

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

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A clear view of the historical and cultural situation in Russia in the late 19th to early 20th centuries is essential to understand the art of Rachmaninov and other contemporary Russian composers. The works of these composers and musicians are inseparably connected to its time.

Literary and art historians often call the late 19th to early 20th centuries "The Silver Age of Russian Culture" - by analogy with the Golden Age of Russian literature associated with the greatest Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin.

The extraordinary intensity of the artistic quest of that time in Russia shaped and developed many outstanding talents, such as Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Medtner in music, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky in literature. The psychological and philosophical novels and stories of these Russian writers reflect the artistic flourish of that period.

An acute expressionistic perception of nature, people and their personalities, and social and psychological conflicts, became the major motives in the works of Maxim Gorky, Leonid Andreyev, Ivan Bunin, and other writers at the turn of the century. A subconscious premonition of the future (world war and revolutions) was expressed in the works of poets and artists as ambivalent, "encoded", symbolic images. These images are dominant in the poetry of Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and other poets-symbolists, and in the paintings of painter Mikhail Vrubel.

The art of that time was full of sharp contrasts and conflicts. Ecstasy and despair, attempts to go beyond immediate reality (mysticism) and romantic poetization of everyday life, psychological depth and decorative intensity (which was especially evident in the works of St. Petersburg's painters group "World of Arts") [(1) http://www.silverage.ru/obed/mir_iskus.html] - just a few characteristics of the "Silver Age" culture reflected in fast-changing moods, schools, and groups in Russian arts and literature. The works of Russian composers and performers carry the imprint of these contrasts and conflicts.

Russian piano music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries reached its peak in the works of composers from the St. Petersburg and Moscow schools. Both schools were established through

the activities of conservatories founded by Anton Rubinstein in St. Petersburg and by his brother Nikolai in Moscow.

The predominantly romantic art of contemporary composers reflected the unique creative atmosphere at the turn of the century.

The most talented representatives of the St. Petersburg school were Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's students Anatoly Lyadov and Alexander Glazunov, members of the so-called "Belyaev's Circle".

The delicate style of Lyadov's compositions makes his works very distinctive. He was a master of musical miniatures such as preludes, mazurkas, intermezzo, and etudes - as he could not justify expressing his deepest emotions in large-scale compositions. Nurtured on the music of Glinka, Chopin, and Schumann, Lyadov found his individual style, distinguished by peculiar lacy ornamentations, elegant polyphony, and carefully drawn details, using Russian folk music as a melodic framework in his compositions (such as his Prelude h-moll op. 11-1). Meditation with gentle melancholy and relaxed pastoral moods are the major emotions in Lyadov's works. The composer was often inspired by musical toys, an influence reflected in his miniatures such as Musical Snuffbox op. 32, Kukolki (Marionettes) op. 29, and Little Waltz op. 26. The fragile finesse and aristocratism of his music makes it congenial to the "World of Arts", especially to painter Victor Borisov-Musatov.

The lyrical style of Alexander Glazunov's meditative miniatures is similar to Lyadov's compositions. However his music is generally more majestic, dense and saturated. There are quite a few pathetic pages in his piano compositions (such as two sonatas and two concertos). The magnificent, decorative style of Glazunov's works emerged from the art of St. Petersburg's Imperial Russian Ballet (now called Kirov Ballet) that flourished at the turn of the 20th century. Many of Glazunov's compositions are written in the ballet genre.

Sergey Rachmaninov, Alexander Scriabin and Nikolai Medtner, students of Sergey Taneyev, were the leading composers of the Moscow school in the beginning of the 20th century.

The music of Scriabin expresses with the utmost clarity and spontaneity Russia's philosophical-artistic quest of that time. Scriabin's concepts of life and philosophy are based on a romantic aspiration to a symbolic representation of reality, to extreme emotions, higher extents and higher finesse - spiritually akin to the vision of the Russian poets-symbolists.

According to Scriabin, art is not just a way of understanding the nature of existence but a tool for complete mystical transformation of the world through the grandiose Art Mystery - the true destiny and purpose of his life. Amongst the music of the world, there is no parallel to the swift and continuous evolution of Scriabin's style over a quarter of a century. His style developed from lyrical melancholy, similar to Tchaikovsky's, Chopin's and Lyadov's, to a strong

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

integrated expression of different patterns including languor, soaring, majestic self-affirmation and ecstatic enthusiasm. Scriabin's musical language became more sophisticated, arriving at a complicated modal system far away from the usual major and minor modes. Short motives-symbols penetrate his musical fabric like mystical spells.

Scriabin's late compositions suggest a fictitious, magical world full of intense inner life, yet screened off from reality.

Nikolai Medtner took a different creative approach, far away from Scriabin's. His world is a synthesis of Russian (Tchaikovsky, Taneyev) and German (Schumann, Brahms) musical traditions - an idealized world of the classical past. There is no direct stylization in Medtner's art. For him, the past was a concentration of spiritual experience, truth and beauty - remaining no more than a distant dream. This is the basic tone of Medtner's chamber compositions - melancholic, full of agonizing and sweet nostalgia, sometimes hiding under the mask of a severe ballade style. These characters dominate the majority of his Fairy Tales (a genre invented by Medtner), sonatas, and other works.

The years leading up to World War 1 brought new tendencies to Russian piano music. Sergei Prokofiev was among the new musicians emerging on the art stage. His early compositions drew attention to the strictly "physical" treatment of the piano as a percussion instrument; this style was connected with the new content of Prokofiev's music expressed in a vigorous rhythmic pulse, far from romantic emotions and lyrical openness. Prokofiev's work also evolved, arriving in the end of his life at chamber style, clarity of textures, and fairy-tale content (ex. Piano Sonata no.9 C-Dur op. 103).

The topic of Russian piano music is inexhaustible, so from here we will concentrate on the music of Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninov.

"Music must come from the heart." [(2) С. В. Рахманинов: "Музыка должна идти от сердца" (интервью с Д. Эвеном). Литературное наследие, т. 1, стр. 144-148. Sergei Rachmaninov: 'Music should speak from the heart', an interview with David Ewen. Literature heritage, vol. 1, pp. 144-148.] Rachmaninov's last interview was published under this headline in November 1942. We can use these words as an epigraph to the entire creative output of this great Russian composer and pianist.

People all over the world cherish the music of Sergei Rachmaninov for its sincerity and deep emotions, nobility and openness. Through his compositions people discover the extraordinary Russian culture. Rachmaninov once said, "Music should express the spirit of the composer's homeland, his love, his beliefs, the thoughts he experiences after reading his favorite books or seeing paintings. Music should synthesize a composer's entire life experience. I am a Russian composer, and my homeland is imprinted in my mind and my character. My music is a product

of my character, and that's why this music is Russian" [(2)].

Piano compositions are central in Rachmaninov's works. This is one of the typical features of Russian musical culture at the turn of the century; most compositions of two other great Russian musicians of that time, Scriabin and Medtner, were also predominantly written for piano. A substantial part of the piano legacy of Lyadov, Glazunov, Balakirev and Arensky comes from the period 1890-1900. By the time Rachmaninov's first piano compositions appeared - Concerto fis-moll op. 1 (1891) and Fantasy op. 2 (1892) - Russian piano music had undergone substantial development. Small simple pieces written in dance styles - waltzes, polkas, mazurkas - had been very popular since the time of Mikhail Glinka - the founder of Russian music and the first professional composer in Russia. Lyrical pieces in song or romance style also had broad appeal among Russian music lovers. During Rachmaninov's youth, the most popular composers writing in this style were Anton Rubinstein and Pyotr Tchaikovsky. Those composers were also the creators of the Russian piano concerto - a genre in which Rachmaninov fully revealed his talent. Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky significantly influenced the work of their young successor. However Rachmaninov's piano compositions cannot be considered a result of direct influence. From his very first steps as a composer, all his works are notable for their striking originality.

There is no easy way to define specific periods within Rachmaninov's legacy, however a number of dominant themes emerge. It may be possible to distinguish an early period, ending in professional and emotional crisis, which followed the failed premiere of his Symphony No. 1 in St. Petersburg (1897, under Glazunov conducting). During his early years, along with Fantasy Pieces op. 3 and Piano Concerto op. 1, Rachmaninov wrote Fantasy op. 5 (1st Suite for 2 pianos), Morceaux de Salon op. 10, Six pieces for piano 4 hands op. 11, and Six Musical Moments op. 16. These works, often with program or genre names (for example, Elegy and Serenade from op. 3, Romances and Waltzes from op. 10 and 11), more so than his later compositions, draw on traditions of household music, not only instrumental but vocal, particularly on the popular Gypsy romances beloved by many exponents of Russian culture from Pushkin to Tchaikovsky and Blok.

From 1900, after nearly a three-year break from compositional activity, we can trace the beginning of a new phase in Rachmaninov's works. It opens with the Second Piano Concerto op. 18, the work where the main qualities of Rachmaninov - the melodist, the creator of majestic musical concepts with warm and sincere lyrical emotions - first appeared with subjugating force. Russia and its destiny becomes the dominant theme of the composer's creative output. Images developed in the Second Concerto continued to appear in the Second Suite for two pianos op. 17, written at the same time, and in Preludes op. 23 (1903). The Third Piano Concerto op. 30 (1909) may be called his final work of the 1900s. More severe, dramatically contrasting, dominated by a clearly defined soloist part, this Concerto, as well as its predecessor in this genre,

the Second Concerto, became the most vivid representation of Rachmaninov's individual style.

New trends appeared in Rachmaninov's compositions in the years following 1910. Fewer lyrical, spontaneous and life-affirming themes can be found in his Preludes op. 32 (1910), Etudes-Tableaux op. 33 (1911), and op. 39 (1916-1917). Alarming and morbid ideas are more common in these works. Images of vigorous movement acquire an intimidating mechanistic or devilishly sarcastic character. These images also dominate compositions written or completed during his life in emigration: in Piano Concerto No. 4 op. 40 (1914-1926), Variations on a Theme of Corelli op. 42 (1931), and Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini op. 43 (1934).

Melodic thinking was fundamental to his creative method. "Melody - the basis of all music; melodic ingenuity - a composer's main objective," said Rachmaninov [(3) С. В. Рахманинов: "Связь музыки с народным творчеством". Интервью с С. В. Рахманиновым в переводе Г. М. Шнеерсона // Советская музыка. - Сб. статей. - М.; Л., 1945. Вып. 4. - С. 53-57. Sergei Rachmaninov: "Connection between music and peoples' creativity" (interview translated by G. M. Shneerson). "Soviet Music" 1945, no. 4, pp. 53-57]. He managed to bring musical expressiveness closer to human speech to create a synthesis of singing and speech intonations.

The sound of Rachmaninov's piano is distinguished by a bell-like sonority. The sound continues, and the piano "rings" as if like a bell.

We encounter many types of bell tones in his piano compositions. Different bell sounds commonly accompanied Russian people throughout their life, from birth to death. Some of Rachmaninov's bells came from real life experiences: Novgorod bells in "Tears" from Fantasy, the bells of Moscow's Sretensky Monastery in "Easter Festival" from Fantasy, Moscow bells in Prelude in C sharp minor (according to Rachmaninov's own words).

We also find examples of bell sounds in the following compositions: the bell dance in Prelude Es-Dur op. 32-2, the winter hand bell on the troika in Prelude a-moll op. 32-8, the toll of the bell in Prelude C-Dur op. 32-1 - expressing fear and confusion, the funeral hand bell in Prelude gis-moll op. 32-12 (discovered by Vladimir Horowitz). Tocsins (bells of misfortune, in Russian "набат") can be heard in several Etudes-Tableaux, festive bells in the finales of Concertos, and a jester's bells in "Polichinelle" op. 3-4.

Rachmaninov's texture is dense and multidimensional. Like in paintings, it has perspective, depth, a 3rd dimension. Different elements of texture in his piano works exist separately and are not mixed. Sometimes distant planes in his works are more important than the main material - this being an inheritance from Russian icon paintings. An example: Etude-Tableau a-moll op. 39-2 (with the bass motive-the medieval "Dies Irae").

Ex. 1-A. Etude-Tableau a-moll, op. 39-2

Ex. 1-B. Dies Irae

Di-es i-rae, di-es il-la, Sol-vet sae-clum in-fa-vil-la Tes-te Da-vid cum Sy-bil-la

The dramaturgy of piano pieces often comes from romance, culminating in a pause, or in an ascending melody. Prelude F-Dur op. 32-7 was obviously inspired by Tchaikovsky's romance "Terrible Minute".

Ex. 2-A. Rachmaninov: Prelude F-Dur, op. 32-7

Ex. 2-B. Tchaikovsky: Romance "Terrible Minute"(Страшная минута), op. 28 no. 6

p con tenerezza

Ты вни-мв-ешь, вниз скло-нив го-лов-ку, о-чи о-пу-стив и ти-хо възды-

p

dolce

Rachmaninov's bass register is always very profound, but not loud. Its importance comes from the influence of Fyodor Chaliapin, the great Russian bass singer and lifelong friend of Rachmaninov. Soft dynamics (*piano and pianissimo*) are often found in recapitulations, codas, and finales. Eight out of 10 Preludes op. 23, 10 out of 13 Preludes op. 32 (including the loud

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

Preludes in C major and E major), and six out of eight Etudes-Tableaux op. 33 finish in *p* and *pp*.

Rachmaninov has noticeably more descending melodies than ascending ones. Harmonically, he prefers a descending alteration to ascending.

Long codas are typical: in Prelude in Es-Dur op. 23-6 the recapitulation-coda lasts for 21 bars, Prelude d-moll op. 23-3 with three codas, long descending finales in Etude-Tableau fis-moll op. 39 No. 3, in Etude-Tableau es-moll op. 39-5.

The form of Rachmaninov's works is always well constructed and has a clear climax point, which Rachmaninov himself considered the most important of all form-making elements.

Rachmaninov did not write in strict polyphonic style, however his textures are rich with multiple voices. Even where there is a single melodic line, its length often makes it feel like a dialogue - the melody seems to talk to itself.

Rachmaninov was acutely homesick, often recollecting his life before the emigration from Russia. Late versions of early compositions, such as Melody, Serenade op. 3, Humoresque op. 1, are written in a chromatic atmosphere that emphasizes reminiscence of the past (similar to Ivan Bunin's famous collection of stories "Dark Alleys"). During difficult moments in his life Rachmaninov revised his early compositions (a new edition of Concerto No. 1 in November 1917, the use of early compositions while working on Concerto No. 4).

The performing tradition of Rachmaninov's music was defined by the composer himself. Audiences were astonished by the extraordinary prominence and brightness of his interpretations. Fortunately, even today we can appreciate and enjoy his recordings. The powerful impact of the music is rooted in the depth and significance of the underlying message of the composition and by the pianist's ability to experience and express that message. For Rachmaninov, this underlying message is primarily based on his connection with the life and destiny of his people and country. Russian history is mysterious and tragic; misfortune frequently leads this country astray. Rachmaninov was able to ingeniously express these emotions, experienced by many generations of Russian writers, artists and philosophers.

The 19-year old composer and pianist started his life long creative journey with a composition that aphoristically compressed and condensed all those experiences. The composition is Prelude cis-moll op. 3-2, which became Rachmaninov's "name card".

Ex. 3. Rachmaninov: *Prelude cist-moll, op. 2-3*



It was his first solo work performed in public. The composer was surprised by its popularity in later years (he was requested to play this Prelude as an encore at the end of almost every concert). Journalists, especially in England and in America, had given different curious titles to that Prelude: "The Fire of Moscow", "Doomsday" and even "The Moscow Waltz". In the USA, this piece was named simply "This"; it was even performed as a jazz arrangement. The composer did not like to offer verbal explanations of his music and reacted with sarcasm to any such attempts by others. For instance, in answer to an American lady's question if "This" expresses the agony of being buried alive, he replied, "If this Prelude calls forth such an association from the public, I would not want to disappoint them."

These are his own comments: "This Prelude simply came to me once, and I just wrote it down. It came to me with such a force that I could not shake it off even if I tried. It was destined to be - and now it is." [(4) С. В. Рахманинов: Литературное наследие, т. 1, стр. 94. Sergei Rachmaninov: Literature heritage, vol. 1, p. 94.]

In truth, any actual program seems coincidental in comparison to the power of purely musical expression.

Rachmaninov's Prelude became a concentrated summary of musical traditions from the past. Since the Baroque period, the concept of basso ostinato, used in the outer sections of this three-part Prelude, often served as a method of expressing the deepest lyric-tragic content (let us recall the aria of the dying Dido from the opera "Dido and Aeneas" by Purcell, Bach's violin Chaconne, or the Finale of Symphony No. 4 by Brahms). However, in sharp contrast between the strictly imperative bass (which, incidentally, represents the simplest cadence that came from the classical era), and the reply, which has the intonation of a prayer, we can hear echoes of the thematic conflicts in the dramatic symphonies of the 19th century, starting from Beethoven's Fifth. Hence, despite the influence of European traditions, this Prelude remains Russian in spirit.

The Russian connection becomes evident in the chimes of the first theme and in echoes of Russian church singing in the responding chord sequences.

The middle part, with its rising melodic waves, is built from moaning descending motives,

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

reminding us of Russian lamentations. Professional mourners were common in Russia, wailing for the dead at funerals. These tragically predestinated motives are followed by the catastrophic choral fall into the abyss. From there, with grim triumph comes "the Fate theme". The struggle becomes violent. In the recapitulation, Rachmaninov reaches the grandiose volume of sound using only the simplest devices - combinations of octaves and chords.

Ex. 4. Rachmaninov: Prelude cis-moll, op. 2-3, recapitulation.

The image shows a musical score for the recapitulation of Rachmaninov's Prelude in C sharp minor, op. 2-3. The score is written for piano and consists of four staves. The top two staves are the treble clef and the bottom two are the bass clef. The music is marked "Tempo primo" and "ff pesante". The score features a dense texture of octaves and chords, with many notes beamed together. The key signature is C sharp minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#).

These devices are not his invention. We can find a similar octave-chord passage written on four staves in the middle of the C sharp minor episode in the second movement of the Piano Concerto by well-known pianist, teacher and St. Petersburg resident, Adolf von Henselt. However, due to the specific placement of this pattern in Rachmaninov's Prelude, the music makes a remarkably powerful impact.

The Prelude in C sharp minor can be seen as a distinctive epigraph to all of Rachmaninov's creative output. Different variations of the bell themes from that work emerge later in many of Rachmaninov's compositions. The introduction of his Second Concerto begins with the same mysterious ringing that concluded the Prelude, only with the reversed dynamics.

Ex. 5-A. Rachmaninov: Concerto no. 2 c-moll, op.18, 1st movement.

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Rachmaninov's Concerto No. 2 in C minor, op. 18. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The top staff is the treble clef and the bottom is the bass clef. The music is marked "Moderato (♩ = 66)" and "pp". The score features a dense texture of octaves and chords, with many notes beamed together. The key signature is C minor (no sharps or flats).

Ex. 5-B. Rachmaninov: Prelude cis-moll, op. 2-3, ending

Common intonations are also clearly evident between the second thematic element of Rachmaninov's Prelude and the trembling sighs of strings accompanying the main theme of the Third Concerto.

Ex. 6-A. Rachmaninov: Prelude cis-moll, op. 2-3, middle section

Ex. 6-B. Rachmaninov: Concerto no. 3, 1st movement, accompaniment to the main theme

From the very outset of his creative journey, Rachmaninov appeared to audiences as an artist of tragedy. Music critics called him a "bard of horror and tragedy" and a "tragic pessimist". The composer himself was compelled to agree with this evaluation of his personality. For example, asking the writer Marietta Shaginyan to choose some texts for his romances, he warned her that

the verses "should sooner be sad than joyous. Bright colors make me ill!" [(5) Мариэтта Шагинян: Приложение к письмам. "Новый Мир" 1943, номер 4, стр. 105-113. Marietta Shaginyan - Attachment to letters. "New World" 1943 no. 4, pp. 105-113]. Of course, it was an exaggeration; amongst Rachmaninov's compositions are more than a few pages filled with light, lyrical feeling and enthusiastic inspiration. However it is true that the composer was particularly attracted to "minor" themes. Characteristically, compositions in minor keys significantly outnumber works in major keys (all three Symphonies, all Piano Concertos and the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini; four out of five of his early piano works op. 3 and eight out of nine of Etudes-Tableaux op. 39 were written in minor keys.

Elegiac moods could be found in many of Rachmaninov's most inspired compositions. The famous Elegy es-moll op. 3 no. 1 is an example of a natural combination of an unhurried and monotonous Russian song and the "sobbing" intonations of a gypsy romance. As we mentioned before, such music was very popular in Russia in late 19th to early 20th centuries.

Romantic art saw in the gypsies a symbol of human existence outside of the boundaries and conventions implied by city culture and its dignified bourgeois appearance. Their life, culture, traditions, and appearance were unusual, different from ordinary people, and seemed to be excitingly attractive. Gypsy music had won an audience with its emotional sincerity, open exhibition of passions, and swift transitions from extreme misery and despair to reckless merriment. In 1824, Pushkin wrote his famous poem "Tsygany" (The Gypsies), which became the subject of Rachmaninov's first opera, "Aleko" - his graduation work at the Moscow Conservatory (1892). It is known that the young composer was deeply absorbed in this work and completed the score in 17 days after receiving the libretto. The gypsy style were reflected in many of Rachmaninov's piano pieces and romances; he also wrote the Capriccio on Gypsy Themes for a symphony orchestra.

The presence of gypsy elements in Rachmaninov's compositions creates certain problems in interpretation. These problems lie in the Gypsy music emotional openness. Its performance could easily slip into vulgarization, simplification and cheap sentimentality, which are completely absent in the author's own performance. Rachmaninov's performing style was discreet, even severe at times, expressing high emotions only in specific moments.

Rachmaninov's Etude-Tableau g-moll op. 33 No. 5. is one of his most elegiac works. Like the entire series of Etudes-Tableaux op. 33, it was written in 1911 in the village of Ivanovka, Rachmaninov's wife Natalia Satina estate, situated about 500 km south of Moscow, where he spent every summer and was especially successful in his composition work. His Preludes op. 32 were also written in Ivanovka a year earlier. Despite his complaints that "work on the small piano pieces is going worst of all," and that "short piano pieces always required much more effort and caused more problems than a Symphony or a Concerto," both series, created in 1910-

1911, enchant us with their excitement and inspiration.

Rachmaninov named his op. 33 "Etudes-Tableaux". In this name the word "Etudes" was used just conditionally. They were called "Preludes-Tableaux" at the first performance. The second name, Tableaux, deserved more attention. Known for his shyness when talking about own works, Rachmaninov admitted that clarity and visual imagination are the most important characteristics of his creative mind. "A composer should first of all imagine - then create", he said during an interview. "His imagination should be powerful enough to see a clear picture of his composition before even a single note is written down." [(6) С. В. Рахманинов: Литературное наследие, т. 1, стр. 129. Sergei Rachmaninov: Literature heritage, vol. 1, p. 129.]

Here is another of Rachmaninov's confessions: "A book I just read, some beautiful painting, or a poem, helps me very much in my composing. Sometimes a certain story will get stuck in my mind, and I would try to turn it into music without disclosing the source of inspiration."

That's likely why he named his works "Tableaux" (painting, picture). Apparently, all his Preludes and Etudes could be named "Pieces-Paintings".

Rachmaninov had never considered the name "Tableaux" as a musical illustration. In his opinion, a musical work is an attempt to express "the essence" of the imagination formed in the composer's mind. The audience in most cases could only guess what the author's message was, using some hints contained in the music as guidance. In the Etude-Tableau g-moll op. 33-8, one can hear a melody almost identical to Chopin's First Ballade op. 23 (written, by the way, in the same key).

Ex. 7-A. Rachmaninov: Etude-Tableau g-moll, op. 33-8

Moderato

pp *mf molto legato e cantabile*

m. d. *m. s.* *dim.* *m. s.* *p* *mf*

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

Ex. 7-B. Chopin: Ballade no. 1 g-moll, op. 23, main theme



Rachmaninov's piece, like the Ballade, finishes in a rapid scale-like ascent and quick descent to two distressful chords. The style of this noble, tragic narrative also resembles ballades. All Etudes-Tableaux are built on short melodic formulas. Rachmaninov loved such significant aphoristic themes: let's recall the "Motive of Destiny" from his Prelude cis-moll. The sad, depressing motive, arising from the rhythmically fluctuating accompaniment, appears quite often in different modifications in the following compositions: Elegy op. 3, middle part of the same Prelude cis-moll, Etude-Tableau c-moll op. 33 No. 7.

The roots of such motives can be found in Russian folklore's ritual lamentations associated with the mourning of the dead. Similar melodic formations can be found in the works of other Russian composers such as Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Tchaikovsky. A typical example is the theme in the Finale of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6.

Ex. 8. Tchaikovsky: Symphony no. 6 h-moll, op. 74, Finale



In Etude-Tableau g-moll op. 33-8 the main theme, placed in the middle, "singing", register, appears especially dark (Ex. 7-A). This effect is achieved by the lowered 2nd note of the minor mode, creating a dark, Phrygian atmosphere. Other versions of this theme (in basic harmonic minor) are developed in the bass register, Rachmaninov's favorite. Under the composer's fingers, bass voices sounded especially impressive; the whole sound texture became prominent, almost stereoscopic.

Finally, the third version of this theme, placed in the high register, carries a mood of sad

resignation - due to its folksong origin (natural minor).

In this Etude-Tableau, intense musical events are developed. The bass version of the theme becomes urgent and rebellious, and descending motives shrink. However the burst is interrupted: a simple cadence, terrible in its fatal inexorability, follows the exited exclamation. Then the third theme appears. Its quiet modulations whirl around in wild ecstasy, however the same fatal cadence again interrupts all attempts to break free from despair and hopelessness. The voice of proud protest grows for the third time, and here she is - the desired tonic! But in its achievement lies destruction - and the ascending g-moll scale stops forever all impulses and writhing of the human soul.

Such an interpretation of this Etude-Tableau is certainly subjective; besides, any verbal explanation of music is always simplistic. However a deeply experienced poetic concept is necessary to understand and interpret Rachmaninov's music. By the way, such a concept was always one of the distinctive characteristics of Rachmaninov's and other leading Russian artists' performing style.

It was the same depth and brightness of imagery, which always astonished Anton Rubinstein's audience; Rubinstein's own compositions have much in common with Rachmaninov's style.

Konstantin Stanislavsky, the founder of the well-known Moscow Art Theatre, in his book "An Actor's Work: A Student Diary" [(7) К.С. Станиславский: Работа актера над собой: дневник ученика. Издательство: Артист. Режиссер. Театр. 2007, Москва." К.С. Stanislavsky: "An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary". Taylor & Francis, Inc. April 2008], taught his students to absorb in themselves the images of the play. Stanislavsky demanded from the actors of the Bolshoi Theatre that "it's not your notes that should be perceived by the audience; the public should forget about them, seeing your association with the image that you live in - this is a piece of your life." The art of Feodor Chaliapin was filled with such imagery; Chaliapin's singing was often compared to Rachmaninov's playing. By the way, these musicians were close friends and often performed together. Many of Chaliapin's best operatic roles were born in cooperation with Rachmaninov conducting the operas.

Let's return to the style of Rachmaninov's piano compositions.

The tragic character of the majority of his works is related to melodies inherited from the intonations of Russian Church music. Such intonations can be found in Musical Moment h-moll op. 16 No. 3, Preludes e-moll op. 32-4, h-moll op. 32-10, Etudes-Tableaux d-moll op. 33-5, c-moll op. 33-8 and c-moll op. 39 No. 7. Rachmaninov wrote two large-scale compositions in Church genres - "The Liturgy of St. John Zlatoust" op. 31 and "All Night Vigil" op. 36.

Russian religious music is very different from its Western European counterpart. It is strictly

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

vocal music - no instruments are allowed in the Orthodox Church. Its ceremonies are stricter than Catholic or Protestant: sitting, for example is forbidden in Russian church. Church singing arises from archaic medieval short motives. These brief hymns are the foundation of church singing (so called "Obikhod" - plain chant, the choristers' book of Russian Orthodox Church singing; in Russian "Обиход") and have a narrow sound range with frequent repetitions of certain sounds. Unlike Western European church compositions with their developed polyphony, Russian liturgical music is built mostly in chordal style. Similar chordal-choral textures can often be found in Rachmaninov's piano compositions.

The themes based on church motives, which often appear in Rachmaninov's music, are not direct quotations. When Rachmaninov's attention was drawn to the similarity of the main theme of his Third Piano Concerto to the "Obikhod" motives, he responded that it was not his intention.

Ex. 9. Rachmaninov: Concerto no. 3 d-moll, op. 30, 1st movement, main theme

The image shows a musical score for the main theme of Rachmaninov's Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30, 1st movement. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time. It is marked 'commodo' and 'p'. The score consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a melody and a bass clef staff with accompaniment. The second system has a grand staff with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody in the treble clef staff is characterized by a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, with a prominent interval of a fourth. The accompaniment in the bass clef staff consists of a steady eighth-note pattern.

Only once did the composer himself point to choral motives in his piano composition. In his letter to the composer Ottorino Respighi, who was working on orchestrating five of Rachmaninov's Etudes-Tableaux, Rachmaninov gave a commentary about the Etude-Tableau c-moll op. 39-7 as follows: "Etude-Tableau in C minor is a funeral march... The initial theme is a march. The second theme represents a choir singing. Starting from the movement of sixteenth notes in C minor and a little further in E flat minor, the music should evoke a light rain, unending and hopeless; then movement develops, reaching the climax in C minor, representing ringing church bells. At the end, the first theme - the march - reappears."

The Etude-Tableau c-moll is one of the brightest implementations of the Death theme - a theme prevalent in Rachmaninov's compositions and in Russian art in general in the early 20th century (the most vivid examples are playwright Leonid Andreev, poets Alexander Blok and Fyodor Sollogub). The composer expressed keen interest in the Catholic sequence "Dies Irae" (mentioned above), the old symbol of death in music literature. One can hear it in the First and Third Symphonies, in the symphonic poem "Island of the Dead", in Variations on a Theme of

Corelli, in Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, and in the Symphonic Dances. In addition, intonations from the "Dies Irae" could be found in many other Rachmaninov's compositions, such as Etude-Tableau a-moll op. 39-2 (see Ex. 1), which the author named "The Sea and Seagulls" in his letter to Respighi, where the first four sounds of this mournful prayer are repeatedly cited in the bass line. Evidently, Rachmaninov was drawn to this motif by its similarity to Russian church singing.

One other image, which, in his letter to the choreographer Michael Fokin, Rachmaninov called an "evil spirit" (he was referring to an upcoming ballet presentation of his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini), plays a significant role in Rachmaninov's music dramaturgy. At first, this image appeared in "Humoresque" op. 10. Then it had been developed in the Prelude d-moll op. 23-3, scherzando episodes of the Second and Third Concertos, Etude-Tableau es-moll op. 33-3 (known as "Blizzard"), h-moll op. 39-4; finally, this image dominates in the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. All these compositions share grotesque broken melodic lines, "thorny" rhythms, mockery, and taunt. These episodes were demonically expressive when performed by the author himself.

The images of destiny and fate in Rachmaninov's works are never far from the images of "evil spirit". His relatives recalled that the composer was "mystically afraid" of his fate during his entire life. "One word, but what a word it is!" he mentioned once in conversation. "I am afraid of everything," he admitted in his letter to the writer Marietta Shaginyan. "I am afraid of mice, rats, bugs, bulls, robbers; I am afraid when a strong wind blows and howls in chimneys, when rain strikes on the windows; I am afraid of darkness, and so on. I do not love old attics and I am even ready to believe in ghosts; otherwise it is difficult to understand what am I afraid of even in daytime when I am at home alone..." [(8) С. В. Рахманинов: Письмо к Мариэтте Шагинян, 8 мая 1912 г. Sergei Rachmaninov: Letter to Marietta Shaginyan, 8 May 1912.]

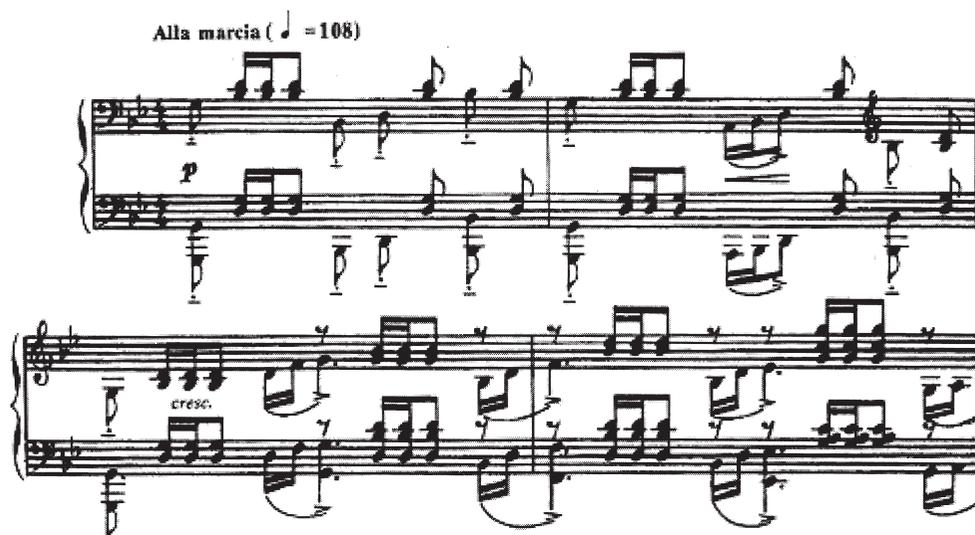
Of course, these words of Rachmaninov show only one side of his character; however they help us to understand many events of his life and work.

One of Rachmaninov's most popular compositions - Prelude g-moll op. 23-5 is undoubtedly connected to the theme of Fate.

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

Ex. 10. Rachmaninov: Prelude g-moll, op. 23 No. 5

Alla marcia (♩ = 108)



The image displays a musical score for Sergei Rachmaninov's Prelude in G minor, Op. 23 No. 5. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time. It is marked "Alla marcia" with a tempo of 108 beats per minute. The score is divided into two systems. The first system begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The second system includes a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The music features a strong bass line and complex chordal textures.

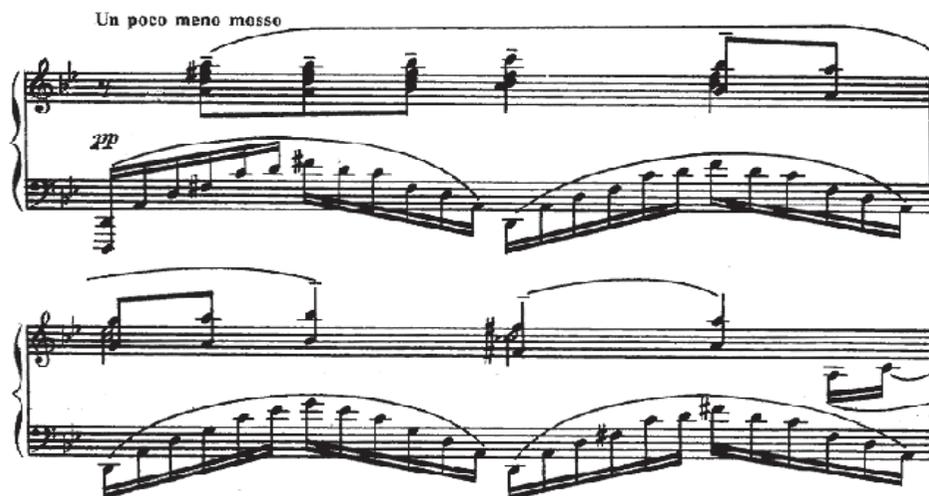
This is why this composition made such stunning impression in the author's interpretation. "I was always terrified when Rachmaninov played this Prelude", recollected one woman from the audience. "He began quietly, ominously quiet... Then a swell of such monstrous force that it seemed a flood of terrible sounds falls upon you in rage... Like a bursting dam".

According to the composer, this prelude is written "in the style of the march," one of the most popular musical genres. However the most popular marches are usually those with a clear and bright melody. There is no consistent melody in this 'Prelude. The composer gives just the barest idea of a march - a typical march "foundation" - bass unison (mainly on the strong beat) and reciprocal chords (on the upbeat). In ominous bass steps, short melodic motives steadily gain power. The elegant fanfare theme, born from the chordal "answers" in the beginning of the Prelude, appears in the middle of the march. Then, returned to its original form, the procession leaves gradually. The impressive power of the Prelude undoubtedly comes not only from the pianist's ability to show the determined rise of dynamics, but also from a strong sense of rhythm. Rachmaninov's rhythm was made of "steel" - imperious, adamant. Deviations from the strict metric pulse brought special intensity to his style. Return to the initial pulse after a rhythmic deviation was perceived as "a relief". One could feel the joy of free breathing when Rachmaninov would return to strict rhythm.

The center section of the Prelude g-moll, in comparison with the beginning, illustrates a completely different image.

Ex. 11. Rachmaninov: Prelude g-moll, op. 23 No. 5, middle section

Un poco meno mosso



pp

This is one of Rachmaninov's warmest lyrical melodies, full of joy and passionate languor. Only a quiet echo of the former bass "bursts" occasionally evokes the past. The second appearance of this theme represents a poetic love duet.

Finally, when the lyrical middle part seems to be melting in exhaustion, the march theme - hidden and waiting - begins its brutal, all-shattering ascent from the bass register. Destiny, seemingly drawn away, again squeezes its hand into an iron fist.

The Prelude g-moll was written in the same year as the Second Concerto, and represents the two major poles of the Concerto in condensed form: dramatically adamant (let's recall the main theme in the first movement of the Second Concerto, especially in the recapitulation, when it appears in a marching style) and lyrically enthusiastic (second themes of the first and final movements). However the general concepts of the Concerto and the Prelude are opposites: musical development in the Concerto leads to an apotheosis, but in the Prelude Rachmaninov leaves us with the mystery of Fate. In the Prelude g-moll, destiny appeared as a force resisting human happiness, but nevertheless both concepts have origins in romantic generality and conventionality.

Rachmaninov presents a similar conflict in a different way in Etude-Tableau a-moll op. 39-6; according to the author's commentary, "it was inspired by the story of Little Red Riding Hood and the Grey Wolf."

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

Ex. 12. Rachmaninov: Etude-Tableau a-moll, op. 39-6

The image shows a musical score for Sergei Rachmaninov's Etude-Tableau in A minor, Op. 39, No. 6. The score is presented in two systems. The first system is marked 'Allegro' and consists of two staves. The right-hand staff has a melody with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and the left-hand staff has a rhythmic accompaniment with a *dim.* (diminuendo) dynamic. The second system is marked 'p leggiero' and also consists of two staves, with the right-hand staff having a melody and the left-hand staff having a rhythmic accompaniment, both marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The key signature has one flat (A minor), and the time signature is 3/4.

Yet this piece is much more than a musical illustration to the simple children's fairy tale. For Rachmaninov, Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf were reflections of life around him. It is not a coincidence that this Etude-Tableau was completed in September 1916, in the middle of World War I and right before the Russian Revolution. The image of destiny, not only opposing the man, but ruthless, furious, and in pursuit, is depicted in the terrible "roar" of the wolf, in its crushing pressure and predatory leaps. In the theme of "Little Red Riding Hood", in which she is shown pitiful and intimidated, among the repeated notes appeared a melody that is based on "Obikhod" motives. As mentioned above, Rachmaninov often created great melodies, similar to the themes in the Second and Third Concertos, based on such motives. Tragic despair and resistance to fate are shown in this theme with an expressive boldness.

The Etude-Tableau fis-moll op. 39-3 is also distinguished by its expressionistic tension.

Ex. 13. Rachmaninov: Etude-Tableau fis-moll, op. 39-3

Allegro molto

The composer did not leave any comments explaining the content of this piece, yet its extraordinary bright imagery compels one to search for a hidden program. For instance, we may imagine the scene of disastrous fire. Like an alarming tocsin, a warning bell sound, used in Russian villages at times of disasters - one can hear the short motive, constantly repeated with variations. The octaves and "empty" fourth intervals (Rachmaninov underlines the latter with accents-tenuto) sound like a bell. Changeable, as if "broken", rhythmic pulsation makes this music particularly anxious.

There are two rhythmic accents in the first two bars and three in the next two bars. One can hear the same groaning intonations of the high-register short "alarm bell" motive in the second thematic element of the Prelude cis-moll op. 2-3 and in the accompaniment to the main theme of the Third Concerto.

The music of this Etude-Tableau arouses associations with fire, repeatedly hiding under the ashes, breaking free in huge flames, and scattering in ominous sparks. The third movement of Rachmaninov's poem "Bells", with its image of "the world on fire", is very similar to this Etude-Tableau. However, in contrast to the former, the Etude-Tableau finishes by fading into mysterious shimmering, as if terrified by this picture, opened before the composer in a prophetic vision.

Despite all the clear signs of his tragic mindset, it would be a mistake to characterize Rachmaninov's music by only this side of his personality.

Rachmaninov's personality, like that of every other extraordinary artist, was complex and diverse. In the memoirs of people close to him, he is shown as a cheerful, fun-loving person, a

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

caring father and husband. He was accurate, punctual, precise and organized in his dealings with his publishers and impresarios. He was a skilled landowner who transformed his wife's manor, Ivanovka, into a prosperous business; he was also a deft sportsman and a passionate car owner.

Here is one telling episode, recalled by Marietta Shaginyan: [(9) Мариэтта Шагинян: Воспоминания о Рахманинове (1955). Marietta Shaginyan: The Recollections about Rachmaninov (1955). <http://www.senar.ru/memoirs/Shaginyan/>]

One day, Rachmaninov spoke with her about death, trying to prove that "it is impossible to live" knowing that "it would be necessary to die." While speaking, he kept himself busy with roasted pistachios - he loved them very much. Suddenly he looked at the pistachio plate, remembered, smiled, and said, "With pistachios, the fear of death has evaporated somewhere. Any idea where?"

In Rachmaninov's piano music there are many pages full of joy and heroic energy, where the surrounding world appears before us in all its splendor and beauty. As examples, we could mention the majestic epic images in his Second and Third Concertos, in the Musical Moment e-moll op. 16-4, Preludes B-Dur op. 23-2 and E-Dur op. 32-3 and Etude-Tableau D-Dur op. 39-9.

Subsequently, the composer nicknamed his Etude-Tableau Es-Dur op. 33-7 "Scene at the Fair" in his letter to Respighi. Musicians traditionally call it "Maslenitsa" (Russian Easter), a festival celebrated since pagan times to farewell winter. It is a time of fun, drunkenness, and feasting - similar to a Western European carnival. There were parades, sleighing, games, and puppet shows. Rachmaninov's entire piece is filled with festive bell ringing and with the fanfares of street orchestras. One can hear the motives of bold "drinking" songs, recalling the well-known "Along Piterskaya Road" - the song that became one of the favorite "encores" in Chaliapin's repertoire.

Ex. 14-A. Rachmaninov: Etude-Tableau Es-Dur, op. 33-7, bars 11-13

Musical score for Ex. 14-A, Rachmaninov's Etude-Tableau Es-Dur, bars 11-13. The score is in 2/4 time and E major. It features a piano (*p*) melody in the right hand and a forte (*ff*) accompaniment in the left hand. The piano part includes markings for *leggiero* and *dim*.

Ex. 14-B. Russian folk song: "Along Piterskaya Road" (Вдоль по Питерской)

Musical score for Ex. 14-B, Russian folk song "Along Piterskaya Road" (Вдоль по Питерской). The score is in 2/4 time and E major. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a forte (*ff*) marking.

Ekh, vdol' po Pi - ter - skoi,

Po Tver - skoi Iam - skoi, da, okh, — Po Tver -

The middle section of this Etude-Tableau suggests an image of a puppeteer amusing the crowd with his dolls.

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

Ex. 15. Rachmaninov: Etude-Tableau Es-Dur, op. 33-7, middle section



Rachmaninov's lyricism allows the audience to enter a unique, fragrant world. Rachmaninov was an incomparable advocate of Russian nature; it is difficult to find any equals in the history of music. It is impossible to fully imagine and appreciate the unique Russian scenery without living in Russia - photos and paintings can hardly help here. Rachmaninov's music is one of the most effective means of reaching Russia's distinctive beauty. The landscapes of central Russia are not ornate or extraordinarily picturesque. The Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev called them "impoverished". Rachmaninov is connected to his country's nature as deeply as Pushkin, Tolstoy or Tchaikovsky.

The majority of great Russian artists, musicians, and poets were raised and then spent a considerable part of their lives in villages, country manors or mansions; from an early age they absorbed the simple poetry of the native landscape and learned to see beauty in barely perceptible changes of nature. Time and again, Rachmaninov repeated that only necessity forced him to live in Moscow and he would prefer to live in the country. Before emigrating from Russia, he spent every summer in Ivanovka, where he was engaged not only in music, but also in agriculture. In being drawn to the land, he was similar to the great poet of the same period, Alexander Blok, whose art is very close to Rachmaninov's.

Nature in Rachmaninov's music is usually static; nothing is happening - just a stretch of steppe, a light breeze, a rustle of grass, the shimmering of the trees in the forest, the sweet smell of lilac. Rachmaninov was able to listen to the silence and deliver his emotions to the audience with modest and touching warmth. We can feel this warmth and tenderness in his Prelude Es-Dur op. 23 No. 6, with its immense melody, as though filled with smooth and warm sunlight. "It poured out of me on the day when my daughter was born," admitted Rachmaninov. "The brightest, most precious thing in my life! And in that brightness is serenity and joy!" - said the composer of his children. [(10) Е. Ф. Гнесина: О Рахманинове (1958). Elena Gnessina: About Rachmaninov (1958). <http://www.senar.ru/memoirs/Gnesina/>]

Rachmaninov's prolonged rocking on the same harmony, found, for example, in his Musical Moment Des-Dur op. 16-5 or in Prelude gis-moll op. 32-10, brings a sense of vibrating silence to the audience. Rachmaninov makes his music glimmer, like colors on the canvasses of French

impressionists Pissarro or Sisley. This effect is revealed in his remarkable Prelude G-Dur op. 32-5.

Ex. 16. Rachmaninov: Prelude G-Dur, op. 32-5

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninov's Prelude G-Dur, op. 32-5. The score is in G major, 4/4 time, and marked 'Moderato'. It features a piano accompaniment of alternating G-Dur and e-moll triads in the left hand, and a melodic line in the right hand. The melody is marked 'dolce' and includes a triplet. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting with the instruction 'Meno rit.'

Soft alternations, oscillations of G-Dur and e-moll triads as background for a fragile melody rising to the highest skies gives us an impression of the wide Russian steppe. (It is significant that Ivanovka was located in the steppes). The light and clear echoes of a singing lark can be heard in the melody. In this composition, Rachmaninov shows himself as the successor to the other remarkable proponents of Russian nature - Glinka and Tchaikovsky.

The coincidence of the Prelude's harmonic oscillations with the major tonalities in Glinka's romance "The Lark" and Tchaikovsky's "Song of the Lark" from "The Children's Album" would appear to be no accident. In the middle part of the Prelude one feels a gloomy coolness, as though a shade of cloud runs over the sunny land. However, after a few moments the light changes again, the sun reappears, and a light song rises ever higher and higher, dissolving in the blue sky.

In Rachmaninov's works, images of nature are often combined with images of the road and with another image symbolic of Russian culture - "Troika" (a three-horse drawn sled or carriage). Earlier, Russian writer Nikolai Gogol compared "Troika" to Russia in his poem "Dead Souls". Rachmaninov implemented this deep undercurrent precisely in his performance of Tchaikovsky's "On the Troika" from "The Seasons" op. 37 bis. The same undercurrent can be perceived in Rachmaninov's own compositions - in the Prelude gis-moll op. 32-12, in Etude-Tableau h-moll op. 39 No. 4, in the first movement of the Third Concerto, and in the Poem for orchestra, chorus and soloists, "The Bells" op. 35.

The development of Russian music in the late 19th to early 20th centuries and the piano music of Sergei Rachmaninov, its traditions and interpretation.

In this article we tried to concentrate on the general principles that shaped Rachmaninov's music and on the deep human experiences behind the sound. Same principles could also be applied to the Piano Concertos where similar content finds an even more elaborate, grandiose embodiment.

In conclusion, it must be said that the road to understanding Rachmaninov's music and interpreting it lies in the deep study of Russian culture in all its forms. The wonderful world of Rachmaninov will fully reveal itself to those devoted.

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