CHAPTER 3
RUSSIAN PIANO MUSIC DISPLAYING EXTRA-MUSICAL THEMES:
PROGRAMMATIC MUSIC AND THE RUSSIAN ELEGY

It may, at first glance, seem a little odd to group programmatic music with the elegy. But on closer inspection, The Seasons of Tchaikovsky and Tales of Medtner have a surprising number of commonalities with the Elegies of Arensky and Rachmaninoff. Because of the intensively expressive musical language of all four composers, performers can instinctively ‘tap into’ the underlying passion. However, by studying both the ‘obvious’ and ‘hidden’ extra-musical influences (both cultural and biographical), performers can further empathise and discover these are by no means written purely for the nineteenth and early twentieth century salon.

TCHAIKOVSKY: The Seasons (opus 37 bis)
Understanding Tchaikovsky’s musical language

It is possible to view Tchaikovsky’s Seasons as simple nineteenth-century miniatures aiming only to please the amateur market. David Brown, in his biography of Tchaikovsky, dismissed the set as “no more than a set of salon pieces, tuneful and pretty, sometimes garnished with a mild picturesqueness prompted by the little poetic epigraph that Bernard selected to head each piece.”

Presumably, if the performer was to take this rather superficial approach, to perform it ‘authentically’ he would need to play it as a nineteenth-century amateur would.

It is true that they were written for the amateur market. Tchaikovsky’s The Seasons were written for the periodical Nouvelliste. The editor, Nikolay Bernard, requested a series of twelve piano pieces which would be published consecutively each month of the year. Tchaikovsky wrote each work in the month prior to it being published, starting in December 1875 and completing the cycle in November 1876. It is also true that Tchaikovsky wrote these works quickly. Kashkin (a fellow professor at the Moscow Conservatory) describes:

so as not to miss any of the dates on which it had been agreed that the pieces should be delivered, he charged his servant to remind him, on a certain day of each month, of his commission. The servant carried out

this instruction very punctiliously, and once a month on the agreed
day said: “Pyotr Ilich, it’s time to send off to St Petersburg” — And
Pyotr Ilich wrote a piece at a single sitting and sent it off.\textsuperscript{153}

However, this does not imply that the works are of any less musical value.
Tchaikovsky’s compositional process at this stage in his life was at times fast.
Tchaikovsky wrote in 1875 to his brother Modest:

when composing, I have to bite my nails sometimes, smoke an
enormous amount of cigarettes, and walk up and down the room
before discovering the main theme. Sometimes, on the other hand,
everything is easy and thoughts are born and push each other as fast as
they can. Everything depends on the mood and humour you are in.
But even if you are not in the proper mood you have to force yourself
to work.\textsuperscript{154}

The fact that they were written for an amateur market does explain the slightly
more accessible style than some other compositions by Tchaikovsky in this era. This is
shown in a comparison of the works written in this period for commission, or at least
with a wider market in mind (such as \textit{The Seasons} and \textit{Swan Lake}) with those not (such as the \textit{String Quartet No.3} and the \textit{Third Symphony}). It is worthwhile, from a
performance perspective, to firstly look at the commonalities between these works.

The \textit{String Quartet No.3} and \textit{The Seasons} were both written in 1876. When, for
example, comparing the third movement of the \textit{String Quartet} with “October” of \textit{The Seasons}, at face value (purely from an analytical perspective) they appear to be
completely different styles. The \textit{String Quartet} possesses a far greater harmonic range
and a more involved counterpoint than what is found in “October”, or any of \textit{The Seasons}. This is illustrated in figure 95, which displays a sample of the most complex
harmonic and textural passages in each of the works.

\textsuperscript{153} Kashkin, N., “Is vospominany o P. I. Chaykovskom” [From my recollections of Tchaikovsky],
\textsuperscript{154} Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Modest dated 6 January 1875. Cited in: Tchaikovsky, \textit{Letters to his
The result, from a listener’s perspective, is a more intense communication of emotion in the String Quartet. It is important to realise, though, this is looking at the music purely from the composer-listener stance, without considering the interpretation of the performer.
If played by a poor player, “October” would certainly have considerably less emotional impact on the listener than the *Quartet*. It is highly probable that a musician lacking imagination would play bars that contain identical musical content (e.g. bars 22-25 and bars 26-29) exactly the same — most probably giving the listener the impression that it is a nice tune, but little more.

Figure 96: Tchaikovsky – “October”, *The Seasons*, op.37 bis, bars 17-30

However, it is possible for the performer to interpret this passage as a passionate outcry and by extending the dynamic range of the work and using *rubato* the performer can create an emotion similar to the *String Quartet*, or even one of the climatic string melodies out of the one of the symphonies.
Figure 97: Tchaikovsky – “October”, The Seasons, op.37 bis, bars 17-30

My indications:

- **PPP** easing into tempo
- flexible, but generally in
- slight rubato on F
  (held back, sweet tone)
- ease back
- In tempo
- increase tone
  (no rubato on F - straight through)
- **PPP**

- **ff** (broaden)

- in tempo
- slight rubato on Bb

- **ff**

- **mf**

- more intense tone
  significant pull back in
  *tempo*
  (particularly on Bb)
Such an interpretation can be justified purely from looking at Tchaikovsky’s compositional technique — repetition is one of his chief tools of intensifying emotion. In one of the most intense, magical moments of Tchaikovsky’s music — the last movement of his *Sixth Symphony*, melodic repetition contributes considerably to the impact of the music.

Figure 98: Tchaikovsky – *Symphony No.6*, op.74, fourth movement, bars 39-71, violin 1
As Leon Bolstein states (when discussing repetition in the *Fourth Symphony*):

Tchaikovsky’s brilliant achievement is the use of repetition with only slight variation, the marshalling of overlays and audibly discrete supplementary materials on common ground, and the effective creation of rhetorical bridges between clearly demarcated sections [i.e., if applied to “October”, the middle section is clearly distinct from the outer sections]. Precisely because there is no Brahmsian transformation, the listener is drawn convincingly into the artificially created illusion of real experience of an emotional state of being. The listener judges the emotions to be as plausible, as intense, and as realistic as those he or she has experienced in real time.155

Simple music does not equate to simple expression — a fact which is proven by the music alone, without even considering the programmatic and external influences which will be discussed later in the paper.

It is very easy to imagine *The Seasons* orchestrated. Considering Tchaikovsky’s vast orchestral output, it can be useful for the performer to look briefly at Tchaikovsky’s orchestration techniques. It is significant that Tchaikovsky used to compose a ‘short score’ first, saying that “the scoring is just the brainwork”.156 Therefore, it is possible to view his piano works as scores which need ‘orchestrating’ with pianistic colour. The most obvious characteristic of Tchaikovsky’s orchestration is the predominance of strings. There is no orchestral work by Tchaikovsky that doesn’t possess a rich melody in the string section — the warmth of that timbre akin to the warmth of Tchaikovsky’s melodic style. This can be transferred to the piano — ensuring (despite what the accompanying parts are doing), a warmth in tone quality.

Tchaikovsky characteristically orchestrates in blocks — a melody is usually played in its entirety by a certain instrument (with the accompaniment also consistent), then the orchestration changes for the next section. This can be seen in the waltz from *Swan Lake*. The first sixteen bars of melodic material are played in the first violins, with a consistent accompaniment in the horns and lower strings.

This is followed by a section which opens with the same melodic material, but Tchaikovsky doubles the melody this time in the viola, and adds flute and clarinet arpeggios for additional colour.
Figure 100: Tchaikovsky – Swan Lake Suite, “Valse”, bars 35-50
When the thematic material changes completely, Tchaikovsky increases the orchestration further.

Figure 101: Tchaikovsky – Swan Lake Suite, “Valse”, bars 51-66
This is how Tchaikovsky achieves colour and shape, while maintaining unified thematic material.

A similar approach can be taken when interpreting *The Seasons*. From Tchaikovsky’s markings in “December”, for example, it appears on the score that Tchaikovsky wants the opening of each ‘block’ of thematic material in the first forty bars to commence *piano*. However, if he were orchestrating it, it is extremely unlikely that he would have orchestrated each of these sections the same. It is up to the performer to ‘orchestrate’ the work by providing differences in tone colour. The middle section of “December” from *The Seasons* is almost identical to the waltz in *Swan Lake* (i.e., essentially the same thematic block twice, then new thematic material). Performers
can simulate the change in orchestration by changing the tone colour and using *rubato*.

Figure 102: Tchaikovsky – *The Seasons*, “December”, bars 88-111

Another example of block ‘colours’ can be found in the opening of “December”. The opening eight bars are typical of Tchaikovsky’s waltzes, and could be orchestrated in exactly the same manner as the opening of the *Swan Lake* waltz. The melody in the *Swan Lake* waltz appears in the strings — this contributes to the melodic warmth. When playing “December”, it is effective to open with a warm quality in the melody line with a light accompaniment.
In bar 9 there appears to be a distinct change in character. It is quite effective to give the following eight bars a lighter character (both in dynamics and articulation, particularly in the accompaniment). It can also be quite effective to use a slight *rubato* leading to the F (in the melody of the second bar of the excerpt) to highlight the accents, using a similar *rubato* two bars later to the Eb, though not to the same extent (so it is not predictable).

Figure 104: Tchaikovsky – *The Seasons*, “December”, bars 9-16
Following this is a return to the initial theme, which brings back the warmth of the opening.

Figure 105: Tchaikovsky – The Seasons, “December”, bars 17-24

![Musical notation image]

Using these ‘blocks’ of sound will add more colour and simulate Tchaikovsky’s orchestral music: this contributes significantly to the listener’s experience of the music. Many educated listeners would naturally associate The Seasons with his orchestral music (his ballets in particular). There is nothing wrong with this: by performing in this fashion, listeners may very well get an ‘orchestral’ picture in their mind and associate the melodies with the warmth of Tchaikovsky’s other melodies, thus getting an insight into Tchaikovsky’s musical (and, subconsciously, personal) character.

**Extra-musical influences**

Having established from purely musical analysis that these works have emotional worth, extra-musical influences can be explored. The “emotional” content in music is the somewhat complicated combination of the expression of culture, social interaction, events taking place in the composer’s life, and the composer’s psychological state. In this case there is also the additional influence of the program — encapsulating the months of the year in music. If, as Bortkiewicz’s teacher Reisenauer put it, the role of the performer is to create

> an artistic estimate of the composer’s intention and to feel that during the period of reproduction he [the performer] simulates the natural psychological conditions which affected the composer during the actual process of composition\(^\text{157}\)

then the more performers study the extra-musical influences, the more they will empathise with Tchaikovsky’s music.

The titles and accompanying epigraphs for *The Seasons* were actually added by Bernard after Tchaikovsky had written the music. Nevertheless, it is not hard to see why Bernard chose the poetry that he did, and referring to his ‘descriptions’ can be useful when discussing the culture that Tchaikovsky is depicting.

Figure 106: the titles and epigraphs Bernard added to *The Seasons* [only those months discussed in the paper are included below]

**January:** “At the Fireside”

> A little corner of peaceful bliss,
> The night dressed in twilight;
> The little fire is dying in the fireplace,
> and the candle has burned out.

— Pushkin

**February:** “Carnival”

> At the lively Mardi Gras
> soon a large feast will overflow

— Vyasamsky

**April:** “Snowdrops”

> The blue, pure snowdrop flower,
> and near it the last snow drops.
> The last tears over past griefs
> and first dreams of another happiness.

— Maykov

**September:** “Hunting”

> It is time! The horns are sounding!
> The hunters in their hunting dress are mounted on their horses;
> in early dawn the borzois are jumping.

— Pushkin

**October:** “Autumn Song”

> The fall, falling down on our poor orchard,
> the yellow leaves are flying in the wind.

— Tolstoy

**December:** “Christmas”

> Once upon a Christmas night
> the girls were telling fortunes:
> taking their slippers off their feet
> and throwing them out the gate.

— Nekrasov
Interestingly, Bernard obviously thought that his choices were accurate depictions. When he published the works, he announced that “they will be pieces whose character will correspond exactly, both in their titles and their impressions to the month in which they will be published”.

While the music is not conceived as programmatic in a text-music sense, it was still written as a representation of that month of the year. Many of Bernard’s epigraphs have a distinctly Russian flavour, and it is likely that Tchaikovsky also had “Russian” seasons in mind when writing the works. After all, he was proud of his nationality, exclaiming that “I am Russian, Russian to the marrow.”

Why does a simple Russian landscape, a walk through countryside, forest or steppe on a summer’s evening, move me so, that I lie down on the ground, filled with a kind of torpor, an immense upsurge of love for nature, my head turned by the intoxicating atmosphere that enfolds me as it wafts out of the forest or steppe, from the little river, the distant village, the humble country church: in short everything that goes to make up the scenery of my poor native Russia.

An obvious depiction of Russian culture can be found in February, which Bernard has entitled “Carnival”. The mardi gras the poem is referring to is Shrovetide, a significant part of Russian culture. It is a week-long festival held seven weeks before Easter — which is usually February (or the beginning of March). Once Lent had begun, all concerts and theatre ceased. Each day in the week would have its own rituals: “Monday was “Celebration”; Tuesday — “Flirting”; Wednesday — “Sweet Tooth”, “Turning Point”, “Carousing”; Thursday — “Merrymaking”; Friday — “Mother-in-Law Evenings”; Saturday — “Sister-in-Law’s Party”, “Good-Bye Party”; and Sunday was “A Farewell”. Overall, the week was filled with “tobogganing, entertaining guests and enjoying traditional gluttony. People were singing, riding troikas, kissing and hugging each other.”

The week was rich in musical activity:

At all hours of the day or night you could find a concert in some maecenas’ house, or a bliny party where you spread pancakes with caviar or herring, or blinchiki with sweetened cloudbberries, washing each mouthful down with gulps of vodka.

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158 Written in sleeve notes to James Lisney’s recording of The Seasons.
160 Ibid., p.8.
162 Ibid.
The pancake, incidentally, was the symbol of the spring sun. Tchaikovsky describes one Shrovetide in a letter to his sister in 1866:

I spend Shrovetide very quietly and was home nearly all the time. It was not until yesterday that I went to the funfair and the circus that belongs to it. The frost was bitter and the poor little equestrian dances in their short gauzy dresses were pathetic. Today is the first day of Lent and Moscow looks absolutely dead.164

It is very likely that the atmosphere of Shrovetide is what Tchaikovsky had in mind when writing *February* (in this case Bernard’s claim to accurate representation of the music does appear to be founded). Pianists can use this cultural context to assist in their interpretation of the work. The main concern for performers is to make the music as exciting as possible. This is achieved primarily by attention to two things: contrast in dynamics and attention to articulations. For example, in figure 107, the dynamic range between the first four bars and the remainder can be exaggerated. Also, observing the accents and the two-note phrases helps to create more excitement. The sparing use of pedal at the start creates clarity in the two-note phrase. Characteristically, Tchaikovsky uses minimal thematic material in sequence to create the build up. Pianists can enhance this by using more pedal as the dynamics and sequences increase.

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In the passage immediately following the climax, there is a risk of the semiquaver passage seeming a little pointless. This occurs if the pianist treats the semiquavers as four groups of four semiquavers:
It is more effective to maintain a sense of direction over the two bars of descending phrases, in fact keeping that direction going until the end of the four bar phrase. Once again, exaggerating the accents on the final two notes helps add more excitement. Particularly with the sense of direction over the entire phrase, it is possible to imagine these four bars as a toboggan sliding down the hill.

While some of *The Seasons* obviously reflect Russian customs, others are somewhat more obscure. Bernard’s titles and epigraphs have their uses. By imposing pictorial images, Bernard was possibly aiming to: (1) ensure that the works represented the appropriate season enough, and that the audience was conscious why they were included in the season; (2) make the music more accessible (programmatic music is generally more readily understood by amateur markets). Katharine Boyes analyses the relationship between the poetry and the text of “April” in some detail:

The subtitle and poetry attached to “April” describes the snowdrop, an early spring flower. In the first stanza of Maikov’s poem the flower appears “blue” against the whiteness of the surrounding snow. (Blue is a color [sic.] associated with cold and sadness.) However, we are reminded that the word snowdrop is “pure” white in color — hence its name — and that in some parts of the world it blooms when snow is still on the ground. The second stanza of the poem laments the ending of Winter, but rejoices at the coming of Spring, “The first daydreams of new happiness”. This also relates to sadness experienced in the passing of time, but with renewed hope as the seasons change. Spring is the season of renewal and re-birth of which the snowdrop is a part. The simple compositional style of “April” is in keeping with the portrait of a snowdrop. The reference to “tears” and “bygone sorrow” are suggested in the “sighing” figuration that permeates the piece and in the minor tonalities.\textsuperscript{165}

It is plausible that, if he were to choose a text, Tchaikovsky would choose one with such a theme. Tchaikovsky loved nature, once exclaiming “thank God, I have again

\textsuperscript{165} Boyes, op. cit., p.227.
become fully receptive to Nature, seeing and comprehending in each leaf and flower something unattainably beautiful, reposeful, peaceful, giving me again an intense love of life.”

One year after completing The Seasons, he wrote a poem entitled “Lilies of the Valley”, which he considered to be “the king of flowers”. However, while the poem Bernard chose does fit the music, and Tchaikovsky’s love of nature supports his choice in poem, the poem was added after the composition was written. These images were imposed upon the music. At this point, discussing programmatic music from a “pictorial” or “dramatic” purpose becomes somewhat obsolete. The deeper level of the program lies in its psychological realms.

Tchaikovsky’s music is imbued with his personality. Konstantin di Lazari, a close friend, described that

> it was impossible not to love him. From his youthful appearance and wonderful eyes with their profound expression, everything about him created insuperable attraction, most of all his touching kindness and humility, which was surprising in one of such talent. No one was more capable of treating everyone sincerely and sweetly; no one’s view of people had such a childlike purity and radiance. Conversation with him made everyone feel a certain warmth, a certain caress in the sound of his voice and in his eyes.

In his letters, his directness of expression is also displayed. It is not uncommon to see in these letters phrases such as:

> I kiss you hard, dear Modia! Kiss Kolia’s eyes and his little palm!
> How I love the little fellow!

> I embrace you...

The warm hearted, direct quality of Tchaikovsky can be seen in his works, such as “January”, “April” or “December”. As discussed earlier in the chapter, these melodies would be played with the characteristic warm string tone in mind.

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166 Vladimir Volkoff, Tchaikovsky (London, 1975), p.44.
Figure 109a: Tchaikovsky – The Seasons, “January”, bars 1-8

Figure 109b: Tchaikovsky – The Seasons, “April”, bars 1-8

Figure 109c: Tchaikovsky – The Seasons, “December”, bars 1-8
It is possible to view Tchaikovsky’s *Seasons* also as programmatic in a sense of his personal character.

The journalist Alexander Sokolva shows a hint of a different side in Tchaikovsky’s character:

[Tchaikovsky] was notable for the extraordinary likeableness that colored [sic.] his many distinctive traits. He was unquestionably kind, but it was a sort of lazy kindness, owing not so much to gentleheartedness as to a desire to avoid conflict at all cost.

He was always willing to let other have their way, though again not because of meekness or Christian humility, but simply because he either had no time or was just too lazy to argue.

In his company, he was always reserved and very taciturn and only grew lively within his own circle, among people he knew well and liked...\(^{169}\)

Tchaikovsky’s dislike of crowds is evident in a letter he wrote either during or after a stay with his sister’s in-laws (the Davyдов family):

> From the moment our small circle was broken and whole heaps of acquaintances poured in on ‘ours’ and thereby in part on us, I began to frown and have made an inner vow never again to spend summer in such places where people dance virtually every day and pay visits to one another every minute. ... But here’s the nasty part: I have had continual opportunity at Haapsalu to become convinced that I harbor [sic.] within me the disease called ‘misanthropy’. I am overcome here by terrible fits of hatred toward mankind.\(^{169}\)

At times, Tchaikovsky states that he had “become intolerably depressed as the result of a strong nervous disorder ... [and wished to] go away somewhere and hide in some lonely backwoods.”\(^{170}\) When Tchaikovsky was travelling to receive his honorary doctorate from Cambridge in 1893, “he was prepared to turn back halfway to Cambridge University to receive an honorary doctorate” because “the mere thought of public meetings or private parties where there could be many people whom he knew hardly or not at all could drive him to desperation.”

In stark contrast to this, when alone, Tchaikovsky feared loneliness. “[I am] really disturbed by this unbearable state of mind which overcomes me every time I am


\(^{171}\) Ibid.
abroad alone! There is something morbid in this!” Evidence of this is also found in the letters to his brother Modest:

Tomorrow, after a good night’s sleep, I shall probably be in a better mood, but at this moment I can only quote Katerina in [Ostrovsky’s] Storm. “Oh! How lonely I am without you!” Tomorrow morning I shall send you a telegram; writing this letter and the idea of sending a telegram has consoled me. The only good thing about separation from a beloved person is that it is possible to measure the strength of one’s love him.175

So why did Tchaikovsky label himself frequently as a misanthrope? Part of the reason of this self-diagnosed ‘misanthropy’ was his homosexuality. Tchaikovsky wrote:

I am here, very lonely here, and if it were not for working constantly I should simply give myself over to melancholy. It is also true that my damned homosexuality creates an unbridgeable chasm between me and most people. It imparts to my character an estrangement, a fear of people, immoderate timidity, mistrustfulness, in short, a thousand qualities whereby I am growing more and more unsociable. Just imagine, frequently now and at length I dwell on the idea of a monastery or something of the sort...176

There are several reasons for this predicament. Although homosexuality was readily practised in Russia, it was still illegal — the punishment being exile to Siberia. As Poznansky points out, “there is little doubt that many of his colleagues [at the Conservatory], and certainly those closest to him, knew or guessed the true nature of his sexual preferences, a fact of which Tchaikovsky himself was well aware.”177

Tchaikovsky wrote in a letter to his brother Anatoly:

He [Rubinstein] continues to think that I am maintained by his benefactions alone. Do you know what I see at the root of all this? Still the same thing. Blackmail! He’s saying that with my shameful reputation I should thank my lucky stars that he keeps me on. Upon my word, it is so!178

Another factor contributing to Tchaikovsky’s unrest was that in August 1876 Tchaikovsky spent time living in close proximity to his father in Verbokvka (the small

172 Ibid., p.102.
175 Poznansky, Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man, op. cit., p.176.
176 Ibid., p176-7.
village adjoining the Davydov’s (sister in laws’) estate. As Alexander Poznansky remarks “it is not difficult to image the old man hounding his son with questions about when he was finally going to marry and the effect of this face-to-face prodding must have had on Tchaikovsky.” Tchaikovsky started to consider, more strongly, the possibility of marriage. In a letter to Modest he writes:

Do you really think that I am not oppressed by this awareness that they pity and forgive me, when in fact I am guilty of nothing! And is it really not dreadful to think that people who love me can ever be ashamed of me! But, you see, this has happened a hundred times before and will happen a hundred times again. In a word, I should like my marriage or, in general, an open affair with a woman, to shut the mouths of various contemptible creatures whose opinion I do not value in the least but who can cause pain to the people close to me.

On 6 July the following year (1877), Tchaikovsky married Anotonia Milyukova, a former conservatory student. The marriage was made on ‘open terms’, “promising his bride only a ‘brotherly’ love” In a letter to his brother Anatoly two days after his wedding Tchaikovsky states that he and his wife “had conversations that further clarified our mutual relations ... I had reserved for myself complete freedom of action.”

In a letter to Modest on the same day, he wrote that “I cannot say that I love her.” Needless to say the marriage was very short lived.

Tchaikovsky misanthropy can also be attributed to his artistic temperament. He once said “This music! This music! It’s here in my head and won’t let me sleep.” It does seem plausible that Tchaikovsky “was one of those happy few whose life organizes [sic.] itself in complete accordance with the demands of their consciousness and their inner nature.” Tchaikovsky’s compositional process does support this notion. Tchaikovsky would usually keep a routine (that would essentially not change throughout his life that included composition and solitary walks. This lifestyle was consistent, whether working at the conservatory or on a vacation. In 1866, Tchaikovsky (when still living in Rubinstein’s house) stated that

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177 Ibid., p.185.
178 Ibid., p.186.
179 Poznansky.
180 Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, 8 July 1877 (St. Petersburg). Cited in ibid., p.73.
181 Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Modest Tchaikovsky, 8 July 1877 (St. Petersburg). Cited in ibid., p.78.
184 Poznansky, The Quest for the Inner Man, op. cit., p.89.
my days are very regular and this is how I pass them. I stir between 9
and 10. Still lazing in bed I talk to Rubinstein and then we have tea
together; then I either give lessons from 11 to 1 or work at my
symphony (which is not getting on very well) and in that case I stay
in my room until half past two, when either Kashkin or Valsek visit
me. At 2:30 I go to the Theatre Square to Ourmetin’s bookshop to
read the daily papers and from there I sometimes walk to the Kuznecky
Most [Blacksmith’s Bridge]. At 4.00 I mostly dine at the
Tamovsky’s or with Nilus (only three times in the last three weeks),
or in the pub. After dinner I go for another walk or sit in my room.
In the evening, I nearly always have tea with Tarnovskys and
sometimes go to a club .. where I read the periodicals. I usually return
home about 12, when I write my symphony, or letters, and read in bed
till late.185

However, when Tchaikovsky had a need to compose he abandoned his routine. In
December 1874 it appears that his whole ‘scheduled’ way of life is abandoned when he
writes that “I work at my concerto [Piano Concerto No.1] without stopping and must
finish it this week; so do not expect more than a few words from me...”186

The actual process of composition was not always an easy one. In November
1874, Tchaikovsky wrote “I am engrossed in the composition of a piano concerto [no.1]
... but it is not coming easily and well. I have, as a duty, to force my brain to invent
piano passages, with the result that my nerves are very strained.”187 The need to
complete the work, and the difficulty in achieving that goal would have added to his
phases of depression. Yet, at other times, actually composing was what prevented
Tchaikovsky from sinking into depression. A phrase that appears frequently in his
letters is “if it had not been for steady work I would have gone into a profound state of
melancholia.”188 Overall, this tends to support Poznansky’s suggestion that “just as the
slightest intrusion on his music and his work could plunge him into fits of despair and
“misanthropy”, so could his creative drive draw him out of despondency. Righting the
balance was for him a necessary way of living.”189

Poznansky also writes that “considerable caution is always required when

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185 Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, 25 April 1866 (Moscow). Cited in: Tchaikovsky,
Letters to his Family, op. cit., p.31.
186 Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Modest Tchaikovsky, Middle of December (Moscow). Cited in: ibid.,
p.92.
187 Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, 21 November 1874 (Moscow). Cited in: ibid.,
p.88.
188 Tchaikovsky, in a letter to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, 9 January 1875 (Moscow). Cited in: ibid., p.94.
189 Poznansky, Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man, p.107.
relating a musical composition directly to biographical tribulation, for a work of art nearly always obscures and transcends the experience that gives impetus to the composition.”\(^{190}\) However, upon considering the biographical and emotional backdrop of the work, the listener or performer can’t help but think of Tchaikovsky’s state when listening to “October” from *The Seasons*. From the bleak opening Tchaikovsky’s bouts of loneliness and depression can be seen. Performers can enhance the music by creating a feeling of absolute stillness at the beginning. This can be achieved by keeping the accompaniment extremely soft. While the first two notes of the melody are projected, it is effective not to give the melody any particular sense of direction until the second bar. The music itself creates an effective enough picture — achieved with the thin texture and the pedal point. As the melody and harmonies start to move, from the second bar, performers can then appropriately shape the four-bar phrase. The answering four bars provide the opportunity to build the melody and supporting harmonies. The accents in bar 8 are particularly effective — they further create the impression that some kind of torment is being reflected in the music.

Figure 110: Tchaikovsky – *The Seasons*, “October”, bars 1-9

\(^{190}\) Ibid., p.119.
Considering Tchaikovsky’s state of mind, it is easy to see why the passionate middle section, which was discussed at the opening of the chapter, instinctively required expressions purely on musical grounds. Tchaikovsky’s musical language is, directly or indirectly, the expression of a complex psychosis. As mentioned at the opening, Tchaikovsky’s language relies particularly on harmonic intensity and repetition of material to create the climax. The performer’s tools are rubato, melodic shaping, and expression of tone colours.
Figure 111: Tchaikovsky – *The Seasons*, “October”, bars 17-30

My indications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ppp</th>
<th>easing into tempo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>flexible, but generally in tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ease back</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>increase tone</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(no rubato on F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(straight through)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In tempo

slight rubato on F

(hold back, sweet tone)

In tempo

slight rubato on Bb

In tempo

more intense tone

significant pull back in tempo

(particularly on Bb)
Naturally, the end result is a combination between Tchaikovsky’s musical language, instinct on the performer’s part (i.e., looking from a purely musical point of view), a kind of musical empathy (bearing in mind the social conditions, Tchaikovsky’s biography, personality, etc.), the performer’s own character and psychosis, the listener’s (subconscious) relationship with the musical language, and if the listener is educated, an empathy (perhaps subconscious) with Tchaikovsky while hearing the music. This is what is wonderful about Tchaikovsky’s music: it is so simple at face value, yet such an emotional charge is created when all these elements are combined in a performance.

MEDTNER: Tales

Attitude to art

Tchaikovsky’s Seasons display how music can be programmatic in two senses: the literal (written program) and the psychological. This is also evident in the Tales of Nicolas Medtner. Before dealing specifically with Medtner’s music, it is important to understand the composer’s attitude to his art. Alexander Ossovsky, a colleague of Medtner’s on the advisory board of the Russian Musical Press, describes Medtner as unusually attractive; infinitely modest, quiet, delicate, shy, like a little girl, with a sensitive lofty soul, he was in truth “a man not of this world”, being in no way adapted to practical life. The very simplest of things seemed complicating to him, and he would embark on a philosophical analysis of them.191 “Philosophical analysis” was at the core of Medtner’s musical thinking, and thereby his way of life. As Medtner puts it, although he was “obsessed with myself and my compositions ... however meagre my livelihood may be, it is my only livelihood, for apart from my music, apart from what I do in it, I am absolutely nothing.”192

For Medtner, “the whole justification of my single life, I think, is just this, to work on the material given [to] me by God.”\textsuperscript{193} The artist must have

The kind of faith I, for example, only understand a man having in God when he feels him absolutely distinctly in his heart and does not recognize \textit{[sic.]} Him as just some images beyond the clouds. That is how an artist must believe in art.\textsuperscript{194}

This philosophy affected his compositional technique and style.

Medtner wrote:

For nearly a year I have devoted myself exclusively to my calling — I am only composing ... I have an even greater and firmer belief than ever in my themes, or rather generally in my theme, but I suffer from the disproportionate amount of material itself compared to its rate of realization \textit{[sic.]} ... Just familiarizing \textit{[sic.]} myself with all the material, keeping it in mind and putting it in order, is an enormous task.\textsuperscript{195}

This provides an insight into the composer’s compositional procedure. Medtner kept notebooks to write down musical ideas. “He once explained that some of these ideas or ‘motifs’ would occur to him a second or third time after having been forgotten, whereupon he would note them down again. Such insistently recurring motifs he considered to be the most authentic and it was these he used in his compositions."\textsuperscript{196}

Medtner’s reference to the “rate of realization” is something that would trouble him frequently. In 1907 he wrote:

I feel a kind of disorder, a kind of imbalance in myself. I want to work terribly but I cannot ... But I am not at all weak-willed — so, for example, no powers can force me to write a single note in order ... Isn’t this talent to write to order indispensable? Really have not even the greatest composers sometimes written music to order as it were to clean out a channel through which whole streams of their innermost thoughts may then flow more freely and spontaneously? [...] I have never (or almost never) written a single exercise in composition ... I used to think this was normal ... But now I’m beginning to doubt it. To develop a real technique one must write a great many exercises or compositions, it doesn’t matter which. The latter, of course, is a thousand times better and more useful. But ... writing as I do, that is giving birth to each creation at intervals of nine months minimum, to develop a technique even by the end of one’s life one would have to

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., p.133.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p.21.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, p.134.
\textsuperscript{196} Martyn, \textit{Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music}, op. cit., p.135.
live as long as Methuselah. And since I really don’t expect to reach the age of this venerable biblical patriarch but quite often wonder whether, with my poor state of nerves, I shall reach the age of forty, it turns out I should have been writing exercises, exercises, exercises.\textsuperscript{197}

Medtner’s comment on education significantly supports this notion, but also ends with a hint of his philosophy toward music:

\begin{quote}
What a good thing that in conservatories where they have classes in harmony, fugue, and counterpoint, they haven’t yet started a class in \textit{inspiration}!! It should be kind of consecratory, and ought to treat of spiritual experience.\textsuperscript{198}
\end{quote}

Medtner stated that “consistency in work is just as important as in love, as in prayer.”\textsuperscript{199} As Robert Rimm points out “by communing daily with his craft and stretching his abilities in the service of an internal moral guidance, he fostered the means for inspired creativity.”\textsuperscript{200}

Naturally, Medtner’s philosophy on musical taste rejected music written for or performed for virtuosic and/or commercial reasons. After graduating from the Moscow Conservatory in 1900 his teacher, Safonov, had organised a tour for him, playing Rubinstein’s Concerto. However,

\begin{quote}
when Medtner realized [sic.] that he would be expected not only to play the same musically empty Rubinstein Concerto everywhere he went, but to give recitals of uncongenial works merely to show off technique, he rebelled and to Safonov’s great annoyances withdrew from the agreement ... It was the life of a travelling virtuoso, he wanted none of it; henceforth he decided, he would make his way in life as a composer. As for the Rubinstein Concerto, there was a story in that, needing the score no longer, he glued together every page and then threw the whole thing into a lumber room.\textsuperscript{201}
\end{quote}

Medtner’s strong desire for artistic ‘integrity’ as a performer is also seen in an incident in 1910. Medtner was to play Beethoven’s Fourth Concerto with conductor Willem Mengelberg. Mengelberg was not willing to use Medtner’s tempi, so Medtner “slammed the piano shut, marched off, and refused to participate any further.”\textsuperscript{202}

Needless to say, Medtner did no play in the concert that evening. Medtner sent a letter to a musical journal, which was reprinted in Moscow and St. Petersburg newspapers. 

What is most significant about this article, at least in terms of Medtner’s philosophy, is

\begin{itemize}
\item[{197}]
\item[{198}]
\item[{199}]
Ibid.
\item[{200}]
\item[{201}]
Martyn, \textit{Medtner: His Life and Music}, op. cit., p.13
\item[{202}]
Medtner, cited in ibid., p.78.
\end{itemize}
In general this whole incident has a significance far exceeding the limits of the purely personal. To begin with, it is not unique in recent time. Not so long ago something similar blew up between the conductor Mr Fried and the great Wüllner...

Both cases are equally typical. The first of them represents the attitude of a new breed of conductors towards the prerogatives of soloists. Gentlemen like Mr Fried imagined that in the future a soloist would have to adapt his interpretation to the intentions of the “impassioned temperament” of any musical sergeant major. The second case highlights the fact that no-one deserves the contempt with which Russian artists continue to be treated by foreign musical commercial travellers.

The incident with me is, so to speak, two-sided: a soloist, in the person of myself, was insulted by the conductor giving himself airs; more importantly, a Russian artist was insulted by a visiting foreigner.203

The way in which Medtner labels Russians as “artists” and foreigners as “musical commercial travellers” would become increasingly dominant throughout his life. After leaving Russian due to the social conditions of the Russian Revolution (which will be dealt with in more detail later), Medtner spent some time in Berlin. There he wrote to his close friend Rachmaninoff:

Whatever am I to do, even though I don’t hear all this so-called music and have only just found myself in this atmosphere, I have felt as it were an electric spark, I have felt that I have landed in a world not my own and that I am absolutely unable to make myself go and pester this world in order to secure some kind of patronage. I swear this is not pride. It is only a true defence in my heart of that intimate core from which alone, in my view, can arise any artistic activity and which sinks into the earth beneath me with every bruising encounter with this alien atmosphere or, worse still, with the so-called marketplace of fashion, depriving me of the feeling of any ground under me at all.204

203 Ibid., p.79.
204 Ibid., p.148.
Page 140

Rachmaninoff’s reply shows the attitude of both composers: “as for the estrangement you feel, I must say that I feel it here [America] too ... I see very few real and sincere musicians around. It seems you may be the only one left.”

Medtner’s dislike of commercialism can also be seen in this letter he wrote while in France in 1925 to his brother Alexander:

In general, every contemporary circumstance of life is strongly conductive to making the artist either fall silent or produce the kind of outrages with which the market-place of art is now filled ... I feel that if now, after long years of disorderly sitting down to work, I don’t surround myself with Kremlin walls against every outside circumstance, I really shall do nothing anymore ... If a bird in a cage breaks its wings against the roof and sides, even if set free it will still not fly. [...] 

The artistic idealism for which I am indebted to our Russian artistic education and which apparently has remained intact until recently in Russian alone, this idealism grows stronger, but faith in its realization, in its carrying through into life, sinks utterly, for, all around, everything and everybody merely profiteers in art.

Success itself, such for example, as I had in America, gives me no satisfaction at all, despite its undoubted practical results — brilliant reviews and certain sum of money. It gives me no satisfaction precisely because it is practical and not to do with ideals. ... This may sound very pretentious but, as I see it, however insignificant an artist may be, provided that he really is an artist, for him his ideals are the most precious thing he has.

Medtner would later develop his ideologies, and eventually publish a book in the 1930s called The Muse and the Fashion. In it, he discussed the nature of music and musical language and criticises modern music. He states in the preface that the book is attacking the “stifling, explosive ideology which in our day has destroyed the connection between the artist’s soul and his art.”

Apart from music, Medtner was also interested in poetry. When choosing poems, even if just for epigraphs for his Tales, they would often be in keeping with his musical philosophy. An example this is his choice of “There lived in the world a poor knight”, the opening line of a poem by Pushkin, as the epigraph for his Tale, op.34 no.4.

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207 Martyn, Medtner, op. cit., p.216.
208 Medtner, in the preface to The Muse and the Fashion. Cited in ibid., p.216.
In Tchaikovský’s *Seasons*, the epigraph could only be treated as a pictorial representation imposed by an individual upon the music. Medtner’s music is more programmatic in the literal sense, so the program (and its relationship to the music) can be studied in greater detail.

The poem Medtner used for this tale is “about a paladin who, having devoted his life to serving the Mother of Christ, is finally rewarded by being admitted into Heaven.” This in itself is representative of Medtner’s devotion to his religion, but it is the interpretation placed upon the poem in Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* that is more significant in understanding Medtner’s reasons for the choice of the poem. When asked why she has a profound respect for the poem, the character Aglaya replies:

> in the poem the knight is described as a man of living up to an ideal all his life. That sort of thing is not to be found every day in the men of our times. In the poem ... the knight wore round his neck, instead of a scarf, a rosary. A device — A. N. B. — the meaning of which is not explained, is inscribed on his shield.\(^2\)

A portion of the poem is cited in the novel (this is not from the beginning of the poem):

> Once there came a vision glorious
Mystic, dreadful, wondrous fair;
Burned itself into his spirit,
And abode for ever there!

> Never more — from that sweet moment —
Gazed he on womankind;
He was dumb to love and wooing
And to all their graces blind.

> Full of love for that sweet vision,
Brave and pure he took the field;
With his blood he stained the letters
N. P. B. upon his shield.

> “Lumen caeli, sancta Rosa!”
Shouting on the foe he fell,
And like thunder rang his war-cry
O’er the cowering infidel.

> Then within his distant castle,
Home returned, he dreamed his days —


\(^{210}\) There is no direct link between *The Idiot* and Medtner’s setting, however, the interpretation of the poem is a valuable one in understanding its meaning, and why Medtner may have chosen it.

Silent, sad — and when death took him
He was mad, the legend says.\textsuperscript{212}

It is quite possible (though only speculation), that Medtner was attracted to the knight’s commitment to his ideal (bearing in mind Medtner’s views that a musician’s “ideals are the most precious things he has.”)\textsuperscript{213}

**Biographical influences**

On other occasions, Medtner’s *Tales* show a direct correlation to events occurring in his life. Considering Medtner’s compositional process (a composition generally took some time to complete), it is not so much isolated events (or brief psychological states) that would affect his composition, but more long-term ones, such as the Russian Revolution.

Medtner shared the attitudes of the intelligentsia and the conservatives towards the new communist regime. There were food shortages in the city, transport shortages, the Conservatory (where Medtner taught) was unheated, and Medtner and Anna had to move in with his brother Karl’s family to share resources. Medtner had to save his brother Karl, who was a former tsarist officer in the Red Army, from a firing squad. Discovering his brother was in prison, Medtner “rushed to the goal, sick with anxiety. He introduced himself to the woman officer in charge ... once identified as the brother of a luminary of Russian music, he [Karl] was set free.”\textsuperscript{214}

One positive event that did happen in the period was that he was able to marry his love, Anna, in 1919 (twenty-three years after meeting her). Anna had actually married his brother Emil in 1902. Nicolas Medtner had fallen in love with her previously and Anna reciprocated this love, and felt, even when she accepted Emil’s marriage proposal, that “she could never be a proper wife to him”\textsuperscript{215}. After admitting to Emil his feeling about Anna, in 1903, it was decided that Anna would continue to play the ‘role’ of wife to Emil purely for the sake of his career and the family, though Nicolas would live with Emil and Anna (eventually, with just Anna). It was not until 1909 that Medtner’s parents knew of this strange marital arrangement. Medtner’s mother was the “last barrier against him getting married to Anna.”\textsuperscript{216} His mother died in 1918, and on

\textsuperscript{212} Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (http://www.online-literature.com/dostoevsky/idiot/23).
\textsuperscript{214} Martyn, *Medtner*, op. cit., p.129.
\textsuperscript{215} Anna Medtner. Cited in: ibid., p.133.
\textsuperscript{216} Martyn, *Medtner*, op. cit., p.133.
the 21 June 1919 Medtner finally married Anna.

Nicolas and Anna spent the summers of 1918 and 1919 in the country, where the conditions were a little more tolerable. They stayed with Anna Troyanskaya at a cottage owned by her father in Bugry (south-west of Moscow). However, when they returned to Moscow in 1919 they discovered that their block of flats had been taken over by the factory which owned it and its occupants had been evicted. Homeless, they were helped by Troyanskaya, who offered them the Bugry cottage. Medtner and his wife stayed there for seventeen months, and he was granted paid sabbatical from the conservatory.

In October of 1920, Medtner returned to Moscow, gave some concerts, and the next year, tried to negotiate for permission from the State Publishing House to publish his works with overseas publishers. He also managed to obtain an Estonian passport and in September 1921 left Moscow for Estonia.

At the Estonian border they were “detained for quarantine for ten days, sharing the squalor of a single room with 20 other occupants. While one slept the other had to watch for bugs, the unpleasantness of the situation made worse by a painful ear infection which Medtner developed.” After spending some time in Estonia, they obtained German visas, and left Estonia “armed only with some pieces of silverware to convert into currency, the clothes they stood in, and copies of the New Testament, Plato, and Pushkin.”

In Berlin, Medtner found it hard to get concert engagements, but he did manage to get some works published by Zimmermann. In a letter to his brother Alexander in 1922 Medtner wrote:

> our spirits have sunk at the hopeless futility of all my concert attempts
> ... I played very well and the success I had with the public is enormous. But the critics tore me to pieces, so that it’s no use hoping for any successes in the future in this foul den of vice. Beside the fact that my muse is not wanted […] I myself, as an alien, as a Russian … cannot count on sympathy…”

By the summer of 1923, Medtner was living in Erquy, France. It was here that he

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217 Ibid.
218 Ibid., p.144.
219 Ibid., p.145.
completed the opus 42 Tales.

It is no surprise that, considering this somewhat undesirable way of living in the past few years, Medtner’s first tale in the opus 42 set was titled “Russian Tale”. The idea was conceived in Bugry several years before (it was, in fact, dedicated to Anna Troyanovskaya). Exactly when it was completed is not known, though it was published in approximately 1923-4. It is likely that the work was not completed until closer to this time considering that: (1) the work wasn’t published (other works were, and seeing he desperately needed income, it would be logical that Medtner would publish all his completed work); and (2) Medtner’s compositional process lends itself towards reviving ideas from previous times (the Forgotten Melodies are the best examples of this). It is likely that, considering Medtner’s homesickness and general feelings of alienation, his attention turned again to writing something distinctly Russian.

On a more philosophical level, the Russian Folktale also bears deeper significance: (1) Russian is not only Medtner’s homeland but also symbolises a more cultured society; (2) Medtner, fed up with the commercialism and modernism of the city, wrote that “in our time the only place to live is a long way from centres and capitals, because these are like dens, the abscesses of a nonsensical, purposeless, self-sufficient, self-destructive civilization [sic.], which has as little in common with real culture as a clockwork doll with a human being.”221 Folk culture, and folk music, is more true to human nature than modern society and modern music. By using folk elements Medtner was in a way disconnecting himself from purely commercial or purely experimental sonorities of modern music. In any case, it is difficult to ignore the intensity of emotion in the opening bars of the Russian Folktale.
What contributes to this emotional intensity? — an intensity which is found in all four Tales studied in this paper (opus 20 no.1, opus 34 no.2, opus 34 no.3, and opus 42 no.2). More importantly, from a performance perspective, how does the performer successfully interpret Medtner’s musical language?

**Communicating Medtner’s musical language**

Medtner’s music is carefully thought out, intelligent music. It is often criticised for its lack of colour — the very element that other composers at the time were focusing on. Medtner wrote that “modern musicians whose work, intentionally or unintentionally, is lacking in subjective content have made a fetish of timbre ... They
have made sound, as such, the theme of music.”

Unfortunately, this is probably one of the reasons that Medtner’s music has not achieved the fame of the other composers. In many ways, the more the listener is familiar with Medtner’s music, the better the experience will be. While the pianist has the opportunity to discover the new details on further performances, it should be remembered that the listener will probably only hear the work once, and if it doesn’t make a good impression on them, they will most likely not make an effort to hear it again. The pianist, therefore, should draw the listener’s attention to the subtleties of Medtner’s music.

The opening of the Russian Folktale is a fine example of Medtner’s craft. Although the work as a whole is in f minor, the opening section hovers around its upper tetrachord in its harmonic minor form (i.e., C, Db, E, F) — the intervals being minor second - augmented second - minor second. This sound is characteristic of the lament in Russian folk music: this is Medtner’s obvious stylistic link between the music and the ‘Russian’ program. This in itself is an obvious cultural association that even second-rate composers would use.

Although the work as a whole is in f minor, the opening section hovers around its upper tetrachord in its harmonic minor form (i.e., C, Db, E, F) — the intervals being minor second - augmented second - minor second. This sound is characteristic of the lament in Russian folk music: this is Medtner’s obvious stylistic link between the music and the ‘Russian’ program. This in itself is an obvious cultural association that even second-rate composers would use.

Yet Medtner intensifies the sound, primarily with harmonic and contrapuntal devices. The pedal point that lasts for almost the entire duration of the opening melody helps to create a darker, tenser atmosphere (see figure 112). With the lack of motion in the bass, the music becomes weighted, and the dissonances above more intense. The pedal point

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ends at the cadence, where the movement in the bass contributes to the more positive, consonant cadence into C major. For the performer, this is more a psychological issue than a practical one — with the note being held there is absolutely no way the performer can physically ‘do’ anything with the pedal point. However, being aware of its presence and effect will change the performer’s mindset and interpretation of the upper parts. For example, the dissonance of the diminished triad against the pedal point can be highlighted with slight rubato and intensified tone.

Figure 114: Medtner – *Russian Folktale*, op.42, bars 4-7

The counterpoint consistently placed against the theme in the left hand adds extra dimension and is the major source of harmonic foundation.

Figure 115: Medtner – *Russian Folktale*, op.42, bars 1-4

However, there are also more intricate countermelodies, such as in the second bar.

Figure 116: Medtner – *Russian Folktale*, op.42, bar 2

The very nature of this writing heightens the atmosphere: the melody already possesses the previously mentioned characteristic augmented second, but placed against it is a melody oscillating between minor thirds (one of the darkest intervals) and augmented
fourth (one of the most dissonant of intervals). Projecting this countermelody will create a grimmer atmosphere.

Subtle counterpoint in a deceivingly clear texture is a common feature of Medtner’s works. For example, in the opening of the “poor knight” Tale (opus 34 no.4) there is an obvious counterpoint between the melody and the lower part of the right hand:

Figure 117: Medtner – Tale, opus 34 no.4, bars 1-4, reduction of principal melodies

However, there are many other more subtle melodies hidden in the texture. Some of these are indicated by Medtner: in the first bar, in addition to the two melodies indicated in figure 117, there is also a subtle E-D movement.

Figure 118: Medtner – Tale, opus 34 no.4, bar 1

This serves several functions: (1) it is a countermelody; (2) it contrasts against the shorter nature of the other ‘accompanying’ parts; (3) it adds harmonic colour in an otherwise harmonically simple section (V6/5-I), it forms a 9-8 suspension against the chord. Being aware of the importance of these two, seemingly insignificant middle notes can make a tremendous difference to the sound of the bar, even making it sound more stately, pious, and representative of the ‘poor knight’ figure.

At other times, the subtle counterpoints aren’t specifically notated by Medtner. In general chords should not be just thought of in the vertical sense, but also in their
contrapuntal possibilities. For example, the apparently simple third bar chord can be interpreted simply as a melody with chordal accompaniment — the result being somewhat dull. Alternatively, if the pianist looks at all the moving parts, there are actually three parts moving against the melody. The parts with a common note should also not be forgotten, as they provide stability in the harmonic texture which contrasts against the movement in the other parts.

Figure 119: Medtner – Tale, opus 34 no.4, bar 3

Being aware of the intricate harmonic texture not only makes the bar sound more interesting, but also intensifies the *crescendo-diminuendo* effect that Medtner has indicated.

Pianists should use their harmonic knowledge and instinct when creating these harmonic colours. Most times, the direction of the counterpoint is easily visible by the layout of the notes on the page. At other times it is not. An example of this is found in the Bb minor *Tale* (opus 20 no.1)

Figure 120: Medtner – Tale, opus 20 no.1, bars 9-10
From the layout of the page, the counterpoint looks like this:

Figure 121: Medtner – *Tale*, opus 20 no.1, bars 9-10

However, this sound is quite awkward because the E, the leading note of F (which is currently being applied) does not resolve. In a case like this, pianists should consider what kind of sound Medtner is trying to create. In the *Russian Folktale*, where an intense, dark atmosphere is being created, not resolving the leading note may work. However, in the Bb minor *Tale*, the atmosphere is passionate, but a warm, positive passion: the leading note needs to resolve. When you look more closely at the score, the left hand significantly has the seventh of the diminished seventh — this too would need to resolve. From a purely technical point of view, the leading note in the right hand falls to the C, and the seventh in the left hand does not resolve. From a musical point of view, though, it is more successful for the leading note to resolve to the F (in the right hand), and the seventh to resolve down into the C (which is in the right hand).

Figure 122: Medtner – *Tale*, opus 20 no.1, bars 9-10
In this case, being aware of these inner counterpoints allows the music to become more passionate — it is no longer merely two bars alternating between diminished seventh and tonic harmony disguised in virtuosic writing (a technique that has been used in plenty of virtuosic music from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

In general, the shaping of the melodic material, whether principal or countermelodies, is of vital importance in creating a successful performance of Medtner’s music. Naturally, this applies in all melodies, but is particularly important in those melodies which are made up of motivic construction, or where counterpoint plays a role in large-scale shapes. In some cases, like in figure 123, there appears to be no conventional form of melodic shape. However, it does tend to lean instinctively toward the middle of the bar. Compositionally speaking, this is mainly created by the rhythm (the motion to the two quavers on the third beat [left hand]), and the harmonic motion (the ‘perfect’ cadence effect on the third beat emphasised by the rhythm).

Figure 123: Medtner – Tale, opus 34 no.4, bar 10

Performers can enhance this by creating this shape rather than thinking in smaller motives.

On a larger scale, though, the shape created in bar 10 is part of a two-bar shape. The danger in bars 10 and 11 (figure 124) is to to think of it in three parts: the three-note motif (first bar), the descending melodic material in the first half of bar 11 in the right hand, and the left hand passage imitating this in the second half of that bar. The result is somewhat lacking in interest. However, if the two bars are thought of as one large phrase, with each theme ‘growing’ out of the other (i.e., the performer creating a sense of overall direction, avoiding accentuation of the beat, etc.), the bars will make sense.
A similar example is found in an even more contrapuntal section of the same *Tale*.

This section expands continuously rather than in ‘blocks’ of thematic material.

Medtner takes particular care in the notation of his music — particularly in the phrase markings. For example, in the opus 34 no. 2 *Tale*, Medtner’s phrase and ‘breath’ indications (commas) serve to: (1) provide melodic shape; (2) make the melody more distinct from an otherwise consistent texture of flowing left hand passages.
This does not imply that each phrase is an individual entity and should be individually shaped with a disregard for the overall musical shape: overall, the entire passage cited above is leading toward the end.
In other cases, Medtner’s indications are more obscure. For example, in bar 14 of the E minor Tale (opus 34 no.2), Medtner simultaneously indicates that the right hand should play an accent, yet also play *dolce* in a passage marked *piu f*.

Figure 127: Medtner – Tale, opus 34 no.2, bars 12-15

One way to interpret this is to take note of the hairpin *crescendo* Medtner places above the accented note. This can be enhanced with the left hand. The notation of two separate crescendos (one for left and one of the right) shows Medtner’s attention to detail. Why did Medtner indicate two crescendos, when that indicated in the right hand, on a single chord, is physically impossible on the piano? Its purpose is psychological: the performer should think a *crescendo* on that note (i.e., thinking through the phrase). If it were to be played on a wind instrument, where the *crescendo* is possible; the performer would most likely drop down in dynamics on the initial attack of the note to allow for the effect of the *crescendo* to be greater. A similar effect can be achieved on the piano: this is justified by several other factors: (1) the harmonic colour of the chord (a half diminished seventh) is distinctive from the surrounding harmonies, and colouring
it with a more subtle tone colour is effective (this is also supported by the *dolce* indication); (2) accent indications in this style of music not only imply an increased tone but also a little space (as seen so often in the *tenuto* markings in Rachmaninoff’s music). So this accent can be interpreted primarily in the rhythmic rather than the dynamic sense (i.e., as an indication of a slight *rubato* to colour the tone colour). Naturally, this is not the only interpretation of this marking, but it does effectively achieve a pleasant colour to highlight the conclusion of the first section of the *Tale*.

Medtner’s compositional language primarily rests on his use of harmony and counterpoint. Considering the detail in his works, it is no surprise that his compositional process was slow. What all this detail achieves is quite an intense emotion: such as is represented by the predominant use of awkward intervals to create angst in the *Russian Tale*, or the use of the 4-3 suspension evoking the regal nature of the “Poor Knight” tale. It is on this level of detail that Medtner creates the psychological state of the composition. Medtner’s *Tales* are far from *Fairy Tales*, as they are commonly incorrectly referred to in the West. The fact that the opus 20 no.2 has no literary programmatic references whatsoever is particularly indicative of this. Even where they do have an extra-musical theme, it is a psychological theme rather than a descriptive one. Each of the programs Medtner chooses embraces an emotion: the opus 34 no.2 has the epigraph “When we have called a thing ours it departs us forever” (Tyutchev)’; the “poor knight” represents a faith in an individual’s ideal (which is related to Medtner's philosophies on music); and the *Russian Tale* is an encapsulation of the Russian spirit rather than a more physical form of nationalism. Medtner goes beyond the commonly used ‘encapsulations’ of the states being created in the work (such as the expected augmented second in the melody of the *Russian Tale*, and a regal melody for the “poor knight”), and intensifies the emotion with his musical language — thus imposing his emotional and psychological state on the program. As with Tchaikovsky, once the performer is added to this chain of influences, the ‘web’ of emotions becomes even more complex. Although this music is not as readily accessible to the audience as Tchaikovsky’s, if the performer communicates the subtleties of Medtner’s musical language, the listener’s experience of the music will be intensified.
THE RUSSIAN ELEGY

It is not difficult, considering the emotive musical language of Tchaikovsky and Medtner, to see the relationship between programmatic music and the genre of the elegy. In a way, the elegy is programmatic in the sense that the composer consciously identifies a lament as being the theme of the piece. Discussion of the “elegy” seldom seems out of context when discussing Russian music from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Fyodor Dostoevsky described, “there is an indispensable measure of suffering even in the happiness of the Russian people, for without it, its happiness is incomplete.” Even in the salon context in the nineteenth century, the majority of songs published, bought and sung were Russian:

most of them are written in the minor mood — then and now considered more appropriate for the expression of elegiac moods, regret, and gentle sorrow than for raging, tragic grief ... Love songs are usually sad rather than triumphant; Tolstoy hinted that happy marriages are boring — and perhaps happy love as well. In Russia, the melancholy feeling of toska, or vague longing and regret, has been paramount, especially in the popular genres.

Pushkin’s Elegy is a fine literary example of the ‘spirit’ of the elegy.

The mirth, now dead, that once was muddly bubbling,
Like fumes of last night’s cups is vaguely troubling;
Not so the griefs that to those years belong:
Like wine, I find, with age they grow more strong.
My path is bleak — before me stretch my morrows:
A tossing sea, foreboding toil and sorrows.
And yet I do not wish to die, be sure;
I want to live — think, suffer, and endure;
And I shall know some savour of elation
Amidst the cares, the woes, and the vexation:
At times I shall be drunk on music still,
Or at a moving tale my eyes will fill,
And, as sad dusk folds down about my story,
Love’s farewell smile may shed a parting glory.

The nature of each elegy, whether literary or musical, is of course individual, depending on the creator’s character, biographical influences, and state of mind at the time: the influence of these factors is displayed in the elegies of Arensky and Rachmaninoff.

Unfortunately, because of the lack of documentation available on Arensky, a close exploration into his emotional/psychological state at the time of writing the Elegy can not be undertaken. One recurring account of his personality, which would have had an influence on his music, however, was his nervousness. Tchaikovsky described him as “strange, unstable, and he is nervous unto sickness”.\textsuperscript{226} One of his students at the Moscow Conservatory (where he was a harmony teacher) described him as “nervous, with a smile on his clever, half Tartar face, always joking or snarling. All feared his laughter and adored his talent.”\textsuperscript{227} Perhaps due to his nervousness, “in the course of his tormented life he had never married nor formed any attachment of a romantic nature with a woman.”\textsuperscript{228} In his memoirs, Rimsky Korsakov wrote:

According to all testimony, his life had run a dissipated course between wine and card playing, yet his activity as a composer was most fertile ... He did work much at composition, but that is just where he began to burn the candle at both ends. Revels, card-playing, health undermined by his mode of living, galloping consumption as the final result, dying at Nice, and death at last in Finland ... he will soon be forgotten.\textsuperscript{229}

Arensky died at the age of 44, just over ten years after the composition of the Elegy (1894), of acute alcoholism.

While too much speculation shouldn’t be made about Arensky’s state at the time he composed the Elegy, it is worthwhile noting that the melancholic musical language does appear to reflect his personality; it is plausible that it was written during one of his “bouts of depression.”\textsuperscript{220} Arensky’s language is subtle. His music, like Medtner’s, requires the performer to look beneath the surface.

Atmosphere and shape are important in Arensky’s music. It can be effective to think of the opening bars as like a haze — the left hand is played as softly as possible, the rich tone of the elegiac melody grows out of this.

\textsuperscript{228} Bowers, op. cit., p.65.  
\textsuperscript{229} Rimsky Korsakov. Cited in \textit{Anton Arensky: Piano Music}.  
http://www.hyperion.records.co.uk/notes/67066.html.  
When the opening material returns after the climactic section, essentially the same as at the beginning only in octaves, it is very effective to start the melody (as well as the accompaniment), as soft as possible and slightly under tempo — moving back into tempo by the end of the bar, and progressing to a fuller tone by the second phrase. The performer can then continue to build until the climax in bar 25. This can then subside to a very soft atmosphere for the rolled chord, which instinctively wants to slow in tempo.
This shape is similar to the shape at the opening (where Arensky actually marked the expressive indications). The main difference in my interpretation in the second occurrence is that the extremes are further exaggerated: the melody starts softer, highlighted by *rubato*, the climax is larger, and the tempo reduction at the end is greater. The purpose of the first section (from a performer’s/listener’s point of view) is to
introduce the listener to the material. By the second occurrence, the listener will naturally be more receptive to the material (it is, at times, easier to be moved by something you are more familiar with), so the performer can add extra colours to the music: a technique that has been formalised in music for centuries (e.g., the da capo aria). In the case of the da capo aria, however, the main purpose of the embellishment in the repeated section is to display virtuosity. In this case, it is to contribute to the atmosphere with subtle colourations.

A similar effect is found in the coda. The coda begins with the material that was used in the passionate climax.
When it returns in the coda, however, the bleak nature of the ‘elegy’ is maintained: this is merely a distant echo of the previous theme. Pianists can highlight this, once again, by exaggerating the existing indications. It is effective to start the first bar at the marked pianissimo, easing into the tempo. When the material is repeated, the material is played as softly as possible, with a considerable use of rubato.
This contrasts completely to the following fortissimo bars, which are the final cry of anguish (almost as if to say “I am fed up with this melancholy”), before the prevailing bleak atmosphere returns.

In Arensky’s *Elegy*, the performer’s interpretation is vital in contributing to the emotional effect of the work. Like Tchaikovsky’s *Seasons*, if performed without imagination, the general emotion of Arensky would still penetrate, probably prompting the listener to think “nice tune”. With its deserved interpretation, the psychological state of both Arensky and the performer can further move the listener’s emotions.
RACHMANINOFF: Elegy (opus 3 no.1)

Rachmaninoff’s Elegy displays a more outward, dramatic kind of melancholy than Arensky’s. When considering Rachmaninoff’s Elegy, it should be remembered that he was only nineteen when he wrote it. This does not undermine the depth of the work: accounts of his personality to this point imply that he had already formed his character. Nikolai Avierno wrote that

I believe I am not wrong in saying that at the age of seventeen or eighteen, Rachmaninoff had a completely formed character: he was self-centred but not arrogant, he held himself with dignity, behaving simply and nicely with us, but there was no one with whom he could be said to be “fraternal”. When I was later told that he was “haughty and conceited”, I could assure everyone that I had never detected a trace of hauteur or conceit in him. Such an appearance, strange as it may seem, must have derived from his shyness. 231

By this stage, music for Rachmaninoff (like Tchaikovsky), seems to have been a need — a force which was capable of pulling him out of depression. In 1891 he wrote “when I feel depressed, I can’t do a thing — I can only work.” 232 At another point, he wrote that “after the song I wrote to you about in my last letter, I also wrote a prélude for piano [F major]: after this prélude I have grown a little calmer and stronger in my weakened spirits. All is not as bad as the song.” 233

The period in which Rachmaninoff wrote the Elegy (1892) was not an entirely comfortable one. Having graduated from the Moscow Conservatory that year, Rachmaninoff had to establish his career as a freelance musician. His career had slowed to a “tortoise pace” 234 and Rachmaninoff had become, at times, understandably depressed. He wrote to Natalia Skalon:

Your letters make me feel good, but otherwise I am in a foul mood, for I am definitely not well. This isn’t the cause of my melancholy, the main thing being that I’m afraid to take to my bed completely. That would be quite untimely now. I’ve just started to be attracted to work, and suddenly all this has to be given up for some stupid reason — the lack of money to buy a winter coat. And besides, I hate to be ill away from home. A nuisance to oneself and a burden to others. For me there’s nothing more unpleasant than that. I feel oppressed now. I can’t move from here, for I am unable to get a permit [to change residence]. Every office I go to feeds me “tomorrow.” They make me terribly angry.

231 Nikolai Avierno, cited in Bertensson & Leyda, op. cit., p. 27.
233 Ibid., p.37.
234 Bertensson & Leyda, op. cit., p.49.
Recently I’ve been getting to bed late and getting up early, so my head is now heavy — after playing I get terribly tired, and my head gets heavier and heavier. A sort of apathy for everything setting in. After playing I can’t do anything, so the lecture I was planning was halted at the point where you heard about it.\(^{235}\)

Although written a few months after the elegy was composed, a letter to Natalia Skalon in February 1893 reveals some issues which Rachmaninoff had perhaps pondered previously.

You were not mistaken in believing that my silence was caused by difficulties in my life. That is the genuine truth. Yes, my soul bears a large burden of grief. It is unnecessary to dwell on it, for this will not eliminate it but merely increase it, to talk about it, and analyze [sic.] it.

Actually, all my relatives seemed agreed on killing me and laying me in my coffin — not intentionally, of course, but simply through circumstances. My closest relatives console me in this way: my father lives a most senseless life; my mother is gravely ill; my older brother accumulates debts that God alone knows how he is to repay (in the present circumstances little hope can be placed on me); my younger brother is terribly lazy and is sure to be stuck for another year in his grade; my grandmother is at the point of death...

You will tell me over and over: “Take treatments.” But how can moral pain be treated? How can you change the whole nervous system which I’ve already tried to change with several nights of merrymaking and drunkenness? This didn’t help ... People often tell me, and you too in your last letter: throw off this melancholy — at your age and with your talent, it’s a shame. But everyone forgets that besides being (perhaps) a talented musician, I am also a man, like everyone else, demanding from life the same things that others do...\(^{236}\)

This emotional state is clearly seen in his *Elegy*. Compositionally speaking, of all the works discussed in this chapter, this is one of the most direct in expressing its elegiac emotion. As in all Rachmaninoff’s music, the overall emotional shape is already carefully paced (compositionally speaking). The performer’s role is to intensify this given shape. This can be achieved by using *rubato* to heighten the climax:

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\(^{235}\) Rachmaninoff, cited in *ibid.*, p.34-50.

Figure 133: Rachmaninoff – Elegy, opus 3 no.1, bars 22-33
Rubato can be used in conjunction with tonal colour at certain moments, such as the start of a new thematic idea (figure 134a), or to highlight harmonic colours (figure 134b).

Figure 134a: Rachmaninoff – Elegy, opus 3 no.1, bars 18-21

![Figure 134a: Rachmaninoff – Elegy, opus 3 no.1, bars 18-21](image)

Figure 134b: Rachmaninoff – Elegy, opus 3 no.1, bars 90-2

![Figure 134b: Rachmaninoff – Elegy, opus 3 no.1, bars 90-2](image)

As was found in the performance of Arensky’s Elegy, it is also effective to explore the extreme colours of the piano’s soft range. Even when playing softly, the elegiac element can be created by drawing attention to certain registers. For example, in the opening bars, it is effective to project the repeated E flats in the left hand — particularly for the opening six bars, which function as a pedal point that helps to create the sombre atmosphere. The other notes in the left hand can be played as soft as possible. The right hand will naturally project the melody in a rich tone.
Once the bass completes the pedal point and moves onto the cadential figure, the other notes in the left hand can be brought up: this draws attention to the harmonic motion, and supports the shape of the phrase. Overall, the bass notes play an important role in creating a rich tone, particularly in the climaxes.

By studying the composer’s personality and cultural and biographical influences at the time of composition, a correlation can be found between the psychological state of the works and the possible state of the composer. Given, in most of these works, a relatively simple musical language, the performer can intensify the emotion by drawing attention to the intricacies of the work: predominately harmonic and contrapuntal colours. The result is an increased intimacy with the work, and with the composer’s psychosis — both for the performer and the listener experiencing the music. It is in this way, more than in any literary connotations, that these works a programmatic.
CHAPTER 4

THE RUSSIAN PIANO SONATA

The preceding chapters of this paper have demonstrated how both ‘intimate’
genres, such as the miniatures and programmatic music, and ‘technical works’ are
imbued with the personalities and philosophies of the Russian composers. It is no
surprise that this is also seen in the sonatas produced in this era. There are two
principal benefits of including a study of the Russian sonata genre in this thesis. The
most obvious is that it enables discussion of performance practice issues in larger scale
Russian solo works (which constitute a substantial portion of the repertoire). More
important, though, is the deeper significance of these larger scale works.

The sonata genre, for Romantic musicians, was seen as an ideal achievement in
instrumental writing. The reasons for composers writing sonatas could be for a didactic
purpose, or to promote themselves as a performer, but seldom for financial benefit.
Schumann wrote in 1841 that the sonata “had to struggle with three powerful enemies ... the
public reluctant to buy, the publisher reluctant to print, and the composers
themselves thus continue (though perhaps for inner reasons), to write in an old-
fashioned style.”\(^{237}\) The ‘inner reasons’ he mentions here could be reflective of an
artist’s desire for perfection. The sonata genre, Schumann states, requires “both
capability of effort and artistic experience.”\(^{238}\) For composers like Nikolay Medtner and
Alexander Scriabin, whose exploration of musical language had spiritual significance, the
sonata can be seen as one of the most intense expressions of their emotions. A study of
their musical language and its impact on performance practice will achieve a closer link
between the performer and this emotion. This will be demonstrated through detailed
analysis of Medtner’s Sonata in G minor (opus 22) and Scriabin’s Sonata No.9 (“Black
Mass”).

The musical language of both Medtner and Scriabin is a personal one: both
composers had little respect for other musical ‘fashions’ of the time, nor were they
forced into conforming to one. Composers of the Soviet era, however, did not have this
luxury. It is useful to see how the concept of the sonata changed in this period. This,

and its impact on performance practice, will be explored in the study of Dmitry Kabalevsky’s *Sonata No.3* (opus 46), and the smaller scale *Sonatine* by Alexander Baltin.

**MEDTNER: Sonata in G minor (opus 22)**

Medtner’s high regard for musical ideals has already been studied in considerable detail in Chapter 3. Prehn, in his article “Medtner and Art”, captures Medtner’s ideology appropriately:

...the most important article in Medtner’s creed was that art is one of the most precious gifts of God to the human race and that the artist, as recipient of that gift, is first and foremost God’s chosen servant and should work and act accordingly.\(^{239}\)

In Chapter 3, Medtner’s slow compositional process was noted as being representative of a kind of consistent moral guidance.\(^{240}\) The G minor *Sonata* is certainly consistent with this process. It was written over a period of almost ten years. The sketches of the first subject date back to 1901, when it was planned as a three-movement violin sonata. It was then developed into a “Concerto-Sonata” for solo piano. This was later abandoned as Medtner decided to include the F minor Prelude (a work from his student days) as an interlude in the development. It took Medtner three more versions for the composition to reach its final stage. The introduction was not added until after the rest of the sonata was complete. The sonata was completed in approximately 1909-10, and first performed in March 1910.

Medtner’s ideology can most strongly be found in his musical language. To start to understand this language, it is valuable for performers to be aware of Medtner’s ideas discussed in *The Muse and the Fashion*. Although it was written some time after the G minor sonata, Medtner’s thoughts tend to have remained consistent throughout his life, so the approach is likely to be similar.

Medtner believed that “the true function of music is not to entertain or distract, but to attract, collect, hypnotically, concentrate the feelings and thoughts of the listener.” A fine example of this can be found at the end of the development of the G


minor Sonata. The music builds in tempo and texture (Medtner’s precise musical language will be discussed later in the paper), until it halts dramatically with a restatement of the opening material. This is followed by silence. The bleak interlude emerges from this silence (bar 197).

Figure 136: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 179-200
The inclusion of this ‘interlude’ before the recapitulation goes against the traditional principle of sonata form. Traditionally, the main purpose of the recapitulation is to serve as the release from the tension created by the development. In many respects, however, the interlude gives more meaning to the surrounding drama. The intensive build up becomes more a psychological one (a concept which will be expanded upon shortly). The effect of the following silence and interlude could be likened, as Barrie Martyn does, to a “profound spiritual questioning.”

This relates to a central concept in Medtner’s theory of music: that it is a language of the senses. These

- can be reduced to similar correlative notions: unity and plurality;
- homogeneity (of plurality) and its diversity; simplicity and complexity; repose and motion; contemplation and action; light and shadow, etc.

Naturally, for the performer, this implies that Medtner is seeking contrast: the G minor Sonata contains great potential for these contrasts through dramatic gestures. Such gestures are expected in large-scale virtuosic sonatas of the nineteenth-century. However, Medtner’s language is a more subtle one. In The Muse and the Fashion Medtner constructs a table listing how he perceived music can play on the senses (shaded portion of figure 137). The ‘fundamental’ senses are listed (‘Centre’), and how they can be expanded upon is listed under ‘Encirclement’. Significantly, Medtner wrote that music must always gravitate “towards unity and simplicity through co-ordination.”

The annotations on the right side of the column suggest ways these theories could be applied to performance practice.

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241 Martyn, Medtner, p.75.
243 Ibid., p.29.
### MEDTNER'S ORIGINAL TABLE

#### AN APPROXIMATE SCHEME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL SENSES OF THE MUSICAL LANGUAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRE</th>
<th>ENCIRCLEMENT (gravitation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) The contemplated sound (heard by the inner ear)</td>
<td>the emitted or affixed sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) time, the plane of music (the horizontal line of harmony - the placement of musical sounds)</td>
<td>the movement in time of musical senses and elements (the vertical line of harmony - the capacity of musical sounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) the tonic (the root note of mode, scale, tonality)</td>
<td>the mode, the scale, the tonality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) the diatonic scale (diatonism)</td>
<td>the chromatic scale (chromaticism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) consonance (an interval)</td>
<td>dissonance (an interval)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) the tonic (the fundamental triad)</td>
<td>the dominant (a triad that is the co-ordinate of tonality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) tonality</td>
<td>modulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS IN PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRE</th>
<th>ENCIRCLEMENT (gravitation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The performer's inner musical voice.</td>
<td>Achieving this inner voice on the piano. This is attained with an awareness of concepts 2-9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness, in a melodic sense, of the function and colour of the tonic.</td>
<td>Awareness of tonality (in a linear sense) as a semiotic device (i.e., the expressive potentials of varying kinds and degrees of scales).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to uses of both these scales and exploration of the potential for psychological contrasts. This could be applied at various levels, from slight chromatic inflections, to more complex chromaticism.</td>
<td>Uses of chromaticism as an intensifying device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devices can be enhanced with rubato, tone colour, shaping, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness, as a performer, of the expressive powers of intervals. Could be achieved through subtle rubatos, shifts in tone, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the essential pulls of dominant to tonic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of the potential of highlighting large-scale modulation through other colouristic devices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related to, but differing from, concept no.6

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**Figure 137:**

**ENCIRCLEMENT (gravitation)**

**CENTRE**

**ENCIRCLEMENT (gravitation)**
The most striking aspect about Medtner’s original table is the heavy emphasis on harmony — both in the vertical and the horizontal sense. This is not surprising, considering his music relies so much on these kinds of colours. The incredible attention to detail is noteworthy. It is useful to discuss in further detail specific examples of Medtner’s theories and how they can be related to performance practice in the G minor Sonata.

**1) The contemplated sound and the emitted sound**

Essentially, these two factors constitute the primary challenge for both the composer and performer. For the composer, his complete musical language must correlate to the emotion he is trying to communicate. This, in many ways, comes back to Schumann’s concept of writing the sonata more out of an “inner need” than for any other reason. It also explains Medtner’s slow compositional process and attention to detail — particularly in structure, harmony, and counterpoint.

For performers, the challenge is similar to that posed when discussing the etude (chapter 2). Pianists must discipline themselves with technique to enable the contemplated sound to be communicated to the audience. This technique, however, should not be on a purely technical scale, but also encompassing a strong awareness of the emotive elements of the work. These are found, in part, in his descriptive expression markings — indications such as *poco a poco svelgando* (“awakening, little by little”), *acchiaccato* (“full of pain”), and description of the second subject as *timidezza*
("timid"). The ultimate key to unlocking these emotions, however, is through the remaining eight more detailed fundamental senses.

(2) The horizontal versus the vertical planes of music

Essentially, the horizontal aspect of music is related to time and shape, though it can be analysed on several levels. The principle of time, for example, applies from large-scale tempo changes to subtle rubatos. At times, the most effective use of time can be with silence. The prime example of this is found between the development and the interlude.

Figure 138: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 193-198

The amount of time taken over both these silences is completely instinctive. Medtner indicates that it is not to be ‘measured’ by placing a ritenuto in bar 195. By having the silence, Medtner is in fact achieving his goal of “hypnotically concentrating the feelings and thoughts of the listener”, placing much more significance on the bleak nature of the interlude.
Another aspect of the horizontal plane of music is related not only to time, but also to shape. Medtner indicates that “all tempo changes should be gradual and unnoticed” (except for the interlude and the return to the *Allegro assai*). Performers have to decide the exact point where the new tempo is reached. In the opening of the sonata, for example, the work starts quite dark and slow (approximately $\downarrow = 40$ in my performance). A logical place for the new tempo of *Allegro assai* to stabilise is bar 36: this is due in part to the clear V13-I cadence here, marking the end of the harmonic shape of the whole first section. Also, bars 36-7 serve to ‘announce’ the start of the new thematic material in bar 37. A broad tempo map of this section is shown in figure 4. This chart does not include subtle *rubatos*. 
Figure 139: Medtner – *Sonata in G minor*, op.22, bars 1-37

Tempo starting to stabilise, but maintaining its feeling of pushing forward.
Effectively, on an emotional level, the transition between the opening and the more rapid passage has a narrative function. For this reason, it can be convincing, if the performer feels the need, to get slightly faster than the ‘established’ new tempo in the bars leading to 36 (particularly 31-6), pulling back slightly in bar 35, and establishing the new tempo in 36. This is particularly the case if the performer feels the overall tempo of the work (Medtner indicates $d = 72$) is slightly too fast to enable the subtleties of Medtner’s language (i.e., what is discussed in the third to ninth ‘fundamental senses’) to be convincingly communicated. Approximately $d = 60$ still maintains the energy provided by the faster tempo, yet allows more attention to detail.

Apart from issues with the tempo, the opening 38 bars require an overall conception of the meta-phrase. This is achieved both through melodic direction, and overall shaping of dynamic levels.
Another case where flexibility of tempo is important is in the quasi cadenza towards the end of the work. In addition to the indication poco quasi cadenza, the fact the writing is largely constructed of sequential treatment of short fragments suggests flexibility in tempo to maintain interest and direction. Application of this is fairly straightforward, generally starting slow, and logically increasing the tempo as the sequences rise.

Figure 140: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 354-363

Naturally, horizontal thought implies always ‘thinking through the phrase’. There are also many instances where this applies in contrapuntal textures. An obvious example of this is found in the interlude:
As Medtner’s dynamic and phrase markings indicate, the two distinct parts are best treated individually (i.e., in terms of shape). Naturally, though, this interlocking effect is part of the larger-scale arch shape. Horizontal thought also implies attention to counterpoint — a prominent feature of Medtner’s music. This will be discussed in more detail in relation to the other fundamental senses.

In suggesting, in his table of fundamental senses, that the vertical aspect should
gravitate towards the horizontal, Medtner is implying that the vertical lines and sonorities of harmony are important, but should not distract from the overall shape of the work. Therefore, pianists should explore harmonic colours, that will be discussed in concepts 3-9, but these should never interfere with the direction of the melody.

(3) The tonic versus tonality

   It is interesting that Medtner makes a clear distinction between the tonic, in terms of its function in the scale, and the tonic chord. On a purely linear plane, the tonic note (i.e., clearly functioning as the tonic, not in passing motion) is very seldom used. Figure 7 lists all the uses of the tonic in the G minor Sonata, its role, and how that can be applied to performance practice.
Figure 142: The tonic as a melodic device in Medtner’s *Sonata in G minor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAR</th>
<th>USE</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>POSSIBLE APPLICATION IN PERFORMANCE PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1-2       | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Initial dominant to tonic creates yearning effect for tonic, this is extended in the second motive. | Exaggerate the ‘yearning’ effect, particularly with dynamics. |
|           | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | This tonic is quite important, as it is the melodic resolution of all the tension created in the opening 36 bars. |
|           | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Because this motive is developed into the second subject, it doesn’t possess the same yearning effect as at the opening. |
|           | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Because this motive is developed into the second subject, it doesn’t possess the same yearning effect as at the opening. |
| 36        | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Gives reason to pull back the preceding bars to mark the melodic cadence point — in particular, the tonic note. |
| 95        | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | No particular need to draw attention to this tonic, though being aware of its stabilising qualities has advantages in creating a calmer emotional atmosphere. |
| bar 121   | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | as above                                      | as above                                      | as above                                      |
| bar 131 & 134 | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Motive from opening used to start melody, stabilised this time by ending the four bar phrase on the tonic (of d). This is a logical stabilisation of key for the coda of the exposition. | Being aware of the effect of the tonic on the phrase. Ensuring that the end of the phrase resolves to the tonic note appropriately (perhaps coloured with slight *rubato*). |
| b.138     | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Similar use of tonic to end phrase. | |
| b.139     | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Opening motif. | |
| b.143     | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | **\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{tonic} \text{note} \\
\end{array}\]** | Constant use of tonic on first beat of scalar bars. | |

*This is the last prominent tonic note until bar 36*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>196-200 (also 204-6)</th>
<th>![Music notation]</th>
<th><strong>INTERLUDE:</strong> it is the ‘hovering’ around the tonic (f minor) that helps create such a bleak atmosphere (this also makes the surrounding chords seem more colourful).</th>
<th>Being aware of the psychological potential created by returning to the tonic. This can be enhanced by stillness in atmosphere.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>![Music notation]</td>
<td>Leading-note to tonic relationship in Ab is fundamental to the positive outlook of the new phrase. The return of the tonic at the end of the phrase affirms this mood.</td>
<td>In conjunction with other harmonic colours in the cadence, the tonic of the major key can be in some way coloured to highlight the new mood. Can be used in conjunction with the increase in tempo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>![Music notation]</td>
<td>Similar to bar 209, except that because silence preceded it, it feels more timid than at the start.</td>
<td>Can slightly delay resolution of the tonic to help create this (in conjunction with tone colours, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>328</td>
<td>SECOND SUBJECT MATERIAL</td>
<td>(same function as in exposition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>423</td>
<td>![Music notation]</td>
<td>Appropriate ending on tonic for end of coda. Creates complete feel.</td>
<td>Ending with flair! (This tonic note takes care of itself!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the scale of the work, it is quite surprising to see just how little Medtner relies on the tonic functioning in the scalaric sense, and it is interesting to note that when he does use it, there is a good reason for it.

The ‘encirclement’ of the the tonic theory could be interpreted in several ways. One of these is to look at the function of other degrees of the scale, and what kinds of roles they possess. For example, on a linear level, the fact that the melody in figure 143 is based around the second degree of the scale (d minor) contributes to its awkwardness. Even when there is a leading note in bar 84, the only resolution offered is essentially back to the 7th (if the lower parts were treated as ‘accompaniment’).
Naturally, the chromaticism and underlying harmonies contribute also to this effect.

In a quite contrasting passage, it is the fact that the left hand melody in figure 144 hovers around the third that helps give it its graceful quality.

Pianists can enhance this with a rich melodic tone, paying particular attention to the melodic direction and the tone of the third (D).
The main advantages in placing such an emphasis on individual degrees of the scales are that it provides opportunity for new pianistic colour, and it also ensures that a sense of melodic direction is always maintained: it is impossible not to play with direction if aware of the principle tonal areas of the melody.

(4) **Diatonic and chromatic scales**

Once again, this discussion is related to scales in a linear sense, rather than a vertical one. There are two principal ways of studying this. One of these is to look at these scales used in their original form. For example, in the second subject area, Medtner places what is essentially a descending major scale in the melody, against an ascending scale (treating the movement in crotchet beats) in the left. The effect of this is quite sweet.

Figure 145: Medtner – *Sonata in G minor*, opus 22, bars 101-2

Pianists can enhance this with a rich tone, by paying attention to Medtner’s hairpin *diminuendos*, and by ensuring that the scale in the left hand is audible to the listener.

Medtner uses the harmonic minor and chromatic scales for a somewhat darker effect. This is seen in the development.
Descent is traditionally associated with an intensification of the darker emotions. Medtner uses the chromatic scale in the first two bars, he then intensifies this with the harmonic minor in the following four (the main reason why the sound is more intense is because of the augmented second present in this scale). Performers can enhance this by projecting the scalic part and maintaining a strong sense of direction through to the end of the phrase. This can be further heightened by emphasising the first note of the two note phrases in tone, at times with a slight rubato (holding back expected resolutions).

The other application of Medtner’s concept of scales in the linear sense is how they are used in melodies. Once again, this is largely for psychological reasons. For example, where Medtner is seeking clearer emotions, he uses a more diatonic language (as would be expected). In such cases, pianists would most probably be instinctively aware of the atmosphere Medtner is trying to create, and promote this with a sweet tone and subtle nuances in phrasing.

Chromaticism is more widely used in the interlude, though not in the tension-making sense that was mentioned in the discussion of figure 146. In this case, the chromaticism of the melody creates a sparse, bleak effect. This is also helped by the fact that the
melody after the first bar is contained within the small range of a third. In this case, an awareness of the shape of the melody (partly indicated by Medtner’s dynamic markings) is required. This can be enhanced with tempo fluctuations.

Figure 148: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 235-244

Immediately following this, Medtner creates a more positive emotion by using the F melodic minor scale. The opening notes give the illusion of light, being the first five notes of C major. This is reaffirmed by the tonic of C in the bass of the first bar, and is intensified by the somewhat more awkward Ab (sixth note of the melody). This is all heightened by the mostly chromatic scale Medtner places against it in the bass.

Figure 149: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 243-5 (reduction of outer parts)

Pianists can magnify this effect by creating a much richer tone (to create the ‘light’ illusion), while maintaining the intensity by projecting the bass as well.

The study of scales and their applications has many uses in further exploring Medtner’s psychological language. Being aware of the considerable impact the construction of the scale can have on the linear aspect of music will further heighten pianists’ overall sense of colour and direction.
(5) **Consonant and dissonant intervals**

Awareness of the expressive qualities of intervals can also promote new pianistic colours. A device Medtner frequently uses to construct melodies is to apply different intervals to the same idea. This has the advantage of providing extra cohesion in the work. An example of this can be found in the interlude:

**Figure 150: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 201-204**

Medtner progressively applies increasingly dissonant intervals to the fragment — from the stableness of the perfect fifth, to the dissonance of the minor sixth, to the more dissonant minor seventh. The effect, logically, is the promotion of the direction of the melody. The minor seventh can be coloured with *rubato* to highlight both the individual dissonance of the interval, and the overall musical shape of the phrase.

(6) **The tonic and dominant chords**

The main application of this theory, for large-scale works such as the sonata, is on a broad plane. The gravitation from dominant to tonic is mostly used to distinguish larger-scale sections. It is not surprising that there is a degree of overlap here between discussion of the tonic chord and the tonic note. For example, the opening bars (1-36, figure 139) conclude with a very defined V13-I cadence. At the end of the exposition, the tonic of the key at this time is prolonged for some 16 bars (this is in d minor, the exposition, of course, ending in the dominant of the overall key of the work).

As would be expected, the grandest gravitation from dominant to tonic is seen in the final 30 bars. Performers can use this pull to make the build up for the final climax more intense. Bars 395 to 404 are dominant harmony. Performers can emphasise the cadence to the tonic in bar 405 by broadening the preceding bar (this is indicated by the *allargando* marking). When the harmony moves back to the dominant at bar 410, the new dynamic marking (*piano*) enables it to be treated as a new colour. Performers then only have four bars to build up to the final chord change at bar 413, where the music reaches the tonic for the final time.\(^{244}\) From this point on, it is more a matter of maintaining the energy created by such an intensive build up, and propelled by the

\(^{244}\)There is a V13-I cadence at the very end of the work, but this doesn’t bear as much significance to the overall harmonic structure of the work.
increased speed and chromatic inflections.

Figure 151: Medtner – *Sonata in G minor*, op.22, bars 395-424
(7) Tonality and modulation

The principle behind modulation is to provide new colour, and to strengthen the need for resolution back to the original key. Medtner’s use of modulation is quite interesting to study. A broad perspective of the modulation scheme can be seen in figure 152.

Figure 152: Table of principal modulations in Medtner’s Sonata in G minor, op.22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bar</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Comments and possible applications to performance practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction, then first subject of exposition</td>
<td>g min. (i)</td>
<td>Dark, intense — rich tone (can be enhanced by particular attention to the bass register).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Lyrical theme of first subject group</td>
<td>Bb maj. (III)</td>
<td>As Medtner indicates, ‘graceful’. Considerably calmer. Lyrical tone, with light accompaniment texture, can assist creating this. (This section was previously discussed in reference to the function of the third in the melody).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Preparing for second subject</td>
<td>d min. (v)</td>
<td>Calmer, can be assisted by a more lyrical tone, and with the absence of the pedal (Medtner’s indication).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Second subject</td>
<td>d min. (v)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Many vague modulations. Quite ambiguous tonality. Ends in F minor. The performer, here, should use the colours of the vague modulations (coupled with the textures Medtner uses here) to create as intense emotion as possible before the silence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>F minor (iv)</td>
<td>Bleak effect — created by chromatic vocabulary used here. The performer should start with a feeling of absolute stillness: this can be helped by using the una corda, and creating as much space (on the horizontal plane) as possible. As the phrase progresses, the music can intensify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>Positive theme of interlude</td>
<td>Ab (III of f min.)</td>
<td>Major key provides new ‘light’. Gradually increasing the tempo (as Medtner indicated) and opening up the tone quality can help achieve this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222</td>
<td>Middle theme of interlude</td>
<td>Db maj (bvi/f) This section ends in A major</td>
<td>A feeling of grandness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>Positive theme of interlude</td>
<td>c minor (iv/f)</td>
<td>Though less positive due to overall minor tonality. This can be enhanced by starting softer and using slightly more rubato than the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Key</td>
<td>Comments and possible applications to performance practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>243</td>
<td>Contrapuntal build up to conclude interlude.</td>
<td>f min. (i/f = iv/G)</td>
<td>Although back in the tonic of the movement, the need for that to resolve back into the tonic of the overall sonata can be intensified by attention to the counterpoint and shape (the independence of parts, and the roles linear scales play in this was discussed earlier).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264</td>
<td>Recapitulation: first subject</td>
<td>a minor (ii)</td>
<td>The fact that this subject has not, as it traditionally would, arrived back at the tonic indicates that Medtner intended this to encompass new emotional tensions. This is achieved also through more complex textures, more abrupt chromatic shifts, etc.. Performers should keep the ‘tension building’ state of mind in this section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>293</td>
<td>Lyrical theme of first subject</td>
<td>g min. (i)</td>
<td>This movement to i is more in passing motion than a definite arrival at the tonic goal. Performers can apply similar approaches as in the exposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312</td>
<td>Setting up for second subject</td>
<td>c min. (iv)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>328</td>
<td>Second subject</td>
<td>c min. (iv)</td>
<td>Similar approaches can be taken as exposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>374</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>g min. (i)</td>
<td>Large dominant to tonic goal in final bars, as discussed previously. Sense, as a performer, of overcoming the tonal battle present throughout the entire sonata (this is easily achieved, considering the nature of the musical language here).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Medtner’s methods of modulating are often quite colourful. An example of this is the link between the energetic first half of the first subject, and the more lyrical second half. The clearest (and most beautiful) change occurs in bar 56, where the music moves abruptly into an apparent augmented sixth chord, which expands into dominant preparation of Bb, which then cadences appropriately.
This can be coloured pianistically by exaggerating the *piano* at the start of bar 56 (perhaps even using the *una corda* to change the quality of the sound). The *crescendo* can be guided not only by the harmonic progression in the vertical sense, but also the need for the upper note of the augmented sixth (A) to resolve up to the Bb.

Another example of a particularly colourful modulation is found in bar 109. Here, Medtner modulates quite abruptly from d minor to Eb major.
Medtner has obviously considered the potential for pianistic colour here. The preceding 14 bars (from the start of the second subject) have been marked *senza pedale*, so when the pedal is reintroduced at the modulation to Eb, the effect is quite refreshing.

(8) **Prototypes of consonant chords (the triads and their inversions), and dissonant chords (chords of the seventh and ninth, and their inversions)**

Medtner’s attention to the quality of inversions of a chord once again shows his attention to detail in harmonic colour. The performer can use this approach not only to explore harmonic colour in the vertical sense, but also in the horizontal sense (i.e., the importance of the bass line).

An example of the prominent use of the root position chord is found in the second subject. Here, most of the harmonically functioning chords are in root position.

Figure 154: Medtner – *Sonata in G minor*, op.22, bars 95-98

This gives the overall sound its stability. Awareness of the bass part here adds more dimension to the melody.

When first inversion chords are used in succession, however, it is often to promote a sense of movement in the music. An example of this can be found in bars 18-25.

Figure 155: Medtner – *Sonata in G minor*, op.22, bars 17-29

It is the quality of the 6/3 chord that pianists can enhance, in a melodic sense, to
The 6/4 triad, with its strong associations with the cadential 6/4, is traditionally a tension creating device. A very effective use of the 6/4 chord can be found in the interlude (bar 218).

Figure 156: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 216-222

Here, the 6/4 chord serves as an emotional turning point between the anguish of the build up to that point (created largely by the chromatic nature of the writing), and the positivism of the following section (promoted largely by the initial use of the major scale in the melody). The 6/4 chord is the initial outburst of light, yet, because of the nature of the chord, it still propels the music through the remaining four bars. For pianists, the application of this information is largely psychological. Attempts to colour the chord more with *rubato* would interfere with the overall shape of the section. It could, however, be coloured with a more open tone.

There are also advantages in being aware of the dissonant notes in chords. A good example of this is in bar 217 of the interlude, where there is a chain of applied
seventh chords. The seventh of the chord alternates between being placed in the ‘alto’ and ‘tenor’ parts.

Figure 157: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 217

![Musical notation]

Projection of the seventh and its resolution helps to further create the distressed effect of the section.

Aside from the need of the dissonant notes, as an independent voice, to resolve, they also posses the power to create a richer harmonic texture. This can be seen in bars 88-91. Once again, this is a sequence of applied chords — this time, though, alternating between ninth and seventh chords.

Figure 158: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, opus 22, bars 88-90

![Musical notation]

Projection of both the ninths, and sevenths (which are, at times, in inner part) can be combined with a full tone and observation of Medtner’s allargando and molto appassionato e poco mosso indications to create the effect of the emotional turmoil in the musical language.

In other cases, it is the very fact that these dissonant notes don’t resolve that creates colour. For example, it is the seventh rising in the first cadence (in conjunction with other aspects previously discussed) that helps create the more positive Ab major section of the interlude.
In more extreme cases, unresolved seventh chords and ninth chords (on the first beat of every second bar) create a tonal ambiguity which creates an uneasiness at the start of the final build up in the development.

Pianists can promote this by being aware of the sonorities of these seventh chords — making sure they are audible to the listener.
Prototypes of consonant and dissonant chords and their inversions versus casual harmonic formations

The last of Medtner’s fundamental senses aligns with his overall conception of music — that detail should gravitate towards simplicity. Decoration — such as suspensions, passing notes, neighbour notes, etc. — should therefore never interfere with the overall shape created by concepts 1-8. This does not mean, however, that, when appropriate, it can not be used as a colouration device.

For example, the decorative notes in both the right and left hands make the passage from bar 109 so magical.

Figure 161: Medtner – Sonata in G minor, op.22, bars 109-113

Pianists do not need to colour this in any specific way, but a general awareness of decorative notes (perhaps enhanced with the occasional subtle *rubato*) can create the misty nature of the passage. This can also relate back to Medtner’s fifth fundamental sense — consonant and dissonant triads — as it is the colourful combination of chromatic intervals that makes this section so magical.

OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

When describing Medtner as a pianist, Harriet Moore Brower wrote that he is just a quiet man, who is artist to his fingertips, and who desires to give the results, in his playing and interpretation, of a lifetime of seriousness, earnest study, of devotion to the highest ideals of art, for the love of art; in short, one of the true musicians of his day and
A similar sense of devotion to his ideal can be found in his approach to composition. An application of Medtner’s nine fundamental senses to performance practice reveals the extreme depth of Medtner’s musical language. Medtner’s overall conception of hierarchical structures is very similar, not surprisingly, to Rachmaninoff’s. With an acute awareness of musical colours available on various levels on both horizontal and vertical planes, pianists can gain insight into Medtner’s fundamental emotional concepts for the \textit{Sonata in G minor}.

\textbf{SCRIABIN: Sonata No.9 (Black Mass), opus 68}

Scriabin’s musical philosophy (including his fascination with mysticism) has already been discussed in chapters 1 & 2. So far, the primary emotions explored have been related to the feeling of ecstasy. In Scriabin’s later philosophy, however, he felt that the individual should never limit themselves to any one particular experience.

\begin{quote}
You must experience everything. Every sensation is a source of knowledge and therefore valuable. It is a great mistake to shrink from sensation. You must experience all sensations to the fullest. Then you can stop being interested.\footnote{Scriabin. Cited in Bowers, \textit{Scriabin} [first edition] (Tokyo, 1970), vol.2, p.98}
\end{quote}

This accounts for the exploration of more sinister areas of mysticism in his music. This is found particularly in his sixth and ninth \textit{Sonatas}.

It is not completely out of social context for Scriabin to be exploring such subjects. Black Masses were practised in pre-Revolutionary, Rasputin Russia. Sadism and cannibalism were practised. Nikolai Sperlig, a friend of Scriabin, drank the human blood of wounded men and ate human flesh of soldiers at the front during World War I in an effort to derive mystical experience.

Scriabin’s exploration of ‘evil’ forces, in comparison to these, is less extreme. The images of the “Black Mass” are conjured through the harmonic, rhythmic, and textural language of the sonata. It should be remembered that Scriabin didn’t apply the title “Black Mass” to the sonata. This was suggested by his friend Alexi Podgaetsky. However, Scriabin did say that he was “practising sorcery” while playing it.\footnote{Scriabin. Cited in Bowers, \textit{The New Scriabin}, op. cit., p.181.}

\begin{small}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item Bowers, \textit{The New Scriabin}, op. cit., p.181.
\end{itemize}
\end{small}
Mysticism aside, Scriabin’s musical language does have some parallels to that of Medtner — primarily the fact that he regarded music to be a language of the senses rather than of the mind. He wrote, in 1915, that “through music and color [sic.], with the aid of perfume, the human mind or soul can be lifted outside or above merely physical sensations into the region of purely abstract ecstasy and purely intellectual speculation.”

In an attempt to classify issues concerning performance practice in Scriabin’s *Ninth Sonata*, it is best to initially divide the overall expression into two extremes: the ‘satanic’ and the ‘ecstatic’ elements.

**THE SATANIC ELEMENT**

Scriabin’s concept of Satan is nowhere near as negative as displayed in the Western Christian tradition. Sabaneyeff describes that

> For Scriabin, it was not something wicked or bad at all. He was sympathetic to it and called it the ‘creative spirit’. It was that which created everything from the world itself to the *Poem of Ecstasy*.

> “Satan”, he said, “is the shivering of the universe which cannot gather all together in one place or unify. It is the principle of movement.”

If Scriabin associates Satan with movement, then an exploration of the techniques that promote movement is vital to understanding Scriabin’s overall musical language.

Movement, in music, is primarily created through some kind of tension. Because Scriabin’s music focuses on colour, harmony plays a key role in producing this tension. Scriabin initially believed that “there is no difference between melody and harmony.”

After experimenting with coloured lights representing the harmonies in *Prometheus*, however, Scriabin expressed a need for “contrapuntalism of all the different lines of art.” Thus, Medtner’s principles of exploring harmony on both horizontal and vertical planes is relevant to Scriabin.

Not surprisingly, a key feature of Scriabin’s harmonic language is the tritone —

---

an interval associated traditionally with Satan. For example, in the opening bars, the tritone features on both a horizontal and vertical scale.

Figure 162: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, opus 68, bars 1-5

In conjunction with the G ‘tonality’ and the thin texture, what the tritone creates here is a sense of movement — not so much in the traditional sense, but more a kind of suspended atmosphere. Pianists can enhance this with a distant tone and overall feeling of space.

The other prominent interval is the minor third (or its enharmonic equivalent — in any case, the equal subdivision of the tritone). It is generally used as an intensifying device — i.e., to build material up sequentially (figure 163). This is used in conjunction with Scriabin’s other primary movement-creating device — rhythm. Scriabin logically increases the division of the beat to promote an intensification of the overall emotion. Naturally, pianists can enhance this by increasing the tone, but also through rubato — easing into it, then having a slight accelerando.

Figure 163: Scriabin — Sonata No.9, opus 68, bars 5-7
Similar techniques are used in bars 8-10 (figure 164). This time, Scriabin uses the minor third figure both as a sequential device and as the basis of the melodic fragment. Pianists can project (in a sinister tone) the arpeggiated chord built of two tritones in the left hand. In both cases, it is effective for pianists to be conscious of Scriabin’s juxtaposition of dividing the beat symmetrically and into three. This can be enhanced by promoting the smoother nature of the triplet. In the right hand this can be achieved by creating a slight crescendo through to the next beat. In the left, the lilting, more legato nature can be contrasted to the more rhythmic, almost stricter feel of the equal subdivision.

Figure 164: Scriabin — Sonata No.9, opus 68, bars 8-10

This can help achieve Scriabin’s indication that those bars should be mysterieusement mumuré (“in a mysterious murmur”).

Some of the most demonic moments in Scriabin’s Ninth Sonata are found in those sections featuring trills.
Figure 165: Scriabin – Sonata No. 9, opus 68, bars 24-30

[Musical notation image]

Page 202
Naturally, trills aren’t the only element creating this effect. Figure 166 details the contributing factors, and lists ways they can be enhanced in performance.

Figure 166: Tension creating devices in bars 24-30 of Scriabin’s *Sonata No.9*, opus 68

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Comments and possible applications to performance practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trills</td>
<td>Can be made more effective by observing Scriabin’s dynamic markings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic markings (particularly <em>cresc.</em> or <em>dim.</em> on trill or sudden changes, such as bar 30)</td>
<td>Exaggeration of these will create more tension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedal point (left hand)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminished fifth ‘interjections’ in low register (left hand)</td>
<td>Projection of lower register of the piano will make sound more intense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminution of rhythmic values and repetition</td>
<td>E.g., bar 29 — the trill no longer rests for a whole quaver. This creates more tension. Pianists can heighten this by maintaining the <em>crescendo</em> throughout the bar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody in the centre of the texture (upper left hand)</td>
<td>In particular, the projection of B’s in bar 29 helps create the peak volume of the section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of the diminished fifth as a sequential tool.</td>
<td>Previously, the minor third was used for this purpose (see discussion relating to figure 29). The wider spacing and more dissonant nature of the diminished fifth helps create a larger climax than previously attained. There is not really a direct way the performer can project this specific device, but it does complement the effects previously mentioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These techniques are used at other major climaxes in the work, only to a higher degree and on a more prolonged scale.

**THE ECSTATIC ELEMENT**

The main material in the *Ninth Sonata* that explores the ecstatic element is that derived from the second subject. Scriabin described the second subject as “dormant or dreaming saintliness.”²⁵¹ Once again, a study of the subtleties of Scriabin’s musical language will provide an insight into how performers can create this effect.

²⁵¹ Scriabin. Cited in: ibid., p.244.
The principal device creating the ‘dreamy’ effect is the harmony (once again on both the vertical and horizontal levels). Scriabin does retain some features from the more ‘satanic’ sections of the sonata. These include the occasional use of the tritone in chord construction, and the use of the minor third as a sequential device. However, his harmonic language is generally richer. For example, in the opening bars of the second subject, the most common chords are:

1. tritone + diminished 4th + major 3rd (bar 35)
2. major 2nd + major 3rd [+ perfect 8ve] (bars 36, 41, 45)
3. major 2nd + major 3rd + perfect 5th (bars 37, 38, 40, 44)
4. major 3rd + minor 3rd [i.e., a major triad] (bars 39, 43)

The overall sound of the chords is naturally more consonant than the more ‘satanic’ sections of the work. However, a deeper knowledge of the harmonic functions on the linear plane has a bearing on aspects of colour in performance practice.

On a linear plane, the most prominent interval used in the second subject is the minor second — this creates a languid effect. Scriabin enhances this with dynamics (i.e., emphasising the middle note of the three-note figure).

Figure 167: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, op.68, bar 35 (right hand part)

![Figure 167](image)

The subtlety in musical inflection lies in how this middle note fits in with the vertical harmony of the bar: i.e., does it belong to the chord or not? At the outset, the ‘middle’ note is introduced as a dissonant note — the crescendo and diminuendo heightening the dissonance. The overall effect of this bar (in combination with the slightly more unstable chord construction) is slightly uneasy.

Figure 168: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, opus 68, bar 35

![Figure 168](image)

Scriabin maintains this slight uneasiness by repeating this motive over the changing harmonies (which, incidentally, move up in minor thirds — unifying this section with
the rest of the sonata). However, the quality of the middle note changes. As the harmonies become increasingly consonant, the middle note shifts from being the dissonant note to a consonant colour (i.e., belonging to the chord). One way which pianists can highlight this consonance is by slightly delaying the resolution back to the more dissonant note. This also fits with the overall shape of the four-bar phrase which, largely because of this movement from dissonance to consonance, instinctively requires flexibility in tempo.

Figure 169: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, opus 68, bars 35-38

TEMPO FLUCTUATIONS:

slightly push tempo forward
rubato to intensify dissonance

pull back tempo
rubato to 'level' in the consonance

OVERALL HARMONIC SHAPE:

DISSONANCE ———— CONSONANCE

On some occasions, Scriabin’s harmonic language can be particularly lush. An example of this is in bar 49 where Scriabin uses a ninth chord in the richest register of the piano.

Figure 170: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, opus 68, bar 49

Pianists can enhance this with a warm tone.

In other cases, Scriabin is aiming for a more atmospheric effect (figure 171). An indication that Scriabin is thinking of the psychological state of this section is seen in his indication that it is to be “pure”. From a compositional perspective, this is achieved through the hazy texture and the use of unresolved seventh chords (or in the case of bar
90, ninth chords) moving in slow harmonic rhythm. This creates a kind of suspended atmosphere. Pianists can enhance this by using the una corda, and making the hemi-demi-semiquaver movement in the left hand feel as distant as possible: i.e., the effect of these rapid rhythms is not to promote rhythm, but to add a ‘haze’ to the texture. Naturally, this can be enhanced with the pedal (as Scriabin indicates, though he doesn’t indicate any pedal changes). Generally, somewhere between 1/2 and 3/4 changes are best — clearing the sound, while maintaining the hazy atmosphere. However, at bar 87 a complete pedal change is effective to colour the change in harmony — a slight rubato can also help achieve this. This pedal change also draws attention to the fact that there is a rest in the melody part (i.e., the pedalling is helping to create the phrasing).

Figure 171: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, opus 68, bar 49

Overall, the ‘ecstatic’ element of Scriabin’s Ninth Sonata is best highlighted through attention to harmonic colours, a flexibility in tempo, and subtle use of the pedal (all characteristics of Scriabin’s playing, discussed in chapter 1).
THE JUXTAPOSITION OF THE SATANIC AND THE ECSTATIC

A central element in the psychological effect of Scriabin’s music is the way he contrasts the Satanic and the ecstatic elements. In the development, Scriabin transforms the second subject from pure to satanic. This is indicated by his expression avec une douceur de plus caressante et empoisonnée (“with profound gentleness more and more caressed and poisoned”).

Essential to this transformation is the contrasts between the two subjects created from bar 93.

Figure 172: Scriabin – Sonata No.9, opus 68, bars 93-95

The initial contrast is quite obvious: the distinction between dark and lush harmonies, low and middle register, and so on. Pianists can enhance this primarily through contrasts in tone colour, as well as through juxtaposing the rhythmically sinister nature of the satanic with the more flexible nature of the second subject material.

The unexpected element is crucial in maintaining the ‘satanic’ battle against the ecstatic second subject. This is seen in places where the second subject, which is increasingly intensifying, is cut off suddenly by material from the first subject.
Although the music is dropping in dynamics, pianists must ensure that it doesn’t lose its intensity. This can be achieved by maintaining a tight tone, and starting the following crescendo as soon as possible.

**OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS**

Scriabin’s musical language is one of sensations. The *Sonata No.9* explores both the extremes — from ecstatic to satanic. Most importantly, the *Sonata* is a psychological drama: the satanic battles with the ecstatic and wins. It is the pianist’s task to communicate this drama. The music itself is cleverly written, so in many ways, it speaks for itself. However, by exploring the detail, particularly in the harmonic colour and rhythm, a superior level of expression can be achieved.

**KABALEVSKY: Sonata No.3 (opus 46)**

The sonata, as an ‘ideal achievement’ of expression for composers, demonstrates how the musical language of Medtner and Scriabin is closely linked to their personal philosophies of music. Kabalevsky’s, on the other hand, is highly influenced by an external force: the Soviet regime. In Soviet ideology, art was not to be written for art’s sake: it had to reflect the principles of the party.
The sonata, as a genre, is traditionally formalist. Unless a program is attached, it is incapable of containing socialist realism. Following the 1917 Revolution there was a major decline in the amount of music written for piano (including sonatas). However, after the dissolution of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) in 1931, there was a renewed interest in instrumental music. Even then, limitations were placed upon such work. To conform, many composers simply attached Soviet-related titles or programmes to works whose musical content had little or nothing to do with that ideology at all. In the mid-1930s, Kabalevsky criticised such works, stating that they are “a remnant of the RAPM times ... the distrust of purely instrumental music which allegedly was incapable of fully reflecting our Soviet reality.” He continued to write that “it does not mean that all Soviet music must ‘depict’ and ‘portray’ concrete facts and occurrences — things of which, perhaps, music is not even capable. We must keep in mind the concrete ideo-emotional basis of creativity.”

So what is this “ideo-emotional basis” of Kabalevsky’s creativity, and how is it reflected in his musical language? This relates to the Soviet conception of the artist’s role in society. In his book *Music and education: a composer writes about musical education*, Kabalevsky describes that “when Lenin said that art had to arouse the artist in man, he was thinking of the artist as a creator, as a builder of new life.” Kabalevsky continues to describe that creativity is responsible for developments not only in the arts, but also in science, mathematics, teaching — in fact in every facet of life. It was vital, therefore, to encourage creative development, particularly in children, as “without creative imagination there can be no advance in any sphere of human activity.”

Music, therefore, possessed quite a central role in Soviet ideology, as it could express, and thus inspire “the strength of ideological conviction, of intellect, of feeling, and will.” Kabalevsky felt that many composers, without having experienced tragedy, were “exaggerating the idea of the importance of tragedy.” “Tragedy is not the sphere

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254 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
258 Ibid.
of art adapted to the main features that are characteristic of our country’s life and of the spirit of our people.” The key to Kabalevsky’s musical ideology, and thus his musical language, is rather to create “works that are connected with the image of contemporary man, his rich inner life, and clear optimistic outlook into the future.”\textsuperscript{259} It is the expression of this optimism in Kabalevsky’s music that links what would be traditionally formalist works to the Soviet ideology. This is seen in his third Sonata (written in 1946).

**Expression of optimism**

From the outset, the Sonata is filled with cheerfulness.

Figure 174: Kabalevsky – Sonata No.3, op.46, first movement, bars 1-13

The compositional techniques contributing to this cheerfulness, and how these can be heightened by the performer, are outlined in figure 175:

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
Figure 175: “Optimistic” devices in the opening bars of Kabalevsky’s Sonata No.3 (first movement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Comments and possible applications to performance practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major tonality</td>
<td>The most obvious rhetorical device!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Chugging’ accompaniment</td>
<td>Maintains the light atmosphere. The fact that the chords are mostly in 6/3 inversion at the start (if not, in 6/4, often in a neighbouring function) helps maintain this mood. Pianists can enhance this with a light, detached touch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the ninth chord (bars 1-2)</td>
<td>The ninth chord is a naturally bright chord. Kabalevsky plays with it in two ways: he uses the 9-8 resolution as a melodic device, and also uses the arpeggiation up the ninth chord (end of bar 1). Pianists can supplement this with a light, yet still projecting, character of tone in the right hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Quirky’ chromaticism and repetition of melodic and harmonic material (e.g., bars 4-7)</td>
<td>The playful nature of these techniques can be highlighted through an awareness of phrasing (particularly the rests). It is effective to ‘lean into’ the B in the first two occurrences — in tone, and with a very slight rubato. The third time, the ‘lean’ can be less, as the motive expands into a fuller shape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic indications</td>
<td>Exaggeration of these can help promote energy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To maintain its energy, the sonata relies heavily on contrasting gestures. This is seen in bars 31-37, where pianists can exaggerate the contrast by paying attention to dynamic and articulation markings. Also, pianists can contrast, as in the Scriabin Sonata, the more rhythmical nature of the equal subdivision of the beat to the more playful nature (in this case) of the triplets.
A similar cheerfulness is found in bars 65-80 of the third movement. Many of the musical techniques are similar to those used in the first movement: the light accompaniment, and the quirky chromaticism in conjunction with repetition (then expansion of) motives. In this case, the accents can highlight the cheeky nature of the theme.
A very different kind of optimism is found in the opening of the second movement — it possesses a more warm-hearted, personal nature. This is created by the slow harmonic rhythm, the affirmation of the harmony in the bass (in the opening bars, this is dominant to tonic), the fact that the melody is centred around the third of the chord (the warmest colour of the chord), and also that it is written in a rich register of the piano. The performer can enhance this by creating a rich tone in the melody, and by keeping the surrounding parts to a minimum (creating atmosphere). In addition to Kabalevsky’s expressive markings, pianists can express the nature of the movement by colouring the phrases with subtle dynamic inflections and rubatos.

Figure 178: Kabalevsky – Sonata No.3, op.46, second movement, bars 1-11

**Opposing the optimism**

Kabalevsky’s third Sonata is far from being completely optimistic. The opening of the third movement, for example, is quite mysterious. This can be enhanced by a very tight, yet soft tone, a crisp *staccato*, and projection of the bass notes.
A similar approach is effective in the development of the first movement. Here, the atmosphere can also be heightened by the projection of the chromatic ‘alto’ part in the right hand and a slight emphasis on the first beat of each bar.

In both the first and third movements, once the development has started (where the bulk of the non-optimistic material occurs) it is important for pianists to maintain the tension. For example, even though the opening of the passage in figure 181 is marked piano, pianists should maintain a tight sound. This can be enhanced by a short staccato in the right hand chords. An exaggeration of the crescendos (highlighting the semitone figure in the bass) is also effective. It is important to maintain a sense of direction (in this case, by intensifying the tone) in bars 172-5 to effectively lead into the sequential treatment of this material from bar 176.
In the intensive development of the third movement, which is all essentially based around the same material, pianists can intensify Kabalevsky’s existing expressive markings (which are mainly accents). For example, it is effective to create a surge in the quavers following the three accented, “announcing” notes of the development. This increases the energy of the section.

Similarly, pianists can intensify the arpeggiation of the diminished seventh by increase the tone through it.

The middle section of the second movement is less aggressive than the outer movements. However, similar performance techniques can be used to enhance the quite intense climax. The beginning of this section is, from a compositional perspective, structured quite simply: an arpeggiation of a Bb minor chord, followed by a diminished seventh of F in the right hand, against a quite haunting repeated Bb minor chord in the left.
At the start of this section, the performer can explore the softest, most sinister range of the instrument (perhaps using the *una corda*). As the *crescendo* increases, it is crucial that the left hand intensifies with the right — almost like a persistent force, attempting to draw the harmonies of the right back to it (it does win, in bar 32).

Another effective intensifying tool that Kabalevsky uses is repetition: bars 35 and 36 are very similar — the only difference being that the first beat of bar 36 lands on an Eb rather than E natural. Pianists can enhance this with *rubato*. This not only draws attention to the altered note, but enhances the direction of the phrase: the purpose of the preceding notes, in both cases, is to fall and then ‘lean into’ the first beat of the bar.

**Figure 185: Kabalevsky – Sonata No.3, opus 46, second movement, bars 34-36**

**Ideologically sound music — reinstating the optimism**

The overall effect of these middle sections is somewhat like a test of strength. It is almost like a battle against the optimistic ideals (or, a test of strength of socialism). Ultimately, optimism wins and Kabalevsky characteristically returns, in the recapitulation, to the cheerful nature of the opening (in the third movement, the recapitulation is more optimistic than in the opening).

Kabalevsky was one of the few composers of the era who successfully managed to merge Soviet ideology with clever composition — particularly in a traditionally formalist structure. The performer does not necessarily need to maintain a ‘socialist’
mindset when performing Kabalevsky’s music — just as it is not essential to be thinking in the same ‘mystical’ mindset of Scriabin to perform his *Ninth Sonata*. It is essential to capture its optimism, vitality, and drive (through contrast) — the key characteristics of Kabalevsky’s musical language: a language, that not only represents his socialist outlook, but also his tremendous enthusiasm for teaching. His compositions were also intended to, and certainly did in reality, promote enthusiasm for music in the education field. Both these ideologies merge (constantly) in his book *Music and Education*. Kabalevsky described the ultimate power of music in 1968 when he wrote: “Music is not simply an art! Music teaches mutual understanding, indicates humanitarian ideals, and helps mankind to safeguard peace.”

**BALTIN: Sonatine**

The early style of Alexander Baltin (born 1931) resembles earlier Soviet composers: particularly Kabalevsky, and also Prokofiev and Shostakovich. This can be attributed to his education and Soviet policy of the time. Baltin wrote the *Sonatine* in 1955, while a student at the Moscow Conservatory. This institution, among others, had been criticised several years before for their “formalist tendencies”. The Resolution of 1948 stated that

The fallacious, anti-national, formalist tendency in Soviet music exerts a pernicious influence on the ... education of young composers ... especially in the Moscow Conservatory ... where the formalistic tendency is predominant. Students are not inculcated in the respect for best traditions of Russian and Western classical music ... The creative output of many students of our conservatories consists of blind imitation of the music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and others.

Composers were not encouraged to

fight rigidly and sternly for sharp individualistic principles and tastes, for personal ‘sediment’ in invention so as not to be repetitious, not to resemble anyone, and to speak only in a personal idiom. Such composers ought to think hard about their future creative development.

Although the cultural thaw after Stalin’s death did result in fresh experimentation, Baltin’s early style seems to resemble the clear optimism found in the music of ‘Soviet’ composers such as Kabalevsky. This may not necessarily be as a conscious desire to

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260 Kabalevsky, op. cit., p.137.
represent socialist ideology — it is possible that the stylistic resemblance is purely based on the musical influence of such composers.

Given its clear texture and brevity, a successful performance of this light-hearted work is largely reliant on exaggeration of existing expressive markings. The most obvious of these is to exaggerate the dynamic markings.

Figure 186: Baltin – Sonatine, bars 73-76

Pianists can also experiment with changes in character of thematic material to maintain interest. At times, Baltin indicates such changes. For example, the first subject is marked *forte* at the very opening, then when it is repeated in the dominant in bar 10 it is marked *mezzo forte* and *grazioso*. The change in mood is created by the new key, the higher register (particularly the left hand) and the lighter nature of the accompaniment.

Figure 187a: Baltin – *Sonatine*, bars 1-5 (original occurrence)
Figure 187b: Baltin – *Sonatine*, bars 10-13 (in dominant)

Pianists can exaggerate this by using a lighter touch, and by drawing attention to the accents on the colourful Bb in the left hand to maintain the more playful feel.

At other times, pianists can enhance Baltin’s repetition of thematic material (where he indicates no change in expression) with subtle colours in dynamics and articulation. For example, in the coda of the exposition (figure 188) pianists can experiment with Baltin’s constant imitation of material up one octave.

Figure 188: Baltin – *Sonatine*, bars 58-61

This is largely instinctive and difficult to graph on paper: the most obvious method is to explain it as an echo (or the reverse) in dynamics (e.g., *p* followed by *pp*). However, merely to do this would get a little too predictable. Pianists can also explore more subtle variances in tone colour, the amount of emphasis put on the accents, and other such devices to ensure that the character of each motive is always fresh. Pianists can also create interest by drawing attention to the left hand. This is effective at bar 60, where the left hand moves to an A#. The phrasing and the accent indicate that Baltin would like the texture enhanced by the left hand in that bar.
On a larger scale, pianists can exaggerate the contrasts between such lively sections and the more lush moments. For example, fullness of tone (particularly heightened by the initial crescendo in the left hand), interplay between the voices, and slight rubatos can enhance the climax towards the end of the recapitulation. When the lower register of the piano is introduced in bar 127, the rich nature of those notes can be explored.

Figure 189: Baltin – Sonatine, bars 122-129
It is almost reminiscent of the climax of a film score, orchestrated with strings on the top part, with horns on the echo (not to mention the initial surge of sound by the *tutti* in the first bar). Because of the overall light-hearted nature of the work as a whole, it is virtually impossible for pianists to overdo the romanticism of the climax.

At other times, the lyrical moments can be more subtle. This is seen in figure 56, where it is effective to project the two outer voices moving in compound ninths, keeping the inner voices as soft as possible. Baltin’s *staccato* indications for the upper part of the left hand, when used with the pedal, add an effective contrast to the other *legato* sounds being produced.

Figure 190: Baltin – *Sonatine*, bars 114-117

Baltin’s pedal indications should be observed: at times they create quite distinctive pianistic colours. In the occurrence of the second subject in the development, Baltin indicates that the pedal should be used throughout. It is effective to ensure the lower bass notes (second beat of bar 86) resonant as long as possible. Half pedalling can be used to achieve this.
This pedalling, in conjunction with the scales surrounding the melody (which, considering the pedalling, should be kept as soft as possible) is quite atmospheric.
Another interesting use of the pedal is found at the beginnings of the codas of both the exposition and recapitulation. Here, Baltin indicates that the pedal should be held through the first two bars then released.

![Figure 192: Baltin – Sonatine, bars 133-137](image)

This has two main effects: it creates a bigger sound for the start of the coda (which in both cases is built up to in the preceding bars), and it contrasts more with the following two, which maintained a constant texture more or less arpeggiating down the piano.

The elements required to produce a successful, imaginative performance of Baltin’s *Sonatine* are essentially indicated on the score. Pianists should exaggerate these and experiment with ways of enhancing the character of the thematic material and increasing the overall contrasts (i.e., drama) in the work.

The sonatas discussed in this paper display a wide variety of styles. Clearly, the composers’ overall approach to music has considerable bearing on their musical language, and therefore to the way pianists should approach it. Kabalevsky and Baltin both possess an optimism and vitality in their musical style which tends to be best realised through attention to contrasts in the character of thematic material, dynamics, and attention to articulations. The music of Scriabin and Medtner, however, require more attention to detail. For both of these composers, who regarded music as a language of the senses, interpretation is largely related to the device that arguably has the biggest control over the senses — harmony (both on the vertical and horizontal planes). A focus on harmonic colour, structure, and shape reveals not only the incredible detail in which the sonatas of Scriabin and Medtner are constructed, but also increases the performer’s understanding of these composers’ musical language.
CONCLUSION

The repertoire studied in this paper displays the wide variety of approaches to musical style in Russian music. The advantage of a genre-based study is that it enables specific aspects of composers’ approaches to be studied. The study of the piano miniature, in general, reveals the importance of spontaneity in creating an intimate or exciting performance. This should not interfere, however, with the overall compositional shape of the work (this is particularly the case with performances of Rachmaninoff’s music).

The study of the etude reveals different conceptions of technique. The close link between technique and musical ideology (particularly in the music of Bortkiewicz, Rachmaninoff, and Scriabin) helps explain why the era produced so many Russian ‘titans’ of the piano. In general, the etude can be seen not as a tool of technical improvement, but as a means of trying to achieve musical perfection. The performer’s approach to such works should therefore be primarily ‘musically’ focused.

Programmatic music and elegies illustrate the biographical, cultural and psychological influences on music. The very choice of the program often reveals the composer’s approach to music (this is particularly found in Medtner’s music). More importantly, the chapter reveals how composers had a distinct need for music as an outlet for their emotional hardships. The often relatively simple language found in these works can be dramatised by performers to communicate the extra-musical program (or psychological state) to the listener (naturally, this approach should be used in all the works studied in this paper).

The detailed study of musical rhetoric in the piano sonatas further emphasises the need for performers to study the intricacies of such composers’ language. Such attention to detail will, once again, help create the emotional intensity of these works (particularly those of Medtner and Scriabin), or the more intentional optimism of Kabalevsky and Baltin.

Overall, the composers studied in this paper essentially display two approaches to music. On one hand, there is the musical idealism of Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, and
Composers such as Liadoff and Arensky most likely shared these ideals — this is reflected in the intimacy of their style. The musical language of these composers is heavily reliant on their emotive use of melody, harmony, and overall musical shape. It is important for performers to study such detail so that they are aware of the often quite intense emotional ‘message’ of the works. On the other extreme, composers such as Shostakovich, Kabalevsky, Sorokin, Baltin (and even Prokofiev, in his cheekiness), in some ways, approach music more as a means of entertainment. Shostakovich stated that “I want to fight for the legitimate right of laughter in ‘serious’ music.”

This does not imply that they were writing for commercial gain. These composers were also influenced by the external ideology of the Soviet regime, which demanded that music should not express tragedy. The music of such composers generally relies on the exaggeration of contrasts, and an overall attention to musical colour to create the musical picture.

A successful approach to performance practice is not to take a purely musical approach, but to integrate this with a study of culture, biography, and ideology. In many ways, the purpose of composing, interpreting, or listening to music has two principle functions: feeling the experience, and educating oneself to improve that experience. As the Soviet teacher V. A. Suchomlinsky remarked: “musical education is not the education of the musician, but above all the education of the human being.”

\[\text{Page 225}\]

\[264\] The exception here is Prokofiev, who wrote his *Etudes* (op.2) in 1909.
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

KNOWN PUBLISHED WORKS OF
KONSTANTIN STEPAŇOVIČ SOROKIN

SOURCES
BNL - British National Library


DF - www.ovar.myweb.nl/sovrev/shchfan.html - David Fanning on Rodion Shchedrin and his Second Symphony


LC - Library of Congress.


COMPOSITIONS

PIANO SOLO:

INDIVIDUAL WORKS:


Piano Concerto, op.42. Pub. 1970 (no other publication details provided) [LC]

Polyphonic Exercises for the Young: 24 Preludes and Fugues, Work 78. (i.e., opus 78?). Pub. Moscow: Soviet composer, 1978. [LC] [possibly written 1975 [DF], although this could be the op.75 Preludes and Fugues]

Preludes and Fugues, op.75. Pub. 1977 [LC] [possibly written 1975 [DF], although this could be the op.78 Preludes and Fugues]


Tanz (Dance), op.29, no.2. [EP]

Youth Concerto. Pub.1972 [LC]

COLLECTIONS:


Compositions for piano. Pub. 1972 (publication is 182 pages) [LC]


Selected foreign songs for piano forte (for piano, with words). Pub. Moscow: Soviet Composer, 1959 [LC]


PIANO DUET:

2 PIANOS - 4 HANDS:

ORGAN:

SONGS/CHORAL:

CHAMBER:
Sonata for violin and piano, op.33. Pub. 1965 [LC]

ORCHESTRA:
Poem-Overture. pub.1970. [LC]
EDITORIAL WORK


## APPENDIX 2

### CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF RACHMANINOFF’S PERFORMANCES

(1891-1917)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOSER</th>
<th>WORK</th>
<th>YEAR OF PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>WORK</th>
<th>YEAR OF COMP.</th>
<th>LOCATION/DETAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brandukov</td>
<td>Three Pieces for Cello and Piano: “Feuille d’album”, “Mazurka”, “On the Water” (accompanying Brandukov)</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin</td>
<td>Berceuse in D flat, opus 57</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin</td>
<td>Etude in A flat, op.10, no.10</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin</td>
<td>Etude in c minor, op.10, no.12 (“Revolutionary”)</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin</td>
<td>Scherzo No.1 in b minor, op.20</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chopin</td>
<td>Waltz in Db, opus 64, no.1</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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266 Table compiled from information in Martyn, Rachmaninoff, op. cit., and Cunningham, op. cit.
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<td>Waltz in A flat, opus 42</td>
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<td>Davydov</td>
<td>By the Fountain for cello and piano (acc. Brandukov)</td>
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<td>Godard</td>
<td>En Courant</td>
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<td>Concert Study No.3 in D flat (“Un Sospiro”), G.144</td>
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<td>Hungarian Rhapsody no.12, G.244</td>
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<td>Valse Impromptu, G.213</td>
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<td>Pabst</td>
<td>Fantasy on themes from Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin.</td>
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<td>Two Pieces for cello and piano (acc. Brandukov)</td>
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<td>Concerto No.4 in d minor, op.70 - 1st mve. only</td>
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<td>Ungarische Zigeunerweisen</td>
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<td><em>Six Songs</em>, op.4</td>
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<td><strong>Kharkov. With Mikhail A. Slonov.</strong></td>
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<td><em>Suite No.1 for Two Pianos</em>, op.4</td>
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<td><em>Kreislerianna</em>, op.16</td>
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<td><em>Seven Morceaux de salon for piano</em>, op.10</td>
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<td><em>Trio élagiaque No.2 for piano, violin, and cello</em>, op.9</td>
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<td><em>Rêverie</em>, op.9 no.1</td>
<td>1894</td>
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<td><em>Barcarolle</em> in F major*, op.36 no.11</td>
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<td>Beethoven</td>
<td><em>Sonata No.9</em> in A major for vln &amp; pf, op.47 (<em>Kreutzer</em>) (accompanying Teresina Tua)</td>
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<td>1895</td>
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<td>Lark (arr. Balakirev)</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>Waldesrauschen, G.145</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>Sarasate</td>
<td>Dance, for violin and piano (accomp. Teresina Tua)</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>Rondo for violin and piano in b minor, D895 (accomp. Teresina Tua)</td>
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<td>Five Morceaux de fantaisie for piano, op.2</td>
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<td>Twelve Songs, op.21 (completed)</td>
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<td>Song, The Old Corporal (acc. Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Song, The Paladin (acc. Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Songs (accompanying Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Figaro, Aria, “Husband open your eyes” (acc. Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Mussorgsky</td>
<td>Song: Orphan Puppet Show Trepak (acc. Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
<td>Songs (acc. Chaliapin): <em>O if thou couldst for one moment</em> (op.39 no.1), <em>Prophet</em> (op.49 no.2)</td>
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<td>Rubinstein, A.</td>
<td>Song, <em>The Prisoner</em> (acc. Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Rubinstein, N.</td>
<td><em>Valse et Tarantelle</em>, for two pianos (arr. Langer). With Goldenweiser.</td>
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<td>Saint-Saëns</td>
<td><em>Danse macabre</em> (arr. two pianos). With Siloti.</td>
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<td>Songs (accompanying Chaliapin)</td>
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<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
<td><em>I bless you, forests</em>, op.47 no.5 (acc. Chaliapin)</td>
<td>1900</td>
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<td>27 Oct. 1901 <em>Piano Concerto No.2</em>, op.18</td>
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<td>24 Nov. 1901 <em>Suite No.2</em> for two pianos, op.17</td>
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<td>2 Dec. 1901 <em>Sonata</em> for cello and piano, op.19</td>
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<td><em>Piano Trio</em> in a minor, op.50 (with Ysaye and Branukov)</td>
<td>1901</td>
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<td>Vieuxtemps</td>
<td><em>Concerto No.4</em> in d minor, op.31, arr. violin &amp; piano (acc. Ysaye)</td>
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<td>10 Feb. 1903 <em>Ten Preludes</em> for piano, op.23</td>
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<td>10 Feb. 1903 <em>Variations on a Theme of Chopin</em> for piano, op.22</td>
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<td>Arensky</td>
<td><em>Song, Night</em>, op.17 no.4 (acc. Vera Petrova-Zvantseva)</td>
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<td>Brahms</td>
<td><em>Liebeslieder Walzer</em>, op.52 (with Siloti)</td>
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<td>Ippolitov-Ivanov</td>
<td>Song, <em>Of What in the silence of the night</em> (acc. Vera Petrova-Zvantseva)</td>
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<td>Song, <em>Gopark</em> (acc. Vera Petrova-Zvantseva)</td>
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<td>Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
<td>Songs (acc. Nadezhda Zabela-Vrubel) <em>Look in thy garden</em> (op.41 no.4), <em>Nymph</em> (op.56 no.1)</td>
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<td><em>Andante cantabile</em> from <em>Quartet No.1</em> in D major, op.11 (arr. for cello &amp; piano). Acc. Brandukov.</td>
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<td><em>The Made of Orleans</em> – Joan’s Aria (acc. Vera Petrova-Zvantseva)</td>
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<td>Strauss, R.</td>
<td>Song, <em>Sie wissen’s nicht</em>, op.49 no.5 (acc. Nezhdanova)</td>
<td>1908</td>
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- 28 Nov. 1909, *Piano Concerto No.3*, op.30, New York, with New York SO
- Oct.-Nov. 1911, Six [originally nine] *Etudes Tableaux* for piano, op.33, England (on tour)
- 5 Dec. 1911, *Five Morceaux de fantaisie* for piano, op.2, St. Petersburg (1st mve.)
- 5 Dec. 1911, *Seven Morceaux de salon* for piano, op.10, St. Petersburg (3rd & 5th movements)
- 5 Dec. 1911, Six [originally nine] *Etudes Tableaux* for piano, op.33, St. Petersburg
- 5 Dec. 1911, *Sonata No.1* for piano, op.28, St. Petersburg
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<td><em>Ten Preludes for piano</em>, op.23</td>
<td>1903</td>
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<td><em>Thirteen Preludes for piano</em>, op.32</td>
<td>1910</td>
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<td>13 Dec. 1911</td>
<td><em>Six</em> [originally nine] <em>Etudes Tableaux for piano</em>, op.33</td>
<td>1911</td>
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<td>“<em>Lilacs</em>, arr. for piano”</td>
<td>1914?</td>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
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<td>3 Dec. 1913</td>
<td><em>Sonata No.2 for piano</em>, op.36</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
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<td><em>Concerto No.1 in B flat minor</em>, op.23</td>
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<td><em>Concerto in F-sharp minor</em>, op.20</td>
<td>1915</td>
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<td>1915</td>
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<td><em>Sonic Poem</em>, op.36</td>
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<td>24 Jan. 1916</td>
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<td>1912/1915</td>
<td>Moscow (no.14 - Vocalise), with Antonina Nezhdanova, sop.</td>
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<td>Moscow, with Nina Koshetz, sop.</td>
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<td><em>Sonata No.1 for piano</em>, op.28</td>
<td>1907</td>
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<td>1910</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Nine <em>Etudes Tableaux</em> for piano, op.39</td>
<td>1917</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY

LITERATURE


WEBSITES


