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"FRESCOES" BY MUSTAFO BAFOEV AS A REFLECTION OF AVICENNA'S PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This article discusses the choral poem *Frescoes* by the famous Uzbek composer Mustafa Bafoev, dedicated to the great medieval scholar, philosopher, and poet Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna). The work's figurative structure and composition are explored in the context of Uzbek composers' general interest to the theme of embodying the biography, poetic, and philosophical legacy of Ibn Sina.

Objective: To consistently reveal the image and structure of each of the choral miniatures united in the poem *Frescoes*; to demonstrate the composer's primary expression means which help him achieve a vivid embodiment of the content.

Methods: holistic analysis, semantic analysis, and systemic review method.

Results: The structure of the work as a whole, as well as its individual sections, is revealed, the key choral techniques, textural, melodic, and metrical features, as well as compositional innovations, are highlighted; the dramaturgy and semantics of the work – both as a whole and in each individual section – are traced.

Scientific Novelty: This is the first holistic and detailed analysis of M. Bafoev's composition, also touching on the issues of imagery and dedication to the famous scholar Abu Ali Ibn Sina.

Practical Application: The article's key findings can be applied in performance and teaching practice.

Keywords: *Mustafa Bafoev, Frescoes, choral poem, Avicenna, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, composer's work*

Introduction

For the 1045th Anniversary of Ibn Sina

Abu Ali ibn Sina, better known in Europe as Avicenna (980–1037), was a distinguished scholar and polymath, the representative of the first Oriental Renaissance, and one of the most significant figures in the history and identity of the Uzbek people, and

the world society celebrates his 1045th anniversary in 2025. Ibn Sina became famous primarily for his achievements in medicine, but he also made significant contributions to other fields of knowledge, including poetry and music, which he identified as forms of healing for the human soul. The researcher N.Isgandarova emphasizes: "Ibn Sina also argued that the harmony of sounds attracts

and influences the spirit for many reasons.” (Original in English: Ibn Sina also argued that the harmony of sounds attracts and influences the spirit for many reasons) (Isgandarova, 2015, p. 108).

Avicenna’s biography, scientific and poetic works have inspired vivid artistic images in many works by Uzbek composers. This scholar’s personality is addressed in a historical context that is particularly relevant today: “No nation can imagine its future without knowing its history, without relying on its centuries-old spiritual heritage. Historical memory, the study and understanding of the works of great ancestors, national moral values, and traditions play a significant role in the development of spirituality in society” (Mustafina, Mamadjanova, 2019, p. 73).

One of the first steps in the multifaceted understanding of Ibn Sina’s legacy came in the 1950s, when the music for the film *Avicenna* and the suite of the same name were written by the renowned Uzbek composer Mutal Burkhanov. Interest in Avicenna was particularly strong in the 1980s, a time when the scholar’s 1,000th anniversary was widely celebrated. At that time, Uzbek composers created a number of unique musical works, including: “Five Recitatives on the Poems of Ibn Sina” for bass and piano by G. Mushel, the vocal-symphonic poem *Avicenna* by R. Khamraev, the symphonic poem *Avicenna* by N. Giyasov, *Avicenna* by I. Akbarov, *5 Rubai* for voice and chamber orchestra on the poems of Ibn Sina by H. Rakhimov, and others.

The most consistent interest in the personality and work of Ibn Sina is demonstrated by composer Mustafa Bafoev. He is the author of the poem *Frescoes* for choir and soloist to the words of Ibn Sina (1980), the Second Symphony *In Memory of Avicenna* for string orchestra (1984), and the opera *Avicenna* (2011). A sensitive and profound composer, M. Bafoev was able to vividly and multifacetedly reflect in his music the historical image and fundamental lyrical and philosophical ideas of the great scientist.

Main content

Let us turn to the analysis of the poem *Frescoes* as the most interesting example of M. Bafoev’s choral work, revealing the creative ideas of Avicenna. The composition is

based on the rubais of Ibn Sina, translated from Farsi by J. Kamal. Philosophical reflections on the meaning of life, the thorny path of the famous scholar, his doubts, the desire to understand and solve the problems of the surrounding world, devotion to humanistic ideas – this is the main idea of M. Bafoev’s poem. Regarding the title of this opus, the composer noted that he “considering the internal content, chose the beautiful and poetic title *Frescoes*. <...> *Frescoes* is a form of wall painting, widespread since ancient times in the East and West. Rubaiyat is also a very old and popular form of poetry. Both have come to us from the depths of centuries” (Bafoev, 2008, pp. 44–45).

The work consists of seven choral miniatures united by a common artistic concept, which determines the sequence, and the remark *attaca* – continuity in performance. “The main stimulus for the movement of form in the poem is the contrast of images recreated based on lyrical and dance-dynamic themes” (Kuznetsova, 1991, pp. 148–149). The melodic and modal basis of the choral cycle are elements of the Bukhara “Shashmaqom.” It is interesting to note that in the cycle, choral numbers alternate with mixed numbers of chorus and soloist. This compositional technique stems from maqoms, which also contain both solo and ensemble numbers. Moreover, the choruses, with the dominant role of the soloist, are much more complicated and individualized in their melodic and rhythmic pattern than the choral episodes of the poem.

The first miniature is written in continuous form, with a short introduction and conclusion. The theme of the introduction is Avicenna’s leitmotif, and thanks to its improvisational presentation, it has a reflective quality. This is largely facilitated by the bar-by-bar meter shift. Initially, the theme is performed by the altos, with the soprano part serving as a countertheme. In the repetition, the theme is transferred to the basses, and the countertheme transferred to the tenors, creating a sense of timbral echoes between the female and male choirs. This leitmotif, according to the composer’s conception, “...has a dual function: first and foremost, it is a theme, but also an image of the night” (Bafoev, 2008, p. 45).

The main melody, built on the intonations of the introduction, is assigned to the

soloist (tenor). The remaining voices serve as a counter the me and also imitate the soloist's theme at the ends of phrases, as if complementing and affirming the main musical idea. The soloist's melody gradually moves into the upper register in the form of an ascending sequence, raising of the overall dynamics leads to a vibrant climax. This is followed by a dynamic decline, a return to the starting point, and brief imitations between the soloist and choir. The choral texture of the first miniature is dominated by polyphonic presentation, metrical and rhythmic diversity, and frequent use of vocalization in the choir with melodized recitation in the soloist's part.

The second miniature contrasts with the first. The lyrical verse extols the beauty of life in its various manifestations. The poet attempts to understand the mystery of the beauty and harmony of the world around him. The chorus is written in a simple three-part form. The main melody of the first movement is a transformed main theme from the first miniature. The composer uses a two-part presentation of the thematic material. The theme is then developed in the upper voice against a tonic organ note, imitating the doira's *usul*.

The middle section utilizes a polyphonic development of the thematic material of the first movement in the form of imitations between the male and female choral parts. Toward the end of the section, the voices form a harmonic structure and merge into a common choral tutti, preparing for the reprise. The harmonic and melodic foundation is characterized by the emphasis of the third of the mode, lending color to the theme.

The reprise is dynamicized and abbreviated. The choral texture is characterized by a variety of techniques: simultaneous and alternating performances of the male and female choirs, and choral tutti. The even vocal load and comfortable tessitura contribute to the naturalness of the choral sound during performance.

The third miniature is distinguished by the profound soulfulness of the music. With vivid expressive means and vocal and choral colors, the composer managed to convey the greatness of the scientist and his philosophical reflections on the enormous responsibility of man for his actions. The poems, written a thousand years ago, are still relevant today.

The chorus is written in a simple three-part form with an abbreviated reprise. The main melodic refrain is of a small range, very brief (two bars), and expressive. Its first repetition is heard first by the male voices, then by the female ones. Individual intonations are imitated by the soloist (tenor) and soprano against the backdrop of sustained intervals in the other voices.

The middle section introduces contrast. The music takes on a recitative character. The broken melodic line is emphasized by a triplet rhythmic pattern. Gradually, the choral texture thickens, and all the voices merge into a single harmonic complex. The dynamics increase from *pp* to *ff*, leading to a vibrant climax. The choral unison of the first voices in the upper register further accentuates this climax. The second voices develop according to the principle of canonic imitation.

The appearance of smooth voice leading in the choral parts and the use of high tessitura lend the music a solemn, majestic character, fully in keeping with the poetic content of the piece. The middle section is tonally unstable due to frequent deviations (c-moll – G-dur – h-moll), non-chord notes, and a polyphonic style of presentation. In the reprise, there is a sudden dynamic decline, and the musical material of the first part is repeated with a slight reduction.

The fourth miniature is written in three-part form with elements of rondeau. The choir begins with a short introduction, in which the composer strives to convey the sound of Uzbek folk instruments through various melodic, rhythmic, and timbral means. For example, the bass line is assigned a rhythmic *usul*, imitating the percussion instrument doira, while sustained second harmonies convey the playing of the *karnays*.

Alternating with the dynamic *usul*, the melodious, soulful melody lends the first movement a song-and-dance character. The main theme is assigned to the soprano part and covers a small range of a fifth. It is accompanied by the alto part, built on the intonations of the doira *usul*. The female choir sings in a lower register.

In the middle section, a recitative (tenor solo) appears. The main theme, however, is presented in a different melodic and rhythmic form. The performance poses significant

difficulties for the soprano, as their part is performed in the upper register, on *f*. The remaining choral parts serve as background music and are performed on the “ho” exclamation.

The reprise is dynamicized. This is due not only to the rhythmic *usul*, which forms an arc between the reprise and the introduction, but also to the timbral diversity of the choral sound. While in the first movement the main theme was performed solely by the female choir, in the reprise it is entrusted to male voices in the first performance, and to female voices in the second. At the end of the chorus, the *usul* becomes melodious.

The fifth miniature for mixed choir and tenor soloist (Andante cantabile, 2/4, D-dur) is distinguished by its restraint and philosophical richness. The poet reflects on the eternal problems of Good and Evil, the struggle between darkness and light. This content largely predetermines the musical framework. The composer uses Avicenna's theme as thematic material, which runs throughout the miniature like a red thread. It is presented in the form of a canon for soprano and alto in the lower register.

Against the backdrop of the leitmotif, the declamatory part of the soloist, speaking on behalf of the people, stands out. The male voices alternately echo it. The chorus is written in two-part form. Both parts are similar in structure and thematic material, but contrasting in dynamics. The difference lies in the fact that in the first part, the soprano sings the *p* theme, which is imitated by the altos, a perfect fourth down. In the second part, a contrapuntal shift of voices occurs on *f*: the soprano part is transferred to the altos, while the alto theme moves to the sopranos and sounds an octave higher, acquiring a lighter tone. This is further enhanced by the Mixolydian mode.

The sixth miniature is lyrical. The poet extols the beauty of a girl, like precious stones – ruby and emerald. The main melody incorporates intonations from the themes of the second and fourth miniatures. The chorus form is simple, three-part, with a shortened reprise (Allegro, 2/2, B major). A lively, melodious, sinuous melody and a developed *usul* lend the music a song-and-dance character. A dissonant second imitates the sounds of a *karnay*.

The first movement is a dialogue between the male and female choirs in the nuance of *f*. The appearance of the main theme is preceded by *usul*, which invariably accompanies the main line. The middle movement includes elements of polyphony in the form of imitations and is performed first by the male choir, then by the female choir. The reprise is varied by shortening the second period. The music takes on a solemn, majestic character. At the end, a short conclusion is introduced, vocalized by the male choir, preparing the final miniature of the poem.

The finale seems to affirm the poet-scholar's philosophical credo, his devotion to his ideas, his dissatisfaction with what he has achieved, his search for and faith in a bright future. The thematic material here is developed throughout. Nevertheless, in the presentation of the choral parts, a caesura can be noted, dividing this chorus into two sections.

The first of these is distinguished by a somber, dramatic character (Tempo rubato (misterioso), 2/4, B-dur – b-moll). It is based on two themes. The main one is assigned to the soloist. The repeated repetition of a single note, a constantly sustained triplet pattern, and syncopations on the second beat of the bar impart a static quality to the theme, resembling Sufi zikr chants. The second theme is based on a slightly transformed rhythmic intonation of the themes of the first and third miniatures. It constantly accompanies the main theme alternately in all choral parts.

While the first section is characterized by an imitative presentation of the musical material, in the transition to the second section, the choral parts are maintained within a strict harmonic texture. Sharp, dissonant chords (*ff*) suddenly appear. Against the overall dramatic backdrop, these exclamations are perceived as a symbol of protest. They prepare the way for the second section – the culmination of the entire poem. The unison sound of the choir in the upper register, the tessitura, and the dynamics reach a peak of tension. Avicenna's theme, developed in the first, third, and fifth miniatures, is confirmed in the finale.

Conclusions

The choral poem *Frescoes* is a work of original composition and dramaturgy, distinguished by its distinctive sound. The seman-

tics of Avicenna's poetics are emphasized by expressive means and reflected in the dramaturgy of the entire cycle. The composer himself noted that he constructed the cycle's dramaturgy in accordance with the imagery of poetry, and during his work, he outlined the character of each miniature depending on the mood of the rubai: "... noted that rubais 1, 3, 5 and 7 tend toward slow and contemplative music, while rubais 2, 4 and 6 tend toward fast and active music" (Bafoev, 2008, p. 44). This approach helped the composer convey the mood and ideas of Avicenna's poetry as accurately as possible.

The intonational nature of *Frescoes* is rooted in a profound understanding of the melodic structure of the Bukhara *Shashmaqom*. This principle can be applied to the composer's creative method as a whole. The composition of the poem, the structure of its individual sections, their relationships, and the juxtaposition of choral numbers with soloists with the choral episodes themselves all reveal the influence of developed oral-professional genres, particularly the alternation of ensemble and

solo numbers in the *maqom*. The numbers written for choir have a song-and-dance character (similar to the *ufar* sections of *maqoms*). The use of *maqom* elements in a choral composition that is quite modern in its means and texture can be perceived as a synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions.

The distinctive coloration of the choral numbers is achieved through the extensive use of *usuls*. The composer's interpretation of them is varied and expressive: a melodized *usul*-background, as well as a rhythmic *usul* imitating the Uzbek instrument *nagora*. The choral texture is distinguished by a richness of color and a variety of techniques. Within the framework of his homophonic-harmonic approach, the composer also turned to polyphonic techniques (imitation, *stretto*, various contrapuntal combinations of voices). The composer's chosen tonal-harmonic means are also aimed at creating a structurally and stylistically coherent choral score. Thus, national elements enrich the composition, demonstrating the continuity and soundness of M. Bafoev's work.

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