

A musical analysis of the “Mizan” cycle: the 24 preludes and fugues by Azerbaijani composer Yashar Sufi

Gunay Mammadova

Corresponding Author: Assoc. Prof., PhD in Art Studies, Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan.
Email: gunaymammadova6565@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0007-5445-957X

Rukhsara Huseynova

Senior teacher, Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan.
Email: rukhsarahuseynova.rh@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0001-9581-5680

DOI 10.12975/rastmd.20251324 Submitted March 4, 2025 Accepted June 1, 2025

Abstract

The presented article examines the emergence and development of polyphonic cycles, focusing on how various composers, particularly Azerbaijani composers, have utilized these. The article discusses the significance of J.S. Bach's “Well-Tempered Clavier” in the field of polyphonic cycles, a masterpiece not only of the composer himself but also of world music literature. It highlights how this genre was adopted and developed by Azerbaijani composers. The article also delves into how Azerbaijani composer Yashar Sufi's “Mizan” cycle integrates national modes within polyphonic structures and how these elements are presented in a polyphonic form. The study also explores the innovations brought by Sufi's work in applying polyphonic cycles within Azerbaijani music and how this form is synthesized with national modes. Additionally, the article highlights the continued influence of polyphonic cycles from Bach to the present day. Since Yashar Sufi's “Mizan” is one of the first examples of polyphonic cycles in Azerbaijani music, analyzing this work helps us understand the composer's creative approach. This article also contributes significantly by showing how the polyphonic form in Azerbaijani music can blend national elements with traditional polyphonic techniques. The research was conducted using both descriptive and analytical methods. Yashar Sufi's “Mizan” cycle was studied in detail from a music theory perspective, and theoretical analyses of the prelude and fugue structures were carried out. The data collection process involved examining the sheet music of Yashar Sufi's “Mizan” cycle and relevant music works. The sheet music of Sufi's work served as the primary data source for the structural analysis of the preludes and fugues. The article underscores the pedagogical and historical significance of polyphonic cycles as a music form, showing that this genre thrives in the 21st century. Sufi's work offers a new perspective on Azerbaijan's musical identity, illustrating the vital role of local elements in polyphonic music.

Keywords

Azerbaijani music, Bach, fugue, prelude, polyphonic cycle, Yashar Sufi

Introduction

The most perfect and complex form of the polyphonic texture is represented by the polyphonic style. Known as the “ensemble of melodies” polyphony is considered a significant means of expression in music composition and has undergone a long historical development. The source of rich polyphonic style traces back to the folk music of various peoples, gradually developing in professional music as well, expanding and diversifying across various genres and works.

As we know, the most perfect form of imitative polyphony is the fugue. In

composition practice, the fugue is used in various ways, such as an independent instrumental or choral work, a part of an instrumental or vocal-instrumental sequence, or as a section within a larger form. Starting from the second half of the 17th century, the fugue was combined with a preceding introductory piece, such as a prelude, fantasia, or toccata, in a two-part sequence. In music practice, the prelude and fugue sequence became more widespread, and their relationship in musical works expressed the highest level of contrast and unity. These two fundamental forms of classical music are directly related to the historical development of polyphony. The

highest achievement in the unity of prelude and fugue was reached in the work *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by the German composer J.S. Bach. By writing this work, Bach was the first to demonstrate the possibility of using all major and minor tonalities.

“In writing his WTC Bach not only wrote fascinating pieces for the interest and instruction of his students, but he also created musical offerings of praise to his God and pieces of incredible variety in affection. With all of these intended effects of his collection, one might expect Bach’s music to sound forced or only excel in one area over another. Yet Bach managed to write beautiful masterpieces even as he fulfilled his pedagogical, theological, and emotional aims. These masterpieces can stand alone as teaching pieces, offerings of worship, or studies in a certain mood. But the whole collection carries an even more powerful impact when all three of these aims are considered.” (Rachel, 2013: 28)

J.S. Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (WTC) has inspired the creation of new works of a similar nature in the future. Particularly in the 20th century, polyphonic cycles began to experience a period of revival. Among the first polyphonic cycles written in the example of J.S. Bach’s famous collection and those that followed, one can highlight the work “*Ludus Tonalis*” by the prominent German composer Paul Hindemith (Vlahopol, 2010) as well as the “24 Preludes and Fugues” cycles by composers who left an invaluable legacy in this area, such as Dmitri Shostakovich and Roman Shchedrin. This list can be extended further, including composers like V.P. Zaderetski (Makarova, 2024), G. Mushel (Mushel, 1978), K. Sarokin, S. Slonimski and others.

One of the giants of the 20th century, Dmitri Shostakovich’s polyphonic cycle (Ursova, 2009), written on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the death of the great composer J.S. Bach, was created under the influence of Shostakovich’s visit

to Leipzig, Germany, and quickly became a major success, embellishing concert life and teaching repertoires. In his cycle, the composer introduced new tonal thinking and referred to major and minor keys, as well as the diatonic system, alongside a new system he created (c-d-es-fes-g-as-b-ces). Shostakovich arranged his preludes and fugues according to the circle of fifths in parallel major and minor tonalities. Musicologist A. Dolzhansky, in his book dedicated to Shostakovich’s 24 Preludes and Fugues, highly praised the cycle, writing, “The compositional features of Shostakovich’s fugues resulted in the innovative realization of many of the most progressive ideas of our time. ... With his preludes and fugues cycle, Shostakovich achieved a result that no composer has reached in the two hundred years since Bach’s death.” (Dolzhansky, 1970: 225).

Even in China, composers have written works in this style, drawing on Bach’s traditions, achieving new accomplishments in finding new means of expression and enriching the musical language. “The formation of the style of the Chinese composer was particularly influenced by the work of the great polyphonist J. S. Bach. The national roots of the polyphonic style of Ding Shande are connected with the refraction of the characteristic trends of modern music, including the linearity of orchestral thinking, which is more or less characteristic of most of the greatest composers of the XX century. The composer has particularly well and comprehensively developed polymelodic tendencies associated not only with the creative development of the traditions of the past, but also with the traditions of Chinese folk music.” (Chernyavska, Mengzhe, 2021: 2947)

It should also be noted that the main reason for the emergence of new polyphonic cycles during this period was, in particular, the enrichment of educational and pedagogical literature through them, the development process of contemporary polyphony, the

expansion of the concert repertoire for pianists, and the necessity of creating textbooks on polyphony. In the preludes and fugues written during this period, each composer introduced their innovations into the form, further enriching it in terms of style and means of expression.

Polyphonic Series in the Creative Work of Azerbaijani Composers

In the creative work of Azerbaijani composers, the series of preludes and fugues. The roots of polyphony in Azerbaijan must be sought in the multi-voiced characteristics of orally transmitted musical examples. In folk music genres, various types of polyphony can sometimes be found very clearly, while at other times, they are more hidden. Here, we refer to sound polyphony, homophony, as well as other types of polyphony. The imitation present in vocal-instrumental mugham, the ostinato style in ashik music, and the features of sound polyphony in songs, dances, and tasnifs further confirm this.

The foundation of the development of polyphony in Azerbaijani compositional art was laid by the founder of Azerbaijani professional music, U.H. Hajibeyli. In his creative work, polyphony and the essential regularities of traditional Azerbaijani music found their artistic embodiment in unity, and the future development path of national music was determined. The great composer once wrote in the "Azerbaijani Folk Music Fundamentals" section of his scientific-theoretical work titled *The Problem of Polyphony in Azerbaijani Folk Music*: "There is an opinion that if harmony (consonance) is applied to Azerbaijani music, which is inherently monophonic, then all of its tonal characteristics might be lost. This idea is entirely true. Incompetently applying harmony to the Azerbaijani melody could change its nature, remove its brilliance in tonal characteristics, and even make it dull. However, this does not mean that Azerbaijani music must remain permanently monophonic.

... The problem of polyphony in Azerbaijani music is still a matter of concern for composers and musicologists. The main issue is that polyphony should not be based on the principle of constructing harmonic cadences that require the correct succession of chords and changes in the tonal structure. Instead, it must be based on the logical combination of independent melodies that follow the laws of coherence." (Hajibeyli, 2019: 45).

Thus, in this scientific work, the composer not only discusses the monophonic nature of Azerbaijani music but also shares his thoughts on the problems of polyphony, emphasizing the theoretical possibility of resolving this issue. Through his creative work, he has set an example for future generations of composers in this area. Azerbaijani composers, in almost all of their works, including their operas, ballets, musical comedies, symphonies, songs, and romances, have skillfully utilized all the features of Azerbaijani folk music, blending it with classical polyphony. In their creations, one can encounter brilliant examples of both contrastive and imitative polyphony.

Azerbaijani composers, continuing the creative traditions of world composers, have turned to polyphonic cycles in their works. The first step in this area of Azerbaijani music was taken by the prominent composer Q. Qarayev with his 12 Fugues cycle. In this work, the composer masterfully assimilates the styles of both past and contemporary classical polyphonists, creating an exceptionally perfect piece. In the monothematic cycle, Qarayev used various styles of polyphonic techniques. In this regard, the work reminds one of J.S. Bach's *Art of Fugue*. Qarayev's 12 Fugues cycle is "a brilliant manifestation of the mutual unity of Azerbaijani oral folk music and Western European polyphony" (Dadashova, 1991: 68).

The tradition of creating polyphonic cycles, established by Qara Qarayev (Garayev, 1982)

in Azerbaijan, has been continued by the great composer's students, professor and composer Elnara Dadashova, and composer Yashar Sufi (Khalilov). Dadashova's 21 Fugues in Azerbaijani Mugham Modes series has made a significant contribution to Azerbaijani piano music (Dadashova, 2010, 2012). The 21 fugues, placed in two volumes, were composed by the composer in Azerbaijani mugham modes, and the cycle includes fugues written on the modes of Rast, Shur, Segah, Shushtar, Mukhalif, Humayun, and Chahargah. In these fugues, one can hear the intonations of various genres – folk dances, diringas, lyrical songs, and ashik music.

Azerbaijani composer Yashar Sufi

Yaşar Sufi, one of the prominent figures of contemporary Azerbaijani music, is a composer whose body of work spans a wide range of musical genres. His compositions in opera, ballet, symphonic, chamber-instrumental, and chamber-vocal forms demonstrate both a strong connection to traditional musical heritage and an openness to modern compositional approaches. In Sufi's oeuvre, a refined aesthetic balance is established between the rich musical legacy of Azerbaijan and the formal and harmonic structures of the Western classical tradition. In this regard, his artistic output may be considered a successful attempt to preserve national identity while simultaneously constructing a universal musical language.



Photo 1. Composer Yashar Sufi (personal archive)

Sufi was a student of Gara Garayev, an internationally renowned Azerbaijani composer who played a significant role in shaping the post-Soviet musical landscape of Azerbaijan. Garayev's aesthetic principles and musical discipline have had a formative influence on Sufi's artistic development. Nevertheless, Sufi's compositions reflect not only the legacy of his mentor but also his own original and innovative creative vision.

Among the composer's most significant contributions to the musical repertoire are the 9 Preludes, Scherzo for violin and piano, Theme and Variations for piano, Concerto for tar and folk instrument orchestra, “Mansuriyya” for piano and folk instrument orchestra, Four Mugham Etudes and Four Short Pieces for piano, Ballad - Garland of Salvation for choir and piano, Requiem, Hymn “Heydar”, Symphony - “Karbala” for symphonic orchestra, the ballet “Ashab al-Kahf”, the opera “Iblis”, and the romances “Nakhchivan Nights” and “Girls' Spring”, along with numerous compositions for theatrical productions. (Asadova, 2015)

Among these works, the polyphonic composition titled “Mizan” holds particular significance. In this work, Sufi skillfully merges classical Western musical forms with Azerbaijani national modal systems, presenting a unique synthesis that reflects his innovative compositional approach. “Mizan” stands out as a tangible manifestation of the composer's aspiration to transcend traditional musical boundaries and construct a novel language of musical expression, both technically and aesthetically.

The term “Mizan” literally denotes measure, criterion, balance, scale, and equilibrium. In a more specific and theological context, particularly within Islamic discourse, Mizan refers to the divine scale that will be used on the Day of Judgment to weigh an individual's good and bad deeds. Thus, beyond its literal implication as a physical instrument of measurement, Mizan also embodies a symbolic representation of moral and metaphysical balance (Akhundov, 2005: 259).

Problem of Study

The main problem of the study is to determine the significance of Azerbaijani composer Yashar Sufi's work "Mizan" within the context of Azerbaijani music and to reveal the musical characteristics of the composition.

The subtopics of the study are as follows:

- To identify Yashar Sufi's polyphonic style of expression and to examine the modal, tonal, formal, and thematic features of the preludes and fugues in Mizan;
- To explore the relationship of the preludes and fugues in the work with European musical traditions, as well as their national characteristics.

Method

The research utilized both descriptive and analytical approaches. Yashar Sufi's "Mizan" cycle was thoroughly examined from a music theory standpoint, with a particular focus on analyzing the prelude and fugue structures. The study delved into the work's form, melodic, and rhythmic aspects, as well as its use of modes and the integration of major-minor tonal systems (Skrebkov, 2020). Furthermore, a comparative analysis of musical forms and structures was included in the study.

Research Model

This research model aims to bridge the gap between the historical context and contemporary practices in Azerbaijani music by integrating both qualitative and theoretical approaches. The study focuses particularly on Yashar Sufi's innovative contributions to the polyphonic genre. In this context, a musical analysis of the composer's Mizan, a cycle consisting of 24 Preludes and Fugues, has been conducted.

During the analysis process, particular emphasis has been placed on tonal structure, contrapuntal techniques, and

methods of formal analysis. While the formal and harmonic structure of the work has been examined using traditional Western analytical approaches, the cultural, aesthetic, and modal elements found in Yashar Sufi's composition enrich the study with a multi-layered perspective.

Research Materials

The primary subject of investigation in this study is Mizan, a cycle of 24 Preludes and Fugues composed by Yashar Sufi. In addition, the relevant works of J.S. Bach and Dmitri Shostakovich have been examined for the purposes of comparative analysis. Furthermore, a limited number of written documents related to the composer's oeuvre, interview notes, and published writings on his music have been utilized as supplementary materials in the contextual analysis.

The theoretical framework is primarily grounded in the historical development and formal structures of the prelude and fugue forms. In this regard, works such as J.S. Bach's Das Wohltemperierte Klavier and Dmitri Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues have been used as key reference points.

Data Collection Tools

- The notated materials of the Mizan cycle constituted the primary source of data.
- Literature concerning the composer, academic publications, and historical background information were systematically examined.
- Existing written documents related to the works, as well as the composer's own statements and interpretations, were analyzed.
- Structural, technical, and formal comparisons were conducted with key examples from the history of Western music.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was structured to encompass various levels of music theory. The analytical process was carried out according to the following steps:

- The tonal centers, modulatory processes, and harmonic progressions of each prelude and fugue were examined in detail.
- Technical aspects such as thematic construction, number of voices, order of entries, stretto, and inversion were analyzed within the fugues.
- The formal structures of the preludes and fugues were evaluated through comparison with classical models.
- Modal characteristics, rhythmic patterns, and melodic structures reflecting elements of the Azerbaijani musical tradition were interpreted within a contextual framework.

This analytical structure enabled a systematic and in-depth investigation and facilitated the integration of theoretical and analytical tools in the effort to understand Yashar Sufi’s musical thought.

Results

A Musical Analysis of Composer Yashar Sufi’s “Mizan” Cycle

Among the recently composed polyphonic cycles, Yashar Sufi’s new work, consisting of 24 preludes and fugues, has also been included. (Sufi, 2023). The composer has named this cycle “Mizan” and dedicated it to the 300th anniversary of the great German composer J.S. Bach’s The Well-Tempered Clavier collection.

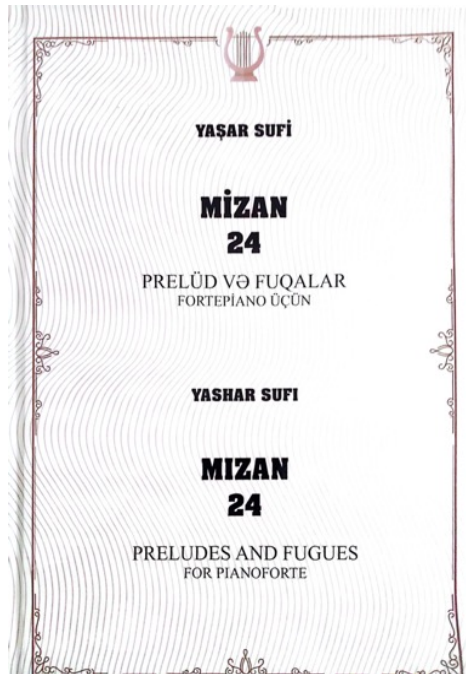


Photo 2. Mizan cycle. (Sufi, 2023)

The collection consists of a two-part cycle of preludes and fugues, where the preludes serve as an introduction to the fugues. The preludes are written in a free, homophonic-harmonic style, while the fugues are written in a serious style. Although the preludes and fugues differ in terms of content and musical material, they are unified by a common tonality. Thus, the cycle encompasses all the sharps and flats in both major and minor keys through a continuous chromatic movement, similar to the structure of J.S.Bach’s famous Well-Tempered Clavier collection. In the Mizan cycle, the arrangement of fugues follows a regularly maintained chromatic system, just as in Bach’s collection.

The chromatic arrangement of the preludes and fugues is realized in the following sequence:

Table 1. The chromatic arrangement of Preludes and Fugues in “Mizan” cycle

1. C	13. Fis
2. c	14. fis
3. Cis	15. G
4. cis	16. g
5. D	17. As
6. d	18. gis
7. Es	19. A
8. es	20. a
9. E	21. B
10. e	22. b
11. F	23. H
12. f	24. h

As can be seen, the cycle begins in the key of C major and ends with a fugue written in the key of B minor. It is also worth noting that all the preludes and fugues written in minor keys are completed with the same major tonality. In general, the composer’s work stands out with its distinctive tonal foundation. In these works, Yashar Sufi has synthesized the major-minor system with the mugham

tradition. The fugues are based on the main Azerbaijani modes. In the fugues, the theme and answer subjects are given following the classical fugue structure, following the fourth-fifth relationship. Throughout the fugues, adherence to classical harmony is evident, and the use of dissonances reflects the principles of the Renaissance period.

The preludes and fugues are distinguished by their variety in genre. Each prelude in the work has a vivid musical character. Here, lyrical, tragic, cheerful, and dance-like pieces alternate. The preludes are written in simple yet precise and colorful forms. Some of them are characteristically close to dances. An example of this is the a-minor prelude, which is based on a passacaglia dance. Corresponding to its Spanish origin, the fugue is in a slow tempo, in a minor key, and has a calm, melancholic character, developed in a variation form. The theme is placed in the tenor voice, and at the base, repeated, unchanged figurations are presented. The prelude is written in the rarely used 7/4 time signature.

Andante sostenuto e tranquillo *mp espr: sempre* *dolcissimo*

Figure 1. Prelude in A minor from the “Mizan” cycle. No.20, p.152

Some of the preludes are mugham-like (V, XVIII), while others (such as the E minor X prelude) resemble études. The collection

also includes preludes based on elements of improvisation. For example, preludes VIII, XIII, and XVIII are improvisational.

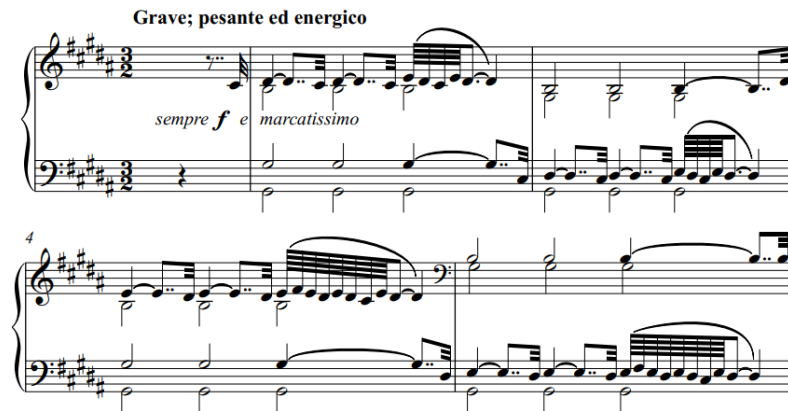


Figure 2. Prelude in G minor from the “Mizan” cycle. No. 18, p.134

Overall, the preludes stand out with their diversity in character, structure, and content. For example, in the VIII prelude, the movement of 32nd notes in sextuplets

gives it great energy and liveliness. The fast-moving sextuplets alternate with octave chord textures, and the prelude ends with a 10-voice chord.

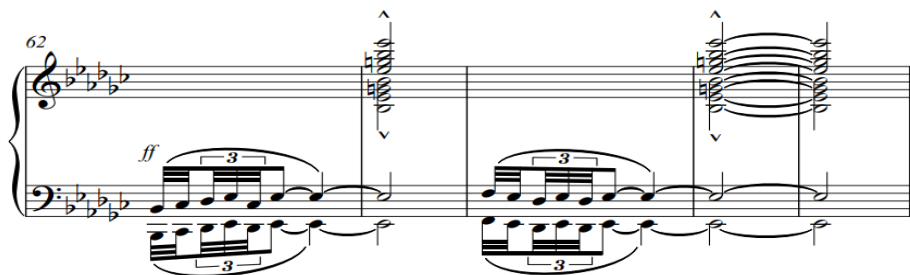


Figure 3. Prelude in E-flat minor from the “Mizan” cycle. № 8, p. 48

The IX prelude is presented with an octaval movement from the beginning to the end.

The prelude makes use of 5, 6, and also 7-8 note chords.



Figure 4. Prelude in E major from the “Mizan” cycle. No. 9, p. 55

In the XII, XVI, and XIX preludes, the techniques with horizontal movement. the composer has used complex contrapuntal



Figure 5. Prelude in F minor from the “Mizan” cycle. No.12, p.79

The XIII prelude, written in F-sharp major, is composed in a fast tempo and is presented with continuous movement of 32nd notes. The same melodic movement, transferred from one hand to the other, continues from

the beginning to the end. The prelude, written in a three-part form, has a coda section where the movement of syncopated octaves gives it a majestic character.



Figure 6. Prelude in F-sharp major from the “Mizan” cycle. No.13, p. 86

In this work, Y. Sufi particularly demonstrated the possibilities of the fugue genre. The fugues included in the collection are simple 3-4 voice fugues. In the collection, only the G major fugue is a complex 5-voice fugue. Thus, the collection contains 15 fugues with 3 voices, 8 fugues with 4 voices,

and 1 fugue with 5 voices. The themes of the fugues are compact, covering 2, 4, and sometimes 6 measures (for example, the XI song-like fugue), and at times, they consist of a single measure (the X fugue written in the Shushtar mode (mi), or even just a few notes. For example, the G major XV fugue.



Figure 7. Fugue in G major from the “Mizan” cycle. No. 15, p.111

The fugue themes are mostly written within a single tonality. Most of the fugues begin in the tonic or dominant key. However, sometimes they also start from other degrees, such as the leading tone (for example, the Fugue in C-sharp major, No. III). The themes typically end in the tonic key or in the dominant key,

and very often in the mediant (third) note. The themes do not exceed the octave in range, meaning they change in the range of a fourth and an octave. Only in the XVIII fugue (in G-sharp minor) does the theme's range extend to an undisturbed seventh.



Figure 8. Fugue in G-sharp minor from the “Mizan” cycle. No. 18. Page 137

The smallest range in terms of the theme is found in the G major (third) fugue. In terms of the development of the melodic line, the themes differ from one another. In some fugues, the melodic movement is gradually descending (e.g., Fugue I), while in others, it is presented in ascending scale-like sequences (e.g., Fugue XXIII in B major). In some fugues, the movement alternates in a wave-like manner, first moving upward and then descending (e.g., Fugue II in C minor), or it is presented in a sequence form (e.g., Fugue VI in D minor, Fugue VII in E-flat major, Fugue VIII in E-flat minor, Fugue XI in F major, Fugue XXIV in B minor). In some fugues, the theme begins with a leap of a fourth (e.g., Fugue IX), in others

with a fifth interval (e.g., Fugues V, XIV), and in some with a leap of a sixth interval (e.g., Fugue XXIV). The fugues, written with high polyphonic skill, are distinguished by their character and diversity. Among the themes, there are serious, sorrowful, and melancholic, as well as cheerful, song-like, lyrical, and dance-like images. Some themes are soft, calm, and thoughtful, while others are majestic and dramatic in character. Additionally, there are delicate, pastoral, and energetic themes. Examples include cheerful, simple C-sharp minor (IV), lyrical, expressive C major (I), C-sharp major (III), sorrowful E minor (X), fiery B minor (XXII), energetic, playful D major (V), E-flat minor (VIII), A major (XIX), B minor (XXIII), majestic

D minor (VI), joyful, grandiose E-flat major (VII), and E major (IX) fugue themes. All the fugues begin monophonically, without accompaniment, from any voice such as bass, soprano, alto, etc. In the majority of three-voice fugues, the theme is introduced in the bass voice, and in four-voice fugues, it is presented in the tenor voice. Real answers are dominant in the fugues, and it can be said that all the fugues have real answers. Only in one fugue—Fugue XVIII—is there a tonal answer. In this fugue, the theme, starting with octaval movement, has its non-diatonic leap in the answer replaced by a second interval.

In most of the fugues, the use of the inverse structure is maintained. The fugues in the series display a three-part structure. The first part, the exposition, begins with the theme presented in the main tonality, and this part includes the transition of the theme through all voices. Sometimes, there is also an additional transition of the subject within this section. For example, in Fugue I in C

major. In the second and third sections of the fugue, the theme's stretto transition is used. The middle section is presented in related tonalities, and the theme is developed through various polyphonic variations. In this section, the intermediary holds particular significance. Some fugues are noted for their abundance of stretto. In these fugues, the theme is presented in straight motion or with inverted, counter-motion. For example, in Fugue VI. However, there are also fugues where stretto is not used. For instance, in Fugues I, III, IV, and others. In these, the theme is presented in straight, inverted, or paired transitions. In Fugue III, only 9 transitions of the theme are used, and here, the main focus is on the intonations of the subject based on the intermediary. The volume of the intermediary in the fugue extends to 12 measures. In the fugues, alongside the stretto transition of the theme, as we mentioned, the paired transition of the theme at the same time in different voices also appears. For example, in the Fugue in C major.



Figure 9. Fugue in C major from the “Mizan” cycle. No. 1, p. 6

The intermedia is based on the material of the theme and the counter-subject. In the fugues, the intermediates are characterized by their development and are structured in the form of a sequence, playing a significant role in the fugue.

The themes of the fugues are diverse in terms of genre. In particular, the intonations

of song and dance genres are present. For example, the dance-like fugues XIII and XXII, and the song-like fugue XII can be cited as examples. Thus, the composer, by utilizing the richness of folk song and dance arts in his polyphonic themes, has created highly memorable examples. His polyphonic themes are distinguished by their clarity and transparency.

Like the preludes, the fugues also attract attention with many distinguishing features. For example, the IV C-sharp minor fugue ends in the same major tonality. Written in three parts, this four-voice fugue (a total

of 63 bars - 24 + 18 + 21) has the theme presented in a retrograde motion in the middle section. The reprise begins with the coupled transition of the theme.



Figure 10. Fugue C-sharp minor from “Mizan” cycle. No. 4, p.25

Fugues V and XIII have a cheerful, playful character. They are written in 6/8 time, typical of Azerbaijani folk dance music. The theme of Fugue XVIII, which spans one

measure, begins with octave motion. In this fugue, the composer has used a double subject. Starting from measure 25, the organ point becomes evident.



Figure 11. Fugue in G-sharp minor from “Mizan” cycle. No.18, p.140

As mentioned, Y. Sufi, in his “Mizan” work, not only used simple fugues but also resorted to complex fugues. The 15th fugue is a 5-voice fugue. Written in G major, the theme of this fugue spans a compact 1 and a half measures. The theme, presented with a

somewhat thoughtful character, begins with the tonic note of the key and concludes on the mediant. The fugue emphasizes chordal textures, with stretto playing a significant role in its development.



Figure 12. Fugue in G major from “Mizan” cycle. No.15, p.113

As mentioned, Y. Sufi, in his “Mizan” work, not only used simple fugues but also resorted to complex fugues. The 15th fugue is a 5-voice fugue. Written in G major, the theme of this fugue spans a compact 1 and a half measures. The theme, presented with a somewhat thoughtful character, begins with the tonic note of the key and concludes on the mediant. The fugue emphasizes chordal textures, with stretto playing a significant role in its development.

Conclusion

Thus, the great German composer J.S. Bach, with his “Well-Tempered Clavier” (WTC), laid the magnificent foundation for the polyphonic cycle genre, which continues to successfully evolve in the 21st century. By creating such a cycle, he proved that it is possible to compose and perform music on all the white and black keys of the piano. This work has not only become a musical masterpiece but has also inspired other composers, creating an important turning point in the evolution of polyphonic form. Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier” brilliantly structures the musical framework of the polyphonic cycle and has become a model to be followed both theoretically and practically. Therefore, after Bach, composers such as Hindemith, Shchedrin, Shostakovich, Gara Garayev, and others wrote works in this genre. This tradition, established in the 17th century, has laid the foundation for the extremely rich and diverse creativity of both European and Russian composers, as

well as Azerbaijani composers in the field of polyphonic cycles. These magnificent artistic examples continue to inspire composers and performers, and although some changes have occurred, they still maintain their relevance as a form today, allowing musicians to express deep thought and emotion. In the polyphonic cycles written in the modern era, each composer reflects their own unique individual approach, and most importantly, the cycles composed by Azerbaijani composers are presented with Azerbaijani mugham elements, and Azerbaijani modes are showcased in a completely different style.

Like the works of J.S. Bach and D. Shostakovich, this suite composed for keyboard instrument encompasses all tonalities and is constructed upon the alternation of homophonic and polyphonic sections.

Unlike Shostakovich’s preludes and fugues, which are composed according to the circle of fifths, Y. Sufi’s suite follows a chromatic sequence in the arrangement of preludes and fugues, similar to Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier. Differing from Bach, Y. Sufi incorporates not only major and minor scales but also Azerbaijani national modes into the suite, presenting them in a synthesized form. In Hindemith’s Ludus Tonalis, which begins with a prelude and ends with a postlude, the arrangement of fugues and interludes is organized based on closely related tonalities. As noted, Y. Sufi’s

suite consists of 24 preludes and fugues. In contrast, Q. Garayev's suite comprises a total of 12 fugues and is based on a synthesis of Azerbaijani modes with serial technique, relying exclusively on the sequencing of polyphonic sections. The same structural approach applies to E. Dadashova's suite, which consists of 21 fugues.

Azerbaijani composer Yashar Sufi has not only mastered Bach's legacy but also infused it with elements of Azerbaijan's traditional music, thereby giving it a new dimension. This work reflects not only Western music techniques but also Azerbaijan's rich musical heritage. In Sufi's preludes and fugues, the Azerbaijani mugham, synthesized with Bach's major-minor tonality system, plays an important role in merging the universal language of music with local identity.

The works included in the “Mizan” cycle, consisting of 24 preludes and fugues, have been analyzed in terms of their formal structure, thematic and textural qualities, modal-intonation, rhythmic and melodic features, which has helped reveal the distinctive characteristics of the musical language of the piece.

In his work, Yashar Sufi remains faithful to Bach's tradition, maintaining the chromatic arrangement features of the preludes and fugues in the same manner. The composer has created a diverse range of genres in his preludes and fugues. For example, in the 20th prelude, he incorporates the characteristics of the passacaglia dance, in the 5th and 18th preludes, he integrates mugham, and in the 12th, 16th, and 19th preludes, he employs complex counterpoint. He has achieved the synthesis of the two accepted modes in world music: major and minor, with mugham.

In this cycle, the fugues stand out with their varied character qualities: among the themes, there are serious, melancholic, sorrowful, as well as joyful, song-like, lyrical, dance-like, soft, calm, thoughtful, triumphant, and exciting characters. Sufi's polyphonic works reveal the potential and significance of presenting local elements

through polyphony, a universal language, in modern music.

Lastly, the “Mizan” cycle demonstrates how traditional polyphonic music forms can be synthesized with local melodic elements, and how this offers a valuable contribution both in terms of education and art. We believe that this work will continue to inspire future generations, maintaining the vitality of the polyphonic genre in the 21st century.

Recommendations

Analyses of the performance of the “Mizan” cycle could examine the challenges in stage performance, technical requirements, and the impact on interpretation. Technical differences in the orchestration of the work or the way pianists approach it could create an interesting area to explore how the musical meaning is shaped. In addition to the musical analysis of the Mizan cycle, a philosophical or aesthetic examination could be conducted. The modular structures within the work may convey an intrinsic meaning or cultural narrative, thus offering a deeper level of interpretation. In this context, an analysis could be undertaken through the lens of philosophical thought and aesthetic theories.

Moreover, a sociological approach could also be adopted. In-depth studies could be carried out on the place of Mizan in Azerbaijani culture and its societal impact, exploring the social and cultural norms associated with music. A research study could also focus on the psychology of the audience. How does the Mizan cycle influence different audience groups, and how does it shape musical perception? Such a study could provide insights into the psychological and emotional effects of music on the listener. Furthermore, psychological themes within the Mizan cycle could be explored in greater depth. Research could investigate how music reflects psychological processes such as human emotions, inner conflicts, and interactions with the external world, and how these reflections are interconnected with the structural features of the work.

References

- Abbasova, N. (2023). Investigation of the modal-tonal features of mugham in the short-form piano works of Azerbaijani composers. *World of Music*, (2), 9138-9146.
- Akhundov, A. (2005). *Explanatory dictionary of the Azerbaijani language* (451 pages). Baku: Elm.
- Asadova, Y. (2015). *Yashar Khalilov*. (30 p.). Baku: Sharg-Garb Publishing House.
- Chernyavska, M., & Mengzhe, Z. (2021). Preludes and fugues for piano in the polyphonic works of Chinese composers. *Rast Muzikoloji Dergisi*, 9(3, Special Issue), 2943-2960.
- Dadashova, E. (1991). *A short course of lectures on polyphony* (111 p.). Baku: Elm.
- Dadashova, E. (2010). *21 prelude and fugues* (68 p.). Baku: Elm.
- Dolzhansky, A. (1970). *24 preludes and fugues by D. Shostakovich* (258 p.). Leningrad.
- Eminova, N. (2023). Polyphonic cycle "12 Fugues" for piano by Gara Garaev. *Erciyes Akademi*, 7(2), 806-831. <https://doi.org/10.48070/erciyesakademi.1301579>
- Garayev, G. (1982). *12 fugues* (40 p.). Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor.
- Gadimova, N. (2000). The intonational features of piano fugues in Asaf Zeynally's compositions. *World of Music*, Baku.
- Hajibeyli, U. (2019). *Fundamentals of Azerbaijani folk music* (360 p.). Baku: Sharg-Garb.
- Huseynova, R. (2024). The historical development path of polyphonic series and its implementation in the creativity of Azerbaijan. *Scientific Reports of Bukhara State University*, (6), 221-233.
- Huseynova, R. (2017). *Polyphony: The history of polyphony in Western European music from the 9th to the 17th century* (263 p.). Nakhchivan: Ajami.
- Ivanova, N. A. (2015). *Short lectures for a course in polyphony* (56 p.). Saratov. [Publisher not specified]
- Makarova, N. (2024). Vsevolod Zaderatsky's "24 preludes and fugues": Return from oblivion. *Aspects of Historical Musicology*, 36(36), 62-80. <https://doi.org/10.34064/khnum2-36.04>
- Mazullo, M. (2010). *Shostakovich's preludes and fugues: Contexts, style, performance*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/978-0-300-14943-2>
- Mushel, G. (1978). *Twenty-four preludes and fugues for piano* (116 pages). Moscow: Soviet Composer.
- Lowrance, R. A. (2013). Instruction, devotion, and affection: Three roles of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. *Musical Offerings*, 4(1), Article 2, 15-30.
- Skrebkov, S. (2020). *Analysis of musical works* (302 p.). Moscow: Urayt.
- Sufi, Y. (2023). *Mizan: 24 preludes and fugues* (193 p.). Nakhchivan: Ajami.
- Ursova, T. (2009). *Interpreting cycles of preludes and fugues by Soviet composers: Problems of performance and perception*. Doctoral dissertation. Goldsmiths College, University of London.
- Vlahopol, G. (2010). Baroque reflections in *Ludus Tonalis* by Paul Hindemith. *Recent Advances in Acoustics & Music*.

Biodata of Authors



Assoc. Prof., Dr. **Gunay Mammadova** completed her undergraduate education in 2003 in the Musicology department at Nakhchivan State University. She completed her master's degree in 2005 in the Musicology department of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory with a thesis titled “Structural Features of Azerbaijani Folk Dance Melodies”. Since 2007, she has been a member of the Union of Composers of Azerbaijan. She also served as the General Secretary of the Nakhchivan Union of Composers for a period. Her songs have been performed in concerts. In 2013, she defended her thesis titled “The Musical Folklore of the Nakhchivan Region” and obtained her PhD, and in 2015, she was awarded the title of Associate Professor. From 2016 to 2020, she served as the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Nakhchivan State University. Gunay Mammadova currently works as a faculty member in the History and Theory of Music department at Nakhchivan State University and is writing a new PhD thesis titled “Ritual Music of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan and Turkey's Iğdır-Kars Regions”. She frequently gives talks on various contemporary issues in Azerbaijani music in scientific journals, periodicals, television, and radio. She regularly participates in international scientific conferences, symposiums, congresses, and festivals held both in Azerbaijan and abroad. She also moderates international conferences and serves as a reviewer for internationally indexed journals. She has edited and reviewed various textbooks and music notation books. She has 6 books and more than 60 scientific and journalistic articles.

Affiliation: Nakhchivan State University, Art Faculty, Department of Music History and Theory.

Email: gunaymammadova6565@gmail.com

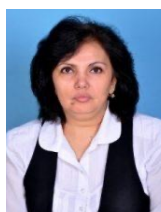
ORCID: 0009-0007-5445-957X

Personal web site: <https://ndu.edu.az/gunaymemmedova>

Research Gate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gunay-Memmedova/research>

AcademiaEdu: <https://nakhchivanstate.academia.edu/GunayMammadova>

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=_rP-R0EAAAAJ&hl=tr



Rukhsara Huseynova graduated from the Azerbaijan State Conservatory named after U. Hacibeyov in 1987 with a distinction diploma in musicology. Since that year, she has been working at the Nakhchivan Music College, and since 2001, at the Department of History and Theory of Music at Nakhchivan State University. R. Huseynova authorizes 4 textbooks, various course programs, methodological guides, test books, and more than 20 scientific and journalistic articles. In 2019, R. Huseynova was awarded a diploma by the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children's Affairs of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic for her effective work in the field of education. She was also granted the honorary title of “Honored Teacher of the Republic of Azerbaijan” by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated September 17, 2019.

Affiliation: Nakhchivan State University, Art Faculty, Department of Music History and Theory.

Email: ruxsarehuseynova.rh@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0001-9581-5680

Personal web site: <https://ndu.edu.az/ruxsarehuseynova>

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?use=UxB1VJ_EAAAAJ&authuser=1