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## INTERPRETATION OF AZER DADASHOV'S PIANO SONATINAS

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### Abstract

**The purpose of the research** is to study various aspects of interpreting sonatinas by modern Azerbaijani composer Azer Dadashov. The author associates challenges of interpreting these works with the distinctive features of the composer's style. Studying this style helps pianists uncover the musical and imaginative content of the compositions and create a unified concept of performance dramaturgy. **The research methodology** is based on following methods: comparison; analysis; synthesis; generalisation, summarising. **The scientific novelty** of this research grounds on the fact that for the first time, a thorough analysis of the interpretive possibilities of performing three piano sonatinas by Dadashov is conducted. The three piano sonatinas by Dadashov are undeniable achievements in the artistic repertoire of this renowned Azerbaijani composer. The diversity and richness of musical expression used by this master in the sonatinas serve as a source for pianists' individual understanding and recreation in complete harmony of conscious and emotional elements. **Conclusions.** For every performer, strict adherence to the composer's instructions in the score hides wide opportunities for crafting their own interpretation. To achieve this, it is essential to develop the pianist's musical imagination, thinking, intuition, and artistic taste.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijani composer; Azer Dadashov; sonatinas; piano; interpretation

### Introduction

Works by Azerbaijani composer Azer Dadashov represent a vivid and deeply original chapter in the history of contemporary musical culture. As one of the talented students of Qara Qarayev, Dadashov absorbed the fundamental principles of his mentor's compositional school and, while preserving his unique artistic individuality, developed a distinctive personal style. Integrating the finest achievements of classical, romantic and contemporary musical languages while drawing upon traditional Azerbaijani musical heritage, the master harmoniously incorporates these elements into his compositions.

By utilising the modal uniqueness of Azerbaijani music, its characteristic melodic and rhythmic patterns, ornamentation, polyphony and the richness of musical imagery, Dadashov has created numerous bright and intriguing piano works. These include

cycles of pieces, preludes, sonatas, sonatinas, concertos, etc. His works are notable for their uplifting emotional tone and humanistic interpretation of folklore material. M. Babaeva (2014) notes: "A. Dadashov deeply understands the specific nature of any chosen genre, freely adapting its principles to align with the idea and imagery he seeks to convey" (p. 312).

Dadashov's piano compositions are distinguished not only by their profound artistic and aesthetic content, but also by their excellent pianism. All of his works bear the unmistakable stamp of the composer's individuality and worldview.

In general, the master's piano works are marked by their rich content and inseparable connection to Azerbaijani folk music traditions. The musical language of his numerous piano pieces is highly expressive. It is characterised by tonal richness, rhythmic, melodic and harmonic originality.

### **Purpose of the article**

The purpose of the study is to research various aspects of interpreting the sonatinas of modern Azerbaijani composer Dadashov. Listening to his piano compositions, it becomes clear that the development of his piano style was directly influenced by Qarayev's legacy, particularly evident in the sonata genre. To some extent, Dadashov's sonatinas reflect the creative handwriting of his mentor. They are major in tonality, bright and optimistic, as well as can be performed as a unified cycle by more experienced pianists.

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### **Recent research and publications analysis**

There are multiple publications dedicated to Dadashov's composing style, his works for piano solo, chamber music, orchestra, etc. Here we should surely mention such authors as M. I. Babaeva (2014), N. K. Dadasheva (2012), T. A. Seidov (2006), I. Khankishieva (Xankışiyeva, 2021), et al. These scientific works take a significant place in the field of studies dedicated to the works by Dadashov. Our study is focused exclusively on the interpretive and performative analysis of piano sonatinas. Thus, based on the stylistic features of Dadashov's piano music, we conduct a detailed analysis of interpretive tasks and possibilities for the pianist.

### **Main research material**

The first three piano sonatinas by Dadashov are undeniable achievements in the artistic repertoire of this renowned Azerbaijani composer. These sonatinas, with their colourful and fresh sound, are gratifying for performers and have become popular among Azerbaijani piano works, warranting special attention from researchers. The second and third sonatinas were included in the mandatory programme of the First International Competition of Pianists for the Best Performance of Dadashov's Piano Works, held in Baku in 2010.

The sonatinas leave an impression of extraordinary novelty, which persists even after repeated listening. This is partly due to the distinctive features of their intona-

tional and harmonic language, determined by their unique modal and tonal structure. At the same time, Dadashov freely incorporates principles from various compositional schools, skillfully intertwining them with the norms of national modal thinking. "...Whatever genre the composer works in, the expressive intonation rooted in centuries-old folk music remains central to his work" (Babaeva, 2014, p. 314).

All three sonatinas consist of three movements and, at the same time, are concise and substantial. They are characterised by an overall joyful, life-affirming mood and a distinctive resilient rhythmic foundation. Let us study them in detail.

The first sonatina consists of three movements, written in the key of C major in the form of a sonata Allegro. It is the largest and the most complex of the three ones. Its entire first movement, Allegro, has a motoric character, filled with bright, optimistic, cheerful and joyful images. The main theme and its intonations develop like a leitmotif throughout the sonatina. It serves as the primary musical material unifying the entire structure of the piece. Its rhythmically resilient and energetically charged character drives the entire musical development. The accompaniment is very energetic and, at the same time, transparent.

Example 1.



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Analysing the development of the sonata genre in Azerbaijani piano art, one can note the predominance of motoric, rhythmically even movement, which allows them to be classified as sonata-toccatas. For example, in Qarayev's *A minor sonatina*, the unified flow of development and a certain compositional freedom give this work toccata-like qualities.

In the development, the main musical images alternate and intertwine. A significant role is given to the energetic introductory motif. The intonations of the main theme acquire a new swift and decisive character. The first sonatina features complex, dissonant harmonies painted in vivid colours. Their sharp sound requires the performer to have a solid command of dynamic gradations and the ability to feel the tonal shading of chordal textures.

The second movement, Andantino, is lyrical in character and written in an impressionistic style, as the characteristic techniques of this style are clearly felt. It requires good expressive legato and a singing performance.

The third movement, Presto, embodies and concentrates the primary image of the piece within two thematic lines: the main theme and the secondary one. The music of

this movement is strikingly dissonant and demands clear articulation and a precise rhythmic pulse. It is based on two contrasting themes typical of a sonata-allegro: the first theme resembles the technique of folk *Ashiq* performance, while the second one is darker, more intense and improvisational in character, consisting of several dynamic crescendos. At the same time, this is not a clear stylisation of *Ashiq* forms of music, but rather an embodiment of its intonations, chordal structure, rhythm and sound production. The performer's task is to highlight and reveal dynamic contrasts.

The material of the main theme is based on chordal presentation, while the secondary theme, sharply contrasting with the main one, contributes to the further development of the sonatina.

The third movement is saturated with register-based contrasts in thematic development and ends with a quadruple *FFFF*. The virtuosic nature of the sonatina dictates a corresponding style of performance. Its interpretation requires great emotional expression, vibrant temperament, rhythmic coherence and organization. All this can help achieve an overall dramaturgical unity. The performer has to understand the entire concept of the sonatina, delve into the essence of its images, reveal and convey the artistic content of the piece to the audience.

The image of the work permeates every note. Yet it does not lie "ready-made" on the surface. It has to be comprehended and expressed holistically as a result of the integral emotional perception of the work and an analysis of the complex internal relationships and contrasts revealed by the composer throughout the musical development.

The second sonatina is also written in the key of C major. Still, it is more concise. The first movement, *Allegretto*, consists of two contrasting themes stylistically reminiscent of folk *Mugham* intonations. A clear interplay, like a dialogue between the upper and lower voices, is evident. The accompaniment of both themes is based on rhythmic and bass ostinatos. The left-hand staccato must be articulated clearly.

Example 2.

**Allegretto**

The musical score is for a piece titled "Allegretto". It is written for piano in 2/4 time and C major. The score consists of two systems, each with four measures. The right hand plays a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2). The left hand plays a rhythmic ostinato of eighth notes. Dynamics include *f* and *p*. The piece ends with a final cadence marked with a double bar line and repeat sign.

When performing the first movement of the piece, pianists should strive to overcome any sense of fragmentation or disjointedness. They must feel and convey to the listener the internal meaning and thematic connections between contrasting changes, attempting to unify them into a single line of artistic and dramaturgical development.

The second movement, *Andante con tristezza*, is very concise and sounds like a vividly expressive miniature. The material of this movement should be performed with a "fading" sound dynamic, as if dissolving into the silence of the hall.

Seidov (2006) notes: "Unlike the first movement, where musical material consists of polytonal complexes, the second is more complex rhythmically and texturally. The short note values of the descending phrases resemble the improvisational embellishments of folk instrumental musicians" (p. 226).

The third movement, *Allegro, scherzando*, is based on an original theme from a previously written piece for children. Despite its deeply subjective style, the music of the sonatina possesses such compelling expressive power, with its vivid content and defined imagery. So, the composer naturally captures the listener's attention, conveying the mood and perception of a multifaceted image.

The third sonatina is also in three movements. It is written in D major. The first movement, *Allegretto festivo*, sounds like a cheerful march. Its music is simple, clear and easy to listen to, with evident national folk intonations.

Example 3.



Here, students' creative imagination should be actively engaged in order to embody the musical imagery of the entire movement.

The second movement, *Andantino*, is lyrical in nature, with distinctly *Mugham*-like melodies. It is rich in polyphonic texture and reminiscent of a lullaby.

The third movement, *Andantino scherzando*, features dissonant harmonies. They sound convincing and expressive. The musical material throughout the movement is motoric, intensifying toward the end as the tempo accelerates to a dynamic indication of *Vivace*.

The difficulty of performing this movement lies in two factors: its technical demands and a simultaneous execution of a powerful dynamic build-up. This challenge is primarily psychological and can be overcome by mentally relying on the piece imagery. The recapitulation is compact and dynamic, synthesising lyrical elements of the composition. Thus, it is essential for students to convincingly bring out the subtle connections between thematic elements in this section, presenting them as the culmination of the form's intricate developmental journey.

The following observations can be made regarding the performance of these sonatinas. Firstly, attention is drawn to the unique form of the piano sonatinas. They are extremely concise and seem to unfold in a single breath, as a unified flow of sound that resists division into conventional formal sections. At the same time, the three-part structure is distinctly audible as a realisation of a general thematic-dynamic rise and fall.

The composer is attracted to the possibility of creating sonatinas in an improvisational style, free from formal conventions, where the form emerges organically within the musical expression itself. This distinctly Romantic approach is vividly and consistently embodied in Dadashov's works. The sonata qualities in these pieces are also connected with the juxtaposition of thematic images—motoric and melodic.

Researcher Dadasheva (2012) notes, "The primary appeal of the composer's music lies in its special lyricism, where every phrase, motif or harmonic complex carries the energy of the author's deeply felt emotion" (p. 7).

Thus, pianists may exercise a certain degree of improvisational freedom and creative liberty in their interpretations of these sonatinas, as their musical expressiveness is highly adaptable.

When performing these sonatinas, a pianist has a right to approach the text with a degree of interpretative freedom, effectively becoming a "co-author" of the work. Naturally, it is crucial to balance the pianist's capabilities and intentions with the requirements set forth by the composer in the score. Sensitive regulation of the degree of freedom in all sound parameters, alongside precise limitations, is key to achieving both a high artistic result and the pianist's interpretative self-expression. Here we can surely refer to the following statement by Kengerli-Najafova (2020): "The more solutions to this formula, that is, the richer and more diverse the means of articulation, the higher the skill of the performer, the deeper and more meaningful the performing interpretation process" (p. 158).

From the outset of studying the piece, attention should be paid to precise articulation, consistent tempo, numerous accents and all other critical textural elements. By employing the full arsenal of expressive tools and relying on the sense of measure and taste, the pianist should aim to create an artistically convincing interpretation.

In the sheet music for the piano sonatinas, the composer includes pedaling indications. However, some modifications may be justified from the perspective of the piece's sound. It seems that the pedal should be used with extreme care by the pianist to avoid "blurring" or mixing the delicate colours of chromatic contrasts, especially in chords.

## Conclusions

Adhering strictly to the composer's instructions allows to create an image with vivid, almost pictorial clarity. The richness of tonal nuances, brought to the forefront

by the performer's thoughtful interpretation, contributes to the distinctiveness of expression, shaping a plasticity and relief in the musical and artistic image. Alongside the various gradations of loud dynamics frequently employed by the composer, agogic nuances serve as an exceptionally effective means of expression. In crescendos and decrescendos, subtle, shifting shades – waves of moods, images and visually perceptible movements of the composer's thought – are revealed, forming the essence of these remarkable works.

The unique sound, dynamism and wealth of applied techniques and elements of sonic "imagery" in the piano sonatinas leave listeners deeply moved. Naturally, a lot depends on performers, their sensitivity, intuition and artistic taste. These qualities should take precedence in the performers' understanding and concert realisation of vivid and fascinating compositions.

Drawing on the experience of studying Dadashov's sonatinas, we can highlight the characteristic features of their interpretation and the important performance tasks they present. This pedagogical experience can serve as a foundation for studying these works and creating one's own interpretive approach.

Pianists are advised to approach the composer's text with great care, strictly adhering to all his instructions, while also not hesitating to demonstrate their own creative initiative. They should aim to bring to life not just the written notes, but music imbued with profound meaning, modern in spirit and vibrancy of expression.

The music of every single generation demands from performers a comprehensive mastery of skills, including musical-historical and theoretical knowledge, familiarity with modern compositional techniques, the highest technical proficiency, as well as complete harmony between the *ratio* and *intuitio* of pianistic development. This alignment is a key in achieving true excellence in performing the music of modern composers.

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## ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЯ ФОРТЕПІАННИХ СОНАТИН АЗЕРА ДАДАШЕВА

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### Анотація

**Мета дослідження** – вивчення різних аспектів інтерпретації сонатин сучасного азербайджанського композитора Азера Дадашева. Автор пов'язує проблему інтерпретації цих творів з характерними особливостями композиторського стилю, вивчення якого допомагає піаністу розкрити музично-образний зміст творів, створити єдину концепцію виконавської драматургії. **Методологія дослідження.** У статті використано такі методи дослідження, як порівняння, аналіз, синтез, узагальнення. **Наукова новизна** дослідження полягає в тому, що вперше проведено інтерпретаторський аналіз різних варіантів виконання трьох сонатин А. Дадашева. Три фортепіанні сонатини А. Дадашева можна зарахувати до безсумнівних досягнень художньої палітри відомого азербайджанського композитора. Різноманіття та багатство засобів музичної виразності, які використовує композитор у сонатинах, є для піаністів джерелом їхнього індивідуального пізнання і відтворення в повній відповідності свідомого й емоційного. **Висновки.** Для кожного виконавця в разі точного дотримання авторських вказівок у нотному тексті є безліч варіантів створення власної інтерпретації, тому необхідно розвивати музичну уяву, мислення, інтуїцію та художній смак піаніста.

**Ключові слова:** азербайджанський композитор; Азер Дадашев; сонатини; фортепіано; інтерпретація

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