## Journal of The Scriabin Society of America

Vol. 1, No. 1

Winter 1996-1997



THE SCRIABIN SOCIETY OF AMERICA was founded in 1995. Mindful of its predecessor, The Scriabin Circle, created by Katherine Ruth Heyman in New York in 1934 and appreciative of good wishes from the Scriabin Museum in Moscow and the All-Russian Scriabin Association, The Scriabin Society of America has as its purpose the furtherance of the music and ideas of Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915).

The Society aspires to be a focal point for those interested in Scriabin's music and life, a provider of information on scholarly writings and current projects regarding Scriabin, a supporter of works in progress and a sponsor of activities promoting Scriabin's legacy.

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The Journal of the Scriabin Society of America welcomes correspondence, announcements of activities of interest, and articles on Scriabin - his life, his music, his ideas.

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Joseph Hofmann and Alexander Scriabin, Moscow, ca. 1892

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Why The Scriabin Society of America?

## Why The Scriabin Society Of America?

by Edith Finton Rieber

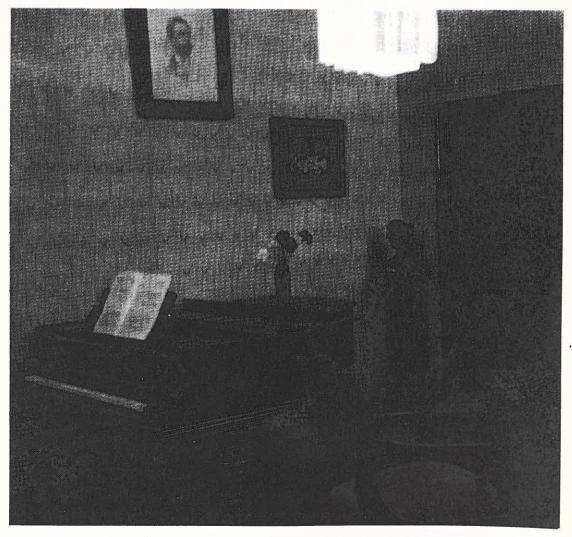
It began in Moscow in January, 1956 when I traveled to Russia with my husband, Alfred Rieber, as part of the first group of 20 Americans allowed to visit Russia during the Cold War era. My first request as a tourist was to visit the Moscow Conservatory where, during interviews with various musicians, I met Gold Medal award-winning cellist, Victor Stolin, who invited us to a concert at the Scriabin Museum on January 6th, Scriabin's birthday. The pianist, Vladimir Sofronitski, gave an all-Scriabin recital in the intimate setting of the composer's apartment. What an unforgettable evening! The room where he had once played was filled with photographs of Scriabin. The Christmas tree was aglow with tiny lights!

Two years later when we returned as part of the first cultural exchange program between the USSR and USA, I began studying Scriabin's piano music with Boris Moiseiwitch Berlin, pupil of the great Scriabin interpreter, Konstantine Igumnov.

These years of study in Moscow revolutionized my approach to music. I learned HOW to listen to the overlap of sound between notes, HOW to shape and voice Scriabin's transparent miniatures, HOW to create the overlay or sfumato which is essential to the transcendental nature of Scriabin's compositions.

I hope that this initial issue of the Journal of The Scriabin Society will inspire many of you to explore even further the music and ideas of Alexander Scriabin.

May the day come, as Scriabin said, "when Life, Labor and Love will be as beautiful as MUSIC."



Scriabin's apartment, Moscow, now The Scriabin Museum

#### The Scriabin Virus, a Lifelong Afflication

## The Scriabin Virus, a Lifelong Affliction

by Joseph Bloch

Luckily I was exposed to the Scriabin virus in early adolescence when my piano teacher assigned to me the two Poems, op. 32. I immediately responded to the waves of tritones, the sensuous relationship of hand to keyboard, the spidery counterpoint and the mysterious pale blue Belaieff cover with its black runic Cyrillic lettering. Then I devoured as much of Scriabin's music as I could and as much information as was available (the Swan and Eaglefield Hull books were hard, but not impossible, to find). A sophisticated older friend assured me that my passion for Scriabin was like any childhood disease (I believe that he compared it to the mumps) and would pass. He was wrong. I have never recovered.

Subsequent milestones along my Journey with Scriabin have been:

- The Stokowski recordings of the Poem of Ecstasy and Prometheus in the 1930s.
- Live performances of these plus the Divine Poem by Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony and later by Koussevitzky in Boston during my student days.
- Katherine Ruth Heyman's all-Scriabin recital at Town Hall in New York City in 1935. Unforgettable was her flight off the piano bench at the end of the 5th Sonata.
- Fighting the good fight for Scriabin at Harvard where I was told that his music was "too perfumed" to be played at Music Club gatherings.

- Arranging performances of the ten Sonatas by faculty members and students as a public event at the Juilliard School in 1969, the first time that the Sonatas had been heard complete in New York.
- A pilgrimage to the Scriabin Museum in Moscow in 1976 where I played the 5th Sonata while the curator, Irena Sofronitzka, brought out the manuscript for me to kiss.
- Sometimes I have had transporting, out-of-body experiences while playing his music, experiences unexpected and unexplainable - the 9th Sonata in my New York debut in 1950, Vers la Flamme in an Episcopal church (!) in England, the 7th Sonata in New Zealand.

And, now there is The Scriabin Society of America to keep my fever high and my interest alive.

## The Scriabin Society of America -From Idea to Reality

By Dmitry Rachmanov

The music of Scriabin has been a part of my life since my teenage days in Moscow as a student of the Gnesin Musical Institute. Scriabin first registered in my subconscious in the form of sounds I heard pouring out of the School's studios and auditoriums. In my early teens I was more and more fascinated by Scriabin's works. One of my friends played a lot of Scriabin, and I always felt he had a magic touch that penetrated the soul of the composer. His name was Kirill Dudnikov, and he died at the age of twenty.

I also grew up with recordings of Vladimir Sofronitsky, Heinrich and Stanislav Neuhaus (father and son), and others. I was an adolescent the first time I visited the Scriabin Museum in Moscow where the composer had lived and died. An atmosphere of mystery pervaded the walls of that memorable place. At that time I tried to approach Scriabin's more mature works, but it was a gradual process that came to fruition only years later, long after I had emigrated to New York in 1977. And each new step in encountering Scriabin's music was very special for me.

The idea of organizing The Scriabin Society of America was mentioned during my visit to Moscow in June, 1991. Moscow pianist Vladimir Tropp introduced me to Alexander S. Scriabin, the grandnephew of the composer and president of the Russian Scriabin Society. During our conversation, Mr. Scriabin said that while there were several European Scriabin associations, there was no such organization in America. "We would like to see something develop in the U.S.," he said, implying that this would open up possibilities of future artistic exchanges between continents. I promised to act as ambassador in this regard. On my return to New York, I shared these ideas with such musicians as Joseph Bloch, Faubion Bowers, and Ruth Laredo. But it wasn't until I met Edith Finton Rieber a few years later that it became possible to transform an idea into reality. Her great enthusiasm and love of the music of Scriabin, her hard work and zeal helped create The Scriabin Society of America!

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There is still a lot of work lying ahead. In order to organize events such as festivals, seminars, and concerts as well as international exchanges, we need the help of musicians and music lovers like you.

## **Keynote Address at The Scriabin** Museum, Moscow

January 7, 1992

**By Faubion Bowers** 

The 120th Anniversary Of The Birth Of Scriabin

Dear friends - of Scriabin!

What an honor for me to be speaking within the walls of the Scriabin Museum!

It has been 33 years since I was first here. I find it hard to call this a "museum." To me it will always be an "apartment." Here our beloved Scriabin lived and died. Here too, all the great names of the past came to pay homage – or to satisfy curiosity - to Scriabin: Siloti (my teacher of piano at the Juilliard School in New York), his pupil Rachmaninov, Busoni, Casals, Balmont, Tairov, Hofmann, Neuhaus, Goldenweiser...

First, I want to remember and pay my deepest respects to the memory of two people whom I can never forget: Tatyana Grigorevna Shoborkina. She opened the doors of this apartment to me in 1959 (when the place was being repaired), opened her heart to this American who had come to see where the composer had lived. "He is my most beloved composer", she said to me. And I answered, "Same here." She gave me photostat sketches of the Prefatory Action, and there in his handwriting was all of the future that Scriabin had once anticipated. The realization of that final work was to be in the hands of Alexander Nemtin, whose Universe was - is- one of the most splendid compositions of our time, a chef d'oeuvre. And as a person, Shaborkina was so sweet. When J. F. Belza gave a bad

review of my book, she never answered my requests for a copy of the review, although I am sure he was quite right in his criticisms.

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And. on this occasion, I also remember with deepest affection A. V. Kashperov. All my life I had wanted to write a biography of Scriabin. Since age 16, I had adored his music - what Nikolai Nabokov (the musician) called "flucht nach krankheit" (flight into sickness), meaning that every adolescent has a "crush" on Scriabin.

Finally, at age 50 I had enough money and leisure and composure to begin the biography. I had written more than 100 pages when Kashperov's collection of Scriabin's letters was published. George Reavy (the late poet-translator) sent me a copy. (He was also Evgenii Yevtushenko's translator in English.) To my dismay, everything I had written was wrong, contradicted by Scriabin's own words and letters and Kashperov's commentary. I remember throwing the pages away, and the wind blew them all over 95th Street in New York where I was living. A young man nearby who knew that I was writing a biography gathered up the pages and knocked on my door. I had not the heart to say that I had thrown them away, that they were all wrong. Needless to say, I began the biography all over again. This time, more accurately, but still there are, as so many of you scholars know, many, many mistakes. Mistakes of fact, yes; but surely few mistakes of heart. The subject of my talk today is "Scriabin in America", and that is a twisted, turning, tortuous story which I will try to tell you in all honesty.

When Modest Altschuler and Vasili Safonoff brought Scriabin to America in 1906-7, the visit was not a success. "Your billygoat will return with pocketsful of money," Scriabin wrote Tatyana. The reviews were bad; and the audiences thin. His fame then depended largely on being "Mr. Left-Hand," because of the famous *Nocturne*, op. 9.

Usually, a composer becomes more famous after he dies. This was not the case with Scriabin. He became even more neglected in America. Koussevitszky conducted *Poem of Ecstasy* at his debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1923. But, by the time I met him in the 30's and asked him why he rarely played Scriabin, he said, "The public doesn't like him and leading an orchestra is a matter of pleasing the public." Later, Koussevitszky would fall in love with Shostakovich and call him "the second Beethoven." Although audiences in America did not quite agree with that high evaluation. Shostakovich, once pro-Soviet, had publicly damned Scriabin as "our worst enemy." And, even earlier, Prokovief, who in his youth had imitated Scriabin, protested against Scriabin by telling his pupils, "No dominant ninth chords!"

In America, Rachmaninoff dropped Scriabin from his repertoire. And, by the time I got to the Juilliard, Siloti wouldn't talk to me about Scriabin. He was 80 years old, rather gaga, and his memories went back further in time to the 1880's when he was with Liszt. He talked only about Liszt, and would describe Liszt's piano playing in most exaggerated terms. For instance, how when Liszt played La Campanella, his fifth finger hit the high D# each time landing squarely in the center of the black key.

However, Vera Pavlovna Tretvañova, Siloti's darling wife, simply adored Scriabin and wouldn't talk about anything else with me. "He was not only my favorite composer, he was my favorite man", she would often say, "He was adorable!" She gave me a postcard photograph of Scriabin. It was one of the few souvenirs of Russia she had brought with her, when she and her husband, Siloti, emigrated to America.

I also asked the impresario Sol Hurok, why didn't the many, many pianists he imported to America play Scriabin? "The public doesn't like him," he sharply answered.

In those dark days for Scriabin, there was one pianist, Katherine Ruth Heyman, who stood guardian at the sepulchre of Scriabin. She was known as "the High Priestess of the Scriabin cult." In 1935 she became my teacher. She was a beautifully strange woman. She had made her debut at age 15 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1899, playing the American premiere of the Arensky Concerto. She also played in St. Petersburg at the palace of Prince Bariatinsky, where she played Arthur Farwell, "Father of modern American music," as she called her friend. She played his "War Dances" based on Indian themes.

At the time I was studying with her she didn't play so well. Time had robbed her of virtuosity. Nevertheless, her pianism was like a string of softly glowing pearls. She was a mystic, anti-Semitic, and believed all kinds of impossible things. She was surrounded by odd people. Reading one of Scriabin's letters years later, I thought of her. He had written Tatyana, his wife, that he was bemused by how his most outlandish ideas attracted the most unlikely people!

Suddenly, beginning in 1970, the perolom ("divide in the stairs," "break in the fever") happened. Scriabin began being played. No one person started it, but everyone began playing Scriabin. I remember Sviatoslav Richter who toured America playing the Seventh Sonata. Audiences applauded it just as loudly as they applauded everything else he played. When I interviewed him for an American magazine, he said, "I felt the Seventh Sonata needed an airing." And, in response to many reporters questions about Scriabin, he said, "I don't understand all this fuss about 'Why Scriabin?' In Russia he is simply part of the mainstream." And, now I think it can be safely said that Scriabin has become part of the American mainstream too. In fact, one teacher at the Juilliard School once told me, "If another student comes to me asking me to teach the Tenth Sonata, I will go mad."

Vladimir Horowitz was one of the first to re-instate Scriabin. During his absence from the concert stage (for 10 years he was a nervous wreck), Horowitz made a recording of dozens of Scriabin preludes. Perhaps that started the vogue. When he did return to the stage, he first played the *Ninth Sonata*, and every student in town began learning it.

Vladimir Ashkenazy also contributed to the popularity. His All-Scriabin recitals were sell-outs. So are his records of all the *Sonatas*, the *Concerto* and *Prometheus*. I remember with astonishment, at his performance of the Concerto with the New York Philharmonic, the applause was as thunderous as it was when he played Beethoven. Where was all that "the public doesn't like Scriabin" business?

Here, I'd like to mention Japan. In the dark days for Scriabin, in 1934, a Polish pianist, Senkievich recorded the *Tenth Sonata*, *Guirlandes* and other Scriabin I no longer remember. The two Polydor records could only be bought from some music society in <u>Japan</u>. This is not altogether surprising, because Japan's greatest composer, Yamada Kosaku, became a composer <u>because</u> of Scriabin. Just before World War I, Yamada was in Moscow, and, walking down a corridor of the Moscow Conservatory, he heard ravishing sounds coming from a practice room. "It was the most beautiful music I had ever heard," he wrote, "and, I decided to become a composer." The music he heard was the *Poème* in F sharp major, op. 32, no. 1.

Scriabin still has his enemies. When I asked my friend Semyon Bychkov, conductor of the Orchestre de Paris, to celebrate this 120th year of Scriabin's birth by playing *Poem of Ecstasy* which has deep connections with Paris, he sarcastically wrote me, "I will never play Scriabin."

Sometimes I wonder about Scriabin. Is he like folk dancing which is more pleasurable to <u>do</u> than to <u>see</u>? Perhaps, Scriabin brings more pleasure to the performer than to the listener. After all these years, I still marvel at the mystery of Scriabin's music and the mystery of its public acceptance.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

[Reproduced from Youthful and Early Works Alexander and Julian Scriabin, Compiled and annotated by Donald M. Garvelmann, Music Treasure Publications. New York, 1970, Donald M. Garvelmann, by permission.]



Scriabin age 11 in cadet uniform, with his father



Georgy Konyus

CANON

Composed in 1883. Manuscript No. 961 in the Scriabin State Museum. First published in 1929 by Muzgiz.

Scriabin's first musical influence might have come from his mother, Lyubov Petrovna Shchetinina-Scriabina (1849-1873). She had studied with Theodor Leschetizky and graduated from the Petersburg Conservatory. She died, however, when Scriabin was only one year old. By 1875, his father, Nikolai (Nikolaevich) Scriabin (1849-1914), had become interpreter to the Russian Embassy in Constantinople, and the young boy saw little of his father at home in Moscow, except for a few weeks' leave every three years. It was his fate, then, to grow up in a matriarchy of a grandmother, a grandaunt and his attentive, devoted and doting aunt, Lyubov Alexandrova Scriabina (1852-1941). "Shurinka's love of music showed from the cradle," Lyubov wrote of him in her memoirs, and she encouraged his musical development, taking him to concerts and the opera and praising his first attempts at composition.

Music promised no livelihood, and the problem of the boy's education had to be solved. He did not want to attend the Lycée, and surprisingly he himself (under the influence of an uncle) announced his decision to attend the Cadet Corps in Moscow. Though not physically equipped for that environment, it offered a good academic education and access to a piano. He entered the Corps in 1882.

Although Sasha (as the boy was called) learned a great deal about music by himself and under his aunt, it was not until the summer of 1883 that he came under the wing of his first formal piano teacher, Georgy Konyus (1862-1933). The Scriabin ladies had arranged their usual summer vacation in the rural village of Khovrino, near Moscow. Konyus was one of their neighbors. He had studied piano with the distinguished Paul Pabst (1854-1897) and was then a budding 21-year-old artist already graduated from the Moscow Conservatory, where he would later serve as professor. Konyus' early impressions of Sasha were recalled many years later at the request of Scriabin's monographer, Yuri Engel: "What a puny boy he was! Pale, short, looking far younger even than his years. He played the piano neatly and fluently, but weakly,..." Sasha's compositional efforts under Konyus were of a more disciplined nature than before. This Canon is the first known example.

## CANON

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## Skryabin: Summer 1903 and After

#### by Alexander Pasternak

(reprinted from *The Musical Times*, December 1972 – This is an edited version of an article originally published in the Russian journal "Novy Mir" in 1972; it has been translated by Felicity Ashbee and Irina Tidmarsh)

I remember the summer of 1903 for many reasons, both sad and happy, but above all because it was the first time that we stayed near Moscow and did not go to the south. We spent the summer on an estate 100 versts from Moscow, an exceptionally beautiful, hilly place, in a landscape of great variety. The estate was near Maroyaloslavetz, and the tiny railway station was the last stop before the town, used only for goods, trains and summer visitors.

In a part of the property belonging to one of the Obolensky princes, there stood three wooden dachas. There had long since been neither manor house nor outbuildings, no peasant huts nor semblance of lord-and-peasant relationship. The only reminder of the former estate, unofficial at that, was the name of the little station, "Obolenskoye". Nevertheless the estate and the dachas existed. The dachas were almost on the crest of a hill, which jutted out into the water-meadows and the arable land reaching the railway. The hill was thickly covered with pines, where there had once been a park; but now the pines had shouldered out the foreign beauty of the old limes and reappropriated their dry native soil. Even in so miniature a forest, when storms and high winds whirled through the trees the roaring and rumbling was like a huge organ and reminded us of the unceasing roar of the sea. But on quiet, sunny days all the qualities of a real forest were there: the dry, slippery, reddish pine needles lay in a thick,

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springy layer; squirrels lived high in the pines, not in the least afraid, and deafening us with their shrill chattering, scattering us with bits of gnawed fir-cones and the husks of seeds; everywhere were the mushrooms that can only be found in pinewoods.

For so large an expanse, it seemed rather empty and deserted. The trains dropped off only one or two passengers a day. I cannot remember the road from the station to our dacha, but it must have been an ordinary country one, dusty on dry days, impassable on rainy ones. Our dacha - we were the first to arrive was exactly opposite the bridge. From our terrace the view fanned out on to the wide meadows and the spiky tops of the trees on the horizon. It was particularly beautiful at sundown, when everything was bathed and patterned in red. At night, the river mist gradually filled all the lower reaches by our hill: this gave us an idea of how it must look in winter, when transformed by a covering of deep snow, sparkling under the moon, with a light at once dead, mysterious and rivetingly fascinating.

Although the dachas stood on the open meadows in front of the wood, they were isolated from one another by the curve of the hill. At first we did not suspect there were others besides our own. When we discovered their existence, it turned out that the others were like ours, each on its own small plot, ringed with the usual country fencing of two long horizontal planks fixed into poles at each end. All the dachas were lightly built and faced with wood; they were without heating and were used only in summer. I have described the situation and appearance of the dachas at length, because one of the summer's events - getting to know Skryabin and his family - was connected with, and partly the result of, the place's special character.

From the beginning of our stay at the dacha, my brother Boris and I daily made new discoveries. He had to make a collection of plants as part of a school project, which he did methodically, setting it out very beautifully. I made a collection of my own in imitation, though not half as full or attractive. Collecting these specimens often led us to far-off and unfamiliar spots. Then we felt like pathfinders or Red Indians, closely following their methods of remaining invisible (though there wasn't a soul for miles around!). On hot days we preferred the twilight freshness of the overgrown forest to the open spaces. One day we were walking thus through the pathless forest, with no definite aim, seeking nothing special. Suddenly in the surrounding silence, which seemed the greater for the rare trilling of some small bird and the chatter of the squirrels, we heard from far off broken snatches of piano playing. In the proper Red Indian manner, we crept through the thickets toward the sound of the music till we reached its source - and it was marvelous!

From the edge of the clearing we could see the dacha exactly like ours, from which the music was coming. It sounded as if someone were practicing; but it seemed strange that there were no hesitations over difficult passages. Pausing unexpectedly at one pint, it broke off, and we heard indistinct mutterings, then one or two notes repeated (like a piano-tuner's testing); then the phrase was resumed, moving on with its former swiftness and faultlessness. The muttering and piano-tuner's testing recurred too. My brother said that this was undoubtedly someone composing, not someone studying or practicing a new piece. From that day on we took to establishing ourselves there; from our vantage point we could watch and listen to our hearts' content. The power of the music was such that we were impelled to settle ourselves in our hide-out where, invisible, we could just go on listening.

One day my father came back in an unusually cheerful mood from his daily walk. He told us laughingly how on his way he had met an extraordinary person coming down the steep hill. This chap was not just walking, but was hopping down, flapping his arms like wings; he seemed about to take off, like an eagle, vulture or other such heavy bird. He might have been thought to be dead drunk. But from his appearance and movement it was clear that he was not, but was more probably an eccentric. At another such meeting a conversation sprang up; though even after this first acquaintance the eccentric flapping and hopping went on. It transpired that he too was a summer visitor, that his dacha was in the clearing by the wood (he had pointed to what was almost our hideout), that he was also a Muscovite, and that his name was Skryabin. He said he was a musician and composer, and that in the dacha that summer he was busy composing his Third Symphony (the Divine Poem). From that moment my parents' friendship with the Skryabin family started. It was also the end of our own secret link with this truly bewitching music.

My brother has twice described it: once, almost 30 years later, in his Safe Conduct, and a second time in his attempted autobiography in the 1950s. Like a stone carver who hacks off and throws away all that is superfluous from a chunk of marble, to reach the very core, my brother managed to convey, in a compressed and concentrated form, the overwhelming quality of the music. There is no need for me to dilute his words with my own; I want only to add a little about the direct outcome of this summer.

After both families had returned to town, the friendship between my parents and the Skryabins grew and strengthened. At Obolenskove I had begun to feel a great devotion to Skryabin's wife, Vera Ivanovna: she was the sweetest person, the embodiment of kindness and gentleness. As so often happens with children I came to love her deeply and secretly with all the tenderness and devotion of a 10-year old. In Moscow this grew stronger. In their family conflicts, I naturally took Vera Ivanovna's side, while retaining my fascination for Skryabin's music. When her conversations with my mother touched on painful matters, Vera Ivanovna was full of dignity. The fate of the Skryabins brought home to me all the bitterness of those family quarrels where people love each other but are more dedicated to their art than to family life. I had further proofs of this later on. When such a blow falls on ordinary people it is tragic enough; when the couples are distinguished by artistic gifts and strong creative personalities, it is even more tragic.

At first the Skryabins used to visit us informally, together or with their children. As the conflict developed, they more often tended to come separately. When the break came, Skryabin, to spare everyone's feelings, went for a long time into solitary exile abroad. Ivanovna remained in Moscow with the children, visiting us as usual. She gave many concerts, with considerable success, gradually narrowing her repertory down exclusively to her husband's works. When he was abroad, Vera Ivanovna – who was deeply immersed in his theories and his approach to the meaning of his music – was the only Moscow pianist who played his music in the authentic manner. I am not merely giving my own opinions, which might be open to doubt; others who knew the playing of both Skryabin and his wife thought the same. Of other Skryabin interpreters of the time, Igumnov, not to mention my own mother, took Vera Ivanovna's playing as their model.

Our family spent 1906 in Germany. In spite of correspondence, the link between our family and Vera Ivanovna grew weaker; on our return to Moscow it at first seemed to revive, but soon dwindled and finally broke.

\*

After several years' absence Skryabin returned to Moscow. To our parents, and to us, he somehow seemed different, new almost reborn. His new philosophical (or theosophical) ideas were already clearly defined, with new theories on the future of art and new ideas about his own future works. It was about that time, as my brother wrote, that he arrived, and rehearsals of *Ecstasy* started immediately.

The Poem of Ecstasy had been composed abroad; we of course did not know it. The symphony whose birth we had witnessed from the bushes at Obolenskoye had its first Russian performance in winter 1906 when we were in Berlin. Later we heard it often, and I came to know it almost by heart; its first conductor was Emil Cooper. The first performances of Ecstasy were all conducted by him; later Koussevitzky conducted it, less successfully. I think that Cooper worked on Ecstasy with Skryabin's direct help, perhaps even under his guidance.

My mother and I went to all the rehearsals of *Ecstasy*, often with my brother. They were held in the mornings or afternoons when the Conservatory hall was free and empty; few listeners were present. In the unusual emptiness and the half-light, the hall seemed unbelievably huge. The resonance and the dim lighting were oppressive and created a feeling of insecurity: the least rustle, it seemed, could precipitate a landslide or shatter the stillness. Sunlight fell in bright, arc-like beams on the oval portraits on the opposite wall; very slowly these arcs slid from portrait to portrait. Fretwork patches of glittering air seemed stretched obliquely

from windows to wall. In these continually moving patches there danced sparks of illuminated dust. The play of light belonged equally to the music and the hall.

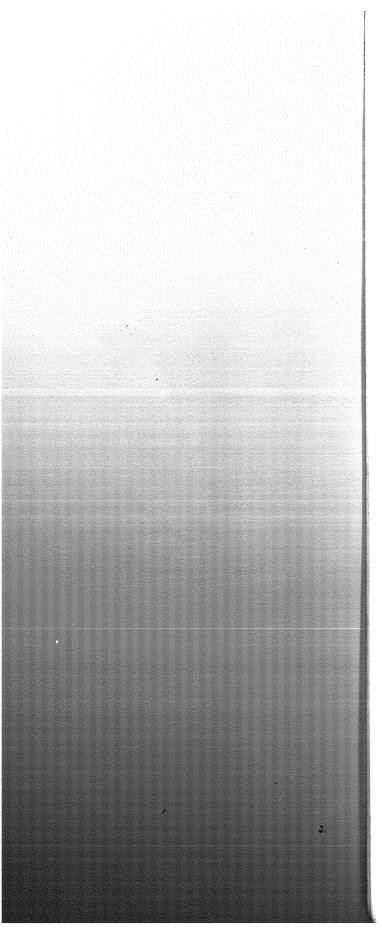
At these first rehearsals of *Ecstasy* – just as when we had listened from the bushes to the birth of the third symphony on the piano – everything seemed chaotic, as though a building was in pieces. But from the chaos of disparate elements each particle fell into its appointed place; to our joy and delight the building, its plan and its construction, began to be felt as a whole. The more we adapted ourselves to this recurring falling apart and coming together, the less frequently did Cooper's tapping baton have to halt the proceedings and interrupt the development of the chaos, the seemingly disparate elements grew into an indissoluble whole and revealed increasingly clearly the music's depth and force and newness.

So deep are the impressions music can make on a 15-year-old that, listening even now, to the *Divine Poem of Ecstasy*, no sooner has the first phrase sounded than I begin to tremble involuntarily, and images from those early years grip me again – the sound of masses of tumbling water, visions of the Creator in tumultuous joy roaring "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end". Or, when the sharp voices of the trombones, rising in solid architectural structures, shatter all the foregoing sounds; or, in the final passages of *Ecstasy*, when the clear sounds of the french horns soaring upwards transform themselves into a choir of pure women's voices' or when the whole orchestra, like an enormous ship, sails billowing, comes plunging forward through storm and waves. Then, suddenly there come the first sounds of the church bell, spreading above the orchestra, filling the hall with an immensity of joy, and with the affirmation of life. However often I hear this music, I reach the finale trembling, covered with sweat, and somehow purged as after the hardest and most satisfying piece of work.

It must be said, however, that performances after Cooper's and Koussevitsky's began to move away from the original interpretation. A metal tube has replaced the great church bell; the french horns no longer sound quite so like women's voices; and, alas, the ship no longer plunges forward.

\*

My impressions of music, however well remembered, are still only those of a layman. In those years I adored music and played a bit on the violin, although untrained; I went to practically every concert, and always heard marvelous music at home. I was lucky enough to have heard three pianists, giants amongst interpreters: Rakhmaninov, Busoni and Skryabin. The three were absolutely different. One could almost say that each was the antithesis of the others. Antithesis in everything: in behavior and character, in their love for various composers, in their understanding of those composers' works, and in their repertories.





Rakhmaninov was always stern, unsmiling and serious in the extreme. Unusually simple, severe, and economical in his movements, he was equally good in the works of others as in his own, and almost gave the impression of fulfilling a religious rather than a lay duty. At such times you would have said that it was no longer even a duty, but a kind of dedication, for there was such seriousness and asceticism in his playing and in his attitude to it. His spiritual power, and the power of his tenderness, the whole impression he made as a man – composer, pianist and conductor – was expressed in the sparing, stern, meaningful yet profound simplicity of his performance. Unless I am mistaken, he did not wear the usual tails, but appeared in a very severe, classical jacket, the kind incidentally that the conductor Nikisch also wore.

Rakhmaninov's playing was always astonishing in its masculinity, like some charger galloping. The hugeness of his hands is well known, and musicians envied him his span. He was successful, in my opinion, with Chopin, for the gift of interpreting this composer in the true Chopin manner – and who knows now how he played? – is given to few performers. In general, the character of a performer comes across in the way he sits at his instrument. Rakhmaninov sat at the piano with the same seriousness and simplicity as he must have sat at his writing desk or at meals in front of a plate of soup, in as prosaic a manner, forgetful of how many eyes were fixed on him at that moment, on his hands, his fingers, his head, or the pedals. I remember him thus, bolt upright, his head slightly bent, his body rigid. All the strength of his touch was concentrated in his hands; his body apparently playing no part in his extraordinary *fortissimo*.

Busoni was a complete contrast to him. On the concert platform, at the piano, I sensed a maniacal enthusiast for music. I do not know how he appeared when not on the platform, not concerted with music; but I imagine he could not exist away from it, even in his sleep. When he was sitting at the piano - or to be more exact almost lying on it – he became completely lost in the world of the music he was interpreting. The hall, the audience, even his own personality, ceased to exist for him. At such moments he behaved with a spontaneous childish naiveté, snorting and making hoarse, quite audible noises; he would hum loudly, particularly at pathetic moments, neither hearing himself nor noticing anything around him, so that he would infect the audience - who still forgave him everything, charmed by his playing. They forgave him, too, for his apparent lack of interest in the effect of his performance. He would rush off back-stage with a single nod, showing merely that he took account of the ovation. As this behavior became known, the ecstatic girls among his audience did not gather in the usual way, like garlands round the footlights, to shout for encores of their favorite works.

Busoni was an especially fine interpreter of Bach. The exceptional sounds and the unusual richness of tone that he extracted from the instrument gave the impression of an organ performance. When he played Bach, he seemed to be in a special mood, as if improvising, playing at a slower tempo than was usual with other pianists.

And Skryabin! But before speaking of Skryabin the performer, I must deviate for a moment to mention some "history".

It is easy to imagine composer-performers playing in the manner of Rakhmaninov (although they would never quite be able to achieve his personal style), or in the manner of Egon Petri, or Busoni, with the same reservations. This "in-the-manner-of" can be said of many leading performers. I remember Hofmann's playing, for instance; he subjugated his audience and reigned as the sole interpreter of Chopin, though many tried in vain to imitate him.

To play like Skryabin was absolutely impossible. His playing was unique; it could not be imitated by producing similar tone, or power or softness, and so on. For he had a special and entirely different relationship with the instrument, which was his own unrepeatable secret.

It is odd, but I do not remember Skryabin on the concert platform, though I heard him many times at concerts. But I remember perfectly everything about his playing when he performed his own works in our drawing-room. What struck me, whatever he was playing, in whatever withdrawn mood he was at the time, was that I always sensed a special personal quality in his interpretation, one which I have never met in any other performer. This may be merely a personal reaction; musicians who have heard Skryabin's playing may not have felt the same way about such special qualities. For me, a layman, it is difficult to explain

this in musical terms; but as soon as I heard the first sounds on the piano, even if I was sitting with my eyes shut not looking at Skryabin's hands and fingers, I immediately had the impression that his fingers were producing the sound without touching the keys, that he was (as it were) snatching them away from the keyboard and letting them flutter lightly over it. This created an extraordinary illusion that his fingers in some strange way were drawing the sound *out* of the instrument, a sound at once light, abrupt, and very strong. His enemies used to say it was not real piano playing, but a twittering of birds or a mewing of kittens, meaning both his interpretation and the actual sound of the instrument.

His *forte*, however, in spite of its lightness and transparency, sounded like the *fff* of any ordinary pianist; yet he achieved this without any of the tricks usually used to emphasize the difficulties of a passage, such as unnecessary crashing, over-use of the pedal, and so on. He made his effect simply by the contrast between a light, bell-like resonance and the special Skryabin forte, a contrast which in his playing was so tremendous that it unfailingly produced the necessary effect.

His spiritual lightness, so characteristic of the man, was reflected in his playing: in his gait, his movements, his gesticulations, the way he jerked his head up when he spoke. All this was quite natural and devoid of any theatricality or affectation. Indeed his whole appearance, his clothes, his ties, even the way he presented himself before the public, were intended to dispel any image of an artist.

But to get back to his playing. The character of his playing was inseparably connected with the way he sat at the instrument. He always sat somewhat farther from the keyboard than is usual, leaning back, his head up. That is why it seemed that his fingers were not actually touching the notes. All this ensured the lightness and resonance which were the essence and charm of his playing, and that twittering of little birds which is so necessary to him. Although many first-class pianists performed Skryabin's works excellently, for example Sofronitzky and Neuhaus, their playing never achieved that lightness and "fluttering" which I remember to this day in Skryabin's playing, and of which Sofrontizky must have had personal knowledge (Neuhaus could not have heard him; he did not appear in Moscow until long after Skryabin's death). In several works, such as the fourth and seventh sonatas, Neuhaus almost achieved Skryabin's "conversational" quality and the "nervous" playing which was also one of his characteristics.

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There is one more thing I should like to mention, maybe unimportant, though it may have a certain interest in connection with the birth of the Third Symphony. So we must return to the summer of 1903.

The third *dacha* on the Obolenskoye estate, some distance from the Skryabin dacha, was let to a group of pupils from some orphanage or religious institution. They reminded us of the pupils of the former Bursas seminaries in the Ukraine. We sometimes met them going to bathe in the river – in their summer uniforms, dark gray Russian shirts with leather belts like our school ones, black with metal buckles, they looked like little herds of horses being driven down to drink. They were robust, glum but harmless chaps who, it turned out, had organized their own brass band. A supervisor, a choirmaster and a servant lived with them in the dacha. Often, listening in our hide-out to Skryabin playing and to the gradual evolution of the *Divine Poem*, totally cut off from the reality of existence at Oboleskoye, and floating away into a world of fantasy, I would nearly fall flat on the ground with fright when the bull-like roar of a bass tuba would intrude suddenly and arrogantly into the surrounding beauty, supported by the crash of cymbals and the big drum – the orchestra of the blockheads next door!

The piano in the dacha would stop instantly, and so would the enthusiasm of the orchestra, as suddenly as it had begun. There would be absolute silence. enhanced only by the twittering of some bird; then the Divine Poem would again take over the world, and us in it. I think in these circumstances - calculated, you might think, to prevent any possibility of sensitive work of mind or hand - that the birth of this new music managed to take place. And so, later, listening to the symphony in its finished orchestral form, I invariably shuddered when the familiar, marvelous sound of the bass tuba burst in above the whole orchestra with its triumphantly joyful and assertive "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end". Involuntarily but instantly those bright cool mornings flashed before my mind's eye, the bushes, the sound of the piano playing - and then the all-destroying roar of brass! An almost blasphemous idea comes to my mind: could this dacha of orphans have inspired Skryabin's use of brass in his symphony? Could not the gloomy brass entry, grim as the Last Judgment, but developed and brightened as it recurs, be some kind of response? After all, it appears in his assertion of life, in his affirmation of the joy of struggle and conquest, in the Bacchanalian gaiety of those heavenly games, and in the bliss of rest after rewarding work. Is not this transformation of the senseless wail of the bass tuba behind the trees, trying to howl down the piano in the dacha? Is not the transfiguration of blind, gross, bull-like strength into its absolute opposite, the triumph of reason and will, expressed in the creation of a genius?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> seminaries for the priesthood, later renowned for the severity of their regime

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#### МАЛЫЙ ЗАЛЪ КОНСЕРВАТОРІИ.

Въ Четвергъ, 2-го Марта,

# концертъ

в. н. скрябиной.

Программа возвищема сечиновіями

A. H. CRPSENHA



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Op. 10. Impromets, A-d

Op. 11. Preludes: e-mail, es-mail

Op. 12. Impromptu: Fis-dur, b-moi

Op. 17. Préludes: d-moll, f-moll.

a) Andante b) Presto.

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Op. 87. Préludea: b-moll, es-mol

Op. 39. Prélude, G-dur.

Op. 41. Etudes: Des-dur, cis-mo

Op. 12. Poème, Fis-dur.

Havana as 8 v. apr., apper, as 11 v. sov.

Рокан фаброко Вехиновия, при магарина Геограда и Гресская

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Program of Scriabin music played by ex-wife Vera at The Small Hall of The Moscow Conservatory 2 March, 1906.

## Scriabin's Mystic Chord

#### by Stuart Isacoff

This article originally appeared in "Jazz and Keyboard Workshop"

Classical music has always played an important part in the development of jazz style. In the area of chords and voicings, contemporary pianists such as Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and the late Bill Evans were heavily influenced by Ravel. Another influential but lesser-known composer was the Russian Alexander Scriabin, a turn-of-the-century visionary, whose music and ideas found many adherents in the counterculture of the 1960's. Scriabin came up with a harmony he termed the "mystic" chord, and it has many applications for today's jazz player. Here is the original chord.



We can derive many different voicings from this rather thick combination of notes. By selecting some of the pitches we can create 13th, 9th augmented 11th and augmented 5th chords.

_^	C13	C9	C9(+11)	D7(+5)	E7(15)
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Many of these chord voicings share an interesting quality. They work equally well with either of two roots, a tritone apart.



Here are both applications, presented in descending chromatic (half step) lines.

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The fact that we can switch roots with this voicing is particularly handy in playing a cycle of fifths progression. Here is an example that shows why. Alternating bass notes in the cycle allows us to play an endless progression of V-I progressions, simply by moving the voicing down in half-steps!

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We can accomplish the same feat with the other voicings we selected from our original "mystic" chord.



Using these voicings in the left hand while the bass player of the group plays the roots is a common practice among today's performers. Of course, they can also be used in the right hand, sometimes with additional chord tones played in the left – as this last example demonstrates.

ــهــ	E9(\$5)	A7(+5)	D9(15)	G7(+5)	
9	<b>#8</b>	8	₩\$	ŝ	arraycolling
) •):	‡8	10	18	10	$\exists$
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Contemporary harmony, because it makes use of such "altered" chord members as augmented 9ths or flatted 5ths, allows for more "shared" tones between different chords. In the case of "tritone substitution" – offered in these examples – the 7th of one chord becomes the 3rd of another; the 13th of one becomes the augmented 9th of the other, and so on. This makes moving from one chord to another easy.

Scriabin helped lead the way, by discovering his "mystic" harmony.

## Tatyana's Lament

STUART ISACOFF



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Editor's Note - Tatyana was Scriabin's second wife (common-law).

## Late Skriabin: Some Principles Behind the Style

by Jay Reise

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Skriabin was always unwilling to explain the compositional techniques of his late works, starting with *Prometheus*, op. 60 (1910). Composers, like magicians, are often reluctant to give away secrets. Skriabin once invited Sergei Taneiev and Alexander Goldenweiser to his apartment promising to demonstrate some of his procedures, but then got cold feet and sent the two away. Perhaps the puritanically conservative Taneiev, who had been Skriabin's theory and composition teacher, would have reacted badly to his former student's avantgarde ways; Goldenweiser, who was something of a Moscow Steuermann, would almost certainly have been intrigued if not enthusiastic.

The mystery of Skriabin's methodology has been the subject of many analyses since Leonid Sabaneiev published his article "Skriabin's *Prometheus*" in *Der Blaue Reiter* in 1912. From then on, each writer has segregated pitches, isolated scales, and circled hexachords, but, with the qualified exception of Varvara Dernova,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Varvara Dernova, Garmoniia Skriabina (Leningrad, 1968)

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none has provided a concise and consistent explanation of Skriabin's pitch organization. In this article I hope to establish four main points. First: most previous attempts to explain Skriabin's music have failed to describe satisfactorily his derivation and organization of pitches. Second: Dernova was right in claiming that the principal elements of Skriabin's later style have their sources in the earlier functionally tonal works. Third: tonally derived whole-tone and octatonic scales are the exclusive pitch sources in the later pieces; tones foreign to these scales are treated as "chromatic" notes and resolved through careful voice leading into the scales. And fourth: Scriabin retained an important structural tie with tonal music by constructing the formal design of many works on transposition levels outlining symmetrical chords of tonal music, the augmented triad and the diminished seventh chord.

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Most analysts of Skriabin's later music have confronted a difficult situation: when a precise analysis predicated on a single set or a single scale is attempted, too many pitches outside the set remain unaccounted for, and when more sets (or more inclusive sets) are proposed, a sense of focused understanding of the style is lost. Sabaneiev, for example, who might have been described as Skriabin's amanuensis, derived the so-called "mystic chord" from the "overtones of the so-called harmonic scale of sounds... 8, 9, 10, 11-13, 14"<sup>2</sup> (e.g., C, D, E, F‡, A, B♭). These pitches were then arranged into perfect fourths, augmented fourths, and diminished fourths and became, according to Sabaneiev, the "harmonic principle" of *Prometheus* (see ex. 1).



Example 1: The Mystic chord

There seems today to be a general consensus that the mystic chord is neither the key nor the generating element in Skriabin's method. That it appears often and is among Skriabin's favorite sonorities is undeniable, but many other similar chords are also present. Glancing through the sketches of the *Prefatory Action* (1914-15), for example, one finds the mystic chord quite often, in many guises, but also a host of other chords containing other dispersions of the mystic chord's characteristic intervals. In these sketches Skriabin often treats the chords as a point of departure by beginning a progression with it (often altered

by a note or expanded) and then moving away.<sup>3</sup> Like the "Tristan" chord the mystic chord is an important idiomatic sonority, but it cannot accurately be described as a generating principle. In a word, then, Sabaneiev's explanation is simplistic. He is accurate in describing the mystic chord as a characteristic sonority whose pitches are derived from the upper overtones, but his implications of a harmonic system derived from it are vague and misleading.

Dernova's study, which was written in the 1940s but not published until 1968, is currently regarded quite highly, since she is considered by many to have cracked the code of Skriabin's harmonic system. Dernova is at her best when she demonstrates that the principal harmonic elements of the later style have their roots in the music of the middle period (1903-10, from the Fourth Sonata, op. 30 to the *Album Leaf*, op. 58). She is not as persuasive, however, when she discusses the pitch organization of the later style exclusively in terms of two dominant ninths a tritone apart with added and variable pitches. These non-harmonic "problem" tones (variously labeled "v" and "w") are given a singularly unconvincing explanation, unconvincing primarily because Dernova does not satisfactorily discuss Skriabin's voice leading techniques. (According to Prokofiev, Liadov considered Skriabin's voice leading in the early works to be "the purist" of all contemporary composers", although he refused to analyze the later pieces.)

George Perle, and several others perhaps under the influence of the post-Schoenbergian tendency towards over-systematization, have considered Skriabin a pre-serialist who was employing set-theory and who was moving, before his premature death, toward dodecaphony.<sup>7</sup> This is a somewhat questionable hypothesis, since it is only in the initial works of the later period, such as the Sixth and Seventh Sonatas, Opp. 62 and 64, that Skriabin employs rigid sets (i.e., the octatonic scale). In the final works, pitches foreign to the basic set are used with increasing frequency.

In his book Zwischen Tonalität und Atonalität, Studien zur Harmonik Alexander Skriabins (1978), Gottfried Eberle seeks an explanation on a middle ground between tonality and set-theory. Eberle is correct when he points out that the bass line of local harmonic progressions sometimes outlines a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Leonid Sabaneiev, "Skriabin's *Prometheus," The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, New Documentary Edition ed. Klaus Lankeit, trans. H. Falkenstein (New York, 1974), pp. 134-35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Skriabin, Alexander, Prefatory Action (Predvaritel'noe deistvie), facs. in Manfred Kelkel, Alexandre Scriabine, Sa vie l'ésotérisme et la langage musical dans son oeuvre (Paris, 1978), vol III, pp. 172-200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Dernova, pp. 29-68. A connection can be drawn even to the early works in which the French sixth and the "floating 5th" of the  $V^7$  (i.e.  $V^7$ ,  $V_{15}$ , and  $V_{15}$  are consistently applied elements: see p. 223. The  $V_{15}$  is a characteristic sonority of the well-known Etude in  $D_5$ , op. 8, no. 10.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Dernova, pp. 21-29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Sergei Prokofiev, Prokofiev by Prokofiev, ed. David H. Appel (New York, 1979), p. 238.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality*, 3rd edn. (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), pp. 41-43.

diminished seventh chord,<sup>8</sup> but his derivation of pitch vocabularies from synthetic modes or sets beyond the octatonic and whole-tone scales is again arbitrary and vague.<sup>9</sup> Like Dernova, Eberle provides no satisfactory discussion of voice leading, and his invocation of a plethora of modes<sup>10</sup> certainly does not lead to an understanding of a style so limited, unified, and refined as that of Skriabin's opp. 60-74.

This is merely a brief account of a few of the better-known attempts at revealing Skriabin's methods. Each author, and most especially Dernova, makes useful observations about Skriabin's style, but none of them is convincing in explaining the fundamental question: how does Skriabin derive and organize his pitches? In pursuing an answer to this question, it might be best to first trace the evolution and clarify the function of the mystic chord, and then proceed to discuss the very separate issue of pitch organization.

The mystic chord is the sonority always associated with Skriabin, but in its seventy-year history no adequate explanation of its role in Skriabin's work has been proposed. Sabaneiev, as we have seen, merely presents the chord and then makes unsubstantiated claims for it. A tonal explanation is usually abandoned after the rather unhelpful description of the chord as some sort of dominant thirteenth. More significant, however, is the characteristic that the bottom four notes of the chord form an enharmonic French sixth. The French sixth and its enharmonic sonority V<sub>5</sub> can be found frequently in Skriabin's early works and are among his favorite harmonic devices in the middle periods, where they amount to something of a preoccupation: see especially The Poem of Ecstasy (1908). (Two of Skriabin's most ardent admirers at the time soon absorbed his influence in this respect with varying degrees of success, Stravinsky in The Firebird of 1910 and Glière in Ilya Muromets of a year later.) Several pieces from the early and middle periods contain particularly good examples of Skriabin's use of the French sixth/V<sub>5</sub> sonority. In the Prelude, op. 11, no. 2 (1895), Skriabin uses the sonority nine times in the course of the 68 measures of the piece, while in the Poème, op. 32, no. 1 (1903), one of Skriabin's most famous pieces, the principal idea of the piece is based upon the ambiguity of the chord as French sixth (upbeat measure), appoggiatura to  $V^7$  (m.1), and  $V_5^7$  (m. 4). The beginning of the Poème languide, op. 52, no. 3 (1907) is also noteworthy because Skriabin adds the ninth to the sonority, which now gives us five of the six notes of the mystic chord. The mystic chord then is a characteristic vertical sonority derived from the French sixth, but, as we shall see, it is not the principal element in the process of pitch generation.



Example 2: Poème, op. 69, no. 1. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Gottfried Eberle, Zwishschen Tonalität und Atonalität: Studien zur Harmonik Alexander Skrjiabins, Berliner Musik-wissenschaftliche Arbeiten, 14 (Munich, 1978), pp. 87 and 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Eberle, pp. 89, 99, 107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Manfred Kelkel, in his gargantuan study, also lists too many modes to be helpful.

The separation of the function of the mystic chord and the generation and manipulation of pitches can be seen clearly in the Poème, op. 69, no. 1 (ex. 2a), in which the mystic chord appears at once in the first measure. Throughout the opening eight measures of the piece, one is struck by the whole-tone sound of the music (C/D/E/F#/G#/A#: abbreviated WT1), despite the fact that most of the remaining tones (A, Db, Eb, F) are to be found in mm. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8. With the presence of so many foreign tones it might seem unlikely that a whole-tone analysis would produce a satisfactory description of the sound, but if we examine the situation a bit more closely, we see that Skriabin treats these foreign tones as "Chromatic" to the whole tone scale, and almost always "resolves" them in the traditional fashion – by half step.

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In m. 1 of the Poème, the first A in the right hand is resolved to the B immediately, while the corresponding resolution of the A in the left hand is delayed until the first beat of the next measure. The A on the first beat of m. 2 is resolved on the first beat of m. 3, while the Db in the left hand of m. 2 resolves first back to the Di immediately following and then to the C on the initial beat of m. 3. This measure is entirely within the whole-tone scale. The two Els of m. 4 are outside the scale and the resolutions of both are delayed until m. 5 as shown. Mm. 5-8 are essentially a transposition of mm. 1-3 with a few alterations, and all tones foreign to WT1 resolve by half step. On the third beat of m. 9, pitches from WT2 (C# and F) are introduced producing a chromatic blur. These new notes are "blinding pitches" to WT<sup>2</sup> and represent a pivotal area from which WT<sup>2</sup> emerges almost in its entirety in m. 10. The next "problem" tones are the D\s of m. 13. The upper one (in the left hand) resolves to the E of m. 14, while the resolution of the lower D# is delayed until the initial beat o/m. 15. The D# is repeated in m. 15, and this time it moves down to the D\; this procedure is similar to the D\, - D\; - C figure in mm. 2-3. Throughout the "leger" passage of m. 16, the "chromatic" note is A and it always resolves to B<sub>b</sub>. The second half of the piece (not shown) is, for the most part, a repetition of the first half with a few additions.11

In the last four measures of the piece (ex. 2b), Skriabin alters his procedures somewhat. Mm. 33 and 34 contain an octatonic reinterpretation of the melodic material of m. 1 which is similar to the tonal procedure of reharmonization. The chord of mm. 34 and 36 is the mystic chord with a few alternations: the F# and A are missing, the E is doubled, and the Bb is tripled (note that the Bb was the melodic goal of mm. 1 and 2, resolving the A of m. 2). The note G, which is not found in the mystic chord is also present. The G is the twelfth above the root C, is the missing element in Sabaneiev's overtone series, and would be the next

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Space does not permit me to demonstrate that these principles are applied consistently throughout all of the pieces from which examples have been taken for this paper.



Example 3: Etrangeté, op. 63, no. 2. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

perfect fourth above the D of the mystic chord (compare ex. 1). In the post-Prometheus piano works, many of which are offshoots of the Prefatory Action. Skriabin often extends the mystic chord by its characteristic intervals and rearranges the pitches. This procedure can be seen clearly in the sketches of the Prefactory Action. 12 The G. of course, is not a member of WT1, but it does not require resolution because Skriabin's process of chromaticism is not at work here. In this final chord of the piece, Skriabin has returned to the "home" sonority slightly elaborated.

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We have seen how the pitch organization of the *Poème* is based upon the handling of chromaticism within the whole-tone scale. In many of his late compositions Skriabin uses another symmetrical scale, the octatonic scale, as the fundamental pitch group, and again includes the tones foreign to the scale as chromatic notes which are resolved.

In Etrangeté, op. 63 no. 2 (ex. 3), Skriabin uses all three transpositions of the octatonic scale (ex. 4):



Example 4: Octatonic scales

The first seven measures employ octatonic scale 1 (abbreviated O1). "Chromatic" pitches occur at several points. In groups 3 and 5 of m. 3, the note D resolves to D<sub>b</sub> in the following groups. In m. 6 the D in the chord splash moves immediately to C#. In m. 8 this twice stated C#/D combination is used as the first two notes of the contrasting phrase which is constructed with the second transposition of the octatonic scale. A modulation between O<sup>1</sup> and O<sup>2</sup> thus takes place when the chromatic D asserts itself as a diatonic element binding the two phrases together and resulting in a transposition of scales. This is, of course, similar to certain procedures of modulation in tonal music. In m. 11 the shift from O<sup>2</sup> to O<sup>3</sup> is accomplished through a device again borrowed from tonal music, the sequence (compare the last beats of mm. 9 and 11). Through the remainder of the piece these techniques are employed consistently.

The mystic chord is not as recognizable in Etrangeté as it was in the Poème, but its characteristic intervals are found throughout the piece. All of the notes of the first four beats of m. 1 except for the Db, are members of the chord, and the three notes of the first-beat chord maintain the vertical placement of the source (cf. ex. 1). This configuration could be described as the mystic chord in second inversion. The first group in m. 3 is an arpeggio of the mystic chord in first inversion, but we have a Db instead of a Db. The Db of the mystic chord appears in the third group of m. 3, but since it is a chromatic note in O1 it resolves to Db in the fourth group.

At this point, we have the evidence to draw several conclusions regarding Skriabin's methods of pitch organization. Unlike Debussy (cf. "Voiles") and Messiaen (cf. "Regard du Pere" from the Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jesus), who only exceptionally use pitches outside the symmetrical scale of a given octotonic or whole-tone passage, Skriabin employs a subtle but traditionally treated principle of "chromaticism" within whole-tone and octatonic contexts. Notes foreign to the scale are introduced as chromatic elements, which are then resolved back into the given scale by half-step. The mystic chord is a vertical intervallic referent, as Dernova states.<sup>13</sup> but it is also directly related to both the whole-tone and octatonic scales. The mystic chord is a whole-tone chord except for the note A, and it is octatonic except for the note D (see ex. 5):



Example 5

In the whole-tone phrases (m. 1 of the Poème, ex. 2), the A is a chromatic element which resolves into the whole-tone scale, and in the octatonic passages (m. 3 of Etrangeté, ex. 3) the D is a chromatic element which resolves into the octatonic scale. Examination of the Prefactory Action fragment further supports this view of chromatic pitches in the mystic chord. Most of the Prefactory Action sketches are octatonic, and Skriabin almost invariably spells the mystic chord C-F#-BI-E-A-DI or D#.14 The octatonic variant of the mystic chord with the flattened ninth is also the final chord in each of the Deux Danses, op. 73 (see ex. 6B from Guirlandes, op. 73, no. 1), which are extracts from the Prefactory Action.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Kelkel, III, p. 179, col b, system 4. Here the added G is present in a twelve-tone version of the chord.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Dernova, p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See Kelkel, III, p. 173, col. a, system 3, p. 175/b/2, p. 176/b/2, p. 179/b/3 for several examples I have chosen at random. For the sake of clarity and simplicity I have selected only untransposed examples of the mystic chord. Needless to say, Skriabin transposes the chord freely.



Example 6: Guirlandes, op. 73, no. 1. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

When we teach the Bach chorales to beginning harmony students, we do not seek to present an airtight system of composition but rather the elements of a style. Similarly, I am not trying to reveal a rigid system in Skriabin's work, but rather a few components of a relatively flexible method of composition, which can explain or at least describe certain characteristics of his style. He himself apparently did not describe his methods as a system, and more likely sought to employ a series of relatively few principles which generated a *small* number of functional relationships (i.e. the symmetrical scales and the application of "chromaticism" within them). These relationships were then used as the basis of the pitch language which could then be employed for a large number of works.

It is important to recognize that such a description applies as well to tonality but not to serialism, since in the latter no predetermined hierarchy supposedly exists among the pitches. Skriabin's approach centers around the concept that any symmetrical scale or mode of limited transposition (Messiaen's term) will generate music of a small number of pitch collections, and although the number of pitch collections varies greatly between the modes of limited transposition and the diatonic major and minor scales (which contain twelve collections for each scale), the concept of diatonic/chromatic is common to both. The diatonic/chromatic concept is not, of course, a property of either serialism or pre-twelve-tone cell composition. Thus Perle's statement that "Scriabin, in his employment of a more complicated set, of transpositions of the set, of invariant segments that function as pivotal elements among the various transpositions, and of consistent variants of the set, may be considered the first to exploit serial procedures systematically as a means of compensating for the loss of traditional tonal functions"15 is essentially an overinterpretation of Skriabin's approach. Because the symmetrical scales are derived from the tonal vocabulary, and because Skriabin treats them as diatonic units colored by the nondiatonic pitches, his approach cannot be accurately described as serial but rather as chromatically modal.

This symmetrical-scale approach has obvious limitations, and Skriabin often increases his resources by first establishing a whole-tone or octatonic context and then delaying the resolution of some chromatic tones. In Guirlandes, op. 73, no. 1 (ex. 6a), for example, the treatment of chromaticism within the octatonic framework is freer and, in some ways, even more impressive than in the earlier works. Taking the circled chromatic pitches in the first eight measures in order, the B in the first measure very tentatively resolves to the Bb of m. 2 by octave displacement, the G# in m. 3 is unresolved but will reappear and resolve in mm. 6 and 7, the B in m. 3 resolves to the C in m. 4, the B in m. 5 again weakly resolves by octave displacement, the ensuing Fs resolve to the Es of m. 6, the resolution of the G# in m. 6 is delayed through the change to O3 where it resolves to the A, and the D, vaguely resolves to the C in the second group of the descending sequential figure of m. 9. The octatonic sound of the music is carefully preserved by burying the chromaticism (especially where it remains unresolved or is resolved by octave displacement) in thick and rhythmically weak parts of the texture. It is interesting to note that the heavily chromatic ascending first passage (mm. 1-7) is followed by a long descending passage which relaxes the tension and contains no chromaticism at all. Similar patterns are continued throughout the piece. At the very end (ex. 6b), Skriabin repeats the initial quintuplet figure (cf. ex. 6a, m. 1) with its chromatic B, and proceeds to resolve it directly by half step (to the Bb) for the first time.

Perle, p. 41. Notice that each of Perle's examples from the Seventh Sonata is constructed from chromatically unaltered octatonic scales.

#### II

I mentioned above that I felt Skriabin arrived at the vocabulary of his later style partially through his earlier explorations of the French sixth/V<sub>5</sub>? sonority. This sonority is the basis of the mystic chord, and of the six notes which define the chord they are the four notes which are common to both the whole-tone and octatonic scales; the upper two notes, as we have seen, are "chromatic" depending on whether the context is whole-tone or octatonic. The symmetrical scales can be derived by combining various transpositions of the symmetrical chords of the tonal vocabulary. Combining two French sixths a minor third apart will produce an octatonic scale, and combining two of them a major second apart will yield all of the pitches of a whole-tone scale.

The other two symmetrical chords common to the tonal vocabulary of the nineteenth century are the augmented triad and the diminished seventh chord. Combining two augmented triads a major second apart will produce a whole tone scale, and combining any two diminished seventh chords will produce an octatonic scale. Given these characteristics of the whole tone and octatonic scales, it is interesting to observe that Skriabin, probably trying to avoid the idiomatic sonorities of Wagner and Liszt, used relatively few pure augmented triads and diminished seventh chords in his later music. He did, however, continue to employ the nineteenth-century device of building sequences and structuring the sections of a piece on degrees that would outline the diminished seventh chord or the augmented triad. Such structural use of symmetrical chords is often found in the music of Chopin and Liszt. Sequences built on the diminished seventh chord can be found in the Chopin Mazurka in C# Minor, op. 50, no. 3 (mm. 161-65), and in Liszt's Via Crucis, Station VIII, "Die Frauen von Jerusalem" (mm. 1-8). Key structures based on an augmented triad can be found in Liszt's Consolation No. 3 (Db major, F minor, A minor/major), and in Chopin's Ballade in F Minor, Op. 52, where important structural keys are F minor, A major, and Db major.

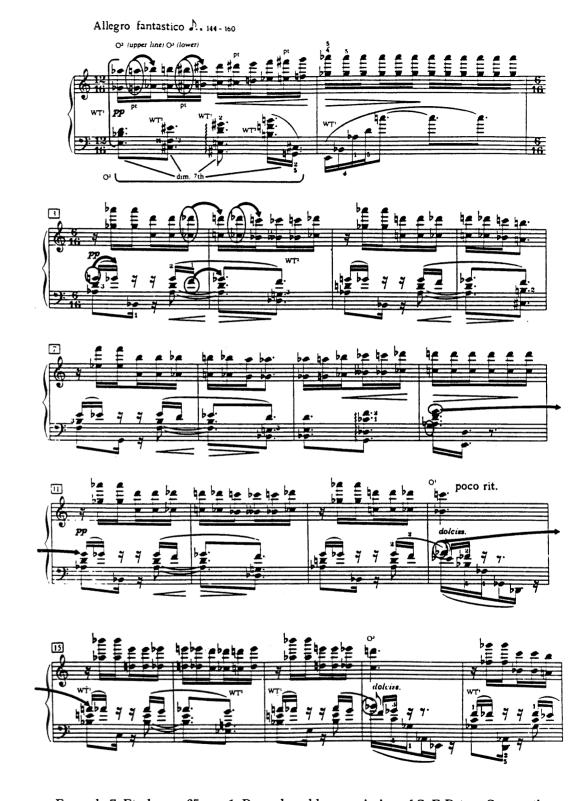
Skriabin uses these structuring techniques in a very similar fashion in much of his later music. In the *Prelude*, *op.* 67, no. 1 (ex. 6c), a long sequence (mm. 19-27) returns us to the beginning of the piece. Each of the four phrases of the melody in the sequence is built a minor third lower than its predecessor. The beginning soprano notes of each of the four phrases combine to form a diminished seventh chord. Within this same sequence, the notes of the bass line combine to produce a different diminished seventh chord. These pitches form the bass line for the entire piece except for four measures in the middle (mm. 15-18) where the bass pitches are members of the third diminished seventh chord.

## Two Preludes, Op. 67 (1912–1913) № 1



Example 6c: Prelude, op. 67, no. 1.





Example 7: Etude, op. 65, no. 1. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.



Example 7, continued

In the Etude op. 65, no. 1 (ex. 7), we see Skriabin using the degrees of a symmetrical chord as a substitute for key structure in the large sense. The material of this piece consists of two contrasting sections, Allegro fantastico and Meno vivo, each of which is stated, with variation, four times. The Allegro fantastico appears in only two transpositions, beginning (in the left hand) on E (m. 1) and B# (m. 35), forming an incomplete augmented triad. The Meno vivo is first heard beginning on a bass note of F# (m. 23); its repetitions then occur beginning with bass notes of D (m. 47), Bb (m. 87), and finally again Bb (m. 111). These structural pitches, of course, outline a complete augmented triad, an augmented triad that is different from the incomplete one on which the Allegro fantastico is based.

Some further analysis of this etude will give some of the points in this article more substance and clarification. In spite of the chromatic run of major ninths which characterizes the Allegro fantastico theme, this piece is based primarily on the whole-tone scale. The harmony of the first measure consists of alternating French sixths with roots a minor third apart, and the bass line is built on a chain of minor thirds which forms a complete diminished seventh chord. The pitch content of the left hand is thus octatonic, although the pitch content of each discrete beat (including the notes in the right hand) is whole-tone. The middle notes of each sixteenth group are passing tones in two senses: vertically they move to a whole tone sonority, and horizontally they move to pitches of the octatonic scale (O<sup>2</sup> and O<sup>3</sup> for the upper and lower members of the major-ninth run respectively). The pitch content of the second measure is entirely wholetone. The circled notes in m. 3 would seem to indicate that the whole-tone scale has been abandoned, but we find that these notes are chromatic elements which resolve into WT<sup>1</sup> by half step, as shown. The G on the first beat of m. 10 is the only chromaticism in this section whose resolution is delayed until the following phrase (the upper G). The lower G is left unresolved; its function seems to be to enrich the sonority emphasizing the clashing dissonance (Ab - G) at the end of the phrase.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to compare this spot with the end of the piece. which reaches the same chord (m. 112, first beat, missing a few of the doublings), but in which the G immediately resolves to G, producing a French sixth (common to both symmetrical scales) as the final chord.

Returning to mm. 14 and 18, both of which mark the ends of four-bar phrases, we see Skriabin shifting to the octatonic configuration. The descending octatonic figure here is used also in m. 20. In each instance, the initial pitch of the tenor voice is chromatic: the Ab of m. 14 resolves to the Ab of m. 15, but the analogous pitches of mm. 18 and 20 are left unresolved in favor of a sequence at m. 19 which produces an abrupt increase of tension at m. 21. These unresolved chromatic tones (as well as the resolved one in m. 14) can, however, be assimilated into the octatonic/whole-tone scheme as binding tones in the pivotal area between octatonic and whole tone sections. In each instance, by combining the chromatic pitch with the two notes on the right hand, a whole-tone configuration is produced (mm. 14, 18, and 20). Thus as in the chromatic blurring in the *Poème*, op. 69, no. 1, and the binding Ca of *Etrangeté*, chromatic elements become diatonic; but whereas those pieces were entirely whole-tone or entirely octatonic, this Etude contains both symmetrical scales, and in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The added pitches in the *ossia* passages (mm. 73-74, 86-87) are also meant to enrich the sonority and do not fit into the whole-tone scheme. It is interesting to note in m. 10 that the chromatic G, when transposed to the register between the C and D of the right hand, yields the identical sonority of the *ossia* chords, i.e.

binding areas both scales sound simultaneously although their identities remain clear. In the bass line of m. 22 Skriabin completes the linear diminished seventh chord with F‡ on the first beat of the Meno vivo, thereby moving with maximum smoothness into the contrasting section.

The Meno vivo sections are whole-tone. In the right hand of m. 23 the G and A, and the D# and E# are chromatic tones which resolve by half step as expected. The left hand presents the mystic chord transposed to F#, which means that the second pitch from the top, D#, is foreign to the whole-tone scale. This chromatic D# acts as something of a pedal tone throughout the passage, and resolves downward by half step in mm. 27 and 28 (somewhat tentatively) and in m. 34 (more convincingly).<sup>17</sup>

It is perhaps important to emphasize again that the methods and procedures discussed in this article are not an attempt to define or describe an airtight system in Skriabin's work. The search for such a system might be the single greatest problem in the researches and analyses of Derna and Perle. And although passages exist such as the final measures of Prometheus and Vers la flamme, op. 72 (1914), and the climax of the Seventh Sonata (1912, m. 313), in which compositional decisions are based on considerations of triadic harmony rather than the symmetrical scales exclusively, Skriabin's basic procedures for pitch organization can be simply and briefly stated: four of the six tones of the mystic chord form a French sixth, while the other two function as "chromatic" notes depending on whether a given passage is in the octatonic or whole-tone scale. Skriabin differs from other composers in his treatment of these symmetrical scales. The pitches excluded from the scales function as chromatic tones, and they are resolved into the given scale by half step. In some instances chromatic tones are left unresolved, but the surrounding pitches so consistently define the scale that the unresolved notes do not obscure the octatonic or whole-tone nature of the passage. With careful rhythmic placement, a great many chromatic pitches may be used - even whole chromatic scales. (The chromatic scale is, of course, still another symmetrical scale, and occasionally functions independently, as in the passage mentioned above from the Seventh Sonata, m. 313.)

On the other hand, formal structures in Skriabin are often determined by major and minor-third chains, as they were in much of the music of the nineteenth century. With Skriabin these chains are derived, once again, from his favorite scales: the whole-tone scale based on the augmented triad, and the octatonic scale based on the diminished seventh chord.

## Scriabin's Self-Analyses

by George Perle

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What authority does a composer have as analyst of his own music? This is not a question that we are often constrained to consider, since composers seldom offer us anything that can be construed as an analysis when it comes to explaining how their music is put together. And we cannot always trust the relevance of the vague and spacious generalities they give us instead, or the motivations behind these. When Schindler asked Beethoven why his last piano sonata had only two movements the composer replied that he hadn't had time to write a third, a reply that was quite good enough for Schindler. In his only extended exposition of the twelve-tone system Schoenberg makes the following assertion about the use of inversional forms of the series: "While a piece usually begins with the basic set itself, the mirror forms . . . are applied only later" Almost every twelve-tone piece of Schoenberg's controverts this assertion in its opening bars. Webern, himself a conductor, whose works are meticulously marked with explicit and exhaustive metronomic indications, seems to have had no idea at all of their time-span. The durations given in the scores and in his letters are as much as two or three times longer than the durations implied in his metronomic indications. Though Scriabin admitted that there was "nothing by accident" in his music, that he composed "according to definite principle," he

In the Meno vivo beginning at m. 47 (not shown) the analogous pedal tone, B, resolves by upward half step to C (m. 57). Skriabin makes the necessary shifts here to move into a transition to the recapitulation. A literal restatement of the Meno vivo would lead to the Allegro fantastico on Gl, nicely completing the structural augmented triad E-B+Gl, but would make the piece too long and repetitious, It seems significant that despite the necessary structural and harmonic shifts at this point the resolution of the B has a high priority.

Arnold Schoenberg, Style and Idea (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 227.

refused to say what the principle was. Faubion Bowers quotes a contemporary: "Scriabin always said that everything in his later compositions was strictly according to 'law.' He said that he could prove this fact. However, everything seemed to conspire against his giving a demonstration. One day he invited Taneyev and me to his apartment so he could explain his theories of composition. We arrived and he dilly-dallied for a long time. Finally, he said he had a headache and would explain it all another day. That 'another day' never came."

Yet even though they did not give us analytical surveys of their compositions, the composers of an earlier age were constantly making explicit and detailed analytical assertions, in the very act of writing the notes down. When Beethoven, in the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony, spells the same pitch-class collection as Al-C-El-Fl in m. 29 and as Al-C-El-Gl in m. 206, he is engaged in an act of analysis, as well as an act of composition. For Scriabin, as for Schoenberg, and almost at the same time, a diatonic scale of functionally differentiated notes was replaced by a semitonal scale of functionally undifferentiated notes. The notational system was not replaced, however, and the new music, based on the material of the universal set of twelve pitch classes, had to make do with only seven degree-names and the "accidental signs" that permit us to modify their signification. The discrepancy between the new musical language and the means of notating it troubled Schoenberg, and in 1924 he invented and, without success, proposed the adoption of a new notation.

Scriabin, on the other hand, tried to establish consistent and uniform rules for the continued employment of the traditional notational means. Even a superficial glance at some of the late piano pieces shows that he was up to something of the sort. The 0,3,4,7 tetrachord plays an important role in both the Seventh Sonata and the fourth of the Five Preludes, Op. 74, Scriabin's last opus. In the former the corresponding notes are invariably represented as A-C-DI-FI (Ex. 1), and in the latter as A-C-CI-E (Ex. 2). In other pieces a single structure is subjected to curious notational revisions when it is transposed, as in Ex. 3, from Op. 74, No. 3.

Ex. 1	Ex. 2	Ex. 3
		9

The revised spelling, unlike our example from Beethoven, implies no distinction in function between the two chords. What it tells us is that both derive from the same set, an octatonic scale which contains its own tritone transposition and which – if we lay it out so that the two notes that employ the same letter-name, A# and A, occur as boundary elements – may be spelled "diatonically," that is, so that successive notes unfold successive letter-names as in the diatonic system (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4

Since this scale consists of two "diminished 7th" chords, the same pitch-class collection is repeated at t3 and t9 transpositions, as well as at t6. Scriabin retains the same spelling, regardless of transposition (Ex. 5). (Only a single "non-harmonic" element is introduced in the piece, a passing note, marked in the example, that is repeated in exactly the same context wherever it occurs.)



Ex. 1 is based on the same scale. The successive t3 statements of this chord, if we maintain the principle of the Prelude and limit ourselves to the notational resources given in Ex. 4, would be spelled as follows (Ex. 6):

Ex. 6

But another kind of notational consistency is represented in the Sonata. The chord is derived from a seven-note segment of the octatonic collection, a segment of what may be defined, in reference to the Seventh Sonata, as a "master scale." Scriabin's curious spellings are derived from a tertial harmonic representation of his seven-note scale (Ex. 7). Though the four transpositions are all derived from the same octatonic collection, as demonstrated in Ex. 6,3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 129

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The consequent compositional implications are discussed in my book, *Serial Composition and Atonality* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981, fifth edition), 41-3. [Sixth edition, 1991]

Scriabin prefers to represent them as corresponding components of the four t3 transpositions of his derived scale.



The derived heptatonic scale has important practical advantages, as compared to the octatonic. Since the successive t3 transpositions of an octatonic scale are identical in pitch-class content, there are only three independent octatonic collections; no hierarchical structuring is possible, since the intersecting pitch-class content of each with either of the others is always the same: one of the component "diminished 7th" chords is retained, the other one is replaced. The heptatonic scale, however has twelve independent forms, four for each of the master scales, and each form shares a different collection of six pitch classes with each of the other derived from the same master scale, and a different collection of three pitch classes with each of the forms derived from the other two master scales. The master scales and the derived heptatonic scales are illustrated in Ex. 8.4



<sup>&#</sup>x27;The octatonic scales are named in Ex. 8 according to the terminology for the identification of interval cycles proposed in my book, Volume Two of *The Operas of Alban Berg* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 199f. The letter 'C' followed by an interval-class number identifies the cycle; a subscript identifies the transpositional level of the specific cyclic collection by the pitch-class number (0 for C, 1 for C‡, etc.) of one of its elements. Thus 'C3₀' designates the "diminished 7th" chord that contains pitch-class C, 'C3₁' designates the one that contains pitch-class C‡, and 'C3₀₁' designates the octatonic scale that contains both. The last may also be represented as 'C3₁₃' since the same 'diminished 7th' chord that contains C also contains E๋. I have preferred to show a difference of a whole step rather than a semitone between the pitch-class numbers because this seems to correspond to Scriabin's usual conception of the relation between the cyclic components of the scale.

The tonal vocabulary is still frustratingly restrictive, however, for the musical language makes no distinction between chord and scale, and the linear dimension unfolds as a series of arpeggiated segments of paired "diminished 7th" chords. Scriabin provides a source of contrast through a variant form of the derived scale, the final degree of which is occasionally raised by a semitone, a revision that results in a striking change of harmonic color by converting a five-note segment of the scale into a whole-tone collection (Ex. 9).



That this is the primary, though not the sole function of the semitonal inflection is made abundantly clear throughout the work. When the inflection first occurs it entirely converts the tone material given at this point into the whole-tone segment of the scale (Ex. 10, m. 30). The seventh degree is restored to its normal form, and then immediately raised a second time as part of a symmetrical progression in the middle voices (Ex. 10, mm. 33-34).

Ex. 10: Sonata No. 7



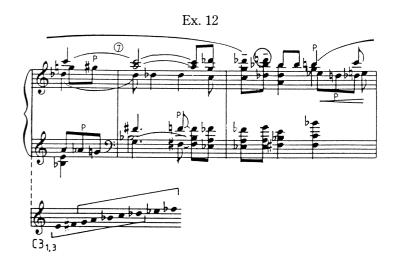
Each of the Five Preludes is also based on the octatonic system. No. 3 is an unproblematical piece whose tonal structure is sufficiently demonstrated in Ex. 4 and 5. A single octatonic pitch-class collection is unfolded, with the same compositional representations of the collection reiterated at each of its four equivalent pitch levels. Prelude No. 1, only sixteen bars in length, is one of the finest of Scriabin's late pieces. As in the Seventh Sonata, the octatonic scale is represented through its derived heptatonic scales. The first section, into m. 4, is

based on master scale C3<sub>1,3</sub>; the middle section commences (upbeat to m. 5) in C3<sub>0,2</sub> and returns in m. 6 to the original tonality; the recapitulation – mm. 8 to 12 – repeats the first section at the tritone; the codetta (Ex. 11) commences with a restatement of the closing phrase of the recapitulation, followed by a cadential phrase whose final chord, inflecting the D‡ of the preceding chord to D, gives us the only instance in the movement of the whole-tone variant of the heptatonic scale.

Ex. 11: Op. 74, No. 1



Appogiaturas, passing notes and neighboring notes occur throughout the movement. Their special function as elements of melodic figuration that are foreign to the "diminished 7th" components of the master scale is unmistakable. There are only two "dissonant" notes that cannot easily be explained in the familiar terminology of traditional harmony, and both are instances of the same pitch class, D. The first instance is the climactic note at the midpoint of the piece, in the closing phrase of the middle section (Ex. 12). The effect is that of an interrupted passing note whose progress is resumed and completed at the conclusion of the recapitulation in m. 10, again at the inception of the codetta (Ex. 11), and one last time in the lower octave in the concluding phrase. The "dissonant" D, in a second lower octave displacement, finally takes its place in the last chord as a component of the whole-tone variant of the heptatonic scale. Structural principles exemplified in the Sonata are subtilized and refined to an extraordinary degree in these sixteen bars.



The distinction between the two forms of the derived heptatonic scale holds implications for harmonic differentiation and structure that are most fully realized in Prelude No. 5. Transpositional relations are determined by the interval-2 as well as the interval-3 cycle. The pitch-class content of the piece is shown in the following table:

#### PART ONE, SECTION ONE

M(m).

1: G A B C D E F G A B (C) D E F A B (C) D E F G

2: F G (Ab) Bb Cb Db Eb Ebb

3: D# E# F# G# A B C# | D# E# F# (G#) A B C# | E# Fx (G#) A# B C# D#

4: C# D# (E) F# G A B/B

#### PART ONE, SECTION TWO

5: C D (E) F G A B

6: C# D# E F# G A Bb

7: E F G A B C D

8: G A Bb C Db Eb Fb Gb

#### PART TWO, SECTION ONE

9-10: = Mm. 1-2

11:  $ABCDE_{b}FG|ABC(D)E_{b}FG|BC_{\sharp}(D)EFGA$ 

12: G A (Bb) C Db Eb F/Fb

#### PART TWO, SECTION TWO

13: G A (Bb) C Db Eb Fb

14: G A B C D E F

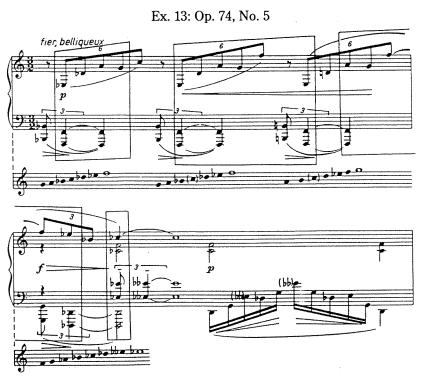
15: A# B# C# D# E F# G

16-17: C# D# E F# G A Bb C | G A Bb C Db Eb Fb Gb

Scriabin's Self-Analyses

Scriabin's own bar lines and rhythmic groupings within each bar provide an unproblematical basis for partitioning the composition into the pitch collections that are here represented as scales. In representing them thus I have simply ordered the pitches so that successive letter-names correspond without exception to the composer's own spelling. The only liberty I have taken is in supplying, in parentheses, the single note that is missing from some of the scales, a note unambiguously implied, in each instance, in the invariant scale patterns of the movement. If we eliminate literal repetitions and the final cadential chord, we find the whole movement contained in only five bars: mm. 1-2 return at t8, t0 and t2 respectively in mm. 3-4, 9-10 and 11-12: m. 5 returns at t6 in m. 13; m. 6 returns at t3, t6 and t9 respectively in mm. 7, 14 and 15; m. 8 returns at t6 in m. 16. The second half of the piece, m. 9-16 is a repetition of the first, commencing at the original pitch level and shifting after two bars to the tritone.

Three scale-types appear. The complete octatonic scale occurs only at the close of each part. The opening is based on what we call, in connection with the Seventh Sonata, a variant form of the seventh-note subset of the octatonic scale, in which a five-note segment of the whole-tone scale is established through the raising of the seventh degree (Ex. 9). This distinctive scale-degree is indicated in italics in the above table. The whole-tone type heptatonic scale plays such an important structural role in Prelude No. 5 that it is no longer appropriate to define it as a variant form of some other scale. Transpositions occur at every even pitch level, so that every five-note subset of the same whole-tone scale, C2<sub>1</sub>, is represented. In every instance the "altered" note is a component of a whole-tone collection (boxed in Ex. 13) in the compositional foreground.



In m. 2 and at the corresponding point in m. 4 the seventh degree is restored to its "normal" octatonic version, so that the heptatonic scale is converted to a subset of the octatonic scale. In m. 4 this change serves as a modulation into a contrasting episode, mm. 5-8, based on the unaltered form of master scale C3<sub>1,3</sub>. Here, and at the return of this music in the last four bars, transpositional levels are determined by the interval-3 cyclic structure that generates the master scale: the "normal" heptatonic scale of mm. 5-6 returns at t3, t6 and t9. The explicit unfolding of the master scale in m. 16 embraces all four pitch levels. Its apparent tritone transposition at the close is only an enharmonic respelling, a notational way of referring back to the very beginning of the piece. The final chord, El-Dl-G, in association with the bass line, A-El, summarizes the two cyclic structures, C2<sub>1</sub> and C3<sub>1,3</sub>, on which the piece is based, by restricting itself to those notes which are common to both. The unfolding of these two cycles is illustrated in the following outline, which embraces all the cyclic scale segments and shows the source of Scriabin's notation for them:

Mm.

1-4: Tonality C2, (Cb Db Eb F G A B C# D# E# Fx)

5-8: Tonality C3<sub>1.3</sub> (C# D# E F# G A Bb C Db Eb Fb Gb)

9-12: Tonality C2<sub>1</sub> (Cb Db Eb F G A B Ct)

13-17: Tonality C3<sub>1.3</sub> (A# B# C# D# E F# G A B# C D# E# F# G#)

The first of the two Preludes of Op. 67 is a precursor of this remarkable little piece. The whole-tone collection shown in Ex. 14, or a transposition of the same, occurs on the downbeat of fourteen of its thirty-five bars.

Ex. 14



The only note that is not a component of the  $C3_{1,3}$  octatonic scale in the first twelve bars is the Ab of Ex. 14. Consecutively ordered degree-names in the composer's own spelling unfold as follows (the non-octatonic component is represented by a lower-case letter):

DIEFIGADABCDDFGG

The scale is shifted to C3<sub>24</sub> in mm. 15-16:

G# A# B C# D E F f# G

There is a return to the "home key" in mm. 19-20, a t11 transposition of mm. 15-16:

#### G A B C D E F G

The C3<sub>1,3</sub> octatonic scale is maintained for the remainder of the movement, but the non-octatonic element appears as D in m. 21 and as C in m. 23, where Ex. 14 is transposed at t6 and t3 respectively before returning to its original pitch level in m. 27. In the last four bars the non-octatonic element is omitted altogether:

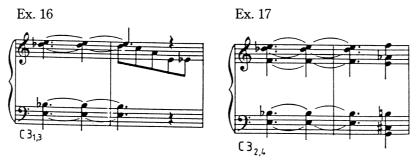
#### EF#GABCDE

The modulation from  $C3_{13}$  to  $C3_{24}$  is effected in mm. 13-14 (ex. 15).

Ex 15: Op. 67, No. 1



C3<sub>1</sub> (E-G-B-D-) is shared by the two scales: C3<sub>3</sub> (D+F+A-C) in the first scale is displaced by C3<sub>2</sub> (F-A-B-D) in the second. The first chord emphasizes the shared component of the scales and gives us only one note, F, of the new C3<sub>2</sub> collection. In the following bar the eighth-note figure in an inner voice refers to a prominent melodic figure of the first section (mm. 4 and 10), returning as it does so, in spite of the retention of the new note, F, to the displaced component, C3<sub>0</sub>, of the first scale. The missing associates of F in the C3<sub>2</sub> collection are provided in the second chord that accompanies the inner-voice melody and on the downbeat of m. 15. This overlapping of C3<sub>1,3</sub> and C3<sub>2,4</sub> may be illustrated by interpreting Ex. 15 as a simultaneous representation of Exx. 16 and 17.



A t11 transposition of mm. 13-14 (mm. 17-18) effects the return from  $C3_{2,4}$  to  $C3_{13}$ .

At first sight the musical orthography of Prelude No. 2 of Op. 74 seems bizarre and eccentric to an extreme, with its spelling of a three-note semitonal motive as inflections of a single scale degree, of octave relations as augmented 7th or diminished 9th, of perfect 5ths as doubly augmented 4ths or diminished 6th (Ex. 18).

Ex. 18: op. 74, No. 2



But here again we discover that the composer is applying consistent rules especially designed for a particular compositional context. The principle scale is C3<sub>1,3</sub>, embellished through the inclusion of chromatic passing notes and represented through one or another segmentation of the following series (passing notes are shown in lower-case letters):

A second scale is derived through segmentation of the following series:

The bass part throughout, with the exception of the first two bars and the return of the same passage at the close, is restricted to the ostinato figure shown in m. 3, interrupted at four points by the figure on the second beat of m. 4. The second scale appears only where this interruption occurs. Otherwise everything in the piece is derived from the embellished C3<sub>1,3</sub> scale. Orthographic consistency is largely determined within an eighth-note context that follows the pendulum-like motion of the bass. The notation of m. 9 (Ex. 19), for instance, derives from the following alternation of scale segments:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Romanian musicologist Adrian Ratiu, in "Sistemul armonic al lui Skriabin," *Muzica*, Vol. 22, February and March, 1972, also describes the F in m. 13 as an anticipation of the second octatonic scale. See Roy James Guenther, "An Examination of Analytical Approaches to Harmonic Organization in the Late Piano Works of Alexander Scriabin," M.A. diss., The Catholic University of America, (1974) 123-4.

Strict orthographic consistency would have required an enharmonic change of A# to B\$ on the second and fourth eighth-note beats of the bar, but Scriabin does not carry adherence to this principle to such a degree of pedantry. Of more substantive interest are the new transpositional relations made available by the inclusion of passing notes in the precompositional scale pattern. Thus within the principal tonality we find the figures shown in Ex. 20.



In Prelude No. 5 the infiltration of a non-octatonic element is exploited for its extension of whole-tone relations. In Prelude No. 2 it is exploited for its extension of semitonal relations. Prelude No. 4 investigates still other implications of this variant of the octatonic set. Through the semitonal inflection of any one note of the set we derive a second complete cycle, the "augmented triad," and this provides still another means of harmonic differentiation and another basis for progression among the three octatonic scales. The t4 and t8 transpositions that occur throughout Prelude No. 4 are as integral to its musical language as t3, t6 and t9 transpositions are to the musical language of Prelude No. 3 and the Seventh Sonata.

Every simultaneity, without exception, is derivable from one of the three non-equivalent octatonic scales, or from a variant in which one or another element of the scale is semitonally raised or lowered through chromatic inflection and thereby converted into an element of the C3 collection that is *not* a component of the given octatonic scale. Though there is never more than one such chromatically inflected note in any simultaneity, the aggregate result is a twelve-tone master scale, each of whose constituent sub-scales comprises one complete interval-3 cycle, one or another note of the remaining interval-3 cycle. Through

chromatic inflection each of the three non-equivalent octatonic scales is convertible into such a twelve-tone master scale. The three octatonic scales and their aggregate variant forms as represented in Scriabin's own notation are shown below (letter names of variant elements are italicized: letter names of missing elements are in parentheses):

 $C3_{1,3}: A\sharp \ B/B\sharp \ C\sharp \ D/D\sharp \ E \ F/F\sharp \ G/G\sharp \ A \ B\flat/B \ C \ D\flat \ E\flat\flat/E\flat \ (F\flat) \ G\flat \ (A\flat\flat)/A\flat \ B\flat\flat$ 

 $C3_{0,2}$ : D# E# F# G# A Bb/B C/C# D (Eb) F Gb

 $C3_{24}$ : B (C#) D Eb/E F Gb/G Ab/A Bb Cb/C Db Ebb Fb

In the totality of their variant forms all three octatonic scales share the four "augmented triads." For example, the first and third of the above three scales unfold all twelve pitch classes and respectively represent the "augmented triads" as follows:

C3<sub>1,3</sub>: B D# G B Eb, B# E G# C Ab, C# F A Db, D F# Bb Ebb Gb C3<sub>2,4</sub>: B Eb G Cb, E Ab C Fb, F A Db, D Gb B Ebb

The aggregate variants of  $C3_{0,2}$  that are exploited in Prelude No. 4 do not unfold the complete twelve-tone master scale. Only two "augmented triads" are represented:

 $C3_{02}$ : E A C F, F B D G

The shared interval-4 cycles result in a much closer interrelatedness of the three octatonic scales. This explains why there is a more rapid and continual interchange of scales than in any of the other pieces we have examined. Compositional implications and characteristic notational procedures are both demonstrated in Ex. 21 and in its t4 transposition, Ex. 22. The same sequence of "augmented triads" unfolds at both pitch levels: C4<sub>0</sub>, C4<sub>3</sub>, C4<sub>2</sub>. The following scale segments are represented respectively, in the two examples:

Ex 21; Op. 74, No. 4



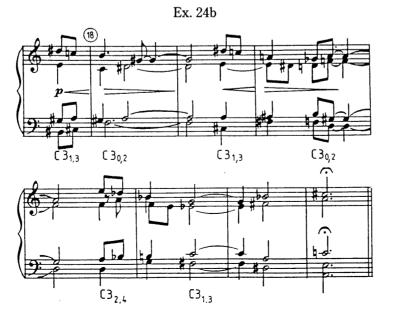


In Ex. 23 the apparent notational inconsistencies (C# and C on the first beat, Db and B# on the second) are explained by the conflict between contrapuntal and harmonic considerations. The outer voices progress in contrary motion to their adjacent semitonal neighbors, thus expanding the interval between the boundary elements of the scale segment from C#C to B#- Db.

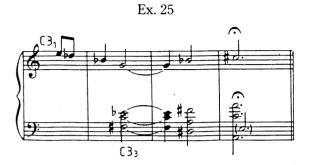
#### $C3_{1,3}$ : B# C# (D#) E F G# A (Bb) C Db

The opening bars and their strikingly modified recapitulation at the close are shown in Exx 24a and b. In the last phrase the interpolation of a t1 transposition





of m. 2 and rhythmic augmentation postpone the final return to the pitch-class content of the initial chord. Linearly unfolded interval-3 cycles in the closing progression restore the basic tonality, C3<sub>1,3</sub>, and the interpolation of E in the last chord restores the initial pitch-class collection (Ex. 25).



We must distinguish between Scriabin's literal use of the octatonic scale in Op. 74, No. 3 and antecedent examples like the first four bars of Liszt's Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, in which the same pitch-class collection is engendered in a tonal context through the recurrent neighboring-note juxtaposition of two diminished 7th chords.6 But in making this distinction we must recognize that the example from Liszt represents an important late state in the development toward the integral, autonomous exploitation of cyclic interval relations that we eventually find in Scriabin. On the other side of the example from Liszt we find the interval cycle partitioning musical space in the chromatic prolongation techniques of other nineteenth-century composers. Salzer and Schachter cite an example from Schubert in which the tonal prolongation unfolds an interval-2 cycle, from Chopin in which it unfolds an interval-3 cycle, and from Wagner in which it unfolds an interval-4 cycle.7 In the music of Rimsky-Korsakov cyclic progressions play so extensive and pervasive a role that they tend to replace, rather than prolong, the traditional harmonic functions of the diatonic tonal system. In his memoirs Rimsky-Korsakov cites Liszt and Glinka as influencing his own discovery of the octatonic scale: "(In Sadko) Glinka's scale, descending by whole notes, has been replaced by another descending scale of semitonewhole tone, semitone-whole tone, a scale which subsequently played an important role in many of my compositions."8

Nothing so surely demonstrates Schoenberg's profound and productive conservatism ("I personally hate to be called a revolutionist, which I am not," he wrote, in a letter discussing the origins of the twelve-tone system) as his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Paul Lansky and George Perle, "Atonality," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter, "Counterpoint in Composition" (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), 215-19.

<sup>8</sup> N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, My Musical Life (New York: Tudor, 1936), 71-2.

extraordinary extension of tonal prolongation techniques in the Chamber Symphony, Op. 9 a work in which cyclic collections – the whole-tone scale, augmented triads, series of perfect fourths – are integrated into the hierarchical relations of the diatonic tonal system. This continued development, in an increasingly perilous harmonic situation, of chromatic prolongation procedures of the sort described by Salzer and Schachter comes to an end with the first atonal pieces of 1909.

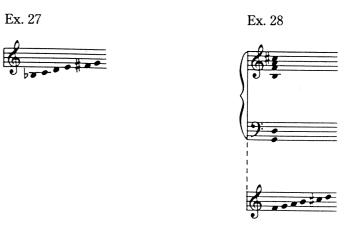
Scriabin's parallel evolution, on the other hand, leads him not into "atonality," but rather into a new kind of "tonality" in which symmetrical partitionings of the semitonal scale by means of interval cycles generate new, totally consistent, referential harmonic structures. Whatever cannot be integrated into the system of cyclic relations that defines the pitch material of a given piece is simply eliminated. Scriabin's compositional exploitation of these new hierarchical relations and new referential harmonic structures sometimes tends to be literal and mechanistic. There are passages that are hardly more than routine demonstrations of the pitch-class invariance maintained under successive t3 transpositions of the octatonic scale. It is almost as though he was so intoxicated with the excitement of his discovery of a new tonal system that he sometimes forgot that to compose means something more than the literal surface restatement of background structural relations. But the Five Preludes show a growing awareness of the limitation of his musical language and an increasing subtlety and sophistication in his compositional technique. In his careful and sensitive use of "non-harmonic" tones in Preludes Nos. 1 and 2 he confronts the problem of voice-leading in a system that makes no distinction between the linear and harmonic implications of the scale. The intersection of different cyclic systems in Preludes Nos. 4 and 5 enlarges transpositional and formal possibilities. In Prelude No. 4 there is an enormous enrichment of the harmonic vocabulary. Above all, there is the extraordinary diversity in unity of the five Preludes as a group. Though all five movements are based on the same principal master scale, C3<sub>13</sub>, each has, within that basic tonality, its own distinctive tonal and harmonic identity. The central movement, in its simple and straightforward surface unfolding of the invariant relations inherent in the basic octatonic scale, has the character of an axis of symmetry in the context of the work as a whole. In sum, the Five Preludes hold great promise for what Scriabin might have achieved in the evolution of a comprehensive and coherent post-diatonic tonal system, had death not brought his work to an end, in his forty-fourth year, so soon after their completion.

Elsewhere I have stressed the role of cyclic interval structure in the atonal and twelve-tone music of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, in the string quartets

of Bartók, and in Stravinsky's *Le Sacre*. <sup>10</sup> The connections between Scriabin and Berg are particularly striking. Ex. 26 from Prelude No. 4 is characteristically Bergian in its simultaneous unfolding of different cyclic progressions. We find numerous similar passages in Berg's oeuvre, from the Piano Sonata, Op. 1 to the Violin Concerto.



The same pentachordal partitioning of the whole-tone scale that plays an increasingly significant role as we progress from the Seventh Sonata through the first Prelude of Op. 67 to the fifth Prelude of Op. 74 is basic to the musical language of *Wozzeck*. The pentachordal whole-tone collection plus one "odd" note which brings the first of the Five Preludes to a close (Ex. 27) also serves in its t7 transposition, as the closing chord of *Wozzeck* and as the principal referential collection of the work as a whole (Ex. 28).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> In Nicholas Slonomsky, *Music Since 1900* (New York: Colenian-Ross, 1949, third edition), 680-81.

Perle, Serial Composition and Atonality vii-ix [sixth edition, xi-xiii], 15, 38-9, 49-50, 121 (n.6); "Berg's Master Array of the Interval Cycles," The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 1977), 1-30 [reprinted in this volume, 207-235]; Twelve-Tone Tonality (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), 11, 76-9, 162-72, The Operas of Alban Berg, Vol. 1: Wozzeck, 153,155-64, and Vol. 2: Lulu, 161-6 (Berkeley: University of California, 1980 and 1985) [See, specially, The Listening Composer (Berkeley: University of California, 1990) passim.]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Perle, Serial Composition and Atonality, 38-9, The Operas of Alban Berg, Vol. 1, 155-8.

Ex. 29

Journal of The Scriabin Society of America



The famous "mystic chord" of *Prometheus* gives us the same collection in its inversional form (Ex. 29). Faubion Bowers reports that on 27 June 1910 "the newspapers carried an announcement that the Mysterium will soon be finished and as *Prometheus* was built from six tones like the Pleiades, the Mysterium will be hitched to a constellation of nine." Surely what Scriabin had in mind was the octatonic scale *plus* the raised scale degree that converts a five-note segment of that scale into a whole-tone collection. This "constellation of nine" gives us the "mystic chord" of *Prometheus* plus the normal octatonic collection (Ex. 30). The basic set of mm. 1-12 of Op. 67 is equivalent to a tritone transposition of the same "constellation of nine" (Ex. 31).



If cyclic interval structures play such an important role in the work of so many different composers, an explanation in terms of their "influence" upon one another is surely inadequate. The interval cycle is a means of symmetrically partitioning, and thus imposing an ordering upon, the functionally undifferentiated pitch classes of the twelve-tone scale. It is a concept that evolves "naturally" and "intuitively," as well as through "influences," concomitantly with the weakening and eventual elimination of traditional harmonic functions and the replacement of a diatonic scale of unequal degrees by an undifferentiated semitonal scale. But the interval cycle is not the only means of symmetrically

<sup>12</sup> Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1969), 215.

partitioning the tone material. Inversional complementation is another. In music based on a twelve-tone scale inversionally related pitch-class collections (Exx. 27/28 and 29 are so related) are functionally equivalent. But it was only with Schoenberg's formulation of the twelve-tone system and in the works immediately preceding this, beginning in 1920, that the new meaning of inversion was axiomatically recognized in Schoenberg's practice. (He never did come to recognize it as a theorist of the new music.<sup>13</sup>) It is, however, implicitly recognized in atonal music from the very beginning, in the treatment of the basic cell and in the special role assigned to symmetrical chords – that is, chords which are their own literal inversion.<sup>14</sup> It is largely through such chords that strict inversional complementation comes to play such a fundamental role in the music of Bartók. 15 At the time of his death Scriabin had not yet discovered the meaning of inversional complementation for a post-diatonic tonal system, but it seems likely that he would soon have done so, in view of the symmetrical – that is, self-invertible – pitch-class structures which provide the pitch material of his late music. In fact, he frequently exploits the symmetry of the precompositional pitch structures as a basis for inversional progressions, as in Ex. 32, in which the two upper parts and the two lower parts converge through their simultaneous transposition in opposite directions by an interval, t3, that maintains the pitchclass invariance of the octatonic scale.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> See Perle, review of Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, in MQ, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 1976), 435-41 [reprinted in this volume, 51-57]

<sup>14</sup> Perle, Serial Composition and Atonality, Chapter 2, passim.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See Elliott Antokoletz, *The Music of Béla Bartók* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984). [See, also, 189-205, below.]

What he fails to recognize is the fact, or at least the implications of the fact, that the whole movement may be literally inverted without departing from the pitch-class content of the same octatonic scale, simply by substituting for each note of the scale its symmetrical complement, a substitution that may be realized at four different transpositional levels (Ex. 33). The composer of the Five Preludes must surely have been well on the road to the discovery of the meaning of inversional equivalence.



Would Scriabin's experience in a post-diatonic musical language also have led him, as Schoenberg's eventually did, to the concept of a precompositional structure embracing the totality of pitch classes – the twelve-tone set? Prelude No. 4 suggests that he may have been moving in this direction. Some of the sketches for his projected, but never realized, "Prefatory Action," which Scriabin originally conceived as a prologue to what was intended to be his, and mankind's, ultimate aesthetic experience, the "Mysterium," provide more direct evidence.<sup>17</sup> (Preludes Nos. 1, 2 and 4 appear to be spin-offs of the projected work, since fragments of them appear among the sketches.) We find a vertical statement of the twelve pitch classes (Ex. 34), derived by striking out octave duplications in a 16-note chord (Ex. 35) consisting of four "major 7th" chords at successive t3 transpositions (pp., 6,12 and 19):<sup>18</sup>



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The given inversional relation is identified by its "sum of complementation," the fixed sum, mod. 12 of complementary pitch-class numbers. See Perle, "Berg's Master Array," 7 [213f., below] and *Twelve-Tone Tonality*, 2.

On page 14 there is another vertical statement of the twelve pitch classes (Ex. 36), one that is exactly analogous to a twelve-tone set devised by Berg some fifteen years later for his opera *Lulu*. Reading upward from the lowest note we find an octatonic collection partitioned into two "French 6th" chords plus the "diminished 7th" chord that is not comprised in that collection:



What I call "Trope III" in *Lulu* (Ex. 37) comprises a basic cell that corresponds to the "French 6th" in that it also consists of two tritones, <sup>19</sup> the same cell at the t9 (or t3) transposition – the two together give the octatonic collection – and the "diminished 7th" chord required to complete the twelve-tone aggregate.





The messianic obsessions of Scriabin's last years have tended to raise some question as to what he might still have accomplished. It might have been a great deal, in spite of his quirks and delusions. It seems likely that significant steps in the evolution of an autonomous and coherent twelve-tone tonal system were long delayed because of his early death.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See the brief but important article on the sketches by Manfred Kelkel, "Les esquisses musicales de L'Acte Préalable de Scriabine," *Revue de Musicologie*, Vol. 57 (1971), 40-8. I am indebted to Faubion Bowers for bringing the sketches of the "Prefatory Action" to my attention and for his generous loan of his own copy.

The brackets in Exx 35 and 36 are my own addition. Each set of alternate notes in Ex. 35 unfolds an octatonic collection. This interpretation is implied on p. 12 where we find Ex. 35, in an enharmonically equivalent spelling, followed by a second chord comprising its alternate elements spelled as a series of 5ths: Db(b), Ab, Eb, Bb, Ft, Ct, Gx, Dx. That the containment of all twelve pitch classes in the 12-note chord of Ex. 34 is not coincidental is confirmed by Scriabin's annotation, '12', below the chord. It is followed by a second chord which is evidently conceived as its resolution, a 12-note chord of eight pitch classes ( not the "octatonic collection." however).

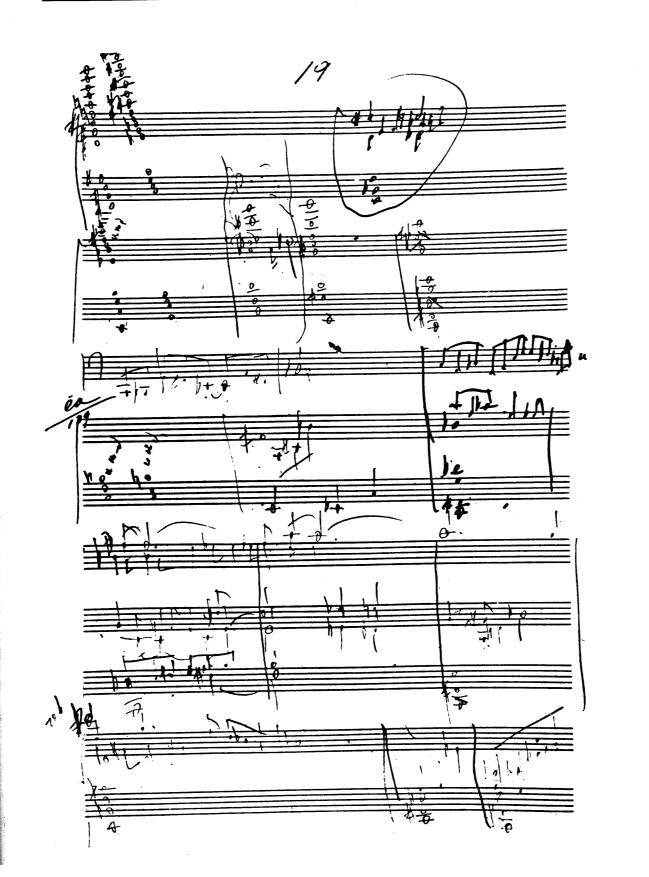
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> This basic cell, the chief motive and pitch-class structure of the opera, was also well known to Weber and Bartók. See Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality*, 5th ed., vii-ix [6th ed., xi-xiii], and *Twelve-Tone Tonality*, 11-2 and 166-7. [See also Perle, "The First Four Notes of Lulu," in *The Berg Companion*, ed. Douglas Jarman (London: Macmillan, 1989).]

Scriabin's Self-Analyses

Following are sketches for the Prefatory Action, Scriabin's unfinished final work, on which George Perle based his conclusions.











# CONCERT

## Scriabine

Pour L'AUDITION DE SES ŒUVRES

#### PROGRAMME

Allegro de Concert en si bémoi mineur (Op. 18) Nocturne en re bémol majeur, pour la main gauche seule (Op. 9 nº 1) Six Préludes Trois Mazurkas

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

nate 🕶 3 en fa diése mineur (Op. 23)

Trois Etudes (Op. 8, 2)

#### PRIX DES PLACES

Billete à l'esgines : Magazine du muzique MEMM, boulevard du Thédira ROYBONY, Corraterie. 22 et chaz le sancturge du Conservatuire.

BILLETS A L'ENTRÈS DU CONCERT

Ouverture des Portes à 8 heures

## THE PIANO WORKS OF SCRIABIN.



LEXANDER NIKOLAYEVICH SCRIABIN (1871-1915)

may be said to occupy an altogether isolated place. of the musical art. In Russia the nature of his compositions and the philosophical idealogy which serves as their literary foundation have aroused discussion so widespread as to recall

that which attended the appearance of Wagner on the musical horizon.

He has been conveniently called a mystic, but unless it is understood as comprehensively implying a symbolical expression of mystical ideas, the term can hardly convey to us the full extent of the composer's separation from the ordinary musician-mystic who, while devoting himself to the exposition of a spiritual idea, is content to rely more or less upon the approved musical paraphernalia.

With Scriabin, the process is distinct in two particulars from that employed by other composers evincing a spiritual tendency. From the moment of entrance into his second period his mind was occupied almost exclusively with the problems of psychic evolution, but he differs from the composer of "Parsifal" in that instead of devoting himself to the consideration of the soul of the human individual his concern is with the Universal Soul, which for him symbolises the phenomenon of Creation and, in its application to humanity, the self-assertion of individuality. In his music is portrayed the condition of this Soul in presence of various antagonistic elements, and in that ceaseless creative activity regarded by him as its function. The second point of difference is that his musical substance is something quite remote from the established conception of harmony.

His philosophical programme is not reserved, as is often supposed, to his symphonic works. The "Poem of Ecstasy" and "Prometheus" are not the only evidences of preparation for that "Mystery," the production of which was to have brought, as he foretold, the happiest day in the composer's life. As may be gathered from the pages of this Handbook, it is possible for those to whom both orchestral scores and symphonic performances are inaccessible to trace the development, not only of Scriabin's individual harmonic method, but of his spiritual system, in the piano works—the latter more particularly in the Sonatas.

The piano works are, in reality, more representative of the composer than his symphonic productions. The first orchestral attempt ("Reverie," Op. 24) is by no means as typical of the youth who slept with a volume of Chopin beneath his pillow as are the bulk of the early piano specimens; the last complete orchestral achievement ("Prometheus," Op. 60) does not bring us to the stage of Scriabin's development now regarded as

the mature or post-Promethean period, in which such examples are met with as the later Sonatas and the final Poems, Preludes and "genre" pieces.

By means of his piano works we are able to survey from beginning to end the musical and spiritual path trodden by this extraordinary man. And the consideration of his work as a whole enables us to do greater justice to those early pieces which are so often carelessly dismissed as

being nothing but a reiteration of Chopinistic sentiments.

In this Handbook an attempt has been made to indicate the growth, from its embryonic appearance, of Scriabin's musical individuality, and, as will be seen, material is to be found in the very first number. And, in fact, it was not until recently, when the work of the composer came to be viewed as a complete document to which nothing could ever be added, that the relation between Scriabin's earliest essays and his final achievements was fully recognised. Having gone through the Scriabin literature in the order of its production, much may be learned, as his friend Sabaneyef points out, by reversing the process.

Until the composer's death, at which time comparatively few of the works composed subsequent to "Prometheus" had been properly assimilated, it was customary to divide Scriabin's output into three periods: the early, or Chopinistic, the middle, or transition, and the third, or Promethean. It is now seen that the "Post-Promethean" works are

entirely deserving of a category to themselves.

For those who, while altogether unfamiliar with Scriabin's output, are nevertheless aware that it covers an exceedingly wide field, a rough indication as to style is to be gathered from the editions in which the

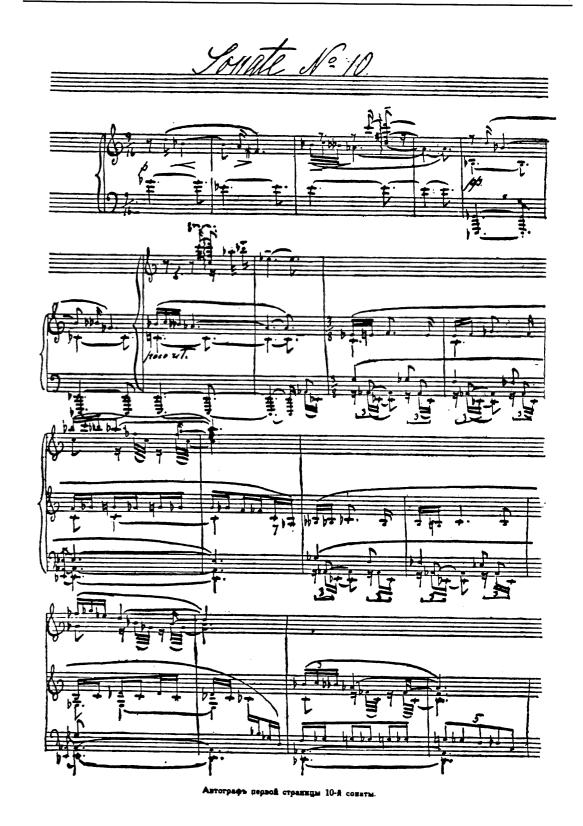
composer's works have been issued.

With a few exceptions, the early examples are to be found in the Belaieff Edition; these (the 4th Sonata and the "Tragic" and "Satanic" Poems are among them) are easily assimilated, and testify usually to the influence of Chopin or Liszt. The more individual 5th, 6th and 7th Sonatas are to be sought in the decorative and symbolical cover (designed by Bilibin) of the Russian Music Publishing Company's Edition, as also such typical works of that period as the Poem-Nocturne, Op. 61, and "Masque" and "Etrangeté," Op. 63. The representative post-Promethean examples: 8th, 9th and 10th Sonatas, and the concluding piano pieces are clothed in the simple azure binding of Jurgenson. Needless to say, this is but a rough and by no means an infallible guide.

The present Handbook is based upon the list recently compiled by Y. Engel for the Scriabin number of the Russian Musical Contemporary Magazine, and from the pages of that periodical, as also from the monographs by E. Gunst and I. Lipaiev, much information and many suggestive ideas have been derived.

M. Montagu-Nathan.

May, 1916.



Belaieff, 1895

### THE PIANO WORKS OF SCRIABIN

			leading to function
OPUS I.	Valse in F minor (3-4) Jurgenson, 1893  At a first glance apparently purely Chopinistic; its 26th and 58th bars are seen, however, to contain the germ of the characteristic chord of "Prometheus."		Tchaikovsky. features.
Opus 2.	Three Pieces Jurgenson, 1893	Opus 7.	Two Impromptus
	1. Etude in C sharp minor (3-4 andante).		1. G sharp mine
	In the B flat minor section occur, in the first and third bars, further hints of the future harmonic scheme.		<ol><li>F sharp majo Chopinesque.</li></ol>
	2. Prelude in B major (3-4).  Influence of Chopin is here uninterruptedly felt.	Opus 8.	Twelve Etudes.
	3. Impromptu à la Mazur in C major (3-4).		1. C sharp majo
	Promethean chord foreshadowed in 45th bar.		2. F sharp mind
OPIIS 2.	Ten Mazurkas. 2 Vols Jurgenson, 1893		3. B minor (6-8
	1. B minor (3-4 tempo giusto).		4. B major (4-4
	First bar (second chord) reveals a "Scriabinist" tendency.		5. E major (4-4
	2. F sharp minor (3-4 allegretto non tanto).		6. A major (3-4
	The manuscript in the possession of E. K. Rosenov, at whose country-house the piece was composed, does not altogether agree with the printed version.		The right hand
	3. G minor (3-4 allegretto semplice).		7. B flat minor (
	The modulation to E flat, eight bars from the end, peculiarly Chopin-like.		These numbers major of No. 7
	4. E major (3-4 moderato).		8. A flat major (
	Attention may be directed to 10th bar of con grazia section. Otherwise somewhat commonplace.		Particularly chaprimo, exceeding
	5. D sharp minor (3-4 doloroso, poco rubato).		9. C sharp mino
	Writing rather more complicated, but no harmonic advance.		Notable for its requiring consider
	6. C sharp minor (3-4 scherzando).  Occasionally Schumannesque. The downward passage three bars before Meno		quaver group, w
	mosso in G sharp minor sounds an individual note.		10. D flat major ( A moto perpetuo
	7. E minor (3-4 con passione).		11. B flat minor (
	Observe 18th bar of middle section. In 32nd bar of final section an obvious misprint. Some hints of Schumann influence.		Principal theme
	8. B flat minor (3-4 con moto).		12. D sharp mino
	Signs of groping after an original method of expression.		Recurring rhaps Last page appa
	<ol> <li>G sharp minor (3-4).</li> <li>Distinguished in manner, but not distinctive in style.</li> </ol>	Onue	
	10. E flat minor (3-4 sotto voce).	OPUS 9.	Prelude and Nocti
	Very charming middle section.		I. Prelude C sha
OPUS 4.	"Allegro appassionato" in E flat minor (3-4 allegro appassionato).		2. Nocturne D fi
	Belaieff, 1894		rendering of the
	Evidences of Lisztian influence, the more noticeable owing to the rareness, at this period, of any other than that of Chopin. Originally conceived as part of a Sonata.		description that The rhapsodical
Opus 5.	Two Nocturnes Jurgenson, 1893		made acquainta fioritura passage
<b>3</b> .	1. F sharp minor (3-4 andante).	Opus ro	Two Images
	Very charming. Penultimate bar strikes a new note, not, however, suggesting	OPUS 10.	Two Impromptus
	later style.		1. F sharp minor

A little work of much charm and poetic feeling; the concluding phrase delightfully

child-like and naif.

Opus 6. First Sonata (F minor) Belaieff, 1895 Allegro con fuoco (9-8 F minor); = 40 (4-4 C minor); presto (12-8 F minor) leading to funebre (4-4 F minor). Principally influenced by Chopin. Karatigin sees in the work an indebtedness to Tchaikovsky. Signs of individuality in second theme of allegro and certain harmonic features. Opus 7. Two Impromptus à la Mazur Jurgenson, 1893 1. G sharp minor (3-4). 2. F sharp major (3-4). Chopinesque. Opus 8. Twelve Etudes. Complete in I Vol. Belaieff, 1895 I. C sharp major (4-4 allegro). 2. F sharp minor (4-4 a capriccio, con forsa). 3. B minor (6-8 tempestuoso). 4. B major (4-4 piacevole). 5. E major (4-4 brioso). 6. A major (3-4 con grasia). The right hand part in sixths. 7. B flat minor (4-4, 12-8 presto tenebroso, agitato). These numbers show the continued influence of Chopin, but the meno vivo in G flat major of No. 7 has a ruggedness foreign to Scriabin's style up to this moment. 8. A flat major (3-4 lento. Tempo rubato). Particularly charming. The embellishment of the first theme, recurring at tempe primo, exceedingly graceful. 9. C sharp minor (4-4 alla ballata). Notable for its octave passages—that in the ante-penultimate bar, marked ppp, requiring considerable dexterity-its syncopation and the appearance of the threequaver group, with dotted middle note, to which Tchaikovsky was partial. 10. D flat major (3-8 allegro). A moto perpetuo in chromatic chords with a masterly accompaniment. 11. B flat minor (3-4 andante cantabile). Principal theme reminiscent of second subject in Allegro of 1st Sonata. 12. D sharp minor (4-4 patetico). Recurring rhapsodical upward passage recalls mood of first subject of 1st Sonata. Last page apparently influenced by Liszt. Opus 9. Prelude and Nocturne for left hand Belaieff, 1895 1. Prelude C sharp minor (3-4 andante). 2. Nocturne D flat major (6-8 andante). Many quite proficient ambidextrous pianists will prefer to use both members in the rendering of these pieces; there is, indeed, nothing in them beyond their secondary description that would suggest that the right hand can be dispensed with. The rhapsodical manner of the second number may perhaps be attributed to a newlymade acquaintance with the music of Liszt; the origin of the melismas and the

fioritura passages cannot for a moment be in doubt.

The middle section in tonic major possesses a charming lyrical quality.

1. F sharp minor (3-4 = 100).

2. A major (3-4 = 160).

- I. C major (2-2 vivace).
- 2. A minor (3-4 allegretto).
- 3. G major (3-4 vivo).
- 4. E minor (6-4 lento).
- 5. D major (4-2 andante cantabile).
- 6. B minor (2-4 allegro).
- 7. A major (6-8 allegro assai).
- 8. F sharp minor (3-4 allegro agitato).
- 9. E major (3-4 andantino).
- 10. C sharp minor (6-8 andante).
- 11. B major (6-8 allegro assai).
- 12. G sharp minor (9-8 andante).
- 13. G flat major (3-4 lento).
- 14. E flat minor (15-8 presto).
- 15. D flat major (4-4 lento).
- 16. B flat minor (5-8 4-8 misterioso).
- 17. A flat major (3-2 allegretto).
- 18. F minor (2-4 allegro agitato).
- 19. E flat major (2-4 affetuoso).
- 20. C minor (3-4 appassionato).
- 21. B flat major ( 3-4 andante).
- 22. G minor (3-4 lento).
- 23. F major (3-4 vivo).
- 24. D minor (6-8 5-8 presto).

Here Scriabin follows the plan, later pursued for quite a different purpose in "Prometheus," of a progression through the circle of keys. Nos. 2, 4, 8, 9, 17 and 22 recall more or less vividly the style of Chopin. A more individual flavour is, however, to be discovered in Nos. 1, 3, 6, which suggests a sentimental "programme,"
11, 12, with its typical melodic figuration, 19, despite its Chopin-like "seventh" leap
in the first bar. No. 10 appears to be influenced by Liszt, but possesses a refinement that is not to be traced to that source; No. 16 by the Schumann of the "Kinderscenen," and No. 5 by both these composers. No. 13 deserves special mention as a delightful example of Scriabin's Chopinesque phase. The exquisite transitional passage preceding the final statement of the principal melody and the repeated bass figure which accompanies its conclusion are exceedingly poetical. No. 14 gives expression to the Titanic side of the composer's personality; it resembles No. 6 but is even more forceful, concluding with a magnificent climax. No. 15 is a little gem in pastoral vein, it is a type to which certain later examples of the composer conform somewhat closely. Orchestrated with responsible parts for oboe, cor anglais and viola it should make an effective symphonic miniature. The muttering quavers in the bass of No. 18 help to create the mood of anger which recalls Nos. 6 and 14, but which is here more intense. The end is a veritable paroxysm. No. 20 is reminiscent of No. 12, Opus 8. No. 21 is an effective illustration of the combination of elements marking a transition from the Chopin to the individualistic period. No. 23-a moto perpetuo in miniatureis in the style of Nos. 1 and 3, the persistent three-quaver groups being here relieved by an occasional three-semiquaver embellishment. In No. 24 alternating rhythms of 6-8 and 5-8 are employed.

#### OPUS 12. Two Impromptus

Belaieff, 1897

- 1. F sharp major (3-4 presto).
- 2. B flat minor (4-4 andante cantabile).
- The happy choice of appropriate tonality testifies rather to the artistic affinity between Chopin and Scriabin than the former's influence.

Opus 13. Six Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. Belaieff, 1897

1. C major (3-4 maestoso).

- 2. A minor (6-8 allegro).
- 3. G major (3-4 andante).
- 4. E minor (2-4 allegro).
- 5. D major (6-8 allegro).

6. B minor (6-8 presto).

A noticeable feature of Scriabin's "serial" collections is their beauty as a whole. Such pieces as these appear to have been written for each other. Thus the calm serenity of No. 1 is admirably, although not violently contrasted with the serious tone of the next number. No. 3 returns to the pastoral style of No. 15, Opus 11. No. 4 is somewhat more strenuous, but No. 5 has the regularity and evenness of a spinning song. The appropriate climactic defiance of the final number is gradually softened into a concluding acquiescence.

Opus 14. Two Impromptus Belaieff, 1897

- 1. B major (3-4 allegretto).
- 2. F sharp minor (9-8 andante cantabile).

Admirable examples of the composer's aristrocratic and delicate refinement. No. 1 suggests the tone-picture of a tall graceful flower, bending and rising again in the breeze.

Opus 15. Five Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1897

- 1. A major (3-4 andante).
- 2. F sharp minor (3-4 vivo).
- 3. E major (6-8 allegro assai).
- 4. E major (3-4 andantino).
- 5. C sharp minor (6-8 andante).

A beautiful series. Nos. 1 and 2 are still quite Chopinesque. No. 3, perhaps the least inspired, bears a physical resemblance to Rachmaninov's celebrated Prelude; the mood is different. The light-heartedness of the Andantino, No. 4, is possibly a reflection of the composer's environment (Paris). The left hand part, mirroring the treble, forms a useful study. Scriabin's unfailing avoidance of the obvious is shown in the octave leap (tenor part) in the last bar. L. Sabaneyef prettily describes these "exquisite miniatures" as a series of "musical compliments."

Opus 16. Five Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... ... Belaieff, 1897

- 1. B major (3-4 andante).
- 2. G sharp minor (2-4 allegro).
- 3. G flat major (4-4 andante cantabile).
- 4. E flat minor (3-4 lento).
- 5. F sharp major (3-8 allegretto).

The wide leaps in the undulating bass of No. 1 and its general harmonic complexion reveal the impress of the composer's individuality, but the poetic feeling savours still of the Polish master. No. 3 is quite in the mood of Op. 11, No. 15, but of larger dimensions. No. 4 is a very charming "moment musical" extending to a mere twelve bars-a model of formalistic precision which finds a worthy pendant in the thrice repeated eight-bar statement of the concluding number.

Opus 17. Seven Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... ... Belaieff, 1897

- I. D minor (3-4 allegretto).
- 2. E flat major (2-4 presto).
- 3. D flat major (3-4 andante, rubato).
- 4. B flat minor (3-2 lento).
- 5. F minor (9-8 prestissimo).
- 6. B flat major (6-8 andante doloroso).
- 7. G minor (0-8 allegro assai).

No. 1. appears to manifest a further groping towards an individual mode of expression, again observable in No. 3. The introspective mood of No. 4 strikes a note hitherto foreign to the composer's musical psychology. Nos. 2 and 5 form effective octave studies, the former recalling Op. 11. "Doloroso" seems hardly to describe No. 6.

OPUS 18. Concert allegro B flat minor (4-4 allegro con fuoco) ... Belaieff, 1897

Contains symptoms of an advance in harmonic thought. Great warmth of colour in the meno mosso (D flat major). The heavy octave passages in the triumphant maestoso suggest Lisztian influence, but the final page has quite a classical ring.

Opus 19. Second Sonata "Sonata Fantasia" (G sharp minor) ... Belaieff, 1898

Andante (3-4 G sharp minor; E major)

Presto (3-2 G sharp minor).

A bold step forward. Individuality of manner clearly shown in melodic contours. The short development of the andante is highly poetical and inspired; in the concluding bars of the movement the composer seems to falter. The turbulence of the presto is relieved by a Trio-like middle section of a melodious nature. The Sonata, which was written at Genoa and in the Crimea, has a maritime "programme."

Opus 21. Polonaise, B flat minor (3-4 allegro maestoso) ... Belaieff, 1898

In the G flat major (middle) section there is a decided return to the early manner.

OPUS 22. Four Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1898

- 1. G sharp minor (3-4 andante).
- 2. C sharp minor (6-8 andante).
- 3. B major (3-4 allegretto).
- 4. B minor (4-4 andantino).

In No. 1 is a foretaste of the later mysticism. The melodic line of No. 2 lends weight to the hint, given by such bars as the antepenultimate of the first Prelude, that the composer's individuality is beginning to establish itself. No. 3 is an extremely delicate trifle.

OPUS 23. Third Sonata (F sharp minor) ... Belaieff, 1898

Drammatico (3-4 F sharp minor and major).

Allegretto (4-8 E flat major).

Andante (3-4 B major) leading to

Presto con fuoco (3-4 F sharp minor).

This Sonata is regarded as the culminating point of the composer's first period. Although containing elements amply justifying its description as "the last moment of spiritual affinity with Chopin" (E. Gunst), and some faint suggestions of Liszt, there is good ground—such as the appearance of the embryonic form of the characteristic or "Promethean" harmony—for considering the work as definitely reflecting Scriabin's emancipation. It is said to have been called by him the "Gothic," to be a record of the impression made on him by the contemplation of a ruined castle, but certain features, such as the mood of the last movement, suggest the psychological "programme" which, nine years after the composition of the Sonata, was circulated in the form of poetic-prose on the occasion of a recital in Brussels. The beautiful second theme of the Finale served, we are told, as a lullaby in the composer's home.

Opus 25. Nine Mazurkas. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1899

- 1. F minor (3-4 allegro).
- 2. C major (3-4 allegretto).
- 3. E minor (3-4 lento).
- 4. E major (3-4 vive).
- 5. C sharp minor (3-4 agitato).
- 6. F sharp major (3-4 allegretto).
- 7. F sharp minor, given as D major in index to volume (3-4 moderato).
- 8. B major (3-4 allegretto).
- q. E flat minor (3-4 mesto).

A series written during the first year of Scriabin's professorship at the Moscow Conservatoire. In No. 2 are some reminiscences of the 3rd Sonata. No. 3 possesses plaintive charm but less novelty than Nos. 5 and 7. No. 9 may be recommended for its beautiful modulatory material and its wealth of harmony.

OPUS 27. Two Preludes ... ... ... Belaieff, 1901

1. G minor (9-8 patetico).

Contains a poignancy of feeling that suggests grier as its inspiration. The harmonic manner is slightly Wagnerian.

2. B major (3-4 andante).

A little masterpiece in the style of Op. 11, No. 15.

Opus 28. Fantasia. B minor (3-4 andante) ... ... Belaieff, 1901

In this fine work may be observed the influence of Liszt and possibly of Wagner; that of Chopin is entirely absent. The triplet figure with dotted middle note is now becoming a noticeable characteristic of the composer's melodic line. As to poetic content the work in some respects appears to anticipate the later musical expression of ecstasy. The treatment and the setting of the prominent falling semiquaver figure in the concluding bars seem to warrant this supposition.

Opus 30. Fourth Sonata. F sharp major. Andante (6-8 F sharp major) leading to Prestissimo volando (12-8 F sharp major) ... Belaieff, 1907

As to form and thematic harmonic and spiritual content this Sonata, composed in 1903, is to be regarded as a direct forerunner of the "Poème de l'Extase." In the first respect it is tentative, for while the movements are united in the poetic sense, they are nominally sub-divided. In the thematic region we have actually the germ of the "theme of ecstasy." The characteristic chord of the orchestral work is to be observed, and in the last particular there is to be noted the employment of themes of psychological import. The Sonata concludes with the orginatic treatment of thematic material which becomes a feature of the later works.

Opus 31. Four Peludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1904

- 1. Tonality indefinite. Begins in D flat and ends in C (3-4 andante).
- 2. F sharp minor (2-4 con stravagante) (sic).
- 3. E flat major (2-2 presto).
- 4. C major (3-4 lento).

A series evincing a curious vacillation between the composer's early and later style. No. 1 contains harmonic features pertaining to the period of the 3rd symphony, but such passages as that marked "cantabile" recall very forcibly the former "Chopinolatry." No. 2 is harmonically less advanced but seems to belong to the programmatic rather than the abstract order of its companion pieces. The concluding bars of No. 3 are peculiarly characteristic of this phase, but the downward-sloping phrases of the brief final number might easily pass for Chopin at his best.

Opus 32. Two Poems ... ... ... ... Belaieff, 1904

1. F sharp major (9-8 andante cantabile).

The principal theme of this popular piece is again strongly reminiscent of Chopin, but the transitional passage at the close of the second page could hardly have come from his pen. In the published version are some misprints: the last three notes in the treble of the 9th bar should be a crotchet and two semiquavers; in the 10th the last quaver in the left-hand part requires a natural. As played by Scriabin this group is reversed, thus forming a contrast with the foregoing bar.

2. D major (4-4 allegro; con eleganza; con fiducia).

Here are some portents of the composer's future manner, thematic and harmonic. The gradually evolved "theme of ecstasy" makes an appearance, and at the beginning of the last page is heard the ninth with sharpened fifth—a stepping stone to that harmonic region which Scriabin finally reached in "Prometheus."

Opus 33. Four Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1904

- 1. E major (3-4 = 96).
- 2. F sharp major (6-8 vagamente).
- 3. C major (3-4 = 88).
- 4. A flat major (5-4 ardito, bellicoso).

A beautifully balanced set. No. 1 is instinct with the serenity of Op. 11, No. 15, and concludes with a particularly charming cadence. Vagueness is well suggested by the unresolved dissonances in No. 2. The brief twelve bars of No. 3 read like a page from the Enigma Variations of Edward Elgar. In No. 4 the principal melodic figure and the harmony of the tenth bar are alike typical of the composer at this period.

Belaieff, 1904

Belaieff, 1905

Belaieff, 1905

Opus 34. Tragic Poem in B flat major (12-8 festivamente, fastoso) Belaieff, 1904 As to general style this work is plainly influenced by Liszt, but it contains nevertheless some evidences of the composer's original methods in an early stage of their development. The melodic outline is occasionally typical (bars 5-6 and 11-12), and the prevalence of the ninth with sharpened fifth is worthy of note. OPUS 35. Three Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... ... ... Belaieff, 1904 1. D flat major (3-4 allegro). 2. B flat major (4-4 elevato). 3. C major (3-8 scherzo). These appear to reflect the styles respectively of Chopin, Wagner and Schumann. Opus 36. Satanic Poem in C major (6-8 allegro) ... Belaieff, 1904 As the title implies, Scriabin has here entered upon a phase in which the exposition of soul-states takes a definite place in the spiritual purpose of his music. It is in this work that he first hints at the satanic or contaminating elements to which the soul finds itself opposed in the process of its evolution; such episodes, which became a regular feature in the later sonatas, are on this occasion indicated by the expression marks riso ironico and ironico, the former occurring at the moment at which the soul's aspirations are first observed by the powers of darkness. The theme by which the former are typified should be compared with that of the "Poem of Ecstasy." A comparison between the present work and the "Tragic Poem" (Op. 34) will provide an insight into the process of the composer's harmonic evolution. Opus 37. Four Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... ... Belaieff, 1904 1. B flat minor (9-8 mesto). 2. F sharp major (9-8 maestoso, fiero). 3. B major (3-4 andante). 4. G minor (3-4 irato, impetueso). This series warns us that the composer has no intention of excluding either the programmatic or the harmonic elements of his compositions in the larger forms from those of the salon order. Harmonically he advances even to the full "Promethean" chord which may be seen in such places as the rather Griegish opening phrase of No. 3. The "literary" element is observable in the moods of Nos. 2 and 4. In the latter the expression of anger somewhat resembles the first theme of the Sonata, Op. 6. The left hand part of No. 1 is typical. Opus 38. Valse. A flat major (3-4 allegro agevole) ... Belaieff, 1904 Despite the presence of advanced harmonies, this piece is reminiscent of earlier days, but we have now to deal rather with a Chopinesque Scriabin than, as previously, with a Scriabinesque Chopin. This piece was for a time a favourite with the composer. Opus 39. Four Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... ... Belaieff, 1904 1. F sharp major (3-4 allegro). 2. D major (2-4 elevato). 3. G major (4-2 languido). 4. A flat major (3-4 = 63-66). No. 1 has at a first glance quite a classical complexion; closer scrutiny reveals distinct touches of an individuality which is established in the penultimate bar. From No. 2 one receives an impression as of one who, Satie-like, is experimenting with harmonic effects, but who is unconscious that they have already been used elsewhere. No. 3 is a little Schumannesque. In No. 4 one seems to hear an echo of the final page of Op. 31. Opus 40. Two Mazurkas Belaieff, 1904 1. D flat major (3-4 allegro). 2. F sharp major (3-4 piacevole). Two very delicate, graceful, and individual pieces. Opus 41. **Poem.** D flat major (6-8) = 96-104... Belaieff, 1904 Less strenuous than previous works under this heading. Somewhat Lisztian in feeling as a whole but the middle section tolerably characteristic.

Opus 42. Eight Etudes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... 1. D flat major (3-4 presto). The sentiment belongs to Chopin, but its expression is Scriabinesque. 2. F sharp minor (2-4 ==112). Apart from its rhythmic peculiarity-groups of five semiquavers in the bass-a little reminiscent of Schumann. 3. F sharp major (6-8 prestissimo). Quite in the style of the classical prelude; a beautifully modelled work in which no note is superfluous. 4. F sharp major (3-4 andante). A piece well representing the composer's second phase. 5. C sharp minor (12-8 affanato). Here on the whole is the robuster Scriabin of the Promethean manner, and little trace of Chopin. 6. D flat major (3-4 esaltate) Opens with a characteristic passage, the harmonies of which form a feature of the whole. 7. F minor (2-4 agitato) Exploits a rhythmic figure of three quavers against four semiquavers. 8. E flat major (4-4 allegro). The middle section recalls the moments at which Chopin indulged in broad impressive passages of rich chords, producing the musical equivalent of a colour progression in velvet. OPUS 44. Two Poems 1. C major (2-4 lento). 2. C major (3-8 moderato). Against the gently undulating accompaniment the melody of No. 1 (" le chant bien marque") is as though a voice in the desert, the latter giving the pleasanter impression. In the second Poem, which is in excellent contrast, the background is warmer in tone. Opus 45. Three Pieces. Complete in 1 Vol. ... 1. Album Leaf. E flat major (3-4 andante piacevole). 2. "Poeme Fantasque." C major (3-4 presto). 3. Prelude. E flat major (3-4 andante).

A delightful set, each number of which might well be described as an album leaf, a title more appropriate than that bestowed upon the second number. Than the opening piece Scriabin surely never wrote a more truly charming or more thoroughly typical page. In the Poème he forsakes the purely poetic and enters the region of fantasy, suggesting by his manner a psychological programmatic basis. In the work of so delicate an artist one looks for the influence of Grieg; from that. direction the upward flights "pp" in the Prelude appear to have come.

Opus 46. Scherzo. C major (6-8 presto) Belaieff, 1905 The composer appears here to be hesitating in contemplation of a harmonic advance.

Opus 47. Quasi-Valse. F major (3-4 = 66) ... ... Belaieff, 1905 A sketch for a valse. For the attentive student of Scriabin its harmony will have begun to sound more or less familiar. His attention may be directed, however, towards the curious notation of the sixth bar; the interval E sharp-B double flat, technically a sixth, is here a third; if isolated, the beginning of the sixth bar has a D minor complexion, but, in its context, that of D flat major.

- Opus 48. Four Preludes. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1906
  - 1. F sharp major (3-4 impetuoso, fiero).
  - 2. C major (4-2 poetico, con delisio).
  - 3. D flat major (3-4 capricciosamente, affanato).
  - 4. C major (3-4 festivamente).

A very striking series. The impetuosity of No. 1 is introduced at the initial bar by means of a sort of guttural ejaculation resembling in general character the opening of the allegro dramatico of the First Symphony. No. 2 is an exquisite little page of eight bars. Rhythmic aids bring to the third number the restless movement implied by its expression-note. No. 4, lacking nothing of the festive, is a thumbnail sketch of a bacchanalian revel.

Opus 49. Three Pieces. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1906

- 1. Etude. E flat major (2-4 = 152).
- 2. Prelude. F major (3-4 bruscamente).
- 3. Rêverie. C major (2-4 con finezsa)

These numbers are so obviously descriptive that it is perhaps pardonable to refer to a suggested sub-title for the Prelude (No. 2), "Ante-prandial observations of a satyr." The indication "brandente" is reflected in a passage recalling, as to mood, the opening of the F sharp major Prelude of the previous opus. In the initial bar of the Etude (No. 1) the resemblance is more on the physical side. The Rêverie is in splendid contrast—calm, contemplative, feminine.

Opus 51. Four Pieces. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1907

- 1. "Fragilité." E flat major (2-4 allegretto, limpide).
- 2. Prelude. A minor (6-8 lugubre).
- 3. Poème ailé. B major (2-4).
- 4. Danse languide. G major (4-4).

With this series Scriabin begins the frequent employment of "genre" titles. The occasional triplet groups assist happily in the suggestion of the fragile, but sobriety rather than lugubriousness is the mood of the little Prelude. In depicting flight the composer relies, with no little success, on figuration and speed-changes, and the languor of the momentary dance of which he gives but a glimpse—as though between the rise and fall of a curtain—is wonderfully portrayed.

OPUS 52. Three Pieces. Complete in 1 Vol., Russian Music Publishing Co. 1911

1. Poem. C major (3-8 lento).

In so far as concerns harmonic and melodic structure this piece is to be considered as the type of its period. In regard to its metrical arrangement, with its almost incessant variation of time-signature, this—as has been clearly demonstrated in an analysis by V. Karatigin—is an excellent example of Scriabin's insistence on clarity of formal design. The Russian critic shows quite plainly that had this work been written in its virtual form of four-bar phrases instead of its actual detailed shape it would have been less easy both to read and to render in accordance with the composer's intentions as to expression.

2. Enigma (3-8 étrange, capricieusement).

This remarkably fascinating little work, though undoubtedly possessing the "salon element" attributed to it by L. Sabaneyef, is allied in more than one respect to the symphonic "Poem of Ecstasy." The rising passages of little leaps closely resemble those which are to be seen in the Allegro volando of the latter score, where they represent the "theme of flight." It is interesting to learn that this piece was played by the composer from manuscript during a sojourn in Switzerland, in 1905, to a former pupil, who was asked to guess its "literary" import. "Enigma" had not then been furnished with a title.

3. Poème languide. B major (9-8 pas vite).

Here are further evidences of the close relationship of this series to the "Poem or Ecstasy," as a comparison of this number with the early pages of the orchestral work will show. At the same time the origin of the first bar of this piano piece may be traced in some earlier and much simpler works.

This group was originally published privately by Scriabin in 1908.

OPUS 53. Fifth Sonata (2-4 allegro impetuoso, con stravaganza).

Russian Music Publishing Co. 1913

This work represents a very important stage in the composer's development. It was written at Lausanne in 1908, soon after the "Poem of Ecstasy," a quotation from the text of which serves as "motto," and occupied Scriabin only three or four days. Beginning here, the composer discards the formal division and proceeds to model his Sonatas in one connected movement. In the harmonic plan as well as in the method of modulation there is a foretaste of "Prometheus." Attention may be called to the sequence of keys in the working-out section, and further to a misprint in the last two bars on page 16, in which the B (in treble) requires a natural.

- Opus 56. Four pieces. Complete in 1 Vol. ... Belaieff, 1908
  - 1. Prelude. E flat major (6-8 violent, très accentue).
  - 2. "Ironies." C major (2-4 vivo, schersoso).
  - 3. "Nuances" (9-8 fondu, velouté).
  - 4. Etude (2-8 presto).

Scriabin has now entered his third period but it is not until we pass from the savagely triumphant page of the initial Prelude to the breathless measure of the second number—an airy trifle that might well have attracted a Nijinsky—that the composer manifests the transition in his harmonies. With the "Nuances" he recalls his former tenderness in music that echoes the mood of Nos. 5 and 13 in Opus 11. The concluding number, a kind of sylph-like saltarella, seems to deserve a descriptive or genre title.

- OPUS 57. Two pieces ... ... ... Belaieff, 1908
  - 1. "Désir" (12-8).
  - 2. "Caresse Dansée" (3-8).

Two very remarkable numbers. The first suggests itself as belonging to the music written with the thought of the unfinished "Mystery," which was to have been the composer's culminating work, in mind. The "Caresse," which would provide something quite expressible in the dance for those prepared for a moment to turn away from Grieg, Chopin and Schumann, has been used as a powerful argument by reason of its apparent inconsistency of notation—in support of the contention that the composer thought in "just intonation" although writing for a tempered instrument. These pieces rank among the very best of Scriabin's smaller creations.

Opus 58. Album Leaf (3-4 con delicatessa).

Issued in a Russian Composers' Album by the

Russian Music Publishing Co. 1911

Placed between a charming Polka by Rachmaninov and the Prelude and Fugue contributed to the collection by S. Taneiev, Scriabin's "Leaf" appears the more characteristic.

- Opus 59. Two pieces ... ... Russian Music Publishing Co. 1913
  - I. Poème (6-8 allegrette).
  - 2. Prelude (6-8 sauvage, belliqueux).

By means of the opening of the first and the majestic close of the second, students may easily trace for themselves the very clear connection between the early and later Scriabinist manners. In the "Poème" the composer seems to be hesitating on the brink of the "Promethean" and harmonic method.

Opus 61. Poème-Nocturne (9-8 avec une grâce capricieuse).

Russian Music Publishing Co. 1913

In its degree of harmonic complexity this work goes already beyond "Prometheus." Its relationship to the "Poem of Ecstasy," to the "Poem of Fire," and the dreamed-of "Mystery," is established by the frequent use of such expression indications as "avec une volupté dormante" and "comme une ombre mouvante." The curious scale passages are of course to be traced to the now enfranchised "overtone" harmonic system.

OPUS 62. Sixth Sonata (3-4 modéré, etc.) ... Russian Music Publishing Co. 1912

This work is in several respects a "milestone." It is the first of the sonatas without key-signature, henceforth discarded; in it, as Sabaneyef points out, the composer brings together two elements hitherto regarded as distinct—those of approved harmony and "timbre"—its harmonic basis being derived from the impression of bell-sounds. Assured as we are that the Sonata was composed as "absolute" music there are in it features to which Scriabin has sanctioned the attribution of a psychological import; among them may be mentioned the unusual expression annotations, such as "Le rêve prend forme," and the two notes, B flat and E double-flat, in the penultimate bar of page 5 (charmes) here representing the evil influence referred to in the "Satanic Poem."

... Russian Music Publishing Co. 1913 Opus 63. Two Poems 1. "Masque" (6-8 allegretto). 2. "Etrangeté" (9-8 gracieux, délicat). The first of these two numbers has a harmonic resemblance to Opus 61 and the Sixth Sonata. In the second, the principal thematic figure of Opus 52, No. 1, is vividly recalled. Opus 64. Seventh Sonata (4-8 allegro, etc.) ... Russian Music Publishing Co. 1912 "In the Seventh Sonata," says E. Gunst, "the mystical element in Scriabin's music reaches its apogee." Dubbed by its composer a White Mass, this remarkable work has points in common with "Prometheus" (thematic figuration, the use of predominating chord, the concluding vertiginous dance rhythm), it is also closely related in its spiritual basis with the "Mystery." Its principal harmonic innovation may be observed on page I "mystérieusement sonore," an indication which coupled with such as "menaçant," "impérieux," and the more specifically descriptive "comme des éclairs" would appear to warrant the assumption that the soul's conflict with contaminating influences is once again being waged. Opus 65. Three Etudes ... Jurgenson, 1913 1. B flat major (12-16 allegro fantastico, in ninths). 2. C sharp major (4-4 allegretto, in sevenths). 3. G major (2-4 molto vivace, in fifths). These three studies are without key signature. Nos. 1 and 2 are exceedingly difficult of execution, but the third is less alarming in this respect, as also in the matter of aural comprehension. The effect of the rising scale of chromatic fifths in an octave setting (last six bars) is exceedingly curious. The enharmonic notation of these studies is not the least of the technical difficulties they present. Opus 66. Eighth Sonata (9-8 lento, etc.) ... ... Jurgenson, 1913 This is the longest of Scriabin's sonatas, having two developments. Like that of the preceding work in the same form its harmony is complex though founded on a single basic chord. A distinguishing feature here is the flattened tenth which occurring as set forth in the fourth bar has a remarkable effect. There is again an ecstatic dance-like Coda, but a rhythm more definitely recalling an earlier appearance is that of the molto piu vivo, which appears to be a reminiscence of the Fifth Sonata. Opus 67. Two Preludes ... Jurgenson, 1913 1. (5-8 andante). 2. (4-8 presto). Both are characteristic of the post-Promethean period. The vague and mysterious harmonics of the andante are perhaps somewhat less easily to be "focussed" than those formed by the semi-quaver triplets of the presto. OPUS 68. Ninth Sonata (4-8 moderato, quasi andante, etc.) ... ... Jurgenson, 1913 The element of the diabolical, introduced in the "Satanic Poem," is given a significant part in the programmatic scheme of this Sonata, which was called by Scriabin a "Black Mass." Belonging to that period which commentators agree in calling the composer's "theurgical" phase, the work refers by means both of its music and its expression indications to the contaminating influence discoverable in some of the earlier creations. The presence of this may be observed in the bass marked "perfide" and "avec une douceur de plus en plus caressante et empoisonée." The concluding pages afford an example of Scriabin's practice of enlarging upon a theme

until at a given moment it serves as material for a culminating point. Such a process

is revealed here in the recapitulation, the climax being reached in the bars preceding

the final allegro. The theme used is the introductory motive which recalls Debussy's

A short acquaintance with the first example will serve to dispel its seeming

obscurity; the second is a particularly charming, imaginative and delicate fantasy.

... Jurgenson, 1913

"Nuages" and its Moussorgskian prototype.

Especially beautiful are the upward flights at più vivo.

Opus 69. Two Poems

1. (3-4 allegretto).

2. (6-8 allegretto).

Opus 70. Tenth Sonata (0-16 moderato) ... *Jurgenson*, 1913 In this, his final work in this form, Scriabin brings about a purification of both the harmonic and the psychological elements. Simpler harmonies prevail, simpler, that is, in structure, and not in their harmonic significance. The process of thematic treatment is reversed, the themes undergoing a gradual abbreviation until, finally, their fragments are employed as material for the climax. Viewed in its spiritual aspect the Sonata is represented as portraying the exorcism of those evil powers referred to in relation to the preceding sonatas. Its musical substance reflects this process in an ethereal purity that contrasts markedly with the empoisoned

Opus 71. Two Poems ... ... Jurgenson, 1914

1. (6-8 fantastique).

Moscow in December, 1913.

2. (3-4 en rêvant).

Of these two pieces, in which the composer is obviously devoting his attention rather to timbre than to harmony, the first is perhaps the more remarkable. Despite its decidedly unusual chord-construction the work has melodic features, such as the principal thematic figure, which immediately proclaim it as the product of the Scriabin of the Chopinistic preludes, mazurkas, etc. Attention is called to a misprint in the penultimate line, from the last bar of which a bass-clef sign has been omitted.

atmosphere of its precursors. The Sonata received its first performance at

OPUS 72. "Vers la Flamme" Poem (9-8 allegro moderato, etc.).

Jurgenson, 1914

Intended to form part of a Sonata this is easily recognisable, both from its harmonic content and certain externals, as not being a piece of descriptive music in the conventional sense of the term. The Poem in reality a page rightfully belonging to the record of soul-states penned by the composer in the later sonatas and symphonic works. Hearing the work one could readily believe it to have been inspired by the flaming cover of the "Poem of Fire."

Opus 73. Two Dances ... Jurgenson, 1914

1. "Guirlandes" (3-4 avec une grâce languissante).

On the opening upward phrase recalling a similar figure in the Eighth Sonata, the whole of this piece is based. Observing the notation one is inclined to accept the explanation advanced by Avraamov, that Scriabin in his last period, being obliged to write for a tempered instrument, made an attempt to record the harmonies as mentally conceived.

2. "Flammes Sombres" (6-8 avec une grâce dolente).

This appears to be a piece of conventional descriptive music; as such it certainly succeeds. It was first performed in January, 1915, at a concert in aid of Serbian wounded.

OPUS 74. Five Preludes ... Jurgenson, 1914

- 1. (3-4 douloureux, déchirant).
- 2. (4-8 très lent, contemplatif).
- 3. (9-8 allegro drammatico).
- 4. (3-4 lent, vague, indécis).
- 5. (3-2 fier, belliqueux).

The controversy that has raged (and is still raging) around these Preludes (reminding us of the reception of "Prometheus") has not yet contributed much beyond some bold theorising as to the import of their notation on the one hand, and some expressions of personal taste on the other. Whatever may be their effect after repeated hearings, most of those who play them will, for a time, prefer to extract comfort from the circumstance that this final work has alienated the sympathy of many of Scriabin's whilom supporters.

Nos. 1, 2, and 4 figured in the programme of the recital at which the composer made his last platform appearance. Whether the "complete triumph," said to have been achieved on this occasion, was in any part due to the audience's appreciation of these

extraordinary pieces, is not made clear.

# [Reproduced from Youthful and Early Works Alexander and Julian Scriabin, Compiled and annotated by Donald M. Garvelmann, Music Treasure Publications, New York, 1970, Donald M. Garvelmann, by permission.]







Scriabin in 1905

Tatuana

Scriabin in 1903



Scriabin with his piano class of 1902.
L. to r.: A. Loiko, Alexander Horowitz, O. Esaulova, Scriabin, Yuri Pomerantsev. A. Malinovskaya and Maria S. Nemenova-Lunz

## FEUILLE D'ALBUM (F# MAJOR)

Composed in 1905, presumably. The manuscript, No. 652, is preserved in the Scriabin State Museum. In the upper right-hand corner, not in Scriabin's handwriting: "Prelude written for the collection for famine victims". First published sometime around 1905 in the "Collection of Compositions by Contemporary Russian Composers," by the Moscow Sector of the RMO "in aid of the fund for widows and orphans of musical artists in Moscow." Also published in S-1(s), which gives the spelling of the title as here given, rather than the correct French, "Feuillet."

This exquisite composition had been mislabeled or miscatalogued for a number of years as a Prelude in F# major. Hence, it was never properly listed in any catalog of Scriabin works. It is included in this collection for that reason. Faubion Bowers calls this piece "one of Scriabin's little aubades or greetings to the morning sun," and makes the following performance suggestions: "The trick of playing it is airiness and lightness. The soprano melody in the right hand must be sung brightly with breathing spaces, as if it were a human voice, and yet the melody fragments of the tenor line in the left hand must warmly support, give a reason for being to this song of the happy heart".

At the death of Paul Schloezer in 1898, Scriabin took his place at the Conservatory as professor of piano (until 1903). In 1903 Scriabin's love affair began with Tatyana Fyodorovna Schloezer (1883-1922). She was the niece of Paul Schloezer and was Boris Schloezer's sister. Tatyana was a pianist and passionately admired Scriabin. She became his common-law wife and mother of Julian.

#### FEUILLE D'ALBUM

ЛИСТОК ИЗ АЛЬБОМА





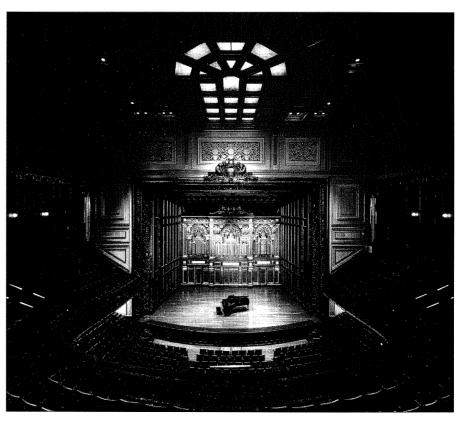
Scriabin, Amsterdam, ca. 1912

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