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### **Research Article**

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# An analysis of Ayaz Gambarli's piano work titled Six Children's Pieces

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 26 April 2025 Accepted: 25 June 2025 Available online: 30 June 2025	The article presents an analysis of the "Six Children's Pieces" by Ayaz Gambarli, a representative of modern Azerbaijani composition. It discusses the programmatic approach used by the composer in this cycle. It is noted that the cycle is dedicated to the composer's
<b>Keywords</b> Ayaz Gambarli Piano music Six Children's Pieces Cycle Musical language World of images	son, Oktay. The compact form of each piece and the creation of a rich childlike imagination with small details generate great interest. The article provides information on the intriguing concept of the cycle. It also offers a detailed explanation of how the pieces, written within a tonal framework, are both contrasting and possess a cohesive overall structure. The article also mentions the names of the cycles written by Azerbaijani composers on children's themes and provides extensive information on the special role of fortepiano music in the composers' creations. The article highlights how the composer skillfully adapted the musical
2717-8870 © 2025 The JIAE. Published by Genc Bilge (Young Wise) Pub. Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license	material to fit the characteristics of fortepiano texture and the performing capabilities of children, presenting it in an original manner. Further studies on A. Gambarli's Six Children's Pieces could explore its pedagogical applications, music education adaptability across age groups, and cultural comparisons, particularly in Azerbaijani music. Additionally, in-depth analysis of the polyphonic structures and modulation techniques could enhance understanding of contemporary children's music.

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#### Introduction

Piano music, which has always remained at the forefront of artistic focus, constitutes one of the principal domains in the creative pursuits of Azerbaijani composers. It is well established that the formation of piano art in Azerbaijan dates back to the late 19th century, coinciding with the establishment of the first piano classes. Within a relatively short period, the piano achieved significant progress and became an integral part of Azerbaijani musical culture (Babayeva, 2021). In general, piano music in the works of Azerbaijani composers is associated with innovative perspectives, while also bearing the influence of European musical traditions—a factor that must be particularly emphasized. The wide adoption of the piano as an instrument has also greatly stimulated the development of several musical directions. Most notably, it has fostered the emergence of original compositions and the evolution of performance art.

The present article is devoted to the analysis of Ayaz Qəmbərli's *Six Children's Pieces*, a representative example of Azerbaijani piano music written for children. As an important aspect of national musical culture, piano music composed for children holds a special place in the creative work of composers and reflects the developmental features of this genre. Since the earliest stage of Azerbaijani piano art, when it emerged as an independent field of composition, this genre has taken shape and gained significance.

Alongside the works of prominent 20th-century composers such as Asaf Zeynally, Gara Garayev, and Fikret Amirov, compositions by many contemporary Azerbaijani composers intended for children have found broad application in

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pedagogical practice. In summary, Azerbaijani composers have enriched the repertoire with numerous examples of children's piano music. This field has undergone significant development and has become one of the essential branches of national music culture. Azerbaijani composers have endeavored to create works that align with children's psychology, are rooted in a national musical language, and are characterized by clear musical imagery.

As Professor T. Seyidov, Doctor of Art Studies, notes: "By the 1950s, Azerbaijani piano literature had been enriched with numerous compositions that differed not only in content and execution methods but also in their approach to the subject. Some composers (e.g., G. Garayev, Z. Bagirov) sought to portray characteristic images in music written for children, while others (F. Amirov, A. Abbasov) adapted 'adult' genres to suit children's abilities" (Seyidov, 1992, p. 38). The composers, who constantly enriched the domains of modal-harmonic language, timbre, and rhythm, reflected a broad palette of genres in their works. The use of contrasting juxtapositions, vivid and distinct thematic development, concise melodic and rhythmic structures, and compact textures all contribute to the accessibility and clarity of musical information.

It is well understood that composers who address themes related to children must first possess a deep familiarity with their modes of thinking and imagination. Writing music for children is by no means an easy task, as children must first be able to comprehend and enjoy these works. Historically, many composers have written piano pieces for children they loved, making this connection well-known. It can be unequivocally stated that piano cycles and albums written in this context serve as genuine gifts for young beginners taking their first delicate steps in the world of music.

Programmatic titles in children's piano cycles have always generated considerable interest. These titles facilitate easier comprehension and performance of the pieces, guiding children through the world of sound. In fact, short and concise compositions help develop children's musical thinking and acquaint them with a rich world of imagery. It should be emphasized that children's piano cycles in a composer's oeuvre often have broad thematic content, encompassing topics such as games, natural phenomena, fairy tales, legends, psychological states, portraits, and more. One of the most notable aspects of such cycles is their contrastive nature. The principle of contrast is highly characteristic of the cycle genre, and many composers include pieces of varying moods and subjects, uniting them under a single narrative line. The alternation of contrasting character pieces within children's cycles enhances their appeal and variety. Most importantly, the emotional and imagistic musical world presented in these cycles must be accessible and comprehensible to children.

The systematic study of Azerbaijani children's piano music requires the examination of a wide range of sources with diverse orientations. This article reviews several significant monographs, scholarly studies, and academic articles dedicated to piano music. Professor Tarlan Seyidov, Doctor of Art Studies, has devoted a substantial portion of his academic work to researching Azerbaijani piano culture. In his 2016 work, he presents the early years of piano music in Azerbaijan enriched with compelling historical facts:

"Among the European-origin musical instruments, the piano captured the attention of Azerbaijani intellectuals and music enthusiasts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, although within a relatively limited circle. Despite amateur performance practices and a restricted repertoire, home piano playing gradually expanded, drawing closer to certain standards of concert performance" (Seyidov, 2016, p. 3).

Historical insights into the formation and development of Azerbaijani piano music can also be found in *The History* of Azerbaijani Music by E. Abbasova and S. Gasimova (Abbasova, 1992). Contributions to children's piano music are also explored in various other studies. For instance, V. Sharifova discusses Asaf Zeynally's *Children's Suite* (Sharifova, 1986), L. Karagicheva analyzes Gara Garayev's *Six Children's Pieces* (Karagicheva, 1960), and A. Taghizade examines J. Hajiyev's *Musical Pictures* in his book (Taghizade, 1979). Composer Vasif Adigezalov's collection of children's pieces is studied in I. Efendiyeva's monograph (Efendiyeva, 1999).

A review of these studies reveals that the theme of childhood has consistently occupied a prominent place in Azerbaijani piano music. This thematic focus reflects both artistic concern and pedagogical significance within the broader context of national musical culture.

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## Aim of the Study

The primary purpose of the present study is to examine and analyze certain features of the musical language in the newly published collection *Six Children's Pieces* by Ayaz Gambarli. In accordance with this aim, the study sets forth the following specific objectives:

- > To investigate the historical development of Azerbaijani piano music in a systematic manner
- > To analyze the general influence of European musical traditions on Azerbaijani national piano music
- > To study piano cycles composed for children by Western and Russian composers
- > To examine works on children's themes in the oeuvre of Azerbaijani composers
- > To analyze the piano music of contemporary composer Ayaz Gambarli within the framework of tradition and innovation
- > To conduct a comparative analysis of the composer's piano works in order to identify his individual compositional style.

### Method

The study employs established methods of musicological research relevant to the subject. These include systematic analysis of the composer's output and application of comparative, structural, and theoretical approaches to the study of musical language. The article draws on scholarly works dedicated to children's piano cycles, including Aygun Abbasova's *Children's Piano Cycles in the Works of Azerbaijani Composers (1930s–1980s)* (2017), Tarlan Seyidov's *20th-Century Azerbaijani Piano Culture* (2016), E. Abbasova's *History of Azerbaijani Music*, V. Sharifova's *Azerbaijani Composers* (1986), L. Karagicheva's *Gara Garayev* (1960), and Z. Adigozalzade's *12 Miniatures by Fikrat Amirov* (1979), among others.

### Findings

### The Beginning of Piano Education in Azerbaijan

One of the most significant developments in this regard was the establishment of the Azerbaijan State Conservatory in 1921, initiated by Uzeyir Hajibeyli. The composition department was one of the first to be founded, and its graduates would later become prominent figures in Azerbaijani composition. These composers gave special attention to piano music, composing notable works in various genres for the instrument. Children's pieces and albums occupy a distinctive place in the creative output of Azerbaijani composers.

### The Role of the Piano in World Music

The piano is a unique musical instrument with vast expressive possibilities. It can encompass a wide range of emotions and emulate the full tonal spectrum of an orchestra. Since its invention, the piano has remained a central instrument in music history. Given the extensive repertoire and the strong creative interest composers have had in it—many of whom were pianists themselves—it is often called the "king of instruments." A prime example is Ludwig van Beethoven, a leading figure of the Viennese classical school. While known for his contributions to symphonic music, he was also a virtuoso pianist who composed prolifically for the piano, even before writing his first symphony at the age of 30. Many of his musical innovations first appeared in his piano sonatas, underscoring the instrument's significance as a "creative laboratory" for composers.

## Children's Piano Cycles in the Romantic Era

As noted, the piano has long served as a creative "laboratory" for composers, and this remains true today. In the 19th century, the emergence of various piano genres—particularly cycles and albums for children—became a defining feature of the instrument's literature. The birth of music specifically composed for children was one of the era's notable achievements. Among the pioneers of this genre was Robert Schumann, a leading figure of the Romantic period, whose *Album for the Young* played a key role in Western European music history and laid the groundwork for a lasting tradition. This tradition was later carried on by composers such as Georges Bizet, Edvard Grieg, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, and many others.

#### Children's Piano Cycles in 20th-Century Composition

Numerous composers of the Soviet era also produced piano cycles for children. During the 1930s and 1940s, notable works include Sergei Prokofiev's *Music for Children*, Op. 65 (1935); Nikolai Myaskovsky's *Pieces for Children*, Op. 43 (1938); Dmitri Kabalevsky's *30 Children's Pieces for Piano*, Op. 27 (1937–1938); and Georgy Sviridov's *Children's Album* (1948). From the 1950s to the 1980s, prominent contributions were made by Dmitri Shostakovich (*The March of the Dolls*, 1952), Sofia Gubaidulina (*Musical Toys*, 1968), Sergey Slonimsky (*Album for Children and Youth*, 1970–1974), and Rodion Shchedrin (*Album for the Young*, 1983), among others.

#### Children's Piano Pieces by Azerbaijani Composers

The global interest in children's music is also reflected in the works of Azerbaijani composers, with the earliest example appearing in the 1930s in the oeuvre of A. Zeynalli. As is well known, Zeynalli holds a significant place in the history of Azerbaijani music culture as the first professionally trained composer. Despite his short life, he pioneered many firsts in Azerbaijani music and turned his attention to children's themes with his composition *Children's Suite*. This suite, consisting of six pieces, presents various character types and reflects different aspects of a child's world through a rich palette of imagery: *March of the Dolls, The Child and Ice, Play, Dance, Sheep*, and *Dispute*. "The lives of children are revealed in a playful manner through musical and domestic scenes. Each piece displays distinctive rhythmic features of a particular genre (march, folk song, or ashig performance)" (Abbasova, 2017, p. 59).

Composing for children and contributing to the pedagogical repertoire has become one of the primary objectives of Azerbaijani composers. This tradition, initiated by A. Zeynalli, continued throughout both the first and second halves of the 20th century. Among those who wrote music on children's themes are Z. Baghirov (*Puppet Show*), H. Neimatov (*Six Children's Pieces*), A. Abbasov (*Little Pieces*), G. Garayev (*Six Children's Pieces*, *Six Moderately Difficult Pieces*), F. Amirov (*Children's Piecus*; *Twelve Miniatures*), E. Nazirova (*Eight Children's Pieces*), O. Zulfuqarov (*Variations*), T. Bakhikhanov (*Five Children's Pieces*), F. Guliyeva (*Gunel's Children's Sketches*), A. Melikov (*Children's Pieces*), A. Alizade (*Children's Suite*), R. Shafag (*For Children, Musical Patterns*), and E. Rustamov (*Six Pieces*), among others. Thus, Azerbaijani composers have written programmatic works for children, both small-scale and large-scale.

Although we do not frequently encounter children's works in the output of 21st-century Azerbaijani composers, one remarkable exception is *Six Children's Pieces* by Ayaz Gambarly, a highly talented contemporary composer whose music has been featured in international competitions and festivals. A. Gambarly is known as a worthy successor of the renowned composer Arif Melikov. His achievements in the field of music and his representation of Azerbaijan abroad have earned him the "Youth Award" and the Presidential Prize on multiple occasions for his stage work. Gambarly is an ever-searching artist, steadily advancing toward his goals. As a young and talented representative of the contemporary era, he reflects innovations and changes brought by globalization in his works. His harmonic and melodic language is exceptionally rich. Whether in orchestral compositions, chamber-instrumental works, or solo piano pieces, Gambarly draws upon classical traditions while remaining within a modern framework. Each of his compositions reveals a strong creative spirit, effectively conveying the subject to the listener. The sound palette and timbres are employed with particular taste. "The most significant feature of the composer's technique is the synthesis of modernity and tradition. Though working within a traditional framework, Gambarly distinguishes himself through the originality of his musical, melodic, and harmonic language. He imitates no one; his style is entirely his own" (Huseynova, 2023, p. 790).

The young composer experiments with a variety of genres and forms, creating highly engaging pieces. Notably, the piano is among his favorite instruments. Since his student years, he has written several notable piano works, such as *Six Sketches* (2003), *Resonance* (2015), *September Clouds* (2015), *Vertical Distortions* (for prepared piano, 2015), *Mirage* (2018), *Melancholy* (2019), and *Rain in Riga* (2020).

Gambarly's music is profound and meaningful, never leaving the listener indifferent. He preserves the high traditions of the Azerbaijani school of composition while also demonstrating a modern sense of clarity, simplicity, and logical structure rooted in philosophical thought. In this regard, *Six Children's Pieces*, a recently composed and significant contribution to the piano repertoire, occupies a special place in Gambarly's body of work. The composer dedicated the collection to his son, Oktay Gambarly. The six pieces portray a range of emotional imagery: *Delicate Steps, Journey by* 

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*Train, Rainbow, In the Botanical Garden, Little Song*, and *Snowflakes.* Each programmatic title is vividly reflected in the music, as the composer takes full advantage of musical means to achieve imagery. Although Gambarly typically avoids overt illustration in his work, the artistic and imaginative elements in these pieces are clear and compelling.

By naming the collection *Six Children's Pieces*, the composer created a musically rich and engaging cycle for children. However, the technical demands suggest that these pieces are more suitable for students in the upper grades rather than younger beginners. Although the textures are simple and clear, the harmonic and melodic richness plays an important role in shaping the performer's artistic sensitivity.

The cycle is presented within a tonal framework, with noticeable contrasts in tempo, tonality, and imagery between the pieces. According to the composer's individual approach, pieces 1, 4, and 6 are more extended, while pieces 2 and 5 are more concise; pieces 3 and 6, written with sixteenth-note textures, contribute to a sense of unity throughout the set. Consequently, *Six Children's Pieces* demands a high level of skill and expressive capacity from the performer. It is worth noting that the composer himself premiered the work.

The cycle seems to depict a child's life through the richness of imagination and fantasy. Each piece captures attention through its evocative title. The series begins with *Delicate Steps* and ends with *Snowflakes*. It appears that the composer sought to portray, through his musical language, the places his young son has seen, the images he has encountered, and his reactions to natural phenomena.

Gambarly's cycle-based compositions reflect a new and original phenomenon, arising from a unique set of ideas and creative thinking. Vivid imagery, colorful nuances, and logical development all contribute to expressing the composer's ideas. As such, the analyzed cycle encompasses themes of domestic life and nature. "...The composer skillfully and delicately adapts the musical material to the characteristics of piano textures and children's performance abilities while maintaining originality. The principle of contrast that regulates the structure of the cycle introduces children to various genres of national traditional music, thereby making them easier to perform and experience directly on the piano" (Timurova, 2021, pp. 57–58).

*Six Children's Pieces* is an engaging cycle built on the contrast between different characters. It reflects the characteristics of various genres (lullaby, lyrical piece, dance, and song). The opening piece, *Delicate Steps* (in D minor), is written in a simple ternary form. Its calm and composed nature musically portrays a baby's first steps. The title is especially thought-provoking—it seems to depict a child taking his first steps, trying to experience the world. In fact, from the moment a human being is born, they begin learning. This process typically starts in early childhood.

Through music, the composer attempts to depict the child's first steps in a calm and lyrical atmosphere. The D minor scale sequence is likened to steps, and with the effect of pauses, the child's fall and recovery are musically illustrated. The piece opens with three measures at *mezzo piano* dynamic, in the piano's upper register, using the pitch sequence E, F<sup>#</sup>, B, and C. The dissonant harmonic combinations within the tonal framework are quite intriguing.

In this first musical number, the D minor scale ascends, symbolizing the child's small steps. Although the key signature includes Bb, the composer alters the sixth degree (Bb) to form a Dorian mode (Example 1). Additionally, Gambarly ventures beyond the tonal framework by using pitches such as  $G^{\sharp}$ ,  $F^{\sharp}$ ,  $A^{\sharp}$ , Eb, Db, and Fb throughout the piece (Example 2). The melodic line is dynamic, energetic, and built on a sequential development principle.



Example 2. Fragile Steps-II

In the middle section of the piece, the composer attempts to portray the steps with more confidence and boldness. The notes previously introduced on the piano are now fully articulated, played in an arpeggio style, which further enhances the dynamics.



Example 3. Fragile Steps-III

The sincerity in the music and the play of poetic colors catch the attention. Towards the end of the piece, the tempo gradually slows down, leading to the tonic. The composer wraps up the work by repeating the initial sound, bringing the piece to a close.

The second piece in the series is titled "Travel by Train" (C major). This delicate, lyrical piece evokes the gentle movement of a colorful train for children. After the calm, composed sound of the first piece, dance-like intonations (waltz rhythm; 3/4) are now felt. The piece is written in C major and follows a simple three-part form. One of the notable features is the piece's changing metro-rhythmic characteristics (3/4, 9/8, 7/8, 5/8). The composer employs polyrhythm to reflect the irregularity in the movement of the train. The fluctuating meter of the piece brings a striking contrast to the music of the series.



Example 4. Train Travel-I

In the middle section of the piece, the composer uses pure fourths with half notes in the bass and tenor voices, followed by the consecutive use of augmented and diminished fourths in a sequential manner (Example 5). It is also

worth noting that although the composer presents the piece in the C major scale, he uses the notes "fis," "es," "gis," and "cis," and the piece concludes with the higher note "e" and the lower notes "dis," "fis," and "cis." This further confirms A. Qəmbərli's free, individual approach within the framework of tradition. Interestingly, in both analyzed pieces, the dynamic marking f is never encountered. Both pieces leave a pleasant impression with their gentle, calm sound.



Example 5. Train Travel-II

The third piece in the series is titled "Rainbow" (G minor) and is written in a simple two-part form. It is an interesting example in the series and represents a nature scene. In this piece, the composer presents one of nature's most beautiful and colorful events, utilizing all the possibilities of the piano to convey it to the listener. Throughout the composition, the accompaniment is presented with sixteenth notes. These sixteenth notes give the music a sense of movement.



Example 6. Rainbow

In this piece, the composer uses the whole-tone scale, incorporating an enchanting, magical realm into the music. As mentioned, the programmatic title of the pieces is quite interesting. The compositions in the series, dedicated by the composer to his child, seem to reflect the most memorable landscapes in his mind. The rainbow, which appears after the

rain, eagerly awaited by everyone and magnificently displaying a palette of colors, is presented in a unique way in A. Qəmbərli's creative pen.

Interestingly, the transition from the third piece of the series to the fourth is seamless. The next piece, "In the Botanical Garden" (E minor), is performed directly. This piece, which contrasts with the one heard before, is characterized by a calm tempo and a composed nature. Here, it seems to depict a child's walk in a new place, exploring nature, touching the yellowed leaves, and gazing at the great trees.

The fifth piece in the series, "Little Song" (E-flat major), is written in a repetitive period form. The piece, written in a lyrical mood, is very readable.



Example 7. Little Song

The final piece of the series, "Snowflakes" (D minor), is particularly remarkable for its expressiveness. Interestingly, the first and last pieces of the series are written in D minor, thus framing the entire set. The astonishing delicacy and refinement of the shades throughout the music captivates the listener. Thinking of the frantic and restless flight of the dancing snowflakes, the composer has managed to bring this to life in the music. Using his skill in descriptive writing, A. Qəmbərli enriches the emotional color of the piece with great mastery.



Example 8. Snowflakes

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The captivating beauty of nature has been reflected in the musical works of many composers. The changing of the seasons has always been a theme that draws the attention of creative individuals working in various fields of art. Musicians, as well as poets, have tried to create a parallel between weather changes and the subjective feelings of human life. In this context, it is worth recalling P. Tchaikovsky's musical world. The great Russian composer's First Symphony in G minor, titled *Winter Dreams*, holds a special place in his creative output. The first two movements of this four-movement symphony are programmatic: the first movement is called "Dreams on the Winter Road," and the second movement is called "Foggy, Dull Land." It is known that the composer was inspired by his impressions from a summer trip to Lake Ladoga, Valaam Island, and the Imatra Waterfalls in 1860 while composing the second movement of this symphony. The image of the winter road in the composer's first symphonic work resembles a delicate, refined watercolor. Thus, by depicting various seasons of nature in their works, composers succeed in expressing the feelings of the human soul. In Tchaikovsky's music, we would like to note how the theme of winter is interpreted with different shades, especially in the coldest season.

#### Conclusion

In his final piece, A. Gamberli attempts to represent the image of the flying snowflakes, eagerly observed from the window, through the means of musical expression. In short, throughout the entire process of composing each piece in this cycle, the composer introduces the listener to carefully thought-out, well-measured, and meticulously crafted writing. The composer's sole aim was to communicate his feelings, emotions, and his relationship with the places he visited with his young son, while bringing the caprices and impressions of nature to life in music, thus creating an engaging cycle for children.

In A. Gamberli's *Six Children's Pieces*, alongside simple forms, we also encounter polyphonic writing. Moreover, there are unexpected modulations and contrapuntal voice leading with polytonal sound combinations. The cycle combines pieces of various characters and genres, showcasing the originality of the new suite's principles.

Contemporary children's piano music represents a unique interpretation and reflection of the global processes within the world of academic music, with its best elements adapted to the child's perception. This cycle, intended for young performers at various stages of their education, is intriguing due to the diversity of expressive means and the composer's individual creative style.

A.Gamberli's *Six Children's Pieces* series occupies an important place when examined within the context of children's music in Azerbaijan. One of the key reasons for its significance is its ability to best express the emotional world of children and nature through musical narrative. In terms of musical techniques, A.Qəmbərli has added new dimensions to his works through elements such as modulation, polyphony, and polytonality. It is highly valuable in music education. Each of Gamberli's works has a unique character. In this regard, its originality, diversity, and pedagogical usability are notable. The richness of the musical language in his works and the variety in expressive forms can deepen the relationship children form with music.

#### Recommendations

*Pedagogical Applications:* A.Gamberli's *Six Children's Pieces* series can be examined in depth for research on children's music education. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods can be employed in these studies.

*Music Education Applications:* Research can be conducted on how the pieces can be utilized in education, especially focusing on adaptation processes for students of different age groups.

*Cultural Contextual Examination:* The cultural themes in A.Qəmbərli's works, especially those related to Azerbaijani music and children's music, can be enriched through cultural comparative studies.

*Studies on Musical Structures:* In-depth analyses of the polyphonic structures and modulation techniques in the works can contribute to a broader understanding of contemporary children's music.

#### **Biodata of Author**



Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Minahanım Babayeva** was born in Baku in 1984. Between 1991 and 2002, she successfully completed her education at the Secondary Specialized Music School named after Bulbul. From 2002 to 2006, she studied in the "Theory of History" faculty at the Baku Music Academy named after Uzeyir Hajibeyli, and completed her master's degree between 2006 and 2008 at Nakhchivan State University. In 2015, she defended her thesis titled *"Stylistic Features of Chamber Music by Azer Dadashov,"* and in 2016,

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