

PERFORMING AND INTERPRETING
EMBELLISHMENTS FEATURED IN
SELECTED PIANO WORKS OF
FAZIL SAY

SITI NUR HAJARUL ASWAD

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2023

PERFORMING AND INTERPRETING
EMBELLISHMENTS FEATURED IN
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Fazil Say is truly an inspiration for 21st century pianism. The artistic value of his creation and interpretation reflects his personality of this century.





ABSTRACT

Western classical pianism has developed and taken many transformations, which has led to the creation of new sounds. The inclination and artistic derivations of the virtuosic musician, composer, keyboardist, and improviser had become prevalent during the 18th and continued into 19th century pianism. The practice of improvisation decreased with composers' concern of the score's fidelity and began to notate in detail during the 20th century. This has become a limitation to the performer's creativity during a performance. The aim of this dissertation is to explore added embellishment of contemporary piano works from an established Turkish pianist Fazil Say (b.1970), who performs Western classical repertory alongside his piano solo works. The application of embellishment is considered a modification to the written notations based on relevant studies by Paul Thom (2007) and Jullian Hellaby (2009). This study of Say's life, musical experiences and analysis of his selected piano works offer an insight to Say's choices of embellishments. The study documents the creative process of performing Say's works into an 80-minute piano recital of his selected piano works. There are three main stage creative processes applied to this study that relevant to the performer's performance practice of performing Fazil Say's works, such as action, process, and movement. The findings also demonstrate both Fazil Say and my interpretation of added embellishments in two recitals of Say's piano contemporary works. This study provides both performers and academics performance practice of embellishments in contemporary works.





PERSEMBAHAN DAN INTERPRETASI DEKORASI BAGI KARYA-KARYA PIANO TERPILIH FAZIL SAY

ABSTRAK

Pianisme klasik barat telah berkembang dan melalui bentuk transformasi, yang telah membawa kepada penciptaan bunyi baru. Kecenderungan dan terbitan artistik pemuzik virtuosik, komposer, pemain kibod dan improvisasi telah menjadi amalan pada abad ke-18 dan berterusan sehingga ke abad ke-19. Amalan ini menimbulkan kebimbangan di kalangan komposer terhadap kesetiaan kepada skor dan mereka mula menulis notasi secara terperinci pada abad ke-20. Seterusnya, ia telah menghadkan kreativiti pemuzik semasa persembahan. Matlamat penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mempersembahkan dan menginterpretasi penambahan dekorasi ornamentasi dan ritma bagi karya piano kontemporari dari Turki iaitu Fazil Say (1970), dimana beliau memilih repertori klasik barat dan karya solo pianonya sebagai repertoire bagi setiap persembahan. Berdasarkan kajian Paul Thom (2007) dan Julian Hellaby (2009), penggunaan ornamentasi dan perubahan ritma dianggap sebagai pengubahsuaian dari notasi yang bertulis. Kajian mengenai kehidupan Say, pengalaman aktiviti muzik, serta karya solo piano yang terpilih memberi gambaran yang mendalam mengenai pemilihan ornamentasi beliau dan perubahan pada ritamanya. Antara hasil kajian adalah pendokumentasian proses kreatif pelaksanaan karya-karya Fazil Say yang terpilih melalui 80-minit resital piano. Terdapat tiga peringkat proses kreatif utama yang diaplikasikan mengikut kesesuaian kajian dan juga berdasarkan amalan persembahan saya sebagai pemuzik dalam mempersembahkan karya Fazil Say iaitu, tindakan, proses dan pergerakan. Hasil kajian ini juga didemonstrasi dalam bentuk persembahan resital berdasarkan interpretasi saya dan Fazil Say dalam penambahan ornamentasi dan ritma yang relevan dalam persembahan piano kontemporari karya Fazil Say. Dengan itu, kajian ini dapat memberi rujukan kepada para pemuzik dan akademia mengenai amalan persembahan dalam penggunaan ornamentasi dan ritma dalam muzik kontemporari.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter serves to address the motivation and inspiration behind my interest as a performer-researcher, which will then be followed by my performance objectives. I will then further discuss the programmes of Recital 1 and 2, referencing the significance of the performance and the proposed repertory.

1.1 Motivation / Inspiration

Over the course of history, Western classical pianism developed and taken many forms of transformation, which has led to the creation of new sounds. There are many examples of Western classical music composers, particularly from Europe, who have integrated folk music into their scores such as Chopin with Polish folk, and Bartók with Hungarian, Slovak, Bulgarian and Romanian folk music. The integration of these





Western musical styles elevated the composer's identity and become an inspiration to others. In this study, my primary interest is to explore the piano compositions from an established Turkish pianist who performs Western classical repertory and his original piano solo compositions.

My early interest in Fazil Say began when I listened to his work, *Black Earth Op.8*, in 2014, which was introduced by my colleague Dr. Milan Franek. No one in the audience knew this piece or the works of this Turkish composer, including me. The music was somewhat different from any other piano music I had encountered in the standard piano repertoire ranging from 17th to 20th century music; it featured a combination of extended piano techniques, chanting melodies and jazz.

I realised that I needed to better understand Fazil Say's *Black Earth Op.8* by analysing his written score and recorded performances, which was somewhat of a challenge due to the difficulty of accessing the published score in Malaysia. Furthermore, as a contemporary piano work, music scores were limited. While I was waiting for the score's arrival for almost two months, I continued to listen to his recorded live performances on YouTube, endeavouring to understand the concepts and creative ideas behind this work. I subsequently decided to add *Black Earth Op.8* to my repertoire and began a more in-depth search on this fascinating performer-composer, alongside his other piano works. As I was listening and reading the scores, I found that some embellishments were not written in. The practice of embellishments and improvisation had decreased "between the middle of the 18th century and the middle of the 20th century" where composers wrote out the intended embellishments, giving less freedom to the performers to develop their own styles of embellishments during





performances (Vigran, 2020; Brown, 2002; Moore, 1992). During the 15th to the 19th century, a performer's ability to embellish and improvise was considered a virtuosic skill (Vigran, 2020; Hamilton, 1998; Moore, 1992). However, the birth of virtuosic pianists is usually identified through competitions, recipient of notable awards and honors around the globe. The pianist revisiting the masterpieces of great composers such as Bach, Mozart, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Charles-Valentine Alkan, and Ignacy Paderewski with own style and interpretations. Most of the concert pianists started their career through competitions. Among a few pianists are Fazil Say is the winner for the Young Concert Artist in year 2017 (*Alumni by Year, 2022*), a Norwegian pianist, Leif Ove Andsnes winner of Hindemith Prize in 1987 (Benser, 2012), Daniil Trifonov won several prizes such as the Moscow's Fourth International Scriabin Competition, and XIV International Tchaikovsky Competition (Deutsche Grammophon - Classical Music Label since 1898 (n.d.)). Their high achievements in performances, competitions and awards are critically acclaimed by the magazines, newspapers and articles. Although many virtuosos can perform those masterpieces with fluid technique and dexterity, very little is said about their embellishments used in performances. It may seem that the practice of embellishment is of less concern to the virtuosos except for those who are experts in embellishing during a performance, such as Robert Levin. Levin is known as an improviser of Mozart's cadenzas. Another outstanding improviser includes the Venezuelan pianist, Gabriela Montero. In this study, I focus on the added embellishments made during a performance, not an improvisation.

Most studies and reviews of embellishments are historically informed practice (HIP), and is relevant to the modern performer where interpretation, articulations, and





techniques are specifically discussed in relation to music of the 18th century. For instance, artistic values of an interpretation such as dynamics, rubato, and pedalling, are the current practice of performers' interpretation when modifying the written notation. Roy Howat's essay discussed the usage of trills in Chopin's Ballade Op.47 as he suggests to begin on the 'auxiliary note rather than the upper' to remain 'the appoggiatura effect' (Howat, 1995). Howat's further discussions is on tempo strictness and rubato of the composers' works. He stated that in several examples the tempo has changed from the composers's tempo marking based on audio recordings played by the composers or their close associates. It is either faster or slower than the metronome marking (Howat, 1995). Howat's essay suggests the note choices on interpreting the ornamentation acquire theoretical and aural understanding based on written score. The tempo is not fix although it is written accordingly because of the instrument differences between the piano and orchestra of the similar work, and error tempo indication that unplayable to the rhythmic sense and styles. It is however, that the suggested interpretation is according to the existing written scores. What about modifying notations such as pitch and rhythm from the written score in contemporary works? I have found little evidence regarding the practice of embellishments in contemporary music. Therefore, this study explores the pianist's melodic and rhythmic embellishments in contemporary works. I intend to use Fazil Say's piano works as a case study. It is likely that Say's approach to embellishments intensifies with the performance practice of his contemporary works. Therefore, the focus of this study is on Fazil Say's piano works and his approach to embellishments through the exploration of my own performance. Say's piano solo album, 'Say Plays Say' was the first recording he made for his solo piano works. Thus, this album is an inspiration for this study and is a significant reference. This doctoral study is based on practice-led research





through a framework of the creative process in which I showcase my performances of selected works from Fazil Say. In addition to this creative work dissertation, I explore the salient features of the music presented. Through this study, I hope to enhance the practice of modification in contemporary works and provide an avenue for performers to consider embellishments as an extension of musical interpretation.

1.2 Performance Objectives

The previous section highlighted my interest in Fazil Say's selected piano works, which eventually inspired this study on embellishments in contemporary piano works. Unfortunately, Say's piano works and performance discussions are still limited despite more and more pianists playing his works. Thus, this study fills this gap, providing further insight into the contemporary pianist's added embellishments. The aim of this thesis is as follows:

- i) To analyse and demonstrate Fazil Say's added embellishments in his live performances of three selected works: *Black Earth Op. 8*, *Summertime Variations Op. 20* and *Alla Turca Jazz Op. 5b* dated up to 2019 via respective audio and video recordings.

I have analysed selected live recordings of Say as part of my creative process to identify and understand his added embellishments and its characteristics of three different works.



- ii) To perform Fazil Say's Black Earth Op. 8, Summertime Variations Op. 20 and *Alla Turca* Jazz Op. 5b in the form of a recital dedicated to Fazil Say's piano works.

Discussions and musical analysis on the embellishments and modification of scores inspired me to develop my own interpretation of Fazil Say's selected piano works. This is expressed through two recitals; the first being 60 minutes in length while the second being 80 minutes. These recitals were documented through audio and video recording, including the process of performance preparation. Such documentation was a requirement as part of this creative work dissertation submission.

This recital programme includes Fazil Say's piano works for solo piano as well as piano works for four hands. This also includes Say's original compositions and musical arrangements. My selection of Say's piano works stem from his piano solo album 'Say plays Say'. It was his first piano solo album.

A solo work, *Yeni Bir Gülnihal* Op.5e featured in the album was not included in my recital because the score had not been published at the writing of this dissertation. Therefore, I selected Say's piano work for four hands, *Winter Morning in Istanbul* Op. 51b instead. Interestingly, Say has never performed this four-hands piece. The work was written for the well-known Turkish piano duo, Ferhan and Ferzan Önder. According to Schott Music, the piece was premiered on April 13th, 2013 in Berlin,



Germany. It provides alternative perspectives when played by two pianists who have added embellishments during the performance.

In the first recital, a 60-minute performance, I demonstrate Fazil Say's embellishments based on findings from a variety of his live performances, audio recordings, and written scores. The added embellishments include those featured in *Black Earth Op. 8*, *Summertime Variations Op. 20* and *Alla Turca Jazz Op. 5b*. Other piano works chosen for the first recital were similarly based on Say's interpretations without considerations of the added embellishments. Unfortunately, a limitation of this study was the lack of multiple live-recorded performances and audio recordings of other piano works and therefore could not be included within this larger study.



In the second recital, which comprised an 80-minute performance, I integrated and developed my choices of embellishments through Say's three selected works. These embellishments considered the musical analysis I completed, which included Say's choices of ornamentations and rhythmic modifications. The keyboard treatise of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Essay on the True Art of Playing the Keyboard Instruments* was used as the main reference for the embellishments, one of the earliest and most referenced resource among the scholars and researchers of the keyboard since the 18th century. The first English translation and editor by William J. Mitchell, combines the original and revised editions of the 18th century. Bach's reference is descriptively specific on the type and characteristic of the baroque ornamentations. It is reliable to the contemporary works for the study because the authenticity and establishments of application from the baroque until present. Other reference is the *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* by Sandra P. Rosenblum. It is the



extension of the ornamentations from the Bach treatise in classical performance practice. The combination of these references is relevant and justifiable to the study.

The two recitals and its repertoire appear in Tables 1.1 and 1.2:

Table 1.1

Title of Works for Recital 1

No.	Title of Works	Composition Year	Duration
1	Alla Turca Jazz Op.5b	1993	3'
2	Black Earth Op.8	1997	10'
3	Summertime Variations Op.20	2009	9'
4	Bodrum Op.41b	2012 2014 (revised)	4'
5	SES Op.40b	2012 2014 (revised)	5'
6	Winter Morning in Istanbul Op.51b (4 Hands)	2012	12'
7	Nietzsche and Wagner Op.49 I Nietzsche II Wagner	2013	14'
	Total		58'

Table 1.2

Title of Works for Recital 2

No.	Title of Works	Composition Year	Duration
1	Four Dances of Nasreddin Hodja Op.1 i) Devri Hindi	1990	3
2	Fantasy Pieces Op.2 i) Vision ii) Elegy of Old Istanbul	1993	8
3	Alla Turca Jazz Op.5b	1993	3'
4	3 Ballads Op.12 i) Nazim ii) Kumru iii) Sevenlere dair	1995-2005 2007	11
5	Black Earth Op.8	1997	10'
6	Summertime Variations Op.20	2009	9'
7	Bodrum Op.41b	2012 2014 (revised)	4'
8	SES Op.40b	2012 2014 (revised)	5'
9	Winter Morning in Istanbul Op.51b (4 Hands)	2012	12'
10	Nietzsche and Wagner Op.49 i) Nietzsche ii) Wagner	2013	13'
Total			78'

The variety of musical styles were truly inspiring and challenging to explore. Therefore, a brief description of Fazil Say and his selected piano works were presented to the audience during the recitals. This functioned to create an awareness of Say's piano works, extend the audience's knowledge and widen the repertoire range of contemporary piano music.

1.4 Significance of Performance

The significance of the performance is pertinent to both academics and musicians:

- i) To explore the performance practice of piano contemporary works.

I aim to synthesise the added embellishments of Fazil Say's piano works through public performances. In so doing I hope that this study will enhance my knowledge and understanding about the practical considerations of embellishments in piano performances.

- ii) To accentuate the facets of 21st century pianist.

This serves to provide an inclusive view of Fazil Say's identity, skills, ability as a composer, pianist and his aptness of 21st century pianism. The insights of Fazil Say enhances the characteristic of 21st century pianist. At the writing of this dissertation, Fazil Say is a living and active performer.

- iii) To extend the selection of repertoire in piano performance.

In Malaysia, repertoire selection for piano recitals or competitions commonly stem from the 17th to 20th century Western composers. I believe it is important for students to learn and adapt works from Western composers as part of their educational syllabus, starting from the early learning in music until the highest level of their music education. Likewise, jazz and contemporary works have gradually been included as part of the repertoire in music students' recitals and public performances. Therefore, this study and



performance will enhance the selection of contemporary piano works among academicians and musicians.

It is my purpose to highlight Fazil Say's piano works to local and international listeners through the lens of a Malaysian performer, and to encourage more pianists to explore non-western composers in performing contemporary piano works. I hope this will even inspire more composers to represent their identity and origins of musical style through their respective compositions.

