

PERFUME OF THE SOUL:
COMPOSITIONAL INFLUENCES OF EMILE NAOUMOFF

By

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ABSTRACT

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Emile Naoumoff is a renowned Bulgarian pianist, composer, teacher and, most notably, the very last disciple of Nadia Boulanger. This document will analyze the four different periods of his compositional life: the early period, influenced by Slavic folk elements; the neoclassical period, from studies with Nadia Boulanger; the French art song period; and his current fascination with the art of improvisation. My main focus will be to define and analyze the distinct stylistic differences of each period and to explore Naoumoff's various influences and inspirations. Additionally, I will examine his use of harmony citing specific examples from his compositions and offering a brief analysis of representative pieces from each period.

Despite the vastly different styles of these four periods, there is one overarching element that is apparent throughout his compositions: the frequent use of basso ostinato.

Its use, according to Naoumoff, reflects the influence of Russian music, and this recurring element is seen repeatedly from his early *Nocturne* to his very latest improvisations.

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Introduction

Emile Naoumoff is a renowned Bulgarian pianist, composer, teacher and, most notably, the very last disciple of Nadia Boulanger, whose students include such renowned figures as Aaron Copland, Dinu Lipatti, Philip Glass, and Astor Piazzolla. Naoumoff was born in 1962 in Sofia, Bulgaria and moved to Paris to study with Madame Boulanger at the age of eight. He worked with her daily from the ages of 10 to 18 and lived with her in her Paris home until her death in 1979. In 1981, Emile Naoumoff was the youngest composer to be published by Schott in Mainz, Germany. Currently, he is professor of piano at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music and keeps an active journal of daily improvisations on YouTube.

This document will analyze the four different periods of his compositional life: the early period, influenced by Slavic folk elements; the neoclassical period, from studies with Nadia Boulanger; the French art song period; and his current fascination with the art of improvisation. My main focus will be to define and analyze the distinct stylistic differences of each period and to explore Naoumoff's various influences and inspirations. Additionally, I will examine his use of harmony citing specific examples from his compositions and offering a brief analysis of representative pieces from each period.

The first period, mostly in the 1970s, when he was influenced by his Slavic background and folk songs. His *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna* (1970) and *Pastorale* (1970) are excellent examples of this early period and represent his early childhood. He was inspired by Bulgarian folk songs when he composed *Nocturne: Silent*

Ancient Alley of Tryavna; there are many traditional Bulgarian elements, including the pedal point that is heard throughout the piece and the use of short and simple motives.

The second period reflects many elements received from Nadia Boulanger, as Naoumoff was highly influenced by French music during this period. Notably, one hears neoclassical gestures and styles that are typically associated with Madame Boulanger. Naoumoff himself said, “It is not something that she taught me to write in neoclassical style, but her love of Stravinsky, revival of Baroque and Stravinsky, and aesthetic of revisiting the past inspired me to write the Piano Sonata (1980).”¹

The third period was inspired by French art songs of the twentieth century and the style is determined mainly by the texts, which are drawn from French poetry not unlike the songs of Fauré and Debussy. Naoumoff wrote about 300 French art songs during this productive period.

Despite the vastly different styles of these four periods, there is one overarching element that is apparent throughout his compositions: the frequent use of basso ostinato. Its use, according to Naoumoff, reflects the influence of Russian music, and this recurring element is seen repeatedly from his early *Nocturne* to his very latest improvisations.

I. Slavic Folk Elements

Although he was born in Bulgaria and lived there until the age of seven, Naoumoff’s compositions from his first style period were not necessarily related to his personal memories of Bulgaria, but they were often influenced by his grandfather’s

¹ Emile Naoumoff, phone interview with the author, February 2014.

paintings.² Vladimir Naumov (1897 – 1947) was a renowned painter in Bulgaria and he produced many beautiful works, including portraits and several landscapes from Bulgaria. *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna* reflects both the inspiration from his grandfather and his Bulgarian background.

Tryavna is a small town located in the central part of Bulgaria and the title reflects the clear connection between the music and his Bulgarian heritage. Although Naumoff never visited the town, one of his grandfather's paintings was a landscape of Tryavna. From this work, one can tell that it was painted on a beautiful sunny day in a rural area. The painting is filled with greenery next to an old wooden building.

Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna was written on August 29th, 1970.

Among many influences from the Bulgarian background, the frequent meter changes are especially evident. Bulgarian folk music includes many simple and complicated asymmetrical time signatures: 2/4, 3/4, 6/8 and 4/4.³ The Nocturne starts in 3/4 and there are total of eight meter changes throughout the piece. The changes are typically shifting between the duple and triple meters as shown in Example 1.

Example 1: Naumoff, *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna*, mm. 10 - 18

The musical score for Example 1, measures 10-18, is written for piano. It begins in 3/4 time and undergoes several meter changes: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 3/4. The piece is in G minor, indicated by one flat in the key signature. The score includes a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) and a first ending bracket. The bass line features several 'Ped.' (pedal) markings with asterisks, indicating where the sustain pedal should be used. The melody in the treble clef is characterized by flowing eighth and sixteenth notes, often with ties across bar lines.

² Naumoff, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 2014

³ Venelin, Krustev, *Bulgarian Music* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1978), 50

The first element one notices about this piece is that the left hand has a long tied note the D in the bass is sustained throughout the entire page. The rest of the notes in the left hand include a pattern that is apparent repeatedly, a basso ostinato. The pattern of descending thirds repeats eight times from mm. 1 - 26. Although there are rhythmic variations of these descending thirds, the notes remain the same. As there are many repetitive left hand patterns, the song is particularly treble dominated.

The melody in the right hand heavily emphasizes tetrachords and pentachords.

The distinguished Bulgarian musicologist Venelin Krustev writes:

Bulgarian folk-music is diatonic. The modi without exception have a tetrachord or pentachord structure... The most frequent combination is the minor tetrachord, which incidentally does not in any way give the song a melancholy character. (The aesthetic and psychological problem of major and minor does not exist in the folk-song at all.)⁴

The first four notes of the right hand (D, E-flat, F and G) in mm. 1-2 outline a minor tetrachord and this figure repeats seven times. The next set of notes comprises a minor pentachord (G, A, B-flat, C, and D) in mm. 5 – 6 (see Example 2). The tetrachord and pentachord structure alternates until m. 26, which creates a repetitive, folk-like impression.

Example 2: Naoumoff, *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna*, mm. 1 - 9

The musical score for Example 2 is presented in a grand staff format, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The time signature is 3/4, and the tempo marking is 'Andante'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The right hand (treble staff) begins with a melody of descending eighth notes: D4, E-flat4, F4, G4, F4, E-flat4, D4. This pattern repeats. The left hand (bass staff) features a long tied note D3 in the bass, which is sustained throughout the piece. Above this note, there is a pattern of descending thirds in the bass register, such as G3-F3, E-flat3-D3, C3-B2, and so on, creating a basso ostinato effect.

⁴ Ibid.

Irregular phrasing is a popular feature in Bulgarian folk music, and the phrase structure in Naoumoff's *Nocturne* is particularly irregular. Krustev states,

Bulgarian folk-music makes use of almost all theoretically possible combinations of line structure, including, of course, the classical quadratic ones (2 + 2, 4 + 4, 8 + 8). The variety of line structures 2 + 3 (five-beat structure), 3 + 3 (six-beat), 3 + 4 (seven-beat), 5 + 3 (eight-beat), 3 + 3 + 3 (nine-beat), 5 + 5 (ten-beat), etc. is one of the most original features of Bulgarian folk music.⁵

For example, the beginning of the *Nocturne* starts with regular phrasing (4 + 4), but many irregular phrasings follow; for example, (5 + 3) and (3 + 5). Although both 4 + 4 and 5 + 3 add up to eight beats, the music sounds vastly different than regular periodic structures.

It is interesting to note that all the motivic ideas are descend. Both the melodic figures in the right hand and the basso ostinato in the left hand include a descending gesture. The most noticeable descending pattern is not seen until the very end of the piece (see example 3). With the melodic descent, the dynamic also descends from *forte* to *piano*.

Example 3: Naoumoff, *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna*, mm. 49 – 59

The musical score for Example 3, Naoumoff's *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna*, mm. 49–59, is presented in two staves. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with various rhythmic values and dynamic markings, including *f* (forte) and *p* (piano), and a *rit.* (ritardando) section. The left hand (bass clef) features a basso ostinato pattern, marked with "Trio" and asterisks, consisting of a descending sequence of notes. The score includes a date "29.8.1970" at the bottom right.

⁵ Ibid, 51.

There are many similar characteristics between the *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna* and the *Pastorale*. The *Pastorale* was written on December 12th, 1970 - about four months after Naoumoff wrote *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna* - and it was also influenced by one of his grandfather's paintings. Compared to *Nocturne*, *Pastorale* includes more developmental motivic ideas, more variety of rhythmic patterns, and is twice as long. However, features such as held note in the bass, the emphasis on tetrachords and pentachords, and the irregular phrasing occur in both compositions.

It is no surprise that the held note in the bass in *Pastorale* is also D. Although there is no clear basso ostinato, this particular sustained note sounds incredibly similar to bagpipes. Bagpipes are one of the most widespread Bulgarian instruments, and one can clearly hear the relationship between the drone bass and the sound of the bagpipe.

Timothy Rice, the author of *Music in Bulgaria*, states,

The *gaida* is the most important instrument in the Rhodopes and is often used to accompany singing (Levy 1985). It comes in a form almost twice as large as Maria's Thracian bagpipe, and it sounds almost an octave lower. It is often called *kaba gaida* ("big bagpipe") to distinguish it from the Thracian bagpipe, and it is regularly used to accompany singing. The instrument is so important and so many men in the region play it... Bagpipes were once a pan-European instrument, and it is likely that the southern Slavs had the instrument already when they arrived in the Balkans fifteen hundred years ago.⁶

The connection between the bagpipes and the title, *Pastorale*, is also significant.

For example, Domenico Scarlatti wrote a number of piano sonatas in a pastoral mood:

piano sonata in D minor, K. 9 and piano sonata in D Major, K. 415. Ludwig van

Beethoven also wrote a piano sonata in D Major, Op. 28, in a pastoral style. Although

the key signature in Naoumoff's *Pastorale* suggests G minor, the majority of the drone

bass is still D and therefore, more emphasis is placed on the dominant chord.

⁶ Timothy Rice, *Music in Bulgaria: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 38-39.

Nearly all of the motivic figures include active ornaments like appoggiaturas, mordents, and turns. These frequently function as a melodic gestures rather than purely decorating the motivic ideas as seen in Example 4.

Example 4: Naoumoff, *Pastorale*, mm. 1 – 4

The musical score for Example 4 is in 3/4 time, marked *Andante*, and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with various ornaments, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

Unlike *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna*, *Pastorale* includes both ascending and descending lines. These ascending gestures suggest a rather hopeful and optimistic sense, which was missing from *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna*. The first appears in m. 17 (also the first time the dynamic marking *forte* is seen), and the energy builds through m. 19.

Example 5: Naoumoff, *Pastorale*, mm. 15 – 22

Between the motivic ideas, there are frequent interruptions of bell-like chords in the extremely high register of the piano. These chords are either D minor or G minor triads, and the dynamic marking is always *pianissimo*.

Example 6: Naoumoff, *Pastorale*, mm. 5 – 9

Both the *Nocturne: Silent Ancient Alley of Tryavna* and the *Pastorale* depict rich musical elements from Bulgaria and clear imagery from Vladimir Naumov's paintings. Based on simple motivic figures, both pieces are especially appealing and charming character pieces that are tonally straightforward.

II. Neoclassicism

Naoumoff was influenced by French music from an early age, but he did not compose any major works in the Neo-classical style until the late 1970s. During the ten years that he studied with Madame Boulanger had not only met renowned figures such as Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland, and Elliot Carter, but meeting and working with such prominent musicians also influenced and shaped Naoumoff's composition style.

Despite her work with many great musicians, Madame Boulanger mentioned that Naoumoff was one of the best gifts of her old age. Jerome Spycket writes,

Especially close to her was a little nine-year-old boy from Sofia, whom his parents had entrusted to her a few months before – Emile Naoumoff. From then on he practically never left her side; he was a constant joy to her during the nine short years that remained of her life. Although she never actually abandoned her proverbial severity nor relaxed her exacting pedagogical demands, she was, all the same, more indulgent in his case than she had ever shown herself to be before. She grew deeply fond of this child, of whom she wrote “the work accomplished always far exceeds in quantity and quality anything one could have hoped for.” For his part, Emile was keenly aware of all that this woman, so close to the end of her life, offered him. They shared a deep mutual affection and understanding, and also a sense of gratitude that grew stronger with the passage of the years. Emile Naoumoff became, in a way, the living legacy of Nadia Boulanger.⁷

During his stay with her, Madame Boulanger and Naoumoff often listened to music together, especially compositions by Igor Stravinsky. Her love of Stravinsky's works was transparent, and it influenced young Naoumoff. Stravinsky and Madame Boulanger maintained a close friendship for many years and shared countless musical ideas. Alan Kendall states:

⁷ Jerome Spycket, *Nadia Boulanger* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), 156 – 157.

Nadia Boulanger's friendship with Igor Stravinsky was probably the most important, in musical terms, in her life, and dated before World War II, in Paris. Naturally she has sustained many musical friendships over the years, of varying degrees of intensity, but Stravinsky's influence on her was of fundamental importance. His respect for her acute musical ear and ability as a conductor was manifestly confirmed when he entrusted to her the first performance of his *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto in Washington in 1938.⁸

The most essential element that impacted Naoumoff's compositional style, however, was not the acquaintance with numerous prominent figures, but Madame Boulanger's remarkable training. According to Naoumoff, his daily studies were divided into two sections: theory and composition. In his theory training, Madame Boulanger was extremely strict with basic rules of voice leading, avoiding parallels, and counterpoint. In his compositions, however, she allowed him to disregard all of the academic rules and let his creativity and originality emerge.⁹ Alan Kendall writes,

In her fourth-floor apartment at 36 Rue Ballu she gave, still gives, private lessons in all the chief musical branches – piano playing, sight reading, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, orchestration, analysis and composition. And there, of a Wednesday afternoon, took place weekly gatherings of pupils (strictly by invitation) at which the most modern scores of the time (by Stravinsky and Schoenberg and Mahler) were analyzed and played on the pianoforte, and the rarest madrigals of the Renaissance (by Monteverdi, Luca Marenzio and Gesualdo di Venosa) were sung in class.¹⁰

Due to her strict teaching style, Madame Boulanger was considered a ruthless teacher by some pupils, but her complete method of musical training made her one of the best modern pedagogues, even to this day. Aside from academic training, she often told her students that music must speak from the heart and an artist must know what his heart

⁸ Alan Kendall, *The Tender Tyrant: Nadia Boulanger, A Life Devoted to Music* (Sofia: 1978), 80.

⁹ Naoumoff, phone interview.

¹⁰ Alan Kendall, *The Tender Tyrant: Nadia Boulanger, A Life Devoted to Music* (Sofia: 1978), 58.

is saying.¹¹ Truly great pedagogues do not only dwell on the technical aspects, but also emphasize a pure love of music and philosophy of life, which Madame Boulanger demonstrated in her teaching.

This is particularly true in Naoumoff's compositions, and his piano sonata displays many of his passionate ideas in one masterpiece. He started to write the sonata when he was eighteen years old and finished a year later.¹² At this point in his life, he has been studying with Madame Boulanger for about ten years and he has already mastered many brilliant compositional techniques. The piano sonata was published in 1980, the year of Madame Boulanger's death.

There are two editions of his piano sonata: the first edition was published in 1980, and the second in 2002. There are three movements in the first edition: Sinfonia, Aria, and Toccata. Naoumoff added two new movements in the second edition: Scherzo Perpetuo and Passacaglia Fugata.

Naoumoff explains that he is fully aware of past experiments with sonata form in the past. However, he felt compelled to write his piano sonata using more traditional forms. The first movement, Sinfonia, is clearly in sonata form. According to Naoumoff,

A sonata is more than a form; it is a statement, an architectural balance between reason and emotion and etymologically the eloquence of musical resonance itself. It is a timeless creative quest. I hope that the performer's desire to play my sonata will be rewarded not only by the resulting connective link with the audience, but also by well-deserved success. The fascination with all forms of art is classicism in the making, providing food for the thought and senses alike. Narrated fiction permits us to escape from reality while simultaneously reaching out innermost feelings in the manner of a boomerang. The desire for beauty in all things, even if ephemeral or unfulfilled, remains the driving force of humanity. It is my humble

¹¹ Ibid, 46.

¹² Naoumoff, Phone interview.

hope that my pianistic offering will convey joy to all those who are brought together through this work.¹³

It is apparent that Naoumoff used many elements from the past, but also combined those elements with new ideas. Naoumoff states,

When I started to compose this sonata in the very beginning, I did not hear the tune alone, but I heard a combination of thematic elements. The polyphonic inner hearing in my imagination was enticed by Boulanger's studies of Renaissance motets and Mozart double viola quintets. Her influences were nourished by many elements from the past including voicing structure in Bach, the polyrhythmic primitive of Neoclassical, energizing mix of serial style from Stravinsky, and powerfully poised heroism of Faure.¹⁴

The first movement begins with a six-measure introduction. While using the traditional sonata form of the first Viennese school, he introduces the sostenuto pedal and dotted rhythms from the French overture of the Baroque period. These elements are heard in the introduction, along with interruptions of fast notes.

Example 7: Naoumoff, *Piano Sonata*, 1st movement, m.1

The musical score for Example 7 shows the beginning of the first movement of Naoumoff's Piano Sonata. It is marked 'Maestoso' with a tempo of approximately 84. The music is written for piano and includes a six-measure introduction. The score shows a complex texture with multiple voices, including a prominent bass line and a treble line. The dynamics range from forte (f) to mezzo-forte (mf). The score includes a sostenuto pedal (S.P.) marking and a fermata over the final note of the introduction.

¹³ Emile Naoumoff, forward to *Piano Sonata* (Mainz: Schott, 1980).

¹⁴ Naoumoff, Phone interview.

It begins with a thunder-like low C octave in the left hand, followed by bitonal sonority hinting at a C minor chord. Although the dotted rhythm appears only once in this measure, it becomes more frequent in the later measures, especially in m. 4. The next musical idea is rather unexpected after the grand French overture style, due to a quick rhythmic change, but these notes are exactly same as the previous ones.

Example 8: Naoumoff, Piano Sonata, 1st movement, m. 4

The musical score for Example 8 shows measure 4 of the first movement of Naoumoff's Piano Sonata. It is written for grand staff. The left hand begins with a low C octave (C1) and a dotted rhythm. The right hand features a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*, and performance instructions like *(S.P.)*. The notation includes various accidentals and articulation marks.

The exposition is largely influenced by Slavic elements. The first theme (mm. 7 – 22) is built over E-flat ostinato in the left hand and folk-like elements in the right hand, and there are seven meter changes in the first theme area.

Example 9: Naoumoff, Piano Sonata, 1st movement, mm. 7-8

The musical score for Example 9 shows measures 7-8 of the first movement of Naoumoff's Piano Sonata. It is titled "Allegro vivo e ritmico (♩ ≈ 168)". The score is written for grand staff. The left hand features a steady E-flat ostinato. The right hand has a folk-like melody. The score includes dynamic markings such as *sub. ff* and *f*, and performance instructions like *sempre staccato*. The notation includes various accidentals and articulation marks.

The second theme (mm. 23 – 47) is lyrical and sensual to add greater contrast between the first and the second theme. Not only is there dynamic contrast and a tempo change, but the modulation from E-flat to C minor also clearly indicates that this is clearly a second theme area. The ascending and descending motivic elements are imitated in close duration in both hands.

Example 10: Naoumoff, Piano Sonata, 1st movement, mm. 23-26



These imitated ideas fragment and become elements, and the development section, based on material from the first theme, begins in m. 48. The development is the more elaborate and freely composed section compared to exposition and recapitulation. The first seven measures are exactly same as the exposition, but rest of the development section borrows motives from throughout the exposition. There is a new unexpected material in mm. 58 – 63, which reappears in the third movement in mm. 18 – 21. The texture, the meter change and the large leaps suggest that Naoumoff is deliberately linking those two sections.

Example 11: Naoumoff, *Piano Sonata*, 1st movement, mm. 60 – 63

Cadenza furioso
violento e rivoltato

120 *fff* *ad libitum* *aba.*

121 *poco a poco rit.* *molto lento ed allargando* *lirico*

The recapitulation starts in m. 122, which is similar to the exposition, but the second theme is omitted. The coda (mm. 140 – 148) is similar to the introduction, where the dotted rhythms of the French overture. Although this movement offers many new elements such as added a cadenza, it is loosely in a sonata form. Not only is this a technically demanding movement, but the voicing is also extremely challenging and requires a virtuosic level of playing.

III. French Art Songs

Naoumoff wrote about 300 French art songs, mainly suitable for mezzo soprano and baritones, between 2005 and 2012. During this productive period he was drawn to French poetry and French music, as he missed France after moving to America; he was primarily inspired and influenced by the symbolism of Fauré and Debussy. I will briefly

analyze the relationship between the poetry and the music of these three French art songs:

Dans ton Coeur, O Mort, and Plainte d'amour.

Dans ton Coeur was written by a renowned French poet named Jean Lahor (1840 - 1909); and this poem was also set by Camille Saint-Saëns and Henri Duparc. Duparc used many of Jean Lahor's poems in his songs, including *Chanson Triste, Extase,* and *Sérénade Florentine.* *Dans ton cœur dort un clair de lune* is roughly translated as "Moonlight sleeps within your heart." by David Paley.

Dans ton cœur dort un clair de lune

*Dans ton cœur dort un clair de lune,
Un doux clair de lune d'été,
Et pour fuir la vie importune,
Je me noierai dans ta clarté.*

*J'oublierai les douleurs passées,
Mon amour, quand tu berceras
Mon triste cœur et mes pensées
Dans le calme aimant de tes bras.*

*Tu prendras ma tête malade,
Oh! quelquefois, sur tes genoux,
Et lui diras une ballade
Qui semblera parler de nous;*

*Et dans tes yeux pleins de tristesse,
Dans tes yeux alors je boirai
Tant de baisers et de tendresse
Que peut-être je guérirai.*

Moonlight Sleeps within your Heart

Moonlight sleeps within your heart,
A gentle light of summer moon
And I shall set the cares of life apart
When, in your brightness, I shall swoon.

I shall forget the sorrows past

If you, my love, will cradle
My heart and thoughts at last
In the calm that loving arms enable.

Sometimes, you will take my head
And rest it on your lap
And then recite a ballad
That will speak of us, perhaps.

And in your eyes so full of sadness,
In those eyes, I shall discover
So many kisses, such tenderness,
That, no doubt, I shall recover.

There is a clear reflection of the text in the music. The beginning of the *Dans ton Coeur* is marked as “flowing, like a harp” (*Coulant, Comme une harpe*), to prepare the affect of a calm summer evening, and the piano sets the tranquil atmosphere in the prelude. The arpeggiated figure in the piano part heard repeatedly throughout the song is harp-like. The voice part reflects the gentle light of a summer moon in the first 17 measures.

Example 14: Naoumoff, *Dans ton Coeur*, mm. 1-11

The musical score for 'Dans ton Coeur' by Naoumoff, measures 1-11, is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 1-5. The voice part is in treble clef with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} \sim 76$. The piano part is in 3/4 time, marked *legato p* and *Coulant (Comme une harpe)*. The second system shows measures 6-11. The voice part has lyrics: "ton coeur dort un clair de lu - -". The piano part continues with the arpeggiated figure, marked *Doucement baigné de pédales* and *no ped.* at the end. A *Pia* marking and an asterisk are present at the bottom right of the second system.

The voice part moves rather slowly, both rhythmically (mostly half notes) and harmonically, but moves much quicker on the text “when in your brightness, I shall swoon” in mm. 26 – 29. There is a mode change from major to minor in m. 35, suggesting a tragic, sad, and desolate mood of the text “I shall forget sorrows past.” After a sad middle section, the text suggests hope and optimism from m. 110 and the accompaniment section mirrors that atmosphere by creating simple harmonies in a major mode. The piano postlude is more than a page long, leaving the audience and the performers with a feeling of eternal hope and happiness toward the two lovers.

Plainte d’amour, however, portrays painful love and death, and the accompaniment is particularly dark and at a slow tempo. *Plainte d’amour* was written by Louis Pomey (1835 – 1901); Fauré based many songs on his poems, for example, *Chanson espagnoles*, *Mélodies*, and *3 Songs, Op. 6*.

Plainte d’amour

*Chère âme, sans toi j'expire,
Pourquoi taire ma douleur?
Mes lèvres veulent sourire
Mes yeux disent mon malheur.
Hélas! Loin de toi j'expire,*

*Que ma cruelle peine,
De ton âme hautaine
Désarme la rigueur.*

*Cette nuit dans un rêve,
Je croyais te voir;
Ah, soudain la nuit s'achève,
Et s'enfuit l'espoir.*

*Je veux sourire
Hélas! La mort, la mort est dans mon coeur.*

Complaint of Love

*Dear soul, without you I die,
Why silence my sorrow?
My lips want to smile
My eyes speak my misfortune.
Alas! Far from you I die.*

*May my cruel pain,
Disarm the hardness
Of your haughty soul.*

*Tonight in a dream,
I believed I saw you;
Ah, suddenly the night is over,
And hope flies away.*

*I want to smile
Alas! death, death is in my heart.*

The most interesting aspect of the accompaniment is that Naoumoff uses the same motivic idea for the prelude and postlude. The ascending sixteenth note figure in the right hand is repeated throughout the piece and the vocal part compliments it, as the mostly descending figures to illustrate sorrow. This song is mostly motivically driven, and this makes the piece complete.

O Mort! was written by Armand Marquiset (1900 – 1981), a philanthropist, who wrote his own prayer to death. This metaphysical reflection poses the question about fear of the death and the soothing response of God’s love. Both the text and the accompaniment are tremendously dramatic. The tempo marking creates a sense of drama and narration from the very beginning: “Revolt and soothes” (*Révolté puis apaisé*). The first four measures are marked *fortissimo* with accents to present a convincing and intense opening.

Example 15: Naoumoff, *O Mort!*, mm. 1 – 4

♩ ~ 66 **Révolté puis apaisé**

Voice

Piano

ff

f

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

8b

8b

8b

8b

8b

8b

8b

8b

*Ped.

*Ped.

*Ped.

*Ped.

*Ped.

*Ped.

*Ped.

*Ped.

O Mort!

*Pour-quoi O mort, Les homes ont ils peur de toi
Puis-que tu es la paix, tu es l'és pérance*

*Pour-quoi craindre ton inconnu
Alors qu'il est Dieu Source de toute vie de tout amour*

*Pour-quoi avoir peur, de tout perdre a lors que nous allons tout gagner
Pour-quoi avoir peur de ce silence de ce silence
Alors que nous entendrons tant de voix que nous verrons tant de visages*

*Pour-quoi avoir peur dece finissement
Alors que tu es le jaillissement vers l'éternité*

O Death!

*Why, O death does mankind fear you,
When you are peace, you are hope.*

*Why fear the unknown
When it is God, the source of life of love.*

*Why fear complete loss
When we will gain all.
When we will hear all voices, see all faces.*

*Why fear the ending
When you, Death, embody the outbreak of eternity.*

From the dramatic opening of both the piano and voice parts, there is a textural and rhythmic change in mm. 27 – 31; the rhythm of the right hand changes to triplets from the previous half note pattern suggesting a more soothing ambience.

Naoumoff's use of basso ostinato is clearly evident in this particular song. From m. 43 until the end, the low C in the bass is heard repeatedly, adding more intensity to gradually build to the climax in mm. 59 – 62. The song ends with a piano postlude depicting death and dissipation.

IV. Improvisations

The most recent composition of Naoumoff are derived from his active journal of daily improvisations on YouTube. Due to this regular video documentation, his compositions have become more melodic, lyrical and romantic some ways. Naoumoff makes a clear distinction between composing and improvising, and expresses his personal view as to how they are different and how they affected him. *Seven Sisters Ballade* (2012) and *Perfume of the Soul* (2013) are great examples of the influence of improvisation.

Naoumoff did not improvise freely from an early age. In fact, when he was studying with Nadia Boulanger, she insisted that he improvise on the organ based on a hymn melody at a church. Improvising on the piano was not something pianists were

interested in at the time in Paris, even though Madame Boulanger was exceptionally brilliant at it. Naoumoff explains,

I avoided improvising, because I considered it as a minor art. I did not allow myself to improvise until the 21st century. I thought it was more of a necessary skill for jazz pianists. When I write, I notate my thought and I clean up until I get the final version. You have an opportunity to reorganize and make something perfect. What I like about improvising is that I can just express my mood by itself and it's really like a diary. I forbid myself for doing it for a long time. I would never improvise in public, because I think it is a very personal and intimate matter.¹⁵

Many studies support this emotional state that Naoumoff experiences improvisation. The publisher of the *International Journal of Free Improvisation*, LaDonna Smith states, “The act of engaging in free-improvisation will become a liberator, and emancipator, for many people to touch into their emotional lives in a non-verbal and non-judgmental way. We must introduce this healthy way of life.”¹⁶ There are nearly 3000 improvisations by Naoumoff on YouTube and each of them is tremendously different from one another. As he mentioned, his improvisations truly reflect the mood of each day.

Due to his daily improvisation, his compositional style has become more free and spontaneous. According to Naoumoff, the romantic influence may perhaps be from composers such as Frédéric Chopin, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Gabriel Fauré¹⁷ Naoumoff did not necessarily intend to necessarily duplicate their compositional styles, but many influences of the Romantic period had an influence on him. *Seven Sisters Ballade* is a great example of this period, displaying extended lyricism and spontaneous motivic development.

¹⁵ Naoumoff, Phone Interview.

¹⁶ Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 21

¹⁷ Naoumoff, Phone Interview.

Seven Sisters Ballade was written in 2012 and it is about 15 minutes in length. The beginning is marked as very legato singing (*Legato et très chanté*) and “bathing in pedal” (*Baigné de pédales*). The beautiful melodic contour in the right hand suggests rich lyricism with detailed dynamic markings of crescendos and decrescendos.

Example 16: Naoumoff, *Seven Sisters Ballade*, mm. 1 – 4

The musical score for Example 16 shows the first four measures of the piece. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf* and the instruction *Legato et très chanté*. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line with a dynamic marking of *mp* and the instruction *Baigné de pédales*. The music is in 4/4 time and features a mix of eighth and quarter notes with various articulations and phrasing slurs.

The motivic idea in mm. 1 - 3 is mostly in stepwise motion, and this figure develops into a more elaborate segment of the piece. The left hand also includes a clear ascending and descending scalar patterns in mm. 21 – 24.

Example 17: Naoumoff, *Seven Sisters Ballade*, mm. 21– 24

The musical score for Example 17 shows measures 21 through 24. The right hand (treble clef) has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The left hand (bass clef) has a dynamic marking of *mpp* and features ascending and descending scalar patterns. The score includes a first ending bracket labeled *1^{sta}* and a *Red.* marking. There is also an asterisk (*) under the first measure of the left hand.

The climax starts in m. 78, where there is extreme use of registers in both hands, and it is marked as *fortissimo* and very intense (*très intense*). While the left hand is hinting a chromatic descent, the right hand has a stepwise ascent, adding more tension between the hands. The climactic section lasts only three measures and the tension gradually releases in the following six measures.

Example 18: Naoumoff, *Seven Sisters Ballade*, mm. 78– 85

The musical score for Example 18 shows measures 78 through 85. The right hand (treble clef) begins in measure 78 with a stepwise ascent, marked *ff* and *très intense*. The left hand (bass clef) features a chromatic descent, marked *f* and *(8va)*. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *mp*, and performance instructions like *suspensu* and *8va*. The piece concludes in measure 85 with a *mp* marking.

Besides the descriptive musical terms, Naoumoff introduces interesting dynamic markings: *mppp*, *mpp*, and *mff*. These are used to express more details in voicing. It is apparent that Naoumoff intends to include many layers of voicing, especially in m. 132-133. Without clear dynamic markings, it is difficult to fathom the hierarchy, but his detailed markings are enormously helpful from the performer’s perspective.

Example 19: Naoumoff, *Seven Sisters Ballade*, mm. 130 – 135

Instead of following a strict form, *Seven Sisters Ballade* is rather freely composed, with mostly stepwise figures. From his improvising routine, his compositional style has become much freer and spontaneous. *Perfume of the Soul* is another masterpiece that reflects improvisatory elements.

Perfume of the Soul: Nocturne for Piano was written in Bloomington, Indiana on November 13th, 2013 and the piece is dedicated to Gabriel Fauré. As he recorded all of the composer's nocturnes, Naumoff is truly an expert on Fauré's style. It is not surprising that Naumoff was especially keen on Fauré's compositions, since Madame Boulanger studied with Fauré. Naumoff did not intend to write in Fauré's style before he started to compose, but he dedicated the piece to the composer after he completed it. There are noticeable stylistic similarities to Fauré's nocturnes, such as the use of particular harmonies and long melodic phrasing.

Like *Seven Sisters Ballade*, *Perfume of the Soul* also includes detailed musical terms and dynamic markings. The tempo marking indicates profoundly narrated (*profondement narré*) and the dynamic of the right hand suggests *mf*, while the left hand specifies *mp* to clarify that the right has the melody from m. 1. Compared to *Seven Sisters Ballade*, this beginning has a much longer phrasing and more a passionate atmosphere. The phrase is eight measures long, establishing the tonal center of E minor.

Example 20: Naoumoff, *Perfume of the Soul*, mm. 1 – 9

The musical score for Example 20 is for Piano, in 4/4 time, marked "Profondement narré" with a tempo of quarter note approximately 60. The right hand is marked "legato" and "mf", and the left hand is marked "mp". The score shows the first nine measures of the piece. In measure 2, there is a "trémolo" marking in the left hand. In measure 3, there is a "simile" marking in the right hand. The piece is in E minor.

This piece is incredibly narrative, as Naoumoff mentions in the tempo marking. In the beginning the melody can be heard as a beautiful young lady singing passionately to express her love. When she is done singing, there is a tremolo with a musical term indicating, “chilly” (*frissonné*) as if there is something stopping them from being together. Then, a young man speaks to her using a similar melodic line in m. 18, and there is a clear dialogue from this point on. This melody functions roughly as the first theme. Throughout the piece, there are countless emotional descriptions that indicate the

narration of the story such as “terrified” (*effaré*), “carefree” (*insouciant*), “magical” (*incantatoire*), “sunny and soothing” (*solaire et apaisé*), “dream” (*onirique*), “resurrecting” (*ressuscitant*), “swaying” (*chaloupé*), and more.

The second theme-like idea starts in m. 53, which is more soft-spoken, sensitive, and intimate compared to the first theme.

Example 21: Naoumoff, *Perfume of the Soul*, m. 52 – 61

After a long developmental section using this second theme motive, the first and the second themes finally unite in m. 143, which is marked as “swaying” (*chaloupé*). The second theme in the left hand is in triplets, while the first theme remains the same as in the beginning.

Example 22: Naoumoff, *Perfume of the Soul*, mm. 143 – 148

143 (♩ = ½) *Chaloupé*

mf

146

f

Perfume of the Soul is highly emotional, poetic, and touching in many ways. In order for a performer to accomplish this exceedingly artistic level of piano playing, both beautiful legato and sensitive touch are necessary. Naoumoff uses his remarkable creativity and various elements of romantic period style, and combines them to create a true masterpiece.

Conclusion

This document presents several analyses from the four different periods of Emile Naoumoff. From the early folk song elements to improvisations, he explores a wide range of compositional styles and combines old and new. Not only does he look back to the earlier periods and compose in the style of Fauré, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff, but he also explores many innovative ideas, such as combining improvisational style and lyrical elements intertwined with his use of harmony. His early training with Nadia Boulanger

has both shaped and influenced his compositional style enormously, but his ambitious desire to continue to discover more innovative and original compositional approaches will never cease.

Although his compositions demand a high level of technical and musical depth from a performer, a pianist who takes the time to learn his compositions will have the privilege of experiencing music of the highest quality. Through his composition and the distinct styles as I have discussed including the Slavic Folk Elements, the neoclassicism, the French art songs, and the improvisations, I believe his compositions are important contribution to the modern piano repertoire.

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