has spread from big cities such as Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir in Türkiye. Although there are Fine Arts High Schools in almost all the cities in the country and university-level music schools in the majority of them, it is a fact that the number of choirs is altogether insufficient compared to the population. One of the most important reasons for this is the lack of education programs in music schools to train qualified choir conductors. Other

problems are the lack of support for those choirs that continue their work, such as working space, concert opportunities, etc., and the fact that choir conducting is not accepted as a profession. Despite all these negative aspects, it is a fact that in the 2000s, when communication opportunities such as the internet, social media, etc. developed and became widespread, the number of children's and youth choirs in Türkiye increased, more children and young people showed interest in choirs, many people studying music were interested in choral conducting and this interest is increasing day by day.



**Dr. Atilla Çağdaş Değer** started his music education by singing in amateur youth choirs. He completed his Bachelor's degree at Bilkent University, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Department of Choral Arts, and his Master's degree and Phd at Gazi University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Fine Arts Education, Music Teaching. He worked as a part-time lecturer in the same institutions. Since 1998, he has worked as a volunteer music educator in many projects, founded many choirs of different types and supported the training of young choir conductors. Since 2006, he has been teaching Solfege-Dictation-Theory and Choir at Hacettepe University Ankara State Conservatory. With an understanding that can be summarized as "music education for everyone", Değer carries out studies for children, young people, adults and the educators who will raise them. For more information: [muammersunkorosu.com](http://muammersunkorosu.com) – Email: [atillacagdas@yahoo.de](mailto:atillacagdas@yahoo.de)

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