



Research Article

Tradition, modernism, and censorship in the music of Feim Ibrahimi

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Abstract

This study examines the creative development of Feim Ibrahimi, one of the leading figures of contemporary Albanian music, focusing on his relationship with modern compositional techniques and the mechanisms of censorship he encountered during the socialist period in Albania. The research analyzes the composer's three creative periods through major works such as Piano Concerto No. 1, Piano Concerto No. 2, Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, String Quartet, and the string trio Vikamë. The study evaluates how Ibrahimi transformed traditional Albanian musical heritage through contemporary compositional approaches, including modality, polymodal structures, atonality, chromatic and enharmonic systems, microintervals, rhythmic intensity, and serial thinking. It further demonstrates that the composer did not merely quote folkloric material directly, but reconstructed it as a structural, harmonic, and rhythmic component of musical discourse. In particular, the predominance of rhythm and harmony over melody in the piano concertos, the intensified use of dissonance and polymodality in the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, and the fully atonal language, microinterval usage, and tragic-dramatic expression in Vikamë constitute the principal analytical focuses of the article. In addition, the study discusses how Ibrahimi's musical language conflicted with the cultural and political environment of the period through the framework of socialist realism, ideological control, press polemics, and the censorship of musical works. Ultimately, the article argues that Feim Ibrahimi should be regarded not only as a pioneer in the modernization of Albanian music, but also as an influential figure in the development of Kosovo and broader Balkan contemporary music culture. In this respect, the study contributes to discussions on Albanian musical modernism, censorship history, and regional music culture.

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Introduction

The process of transition of Albanian music from the traditionalism of the nineteenth century toward the modernism of the twentieth century occurred very late, in the last decade of the previous century, and was conditioned by two factors: 1) the still poor tradition of professional music; and 2) strict ideological control in society, culture, and the arts. Nevertheless, this path was initiated at the beginning of the 1970s, during a very short period (1970-1972), when in Albanian artistic circles, among youth and progressive intellectuals, the false hope arose that Albania's political course would finally change, with a new orientation toward the West. After the revolutionary movements of the late 1960s, inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, such as the declaration of war against religion, the inclusion of the revolutionary triangle in the education system (instruction, productive labor, and physical and military education), the struggle against bureaucratism, and the linking of artists with the people, the beginning of the 1970s brought feelings of optimism and liberation to Albanian society.

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In fact, this “new spirit,” as the generation liked to call it, came from the highest leadership of the Party of Labour of Albania itself, from Enver Hoxha personally. In a conversation in 1971 with Agim Mero, then First Secretary of the Union of the Labour Youth of Albania, Hoxha, while criticizing “conservatism and formalism in work with youth,” stated: “We cannot limit ourselves to transmitting to the youth only our songs, melodies, and folk dances, otherwise they will attempt to find for themselves and listen to foreign music... To repress young people and to try to impose on them thoughts and actions, as conservatives think, is something that does not accord with the Party line... Therefore, I do not understand why certain meaningless orders are given, such that in order to obtain permission to read a novel, let us say Dostoevsky, from the University Library, special authorization must be granted... This is crude sectarianism and bureaucratism!”².

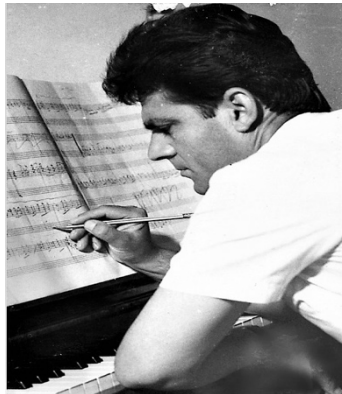


Photo 1. Feim Ibrahimi (Ibrahimi family archive)

On this “new” terrain, the first tendencies toward experimentation with the modernism of the first half of the twentieth century became visible in Albanian art. In the “Spring Exhibitions” of the visual arts, approaches toward Expressionism appeared, such as *The Epic of the Morning Stars*.³ such as those of Edison Gjergo, for example, as well as tendencies toward Cubism, represented by Ksenofon Dilo, and Impressionism, represented by Edi Hila and others. Young poets of the time, such as Xhevahir Spahiu, for example, gravitated toward Symbolism and Hermeticism. Meanwhile, the 11th Song Festival on Albanian Radio and Television (1972) revealed clear aspirations to draw on models of jazz, blues, and rock music. Yet all of this was extinguished very quickly by the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania in 1973, which paved the way for an extreme intensification of the class struggle, deep political, economic, and cultural isolation, including the tightening of censorship in the fields of literature and the arts. In this climate of repression, political persecution did not spare representatives of art and culture either; dozens of them were punished with imprisonment or internment, under accusations such as agitation and propaganda or for creative work influenced by “bourgeois-revisionist” tendencies.

Returning to the beginning of the 1970s, it may be said without hesitation that, in Albanian music, the first tendencies toward a break with traditionalism and schematism, based on the musical experience of the twentieth century, began precisely at that time. These developments are associated first and foremost with the name of the composer Feim Ibrahimi (1935-1997).⁴, one of the first and most distinguished students trained at the State

² Hoxha, E. *Vepra 46, Prill 1971-Shkurt 1972 (Works 46, April 1971-February 1972)*, “Të luftojmë konservatorizmin dhe formalizmin në punën me rininë” (*Let Us Fight Conservatism and Formalism in Work with Youth*). From a conversation with the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the BRPSH. “8 Nëntori” Printing House, Tirana, 1985, pp. 98-99.

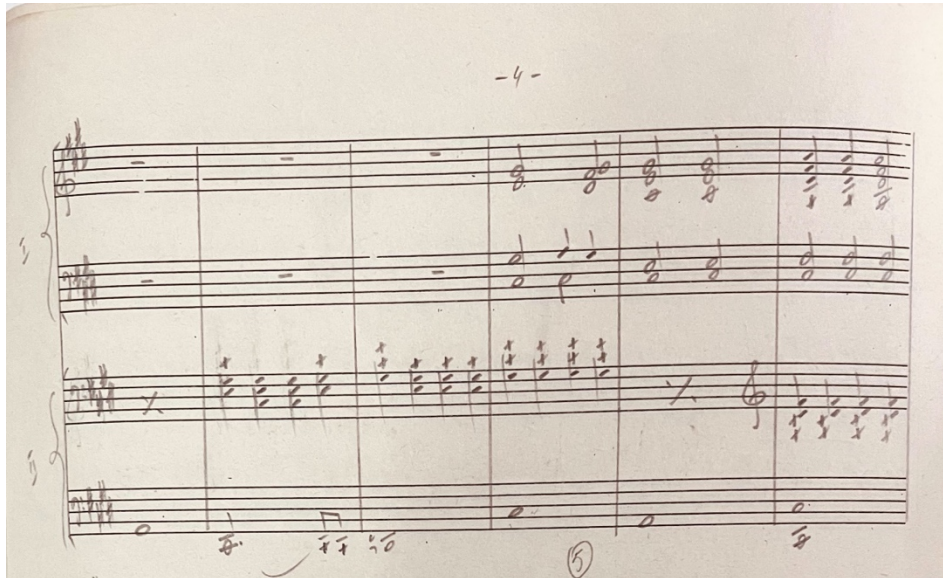
³ For further discussion, see Hoxha, Ermir, *Historia e Artit Shqiptar 1852-2000 (History of Albanian Art, 1852-2000)*, Albdesign Publishing House, 2019, pp. 180-182.

⁴ Leotsakos, George, *The New Grove: Ibrahimi, Feim*, in *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition, edited by Stanley Sadie, Vol. 12: *Huachir to Jennefelt*, Grove, an imprint of Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 47. He was born in the city of Gjirokastra on 20 October 1935 and died in Turin, Italy, on 2 August 1997. His first contacts with music were autodidactic, but he later completed his studies at the newly established State Conservatory in the class of T. Daija, during the period 1962-1966. After completing his studies, he began working as a lecturer at this conservatory until 1973. Later, in the period 1977-1991, he served as secretary for music at the League of Writers and Artists of Albania, and in 1991-1992 he was director of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet. From 1992 until his death, he continued teaching composition at the Academy of Arts in Tirana.

The musical творчество of F. Ibrahimi encompasses almost all musical genres, except opera, and was performed at all important events of Albanian musical life as well as in other countries of the world. His principal works include:

Orchestral music: *Piano Concerto No. 1* (1971); *Piano Concerto No. 2* (1975); *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* (1982); *Symphony for String Orchestra* (1987-1988); *Tragic Symphony*, for narrator, soprano, and orchestra, with verses by A. Podrimja, Migjeni, and L. Aragon (1993-1995).

Conservatory of Tirana. After completing his studies in 1966, Ibrahimî drew the attention of the artistic circles of the time with two works from the late 1960s: the *Suite in Three Movements* from the film *Triumph over Death* (1967-69) and the cantata *Song for the Commissar* (1969), with verses by Fatos Arapi, in which there appears a tendency to depart from the dogmatism of socialist realism, whose content and dramaturgy had placed the new man and the revolutionary fervor of the working masses in the foreground. Ibrahimî's aim seems to have been liberation from the cult of the individual inherited from nineteenth-century Romanticism, something he could achieve only through reliance on folk music. His research in this direction is chiefly connected with the use of a harmonic language of modal-tonal composition, as well as with combinations in sound production on particular instruments in order to obtain rich coloristic effects in orchestration.



Musical Example No 1. Cantata *Song for the Commissar* (author's manuscript), first theme, mm. 41-46.

Ibrahimî turned to musical folklore almost immediately, and this became especially characteristic in his second creative period (1970-1989), with a series of works based on source materials, particularly in *Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2*. With these two works, he succeeded in identifying his compositional style with an individual development characterized by rich modal-tonal harmony, strong rhythmic impulses, and original melodic features, from which importance is given only to the most salient traits in order to achieve the overall effect and the coherence of the composition as a whole. Despite their soft modal coloring, the concertos for piano and orchestra are based chiefly on chordal developments, the harmonic characteristics of which derive from melodies borrowed from folklore.

Through this language, rational in essence, the composer, by clearly distancing himself from the principles of schematic construction, the traditional harmonic standard, and the dramaturgical features of socialist realism, established himself as one of the most prominent figures of the time. These features distinguish the two concertos for piano and orchestra (1971, 1975), which were awarded the Grand Prize of the May Concerts, respectively in 1971⁵ and 1975⁶, placing Ibrahimî at the forefront of the emancipatory musical movement of the time. One of his most significant works of this creative phase is the *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* in two movements, composed in 1982, in which melodic-harmonic complexity reaches very high levels as a result of the emancipation of sharp dissonances that

Chamber and solo music: *Toccata*, for piano (1962-1966); *String Quartet* (1989); *Scherzo*, for violin and piano (1990); *Vikamë*, for string trio (1994).

Stage works: the ballet *The Tenth Wound of Gjergj Elez Alia* (1986).

Vocal-orchestral works: *The Song of Commissar Mustafa Matobiti*, cantata for mezzo-soprano, mixed choir, and orchestra, text by F. Arapi (1969); *Choral Suite*, with folk texts (1984); *The Lake Slumbers*, for four-part choir, text by L. Poradeci (1991).

Songs for voice and piano: *Highlander's Recital*, text by Migjeni (1975-1995); *Beautiful Night*, text by J. W. Goethe (1988); *The Old Man and Death*, text by N. Frashëri (1990-1996); *Nessuno*, text by S. Quasimodo (1993); *The Woodcutter's Death*, text by D. Agolli (1996-1997).

⁵ *Drita* newspaper, Creative Discussion, "The Winners of the May Concerts - Decade 1971," 27 June 1971, p. 2. It was performed by the Orchestra of the Higher Institute of Arts, with M. Kristidhi on piano and Rifat Teqja as conductor.

⁶ Ibrahimî, Vera, *Vikama e Tingullit (The Cry of Sound)*, "Onufri" Publishing House, 2023, pp. 68-69. *Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra* (in three movements) was performed by the Orchestra of the Higher Institute of Arts, with M. Kristidhi on piano and R. Teqja (People's Artist) as conductor.

create instability in the tonal center. Four years later, in 1986, the author composed the music for his only stage work, the ballet *The Tenth Wound of Gjergj Elez Alia* (libretto by I. Kadare, choreography by A. Alija), with sharp dramaturgical confrontations but a more restrained harmonic development.

The piano concertos, with their evident constructivist tendency, brought for the first time into Albanian music the spirit of anti-Romantic aesthetics, so characteristic of European art in the first half of the twentieth century. Neoclassicism of the Bartókian and Stravinskian type served the composer as the principal model for distancing himself from the pathos of the nineteenth century and, from the point of view of musical language, for creating a structuralist relationship with folklore as the principal source of dissonant sonorities of modal origin.

Concerto No. 1 was born in the years of that enthusiasm and illusion concerning a possible opening of the country toward the West after the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. It is difficult to find another case in which an Albanian musical work provoked so much polemic between its supporters and its detractors. The latter, alongside accusations of modernist influences, curiously even from Schoenberg's dodecaphony, also accused it of plagiarism, although they had never wished to speak either of the importation of Soviet models or of the adaptation of examples from certain Romantic composers. Thus, the issue was far more complex than that, since the reaction, in fact, did not come from above, but from circles of musicians, some of whom possessed limited mentalities, others sincerely believed in the doctrine, and still others, even more aggressive than the former, regarded the projection of a new path as dangerous, one that might remove Albanian music, even if only slightly, from the self-satisfaction of provincialism articulated under the guise of national music.⁷

The true transformation of Ibrahim's compositional style occurred in 1989 with the *String Quartet*, which coincides with the beginning of his third creative period and, at the same time, with the onset of the collapse of the communist regime and the establishment of political pluralism. The work is a reworking of a composition from 1966. In both versions, the quartets were not performed for the public.

In an analogical interpretation, Ibrahim's third creative period begins with the recomposition of the quartet, which emerges as a work with a dynamic recapitulation, while the author's creative and physical time appears as a static recapitulation, namely the first and third periods, each lasting seven years. Ibrahim died very soon afterward, in 1997. Thus, his creative life, with its three periods, could be interpreted as the cycle of a tripartite form with dynamic recapitulation. Within this formal structure are divided the years of his creativity: 1962-1969, 1970-1989, and 1990-1997. A-B-A1 was the author's preferred musical form and is almost ubiquitous in his works. Both in terms of the number of works and of artistic achievements, it is clear that the second period bears the greatest weight of his creative output.

The political regime in Albania, depending on the political interests of the Party, and especially on the power of the dictator, in certain periods displayed conditioned orientations while fanatically preserving Stalinist doctrine. Ibrahim was destined to compose music and establish himself in one of the most critical periods of Albanian society, the 1970s and 1980s, when the alliance with the People's Republic of China and the subsequent deep isolation of the country were accompanied by an unprincipled class struggle, economic ruin, and strict censorship in art and culture. It was the time when propaganda and institutions would impose upon creators, more than ever before, the demand for committed art. Nevertheless, judging from the significance of his contributions, Ibrahim's works retained a stable progressive essence, not without consequences for his creativity. It may be said without hesitation that he remains the most anathematized Albanian composer in the pages of the press, in the discussions of the League of Writers and Artists, and in the consequences imposed by censorship. The attacks on his music began with the cantata *The Commissar* of 1969 and continued with the press polemics and the discussions in the League of Writers and Artists concerning the "modernist influences" of *Piano Concerto No. 1*. This opposition reached its climax with *Piano Concerto No. 2*, which was prohibited from being performed and broadcast and was not even included in the text of the *History of Albanian Music* (1985). After the harsh polemics in the newspaper *Drita* in 1972 between the supporters and detractors of the first concerto,

⁷ Shuteriqi, Prela, Zana, Gazeta, ExLibris, *Atë që Kadare e bëri në Letërsi, Fejmi e bëri në Muzikë*, 06.08.2022, f. 5.

the composer was compelled, for a time, to compromise in his orchestral work by reducing the degree of exploration and experimentation with the new. This became evident in three orchestral works written in the period between the two piano concertos, 1971-1975: *Albanian Rhapsody No. 1* (1973), *Epic Dance* (1974), and *Albanian Rhapsody No. 2* (1975). It should be noted, however, that in Ibrahimî's musical creativity this latter orientation remained temporary and was never truly determining.

Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 and the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra

Organized according to the Lisztian concept, in simultaneous sonata form with two episodes and a coda, the melo-thematic materials of *Concerto No. 1* develop as a succession of free constructions, giving the simultaneous form the characteristics of a cycle. The musical character of the work is determined above all by the first theme, which organically fuses the motif of the folk song from Kukës, *O Hysni, direku i shtëpisë*, with the energetic and highly temperamental rhythm of the dances of that region.⁸ Constructed from a two-measure motivic structure in identical repetition, this theme generates the entire impulsive rhythmic energy that dominates the work from beginning to end.



Musical Example No 2. *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1*, first theme, mm. 1-6.

Thus, in the Concerto, the coherence of the development and elaboration of the materials presented as indivisible melo-thematic and harmonic structures appears clearly; from the very opening of the work and throughout its continuation, they preserve with rigor the melo-rhythmic characteristics of the theme. In contrast to the musical output of the period, which was oriented chiefly toward melodic expression, Feim Ibrahimî shifts the latter to a secondary plane, assigning the full weight to rhythm and harmony. The chordal language of the concerto departs entirely from the typical traditions of functional tonality, introducing dissonant sonorities of modal origin. In the Albanian musical context of the time, still marked by stable traditionalist tendencies, this new musical language brought by the concerto provoked harsh polemics within musical circles, as may also be observed below from the quotations drawn from discussions in the League of Writers and Artists of Albania.⁹

The principle of melodization was ‘attacked’ as a stale, ordinary phenomenon, etc. I believe that the composer’s imagination seeks support, and finds it first and foremost in melody, because it is precisely in melody, and from melody, that the musical figure, the ‘sensitive thought,’ is born. Proceeding from this principle, we may conclude that, alongside its positive aspects, the principal shortcoming of Comrade Feim Ibrahimî’s concerto consists in the fact that the corresponding initial idea is not always developed fully and organically. Detached ideas become isolated in themselves precisely for the sake of mechanical fragmentation and melodic “disturbances.” Therefore, the departure from the principle of thematic development impoverishes this very important and essential aspect, all the more so when the author seeks to reveal the progressive aspects of the time in its dramatic quality. (Çesk Zadeja)

Our young composers have their own merit in the development of our concert music. The successes of these last years are the best proof, and I do not agree with Comrades Ç. Zadeja and T. Harapi, as expressed in the open discussion in the newspaper *Drita*, that their creations, for the moment, do not yet constitute achievements but merely attempts. The 1960s not only brought an increase in creative forces, but also the crystallization of certain features of creativity and the growth in the quality of our concert music, something observable in many works. In concert music, as I said above,

⁸ *Historia e muzikës shqiptare* (History of Albanian Music), Vol. 2, SHBLSH, Tirana, 1985, p. 377.

⁹ *Fjalori Enciklopedik Shqiptar* (Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary), Academy of Sciences of Albania, Center of the Albanian Encyclopedia, League of Writers and Artists of Albania (LSHA), an organization of creators bringing together writers, composers, and visual artists. Printed at the “Kristalina-KH” printing house, Tirana, 2008, p. 1510.

one clearly sees the tendency for dramaturgy to be based on melody. This has enabled us to have achievements and valuable explorations. On the other hand, I would say that to seek only in melody, and to think that only melody leads to accomplished works understandable to the masses, is to be one-sided. I shall not dwell here on the role of polyphonic harmony or orchestration, but I would like to recall that extraordinary rhythmic richness possessed by our folk songs and dances, the exploitation of which would greatly raise the quality of professional creativity. (Feim Ibrahim) (Feim Ibrahim)

Now I think that, relying on the solid achievements of our instrumental music, the deepening of the national spirit and the profound development of the original characteristics of our psychology still remain among the fundamental problems of our creativity. Although, in general, in the creative path of our composers, especially in the 1960s, the two paths that support national character had already been clearly defined, namely, first, authentic native music, both through the direct quotation of folkloric musical material and through the elaboration of thought on the basis of the folk heritage. F. Ibrahim's *Piano Concerto* offers us a new and highly interesting relation for our music in the shaping of national character and the sound of a generally new language. In this successful work, F. Ibrahim successfully realized those attempts already noticeable in his concerto for violoncello to express contemporary emotions and to view our reality from a new, fresher, and more effective angle for the listener. Thus one may explain the fact that, despite its advanced language, the work communicates quickly with the audience and attracts with its fantasy and varied colors.¹⁰ (Zhani Ciko)

The second concerto, written four years later, was even more advanced than the first in its anti-Romantic spirit. The themes of the work's three movements are concrete borrowings from folkloric materials. The extensive use of modal sonorities and counterpoint caused the work to acquire high degrees of dissonance, unacceptable for the time, since at its core it devalued the entrenched mentality of the primacy of melodicism, defended through the service of ideological dogmas. Even more than in the first concerto, harmony here assumes a primary role in inner relation with the other compositional means, melody, rhythm, and polyphony. This, together with the tragic sonority of the second movement, regarded as defeatist, was enough for the work to be characterized as "harmful," "modernist," and unacceptable for presentation to the public of the time. Ultimately, the concerto was censored.

In fact, Ibrahim's compositional concept, with its evident rationalist tendency, at this time continued to preserve traditional structure, as occurs in Bartók's cyclical works, such as *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* or the *Concerto for Orchestra*. The composer's explorations, therefore, were concentrated less on form than on elements of musical language, chiefly harmony and rhythm. In both works, although thematic, there essentially appears a tendency to perceive the thematic material as a motivic cell: the theme of *Concerto No. 1* is a phrase containing only four notes, moving in a limited way within the relation of a perfect fourth within the octave, but with two centers of gravity on the notes E and F. Likewise, the first theme of the first movement of *Concerto No. 2* is a phrase composed of four notes, again arranged with two centers of gravity, here on the notes D and C, but in contrary motion. The composer achieves the complexity of the musical writing through polymodality, producing dense dissonant sonorities with clashes of seconds and fourths on the one hand, and, on the other, by transferring the substantive idea into rhythmic expression. The concertos are permeated from beginning to end by a motoric movement with rhythmic energy that recalls Stravinsky's ballets, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*.

Allegro - Moderato ♩ = 104

The musical example shows the first four measures of the first theme. The piano part (treble clef) has a melody of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. The bass part (bass clef) has a rhythmic accompaniment of quarter notes: G3, F3, E3, D3. The tempo is marked 'Allegro - Moderato' with a quarter note equal to 104. The dynamics are marked 'mf'.

Musical Example No 3. Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2, first theme, mm. 1-4.

¹⁰ Drita newspaper, "Criticism: On Certain Problems of Instrumental-Symphonic Music" (from the discussions at the plenum of the committee of the League), 14 May 1972, p. 4.

Ibrahimi's second step toward engaging with the techniques of contemporary music occurred in 1982 with the *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* (in two movements). The work has a character and dramaturgy different from those of the two piano concertos, being liberated from impetuous motoric developments. The musical language employed here is constructed through a harmonic structure based on polymodality, in which atonal harmonic segments are also present, as in the first theme of the first movement, which is based on the augmented fourth as its harmonic center of gravity. Both movements of the concerto are permeated by a perceptible harmonic-rhythmic coherence, the structure of which is presented at the very beginning of the first movement in order to generate and develop itself throughout the entire musical texture of the work.

Musical Example No 4. *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*, first theme, mm. 1-4.

The theme is constructed from a four-measure phrase in a two-voiced contrapuntal dialogue between the oboe and the orchestra, descending chromatically in the lower register, thus also creating the sequence of the principal motif with its center of gravity in the interval of the augmented fourth. It is precisely this diagonal harmonic-contrapuntal movement of the voices that creates sharp dissonant sonorities in registers of differing pitch.

Mode is one of Ibrahimi's strongest resources. His entire work is permeated by a deliberate tendency toward both pentatonic and chromatic modality..¹¹

These bold developments in harmonic language once again provoked harsh criticism against the composer; the work was not performed again until a second interpretation roughly thirty years later, at a time when Albanian society had entered the path of democratic processes. After this artistic "battle," mixed with the more dangerous ideological one, had Ramiz Alia not intervened once again, this *Concerto* too would have suffered the fate of *Piano Concerto No. 2*: it would have been prohibited from being broadcast and performed, and perhaps it might even have exiled us from art, or worse still.¹²

String Quartet and String Trio, Vikamë

Two chamber works written in later years, the *String Quartet* of 1989 and the *String Trio* of 1995, testify not only to the path traversed by the composer's creative output over a period of more than twenty years, but also to some of the principal phenomena of the process through which Albanian music in general moved toward approximation with the most advanced musical trends of the second half of the twentieth century.

The *String Quartet* of 1989 constitutes the composer's recomposition of a quartet written as a student work twenty-three years earlier, in 1966. Although the revised work belongs to the final period of Albanian music under socialist realism, stylistically it adheres to characteristics associated with the aforementioned composers, Bartók and Stravinsky. Its musical language is essentially polymodal, while simultaneously displaying structural elements of atonal music and serialism with limited transposition, that is, incompletely transposed mode. In the Albanian context of the music of the period, these techniques appear entirely new and, as such, define the composer's most advanced approach to the musical language of the twentieth century.

¹¹ Buharaja, Edmond, "The Poetics of a Concerto: Reflections on the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra (1981) by Feim Ibrahimi (1935-1997)," *Analiza*, Online Journal of Music Studies, Group for Analysis and Music Theory (G.A.T.M.), 4 October 2013, p. 2.

¹² Ibrahimi Vera, *Vikama e Tingullit*, shtëpia botuese "Onufri", 2023, f. 103-104.

Musical Example No. 4: Feim Ibrahim, *String Quartet* (author's manuscript).¹³, the principal motif of the first movement's main theme, mm. 1-3.

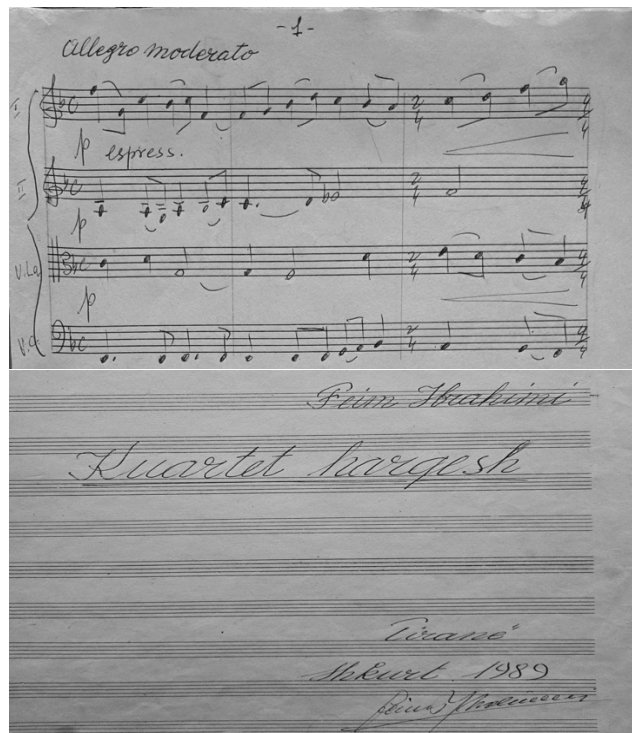
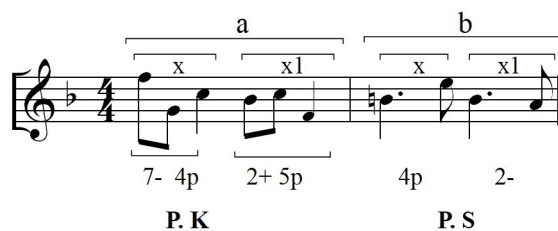


Photo 2. Manuscript of String Quartet (1989)

The first movement clearly departs from the structures of singable melodies or concrete quotations from musical folklore, as occurs in the composer's earlier works. The principal theme begins in the first violin in the Ionian mode transposed to F, set vertically in the other instruments in the Mixolydian mode likewise transposed to F, where it also creates the profile of a center of gravity. It is constructed on a basic structure of four intervallic elements: the minor seventh, the perfect fourth, the perfect fifth, and the major second. These intervals constitute the principal melorhythmic elements of the motif, with a generative structure in the four repetitions of the theme, the last of which is superimposed upon the rhythmic figuration of the connecting passage.



Musical Example No 6. Feim Ibrahim, *String Quartet*, motif of the principal theme and the secondary theme of the first movement.

Unlike the traditional concept of the exposition in sonata form, here the composer presents the theme in a repetitive manner, dynamized through the diminution and augmentation of rhythmic values, placed in inversion and retrograde of the motivic structure. These technical developments create an inner contrast within the theme itself. As in the *Concerto for Oboe*, coherence is determined by the generation of the initial elements: the connecting passage preserves the same intervallic structure as the theme; the second theme, in the Aeolian mode, is formed from the retrograde of the intervallic elements of the motivic cell of the first motif of the same material, though with an altered motivic structure, which in the middle section reintroduces, in dialogue a fourth higher, the first theme itself. Likewise, the closing passage, with its melo-motivic composition derived from the rhythmic structure of the principal material, appears in imitations and diatonic sequences. The two development sections represent the simultaneous elaboration of the two principal

¹³ Archive from family of Ibrahim.

materials: in the first, through their vertical superimposition, and in the second, through dialogue between them at different pitch levels and through the rhythmic interweaving of each.

Allegro moderato

The musical score is titled "Allegro moderato" and "Tema. I". It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with *p* (piano) and *espressivo* in the first half, and *fp* (fortissimo) in the second half. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and dynamic markings.

Musical Example No 7. Feim Ibrahim, *String Quartet*, first movement, principal theme, mm. 1-5.

The other two movements of the quartet are subject to the same compositional logic: on the one hand, the preservation of the general contours of traditional form, with the second movement in tripartite form and the third movement in rondo-sonata form with six sections, A-B-A1-C-B1-A2-coda; and, on the other hand, the detailed elaboration of the inner structural motivic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements. Built from motivic material deriving from the intervals of the minor seventh, the perfect fourth and fifth, and the major second, the motivic structure produces intervallic micro-structures which indeed preserve the concept of the phrase by varying and generating themselves in different forms, yet throughout the work ensure rhythmic-harmonic coherence across all three movements, something that would mark not only the beginning of a new journey in Ibrahim's creative output, but also in Albanian music in general.

From the point of view of artistic idea, the composer directly confronts two different compositional approaches that he had pursued over nearly two decades: first, that of the *Piano Concertos* of 1971-75; and second, that of the *Concerto for Oboe* of 1982, in the continuation of which the quartet was also written. Despite the modal-atonal duality, clarity of phrasing is evident from the harmonic perspective. This is the last work of the composer's second creative period, as well as the first to open the way to the third period. Following this trajectory, it may be said that Ibrahim was the first Albanian composer to move beyond the traditional contour of musical writing even before the new musical movement had begun.

With the beginning of the 1990s, when Albanian society entered the era of democratic transformations, Feim Ibrahim once again found himself at the forefront of the musical movement for change, both as an activist and as a composer. In 1992, together with the English publisher June Emerson, he founded the first concert of *New Albanian Music*, and until 1997, when he passed away, he was the author of several works that qualitatively represented contemporary music in the country, among the most important of them being the *String Trio* for violin, viola, and cello, *Vikamë*.

Whereas in the *String Quartet* of 1989 the composer continues to preserve rigorously two important requirements of traditional music, namely the placement of melody in symmetrical or asymmetrical phrases and the use of sonata form with its three principal sections, in the trio *Vikamë* one encounters a complete break from the concept of the relationship between the clarity of phrase construction and form. Secondly, whereas the quartet was constructed between tonality and atonality, the trio is a genuinely atonal work, with a complete abandonment of the functional relationships of the major-minor system.

The trio *Vikamë*, one of Ibrahimimi's last works, composed in 1994-1995¹⁴ on commission from the *Festival of New Albanian Music*, was first performed on 25 May 1996 and was awarded the *First Prize of the Festival* for chamber music works.¹⁵

From the point of view of content, the trio clearly reflects the concentration of Ibrahimimi's creative output in this final phase within the dramatic-tragic sphere, initiated as early as *Piano Concerto No. 2* (second movement), the romance *Recital of the Highlander* (1975-1995) with poetry by Migjeni, the *Symphony for String Orchestra* (1987-88), and *De profundis* (1994) for electroacoustics, culminating in this work as well as in the *Tragic Symphony* (1993-95). The extreme tragic quality is foreshadowed by the very title of the work, *Vikamë*¹⁶, a word used by northern Albanian highlanders to express the deep pain of death.

In Ibrahimimi's creative output, the *Trio* introduces innovations in the construction of form, the use of compositional techniques, harmonic language, and new elements of sound production. The form preserves the structure of the *Rondo-Sonata*, but with sections, five in number, independent from one another. The elements it retains from traditional structure are twofold: the placement of a connecting passage between the sections, and, at the end, a coda with a concluding and unifying function. All five sections are built with the same symmetry of periods, a-b-c, but are asymmetrical with respect to the number of measures. The middle section, C, has the role of development, since it elaborates the rhythmic figures of the first two sections, which, when placed vertically, produce an increasing melo-rhythmic and harmonic tension, thereby determining the climax of the work. This is further reinforced by the change of tempi for each period, likewise in strong contrast with the principal tempi of the two outer sections.

It should be noted that, in this work, Ibrahimimi, alongside traditional notation, also uses notational symbols characteristic of many musical scores from the second half of the twentieth century.

Some new symbols of musical notation used in the work *String Trio, Vikamë*.


Microintervals.

‡ diezi për çerektoni	(ose ♯)
## diezi për treçerektoni	(ose ‡)
♭ bemoli për çerektoni	(ose ♮)
♭ bemoli për treçerektoni	(ose ♭)

Figure 2. Microintervals and harmonic notation symbols in *Vikamë*

Natural harmonics and artificial harmonics, exemplified by string no. IV of the violin.

Intensity



Accents

- pa vibrato
- ~~~~~ vibrato i ngadalshëm
- ~~~~~ vibrato normal
- ◆◆◆◆◆ vibrato i shpejtë
- ◆◆◆◆◆ vibrato progresiv (ngadalë - shpejt dhe e kundërta)

Λ > — ◡

i fortë -----> i dobët

Pauses and expressive markings.

, ✓ ^ ◡ □ ◻

shkurt -----> shumë gjatë

Coloristic effects.

1. sul ponticello
2. con sordina
3. con legno battuto
4. pizz + (picikato me dorën e majtë)

Figure 3. Expressive symbols and coloristic effects in *Vikamë*

¹⁴ Ibrahimimi, Vera. *The Cry of Sound (Vikama e Tingullit)*. "Naïm Frashëri" Publishing House, Tirana, 1999, pp. 220-221.

¹⁵ Brochure. *The Fourth National Festival: Days of New Albanian Music '96 (Festivali i Katërt Kombëtar: Ditët e muzikës së Re Shqiptare '96)*. Tirana, 1997, p. 7.

¹⁶ Academy of Sciences of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, Institute of Linguistics and Literature. *Dictionary of Contemporary Albanian*. Printed by the Poligraphic Combine, "Mihal Duri" Printing House, Tirana, 1980, p. 2167. The word "Vikamë," regional: cry; call; shout.

Remaining faithful even to Migjeni's idea that the call, the *vikamë*, begins with silence and ends again in silence, Ibrahimimi structured the work according to the scheme below, in which, after section C, the initial tempi and meters return in retrograde, it begins with silence and ends again in silence.

Adagio	Allegretto	Animatto	Allegretto	Larghetto
♩ = 66	♩ = 108	♩ = 120	♩ = 108	♩ = 63
A	B	C	D	E (koda)
[a-b-c-lidhëse] ----	[a-b-c-lidhëse] -----	[a-b-c-lidhëse] -----	[a-b-c-lidhëse] -----	[a-b-c]

Graphical Example No. 1: Feim Ibrahimimi, structure of the form of the *String Trio, Vikamë*.

The harmonic development of the trio is based on two of the three categories of the modal system. The principal mode is the second genus of the system, the chromatic mode constructed with limited transposition, comprising nine tones in ascending horizontal motion, divided into three symmetrical groups of three tones each. The first trichord, with the intervallic structure minor second-augmented second, is the basis of the entire mode, the latter being transposed twice, on tones 4 and 7. Thus, the composer presents the second mode of the chromatic genus in complete vertical form in the first measure, but with an asymmetrical division in the placement of the tonal structure, four plus five tones [gr. I (a) - gr. II (b)]. Thereafter [gr. III (c)], he employs the third type of the modal system, constructed with enharmonic tones, the ordering of which does not contain semitone relations, but rather microintervallic ones. It is precisely the placement of these two genera, the second and third modes of the modal system, that determines the highly complex harmonic language of the work.



Musical Example No 8. Feim Ibrahimimi, structure of the construction of the tonal relations of the modal system of the second chromatic genus and the third enharmonic genus in the *String Trio* for violin, viola, and cello, *Vikamë*.¹⁷

The principal sonic structure of the work is built from three independent micro-structures, *a-b-c*, which complete one another as a whole: a) the first four sustained tones have the role of the harmonic structure; b) the other five tones have the role of the micro-motivic structure, which also applies to the other four following sections; and c) the tones in dialogue of the microintervals represent the enharmonic mode of the third genus, which begins on the sixth degree of the note D, from where it is transposed onto each tone of the mode of the second genus. On the compositional plane, *Vikamë* is a work organized through the interaction of three elements differentiated from one another, *a-b-c*, and with a five-part structure, the musical material of which derives from a micro-motif that moves through the process of uninterrupted development across all five sections by means of rhythmic figuration, the transposition of the micro-motivic material at different pitch levels and intervals, in dialogue with element *c*, the microintervallic mode of the third genus. This process creates unceasing energy and dramatic intensity throughout the work.

¹⁷ According to Ernest Krenek, the letter O symbolizes the first group of the triad from the non-twelve-tone series, while the letters RI symbolize the retrograde inversion, which constitutes the fourth group of the symmetrical series in the string trio work *Vikamë*. Krenek, Ernest. *Serial Counterpoint*. Translated by Sokol Shupo. ASMUS, Tirana, 2002, pp. 23-24

Andante ♩ = 66

mf
Quasi recitativo
mf
mf
mf
pp
sul pont.
sul pont.
pp

Musical Example No 9. Feim Ibrahimi, *Trio for Violin, Viola, and Cello, Vikamë*, mm. 1-2.

With regard to the consistency of the harmonic structure, it should be noted that the composer preserves the same harmonic scheme deriving from the *a-b* chord of the first measure, constructed on the intervals of the major seventh, the ninth, and the minor second, which represents the introductory tableau of all the constituent elements of the work. In the internal construction of the trio, based on micro-intervallic material, one observes the phrasing of musical thought in approximately symmetrical periods, which pass very gradually, or even imperceptibly, from one section to another. The title gives clear meaning to the artistic idea of the work, which in its essence expresses a heavy dramaturgical charge referring to the human spirit and human suffering. Within this state, from the point of view of sonority, the movement of dynamism and expressivity builds an increase of tension up to a kind of sonic aggressiveness.

In Feim Ibrahimi's creative output, the evident difference between the quartet of 1989 and the trio written six years later lies in the line of confrontation with the new through the opposition of two different harmonic languages. From the polymodality and detached atonal harmonic segments of the quartet, *Vikamë* speaks in a fully atonal harmonic language on the basis of the creation of chromatic and enharmonic modes.

From this presentation of the compositional evolution of Feim Ibrahimi, viewed through the principal works of his three creative periods, it may be stated with full conviction that, from one phase to another, he anticipated the process of contemporary musical developments in Albania. His consistency in this direction is quite evident. As the Kosovar composer Rafet Rudi writes, "*De Profundis*, together with *Piano Concerto No. 1* and the *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*, in Albanian music, for the time in which they were composed, I would say, play the role of generative nuclei for the creation of a multitude of other works, and may be considered catalytic works in the stylistic realignment of the whole of Albanian music."¹⁸

Conclusion

Feim Ibrahimi is one of the most important composers who played a decisive role in the modernization process of 20th-century Albanian music. His creative development reflects not only his pursuit of individual composition but also the process of Albanian music moving from traditional structure to contemporary musical aesthetics. The musical language he developed, particularly from the 1970s onwards, is based on the re-evaluation of folkloric material not only as a melodic source but also as a harmonic, rhythmic, and structural element. This approach contributed to the emergence of a new way of thinking in Albanian professional music.

The works examined in this study clearly reveal different stages of the composer's creative evolution. In *Piano Concerto No. 1* and *No. 2*, rhythmic energy, polymodal structure, and the use of dissonance are prominent, while in *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*, harmonic intensity and atonal tendencies become more pronounced. *String Quartet* and especially *Vikamë* stand out as works where the composer approaches contemporary musical techniques at the most advanced level. The use of microintervals, chromatic and enharmonic modal systems, a structural understanding approaching serial thought, and dramatic intensity of expression represent the mature stage of Ibrahimi's musical language.

¹⁸ Rudi, R. (1997, September 14). Bërthamë gjeneruese e krijimitarisë muzikore shqiptare (The Generative Core of Albanian Musical Creativity). *Gazeta Drita*.

The research also shows that the composer's creative output developed in constant conflict with the understanding of socialist realism and ideological censorship mechanisms. The cultural policies of the time considered modernist tendencies as "foreign" and "dangerous"; therefore, some works were subjected to intense criticism, and some were censored. Despite this, Ibrahimî, without backing down from contemporary musical understanding, pioneered the formation of new forms of expression in Albanian music.

In conclusion, Feim Ibrahimî's musical language played an influential role not only in the modernization process of Albanian music but also in the development of contemporary music circles in Kosovo and the wider Balkans. His works can be considered among the most important examples of Balkan musical modernism thanks to the unique relationship he established between traditional musical heritage and contemporary compositional techniques. In this context, Ibrahimî's creative legacy remains an important area of research for contemporary Balkan musicology.

Biodata of Author



Dr. Ajet Çekiçi is an Albanian composer. He was born on June 7, 1983, in the city of Pogradec. He began his music studies at the Artistic High School T. T. Koço in the city of Korça in the accordion department, and completed his higher studies in composition at the Academy of Arts in Tirana (today the University of Arts) (2001-2005), in the class of Prof. Aleksandër Peçi. He is been a full-time lecturer of the subject Instrumentation-Orchestration and the author of that same curriculum, where he has also taught the subject Foundations of Post-tonal Composition I-II (in both bachelor's and master's and masters programs) at UART. In 2013, he completed his under the supervision of Prof Sokol Shupo with a symphonic work. He is currently a second-year doctoral student UART with the dissertation topic "Albanian chamber music of the postmodernist period (1990 onward)." He is the author of several scientific articles published in Albania, Romania, and North Macedonia. The creative output of A. Çekiçi includes almost all genres of music (excluding opera and ballet), with collaborations with the RTSH Orchestra, National Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Academia Albanica string ensemble, Muzika Nova string ensemble, and Prince Radu's orchestra in Romania. He is also a member of the Young Composers Association (ACA). A. Çekiçi's works have been performed in all major events of Albanian musical life (Tirana Autumn Festival, Festival of New Albania Music, Romance Festival, ect.) as well as internationally (Italy, Germany, Romania, the Netherlands, USA, Greece, Kosovo, North Macedonia) by both Albanian and foreign musicians, receiving numerous awards. Winner of the first prize in the "Çesk Zadeja" young composers competition, Tirana 2004; winner of the first prize in the "Austrian Music Week" competition, Tirana 2008; winner of the second international prize for young creators "Ton de Leeuw," Tirana 2008; recipient of the career award in the framework of "Çesk Zadeja" Career Composers Competition, Tirana 2022; and winner of three international awards from the "George Stephanescu" competition in Romania for vocal music with piano accompaniment in 2022, 2024, and 2025 (special prize, second prize, and first prize). He has composed works for various ensembles, such as: An album of piano pieces for children, Theme with variations for string quintet, Four trios for violin, cello and piano, A concerto for cello and orchestra, A symphony, A trio for two violins and piano, A trio for flute, violin, and piano, A trio for clarinet, cello, and piano, A trio for two flutes and piano, Theme with variations for two pianos, Three themes with variations for solo piano, Four string quartets, A sonata for violin and piano violin and piano (three movements), A sonata for cello and piano (three movements), A theme with variations for two solo violins, A concerto for string orchestra, Five pieces for string orchestra, Four pieces for violin and piano, A romance for violin and string orchestra, An elegy for violin and string orchestra, Two pieces for cello and piano, A trio for violin, viola and cello, Eight romances for voice and piano. In the meantime, he has attended numerous masterclasses in Albania with W. Hufshchmid, Theo Luevendie in the Netherlands, Reinhard Febel and Goce Kolarovski in Belgrade, Johannes M. Staud in Tirana, Prof. E. Gaudibert in North Macedonia, etc. Some of his chamber music works have become subjects of doctoral research in Romania and the Czech Republic. **E-mail:** a_cekici@hotmail.com **ORCID:** 0000-0003-1506-6291

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Photos

Ibrahimi family archive.