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### Music as a Message: The Program and its Manifestation in Fazıl Say's Piano Compositions

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**Abstract.** The article examines the features of the programmatic element and the methods of its implementation in a number of selected piano works by Fazıl Say. The composer is a representative of the newest generation of Turkish composers, who successfully combines his composing process with his performing activities. The article reveals the genre palette of his music, the features of his style based on a synthesis of classical music, Turkish folk music and jazz, as well as his aesthetic views on art. The object of analytical attention is formed by two piano works by the composer — his sonata *Gezi Park 2* (2014), which is part of a triptych dedicated to the events of the Turkish protests of 2013, and the *Izmir Suite* (2018), dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Turkish War of Independence. Socio-political issues in Say's music are reflected in different types of programmatic depiction — the narrative-generalized and the pictorial, both of which are enriched by an intertextual approach. This contributes to the individualization of the genres of the sonata and the suite, leads to the modification of their forms and dramatic development, and expands the semantic space of these compositions.

**Keywords:** Turkish music, Fazıl Say, sonata *Gezi Park 2*, *Izmir Suite*, program music

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## Introduction

The musical culture of present-day Türkiye presents a unique and complex phenomenon, which emerged as the result of the crossing and the interaction between the traditions of the East and the West. The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 served as a stimulus for the formation of a national school of composition, the main representatives of which — Ahmed Adnan Saygun (1907–1991), Ulvi Cemal Erkin (1906–1972), Cemal Reşit Rey (1904–1985), Hasan Ferit Alnar (1906–1978), and Necil Kazım Akses (1908–1999) — have created the first specimens of Turkish national operas, symphonies and concertos. The following generation of Turkish composers expanded the palette of the utilized compositional techniques, contrasting their aesthetics to the ideas of “the Turkish Five.” İlhan Usmanbaş (b. 1921) became one of the first who turned in his compositions to the serial and aleatory techniques, whereas Bülent Arel (1919–1990) experimented in the sphere of electronic music. The youngest generation of Turkish composers includes Kamran İnce (b. 1960), Hasan Uçarsu (b. 1965) and Fazıl Say (b. 1970). Notwithstanding the individuality of their respective artistic approaches, the present composers have the tendency towards a deeper immersion into national culture and an attempt to combine it with post-minimalist, pluralistic and other tendencies of our epoch.

The musical legacy of Turkish composers presents an insufficiently studied sphere of Russian musicology. A small amount of works has been published in Russian devoted to the general questions of the formation of the national compositional school [1] and an overview of Turkish music, [2] as well as separate composers pertaining to it [3; 4] and compositions. [5] The object of research of the present article is formed by the music

of Fazıl Say, who is considered to be one of the leading composers of present-day Türkiye. At the center of attention are the peculiarities of the manifestation of the programmatic element in his piano works.

## Fazıl Say: The Path Toward Composition and the Palette of Genre and Style in His Music

Fazıl Say first obtained his fame as a concert performer of the Western European musical classics. He began taking piano lessons with the famous pianist and composer Mithat Fenmen (1916–1982), who pertains to the “second generation” of Turkish musicians. [2, p. 12] His pedagogical methodology included improvisation as an essential element, which helped the beginner musician achieve a certain degree of performing freedom and expand the horizons of creative thinking

In 1986 one of Fazıl Say’s concerts was attended by German composer Aribert Reimann, who recommended his friend, pianist and musicologist Robert David Levin to listen to the young genius. As the result of this meeting, Fazıl Say obtained the possibility of studying in Germany. Starting from 1987, he perfected his musical skills at the Schumann Institute in Dusseldorf, and then at the Berlin Conservatory under Levin’s tutelage. The latter gave a considerable amount of attention towards the performance practice of the Classicist era and was well-known by his reconstructions of unfinished musical compositions from the 18th century (first of all, Bach and Mozart). He developed the Turkish composer’s interest in European classical music and formed his stylistic sensitivity.

The first great success enjoyed by Fazıl Say came from his winning the *Young Concerts Artists* competition in New York, which brought along tours in various cities of the USA and gave a start to his international career. Since that time he has actively performed around the world,

collaborating with many outstanding musicians and with European and American orchestras. His broad repertoire includes the works of Bach, the Viennese Classicists (Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven), the Romanticist composers (Chopin and Liszt), the Impressionists (Debussy and Ravel), the music of Russian composers (Mussorgsky, Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev) and the 20th century innovators (Bartók and Janáček).

In addition to his successful performing career, Fazıl Say has established himself as one of the most original composers of the new millennium from the Middle East. Already during the period of his studies in Europe, his compositions had been noticed and received positive responses from critics.

The genre palette of the Turkish composer's musical creativity is diverse, it includes three symphonies, approximately ten concertos (for piano, violin, clarinet, trumpet and other instruments), numerous chamber vocal and instrumental pieces, works in the genres of cantata and oratorio, as well as music for theater and cinema.

The greatest fame is enjoyed by Fazıl Say's piano works; the musician frequently includes them into the programs of his touring concerts. He has written about twenty solo pieces of the most diverse genres — transcriptions, sonatas, suites, fantasies, rhapsodies, etc. Special popularity has been achieved by such compositions as *Alla Turca Jazz* and *Paganini Jazz*, interpreting world-famous musical themes in the context of a jazz style. At the same time, Say's approach is uncommon: the composer frequently combines puts together stylistically heterogeneous fragments. For example, in the rondo *Alla Turca* he alternates systematically fragments of Mozart's music with variations on them in the styles of jazz and ragtime. The stylistic juxtapositions are masterful, and the idea itself of combining Mozart's music with a musical style historically

alien to it is in its spirit close to the gesture of Marcel Duchamp, who had a certain time ago drawn a moustache and a beard on the portrait of "Mona Lisa."

In general, Fazıl Say's music is marked by an inimitable originality; the composer synthesizes together academic, classical traditions with jazz and Turkish folk music. From the latter he derives specific national modes and rhythms, as well as the range of folk instruments. He brings into his orchestral compositions such national instruments as the kudüm and the darbuka, and he has written a concerto for the ney flute. With the aim of imitating the sounds of folk instruments, he frequently turns to extended performance techniques. The most illustrative piece of music in this regard is his piano piece *Kara Toprak (Black Earth, 1997)*, the prepared sounds and improvisational style of which reminds of playing the saz. The interspersing of Eastern and Western elements in Fazıl Say's musical style may be seen as the result of the influence of that multicultural milieu in which his artistic individuality has been formed.

Practically all of the composer's music is programmatic in its essence. The sources of his inspiration are very diverse — the poetry of Homer, Omar Khayyam, Nâzım Hikmet, and Metin Altıok, Arabic folk tales, the songs of Âşık Veysel, the nature and folklore of his native country. Not infrequently, the impulse towards composing is aroused by actual social-political events of contemporaneity.

Living in one of the most religious countries of the world, Say does not make a secret of his atheistic convictions. He frequently criticizes the ruling Islamist party, expressing his concern about the advancement of conservative values in Türkiye and the suppression of freedom of speech. In 2013 the composer was sentenced by the court of Istanbul to 10 months of prison confinement for his utterances in social media insulting the religious feelings

of the nation.<sup>1</sup> The international protests that erupted as a result have led to a reassessment of the case, and in 2015 the decision of the court was revoked. The Supreme Court of Appeals of Türkiye acknowledged that Say's utterances were on the borderline of freedom of speech. In 2023 the composer's performances with the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland were cancelled after he publicly called for the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu to appear in court for war crimes, genocide and mass killings.<sup>2</sup>

Social-political subject matter has found reflection in the music of Fazıl Say. Thus, his triptych *Gezi Park* was written as a response to the Turkish protests of 2013. Before that, in 2003, the composer wrote a Requiem in memory of Metin Altıok, who tragically died in 1993, when the Sunnis set fire to a hotel in Sivas.

It is obvious that Say pertains to that type of artists who places great emphasis on the social role of art and is convinced of the artist's responsibility to society. His compositional activities possess a highly expressed humanistic directedness. Similar to the musicologist, Constantin Floros, the Turkish composer could very well have stated that "music does not appear or create its impact in a vacuous space, but develops in an interaction with other spiritual motions of time," [6, p. 41] or that "all of music is *humana*, it is created by man and for man." [7, p. 14] Because for Say life and art are closely interconnected with each other,

it is appropriate to make use of the concept brought in by Floros of "music as a message" (Musik als Botschaft).

What is the content of this message? To what extent is Say's approach towards the manifestation of the program? Is it possible to single out among the expressive means used by the composer a complex of sturdy semantic models? We shall try to answer these and other questions on the example of analysis of two piano pieces by the Turkish composer — the sonata *Gezi Park 2* and the *Izmir Suite*,<sup>3</sup> written in recent decades and available for study.

### *Gezi Park 2*

The Piano Sonata *Gezi Park 2* was composed in 2014. It is part of a triptych, which also included the Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra (*Gezi Park 1*) and the Ballade for mezzo-soprano, piano and chamber orchestra (*Gezi Park 3*). These compositions are dedicated to the mass protests taking place in Türkiye in the spring and summer of 2013. At that time, hundreds of people came out in protest against the chopping down of trees in the Gezi Park, situated on Taksim Square at the center of Istanbul. The demolition of the park was advantageous to commercial structures, and in its place there were plans to build shopping and recreation centers in its place. Very soon the protests acquired a political slant.

The introduction to the Sonata contains the following explanations, disclosing the conceptual plan of the triptych:

<sup>1</sup> On his page on Twitter, the composer quoted and commented on the verses of one of Omar Khayyam's poems.

<sup>2</sup> Say came out on social media with criticism of the politics in the Gaza sector, when as a response to attacks carried out by a Palestinian group of militants, Israel carried out bombings, as a result of which thousands of civilians were killed.

<sup>3</sup> The Russian premiere of these compositions took place in the Grand Hall of the Petrozavodsk State A. K. Glazunov Conservatoire as part of a concert titled: "A Parade of Premieres. Fazıl Say." The performers at the concert were Elizaveta Nefyodova and Arina Kulikova. The concert also featured the world premiere of the *Truva Sonati* (*Troy Sonata*) performed by Gölge Kaan Daniel.

“This sonata for solo piano is the second of a three-part cycle of works which recounts the events at Gezi Park. The first work (the Concerto for two Pianos and Orchestra) narrated the days at the end of May 2013, and took as its main theme the sudden police raid on a group of people attempting to protect Gezi Park and the natural environment.

This second piece dwells on the days of May 31 and June 1 and 2, when the many clashes and strong resistance gave the impression of a civil war. Gezi Park and Taksim Square thronged with millions of people, and a great struggle between the police under the authority of prime minister Erdogan and the people began. The slogans which rang in the air and the spirit of that day are reflected in *Gezi Park 2*. The composer explores these events through music.

*Gezi Park 3* is a ‘wordless song’ for mezzo-soprano, piano and chamber orchestra. The piece depicts the situation after the Gezi events, and is a look to the future. It attempts to explain through the language of music, the traces that this incident has left behind in us, the questions we have and our hopes.” [8, p. 4]

The piano sonata consists of four movements, each of them played attacca without any pause in between. Each of them contains a programmatic subtitle: *Nights of Resistance on the Streets of Istanbul, The Silence of the Gas Cloud, Berkin Elvan, Hope is Always in Our Hearts*. In his cycle, Fazıl Say proposes an

individual model of sonata development. Basing himself on the typological features of the genre, at the same time, he transforms them by means of programmatic and ethno-stylistic tendencies, which not only impact the conceptual, content-based level of sonata composition, but also touch upon its development of musical thematicism, intonation and dramaturgy.

Overall, the four-movement cycle is based on a traditional structure, however, instead of a scherzo, it contains two slow movements. The features of the Sonata Allegro form can be traced in the outline of the first movement. It is based on three themes. The first carries out the function of an introduction (Example No. 1). The distinctness of its image is connected with the preparation of its piano sound: the composer wrote instructions to stop the strings with the hand while pressing the keys. This technique is labeled by him as the *bağlama-effect*, since the created sound imitates the sound of a saz — a folk instrument widespread in Türkiye.

The theme opening the sonata is a transformed self-quotation — the piano piece *Black Earth*, which has become the composer’s “visiting card,” begins the same way. In this case, the self-reference carries a particular semantic message. *Black Earth* was inspired by the song *Kara Toprak*, whose creator — the blind poet and singer, Âşık Veysel — is presently considered to be the cultural symbol of Türkiye. The text of his song is permeated by the bitterness of loneliness and loss, but also

Example No. 1

Fazıl Say. *Gezi Park 2*. The first movement, mm. 1–4, the introduction theme

**Allegro maestoso**  
energico, extremely rhythmical

The musical score for the first movement of *Gezi Park 2*, measures 1–4, is presented in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked **Allegro maestoso** with the character *energico, extremely rhythmical*. The score is written for piano, with a right hand (treble clef) and a left hand (bass clef). The right hand plays a series of eighth notes, with a 'muted' effect indicated by a bracket and the word 'muted'. The left hand plays a series of eighth notes, with a fortissimo (**ff**) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as 'ff', 'ord.', 'muted', and '8vb'.



of an endless love for his native land, which, notwithstanding all the hero's hardships of life, provided strength, faith and hope. Thereby, the sonata's introductory theme bears a certain symbolic function, being associated with the composer's native land.

The theme of the primary theme group, starting with rehearsal number 1, is of an impassioned-tumultuous character. Its imagery is emphasized by the initial intonation of a perfect fourth and its sturdy rhythm (Example No. 2). The theme is composed in Aeolian mode, beginning on *C-sharp minor*, corresponding to the Turkish Buzelik mode,<sup>4</sup> and is subjected to an active tonal development.

The subsidiary theme group (starting from rehearsal number 6) also possesses an energetic character, not providing a contrast to the theme

of the primary theme group.<sup>5</sup> The events of the Turkish protests of 2013 here receive an almost literal explication here. Say connects the musical material with the protesters' slogans, writing them into the music under the musical score: "Bu daha başlangıç, mücadeleyle devam" ("This is just the beginning, on with the struggle"). The rhythmic figuration of the motive, essentially, presents a chanting of the syllables of the present phrase (Example No. 3).

The subsidiary theme group is interrupted by harshly dissonant chords sounding against the background of intervals of ninths alternating with each other in the left hand. The composer connects this musical material with the image of a water cannon (see the composer's note in m. 40). This is followed by the development section (starting from rehearsal number 9),

Example No. 2

Fazıl Say. *Gezi Park 2*. The first movement, mm. 1–3, the primary theme group

Example No. 3

Fazıl Say. *Gezi Park 2*. The first movement, mm. 31–33, the subsidiary theme group

<sup>4</sup> The set of modes in Turkish music is analogous to the European modes, but has its own special set of names.

<sup>5</sup> In addition, both themes possess similar types of unfolding — starting from the low register, they gradually pass on to a higher tessitura.

the conflicting dramaturgy of which is emphasized by an entire set of techniques: the composer combines vertically elements of the primary and the subsidiary theme groups, presenting them alternately with statements of the “water cannon” motives, brings in new musical material, the scattered passages of which are associated both with the panic of the dispersing crowd and with the attacks of the police. The intonations of the primary theme group are gradually distorted and infiltrated with the intervals of seconds and tritones, it is accompanied by clusters and becomes atonal.

The recapitulation is subjected to substantial transformations. First of all, the material of the primary theme group is extruded from it. Its function is taken up by the introductory theme. The idea of confrontation, comprising the semantic linchpin of the first movement, is enhanced here, since the motives from *Black Earth*, supplemented with glissandi on the piano strings in the low register, are presented in alternation with aggressively sounding passages from the development section. The substitution of the main theme, describing the people’s protest, with a theme connected with the image and the fate of the native land acquires a significant character.

The material of the theme of the subsidiary theme group is partially renewed by means of the imposition of a new slogan: “Her yer Taksim, her yer direniş” (“Everywhere is Taksim,

everywhere is resistance”). It is illustrative that there is no tonal coordination taking place in the recapitulation: the subsidiary theme group does not change its pitch foundation. Its “sturdiness” in the context of the overall programmatic concept connected with resistance must likewise be interpreted symbolically.

At the conclusion of the first movement, the subsidiary theme group is transferred into the high register. The mechanistic repetition of the beginning motive and its crystal sound bring to mind the image of a music box. The latter, being an old-fashioned kind of toy, is usually associated with nostalgic remembrances of childhood, innocence and love. The frailty and weightlessness of sound, emphasizing the illusoriness of human happiness, colors the conclusion of this movement into tragic tones.

The second movement – *Silence of the Gas Cloud* — presents a specimen of psychedelic music, created by means of both traditional expressive musical means and extended performance techniques. One of the most important dramaturgical devices is the technique of deformation of genre.

The movement is written in a concentric form of the type of  $ABCBA_1A_1$ . The initial figurations create the setting of the genre of a nocturne, however, instead of the expected lyrical melodic theme in the high register, there appear repetitions of separate sounds, similar to glints of dazzling light (Example No. 4). Their piercing quality is provided not only by

Example No. 4

Fazıl Say. *Gezi Park 2*. Second movement, mm. 1–5

Musical score for Example No. 4, measures 1–5 of the second movement of *Gezi Park 2* by Fazıl Say. The score is in 8/8 time, marked *Moderato tranquillo* (♩ = 92). The right hand features a melodic line with a “wondering, seehind” annotation. The left hand features a bass line with various dynamics and articulations: *mp dolce*, *dolce sim.*, *f espr.*, *f*, and *ff (bitter)*. There are also *8va* markings for the right hand in the final measures. The score includes a “Rea. sempre” marking at the bottom.

dynamic and articulatory parameters, but also by a polytonal context: the strata of figurations is placed in the key of *A minor* (with a low fourth degree), whereas the “melodic” line is presented in *E-flat minor*. The genre-related features of the nocturne appear in dim outlines, resembling an image without a face, a transparent covering lacking tangible reality.

The second theme is indicated by the composer himself as an elegy. The complex of its genre features is expressed more prominently: the repeating figurations, the tonic pedal point, the presence of descending figures (albeit, few in number). At the same time, the declamatory character of the melodicism, the abundance of ascending intonations, including those based on the interval of a perfect fourth, the expressivity and dynamic intensity (*f*) endow the theme with passionate qualities and even a certain sense of dramatic pathos, not typical of an elegiac mood. Thereby, the genre, once again, appears in a deformed shape.

The material of the central section (C) is based on a juxtaposition of clusters dissolving, according to the provided performance instructions, “soft and dolce,” with short motives, the sound of which becomes altered by means of stopping the string inside the piano with the hand. In this case, the preparation reminds not of a saz (which is to a considerable degree enhanced by the rhythmic precision and mechanistic quality of the repetitions, along with the simultaneous emergence of the piano

sounds created the customary way), but can rather be associated with a quavering or out of tune sound.

The third movement of the sonata carries out the function of a tragic culmination. Its programmatic content is determined by a real-life incident. The intense night-time clashes of the protesters with the police, which used tear-gas, rubber bullets and water cannon to disperse the demonstrators, led to deaths of innocent people. Among them was the 14-year-old adolescent Berkin Elvan. He was shot by the police, as he was walking to a store to buy bread. Having received a severe injury in the head, Elvan spent 269 days in a coma and died on March 14, 2014. His funeral in Istanbul was attended by half a million people.

The genre foundation of this movement is formed by a lullaby song composed in ternary recapitulation form. The theme, beginning in the key of *B minor*, consists of scant motives. The elements of Dorian and the hemiola modes, juxtapositions of major and minor tonalities, as well as the phonism of the perfect fifth chords endow it with a bright ethnic color. The aerial and weightless quality of sound is provided by the lightness of texture (virtual two-voice polyphony) and quiet nuancing (Example No. 5).

The lullaby theme appears against the background of a constantly repeated chord with a symmetrical structure, reminding of the peal of a funereal bell, which introduces forebodings of misfortune into the undisturbed

Example No. 5

Fazıl Say. *Gezi Park 2*. Third movement, mm. 1–4

Andante tranquillo ♩ c. 54

The musical score shows four measures of music. The left hand plays a constant chord of B-flat, D-flat, and F (B-flat minor triad) in the bass. The right hand plays a melodic line consisting of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some ties and slurs. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) and the articulation is *dolce* (sweetly). The tempo is marked *Andante tranquillo* with a quarter note equal to approximately 54 beats per minute.



imagery. The subsequent tonal shifts (*E-flat minor*, *D minor*), the saturation of the texture, the filling-up of the vertical sonorities with non-harmonic tones, the appearance of a descending chromatic melodic progression correlating with the rhetorical figure of *passus duriusculus*, — all of this provides the overall dramatic sound.

The middle section creates a contrast with the first section, mostly in relation to the tempos (*Andante tranquillo* is replaced with *Allegro*), but in terms of the thematic content presents the development of the latter. Here, against the background of dissonant harmonic figurations, we hear the fragments of the lullaby theme sounding, leading to the culmination — the wail of the sirens and the gunshot,<sup>6</sup> indicated by a strike of the selfsame funereal bell, which has accompanied the lullaby song from the very beginning (although the upper subchord is replaced by the composer with a sonority based on perfect fifths).

The recapitulation is shortened to a considerable degree. The lullaby theme is unfolded on the dominant harmony, instead of a pedal point on the tonic, and its intonations acquire additional chromatic harmonies and are distorted. It is disrupted by a chain of diminished octaves sweeping from the lower register upwards. This is how death is depicted symbolically. It must be noted that such a technique acquires in Say's musical output the character of a sturdy semantic model. For example, in the piano sonata *Truva* (*Troy Sonata*, 2018), created through an inspiration from Homer's epic, the leitmotif of death is presented in an analogous textural solution — by means of a chain of ascending tritones.

In the finale, the composer chooses the form of through development. Such

a choice is natural, since the subject matter of this movement is connected with hopes for the future, which has an ambiguous character. In addition, the problem range touched upon in the sonata would have a continuation in the third part of the triptych.

The thematic material is contrasting: the heroic-pathetic subject matter, saturated with declamatory features, is followed by lyrical themes, the initial intonation of which (the trichord within a perfect fourth) coincides with the motive of the lullaby from the third movement<sup>7</sup>; it is replaced, in its turn, by a new theme, the sharply dissonant image of which is determined by the “contradicting” sounds, situated at a distance of a diminished octave; this is followed by musical material derived from the development section of the first movement; its aggressive and assertive character leads to the appearance of a conclusive theme, in its character reminding a subsidiary theme group.

The inclusion of material from the first movement and the intonational and thematic closeness provide for the dramaturgical integrity of the sonata. At the same time, the succession of themes in the finale, bringing the listener back to the images of struggle and protest, makes it possible to interpret the conclusion of the work as a call for resistance.

The undertaken analysis shows that Say turns to a generalized narrative type of program. It not only concretizes the musical content, but also individualizes the composer's approach to the genre of the sonata itself, its dramaturgy and thematic development. The foundation on folk music modes, changing meters and complex rhythms, the specific “spatial” vertical construction (with a predominance of chords based on fifths) form a steady complex of ethnical features of Say's music, ut it is interpreted for

<sup>6</sup> In the musical score, these moments are concretized verbally.

<sup>7</sup> In addition, in the introduction to the lyrical theme there arise allusions to the *Black Earth*.

the most part within the frames of classical forms and genres. At the same time, the Turkish composer does not in the least aspire to recreating the structure on the basis of a certain specimen. Thus, the programmatic concept leads to a modification of one of the most dialectic forms of Western European music — the sonata form, as well as to the technique of genre deformation (in the second and third movements). It must be emphasized that Say's music possesses an emotionally open character, arousing empathy; at the same time, it is not devoid of illustrative qualities, which is additionally highlighted by verbal commentaries in the musical text. Because of this, the Turkish composer's message is adequately "read" by the performer, as well as by the listener.

### The *Izmir Suite*

The *Izmir Süiti* (*Izmir Suite*) was written by Fazıl Say in 2018 in honor of the 150th anniversary of the municipality of Izmir and the centennial jubilee of the Turkish War for Independence and was performed by him at the same time at the Ahmed Adnan Saygun Center for the Arts. The cycle consists of seven movements: 1. *Waves on the Gulf*, 2. *Brahms in Izmir*, 3. *Quiet Morning on the Kordon*,<sup>8</sup> 4. *Chopin in Izmir*, 5. *Urla poetry*,<sup>9</sup> 6. *Rachmaninov in Izmir*, 7. *Finale "Jazz-Zeybek"*.<sup>10</sup> In the suite the composer's boundless love for his country and its natural landscapes has found reflection. In the composition, the magnificence of the nature of Izmir, its gulfs, embankments and mountains is rhapsodized. The admiration of the beauty of Turkish nature, in all likelihood, was instilled in Fazıl Say from his childhood. His grandmother, Zehra Say, was a well-known artist in Türkiye. In her works,

she depicted the landscapes and cityscapes of Istanbul and Izmir.

The suite is based on a juxtaposition of pieces that are contrasting in style: the pieces depicting the views of nature in and around Izmir are alternated with those that provide the portraits of the famous Romantic composers — Brahms, Chopin and Rachmaninoff. In the music the traditions of the Romantic classics, jazz and elements of Turkish folk music are intertwined together. The principle of stylistic contrasts becomes the source of the intonational-dramaturgic process.

In essence, the suite presents a cycle of dispersed variations, since the "portrait" pieces are based on the same musical material. At their basis lies the theme of the *Izmir March* (*Izmir Marşı*), well-known in Türkiye.

Fazıl Say demonstrates himself as a master of stylistic transformations, magnificently recreating the styles of the piano compositions of the Romanticists. All the pieces are written in ternary recapitulation form, while their genre profile reflects the individual predilections of the stylized composers.

Thus, the miniature piece *Brahms in Izmir* represents the genre of an intermezzo with features of a lullaby, typical for the German composer (Example No. 6). The song quality of the thematicism, the multidimensional polyphonically developed, but at the same time comparatively transparent texture, the shimmering type of figurations, the crowded position of the chords, the motion in parallel intervals in thirds, the complex rhythmic language — this entire assortment of means conveys very delicately and concisely the restrained and intricate Brahmsian lyricism in a folk vein.

<sup>8</sup> Kordon is the name of an embankment in the city of Izmir.

<sup>9</sup> Urla is a city situated in the province of Izmir.

<sup>10</sup> The Zeybek is a Turkish folk dance, popular in Izmir.

Example No. 6

Fazıl Say. *Izmir Suite. Brahms in Izmir*, mm. 1–7



The piece *Chopin in Izmir* presents a mazurka (Example No. 7). Similar to many short pieces by the Polish master, it is permeated with elegiac and melancholy moods. The melodiousness and lightness of sound, the rich ornamentation, including gruppettos, trills, grace notes, passages in pearl technique, creating the sensation of a quasi-ornamental element, stipulates that intricate grace that is immutably associated with the image of Chopin's music, in general.

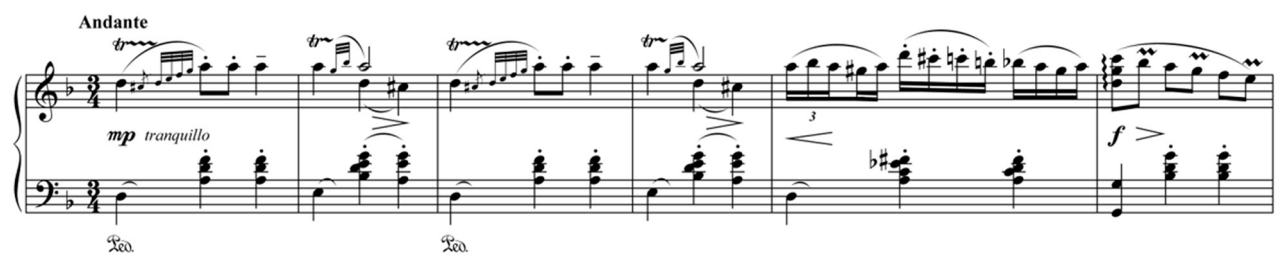
On the other hand, *Rachmaninov in Izmir* demonstrates the sonorous power and energy intrinsic to the piano style of the Russian

composer, demonstrated in his Preludes (Example No. 8). It is illustrative that the piece is unfolded predominantly in the dynamic range of *f–fff*. Fazıl Say relies on a multilayered texture with a concise division of functions of voices, a salient emphasis of the melodic line, the priority of the sound of the lower register, and a predominance of descending motion. In certain fragments of the music, he makes use of elements of bell sounds, and adds dynamism to his recapitulations by means of octave doublings and chordal passages.

Why is it that particularly these composers have been chosen for stylizations? Leaving aside

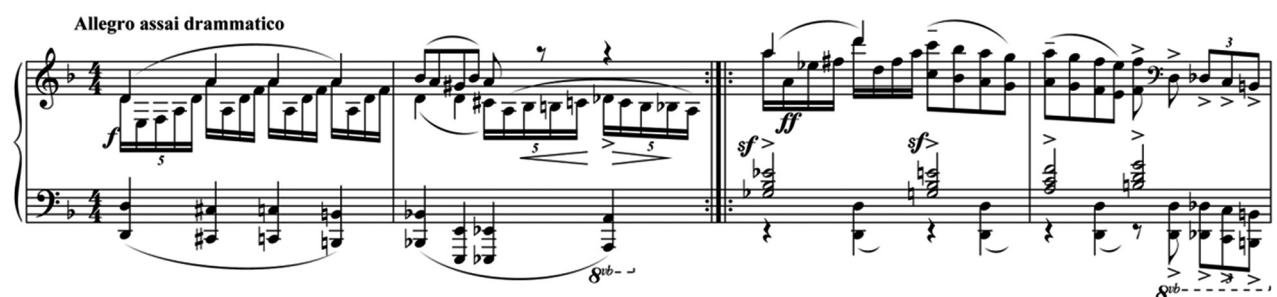
Example No. 7

Fazıl Say. *Izmir Suite. Chopin in Izmir*, mm. 1–6



Example No. 8

Fazıl Say. *Izmir Suite. Rachmaninov in Izmir*, mm. 1–4



any subjective predilections, let us emphasize two moments. First of all, the music of Chopin, Brahms and Rachmaninoff demonstrates different verges of Romanticism: the refined-poetical, the expressive-restrained, and the tumultuous-dramatic. Second, in the works of each of the composers who were subjected to stylization, the organic connection with the folk culture of their respective countries has found reflection. Nobody among these composers quoted genuine folk melodies in his own music, but in their musical languages there was an organic combination of melodic-intonational turns, the modal structure and rhythms typical of the song and dance forms of Polish and Russian (broadly – Slavic), and Hungarian music, which determined the originality of each of their styles.

The block of odd-numbered pieces of the *Izmir Suite*, as has been mentioned before, presents predominantly landscape depictions. These miniature pieces are united by a Turkish color, manifesting itself on the foundation on special modal structures (Aeolian and Dorian minor, minor with a lowered fourth step), and rhythms characterized by a changeability of metric division, alternations of duple and triple meter cells, an abundance of syncopations, which reminds both of the aksak rhythm, widespread in Turkish folk music, and of jazz. Moreover, the pieces are connected by a common intonational and thematic inner structure and a common harmonic language. Thereby, all the “Turkish” pieces begin with chords based on intervals of fifths (such a harmonization was also characteristic for the lullaby from the third movement of *Gezi Park 2*). The harmonic vertical sonorities in them, if compared to the “portrait” pieces, are more acerbic and “vacuous,” because of an abundance of non-tertial chords (chords based on perfect fourths and fifths). In many compositions, there appear similar melodic motives, tracing out trichords and pentachords, with an absence

of half-tones, or including the interval of an augmented second. Especially many of them appear between the first and third pieces.

However, the intonational unity is intrinsic to the entire suite. It is provided by motives of the selfsame *Izmir March*. The most common intonations are, first of all, leaps on perfect fourths and fifths (for example, the initial motive of *The Poetry of Urla* is, essentially, the inversion of the initial intonation of the *Izmir March*), as well as descending short scalar motives.

The inclusion of the *Izmir March* into the composition may be examined as a peculiar national gesture and at the same time as the reflection of certain political views of Fazıl Say. Let us dwell on this in greater detail.

The *Izmir March* appeared during the years of the Turkish War of Independence and was dedicated to the leader of the Turkish national liberation movement, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938). Its authorship has not been established up to the present day, although in various sources it has been ascribed either to İzzeddin Hümayi Elçioğlu, or to Kaptanzade Ali Rıza Efendi. In present-day Türkiye, the *Izmir March* is associated with Kemalism — the ideology of Turkish national modernization, one of the most important positions of which is the struggle against the throwback elements of traditional society, the directedness on progress and enlightenment.

In his reforms, oriented on the Europeanization of Türkiye, one of the significant roles was allotted by Mustafa Kemal to art. He encouraged in all possible ways the implementation of Western musical culture onto Turkish soil. As the result of his social transformations, young composers and performers received the opportunity to study in Europe and, in their turn, well-known musicians started being invited to the country to teach. In 1926 the first conservatory was opened in Istanbul, and later, in 1934, upon the direct order of Atatürk, a similar educational institution



appeared in Ankara. In 1935 Paul Hindemith visited Türkiye. Upon a direct request of Mustafa Kemal, he developed a plan for reorganizing the system for musical education in the country. Later, the teaching positions in the conservatory in Ankara were taken by Ernst Praetorius, Carl Anton Ebert, Eduard Zuckmayer, Licco Amar, Georg Markowitz, and Ninette de Valois. It is difficult to overestimate their impact on the development of musical life in Türkiye.

The essence of Atatürk's cultural polity can be clearly reflected by the words of philosopher and sociologist Ziya Gökalp, who took an active part in the implemented reforms: "Our national music, therefore, is to be born from a synthesis of our folk music and Western music. Our folk music provides us with a rich treasure of melodies. By collecting and arranging them on the basis of the Western musical techniques, we shall have both a national and a modern music. This will be the programme of Turkism in music. It is the task of our composers to bring this aim to fruition." [9, p. 300–301]

Thereby, the music that unites together Turkish folk music with Western European styles and techniques may be considered both as the etalon and the mirror the reflection of the Turkish state founder's reforms. The program of Turkism was realized by the composers who comprised the so-called "Turkish five." They lay the foundations of the national musical tradition and brought it out onto an international level.

The *Izmir Suite* by Fazıl Say, incidentally, just as many of his other compositions, also presents a peculiar implementation of the program of Turkism. It is illustrative that on the composer's official website, this composition is described as "a *political statement* marking the 100th anniversary of the Turkish War of Independence and commemorating the founding father of modern

Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (my italics. — *E. O.*)."<sup>11</sup> The actualization of Turkism after almost a century of Mustafa Kemal's reforms is stipulated, nonetheless, by completely different reasons. Whereas in the 1930s the Turkish composers faced the challenge of creating an art that adequately reflected the spirit of the new nation, in the 2010s, the integration of the national values with European idioms in the context of Say's views on the social situation is perceived rather as an attempt to resist the rising Islamization and conservatism of present-day Turkish society.

### Conclusion

Analysis has shown that Fazıl Say realizes in his piano compositions various types of programmatic character — the generalized-narrative (as in *Gezi Park 2*) and the pictorial (as in the *Izmir Suite*). However, his music overcomes the boundaries of illustrative depiction or "landscape" tone painting intrinsic to Classical and Romantic compositions. The intertextual aspect (such as the reference to *Black Earth* in the sonata, the "alien" material and the stylistic complexity in the *Suite*) spreads apart the semantic space of Say's compositions and to a degree even brings it to a level beyond the boundaries of music. Intense with pathetic emotionality and filled with the pain of loss, the sonata *Gezi Park 2* is perceived as a humanistic message proclaiming the significance of resistance and the value of life, whereas the *Izmir Suite*, in which the Turkish march skillfully mimics in correspondence with Western European styles, while not losing its own image, sounds like a call for tolerance and liberalism.

While aspiring to convey his intention to the listener, Fazıl Say tilts towards the expression of the concrete in music. Besides the already

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://fazilsay.com/say/izmir-suite/> (accessed: 23.01.2025).



mentioned narrative element and figurativeness, the qualities that become his attributes are thematic and timbral personification, implementation into the musical text of a commenting verbal set, and the deformation of classical forms and genres.

Fazıl Say is not the first composer who in his musical output declares the ideas of historical synthesis, national particularity, as well as the connection between life and art,

but he has been able to develop his unique approach to the means of their development. The organic amalgamation of classical music, ethnic music and jazz serving as the reflection of the multicultural milieu of our time, the emotional openness of the music and the comprehensibility of the compositional intentions is what determines the secret of the success of Say's music among the audiences of the most diverse ages.

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