

Review Article

Fikret Amirov's role and contributions in the development of Eastern Symphonic Music: A view on contemporary art in Azerbaijan from Fikret Amirov's perspective

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Abstract

Fikret Amirov is one of the composers who made important contributions to the development of contemporary Azerbaijani music. Amirov brought a different perspective to the symphony in this field by creating a new genre called symphonic mugam, which is described as the "birth of Eastern symphonic music". The research was carried out in order to examine the artistic life, works and contributions of contemporary composer Fikret Amirov, who lived between 1922-1984, to Azerbaijani music, and to draw attention to the importance of the famous composer in the field. In the literature review, very little research was found about Amirov. The findings are important in terms of making Fikret Amirov better known in the world and giving a perspective to future studies on this subject. In the research, document analysis method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. As a result of the research, it was observed that Amirov was a versatile composer by giving many works in different genres, and he worked with the multicultural musical understanding in his works with the mugam symphony he created. However, it was concluded that Amirov played a major role in the development of contemporary art by bringing many works to Azerbaijani music in forms that have not been used before.

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Introduction

The development of Azerbaijani contemporary music started in the 20th century. Contemporary music in this period; It includes operas, operettas, ballets, symphonies and composed songs. Azerbaijani contemporary music was formed as a result of the composition of these different forms of works with folk music melodies. The founder of contemporary Azerbaijani music is the great composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli. In 1907, he composed the opera "Leyla ile Mecnun", which takes its subject from Fuzuli, and it was performed for the first time in 1908 at the Tagiyev theater. The opera "Leyla ile Majnun" was written in history as the first mugam opera of the east. According to [Hacıbayriç \(1996\)](#), by composing this opera, Hacıbeyli laid the foundations of this genre in Azerbaijan as well as laying the foundations of national harmony and polyphony, and by synthesizing polyphony with the monophonic structure of folk music, he combined Azerbaijani mugams with the harmony system of the west (p. 500). In this period, mugam, which started to gain a new understanding with the influence of western music, has an important place in Azerbaijani music. According to [Turunç \(1999\)](#), mugam in Azerbaijani folk music consists of various parts based on improvisation style; it is defined as musical works that can be performed as vocal, vocal-instrumental and instrumental (p.19).

With this approach initiated by Uzeyir Hacıbeyli, Azerbaijani composers started to produce works in different forms by making use of mugam in their works. One of these forms is the "symphonic mugam" genre created by Fikret Amirov. [Ahmedzade \(2019\)](#) defined symphonic mugham as an original symphonic genre characterized by the combination of symphonic music and maqam music principles (p.9). Amirov brought a new perspective to mugama

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and symphony music with his works "Şur ve Kurd Ovşarı" composed in 1948 and brought a new genre to Azerbaijani music.

While writing these works, which are accepted as the synthesis of east and west, Amirov tried to express them within the framework of western symphony normatives without breaking the integrity of the mugams. "Shur" symphonic mugham met with the audience in many prestigious stages of the world in a short time under the direction of famous conductors such as Rojdestvenski and Stokovski. This work of Amirov is considered as the golden page of Azerbaijani music history (Huseynaliyev, 2021, pp.34-35). Amirov's symphonic mugam works have an important place in the contemporary Azerbaijani music literature in terms of both the birth of a new genre and the symphonization of the mugam genre. Amirov successfully used the synthesis of east and west in his works, without breaking the foundation of Azerbaijani folk music, and announced his national music to large audiences. In this respect, Amirov has an important place in the development of Azerbaijani music.

Fikret Amirov's Art Life and Influenced Artists

Fikret Amirov was born on November 22, 1922 in Ganja, Azerbaijan, as the second child of tar artist Meşhedî Cemil Amirov and Dürdane Hanım. The depth of his father's world of music and the skillful tar art played a major role in Fikret's adoption of folk music and his growth as an artist. Fikret learned to play tar at a young age from his father, Meşhedî Cemil, who was his first teacher.

Fikret Amirov expresses his love for the tar instrument in his musical life as follows; "The eyes of Azerbaijani musical instruments are tar. According to its own harmony, timbre, vibration and power, tar is not just an instrument, it is like an orchestra. "It is the Azerbaijani tar that composes me." (Acted by Tezmirazqızı, 2012, p.11-12)



Photo 1

Fikret Amirov

With the death of master artist Meşhedî Cemil Amirov in 1928, Dürdane Hanım raised her children alone and allowed them to continue their education. During this period, Fikret Amirov and his older sister started to take part in activities organized by Yahşi schools. Yahşi sings at events, while Amirov accompanies him with his tar.



Photo 2

Amirov's older sister Yahşi on the left, Fikret Amirov second from the right (Ganbarlı, 2019, p.39)

During childhood, children's creativity Olympics were held in Ganja as well as in Baku, and Amirov and his older sister Yahşi participated in these Olympics. In the competition, Yahşi sang folk tunes, and Amirov accompanied him with a tar. The great composer Üzeyir Hacıbeyli came to Ganja to select the most talented artists in the competition and noticed the talent of Amirov and his older sister Yahşi. With his success in these Olympics, Yahşi qualified to participate in the Olympics held in Baku and won the first place in the Olympics in Baku with his brother Amirov.

The teachers and students of the school named Qorki, where Fikret Amirov studied (now this school is named after the elegant Qayıbov's brother, İsmet Qayıbov), loved him very much and admired his talent. Because she sang the songs successfully and both played the tar and took part in drama activities by singing songs. It was his high talent that brought Fikret Amirov to Baku with the aim of achieving greater success. In 1939, the young Fikret, who successfully completed the tar class of the high school music school along with his high school, went to Baku to continue his education. With this, Fikret Amirov took the new and most important step of the path that took him to art (Tehmirazqızı, 2012, p.21).

In 1938, two brothers came to Baku. Although Yahşi loved to sing, F. Amirov did not want his sister to be a vocal artist. He took into account the ideas of his Yahşi brother and chose to become a doctor by winning the Institute of Medicine. Amirov, on the other hand, took the exams of the Azerbaijan State Conservatory in 1939 upon the advice of Bulbul and Uzeyir Hacıbeyli and was entitled to study there. He completed his education at the conservatory in the Composition department with Prof. It started in the class of Boris Isaakovich Zeydman.

At the beginning of his student years, Amirov stayed with his elder sister Yahşi for a while with his relatives. Later, they rented a house with a violinist friend. When his friend went to military service, Amirov started to live alone at home. Amirov's student years were not easy, but he continued to walk confidently in his art life, regardless of the difficulties. The composer's sister, Şefika Hanım, describes those years as follows;

"When I saw the house where Fikret lived, I was horrified. The condition of his house was very bad. In an empty and cold room there was a wooden table, two chairs, and an iron bed. Every time it rained, water would seep in from the ceiling and he had to move his bed every time. However, in spite of all this, he would never get demoralized, read, write and create with great enthusiasm." (Cited by Ganbarlı, 2019, p.42)

In addition to all these difficulties, Üzeyir Hacıbeyli, who had a great influence on Fikret Amirov's continuing his artistic career and education, is an educator at the conservatory during this period. Here, Amirov took lessons from Uzeyir Hacıbeyli on the principles of Azerbaijani folk music and started to compose his first works within the framework of folk music. The composer expressed his thoughts on Üzeyir Hacıbeyli's art as follows;

"Üzeyir Hacıbeyov is a great school of art. Many of us will still go through this school path, we will learn a lot from this school." "In order to fully express what the art of Üzeyir Hacıbeyov gave to the Azerbaijani composers, I can only say this: We all came from the Üzeyir school." (Cited by Tehmirazqızı, 2012, p.31)

In these years, it is seen that Amirov had great services in the notation of Azerbaijani folk music and makams in the studies at the conservatory under the leadership of Üzeyir Bey and Bülbül. Scientific Research Music Committee, which continues its studies under the name of Azerbaijan State Conservatory, made great efforts to transfer folk songs and makams to notes with the guidance of Bülbül. Fikret Amirov attached great importance to these studies and personally participated in the studies of the Scientific Research Music Committee. He went to various cities and villages of Azerbaijan and listened to the songs and mugams from the minstrels and recorded them. Most of the folk songs that Amirov recorded were included in the book "Azerbaijan Folk Songs", which was published with the arrangements of Bulbul.

Before Amirov graduated from the conservatory, World War II began in 1941. Amirov, who was 19 years old on 27 November 1941, was called to the army and when he joined the army, he was sent to Tbilisi to receive a 3-month training. After successfully completing his education, he was sent to the Voronezh front in the south of Moscow in 1942. During this period, he suffered a lot due to stomach ulcer disease and was taken into surgery. After his recovery, he formed a small music ensemble there, guided this ensemble, included Azerbaijani folk songs and dances in the repertoire, and organized frequent concerts in the hospital. These works of Amirov were highly appreciated and were effective in gaining spiritual strength to people in the war environment. Amirov was discharged from the army in November 1942 due to his illness and surgery. In 1943, he returned to Baku to complete his unfinished education and continued his lessons at the conservatory. In the symphonic poem "In Memory of the Heroes of the Homeland War" he composed in 1943, the composer expressed his feelings at the front by reflecting

his warrior spirit and dedicated this work to the memory of his friend Mammad Israfilzade, who lost his life in the war. After Amirov completed his education at the conservatory, the maturity of his art began and he composed many works. This period will be discussed under the title of "Amirov's Works".

The composer, who devoted his life to the development of Azerbaijani music, received the Azerbaijan State Award for his work "Epic Ballet About Nesimi" in 1974. As a result of his work, he was awarded the Soviet State Awards for the success of his work "One Thousand and One Nights Ballet". He is also a member of the Soviet Composers Union and Azerbaijan He served as the Chairman of the Board of the Composers Union Amirov, who had guided the Azerbaijan Opera and Ballet for a while, passed away on February 20, 1984 in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, due to heart failure.

Amirov's Works

Amirov started to compose works for the piano while he was still a student. While he was in the first year of the conservatory, he composed "Variations" for piano. This work is the first work based on Azerbaijani folk music and written in variation. The composer dedicated this work to the Baku State Conservatory. In 1945, he composed the works "Double Concerto for Violin and Piano" and "Concerto for Piano and Folk Instruments", and these works have an indelible place in Azerbaijani music history. "Concerto for Piano and Folk Instruments" is the first piano concerto sample of Azerbaijan. The "Romantic Sonata", written by the composer in 1946, is also the first piano sonata of Azerbaijani music. At the same time, the composer composed the "Children's Paintings", which consists of 12 small pieces, to be used in piano education for children, and the "12 Miniatures" for young pianists. Amirov has always been interested in Eastern music and included Eastern music in his works. The composer worked meticulously for the works he composed using Arabic music, and visited various Eastern countries during the preparation of the works. As a result of these visits, Amirov, who thought that Arabic music and Azerbaijani music had common aspects, worked with Elmira Nazirova in 1956-1957 and composed the "Piano Concerto on Arab Themes" together with Nazirova.



Photo 3.

Fikret Amirov in Egypt, Second from the Right (Ganbarli, 2019 p.64)

Amirov completed his education at the conservatory by composing the one-act "Ulduz" (Star) Operetta in 1948, and the maturity of his art began. The composer focused on symphonic music during this period. By synthesizing Azerbaijani folk songs and Western music, he created an unprecedented genre in symphony music. The works "Sur ve Kürd Ovşarı", which he composed in 1948, and Gulistan Bayati Shiraz, which he composed in 1968, are among the best examples of the symphonic mugam genre. The works "Shur and Kurd Ovşarı" were added to the first part of the "Fikret Amirov" album released by the Olympia Company in Moscow in 1966. Amirov's symphonic mugams enabled the listeners in Europe to become acquainted with mugam and to have a great interest in mugam music. These two successful works brought the composer a worldwide reputation and at the age of 26 he was awarded the Soviet Union State Prize for his works "Shur and Kurd Ovşarı". "Shur and Kurd Ovşarı" symphonic maqams were performed in the USA, and the famous composers who attended the concert showed great interest in these works and also stated that they wanted to meet with Amirov in person. In addition, Amirov's first concert in Washington, "Shur and Kurd Ovşarı" was performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The "Gülistan Bayat-i Shiraz" symphonic muga, composed by Amirov inspired by the literary work of Iranian poet and great Islamic scholar Sadi Shirazi, named "Gülistan", is the 7th edition of the "Music culture of the peoples, tradition and modernity" organized by UNESCO in Moscow. It was included in the program at the International Music Congress. The piece was performed for the first time on October 8, 1971 at the Moscow State Conservatory. Russian composer Boris Yarustovsky, who attended this concert and listened to the piece "Gülistan Bayat-i Shiraz", expressed his feelings after the concert as follows:

"We are all deeply influenced by Fikret Amirov's symphonic mugam, which we just heard. This work is a continuation of the creative principles in my early symphonic mugams. Amirov manages to use folk music as a source in his works very well. Seeing the creative influence of Western and Eastern musical civilizations on each other in Bayat-i Shiraz, foreign musicians value this feature of the composer's creativity very highly." (Cited by [Ganbarlı, 2019](#), p.52-53)

In addition to these achievements, the composer's Azerbaijan Capricho, Nizami Symphony, Azerbaijan Symphonic Suite, Portraits, Azerbaijan Engravings, Vagifi Symphonic Poem are important works that show his creativity in symphonic music. Fikret Amirov's success set an example for later composers, and symphonic mugam music was continued and developed in the future. After Amirov, Niyazi's Rast, Vasif Adıgüzelov's Segâh, Süleyman Alasgarov's Bayat-i Shiraz, Tofiq Bakıhanov's Hümayun, Şahnaz, Rehab and Neva symphonic mugams can be given as examples of these works.

Amirov gave great importance to stage works and opera music in his art. His interest in the opera genre dates back to his student years. The Yıldız (Ulduz) Operetta, which he composed in 1948 as a graduation assignment at the conservatory, is his first work in the field of performing arts. Ulduz Operetta is a one-act operetta composed by Amirov based on İsmail Hidayetzade's libretto. However, we have almost no sources about this work. We know that the work has been preserved in manuscript form, has never been published or staged. The only opera staged by the composer is the Sevil Opera. Based on Cafer Cabbarlı's play "Sevil" and the libretto by Talat Eyyubov, Amirov composed this piece between 1949-1952. The most important feature of this work is that it is the first lyric opera written on a modern subject in the history of Azerbaijani opera. In this work, Fikret Amirov combined folk music melodies with classical opera understanding and became the pioneer of an unprecedented innovation in Azerbaijan opera, just like in mugam symphonies. With this work, Amirov brought the Azerbaijani opera to the level of world operas, and at the same time reached the peak of his art with this work. Sevil Opera is a very valuable work in that it touches on a social issue as well as its musical success. Sevil is about the role of Azerbaijani women in society, the problems they have suffered and her struggle against the view of patriarchal society. Since the issue of women's rights and freedom was one of the most important issues of that period, it gained a great reputation and was accepted by all segments of society after the staging of both Jabbarlı's Seville and Amirov's Sevil opera. The President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, has the following to say about the Sevil Opera;

"I am not an art critic, not a musicologist, and I cannot undertake this task. But I think that Fikret Amirov reached the highest peak of his creativity with Sevil Opera. Because this work is both the subject of our modern life and is based on our national music." (Cited by [Tezmirazqızı, 2012](#), p.72).

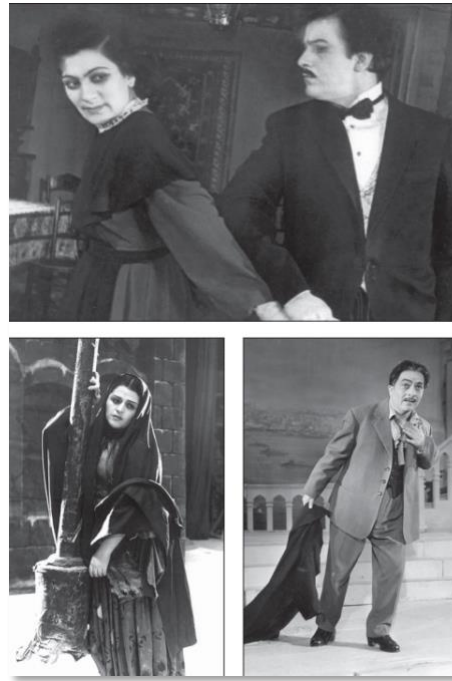


Photo 4-5-6

Scenes from Sevil Opera (Tehmirazqizi, 2012)

In addition, when the Musical Comedy Theater in Baku was opened in 1944, Fikret Amirov's musical comedy "Gönülçelenler" took its place among the first staged works. Amirov later composed music for many theater plays. These works are "Kxans" and "Vagif" by Samed Vurgun, 1950. Year by Cafer Cabbarlı, "Cavaşır" by Mehmed Hüseyin, "Sheikh Sinan" by Hüseyin Cavid, "Dawn on the Caspian" by Imran Qasimov. plays can be cited as an example.

The ballet genre, which has an important place in Amirov's performing arts, first shows up with the "Epic Ballet About Nesimi". A commemoration program was organized in 1973 for Nesimi, one of the important poets of Azerbaijan's history, who deals with subjects such as human being is a precious creature, not hurting the human body and soul, and rights and justice for human beings, in consideration of the 600th anniversary of his birth, with the decision of UNESCO in 1973. On this occasion, Fikret Amirov showed his love and admiration for literature and the great poet Nesimi with the "Epic Ballet About Nesimi". Another ballet piece, "The Ballet of One Thousand and One Nights", is one of the most important works in Amirov's artistic life, and has crossed the borders of the country and made the composer a worldwide success and recognition. "One Thousand and One Nights Ballet" was met with great interest in our country as well as in the world. It was staged for the first time in Turkey at the Istanbul Opera and Ballet, and the leading roles were played by Özkan Aslan and Deniz Olgay as Şehrazad. Of course, it is not a coincidence that the work has achieved such success. Amirov did a lot of research before composing the Thousand and One Nights Ballet.

Since certain roles of "One Thousand and One Nights" are related to the Iraqi people, Fikret Amirov and Naile Nezirova went to Baghdad with the official invitation of the Iraqi state in January of this year. They visited the cities of Baghdad, Mosul, Najaf, Karbala and Babylon for two weeks, had the opportunity to get to know Iraqi music culture closely, and listened to the performances and speeches of various artists and national music ensembles. Fikret Amirov gave a speech on Iraqi television and talked about the development of modern Azerbaijani music, the content and form of the Thousand and One Nights Ballet he was working on. (Cited by [Tehmirazqizi, 2012](#), p.161)



Photo 7

A Scene from "One Thousand and One Nights Ballet" (Tehmirazqizi, 2012)

Amirov benefited from vocal music in many of his works and gave great importance to vocal music in his art. He especially composed his songs and romances in the spirit of folk music, just like in symphonic mugams. The works were composed in the form of classical songs and at the same time, including the folk music approach, and the use of modern techniques in the vocalizations made Amirov's songs and romances special and unforgettable. The composer's works in this field are collected in his book, which he dedicated to Rashid Behbudov, which was published in 1971 and consists of 20 songs for piano and voice. The songs in this book; Azərbaycan Elleri, Reyhan, Gülür eller, Men Seni Araram, Göygöl, Sevdiğim Yardır Menim, Neylemişem, Aslanın Mahnısı, Toy Mahnısı, Üzümcü, Baharımsan, Seginin Mahnısı, Gülerem Gülsen, Gülüm, Pamukçu Kızlar, Kör Arabın Mahnısı, Mavi Nağme, Aman Ey Yar, Layla, Gece geçti (In Turkish).

Although each of these songs is very valuable, the song "Baharımsan" composed by Amirov, especially on the words of Samed Vurgun, has become one of the most well-known and popular songs of the composer in our country. At the same time, the composer's song "Reyhan" made an impact in Turkey and throughout the country, and was sung by various sound artists such as Yüksel Özkasap and Gönül Yazar. Amirov's vocal works still occupy a large place in the artists' repertoire today, as they did in the past. In addition to famous Azerbaijani artists such as Bülbül, Reşid Behbudov, Şevket Elekberova, Gülağa Memedov, many artists have included Amirov's songs in their concerts.

Amirov, who is a dynamic and innovative composer in all aspects, wrote some songs for children while giving vocal works. The songs "Bip-Bipin Nağmesi", "Tren (qatar)", "Bizim Hayat", "Kuzum" and "Tembel" can be given as examples. These songs are suitable for children's thinking and are instructive.

Amirov's Contributions to Azerbaijani Music

Fikret Amirov, who devoted his life to developing Azerbaijani music and making it known to the world, expressed his views on this subject as follows;

"I always dreamed that Azerbaijani music would be heard all over the world. Because the music of a people can form an idea about it. If I can fulfill this wish of my whole life even a little bit, I will be very happy." (Cited by Ganbarlı, 2019, p.33)

Amirov realized this dream and succeeded in making the Azerbaijani music known to the world by performing the works of "Gülistan Bayati Shiraz" and "Shur ve Kurd Ovşarı", which he composed in the symphonic mugam genre, in many stages of the world. "One Thousand and One Nights Ballet Sevil Opera", one of his stage works, has been met with interest in many countries by going beyond the borders of the country.

Amirov, the composer of the firsts and the pioneer of future generations, composed the first piano piece in variation with Azerbaijani melodies. By composing the first piano concerto and the first piano sonata, he brought these genres to Azerbaijani music. He participated in the studies of the Scientific Research Music Committee in order to teach Azerbaijani folk music to future generations and to create a common folk music repertoire throughout the country, and he went to various regions of the country to notate the folk songs he listened to. He made great contributions to the compilation and publication of folk songs.

Conclusion

The fact that Fikret Amirov is a versatile composer is proof that he has produced various works in almost every field of music. In addition, in the light of innovative ideas, it is seen that he pioneered his era and guided young composers with the mugam symphony type he created by using Azerbaijani mugam music together with Western music. The most important feature that distinguishes Amirov from other composers is that he likes to know different cultures, different music and different nationalities closely, and for this purpose he travels abroad and combines the music of different cultures in his works. The most important factor that makes Amirov's works unforgettable, to be accepted and loved around the world, is his skillful art of identifying the music of different cultures.

The richness of Amirov's works in this field, in terms of musical language and content, can be seen in the works that he composed sometimes based on Arabic tales and sometimes the poems of Nesimi and Nizami. Fikret Amirov, who we draw attention to being a versatile composer, also shows itself in many of his works.

By processing Azerbaijani melodies with a modern musical understanding, Amirov achieved great success both in the east and in the west and became the representative of the national music in the world with the works he composed.

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Appendix 1

Works of Fikret Amirov

Symphonic Works

- Shur and Kurd Ovsari (1948)
- Gulustan Bayati-Shiraz (1968)
- Nizami Symphony (1947)
- Azerbaijani Capricho (1961)
- Vagifi Symphonic Poem
- Portraits (1970)

Stage Works

- Ulduz (Star) Operetta (1948)
- Sevil Opera (1953)
- Epic Ballet About Nesimi (1973)
- Thousand and One Nights Ballet (1979)
- Nizami Ballet (1947)

Musical Comedies

- Gönülçelenler (1944)
- Gözün Aydın (1946)

Theater Music

- Illuminated Paths (1947)
- Tifag disintegrated (1950), (disbanded family)
- 1905. Year (1955)
- Sheikh Senan (1956)
- Javanshir (1957)
- You Are Always With Me (1964)
- Közeren quarries (1967), (ember fires)

Movie soundtrack

dawn

- Dawn
- Great Dayag (1962), (big support)
- Living is Good Brother (1966)
- I Wasn't Beautiful (1968)
- Sevil (1970)
- Music Lesson (1974)
- Firengiz (1975)

Vocal Works (1977)

- Azərbaycan Elleri
- Reyhan
- Gülüreller
- Ben Seni Araram
- Göygöl
- Sevdiğim Yardır Benim
- Neylemişem
- Aslanın Şarkısı
- Düğün Şarkısı
- Üzüncü
- Baharımsan
- Sağın Şarkısı
- Gülerimgülsen
- Gülüm
- Pamukçu Kızlar
- Kör Arap'ın Şarkısı

- Mavi Nağme
- Aman Eyyar
- Layla
- Gecegeçti

Piano Works

- Variations (1939)
- 12 Miniatures
- Children's Paintings
- Two Impromptu
- Suite on Alban Themes for Two Pianos
- Two Preludes (1948)
- Concerto on Arabic Themes for Piano and Symphonic Orchestra (1957)
- Double Concerto for Violin and Piano (1946)
- Concerto for Piano and Folk Instruments (1947)
- Romantic Sonata (1946)

Variations

- Varyasyonlar (1939), (piyano için)

Preludes

- No.1 Prelude in A Minor (1948)
- No.2 C Sharp Minor Prelude (1948)

Concertos

- Double Concerto for Violin and Piano (1946)
- Concerto for Piano and Folk Instruments (1947)
- Piano Concerto on Arabic Themes (1957), (with Elmira Nazirova)