20 Short Piano Pieces of Pedagogic Intent, Using Aspects of Traditional Persian Sources

Azadeh Atri
Student Number: U2576433

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I, Azadeh Atri, declare that this work is my own and that I have properly referenced the use of other materials.

Signed:

Date:
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The history of composition for the keyboard reveals a very diverse musical landscape, as well as various technical requirements. Friskin and Freundlich, among others, have already surveyed this large spectrum of keyboard music from 1580 to 1952 by cataloguing “those pieces which have artistic value” (1973: viii), as opposed to mere finger exercises. Performing and enjoying such a large repertoire requires a deep understanding of technique and sound. Obtaining such knowledge is due to the educational systems and pedagogic practices which expose students to the ideas of sound and finger technique from the early stages of learning. For this reason, not only finger exercises should be included in teaching methods, but also the artistic aspects of music should be considered.

As many issues are important in shaping the pianist’s skills, numerous piano compositions (exercises) have been written by composers, performers, and teachers with the focus on velocity, rhythm, and the finger technique (excluding the musical aspects). For instance, Czerny’s etudes (1893), Hanon's finger exercises (1929), Pischna’s technical studies (n.d.) have all been composed with pedagogical purposes regarding the finger technique and velocity. Bach's ‘The Little Clavier Book of Anna Magdanela’ (Friskin & Freundlich, 1973), Bartok's ‘For Children’¹, or his six volumes of Mikrokosmos² show, more or less, similar attitude toward finger technique, but most of them are quite different from mere finger exercises by having artistic values.

For instance, the 153 rather short musical compositions of Mikrokosmos introduce specific melodies or modes from the folkloric musical traditions, such as eastern European's. This pedagogical approach introduces the learners to the sound and the musical ideas, as well as velocity and the finger technique. Such ideas and approaches provide a fertile ground for me to apply

¹ These pieces were written between 1908 and 1909 (Friskin & Freundlich, 1973).
² These pieces were written between 1926 and 1937 (Friskin & Freundlich, 1973).
Persian modes in piano compositions with the aim of both artistic value and pedagogical worth.

Since no pedagogical piano composition has been written to date in Persian modes, this project presents 20 pieces in which the Persian ambience has been created by means of Dastgah(s) (Persian modes) or non-specific keys. As the Dastgah(s) mostly have quarter-tones and western classical music does not allow such a system, I have used my own adaptation from the original Dastgah(s).

The project is informed by primary source material as well as a variety of secondary sources relating to piano performance and education. For example, the piano compositions of Kabalevsky, Kurtag, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Sitsky for children have been studied, as well as studies by Debussy, and Scriabin which concentrate on a number of advanced technical and tonal problems. Moreover, two interviews were conducted in 2008 with Dr. Geoffrey Lancaster and Arnan Wiesel, the piano lecturers at ANU's School of Music, regarding the technical development of the piano students through the existing repertoire.

Issues to do with architecture, rhythm, muscle tension, and dynamic control were examined through the interview with Lancaster. The necessity to learn the art of improvisation was raised in an interview with Wiesel. Therefore, such professional views into colour, finger technique and musical interpretation and architecture were considered in composing the following set. For instance, the improvisation section in the ‘Fantasie for Five Pitches’ is a response to the revitalisation of the fading tradition of improvisation. Furthermore, the broad range of dynamics, extensive use of pedal, finger agility, and the change of metre in Ghoghnus are examples of exercises demanded by Lancaster. In addition to the interviews, some of these pieces were performed by the piano students of ANU’s School of Music in April 2009. Six pieces out of 20 were selected for this performance. What the performers experienced through playing such pieces is of an importance to note.

In general, five out of six university students were not comfortable with the free durations or the
consecutive change of time signatures. Although free durations and successive change of metre are not new ideas in the history of piano composition, it happened to be their first time to see or play such passages. Furthermore, for most of the students it was one of the very rare occasions in which they were performing a piano solo piece composed since 1900. For instance, one of the performers mentioned that he has only played two pieces from the “modern repertoire” (as opposed to the repertoire of 18th and 19th centuries): one from Prokofiev and one composed by me. Such comments may cast light on the effective role of the present project in reacquainting students with issues which seem to be currently missing from a pianist’s training.

To recap, this project sets out to work on some of the principles of the piano technique through a Persian modal system. Compositions in this project have been arranged in a progressive order, according to the technical difficulty and tonal control. The metronome marks should only be considered as an approximate indication, and the use of pedal is optional unless specifically directed. The titles for the first 16 pieces recommend the main focus of the composition, but other aspects of piano technique such as change of hand positions, change of metre, crossed hands technique, use of finger alternations on repeated notes, and dynamic control can also be observed in each individual piece. The last four pieces of the set (Rosella, Canon, Fantasie for Five Pitches, and Ghoghnus) require more technical ability in terms of finger agility, dynamic control, and creating an atmospheric quality. These pieces were performed by both university students and the piano students of the Girls Grammar School. As a result of these performances, some changes were made in the scores to ease the process of learning. For instance, the Canon was first written in 2/4, but it was found that the usual grouping of the semi-quavers (four semi-quavers per beat) is visually confusing for the learners and it adds to the level of difficulty which is not really necessary since the learners have to cope with multiple technical challenges such as phrasing of the individual lines and the even use of fingers without the aid of pedal in the first section of the pieces. Therefore, the 2/4 section was rewritten in 4/8 to avoid the unnecessary challenges.
In conclusion, to compose these pieces I have mostly used the two Persian Dastgah(s) of Chahargah and Homayun\(^3\), as well as my own self-invented scales (my adaptations from the original Dastgahs) to create the Persian mood. The following figures reveal the above mentioned Dastgah(s), but the ‘self-invented’ scales are introduced at the beginning of each piece.

### Chahargah

![Chahargah staff notation]

In the original Chahargah, A, and D are the notes with the quartertones. Since the western classical tuning does not allow such a system, the flats were used instead of koron(s) (the Persian quartertones).

### Homayun

![Homayun staff notation]

Koron(s) were replaced by flats.

The above Dastgah(s) in combination with the pedagogical aspects of piano performance form the following set of compositions.

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\(^3\) Other five Dastgah(s) are called Shur, Nava, Segah, Mahoor, and Rast-Panjgah.
Meditation with Tenths

Largo \( j = 60 \)

Azadeh Atri
A Persian Melody in Unison

The following piece has been composed in *Homayun*, but it modulates to *Chahargah* at the end.
A Persian Melody in Unison

Moderate $q = 90$

*As Homayun and Chahargah have microtones in their system, the harmonic minor seconds in this piece represent the microtones of the above mentioned Dastgahs.*
Study in Broken Chords

Largo \( \frac{1}{4} = 40-45 \)

\( \frac{1}{8} = 150-155 \)

Arpeggiate slowly
rubato

\( \text{p express.} \)

\( \text{con pedal} \)

Tempo I

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9 : 2
in Chahargah

One bar = 45 ca

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The Fixed Thumb Position

Moderato $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{i}} = 95-100$

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Solitude
Clusters and Free Durations in Chahargah

Largo $j = 60$

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(*)

più animato

cresc.

accel.

cluster on the white keys

( **)

rit. subito

pp

(cluster on the white keys)

fore-arm cluster

* Semi quavers are not necessarily equal.
** Make your own cluster within this range. You can use black and white keys.
*** Accelerate and then slow down.
A Piece For the Left Hand

Adagio $\bar{=}$ 60

espress.

con moto

legato

con pedal

Tempo I

accel.

rit.

con moto

rubato

= 70

= 60

= 130-140

mf

legato

arpeggiate slowly

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Melody with Accompaniment

(The Unspeakable Pain)

Moderato \( \frac{j}{4} = 60-65 \)
molto rubato

Tempo I

\( \frac{j}{4} = \) sempre

\( \frac{j}{4} \) accel.

\( \frac{j}{8} \) rit.

\( \frac{j}{8} \) mf

\( \frac{j}{8} \) ff

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Story of the Bats and the Old Cave

A Haiku for Boornik Cave

Largo
mysterious
\( \dot{=45-50} \)

\( \text{PP espress.} \)

con pedal \( \text{PP} \)

fast \( \dot{=180-200} \)

mf espress.

\( \text{PP} \)

mp

sostenuto

\( \text{PP} \)

* Boornik Cave is located in Damavand, one of the provinces of Tehran. This piece is a remembrance of what I experienced when I was caving there.

** If a note has no accidental before it, it must be a natural.
Study for the Repeated Notes

(Longing)

Moderato \( \text{q} = 90 - 100 \)

*Notes with double stems should be brought out.*
Clashing Sounds

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Very slow  \( \dot{=} = 70 \)

Fast and Staccato  \( \dot{=} = 80 \)

L.H

R.H

Fast  \( \dot{=} = 90 \)

Slow  \( \dot{=} = 90 \)

subito rit.

hand cluster on black keys

mf

con pedal

mp

3

3

3

3

mf
Sad and thoughtful
elegy like

Very slow $\frac{d}{=85}$

hand cluster
on black keys
Awkward Sevenths in Homayun

\[ \text{\( \frac{b}{c} \) = 220-230} \]

Molto rubato

* The rhythmic pattern in the left hand is an exact imitation of one of the rhythms of Homayun.

** The sign means to slow down.

*** The sign means to accelerate.

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Octaves and Bimodal Study

The following piece is a bimodal study in *Dastgah(s)* of *Chahargah* and *Homayun*. The treble clef has been written in *Chahargah*, while the bass clef is in *Homayun*.

---

*Chahargah*

---

*Homayun*
Study in Sixths

Moderato \( \text{"} = 90 \text{ - } 100 \)
Azadeh Atri

Tempo I

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27
Walking
in the Molonglo gorge...

All that matters is
a Rosella and its
exotic song.
Rosella the Australian Bird

Azadeh Atri

Andantino \( \frac{4}{4} = 115 \)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Andantino} & \quad \text{fast} \\
\text{Andantino} & \quad \text{fast} \\
\text{Andantino} & \quad \text{fast}
\end{align*}
\]

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Fantasie for Five Pitches

Like any other person, I have lived my life punctuated with the highs and lows of joy and happiness, loss, and pain. Since a very dear friend of mine died in a tragic way in 2004, I have been deeply mindful of one of Sepehri’s (one of the well known Persian poets) poems in which I found consolation and comfort. After the loss of my friend, I challenged Rumi’s and Sepehri’s poetry for a solution to my mystical seeking and, in the dark time of my grief and loss, I found myself drawn to reading Sepehri's *Night of heavenly Solitude* over and over to lighten my days-to convince myself that my bird though far away, is still singing and that I was still nourished and nurtured by her everlasting love.

On one of the Canberra's beautiful sunny days, I was immersed in my thoughts, when a beautiful exotic bird song (exotic to me, as we Persians do not have such a bird in Iran) suddenly reminded me of the first verse of Sepehri's poem: 'Listen, the bird farthest away in the world is singing'. After months of grieving for my loss, and seeking answers, it was this heavenly birdsong, seemingly from nowhere, that came as a sign of relief and freedom. All at once, my journey with Sepehri's beautiful poem was transformed into a musical experience.
Night of Heavenly Solitude
( shab e tanhai ye khub)

Listen, the bird farthest away in the world is singing.
Night has fallen, inviting, lucent and still.
Geraniums and the season’s rustling branches hush
to hear the moon.

Stairs in front of a building.
A door holding a lantern
in the bountiful breeze.

Listen, the road is calling your footsteps from afar.
Your eyes are not just ornaments in the darkness!
Awaken them, put on your shoes and come…
come to where the rays of the moon
illuminate your fingers
and time sits with you on the ground
while the melodies of the night
become one with your body
as a song.

There is a sage there to tell you;
‘eyes are there for gazing,
wet with the tears of loving’.

By Sohrab Sepehri
Improvise with the five pitches, based on the atmosphere of the piece and your own perception of the poem. Improvisation should be between 1 to 2 minutes. Start from both ends of the piano.
Listen, the bird farthest away in the world is singing....
In ancient Persian mythology, Ghoghnus is a phoenix that lives on top of Mt. Damavand, which at a height of 5671 metres, is the highest mountain on the Iranian Plateau. It is volcanic in nature and Ghoghnus is said to inhabit the mountain’s peak of fire and ash. The myth holds that this bird lives for 1000 years and then burns itself to death on a pyre, from the ashes of which another young phoenix arises. It has also been said that before Ghoghnus dies, it sings a heavenly song in which human beings find their musical inspirations.
Ghoghnus of Damavand

Andantino
\( \text{\textit{Azadeh Atri}} \)

Free and expressive

\( \text{\textit{Azadeh Atri}} \)
Vivo non rubato
con moto

\( \text{q} = 110 \)

Largo, nostalgic

\( \text{q} = 55 \)

con pedal

\( \text{ff} \)

\( \text{cresc.} \)

\( \text{con sordino} \)

\( \text{con pedal} \)

\( \text{pp} \) tenuto

\( \text{ppp} \) con sordino

\( \text{ppp} \) con prdal
Slow, thoughtful, and nostalgic $\dot{=} = 110$

Quasi Cadenza $\dot{=} = 105$

Slow and melancolique $\dot{=} = 110$

palm cluster on the white keys

subito express.

rubato

f

p

cresc. accel.

sfz

pp express.

rit.

con sordino
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