

Transcendent Sounds: The Early Piano Music of Alexander Scriabin

by

Laura Lynn Whitehead
BMus, University of Victoria, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

School of Music

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Abstract

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Studies of Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915) have traditionally focused on his middle- and late-period music after 1902. Discussions of his personal philosophy and its impact on his music also concentrate on these two periods. This thesis examines Scriabin's philosophy and piano music from a sub-section of his early period—1892 to 1897—that I designate his “formative” period. I argue that Scriabin's eccentric belief in transcendence through music was already developing and influencing his music during his formative period. Evidence to support this theory is found in three areas: context, performance practice and analysis. A contextual evaluation of Scriabin's formative years is compared against his late ideologies from his opera and the *Mysterium*. Scriabin's performance practices, as seen in both first-hand documentation and his piano roll recordings, reveal possible philosophical performance traits. Analyses of selected formative compositions expose philosophical and performance related elements, demonstrating the interaction between composer, pianist and philosopher.

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I would like to thank the staff at the University of Alberta library, especially Carmen Laconte, who scanned and sent me a copy of Op. 8 no. 12 from the Belaieff first edition.

Dover Publications graciously gave me permission to duplicate Op. 11 no. 1, Op. 11 no. 2, and Op. 8 no. 12 from their edition for some of my musical examples. Examples 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 were prepared using the Dover reprint of the Muzyka edition, as was Appendix F. The remainder of my examples were prepared on Sibelius, Finale, or using the Belaieff first editions.

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Introduction

The music of Russian pianist-composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) is the product of a unique and complex mind. Scriabin's obsession with his personal, mystic philosophy has earned him a spot in history as an eccentric, but his ideology was also an important influence on his creative process. There existed a "special relationship between his philosophy and his artistic aims,"¹ most noticeably in the compositions of Scriabin's second and third period, in which "he lost touch with conventional musical structures."² Analyses of Scriabin's music (for example by Roberts, Baker, Ritter) and discussions of his extra-musical beliefs typically focus on these two complex periods, which began in 1903 and 1910. Alternatively, the music of his early period before 1903 is often designated as late-Romantic or Chopinesque and is frequently overlooked. The rare investigations of the early music (for example Ritter's examination of Op. 20 and Op. 22 no. 4) concentrate on analysis without considering philosophical influences or modernist tendencies. Although Scriabin's early-period music is superficially more traditional than his later music, the early music laid the groundwork for Scriabin's later, transcendent style. As Boris de Schloezer observed, "Scriabin realized very early in life that his art was completely integrated with his philosophy."³

As I will argue in this thesis, Scriabin's early style resulted from many influences usually attributed only to the later music. Scriabin's philosophical explorations are thus essential to an understanding of his early compositions. No less important to his early creative period, however, were his Russian surroundings, cultural influences and personal experiences. His role as an accomplished pianist and active performer, and the traditions inherited from the Russian piano

¹ Boris de Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, trans. Nicolas Slonimsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 56.

² James M. Baker, *The Music of Alexander Scriabin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), vii.

³ Schloezer, 101.

school, also contributed to his artistic personality. Scriabin's pianistic approach both affected his compositions and provides a key to understanding his individual beliefs. The late-Romantic qualities of Scriabin's early music were infused with unique beliefs, experiences and musical abilities, promoting a late-Romantic modernism.

Although scholars such as Schloezer, Baker and Faubion Bowers suggest that 1903 marks the end of Scriabin's first stage, I will investigate a smaller unit within his early period, 1892-97—the first six years after his graduation from the Moscow Conservatory and a time when Scriabin was maturing both artistically and philosophically. During these years Scriabin first experienced romantic love, met his publisher Mitrofan Belaieff, became exposed to Russian cultural and philosophical movements, traveled to and concertized in Europe, and suffered psychological stress, largely brought on by a persistent hand injury, all while questioning “the value of life, religion, God.”⁴ In 1892, Scriabin's reputation as a composer was also underway and he produced over seventy piano compositions in the next six years, including his first, second and third piano sonatas, the Preludes Op. 11, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 22, the Etudes Op. 8, the Piano Concerto Op. 20, and other character pieces. He developed significantly as a composer during these years. It is logical to end my study in 1897, as a period of decreased productivity followed his marriage and honeymoon in the fall of that year. The years 1892-97 were essential to Scriabin's growth as an artist and will be referred to as his “formative” period.

I will explore Scriabin's solo piano music from 1892 to 1897, focusing particularly on his *Fantasia Sonata*, Op. 19, Etude Op. 8 no. 12 and Preludes Op. 11 nos. 1, 2 and 14. These pieces were composed at various points throughout 1892-7, while Op. 19 slowly evolved and was eventually completed during this time. This selection represents a variety of genres and pianistic

⁴ Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography of the Russian Composer, 1871-1915* (Tokyo: Kondansha International Ltd., 1969), 1:168.

styles such as virtuosity, lyricism and complexity. These compositions will be analyzed in the context of Scriabin's emerging musical style, performance approach, personal beliefs and experiences, traditions learned at the Moscow Conservatory, and the Russian cultural movements during the final decade of the nineteenth century.

My thesis will argue that Scriabin's little-studied compositions from the nineteenth century are more complex and progressive than typically acknowledged. Although Scriabin shows similarities with Chopin in his early compositions, he was developing a distinct musical language as early as 1892-7. This unique language demonstrates that Scriabin absorbed ideas from his Russian surroundings and that he possessed an early fascination with his personal philosophy. Scriabin's musical style also reflects his character and personal life. Furthermore, Scriabin's pianistic abilities were instrumental in shaping his compositions, and thus his performance practices can further clarify his early style. These arguments will provide a characterization of Scriabin's early compositional style that highlights his forward-looking, modernist tendencies, while demonstrating the foundational aspects of the music and proposing a new interpretation of some of his earliest works.

Chapter 1 will explore the biographical, socio-political and philosophical context of Scriabin's life and career prior to 1900. Available biographical sources, translations of Scriabin's notebooks and letters, and personal recollections from his close acquaintances will be used to establish Scriabin's artistic personality in his formative years.⁵ Russian cultural trends that were present in late-nineteenth-century Moscow will be examined, such as mysticism, symbolism, Messianism and the broad social and economic situation in Russia. Next, Scriabin's late-period philosophy, as seen in the unfinished *Mysterium* and his unnamed and unfinished opera, will uncover similarities between these nineteenth-century cultural movements and his later

⁵ These sources will be documented in Chapter 1.

ideologies, therefore suggesting the presence of a developing philosophy in Scriabin's formative years. The biographical and sociological context surrounding Scriabin's early life will provide insight into the genesis of his musical style.

Scriabin's performance practices as a pianist during his formative years are the focus of Chapter 2. The context for this topic will include the traditions Scriabin inherited through his teachers and through study at the Moscow Conservatory, with a brief history of Russian music and the Russian piano school. Reviews of Scriabin's performances and teaching provide information about his pianistic style, but more revealing are Scriabin's piano roll recordings made for Welte-Mignon and Phonola player pianos. Analysis of the Welte recordings of Op. 19, Op. 8 no. 12 and Op. 11 nos. 1, 2 and 14 will expose characteristics of his unique performance style. In addition, performances of Scriabin's music by contemporaneous pianists will determine which pianistic elements were unique to Scriabin, and which may have been absorbed through his Russian heritage. Once Scriabin's individual performance style is established, I will identify qualities in his performances that may reflect his personal philosophy.

Chapter 3 is a theoretical analysis of the compositions selected for this thesis. I will provide a brief survey of analytical approaches applied to Scriabin's twentieth-century music, with a focus on the studies by Varvara Dernova and James Baker. These two studies offer possible interpretations of the less conventional aspects of Scriabin's music, while revealing recurring features of Scriabin's compositions from 1903 onward, both tonal and less clearly tonal. Next, the selected works will be analyzed using both traditional harmonic analysis and some techniques utilized by Baker and Dernova, such as set theory and concepts from Schenkerian analysis. Harmonic progression, chord structure, registers, spacing, texture, and voice leading will be explored. I also enhance my analyses with aural and pianistic

interpretations by playing my selected works. Similarities between Scriabin's formative works and later-period compositions will demonstrate how Scriabin's earlier works push the boundaries of late-Romantic tonal music, and to some extent lay the foundation for his later style.

The final chapter will combine research from the first three chapters to display an interrelation between the contextual, performance practice, and compositional elements of Scriabin's music. The formative compositions will be further explicated using information from the previous chapters, in order to offer hermeneutic interpretations of Scriabin's formative music as an extension of his philosophy. I will expand the analysis to include rhythm and meter, and I will draw upon my pianistic abilities to identify certain ideological elements that are more easily recognized aurally. To conclude, I will demonstrate that Scriabin's compositional skills, pianistic style and philosophic ideals influenced each other and combined to create his unique, artistic personality and output. The synthesis of these artistic elements supports the hypothesis that, although his ideological path was not yet fully developed in the nineteenth century, his formative compositions were a product of emerging philosophical intentions. Understanding the sources of Scriabin's formative compositions also provides new possibilities for interpreting and analyzing his early piano music. Furthermore, the many traits revealed through performance and theoretical analyses, including the appearance of his burgeoning philosophy, establish the progressive nature of his formative music.

One of the challenges in studying Scriabin as a non-Russian-language scholar is that many important sources remain in Russian. English-language literature and research on Alexander Scriabin did not gain momentum until the late 1960s. An earlier burst of interest occurred during the first ten years after Scriabin's death, but mainly in the form of criticism, recollections and memoirs appearing in volumes about Russian music or in journals. The main

contributors were British, including Rosa Newmarch (1915), Herbert Antcliffe (1924), and the early biographers Alfred Swan (1923) and A. Eaglefield Hull (1918). However, Hull focused on Scriabin's compositions, while the biography by Swan is brief and falls below the standards of modern scholarship. Between 1925 and 1969 English-language scholarship on Scriabin was intermittent, and during this time his music was still performed mainly by Russian pianists. However, the 1970s witnessed the emergence of a new interest in Scriabin's music among English-language musicologists. In 1969 Faubion Bowers produced the first detailed and well researched biography on Scriabin in English, and after this time serious scholarship gained momentum. The year 1969 also saw the reprinting of Swan's biography, followed by a reissue of Hull's the next year.

Bowers' biography is still considered the most thorough in English. It not only gives personal information on Scriabin, but also includes background on Russian music. Unfortunately, a bibliography is not included and most citations lack footnotes; therefore, it is uncertain from where Bowers accessed his biographical and primary sources. Bowers completed another book on Scriabin in 1973, which includes information previously withheld due to Soviet demands for privacy and is therefore an important supplement. Books on Scriabin are also available in French by Manfred Kelkel (1978) and in German by Sigfried Schibli (1983), but both focus largely on analysis and musical language rather than biography.

Many primary documents pertaining to Scriabin, such as the biography and letters compiled by Leonid Sabaneev (1925, 2000), have not been translated into English. Nonetheless, Scriabin's letters and other documents have been translated into German and edited by Christoph Hellmundt (1988). Scriabin's notebooks have also been translated into French by his daughter Marina Scriabin (1979). Of particular interest is the book by Boris de Schloezer, brother of

Scriabin's second wife and a close friend. In this book Schloezer summarizes his many conversations with Scriabin about the composer's mystical and philosophical beliefs. This has been translated into English by Nicolas Slonimsky (1987). The biographies by Bowers and Kelkel also include translations of primary sources into their respective languages.

The majority of Scriabin criticism is analytical, and within these analyses an obvious bias has developed in favour of his music composed from 1903 onward. This preference likely stems from Scriabin's less conventional musical language in the middle- and late- period works. A few studies focus on formal and structural aspects of certain compositions (Ewell, 2005; Baker, 1986), but more often the analyses attempt to identify Scriabin's unique harmonic constructions (Reise, 1983). Scriabin's 'mystic' chord is mentioned in many studies. A short 1978 study by Hugh Macdonald gives a general, analytical overview of Scriabin's complete output. Some scholars (Roberts, 1993; Baker, 1986; Kutnowski, 2003) make use of Schenkerian analysis, but in the 1970s musicologists and theorists also began placing Scriabin's late music within the realm of atonality. For this reason it is not unusual to encounter set theory in analyses of his music (Baker; Perle, 1984), or even a combination of set theory with more conventional techniques (Ritter, 2001; Baker). The extensive study by Russian theorist Varvara Dernova, accessible in a 1979 English translation by Roy Guenther, is often referenced in analyses of Scriabin's procedures. Her work deals largely with altered dominant-structured chords and tritone relationships. The nineteenth-century compositions, however, are rarely analyzed by music scholars in any detail. Two exceptions are the 2003 dissertation by Martin Kutnowski, and the 2007 dissertation by Keith Phillip Salley.

Regarding Scriabin's extra-musical beliefs, hermeneutical research examines the function of mysticism, philosophy, and symbolism in Scriabin's twentieth-century compositions (Baker,

1997; Malcolm Brown, 1979; Barany-Schlauch, 1985; Matlaw, 1979; Morrison, 1998). Simon Morrison (2002) and Richard Taruskin (2009) also deal with the manifestations of Russian symbolism in Russian opera, while Robert Peterson (1993) and Avril Pyman (1994) discuss the phenomenon of Russian symbolism outside the field of music.

Sources regarding the history and style of Russian music include books by Francis Maes (1996), Taruskin (1997, 2009), Robert C. Ridenour (1981), Stuart Campbell (2003) and Marina Frolova-Walker (2007). Much of this literature addresses nationalism, historical development and the characteristics of Russianness in Russian music. Ridenour specifically focuses on the musical rivalries within Russia, while Campbell's book is a collection of reviews and critiques of Russian composers by their contemporaries. Maes' chapter, "Imagination and Renewal: The Silver Age," discusses politics, symbolism and other Russian cultural movements in Moscow during Scriabin's time. *On Russian Music* by Gerald Abraham offers an early twentieth-century perspective on Russian music history.

Lately, interest in the Russian piano school and performance practice has developed, as seen in dissertations by Irena Kofman (2001) and Anita Lee-ling Chang (1994). Christopher Barnes has translated lectures and teachings by professors at the Moscow Conservatory (2007), while the resource by James Methuen-Campbell (1981) provides insight into the Russian piano school's approach to performing Chopin. A biography by A. A. Nikolayev (1973) on John Field, who greatly influenced the Russian piano school, has many reviews of Field's performances. Furthermore, the dissertation by Jeremy Norris (1979) traces the history of piano compositions produced in Russia until 1917.

More information is now available regarding Scriabin's performance practices. Reviews and recollections of Scriabin's performances can be found in Bowers and other studies, but more

valuable are the piano roll recordings Scriabin made for Welte-Mignon, which are now available from Peiran (2003). These recordings can be supplemented by Anatole Leikin's recent study that analyzes Scriabin's piano rolls (2011). Recordings by Russian pianists associated with Scriabin also provide insight into Scriabin's performance practices. The compact disc of Scriabin's piano rolls includes recordings of Scriabin's works by his friends Konstantin Igumnoff and Alexander Goldenweiser. Many recordings have also been made by the great Scriabin interpreters Vladimir Horowitz and Vladimir Sofronitzky, while Rachmaninoff recorded Scriabin's Op. 11 no. 8.

A few editions have been produced for Scriabin's piano compositions, but currently no collected works or scholarly printings are available. The publication of Scriabin's complete piano works by Muzyka in the 1960s is the closest to a scholarly edition. These versions are edited by pianists who interacted with Scriabin, such as Igumnoff, and the Muzyka editions of the sonatas, etudes and preludes have been reprinted by Dover. The original editions of Scriabin's works printed by Belaieff are also informative, and are in the public domain.

Chapter 1 – Context and Philosophy: 1892-1897

The compositions of Alexander Scriabin's early period from 1887 to 1903 are often labelled as "late-Romantic," and are often considered to be stylistically distinct from his middle- and late-period works. This is especially true of the works prior to 1898, which are typically dismissed as charming salon pieces that display a direct correlation with Chopin.¹ It is his music from 1903 onward that is credited with being forward-looking, or shaped by Russian artistic influences and Scriabin's personal mystic philosophy. I will argue, however, that Scriabin's personal life, surroundings, and philosophical beliefs also impacted his musical output before 1903. Indications that Scriabin's philosophy was already evolving in the last decade of the nineteenth century appear in documents left by Scriabin and in recollections from close acquaintances. Moreover, emerging artistic movements in late nineteenth-century Russia share many traits with Scriabin's later beliefs, indicating that in his early years Scriabin may have absorbed ideas from the world around him. The mystic, modern Scriabin we think of today did not suddenly emerge in his works after 1902. Instead, the foundations of his philosophy and musical style were already present in his earlier works, but as his career progressed his ideas evolved and increased in complexity. As I will attempt to demonstrate throughout this thesis, Scriabin's nineteenth-century compositions are much more than late-Romantic, Chopinesque imitations, and in many ways they anticipate the modernist tendencies and philosophical nature of his later, more celebrated works.

¹ Hugh Macdonald, *Skryabin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 12-13; A. Eaglefield Hull, *A Great Russian Tone-Poet: Scriabin* (1918; repr., New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970), 82-90; Alfred J. Swan, *Scriabin* (1923; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 19; Harold C. Schonberg, "Amoral Little Mystic," *The New Yorker*, April 11, 1965; Nicolas Slonimsky, *Russian and Soviet Music and Composers*, vol. 2 of *Writings on Music*, ed. Electra Slonimsky Yourke (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13, 53; James M. Baker, *The Music of Alexander Scriabin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), vii.

This chapter will establish that Scriabin's music of his formative period was influenced by many factors, including personal experiences and his developing philosophy within late-nineteenth-century Russian culture. My contextual groundwork will address four areas: the biographical, historical, socio-cultural and philosophical. As I will argue, Scriabin's early music requires an understanding of his later ideology² as seen in the *Mysterium*, as well as the rich socio-cultural and philosophical context in late-nineteenth-century Russia. The contextual background will focus on 1892-1897, the first six years following Scriabin's graduation from the Moscow Conservatory, with some attention given to additional, significant events. I will establish the importance of the years 1892-1897 for Scriabin's artistic development and will demonstrate why these years should be categorized as his formative period.

EARLY PHILOSOPHIC FOUNDATIONS

An important element of Scriabin's mature philosophy was his belief in predestination. Scriabin believed that he was selected to transform humanity through music; the seeds of this belief could have been planted in his earliest years. His mother, Lyubov Shchetinina (Scriabin), was a remarkable pianist who knew Anton Rubinstein and had studied with Theodor Leschetizky. She graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1867 with the Great Gold Medal and continued to give concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg after marrying Nikolai Scriabin. In a concert on October 30, 1871, when she was seven months pregnant with Alexander, she performed not only virtuosic pieces by Chopin and Liszt, but also a composition of her own. On December 20, 1871, she completed an ambitious solo concert that included

² In many respects Scriabin's beliefs represent both a philosophy and an ideology; therefore, I use these terms somewhat interchangeably. Scriabin's set of beliefs were philosophical in nature, concerning life and existence, yet he desired change and promoted his beliefs as if they were an ideology.

works by Chopin, Rubinstein, Bach and Liszt. Five days later she gave birth to Scriabin in Moscow.

Childbirth left Scriabin's mother in poor health, and he was placed in the care of his grandmothers, his Aunt Lyubov and a nurse. For a period of time his mother improved, which allowed her to practise and teach piano to Scriabin's aunt. Unfortunately, her condition worsened and she died before the spring of 1873. It is possible, however, that her musical talent left an impression on Scriabin, even if subconsciously. It is understood that the first stage of brain development is in the womb and the second from birth to age three, which is "a critical phase when most of the neurological 'wiring' takes place."³ Research has shown that during these critical times a fetus or infant is capable of listening to and remembering music. It has been demonstrated that infants exposed to music in the womb can recognize the same music after birth,⁴ and also that infants are capable of "retain[ing] musical information" and developing a musical memory.⁵ Thus, Scriabin would have been exposed to music through his mother's practising and performing, both in the womb and as an infant, and may have developed a musical ear very early in his life. Include the assumption that he inherited his mother's talent and it seems only natural that Scriabin displayed a predisposition to music. His Aunt Lyubov said that Scriabin's "love of music showed from the cradle. He bore the piano such a tender feeling that he seemed to think it human."⁶ Scriabin seemed fated for musical greatness, even from infancy.

³ Jayne M. Standley, "The Power of Contingent Music for Infant Learning," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 149 (Spring, 2001): 65.

⁴ Phyllis Evelyn Wilkin, "A Comparison of Fetal and Newborn Responses to Music and Sound Stimuli with and without Daily Exposure to a Specific Piece of Music," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 127 (Winter, 1995/1996): 163-169.

⁵ Jenny R. Saffran, Michelle M. Loman and Rachel R.W. Robertson, "Infant Memory for Musical Experiences," *Cognition* 77 (2000): B22.

⁶ Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography of the Russian Composer, 1871-1915* (Tokyo: Kondansha International Ltd., 1969), 1:110.

Contributing to the idea of destiny is Scriabin's date of birth, which is significant in relation to the mystical element that became predominant in his music and personal beliefs. December 25 has importance in Christian mysticism, and it is probably for this reason that Scriabin insisted his birthday was on that day, rather than January 6, according to the new calendar.⁷ This birth-date had an "impact on his Messianic mentality"⁸ and would have supported Scriabin's belief in a preordained mission. As Russia did not officially adopt the new calendar until 1918, after Scriabin's death, it is logical to accept December 25 as his birthday and with it the mystical connotations that accompany this day. However, it is interesting that in a natal chart completed by Scriabin's daughter, Marina, she uses the new calendar date of January 6 to determine Scriabin's personality and creative style through astrology.⁹

During his childhood, Scriabin's inherent musical ability became increasingly apparent. Aunt Lyubov took him to Anton Rubinstein, who listened to Scriabin's performing and improvising. He confirmed the boy's natural talent, "perfect pitch, exceptional memory, [and] outstanding ability to imitate anything by ear."¹⁰ Rubinstein agreed that Scriabin had a gift, but that his talent should be allowed to develop naturally. Scriabin was also displaying an obsession with music. His aunt says that he "studied without stopping all day—at the piano or writing."¹¹

The majority of people in Scriabin's life during his younger years encouraged, indeed worshipped, his musical abilities. Scriabin's caregiver, his Aunt Lyubov, venerated his musical skills and nurtured the belief that he was exceptionally gifted. She took him to Russian Musical Society (RMO) concerts, rented him a piano every summer when he was young, and seemed

⁷ In an unfinished draft of a letter from March 1914, Scriabin wrote: "I have the pleasure of telling you that I was born on the 25th of December." Bowers, 1:106.

⁸ Nicolas Slonimsky, *Russian and Soviet Music and Composers*, vol. 2 of *Writings on Music*, ed. Electra Slonimsky Yourke (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49.

⁹ Marina Scriabin, "An Astrological Study on the Natal Chart of Alexander Scriabin," in *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, by Boris de Schloezer, translated by Nicolas Slonimsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 21.

¹⁰ Bowers, 1:114.

¹¹ Lyubov Scriabin, *Memoirs*, quoted and translated in Bowers, 1:114.

concerned with every aspect of his musical development.¹² His teachers also gave Scriabin preferential treatment. When Scriabin attended the Cadet Corps from 1882 to 1887, the director excused Scriabin from heavy duty and made arrangements for him to practise piano each day. While receiving piano lessons from Nikolai Zverev (1832-1893?), Scriabin became a favourite,¹³ and at the Moscow Conservatory Vassily Safonoff (1852-1918) allowed Scriabin to skip the entrance exam, provided extra lessons and publicly praised Scriabin's pianism. "Scriabin's wildest shore of self-esteem was reached by the coddling of [Safonoff]."¹⁴ Even Scriabin's friends and acquaintances were enamoured with his playing and early compositions. Constant admiration, Scriabin's natural inclination towards music since infancy, and knowledge of his parentage and mystic birth-date certainly embedded ideas of entitlement by the time he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1892. The fundamental concept of predestination was already being fostered in Scriabin's early years.

INFLUENCES AND CAREER: 1892-1897

Scriabin's last year at the Conservatory, 1891-1892, was stressful. In the summer of 1891 Scriabin injured his right hand for the second time by over-practising and attempting to "deepen his tone."¹⁵ The doctors told him that pursuing a career in performing was no longer possible, throwing him into despair. His childhood had been plagued by nerves and as early as age seven he had been taken to a specialist in nervous conditions. The hand injury only exacerbated his fragile disposition. Scriabin overcame his injury, but he remained nervous about his hand for most of his career. Adding to this stress was a rift that had developed between Scriabin and his

¹² In biographical writings on Scriabin, his Aunt is described as a caregiver who allowed Scriabin to explore his talent naturally, but who watched over every aspect of his development and ensured he had the tools in place to excel as a musician. She viewed him as exceptionally gifted and it seems likely that she would have shared this opinion with the young Scriabin. Bowers, 1:110-1, 1:136, 1:140; Hull, 23-27; Swan, 4-5.

¹³ Bowers, 1:133-4.

¹⁴ Bowers, 1:143-5. Scriabin's musical heritage and education will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Bowers, 1:149. In the spring of 1885 Scriabin had sustained an initial right-hand injury in a carriage accident.

composition professor, Anton Arensky (1861-1906). In 1892 Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was allowed to graduate after only four years of study, because his teacher, Alexander Siloti, was leaving the Conservatory. Scriabin requested the same privilege and, with persuasion from Safonoff, was awarded the little gold medal for piano, based on his final performance. However, Arensky refused to graduate him in composition. Scriabin left the Conservatory regardless, and he graduated a year early with a diploma in piano, but not in composition.

In the spring of 1892 Scriabin embarked on his musical career. From the time of his graduation until the winter of 1897 he began composing more seriously; these six years were extremely productive and influential on his artistic output. During this formative period he endured his first romantic love and heartbreak, made contacts that would prove important for his career, dealt with depression from his hand injury and continued to be afflicted by nervous symptoms. His reputation as a professional composer and pianist was also firmly established. The majority of his popular and artistically mature pieces written before 1902 come from these six years, all while he performed frequently and ventured on his first concert tours of Western Europe. This period of productivity ended in the fall of 1897, after he married Vera Isakovich.

Establishing a successful career as a musician required convincing the cultured public of Scriabin's talent and worth. Socializing with the wealthy elite who supported the arts in Moscow was imperative. Yuly Engel (1868-1927) stated that new graduates from the Conservatory "are in a new arena where each step is a struggle. The public must first meet the artist personally; then it must go hear him. However, audiences are recalcitrant. They only go whither they are habituated to do so."¹⁶ For Scriabin, however, this interaction rapidly paid off, as his talents were soon noticed. In the spring after his graduation Scriabin played a private concert attended by Boris

¹⁶ Yuri Engel, quoted in Bowers, 1:155. Engel was a Russian composer and critic who studied at the Moscow Conservatory from 1893 to 1897.

Jurgenson, who offered to publish fourteen of Scriabin's already composed pieces with his father's company, Peter Jurgenson and Company. Scriabin was not paid for these publications, but they contributed to his growing reputation. In 1893 Jurgenson offered Scriabin fifty rubles for four Impromptus, which were published as Op. 7 and Nos. 2 and 3 of Op. 2.¹⁷

Although this agreement with Jurgenson was an important stepping-stone, the publishing relationship that most positively affected Scriabin's career was with Mitrofan Belaieff (1836-1903), the most important music publisher in Russia during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Belaieff inherited his father's prosperous timber empire, yet continued to indulge an amateur interest in music. At the age of forty-eight he quit forestry to invest in music publishing. In 1884 he bought a printing factory in Leipzig, but the business was based in Russia with the specific goal of promoting Russian music. He searched for talented Russian composers and supported them by publishing their music. The amounts paid for compositions were generous. He also created the Glinka Award, which provided substantial funds for the best Russian compositions each year. His advisory board comprised Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Anatoly Liadov (1855-1914), and Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936).

Therefore, when Safonoff shared Scriabin's music with Belaieff in May of 1894, it was a turning point in the young composer's professional life. Safonoff promoted some larger pieces: the Allegro Appassionata and First Sonata. Belaieff was immediately impressed and after approval from the publishing board, he offered Scriabin 150 rubles for the Allegro and 400 for the First Sonata, which was double the normal rate.¹⁸ In addition to payments for individual publications Scriabin received a monthly salary of 100 rubles, as well as bonuses for larger or

¹⁷ According to Bowers these published pieces were a Waltz in F minor, the Etude Op. 2, No. 1, the ten Op. 3 Mazurkas, and two Nocturnes: Op. 5. It is unclear whether Boris Jurgenson or his father made the offer. 1:156-7.

¹⁸ Bowers, 1:192.

more important works. Thus Belaieff provided Scriabin with financial stability and the ability to pursue a professional music career.

Scriabin appears to have been a favourite of Belaieff, as he regularly received additional financial support. A sort of father-son relationship developed, but Belaieff was strict. Compositions that were completed until 1897 under the watchful eye of Belaieff include the Preludes Op. 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17, the Etudes Op. 8, the Fantasy Sonata Op. 19, the Concert Allegro Op. 18, and the Piano Concerto in F sharp minor. These works were the product of Scriabin's own creativity, but many of them may not have reached completion without Belaieff, who often encouraged Scriabin to finish his compositions. In a letter, Belaieff lectured Scriabin about the Concert Allegro: "I don't want to publish your works in a mess . . . I have written you three or four times about the Allegro . . . I will not print it until you send me the proofs in fit and proper order."¹⁹ Belaieff repeatedly asked Scriabin to complete the Second Sonata, on which Scriabin slowly worked for five years. In August 1897 Belaieff wrote, "You've had the Second Sonata long enough. Don't fuss with it anymore."²⁰ Scriabin sent a final manuscript soon afterwards. It seems that Scriabin regularly needed guidance and discipline to generate a final product. Therefore, Belaieff both promoted Scriabin's music, and encouraged his productivity. Bowers states that, "without [Belaieff], there could have been no Scriabin as we know him today."²¹

Belaieff also organized opportunities for Scriabin to perform his own music. Initially this involved private performances at Belaieff's Friday concerts, but eventually Scriabin debuted as a professional pianist on March 7, 1895 in St. Petersburg. Scriabin's Moscow debut occurred

¹⁹ Mitrofan Belaieff, a portion of a letter quoted and translated in Bowers, 1:242. No date is given, but it appears to be from July 1897.

²⁰ Mitrofan Belaieff, from a letter written in August 1897; Bowers, 1:226.

²¹ Bowers, 1:189.

shortly afterwards on March 11, 1895. Belaieff also arranged for Scriabin to travel in Europe. From May to August of 1895 Scriabin visited Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and was very productive as a composer. The following January he went to Paris for his first concert tour and made his European debut on January 15, 1896 at the Salle Érard. He then traveled for the next few weeks and concertized in various cities, including Brussels, Berlin and Amsterdam, before returning to Paris. Except for a short trip to visit his father in Rome, Scriabin remained in France until the end of that summer. He performed another concert at the Salle Érard on May 5, 1896 and composed frequently. Scriabin's travels and surroundings often provided him with musical inspiration that encouraged his creativity.²²

The first six years after Scriabin's graduation from the Conservatory were also full of romance and heartbreak. In 1891 Scriabin had met Natalya Sekerina at the Conservatory during a concert in which he performed. Scriabin fell in love, spent time with Natalya and "became more and more enamoured of her"²³—until Natalya's maid discovered a letter from Scriabin in March 1892. His affection for the fifteen-year-old girl was forbidden. Scriabin's feelings did not diminish, however, and they continued meeting publicly and writing each other.

This volatile romance triggered Scriabin's creativity. Early in their relationship he wrote a poem for Natalya and set it to music. This "Romance" is his only known song; the manuscript was found after Scriabin's death.²⁴ The Etude Op. 8 no. 8 was also written for her. When Natalya's mother forbade the courtship he went to Natalya's sister, Olga, and begged: "Don't deprive me of my muse."²⁵ The winter of 1893-94 saw the relationship in turmoil. Scriabin left Natalya a note expressing his pain: "Listen to this voice of a sick and tormented soul. Remember

²² Information on Scriabin's travels and musical inspiration is provided in Bowers 1:195-226; Hull, 251.

²³ Lyobov Scriabin, a statement made by his Aunt in her memoirs and translated in Bowers, 1:171. She omitted the girl's name, but when Natalya Sekerina's letters to Scriabin were found in 1922, the connection was made.

²⁴ Bowers, 1:173.

²⁵ Olga Sekerina's recollections of the Natalya affair, quoted in Bowers, 1:173.

and pray for the man whose entire happiness is yours and whose entire life belongs to you.”²⁶ Bowers recognizes the similarities between this statement and the program of the first Sonata, suggesting that Natalya may have inspired this composition. Scriabin told Olga that “Natalya ‘creates my mood, and I create the music.’”²⁷ The relationship ended when Scriabin broached the issue of marriage on December 12, 1895 and was refused.²⁸ Much of Scriabin’s music from 1892 to 1895 was written in the wake of this romance.

In 1896, soon after Scriabin’s heartbreak from the Natalya affair, Belaieff arranged a tour abroad. Scriabin met a young woman known only as M.K.F. and fell in love again. He proposed almost immediately, she accepted, and they spent time together while Scriabin stayed in Paris. He pursued this relationship until November of that year, when it became clear that her parents would not consent to the marriage.²⁹ However, by December he was in love again and proposing marriage to Vera Ivanovna Isakovich, an accomplished pianist who a year later would become Scriabin’s first wife. These many relationships both influenced Scriabin’s compositional output and cause one to question his psychological state.

During this time Scriabin immersed himself in physical pleasure and sensuality. While on the 1895 Europe trip, Belaieff apparently took Scriabin to see a German woman who provided him with his first sexual encounter.³⁰ This would have occurred before Scriabin and Natalya officially ended their relationship. Leonid Sabaneev (1881-1968) also quotes a conversation in which Scriabin claimed his 1896 stay in Paris “was a period of my life when I tried everything. . . . I drowned myself in pleasures, and was put to the test by them.” Some of these pleasures were certainly sexual, and these experiences coincide with the M.K.F. attachment. In reference to his

²⁶ Alexander Scriabin, a message written to Natalya Sekerina, quoted in Bowers, 1:184.

²⁷ Olga Sekerina, quoted in Bowers, 1:184.

²⁸ For further detail on the end of the relationship see Bowers 1:186-7 and 1:210-11.

²⁹ Bowers, 1:228.

³⁰ Bowers, 1:207.

time in Paris, Scriabin said: “I now experience these pleasures, but all on a higher plane. . . . I have known since then that the creative act is inextricably linked to the sexual act. I definitely know that the creative urge in myself has all the signs of a sexual stimulation with me.”³¹ Many compositions written in Paris are passionate and sensual, such as the Preludes Op. 11 no. 22; Op. 15 no. 4 and Op. 17 no. 3. The Second Sonata evolved substantially during his time in Paris.

Another influence on Scriabin’s compositions was his nervousness, depression, and unstable mental state, with one of the triggers being his persistent hand injury. Scriabin wrote many long and personal letters to Natalya that confirm his turmoil. In a letter from May 1893 Scriabin wrote: “What blackness I live in. The doctors have not yet given their verdict. Never before has a state of uncertainty been such torture for me. Oh, if only I could see some light ahead.”³² Scriabin spoke of a doctor who was concerned that his moods “change[d] so quickly between up and down,”³³ while another doctor recommended sea bathing for his hand. By June of 1893 Scriabin was in a Samarian sanatorium. His letters to Natalya suggest that Scriabin was being treated more for his nerves than for his hand.

The nervous symptoms continued past 1893. In April of 1895 Scriabin wrote to Belaieff:

And oh, my extremes of mood! Suddenly it will seem that my strength is unlimited, all is conquered, everything is mine. Then, next second, I am aware of my utter impotence. Weariness and apathy seize me. There is never any equilibrium in me.³⁴

Indeed, Belaieff may have arranged the trip to Europe in May of 1895 partly to provide Scriabin with assessment and treatment from a specialist. On May 16 he saw a German neuropathologist, Dr. Wilhelm Erb, who prescribed hydrotherapy and sea bathing, this time in Italy. Later that May

³¹ The two preceding quotes come from Scriabin, as recalled by Leonid Sabaneev and quoted in Bowers. Bowers does not specify the source, but it is likely from Sabaneev’s Russian memoirs on Scriabin. 1:225-226.

³² Scriabin, letter to Natalya on May 30, 1893, in Bowers, 1:175.

³³ Scriabin, letter to Natalya, in Bowers, 1:175. Date not provided, but likely mid-June 1893. Scriabin’s treatment in Samara is found in two letters he wrote to Natalya, in Bowers, 1:176-178.

³⁴ Alexander Scriabin, letter to Belaieff on April 3, 1895, in Bowers, 1:200-1.

Scriabin wrote to Belaieff that “there are times when I am so terribly, terribly depressed for reasons I cannot fathom, and my head aches.”³⁵ In June he added:

Physically there is nothing I could possibly complain of. It’s only my frame of mind — queer, somehow not good. I myself cannot define it. A sort of uneasiness, an expectation of something horrible lives inside me and torments me continuously.³⁶

Despite this depression and instability, Scriabin had moments of happiness. His travel letters reveal that nature often relaxed him and calmed his nerves. When visiting his father in Europe in May of 1895 and 1896, he was both excited and content. These moments of contentment, however, exacerbated Scriabin’s volatility. The highs were often followed by lows, such as Scriabin’s extreme sadness upon the departure of his father.³⁷ At times he was consumed by depression, and at others he was calm and optimistic. In a letter to Natalya in August 1895, Konstantin Igumnoff observed that Scriabin was:

emotionally unstrung and shattered. . . . He gives the impression of someone who has nothing in the future, very little at present, and for whom everything belongs to the past. He says he is the happiest person in the world, but this doesn’t stop him from saying in the next breath that it is time for him to retire, that he wants to die more than anything else, etc.³⁸

Scriabin’s psychological issues during these years may have contributed to the dark, agitated and melancholic tone of such compositions as Op. 8 no. 12, or the second movement of Op. 19.

In summary, Scriabin’s professional and personal life in 1892-97 played an important role in his artistic development. He was provided with opportunity and support, specifically from Belaieff, which allowed his career to develop. The foundations of his belief in a greater destiny were already in place due to his earliest musical experiences. His hand injury and personal relationships affected his emotional state and contributed to a volatile psyche. The nervousness

³⁵ Scriabin, letter to Belaieff on May 24, 1895, in Bowers, 1:204

³⁶ Scriabin, letter to Belaieff in mid-June, 1895, in Bowers, 1:206.

³⁷ Examples of nature’s positive effect are seen in Scriabin’s letters from June 14, 1893; June 20, 1894; and May 16, 1895, Bowers 1:180-1, 1:203. Visits with Scriabin’s father are found in Bowers, 1:203-204 and 1:222.

³⁸ Konstantin Igumnoff, who was a fellow pianist at the Moscow Conservatory, wrote this from Berlin in August 1895, Bowers, 1:207.

and emotional sensitivity may have influenced his musical creativity. Scriabin's compositional productivity during travels demonstrates that he also drew inspiration from his surroundings. In his formative years Scriabin's mature, artistic personality was beginning to establish itself, and he was already using his music as an outlet for personal expression.

SCRIABIN'S PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETICS

Another likely influence on Scriabin's compositions during his formative period was his developing philosophy of life and art, which consumed him more and more as the years went on. He believed that humanity would transcend its current existence and experience ecstasy through oneness with divinity, a task that he alone could accomplish through music. Therefore, Scriabin felt that art had transfigurative powers and "was a means of transforming phenomenological reality." Scriabin's philosophy is often considered influential on his music composed after 1902,³⁹ because after this time we have better evidence of his beliefs, particularly from his unrealized *Mysterium*,⁴⁰ in which he dreamt of "the unification of mankind in a single instant of ecstatic revelation."⁴¹ However, the ideas were germinating long before.

The most important source we have for understanding Scriabin's ideology is the book written by Boris de Schloezer.⁴² As the brother of Scriabin's second wife, Tatiana, he frequently spent time with Scriabin, and they had many intellectual discussions. As a philosopher, Schloezer was capable of understanding these discourses with Scriabin. In the introduction to his English translation, Nicolas Slonimsky states that Schloezer was "in all probability the only

³⁹ Macdonald, 8; Swan, 27; Baker, vii.

⁴⁰ Scriabin worked on his *Mysterium* from 1904 until his death. It will be discussed later in further detail.

⁴¹ The quotations in this paragraph come from Schloezer's description of Scriabin's philosophy. Boris de Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, trans. Nicolas Slonimsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 96, 161.

⁴² A biography by Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominaniya o Scriabine* [Reminiscences of Scriabin] (Moscow: Muzsektor Gosizdata, 1925), is attributed with slightly different opinions on Scriabin's beliefs, but it has not been translated.

person among Scriabin's close associates who was capable of reporting Scriabin's ideas about art in their integrity and unity and of clarifying the concept of the 'ultimate act'.⁴³ Scriabin and Schloezer met for the first time briefly in 1896, but their friendship and Schloezer's intimate understanding of Scriabin did not begin until 1902. Although their significant conversations took place after this time, Schloezer's credibility as one who truly comprehended Scriabin's thought process gives credence to the following statement about his earlier music:

The difference between this early period, covering the last decade of the nineteenth century, and subsequent periods was that, although he came to believe that the main purpose of his life was the realization of this dream, he did not initially limit this objective to a single work, such as the *Mysterium*, but attached equal significance to all his compositions. In Scriabin's judgment at that time, all his works served but a single purpose, all were directed toward the same goal, all preparing humanity for a final transfiguration through their impact.⁴⁴

This quotation confirms that Scriabin was already contemplating his philosophy as early as 1890, but without the directed purpose that it would have in later years. Hence it is essential to probe the sources of Scriabin's philosophy in nineteenth-century Russian culture.

Nineteenth-Century Cultural Influences

Scriabin's personal philosophy was influenced by many trends in nineteenth-century Russian culture including Symbolism, Messianism and collectiveness, while the central essence of his philosophical and aesthetic world stems from nineteenth-century Russian mysticism. Mysticism is an integral element of many religions in which people aspire "to be at one with God."⁴⁵ In the nineteenth century, Russian mysticism was experiencing its Golden Age. As revolutionary ideas spread from the West, the Tsars saw the church as an important tool for maintaining order amongst a largely orthodox population. Under Nicholas I (1825-1855), Alexander II (1855-1881), and Alexander III (1881-1894), numerous monasteries were founded

⁴³ Nicolas Slonimsky, introduction to *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, by Schloezer, 2.

⁴⁴ Schloezer, 161.

⁴⁵ Margaret Smith, *An Introduction to Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 2.

or restored, and between 1880 and 1890 alone, 160 new monasteries were constructed. Monastic expansion coincided with an increase in mystics and a spread of mystical concepts. Translations of mystic treatises also became available in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, such as the first vernacular edition of *Dobrotolyubie* in 1877,⁴⁶ which allowed mystical ideas to reach a greater percentage of the Russian public.⁴⁷

In more specific terms, mysticism is the desire to “transcend reason and to attain to a direct experience of God, and . . . for the human soul to be united with Ultimate Reality, when ‘God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience’.”⁴⁸ Achieving this experience in orthodox mysticism requires a threefold path: purification, illumination, and unification. Purification involves discipline, prayer, living a good life, avoiding temptations and stripping oneself of sins. Accomplishing purification leads to illumination, which reveals the path to unification with God. The experience of transcending one’s individualistic life and uniting with God is called ecstasy.⁴⁹ Mystics often feel that they have been selected for their ecstatic journey. Mysticism is the most intimate experience of God, when an individual merges with and attains a complete understanding of divinity.

Although mysticism is largely linked to monastic life, a non-orthodox mysticism flourished in nineteenth-century Russia. Non-orthodox mysticism and literature had initially been promoted in the eighteenth century by the Freemasons, who strove for a “union with God through wisdom and morality outside the church” that was open to all denominations.⁵⁰ In the nineteenth century these ideas spread to the aristocracy, who were attracted to the esoteric or seemingly magical

⁴⁶ Sergius Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1977), xxv-xxvii and 277-8. The *Dobrotolyubie* (Love of Beauty) is a collection of mystical patristic treatises from the *Philokalia*, translated by Paisius Velichkovsky into Slavonic and printed in 1793. The 1877 edition is a Russian translation.

⁴⁷ For information on Russian monasteries and mystics during the Golden Age see Bolshakoff, xxvi, 99-101.

⁴⁸ Smith, 3. The general information in this paragraph is found in Smith, 1-12.

⁴⁹ For an understanding of mystical ecstatic experiences see Jordan Paper, *The Mystic Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1-29. Schloezer discusses Scriabin’s concept of ecstasy on 219 and 222.

⁵⁰ Bolshakoff, 104.

aspects of mysticism. The aristocratic mystics believed in the “interior” church, which had existed since the beginning of time. They strove towards unity with the divine, while rejecting the religious sacrifices required of orthodox mysticism. Aristocratic salons, such as Princess Meshchersky’s, became centers for non-orthodox mysticism, and aristocrats used the Russian Bible Society to spread their mystical vision.⁵¹ Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900) and Nicholas Fedorov (1829-1903) were important, non-orthodox mystics later in the century.⁵²

The year 1892 marked the beginning of Russia’s “Silver Age,” a period covering the last twenty-five years of Tsarist rule, in which the country saw a resurgence of art and culture and the emergence of new artistic movements. For years before the Silver Age, realism had dominated art and literature in Russia, promoted by the rise of science, industry and technology in the 1860s. Society was expected to be rational and support progress, and therefore imagination and creativity were suppressed, and utility in art was encouraged. In the opinion of many, art and literature in Russia became stagnant. With the rise of capitalism, a new, non-aristocratic wealthy class emerged. These capitalists strove to emulate the aristocracy by funding the arts, which stimulated the development of new literary forms that resisted the cultural standards.⁵³

Symbolism was a new artistic movement that developed as a reaction against realism during the Silver Age. In Russia, Symbolism is considered to have begun in 1892 with the publication of *Symbols*, a collection of poetry by Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1865-1941). That same year Scriabin graduated from the Moscow Conservatory and immersed himself in the culture of Moscow’s intellectual elite. Merezhkovsky gave influential lectures on the state of Russian

⁵¹ The Russian Bible Society was formed in 1813 with the main purpose of translating the Bible into the Russian language.

⁵² For information on non-orthodox mysticism see Bolshakoff, 103-107.

⁵³ Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From ‘Kamarinskaya’ to ‘Babi Yar’*, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 196-201; Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5.

literature and the need for a renewal. He aligned materialism with realism, while seeing symbolism as a chance for liberation from the restrictions developing in Russian culture. His work was a protest against utilitarianism, the absence of aesthetic art and the absoluteness of morality. He stressed the importance of subtlety, and making use of hints and nuances. He indicated three main features of the new art: “mystical content, symbols, and a broadening of artistic sensitivity.”⁵⁴

Symbolism had a strong connection to mysticism. Three important predecessors to the Symbolist movement, Solovyov, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and Nicholas Gogol (1809-1852), had mystical inclinations; each had visited mystics at the Optino monastery.⁵⁵ The Symbolists adopted many mystical concepts such as transcendence, spiritual transformation and unification.⁵⁶ The goal of oneness appealed to the Symbolists, because it was in opposition to realism, which promoted the emancipation of the individual. During the early years of the movement (1892-1900), Symbolists emphasized individual creativity. They believed in the importance of personal intuition and concluded that an individual would transform humanity. It was not until the later generation of Bely, Balmont and Ivanov that the idea of “collective creation”⁵⁷ became important. Nonetheless, the unification of humanity remained significant throughout the movement, regardless of the emphasis on individual or collective creation.

Rebirth and transcendence infiltrated Symbolist thought. The Symbolists felt that the world was entering a period of rebirth and anticipated the coming of a new existence. They also

⁵⁴ Ronald E. Peterson, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1993), 13. Information on Merezhkovsky can be found in Peterson, 13-16 and Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7-10.

⁵⁵ References to the Monastery of Optino, its startzy (spiritual directors), and these visitors can be found in Bolshakoff, 164, 184, 188. Dostoevsky, Solovyov and Gogol’s writings are identified as origins of Symbolism in Pyman, 10.

⁵⁶ Don Louis Wetzel discusses *sobornost* and unity in Dostoevsky and Solovyov’s writings (43), and provides more detail on Solovyov (99-100). Don Louis Wetzel, “Alexander Scriabin In Russian Musicology And Its Background In Russian Intellectual History” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009).

⁵⁷ Morrison, “Scriabin and the Impossible,” 283. Collective creation shares similarities with the *Mysterium*.

assigned a “transforming force to art,”⁵⁸ which could obtain a higher reality and assume the function of a divine creative power. They were not only bringing a new age of literature to Russia: their art was also the instrument of change that would usher in a new, greater existence for humanity. Many saw “creation as a mythic, ritualistic act, which connects artist with the past and future.”⁵⁹ The Symbolists recognized many dualisms in Russian society, such as consciousness vs. feeling, science vs. religion, matter vs. spirit and individual vs. society. Transcendence required the reconciliation of these dichotomies.⁶⁰

The general atmosphere of late nineteenth-century Russia encouraged this belief in existential renewal. Nearing the last decade of the nineteenth century, the prevailing orthodox faith in Russia was challenged by science. Less importance was placed on morality, and people began viewing society as deteriorating. Partially inspired by Plato’s “doctrine that cosmos was born of chaos,” many felt that a cataclysmic event would bring about a new and more positive world, perhaps on another plane of existence. Those who believed in the rebirth became enthusiastic “for the distant, the far future which would come into being after some great catastrophe.” These predictions were accompanied by apocalyptic foreboding, the concept of the superhuman, mystical inclinations, or hope for a better and more vital culture. This revolutionary attitude encouraged dissent, as change would initiate the emergence of a new society. Some began to question their purpose and mortality, which resulted in a return to faith and Christ.⁶¹

Russian Messianism was supported by these nineteenth-century social ideologies. Throughout the nineteenth century, Russia’s relative isolation promoted a sense of separateness.

⁵⁸ Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From ‘Kamarinskaya’ to ‘Babi Yar’*, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 201.

⁵⁹ Peterson, 8.

⁶⁰ James M. Baker, “Scriabin’s Music: Structure as Prism for Mystical Philosophy,” in *Music Theory in Concept and Practice*, edited by James M. Baker, David W. Beach and Jonathan W. Bernard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 54.

⁶¹ This paragraph is summarized from Pyman, 1-5. The quotations are found on pp. 3 and 4.

In many ways the country was culturally, economically and politically behind the rest of Europe, and some desired equality with the West. Many Russians, however, believed that they were uniquely independent and discouraged influences from their European counterparts. This opinion led to a rift between the Westerners, who sought a greater affinity with the West, and the Slavophiles, who envisioned a Russia free from foreign manipulation. The War of 1812 created a greater need for a national identity and fuelled the Slavophile beliefs. As nationalism increased, Russia's distinctive qualities were celebrated and an attitude of superiority arose. In 1835 the Russian philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev stated that because Russia is

placed between the two great divisions of the world, between the East and the West, resting one elbow on China and the other on Germany, we ought to combine in ourselves the two great principles of human intelligence, imagination and reason, and fuse in our civilization the history of all parts of the globe.⁶²

Belief in an advantageous, geographical position and in the potential for greatness encouraged Russian Messianism. As the end of the century approached, many Russians felt that not only was the world preparing for a great transition, but that like a Messiah, Russia was chosen to complete the task. Russia was given a mission to bring about the “redemption of mankind.”⁶³

The desire for unity or collectiveness was also a symptom of nineteenth-century sociopolitical ideas in Russia. In spite of their shared Russian heritage, the vastness of their country caused many Russians to feel separated from one another. Many had a desire to see the Russian people united. Therefore, the concept of ‘oneness’ became a central part of Russian ideology and philosophy.⁶⁴ This was strongly promoted by the Orthodox Slavophiles, who believed in a spiritual collectivism, which they called *sobornost*. “The Slavophile doctrine of *sobornost* offered a path towards universality through which fraternal communion would

⁶² Pyotr Chaadayev, *Philosophical Letter*, 1836, translated in Don Louis Wetzel, “Alexander Scriabin In Russian Musicology And Its Background In Russian Intellectual History” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009), 95.

⁶³ Wetzel, 96.

⁶⁴ Wetzel, 94.

culminate in the apotheosis of mankind.”⁶⁵ Unification was so integral to nineteenth-century Russian identity that it was manifest in Symbolism, mysticism and the public mentality.

The Philosophy: Mature and Early

Scriabin left minimal evidence of his personal philosophy before 1900. Nonetheless, his later philosophy has many similarities with the nineteenth-century Russian influences discussed above—mysticism, Symbolism, Messianism, apocalyptic foreboding and unification. These commonalities indicate that Scriabin’s mentality was impacted by nineteenth-century Russian culture, while providing evidence towards the extent of his beliefs during his formative period. An understanding of Scriabin’s later philosophy requires an explanation of his unnamed and unfinished opera, followed by an investigation into his most mature beliefs as expressed in the unrealized *Mysterium*, which “provides the key to Scriabin’s creative intent.”⁶⁶

When Scriabin met Schloezer in 1902, he had been working on an opera for two or three years.⁶⁷ The opera did not come to fruition; only fragments of the libretto exist, while some of the musical material was incorporated into other pieces.⁶⁸ Scriabin explained his complete operatic vision to Schloezer, who had the impression that the abstract, melodramatic plot was an expression of Scriabin’s personal thoughts.

⁶⁵ Wetzel, 43.

⁶⁶ Schloezer, 159.

⁶⁷ The uncompleted libretto appears in Scriabin’s notebook from July 1900-December 1903, Brown, 45. Fragments of the libretto appear in Marina Scriabin, *Notes et réflexions*, X-XIV. The notebook from July 1900-December 1903 is not included in her translations.

⁶⁸ Schloezer does not indicate in which pieces the musical fragments were incorporated, but he states that some text appeared in *Le Poème de l’extase*, 164. My understanding of the opera comes from Schloezer’s description, 157-176, and from the translated libretto fragments in Bowers, 1:309-15. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Schloezer’s text are his own words and understanding of the opera.

The opera's protagonist is depicted as a musician, poet and philosopher, who wishes to provide spiritual salvation and freedom through the "unification of all men in the spirit of joy."⁶⁹

The hero is a Superman. Universal joy could only be achieved through the power of his art:

I AM THE SORCERER OF A POWERFUL HEAVENLY HARMONY
Who lavishes caressing dreams on mankind

With the POWER OF LOVE immeasurable and wondrous
I will make life's springtime for them
I will give them long desired peace
I, BY THE FORCE OF MY KNOWING....

I am the apotheosis of world creation
I am the aim of aims, the end of ends.⁷⁰

This solipsistic declaration and description of the hero appear to be an allusion to Scriabin himself, while reflecting his nineteenth-century interest in Friedrich Nietzsche.⁷¹

The king's daughter is seduced into passionate union with the hero, but he is captured and thrown into prison. The people rescue the hero, who "[unites] them into a physical and spiritual entity and [attains] the supreme state of beatitude." His ultimate transfiguration is found in death, as Scriabin explained to Schloezer:

The hero finds his death during a great festival, which crowns the attainment of universal unification with the production of a grandiose musical drama created by the hero. He dies in a state of ecstasy, joined in death by the king's daughter and surrounded by jubilant multitudes united in exultation.⁷²

Ecstasy is for the hero alone; "only he can know bliss, who has tasted the sweetness of labor."⁷³

Around 1902, while still sketching his opera, the concept of the *Mysterium* came to Scriabin. This project consumed him until the end of his life and provides the most consummate insight into his creative ideologies. The compositional process eluded him, however, and he

⁶⁹ Schloezer, 168.

⁷⁰ Scriabin, text from his unfinished opera, Bowers, 1:314-315.

⁷¹ Schloezer also makes these connections, 165, 168. Scriabin's library in 1902 included Nietzsche: Schloezer, 71.

⁷² The previous three quotations are from Schloezer, 168 and 171.

⁷³ Scriabin, text from his unfinished opera, Bowers, 1:314-315.

never fulfilled his ultimate, artistic goal. Therefore, the *Mysterium* exists as a philosophical concept, rather than as a musical composition. Information on the *Mysterium* comes from the text for the *Acte préalable*,⁷⁴ which was started in 1914 with the intention of preparing humanity for the *Mysterium*. These text fragments represent a preliminary sketch of Scriabin's final project. Equally enlightening is the description by Schloezer, whose reliable explication of Scriabin's ideology is based on their many discourses between 1902 and 1915.⁷⁵

Scriabin's *Mysterium* was the work in which his personal philosophy and mystic beliefs were to be realized. He envisioned it as a grand, theatrical 'Omni-art'. Through this artistic project, his music would unite all of humanity with divinity and cause a transfiguration of mankind. "It was to encompass the vision of an apocalyptic ecstasy and the end of the world," which would "lead to cosmic collapse and . . . to another plane of art."⁷⁶ Physical matter would dissolve as humankind achieved ecstasy through death and unity while transporting themselves to another existence. In describing Scriabin's eschatological doctrine, Schloezer states:

It concerned the end of the world as a communal act bound to bring about the fusion of spirit with matter and their extinction in the bosom of the Unique. This act was to be an act of man — the *Mysterium*. What was the purpose of the *Mysterium*? It was to experience ecstasy in human consciousness and death in time and space. Ecstasy and death were for Scriabin the . . . return of mankind and nature to God, followed by the absorption of time and space in the Deity.⁷⁷

Scriabin felt that the world was a product of active phenomena in which the individual psyche and the universe were agents of creation. This actualism⁷⁸ led him to believe that individuals, nations and certain historical periods were all assigned specific tasks. These

⁷⁴ The text for the *Acte préalable* is translated in Bowers, 2:271-6. The original French translation appears in Marina Scriabin, 86-120.

⁷⁵ My knowledge of Scriabin's *Mysterium* has been acquired through Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, and with some reference to the text of the *Acte préalable*. Unless otherwise indicated, references from Schloezer are his own words and understanding of Scriabin's philosophy from their intimate discussions after 1902.

⁷⁶ Schloezer, 177.

⁷⁷ Schloezer, 218-219.

⁷⁸ A philosophical doctrine that all existence is active or spiritual, not inert or dead, or that reality is founded on activity or consists of process (www.merriam-webster.com).

missions would eventually lead to the termination of existence. Accordingly, the universe also had a purpose—transfiguration through death and ecstatic unification of mankind with the divine. Scriabin was to act as the agent who would initiate this transformation.⁷⁹

According to Schloezer, Scriabin viewed evolution as a progression of consciousness in which the individual consciousness must realize its part in a larger, collective consciousness. The first creative act was the “self-differentiation of the Unique,” or God, into multiplicity. Oneness disintegrated into the “duality of spirit and matter, ‘I’ and ‘You’, Eternal Masculine and Eternal Feminine,” and multiplicity increased with each act of creation. Therefore, these dualistic pairs naturally strove to be reunited, which added an erotic element to Scriabin’s philosophy. He viewed the *Mysterium*’s finale as “a grandiose sexual act,” with sexual intercourse as “the physical prototype of ecstasy.”⁸⁰ The *Acte préalable* is filled with contrasting elements that desire physical union: masculine and feminine, the wave and the sunbeam:

You’ve roused in me the awareness
Of existence one and dual.
I am henceforth the combination
Of “I” and an alien “not-I.”

...O all-powerful desire,
You are living — and you are not I.
Our passionate caresses are still living
In multicolored existence.⁸¹

Scriabin believed that man yearned to break away from the “relativistic, individualistic life, by transcending boundaries and attaining freedom by integrating with All.” Ecstasy would be the moment when humankind became conscious of divinity and submitted to “free and voluntary transubstantiation.” Furthermore, in order for mankind to achieve Oneness, every individual must experience ecstasy by collectively participating in the performance. “Only universal ecstasy

⁷⁹ Schloezer, 191-3.

⁸⁰ Quotations in this paragraph are from Schloezer, 209, 212. The paragraph summarizes pp. 203-213.

⁸¹ Scriabin, *Acte préalable*, in Bowers, 2:275.

can grant absolute freedom.”⁸² Scriabin pictured himself as an Orphic figure whose magic power over art could move humanity to realize their destiny. The right artistic performance would generate efflorescence, the “harmonious enhancement, expansion and diversification of the psyche,” allowing humankind to realize their true potential of oneness with the divine.⁸³

Comparing the opera and the *Mysterium* allows one to speculate on the nature of Scriabin’s philosophy during his formative period. Scriabin’s opera was more individualistic and solipsistic than the collective creation found in the *Mysterium*. In the opera, unity would be accomplished through the actions of a single protagonist, and this hero alone could achieve ecstasy in death. The opera was also an artistic performance that depicted a story of unification and ecstasy, as opposed to the mystical, cosmic qualities found in Scriabin’s later beliefs. The *Mysterium* was meant to transcend art by actually achieving ecstatic unification.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, despite the fifteen years that elapsed between the initial sketches of Scriabin’s opera and the unfinished *Mysterium*, the underlying theme of ecstasy through art and unity is essential to both projects.

The anticipation of the *Mysterium*’s fundamental ideologies within the opera demonstrates that many of Scriabin’s core beliefs were probably well-established by 1900. The extensive time that Scriabin spent contemplating the *Mysterium* before sketching the *Acte préalable* suggests that Scriabin meticulously processed his ideologies before committing ideas to paper. Therefore, because much of the *Mysterium*’s philosophy was present in the opera fifteen years earlier, it is practical to argue that works from 1892 to 1897 were conceived with elements of his operatic

⁸² Paragraph quotations: Schloezer, 219, 228 and 184.

⁸³ Schloezer, 246, 240-262. Scriabin believed that to achieve this ecstatic transformation, the division between performers and spectators had to be eliminated and all humanity would be active participants. Scriabin also required a synthesis of all arts. Scriabin’s cosmogony not only included the belief that human history began as Oneness in the Unique, but that the individual arts were originally integrated as one Omni-art. Therefore, in art, the memory of unity and divinity is preserved. A reunification of the arts would aid in restoring that memory in humankind.

⁸⁴ Schloezer discusses Nietzsche on p. 168, and the opera as an art form on p. 173.

philosophy in mind. Scriabin's formative-period philosophy may have been less clarified, but the fundamental beliefs were likely developing.

At the very least, the ideologies common to nineteenth-century Russian culture, the opera and the *Mysterium*, likely factored into Scriabin's formative compositions, if only in a basic form. To summarize, the desire for transcendence, ecstasy and unification with God were found in nineteenth-century mysticism. Like Scriabin, the aristocratic mystics avoided sacrifice or abstinence from worldly pleasures while attempting to achieve ecstasy. Perhaps Scriabin's dedication to art was his own, personal 'purification'. Russian Symbolism embraced many concepts, including rebirth, freedom from artistic stagnation and the dualism of contrasting forces. The Symbolists wanted an all-encompassing unification of all living things, as well as unification of the arts. They believed that art contained divine creative power and could transport humanity to a new existence. Before 1900 the Russian Symbolists, focusing on individual creativity, believed that a single person could transform humanity. The Russian people's desire for oneness and spiritual collectivity, as encouraged by the Slavophiles, mirrors the essential current of Scriabin's thought. In many ways his *Mysterium* represented an act of *sobornost*.⁸⁵ His belief in humanity's termination, followed by rebirth and new existence reflected the apocalyptic feelings circulating around Russia. As well, Scriabin's insistence on his divine preordainment could have been encouraged by Russian Messianism.

One difficulty with this argument is an absence of direct evidence connecting Scriabin to Symbolism, mysticism and socio-cultural influences during his formative period. His personal associations with important Symbolist poets and philosophers, such as Ivanov and Balmont, occurred after 1900, and there is no proof that he owned mystical or Symbolist literature before

⁸⁵ Wetzel, 100.

that time. Even Scriabin's association with Trubetskoy, who was interested in mystic and Symbolist philosophy, did not begin until 1898.⁸⁶

Despite this lack of external evidence, it is improbable that Scriabin escaped the influences from his nineteenth-century Russian surroundings. His socialization with intellectuals and high society throughout the five years after his graduation must have exposed him to cultural trends such as mysticism. Non-orthodox mysticism was extremely popular with the aristocracy and mystical beliefs were discussed in upper-class circles. Furthermore, when Scriabin was young and still fascinated with Orthodox religion, he may have encountered religious mystic beliefs. His later obsessions with ecstasy and unification appear in some of his early writings:

Since the concept of morality is ONE with the total, He speaks of the one true and eternal God. It dwelt in Him (as appearance) and He moved in it (life, actions)...
Religious feeling is awareness of the divine within one's self...
Let us hear within ourselves this holy figure of the suffering Christ and let us dwell in Him...⁸⁷

Symbolism was also developing during Scriabin's formative years. It influenced many facets of Russian culture, and the Symbolists were immersed in important intellectual circles in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. Criticism by men such as Mikhailovsky⁸⁸ caused Symbolist values to spread amongst educated groups. Scriabin may also have been exposed to basic Symbolist ideas before his Conservatory years. Zverev was known for making his students read Dostoevsky.

Concepts such as unification, Messianism, apocalyptic foreboding and rebirth permeated nineteenth-century Russian culture. Indeed, Messianism was so integral to Russian thought that it is not surprising to find commonalities between it and Scriabin's philosophy. "Many Russian thinkers of the nineteenth century had validated the existence of their country and hence

⁸⁶ Malcolm Brown, 43.

⁸⁷ Scriabin, Bowers, 1:138. French translation of the original in Marina Scriabin, 3. Scriabin was 16 years old.

⁸⁸ In 1893, Nikolai Mikhailovsky (1842-1904) criticized Merezhkovsky's lectures and his publication *Symbols* in the Russian Journal *Russkoe Bogatstvo*. Pyman, 7-9.

themselves through the idea of a preordained mission that would unite humanity and all humanity with God, the Absolute.”⁸⁹ A fragment of a poem from 1887 also reveals Scriabin’s juvenile longing for another existence:

O country of visions!
 How different from this life
 Where I have no place
 But there, I hear voices...⁹⁰

Scriabin’s personal life during his formative period showed signs of his developing philosophy. His intense nervousness and unstable mentality could be representative of a growing dissatisfaction with reality, as expressed in the above poetic fragment. Perhaps Scriabin was already contemplating transcendence. Moreover, the creative eroticism found in the *Mysterium* and the opera was already emerging during his early sexual encounters in Paris.

Schloezer asserts that Scriabin only adopted those theories and ideologies that already supported his beliefs. For example, he was attracted to theosophy during his middle period because it facilitated and clarified his philosophy.⁹¹ Scriabin searched for ways to validate his philosophy, and he “interpreted events in the outside world in such a way as to make his own actions appear not only entirely natural, but even inevitable.”⁹² By 1905 Scriabin was corresponding with Symbolist poets, especially Ivanov, and he was exploring philosophy and mysticism as early as 1898 while associating with Trubetskoy.⁹³ It seems unlikely that Scriabin would have accepted Symbolist and mystic ideals at this time unless they complemented his personal ideology. Scriabin’s natural inclinations must have shared traits with his later interests well before his opera project.

⁸⁹ Wetzel, 97.

⁹⁰ Scriabin, fragment of a poem dated 1887, Bowers, 1:137.

⁹¹ Schloezer, 178.

⁹² Schloezer, 55.

⁹³ Malcolm Brown, 42-3. For details on the relationship between Scriabin and the Symbolist poets, and for similarities between his ideas and Ivanov’s, see the full article.

Although Scriabin's philosophy was not fully developed in his formative years, evidence suggests that his core beliefs were establishing during his early period. His philosophy may have been rudimentary in form, but it was already instrumental to his artistic output. Schloezer confirms this assertion:

The entire mass of Scriabin's creative works represents the revelation and incarnation . . . of a spiritual act that is not a function of the intellect, a state of contemplation, or a sensory impression, but a superior entity transcending the mind, the emotions, and the senses while subsuming them.⁹⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Scriabin experienced a period of growth during the first six years after his Moscow Conservatory graduation. From 1892 to 1897 he flourished professionally and artistically, and the foundation of his personal philosophy was taking root. Not only does his close friend Boris de Schloezer attest to the presence of Scriabin's philosophy in his earlier years, but nineteenth-century Russian culture also seemed to nurture the establishment of his beliefs. The desire to achieve unification of mankind by bringing about a new existence and Scriabin's belief that he was the one chosen for the task, is emblematic of Russian culture. This attitude of predestination was also fostered in his earliest years. Scriabin's goal of unity with the divine is mystical in nature and the belief that his art could transcend reality, as well as the concept that a single person could complete this task, shows strong Symbolist influences. Furthermore, Scriabin's music was affected by personal events, both positive and negative. Many outside influences impacted Scriabin's creativity as he attempted to "[express] the inexpressible by musical means alone."⁹⁵ Scriabin's surge of productivity from 1892 to 1897, and the artistic and philosophical foreshadowing of his later style, allows us to designate these six years as a sub-section within his

⁹⁴ Schloezer, 157-8.

⁹⁵ Schloezer, 93.

early period: his formative years. In the following chapters the presence of Scriabin's developing philosophy and musical complexity will be examined through analyses of his performance practice and compositions.

Chapter 2 - Tradition, Innovation and Personal Philosophy in Scriabin's Performance Practices

Like Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt, Scriabin belongs in the category of great pianist-composers. He is predominantly remembered today for his eccentric ideologies and his compositions that pushed the boundaries of tonality, but during his lifetime he was revered for his pianistic abilities. In fact, many of his music instructors believed that his primary potential was in performing rather than in composing. The previous chapter established the years 1892-97 as Scriabin's formative period, while examining the early manifestations of his personal philosophy and its influence on his musical creativity. It also argued that many of Scriabin's seemingly eccentric beliefs were emblematic of late-nineteenth-century Russian culture. This chapter will demonstrate that knowledge of Scriabin's performance practices is essential to a deeper understanding of his artistic intentions and ideologies during these formative years. After examining Scriabin's Russian musical heritage, the performance practices surrounding his compositions of his formative period will be investigated through reviews, memoirs, and analyses of his piano rolls. This information will establish that, although Scriabin was a product of his Russian musical heritage, he also developed a highly individualistic piano style early in his career. Moreover, I will argue for an interaction between Scriabin's philosophy and performance practices in the music of this period.

SCRIABIN'S MUSICAL HERITAGE AND EDUCATION

Scriabin represented a relatively new phenomenon in Russia toward the end of the nineteenth century: Russian-born musicians trained in Russia, by qualified Russians. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century an educated musical culture was not well-established in Russia. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, music became a more integral part of

court life as the aristocracy began absorbing European culture, but much of the music, and most of the musicians, were imported from Europe.¹ Russians who composed or performed were often dilettantes who imitated European style and used music for private pleasure or entertainment. Although the 1836 premier of *A Life for the Tsar* by Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857) inspired new interest in Russian music, there were still few educated or professional Russian musicians. In the mid-nineteenth century, music was not considered an acceptable career in a hierarchical Russian society, which assigned each person a rank determined by profession, family, and education. “Musicians had no more rights than peasants”² and had no official status, as opposed to artists and actors who were given the title of ‘free artist’. Russian musicians could only survive if their families were wealthy, or if they worked as state musicians. It was typically not acceptable for members of high society to devote themselves seriously to music, however, and working as state musicians placed Russians on the lowest rung of society with very minimal income.

Moreover, before 1860 it was difficult for Russians to attain a proper musical education. Many teachers were amateur or foreign, and for comprehensive training, students would have to leave the country. Little motivation for Russians to pursue music and insufficient education led to poorly trained Russian ‘professionals’ and the “almost complete domination of public musical activity by foreign music and musicians.”³ This changed with the perseverance of Anton Rubinstein (1829-94), arguably the first Russian-born, professional musician and one of the great pianists of the nineteenth century.

¹ The Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg preferred Italian opera and Italian singers. Until 1860 a law prevented Russian singers from receiving salaries over 1143 rubles, while Italian singers were earning between 10,000 and 20,000 rubles. The majority of orchestra members employed for Operas and instrumental concerts were also non-Russian. Robert C. Ridenour, *Nationalism, Modernism and Personal Rivalry in 19th Century Russian Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 7-8.

² Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 33.

³ Ridenour, 13. The information in the above paragraphs can be found in Ridenour, 5-18; Maes, 31-34; Bowers, 1:51-53; Slonimsky, 8-9; Geoffrey Norris and Stephen Muir, “Russia” in *Grove Music Online*.

When Rubinstein moved back to Russia in 1848 after years of traveling and performing in Europe, the difference in musical life and quality of musicianship between Russia and the rest of Europe became painfully apparent to him. He thus began making plans for Russia's first Conservatory, which would award the legal rank of "free artist" to graduates and provide music education in Russia to rival that in the rest of Europe. In 1859, he established the Russian Music Society (RMS), which strove for "the development of music education and the taste for music in Russia and the encouragement of native talent."⁴ In 1860 Rubinstein and the RMS began funding free music lessons for the public. When the RMS proposed Rubinstein's idea for a Conservatory, the proposal was rejected by the Ministry of Education. In January 1861 Rubinstein wrote:

In our country it is only amateurs who are involved in music — that is those who, because of their birth or social position, do not depend on music to earn their daily bread, but whose involvement in music is only for their own personal enjoyment...the art of music has until now not become well established in Russia, and its roots are in ground that is all too unfirm and uncultivated. . . . This, of course, is a result of privileges accorded to other arts such as painting, sculpture and the rest, in other words the government does not give those involved in music the *civic status of artist*. . . . Thus in Russia the only people who are engaged in music are amateurs.⁵

With the help of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna,⁶ the Imperial Court approved an advanced school of music in October 1861 and provided an annual subsidy. The St. Petersburg Conservatory opened its doors in September of 1862, with Rubinstein as the director.

The St. Petersburg Conservatory offered a first-rate musical education to Russians of all backgrounds and of both genders, providing they displayed genuine talent. Rubinstein followed the model of Western Conservatories by providing a broad curriculum. With Rubinstein's performance and compositional background, the level of excellence in these areas was high for both faculty and students. The inaugural piano faculty included Rubinstein himself and Theodor

⁴ Ridenour, 32.

⁵ Anton Rubinstein, "The State of Music in Russia," *The Age* 1 (1861). Quoted in Campbell, *Russians on Russian Music: 1830-1880*, 65.

⁶ Rubinstein became a permanent accompanist in Elena Pavlovna's court in 1852 and continued to work for her while acting as director of the RMS and St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Leschetizky (1830-1915), the famous student of Czerny. To ensure that talented Russians of any social status could study, the RMS offered many scholarships, and Rubinstein himself often paid for students' tuition. A second conservatory with the same goals and structure was opened in Moscow in September of 1866 with Rubinstein's brother, Nikolai, as director. By the last decade of the nineteenth century many Russian-born musicians had graduated with status and were filling a greater percentage of faculty positions. The Russian conservatories were firmly established and the level of musicianship in Russia was able to rival the rest of Europe.⁷

The conservatories also allowed wider exposure to the Russian school of piano playing; a school that began when pianist John Field (1782-1837) arrived in Russia in 1802 with his teacher, Muzio Clementi (1752-1832). Field was an accomplished performer renowned for his beautiful style and advanced technique, and he provided lessons in St. Petersburg and Moscow until his death in 1837. His style of piano playing, referred to as "the school of Field," was often compared to Chopin's.⁸ He was famous throughout Europe for remarkable, virtuosic technique and a beautiful tone, while applying economy of movement, precision and clarity. Field was opposed to aggressively striking the key, preferring fine shadings of dynamics. He was also celebrated for advanced pedaling technique and effects. His student Alexander Dubuque (1812-98) said that the "chief beauty lay in [Field's] playing—his touch on the keys—the way his melodies sang—the easy, heavenly 'floating.'"⁹ Field "[possessed] some kind of magic ability to touch the keyboard in a special way: under his fingers it [was] no longer the usual piano with a limited sound—it [reminded] you rather of the singing voice with all its nuances."¹⁰ Yet despite

⁷ Information on Rubinstein and the establishment of the conservatories is found in Maes, 34-37; Ridenour, 25-54; Bowers, 1:55-59; Geoffrey Norris and Stephen Muir, "Russia," in *Grove Music Online*; Edward Garden, "Rubinstein, Anton Grigor'yevich," in *Grove Music Online*.

⁸ Patrick Piggott, *The Life and Music of John Field 1782-1837: Creator of the Nocturne* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 100.

⁹ Alexander Dubuque, quoted in Piggott, 102.

¹⁰ Excerpt from an 1830s periodical; quoted in Piggott, 103, title and exact date not provided.

the beautiful sound, at times his playing could be “erratic and varied.”¹¹ Field became one of the most influential piano teachers in Russia and his school of playing was passed along through his students, Dubuque and Alexander Villoing (1808-78). Many of Dubuque and Villoing’s students went on to teach at the newly founded conservatories, such as the Rubinstein brothers, who studied with Villoing. Almost every accomplished Russian pianist who studied in the late nineteenth century can be traced to Field, Scriabin included.¹²

Musical Instruction and Study

From an early age, Scriabin’s pianism displayed signs of a burgeoning individuality. He preferred playing by ear and intuition, rather than reading music and learning technique. Despite this natural talent and resistance to formal training, Scriabin began lessons in 1883 with Georgy Konyus, who was a student of Paul Pabst (1854-97). Scriabin studied with Konyus until early 1884, and learned how to read music and to play scales and some short piano pieces.¹³

Sometime in 1884 Scriabin began receiving instruction from Sergei Taneieff, the head of the piano department at the Moscow Conservatory and a great pedagogue.¹⁴ Taneieff was only interested in teaching Scriabin composition and theory, however, so he suggested that Scriabin study piano with Nikolai Zverev (1832-93), one of the most formidable piano teachers in Moscow and a student of Dubuque. Zverev taught both privately and at the Conservatory, and he produced many successful pianists. Due to Zverev’s popularity, he expected his students to be exceptionally talented, especially the *pensionnaires* who lived and studied with him at no cost.

¹¹ Mikhail Glinka, quoted in Piggott, 103.

¹² The Russian pianists’ genealogy can be researched by accessing biographies of individual pianists. Much of the same information on Scriabin’s musical heritage and education appears in Anatole Leikin, *The Performing Style of Alexander Scriabin* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 19-43, but I had acquired much of my information from other sources before encountering his book.

¹³ Bowers, 1:114 and 1:127.

¹⁴ Information on Scriabin’s study with Taneieff and Zverev is found in Bowers, 1:128-135, and Powell, “Skrabin [Scriabin], Aleksandr Nikolayevich” in Grove Online.

His *pensionnaires* in 1884 included Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Goldenweiser, Matthew Pressman and Semeon Samuelson. Scriabin was accepted into this prestigious group for lessons, but only part-time, as he remained a student at the Cadet Corps. Nevertheless, Scriabin apparently became one of Zverev's favourites. According to Pressman, Scriabin impressed the students with his "genuine artistic maturity," and "Zverev immediately spotted [Scriabin's] extraordinary gifts."¹⁵ With less than a year of formal piano lessons before acceptance by Zverev, Scriabin's advanced musicality should be attributed more to his natural talent, than to his study with Konyus.

Scriabin studied with Zverev and Taneieff from 1884 to 1887, during which time he began composing miscellaneous pieces. Many of these are incomplete, but the popular Etude Op. 2 no. 1 in C sharp minor comes from this period. Zverev tried to discourage Scriabin from composing, however, as he felt that his future was as a pianist. Ironically, Zverev focused on Scriabin and neglected Rachmaninoff, because he believed that the latter would make a better composer. Under Zverev Scriabin expanded his classic repertoire, especially the works of Chopin. He learned quickly, but still played more by ear than by sight, and was known for technical strength and virtuosity as well as musicality. As a teacher, Zverev insisted on the clarity of notes. His student Alexander Siloti said that Zverev's playing was elegant, "with an unusually beautiful tone."¹⁶ During this time Scriabin also had his first performance in front of a serious music audience, when Zverev invited him to play in a Conservatory concert in 1885.¹⁷

Scriabin officially enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory in January 1888, rather than during the first term in September. The new head of the piano department, Vasily Safonoff (1852-1918), had 'pre-selected' Scriabin without an entrance exam after his 1885 concert.

¹⁵ Bowers, 1:133-4. Zverev's favouritism: Jonathan Powell, "Scriabin," in *Grove Online*; Bowers 1:133-4.

¹⁶ Alexander Siloti, quoted in Bowers, 1:129.

¹⁷ The information in this paragraph is found in Bowers, 1:133-37.

Safonoff was away on tour until December and deferred Scriabin's entrance so that he could personally take care of Scriabin's piano instruction. Therefore, in 1888 Scriabin became a student of Safonoff, who had studied with Villoing in his younger years, and with Leschetizky at the St. Petersburg Conservatory at the same time as Scriabin's mother.¹⁸

Safonoff was an accomplished pianist and pedagogue, and an important exponent of the Russian piano school. He started teaching at the St. Petersburg Conservatory at the age of twenty-five and by 1885 he was head of the piano department in Moscow. Technique and efficiency were essential to Safonoff's teaching. He emphasized hand position and smooth, fluid movement. A supple hand for chords, which he felt in the tradition of Anton Rubinstein, was especially important to him.¹⁹ Safonoff was opposed to a rough tone, loud forte and 'harshness',²⁰ promoting instead tone quality, touch, shading and phrase shape, subtle nuances, and emotion. He taught that good pedaling was imperative, both in clarity and through finding various colourations. Safonoff demanded much from his students, but despite his strictness, he allowed for individuality.²¹

Scriabin performed frequently in concerts and appeared to be Safonoff's favourite student. Piano instruction was often structured as group classes, but Scriabin received additional private lessons at Safonoff's home. According to fellow students, Safonoff gave Scriabin preferential treatment and overlooked his creative idiosyncrasies. Other piano faculty also recognized Scriabin's gifts, and in his first-year piano examination one adjudicator deemed Scriabin a

¹⁸ Bowers, 1:140-2. The talent of Scriabin's mother and Safonoff's personal connection to her likely furthered his desire to become Scriabin's teacher. It is also interesting that Scriabin's study with Safonoff ties him to Leschetizky, the pupil of Chopin. With Scriabin's love of Chopin, it is unfortunate that no recordings of Scriabin performing Chopin exist.

¹⁹ It can be assumed that Rubinstein learned this from Villoing, who could have inherited it from Field.

²⁰ Safonoff's teaching and performance style is discussed by Bowers, 1:142, and in more detail by Leikin, 21-23.

²¹ Leikin, 23.

“genius.”²² His Conservatory recital programs confirm his pianistic abilities. His solo recital in January 1891 included a Bach Prelude and Fugue, Mendelssohn’s *Variations sérieuses*, Schumann’s *Papillons* Op. 2, a Chopin nocturne, etude, mazurka and scherzo and the Liszt Piano Concerto in E flat.²³ The next month Scriabin appeared in a RMO concert as the soloist for Adolf Henselt’s Piano Concerto in F minor. After graduation he pursued a career as a pianist. He performed his first professional concerts in Russia, toured Europe as a solo performer and became a piano instructor at the Moscow Conservatory. His concert repertoire soon consisted solely of his own compositions.²⁴ Scriabin continued performing his own works to great acclaim throughout his life.

Scriabin’s study of counterpoint with Taneieff provided another important influence that aligned him with the Moscow school of composers. Taneieff became a Moscow Conservatory professor in 1878 and taught there for twenty-eight years. He was a specialist in theory and counterpoint, and he built on the foundation of theoretical teaching laid by Tchaikovsky and Herman Laroche (1845-1904). During Taneieff’s tenure he “developed such a well-constructed, consummate system of teaching as barely existed anywhere else before.” Nikolai Kashkin (1839-1920) states that Taneieff’s class in counterpoint was the most “precious feature” of the Moscow Conservatory. Taneieff positively influenced his students and nurtured them into becoming

to a greater or lesser extent, masters of part-writing, that is of the main essential of the technique of writing music – and they have become accustomed to so concentrating their attention on this essential that their music’s external decoration, even when of the most sumptuous, is a secondary matter. In our opinion this is the principal sign which distinguishes the group of composers whom we unite under the name of ‘the Moscow musical school’.²⁵

²² Scriabin’s study at the Conservatory and information on his concerts is found in Bowers, 1:140-154.

²³ The exact opus numbers and titles of this concert repertoire is not listed.

²⁴ Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 195.

²⁵ The quotations and information in the above paragraph are taken from Nikolai Kashkin, “The Moscow School in Music,” in *Russians on Russian Music 1880-1917*, trans. and ed. Stuart Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 168-170. Campbell translates only a portion of the essay, but he indicates that Kashkin also summarizes the careers of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, thus considering them as Moscow school composers.

Scriabin's early predilection for counterpoint in his compositions was doubtless fostered by Taneieff's focus on this discipline. Scriabin learned the importance of form, well-organized harmony and polyphony from Taneieff.

Scriabin's exceptional teachers in Moscow and in the recently established Russian Conservatories contributed to his growth as a pianist and exposed him to teachings of the Russian piano school. His success at the Conservatory confirms Scriabin's pianistic endowment.

SCRIABIN AS PIANIST AND PERFORMER

Reviews and memoirs of Scriabin's piano playing reveal a distinctive style that captivated audiences throughout his career. When Schloezer met Scriabin in 1896 he was "deeply moved by his piano playing, so unusual, so different from what [he] was led to expect."²⁶ After a concert in March of 1902, Prince Trubetskoy expressed that "Scriabin is the first authentically Russian composer to have discovered a piano style which matches his truly lyric music mood."²⁷ Later in Scriabin's life, Konstantin Balmont wrote that when Scriabin "began to play, it was if he emitted light, he was surrounded by an air of witchcraft."²⁸

Scriabin possessed many pianistic skills that evoked this "magical"²⁹ atmosphere. He was known for utilizing soft dynamics and did not often attempt powerful *fortes*. Within a quieter volume, however, he could apparently produce numerous variations of *piano*, and he had the ability to generate power and brilliance when required. This dynamic shading was enhanced by tonal diversity: Scriabin could produce a multitude of colour through various touches. He was also considered a virtuoso who performed difficult pieces quickly and precisely, while using very

²⁶ Schloezer, 53.

²⁷ Sergei Trubetskoy, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:288.

²⁸ Konstantin Balmont, quoted in Leiken, 5.

²⁹ Tatyana Shaborkina catalogued terms most commonly used in Scriabin's performance reviews, such as "magical," Bowers, *The New Scriabin*, 197.

little body movement or exaggeration.³⁰ Many of these traits had been encouraged by his teachers. Beautiful and diverse tone, for example, was taught by both Safonoff and Zverev, as was the importance of controlled and efficient technique. The avoidance of harsh sounds and the economic and fluid movement was more specific to Safonoff. An 1896 review from Paris states that Scriabin's "playing exemplifies that peculiar and indefinable charm of the Slavs who are the greatest pianists in the world."³¹

Scriabin acquired a highly developed left-hand technique. When his right hand was injured in 1885 and again in 1891, he practised only with his left. This isolation allowed his left-hand technique to develop substantially. This fact is confirmed by a reviewer in *L'art moderne*, who found that Scriabin's "left hand is astonishing, and he plays the most difficult passages with a rare ease. . . ."³² After a St. Petersburg concert in 1895, César Cui (1835-1913) remarked that Scriabin's "left hand is stronger than his right and sometimes smothers it."³³ Scriabin's compositions allude to his left-hand proficiency, as the left-hand part is often complex and more difficult than the right. The bass in Etude Op. 8, no. 12 has continuous leaps that require accuracy for both octaves and single notes. In many of his sonatas and preludes, the left hand plays complicated patterns that require extensive practise, such as the Prelude Op. 11, no. 19 and the Second Piano Sonata. Furthermore, Scriabin wrote a Prelude and Nocturne for left hand alone (Op. 9) with a challenging distribution of voices.

Although Scriabin's technique and touch had improved with instruction, many characteristic traits of his playing were part of his natural, personal style. He had acquired the ability "to make the piano not sound like a piano" before studying with Safonoff, and despite

³⁰ I have drawn these features from various memoirs and biographical information on Scriabin. These traits will be reinforced throughout this section, but they are also discussed and confirmed by Leikin, 40-43.

³¹ Unknown, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:213.

³² *L'Art Moderne*, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:213.

³³ Cesar Cui, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:197.

being taught pedaling, touch and tone, it appears that Scriabin possessed a command of these skills before serious study. Safonoff “taught [Scriabin] many things, but he had his own rare and exceptional gifts – tonal variety, pedaling refinement. . . . Under his hands the instrument fair breathed.”³⁴ Many, including Safonoff, felt that Scriabin had “the most refined, impeccable pedaling,”³⁵ and used him as an example for sophisticated pedaling. Scriabin’s preference for softer dynamics was also natural to his technique. When Scriabin started lessons with Konyus “he played the piano neatly and fluently, but weakly.”³⁶ A review from the premier of Scriabin’s Concerto was favourable, but the reviewer felt that the “orchestra held the main role. Perhaps this was due to Scriabin’s weakness of power.”³⁷ Since descriptions of Scriabin often use the words “weak,” “fragile,” “delicate,” or “nervous,” it seems that a light touch was not only an aspect of his playing, but something inherent in his physical and psychological demeanour. Nonetheless, softer volume was not a deficiency under Scriabin’s hands.

Another trait of Scriabin’s personal style was his constant deviation from the written score, with respect to dynamics and pitch, but most notably with unmarked *rubato*. In basic terms, *rubato* refers to tempo modification, but this modification is exploited in various ways. Both Sandra P. Rosenblum and Clive Brown refer to two main categories of *rubato*, although they use slightly different terminology.³⁸ One type of *rubato* is a ‘tempo flexibility’ achieved by modifying the basic pulse.³⁹ This includes lengthening or shortening a single beat, an acceleration or deceleration of a few beats to a few measures, or a complete change of basic tempo for a larger section. The other type of *rubato* applies to a modification of one voice

³⁴ The first two quotations in this paragraph are statements from Vasily Safonoff, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:144.

³⁵ From the *Russkaya muzykal'naya gazeta*, no. 46 (1913), quoted in Leikin, 35.

³⁶ Georgy Konyus, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:127.

³⁷ Review quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:244.

³⁸ Clive Brown, *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice: 1750-1900*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 373-414; Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 362-392.

³⁹ Brown, 377-95. Rosenblum refers to this tempo flexibility as “agogic rubato,” 382.

against a steadier second part.⁴⁰ This latter Chopinesque⁴¹ technique typically involves altering rhythms in the right hand so that it is not always synchronized with the steadier left hand.

Belaieff noted that Scriabin had difficulty keeping a steady rhythm, which sometimes rendered his performances confusing. When Scriabin expressed a desire to conduct, Belaieff replied, “I must tell you I am against it. My conviction is that a conductor must be very stable in rhythm. He needs to be, so as to hold unsteady rhythms together. I have not felt this requisite rhythmicity in you.”⁴² César Cui called Scriabin’s playing “arhythmical, and at times unclear.”⁴³ Scriabin avoided putting metronome marks on his music and in one instance wrote to Belaieff about some impromptus: “I put metronome marks as you suggest, although it is virtually useless to do so. In the second one, the tempo constantly changes.”⁴⁴ He even seemed to display an indifference to specific tempo in a letter to Belaieff about the Second Sonata: “Liadov has heard me play it many times and I am sure he can guess at the speed. Moreover, the second movement depends on the performer’s technique.”⁴⁵ Even Scriabin’s students apparently developed the “inability to play in time.”⁴⁶

Scriabin’s early music is often considered Chopinesque,⁴⁷ especially his twenty-four Preludes Op. 11, which follow the same tonal organization as Chopin’s Preludes Op. 28. Yet perhaps Scriabin’s performance style contributed to his early pieces being aligned with Chopin. Scriabin’s delicacy and fragility combined with his expressive, virtuosic style that utilized liberal

⁴⁰ Brown, 378 and 396-414. Rosenblum calls this rubato “contrametric rubato,” 373.

⁴¹ Chopin was known for keeping a steady left hand, while the right was flexible above. This technique is also discussed in C. P. E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (1753; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1949), 161, and Brown, 405, 412.

⁴² Mitrofan Belaieff, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:282.

⁴³ César Cui, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:197.

⁴⁴ Scriabin, January 4, 1895, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:194. Bowers does not specify the impromptus.

⁴⁵ Scriabin, quoted in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:250.

⁴⁶ Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:288.

⁴⁷ Swan, *Scriabin*, 11-12; Hull, *Scriabin*, 11; Macdonald, *Skryabin*, 12-13; Schonberg in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:81, Slonimsky, *Writings on Music*, 53.

rubato and rarely exploited sheer power,⁴⁸ would have been reminiscent of Chopin. An American concert tour in 1906 even promoted Scriabin as “the left-handed Chopin.”⁴⁹

Scriabin’s time as a Moscow Conservatory professor provides further insight into his performance approach. One of his students, Maria Solomonovna Nemenova-Lunz (1878-1954), left revealing memoirs about Scriabin’s teaching. She confirms that Scriabin did not have a huge *fortissimo*. He taught that the “deepest *forte* must always *sound* soft.” He was extremely concerned with tone and was opposed to attacking the keyboard aggressively. Similar to Safonoff’s teaching, Scriabin would make students repeat a note multiple times to experiment with various touches to produce different colours. Nemenova-Lunz says that Scriabin taught a variety of pieces by many composers. The most memorable pieces he taught her were: Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 109 and Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58; a Bach prelude; a Schubert sonata; and Haydn’s Variation in F minor Hob. XVII:6. Scriabin created wonderful effects in the latter without pedal.⁵⁰

According to Nemenova-Lunz Scriabin once performed a Chopin Waltz for his students in such a captivating manner, and with such technical precision, that he drew an audience from other classes. Scriabin also encouraged imagination and creative interpretation:

He awakened and developed our creative fantasy. He transformed insignificant places in music with comparisons, descriptions and his own performance. Sometimes he would make a beautiful gesture with his hands, or characterize in words. “Flight” was one of his favorite terms, so was “fragrance.” Later he would say, “très parfumé,” meaning make it fragrant with this or that feeling.

This description may seem eccentric, but it indicates that Scriabin visualized extra-musical events when he performed. It also suggests synaesthesia, which became important to Scriabin’s

⁴⁸ Scriabin sometimes used a *rubato* similar to Chopin. This is mentioned above in Leikin’s assessment of Scriabin’s *rubato* and will be explained in the section on Scriabin’s piano rolls.

⁴⁹ Bowers, *The New Scriabin*, 33.

⁵⁰ The information in this paragraph and the next is from Nemenova-Lunz’s memoirs found in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:288-293. Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations in these paragraphs are from the same memoirs (1:292, 1:290). She does not give specific titles for each work.

later philosophy. Scriabin's ability to inspire was confirmed by a private student, Margarita Morozova, for whom Scriabin "could completely enchant a student with music and playing."⁵¹

SCRIABIN'S PIANO ROLLS

Scriabin's musical heritage and education, and first-hand accounts of his performing are useful for understanding his pianistic style, but reviews and memoirs can be affected by subjectivity, and they rarely include specific performance details. It is therefore fortunate that Scriabin left piano roll recordings. In 1908 he recorded for Hupfeld in Leipzig on their Phonola player piano, and two years later he recorded for Welte in Moscow on the Welte-Mignon.⁵² Between these two sessions Scriabin recorded nineteen of his compositions, four of which were recorded for both companies (Table 2.1). Most of the Welte-Mignon rolls have been transferred to modern recordings and issued by the Pierian Recording Society.⁵³

Anatole Leikin has recently published a valuable study of Scriabin's performing style. Leikin argues that Scriabin's interpretations of his own compositions may have contributed to the popular appeal of his music during his lifetime.⁵⁴ Therefore, the absence of Scriabin's live performances likely contributed to the decreasing interest in his piano music after his death. For his research, Leikin examined and reproduced Pavel Lobanov's transcriptions of Scriabin's piano rolls.⁵⁵ By analyzing the perforations on the piano rolls, Lobanov determined the exact tempo, dynamics, rhythm and pitch alterations, providing more precise data than that available from an

⁵¹ Bowers, *The New Scriabin*, 44.

⁵² Leikin, 8 and 11. Welte was located in Freiburg, but they moved equipment to Moscow for Scriabin's recording session.

⁵³ *Alexander Scriabin: The Composer as Pianist*, Pierian Recording Society 0018, 2003.

⁵⁴ Leikin, 1-6.

⁵⁵ The transcriptions that Leikin studied are printed in his book (77-132, 153-272). Leikin states that Lobanov is a friend and former colleague, who provided Leikin with his personal transcriptions of Scriabin's piano rolls. Leikin also located rolls for the second and third piano sonatas, and sent copies to Lobanov for transcription (xi-xii). Information on Lobanov's transcription method: Leikin, 17.

auditory analysis. I completed an aural analysis of the Welte recordings, but have compared and supplemented my findings with Leikin's research and Lobanov's transcriptions. I indicate where I have drawn from Leikin's research.

Table 2.1 - Scriabin's Piano Roll Recordings

Hupfeld-Phonola (1908)		Welte-Mignon (1910)		Available on CD from <i>Pieran</i>	
Preludes	Op. 11 no. 10	Preludes	Op. 11 no. 1	Preludes	Op. 11 no. 1
	<i>Op. 11 no. 13</i>		Op. 11 no. 2		Op. 11 no. 2
	<i>Op. 11 no. 14</i>		<i>Op. 11 no. 13</i>		Op. 11 no. 14
	Op. 17 no. 3		<i>Op. 11 no. 14</i>		Op. 22 no. 1
	Op. 17 no. 4		Op. 22 no. 1	Poem	Op. 32 no. 1
Poems	<i>Op. 32 no. 1</i>	Poem	<i>Op. 32 no. 1</i>	Mazurka	Op. 40 no. 2
	Op. 32 no. 2	Mazurka	<i>Op. 40 no. 2</i>	Etude	Op. 8 no. 12
Mazurkas	Op. 25 no. 1	Etude	Op. 8 no. 12	<i>Désir</i>	Op. 57 no. 1
	Op. 25 no. 3	<i>Désir</i>	Op. 57 no. 1		
	<i>Op. 40 no. 2</i>				
Etude	Op. 8 no. 8	<i>*Italicized opus numbers were recorded at both sessions.</i>			
Sonatas	Op. 19 (second)				
	Op. 23 (third)				
<i>Feuillette</i>	Op. 45 no. 1				

The recordings issued by Pierian, seen in the far right column of Table 2.1, are available for my evaluation. Below, I will analyze the Welte recordings of the following formative works: Preludes Op. 11 nos. 1, 2 and 14, and Etude Op. 8 no. 12. I also reference Lobanov's transcription of the Phonola rolls of the Second Sonata, Op. 19. Leikin does not provide a case study for the Op. 11 no. 14 Welte roll; therefore, my analysis of this piece is completely unassisted.⁵⁶ These enlightening recordings provide additional information regarding Scriabin's performance practices while reinforcing the traits of Scriabin's playing described above. My analyses reveal interesting aspects of his performance practices in regards to *rubato*: tempo

⁵⁶ For the Preludes and Etude I referenced the Muzgiz editions, the Belaieff first editions, and the 1973 Dover reprint of the Muzgiz edition with English translations. I utilized the first edition of Op. 19 printed by Belaieff in 1898.

fluctuation, rhythmic alterations and “desynchronization” of parts;⁵⁷ dynamics, pedaling, articulation and phrasing. I have chosen not to examine pitch alterations in detail, as these elements can be difficult to assess aurally. The study of these recordings demonstrates how liberally Scriabin interpreted his own compositions, revealing the true character of his music. These analyses thus aid in establishing a connection between Scriabin’s performance style and his philosophical ideas.

Piano Roll Technology

Piano rolls are perforated lengths of paper that provide musical information for a playback machine, the player piano. The piano roll passes over a tracker bar with small openings, which are connected to a pneumatic system. Each hole on the tracker bar represents a key on the piano. When an opening encounters a perforation, atmospheric air rushes into the system and triggers the piano action for that note. Early player pianos only played notes automatically and it was up to a person, the *playerist*, to add dynamics, tempo shifts and pedaling. As player pianos became more advanced, some companies found ways for these expressive features to play from perforations on the roll.⁵⁸ The goal was a fully automatic system that played with the sensitivity of a pianist. These machines became known as expression pianos or “reproducing pianos.”⁵⁹ The first reproducing system was made by Welte around 1901, and by 1904 they had constructed a cabinet reproducing machine that pushed up to any piano and played on the keys. Eventually the reproducing system was assembled inside pianos.

The next step was replicating the performances of specific artists, which required “recording” the pianists and turning performances into piano rolls. Every company had a

⁵⁷ Leikin, 26. See p. 57-58 of this thesis for an explanation of these categorizations of *rubato*.

⁵⁸ Player piano system summarized from Orde-Hume, chapters 3-7.

⁵⁹ Aeolian patented this term, but it became the common word for any piano that replicated a performance, Orde-Hume, 119, 173.

different recording system. The exact schematics are often vague, but each one developed a method of transcribing the motion of the keys and pedals as the pianist played, typically onto a moving roll of paper. This transcription is known as “melography.”⁶⁰ Therefore, it was the movement of the piano parts rather than the actual sounds that were being recorded. The better devices recognized which notes were played, how long they were held, the amount of pressure applied to a key, and when the pedals were being depressed. For instance, the Welte system apparently employed carbon contacts dipping into mercury as keys were depressed. These contacts sent electrical currents to an ink-pen machine that made marks showing the force and duration of the depression. Some machines evolved into punching perforations directly from the performance, and the better companies also had separate contacts to record pedaling.⁶¹

Due to the nature of the recording systems, certain elements could be lost in transmission. Therefore, not all aspects of the piano rolls are reliable as performance practice evidence. For example, the machines could determine length of pedal depression, but not the difference between partial or full pedal. They also could not record a full dynamic range, especially in thick textures, and they could not account for touch or tone.⁶² When performance transcriptions were used as templates for the piano rolls, additional degradation of the original performance could occur. Since some companies, such as Hupfeld, required a playerist to add expressive features, they edited their rolls to reduce the playerists’ performance error. For example, notes that were sustained with the pedal by the recording artist were often lengthened on the roll to circumvent missed pedaling by the playerist. Hupfeld would also fix notes, and occasionally rhythms, that were played differently from the score. In these situations the “final master roll was then a

⁶⁰ Orde-Hume, 229; The engineers at Welte were considered the first masters of melography, 231.

⁶¹ The information in this paragraph is summarized from Orde-Hume, 34-5, 229-241.

⁶² Leikin, 14-16.

mixture of recording pianist, roll editors and engineers.”⁶³ Leikin states that Scriabin’s Hupfeld recordings were for the Hupfeld player piano, but Hupfeld had an electric expression piano in production by 1906, and fully automatic reproducing instruments not long after.⁶⁴ It seems unlikely that Hupfeld recorded Scriabin with only the player piano in mind, and perhaps editing was less extensive.⁶⁵

On the other hand, “Welte always insisted that their recording system was fully automatic.”⁶⁶ The playback was also automated with all details performed from the roll, and thus little editing was done. Welte was famous for their flexible and variable dynamics that extended from *pianissimo* to *forte*, as well as a constant roll drive speed. The large number of artists who recorded exclusively with Welte attests to its quality and dependability.⁶⁷ Scriabin himself praised the machine’s capabilities.⁶⁸ Other companies even paid royalties to use aspects of the Welte technology. Nonetheless, the accuracy of minute dynamic shading and the veracity of volume differentiation between unison notes in the Welte rolls are uncertain.⁶⁹

With the above information in mind, which details can one accept as reliable when assessing Scriabin’s piano rolls? The Welte system’s superior roll drive and seemingly advanced recording technology permitted the authentic transmission of many performance aspects. Leikin states that the rhythm, tempo, alignment of notes, articulation, pitches, basic pedaling and general dynamics can be considered accurate representations of Scriabin’s playing in the Welte rolls. Despite the uncertain degree of editing by Hupfeld, many of these same features are also reliable on the Hupfeld rolls, if one bears in mind that some pitches, rhythms and articulations

⁶³ Orde-Hume, 267.

⁶⁴ Orde-Hume, 31, 178.

⁶⁵ It should be noted that all Hupfeld rolls bear the mark, ‘Phonola’, regardless of the intended playback instrument. (Orde-Hume, 179); however, Animatic rolls would have been for the Hupfeld player system (Orde-Hume, 238).

⁶⁶ Orde-Hume, 240.

⁶⁷ A list of artists signed with Welte can be found in Orde-Hume, 241-2.

⁶⁸ Leikin, 13.

⁶⁹ Much of the information in this paragraph is found in Orde-Hume, 174-77.

may not represent Scriabin's performance flexibility. Absent from both companies' piano rolls are the exact details of pedaling, or fine nuances of dynamics and touch.⁷⁰ Scriabin's control of partial or fluttering pedals, and any subtle dynamic shifts, such as his famous, extreme *pianissimos*, would not have been transcribed. And the pianist's touch, for which the Russian piano school and Scriabin were so well known, is something no machine can replicate.

Anyone critical of Scriabin's piano rolls must recognize that the "advantage of the reproducing piano roll lies in presenting to us an overall image of the style of a pianist's playing rather than of an absolute re-creation."⁷¹ Listeners need to "realize the music they hear is played not quite by Scriabin himself, but by a mechanical contraption."⁷² Furthermore, Orde-Hume reminds us that the authenticity of the modern playback can also be affected by the difference between the original recording piano and performance space, and the piano and space that are used for replaying the rolls. If one keeps these facts in mind and does not focus on the "failures" of the piano roll recordings, then they are very interesting, informative and beautiful.

Rubato

Leikin lists three applications of *rubato* in Scriabin's playing: tempo flexibility, modifications of the actual rhythm, and desynchronization of voices.⁷³ Desynchronization of the parts involves two parts that align vertically in the score, yet play at different times. This misalignment obviously represents the second main type of *rubato* discussed above. Rhythmic modifications fall under the blanket of tempo flexibility, but they are frequent in Scriabin's recordings and do not necessarily alter the tempo. Therefore, I agree that it is useful to differentiate rhythmic alterations from flexibility. For the purpose of my analysis I have thus

⁷⁰ Some of the information in this paragraph is summarized from Leikin, 14-17.

⁷¹ Orde-Hume, 263-4, 266.

⁷² Leikin, 15.

⁷³ Leikin, 26. Leikin describes his use of the term *desynchronization* on page 32.

chosen to address the same three types of *rubato*: tempo fluctuation, rhythmic alterations, and desynchronization.⁷⁴

Tempo Fluctuation

A prominent trait of Scriabin's Welte-Mignon rolls is fluctuating tempo. To determine the tempo fluctuations, I used my ear and a metronome. This method is less accurate than Lobanov's, who measured the distance between the perforations to determine the exact duration of each beat. For this reason, my tempos deviate somewhat from Leikin's.⁷⁵ Often, I could only determine an average over a couple of beats, or an entire measure. With very fast tempos it was especially difficult to ascertain the exact time between beats; I often aimed for an average tempo over multiple measures. This approach generally resulted in agreement with Leikin's tempos, but was less specific. In Op. 8 no. 12, I found an average tempo of 215 in mm. 52-53. At the same measures, Lobanov's transcription indicates a tempo that fluctuates between 170 to 240 with most of the beats above 200.⁷⁶ Therefore, my average tempo of 215 for those measures is in concurrence with his findings. In m. 17 of the same piece, however, I found that the tempo slows to below 60 for two beats, while Leikin indicates a low of 64. This variation may be an example of occasional issues with piano roll playback.

Example 2.1 shows my aural analysis of Scriabin's tempo fluctuations in the Prelude, Op. 11 no. 1. The bracketed lines between the treble and bass staves show the average tempo for longer sections, and the numbered slur lines above the treble staff indicate tempo for individual

⁷⁴ I believe that *desynchronization* is Leikin's own term; I have chosen to borrow it. Alan Dodson recognizes the same three categories of *rubato*, but he calls them *time-span stretch*, *note-value transformation*, and *dislocation*. Alan Dodson, "Metrical Dissonance and Directed Motion in Paderewski's Recordings of Chopin's Mazurkas," *Journal of Music Theory* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 57-94. Dodson takes his categorization from Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance 1900-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 37-44.

⁷⁵ Although much of Leikin's analysis is based on Lobanov's transcriptions, because the information is found in Leikin's book, I will sometimes refer to Leikin instead of Lobanov.

⁷⁶ Leikin, 91.

quintuplets. The marked tempos are in relation to the half note.⁷⁷ Arrows indicate some obvious *accelerandos* and *ritardandos*, and I have also inserted breath marks for deliberate pauses at mm. 19-21. Throughout this piece, the right hand plays quintuplet eighth notes while the left hand accompanies with parallel quintuplets, rests, or slightly longer notes. Each musical phrase contains either four or eight of these quintuplets. Visually, this repetition seems rhythmically square, but Scriabin does not perform that way. With every quintuplet he applies some type of unmarked tempo fluctuation. Each phrase also has a distinctive tempo interpretation.

This example demonstrates Scriabin's constant, unmarked tempo flexibility and the variable ways in which he changes tempo. The opening speed of Op. 11 no. 1 is $\text{♩} = 42$, while the final tempo is 115. Occasionally the tempo fluctuates with each beat, as in mm. 3-8, but in other sections Scriabin changes to a steadier tempo, as in mm. 15-18, which essentially remain at a consistent 85. Measures 19-21 are interesting in this regard, because the notes within each quintuplet are played at different speeds and lengths, but the pauses between the quintuplets allow each bar to maintain an average tempo of 66. Sometimes Scriabin accelerates or decelerates into a new tempo, as at the end of m. 8; elsewhere he suddenly changes pace, as in m. 19, which is immediately broadened from 85 to 66. At mm. 13-14 Scriabin utilizes both of the previous techniques. With the upbeat to m. 13 he takes a new tempo of 70 before accelerating the to 84 in m. 14. This acceleration sets up the new tempo of 85 in m. 15. The only tempo changes marked in the score are an *accelerando* in m. 22 and an ambiguous *rubato* at m. 7.

⁷⁷ This piece is written in 2/2 meter. The tempo marking on the original score is for the quarter note, which is likely a printing error. My tempos refer to the half note, which reflects the time signature.

Example 2.1 – Aural Analysis of Tempo Fluctuations in Scriabin's Welte-Mignon Piano Roll Recording of Prelude Op. 11, No. 1.

№ 1

Part I (1888-1896)

¹⁾ **Vivace** ♩ = 63-76

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a measure number in a box (1, 3, 6, 9). The first system starts with a tempo of 63-76 and a dynamic of *p*. The second system has a tempo of 52. The third system has a tempo of 52 and includes the marking *rubato*. The fourth system has a tempo of 50 and ends with a dynamic of *pp*. Blue brackets above the staff indicate tempo fluctuations, and red arrows below the staff indicate the direction of tempo changes. Dynamics include *p*, *cresc.*, *f*, *dim.*, and *pp*.

12

$\text{♩} = 54$ $\text{♩} = 70$ *cresc.* $\text{♩} = 77$

14

$\text{♩} = 84$ $\text{♩} = 85$

17


ff $\text{♩} = 66$ $\text{♩} = 66$

20

$\text{♩} = 66$ $\text{♩} = 80$ *accel.*

23

$\text{♩} = 115$ *ff*

1) In the autograph MS and in Belyaev's edition: 

Scriabin often uses diverse, unmarked tempo flexibility within a phrase or period, as seen at mm. 33-48 of Prelude Op. 11 no. 2 (ex. 2.2). He begins by stretching mm. 33-34 with a dramatic *ritardando*, but he rushes the last beat of m. 34 before taking a noticeably faster and more regular tempo for mm. 35-38. Then, at mm. 39-40 he applies another exaggerated *ritardando*. When the same material is transposed and restated at m. 41, Scriabin begins more quickly and further accelerates into m. 43. He reaches a high tempo of 204 at m. 45 before retarding drastically over mm. 47-48 to his low tempo of 48.⁷⁸ Despite the extreme tempo fluctuations, Scriabin slows at the end of the phrases to create logical, musical ideas.

Example 2.2 – Scriabin’s Tempo Fluctuations in Prelude Op. 11 No. 2, mm. 33-48

⁷⁸ In the Muzyka edition, the notes indicate that Scriabin instructed an *accel.* at the end of m. 46 and a *rit.* at the middle of m. 48. Scriabin begins both the *accelerando* and the *ritardando* slightly earlier, but his performance is more or less representative of these suggestions.

Examples 2.1 and 2.2 illuminate the two main aspects of Scriabin's tempo flexibility: tempo change and tempo malleability.⁷⁹ At some sections the underlying beat clearly changes to a new tempo and at other times the beat fluctuates around an average tempo. For instance, two quintuplets from the first phrase of Op. 11 no. 1 (ex. 2.1) are played at 42, while the other two are played at 50. This fluctuation creates malleability around an average tempo of 46.

The difference between tempo change and malleability is illustrated throughout Scriabin's performance of the Etude Op. 8 no. 12. At m. 22 Scriabin begins at $\downarrow = 86$ for the first two beats before accelerating on beat three and the first three notes of beat four. This acceleration is followed by an exaggerated pause before the final thirty-second note of the measure, which results in an average pulse of 86 in m. 22. The next measure, however, changes to a tempo of 120. At mm. 50 and 51 of the same Etude, Scriabin plays at approximately 150 for the first three beats and then slows drastically on the last beat, creating an average tempo for each measure of 135.⁸⁰ The tempo then changes noticeably at m. 52 to an average of 215, as both hands play a powerful ascending pattern that leads to the final cadence. This shift to a faster tempo supports the intensity and agitation of the music's ascent to the final dominant chord.

Table 2.2 presents my analysis of underlying tempo changes in this Etude. Numbers separated with a slash indicate two tempos in one measure. A number in brackets represents an average tempo, in contrast with the preceding number, which is the predominant tempo for that measure. Only mm. 33 and 34 have tempo modifications marked in the score, a *ritardando* followed by *a tempo*. Leikin found that the average tempo for a complete piece matches the marked metronome speed, for him an indication that Scriabin maintained a steady, underlying

⁷⁹ Tempo malleability is my own term and refers to beats that are fluctuating around an average tempo.

⁸⁰ Where the tempos in the table represent an average for a measure, 'avg.' appears in brackets behind the number.

pulse.⁸¹ Alternatively, I find that different sections show clear changes in the underlying beat, which contribute to the overall, average pulse. Therefore, the fundamental pulse can contrast between sections while Scriabin applies tempo flexibility and manipulates individual beats. This table demonstrates the frequent changes of the underlying pulse in Scriabin's performances.

Measure(s)	m. 1	m. 3	m. 5	mm. 8-9	m. 10	m. 14	m. 15
Tempo	♩ = 76	84	96	106	92	102	120
Measure(s)	m. 16	m. 17	m. 18	m. 19	m. 22	m. 23	m. 24
Tempo	110	110/56	82	120	86	120	125
Measure(s)	m. 26	m. 27	m. 29	m. 30	m. 31	m. 32	m. 33
Tempo	115	120	125	130	135	115	105
Measure(s)	mm. 34-8	m. 39	m. 40	mm. 41-3	m. 44	m. 45	mm. 46-7
Tempo	118	126	116	150	130	136	140
Measure(s)	mm. 48-9	m. 50	m. 51	mm. 52-5			
Tempo	120	150(135)	148(135)	215			

Example 2.3 – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 1-3

Example 2.4 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 43-44

Moreover, in addition to unmarked tempo flexibility, Scriabin rarely follows his indicated tempo modifications in an expected manner, as seen at the *rit.* and *a tempo* found in mm. 2-3 of Op. 11 no. 2 (ex. 2.3). Scriabin begins m. 1 slowly, but immediately accelerates to the downbeat of m. 2 before slowing at the *rit.* Therefore, Scriabin's *ritardando* returns to the opening speed after an acceleration, rather than a retarding from the initial tempo, which would be a typical

⁸¹ Leikin, 30.

interpretation. At the *a tempo* in the next measure, Scriabin takes a new, faster tempo, instead of returning to the opening tempo. He follows a similar pattern whenever this opening theme returns.⁸² The *a tempo* at m. 34 of Op. 8 no. 12 is also performed much faster than the opening tempo. A particularly ambiguous tempo marking is the *rubato* at m. 7 of Op. 11 no. 1. As Scriabin does not use more tempo flexibility at this measure, it is unclear whether this *rubato* marking was Scriabin's indication of *rubato* for the entire piece, or whether it was a haphazard marking added at the request of his editor, with no actual reflection of his interpretation.

Scriabin's occasional tempo markings could be suggestions to apply tempo flexibility, such as in mm.1-7 of Op. 11 no. 2. Although these elastic tempo markings do not continue for the rest of the piece, a performer can assume a similar pattern is implied when the opening theme returns at mm. 17 and 49. I believe that the tempo markings for the first seven measures were Scriabin's way of indicating that he expected tempo fluctuation throughout the piece. A more extreme example is the short Prelude, Op. 11 no. 17, which has nine tempo fluctuations notated within its twelve measures. The overall tempo is unclear, since both an *accelerando* and *ritardando* appear in mm. 1 and 3, whereas mm. 2 and 4 are marked *a tempo*. These *accelerandos* and *ritardandos* seem to be Scriabin's attempt to notate his tempo flexibility. Nonetheless, many of Scriabin's compositions indicate few or no tempo fluctuations, and his performance *rubato* goes well beyond any markings in his music. Scriabin obviously envisioned and performed his music in a way that defied typical notation. He himself said "that it was impossible to indicate everything in the score."⁸³ This may account for his reluctance to include expression or tempo markings and,

⁸² According to the Muzyka edition, Scriabin indicated it was possible to perform "a brief caesura, with following *pp*"⁸² at mm. 8, 13, 62 and 66. The only place where Scriabin seems to follow these directions is at m. 66.

⁸³ Alexander Scriabin, quoted in Leikin, 4.

in some instances, for the long amount of time it took him to fully complete a score. Scriabin likely had difficulty notating how he heard the music in his mind.⁸⁴

By constantly avoiding a steady tempo, Scriabin allows the listener to focus on the musical ideas, rather than the metrical structure. His sectional tempo changes also reflect a change in mood, style, or texture. Some pauses and relaxed tempos could have occurred for pianistic reasons, such as the *ritardando* and pause before the downbeat of m. 44 in Op. 8 no. 12. This breath allows Scriabin to accurately attack the C double sharp on the downbeat of m. 44 (ex. 2.4), which begins an ascending chromatic line in the bass from mm. 44-47. Nonetheless, at other challenging sections Scriabin has no difficulty maintaining a fast tempo. Therefore, I conclude that the main factor governing his tempo choices and fluctuations was not insufficient technique, but his personal, musical conception of each piece.

Rhythmic Alteration

Another important element of Scriabin's *rubato* is the alteration of his notated rhythm. One way he accomplishes such alteration is to create a dotted effect by lengthening a note and shortening an adjacent one. This technique is audible in the third and fourth quintuplet of Op. 11 no. 1 (ex. 2.5). It sounds as if Scriabin lengthens the first eighth of these quintuplets to a dotted eighth and shortens the second eighth to a sixteenth. Scriabin also changes the first two eighth notes of m. 6 to the same dotted rhythm. In each of these examples, the lengthening or shortening of these notes helps place emphasis on the third note of the quintuplet, or on the metrical beat.

Throughout Op. 11 no. 2 Scriabin also changes eighth-note pairs to a dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth. This dotting typically occurs on the last beat of a measure, such as at mm. 9, 25 and 53 (ex. 2.6). In these examples, the shortened note leads into the climax of a two-

⁸⁴ Leonid Sabaneev suggests this possibility (Leikin, 36-7), but it is a conclusion I reached before encountering his statement.

bar phrase or motive, emphasizing the downbeat arrival. These alterations often fall between a dotted rhythm and triplet; however, an audible lengthening and shortening is heard.⁸⁵ Therefore, these changes typically function as agogic accents, which change the duration of notes without shifting the metric emphasis in each measure.

Vivace. M. M. ♩ = 63 - 76.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Vivace. M. M. ♩ = 63 - 76.' The score is in 2/2 time and marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand part features a melody with a quintuplet of eighth notes highlighted in a red box. The left hand part has a bass line with a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note. A smaller inset below the main score shows a close-up of the quintuplet.

Example 2.5 – The highlighted quintuplets are performed closer to the dotted rhythm above.

The image shows a single melodic line in 2/2 time. It features a rhythmic alteration where a note is lengthened and the following note is shortened, creating an uneven feel.

Example 2.6 – Scriabin's rhythmic alteration of the melody in m. 9 of Op. 11 no. 2.

Often Scriabin plays unevenly, but in such a way that it is challenging to determine a definable rhythm. This unevenness happens frequently in Op. 11 no. 1. Although the piece is notated with continuous eighth notes, Scriabin constantly changes the length of the notes. Therefore, the right hand does not sound as if it is composed of equal note values, yet from an auditory analysis, it is difficult to label the alterations with a specific note value. Scriabin's constant pushing and pulling of the tempo is often the cause of this inequality, which demonstrates how tempo fluctuation and rhythmic alteration can be connected. This note-by-note tempo fluctuation also occurs throughout Op. 11 no. 2. For example, Scriabin accelerates across the barline from mm. 1-2, shortening the last note before the barline and lengthening the next downbeat. This pattern occurs at most repetitions of the opening theme. Across the barline of

⁸⁵ Lobanov does not transcribe the rhythmic discrepancies at each of my examples, but only at mm. 9 and 25 of Op. 11 no. 2. At these measures he indicates a *tenuto* over the eighth, rather than a dotted eighth.

mm. 63-64, Scriabin plays with such exaggerated flexibility that it is difficult to define the note values. His playing is closer to example 2.8 than what is notated (ex. 2.7), but it hovers between the two examples, demonstrating Scriabin's rhythmic freedom.



Example 2.7 – Notated rhythm in Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 63-64



Example 2.8 – A representation of Scriabin's performance rhythm in Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 63-64

Scriabin also changes the rhythmic effect of note groupings with drastic accelerations. In Op. 11 no. 1, the first three eighths of mm. 13 and 14, which are notated as the final three notes of a quintuplet, are rushed so as to occupy the duration of two eighths. This compression results in quintuplets that sound like two eighth notes followed by a triplet, or three eighths followed by two sixteenths. The notes are shortened and the tempo increases, blurring the line between rhythmic alteration and tempo fluctuation.

This blurring between alteration and fluctuation is also noticeable in Op. 8 no. 12. With each occurrence of the basic idea,⁸⁶ Scriabin rushes the rising sixteenth octaves, creating the impression of triplet sixteenth notes. Yet instead of accelerating the whole beat, he increases the duration of the rest (ex. 2.9). At m. 18 of the same Etude, Scriabin alters the rhythm in beats three and four. The first four right-hand octaves are played faster and shifted to emulate a quintuplet on beat three, and the next note is lengthened to a dotted eighth note (ex. 2.10). The left hand adjusts accordingly. Although this alteration is caused by an acceleration and

⁸⁶ I consider the melody from m. 1 to the first two beats of m.3, which repeats throughout the Etude, as the basic idea. It is composed of two smaller motives: the downward octave leap followed by an ascending fifth, and the triplet neighbour movement followed by ascending sixteenths.

deceleration, it sounds like a new rhythm. These instances could be interpreted as a tempo fluctuation or a rhythmic alteration. Accelerating these octaves increases the excitement and agitation, while allowing the right hand to prepare for the final octave in the measure.



Example 2.9 – Rising motive from Op. 8, No. 12 main theme (m. 2). On the left is the notated rhythm in the score, on the right is a rhythmic transcription of Scriabin's performance.



Example 2.10 – The notated rhythm from m. 18 of Op. 8 No. 12 is on the left. Scriabin performs closer to the rhythm on the right.

Compressing note values over a longer section can alter the metrical perception. In the Prelude Op. 11 no. 14, the time signature is 15/8. The notation indicates three beats of five eighth notes per measure, but at times Scriabin's rapid performance distorts the subdivisions. At mm. 17-18 he seems to change the left-hand rhythm to alternating dotted quarters and eighths while eliminating the eighth rests from the right hand (ex. 2.11).⁸⁷ This alteration creates the perception of a 12/8 meter and causes otherwise unaligned notes to sound together. Extreme rhythmic compression occurs at mm. 22-24 of Op. 11 no. 1, when Scriabin drops the last note of each

⁸⁷ See Appendix D for the original score.

quintuplet to create quadruplets.⁸⁸ This combination of rhythm and pitch alteration contributes to the increase in tempo at the end of this Prelude. His performance at mm. 52-53 of Op. 8 no. 12 also gives the impression of eighth notes, rather than triplet eighth notes.⁸⁹



Example 2.11 – An approximate dictation of Scriabin’s rhythm at m. 17 of Op. 11 no. 14.

Occasionally Scriabin lengthens a note or rest. From the end of m. 18 through m. 19 in Op. 11 no. 1, he lengthens the last note of each quintuplet. The effect is that of a fermata over the last note of the quintuplets, or a pause before the next quintuplet (ex. 2.1). This could partly be for pianistic reasons, to prepare the hands for shifting up and down the keyboard. In Op. 11 no. 14 Scriabin places a long fermata over the F flat major chord in m. 14, and before the A flat octave sounds in the bass. This fermata arrives at a climatic high point after Scriabin retards the tempo, adding drama and suspense to the passage. The lengthening of a note can also be tied into prior altered rhythms. At m. 8 of Op. 8 no. 12, the right-hand D# from beat four is played early, creating a triplet on beat three. The B major chord at the end of the measure is then shifted and played as a regular eighth note (ex. 2.12).⁹⁰



Example 2.12 – Scriabin’s right hand rhythm from m. 8 of Op. 8 no. 12.

⁸⁸ Lobanov shows that the last note, C1, is dropped, but he also notates a rest where the C should be, which keeps the rhythm in quintuplets. Leikin, 95. To my ear, it sounds like groupings of four.

⁸⁹ Lobanov indicates that Scriabin plays triplets, but they are not audible. Leikin, 91.

⁹⁰ See Appendix A for the original score.

Desynchronization of the Parts

A feature of Scriabin's playing that often coincides with rhythmic alteration is desynchronization. Desynchronization was alluded to in connection with Scriabin's compression of note values in Op. 11 nos. 1 and 14, and Op. 8 no. 12. Consistently shortening note values causes notes to shift and overlap, aligning parts differently than indicated in the score. This misalignment occurs in already mentioned examples: mm. 17-18 of Op. 11 no. 14 and mm. 52-53 of Op. 8 no. 12. Altering rhythm in only one hand for one or two beats, or altering the rhythm differently in each hand, also causes a momentary desynchronization. For example, when Scriabin accelerates the ascending octaves throughout Op. 8 no. 12, the left hand typically accelerates less, which causes the bass octaves to sound after the right-hand part notated above.

This rhythmic alteration or exaggerated tempo flexibility in only one hand often results in a Chopinesque style of *rubato*. At many of the parallel quintuplets in Op. 11 no. 1, Scriabin's left hand can be heard slightly before or after the right. The subtlety of the desynchronization makes it a challenge to decipher which part is coming first, but a listener can hear that the hands are not synchronized. This desynchronization is related to the unevenness in the right hand mentioned above while the left hand maintains a steadier tempo, thus connecting rhythmic alteration with desynchronization. In other instances Scriabin changes the placement of the bass. Throughout the phrase in mm. 14-18, the lowest bass note of each quintuplet sounds slightly after the main pulse (ex. 2.13). Delay also occurs at the end of m. 18 to m. 22, as the left-hand octave Cs occasionally sound after the right-hand counterparts. Scriabin probably delayed the bass so that the melody could sound clearly above the powerful octaves. In Op. 11 no. 2 the bass plays ahead of the treble clef C sharp on the downbeat of m. 34. The left hand also plays before the right on the second beat of m. 48. At both of these examples the melody leaps up to a higher register and this

displacement helps emphasize the leap. Leikin suggests that Scriabin misaligns parts to make the linear structure of his music more audible.⁹¹



Example 2.13 – Op. 11 No. 1, mm. 14-16. The red lines demonstrate how the bass is played slightly after the treble at these measures.



Example 2.14 – This example shows the order of pitches from beat 2 of mm. 14 and 62 in Op. 11 no. 2, but not the exact rhythm.

Another type of ‘desynchronization’ employed by Scriabin is to break intervals or roll chords. This technique is frequently applied in Op. 11 no. 2. For example, Scriabin melodically separates the first interval of the piece—a seventh between B and A in the left hand. He also breaks the right-hand seventh in m. 30, but more slowly and with more emphasis on the top note. In many places he rolls chords from bottom to top, as at the last beat of mm. 64 and 66. The notes of the final chord are also separated and played slowly starting at the bottom. Interesting are the second beats of mm. 14 and 62, in which Scriabin anticipates and breaks the right-hand seventh while rolling the left hand chord underneath. This creates the curious misalignment seen in example 2.14.⁹² The breaking of chords stretches the phrase and can create an ethereal

⁹¹ Leikin, 32.

⁹² For the specific alignment of these measures, see Leikin, 97 and 102.

atmosphere, while at mm. 30, 62, and 66 it emphasizes the melodic leap and top note. In Op. 8 no. 12 Scriabin also frequently breaks the left hand, but to enable the playing of intervals of a tenth or eleventh. The majority of interval- and chord-breaking occurs from the bottom up.

Scriabin's Tempo Flexibility: Atypical or Late-Romantic?

Scriabin's use of tempo fluctuation was not necessarily unusual for his time period, as throughout the nineteenth century, *tempo rubato* was a common practice, especially in solo music.⁹³ Scriabin typically increases his tempo in a logical way, as demonstrated in Op. 8 no. 12. As the texture thickens and the dynamics get louder with each statement of the main theme, Scriabin increases the tempo. He also accelerates upward-sweeping octaves, such as the rising, sixteenth-note octaves from the basic idea, or the right-hand octaves in m. 31. His tempo often slows for gentle, soft, or languishing themes, and increases for more powerful or lively ideas. Tasteful tempo modification in these circumstances was already recommended by C.P.E. Bach in 1753, Daniel Gottlob Türk in 1783, and in 1839 Carl Czerny wrote that there are exceptions to playing in strict time.⁹⁴ Complaints about tempo manipulation in nineteenth-century music reviews also demonstrate that performers used fluctuating tempo. As the century progressed, a more irregular tempo became expected by many, especially in solo performances.⁹⁵ Moreover, some of Scriabin's tempo flexibility is likely a result of pianistic needs. Scriabin's *rubato* is so extreme and full of idiosyncrasies, however, that it seems to go beyond common practice or technical requirements.

⁹³ Brown discusses the controversial issue of tempo modification in the nineteenth century (378-88).

⁹⁴ C. P. E. Bach, 150, 161-2; Brown, 379-80 and 386; Carl Czerny, *Letters to a Young Lady on the Art of Playing the Pianoforte*, trans. J. A. Hamilton (1837-41; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 24; Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1994), 113-53.

⁹⁵ Brown, 388.

Performances of Scriabin's formative piano music by his Moscow Conservatory contemporaries, or those respected as Scriabin interpreters, reveal various applications of *tempo rubato*. Konstantin Igumnoff (1873-1948), a fellow Moscow Conservatory student who studied with Siloti and Pabst, performs the first movement of Op. 19 with a flexible pulse, applying clear tempo changes at contrasting themes (such as a noticeable increase during the second theme in m. 13).⁹⁶ Desynchronization is also frequent in Igumnoff's recording of this Sonata. In a performance of Op. 11 no. 8, Rachmaninoff applies unmarked acceleration and *ritardando*, and the right hand does not always align with the left.⁹⁷ Recordings of Vladimir Sofronitzky (1901-1961), who married Scriabin's daughter and is considered a brilliant Scriabin pianist, also display unmarked tempo fluctuations. His recording of the Op. 11 Preludes includes obvious accelerations, retardations, and tempo changes.⁹⁸

These recordings suggest that Scriabin's tempo flexibility may simply have been a trait of the Russian piano school, but although these pianists each applied *tempo rubato* while performing, their approaches differed. *Rubato* was a dominant trait of Rachmaninoff's pianism, but it contrasts in style with Scriabin's. In his performance of Scriabin's Op. 11 no. 8, Rachmaninoff often stretches the beat at the melodic intervals of ninths and tenths in the right hand, as in mm. 5, 6, 17 and 18, but he quickens the final note of the measure. This lengthening followed by shortening represents true 'robbed' time, and it allows the overall pulse to remain relatively steady without sounding metronomic. Rachmaninoff occasionally applies more obvious tempo flexibility in this piece, usually with *ritardando*. When the final triplet of a measure appears as two eighths, a sixteenth rest and a sixteenth note (ex. 2.12), he often stretches the triplet. He also uses exaggerated, expressive *ritardando* at the ends of episodes or periods,

⁹⁶ Recording found on *Alexander Scriabin: The Composer as Pianist*, Pierian Recording Society 0018, 2003.

⁹⁷ Sergei Rachmaninoff, *The Complete Recordings: Disc 7*, BMG Music, 09026-61265-2, 1992.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Sofronitsky, *Volume 19: Alexander Scriabin: Preludes*, Vista Vera VVCD-00241, 2011.

such as mm. 16, 36 and the end of the Prelude, but these *ritardandi* sound like momentary decelerations and do not disturb the musical pulse. This smooth *rubato*, always returning to the underlying pulse, differs from Scriabin's erratic and contrasting tempo changes.

Sofronitzky's *rubato* is also different from Scriabin's constantly altering tempo. Sofronitzky often practises unmarked tempo flexibility, but his playing is based on a rhythmic precision not found in that of Scriabin. In the recording of Op. 11 no. 1, Sofronitzky does change speed throughout, but the quintuplets retain an element of metronomical regularity. He spaces his eighth notes equally unless he is accelerating or decelerating, in which case the spacing gradually changes in a smooth, almost calculated manner. The performance practice closest to Scriabin's is Igumnoff's, partially due to the frequent desynchronization, but this similarity does not confirm a shared *rubato* learned at the Moscow Conservatory. Igumnoff's tempo fluctuations seem to gravitate around a steady, underlying pulse, in the manner of Rachmaninoff and Sofronitzky. Furthermore, recordings of other composers' music made by Igumnoff, such as Tchaikovsky's Op. 19 no. 1, display more tempo restraint. Perhaps Igumnoff performed Scriabin's music with exaggerated fluctuations, rhythmic alteration, and desynchronization, because it reflected his friend's performance style. Even the great Polish pianist, Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), who was a passionate advocate of *tempo rubato*, does not perform with the extreme *rubato* used by Scriabin.⁹⁹

Although *rubato* was common in the nineteenth century, I believe Scriabin's approach to tempo flexibility was unique. Where other Russian pianists build their *rubato* around an audible pulse, Scriabin seems to avoid a fundamental pulse, which explains the descriptions of his

⁹⁹ Ignacy Jan Paderewski, "Paderewski on Tempo Rubato," in *Success in Music and How it is Won*, by Henry T. Finck, 454-461 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909). Paderewski's piano roll recording of Chopin's Ballade in A flat Op. 47 can be heard on youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8k7ZscLIng>.

performing as arhythmical. Scriabin's *rubato* also sounds impulsive and almost improvised, whereas the other pianists' *rubato* often gives the impression of being planned and practised.

Tempo fluctuations, rhythmic alterations, and desynchronization are intertwined in Scriabin's recordings. Sometimes a rhythmic alteration occurs because of an acceleration, or a desynchronization is the result of rhythmic or tempo changes. In other cases it is unclear exactly whether Scriabin envisioned a tempo change or rhythmic alteration, or perhaps both. Regardless, these elements interact to create an important feature of his performing style: a unique approach to tempo and *rubato*. The tempo and rhythm differ from the written score in essentially every measure in the performance of these pieces, demonstrating Scriabin's assertion that in performance "one can distort rhythm as much as one wants."¹⁰⁰ Scriabin's style of *rubato* is the feature of his performing that can most accurately be determined from the recordings.

Dynamics

Two primary sources exist for Op. 8 no. 12: the first printed edition by Belaieff and a manuscript copy. The inconsistency of dynamics between these sources is clarified by Scriabin's performance of this Etude. First, the unpublished manuscript contains an *fp* in m. 1 that is not present in the first printed edition and is not played by Scriabin in the recording. But more important are the final six measures, which exhibit the greatest degree of discrepancy between the two versions. The unprinted version has dynamics varying from *p* to *fff*, whereas the Belaieff edition remains at *fff*.¹⁰¹ Except for a slight drop in volume at mm. 51-52, Scriabin performs according to the Belaieff edition. This recording suggests that the final edits completed with Belaieff are representative of Scriabin's dynamic conceptualization.

¹⁰⁰ Leonid Sabaneev in his memoirs of Scriabin, quoted in Leikin, 31.

¹⁰¹ Appendix F shows the Belaieff dynamics from mm. 49-55 with a smaller staff below indicating Scriabin's original manuscript markings. This score is a reprint of the Muzgiz edition by Dover, but the dynamics match the Belaieff.

Throughout the Etude Op. 8 no. 12 Scriabin follows the dynamics in the Belaieff edition with some small deviations. At m. 17 Scriabin softens as marked, but it sounds like a decrease to *pp* instead of *p*; the same decrease occurs at mm. 21-22 when the melodic idea of m. 17 is restated. Lobanov's transcription indicates *una corda* at these measures. In the last six measures Scriabin plays *fortissimo*, but it is difficult to determine if he reaches *fff*. This uncertainty could reflect the inability of the recording machine to capture a full dynamic range. The general dynamic shape, however, is reliable on the Welte recordings.

A pattern of adherence to most dynamic markings in the Belaieff editions is also apparent in the recordings of the Preludes Op. 11. The deviations in Op. 11 no. 1 include an undeterminable *crescendo* at m. 2, unclear *crescendo* and *decrescendo* at some hairpins, and an absence of *pianissimo* after the *decrescendo* at m. 11. The rest of the performance matches the score's dynamics. Throughout Op. 11 no. 2 there are few specific volume markings and nothing above *mf*. Apart from the high points at mm. 30 and 62, Scriabin does seem to keep the volume below *forte*. He also increases the volume at the *mezzo forte*(s), plays more quietly at the *piano*(s) and the two places marked *pp* are noticeably softer. Despite limitations of the recording device, he provides a variety of shading and colour within a softer dynamic. Scriabin performs the *crescendo*(s) and *diminuendo*(s), although he sometimes softens slightly later than marked. In contrast, the dynamic markings for Op. 11 no. 14 are all *mf* or higher, excluding one *piano* at m. 17. Scriabin maintains the volume at *mf* or louder throughout the piece, while playing stronger at the *f* and *ff* markings. He also emphasizes the *sforzando*(s) and accents, as at mm. 2, 10 and 18. These recordings indicate that Scriabin's dynamic markings in the Belaieff edition generally represent his performance practices.¹⁰²

¹⁰² The Muzgiz edition typically uses the dynamics found in the Belaieff editions. Therefore, Muzgiz is also a reliable source for Scriabin's dynamics.

Scriabin's performance of *crescendo* to *decrescendo* hairpins (< >) is interesting. In Op. 8 no. 12 he consistently *crescendo*(s) with hairpins leading to a downbeat, but a *decrescendo* does not usually accompany the diminishing hairpin. This is noticeable when he accents the second beat of m. 11. Scriabin approaches these hairpins in various ways throughout Op. 11 no. 2, such as maintaining a constant volume, accenting the final note of the *decrescendo* hairpin, or beginning a *decrescendo* at the start of the increasing hairpin. Nevertheless, despite an absence of clear *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, Scriabin stresses the peak of the hairpin, either through *rubato* or increasing volume. In Op. 11 no. 14 certain hairpins increase to a *sforzando* or accent before decreasing, such as mm. 1-2 and 17-18. A *crescendo* and *decrescendo* are not always clear, but the accents are emphasized. The majority of Scriabin's dual hairpins occur before and after a barline and indicate a *crescendo* to the downbeat. Therefore, they designate high points within a phrase that require emphasis, rather than a distinct *crescendo*.

Pedaling

Scriabin rarely notated pedaling; therefore, his recordings give valuable insight into his pedal choices. Although the specifics of his pedaling, such as partial pedals, were not recorded, a general idea of his pedal usage can be obtained. For instance, Scriabin often used the sustaining pedal liberally. In Op. 11 no. 1, left-hand notes from the first quintuplet are heard lingering through rests during the second quintuplet. This pedaling causes two groups of quintuplets to blend together—a technique Scriabin uses throughout the first eleven measures. Rather than an unpleasant combination of sound, however, the result is a transparent, floating quality. The longer pedaling works due to the light texture, softer dynamics, and slower tempo. As well, in most instances the sustained notes can be broken down as a chain of perfect fifths. In m. 1, mm.

18-19 and mm. 20-21, the pedaled notes are F, C, G, D, A, and E; and in mm. 2-3 they are B flat, F, C, G, D, and A. The sustained fifths are open and airy, and blend together well.

In Op. 8 no. 12 Scriabin consistently holds the pedal often for an entire measure, and never changes pedal more than twice per measure.¹⁰³ In most cases each measure outlines only one or two harmonies; therefore, despite the thick texture, this pedaling does not cause extreme dissonance. For example, Scriabin always pedals the motive shown in example 2.15, but these intervals combine with the bass to create a ninth chord. The only semitone dissonance arises from the lower neighbour of the triplet. The last five measures, in which Scriabin holds down the sustaining pedal without release, repeat the same four pitches until the tonic chord at m. 54. Scriabin could also have been applying partial pedals throughout these measures.



Example 2.15 – Measures 2 and 4 from Op. 8 no. 12. The lower neighbour is circled and the remaining notes create a ninth chord.

Scriabin was sometimes selective with his pedaling. In Op. 11 no. 2 he frequently articulates notes, especially throughout the B section (mm. 33-48). At times the sustaining pedal appears to be completely absent for two or more beats and in some cases two or three measures, such as mm. 39-40.¹⁰⁴ The Chopinesque effect and occasional waltz-like quality in this Prelude could partially account for Scriabin's desired clarity. Because Op. 11 no. 2 is also more chromatic and polyphonic than no. 1, excessive sustaining pedal would blur voices and create

¹⁰³ This is generally audible, but I referred to Lobanov's transcription of Op. 8 no. 12 for exact pedaling (77-91).

¹⁰⁴ Confirmed by Leikin, 99-101.

unpleasant dissonances. Furthermore, Scriabin often removes the pedal when a lower voice takes on a stepwise melody, which is seen in the Phonola rolls of the Second Sonata, Op. 19. He lifts the pedal at mm. 26 and 34 as the bass plays the stepwise countermelody, and on the first beat of mm. 31 and 32.¹⁰⁵ Scriabin's pedaling restraint demonstrates an ability to create tonal variety without pedal and a desire for clarity and audible voicing. This attention to voicing shows an interaction between Scriabin's compositional and performance style. Tanieff's composition and counterpoint classes may have influenced Scriabin's performance practices.

Scriabin also juxtaposes sparse pedaling with more sustained pedaling, as seen in Op. 11 no. 2. In contrast to the articulated passages, he allows otherwise disconnected notes to blend together, typically when the tempo is slowing or when the hands are playing wider, more consonant intervals. When he approaches the end of a phrase and stretches the tempo, the transition from clear articulation to sustained notes results momentarily in a dreamlike quality. Scriabin also applies contrasting pedaling in Op. 11 no. 1. Although he uses ample sustaining pedal, when the piece becomes more agitated from m.12 onward and the sonorities change more drastically, the pedal seems to clear with every quintuplet. Scriabin's alternation between clear articulation and blurring of notes allows for diversity of style and character.

Lobanov determined exactly when the pedal was depressed, providing information regarding Scriabin's *una corda* usage.¹⁰⁶ Scriabin utilizes the *una corda* three times in Op. 11 no. 1 and twelve times in Op. 11 no. 2. In no. 2, however, some of Scriabin's most *pianissimo* moments are achieved without the *una corda*. He also depresses the *una corda* pedal at peaks of *crescendo*(s), such as before m. 2 and at the beginning of m. 6. Therefore, it can be applied for

¹⁰⁵ Leiken, 159-160. See Appendix E for the Op. 19 score.

¹⁰⁶ The *una corda* pedal causes fewer piano strings to sound, thus creating a softer tone.

coloristic effect rather than volume.¹⁰⁷ Using the *una corda* at those moments supports the argument that Scriabin's hairpins can designate an emphasis, rather than a *crescendo*. Scriabin applies the *una corda* twice in Op. 8 no. 12, both times at dramatic *diminuendo(s)*.

The Phonola recordings are valuable in regards to pedaling, because Scriabin left pedal indications in the scores for the Second and Third Sonatas that we can use for comparison. None of the pre-1900 works recorded on the Welte rolls contain pedal markings. The Second Sonata is especially interesting because of the numerous markings and Scriabin's adherence to them. Its first movement has more pedal notations than any of his other pre-1900 compositions and Scriabin depresses and lifts the pedal exactly where indicated.¹⁰⁸ This precision differs from the second movement of the Second Sonata and the Third Sonata, which have fewer indications. Those that are notated are sometimes followed closely, but rarely exactly. In both sonatas Scriabin applies pedal in bars without markings, which is to be expected.

Scriabin spent many years trying to perfect the Second Sonata. It was published in late 1897, after insistence from Belaieff that Scriabin produce a manuscript, but in February 1898 Scriabin asked to insert four new measures.¹⁰⁹ The numerous pedal markings and his adherence to them eleven years after publication are revealing. This accuracy indicates that Scriabin may have attempted to capture his exact conception of the Second Sonata in the notation. In the roll of the second movement Scriabin omits some measures, and inserts entirely new material into others. Memory issues could have caused these alterations, but it is more probable that Scriabin published this piece before it was ready. His obvious concern with the faithful representation of his artistic intentions suggests that this composition was important to him.

¹⁰⁷ Field was famous for using the *una corda* for timbre, rather than for volume. Piggott, 110.

¹⁰⁸ I use Leiken's analysis of the Phonola recordings for this information.

¹⁰⁹ Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:249.

Articulation, Slurs and Phrasing

Much of Scriabin's performance articulation is unmarked in the scores. This pattern is seen throughout Op. 11 no. 2, where Scriabin applies a variety of articulation under both long and short slurs. For example, Scriabin performs the first three notes at m. 16, which are part of a four-measure slur, detached and almost *staccato*, whereas at m. 24 he plays the four eighth notes as two slurred pairs (ex. 2.16). Notes under long slurs, such as mm. 33-40, are performed with diverse accentuation and articulation. This variable touch is obvious at mm. 37-40, when Scriabin switches from *non legato* to *staccato* and finally to a pedalled *legato* approach (ex. 2.17).¹¹⁰ In Op. 11 no. 2 Scriabin does not treat his slurs as indications of continuous *legato*. In contrast, Op. 11 no. 1 is marked with long, phrasing slurs throughout and Scriabin often connects the notes under the slurs with pedal.



Example 2.16 – Scriabin's performance articulation in mm. 16 and 24 of Op. 11 no. 2.



Example 2.17 – Scriabin's performance articulation in mm. 37-40 of Op. 11 no. 2.

These Preludes indicate that Scriabin's slurs do not represent articulation. Otherwise, the notes underneath a single slur would always be connected. Leikin suggests that when Scriabin plays *non legato* under a slur he "completely disregards his own directions."¹¹¹ This is not accurate, however, because slur marks in Romantic music do not necessarily indicate *legato*. In

¹¹⁰ Lobanov's analysis of mm. 37-40 (Leikin, 99) also includes some two-note slurs in mm. 37 and 38.

¹¹¹ Leikin, 34.

the early nineteenth century, composers were already using longer slurs to indicate general *legato*, but accentuation, shaping, and phrasing within the slur was often expected, though unmarked.¹¹² Later in the nineteenth century, there was still confusion as to whether longer slurs were used “to show the extent of a melodic phrase or simply to signify *legato*.”¹¹³ Therefore, although Scriabin’s shaping and articulation under slurs is rarely indicated in the score, he is not ignoring his own markings. He simply chose not to notate every detail of his performance.

Furthermore, despite lacking specific details of articulation, Scriabin’s slurs and phrases hint towards the general character of the piece. Visually, the long, consistent slurs in Op. 11 no. 1 create a smooth and flowing character. The shorter, separated slurs in Op. 11 no. 2 give the impression of a more detached performance with smaller, melodic ideas. The absence of slurs in Op. 8 no. 12 allows a pianist to focus on the strength and virtuosity required for this piece. These visualizations could be a basic description of the three different ways in which Scriabin performs these Preludes. In some instances Scriabin’s slur lines also draw attention to counterpoint. The slurs at mm. 19-24 of Op. 11 no. 2 distinguish each of the three voices from one another, which is how Scriabin performs these measures.

It seems evident, therefore, that instead of representing *legato*, Scriabin’s slurs are phrasing marks. Despite using different articulation under a single slur, Scriabin creates an overall, logical phrase. Long slurs with extreme variation in articulation are still shaped as a musical phrase through dynamic shading and tempo fluctuations. Scriabin phrases the long slur at mm. 33-40 of Op. 11 no. 2 by increasing momentum and volume at the middle of the slur, then slowing and diminishing at the end. The excessively long slur from mm. 1-18 of Op. 11 no. 13, which troubles Leikin, also makes sense as an overall phrasing indication. Although Scriabin

¹¹² Brown, 236.

¹¹³ Brown, 238.

creates melodic ideas within this slur, he gradually builds up momentum until he reaches his fastest tempo in m. 16, followed by an extreme decrease at m. 18.¹¹⁴ These eighteen measures fluctuate in tempo, dynamics and articulation, but together they create a longer, musical idea. Even notes under Scriabin's short slurs are not always connected by *legato*, but they are shaped as one musical unit. Therefore, Scriabin's slurs outline musical thoughts, which can be constructed of smaller melodic groups and variable articulation. For this reason, Scriabin's playing can sometimes sound rhetorical owing to his practice of shaping phrases in a fluctuating, speech-like manner.

The diverse articulation Scriabin applied to his phrases exhibited his creativity, ingenuity and eccentricity in performance. Perhaps he avoided marking his articulations because it would have been tedious, or because he did not wish to provide clues to his unique performance style. Scriabin may have felt that pianists who understood his music would instinctively perform his music appropriately. Similar to his tempo fluctuations, articulation and phrase shaping add unique features to Scriabin's music. He does not disregard the score; rather, he enhances it.

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND SCRIBIN'S PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

An understanding of Scriabin's performance practices establishes the connection to his Russian musical heritage, while also revealing the individual and unique aspects of his performance. His mastery of piano technique, beautiful tone, and control of dynamics are traits that link Scriabin to the Russian piano school and the Conservatory system. Many of his approaches to pedaling, touch, and colour are reminiscent of Field's style of playing. Scriabin's rhetorical devices can be traced from Czerny through Leschetizky to Safonoff, yet they also

¹¹⁴ Leikin puzzles over this slur on p. 34. Lobanov's transcription of the roll is found on pp. 104-107.

show his personal creativity. Deviations from the score (fluctuating tempo, *rubato* and changes to the printed articulation) are partially demonstrative of late-nineteenth-century practices, but also reveal Scriabin's unique personality and style. His *rubato* and variable articulations push the limits of acceptable practice, and his use of both the *una corda* and sustaining pedals for effect and timbre is quite remarkable. Furthermore, Scriabin's ability to produce beautiful, diverse tone at a soft volume is specific to his style.

Scriabin's performance practices of his formative music also assist in establishing a connection between his performing style and its philosophical implications. The element of Scriabin's philosophy that seems to resonate most clearly through his performing is his belief in a reality beyond the material world. When Schloezer first met Scriabin in 1896 he was deeply affected by Scriabin's 'unusual' piano playing. While playing in Paris in 1896 Scriabin "enchanted his listeners" and "held a select audience . . . under the spell of his controlled, precise, nervous and richly colored pianism."¹¹⁵ Scriabin's playing seemed to go beyond material sound. Schloezer describes a concert in 1915 when Scriabin's psyche appeared to be elsewhere, a fact that Scriabin confirmed. And when Scriabin performed parts of his *Acte préalable* Schloezer "felt that he was then already removed from earthly life, that his eternal self had already passed over to another plane."¹¹⁶ It seems that during some performances, the physical world ceased to exist for Scriabin, and that he experienced transcendence to a less-material existence. Although these events described by Schloezer occurred later in Scriabin's life, he sometimes played selections from his earlier compositions during these "moments of the highest spiritual transport."

¹¹⁵ Quotes from *L'echo musicale* and *L'art moderne* in Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:213.

¹¹⁶ The additional quotations and information in this paragraph are found in Schloezer, 53 and 103. Although all that is left of the *Acte préalable* is text fragments, Scriabin played some of the intended music for his friends.

This belief in a transcendent existence may have been manifested in certain aspects of Scriabin's performance practices. Scriabin felt that his music should exist beyond the material world and he complained about some pianists' inability to produce the proper effects:

Why do they all play my pieces with this material-like, lyrical tone as though these had been written by Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov? Here, at the very most there should be a minimum of material essence. These pianists understand nothing of the intensity and intoxication of tone.¹¹⁷

This "minimum of material essence" could have been achieved by Scriabin's control of a *piano/pianissimo* dynamic nuance. Scriabin's ability to produce extreme *pianissimo* without the *una corda* pedal generates a light, floating atmosphere. His skilled pedaling contributes to this lightness, particularly when notes are allowed to blur together and create interesting sonorities, such as in Op. 11 no. 1. Combining the sustaining pedal with softer dynamics can result in translucent overtones that could give the impression of another, distant world. Scriabin's use of *una corda* for effect at the peaks of hairpins creates an unexpected contrast that momentarily disengages an audience from the surrounding character. Moreover, the extreme *rubato* that is created through tempo flexibility, tempo changes, desynchronization, and rhythmic modification seems to avoid an underlying tempo. This almost improvisatory approach to tempo removes his rhythmical grounding, which in turn disconnects the music from the physical world and establishes a transcendent ambiance. It is almost as if Scriabin is performing in a realm outside of rhythmic rules and regulations.

Connected to the concepts of transcendence and detachment from material existence was Scriabin's fascination with flight, which became an important element of his philosophy. He conducted flying experiments, which were connected to 'physical dematerialization', while the *Mysterium* was to have bells suspended from clouds.¹¹⁸ Scriabin may have displayed this interest

¹¹⁷ Sabaneev quoting Scriabin, taken from Wetzel, 118.

¹¹⁸ Bowers, *Scriabin*, 1:94.

in flight in his performances. His hands often hovered above the keyboard, while he allowed the pedal to sustain the sound. According to Prokofiev, Scriabin's notes seemed to soar when he performed.¹¹⁹ He may have taken this approach in Op. 11 no. 1, as the sound seems to float above the piano. Leikin suggests this was Scriabin's reason for sometimes shortening notes with his fingers while the pedal sustains; it helped to create a floating atmosphere.¹²⁰ 'Flight' was one of Scriabin's favourite descriptors while teaching at the Moscow Conservatory, suggesting that it was a well-established part of Scriabin's performance essence before 1900.

Scriabin's philosophical interest in dualities such as "spirit and matter," "I" and "You," and masculine and feminine,¹²¹ is also reflected in his performance practices. The most obvious implications of these dualisms appear in his rhythmic desynchronization and tempo flexibility. When Scriabin destabilizes the beat through misalignment of parts, such as in Op. 11 no. 14, or when his tempo erratically shifts, it seems as if contrasting rhythmical dimensions are attempting to reconcile. His alternation between *legato* and *non legato*, or blurred and sparse pedaling, alludes to drifting between two different states of being. This colliding or overlapping of diverse elements also produces a sonic representation of Scriabin's belief in two worlds: the material and the transcendent.

Scriabin's personality seems to resonate through his performance style. His constantly fluctuating tempos, diverse articulation, and interesting pedaling illuminate his inventiveness and creativity. The extreme tempo flexibility and many score 'additions' could be interpreted as eccentricity. Scriabin's seemingly instinctive method of performance seems to reflect his approach to other aspects of his life. For example, Schloezer states that Scriabin's philosophy

¹¹⁹ The information in these two sentences is taken from Leikin, 37. The source for the Prokofiev quote is not mentioned.

¹²⁰ Leikin, 37.

¹²¹ See Chapter 1, p. 27.

was largely based on intuition, rather than education and study.¹²² Scriabin also pushed the boundaries of performance practice just as he explored the limits of philosophic creativity.

The appearance of philosophical performance traits within his formative music furthers the argument that Scriabin's ideology influenced his early music. Boris Yavorksy noted that although Scriabin's performances varied from the score, as the years passed he continued to play pieces in the same manner. The average tempos may have changed over time,¹²³ but his general shaping, touch and interpretation seems to have remained the same. Therefore, the philosophic performance style of Scriabin's formative music, as recorded in the piano rolls in the early-twentieth century, likely represents his performance style from the time that these works were composed, suggesting that the formative works were inspired by his philosophic beliefs. At the very least, by performing his formative works in a philosophic manner, Scriabin likely perceived philosophic implications within his formative compositions.

Scriabin was a product of Russian musical heritage, but he also developed individual performance idioms that exhibited his personal, philosophic beliefs. He is typically remembered as a composer, but his career as a pianist is equally important and contributed to his professional success. Therefore, Scriabin's performance practices allow us better to comprehend his personality and artistic intentions. This knowledge also clarifies which features of his scores are accurate representations of his musical intentions—a beneficial tool in the following chapter, in which his compositions are analyzed. The philosophic elements that resonate throughout Scriabin's performance style suggest a correlation between his ideology and artistic output. The appearance of these traits in performances of his formative works establishes the interaction of

¹²² Schloezer (72) states that Scriabin's main system of thought was based on intuition.

¹²³ The information in these two sentences is found in Leikin, 29-30.

Scriabin's beliefs with his artistic personality before 1900. This synthesis demonstrates that Scriabin the philosopher and Scriabin the pianist may have been inseparable.

Chapter 3 – The Compositional Style of Scriabin’s Formative Period

Boris de Schloezer insists that “the multifarious ingredients of Scriabin’s music are intimately interconnected, with each part related to the image of the whole.”¹ This observation suggests that Scriabin’s music is constructed of complex, intertwined elements, but also that every one of Scriabin’s compositions is relevant to the structural foundation of his complete output. As I demonstrate in this chapter, although Scriabin’s formative works are superficially distinct from those of his middle and late periods, they share stylistic commonalities with his later compositions.² To accomplish this task, I first discuss the analytical techniques that have been applied to his middle- and late-period music in the scholarly literature, and the musical features exposed by these techniques. Using this information, I analyze selected works from Scriabin’s formative period to reveal an organization that often explores the limits of tonality, while foreshadowing and utilizing practices found within Scriabin’s compositions from 1903 onwards. My findings establish a greater continuity between Scriabin’s early and late styles than is typically acknowledged.

ANALYTICAL APPROACHES TO SCRIABIN’S WORKS

Beginning with the fourth piano Sonata, Op. 30 (1903), Scriabin’s works are noticeably more complex than his nineteenth-century music. Analyses of Scriabin’s compositions deal almost exclusively with his music after 1903, applying analytical techniques appropriate to his

¹ Schloezer, 157.

² After completing my own analyses and research, I came across the dissertation by Keith Phillip Salley in which he also argues for a greater continuity of style in Scriabin’s works. Although my basic argument is shared by Salley, for the most part I analyze different features and works. Salley’s dissertation also supports my opinion that Scriabin’s early works provide the foundation for his later music: Keith Phillip Salley, “Scriabin the Progressive: Elements of Modernism in the Early Works of Alexander Scriabin” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2007). In another recent dissertation, Kutnowski argues that Scriabin’s early music is more mature and distinctive than typically acknowledged: Martin Kutnowski, “Harmony, Voice Leading and Phrase Rhythm in Three Early Piano Preludes by Scriabin: A Schenkerian Perspective” (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2003). I will indicate where my findings are similar to the analyses of Kutnowski or Salley.

more modernist music. Some theorists have placed Scriabin's late works in the realm of atonality, while others view Scriabin's later techniques as a type of 'proto-serialism'. This position was pioneered by the Polish musicologist Zofia Lissa, who determined that a central chord could be freely transposed without a functional link to adjacent sonorities, "thus establish[ing] independence of the twelve tones and freedom from the major/minor system for S[cri]abin's works."³ Scriabin's pitch materials after 1903 have been compared with synthetic or non-tonal scales, for example by George Perle. Perle has analyzed Scriabin's later compositions as structures built from octatonic scales.⁴ These scales can be altered to heptatonic scales, whole-tone patterns and twelve-tone master scales. Perle views these structures as having cyclic interval relations, which allow for symmetry and greater pitch equality, and could have led to a twelve-tone method, such as Schoenberg's.⁵ In another study, James Baker uses Schenkerian analysis and set theory to demonstrate Scriabin's transition from tonality to atonality.⁶ Other theorists, such as Lissa, have attempted to explain Scriabin's more experimental harmonies in terms of superposed fourths.⁷

The 'mystic' chord is frequently referenced in theoretical discussions of Scriabin's middle- and late-period music. The structural function of this hexachord is debated, but it is often analyzed as a dominant seventh or ninth with altered and/or added non-chord tones. As the sonority can be interpreted differently depending on context, enharmonic spelling, or register distribution, and as it cannot be captured by a traditional harmonic label, it is easiest to interpret in terms of set theory. This analytical system creates pitch class sets (pc sets) by arranging

³ Roy Guenther, "Varvara Dernova's System of Analysis of the Music of Skryabin," in *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music* (UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, 1983), 172.

⁴ An octatonic scale consists of eight pitches and alternates between whole-steps and half-steps.

⁵ George Perle, "Scriabin's Self Analysis," *Music Analysis* 3, no. 2 (July 1984): 101-22.

⁶ Baker, *The Music of Alexander Scriabin*. Baker feels that Scriabin began the transition in 1903 and was completely immersed in atonality around 1910 (vii). Unless otherwise indicated, the references to Baker in this chapter are from his book *The Music of Alexander Scriabin*.

⁷ Baker, x, 99; Guenther states that many scholars recognize quartal sonorities in Scriabin's music, 169.

groups of pitch classes (pcs) into the most compact (normal) order. Once in normal order, the intervals between the first pitch and each succeeding pitch are measured in terms of semitones. The resulting sequence of numbers is called prime form, which can be applied as a label to any transposition or inversion. The prime form for the ‘mystic’ chord is (0 1 3 5 7 9), and it is referred to as set 6-34.⁸ Example 3.1 shows a ‘mystic’ chord followed by its prime form, inversion, and a structural arrangement of the inversion. In prime form this chord closely resembles a whole-tone scale (0 2 4 6 8 10), or set 6-35, and the notes can be arranged into various dominant-sounding sonorities. Baker identifies one common appearance of the ‘mystic’ chord as a whole-tone dominant chord sounded above a tonic root.⁹ It was originally believed that the ‘mystic’ chord first appeared in *Prometheus* Op. 60, but it has been found in Scriabin’s works as early as Op. 32¹⁰ and is a common feature of Scriabin’s works from Op. 32 onward.

Prime Form (0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9) **Inversion** (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9)

Example 3.1 – A basic structure for the mystic chord is seen on the left. The single staff shows the same chord converted into prime form and its inversion. On the right is a chord arrangement of the inversion.

Although Scriabin’s formative compositions are more clearly tonal than his later music, at times they can be challenging to analyze with traditional harmonic methods. Therefore, some of the analytical techniques that are applied to his later music can be utilized to evaluate the less

⁸ Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne, *Tonal Harmony with an Introduction to Twentieth Century Music*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 511-519, 557-560. The first pitch class is numbered 0. The label 6-34 comes from Allen Forte’s set names for pc sets. The ‘mystic’ chord is analyzed as 6-34 by Baker, 83, 99-100.

⁹ Baker, 100. This arrangement can also be thought of as a dominant ninth with a raised fifth, over a tonic root.

¹⁰ Baker, 99-100; Swan, *Scriabin*, 86-99.

conventional aspects of Scriabin's formative music. These techniques also illuminate traits in Scriabin's early music that have commonalities with his later compositional style from 1903 onward. Two analytical approaches that combine traditional and modern methods are those by Varvara Dernova and James Baker. Both methods offer interpretations for the unconventional aspects of Scriabin's music, while demonstrating his connection to late-Romantic tonality.

Dernova was a Russian musicologist whose system for analyzing Scriabin's music was first published in 1968 before being further elaborated in her 1974 dissertation, "The Harmony of Scriabin," and in other publications. Her methods and her viewpoint on Scriabin's compositional structure are downplayed by some theorists such as Baker, but her ideas nonetheless offer valuable insights into Scriabin's harmonic organization. My understanding of Dernova's system is drawn from Roy Guenther's English translation and interpretation of her analytical approach.¹¹ For Guenther, Dernova's explanations of Scriabin's middle-period works "are not fundamentally opposed to those of other analysts."¹² Nevertheless, her observation of recurring features resulted in the development of some distinctive concepts.

According to Dernova, after the Third Piano Sonata, Op. 23 (1897) Scriabin frequently uses an altered fifth or added sixth in dominant harmonies, and his most common root movement is by tritone or major third. He often builds chords on a lowered second scale degree; when these flat II chords prepare the dominant, tritone root movement occurs. Throughout his middle period, Scriabin's harmonies evolve to dominant-structured chords (ex. 3.2)¹³ above non-dominant roots. Connecting "two dominant-like chords a tritone apart becomes a virtual style trait"¹⁴ of the later works, which enhances prolongation and avoids resolution. Dernova observes that beginning

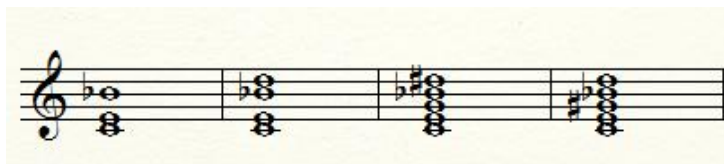
¹¹ See footnote 2 in this chapter.

¹² Guenther, 176. An overview of Dernova's accomplishments is found in Guenther, 175-6.

¹³ Chords with dominant seventh, or major/minor seventh interval structure. Above the chord root is a major third and minor seventh, and there may be additional chord tones, altered or not. Guenther, 176,180.

¹⁴ Guenther, 177.

with the 2 Morceaux for piano, Op. 59 (1910), Scriabin's harmonic language consists solely of dominant-structured chords.



Example 3.2 – Examples of dominant-structured chords. Any chord with a dominant seventh-like structure, but not necessarily built on the fifth scale degree.

From 1903 to 1910 Scriabin progressively moved further away from cadences to the tonic. First, he added non-chord tones that weaken the tonic resolution. He progressed to concluding on a dominant above a tonic root, and eventually, completely avoided a final tonic resolution. Scriabin's reluctance to provide a clear tonic is prominent in the works from Op. 50 to Op. 59 (1906-1910); the last work that concludes on a tonic is *Prometheus* (1909-1910).¹⁵

The prevalence of dominant-structured chords and of tritone bass movement inspired Derrona's theory of the "tritone nucleus," which allows the possibility of two dominants and two tonics a tritone apart. Its source is the recurring V7 chord with a lowered fifth in Scriabin's music (V7 flat5), which results in a chord with two tritones (ex. 3.3). If this chord is spelled enharmonically in second inversion, its new, expected resolution is a tritone away from the original tonic. The "unity of these two chords takes the place of the need for tonic resolution"¹⁶ as the tritone nucleus implies a tonic.

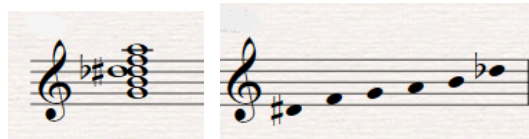


Example 3.3 – Derrona's tritone nucleus. V7 with a lowered fifth (m. 1) followed by an enharmonic spelling (m. 2). The expected V7-I resolutions of each chord (mm. 3 and 4) have roots a tritone away: F and C flat (m. 5).

¹⁵ The information in this paragraph is taken from Guenther, 176-80.

¹⁶ Guenther, 182. The tritone nucleus concept is similar to tritone substitution of a V7 chord.

Example 3.4 – Dernova’s hexachord in compact form, and the chord notes arranged in an enharmonic, whole-tone scale.



The concept of a tritone nucleus, however, is not sufficient to explain all harmonic movement. Accordingly, Dernova expands the basic four-note chord from example 3.3 by adding a raised fifth and major ninth, resulting in a chord built from the six notes of an enharmonic, whole-tone scale (ex. 3.4).¹⁷ This whole-tone hexachord is then sequenced to demonstrate how it can support harmonic movement. A ‘major enharmonic sequence’ (ex. 3.5) is found by transposing the chord down a tritone (to its tritone nucleus) and up a major third until six¹⁸ enharmonically-equivalent chords are obtained. This sequence allows for harmonic movement by tritone or major third. Dernova also explains how Scriabin can shift between the two major enharmonic sequences through a ‘minor sequence’ or a ‘functional sequence’. The minor sequence moves by minor third (ex. 3.6), whereas the functional alternates between tritone and perfect fourth movement (ex. 3.7), similar to a traditional circle-of-fifths progression. Although Dernova’s sequences will not be used in this study, it is important to understand that they demonstrate Scriabin’s use of tonality, even with less conventional harmonies.¹⁹

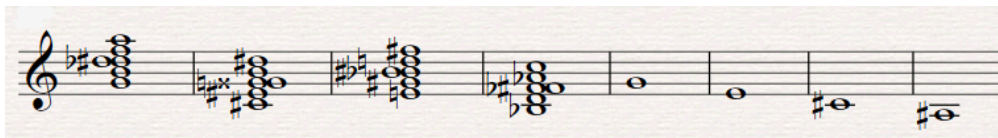


Example 3.5 – The two major enharmonic sequences, each using notes from one whole-tone scale.

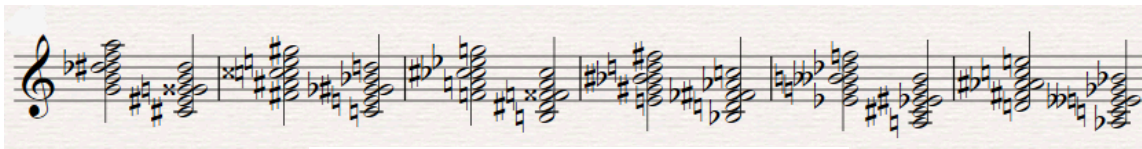
¹⁷ Replacing the raised fifth in Dernova’s hexachord with a sixth would result in the ‘mystic’ chord.

¹⁸ Due to the whole-tone construction of the hexachord, only two pitch combinations are available and thus, two major enharmonic sequences. Each hexachord, however, can be respelled so that each pitch functions as a root.

¹⁹ I constructed examples 3.5-3.7 using diagrams and descriptions of the sequences from Guenther’s text, 184-191.



Example 3.6 – Minor enharmonic sequence.



Example 3.7 – Functional Sequence.

Dernova suggests that Scriabin uses the hexachord as a harmonic and structural model, but she does not “claim that Scriabin used it as a fundamental structure.”²⁰ Scriabin’s harmonies do not require all six pitches, and notes from the hexachord can be altered. It is significant, however, that the lowered fifth is prevalent in many harmonies and that this hexachord is similar to whole-tone-based structures. Moreover, Dernova notes that Scriabin typically arranges his dominant-structured chords from the bass up, as root, seventh and then third. Alternatively, placing the lowered fifth between the root and seventh generates a tritone at the bottom and therefore, an ambiguous root. Sometimes the two chords of a tritone nucleus are combined into a more complex chord with the ambiguous tritone in the bass called a “summary dominant.”²¹

Dernova’s system supports the theory of quartal harmony in Scriabin’s music in regard to chord distribution, rather than chord structure. Her theories justify the appearance of synthetic or exotic scales from a harmonic standpoint by arguing that the basic chord, tritone nucleus, and sequences often result in symmetrical harmonic patterns and even symmetrical melodic organization. Guenther uses Dernova’s system to analyze Scriabin’s music and to explain large, overall structures governed by the tritone nucleus.²² He finds relatively balanced ABAB forms. Dernova shows that Scriabin’s late music was connected to nineteenth-century tonal techniques,

²⁰ Guenther, 210.

²¹ Notes from one chord are sustained and combined with pitches from the following harmony. Guenther, 188.

²² Guenther analyzes Op. 59 no. 2 and Op. 71 no. 2 on pp. 193-207.

while finding “a means of squeezing yet one more expressive language out of what seemed to some in his day to be a totally depleted tonal system.”²³

By contrast, James Baker’s *The Music of Alexander Scriabin* focuses on Scriabin’s transition from tonality to atonality and the traits found during and after the transition. Principally utilizing Schenkerian analysis, Baker demonstrates how the transitional works of 1903-1910 still function within a tonal framework.²⁴ It is interesting, however, that despite different approaches and contrasting theories, Baker uncovers features in Scriabin’s music also found by Dernova. For example, Baker finds frequent occurrences of flat II that often appear before V or connect distantly related harmonies. He notes that Scriabin’s transitional works avoid clear cadences to the tonic, and that Scriabin distorts the tonic through addition of non-chord tones, unresolved dissonances, or chord inversion. Scriabin progresses from blurring to avoiding tonic conclusions, and he occasionally evades tonic resolutions throughout an entire composition. Furthermore, Baker acknowledges the importance of augmented sixth chords for dominant preparation or for linear voice leading.²⁵

The most intriguing commonality is Baker’s observation of recurring French+6th chords that function as dominant sevenths with lowered fifths (V7 flat5). These chords are structurally equivalent to the basic chord of Dernova’s tritone nucleus (see ex. 3.3), but Baker argues that Dernova’s explanation of this chord structure gives equal weight to two tonics, which he finds problematic.²⁶ Regardless of interpretation, Baker observes that the frequent V7 flat5 chords typically move by tritone. He analyzes this movement as shifting between V7 flat5 and flat II7 flat5. For Baker, the “potential for enharmonic reinterpretation” of V7 flat5 demonstrates

²³ Guenther, 213.

²⁴ According to Baker, the Fifth Piano Sonata is Scriabin’s last tonal work, ix.

²⁵ Baker, 1-13.

²⁶ Baker, 4 and 28-29. By Guenther’s reasoning, however, Dernova does not argue for two tonics. She sees two equal dominants with two tonic possibilities, but after evaluation one tonic always asserts itself.

Scriabin's use of enharmonic spellings to "indicate the direction of a progression" or to obscure harmonies. Despite his disagreement with Dernova's tritone nucleus, Baker admits as well that Scriabin occasionally exploits a dual modality.²⁷

Schenkerian and harmonic analyses also uncover structural features of Scriabin's transitional music. Baker determines that Scriabin's transitional works adhere to *Ursatz* forms,²⁸ even if the *Ursatz* structure is occasionally incomplete, with some elements only implied, making it less obvious than the *Ursatz* in more traditional, tonal works. Scriabin's *Ursätze* are typically obscured with register transfer, overlapping, and linear intervallic patterns (sequencing). Sequencing is frequently used to prolong the fundamental structure, as are unusual harmonies and dissonant elements, such as flat II, which often prolongs V. Baker's Schenkerian analyses also reveal that Scriabin repeats musical material, either literally or transposed, and uses "melodic or harmonic motives at various levels of structure."²⁹ Therefore, the same melodic ideas and harmonic progressions appear in the foreground, middleground and background, creating greater unity. Furthermore, Baker shows that Scriabin often employs regular phrases, and balanced or symmetrical subject matter.³⁰ An example of symmetry would be a composition with two main sections, each constructed of two periods, and each period made up of two four-bar phrases: [(4+4)(4+4)][(4+4)(4+4)]. Schenkerian analysis reveals that irregular and incomplete *Ursatz* forms can be built symmetrically when harmonic or melodic background

²⁷ Baker, 4-6 and 14-16.

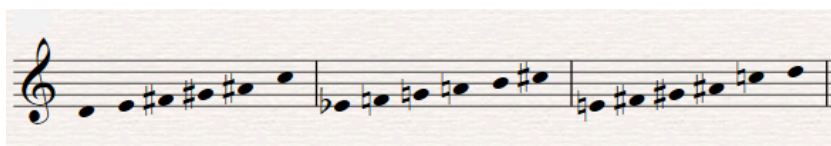
²⁸ *Ursatz* is the term used by Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935) to refer to the fundamental structure, or background, of a tonal composition. An *Ursatz* is a reduction of a composition to a basic outline: a fundamental line (*Ursinie*), which asserts a primary tone and then slowly descends to the tonic over the span of the composition, and the bass, which provides an overall statement of I-(III)-V-I. A background *Ursatz* shows that a piece functions tonally. For more detail see Allen Forte and Steven E. Gilbert, *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1982), 131-141, or Baker, 44.

²⁹ Baker, 74.

³⁰ In his summary of Dernova's technique, Guenther also displays balanced large-scale structures, but by applying Dernova's analytical system.

progressions from the first half are mirrored in the second.³¹ Scriabin also achieves balance by revisiting the opening material before the conclusion, even in through-composed forms.³²

The ideas of symmetry and balance can be connected with the whole-tone scale, an element on which Baker consistently places structural importance in Scriabin's works. He notices that Scriabin's pitch collections regularly form whole-tone scales, or that harmonies combine to create 'whole-tone aggregates'. A common occurrence is V7 flat5, which contains four members of a whole-tone scale. This chord is often prolonged through tonal progressions that create a whole-tone aggregate. When transposed or sequenced the whole-tone scale can either demonstrate full pitch retention, if transposed an even number of steps, or complete pitch contrast, if transposed an odd number of steps (ex. 3.8). Baker sees a shift from one whole-tone scale to its complement as a "colouristic shift of tonal planes."³³



Example 3.8 – A whole tone scale transposed up T1 (odd number) and T2 (even number).

Baker argues that Scriabin's late-tonal³⁴ structures, though determined by tonality, employ less conventional features that are better analyzed with set theory. By applying set theory, Baker finds that Scriabin's transitional works often have recurring pc sets in a single composition; he states that the "late tonal music is saturated with transpositionally and inversionally equivalent sets."³⁵ I feel that these recurring pc sets could be related to Scriabin's

³¹ See Baker's analysis of "Nuances" Op. 56 no. 3, 68-74.

³² Baker, 17. The material in this paragraph is found in the same source, 17-20 and 21-81.

³³ Baker, 10. Whole-tone aggregates and prolongation are discussed on pp. 28-32 and 41-3. The importance of the whole-tone scale and symmetry in Scriabin's works, also reflected in Dernova's system, can be connected to Perle's theory of cyclic interval structures (Perle, 118).

³⁴ Baker also uses 'late-tonal' in reference to the transitional works.

³⁵ Baker, 84.

predilection for repeating musical material, providing a type of motivic connection. According to Baker, Scriabin often transposes by intervals that result in maximal or minimal pitch invariance (i.e., either retaining the highest or lowest possible number of pitches).³⁶ Furthermore, Scriabin frequently uses sets that at certain levels of transposition contain all pitch classes (pcs), such as set 6-35 (the whole-tone scale), or that produce a subset with only one new pitch class.³⁷ I consider Scriabin's retention of many or all pitches when shifting 'sonorities' or sets in his late-tonal music an extension of common-tone modulation. Baker also notices instances of pc sets overlapping each other, which I regard as a type of polytonality.

By analyzing nineteen pieces from 1903-1910, Baker determines which sets are employed and which are 'significant'. He also compares interval class vectors to locate structural patterns between the most utilized sets.³⁸ Baker finds that many sets are whole-tone related, while one of the most predominant sets in the transitional music is 6-34, the so-called "mystic chord." Baker demonstrates that 6-34 forms the primary nexus of a set complex and shares structural properties with many of Scriabin's significant sets.³⁹ Baker also finds that the whole-tone scale is fundamental to the structure of Scriabin's significant sets in the transitional music. In fact, the mystic chord, which "epitomizes the structural premises underlying Scriabin's transition from tonality to atonality,"⁴⁰ shows an amalgamation of the two systems by having a largely whole-tone structure appearing in tonal contexts.

Dernova and Baker's analyses reveal important features of Scriabin's middle and late-period music. From 1903 onwards, Scriabin remained a formalist, concerned with structure and

³⁶ Baker, 92-5.

³⁷ Baker, 111-2. Baker calls the retention of pcs from a single whole-tone scale or subset *whole-tone invariance* (95).

³⁸ IC vectors indicate the number of occurrences of each interval class between pcs in a set. Forte, 13-18.

³⁹ Complete comprehension of set theory terminology is not necessary for this thesis, but through set theory, Baker uncovers the structural importance of the whole-tone scale in Scriabin's transitional music, and that the most significant chord derived from this scale is the mystic chord. For detail on these conclusions see Baker, 92-103 and 104-128, particularly 121-5. For set theory terminology: Forte, 209-11; Baker, 271-274.

⁴⁰ Baker, 128. Also discussed on p. 103.

balance. Even his borderline-atonal works typically adhere to traditional forms and sometimes display symmetrical construction. Scriabin often repeats material, either literally or transposed, and he uses sequencing. Pc sets also recur throughout a composition unaltered, inverted, or transposed, and the set forms often retain pitch content at certain transpositions. Repeated material can be motivic in nature and appear in various levels of the music. He frequently utilizes dominant-structured chords, tritone root movement, flat II, V7 flat5, and enharmonic spellings. Scriabin avoids clear tonic statements or cadences, while his voicing, pitch arrangements, and use of altered or non-chord tones can obscure tonal elements. Nonetheless, less functional harmonies are often the result of careful voice leading and belong to larger, linear progressions. His less traditional gestures can also be connected to synthetic or exotic scales, specifically the whole-tone scale. Furthermore, both Dernova and Baker acknowledge a degree of ‘polytonality’. Baker occasionally finds two different sonorities or sets occurring simultaneously, while Dernova argues for combined harmonies with a ‘summary dominant’. The chord of V7 flat5 also implies a dual modality, with its enharmonic possibilities.

ANALYZING THE MUSIC OF SCRIBIN’S FORMATIVE PERIOD

The following analyses of Scriabin’s formative works expose traits similar to those uncovered by Dernova and Baker in his later works. Moreover, although Scriabin’s formative works are more clearly tonal than his middle and late-period works, analysis reveals intriguing complexities. A detailed examination of Op. 8 no. 12, Op. 11 no. 1, Op. 11 no. 2, and the first movement of the Second Sonata, Op. 19, reveals unconventional elements that challenge traditional harmonic structure and are surprisingly difficult to analyze.

Example 3.9 – Op. 11 no. 1, mm. 1-4

A. Scriabine, Op. 11. Cahier I.

Vivace. M. M. ♩ = 63-76.

C: V7 ————— I V7/IV ————— IV

The Prelude Op. 11 no. 1 provides an excellent example of these analytical difficulties (ex. 3.9). The lack of accidentals in the opening measures and the final C major chord suggest the key of C major, but the harmonic sub-structure is not straightforward. For example, the first note in the bass is C2 moving to G, which implies an opening tonic statement, but except for C5 on the downbeat of m. 1, the remaining pitches from the first quintuplet support V9 without the third. Therefore, the first quintuplet of the Prelude provides an incomplete V9 over a tonic pedal, simultaneously suggesting tonic and dominant harmony. The harmony is not clarified until the complete tonic at the end of the first phrase in m. 2. The opening harmony can be interpreted as a weak dominant that provides an incomplete V-I cadence with no leading-tone.

The second phrase, which begins with the upbeat to m. 3 (ex. 3.9), transposes the first phrase material up a perfect fourth while retaining the bass C. The transposition makes F major (key of IV) the goal of the phrase, with C now functioning as the root of V/IV rather than as a tonic pedal. The V/IV harmony cadences to IV at the end of the phrase, demonstrating a clear V – I relationship in F. The harmonic movement from the second phrase validates the interpretation of the first phrase as a statement of V – I in the tonic key.

Throughout the remainder of this Prelude, determining the primary harmonies is equally challenging. Each quintuplet or consecutive quintuplets consists of five, or sometimes six different pitches that offer two or three possible tonal arrangements, each of which creates a different harmony with non-chord tones. Furthermore, strong melodic or bass pitches do not necessarily corroborate the harmony implied by the remaining notes, as seen in the opening quintuplet. Often, it is only by examining larger sections and voice leading that the most logical harmonies are clarified. The absence of harsh dissonance also makes these pitch combinations sound more complex than simple triads or seventh chords: every note seems structural. A reasonable explanation for this consonance is a modal implication.

Example 3.10a **Example 3.10b** **Example 3.10c** **Example 3.10d**

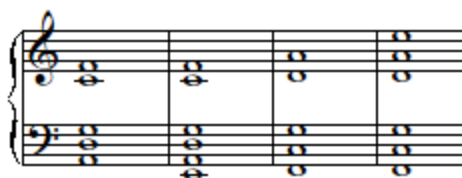
Examples 3.10a and **3.10b** show the pentatonic scales, or set class 5-35 (0 2 4 7 9), starting on F and B flat. **Examples 3.10c** and **3.10d** are the same scales expanded to set 6-32.

Scriabin may have used a pentatonic model as a structural basis for this Prelude.⁴¹ The first and third quintuplets from the first phrase and the quintuplet over mm. 8-9 contain all the notes of a pentatonic scale, or set 5-35, on F (ex. 3.10a). The first and third quintuplets of the second phrase form set 5-35 on B flat (ex. 3.10b). Except for the occasional E, Scriabin returns to set 5-35 on F when the opening material is restated and elaborated in mm. 19-24. If we extend the pitch-class group to include all the notes of the first phrase (ex. 3.9), then it can be interpreted as a pentatonic scale with an added whole-tone at the end, or as set 6-32 beginning on C (ex. 3.10c). If we think in terms of set 6-32, then the second phrase is constructed from 6-32 on F (ex.

⁴¹ Salley also notices the pentatonic structure, but he views it as the combination of two [0257] tetrachords, which in turn are each created by two trichords of [027] (50-54, 135-141). He focuses on the tetrachord and trichord construction.

3.10d), while the end of m. 4 to m. 7 returns to 6-32 on C. Nonetheless, the pc sets more often emphasize the pentatonic scale and therefore, 6-32 should be thought of as an elaborated pentatonic scale.

This pentatonic construction explicates the difficulty behind determining a chord root in these quintuplets: each note could be structural. It also offers an explanation for the absent third in most of the V7 statements. The pentatonic scale can only create certain complete harmonies. Furthermore, the main harmonies emphasized in the overall tonal scheme are C (I), F (IV), D (ii), and A(vi). G is often prolonged as the dominant. Although these harmonic relationships are common in tonal music, it is interesting that the roots outline the notes of the predominant pentatonic scale in this Prelude.⁴² Therefore, the use of the pentatonic scale also demonstrates a degree of motivic connection between the melodic and harmonic aspects of this Prelude.⁴³ Moreover, the notes of a pentatonic scale can be arranged into superposed perfect fourths or fifths (ex. 3.11), and a fourth-motive often appears in the right hand line (see ex. 3.9). The note elaborating 5-35 to create 6-32 adds one more perfect fourth (or perfect fifth, depending on ascending or descending pitch arrangement) to the pentatonic fourth arrangement.



Example 3.11 – Sets 5-35 and 6-32 from examples 3.10a and 3.10c expanded into fourths and fifths.

The pentatonic scale and set 6-32 are also found throughout the first movement of Scriabin's Second Sonata Op. 19 in G# minor. At m. 23 the key is B major and the notes on the

⁴² Salley also finds that the opening pentachord is outlined throughout Op. 11 no. 1, but he views this relationship as a result of 'target' notes of the predominant tetrachords in this piece. Salley, 140-1. He does not claim a motivic connection.

⁴³ Baker recognizes levels of motivic coherence in Scriabin's transitional works, 74.

downbeat can be reordered into fourths: F#-B-E. When the pitches from beats one and two are combined and placed in normal order, they form a pentatonic scale on E. If the D# from beat three is added, the result is 6-32 starting on B (ex. 3-12). Although the second and third beats of the measure emphasize ii9 after the pedal change, the B and F# are also structurally important because they suggest a resolution to tonic harmony after the V chord in m. 22. Therefore, every note in m. 23 contributes to a richer sound. Measure 27 is similar to m. 23 (ex. 3.13). The five pitches from beat one can be arranged into 5-35 on A or a collection of superposed perfect fourths starting on C#. The F# and A resolve outward to the G# on beat two, but they seem to linger through the IV harmony. The pitches from the entire measure construct 6-32 beginning on E. The same pattern is repeated at m. 28 and again, in E major, at mm. 103 and 104.

Example 3.12 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 23-24, and notation of m. 23 into set 5-35 and 6-32.

Example 3.13 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 27-28, followed by arrangements of mm. 27-28 into set 5-35 and 6-32, and an arrangement of 5-35 into perfect fourths.

A more prominent use of 5-35 and 6-32 occurs in mm. 45-56, as each measure is constructed from one of the two sets (ex. 3.14 and 3.15). Measure 45 contains the notes of set 6-

32 on F#, or 5-35 on B with an appoggiatura A# in the melody. Set 6-32 on F# is the basis for mm. 47 and 51, while mm. 49 and 53 consist only of pitches from 5-35 on B (ex. 3.15). Measures 46, 48 and 50 have a V harmony on the final beat, but the first two beats are constructed from 5-35 on E. Measures 48, 52 and 54 each have one D#, which could indicate set 6-32 for the first two beats instead of 5-35 on E, but the D# functions like a melodic passing note. I also interpret the A# in the first two beats of m. 50 as a passing note or an anticipation of the V chord on beat three. The last two measures of this section (mm. 55-56) contain only the notes of set 5-35 on B before adding an A# on beat three (3.14). The A# changes the harmonic colour of beat three, and does not sound like an extension of 5-35 to 6-32.⁴⁴

Example 3.14 – Set 5-35 and 6-32 in Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 45-48. Embellishing notes circled in red.

The above measures could be analyzed harmonically with multiple non-chord tones, but as the combination of pitches frequently results in set 5-35 or 6-32, the use of these two sets

⁴⁴ See Appendix E for full score.

seems to be a conscious choice for Scriabin.⁴⁵ Each note appears to be a member of a more complex sonority. Scriabin also distributes the pitches throughout the register so that they function as a colourful, consonant group. This consonance can be heard by sustaining the notes of m. 53 (ex. 3.15) with the pedal. Therefore, it is plausible that Scriabin sometimes used specific pc sets to generate compositional material and non-traditional sonorities in his formative works.

Example 3.15 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 53 and 55.

The use of sets 5-35 and 6-32 in these earlier compositions establishes a stylistic connection with Scriabin's transitional works. Baker finds 5-35 and 6-32 in Scriabin's transitional works, and 5-35 is significant in Op. 32 no. 1, a transitional work from 1903.⁴⁶ Both 5-35 and 6-32 can be arranged into superposed perfect fourths, which is a feature of Scriabin's chord structures from 1903 onward. Also, these sets are related to the whole-tone scale and mystic chord. If the second half of set 6-32 were transposed up a semi-tone, or T1, the result would be a whole-tone scale. When both set 6-32 and the mystic chord (set 6-34) are placed in prime form, they consist of four whole steps and one semitone, and the outside pitches are separated by T9 (compare ex. 3.1 with 3.10c). Set 5-35 is a subset of 6-32⁴⁷ and therefore shares

⁴⁵ Although these measures can be parsed into tonal harmonies with non-chord tones obscuring the harmonic function, set theory reveals that Scriabin's chord and non-chord tones often combine into the same pitch groups. Set theory also provides a succinct method of discussing these pitch groups.

⁴⁶ Baker, 108.

⁴⁷ All the notes of 5-35 are contained within 6-32, making 5-35 a subset of 6-32.

similar features with the whole-tone scale and mystic chord. Perhaps these pc sets were precursors to Scriabin's mystic chord and to his preference for whole-tone structures.

Tonal Ambiguity

Scriabin's nineteenth-century compositions can be tonally ambiguous. One way in which Scriabin achieves this ambiguity is by avoiding strong statements of tonic harmony. This feature is prominent in the Prelude, Op. 11 no. 2 in A minor, one of Scriabin's most chromatic nineteenth-century works. The first clear tonic in Op. 11 no. 2 appears in m. 4 in first inversion, and the second is the cadential 6/4 at m. 65, which carries dominant function.⁴⁸ A root-position tonic triad is not provided until the final chord of the Prelude. In the first movement of Op. 19, Scriabin begins in G# minor, but the opening chord is missing a third. When the mode is clarified two beats later, the chord is in first inversion and obscured with an added sixth. The next two tonic statements are in second inversion and lead to a strong V chord in m. 10; however, Scriabin does not resolve to the tonic before changing the key and theme in m. 13.

Tonic statements are also avoided through incomplete or obscured V – I cadences. In addition to the blurred V – I cadence at the opening of Op. 11 no. 1,⁴⁹ a complete perfect cadence is absent throughout the entire Prelude. Although the strong V7 in m. 8 anticipates a tonic triad and the bass G moves as expected to the tonic root (ex. 3.16), the tonic triad is clouded by the non-chord tone A in the treble, while the rest of the quintuplet supports a V7 harmony. Therefore, mm. 8, 9 and the first part of 10 function as a prolongation of V7, which then cadences to a clear tonic in the middle of m. 10, but without an obvious leading-tone. The next V

⁴⁸ An A minor chord is outlined in m. 28, but the stronger key area in this section is E minor. Therefore, the chord is acting as a iv7 in the new key, rather than as a tonic. Additional tonic statements have a secondary harmony overlapping and obscuring the function, such as in m. 1.

⁴⁹ See ex. 3.9, p. 101.

– I cadence comes at the end of m. 18 after four measures of dominant preparation, but the tonic is incomplete and masked by non-chord tones. The final cadence of this Prelude has a strong bass statement of V – I with an octave G to octave C, but the remaining pitches are missing from the dominant chord. None of these cadences provide a complete V – I resolution.

— I V7/vi

Example 3.16 – Measures 5-14 of Op. 11 no. 1, with analysis of mm. 8-10.

Scriabin also creates tonal ambiguity by concealing the tonal centre through modulations. In the 68-measure Prelude Op. 11 no. 2, the key changes eleven times, as outlined in Table 3.1. He modulates to foreign keys that do not support a prolongation of A minor. The strong tonic-dominant relationship of A minor - E major is also absent. The overall key area is difficult to pinpoint until the final tonic. The first movement of Op. 19 does not modulate as frequently as Op. 11 no. 2, but Table 3.2 displays how the modulations confuse the overall tonal centre. The exposition and recapitulation initially suggest an overall key of G# minor, but only twenty-four measures function in this key throughout the movement, twelve of which are the retransition, in

comparison to forty-seven measures in B major and forty-eight in E major. E major asserts itself throughout the recapitulation, but the movement avoids a strong E major cadential resolution by concluding with a long tonic pedal in that key. The virtuosic, diatonic passages above an E pedal make the E tonality suspend above the piano before dissipating into nothing. Therefore, it is difficult to identify decisively the tonal centre of this movement. Instead, one can surmise a dual tonic of G# minor and E major—a possible polytonality. This hypothesis is supported by the main key areas throughout the movement, which join the notes of an E major and G# minor triad: E - G# - B - D# (E flat).

Table 3.1 – Op. 11 no. 2 Modulations

m.1	m. 5	m. 8	m. 21	m. 26	m. 37
A minor	E minor	A minor	G# minor	E minor	G major
m. 41	m. 45	m. 49	m. 53	m.57	
G minor	B flat major	A minor	D minor	A minor	

Table 3.2 – Op. 19 Structure and Key Areas

Exposition	Theme 1	mm. 1 – 10	G# minor
		mm. 11 – 12	D# minor
	Theme 2	mm. 13 – 57	B major
Development	Development	mm. 58 – 59	B major
		mm. 60 – 74	E flat major
	Retransition	mm. 75 – 86	G # minor
Recapitulation	Theme 1	mm. 87 – 88	G # minor
	Theme 2	mm. 89 – 136	E major

The use of non-chord tones is another way in which Scriabin obscures tonality. This feature is apparent in Op. 11 no. 2, as the entire Prelude contains non-chord elements and dissonances that mask the harmonies. In m. 16 (ex. 3.18), C, A#, A, and F are non-chord tones and the V7 harmony is barely discernible. It is only by playing and listening to this measure that

the V7 becomes more apparent. The entire section in mm. 33-48 is embellished with chromatic and diatonic non-chord tones. Measures 33-40 begin in E minor, and by m. 37 G major is established. Yet due to the chromaticism, it is difficult to determine where E minor ends and G major begins. The entire phrase is repeated up a third in G minor and B flat major in mm. 41-48. The most intriguing example of non-chord tone chromaticism occurs in m. 8. If the preceding F# from m. 7 and the following G and C# from m. 9 are combined with the nine different pitches from m. 8 (ex. 3.17),⁵⁰ the result is all twelve tones in succession. This highly chromatic moment pushes the limits of tonality and blurs the underlying harmonies.

a: $\frac{V7(\text{TT sub})}{V} \quad V_{b5}^7 \quad V7/iv$

a: $V7$ _____

Example 3.17 – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 7-9. The twelve successive tones are outlined in red.

Example 3.18 – Op. 11 no. 2, m. 16.

Allegretto. M. M. $\text{♩} = 138$.

a: $ii^{\circ 7}(i) \text{ — } V_{b5}^7 \text{ of } V \quad (V)ii^{\circ 7} \text{ — } V_2^4 i^6$

Example 3.19 – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 1-4.

Scriabin sometimes creates harmonic ambiguity by having two harmonies functioning simultaneously, a feature illustrated by the complex and vague harmony at the outset of Op. 11 no. 2. The first two notes of this Prelude provide a harmonic minor seventh built on B,

⁵⁰ TT sub in ex. 3.18 is an abbreviation for tritone substitution. See note 50.

suggesting ii half-dim7 as the initial harmony. This hypothesis is strengthened at the end of m. 1 with a D in the bass and F in the treble, which complete the chord, and also by movement to V7 flat5 in m. 2 (ex. 3.19). Nonetheless, the note sustained throughout m. 1 is the tonic root, A, and the notes not included in the ii half-dim7 belong to the tonic triad. Therefore, this measure has four notes belonging to the tonic, and four belonging to the ii half-dim7. The tonic is an equally logical choice as an initial harmony, due to the sustained A throughout m.1 and the bass B that seems to resolve to C. The melodic E and C in the right hand, however, function more as a lower and upper neighbour to the following F and B. To add further complexity, the notes sounding on the last beat of m. 1 form a chord of iv7.

The first phrase extends from m. 1 to m. 4. Measure 3 provides a clear ii half-dim7 and the phrase ends with a tonic in first inversion. Therefore, the first phrase is a prolongation of the tonic, which could strengthen the argument for a tonic harmony in m.1, if it were not for the equal prominence of ii7. Consequently, m. 1 should be considered as having two chords functioning simultaneously: i and ii7. Except for m. 21 in G sharp minor, each repetition of the opening phrase—m. 5 in E minor, m. 17 in A minor, m. 49 in A minor and m. 53 in d minor—opens with the ambiguous, overlapping harmonies found in m. 1. At m. 32 in E minor, the V7 and tonic chord also overlap. B, the root of V, is the common tone between the two harmonies, but each beat also adds one non-chord element belonging to the tonic. The tonic in the next measure seems to be anticipated within the V7 of m. 32.

Overlapping harmonies occur in Scriabin's other formative compositions. For example, in Op. 11 no. 1 overlapping harmonies are exploited in mm. 1-2 when some notes suggest tonic harmony, while the remaining pitches suggest dominant (ex. 3.9). Overlapping harmonies also appear in the first movement of the Second Sonata. At m. 110 the primary harmony is V7, but

equal weight is given to the pitches of IV7 (ex. 3.20). The root and third of IV7 are stated more often than the third and fifth of V7, although the surrounding harmonies support V7. In m. 7 of the Etude Op. 8 no. 12, the bass line results in two potential harmonies for the first three beats (ex. 3.21). Due to an F# suspension on the downbeat, the harmonically functioning treble notes are E# and B. In the bass, the D# and Cx combine with the other pitches to create either vii dim7 or ii half-dim7. The fluctuation between D# and Cx is so brief that these two chords seem to occur simultaneously. Furthermore, in this Etude the suspensions and appoggiaturas are often long and form consonant harmonies with the bass. Therefore, in many places, such as m. 7, a suspension or appoggiatura harmony sounds over the underlying harmony.⁵¹

Example 3.20 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 109-111

E: ii7 ————— V7(IV) ————— (I)V7/IV IV

Example 3.21 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 6-8

d#: iv7 ii^{°4}/₂ or vii^{°7} (bII) iv

⁵¹ Baker suggests that Scriabin uses “dual modality” in the transitional works by combining the notes from two adjacent chords to make a thicker harmony (5-6). It was already mentioned that Baker finds instances of two pc sets functioning simultaneously, and that Dernova’s theory of summary dominant suggests polytonality.

Example 3.22 – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 9-17

9

a tempo *cresc.*

a: V_{b5}^7 $V_2^4 / iv (I7)$ bII_4^6 vi_2^4 / bII bII^6

17

dim.

VI (V/bII) V7/V $ii^{\circ 7}$ V7 $ii^{\circ 7} (i)$

Scriabin often exploits chromaticism and tonicization to confuse the tonality through unexpected or unrelated harmonies. At mm. 5-8 of Op. 11 no. 2 the first theme is restated in E minor, but before the new key can be solidified with a cadence, Scriabin modulates back to A minor at mm. 8-9 (ex. 3.17). This modulation is accomplished through a highly chromatic progression: an enharmonic V7 tritone substitution, followed by V7 flat5 and V7/iv. The return to A minor is also obscured with chromaticism. Scriabin begins m. 9 with V/iv before moving to and prolonging flat II (ex. 3.22). A dramatic B7 chord at m. 14 prepares V, but as the tritone substitution⁵² for the dominant of flat II, it also anticipates the latter. Instead, the B7 moves to ii half-dim7, which prepares an embellished V7 in m. 16 that resolves to the same overlapping harmony found in m. 1. Measures 8-20 are best analyzed in A minor, although many of the harmonies are chromatic and tonicize other key areas. Another abrupt change of tonality occurs

⁵² A V7 chord with a root a tritone away from the expected V7 chord can work as a substitute V7 for the given key. This substitution is similar to Derrnova's theory of a tritone nucleus.

at mm. 25-26. A V7 chord in m. 25 anticipates the current tonic of G# minor, but an unexpected, enharmonic C7 appears (ex. 3.26). This chord is an augmented sixth in the new key of E minor, but it is still chromatic in regard to the preceding harmonies. The C7 chord delays establishment of the new key and obscures the current tonality. The tonality is vague throughout most of this Prelude and the overall key area is obfuscated until the final tonic chord.

Example 3.23 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 58-61

B: I ————— E^b: V/iii —————

Example 3.24 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 73-78

E^b: V7 ————— ^bIII ————— g#: ii7

ii^o7 ————— V7 Gmaj V7/VI VI —————

Unexpected harmonies and chromaticism are found in the first movement of Op. 19. After two measures of development the theme is suddenly transposed at m. 60 from B major to

the unrelated key of flat III (D major) without a pivot chord (ex. 3.23). D major, however, does not function as a tonic; instead, it tonicizes the G minor chord in m. 62. Through sequencing, Scriabin reaches F minor in m. 65, which initially appears to be the new tonal centre, but a V7 – I in E flat at mm. 71-72 establishes E flat as the stronger key area and therefore, the function of ii for F minor. At m. 74, the music again moves unexpectedly to flat III, G flat major, before suddenly modulating to G sharp minor (ex. 3.24). The G flat chord functions enharmonically in G# minor as VII, but has no diatonic function in E flat major. After G# minor has been re-established, Scriabin provides a chromatic G major chord in m. 77 (ex. 3.24). The previous harmony can be interpreted as either an enharmonic V7 or augmented sixth, and the augmented sixth resolution is alluded to with the D in the bass, but G major is not a typical resolution for either interpretation. The G major chord is used for colour, as it is unexpected within the current key area. Tonicizations, chromaticism, and avoidance of diatonic harmonies often weaken the tonic and make the key difficult to decipher in Scriabin’s formative compositions.

Voice Leading and Common-tone Pivots

Chromaticism, unexpected chords, overlapping harmonies, and non-chord tones in Scriabin’s formative compositions are often a result of carefully planned voice leading. Scriabin’s harmonies can be complex and ambiguous, because his sonorities, “even those most characteristic of his harmonic practice, are . . . by-products of a more important linear motion.”⁵³

For example, the ambiguous harmonies in m. 7 of Op. 8 no. 12 (ex. 3.21) can be viewed as linear, passing chords. The quality of the first chord changes enharmonically from B major to minor, while the fluctuation between Cx or D# makes the root of the second chord uncertain. The final beat produces EM7. Although each beat technically forms a separate harmony, the treble B

⁵³ Baker, 6.

is present throughout the measure, while the octaves that frame it descend by semitone towards the downbeat of m. 8. Therefore, m. 7 functions as a prolongation of the iv chord in mm. 6-8. Harmonic progression is also governed by linear movement at mm. 43-48 (ex. 3.25). The bass line begins in m. 43 on a D#, descends to a neighbouring Cx at the beginning of m. 44, and then ascends a semitone every two beats until reaching an A# at m. 48. On alternating beats the right hand descends until it also reaches an A# in m. 48. The right hand provides a chain of suspensions, and the result is a change of harmony or colour on every beat. It is difficult to determine which harmonies are functionally strongest, because the chords are passing harmonies connecting the tonic (D#) at m. 43 to the dominant (A#) at m. 48. Beginning with the Cx in m. 44, this section could also be viewed as a prolongation of V leading to the A# in m. 48. These two interpretations demonstrate how Scriabin's large-scale prolongations can also be ambiguous.

Example 3.25 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 42-50

Some of the more chromatic and unexpected harmonies from Op. 11 no. 2 are also products of Scriabin's voice leading. For example, mm. 7-17 could be considered a prolongation of ii^7 (ex. 3.22), which would explain why the harmonies do not function strongly in A minor. The B to A interval is stated in the bass in m. 7, and then the bass line descends by step from A to B in mm. 8-14 before the interval is repeated harmonically in mm. 15 and 17. The non-chord tones that obscure V7 in m.16 function within this prolongation. Measures 24-30 could also be a prolongation of the $F\#7$ chord in m. 30, given the linear descent from C# to F# in the bass (ex. 3.26). Therefore, the colourful C7 harmony in m. 26 is a product of voice leading.⁵⁴

Example 3.26 – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 25-31

g#: V_2^4 e: $V7/\flat II(C7)$ i_4^6 $iv7$ i^6 $V7/V$

Scriabin also uses common tones and enharmonic spellings for smooth voice leading into distant harmonies. The G flat harmony in m. 74 of Op. 19 is connected to the preceding chord through a B flat, and to the following G# minor chord by an enharmonic common tone D flat/C# (ex. 3.24). In m. 77, the sudden G major chord is softened by the previous harmony, which provides a common tone of G. The B7 at the end of m. 77 has a common-tone of B with G major (ex. 3.24). The augmented sixth chord in m. 26 of Op. 11 no. 2 is also engaged in smooth voice leading, as it shares two common tones with the harmonies on either side of it (ex. 3.26). Therefore, in addition to being a product of the prolongation mentioned above, the chord acts as a non-traditional, common-tone pivot chord, connecting the two key areas of G# minor and E

⁵⁴ See p. 155 in Appendix C for m. 24 of Op. 11 no. 2.

minor.⁵⁵ Scriabin's formative harmonies can be chromatic and somewhat unexpected, but he avoids harshness through masterful voice leading, demonstrating his affinity for counterpoint.

Harmonic and Melodic Connections to the Transitional and Late-Period Music

Scriabin uses certain harmonic, melodic and structural elements in his formative music that may seem superficially inconsequential, but that connect his early and later style. One of these elements is V7 flat5. This chord is an important feature of Op. 11 no. 2, in which it is exploited nine times. The second measure of the primary four-bar theme is constructed from V7 flat5 (ex. 3.19) and this sonority remains intact with each repetition of the theme. It also appears at the end of mm. 8, 56 and 64. Although V7 flat5 sometimes moves to V, Scriabin rarely resolves it as one would a traditional French +6.⁵⁶ In example 3.19, V7 flat5 resolves only to the root of V, which quickly dissipates with the next harmony. The resolution is not complete and the augmented sixth does not resolve outward. At mm. 8-9 the V7 flat5 chord functions as a dominant by tonicizing the following chord: the root E moves to a root A, but with an incomplete resolution (3.22). The augmented sixth does not resolve outward and the root A is not provided on the downbeat. The only V7 flat5 that resolves traditionally is at m. 64 with movement to i6/4; however, the continuation to V is postponed until m. 67 (ex. 3.27).

Example 3.27 – Op. 11 no. 2 mm. 62-68

a: V7/V ii°7 $V_{b5/V} i_4^6$ ii°7 V7 i

⁵⁵ Kutnowski discusses the same common-tone modulation between mm. 25-27 (36).

⁵⁶ V7 flat5/V contains the same pitches found in a French +6, but to function as a French +6 the augmented sixth in the chord must resolve outward to V.

Scriabin uses V7 flat5 as French +6ths, secondary dominants or passing harmonies. In the first movement of the Second Sonata, this sonority often appears as V7 flat5/V before moving to V. This tonicization occurs at mm. 6-7 (ex. 3.31) and from beats two to three of mm. 83 and 84 (ex. 3.28). In these examples the V7 flat5 functions as a French sixth, as the augmented sixth (E-Cx) resolves to the D#. At m. 80 the harmony is also V7 flat5/V, but it is prolonged through m. 81 before resolving to flat II in m. 82 (ex. 3.28). The root of flat II (A) is a tritone away from the expected V chord of D# major; therefore, this V7 flat5 acts as a secondary dominant through tritone substitution. The augmented sixth (E-Cx) does not resolve to a D#. V7 flat5/V resolving to flat II adds colour by altering the traditional, secondary dominant relationship. At m. 10, V7 flat5/V passes between V and the preceding flat II (ex. 3.32). In his formative period Scriabin uses V7 flat5 in both traditional and inventive ways, demonstrating his growing preference for this harmony. Adding a ninth and sixth to V7 flat5 results in the mystic chord, suggesting that the mystic chord could have developed from Scriabin's use of V7 flat5.

Example 3.28 – Op. 19, 1st movement, mm. 79-84

g#: iv — (ii°7) — V_{b5}⁷ / V — (i7) — (V7/iv) —

bII — V_{b5}⁷ / V — V — V_{b5}⁷ / V — V

Example 3.29 – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 13-15

a: VI V7/V ii°7

Example 3.30 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 3-4

d#: VI bII7

Flat II is another harmony that connects Scriabin's formative practices with his transitional style. Although flat II is not unusual in nineteenth-century music, Scriabin rarely treats this harmony as a traditional Neapolitan,⁵⁷ and it is often coloured with an added seventh or ninth. In Op. 8 no. 12 flat II forms the primary harmony for mm. 4 and 12 (ex. 3.30), while on the last beat of mm. 7 and 15 it is the result of voice leading within a linear progression (ex. 3.21).⁵⁸ In mm. 44-48 flat II also appears within a longer linear progression (ex. 3.25).⁵⁹ It neighbours between two statements of ii half-dim7 at mm. 44-45 and passes between ii half-dim7/iv and VI at m. 47. In Op. 11 no. 2, flat II is prolonged from mm. 11-12 within a larger prolongation of ii half-dim7 (ex. 3.22).⁶⁰ In the first movement of Op. 19, flat II functions as a

⁵⁷ In traditional classical and Romantic practice, flat II often resolves to V and is called a Neapolitan.

⁵⁸ See p. 112 above.

⁵⁹ See p. 116 above.

⁶⁰ See the description of the same passage on p. 113 and 117.

strong harmony after being tonicized by V7 flat5/V in m. 82 (ex. 3.28). In m. 9 flat II does resolve to V, but only after passing through V7 flat5/V (ex. 3.32). Scriabin often uses flat II in a non-traditional manner for colour or to facilitate smooth voice leading.

Tritones, which play a significant role in Scriabin's later music, are already prominent in his formative compositions. Op. 11 no. 2 is saturated with tritones, partially due to the many V7 flat5 chords. Measure 2 of the main theme provides a harmonic tritone on beat one and a descending melodic tritone on beats two and three in the bass. These two tritones form the V7 flat5/V harmony in that measure. In m. 3 the same descending tritone occurs in the melody, now belonging to the ii half-dim7 (ex. 3.19). With each repetition of the opening theme the tritones from m.2 are restated. Tritones constitute the majority of the intervallic material in mm. 8 and 56, which conclude on V7 flat5 (ex. 3.17). The use of V7 flat5 at mm. 10 (ex. 3.32) and 83-4 of the first movement of Op. 19 also results in melodic tritones in the octave bass line. In m. 44 of Op. 8 no. 12, Scriabin constructs a two-note chord from the tritone between E# and B (ex. 3.25). This tritone continues in the right hand on the following beat.

Example 3.31 – Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 5-7

g#: i iv V_{b5}⁷/V V7

Example 3.32 – Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 9-10

g#: VI bII7 V_{b5}⁷ → V

Root movement by tritone also occurs in these early pieces, typically at modulations or tonicizations, and in the context of unexpected harmonies. At mm. 26-27 of Op. 8 no. 12 the harmony moves from DM7 to G#7 during a sequential pattern while the tonal center is unstable.

The root D-G# progression is a flat II – V7 tonicization of the C# minor chord in m. 28 (ex. 3.33). As well, at mm. 5-6, 13-14 and 37-38 the harmony passes through vii^o7 to iv7, creating a passing, tritone root movement. At mm. 13-14 and 61-62 of Op. 11 no. 2 the harmony moves from VI to V/V, creating an F-B root movement (ex. 3.29). The harmony on m. 14 is unexpected; it is not functional in the current key area and it does not resolve to the anticipated tonic. Scriabin uses the same pattern at mm. 29-30 between C-F#. At mm. 14-15 Scriabin continues the B-F relationship to connect two harmonies with the same root (ex. 3.29). The B7 in m. 14 moves to a ii half-dim7 chord in m. 15, but rather than move directly to B, Scriabin sounds the fifth of the ii half-dim7 (F) between the two roots. This pattern recurs at mm. 30-31 and 62-63 when the musical idea is repeated.⁶¹ The B section of this Prelude also moves from E minor through G major/minor and finishes in B flat major before modulating back to A minor. Therefore, the key areas of the B section outline the tritone E-B flat.

Example 3.33 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 26-28

\flat II of C#m
V7 of C#m
C#m

Musical Form and Structure

Despite Scriabin's more modernist style after 1903, he adheres to periodic or formal structures in his later works and he constantly repeats musical material to create balance.⁶²

⁶¹According to Dernova, when a tritone is formed in the lowest part of the texture, the aural ambiguity is increased, especially with V7 flat5 chords (Guenther, 189).

⁶² Scriabin's musical form and balanced structures are discussed in Baker, 17-20, and Guenther, 193, 201.

Although these techniques are common to nineteenth-century practice, Scriabin also uses balanced structures in his formative period music, demonstrating a continuity of style throughout his career. For example, in the 25 measures of Op. 11 no. 1, the opening two-measure phrase is repeated five times (at mm. 3-4, 9-10, 11-12, 19-20 and 21-22), either transposed or elaborated. With the exception of mm. 11-12, the third quintuplet of this phrase is also a literal repetition of the first. Furthermore, the remaining melodic material in this Prelude is based on the initial quintuplets. The right-hand in mm. 23-24 even repeats the opening quintuplets before providing the final chord.

Like Op. 11 no. 1, the second Prelude from Op. 11 repeats the opening phrase five times, with transpositions and some small alterations. These repetitions occur at mm. 5-8, 17-20, 21-24, 49-52, and 53-56. The B section also reuses material, as the second half of the B section, mm. 41-48, is a T3 transposition of the first half from mm. 33-40. In Op. 8 no. 12, Scriabin exploits the same two-measure idea three times within the first 8 bar phrase, each time transposing higher. This 8-bar phrase is then repeated twice more in the same key, but elaborated, before the end of the piece. The opening musical phrases and their repetitions account for 48% of the material in Op. 11 no. 1, 44% in Op. 8 no. 12 and 35% in Op. 11 no. 2.

Table 3.3 outlines the form of Op. 11 nos. 1 and 2, and Op. 8 no. 12. Each piece is balanced by a return to the opening material before the conclusion, a trait that Baker also locates in the transitional works.⁶³ In Op. 11 no. 1, the A section returns in incomplete form at m. 19 with a short extension and functions as a coda. Therefore, the form is best described as a rounded binary. Op. 11 no. 2 and Op. 8 no. 12 are both AABA forms with almost symmetrical length content. Each section in Op. 11 no. 2 consists of sixteen measures with two eight-bar phrases, except for the final section, which extends the closing cadence by four measures after the return

⁶³ Baker, 17.

of opening material. The A sections are structured as sentences, while the B section is a period.⁶⁴ Op. 8 no. 12 begins with a one bar introduction, followed by two eight-measure A sections and the sixteen-measure B section. The final A section is extended to sixteen measures and is followed by a coda (mm. 50-55). The B section and third A section can each be divided into two eight-bar phrases. Therefore, the Etude is constructed of six eight-bar phrases with an introduction and coda. The first two A sections could be considered as one sixteen-measure period, while the B and second A section are structured as sixteen-measure sentences. These pieces are very square and symmetrically balanced on paper. Perhaps the balanced periods and clear structure help to offset the less conventional aspects, such as the dissonance and obscured tonality in Op. 11 no.2.

Table 3.3 – Structure in Op. 11 no. 1 and 2, and Op. 8 no. 12

Opus #	Length	Form	Sections	Measures
Op. 11 no. 1	25 measures	Rounded Binary	A	1-8
			B	9-18
			1/2 A/coda	19-25
Op. 11 no. 2	68 measures	AABA	A	1-16
			A	17-32
			B	33-48
			A	49-68
Op. 8 no. 12	55 measures	AABA (coda)	A	1-9
			A	10-17
			B	18-33
			A	34-49
			coda	50-55

The first movement of Op. 19 demonstrates Scriabin's mixture of traditional formal structures with unexpected elements. In regards to musical material, this movement is a generally well-balanced sonata-allegro form with an exposition, development and recapitulation. What is

⁶⁴ See William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9-13, 35-58. The constant key changes in mm. 33-48 make this period less conventional than the norm. Nonetheless, it meets the basic definition of a period and the cadential arrival on m. 49 is stronger than the arrival on m. 41.

most unusual about this form is Scriabin's overall choice of key areas (see table 3.2). As expected, the relative major (B major) is provided for the second theme in the exposition, and the recapitulation begins in the initial key, G# minor. Instead of remaining in G# minor, however, the recapitulation modulates to VI (E major) and concludes in this new key. The latter unexpected key area generates tonal ambiguity. It is also unusual that the second theme is almost four times the length of the opening theme, and that Scriabin only states two measures of the first theme in the recapitulation before moving to the elaborated and slightly extended second theme in E major (mm. 89-134). He also restates the opening theme as a coda at mm. 135-6, thereby bringing back the opening material and creating a thematic symmetrical balance.

The Transcendent Motive

In these early works, Scriabin utilizes a motive that I have designated the 'transcendent' motive. This motive appears relatively often within the pieces I have analyzed, both melodically and harmonically, and it creates a level of motivic connectivity within a single work, and even between multiple pieces. The motive consists of a minor second followed by a perfect fifth, or the root and fifth of a tonic triad decorated by the leading tone (seventh). It can also be thought of as a MM7 chord in third inversion, but without the third (ex. 3.34). In my opinion, combining these intervals melodically or harmonically is colourful yet transcendent. The seventh sounds as if it is resolving to the root, but is then followed by a fifth, causing openness and ambiguity. Although functional within tonality, this motive is used frequently enough to consider it a feature of Scriabin's formative style. The transcendent ambiance created by this intervallic combination also suggests a connection to his later, 'mystic' style.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ The importance of this ambient spaciousness in relation to Scriabin's philosophy will be discussed in the next chapter.

Example 3.34 – Transcendent motive**Example 3.35** – Op. 11 no. 2, mm. 1-4 with motive

In Op. 11 no. 2 this motive forms the first three melodic notes of the main theme.⁶⁶ In some statements of the main theme, such as mm. 1-4 and 21-24, the last three melodic notes are an inversion of the motive, which results in a thematic symmetry (ex. 3.35). The inverted motive is present in additional statements of the theme, but is sometimes followed by a tritone, such as at m.8. In Op. 8 no. 12 the motive sounds in the treble octaves at the beginning of mm. 26, 28, 30, and 31 (ex. 3.36), but it also appears frequently with passing notes between the root and fifth. Each repetition of the main two-bar idea, whether transposed or literal, contains this motive. In m. 2, the D# is decorated by a lower neighbour, Cx, before ascending through a passing E# and F# to the A# (ex. 3.37). The C# at the end of the measure is isolated by a rest and functions as an anticipation to the downbeat of m. 3. Therefore, the ascent from D# to A# is a separate idea within the main theme, and this idea is constructed from the transcendent motive with passing notes.

Example 3.36 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 30-31

Example 3.37 – Op. 8 no. 12, m. 2

⁶⁶ Kutnowski also finds motivic significance in the opening melody of Op. 11 no. 2, but he proposes a four-note motive that includes the descending minor second (74-77).

This elaborated transcendent motive also appears throughout the B section, as seen in the second half of m. 18. The G# on beat three provides the seventh and is followed by an A major triad. The same pitches are found descending in the next measure. The motive sounds harmonically on beat three of m. 44 with the D# octave in the bass and an E and B in the upper parts (ex. 3.25). Furthermore, the linear bass motion at mm. 43-48 discussed above (ex. 3.25), is a D# decorated by a Cx neighbour, which then ascends through passing notes to A#. Even if the filled-in motive from ex. 3.38 is not an exact replica of the open, transcendent motive, the motivic connection between this linear progression and the opening theme cannot be ignored.

Example 3.38 – Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 45-48

Example 3.38 shows a musical score for Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 45-48. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a vocal line. The piano part has a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. The vocal line is marked *mf* and *ben marcato il canto*. There are dynamic markings *pp* and *mf*. Red circles highlight specific notes in the vocal line, and blue and green circles highlight notes in the piano accompaniment. The number 1605 is written below the piano part.

Example 3.39 – Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 23-25

Example 3.39 shows a musical score for Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 23-25. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a vocal line. The piano part has a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. The vocal line is marked *p rubato* and *cresc.*. There are dynamic markings *p* and *cresc.*. Red circles highlight specific notes in the vocal line. The number 1605 is written below the piano part.

The transcendent motive appears in Op. 19, but in more obscured forms. At m. 46-47 this motive frames the ascent in the alto melody from E to B with a neighbour D# (ex. 3.38, shown in red). The first note of each triplet sixteenth in the elaborate soprano line also outlines this motive: A#, B, F#, and B (ex. 3.38, shown in blue). As well, the alto melody concludes with a variation of this motive in m. 47 when a descending perfect fourth follows the minor second: A#, B and F# (ex. 3.38, shown in green). Each time this melody appears in the exposition, recapitulation, and at mm. 72 and 74, the descending variation can be heard. An elaborated transcendent motive including the third also appears in the melody at mm. 25 and 101 (ex. 3.39). The former statement begins on D# and the latter on G#.

Although the elaborated motive does not have the same openness as the transcendent motive alone, when a short melody is contained within the transcendent motive, the minor second leading to a fifth still resonates. Furthermore, when used to frame melodies, this motive acts as the foundation for melodic material. Just as Scriabin showed a preference for the mystic chord in multiple compositions after 1902, during his formative period he appears to have had a preference for this transcendent motive. His use of this motive also shows a possible thematic connection between multiple compositions of his formative period.

SCRIABIN'S FORMATIVE-PERIOD AS FOUNDATION FOR HIS LATER STYLE

It is apparent that Scriabin's compositions from his formative period, 1892-1897, display a burgeoning ingenuity and are more inventive than typically acknowledged. The formative works begin to push the boundaries of tonality by creating tonal ambiguity, using extreme chromaticism or overlapping harmonies, demonstrating a use of non-tonal sets, and experimenting with chord structure and harmonic movement. Many of these traits anticipate features of Scriabin's compositional techniques after 1902, even if in a rudimentary form.

Harmonic and structural features of Scriabin's transitional works, such as his non-traditional use of V7 flat5 and flat II, and his use of sequencing, motivic connections, balanced forms and symmetry, also appear within the formative compositions. Analysis also reveals that unexpected harmonic movement often results from carefully planned voice leading: an important element of Scriabin's later works.

The years 1892-1897 were imperative to Scriabin's development as an artist. During this formative period he experimented with compositional techniques that were essential to his later style, thereby laying the foundation for his more modernist works. By sharing traits with his transitional works, Scriabin's formative works foreshadow his later style. Scriabin does access procedures found in other, late-Romantic piano music, but he manipulates many of these techniques to push the boundaries of late-Romantic tonality. Due to the combination of late-Romantic features with traits found in his more modern compositions, the works of Scriabin's formative period display an element of late-Romantic modernism. In the final chapter, analyses of these works will be used to explore the interaction between three facets of Scriabin's artistic personality: the composer, the performer and the philosopher.

Chapter 4 – Integration of Composer, Performer and Philosopher

Many late nineteenth-century composers were inspired by their surroundings and personal life, Scriabin included. What distinguished Scriabin from other composers was that his music became a direct expression of his philosophy, a philosophy that encompassed artistic and mystic ideals within a grandiose scheme, which Scriabin felt would achieve unification with the divine through his music. While this ideology has been shown to have been essential to Scriabin's music after 1900, the difficulty lies in determining the extent of its influence during his early period. The first chapter explored the context surrounding Scriabin's nineteenth-century career and the probability of his philosophy having developed during that time. Scriabin's formative performance practices were examined in chapter two and his performance style was connected to his personal beliefs. In chapter three, Scriabin's formative music was found to have correlations with his music from 1903 onward. By combining analyses from chapter three with new analytical material, this final chapter demonstrates that many of Scriabin's compositional traits can be considered extensions of his performance style or philosophical beliefs, therefore, offering hermeneutical interpretations. The appearance of these influences within his compositions reveals the interrelation between Scriabin the composer, performer, and philosopher and further justifies the argument that Scriabin's early-period creativity was impacted by his developing mystic ideology.

PERFORMANCE AND PHILOSOPHY IN SCRIBABIN'S FORMATIVE MUSIC

Scriabin's compositional style often creates a floating, spacious ambience. One way in which he achieves this atmosphere is through incomplete chords, specifically, chords missing a

third. Missing thirds contribute to tonal ambiguity and create open fifths, which add spaciousness and lightness, as the harmonies are less grounded and seem to soar upward. Incomplete chords were alluded to in the analysis of Op. 11 no. 1, when a V7 chord is implied, but the third is absent (see ex. 3.9). Such absent thirds are also found throughout Op. 8 no. 12, for example, the open fifth between E and B in the treble and the bass at mm. 44-45 (see ex. 3.25). Measures 52 and 53, which lead up to and embellish the final tonic, imply dominant harmony on every second beat, but the V chord has only a root and fifth. Therefore, the final cadence is open, without a leading-tone-to-tonic resolution (ex. 4.1). The chord across the barline from mm. 42-43 is also missing a third. The pitches are C#, G# and D#, which can be organized into open perfect fifths or fourths (ex. 4.2). Until the C# resolves to B on beat three, this pitch combination provides an open, harmonic ambiguity.

Example 4.1 – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 51-55

d#: V i (V) i (V) i (V) i (V) i i₄ i

Example 4.2 – Op. 8 no. 12, m. 43

Example 4.3 – Op. 19, m. 1

g#: I (I?) i⁶

Chords without thirds and/or constructed from open fifths play an important role in the first movement of Op. 19. The first chord of the movement contains only the root and fifth of the G# minor triad (ex. 4.3). The third is provided on the second beat of m. 1, but the initial chord is modally ambiguous. This pattern is repeated on D# at mm. 10-11, at the beginning of the development and recapitulation, and in the final two measures. On the downbeats of mm. 23-24 Scriabin notates fifths with added fourths, which imply I and vi respectively (ex. 3.12). These fourths add richness, but the three notes can only be arranged into perfect fifths or fourths and therefore, the fourths do not clarify the harmony.

Example 4.4 – Op. 19, 1st mvmt, mm. 127-130

Harmonic ambiguity and openness are heightened by Scriabin's voicing and chord spacing. This effect is seen in mm. 52-56 (ex. 3.15) and 128-133 (ex. 4.4) of the first movement of the Sonata Op. 19. The non-melodic bass notes provide open fifths below the virtuosic gossamer trickling of treble notes. Although the cascading right hand passages contain the third,

these momentary thirds are two or three registers above; therefore, what resonates most strongly is the open fifth below. Scriabin tends to space his chords widely across registers and often avoids arranging the pitches in order of thirds. If the two lowest notes do result in a third interval, it is typically voiced as a 10th. He uses voicing to avoid the predominance of the chord root and to make the chord members sound more aurally equivalent. When chords are in root position, the root is rarely added in the highest voice. Distributing pitches to emphasize openness not only contributes to harmonic ambiguity, but also creates a resounding expansiveness.

The open, searching quality of mm. 52-26 and mm. 128-132 from Op. 19 (ex. 4.4) is enhanced by the tonic pedal below. The reiterated tonic root combines with the cascading passages to create a subtle blending of sound that suspends above the keyboard. Scriabin regularly employs tonic pedals under changing harmonies and passing notes, which creates a feeling of harmonic uncertainty and detachment.

Some of Scriabin's pitch combinations or melodic patterns also produce a rich yet open sound. The pentatonic scale (set 5-35) can be arranged into superposed fourths or fifths, creating openness through the lack of a clear third. When this pc set is sustained under one pedal as Scriabin often does,¹ the pitches have a consonant and colourful expansiveness. The resulting sonority seems to transcend tonality by defying traditional harmonies. Sections dominated by set 5-35 in the Prelude Op. 11 no. 1 and Op. 19 are particularly beautiful with their light floating quality.² The transcendent motive also generates openness through its particular combination of intervals. The dissonance of the minor second is followed by the reaching, open purity of a rising fifth. The sound suspends, beautiful and unresolved. Both the pentatonic scale and the transcendent motive, especially when sustained, have a colourful yet spacious atmosphere.

¹ See Lobanov's transcription of Prelude Op. 11 no. 1 and the first movement of the second Sonata for Scriabin's pedaling (Leikin, 92-95, 156-179).

² See pp. 102-106.

The sensation of openness and lightness produced by these compositional techniques seems to create a transcendent or other-worldly effect, demonstrating an affinity between Scriabin's philosophy of transcendence and his music. Scriabin believed that his music would unite humanity with God and initiate the transformation to another plane of existence. The above traits could be Scriabin's attempt to notate his mystic aspirations. His compositional procedures also reflect his fascination with flight. Not only did Scriabin have a philosophical interest in flying, but when performing, he generated a floating sound. His hands even hovered above the keyboard.³ By writing passages with a floating quality, Scriabin may have intended to capture both his performance style and his philosophical intent in his compositions.

Scriabin's preference for *piano* or *pianissimo* dynamics increases the floating quality of his formative compositions. Seventeen of the twenty-four Op. 11 Preludes are marked *piano* or *pianissimo* at the outset, and no. 21, which is lacking an initial dynamic marking, suggests a soft dynamic due to the *pianissimo* at the end. Fifteen of these Preludes from Op. 11⁴ open and conclude with *piano* or softer dynamics and stay within that range for the majority of the composition. Not included in these fifteen are no. 9, which begins *mf*, but has many *p* or *pp* markings, and no. 10, which is largely *pianissimo* despite the *mf* and *sf* accents. If a short composition begins *piano* and contains a climactic *forte* or *fortissimo*, the *forte* is usually brief and the soft dynamic still dominates. Scriabin's preference for *piano* dynamic levels continues in the Op. 13, 15, 16 and 17 Preludes. Scriabin often performed at a softer dynamic. Marking this feature into his scores is another way in which Scriabin notated both his philosophical ideals and performance idioms within his compositions.

³ Chapter 2, p. 86.

⁴ Including no. 21 with its implied *piano* beginning.

Scriabin applies certain compositional techniques that complement his pedaling practices, such as long tonic pedals, overlapping chords and the prolongation of sonorities throughout an entire measure. Tonic pedals already blur passing harmonies with the tonic throughout longer sections. Therefore, holding the sustaining pedal during tonic pedals does not cause excessive dissonance, especially when the upper harmonies are in a higher register. The pedal can also be depressed without noticeable dissonance through measures that emphasize a single harmony or set, even if non-chord tones are present. Open sonorities without thirds, or pitch combinations that form superposed fourths (set 5-35 and 6-32), are particularly appropriate for long pedals. Scriabin's overlapping harmonies also imply a depressed sustaining pedal, because the two harmonies are already blending. Another feature that allows for Scriabin's liberal use of the sustaining pedal is his preference for softer dynamics. The pedal can be depressed for longer periods when the dynamics are *piano* or *pianissimo*. In the above situations the sustaining pedal allows the sounds to blend and suspend above the piano, which increases the transcendent, mystical effect of Scriabin's music.

Scriabin's voice leading and pitch choices also reflect his training and skill as a performer. Some of Scriabin's pitches and harmonies are unexpected from an initial, analytical perspective, especially in regards to enharmonic notes, but for the performer they are extremely natural. An example is found at m. 25-26 of Op. 11 no. 2 when Scriabin moves from D#7 to an enharmonic C7 (ex. 3.26). Harmonically these chords are unrelated, but the move to C7 feels comfortable under a pianist's hands, due to the two common tones. Scriabin also spells the seventh of C7 enharmonically as A#, which is appropriate for the augmented sixth function, but the A# is easier to read in the context of the preceding notes. B flat would look awkward to a pianist. At the end of m. 76 in the first movement of Op. 19, the augmented sixth (E flat and C#)

also aids in smooth voice leading. The E flat in the left-hand provides an obvious semi tone from the preceding E natural and is easier to read than a D# in this context. In the right-hand, retaining the C# is more practical than changing to D flat. The retention of the C# also allows for the distant chord to connect visually to the previous harmony. Scriabin's pitch choices often reflect pianistic needs and aid sight-reading, demonstrating his command of piano technique.

Rhythmic and Metrical Analysis

One feature of Scriabin's music that was not investigated in the previous chapter, but that reveals an integration of compositional style with performance and philosophy, is his choice of rhythm and meter. At times Scriabin's rhythm and meter suggest an attempt to notate his approach to tempo fluctuations and *rubato*. Throughout Op. 11 no. 1, each measure consists of two quintuplet eighth notes. These could be completely regular, yet Scriabin displaces the quintuplets; they are shifted so that the third note of each group comes on the beat.⁵ This displacement could indicate an agogic emphasis on the third note rather than the first, but it also interrupts the visual consistency of the quintuplets. Spreading the quintuplets across the barline makes the regularity of the phrases less obvious. Scriabin himself performs the quintuplets with an irregular rhythm; he sometimes emphasizes the third note and sometimes the first note of the quintuplet. Therefore, it seems that Scriabin uses this displacement to suggest a rhythmic flexibility, rather than to show metrical emphasis. Even the use of quintuplets suggests a certain amount of irregularity. Due to our system of musical training, groupings of two, three, or four feel more natural to most musicians. Quintuplets also do not subdivide as easily against other rhythms, in comparison to duplets, triplets or quadruplets.

⁵ See Appendix B.

Example 4.5 – Op. 11 no. 19, mm. 1-3

Example 4.6 – Op. 11 no. 19, mm. 12-13

Example 4.7 – Op. 11 no. 19, mm. 22-23

Example 4.8 – Op. 11 no. 14, m. 1

A more extreme case of this displacement occurs in Op. 11 no. 19. The left hand has a quintuplet accompaniment, which is again shifted, this time with the first note of each group placed before the barline (ex. 4.5). It seems that the strongest note of each two quintuplets should be the one sounding before the regular beat. This grouping is accentuated by slur lines over each two quintuplets in the bass, but the right hand conflicts with this slurring, as it provides a melody that conforms to the regular downbeats. The visual conflict of right- and left-hand accentuation makes the metrical interpretation difficult. The bass note before each measure could be thought of as an upbeat, but this creates issues for performance. Because the right hand is signifying a regular pulse, it is difficult to continue the left-hand accompaniment in the manner of an upbeat

once the melody enters. The beginning of each slurred group of quintuplets at the end of each measure is also disruptive to the right-hand pulse. Downbeat triplets in the treble also occasionally play against the offset quintuplets in the bass (ex. 4.6), and this pattern shifts hands at m. 21 (ex. 4.7). Therefore, the right hand and left hand appear to be operating in slightly different time frames. This ‘misalignment’ of the two staves demonstrates another way in which Scriabin may have been notating his rhythmic flexibility, thus creating a Chopinesque *rubato* with a desynchronization of the parts. It is unfortunate that Scriabin did not record this Prelude.

Scriabin sometimes uses notation to shift the metrical emphasis momentarily within a composition. At m. 13 of the first movement of Op. 19 the left-hand triplets are shifted before the beat, while the right-hand triplets are on the beat.⁶ Although placed before the barline, the bass upbeat to m. 13 sounds like the downbeat, while the right-hand downbeat functions as a syncopation. In m. 19 the metrical emphasis transitions back to the actual downbeat, which gives the impression that this measure has one extra eighth note, making it difficult to perform smoothly without some sort of *rubato*. This sectional shift of the downbeat could be representative of Scriabin’s erratic tempo changes or manipulations of the rhythmic perception in his performances. In Op. 11 no. 14 each measure is organized into three groups of five eighth notes. Example 4.8 shows the accents and melodic shape in m. 1 and this accentuation is implied wherever this notational pattern occurs (ex. 4.9). Whenever the second treble rest is replaced by octaves while the left hand sustains, those octaves are given *sf* accents (ex. 4.10). These accents shift the accentuation one eighth earlier, which gives the impression of shortening the first beat. The *sforzandos* could be Scriabin’s method of notating a brief tempo increase, as his performance of these measures seems compressed. In these examples Scriabin is utilizing unusual or unexpected rhythmic notation to provide visual clues towards rhythmic flexibility.

⁶ See Appendix E

The Prelude Op. 11 no. 21 is also indicative of Scriabin's unique *rubato* with its constantly changing time signatures.

Example 4.9 – Continued and implied accentuation in Op. 11 no. 14



Example 4.10 – Shifting accentuation with *sf* in Op. 11 no. 14



Scriabin's use of polyrhythms, such as the quintuplets against triplets in Op. 11 no. 19, could be a written representation of his *rubato*. Op. 13 no. 4 is continuously notated with triplets in the left hand below right-hand quintuplets, and in Op. 15 no. 1 the right hand plays quintuplets or triplets throughout the piece, while the left plays eighth notes or the occasional triplet. The right hand and left hand in these Preludes are rhythmically misaligned with challenging polyrhythms. These complex polyrhythms do not seem typical of late-Romantic style, nor do they seem to look ahead to the driving metrical polyrhythms of early-twentieth-century composers, such as Stravinsky. Due to the rhythmic freedom and flexible tempos found in Scriabin's recordings, his polyrhythms and metrical displacements should not be thought of as mathematical divisions. Instead, Scriabin's notation seems to be a visualization of his *rubato* and more specifically, his desynchronization of the parts. It is also interesting that the quintuplets in Op. 11 no. 1 are notated as eighth notes, whereas in Op. 11 no. 19 Scriabin writes them as

sixteenths, even though both pieces are in 2/4 with two quintuplets per measure. This inconsistency of notation suggests that Scriabin was not concerned with rhythmic strictness or accuracy.

In an indirect way, Scriabin's use of regular phrases, periods and balanced structures is also indicative of his tempo flexibility and *rubato*. Since Scriabin's performances were anything but square and rigid, it is somewhat ironic that on paper his music is often balanced with even phrases and periods. As Leikin suggests, Scriabin may have written seemingly balanced and square music because he expected the performer to interpret the regularity of the structure as a licence to apply tempo flexibility. Scriabin's adherence to balanced structures may have been a discreet way of suggesting liberal *rubato* and tempo fluctuation.

Although Scriabin's interesting meters and rhythmic placements were probably an attempt to notate his extreme *rubato*, they may also be connected to his philosophical beliefs. This connection stems from the link between Scriabin's tempo flexibility in performance and his philosophy, which was discussed in chapter two. His *rubato* and extreme tempo fluctuations often lack rhythmical grounding, allowing the colours and sounds to transcend metrical restraints and transport listeners to another world beyond material existence. The spiritual ambiance created by this tempo flexibility seems to reflect Scriabin's desire to transcend earthly life. Scriabin's use of ambiguous, metrical placement in his scores could be a visual representation of this performance style, and of the philosophical associations.

When the parts are desynchronized, or when Scriabin unexpectedly takes a new tempo, it can sound as if two rhythmic worlds are colliding. This rhythmic conflict could represent Scriabin's belief in dualities, such as the sexual conflict between masculine and feminine, or his belief in a world beyond material existence. Baker suggests that when Scriabin shifts between

two whole-tone scales he is shifting planes of existence.⁷ Therefore, when Scriabin changes metrical emphasis, it could be considered a shift from the material to immaterial world. Scriabin's polyrhythms, misaligned parts, and notated shifts in metrical emphasis, are characteristic of his performing style, but they could also be Scriabin's attempt to express his philosophical dichotomies or his belief in a transcendent existence. Combining disparate rhythms and shifting between rhythmical perceptions could also represent Scriabin's desire for unification and his need to consolidate dualisms. Scriabin's rhythms and meters demonstrate how both his unique performance practices and his mystical ideology are reflected in his compositional style.

Scriabin's nineteenth-century music is substantially more complex and forward-looking than typically acknowledged, in both style and philosophical intent. During his formative period, Scriabin was breaking away from late-Romantic traditions and beginning to establish a unique musical language. His compositions from this period display many traits that became trademarks of his transitional and late works, which suggests that in the nineteenth century, Scriabin was laying the foundation for his later style. Scriabin was also developing his performing career and defining his pianistic style: a combination of personal, philosophical expression with elements passed along from his Russian musical heritage.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that Scriabin's ideological beliefs were already instrumental to his creative process throughout his formative years. We unfortunately lack primary sources that elucidate Scriabin's exact beliefs in 1892-1897, but we can speculate on the extent of Scriabin's formative-period philosophy. The mystic essence of Scriabin's philosophy

⁷ Baker, *Scriabin's Music: Structure as Prism*, 76-7.

was firmly established by 1900 as a logical development from his formative beliefs. Moreover, his nineteenth-century Russian surroundings were permeated with concepts that become essential to his later philosophy, and he was likely impacted by these influences during his formative period.

If one is uncertain that Scriabin's later philosophy may have stimulated his early creativity, one need only analyze Scriabin's formative performance practices and compositions. His music and performing style from this time already resonate with elements that seem to anticipate his mystical and transcendent ideology. Therefore, it is logical to argue for the presence of a developing philosophy during the formative years, even if at an elementary stage. The philosophical tendencies of his nineteenth-century performing practice and music also demonstrate the interrelation between Scriabin's philosophy, performance practices and compositional style. These three elements influenced each other and combined to create Scriabin's eccentric and unique persona. Scriabin's musical output was shaped by an artistic synthesis of composer, pianist and philosopher.

Scriabin's early piano music enchants audiences with its transcendent power, and modern pianists are often drawn to this repertoire. Why, then, is the music from this period often disregarded in analytical studies? The music of Scriabin's formative period has an element of late-Romantic modernism that foreshadows his later works, and although superficially Chopinesque, the formative music is imbued with philosophic connotations and compositional complexities that expose Scriabin's multifaceted, artistic personality. The nineteenth-century compositions should not be overlooked: the early music provides insight into the source and evolution of Scriabin's transcendent, multidimensional style.

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Rachmaninoff, Sergei. *The Complete Recordings*. 10 discs.

- Rachmaninoff playing Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11 No. 8 in F sharp minor: disc 7, track 16. Recorded in 1929.

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- Scriabin playing Scriabin, Op. 11 no. 1, Op. 11 no. 2, Op. 8 no. 12, Op. 11 no. 13, and Op. 11 no. 14: tracks 1, 2, 4, 8 and 9. Recorded in 1910.
- Konstantin Igumnoff playing Scriabin, Fantasie-Sonata Op. 19: track 11. Recorded in 1910.

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- Konstantin Igumnoff plays Tchaikovsky, Op. 19:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9swdNmbYfxs>
- Konstantin Igumnoff plays Tchanikovsky, Sonata Op. 37:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63SsEfG23ak>
- Ignacy Jan Paderewski plays Chopin, Ballade in A flat Op. 47:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8k7ZscLIng>

Appendix A – Op. 8 no. 12, Belaieff Edition

Droits d'exécution réservés.

41

XII.

A. Scriabine, Op. 8 N°12

1

Patetico $\text{♩} = 100-112$

3

6

9

12

15

cresc.

dim.

ff

dim.

M. P. Belaieff, Leipzig

H 80 1102

4^o 18

21

24

27

30

33

cresc.

sf

p

ff

rit.

ff

4180 1102

Detailed description: This page contains a piano score for measures 18 through 33. The music is written in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The score is divided into six systems, each with a measure number in a box at the beginning. The first system (measures 18-20) features a *cresc.* marking. The second system (measures 21-23) includes *sf* and *p* markings. The third system (measures 24-26) has a *cresc.* marking. The fourth system (measures 27-29) includes *sf* and *cresc.* markings. The fifth system (measures 30-32) features a *ff* marking. The sixth system (measures 33) includes *cresc.*, *rit.*, and *ff* markings. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and dynamic markings.

36

Measures 36-38 of a piano piece. The music is in a key with four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#) and a 3/4 time signature. The right hand features a complex, rhythmic melody with many beamed eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

39

Measures 39-41. Measure 39 is marked with a forte (**f**) dynamic. The right hand continues with intricate patterns, including some triplets. The left hand maintains a consistent rhythmic accompaniment.

42

Measures 42-44. The right hand features a series of chords and moving lines. The left hand continues with a steady accompaniment.

45

Measures 45-47. The right hand has a dense texture with many beamed notes. The left hand accompaniment includes some chords marked with an 'x'.

48

Measures 48-50. Measure 48 is marked with a fortissimo (**fff**) dynamic. The right hand has a very dense, chordal texture. The left hand accompaniment is also dense.

51

Measures 51-53. Measure 51 is marked with a fortissimo (**fff**) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with some grace notes. The left hand accompaniment is steady. The piece concludes with a final chord marked with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Appendix B – Op. 11 no. 1, Belaieff Edition

3

24 Préludes.

Droits d'exécution réservés.

N^o 1.

A. Scriabine, Op. 11. Cahier I.

Vivace. M. M. ♩ = 63-76.

Piano. *p* *cresc.* *cresc.*

5 *cresc.* *rubato* *f* *dim.* *p*

10 *pp* *cresc.*

15 *ff* 8

20 *accelerando* *ff*

Appendix C – Op. 11 no. 2, Belaieff Edition

No 2.

Allegretto. M. M. ♩ = 138.

7

13

19

25

p *rit.* *a tempo* *rit.*

a tempo *cresc.*

dim.

pp

cresc. *mf* *dim.*

1353 1384

32

38

44

50

56

62

Moscou Novembre 1595.

Appendix D – Op. 11 no. 14, Belaieff Edition

22

Nº 14.

Presto. M.M. ♩ = 69-72.

2

4

6

8

10

1353 1356

12 23

Musical score for measures 12-23. The piece is in a minor key with a 3/4 time signature. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines. Dynamics include *ff* and *cresc.*

14

Musical score for measures 14-15. A first ending bracket with an 8-measure count spans these two measures. Dynamics include *cresc.* and *ff*.

16

Musical score for measures 16-17. Dynamics include *dim.*, *p*, and *f*.

18

Musical score for measures 18-19. Dynamics include *mf*, *ff*, *f*, and *cresc.*

20

Musical score for measures 20-21. Dynamics include *fff*.

22

Musical score for measures 22-23. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand.

Appendix E – Op. 19, 1st movement, Belaïeff Edition

Sonate-Fantaisie

N.º 2, en SOL-dièse mineur

POUR
PIANO
PAR

A. SCRIBINE.

OP. 19.  Pt. $\frac{M. 160}{R. 60}$

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1605.

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Droits d'exécution réservés.

Sonate - Fantaisie. N° 2.

A. Scriabine, Op. 19.
1892-1897

Andante. M. M. ♩ = 60

Piano.

4

8

12

16

M. P. Belaieff, Leipzig.

1605

4

19

mf *cresc. mf* *dim.*

23

p rubato *cresc.* *cresc.* *dim.*

27

pp *pp cresc.* *rubato*

31

p

34

pp

37 *espress.*

40

43 *cresc.*

45 *mf* *ben marcato il canto* *pp* *mf*

47

6
49

pp mf pp mf

This system contains measures 49 and 50. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *pp* and *mf*.

51

mf pp mf

* Red. *

This system contains measures 51 and 52. The right hand has a more active melodic line with slurs. The left hand continues with accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *pp*. A ** Red. ** marking is present below the staff.

53

* Red. *

This system contains measures 53 and 54. The right hand features a complex melodic passage with many slurs. The left hand has a steady accompaniment. A ** Red. ** marking is present below the staff.

55

pp

This system contains measures 55, 56, and 57. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment. A *pp* marking is present. A ** Red. ** marking is present below the staff.

58

pp m.d. p

* Red. *

1605

This system contains measures 58, 59, and 60. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. The left hand has a complex accompaniment with triplets. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *m.d.*, and *p*. A ** Red. ** marking is present below the staff. The number 1605 is written at the bottom.

62 7

Musical score for measures 62-65. The piece is in G minor. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include mezzo-forte (m.f.), mezzo-dolce (m.d.), and crescendo (cresc.).

66

Musical score for measures 66-69. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet in measure 68. The left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include mezzo-dolce (m.d.), forte (f), and crescendo (cresc.).

70

Musical score for measures 70-72. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs. The left hand features a more active rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include fortissimo (ff) and piano (p).

73

Musical score for measures 73-75. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs. The left hand features a more active rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include piano (p) and fortissimo (ff).

76

Musical score for measures 76-78. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs. The left hand features a more active rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include piano (p) and crescendo (cresc.).

79

cresc.

f

cresc.

**Rad.*

**Rad.* **Rad.*

82

cresc.

**Rad.*

85

ff

88

pp

91

94

cresc.

mf

1605

97

rubato *mf* *dim.* *p*

This system contains measures 97, 98, 99, and 100. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Measure 97 starts with a *rubato* marking and a dynamic of *mf*. Measure 98 includes a *dim.* marking. Measure 99 begins with a *p* dynamic. Measure 100 concludes the system with a *dim.* marking.

100

cresc. *dim.*

This system contains measures 100, 101, 102, and 103. It continues the piece with a treble and bass clef. Measure 100 has a *cresc.* marking. Measure 101 has a *dim.* marking. Measure 102 has a *cresc.* marking. Measure 103 concludes the system with a *dim.* marking.

103

pp *cresc.* *Red.* * *Red.*

This system contains measures 103, 104, 105, and 106. It features a treble and bass clef. Measure 103 starts with a *pp* dynamic. Measure 104 has a *cresc.* marking. Measure 105 includes a *Red.* marking. Measure 106 concludes the system with a ** Red.* marking.

106

pp *5*

This system contains measures 106, 107, 108, and 109. It features a treble and bass clef. Measure 106 starts with a *pp* dynamic. Measure 107 includes a *5* fingering. Measure 108 includes a *5* fingering. Measure 109 concludes the system with a *5* fingering.

109

5

This system contains measures 109, 110, 111, and 112. It features a treble and bass clef. Measure 109 starts with a *5* fingering. Measure 110 includes a *5* fingering. Measure 111 includes a *5* fingering. Measure 112 concludes the system with a *5* fingering.

112

ppp *2* *3*

This system contains measures 112, 113, 114, and 115. It features a treble and bass clef. Measure 112 starts with a *ppp* dynamic. Measure 113 includes a *2* fingering. Measure 114 includes a *3* fingering. Measure 115 concludes the system with a *3* fingering.

115

118

121

123

125

1605

127 ⁸

129

131

132

134

1605

2037

Appendix F – Op. 8 no. 12, mm. 49-55, Dover Edition

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²⁾ In the MS the dynamics of the ending
are altogether different, namely:

Etudes: Op. 8 (Part II), No. 12