

The Nevzat Akpinar Ensemble at Zankel Hall; the musicians are playing mandolinlike baglamas, which have 19 to 26 strings.

Music for Use: Dance, Sing Along or Examine It Closely

It must be odd for those outside Western European culture to find their music presented on brightly lighted stages in front of listeners sitting quietly in the dark. Friday

MUSIC REVIEW

night at Zankel Hall, BERNARD the Nevzat Akpinar Ensemble - eight musicians performing folk and ritual music of Turks and Kurds wrestled good-na-

turedly with a printed program seemingly created to be undermined.

"They made us send them a list a few months ago," Mr. Akpinar said from the stage after the fourth or fifth reordering. "At home one of us starts playing,

Berlin in Lights runs through Nov. 18 at various locations; (212) 247-7800, carnegiehall.org.

and then we join in when we feel like it." Singing songs and playing the mandolinlike baglama, either as solos or in unison, he and his colleagues took a path somewhere between how they do it at home and how they do it for people like us: a lot of improvising but following carefully rehearsed outlines as well.

A German-speaking gentleman sitting in front of me swiveled his head disapprovingly at every extraneous audience noise on Friday. I think he missed the point. This is music to be used, not worshiped: to be danced to, sung along with, walked past in the street, overheard or, if the listener has time to spare, intensely examined.

But it was a German event in its way, part of Carnegie Hall's citywide Berlin in Lights festival, now in full swing. The Chinese

Nevzat Akpinar Ensemble Zankel Hall

came to build America's railroads, the Finns to quarry New England's granite and the Latin Americans to tend our fields. In the same way, Turks by the thousands immigrated to West Germany, manning the wirtschaftswunder, or economic miracle, of a defeated nation's regeneration.

If the reluctant assimilation of their onetime "guest workers" haunts Germans today, the Nevzat Akpinar Ensemble offered a positive take on cultural reclusiveness: a stubbornness that protects its past and keeps Mozart and Wagner at bay. The singing, done with great soulfulness and slightly nasal head tones, negotiates scales with fewer notes

than our major and minor modes. Dance music, motivated by hip-shaking syncopations and shouted accents, can follow regular beats. The songs ignore bar lines and go where melodic inspiration leads them.

The baglamas, with their long, thin necks and with 19 to 26 strings, resonate freely, sending out clouds of gathered sounds. Intervals are not tuned as we tune them. Chords exist for themselves, not to generate harmonic movement, yet melody has the homing instincts of our tonal music. What would sound sour in Beethoven is just fine here. Everything was amplified. The instrumental solos sometimes offered great and perhaps excessive virtuoso displays. Imam Cetin, the only nonplaying singer and a very energetic one, made several appearances.