

DOI:10.29013/EJA-26-1-47-50



THE PIANO DUET AS A GENRE IN THE WORKS OF UZBEK COMPOSERS

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Cite: *Khayitbaeva D.S. (2026). The Piano Duet as a Genre in the Works of Uzbek Composers. European Journal of Arts 2026, No 1. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJA-26-1-47-50>*

Abstract

This article explores the piano duet genre in the context of Uzbek composers. It examines the historical and theoretical preconditions for the genre's development, as well as the specific features of its development within national musical culture in the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. Particular attention is paid to the interaction of European genre models with traditional Uzbek stylistics, manifested in modal-intonational, rhythmic organization, and principles of form-building. An analysis of works for two pianos by Uzbek composers reveals consistent artistic tendencies associated with the search for new expressive possibilities of ensemble writing and the expansion of the concert and pedagogical repertoire. The article concludes that the piano duet is a form of creative dialogue that contributes to the preservation of national identity and the active development of contemporary compositional practice.

Keywords: *genre, chamber music, piano duet, piano ensemble, ensemble thinking, composers, national style, form formation, dramaturgy*

The piano duet occupies a distinct and significant position in the system of chamber music, representing a stable yet diverse field of composition and performance creativity. Its historical development extends over several centuries, during which the genre has undergone significant transformations, reflecting shifts in aesthetic ideals, performance capabilities, and the artistic objectives of musical art and culture. Despite the changing eras and styles, the piano duet has maintained its relevance, functioning as an important space for experimentation with form, texture, and sound organization, as well as the development of collective principles of performance thinking.

The extensive repertoire created for different types of piano duet confirms the enduring interest of composers across diverse national traditions and artistic movements in this genre.

The academic understanding of the piano duet as an independent genre phenomenon began in the second half of the 20th century. During this period, musicology developed a desire to refine the conceptual framework associated with ensemble piano music, as well as to identify the typological and functional characteristics of various forms of collaborative performance by pianists. One of the key challenges became the delineation of the concepts traditionally used to describe ensembles involving piano.

Studies often differentiate “piano ensemble” and “piano duet,” though the terms are frequently used interchangeably. An ensemble is a broader concept encompassing joint performance, while a duet specifically involves two performers. Sorokina (1988) notes that a four-hand performance on one piano is a “piano duet,” whereas two pianists on two pianos constitute a piano ensemble (p. 5), though she emphasizes that these distinctions are conventional rather than rigid.

The problem of terminological ambiguity is further developed in the works of N. Katonova (2002), who draws attention to the distinction, established in international practice, between the concepts of piano duet (four-handed performance on one instrument) and piano duo (an ensemble of two pianos), noting that “in domestic professional terminology, genre concepts are not clearly distinguished” and works for two pianos are often designated as “duets” or “piano ensembles” without strict differentiation (p. 3). In order to organize the conceptual field, N. Katonova proposes a system of terms that includes “four-handed duet”, “ensemble of two pianos” (or “double piano ensemble”), and also “multiclavier ensemble”, which allows for taking into account both the performing composition and the instrumental specifics.

Polskaya (1992) proposed a typology of piano ensembles in the Austro-German Romantic tradition, distinguishing “constant” ensembles with a fixed duo and “relative” ensembles with a variable number of performers. Timbre also serves as a classification criterion: one piano forms a “mono-timbral ensemble,” while two or more instruments create a “homogeneous timbre” or “multi-piano” ensemble (p. 4). This framework considers the piano duet both in terms of performer number and acoustic character.

A different interpretation of the conceptual framework is presented in V. Petrov’s work, “The Piano Duet of the 20th Century: Questions of the History and Theory of the Genre”. The author views the piano ensemble as a universal, generic concept, within which the duet of two pianos occupies the position of one of its genre-specific forms. At the same time, V. Petrov (2006) offers a more strict definition of the duet, connecting it to the mandatory presence of two performers and two instru-

ments in a single spatio-temporal continuum. Only under this condition, in his opinion, “does a true duet forms” (Petrov, 2006). This position emphasizes the fundamental importance of the independence of the instrumental parts and their equal dialogue.

The type of ensemble interaction also becomes a significant criterion for differentiating piano duets. In some cases, both parts share equal artistic and functional importance, creating a dialogic, parity-based relationship between the voices. In others, one part takes center stage, assuming a solo role, while the other performs an accompanying or background function. This distinction allows for a deeper understanding of the dramaturgy of the works and the specifics of composer thinking within the genre.

The rise of the two-piano duet in concert practice reflects the instrument’s enhanced expressive and technical capabilities. Two performers on independent pianos allow greater freedom in register, pedaling, dynamics, and texture, enabling virtuosity and symphonic expression. In contrast, the four-hand duet on one piano emphasizes chamber music qualities, such as intonation, coordination, and artistic collaboration between performers.

Therefore, the piano duet emerges as a complex and multifaceted genre, combining a variety of performance forms, terminological approaches, and artistic models of interaction. A theoretical understanding of this genre provides the necessary methodological basis for analyzes of its national interpretations, including in the work of Uzbek composers.

The growing interest in the piano duet genre in Uzbek musical culture can be attributed to its significant artistic and expressive potential. The possibility of combining national intonational sources with developed European forms, as well as the richness of textural and timbral solutions, has made this genre attractive to many composers in the republic.

The piano duet originated in V. Uspensky’s 1936 works, which arranged fragments from the musical drama *Farkhad and Shirin* for two and four hands. While texturally simple, the pieces feature expressive intonation reflecting Uzbek folklore. Their modal-intonational structure draws on folk song patterns, and the rhythmic organization follows traditional metrorhythmic. Uspen-

sky's compositions also reveal an emerging harmonic approach, seeking a synthesis between monodic foundations and European harmonic elements.

The piano duet genre developed particularly actively in Uzbekistan in the postwar period. This period was marked by significant artistic achievements, primarily those associated with the work of Suleiman Yudakov and Georgy Mushel. Their works not only broadened the genre framework of ensemble piano music, but also established stable models for the interaction between national and European principles.

Suleiman Yudakov, a pioneer in the development of a several musical genres in the republic, was also author of the first major work for two pianos – “Dance Suite” (1948). Each of the three parts of the cycle are associated with the representation of specific cultural tradition: “Khorezm Festive Procession,” “Azerbaijani Lyrical Dance,” and “Fergana Dance.” As V. Plungyan (1979) notes, “The artistic merits of the suite lie in the vividness of its thematic material and the richness of its ensemble possibilities, which immediately attracted the attention of the leading performers of the time” (p. 18).

The suite's first movement, composed in a complex three-part form, is distinguished by its strongly defined genre character. The recurrence of rhythmic patterns, the accentuation, and the periodic structure of two-bar phrases create a sense of forward motion. The composer also relies on the characteristics typical of folklore genres: a narrow range melody with an emphasis on the D support in the first incorporation of the Mixolydian mode, and in the second, the Dorian mode. The textural organization of the material is traditional as well, with a monophonic line doubled at the octave. At the same time, the distribution of roles between the instruments is hierarchical: the thematic material is concentrated in the first piano, while the second piano serves an accompanying function, imitating the usual of a percussion instrument.

In the cycle, the second movement, “Azerbaijani Lyrical Dance,” provides contrast. Set at a moderate tempo in ternary form, its expressiveness relies on intonation and rhythm. A rhythmic motif introduced at the start underpins variant development, expanded

range, and complex metrorhythmic patterns. Accent shifts, syncopations, and changing rhythms create a flexible, flowing melody reflecting monodic principles. The use of characteristic modes, especially the Chagah mode, enhances the national color. The texture is three-layered, with melodies counterpointed against supporting voices and a drone bass, highlighting the first piano's leading role and the second piano's accompaniment.

The final movement, “Fergana Dance,” brings the listener back to the vivid imagery of dance. Overall, S. Yudakov's “Dance Suite” is distinguished by its richness of ensemble possibilities and organic synthesis of genre and folk based elements with professional compositional techniques, ensuring its firm presence in the piano duet repertoire both within Uzbekistan and beyond.

Georgy Mushel – a composer, pianist, and teacher – played a key role in the development of the Uzbek piano duet, integrating national intonational language with European forms and genres. His notable work, the *Samarkand Suite* for two pianos (1962), is a four-part cycle distinguished by impressionistic color, subtle harmonies, and sophisticated textures, giving it a unique artistic expressiveness.

The first movement, “*On the Deserted Hills of Afrasiab*,” conveys a contemplative mood. The main theme, rooted in song-and-dance intonations, spans a narrow fourth and is introduced by the first piano. Register shifts create spatial depth, enriched by the contrapuntal lines of the second piano. The modal structure mixes Phrygian and Mixolydian modes, reflecting national musical characteristics. Parallel chords in the second piano produce a heterophonic texture. In the first section, both instruments share functional roles, while in the reprise, the first piano gradually assumes the leading role.

The second movement, “The Blooming Valley of Zarafshan,” offers a striking contrast in character. Its foundation is toccata-like motoricity, realized through a rapid tempo, percussive pianistic technique and a distinctive textural organization. The genre- and folk-inspired character is highlighted by the imitation of a karnay sound at the climax. The harmonic language is rich and colorful, and emphasized by bold use of the thirds and seconds in the chordal vertical. Here, the

instrumental parts are structured on principles of equality, with both parts engaging in identical thematic development.

The third movement, “In the Twilight of the Shah-i-Zinda Mausoleum”, immerses the listener in an atmosphere of restrained focus. The main theme, reminiscent of lamenting intonations, is presented alternately by both instruments. Chromatic supporting vocals, syncopated rhythm, and rich harmony enhance the dramatic character of the piece. The alternating presentation of the thematic material demonstrates the functional equality of the parts.

The suite’s finale “Samarkand in the Rays of the Rising Sun” takes a form of a fugue. The European polyphonic form is imbued with nationally colored content, as it is based on a theme rooted in the song-and-dance traditions of monodic heritage. The gradual textural buildup, modal shifts, chromaticism, and the active use of melismatics lead to a powerful climax, evoking the effect of an orchestral tutti.

G. Mushel’s “Samarkand Suite” reflects a significant expansion of the expressive potential of the Uzbek piano duet and demonstrates advanced level of synthesis between national musical roots and professional forms of European composition, opening new prospects for the further development of the genre.

The period of state independence marked a new phase in the Uzbek piano duet, with expanded genre boundaries, renewed expressive means, and integration into contemporary practice. This reflects the genre’s adaptability and importance in performance and education. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, original works emerged, showcasing diverse stylistic approaches and individual artistic thinking. Notable composers include Mustafo Bafoev, Rustam Abdullaev, Valery Saparov, Avaz Mansurov, Muhammad Atadjanov, and Oydin Abdullaeva, who renewed the genre while preserving links to national musical traditions.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the piano duet genre occupies a firmly established and prominent place in contemporary Uzbek musical culture. Valued by both composers and performers, it offers a vital arena for creative exploration and experimentation.

Uzbek two-piano compositions combine national stylistic features with European genre models, showcasing artistic freedom, individual interpretation, and professional mastery. The development of the piano duet in Uzbekistan reflects major musical trends and represents a dynamic, promising direction in the national compositional school.

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submitted 10.12.2025;

accepted for publication 24.12.2025;

published 31.01.2026

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