

**SKRYABIN, RAKHMANINOV, AND PROKOFIEV
AS COMPOSER-PIANISTS:
THE RUSSIAN PIANO TRADITION, AESTHETICS,
AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pianism of three of Russia's most significant composers: Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev. In the process of uncovering performance practices, this study embraces aesthetics, compositional syntax, musical formation, and reception – all of which have a bearing upon the development of each composer's unique brand of pianism. Further, the dissertation uses written documentary sources as an adjunct to sound recordings (its primary source material) upon which to base and support its observations and extrapolate to form its conclusions.

The first chapter is an attempt to provide some historical context and a governing framework for this study. The Russian Piano School or Tradition is a term widely used in scholarly discourse on performance. The employment of this term generally recalls more populist usage one might encounter in program notes or through various media which use it to refer to a particular style of performance or pedagogy. The historical implications of the term "Russian Piano School/Tradition" and its connection to a style of performance or pedagogy have yet to be delineated in Western musicological scholarship. This chapter aims firstly to define Russian pianism and pedagogical music traditions and also situate the three subjects of this dissertation within the milieu that shaped and influenced every aspect of their respective artistry. This is a mammoth topic, one that scholars in the former Soviet Union have covered extensively in bits and pieces. Thus, the secondary literature is huge and almost all in the Russian language,

but also requires critical reading and evaluation in light of its sometimes obvious agendas or prejudices.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present the three subjects of this study. The pianism of Aleksandr Skryabin has received virtually no attention in Western musicological scholarship despite evidence of its profound effect on listeners of his time which is explored in the section on reception. The second chapter aims to posit a connection between Skryabin's playing style and his idiosyncratic cosmology.

Chapter 3 focuses the spotlight on Rakhmaninov's pianism. In contrast to Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, as one of the most celebrated keyboard virtuosi of the modern age, has received a great deal of attention. This chapter, however, aims to explore the fissure between his compositional syntax and performance style, necessarily considering the myriad influences (pedagogic and aesthetic) which contributed to these unique idioms. The subject of reception is again touched upon briefly, although in the case of such a distinguished master of the piano it does not provide much information due to its fairly constant and consistent observations of exceptional artistry. It does, however, suggest a particular manner, a craft, an idea which when combined with an arsenal of limitless resources could effect a magnanimous musical personality capable of embracing and realizing multiple, even contrasting, musical aesthetics.

The subject of Prokofiev as pianist – Chapter 4 -- has received some air-time but is possibly not ascribed the significance it should warrant. In sketching his formation as a

musician together with the various primal aesthetic influences which were to have a profound impact on his voice as both composer and pianist, this study subsequently uses reception observations combined with the historical background set up in chapter 1 to advance an argument for the pivotal role Prokofiev's pianism played in the formation of a distinctly Soviet brand of pianism.

The fifth chapter, as its title suggests, focuses on performers and performances other than those of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, or Prokofiev. This section reveals some particularly striking observations. It should be of interest to note that there apparently exists a unique Skryabin performance tradition which has coalesced among those artists exposed to and aware of his philosophical postulations. Also of interest, and perhaps vital to consider, will be the most celebrated interpreter of Rakhmaninov's Op. 30, Vladimir Horowitz. Indeed, Horowitz's interpretation of the said work was praised by Rakhmaninov himself as being ideal, even surpassing the composer's own authority and unparalleled account of the work. Lastly, there is more food for thought provided on Prokofiev's role in updating Russian pianism and leading it into the Soviet era which produced a multitude of illustrious representatives.

Finally, a concluding section brings the various threads of this study together. Above all, it again revisits the topic of what constitutes a specifically Russian brand of pianism. In the process many similarities between the three subjects are exposed, although the singularity and uniqueness of the pianism of each subject is never diminished.

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PREFACE

Unless stated otherwise, all translations throughout from various languages into English are mine. For the sake of clarity, I have included the quoted original language text as a footnote to the English translation which appears within square brackets in the main body of the text.

In reference specifically to Russian transliterations from Cyrillic, I use the American Library Association-Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system with exceptions outlined below. Anglicized spellings of place names for the most part remain unchanged for the sake of familiarity: thus, for example, “Moscow,” not “Moskva,” and “Saint Petersburg,” not “Sankt Peterburg,” although others more familiar remain in their respective original language form thus “Kraków,” not “Cracow,” and “Köln,” not “Cologne.”

Names of Russian musicians reflect a more difficult and inconsistent picture. I use the following main spellings: Aleksandr Skryabin, Sergei Rakhmaninov, and Sergei Prokofiev. In general, I have a preference for “authentic” transliterations, even if this means not using the standard and recognized Anglicized forms. To this end, the Russian hard and soft signs are denoted by a single apostrophe. Nevertheless, in keeping with the above, Sergei Prokofiev is preferred, although the musicologist Grigorii Prokof'ev receives more authentic and consistent transliteration. Any transliterations within quotations, or book/article titles are also left as they appear. Thus, I use the easily

recognized Cui and Mussorgsky only when these are not transliterations from the Cyrillic in which case they become Kyui and Mussorgskii. Similarly, Tchaikovsky is preferred over Chaikovskii, although in the case of the pianist Vladimir Sofronitzkii the “ii” is used to show that he achieved fame prior to the Anglicized form of his name. Thus, in keeping with the same modus Jaroshevsky becomes Iaroshevskii, which is consistent with the ALA-LC system of transliteration that always preferences the letter I in lieu of Y or J. Further, the name Ю́рий is transliterated Iurii and not the more commonly seen Yuri or Juri. Exceptions to this rule concern people who achieved international renown under an Anglicized form of their names, hence for examples Julius Isserlis and Maria Yudina.

The royal counts, brothers Mikhail and Matvei Viel’gorskii were also known by their Polish Baptismal names Michał and Mateusz Wielhorski. Troubetzkoy is preferred over Troubetskoi. Alexej Lubimow in the German spelling of his name becomes Aleksei Liubimov in Russian. Likewise Vasily Trutovsky has been changed into Vasili Trutovskii, and Dargomizhsky or Dargomyzhsky has been changed into Dargomyzhskii to preserve uniformity.

In references to music, I have used lower case italics for references to single pitch classes. In addition, I use the *b* and # sign to indicate flat and sharp respectively. Keys (tonal centers) are also differentiated with upper case signifying major tonality and lower case denoting minor. Similarly, upper case Roman numerals denote major keys while lower case Roman points to minor.

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Congress (Washington DC, USA), Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek (Bern, Switzerland), Kansalliskirjasto (Helsinki, Finland), der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek (Vienna, Austria), Koninklijke Bibliotheek (The Hague, Netherlands), Bibliothèque royale de Belgique (Brussels, Belgium), Det Kongelige Bibliotek (Copenhagen, Denmark), Nasjonalbiblioteket (Oslo, Norway), Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu (Tallinn, Estonia), Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (Berlin, Germany), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin, Germany), Universitätsbibliothek (Greifswald, Germany), Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (Hamburg, Germany), Sächsische Landesbibliothek -Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (Dresden, Germany), Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek (Bonn, Germany), Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris, France), Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet (Paris, France), Biblioteka Narodowa (Warsaw, Poland), and the Musik- och teaterbiblioteket (Stockholm, Sweden).

Above all, I am grateful to my Princeton advisor, Prof. Simon Morrison. Our association goes back to when I was a graduate student at Oxford University in 1998 and he responded to my request for guidance and commentary on sections of my investigation into Skryabin's aesthetics which was the starting point for the present study. Upon coming to Princeton some years later, our interaction during his seminar on Prokofiev inspired yet another section of this dissertation. His incisive and thorough commentary on my drafts challenged me to think further about implications of my research that I had not considered and to broaden the scope of my work to include Rakhmaninov's towering importance as a pianist. Simon's advice and critical insights guided my research to its completion.

Finally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of the Princeton Graduate School who provided me with a five-year fellowship.

INTRODUCTION

Percy Grainger, himself a successful touring virtuoso pianist and composer, made an interesting comment in relation to the distinctive insight of the composer-pianist.

Grainger observed that the greatest performers were composers who perhaps enjoyed a superior gift in the understanding and interpretation of a composition.¹ In the history of Russian music, Aleksandr Skryabin, Sergei Rakhmaninov, and Sergei Prokofiev are immediately conspicuous due to the fact that their gifts as composers were coupled with documented consummate skill, virtuosity, and distinctive artistry as performers. In an age when the concept of the pianist-composer was still popular and indeed almost a normative musical career path, these three figures not only represented Russian musical developments at their pinnacle but also achieved momentous local and international acclaim first and foremost via the piano. Indeed, the spotlight is all too rarely focused on talents that made the three subjects pianistic giants in their time, idolized by their public, and revered by their colleagues. While a study examining their respective pianistic skills could stand alone on its own merits, however, I consider the pianism of all three subjects to be one part of a whole, all-embracing musicianship that integrated accomplished and commanding proficiency in both composition and piano performance. To this end and furthermore, in all cases theirs was a brand of pianism that influenced their art as much as it, together with their compositional craft, was also influenced by extra-musical currents.

¹ Malcolm Gillies and David Pear, Portrait of Percy Grainger (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 172.

It is somewhat surprising that in existing scholarship very little has been made of the connection between musical aesthetic and compositional technique of each composer.

The lacuna is even greater when it comes to examining the relationship between musical aesthetic and the equally idiosyncratic pianism of our three subjects. The latter connection will be the central point of research and discussion in my dissertation.

Put simply, I contend that Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev gave voice to their aesthetic ideals through their respective compositional syntax and pianism. I also argue that in the interpretation of their own compositions, they provide ample evidence that the act of realizing their musical works considers elements that lie beyond a mere manipulation of the musical parameters of a notated score. Yet another variable in this situation, however, concerns the perspective of their formation within a disciplined, systematized, and distinctly Russian piano tradition. As a result and in this context, the topic of what constitutes Russian pianism – a subject matter Western scholars have been slow to codify² -- its traditions and philosophy, pedagogical methods, technical and artistic principles, and so forth, requires investigation for its impact upon our subjects' performance practices. Also, while one might reasonably expect musicians who

² Russian musicological scholarship has produced several works on these topics. Some of the important sources are: Vladimir Natanson, Voprosy fortepiannoi pedagogiki IV (Moscow: Muzyka, 1976); Mikhail Sokolov, ed., Problemy v fortep'ano raboty praktike VII (Moscow: Muzyka, 1973); Iakov Mil'shtein, Masterstvo muzykanta ispolnitelia II 2 vols., (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1977); Ira Petrovskaiia, "K istorii muzykal'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii," in Pamiatniki kul'tury: novye otkrytiia (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1979), 219-26; Mikhail Voskresenskii, "Litso natsional'noi skoly opredeliiatsia professionalizmom: Beseda," Fortepiano 1 (1988): 10-11; Elena L'vova, "Vydaiushchiesia sovetskie pedagogi-muzykanty 1930-50-kh godov: 'Moskovskaya pianisticheskaia shkola' – ikh printsipy i metody prepodavaniia," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Gosudarstvennii pedagogiceskii institut im V. Lenina, Moscow, 1988); Lina Bulatova, Pedagogicheskie printsipy E.F. Gnesinoi (Moscow: Muzyka, 1976); Lev Barenboim, "Osnovopolozhnik leningradskoi forteniannoi shkoly," Sovetskaia muzyka 1 (January 1979): 91-99; Yakov Gelfand, "Piano education in the Soviet Union," trans. Irina Lasoff, Piano Quarterly 35.136 (Winter 1986-7): 39-49; Gennadii Tsy-pin, Portrety sovetskikh pianistov (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1982); Grigorii Kogan, "Ob intonatsionnoi sodержatel'nosti fortepiannogo ispolneniia," Sovetskaia muzyka 11 (November 1975): 94-96.

received their formative training within the same tradition to share some common traits, it would appear that, possibly due to the unique appropriation, influence, and translation of personal aesthetic notions, Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev became such radically different musicians (pianists) from each other but nevertheless maintained distinctive characteristics of their school. These are all issues that have hitherto been unexplored. The importance of these topics touches the heart of what constitutes Russian piano playing and has obvious implications for performance practice and authenticity in interpretation studies, particularly as it concerns the music of these three figures.

First, in surveying the literature a significant number of scholars have examined the oeuvre of Skryabin,³ Rakhmaninov,⁴ and Prokofiev⁵ from a theoretical standpoint;

³ The three sets which constitute principle sonorities in the oeuvre are the octatonic scale, whole-tone scale, and French 6th. See James Baker, The Music of Alexander Scriabin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), for a pc-set overview. The mystic chord functions as a nexus between these three sets which is rather significant given that cyclic transpositions of the three sets are inclined programmatically to initiate moments of stasis within Skryabin's works. See also Simon Morrison, "Skryabin and the Impossible," Journal of the American Musicological Society 51.2 (1998): 313, for an explanation of the symbolic implications of the mystic chord. Other theoretical approaches to the music of Skryabin have been suggested in the following sources: Manfred Angerer, "Musikalischer Aesthetizismus: Analytische Studien zu Skryabins Spätwerk," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wien: UMI Research Press, 1979); Wai-Ling Cheong, "Orthography in Scriabin's Late Works," Music Analysis 12.1 (1993): 47-69; Vavara Dernova, Garmoniiia Skriabina (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1968); Pawel Dickenmann, "Die Entwicklung der Harmonik bei Alexander Skryabin," Vol. 4 of Berner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikforschung (Bern: P. Haupt, 1935); Gottfried Eberle, Zwischen Tonalität und Atonalität: Studien zur Harmonik Alexander Skryabins (Munich: Katzbichler, 1978); Allen Forte, "New Approaches to the Linear Analysis of Music," Journal of the American Musicological Society 41.2 (1988): 315-48; Claude Herndon, "Skryabin's New Harmonic Vocabulary in his Sixth Sonata," Journal of Musicological Research 4.3 (1983): 353-68; Manfred Kelkel, Alexandre Scriabine: Sa vie, l'ésotrisme et le langage musical dans son oeuvre (Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 1978); Sergei Pavchinskii, Sonatnaia forma v proizvedeniiakh Skriabina (Moscow: Muzyka, 1979); Jay Reise, "Late Skryabin: Some Principles Behind the Style," 19th Century Music 6.3 (1983): 220-31; Kurt Westphal, "Die Harmonik Skryabins: Ein Versuch über ihr System und ihre Entwicklung in den Klavierwerken," Musikblätter des Anbruch 11(1929): 64-69; Hans Zeller, "Monodynamik und Form in den Klavierzyklen Skryabins," Musik-Konzepte 37.38 (1984): 4-43.

⁴ For theoretical discussions of the music of Rakhmaninov see: Christine Yoshikawa, "Rachmaninoff's Integrative Technique and Structural Organization: A Schenkerian Analysis of Allegro

focusing on compositional techniques that uncover a predilection for certain pitch-class sets, harmonic progressions, modulatory procedures, phrase forms, rhythmical structures and the like. There are also many biographical studies that deal with various aspects of these three composers' lives.⁶ An interesting byproduct of some of these biographical surveys has been the sometimes weighty and reflective attention they have focused on the respective aesthetics of each composer. Indeed, the influence of a way of conceptualizing music or trying to represent in music a deeper meaning is a factor common to all three of these composers.

A general issue which has significant implications for this type of research is the difficulty in dealing with recollections, letters, diaries, and reviews as primary source material. Such an array of intermediary sources provides only a very vague and

Moderato, from Piano Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, Opus 28," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Arizona State University, 2004); Olga Georgievskaiia, "K probleme polifonii S.V. Rakhmaninova: Shopenovskie istoki netraditsionnykh polifonicheskikh form," *Fortepiano* 4 (2003); Charles Smith, "Is It Original, or Is It Good: The Paradox of Rachmaninoff's Intra-Tonal Chromatic Harmony," (Rhodes International Rachmaninoff Conference, 2005); Joseph Yasser, "The Opening Theme of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto and Its Liturgical Prototype," *The Musical Quarterly* 55 (July 1969): 313-28; Patrick Piggott, *Rachmaninoff Orchestral Music* (London: BBC Publications, 1980); David Cannata, "Rachmaninoff's Changing View of Symphonic Structure," (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1993); Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (London: Scholar Press, 1990); David Rubin, "Transformations in Rachmaninov's Second Symphony," *Music Review* 23 (1962): 132-36; Dana Collins, "Form, Harmony and Tonality in S. Rakhmaninov's Three Symphonies," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Arizona, 1988); Richard Coolidge, "Architectonic Technique and Innovation in the Rachmaninov Piano Concertos," *The Music Review* 40 (August 1979): 176-216.

⁵ Various theoretical methods and approaches to the music of Prokofiev can also be found in the following sources: A. Klimov, "Gorizonta'lnaia i vertikal'naia vvodnotonovye sistemy (nekotorye ladogarmonicheskie iavleniia v muzyke S. Prokof'eva i D. Shostakovicha)," *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki* vii (1989): 90-102; Vladimir Blok, *Metod tvorcheskoi raboty S. Prokof'eva: Issledovanie* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1979); Alfred Schnittke, "Osobennosti orkestrrovogo golosovedeniia S. Prokof'eva," *Muzyka i sovremennost'* viii (1974): 202-28; Tatiana Ter-Martirosian, *Nekotorye osobennosti garmonii Prokof'eva* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966); Neil Minturn, *The Music of Sergei Prokofiev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Richard Bass, "Prokofiev's Technique of Chromatic Displacement," *Music Analysis* 7.2 (July 1998): 197-214; Iuri Kholopov, *Sovremnnye cherty garmonii Prokof'eva* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967); Deborah Rifkin, "A Theory of Motives for Prokofiev's Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 26.2 (2004): 265-289.

⁶ These are too numerous to cite here. For a complete list see bibliography.

imprecise account of performance qualities. Access to such material is also not straightforward in every case and thus the reliability of such evidence can be questionable, as a simple case outlined in Harrison's recent study of Rakhmaninov indicates.⁷ As such, one is left feeling that the written sources provide as many questions as answers. Thus, as in other aspects of performance practice, it is only recordings which demonstrate the genuine traits and idiosyncrasies of these performers.

The nineteenth century is unparalleled in giving us not only a myriad pianists who descended from a distinguished line of composer-performers, but also in introducing us to different piano schools and traditions.⁸ The examination of performance styles can be exceedingly challenging, however, due to the paucity and poor technical quality of recordings which do not veritably and fully replicate the interpretations. This is particularly relevant in the cases of Skryabin and Prokofiev. The process of recording was obviously not as advanced as it is today. This supported the notion of early recordings being an inaccurate and unreliable source. Without a doubt, while the arrival of the reproducing piano⁹ technology of the first two decades of the twentieth century of

⁷ Max Harrison, Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings (New York: Continuum, 2005), 88-89.

⁸ Kenneth Hamilton, "The Virtuoso Tradition," in The Cambridge Companion to the Piano ed. David Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57. Hamilton defines the 'golden age' of Romantic pianism as beginning in 1837 with the famous duel between Liszt and Thalberg and ending with the death of Paderewski in 1941. Major figures included Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt.

⁹ The player piano predated the reproducing piano and is the more primitive of the two instruments that use rolls to reproduce sound. Both instruments are powered by air that passes through a perforated roll. Only a reproducing piano, however, can also reproduce the performer's dynamics and pedalling, making it a much more sophisticated and artistically satisfying instrument. The disadvantages of the reproducing technology pertained to the difficulties associated with the maintenance of the rolls and instruments used for playbacks. Thus, a healthy degree of scepticism is warranted when examining piano roll recordings. In addition, an important notion that must be comprehended here is that a roll is a record of how the piece was played, not necessarily how it sounded.

recording saw many pianists of great stature including Prokofiev, Rakhmaninov, Ignacy Paderewski, Josef Hofmann, Josef Lhévinne, Percy Grainger, and Vladimir de Pachmann, leave valuable recorded legacies in the form of piano rolls prior to the advent of the electrical 78 rpms,¹⁰ it was indisputable that such primitive recording technology could not capture the full range of their art. This is the main reason why early recordings of classical music repertoire have previously been ascribed little value and have been deemed rather inconsequential as primary source material.

Essentially, pre-1950 recording technology involved an acoustic transfer onto a wax disc one side at a time. The frequency range in both treble and bass registers was also very limited which drastically effected the resonance of a grand piano making it sound like an upright.¹¹ Nevertheless, the sources provide musicians with an important resource which casts new light on the performing styles of the nineteenth century. Musicologist Robert Philip in an essay on the subject of early piano recordings has posited a set of criteria for the evaluation of early recordings as evidence of nineteenth-century performance styles. Essentially, he proposes three questions be asked: 1) What was the

¹⁰ Electrical recordings – whereby the performer would play before a microphone on to a wax master -- were introduced in the latter part of 1924, and shortly thereafter replaced the acoustic recording process in which performers played into an acoustic horn on to a wax master. The microphone had been in operation since the advent of the telephone in the 1870s, although the signal was too faint and vulnerable for it to be used in recording. The development of the Fleming amplifying valve circa 1920 solved this obstacle. All this notwithstanding, record companies were slow to utilize the new technology. Indeed, it was only when the birth of radio began to harm revenues that enthusiasm literally mushroomed. For the next major innovation in recording technology one would have to wait until the late 1930s when magnetic tape began, very gradually over the next fifteen to twenty years, to replace wax as the recording medium. Before the introduction of this process, tape made extended ‘takes’ and micro-editing possible; records were organized in four to five minute segments which corresponded to the maximum capacity of one ten or twelve inch side of a record. Essentially, there was no means to edit a smudged passage without retaking the whole side. It was thus unavoidable that blemishes remained part of the recording.

¹¹ Marguerite Broadbent, Great Pianists of the Golden Age (Wilmslow: North West Player Piano Association, 1996), xi.

reputation of the pianist at the time of the recording? 2) How might the pianist's normal performance have been adapted for the purpose of recording? 3) What are we missing by not being the able to see the pianist?¹²

The length of the chosen repertoire of an artist was a determining factor in the recording studio as all the works had to fit onto two four-minute sides.¹³ The majority of recorded works necessarily came from the nineteenth century which did not at all reflect the diversity of concert programmes.¹⁴ Indeed, many years elapsed, with fragmented excerpts of longer works continuing a normative practice, before the advent of electrical recordings in the 1920s when, for the first time, the breadth of concert programmes were reflected in the recording studio. The lack of choice in a lot of repertoire implied that many listeners came to associate a particular pianist with a work or a composer, and this became a yardstick for the measurement of all subsequent performances and recordings of the work.¹⁵ Thus, for many people, the opportunity to hear some of the more obscure works in a particular composer's oeuvre was rare until such a work received its concert premier. "This encouraged top-class pianists to create their own interpretation rather

¹² Robert Philip, "Pianists on Record in the Early 20th Century," in The Cambridge Companion to the Piano ed. David Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77.

¹³ Robert Philip, Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35-6. This also, in some part, accounted for the unusually quick tempi prevalent in pre-electrical recordings.

¹⁴ Another obstacle in this process of repertoire extension was the conservative attitude of record producers who did not usually entertain the whims of even the most distinguished artist.

¹⁵ Philip (1998), *op.cit.*, 84.

than to conform to a generally accepted standard. For this reason there was more individuality in the Golden Age...and that resulted in more freedom of expression.”¹⁶

Recording technology has undergone constant development over the last century. With the dawn of the computer revolution, the capability accurately to represent audio signals has increased manifold times. In actual fact, it is only very recently that such historical evidence has been reappraised in the search for authenticity, the traditions of a particular school, and in light of the information it can offer as to performance practices sanctioned by a prominent composer-performer. As Philip states:

early recordings have a particular relevance to the study of performance practice in the late nineteenth century, as many of the performers heard in these recordings lived through the mid to late 1800s and their performing styles can be seen as remnants of the nineteenth-century style.¹⁷

Sound recordings nevertheless possess an intrinsic property, that is one of true replication, that cannot be matched by written documents, no matter how eloquent, descriptive, or colorful in language. Recordings thus hold and preserve information regarding trends, performance practices, habits, and general tendencies, that are inadequately, if also rarely, described in written criticism.¹⁸ They make it possible to trace significant influences, notwithstanding the fact that differences can be more striking than similarities. Early recordings “therefore shed light on the limitations of

¹⁶ Broadbent, *op.cit.*, xiii.

¹⁷ Philip (1992), *op. cit.*, 1. Other written sources include notebooks, correspondence, sketches, annotated scores, student letters and reminiscences. See Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, Chopin: Pianist and Teacher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

¹⁸ Joachim Kaiser, Great Pianists of Today and Yesterday (Boston: The Page Co., 1900), 34.

documentary evidence in any period, not just in the early twentieth century.”¹⁹

Musicians do not necessarily abide by their own words, or heed the advice of mentors or critics, and thus it can be difficult to infer pertinent attributes of performances in the absence of recordings. Of course, recordings do not provide the all the solutions, although in most instances they are singularly representative and assist in articulating other documentary sources. Written criticism, however, is also a valid testament to the significance and stature of a particular performer, “even though the evidence has to be carefully weighed, and a healthy amount of skepticism -- cynicism, even -- is mandatory”²⁰ as there is frequently the problem of separating fact from myth.

The recordings of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev need to be examined and contextualized within the Russian piano tradition. For the fact that Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev, as we will see, remained identifiably ‘Russian’ as pianists, has significant and meaningful implications for how performance styles, pertaining to the interpretation of their music, are defined today, and how best to achieve an authentic interpretation of the music of these composer-pianists.²¹ Further, in the process of scrutinizing their respective recorded outputs, some gaps left by the recording technology itself might also be filled. Thus, it is both appropriate and necessary to

¹⁹ Philip (1992), *op.cit.*, 1.

²⁰ Harold Schonberg, The Great Pianists (London: V. Gollancz, 1964), 12.

²¹ National piano idioms began to form as a result of the development of a certain stylistic self-consciousness which paralleled developments in mainstream musical performance. Indeed, such distinctions between national traditions in composition and performance were already long in existence, and, as such, the piano being a relatively new instrument in the 18th century, trod a path well-traveled. It accumulated a new and diverse repertoire as it expanded in range and technical capability and spread in popularity throughout the European continent.

provide a brief synopsis of the historical and technical milieu surrounding the Russian Piano School.

The Russian Piano School had its formal foundation in the St. Petersburg (1862) and Moscow (1864) Conservatoires, established by Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein respectively.²² Anton Rubinstein was not merely a great pianist on the same level as Liszt during the nineteenth century, but, in the words of Tsipin, he was:

the initiator of a definite aesthetic in national piano culture, the founder of a tradition, outlining and defining the features of those ideals that were to remain the same for a period of several decades for the majority of his countrymen and colleagues. Russian musicians followed in Rubinstein's path insofar as they could, guided by his artistic criteria, acquainting themselves with his 'school' for the next generation of pianists. [He] became an arbiter of taste in Russian performing art...[and] refined the art of Russian piano playing.²³

Rubinstein's great transformation from virtuoso to cultured pedagogue, however, came as a result of his meeting with both Chopin and Liszt during a concert tour of Paris in the 1840s. He was captivated by their differing performance styles, mannerisms, and movements at the keyboard.²⁴ This was his first acquaintance with the two dominant

²² Nikolai Rubinstein was no less a virtuoso than his older brother Anton, although he remains ultimately less influential in the formation of a Russian performance style possibly due to his adoption of the then more fashionable and restrained playing style that was characteristic of the German school. His playing was said to be planned with precision, meticulous in its attention to detail, and detached; rather dissimilar to that of his brother. See Olga Bennigsen, "The Brothers Rubinstein and their Circle," Musical Quarterly xxv (1939): 407–19.

²³ Gennadi Tsipin, "Chopin and the Russian Piano Tradition," Journal of the American Liszt Society 38 (1995): 72.

²⁴ Anton Rubinstein, Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein, 1829-1889, trans. Aline Delano (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1892), 19. See also: Louis Biancolli, "The Great Anton Rubinstein," In Robert Wallace, A Century of Music Making (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Catherine Bowen, "Free Artist": The Story of Anton and Nicholas Rubinstein (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1939); Anita Chang, "The Russian School of Advanced Piano Technique: Its History and Development From the 19th to 20th Century," (DMA Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin: UMI

performance traditions of the time: the French (Chopin) and German (Liszt), from which he was to borrow many ideas and embody in a new pedagogical method.

The other important figure, if somewhat less immediately influential than Rubinstein, was Teodor Leszetycki.²⁵ Born a mere year after Rubinstein in Russian-occupied Poland, Leszetycki became a student of Carl Czerny in Vienna at where he became acquainted with the prerequisites of solid technical formation. Both Rubinstein and Leszetycki shared many ideas on pedagogical methods. These points will need parsing in trying to determine inherited traits of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev from their respective teacher genealogies. As the two founding representatives of the Russian Piano School, however, they also differed on some aspects of piano mechanical principles, some of which imbued their students with idiosyncrasies that produced two distinct but related teacher-student lineages. Some of these stylistic tendencies that they put forward as distinctively Russian included: significantly greater freedom in interpretation, the lack of restraint, relaxation of expressive resources, tempo rubato,

Research Press, 1994); Adelaide Hippius, "Anton Rubinstein in His Classroom," *Etude* 25 (March 1907): 154; Jordan Krassimira, "The Legacy of Anton Rubinstein," *Clavier* 31 (December 1992): 25; Ethel Newcomb, *Leschetizsky As I Knew Him* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967); Angela Potocka, *Theodore Leschetizsky* (New York: The Century Company, 1903); Jonathan Summers, "Anton Rubinstein," *International Piano Quarterly* (Autumn 1998): 48-53.

²⁵ The importance of Rubinstein and Leszetycki in the Russian musical cannon has been grossly understated. There is hardly any literature in the West dealing with their significant contributions to fostering Russian musical life in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Their lack of success as composers may have contributed to this and lead to their relative obscurity. This notwithstanding, the St. Petersburg and Moscow conservatories were to become an important breeding ground for a significant school of composition which was directly connected with an equally notable performance tradition through which many a later prominent composer emerged. The development of a national training system gave rise to a new philosophy and conception of music. This necessarily affected an already distinct attitude towards performance and interpretation which was to become further defined. The Russian school now developed its own ideas towards every aspect concerning performance, from pedagogical methods to interpretation. Thus, a pedagogical method and practice began to evolve with the students of these two masters codifying technical methods that were communicated to them directly.

agogic nuances, contrasts in dynamics (in particular *forte subito* or *subito piano*), anticipated basses, fading away, excessive passion and sentimentality, thick pedalling, and effects of broad tone colour. Rubinstein's artistic concept was predicated on the establishment of an appropriate spirit in work being studied. It extended to embracing the projection of personal character for composers corresponding to their historical traditions and experiences. Musical performance also took a step away from the Germanic tradition of predetermined and considered interpretation and leaned more towards a notion of spontaneous creation and improvisation by the artist. The emphasis on the mechanical principle, however, diminished once a student reached an executive level and was able to cope with all aspects of piano technique. At this point, the major emphasis shifted to the most tangible identification of Russian Piano School characteristics: musical interpretation.²⁶

It was Rubinstein's artistic aesthetics, especially the emotive approach to musical interpretation, that inspired the principal ambassadors of the Russian School in the early 20th-century: Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, Hofmann, Lhévinne, and later Horowitz, and continues to live and inspire a multitude of pianists connected with the aforementioned founding pedagogues.²⁷ In the vocabulary of the Russian Piano School, the artistic conception of a musical work symbolises the expression of human feelings through

²⁶ See Bowen, *op. cit.*, 119.

²⁷ A more in-depth discussion of Rubinstein's artistic principles and its relevance for Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev, will need to be laid out in consultation with some of the following principal sources: Vladimir Natanson, Proshloe russkogo pianizma (Moscow: Muzyka, 1960); Mikhail Ovchinnikov, Fortepiannoe ispolnitel'stvo i russkaia muzykal'naiia kritika XIX v. (Moscow: Muzyka, 1987); Evgenii Vessel', Nekotorye iz primerov, ukazanii i zamechanii A.G. Rubinshteina na urokakh v ego fortepiannom klasse v Sankt-Peterburgskoi konservatorii (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1901); Lev Barenboim, Anton Grigor'evich Rubinshtein 2 vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1962).

music. The use of images by the pianist to evoke different emotions is imperative if a performance is to assume a necessary quasi-programmatic atmosphere. In addition, a pianist may need to visualise an analogy with speech to inspire an uncovered energy source and intensity in phrases, and to expose the relevance of agogic markings and the composer's objective concept. Piano performance thus becomes an emotional experience when this artistic concept is applied.²⁸

The period of virtuosity in piano playing might have been initiated by Liszt, but it was not until Anton Rubinstein, that 'romanticism' in piano playing was redefined.²⁹ Critics variously described this as a capacity for repose alongside uncontrollable impetuosity,³⁰ a "dislike of contrived or preconceived artifice,"³¹ or as Saint-Saëns expressed it:

[If Liszt was an eagle, then Rubinstein was a lion...and when he joined forces with the orchestra itself what an amazing role the instrument played under his finger through this sea of sonority! Only lightning passing through

²⁸ This practice differs in application from French and German traditions. Emotion is far more overtly expressed through the concept of increased and decreased periods of tension in Russian traditions. Technically speaking, Russian pianism was defined by its full-bodied sound achieved through greater weight of the arm and subtle use of the pedal. It was also very free and liberal in its translation of the text. The German tradition sought to suppress emotion and imagination for the attainment of purity. It was characterised by its mannered sensibility, pedantry, discipline, unsentimentality, and concern for the transmission of form and content. The French were predominantly concerned with communicating the artistry of the performer through the expression of the music. French pianism projected a faster, cleaner, and altogether lighter sounding surface, marked by its taste and discretion. Marguerite Long, the last representative of the old French School, typified French pianism with its total lack of interest in the arm, shoulder, or body for sound production. Instead she, as with other French pianists, stressed the importance of finger playing with minimal use of the pedal. A more detailed discussion of these points can be found in Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism* (New York: Amadeus Press, 1999), 63, 129, 191, 225, 238, James Methuen-Campbell, *Chopin Playing: From the Composer to the Present Day* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981), and Rudolf Breithaupt, *Die natürliche Klaviertechnik* (Leipzig: C.F. Kahnt, 1921).

²⁹ See Bennowitz Moiseiwitsch, "Trends in Piano Playing," *Etude* 73 (November 1955): 26, for a detailed discussion of 'Romantic' piano playing. See also Josef Hofmann's account of the differences between Liszt and Rubinstein as pianists in his *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Company, 1920), 159.

³⁰ "Herr Anton Rubinstein," May 6, 1876.

³¹ Philip Taylor, *Anton Rubinstein: A Life in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 51.

a storm cloud can give any idea of it...And how he could make the piano sing. By what sorcery did these velvety sounds have a lingering duration, which they do not have and could not have under the fingers of others.]³²

Rubinstein championed an entire transformation of piano playing together with a fresh spirit which he transmitted to the mechanical principles of piano technique. In forming his pedagogical method, which became the guiding principles of the Russian Piano School, Rubinstein placed foremost emphasis upon the communication of emotional content which he considered the principal objective of musical interpretation. In order to realise this goal, a disciplined technique is crucial, as superior musical interpretation would be inconceivable in its absence. Technical development here signifies the homogeneity of physical movement and spiritual representation. It is well evidenced that the Russian piano tradition has greatly influenced many pianists over the last century with their unique approach to aspects of technique, pedagogical methods, and performance. It is, however, the artistic concept of musical interpretation which continues to affect and arouse many musicians of our times.

Skryabin received a rigorous schooling within the Russian piano tradition via Nikolai Zverev and Vasily Safonov. His association with Zverev began when Skryabin was thirteen. While Skryabin apparently heeded little of his teacher's advice on pianistic matters, Zverev provided the young Skryabin with a broad and eclectic cultural education and also laid the foundations for a solid technique. With respect to technical

³² "Liszt tenait de l'aigle et Rubinstein du lion...Et quand il s'adjoignait à l'orchestre lui-même, quel rôle surprenant de l'instrument ne jouait-il pas sous ses doigts à travers cette mer de sonorités ! la foudre, traversant une nuée orageuse, peut seule en donner l'idée . . . et quelle façon de faire chanter le piano ! par quel sortilège ces sons de velours avaient-ils une durée indéfinie qu'ils n'ont pas, qu'ils ne peuvent pas avoir sous les doigts des autres." Camille Saint-Saëns, Potraits et souvenirs (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1900), 106.

development, Zverev was obsessive in his focus on hand positioning which he considered the basis for establishing a complete dexterity. As a result, by the time Skryabin joined the tertiary class of Safonov at the Moscow Conservatoire two years later, he was already an accomplished pianist. Safonov, who exerted the most significant influence on Skryabin's pianistic development, was able to focus on building his repertoire. Perhaps due to his own multi talents as composer, pianist, and conductor, Safonov was primarily concerned with imparting concepts and techniques related to musical projection and the imbuelement of sincerity and spirituality in performance. In his teaching of Skryabin, Safonov was proud of the fact that his emphasis on pedalling and sound production produced such inimitable results.

In assimilating the traditions of Russian pianism he learned from Zverev and Safonov, Skryabin also created his own hybrid performance style. Indeed, Skryabin's pianism was somewhat divorced from the mainstream Russian school due to the fact that he brought his philosophical ideas to bear upon his pianism. This followed the trajectory of his development as a composer where, in creating his own dialect, Skryabin was able skilfully to negotiate a successful combination of Russian musical ingredients with his new aesthetic-influenced and -saturated harmonic vocabulary to produce an immediately compelling language.

Skryabin's was an eclectic aesthetic which emanated out of his sympathy with certain views and also his lack of comprehension of the complexities of philosophical

deductions.³³ Much of his theories were gleaned from conversations had with knowledgeable people in this field with his underlying *modus operandi* being intuition and analogy.³⁴ Skryabin was fully aware of the limitations of his ideas and tried desperately to reconcile the many contradictions.³⁵ Skryabin's initial philosophical formation was marked by his belief that the world did not conform to a grand scheme, that he controlled the experience and licensing of ecstasy, and that the final chapter of earthly existence was to be determined by him. As his ideas developed, his preoccupation with his personal role faded whilst his regard for the mystical experience as a natural phenomenon gained impetus. The grandiose artistic construct Skryabin created to realize his philosophical musings was the *Mysterium*. Skryabin's philosophy behind the *Mysterium* postulated a synthesis of all arts. This unique concept of an all-encompassing art form was essentially an expanded version of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which included only music and drama utilized in a complementary design.³⁶ Skryabin's envisaged combining music and drama with stimuli for all the senses, and being able to fuse this into an integrated work of art.³⁷ In essence, this work which remained unrealized was intended to unite all beings, and in a sacramental sign would assume all into a nirvana or new world.

³³ Alexander Brent-Smith, "Some Reflections of the Work of Scriabin," The Musical Times lxxvii (1926): 694.

³⁴ This is not to suggest that his views were merely flippant musings. These theories should be seen within a light of a developing aesthetic.

³⁵ These contradictions were the result of a solipsistic focus. For instance, Skryabin knew that his role as quasi-deity was not in keeping with an ideology that promoted universal oneness.

³⁶ Leonid Sabaneyev, Modern Russian Composers (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1927), 42.

³⁷ Michael Calvocoressi, A Survey of Russian Music (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1944), 85.

The governing framework under which Skryabin united the disparate elements of his aesthetic was Russian Symbolism. This movement, originating in France and spurred there by reactions against Realism and Impressionism in poetry, literature, and painting, flourished in Russia during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. It attained a unique national and social character in Russia due to the social upheavals and ideological quests of the prerevolutionary decades. Symbolists believed that art should apprehend absolute truths which could only be accessed indirectly. Thus, the representation of nature, human behaviors, and other real-world phenomena was especially metaphorical and suggestive in form. Unlike in France, it also permeated the discipline of philosophy in Russia with its inherent inclination towards mysticism.³⁸

The works of Burisov, Bal'mont, and Sologub in particular exerted a great influence on Skryabin through their own striving for a synthesis and rapprochement of the arts in the twentieth century. Through their works, Skryabin learned gradually to intensify the multiplicity of meanings within his compositional syntax, impart new expressive possibilities to the forms with which he worked, and enrich his music with vocabulary and principles borrowed from poetry. In revisiting my original premise, I believe his performance style proves his desire to realize and give voice to his aesthetical postulations. It is for this reason that the intersection between compositional vocabulary, aesthetics, and pianism must be examined for the information it promises to reveal regarding Skryabin's performance practices. Indeed, as Taruskin has opined:

At the very least it should be apparent that musicians who dismiss Scriabin's spiritual vision as "cosmic hocus-pocus," and literary investigators who assume it impossible that a spiritual vision could be "communicated musically," are cut off equally from the vision and from the music. It is only

³⁸ Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 187.

the music that can communicate the vision, but only if we have vision enough to receive the communication.³⁹

Fortunately, in the process of connecting such a convoluted aesthetic to performance practice, Skryabin consigned a small recorded legacy to the judgement of posterity. Unfortunately, however, his recorded output from the first decade of the twentieth century was prepared on reproducing pianos, that is prior to the advent of electrical recording technology. To this end, such evidence needs to be carefully scrutinised, taking into consideration the shortcomings of early recording technology. Nevertheless, it affords us the opportunity to delineate Skryabin's unique practices whereby modifications to tempo, pitch, dynamics, and other parameters that produced such an overwhelming reaction inducing frenzied states were common.⁴⁰

The relevance of this study, therefore, is considerable, as it proposes that many performances of the piano music of Skryabin are deficient in elements that would enable them to represent the composer's ideas in a true fashion. Of course, this is not to imply that all such performances are invalid, although when one plays without a knowledge of the concepts described above one also does not react to the extra-musical language appropriately.⁴¹

³⁹ Richard Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 359.

⁴⁰ Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, 47.

⁴¹ In this sense, the quality and nature of Skryabin editions could perhaps go further to provide the performer with an idea of the limitations of the score.

If the problems of investigating the pianism of Skryabin might stem from the fact that his recorded output is very small and of a poorer and less reliable technological quality, the problems surrounding the examination and drawing of conclusions from the recordings of Rakhmaninov are, for the most part, non-existent. Nevertheless, if there is one issue that might require consideration here it is the fact that Rakhmaninov evidently disliked the recording process and deemed it incapable of fully capturing his art. He stated that the whole process formed an encumbrance on his performing freedom.⁴² Fortunately, however, his legacy of electrical recordings together with copious concert reviews, interviews and other such documents (the former more than five times the combined recorded testaments of Skryabin and Prokofiev, and the latter equally voluminous) can help to surmount this problem. It is also widely known that he was notoriously picky regarding what was passed for commercial release, which increases the value of the recordings and goes some way toward solving the debate over the efficacy of his recordings. The wealth of recorded evidence in the case of Rakhmaninov also attests to both his relative longevity as a performing artist (producing electrical recordings well in to the 1930s after his introduction to recorded technology via Ampico and Welte-Mignon rolls) and his outstanding calibre as a pianist.⁴³ Reviews of his

⁴² See Zarui Apetian (ed.), "Letter from Sofii Satina," in Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove, 2 vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), I:108-9.

⁴³ Francesco Izzo, "Rachmaninoff in Italy: Criticism – Influence – Performance," Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario 15 (1995): 79. It should be noted, however, that it was only through a lack of a conspicuous patron that necessitated Rakhmaninov having to rely on his pianistic skills and thus begin what would be a most celebrated concert career. At various points in his life Rakhmaninov gave divergent opinions on his liking or disliking of the profession of a concert artist, although he won instant admiration for his pianistic talents. His compositional and conducting abilities, however, were much less widely lauded. This precipitated a loss of confidence and faith in his creative voice around the time of the Revolt of 1905. Even if he seemed to don the façade of welcoming artistic benefaction by entrepreneurs and industry, he loathed the concert career he now had and the celebrity it brought him when, to his professional peers, he was regarded as a second-rate composer. The feeling of inadequacy and seeming lack of anything more than an average ability would be recurring themes

concerts definitely concur as to his consummate skill. “Unlike some of his contemporaries who were known for one or another aspect of their pianistic skill, Rachmaninoff possessed an art which was absolutely comprehensive.”⁴⁴

There are many layers of allegory which cloud Rakhmaninov’s reception as pianist, and hence which require careful delineation. Contributing to the ambiguity is the fact that meaningful study of Rakhmaninov’s life and music has been much avoided in the musicological canon. The early editions of Grove provided much of the information that was previously accessible on Rakhmaninov in the west. Much of this information concerned his reception as a celebrated piano virtuoso and thus attested to his considerable acclaim in Russia, Europe, and the early concert tours of America. Eric Blom’s Grove article from 1955 turned the tide against Rakhmaninov and did much to prejudice his reception.⁴⁵ Blom essentially classified the music as monotonous, among other disparaging terms, and this became the catalyst for and reasoning behind a deliberate avoidance to engage in any lengthy discussion of his pianism or oeuvre in

throughout the rest of his life and brought on several severe bouts of depression. The Skryabin-Rakhmaninov rivalry which began in their student years competing for Zverev’s favour, was now to Skryabin’s advantage who dismissed Rakhmaninov as being unable to take music forward and explore new frontiers and whose compositional technique was archaic. See Charles Ruud, “*Fin de siècle* Culture and the Shaping of Rachmaninoff,” Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario 15 (1995): 35.

⁴⁴ Barrie Martyn, Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 401. This notwithstanding, Aleksandr Tcherepnin described Rakhmaninov’s playing of the music of Chopin as being cold-blooded and reminiscent of Prokofiev’s pianism. Indeed, Rakhmaninov’s interpretations of Chopin provoked strong reactions during an age when effeminate approaches to his music were in fashion as opposed to a more straight and forceful reading. His unique way with Chopin, however, did not have any adverse effects on his general reception as the preeminent pianist of his day. *Ibid.*, 407.

⁴⁵ Eric Blom (ed.), “Rakhmaninov, Sergey Vassilievich,” in Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th edition (London: Macmillan, 1954), VII: 27. Well before Blom, some harm was already done with the identification of Rakhmaninov’s musical syntax and style with an outmoded past. See Paul Rosenfeld, “Rachmaninoff,” The New Republic 18.228 (15 March, 1919): 208-210.

historical surveys until recently. Instead, Rakhmaninov was consigned to a list of composers who may experience temporary notoriety but whose language was conservative, backward looking, and imbued with a Romantic sentiment that pioneering musical figures of the early twentieth century were eager to shake off. Further, the facts of his non-Germanic nationality and schooling together with his part-time vocation as composer/pianist impeded his serious consideration by the musicological establishment.⁴⁶

Fortunately and since the time of Blom's derisive essay, a number of specialist studies have emerged to counteract its short-sighted claims.⁴⁷ These include the first English archival study which resulted in a biographical study by Bertensson and Leyda.⁴⁸

Ironically, this was published a mere one year after Blom's influential and condemnatory piece in Grove's. Further, scholars such as Threlfall,⁴⁹ Piggott,⁵⁰ Martyn,⁵¹ Norris,⁵² Cannata,⁵³ and, most recently, Harrison,⁵⁴ have examined his life and

⁴⁶ Marcia Citron, Gender and the Musical Canon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 10, 24-27, 207-8.

⁴⁷ Where once banished from musicological discourse, Rakhmaninov studies reappeared in copious quantities from and since the one hundred year anniversary of his birth in 1973. See Robert Palmieri, Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninoff: A Guide to Research (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), xiv.

⁴⁸ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff: A lifetime in Music (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Robert Threlfall, Sergei Rachmaninoff: His Life and Music (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1973).

⁵⁰ Patrick Piggott, Rachmaninov (London: Faber and Faber, 1978).

⁵¹ Barrie Martyn, Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990).

⁵² Geoffrey Norris, Rachmaninoff (London: Dent, 1993).

⁵³ David Cannata, Rachmaninoff and the Symphony (Innsbruck-Vienna: Studien Verlag, 1999).

works in great detail and in the process have offered new perspectives for the study and reception of his music. These works typify the relatively recent resurgence of interest in Rakhmaninov. This is congruent with a paradigmatic shift in musicology from the prevailing view of Rakhmaninov as conservative to that of an innovator. This shift has been termed a revisionist approach. In particular, Martyn's study drew attention to the three facets of Rakhmaninov's imposing talent: as composer, performer, and conductor. Norris's work looked at issues of style and history against the background of Russian musicological scholarship on Rakhmaninov. The work of Harrison combined the best approaches of both Martyn's and Norris's studies and offered a new and updated chronological investigation into the man and his environment, his multifaceted talents, and his music. In addition, Cook's and Pople's *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music*⁵⁵ together with Taruskin's *Oxford History of Western Music*⁵⁶ have done much to lift the veil of taboo for general histories in dealing with the significance and talents of Rakhmaninov.⁵⁷

A central point of focus in this study on Rakhmaninov is trying to reconcile a playing style with a mode of thought that influenced his compositional style. Whereas with Skryabin it is a matter of proving a hypothesis, namely, that an aesthetic influenced his

⁵⁴ Harrison, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵⁶ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵⁷ Martin Cooper was the last significant and wholly contemptuous commentary on Rakhmaninov's music to be published and unfortunately to be accorded some credence. Ironically, his short text dates from the beginning of the Rakhmaninov revival. See Martin Cooper (ed.), *The Modern Age: 1890-1960* Vol. 10 of *The New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 34.

compositional style and performance practice in spite of his Russian piano heritage, with Rakhmaninov it is a more convoluted matter. For instance, a key issue requiring investigation and explanation is the connection between a seemingly conservative composer and a pianist who rebelled against prevailing performance trends of his time. Evidently, Rakhmaninov as pianist and Rakhmaninov as composer began very early to forge separate and dissimilar paths. These are where the contradictions in Rakhmaninov's art begin to emerge. In attempting to resolve these paradoxes it is imperative to research the modes of thought that combined to form Rakhmaninov's artistic persona, together with the reasons why his compositional style and pianistic style can seem hardly reconcilable. This will set an appropriate background for a focus on and a delineation of his performance style and practices.

Two principle questions that require re-evaluation are: was Rakhmaninov a truly conservative composer, and, is his playing style so unique? Answering these questions is not as simple as many scholars would have us believe. The first of these two questions is perhaps easier to deal with briefly since it is also not the intended focus of this study; the second will require further investigation. Another genuine problem is that many sources contradict each other on the fundamental characteristics of Rakhmaninov's playing style. This has given rise to three terms used in descriptions of Rakhmaninov's playing: Classicist, Romanticist, and Modernist. While critics champion and situate these aesthetics in the pianism of Rakhmaninov, I contend that Rakhmaninov embraced all three; that his pianistic art was unusually catholic and all-encompassing in its tastes

and spectrum of influences. Thus, there is a need to reread his recordings and elicit fundamental practices.

For an insight into Rakhmaninov's playing style one must examine his formative piano education which began when he came under the tutelage of the Russian master-pedagogue Nikolai Zverev from the age of twelve. Zverev instilled in Rakhmaninov the importance of acquiring technical perfection even at the expense of cultivating musical individuality which he deemed would develop naturally at a later stage.⁵⁸ It was through Zverev that Rakhmaninov received his initiation into the Russian Piano School. Both men were totally enamoured of the playing of Rubinstein, and tried at all times to replicate his approach and relationship to the instrument.

The environment that formed Rakhmaninov's unique interpretative approach and some of the idiosyncrasies elicited was not a marked conformance to a guiding set of philosophical principles which would be the case with both Skryabin and Prokofiev. Nevertheless, Rakhmaninov was born during a time when a quest for technical perfection was encouraged by Alexander III and, as such, common to all the arts in the lead up to the Russian Revolution. This was part of a greater renaissance for all the arts in Russia, and came to be defined as the Russian Silver Age.⁵⁹ Artists of the Silver Age were united in their contempt for extreme left-wing politics, which tried to impose

⁵⁸ Ziloti, a former student of and assistant to Zverev, also played a significant role in tutoring Rakhmaninov.

⁵⁹ This is commonly dated from 1897 to 1915. Rakhmaninov was also reluctant to follow the norm upheld by other artists of the Silver Age in their aversion to commerce and industry, but rather welcomed the support both free and private enterprise and industry brought to the arts.

restrictions on personal freedom, despite their resolve to remain apolitical. A common theme to all arts connected with the Silver Age was that of experimentation. This achieved its musical translation through a quest to push forward the boundaries of tonality, an engagement of mysticism, and the adoption of a Symbolist-influenced philosophical conviction.⁶⁰ Composers such as Rakhmaninov (and Skryabin) were schooled in this environment. Commensurate with such a focus on technical sophistication was a Romantic ethos which linked Rakhmaninov to early Romantic ideals and the liberty, open display of emotion, excess, and flamboyance exhibited by figures such as Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Liszt. Further, Rakhmaninov was also capable of expressing an equally natural affinity with both Classical and Modernist aesthetics.

The pianism of Rakhmaninov has indeed been treated as a subject before, although much of these discussions either border on opiated statements regarding aspects of his playing style, or a documentation of his technical methods, or a mere superficial treatment of some idiosyncratic performance practices. I propose that there needs to be an investigation of the reasons behind his performance style, particularly in light of its seeming incongruence with his compositional syntax. What factors came together to produce such a unique performance practice which evidently rebelled against the prevailing performance trends of the day? This is the appropriate and desired context in which to formulate my discussion of Rakhmaninov's pianism and elucidate his distinctive performance traits.

⁶⁰ Ruud, *op. cit.*, 31.

The twenty years that separate Skryabin and Rakhmaninov from Prokofiev did not produce any significant changes in the Russian pedagogical system. Prokofiev had a few teachers before he was brought to Alexander Winkler, a Leszetycki pupil and professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, in 1905. Winkler remained the most significant formative influence on Prokofiev's development as a pianist and emphasized the attainment of a brilliant technique.⁶¹ The imposed regime of exercises and etudes greatly enhanced Prokofiev's technique which was rather slipshod prior to that time, but after four years Prokofiev yearned for a change to a more imaginative mentor and was curious to try the studio of the most celebrated of St. Petersburg's teachers at that time, Anna Esipova. The change occurred in 1909 and by all accounts seemed to work very well initially.⁶² Prokofiev studied vast amounts of virtuoso repertoire with Esipova and was especially pleased to connect himself with the distinguished Leszetycki lineage of the Russian piano tradition. During his time with Esipova, Prokofiev acquired an extraordinary finger articulation which was one of the hallmarks of Leszetycki students. Despite the advancements, tension in his relationship with Esipova became apparent by 1911. Prokofiev had become increasingly frustrated with Esipova's attempts to remedy his technical sloppiness and reign in his eccentric interpretative concepts which he construed as constraining his style. Their relationship continued out of necessity to adhere to regulations until 1914, the year of Prokofiev's graduation.

⁶¹ David Nice, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891-1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 30, and Boris Berman, *Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 38.

⁶² Sergei Prokof'ev, *Dnevnik 1907-1933* ed. Sviatoslav Prokofiev, 2 vols., (Paris: sprkfv, 2002), I: 100.

Developments in musical composition over the same period that separates Prokofiev from Skryabin and Rakhmaninov were considerable. Prokofiev's music has been aptly described as an assorted blend of conventional and modern sounds.⁶³ His music variously embraces and reflects Scythian overtones whilst trying to permeate a highly idiosyncratic, progressive, and deliberately reactionary vocabulary. In a situation somewhat analogous to Skryabin's, a few theories that seek to explain Prokofiev's compositional methods have been advanced.⁶⁴ Arnold Whittall, in his examination and comparison of technical and hermeneutic analytical methodologies with respect to Prokofiev's music, has stated that all such approaches can be complementary. In this light, scholars such as Rifkin and Salzer have used Schenkerian techniques to demonstrate coherence, whilst Bass and Minturn have focused on structural and stylistic issues, in particular the concepts of modality and octatonicism as they apply to the music. Further confirmation of the need to use multiple analytical approaches has come from Daniel Zimmerman who has stated that the use of any single analytical method is inadequate and does not account for all of Prokofiev's innovations and ambiguities.⁶⁵

I suspect that there is a correlation between the calculated effect and the strict economy which are the fundamental principles of Prokofiev's compositional style and the perfection and painstaking precision of his piano playing which requires explication.⁶⁶

⁶³ Rifkin, *op. cit.*, 265.

⁶⁴ See the works of Kholopov, Bass, and Minturn previously cited, and Richard Taruskin, Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶⁵ See Daniel Zimmerman, "Families without Clusters in the Early Works of Sergei Prokofiev," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2002).

⁶⁶ Thomas Schipperges, Prokofiev trans. J. Davies (London: Haus, 2003), 12.

Indeed, I argue that Prokofiev's performance style undeniably awakens an appreciation of his syntax in the educated listener and is, as such, pedagogical. This can be demonstrated by examining the background to the compositional language used, namely the extra-musical factors that evidently impacted Prokofiev's designs.

The spirit of the Russian Silver Age, in particular the Russian Symbolist poet, Konstantin Bal'mont, exerted a considerable influence on the development a Prokofiev aesthetic. Prokofiev's relationship with Bal'mont was strengthened by a mutual urge to renew the communal rites of the ancient civilizations.⁶⁷ For Prokofiev, this led to a fascination with the representation of a semi-legendary society termed the Scyths.⁶⁸ This narrative, which is explicitly invoked in the "program" behind Prokofiev's third piano concerto, a work which also represents the most substantial and noteworthy recorded legacy of Prokofiev as a pianist, requires much further exploration and definition for the light it may be able to shed on the connections between aesthetic outlook, composition style, and performance practice.

In spite of what appears on the surface to be both a prodigious and virtuosic pianistic ability which would have allowed him to contend with other piano giants of the time such as Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, et al, Prokofiev's capabilities and career as a pianist seem mysteriously under-documented. The discussions of his pianism are confined to

⁶⁷ This very much mirrors the relationship of Skryabin and Ivanov who in addition to a preoccupation with primordial cultures also shared a lesser aspiration to employ symbols to arbitrate between disparate planes of cognition in art and also between art and human existence.

⁶⁸ Simon Morrison, Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 258.

newspaper reviews and brief eyewitness accounts. It is apparent that such a “revolutionary” composer naturally and maybe unintentionally deflected attention away from his considerable pianistic skills in an effort to establish his voice as a composer. Indeed, he struggled to shake-off the persona of the virtuoso -- which, for him, had negative associations – in favour of a composer/artist persona. In this respect, Prokofiev’s beginnings and his general attitude towards a performance career were not unlike those of Rakhmaninov. Thus, Prokofiev utilized his skills as a practitioner primarily to take his music to a wider audience and increase their awareness of his compositional technique. Notwithstanding this, Prokofiev was a virtuoso pianist of the highest rank, whose talent, background, and training all combined to make him an ideal interpreter of his piano music.⁶⁹

In the interpretation of his own music Prokofiev, arguably more so than either Skryabin or Rakhmaninov, initiated a totally unique performance practice that had much to do with his embrace of Scythian ideals together with his artistic survival in Soviet Russia. No scholar has engaged in the dialectic between his fascination with Scythianism and the resultant performance practice. Also, no western scholar has discussed extensively the Soviet school within the Russian piano tradition. Even if various Russian scholars have previously treated this subject, they have been reluctant to situate Prokofiev at the centre of its development. Whilst it is not the purpose of his study to investigate in depth the technical principles of the Soviet Piano School, I posit that a disproportionate amount of attention has hitherto been focused on Aleksandr Goldenweiser and Genrikh

⁶⁹ Heinrich Neuhaus, “Prokofiev, Composer and Pianist,” in S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences comp. S Shlifstein, trans. R. Prokofieva (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 233.

Neigauz as founders of the Soviet Piano School when Prokofiev's contribution in bringing forward the technical principles of the Russian Piano School were arguably more significant. Indeed, various sources confirm that a performance style similar to the practices outlined herein draw attention to might have lead to the formation of a new set of technical principles. This point merits much further exploration by examining various Russian sources.⁷⁰

In examining Prokofiev's pianism the same questions that were previously asked in relation to both Skryabin and Rakhmaninov must also be posed here. Certainly, the uncovering of what vestiges of his Russian-tradition schooling are latent in his playing needs to be undertaken prior to a focus upon the more pertinent issue of how his development as a pianist affects his interpretative concept.

Prokofiev's piano roll recordings reveal two characteristics he shared with Rakhmaninov, and as such may have been Prokofiev's attempt to update or even to modernize Rakhmaninov's playing style. The first of these feature concerns a fondness for fast tempi. The second of the common traits points to a similar, albeit unique in both cases, *rubato* style. These features are both exemplified in abundance in his recording of his third piano concerto, although one notices a development, a maturity, which separates his piano roll recording period from his later electrical recordings. The process is characterized by a reigning in of Romantic excess and greater exercise of restraint in performance. In this way he divorced himself from the prevailing

⁷⁰ See Berta Kremenshtein, *Pedagogika G.G. Neigauza* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1984) and Czesław Stańczyk, "Uwagi o pracy nad kształtowaniem wyrazu i dźwięku w radzieckiej szkole pianistycznej," *Muzyka fortepianowa III* 2 (2000): 101-121.

performance trends of his era and liberated himself from the clutches of his traditional Russian formation to draw attention to new possibilities of making music at the piano.⁷¹

Connecting such a performance style to his Scythian fascination, and proving a hypothesis regarding his founding role of Soviet pianism is necessarily going to entail a thorough examination of a vast array of Russian source materials. It will suffice to say now that the Scythian characteristics that typify Prokofiev's new performance style were a translation of the primitive and barbaric, the unadorned, the natural, and the absence of pretense.

A primary reason the playing of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev still remains unable to be accurately categorized is due to the fact that their approach to piano music never took wide hold of subsequent generations of performers of their music and has not lived on to our times. Thus, when these composer-pianists wield their idiosyncratic playing styles, our expectations are still to some extent thwarted if not also affronted because we have a tendency to listen with ears of today, necessarily influenced by over half a century of eminent recorded and live performances of the same works. This surely merits an examination of their work as performers, as the messages resident in the extant recordings have enormous import for performers of today.

The understanding of the performance practices of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev will not be complete without a consideration of the compositional aesthetics that permeated every facet of their respective arts. Further, an understanding of their

⁷¹ Harriet Bower, Piano Mastery (New York: Frederick Stokes Company, 1917), 24-5.

respective formation within the Russian piano tradition will provide the necessary context to enhance our appreciation specific traits which may also represent shared characteristics with pianists of today who were trained within the same school. In examining the extant recordings, reviews, and other documentary sources of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev, this study aims to offer new possibilities in the codification of their practices, which I believe to have major significance for understanding their music and its performance.

CHAPTER 1

The Russian Piano School

The methodical principles of the Rubinstein brothers and Leszetycki, together with their first-generation disciples: Sergei Taneev, Pavel Pabst, Vasilii Safonov, and Anna Esipova, formed the foundation of the Russian Piano School from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. Despite their differences with regards to views of nurturing a pianist and the development of mastery in performance, they were exceedingly similar in their artistic philosophies. Their pedagogical work underpinned Russian piano pedagogy of the pre-Revolutionary period and led in turn to the developments of the Soviet school of pianism. Through this transition, the role of the piano teacher was redefined as not only a professional pianist but also a scholar with an educated insight into and understanding of how to play the instrument. As such, Russian pianism in the twentieth century saw some changes. It was a time characterised by a wealth of fresh experience and ideas in piano teaching.¹ In terms of the development of Russian pianism, the role of the generation which began its activity at the end of the nineteenth century was especially prominent due to their connections with the original pioneers of the Russian pianism. The musical careers of Konstantin Igumnov, Aleksandr Goldenweiser, Leonid Nikolaev, Genrikh Neigauz furnish a tremendous amount of information and are a study of the musical education methods of

¹ Obviously, any methodology is a generalisation of practice, being dependent on and nourished by it. It is from this perspective that the flourishing of pianistic methodologies should be viewed.

the time. Each of the aforementioned pedagogues enriched the art of pianism through valuable theoretical and practical contributions.

At the outset and in relation to the definition of Russian pianism, Samuel Feinberg (a student of Goldenweiser and significant presence on the piano faculty of the Moscow Conservatoire from 1922-1962) outlines an important point:

The strength of the Russian piano tradition lies in its breadth and in the range of individual approaches that it permits. Rakhmaninov's performance of classical works differed vastly from, say, Nikolai Medtner's interpretation of Beethoven, and the pianism of Prokofiev was often the diametrical opposite of Scriabin's. Traditions are valuable and bear fruit if they are bound up with the legacy of Rakhmaninov or the work of a whole series of other splendid interpreters. But if by tradition we understand some preconceived ideas about style, if we link tradition with some particular approach only because it has hardened into habit, we can easily fall into error.²

In essence, as the discussion of a Russian Piano School proceeds it is crucial to bear in mind that the notion of a school of playing is founded less on any certain, definite features of playing than a collective understanding of a technical and interpretive tradition.

In providing a context for the definition of the parameters of the Russian Piano School it is imperative that the early history of the piano in Russia be examined and outlined. The ensuing discussion on the formation of amateur music societies which in turn lead to the establishment of the Conservatories in St. Petersburg and Moscow will then provide the

² Christopher Barnes (ed.), The Russian Piano School: Russian Pianists & Moscow Conservatoire Professors on the Art of the Piano (London: Kahn & Averill Publishers, 2008), 39.

appropriate setting for a more technical study of the various significant personalities mentioned above that helped to form and solidify a distinctly Russian brand of pianism. Unlike Western Europe, Russia did not have a highly-developed keyboard culture. Even though the harpsichord was known in Russia as early as the sixteenth century,³ keyboard instruments were still not widespread during the period stretching from the seventeenth through the greater part of the eighteenth century.⁴ Around the same time it was vocal music, particularly that of the folk-song genre, which captivated the interests of Russian audiences with keyboard instruments being played only in the tzar's court and the homes of the aristocracy.⁵ Indeed, piano music in Russia⁶ was initially the sole preserve

³ Vladimir Muzalevskii, Russkaia fortepiannaia muzyka: ocherki i materialy po istorii russkoi fortepiannoi kul'tury (XVIII-pervoi poloviny XIX st.) (Leningrad and Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1949), 8.

⁴ Aleksandr Alekseev, Russkaia fortepiannaia muzyka ot istokov do vershin tvorchestva: predglinkinskii period, Glinka i ego sovremeniki, A. Rubinshtein, Moguchaia kuchka (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963), 13-14.

⁵ Anne Swartz, "Technological Muses: Piano Builders in Russia, 1810-1881," Cahiers du Monde russe 43.1 (Janvier-mars 2002): 120. The musical instruments that existed in Russia were used primarily as an accompaniment for singing and dancing. The first pianofortes appeared in Russia in the 1770s. Vladimir Natanson, Proshloe russkogo pianizma (XVIII-nachalo XIX veka): ocherki i materialy (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1960), 3.

⁶ The Russian musicologist and composer, Vladimir Drozdov (1882-1960), surveyed the beginnings of Russian piano music which has been clouded in mystery and remains very much uncharted territory in terms of useable performance repertoire for later Russian pianists. Drozdov explains that while the first Russian work for keyboard was written in 1780 by Vasilii Trutovskii (1740-1810), a fascination with keyboard composition can be seen as early as Prince Dolgorukii's manuscript collection of 1724. See G.A., Music & Letters 20.1 (January 1939): 109. Alexei Liubimov also cites Trutovskii's pivotal role in Russian keyboard music composition, in particular his *Sobranie russkikh prostykh pesen s notami* and variation sets which represent seminal contributions. Liubimov also mentions the significant influence of both Dmitrii Bortnianskii (1751-1825), and Ivan Khandoshkin (1747-1804). See Lubimow (ed.), Russische Klaviermusik 1780-1820 (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichschofen (Peters), 1983).

of the nobility who also played a significant role in fostering its development through their own patronage and practice of the arts.⁷

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, European culture gradually permeated Russian life.⁸ The Russian assimilation of aspects of the European tradition while maintaining and developing its own national cultural traditions was encouraged by Catherine II⁹ and continued under the reign of Alexander II.¹⁰ In relation to musical refinement, the piano played a significant role in the transmission and development of musical knowledge through acquainting the general population with elementary musical culture and literacy.

The ensuing period, from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, was a time of increased interest in musical education amongst the wider public. It was during this time that a large number of

⁷ Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 6. Alekseev explains that this was due to the great receptivity of the nobility in comparison with the other levels of the Russian population such as the working class and peasants. Further, due to the high prices of musical instruments, the procurement of them was achievable only for the propertied classes.

⁸ See James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretative History of Russian Culture* (New York: Random House Vintage Books, 1966), 115-205, who dates the start of westernization from the religious reform of 1667, and proceeds to posit dates for a definite 'westward turn' in St. Petersburg which was to lead to a troubled enlightenment.

⁹ Marc Raeff, "Seventeenth-Century Europe in Eighteenth-Century Russia? (Pour prendre congé du dix-huitième siècle russe)," *Slavic Review* 41.4 (Winter, 1982): 617-19. Catherine II (born in 1729 and also known as Catherine the Great) reigned from 1762 until her death in 1796.

¹⁰ Colum Leckey, "Patronage and Public Culture in the Russian Free Economic Society, 1765-1796," *Slavic Review* 64.2 (Summer, 2005): 355. Alexander II (born in 1818) reigned from 1855 until his death in 1881.

musical education institutions arose in Europe, including various high-schools, colleges, conservatories, and academies.¹¹ These institutions were aimed at producing professional musicians. The same establishments also began formalised production of a copious supply of pedagogical material.¹² Leadership in the formation of a piano culture revolved around three centres -- London, Paris, and Vienna. The many foreign musicians who toured or lived in Russia during this time had close ties with one of these centres.¹³ These artists exerted a considerable influence on the formation, development,

¹¹ See Reginald Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Technique* (Washington: R.B. Luce, 1974), 287-8, who discusses the flourishing of such institutions and some of their differences.

¹² Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach's treatise *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (1753) together with Daniel Gotlob Türk's *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Clavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende* (1789) and Vinchenso Manfredini's *Regole armoniche, o sieno Precetti ragionati* (1775), all represent seminal pedagogical treatises that were introduced into Russian musical education by foreign pedagogues. Such keyboard treatises of Western European musicians established the basis for the formation and development of Russian methods of musical training. (The fundamental topics addressed in these works involve the development of pianistic skill, proper seating, placement of hands, and applications. Particular emphasis is given to the art of interpretation and communication of a musical work, while performative methods and means are said to depend on genre, considering the nationalistic and stylistic peculiarities of the material.)

¹³ The focus of foreign pedagogues and artists was the piano, which led to it becoming the primary instrument of musical education by the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to this time, the Italian keyboardists: Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785), Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801), Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816), and Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) had visited Russia and left an indelible impression on Russian audiences. Later in the century names such as Johann Cramer (1771-1858), Johann Hummel (1778-1837), Ludwig Berger (1777-1838), John Field (1782-1837),^{nb} Sigismond Thalberg (1812-1871), Clara Schumann (1819-1896), and others were well-known to musicians across Europe and are still known to this day largely through their pedagogical repertoire for young pianists. In addition, the Germans: Daniel Steibelt (1765-1823), Hessler, and Adolf von Henselt (1814-1889) were also living and performing in Russia during this time. John Field played a significant role in refining the tastes of Russian concert-goers. Living in Russia from 1802, he introduced a then unheard of sensitivity in piano playing. Mikhail Glinka remarked: that this was combined with a singing style and precise and delicate touch. He literally put his virtuoso technique at the service of the music and was always aiming for smoothness of phrase together with graceful movement. It was the complete antithesis to Liszt's bombastic virtuosity, which triumphed in Russia during his tour of 1842. Liszt's condescending characterisation of Field's playing as 'languid' would seem wholly to miss the often bold, capricious, and diverse performances Field was capable of. At any rate, Liszt was unable to diminish the rapport Field enjoyed with the Russian musical establishment. See Glinka, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska* ed. A. Liapunova and A. Rozanov, 2 vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1973-1977), I: 218-219, also Patrick Piggott, *The Life & Music of*

history, and culture of musical education in Russia which also compensated for the absence of Russian musical institutions.¹⁴ Through such exchanges Russian pianism was able to learn from the practices of Western European pianism.¹⁵

The end of the eighteenth century saw the dawn of the first definable period of Russian pianism that was in fact predominated by amateur musicians.¹⁶ These so-called “amateurs” were far from musically or artistically ignorant. On the contrary, many of them [were educated musicians, who, despite their education, did not become professionals.]¹⁷ They played a notable role in the development of musical culture in Russia, through promoting new Russian music, instilling in society a sense of musical

John Field, 1782-1837: Creator of the Nocturne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 103-105.

¹⁴ A fascination with the Russian people together with the warm reception artists received in Russia made it a favourite destination for musicians. This is described vividly in the following quote: Неужели Вы можете думать, что какой-нибудь (материальный) интерес может заставить меня остаться в Петербурге, - сказала как-то Виардо-Гарсиа. – Вспомните, что здесь певица каждую минуту рискует лишиться голоса и что для непривычного к жестокой зиме она составляет мучение. Но если я останусь, то останусь потому только, что при 30-ти градусах мороза, в вашей публике я нахожу 35 градусов теплоты, что эта публика одушевляет меня, и что мое собственное одушевление и чувство не пропадают понапрасну, одним словом, что...я люблю вашу публику. [You could possibly think that some (material) interest would make me stay in St. Petersburg, Viardo-Garsia said. “Remember that here a singer risks losing his voice every minute and that those who are not acclimatized to such a harsh winter can suffer. But if I stay, I would stay only do so because in -30 degree weather I find 35 degrees of warmth from your public, the public here inspires me, and my own inspiration and feelings don’t go unnoticed. In one word...I love your public.] (*Severnaia pchela*, 1845, No. 55). Cited in Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 16.

¹⁵ Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 17.

¹⁶ Seaman provides a detailed account of the role of the amateur musician in Russian society and charts the growing popularity and acceptance of contemporary Western European masters in Russia. See Gerald Seaman, “Amateur Music-Making in Russia,” *Music & Letters* 47.3 (July 1966): 249-259.

¹⁷ “...являлись образованными музыкантами, по своей выучке не уступающими профессионалам.” Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 18.

taste, and giving talented musicians the opportunity to develop their art. They typically performed in charitable concerts or at house gatherings. These events grew in popularity and became a forum for the introduction of new repertoire and artists. In addition to their staging of concerts, they organized a fairly rigorous and systematic musical education.¹⁸

As their profile increased, the amateurs sought to erect a more formal and appropriate forum to provide for the presentation of their concerts. In 1828, a “Society of Music Lovers” was founded in St. Petersburg. The press informed the public of the new society, stating: [to true connoisseurs and lovers of music: a society has been formed amongst you with the goal of holding pleasant gatherings at leisure so that a taste for music amongst the local public can take hold...]¹⁹ During the same year another society

¹⁸ During this time, the study of music was considered an integral part of a person’s education. Supporting this curriculum was “one of the progressive characteristics of the pedagogy of that time, providing for the discovery of people who were artistically gifted and the foundation of a significant circle of musically cultured people.” (See Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 21). Along with in-house education, musical education existed in boarding houses and institutes, which held concert performances of their graduates. In Anna Kostomarova’s, the wife of the famous historian Nikolai Kostomarov (1817-1885), memoirs, she includes a list of concerts held in such boarding houses. See Anna Kostomarova, *Avtobiografiia N.I. Kostomarov* (Moscow: Zadruga, 1922), 18-19. These recollections allow one to determine the attention given to the concert performances of musicians, and the quality of the musical education available to pianists in the said educational institutions of that time. It should be added that the best pedagogues often taught in these institutes, including John Field, Adolf von Henselt, Anton Gerke, and others, which highlights the significance of these educational institutions in the development of a Russian musical identity.

¹⁹ ... “Истинные знатоки и любители музыки...составили между собой Общество в той цели, чтобы проводя приятно досужее (‘досуг’ - примечание автора) время, укоренить в здешней публике вкус к музыке...” *Severnaia pchela*, 1828, No. 20. Cited in Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 18. The management committee of the society was led by Count Mikhail Viel’gorskii (1788-1856) and Aleksandr Pashkov. The importance of Viel’gorskii, together with his brother Count Matvei Viel’gorskii (1794-1866), as a patron of amateur music groups cannot be overstated. It was at his salon that the educated and cultured would gather to hear new repertoire from foreign masters. His personal friendships with a myriad of celebrated foreign composers and performers also assisted in broadening the tastes of locals.

was formed also in St. Petersburg called “The Musical Academy of Amateurs,” which advertised a similar goal to that of the previous group. It was headed by Fedor L’vov (1766-1836) and counted among its board members two very prominent musicians of the day: the violinist Aleksei L’vov (1798-1870) and the pianist Elizaveta Khvostova.

Following the examples of these early musical foundations, several societies were established in the years that followed. These also began to define goals more specifically,²⁰ although many of these groups collapsed soon after they were formed. The more long-lasting and serious of them, inevitably trace their origins back to a certain Women’s Patriotic Society (Zhenskoe patrioticheskoe obshchestvo) . This society was founded by Empress Elizabeth (wife of Aleksandr I) in 1812 and comprised of a number of academic institutions in which the children of poor families studied the social sciences and humanities. Every year the society would organize concerts amongst its schools.²¹

In 1834, a local newspaper reported on the establishment of an amateur musical society in Moscow: [a noteworthy Conservatory was formed in Moscow, the likes of which

See Mikhail Venevitinov, “Frants List i graf Mikhail Yur’evich Viel’gorskii,” *Russkaia starina* lii (1886): 485.

²⁰ For example, a new musical society was founded in the winter of 1840-1841 “for giving amateurs the means to practice polyphonic music and for the performance of classical orchestral pieces.” See Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 19.

²¹ Barbara Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43, or Robin Bisha, *Russian women, 1698-1917: experience and expression, an anthology of sources* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 10, for background information on this institution together with its initial charter and mission.

perhaps cannot be found anywhere else. To be more precise, it was formed of honorable music enthusiasts, who had long been known for their exceptional talents, and was called the Moscow Musical Assembly.]²² The majority of members of this society were in fact students of Moscow University. They succeeded in taking Russian music into the provinces and also played many of their concerts to raise funds for the poor and sick.²³

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the piano had pervaded the ranks of the educated non-aristocratic classes.²⁴ In addition, the instrument was now manufactured and produced in Russia. These developments coincided with the visits of prominent European musicians including Liszt,²⁵ Thalberg, and Clara Schumann, all of whom left a deep impression on Russian audiences. During this period, Russian pianists such as

²² “Составилась достопримечательная Консерватория, какой, может быть, нет нигде, а именно из благородных любителей и любительниц музыки, давно и недавно известных своими отличными дарованиями, и названа Московским Музыкальным Собранием.” *Severnaia pchela*, 1834, No. 92, cited in Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 19.

²³ See *Damskii zhurnal*, 1833, No. 21, and *Severnaia pchela*, 1839, No. 84, cited in Alekseev, *op. cit.*, 19.

²⁴ Swartz, *op. cit.*, 121. This social class were termed, “raznochinets”, meaning an educated person of non-aristocratic descent in nineteenth century Russia.

²⁵ Ruvim Ostrovskii, “Ferents List i russkoe fortepiannoe ispolnitel’stvo XIX stoletiiia,” (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia imeni P.I. Chaikovskogo, 1995), discusses the influence Liszt exerted on the formation of Russian pianism and focuses on the artistic relationship between Liszt and Rubinstein. For a review detailing Liszt’s successes in Russia see *Journal de Saint-Pétersbourg* 18.30 (Août 1842): 1929-30, also Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 262, for an account of Liszt-mania and his theatrics in Russia.

Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)²⁶ and Aleksandr Dargomyzhskii (1813-1869)²⁷ also grew commensurately in stature and achieved local and international acclaim as pianists.²⁸

²⁶ Glinka's contribution to a growing culture and enthusiasm for the piano was undoubtedly through the field of composition. The innovation of Glinka as composer for piano was in his use of polyphony. Glinka typically reproduced the characteristics of Russian folk singing on the keyboard, alternating between the imitation of solo and choral singing, and developing an additional voice that provides a variant of the initial melody. Glinka was also very interested in the genre of piano variations. He developed variation cycles not only on Russian themes (such as the song *Sredi doliny rovnyia* and the Aliab'ev romance *Solovei*), but also from themes by Mozart, Cherubini, and Bellini. His variation cycles are structured and laconic and typically comprise five or six variations. It is also worth drawing attention to his lyrical pieces, the most famous of which was *Razluka*, the first example of a Russian nocturne. Here his intonation is typically Russian. The development of thematic material in the nocturne is characterized by the poetic coloring and masterful reproduction of singing on the piano. Glinka attempted to underscore the lyrical content of the theme, thereby strengthening the emotional intensity of the music. In general his piano compositions reflect the melodic and harmonic language of Russian vocal music together with a strengthening of ties with folk art and an attempt at a representation of Russian society, their problems, adversity, and happiness. See Sergei Privalov, *Russkaia muzykal'naiia literatura* (St. Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2006), 53, and Aleksandr Alekseev, *Istoriia fortepiannogo iskusstva*, 3 vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1982), II: 216-223.

²⁷ Other Russian pianist-pioneers who stood out were Aleksandr Diubiuk (1812-1897), Ivan Laskovskii (1799-1855), Anton Gerke (1812-1870), Mariia Kalerdzhii (Mukhanova) (1822-1875), Timofei Shpakovskii (1821-1861).

²⁸ Glinka's formative tuition on the piano was undertaken with Charles Meyer (1799-1862), and Field. His early performances as an accompanist to singers and to his own singing took place in salons and were evidently very successful events. Many of his contemporaries attest to Glinka's proficiency and professionalism on the piano. Kern states that "У Глинки клавиши пели от прикосновения его маленькой руки. Он так искусно владел инструментом, что до точности мог выразить все, что хотел; невозможно было не понять того, что пели клавиши под его миниатюрными пальцами" [when Glinka played, the piano sang from his light touch and his small hands. He played his instrument so skillfully that he could express everything that he wanted. It was impossible not to understand the music his tiny fingers produced.] See Anna Kern, *Vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: Academia, 1929), 296-297. Another of Glinka's peers recalled: "Михаил Иванович Глинка окончательно расхотелся: сел за рояль и начал показывать, какая будет в оркестре сочиняемая им в то время фантазия на Камаринскую. Он подыгрывал губами, ударял по клавишам обеими пятернями в пассажах tutti, пристукивал каблуками, подпевал..." [Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka sat down at the piano and showed us what his "Fantasy on Kamarinskii" would sound like with an orchestra. He played with his lips, beat the keys in the tutti passages, beat with both feet, and sang.] See Pavel Kovalevskii, "Vstrechi na zhiznennom puti: Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov," in D.V. Grigorovich, *Literaturnye vospominaniia s prilozheniem polnogo teksta vospominanii P.M. Kovalevskogo* ed. V.L. Komarovich (St. Petersburg: "Academia", 1928), 339-343.

THE DEMOCRATIZATION AND PROFESSIONALISM OF MUSICAL CULTURE

The 1860s heralded a new age of cultural life in Russia²⁹ which affected developments in Russian pianism. The life of musical societies during this time became more rich and intensive, and gave impetus and status to the notion of the professional musician.³⁰

While the first half of the century saw the spread of piano music amongst the nobility, the second half was characterized first and foremost by the democratization of pianistic culture.³¹ There was a proliferation of interest in the piano among bureaucrats, merchants, and intelligentsia which generated the development of Russian pianism. It was primarily these social classes that produced the gifted performers of that time.³²

The democratization of a pianistic culture was connected with a growing acceptance of the professional musician whereby the amateur musician was gradually relegated to an entertainment role. Amateur musicians nevertheless continued to exist into the 1860s and were even supported by the nobility who frequently expressed contempt for the new professional musician due to their obvious fear that music would cease to be the sole preserve of the aristocracy.³³ This led to a situation where for an amateur musician to become recognized, he had firstly to become a professional.

²⁹ This was precipitated by substantial reforms in education, the government, the judiciary, and the military.

³⁰ See the comments of Angelina Zorina, Aleksandr Porfir'evich Borodin (Moscow: Muzyka, 1987), 132.

³¹ Aleksandr Alekseev, Russkie pianisty: ocherki i materialy po istorii pianizma, 2 vols., (Moscow-St. Petersburg: Muzgiz, 1948), I:65.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

During the first half of the nineteenth century in Russia, few musicians had the goal of engaging in the education of society in an effort to cultivate a sophisticated musical taste. By the latter part of the century, the desire of performers to enlighten their public began to grow and the primary task of musicians soon became associated with serving the people. Such tendencies towards enlightenment were also reflected in the pianists' repertoire.³⁴ For instance, Balakirev structured his programs around pieces by serious composers and selections from those who were little known.³⁵ Mussorgsky, however, concentrated on vocal transcription, playing entire scenes from his own operas.³⁶

³⁴ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 70.

³⁵ Balakirev was evidently a fine pianist. Reports of the time suggest that had Balakirev dedicated himself more towards concert work, he would undoubtedly have been considered one of the foremost pianists of his generation. In the 1860s, Balakirev's playing was especially unique for its dedicated search for truth in performance. It also possessed a special sonority, asceticism, a lyrical warmth and timbre, and inimitable articulation. Balakirev was an uncompromising opponent of the tendency towards salon-style and other light and frivolous approaches towards musical performance which embraced an entertainment and leisure-time ethos. See Victor Belaiev and S.W. Pring, "Olenin's Reminiscences of Balakirev," *The Musical Quarterly* 16.1 (January, 1930): 75, and Mikhail Zetlin, "Balakirev," trans. Olga Oushakoff *Russian Review* 4.1 (Spring, 1944): 68.

³⁶ The no-less pianistically gifted Mussorgsky was considered to be on an equal footing with Balakirev. The multi-faceted nature of his musical talent (he was also an accomplished singer and actor) was evidently something to behold. His playing embodied lyricism and drama, incomparable humor that made the listeners laugh, virtuosic brilliance, and bell-like strength to his sound. He told a story through his performance and in this sense it is no accident that arguably the most identifiable work for solo piano in Russian musical literature that was *Pictures at an Exhibition* came from his pen. This concept exerted a great influence on the Rubinstein brothers in their formation of a pedagogical philosophy governing their conservatories. According to Cui, Mussorgsky's pianistic skills had the potential to rival the Rubinstein brothers. See Michael Calvocoressi, "Mussorgsky's Youth: In the Light of the Latest Information," *The Musical Quarterly* 20.1 (January, 1934): 2 & 7. Mussorgsky also played a special role in the development of the art of accompaniment. In 1879, along with the singer Dar'ia Leonova (1829-1896), Mussorgsky undertook a concert tour across southern Russia where he performed both as a solo-pianist and an accompanist. His gift for accompaniment was always highly valued by the public—he was considered separately from the singer for his performance of piano parts. See Ivan Lapshin, *Modest Petrovich Musorgskii* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1917), 49-50. Along with Glinka, Mussorgsky is counted as one of the founders of the high art of accompaniment which greatly influenced the solo pianism of Sergei Rakhmaninov, Vasilii Safonov (1852-1918), and Felix Blumenfeld (1863-1931).

Together with the aforementioned democratization and professionalism of pianism was the gradual formation of an increasingly national imprint.³⁷ The role of foreign musicians was in essence becoming less prominent with Russians replacing the foreign artists. Styles of performance also underwent significant changes with a concentration on new characteristics which responded to the demands of the changing tastes of society. During this time, the style reflected more fully the uniqueness of Russian artistic culture and the Russian national idiom.³⁸ While the character of a musician's playing previously lay in a tendency towards intimacy, grace, and sonority,³⁹ Russian pianism during the second half of the century adopted new tendencies — images of the monumental, profound, and extreme power were discovered.⁴⁰ Works written to embrace this new ethos include three iconic symbols of Russian pianism: *Islamei* by Balakirev (1869), *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky (1874) and the *Piano Concerto No.1 in b^b-moll* by Tchaikovsky (1875). The interest in piano music during this period allowed for the development of Russian pianism, which became focused on the individual person.⁴¹

³⁷ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 65.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68. This betrays a direct link with both Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein. See footnotes 44 and 111.

⁴¹ Zorina, *op. cit.*, 133.

ANTON RUBINSTEIN AND THE ST. PETERSBURG CONSERVATORY

Into this stimulating musical environment entered Anton Grigorievich Rubinstein, a figure who represents a high point in the history and development of Russian and international pianism.⁴² Rubinstein's artistic awakening came as a result of his meeting with both Chopin and Liszt during his concert tour of Paris in 1841. He was captivated by their differing performance styles, mannerisms, and movements at the keyboard.⁴³ This was also his first acquaintance with the two dominant performance traditions of the time: the French (Chopin) and German (Liszt), from which he was to borrow many ideas and embody in a new pedagogical method.⁴⁴

⁴² Rubinstein (1829-1894) was born in the town of Vykhvatnets, in what is today the Republic of Moldova. He began his piano studies with his mother at the age of five and after three years came under the tutelage of Aleksandr Villoing (1804-1878), the most renowned piano teacher in Moscow at the time. See Philip Taylor, Anton Rubinstein: A Life in Music (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 5, and Jonathan Summers, "Anton Rubinstein," International Piano Quarterly (Autumn 1998): 78. His younger brother, Nikolai, shared the same formative influences and training and was also to play a foundational role in Russian musical education as shall be discussed later.

⁴³ Anton Rubinstein, Autobiography of Anton Rubinstein, 1829-1889, trans. Aline Delano (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1892), 19. Liszt was also greatly impressed by the young Rubinstein's playing stating that "he is the heir of my playing." See Aubertine Woodward Moore, "Rubinstein, Master of Tone," The Etude 38.12 (December 1920): 801-2. See also Hamilton, *op. cit.*, 8-9, who contrasts Liszt and Rubinstein citing the opinions of Sauer, Busoni, and Rosenthal who believed Rubinstein possessed the greater command of the instrument as opposed to Mason, Stradal, and Paderewski who sided with Liszt.

⁴⁴ See Olga Bennigsen, "The Rubinstein Brothers and their Circle," The Musical Quarterly 25.4 (October, 1939): 409-10, and Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, Chopin: Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by his Pupils (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 267-279, and Konstantin Zenkin, "The Liszt Tradition at the Moscow Conservatoire," Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae (Franz Liszt and Advanced Musical Education in Europe: International Conference) 42.1/2 (2001): 96. Rubinstein also met Mendelssohn and Schumann, both of whom influenced him greatly.

Rubinstein's pianism apparently left a life-long and indelible impression on all his listeners, both professionals and dilettantes.⁴⁵ Petr Veinberg wrote that [the universal fame and unusual popularity of Rubinstein's name are based most of all on his performative genius...behind the piano he was a creator, poet, artist...]⁴⁶ Such sentiment was echoed in a later fragment from another newspaper publication in which Aleksandr Ossovskii stated: [the glory of Rubinstein as a performer is based on his striving towards the higher ideal purposes of art, not at all on the search for cheap acclaim.]⁴⁷

His performances were characterized by their sound, the colour and variety he brought to the singing of the melodic line, and a vibrancy that was always maintained.⁴⁸

Rubinstein's contemporaries were particularly astonished by his mastery of musical conception, phrasing, and pedalling.⁴⁹ In an interview entitled, "Ten characteristic signs

⁴⁵ Victor Walter and D.A. Modell, "Reminiscences of Anton Rubinstein," The Musical Quarterly 5.1 (January, 1919): 10.

⁴⁶ "всемирная слава и необычайная популярность имени Рубинштейна зиждутся всего более на его исполнительском гении..., за роялем он являлся творцом, поэтом, художником..." Petr Veinberg, "Anton Grigor'evich Rubinshtein," in Russkoe slovo 89 (1905), cited in Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 74.

⁴⁷ "Слава Рубинштейна-исполнителя зиждется на стремлении его к высшим, идеальным целям искусства, но никак не на искании дешевых лавров" Aleksandr Ossovskii, "Anton Grigor'evich Rubinshtein," Ruskaia muzykal'naia gazeta 12 (1894): 4.

⁴⁸ [unsigned author], "Anton Rubinstein, Pianist," 27.521 The Musical Times (1 July, 1886): 387. His peers emphasized that the grandiosity, scope, and strength of his performative conceptions combined with an expressiveness, softness, incomparable sonority of tone, and sincerity in his playing. See Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 75.

⁴⁹ See Anton Rubinstein and Teresa Carreño, The Art of Piano Pedalling: Two Classic Guides (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), xi. The peak of his performative work was displayed in a cycle of 'historical' concerts throughout Russia and a few European cities during 1885-6. The idea of a historical

of beautiful playing,” Rakhmaninov repeatedly returned to the memory of Rubinstein.

He spoke especially of Rubinstein’s phenomenal command of the pedal and the uniqueness of his performance of the finale movement of Chopin’s Sonata No. 2.⁵⁰

Rubinstein also exhibited a breadth and power that was previously unheard. Ossovskii recalled that [no one had that mighty, poetic, well-thought out, and heartfelt conception of the whole and the titanic embodiment of it in sounds, which formed the distinguishing and greatest characteristics of the performative genius of Rubinstein.]⁵¹

In 1849, he curtailed his international concert touring activities and returned to his homeland only to find that music in Russia did not share the same profile as what he had

survey of the entire piano repertory was originally conceived and presented in the same format by both Moscheles and Liszt in 1837. Liszt presented his programs in Paris while Moscheles gave his series in London. See Philip Taylor, *Anton Rubinstein: A Life in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 269-71. Rubinstein’s seven recitals covered the history of piano music ranging from Byrd, Bull, Couperin and Rameau in the first recital to his Russian contemporaries in the final concert. The concerts in between featured a broad selection of music of the major composers for piano, including C.P.E. Bach and Weber. These were also some of the largest concert programs ever recorded in the history of concert recitals. See George Kehler, *The Piano in Concert*, 2 vols., (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), II: 1095. An example of this was the second concert in the series which he devoted to the sonatas of Beethoven. During this recital he played the following nine sonatas Opp. 27/2, 31/2, 53, 57, 90, 101, 109, 110, and 111. See also R. Allen Lott, “Anton Rubinstein in America (1872-1873),” *American Music* 21.3 (Autumn, 2003): 291-318.

⁵⁰ Sergei Rakhmaninov, *Literaturnoe nasledie*, 3 vols., (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1948-1950), III: 121-123, 236. The above-cited interview was from 1910. Another such interview entitled “Interpretations depend on talent and individuality” was conducted in 1932. This interview was further subdivided and represented into two halves: “The Repertoire of Rubinstein” and “Memories of Rubinstein.”

⁵¹ “Ни у кого не было той могучей, поэтической, продуманной и прочувствованной концепции целого и того титанического воплощения ее в звуках, которые составляли отличительную и самую великую черту исполнительского гения Рубинштейна.” Aleksandr Ossovskii, “Anton Grigor’evich Rubinshtein,” *Russkaia muzykal’naia gazeta* 12 (1894): 252-253. The smudges and slips evident in performances from his later years did not adversely effect the perception of the listeners, partially because his programmatic manner of playing in general enhanced his musical appeal and authority. Rakhmaninov stated that “for every possible mistake [Rubinstein] may have made, he gave, in return, ideas and musical tone pictures that would have made up for a million mistakes.” See Gerig, *op. cit.*, 291.

experienced in Europe where the life of the musician/artist was respected.⁵² This situation quickly propelled Rubinstein to become the most vocal proponent for the need to establish an educational foundation that would raise the social status of musicians in Russia and provide them with the opportunity to survive solely concentrating on their art.⁵³ The idea of a Russian musical institution to advance these aims gathered impetus in the mid-1850s and counted numerous celebrated artists and Rubinstein-supporters

⁵² James Bakst, *A History of Russian-Soviet Music* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1966), 49. In 1861, Anton Rubinstein published an article entitled “O muzyke v Rossii,” *Vek* 1 (1861), which is reprinted in Lev Barenboim (ed.), *A.G. Rubinstein: Literaturnoe nasledie*, 3 vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1983), I: 46-53, in which he expressed his consternation and frustration at Russia’s musical ignorance and dilettantism. He viewed the establishment of a conservatory as the only viable option to remedy this situation. In advocating the need for a national conservatory, Rubinstein was also supporting the notion of a musician assuming a status of a professional. In the same paper, Rubinstein wrote about the necessity to make musical education accessible not only for the privileged classes, but among lower socio-economic circles. See Igor Glebov, *Anton Grigor’evich Rubinshtein* (Moscow: Muzykal’nyi sektor gosudarstvennogo izdatel’stva, 1922), 92, also Ira Petrovskaia (ed.), “K istorii muzykal’nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii,” in *Pamiatniki kul’tury: novye otkrytiia* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1979), 219-26.

⁵³ Not all of Rubinstein’s colleagues held the same opinion regarding the need for a conservatory. P.P. Soshal’skii in “Vremia” and Vladimir Stasov in “Severnaia pchela” both publicly objected to Rubinstein’s idea, stating “the academies and conservatories in most of Europe serve only as centres of error, allowing for a harmful understanding of and taste in art.” See Vladimir Stasov, *Stat’i o muzyke* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), II: 9. Nevertheless, Stasov’s initial vehement objection to Rubinstein’s idea was eventually followed by his denouncing of Balakirev and his rival foundation and realignment with the Rubinstein faction. He thereafter became another key figure and power-broker in the advocacy for Russian arts and culture. See Stuart Campbell (ed. and trans.), *Russians on Russian Music, 1830-1880: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 74-5, and Yuri Olkhovsky, *Vladimir Stasov and Russian National Culture* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983). The strongest opponent to the conservatory idea was Mily Balakirev. Balakirev took umbrage to the explicit reference of Anton Rubinstein who characterised the ‘Moguchaia Kuchka’ as being nothing more than a group of amateurs. Whilst this criticism was quite justified, as neither César Cui (1835-1918), nor Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Aleksandr Borodin (1833-1887), or Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) were “professional” musicians, it offended the nationalistic sensibilities of Balakirev and his circle to such an extent that a rival music educational foundation called the “Free School of Music” was established by Balakirev’s associate, Gavriil Lomakin (1812-1885), in 1862. The irony of the ideological battle between Rubinstein and Balakirev was that upon the former’s retirement from the position of director at the Russian Musical Society, the latter was selected to be his replacement. This situation is recounted in epic detail in Robert Ridenour, *Nationalism, Modernism and Personal Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981). See also footnotes 35 and 36 relating to the pianistic talents of Balakirev and Mussorgsky.

among its advocates including Vasilii Kologrivov⁵⁴ (1827-1875), Dmitrii Stasov (1828-1918), Nikolai Kashkin (1839-1920), and Count Mikhail Viel'gorskii, all of whom understood the need to recognize serious musical interest and to answer the long felt need for a rigorous and professional education.

Rubinstein seized the demand towards the condensation of the performance traditions which had developed amongst his pianistic predecessors in Russia.⁵⁵ In an effort to perpetuate his pedagogical legacy he founded the Russkoe Muzykal'noe Obshchestvo or Russian Musical Society (1859).⁵⁶ This became the largest pre-Revolutionary concert organization in Russia, and was followed by the foundation of the St. Petersburg Conservatory (1862). The organization of these two institutions provided for the required preparation of talented musical specialists and also granted a significant proportion of music enthusiasts the possibility to begin a systematic musical education.

Having invited leading pedagogues to the Conservatory and establishing a high-level examination requirement, Rubinstein was able to create an example of an educational institution that was the equal of the best conservatories in Western Europe.⁵⁷ In his

⁵⁴ Kologrivov was a close friend of Balakirev and tried unsuccessfully to position himself as a mediator between Balakirev and Rubinstein in their public and bitter dispute. See Edward Garden, Music & Letters 63.3/4 (July-October, 1982): 307-309.

⁵⁵ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 73.

⁵⁶ In 1869, this became known as the Imperial Russian Music Society. Its existence thrived under royal patronage until its closing in 1917.

article “About Music in Russia,” the “school” also served as a necessary and integral aspect in the legitimate development of European culture.⁵⁸ Boris Asaf’ev characterized this process as a progression of Russian musical life from dilettante to professional.⁵⁹ It is in this sense that the value of Rubinstein’s performative and pedagogical work cannot be separated from an understanding of his founding role in the school.

PEDAGOGICAL WORK OF A.G. RUBINSTEIN

Characteristic of A. Rubinstein’s holistic pedagogical method was his active role in teaching not only piano, but also orchestration and composition, chamber music, and choral and orchestral conducting classes. In his teaching, A. Rubinstein developed his vision and ideas concerning the cultivation and improvement of musical aptitude. This often necessitated some experimentation which in turn lead to combining methodologies. An analysis of the two pedagogical periods of A. Rubinstein reveals that the first period was characterized by its considerable emphasis on the preparation of a pianist-musician; the second period predominantly focused on the nurturing of a musician-pianist. The pianist-musician boasted a complete technical command of the

⁵⁷ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 75. Rubinstein also succeeded in gaining governmental financial support for the Conservatory after more than twenty years of precarious private funding. Further and at his behest, preparatory music classes were introduced in every school in an effort not only to identify talent that could be nurtured, but also to make music education accessible for the masses. All these extraordinary efforts earned him an award for excellence by the Tsar Aleksandr II and a unique place in Russian musical history as a pioneer in the field of music performance and education. See Catherine Bowen, ‘Free Artist’ *The Story of Anton and Nicholas Rubinstein* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1939), 79. See also Gerig, *op. cit.*, 287, who contextualises Russian musical developments within Europe and also discusses the general birth and growth of Conservatories on the continent.

⁵⁸ See footnote 52.

⁵⁹ Boris Asaf’ev, *Russkaia muzyka: XIX i nachalo XX veka* 2nd ed., (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1979), 314.

instrument with an equally dazzling and thorough knowledge of the repertory, whereas the musician-pianist was well-read in aesthetics and performance practices and more adept at using the imagination to express the music. Through these two periods, Rubinstein's performance style did not undergo any substantial changes, but his system of teaching was reformed. For example, "lessons," as Rubinstein understood them, were not to be given but rather directed at a student, to increase their knowledge, develop their imagination, and assist them in exposing the underlying meaning of the music to be performed. Rubinstein put before the student a methodology for reaching this purpose. [The artist must, first of all, focus on harnessing their creativity, but in pedagogical situations this work is limited to suggestions and a wide variety of instructions and, not to mention, the demands of students wanting to receive from him, like from any other teacher/professor, simply "lessons."]⁶⁰

As a teacher, all of Rubinstein's energy was directed towards his relationship with the individual student (especially those who exhibited talent) and to developing the student's independence. He believed that by being an uncompromising taskmaster the student would lose their ability to assimilate important musical concepts. In view of this, a foundational principle of his pedagogical approach was flexibility. Ultimately the role of a teacher, he contended, should become unnecessary for the student.

⁶⁰ "... Выдающийся художник должен прежде всего заниматься своим творчеством, а в педагогике - ограничить свою работу советами, широкого порядка указаниями и не считаться с требованиями учеников и особенно учениц, жаждущих получить от него, как от любого учителя-профессионала, прежде всего, 'уроки.'" Anton Rubinshtein, Korob myslei (St. Petersburg: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1975), 39.

In his work with students, a special place was given to the development of concentration and self-discipline during performance which he deemed imperative to avoid the pitfalls of a mechanistic performance. He advised much reflection on and a total immersion in the emotional and rhythmic content of a work especially in the moments prior to beginning a performance.⁶¹

Rubinstein generally circumvented questions pertaining to technique and methods of learning.⁶² As Lev Barenboim emphasizes, Rubinstein [only directed the student, broadening his outlook, developing his imagination, helping to reveal the lofty aesthetic and ethical values in the music being performed.]⁶³ He was reluctant to demonstrate, polish, or explain technical details associated with performance, instead preferring the student to solve such problems by way of trial and error.⁶⁴ This was also evident in his avoidance of pedagogical repertoire to hone the mechanical skills of his students. He considered such repertoire substandard and believed that a student's investment of time in learning these compositions was wasted. Instead, he advocated that musicians be

⁶¹ See footnote 80.

⁶² He would often retort with a joke, as when he answered Hofmann's question dealing with a difficult passage by stating [play with your nose if it will sound good!]. "Играйте хоть носом, лишь бы хорошо звучало!" Josef Hofmann, *Fortepiannaia igra: otvety i voprosy o fortepiannoii igre* (Moscow: Gos. Muz. Izd-vo, 1961), 72.

⁶³ Lev Barenboim, "Rubinshteinovskie traditsii i nasha sovremennost'," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 12 (1961): 79.

⁶⁴ It was precisely this kind of freedom of creative self-expression that Rubinstein sought to inculcate in his students. See Jordan Krassimira, "The Legacy of Anton Rubinstein," *Clavier* 31 (December 1992): 25.

exposed from the beginning to the best excerpts of piano music such as those of Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, and Chopin.⁶⁵

In a student's learning and preparation of new repertoire Rubinstein demanded the strictest fidelity to the score. He held the unshakeable conviction that his chief task was to transmit faithfully the composer's intention. Consequently he had a very demanding approach to his students' study of the score, even if in the final analysis he was concerned more about the discovery of the emotional-lyrical in the music.⁶⁶ Indeed, he did not appreciate mechanical labour and pedantry.⁶⁷ The study of a composer's score had to be creative and alive since the final goal was to transmit 'the idea of the work' which could be reproduced in a variety of individual variations. Rubinstein's preferred means for achieving this aim was through verbal description of how the work ought to sound, which had to be accurate, with inspired associations and rich metaphorical

⁶⁵ Rubinstein gave special classes devoted to matters of piano technique once every month only in his first two years as a teacher. During these sessions his pupils would rehearse exercises, arpeggios, scales, and pedagogical etudes. (See German Larosh, Sobranie muzykal'no-kriticheskikh statei (Moscow: Tipo-lit. t-va I.N. Kushnerev i ko, 1922), I: 46). Rubinstein would also compose his own exercises in which he would take simple material (five finger sequences) and attach to them complex tasks of articulation, dynamics, and tone colour (e.g., playing various groups with different phrasing and/or dynamics or articulation). A favourite method of Rubinstein's was to ask two students to play such exercises in unison on two pianos. Such tasks focussed the hearing and attention of students and prohibited mechanical playing.

⁶⁶ Evgenii Vessel', Nekotorye iz priemov ukazanii i zamechaniy A.G. Rubinshteina na urokakh v ego fortepiannom klasse v S.-Peterburgskoi konservatorii (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1901), 27.

⁶⁷ See Alekseev, (1982), *op. cit.*, II: 237-8. See also Moritz Rosenthal's account of a Rubinstein concert in 1885 which draws attention to liberties that were arguably commonplace during the late nineteenth century which today would seem excessive in Mark Mitchell and Allan Evans, Moritz Rosenthal in Words and Music (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 97-103. Yet another account, which highlights a fashionable freedom from the limitations of the notated score, of the same concert is provided in August Stradal, Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt (Bern: Paul Haupt Verlag, 1929), 84-87.

imagery. For example, regarding the Scherzo of Schubert's B^b major sonata he said:
 [Viennese humour...smile with your fingers.]⁶⁸

Dynamic markings also played a significant role in Rubinstein's concept of establishing the musical mood.⁶⁹ For instance, he opposed playing all *fortes* the same way in all compositions. *Forte* in a heroic composition must sound different to a *forte* in a lyrical work.⁷⁰ Similarly, the consideration of phrasing constituted one of the most critical components of Rubinstein's musical vocabulary. In his opinion there were three essential factors in phrasing. First, he demanded that pianists undertake vocal studies in an effort to comprehend better melodic phraseology and expression from a singer's perspective. In this way, a pianist might better acquire an overall sense of phrase contour. Rubinstein asserted that the shaping of phrases should be conceptualised similar to the breath required by a vocalist, and that the study of the manner in which a good singer executes this is far more worthwhile than acquiring this in theory from textbooks. He also recommended adding text to music to assist the pianist to distinguish phrases. In using such an idea, students would be able to identify the particular notes which receive the most emphasis or stress. The second factor concerned the climax of a phrase. Rubinstein suggested that a phrase should begin with a low energy level with a

⁶⁸ “Венский юмор...пальцами своими улыбнитесь.” Varenboim, *op. cit.*, 349.

⁶⁹ Rubinstein also used images to create moods. For example, during one of his masterclasses, a student played the fourth movement of Schumann's *Kriesleriana*. Rubinstein offered the student an image of a dream and made them rehearse the piece repeatedly in an effort to achieve that effect.

⁷⁰ Hofmann (1961), *op. cit.*, 75.

highpoint being synonymous with the climax of the phrase. The third principle concerned the dissection of a phrase into small motifs and, conversely, the merging of phrases into an inclusive whole. This statement seems logically to imply that the totality of motifs comprise a phrase, with each motif possessing a particular degree of importance within it. The combination of phrases into a larger whole refers to the notion that a pianist must learn to determine which phrase, of the many that constitute a musical work, functions as the climax of the work.⁷¹

Rubinstein paid a great deal of attention to the formation of the complete and professional musician. He took upon himself [the mission of a piano teacher who concerned himself with every aspect of the development and teaching of his protégés].⁷² He developed in his pupils the ability to read through and thoroughly grasp and orientate themselves within a given score in the shortest possible time. In ensemble classes, he also fostered the art of playing with others, emphasising the importance of playing from sight, transposing, and the ability to improvise a cadenza for a concerto.

Realizing that it was impossible for him to transmit his individuality to his pupils, Rubinstein gradually began to avoid revealing his own interpretative views in his

⁷¹ Krassimira, *op. cit.*, 25.

⁷² “миссию учителя фортепианной игры, заботящегося обо всех сторонах воспитания и обучения своих питомцев.” Lev Barenboim, Anton Grigor’evich Rubinshtein: zhizn’, artisticheskii put’, tvorchestvo, muzykal’no-obshchestvennaia deiatel’nost’ (1867-1894) (St. Petersburg: Muzgiz, 1962), II: 343.

classes, fearing that his students would simply begin to imitate his manner of playing.⁷³ German Larosh described this tendency, [there was not one student who could be called a direct imitator of Rubinstein, which, in my opinion, shows how much he valued a student's independence and personal musical talent.]⁷⁴ In this regard, Rubinstein strove in every way to develop the individuality of his pupils, their independence. He considered that one of his main tasks as a teacher was not only to enrich the spectrum of the general and particular musical abilities of his students, but also to shape of his/her individual personality, the development of his/her creative imagination, artistic sensitivity and curiosity.

During the 1880s, without changing his fundamental aesthetic piano-teaching principles, Rubinstein's style of teaching began to focus more attention to his student's absorption of the principles of musical styles. He would analyse the works of a single composer for a considerable period and his classes subsequently assumed the character of a seminar. If Rubinstein happened to be studying the same work with several students at the same time, he would change his interpretative ideas every time thereby striving to arouse in his pupils a spontaneous yet informed response to a particular musical style.⁷⁵

⁷³ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 76.

⁷⁴ “Нет ни одного его ученика, которого можно было бы назвать прямым подражателем ему, что, по-моему, служит свидетельством его уважения к свободе ученика, к личности музыкального таланта.” See Modest Chaikovskii, *Zhizn' Petra Il'icha Chaikovskogo*, 3 vols. (Moscow-Leipzig: P. Jurgenson, 1900-1902), I: 167-168.

⁷⁵ Barenboim, *op. cit.*, 348.

For Rubinstein, performance was an art in which originality and the ability to express something new was important. These new ideas should emanate from the ability of the performer to interpret the intentions of the composer.⁷⁶ In this sense, Rubinstein believed that musicians were obliged to reinterpret artistically the material presented to them, to make it their property, and subsequently create an organic whole from it. His student Josef Hofmann wrote, [Rubinstein would often tell me: ‘first, you should play what is written and if you can completely give it its due and then you feel that you want to add or change something, then do that’].⁷⁷ Adhering to such a philosophy would ensure a performance which was not dry or lifeless.

Regarding interpretation, A. Rubinstein’s artistic concept was predicated on the establishment of an appropriate spirit in the work being studied. Samuil Maikapar wrote after attending one of Rubinstein’s performances: [listening to his performance it seemed that you were present at the same act of creation performed by nature itself, when everything is born as if by itself, and is furthered by immeasurable strength, artistic richness and splendor...]⁷⁸ For him the first measure was the most consequential

⁷⁶ Barenboim, *op. cit.*, 348.

⁷⁷ “Рубинштейн часто говорил мне: ‘Сыграйте сперва то, что написано; если вы полностью воздали этому должное и затем вам еще захочется что-нибудь добавить или изменить, что ж, сделайте это.’ Hofmann (1961), *op. cit.*, 67.

⁷⁸ “Слушая его исполнение, казалось, что ты присутствуешь при таком же акте творчества самой природы, когда все рождается как бы само собой, притом еще с беспредельной силой, художественным богатством и величием...” Samuil Maikapar, *Gody ucheniia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1938), 56.

and should affirm the conception of the entire work.⁷⁹ A. Rubinstein reinforced this in advice to Hofmann:

before your fingers touch the keys, you must begin the piece mentally -- that is you must have settled in your mind the tempo, the manner of touch, and above all, the attack of the first note, before your actual playing begins.⁸⁰

Rubinstein's artistic concept extended to the projection of historical traditions and experiences pertinent to the music and composer being studied. For instance, upon conclusion of a performance of a work by Haydn in one of his master classes, he said: "you see, that Haydn is always engaging, always charming, always smiling. His music is thoroughly characteristic of Vienna."⁸¹ A further statement he conveyed to Hofmann illustrates well his approach: "do you know why piano-playing is so difficult? Because it is prone to be either affected or else afflicted with mannerisms: and when these two pitfalls are luckily avoided, then it is liable to be dry. The truth lies between those three indiscretions."⁸²

NIKOLAI RUBINSTEIN AND THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY

After the establishment of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, institutes of musical education began to appear in all the larger cities of Russia including in Moscow, Kiev,

⁷⁹ Rubinshtein, *op. cit.*, 64.

⁸⁰ Josef Hofmann, Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Company, 1920), 60-61. See also "Раньше, чем ваши пальцы коснутся клавиш, вы должны начать пьесу в уме, то есть представить себе мысленно темп, характер туше и, прежде всего, способ взятия первых звуков - все это до того, как начать играть фактически." Маикара, *op. cit.*, 75-76.

⁸¹ Adelaide Hippius, "Anton Rubinstein in His Classroom," Etude 25 (March 1907): 154.

⁸² Hofmann (1920), *op. cit.*, 65.

Odessa, and Saratov.⁸³ Among these the Moscow Conservatory quickly assumed prominence. Nikolai Grigorievich Rubinstein (1835-1881), the founder and first director of the Moscow conservatory, agreed with his brother on the foundational questions of musical education⁸⁴ and concentrated his efforts on the development of institutions of musical education in Russia significantly more than his brother.⁸⁵ The Moscow Conservatory was founded in 1866 from musical classes that were originally operating under the auspices of the Moscow division of the Russian Musical Society. These open classes initially taught elementary music theory and choral singing, but subsequently commenced piano classes in 1863. The lower piano classes were taught by Nikolai Kashkin (women) and Eduard Langer (1835-1905) (men), while the advanced classes were conducted by N. Rubinstein. From 1864, N. Rubinstein was joined on the piano faculty by Józef Wieniawski (1837-1912) and the following year by Anton Door (1833-1919).⁸⁶

Nikolai Rubinstein was said to be as gifted a pianist as his brother. It was in fact believed that he also could have held as venerated a place in Russian musical history as his brother had he placed a greater emphasis on his performance career. His playing

⁸³ This was the beginning of a rapid spread in the establishment of new musical institutes around the country which was a reflection of the growing desire of the public for a professional and systematized musical education.

⁸⁴ See Lev Barenboim, *Nikolai Grigor'evich Rubinshtein: Istoriiia zhizni i deiatel'nosti* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1982), for a discussion of the historical significance of Nikolai Rubinstein and his place in Russian culture.

⁸⁵ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 88-89.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

was unique for its depth and scale, raw energy, power, and sonorous tone, and its display of the same level of artistry as the performances of his brother.⁸⁷ Many musicians who knew the playing of both brothers preferred Nikolai over Anton. In Kashkin's recollection of a meeting with Carl Tausig after having attended a concert of N. Rubinstein, he states: [Tausig observed that if Nikolai Rubinstein decided to become a concert pianist, then his brother Anton and Tausig himself would have to cease playing, because a pianist with such rich talent as N.R. had never been seen before.]⁸⁸ His performances also shared his brother's aim towards enlightenment of the general public.

PEDAGOGICAL WORK OF N.G. RUBINSTEIN

N. Rubinstein's teaching methodology was very consistent and systematic. He saw the purpose of a pianist-pedagogue not only as a teacher of an instrument, but also a person entrusted with the task of developing educated and cultured students. Nikolai believed it was crucial that, along with imparting the necessary concepts for the development of instrumental mastery, his task was to teach students to find the very essence of a piece

⁸⁷ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 90. One anecdote relates that he would learn the most difficult repertoire in two days and once he had memorized it he could play the piece flawlessly a few years later. Rubinstein also possessed a great aural ability which enabled him to transpose without effort.

⁸⁸ “Таузи́г заметил, что если Николай Рубинштейн вздумает сделаться концертным пианистом, то и его брату Антону и ему самому, то есть Таузи́гу, придется прекратить свою деятельность, ибо «пианиста, настолько богато одаренного, как Н.Р., никогда не существовало даже.” Nikolai Kashkin, “Dve muzykal’nye pamiatki: N.G. Rubinshtein i M.P. Musorgskii (po povodu 25-letii ikh konchiny 1881-1906),” *Russkaia mysl’* 4 (April, 1906): 33. Regarding the differences of the Rubinstein brothers as pianists, Borodin wrote in 1869 that in his opinion both brothers need to be recognized as the preeminent pianists of our time. Between them there is one difference: “the natural sphere of Anton Rubinstein is the salon and smaller piano works, while the natural sphere of Nikolai Rubinstein is a concert platform and the larger works, however the legacy of Anton Rubinstein's playing is more mature and could block out the memory of the pianism of Nikolai Rubinstein.”

and portray it convincingly.⁸⁹ In the process of achieving this aim, he differed from his brother in pedagogical method. Nikolai highlighted the content of a musical work not just through methods of comparison, but through analysis and performance.⁹⁰ Unlike his brother, he would frequently demonstrate at the piano. In demonstrating to his students, he did not fear suppressing individuality due to the fact that he had the ability to differentiate his playing for each student depending on their level of talent.⁹¹ In this regard, it was not unusual for his students to hear him play a piece in its entirety, which provided much inspiration.⁹² He believed that the concerns of his older brother in producing imitators were unfounded. Indeed, he had little hesitation in requesting that his students imitate him, although he could not deny that when subject to overtly exaggerated imitation this method revealed the weaknesses of his students.

⁸⁹ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 90.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Aleksandr Ziloti, Moi vospominaniia o F. Liszte (St. Petersburg: s.n. Kind, 1911), 5. Nikolai Rubinstein's most outstanding students were Sergei Taneev (1856-1915), Aleksandr Ziloti (1863-1945), and Emil von Sauer (1862-1942). Sauer came to study with him from abroad at the suggestion of Anton Rubinstein. After the death of his teacher, Sauer continued his musical education with Liszt. Neither his pedagogical work nor that of Ziloti at the Moscow Conservatory produced a significant legacy of illustrious pupils, although among the students Ziloti guided towards graduation were celebrated pianists such as Sergei Rakhmaninov, Aleksandr Goldenweiser, and Konstantin Igumnov (1873-1948). See Charles Barber, Lost in the Stars: The Forgotten Musical Life of Alexander Siloti (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 197, 207, and Emil von Sauer, Liszt by his Disciple (London: Musical Scope Publishers, 1975).

⁹² Genika writes that “В интимной обстановке класса, <...> среди небольшой кучки товарищей, замирая от восторга, когда Николай Григорьевич проигрывал наши пьесы, стоя от него так близко-близко, как бы осязая физически это дивное артистическое творчество, я впитывал идеалы высочайшего совершенства фортепианной игры. То, что тогда играл Николай Григорьевич, еще глубже западало в душу, нежели то, что он играл в обстановке многолюдного концерта” [in an intimate classroom situation amongst the small group of colleagues, we would be enraptured with pleasure when Nikolai Grigor'evich would play our pieces, while we stood so close to him that we physically felt his deep artistic creativity. I was taking in the ideals of the highest level of perfection in piano playing. The playing of Nikolai Grigor'evich as a result, took deep root in my soul in this situation more so than when he played in a concert setting.] See Alekseev (1982), *op. cit.*, II: 282.

The pedagogical work of N. Rubinstein was marked by its demand for devotion. He was reportedly a strict and demanding teacher who required all his students to prepare complete works for each lesson without any technical or rhythmic defects. N. Rubinstein chose his students specifically for their pianistic capabilities and potential and would expect them to take the initiative of educating themselves in the theoretical disciplines of harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration.⁹³ His piano class was composed of eight to ten students. The students were divided into groups of two to three people with each group receiving the same work for study. The aims of such a methodology were to stimulate a healthy sense of competition between the students playing, to concentrate on different interpretative possibilities of the same piece, and to allow for constructive and critical analysis of the interpretation by all students.

Another principal tenet of his methodology was the obligatory engagement of his students with contemporary music. Emil von Sauer recalled the consummate knowledge of contemporary music which Nikolai displayed, stating that [the a-moll concerto of Grieg, which has now become the common property of all pianists, and the mighty instructive Brahms-Paganini Variations were still new pieces in German concert programs and no one even dreamed of their pedagogical use, both were already shining in his repertoire, and one could often hear them within the walls of the Moscow

⁹³ Much like his brother's attitude of resistance to working with students on technique, this deflection of responsibility reflected not some lofty principle but a simple distaste for the tedium of teaching together with a lack of time.

Conservatory.]⁹⁴ In addition to contemporary repertoire such as the solo works and concerti of Brahms, Grieg, Tchaikovsky and Balakirev, he displayed a particular affection for the music of Schumann and went through his complete works for piano with his class.⁹⁵ N. Rubinstein also played a large role as a propagandist of Russian music, especially of the works of Tchaikovsky.⁹⁶ In addition, he stressed the study of Bach's "Das Wohltemperierte Clavier". Like his brother who had a habit of going through a few fugues with students and assigning a range of fugues for independent study, he considered this work very useful for technical development alongside the etudes of Tausig, Chopin, Rubinstein, and Henselt.⁹⁷ It was from such repertoire that his students first encountered N. Rubinstein's respect for the score. He opposed any interference on behalf of the interpreter with the composer's original score.

N. Rubinstein was very attentive to the use of the pedal. He believed that through its assiduous use a pianist would gain an understanding of pianistic sonority and acoustics of the performance space. Nonetheless, he offered little specific technical advice,

⁹⁴ "В то время как сделавшийся теперь общим достоянием всех пианистов концерт а moll Грига и могучие инструктивные вариации Брамса (на тему Паганини) у нас в Германии были в концертных программах еще новинками и никто даже не помышлял об их применении в учебных целях, они давно уже блистали в его репертуаре, и их часто можно было слышать в стенах Московской консерватории." Alekseev (1982), *op. cit.*, II: 282.

⁹⁵ Grigori Rost, Vospominaniia o Moskovskoi konservatorii (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966), 48-65.

⁹⁶ Nikolai Kashkin, "Nikolai Grigor'evich Rubinshtein," Moskovskie vedomosti 65 (1906): 3. These two artists formed a deep musical connection which resulted in many premieres and dedications exchanged between them. Nikolai Kashkin wrote, that Nikolai Rubinstein was a particularly brilliant performer of the works of Tchaikovsky.

⁹⁷ Emil von Sauer, Kto menia sdelał muzykantom: glava iz knigi 'Moi mir': Voprosy fortepiannogo ispolnitel'stva (Moscow: Muzyka, 1976), 21. Only after the student had mastered Bach in its original form could they progress to transcriptions of his organ music.

preferring to leave its employment to the musical instincts of the player.⁹⁸ This notwithstanding, he recommended using the pedal with caution in the music of Chopin. This was due to his conviction that Chopin wrote in too many pedal markings, as his performance spaces were predominately small salons and intimate social settings where there was quite possibly very little resonance.⁹⁹

In regard to the position of the hand, N. Rubinstein became one of the founders of the modern principles of piano playing. He deviated from the norm of a frozen, unchanging position of the hands and mechanical playing.¹⁰⁰ In place of this he suggested: [moving examples that related to the character of the music, demanded the participation of the whole hand, and fostered the skills of rational training in his students through which “fingers and head go hand in hand.”]¹⁰¹

The Rubinstein brothers provided an outstanding display of new tendencies in performance and pedagogy. [The astonishing grandiosity of their conceptions, the scale

⁹⁸ Sauer, *op. cit.*, 21.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 90. The old school represented most notably by Clementi and Czerny desired finger movement to be isolated from hand and arm movement. To achieve this they recommended the hand remain immobile. While both Chopin and Liszt suggested integration of the whole arm and hand in technical formation and wrote their respective etude sets to demonstrate this principle, it was Deppe, Breithaupt, and Matthay, who codified these points in their respective treatises, claiming some unmerited kudos in the process. Preceding these in the practice of such technique in his playing and teaching, however, N. Rubinstein espoused such concepts even if he received little credit for them.

¹⁰¹ “двигательные приемы, соответствующие характеру исполняемой музыки, требовал участия в игре всей руки, воспитывал в учениках навыки рациональной тренировки, при которой “пальцы и голова идут рука об руку.” Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 90.

and titanic strength -- the playing of the Rubinstein brothers was cosmic and often brought forth associations of the appearance of nature to the listeners.]¹⁰² Further, their assured and powerful playing conquered a lyrical approach to the piano which previously dominated early Romantic pianism in Germany, Italy, France, and elsewhere on the European continent, and was thereafter imported into Russia.¹⁰³

PEDAGOGICAL WORK OF T. LESZETYCKI

The only legitimate claim to share some credit alongside the Rubinstein brothers for the formative direction of Russian pianism would be Teodor Leszetycki (1830-1915).

Leszetycki, a student of Carl Czerny with whom he cultivated a virtuosic and brilliant playing style, lived in St. Petersburg from 1852 to 1878 where he established a reputation as a skillful performer and teacher. Soon after the Conservatory in St. Petersburg opened he was appointed professor of piano.

¹⁰² “... Поражавшая грандиозностью своих концепций, львиным размахом и титанической силой,- игра Рубинштейнов таила в себе, казалось, нечто космическое и нередко вызывала у слушателей ассоциации со стихийными явлениями природы.” Zorina, *op. cit.*, 133.

¹⁰³ Zorina, *op. cit.*, 133. Performance styles changed both in relation to the individuality of the performer and in response to the currents of a turbulent societal development (see Billington, *op. cit.*, 213-268) in Russia at that time. During this time a number of gifted pianists were trained in the two available music schools run by Balakirev and Rubinstein. The Rubinstein method stressed the pedagogical work of a musician and strived to raise students with a serious relationship to artistry. As such, the main charter of Rubinstein’s school was to establish a performative and pedagogical approach. See Aleksandr Alekseev, *Istoriia fortepiannogo iskusstva*, 3 vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967), II: 243. Balakirev’s approach saw him guide a few extremely gifted musicians who saw their vocation in the field of composition. As such, while some of them also possessed impressive pianistic gifts, they nevertheless placed less emphasis on its development. The influence of their pianism on their contemporaries and the following generations was seen primarily through their compositions. See Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 69.

The pedagogical work of Leszetycki had a great impact on the formation of Russian pianism.¹⁰⁴ With Rubinstein as the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Leszetycki assumed the role of the first piano tutor and founded the custom of engaging *Vorbereiter* or preparatory teachers, due to the growing number of students.¹⁰⁵ Leszetycki was known as a systematic reformer, and developed his methodology through his association with gifted pianists including Vladimir Pukhal'skii (1848-1933), Leonid Nikolaev (1876-1942), and others.¹⁰⁶ The greatest virtue of his teaching method was the individuality of his pupils.¹⁰⁷ This had a significant impact on the further development of Russian pianism through his star pupils from the St. Petersburg Conservatory.¹⁰⁸ Leszetycki's pedagogical method endeavored to supplement the widespread emphasis on merely training technically and musically competent pianists, with a focus on developing thinking performers who possessed the necessary skills to

¹⁰⁴ Gerig believes there is an inherent difficulty in defining a Leszetycki method. As Gerig states, Leszetycki was against the idea that he possessed a special method of teaching. In fact, Leszetycki was primarily concerned not with technique but with musicianship. See Gerig, *op. cit.*, 273.

¹⁰⁵ Angela Potocka, Theodore Leschetizsky (New York: The Century Company, 1903), 10. This practice of teaching assistants, the custom in Europe, was later adopted in many parts of the world. The function of *Vorbereiter*, was to monitor the technical discipline of newly accepted pupils until they were deemed sufficiently equipped to transfer to Leszetycki's studio for lessons on musical interpretation.

¹⁰⁶ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 77.

¹⁰⁷ “всей жизненной силы, порыва, чувства красоты, которые присущи были индивидуальности ученика.” Artur Schnabel, Moia zhizn' i muzyka (Iсполnitel'skoe iskusstvo zarubezhnykh stran), ed. G. Edel'man, (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967), III: 79.

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Pukhal'skii, Dmitrii Klimov (1850-1917), and Anna Esipova went on to become renowned pedagogues in their own rights, and in the process passed on their knowledge of the pedagogical method of the most renowned teacher after the Rubinstein brothers.

offer interpretations of artistic and technical independence and excellence.¹⁰⁹ Maikapar wrote:

[on the one hand there was the independent search for the technical and artistic sides of a performance, which Leszetycki taught his students, while on the other hand there was the development of a conscious critical analysis of the general and the minute details of the performances of one's self and others, which together served as leverage for continuous progress of both his own performative and pedagogical work...]¹¹⁰

In terms of technique, Leszetycki was one of the first pedagogues to realize that an exercise is a mental process, as opposed to a mechanical task based upon the principle of concentrated attention to and analysis of difficulties.¹¹¹ He opposed the purely mechanical development of technique through long and tedious rehearsal.¹¹² Perhaps this might go some way to explain why his pedagogy sometimes attracted criticism for its tendency towards a salon style. Rather, he placed a great emphasis on proper seating

¹⁰⁹ Malwine Brée, The Leschetizky Method: A Guide to Fine and Correct Piano Playing (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), 58. This was in large part based on Brée's original publication, Die Grundlage der Methode Leschetizky, mit Autorisation des Meisters herausgegeben von seiner Assistentin (Mainz: Schott, 1903). It was characteristic of Leszetycki to combine the pianistic innovations of the different traditions and thereby emphasize the importance for his students to cultivate an awareness and intellect that was cognizant of different schools of playing.

¹¹⁰ “С одной стороны, самостоятельные искания в области технической и художественной стороны исполнения, к которым приучал своих учеников Лешетицкий, с другой стороны, исключительное развитие сознательного критического анализа в общем и в мельчайших подробностях своего и чужого исполнительства служили могучим рычагом непрерывного прогресса как собственного исполнения, так и педагогической работы...” Maikapar, *op. cit.*, 169-170.

¹¹¹ Brée, *op. cit.*, 57. Another St. Petersburg Conservatory pianist and pedagogue who embodied this philosophy was none other than his wife, Anna Esipova. Her students included Sergei Prokofiev, Aleksandr Borovskii (1889-1968), Leonid Kreitser (1884-1953) and others. Esipova's playing was unique for its evenness, effortlessness, and striking mastery.

¹¹² Prentner, *op. cit.*, 83.

and placement of hands,¹¹³ advocating an upright and tension-free posture to allow for free breathing. The lower wrist and hand were to be held in an arched position to enable the metacarpal bones to be supported by the bent fingers. Such positioning of torso and hand was his basic tenet for overcoming the production of a harsh sound.¹¹⁴

Leszetycki focused much of his teaching on the concept of sound. Two points he considered crucial were that the ideal piano sound should be able to replicate the resonance of the human voice and a stringed instrument,¹¹⁵ and the ability to produce a *cantabile* and sustained soft sound was the most important and necessary accomplishment of the refined pianist.¹¹⁶ In an effort to realize these concepts, Leszetycki was constantly refining his technical methodology in an effort to acquire greater flexibility and freedom of sound. He also strove for rhythmic freedom, even if he demanded strict rhythmic discipline in the learning of new repertoire. He advocated a calculated balance between acceleration versus deceleration whereby the piece as a whole created the impression of an unchanging and unified tempo.¹¹⁷ The same concept applied to dynamics where an increase in sonority would be counteracted by a

¹¹³ Brée, *op. cit.*, 5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7; and Harold Schonberg, The Great Pianists: From Mozart to the Present (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 300.

¹¹⁵ Schonberg, *op. cit.*, 296.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 299-300. The performances of his students demonstrated on the one hand a captivating softness of sound, and on the other a blinding brilliance and relaxed perfection of virtuosity. See Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 78.

¹¹⁷ Prentner, *op. cit.*, 73; and Brée, *op. cit.*, 54.

decrease.¹¹⁸ But even if he spoke of a certain freedom and liberty that should feature in performance, Leszetycki preferred mechanical “rote memorization” with a rational, pre-prepared interpretation.

In summary, through the efforts of Leszetycki together with Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein, Russian piano pedagogy gained authority and international recognition in the final third of the nineteenth century. They elevated Russia to a preeminent status for the study of the piano and also circumvented the need for promising Russian pianists of the time to travel to Paris or Leipzig to receive professional tuition.¹¹⁹ In fact, the establishment, by the Rubinstein’s, of the Conservatories which eventually coalesced into what is loosely defined as the Russian Piano School resulted in a new wave of student migration from outside Russia flocking to the piano classes offered at these institutions.

The Rubinstein brothers also differed significantly with regard to certain aspects of musical education. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that their students consolidated the methodologies received from either brother and, in combining it with their own artistic inclinations, fashioned new methods. Other differences can be seen in a comparison of the brothers’ basic approach to a lesson. In Anton Rubinstein’s lessons his students would, as a rule, begin forming an artistic concept of a particular work from

¹¹⁸ Brée, *op. cit.*, 49.

¹¹⁹ Varshavskii dnevnik 7.19 (April, 1873): 77. This was precisely in accord with Anton Rubinstein’s initial vision for such an institution as described in his article in Vek. See footnote 30.

an emotional response that was later refined as the music was digested and comprehended. In an effort to heighten the emotional response and stimulate the imagination, Rubinstein would captivate the young pianist with associations and vivid comparisons. It is clear that the final product desired by Rubinstein was the point where his pupils arrived at a logical interpretation acquired through a disciplined reading which combined emotional and rational sensibilities. Nikolai Rubinstein conducted his lessons differently. He inspired his students not with colorful ideas and explanations suggesting interpretative ideas, but through the impression of demonstration. In this sense, Nikolai reversed the rule established by his brother for the formation of an interpretative concept. He advocated firstly gaining a comprehensive understanding of a work's structure and content and thereafter freeing this rational response to the music through a gradually forming expression of the emotive content of a work.¹²⁰

In delineating the pedagogical methods of Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein and Leszetycki and therein observing the gradual formation of identity in Russian pianism, points of focus common to all piano pedagogues include the provision of a holistic musical education, cultivating serious relationships with works of art, developing artistic initiative, and bringing all of this to the attention of a broader general audience for the purposes of raising cultural standards. This was the philosophy behind the pedagogical methods, which may have differed in detail but, which were shaped by the power of

¹²⁰ Obviously, both routes of interpretation produced results and had their merits and both harbored their own dangers. In addition, it should be remembered that both paths are abstractions in the pure sense: in reality, and particularly in the pedagogical practice of both the Rubinstein brothers, the paths often intersect, although certain real musical-pedagogical tendencies remain.

Anton Rubinstein's influence and initial charter in the foundation of the first Russian conservatories.

The second half of the nineteenth century produced an intense development of Russian thought on art, music, and musical performance. Particular emphasis was placed on the critical musical questions that touched on the study of a composition, its interpretation, and the role of the performer. Two general tendencies influencing performance art of that time prevailed. The first was the subjective license of the artist and the drive to assert oneself.¹²¹ In the criticism of Aleksandr Serov, one can read that for an entire legion of virtuosos, the performance was more important than what was played. Serov seems to suggest that these performers invited the audience to see the meaning of the piece through their lens which in fact impeded the real purpose of the performative act.¹²² He noted also, in such performers, a disregard for the higher obligation of the artist, that is the musical enlightenment of those listening and the promotion of the music of great composers.¹²³ The second tendency was following a text to the letter which necessarily prevented the possibility of deeply understanding the content of the piece.¹²⁴ Once again, for Serov, a true performance does not imply a mere accurate rendering of the score. Serov reiterated the dictums of the Rubinstein brothers who

¹²¹ Alekseev, (1982), *op. cit.*, II: 237.

¹²² Aleksandr Serov, *Kriticheskiia stat'i* vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Tip. Departamenta udelov, 1892-5), 38. Serov (1820-1871), was one of the most significant music critics in Moscow during the mid-nineteenth century and also an important composer of opera.

¹²³ Alekseev, (1982), *op. cit.*, II: 237-8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, II: 237.

stated that the artist must learn the art of comprehending the purpose of the musical utterances, teaching oneself to read between the lines.¹²⁵

CONTINUING THE LEGACY: TANEEV, PABST, SAFONOV, ESIPOVA

Russian pianism of the late nineteenth-century reinforced the aforementioned pedagogical methods, notwithstanding individual artistic idiosyncrasies. Foremost among principles was an underlining of the relationship between performer and art whereby the strength of this bond had the intensity to persuade and educate a non-musically trained audience. The notion of an artistic concept with an aim to address and master all musical and technical problems was also developed. And the ability of a performer to interpret stylistically music of different periods whilst preserving their individuality was advanced. In terms of pedagogy, an individual approach to a particular student together with an attempt to instill in them a sense of independence and foster a devotion to and artistic relationship with his/her work was encouraged. These

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, II: 237-8. Also during the second half of the nineteenth century in Russia, special works on the questions related to the art of performance and pedagogy were published. One of the most interesting of these was a monograph by Mikhail Kurbatov with a title of [*A Few Words on Artistic Performance on the Piano* (1899).] “Несколько слов о художественном исполнении на фортепиано (1899).” See citation below. At the outset, Kurbatov writes that for the successful mastery of a piece, it is necessary for the performer to familiarize themselves with other pieces by the composer. (Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 75). He also states that a performer must thoroughly learn the composer’s score and inculcate the thoughts and feelings contained therein, and only with such an approach to interpretation will a work become the personal property of a performer whereby they earn the right to suggest the thoughts of the composer as if they were the composer themselves. (See Mikhail Kurbatov, *Neskol’ko slov o khudozhestvennom ispolnenii na fortepiano* (Moscow: 1899), cited in Alekseev, (1948), *op. cit.*, 281-285). Kurbatov believed that this level of artistic freedom, which was imperative if the performer was going to be able to comprehend the piece, would lead to both a sense of familiarity and pleasure being communicated to the listener. (See Kurbatov cited in Alekseev, (1948), *op. cit.*, 281-285). Kurbatov’s ideas on technical matters were also interesting. He understood technique not as a mechanical skill, but in terms of a performer’s ability to attain any particular sound from the instrument as was desired and appropriate at a particular moment in a piece. He contended that since the artistic thoughts of performers are different, there is no universal technical method as every artist should possess an individual approach to pianistic mastery. See Alekseev, (1982), *op. cit.*, II: 240.

specific qualities were common to all pedagogues of renown, beginning with the Rubinstein brothers and Leszetycki and continuing through their immediate successors in Sergei Taneev, Pavel Pabst, Vasilii Safonov, and Anna Esipova.

As the Rubinsteins entered the final years of their artistic activity, more responsibility for the administration and direction of the Conservatories was assumed by their students. This period was fraught with tension and personal agendas, and precipitated a significant divide in the level and quality of education between the two conservatory cities and other major towns.¹²⁶ If the early 1870s was a time of searching and instability at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, in Moscow the difficult times began with the death of Nikolai Rubinstein in the Spring of 1881. Karl Klindvort¹²⁷ performed Nikolai Rubinstein's duties for the final years of his life, but he left the employ of the conservatory upon Rubinstein's death. Sergei Taneev and Pavel Pabst¹²⁸ were chosen to fill the vacancy.¹²⁹ Whilst the establishment of higher educational institutes catered to

¹²⁶ Aleksandr Famintsyn, "Muzykal'nye zametki," Muzykal'nyi sezon 1(1970): 3.

¹²⁷ Klindvort (1830-1916), was a German pianist and previously a student of Liszt who was invited by Nikolai Rubinstein to take up a professorship at the Moscow Conservatoire.

¹²⁸ The contribution of Pabst was not immediately significant, although the power of his influence became unmistakable during the Soviet era. He focused on broadening the repertoire played and developed the art of piano transcription. He also passed on a characteristic virtuosity and elegant pianism which became chief hallmarks of his three most outstanding pupils Igumnov, Gedike, and Goldenweiser.

¹²⁹ Taneev was the last remaining follower of the pianistic and pedagogical traditions of Nikolai Rubinstein. Having studied under Nikolai Rubinstein for four years, he borrowed a lot from his teacher: especially a way of conceptualizing and understanding music. Kashkin wrote: Впоследствии, он применял приемы преподавания Н. Г. Рубинштейна не только в классе фортепиано, но и в теории музыки <.. > Даже в последнее время, обсуждая те или другие способы преподавания, он иногда говорил: „Николай Григорьевич в подобных случаях требовал

the advanced students, there was no such established facility that catered for preparatory levels until the late 1890s. This was the major contribution and legacy of Taneev.

Taneev was among the most influential to continue the pedagogical traditions of Nikolai Rubinstein at the Moscow Conservatory. Taneev was an outstanding pianist who possessed a solid technique which he apparently obtained through long and grueling effort.¹³⁰ Alekseev states that [his playing did not have particular brilliance or virtuosic stylishness, but it was marked by a deep insight into the composer's thoughts...along with this was an inherent temperament and originality which made his playing brilliant, entertaining, and bearing an individual imprint.]¹³¹ Taneev had a significant influence on the youth of the Conservatory not only as a performer, but also through his championing of the notion of musical enlightenment.¹³² It was largely through his

того-то или того-то", и это для него являлось как бы основным положением, не подлежащим оспариванию.¹²⁹ [In his legacy, he used the teaching methods of N.G. Rubinstein both in his piano classes and in his general musical theory...Even towards the end of his career when discussing the different methods of teaching, he would sometimes say, 'Nikolai Grigor'evich in this situation would have demanded this or that,' and that became his fundamental and indisputable position.] Kashkin, "Taneev i Moskovskaia konservatoriia," *Muzykal'nyi sovremennik* 8 (1916): 14.

¹³⁰ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 92.

¹³¹ "В его игре не было особого блеска и виртуозного шика, но она отличалась глубоким проникновением в авторский замысел... Вместе с тем в ней проявлялись темперамент и самобытность его натуры, что делало его игру яркой, увлекательной, носящей индивидуальный отпечаток." Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 92.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 93.

‘marketing’, that a systematized, flexible, and highly successful formative education was established in Russia and has been flourishing ever since.¹³³

Taneev sought to unite the St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories in a move he believed would better serve Russian music.¹³⁴ Whilst he met with little resistance, his efforts were stifled by a generation of students who had already spread variations on the pedagogical methods of the Rubinstein brothers. This made the project of unity more problematic. Indeed, the Moscow Conservatory did not copy the work of St. Petersburg, which largely developed independently and became more liberal in its translation of Rubinsteinian pedagogy. External factors such as the more intimate connection of the Moscow Conservatory with the cultural powers of the city also made differences more pronounced.¹³⁵

¹³³ The pedagogical efforts of the Gnessin sisters among others were also significant. The Gnessin Musical Academy was opened at the height of a new wave of Russian enlightenment at the end of the nineteenth century, following the foundation of the first two Conservatories. The Academy itself was founded in 1895 by the sisters Eugenia, Helena, and Maria Gnessin who had all graduated earlier as pianists of some renown from the Moscow Conservatory. See Lina Bulatova, Elena Fabianovna Gnesina--vydaiushchiisia deiatel' otechestvennogo fortepiannogo iskusstva (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Muzyki imeni Gnesinykh, 1994). See also Evelyn Porter, “The Education of the Musical Child: How the Moscow Conservatoire Solves the Problem,” Musical Times 78.1135 (September 1937): 813-14, and Alberta Lowe and Harold Pryor, “Music Education in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” Music Educators Journal 45.6 (Jun-Jul., 1959), 28-30+32, for a detailed description and historical background on the incorporation of musical education into the mainstream education curricula in Russia.

¹³⁴ Ivan Golubovskii, Sto let Leningradskoi konservatorii: istoricheskii ocherk (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1962), 47.

¹³⁵ See Golos 322 (1878).

With Taneev as director of the Moscow Conservatory, his first task was to address and promote a more convivial yet professional student-faculty relationship.¹³⁶ Through this new rapport, together with Taneev's constant recollections with students about the precepts of Rubinstein, his penchant for four-handed piano music, and his organization of "Rubinstein lunches," the pedagogical methods of Taneev, propagating the traditions of the Moscow Rubinstein, continued to survive. Further, if the notion that a national performance school cannot be formed without the support of a national repertoire is tenable, Taneev did more to support the wider reception of contemporary Russian music than any of his colleagues. He achieved this by constantly exposing his students to the repertoire of Anton Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky, among many others.

At the same time, Pavel Pabst (1854-1897) was appointed as a professor of piano studies. Pabst belonged to a large group of Western European virtuosos (he came from Königsberg in Eastern Prussia), who lived in Russia. Pabst, who studied with Door after the latter's return to Vienna from Moscow and for a short period with Liszt in Weimar, taught many gifted pianists including Konstantin Igumnov, Aleksandr Gedike (1877-1957), Adolf Iaroshevskii (1863-1911), and Sergei Liapunov (1859-1924). His pianism

¹³⁶ In connection with this was the division of piano classes (more numerous and now also attended by many amateurs) into two types—"virtuosos" and "pedagogues." The lower level classes were the same for all pianists, but when advancing to the fifth level there was a corresponding division: the more capable and developed students would progress to the full (nine year) program with the possibility of obtaining either a diploma or a certificate, while the rest would undertake the two year program resulting in a certificate. Students in the nine year program were required to study piano pedagogy although to a lesser degree than those in the shorter course. Subjects in music theory and chamber music were compulsory for all students. In attempting to broaden the general musical knowledge and skills of students of the piano classes, Taneev would work with them himself. This led to a significant raising of entry level requirements by 1886.

was among the most unanimously acclaimed in Russia being lauded by Tchaikovsky and Rakhmaninov among many others, although he focused his energies largely on teaching.¹³⁷ He spoke little about how a student might ameliorate technical difficulties or how to remedy technical deficiencies. Instead, Pabst emphasized the development of artistry, or the combination of imagination and penetrating studies of aesthetics of composers and the eras in which they lived to enhance the interpretative concept. Accordingly, his method proved successful only with the most gifted students.

Vasilii Safonov, a student of Villoing, Leszetycki, and Brassin, was invited to join the piano faculty of the Moscow Conservatory in the 1880s and educated many pianists including Skryabin, Medtner, Lhévinne, and Aleksandr Grechaninov (1864-1956).¹³⁸ Safonov, a first-class pianist and master of piano sonority, combined the best methods of star tutors from both Moscow and St. Petersburg in his pedagogical practice which contributed to his rare and truly harmonious pedagogical gift.¹³⁹ Following the ideas of his artistic lineage, Safonov too was interested not only in the development of technical and musical mastery in his students, but in inculcating in them a sense of cultured musical thought. While he placed great emphasis on the practice of good finger

¹³⁷ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 93. He possessed a formidable technical facility which allowed him to play repertoire such as Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* to great praise.

¹³⁸ Safonov graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory with a gold medal from the class of Louis Brassin. Brassin (1840-1884), a Belgian pianist and one time pupil of Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), accepted Anton Rubinstein's invitation to join the piano faculty at the St. Petersburg in 1878 where he lived until he died.

¹³⁹ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 94. More information regarding Safonov the pianist and pedagogue will be outlined in the next chapter, which also highlights his significance for Skryabin's pianistic development.

technique, having his students learn difficult passages in all possible rhythms and different dynamics, he recommended an approach to a particular musical work which firstly developed an artistic concept in the mind prior to an attempt at its realization at the piano.¹⁴⁰

The pedagogical work of Safonov had a considerable influence on developments in Moscow after the death of N. Rubinstein.¹⁴¹ Safonov's teaching emphasized first and foremost the obligation of every pianist to attempt to discover the underlying artistic concept governing a particular work.¹⁴² He formed his pedagogical method based on the progressive tendencies that had coalesced in the first Russian conservatories together with the influences of western European pedagogy, along the lines of Moscheles and Brassin.

Above all, the pedagogy of Safonov was marked by its focus on technique, which, during his time, became a focal point in piano education. In contrast with the prevailing practice of scales and arduous technical exercises which students would typically

¹⁴⁰ Barnes, *op. cit.*, xvii.

¹⁴¹ In a letter from Chaikovskii to Safonov, Chaikovskii wrote “Московская консерватория была бы очень польщена, если бы Вы сообразовали поступить в состав профессуры по фортепианному классу. Мне поручено узнать, можно ли обратиться к Вам с официальным предложением? [...] Между тем в лице Вас Московская консерватория сочла бы большим благополучием приобрести отличного преподавателя и притом природного русского.” [The Moscow Conservatory would be highly honoured if you were pleased to join the piano faculty. I am commissioned to inquire whether it will be possible to approach you with an official offer? [...] The Moscow Conservatory would be happy to acquire an exceptional—and innately Russian—teacher in your name.] See Iz pis'ma P.I. Chaikovskogo k Safonovu ot 10 iulia 1885 g.

¹⁴² Barnes, *op. cit.*, xvii.

execute in mechanical fashion, Safonov developed exercises from the etude repertory which promoted a new approach to the learning of musical literature. This new approach, while not completely avoiding exercises, inspired students to think in both mechanical and artistic terms through the use of the etude repertory. These methods were published in 1916 under the title “New Formula: Thoughts for Students and Pupils of the Piano”¹⁴³ and were greatly valued by his colleagues. Josef Hofmann wrote that the etudes in Safonov’s new method:

[are constructed so that it is impossible to play them mechanically, thus the exercises are not just exercises of the fingers, but for the mind also. It is like a telegraph between the mind and the ends of one’s fingers, demanding from the person playing complete concentration.]¹⁴⁴

This method engendered a new performance culture marked by its progressiveness and precise attention to detail. The role of Safonov as a pedagogue also became more pronounced through his successful application of this method.¹⁴⁵

Also among the first generation of Rubinstein and Leszetycki pupils, Anna Esipova (1851-1914), in particular, occupies a venerated place amongst Russian pianists-

¹⁴³ Vasilii Safonov, Novaia formula: mysli dlia uchashchikh i uchashchikhsia na fortepiano (Moscow: Muzyka, 1916).

¹⁴⁴ “сконструированы так, что их невозможно играть механически, ибо упражнения эти суть не только упражнения пальцев, но одновременно и упражнения мозга. Это своего рода телеграф между мозгом и руками (концами пальцев), требующий от играющего полного сосредоточения.” See Safonov, *op. cit.*, 3. The publication concluded with five precepts concerning how to conduct daily practice at the piano. Safonov suggested that all his published exercises be played in different ways with great attention to the quality of the sound.

¹⁴⁵ Safonov’s list of pupils included such renowned pianists as: A.N. Skryabin, N.K. Medtner, A.F. Gedike, G.N. Beklemishev, J.D. Iserlis, J.A. Lhévinne, M.L. Presman, E.A. Bekman-Shcherbina, and Elena Gnesina. K.N. Igumnov and A.B. Goldenweiser also studied in Safonov’s chamber ensemble classes. Many of these names went on to become internationally renowned performers and pedagogues and were directly connected with the further success and development of the Russian Piano School.

pedagogues. She performed for forty-five years throughout Russia, the European continent and the USA, was widely acclaimed, and demonstrated the highest professionalism. Much of Esipova's pedagogy was borrowed from Leszetycki, especially his foundational principle of teaching students to process music away from the instrument. This entailed forming a general plan of interpretation, anticipating the nuances and shades to be employed in performance, application of the pedal, and other techniques.¹⁴⁶

In her unfinished manuscript, "School,"¹⁴⁷ Esipova recalled the problems associated with the development of musical culture, artistry, the detailed mastery of pianism together with the art of singing, and the development of refined and flexible nuances (both dynamic and rhythmic). All this was governed by her basic principle concerning position at the instrument:

[when sitting at the piano, place the stool far enough from it that the feet touch the pedals only with the toes. When playing lean your body lightly

¹⁴⁶ In a direct influence from studies with Leszetycki, her one-time husband, Esipova stressed the importance of the ability to produce a soft, singing sound at the piano through the positioning of one's hands.

¹⁴⁷ The pedagogical work of Esipova was summarized in "School," although she expressed reservations regarding its efficacy and comprehensiveness in stating that she had: [Есипова] перестала писать, потому, что зафиксировать раз и навсегда свои приёмы и установки, гибко применявшиеся в практической работе, постоянно творчески совершенствовавшиеся, значило бы для нее остановиться, выдать их за предел своих достижений, а остановиться она не могла. Эпиграф к 'Фортепианной школе' – 'Sempre avanti' – 'всегда вперед' – был, по существу, девизом всей её творческой деятельности. [Esipova stopped writing because to record her techniques and objectives once and for all, which had been flexibly used in practice and constantly developing in a creative way, meant that for her it would end and limit her achievements and she could not allow it. The epigraph to "The School"—Sempre avanti—"always toward"—was, in fact, the motto of all her creative activity.] Natal'ia Nikolaevna Pozdniakovskaia, "O nekotorykh ispolnitel'skikh i pedagogicheskikh printsipakh shkoly A.N. Esipovoi," in Nauchno-metodicheskie zapiski Ural'skoi konservatorii (Sverdlovsk: Muzyka, 1957), 88.

forward. From that bent position one's hands get rounded just enough that all their movements become comfortable and beautiful to observe from the side.]¹⁴⁸

The greatest achievement for an aspiring pianist in Esipova's view was the ability always to relate rehearsals to the overall aim of realizing the work in performance, to comprehend and execute every technical detail well and comfortably, and to prepare an interpretation that was the fruit of much reflection and mechanical toil. Given the fact that her method was highly valued by her students, it was inevitable that they would attempt to replicate her performances of particular works. Indeed, a rumor circulated that Esipova was trying to make all her students play identically. It is evident, though, that Esipova differentiated her teaching according to the talent of her pupils. To this end, the more talented the student, the more liberty and freedom in interpretation they would enjoy, with Esipova trying instead to nurture the talent and guide the interpreter. She also warned her students constantly that all "rules" were merely guiding principles provided to assist in the cultivation of taste and intuition for both the performer and the pedagogue.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ "Садясь к роялю, поставьте стул так далеко от него, чтобы нога касалась педали только пальцами. Для игры наклонитесь корпусом слегка вперед. От этого наклона руки округляются настолько, что все их движения делаются удобны и (что не излишне) красивы со стороны." Nikolai Bertenson, *Anna Nikolaevna Esipova: ocherki zhizni i deiatel'nosti* (St. Petersburg: Gos. muz. izd-vo, 1960), 105. As Esipova would say, "Грамотная и вместе с тем удобная аппликатура - это одно из главных условий для достижения уверенности в исполнении." [A correct and comfortable finger position is one of the most important conditions in achieving confidence in performance.] *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

RUSSIAN PIANISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Russian pianism experienced another period of growth during the beginning of the twentieth century. The export of Russian pianists to the West, advertised well the unique traditions of Russian pianism and earned it a formidable reputation.¹⁵⁰

International piano competitions, organized towards the end of the nineteenth century, also raised the profile of Russian pianism with tours of Germany and USA frequently being offered to laureates of such competitions.¹⁵¹

The most outstanding pianists of the time were Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and somewhat later, Prokofiev, all of whom chiefly performed their own music.¹⁵² In their shadow were two groups of prominent pianists, all products of the two major conservatories. Among the young St. Petersburg pianists of the beginning of the twentieth century, the students of Esipova were particularly distinguished: Marian Dombrowski and Vladimir Drozdov. The most highly regarded Moscow pianists of this period included the students of Safonov and Pabst. It may thus seem no accident that a lasting effect on the development of Russian pianism was left by three of their students: Konstantin Igumnov (Pabst), Aleksandr Goldenweiser (Pabst and Safonov), and Leonid Nikolaev (Safonov).

¹⁵⁰ Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 99. The significant role played by Russian pianists in the musical developments of the early twentieth century was enhanced not only by their professionalism, but also through the profundity of their interpretations.

¹⁵¹ See footnote 176.

¹⁵² The name of Nikolai Medtner could justifiably be added to this list. His performance style was characterized by “ослепительной техникой, ясностью, уравновешенностью, мягким и певучим звуком” [rhythmic energy, powerful sonority, and strong contained emotionalism that sometimes grew into a tragic pathos.] (See Alekseev (1948), *op. cit.*, 102.) See also Aleksandr Alekseev, Istoriia fortepiannogo iskusstva, 3 vols., (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1982), III: 81.

THE TRANSITION TO A SOVIET PIANISM: BLUMENFELD

Immediately prior to the revolution, perhaps the most recognisable piano pedagogue who straddled both pre- and post- Revolutionary periods of Russian pianism was Felix Mikhailovich Blumenfeld (1863-1931).¹⁵³ Blumenfeld, an important transitional figure, reined in the Romantic and idiosyncratic excesses that had become hallmarks of pre-Revolutionary Russian pianism and prefigured Soviet-era pianism through his advertisement of such a change in attitude and spirit. He also left a significant mark on the history of post-revolutionary Russian musical culture, not only as a brilliant pianist, but also as a conductor, composer, and an inspiring teacher who educated a number of brilliant pianists, including Vladimir Horowitz (1903-1989), Maria Yudina (1899-1970), and Aleksandr Dubianskii (1900-1920).

The teaching activity of Blumenfeld began at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1885 and continued there until 1918. After a brief hiatus he resumed his teaching activities in Moscow at the Conservatory from 1922-1931. Blumenfeld's piano-teaching methods were shaped by his views on the essence and goals of performance. Barenboim summarized the teaching philosophy of Blumenfeld as follows:

[the counsel of Blumenfeld, which directed the work of students at attaining technical perfection flowed on, in essence, from the following principles: auditory realisation of the task, understanding of the structure of the passage, and slow, but necessarily melodic playing.]¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Among those who taught Blumenfeld were Aleksandr Stein, Anton Rubinstein, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

¹⁵⁴ “Советы Blumenфельда, направлявшие работу учащихся над техническим совершенствованием, вытекали, по существу говоря, из следующих принципов: слуховое осознание

Blumenfeld believed that the main task of the performer was to make music understandable to any audience. Through his example of bringing to bear upon the musical study an informed and cultured intellect, he moved Russian pianism into a new phase. His axiom for achieving the task of clear communication with an audience was to make a performance rich, clear, colourful, and sincere. One of his antidotes to uninspired or indifferent performance was to promote the use of the pedal through which, he advised, a pianist could attain a myriad of sounds. In this respect, Blumenfeld often repeated the words of Anton Rubinstein that the pedal is the soul of the piano. Blumenfeld stated that [a pianist must be able literally to mould the form of the work, having shown its multi-facetedness and its depth, and having imparted to it an almost physical ‘visibility’ and feeling.]¹⁵⁵ For this, he considered it necessary to learn how to listen attentively to music. Barenboim writes:

[I]n various ways and through various means he assisted the formation of our hearing. He wanted our hearing to become sharp, clever and adaptable; he wanted our auditory imagination to develop, as this is the basis for any creative musical activity. For the duration of all the years we spent in his class, he taught us, through repetition, to listen attentively to music and cultivated not only how to ‘hear with one’s ears’, but also how to ‘hear with one’s eyes’ and to ‘hear with one’s fingers.’]¹⁵⁶

задачи, понимания строения пассажа и медленной, но обязательно мелодизированной игры.” Alekseev (1982), *op. cit.*, III: 79.

¹⁵⁵ “Пианист должен суметь вылепить - именно вылепить - образ произведения, показав его многоэлементность, объемность, придав ему почти физическую «видимость» и осязаемость.” Lev Barenboim, *Za polveka: ocherki, stat'i, materialy* (St. Petersburg: Vsesoiuznoe izd-vo Sov. kompozitor, 1989), 24.

¹⁵⁶ “разными путями и разными средствами он способствовал формированию нашего слуха. Он [Блуменфельд] хотел, чтобы слух наш стал чуток, умен и гибок; чтобы развивалось наше слуховое воображение - основа любой творческой музыкальной деятельности. На протяжении всех лет пребывания в его классе, он, повторяя, учил вслушиваться в музыку и воспитывал не только ‘слышащие уши’, но также ‘слышащие глаза’ и ‘слышащие пальцы” Barenboim, *op. cit.*, 25.

In developing auditory perception, Blumenfeld followed the advice of Anton Rubinstein: [teach yourself the ability to comprehend music with an internal ear, learning the piece without an instrument.]¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the crux of Blumenfeld's pedagogical work, and an ever-present theme running through it, pertains to issues involving auditory perception and comprehension.¹⁵⁸

For Blumenfeld, nothing was to be done formally or mechanically. He deemed incomprehensible and indifferent any playing that would serve only to impede the development of the auditory faculties, thus blunting its ability to discriminate and lowering its attention to detail. In this respect, Blumenfeld also foreshadowed the discipline and meticulousness of Soviet pianism.

THE SOVIET SCHOOL OF PIANISM IN RUSSIA

Soviet-era pedagogy was characterised by a striving for a profound and faithful interpretation of the musical text, a precise communication of the composer's ideas, and an understanding of the style and character of the music as the basis for a realistic interpretation of the composition. In the process of forming an interpretation, a great deal of attention was paid to questions of intonation, phrasing, rhythm, fingering, and

¹⁵⁷ “воспитывать в себе умение воспринимать музыку внутренним слухом, разучивая произведение без инструмента.” Aleksei Nikolaev, Ocherki po istorii fortepiannoi pedagogiki i teorii pianizma (Moscow: Muzyka, 1980), 79.

¹⁵⁸ Barenboim, *op. cit.*, 35.

use of the pedals, since it was considered that through these variables a particular performance is able to communicate a definite and intended musical image.

For all their individualities, the views of the leading Soviet pedagogues (Igumnov, Goldenweiser, Nikolaev, and Nejgauz) on the art of piano performance had much in common.¹⁵⁹ According to Elena Nazarova, the following features appear common to all pedagogical methods of the Soviet era:¹⁶⁰

- consciousness of the mission of art in the formation of the artist and the broader community.
- profound knowledge of music, broad cultural outlook, artistic taste, and love of the profession.
- high expectations imposed on both the master and the pupil.
- the main goal was the nurturing and refining of both the innate qualities of the musician and the person through the formation of his/her attitude, spirituality, and personal qualities as an artist, and artistic independence.
- execution was understood as the art of interpretation, the teaching of which proceeds through painstaking examination of the score, analysis of the composer's and editor's indications which eventually lead to the generation of

¹⁵⁹ Nejgauz mentioned that he, together with most of his colleagues, speaks about the same concepts only with different words.

¹⁶⁰ Elena Nazarova, "Osnovnye printsipy obucheniia pianista v istorii otechestvennoi fortepiannoi pedagogiki," in Fortepiannoe iskusstvo. Istoriia i sovremennost': problemy tvorchestva, ispolnitel'stva, pedagogiki (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo RGPU im. A.I. Gertsena, 2004), 44.

one's own interpretation.¹⁶¹

- a constant focus on sound production.
- technique was aimed at realizing a profound interpretation, projecting the right sound, through the comfort and natural movement of the hands.
- an engagement with high-art repertoire.

The early years in the formation of Soviet musical culture were fraught with difficulties due to the political events taking place in the country: the fratricidal civil war provoked by the Bolshevik regime, the introduction of the New Economic Policy, and the intensive industrialization of the country, and all this against a background of insufficiency of the essentials of life, a general famine and economic collapse. In the 30s, under the conditions of the Stalinist dictatorship, the forced collectivization of the countryside, mass repression, and, finally, with a new war looming, the drama of the times – all this was reflected in the destinies of the foremost figures in music and its content. Musical education, interpretation of the standard repertory, and the actual means of making music accessible to the broad mass of the population all underwent a considerable transformation by comparison with the pre-revolutionary period in the country's artistic history.

Prior to the revolution, many middle-class families desired an appreciation of music for their children. The employment of a governess with musical skills was commonplace,

¹⁶¹ Lev Barenboim, Na urokakh F.M. Blumenfel'da: voprosy fortepiannogo ispolnitel'stva (Moscow: Muzyka, 1965), 81.

and children were typically instructed through this means. The importance placed on a musical education was such that children started playing instruments along with learning how to read and write, even though the intensity of the lessons depended on the students' abilities. Ideally, music education would begin long before a child learned to read their native language, which was the case particularly in families with musically-educated parents. In the years immediately following the Soviet revolution of 1917, however, the noble and middle classes disappeared and with them the private home tutors. Musical life in Russia appeared directionless if not also totally buried by a communist edict that demanded embracing of a new ethos which would pander to proletariat and peasantry.¹⁶²

The idea of general accessibility opened the doors of the former imperial theatres and philharmonic societies to the working class, the soldiers of the Red Army, and other non-propertied constituents of the urban population. Cultural policy, laid out in official declarations, at first boiled down to the main aim: to make the treasures of artistic creativity accessible to the people, the property of the masses. In his piece "The successes and difficulties of Soviet power" (*Uspekhi i trudnosti Sovetskoi vlasti*), Lenin wrote: [We must take all the culture that capitalism has left behind and construct socialism from it, we must take all the science, the technology, all the knowledge, the

¹⁶² William Kozlenko, "Soviet Music and Musicians," *The Musical Quarterly* 23.3 (July 1937): 297.

art. Without this we cannot build the life of a communist society.]¹⁶³ On the one hand, there was a demand to take possession of previous artistic achievements of art while on the other hand, and very much to the contrary, there was a latent denial that national traditions had any role, as they were considered out of date and bore the stamp of bourgeois and aristocratic ideology.

In addition, the Soviet government controlled virtually all the schools in Russia which centralized education policy and curriculum.¹⁶⁴ The underlying philosophy of Soviet music education was to “solidify the masses in nationalistic and political feelings.”¹⁶⁵ The methodology to communicate this ethos would place the responsibility on students to learn material presented to them against the backdrop of socialist ethics. This code stressed the primacy of the collective over the interests of the individual. Therefore, for

¹⁶³ “Нужно взять всю культуру, которую капитализм оставил, и из нее построить социализм, нужно взять всю науку, технику, все знания, искусство. Без этого мы жизнь коммунистического общества построить не можем.” Vladimir Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii 5th ed., (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1967-1970), xxxviii: 55.

¹⁶⁴ The deliberate State control and structuring of music and its academies guaranteed a special atmosphere in culture and art at the beginning of the 1920s-30s, an atmosphere filled with enthusiasm and a profound faith in the educative function of art. This enabled Neigauz to state that [our piano culture is not some sort of isolated region, it is part of our overall Soviet culture, and its exponents are subject to the same laws -- political, moral and social -- as are all exponents of culture and literature.] “наша пианистическая культура не является какой-то изолированной областью, она часть нашей общей советской культуры, и деятели ее подчинены тем же законам – политическим, нравственным и общественным, которым подчинены все деятели культуры и литературы.” See Genrikh Neigauz, Tvorchestvo pianista: vydayushchiesia pianisty-pedagogi o fortepiannom iskusstve (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966), 58.

¹⁶⁵ Abraham Schwadron, “Music in Soviet Education,” Music Educators Journal 53.8 (April, 1967): 87.

both teachers and students, creativity and individualism were discouraged.¹⁶⁶ Married to this ideology was a systematic training regime which would glorify the State.¹⁶⁷ In this sense, the methodical and rigorous approach to training was similar for musicians and sportsmen alike. The goals of the intense training program were service of the State and preparation for State representation in the all-important international competitions¹⁶⁸ and thereafter the possible achievement of wider personal recognition and benefit to the union.¹⁶⁹ While the conservatories embraced the rigorous and systematized approach to the training of musicians, they tried to eschew any encumbrance on freedom artistic expression imposed by the revolutionary reforms. This produced some positive effects.

¹⁶⁶ Vanett Lawler, "The Arts in the Educational Program in the Soviet Union," Music Educators Journal 47.4 (Feb.-Mar., 1961): 46. See also Samarii Savshinskii, "Proshloe ne umiraet," Sovetskaia muzyka 31.1 (January 1967): 65-77, who recalls his association with the first Soviet Commissar of Education, Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875-1933). For Savshinskii (a prominent pianist-pedagogue at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire), it was Lunacharskii who shaped and influenced the direction of artistic life under the newly formed Soviet state. Zofia Lissa recounts the decidedly Marxist tendencies in Lunacharskii's philosophy of art which permeated educational academies under the Soviet empire. See Zofia Lissa, "Poglady Anatola Lunaczarskiego na muzyke," in Polsko-rosyjskie miscellanea muzyczne (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1967), 322-52. In spite of all the negative criticism, however, Lunacharskii fostered "cultural achievements of the so-called *intelligentsia* of Tsarist Russia," through skilful negotiation with the respective factions and thereby created a progressive and contemporary cultural environment which became an oasis for the musician. This is further supported by the fact that he openly encouraged "inter-European cultural exchange, especially with Germans," during the Soviet era. His open sympathy and admiration for Skryabin whom he thought a musical revolutionary and whom he described as "an optimist whose struggle toward utopian ideals for mankind [which] is very similar to the struggle of the Russian Communist Movement towards a more perfect society," is further testament to his modernist thinking. See Don Wetzel (trans.), "Anatoly Lunacharsky: On Scriabin," Journal of The Scriabin Society of America 8.1 (Winter 2003-2004): 37-38.

¹⁶⁷ Frederick Martens, "Reports Fine Arts Flourishing in 'Red Russia'," Musical America (28 September, 1918): 9.

¹⁶⁸ Fred Hechinger, The Big Red Schoolhouse (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1959), 28. The important competitions for Soviet musicians to launch careers were initially the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels, the competition of the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Wien, and the Wieniawski Competition for violin. By the 1950s, a new series of contests emerged and rapidly grew in prominence. These would include the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, which was to become a vehicle of display for musicians bred under the Soviet banner.

¹⁶⁹ Harlow Robinson, "Zapiski moskovskogo pianista," Russian Review 43.3 (July, 1984): 294.

While evasion of being controlled was perhaps more successful on the performance front as opposed to the plight of composers, Soviet musicians saw the benefits of a highly-developed network of government controlled and subsidized music schools which covered the entire country. The opening of such music schools and their continuing development and growth had a tremendous impact on music education in general.¹⁷⁰

The table below shows the hierarchical structure of music education in the USSR.¹⁷¹

Conservatories

- Music and academic classes are combined
- Tuition is free
- Challenging admission exams
- Period of study: 5 years (ages 19 to 23)
- Every major city has a conservatory. Moscow has two: the Tchaikovsky State Conservatory and the Gnessin Music College which ranks as a conservatory. St. Petersburg has one conservatory: the Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory.



¹⁷⁰ A significant shift in the musical culture of the post-revolutionary period was heralded connected with the Soviet government's "Decree concerning Conservatoria in Moscow and Petrograd" of 12 July, 1918. This edict initiated a vigorous program of nationalization of the biggest musical theatres (including opera houses), philharmonic concert halls, conservatoria, and music publishing house. Similar processes also took place in other branches of the arts as well.

Conservatories began to realize the importance of early music education, and soon opened their own preparatory departments for children. In addition to the preparatory schools, there were teachers who opened their own boarding houses for exceptionally gifted students, where they lived and studied. The major proportion of young musicians, however, were educated at home.

¹⁷¹ Borrowed and enhanced from Irena Kofman, "The History of the Russian Piano School: Individuals and Traditions," (DMA Dissertation, University of Miami, 2001), 102.

Music Colleges

- Music and academic classes are combined
- Tuition is free
- Challenging admission exams
- Period of study: 4 years (ages 15 to 18)
- Every big city has a music college. Moscow has four, St. Petersburg has two

Special Music Schools

- Schools within Conservatory system
- Music and academic classes are combined
- Tuition is free
- Admission exams
- Period of study: 11 years (ages 7 to 18)
- Every major conservatory has one Special Music School

**Children's Music Schools**

- Only music education (students must attend an academic school concurrently)
- Tuition must be paid
- Admission exams
- Period of study: 7 years (usually ages 7 to 15)
- Preparatory classes for 5 – 6 year olds
- Cities have up to 15 schools

The Children's Music Schools served as the most formative establishment for musical education. While children received their general education at normal schools, the children's music schools provided intensive and comprehensive tuition in the principle instrument, together with instruction in sight-reading, basic harmonic structures and forms, and musical dictations. Music history and appreciation, choir, and piano ensemble were also an integral part of the education. After seven years of intense music study and an academic education at a separate school, students who passed rigorous

entrance exams could avail themselves of four additional years of music and general academics training at “colleges” for fourteen to eighteen year olds.

The curriculum of the four-year Music Colleges included applied piano, harmonization, accompaniment, chamber music, advanced music history, and musical analysis. The increased rigor and specialization at the colleges meant that all subjects prescribed by the government were mandatory.

Special Music Schools, opened in large cities and regional centers such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, Novosibirsk, and Tbilisi, combined the education available from the Children’s Music Schools and Music Colleges into an eleven year program. These institutions typically recruited the best teachers (professors of the major conservatories) to provide education for outstanding young students. A general education in addition to intensive music studies was included as a part of the overall curriculum. These institutions enjoyed the best reputation, achieved the most outstanding results, and supplied the best students to the Moscow or St. Petersburg Conservatories.¹⁷²

In the years following the revolution, theoretical works and practical textbooks of Soviet performance musicologists together with those of foreign authors were widely disseminated and published. Particular attention was paid to the teaching of piano-

¹⁷² The Gnessin Academy, which became a competitor to the Moscow Conservatory, included a seven-year children’s music school, an eleven-year special music school, a music college, and a five-year institute of music and pedagogy.

playing at elementary levels and to the selection of an appropriate repertory for pupils of music at schools and colleges.¹⁷³ In conservatories, courses in the history and theory of pianism and teaching methods were introduced together with an important place being ascribed to teaching practice. All these developments advanced a new Soviet school of pianism and improved the training of both performers and educators. Once again, this was a period where Russian musical life was invigorated by European influences.

The development of Soviet pianism in the 1920s-30s reflected, in many ways, the contradictory features characteristic of foreign methodologies. It seemed to many Soviet musicians, who had become admirers of the significant achievements of foreign pianists such as Artur Schnabel (1882-1951), Artur Schnabel (1887-1982), Alfred Cortot (1877-1962), Egon Petri (1881-1962) and other leading virtuosi, that the teaching methodologies used in other countries had left the practices of Russian conservatories behind.¹⁷⁴ It also seemed imperative that for a real development and renewal of Soviet pianistic education to take place, Russian pianists necessarily had to become acquainted with works on the subject of the theory of pianism and to learn the ‘secrets’ of foreign

¹⁷³ See the excellent and detailed discussion regarding the musical formation of pianists under the Soviet system by Walter Robert, “Piano Study in Soviet-Russian Schools of Music,” Journal of Research in Music Education 12.3 (Autumn, 1964): 199-211. Also, Yakov Gelfand, “Piano Education in the Soviet Union,” trans., Irina Lasoff, in Piano Quarterly 35.136 (Winter 1986-7): 39-49.

¹⁷⁴ This situation perhaps reflected an insecurity that had permeated the conservatories as a result of the politics of the Soviet state. Evidently, notable foreign pianists such as György Sandor (1912-2005), Lhévinne, Giesecking, and Karl Leimer, et al., had all added to the vast corpus of pedagogical manuals, although it should be noted that the Russians had themselves already addressed the central themes associated with the theory of pianism and pedagogy comprehensively. The major difference has been the accessibility of the Russian works which, to this day and for the most part, remain unknown due to barriers such as language.

teaching methodologies. An important role in this regard was played by Grigorii Prokof'ev and Mark Meichik (1880-1950).¹⁷⁵ G. Prokof'ev's seminal text "*Игра на фортепиано*" [Piano-Playing] was released in 1928, while another two important pedagogical treatises appeared either side of it. Vasilii Ivanovskii of Kiev published his "*Теория пианизма*" [Piano Theory] in 1927 with the sub-title "*Опыт научных предпосылок к методике обучения игре на фортепиано*" [Experience of Prerequisite Knowledge of the Methodology of Piano-Playing] and Andrei Shapov's book "*Опыт анализа фортепианной техники в ее зависимости от механических факторов*" [An Experiment in Analysing Piano Technique in Relation to its Dependence on Mechanical Factors] was published in 1931.

The works of foreign authors had an unquestionable influence on the texts published by Soviet musicologists in those years and neither Prokof'ev, nor Ivanovskii or Shapov escaped this influence. Prokof'ev, for example, the most erudite and serious explorer of questions relating to pianism, was an ardent follower of Steinhausen. While critical of the methodological aspect of Steinhausen's work, he nevertheless considered that an educator can succeed only when his work has been illuminated by the ideas of Steinhausen. As such, a considerable degree of influence from the physiological

¹⁷⁵ In Meichik's own translation and under his editorship, a section of Rudolf Breichthaupt's *Die natürliche Klaviertechnik* Band I & II (Leipzig: C.F. Kahnt, 1913 & 1921), as *Естественная фортепианная техника* [Natural Piano Technique] was published in 1927. Under the editorship of G.P. Prokof'ev and with his commentary, Friederich Steinhausen's book *Die physiologischen Fehler und die Umgestaltung der Klaviertechnik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1913), was published in Russian as *Физиологические ошибки в технике игры на фортепиано и преобразование этой техники*. A Russian translation of Eugen Tetzl's book *Das Problem der modernen Klaviertechnik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1909), "*Современная фортепианная техника*" [Contemporary Piano Technique] was also released in 1929.

movement came through in Prokof'ev's *Piano-Playing*, and this brought him into significant conflicts in expounding his views. For instance, in criticising Ludwig Deppe (1828-1890)¹⁷⁶ and his followers, Prokof'ev fairly pointed out their one-sided focus on the question of movement:

[under the influence of such a fascination...the art cannot but suffer: human movement is not something self-sufficient, while the human body has enormous capabilities of adaptation, but under conditions of strongly-held ideas of the goal of movement, that is, in our case, in the contemplation by the pianist of a clear image of sound. Without music, without a musical design, without an image of sound there cannot be and will not be technical perfection in playing the piano.]¹⁷⁷

Having subjected a number of works by various proponents of the 'anatomic-physiological movement' to criticism, Prokof'ev then asserts that the main role in the mastery of piano technique belongs to the idea of the artistic purpose of movement.

¹⁷⁶ Deppe was the true precursor and pedagogical antecedent of both Steinhausen and Breithaupt. See Arthur Elson, "Other Piano Methods," in Malwine Brée, The Leschetizky Method: A Guide to Fine and Correct Piano Playing (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), 83-89. Gerig, *op. cit.*, 250-68, also provides a detailed account of Deppe's pioneering contribution to pedagogical scholarship.

¹⁷⁷ При таком увлечении...искусство не могло не пострадать: движение человека не является чем-то самодовлеющим, а тело человека обладает огромными силами приспособления, но при условии яркого представления цели движения, т. е. в нашем случае при созерцании пианистом яркого звукового образа. Без музыки, без художественного замысла, без звукового образа нет и не будет технического совершенства в игре на фортепиано.

Grigorii Prokof'ev, Formirovanie muzykanta-ispolnitelia (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1956), 44.

This wide-ranging work was the sum of his long scientific investigations and educational experiences. The book consists of two parts: Part One, "Fundamentals of the Art of Performance", and Part Two, "The Formation of the Personality and Creative Skill of the Pianist" and its contents reveal that Prokofiev had in many ways departed from the doctrines of the so called 'anatomical-physiological movement,' with its concentration on physical actions while playing. In this respect he was highly critical, for example, of Breichthaupt's 'weight-method,' noting that there was an over-abundance of methodologies which discussed the potential of the arm: stipulations for its correct weight distribution, freedom in its movement, and its ability to transfer properly its weight to the fingers etc. These methods, in his opinion, [were proving...unsatisfactory, contradictory for students and unable to stand up to criticism from both the artistic and biomechanical points of view.] "оказывались... неудовлетворительными, сбивчивыми для учащихся и не выдерживающими критики ни с художественной, ни с биомеханической точки зрения." Prokof'ev, *op. cit.*, 134-135.

[The richer the expression of the imagination of sound and the feeling for musical form on the part of the pianist, the greater is the potential for the technical development of the pianist.]¹⁷⁸ In an effort to promote the importance and a clear understanding of this premise among pianists, Prokof'ev went to great lengths to explain the workings of the central nervous system and the brain based on the accepted scientific data of the 1920s. He continuously returned to the positions of the physiological movement, seeking the most useful methods of movement which best provided, in his opinion, for the technical success of the student pianist.

Theoretical treatises on piano technique, with their striving to substantiate scientifically a piano teaching methodology, proved to be far removed from artistic practice. The enthusiasm for the physiology of the pianist's movements was thought by mainstream pedagogues to have no connection with the concrete goals of performing art. It was considered an abstract science which was not able to provide practical assistance in the education of pianists. This was undoubtedly the reason that leading Soviet musicians viewed the works of piano theorists with scepticism. Nejgauz encapsulated the sentiments of colleagues such as Igumnov, Goldenweiser, and Nikolaev, all of whom shared an aversion to theoretical treatises and scientific ponderings regarding piano playing:

Young musicologists (and sometimes also the middle-aged) fail to grasp the meaning, the significance and enchantment of the works I have mentioned. Their own work is permeated with "scholarliness", "analysis" and an

¹⁷⁸ "Чем богаче выражены у пианиста фантазия звуковая и чутье музыкальной формы, тем больше данных и для технического развития пианиста." Prokof'ev, *op. cit.*, 59.

accurate description of the object of that analysis which in most cases envelop the reader in unrelieved boredom. You cannot talk about art in a language that is too inartistic. Incidentally, in recent time there has been an improvement in the type of writing known as “dissertation”, but this is far from sufficient. There is still too much description in minute-writer’s style...It is probably that type of description that gave rise to the jokes about “describing a dinner” and similar witticisms. I consider that these bad, formalistic musicological habits should be abandoned once and for all. For a musician they are unnecessary, because he can hear; they are even more un-necessary for the non-musician because he cannot understand them.¹⁷⁹

Instead, each pedagogue, in preserving the best traditions of the pre-revolutionary school of Russian pianism, shaped and generated their own unique traditions by relying on experiences of their pianistic lineage.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Neuhaus (1993), *op. cit.*, 231.

¹⁸⁰ Despite its allegiance to the traditions of pre-revolutionary Russian pianism in the most essential aspects, there were important differences between pre- and Soviet pianism at the formative level and relate to the following points:

1) Repertoire: Prior to the revolution, formative technical piano education relied on teaching materials compiled by German pedagogues. Especially popular were the works of Bayer, Burgmüller, and Leschhorn et al. The methodology was based on solving purely technical problems that had little bearing on the cultivation of the musician as artist. During the 20s and 30s, however, the repertoire for children was updated and expanded by the appearance of numerous collections and etudes by Maikapar, Gedike, Grechaninov, Miaskovskii, Goldenweiser, and E. Gnesin. These simple pieces (often arrangements of folksongs), acquainted children with the basic means of expression in a simple unadulterated manner and prepared them for more complex technical material. Their principal aim was to familiarize the pupil with music as an artistic phenomenon and to inculcate a love for musical art and for playing the piano.

In line with the difference of aims in the methods of teaching beginners, there were also differences in the repertoire being played. In the pre-revolutionary period, students were expected to master performance skills playing works that laid no claim to depth of artistic content. This resulted in the popularity of many second-rate composers which had a negative effect on the development of musical culture in young performers. A special feature of Soviet piano teaching was an insistence on teaching through familiarization with genuine masterpieces.

2) Technique: This was previously considered synonymous with the development of fluid and independent finger movement attained with a relatively static position of the hand. Five finger exercises were introduced in the earliest lessons and trained the pupil to play with both hands in unison, legato, and with minimum movement of the hands. This led to a tense and restricted hand which many teachers found difficult to alter. Soviet teaching changed the whole system of the development of elementary movement skills. Attention was immediately paid to the free movement of the whole arm from the shoulder in performing a single melodic line. Gradual acquisition of this ability was reflected in playing at first with one finger, then with two and more. Simple melodies with accompaniment were then studied

While Soviet pedagogues continued the traditions paved by the founders of the Russian school, they were also largely responsible for the rescue of Russian pianism from salon accretion and sentimentality, vestiges of the golden age of Romantic pianism.

Khentova's summary of Goldenweiser's pedagogical approach, which may indeed be held up as common to all the major Soviet pedagogues, hints at this process of updating or modernizing Russian pianism:

[logic, discipline and professionalism lay at the foundations of his teaching method. There was no room for extremes or unjustified passions- every action was subordinated to common sense and subjected to the rules of reason; a true teacher was visible in all things, with his exceptional ability and skill to explain, to demonstrate, to persuade. Goldenweiser taught the pianist to think, to work at the piano and to understand the demands of practice. He gave clear advice and found a logical, infallible key to everything.]¹⁸¹

Key features which set the Soviet musicians apart from their forebears and through which they formed a unified pedagogical and aesthetic approach can be subsumed by three terms: individuality, discipline, and precision. The production of a more disciplined and precise art were natural responses to a Soviet education system designed to promote such an ethos. The endorsement of and aspiration towards embracing individuality, however, was a complete repudiation of the Soviet doctrine which tried to suppress such freedom of expression.

with the teacher imparting a feeling for gentle and uninhibited movement. This prepared the student for the execution of various tone colours within phrases and shades of sound.

¹⁸¹ “Логика, дисциплина и профессионализм лежали в основе его педагогики. Здесь не было места крайностям, неоправданным увлечениям: каждое действие подчинялось здравому смыслу, законам аргументации, во всём был виден истинный учитель с исключительной способностью и умением разъяснять, показать, убедить. Гольденвейзер учил пианиста мыслить, работать за фортепиано и понимать требования практики. Он давал ясные советы и ко всему находил логический безошибочный ключ.” Sof'ia Khentova, Sovremennaia fortepiannaia pedagogika i ee mastera: vydaiushchiesia pianisty-pedagogi o fortepiannom iskusstve (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966), 16.

IGUMNOV & GOLDENWEISER

In 1899, Igumnov¹⁸² was invited by Taneev and Safonov into the ranks of Moscow Conservatory professors and from this point onwards all of Igumnov's artistic and teaching activity, lasting almost half a century, was inextricably linked to the life of the same institution. He expressed some trepidation regarding the precise definition of his teaching method when he stated: [my path as a performer and educator was difficult and tortuous; my views on the art of pianism changed many times. Only in the 'thirties did I arrive at the principles to which I now hold.]¹⁸³ Indeed, the constant search for truth in the art of performance and teaching was a defining feature of Igumnov's creative work which led to his rejection of the notion of a 'system' as an unalterable sum of rules. It is, as such, difficult to lay out his pedagogical principles into some form of definite and precise system.

Perhaps his most memorable principle which never changed was his advocacy of spontaneity in performance as long as such improvisation was informed by intelligent and cultured preparation.¹⁸⁴ This combined with another chief preoccupation: the individuality of the pupil before all else. He was adamant that all his students should

¹⁸² Igumnov had graduated from the Moscow Conservatory with a Gold Medal in the piano class of 1894 (his teachers having been Zverev, Ziloti and Pabst).

¹⁸³ "Мой исполнительский и педагогический путь был сложен и извилист; взгляды мои на пианистическое искусство неоднократно менялись. Лишь в тридцатых годах я пришел к тем принципам, которых придерживаюсь сейчас." Alexei Nikolaev, Mastera sovetskoi pianisticheskoi shkoly (Moscow: Muzyka, 1961), 47.

¹⁸⁴ Konstantin Igumnov, O tvorcheskoi puti i ispolnitel'skom iskusstve pianista (Moscow: Muzyka, 1984), 144.

develop a capacity for independent creative thought. In respect of this goal, Igumnov never imposed his interpretation on his students, imparting to them instead a taste for independence and for taking initiative. He regarded art as a constant search, a persistent labour driven by curiosity in which there was no such thing as a singular, objective solution. It was precisely for this reason that Igumnov's own demonstrations of a work could be extraordinarily varied both musically and technically. He considered the principal aim of the teacher's demonstration to be the correction of mistakes, to find what one should not do or the reason for the inability to realize one's potential.¹⁸⁵ The principle of cultivating individuality was also evident in other positions of his teaching philosophy. For example, being very responsible, careful and circumspect in his choice of repertoire, Igumnov considered that a work should correspond to the student's musical consciousness.¹⁸⁶

Igumnov was extremely attentive in fostering the ability to listen while playing. He called this "the approach from within," and appealed to his students to follow their inner ear for every note played, controlling and correcting their performance as they went along. The aim of such an approach was the desire to develop the ability to distinguish and achieve the most subtle nuances.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Iakov Mil'shtein, "K.N. Igumnov i voprosy fortepiannoj pedagogiki," in Voprosy fortepiannogo ispolnitel'stva, ed. Mikhail Sokolov, Vol. 1, (Moscow: Muzyka, 1965), 147.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

He also placed particular emphasis on the concept of touch and intonation, since he perceived music as being connected to speech. At the base of the ability to “narrate” on the piano lay control of the musical phrase, their linking and movement, in other words, the connective development of musical speech. Appealing to his students to find the special points of gravity, Igumnov taught his students to hear each phrase in its mutual relation with the previous and subsequent phrases, because [nowhere should there be seams and unjustified separations.]¹⁸⁸

Teaching alongside Igumnov in the Moscow Conservatory for more than half a century was Goldenweiser, a teacher of a totally different character and temperament to Igumnov, even if both had been pupils of Ziloti and Pabst.¹⁸⁹ The activity of Goldenweiser was surprisingly multifaceted. He was a celebrated soloist, chamber musician, and composer, a teacher who educated more than 200 musicians, and a respected editor of music. In his views on musical art and his understanding of the tasks of the performer and teacher, Goldenweiser was a true successor to the original pioneers of Russian pianism, and an exponent of its more progressive ideas and aspirations.¹⁹⁰ He understood the primary mission of a teacher to be the education of the musician. At the same time, Goldenweiser believed that the teacher should also provide a student performer with a fundamental background that enables them to cope with any technical

¹⁸⁸ “нигде не должно быть швов и неоправданных разрывов.” Iakov Mil’shtein, “К. Igumnov o masterstve ispolnitelia,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1 (1959): 119.

¹⁸⁹ Goldenweiser also studied with Safonov.

¹⁹⁰ Robinson, *op. cit.*, 294.

or musical situation that might present itself. He deemed it the teacher's responsibility to communicate the basic technical principles and musical goals while simultaneously allowing for the development of a unique artistic personality.¹⁹¹

In his classes, Goldenweiser often concentrated on the problem of the performer's approach to the score. For example, when a student brought a newly learned work to class for the first time, Goldenweiser would listen to the whole performance and dedicate the first lesson to a discussion about the composer (whose work the student had just played), his place in the history of the music, and his creative methods and compositional style.¹⁹² In a subsequent analysis of the piece, Goldenweiser would play a portion of it himself, illustrating the sound of particular episodes and phrases, explaining the expressive significance of various details, and occasionally making a series of generalisations regarding the various tasks of the performer. In this way, the pupil would begin to understand the concept and details of the score; what had previously gone un-noticed would assume an essential role, receiving a new image and expressive substance.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Aleksei Nikolaev, A.B. Goldenweiser – Pedagog: stat'i, materialy, vospominaniia (Moscow: Muzyka, 1963), 54.

¹⁹² In bringing a new work to Goldenweiser's class for the first time, a student was not expected to 'perform' it but simply be able to play it at a moderate tempo, although with maximum precision and following all the directions of the composer. See comments pertaining to 'stylish' performance in Barnes, *op. cit.*, 54.

¹⁹³ Barnes, *op. cit.*, 54-55.

Another of Goldenweiser's most important requirements was that a student be able to play from memory, or "by heart" as Goldenweiser preferred to say. In his opinion, the practice of committing a work to memory should be emphasised from childhood. He believed that only in playing from memory could a performer feel total freedom. Memorization together with nuanced dynamic and rhythmic refinement which allow for flexibility and lively expression to be added to the musical interpretation was also necessary for expressive, cantabile playing.¹⁹⁴

The assiduous use of the pedals received a great amount of attention in Goldenweiser's teaching. Speaking of various principles regarding the use of the pedal, Goldenweiser emphasised that such methods must always be closely connected with the style of the piece being performed. He warned constantly against misuse or over-use of the pedal especially in situations where it is not warranted, such as in the exposition of a fugal subject. He thought of the pedal instead as a tool with the ability to enhance sound. In this sense, its skilful use could never be confined to a simple press and release which was his common observation of many pianists.¹⁹⁵ Rather, in his opinion the professional pianist should be cognisant of a multitude of nuances involved in the use of the pedal: small, continuous movements of the foot, fast or slow, deep, and shallow depressions.

¹⁹⁴ Barnes, *op. cit.*, 58.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

In essence, Goldenweiser believed that it would not be paradoxical to say that the art of using the pedals is, more than anything, the ability to play without the pedals.¹⁹⁶

Goldenweiser devoted the major part of his classes at the conservatory, to the artistic side of performance and questions of a technical nature associated with interpretation; he only rarely focused on technique. Nevertheless, even though he did not think it wise to perform exercises that were unconnected with concrete musical goals, he did stress the need to cultivate a solid technical foundation for which he was fond of using the etudes of Czerny.¹⁹⁷ Goldenweiser possessed a keen interest in discussing foundational technical concepts such as the positioning of the hands and the acquisition of strong and independent fingers.¹⁹⁸ His general advice concerning technique was that each student should form their own preferred style of playing in keeping with their own physical characteristics and ideas on sound.¹⁹⁹ In this respect, his guiding principle was simply that each movement and every sensation should correspond to the musical result one

¹⁹⁶ Aleksandr Goldenweiser, O muzykal'nom ispolnitel'stve: vydaiushchiesia pianisty-pedagogi o fortepiannom iskusstve (Moscow & St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1966), 106.

¹⁹⁷ Barnes, *op. cit.*, 64.

¹⁹⁸ Working with musical school or pre-college students he would focus systematically on scales and arpeggios in separate exercises. Goldenweiser was one of the few distinguished professors in Russia who desired also to teach beginners. This was totally against established norms. In later years he revealed that a wise pedagogical influence from the beginning would perhaps prevent an outcome whereby a talented student was limited by their lack of technical skill. This was an oblique if also explicit reference to his own shortcomings as a technician which he believed hampered his ascendancy to true stardom as a pianist.

¹⁹⁹ See Barnes, *op. cit.*, 61-2, who also translates Dmitrii Blagoi's account of Goldenweiser's advice on the development of a sound finger technique.

hoped to attain.²⁰⁰ He also advised that the sound of the instrument is its reaction to the movement of our body. In light of this point, he would frequently point out, for example, that many pianists make sound by pushing the instrument away from them when it is sometimes warranted that the piano be pulled towards them. Such distinctions he viewed as very important in preserving an unmechanistic approach to the piano.²⁰¹ In this and in many other respects, Goldenweiser as performer and teacher continued the path and traditions of his own teachers: the Rubinstein brothers, Safonov, and Ziloti.²⁰²

Above all, Goldenweiser was a musical conservative, a serious musician who expressed total disdain for the tendency to play for effect. The central theme of his method was a meticulousness combined with an intellectual approach to music which was frequently criticised by some who contended that this impeded the concept of the musical work. In this respect, there was a noticeable absence of the tendency toward superficial

²⁰⁰ Aleksandr Goldenweiser, O muzykal'nom iskusstve. Sbornik statei (Moscow: Muzyka, 1975), 104.

²⁰¹ Goldenweiser (1966), *op. cit.*, 104 and 106.

²⁰² See also the posthumously published transcripts of his lessons by his wife Elena Goldenweiser, Stenogrammy otkrytykh urokov (Moscow: Muzyka, 1984) and reminiscences by his most celebrated student, Grigorii Ginzburg in Mikhail Iakovlev (ed.), G.R. Ginzburg: Stat'i, vospominaniia, materialy (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1984). Besides Ginzburg, Samuel Feinberg was Goldenweiser's other student of exceptional talent and prominence. Feinberg's approach to performance was influenced by the serious and comprehensive side of his teacher's personality. He became the first Russian pianist to offer recitals of the complete *Das Wohltemperierte Clavier*, Beethoven Sonatas and other pillars of the repertory. Unlike his teacher, Feinberg also became an advocate for contemporary music of the time. In particular he was renowned for his complete Skryabin Sonata cycle, and was constantly being lauded by Miaskovskii for his performances of the piano music of Prokofiev, which the composer himself also commended highly. See Miralda Kozlova & Nina Iatsenko (eds.), S.S. Prokof'ev and N.Y. Miaskovskii: perepiska comp., Vasilii Kiselev (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1977), 151, 164-5. For more information on the pianism and pedagogy of Feinberg see the recent publication by his student Viktor Bunin, Samuil Evgen'evich Feinberg: zhizn' i tvorchestvo (Moscow: Muzyka, 1999).

expression heard in representatives of the old Russian school. One could observe instead a degree of emotional intensity combined with restraint, which were heightened by sophisticated *rubato* and economical use of the pedal. These qualities could be heard in his most prominent students of his later years: Tat'iana Nikolaeva, Dmitrii Bashkirov, Leonid Roizman, and Victor Merzhanov.

NIKOLAEV

While Moscow had the likes of Igumnov and Goldenweiser to guide the institution into a new era, these responsibilities in St. Petersburg lay most conspicuously with Leonid Vladimirovich Nikolaev (1872-1942).²⁰³ In his years of working at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, more than 124 students graduated from his class.²⁰⁴ Nikolaev's pedagogy attracted students with, above all, its solid, multi-faceted professionalism, its distinctive work methods, and the precision of its technical methods, all existing within a high musical culture. These ingredients unite seemingly dissimilar figures such as Aleksandr Kamenskii, Dmitrii Shostakovich, and Vladimir Sofronitskii. After a concert of Nikolaev's students in 1927, the noted critic K. Grimikh wrote that almost all the pianists have a level of command of their instrument together with a polished and facile technique equal to any of the greatest Russian pianists from other lineages. His pupils

²⁰³ A student of Safonov from his days in St. Petersburg, Nikolaev was a pianist, composer, a doctor of art history, and a professor of the St. Petersburg (and later, Leningrad) Conservatory.

²⁰⁴ At different times such students as Maior Brenner, Vera Razumovskaia, Isai Renzin, Samarii Savshinskii, Vladimir Sofronitskii, Konstantin Schmidt, Dmitrii Shostakovich and Maria Yudina studied under Nikolaev. Indeed, his students, and now his musical 'grandchildren', comprised and still form the core of the piano faculty of the St. Petersburg Conservatory. See Lev Barenboim and Natan Fishman (comps.), *L.V. Nikolaev: stat'i i vospominaniia sovremennikov, pis'ma* (St. Petersburg: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1979), provides detailed information regarding the importance and significance of Nikolaev.

exhibited an exceptionally subtle use the pedals, together with a sense of musical culture, interpretative skill and artistry that were exceptionally refined. They also possessed a natural soft sound together with the capability of producing a vast range of colours from the piano.²⁰⁵

Nikolaev's unique philosophy began from the point where he believed that there were no exercises to assist in acquiring a good sound. He contended that a good sound is hidden instead in the correlation of the elements that make it up, in the sustained tone and the beauty of the intervallic sonority. His advice on achieving a singing line was to emulate the idea of *bel canto*. In this sense, the sound should be supported, that is, at the moment of pressing the key the arm (sharing the pressure on the key) should take the form of a firm line from the tips of the fingers to the shoulder. All movements of the arm and fingers are made because with them the notes are played or the sound of the next note is prepared, often 'generalising' a few notes in one movement of the arm.²⁰⁶

Occasionally, Nikolaev would concede that having played a long note or chord, it becomes necessary to place the arm in a more comfortable position. In the final result, Nikolaev contended that the basis for creating sound is also closely linked with phrasing. In order to achieve a connected and smooth line, Nikolaev called for acute

²⁰⁵ Grimikh, "Kontsert leningradskikh pianistov shkoly L.V. Nikolaeva," Muzyka i evoliutsiia 4.16 (1927): 31. Khentova also speaks about Nikolaev's fondness for Bach in an effort to educate and refine a pianist. See Sof'ia Khentova, Vydaiushchiesia pianisty-pedagogi o fortepiannom iskusstve (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966), 119.

²⁰⁶ Samarii Savshinskii, Leonid Vladimirovich Nikolaev: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva (St. Petersburg: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1960), 59-61.

attention to the sound, both at the moment in which the keys are depressed and also after its execution, in the event that excess reverberation can be regulated with the pedal.²⁰⁷

All this notwithstanding, it may be said that the foundation of Nikolaev's lessons with students was his striving to educate genuine musicians, [to 'open the ears' of his students, to teach them to listen and to hear down to the smallest detail, with the utmost precision, the various expressive capabilities and unique aesthetic qualities of the piano.]²⁰⁸

NEIGAUZ

Rightfully acknowledged as the high point of Soviet pianism in his production of its brightest artistic achievements was the pianist and pedagogue, Genrikh Gustavovich Neigauz (1888-1964).²⁰⁹ He defined the main professional task of a music teacher as the ability to nurture in the student an understanding of music and its ideological-emotional substance, to teach the student to approach thoughtfully both the score itself

²⁰⁷ Savshinskii, *op. cit.*, 59-61.

²⁰⁸ “открыть уши своим студентам, научить их слушать и слышать во всех деталях, со всей тонкостью различные выразительные возможности и эстетические особенности фортепиано.” Samarii Savshinskii, Leonid Nikolaev: pianist, kompozitor, pedagog (St. Petersburg & Moscow: Gos. Muz izd-vo, 1950), 132.

²⁰⁹ Paperno contends that Neigauz was “amazingly not a Soviet, but rather a nonstandard, bright emissary from an eternal world of art.” This brief statement goes some way to explaining the cosmopolitan and eclectic influences Neigauz brought to bear upon his pedagogy and musicianship. See Dimitry Paperno, Notes of a Moscow Pianist (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1998), 105. Neigauz studied with Blumenfeld and thereafter with Leopold Godowsky and Heinrich Bart in Berlin. While legend portrays him as a pedagogical innovator whose ideas were wholly personal and came totally from within, Neigauz's detailed investigations into piano technique allowed him to distil his ideas on the subject especially with respect to his obsession of optimising the conversion of energy of motion into musical energy. This process was governed by his all-pervasive philosophy that the best technical solution would find itself when the artistic goal is clear. See Kofman, *op. cit.*, 60.

and the musical ideas incorporated within it.²¹⁰ One of his most famous axioms was: “above all it is necessary to know *what* to play, and only then *how* to play”. For Neigauz, the formation of a performance style should be the result of observation, analysis, and comprehension of musical content.²¹¹

A fundamental aspect of Neigauz’s art of piano performance was made up of three basic elements: the music, the performer, and the instrument. It followed that in order to attain a required goal, the performer must first of all know the music, then know themselves, and then know the instrument. Neigauz contended that working on the musical form must be the first consideration, thereby imagining clearly what it is that one intends to play.²¹² Thereafter the teacher will be capable of providing the performing artist with the vital knowledge and impressions of the music. In addition, an enlightened teacher will be able to teach their students to hear and think properly.

In order to gain a more precise understanding of the concept behind a composition, Neigauz often used analogies from the fields of literature, poetry and painting.²¹³ His

²¹⁰ Neuhaus, The Art of Piano Playing (London: Kahn & Averill, 1993), 173.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

²¹² Nehaus (1993), *op. cit.*, 173-4.

²¹³ Heinrich Neuhaus, The Art of Piano Playing, trans. K. Leibovitch (London: Barne & Jenkins, 1973), 76. Neigauz believed that such a method could and should be used from the first lessons of a musically gifted child. Hence, once a child can play a simple melody, the facet of expression should be emphasised. Neigauz maintained that this was a good reason to support the use and benefit of standard folk songs for children to cultivate an appreciation for emotional and poetic ingredients. In addition to developing their emotional awareness by the use of such customary material, the added value is that it is also an uncomplicated prelude to the discrimination of tone quality.

reasoning behind such a methodology was that this means of studying a composition trains the student to view the piece with the eyes of an artist, in the broadest sense. Neigauz would typically use such extra-musical associations to communicate with students whose imaginations were not sufficiently awakened. In his opinion, using such stimuli would facilitate the creation of a musical idea or image in the mind of the student.²¹⁴ Of course, the use of such stimulus was dependent on the level of musical talent of the student. He contended that the more talented the musician was, the greater was their imagination and realisation of possibilities inherent in the music for translation into different images, sounds, and colours.²¹⁵ In the process of translation, Neigauz would stress the importance of the music itself, thereby advancing its comprehension and preparation for performance, and underlining the significance of cultivating a pianistic approach. [One should not play just as a musician, but precisely as a pianist. The hands must enter into the text.]²¹⁶

²¹⁴ See Iuliia Siskina, “Rabota nad khudozestvennym obrazom v klasse G.G. Neigauza,” in Muzykal’naia pedagogika: ispolnitel’stvo III (Moscow: Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi institut kul’tury, 1998), 174-183.

²¹⁵ Nikolaev (1961), *op. cit.*, 171 and 173. Neigauz proposed other formulae for improving artistic sensitivity in more advanced students which reveal parallels with the methods of Goldenweiser and Nikolaev. The first strategy is cultivating and improving aural perception by exposure to piano literature and intensive familiarity with the works of the same composer. The importance of memorization, comprehension of form, themes, and harmonic structure, should be stressed through systematic and methodological analysis of the score away from the instrument in an effort to develop an inner hearing. The third way is the use of metaphor, simile, natural phenomena, spiritual or emotional events in life. Neuhaus (1973), *op. cit.*, 76.

²¹⁶ “Играть надо не только как музыканту, но именно как пианисту. Надо, чтобы руки входили в текст.” Nikolaev (1961), *op. cit.*, 174.

Neigauz was very much against the old methods of education which prescribed that piano teaching should begin with the positioning of the hands and endless exercises.²¹⁷ He feared that such an approach would contribute to the pianist temporarily renouncing musical-artistic concerns by working on the elements that comprise the art form.²¹⁸ Instead, he believed that teaching technique should never be separated from real music.²¹⁹ Even in the playing of a few notes, a child must be trained to play them expressively. He asserted that all education of the pianist must be subordinated to problems of musical expression, beginning with the very first lessons. Therefore, Neigauz assigned an especially important place in the study of the pianist to working on *sound*.²²⁰

[It is necessary always to remember that music is an artistic process of sound which is flowing in time. Sound and time have a distinctive meaning in the creation of the musical image. The performer must have a mastery of sound, rhythm, dynamics and agogics...Sound is the matter from which music is made, its flesh- it must be the main component of our daily labours.]²²¹

While Neigauz attached a great deal of meaning specifically to the quality of sound, he was also careful to emphasise that sound is a means and not an end. In essence, a

²¹⁷ Neigauz saw exercises such as scales, arpeggios, five-step sequences, exercises for the development of octave technique, jumps, chords, and so on, as a 'half-finished' process.

²¹⁸ Nikolaev (1961), *op. cit.*, 179.

²¹⁹ In this respect, his chapter "On Technique" in *The Art of Piano Playing* is actually a revolution in methodology. See this chapter and an addendum to this chapter in Neuhaus (1993), *op. cit.*, 82-168.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

²²¹ "Надо всегда помнить, что музыка есть художественный звуковой процесс, протекающий во времени. Звук и время имеют определяющее значение в создании музыкального образа. Исполнитель должен владеть звуком, ритмом, динамикой и агогикой...Звук - это материя музыки, её плоть - должен быть главным содержанием наших повседневных трудов." Nikolaev (1961), *op. cit.*, 180.

beautiful sound is an appropriate sound, and, as such, dependent upon the substance and character of the musical composition.²²² Neigauz compelled his students to listen attentively to the smallest details with a watch in their hands, listening to the length of the sound from its beginning to its final fading-out. In this way, the pianist would grasp the importance of learning to listen to how sound is sustained in performance.

A large section of his book is also dedicated to rhythm, which, for Neigauz, was an intrinsic part of the success in artistic communication. He constantly compared musical rhythm with human speech, poetry, and poetic breath stating:

I have to admit, I perceive music (performance), which lacks a rhythmical core, logic of time and development in time, as musical noise. Musical speech in that case is mangled beyond recognition for me; it's just lost. The stringing of disjointed moments and hectic motions remind me of frantic movements of a seismograph, not the majestic ocean waves raised by a wind. Of two evils – rhythmical and non-rhythmical playing – I prefer the former. Of course, real, live, artistic and moving performance is equally removed from both of them.²²³

On the topic of fingering, Neigauz believed that the pianist proceeding from an understanding of the musical task and their own capabilities was best placed to offer the most suitable and comfortable fingering. He stated that the most ideal fingering is that which allows the pianist to reproduce a given piece with fidelity and precision in keeping with the style, spirit, and character of the work.²²⁴ [In this sense it is possible to

²²² Nikolaev (1961), *op. cit.*, 181.

²²³ Neuhaus (1993), *op. cit.*, 39. Neigauz constantly reminded students that a conductor is one of the performer's incarnations.

speak of the aesthetics of fingering, bearing in mind the fact that in art everything is subordinated to the laws of beauty.]²²⁵ Whilst the physical comfort of the hand is important, it should always be subordinated to the primary consideration of producing beauty.

His views on the pedal were derived directly from Rubinstein in that he advocated the use of the pedals as a means of enrichment and diversification in performance.²²⁶ For Neigauz, the foot should be trained to such a level so as to enable virtuoso motions similar to the hand. He was usually irritated by pedal notations, except for those made by a composer.²²⁷ In general, he commended students to listen often to celebrated professional pianists, learning how they played and particularly how they used the pedals.

In summary, the most portentous leitmotif which runs through the entire pedagogical work of Neigauz was that the first stage in the work of a teacher is the revelation to the student of the artistic substance of the composition and the means of implementing the

²²⁴ Neuhaus (1993), *op. cit.*, 141.

²²⁵ “В этом смысле можно говорить об эстетике аппликатуры, имея в виду, что в искусстве всё подчинено законам красоты.” Genrikh Neigauz, *Ob iskusstve fortepiannoi muzyki* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), 124. See also Isaak Zetel, “Die Aktualität der Schrift ‘Die Kunst des Klavierspiels’ von Heinrich Neuhaus,” in *Heinrich Neuhaus (1888-1964) zum 110 Geburtsjahr: Aspekte interkultureller Beziehung in Pianistik und Musikgeschichte zwischen dem östlichen Europa und Deutschland--Konferenzbericht Köln 23-26 Oktober 1998* (Sinzig: Studio-Verlag, 2000), who provides an account of the scale, scope, and influence of Neuhaus’s pedagogical ideas with particular focus on his seminal monograph which details these concepts.

²²⁶ Neuhaus (1993), *op. cit.*, 156.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

necessary artistic forms associated with it. This was his fundamental goal, and all other technical work, together with concepts of sound, phrasing, and performance considerations were to be subordinated to it.

CONCLUSION

The Russian Piano School can trace its genesis to the growing western European influence and presence in Russia in the eighteenth century. During this time, it had become customary for foreign musicians (especially Italian and German keyboardists) to tour Russia. The inclusion of Russia in such concert circuits inevitably planted a seed among the native talent. The tours also precipitated the breakdown of the monopoly on keyboard instruments by the aristocracy. This process eventually provided an attractive situation for foreign keyboardists to reside and work in Russia with the emergence of an increasing enthusiasm for the instrument and its repertoire together with a growing class of talented and artistically informed individuals. While Steibelt, Hessler, and von Henselt were the first among celebrated names to tread the path of Russian domicile, it was the Irish pianist-composer, John Field, who became the prime mover in the development of a distinctly Russian school of pianism. Field imported a new Romantic, salon style of pianism to Russia and promoted a then novel concept of technique at the service of music, all of which he learned during his studies with Clementi. Field's popularity was unparalleled and his style became infectious. His authority was reinforced by his long residence in Russia and also by those under his influence who

came after him such as Thalberg, Clara Schumann, and perhaps most significantly by his Russian pupil, Glinka, among many others.

Diametrically opposed to the sensitive and unpretentious musicianship displayed by Field, Liszt introduced a flamboyance and dramatic virtuosity which had not previously been experienced in the country during his Russian tour of 1840. Liszt's style had an equally galvanizing effect on Russian audiences and musicians alike. He also foresaw that "Germany and France had had their say in music, and that everything new must perforce come from Russia."²²⁸ But the survival of an incipient and new Russian pianism was dependent upon a figure who could successfully unite the opposing stylistic trends. The emergence of Anton Rubinstein, a pianistic talent who was able to achieve this amalgamation with relative ease, represents a revolution in the forging of a conspicuously Russian brand of pianism. Rubinstein was also cognizant of the fact that the survival of a Russian musical tradition depended upon education. His founding of the St. Petersburg Conservatory marked the initial solidification of a Russian stylistic imprint. His artistic philosophy together with his advocacy for the status of a musician within Russia helped to raise the profile and authority of the institution and professional artists.

Nikolai Rubinstein was the ideal candidate to further his brother's mission in Moscow.

Like his brother, Nikolai's authority was predicated on a combination of supreme

²²⁸ See Alexander Siloti, "My Memories of Liszt," in Remembering Franz Liszt, ed. Mark Grant (New York: Limelight Editions, 1986), 367.

pianistic talent and rare pedagogical gift. In founding the Conservatories, the Rubinsteins signaled the end of the dominance of foreign professional musicians in Russia. Together with Leszetycki, they represent the founding fathers of Russian pianism as it is known today, and worked tirelessly to develop and nurture native talent to the point where their mission could be carried forward.

While the Rubinsteins introduced significant technical developments in piano playing through their pedagogical efforts, their more distinguished contribution lay in the tenets of their teaching philosophy. It was their belief that great artistic success could be attained not necessarily by the most brilliant performer, but usually by the person who possessed the most developed emotional intellect, the performer whose emotional palette was most rich and varied.²²⁹ In accordance with this premise, there were two fundamental methods for educating a person in the skills of artistic reasoning and playing. The first method, perhaps familiar to every pedagogue, concerned the nurturing and development of a student's consciousness as the primary means of formation.²³⁰ This is achieved through different processes, for example, the direct influence of the pedagogue (through demonstrations, explanations, and remarks) and/or by listening to recordings of other performers. The second method is significant for its

²²⁹ Shul'piakov, *op. cit.*, 21. Henceforth, whenever Russian pedagogues or performance musicologists addressed the mental profile of a musician, it was considered necessary to note the interrelation of the emotional and intellectual spheres.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

successful solution to the question of motivation.²³¹ The more a musician can observe concrete results during their lessons, the greater the significance of the learning process and therefore the greater probability that a particular student will persevere.²³²

In summarizing the Rubinstein approach to forming an artistic concept, technique itself serves not only as a means of expression, but as an instrument of musical discovery and thus as a coauthor of the artistic process. It follows that unique musical thought will proceed only when a performer thinks through the technique, achieving a union between physical action and the intellectual process.²³³ Subsequently, to achieve an original and complete conception of a piece, it is necessary to create a stimulating pedagogical approach which is able to extract the unique abilities of the performer. The organization of musical thought for a performer is characterized by the following key skills: the ability to perceive the contents and form of a work; the ability to develop an individual performative conception; the ability to express technical variants in the interpretation of a piece; and the ability to make spontaneous artistic decisions whilst consciously controlling the form and contents in performance.

²³¹ Shul'piakov, *op. cit.*, 29.

²³² *Ibid.*, 34. Carl Flesch wrote that “выработка любого двигательного навыка, в том числе художественного мастерства, - есть не что иное, как отработка управляемости по этому навыку” [the formation of any motor skill, including that of artistic mastery—is nothing more than learning how to control that skill.] See Carl Flesch, *Iskusstvo skripichnoi igry* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1964), 211.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 34.

Rubinstein did not limit the understanding of the work to a literal rendition of the score. Rather, he held a much wider understanding of interpretation and stated that [artistic conception of a piece encompasses the whole, comprising concrete historical, artistic, and other connections and relations, including social constructs.]²³⁴ As such, a certain artistic logic, which must be rendered correctly to ensure an accurate representation of the composer's intentions, is an innate property of every musical score.²³⁵ The primary task of the performer-interpreter then is in the discovery of subtexts within the structure of the piece. The implication here is that the 'hidden meaning' in this situation serves as a means of utilizing the experience, emotions, and impressions of the performer to enhance the interpretative act.²³⁶

The reading of a work's content is thus linked with the independence of the performer. This was a virtue promoted with particular fervor by the Rubinsteins and carried right through to present day Russian pianism.²³⁷ In the formation of a student, it was deemed

²³⁴ “художественная концепция сочинения есть в целом, включая конкретные исторические, художественные и прочие связи и отношения, в том числе и социальные.” Vladimir Grigor'ev, “Spetsifika ispolnitel'skogo tvorchestva i rabota nad muzykal'nym proizvedeniem,” in Aktual'nye voprosy strunno-smychkovoï pedagogiki (Novosibirsk: Muzyka, 1987), 28.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Shul'piakov, *op. cit.*, 11. Shul'piakov contends that the possibility of a comprehensive and profound reading of a work of art lies not only in the general level of professional preparation of the performer, but is also intimately linked with the richness and brilliance of the added esthetic impressions, emotional and life experience, and the presence of a musical intuition.

²³⁷ When the noted pedagogue, Boris Gutnikov, was asked how he measured the level of independence of a student and their preparation for a performance of a particular work, he offered the following three criteria: 1) the depth of emotion in the thought and representation of the contents of the music; 2) the clarity and precision of the student's intentions; and 3) the freedom and naturalness of each technical action. Boris Gutnikov, Ob iskusstve skripichnoi igry (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1988), 37.

advisable that the task of interpretation should not be undertaken independently but with the guidance of an experienced pedagogue. In the art of performance, there must be an intellectual beginning, or point of conception. Without this it is not possible to understand the expression of the piece, nor is it possible to provide a corresponding esthetic picture. On this point, Leopold Auer wrote that the main goal of musical performance was to make playing lively and expressive to the point where the intentions of the composer are clearly understood.²³⁸ In conclusion, Russian thought on interpretation in music emphasizes primarily the artist's thought through a musical work, and the degree of freedom and sincerity in its transmission to an audience.²³⁹

Their disciples, all of whom achieved renown in their own right as pianists-pedagogues, never strayed far from the foundational principles set forth by the Rubinstein's and Leszetycki. Taneev, Pabst, Safonov, and Esipova continued the legacy and reinforced the distinctiveness of Russian pianism in the process. The most prominent students of the first generation of pupils, Igumnov, Goldenweiser, Nikolaev, and Neigauz, also adhered to the defining principles of Russian pianism, although they were compelled to update defining Russian characteristics to accord with the all-pervasive Soviet doctrine. In the final analysis, while many Russian pianists may embody the individuality so

²³⁸ Leopold Auer, Moia shkola igry na skripke: interpretatsiia proizvedenii skripichnoi klassiki (Moscow: Muzyka, 1965), 15. Auer (1845-1930), was a Hungarian violinist who was invited by Anton Rubinstein to teach at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. He remained there for forty-nine years and became something of an institution himself. He was a favoured chamber music partner of Anton Rubinstein and Anna Esipova, and was a dedicatee of, and premiered many works by, Russia's foremost composers of the time.

²³⁹ Gutnikov, *op. cit.*, 38.

enshrined and promoted by the founders of the tradition and hence be rather dissimilar in performance style to each other, the shadow of Anton Rubinstein's towering influence on stylistic, interpretative, technical, and conceptual ideas proved to be immense and inescapable. Nevertheless, Rubinstein certainly would not endorse a piano tradition celebrating the notion of pianistic clones. Indeed, Dimtri Shostakovich's very apt comment on the pedagogical style of his teacher, Leonid Nikolaev, could, in many respects, be applied to a greater or lesser degree to all major Russian pianist-pedagogues surveyed beginning with the Rubinstein:

he trained not simply pianists, but in the first place thinking musicians. He didn't create a school in the specific sense of some single narrow professional direction. He shaped and nurtured a broad aesthetic trend in the sphere of pianistic art.²⁴⁰

And it is in this sense that the achievements of Rubinstein in providing the situation and environment for Russian pianism to mature should be recognised.

²⁴⁰ Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18. See also Dmitrii Shostakovich, "Muzyka i vremia: Zametki kompozitora," in *Muzyka i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1976), 11.

CHAPTER 2

Skryabin plays Symbolist motifs

The principles of the Russian Piano School were transmitted to Skryabin through his studies with Zverev and Safonov. The major characteristics of the new Russian performing style, however, were exacerbated and transformed in the pianism of Skryabin, mixing with an equally intense and personal aesthetic. It is this intersection that I will examine, for Skryabin initially addressed his compositional output to colleagues and hence was not compelled to transcribe all the nuances of its components. Skryabin's scores spoke to contemporary interpreters because of their acquaintance with how he perceived music and how he believed his ideas should be translated into sound. Thus, a rapport between inventor and interpreter subsisted within the paradigm of a collaborative practice.¹ The performance markings especially became more ambiguous and the translation of the genuine design of his works became more complicated as soon as the conventional norms were altered by the underlying ideology. The affinity between composer and interpreter, however, soon dissipated. Today we need to re-examine as much evidence as possible in order to form a complete and clear picture as to how Skryabin intended his music to be realised. McDonald states, "we need to take seriously not the meanings and ideas which Skryabin attributed to his music, but the very fact that he thought in this way, and that he constructed [and performed] his music

¹ Joanna Goldstein, *A Beethoven Enigma: Performance Practice and the Piano Sonata, Op. 111* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 1. That is to say performers of Skryabin's music in the composer's lifetime were aware of the significance and relationship of his aesthetic considerations to the interpretative act.

with such notions in his head.”² Thus, I shall first outline this aesthetic and subsequently demonstrate its interaction with Skryabin’s pianism.

AN ECLECTIC AESTHETIC

Skryabin’s spirit was swayed most by the Russian Symbolist movement as it was portrayed in poetry and literature during the Russian Silver Age. Skryabin’s aesthetic is, however, much more complex. Symbolism might be said to be the prime and governing ingredient of an eclectic philosophy that propelled his music, with the theosophical postulations, mythological references, Eastern influences, all being derived from Symbolist thought.³ I believe that given the complexity and uniqueness of his language, Skryabin’s music requires a special performative approach which cannot be formulated independently of his philosophical ideas. I shall now proceed to outline some of these ideas prior to an examination of Skryabin as piano student and professional pianist.

Skryabin’s ability to maintain his Russian identity⁴ and yet distance himself sufficiently

² Hugh Macdonald, “Words and Music by A. Skryabin,” The Musical Times 113 (1972): 22.

³ Malcolm Brown, “Scriabin and Russian ‘Mystic’ Symbolism,” 19th Century Music 3.1 (July 1979): 42. Brown justifiably contends that the ‘Symbolist’ movement (initially connected with poetry), that arose around the same time and exerted a considerable influence on art in Russia had a more profound impact on the development of Skryabin’s personal aesthetic than theosophy or other concepts. According to Brown, Skryabin was able to find a cohesive and cogent expression of his philosophical, mystical, and religious thought in the work of the Russian Symbolists. Brown identifies two dominant strands within this movement, the first being the formalist approach as championed by Briusov. This method defended the notion of ‘poetry as the primary aim of poetry’. The second current was identified as the embodiment of the mystical precepts of Vladimir Solov’ev. This position, which reflected the religious/theological nature of art was expressed in the work of the poet-mystic, Viacheslav Ivanov. Ivanov’s relationship with Skryabin was evidently close and therefore it is plausible to assume that Skryabin adopted some of his own theories from those of Ivanov. See also Avril Pyman, A History of Russian Symbolism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 187 and Olga Tompakova, Skriabin i poety serebriannogo veka: Viacheslav Ivanov (Moscow: Iris Press, 1995), 5-6.

⁴ In defining Skryabin’s “Russianness” I do not refer here to folksong borrowings or an invocation of popular concepts such as plagalism among other ideas that have become synonymous with

from his contemporaries in order to create a new and unique language was the quality that fuelled his stardom. In this respect, his relationship to the Russian musical tradition was essentially that of a foreigner but one whose course was shaped by its history.⁵ It is in this sense also that such a peculiar talent could hardly have prospered in any other cultural milieu than Russia. Bowers confirms that “without any question Scriabin was the most unusual composer ever nurtured on Russian soil. He was, however, and is still enveloped in clouds of contention, vast mists of misunderstanding.”⁶

Skryabin’s philosophical predilections further distinguished him from his contemporaries.⁷ It was after *Le Poème de l’extase* (1905-08), when his music and ideas of philosophy became interdependent features and were manifested in the formulation of a unique language within the frame of conventional structures.⁸ The central thrust of this new ideology was the all-pervading idea of the *Mysterium*, an unrealised work that was predicated on the transmission of his brand of mysticism (to be defined below)

the identification of “Russianness” in Russian music. Instead, I refer to the concept of the tragic Russian soul, as Frovlova-Walker terms it, which encapsulates traits of mysteriousness, contemplativeness, extremism, and the willingness to sacrifice form versus content. See Marina Frovlova-Walker, “On ‘Ruslan’ and Russianness,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9.1 (March 1997): 33. Also see Martin Cooper, “Aleksandr Skryabin and the Russian Renaissance,” *Studi musicali* 1 (1972): 327-56, and Richard Taruskin, “Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 3.4 (Autumn, 1984): 328.

⁵ Leonid Sabaneev, *Modern Russian Composers* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1927), 40. See also Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), for additional sources and insight into Skryabin’s relationship to the canon. Irina Nikol’skaia also makes the point that Skryabin was accorded little respect in comparison with mainstream Russian composers. See Irina Nikol’skaia, “K Izucheniiu nasledii A.N. Skriabina: samyi luchezyarnyi iz tvortsov,” *Muzykal’naia akademiia* 4 (1993): 168.

⁶ Fabion Bowers, *Scriabin* (Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International Ltd., 1969), 76.

⁷ It is important here to emphasise that the innovations lie in the later works; Skryabin’s early works, in contrast, bear the direct influence of Chopin, Liszt, and others.

⁸ Rollo Myers, “Scriabin: A Reassessment,” *The Musical Times* xcvi (1957): 17.

through music and which essentially described and then aspired to enact the unification of humanity. The mystic aesthetic was one he embraced whole-heartedly and it became the means by which his persona was transformed. The mystical ideal also encompassed the realisation of ecstasy through the medium of sound together with a pantheistic religiosity, all of which were spurred by a rebellious individualism.⁹

Skryabin believed that his role in life was preordained and, as such, essential for the sanctification and salvation of humanity which he sought to unite on earth.¹⁰ This effected a striving for perfection in form and clarity in execution which became traits of the artist.¹¹ Skryabin was able to propitiate the paradoxical and illogical elements associated with his philosophy by delving into the field of psychology, which made his “prophetic visions” plausible and gave credence to the view that much spirituality cannot be reasoned. He would often state: “as a rationalist you cannot understand what I have to say,”¹² which allowed him to say anything.

Around the time he composed *Le Poème de l'extase* Op. 54, there appeared a noticeable shift in his philosophical musings. With the composition of this work, Skryabin assumed a new and significant role in a grand design as its initial formulator. A

⁹ Boris de Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 32. On the various stages of Skryabin's career, see Ivanov's 1919 speech, quoted in Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Skryabin progressed from worshipping music (*Symphony No.1*), to viewing himself as a figure to be worshipped (*Prométhée*), to seeking to enact, rather than represent cosmic conflagration (*Mysterium*).

¹⁰ Martin Cooper, “Scriabin's Mystical Beliefs,” *Music and Letters* xvi (1935): 112.

¹¹ Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, 45.

¹² de Schloezer, *op. cit.*, 62.

selective choice of theosophical writings was used to justify his pivotal role.¹³ States of ecstasy also came to possess different implications. Ecstasy was previously a temporary, human experience for Scriabin, one that had a defined beginning and end. It was also limited by the human ego which controlled it and was, as such, a self-conscious, unrefined, and turbulent feeling. This was duly supplanted by a cosmic experience where an eternal state of peace could be achieved. A cosmic ecstasy would be realised upon union with the deific or at the point of dematerialization where a process of cleansing and refinement of the soul is also achieved. It is a delicate, cultivated, and intangible sensation, devoid of any self-conscious feeling. While the moment of cosmic ecstasy is characterised by annihilation and shattering, its function is unified through the indefinable infiniteness of the cosmos. The text for the *Le Poème de l'extase* reflects this change in thought when it refers to a unified spirit and to a deity created in the image of man.¹⁴ The aspect of self-cognition and the understanding of consciousness were extensively developed, and models were constructed to illustrate the related psychological experience. As de Schloezer states:

such sentiments were completely at odds with Scriabin's early philosophy, in which all states of being were reduced to their relationship to other states of being. The divergence continued for a number of years, until Scriabin, intolerant of disharmony, finally realized that it was impossible to formulate a vast religio-philosophical system on the foundation of phenomenalism and relativism. It was then that he began to add building stones to this foundation. These new elements, however, did not alter the essential character and general spirit of Scriabin's concept of states of being, the

¹³ In addition to Blavatsky's seminal works (see text on page 7), the theosophists had a "canon" of central works, some of them dealing with sound (music) and image (art). *Thought-Forms*, a book published in 1901 by Besant and Leadbeater had an enormous impact on Scriabin. *Thought-Forms* was a key text for Scriabin (as it was for Kandinsky in art and for Andrei Bely in prose). See Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought Forms* (London: Theosophical House, 1901).

¹⁴ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, 26-27.

objective of which remained the achievement of blissful ecstasy in the ultimate union of all in all.¹⁵

By 1906, however, Skryabin began another search to find a truer identity, a path that he could call his own. Around this time he came under the influence of Sergei Troubetzkoy,¹⁶ Vladimir Solov'ev,¹⁷ and the Russian socialist Georgii Plekhanov.¹⁸ It was these Russians who informed Skryabin that his *Mysterium* could find a common denominator in theosophy.¹⁹

Skryabin's readings in theosophy were broad and extended to a preoccupation with such Eastern religions as Brahmanism and Buddhism.²⁰ His research culminated in finding a

¹⁵ de Schloezer, *op. cit.*, 207-8.

¹⁶ See Malcolm Brown, *op.cit.*, 43, for a more detailed explanation of the teachings of Troubetzkoy and for his relationship with Skryabin.

¹⁷ Skryabin first acquaintance with Solov'ev was through the latter's concept of "Vse-Edinstvo" (a reference to a reunion of the world of physical matter with the Spirit of God) which Skryabin was to borrow and repackage as his "Vse-Iskusstvo."

¹⁸ de Schloezer, *op. cit.*, 66. It was Plekhanov who called Skryabin a great mystic and example of idealism. See Olga Tompakova, "Idu skazat' liudiam, chto oni sil'ny i moguchi," *Muzykal'naia akademiia* 4 (1993): 182. It was also through Plekhanov's influence that Skryabin first became acquainted with the writings of Karl Marx and the social and political ramifications of his dogmas, which subsequently was the catalyst for his exploration into theosophy.

¹⁹ Tatiana Rybakova, *Marina Tsvetaeva i dom A.N. Skriabina* (Moscow: Iris Press, 1994), 23. The comprehension of the *Mysterium* idea is imperative for a fully conscious examination of his late works. Indeed, this abstruse focus was not arbitrary or a mere fanciful representation, but an attempt to personify, actualise, and consummate a universal rather than personal instance of ecstasy. The means to communicate this goal was originally connected with a theatrical display and representation of a type of nirvana or new age. During the formulation of ideas, however, Skryabin began to elicit and observe contradictions between theatre and dramatic representations. The most glaring paradox concerned the separation of actors and audience that would impede the audience's appreciation of sensation. Skryabin desired equal participation in an effort to advance the universal ecstatic experience. See Simon Morrison, "Skryabin and the Impossible," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51.2 (1998): 284. Note also the paradox of designating "actors" in such a "freely" communal event.

²⁰ Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, 48.

counterpart in the writings of Madame Blavatsky.²¹ Her two-volume work *La Doctrine secrète* and *La Clef de la théosophie* became Skryabin's Bible.²² From this he was able to borrow terms and ascribe new meanings to them which in turn enabled him to move further away from recognised Romanticism-influenced strictures and formulate his own theories to be outlined in due course. This move gradually became identified with solipsism and metaphysical nihilism which lead him to state that all things are derived from his conception and creation.²³

Skryabin referred to the writings of Blavatsky to justify the production of the *Mysterium* over a period of seven days in accordance with the number of races in the human species.²⁴ Gradually, the plan to stage such an event exceeded the practical and took on a more metaphorical if not spiritual context. Morrison explains:

the ideal of the *Mysterium* yielded to a *Preparatory Act*, which in turn yielded to a partial libretto, the musical sketches, and then silence altogether.

²¹ See Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia 1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²² The acquaintance with these theosophical writings promptly displaced Nietzschean philosophy as his principal preoccupation. Skryabin took copious notes, filling pads with philosophical, largely disconnected, writings, and a beguiling poem, *Poema ekstaza*, became the foundation of his subsequent orchestral works as well as of his Fifth Sonata. The works for piano from Opp. 44-57 initiated a unique style which paved the way for the single-movement *Le poème de l'extase* for orchestra, completed in 1908 and first performed that year in New York.

²³ Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, 45. It was precisely from this time and with this preoccupation of thought that the roots of the *Mysterium* were formed.

²⁴ The *Seven Races* doctrine which also greatly appealed to him during this time describes a certain phase in the evolution of human's spiritual life, in which the history of the races becomes a history of the human psyche, which acquire senses and desires vested in the flesh and then gradually denudes itself, abandoning its belongings and returning to the simplicity of the primordial oneness. The seven-day and seven-night duration of the *Mysterium* communicates Blavatsky's view, which is based on Buddhism and Hinduism tenets, that human beings, the Universe, and the course of history are structured in septuple units. It was during this period of his acquaintance with Blavatsky that Skryabin formulated the content and subject matter of the *Mysterium*, which he understood as a history of the races of man and of individual consciousness or, more accurately, as an evolutionary psychology of the human races. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 300-1, for a fuller exposition of the concepts related to this topic.

Each phase symbolized the theurgic ideal, the noumenal entity beyond phenomena, but each was an acknowledgement that the ideal was unachievable within the realm of human experience...By not completing the *Preparatory Act*, Skryabin was able to retain his object-cause of desire: the vision of utopia that preoccupied and sustained the mystic Symbolists. In the end, the outlandish subject matter, antique references, and familiar Wagnerian precepts could not hide the fundamental paradoxes and inconsistencies of Skryabin's ideas.²⁵

Thus, the search for an adequate mode of expression for his ideas never ended.

Skryabin was constantly refining his positions to accord with the innovations of his music.²⁶ As such it might have been inevitable that Skryabin's major aesthetic foray, developing alongside the aforementioned concepts, was mostly connected with the genre of poetry, which underwent its own revolutionary transformation in Russia through the influence of French Symbolism.²⁷ Symbolists believed that art should aim to capture more absolute truths which could only be accessed by indirect methods. Thus, they wrote in a highly metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. Skryabin's connection with Symbolism is

²⁵ Morrison, *op. cit.*, 326-7.

²⁶ Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, 51.

²⁷ See Tompakova (1995), *op. cit.*, 5-6. In a general sense, French Symbolism was a major source of influence on the attempts of Russian poets at the turn of the 20th century to make their poetry more "musical". This effect is especially apparent with poets of the first "decadent" generation of Russian Symbolism such as Konstantin Bal'mont, Valerii Briusov, and Innokentii Annenskii. The inspiration of French Symbolism encouraged experiments with "free verse" among the Russian Symbolist poets (especially Valerii Briusov) and initiated the development of *dol'nik* (a tonic meter which combines two- and three-syllabic meters that was to become very popular). In terms of phonetics, Russian Symbolists experimented with and widely used assonances and alliterations to make their poems sound like musical pieces. The influence of Verlaine and Mallarme on Briusov (who translated them and thought a lot about the musicality of poetry and the sounds of certain word combinations) is very transparent. All this notwithstanding, the two languages had different systems of versification (syllabic vs. syllabo-tonic) and, of course, different sounds registers. Interestingly, one French innovation that had almost no impact in Russia was the *vers libre*. By and large, Russian poets preferred to write metric and rhymed poetry, and have continued to do so until recently. See Victor Erlich, "Russian Poets in Search of a Poetics", *Comparative Literature* 4.1 (Winter, 1952): 54-74, Georgette Donchin, "French Influence on Russian Symbolist Versification," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 33.80 (December 1954): 161-187, and Georgette Donchin, *The Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1958).

emphasised by Tompakova who writes that:

[in the literature on Skryabin, there is a fairly stable opinion that his ideas were derived from the creativity and aesthetics of Russian poetic symbolism, represented by – D. Merezhkovskii, K. Bal'mont, V. Ivanov, V. Briusov, J. Baltrushaitis, A. Belyi – with whom he was a close friend and entered into a creative contacts.]²⁸

At the core of the Symbolist movement was an intrinsic paradox that emanated from the desire to voice personal convictions even if they were impossible to realise. Thoughts were communicated implicitly with layers of allegory deliberately distorting the message.²⁹ In essence, the written word did not accurately portray the inner encounter. The Symbolists strove to reconcile this paradox through worded expression of opinions together with the application of the innate standard logic of word-concepts to symbolic notions.³⁰

The notion of creativity for the Symbolist was split into two Nietzschean elements:

²⁸ “В литературе о Скрябине существует довольно устойчивое мнение о том, что его идеи были почерпнуты им из творчества и эстетики русского поэтического символизма, с представителями которого – Д. Мережковским, К. Бальмонтом, Вяч. Ивановым, В. Брюсовым, Ю. Балтрушайтисом, А. Белым – он был близко знаком и даже входил в творческие контакты.” Tompakova (1993), *op. cit.*, 181.

Sabaneev also stated that Skryabin had a special interest in, respect and liking for the Symbolist poet, Konstantin Bal'mont. See Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine* (Moscow: Muzykal'nyi Sektor, 1925), 166. Tompakova goes further to state that both artists had the same understanding and ideas regarding Symbolist philosophy and the divinity of man, absolute will, and freedom. In both their creations one can find the representation of the light and darkness of the cosmos, energy of the sun, and flames. These congruencies can be observed in the likeness of Bal'mont's poetry about the sun and representation of flames which is directly related to Skryabin's *Prométhée* and *Vers la flamme*. See Olga Tompakova, *Skriabin i poety serebriannogo veka: Konstantin Bal'mont* (Moscow: Iris Press, 1995), 7.

²⁹ Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), 956.

³⁰ Language expresses culture through its inherent logic, however, it also eschews the genuinely symbolic or fictitious even though it is the only means capable of ascertaining the veracity of the stated viewpoint. See Ronald Peterson, *The Russian Symbolists* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 144.

Apollo (feminine) and Dionysus (masculine).³¹ These two inclinations are not so much divided by difference as they are indivisible and jointly manifested in every authentic work of art where their duality can be perceived. Skryabin attempted to portray the Masculine-Feminine union which he “depicted in the aural realm, rather than the visual realm, through a transposition of vocal registers, exchanges of instrumental and vocal sounds, and graphic crescendo effects.”³² The inherent difficulty associated with giving expression to Symbolist concepts, however, was the lack of a vocabulary. In the absence of a special language there could only be hints which were to suggest to the listener that which was not expressible in words. Thus, Symbolism accumulated a unique dialect with distinctive connotations only comprehended by those within the movement. This fortified the position of Symbolist artists as custodians and ambassadors of communication, for they were believed to communicate with the gods and were respected for their interpretation of the divine message.³³ In this respect, the Symbolist was actually seen as an emissary and intermediary between the gods and the mortal beings of earth,³⁴ and, as such, was confirmed as being inherently religious. This also effected an outlook that became increasingly nihilistic in its views of society, symbiotic in its desires, and intellectually degenerate.³⁵

³¹ Pyman, *op. cit.*, 239.

³² Morrison, *op. cit.*, 305. “From Sabaneyev, we know that Skryabin sought to use all of these devices to depict the synthesis of the Masculine and Feminine Principles.”

³³ Pyman, *op. cit.*, 332.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵ Pyman, *op. cit.*, 15. This was somewhat surprising given the fact that authentic Russian Symbolism had its foundation in Tiutchev’s rebellion opposing the swell of nonconformist materialism.

Symbolism brought to light two important movements, the first of which portrayed cognition as it was revealed to the artist. This was characterised by the forgetfulness of the distinction between the permissible and impermissible. The other movement was characterised by its optimism, by a certain air of confidence and nonchalance.

Symbolism neither wanted to be nor could be identified as only art. It desired, as a movement, to identify with the struggles of Russian society, to experience and inculcate the same suffering.³⁶

Skryabin's adoption of Symbolist tenets also embraced a concept of music as an omni-art analogous to Wagner's idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, although the re-establishment of unity was not his main purpose, as it was in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*.³⁷ Skryabin's vision of the all-encompassing art included not only music and drama, but called for an assault on all the senses. This sensory assault included colour, perfumes, sounds and words, and movement that were to be integrated into a meaningful whole and were to be perceived in counterpoint.³⁸ In his view, sounds had no separate existence from colours

³⁶ Pyman, *op. cit.*, 3. For this reason, many artists digressed in their application of true Symbolist characteristics due to its rigour and the pressure of its traditions. This led some of these into new movements of less constraint, which also provided less contradictions and more freedom to express. The artists who remained allegiant to the authentic tradition, however, were left to reconcile and appropriate the duality of fantasy versus reality. The main impediment to a total reconciliation, as viewed by the Symbolists, was that all attempts appeared to distort the nature of lyrical poetry.

³⁷ Sabaneev (1925), *op. cit.*, 42. Also see Tatiana Kiuregian, "Aleksandr Skriabin – nash sovremennik: pervovestnik svetozvuka," *Muzykal'naia akademiia* 2 (2002): 1, and footnote 15 which mentions Skryabin's borrowing of Solov'ev's "Vse-Edinstvo". Wagner's most celebrated feat was described by Ivanov as the liberation of the collective (*sobornyi*) element of music theatre. Ivanov asserts that Wagner offered his listeners a recreative and progressive function in the realisation of his aspirations. Ivanov regrets, however, that the assembly could only envision, as opposed to create, his musical dramas.

³⁸ Michael Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1944), 85.

(synaesthesia), images, or concepts.³⁹ Skryabin's idea was to bring about a synthesis, to define a polyphony of the arts within the confines of a homogeneous structure. The various mediums would function as contrapuntal voices. The aesthetic of such a work implied a writing methodology akin to a symphonic score in which the compositional process was conceptualized simultaneously with respect to all the components.

As previously stated, in addition to an enhanced Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Skryabin also appropriated the attraction of Russian Symbolists to mysticism. Mysticism is essentially a multi-dimensional experience which manifests itself in myriad ways. All mystics, however, share certain traits; notably, a desire to comprehend and translate the nature of the supreme deity through the mode of contemplation. The fruits of contemplation on this level are revealed in states of heightened ecstasy. These revelations usually spur intensified activity or, as is the case with other mystics, is commonly seen as an end in itself which, in the interim, increases the desire and longing for subsequent ecstatic visions.⁴⁰

In attempting to connect their poetry with a new fascination for mysticism, Valerii Briusov, for instance, established for himself the reputation of a Magian, experimented widely with psychotropic substances and alcohol (as did Konstantin Bal'mont), and apparently attended spiritual seances which were in vogue in *fin-de-siècle* Russia. Further, in 1909, Andrei Belyi and Viacheslav Ivanov were both involved with a group

³⁹ For a sophisticated discussion of Skryabin's synaesthesia see Kiuregian, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁴⁰ See Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 253.

of self-proclaimed mystics organised by the charismatic, influential, and mesmeric Anna Mintslova. In general, the Symbolists were mystically attuned through the work of Solov'ev and his doctrine regarding Sofia, which exerted a great influence on the work of Belyi and Blok.⁴¹ Viacheslav Ivanov, in turn, devoted many years of his life to the study of Ancient Greek culture -- especially the cult of the Dionysus and Eleusinian mysteries. The notion of theurgy, borrowed from the writings of Solov'ev, was also important and widely discussed by Russian Symbolists. In addition, the relationship between Symbolism and mysticism gave rise to a new sect of mystical anarchists founded by the minor Symbolist, Georgii Chulkov.⁴²

Indeed, one of the most enduring and distinguishing features of Skryabin's music is its association and preoccupation with mysticism.⁴³ Skryabin's mysticism, which permeated his entire philosophy and necessarily affected his musical language, was characterised by his desire to explain, demonstrate, and embody the nature of the Divine. This propelled him to act with a degree of urgency in an effort to realise his dynamic visions through his artistic creations. Thus, it is well evidenced that his mystical proclivities inspired his compositional designs. The influence of Nietzsche in

⁴¹ See Solovyov, Lectures on Divine Humanity ed. Boris Jakim (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 1995), for an introduction to the concept of "Godmanhood," and Judith Kornblatt and Richard Gustafson (eds.), Russian Religious Thought (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

⁴² On the subject of occultism, see Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia," in The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture ed. Bernice Rosenthal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 135-152. Also useful as background reading on this topic are the articles discussing Aleksandr Blok in Russian Literature and Its Demons ed. Pamela Davidson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

⁴³ Alexander Brent-Smith, "Some Reflections on the work of Scriabin," The Musical Times 67.1001 (July 1926): 694. See also the discussion of Andrei Bandura, "Skriabin i novaia nauchnaia paradigma XX veka," Muzykal'naia akademiia 4 (1993): 176, and Myers, *op. cit.*, 17.

formulating Skryabin's brand of mysticism is conspicuous, even if the Nietzschean position was arguably closer to Skryabin during his later solipsistic period.⁴⁴ The most striking aspect of Nietzsche that Skryabin adopted was the principle concerning the significance of art in man's redemption, together with the aforementioned Apollo-Dionysus binary.⁴⁵ This ideology was born out of a romantic world-view which was predominant at the time and permeated Skryabin's creative output.

Skryabin's fixation on eroticism and sensuality is also intrinsic to most mystical traditions. His inclinations in this regard, however, greatly differed from the norm. Mystics in general are aroused erotically by their images with a concept of love that is holy.⁴⁶ Skryabin, however, displays his penchant for the erotic in terms of a conqueror who seeks sexually to liberate society.⁴⁷ The partial attributes of Skryabin's mysticism

⁴⁴ David Ewen, *The World of Twentieth-Century Music* (London: Robert Hale, 1966), 710. See also Morrison, *op. cit.*, 287. The Symbolist poet, Baltrusaitis was enamoured of Skryabin's attempt to marry the Nietzschean aesthetic with theosophy and his desire to express this unity through the 'Dionysian' language of music. Mitchell Morris has investigated specifically the appropriation of Nietzschean principles by Skryabin. See his dissertation "Musical Eroticism and the Transcendent Strain: The Works of Alexander Skryabin, 1898-1908," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1998).

⁴⁵ Herbert Antcliffe, "The Significance of Scriabin," *The Musical Quarterly* x (1924): 340.

⁴⁶ William James characterized mystical experience by four marks: transiency, passivity, poetic quality, and ineffability. Perhaps we should add a fifth, that mystical experiences often, perhaps characteristically, involve what is now called an 'altered state of consciousness' -- trance, visions, suppression of cognitive contact with the ordinary world, loss of usual distinction between subject and object, weakening or loss of the sense of the self, etc...Not all religious experience is mystical and not every mystical experience [is religious, although] much of this mystical experience is taken to be religiously significant by the subject.^a

^aGeorge Mavrodes, "Mysticism," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 599.

⁴⁷ Cooper, *op. cit.*, 110. *Le Poème Divin* is the first overtly erotic piece of music. The second movement 'Vohuptes' seeks to portray not only a spiritual but a physical sensation as well. In Scriabin's words: "I want to take the world like I take a woman." Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography*, 2 vols., (New York: Dover Publications, 1996), II: 54. See also Kenneth Smith, "'Desire and the Drives': A New

are revealed in the remarkable uniqueness of his musical compositions.

In combining all the various aesthetic elements outlined above, Skryabin required an organizational system which could facilitate the musical translation of such dense philosophical concepts. He found this system through the musical representation of states of ecstasy.⁴⁸ As de Schloezer writes:

Scriabin associated this [eclectic] philosophy of life with the specific structure of his major works, which to him represented a series of gradual expansions systematically and logically evolving in the direction of a final ecstasy. Indeed, all of Scriabin's works...are built according to a uniform succession of states--languor, longing, impetuous striving, dance, ecstasy, and transfiguration. This outline is basically simple; it is built on a series of upswings, with each successive wave rising higher and higher toward a final effort, liberation, and ecstasy.⁴⁹

In the final analysis, the nature of Skryabin's cosmogony was inextricably linked to a religious view of the purpose of all art. The religious aspect of art was regarded as the source of power and justification for the varied artistic creations and innovations imbued

Analytical Approach to the Harmonic Language of Alexander Skryabin," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Durham, 2009), for a specific discussion of this subject.

⁴⁸ Boris de Schloezer, *A. Skriabin: monografiia o lichnosti i tvorchestve* (Berlin: Grani, 1932), 136. States of ecstasy are complex but highly structured elements in Skryabin's writings. Essentially, the goal of Skryabin's artistic creations was to stimulate a heightened ecstatic arousal. For Skryabin, ecstasy was the highest form of action and happiness affecting both the intellect and the emotions. In this ecstatic state, he perceived himself as possessing a boundless energy through which his human form acted as a channel. The idea of ecstatic states was the inspiration for the majority of his late work, and evidences the fluid process which is amply demonstrated in the coherence and formal precision of his musical designs. See Cooper, *op. cit.*, 112 and 110. The notion of an artist succeeding in creating a 'mysterium' and henceforth being transfigured together with universal metamorphosis was embraced with similar enthusiasm by the Symbolist poet, Belyi.

⁴⁹ de Schloezer (1987), *op. cit.*, 97.

in the oeuvre.⁵⁰ In this light, the *Mysterium* was a work that sought to strengthen the intrinsic bond between art and religion.⁵¹ Skryabin contended that the material impact of a work of art affects not only the emotional and physical state, but also the mental perception.⁵² This dense package, with all its variously integrated elements, comprised Skryabin's philosophy.

TRANSLATING AN AESTHETIC INTO MUSIC

In the foregoing delineation of aesthetic influences, it has been demonstrated that Skryabin's musical concepts were largely formed by the tenets of the Russian Symbolist movement.⁵³ What is needed now, therefore, is:

to examine Skryabin's ideas at the points where they [aesthetic influences] touch his music closely, and extract what relevance and meaning we can. We need to take seriously not the meanings and ideas which Skryabin attributed to his music, but the very fact that he thought in this way, and that he constructed his music with such notions in his head. An important distinction may be made between ideas and words.⁵⁴

It would appear that his aspiration to convert a mystical encounter into music is rather apparent, although it is a far more enigmatic task to ascertain if and how these concepts were represented in the intangible genre of solo piano music. The task of determining a

⁵⁰ Andrei Bandura, *Inye miry Aleksandra Skriabina* (Moscow: Iris Press, 1994), 3. See also Morrison, *op. cit.*, 291. This notion of the religious value of art was borrowed from the 'mystic' Symbolists. Ivanov, who impelled the composer to realise this mystery, was of particular significance.

⁵¹ Cooper (1935), *op. cit.*, 112.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ In particular, Viacheslav Ivanov's concept of Dionysian bliss, which centres around the associations and conflict between the Male (Active) principle and the Eternal Feminine (Passive) was a paragon. Hence, Skryabin desired a musical translation of a mystical experience by manipulating a system of symbols that interact with each other according to his pre-designed scheme. This refers to the concept of music as a composed narrative.

⁵⁴ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, 22.

possible connection would be considerably easier if the music exhibited a programme, even if, by definition, a programme would be inevitably reductive.⁵⁵

The inherent subjectivity surrounding the establishment of an individual symbolic dialect and its universal perception was a contentious point even though it was a distinctive feature of the Symbolist movement. In his examination of the features of Symbolist theatre Kalbouss states:

the Symbolists never agreed upon any single set of myth symbols for mystery-play writing; rather they created an internationally artificial mythological language, using many favorite images from their poetry. Each poet wrote mystery play dialogue in his own way. Some used modern, private symbols while others stylized their works in terms from Greek mythology.⁵⁶

It was during the middle period of Skryabin's compositional output that his Symbolist language began to evolve. Skryabin commenced using a fundamental mental formula to reveal his Symbolist plot with the Fourth Sonata. Bowers alludes to Skryabin's preoccupation with a design:

Skryabin will follow this structure of gradually evolving moods in all future sonatas, from languor, thirst, or longing, through struggle, depths and heights, or battle, through flight, dance, luminosity, or ecstasy. The chain is a series of lifts, ascents and upsurges, finally bursting into fragmentation, dematerialization, dissolution -- a last and final strengthening of freedom.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ All this notwithstanding, Skryabin authored many poems to accompany his instrumental works, even though none of these were effectively realised in musical form. His words and music were evidently informed by the same artistic inclination, even if they did not possess a specific correlation. The prose accompaniments were, however, abandoned in the post-1911 music. This music is intrinsically bound to the Symbolist aesthetic and therefore is naturally imbued with prosaic terminology and phrases of expression which, together with a specific musical syntax, portrays a Symbolist plot.

⁵⁶ George Kalbouss, The Plays of the Russian Symbolists (East Lansing: Russian Language Journal, 1982), 59.

⁵⁷ Bowers, *op. cit.*, 158.

Schloezer also concurs with this interpretation (even if he posits the beginning slightly earlier): “indeed, all Scriabin's works, beginning with the Third Piano Sonata and ending with the Tenth Piano Sonata, are built according to a uniform succession of states -- languor, longing, impetuous striving, dance, ecstasy, and transfiguration.”⁵⁸ The works for orchestra, in particular, gave birth to some of these motifs, although it was in the final phase of his compositional output that Skryabin’s preoccupation with symbols was realised in abundance. These were also embodied only in works for solo piano.⁵⁹

In the music of the late period, Skryabin attempted to incorporate characteristics of mystical symbolism such as hidden spirits, delirium, metamorphosis, bliss, and the portrayal of the eternal feminine, as they were defined by the poets of this movement. Such expressive indications elucidate Skryabin’s employment of unique musical formula together with particular words that evoke certain images, thus forming a consistent collection of symbols.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Schloezer (1987), *op. cit.*, 97.

⁵⁹ Orchestration was certainly an early issue (see his clashes with Rimsky-Korsakov) for Skryabin, and thus he used the piano miniature as “material” for his orchestral plans (see the *Prelude Op. 74 no. 2* for the *Mysterium*; and some 1903 works recycled for his abandoned opera plans). His orchestral works were, in general, far too ambitious (this can be seen from the choral finale of the first symphony) and brought him to the realisation that his real strength was in writing for the piano. To this end, he made the statement, “I don't know anything I can't express at the piano.” See Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 63. Insofar as the differences in the overall “mystic” effects of the piano works versus the orchestral ones are concerned, I believe that the orchestral “mysticism” was greatly enhanced and elaborated through “programmes” (eg., the accompanying poem to *Le Poème de l’extase*) and gimmicks such as the light shows, together with the orchestration itself. Compare the “Nietzschean trumpet” (see Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 213, and (1997), *op. cit.*, 58) of *Le Poème de l’extase* with the rising fourths motifs found in his piano writing (see Op. 30) which are so much more immediately striking. The piano was simply much more intimate and compact a vehicle for the expression of his aesthetic. Another part of this equation, of course, was that Skryabin's mysticism was tied in with his own personality.

⁶⁰ Here below are the unique performance indications used by Skryabin:

The representation of light is achieved through the exploitation of the high register.⁶¹

Similarly, a depiction of an ecstasy was realised through the use of repeated chords.

Skryabin's most idiosyncratic and frequently utilised symbols was the motif of summons. It is distinguished by its short-long rhythm, although the motif normally has a melodic contour of an upward leap. The verbal indications⁶² frequently accompanying this motif, provided Skryabin with a degree of latitude to imbue concealed implications in the use of this motif. It is rather difficult to follow a pattern in the positioning of this motif, although it occurs regularly at significant junctures in the music.

Extensive use of trills and tremolos suggest celestial illumination in a Symbolic context.

ailé tourbillonnant; animé, ailé; appel mystérieux; avec éclat; avec élan; avec élan lumineux, vibrant; avec émotion, avec entraînement; avec ravissement; avec ravissement et tendresse; avec trouble; avec une ardeur profonde et voilée; avec une céleste volupté; avec une chaleur contenue; avec une douce ivresse; avec une douce langueur de plus en plus éteinte; avec une douceur de plus en plus caressante et empoisonnée; avec une joie débordante; avec une joie exaltée; avec une joie subite; avec une joyeuse exaltation; avec une langueur naissante; avec une sombre majesté; avec une volupté douloureuse; avec une volupté radieuse, extatique; charmes; comme des éclairs; concentré; cristallin; de plus en plus entraînant, avec enchantement; de plus en plus radieux; de plus en plus sonore et animé; doux, languissant; effondrement subit; en délire; en s'éteignant peu à peu; en un vertige; épanouissement de forces mystérieuses; étincelant; étange, ailé; frémissant, ailé; foudroyant; fulgurant; haletant; impérieux; inquiet; joyeux, triomphant; la mélodie bien marquée; légendaire; l'épouvante surgit, elle se mêle à la danse délirante; le rêve prend forme (clarté, douceur, pureté); lumineux, vibrant; menaçant; modéré; mystérieusement murmuré; mystérieusement sonore; mystérieux, concentré; onde caressante; ondoyant; onduleux, insinuant; puissant radieux; pur, limpide; sombre, mystérieux; souffle mystérieux; tout devient charme et douceur; tragique; très animé, ailé; très doux et pur; très doux, joyeux, étincelant; très pur, avec douceur; très pur, avec une profonde douceur; un peu plus lent; vol joyeux; cachée; confus; désordonné; dolente; dormante; enthousiasme; languissante; lassé; naissante; ombre; onduleux.

⁶¹ According to Tompakova, the combination of light with the music of Skryabin is essential, because all his music is luminous. See Tompakova (1995), *op. cit.*, 13. The notion of light was not a mere description of a natural agent, but rather symbolised an image of illumination or contact with the deific.

⁶² See for example Skryabin's employment of this motif in his sixth and seventh piano sonatas where it is accompanied by the words ailé, le rêve prend forme (clarté, douceur, pureté), or avec une joie débordante.

This marks another preoccupation⁶³ and defines a new motif for Skryabin. This motif is frequently bound to the notion of the sensual.⁶⁴ The emphasis on sensuality is explicit and this motif fairly permeates all other motifs.⁶⁵ The culmination of the motif of sensuality is the realisation of a mystical experience. A defining feature of this motif is its formation from consonant sonorities that encompass unresolved dominant progressions and elaborate chromaticism.⁶⁶ The rhythm is also idiosyncratic with its improvisatory character, arpeggiated sonorities, consistent obfuscation and displacement of pulse, abundance of triplets, and polymetric and polyrhythmic figures. The combination of these attributes restricts the forward drive by eliminating a puissant metrical and harmonic function, and inducing a spirit of calm. Ecstasy, together with other sensual and mystical concepts were, for Skryabin, bound to the concept of flight. This motif represented a means by which he could translate the micro and also realise the macro. Flight motifs comprise several groups of vigorous quintuplet scales or arpeggios.⁶⁷

⁶³ In other words, Skryabin is privileging ornaments – trills, tremoli – as embodiments perhaps, of the immaterial and the unbounded.

⁶⁴ The Tenth Sonata is the penultimate example of the use of this motive as a significant ingredient in structural definition.

⁶⁵ Symbolist philosophy sought a suitable representation of Apollo (the eternal feminine), the symbol of the established world. Apollo is characterised through an erotic yearning for the state of euphoria which effects fusion with the spiritual cosmos.

⁶⁶ See for example Poème Op.32/1: mm.15-23 and mm. 39-47, for a portrayal of sensuality. See also Taruskin (1997), *op. cit.*, 323-329, for an explanation of Skryabin's delayed resolution and its representation of unfilled desire.

⁶⁷ Bowers (1973), *op. cit.*, 96. It appears that Skryabin genuinely believed that he could achieve flight. He apparently tried to convince Plekhanov that "there are no obstacles to manifesting our wills. The law of gravity does not exist. I can throw myself from this bridge and I will not crack my head on the stones. I will float in the air. Thanks to will power."

Other motifs were appropriated from the liturgy surrounding the cult worship of Dionysus, which was also important to the Symbolists. An integral part of the rite was the inducing of an ecstatic, trance-like state through dynamic and exhilarating dances which increased the performer's inclination to deific arousal. These programmatic dances, forming the motif of hysteria, were characterised by decisive and simple rhythmic patterns within conventional meters. Harmonically, this motif is identified by its association with blocked chordal patterns which pivot around a fixed melodic axis in brief phrase structures. The motif of celestial illumination or even a fleeting reference to light frequently follows the motive of hysteria, as a preamble to an ecstatic or euphoric experience.⁶⁸

The abundance of musical and philosophical connections explicated above plays a significant role in the reception of Skryabin's music and is the reason why the music arouses a peculiarly broad range of reactions from performers, musicologists, and audiences alike. Indeed, it is doubtful that any singular gathering of his devotees could achieve an agreement regarding the calibre of a given artist or performance. This reveals a great deal regarding the accessibility of the music for the general audience.

Clark has alluded to this in his comment: "for Beethoven the canonic performance

⁶⁸ The definition of such motifs and emotional states, however, is not enough to define a plot. A plot implies an organisational method affecting an anticipated consequence. Skryabin's true plot paradigm is based on Ivanov's supposition that the condition of Dionysian euphoria could be consummated through sexual union. In essence, Ivanov maintained that love-making as non-cognitive experience was the most primal manner for man to achieve union with god. The central characters of the plot are the Masculine or active principle and the Feminine or passive principle. This philosophy accommodates numerous conflicts: male-female; creator-created; active-passive; subject-object. Skryabin utilised the thematic and harmonic tensions connate in the music to imply and settle these disparities.

Bear in mind that the illusion of spontaneity or improvisation was integral to Skryabin's effort to construct a musical experience that was, as it were, evolving out of sensual, primal impulses.

tradition is represented on records by Schnabel and Brendel, for Chopin there is Rubinstein, and Debussy has Gieseking; but who is there for Skriabin?”⁶⁹

Thus, given the knowledge that can be gleaned from both an aesthetic examination and how this is translated for piano, there remains the increasingly perplexing and enigmatic problem of defining a Skryabin performance style and tradition. The answer to this will shed much light on the equally bewildering question of precisely how to interpret the works of this composer. In an effort to clarify this puzzle it is imperative that Skryabin’s own recordings be scrutinised.⁷⁰ In order to receive a holistic understanding of Skryabin’s performance art, however, we need to begin our investigations from his earliest years as a pianist. Only in this way will we know how he was taught, what and who influenced him, how his pianistic artistry was formed, and how he was received by audiences over an extended period of time.

THE PIANO STUDENT

Very little is known about Skryabin’s childhood musical studies. Nevertheless all commentators, referring to the memoirs of his aunt, Liubov’ Aleksandrovna, note the very early appearance of his talent and his special enthusiasm precisely for the piano.⁷¹

⁶⁹ John Clark, “Divine Mysteries: On Some Skriabin Recordings,” *19th Century Music* 5.7 (1988): 264.

⁷⁰ Faubion Bowers, “How to Play Scriabin,” *The Piano Quarterly* x.x (Winter 1970-71): 13. “Scriabin’s message resident within the corpus of his output relates to what people of today are discovering -- intuitive knowledge or feeling instead of thought, mysticism as an alternate logic, action rather than contemplation...”

⁷¹ Liubov’ Skriabina, “Vospominaniia,” in *A.N. Skriabin: Sbornik k 25-letiiu so dnia smerti* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal’noe Izdatel’stvo, 1940), 10. Aleksandrovna is a patronymic name.

Liubov' Aleksandrovna noticed his love for music and took the young Skryabin to see Anton Rubinstein.⁷² Rubinstein foretold of a brilliant future for the young pianist.⁷³ On the basis of Rubinstein's advice, however, Skryabin's piano tutelage was overseen by his aunt from 1880-81 and formal lessons were delayed.⁷⁴

In the summer of 1883, as his aunt later recalled, they lived in a *dacha* in Khovrino where Georgii Konius⁷⁵ also resided. Skryabin obviously expressed the desire to learn and his aunt approached Konius to tutor him. Konius agreed and came regularly to the Corps during the winter to teach him. Thus, Skryabin began studying piano under Konius, himself still a student at the Moscow Conservatory.⁷⁶ The recollection of Konius regarding his student Skryabin is particularly vivid and warrants quotation *in extensio*:

[He seemed to know not merely notes but he also knew the scales, the tonalities and, with his fingers which could hardly squeeze a sound, he played to me something that I cannot now recall, but he played it clearly and fluently. One can get only a very approximate idea regarding the extent of his preliminary studies, because one of the first pieces we played with him was *Perpetuum Mobile* by Weber, Op. 24. He learned pieces quickly but his

⁷² The uncanny connection between Skryabin, his mother (Liubov' Petrovna Shchetinina), Liubov Aleksandrovna, Safonov, Leszetycki, and the Rubinstein brothers is given in Philip Taylor, Anton Rubinstein: A Life in Music (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 224.

⁷³ Iurii Engel', "Skriabin: Biograficheskii ocherk," Muzykal'nyi sovremennik 4-5 (1916): 14. "Не троньте ребенка, дайте ему развиваться свободно, со временем все придет само собой." [Don't interfere with the child, let him develop freely, and with time everything will happen of its own accord.]

⁷⁴ Margarita Prashnikova and Olga Tompakova, Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva A.N. Skriabina (Moscow: Muzyka, 1985), 18.

⁷⁵ Konius (1862-1933) was the eldest son of a famous musical family in Russia. His father, Eduard, and his brothers, Iulii and Lev (the latter of whom was a formative teacher of Sergei Prokofiev), were highly-esteemed pedagogues. Georgii studied piano with Pabst and composition with Arenskii and Taneev. Respected as a pianist, piano teacher, and composer, he founded the department of music analysis at the Moscow Conservatory.

⁷⁶ Prashnikova and Tompakova, *op. cit.*, 20.

performance, perhaps as a result of insufficient physical abilities as I remember, was very monotonous and airy. I regret that I cannot say with precision what we played together, but perhaps I would not be mistaken if I said that there were scales in all keys, the practice of all different movements, arpeggios, the easy Etudes of Cramer, Mendelssohn's *Lieder Ohne Worte*, and easy short pieces by Chopin. I studied with Skryabin for almost the entire summer and then, after moving from the Dacha, we continued our association in Moscow during the winter and only stopped perhaps before the exams. At that time, nobody would even think about Sasha entering the Conservatory. He studied music because he liked it, and I was preparing myself for a military career...In the Spring, I lost touch with him.]⁷⁷

The study with Konius could not, however, be regarded as very serious due to the fact that Skryabin's time was still consumed by the Corps. In addition, the idea of pursuing a career in music at this stage had not entered his mind. His repertoire at this time consisted of basic pieces by Cramer, Mendelssohn and Chopin. After a year, however, the lessons with Konius came to an end and a little later, on the advice of the composer, pedagogue, and ethnographer, Sergei Taneev, Skryabin approached Nikolai Zverev.

In 1885, Skryabin became the pupil of Zverev who was at the time a professor of the junior school at the Moscow Conservatoire. This was a time when Zverev's teaching was flourishing. Among his enrolled pupils were several stars including Sergei Rakhmaninov, Konstantin Igumnov, Aleksandr Ziloti, Leonid Maxsimov, Fedor

⁷⁷ “Он оказался знающим не только ноты; знал гаммы, тональности и слабыми, еле выдавливавшими звук пальчиками сыграл мне, — что именно, не помню, — но чисто и достаточно бегло. О степени его предварительной подготовки можно составить себе приблизительно понятие потому, что одной из первых пьес, которую мы с ним играли, было *Perpetuum mobile* Вебера, ор. 24. Выучивал он вещи быстро, но исполнение его, вероятно, вследствие недостаточных физических данных, помнится, всегда было эфирное и монотонное. Жалею, что не могу с полной определенностью сказать, что мы с ним еще играли. Но, вероятно, я не ошибусь, назвав гаммы во всех тональностях и всяких движениях, арпеджии, более легкие из этюдов Крамера, песни Мендельсона и легкие, короткие пьески Шопена. Занимался я со Скрябиным в течение всего лета, и затем после переезда с дачи продолжал с ним уроки в Москве в течение зимы, и прекратил их, вероятно, перед экзаменами. В то время и речи еще не было о поступлении Саши в консерваторию, занимался он музыкой по собственному влечению, а готовился к военной карьере... Весной я потерял Скрябина из виду.” Vasilii Iakovlev, *A.N. Skriabin* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1925), 16-17.

Keneman, and Matvei Presman. In evidence that can be gleaned from primary (or the few secondary) sources of the time, it would seem that Zverev's influence on Skryabin's development as a performer was slight. Nevertheless, Zverev was one of the first to esteem Skryabin as a pianist rather than as a composer.

In accordance with the established pedagogical system in Zverev's class, his Conservatoire pupils lived in his house and studied every day under his guidance. It has been noted that he was a demanding teacher who had little tolerance for indolence or indifference. The most valuable aspect in his system of teaching, however, was the placement of the hands and the imposition of an exacting method for the development of technical perfection. Apart from technical skills, Zverev also inculcated in his pupils a genuine love of music through his organisation of musical evenings with Russia's most prominent artists, traversal of a broad range of the repertory, and a personal belief that the role and duties of a pedagogue were sacred. Most of his students would progress on to the classes of Ziloti, Safonov, and Pabst.⁷⁸

Opinions vary regarding Skryabin's studies under Zverev. For example, Presman maintains that Skryabin attended lessons once a week, although his aunt states that it was more like three times a week. Nevertheless, he was required to prepare and play from memory a sizeable and well-rehearsed program which would typically include

⁷⁸ Matvei Presman, "Ugolok muzykal'noi Moskvyy vos'midesiatykh godov," in Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 148-207. It was precisely at this time while studying with Zverev and Taneev, that Skryabin decided to devote himself wholeheartedly to music. He then began to prepare in earnest for entry into the Moscow Conservatoire.

several etudes and other works.⁷⁹ Skryabin apparently did not practice for more than two hours per day and lagged behind his classmates in technique. He was also well-known for paying little heed to the advice of Zverev and following his own inclinations instead. This behaviour lent his artistry a precociousness that, somewhat ironically, Zverev evidently liked to showcase. Presman observed on two separate occasions that Skryabin astounded all those present with the artistic maturity of his interpretations and playing of Haydn's *F-minor Variations* and Schumann's *Paganini Etudes*.⁸⁰ During the same year in which he began studies with Zverev, he also commenced studying theory under the guidance of Sergei Taneev.

In the autumn of 1887, Skryabin entered the piano class of Vasilii Safonov at the Moscow Conservatoire.⁸¹ With respect to Skryabin's new piano tutor, Iurii Engel' recalls:

[Safonov made overtures to Skryabin to join his class while the latter was still a student in Zverev's class. He was very attracted to the young pianist's talent, and, of course, the gentle refined type of Skryabin's playing was more akin to that of Safonov's Brassin school than to...that of P.A. Pabst's school and, partly to that of P.Y. Shletser's...two other senior professors of the Moscow Conservatoire at that time.]⁸²

Safonov can be considered Skryabin's most significant teacher and artistic influence.

⁷⁹ Matvei Presman "Vospominaniia," in A.N. Skriabin: Sbornik k 25-letiiu so dnia smerti (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1940), 33.

⁸⁰ Presman (1940), *op. cit.*, 33.

⁸¹ Safonov was a renowned conductor and pianist who served as the director of the Moscow Conservatory from 1889-1905. He would also champion Skryabin in the USA.

⁸² "Сафонов облюбовал для своего класса Скрябина, когда тот еще занимался в классе Зверева; очень привлекал его талант молодого пианиста, да и мягкий, утонченный тип скрябинской игры больше подходил к брасеновской школе Сафонова, чем к ... школе П.А. Пабста и, частью П.Ю. Шлецера, — двух других старших профессоров Московской консерватории того времени." Engel', *op. cit.*, 26.

Therefore, it is imperative that Safonov's pianistic traits which could have been passed on to Skryabin be considered in some detail. Safonov was initially a student at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire where he studied piano with Teodor Leszetycki and Louis Brassin.⁸³ In 1885, at the instigation of Tchaikovsky and Taneev, Safonov moved to Moscow where he began teaching a special piano class at the Conservatoire. It was here that he nurtured a whole constellation of splendid players, such as Skryabin, Medtner, Gedike, the Gnesin sisters⁸⁴, and the Lhévinne's. Graduates of his chamber music class were Igumnov and Goldenweiser. Safonov apparently paid great attention to building a wide-ranging performance repertoire for his students, but perhaps his distinguishing characteristic as a teacher was his ability to discover and develop a pupil's inherent abilities. It was precisely this ability that enabled Safonov to produce many pupils distinct in their manner of playing. He also brought to his lessons a multi-angled view of the creative process with his knowledge of experience as a pianist, composer and conductor. Safonov's pupil, Vera Dem'ianova-Shatskaia, reminisced that, more than anything else, Safonov demanded conviction, freedom in playing, and clarity of musical image.⁸⁵

Safonov's own playing was characterized by its singing quality and the significance of the artistic intention to which technical mastery was subordinate. As the newspaper

⁸³ Brassin, through his contact with Ignacy Moscheles (a pupil of Beethoven), had acquired the spirit of Beethoven's piano playing technique. The influence of the Rubinstein brothers was apparently also significant.

⁸⁴ The Gnesin sisters (discussed briefly in chapter 1) also had a brother, Mikhail (1883-1957), who was a fairly prominent Symbolist composer.

⁸⁵ Aleksei Nikolaev, "Moskovskaia shkola pianizma," *Sovetskaia Muzyka* 4 (1947): 76. See also Vasilii Safonov, *'Novaia formula': mysli dlia uchashchikh i uchashchikhsia na fortepiano* (London: Chester, 1916).

‘Muzykal’noe obozrenie’ recorded in 1880, [he has a wonderful gift and a beautiful tone, though not very big.] On the same subject of sound production, Iurii Engel’ wrote, [his delicate, exquisite, artfully accomplished performance attracts one by its softness and reservedness. Safonov’s sound is charming.]⁸⁶ Yet another critic in St. Petersburg wrote, [it is hard to remember a time when the piano sounded so soft, so melodious as under Safonov’s fingers. Safonov gives the instrument an extraordinary power of expressiveness. He plays with such a high degree of simplicity which leaves the impression of a completely flawless accomplishment.]⁸⁷

Indeed, Safonov’s focus on the sound of his students was integral to his teaching methodology. It was this aspect which Skryabin, as we shall see, appropriated and esteemed above anything else he learned. In Safonov’s view, an excellent pianist should possess beauty and gentleness of tone together with a rich palette of tonal colours and nuances.⁸⁸ Safonov himself offered some commentary on the topic of sound when he said, [I am an ardent, old enemy of the strike on the instrument. I like the word ‘touché’ as much as I hate the word ‘strike’. One should better caress the keys softly rather than

⁸⁶ “У него чудесный удар и красивый тон, хотя и не очень большой,” and “Его тонкое, изящное, художественно законченное исполнение привлекает особой мягкостью и сдержанностью. Очарователен у Сафонова сам звук.” See Russkie vedomosti (21 February, 1912).

⁸⁷ “Не помнится, чтобы рояль звучал так мягко, так певуче, как под пальцами Сафонова, Сафонов придает инструменту необычайную силу выразительности...он играет с той высшей простотой, которая накладывает на исполнителя печать полной, безупречной законченности.” Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti (25 February, 1912).

⁸⁸ Aleksandr (Serafimovich) Skriabin and Olga Tompakova, V.I. Safonov i A.N. Skriabin: V.I. Safonov, K 150-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia (Moscow: Muzyka, 2003), 84-91.

to strike them in disgust.]⁸⁹ This statement also seemed to imply that for Safonov the performance should also be driven by the intellect and not by virtuosity.

Safonov believed there was no such thing as an easy piano piece, that to produce an artistically satisfying performance of the easiest pieces by Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven was a very difficult task.⁹⁰ He would try to interest his pupils in producing interesting, emotional, and daring performances. He would demonstrate, would explain a complex method, and would assist in the discovery of a suitable approach. Safonov evidently demanded precision and lightness with great attention to dynamic nuances. He also spent much time on details of technique, plans of modulations to promote concentration in performance, and fluency of the fingers through the practising of various exercises. He invariably responded encouragingly to an opinion expressed by his pupils regarding details or shadings and if the opinion was musical and not unartistic he would allow the pupil to play as they wished.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “Я непримиримый старый враг удара по инструменту. Насколько люблю слово ‘туше’, настолько ненавижу слово ‘удар’. Клавиши надо скорее ласкать, мягко прикасаясь к ним, а не бить их с отвращением.” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 4 (1948).

⁹⁰ Safonov paid much attention to working on polyphonic compositions. Presman remembers that Safonov’s pupils were mostly given Czerny’s *Etudes Op. 740* and Bach’s *Two-Part Inventions*, while other students at the same level got *Etudes* by Chopin, *Preludes and Fugues* by Bach and similar works by Chopin, Schumann, and Beethoven. Using Safonov’s pedagogical method, however, made his most competent students have difficulties in coping with these seemingly insignificant pieces. For example, Safonov required that a Bach Invention be played in pairs with one student per hand per piano and from memory. Then the students would swap hands. When Safonov was satisfied in this way that we were able to play completely independently either hand separately, not only technically but from the point of view of phrasing so that every musical phrase was played correctly as regards the sound, he would make us play the invention with both hands. See Matvei Presman, “Dva napravleniia v metodakh prepodavaniia igry na fortepiano,” *Russkaia muzykal’naia gazeta* 6 (1916): 132-3. Presman stresses that Safonov required the most painstaking phrasing both as regards nuances and the sound of each part.

⁹¹ Presman (1974), *op. cit.*, 188-192.

Another aspect of pianism to which Safonov gave special attention was the use of the pedals. He was fond of repeating Anton Rubinstein's phrase that the pedal was the "soul of the instrument." Safonov would say that the sound should fly (especially in *piano* sections) and yet should still be audible from a long distance.⁹² The focus on the pedal marks another significant preoccupation for Skryabin and bears much relevance for understanding performance practices in his music.⁹³ Safonov regarded the sound of the music produced by Skryabin's use of the pedals as one of the most subtle musical pleasures since that of Anton Rubinstein. According to Feinberg, methods of using the pedals became highly refined and cultivated with Skryabin, and as with Chopin, the sonority of his piano resided within the limits of a purely Skryabinesque beauty of sound.⁹⁴

Safonov quickly realised that his new student was a musician of unusual talent and treated him with the utmost care.⁹⁵ Safonov was never sharp in his criticism of Skryabin where artistic matters were concerned. To this end, even if he disagreed with an

⁹² Iakov Ravicher, *Vasilii Il'ich Safonov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1959), 95. It is this same notion of flight that would later be translated into a Symbolist context Skryabin.

⁹³ As will be examined later in this paper, it was the subtle use of the pedal which was to serve Skryabin in his quest to create a *séance*-like atmosphere in his recitals.

⁹⁴ Samuel Feinberg, *Pianizm kak iskusstvo* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1965), 101. Skryabin accorded great importance to the use of the pedals and so would say indignantly, "what sort of pianists are these who think that the pedal is just a footrest?" The attitude of the critics to the matter of the pedals, however, was not necessarily uniform. Some found Skryabin's use of them a sign of genius, others thought it odd, yet others thought it just muddy.

⁹⁵ Not much in the way of practical information is known about Skryabin's lessons with Safonov. The memories of Safonov's other pupils, however, make it clear that lessons were conducted in the presence of the entire class. It can therefore be proposed that the method of teaching described below applied also to Skryabin. In addition, Safonov maintained that he would often have Skryabin at home beside him playing while he rested. See Iakovlev, *op. cit.*, 20.

interpretation he would still commend it.⁹⁶ In Safonov's opinion, Skryabin mastered at a high level something that which he always tried to inculcate in his students: the less the piano under the fingers of the player resembles itself, the better it is. Safonov believed that a great deal in Skryabin's manner and style of playing was his, although he was quick to point out that Skryabin possessed a large range of different tonal colours of sound, a special and ideally subtle use of the pedals, and a rare and exclusive gift which allowed him to make the instrument breathe.⁹⁷

In examining the principle tenets of Safonov's pedagogical method, one can readily see the congruencies with the pianism of Skryabin, and the many ways in which Safonov influenced his student's formation as a musician. In fact, Mark Meichik described Skryabin as a typical product of Safonov. The slightly raised hand, the freely placed and only slightly bent fingers, and the light but very quick strike of the raised fingers were all typical Safonov traits, although Skryabin's *legato* was extraordinarily individual. It was more of a quasi-*legato* arising from a mere touch of the fingers on the keys, not from any pressure (something Safonov extremely disliked).⁹⁸

Sensing the free spirit of his pupil, Safonov sought to emphasize and intensify the lyrical side of his playing. Safonov's principle of sound animation being the only condition of

⁹⁶ Engel', *op. cit.*, 27.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Mark Meichik, "Vospominaniia o A.N. Skriabine," (neopublikovannaia rukopis', arkhiv muzeia A.N. Skriabina). (Meichik, 1880-1950, a fellow student of Safonov and close friend of Skryabin's, also gave the premiere of Skryabin's *Piano Sonata No. 5, Op. 53*. He was regarded by Skryabin as the foremost interpreter of his music among pianists other than himself. See A.N. Skriabin: Pis'ma ed. Aleksei Kashperov (Moscow: Muzyka, 2003), 538).

a fruitful exercise was fully absorbed by Skryabin. According to Presman, Skryabin made great progress under Safonov.⁹⁹ Furthermore, under Safonov, Skryabin was extremely assiduous and conscientious in his studies, following precisely all the instructions of his professor.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, for Skryabin, Safonov's authority was so great that even at the beginning of his work as a composer, Skryabin would consult with Safonov about dynamic and agogic markings.

By 1889, Skryabin had set his sights on a career as a virtuoso concert pianist, which marked the beginning of the vain glorification that would command his vision of divine creation. Despite his natural gifts as a lyrical and artistic pianist he decided to immerse himself in virtuoso studies and repertoire and even set himself the goal of out-doing Lhévinne and Rakhmaninov in this respect.¹⁰¹ Skryabin was, however, not naturally

⁹⁹ Presman (1940), *op. cit.*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Engel', *op. cit.*, 26.

¹⁰¹ Presman, who had closely observed the progress of Skryabin's studies, tells the following story:

“В классе у проф. В. И. Сафонова был вместе с нами совершенно изумительный в техническом отношении пианист Иосиф Левин, который, будучи еще учеником консерватории, поражал своей техникой наших профессоров, среди которых были такие виртуозы, как А. И. Зилоти и П. А. Пабст... И. Левин великолепно играл *Исламея* Балакирева, *Дон-Жуана* Листа и другие не менее трудные сочинения. Скрябину во что бы то ни стало захотелось самому, подобно Левину, блеснуть своим пианизмом, и он потихоньку от своего учителя проф. В. И. Сафонова принялся летом за работу, стараясь использовать показанный ему Сафоновым прием извлечения из инструмента глубокого звука. Я глубоко убежден, что если бы Скрябин сказал В. И. Сафонову, что он хочет работать над *Дон-Жуаном* и *Исламеем*, В. И. Сафонов приложил бы все старания, чтобы отговорить его от такой опасной и рискованной затеи. Но Скрябин свое желание от Сафонова скрыл.”

[In the class of Professor Safonov, we had an absolutely amazing pianist in the technical sense in Josef Lhévinne who, still being a student of the Conservatory, struck our Professors with his technique. These professors included such virtuosi as Ziloti and Pabst. Lhévinne played *Islamey* by Balakirev beautifully, together with *Don Juan* by Liszt, and other no less difficult pieces. Skryabin wanted at any cost to impress others with his pianism just like Lhévinne, and he started to work in secret during that summer using a device shown to him by his Professor Safonov which would enable the extraction of a deeper sound from the instrument. I am deeply convinced that if Skryabin had mentioned to Safonov that he

endowed with the equipment of a virtuoso, and soon ‘overplayed’ his right hand. Thereafter he began to play heavily and his fingers lost their lightness and freedom of movement. When Safonov heard and saw how Skryabin had begun to play he was horrified and suggested that Skryabin seek treatment and, above all, cleanse his artistry with a Mozart concerto.¹⁰² Skryabin tried having medical treatment and Safonov thought up all sorts of exercises to remedy the situation but nothing was of any use. Three fingers of his right hand remained damaged and he could no longer play as well as he could previously. Thus, at the age of twenty, Skriabin suffered a heavy blow that was to leave its mark on him for the rest of his life.¹⁰³ Despite all the lobbying by Safonov, the number of Skryabin’s public appearances was drastically reduced after his injury. (At first Skryabin himself wanted to renounce completely any idea of a career on the concert stage but his material circumstances compelled him to make appearances from time to time.) It was at this time that Skryabin began to play nothing but his own works. Even though as a student he had been a fine interpreter not only of his own works but also those of Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and Liszt. This breadth of piano repertoire was in accordance with Safonov’s pianistic traditions. Skryabin would, in the years ahead, seek to transcend this physical limitation; elevating performance into something much more than virtuosic display. None of this trauma, however, affected his glorious

wanted to work on *Islamey* and *Don Juan*, Safonov would have done his best to talk him out of such a dangerous and risky affair. But Skryabin hid his desire from Safonov.]

See Presman (1940), *op. cit.*, 33-34.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰³ Engel’, *op. cit.*, 26.

graduation from the Conservatoire in 1892.¹⁰⁴

Soon after Skryabin graduated from the Conservatory, Safonov began negotiations with Cui for Skryabin to participate in the concerts of the Russian Musical Society. Cui and Safonov had an interesting exchange regarding Skryabin's pianism which speaks indirectly about his reception as a pianist in Russia at this time by the musical establishment. Apparently, Cui answered a petition by Safonov on behalf of Skryabin by advising him not to lobby too hard for Skryabin as he had heard that Skryabin was not a good pianist. Safonov replied that he considered his own judgement of him as a pianist to be far more competent than that of the various persons Cui mentioned, and particularly in view of the fact that Skryabin plays nothing but his own compositions and plays beyond all comparison with other pianists.¹⁰⁵

There are not very many accounts of Skryabin's performances as a student.

Furthermore, it is exceedingly difficult to evaluate Skryabin's technique and pianism on the basis of them because the reviews and responses are at times completely contradictory.¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding this, on 21 November, 1888, Skryabin took part in a

¹⁰⁴ The program specified by the Artistic Council was: prepare with a professor, Beethoven -- *Sonata in e, Op. 109*; prepare without professor, Bach -- *Capriccio on the departure of a beloved brother*; Chopin -- *Barcarolle, Op. 60*; Liszt -- *Frühlingsnacht*; Liapunov -- *Waltz*. See Prashnikova and Tompakova, *op. cit.*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁵ Konstantin Zenkin, "V.I. Safonov — uchitel' A.N. Skriabina i N.K. Metnera," in V.I. Safonov. K 150-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia (Moscow: Muzyka, 2003), 68.

¹⁰⁶ One thing is beyond doubt: that Skryabin was regarded as one of the most gifted pianists of his era. This reputation was built from his earliest years. Skriabina reports that one of Skryabin's earliest appearances was at a students' musical evening at the Conservatoire when he was still a pupil of Zverev. He played some small piece of Schumann. It was his first appearance in a large auditorium and he was quite nervous. He was playing well until near the end of the piece where he was supposed to imitate the sound of a chiming clock and for some reason couldn't hit the keys correctly. A critic apparently reported

concert of Conservatoire students in the Hall of the Noble Association where he played Schumann's *Papillons*. Nikolai Kashkin reviewed this concert as follows: [the playing of this young virtuoso, judging by the dress of high-school students, was distinguished by its great variety and character and clear shaping of the pieces performed.]¹⁰⁷ At the end of this same year, other concerts followed at which Skryabin played, among other things, his own compositions. Sergei Vasilenko recounts that in 1889 Skryabin took part in a student concert at the Conservatoire. During the evening he played through a lot of repertoire, including works by Schumann, Liszt, and Chopin, before playing a selection of his own compositions. Vasilenko described his amazement at the incredible technique and boldness of musical interpretation, but chiefly was astounded by the beauty of tone.¹⁰⁸

Aleksandr Ossovskii offers the most descriptive and informative account of Skryabin as a student pianist at the Moscow Conservatoire in a recital he gave of his own works during the winter of 1890-91. Ossovskii writes:

[There was a rumour among the musical circles in Moscow about a new and extraordinary musical talent...the movements of the young man were nervous, spontaneous, sharp, the way he carried himself was modest, and the way he communicated was simple. The host and guests started asking Skryabin to introduce us to his musical pieces. Willingly and without any

that even if he played wrong notes all the time you would still be aware that here was real talent. See Skriabina, *op. cit.*, 13. This concert was sometime in 1885, when Skryabin was 13.

¹⁰⁷ “Игра этого молодого виртуоза, судя по костюму еще ученика гимназии, отличалась большим разнообразием и характерностью, ясно обрисовывавшими исполняемые номера.” Nikolai Kashkin, “Teatral'nye i muzykal'nye izvestiia,” *Moskva Vedomosti* 24.326 (1888).

¹⁰⁸ Prashnikova and Tompakova, *op. cit.*, 29-30. There are memoirs of concerts of the early 1890s at which Skryabin played the *Prelude and Nocturne for Left-Hand, Op. 9*. These speak about the poetic and capricious playing manner of Skryabin and his exceptional control to the extent that if one did not know that the music was written for left-hand alone, one could easily conclude that two-hands were in fact playing. See Kashperov (2003), *op. cit.*, 93, and Arnol'd Al'shvang, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo A.N. Skriabina: sbornik statei* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973), 84.

hesitation, Skryabin sat at the piano. Just a few moments were enough for the listeners to fall under his power. Even in those early years, Skryabin possessed an ability which accompanied him throughout his life, that is from the first chords he played he was able to establish a psychic contact with the audience. He exuded a nervous current which stunningly conquered the audience. Skryabin played only his own pieces this time, as always in the future. They seemed like improvisations performed by Skryabin, as if they were just being born, and still carried the heat of his creative inspiration. So much freedom and the ability to fly and capriciousness was in his playing, so much freshness, simplicity, and ease characterised his playing. Captivating also was the sound of the instrument itself under the magic fingers of his beautifully groomed and small hands. His performance was marked by individuality and beauty of the inner mood and reflected in the exquisiteness of the outer form.]¹⁰⁹

On 24 February, 1891, there was a concert organised by Safonov's pupils. Skryabin, who played the first movement of Henselt's piano concerto, apparently played accurately, cleanly, and technically well but without the brilliance or talent that was displayed by Ziloti's pupil, Rakhmaninov.¹¹⁰ Another review of the same concert describes Skryabin's exceptional success in his performance of the Henselt's Concerto. Skryabin performed with such calm and self-control as is usually found only in the most experienced of virtuosi. The reviewer proceeded to say that Skryabin is definitely making enormous progress not only in the virtuosic sense, but his extraordinarily

¹⁰⁹ “По музыкальной Москве шла уже молва о новоявленном, необычайно ярком музыкальном таланте... Движения юноши были нервны, порывисты, остры, повадка — скромная, обращение — простое... Хозяин и гости стали единодушно просить Скрябина познакомить нас с его музыкальными произведениями. Охотно, без всякой рисовки, Скрябин сел за рояль. Всего лишь несколько мгновений было достаточно, чтобы слушатели оказались уже в его власти. Еще в те ранние годы Скрябин обладал сопутствовавшей ему всю жизнь способностью с первых же взятых им аккордов устанавливать психический контакт с аудиторией, источать из себя некий нервный, гипнотизирующий ток, неотразимо покорявший ее. В этот раз, как и всегда впоследствии, Скрябин играл только свои сочинения... В исполнении Скрябина они казались импровизациями, как бы тут же рождавшимися, еще носившими неостывший пыл творческого вдохновения: столько полетности, свободы и прихотливости было в его игре, такой свежестью и непосредственностью веяло от нее. Пленителен был уже самый звук инструмента под магическими пальцами его красивых, холеных, небольших рук. На всем исполнении лежала печать индивидуальности и высокого изящества душевного строя, отражавшегося в изяществе внешней формы.” Aleksandr Ossovskii, *Iunyi Skriabin: izbrannye stat'i i vospominaniia* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1961), 323-324.

¹¹⁰ Semen Kruglikov, “Uchebnyi koncert Moskovskoi konservatorii,” *Novosti dnia* 26.2753 (1891).

charming playing shows the indubitable signs of an artistic gift.¹¹¹

This period also marks the first association of Sabaneev¹¹² and Skryabin. Sabaneev, who would later become the foremost champion and biographer of Skryabin, first heard him in recital at the invitation of Zverev in 1891. It was another student concert at the Conservatoire at which Skryabin played Beethoven's Sonata Op. 101, however the performance certainly failed to make any special impression on Sabaneev.¹¹³ A similar reception was accorded Skryabin a few weeks later on 17 March when he played a concert in the hall of the Aristocratic Association. The critic wrote that Skryabin, who has played here before, was less successful on this occasion than formerly. The critic also seemed to infer that perhaps he has more of a bent for carrying out complex musical tasks than for the chiefly external brilliance that is required in the first piano concerto of Liszt.¹¹⁴

It was no doubt due to some such unfavourable press, combined with his own awareness and Symbolist awakenings, that around the year 1894 Skryabin began to perform only

¹¹¹ "Teatral'nye i muzykal'nye izvestiia," Moskva Vedomosti 59 (28 February, 1891): 5.

¹¹² Sabaneev (1881-1968), was an influential figure in the shaping of Russian musicology of the early twentieth century. He was a student of Zverev some years after Skryabin, and studied composition with Taneev. His openness to contemporary ideas in composition, made him a natural candidate to advocate for the then new music of Skryabin. Commensurate with a steady rise in public profile through his work as a music critic for a number of Russian and foreign journals and newspapers, Sabaneev was able also to advertise Skryabin's music to a new generation of composers. See Aleksandr Stupel', Russkaia mysl' o muzyke 1895–1917: ocherk istorii russkoi muzykal'noi kritiki (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1980), 207–13.

¹¹³ Leonid Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o A.N. Skriabine (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2000), 11.

¹¹⁴ Moskovskie Vedomosti 80 (21 March, 1892): 6.

his own works in recital.¹¹⁵ One of the first concerts in which he presented nothing but his own music took place on 13 February of that year. In addition to observing Skryabin's technical elegance, the critic noticed a certain strangeness or uniqueness of expression which affected the rhythm and movements, together with a constant striving to be original and pursue extreme effects.¹¹⁶ Conversely, the worst review from his student years also emanated from a recital during this same year. The reviewer writes: [Skryabin is a very bad pianist, he does not have technique, power, tone, or rhythm. We even admit that Skryabin's pieces might have been more pleasant had they been played by another pianist.]¹¹⁷

PROFESSIONAL CONCERTIZING IN RUSSIA AND ABROAD

After graduating from the Conservatoire, Skryabin involved himself in concert activity, although the concerts he gave at that time attracted practically no attention.¹¹⁸ Several critics bemoaned the fact that his performances in 1895 aroused little public interest, which they believed he did not deserve. This was particularly unfortunate, considering

¹¹⁵ It is not known how much the hand injury played a part in his deliberate decision to play only his music for then on. Indeed, it seems as though he decided to withdraw as a competing performer into his own world of idiosyncratic composition/expression. See also Emanuel Garcia, "Rachmaninoff and Scriabin: Creativity and Suffering in Talent and Genius," *Psychoanalytical Review* 91 (2004): 234.

¹¹⁶ *Rus'* 44 (13 February, 1894): 4. Another review within days of the one here cited praised Skryabin's deft touch. See *Peterburgskii listok* 43 (13 February, 1894): 4.

¹¹⁷ "Скрябинь очень плохой пианисть; у него нть ни техники, ни силы, ни тона, ни чувства ритма. Мы допускаемъ даже, что сочиненія г. Скрябина понравились бы больше, если бы исполнителемъ ихъ явился другой пианисть." *Birzhevye vedomosti* 45 (14 February, 1894): x. Around this time, Olga Sekerina wrote in her memoirs praising the artistry of Skryabin. When she heard Skryabin play she apparently felt that he had grown ten years in the space of one in his creativity. In her opinion, his success during this time was enormous. See Olga Sekerina, "Vospominaniia," in *A.N. Skriabin: sb. k 25-letiiu so dnia smerti* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1940), 52.

¹¹⁸ Upon graduation, Skryabin was given the title 'free artist'. This is a designation awarded to him by the Moscow Conservatoire which refers to his graduation and beginning of a professional career. During his professional career he was supported by the generous benefaction of several patrons including Margarita Morozova, Mitrofan Beliaev, Gustave Doret, Gabriel Astruc, and Sergei Koussevitzky.

the fact that he performed his own music together with the foreknowledge that he came highly recommended by Safonov and Arenskii, his teachers at the Conservatoire.

Despite this lack of public approbation, Skryabin's star was rising among the musical elite of Moscow. In February of 1895, Nikolai Findeisen wrote, after hearing Skryabin perform at the house of Beliaev, that Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov, Blumenfeld, Lavrov, Beliaev and Stavsov were literally falling over themselves after hearing him play his *Sonata-Fantasia in g#, Op.19*, which was evidently an unforgettable experience. All present started cheering and made him repeat it immediately.¹¹⁹ On 7 March of the same year Skryabin gave a concert in the Petrovskoe College. Findeisen wrote that all the pieces he played at this concert were expressive of the greatest talent and as a pianist Skryabin is an extraordinarily gifted musician, possessing power and expressiveness, despite an insufficiently mature technique.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ "Kommentarii," in Kashperov (2003), *op. cit.*, 90. See also the review in Peterburgskii listok 61 (4 March, 1895): 3. Findeisen (1868-1928) was a highly respected music journalist, pedagogue, and founder and editor of the journal *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta*.

¹²⁰ Nikolai Findeisen, "Kontsert: A.N. Skriabina," Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta 4 (1895): 284-285. See also Nedelia 11 (12 March, 1895): 353 for another positive response. Yet another review of the same concert, however, was not nearly as encouraging:

Как пианист г. Скрябин значительно слабее композитора. Игра его нервная, не ритмичная, по временам неясная, с преувеличением эффектов *piano* и *forte*. Левая рука сильнее правой и часто ее заглушает, так что пьеса, написанная для одной левой руки (ноктюрн), была им исполнена лучше, чем те, которые он играл обеими руками. Несмотря на неудовлетворительность исполнения, он имел значительный успех. В данном случае, в противоположность тому, что обыкновенно бывает, композитор вывез исполнителя. (See Cesar Cui, "Retsenziiia," Nedelia SPb 11 (1895): 353-354.)

[As a pianist, Skryabin is significantly weaker than as a composer. His playing is nervous, not rhythmical, sometimes not clear, with exaggerations of *piano* and *forte* effects. His left hand is stronger than his right and very often over-powers it to such an extent that his piece written for only one hand (Nocturne Op.9) was played better than those which he played with both hands. In spite of the unsatisfactory performance, he enjoyed a significant success. In this case, contrary to what usually happens, the composer helped to rescue the performer.]

This highlights the fact that the reviews of the later years could be rather contradictory, even if they do reflect all the variety of Skryabin's playing. Also, Cui's comment brings to light a significant point in that performance was inseparable from composition for Skryabin.

His official debut in Moscow took place on 11 March, 1895, in the Great Hall of the Noble Association. Skryabin played his *Nocturne Op.9*, *Preludes Op.2* and *Op.11*, *Etudes Op.8*, and *Impromptu Op.10*.¹²¹ Safonov informed Beliaev by letter dated 20 March that Skryabin played his compositions with great success and attracted positive attention.¹²² Nikolai Kashkin noted in his review that Skryabin played six small pieces for piano which were very warmly received. He also observed that Skryabin possessed undoubted talent both as a pianist and composer. Kashkin went on to say that Skryabin has a noble pianistic style which is quite unlike all the usual gimmicks that we have become used to in imitations of Liszt.¹²³

A fair degree of scepticism followed him on his Russian tours from around 1895 onward. Judging from the reviews, it seems apparent that Russian critics did not know how to deal with an evidently insufferable pianistic talent that was beginning to forge its own very individual identity. This resonates with the observations of Kashkin in the aforementioned review. Beliaev also alluded to this problem in a letter to Safonov:

¹²¹ Several specimens of concert programs and drafts of concert programs have been preserved in the Skryabin museum in Moscow. It is clear enough from these that Skryabin reflected considerably on the structure and programming of his concerts. The programs typically have only two climaxes: one in the middle, the other at the end. Three principles of program construction emerge: 1) the principle of contrast in the sense of frequent changes of mood; 2) contrast of more protracted psychological states; 3) gradual, irrevocable rise of nervous, rhythmic, and dynamic tension. See Tatiana Shaborkina, "Zametki o Skriabine-pianiste," in *A.N. Skriabin: Sbornik k 25-letiu so dnia smerti* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1940), 216.

¹²² Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 92.

¹²³ Nikolai Kashkin, "Retsenziia," *Russkie vedomosti* 71 (1895): 2-3. This is rather similar to the review of Kruglikov who wrote "...Скрябина, этого так много одаренного композитора для фортепиано и пианиста с неоспоримыми достоинствами." [...Skryabin, this so richly gifted composer for piano and a pianist with indisputable merit.] See Semen Kruglikov, "Retsenziia," *Novosti dnia* 4492 (1895). Kashkin (1839-1920) was a highly respected critic and pedagogue. In the latter capacity he was among the founding faculty members in Nikolai Rubinstein's Moscow Conservatory holding the position of professor of theory, music history, and piano.

[I am even happier that you introduced me to Aleksandr Nikolaevich whose great talent as a composer is already apparent to many people. As a performer, people treat him with some distrust, and I believe that this is not without reason. Due to his irritability and constant desire to perform solo without other participants, he sometimes makes a mess of his own compositions. The listener unfamiliar with his music sometimes cannot find either rhythm or melody, and therefore his performances often do damage to his own compositions. I believe that you may also not like such extremes and thus I am sure that your advice would be beneficial to him.]¹²⁴

Skryabin was quite aware of his susceptibility to receiving unfavourable reviews which were not always based on the performance of the day. An example of such an instance was his reception in Odessa. The critic in this case speaks of his inability to judge Skryabin's pianism and performance of his own concerto due to the fact that his music is foreign.¹²⁵ Skryabin, however, writes of a very successful partnership with Safonov in Odessa (even if he relates that the local newspapers were cautious and deliberate in their reviews of his concerto performance.)¹²⁶ It is impossible to pronounce a judgement in this case when two accounts of the same story seem irreconcilable, but perhaps

¹²⁴ “Еще более благодарен Вам за то, что Вы познакомили с Александром Николаевичем, которого композиторский талант поразил здесь многих. Как к исполнителю – к нему здесь отнеслись более недоверчиво, и мне кажется не без некоторого основания. solo без участников, он иногда так комкает свои сочинения, что слушатель, незнакомый с ними, не может усвоить ни ритма, ни мелодии, и, таким образом, часто исполнение его идет в ущерб сочинению. [...] Я уверен, что подобные крайности не могут быть Вам по сердцу, а принимая в нем такое сердечное участие, мне кажется, Ваши советы могли бы принести ему большую пользу.” Kashperov, *op. cit.*, 94.

¹²⁵ “Odesskie novosti,” 4112 (13 October, 1897): 3. Other reviews of the same concert (also expressing the same negative sentiment) may be found in “Odesskii Listok,” 243 (13 October, 1897): 3, and “Novorossiiskii telegraf,” 7273 (13 October, 1897): 3, although the later does make reference to an especially good left-hand technique. Nevertheless, see also the following reviews which convey similar unenthusiastic feelings and discuss briefly some points of technical downfall in Skryabin's pianism: “Birzhevye vedomosti,” 327 (30 January, 1898): 3; “Peterburgskaia gazeta,” 337 (8 December, 1898): 4; “Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti,” 329 (30 November, 1898): 4; “Novoe vremia,” 8183 (7 December, 1898): 3. Another review which came from “Peterburgskaia gazeta,” 328 (29 November, 1898): 9, was particularly disparaging. Most of these are reviews of Skryabin's performance of his piano concerto in St. Petersburg on 28 November, 1898.

¹²⁶ Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 183 and 207-8. The former page reference pertains to Skryabin's comments regarding Odessa, while the latter refers to his performance of his piano concerto in St. Petersburg on 28 November, 1898.

Skryabin's cautious reference to the reviews can be taken as an indicator of a fair measure of objectivity in his diary entries. A more dispassionate view of the St. Petersburg Concerto performance, while certainly not advertising the success of the Concerto, mentioned the considerable gift of the soloist. Also from this reviewer is the observation of Skryabin as a pianist not being ideally suited to the stage of a big hall.¹²⁷ These same points were reiterated by the reviewer of his concert in St. Petersburg on 30 March, 1902.

Another thread emerging from the reviews of Skryabin's early professional career is the fact that he was particularly prone to inconsistency as a performer. His bad days could be characterised by memory slips, technical problems, impulsive and rough playing. In general, however, evidence of failure or poor performance is corroborated by his diary entries.¹²⁸

In order to gain a full view of Skryabin's reception as a performer, it is also necessary to examine his concert career outside Russia. Skryabin's reception as a pianist outside his homeland was mixed. Reviews could range from reverential and fantastic to complete indifference or belittlement. In general, however, Western Europe warmed to his pianism almost immediately, while it seems plausible that some bias, probably political in foundation, greeted his tour of the USA and adversely effected his reception there.

¹²⁷ "Novoe vremia," 8176 (30 November, 1898): 4. This is one of the first remarks of its kind which would come to be an ever-present observation of the majority of critics.

¹²⁸ For example, "...Не совсем удался только полонез, то есть даже последняя его страница, которую смазал." [...my performance of the Polonaise was not successful due to my smudged rendition of the last page.] See Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 236.

The situation becomes more complicated when one reads of the apparent contradiction between his actual reception by the respective critics and Skryabin's own perception of his reception in the USA. I shall cite instances of this paradox in the ensuing discussion. Skryabin's first tour abroad took place in 1896. On the tour he performed in Berlin, Paris, and Brussels. The Russian review of this tour highlights the fact that he was well-received as a pianist in both France and Germany; the French also praised the originality and independence of his compositional voice. The critics wrote that he is a splendid pianist, in absolute control of his instrument, and the outstanding development of his left hand is especially noticeable.¹²⁹ Beliaev, however, in a letter to Safonov outlines that Skryabin is regarded with less confidence as a performer in Paris. A mitigating factor here might have been Skryabin's desire to risk his reputation by not practicing prior to his concerts.¹³⁰ Indeed, he seems to have believed that French audiences had taken him into their hearts and that he could do no wrong in their eyes.

All of this notwithstanding, other reviews in the French press were certainly approving, even if they did not address his pianism in detail. The French were truly moved if not also charmed by Skryabin's pianism, and also lauded his compositional skill which they thought very refined, condensed, and encompassing significant harmonic achievement.¹³¹ Evidently, the acclamation Skryabin received in France was unlike anywhere else. Another review testifies that:

¹²⁹ *Russkaia muzyka za granitsei* (1896): 386. Concert dates: 15th (Paris), 18th (Brussels), 29th (Berlin) January, 1896. Program: 2 Impromptus Op.10, Nocturne Op.5, 2 Impromptus a la Mazur Op.7, Allegro de Concert Op.18, 12 Preludes: Op.11 (E, c#, B, b, A, f#, G#, b), Op.16 (F#), Op.13 (e), and Op.17 (f), 4 Etudes Op.8 (f#, B, d#), 3 Mazurkas Op.3, and the Presto from Sonata #2 Op.19.

¹³⁰ See a letter to Beliaev from 12/24 April, 1896, in Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 142.

¹³¹ "L'Echo Musicale," (26 January, 1896): i5.

[Scriabine performed one of the most delicious recitals in Erard Hall which we have tasted in recent times. In him we see an exceptional personality, both an outstanding composer and pianist, prominent individualist and philosopher...He captivated the audience within a very short period of time with his playing without making anyone tired. After the recital he was asked to play some of his other pieces and he obliged graciously by playing several encores on request.]¹³²

Skryabin's reception in France was enviable to the point where he could only wish for a similar reception in his native Russia. By the time he visited Paris in 1906, his reputation had grown considerably as the critiques attest:

[M. Scriabin is not only a very original and distinguished talent, but also an accomplished technician as well as a talented composer. Regarding his virtuoso skills, he is an accomplished master whose playing is powerful, nervous, sometimes impetuous, although never lacking in charm in the calm passages.]¹³³

In Switzerland too, Skryabin was feted with much adulation for his virtuoso pianistic skills which were essentially termed out-of-this world:¹³⁴

[we heard a first-class virtuoso...M. Scriabine is a marvellous pianist who plays powerfully and combines an extraordinary rhythmic sense with a perfect technique. M. Scriabine presented us his work under the best possible conditions. His success was complete.]¹³⁵

¹³² "Scriabine a donné à la Salle Erard une des plus délicieuses auditions que nous ayons goûtées depuis longtemps. Nous étions en présence d'une nature d'élite, aussi éminent compositeur que pianiste, aussi intellectuel que philosophe...il a captivé son auditoire par ses oeuvres et ce, durant plusieurs heures, sans fatiguer le moins du monde. Après sa séance, on lui a même redemandé d'autres morceaux toujours de lui, et il s'y est prêté de fort bonne grâce." Yevgeny Georges, "La Libre Critique," 2.4 (26 January, 1896): 35.

¹³³ "...technicien accompli de son instrument autant que compositeur de talent...M. Scriabine n'en pas moins un talent très original et distingué...Quant au virtuose, c'est un maître accompli, don't le jeu, puissant, nerveux, vehement parfois, sans être exempt de charme dans les passages de douceur." "Le Guide Musical," 45 (1906): 707.

¹³⁴ See "Journal de Genève," (9 July, 1906), "car c'est un virtuose hors ligne."

¹³⁵ "ont entendu un virtuose de premier mérite...M. Scriabine est un merveilleux pianist an jeu puissant, qui joint à une technique parfait un rythme extraordinaire, on comprendra que M. Scriabine nous a présenté ses œuvres dans les meilleures conditions possible. Son succes été complet." "Tribune de Genève," (5 July, 1906). Skriabin played a recital in Geneva on 30 June, 1906, in Conservatorium Hall. The program was: Allegro de Concert Op.18, Nocturne Op.9, 6 Preludes Op.11, 3 Mazurkas, Sonata #3, Poème #2 Op.32, 3 Etudes Op.8 & 2, Waltz Op.38. See Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 426-7.

His concerts in Belgium were a resounding success. It was said that at a concert in Brussels in January of 1896, Skryabin kept his audience spellbound for hours with his precise, clear, intense, and richly coloured playing. The reviewer went on to state that the stronger sections of Skryabin's music sound unusually powerful¹³⁶ and that his left hand is breathtaking, which enables him to play the most difficult passages with rare ease. The reviewer concluded with the claim that more than anything else, Skryabin is a musician with a refined soul.¹³⁷

Similarly in Holland, Skryabin was warmly received. [The editorial of another daily newspaper called Skryabin a musician 'greatly gifted'.]¹³⁸ A slightly more specific account regarding Skryabin's pianistic abilities was provided by another unnamed critic who reviewed a recital in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw: [in his role as pianist, he was able to endear his audience with his refinement and impact on the keys, weakness in tone, and a certain grace in technique.]¹³⁹ The most detailed account from Holland emanates from various sources in the following statement:

[substantially developed pianist (...) although not an especially strong personality as a performer; a beautiful, subtle touch enhanced by feeling; his

¹³⁶ Clearly, Skryabin seems to have recovered from the after effects of the injury to his hand.

¹³⁷ "L'Art Moderne," 16.4 (26 January, 1896): 28. "...et a tenu, deux heures durant, l'auditoire choisi qui l'écoulait sous le charme de son jeu correct, précis, nerveux et nuancé. M. Scriabine a dans les passages de force, une puissance de son peu commune. Sa main gauche est déconcertante et se joue avec une aisance rare des plus grandes difficultés. Mais il y a surtout en M. Scriabine un musicien à l'âme delicate." Program details provided in footnote 118.

¹³⁸ "De recensent van een ander dagblad noemde Skryabin daarentegen een musicus 'van groote gaven'." The reviews available from Holland date from a later tour in 1912. This is cited from "Skryabin Bulletin," 7.2 (November, 1991): 5; original source information unknown. Program details: Piano Concerto Op.20, Poème Op.32, Etrangeté Op.63, Etude Op.8/12, and Preludes Op.11. See Kashperov, *op. cit.*, 597.

¹³⁹ "Als pianist kon hij bekoren door zekere fijnheid van aanslag weekheid van toon en gracie in de techniek..." "Haarlemsche Courant," (28 October, 1912).

touch contains a certain ‘charm’, and the tone produced through it enchants by its combination of weakness and lovely precision, his technique is full of grace and his rendition of a particular piece often sounds tender and sentimental, however we are unable to detect life and shine and masculinity together with conviction in his delivery (...) as a keyboard player he reaches the heights of a tone poet...he is a smart, technically well-developed pianist without a determined personal character; his technique - what brilliant octaves he displayed in the Etude! – it really proved to be more of a common everyday experience; exceptional pianist; warm piano-playing.]¹⁴⁰

This review seems to encapsulate the unique traits of Skryabin’s pianism previously highlighted by the Russian critics.

In Germany, Skryabin was highly praised for his display of great artistry and technique, and his profound expression of music. The same review published in Hamburg describes the attraction of Skryabin’s pianism, therein providing a reflective insight into the traits that herald his distinctiveness:

[not all the collection of ideas that Scriabine offered appeared convincing, in particular because he frequently contents himself with hints of intellectual/spiritual content. The sometimes capricious way of presentation, however, is so interesting that it must be welcome, even if it does not result in the listener’s ultimate artistic satisfaction. The artist received much praise for his brilliant interpretation of compositions and his captivating playing which was tinted with strong and suggestive energy.]¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ “degelijk ontwikkeld pianist (...) geen bepaald sterk persoonlijk spel; een mooie soepele aanslag gaat gepaard me gevoel; zijn aanslag heft wel zekere ‘charme’, en zijn toon bekoort door iets fijns en weeks, zijn techniek isgracicus en in zijn voordracht klinkt vaak een teeder sentiment, doch wij missen in zijn praestatie leven en gloed en mannelijheid en overtuiging (...) [staat] als klavierspeler hooger dan als toondichter...knap, technisch zeer ontwikkeld pianist zonder bepaald persoonlijk karakter; zijn techniek – wat een brillant octavenspel in die Etude! – bleek van meer dan alledaagsche beteekenis; uitstekend pianist; warmgevoeld piano-spel.” This is cited from “Skrjabin Bulletin,” 7.2 (November, 1991): 8. The citation details given therein are: GAA arch. 1039 (CG) knipsels 1912: “Het Vaderland” dd. 26.10.1912; “Dagblad van Zuid-Holland en s’Gravenhage,” “Algemeen Handelsblad,” dd. 28.10.1912; “NRC,” dd. 28 en 29.10.1912; “De Maasbode,” “De Nieuwe Courant,” “Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant,” “Haarlem’s Dagblad,” “Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant,” “De Residentiebode,” dd. 29.10.1912.

¹⁴¹ “nicht alles was Scriabine bot, erschien als in sich geschlossene Gruppe von überzeugenden Einfällen, zumal er sich häufig mit der Andeutung eines geistigen Inhaltes begnügt. Diese mitunter kapriziöse Art des Schaffens jedoch hat so viel Interessantes an sich, daß sie willkommen sein muß, auch wenn sie nicht das Letzte an künstlerischer Befriedigung bei dem Aufnehmenden hervorbringt. Hohes Lob kommt dem Künstler zu für die geistvolle Interpretierung der Kompositionen, für sein fesselndes, von

Skryabin was also enthusiastically received in England. Once again, the critics made observations that were in comparable to those made in other European centres. In particular, his playing was complimented for its velvet touch, beautiful and exact phrasing, and vital rhythmic drive.¹⁴² The concerts in England came just over one year prior to his sudden death.

Skryabin's reception in America was certainly not in keeping with the recognition he received elsewhere. This raises important issues: first, can we place weight on and affirm the veracity and integrity of Skryabin's own diary entries (particularly of his concert activities) which speak of his phenomenal success in the USA, when the fact remains that this is not evidenced in the reviews, which were unenthusiastic?¹⁴³ In the face of the rave reviews that followed him from Europe, the best Skryabin could muster

starker suggestiver Kraft durchwehtes gesundes Musizieren." J.C. Lusztiq, "Hamburger Fermdenbatt," 53 (3 March, 1911): 18. The review relates to a recital on 14/27 February, 1911, in Berlin. Program details: Prelude Op.13/1, Preludes Op.11 (G^b, b^b, D, c#, g, d), Preludes Op.16 (B, g#), Preludes Op.31 (e^b), Preludes Op.17 (D^b, b^b), Nocturne Op.9, Etudes Op.8 (f#, A^b, d#), Third Sonata Op.23, Mazurka Op.3 (e^b), Mazurka Op.40 (D^b, F#), Poèmes Op.32, Désir Op.57, quasi-Waltz Op.47, Enigme Op.52, Polonaise Op.21.

¹⁴² "The Times," (16 March, 1914): 12; this review is taken from Skryabin's London debut concert in Queen's Hall, London. At this concert he played his piano concerto with Sergei Koussevitzky and the London Symphony Orchestra. Another review of this same concert appears in "The Musical Courier," 3 (1914): 36-7. The second said review also confirms Skryabin's wonderful pianism. Later on the same day, it was reported that Skryabin gave masterly interpretations of his own works in Bechstein Hall, London. See "The Times," (21 March, 1914): 10. Another review of Skryabin's two concerts in London can be found in "Allgemeine Musik Zeitung" 15 (1914): 520. The critic, Alma Goatley, responding positively to both concerts states: "der erste Klavierabend Scriabines erweckte bei einer großen Zuhörerschaft größtes Interesse und Anerkennung...Daß uns in Scriabine eine aufrichtige, echte Künstlernatur begegnet, darüber ist kein Zweifel, gleichviel wie man sich zu seinen Arbeiten stellt." Skryabin played a recital consisting of his 2nd, 3rd, and 9th Sonatas, 8 Preludes Op.11, and Pieces from Opp.51, 56, 59 and 63.

¹⁴³ Olga Tompakova, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Skriabin: liubov' i muzyka; chast' vtoraiia: Tat'iana Fedorovna (Moscow: Iris Press, 1994), 13.

in the USA was one critic who described his playing as “finished and refined.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the reviews in the USA tend to be more conservative, dilettantish, and Russo-sceptic than elsewhere. To this end, a comparison of a particular critic’s review with Skryabin’s own account of his performance typically reveals a glaring contradiction. Second, and perhaps a more significant matter to address is why have American critics been so disparaging in their remarks where their European counterparts had previously written with so much enthusiasm for the artistry of Skryabin as both pianist and composer?

Let us examine these issues of reception in greater detail. In anticipation of Skryabin’s first American tour, his old teacher, Safonov, now the chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic, undertook to promote and prepare audiences for Skryabin’s artistry. Safonov’s esteem for his former student had evidently not diminished.¹⁴⁵ Thus, largely through Safonov’s efforts and the promotion of the Russian Symphony Society, America awaited a pianist with a “passionate energy, very influential; a beautiful tone quality, supple technique and rhythmic intelligence.”¹⁴⁶

Skryabin’s American debut took place on 20 December, 1906, in Carnegie Hall, New York. By all accounts it was an inauspicious occasion with a small audience gathered.

¹⁴⁴ “Town & Country: New Series of the Home Journal,” 61.47 (New York: 9 February, 1907): 8. This comment pertains to a Skryabin’s recital at Mendelssohn Hall, New York, on 13 January, 1907.

¹⁴⁵ Read of Safonov’s promotion of and admiration for his former pupil in “The Sun,” (19 January, 1908): 6.

¹⁴⁶ This quote is found within the review herewith cited. It is quite plausible to assume that these words emanate from Safonov given the context in which the quote is mentioned. See “New York Tribune,” (9 December, 1906): b2.

Skryabin played his concerto with Safonov directing the orchestra. Skryabin's own view of the concert can be summarised in the following statement he made, [in spite of terrible nervousness, like never before, I played quite well. They say the grand-piano sounded fantastic.]¹⁴⁷ The two reviews of this concert, however, tell a very different story. "Mr. Scriabine's playing did not make a profound impression, being devoted more to external glitter than to beauty of tone and expression."¹⁴⁸ This comment comes from a rather scathing review not only of Skryabin as pianist and composer, but also of Safonov and the Russian Symphony Society. It openly voices a bias that must have greeted Skryabin. In the words of the reviewer, Skryabin's presence in America (together with the steady programming of Russian music and musicians in New York) is part of a propaganda campaign. Another review of the same concert stated "Scriabine the composer has provided Scriabine the pianist with matter well suited to his style, which is brilliant, crisp, and clear; but he has not, so far as he showed last evening, any considerable command of richness or depth of tone."¹⁴⁹

The reviews relating to his recital debut at Mendelssohn Hall, New York, were also far from laudatory, even if the concert was marginally more successful than his debut at Carnegie Hall:¹⁵⁰

As a pianist Mr. Scriabine has less charm than as a composer. He cannot wring out of the piano all it can offer in the way of richness, beauty, or variety of tone, nor does he always make it sing. His style is toward

¹⁴⁷ "Я хотя безумно волновался, как никогда, но играл все же хорошо. Рояль, говорят, звучал волшеббно." Kashperov, *op. cit.*, 448.

¹⁴⁸ H.E.K., "New York Tribune," (21 December, 1906): 7.

¹⁴⁹ "New York Times," (21 December, 1906): 9.

¹⁵⁰ See the review from "New York Times," (31 January, 1907): 9.

crispness, a little overdone and a brilliancy that is a little hard. A more convincing interpreter than he himself is of his own music could make it sound even more ingratiating than he did.¹⁵¹

The review published in “The Independent” restated the belief that Skryabin, due to his shortcomings as a player, was not the ideal interpreter of his own music.¹⁵² Once again, all this stands in stark opposition to Skryabin’s diary entry which describes the New York recital debut as a great success. Skryabin went further to state that Safonov, who said that all his expectations were exceeded, was in ecstasy!¹⁵³

The propagandistic insinuations together with a generally dismissive tone continued to be leitmotifs present in almost every American review. Safonov was in fact openly accused of attempting to pervert the musical tastes of the New York audience, by his frequent programming of Russian compositions and his sponsoring of young instrumentalists like his former student.¹⁵⁴ Skryabin’s compositional gifts too were not appreciated by American critics. In almost all the reviews there is mention of his predilection for miniatures, his inability to offer and perhaps comprehend larger formal structures, his poor imitation of Chopin, and that his music belongs within the domain of a salon as opposed to the concert hall. Reasons behind the mainly cold reception Skryabin received in the USA could be numerous.¹⁵⁵ It seems apparent, however, that

¹⁵¹ “New York Times,” (4 January, 1907): 7.

¹⁵² See “The Independent,” (31 January, 1907): 256.

¹⁵³ Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 453-4.

¹⁵⁴ See “The Sun,” (19 January, 1908): 6.

¹⁵⁵ Historically, there might be plausible reason for the hostility toward Russian artists in America during this time as a result of the Russo-Japanese war. Even though America seemed strongly allied with Russia after the debacle of the Russo-Japanese war (doing so pointedly against Britain, which

critics, who were to a large extent the voice of the people, felt besieged at the time by a quasi-Russian musical invasion of America. An unashamedly bigoted review highlights the intensity of this problem:

possibly some day the secret of the astonishing support of Russian music will come out. At present the thoughtful observer of musical doings in this city can only wonder why so many excellent persons are willing to put their hands into their pockets to pay for so much poor stuff...It is the privilege of the general public to stay away from these concerts, and it does so with admirable composure. Nevertheless the concerts go on and are attended by audiences composed largely of Russians, who, to put the matter as softly as possible, are not prepared to qualify as experts in the gentle art of listening to good music....Why should we be expected to take such an extraordinary interest in the writings of the contemporaneous Cossacks? The attempt to get [Alexander Scriabine] accepted here as a piano virtuoso was one of the most ludicrous failures of the season. Mr. Scriabine is a gentleman and a scholar and doubtless a good judge of vodka, but as a composer he is open to the suspicion of drinking cream of violets and smoking Turkish cigarettes.¹⁵⁶

All this undoubtedly effected and prejudiced Skryabin's reception in America.¹⁵⁷

Paradoxically and notwithstanding all the undistinguished reviews, Skryabin himself was more than merely satisfied with his performances in America, even if he expressed his disdain for American culture and his annoyance with the fact that conservative American values frowned upon his *de facto* relationship status with Tatiana. The weight of the extant evidence is certainly on the side of Skryabin, especially considering that it is reasonable to assume he was playing at his peak during this period. The European

wanted the peace treaty to be as humiliating and weakening for Russia as possible), there was obviously residual and still simmering tensions together with a suppressed antagonism towards Russians in America as a result of the war. Furthermore, this conflict was the precursor to the Russian Revolution of 1905 which evidently did little to rebuild the confidence of foreigners in the Russian state and people as peaceful and non-confrontational. See Andrew Malozemoff, Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 41-253 and John Westwood, Russia against Japan, 1904-05: A New Look at the Russo-Japanese War (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 116-153.

¹⁵⁶ "The Sun," (10 March, 1907): 10. This represents an orientalist view of Russia as wild, exotic, other. Skryabin perhaps took advantage of this stereotype too.

¹⁵⁷ The hostility might have, on some level, been a factor in Skryabin's withdrawal into more private events as his career unfolded.

reviews not only attest to this fact, but a mere six weeks prior to his American debut Skryabin himself stated in a letter to Morozova from Geneva that [I play a lot and am very happy with my technique which has never been in such a brilliant condition.]¹⁵⁸ Underscoring the incongruence between Skryabin's diary entries and the reviews, Skryabin wrote a letter to Schloezer-Skryabina stating that [the concert in New York went brilliantly, in Cincinnati even better! Critics were full of praise!]¹⁵⁹ In fact, the review from Cincinnati was certainly positive and remains a singular instance of American approbation of Skryabin's pianism. The unnamed critic praises Skryabin, but what is even more revealing is the impressive qualities the reviewer observed in his playing which contradicts the statements made by all other American critics. An extract from the Cincinnati review follows:

Scriabine's playing is...well-proportioned. He plays, too, as one who has reserve power and is not letting out his full strength...his virility of style, coupled with an extraordinary delicacy, was shown to best advantage...he developed extraordinary speed and bravura, fully meeting orchestral demands of tone production in fortissimo passages. And it goes without saying that his reading was authoritative and musicianly.¹⁶⁰

In accordance with the above review, Skryabin wrote to Morozova immediately prior to his departure from America and stated [...the artistic success was huge...].¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ “Я много играю и очень доволен своей техникой, которая никогда не была в таком блестящем состоянии.” Kashperov, *op. cit.*, 429. The conservative attitudes he found in the USA were to prevail with respect to another notorious event in Skryabin's career: the unsuccessful American premiere of his *Prométhée -- Le Poème du Feu*, Op. 60 in 1915. Successfully received in Russia, England, and Holland, it was a dismal failure in the USA. See James Baker, “*Prometheus* and the Quest for Color-Music: The World Première of Scriabin's *Poem of Fire* with Lights, New York, 20 March 1915,” Journal of the Scriabin Society of America 9.1 (2004-05): 29-30.

¹⁵⁹ “Концерты в Нью-Йорке сошли блестяще, в Цинцинати еще лучше! Критики были бесподобные!” Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 461.

¹⁶⁰ “The Musical Courier,” 3 (1907): 30.

¹⁶¹ “...артистический успех был большой...” Kashperov (1965), *op. cit.*, 465.

Skryabin's return to Russia in 1909 after years of exile abroad heralded his real recognition and enshrinement in Russian culture both as composer and pianist.¹⁶² The impressions of later performances are chiefly connected with the perception of Skryabin the pianist as seen through the works of Skryabin the composer.¹⁶³ Many people noted the precise incarnation of the musical imagery of Skryabin's compositions in his playing. It was apparent that the Russian musical elite had changed their attitude towards him in statements such as: [while he creates, art progresses and Russian music is always developing.]¹⁶⁴

In spite of all the negative criticism,¹⁶⁵ however, Skryabin as pianist was thought to offer a unique and special insight into his own music which was unmatched by other performers of his music. In this sense, his sincerity as a performer was greatly admired and added authority to his performances.¹⁶⁶ Anatolii Drozdov remembers the opening

¹⁶² Olga Tompakova, Skryabin v khudozhestvennom mire Moskvy konca XIX-nachala XX veka: novye techeniia (Moscow: Muzyka, 1997), 30. See also "Moskovskie vedomosti," 35 (13 February, 1910): 4. It was Sergei Koussevitzky who persuaded Skryabin to return to Russia. Skryabin met him in 1908, and thereafter Koussevitzky filled the void left by Beliaev and assumed responsibility, like Beliaev before him, for Skryabin's career, officiating as concert promoter and publisher. Performances of *Le poème de l'extase* in both Moscow and St. Petersburg caused a sensation and firmly established Skryabin's position at the forefront of contemporary musicians.

¹⁶³ It seems to have been accepted that Skryabin was now not the most technically accomplished pianist he had once been as a student. Certainly, his technical flaws received attention, but the reviewers seemed to be praising a more mature, individual performer of his own music, for whom the piano was now a secondary career to his compositional output.

¹⁶⁴ "Пока Скрябинь творить – искусство идет вперед, и русская музыка является искусством передовым, неизменно развивающимся." "Utro Rossii," 88.55 (23 January, 1910): 2.

¹⁶⁵ See "Russkie vedomosti," 35 (13 February, 1910): 4; "Russkie vedomosti," 35 (13 February, 1910): 5; "Birzhevye vedomosti," 12037 (23 November, 1910): 5; "Saratovskii vestnik," 102 (13 May, 1910): 4. A common theme that runs through the reviews of this time is that his miniature forms and soft sound were not ideally suited to the atmosphere of a big hall.

¹⁶⁶ "Birzhevye vedomosti," 12612 (1 November, 1911): 4-5, and "Russkie vedomosti," 35 (13 February, 1910): 5.

of the Moscow agency of the fortepiano firm Bechstein on 9 September, 1911, at which Skryabin performed several of his miniatures. In this intimate setting with its immediate closeness to the artist, Drozdov sensed for the first time the secrets of Skryabin's touch and pedal technique, the breathing of the piano, the dematerialization of the sound, all of which were so characteristic of his playing.¹⁶⁷ From this period, Fokt also relates an interesting meeting with Skryabin which sheds light on his ability to express the intangible and metaphoric Symbolist concepts through his pianism:

During our third and last meeting, Skryabin played a whole range of pieces. They were very interesting experiences of musical expression of different concepts such as: change, abstraction, detailed unity, uninterruptedness, occurrence, etc. He was indeed inexhaustible in his Etudes, and frankly told me that in the musical expression of even the most precise concepts and relations, he felt especially strong. I don't know if there is anything I cannot express on the piano, he said. It seems that from those separate expressions I could have been able to create the whole system, at least in the sense of a certain inner whole, and it seems to me that the musical expressions are even more precise than the logical. They have a pictorial imagery which abstract concepts do not have.¹⁶⁸

By the time of Skryabin's final appearances in Russia, it would appear that critics were already prepared to engage in a discussion of the manner in which his playing translated Symbolist concepts. From reminiscences of one of these final concerts in Russia:

Skryabin's playing (bound by no program either in print or by announcement), was a complete and undivided immersion in the musical

¹⁶⁷ Anatolii Drozdov, "Vospominaniia o Skriabine," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 12 (1946): 71-72. Drozdov (1883-1950), was an esteemed composer, pianist, and musicologist, having taught at an array of Russian institutions in his career.

¹⁶⁸ "В нашу третью и последнюю встречу А.Н. сыграл мне целый ряд вещей – это были очень интересные опыты музыкального выражения различных понятий, как-то: изменение, абстракция, конкретное единство, непрерывность, возникновение и т.п. Он был поистине неисчерпаем в этих этюдах и чистосердечно заявил мне, что в музыкальном выражении даже самых точных понятий и отношений он чувствовал себя особенно сильным. Я не знаю, чего я бы не мог выразить на рояле, - сказал он, - мне кажется, что из этих отдельных выражений я мог бы создать целую систему, по крайней мере в смысле некоторого внутреннего целого, и мне кажется, что музыкальное выражение даже точнее логического – в нем есть изобразительность, которой нет в отвлеченных понятиях." Tompakova (1993), *op. cit.*, 183.

element -- both for the audience and for the player. The contours of his person and the plasticity of his movements at the piano were apparently outlined in the hall. His head was slightly raised, and his torso was sometimes thrown back towards the back of the chair in wrenching movements, whilst at other times it stood erect in a self-assured commanding posture in moments of animation. The sound of the grand piano was changed beyond recognition. The whimsical, enigmatic sounds seemed to float in the air during his playing of numerous miniatures (*Désir*, *Fragilité* etc.). Even more significant and profound was the content of the larger excerpts. One could sense the massive timbres of mighty church bells and the martial peal of trumpets. The lyricism of fantastic concords yielded to the elemental growth of sonic massifs. Orgiastic dances formed the climax of a complex chain of Attic dramas of conflict and accumulation. The explanation of the profound impression that was created lies precisely in the seamless union and congeniality of creative and pianistic mastery which were so characteristic of Skryabin.¹⁶⁹

Here one observes a commentary that marries the metaphoric associations with the implied metaphysical transformation envisaged by the Symbolist aesthetic programme, articulates the realisation of Symbolist motifs, and provides a succinct and practical description of a master pianist in performance. The focus on programmatic effects, also typical of the language of Sabaneev, may have been informed by Skryabin himself, who tended to comment on his music programmatically, as if willing it to be more than music. Nevertheless, the review of Skryabin's final concert on 4 April, 1915 simply read: [he played remarkably well. Skryabin enjoyed an outstanding success, and left a

¹⁶⁹ “Освобожденная от всех средостений концертной обстановки, не связанная ни программой, ни анонсированием исполняемого, игра эта была полным и безраздельным погружением в музыкальную стихию — как для слушателей, так и для исполнителя. В полумраке кабинета (Александр Николаевич любил иногда “засурдиненное” освещение) мягко рисовались контуры его фигуры, пластика его фортепианных жестов. Слегка приподнятая голова, корпус, — то откинутый к спинке стула (в “истомных” моментах), то выпрямленный в повелительно-волевой позе (в моменты подъема). Неузнаваемо преобразалась звучность моего рояля. Причудливые, “энигматические” [загадочные] звучания как бы парили в воздухе (это были многочисленные миниатюры типа *Désir*, *Fragilité* и т. п.). Еще значительнее, глубже было содержание крупных фрагментов. Ощущались массивные колокольные тембры, призывные звуки труб. Лирика причудливых ладов сменялась стихичным ростом звуковых массивов. Оргийные танцы завершали сложную цепь драм аттических коллизий и нарастаний. Это были черновики создававшихся тогда сонат седьмой и шестой, возможно, и восьмой...Разгадка [глубокого впечатления] лежит именно в слитности и конгенности творческого и пианистического мастерства, которые так характерны были для Скрябина.” Drozdov, *op. cit.*, 71-72.

superb impression from the point of view of pianistic purity.]¹⁷⁰

EXAMINING THE RECORDED EVIDENCE

Having seen how the musical establishment responded to Skryabin's pianism, one is still left to speculate if this is congruent with his recorded evidence. Furthermore, given the knowledge that can be gleaned from an aesthetic together with a theoretical examination¹⁷¹ of the harmonic vocabulary¹⁷² and how this is technically and practically

¹⁷⁰ “Он играл замечательно хорошо. Скрябин имел выдающийся успех, причем оставил великолепное впечатление с чисто фортепианной точки зрения, как пианист.” Nik Bernshtein, “Kontsert: A.N. Skriabina,” Petrogradskie vedomosti (4 Apr., 1915).

¹⁷¹ Skryabin's early style, with its sophisticated exploitation of lush diatonic harmony saturated with chromaticism, was clearly an attempt to imitate an idol in Chopin. His early works abound with evidence of quartal and whole-tone harmony, although his most significant and enduring innovation in harmony exploited the ambiguity of the dominant 7th with the addition of b5 or #11. Although many theorists, among them the most prominent of whom is James Baker, regard his music post-Op. 30 as having no direct connection to the earlier romantic imitations, there still exists a subtle suggestion of his subsequent maturation. Indeed, this is a somewhat ambiguous contention particularly in view of Skryabin's gradual development from a tonal language to a post-tonal vocabulary. There are definitely fragments, as early as Op. 1, of quartal and whole-tone harmony which suggest the post-tonal compositions. The eminent Russian Skryabin scholar Vavara Dernova's work Garmoniia Skriabina (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1968) is closer to reconciling this paradox by her demonstration of foundational principles of the later style in the music from Opp. 30-58. Dernova is primarily concerned with delineating atonal procedures in the music. The “mystic chord” as a referential set is of great significance in her work which seeks to expose and emphasise the relevance of superimposed fourths. See also Gordon McQuere, Russian Theoretical Thought in Music (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), for an overview of Dernova's work. For other studies written from the viewpoint of regarding Skryabin's innovative harmonies as originating from traditional harmonic elements organised in superimposed thirds, cf.: David Brown, The New Grove Russian Masters, 2 vols., (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); Bowers (1973), *op. cit.*; Paul Dickenmann, Die Entwicklung der Harmonik bei Alexander Skryabin (Bern: P. Haupt, 1935); Kurt Westphal, “Die Harmonik Skryabins: Ein Versuch über ihr System und ihre Entwicklung in den Klavierwerken,” Musikblätter des Anbruch 11(1929): 64-69. In the transitional music, several conventional harmonies such as 7th chords frequently originate from voice-leading techniques and hence are not in themselves distinguishable harmonic functions. Dernova's central thesis was predicated on the advancement of the concept of “dual modality” (polytonality), whereby the existence and aural experience of two tonics can be demonstrated. Upon close scrutiny, however, it would appear that this is not a normative practice, although it may justifiably be proposed. For instance, the Etude Op. 56/4 capitalises on the ambiguity of what would appear to be V^7_{b5} which is also a subset of the whole-tone scale. Skryabin had a fondness for whole-tone harmonies, although they are seldom found in an unaltered and whole form. The whole-tone scales are commonly found in 4 or 5-note subsets. Baker explains the significance V^7_{b5} which functions as both a French 6th and a dominant seventh with a flattened fifth. This is the basic premise of Dernova's thesis. “For when V^7_{b5} is transposed up six half steps, the resulting chord contains the same pitches but functions as the dominant of a tonic a tritone above the original tonal center” (Baker: 4). This is typical of Russian theoretical approaches to Skryabin which have been almost always vertical in conception, conservative in their approach to

dissonant stability. Another characteristic feature of their approaches is their view that Skryabin remained a tonal composer to the end. Thus, Russian theory commonly advertises a tonic and/or dominant function with respect to his harmonic vocabulary. This concept together with the significance and implications of the tritone were first advanced by Boleslav Yavorsky from whom the respective theories of Kholopov and Dernova have taken their cue.

Octatonic approaches have had their chief representatives in Taruskin, Berger, and van den Toorn. This approach has been bolstered by evidence that Skryabin could not have escaped the octatonic influences of Rimsky-Korsakov. Reise, however, while sympathetic to whole-tone and octatonic readings and offering a very logical approach to Skryabin's voice-leading, is the most vocal opponent of using this as a whole-sale approach. See Richard Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 298, and also Jay Reise, "Late Skriabin: Some Principles Behind the Style," Nineteenth-Century Music 6 (1983): 220-31. Perle shocked sensibilities in his descriptions of this music of Skryabin's final phase when he stated not only that Skryabin prefigured Schoenberg's dodecaphonic music but that he was as such a serial composer. (See Perle, Serial Composition and Atonality, 3rd ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 41). Perle did stop short, however, of describing Skryabin as an atonal composer but nevertheless proceeded to add to confusion when he viewed Op. 74 as being octatonically derived with obvious tonal functions underneath. (See George Perle, "Scriabin's Self-Analyses," Music Analysis 3.2 (1984): 105). Summarizing the various theoretical approaches to Skryabin, it should be stated that all analytical methods share a common ground in their identification and discussion of a dominant-type chord which is composed of a major third and minor seventh but is frequently not built on the fifth scale degree. This sonority has been variously labeled as the Mystic or Prometheus chord. The interpretation and function of this chord has been the source of much debate. Skryabin's biographer, Leonid Sabaneev, described this chord as a collection of overtone partials but fails to show its relationship to other structural features in the music. Another theoretical approach has been to emphasize the prevalence of fourths and its centrality to both Skryabin's post-transitional harmonic vocabulary and his general harmonic conception. Whilst this observation seems quite accurate, it fails to account for the intervallic third motions in the bass and thus the fact that Skryabin's oeuvre might truly be more triadic than anything else. See Philip Ewell, "Analytical Approaches to Large-scale Structure in the Music of Alexander Scriabin," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2001), 3.

¹⁷² Following 1903, the feeling of metre was further distorted and displaced, the harmonic rhythm was elongated, and the tritone and its intrinsic ambivalence emerged as the central kernel of his harmonic vocabulary. Gradually, the statement of defined tonal progressions became scarce. Cadences to signify closure became more sporadic, and tonal functions were obscured, even though they were not forsaken until *Prométhée*. As a result, the listener perceives a distorted sense of time. Also serving to suspend the sense of time in the music are ever-present metric modulations and irregular rhythms. The significance of bII (together with tonic and dominant movement) as a consequential function in Skryabin's early-transitional music is not mere coincidence. This sonority is utilised in two idiosyncratic ways in the music of Skryabin: firstly, when superimposed with the dominant it reveals an enchanting sonority where the tritone defines the intervallic structure (see Etude Op. 42/1, mm. 70-1); and secondly, the tonic of bII (*i.e.*, the flattened supertonic in relation to I) is commonly utilised in the music as an upper auxiliary to the tonic (see Etude Op. 8/8, mm. 14-15). Given the importance Skryabin places on the bII function, its use as an ancillary tonal reference, due to its inherent capability to link remote chords to the tonic, is not uncommon. Also significant in Skryabin's harmonic vocabulary are augmented 6th chords. They are frequently used in their conventional role of preparing the dominant. A fundamental notion concerning the organisation of Skryabin's music is the idea of repetition. The representation of musical material was achieved through either a repetition at the same pitch level or by a sequential transposition. (See Robert Morgan, Twentieth Century Music (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 56). A repetition usually highlights a specific sonority in an attempt to stress its transforming implication. Such repeated sections are commonly dispersed at critical points throughout the music. Skryabin's concept of repetition generally comprises a similar representation of a particular section transposed to a different tonality. This process and the concept of repetition represents Skryabin's main strategy for realising the primary harmonic targets of his tonal plans. Repetition at different pitch

translated for piano, there remains the increasingly perplexing and enigmatic problem of defining a Skryabin performance style. The answer to this will shed much light on the

levels provided his music with a powerful generator that was used to highlight his proclivity for certain sonorities.

Harmonic motifs as opposed to themes permeate the compositions of his final phase, from 1910 to 1915. This is a pivotal contention, for many analysts (including Baker) examine this music using set-complex theory with the justification that it is atonal. An aural experience together with a performer's approach to this music, however, both seem to confirm its foundations in tonality. It can therefore be misleading to use an analytical orthodoxy in the examination of this music that is primarily intended to demonstrate coherence in atonal music. Consequently, an extension of tonality or post-tonality would be a far more accurate description of the tendencies of this music. These motifs typically share a common denominator in the "mystic" chord. Concentrated designs were the result of a tendency to distort the sense of time. Skryabin wrote exclusively in single movements, frequently in quasi-epigrams like the extremely condensed *Preludes Op. 74*, whilst the majority of his contemporaries were writing on ever larger canvases. See also Perle (1984), *op. cit.*, 101-22. The music seeks not to 'move' anywhere, but revolves kaleidoscopically around itself.

In the compositions post-1910, Skryabin began to increase the number of intervals above the root which subsequently found their way into his exotic chords. Characteristic of the music of the last period is the instability and apparent lack of any predominant tonal centre, the exploration of other possibilities to the established mediant/dominant based tonal relationships of his Romantic predecessors, and the greater sophistication of the harmony, which resulted in the distortion of the boundary between tones of the prevailing harmony and those imported nonharmonic tones. "As Scriabin's dominant harmonies became increasingly non-functional, it is the added 6th which, more than anything else, suggests the tonic: it often functions as a harmony note, not within the dominant but as the 3rd of the implied tonic intruding into the dominant chord." See Peter Roberts, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Skriabin, Prokofiev, and their Russian Contemporaries* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), 11.

The interval of the minor 3rd over the tonic was recast as a dissonance which impeded the aural awareness of the existing dominant sonority. The common resolutive motion was a descent to the minor 9th, although this interval also became identified with experimental octatonic scales and modes of limited transposition. In this sense, the concept of the minor 3rd was of great significance. Another feature introduced into the late works was that of the 4th being placed below the root, either as a substitute for or a mere alternative to the triton (see *Etude Op. 65/2*, m. 29). Employed in this position in the absence of other tones, the 4th strengthens the position of the upper note (the perceived root) and rather ambiguously emphasises its aural perspective as an albeit temporary tonic.

The prominence of a pitch within the harmony came to be regulated not merely by its dissonance, tonal function, or position in conventional voice leading, but by its capacity to be consumed by a dominant function without spoiling the aural impact of that harmony. The introduction of unessential dominant-based 7ths (with one or more notes in common) where such chords may encompass a tritone together with the use of chords related by whole tone movement in the bass voice, were all traits which Skryabin adopted from his Russian nationalist forebears and were extended in his vocabulary.

It is imperative to grasp the concept of Skryabin's fondness for and fascination with piano sonority, which was a significant factor in the determination of the intervallic structures used. Undoubtedly, one of the most striking examples of this is the so called mystic chord. A close study of the oeuvre would highlight its use not so much as a chord of a functional harmony but rather as a sonority. "For me there is no difference between melody and harmony – they are one and the same." See Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia ob A.N. Skriabine* (Moscow: Klassika -XXI, 2000), 46-7. From this passage of Sabaneev, we can ascertain that Skryabin in fact thought of his Mystic chord as a replacement for the traditional tonic. In it he thus saw stability and the ability for other chords to resolve to it. To this end, we can also be certain that he most definitely thought of himself as a tonal composer unlike Debussy, Schoenberg, or Stravinsky. Of even greater interest is Skryabin's employment of a complete mixture of the upper partials of the harmonic series as a consonance. This sonority permeates the compositions of the late period where only auxiliary and passing tones are conceived as discordant. (See Arthur Eaglefield Hull, "The Pianoforte Sonatas of Scriabin," *The Musical Times* 57.886 (December, 1916): 539-40.

equally bewildering question of precisely how to interpret the works of this composer.¹⁷³

In an effort to clarify this puzzle it is imperative that Skryabin's own recordings be scrutinised. "Scriabin's message resident within the corpus of his output relates to what people of today are discovering -- intuitive knowledge or feeling instead of thought, mysticism as an alternate logic, action rather than contemplation..."¹⁷⁴

There remains, however, an impediment in connecting Skryabin's aesthetic ideas with his performance practices and forming conclusions based on them. The primary reason for this problem is the paucity of extant recordings of Skryabin together with the fact that (with the exception of *Désir* Op.57/1) he chose to record miniatures from his early period of composition. These Chopin-influenced compositions fall well outside the ambit of the final phase when the aesthetic truly permeated and came to rest within the music. Circumventing this difficulty is possible, however, if one assumes that both aesthetic and performance practices developed gradually and commensurately, thus becoming increasingly interrelated moving through the oeuvre. Then it is certainly possible to posit and chart the existence of such links even in the face of such difficulties. This notwithstanding, in locating Symbolist motifs in three of the short pieces, I have tried not to be over-zealous in connecting aesthetic and music for want of offering a bias or unreasonable and reductive reading. In cases where the connection is

¹⁷³ See an article by the author of this study which exemplifies and summarises the cardinal themes in the Skryabin theoretical literature and also discusses Skryabin's predilection for certain sonorities. See John Rego, "Defining a performance style: general observations on Skryabin the pianist, his compositional language and its translation for piano," *Journal of the Scriabin Society of America* 9.1 (Winter, 2004-2005): 63-78.

¹⁷⁴ Bowers (1970-71), *op. cit.*, 13.

more tenuous, I will simply précis Skryabin's performance practices and interpretative approach to the respective piece of music.¹⁷⁵

“As Skryabin played his secret liturgical acts for people, even a passive listener began to feel currents of electricity stretching out to tingle at his psychic nerves. This was not simply an artistic experience, but something irrational, unamenable to reason. It shattered the frontiers of art as we know them.”¹⁷⁶ What then are some of these characteristics? Comments such as these from people who witnessed the composer in performance attest to a distinctive performance style whereby tempo, rhythmic, dynamic, and pitch alterations were frequent.¹⁷⁷ These embellishments of the original score were not, however, merely arbitrary changes, as a close examination of the extant sources reveals a certain consistency.

The recorded legacy of Skryabin dates from two sessions in the first decade of this century. In 1908, Skryabin committed fourteen short works to record via the Hupfeld

¹⁷⁵ By definition, such connections can only be loose and malleable, traces of the fleeting other experiential planes Skryabin sought to invoke.

¹⁷⁶ Sabaneev (1927), *op. cit.*, 47, and Bowers (1970-71), *op. cit.*, 15. See Vladimir Jankélévitch, La musique et l'ineffable (Paris: A. Colin, 1961) for a general discussion on the subject of transformations of listening experiences.

¹⁷⁷ A much documented theme that runs through Romantic pianism is the preoccupation with the transmission of *cantabile* melodic lines and tone that could sing. Leszetycki embodied the tendency of the late nineteenth century pianist who frequently arpeggiated chords and displaced the bass before the treble, in an effort to highlight the importance of the melody. The methods which were devised to emphasise the importance of singing through tone production also affected a new repertoire of songs transcriptions. As such, it can be generally stated that an obsession with tone quality together with the projection of melody characterises late-Romantic pianism. Skryabin certainly did not escape such preoccupations, traditions, and fads of the mainstream, although his performance practices took on a greater significance in the attachment to an unconcealed Symbolist aesthetic. See Kenneth Hamilton, “The Virtuoso Tradition,” in The Cambridge Companion to the Piano ed. David Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 69.

Phonola reproducing piano.¹⁷⁸ This apparatus was able to retain the original speed but not the original sound. In 1910, Skryabin recorded a further nine works, including four which were previously recorded for the Hupfeld Phonola firm, for Welte-Mignon.¹⁷⁹ Of these twenty-three recordings, a mere nine have been acoustically recorded and released.¹⁸⁰ Welte-Mignon provided a more precise representation of the composer's playing by its ability to reproduce the pedalling and capture most of the range of volume. The Welte-Mignon apparatus had two models, the first of which had a perforating machine built into a normal grand piano. The second model separated the machine (known as the *Welte Vorsetzer*) and the instrument. The strength of the Welte-Mignon was its capability to reproduce fast passage-work, intricate rhythms, and delicate alterations in tempo with remarkable precision. The major weakness of this apparatus was its inability to reproduce a subtle dynamic range. As Leikin explains:

the dynamic differentiation between various layers of musical texture was particularly problematic. The entire diapason of the Welte-Mignon was divided into two halves. Each half (above or below the f# in the first octave) had an independently operating mechanism for dynamics. As long as the treble and the bass did not cross the f# borderline in the middle, they could be performed with autonomous dynamics. But voicing two parts differently was impossible if they both moved within the same half of the diapason.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Preludes Op. 11, Nos. 10, 13, & 14; Mazurkas Op. 25, Nos. 1 & 3, Op. 40, No. 2; Two Poèmes Op. 32; Etude Op. 8, No. 8; Albumleaf Op. 45, No. 1; Sonatas No. 2 & 3.

¹⁷⁹ Preludes Op. 11, Nos. 1, 2, 13, & 14, Op. 22, No. 1; Mazurkas Op. 40, No. 2; Poème Op. 32, No. 1; Etude Op. 8, No. 12; Désir Op. 57, No. 1.

¹⁸⁰ This involved either one of two processes: 1) the pianist was made to play on an instrument that was wired, via the hammers, to markers which recorded whenever the key was depressed by an indication on a roll of paper being pulled along at a constant speed; these markings were subsequently perforated to make the piano roll; 2) the second method eliminated the need for markers by attaching, in the first instance, a perforating machine to the piano. For an explanation of greater detail see Arthur Ord-Hume, *Pianola: The History of the Self-Playing Piano* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

¹⁸¹ Anatole Leikin, "The Performance of Scriabin's Piano Music," *Performance Practice Review* 9 (1996): 101.

Similarly, the accurate rendering of the pedalling used was almost impossible. In essence, the Welte-Mignon apparatus could only capture a full depression or release of the pedal. The apparatus did not cater for half and quarter depressions of the pedal, or for a vibrating pedal, both of which are essential to appreciate Skryabin's pedal indications and his own talent and unique manner of utilising them in performance. The greatest offence, however, involved the inability of the apparatus to capture Skryabin's wide and acclaimed spectrum of touch. Further, an inherent problem with such primitive recording equipment was the decomposition of the paper used to register the holes which would inevitably shrink as time passed and hence effect changes to the various parameters.¹⁸²

Thus, the limitations of the Welte-Mignon technology are obvious, but care must also be taken to ensure that the estimation of Skryabin's artistry is not diminished by such modest recording techniques.¹⁸³ It may be difficult to enumerate the various qualities of Skryabin's playing, but not impossible. There is a method by which the authentic features of his performances can be highlighted without misrepresentation. The variation in pitch, rhythm, and tempo, together with basic dynamic and pedal markings,

¹⁸² Minor corrections or edits could be made to both apparatus by adjusting the placement of the holes, although such practices could also compromise the authenticity of the recorded performance.

¹⁸³ Skryabin in fact wrote positively regarding Welte-Mignon technology: "Нельзя представить себе ничего лучшего, как обладание инструментом, сочетающим в себе исполнительские возможности с гениальными техническими средствами помощи исполнителю. Я определенно верю, что Фоноле – фортепиано принадлежит будущее, тем более, что в художественном отношении она не оставляет желать ничего лучшего." [One cannot imagine anything better than possession of an instrument which combines in itself performing capabilities together with a superb technical means of helping the performer. I definitely believe that the future belongs to Phonola-Fortepiano, moreover, that in the artistic sense, it does not leave anything else to be desired.] See Lobanov, *op. cit.*, 10.

is discernible and can be delineated directly from the piano rolls and graphically illustrated.¹⁸⁴ Leikin provides a concise account of this process:

each pitch, as well as the dynamics and pedalling, have fixed positions alongside a piano roll. Measurements across the roll show whether the notes of a chord are taken simultaneously or in a staggered manner. Similarly, the transverse relationships between the endings of preceding perforations and the beginnings of subsequent perforations show whether the consecutive notes are played legato or non-legato. The tempo fluctuations can be determined by measuring the distances between the commencements of the perforations corresponding to musical beats. On the Welte-Mignon, the speed of the moving piano roll during a playback is 60mm per second.¹⁸⁵

Thus, tempo was determined by measuring the distance in millimetres between the holes which were at the beginning of every bar. For example, if the distance between the beginning of the first bar and the beginning of the second bar is 50mm then the first bar is played in the tempo 72MM, and if the distance is 25mm then the tempo is 144MM.

Lobanov has scrutinised Skryabin's recordings and has detailed every minute change to the printed score. I will not be representing the same information here. Indeed, I question the value of such specificity, clinical dissection, and over-zealous hearing given what has been recorded in reviews and critiques concerning the improvisatory performance style of Skryabin. Furthermore, the score was, for Skryabin, an expression of both the musical and philosophical idea and, as such it also became a canvas which he would embellish freely in trying to release himself from the limitations of notation and realise his aesthetic. To this end, it would seem counter-productive to chart every

¹⁸⁴ Skryabin had a tendency whereby his hands would habitually leave the keyboard which is discernible from the Welte-Mignon roll.

¹⁸⁵ Leikin, *op. cit.*, 104-5. In the section above, lower case 'mm' refers to a distance measured in millimetres, whilst 'MM' denotes a Maetzl metronome mark.

minute change in pitch and rhythm. Instead, I will firstly make general observations (only occasionally noting additions or subtractions of certain pitches, distortions of rhythms etc.) on Skryabin's performance of each respective work. After enumerating these salient features for each individual work, I will attempt to offer a summary of Skryabin's performance practices, which portend his unique interpretative concept. In so doing, I will endeavour to contextualize these observations within the preceding discussion of Skryabin's philosophical inclinations.

Prelude Op. 11/1 *Vivace

- The recording has definitely been edited by Welte-Mignon. Skryabin had no possibility of spanning the intervals in the left-hand and playing them simultaneously as the recording would lead us to believe.
- There is a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the phrasing. As such, after every phrase there is a slight breath/pause which is able to be heard.
- Skryabin's singing tone is clearly audible.
- A 2-note motive is given prominence (that is the first and third notes of the five-grouped eighth notes).



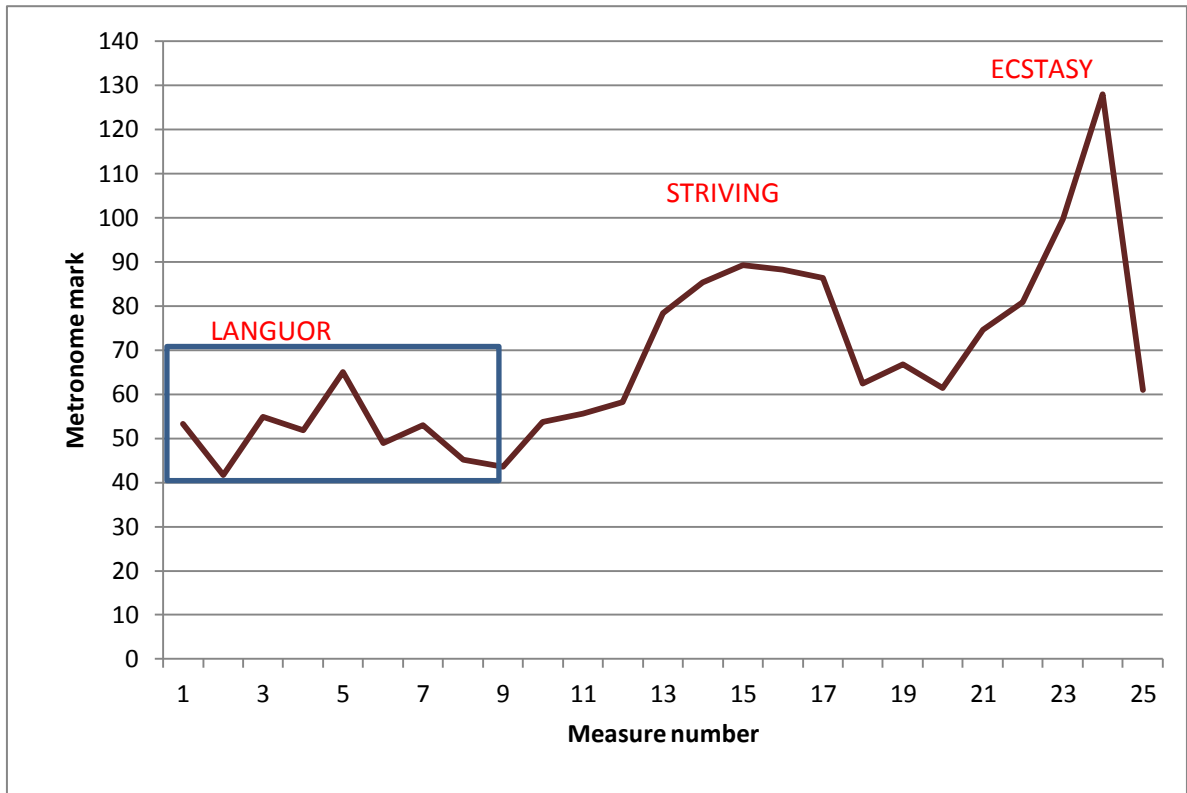
- Momentum gathers from m.12 with a drive towards the climax at the upbeat to m.19. This can be seen by a sudden incline in the tempo graph which underscores also the previously highlighted inclination to accelerate in tempo with a crescendo in dynamic level.

- Skryabin plays an acciaccatura *D* octave as an upbeat to m.19

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 18-28. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. Measures 18-19 show a complex texture with rapid sixteenth-note runs in both hands. Measure 19 features an acciaccatura (a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note) on the octave D in the right hand. Measures 20-24 show a change in texture with more sustained notes and accents on the notes D and E. Measure 28 begins with a forte (*sf*) dynamic and a more rhythmic pattern.

- There is some evidence of dislocation of hands (mm.19-22).
- Emphasis/accents on *d* and *e* simultaneously mm.22-24
- *Not played *vivace* which is the stated tempo. Skryabin's original designation for this piece was *Ondeggiante, carezzando*, which is a more appropriate definition of the general character of this Prelude. *Ondeggiante* was later deleted; *carezzando* remained in the autograph manuscript, but it too, apparently, was changed to *vivace* in the proof stage.

Symbolist motifs do not exist in this piece of early Skryabin. Nevertheless, the concept of a succession of states leading to an ecstasy, while not apparent in examining the score, can certainly be advanced as an explanation for Skryabin's performance. The change in the sound and tempi together with the phrasing (pauses and agogics) definitely support a plan that begins with languor and moves through striving, toward ecstasy and transfiguration. How else is it possible to explain a tempo differential of MM=41 in m.2 to MM=128 in m.24? This was certainly not consistent with any performance trends of the day.



Prelude Op.11/2 Allegretto

- Skryabin plays with an almost extreme elasticity of tempo which is evidenced in the tempo graph
- Immediately noticeable is the straddling of the very first simultaneity
- The melodic line is rendered in a *cantabile* style and is phrased in long units
- Great attention is also placed on the chords in the left hand
- Skryabin adds a *d#* as an acciaccatura on the second beat of m.14 and repeats this practice in m.62

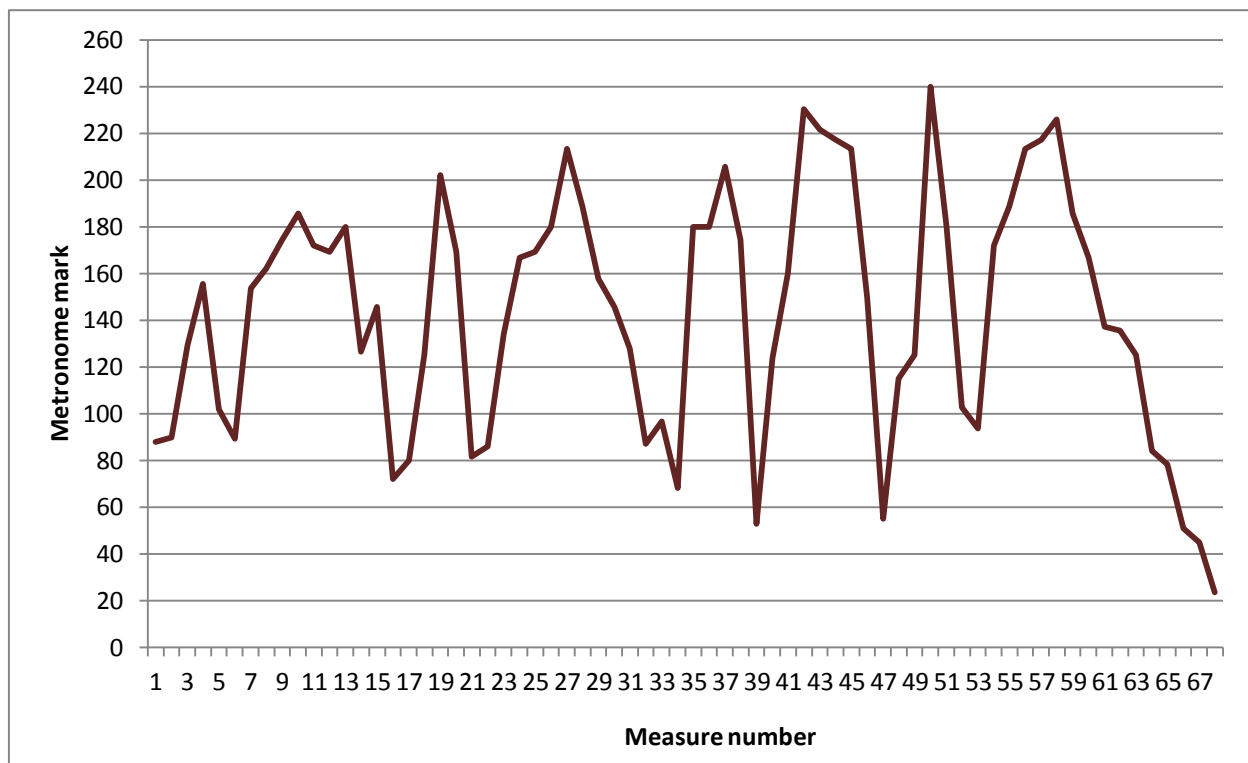
m.14

- There is pronounced variation in articulation (semi-staccato) evident in mm.39-40 which is also repeated in m.47

mm.38-39

- The sound is very distinctive, atmospheric, inclined to be very much ‘from the keys’ yet possessing a singing quality. In this sense, Skryabin tries to capture a mood or motif of flight
- The final chord is arpeggiated – a habitual practice in slow pieces
- The numerous small changes to the score highlight a desire to have freedom from the constraints of the notated score

This performance betrays a direct link with Skryabin’s schooling in the Russian tradition. While the features of freedom and improvisation, sound quality, wide latitude of tempo, and spontaneous changes in articulation remain characteristics of Skryabin’s pianism, the almost speech-like projection of the melodic line is very reminiscent of Rubinstein’s concept of melody previously discussed.



Prelude Op.11/13 Lento

- Significantly slower in the recorded performance than indicated by his metronome mark
- Importance/emphasis is given to the moving left hand voice
- Not much evidence of dislocation of hands
- The change of pedal after rendering the last b^b of m.18 excludes the bottom b^b which was the first note of the measure
- The momentum to drive toward the mid-piece climax begins somewhat suddenly in m.15
- A low g^b is added after playing the final chord

m.35

The image shows a musical score for measure 35. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (right hand) and a bass clef staff (left hand). The key signature has five flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat, G-flat). The right hand features a melodic line with a recitatory quality, characterized by a series of eighth notes and a final dotted half note. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with a series of chords and single notes, maintaining a consistent rhythmic and harmonic texture.

Once again, a very recitatorial or incantational realisation of the melodic line is in evidence together with a left-hand voice which moves without much sudden change. The sound is the most Skryabinesque trait in this performance, which does not feature any other connection with ideas that were to become characteristics of his musical philosophy.

Prelude Op.11/14 Presto

- There is a significant pause/break between measures 14 and 15, where before there was a much less significant but noticeable pause between the last chord in the right hand and the upbeat to m.9. Once again, this is a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the phrasing through these agogics.

m.14

The image shows a musical score for measure 14 of the Prelude Op.11/14. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (right hand) and a bass clef staff (left hand). The key signature has five flats. The right hand features a melodic line with a recitatory quality, characterized by a series of eighth notes and a final dotted half note. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with a series of chords and single notes, maintaining a consistent rhythmic and harmonic texture. The score shows a significant pause/break between measures 14 and 15, which is a deliberate attempt to draw attention to the phrasing through these agogics.

- There is no significant variation in tempo throughout the piece.

- The E^b octaves in mm. 10 and 12 seem to be rendered as a group of three with definite emphasis on the third beat of each three-note group in the right hand.
- A final e^b minor chord is added which is two octaves higher than the last notated chord.

m.24

The image shows a musical score for measure 24. It consists of two staves: a bass staff and a treble staff. The bass staff begins with a series of chords, followed by a final chord two octaves higher than the last notated chord. The treble staff contains a few notes and rests.

Prelude Op.22/1 Andante

- The piece is performed significantly faster than the indicated metronome mark in the autograph
- There is a marked difference between the tempo of first and second phrases. This can be seen in the tempo graph.
- *Tempo rubato* becomes an adjunct to phrasing.
- The dotted quavers in m.3 and m.7 are lengthened to the point that the following semiquaver becomes an acciaccatura to the dotted minims for the following measures.
- Skryabin embellishes the melody from mm.14-16

mm. 14-16

The image shows a musical score for measures 14-16. It consists of a single treble staff with a melody line. The melody is embellished with various notes and rests, including some notes marked with an 'x'.

- The final measure again emphasises finality with the addition of an extra chord
m.32



Etude Op.8/12 Patetico

- Very steady tempo from the beginning
- Every two measures (2-3, 4-5, 6-7) there is a discernible rise in intensity
- The first small climax occurs at the first beat of m.8; he executes the quavers of the third beat of that bar rapidly
- The diminuendo in m.16 prepares the way for a change in tone colour in m.17 which also has a *ritardando* marking
- Beginning the next phrase at m.21 there is another *ritardando* followed by a quickened pace
- The performance of the middle section gives the impression of a fantasy; whilst there is no presence of any particular motif, the connection to flight is discernible in the way his hands frequently leave the keyboard. This affects a very light and luminous sound.
- The recapitulation represents the same thematic material albeit with considerably more tension. The phrasing is evidently clear throughout.
- Skryabin plays a large *portamento* at the upbeat to m.44

- Last two chords are played *fff* as opposed to the *p* marking in the autograph

Poème Op.32/1 Andante cantabile

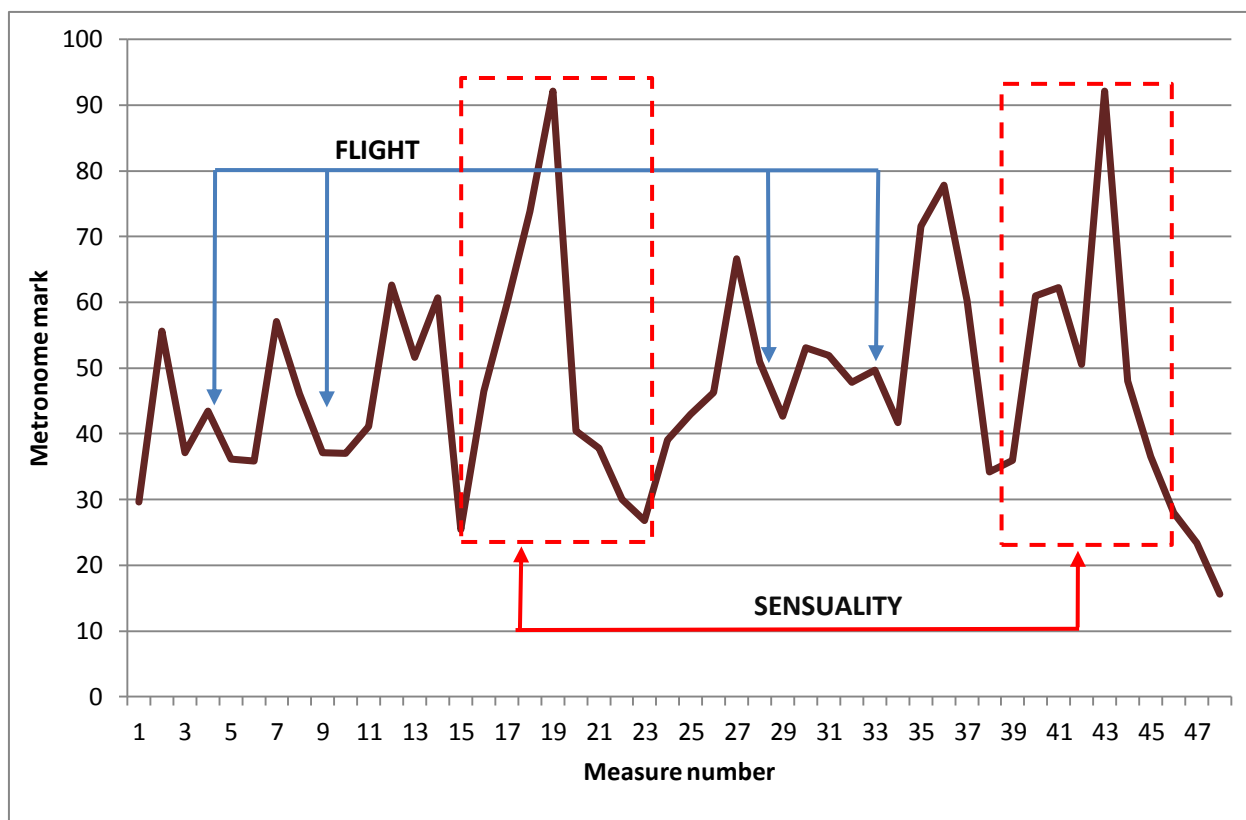
- There are apparent and extreme tempo fluctuations from measure to measure which affects significant changes to the notated rhythms
- The last group of three notes in the left hand m.10 are played ascending as opposed to descending; same as m.34
- Both sections marked *in crescendo* begin very slowly and build in tension and speed to a quasi-climax before dissipating into a calm
- The final chord is not played as written (changes in pitches)
- The *ben marcato* in m.25 is not observed
- Pauses precede the beginning of each phrase

As noted, by 1903 and with the composition of the *Sonata No. 4 in F#, Op.28*, Scriabin began to compose according to a Symbolist-influenced paradigm. Thus, in this work it is interesting to note how he differentiates and highlights some of the Symbolist motifs. The four appearances of the flight motif occur in two pairs (mm.4-5, 9-10 and mm.28-

29, 33-34).



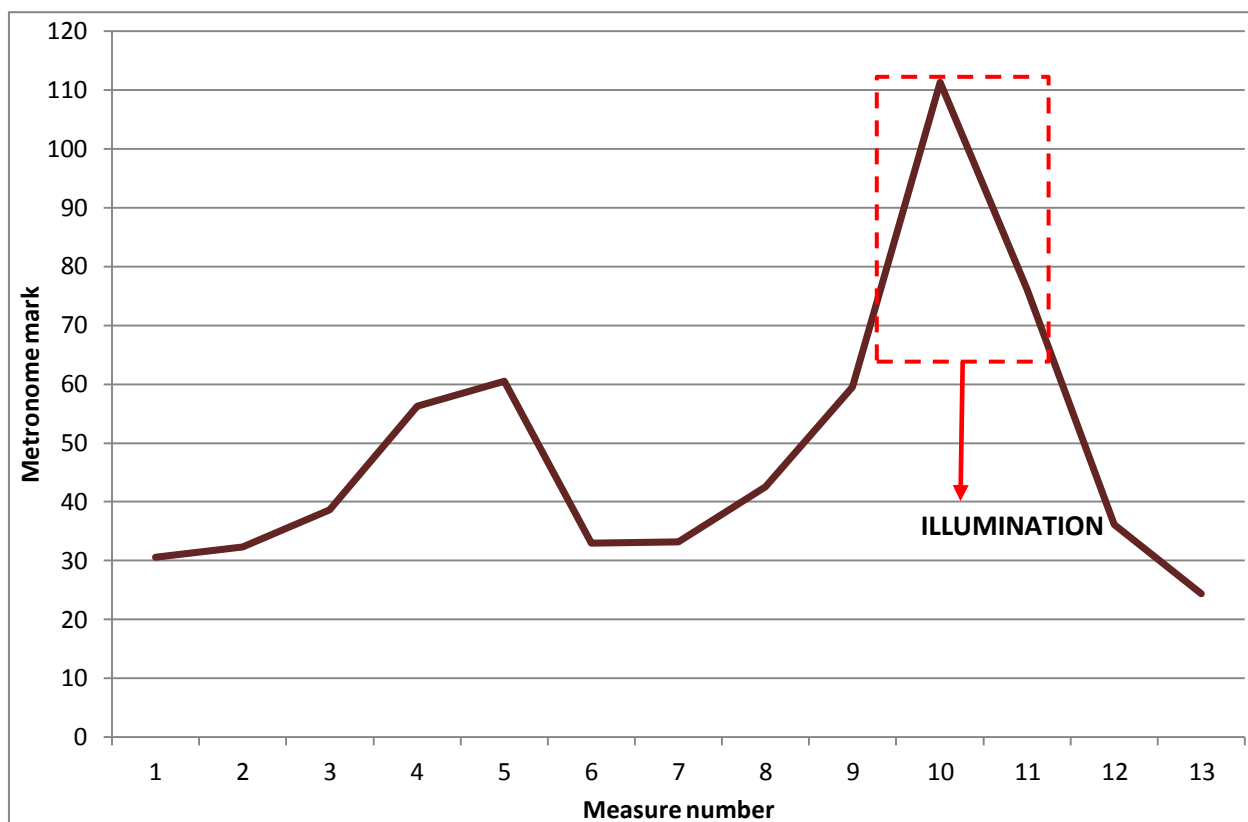
Each pair is marked by a tempo contour together with a metronome mark which is remarkably similar. In the performance, the tempo slows as the motif's scale ascends. The two *infaferando* sections comprising mm.15-23 and mm. 39-47 depict the motif of sensuality as previously defined. Skryabin renders these similarly which could be expected, but more interestingly reaches a climax in precisely the same place (m.19 and m.43) and at exactly the same tempo and articulation in each section. This lends weight to the fact that the uncovering of Symbolist motifs govern his interpretative concept and performance practices.



Désir Op.57/1

- Skryabin markedly differentiates the execution (rhythmically) of the *tenuto*-marked quavers with those not marked as such. It amounts to a considerable lengthening of the quaver beats for those marked with the *tenuto* sign.
- The final measure is played with the first four notes being arpeggiated and the following five notes together
- The phrasing portends the gradual unfolding of a rising series of ecstatic states.
- Skryabin underlines the pervasive sensuality of the work with his deliberate articulation and speech-like toying with the tempo.

Skryabin again highlights the build-up to the appearance of the illumination motif in m.12. There is also a definite marking of the two separate thematic ideas, both representing a topic of sensuality, in the piece which receive different realisations even if the notated rhythms are the same.



Mazurka Op.40/2 Piacevole

- Extreme elasticity in tempo with great swells as evidenced in the tempo graph
- Measures 33-40 are excised in this recorded performance
- The piece is played considerably quicker on average than the stated metronome mark
- Skryabin adds an additional chord at the end of piece

The absence of eight measures which would reprise the original material presented in mm.1-16 in this piece is curious. It is difficult to offer any other explanation than something which was improvised at the time. Once again, it definitely communicates to us the relationship Skryabin had with his own scores in performance. The recurring cell heard in mm.9, 10, 41 and 42 is similar in contour and impression to what has

previously been termed a motif of summons.



It should also be mentioned that in Skryabin's interpretation, the features of the Mazurka are hardly given prominence. For example, there is no agogic emphasis on the second or third beats which would distinguish this genre from that of a generic composition with a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature.

DELINEATION OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Based on the examination of his recordings, we can summarize Skryabin's idiosyncrasies and performance practices into the following points:

- ❖ Skryabin frequently goes against his own performance instructions in the score, particularly the indicated tempo
- ❖ He has an inclination to stride simultaneities and dislocate hands in an effort to emphasise the melody
- ❖ There exists a definite connection between tempo and dynamics whereby Skryabin habitually gets faster with a crescendo and slows with a decrescendo
- ❖ Skryabin desired to give the end of many of his miniatures¹⁸⁶ more finality with the addition of a chord after the final printed measure
- ❖ He frequently doubles the bass voice to provide greater harmonic support for the melodic voice
- ❖ Skryabin typically pauses between phrases to highlight form and structure;

¹⁸⁶ Of course these are only miniature in the material sense – experientially, they are anything but. The microcosm connects with the macrocosm in these works, or so Skryabin hoped!

sometimes this would entail deleting some notes

- ❖ He would habitually take his hands off the keyboard and allow the pedal to sustain the sound
- ❖ Skryabin draws attention to the form of a work through his performance
- ❖ To the extent that he was foregrounding them, he seems to differentiate Symbolist motifs through articulation, tempo, or by using some other parameter

In elucidating these traits from his recordings, detailed observations can be made on Skryabin's performance art by considering the entire corpus of information (reviews, personal statements, and recorded evidence) which has heretofore been examined. This will go some way to advancing my theory that Skryabin proposed an original, informative, and new way of interpreting his own music which has not been wholly appreciated or studied.

Many important concepts and ideas for the interpretation of Skryabin's piano works are transmitted through an examination of his eclectic philosophy and a study of his own playing. His pianism was not only unique but also innovative and pedagogical in that he established an approach to the interpretation of his music which had no precedent. In so doing, Skryabin was bringing forth a new approach to the instrument in the same manner as he had done with his compositional idiom. The words of Berdiaev seem to confirm this view: [I don't know anyone in contemporary art who had such a passionate and creative urge to ruin the old world and create a new world.]¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, many

¹⁸⁷ “Я не знаю в новейшем искусстве никого, в ком был бы такой иступленный творческий порыв разрушить старый мир и создать мир новый.” Nikolai Berdiaev, Filosofia

other reviewers also highlighted this novel approach; a Dutch reviewer states, [in recent performances, many believed to hear a totally new and novel sound.]¹⁸⁸ Essentially, these views can be appreciated through scrutiny of Skryabin's approach to the various musical parameters.

Sound

For all the criticism he experienced as a performer due to his lack of a grand sound,¹⁸⁹ it should be remembered that Skryabin evidently disliked loud, open sounds together with large performance spaces. It is surely debatable whether Skryabin's music is appropriately heard in a modern, large concert hall.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, his aesthetics would seem to contravene that potentially alienating large concert experience. This does not imply, however, that Skryabin was incapable of playing loud. Indeed, some of his works (for example the Etude Op.8/12) also call for a dynamic marking of *fff* in places, and this is by no means an exceptional occurrence in his autographs. For Skryabin, however, the grand sound, bombastic style, and mechanistic virtuosity of the Romantic piano tradition was not ideally suited to his music. His music required a 'new' sound. As such, Skryabin in fact desired that a weak or delicate sound be transmitted to

tvorchestva, kul'tury i isskustva Vol. 2 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1994), 401-402. Ivanov also emphasised this preoccupation with innovating a new form. See also Viachelslav Ivanov, Skriabin (Moscow: Iris Press, 1996), 66.

¹⁸⁸ "Daar het nieuwe – en vooral dat nieuwe, waarin velen een nieuw geluid meenen te hooren." "Caecilia," 69 (1912): 367.

¹⁸⁹ Sergei Prokofiev indirectly confirms Skryabin's inclination toward a soft sound. See Anthony Phillips trans., Sergey Prokofiev Diaries: 1907-1914 Prodigious Youth (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 258.

¹⁹⁰ Vladimir Chinaev, "Iz traditsii v budushchee," Muzykal'naia akademiia 4 (1993): 191. Skryabin was apparently unrivalled in small halls and intimate settings. See Matvei Presman, "Ugolok muzykal'noi Moskvy vos'midesiatykh godov," in Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove ed. Zarui Apetian, 2 vols., (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1957), I:171.

facilitate (in his opinion) a closer relationship to his Symbolist aesthetic. Essentially, through a soft, muted-sound approach, Skryabin was better able to replicate speech patterns and align his music with the musical poetry of the Russian Symbolists.¹⁹¹ Sound, as a musical parameter, needed to be able to assume a metaphysical identity whereby it ceased to exist and could instead be imagined. This certainly differentiated him from the typical Russian post-Romantic pianist. Sabaneev captured some of the essence of this idea in his recollection of a comment from Skryabin: [why do they play my pieces with this material, this lyrical sound, as if they are playing Tchaikovsky or Rakhmaninov? Here there should be a minimum of material...]¹⁹²

As the philosophical program began to take a larger hold of Skryabin's compositional oeuvre, Skryabin's fascination with the concept of flight, or a sensual abandonment of the self, grew. While I have previously demonstrated how this concept was realised within his compositional syntax, its main effect was to be sensed through the sound. This necessitated a touch that was variously described as caressing the keys, or playing 'from' the keyboard rather than 'into' the keys. Sabaneev also described a fondness for pale or colourless sounds or 'sub-sounds' which possess a lifeless quality them.¹⁹³ This was Skryabin's means to underscore the Symbolism-related concepts of mysticism and mystery.

¹⁹¹ Chinaev, *op. cit.*, 191.

¹⁹² “Ах, зачем они играют мои вещи этим материальным, этим лирическим звуком, как Чайковского или Рахманинова?! Тут должен быть минимум материи...” Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine* (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2003), 298. When Skryabin related this to Sabaneev, he also spoke of sound in terms of being intoxicating.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

An audible manifestation of these ideas with respect to sound may be heard in Skryabin's interpretations. Hear for example the approach to sound in the Prelude Op.11/2. This is rendered in a manner whereby the sound is devoid of colour thereby enhancing the wistful mood. It is also apparent that Skryabin does not play 'into' the keyboard, preferring instead to maintain a thin sound which gives the impression of floating – quite possibly attempting to evoke an out-of-body experience.

In terms of how this approach was affected physically, Skryabin certainly went against the principles of his education in the Russian Piano School. It is said that he played as an 'anti-Romantic' pianist, with a stiffened wrist, extremely light touch even in *fortes* from the hand or shoulder, and little freedom of hand-movement which was subsumed instead by an economy of gesture.¹⁹⁴ He apparently said that the gestures must be conditioned by the work and must express the work.¹⁹⁵

Pedal¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Chinaev, *op. cit.*, 191.

¹⁹⁵ Shaborkina, *op. cit.*, 222.

¹⁹⁶ The application of the damper pedal in late romantic piano music is evidently so sophisticated that it defies notation. Further, its use is also fundamental to the music of the period and thus is usually assumed. Rosenblum describes the significance of pedalling in the works of Romantic composers, stating, "although their music now depended on an extensive use of the damper pedal, most composers were still sparing in their indications." See Sandra Rosenblum, "Pedalling the Piano: A Brief Survey from the Eighteenth Century to the Present," *Performance Practice Review* 6.2 (Fall 1993): 164. Significant developments in the piano repertoire of the romantic era were manifested in the increased emphasis on aspects of sound colours and variety in harmony. These changes highlighted the differences in the registers of the piano. It was during this era (the mid-nineteenth century) that syncopated pedalling was first described by Carl Czerny (cf. Carl Czerny, *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School, Op. 500*, 3 vols., trans. J.A. Hamilton (London: Cocks, 1839). Chopin represented the most formal approach to pedal instruction, marking his scores very meticulously. His indications frequently called for the mixing of harmonies which created unusual overtones. In the music of Chopin, the pedal played a pivotal role in defining formal and harmonic structure due to its ability to suspend or resolve

An appropriate context for a brief discussion of Skryabin's pedalling practices would be to compare them with Kullak's treatise which summarizes the typical practice of nineteenth-century performers and composers.¹⁹⁷ Kullak advocates the pedal's usage in conventional circumstances for the purpose of joining notes, supplementing the number of sounding notes, resonating sound, and as a tool to enrich the colour and add to the lyricism. Generally, Skryabin's criteria for use of the pedal are consistent with Kullak's, although it must be stated that his prescriptions are fewer. Skryabin also habitually sanctioned the use of pedal through progressions of diatonic tones in a manner which would have seemed injudicious to Kullak. The variance between the representative pedagogic corpus of literature on pedalling and Skryabin's methodology is pivotal. For instance, most pedalling treatises call for judicious and regulated use of the pedal, whereas Skryabin alters the pedalling in similar passages. Among the myriad pedagogical manuals, most implicitly state that pedalling is a product and function of harmony.¹⁹⁸ In Skryabin's music, however, it often operates independently of harmony, as when it blurs incongruous sonorities together, or disregards harmonic factors altogether in support of the crystalline profile of every voice. Furthermore, Skryabin frequently pedalled scales whereas this is not a prescribed practice in the literature.

dissonances or consonances within the context of a tempo rubato. Liszt also increased the profile of the pedal notating vibrato pedalling (*ped vibrato* -- see '*Tarantella*' from *Venezia e Napoli*). Skryabin's unique application of the pedal receives a mention by Bowers (1970-1) and Leikin both of whom describe a flutter pedal.

¹⁹⁷ Adolf Kullak, *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte-Playing*, trans. Theodore Baker from the third German edition (*Aesthetik des Klavierspiels*, Berlin, 1861), rev. and ed., Hans Bischoff (New York: G. Schirmer, 1903), 302-307. It should also be noted that such practices have developed comparatively little since that time. See also, David Rowland, *A History of Pianoforte Pedalling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) for a more detailed précis of this situation.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Higgins, "Chopin Interpretation: A Study of Performance Directions in Selected Autographs and Other Sources," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, UMI Research Press, 1966), 75.

Such pedalling techniques can be observed in the performances of Skryabin. He uses conventional techniques in combination with more idiosyncratic usage frequently prescribed by the music for the realisation of what becomes a meta-physical construct. The pedal's use in generating sound is not merely applied to provide excessive resonance, but is intrinsically related to his concept of phrasing, as can be seen in the pieces examined. In this regard, the unique flutter technique (previously described) is commonplace, as is the inclination to pedal off the beat.

Skryabin's fondness for the pedal was evident from his earliest years. The variety in pedal usage is central to the music of the late period and overshadows Skryabin's musical conception, including the works for orchestra. Skryabin autographs, however, include only very sporadic pedal indications.¹⁹⁹ The paramount concern of which all Skryabin interpreters need to be conscious is the significance of the bass voice, which sustains the whole harmony. Due attention must be paid, therefore, to ensure that the bass is included by the pedal so that the upper voices have a fundamental over which they can build. This special attention is not to underestimate the importance of the upper voices which colour the harmony built on the bass, but rather, seeks to reinforce the significance of the bass voice, which is frequently highlighted through use of an *acciaccatura*, or articulation markings.

¹⁹⁹ The occasional appearance of pedal indications in Skryabin's scores usually seeks to communicate a degree of discretion, directing the pianist against an untimely release which could impede the aural awareness of the bass note.

Tempo

Skryabin's interpretations were marked by a tendency to express in a most free and liberated manner, which is enhanced further by his desire to realise the Symbolist elements. There is a distinct preference to linger on climaxes of phrases and to distinguish A and B sections (within tripartite forms) in character. Also significant is the inclination to build tension in a long phrase through acceleration combined with *crescendi* to reach a point of climax.

As has been previously mentioned, his unique *rubato* concept also extends the range of tempi. Skryabin evidently had a habit of contrasting different themes, motifs, or sections by a sudden reduction or increase of the tempo.²⁰⁰ Also, at the end of phrases in slow sections, there is frequently a pause of considerable length before the commencement of the following measure.

Clark discusses Skryabin's inclination to identify an increase in musical tension with an acceleration in tempo. He explicitly confirms that Skryabin habitually played faster as his dynamic level increased and vice versa. Clark goes on further to state that "in general the mannerism clearly results in the loss of an important and useful resource in performance."²⁰¹ This criticism, however, does not take into consideration Skryabin's style of *rubato*, through which he obtained motivic asymmetry and rhythmic buoyancy.

²⁰⁰ Tempo, dynamic, and timbral nuances are replacing harmony, melody, rhythm – the essential elements of a work, its structural content. The "immaterial" elements of music replace the material, the kinetic, and the cognitive.

²⁰¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, 265. Consistency in performance tempo was embodied by both Skryabin and Rakhmaninov contrary to popular belief. See table of coefficients in Lobanov, *op. cit.*, 8-22.

In general, it is possible to delineate at least three recurring issues in writings about *tempo rubato*: “(1) the non-synchronization of melody and accompaniment, and especially of outer voices, (2) the acceleration or declaration of the beat, what some authors call agogic *rubato*, and (3) deviations from a regular or predictable accentuation pattern intrinsic to a given meter.”²⁰² Since Skryabin made explicit use of all three, one may therefore conceive of *rubato* in Skryabin as being: (1) sub-metric -- involving minute divisions of a beat, (2) metric -- at the level of the beat, or (3) poly-metric -- contesting aspects of meter. Those who maintain that the notion of *rubato* be confined to its literal meaning will not understand its applications in Skryabin’s music or Skryabin’s manipulation of this vocal technique as a compositional resource. It is important also to remember the *rubato* concept assumes a new and abstract level of significance in the music of Scriabin given its connection with his philosophy and Symbolist paradigm.

This style occasionally necessitated an alteration of note values and pitches during a performance.²⁰³ Further, there was another more consequential purpose for this incessant rhythmic distortion. Skryabin believed it was necessary to distinguish

²⁰² John Ferri, “Performance Indications and the Analysis of Chopin’s Music,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, UMI Research Press, 1996), 176.

²⁰³ See Lobanov, *op. cit.*, 13, for a graph that shows the existence of two-hundred such modifications in the Etude Op. 8/12. Lobanov also discusses this tendency, offering a particularly pertinent comment: Темповые изменения в скрябинском исполнении часто связаны с формообразованием исполняемого произведения. Обычна схема здесь следующая. В начале какого-либо раздела формы (фразы, предложения) темп относительно невелик. Затем темп повышается и достигает своего максимума при подходе к кульминации или в момент кульминации, после чего начинается понижение темпа. [The changes in tempo in Skryabin’s performance are very often connected with the creation of the form of the performed piece. Usually the system is the following: in the beginning of any part of the form such as a phrase or sentence the tempo is relatively low, but then the tempo increases and reaches its maximum at the moment of culmination after which it begins to decrease.] See Lobanov, *op. cit.*, 15.

between foreground and secondary levels in performance. Consequently, there is a deliberate attempt to displace simultaneities and desynchronize separate textures in an effort to articulate every voice. Skryabin's "polyphony" seeks to distribute thematic material among the various voices, whereby "every textural component becomes thematic to such an extent that the boundaries between melody and the accompaniment virtually dissolve."²⁰⁴ Skryabin's unique and inconspicuous method of interweaving several voices within a dense texture was extremely reliant on his own special performance practices to uncover this aspect of his writing.

It is evident from the inscriptions that in most cases Skryabin follows the average tempo indicated by him on the manuscript. He did, however, permit modifying tempi in quick pieces, depending on the technical abilities of the player. This subject was discussed with his publisher Belaiev, prior to introducing metronome markings on the first editions of the early music.²⁰⁵

Rhythm

Practically all the critics, in the reviews heretofore examined, noted the rhythmical freedom in Skryabin's playing. The same attitude to rhythm emerges from the

²⁰⁴ Leikin, *op. cit.*, 112-3. A similar claim has also been made by Jarocinski about Debussy when he stated that pure sound begins to collaborate in the creation of the structure of the work, on a level of equality with melody and harmony. See Stefan Jarocinski, "Gueiques aspects de l'univers sono-re de Debussy," in *Debussy et l'évolution de la musique au XXe siècle* ed. Edith Weber (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965), 185-187. See also Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable* trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 109, and Carolyn Abbate, "Debussy's Phantom Sounds," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10.1 (March 1998): 67-96.

²⁰⁵ In *Désir* Op. 57/1, there is much *rubato* used, with the tempo constantly changing. Hence, it is difficult to determine the average tempo. At the same time, from Op. 51 onwards we almost never see the existence of metronome markings in the works of Skryabin.

pronouncements of Liszt, who regarded such freedom as an essential quality of a great artist. In Liszt's opinion the method of playing by the metronome was unforgivable, and represented the means by which Beethoven and all the great composers were trampled underfoot in such a way that the world that listened to the *Apassionata* or the *Moonlight* Sonatas, the *Eroica* or the Ninth Symphonies in the accepted metronomic tempo did violence to its aesthetic spirit.²⁰⁶ Thus, Skryabin certainly inherited from Liszt the desire to use one's playing to introduce people to the ideas that were expressed in one's compositions.

Based on the recorded impressions of Skryabin together with his ideas, we can observe a post-Romantic and new performing concept in relation to timbre and rhythm. Skryabin was, as such, driving towards the abandonment of rhythm in the traditional sense together with the disappearance of time as a metered and essential variable. This is the reason for the increasingly complex notation through which Skryabin was evidently constrained. The same approach to time accounts for the illusion that his miniatures appear larger than they are.

Skryabin believed that the player was creating on stage, that he or she should live in their playing, and that the work was born anew at every performance under the player's fingers, hence the rhythmic freedom so characteristic of Skryabin's style. Living rhythm, rhythm that reflected the breath of life was often interpreted as rhythmic

²⁰⁶ Franz Liszt, Gesammelte Schriften von Franz Liszt, 5 vols., (Leipzig: Bibliothek der deutschen Literatur, 1882), V: 231.

obscurity, although it was this very concept of rhythm that provided energy and intensity to his playing and compensated for the lack of a big sound.

Phrasing

In an effort effectively to realise some of the more sudden changes with respect to the other parameters, the phrases are almost always long in his interpretations. This provides a degree of cogency required to maintain the distortions of parameters. In his application of the slur sign, Skryabin established himself as a lyricist of the most radical description, sculpting his works into rhetorical yet vivid expressions analogous to the syllables, words, phrases and lines of speech and song.²⁰⁷ Skryabin articulated an innovative, more improvisatory idiom with the long slur. In his use of the slur one identifies a natural liberation of lyrical phrases, emancipated from constructs of form and harmony, with contemporary juxtapositions of long and short lines, and lines distending beyond expected situations of serenity or not reaching them. Skryabin has continually been portrayed as a poet, but seldom has this been qualified literally, in connection to the slurs marked in his manuscripts.

Dynamics

Dynamic contrast is regulated by a predilection for sudden change, although there is still a notable presence of great and gradual dynamic swells. Performances of Skryabin are generally distinguished by the extremes of the dynamic spectrum which signifies an effort to capture the essence and erratic nature of the aesthetic. Given our knowledge of

²⁰⁷ The sensual, erotic “grain of the voice” in Roland Barthes’s conception is, in other words, encoded into Skryabin’s piano music.

the Russian Piano School's pedagogical method, it is unusual to observe Skryabin's somewhat unorthodox approach to dynamic contrast in this music. The equivalent to what would be pianissimo or softer very frequently has no depth and is almost clinical in its sound quality. Similarly, the *fff* markings are usually defined by a percussive harshness, although the harsh sound could well be a result of the poor recording technology.

Improvisation

Skryabin played his own compositions in different styles, according to the inspiration of the moment, and always charmed his audience. Nothing was more foreign to Skryabin's improvisatory genius than a learnt, immutably fixed interpretation.²⁰⁸ His contemporaries are unanimous in emphasizing this stamp of miraculous spontaneity which characterized his playing and affected his listeners in an absolutely unique way. All this notwithstanding, there is, within the wide boundaries of spontaneously 'inspired' performance, an informed approach that enhances the interpretation of Skryabin's music. In view of the information deduced through a comparison of the printed and performed versions, a pianist today can create a truly Skryabinesque interpretation. Concurrently, as the guiding rule of Skryabin's performance is the embodiment of liberty rather than restriction, the individual style of the performer need

²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Skryabin's aesthetic also calls for a lot of predetermined, calculated manipulation of sound towards specific expressive ends.

not be inhibited.²⁰⁹

In addition to the improvisatory quality, Skryabin's playing has a somewhat intimate style, as if he was confessing to himself his most treasured inspirations. One only hears and experiences what he compels you to hear and experience through his creative will. Indeed, Skryabin's manner of playing some arpeggios with a sort of tenacious, rapacious strike, his art of producing, when necessary, sounds filled with a mysterious languor, indolence, exhaustion, his ability to play in great rhythmic waves more in keeping with expressiveness and phrasing than with keeping punctiliously to the bar lines and groupings marked in the music are all very suited to the character of Skryabin's style as composer which is somehow reminiscent of a free and fascinating piece of improvisation.²¹⁰ Accordingly, he believed that a work is always many faceted and lives and breathes of its own accord. For him the work might mean something today, but tomorrow this was bound to change. This was Skryabin's main connection to, and preservation of, the Russian Piano School legacy.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Skryabin's own adherents' chief aim was to interpret him authentically, to understand and realise effectively his message rather than to produce an imitation of his method.

His schemata, which signify the acme in liberty from any preconceived method or

²⁰⁹ Sofronitskii was arguably the most renowned interpreter of music of Skryabin although his interpretations were quite dissimilar to that of Skryabin. Lobanov highlights this fact with a graph in a comparison of Op. 32/1.

²¹⁰ Shaborkina, *op. cit.*, 222.

whimsical musical traditions are communicated with the greatest clarity in his manuscripts, and from them a number of principles of performance (described above) can be derived. The consequence of the application of these precepts is a performance style akin to Skryabin's own, in that no two performances of one of his works will be the same, yet all will be in dutiful accord with the special practices extrapolated from an examination of the texts.²¹¹

Perhaps the final word on Skryabin as pianist should go to Goldenweiser who has written one of the most considered and objective responses to his pianism:

He (Skryabin) on the stage very often felt lost and found himself in a disastrous situation. Nevertheless, in his concert performances, even in such big halls like Column Hall, or the Grand Hall of the Conservatory, he left a huge impression on the audience thanks to the power of his talent. But still one would not know the genuine accomplishment and genius of Skryabin's performance if one did not hear him in the home atmosphere. Skryabin, contrary to many pianists who usually do not like to play at home among friends -- I rarely met professional performers who would do this willingly -- Skryabin, on the contrary, played most willingly in such home environments and during these times played absolutely unforgettably. His *rubato* was free, exceptionally free, even exquisite, at the same time it left the impression of being very convincing and accomplished. While lacking physical power in performance, Skryabin's performances were distinguished with temperament of exceptional brilliance. His extraordinary *piano* sound and pedalling skill, which was absolutely unsurpassed by anybody, made his performances unique in themselves.²¹²

²¹¹ Alfred Cortot, In Search of Chopin, trans. Cyril and Rena Clarke (New York: Abelard Press, 1952), 27.

²¹² “Он [Скрябин] на эстраде нередко терялся и попадал в катастрофическое положение. Тем не менее в своих концертных выступлениях даже в таких больших помещениях, как в Колонном зале или Большом зале консерватории, он благодаря силе своего таланта производил огромное впечатление на публику. Но все-таки тот не знал истинного совершенства и гениальности исполнения Скрябина, кто не слышал его в домашней обстановке. Скрябин, в противоположность многим пианистам, которые обычно не любят играть дома, среди друзей, — я редко встречал профессиональных исполнителей, которые делали бы это охотно, — наоборот, охотнее всего играл в такой домашней обстановке и играл в таких случаях совершенно незабываемо. Его свободное *rubato*, исключительно свободное, даже изысканное, в то же время производило впечатление убедительности и законченности. При отсутствии физической силы исполнение Скрябина отличалось темпераментом исключительной яркости. Его необыкновенный

Adding authority to this statement is the fact that it comes from one who was to play a significant role in the transmission of Skryabin's music to a new generation and in its survival after the revolution. Furthermore, it bears testament to the fact that Skryabin, whilst possessing some short-comings as a performer, was nevertheless a unique pianistic talent who was most at home in the interpretation of his own music. It is in this sense that Skryabin the pianist can also be said to be the ideal, and perhaps the only true, interpreter of the music of Skryabin!²¹³

Ultimately, the challenge for the performer of Skryabin's music is not between the recreation of a modern versus an archaic interpretation or performance style, but between a colourless versus a unique one. A genuine performance of Skryabin's music hinges not on the trends of an era, but on a pianist's cognisance of Skryabin's texts and his or her capacity to bring them to life, irrespective of fads. Pianists of any era can enjoy an equal role in Skryabin's enterprise of getting beyond time and style, especially when they realize in performance the corresponding traits in his music, and inculcate these as a component of their own interpretations.

фортепианный звук и совершенно никем не превзойденное мастерство педализации делали его исполнение единственным в своем роде.” Aleksandr Goldenweiser, “Vospominaniia,” in A. Alekseev, *Russkie pianisty: ocherki po istorii pianizma*, 2 vols., (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1948), II: 291-292.

²¹³ The aesthetics were personality-driven. Whatever Skryabin managed to achieve in his occult salon has not been replicated by his descendents.

CHAPTER 3

Rakhmaninov the Classicist, Romanticist, and Modernist playing his Piano Concerto No. 3

Any reference to Rakhmaninov as pianist is sure to involve superlatives of the highest praise. In the copious amounts of concert reviews available, some of which will be examined in due course, it is, in fact, extremely rare to find a negatively critical statement.¹ This is a testament to an artist who commanded unmatched respect from audiences, critics, and colleagues alike. In marrying the available written source material on his pianism to his extant audio recordings, however, there exists a rather strange concurrence which portends an unclassifiable artist. The inability to be pigeon-

¹ A selection of reviews will be discussed later in this paper, although the vast majority seem to confirm this view. Ironically, it was none other than Sergei Prokofiev who contributed probably the most disparaging criticism of Rakhmaninov as pianist. See for examples:

“Баха он играет хорошо, Шопена неровно: технику ошеломляюще, но лирику вычурно и со вбиванием гвоздей. Себя – плохо: убивает собственно поэзию, которую на старости лет забыл, заместив виртуозностью.”

“...когда он последним номером сыграл свою новую парافразу на какую-то пошлость Крейсера (да и сама парафраза ординарная), я пришёл в такое бешенство, что не пошёл за кулисы. Как смеет человек, так импонирующий публике, демонстрировать такую гадость?!”

See Sergei Prokofiev, *Dnevnik 1907-1933* ed. Sviatoslav Prokofiev (Paris: sprkfv, 2002), II: 653 and 738. Such condemnation, however, could well find its origins in their historically strained relationship.

The only other reviews expressing some displeasure involved his “Skryabin” series after the composer’s death. Aleksandrov makes the point that Rakhmaninov had the power and temperament in his playing (that some missed in Skryabin’s own performances of his music), although the vital elasticity and upward inclination seem to elude him. See *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 168-9.

holed is perhaps nothing new for Rakhmaninov,² with scholars still debating his compositional syntax in terms of neo-Romantic, archaic, conservative, sentimental, nostalgic, and innovative. And though there may be no use of the pejorative with reference to his pianism, contextualizing his pianism within his era and alongside his notable colleagues (Skryabin, Prokofiev, Busoni, Hofmann, Lhévinne, Godowsky, Rosenthal, *et al*) is nonetheless problematic.³ Perhaps it would suffice to call both compositional and pianistic styles reactionary! The question that still remains, however, is how do we classify a pianist whose performance practices were in large part antithetical to those of his day? Further, while there is some aptness in the use of the word reactionary in a description of Rakhmaninov's art, there are three other loaded terms that have permeated and dominated Rakhmaninov's reception as a pianist: these variously describe him as a Classicist, Romanticist, or Modernist. The terms are used either to reference his pianism as a whole or with respect to different and specific aspects. What is startling about these terms, however, is the fact that they also express totally different concepts and stylistic notions. In addition, while these terms have always been used in a mutually exclusive manner, they attempt to typecast an artist who transcended such reductive labels. Could it be that the piano art of Rakhmaninov is immune from classification? Further, given that his performance art and compositional art are related, how can his compositional syntax be appropriately contextualized alongside a discussion of his performance practices?

² See Aleksandr Gedike's comments on the uniqueness of Rakhmaninov's talent in Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 6.

³ The Russian composer, Iurii Nikol'skii (1895-1962) discusses the difficulty surrounding the categorization of Rakhmaninov's pianism when he states that his playing combined the best attributes of Busoni and Hofmann. See Jacek Gębski, Sergiusz Rachmaninow w literaturze (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2006), 49.

I propose to begin my investigation with an exploration of Rakhmaninov's musical formation. I am particularly interested in what he appropriated stylistically from his training in the Russian piano tradition for the light it can shed on how Rakhmaninov's unique performance practices may have been formed. Subsequently, aesthetic considerations, which might be inscrutable in Rakhmaninov's case, but were nevertheless a part of his myriad stimuli will be outlined prior to a discussion of his interpretation of the Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30.

THE PIANO STUDENT AND HIS FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Rakhmaninov's musical beginnings were perhaps helped by a fortunate set of circumstances, even if the precise details of these beginnings are both blurry and in some sense contradictory. To this end, one is left to speculate in many instances as to the chronology and personalities involved. It is a known fact that both his parents were fine amateur pianists. Thus, it seems plausible to assume from the anecdotes presented that his mother, Lyubov, would have supervised his initial instruction at the instrument.⁴ This notwithstanding, Rakhmaninov confirmed that the person instrumental in discovering his talent was in fact his paternal grandfather, Arkady, himself a student of John Field.⁵ Arkady was behind the move to formalise his grandson's musical

⁴ Harrison retells the various contradictory accounts by Rakhmaninov himself regarding his formal beginnings at the piano. See Max Harrison, Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings (New York: Continuum, 2005), 7-8.

⁵ Harrison, *op. cit.*, 5 & 7. The work of Vladimir Bunimovich has sought to trace the influence of Field upon Rakhmaninov. See Russkoe fortep'iannoe iskusstvo XVIII-pervoi poloviny XIX veka (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1961). Also see Edmund Battersby, "Rachmaninoff's Roots," Keyboard Classics 13.5 (1993): 6-9.

education by hiring a professional and sought a pupil of Gustav Kross (1831-1885)⁶ from the St. Petersburg Conservatoire in Anna Ornatskaia (d. 1927) to begin teaching Rakhmaninov.⁷ Ornatskaia assumed responsibilities for Rakhmaninov's entry exams into the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, and, once admitted, Rakhmaninov came under the tutelage of Vladimir Demi'anskii (1846-1915), another star pupil of Kross. Studies with Dem'ianskii, however, were not very successful, to the extent that Rakhmaninov was not improving, and his enthusiasm for lessons (which he would habitually skip) was waning.⁸ Thus, soon after commencement at the Conservatoire, and acting on the advice of his cousin Aleksandr Ziloti who saw the need for discipline and a strong work ethic to be instilled in the young Rakhmaninov, he was brought to the attention of Ziloti's teacher in Nikolai Zverev.⁹ This necessitated a move to Moscow.¹⁰

⁶ Kross is most famously remembered as the pianist who premiered the *Piano Concerto No. 1 in b^b*, Op. 23 of Tchaikovsky in 1875. He was a close friend of Tchaikovsky and together they were among the first graduates of the newly formed St. Petersburg Conservatoire. See Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 36.

⁷ Oskar von Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 24.

⁸ Gerard Kimeklis, *Nikolai Sergeevich Zverev* (Zhil-gorodok VNIIGaz: Muzykal'noe prosveshchenie, 2004), I: 10.

⁹ Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff* (London: J M Dent & Sons, 1976), 2. Zverev was an authority on preparatory training. His pedagogical talent was observed and championed by Nikolai Rubinstein, and was also witnessed by his colleagues, Presman, Pabst, and Safonov, amongst others. Many of these colleagues who taught the higher classes willingly, accepted Zverev's students into their classes with the knowledge that they had received a solid fundamental preparation in the mechanics of piano playing, instruction in the art of performance and the sacred duty of a professional, together with a holistic musical education. As such, these pupils did not need to be retrained or schooled in technical principles. See Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 8 and 26.

¹⁰ Norris makes a reasonable argument for the case that Rakhmaninov's musical talent might have developed rather differently had he chosen to remain in St. Petersburg, especially given the inescapable influence of Rimsky-Korsakov. See "Rakhmaninov's Apprenticeship," *The Musical Times* 24.1688 (October 1983): 602-603.

Some details on Zverev as pedagogue are particularly germane to the discussion, considering he had the most significant formative influence on Rakhmaninov's development as a pianist and was his last piano teacher. Specific knowledge of Zverev as either pianist¹¹ or pedagogue, however, is limited.¹² Nevertheless, detailing here what is known of his method (which Rakhmaninov absorbed, exemplified, and later extolled, as will be seen later) will provide a clear outline of what he passed on to Rakhmaninov.

Zverev received his own musical education from two important pedagogues of the time resident in Russia: the Frenchman, Alexandre Dubuque (1812-98)¹³ -- a pupil of Field, and Adolf von Henselt (1814-89)¹⁴ -- a pupil of Hummel. It was through them that Zverev learned and subsequently taught Rakhmaninov an appreciation of the "old

¹¹ It is documented that Zverev avoided playing in public as much as possible; his reputation seems to have been built by his association with Russia's elite class of musicians, especially his friendship with Nikolai Rubinstein. This was no doubt why Zverev almost never demonstrated on the instrument, but instead used verbal explanations in teaching situations. These explanations were characterised by practical directions, comparative analogies, or metaphoric associations. See Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music (New York: New York University, 1956), 11.

¹² Zverev left no manual of pedagogical ideas. Only the reminiscences of his students remain. These thoughts of Korishenko, Bekman-Shcherbina, Presman, and Igumnov have been expanded and developed in the scholarship of Alekseev, Mil'shtein, and Goldenweiser. The commentary is small but contains some valuable insights.

¹³ There are several secondary sources that point to Dubuque's crucial role in the development of Russian pianism, but none of these speak of him as a pianist or pedagogue. Edward Garden's *Grove* entry surmises "an intellectually controlled, poised and precise style (even for the interpretation of virtuoso pieces) is particularly associated with the Field-Dubuque Moscow tradition." See "Dubuque, Aleksandr Ivanovich," in Grove Music Online (Accessed 23 February, 2010), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08240>. Some of Dubuque's pedagogical style is captured in his manual: Tekhnika fortepiannoi igry (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1866).

¹⁴ Read of Edward Dannreuther's commentary on the "abnormal" but "grand" piano method of Henselt which received wide approbation from luminaries such as Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, and von Lenz. See "From My Study," The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular 35.619 (September 1, 1894): 590-91. See also Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, Chopin: Pianist and Teacher, As Seen by his Pupils (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 146. The work of Natalia Keil-Zenzerova, Adolph von Henselt: ein Leben für die Klavierpädagogik in Russland (Frankfurt & New York: Lang, 2007), also discusses the significance of Henselt in the development of Russian pianism.

Moscow style.”¹⁵ The importance of a virtuoso technique together with a special focus on hand positioning, was given particular emphasis in the three years (1885-89) Rakhmaninov spent as a student of Zverev.¹⁶ The primary goal of Zverev’s method, however, was the transmission of musical content and emotional essence. Likewise, for the student, the mastering of the artistic image of the music through attentive listening was the most important factor. Zverev also emphasised that due attention be given to the conscious, preconceived goals of playing, and he highly valued the role of the intellect in assisting the interpretative task, to the extent that the head heard first what the hands would subsequently play. The first rule of interpretation for Zverev, however, was to preserve absolute fidelity to the text.¹⁷ This entailed a scrupulous observation of metre, articulation, dynamics, in learning¹⁸ and performing a piece of music.

The Zverev method paid great attention to the development of superior finger technique. In achieving this aim, Zverev began with scales and pedagogical exercises,¹⁹ and only then proceeded through the etude repertoire. In this respect, Zverev promoted a strict

¹⁵ See the first chapter of this dissertation and Victor Seroff, Rachmaninoff (London: Cassell, 1951), 13.

¹⁶ Rakhmaninov’s study with Zverev overlapped for at least two years with Skryabin.

¹⁷ Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹⁸ Learning was done at a slow or moderate tempo. The metronome was employed to keep students in check. Through slow learning and careful listening to each note, one could obtain a clear view of all the meaningful and constructive peculiarities of the music which also aided the realisation of artistic goals and the obtaining of technical perfection. See Rakhmaninov’s employment of the same method for learning in Gębski, *op. cit.*, 60.

¹⁹ Scales were performed in different keys in classes with four people on two pianos. He would command students to raise fingers high, not blink the eyes, not to shake the head, and not to swing the feet. Teenage students were required to be able to play all the scales in double notes and in every key. See Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 21.

diet of Hanon,²⁰ Bertini, Heller, Clementi, Kullak, and Cramer with a goal for all his students to attain rapid, strong, and elastic fingers.²¹ Only when students had mastered these pedagogical exercises were they introduced to the etude repertoire of Tausig, Moszkowski, and Czerny.²² Clarity, accurate tone production, and the enunciation of each sound was valued, as was the unification and development of melodic lines and the switching from one type of technical exercise to another.²³

Zverev was always concerned with economy of movement²⁴ and the elimination of any tension in arm and body.²⁵ According to Presman, Zverev was merciless when a student played with tension in the hand (caused by a stiff wrist and/or moving elbows) which inevitably resulted in rough and harsh playing.²⁶ The elimination of tension was a

²⁰ Goldenweiser recalled Rakhmaninov's preference for Hanon exercises. See Gębski, *op. cit.*, 60.

²¹ James Cooke, *Great Pianists on Piano Playing* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 209. Also played were Villoing's exercises which were very popular at that time. See *Theoretisch-technische Lehre des Klavierspiels* (Berlin: Simrock, 1875), and *Rubinsteinsche Fingerübungen: technische Studien aus dem Theoretisch-technische Lehre des Klavierspiels* (Berlin: Simrock, 1900).

²² Olga Konius makes the comment that Rakhmaninov transformed Czerny etudes (especially *Kunst der Fingerfertigkeit Op. 740*) into brilliant recital pieces. Rakhmaninov, from his later recollections in various sources, exhorted students to undertake a thorough study of the etude repertoire as he did in trying to acquire a strong technical foundation. See Gębski, *op. cit.*, 39.

²³ Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 21.

²⁴ See the comments of Zoia Pribitkova who speaks of Rakhmaninov's economy of movement in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 66.

²⁵ This was followed by Bach *Inventions, Sinfonias, Preludes & Fugues, French and English Suites, Partitas, Concertos*, and sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, and works of Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, Glinka, the Romantics. He also paid attention to Scarlatti, Rameau, and Couperin. See Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 24.

²⁶ Zverev sometimes put a copper coin on the wrist of a student if their wrist dropped unnecessarily and was unable to move in a manner which united the melodic contour and phrase. Matvei Presman, "Ugolok muzykal'noi Moskvyy vos'midesiatykh godov," in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 152.

unique feature of his students who were said to possess a rounded and full sound.²⁷

With such a systematic and exacting technical regime in place, Rakhmaninov honed a formidable technical facility.²⁸

Rakhmaninov thus stressed the importance of technical preparedness for the successful performance of his music, emphasizing that a commanding technique was the foundation of interpretation.²⁹ In his opinion, if a pianist did not command an arsenal of technical methods for the expression of the ideas of a composer, there could be no communication in the interpretation. Technique should be at such a high level that the piece which is to be played can be learned by the performer with the sole purpose of unearthing the interpretative ideas.³⁰

Zverev also emphasised the acquisition of musical skills which Rakhmaninov would display to much acclaim throughout his career as a professional artist. Proficiency in sight-reading, transposition, memorization, and improvisation were demonstrated with brilliance by Rakhmaninov and his peers.³¹ In addition, Zverev encouraged the learning of salon pieces, giving them special prominence late in his teaching career. He

²⁷ Gębski, *op. cit.*, 51 and 83.

²⁸ The drudgery of technical exercises and etudes was only broken by some Baroque transcriptions together with a significant selection of the music of Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Liadov, Balakirev, Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Josef Lhévinne, "Practical Phases of Modern Pianoforte Study," *The Etude* 39 (1921): 151.

²⁹ Sergei Rakhmaninov, "Interpretatsiia zavisit ot talanta i individual'nosti," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 4 (1973): 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Also note, "Он был очень строг не только к другим, он требовал и от себя того же, что от других." See *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 327.

³¹ Gębski, *op. cit.*, 37, 53-4, 59.

considered such repertoire important for the professional pianist to engage with the public.³²

All this notwithstanding, Zverev's real strength was in being able to inculcate a love for music in his students, and it was with this aim that he provided a total arts education, where privileged and select students lived with him and studied not only the art of the piano but also a broader culture and arts curriculum. As Kimeklis writes:

[...he was not the ordinary tutor whose erudition did not stretch beyond primitive exercises for five fingers. The talent of Nikolai Sergeevich, was a multifaceted and very complicated phenomenon. It can be measured not only by its depth but by its breadth, because he did not think that the education of an artist was possible without the formation of their human qualities and self-esteem due to the fact that if the person does not have them then aesthetic perception is faceless and dead.]³³

Despite the later breakdown in their relationship,³⁴ Rakhmaninov remained grateful for Zverev's guidance and rigorous curriculum, and also considered himself fortunate to

³² Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 24.

³³ “он был <...> не репетитор-ремесленник, эрудиция которого не простирается дальше примитивных упражнений для пяти пальцев. Талант Николая Сергеевича - явление неоднозначное, сложное и, как нам кажется, подлежащее измерению не только вглубь, но и вширь, поскольку учитель не представлял себе воспитания художника вне формирования его человеческих качеств и самоутверждения, без которых эстетическое чувство обезличено и мертво.” Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 9.

³⁴ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia 1890–1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 53, and Samuel Lipman, *Music after Modernism* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 94. Rakhmaninov's relationship with Zverev was at breaking point due to Rakhmaninov's increasing enthusiasm for composition. Zverev considered the pursuit of composition a waste of time for his most promising piano students. This seemingly innocuous detail was the catalyst for a significant rupture in the relationship between the two men only to be repaired at Rakhmaninov's graduation. See Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 20-21.

have encountered many major artists passing through or resident in Moscow at the home of Zverev.³⁵

By the summer of 1888, Rakhmaninov's time had come to transfer into the upper division of the Conservatory. The move across to Ziloti also corresponded with Rakhmaninov's expanded curriculum to include counterpoint and harmony studies with Tanev and Arenskii respectively.³⁶ The student-teacher relationship of Rakhmaninov and Ziloti was short-lived, however, due to Ziloti's resumption of an active concert career.³⁷ Being without a teacher, Rakhmaninov was given special consideration to take his graduation exams one year early.³⁸

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE: DEFINING TERMS AND GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

If Rakhmaninov's pianistic formation seems relatively straight-forward, the sketching of some relevant background on his compositional style is considerably more problematic. In general terms, Paisov has contended that the Romantic tendencies of Rakhmaninov's work developed as an intermediary between two other trends: the Classical and the

³⁵ Zverev believed that the personality of a human being and musician is formed not only in the process of many hours spent at the piano, but as a result of the live communication and exchange with talented people who know their art perfectly well. See Kimeklis, *op. cit.*, 13.

³⁶ The transfer to Ziloti was engineered by Zverev who wanted to give Ziloti (his former pupil) the best students from his studio. Rakhmaninov would have preferred to study alongside Skryabin under the tutelage of Safonov. See Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 17.

³⁷ Ziloti's resignation from teaching duties at the Conservatoire was hastened by a disagreement between himself and Safonov (the new director of the Conservatoire). See Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 33.

³⁸ Robert Cunningham, Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Bio-Bibliography (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 2.

Modern.³⁹ While this statement may seem simplistic, it affords us the opportunity to pause and return to the three aforementioned and central terms to this thesis, and undertake some pertinent definition for the relevance of these terms in establishing Rakhmaninov's compositional style.

It would seem axiomatic to state that labels such as Classic, Romantic, and Modern⁴⁰ are reductive and that they represent arbitrary or changeable stylistic features. In this sense, it should be remembered that while the notion of periodization in history has its usefulness in defining boundaries, such labels should not be considered stable unitary aesthetics, mutually exclusive entities, or in antithesis to one another without good reason.⁴¹ Further, the continuity and fluidity between these styles is in fact far more significant than the contrast.⁴²

Nonetheless, in defining characteristics of high Classicism, there exists an overarching concept of the concern for the expression of rationality as opposed to poetry. To this end, there is little room for preoccupation with the grandiose, profound, passionate, and mystical elements that were so characteristic of the musical epochs on either side of the

³⁹ Iurii Paisov, "Zhiznestoikost' romanticheskogo mirosozertsaniia: Rakhmaninov" in Russkaia muzyka i XX vek (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvovedeniia Ministerstva kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1997), 91-92.

⁴⁰ In extrapolating on the apt definition provided by Rosen and Zerner, "they are primitive shorthand signs for long-range historical developments that one feels nevertheless to have a certain integrity." See Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 31.

⁴¹ Donald Grout and Claude Palisca, A History of Western Music 4th ed., (New York: Norton, 1988), 657.

⁴² Charles Rosen, The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 20.

Classical era.⁴³ While esthetics of the time posited that music was to “offer to the listener pleasant sounding images of reality,”⁴⁴ the primary task of the composer and/or performer was to communicate ideals of balance, restraint and moderation, purity/clarity of line and form, and replicate the sounds of speech.⁴⁵

The connection of music and rhetoric, a Baroque vestige, became a central influence in the formation of the new Classical performance style. In her discussion of Classical-styled execution, Rosenblum discusses Türk’s idea of the expressive execution of music and compares it to a “delivery of ideas through the spoken word.”⁴⁶ Türk was explicit in his descriptive analogies of the relationship between music and rhetoric, and in his statements regarding the ingredients constituting good execution. But while Türk spoke of clarity, grammar, and accents in performance,⁴⁷ Koch and Quantz reformed the connection of music and rhetoric into the more expressive *Empfindsamkeit* style.⁴⁸ This “sensitive” style sought to convey expressions of intimacy, affectation, and

⁴³ Edward Lippman, A History of Western Musical Aesthetics (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 77.

⁴⁴ Grout and Palisca, *op cit.*, 546.

⁴⁵ See the work of Henri Peyre, Qu’est-ce que le classicisme?: essai de mise au point (Paris: Droz, 1933), and Charles Cudworth, “An Essay by John Marsh,” Music & Letters 36.2 (April 1955), 155-164.

⁴⁶ Sandra Rosenblum, Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 9.

⁴⁷ Daniel Türk, Klavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende ed. Erwin Jacobi (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962), 338, 340-343.

⁴⁸ See Johann Quantz, On Playing the Flute trans. and ed. Edward Reilly (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 119 and 124-125; and Heinrich Koch, Musikalisches Lexikon (Frankfurt: Hermann dem jüngern, 1802), 1417.

sentimentality, through ornamentation, frequent dynamic change, leaps, changes in rhythm and mood to “enhance the personal quality of the expression.”⁴⁹

While the embrace of Romanticism entailed an abandonment of existing Classical traditions and strictures for the early Romantic artists, Rosen and Zerner state:

the true originality of Romanticism, however, lies in a still greater ambition: a claim not only to destroy the Classical tradition and replace it with something better, but eventually—in the near, or far, or infinitely distant future—to arrive at a higher form of Classicism.⁵⁰

Thus, the notion of fluidity between these labels is sufficiently apparent. Nevertheless, the Romantic movement in art has been contextualised by its association with a revolutionary character, politics, the avant-garde, realism, and various historical events.⁵¹ This has contributed to the difficulty in positing a stable definition for Romanticism in music.⁵² For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to take up on one

⁴⁹ Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁵⁰ Rosen and Zerner, *op. cit.*, 24. This resonates with the idea that “in...early 19th-century polemics Romanticism was clearly identified as a movement concurrent with Classicism rather than a period succeeding it.” See Jim Samson, “Romanticism,” in *Grove Music Online* and *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23751> (Accessed 1 April, 2010).

⁵¹ See Jim Samson, “Music and Society,” in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Late Romantic Era – From the mid-19th century to World War I* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), 1 and 3.

⁵² Indeed, some writers of the time including E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) considered Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven to be Romantics. See Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 18. This idea has been recently reprised by Richard Taruskin who also underscores in didactic fashion the fluidity between and the difficulty of positing stable definitions for these terms. See Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), II: 646-647. Further, the dating of a beginning and end to the movement has been fiercely contested by many musicologists with various year’s begin proffered to indicate commencement and conclusion. For example, marking the beginning has for some the necessity of being associated with the composition of Beethoven’s *Eroica*, while for others it was the death of Schubert that provoked some stabilization in the new musical directions of the time. Similarly, the end of Romanticism in music has variously been situated at 1880, 1900, or coinciding with the premiere of Stravinsky’s *Le sacre du printemps*, among many other dates. See Rey Longyear, *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music* 2nd ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 4-6.

of these contextual associations where a dialectic has been established which pits Romanticism in opposition to the Classical movement that preceded it.⁵³

Perhaps the most consequential ideas of early Romantic theory that were to have the most impact on the performing artist were the relationship of the artist to his work, and the express intention to dismantle the barriers between life and art.⁵⁴ In considering the former, “the personality of the artist merges with the work of art; classical clarity is replaced by a certain intentional obscurity and ambiguity, definite statement by suggestion, allusion, or symbol.”⁵⁵ Another primary Romantic trait is a certain expansiveness which aims to transcend the variable of time. In communicating with past, present, and future, the Romanticist strived to glimpse the eternal, to transform existing realities, and to achieve the impossible through the liberal exercise and passionate expression of one’s freedom.⁵⁶

The transition from Romanticism to Modernism was commensurate with a distortion or corruption of tonal stability and lush sonority, a turning away from established formal structures, and a bastardization of conventional musical syntax for the purposes of

⁵³ This argument was promoted by Karl Kahlert. See Christopher Murray, Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850, 2 vols., (London: Taylor and Francis Books, 2004), II: 762. For Dahlhaus, however, this antithesis is built on an erroneous premise. See Dahlhaus, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁵⁴ See the works of Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829), August von Schlegel (1767–1845), Novalis (1772-1801), and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) referenced in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Prior to the Germans, however, the primacy of the artists’ aspirations which, through spontaneity of expression, could lead to the formation of a Romantic hero concept was propagated by Rousseau in his *Les confessions*.

⁵⁵ Grout and Palisca, *op cit.*, 659.

⁵⁶ Samson, *op. cit.*, 3.

increasing accessibility. Thus, the advent of Modernism was characterised by an *aggiornamento* and new musical direction. The Modernist celebrated notions of innovation, exclusivity, optimism, self-consciousness, and an awareness of one's environment. Taruskin goes further to state that superseding any of the aforementioned features of Modernism was:

urbanity in every meaning of the word from “citified” to “sophisticated” to “artificial” to “mannered.” Modernism celebrates every quality that Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Johann Gottfried von Herder reviled – and does it, moreover, with irony (as anything so self-aware must do), so that any attempt to reduce modernism to a set of core beliefs or practices quickly turns into an exercise in chasing one's tail.⁵⁷

It would seem, at least on the surface, that Rakhmaninov vehemently repudiated all of the above Modernist ideals, (even if for Aleksandr Gauk, the conductor who successfully revived the first symphony, Rakhmaninov was ahead of his time,⁵⁸ while for Ivan Narodny, Rakhmaninov was an ultra-modernist).⁵⁹ Further, Rakhmaninov was not preoccupied with Modernist notions of transcendence that were so integral to Skryabin's abjuring of conventional tonal syntax, nor was he interested in the rediscovery of the primitive that so influenced the development of both Stravinsky and Prokofiev.⁶⁰ Rakhmaninov's brand of Modernism was instead closer to a Wagnerian

⁵⁷ Taruskin (2005), *op. cit.*, IV: 2.

⁵⁸ See Antoni Gronowicz, *Sergei Rachmaninoff* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946), 67.

⁵⁹ Ivan Narodny, “The Art of Sergei Rachmaninoff,” *Musical America* 16.7 (22 June 1912): 17.

⁶⁰ Paul Griffiths, “Modernism,” in *The Oxford Companion to Music* ed. Alison Latham, in *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e4473> (Accessed 6 April, 2010). Nevertheless, Kuznetsov, Daniel Zhitomirskii, and Nicholas Slonimsky all of whom wrote on this subject as far back as the 1940s, have all uncovered links between the work of Rakhmaninov and Prokofiev. More recently, Norris has taken up this baton and is rather explicit regarding the origins of Rakhmaninov's post-Russian (1917) music, speaking of their “biting chromaticism,” “curious, shifting harmonies,” “rhythmic incisiveness,” and “almost Prokofiev-like grotesquery,” even if he offers no analyses to support such characterisations. Zhitomirskii and Slonimsky are quoted in Joseph Yasser, “Progressive Tendencies in Rachmaninoff's Music,” *Tempo* 22 (1951-52): 21.

understanding of the term where “the imperative of art was a dynamic originality rooted in the past but transcending it.”⁶¹ Indeed, while a negative reaction to perceived Modernist tendencies in Rakhmaninov’s music did arise from 1910-1920, “his critics have so often in the past refused to accept, that he is a composer of the twentieth and not nineteenth century.”⁶² It was in this sense that Shevliakov described Rakhmaninov as being uniquely modern and un-modern at the same time.⁶³

Thus, how is Rakhmaninov’s music to be classified and who were the major influences on his compositional style? In his statement cited above, Paisov does posit links for Classical influences including Glinka, Taneev, and Glazunov, and similarly for Modernist borrowings from Symbolism, Expressionism, and Constructivism. Paisov fails, however, to define or demonstrate these connections with any specificity or detail. Similarly, Aranovskii contends that Rakhmaninov assimilated separate elements of the compositional technique of representatives of the different trends (in particular, the polyphony of Taneev and the harmony of Skryabin), while also continuing the

⁶¹ Leon Botstein, “Modernism,” in Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40625> (Accessed 7 April, 2010).

⁶² Barrie Martyn, Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 274.

⁶³ Evgeni Shevliakov, Rakhmaninov v khudozhestvennoi kul'ture ego vremeni (Rostov-na-Donu: Izd-vo Rostovskogo gos. pedagog. universiteta, 1997), 67. This statement echoes that of John Carpenter who contended that “Rachmaninoff’s importance in contemporary music lies in the fact that he is a sensitive touchstone between the new and the old, and strong and logical link between the great music of the past and the newest tendencies of the present times.” See “Appreciations of Rachmaninoff from famous musicians in America,” The Etude 37.10 (October 1919): 617. This statement was also paraphrased decades later by Barrie Martyn who stated that “the fundamental fact of Rachmaninoff’s place in Russian musical history is that he stands Janus-like between the old Russia and the new, looking back to the flowering of Russian nineteenth-century ‘classical’ music as also ahead to the first generation of Soviet Composers.” See Martyn, *op. cit.*, 3.

development of the main line of musical Romanticism seen in the work of Tchaikovsky but offers little meaningful analysis to support these claims.⁶⁴

Rakhmaninov's only wish was to dissociate himself from experimental or modern music.⁶⁵ Further, in trying definitively to quash any perceived affinity with contemporary music of his time he stated [...I do not have sympathy for composers who write with a set formula or theory in mind, or composers who write in a specific style only because that style is in fashion.]⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Aranovskii states that the farthest evolution of Tchaikovsky's Romanticism is connected with the music of Rakhmaninov and Skryabin. For Aranovskii, the Romantic language of Tchaikovsky is noticeably strengthened in the music of Rakhmaninov and Skryabin and affected by Symbolism. See Mark Aranovskii, "Romantizm i russkaia muzyka XIX veka," *Voprosy teorii i estetiki muzyki* 4 (1965): 104. Robert Morgan evidently concurs with Aronovski's view of the relationship between Tchaikovsky and Rakhmaninov. See Robert Morgan, "Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America," in *The Norton Introduction to Music History* (New York: Norton, 1991), 112-113, and Geoffrey Norris, "Rakhmaninov's Apprenticeship," *The Musical Times* 124.1688 (October 1983): 603. Yet another angle on this topic, one of the earliest, most traditional positions of Soviet studies on Rakhmaninov, associate the artist's aesthetic credo with Realism, especially in the pre-October period when the composer was subjected to the criticism of the Modernists. (See Nadezhda Tumanina (ed.), *Istoriia russkoi muzyki* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1960), III: 250-251). It was thought that the musical language of the works composed during his emigration showed that he [remained a Realist, continuing the Classical traditions of the nineteenth century and by no means adopted the tenets of Modernism.] "остаётся реалистом, продолжателем классических традиций XIX века и отнюдь не переходит на позиции модернизма." *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶⁵ For his part, Rakhmaninov wrote that he [spent enormous effort trying to feel the musical style of today, but it did not come to me.] "Я делал огромные усилия, чтобы ощутить музыкальный стиль сегодняшнего дня, но он не доходит до меня." See Zarui Apetian (ed.), *Literaturnoe nasledie v trekh tomakh. S. Rakhmaninov* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1970), III: 171. See also Sergei Rakhmaninov, "Muzyka dolzhna idti ot serdtsa," *Sovetskaia muzyka* (1973): 102. The objective insight of Percy Grainger construed the same. "The very absence of the experimental and the iconoclastic from [Rakhmaninov's] works lends them a certain quality of...inevitability and "naturalness" that makes their appeal singularly wide and immediate." See Harold Bauer et al, "Appreciations of Rachmaninoff from famous musicians in America," *The Etude* 37.10 (October 1919): 617.

⁶⁶ "...не испытываю симпатии к композиторам, которые пишут по заранее составленным формулам или теориям, или к композиторам, которые пишут в определенном стиле только потому, что этот стиль в моде." *Ibid.* Rakhmaninov had great respect, however, for composers who adopted Modernist principles after a preliminary and intensive preparation and study of the Classical methods of composition. In this respect, Rakhmaninov maintained a great admiration for Stravinsky, who was firmly grounded in the rubrics of Classical harmony, polyphony, and orchestration, and only then went on to forge his innovative and personal style at the forefront of the development of a new musical syntax. See

In moving beyond labels, the definition and origin of Rakhmaninov's compositional style evidently reveals an eclectic range of influences which have long been contested.⁶⁷ Scholars have long argued about the origins of his style. At the heart of this issue, in most cases, are unbalanced generalizations that consider one particular aspect of a Rakhmaninov's complex musical personality. To this end and similar to the Soviet scholarship on the composer outlined above, the argument of Calvocoressi⁶⁸ who emphasises traditional formal structures and tonal procedures, non-nationalistic elements, and a direct connection with Tchaikovsky, is typically one-sided. Newman's⁶⁹ ideological, as opposed to technically-based, advocacy of nationalistic and folk elements in Rakhmaninov's oeuvre is similarly biased. Asaf'ev attempted to transcend these one-dimensional prejudices by identifying three primary elements which played a critical role in the formation of the composer's individual musical language, namely the cantilena of Russian folk music, the influence of melodic elements from Rakhmaninov's western European contemporaries, and the inspiration of Tchaikovsky.

David Ewen, "Music should speak from the Heart: An interview with Serge Rachmaninoff," The Etude 59.12 (December 1941): 804-48.

⁶⁷ Blair Johnston invokes Symbolist metaphors in describing the influences. "Rachmaninoff had something of a Dionysian side as a composer, which comes through especially clearly in works from the late Russian and exile periods. Apollonian analytic approaches disguise the extent to which he was, like many Russian composers before and after him, an eclectic composer in whose music the fusion of different melodic-harmonic idioms sometimes seems as much a mad improvisation as a conventionally-formed musical argument." See his doctoral dissertation, "Harmony and Climax in the Late Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009), 6-7.

⁶⁸ See Michel Calvocoressi, A Survey of Russian Music (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1944), 72.

⁶⁹ Quoted from Martyn, *op. cit.*, 27.

Nevertheless, even Asaf'ev's account remains problematic and exclusive as it fails to consider anything but melodic elements.⁷⁰

It may appear that Rakhmaninov was conservative in his harmonic experiments, especially compared with those of his contemporaries, Skryabin and Stravinsky, and that his music rebelled against the Modernist tendencies driving artistic and musical culture and composition into the early twentieth century. It is perhaps the works between the *Symphony No. 1*, Op. 13 and the *Vespers*, Op. 37 (inclusive) that, on the surface, seem to confirm this view. Indeed, the disastrous reception accorded the first symphony precipitated his first severe bout of depression and necessarily made him retreat back to the more secure harmonic fields defined by Tchaikovsky, Arenskii, and Taneev.

His music prior to Op. 13 and post Op. 37, however, shows a more overtly bold composer who was assertive, experimental, and modern in approach.⁷¹ Of his early works, prior to the first symphony, his opera *Aleko* was praised by Ippolitov-Ivanov, and

⁷⁰ See Boris Asaf'ev, Russian Music from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century trans. Alfred Swan (Ann Arbor: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953), 176.

⁷¹ The irony surrounding the composition and subsequent failure of the first symphony was the fact that Rakhmaninov believed this work to be one which would forge new directions in music. In fact the work's failure seems to have been exacerbated largely by the tensions between the musical establishments of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Cui was among the most vociferous of the St. Petersburg critics, even if he acknowledged some pioneering developments in the work. See Cesar Cui, "Tretii russkii simfonicheskii kontsert," Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta (17 March, 1897): 3. Findeizen offered a more impartial view which, in part, seemed to confirm Rakhmaninov's own view that the work's disappointment was the result of a bad performance. For Rakhmaninov this pointed to Glazunov's incompetence on the podium. See Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 72. Also see Martyn, *op. cit.*, 97, who cites the reactions of conductor Aleksandr Khessin, who was also of the opinion that the substandard performance was to blame.

Also, it was the works within the so-called conservative period (particularly the second and third piano concerti) that brought him the most fame. See Oskar von Riesemann, Rachmaninoff's Recollections told to Oskar von Riesemann trans. D. Rutherford (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 98, who suspects that the wide-ranging accessibility of Rakhmaninov's music could also have been linked to the composer's perceived lack of originality. See also Irina Nikol'skaia, "K Izucheniiu nasledii A.N. Skriabina: samyi luchezhnyi iz tvortsov," Muzykal'naia Akademiia 4 (1993): 168.

explores daring harmonic possibilities. The augmented triad together with a penchant for all forms of seventh chords, was always present in his earliest compositions. Rakhmaninov had a unique tendency to delay resolution and explore the colours of these chords frequently through parallel motion (see Op. 3, Op. 7 or Op. 8/2 for typical non-traditional approaches to seventh chords). Augmented chords were frequently formed using two scale sets separated by a major third. This also led him naturally to explore whole-tone sonorities (see the first movement of the *Symphony No. 1* or *Prince Rostislav*) which Yasser believes might have been gleaned from Rebikov. Garry Ziegler, however, deems the whole-tone fascination to have been influenced by Glinka (through *Ruslan and Liudmila*) and Dargomyzhskii (*Rusalka* and *Kamennyi gost*). Ziegler also remarks that Rakhmaninov's *Polichinelle* foreshadows Stravinsky's *Petrushka* in its approach to combining two tonalities. He proceeds to state that perhaps Rakhmaninov and Stravinsky had more in common in their experimental approaches as opposed to being radically dissimilar from one another.⁷² David Cannata also discusses Rakhmaninov's harmonic innovations and development, and concludes that the symphonies show Rakhmaninov at his most commanding as a composer. In Cannata's view, the concept of genre controlled Rakhmaninov's compositional approach, and if the symphonies were the pinnacle in achievements for their respective periods in his oeuvre, the piano concerti were the testing ground for experimentation.⁷³

⁷² Garry Ziegler, "Rachmaninoff's Early Voice," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 15 (1995): 39. See also Joseph Yasser, "Progressive Tendencies in Rachmaninoff's Music," *Tempo* 22 (1951-2): 16. This is a tenuous argument which has been refuted and dismissed by many other scholars. See for example Stephen Walsh, "Sergei Rachmaninoff 1873-1943," *Tempo* 105 (June 1973): 17.

⁷³ See David Cannata, "Rachmaninoff's Concept of Genre," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 15 (1995): 59-73.

In view of the above, could it be that Rakhmaninov may not be as conservative in harmonic language as many believe? This exposes the polarity in Rakhmaninov scholarship which has existed since the reviews of his first symphony and persists to this day. A paraphrase of the comments of Carruthers from two sources expresses a succinct and pertinent viewpoint:

the rhetoric Rachmaninov's music engenders is often far removed from a cogent and defensible critical stance...Rachmaninov's "supporters tend toward hyperbole, without benefit of critical distance." The same could be said of his detractors...Subjective opinions...masquerading as objective assessments, helped shape the critical reception accorded Rachmaninov's music in his lifetime and, even more so, in the years following his death.⁷⁴

One can readily see, through the above citation of only a few of the opinions regarding the origins and nature, that Rakhmaninov's compositional style does indeed represent an intricate fusion of external musical influences and genuine individual qualities. I contend that Rakhmaninov's most significant stylistic influences came in varying degrees from four musical sources: Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, and the Russian Orthodox Church.⁷⁵

Liszt undoubtedly provided pianistic inspiration which Rakhmaninov would have encountered through the Rubinstein brothers, Ziloti, and the Moscow Conservatory,

⁷⁴ Carruthers, *op. cit.*, 45, and Glen Carruthers, "Rachmaninoff," in Reader's Guide to Music: History, Theory and Criticism (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 582-83.

⁷⁵ Of course, if this paper was solely about the subject of Rakhmaninov's myriad influences, the discussion should necessarily incorporate stylistic connections with Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Grieg, Mussorgsky, Arenskii, Borodin, Taneev, and especially Rimsky-Korsakov, and also gypsy connections among others. See in particular the work of Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovskii, Molodye gody S.V. Rakhmaninova: pis'ma, vospominaniia (St. Petersburg: Muzgiz, 1949), 111-158, and Ziegler, *op. cit.*, 39-47, on the last of these points.

renowned for its study of the music of Liszt.⁷⁶ Further, Liszt's late piano music, characterised by the experimental excursions to the boundaries of tonality in works such as *Nuages Gris* or *La lugubre gondola* which exploit augmented triadic sonorities (mixed with a Lydian mode-based melody in the former work), may have been known to him via Ziloti, as was the *Faust Symphony* which he considered a masterpiece.⁷⁷ Rakhmaninov's familiarity and affinity with the piano writing of Liszt was evident to the extent that when not playing his own concerti as a soloist he inevitably opted for the Liszt concerti. From Liszt, Rakhmaninov also learned the concept of thematic unity which he used to great effect in Op. 30.⁷⁸ Cannata further speculates that Rakhmaninov came under the spell of Wagner through the Liszt transcriptions and paraphrases of the operas.⁷⁹

Liszt's influence was also communicated through Tchaikovsky, who was one of the most notable champions of his music, introducing several of his works to the Moscow Conservatory and prominent musical circles.⁸⁰ The line from Tchaikovsky to Rakhmaninov represents an influence freely admitted by Rakhmaninov himself. The inspiration of Tchaikovsky is unmistakable in Rakhmaninov's construction of melody.

⁷⁶ See David Cannata, *Rachmaninoff and the Symphony* (Innsbruck-Wien: Studien Verlag, 1999), 29.

⁷⁷ Jakov Milstein deals with Liszt's shadow of influence over Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich. See "Az orosz Liszt-kutatás Kevéssé ismert lapjai," *Magyar Zene* 18 (December 1977), 354.

⁷⁸ Norris discusses the transformation of thematic material in Op. 30. See Norris, *op. cit.*, 116-117.

⁷⁹ Cannata (1999), *op. cit.*, 33.

⁸⁰ This influence can be seen in the overt virtuosity of Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto and also the programmatic symphony (*Manfred*) and *The Tempest*.

See for example the rising sequence from $d-b^b$, or the presence of the ubiquitous $c\#-f$ interval in the principal theme of the first movement of Op. 30 which Yasser contends is a folk-inspired device modelled directly on Tchaikovsky.⁸¹ Walsh offers a simplistic comparison of the two composer's respective approaches to the construction of melody which is nevertheless rather insightful:

as a melodist, Rachmaninoff was much influenced by Tchaikovsky. But he was greatly Tchaikovsky's inferior in the range and variety of his tunes; and in learning from the older composer he seems to have been over-impressed by the cantabile mechanism which underlies Tchaikovsky's best lyrical inspiration – the step-wise motion and sensuous orchestration – while being unable to follow its immense intervallic span and extensive growth in time. Typically, Rachmaninoff's melodic periods are short, and there is a tendency to revolve round pivotal notes in descending sequence, whereas the typical Tchaikovsky progression is an ascending one. The long aspiring tunes of the Fifth Symphony, *Francesca da Rimini*, *Hamlet* and the *Pathétique* have few if any parallels in Rachmaninoff...But if Rachmaninoff's genius was mainly for soulful, reflective or nostalgic melody, he certainly was a master of the type.⁸²

Further, the use of Tchaikovsky motto-theme principles in Rakhmaninov's second symphony (scherzo movement) recalls the former's fourth symphony.

The evident influence on melodic construction notwithstanding, Tchaikovsky's concept of form possibly exerted a more profound impact on Rakhmaninov and also regulated to

⁸¹ Joseph Yasser, "The Opening Theme of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto and its Liturgical Prototype," *Musical Quarterly* LV (1969): 323-324.

⁸² Stephen Walsh, "Sergei Rachmaninoff 1873 – 1943," *Tempo* 105 (June 1973): 15. Walsh proceeds to discuss the second symphony as an example of Rachmaninoff's melodic genius. Mazel' also categorized Rakhmaninov's melodies into two groups: the dynamic and the static. Dynamic characteristics arise in the phrases leading towards a climax, where each progressive wave becomes higher, stronger, and brighter than the last, maintaining the inertia of development. The static group on the other hand is the root of the dynamic impulse. The dynamic line is encountered in the finales of both the second and third piano concerti. The static tendency is seen in the central themes of the middle movements also of both the second and third concerti. See Leo Mazel', "O liricheskoi melodike Rakhmaninova," in *S.V. Rakhmaninov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947), 155-175.

some extent the melodic content.⁸³ An example of this is Rakhmaninov's application of the traditional concerto cadenza.⁸⁴ While Tchaikovsky was not the first to tamper with the cadenza's function and/or placement,⁸⁵ he provided for Rakhmaninov a model for increasing its importance and expansiveness, which the latter assimilated and recast to give his gargantuan cadenza of the first movement of Op. 30 a distinct structural and formal recapitulatory function.

In addition to melodic construction and formal concepts, Cannata has shown convincingly how Rakhmaninov appropriated and manipulated Tchaikovsky's double-tonic complex, and successfully exploited "tonic/subdominant strategies to focus [*sic*] middle-dimensional continuity and thereby ensure large-dimensional coherence", through a comparison of the *Ostrov mertvykh* and *Kolokola* with Tchaikovsky's fourth and fifth symphonies respectively.⁸⁶ Thus, while a line of influence from Tchaikovsky

⁸³ For his part, Tchaikovsky was attempting to demonstrate post-Wagnerian principles as they related to tonal construction.

⁸⁴ The cadenza of this work has assumed an exalted and notorious status of its own due to its extreme difficulty. Two were composed: the *ossia* which was the first to be written subsequently appeared in the score as the alternate version, and the shorter *scherzando*. Rakhmaninov only ever played the *scherzando*, but today, one hundred years after the work's premiere, the *ossia* has become the most popular. Very much akin to two works he greatly admired, Mozart's Piano Concerto K. 466 and Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Rakhmaninov's cadenzas are also developmental. Indeed, as in the Mendelssohn, Rakhmaninov situates his cadenza between development and recapitulation sections. In the history of the Romantic concerto genre there were already many experiments with the form whether it involved the placement of the cadenza, linking of the movements, use of motto-themes, etc., see Stephan Lindeman, *Structural Novelty and Tradition in the Early Romantic Piano Concerto* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1999).

⁸⁵ Robert Gauldin, "New Twists for Old Endings: Cadenza and Apotheosis in the Romantic Piano Concerto," *Intégral* 18/19 (2004/2005): 1-23, see especially pages 10 and 20.

⁸⁶ Cannata (1999), *op. cit.*, 68. The subdominant constituted one of the most characteristic sonorities of his harmonic technique. This was first noted in the studies of that chord by Viktor Berkov, see Berkov, "Ob odnoi garmonii Rakhmaninova," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 4 (1958), and Berkov, *Garmoniia i muzykal'naia forma* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962). Iurii Paisov also spoke of Rakhmaninov's overbalanced interest towards the subdominant sphere of harmony. See Paisov, *op. cit.*, 97. Of more

to Rakhmaninov is relatively transparent, Rakhmaninov's style is anything but derivative. In this regard, Cannata proceeds to state:

with the *Third Symphony* Rachmaninoff advanced the Russian, post-Wagnerian rhetoric beyond Tchaikovsky's models. Whereas the "Pathétique" pivoted around a double-tonic complex of relative keys, Rachmaninoff went one step further and fashioned the double-tonic complex in the *Third Symphony* using keys with different key signatures.⁸⁷

With respect to the three aforementioned composers, it was the creativity of Wagner, filtered through Tchaikovsky⁸⁸ and Liszt, that had the most significant effect on Rakhmaninov. Rakhmaninov's acquaintance with Wagner's music occurred as late as the mid to late 1890s.⁸⁹ Indeed, it was via Taneev, who hosted "Wagner evenings", that Rakhmaninov and his contemporaries received their Wagnerian initiation.⁹⁰

Rakhmaninov went on to feed his insatiable appetite for Wagner during his exile in

recent times, Anatole Leikin has stated, "in Rachmaninov, plagality becomes quintessential." See Leikin, "From Paganism to Orthodoxy to Theosophy: Reflections of Other Worlds in the Piano Music of Rachmaninov and Scriabin," in *Voicing the Ineffable: Musical Representations of Religious Experience*, ed. Siglind Bruhn (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2002), 37. Cunningham's scholarship also recognizes the possibility of structurally significant subdominants. The subdominant is seen in two forms: the first variant is seen, for example, in the Romance, *O net, molyu, ne ukhodi* (Op. 4/1) and *Ia zhdu tebia* (Op. 14/1), and the second variant is found in the Romances *Molitva* (Op. 8/6), *O mne grusti!* (Op. 14/8) and *Zdes' khorosho* (Op. 21/7). All this notwithstanding, the whole notion of "plagality" and its Russian associations has been challenged by Marina Frovlova-Walker. See her article "On 'Ruslan' and Russianness," *Cambridge Opera Journal* (1997), 21-45.

⁸⁷ Cannata (1999), *op. cit.*, 125.

⁸⁸ Tchaikovsky's loathing of Wagnerism was widely known and advertised even though he always recognised Wagner's singular compositional genius. See Vladimir Zhdanov ed., *P.I. Chaikovskii: Pis'ma k blizkim* (Moscow: Gos. Muzykal'noe izd-vo, 1955), 418. Tchaikovsky skilfully employed and manipulated post-Wagnerian rhetoric and construction techniques, evident in his last three symphonies, after his visit to Bayreuth in 1876. This subject is discussed in detail by Robert Bailey in his monograph *Richard Wagner: Prelude and Transfiguration from "Tristan and Isolde"* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985). See also Cannata (1999), *op. cit.*, 67+ for an explanation of how Tchaikovsky adhered to principles of Wagnerian tonal design which Rakhmaninov later emulated.

⁸⁹ See Zarui Apetian (ed.), *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), I: 245. Thus, Sabaneyev's claim that *Aleko*, a work evidently completed in 1892 before Rakhmaninov had any substantial contact with Wagner's music, reveals traces and influences of Wagner might seem a little disingenuous. See Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers* (New York: International Publishers, 1927), 105.

⁹⁰ Leonid Sabaneev, *Novoe russkoe slovo* (28 September, 1952): 2.

Dresden where he heard and was immediately captivated by *Die Meistersinger*. This also spurred him to add several Wagner works to his conducting repertoire.⁹¹

The general influence of Wagner can be seen in the gradual increase of chromatic saturation in Rakhmaninov's harmonic language.⁹² Rakhmaninov's penchant for chromatic ornamentation gave his melodic lines a harmonic character and contributed to the instability of the diatonic line,⁹³ which is exemplified clearly in the first *Più vivo* section of the first movement of Op. 30 (mm. 52-76). The ability to negotiate distantly related tonal centres was another by-product of increased chromaticism. See for example the second movement of Op. 30:

measure: 1 26 32 38 55 65 85 102 111 126
 tonal centres: $d - A - f^\# - D^b - f - F - B^b - D - D^b - c^\# - \text{-----} - A - d$

or the third movement's heavy use of ^bII and the tonicizing of its upper auxiliary at m. 265). But while the inspiration here came from Wagner, the resultant effect was different, due to a subtle difference in their respective concepts regarding tonal design.⁹⁴

As Yasser explains:

⁹¹ Martyn, *op. cit.*, 509-562.

⁹² Rieseemann alluded to this point but failed to develop it any further than a mere statement. See Rieseemann, *op. cit.*, 224-225, 233, and 240. Engel also spoke of Rakhmaninov's general application of Wagner's system of leitmotifs. See Stuart Campbell (ed., and trans.), Russians on Russian Music, 1880-1917: An Anthology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 179.

⁹³ This is an observation by Alfred Swan quoted in Yasser (1951-52), *op. cit.*, 20.

⁹⁴ The melodic lines gravitate towards growth and development akin to Wagner's "unending" melody which allows for cadential expansion, tonal deflection, ellipses, sequences, and other means of structural-harmonic disconnection, together with the extension of structure with the help of delayed cadences. See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 351, who correctly asserts that Wagner's chromaticism moved freely between various keys, many times distantly related. With Rakhmaninov, however, the movement is via pivots or the use of altered chords, all while firmly remaining within a particular key.

in its most typical manifestations, Wagner's chromaticism is mainly the result of a skilful manouvering by the composer somewhere *between* the different and, preferably, widely separated keys, without dwelling too long on each of them individually. On the contrary, Rachmaninoff's chromaticism ensues mostly from his many-sided use of altered chords, progressions, and bold digressions *within* the limits of a single or, at any rate, long exploited key. In other words, Rachmaninoff's is pre-eminently an *intra-tonal* chromaticism which, by this very quality, stands in marked contrast to the *inter-tonal* chromaticism of Wagner, and still more so, we may add incidentally, to the *extra-tonal* (atonal) chromaticism of the radical twentieth century modernists. This specific trait in the harmonic style of Rachmaninoff, along with his marked leaning toward diatonic melody, is generally responsible for the fact that, even when his chromatic harmonies are sufficiently abundant and complicated, they are not felt nearly as strongly as in the music of Wagner and his successors.⁹⁵

Yasser's theory of intra-tonal chromaticism receives ideal exemplification in an analysis of the harmonic progression of the first five measures of the second movement. In this passage one observes a saturation of chromaticism which is inflected with Aeolian modality all without obfuscating a defined frame of reference in the *d* tonal centre.

EX. 1: *harmonic analysis of mov. II: mm.1-5*

The musical score shows the first five measures of the second movement. The tempo is Adagio. The key signature is D major (two sharps). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes a piano part with a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The melodic line features triplets and a 'mf espress.' marking. The harmonic analysis below the staff identifies the chords as: d: i, V/V, V, V₃, iv⁷ (labeled 'aeolian mode'), V⁶, V⁷/V, V⁷, i₂, iv⁷, V⁷/V, V⁷/V, V⁶.

The last of the major influences to be discussed moves some way toward uncovering Rakhmaninov's "Russianness". There has been much debate over what his nationalistic

⁹⁵ Yasser (1951-52), *op. cit.*, 21. Harrison states the case in more simplistic terms, "whatever the music looks like, it never really sounds like Wagner." Harrison, *op. cit.*, 351.

influences amount to and how they have or have not received expression in his music.

Calvocoressi offers some food for thought:

with the nationalists, it is the non-observance of certain conventions that is obvious, and the critic's task is to decide if this helped to fulfil a genuine artistic purpose. With the non-nationalists, the obvious is the conventionality, and the critic has to decide whether they give us genuine eloquence, or only rhetoric derived from the eloquence of their predecessors.⁹⁶

Two facts are important to state here: first, while Calvocoressi's statement highlights some significant points, it nevertheless perpetuates the school of thought which divides Russian composers into two camps. Calvocoressi contends that Rakhmaninov belonged to the Moscow school of musicians: a group who were generally considered more conservative, guided by their academic formation, not inclined toward nationalistic expression, and cosmopolitan in their intent on developing Austro-Germanic syntax and formal models. Second, while Rakhmaninov typically avoided use of Russian folk material, he "developed and coloured...all that was national and characteristic in the work of his predecessors and teachers,"⁹⁷ and, as such, was "so profoundly Russian himself that he has no need of folk music."⁹⁸ This is a figure, however, who resists such simplistic pigeon-holing and to some extent defies such ready-made labeling categorization. Indeed, in reconsidering Calvocoressi's first point, one could justifiably contend that Rakhmaninov broke free of the harmonic and aesthetic limitations of Moscow quite early in his career, even if he continued to rely upon functional tonal patterns and goal-oriented, together with arc-shaped, phrase designs derived from

⁹⁶ Calvocoressi, *op. cit.*, 83.

⁹⁷ Asafiev, *op. cit.*, 249.

⁹⁸ These are the words of Medtner. See Martyn, *op. cit.*, 27.

common-practice models more than his St. Petersburg colleagues such as Mussorgsky or Rimsky-Korsakov. Further, Rakhmaninov personalised and extended the employment of equal-interval chromatic structures (that is what Taruskin has termed Russian “fantastic” harmony), typically found in Russian music from the final decades of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.⁹⁹ In this respect, Rakhmaninov’s intense although concealed fascination with the music of progressive St. Petersburg composers one generation his senior (Mussorgsky and, especially, Rimsky-Korsakov)¹⁰⁰ is pertinent. It may also be plausible that Rakhmaninov’s performances of Skryabin’s works¹⁰¹ after the latter composer’s death in 1915 assisted in provoking the concentrated chromatic developments of 1916–1917. Indeed, the six songs published as Op. 38 and the *Etudes-Tableaux*, Op. 39 are among Rakhmaninov’s most harmonically complex works, even if the music of 1913 (*Kolokola*, Op. 35, and the *Piano Sonata No. 2*, Op. 36) already prefigure the new chromatic procedures.

⁹⁹ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), see chapters 4, 5, and 10 in particular.

¹⁰⁰ Norris and Martyn suggest that Rimsky-Korsakov’s influence was as strong as Tchaikovsky’s, particularly in the music written after 1909. See Martyn, *op.cit.*, 31. In his use of octatonic structures and its derivative extensions, Rachmaninoff exposes his affinity with “progressive” Russian composers with whom he is not often linked, including Rimsky-Korsakov. Octatonic procedures in Rimsky-Korsakov has been covered in detail by Taruskin; the same topics and their presence in the work of Stravinsky has been discussed by Arthur Berger, Pieter van den Toorn, Taruskin, and others; while octatonicism and Mussorgsky, Skryabin and Prokofiev, has been examined by Allen Forte, James Baker, and Daniel Zimmerman, respectively. See Taruskin (1996), *op. cit.*, 255-306; Arthur Berger, “Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky,” *Perspectives of New Music* 2 (1963): 11-42; Pieter van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Allen Forte, “Mussorgsky as Modernist The Phantasmic Episode in ‘Boris Godunov,’” *Music Analysis* 9 (1990): 3-45; James Baker, *The Music of Alexander Scriabin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Daniel Zimmerman, “Families Without Clusters in the Early Works of Sergei Prokofiev,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2002); and Steven Baur, “Ravel’s ‘Russian’ Period: Octatonicism in His Early Works, 1893-1908,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (1999): 531-92.

¹⁰¹ See Martyn, *op.cit.*, 261 and 435-436.

Addressing the question of nationalistic influences is a more complex matter. Asaf'ev implies that Rakhmaninov's style reflected the peculiarities of the development of Russian national musical culture between 1860-1890 in general,¹⁰² and also the specific changes in methods of expressing nationalistic sentiments found in the compositions of Tchaikovsky or Rimsky-Korsakov. Hence, like seminal figures in Russian literature and music such as Pushkin and Glinka, the expression of nationalistic sentiments was achieved not so much through extensive usage of genuine Russian folklore (musical or literary), but, rather, through a conscious attempt to appeal to a general mentality and the emotional nature of certain social groups within Russian society.¹⁰³

Thus, in returning to a paraphrase of Medtner's statement above, there was no obligation to include direct quotes of folk-melody in order for music to be perceived as possessing an identifiable (tangible or otherwise) Russian sense. This statement encapsulates Rakhmaninov's own defence of his first theme of Op. 30. Indeed, while many

¹⁰² See Robert Ridenour, Nationalism, Modernism, and Personal Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), for more information on the situation with the Russian musical community of the 1860s-70s.

¹⁰³ See the related characterizations of Op. 30 by Vera Briantseva in her, "Fortepiannye kontserty Rakhmaninova: ob osnove zhanrovo-stilisticheskogo svoeobraziiia tvorchestva kompozitora," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Moscow Conservatoire, 1965), 8.

See also Ruth Rowen who states that "nationalism for Pushkin was not a matter of seeking a subject from Russia's history or of using Russian clichés to express oneself in the Russian language." In Pushkin's writing of and Glinka's setting of *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, "Pushkin's rendition of the tale, and Glinka's creation of the music are national in quality, not because of the locale of the story or the replica of native melodies, but because of the artist's ability to identify in thought and feeling with the people of their country." See Rowen, "Glinka's Tour of Folk Modes on the Wheel of Harmony," in Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz ed. Malcolm Brown (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 40.

musicologists have noted the similarities to Russian church chant,¹⁰⁴ the composer himself stated:

[the first theme of my Third Concerto is not taken from the form of folktale, nor church hymns. It was just written in that way!...I did not try to give my theme either a folkloric or a liturgical character. If I had any specific plans for the composition of that theme, then they were purely based on sound. *I wanted to "sing" the melody on the piano, as would a singer – to find an appropriate, or more correctly, an unsuppressing orchestrated accompaniment for this singing. That's all!*]¹⁰⁵

As such, it would be misleading to describe the St. Petersburg group of composers as purely nationalist and the Moscow group as mere cosmopolitans, even if there were clear distinctions between the artistic principles which governed the compositional output of both schools. Further, it is well documented that by the 1890s the differences in artistic objectives between the two camps were no longer as sharp as they were thirty year prior.¹⁰⁶ In addition, Rakhmaninov himself expressed his gratitude to the principal figures of both Moscow and St. Petersburg, while asserting his individuality:

my music is the product of my temperament, and so it is Russian music; I never consciously attempted to write Russian music, or any other kind of music. I have been strongly influenced by Tchaikovksy and Rimsky-

¹⁰⁴ See Patrick Piggott, *op. cit.*, 49, who demonstrates rather convincingly a distinct relationship between the first theme of Op. 30 and a chant entitled "Thy tomb, O Saviour, soldiers guarding."

¹⁰⁵ "Первая тема моего Третьего концерта ни из народно-песенных форм, ни из церковных источников не заимствована. Просто так написалось!.. Я не стремился придать теме ни песенного, ни литургического характера. Если у меня и были какие планы при сочинении этой темы, то чисто звуковые. Я хотел "спеть" мелодию на фортепиано, как ее поют певцы — найти подходящее, вернее, не заглушающее это "пение" оркестровое сопровождение. Вот и все!" Quoted from the unpublished "Архив российских Музыкантов" (Moscow: 1962), 62. Also see, "Первая тема моего Третьего концерта, - писал Раманинов, - ни из народно-песенных форм, ни из церковных источников не заимствована. Просто так "написалось"! .. Я хотел спеть мелодия на фортепиано, как ее поют певцы, и найти подходяще, вернее, не заглушающее это «пение» оркестровое сопровождение." Iurii Keldysh, *Rakhmaninov i ego vremia* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1973), 326.

¹⁰⁶ Martyn, *op. cit.*, 8. This had a lot to do with the deaths of Mussorgsky (1881) and Borodin (1887) and the psychological crisis of Balakirev.

Korsakov; but I have never, to the best of my knowledge, imitated anyone.¹⁰⁷

Rakhmaninov's comments bolster Adolfo Salazar's succinct summary of the composer's significant position in Russian music history: "after Glazunov...it is no longer possible to differentiate between the two schools [Moscow and St. Petersburg], which finally become firmly united in Rakhmaninov."¹⁰⁸

SYMBOLIST INFLUENCES AND BELLS

As previously stated, Rakhmaninov's art is also intimately tied to the "Silver Age" Symbolists -- a new intellectual and aesthetical idea which has been defined previously in this study in relation to the life and music of Skryabin.¹⁰⁹ Symbolist poetry imbued with the troubled moods at the borders of eras, illustrating an anxiety about the fate of the Motherland became one of the strongest impulses of the compositional work of Rakhmaninov.¹¹⁰ To this end, Liudmila Skaftymova¹¹¹ and Boris Egorov¹¹² have analyzed several of Rakhmaninov's works inspired by Symbolist poetry and painting,

¹⁰⁷ Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 369.

¹⁰⁸ Adolfo Salazar, Music in Our Time: Trends in Music since the Romantic Era, trans. Isabel Pope (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1946), 124.

¹⁰⁹ Incidentally, Sabaneev defines the culture of Moscow at the end of the nineteenth century in speaking of a "bohemian milieu with a strong bourgeois colouring," together with feelings of impenetrable pessimism, passion, and heartache. See Sabaneev (1927), *op. cit.*, 105-106.

¹¹⁰ Indeed, the fact that Symbolist perspectives had penetrated his thoughts made parting with Russia very difficult. See Valentina Rubtsova, "V kontekste serebriannogo veka," Muzykal'naiia akademiia 3 (2003): 3. This is despite the fact that Marietta Shaginian stated that Rakhmaninov viewed all such new literary movements with disdain.

¹¹¹ Liudmila Skaftymova, "Osnovnye cherty stilia Rakhmaninova predoktiabr'skogo desiatiletiia," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Leningrad Conservatoire, 1979), 7-9.

¹¹² Boris Egorov, "Motiv ostrova v tvorchestve S. Rakhmaninova. K probleme: Rakhmaninov i kul'tura moderna," in Rakhmaninov v khudozhestvennoi kul'ture ego vremeni (Rostov-na-Donu: Izd-vo Rostovskogo gos. pedagog. universiteta, 1997), 9-12.

for example the Symphonic Poem “*Ostrov mertvykh*” Op. 29, which was based on a painting by the Swiss Symbolist, Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901); the Cantata “*Kolokola*” Op. 35, based on a text by Edgar Allen Poe as freely translated and embellished by Konstantin Bal'mont; and Six Romances Op. 38, based on the poems of various Symbolists.¹¹³ Skaftymova confirms that the depictive qualities of these works touched upon the characteristic themes permeating Rakhmaninov's entire oeuvre (that of life and death, bells,¹¹⁴ and themes of solitude), and furthermore, that the composer was preoccupied with the musical translation of these same topics. The sound of this music recalled the “someone,” “somewhere,” “something,” concepts of Symbolists in its evocation of invitations of Spring, ringing bells, and Winter fears.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ The six songs were entitled: *Noch'iu v sadu u menia* (Isaakian/Blok); *K nei* (Belyi); *Margaritki* (Severianin); *Krysolov* (Briusov); *Son* (Sologub); and *A-u!* (Bal'mont).

¹¹⁴ Bell-like sounds are depicted in and permeate all genres of Rakhmaninov's music – religious, secular, vocal, and instrumental. The bell sounds represent a variety of different bells from sleigh, wedding, to church bells which are translated through “gentle oscillations, descant figurations, bold punctuating strokes, reverberant clanging, and vast pendulum-like swings.” (Carruthers, *op. cit.*, 48). For his detractors, the preoccupation with bells was indicative of a regressive and repetitive element infecting his oeuvre. See Carruthers, *op. cit.*, 45. The only other Symbolist motif encountered with some regularity and transparence are those of flight and ecstasy commonly found in different harmonizations of the same melody, and together with a typical dominant ninth sonority seen in the build up to the apex of a melodic line in climaxes (as is the case in Op. 30). (See Paisov, *op. cit.*, 119). Indeed, the moment a melodic climax is reached it is typically coupled with a dissonant sound. The climax is thus received as a “point of emphasis” in the melody. In the third concerto, the culmination in the finale is emphasized in the marking of *allargando*. The dynamic role played by the harmony is especially important during such climaxes when there is an unexpected turn or modulation highlighting the melodic foundations. This is typical for Rakhmaninov in the unexpected shifts of chords by semitones with bass movement outlining the tritone, thus dissolving the clarity of the functional-harmonic connections.

¹¹⁵ At the same time, these pieces displayed characteristics not only of allegorical Symbolism, but of Impressionism and Expressionism. Egorov, *op. cit.*, 9-12. Rakhmaninov's preoccupation with Symbolism is seen further in the organically synthesized characteristics of musical Romanticism with the refined expression and allegorical multilayering of Symbolist motifs. While Zhirmunskii called Symbolists neo-Romantics, (see Viktor Zhirmunskii, *Teoriia literatury, poetika, stilistika* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977), 134), Losev points to two inherent connections of the differing directions: [the irrationality of Romantic esthetics is, without a doubt, a constant and energetically conducive Symbolism.] (See “Иррациональность романтической эстетики есть безусловный, постоянный и весьма энергично проводимый символизм.” Aleksei Losev, “Konspekt lektzii po estetike Novogo vremeni: romantizm,” *Literaturnaia ucheba* 6 (November-December 1990): 142). Commensurate with the aforementioned Symbolist and neo-Romantic tendencies, was a proclivity for the poetic, picturesque, and

The subjects and verses of his vocal works are especially close to the depictions and poems of the Symbolists; the “Pushkin” operas (*Aleko* and *Skupoi rytsar’*) and the languid Romances¹¹⁶ with their characteristic voluptuous sonority. The culmination of Symbolist inspiration, however, can be seen in his pre-Revolutionary work, *Kolokola*. Rakhmaninov devised an unusual structure which combined a four-movement symphony (thus corresponding to Poe’s four verses) for a large orchestra with three soloists and a chorus in this work. The four types of bells as described by Poe -- silver sleigh bells, golden wedding bells, brazen alarum bells and mournful iron bells -- span the stages of human existence: childhood innocence; marriage and family; war and devastation; and, finally, death.

Bal’mont’s symbolism is realised in his total changing of Poe’s evocation of carefree high spirits using sleigh bells and wedding bells into a meditation on death as a heavenly reward: “that beyond illusion’s cumber, births and lives beyond all number, waits a universal slumber – deep and sweet beyond compare.” Initially, this permitted Rakhmaninov to introduce dramatic variation into his first movement with a brilliant and luminous texture contrasted against sombre and solemn sonorities. He also introduces two late-Romantic characteristics very early, namely the building of a tonal ambiguity surrounding the true tonic, and the subtle but pervasive chromaticism which,

programmatic, especially clear in the *Etude-Tableaux* cycles of Opp. 33 and 39. Rakhmaninov himself stated:

when I compose, it really helps if I have a recently read book in mind, or a beautiful picture or poem. Sometimes an idea or story comes to mind when I am trying to develop certain sounds, allowing for inspiration...I find that musical ideas come to me faster if I have a description of a non-musical object.

See David Ewen, “Music should speak from the Heart: An interview with Serge Rachmaninoff,” *The Etude* 59.12 (December 1941): 804-48. See also Aranovskii (1963), *op. cit.*

¹¹⁶ This is a collective reference to the various sets of songs of Opp. 4, 8, 14, 21, 26, 34, and 38.

in the first movement, enables him seamlessly to respell c^\sharp and suggest the D^b tonic to underline the hearing of sledges. In relation to the tonic, this is the first opening movement of Rakhmaninov which is not written in the tonic key of the work. In writing the first movement in the key of A^b , however, Rakhmaninov was able to set up a “tonic/subdominant ploy”,¹¹⁷ an idea which he reprises in both the second and third movements. Rakhmaninov recreates the timbre of sleigh bells with combinations of triangle, tambourine and celesta in the opening measures, followed by flutes, oboes, clarinets, pizzicato strings and muted trumpets, alternating their sounds to create the auditory image while he eulogizes the sound of sleigh bells.

While Bal'mont faithfully translates the joyousness, idyllic romance, and hope of Poe's wedding bells second stanza, Rakhmaninov introduces the *Dies Irae* chant and again sets up a tension between two contrasting moods. Rachmaninoff's brooding chorus, which seems to focus more on the solemnity of the sacrament and human commitment, produces an emotive disconnect from the text. The disconnect and contrast is further emphasised in this movement's tonal plan which begins with a gradual establishment of the D tonic before a departure into the minor subdominant of g . If the tonic-minor subdominant relationship might not be considered adventurous as it has already been heard in the previous movement, Rakhmaninov makes a bold and rather unprepared move into G^b which prepares the way for a chromatic ascent into E^b (^bII of the original key of the movement) to coincide with the joyful evocation of “hear the wedding bells?” The music seems to be a reminder of the shoals and responsibilities of married life, not to mention the transitory nature of happiness and of life itself. Rakhmaninov veers

¹¹⁷ Cannata (1999), *op. cit.*, 85.

away from the chant melody to create the tolling ostinato bell theme, but the emotional ambiguity of the music persists throughout the movement.

Rakhmaninov represents the rage of the third-movement scherzo by pitting the chorus alone against a cacophonous orchestra. This is a translation of Poe's bells of turbulence and alarum suggesting both terror and despair which Bal'mont describes as a "ruthless conflagration" in his use of Poe's imagery to speculate on the cause of this anguish. Rakhmaninov sets the movement in the key of *f*, with the three strophes outlining a subdominant *b^b* triad.

In the fourth movement, Poe speaks of the tolling of iron bells, which is a representation of the horror of hearing death-knells, while Bal'mont proceeds further to ensure that readers contemplate death and dissolution. (Rakhmaninov's funereal *Lento lugubre* is introduced by the English horn in *c[#]*. He also sets the lines regarding mournful iron bells especially memorably for his baritone soloist who intones his grim message over the grieving choir.) In the second part of the stanza and as often happens in Poe, the supernatural is invoked to deepen terror, never to comfort; heaven is an illusion but hell is real. Bal'mont, again more given to the concrete, replaces Poe's shapeless ghouls with a fiend, and whereas Poe ends all his stanzas in the same way with an invocation of bells as a kind of textual ostinato, Bal'mont must carry through the explicit idea of death, "While those iron bells, unfeeling, through the void repeat the doom: There is neither rest nor respite, save the quiet of the tomb!" Here Rakhmaninov, who has so far worked to intensify the macabre aspects of the poem, and brought back the *Dies Irae*

with all its wrath, now ends the stanza and the entire symphony with music that is calm and comforting. He achieves this by reusing the $c^\#/D^b$ tonal transformation he introduced in the middle of the first movement's first strophe. Thus, a musical *lux aeternae* in D^b brings back the accepting and serene view of death that Bal'mont had slipped into the opening stanza.

The realization of Bal'mont's Symbolist-inspired prose required little effort from Rakhmaninov due to the presence of voices to articulate effectively the text.

Rakhmaninov also demonstrates his identification with a late-Romantic compositional idiom in his combination of chromatic and enharmonic modulation which leads to extremely complex progressions in the music in which two or three key shifts could occur in a short space of time. Even if one were to argue, however, that Rakhmaninov takes certain musical parameters including texture, treatment of dissonance, the vibrancy of foreground harmonic and contrapuntal activity beyond nineteenth century norms, he was never able to abandon functional tonality as a fundamental structure.¹¹⁸ Fisk describes the process of Rakhmaninov's adaptation of his inheritance of late Romantic chromatic tonality:

he simply managed to bring an ever-wider range of foreground and middleground harmonic progressions and tonal effects under its control. It was in his ability to draw so many new and original tonal configurations and textures into a traditional tonal framework, to a degree that surpassed the more traditionally minded of his contemporaries, that Rachmaninov's special talents came to their fullest fruition.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Charles Fisk, "Nineteenth-Century Music? The Case of Rachmaninov," *19th Century Music* 31.3 (Spring 2008): 254. An interesting parallel can be seen in the syntax of Debussy. See Boyd Pomeroy, "Debussy's Tonality: A formal perspective," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 155-178.

¹¹⁹ Fisk, *op. cit.*, 258.

In this marriage of two distinct directions, Rakhmaninov fused the Symbolist principles of the ambiguity of representation with an emphasis on the larger meaning of the irrational depictions in Romanticism.

While Rakhmaninov did not appropriate all the concepts expressed by the Russian Symbolist poets (especially the overtones of mysticism and irrationality as expressed by Ivanov, Berdiaev, and Frank),¹²⁰ “he used a new fascination with religion simply as a façade for the codification of humanistic moral values, those upheld by the Russian Orthodox Church, which were perceived as common within the heart of every Russian.”¹²¹ Rakhmaninov was evidently captivated by the liturgical chant of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikolai Danilin¹²² recalled Rakhmaninov’s earnest study of the *oktoechos*, Russian liturgical chant, and the unique choral traditions of Moscow, Kiev, and Novgorod. Rakhmaninov also enlisted the help of the Russian church music specialist, Stepan Smolenskii, to study ancient chant notation in order to represent

¹²⁰ A more wholesale adoption of Symbolist tenets has been uncovered in the music of Skryabin who used rational philosophical conceptions behind his indefinable vocabulary of terms and the changing colours of his varied associations, hints, and depictions. See chapter two of this study.

¹²¹ Oleg Maslov, “Rachmaninoff’s Early Works for Two Pianos: Nationalistic Icons?” (DMA Dissertation, Temple University, 2001), 14. It was hence through the notions of cultural cosmopolitanism and religiosity of the Silver Age on the one hand combined with the apparent aesthetic connection with Russian musical and literary traditions of the preceding decades (Tchaikovsky, Lermontov, Tiutchev) on the other, that critics began to view him as being out of touch with the then contemporary Russian culture and thus, ironically, of being non-national and conservative. Arguably the most vocal detractor was the influential critic and scholar, Viacheslav Karatygin. See Bogdanov-Berezovskii, *op. cit.*, 130. Interestingly, Asaf’ev argued the contrary, trying unsuccessfully to counteract this view by contending that Rakhmaninov was a truly Russian nationalist composer who was “destined to uphold and develop the best traditions of Russian musical culture of the second half of the nineteenth century.” (Maslov, *op. cit.*, 14). This view, however, only confirmed the conservative stereotype regarding Rakhmaninov as composer.

¹²² Danilin was musical director of the Moscow Synodal Choir and in this capacity directed the first performances of both the *Liturgiia sviatogo Ioanna Zlatoustia Op. 31* and *Vsenoshchnoe bdenie Op. 37*.

accurately its intervallic structure. These influences are given voice not only in the religiously-inspired *Liturgiia sviatogo Ioanna Zlatousta Op. 31, Vsenoshchnoe bdenie Op. 37*, and *V molitvakh neusypaiushchuiu bogoroditsu*, but also the more generic and traditional styles such as the *Symphony No. 1, Op. 13*, or the *Symphonic Dances, Op. 45*.

As Martyn comments:

the Orthodox Church laid down that, in order to avoid jarring intervals between adjacent notes, liturgical music should move by adjacent steps in the scale, and it is in the gently undulating contours of many of Rachmaninoff's most characteristic melodies that its influence is most pervasive.¹²³

In Swan's words, however, "at best he arrived at only a sort of semi-modal conception."¹²⁴ Swan grasped a fundamental point: modal constructions in Rakhmaninov's music are habitually united with non-modal melodic and harmonic constructions. For this reason, an attempt to appreciate modal constructions via scrupulous comparison with authentic Russian chant, genuine Russian folk music, or Russian modal theory will likely be as "handicapped" as the modal devices themselves.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the Op. 30 concerto evinces modal influences¹²⁶ recalling liturgical chant. See for example:

¹²³ Martyn, *op. cit.*, 30.

¹²⁴ Alfred Swan, *Russian Music and Its Sources in Chant and Folk-Song* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 176.

¹²⁵ Johnston, *op. cit.*, 12. Calvocoressi illustrated the significance of modal constructions in Mussorgsky's works as follows: "exactly as Mussorgsky's syntax represents and adjustment between the tonal principle and the modal (including particular treatment of modes exemplified in Russian folk-music), so do his most interesting forms." Even if the music of Rakhmaninov demonstrates markedly greater dependence on conventional tonal structures than Mussorgsky's, Calvocoressi's statement might well be said of Rakhmaninov. See Michel Calvocoressi, *Mussorgsky* (London: Rockliff, 1956), 290.

¹²⁶ Whether or not all these modal cadences or progressions take their inspiration from chant is debateable. Johnston, for one, convincingly asserts that Rakhmaninov's use of the Phrygian mode is not so much suggestive of liturgical stimulus as it is representing an exotic (gypsy) affect. See Johnston, *op. cit.*, 160.

EX. 2: Aeolian and Phrygian examples, mov. II: mm. 47-48, 65-66, 184-185, 190-191

m.47

Musical notation for m. 47 in D \flat major, 3/4 time. The piece features a Phrygian cadence. The first measure (m. 47) shows a half note chord (I) in the bass and a half note chord (V 7 (Phrygian)) in the treble. The second measure (m. 48) shows a half note chord (I) in the bass and a half note chord (V 7 (Phrygian)) in the treble. The treble clef part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

D \flat : I V 7 (Phrygian) I V 7 (Phrygian)

Musical notation for m. 65 in F major, 3/4 time. The piece features a Phrygian cadence. The first measure (m. 65) shows a half note chord (I) in the bass and a half note chord (V 7 (Phrygian)) in the treble. The second measure (m. 66) shows a half note chord (I) in the bass and a half note chord (V 7 (Phrygian)) in the treble. The treble clef part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

F: I V 7 (Phrygian) I V 7 (Phrygian)

Musical notation for m. 184 in A major, 3/4 time. The piece features a Phrygian cadence. The first measure (m. 184) shows a half note chord (I) in the bass and a half note chord (V 7 (Phrygian)) in the treble. The second measure (m. 185) shows a half note chord (I) in the bass and a half note chord (V 7 (Phrygian)) in the treble. The treble clef part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

I V 7 (Phrygian) I V 7 (Phrygian)

C#: I⁶ I⁷ V³ I⁶ V³₄ V⁷/IV
aeolian phrygian

Thus, adding to the nationalistic musical imagery were the distinctive sonorities of Russian bells and chant. Indeed, the significance of bells and chant as symbols of Russian spiritual and social life throughout its history cannot be overstated.¹²⁷

Rakhmaninov, however, was not so much concerned with the religio-political associations of the symbols as with their specific sound and their melodic and textural capabilities. As such, his purpose was always musical. Essentially, Rakhmaninov wanted to “utilize the extraordinarily vast potential of musical intonations found in ancient Russian religious chants and bell-sounds, and, in doing so, reveal their obvious nationalistic appeal.”¹²⁸

OP. 30: GENESIS, THEMATIC UNITY, 3RD RELATIONS – SOME EXAMPLES

A more holistic picture has been formed for a consideration of Rakhmaninov’s performance art through the process of outlining Rakhmaninov’s pianistic formation together with technical aspects of and aesthetic influences on his compositional style. Prior to the discussion about Rakhmaninov’s performance practices, however, I shall

¹²⁷ See Edward Williams, *The Bells of Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 176.

¹²⁸ Maslov, *op. cit.*, 20.

offer some pertinent background information on the third piano concerto, a work which is among the most outstanding Russian contributions to the concerto genre.¹²⁹

Rakhmaninov's Op. 30 was written¹³⁰ from Ivanovka for his first tour of America during the 1909-10 season and dedicated to Józef Hofmann. The general consensus among such critics was that the third concerto confirmed Rakhmaninov as [a traditionalist, a tired of life imitator Tchaikovsky, who was considered too sentimental for the new era.]¹³¹ Indeed, there was also a vocal group of Russian critics who formed an anti-Rakhmaninov camp around 1909 and who failed to accord any recognition to the new Op. 30. In St. Petersburg, the group was led by Viacheslav Karatygin while the Moscow representative was the widely known Sabaneev. Grigorii Krein (1879–1955), a representative of the younger generation of talented Russian composers, also severely criticized the work, not finding anything worthwhile other than a colourless theme [with monotonous and wandering pianistic passages of unoriginal harmonies.]¹³² Such bias reflected the expectations of a musical establishment inclined towards the exploration of new frontiers. It was thought that the popularity and accessibility of art was

¹²⁹ von Rieseemann (1934), *op.cit.*, 234. Rieseemann writes of a uniquely Russian symphonic concept of the genre in the nineteenth century with the visible influence of opera.

¹³⁰ The third piano concerto was composed during one of the most fruitful periods of Rakhmaninov's artistic work. From 1908 to 1910, Rakhmaninov wrote the following major works of his oeuvre: *Symphony No.2 in E minor*, Op.27 (1908); *Piano Sonata No.1 in D minor*, Op.28 (1908); *The Ostrov mertvykh* Op.29 (1909); *Piano Concerto No.3 in D minor*, Op.30 (1909); *Liturgiia sviatogo Ioanna Zlatousto*, Op.31 (1910); *13 Preludes for Piano* Op.32 (1910).

¹³¹ “отсталый от жизни традиционалист, эпигон слишком sentimentalного для нового времени Чайковского.” Briantseva, *op. cit.*, 409. Kandinskii further suggested that a degree of emotional restraint together with a lyricism that was not openly expansive or immediate contributed to the harsh reception received by the third piano concerto. See Aleksei Kandinskii, “Rakhmaninov,” in *Muzyka XX veka: ocherki 1890-1917* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1977), 64.

¹³² “с монотонным блужданием пианистических пассажей, покоящихся на мало оригинальных гармониях.” Briantseva, *op. cit.*, 409.

synonymous with its datedness and primitiveness, and due to these characteristics it was incompatible with profundity and significance. Sergei Prokofiev was among the few who saw immediate and great merit in the new Rakhmaninov concerto:

competent critics might think that the Third Concerto opens up a “third period” of the composer’s art. Rakhmaninov was never a revolutionary, neither in his thoughts, nor in his deeds, he did not experience unseen jolts, his development went not in spurts or in painful breaks from the spiritual values of the past and triumphal victories of the new, but with slow and steady progression, without any sort of noticeable leaps. The spiritual growth of the composer opens up onto a picture of a quiet, slow evolution, without the feverish attempts at innovation. But do we think of the beginning of the new period as being marked by the piano concerto or a little later with Op. 35 “The Bells?” It’s clear that the Third Concerto opens up a completely new and never before seen harmonic language, developed enough to consider it to be the start of a new, third period...The definition “Piano symphony,” which can also be applied to the Second Concerto, is even more true for this composition. The piano and the orchestra pour out here in an unbroken unity and even in the cadenzas, where it has been traditional over the ages for the piano to remain solitary, with the instruments of the orchestra answering the aspirations of the “soloist.” I, without a doubt, confirm that the Third Piano Concerto of Rakhmaninov achieved a level that has not been surpassed, not in his previous pieces, not in other pieces of the genre.¹³³

¹³³ “Компетентные критики, возможно, сочтут, что Третьим концертом открывается "третий период" творчества композитора. Рахманинов никогда не был революционером, ни в мыслях, ни в поступках, он не страдал от непредвиденных ударов, его развитие шло не рывками, в болезненных разрывах с духовными ценностями прошлого и в триумфальных победах нового, но медленно и постепенно, без сколько-нибудь заметных скачков. Духовный рост этого композитора открывает перед нами картину спокойной, постепенной эволюции, лишенной лихорадочных потуг к новаторству. Но сочтем ли мы началом нового периода фортепианный концерт или написанный чуть позже op. 35 — "Колокола"? Совершенно очевидно, что Третий концерт открывает совершенно новые и прежде неведомые особенности гармонического языка, достаточно существенные для того, чтобы считать их отправной точкой нового, третьего, периода... Определение "Фортепианная симфония", которое может быть отнесено также и ко Второму концерту, явилось бы еще более справедливым для этого сочинения. Фортепиано и оркестр слиты здесь в неразрывном единстве, и даже в каденции, где по освященной веками традиции фортепиано остается в одиночестве, постепенно появляются инструменты оркестра как бы для того, чтобы ответить стремлениям "солиста". Я без колебаний утверждаю, что Третий фортепианный концерт Рахманинова достиг уровня, не превзойденного ни его собственными предшествующими произведениями, ни одним из произведений в этом жанре.” *Ibid.* Prokofiev’s comments also reflect the fact that the works of Rakhmaninov were widely accessible and received with pleasure among many levels of society who disapproved of the anti-traditionalist credo. For more information on the compositional periods of Rakhmaninov see Cunningham, *op. cit.*, 7.

This notwithstanding, the premiere of the third piano concerto took place on 28 November, 1909 in New York City at The New Theatre. In what seemed like a confirmation of the reasons behind its initial unfavourable reception in Russia, not even the distinguished Walter Damrosch at the helm of the New York Philharmonic could save the work from the bad press it received. Further, the dedicatee concurred with the views of the critics and hence never performed the work, citing its formal problems as contributing to his disregard for it.¹³⁴ Less than two months later, Rakhmaninov repeated the performance under the baton of Gustav Mahler, whom he greatly appreciated for the skills and devotion he brought to the accompaniment.¹³⁵ This occasion marked the first favourable review of the work, which was acclaimed by critics and public alike.¹³⁶ On his return home to Russia, Rakhmaninov gave the first Russian performance of the work which occurred alongside symphonic repertoire of the Moscow

¹³⁴ See H.E.K., "A New Concerto by Rachmaninoff," New York Tribune (29 November, 1909): 7, and New York Daily Tribune (17 January, 1910). Hofmann never publicly performed or even promoted the work. Instead, it was Vladimir Horowitz who championed the concerto, being the first to record the work with Albert Coates and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1930, even if his advocacy for its place in the repertoire has been perhaps a little exaggerated and forms a narrative which Horowitz himself carefully designed. Indeed, it was actually Walter Gieseking who was most responsible for transmitting the work in the form in which we hear it performed today. Gieseking made his first recording of the work in 1939 with John Barbirolli and the New York Philharmonic, and subsequently with Willem Mengelberg and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1940. Gieseking was also the first to perform the work at the considerably slower pace we have grown accustomed to hearing today, minus any of the sanctioned cuts, and together with the *ossia* cadenza. See pages 65-67. Incidentally, the cuts are today viewed with disdain and considered as events that disturb the logical succession of musical material. This notwithstanding, in Rakhmaninov's implementation of the cuts, he is able to project a wholeness of form that is not achieved by other pianists. See Ponizovkin, *op. cit.*, 62, who concurs with this view.

¹³⁵ Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 164. The only other conductor, with the possible exception of Arthur Nikisch who was predominantly Europe-based, for whom Rakhmaninov expressed the same high admiration was Leopold Stokowski. It was no accident then that Rakhmaninov desired to record his piano concerti with Stokowski and The Philadelphia orchestra. See Sergei Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," The Gramophone 9 (1931): 526. By the time of the recording of Op. 30 in 1939, however, Stokowski had begun to withdraw from involvement with The Philadelphia Orchestra. This took place from 1936 and paved the way for Eugene Ormandy gradually to assume the musical directorship. Thus, it was Ormandy who partnered Rakhmaninov in recording his piano concerti.

¹³⁶ See the review "The Philharmonic Again," New York Times (17 January, 1910): 7.

Philharmonic society on 4 April, 1910. In signs that the anti-Rakhmaninov camp might have curbed hostilities towards him, the performance was highly praised in the Russian press. The Moscow Gazette which seemed to build on Prokofiev's partiality towards the new work stated:

[it is difficult to find such expressions of praise and admiration that, applied to this new piece by Rakhmaninov, would sound exaggerated. In this piece the composer takes a new step forward...The Concerto possessed enormous meaning...This is a real musical poem of great beauty and power...]¹³⁷

Prokofiev, however, also justified his admiration of the work on a theoretical level in stating:


[the absolutely excellent aspect of this composition is in the desire towards a strong thematic unity, thanks to which each episode and its continuation develop directly from the themes and the different rhythmic variations. Therefore, the intricately rich interlacing of notes in this large work do not have alien cells, which would detract from the integrity of the whole.]¹³⁸

Indeed, the outstanding feature of this work is its thematic cohesion.¹³⁹ Thematic unity contributes to a continuous and smooth narrative which maintains the interest of the listener. This is aided by the duality of the principal theme which presents a cantabile

¹³⁷ “Трудно подобрать такие выражения похвалы и восхищения, которые в приложении к этому новому произведению Рахманинова могли бы показаться преувеличенными. В этом произведении композитор делает новый большой шаг вперед... Концерт подкупает большой значительностью своего содержания... Это – настоящая музыкальная поэма большой красоты и силы...” *Ibid.*, 297. The noted critic, Kashkin, also commended Rakhmaninov on his ability to contribute such an outstanding work to the genre while at the same time resisting the language of the Modernists. See Briantseva (1976), *op. cit.*, 409.

¹³⁸ “Абсолютно замечательным в этом сочинении является стремление к строгому тематическому единству, благодаря которому каждый эпизод и его продолжение развиваются непосредственно из тем и их различных ритмических вариаций. Поэтому филигранное густое кружево нот в этом большом произведении не содержит чужеродных ячеек, не являющихся неотъемлемой частью целого.” Semen Shlifshtein, S.S. Prokofiev: Materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia (Moscow: Gos. muzykal'noe izd-vo, 1961), 217-218.

¹³⁹ Briantseva suggests that developmental function throughout the work is generated through the initial theme. Briantseva (1976), *op. cit.*, 425. See also Iurii Ponizovkin, Rakhmaninov—pianist, interpretator sobstvennykh proizvedenii (Moscow: Muzyka, 1965), 62.

melody flowing from the initial minor third interval and developing via different expressive turns¹⁴⁰ against an incessant  rhythmic motif which reappears at every opportunity throughout the work. Out of the opening theme, Rakhmaninov skilfully weaves many variants (see example 3 below, together with mm. 69-70 in the clarinets and horns which foreshadows the second subject).

EX. 3: *Thematic variants*



m. 38-39



m. 81--



m. 379--



m. 174--



m. 195--



¹⁴⁰ Asaf'ev highlights the Mozartean simplicity of the opening theme. See Boris Asaf'ev, "S.V. Rakhmaninov," in *Izbrannye trudy* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1954), II: 56.

Further, in a more long range example of thematic unity, one can readily see the motivic cell of the first theme which will eventually unite both first and third movements:

EX. 4: *Orchestral introduction of first movement compared with first theme of third movement*

Allegro, ma non tanto

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The top system is a piano introduction in 3/4 time, marked 'Allegro, ma non tanto'. It features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The music consists of a series of chords in the right hand, with a bass line in the left hand. The first two measures are marked 'p' (piano) and the last two are marked 'dim.' (diminuendo). The bottom system shows the first theme of the third movement, also in 3/4 time and one flat. It features a treble clef and a series of chords, with accents (>) and triplets (3) indicated below the notes.

The other factor generating development and supporting the unity in thematic material is the technique of repetition at intervals of a third which is well used throughout the work.

EX. 5: *Third intervals*

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The top system is divided into measures 61, 63, and 65. Measure 61 has chord symbols d: and i⁶/₄ V⁷. Measure 63 has chord symbols i F: I⁶/₄ V⁷ I. Measure 65 has chord symbols a: i⁶/₄ V⁷ i. The bottom system is divided into measures 67 and 68. Measure 67 has chord symbols C: I⁶/₄ V⁷. Measure 68 has chord symbol I.

In the cadenza, Rakhmaninov reinforces the importance of repetition at third intervals by playing with the primary degrees of a *d*-minor triad in three successive and tension-building waves over a prolonged dominant pedal.

EX. 6: *Cadenza built on d-min triad*

The musical score for Example 6 is presented in two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The treble staff contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. The bass staff contains a harmonic accompaniment with chords. Below the bass staff, there are fingering numbers: 6/4, 6/3, 5/3, and then Roman numerals #V and I. A fermata is placed over the final chord in the treble staff, with an 8va marking above it.

The recapitulation, altered and shortened, continues the thematic transformation, particularly through distortion by chromaticism of the main thematic material. See for example the transitional *meno mosso* episode (mm. 354-366), where motifs of the original theme reappear together with the ubiquitous rhythmic cell.¹⁴¹

Related to the concept of thematic unity is Rakhmaninov's use of a small amount of thematic material to generate his music. The most interesting and innovative example of this occurs in the second movement where the variations use only the first part of the given theme, emphasizing the falling minor third interval first heard in the principal theme of the first movement.

¹⁴¹ Rakhmaninov's formal idiosyncrasies are discussed by Skaftymova, *op. cit.*, 9, who speaks of the absence of conflicting thematic gestures in the exposition; transformation of the initial melodic material; and the reprise of the initial reworking of the main theme. Briantseva suggests that the form of the *Scherzando* episode is similar to the form of the *Intermezzo* of the second movement (four stanzas). Thus, she deems the form of the finale a rondo. See Briantseva (1976), *op. cit.*, 436.

EX. 7: Main theme of second movement



From these three and a half measures, Rakhmaninov is able to negotiate his expansive plan for the movement which includes excursions into distant tonalities:

- m. 38 = D^b
 - m. 53-54 = *brief cadenza*
 - mm. 71-84 = *transition*
- m. 85 = B^b
- m. 89 = C
 - mm. 94-101 = *transition*
- m. 102 = D (orchestra)
- m. 111 = D^b

Once again, in addition to thematic transformation within the movement, the waltz episode (mm. 160-171) is derived directly from the principal theme of the first movement.

The third movement also reprises and transforms thematic material from the first movement. We have previously observed the connection between the opening theme of the finale and the rhythmic motif which opens the first movement. Yet another parallel, however, can be seen between the central rhythmic motif encountered at the beginning of the work and the episode commencing at m. 239 in the finale. Rakhmaninov even recycles the harmonic progression toward the dominant climax, seen originally in both the cadenzas, in the *vivace* episode from m. 436. The *vivacissimo* episode from m.494

in the tonic major also betrays its connections with the idea heard previously at m. 406, but more significantly exposes clearly its genesis in the orchestral passage beginning at m. 81 in the first movement. Thus, it is well demonstrated that the principle of unity in thematic material permeates the work.

In summarizing Rakhmaninov's compositional style, one might reasonably contend that despite attempts to disassociate himself from what his critics considered a regressive outmoded compositional style, a Romantic orientation¹⁴² and its characteristic pathos not only formed Rakhmaninov's semantic complex, but became the dominant mode of his music, arising primarily from a fondness for lyrical expression. As such, Rakhmaninov was one of the last artists in Russia to follow the spirit of Romanticism openly and to develop it in his own unique way.¹⁴³ In this sense, the trajectory of Rakhmaninov's development is atypical and unlike others of his generation including Skryabin, Stravinsky, and later, Prokofiev, all of whom were focused on construction and expansion. This notwithstanding, he was also one of the few artists who were able

¹⁴² See Mark Aranovskii, "Melodicheskie kul'minatsii veka," in *Russkaia muzyka i XX vek* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia Ministerstva kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1997), 532. In defining Rakhmaninov's conception of Romanticism, Bal'mont provides perhaps the most authentic and accurate description of the composer's inclinations which also portends Symbolism in its striving towards phantasmagoria.

Чтобы...разъяснить данное понятие, нужно взять хоть несколько признаков, которые общи романтикам, при всем их личном разнообразии. Любовь к далекому, что связано с мечтой и достижением, — вот, может, первый из этих признаков. Романтик...всегда стремится от предела к Запредельному и Беспредельному

[In order to...explain this, you need to look only at a few characteristics, which are common to Romanticists, in all their individualism. The love of the far-removed, such as dreams and achievement, is the first characteristic. A Romanticist...always tries to overcome boundaries and achieve the infinite.]

See Paisov, *op. cit.*, 91-92.

¹⁴³ "был последним, кто связывал современность с эпохами Чайковского и Чехова, Блока и Скрябина." Mark Aranovskii, *Etiudy-kartiny Rakhmaninova* (Moscow: Gos. muzykal'noe izd-vo, 1963), 8.

to unite the present and the past.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Kuznetsov observed as far back as 1945 that Rachmaninoff's "musical language is invariably progressive even if permanently connected with foundations of Russian and world classicism," and that the "harmonic boldness" of works composed during the 1910s "exemplifies a certain tribute paid by him...to modernism."¹⁴⁵ Thus, the assignation of Modernist or Romanticist terms even to Rakhmaninov's compositional style, generally considered to be Romantic (albeit late-Romantic, post-Romantic, or neo-Romantic), has been and continues to be contested.¹⁴⁶ Rakhmaninov himself desired to transcend the reductive labels that he felt constrained and limited his art in stating, "in my own compositions, I did not consciously try to be

¹⁴⁴ Indeed, it would seem that the very qualities of the music such as the expansive tunes, principle of extensive repetition of thematic material within works, bell motifs, thematic sharing between different works, that "Rakhmaninov's advocates applaud, and what his critics decry, is frequently one and the same thing." Glen Carruthers, "The (re)appraisal of Rachmaninov's music: Contradictions and Fallacies," *The Musical Times* 147.1896 (Autumn 2006): 44.

¹⁴⁵ See Yasser, *op. cit.*, 22. Kuznetsov's statement echoes that of Ossovskii.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Burkholder has commented on the intricacies associated with appropriate categorizations of composers of Rakhmaninov's generation, asking the question, "Late Romantic or Modern?" and then responding, "all the composers of this generation have aspects of both eras, combining nineteenth-century elements with twentieth-century sensibilities." (See J. Peter Burkholder, Donald J. Grout and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 7th edition (New York: Norton, 2006), 799). This seems to suggest that the now rarely used term "postromantic" might be appropriate for want of categorizing Rakhmaninov. Indeed, if one uses the *Encyclopædia Britannica* definition:

musical style typical of the last decades of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century and characterized by exaggeration of certain elements of the musical Romanticism of the 19th century. Postromanticism exhibits extreme largeness of scope and design, a mixture of various musical forms (e.g., opera and symphony), and heightened contrapuntal complexity (i.e., a long or vast array, or both, of simultaneous but independent musical lines or events). Often Postromanticism also embraces vivid religious or mystical fervour, a sense of longing, and a sense of the grim and the grotesque. (See *Encyclopædia Britannica* Online, s.v. "Postromantic music,"

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/472266/Postromantic-music> (accessed August 20, 2010).

It is rather plain to see that Rakhmaninov has found a categorical home. From here one can extrapolate further. To this end, "exaggeration" and "vast array...of simultaneous but independent musical lines or events" are unusually revealing. More specifically, if the Romantic is characterized by chromatic expansion and the development of salient embellishments of linear tonal syntax, then the Postromantic is characterized by amplification and in due course disintegration of tonal syntax, and the juxtaposition or overlay of standard functional tonal constructions and forceful chromatic or modal structures that confront and even distort the functional tonal foundations. Nevertheless, the label postromantic would convolute the central argument here and would also be a confusing and problematic term to define in relation to performance practice.

original, or romantic, or nationalistic, or anything else. I just wrote on the paper the truest music that I saw within myself.”¹⁴⁷ While a similar statement might have been made in relation to his performance art, I believe Rakhmaninov’s eclectic, all-embracing, and unique style made it certain that each term had its place within his performance purview. This remains to be scrutinised in detail, but at this juncture it seems prudent to investigate the general reactions of the musical establishment to his pianism against the backdrop of the Classical, Romantic, and Modern labels, and in the process to educe any trends that might resurface in the examination of his pianism and extant recording of Op. 30.

RECEPTION

As stated at the outset of this discussion, Rakhmaninov’s reputation as a pianist was rather unique. None of his contemporaries, and probably no other pianist since the Rubinstein brothers or perhaps Busoni, were able to garner such unanimous acclamation. To this extent, it can be expected that any examination of his reception as a pianist would typically highlight outstanding features as opposed to the virtually non-existent flaws of his pianism. Thus, a study of concert reviews for Rakhmaninov may not reveal a wide divergence of opinions regarding his pianism which justifies this relatively small survey of his criticism. In conducting a study of a sample of reviews and the attributes of Rakhmaninov’s pianism they underscore, however, I am hoping that the findings might go some way toward developing further the hypothesis on which this

¹⁴⁷ Ewen, *op. cit.*, 804-48. Not only was he at pains to adopt a novel and avant-garde style, but he repeatedly forecast the temporality and shallowness of such art. Sergei Rachmaninoff, “National and Radical Impressions in the Music of Today and Yesterday,” *The Etude* 37.10 (October 1919): 615, and Sergei Rachmaninoff, “New Lights on the Art of the Piano,” *The Etude* 41.5 (May 1923): 298.

thesis is predicated, that is the relevance and appropriateness of Classical, Romantic, and Modern labels in describing his performance style and practices.

Information on Rakhmaninov's early career as a pianist is scant, and, in general does not reveal much on his pianism. Excerpted commentaries from reviews of performances during his student years reveal Rakhmaninov's rising star and effect on his audiences.

For example:

exceptional interest was lent the concert by the participation of S.V. Rachmaninoff, who graduated this spring from the Moscow Conservatory...His performance of the first movement of Rubinstein's concerto was beautiful both technically and musically. A group of solo numbers including a Prelude of his own compositions, also aroused enthusiasm.¹⁴⁸

Immediately following his graduation in 1891, however, Rakhmaninov virtually ceased performing as a pianist to devote himself to his new position as a music director in a high school.¹⁴⁹ Thereafter, he took an appointment as conductor of the Marmontov

¹⁴⁸ Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 49. Rakhmaninov gave his first independent concert on 20 January, 1892, in the Vostriakov Hall. Concert programs are cited in Anatolii Alekseev, Rakhmaninov: zhizn' i tvorcheskaja deiatel'nost' (Moscow: Gos. muz. izd-vo, 1954), 20-21.

¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it seems that Rakhmaninov's pianism was already at such a level so as to impede the quality of chamber ensemble with partners of lesser talent. See Iurii Engel', "Kontsert S. Rakhmaninova i N. Koshits," Russkie vedomosti (25 October, 1916):

A full theatre...a wonderful concert...in these instances the center of attention is usually the singer; some in the public are also interested in what she sings and no one—or almost no one—is interested in the accompaniment. But this time it was quite the contrary. The center of attention was the accompanist and not only *de jure*, as the creator of all the pieces, but *de facto*, as a miraculous and incomparable artist, his writings had flesh and blood, igniting them with a breath of life and permeating with this breath the entire atmosphere of the performance. Rakhmaninov's accompaniment was not an appendage to the singing, but a creative melting process, now turbulent like a hurricane now delicate, compared to which the singing itself became less important, derivative.

“Полный театр... Блестящий концерт... В таких случаях в центре внимания, обыкновенно, певица; кое-кто в публике интересуется еще и тем, что она поет, и уж никому, — или почти никому, — нет дела до аккомпаниатора. На этот раз все сложилось наоборот. Центром вечера был аккомпаниатор, и не только *de jure*, как творец всего, что исполнялось, но и *de facto*, как чудесный, несравненный артист, давший своим писаниям звучащую плоть и кровь, зажегший их дыханием жизни и

Opera Company. Thus, from 1891 until 1900, the year of the premiere of the *Piano Concerto No. 2*, Rakhmaninov only appeared in public on a few occasions as a pianist. In the following six years until his temporary relocation to Dresden in 1906, Rakhmaninov's appearances as pianist were limited primarily to performances as soloist in the second piano concerto together with the *Variations for the Piano on a Theme of Chopin*.¹⁵⁰

The move westward allowed and, in some respects, necessitated, a full-time return to his career as a pianist due to financial concerns.¹⁵¹ Rakhmaninov was already well-known in Europe, where audiences had seen and heard him since his first tour outside Russia which came at the invitation of the Philharmonic Society of London in 1899.¹⁵² Even the English who initially greeted him with hostility, had to admit, albeit without a hint of exaggeration, to his prowess at the keyboard in calling him a "cultivated player" and marvelling at the expressiveness, sensitivity, magical inspiration, and precision of his playing together with the economy of movement.¹⁵³ The success of the London

дыханием этим пронизавший всю атмосферу исполнения. Аккомпанемент Рахманинова был не придатком к пению, а какой-то созидательной плавильней, то бурной, как вулкан, то ювелирно-тонкой, перед лицом которой и самое пение получало значение чего-то менее важного, производного."

Schonberg also makes the comment "when he played a Liszt transcription of a Schubert song, one immediately realized how unimaginative and unmusical most singers were." Schonberg, *op. cit.*, 390.

¹⁵⁰ Harrison, *op. cit.*, 132.

¹⁵¹ The Rakhmaninov family were based in Dresden for a total of three years, with each summer being spent back at Ivanovka, Russia. Harrison, *op. cit.*, 132.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁵³ Norris speaks of an apparently suspicious reception given by the English to Rakhmaninov as composer. The English, unable to find real fault in their reviews of him as a pianist, nevertheless expressed their preference for home-bred pianists. See Geoffrey Norris, "Rachmaninoff's Reception in England 1899-1938," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 15 (1995): 49, 55, 57. See

encounter¹⁵⁴ was repeated in Berlin,¹⁵⁵ Antwerp, Warsaw,¹⁵⁶ and Paris among many other major European cities.

The most significant series of performances during this period, however, came in the 1909-10 season when he was invited to tour the USA. The reviews from this three-month tour were such that his reputation as the foremost among then modern virtuosos was firmly established. In Boston, a critic offered that “he is a pianist of highly developed technique, as who must be that plays this [Op. 30] concerto, and he has ample resources of expressions upon the instrument...he played his own music with intense conviction.”¹⁵⁷ It was perhaps also not surprising that his commanding presence and transcendental virtuosity would give rise to some exaggeration in the press reports of a country where Rakhmaninov had enthralled the public from the beginning. For example, Rakhmaninov “has been appointed musical director of the Russian empire by the Czar” and “his fingers are so long that he can stretch two octaves with either

also Ziegler, *op. cit.*, 39, and Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 186, 220, 248-250, for similar comments to Norris.

¹⁵⁴ See review in The Musical Standard (22 April, 1899): 244, “Music of the Week §Debut of M. Rachmaninoff,” The Graphic 1535 (29 April, 1899), or “The Philharmonic Society,” The Times 35809 (21 April, 1899): 15. In the latter review, “as a pianist, he plays like a conductor...M. Rachmaninoff can certainly claim a success for his first appearance in England.” The theme of his emotional aloofness makes its appearance for the first time in reviews from this tour. This would be constantly reprised throughout his future career, especially in the USA. See “Russian Music, New and Old §Rachmaninoff and Kalinnikoff,” The Observer (31 May, 1908): 5, “The Opening of the London Opera House §The Philharmonic Society,” The Observer (12 November, 1911): 7.

¹⁵⁵ See Gębski, *op. cit.*, 38, for commentary.

¹⁵⁶ See Gębski, *op. cit.*, 129; Aleksander Polinski, “Kurier Warszawski,” (29 March, 1911); Czesław Jankowski, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany,” (15 June, 1910); J. Rosenzweig, “Kurier Poranny,” (18 March, 1910); and Felicjan Szopski, “Gazeta Warszawska,” (21 March, 1910), for reviews.

¹⁵⁷ “Brilliant Concert by Boston Orchestra,” New York Times (14 November, 1909): 13. Such sentiments were echoed in “Rachmaninoff Recital,” New York Tribune (21 November, 1909): 9.

hand.”¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it was William Hubbard, chief music critic in Chicago at the time, who contributed the most detailed examination of Rakhmaninov’s pianistic talents and impression on American audiences during his debut tour with his statement:

It was my first hearing of the Russian, and the chief surprise produced by his recital yesterday was the admirable skill of the man as a pianist. He plays with mastery. His technic [*sic*] is ample for all the demands his compositions make and some of them which he gave yesterday demand much in the way of fleetness and surety of finger and in the management of the finer mechanics and dynamics of piano playing. He renders his playing ever beautiful through the employment of delicate and fine nuance, which he obtains with a certainty and ease which belong only to the person who has solved the mysteries of the keyboard and made them his own. It is playing ever sensuously appealing, ever clear, ever clean and exact. That the best of musicianship was present yesterday may be taken for granted, for the program contained only works of the pianist’s own creating, and the message he delivered was a message authoritative and emotionally correct. Pianistically and interpretatively the recital was an unqualified joy.¹⁵⁹

The American debut was a resounding success. Rakhmaninov was evidently happy to return to his Russian country estate, however, as his first impressions of American society and culture were not enthusiastic. From Ivanovka he continued sporadically to concertize around Europe.¹⁶⁰ With the October Revolution of 1917, however, he foresaw the further encumbrance on his artistic freedom that Soviet communism might become.¹⁶¹ Thus, he seized upon an invitation to play in Stockholm during December of 1917 and departed Russia hastily, never to return.

¹⁵⁸ “Rachmaninoff,” Christian Science Monitor (10 December, 1909): 11.

¹⁵⁹ William Hubbard, “Dramatic and Musical News,” Chicago Daily Tribune (27 December, 1909): 5.

¹⁶⁰ Again, there are very few concert reviews or documented sources detailing his concert activities during this period.

¹⁶¹ Rakhmaninov was always championed and promoted in Soviet Russia for his conservative compositional style. Nevertheless, the Soviet state did take umbrage at his signing of a letter of protest in which he denounced the Soviet government and repudiated the remarks of Rabindranath Tagore, a renowned Indian poet, who lavished praise on the Soviet education system following his visit to the

The evidence from his domicile in Scandinavia¹⁶² mirrors the early American criticism and points to a developing fanaticism with Rakhmaninov's pianism. In Norway, the press were clearly prepared for a superstar to grace the stage. [It will be a musical sensation when the Russian composer and pianist Sergei Rachmaninow joins the symphonic concert at the National theatre on Saturday. Rachmaninow is not merely Russia's first and most famous composer, but he is surely one of the great piano heroes, like Rubinstein.]¹⁶³ The reviews from Sweden highlight two traits repeatedly: 1) an affinity for the music of Chopin; and 2) a "cool" and somewhat detached stage presence and manner which were in competition with the raw energy, dynamism, and power of his pianism.¹⁶⁴ The most detailed review with respect to Rakhmaninov's playing from

country. See "Tagore on Russia," New York Times (15 January, 1931). Rakhmaninov's anti-Soviet actions were noticed by the regime and received harsh condemnation. His reputation was badly damaged (the performance of his works together with the teaching of his music at Conservatories being officially banned). The state-imposed ban was formally rescinded in 1934, although another was imposed in 1951. See the following: Iwan Ostromislensky, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Count Ilya Tolstoy, "Tagore On Russia," New York Times (15 January, 1931): 22, Sergei Rachmaninoff et al, "Exiles Ask America To Outlaw Soviet," New York Times (20 January, 1931): 18, and "Soviet And Art Clash Over Many Points," New York Times (23 March, 1931): 24. See also: Culshaw, *op. cit.*, 44, and Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 273, who quotes from leading newspapers of the time including *Pravda*, and *Vecherniaia Moskva*. Also see Sergei Rachmaninoff, "Some Critical Moments in My Career," The Musical Times 71 (June, 1931): 558, and "Soviet and Art Clash over Many Points," New York Times (23 March, 1931), and Victor Seroff, "The Great Rachmaninoff," Vogue (1 April, 1943): 88. This episode endeared Rakhmaninov all the more to the American people and also made him more hostile in feeling towards his former homeland.

¹⁶² The Rakhmaninov family were based in Copenhagen, Denmark, from December 1917 until they departed Scandinavia for the USA on 1 November of the following year.

¹⁶³ "En musicbegiivenhet blir den russiske komponist og pianist Sergei Rachmaninows medvirken ved Nationalcetrrets symfon konsert lørdag. Rachmaninow er ikke alene Ruslands første og mesi berøorte komponist, men han er overløvet en av de store pianoheroer, i lefbut med Rubinstein." [Taken from a newspaper review of a concert in Oslo on 4 April, 1918, housed in an archive at the Nasjonalbiblioteket in Oslo, Norway. No further details available.]

¹⁶⁴ See the commentary cited here below which I presume to be taken from Svenska Dagbladet, although such information is not explicitly stated on these reviews which are reproduced from an excerpted collection at the Musikmuseet in Stockholm, Sweden, and not from the journals and newspapers themselves. (In the early twentieth century, vast amounts of information was excerpted from daily press in this way, often entirely without reference to origin.)

Konstnärskap är hans lunga, säkra uppträdande och mycket väl gjorda virtuosa skicklighet, hvilket allt imponerar på publiken, och, som förut sagdt, bifallsstormarna nu vero likaså

performances in Scandinavia represents a nuanced and didactic assessment of style and interpretative concept:

Sergei Rachmaninoff as a pianist is in a league of his own. He unites the burning Russian interest in the purely occupational quality of art with his phenomenal musical gift. Thanks to this course, his manual technique has been developed to the highest level of virtuosity. Also a prominent composer, he has an even more intimate contact and deeper understanding than most pianists of the creative process of the works he is interpreting. But as a recognised personality and rare complex temperament, he has not always found this kind of self-denial easy, which is presupposed in an ideal performer of others' personalities. It is mostly a question of mood. Take for example Chopin, where Rachmaninoff - as on Tuesday - ... the performance seems to stand outside that sphere in which the compositions may most strongly live a life of their own, though all of a sudden the performance again entered into the middle of the same sphere and from then on he, like a medium, radiated its [the composition's] entire pulsating life in all its minute changes. It is as if his energy-laden, but somewhat frail, being needed to be discharged before it could react to the fine nuances of Chopinesque sentimentality. This time there were four of his own preludes, amongst them the famous one in c# minor, that brought about the change. In the Chopin pieces which followed (beyond the programme) after the said preludes, Rachmaninoff gave us an idea of what an ideal Chopin interpreter he can be under certain circumstances.

In the introductory piece, two chorale preludes by Bach-Busoni, one could hear Rachmaninoff's incredibly differentiated dynamics, just as during the course of the entire evening one could enjoy his lively rhythmical fantasy and sumptuous passage playing. It was a great night. The genius musician and pianist captured the hall to the last soul and the hall raged - with joy.¹⁶⁵

frenetiska so mi våras.” In another article, “det förefaller, som Chopin skulle ligga pianisten närmast.” “Det mondäna draget, som också hör till bade skolan och det gamla Ryssland, betecknar fortfarande hans begränsning och gör hans bravur grann och glittrande men också ofta rätt kall och tom...Bäst passer Rachmaninoff, liksom alla slaver, för Chopin.” In another review there is the statement, Rachmaninoffs spel har en egendomlig dubbelkaraktär. “Å ena sidan en kylig, artistisk kräsenhet, inför vilken all sentimentalitet, all känslsamhet är bannlyst, å andra sidan ett flammande musikertemperament, som fyller varje detalj av de spelade verken med pulserande liv.

¹⁶⁵ Sergei Rachmaninoff står som pianist i en klass för sig. Med sin fenomenala musikaliska begåvning förenar han ryssens brinnande intresse för det rent yrkesmässiga i konsten. Tack vare denna inriktning har hans manuella teknik under årens lopp utvecklats till en virtuositet av högsta ordningen. Själv framstående komponist har han dessutom en intimare kontakt med och en djupare förståelse än de flesta andra pianister för skapelseprocessen i de verk han tolkar. Men som utpräglad personlighet och sällsamt komplicerat temperament har han icke alltid lätt för den art av självförnekelse, som förutsättes hos en idealisk framställare av andras personligheter. Det blir ytterst en stämningsfråga. Som t. ex. i fallet Chopin, där Rachmaninoff – som nu på tisdagen – trots ett i allo överlägset musicerande länge kan liksom stå utanför den sfär, i vilken kompositionerna starkast leva sitt egenliv, men blott för

By late 1918, Rakhmaninov was all too aware that the number of opportunities in Scandinavia was limited, and hence the opportunity to reside in Europe and remain close to his homeland might have to be compromised in order to further his artistic career. Thus, he departed again for the USA in late 1918 with three separate invitations offering lucrative conducting positions.¹⁶⁶ He rejected all of these due to his own feeling of inadequacy as a conductor and began to forge a new career as a concert pianist with programs he had already aired in Scandinavia.¹⁶⁷

Rakhmaninov's return to the USA in 1918 was greeted with great enthusiasm by critics and audiences alike.¹⁶⁸ Beginning at Providence, Rhode Island, he gave his first

att sedan plötsligt bege sig in i medelpunkten av denna sfär och därifrån likt ett medium utstråla hela dess pulserande liv i alla dess minsta skiftningar. Det är so mom hans energiladdade men något sträva väsen behoved en urladdning innan det reagerade för den chopinska sentimentalitetens hårfina nyanser. Denna gang var det fyra av hans egna preludier, däribland den berömda i cis-moll, som medförde förändringen. I de chopinnummer, som (utom programmet) följde på nämnda preludier gav oss Rachmaninoff nämligen en föreställning om vilken idealisk chopinspelare han under visa förutsättningar kan vara.

I inledningsnumret, två koralförspel av Bach-Busoni, fick man tillfälle beundra Rachmaninoffs oerhört differentierade dynamic, liksom man f. ö. Under hela aftenens lopp kunde glädja sig åt hans livliga rytmiska fantasi och överdådiga passagespel. Det var en stor kväll. Den genial musikern och pianisten fängslade auditoriet till sista själen, och auditoriet rasade – av lyckorus.

¹⁶⁶ These refer to contracts with the Boston, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati symphony orchestras.

¹⁶⁷ See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 219.

¹⁶⁸ Rakhmaninov's permanent domicile in the USA from 1918 produced an abundance of reviews and articles on his pianism and general musicianship. As Gehl states:

nearly every city offered at least two widely read newspapers, with large cities like New York and Boston boasting six to eight major newspapers throughout the Rachmaninoff era. In addition to regular newspaper and music magazine articles promoting and reviewing a major artist's appearance, general interest magazines also offered in-depth treatment of classical music, magazines such as *Collier's*, *Esquire*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Vogue*.

See Gehl, *op. cit.*, 103. Thus, the need henceforth to examine Rakhmaninov's European reception is redundant.

performance in his new homeland a mere month after his arrival.¹⁶⁹ His second appearance, in Boston, was received as if a favoured artist had returned home, with every major newspaper commenting on the event and offering reviews full of praise.¹⁷⁰ It also initiated a new fascination for American audiences and critics with his stage craft and appearance.¹⁷¹ Perhaps the most thorough performance-related description of Rakhmaninov's unusual physical appearance and stage presence has been captured in the following quote from Alexander Pasternak:

Rachmaninoff was always stern, unsmiling and serious in the extreme. Unusually simple, severe and economical in his movements, he was equally good in the works of others as in his own, and almost gave the impressions of fulfilling a religious rather than a lay duty. At such times you would have said that it was no longer even a duty but a kind of dedication, for there was such seriousness and asceticism in his playing and in his attitude to it. His spiritual power and the power of his tenderness, the whole impression he made as a man – composer, pianist, conductor – was expressed in the stern, meaningful yet profound simplicity of his performance...Rachmaninoff's playing was always astonishing in its masculinity, like some charger galloping...I remember him thus, bolt upright, his head slightly bent, his body rigid. All the strength of his touch was concentrated in his hands, his body apparently playing no part in his extraordinary *fortissimo*.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ See a praiseworthy review in The Musical Courier (21 December, 1918): 33. Also, "Rachmaninoff Opens his Tour in Providence, R.I.," Musical America 29.8 (21 December, 1918): 33, which speaks of "musicianship, clarity and a delightful spontaneity of style."

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, the following reviews from Boston: Olin Downes, "Music for Piano Made Colourful: Rakhmaninoff Arouses Enthusiasm of Hearers," Boston Post (16 December, 1918); Philip Hale, "Rachmaninoff Gives Recital: Russian Pianist Delights Large Audience at Symphony Hall," Boston Herald (16 December, 1918); "Rachmaninov's Return: Personality and Pianist in Deep Impression," Boston Evening Transcript (16 December, 1918).

¹⁷¹ See "Rachmaninoff is a Master Pianist," Boston Post (16 December, 1918); "Rachmaninoff Proves His Mastery of Music," Binghamton Press and Leader (26 January, 1921); F.W.H., "Toledo Applauds Master Composer: Two Thousand Approve Concert Work of Sergei Rachmaninoff," Toledo Times (28 November, 1921); Harvey Gaul, "Rachmaninoff Recital," Pittsburgh Post (7 December, 1922); John Rogers, "Rachmaninoff Recital Exciting Experience for Dallas Audience," Dallas Times Herald (13 December, 1936).

¹⁷² Alexander Pasternak, "Skryabin: Summer 1903 and after," The Musical Times 113.1558 (December, 1972), 1172-3.

The seeming disengagement and emotional reserve highlighted above was one of the many direct influences of Anton Rubinstein who also presented an unaffected disposition in performance.¹⁷³ Such emotional detachment perhaps affected also an inclination towards an avoidance of excessive liberties and sensationalist approaches to interpretation that were common at the time.¹⁷⁴ This point merits further detailed scrutiny and will be reprised later in connection with Rakhmaninov's interpretation of his Op. 30, but it should be stated here that he was for such reasons in fact considered something of a reactionary. Indeed, "his pianism was much more classical...than his composing inclination...His style, in fact, was often judged to be severe and unromantic."¹⁷⁵

Notwithstanding the criticism of impassivity and poker-face stage demeanour, Rakhmaninov, like Skryabin before him, also had to endure the biased reproaches of American critics with little sympathy or friendliness towards Russian artists. To this end, he was tagged with then stereotypical descriptions of Russian folk musicians such as barbaric, fatalistic, morose, unromantic, and incapable of laughter at the instrument.¹⁷⁶ In spite of such prejudice, however, the vast majority of reviews concur

¹⁷³ Anton Rubinstein, Autobiography (Boston: Little Brown, 1890), unpaginated appendix.

¹⁷⁴ Harrison, *op. cit.*, 225. Harrison again relates this back to the influence of Rubinstein, and exemplifies this contention in Rakhmaninov's approach to the music of Chopin which negated the then popular trend of producing a feeble and delicate sound in order to allow for Chopin's physical weakness.

¹⁷⁵ Rosalyn Tureck, "Virtuoso," New Statesman 71.1824 (25 February, 1966): 268. Harrison also speaks of an "objective straightforwardness" in Rakhmaninov's delivery. See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 282.

¹⁷⁶ "Russian Pianist in Concert Here: The Somber Rachmaninoff Beyond the Comprehension of Many," Raleigh News and Observer (10 January, 1922).

that Rakhmaninov's pianism was phenomenal, exhibiting a supreme technical equipment that was always placed at the service of the music.

As a pianist he was one of the mightiest of the twentieth century. His technique was formidable, but those who heard him were not required to be conscious of it. For he subordinated everything to the message of the composer. His performances had matchless dignity and purity, simplicity and loftiness...He believed, and his music and playing confirmed that belief, that music "should rehabilitate minds and souls." His music will continue to console and to refresh through the years.¹⁷⁷

His reputation as a grand virtuoso never waned throughout his life, even if his own impressions and self-criticism of his pianism may have suggested otherwise.¹⁷⁸ As such, Rakhmaninov was still able to command the attention of audiences and critics alike months prior to his death, receiving praise attesting to his undiminished powers:

although we know the number of opportunities left to hear this Titan of the keyboard are growing few – he's 70 years old now – there seems to be no faltering of his fingers, no weakening of his attack, no waning of his powers. Rather he seems to defy the idea of old age with a vigor and a force which is indeed incredible. The facility with which he can encompass the technical demands of lightning passages in a Liszt bravura piece for example, is something you can hardly bring your ear to believe.¹⁷⁹

In the process of having studied and cited many reviews here, what does this body of evidence say with respect to the place of the three labels in describing Rakhmaninov's performance art? In the context of this discussion, it should be interesting to point out here that Russian critics have had a long-standing debate regarding the appropriate

¹⁷⁷ "Rachmaninoff," New York Times (30 March, 1943). See also "Rachmaninoff Dies in California at 70," New York Times (29 March, 1943), Archibald Henderson, "Rachmaninoff as I knew him," Etude 72 (April, 1954): 9, 14, and Seroff, *op. cit.*, 64.

¹⁷⁸ He purportedly made comments to the effect that the more he plays the more he realises his own shortcomings; and with every passing year his fingers were getting more lazy. See Gębski, *op. cit.*, 146 and 174.

¹⁷⁹ Charles Gentry, "Rachmaninoff Recital Here Great Event," Detroit Evening Times (13 October, 1942).

characterisation and description of Rakhmaninov's pianism. For instance, Kuznetsov observed that Rakhmaninov's playing was [disciplined, free of pseudo-romantic qualities and sentimental weakness.]¹⁸⁰ Ponizovkin also supported a Romantic dissociation calling Rakhmaninov's entire performance style Classically balanced.¹⁸¹ Asaf'ev, however, noted that [Rakhmaninov's style possessed a monumental Classicism in the manner in which it influences or dominates the listener],¹⁸² wherein one could observe a wise simplicity, thoughtfulness, concentration, and the feeling of always considering each note.

For Kandinskii, the implication of a performer who followed both the rational and predominantly subjective elements in a work supported a "Romantic" inclination in Rakhmaninov's pianism.¹⁸³ But where others defined a Romantic style of interpretation by its dissimilarity to Classical or Modern styles, Kandinskii defined the criteria through which Rakhmaninov's pianism could be characterized as Romantic by the choice of repertoire which revealed a distinct proclivity and bias towards Romantic-era composers, and the fact that any pre-Beethoven works in his repertoire were inevitably performed in Romantic transcriptions.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ "нерасхлябанная, лишенная псевдоромантической дряблости или сентиментальной расслабленности." Konstantin Kuznetsov, "Tvorcheskaia zhizn' Rakhmaninova," Sovetskaia muzyka 4 (1945): 46.

¹⁸¹ Ponizovkin, *op. cit.*, 20.

¹⁸² "...стиль Рахманинова довлеет как стиль монументального классицизма." Igor' Glebov, S.V. Rakhmaninov (Moscow: Muzyka, 1945), 31.

¹⁸³ Aleksei Kandinskii, Iz istorii russkoi i sovetskoi muzyki (Moscow: Muzyka, 1971), 85.

¹⁸⁴ Aleksei Kandinskii, S.V. Rakhmaninov (Moscow: Muzyka, 1982), 46. In his readings of pre-Romantic repertoire, Rakhmaninov clearly displayed his sympathy with a Romantic ethos which permitted abundant digressions from the original text through the "romanticizing" of the performative

A polar opposite view to the Romantic essence of Rakhmaninov's pianistic art, however, has been proposed by Vladimir Chinaev in whose opinion the traits of exaggeration, extension of tempi, intonation, etc., were in fact indicative of a Modernist approach to art. For Chinaev, Rakhmaninov's performance of the *Polka de V.R.* is definitive and thoughtful, and marked by an ironic reverence in delivery.¹⁸⁵ Using the same work to demonstrate his thesis, Chinaev emphasizes Rakhmaninov's unique ability to attain and project clear proportions in the whole piece which he states portends a Modernist style.¹⁸⁶

Scholars from the West have also taken up the baton on either side of these characterisations of Rakhmaninov's performance art. For instance, Harrison views Rakhmaninov's playing as being devoid of the excesses that were characteristic of early twentieth century performance practice. Thus, in Harrison's view, Rakhmaninov represents a 'Classical' approach which had long since been outmoded. Martyn,

dynamics, texture, and harmony of the score with the purpose of "improving" the compositional language of the composer. Further, the abundance of trivial salon pieces and transcriptions in his repertoire were vehicles intended to demonstrate his virtuosity. See also Olga Sokolova, Sergei Vasil'evich Rakhmaninov (Moscow: Muzyka, 1987), 53, who concurs with this view.

¹⁸⁵ Vladimir Chinaev, "Stil' modern i pianism Rakhmaninova," Muzykal'naia akademiia 2 (1993): 201.

¹⁸⁶ The position between the traditional view of Rakhmaninov's pianistic style and that expressed by Chinaev is Grigorii Kogan's study, who circumvents the three labels used in this discussion and recognizes in lieu a constant tension between Realism and Symbolism in Rakhmaninov's art.

[...It is incorrect to think that Rakhmaninov always was, and remained until the end, a one hundred percent realist, never possessing anything in common with the modernist movements of art...His artistry, as with many of the other artistic phenomena, realistic in their core, did not shy away from the influence of the other non-realistic schools of art, especially symbolism.]

"...Неверно, будто Рахманинов всегда был и оставался до конца стопроцентным реалистом, никогда не имевшим ничего общего с модернистскими течениями в искусстве... Его творчество, подобно ряду других реалистических в основе своей явлений (Художественный театр), не избежало влияния нереалистического искусства, прежде всего, символизма."

Grigorii Kogan, "O Rakhmaninove k 85-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia," Sovetskaia muzyka 4 (1958): 63.

however, while not condemning him, characterizes Rakhmaninov's interpretative approach as being rather typical of his time and thus rather reminiscent of the self-indulgent Romanticist.¹⁸⁷

At this point, it would be sensible to revisit the three central labels and attempt to define how these might be translated in performance. Thereafter it might be possible to codify the language and traits of the reception criticism enumerated by various critics spanning many countries and years. Beginning with a frequently enumerated feature of Rakhmaninov's pianism, the art of singing at the keyboard¹⁸⁸ is commonly thought to be a Romantic performance trait. In fact, it was the Classical keyboardist of the eighteenth-century (and not the nineteenth) who was advised to listen to and emulate a singer's projection of a melodic line.¹⁸⁹ In Arnold Schering's words:

until the aesthetic of the young Romanticism, a communicative [*sprechend*] music and a communicative performance on instruments is clearly considered ideal...One spoke of the principle of discourse [*das redende Prinzip*] in music or...of "notes that speak" [*tons parlants*].¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Martyn, *op. cit.*, 402. The scholarship of David Rowland, Robert Philip, and Kenneth Hamilton et al., has documented these early 20th century performance practices. See bibliography for citation details.

¹⁸⁸ See the comments of Nadezhda Salina in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 37.

¹⁸⁹ Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1978), 121-122. While the importance of a "singing" style or focus on melodic line delineation was also transmitted through and esteemed in the Romantic period, the significant difference between this and the Classical era discussion is in Classical aesthetics, singing at the keyboard was a representation of communication, declamation, and the imitation of speech, whereas in Romantic performance practice a singing style was extolled for its ability to enhance beauty and support phraseology.

¹⁹⁰ Arnold Schering, "Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach un das 'redende Prinzip' in der Musik," *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters* xlv (1939): 16-17.

Thus, a speech-like declamatory style seen especially in cantabile sections or slow movements was extolled as among the most superior of skills that could be demonstrated at the keyboard in high-Classicism.¹⁹¹ Added to a declamatory style which connected music with rhetorical principles, came other defining characteristics of Classical-styled performance.¹⁹² Geiringer speaks of a “perfect blend of the work of the mind and the work of the heart” in his definition of Classicism, which is very fitting in describing the performance style of Rakhmaninov.¹⁹³ One can also justifiably contend that Rakhmaninov did not strive to be original. He only maintained his constant striving for consistency in performance and for playing of the highest quality. Further, in any review of his concerts there are also references to an unadorned masculinity, consummate technical skill, together with a pervasive ease of communication in his relationship with his audience all of which portend a Classical temperament.¹⁹⁴ Such traits amplify similarities to his idol, Anton Rubinstein, and underscore Classical traits in the pianism of both men. The nobility and sobriety which made both pianists such

¹⁹¹ Of all pianists throughout the Classical period, it was Johann Baptist Cramer whose abilities in this regard remained unmatched.

As a performer on the pianoforte, Cramer is unrivalled...His brilliancy of execution is astonishing; but this quality...amounts to little or nothing in the general estimate of such merits as his in taste, expression, feeling, the power that he possesses of almost making the instrument speak a language...those who love to have their sympathies awakened by the ‘eloquent music’ which this instrument may be made to ‘discourse’,...such persons should seize every opportunity that is afforded them of hearing Cramer.”

Anonymous review, *Harmonicon* 1.7 (July 1823): 103. Quoted in Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 16.

¹⁹² A brief review of Haydn at the keyboard by Samuel Wesley in 1792 speaks of accuracy, neatness, precision, distinctness. Among the traits of Mozart’s pianism that came to be identified as Classical performance practices were his striving for accuracy, economy of movement, singing at the instrument, and expressive dynamics. Beethoven introduced an energy and other effects due to the development of the pianoforte that were not previously encountered. Among these were the refined use of the pedals, the practice of fast tempi, and a noble and singing style that could also engender a profound melancholy. See Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹⁹³ Karl Geiringer, *Haydn: A Creative Life in Music* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1947), 303.

¹⁹⁴ Hugh Honour, *Neo-classicism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1991), 65.

noted interpreters of Beethoven,¹⁹⁵ the conservatism of musical opinions, the simplicity and grandeur,¹⁹⁶ and a yearning to represent a uniquely Russian performance tradition loaned their pianism a Classical disposition.¹⁹⁷

In performance, the quality of aloofness which has been located in Rakhmaninov's pianism, stage craft, and which affected a general disengagement with his public is also an indication of a Romantic artist, one who possessed an ability to create a new world divorced from reality. In this sense, the Romantic artist sought to find his or her unique voice, aimed at giving expression to the sublime, the infinite, and the spiritual.¹⁹⁸ In reading the reviews, there are many who have described Rakhmaninov's playing in terms of being uniquely imaginative, colourful, and deeply moving and perhaps tinged also with a self-consciousness, all of which are so characteristic of the Romantic performer.

¹⁹⁵ Sergei Prokofiev was a most ardent fan of Rakhmaninov's interpretations of Beethoven. According to Prokofiev, Rakhmaninov's Beethoven interpretations were peerless. See Anthony Phillips trans., *Sergey Prokofiev Diaries: 1915-1923 Behind the Mask* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 429. Alfred Swan shared this view expressing the uniqueness of Rakhmaninov's performances of Beethoven as compared to the then modern German pianists. See *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 218-219. Similarly, Sabaneev considered Rubinstein at his most awe-inspiring in Beethoven's Sonatas. See Leonid Sabaneev and S.W. Pring, "Anton Rubinstein (Born November 28, 1829)," *The Musical Times* 70.1041 (1 November 1929): 980.

¹⁹⁶ See the comments of Zoia Pribitkova who speaks of the simplicity and unmannered/unaffected playing style in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 66.

¹⁹⁷ Sabaneev and Pring, *op. cit.*, 977, and Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), II: 253. Here Taruskin quotes from the theoretician, archaeologist, and art historian Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) who used the phrase "eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Grösse" in his seminal treatise *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* of 1755 which became central to any future interpretation of the ideals of the Enlightenment and Classicism.

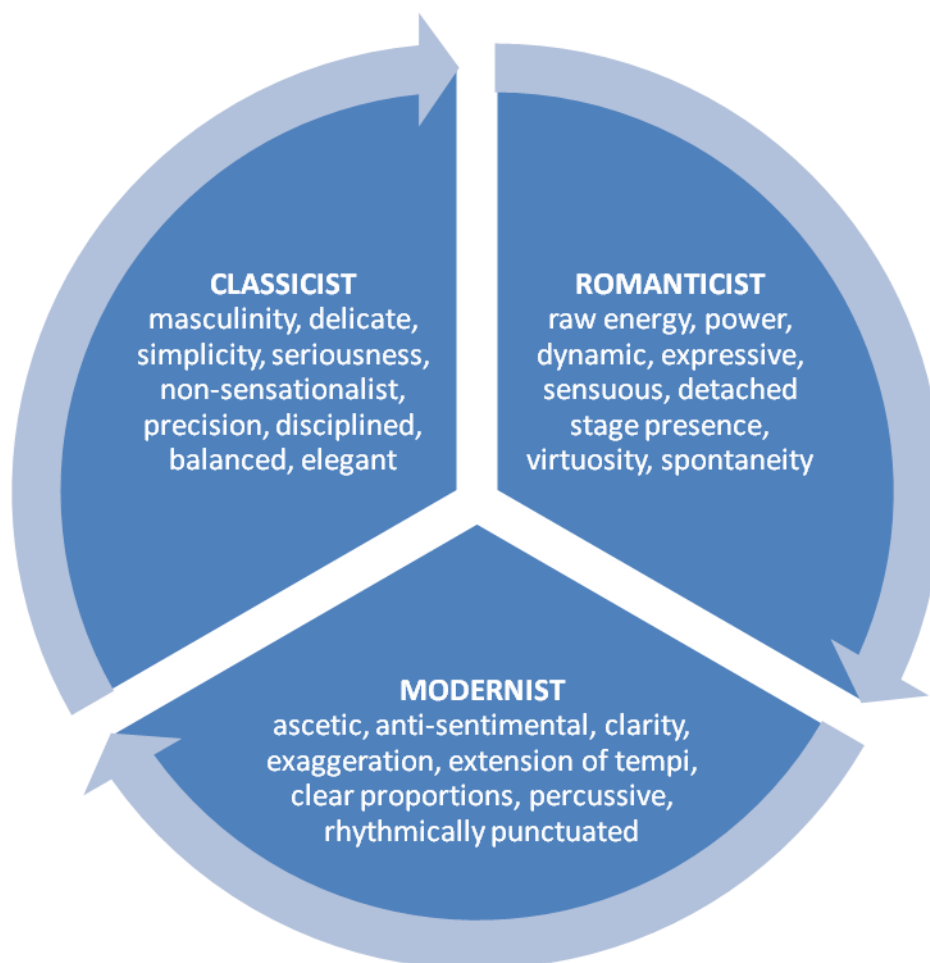
¹⁹⁸ Gustav Schilling, *Encyklopädie der gesammte musikalischen Wissenschaften, oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* Volume 6 (Stuttgart: F. H. Köhler, 1837), in Peter le Huray and James Day (eds.), *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 470.

If the Classical or Romantic labels seem appropriate to use in describing certain features of Rakhmaninov's pianism and warrant further tracking, the application of the Modernist tag could initially be thought of as unseemly, inapt, and perhaps even an insult to such a formidable pianist. The identification of Modernism in Rakhmaninov's pianism, however, refers to an attitude,¹⁹⁹ a breakaway from prevailing Romantic performance practices. In this respect, his pianism emphasized clarity and objectivity at the expense of improvisation and overly personal and expressive readings. It is this character in his interpretations, variously termed ascetic and anti-sentimental, which represents the new rationalism and critical formalism of Modernism.²⁰⁰ In using succinct definitions of how Classicist, Romanticist, and Modernist aesthetics might respectively be translated into performance practices, it is possible to group and categorize the pertinent and expressive language encountered in the above-mentioned reviews under the three aforementioned labels.

¹⁹⁹ James McHard, The Future of Modern Music: A Philosophical Exploration of Modernist Music in the 20th Century and Beyond 3rd ed., (Livonia: Iconic Press, 2008), 14.

²⁰⁰ Botstein, *op. cit.*

EX. 8: *Grouping terms found in an examination of Rakhmaninov's reception into Classical, Romantic, and Modern*



In this way it becomes more apparent that all three labels do have their place within Rakhmaninov's performance purview. This thesis will now be further developed in an examination of the extant recording of the third piano concerto.

RAKHMANNINOV PLAYS OP. 30

The recording of Op. 30 emanates from a number of sessions over a two-year period in which Eugene Ormandy, The Philadelphia Orchestra, and Rakhmaninov were attempting to record all the piano concerti. Rakhmaninov closely followed the

development of recorded technology and was evidently committed to and enthusiastic in embracing it as soon as he determined its potential sufficient to reproduce his art faithfully.²⁰¹ While he clearly spoke of a preference for live, in-person performances, where artist and audience could engage and dialogue with each other, he was prepared and eager to set down recorded performances for the opportunity they offered him to attain and preserve a higher artistic ideal. In this respect, he was among the most prominent of his generation, and certainly the first composer-pianist to endorse recording technology unreservedly.²⁰² In the confines of a studio, Rakhmaninov was possessed by the quest for perfection and meticulous in his efforts to achieve this.²⁰³ The possibility of retakes was a practical means through which he could control and eradicate any self-consciousness or anxiety, and also exercise greater influence over his legacy.

²⁰¹ Rakhmaninov felt that his pre-electric piano rolls for Edison, Welte-Mignon, Duo-Art, and even the more sophisticated Ampico were far from satisfactory, and thus welcomed electric technology. See Sergei Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," The Gramophone 9 (1931): 525. For information relating to Rakhmaninov's contracts with Edison and the working habits he formed in the studio which followed him into his RCA-Victor period see John and Susan Harvith (eds.), Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 25-6, and Raymond Wile, "The Edison Recordings of Serge Rachmaninoff," The American Record Guide 40.3 (February 1977): 11-12. All his recordings from 1925 onwards utilized the electric technique.

²⁰² Robert Threlfall, "Rachmaninoff's Revisions and an Unknown Version of His Fourth Concerto," Musical Opinion 96.1145 (February 1973): 235. This was very different to his close friend, Józef Hofmann. Rakhmaninov regarded Hofmann as the greatest living pianist of his time and, as such, a superior technician to himself. Hofmann, however, remained suspicious of recording technology and as a result left behind an insignificant legacy.

²⁰³ See Robert Philip, Performing Music in the Age of Recording (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 25 and 39, for an account of the self-consciousness of early recording artists. Rakhmaninov's anxiety was heightened in the recording studio; he was unusually disconcerted by warning buzzers and signal lights. See John Porte, "Gramophone Celebrities: XII – Sergei Rachmaninoff," The Gramophone 3 (1925): 128-9, and Sergei Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," The Gramophone 9 (1931): 525-6.

There is no need for further justification regarding my choice of work (see introduction), but it is relevant to state that by the time the third concerto was written (and even more so during the time of its recording in 1939-1940), Rakhmaninov already possessed enormous respect as a pianist and original interpreter of both his own music and that of other composers. Further, as seen above, his pianistic and artistic abilities did not diminish as he neared the end of his life. Thus, the reviews immediately following the recording of the Third Concerto were typically full of praise.²⁰⁴

The most immediate characteristic of Rakhmaninov's playing exhibited also in his recording of Op. 30, is his penchant for fleeting tempi. It is evident from the outset that his approach to tempo will have an effect on every other parameter. This necessitates a focus on tempo in trying to elucidate Rakhmaninov's performance practices. Such a focus is not arbitrary, as Rosenblum states:

tempo is a fundamental yet elusive aspect of performance practice. Tempo affects virtually every other aspect of interpretation: dynamics, touch, articulation, pedalling, realization of ornaments, and the relating of all these details to the whole. Tempo also affects what the listener perceives, hence it bears directly on the effectiveness of the interpretation.

Rakhmaninov plays the opening theme in a manner very dissimilar to what is today the pervading trend. A faster tempo,²⁰⁵ declamatory phrasing, and changing rhythmic pulse give it a sense of authority, excitement, and command. While the dynamic range of the

²⁰⁴ Howard Taubman, "Records: Rachmaninoff," New York Times (1 December, 1940). One reads that "it is unique and completely different from what one usually hears in its performance." See Robert Matthew-Walker, Rakhmaninov (Cheliabinsk: Ural, 1999), 184.

²⁰⁵ Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 305.

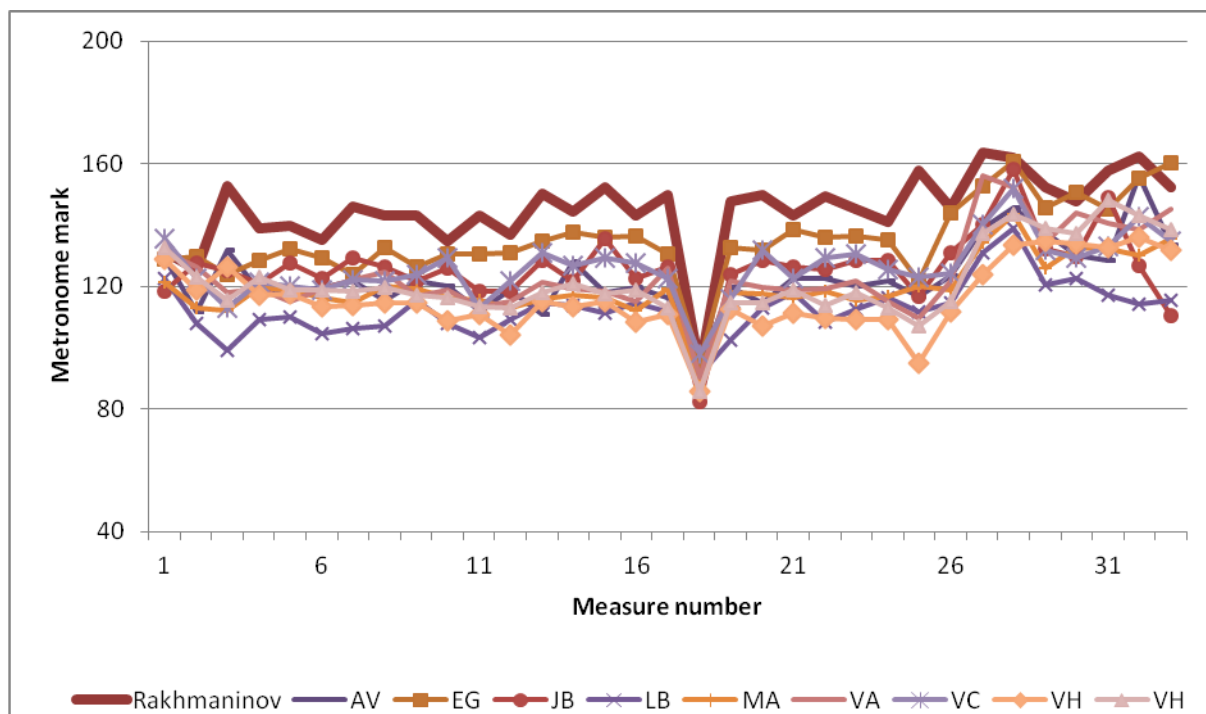
theme is soft as marked,²⁰⁶ it is strongly accented with a sense of rhythmic striving towards the center of the phrase. Here one can observe a characteristic phrasing method of Rakhmaninov: if the melodic contour is clearly delineated in the antecedent phrase, the consequent phrase will be less clear as he unites the two phrases into one. In essence, Rakhmaninov emphasizes the beginning of a phrase and fades towards the end of the phrase with the final note/notes being almost inaudible. The absence of dynamic contrast between the end of the first and the beginning of the second phrase (which is not played *mezzo forte*, but *piano*) also allows for the continual development of the melodic line. In the development towards the apex of the phrase, Rakhmaninov allows for complex tempo-dynamic relationships which show a growth in tension: *accelerando* changes to a definite slowing, while the marked *crescendo* unexpectedly becomes a *diminuendo*. As a whole, the entire theme is thus performed in one breath, flowing, but nevertheless anxious. This is enabled primarily by the fast tempo, which is considerably quicker than any of the subsequent celebrated recordings of the work, as the graph below shows.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Solovtsov notes that Rakhmaninov's performance of the opening theme [at first glance is so quiet that it is almost pastoral]. "...на первый взгляд такая спокойная, почти пасторальная." Anatolii Solovtsov, *S.V. Rakhmaninov* (Moscow-Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1947), 100.

²⁰⁷

PIANIST	CONDUCTOR	ORCHESTRA	LABEL & No.	DATE OF REC.
Martha Argerich (MA)	Ricardo Chailly	Berlin Radio Symphony	Philips #446673	December, 1982
Vladimir Ashkenazy (VA)	Bernard Haitink	Royal Concertgebouw	Decca #417239	August, 1985
Lazar Berman (LB)	Claudio Abbado	London Symphony	CBS MYK 37809	November, 1976
Jorge Bolet (JB)	Charles Webb	Indiana University Symphony	Palexa #503	June, 1969
Van Cliburn (VC)	Kiril Kondrashin	Symphony of the Air	RCA Victor Living Stereo #67894	May, 1958

EX. 9: Tempo graph of mov. I: mm. 1-33



In his choice of fast tempi, Rakhmaninov replicates a common practice of the Classicist in which a fast tempo was synonymous with a light execution.²⁰⁸ The fast tempo requires an alignment with the method codified by Türk regarding economy of movement and primacy of finger technique. This entailed the independence of each finger, staying as close as possible to the keys, suppleness of the wrist, and immobile arms.²⁰⁹ These characteristics (with the exception of the immobility of the arms, even if

Emil Gilels (EG)	André Cluytens	Orchestre de la Société du Conservatoire Paris	EMI Great Recordings Of The Century #45820	June, 1955
Vladimir Horowitz (VH)	Fritz Reiner	RCA Victor Symphony	RCA Victor Gold Seal #7754	April, 1980
Vladimir Horowitz (VH)	Eugene Ormandy	New York Philharmonic	RCA Victor Red Seal #61564	August, 1978
Arkady Volodos (AV)	James Levine	Berlin Philharmonic	Sony Classical SK #64384	June, 1999

²⁰⁸ See Türk, *op. cit.*, 358-360.

one can presume this to be the case to enable such a sound and articulation) are audible in Rakhmaninov's attempt to embody a Classical performance style.

Rakhmaninov yields to the orchestra in the subsequent *Più mosso*, quickening the tempo after the initial thematic presentation. The interim passages in Rakhmaninov's performance possess a rhythmic energy and organization, with Rakhmaninov providing punctuated cues for the conductor and orchestra as in his heavy accent on the B^b at m. 47. In such playing, which highlights a visceral rhythmic excitement and a clear and slightly percussive execution,²¹⁰ the Modernist inclinations of Rakhmaninov's pianism become apparent.²¹¹ Such rhythmic vitality also lent his playing enormous energy and authority.²¹² Again in the *Più vivo* section beginning at m. 52, Rakhmaninov goes against his dynamic indications with the application of *crescendi* across the measures 52-53 and 56-57 in lieu of the marked *diminuendi*. Notice also the concern for ensemble evident in his rendition of mm. 67-68 where he actually places the *a tempo* one quarter-note beat earlier and then uses the 2/4 measure at m. 68 to cue the conductor and orchestra.

²⁰⁹ See Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Pièces de clavecina* ed. Erwin Jacobi (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960), 16-19.

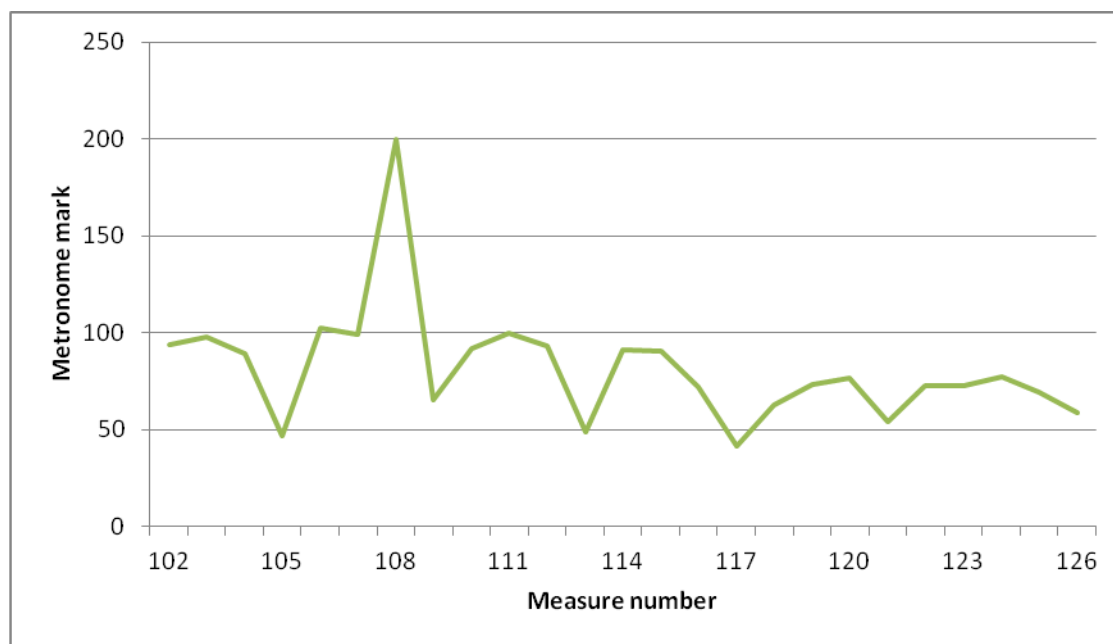
²¹⁰ It is interesting to note that some critics occasionally observed in his playing a harsh or percussive tone quality, not unlike descriptions of Prokofiev's pianism. The piano rolls Rakhmaninov made with Edison can certainly support this claim, although observations of harsh sounds in his electrical recordings are rare. See Leslie Hodgson, "Rachmaninoff, the Pianist," *Musical America* 63 (1943): 6, 26, 33.

²¹¹ See William Flanagan, "Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Twentieth-Century Composer," *Tempo* 22 (1952): 6-7, who attests to such Modernist traits of Rakhmaninov's performance practices.

²¹² Israel Citkowitz, "Orpheus with his Lute," *Tempo* 22 (1952): 10.

Playing in one breath with insignificant change to the tempo, Rakhmaninov completes the small *veloce* cadenza also in the same tempo with noticeably sparse use of the pedal throughout. In his presentation of the second theme, Rakhmaninov is able to achieve a suppleness through his rhythmic breathing and plasticity of phrasing, whilst maintaining a sense of definition. He constantly employs dynamics, at the expense of compressing articulation, to assist in creating development. Rakhmaninov in fact plays the second theme in a lively manner even if he uses marked declinations in tempo before the completion of the phrase. Only at the *ritardando* does he dissolve the tension. See the graph below which demonstrates the fleeting tempo and the significant slowing every four measures producing a noticeable dip in the curve. In this way, Rakhmaninov again manages to achieve a Classically-inspired, vocal and declamatory realization that is characteristic of his approach to melodic lines.

EX. 10: *Mov. I: 2nd subject, mm. 102-126*



Immediately prior to the development, Rakhmaninov shows the marriage of his compositional conception and realization in performance when he renders the registral change from mm. 155-156 as an echo, totally ignoring his stated *pianissimo* in m. 155 for an *mf* dynamic which is then repeated at a much softer level in the following measure. As the development begins, Rakhmaninov also changes the colour of the sound when rendering the main thematic idea in *c*-minor. Long phrases are again in evidence in the beginning of the development. Such long slurs and phrase groupings were a typical Romantic performance practice employed to enhance *legato*. This was frequently encountered in fast passagework and, as is the case here, does not impede or prevent accentuation, dynamic shaping, or phrasing.²¹³ Rakhmaninov also arrives at the *Più mosso* section with a noticeably faster tempo, but from the *Più mosso* at m. 173 until the appearance of thirds in solo part at m. 171, the tempo is actually slower than previously, and more rhythmically free with an emphasis before the beat.

Rakhmaninov uses the inherent contrast of the development section to vary his articulation in different phrases. For instance, he emphasizes the rhythmic energy with punctuated accents in the right hand in mm. 177-180 and mm. 187-194. Rakhmaninov frequently utilizes such accents to clarify structure – very much a Classical performance practice. Koch termed these typically imperceptible points of emphasis “grammatical accents.”²¹⁴ They occur in Rakhmaninov’s performance in passages of “equal note

²¹³ Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 236.

²¹⁴ Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Frankfurt: Hermann dem jüngern, 1802), 51. See also Johann Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien 1808-1809*, 2 vols., (Amsterdam: Im Kunst und Industrie-Comtoir, 1810). Sudden *sforzandi* or short, sharp *crescendi*,

values in lively movement,²¹⁵ as stipulated and employed in the Classical era. Rakhmaninov's playing often evinces different accents especially at the beginning of melodic phrases, which is not only uncommon in relation to other pianists of his tradition, but constituted a practice that was frowned upon. Sometimes these accents fell off the beat (non-metrical) -- a Romantic, late-nineteenth century, convention which Rakhmaninov made into a refined practice.²¹⁶ This can be observed in his piano entry at the beginning of the first movement, or later in m. 107 where he accents the *c*.

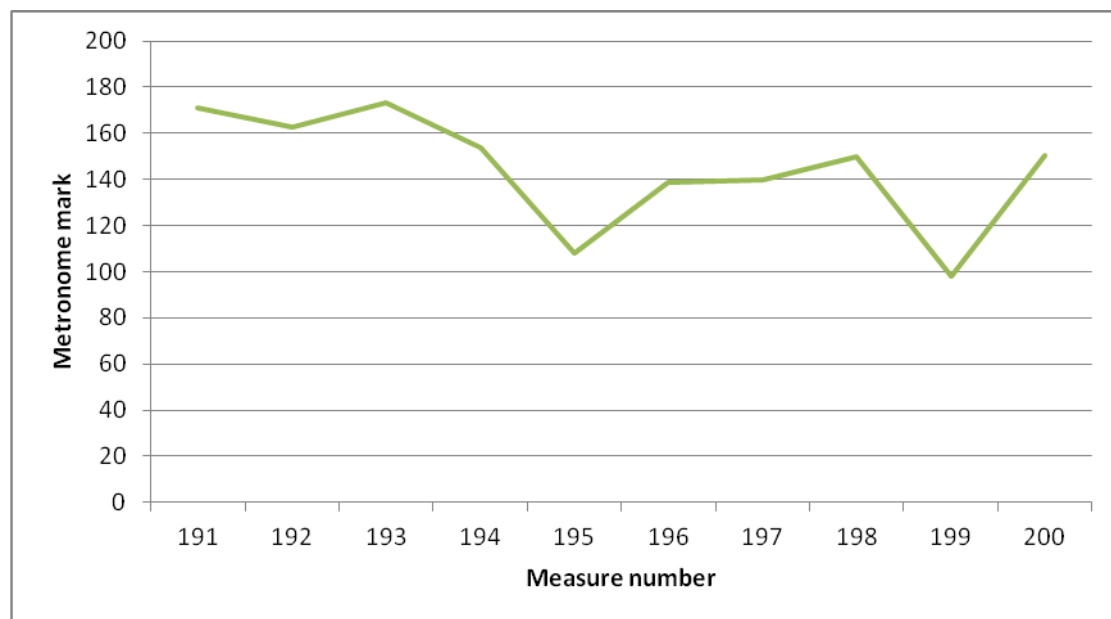
Rakhmaninov also shifts to a metronomic, even layout, which could be behind the Kurbatski edition marking of *Meno vivo* in lieu of *Più vivo*. Interestingly, the *Più vivo* marking actually gives way to a slower tempo than the preceding section (see example 11 below).

are often connected with the emphasis of significant harmonic progressions. For example, in the *Polka de V.R.*, Rakhmaninov uses sharp accents on the grace notes of the melody thereby strengthening the playful character of the music with syncopation and adding a certain aristocratic manner. These methods were used consistently for a range of emotional-dynamic effects where a constant rise in dynamic level compliments a constant growth in harmonic complexity. This is indicative of what occurs in the exposition of the first movement of Op. 30.

²¹⁵ Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 91.

²¹⁶ Brown, *op. cit.*, 27.

EX. 11: *Più vivo* = slowing, mov. I: mm. 191-200



It is also distinguished by an inclination to phrase in four-measure units (instead of the marked two-measure phrases), where the first two measures emphasize the top voice and the second two measure draw attention to the inner line of the right hand. Further, as the texture becomes more dense, Rakhmaninov uses minimal pedal to achieve a unique clarity of texture.

Rakhmaninov's sparse pedalling was a deliberate attempt to replicate a Classical practice aimed at not obscuring articulation or counterpoint.²¹⁷ For example, in trying to maintain the utmost clarity in passages of fast fingerwork, Rakhmaninov would habitually be "frugal rather than overgenerous with pedalling."²¹⁸ Due care was taken especially to separate cadential progressions, pedalling so as not to obscure non-legato

²¹⁷ Beethoven's pedalling practice apparently went further to possess a structural role wherein it was used to clarify form. See Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 134.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

notes, and not unnecessarily transforming a linear progression into a harmonic one through overuse of the pedal. Instead, Rakhmaninov sought to emulate Beethoven's practice of using the pedal as a colouration device.²¹⁹

In the lead up towards the *Allegro* at m. 215, there is an apparent structural building in four long phrases. Rachmaninov achieves this through a switch from a four-measure phrasing to two-measure units, Rakhmaninov deliberately differentiates mm. 213-214 from mm. 211-212 by accenting the last chord of each three-chord grouping in mm. 213-214. In this manner he is able to project continuous development and actually elongate a phrase, of what would otherwise be eight three-chord groups.

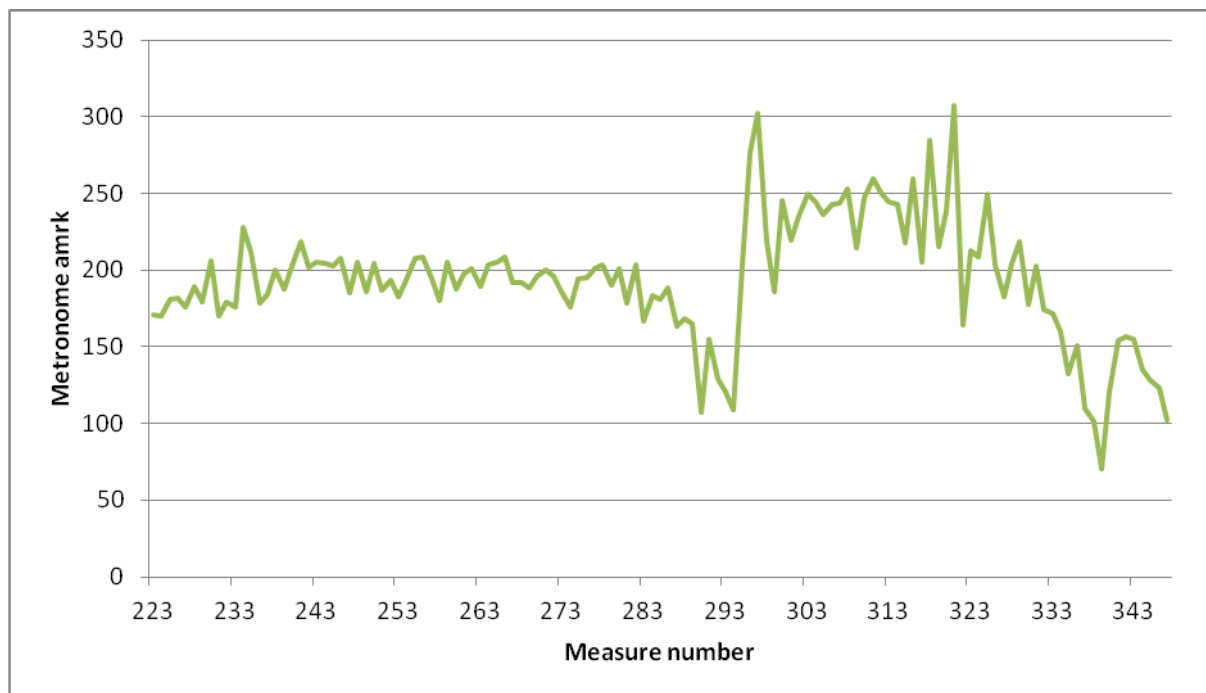
EX. 12: change in phrase groupings, mov. I: mm. 211-214

Once again, through the lengthening of the phrase within a supple *rubato* combined with a striving *accelerando* and a growth in dynamic level, Rakhmaninov is able to render the long preamble build-up towards the climax (*Allegro molto. Alla breve*) in one breath. He creates a united and whole line of ascent while the various subordinate parts emphasize the internal contrast.

²¹⁹ Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, 127-128.

The rhythm halves with the move to eighth notes from m. 235 where Rakhmaninov quickens the tempo. This marks the beginning of the most unstable section in terms of tempi in this movement. It would seem that the main reason for the instability would have to do again with Rakhmaninov's penchant for the elongated phrase in the midst of changing rhythmic units (eg., mm. 223-250). For instance, the tempo again quickens as the rhythmic unit changes to half-note values from mm. 291-294. Indeed, the left hand *tenuto* is here not observed, making it barely audible. Rhythmic stability is restored albeit temporarily at the beginning of the cadenza. By m. 335, Rakhmaninov employs an *allargando* which permits his orchestral sound to assume prominence. Further, by the *a tempo* at m. 340 until m. 345, Rakhmaninov uses fermatas on the first *D*-major chord of every measure thereby reinforcing the arrival of the tonic.

EX. 13: *tempo instability, mov. I: mm. 223-350*



Rakhmaninov begins the *scherzando* cadenza with an emphasis on the first beat of every measure in the left hand and at a faster tempo compared to his playing of the movement

up until that point. The avalanche of chords and octaves creates a prolonged development and striving towards the tonic. Measure 350 is preceded by a *ritardando* to intensify this drive toward the tonic-major tonality. This is an instance where Rakhmaninov's interpretation highlights his harmonic progressions and modulations. For example, in some parts of harmonic tension, he shadows a sonority and impedes rhythmic motion to create a broadening effect. This occurs in the cadenza where, in approaching the climax, Rakhmaninov accentuates the alternating dominants creating an orchestral sonority. There is also a direct correlation between a harmonic/melodic descent and an accompanying reduction in sound.

EX. 14: *drive toward D-tonic preceded by broadening of tempo, mov. I: mm. 348-350*

The musical score for Example 14 consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system shows measures 348 and 349. The upper staff (treble clef) features a melodic line with a descending eighth-note pattern, while the lower staff (bass clef) plays a steady sixteenth-note accompaniment. The second system shows measures 350 and 351. In measure 350, the tempo is marked *poco veloce*. The upper staff has a melodic line with a descending eighth-note pattern, and the lower staff continues with a sixteenth-note accompaniment. In measure 351, the upper staff has a melodic line with a descending eighth-note pattern, and the lower staff has a sixteenth-note accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as *poco veloce*, *ff*, and *v*. There are also performance instructions like *poco veloce* and *ff*.

By the time of the *Meno mosso* episode from m. 354, the performance becomes accompanimental and sounds almost Impressionistic in its exploration of soft and ethereal sounds achieved through skillful employment of the pedal. Beginning with the introduction of the French horns, Rakhmaninov emphasizes the descending scalar line in

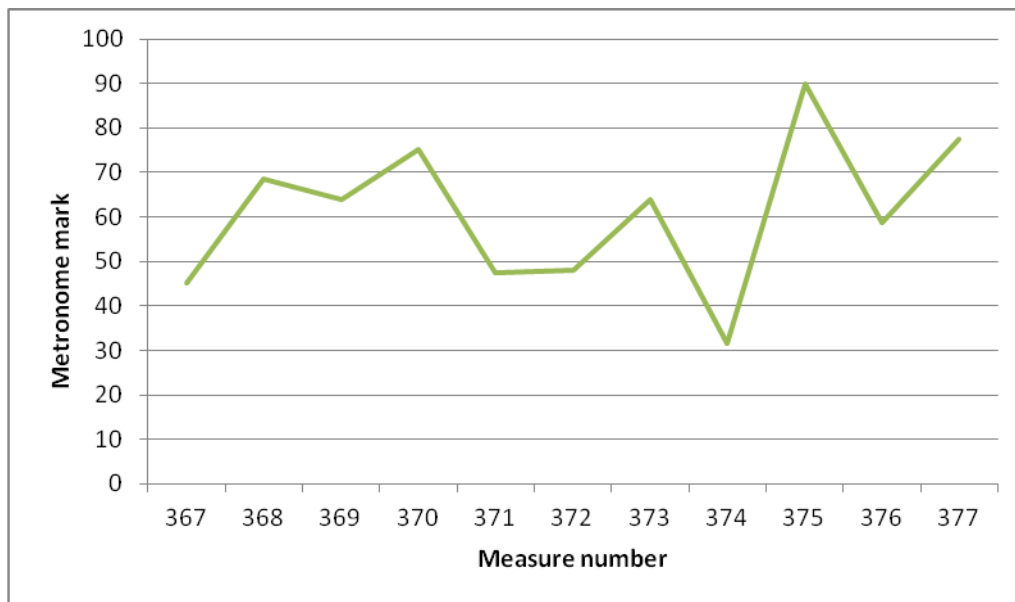
the left hand. Again, he performs the secondary theme in a free manner with a sharply nuanced and polyphonic delineation of the voices, creating the impression of an improvisation. There is also a pronounced drive towards the arpeggiated chords that begin each measure. These measures (mm. 367-378) show Rakhmaninov at his most extreme in his *rubato* concept and general handling of tempo. Indeed, this is rather dissimilar to the normative Romantic-period practice of metrical *rubato*.²²⁰ There is a sense of freedom, combined with some exaggeration and extension of tempi, which points instead to Modernist tendencies. To this extent, the motion is almost halted altogether at the *tenuto* chord of m. 374 as the graph below shows.

²²⁰ In the second part of his *New Treatise*, García defines metrical *rubato* as: the momentary increase of values, which is given to one or several sounds, to the detriment of the rest, while the total length of the bar remains unaltered. The distribution of notes into long and short, breaks the monotony of regular movements, and gives greater vehemence to bursts of passion.

Further, he advises that in order to make metrical *rubato* perceptible in singing:

the accents and time of an accompaniment should be strictly maintained: upon this monotonous ground, all alterations introduced by a singer will stand out in relief, and change the character of certain phrases.

See Manuel García, *Traité complet de l'art du chant* (Paris and London: Schott, 1847), part 1, 49-51. For similar descriptions of *rubato* as it was conceived and practiced during the Romantic period, see the influential writings of: Camile Saint-Saëns, "Quelques mots sur l'exécution des oeuvres de Chopin," *Le Courier musical* 13.10 (1910): 386-7; Camile Saint-Saëns, "Pauline Viardot," in *École Buissonnière: notes et souvenirs* (Paris: P. Lafitte & Cie, 1913), 222; and Mathis Lussy, *Traité de L'Expression Musicale: Accents, nuances et mouvements dans la musique vocale et instrumentale* (Paris, 1874), trans. by M.E. von Glehn as *Musical Expression* (London: Novello, 1885).

EX. 15: *extreme tempo fluctuation, mov. I: mm. 367-378*

The following double notes from mm. 413-416 are played extremely fast and are almost inaudible. This enhances the effect of Rakhmaninov's rendering of mm. 417-421, which he plays as one phrase highlighting the descending scale in the right hand from *d* to *e*. The ensuing arrival of a reminiscence of the second theme is well articulated before an un-notated *ritardando* in the final few measures which stands out due to its avoidance in any modern performance. In general, the tempo of the first movement is quick, the climax powerful, the phrasing malleable and long, all assisted by a unique *rubato*, articulation, and technique of interweaving the polyphony. Rakhmaninov's ability to orchestrate at the piano can be seen in his recreation of the instrumental colours of the orchestra.

Rakhmaninov's performance of the second movement of the concerto possesses a guarded quietness which counterbalances the many *fortes* written in the score. The polyphonic entry sees Rakhmaninov focus his attention on the principal melodic line.

This can be observed especially in mm. 186-189, where the left hand sixteenth-notes are almost inaudible. Today, a pianist performing Rakhmaninov's music typically emphasises the importance of every voice in a dense texture, but this is not the manner in which Rakhmaninov performed his own music. Rakhmaninov paid attention instead to details or nuances of significance and passed over other notes, voices, or lines in a fleeting manner. Rakhmaninov also demonstrates his singular ability to differentiate the voices of different timbres that differ from the primary melody, therein creating a reduction in intensity or a sharpening of sound. He habitually exposes an inner voice for the duration of a phrase and follows this by emphasizing the principal melodic line, thereby enriching and broadening the structure of the piece. Through such processes, Rakhmaninov generates colour, which was a paramount principle in forming his interpretations.²²¹ Rakhmaninov achieves these subtle effects also with the minimum use of the pedal. In this way he sculpted a narrative with his phrasing and its interaction with his *rubato* concept. In his interpretations of his own music, this fluidity and elasticity of phrase serves to produce a balance of tension and brilliance.²²² Even accepting the freedom of *rubato*, for example in the first *f*-minor variation, a united direction is maintained both in tempo and phrasing. In this way, he demonstrates, as was exemplified amply in the first movement, that his phrasing is intrinsically bound to his *rubato* concept. He creates tension and ambience through great surges in tempo in both directions which contributes to a unique flexibility in phrasing. This also affects a

²²¹ Basil Maine, Basil Maine on Music (London: Westhouse, 1945), 119-21.

²²² Such an approach can also, however, impede the natural flow of the music especially when he applied it to other repertoire, as has been noted in Rakhmaninov's interpretations of Mozart. See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 226. It would seem that Rakhmaninov did not always follow his own advice. See Sergei Rachmaninoff, "Ten Important Attributes of Beautiful Pianoforte Playing," The Etude 28 (1910): 154.

shortening or lengthening of note values as the case may be. Thus, there is no even distribution of time within a particular phrase, as is the common practice today.

In general, he plays the movement with a light, crystal-clear touch (seen particularly in the waltz episode from m. 126) combined with a quick and stable tempo. What is most unusual of Rakhmaninov's playing of this movement is the anti-sentimental approach in spite of the exaggerated and unusual *rubato* practice. There is no lingering or undue emphasis placed on the first note of the falling minor-third interval which would render it in the overly affected style that has become characteristic of subsequent interpretations. Further, there is no evidence of either dislocation or un-notated arpeggiation, as one might reasonably expect to find in ample display from pianists of this period especially in slow movements.²²³ Indeed, these are two Romantic practices which became associated with every major pianist of Rakhmaninov's generation. These qualities would seem to make Rakhmaninov's interpretation of this movement more modern than many subsequent and contemporary performances of this movement.²²⁴

²²³ For discussions of dislocation citing sources of the period see: Will Crutchfield, "Brahms, by Those Who Knew Him," *Opus 2* (1986): 14, Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 334, and the seminal work Sigmund Lebert and Ludwig Stark, *Grosse theoretische-praktische Klavierschule für systematischen Unterricht nach allen Richtungen des Klavierspiels vom ersten Anfang bis zur höchsten Ausbildung* 3 parts (Stuttgart: J.G.Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1858), 3.

For discussions of un-notated arpeggiation citing sources of the period see: Malwine Brée, *Die Grundlage der Methode Leschetizky* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1902), trans. Theodore Baker as *The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1905), 72-3; Ernst Pauer, *The Art of Pianoforte Playing* (London: Novello, Ewer and Co, 1877), 46; Sigismond Thalberg, *L'Art du chant appliqué au piano, Op. 70* (Paris: F. Lucca, 1853), 5; Frédéric Kalkbrenner, *Méthode pour apprendre le piano-forte à l'aide du guide-mains, Op. 108* 2nd ed. (Paris: Pleyel, 1831), 12; Adolf Kullak, *Die Ästhetik des Klavierspiels* (Berlin: Verlag von J. Guttentag, 1861), trans. Theodore Baker as *The Aesthetics of Pianoforte Playing*, rev. and ed. Hans Bischoff (New York: G. Schirmer, 1893), 297-8.

The main difference between arpeggiation and dislocation is that separation of the hands or playing the hands one after the other is not the underlying principle in the latter.

The finale of the concerto reflects the main characteristics of his interpretation and the particularities of his performance of the prior movements. For instance, the modulation at m. 19 is outstanding with a *forte* instead of *piano* dynamic. Again, Rakhmaninov displays his penchant for orchestral colouring and long phrase groupings at the piano, as when he emphasizes the descending line from b^b - c in mm. 135-138.

EX. 16: *mov. III: mm. 145-152*

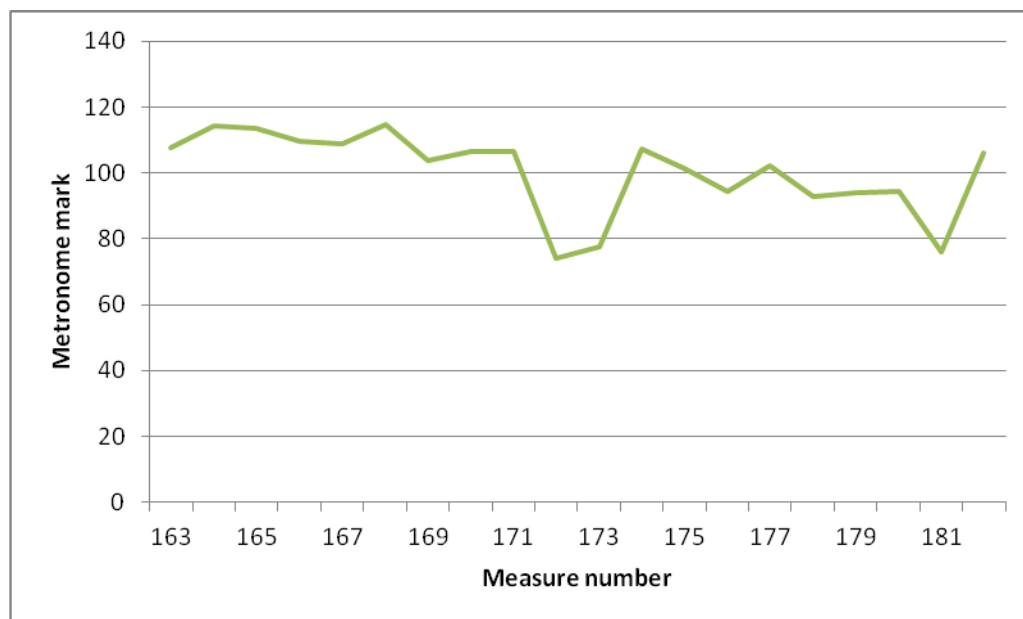
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²²⁴ For some pertinent remarks on the subject of what constitutes Modernist performance practice see Gustav Damm, Klavierschule und Melodienschatz für die Jugend. Praktisch bewährte Anleitung zur gründlichen Erlernung des Klavierspiels mit mehr als 140 melodischen Lust und Fleiss anregenden Musikstücken zu zwei und vier Händen und vielen schnellfördernden technischen Uebungen (Leipzig: Steingräber, 1879), 73-74.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of four staves. The top two staves are a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff contains a series of chords with accents (v) and a 'cresc.' marking. The second staff contains a melodic line with slurs and accents. The third staff is a single treble clef staff with a melodic line. The bottom two staves are a grand staff with a key signature of one flat. The first staff has a 'mf' marking and a 'cresc.' marking. The second staff has a 'cresc.' marking. The score illustrates dynamic manipulation through a constantly quickening tempo.

In the example above, Rakhmaninov places accents of differing strength through a constantly quickening tempo, thereby enhancing development through the continual manipulation of dynamics. Of most interest, however, is the *Più mosso* from. 172 and its corresponding recurrences in the movement, in which Rakhmaninov actually slows the tempo considerably. It would seem as though the four chords preceding the “skips” constitute some kind of stabilization of tonicity and settling of the sounding surface before he launches into the new thematic idea. Rakhmaninov creates a dynamic wave within each phrase, with a variously increasing and abating *accelerando* which eventually returns to the initial tempo of the theme.

EX. 17: *mov. III: mm. 163-181, Più mosso=ritardando*



The *scherzando* beginning at m. 221 not only adds formal ambiguity to the movement, but is a testament to the fact that Rakhmaninov could play with incredible lightness of touch and articulation, and maintain extraordinary accuracy all at such high speeds. The buoyancy he is able to generate here also demonstrates a very natural and rapid reflex action.²²⁵ He concludes this episode with the addition of an E^b chord in the left hand to match that written in the right hand, and then sculpts the descending line of the left hand from mm. 240-246.

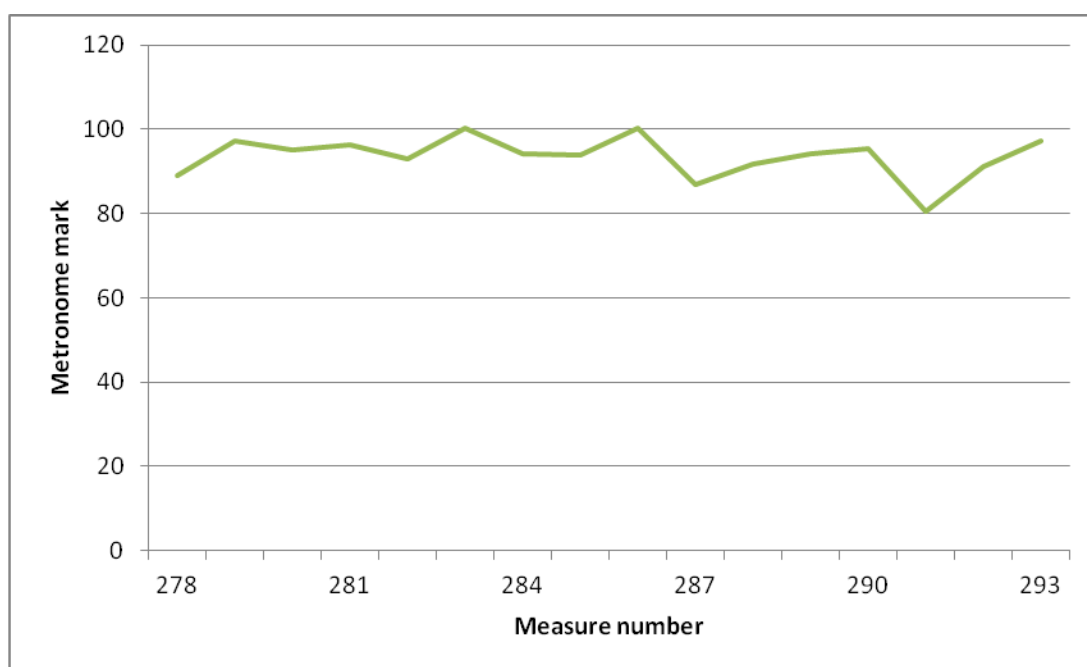
Rakhmaninov shows a heightened awareness of the importance of dialogue with the orchestra. This can be observed in his retreat to an accompanimental role from m. 257,

²²⁵ Robert Philip makes similar comments when he states that Rakhmaninov's pianism "has great verve and brilliance, but without the massive weight of many later pianists. His tempi are often very fast, and the rhythms light and snappy" which is combined with an "energy, lightness and detailed flexibility." See Philip (2004), *op. cit.*, 173, and also *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 200.

before resuming prominence one measure prior to the *Lento* section which is rendered again in a speech-like manner with a distinct singing melodic line.

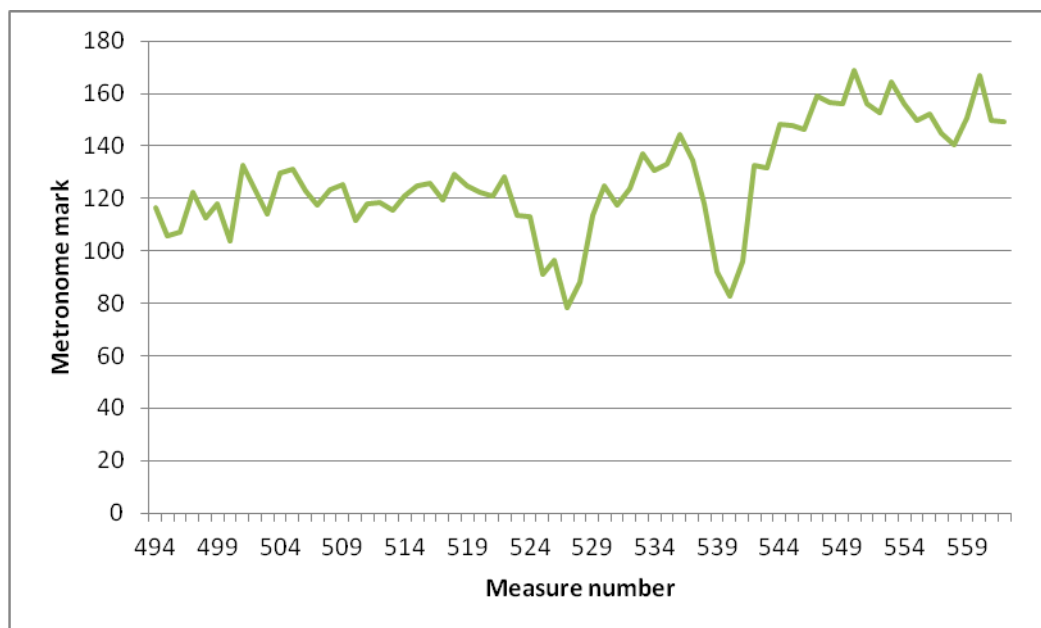
Rakhmaninov regains the momentum and intensity with a very rhythmic *a tempo come prima* from mm. 278-298. The graph below underscores the reversion to an almost metronomic pulse.

EX. 18: *mov. III: mm. 278-293, stable pulse*



The *Più vivo* episode, excised in the exposition of the movement, is now played in the key of *F* with a total focus on the melodic line. Rakhmaninov even plays through the written ties in mm. 425-427 in an effort to sustain the melodic focus. In the last wave of drama, the *Vivacissimo* section, Rakhmaninov's performance is rhythmically even and energetic with no sign of the now customary *ritardando* as each phrase reaches its apex. See the graph below.

EX. 19: *mov. III: mm. 494-, no slowing*



Again, there is total absence of sentiment in these final passages. Rakhmaninov's Modernist tendencies come to the fore yet again to ensure the projection of clear proportions.

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing investigation of Rakhmaninov's recording of his third piano concerto, together with the detailed study of criticism, reception, and aesthetic considerations, one can enumerate some general tendencies regarding his performance art. Certainly one of his gifts as an interpreter, and a principle which he enshrined, was to expose the structure of a particular work. In uncovering the structure of a particular

work, Rakhmaninov stressed the importance of finding and revealing the one point of culmination.²²⁶

He explained that each piece he plays is shaped around its culminating point: the whole mass of sounds must be so measured, the depth and power of each sound must be given with such purity and gradation, that this peak point is achieved with an appearance of the greatest naturalness, though actually its accomplishment is the highest art...The composition itself determines this culmination; the point may come at its end or in the middle; it may be loud or soft, yet the musician must always be able to approach it with sure calculation, for if it slips by, the whole structure crumbles, the work becomes soft and fuzzy, and cannot convey to the listener what must be conveyed.²²⁷

²²⁶ A point of culmination for Rakhmaninov is not merely what one might construe as a climax. Points of culmination by his definition could indeed be soft and tranquil moments, whereas a typical climax is an animated and loud event involving a synchronized amplification of dynamics, melody, texture, rhythm, and harmonic tension. This is what Kofi Agawu terms a “highpoint.” Agawu observes that “the phenomenon of climax is central to our musical experience,” but that existing music-theoretic methodologies have a propensity to minimize their importance. See Agawu, “Highpoints in Schumann’s ‘Dichterliebe’,” *Music Analysis* 3 (1984), 159-160.

²²⁷ Bertensson and Leyda, *op. cit.*, 195. In discussing the same point of culmination, Glebov makes the following observation:

[One time during an encore when the hall was filled with a storm of frantic elation and it was difficult to make it through the crowd, we managed to get to his dressing room and saw in Rakhmaninov’s face, that he himself was in a terrible state—he was angry, yellow, and biting his lip. No sooner had we opened our mouths to congratulate him than he began to complain that he perhaps is going mad, that he is getting older, that he is ready to be taken down <like an old house>, that one should write his obituary, that there used to be a musician who now does not exist, and that he cannot forgive himself etc. “Didn’t you notice that I missed an accent? It fell away!” Then he told me that for him every performed piece is built up to a culminating point. And the mass of sounds needs to be measured in order to give the depth and power of sound in such a pure and gradual way as to achieve a high point, that must be attained with a great naturalness, although it is amazing artistry to make that point sound and sparkle so as if a finish line dropped at the horserace or a piece of glass splintered, in short, as the liberation from the last material obstacle, the last barrier between truth and its depiction. This *culmination*, dependent on the piece itself, could be at the beginning or end, loud or soft, but the performer needed to approach it with absolute calculation and absolute precision, because if he did not, then the construction would scatter, leaving it mellow and patchy and failing to bring to the listener what is needed. Rakhmaninov added: “This is not only my thing. Chaliapin got upset in the same way. Once at his concert the public was raving whereas he was tearing his hair out behind the curtain because the accent fell away.]

“Один раз во время антракта, когда в зале стояла буря неистового восторга и трудно было пробраться через толпу, войдя к нему в артистическую, мы увидели по лицу Рахманинова, что сам он в ужасном состоянии: закусил губу, зол, желт. Не успели мы раскрыть рот, чтобы его поздравить, как он начал жаловаться: наверное, он выжил из ума, стареет, его нужно на слом, надо готовить ему некролог, что вот был музыкант и весь вышел, он простить себе не может и т. д.: «Разве вы не заметили, что я точку упустил? Точка у меня сползла, понимаете!» Потом он мне рассказал, что для него

As a rule, the culmination was prepared with an intense dynamic growth in which smaller, localized climaxes could also be highlighted through intensive *rubato* and declamational clarity.²²⁸ In the apotheistic culminations, typically found in finales of large-scale works, Rakhmaninov broadens the rhythm of the respective theme as he does in his interpretation of Op. 30.²²⁹ Rakhmaninov was able to sustain the required tension through such elongation of phrases by the clarity and elegance with which he delineated them.²³⁰ As Philip Hale remarked, this was not an inclination towards pedagogical performance, but merely the illustration of another gift for which he had no peer.²³¹

каждая исполняемая вещь — это построение с кульминационной точкой. И надо так размерять всю массу звуков, давать глубину и силу звука в такой чистоте и постепенности, чтобы эта вершинная точка, в обладание которой музыкант должен войти как бы с величайшей естественностью, хотя на самом деле она величайшее искусство, чтобы эта точка зазвучала, засверкала так, как если бы упала лента на финише скачек, или лопнуло стекло от удара, словом, как освобождение от последнего материального препятствия, последнего средостения между истиной и ее выражением. Эта *кульминация*, в зависимости от самой вещи, может быть и в конце ее, и в середине, может быть громкой или тихой, но исполнитель должен уметь подойти к ней с абсолютным расчетом, абсолютной точностью, потому что если она сползет, то рассыплется все построение, вещь делается рыхлой и клочковатой и донесет до слушателя не то, что должна донести. Рахманинов прибавил: «Это не только у меня, это Шаляпин тоже так переживает. Один раз на его концерте публика бесновалась от восторга, а он за кулисами волосы на себе рвал, потому что точка сползла.»

See Glebov (1945), *op. cit.*, 14-16.

²²⁸ See the work of Natal'ia Andreeva, "O formoobrauiushchei roli kul'minatsii v muzikal'nom proizvedenii, na primere fortepiannykh proizvedenii S.V. Rakhmaninova," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Moskovskaia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia, 1984), who discusses the connection between the intensification of drama and a point of culmination and thereafter proffers a hierarchy of organizational principles.

²²⁹ Anatolii Alekseev, *S.V. Rakhmaninov: Zhizn' i tvorcheskaia deyatel'nost'* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1954), 123.

²³⁰ Harold Schoenberg, *The Great Pianists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 390.

²³¹ Philip Hale, *Boston Herald* (8 December, 1921).

This concept of phrase was, in some part, behind the unusual hallmark for one from his performing tradition of consistency in artistic and interpretative conception. In fact, Rakhmaninov's concept of a piece apparently never altered greatly, even if one were able to hear differences effecting articulation, phrasing, chord voicing, or tempo on a surface level. The striving for an ideal interpretative concept which exhibited an architectural logic and which he could preserve and reproduce with consistency also lay at the foundation of his exacting practice regime.²³² In preparation for performance, Rakhmaninov would rehearse repeatedly "making a thousand experiments" in an effort to "control the musical effects."²³³ This approach to interpretation was completely antithetical to that of his icon, Anton Rubinstein, and can be heard in any work he recorded two or more times.²³⁴ This notwithstanding, the manner in which Rakhmaninov presented a work to the public, characterised as it was by a wide artistic freedom, rendered the performance an air of spontaneity. He possessed a unique ability to make a work seem fresh, and present a convincing logic that was previously unconsidered.²³⁵ The element of freshness was generated from two facets of Rakhmaninov's musicianship, these being his penchant for quick tempi and his desire to

²³² As Schonberg recounted: "the playing was at all times elegant. But it had inevitability rather than spontaneity. Rachmaninoff never gave the impression that he was doing something on the spur of the moment. His interpretations sounded as though they had been worked out in collaboration with God – the final statement of a work, to be played eternally this way and no other." See Schonberg, "Did Rachmaninoff Collaborate with God?," New York Times (1 April, 1973): 167.

²³³ Florence Leonard, "Sergei Rachmaninoff: Interpretation depends on talent and personality," Etude 50 (April, 1932): 239-40.

²³⁴ Catherine Bowen, Free Artist - The Story of Anton and Nicholas Rubinstein (New York: Random House, 1939), 290.

²³⁵ William Henderson, New York Sun (16 February, 1930); Neville Cardus, Manchester Guardian (25 November, 1929).

reflect the elusiveness of his compositional syntax through performance.²³⁶ As such, it was said that his originality was “recreative rather than just interpretative.”²³⁷ Medtner wrote:

[...the value and strength of Rakhmaninov lies in his imagination, or his ability to put his soul into musical expression in an original manner. His performance is always creative, always “like the composer” and always as though it were being played “for the first time.” He always, like a true Baian, seems like he is improvising, performing a hitherto unheard piece.]²³⁸

The intrinsic relationship between composer and performer has perhaps received little attention in the case of Rakhmaninov. In his case, the link between composer and performer was all-pervasive. For example, the rhythmic buoyancy of his music was directly translated into the same characteristic of his playing, and the elongated and sweeping phrases were related to his outstanding *legato* technique. Further, the constant striving towards dynamic development caused the composer to create longer phrases. In his chordal playing, Rakhmaninov further reinforces the connection between an orchestral compositional technique and his capacity to orchestrate on the piano.²³⁹ This was not merely an ability to sound orchestral, but a singular talent to differentiate voices

²³⁶ Harrison, *op. cit.*, 268.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 285. Rakhmaninov shocked his peers, especially Medtner, with his unique ability to express through his fingers something that would appear to be played for the first time. See Nikolai Medtner, “S.V. Rakhmaninov,” in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed., Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Gos. muzykal'noe izd-vo, 1961), I: 318 & 320.

²³⁸ Nikolai Medtner, “S.V. Rakhmaninov,” in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed., Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), II: 358.

²³⁹ Harrison contends that this ability to orchestrate at the piano resembled the balanced voices of a choir which is an indicator of Rakhmaninov’s Russian pianism. See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 226. This definition of Russianness seems a little dubious at best, especially in view of the first chapter of this dissertation, and also, more significantly, in respect of what constitutes Russianness. See Richard Taruskin, “Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 3.4 (Autumn, 1984): 323.

in a chord and bring out one or several lines simultaneously within a dense polyphonic texture.²⁴⁰

Justification for his interpretative concepts together with the rapport he enjoyed with audiences was also based on the fact that he was a composer-pianist. Rakhmaninov believed that his composer-pianist identity afforded him a special affinity with the work of other composers and provided him with a unique insight into a composer's imagination. With this as a basis, Rakhmaninov maintained that he possessed a mandate judiciously to add colour to his interpretations, which might include some modification to the notated score.

Rakhmaninov incorporated a wide spectrum of sounds in his performances, including a vocal quality to his playing which directly linked him to the pianist he most admired, Anton Rubinstein,²⁴¹ together with a sobering lyricism and nuanced soft sound of enormous sweep and intensity.²⁴² Rakhmaninov's sound was said to be a golden sound which always was inclined to sing. As a discerning critic from Kansas observed:

Rachmaninoff was indeed the supreme pianist. He drew the most ravishing tone from his instrument that can be imagined. He sang upon the piano; his legato was perfection itself; there was an entire lack of mannerism to detract from his interpretations; he was there to play and he played – he was the perfect musician.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Citkowitz outlined other characteristics common to both his compositions and pianism such as “unexampled control, absolute economy, completeness of range, characteristic incisiveness, lapidary sense of phrase and line.” Israel Citkowitz, “Orpheus with His Lute,” *Tempo* 22 (Winter 1951-52): 9.

²⁴¹ See the comments of Medtner and Nelidova-Fiveiskaia in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 225-226 and 357-358.

²⁴² Iurii Keldysh, “Tvorcheskii put' velikogo muzykanta,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 4 (1973): 77.

It was through his unique sound that he was able to direct a melodic line, sculpt a phrase, emphasise the more significant structural moments, and skilfully extend the climax.²⁴⁴

Rakhmaninov used *rubato*, especially rhythmic compression or the quickening of tempo, to support his concept of phrase. His unique *rubato* concept evidently combined an extremely supple *accelerando* with *crescendo* in the development of the entire phrase. Asaf'ev has already noted Rakhmaninov's flexibility and spontaneity of rhythm.²⁴⁵ It was Medtner who said that [not everyone understood and valued Rakhmaninov's *rubato* and *espressivo*, but it was always in balance with the foundational rhythm and tempo and in contact with the primary *idea* of the piece. His rhythm and sound were always part of his musical spirit -- like the beating of a live pulse.]²⁴⁶ Another distinguishing feature of Rakhmaninov's *tempo rubato* was the

²⁴³ C.S.M., "The Rachmaninoff Recital," Topeka Daily State Journal (25 January, 1925). Further, the task of concert giving and the earnestness with which Rakhmaninov fulfilled his engagements, never compromising his exacting standards even for the most insignificant venue or public, was also modelled on Rubinstein. See James Cooke, Great Pianists on Piano Playing (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 216-17.

²⁴⁴ In Asaf'ev's description, Rakhmaninov was capable of expressing the gamut of human emotion in performance from the soft and lyrical, to contemplative statements, to waves of anger, indignation, unbridled enthusiasm, and joy. Boris Asaf'ev, "Rakhmaninov," Sovetskaia muzyka 6 (1973): 3.

²⁴⁵ Asaf'ev also added that [the rhythm that is at the foundation of the music was passed to its performer as the circulation of the music, its pulse, for Rakhmaninov's music does not exist only architectonically, and it stops being seemingly loose only in an entirely organized performance.] "...Ритм, коренясь в музыке, передавался исполнителю, как ее кровообращение, пульсация, ибо рахманиновская музыка никак не существует только архитектурно: только в насквозь организованном исполнении она перестает быть кажущейся рыхлой." Asaf'ev, *op. cit.*, 362.

²⁴⁶ "He все поняли и оценили рахманиновское *rubato* и *espressivo*, а между тем оно всегда находится в равновесии с основным ритмом и темпом, в контакте с основным *смыслом* исполняемого. Его ритм так же, как и звук, всегда включен в его музыкальную душу — это как бы биение его живого пульса." See Nikolai Medtner, "S.V. Rakhmaninov," in Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), II: 360. In his performance of the *Polka de*

improvisational quality and freedom of rhythm even within a quick pulse. The limitations of notation are readily apparent in listening to such rhythmic flexibility. It would seem that Rakhmaninov's practices in this regard were very reminiscent of the *rubato* style of Chopin when a reviewer stated that "it was not possible to notate adequately 'this swaying, languid, groping style, this style which no known arrangement of note values can well express'."²⁴⁷ While Aleksandr Khessin uncovered a steel rhythm commanding the whole piece,²⁴⁸ there was an apparently idiosyncratic delivery of rhythmic nuance which grew imperceptibly out of a foundational tempo and abated at the required moment. The bold and, at the same time, organized *ritardandi* is yet another of the unique mannerisms of Rakhmaninov's playing. An instance of this occurs in the *Moderato* section of the first movement of Op. 30 wherein an imperceptible deceleration is used to prepare the shift from E^b -major to d -minor.²⁴⁹

Rakhmaninov also had a somewhat unusual means of acquiring an artistic concept of a work. He advocated that students listen to the recordings of distinguished artists, in

V.R., Rakhmaninov's *rubato* differs in its subtlety and detail. The energy of this *rubato* is especially strengthened by the capricious delays during relatively short intervals of time. In his performance of Prelude Op. 23/10, there is also a very flexible rhythmic relationship within each phrase where Rakhmaninov executes a micro-quickening and slowing therein highlighting the unique harmonic implications of each new melodic utterance.

²⁴⁷ Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: A History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 190.

²⁴⁸ Aleksandr Khessin, "Stranitsy iz memuarov," in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed., Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), I: 430. Further, Grigorii Kogan also stated that Rakhmaninov's rhythm possesses an unwavering uniformity, accented in some episodes, while in others he strives towards flexibility and freedom. See Grigorii Kogan, "Rakhmaninov i Skriabin," in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed., Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), I: 435.

²⁴⁹ Rakhmaninov's performance of the introductory four lines of his *Polka de V.R.*, also exemplifies the impression of a "rhythmic spring" when the tempo (measured in quarter notes) moves from 192 to 44. This sort of freeing of the rhythmic pulse is characteristic of the lyrical character of Rakhmaninov's performance.

order to gain a feeling and concept of a work in its entirety. This method was imperative in Rakhmaninov's view because, in the absence of such a process, the diligent but amateur student may uncover all the features of the composition, but it may still sound unpolished and segmented. This was totally opposed to the methods of the tradition in which he was schooled. Further, of greatest significance in Rakhmaninov's opinion was the need for the performer to comprehend the composer's design and communicate it in the performance.²⁵⁰ Once this design was comprehended or the interpretation had been constructed, he believed that it should remain fixed. Thus, a work should ideally be rendered in exactly the same manner on each successive performance. Such an idea would be anathema to Rubinstein and other representatives of the Russian Piano School whose very concept of artistic conception of a work hinges on spontaneity and improvisation.

Whether or not one views Rakhmaninov as anticipating a new (or reintroducing an archaic) performance style, in investigating the recorded legacy, one can generally hear an artistic persona that was indeed quite naturally disposed to excessive Romantic liberties and expression. Yet he has managed to keep such immoderation in check with a restraint that was formed through a combination of the influence of his teaching and his persuasion by a certain attitude or mode of thought. Thus, and for example, alterations to scores (addition of notes, octave doublings, ostentatious displays of virtuosity) are generally not features of his playing even if these were commonplace in

²⁵⁰ Sergei Rachmaninoff, "Essentials of Artistic Playing," in Great Pianists on Piano Playing ed. James Cooke (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Company, 1913), 208.

performances of early twentieth century pianists.²⁵¹ This is despite the fact that expressivity, a modest sensuousness, unostentatious virtuosity, and an almost complete sense of physical detachment betray his Romantic footprint. This notwithstanding, he apparently performed with a heightened degree of elegance and poise, together with precision and simplicity. In this sense, Rakhmaninov must be able legitimately to be considered a Classicist. Yet what of the heightened clarity, clinical control, and more brash and ascetic elements of his style which point to Modernist performance practices?²⁵² These are contentious and much disputed questions and characterisations,²⁵³ even though his playing style is evidently unique and must be considered apart from performers of his generation. What I have attempted to demonstrate is that Rakhmaninov was uniquely gifted, and magnanimous and charismatic enough, as a pianist to embrace and exhibit features of three distinct performance-related aesthetics and styles. This should highlight possibilities for a re-evaluation of performance practices employed today with respect to his music. For there can be little doubt that in interpreting his own works, Rakhmaninov's recorded legacy evinces an interpretative concept which is completely different to modern performances of his music. In light of the preceding discussion, whether or not "a composer-pianist of the stature of Rakhmaninov necessarily present[s] the most faithful and authoritative interpretations of his own music,"²⁵⁴ may be considered a moot point, but where Harrison has stated "his interpretations should not be copied nor should they

²⁵¹ Martyn, *op. cit.*, 168.

²⁵² Philip (2004), *op. cit.*, 132.

²⁵³ See the views of Harrison, Norris, Nikitin, Karpinskii et al.

²⁵⁴ Harrison, *op. cit.*, 342.

be ignored,” I would assert that Rakhmaninov’s interpretations cannot be copied nor can they be ignored.

CHAPTER 4

Prokofiev as Pianist: Listening to his recording of Op. 26 as evidence of a new performance style

SITUATING OP. 26

Prokofiev's piano concerti show the composer apparently rejoicing in his own prodigious keyboard technique and writing with a consummate comprehension of the possibilities of the instrument.¹ The concerti explore new frontiers in writing integrated works for piano and orchestra where the soloist is incorporated into the musical fabric as opposed merely to functioning as works for a soloist with orchestral accompaniment. On this point, Prokofiev detailed some of his thoughts on concerto writing in his diary which underscore his novel conception of the genre. He states:

When you are writing a concerto, if you conceive of it as a combination of piano and orchestra, the pianistic side of the solo part will always suffer. This has happened in about half the passages in my Concerto No. 1, where the piano-orchestra combination is effective but not particularly interesting for the pianist to play. When composing the Second Concerto I paid a great deal of attention to the challenges of the solo part, but even so there are times when the composer-musician in me prevails over the composer-pianist, and I have not been able to avoid dull or, so to say routine, passages for the soloist.²

¹ Alan Frank, "Serge Prokofiev," in *The Concerto* ed. Ralph Hill (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 380.

² Anthony Phillips (trans.), *Sergey Prokofiev Diaries: 1907-1914 Prodigious Youth* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 280.

The *Third Piano Concerto* remained in a process of gestation from 1911 until its premiere in Chicago in 1921. Throughout this period, the work assumed several generic guises before the composer was able to sew together all the various thematic fragments and motifs into one organic whole.³ Indeed, it is undeniable that a degree of motivic unity (evinced in example 1) is responsible for this work's ability to coalesce and its structural coherence.⁴

EX. 1: *Themes of Op. 26*

I: mm. 1-7

³ The beginnings of Op. 26 can be traced to 1911 when Prokofiev scribbled down the parallel triads in the recapitulation of the first movement. In 1913, the theme of the second movement was born, whilst the two central ideas that open the first movement together with two variations on the second movement theme date from 1916-17. The two opening themes of the third movement are derived from an unfinished “white quartet” of 1918 and also used in *The Fiery Angel*, and the secondary theme together with the third theme of the finale were the last to be conceived. The themes were thus composed in abstract and used, in different guises, by Prokofiev in a collection of works, of which the Concerto Op. 26 was just one. Hence, the stitching process began much later than the actual thematic genesis. See John Harris, *A History of Music for Harpsichord or Piano and Orchestra* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 192, and Robert Layton, *A Guide to the Concerto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 206-7.

⁴ John Culshaw, *The Concerto* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), 57. See also Manuel Gervink, “Klassizistische Tendenzen im Klavierwerk Prokofjews,” in *Bericht über das Internationale Symposium ‚Sergej Prokofjew – Aspekte seines Werkes und der Biographie‘* (Köln: Gustav Bosse Verlag Regensburg, 1991).

I: mm. 15-18

Piano

15 Allegro

f *aⁱ* *p*

eⁱ *b* *a*

Piano

17 *mf*

b *a*

I: mm. 68-72

Ob.

68 *mp*

dⁱ *d*

II: mm. 73-

73

bⁱ *b*

II: mm. 77-

Violin

77 Allegro giusto

b *cⁱ* *c*

III: mm. 1-4

Bsn.
Vc.
Cb.

1 *a* *bⁱ* *aⁱ*

III: mm. 147-154

Ob.
Cl.

147 *meno mosso*

p *expressivo*

dⁱ *a* *dⁱ* *dⁱ*

III: mm. 170-173

The image shows a musical score for Piano, measures 170-173. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. Measure 170 begins with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4 and B4. Measure 171 contains a half note C5, a quarter note D5, and a quarter note E5. Measure 172 features a triplet of eighth notes: F5, G5, and A5. Measure 173 consists of a half note B5 and a quarter note C6. A dynamic marking 'd' (forte) is placed below the staff, spanning from the beginning of measure 172 to the end of measure 173.

The work was written during a time in which Prokofiev made considerable progress in establishing and giving voice to his own compositional style and language, and it is contemporary with several authoritative compositional statements including the *Five Poems (Balmont) for voice and piano, Op. 36*, *The Love for Three Oranges, Op. 33*, and *The Fiery Angel, Op. 37*. Begun in Moscow, completed in Brittany, premiered in Chicago, and soon thereafter performed by the composer in New York, Paris and London, the *Third Piano Concerto* quickly attracted international attention that superseded its transcontinental compositional process and debut, and also became something of a meal-ticket for Prokofiev.⁵

HARMONIC AND FORMAL FEATURES

Contributing to the popularity and accessibility of the *Third Piano Concerto* are its unique harmonic and formal characteristics. It is this uniqueness, or what Rifkin has referred to as its “eclectic mix of traditional and 20th-century sounds,”⁶ that makes Prokofiev’s music in general rather awkward for the analyst. The individuality of

⁵ Dorothea Redepenning, “Sergey Prokofiev,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 17 December, 2004), <http://www.grovemusic.com>. Following its first performance, the third piano concerto assumed pride of place in Prokofiev’s concert repertoire. During the ten seasons from 1921/1922 to 1930/1931, he played the work at least fifty times, while, for example, the first piano concerto received a mere six performances. Prokofiev promoted his Op. 26 right through the final years of his performative work. See Tamara Evseeva, *Tvorchestvo S.S. Prokof'eva-pianista* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1991), 23.

⁶ Deborah Rifkin, “A Theory of Motives for Prokofiev’s Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 26.2 (2004): 265.

Prokofiev's harmonic vocabulary stems from a fusion of old and new functions and tonal principles. To this end, the scope of his innovation should be viewed more as an enrichment of harmony via new possibilities than a rejection of old conventions.⁷ Iurii Kholopov has said of the role of harmony in Prokofiev's work, that it:

[is usually connected with a more or less precise expression of tonally-functional and linearly-melodic meaning of the chords both in their full and individual parts. The necessarily present picturesque side of the chord, with all its development in Prokofiev's harmony, is usually subordinate to the tonal-functional qualities and does not become dominant. Chords that appear this way can be defined as decorative-picturesque soundings.]⁸

In an effort to substantiate this position, Kholopov provides the following example:

EX. 2: 1st movement: mm. 237-238

⁷ Iurii Kholopov, "Novaia Garmonia: Stravinskii, Prokof'ev, Shostakovich," in Mark Aranovskii (ed.), *Russkaia muzyka i XX vek: russkoe muzykal'noe iskusstvo v istorii khudozhestvennoi kul'tury XX veka* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvovedeniia Ministerstva kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1997), 443.

⁸ "обычно связана с более или менее четким выявлением тонально-функционального и линейно-мелодического значения и аккорда в целом и отдельных его частей — звуков. Неизменно присутствующая в аккорде красочная сторона при всей ее развитости в прокофьевской гармонии обычно подчинена тонально-функциональной и не становится преобладающей. Возникающий таким путем род аккордики можно обозначить как декоративно-красочные звучания." Iurii Kholopov, *Sovremennye cherty harmonii Prokof'eva* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967), 172-174.

Kholopov's contention of "tonally-functional and linearly-melodic meaning of the chords" in the example above is best understood by comparing it with the original presentation of this theme from m. 68. Here, as in the example above, the harmonic implications of the melody (top voice) are indeed clear, with the decorative aspect playing a secondary role.

Similarly, Kholopov regards the motoric sixteenth-note introductory passage:

EX. 3: 1st movement: mm. 11-15

The musical score for EX. 3: 1st movement: mm. 11-15 is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 11-12) is marked *Allegro* and *p*. It features a V-le (Violin I) part in the treble clef and a V-ni II (Violin II) part in the treble clef. The V-ni II part has a *cresc.* marking. The second system (mm. 13-15) features a V-ni I (Violin I) part in the treble clef and a V-ni II part in the bass clef. The V-ni I part has a *fp* marking and a sixteenth-note run with a slur and a '6' below it. The V-ni II part has an *8va-7* marking above it. The score ends with a double bar line.

as a presentation of thematic material reminiscent of Scarlatti or Beethoven by virtue of its confirmation of C-major tonality and the fact that this material is represented later in

the work.⁹ Kholopov also states that Prokofiev's imprint is felt in the modern, albeit neo-classical sound of this passage.

Prokofiev employs a large number of new chordal structures along with those considered traditional in Op. 26. This combination of sonorities forms a dissonant foundation that is further enriched by the expressiveness of the harmony. The composer did not miss a chance to display the expressiveness of different sonorities for an emotional effect. An example of this is the arpeggios in intervals of seconds (mm. 137, 138, 143, 145) in the spirited *brioso* conclusion. Yet another example which Kholopov also points to is an intervallic series (*c-e-f#-b*) played 'hemitonically' which can be seen in the refined *Andante meditativo* fourth variation of the second movement of the Concerto.¹⁰

⁹ Kholopov (1967), *op. cit.*, 227. Both Asaf'ev (322) and Evseeva (73) affirm the centrality of the C-major tonal centre. Evseev also writes of Prokofiev's performative logic in presenting the function of C-major as a central topic in the work. The C-major tonal centre is felt particularly in the first and last movements. Prokofiev strongly emphasises the quick passages that begin and end with the note *c* before the coda of the first movement. In the coda of the finale, Prokofiev again places stress on the tonic points which cuts through the orchestration and colours the sound. Prokofiev uses the C-major sonority as a buffer to reveal various tonal shifts throughout the concerto. This is especially apparent in the main and secondary parts of the exposition in the first movement, where he performs a decisive transition from the primary tonality to *a*-minor.

¹⁰ Kholopov (1997), *op. cit.*, 448.

EX. 4: 2nd movement: fourth variation

Andante Meditativo

The score consists of two systems. The first system is for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The tempo is *Andante Meditativo*. The music starts in 4/4 time, then changes to 2/4, and returns to 4/4. Dynamics include *mp* in the treble and *pp* in the bass. A *pp* *delicatissimo* passage is marked with a *ten.* (tenuto) in the treble. The second system is for strings, with a treble and bass clef. The tempo is *Andante Meditativo*. The music starts in 4/4 time, then changes to 2/4, and returns to 4/4. Dynamics include *ppp* for the strings and *p* for the Cor. (Cor Anglais).

Prokofiev also highlights characteristic harmonic shifts with agogics. This can be heard in the passage below which begins with a *Caesura* and light *tenuto* in b^b -minor and changes into luminous a -minor with an accent on the first beat of that harmony:

EX. 5: 1st movement: mm. 159-160

The score consists of two systems for piano. The first system shows measures 159 and 160. The tempo is *Andante Meditativo*. The music starts in 4/4 time, then changes to 2/4, and returns to 4/4. Dynamics include *pp* and *p*. A *ten.* (tenuto) is marked over the first measure. A *8va* (octave) marking is present over the second measure. The second system shows measures 161 and 162. The tempo is *Andante Meditativo*. The music starts in 4/4 time, then changes to 2/4, and returns to 4/4. Dynamics include *pp* and *p*. A *ten.* (tenuto) is marked over the first measure. A *8va* (octave) marking is present over the second measure.

Formally, the established concerto model found no innovations in the hands of Prokofiev. The composer attempted to attain a level of laconicism in presentation that would underline the architectural expressiveness and logic of the work.¹¹ Thus, a true understanding of Prokofiev's form should proceed from a focus on harmonic principles including the unique qualities and sonorities of the musical content of the piece. In this respect it can be said that the work's episodic form also draws attention to the dramaturgical aspect of the concerto.

In general, the first movement can be divided into a few short episodes, each of which contains a particular image.¹² For example, the opening theme seen in example 6, represents a Russian folk element which is regularly seen alongside a machine-like idea represented by fast and incessant figurations. The latter concept often swallows the folksong, even if melodic folksong can always be heard piercing the frenetic texture.¹³ The impression of development is achieved due to the use of contrasting divisions and

¹¹ The subordination of formal innovation was confirmed by Prokofiev who wanted this work to be considered classical. See Leonid Gakkel', Fortepiannoe tvorchestvo Prokof'eva (St. Petersburg: Gos. muz. izd-vo, 1965), 78. See also the comments of Neigauz regarding compositional technique in Sergei Prokof'ev: materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniya comp. Semen Shlifshtein (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956), 271-272.

¹² See the discussion of Prokofiev's 'lines' on pages 326-330.

¹³ Izrail' Nest'ev, Zhizn' Sergeya Prokof'eva (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973), 208. Mark Aranovskii has written regarding Prokofiev's folk influences which he locates in Op. 26 (I: 1-7; II: Andantino; III: 147-154). Aranovskii is able to show a possible source for the opening melody of the concerto by comparing it to a chorus scene from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. (See Mark Aranovskii, "Melodicheskie kul'minatsii veka," in Russkaia muzyka i XX vek: russkoe muzykal'noe iskusstvo v istorii khudozhestvennoi kul'tury XX veka (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia Ministerstva kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1997), 539-40). Interestingly, Asaf'ev wholly rejects the notion of folk influence in Op. 26, suggesting instead a *style modern* which pervades this work concealing any hint of folk. See Boris Asaf'ev, "Tretii fortepiannyi kontsert," in Sergei Prokof'ev: Stat'i i materialy (Moscow: Muzyka, 1965), 383.

due to the connections of the topical/gestural changes (*e.g.*, the flights of tempo at the beginning of every new section).

EX. 6: 1st movement: mm. 1-6

Andante

Cl.

p dolce

4

The theme of the variations movement forms the central chapter of the narrative with an entertaining stream of images. The initial theme is written in an elegant style; the strong rhythmic dance character of the “Gavotte” theme is in the spirit of Prokofiev’s earlier Classical excursions (see the early “Gavotte” of Op. 12). In the five variations of the theme that follow, Prokofiev changes the theme beyond recognition, distorting its intonational and intervallic elements to lend it an impressionistic character which eventually loses itself in difficult figurations. With the original theme increasingly difficult to decipher, only repeating cadences at the end of each variation are left to remind the listener and ensure thematic unity in the movement.¹⁴

¹⁴ Gakkel’, *op. cit.*, 80.

There is a preponderance of brief episodic material in the outer movements which forms not only transitory and connecting elements but also allows Prokofiev to indulge his penchant for the chromatic pivots. Let us examine one such passage, which shows Prokofiev using a variety of techniques which aim at a displacement of expectation. The effect of this passage in performance will be discussed later.

EX. 7: *Foreground reduction I: 140-169*

The image displays a foreground reduction of a musical passage from measures 140 to 169. It is organized into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system, labeled 140-143, shows a complex melodic line in the treble staff with various ornaments and a descending sequence of notes (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) in the final measure. The bass staff features a series of chords and a chromatic bass line. Annotations include a $V \begin{smallmatrix} 11 \\ 9 \\ 7 \end{smallmatrix}$ chord symbol, a $(vi) \begin{smallmatrix} 6 \\ 3 \\ 2 \end{smallmatrix}$ chord symbol, and fingerings 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. The second system, labeled 144-147, continues the melodic and harmonic development. It includes a vi chord symbol and a V chord symbol. The notation uses various ornaments and slurs to indicate specific performance techniques.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 23. The first system, labeled '148-152', shows a complex contrapuntal texture with chromatic displacement. The second system, labeled '152-158', continues this texture, featuring a 'wrong note' (a chromatic shift) and a 'wrong note' triad. The third system, labeled '- RECAP.', shows a recapitulation of the material, with a key signature change to G minor and a 'wrong note' triad. The score is in G major and 2/4 time.

Arguably the most curious aspect of the two passages presented above is the fact that Prokofiev would resist his most characteristic tendency of rebuilding functionality through a confirmation of the central role of the tonic by continually obfuscating the tonic. The contrapuntal texture together with the “wrong note”¹⁵ triads and the fact that

¹⁵ See Richard Bass, “Prokofiev’s Technique of Chromatic Displacement,” *Music Analysis* 7.2 (July 1998): 199. The “wrong note” concept has permeated Prokofiev scholarship for over fifty years. (Rifkin provides a chronological list of scholars who use this term. See Rifkin, *op. cit.*, 265. It refers explicitly to the omnipresent middleground chromatic shifts in Prokofiev’s music (for example see Ex. 1/b which moves from a $d^7-e^b-d^7$ tonicizations). The “wrong note”, or in this case, harmony, refers to the interpolated e^b which shifts the axis up a semitone before being lowered to represent the theme. The term encapsulates the incompatibility and peculiarity of such interpolations and chromatic movements with their tonal surroundings. Bass highlights the inconsistency in the use of the term “wrong note” with reference to the works of William Austin, *Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Norton, 1966), 216, and Patricia Ashley, “Prokofiev’s Piano Music: Line, Chord, Key,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1963), 16-17, who offer definitions of startling dissimilarity. In more recent discourse, Minturn has appropriated the term as used by Jonathan Kramer in his book, *Listen to the Music: A Self-Guided Tour Through the Orchestral Repertoire* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 518. (Pieter van den Toorn used the term in the same sense also to trace neoclassicism in the music of Stravinsky. See his *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), xiv.) Most revealing of all, however, is the fact that Prokofiev used the term “bakhizmv s fal’shivizmami” in his derogatory remarks concerning Stravinsky’s neoclassical music. See Sergei Prokof’ev, *Materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia* comp. Semen Shlifshtein (Moscow: Gos. muz. iz-vo, 1961), 171.

there is no unifying background harmonic progression further destabilizes these passages. The fundamental line is also here always impeded by this process.

The theme is harmonized at the foreground level in a variety of keys as can be seen in the graph. In each progressive tonicization, however, the theme liberates itself from its function as a prolongation of the dominant-tonic which it had, albeit implicitly, in the exposition. The triadic parallel movement of the middleground is (particularly at m. 150 and m. 154) to some extent alleviated by the smooth voice-leading of the foreground. The three repetitions of the theme are structurally identical, although all contain varied chromatic displacements as evidenced in the reductions. The episode from m. 144 to m. 168 (inclusive) can indeed be excised without any disturbance either to the form or to the large-scale harmonic movement. This may counteract the claim that Prokofiev's stitching of the various themes and motifs (as outlined above) is seamless. Indeed, the work is not organic, but a sum of parts.

The piano concerti also reveal a balance in their presentation of Prokofiev's four different lines – classical, modern, toccata, and lyrical.¹⁶ Considering the tangible impact these four currents had on his playing, the explication of these has significant import for this study.¹⁷ In his Op. 26, Prokofiev fused these currents homogeneously. The classical line Op. 26 is evident in the attachment to traditional formal paradigms

¹⁶ Douglas Lee, *Masterworks of 20th-century Music: The Modern Repertory of the Symphony Orchestra* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 266. See also Neil Minturn, *The Music of Sergei Prokofiev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 24-25. Minturn also lists the addition of a 'grotesque' line which the composer initially rejected vehemently.

¹⁷ Viktor Del'son, *Fortepiannoe tvorchestvo i pianism Prokof'eva* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973), 264-266.

(sonata-form first movement, theme and variations second-movement, and tripartite-structured finale).¹⁸ The classicism may not be as pervasive as and on a par with the highly stylized textures found in his *Classical Symphony* or 'Arrival of the Guests' scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, but the phrase structure and voice leading (see in particular the minuet-like theme of the second movement) are conventional.

At the other stylistic extreme of the classical current stands a modern line, which "covers harmonic language mainly, [but] also includes new departures in melody, orchestration and drama."¹⁹ The chordal sections of mm. 41-70 in the first movement, where the piano shifts directly from one harmony and voicing to another over an incessant tritone outline in the bass, and thereafter moves in and out of *a* minor tonality via the augmented triad before transitioning into the second subject at m. 69, is evidently modernist.²⁰ The especially dense orchestration which moves over a wide range (mm. 46-50), includes repeated notes in an unusually high register (mm. 42-45), and calls for four horns at m. 59, can also be interpreted as modernist.

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that the forms are scaffolds for a non-traditional process of combining theatrical gestures with larger sections of continuous development.

¹⁹ Minturn, *op. cit.*, 24. A modern line should not pigeonhole or identify Prokofiev as a modern composer. Prokofiev explained that the word "modern" had become an odious expression during his day with its typical connotation being that of a dissonant experimentalist composer who wrote in such a manner for its own sake. Thus, Prokofiev preferred the term "contemporary". See Marion Bauer, "Prokofieff Distinguishes Between Modern and Contemporary," The Musical Leader (3 February, 1930).

²⁰ See Bass, *op. cit.*, 199, who asserts that such direct chromatic movement, which shifts the tonal axis upwards by a semitone, is not new to tonal music. Bass, however, highlights the key difference -- that Prokofiev's chromaticism "derives from the concept of expanded tonality rather than from the concept of tonal dissolution." This idea comes from Malcolm Brown, "Prokofiev's Eighth Piano Sonata," Tempo 70 (Autumn 1964): 9-15. The same point is also made by Iurii Kholopov, Sovremennyye cherty garmonii Prokof'eva (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967), 443.

The repetitive intensity of the toccata line is especially apparent in the opening motor-like *allegro* and its reappearances throughout the first movement. The energy of the toccata, with its dance-like theme in the first movement, heightens the sense of drama. There is a vivid impression of a gradual building of pressure and accumulation of energy, particularly as the first theme enters in the solo part.

EX. 8: 1st movement: mm. 15-16

Toccata-like episodes also occur at the *poco meno mosso* (m. 208-246) in the first movement, mm. 147-178 in the second movement, and the unique scalar passage in seconds in the third movement m. 359 through to the end.

The lyrical line presents itself through the guises of genre, themes, and expression. Prokofiev's lyricism is manifest also in broad melodic lines which have a slow harmonic rhythm and seem intentionally inflected with "wrong notes".²¹ In addition, harmonic structures are saturated by intervals of fourths and fifths. The first themes of the first and third movements typify characteristic lyrical currents, while a new level of lyricism is evident in the poetic fourth variation of the second movement, where one feels the careful attention of Prokofiev as pianist to each sound. In his performance of the first three notes of the theme there is a progressive increase in

²¹ Bass, *op. cit.*, 199.

tension as it rises through the three-octave range. As is frequently the case with lyric motifs in Prokofiev slow movements, the *cantilena* element suppresses the drama and invites the listener to hear the beauty of the wide intervals and the chromaticism of the upper line.²²

EX. 9: 2nd movement: fourth variation

The controversy surrounding the label ‘grotesque’ has negligible import for this paper. One cannot deny, however, that the theme which occurs from mm. 170-73 (see Ex. 1) in the finale is humorous at best or grotesque at worst, particularly in the way in which the semitone motion is boldly presented. Notice the *e-f* repetitive cell in the left hand over which a melody begins on *b*, then suddenly rises a minor seventh before immediately falling a major seventh. The result of the leap upwards and equally sudden major seventh drop (which perhaps contributes to the humorous/grotesque quality of the theme) is a landing on the lower auxiliary to the *b*, that is the *a#*. Prokofiev then

²² Evseeva, *op. cit.*, 76.

stretches the semitone interval firstly from *g-a#* and then from *g#-c* before using the *c* to function as an upper auxiliary to a representation of *b*. In parsing out these lines and examining the construction of the music, the central themes of Prokofiev's enigmatic philosophy provide another important variable that must be considered in the formation of a holistic picture. Certainly, many of the aforementioned theoretical considerations are highlighted in uncovering the allegorical narrative behind the *Third Piano Concerto's* creation.

AESTHETIC THEMES: SCYTHIANISM, MECHANICALISM, SYMBOLISM

In the nineteenth century, two basic approaches formed in the translation of mythology into music: the 'cosmogonic' (Wagner) and the 'ritualistic' (Rimsky-Korsakov).²³ These approaches are perhaps best represented in Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* and Prokofiev's ballet *Alla and Lolly*²⁴ (later called the *Scythian Suite*) where the tendencies are seemingly fused, and ritualistic mythology acquires a 'cosmogonic'

²³ The apprehension of the same problem of *Weltanschauung* appears in Wagner and in Rimsky-Korsakov, although from different angles.

²⁴ The actual name of the ballet *Alla and Lolly*, as chosen by Sergei Gorodetskii (1884-1967), reminds one of the unfulfilled plan of Anton Liadov to compose the mythological-fairytale ballet *Leila and Alalei*. Gorodetskii was acquainted with Liadov's script-writer, Aleksei Remizov, and possibly developed some of these images in his own libretto. Thus, although Prokofiev rejected the 'fairytale' subject in favour of the 'prehistoric,' in the course of working with the librettist, the well-known 'fairytale' direction of the ballet became apparent. Indeed, the composer almost completely entrusted the composition of the scenario to the poet: "if Gorodetskii will send me a good libretto, whose general principles we discussed, I will compose a ballet, and a very intricate one at that," reported Prokofiev to Miaskovskii. (See "Если Городецкий пришлет мне хорошее либретто, общие принципы которого мы обсудили, то я балет напишу, и весьма заковыристый." Nest'ev (1973), *op. cit.*, 105. The paganism of Sergei Gorodetskii and the "Scythianism" of Prokofiev, were essentially spontaneous expressions of emotion. They did not contain the fears of which Stravinsky spoke in describing *Le Sacre du Printemps* (Igor Stravinsky, "Chto ia khotel vyrazit' v 'Vesne sviashchennoi'," *Muzyka* 141 (1913): 490.) For Gorodetskii, as well as for Prokofiev, antiquity was alive in the present. Both artists were united in their love for the whimsical-fantastic perception of fairytale images (Kurchenko, *op. cit.*, 192). In accordance with the special features of fairytale-epic drama, Prokofiev demanded an imaginative drama of Gorodetskii, a dynamic plot, and a maximum of upheavals in the scenes. See Kurchenko, *op. cit.*, 193. The musical language of the *Scythian Suite* reminds one of an epic opera with its numerous textual repetitions characterised by the schematisation of themes.

nature. This notwithstanding, the ‘cosmogony’ of Stravinsky and Prokofiev is very different. While Stravinsky’s idea in *Le Sacre du Printemps* is related from day to night, from life to death, Prokofiev’s cosmogony proceeds from the opposite direction, that is from night to day. In the process, Prokofiev depicts a victory over the forces of evil and raises the image of the Sun.²⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century a mythological worldview, antiquity, and the attempt to penetrate the supernatural world, constituted the possibility of understanding cultural trends of the time and provided an opportunity for artists to return to primitive sources. At the same time, a symptom of innovation emerged through a recoil from the Romantic-aesthetic worldview. The Scythian theme arose amidst such a rebellious mood of the beginning of the twentieth century as a foretaste of revolution.

The preoccupation with the Scyths, “a half-mythic people who were supposed to have once occupied land north of the Black Sea and who were lauded by the ‘mystic’ Symbolists as students of the natural sciences,”²⁶ was conceived within the artistic association ‘The World of Art’ (*Mir iskusstva*).²⁷ It was also a demonstration to

²⁵ Aleksandr Kurchenko, “‘Skifstvo’ v russkoi muzyke XX veka,” in *Iz istorii russkoi i sovetskoi muzyki* Vol. 2 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1976), 193-4. Kurchenko goes further to state that in Prokofiev’s works the role of the entertaining fairytale plot grows, and the symphonic development is divided into a number of local characteristics, culminations, episodes, ‘conflicts.’ It is typically only in the coda of a finale that a general summary is provided which expresses the central thought.

²⁶ Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 258. See also Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 856, and Nice, *op. cit.*, 105.

²⁷ In addition to its reference to an artistic movement, the term also refers to a journal which was founded at the same time by the original members of the movement. See Mikhail Kiselev, “Graphic Design and Russian Art Journals of the Early Twentieth Century,” *The Journal of Decorative and*

Europeans of Russia's culture and attraction to its pagan and 'barbarous' sources.²⁸ Its images organically combined antiquity and the contemporary, epic traditions and principles of modernism, excessive Asian luxury and strict artistic taste.²⁹

Prokofiev noted that [as soon as I got the material I composed. I wanted to challenge myself with something big. I had already heard Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in concert, but did not understand it. It is very likely that I was searching for the same images in my own way.]³⁰ The appearance and first performance of the *Scythian Suite*, developed from the original ballet, evoked quite an ambiguous reaction from the public.³¹ The public was shocked by the intonation, conditionality, anti-psychologism, theatricality, reflected energy, and pressure of the music which they found evidently disturbing. Samuel Feinberg wrote the following concerning this music:

[those features of the young composer's creativity which shocked musical tastes, accustomed to more refined forms of musical expression, the features of a primordial nature, unruliness, the pressure of obstinate metrical forms, a flood of primitive, persistent, rectangular images, everything that can be combined under the concept of Prokofian "Scythianism" - were precisely the

Propaganda Arts 11.2 (Winter, 1989): 50; and Stuart R. Grover, "The World of Art Movement in Russia," Russian Review 32.1 (January, 1973): 28-30.

²⁸ These influences intended to "represent pagan conjugation rituals." See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 258. For a more detailed discussion of 'Scythianism,' see Stephani Hoffman, "Scythianism: A Cultural Vision in Revolutionary Russia," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1975).

²⁹ Kurchenko, *op. cit.*, 181. Many artists, writers and poets turned to Scythian themes including Nikolai Rerikh, Osip Mandel'shtam, Aleksandr Blok, Vatslav Nizhinskii, thereby attempting to uncover and emphasise the Asian roots of Russian culture.

³⁰ "по мере поступления материала, я немедленно писал музыку. Хотелось размахнуться на что-то большое. "Весну священную" Стравинского я уже слышал в концерте, но не понял. Весьма возможно, я искал те же образы по-своему." Sergei Prokofiev (1961), *op. cit.*, 33.

³¹ See *ibid.*, 36, wherein Prokofiev describes vividly the premiere of the *Scythian Suite* under his direction.

qualities of his giftedness as a composer that appealed, earlier than others, to the aesthetical consciousness of many connoisseurs.]³²

For Prokofiev, the *Scythian Suite* became the symbol of his break with academicism and a banner for new music connected with the scandalous and sensational impresario, Sergei Diaghilev. Diaghilev calculated with striking intuition that for the Parisian public, which had a lively interest in fauvism, expressionism, and cubism, the success of the ‘Asian,’ ‘barbaric’ music of Prokofiev would constitute a new sensation. The ‘brutality’ of Prokofiev’s music, together with its familiar dance qualities and its plasticity caused pandemonium.³³ In Prokofiev’s suite, however, there is no spirit of sacrifice, no fatalism, as there was in *Le Sacre du Printemps*. On the contrary, this music is closer in spirit to the fairy-tale images of Rimsky-Korsakov. A parallel is clearly outlined between the finale “Procession of the Sun” in the ballet of Prokofiev and Yarila’s scene in the finale of the opera *The Snow Maiden* by Rimsky-Korsakov.

As Kurchenko writes:

[the worship of pagan gods in Prokofiev’s suite is absolutely devoid of mystical colouring: it expresses the joy of life and sounds like a hymn to nature. In this sense the composer resembles Glinka and Borodin, in whom, as Asafiev notes, was inherent “a purely pagan joy and love of life. The

³² Те черты творчества молодого композитора, которые шокировали музыкальные вкусы, привыкшие к наиболее утонченным формам музыкального выражения, — черты первобытности, буйства, напора упрямых метрических форм, наваждения примитивных, неотступных, прямоугольных образов, все, что можно объединить понятием о прокофьевском “скифстве”, — именно эти качества его композиторского дарования раньше других начали импонировать эстетическому сознанию многих ценителей. Samuel’ Feinberg, *Pianizm kak iskusstvo* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1969), 134.

³³ Kurchenko, *op. cit.*, 187. This would go some way to explaining why initial reactions by French critics to the Paris premier of Op. 26 on 28 April, 1922 (a concert attended by Ravel, Honegger, Poulenc, and other prominent French musicians) were cold. Indeed, certain “left” critics reproached the composer for academism and ignorance of the older Romantic tastes. After the rage of the *Scythian Suite*, critics thought “the themes of the Third Concerto outdated, especially its lyrical themes. In Paris I am persistently accused of cheap imagery, for being outmoded, and being like Rakhmaninov,” Prokofiev wrote to Miaskovskii. See Fransis Pulenk, “Ego fortepiannaia muzyka,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* 4 (1968): 110.

horror of death and a generally Christian dualism with its ‘here and there’ is totally absent from this vibrant earthy music.”³⁴

In reality, Prokofiev’s method of montage together with the principles established in the *Scythian Suite* germinate in other compositions. These are manifested, perhaps, on the one hand, in his gravitation towards theatricality and the concrete definition of images, musical jokes and games³⁵ in the descriptive plan. On the other hand, Prokofiev’s unrestrained movement and toccata related to the tense barbaric elements, and modular structure and thinking which bears testament to a certain mechanicality or constructive building and manipulation of the musical material also displays the same techniques and tenets. This can be seen in the *First Piano Concerto* and the ballet *The Prodigal Son*, but also in the fifth variation of the second movement of Op. 26 and thereafter in the clangorous and brilliant closing passages of the finale.³⁶

³⁴ “Поклонение языческим богам в сюите Прокофьева абсолютно лишено мистической окраски, оно выражает радость бытия и звучит как гимн природе. В этом смысле композитор близок Глинке и Бородину, которым, как отмечал Асафьев, присуща “чисто языческая радость жизни и любовь к ней. Ужас смерти и вообще христианский дуализм с его «здесь и там» абсолютно отсутствует в этой сочной черноземной музыке.” See Boris Asaf’ev, Russkaia muzyka: XIX i nachalo XX veka (St. Petersburg: Muzyka, 1973), and Kurchenko, *op. cit.*, 191.

³⁵ This points to a major difference in the translation of the Scythian idea between Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Prokofiev’s appropriation of Scythianism is replete with humour, even clowning, whereas in Stravinsky everything is dramatised.

³⁶ “The theme of the second movement seems scarcely to fall into the Slavic classification. It sings of such characteristics at times but always with a Far East ring that the reviewer decided must be Tartar. Like the pictures he remembered of Tartar warriors and women, the melody and its dressings, that is – the variations – were barbaric, at times crying out savagely; but they were fascinatingly picturesque. The term “melody” was employed purposely for a melody new, crisp, and followable.” See “Music: Prokofieff’s New Piano Concerto,” Christian Science Monitor (7 February, 1922): 7.

As such, Prokofiev's music during the period c.1905-1920 personified the Scythian trend. Much to the bane of his professors, Prokofiev also flaunted his Scythianism.³⁷ In "The House of Petipa," from the Bolshoi Theatre, Leonid Gakkel writes:

In 1915, the young Prokofiev had written his *Scythian* suite. There was a savage force, savage sound coloring in it, a frenzied desire to live life to the full, come out top, do battle – all that Prokofiev stood for in his early years, when he broke with the dull, uninspired post-impressionist euphony, with the sugary post-romantic aestheticism. A young man could not but be a Scythian, he maintained, as he transposed into sound, reorganized into graphs of notes, the vital energy of non-urban man. Sergei Prokofiev had grown up in the country, a long way from Russia's cultural capitals, on an estate of which his father was manager – there was more to his 'Scythianism' therefore than artistic apprenticeship, sophisticated play or a tribute to a daring, literary fashion. Nor was it what today goes by the name of counter-culture. His superb artistic skill astonished the auditorium or, at any rate, that part of it which had not lost its ability to listen.³⁸

Notwithstanding the preoccupation with primitive, barbarous, and percussive elements, the lyricism of the instrument is not neglected in the third concerto. Perhaps this was intensified by the proximity of the poet and friend, Konstantin Bal'mont (the work's dedicatee), at the time of the third concerto's completion.³⁹ Bal'mont was also treated to

³⁷ See Nice, *op. cit.*, 105, who connects the creation of the new noun 'Scythianism' (or 'skifstvo' in Russian) with the premiere of Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* in 1916, even if Nice also acknowledges that Vladimir Senilov (a student of Rimsky-Korsakov) may have been the first to bring the term into public consciousness with his tone-poem *Skify* of 1912.

³⁸ Leonid Gakkel, "Juliet's Flight," from *Romeo and Juliet* programme notes of The State Academic Bolshoi Theatre of Russia, 12. Gakkel evidently had mixed feelings on Prokofiev's translation of the Scythian aesthetic in performance. In another source, Gakkel writes of a hostile criticism which he believed profoundly over-exaggerated certain peculiarities of Prokofiev's piano style (in particular, his dry tone and his abruptness in forte) which in turn led to the birth of the current opinion about the "Scythianness" of his playing. (See "O pianisticheskome iskusstve Prokof'eva," *Sovetskaja muzyka* 8 (1959): 125.) Evidently there is some truth in both positions given the fact that uncovering Prokofiev's Scythian (or general aesthetic) proclivities in performance is not transparent as in the case of Skryabin. Indeed, with Prokofiev the situation is inscrutable.

³⁹ Davidson makes the point that given their considerable age and ideological differences, it is remarkable that their relationship would remain so close and productive. She believes that Prokofiev was drawn principally to Bal'mont's ability to marry music and sorcery with ancient folklore. See Pamela Davidson, "Magic, Music and Poetry: Prokofiev's Creative Relationship with Bal'mont and the Genesis of *Seven, They Are Seven*," *Three Oranges Journal* 2 (November 2001): 15.

a special pre-premiere performance of the work and composed a kaleidoscopic sonnet in return for the privilege of the preview:

Exultant leaping flame of crimson flower
 A keyboard of words plays with sparkling fires
 That suddenly dart out with flaming tongues.
 A river leaping forth of molten ore.
 The moments dance a waltz, ages gavotte,
 Suddenly a wild bull, ensnared by foes,
 Has burst his chains and stands with threatening horns
 But tender sounds again call from afar
 And children fashion castles from small shells,
 An opal balcony, subtle and fair.
 Then, gushing fierce, a flood dispels it all.
 Prokofiev! Music and youth in bloom,
 In you the orchestra craves bright summer
 And mighty Scythian strikes the sun's great drum.⁴⁰

Bal'mont was the only connection with the Russian Symbolist movement that Prokofiev enjoyed. Bal'mont's poetry also merged well with Prokofiev's music.

In deeming Prokofiev the leading Scythian composer, Bal'mont undoubtedly construed Prokofiev's music in terms of his own comprehension of the connection between contemporary art and antediluvian civilizations. He constantly called attention to the restless, original Scythian attributes of Prokofiev's music in the poems that he dedicated to Prokofiev in 1917 and 1921. Bal'mont succeeded in putting forward Prokofiev as the fulfillment of his artistic standard: the revitalization of contemporary art through a reversion to ancient mysteries and the essence of Russian mythology.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bal'mont entitled this sonnet: *Ликующий пожар багряного цветка*. David Nice, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891-1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 180. Note that the very practice of writing a poem in response to a musical work is a vestige of an old-fashioned, perhaps even archaic aesthetic paradigm from the 19th century. Bal'mont describes Prokofiev from the standpoint of a discredited "Romantic" hermeneutic.

⁴¹ Davidson, *op. cit.*, 17.

The Bal'mont sonnet is saturated with nature metaphors (*fire, bull, flood, river, molten ore*) that are germane to Scythian ideals and also reflect Prokofiev's coming from the countryside. Musically, the first four lines most definitely refer to the exuberance of the first movement – the introduction, the toccata-like rise into the presentation of the first theme. *Molten ore* might refer to the hidden resources of the country or to the individual youth and can be variously translated as a reference to the *andante* middle section, the *poco meno mosso* episode from m. 208, or a macro view of the entire movement.

The ensuing five lines are a response to the second movement's highly stylized form which is reminiscent of an eighteenth-century dance. *Wild bull* and *foes with chains*, could indeed be metaphors for the way in which the cultural capitals tried to bind Prokofiev to their aesthetic. It receives its musical translation in both the second and third variations, with the *tender sounds calling from afar* referring to the *l'istesso tempo* section at m. 179.

I believe that the *flood* and *youth in bloom* are most definitely clichéd. Bal'mont emphasises this point rather overtly: that is, the freshness and vitality (but in the case of the *flood*, also of an overpowering force) of youth remain unsurpassed, and in the music of Prokofiev the quality of youthfulness has found its ideal expression. The yearning for the radiance of the sun is translated by the episodic material beginning at m. 275 in the finale which builds in cycles of climaxes originating respectively at mm. 275, 328, 376, to the final climax beginning from m. 408. Bal'mont's sonnet concludes with an

implication of Prokofiev as the manifestation of the “непобедимый Скиф” or invincible Scythian.

MECHANICALISM

Prokofiev began to show an interest in futurism as far back as the second decade of the twentieth century. He wrote in the journal “Музыка,” [one of the essential aspects of the futuristic perspective is its admiration of contemporary technical progress. Futurists, idolising speed, glorify contemporary machines, which in turn provides us with speed in movement and life. They [the futurists] go even further by poeticizing and claiming that there is the beauty of noises—the distant noise of a moving train, the singing of a propeller, etc.]⁴² Prokofiev’s enthusiasm for constructivism continued into the 1920’s with his ballet, *Le Pas d’Acier*, and the *Symphony No.2*. In this music as in Op. 26, the ever-present ostinato principle is joined together with discordant sonorities to function as a major organisational principle. In addition, a gravitation towards symmetry together with an intense interest in energetic and precise rhythms characterise the musical language of these compositions.⁴³ Dolinskaia writes further concerning the contact with constructive aesthetics in the concerti of Prokofiev mentioned earlier: [in the allegro sections of the concerti, the constructive principle contributed to the

⁴² “Одной из существенных сторон футуристических воззрений является преклонение их перед современным техническим прогрессом. Футуристы, боготворя скорость, воспевают и современные машины. Давшие нам скорость движения и жизни. Идя дальше, они поэтизируют и утверждают, что есть красота шумов; отдаленного шума бегущего поезда, пения пропеллера и пр.” Sergei Prokofiev, “Музыкальные инструменты футуристов,” *Музыка* 219 (1915): 255.

⁴³ Elena Dolinskaia, *Fortepiannyyi kontsert v russkoi muzyke XX stoletia* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2006), 131.

energetic affirmation of life, including the introduction of innovations into the technical arsenal of the concerti.]⁴⁴

Prokofiev's constructivism grew out of the *art modern* movement of the beginning of the twentieth century. Apropos modern art, Tarakanov makes a statement which has broad implications for this study of Prokofiev's pianism:

[yet another trend which pointed to Prokofiev as a modern artist is connected with the paradoxical distortion of the usual, well-established sounds which caress the auditory senses, reaching the openly grotesque; more precisely -- parody, mockery, which constituted the apparent and hidden essence of Prokofiev's scherzo approach. This humourous scherzo approach was infinitely distant from romantic whimsicality; in it, for the first time in world music, appeared the spirit of non-acceptance, open negation of the ideals of sensual art with its domestic comfort and warm sociability - ideals which had been driven into the ghetto of the mass culture of the time and considered by modernists as the manifestation of immortal banality.]⁴⁵

In the case of Prokofiev, perhaps it was on the one hand his protest against Romanticism that awakened in him an aggression and rebelliousness and a desire to embrace Scythianism. On the other hand, the same protest was responsible for his constructivism, toccata line, mechanistic images, and modular structure. We will see

⁴⁴ “В быстрых частях концертов конструктивное начало способствовало энергии жизнеутверждения, в том числе и через привнесение новаций в технический арсенал концертов.” Dolinskaia, *op. cit.*, 132.

⁴⁵ “Еще одно направление, выдававшее в Прокофьеве художника-модерниста, связано с парадоксальным искажением привычного, устоявшегося, ласкающего слух, что доходило до откровенного гротеска, а точнее — пародии, насмешки, составляющей явную или скрытую суть прокофьевской скерцозности. Эта скерцозность бесконечно далека от романтической причудливости, в ней — опять-таки впервые в мировой музыке — проявлен дух неприятия, открытого отрицания идеалов чувственного искусства, с его домашней уютностью, сердечной общительностью, — идеалов, загнанных в гетто тогдашней массовой культуры и воспринимающихся модернистами как проявления бессмертной пошлости.” Mikhail Tarakanov, “Prokof'ev: Mnogoobrazie khudozhestvennogo soznaniia,” in *Russkaia muzyka i XX vek: russkoe muzykal'noe iskusstvo v istorii khudozhestvennoi kul'tury XX veka* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut iskusstvoznaniia Ministerstva kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1997), 189.

evidence that such qualities not only became an intrinsic part of his compositional vocabulary, but also permeated his pianism.⁴⁶

SYMBOLISM

Another prime ingredient in Prokofiev's aesthetic frame was his influence by and sympathy with Symbolism, the beginnings of which have already received discussion in connection with both Skryabin and Rakhmaninov. In Prokofiev's case, it would appear that Symbolist ideas could never resonate with an artist who was evidently so calculated, sarcastic, and antithetical to the contemplative spirit. He was also uninterested in exploring concepts pertaining to the true essence of being which, in Symbolist mode, manifested itself only in images reflecting a multitude of different meanings.

Nevertheless, one can find a certain influence of Symbolist images in the music of Prokofiev. These connections are particularly evident in two operas of Prokofiev, *Madalena* and more especially in *The Fiery Angel*, based on the narrative of Valerii Briusov (1873-1924).⁴⁷ The Third Piano Concerto also freely suggests the influences of Romanticism and Symbolism. Dolinskaia states the following regarding Symbolist currents in the work:

[it gravitates towards two poles: at the one pole, an inebriation with movement, the steely lustre of passages, the energetic nature of rhythm (for example, such are the main part of the first sonata and the basic theme of the rondo-sonata form of the finale, with their characteristically energetic

⁴⁶ This is supported in a statement from a review of a concert in Kraków, Poland. "Grę Prokofjewa cechuje – podobnie jak i muzykę – zupełne opanowanie, graniczące z mechanizacją. Programowa oschłość i ostrość, niezwykła precyzja dźwięku i rytmu oto wyniki tego nastawienia." [Prokofiev's piano playing is characterised – similar to his music – by total control, bordering on the mechanical. This results in a certain programmed dryness and sharpness, and incredible precision of sound and rhythm.] I.B., "Sergjusz Prokofjew," *Nowy Dziennik* (25 October, 1933).

⁴⁷ See Tarakanov, *op. cit.*, 192, for a detailed discussion of the Symbolist language in these works. Briusov was one of the original members of the Russian Symbolist group of poets.

passages and parallel movements); at the other pole, a flood of lyric poetry, with striking variety of nuances and gradations.]⁴⁸

In this sense, it is perhaps unwise to limit Prokofiev's aesthetic influences to the three currents listed above. Indeed, it might be legitimately argued that Prokofiev's lyricism has as its source not only Symbolist poetry, but also a pure and fragile neo-classicism which was evidently revived in the early twentieth century. In connecting Prokofiev's aesthetic proclivities with his pianism, however, a review of a concert from Bordeaux, France, in which Prokofiev performed his Op. 26 provides some important details: [hearing it played by him, the music of the concerto can seem deafening...the Slavic soul: mysticism, wild instincts, convulsions, childishness, naivety, complaints, a crying demand for forgiveness, all at the same time as barbaric anger...].⁴⁹ In order to contextualize and focus the influences and background behind the *Third Piano Concerto* more fully and to begin further discussion of the composer's recording of the same work, it is imperative to examine Prokofiev's pianistic formation. Outlining this background can only illuminate and assist our discussion, and focus it on how Prokofiev the composer affected Prokofiev the performer who affects the listener in turn.

⁴⁸ тяготеет к двум полюсам: на одном — упоенность движением, стальным блеском пассажей, напористостью ритмики (таковы, например, главная партия сонатной I части и основная тема рондо-сонатной формы финала, со свойственным им энергетизмом пассажей и параллельных движений); на другом — полове лирики, поражающей многообразием оттенков и градаций. Dolinskaia, *op. cit.*, 109. Evseeva also alludes to Symbolist “poetic depictions” in Prokofiev's recorded performance of Op. 26. See Evseeva, *op. cit.*, 71.

⁴⁹ Cette musique produit une impression assourdissante et abasourdissante...l'âme slave: élans de mysticisme, frénétique, déchainements, d'instincts sauvages, trépidations, convulsive, tourbillonnements vertigineux, puérilités grimaçantes, grotesques naïvetés, gesticulations de mascarades, plaintes désolées, gémissements apeurés, innocences larmoyantes, brusques alternatives de prostrations accablées et de fureurs barbares, de béatitudes et d'appétits, d'oublis et de ruées...” Max Martin, “Serge Prokofieff,” *France* (14 September, 1933).

THE RUSSIAN PIANO STUDENT

Considering the aforementioned definition of the main characteristics of Russian pianism, it should be possible to determine what Prokofiev would have inherited from his tutors and other artists he heard. How did his training within this system effect his approach to the piano? What characteristics of this methodology did he adopt?

Subsequently, we can address the more germane point of how his formation as a pianist impinges on his interpretative concept.

The *Third Piano Concerto* was a product, like its composer, of a systematized and formalized musical education. Kabalevskii provides some commentary on Prokofiev as composer and performer and the cognitive experience of the listener:

it is hard to describe the impression Prokofiev made on us that evening. I think I shall not be mistaken if I say that that first performance of his gave many of us an entirely new understanding of his music, very different from that gained from the performance of other musicians, who tended to emphasize the elemental quality of the music, the dynamic contrasts and the mechanical elements. The music sounded far richer, far more subtle when Prokofiev played it. Everything he played sounded full-blooded and healthy, both spiritually and physically, everything was colourful, dynamic but without the slightest exaggeration, the slightest crudity let alone coarseness. In short, nothing “Scythian.” And what was most important, everything was illumined by the light of sincerity, poetry and human warmth. Moreover, the whole performance was distinguished by a quiet reserve, a total absence of any external pianistic effects that conveyed an impression of a great spiritual calm. With his extraordinary pianistic talents, Prokofiev revealed that rich lyrical feeling in his music which we had failed to notice until then. This was a joyous and unexpected discovery for us.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Dmitrii Kabalevskii, “A Vivid Personality,” in *S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* comp. S Shlifstein, trans. R. Prokofieva (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 204. It is important to bear in mind the political dimension of Kabalevskii’s statement. Kabalevskii was charged with presenting Prokofiev in a sanitized, neo-Romantic, neo-Classical Soviet guise. Thus, Kabalevskii’s onerous responsibilities to the State would surely have effected and/or distorted his perceptions of Prokofiev.

Prokofiev began his piano instruction with his mother, Mariia Grigor'evna. From his own recollection these early years proved to have both advantages and disadvantages.

Prokofiev recalls his childhood study:

My mother displayed great attention and caution towards my musical development. The most important thing was to maintain the child's interest in music and, God permitting, not push him away from music with boring repetition. Based on this principle, the lessons involved the least amount of time as possible spent on exercises and as much time as possible on acquainting oneself with the literature...A wonderful point of view which should be remembered by all mums. On the other side of the coin: nothing was completely learned and so a carelessness of performance developed. Another sloppy practice that developed was the careless way of placing my fingers on the keys: my thoughts ran ahead, while my fingers were rushing somewhere behind. This inattention to detail and unclear technique was my personal scourge during my time at the conservatory, and both began gradually to vanish only in my twenties.⁵¹

Evidently, strictness in establishing a proper foundational technical regime was not his mother's pedagogical style. In the ensuing conservatory years, this flaw in his initial formation of a pianist would become a stain on his reputation as an otherwise talented performer. Mariia Grigor'evna did succeed, however, in introducing her son to a significant corpus of musical literature including early Mozart and Beethoven piano sonatas, Chopin preludes, mazurkas, and waltzes, some of Liszt's less demanding works, and various pieces of both Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein. Prokofiev recounts

⁵¹ К моему музыкальному развитию мать относилась с большим вниманием и осторожностью. Главное, поддержать в ребенке интерес к музыке и, сохрани бог, не оттолкнуть его скучной зубрежкой. Отсюда: на упражнения как можно меньше времени и как можно больше на знакомство с литературой. Точка зрения замечательная, которую надо бы, чтобы мамы помнили...Была у этого и обратная сторона медали: ничто не было доучено, развивалась небрежность исполнения. Развивалась и другая небрежность - небрежность постановки пальцев на клавиатуре: мысль бежала впереди, а пальцы кое-как поспевали сзади. Эта неотделанность деталей и нечистота техники были моим бичом во все время последующего пребывания в консерватории и лишь после двадцатилетнего возраста стали постепенно изживаться. Sergey Prokofiev, *Avtobiografiia* ed. Miral'da Kozlova (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1982), 43.

memories of his mother taking him to see *Faust*, *Prince Igor*, and the *Sleeping Beauty*.⁵² Prokofiev also appreciated her holistic pedagogical method which was aimed at guiding him carefully through the challenge of how to use the piano to form his own ideas and also opinions about other music he encountered. His mother's guiding rule was to do everything she could not to dissuade him in his musical education. Indeed, he was so enamoured of her talent for teaching him that he suggested her method to parents for providing a solid formative musical education.⁵³

Reinhold Glière was Prokofiev's next piano tutor at Sontsovka during the summers of 1902 and 1903.⁵⁴ Details regarding their musical collaboration (particularly those pertaining to piano instruction) are sparse, although Glière offered some insight into Prokofiev's pianistic development and level of attainment at that point in the statement: [his playing wasn't orderly, he held his hands incorrectly. His long fingers seemed very clumsy. Yet he played difficult passages easily. But sometimes he could not control a simple scale or play an arpeggio evenly.]⁵⁵ It was undoubtedly an intense period for the young Prokofiev and one in which he learned the craft of composition and

⁵² Sergei Prokofiev, *Prokofiev by Prokofiev: A Composer's Memoir* ed. David Appel, trans. Guy Daniels (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1979), 13-19. Prokofiev also speaks of having seen several other operas around this time including: *A Life for the Tsar*, *Russalka*, *The Demon*, *La Traviata*, and *Carmen*.

⁵³ Nice, *op. cit.*, 8; originally taken from Sergei Prokof'ev, *Avtobiografiia* ed. Miral'da Kozlova (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973), 53 and 55.

⁵⁴ Taneev's first choice to teach Prokofiev was apparently none other than Aleksandr Goldenweiser, although this did not eventuate (much to Prokofiev's relief) due to Goldenweiser's need to travel to Iasnaia Poliana to meet with Tolstoy. See Nice, *op. cit.*, 15.

⁵⁵ Игра была не упорядочена, руки он держал неправильно. Его длинные пальцы казались очень неуклюжими. Порой ему легко давались довольно сложные пассажи. А иногда он не мог совладать с простой гаммой, ровно сыграть нетрудное арпеджио. Sergei Prokof'ev, *Materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia* comp. Semen Shlifshtein (Moscow: Gos. muz. iz-vo, 1961), 253.

orchestration.⁵⁶ Glière's approach was to fuse piano and composition instruction together; for example, in Schumann's *Warum Op. 12*, Glière would ask Prokofiev how the melodic line could be orchestrated. He would also habitually play to the young Prokofiev, and in the process would introduce him to new music and use the opportunity to acquaint him with musical forms.⁵⁷ Despite the negative aspects of a lack of total focus on the piano, Prokofiev greatly esteemed Glière and was appreciative of his efforts in tutoring him.⁵⁸

Alexander Winkler followed Glière in autumn of 1905, and apparently exerted much influence on Prokofiev's development as a pianist, in particular, by beginning to instill in him the importance of acquiring a solid technique.⁵⁹ The technical regime of double-third scales with various fingerings, etudes, trill and octave studies, combined with repertoire such as Rubinstein's '*Staccato*' *Etude*, Schumann's *Traumes Wirren*, Beethoven sonatas, and difficult transcriptions, gave him discipline and reinforced healthy practices with regard to performance and interpretation. Upon graduation from Winkler's advanced piano class, Glazunov remarked of his performance examination "a brilliant technique and very beautiful tone" with "a new kind of technique...trying to

⁵⁶ See Lawrence Hanson, Prokofiev, The Prodigal Son: An Introduction to his Life and Work in Three Movements (London: Cassell, 1964), 13-20, for a more descriptive account of the association between Glière and Prokofiev.

⁵⁷ Prokofiev (1979), *op. cit.*, 47.

⁵⁸ Prokofiev (1982), *op. cit.*, 89-90.

⁵⁹ Nice, *op. cit.*, 30, and Boris Berman, Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 38.

produce effects which are often beyond the piano's abilities."⁶⁰ Winkler himself was also full of praise even if somewhat less generous. He did, however, allude to previous views of carelessness which had been so characteristic of Prokofiev's pre-Winkler days. Prokofiev's impatience with Winkler and his pedagogical method appears to have been spurred by various musical personalities, whose opinions greatly influenced the young pianist.⁶¹ It is clear that Prokofiev tries to conceal his apparent guilt in switching to the piano class of St. Petersburg's most renowned piano pedagogue and performer of the time, Anna Esipova in 1909, by denigrating Winkler for his lack of inspiration, caliber, and prominence as both a pianist and teacher, but also by composing four etudes dedicated to him. Esipova agreed to admit Prokofiev to her highly selective and famed piano class on the strength of his performance of Rubinstein's *'Staccato' Etude*.⁶² Esipova was initially genuinely impressed by Prokofiev's responsiveness to her teaching.⁶³ Prokofiev came to her class with a well-developed technique, but also with a tendency towards playing carelessly.⁶⁴ Esipova still tried to teach Prokofiev to stop playing messily. Prokofiev describes the pedagogical method he encountered:

⁶⁰ Nice, *op. cit.*, 50.

⁶¹ Prokofiev's initial enthusiasm for Winkler's tutelage began to wane as his own personality and development as a pianist grew. Sergei Prokofiev, *Dnevnik 1907-1933* ed. Sviatoslav Prokofiev (Paris: sprkfv, 2002), I: 81. See the same reference and also Prokofiev (1979), *op. cit.*, 279-281, for more information on the criticisms of various prominent musical personalities.

⁶² Ivan Martynov, *Sergei Prokofiev: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 46.

⁶³ Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, I: 100. In Esipova, Prokofiev encountered the Leszetycki method which espoused many new ideas regarding piano technique. For example, Leszetycki emphasizes that the body should relax with the motion of the arm and believed that the correct hand position starts from a wrist positioned lower than the knuckles with the hand forming an arch of curved fingers, in order to ensure that the end joints drop vertically onto the keys. According to Leszetycki, the thumb was to be separated from the rest of the hand with a bent end joint touching the edge of the key.

⁶⁴ Nest'ev, *op. cit.*, 60. This carelessness would continue to haunt Prokofiev for many years to come. Leonard Lieblich described this characteristic of Prokofiev's pianism as a "debonair unconcern," in his review of Prokofiev's New York City performance of Op. 26 on 19 January, 1933. See Leonard

[the main characteristic of Esipova's teaching was the desire to mould students to one form. True, that form was a high course and if the individuality of the student fell in line with the individuality of Esipova, the results were amazing. But if the student thought in his own way, Esipova would get in a conflict with them, rather than helping them develop their independent selves. This is why it was difficult for me to learn not to play messily, and Mozart, Schubert, and Chopin, which Esipova preferred, were just not in the field of my vision.]⁶⁵

Difficulties in the relationship began to emerge by the summer of 1911. The catalyst for this downturn in relations was Prokofiev's receipt of a lower than expected end-of-year examination grade.⁶⁶ Further, Prokofiev felt that the strong and demanding Esipova grouped all her students together which inevitably cramped his style.⁶⁷ Thus, Prokofiev's subsequent tenure under Esipova was fraught with much tension, with constant disagreements over choice of repertoire, technical precepts, and interpretative matters among many other issues.⁶⁸ It is hardly a coincidence that Prokofiev took advantage of her final illness and absence from the teaching studio in 1914 to prepare and perform his *First Piano Concerto, Op. 10* for his graduation concert during which

Liebling, "Prokofieff Plays his Piano Concerto with Philharmonic," The American (20 January, 1933). Another review of the same concert also refers to a sloppy manner, although the critic believed that such an idiosyncrasy was attractive for the listeners. See J.H.M., "Philharmonie-Konzert," Staats-Zeitung (20 January, 1933).

⁶⁵ Prokofiev (1982), *op. cit.*, 148. Характерной чертой есиповского преподавания было желание всех стричь под одну гребёнку. Правда, гребёнка это была высокого полёта и если индивидуальность ученика совпадала с индивидуальностью Есиповой, результаты были превосходные. Но если ученик мыслил по-своему, Есипова вступала с ним в конфликт, вместо того, чтобы помочь развитию его собственного «я». К тому же мне трудно было отучиться от привычки играть грязновато, а Моцарт, Шуберт и Шопен, на которых особенно настаивала Есипова, как-то были вне поля моего зрения.

⁶⁶ Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, I: 160. See also Phillips (2006), *op. cit.*, 194 & 213, which adds that Esipova's disdain for Prokofiev as composer also exacerbated tensions between them.

⁶⁷ Marina Sabinina, Sergei Prokof'ev (Moscow: Glavpoligrafprom, 1957), 10. See also Phillips, *op. cit.*, 315.

⁶⁸ Sergei Prokofiev, Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings trans. and ed. Oleg Prokofiev (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), 241.

time adjudication for the much sought after Rubinstein prize would also be made.⁶⁹ The work was originally conceived as a modest concertino and expanded into a small-scale one-movement concerto with three distinct sections and an opening theme recurring in all three sections.⁷⁰

Prokofiev reveled in the shock and polarization of the musical establishment he was able to generate with his Op. 10, which could also showcase his virtuoso pianistic ability.

As Lee states:

the musical traits of the work came to be those that, for most listeners, identified Prokofiev's music in general: a volcanic musical temperament marked by sharp swings in mood and thematic materials...which stood well apart from the relatively mellifluous fabric of the prevailing musical style of the late 19th century....Prokofiev's works in particular were now considered a revolt against musical traditions comparable to the political revolt that had transformed Russia.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The Rubinstein competition victory brought Prokofiev much needed publicity and also won him a Shreder piano. There was also a graduation recital which preceded the concerto performance. The recital program and a story of success is described in Phillips, *op. cit.*, 619-21.

⁷⁰ Prokofiev offers this insight into the conception of this work: the conception is expressed, firstly, in some of the means used for combining piano and orchestra, and secondly in the form: a sonata Allegro with the introduction repeated after the exposition and at the end; a short Andante inserted before the development; development in the form of a Scherzo and a cadenza to introduce the recapitulation. True, this form was criticized on the grounds that the concerto consisted of a succession of unrelated episodes. But these episodes were held together quite firmly. Prokofiev (1991), *op. cit.*, 242-3. Prokofiev would later consider Op. 10 his first mature composition. The purported audaciousness of this work chiefly relates to the manifestation of the modernist line described above. (Prokofiev (1991), *op. cit.*, 242-3. See also Taruskin, *op. cit.*, 1124). It is built on short phrases and motifs such as the first theme with its ubiquitous falling minor third which is repeated in ascending sequences to build tension. The lyrical second movement also abounds with modally inflected scales like that of its main theme (*b-c#-d#-e-f#-g-g#-a#-b*) and juxtapositions such as at m. 10 (C/A^b), in addition to the motoric/toccata elements of the outer sections. (This is yet another example of Prokofiev's expanded corruption of diatonicism and tonality.)

⁷¹ Lee, *op. cit.*, 277.

Furthermore, Prokofiev's pianistic skill united his "love for the theatrical, the unexpected and the controversial"⁷² with his artistic-political acumen, which enabled him to pit his adversaries Glazunov, Liadov, and Golubovskaia, against his allies, who included Tcherepnin⁷³ and other former Esipova students who were on the jury. It was none other than Glazunov, his one-time mentor who along with Liadov now abhorred the young upstart, who begrudgingly conferred on him the grand prize.⁷⁴

As Esipova became increasingly convinced that she could not impart much to such an inflexible student, Prokofiev says [I came to the conclusion that overall Esipova had done me more harm than good, putting me off performing on stage and taking away from me much of my love for and joy in the instrument].⁷⁵ By 1914, Esipova apparently decried his tenacious artistic personality as much as she detested his crude playing, in spite of her acknowledgement of his distinguished pedigree as a pianist.⁷⁶ Her admonition of Prokofiev was typical of the divisive reactions his pianism aroused. One

⁷² Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1987), 99.

⁷³ Martynov posits the enormous influence Tcherepnin had not only on the development of the young composer's talent, but also for the broadening of his art. See Martynov, *op. cit.*, 46.

⁷⁴ The graduation concerto performance of Prokofiev is recounted in epic detail by Viacheslav Katarygin in Prokofiev (1961), *op. cit.*, 300.

⁷⁵ "...я пришёл к заключению, что в конце концов Есипова принесла мне гораздо больше вреда, чем пользы, отодвинув меня от эстрады и много отбив у меня любви и желания к инструменту." Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, I: 226.

⁷⁶ Nest'ev (1973), *op. cit.*, 60. See also Robinson, *op. cit.*, 72. Robinson states: Pedagogues and Prokofiev rarely got along very well. He refused to become a 'nice student' who behaved, performed and composed in a docile way that pleased the teacher. He was too idiosyncratic, definite and artistically self-confident to be a teacher's pet. Neither was he willing to conceal his knowledge and talent for the sake of ingratiating himself with the instructor – as his generally undistinguished grades throughout his Conservatory career seem to prove. And yet he was never so much a rebel as to reject the value and necessity of Conservatory training. Prokofiev might criticize, resist and try to outsmart his professors, but he still wanted the institutional stamp of approval and respectability. Later on, his attitude toward the Soviet government was similarly motivated: although uncomfortable with certain aspects of the system, he still wanted its official approval [cf. *ibid.*, 72-73].

critic would rebuke Prokofiev for his “coarse and dry”⁷⁷ sound, while another would commend his “freshness and self-confidence.”⁷⁸

It is clear, however, that Prokofiev studied much of the major virtuoso⁷⁹ repertoire under Esipova’s guidance, including a number of concerti that would later become a staple part of his performing repertory. These include: Beethoven’s ‘Emperor’, Rubinstein’s No. 4, Tchaikovsky’s No. 1, and the first two Rakhmaninov concerti.⁸⁰ Prokofiev also assimilated much of the Esipova- Leszetycki school technique and interpretative method especially with his “clear-cut finger technique, steel-like touch and exceptional freedom of wrist movement.”⁸¹ Another significant notion that Prokofiev gleaned from Esipova was Leszetycki’s artistic concept of all musical composition being fantasy.⁸²

Leszetycki’s perception of fantasy implied the rendering of an interpretation from the

⁷⁷ Russkie vedomosti (27 July, 1912), cited in Nest’ev (1973), *op. cit.*, 71.

⁷⁸ Peterburgskaia gazeta (25 August, 1913), cited in Martynov, *op. cit.*, 42-43.

⁷⁹ The term “virtuoso” originally referred to several categories of musician. Among these were performers, composers, and even theorists. In the latter part of the 18th century, it came to denote a singer or instrumentalist of exceptional talent. The term became more problematic in the 19th century and later, sometimes being used to describe a performer whose talent was ‘merely’ technical, unduly crowd-pleasing, and lacking in good taste; but the positive meaning of the term is still in more general use, its most common association being with such celebrated 19th-century soloists as Paganini and Liszt. As such, virtuoso repertoire implies music requiring an executive degree of technical skill for its performance. See Owen Jander, “Virtuoso,” Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 9 October, 2008), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

⁸⁰ Robinson, *op. cit.*, 84. Prokofiev recalls his growing admiration for the genre of the piano concerto in Prokofiev (1979), *op. cit.*, 228.

⁸¹ Izrail’ Nest’ev, Sergei Prokofiev, His Musical Life trans. Rose Prokofieva (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946), 17. Other influences from Esipova were noticed and described as follows: “Prokofievs Klavierspiel - aus Essipoff'scher Schule hervorgegangen, zeugte von großem Können...mit heerscharfem Staccati und wunderbaren Diminuendi - als asthetische Köstlichkeit!” [Prokofiev’s piano playing was influence by Esipova as teacher and thus shows a very high mastery...at times with very precise staccato and wonderful diminuendo.] See “Serge Prokofjeffs Kompositionsabend,” Neue Lodzer Volkszeitung (18 October, 1933). Indeed, Prokofiev himself speaks of his gratitude to Yesipova, despite their differences of personality. See Martynov, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁸² Ethel Newcomb, Leschetizsky As I Knew Him (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 66.

heart without necessarily dwelling on the pre-rehearsed intellectual performance parameters.⁸³ Other principles advocated by the Leszetycki method that should be noted here include establishing the musical mood through dynamics.⁸⁴ It is difficult if not also contentious to assert Prokofiev's adoption of this principle. The primitive recording technology is but one issue that makes an accurate adjudication on this issue rather problematic. This subject will be taken up again when the thesis of Prokofiev's uniqueness of style is expanded. Prokofiev's appropriation of the aforementioned principles together with vestiges of Romanticism in his playing will also receive further discussion later in the paper in relation specifically to his performance of Op. 26.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

When Prokofiev embarked on his first tour of America he trod a path already paved by pianists such as Skryabin in 1906⁸⁵ and Rakhmaninov in 1909-10 among others, all renowned for their unique artistry and brilliance. Prokofiev was expected to live up to high expectations, that is, to display a kinship with and resemblance to his Romantic-virtuoso Russian-schooled predecessors. Indeed, on hearing Rakhmaninov play,

⁸³ Newcomb, *op. cit.*, 160. This was definitely transmitted to and imbued by Prokofiev as his hallucinatory reading of the *andante* from the *Piano Sonata No. 4* will attest. Prokofiev here realises fantasy by his toying with the parameter of tempo. He begins the second movement marked *andante assai* at a leisurely pace (around MM. 48), and by the *allegro* designation at m. 25 is already over MM. 80. This highlights a rare instance in which Prokofiev succumbs to the influence of his formation. (Prokofiev alludes to this notion as having been hampered in his recording of Op. 26. See Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 806.

⁸⁴ Josef Hofmann, *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Company, 1920), 60-61. Prokofiev speaks of his admiration for Hofmann in his memoirs, and of his ability to translate this idea in performance. See Prokofiev (1979), *op. cit.*, 284-5. With regard to the aforementioned points, see the discussion of Prokofiev's interpretations of Op. 31/3 on page 62.

⁸⁵ Skryabin's American debut was not a unanimously lauded event. In this sense, Rakhmaninov's first American appearances were of greater significance in imbuing a heightened sense of expectation in American audiences by the time of Prokofiev's debut there.

Prokofiev was alerted to the need for further technical refinement in his own playing, even if he was aware that such a preoccupation could lead his playing to sound clinical.⁸⁶ He states that “I tried to make my playing as accurate as possible, so that not a single note was left to chance.”⁸⁷

American critics made considerable efforts to prepare audiences for Prokofiev’s coming. In commending the public to take his art seriously, Prokofiev was advertised as a musical materialist whose creative powers could swing freely.⁸⁸ His introduction to American audiences in Brooklyn was a modest affair and was well received. Indeed, his rare pianistic pedigree was immediately attested to by many critics.⁸⁹ This

⁸⁶ Prokofiev’s admiration for Rakhmaninov as a pianist hid a strained relationship between the two men. Rakhmaninov, it seems, initiated a cold and indifferent relationship with Prokofiev whilst the latter was a student. As a member of the board of Russian Music Publishers in 1910, Rakhmaninov refused to recommend two of Prokofiev’s compositions for publication. Prokofiev construed this as Rakhmaninov’s disdain for novelty which became one of the first obstacles to their friendship. (See Prokofiev (1991), *op. cit.*, 244-5.) Prokofiev’s disgruntlement with his senior colleague was nevertheless always overshadowed by a high regard for his artistry as a pianist. That notwithstanding, Prokofiev shares an exchange they had after a Skryabin memorial concert in 1915 at which Rakhmaninov played, among other pieces, the Fifth Sonata. It seems Prokofiev communicated, albeit very subtly and perhaps also a little facetiously, his objection to Rakhmaninov’s interpretation. Thereafter, says Prokofiev, our good relations ended. (See Prokofiev (1991), *op. cit.*, 253.) Prokofiev again highly commended Rakhmaninov’s playing after an American concert only to be treated to a “strange” and cold post-concert reception. Prokofiev seemed to think that Rakhmaninov held a grudge from the unpleasant exchange they had following the aforementioned Skryabin recital three years earlier. (Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 22-3.) At another Rakhmaninov recital Prokofiev again recalls an unreceptive encounter [*ibid.*, II: 46]. Rakhmaninov was not present for Prokofiev’s New York debut in 1918, but a seemingly affectionate exchange related by Prokofiev is implicitly tainted by sarcasm emanating from both sides [see *ibid.*, I: 749]. By 1921, however, Rakhmaninov accorded Prokofiev more civility, respect, and warmth. Prokofiev interpreted this as a positive change toward his music. Indeed, Rakhmaninov asked Prokofiev for a copy of his Op. 31, for which he expressed fondness. (See *ibid.*, I: 175.) Subsequent meetings, like that in 1929, supported the claim that their relationship was never better than civil. Indeed, Rakhmaninov and Prokofiev shared a fair degree of contempt and cynicism for each other.

⁸⁷ Sviatoslav Prokofiev, “Prokofiev’s Life and Letters,” Three Oranges Journal 2 (November 2001).

⁸⁸ Frederick Martens, “The Last Word in Russian Music: An Interview with Serge Prokofieff,” The Musical Observer (November, 1918): 36-37.

⁸⁹ The Musical Courier (3 April, 1919). See also Grenville Vernon, “(?)...First Recital,” New York Tribune (21 November, 1918).

notwithstanding, it was occasionally suggested that his music might make a better impression if it were performed by a better pianist!⁹⁰ The bigger occasion, which was on the whole satisfactorily received, however, came less than one month later with Prokofiev's New York debut recital at the Aeolian Hall.⁹¹ The repertoire included his own etudes, the *Second Piano Sonata*, *Six Pieces of Op. 12*, the Gavotte from the *Classical Symphony* and the *Suggestion diabolique*, along with preludes of Rakhmaninov and Skryabin's *Feuillet d'album* and two etudes. Reviews ranged from "fingers are steel,⁹² his wrists are steel, his biceps and triceps steel, his scapula steel" to "very modern without being very interesting" and "he is a psychologist of the uglier emotions – hate, contempt, rage – above all rage – disgust, despair, mockery, and defiance legitimately serve as models for moods."⁹³ Despite what Prokofiev describes as an exceedingly and overtly enthusiastic audience, many of the reviews on the part of the American critics reflected a distinct bias and hostility, ostensibly prejudiced by the new Bolshevik regime in Russia.⁹⁴ Prokofiev was trivialized as a Bolshevik artist, a member of a new unmannered musical proletariat. Furthermore, his reputation as a

⁹⁰ "Prokofieff Plays Own Compositions," New York Sun [author, date, page unknown; procured from the Prokofiev archive at the New York Public Library].

⁹¹ George Kehler, The Piano in Concert Vol. 2 (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), 1002. The success of this concert was somewhat marred by less enthusiastic or mixed reviews.

⁹² This comment was also made in a review of a concert played in Rome, Italy. See "...che il Prokofieff, con le sue dita d'acciaio,..." in "Musiche di Miaskowski e Prokofieff," La Tribuna (12 December, 1933).

⁹³ Nice, *op. cit.*, 152. Prokofiev dwells much more on the positive reviews even if he does express some reservations regarding his playing. See Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, I: 748. See also "Serge Prokofieff, Pianist," New York Daily Concerts (17 February, 1919), and "Russian Symphony Gives First Matinee: Audience Introduced to New School of Piano Music," The Sun (11 December, 1918) both of which express similar sentiments to the review here cited.

⁹⁴ Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, I: 748. See also Phillips, *op. cit.*, 151-2, and Nice, *op. cit.*, 151. Richard Aldrich of the New York Times was perhaps the most immediately critical of all the New York press. At the other end of the spectrum was James Huneker who was an almost instant Prokofiev fan. Nice contends that Huneker most accurately represented the feelings of the New York audiences.

musical radical had preceded him, and it was said that the American public “waited in vain for the manifestations of musical extremes for which he is so famous.”⁹⁵ Clearly, his critics and wider American audience would have to grow to appreciate his artistry.⁹⁶

Notwithstanding the hostility of American critics towards him, it was they who noticed Prokofiev’s ability to highlight his own musical vocabulary through performance.

Hubbard states:

just what [his] works would sound like under the fingers of any pianist other than he is a question. But when played by him they are not only technically astounding, they are so strange in tonal coloring, so daringly attractive in harmonic structure and progression, so original in subject matter, and yet so clear and definite in their melodic curve and aim that they end by impressing as musically logical and sane.⁹⁷

Further, critics were quick to connect Prokofiev’s orchestral and percussive performance style with his passion for Scythian drama.⁹⁸ It is clear that reviews tended to locate in Prokofiev’s playing a certain roughness, a tendency away from the genteel yet emotional aspect of Romanticism, and a primitive energy which nevertheless gave his

⁹⁵ Kramer, *op. cit.*, 502. See also Nice, *op. cit.*, 172, and the philosophical discussion connecting high art with simplicity and Prokofiev’s pianism by the critic from the San Diego Union as quoted in the New York Times (19 September, 1918). Prokofiev enjoyed a warmer and more impartial reception in Chicago as opposed to the measured hostility of New York City. See Anthony Phillips (trans.), Sergey Prokofiev Diaries: 1915-1923 Behind the Mask (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 426, 431-433.

⁹⁶ Nice speaks of the banal and unqualified evaluation Prokofiev received from American critics. See Nice, *op. cit.*, 152.

⁹⁷ William Hubbard, “Music and the Musicians,” Chicago Daily Tribune (2 November, 1919): E5.

⁹⁸ “Serge Prokofieff a Virile Pianist,” New York Times (21 November, 1918): 13, and “Anarchs and Ecstasy,” New York Times (26 January, 1919): 44. The latter of these describes Prokofiev as a neo-Scythian.

playing a tremendous excitement.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, these first American concerts were responsible for procuring him a recording contract with Duo-Art.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps one American review which encapsulated every unique facet of Prokofiev's pianism was actually taken from a Chicago concert published in 1919:

Serge Prokofieff personifies in his piano playing the musician of the day. He eschews any traits that might in any way betray sentiment or maudlinism. His playing is straightforward, manly, crisp and clear, and there is a certain breezy exuberance which bespeaks youth. With all this he has a remarkable technical command, unusual strength and fleetness and a rhythmic force which is almost obstinate in its sturdy pulsation. There are moments of introspection, of poesy also, but they are episodes which come more from the brain than the heart, and while the tone is often beautiful and silvery in clearness, it is crystalline rather than velvety in quality.¹⁰¹

In another equally illuminating review of the same concert, Prokofiev is described as possessing a unique ability to interpret and play from any genre or period. There is a clear implication that Prokofiev seemed to be moving away from the then prevailing trends of early twentieth century pianism. This is explicitly suggested in the statement: "his playing is never cold and it is never dry, but it has in it something peculiarly impersonal and almost aloof as its fundamental characteristic."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ James Huneker, "Music: The Russian Symphony Orchestra," New York Times (11 December, 1918): 13. See two further reviews by Huneker: "A Masque of Music," New York Times (5 January, 1919): 68, and "Anarchs and Ecstasy," New York Times (26 January, 1919): 44. The latter of these describes Prokofiev as a neo-Scythian. Huneker had reassessed and revised his slightly disparaging remarks by February of 1919. In a review entitled "Opera § Prokofieff Plays," New York Times (18 February, 1919): 9, Huneker in fact commended Prokofiev's pianism including his ability to play poetically and with a multitude of colours.

¹⁰⁰ Phillips (2008), *op. cit.*, 391.

¹⁰¹ "Prokofieff and Scotti Forces Afford Chicago And Interesting Musical Week," Musical America (29 October, 1919).

¹⁰² William Hubbard, "The Prokofieff Recital," Chicago Daily Tribune (29 October, 1919): 19.

In the two abovementioned reviews from Chicago, one finds not only the signs of technical prowess, rhythmic drive, and percussive sound which were trademark characteristics observed by many other critics, but also an early suggestion that Prokofiev's pianism was heralding something new. Yet another reviewer stated this in more explicit terms: "Prokofieff's pianism is healthy, vigorous, but detached from the ordinary idea that the keyboard should be made primarily to yield beautiful tone and to woo occasionally as well as to command."¹⁰³ The newness of Prokofiev's style was reiterated days later by another critic who called Prokofiev "an individual virtuoso with a technique all his own" and concluded with the statement "new music for a new era. Serge Prokofieff is very startling."¹⁰⁴ The characteristics of the novel style were variously enumerated as playing without dynamic gradations, that is, either all soft or loud, a brittle sound, and angular phrasing.¹⁰⁵ There was an instant attraction and compulsion to his pianism that was described as an intellectual force combined with an interpretative zeal.¹⁰⁶

By 1919, Prokofiev's pianistic abilities were well-known. The novelty of his music combined with his unaffected performance manner had settled with the critics and

¹⁰³ "Musical Bolshevism in Prokofieff's Music," The Musical Courier (19 December, 1918). See also a later review entitled "Dynamic Russian to give Concert Here," San Jose Mercury News 154 (1 December, 1920): 16. The latter review here cited refers to a concert given in San Jose on 16 December, 1920, in which Prokofiev played works other than his own. (For example, Prokofiev here played Beethoven Op. 101 among other works). See a review of this concert which further defines Prokofiev's pianism "Serge Prokofieff in Recital at Normal," San Jose Mercury News 170 (17 December, 1920): 10.

¹⁰⁴ "Serge Prokofieff a Virile Pianist," New York Times (21 November, 1918): 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Another critic went so far as to contend that Prokofiev could strike the keyboard harder than any other pianist he had heard during the 1918 season. See Frederick Donaghey, "Prokofiev Puts Self and Stuff Into the Orchestra's Seventh," Chicago Daily Tribune (7 December, 1918): 14.

¹⁰⁶ "Serge Prokofieff in his Own Works," Christian Science Monitor (23 November, 1918): 14.

audiences alike and was now less confrontational than during his debut season, and henceforth reviews began to be more objective and certainly less overtly critical.¹⁰⁷ Yet another review from Chicago at this time, furnishes extraordinary detail not merely on Prokofiev's technical abilities but also on the manner in which he moved at the keyboard. Hubbard states that "he is repose and immobility personified so far as movement of the body is concerned. He seems to play wholly from the elbows – only his forearms and those large, long fingered hands appear to be in motion."¹⁰⁸ After further extolling Prokofiev's technical prowess, Hubbard proceeds to note the "exceptional clarity of phrase" together with the "absolutely impersonal nature of his interpretations" which, he contended, set Prokofiev apart from any other pianist.¹⁰⁹ Here again, yet another critic observed an approach to interpretation that was then unheard of: "Prokofiev is ever objective in his readings and yet they are never wanting and sympathy...it is skill and an art as admirable as unique...to experience them once is to have a new sensation."¹¹⁰

Counting on the warmth he had previously experienced with Chicago audiences and critics, Prokofiev chose this city for the premiere of his *Third Piano Concerto* in

¹⁰⁷ Prokofiev's own reaction to his American reviews of the 1919 season was indicative of one who was very objective and rather self-effacing. Indeed, he frequently expressed dissatisfaction with his performances even when the press praised him. See Prokofiev's own diary entries relating to three such concerts during the 1919 season in Phillips (2008), *op. cit.*, 390, 433, 441.

¹⁰⁸ William Hubbard, "Music and the Musicians," Chicago Daily Tribune (2 November, 1919): E5. Hubbard was clearly a fan of Prokofiev the pianist. See another review by him of a Chicago concert: "Werrenrath and Masson, Kinsolving Stars, Are Praised," Chicago Daily Tribune (31 December, 1919): 15.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

1921.¹¹¹ Despite Prokofiev's scepticism about the sincerity of Chicago's enthusiasm,¹¹² however, the performance received immediate acclaim.¹¹³ This was followed shortly thereafter with a less successful reception of the work in New York. Nevertheless, describing his concerts of 16-17 December, 1921, it was noted that, "the performance of Prokofiev as a pianist was amazing. There is no one who commands such complete mastery as him."¹¹⁴ New York reviews of concerts on 26-27 January, 1922, judged Prokofiev to be first and foremost a brilliant performer, even if his interpretative skills were sometimes questionable.¹¹⁵ "The pianist played the piece wonderfully and received long, loud applause after each movement and especially at the conclusion of the concerto."¹¹⁶ The reviews were an affirmation of Prokofiev's consummate musicianship in that "the novelties of the Third Concerto are dependent on both the music...and the composer's interpretation."¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ See footnote 94.

¹¹² See Michael Steinberg, *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 348, and Kramer, *op. cit.*, 504, for a discussion of initial American reactions to the premiere. Prokofiev himself expressed satisfaction with his playing although he speaks about the attention he gave the solo part at the expense of listening to the ensemble see Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 186 and 197.

¹¹³ According to Prokofiev, the American public did not fully comprehend the music of Op. 26. Indeed, well-known Chicago musical critics such as G. Devrie and K. Khaskett revealed their complete misunderstanding of the piece. The first of these reviews spoke of "an athlete who lost his normal form,"^a while the second stated that the piece "seems like jazz."^b See: a – *Evening America* (17 December, 1921); and b -- *The Chicago Evening Post* (17 December, 1921). In the latter review, the critic does issue a quasi-warning against judging the work too harshly on first hearing.

¹¹⁴ *Chicago Daily Journal* (17 December, 1921).

¹¹⁵ *New York Tribune* (27 January, 1922).

¹¹⁶ *The Globe* (27 January, 1922).

¹¹⁷ Evseeva, *op. cit.*, 23.

The work's cautious initial reception in America was invalidated by its introduction to Europe, with Koussevitzky and his Orchestra accompanying Prokofiev in Paris in 1922. Prokofiev received a resounding ovation in Paris and an even greater reception shortly thereafter in London.¹¹⁸ The success of the third concerto's debut in Europe apparently left Prokofiev flabbergasted, and since that time the work has cemented its favourable place in the repertory.¹¹⁹

Prokofiev's performances in the Soviet Union in 1927, after an absence of nearly 10 years, caused an immense commotion among the entire musical fraternity of Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa, where he performed.¹²⁰ The uproar occurred because Soviet musicians who had already managed to fall in love with the music of their great compatriot longed to confirm or deny the rumours that were circulating regarding Prokofiev's style of playing. The American press simply intensified the impression left behind in Russia by Prokofiev at his concerts as a young man. As Milstein remembers, [many thought they would hear a Prokofiev who was stormy, audacious, impertinent, and full of superficial effects.]¹²¹ These expectations, however, proved false when instead [they heard a pianist who played with discipline and economy and with utter

¹¹⁸ "A Prokofiev Concerto: Composer's Performance at Queen's Hall," The Times (25 April, 1922), 10. Here once again, Prokofiev as interpreter of his own music is praised.

¹¹⁹ Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 201.

¹²⁰ "По окончании Концерта зал ревёт. Конечно, такого успеха у меня не было нигде." Sergei Prokofiev, Dnevnik 1907-1933 ed. Sviatoslav Prokofiev (Paris: sprkfv, 2002), II: 474 & 506.

¹²¹ "многие думали, что услышат Прокофьева буйного, дерзкого, поверхностно эффектного." See Iakov Mil'shtein, "Prokofiev igraet v Moskve," Sovetskaia muzyka 8 (1962): 49.

simplicity.]¹²²

Critics are unanimous about the unforgettable impression made by these concerts, especially that of Prokofiev not only as a technically perfect and irreproachable master, but also as an unsurpassed lyricist in the performance of his own music. The simple, heartfelt gentleness of the lyrical episodes revealed to Soviet listeners a new Prokofiev, who was mature, clear, and utterly human in his luminous poeticality. Russian audiences, who at that time already possessed magnificent interpreters of Prokofiev's sonatas (especially Vladimir Sofronitskii), were captivated by the unusual power and, at the same time, the marvellous absence of artifice in the interpretations of the composer.¹²³ His "enchanted cantabile sound" created the image of Prokofiev the lyricist having an excellent command of shades of tone colour and being a genuine master of legato (which might not be conveyed through his clangorous harmonic vocabulary). "Prokofiev's playing in his [more] lyrical moments became as touching as that of a child."¹²⁴ Neigauz noted that Prokofiev's pianism was characterized by "masculinity, confidence, an indomitable will, iron rhythm, enormous strength of sound, a special "epic" quality that strove to avoid anything too refined or intimate," emphasizing at the same time "his amazing ability to convey to the listener in its entirety the lyricism of the piece, its pathos, contemplativeness, a certain fullness of human

¹²² "услышали пианиста, играющего строго, скупю и совсем просто." Mil'shtein, *op. cit.*, 49.

¹²³ Gakkel (1959), *op. cit.*, 124.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

experience, a feeling of nature.”¹²⁵

More than one decade after his first appearances in the USA, Prokofiev’s reputation as a pianist was well and truly established. His star had grown exponentially in the USA. The following review is one of many which praises his artistry, “Mr. Prokofieff, as a solo pianist, played this music with overwhelming brilliancy and fire. He performed with the same certainty and élan that he had previously and obviously brought to the composition of the piece.”¹²⁶ The reception Prokofiev enjoyed in America now equaled the praise he received in Europe, even if a healthy fanaticism was more characteristic of the European reviews.

While inclined to be perhaps more hyperbolic and flattering of Prokofiev’s pianistic abilities, European reviews were also more descriptive and detailed with regard to his mechanics and musicianship. Certainly, the praise of Prokofiev’s excellent technical equipment was mentioned in almost all critiques. More specifically, however, his [hammer-like fingers]¹²⁷ were praised for producing a [dynamic force]¹²⁸ combined with

¹²⁵ “мужественность, уверенность, несокрушимая воля, железный ритм, огромная сила звука, особенная ‘эпичность’, тщательно избегающая всего слишком утонченного или интимного”... “удивительное умение полностью донести до слушателя лирику, “поэтичность”, грусть, раздумье, какую-то особенную человеческую полноту, чувство природы.” Genrikh Neigauz, “Tvorchestvo pianista,” in Vydaiushchiesia pianisty-pedagogi o fortepiannom iskusstve (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966), 94.

¹²⁶ Olin Downes, “Prokofieff heard in his own works,” New York Times (20 January, 1933). See also Detroit News (3 March, 1930), Los Angeles Evening Herald (20 February, 1930), and the San Francisco Examiner (19 February, 1930).

¹²⁷ “...dalle dita ferree che paiono martelletti...” “Prokofieff,” Giornale d’Italia (12 December, 1933).

¹²⁸ “La sua caratteristica risiede nella forza quasi brutale del dinamismo.” “Prokofieff all’Augusteo,” Il Lavoro (12 December, 1933).

a [lightness of touch]¹²⁹ and [rhythmic precision].¹³⁰ It was agreed that Prokofiev could control his fingers and the piano to a level that few could match.¹³¹ These chief characteristics of Prokofiev's pianism won him many admirers in Europe, most especially in Belgium, France, and Poland.¹³²

In summarizing the corpus of documentary sources and critiques of Prokofiev's recitals, concerts, and performances, however, one becomes aware of an apparent contradiction as to his style, manner, and technical approach to the piano. Yet, all accounts seem to concur and attest to an approach that set him apart from the typical Russian-trained virtuoso pianist. Indeed, he rebelled against the institutions that trained him.¹³³ Most commentaries seem to highlight his percussive characteristics by which he, unlike Rakhmaninov or Skryabin, tended to exploit the piano's mechanical personality rather

¹²⁹ "...легкая игра..." I.K. Kardjalis, "Porazitej'nijj pianist," Letuovoe (12 October, 1933). Review of a concert from Kaunas, Lithuania.

¹³⁰ "Als überlegener Pianist verleiht Prokofjew seinen Werken durch feindifferenziertes Spiel größte Lebendigkeit. Klarheit des Aufbaus und rhythmische Gestrafftheit sind seinen Kompositionen eigen." H.E.S, "Sergiej Prokofjew" Freire Presse (18 October, 1933).

¹³¹ "...und beherrscht sonst das Instrument wie wenige seines Faches." A.L, Die Musik, Berlin (August, 1933). Concert from Chicago.

¹³² See a review of a concert from Gaud by Paul Bergmans, La Flandre Liberale (3 April, 1933); also a concert from Lwów reviewed by Dr. Stefania Lobaczewska, "Recital fortepianowy Sergjusza Prokofjewa" Słowo Polski (22 October, 1933). Also, see Nice, *op. cit.*, 190, 198, and 283. Prokofiev had previously documented the stupendous reception he was accorded in these lands in concerts from 1924-26. See Sergei Prokofiev, Dnevnik 1907-1933 ed. Sviatoslav Prokofiev (Paris: sprkfv, 2002), II: 293 (Brussels), 300 (Warsaw), 452 (Paris).

¹³³ Mikhail Owtschinnikow, "Prokofjews Aufführungsstil als Pianist," in Bericht über das Internationale Symposium ‚Sergej Prokofjew – Aspekte seines Werkes und der Biographie‘ (Köln: Gustav Bosse Verlag Regensburg, 1991), 331.

than its ability to sing.¹³⁴ He played “almost without pedal, and with a percussive, metallic-sounding tone.”¹³⁵ Another critic said:

his tone was somewhat dry, but he played with amazing assurance and freedom. Beneath his fingers the piano does not sing or vibrate. It speaks with the stern and precise tone of a percussion instrument...the tone of the old-fashioned harpsichord. But it was precisely the convincing freedom of his playing and the clear-cut rhythm that won the composer such enthusiastic applause.¹³⁶

Francis Poulenc, however, provides invaluable insight into Prokofiev’s pianism, leading us to believe that the percussive sound was perhaps exaggerated:

Prokofiev played on a level with the keyboard, with an extraordinary sureness of wrist, a marvellous staccato. He rarely attacked from on high; he wasn’t at all the sort of pianist who throws himself from the fifth floor to produce the sound. He had a nervous power like steel, so that on a level with the keys he was capable of producing sonority of fantastic strength and intensity, and in addition, the tempo never, never varied.¹³⁷

Indeed, in Italy, Prokofiev was evidently capable of producing an [expressive and sweet sound]¹³⁸ and [never before heard sonorities].¹³⁹ Nevertheless, in these somewhat reserved yet gracious reviews, Prokofiev’s anti-Romantic-tradition style of pianism had

¹³⁴ Michael Roeder, A History of the Concerto (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 316.

¹³⁵ Harold Schonberg, The Great Pianists (London: V. Gollancz, 1964), 414. See Lawrence Gilman’s review of Prokofiev’s performance of his Piano Concerto No. 5 in New York City in “Mr. Prokofiev has a bout with Euterpe: Ringside Notes on a new Concerto,” New York Times (6 January, 1933). Also see the Elmira Telegram (12 February, 1933), which speaks of a “...rebellious dynamo...[who] appears about to tear up a keyboard...”

¹³⁶ Schonberg, *op. cit.*, 415-6.

¹³⁷ Francis Poulenc, My Friends and Myself trans. James Harding (London: Dobson, 1978), 120.

¹³⁸ “...suono dolce ed espressivo...” L’Averise d’Italia (12 December, 1933).

¹³⁹ Vladimir Pastuchov’, “Sergei Prokof’ev: K ego segodniashnemu kontsertu v Rige,” Segodja (8 October, 1933), “...новыми, до него неслыханными звучностями.”

come to recognition.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the main characteristics of his playing that had already become apparent were: an inclination to sound percussive, sparse use of the pedal, and a disdain for all forms of rubato and cantabile playing. In addition, Prokofiev had a proclivity to terrace dynamic levels rather than gradually build or decrease tension, and was the embodiment of rhythmic precision. The prevailing tendency to use agogic accents and to dislocate melody and accompaniment was also generally avoided by Prokofiev.

By 1930, Prokofiev was heralding a new and modern performance style, as his recording of the *Third Piano Concerto* evinces.¹⁴¹ Sviatoslav Richter commented that his playing “seemed to be altogether exceptional and different from anything [he] had heard before.”¹⁴² To this end, if we were to generalize about early twentieth-century performance practices, with its lavish portamento, sparse vibrato, tempo changes, agogic rubato and casual rhythmic details, then Prokofiev is perhaps the first pianist to advance a new interpretative concept which eschews such practices.¹⁴³ In reviews previously

¹⁴⁰ Prokofiev’s disdain for the traditional performance practices of his generation were noticed in concerts in Latvia and Lithuania. See Vladas Jakubėnas, “Kontsert Sergeia Prokof’eva: Vazhnoe sobytie v nashei muzykal’noi zhizni,” *Lietuvos aidas* (13 October, 1933), “Никакой позы, никакого романтического эротизма.” [There is no posing, no romantic eroticism]. Also, see “Kontsert Sergeia Prokof’eva: Uspech kompozitora – pianista vylilsia v burniu ovatsiu,” *Segodja* (9 October, 1933), “Въ исполненіи Прокофьева нѣтъ романтизма...Въ немъ нѣтъ страстности и экстаичности взлетовъ. Но его желѣзный ритмъ волнуетъ, можетъ быть, больше, чѣмъ вспышка темперамента у романтическихъ піанистовъ.” [There is no Romanticism...there is no passion, or ecstasy of flights, but his iron rhythm excites more than the sparkles of temperament of Romantic pianists.]

¹⁴¹ “...it seems as if a new “touch” must be learned before one could play it with anything like the fire the composer did.” See “Music: Prokofieff’s New Piano Concerto,” *Christian Science Monitor* (7 February, 1922): 7.

¹⁴² Bruno Monsaingeon, *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 68.

¹⁴³ It bears mentioning here that the performance technique deviates – from performance to performance – from the rubato/agogic indications in the scores. Prokofiev tended to be pithy about performance style indications, and no wonder, since he himself violated them.

cited in this essay, the word ‘simplicity,’ also variously translated as clarity or transparency, is frequently found. This concept forms the crux of the new performance style Prokofiev initiated,¹⁴⁴ and will be revisited in greater detail after the analysis of the composer’s recording of Op. 26.

PROKOFIEV’S RECORDINGS

Prokofiev recorded a number of works on a reproducing piano during the period 1919-26 at the behest of the Duo-Art recording company.

<i>Composer</i>	<i>Work</i>
Glazunov	Gavotte, Op. 49 #3*
Miaskovskii	Grillen, Op. 25 (#s 1 & 6)*
Mussorgsky	Pictures at an Exhibition (Promenade; The Old Castle)
Mussorgsky	Pictures at an Exhibition (Bydlo; Ballet of Chicks in Their Eggs)*
Prokofiev	Gavotte, Op. 12 #2*
Prokofiev	Love for Three Oranges: Intermezzo*
Prokofiev	Love for Three Oranges: March
Prokofiev	Marche, Op. 12 #1*
Prokofiev	Prelude, Op. 12 #7*
Prokofiev	Rigadoun, Op. 12 #2*
Prokofiev	Sarcasms, Op. 27 (#s 1 & 2)*
Prokofiev	Scherzo, Op. 12 #10*
Prokofiev	Tales of an Old Grandmother, Op. 31 (#3)*

¹⁴⁴ See I.K. Kardjalis, “Porazitel’nyi pianist,” *Letuovoe* (12 October, 1933) and “Kontsert Sergeia Prokof’eva: uspekhn kompozitora–pianista vylilsia v burnuii ovatsiiu,” *Segodnja* (9 October, 1933). During the same 1933 season, the ‘simplicity’ factor was observed yet again in a review entitled “Kontsert S. Prokof’eva,” *Zarja Voeuoka* (15 May, 1933), from Prokofiev’s recitals in Tbilisi, Georgia. Here the critic observed:

“Крупное творческое лицо С. Прокофьева, как автора и пианиста, в сочетании с блестящей техникой и виртуозной отделкой деталей, необычайная сила, простота и убедительность исполнения, лежащего вне обычных эстрадных манер и приемов, оставили сильное впечатление.”

[The outstanding feature of Prokofiev’s art as a composer and pianist combined with his brilliant technique and virtuosic individual details, unusual strength, simplicity, and persuasiveness of performance, all placed within an unusual stage mannerism and reception, to leave a strong impression.]

Prokofiev	Toccatà, Op. 11*
Rimsky-Korsakov	Scheherazade, Op. 35 (Fantasia, transcribed by Prokofiev)*
Rakhmaninov	Prelude in g minor, Op. 23 #5
Scriabin	Prelude, Op. 45 #3*
Scriabin	Winged Poem, Op. 51 #3*

There are two significant and consequential characteristics of Prokofiev's playing that come through on these piano roll recordings. First, there is a distinct proclivity for quick tempi. Comparison of his recordings with those of modern performances reveal how much faster and lighter (less ponderous) they are.¹⁴⁵ Combined with fleeting tempi was a unique rubato concept that quickened as much as it slowed in expansive swells and surges.¹⁴⁶ The distribution of time within a phrase is noticeably uneven, which is totally different to most modern performances of his work. It is a prominent characteristic of Prokofiev's playing, giving it a speaking character.¹⁴⁷ Both characteristics were to come into question, however, by the time of his electrical 78 rpm.¹⁴⁸

Prokofiev's recording of his Op. 26 is an electric 78RPM recording transfer for HMV which dates from 27-28 June, 1932. This recording was made ten years after its London premiere and while the composer was performing in London. (Prokofiev returned to

¹⁴⁵ Schonberg, *op. cit.*, 369. Listen to 'Promenade' from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* to hear an example of this fleetness of tempo.

¹⁴⁶ This is perhaps what the critic Richard Aldrich was referring to when he described Prokofiev's performance of Schumann's *Carnival* at his second New York recital appearance at Aeolian Hall. "He played... with a youthful vigor and a youthful tendency to exaggeration in rubato." "The Opera § Mr. Prokofieff's Recital," New York Times (23 November, 1919): 20.

¹⁴⁷ Philip (1998), *op. cit.*, 80.

¹⁴⁸ See the case study of Op. 31/3 discussed on pp. 63-4.

London in February-March of 1935 to record several of his other smaller works for the same company.)¹⁴⁹ On this occasion the conductor was the Italian Piero Coppola with the London Symphony Orchestra. Kabalevskii spoke about Prokofiev's labour in practicing Op. 26 to perfection before each performance because of its notoriety as a work and the onerous expectation on him as pianist.¹⁵⁰ This is confirmed by Prokofiev himself in a diary entry of the day (27 June, 1932) in which he alludes to working with a high degree of both intensity and enthusiasm immediately prior to the recording.¹⁵¹ Thus, we can readily ascertain that Prokofiev was at his best and also in his prime as a performer when this recording was made.¹⁵² His only technical comment that relates

¹⁴⁹ <i>Work</i>
Concerto #3, Op. 26
Conte de la Vielle Grand'mere, Op. 31 (#2)
Conte de la Vielle Grand'mere, Op. 31 (#3)
Four Pieces, Op. 4 (#4, Suggestion diabolique)
Four Pieces, Op. 32 (#3, Gavotte)
Etudes, Op. 52 (#3)
Gavotte from "Classical Symphony," Op. 25 (tr. Prokofiev)
Sonata #4 in c minor, Op. 29 (Andante only)
Three Pieces, Op. 59 (#2, Paysage)
Three Pieces, Op. 59 (#3, Sonatine Pastorale)
Visions Fugitives (#s 3,5,6,9-11, 16-18)

¹⁵⁰ Prokofiev played Op. 26 everywhere. See Claude Samuel, *Prokofiev* trans. Miriam John (London: Calder and Boyars, 1971), 96. Originally taken from Dmitrii Kabalevskii, "A Vivid Personality," in *S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* comp. S Shlifstein, trans. R. Prokofieva (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 208. As previously stated, even though the reliability of Kabalevskii as a source might be questionable, I believe it is highly probable that this statement might be accurate as Prokofiev himself expresses similar sentiments in his memoirs around this time. Also, see Nice, *op. cit.*, 224.

¹⁵¹ Sergei Prokofiev, *Dnevnik 1907-1933* ed., Sviatoslav Prokofiev (Paris: sprkfv, 2002), II: 806. See also the commentary of Edward Morgan, "Prokofiev's recording of his Third Piano Concerto: London, June 1932," *Three Oranges Journal* 11 (May 2006). Also note the remarks of the conductor Piero Coppola, *Dix-sept ans de musique à Paris 1922-1939* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1944), 134-136.

¹⁵² Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 806. Reviews of the recording written at the time of the original release also attest to this fact. See Helen Buchalter, "Prokofieff plays with Symphonies for Victor," *Washington News* (15 April, 1933), who states that "...at times Prokofieff makes the piano like

specifically to the recording is also an important consideration that needs to be taken into account when examining this recording: [My playing somehow comes out well, forcefully, but a little affected: it is in a place of light uncertainty and artistry. It is difficult to play an entire side of a disk, or four minutes, without playing one false note. But when one tries to play more carefully, the playing becomes contrived and loses its freedom.]¹⁵³

In general, Prokofiev's own attitude towards his electrical recordings was far from indifferent. He expressed his views about them in two letters (written during his residency in Paris) from March 5, 1935. While there is no specific mention of Op. 26 -- which was committed to record in London three years earlier in 1932 -- he makes two statements of interest. First, he deplores the sound quality; second, he states (in the letter to Mr. Gaisberg of the Gramophone Company) that "I did my work with much attention and perseverance and I hope that the result, from the standpoint of playing, will be satisfactory."¹⁵⁴

one of the reed instruments of the orchestra. He thumps, mews, or crashes brilliantly the strange harmonies..." Also, Andre Rousseaux, "La Musique Mecanique," *Le Crapouillot* (February 1933) says that:

Voilà qui m'a stupéfié. Le talent si riche de Serge Prokofieff, son élan, sa flamme, sa puissance d'invention, ont au contraire de quoi emporter l'adhésion des amateurs les plus timides et les plus récalcitrants à la nouveauté en musique.

[I] was stupefied to find that the rich talent, the elan, the flame, the power of invention of Serge would make even the most timid amateurs, and these most obstinate towards modern music, stick their ears up.

¹⁵³ "Моя игра кое-где выходит хорошо, напористо, а кое-где манерно; это там, где лёгкая неуверенность или искусственность. Очень трудно сыграть целую сторону диска, т.е. четыре минуты, не задев ни одной фальшивой ноты. А как начинаешь играть осторожней, сейчас же игра становится искусственной и теряет свободу." Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 806. This is a fascinating comment which reveals that recording technology less preserved the work than altered it, commodified it.

¹⁵⁴ Noëlle Mann, "Prokofiev's 1935 Recordings," *Three Oranges Journal* 6 (November 2003). A more complete picture of the recording sessions of 1932 for Op. 26 is given in Prokofiev (2002), *op. cit.*, II: 806. See also footnote 152.

PROKOFIEV'S INTERPRETATION OF OP. 26

Generally speaking, one of the most immediate characteristics of Prokofiev's pianism is his strong rhythmic instinct. This is evidenced by his use of accents associated with the melody which typically fall on both long notes and strong beats. For example, the sixteenth-notes in mm. 173-193 are interposed with accents not marked in the score. They all fall on the beat and appear to intensify the scherzando quality of the passage. Prokofiev renders other sixteenth-note passages similarly, such as one found mm.50-51 and at mm.217-218 in the recapitulation. In playing this passage in the exposition, Prokofiev accents the first note of each four-note group to the extent that only the *d* and *f* are audible. Two other passages worthy of mention here are the *Più mosso* section in the first movement mm. 101-139 where the first note of every second triplet group is noticeably accented, and the third variation of the second movement where he accents the last eighth-note of each 12/8 measure to underline both the grouping (which crosses the measure line) and the phrasing.

His rhythmic sensitivity also effected a preference for abrupt, marked accentuations and terraced dynamics to *crescendi* and *decrescendi*. An inflection of some form usually accompanied his rare use of *crescendi* and *decrescendi*. The first movement proliferates with such an approach to accentuation. The terracing of dynamic levels also occurs in the second movement starting from m. 23 where Prokofiev reduces in volume by one level each measure in lieu of the printed *diminuendo*.

EX. 10: *Preference for terraced dynamics instead of the marked diminuendo* {II: mm.23-25}

Var 1.
L'istesso tempo

p

tr

8^{va}

3

pp

8^{va}

6

dim.

pp *mp*

Prokofiev's predilection for making transparent the underlying rhythmic structure is probably also responsible for the alteration in dynamics to the upbeat of the second variation in the second movement where he turns a *pianissimo* marked passage into a *forte*.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ See footnote 155.

EX. 11: Change in dynamic marking from *pp* to *ff* {II:upbeat to second variation}

The musical score for Example 11 is presented in two systems. The first system is marked *pp* and *Allegro*. It features a piano part with a treble clef and a bass clef, and a cor part with a treble clef. The piano part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *Allegro*. The cor part has a dynamic marking of *p* and a tempo marking of *Allegro*. The second system is marked *ff* and *Allegro* with the tempo change *Cor.*. The piano part has a dynamic marking of *ff* and a tempo marking of *Allegro*. The cor part has a dynamic marking of *ff* and a tempo marking of *Allegro*. The score includes piano and cor parts.

Unaccented syncopated notes are conspicuous when they arise, and, together with a proclivity for dynamic accents as opposed to agogic accents, became a prominent feature of a new style that was adopted by younger pianists. This tendency toward use of dynamic accents was Prokofiev's clear attempt to distance himself from normative practices and establish a new constructive method intended to provide an unambiguous rhythmic framework. It appears he desired that the listener be able to sense the metrical structure.¹⁵⁶ In fact, it is worth noting Prokofiev's penchant for varied uses of the accent. This was an idiosyncratic symbol of his pianism: from the barely audible and barely noticeable jolts, pricks, and emphases, to the temperamental and commanding accents, such agogics lent his pianism a characteristic sharpness, capriciousness, and a dry brilliance. The measurement of metric beats seemed to disappear under the influence of dynamic accents together with the feeling of a rhythmic exploration.

¹⁵⁶ Owtshinnikow, *op. cit.*, 326.

Further, the phrasing became especially short and lively, while the sound possessed a renewed energy. From such personal qualities stems a concept of interpretation that tends towards the emotional, where there is not a hint of cold feeling, no toleration for the idea of entertaining an audience with cheap pyrotechnical displays. Prokofiev was an emotional performer yet never given to melodramatic pathos. He attained instead a simplicity and truth as a result of his ability to seduce. This was totally in opposition to an often described stage of seduction, where the performer lures one with empty virtuosity and mechanical playing.

Prokofiev typically played without using the pedals.¹⁵⁷ This can be gleaned from his rolls of the works of Rakhmaninov and Mussorgsky as much as they can from the first movement of the concerto.¹⁵⁸ The melody inevitably sits one dynamic level above the accompaniment. Two traits that further distinguished him from pianists of his era were a pronounced and habitual tendency to differentiate melody from accompaniment, and also a complete avoidance of the common practices of either dislocating treble from bass or arpeggiating chords except when notated. These qualities give his playing a unique character that influenced performance conventions as we know them today.

With reference to the preceding examination of the passage in Example 10, Prokofiev's absence of rubato accentuates the theme whilst also drawing attention, via the deliberate action not to dislocate treble from bass, to vertical simultaneities which inform the

¹⁵⁷ Monsaingeon, *op. cit.*, 68.

¹⁵⁸ See in particular Prokofiev's rendition of Rakhmaninov's *Prelude in g, Op. 23/5*. The middle section is hardly pedaled at all.

listener of the modified harmonic environment from its initial presentation. In general, Prokofiev's emphasis on simultaneities and percussive tone also highlight the sense of 'wrong note' texture.¹⁵⁹

EX. 12: *Notated arpeggiation of chords* {I: mm. 148--}

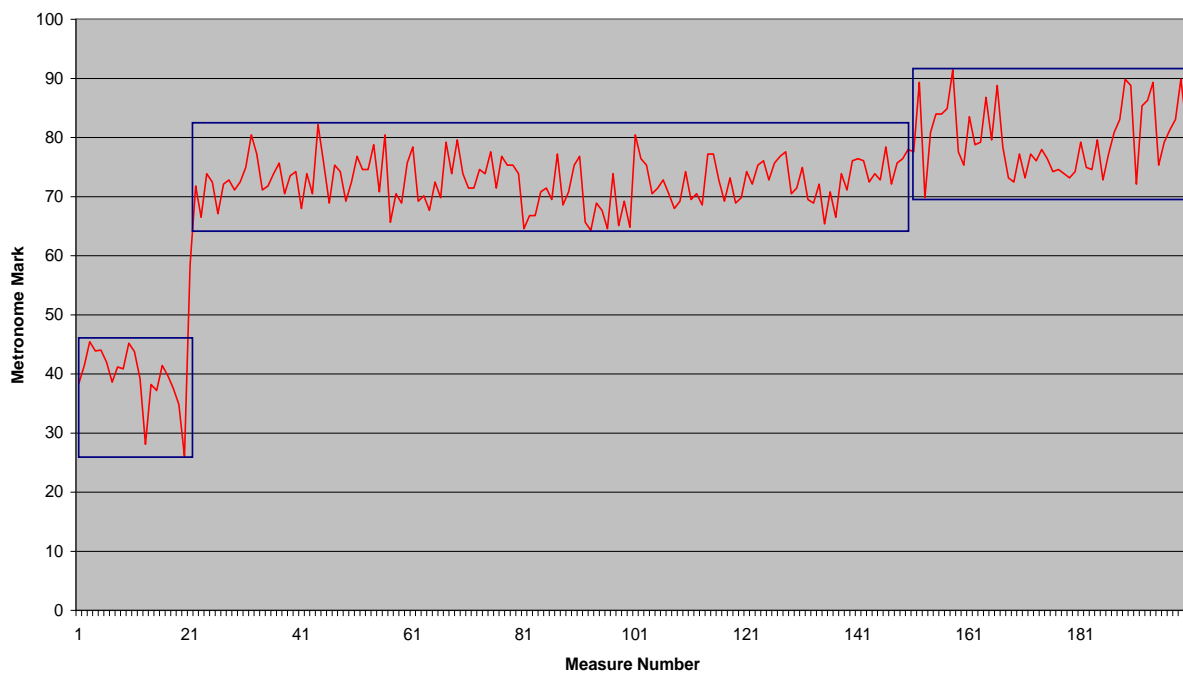
Prokofiev eschews the slightest hint of rubato in his effort to maintain a strict sense of pulse. In fact his concept of phrase from mm.155-158 in the first movement goes against the normative idea of a reduction in tempo as the end of as the phrase approaches. Instead, Prokofiev accelerates into the b^b -minor tonality at m. 159, thus creating ensemble problems between piano and orchestra. The conductor seems to have interpreted Prokofiev's accelerando as the setting of a new tempo and thus Prokofiev lags behind the orchestra when he resumes his original slightly slower tempo at mm. 159. Such an anti-Romantic tendency was the antithesis to pianists of the time such as Paderewski and others. The concept of pulse was far more supple, a parameter prone to

¹⁵⁹ A similar approach and result is found in Ex. 3 previously discussed, with the addition that in that passage is also seems to confirm the feel of the eighteenth-century stylized dance genre theme and, as such, forms an appropriate segue into the thematic representation at m. 35. Essentially, Prokofiev is inviting us to hear his embellishment of the functional vocabulary which lends his performance a pedagogical disposition.

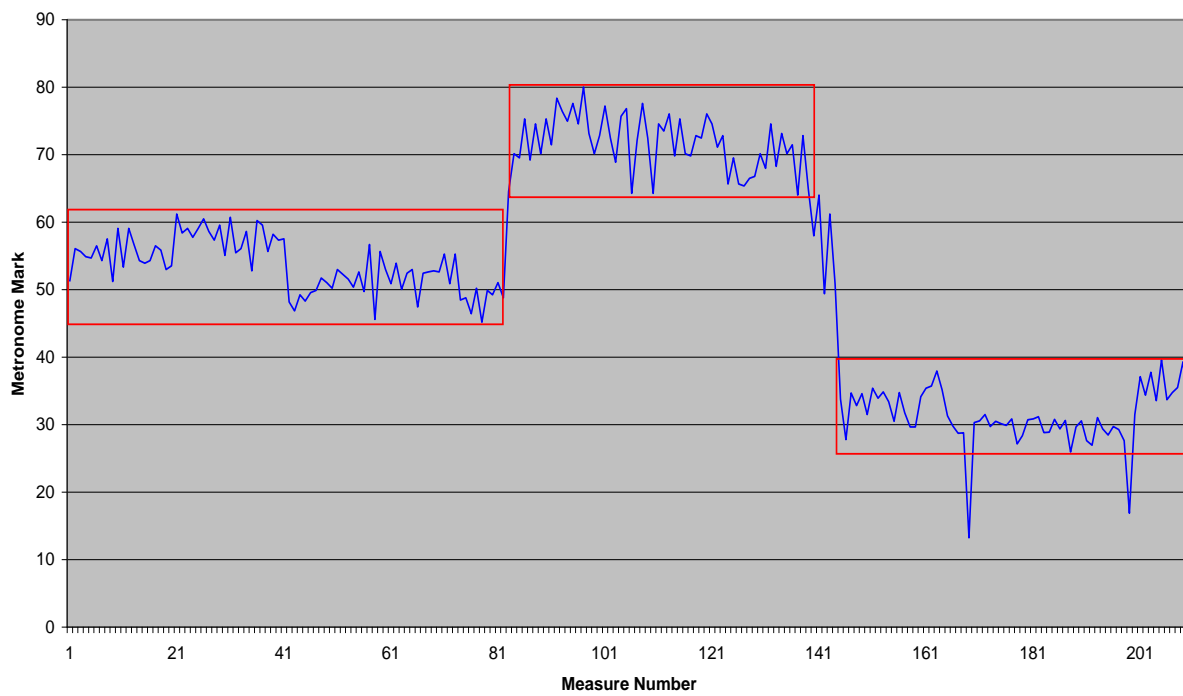
excessive liberty. In comparison to performances of today, however, Prokofiev's interpretations embody an abundance of rhythmic inflections.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the concept of rhythm provided the foundations for Prokofiev's artistic interpretations. He would isolate a pulse and embed this into the musical fabric thereby creating a clear shell in which he could sculpt an interpretation. This can be clearly seen in both the outer movements of his interpretation of Op. 26. When viewed on a macro level, it is possible to chart such inflections within an extremely consistent fundamental range of pulse that only changes according to the levels of the music. These points are highlighted in the following tempo graphs, which illustrate Prokofiev thinking in terraced levels.

¹⁶⁰ See Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 188-190, for a discussion of Prokofiev's rendition of the *Gavotte Op. 32/3* and other inflections related to the genre.

Op. 26/I: mm. 1-200



Op. 26/III: mm. 1-210



This is a constructive process through which all other parameters combine with an emotional unfolding to give voice to the musical narrative.¹⁶¹ For example, Prokofiev habitually accelerates short groups of notes that form upbeats in an effort to reach the downbeat ahead of time. Such rhythmic inflections communicate with and engage the listener and thus are to be considered expressive. Note, for example, the conspicuous fermata-like gesture employed in the third movement which is used to underline the dramatic falling major 7th (m. 188).

EX. 13: *Fermata-like gesture {III: mm.188--}*

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).
 System 1: Treble clef has a melodic line with a fermata-like gesture over a falling major 7th interval. Bass clef has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *p*.
 System 2: Treble clef has a melodic line starting with *f* and ending with *pp*. Bass clef has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* and *pp*. A marking 'V-e.' is present.
 System 3: Treble clef has a melodic line starting with a 4-measure rest. Bass clef has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp*. A marking 'V.ni con sord.' is present.
 System 4: Treble clef has a melodic line starting with a 4-measure rest. Bass clef has a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp*. A marking 'V.ni con sord.' is present.

¹⁶¹ Viktor Varunts (ed.), *Prokof'ev o Prokof'eve: stat'i i interv'iu* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1991), 83.

Appoggiaturas and acciaccaturas, together with arpeggiated chords are played or begun prior to the beat rather than on the beat. See for example the short phrase echoing the orchestra which occurs in the five measures before the conclusion of the second movement. The latter practice frequently impedes the flow of a melodic line but nevertheless marks a normative habit in Prokofiev's playing. Very occasionally, Prokofiev succumbed to Romantic tendencies in lyrical passages by starting an arpeggiated chord on the beat and slightly holding back the top pitch. Prokofiev customarily notated such practices as can be seen in the 1st movement at m. 148 (see Example 12).

Another remnant of Romantic pianism performance practice that Prokofiev sought to avoid was drastic tempo changes. Prokofiev apparently desired to project in most cases a structured, organized, and quasi-terraced view of tempo where unity was the governing concept. Nevertheless, the Romantic spirit appears to repossess him in the recapitulation of the first movement where he increases the tempo from MM. 144 to MM. 160.

EX. 14: *Tempo change (I: recapitulation)*

Allegro

Allegro

5 *non legato*
pp

7

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has two staves: the top staff is the right hand (treble clef) and the bottom staff is the left hand (bass clef). The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo). The second system starts at measure 2 and continues with similar melodic and harmonic development. The score concludes with a double bar line.

The melodic line became another important part of the formation of Prokofiev's interpretative construction. Due to the emphasis on melody, Prokofiev formed a singing line without the affectation or coquettishness of salon music. From the beginning to the end, Prokofiev's performance evinces a complete unfolding of the material and a dynamically intense development of the themes. Each piece thus sounded with rare finality and completeness. This development is strongly rational and at the same time expressive in character. In this way Prokofiev attained unity and harmony. The expression of sound was not violated, but turned into a constructive whole. Further, the

potency of the tonic did not diminish the character of the playing or the expression of the music, in fact, it increased it.¹⁶²

It appears from the examples elicited above that Prokofiev sought to establish a newer style of pianism even if some of his characteristics as a player bear direct connection with his schooling in Russian Romantic pianism. These include his affinity, even if displayed rarely, for tempi changes, and his penchant for expressive gestures, or what Taruskin terms “fast slurs...picked up from the performances of any number of virtuosos active in Russia” around the turn of the century, which inform the listener of his pianistic heritage.¹⁶³ Prokofiev also sought to extricate himself from the improvisatory and excessively romanticized performance styles of the time, which can be heard in the recordings of his contemporaries, and initiate a new interpretative concept.¹⁶⁴

As one moves away from the excessive liberalism of Romantic late-nineteenth-century pianism, the gradual changes towards informed musical practice with an emphasis on detail start to emerge. This development can be traced in the recordings of artists whose careers spanned long periods, including Artur Schnabel, Arrau, and Backhaus, all of whom changed significantly as they matured.¹⁶⁵ I believe that Prokofiev might have

¹⁶² Boris Asaf'ev, in *S.S. Prokof'ev: materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia* comp. Semen Shlifshtein (Moscow: Gos. muz. iz-vo, 1961), 325-327.

¹⁶³ Taruskin (1995), *op. cit.*, 188. Taruskin cites the *Gavotte, Op. 32/3* as an example.

¹⁶⁴ See Harriet Bower, *Piano Mastery* (New York: Frederick Stokes Company, 1917), 24-5.

¹⁶⁵ Philip (1998), *op.cit.*, 93.

been instrumental in initiating this development toward a more contemporary performance style as evidenced in his recording of his Op. 26.

A work that Prokofiev recorded twice with a considerable time period between the recordings would provide a significant, albeit modest in the existing case, amount of data by which to prove the veracity of this claim. This evidence is proffered in Prokofiev's two recordings of his Op. 31/3. In the piano roll of Op. 31/3 recorded in 1924, traits of late-Romantic pianism are noticeably present: a staggering of the left hand which almost obfuscates the pulse entirely, a pronounced tendency to dislocate the left and right hands, and extreme elasticity of tempo. By the time Prokofiev re-recorded this same work in 1935, one can readily observe that the left hand has been transformed into a functional ostinato, providing a well-defined metrical structure and constant tempo over which the right hand melody can play. There are no instances of dislocation between the left and right hands, and the voices of the middle section are well delineated.

Prokofiev's piano-roll recording of four scenes from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* demonstrates further that his approach to interpretation changed dramatically over the intervening years in which the rolls and 78rpms were made. The *Promenade* and *Ballet de Poussins dans leurs Coques* in particular display an extremely flexible approach to tempo together with, what we would consider today, an almost disturbing rubato concept (hear the opening phrase of *Ballet de Poussins dans leurs Coques* and its recurrences) which exposes Prokofiev's nineteenth-century pedagogical influences.

These traits are nowhere to be found in any of his recordings from a decade later – that of Op. 26 significantly being the first of these recordings.

Given our knowledge of pianism around the turn of the last century and the ensuing decades, one can only concur with the evidence herein supplied that the effect of Prokofiev's playing on ears of his time was nothing less than shocking. A pianist that espoused such a different approach to the instrument with respect to tempo, rubato, and tone, was bound to cause much unease. I believe, however, a primary reason his playing still remains unable to be categorized is due to the fact that his approach to his piano music never took hold of subsequent generations of performers of his music. Thus, when Prokofiev wields his idiosyncratic playing style, which exhibits the characteristics discussed above, our expectations are still to some extent thwarted if not also affronted because we have a tendency to listen with ears of today, necessarily influenced by over half a century of eminent recorded and live performances of the same work.

Implicitly stated in the preceding discussion is also the fact that Prokofiev's manner of playing unquestionably arouses an awareness in the cultured listener of his syntax. Indeed, returning briefly to the analysis presented in Example 6, we can observe that Prokofiev's avoidance of rubato not only highlights the polyphonic/canonic texture but also, in combination with a fleeting tempo, turns our attention away from the tonic evasion and chromatic displacements and asks the listener to focus on the large scale 'lyrical' movement from dominant in m. 143 to tonic in m. 169. Such an approach also deflects our attention from any weaknesses in the stitching process which might impede

our aural awareness of the purpose of such episodes. In addition, Prokofiev's percussive tone frequently accentuates vertical sonorities where chromatic substitutions like those seen in the above example proliferate.

CONCLUSIONS

If Schonberg's claim of 'New Man of the century'¹⁶⁶ might seem a little exaggerated, there can be little skepticism regarding the inimitability of Prokofiev's pianism, which evidently did not share much in common with the past. Furthermore, it seems that his effect upon middle to late twentieth-century approaches to the instrument, performance practices, and interpretative concepts was particularly profound, notwithstanding the inimitability of his interpretations of his own music. He conceivably initiated a performance rationale which was requisite for and adopted in interpreting the piano music of Bartók, Stravinsky, and their successors. Indeed, he was the first pianist to draw attention to the percussive capabilities of the piano,¹⁶⁷ but it was his "functional pianism, stripped clear of artificial device, bleak and powerful, unpadded, impatient of bar lines and orthodox metrics and agogics"¹⁶⁸ that also heralded the modern style. [He played...with surprising conviction and freedom, under his fingers the piano did not want to sing and vibrate: it wanted to sound with the strong tone of a percussive

¹⁶⁶ Schonberg, *op. cit.*, 417.

¹⁶⁷ David Gutman, *Prokofiev* (London: Alderman, 1987), 15. The percussive view of the instrument was observed by American critics.

¹⁶⁸ Schonberg, *op. cit.*, 417.

instrument...like an old harpsichord. But it is this forceful strength in performance and strong enunciation that gave the composer great success with the public.]¹⁶⁹

In considering the various sound recordings and written sources available, it is possible to summarize the general traits of Prokofiev's pianism as follows:

1) *artistic objectivity* -- his performances were not marked by excessive emotionality or forays into the depths of psychological experiences. It is said that he was embarrassed to witness sentimentality in the playing of others. Instead, with reference to the undoubted Romanticism at the root of Prokofiev's pianism, Del'son emphasized that this was a special kind of Romanticism: epic, restrained and strict.¹⁷⁰

2) *dynamism* -- from his very first appearances in America, Prokofiev attracted attention precisely because of the quality of his playing, which was filled with energy, strength, and life.

3) *power of rhythm* – critics and reviewers are unanimous in naming rhythm as the most powerful source contributing to the dynamism of Prokofiev's playing. Evseeva considers that his ability to offer a separate rhythm for each structure, that is a rhythmic outline that clarifies its semantic role and is hence extremely malleable, creates an effect of unity where each idea finds its own place in the overall “fresco” like a missing piece in a mosaic. Prokofiev's pianistic rhythm is thus one of the important components in the creation of his living interpretations, of an elastic and driving musical motion.

¹⁶⁹ “Он играл...но удивительно убежденно и свободно, под его пальцами фортепиано не хочет петь и вибрировать: оно хочет говорить убежденным и строгим тоном ударного инструмента ...типа старинного клавирина. Но именно эта убежденная свобода исполнения и строгая чеканка ритма доставили автору хороший успех у публики.” *Russkie vedomosti* (27 July, 1912), cited in Nest'ev (1973), *op. cit.*, 71.

¹⁷⁰ Del'son, *op. cit.*, 264-266.

Prokofiev's rhythmic pulsation, or the clear and distinct beating of elements in one or more layers of the musical fabric, assisted the uncovering of the rhythmic skeleton of the work. Further, rhythm for Prokofiev was not only a structural tool but also a most powerful means of conveying emotion.

4) *accent* – the masterly placement of articulation accents introduced variety into and enlivened Prokofiev's playing. According to Asaf'ev, there was an infinite progression from barely audible bumps or jabs and passing emphases to fiery and powerful blows. All this imparted to his playing a certain piquancy, whimsicality, and a special dry brilliance. In the process, the regularity of the metrical beat dissolved in a rhythmically intricate and dynamically saturated accentuation. This generated a special clarity of phrasing and energy of sound.

5) *touch* – a characteristic springy, light, and finger-articulate touch, somewhere between a legato and non legato, (see especially the *L'istesso tempo* section at the conclusion of the second movement of Op. 26), imparted to every sound a three-dimensional effect, a resilience, and a special clarity of detail. See also the final allegro of the third movement and the articulation of mm. 77 and 93, where the difference between staccato and legato is blurred. As Evseeva shows, his percussiveness was formed through a synthesis of rhythmic, melodic, timbre-related, harmonic and other means of achieving expressiveness. The dominant features of his touch were an abrupt manner of producing sound, an elastic strike and a recitativo-declamatory basis of intonation. Having suffered in his youth from undisciplined hands, Prokofiev nevertheless quickly mastered Esipova's method of precise finger articulation and touch. This gave his hands a high state of organization and was responsible for the recognised

accuracy with which his fingers fell upon the keys and his freedom in the most technically complex passages. Despite the general effect of dryness and emotional severity, Prokofiev possessed a rich palette of legato devices. The deeply felt, lyrical passages in his music (already noted above) reveal Prokofiev's exceptional ability to carry a melody.

6) *pedal* -- with his fairly economical use of the pedals, Prokofiev continued pre-Lisztian traditions which prompted his contemporaries to compare his playing with drawing rather than with painting. Constantly transparent use of the pedal was one of the features of piano playing that were firmly inculcated in him by Esipova. Nevertheless, Prokofiev was very fond of juxtaposing pedaled and non-pedaled sonorities, supporting them with a clearly delineated harmonic line.

In his performances, Prokofiev began to differentiate his playing from the artistic traditions of Romanticism and his Russian predecessors. The performative style of the composer was highly instrumental. In this way the uniqueness of Prokofiev's pianism has few connections with the vocally-preoccupied performative art of his predecessors of the 19th century.¹⁷¹ In his performances one could see the polemic depth of his artistry. In characterizing his most sincere expressions alongside aesthetic considerations, Prokofiev's pianism confirms an openness, lyricism, simplicity, and consistency of expression, which went against the traditions of Romanticism.

In returning to the concept of simplicity, Asaf'ev emphasized that the playing of

¹⁷¹ Varunts, *op. cit.*, 82.

Prokofiev was [beyond the usual manner of the popular concert artist.]¹⁷² His unquestionable technical excellence and brilliant virtuosity were never presented as elements sufficient in themselves. Rather, [he achieved something better: simplicity and naturalness through overcoming the temptation of the stage to indulge in empty, mechanical displays of virtuosity.]¹⁷³ Further, [his playing is simple, clear, and sensible, it is calm without the cold self-confidence of the virtuoso, brilliant without any ostentatious display of his amazing technique.]¹⁷⁴ David Oistrakh, remembering Prokofiev's concert in Odessa in 1927, wrote: [his playing amazed me with its simplicity. There was not a single superfluous gesture, not a single overdone expression of feeling, nothing that could be interpreted as a desire to make an impression.]¹⁷⁵

In place of the flexible intimate phrasing, Prokofiev developed a narrative that was astounding and often unbridled in its poetic movement. In place of the soft-touch of the keyboard came a sharp, masculine, energetic, and forward-moving force. In place of a rhythmic rubato was a metric strictness, motoric toccata episodes, and a regularity of accent. In place of a fog-like pedaling, was a sharpened and well-defined sound.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² "...вне обычной эстрадной манеры." See Boris Asaf'ev, "Pervoe vystuplenie Sergeia Prokof'eva," in Sergei Prokofiev: materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia comp. Semen Shlifshtein (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956), 164.

¹⁷³ "Он достиг лучшего: простоты и естественности, как следствия преодоления эстрадных соблазнов – пустого виртуозничанья и механической игры напоказ." *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ "он играет просто, ясно и разумно, спокойно, но без холодности самоуверенного виртуоза, блестяще, но без нарочитого щегольства своей изумительной техникой." *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷⁵ "его игра поразила меня своей простотой. Ни одного лишнего движения, ни одного преувеличенно выраженного чувства, ничего, что можно было бы определить, как желание произвести впечатление." *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁷⁶ Prokofiev (1982), *op. cit.*, 236.

Prokofiev as a pianist was characterised by an intense strength, yet also by a sense of restraint and quiet. These basic qualities combined with a colossal self-possession and overwhelming will-power which were found in everything: from his walking onto a stage, his sitting at the instrument, to how he played. This yielded performances marked by their capability of expression and rhythmic energy, which was presented to the listener through the unfolding of a work. There was little room for the unpredictable, disorganised, or ambiguous in his performance art. As such, the richness of decoration rivalled the clarity and precision of his ambient and pervasive sound.

Prokofiev's recorded performances merits our attention and scrutiny due to the fact that they allow us to enter and grasp the general sound-world envisioned by him. They also assists us in defining interpretative limits by providing us with an insight into Prokofiev's strictness or laxity, idiosyncrasies, and performance practices that have escaped notation in realizing his score. Prokofiev's idiomatic and creative writing shows that he was extremely conscious of the piano's potential and unique characteristics. The writing found in the *Third Piano Concerto* also reveals that he surely thought as an artist/practitioner.¹⁷⁷

Arguably the most distinctive feature of Prokofiev's pianism was his skill in being able to communicate and delineate the fundamental logic of a particular work through the process of the performance. Among Neigauz's most astute comments on Prokofiev's pianism which accentuates his innovative artistry was his declaration that "so great was

¹⁷⁷ Robinson, *op. cit.*, 371.

the spiritual and creative impact of his music that even Prokofiev's opponents who accused him of coldness and crudeness could not but be affected by it."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Neuhaus, *op. cit.*, 234. Even Sergei Liapunov and Aleksandr Borovskii, two long-time adversaries of Prokofiev's musicianship, had to admit he was a pianist of excellence. See Phillips, *op. cit.*, 621 & 787.

CHAPTER 5

Performers and Performances

As products of an established Russian piano tradition, Skryabin's and Rakhmaninov's formation via Safonov and Zverev branded them both with a Russian stamp which they subsequently personalised.¹ For two such pianistic giants who received their formation for some time in the same studio, their musical and pianistic styles were at opposite poles. The individuality of their pianism was perhaps born out of the fact that as composers they were inclined in different directions. Both artists, however, were also stimulated and inspired by a thriving Symbolist art movement which permeated all arts during the Silver Age in Russia. Indeed and as we have observed, Prokofiev also was susceptible to Symbolist influences.

SKRYABIN

In the case of Skryabin, his art essentially has no fullness of meaning in the absence of the consideration of his philosophy.² Skryabin's insecurity and general dissatisfaction with his musical creations necessitated a moral, religious, and scientific justification.³

¹ It was often indicated that Rakhmaninov, whose pianism formed in the traditions of Anton Rubinstein under Zverev, became the figurative nephew of Anton Rubinstein thanks to his later association with Ziloti. While this is clear, he was also most definitely related also to the Moscow Rubinstein through Taneev's theoretical class. Indeed, throughout this course he would play the piano with Taneev which obviously left an imprint on a young and impressionable Rakhmaninov.

² Hugh Macdonald, "Words and Music by A. Skryabin," *The Musical Times* cxiii (1972): 22.

³ Skryabin's defence included a plethora of utopian doctrines and Eastern tenets, encompassing: Nietzsche, Wagner, Blavatsky, Schopenhauer, and Solov'ev.

This was also conjoined with his aesthetics and metaphysical views in an effort to shed a clearer light on his artistic innovations.⁴ Such a mode of thought and operation advances the theory of the inseparability of a reflective artist's philosophy and creations, which are essentially two sides of the one object.⁵ The complexity of the individual parameters notwithstanding, Skryabin strove towards an improved realisation of his mission through the advancing of rational concepts.⁶ In this respect, he stands among the great thinkers, mystics, and visionaries who communicate but one desire, purpose, and mood emanating from the one source. It logically follows, that one must possess a knowledge of his artistic development and sources of stimulus to comprehend his oeuvre in an accurate manner.⁷ "We must ascertain what concepts were incarnated in the procession of sonatas, tone poems, and symphonies."⁸ A mere technical and clinical analysis will not furnish us with a complete plot. The formation of an artistic concept based on aesthetic contemplation is the most beneficial way to appreciate Skryabin's musical language.

The links between aesthetics, musical vocabulary, and performance practice may be tenuous to the sceptic, but upon removal of allegorical layers together with a deeper

⁴ This is evidenced in much correspondence and annotated conversations with friends and colleagues of the composer. A comprehensive treatment of the relationship between art, artist, and philosophy is given in Boris de Schloezer, Scriabin: Artist and Mystic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵ Martin Cooper, "Scriabin's Mystical Beliefs," Music and Letters xvi (1935): 114.

⁶ The intention to overcome convolution is voiced by Skryabin himself. "Everybody thinks that I make everything more and more complex. I do, but in order to surmount complexity, to move away from it. I must attain the summit of complexity in order to become simple." Leonid Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine (Moscow: Muzykal'nyi sektor gosudarstvennogo izdatel'stva, 1925), 269.

⁷ Macdonald, *op. cit.* , 22.

⁸ Boris de Schloezer, Scriabin: Artist and Mystic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 159.

penetration of the musical fabric that is free of populist concepts and prejudices, I believe these connections are visibly articulated in the case of Skryabin. His pianism was evidently the medium through which he could most effectively propagate his philosophy. Skryabin was a product of the intimate and ruminative guises of Chopin and Liszt. His artistry was immediately noticeable in public. Skryabin always performed in big halls, but he only did this because he considered that it was beneath his reputation and dignity to play in small ones. In actual fact, however, Skryabin's pianism was just made for playing precisely in salons, not even in small halls, so intimate was his sound, so diminutive was his purely physical strength. Sabaneev's commentary is particularly insightful:

[those who heard him [Skryabin] in large venues and did not hear him in an intimate setting have not the slightest conception of what his playing was "really" like. He was a genuine magician of sound, possessing the key to the subtlest nuances of sonority. He possessed the secret of transforming the resonance of the piano into echoes of orchestral timbres. No one could compare with him in the rendition of the refined sensuality of his own erotic moments in his works, which he labelled, perhaps without sufficient foundation, "mystical". Skryabin had refinement, an exquisite sensuality and an incorporeal fantasy, yet he somewhat exaggerated all the qualities of his playing in performance -- chastity there was not.]⁹

His performance practices must therefore be instructive for performers faced with making decisions regarding interpretation, even if Skryabin himself would never have intended his performance style to be exactly replicated.

⁹ "Те, кто слышал его в больших залах и не слышал в интимном кругу, не имеют никакого представления о его «настоящей» игре. Это был настоящий волшебник звуков, обладавший тончайшими нюансами звучаний. Он владел тайной преобразования фортепианной звучности в какие-то отзвуки оркестровых тембров — никто с ним не мог сравниться в передаче его собственных утонченно-чувственных, эротических моментов его сочинений, которые он, может быть, без достаточного основания именовал «мистическими». Наверное, в этом роде когда-то играл Шопен. У Скрябина была утонченность, изысканная чувственность и бесплотная фантастика, но все качества своей игры он несколько утрировал при исполнении — целомудренности не было." Leonid Sabaneev, "Rakhmaninov i Skriabin," *Muzykal'naiia akademiia* 2 (1993): 212-213.

In supporting the notion that a cognisance of extra-musical concepts aids performances of his music, an identifiable performance tradition which has grown up in relation to the piano music of Skryabin is able to be isolated. Even if such an illustration has no direct bearing on the performance practices of Skryabin himself, it should be of some significance to note that such a trend exists and can be exemplified. It is a process that has more to do with a singular artistic conception influencing the performance preparation, than a method that seeks to promote unity in performance practice or the existence of a quasi-programmatic notion. In this respect, it is appropriate to examine a genre of music that bears no overt and obvious programmatic inclination, as this makes the proof of such a hypothesis more difficult and necessarily substantial. In the oeuvre of Skryabin, the etudes represent the composer's most non-programmatic output, although they are no less significant in their embodiment of the aesthetical ideas.

The choice and comparison of pianists for the purposes of highlighting a unique Skryabin performing tradition, reflect an investigation into artists of considerable prominence who have been noticeable champions of the music of Skryabin. Vladimir Horowitz, Vladimir Sofronitskii, and Sviatoslav Richter, are products of the Russian piano tradition and were trained by Skryabin disciples. To this end, the analyses of their performances aim to find a convergence or common performance practice. On the other hand, John Ogdon, Ruth Laredo, and Piers Lane have little if any direct association with the Russian pianistic tradition and/or a first-hand knowledge of unique Skryabin performing practices. Consequently, their performances reveal an individuality which is

immune to the foreknowledge of a performance tradition and its inherent artistic conception.

Etude in c#, Op. 42 No. 5

With music moving at such a speed as in this etude, it is difficult to ascertain the presence of any consequential discrepancies in pitch between the performance and the published score. Further, the considerable technical difficulty together with the musical structure of the work does not always enable accuracy in articulation or compel clarity in sound. Rhythmic alterations have also to be understood as being distinct from the concept of *rubato*.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Vladimir Horowitz	RCA GD86215 1953 (live)	3:06

Pitch: The imprecision of this particular performance is magnified due to the fact that it is a live recording, even if this also enhances the spontaneity, an essential ingredient in a genuine Skryabin performance. The only apparent and deliberate deviation from the published score is the voicing of the final chord, transposed an octave higher; this voicing is significant in that it reinforces what Leikin has termed the “indisputable prerogative [of the artist] to enhance the music they played so that their expressiveness and mastery of the instrument could shine through more brightly.”¹⁰

Rhythm: The main rhythmic alterations are notes of anticipation, deliberately staggered to separate the voices in a convoluted texture. This occurs discernibly at m. 23 where the *a#* is displaced to prepare a delayed arrival of the *g#* octave (melody). Also, in mm.

¹⁰ Leikin, *op. cit.*, 110.

28-9 the *c#-b#* resolution in the treble voice is prolonged an extra half beat to read the same as that in m. 30.

Phrasing: This parameter is intrinsically bound to tempo relationships. It can be said that a concern for phrasing governs the fluctuations in tempo. Horowitz typifies and mirrors Skryabin's Russian Piano School-influenced approach to phrasing which uses the resonance and accelerating speed to link long phrases. An example of this occurs from the final beat (*g#*) of m. 12, where Horowitz uses the pedal and subtle control of dynamic levels to sustain one phrase through to m. 18. There is great attention given in this performance to the singing of the melodic line, and voice leading is realised in performance by an emphasis on certain suspensions and their resolutions.

Dynamics: Horowitz provides another picture of a true Skryabin interpretation with enormous dynamic range and great swells. The long-range *crescendi* help to build and sustain the tension. The composer's original dynamic indications are observed throughout, although both the B sections are rendered with extreme contrast to the turbulence of the A section. Consequently, while the score indicates *forte* for both B sections, Horowitz plays them with much delicacy, even though the volume and intensity of sound is still considerable.

Pedalling: Horowitz is sparing in his use of the pedal. It is evident, however, that Horowitz typically employs a wide range of pedal techniques based on a familiarisation with the methods of the Russian Piano School and Skryabin's own practices. A

depression of 1/4-1/2 depth is used to generate the clarity in texture one finds from m. 9, when the alto voice begins to move in semiquavers. A flutter technique (previously discussed as a personal trait of Skryabin) is used throughout the B section (from mm. 21-29), and also informs the recapitulation where an immense sound is generated through the use of a deeper pedal depression but is relieved from becoming blurred through frequent releases to 1/4 depth.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Sviatoslav Richter	Melodia 7432129470-2 1952	1:52

Pitch: In this performance, pitch alterations are not discernible.

Rhythm: Like Horowitz, there is a distinct tendency to separate the voices by the displacement of simultaneities, although this is done with more subtlety in Richter's performance. This effect also occurs in almost exactly the same places as those of the Horowitz interpretation. Rhythmically, Richter's performance reveals a metronomic rendition which also allows for a similar concept of rubato to that of Horowitz to be employed. This is demonstrated in his approach to the B section.

Phrasing: Once again, the similarities in Richter's phrasing to Horowitz's are telling. There is an apparent tendency to phrase in long sections and Richter evidently uses the sound and inherent speed of the piece to achieve this aim. Likewise, there is an obvious inclination to emphasise a singing melodic line. This is also most discernible in the middle section (from mm. 39-46) where the left hand is phrased in groups of twelve to support the melodic line.

Dynamics: In union with his concept of long phrases, Richter's dynamic range functions on a large scale. The range is wide and this is especially noticeable from m. 9 when the moving alto voice enters and is rendered extremely softly. Richter does not reduce substantially the dynamic level for the B sections, even though his emphasis on the melodic line makes these sections prominent as the textures are not as dense.

Pedalling: Richter is arguably even more sparse in his use of the sustaining pedal in this piece. This assists in the production of a clear texture where one easily hears every voice. Even the reprise of A at m. 31 together with the closing section are preformed with the pedal at hardly more than 1/2 depth. Richter frequently uses the flutter technique to produce a dry sound which is especially suited to the first B section.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
John Ogdon	EMI HQS 1296 1973	2:24

Pitch: There are noticeable absences in Ogdon's realisation of the published score even though pitch alterations are extremely hard to discern in this music. The first of these occurs in m. 3 where the *d#* in the alto voice of the treble is not played. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is a deliberate action on the part of the performer, as one would not find any edition to support such an omission. Thus, it is more reasonable to presume that this is a mistake. Also, the last note of each sextuplet grouping in the L.H. from mm. 13-16 is inaudible.

Rhythm: An apparent rhythmic alteration occurs in both mm. 14 and 16, with the treble voice cutting short the tie. This is associated with a small-scale *accelerando* through

which one perceives Ogdon striving for a longer phrase; however, this is thwarted by his accentuation on both the *d natural* in m. 14 and the following *b* that begins m. 15.

Ogdon also does not slow the tempo leading into the B sections.

Phrasing: Ogdon's approach is to consider phrasing in small units. This is uncharacteristic of a Russian school approach, which views climaxes on a large scale. Ogdon also obfuscates the meter by emphasising the first beat of the anacrusis bar and its subsequent repetitions. The ascending phrase in m. 4 is divided into two shorter phrases and from m. 14 there is a noticeable accent on every dotted quarter beat. This is even more pronounced in the rendering of the second theme mm. 22-23. Especially unusual are the accents on the first beats of mm. 18 and 20. All such unwarranted accents only reinforce his concept of viewing this work in small phrase units.

Dynamics: Ogdon maintains a very restricted dynamic range in his interpretation. He begins closer to *mp* and climaxes at *ff*. There is virtually no observance of the detailed swells that permeate the original score. The arrival of the moving alto voice in m. 8 is performed at such a volume level that it overshadows the melody. This is commonplace in Ogdon's interpretation, whereby the melodic voice is frequently subordinated. The second section is played loud with no differentiation from the tempestuous A section.

Pedalling: Ogdon uses a full pedal to create a big but frequently blurred and muffled sound. This becomes a strange practice in light of the turbid textures that are realised particularly from mm. 13-16.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Piers Lane	Hyperion CDA66607 1992	2:53

Pitch: No alterations to the score are discernible.

Rhythm: Lane renders the rhythm of the melody in mm. 1-2 differently to that printed, shortening the value of the *c#* from eighth to sixteenth note. At m. 5, however, the *a* in the melody is lengthened to an eighth instead of the written sixteenth. Lane also emphasises the second note of each L.H. septuplet from mm. 1-2 to highlight the *g#-g#f#* motif. This is not done, however, in any subsequent appearance of this theme.

Phrasing: As with Ogdon, phrases in this performance are also conceived in small units.

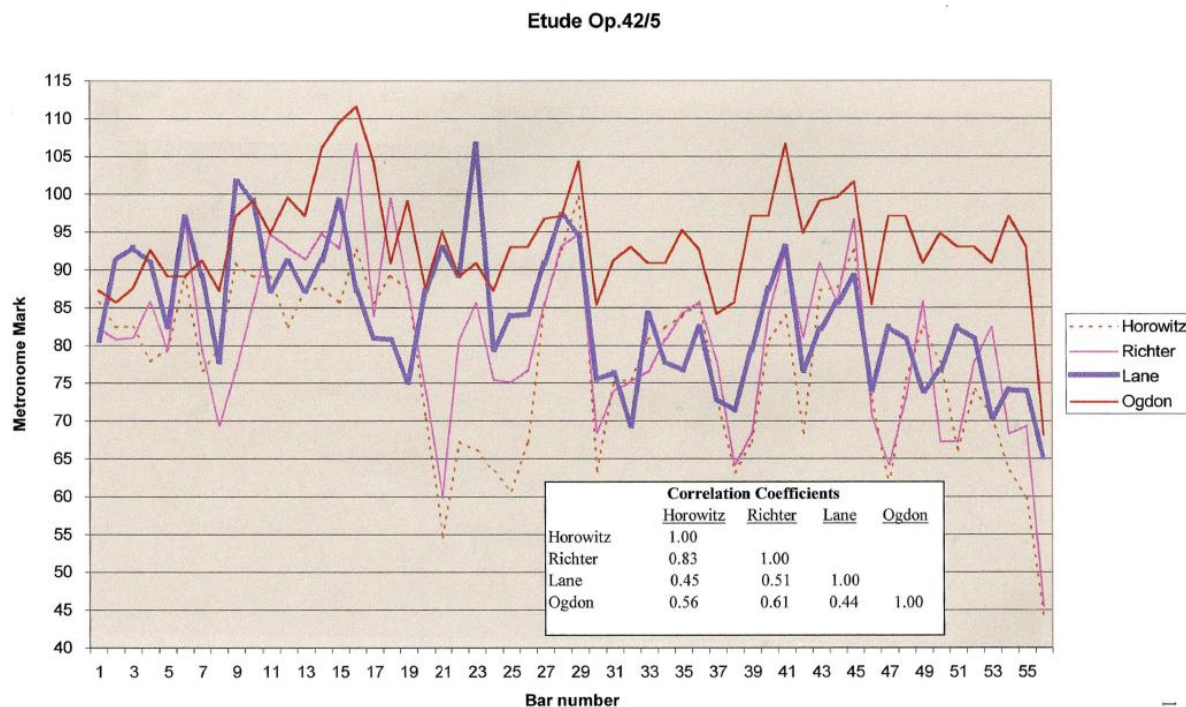
Dynamics: The B sections are performed at a *forte* level with the inner voice being highlighted. This underscores an unusual interpretation of the score, as Skryabin would have specifically differentiated the inner voice from the melody merely to stress the importance of a singing melodic line rather than to draw attention to a contrapuntal line in the alto voice (see mm. 21-26). The *cresc poco a poco* from m. 28 is only begun from m. 30; and an unusual *sforzando* occurs at m. 47.

Pedalling: The use of the pedal is rare and sparse if not also too clean. Consequently, Lane fails to generate the big sound required to sustain the tension required in this turbulent work.

Tempo Graph: The graphic representation of fluctuations in tempo reveals some obvious features. Statistically, these are best analysed by comparing the graphs of each performance to yield a correlative coefficient -- the higher the number, the greater the similarity, with 1.00 being a perfect match. Thus, the performances of Horowitz and Richter are incredibly similar with a coefficient of 0.83.

Of greatest interest in this piece is the approach to the middle section from mm. 21-30 and 39-46. Both Horowitz and Richter slow down considerably during this section and play with a very free, almost improvised feel with tremendous swells (see the variation in tempo even over a two-measure period, e.g., mm. 21-3 Horowitz, and 44-6 Richter) and a great emphasis, as always, on the singing quality of the melody. The average tempo subsequently increases in the following A, A' sections, although in both cases it never quite matches the tempo at the beginning.

Alternatively, both Ogdon and Lane maintain a reasonably consistent tempo throughout with no dramatic fluctuations. The correlative coefficients do not inform us with much in the way of either pianist, except to say that they reveal no apparent similarities between each other. Ogdon is undoubtedly the most consistent in his tempo, whereas Lane gets progressively slower as the piece goes on.



Etude in F#, Op. 42 No. 4

The concept of a Skryabin *rubato* arguably effects this etude more than any other in this set. The indications on the score provide us with virtually no evidence to support the interpretations of the Russians, Sofronitskii and Horowitz, which personify a totally unique *rubato* concept. A comparison of the tempo graphs of the Russian pianists with Laredo and Ogdon is very revealing. The tempo indication by the composer is $\text{♩} = 60$; which implies that the piece should last for approximately 2 mins 35 secs.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Vladimir Sofronitskii	Multisonic 310181-2 1946-51	2:45

Pedalling: Sofronitskii uses the pedal to create a cloudy ambience. This is a technique that Skryabin himself talked about. It is achieved through using a flutter technique, although here the pedal is fully depressed and subsequently released to half-depth which

allows the sound to reverberate. It also assists in maintaining the long phrases at such a slow tempo.

Rhythm: Once again, rhythmic distortions are connected to the unique *rubato* practice. The tenth triads (that is the triads that span the interval of a tenth) are played with the lowest note as an *appoggiatura*. These occur in mm. 1, 5, 9, 25, 29, 31. Also, the motif that first occurs in m. 13 is rendered in a most unusual way, with a seemingly indefinite fermata on the first eighth note and an elongated dotted eighth to follow. It is also preceded by an impulsive and swollen ritardation in tempo from the final group of triplet eighth notes immediately preceding this motif. The articulation and touch also characterises a sound that is produced “from” the keys, that is by depressing the keys with a high wrist action -- moving up and away from the keyboard.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Vladimir Horowitz	Sony SK 53472 1972	2:37

Pedalling: Horowitz’s use of the pedal is almost exactly the same as that of Sofronitskii. Notice in particular how Horowitz pedal’s the B section (m. 13) is very dissimilar from that of the A section, as it is the case in Sofronitskii’s performance. The pedal in both cases is manipulated to provide for a resonant melodic voice whilst maintaining a smooth bass. This introduces the use of a pedal that is depressed at 3/4 depth and “adjusted” minutely on almost every eighth beat.

Rhythm: It is not incidental that Horowitz’s reading is a mere 8 seconds shorter than Sofronitskii’s. Obvious instances of individuality abound, although their artistic concept of this piece remains almost exactly the same from articulation to dynamics to phrasing.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Ruth Laredo	Nonesuch 7559-73035-2 1970	1:40

Pedalling: Laredo uses the pedal to colour and to sustain but not with the same degree of subtlety as that of either Horowitz or Sofronitskii. She pedals mostly on the beat of each triplet.

Rhythm: The above-mentioned tenth triads are played by Laredo as arpeggiated chords as opposed to using the bottom note as an anticipation. The motif of m. 13 is played without any ritardation and the second eighth is doubly dotted and followed by a thirty-second note. The ensuing *mezzo staccato* group of triplet eighth notes is performed with a touch that is firmly into the keys with a low wrist and hands close to the keyboard. Laredo's sudden standstill between mm.32-33 is a rather peculiar hesitation in light of the tempo and generally brisk flow she has set prior to this and which she continues soon after the first triad of m. 33 has been struck.

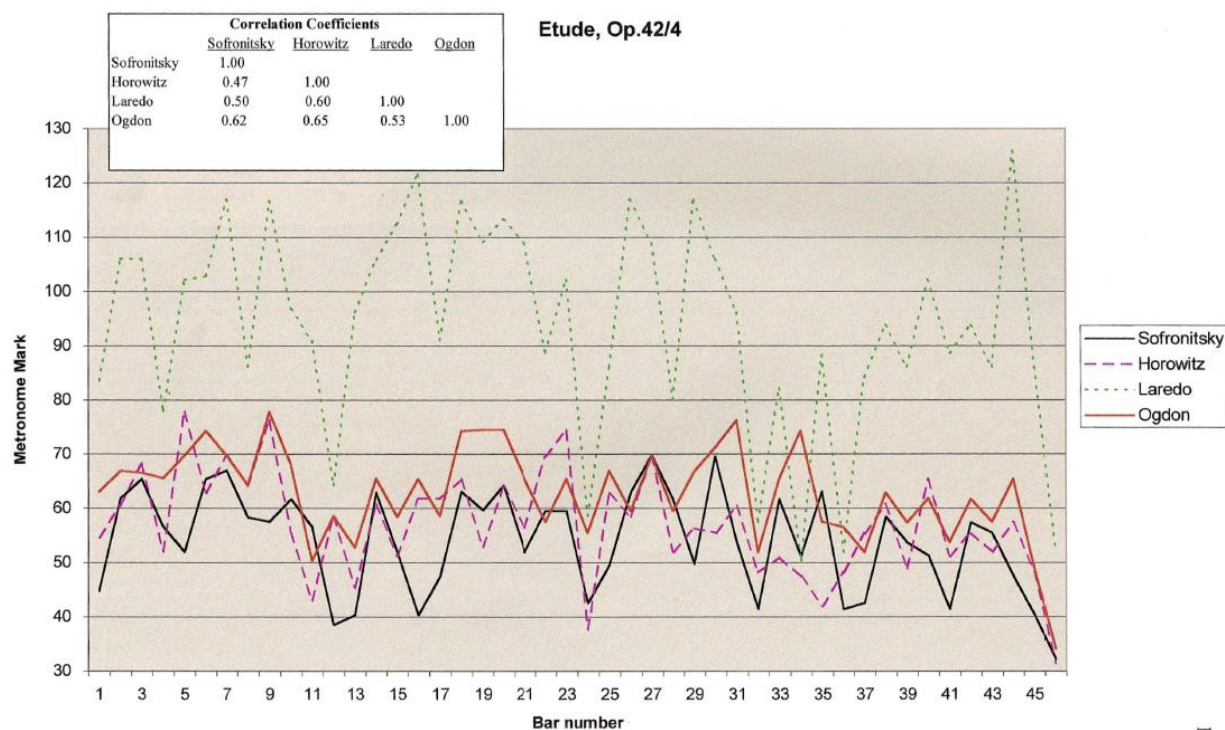
PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
John Ogdon	EMI HQS 1296 1973	2:14

Pedalling: Ogdon also uses the pedal to sustain, but with no great subtlety. Like Laredo, he pedals mostly on the first eighth beat of each triplet group. In this interpretation, more so than in Laredo's, Ogdon's pedalling contributes to a short phrase structure which is generally at odds with phrasing indicated and the overall character of the piece.

Rhythm: Ogdon's interpretation is a "straight" reading of the score. His *rubato* is typical of a normative Romantic concept with no dramatic variations in tempo.

Tempo Graph: The most outstanding observation that can be made from an examination of the tempo graph is the uniqueness of the Laredo performance. The dissimilarity pertains more to the actual brisk speed of the performance than anything else. Coefficients do not reveal as much in this piece as does a closer inspection of the contours at specific points of the graph, which displays the similarities of the performances of Sofronitskii and Horowitz.

The approach of both Russian pianists to mm. 13 and 33 is very similar. Both interpretations are within a few metronome marks of each other at m. 13, and are prepared by a similar fall in tempo at m. 33. Also, both Horowitz and Sofronitskii share an affinity for tempo range. A range from MM 40-70 also characterises Ogdon's performance, although a listening to the recording shows that his tempo fluctuation is brought about by his delayed arrival of the L.H. after the eighth rest at the beginning of most measures.



Etude in Db, Op. 42 No. 6

This etude highlights the approach to phrasing that was unique to pianists of the Russian school in their interpretation of the music of Skryabin.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Vladimir Sofronitskii	Multisonic 310181-2 1946-51	2:02
Sviatoslav Richter	Melodia 74321 29470 2 1952	1:52

Phrasing: Note how both Sofronitskii and Richter stagger the distance between the first and second beats of every measure in which the third beat is tied to the second. This is a common practice that enables the end of the phrase to move through the bar line and into the following measure. This approach to phrasing also lengthens the phrase and assists in building the tension. It is interesting to observe their identical 2+2+4 measure approach to the first eight measures. Sofronitskii also emphasises the first note of each bar in the left hand to form a contrapuntal line. See, in particular, their similar interpretation of the B section which moves through phrases of various lengths.

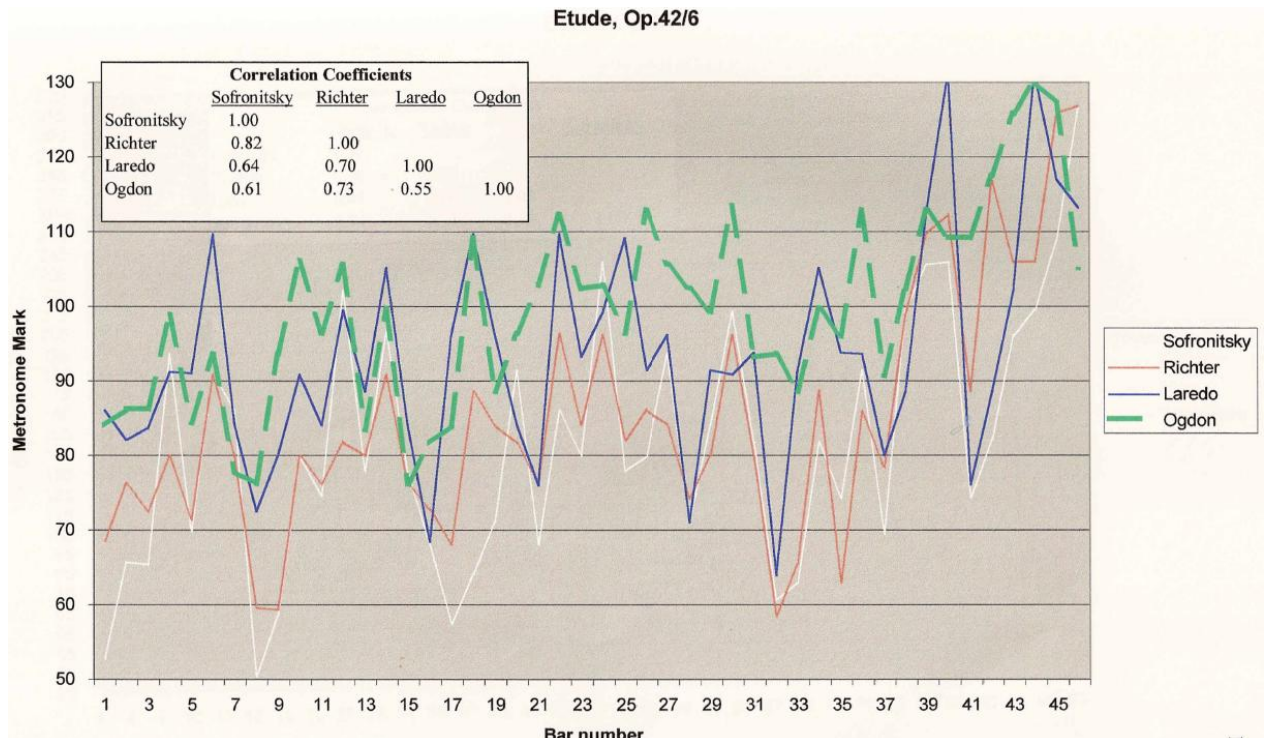
PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Ruth Laredo	Nonesuch 7559-73035-2 1970	1:40
John Ogdon	EMI HQS 1296 1973	1:25

Laredo and Ogdon tend to phrase in two-measure units, although both manage to hold the structure together due to a faster tempo. This is naturally caused by the emphasis given to each crotchet beat. There is also an ostensible lack of tonal weight accorded to the melodic line, or rather, the inside lines are much more pronounced than in the playing of the Russians. This impedes the dynamic control that is exacerbated by the moving quintuplets. Essentially, the *crescendi/decrescendi* have to be reset every two measures which does not allow for long phrases. Also worth mentioning is their similarities with regard to articulation of the quintuplets, which are far more pronounced than in either of the Russian pianist's performances.

Tempo Graph: The graph highlights the resemblance of Sofronitskii and Richter in their interpretations, which almost map onto each other. Note especially the extreme range of tempo used in both performances. This also shows a gradual but steady increase in average tempo as the piece progresses, which is commensurate with the elongation of phrases and resultant quickening of the quintuplets. Of course, the correlative coefficient of 0.82 is, in itself, enough to inform us that both Russian pianists share a similar conception of this work.

The average tempo chosen by both Laredo and Ogdon is considerably faster than either Richter or Sofronitskii. Both graphs are also significantly more angular than that of the Russian pianists. This would explain the predilection for shorter phrase units which

necessarily effects a tempo change over a shorter time period. All this notwithstanding, the performances are not actually that similar to one another as Laredo and Ogdon only yield a coefficient of 0.55. This does not, however, explain a great similarity in their *rubato* concept which necessarily effects their phrasing and tempo.



Etude Op. 65 No. 3

With this etude, our examination considers the impact of the Skryabin aesthetic upon a performer's interpretation. Thus, it is imperative to define the manifestations in the music of the Symbolist plot.

PERFORMER	RECORDING	DURATION
Vladimir Sofronitskii	Multisonic 310181-2 1946-51	2:02
Sviatoslav Richter	Melodia 74321 29470 2 1952	1:52
Vladimir Horowitz	Sony SK 53472 1972	1:46

All three pianists exhibit a noticeable difference in comparison to others, and, indeed, achieve a concordance in their approach to the various sections of this music that are infused with Symbolist allegory. Firstly, let us consider the A section which contains the motif of hysteria, with its conventional metre together with broken chordal textures that pivot around a given axis. Richter begins closest to the metronomic indication of 144/quarter beat, although all three pianists exhibit an obvious tendency to accelerate gradually whilst also building the tension. This is reflected in the tempo graph also which shows the similarity between their interpretations from mm. 1-16. The two most interesting aspects here, however, which indeed set these interpretations apart from others, are the unique approach to pedalling and phrasing. The pedalling of the A section is interesting because all three pianists begin without the pedal and subsequently depress it at the same point, that is at mm. 5-6, and 15-16. This is not a mere coincidence but reflects a common practice of all three pianists in analogous situations. See a similar instance in Op. 65/2, mm. 17-19 and also the exposition of Op. 53, where the phrase climaxes immediately after a motif of hysteria or summons and the pedal is depressed fully and usually blurred over the period of the ensuing measures.

If there was any uncertainty and/or scepticism relating to the common usage of the pedal, the phrasing of the same section of music is even more obviously discernible from listening to the recordings. The predilection of all three pianists to phrase mm. 1-16 in two groups of 2+4+2 is unusual and even though it cannot be explained by a reference to the Symbolist plot, it is, however, a deliberate enough practice to warrant special mention. The dynamic range also progresses commensurate with the phrase

structure. This matches the dynamic indications of the score, whereby at m. 9 there is another drop in both volume level and tempo.

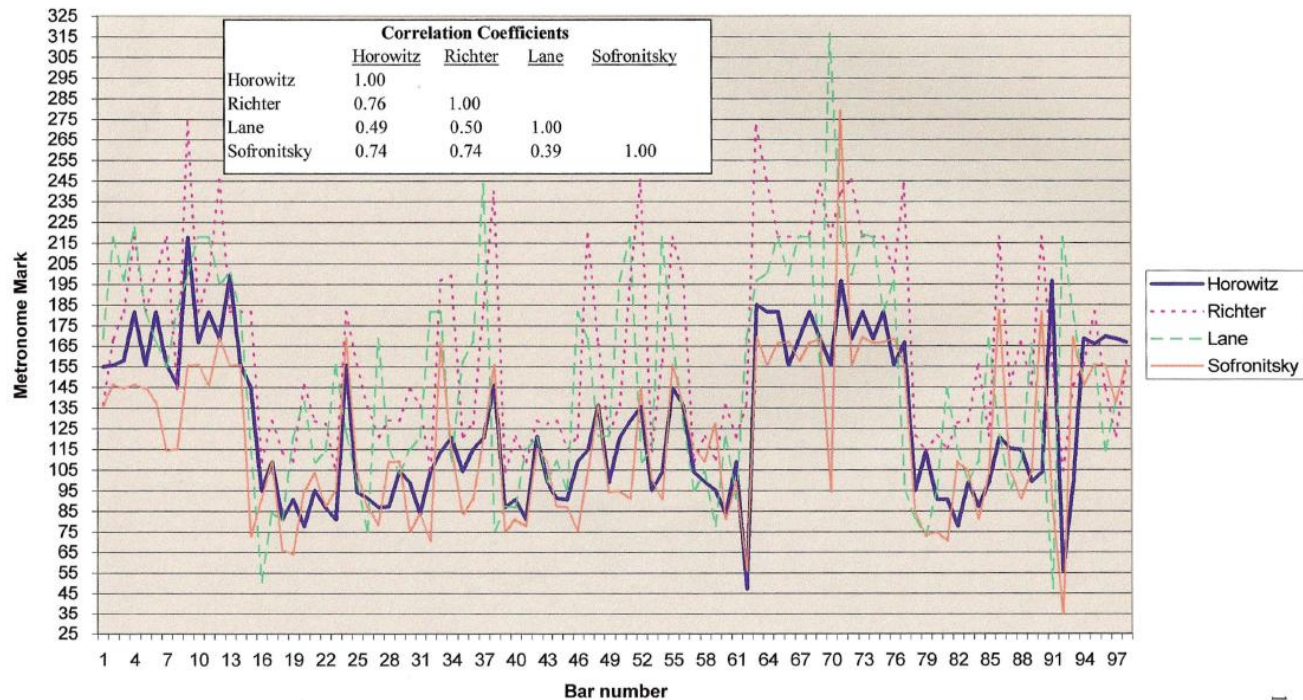
The section entitled *Impérieux*, which reverses and translates the enharmonic equivalent $g-d^b$ of the tritone motion into $c\#-g$ whilst still maintaining the 9+13 harmonic degrees, also reveals many similarities in the interpretative approach. This section uncovers the motif of summons (that is the upward, and frequently reversed, motion from $c-g$ in the treble voice of mm. 31 & 35), a tension-generator that is dispersed between short episodes of the hysteria motif. The harmonic plan of mm. 17-60 follows that of a repeated rising sequence, exhibiting representations of the same combination of the two motifs (see especially the step motion of the hysteria motif). This climaxes in mm. 61-2 with the manifestation of the light and ecstasy motifs. Throughout this whole section (mm. 17-32) one immediately notices the different energy levels associated with the realisation of the motives in performances of the Russians. There is a marked separation between mm. 32-33. This difference is noticeable in its effect on all parameters. In mm. 17-32, the tempo broadens and there is an emphasis on both the bass tritone movement together with the summons motif. All three pianists exhibit a break between the various episodes. This recurs from m. 63 onwards.

Lane's interpretation is rather dissimilar in most respects to any of the Russians. His reading is obviously not effected by a foreknowledge of the Symbolist syntax. His interpretative approach reflects a normative tendency exemplified by most pianists outside the tradition to render the given text as accurately as possible without

considering the information behind it. One can readily observe the differences in the interpretative approach. Firstly, Lane's concept of touch and articulation lends itself to a smooth, legato rendition which does not assist in producing the most effective and vivid realisation of the underlying Symbolist plot. There is also a distinct preference for performing the music in a manner that does not differentiate between the diverse sections. Notice, for example, the transition from mm. 32-33 where, apart from the obvious dynamic contrast, Lane does not alter his pedalling, and there is no significant change in the speed. This occurs repeatedly throughout the piece, together with the rather monotonous tendency to stress the first beat of every measure. The absence also of coherence in phraseology, analogous to the Russians, only serves to keep any realisation of the Symbolist content out of the question.

The nature of tempo fluctuations, as a result of a unique *rubato* concept, assumes a new meaning in the music of Op. 65 in comparison with that of Op. 42. Op. 65 most definitely belongs to Skryabin's latest period of compositional activity, the one in which he had come to terms with the musical translation of his Symbolist plot and sought its realisation in the most precise way. In this regard, it represents a rather sectionalised and disjointed pastiche of motifs which makes a consideration of the correlative coefficients more relevant. Thus, it is quite revealing in itself to observe that Lane's performance has little similarities with those of the Russians, as the highest coefficient of 0.5 (in comparison with Richter) shows. In demonstrating the above, credence is inadvertently lent also not merely to the existence and veritability of a Russian piano tradition but to the sincerity and profundity of its pedagogical methods.

Etude, Op.65/3



These analyses prove that the Russian piano school has been promoting an informed approach towards the interpretation of the music of Skryabin. Thus, the Russian pianists listed would have held an almost unfair advantage over their non-Russian counterparts in that they were not only trained by pianists-pedagogues who had a direct connection with the composer but were exhorted to enlighten themselves of aesthetic considerations considered vital to making informed decisions regarding interpretation. While the resulting interpretations may have been somewhat different to Skryabin's own interpretations, they expose a vital conversance and familiarity which helps connect aesthetic, musical vocabulary, and performance practice as a unified and whole entity.

RAKHMANNINOV

Unlike Skryabin, Rakhmaninov's compositional style can be seen as the culmination of the Romantic tradition in Russian music,¹¹ creating a continuity of tradition with his immediate predecessors such as Glinka, Tchaikovsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Remaining an adherent of a Romantically-inspired musical language from the beginning to the end of his artistic career, Rakhmaninov stood sharply against his colleagues such as Skryabin, Stravinsky, and later Prokofiev and Shostakovich, all of whom followed a path oriented towards the embrace of musical modernism. Rakhmaninov expressed his partialities unequivocally when offering his own insights on the then new musical directions of the early twentieth century, [not only did I not find myself part of that, I did not want to follow the trend just because it was called "development" and did not follow a straight course of evolution, but galloped sideways in a grotesque distortion, unacceptable for those who reverently looked at their favourite art form...]¹² This notwithstanding, Percy Grainger's insightful statement that Rakhmaninov represented "the somewhat rare case of a creative mind that is thoroughly original and personal without being particularly modern,¹³ could be applied equally to Rakhmaninov as composer, pianist, or conductor, and was representative not merely of Rakhmaninov's

¹¹ "Имя Рахманинова... было окружено каким-то ореолом романтизма...Его индивидуальность действовала на воображение молодежи, его бегали смотреть, слушать, о нем много говорили, о нем в тиши мечтали, его сочинения тревожили молодые души." Mikhail Bukinik, in Zarui Apetian (ed.), *Vospominaniia o S. Rakhmaninove* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1967), 244.

¹² "не только оказался не в состоянии, но и не захотел следовать моде; особенно потому, что это так называемое «развитие» не следовало прямым курсом эволюции, но состояло из скачков вбок и гротескных искажений, неприемлемых для всякого, кто благоговейно относится к своему любимому искусству..." Sergei Rakhmaninov, *Vospominaniia, zapisannye Oskarom fon Rizemanom* (Moscow: Raduga, 1992), 227.

¹³ Sergei Rachmaninoff, "National and Radical Impressions in the Music of Today and Yesterday," *The Etude* 37.10 (October 1919): 615.

Romantic sympathies but also of the respect he enjoyed among his composer colleagues such as Bartok, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Ginastera, and even the Americans Virgil Thomson and Amy Beach.

As we have already observed, Rakhmaninov also rebelled against excessive Romantic tendencies, ideals of liberty, and open display of emotion, excess, and flamboyance exhibited by figures such as Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt, and deliberately sought to remain as clinical, unmoved, and as anti-Romantic in playing style as possible. A catalyst for this unusual performance style which remains hitherto unexplored could be Rakhmaninov's attraction to a pervasive and populist current in Russia described vividly in *What Is Art?* by Leo Tolstoy. This mode of thought essentially embraced the unification of all the arts in an effort to spread unity, egalitarianism, and raise the status of the peasant. It was as such socially divergent from capitalist ideals of the West.¹⁴ Rakhmaninov wholly supported Russian populism in its attachment to nature, solitude, and the simplicity of the peasant and tried to translate its meaning into music.¹⁵ It is perhaps this notion of straightforwardness and a circumvention of the artistic pretension common to early twentieth-century performance practice, together with a disposition which seeks to look backwards for a comfortable musical syntax that might explain his unaffected performance style.¹⁶

¹⁴ Charles Ruud, "Fin de siecle Culture and the Shaping of Rachmaninoff," Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario 15 (1995): 23.

¹⁵ Sergei Rakhmaninov, "Vospominaniia," Literaturnoe nasledie, 3 Vols., (Moscow: Muzyka, 1978), I:52.

¹⁶ Leonid Gakkel', Fortepiannaia muzyka XX veka: ocherki (Moscow: Sov. kompozitor, 1997).

The characteristics of Rakhmninov's performative art are directly related to his interpretation of the works of other composers which in turn are affected by the unique qualities of his own music. The subjective character of Rakhmaninov's performance was also affected by the powerful influence of his own individuality, through which he conceptualized and interpreted the works of other composers. In general, this resulted in a dramatization, or emphasis on the tragic narrative of a particular work, situating an interpretation against the typically challenging circumstances of a composer's life. In enumerating Rakhmaninov's stylistic traits, Harrison has alluded to his representation of typical Russian school qualities by his clear sense of line, variety of tonal nuance, his approach to filigree or cadenzas which he viewed as integral to the music's structure and not mere decoration; pedalling which, like that of Skryabin, was connected to his concept of dynamics; amazing legato; and a combination of Classical discipline and effortless virtuosity. His piano playing also engendered a sense of nostalgia for Russia. Indeed, during the years of emigration, nostalgia affected Rakhmaninov's pianism with a renewed feeling for musical silence, richness of *piano*, expressiveness, and a penchant for sudden retardations in tempo. Even while in his homeland, he was surrounded by an environment in which there was evidently a sense of anguish or yearning for the past, and the memory of the old school of Russian music and art. It was from this perspective that he came to idolize the Rubinstein brothers. The unique qualities of his playing were associated with an uncovering of form and exposition of a work's structure. In addition to his inimitable tone and buoyancy of touch, Rakhmaninov displayed a proclivity to sweep through phrases, avoiding excessive *rubato* or any self-indulgence which might impede the line. This gave his playing a fleeting quality which was reflected in his

choice of unusually fast tempi. Indeed, Rakhmaninov's concept of *rubato* was unique and merits much further investigation, particularly in light of the fact that modern-day interpretations seem to spread *rubato* evenly throughout a measure or phrase whereas Rakhmaninov's *rubato* evinces large swells and dramatic *rallentandi*.¹⁷ Yet it is in the examination of these practices, especially as they pertain to his *rubato* style, where diametrically opposite views have been expressed.

Rakhmaninov's performative rhythm is compact, impulsive, with many sudden surges of tempi. Together with this, he could hypnotize by a means of a constant march-like pulse, which can be heard in metrical, toccata passages. Also very idiosyncratic was his penchant for pedal-less playing, especially of slow, *legato* melodic lines. His was a seemingly spontaneous performance art embodying freedom and perfection. This can be observed particularly in the Classical repertoire, where he combined a sense of the old-fashioned and nostalgic with the salon and demonic virtuosity. Thus, Rakhmaninov was said to combine the sincerity of Busoni with a spontaneity characteristic of the eminent Josef Hofmann. It was a grandiose temperament with a powerful, vivid artistic conception of seemingly limitless colours. Yet, it was his supple and expressive sound that became his most identifiable and unique characteristic.¹⁸ In Sabaneev's words,

¹⁷ This is suggested by Harrison as a particularly idiosyncratic feature of Rakhmaninov's playing. He describes his *rubato* as seeming impulsive and never sounding studied. See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 307 and 324.

¹⁸ Iurii Nikol'skii, "Iz vospominanii," in *Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove* ed. Zarui Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1988), II: 49.

“Rachmaninov possessed a powerful and passionate spirit yet at the same time he also had a sort of chaste modesty which characterised his finer nuances.”¹⁹

In enumerating all these characteristics of Rakhmaninov’s pianism, one can readily observe that his was an art unlike that of any of his notable colleagues from the Golden Age of pianism. Rakhmaninov’s pianism, however, resisted easy classification not only due to its dissimilarity from his peers but primarily due to the fact that he consciously embodied stylistic traits uncovered as having Classical, Romantic, and Modern dispositions and derivations. In this sense, his pianism was uniquely wide-ranging and all-embracing even if it remained identifiably Russian.

In choosing to focus attention on the third piano concerto, I have deliberately chosen a work which lies not only at the pinnacle of Rakhmaninov’s compositional achievements but also one through which he has clearly articulated his interpretative and performative practices. It should be interesting to note here that Rakhmaninov stated in no uncertain terms that an ideal interpretation of this work did exist in the performance of Vladimir Horowitz. In fact, Rakhmaninov’s unreserved endorsement of Horowitz’s interpretation was combined with an admission that he believed Horowitz’s playing of Op. 30 was better than his own. Indeed, the admiration of the composer for Horowitz’s insights into his music led to a concert with Horowitz as soloist and the composer as conductor in Pasadena, California in 1942.

¹⁹ “У Рахманинова была мощь и темперамент, причем одновременно в нем была какая-то целомудренная скромность в оттенках.” Leonid Sabaneev, “Rakhmaninov i Skryabin,” Muzykal’naia akademiia 2 (1993): 212-213.

Rakhmaninov had already witnessed the wild reception Horowitz was given when touring Europe with the work in 1924.²⁰ In February of 1925, however, Horowitz was invited to play the work with Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Orchestra. The night before the performance, Horowitz joined Rakhmaninov in a preview of the concerto at Steinway Hall. According to Abram Chasins, Rakhmaninov admitted being deeply shaken and listened in awe as Horowitz dealt with the piece with the “insatiableness of a tiger”.²¹ Given Rakhmaninov’s esteem for Horowitz’s interpretation, some pertinent observations comparing the composer’s interpretation and that of his favourite performance of the work seem particularly relevant and justified.

In Horowitz’s performance, the main theme of the concerto sounds altogether different. The theme sounds less rushed due to the slower tempo, pliant phrasing, and abundant swells and slight delays in tempo, causing the opening section also to sound more dramatic with an emphasis on highlighting a greater internal contrast. Horowitz’s phrasing is more detached, with localized and overt dynamic flights (which also exist in Rakhmaninov’s performance), but with a developing *crescendo* before the climax at the place when the composer lengthens and stretches the phrases, thereby choosing not to emphasize the sequential conflict in the drive towards mm. 14-15. In regards to tempo,

²⁰ Horowitz had already given the Moscow premiere of the work in 1923. Other significant performances soon after the premiere were given by Lev Oborin (1928), Pavel Serebriakov (1933), and Iakov Flier (1935). From the late 1930s to 50s, Gilels, Ginzburg, Merzhanov, Renzin, and Cliburn became the principal champions of the work. See Natalia Rastopchina, “Ispolnenie fortepiannykh kontsertov Rakhmaninova sovetскими pianistami,” in Ob ispolnenii fortepiannoi muzyki Bakha, Betkhovena, Debiussi, Rakhmaninova, Prokof’eva, Shostakovicha (Moscow-Leningrad: Muzyka, 1965), 133.

²¹ Walker, *op. cit.*, 153. Horowitz made many recordings of the Third Piano Concerto. See <http://web.telia.com/~u85420275/> for a listing. In this discussion, I shall use the Horowitz RCA recording with Eugene Ormandy for its fidelity to the original form of the work.

Horowitz is generally more controlled and “rhythmic,” while Rakhmaninov’s playing is more free and unrestrained, marked by his characteristically flexible *tempo rubato*.

Even in the *più mosso*, Horowitz immediately creates a dynamic and sonorous singing line. In the development, Horowitz again chooses rhythmic and dynamic evenness over Rakhmaninov’s characteristic dynamic mini-waves. Horowitz’s impulses and occasional accentuations of the theme draw attention to the sounds of the motif and they add significantly to the orchestral sonority. The movement towards the climax in Horowitz’s interpretation directly corresponds to the directions of the score, with a strong *crescendo* and an accented *sforzando* every second and fourth beats which continues through the *Allegro*. Once again, the development felt in Horowitz’s performance is more measured than in Rakhmaninov’s due to the slower tempo. The last surge of energy occurs at the beginning of the concluding section of the coda. In Horowitz’s performance, the dynamics and definition of the initial theme are further softened and muffled in the reprise-coda, causing the phrasing to become more even and elongated with a singing melodic line characterized by its softness and simplicity.

In the second movement, Horowitz gives special attention to the delineation of each voice causing the texture to sound dense. His reading is lyrical, an apparent contrast and antidote to the two movements on either side. This allows for the active articulation of the piano, which leads to a more punctuated phrase structure than the united wave of development in the hands of Rakhmaninov. Omitted by the composer, Horowitz’s rendering of the *Più vivo* section lengthens the development in one broad gesture. His

emphasis on the sequential development in the culminating section creates a deeper complexity, and the deliberately separated phrases strengthen the feeling of a struggle towards the culminating point. Horowitz's persistent and piercing inflections and declamations from the waltz episode through the *meno mosso* section, recall the tension of the development of the first movement and prepare for the triumphal, victorious cadence in the finale.

In Horowitz's performance of the third movement, the adherence to the directions of the score is considerably greater than in the fleeting interpretation of this movement by the composer. Rakhmaninov often ignores his own dynamic, articulation, and phrasing marks while Horowitz is not only observant but, in the employment of a slower tempo, also showcases his technical mastery together with a more substantial piano sonority. Horowitz's reading, especially noticeable in the second (lyrical) section of the *meno mosso*, is generally lighter in touch and mood, and also maintains an intelligibility while simultaneously emphasizing the intricacies and complexities of the work.

Overall, Horowitz diligently follows the composer's score in its tempo markings, relationships of the parts, rhythm, dynamics, etc. Neither Horowitz nor the composer, however, ever played the work as written.²² In all the solo sections, Horowitz performs with a free feeling of the tempo, emphasizing the vocal influence of the themes in a manner akin to a fantasy or ballad. In his preparations of points of culmination,

²² Glen Carruthers, "The (re)appraisal of Rachmaninov's music: Contradictions and Fallacies," The Musical Times 147.1896 (Autumn 2006): 44. Carruthers proceeds to cite the fact that, even in the various cuts made, Rakhmaninov and Horowitz not only differ from each other but changed the number and placement of cuts with each performance and recording.

Horowitz also noticeably broadens the tempo. Thus, in general terms the performance of Horowitz is perhaps closely modeled on that of Rakhmaninov, and their performance practices do achieve a high level of congruence. A major difference is that Horowitz does not embrace anywhere near the myriad stylistic influences betraying Classical, Romantic, and Modernist performance practices that can be discerned in Rakhmaninov's pianism. The significance of the Horowitz phenomenon cannot be understated and his pianism has certainly cast a unique and considerable shadow over developments in piano playing from the mid through to late twentieth century. This notwithstanding, "aesthetic awareness was generally not a priority"²³ or defining characteristic of his pianism. Even if, in his survey of a broad range of repertoire from Scarlatti to Debussy, he was concerned with correctness of musical idiom and style, Horowitz could never represent anything but a consummate Romantic-inspired super virtuoso of the Golden Age. While the same could be said of Rakhmaninov, his pianism also exemplified an expressive catholicity which drew upon an extensive range of stylistic and aesthetic influences.

Horowitz's interpretation of Op. 30 does nevertheless confirm that an interpreter of Rakhmaninov must possess some basic attributes. The Rakhmaninovian pianist must, for instance, be able to maintain contrast and a fine calibration of sounds to recreate the rich palette of orchestral colours and timbres. Also, great attention must be paid to the connectedness of the vocal line, especially in the intricate passagework and toccata episodes, and the maintenance of rhythmic pulse. Some improvisation in the

²³ David Dubal, Evenings with Horowitz: A Personal Potrait (London: Robson Books, 2002), 285.

interpretation of the melodies is suggested especially using gradation of dynamic levels in preparation for the main climaxes. Perhaps most important of all, however, is an ability to combine an orchestral realization, grand in gesture, with vocal expression.²⁴ In this regard, the observation of Bacon regarding Rakhmaninov's pianism seems perfectly apt here: "with no pianist were you so little aware of the piano itself, while at the same time engulfed in its sound."²⁵

PROKOFIEV

Prokofiev's artistry was audacious, strong-willed, yet infectiously happy and imbued with an unusual simplicity. The strong character of Prokofiev's pianism, however, was accentuated through a realist interpretation of his own music.²⁶ The unification of the aesthetic ideals of the composer and pianist were clear in their orientation towards the development of performative mastery and the desire to express the discoveries of his artistic conceptions. The reverse was also true: the strength and character of his artistic ideas and his ability to articulate them with coherence was certainly due to his brilliant performative gifts.²⁷ Prokofiev as pianist, however, typically evoked two sharply contrasting reactions: ecstasy or indignance. This notwithstanding, Prokofiev never yielded to performative fashions or trends of his day. Indeed, it was evidently clear that

²⁴ Igor Sukhomlinov, "Problema stilia i interpretatsii fortepiannykh proizvedenii Rakhmaninova na primere etjudov-kartin," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Moscow, 1980), 22.

²⁵ Ernst Bacon, "Pianists Then and Now," *Clavier* 20.9 (November 1981): 22-25.

²⁶ Boris Asaf'ev, *Russkaia muzyka ot nachala XIX stoletia* (Moscow: "Academia", 1930), 297.

²⁷ Viktor Varunts (comp.), *Prokof'ev o Prokof'ev* (Moscow: izd. Sovetskii kompozitor, 1991), 81-2.

he declared war with the late-Romantic pianism that pervaded the performance art of pianists around the turn of the twentieth century.

Prokofiev's pianism was a precise art, very human, and yet without any additional layers of allegory. His playing was characterised by a confidence, rhythmic drive, and enormous power of sound (which sometimes did not translate well in small performance spaces), but still articulate and intimate. His pianistic freedom and assurance enabled him to take risks and lent his performance demeanour a casual aspect. His consummate virtuosity, evidently displayed in the transcendental difficulty of his piano oeuvre, was seen especially in his ability to leap rapidly and fall onto the keys from considerable heights with speed and accuracy. He also possessed a unique talent for communicating lyricism and expressing the gamut of human emotions to an audience. This notwithstanding, his emotions were dampened quite deliberately in a concert situation. Thus, it can be said that he displayed a distinct contempt for excessive feeling or temperament in performance. Nevertheless, he tried to command his emotions in such a way as to avoid sounding cold, or deliberately dry, or to give the impression of being produced.

Evseeva, one of the major scholars on the topic of Prokofiev's activities as a performer, calls his piano playing style, instrumental. The founder of a new style of piano playing, Prokofiev arrived at this point already in his youth and primarily due to the influence of his own music. The kind of playing that combined the leading structural and expressive roles of rhythm, with a predominantly abrupt manner of producing the sound, created an

inimitable transparency of form, a special clarity, and a three-dimensionality affecting the melodic idea. This was particularly noticeable when Prokofiev was playing his own works. It was precisely the performances by Prokofiev of his own sonatas, concerti, and other pieces, that assisted his contemporaries to appreciate the individuality and charm of his oeuvre, to illuminate and clarify for themselves passages that had seemed incomprehensible or incorrectly termed mechanical when played by other recognized interpreters of his music.

The new path in relation to pianism forged by Prokofiev through the unification of both the Russian piano tradition via Esipova and his own pianistic innovations also had a significant impact on the formation of a Soviet piano tradition. The new style was characterised by its energy, by a percussive and abrupt manner of producing the sound, the dynamic employment of rhythm, and the transparent and sparing use of the pedal. It was a predominantly instrumental manner of playing seeking to represent the primitive, mechanistic, and bleak aspects of socialist realism under the Bolshevik regime.

Prokofiev's approach to his scores will not be a revelation for one who is familiar with composers' interpretations of their own works. His attitude also reflected in some part that of his tradition, which treated scores with what would be considered today an unhealthy degree of liberalism. Prokofiev's performances offer credibility to the theory that a great deal of composer's stipulations in the score falls under the category of ideas as opposed to definitive instructions.²⁸ As is commonplace with composer-performers

²⁸ Peter Kivy, Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9-46.

of his era, Prokofiev would have permitted the pianist much more expressive and interpretative latitude with his music than is generally taken today. It is important to state, however, that there is a far greater degree of correspondence between his interpretations and scores than in the performances and scores of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, or even Bartók.

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS |

As has been shown in the preceding chapters, the Russian piano tradition is not some arbitrary or vague entity which flavours music interpretation with culturally stereotypical and random idiosyncrasies.¹ Rather, the Russian piano tradition speaks of a historically significant body of musicians who developed a unique conception and representation of music. The basic pedagogical principles of the Russian school were founded and elaborated by the Rubinstein brothers, and thereafter by Leszetycki, Esipova, Safonov, et al. Combining active performing careers with teaching in the then newly founded musical establishments of the country, these musicians had the opportunity directly to influence the formation of a system of music education and piano teaching in particular. As early as the 1860s, the Russian piano school achieved a stage of creative maturity and firmly took its place among the leading performance schools of the world.

It is necessary again to reiterate the fact that all Russian pedagogues could not escape the enormous impact and intellectual and artistic force of Anton Rubinstein as a performer and a pedagogue. Many of the traditions of Rubinstein's pedagogy are alive to this day in modern Russia's conservatories and can be heard in contemporary Russian

¹ Harrison, to cite one example among many other scholars, is undefined in his use of the term "Russian piano tradition." See Harrison, *op. cit.*, 246.

musicians. Together with his younger brother, he provided a new and profound meaning for the mastery of one's instrument. Questions of technique, interpretation, and the whole notion of performance were seen as integral to their pedagogical philosophy. The Rubinsteins attempted to inculcate in their students a new understanding of the artistic purpose of interpretation. These principles continued and developed in the pedagogical work of the most recognizable pedagogues of the St. Petersburg and Moscow conservatories of the final decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

The pedagogical and performative activities of the Rubinsteins together with other outstanding representatives of the Russian pianistic tradition gave scholars the basis for ascribing the following properties to the concept of "Russian pianists and pianism": 1) an ability to perform professionally and to concertize; 2) brilliance and profundity of expression; 3) a dramatic character; 4) an intimate lyricism; and 5) an obligation to consider the educational role of the performer, that is to be a "zealous musical missionary."² These properties were, however, surpassed by some principal qualities that were to remind listeners *inter alia* of the extraordinarily rich folk culture of the Russian people: 1) the art of *cantabile* sound production; 2) the vocally-inspired breathing at the instrument; 3) the art of controlling the sound production; 4) a consummate technical mastery; and 5) the spiritual depth of the artistic personality.³

² Valentina Kholopova, Formy muzykal'nykh proizvedenii (St. Petersburg: Lan, 2001), 46.

³ On the subject of Anton Rubinstein's preoccupation with sound, Asaf'ev wrote: [Singing of the hands and hence the transformation of the instrument into a human speech organ, into a voice carrying the entire melody, the melody that runs through everything -- this is the source of the feeling of warmth, of strength of the romantic culture of feelings in Rubinstein's sound.]

As Russian pianism entered the Soviet era, the practice of teachers of the older generation revealed both continuity and innovation in performance and in teaching methods. Despite the individuality of the great names of any particular period within the history of the Russian piano tradition (especially during the Soviet era) and the various sub-schools of performance they formed, however, one finds the emergence of several common traits or characteristics that did not fade during the abrupt and politically-enforced transformation, but were instead reinforced. These features include:

- traditions of *cantabile* and *legato* playing, which was an attempt to replicate the texture and line of Glinka's vocal music;
- a tradition of declamatory, speech-like intonation derived from Mussorgsky, whereby a pianist was exhorted not merely to sing at the instrument but also to be able to speak;
- expressiveness of the sound;
- a search for new methods of melodic projection;
- a unique and percussive sound derived again from Mussorgsky and developed by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Schedrin.⁴

Perhaps one other noticeable facet of Russian pianism which developed during the Soviet period was a creative, but at the same time sensitive, attitude to the composer's

“Пение рук и отсюда превращение инструмента в человеческий орган речи, в голос, несущий всюду мелодию, все пронизывающую мелодию, – вот откуда проистекает и ощущение тепла, и силы, и романтической культуры чувств в звуке Рубинштейна.”
Anton Rubinshtein, *Sbornik statei* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1946), 45.

⁴ Mikhail Smirnov, *Russkaia fortepiannaia muzyka: cherty svoeobraziiia* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1983).

text and intention. This engendered a concentration not on form but on content, and also not merely on execution but on transmitting the artistic conception. Nevertheless and above all, there was an agreement in a serious, sincere, and altruistic attitude towards art, in the humanity and depth of interpretation, and in the search for truth in musical expression.⁵

The pedagogical method behind the achievement of the above-stated features of Russian pianism was as idealistic, rigorous, and disciplined in its search for truth as the brand of pianism it produced. In defining the fundamental precepts of Russian piano pedagogy, as they applied to the most advanced students, through to the beginning of the twentieth century one can observe:

- the essential ability of all pianists-pedagogues to convey musical content in performance based on an understanding of a work and the skill to convey an artistic image in one's interpretation;
- the development of executive technical mastery and flexibility in the employment of various methods of playing;
- a special focus on the development of expressive means, with due attention to the formation of a *cantabile* delivery;
- active listening during performance;
- the use of a variety of forms of pedagogical exercises;

⁵ Dmitrii Rabinovich, "Bol'shoi put' sovetskogo pianizma," *Sovetskaia muzyka* 11 (1957): 79. Rabinovich observed what there was in common between the Russian school and the Soviet school with respect to, on the one hand, matters of technique (placement of the hands, methods of eliciting sound, use of pedals) and, on the other, questions of musical nurturing, knowledge, and creative output.

- teaching through practical demonstration, verbal explanation and analogy, and musical analysis;
- the use of high art repertoire comprising of both Russian and foreign works;
- attention to nurturing the individuality of the pupil;
- the development of skills to enable independent work as an artist.⁶

In the junior classes and in group or domestic teaching situations, on the other hand, old doctrines continued to hold sway. This was marked by a primary emphasis on technique, superficial attitude towards artistic-aesthetic nurturing, primitive view of expressiveness in playing, use of poorly designed and flawed instructional material in teaching, and conservative teaching methods.⁷

From the foregoing information on the performance styles of these three late-nineteenth century pianists, one can elucidate some common elements, irrespective of background or other external influences, that were common to pianists of this era. The flexibility with regard to tempo permeates all styles of music in a way that today would be considered excessively romanticised. Generally, any significant contrast in the music was underlined with a change in tempo. Wedded to this was a distinguishing *rubato* concept. Three different aspects of tempo *rubato* were used by Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev: the use of *accelerando* and *rallentando*, the use of tenutos or agogic

⁶ Elena Nazarova, "Osnovnye printsiipy obucheniia pianista v istorii otechestvennoi fortepiannoi pedagogiki," in *Fortepiannoe iskusstvo. Istoriia i sovremennost': problemy tvorchestva, ispolnitel'stva, pedagogiki* (Mezhvuzov. sb. nauch. tr.) (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo RGPU im. A.I.Gertsena, 2004), 44.

⁷ Nazarova, *op. cit.*, 44.

accents, and a style of *rubato* in which the melody was separated and rhythmically dislocated from the accompaniment.⁸ A pronounced rhythmic buoyancy, where sixteenth notes in fast movements were rendered at rapid speed together with the over-dotting of dotted rhythms, was also common. In addition, a general attitude of liberal permissiveness is prevalent in the recordings, which naturally led to less attention being paid to the precise indications and minute details of the score. As one moves away from this period of pianism, the gradual changes towards an emphasis on detail and informed musical practice begin to emerge.

In the foregoing discussion of the interpretative act, it is important to remember that Skryabin's, Rakhmaninov's, or Prokofiev's interpretations are like those of any composer-performer and cannot be held objectively to be an archetype or more authoritative than another.⁹ Evidently, they "possessed a most unusual gift for interpreting [their] own music."¹⁰ But master composer-pianists like Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev, whose art is strengthened by the fact that they are able to combine the gift of composer and performer, assume the role of another interpreter, even if they enjoy a special affinity with their music. Neigauz made a valiant and

⁸ Tempo rubato in its various guises is documented by Oskar Bie (1899), Leichtentritt (1924), Kullak (1861), Lussy (1874), Engel (1853), and Christiani (1885). See Philip, *op.cit.*, 221, who highlights the problems and contradictions inherent in such written documents. Also, Eigeldinger, *op. cit.*, 49, who discusses Chopin's rubato concept, discrediting the dislocation of the Leszetycki school.

⁹ Richard Taruskin, Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 189.

¹⁰ Lawrence Hanson, Prokofiev, The Prodigal Son: An Introduction to his Life and Work in Three Movements (London: Cassell, 1964), 50.

eloquent attempt to present a two-sided argument supporting the notion of supremacy of the composer-pianist in his statement:

one may like one or another performance, one may prefer the especial gifts of one virtuoso to those of another, but no one can deny that the author's performance of his own work – if he is a noted composer and brilliant performer – is the most perfect possible performance, the highest standard for judging all other performances of the given work. It would naturally be absurd to deny, or even to try to restrict in the slightest the right of the entire vast fraternity of concert musicians to express their own artistic personality, to have their own individuality, their own voice. There can be no argument on this score, for experience speaks for itself. But of course in the final analysis it is the composer-performer who must have the last word in the matter of the performance of his own works. Here everything is integral – the content and form, the idea, the artistic image and the medium – everything is harmonious, live and genuine.¹¹

Neigauz's statement, however, goes against the evidence highlighted in this dissertation and seems to miss the fundamental point of such studies, that is, not to collate data and evidence pertaining to performance practices for performers to copy and replicate, but to listen to the respective interpretative approaches of these masters as reflections of their conception of their own music. With this knowledge as a background, we can inform our own ideas in the hope of achieving more authentic, sensitive, and unique interpretations. As Lenz writes "the music runs the risk of being misunderstood if one has not known the master's way of playing, his intentions and his conception of the instrument--since their result on paper is quite different from that of the sound world in which they really live."¹² Indeed, there is a school of thought that posits the existence of an authentic performance that is true to the original intentions of the composer. This

¹¹ Heinrich Neuhaus, "Prokofiev, Composer and Pianist," in S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences comp. Semen Shlifshtein, trans. R. Prokofieva (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 231.

¹² This is a secondary quotation taken from John Rink, "Authentic Chopin: History, Analysis and Intuition in Performance," in Chopin Studies 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 216.

school of thought then measures authenticity by using an established model (ideally a recording of the composer) as a yardstick for comparison. The other camp would paradoxically suggest that striving to replicate a model performance would constrain the piece.¹³ Thus, the score is either seen as a revered and precious object or as an incentive for artistic interpretation. Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev evidently saw this conundrum based on the advice they offered. Their unwillingness to commit to either camp, however, together with a genuine belief that their interpretative ideas were but one of a myriad of possibilities, ensured that they had no direct followers of their inimitable brands of pianism.¹⁴ Rakhmaninov expressed this limitation, implicitly and subtly suggested, in his statement:

[...if my performance of my own pieces differs from my performance of other pieces, it is only because I know my own music better. As a composer, I have already thought over the piece to the point where it has already become a part of myself. As a pianist, I approach the piece internally, understanding it deeper than any other performer could understand it.]¹⁵

Needless to say, it must be the duty and role of every performer/interpreter thus to maintain artistic integrity. The performer's natural instinct, supposing it results from considerable exposure to the composer's oeuvre, philosophy, and performance practice, together with sustained involvement in the music itself, will provide the most ideal

¹³ Henry Shaffer, "Performing the F# minor Prelude Op.28 No.8," in Chopin Studies 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 185.

¹⁴ This is perhaps suggested by Lyle Wilson who states that neither Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, nor Prokofiev created a school of playing. See A Dictionary of Pianists (London: Robert Hale, 1985), 228-230.

¹⁵ "если мое исполнение собственных произведений отличается от исполнения чужих произведений, то это потому только, что свою музыку я знаю лучше. Как композитор, я уже так много думал над ней, что она стала как бы частью меня самого. Как пианист, я подхожу к ней изнутри, понимая ее глубже, чем ее сможет понять любой другой исполнитель." Sergei Rakhmaninov, "Kompozitor kak interpretator," Sovetskaia muzyka 2 (1955): 78.

foundation to inform the performer's musical intuition. In the absence of such a holistic approach, the structured logic which must underpin every good performance will remain missing. As Rink states:

the performer will almost inevitably distort the work, yielding to concerns of relative insignificance while playing, without regard -- without a feel -- for the demands of the whole, or possibly offering a historically accurate or analytically rigorous interpretation which at heart is musically impoverished.¹⁶ Musical intuition resulting from a sustained relationship with a composer's work will effect a finite degree of authenticity in performance. Furthermore, skill and aptitude are required to produce a cohesive, unified, and cogent interpretative concept.¹⁷

The notion of a model performance would thus seem almost irrational, although there are boundaries which exist to abrogate the supposition that the performer carries an open interpretative licence. Informed interpretation is born out of the aspiration of the performer to uncover the composer's fundamental design or to expose a generative potential inherent in the music.

Thus, in attempting to bring to the surface and contextualise the performance practices of Skyrabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev, my desire has been to offer some evidence-based advice on how these composer-pianists conceptualised and interpreted their own music. In this process, I hope to have offered a new and holistic perspective from which modern-day performers can seek inspiration and guidance. Needless to say, such a study has only scratched the surface, a sentiment especially pertinent in the cases of Rakhmaninov and Prokofiev, where a more complete understanding warrants an

¹⁶ Rink, *op. cit.*, 217.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

examination of their complete recorded output. In the case of Rakhmaninov this would be a sizeable thesis in itself.

At the outset of this study, one of my aims was to reconcile three vastly different approaches to piano playing with the fact that all three emerged from of the same systematized and pedagogically structured piano tradition. The unique performance practices, characteristics, and approaches of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev were always prominent but within an identifiable Russian quality and spirit. It is this disposition or “Russianness,” characteristics of which have been enumerated earlier, that bears testament to a distinguished and inimitable piano tradition. It also proves that by the end of the nineteenth century, the cultural, musical, and intellectual life in Russia was rich and diverse enough to produce such dissimilar musical personalities.

The obvious limitations of this study cannot do justice to such a vast field. For one, the topic of sketching a history of the Russian Piano Tradition, and incorporating the unique technical, artistic, and pedagogical practices alongside a discussion of figures of significance is enormous, and one that Russian and Soviet scholars have trodden extensively in bits and pieces. This notwithstanding, the Russian-language literature has not achieved wide dissemination or critical acclaim primarily due to the evident problems of Russian musicology.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the Soviet piano tradition, its contexts, pedagogy, and celebrated artists (say Goldenweiser through Ashkenazy) is a

¹⁸ See Richard Taruskin, “Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 3.4 (Autumn, 1984): 337-38, who speaks of the limitations of Russian musicology due to reasons such as a false construction of history, deliberate withholding of evidence, and ideological issues.

topic that is also desperate for attention, together with the founding of the Tchaikovsky Competition. These are topics that are also fraught with political threads, which is a possible further explanation as to why they have remained under the radar thus far.

In developing and extending the format of the present study, however, another three figures (all of whom have audio recordings and written documentary sources for examination at the ready) warrant serious investigation and research. The pianism of Medtner, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, respectively, has to date not commanded anywhere near the same attention or respect as those discussed in this study. To this end, I hope that this dissertation will spur renewed interest in what constitutes Russian pianism, specifically the pianism of Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokofiev, and make a modest contribution to the study and understanding of performance practices from a holistic perspective of three of the most recognizable and distinguished composer-pianists in the history of Western music.

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