



Musical Alteration on Fazil Say's Piano Work *Summertime Variations* *Op.20*

Siti Nur Hajarul Aswad Shakeeb Arsalaan Bajunid¹, Rizal Ezuan Zulkifly Tony², ^{1,2}Conservatory of Music, College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. Corresponding author: hajarulbajunid@uitm.edu.my

This paper focuses on the embellishment approaches on Fazil Say's *Summertime Variations Op.20* piano solo work. The opportunity of embellishing musical material presented in a recital appears to suggest that alternative approaches are required. Performing music that incorporates "alteration" enhances the opportunity to rethink one's approach to learning and practice; a performer may need to find alternative strategies to perform and interpret Fazil Say's music effectively, particularly in the alteration of the notes and musical phrases. The creative process includes analysis of Fazil Say's written score and recordings, and documentation of self-interpretation on musical alteration, performed during a recital, as a guideline for performers to integrate and arrange melodic, rhythmic, metric and structure. Epitomising within Fazil Say's selected piano work, this article also attempts to reproduce ideas of a performer's creative process that can contribute to a performance on works based on the philosophies of Julian Hellaby that provides conceptual recommendations that supports a performer to include alternative pianistic possibilities to the limit, if not beyond.

Keywords: *score modification, contemporary work, embellishments, alteration*



Introduction

Interpreting composer's and performer's works is a challenge to most performers, to achieve an overall impact on the soundscapes and perhaps exploring possibilities of musical alteration. It is common among the performers to apply the practice of modification in western classical composers' masterpieces such as Mozart, Schumann, Beethoven, and Chopin. Nevertheless, little study is done on modification practice in contemporary works as an alternative strategy in a recital or performances.

Performers have the ability to explore and modify the written score as an alternative strategy to provide an impact on the overall performance, with the understanding of the philosophical concept and practice of score modification that includes altering phrasings, articulations, dynamics, and pedalling. As a result, their personal interpretation makes the work sounds different than the other performers. A reflection of identity continues to be a musical option for twenty-first century pianists, exploring through improvisation, paraphrasing, or transcription over the written score, and Fazil Say is one of the leading pianists utilising these options, also evident among others like Leif Ove Andsnes, Stephen Hough, Gabriela Montero and Marc-André Hamelin (Aswad, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the performance practice of contemporary work through an exploration of embellishment with the objective of identifying melodic and rhythm modification on Fazil Say's rearrangement of *Summertime*.

The objective of the this study are 1) to identify Fazil Say's embellishments of melodic, rhythmic modification, and 2) to perform personal and Fazil Say's embellishments of his *Summertime Variations Op.20* in a recital . Little has known that studies on his contemporary piano works are still limited even when knowing that Fazil Say's repertoire consists of a wider selection of western classical composers, Turkish and his own compositions. Through exploration of musical possibilities, a performer will enhance and develop alternative strategies to rethink one's approaches to learning and practise, and to reproduce a performer's idea of a creative process and pianistic possibilities in preparation for a performance.

Literature Review/Artistic Review

Musical Background of Fazil Say

Turkish born Fazil Say studied music both in Turkey and Germany at his early age. He explores both music aesthetics in his performance, and compositions. In his early years, he studied with prominent Turkish pianist, Mithat Fenmen, Kamuran Gündemir, and Ertugrul Oğuz Efirat. Later years, he studied with David Levine in Düsseldorf , Germany (Otten, 2011). Say had performed internationally and is still currently performing and composing in tandem with the writing of this study. Fazil Say's compositions and music arrangements are correlated of Turkish folklore, western classical, and jazz culture. One of his musical arrangements is the *Alla Turca Jazz, Op.5*. It is a paraphrase of Mozart's *Rondo from Sonata in A Major K 331*. His musical arrangement combines his own pianistic interpretation of *Summertime* utilising ragtime and jazz elements. His



“integration of the eastern and western musical elements reflects his personality as a Turkish pianist-composer through his musical activities of the twenty-first century” (Aswad, 2023; Weng, 2020).

The Context of Score Modification

Modification is generally understood as changing or altering the score from the original. Similar to Hellaby (2009) that the alteration of the notations are “more or less to the original”. This explains that the original structure of the work is attempted to mostly remain its framework with only several modification in music scores that includes, dynamics, tempo, pedalling, and phrasing. What about modifying the notations? The scholars and researchers argue that changing or modifying the notations is not relevant as it changes the composers’ originality of their work. However, in contrast, the practice of modifying score is required by the performers to enhance their identity and personal interpretation towards the compositional works. A recorded interview of the legendary pianist Claudio Arrau, he rigidly argues on pertaining the written notations to remain the originality of the composers’ works. (‘Claudio Arrau’, 2014). On the contrary, pianist Vladimir Horowitz argues that the modification was “to improve the imperfect writing or to convey the composer’s intentions” through performer’s interpretation (Dubal, 1993, as cited in Weng, 2020). In author’s opinion, both contexts are considered relevant for the progress of performance practice, with reasonable and necessary grounds.

Hellaby (2009) explains the type of score modifications of the transcription, variation, paraphrasing and realisation. The practice of score modification prevailed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. His categorisation of formal and informal modification is applicable to the performer’s practice. A formal published written score that involved editorial work is categorised as formal modification (Hellaby, 2009). Furthermore, the written score consists of the performer’s modification and aims to perform by other performers possibly enhancing “further modification” (Hellaby, 2009).

In this study, the pianistic arrangement “*Summertime Variations Op.20*” is an example of formal modification. Fazil Say paraphrases and modifies his own written score during performances. In result to this creative process will provide the author insights into creating her own personal modifications from Say’s published score in performance. Informal modification is the spontaneous action of modification during the performance that has no interest to share or expand the performer’s creativity directly with other performers (Hellaby, 2009). Listeners can only experience the artistry value of a performer during the performance.



Methodology/Creative Process

The creative process of this study investigates Fazil Say's piano performance and work of *Summertime Variations Op.20*. It is to explore the notations and options of modification exploited from Fazil Say's live performance. This study focuses on melodic and rhythmic embellishments

A musical analysis on three Fazil Say's live-recorded performances with transcription on modifications during Say's live recorded performance and personal embellishments during recital was analysed based on the written score for comparison. It is to identify the type of ornamentation application in his contemporary piano work. The performer who is also the author, performed the *Summertime Variations Op.20* in a recital on August 24th, 2022 based on the findings and exploration of this study.

We have selected three live-recorded performances from the selected Youtube links and transcribed his added embellishment with a slow-downer software known as Tune Transcriber. The software can reduce the speed of the video recordings without changing the original key signature. We refer to Say's written score published by Schott edition as a guide and notate the added embellishments while transcribing the notations. We then observed the similarities and differences between the three venues and years of performances for the consistency and spontaneity of his added embellishments. The author began to adapt Say's added embellishments in her practices and comprehensively define the placement of the alterations. Consequently, she explores her personal added embellishments during practice and recital, then notates them for analysis. The piano work *Summertime Variations Op.20* was performed with a combination of Say's added embellishments.

Musical Analysis

Fazil Say and Personal Embellishments in Piano Recital

This creative research juxtaposes various concepts from different parts of the jazz tradition through materials in the piece: melodic materials, harmonic materials, and rhythmic materials. Concepts in these materials were invented and used in different decades through the unification of musical concepts originated from multiple parts of jazz history. The creative process is to connect these musical fragments from different historical backgrounds and chronological locations into a composition.

George Gershwin originally wrote *Summertime* in 1934 for the opera *Porgy and Bess*. It remains a well-known song until today. Fazil Say was inspired to write his version of *Summertime*, combining elements of the ballad and swing. In 2005, written music of Say's *Summertime Variations Op. 20* was published by Schott publication. This marked his first piano solo arrangement for Gershwin's music (Say, 2005). The opening motif remains the same as the original form with an additional scalic passage at the end of melodic phrase, functioning like an

echo. The tempo marking is stated as ‘Freely’, which indicates that the piece can be played in a free tempo. However, in the second section, Say changed the mood of the piece from a ballad to a fast swing. In this section, the music feels more like an improvisation. The left hand plays the walking bass while chords are played in the right hand. The pulse of this section falls on beats two and four. At the variation section, there is another melodic improvisation based on the blues and chromatic scales. Say ends this song in a freestyle cantabile, repeating the theme heard at the beginning. *Summertime Variations Op. 20* is usually played as an encore during Say’s performances.

Three live recordings of *Summertime Variations Op. 20* were selected for this study: 1) Paris, 2011, 2) Frankfurt, 2015 and 3) Berlin, 2015. All three performances were recorded live during the encore. Details of the sources and years of performances are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Three Live Recorded Performances of Summertime Variations op. 20 For Musical Analysis

No.	Date	Venue	Video Link
1	Published on YouTube 6 th May 2011	Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris (France)	https://youtu.be/wceIuP0Ydsk
2	Published on YouTube 17 th May 2015	Alter Oper, Frankfurt (Germany)	https://youtu.be/U89oKFqb3Z4
3	Published on YouTube 31 st July 2015	Junge Norddeutsche Philharmonie, Berlin (Germany)	https://youtu.be/sewynauayk8

Summertime Variations Op. 20 is an example of added embellishments utilised within a jazz arrangement. Several melodic and rhythmic embellishments were added spontaneously. The most common was the acciaccatura. This reflects the jazz musical style and the dissonance associated with it. The melody was continuously repeated with slight harmonic changes. Therefore, the opportunity to embellish the melodic and rhythmic phrases were left open, as Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach had written in his treatise, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*.

Acciaccaturas were added to the second, fourth and fifth times of the repeated melodic phrases in bars 5, 10 and 16. At bar 10, a chromatic acciaccatura of two melodic notes were added and held over the tonic with an additional B note added to the bass line. This B note is similar to Say’s added anticipation during his performances. In addition, the performer added an acciaccatura to introduce the dissonance of the tonic followed by a chromatic acciaccatura to the melodic phrase.

This helped to emphasise the tonic key with its dissonant melody, reflecting that of a jazz singer. Two other acciaccaturas were played at this bar with rhythmic displacement. Figure 1.1 shows the acciaccatura and rhythmic displacement of bar 10.

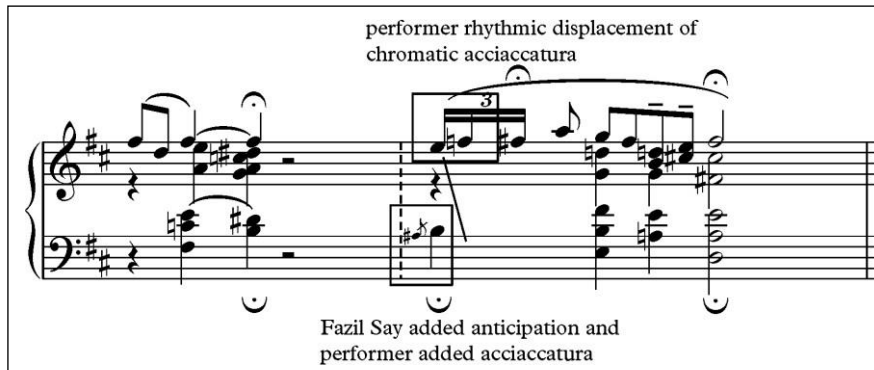


Figure 1.1 Added Acciaccatura and Rhythmic Displacement in Bar 10

At bar 16, a trill was added before the acciaccatura, introducing the acciaccatura and written fermata. Although Bach (1949) stated that trill placements were for ‘longer tones’, this inclusion suggests that it can also be applied to shorter tones. The trill is shorter than the beat with the fermata. Figure 1.2 shows the added trill before the acciaccatura at bars 16 and 17.

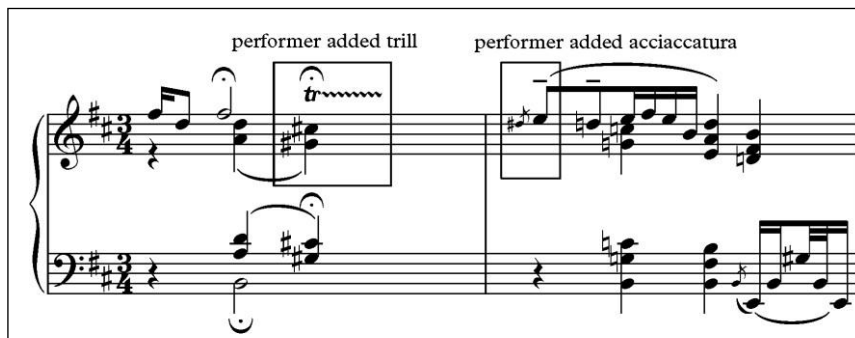


Figure 1.2. Added Trill and Acciaccatura at Bars 16 and 17

The added mordent at bar 28 produced a “playful” character before the emergence of octaves. The added rhythmic embellishment of semiquavers at beats three and four function to emphasise the F sharp repetition and its melodic phrase at bar 29. Figure 1.3 shows the added mordent and rhythmic embellishments at bars 28 to 29.



Figure 1.3. Added Mordent and Rhythmic Embellishments at Bars 28-29

The added acciaccatura at the syncopated rhythm in bar 31 arguably aligns with Bach's treatise where long notes are recommended. This suggests that the tempo is slow. Similar to Say's recording, the performer retained her rhythmic modification at bars 32-33 because the additional syncopations were applicable to the material before the tempo was sped up. Figure 1.4 shows the added acciaccatura to the syncopated rhythm of bar 31 and the rhythmic modification in bars 32 to 33.

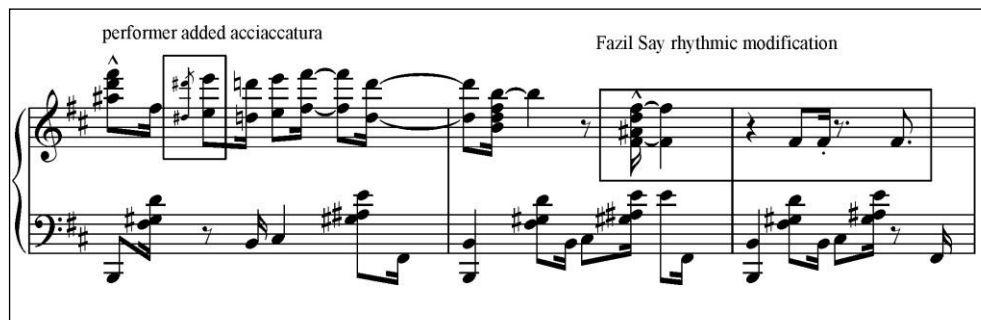


Figure 1.4. Added Acciaccatura to Syncopated Rhythms and Rhythmic Modifications at Bars 31-33

Adding embellishments at a fast tempo was rather challenging because the characteristics of each embellishment can vary. Through practicing and listening, spontaneous embellishments could be achieved during the recording of the rehearsal.

The repetition of the melodic phrases from bars 70-73 and bars 110-111 allows for additional embellishments. The melodic phrases from bars 70-75 leads towards *Variation I*, that is, the improvisatory section. Therefore, a development in the texture using a tense *crescendo* and rhythmic modifications were used. At bar 71, the performer added embellishments of triplet quavers to the first and second beats instead of crotchets on the first and third beats. She retained Say's added crotchet on beat four of bar 70 and his syncopated modification at bar 71. Although Say tended to favour syncopation, the author preferred to use triplets to vary the rhythmic pattern. The acciaccatura was added after the thick rhythmic chords to gradually lead the melody

towards the improvisatory section. Figure 1.5 shows the rhythmic modifications with an added acciaccatura at bars 70-73.

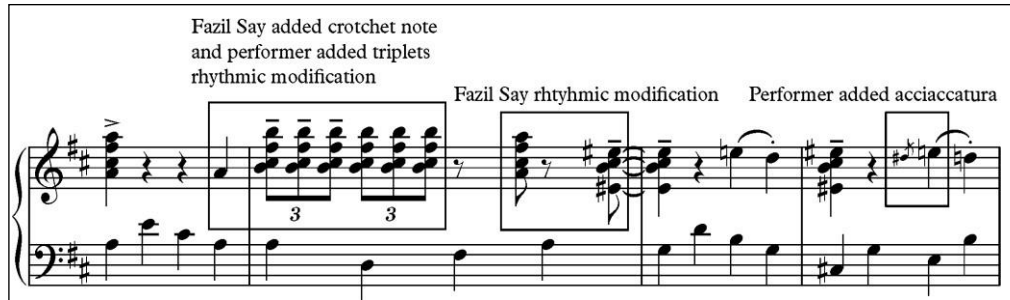


Figure 1.5. Added Acciaccatura and Rhythmic Modifications at Bars 70-73

Another example of melodic repetition occurs from bars 110-111. A tremolo *furioso* is written in bar 108. This section is tense with fierce expression. There are accented notes written on the strong beat, and Say's added acciaccaturas on each beat is fascinating. However, the performer modified the ornament on the third beat by replacing it with a short mordent. This allowed for the embellishment of crotchets and the repeated melodic phrases. The repetition of the dissonance was impactful and aggressive. The added mordent in bars 110-111 is shown in Figure 1.6.

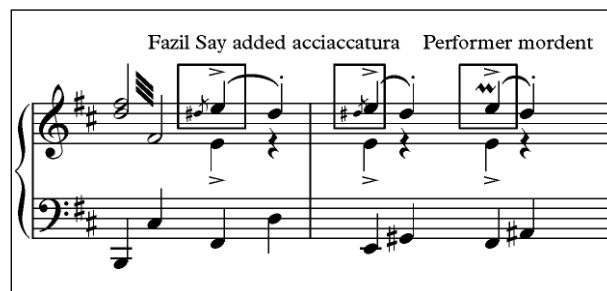


Figure 1.6. Added Mordent at Bars 110-111

Discussion

During performance, the author realised that the role of a performer was unlimited and not confined to common interpretation such as dynamics, tempo, rubato and pedalling. Embellishments became a tool to enhance the creativity of a performer to compliment the musical style and unequivocally to a performer's preference. In comparison to Say's embellishments, there were similarities and differences in performer's application of the type of embellishments. The performer retained Say's original embellishments at several sections and did not modify it further because it was relevant to the melodic phrase and musical style. Additional embellishments such as the acciaccatura, trill, turn, mordent and arpeggios were mostly applied. This allowed for a change of expression and exploration of different sounds, colours and texture, emphasising the piece's character and linked emotions. Embellishments had a great impact on the performer's creativity within the piano works. In addition, the selection of ornamentations were relevant to the musical styles. However, these additional embellishments needed to be balanced



and properly placed within the piano works. Too much or too little modifications could destruct the composer's work. Embellishments serve to artistically enhance the written score and not to re-compose the work.

Conclusion

Fazil Say's written score and recording, and documentation of self-interpretation on musical alteration, performed during a recital, as a guideline for performer to integrate and arrange melodic, rhythmic, metric and structure. Epitomizing within Fazil Say's selected piano work, this article also attempts to reproduce ideas of a performer's creative process that can contribute to a performance on works based on the philosophies of Julian Hellaby that provides conceptual recommendations that supports a performer to include alternative pianistic possibilities to the limit, if not beyond.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by Huckle B Production. No conflict of interest as a result of this study.



References

- Arrau, C. (2014, November 30). *Claudio Arrau*. Retrieved from Youtube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8GN1O6Zzyw&list=PL4XnTS9tjBZVT2mXULC3QyGWR_8fUCpQp&index=1&t=3s
- Aswad S.N.H (2023) *Performing and interpreting embellishments featured in selected piano work of Fazil Say*. [unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
- Bach, C. P. E(1949). *Essay on the true art of playing keyboard instruments*. (W. J.Mitchell, Ed., & W. J. Mitchell, Trans.) London: Ernst Eulenburg Limited. First printed in Berlin, 1759.
- Chen, Y. (2019). *Three facets of fazil say in his selected piano compositions*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2331266639). Retrieved from <https://www-proquest-com.ezpustaka2.upsi.edu.my/dissertations-theses/three-facets-fazil-say-his-selected-piano/docview/2331266639/se-2?accountid=13155>
- Gershwin, G., & Say, F. (2009). *The virtuoso piano transcription series 16 Summertime Variations*. Mainz, Germany: Schott Music.
- Hellaby, J. (2009). Modifying score. *Music Performance Research*, 3, 1-21.
- Otten, J. (2011). *Fazil Say: Pianist, Komponist, Welbürger*. Leipzig: Henschel-verlag.
- ŞAR, S. (2015, May 17). *Fazil SAY - Summertime*. Retrieved June 14, 2019, from Youtube video: <https://youtu.be/U89oKFqb3Z4>
- Say, F. (2005). *The virtuoso piano transcription series 16 Summertime Variations*. Mainz, Germany: Schott Music GmbH & Co