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## Romantic Improvisation

### The Performance of Scriabin's Piano Music: Evidence from the Piano Rolls\*

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Anatole Leikin

Alexander Scriabin was an extraordinary pianist, who sought to make his own piano music known through his own concertizing. Those who attended his recitals, however, came to experience something different from what was found in his published scores. He significantly changed the tempi, dynamics, rhythms, and even the original notes themselves. These modifications appeared to have been carried out consistently from one performance to another, and (in light of contemporary reports) were regarded as enhancements of the original score.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Versions of this essay were previewed at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Oakland (1990) and at the International Scriabin Conference in Moscow (1992).

<sup>1</sup> See Arnold Alshvang, "Zhizn' I tvorchestvo A. N. Scriabina," (The Life and Creative Work of A. N. Scriabin) in *A. N. Scriabin*, ed. S. Pavchinsky (Moscow: Sovetsky kompositor, 1973), 92.

**Leonid Pasternak, "A. N. Scriabin," 1911**



Regrettably, no one described what precisely the changes were that Scriabin introduced during his concerts. However, Scriabin's alterations, his "improvisatory" additions to the written scores have not been entirely lost. He left behind some clues which enable us to reconstruct—to a certain extent—the stunning effects that his music created during the composer's performances.<sup>2</sup> In 1908 and 1910, Scriabin made twenty-three recordings of his own compositions on the Hupfeld and Welte-Mignon reproducing pianos.<sup>3</sup> Of these, nine have recently been acoustically recorded and released.<sup>4</sup> Modern critical reaction to these releases has been less than enthusiastic. Some commentators have even characterized Scriabin's performance as "erratic, uninspired, and full of distorting mannerisms."<sup>5</sup> Such a lukewarm reception is clearly at odds with the ecstatic responses that Scriabin's performances inspired at the turn of the century. In order to explain this discrepancy, one has to take a closer look at the capabilities of player pianos on which Scriabin recorded.

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<sup>2</sup> Eugène George, for example, called him phenomenal, "all nerve and a holy flame," *La libre critique*, 26 Jan. 1896, No. 4; and Wilhelm Gericke, conductor of the Vienna opera, rushed backstage after one of Scriabin's concerts and fell on his knees crying, "It's genius, it's genius . . ." Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1969), II: 195.

<sup>3</sup> First, he recorded fourteen compositions for the Hupfeld Phonola firm in 1908: Album Leaf (Op. 45, No. 1); Etude (Op. 8, No. 8); Mazurkas (Op. 25, Nos. 1 and 3 and Op. 40, No. 2); Two Poems (Op. 32); Preludes (Op. 11, Nos. 10, 13, and 14, and Op. 17, Nos. 3 and 4); Sonatas (No. 2, Op. 19, and No. 3, Op. 23). Two years later he recorded nine works for the Welte-Mignon company (four of which coincided with the Hupfeld list): Preludes (Op. 11, Nos. 1, 2, 13, and 14, and Op. 22, No. 1); Mazurka (Op. 40, No. 2); *Désir* (Op. 57, No. 1); *Poema* (Op. 32, No. 1); and Etude (Op. 8, No. 12). John W. Clark ("Divine Mysteries: On Some Scriabin Recordings," *19th-Century Music* 6, 1983, 265) reports that Scriabin made these Welte-Mignon recordings in January of 1908. This, however, is not so; in 1908, Scriabin traveled to Leipzig in order to record for Hupfeld. The Welte-Mignon music rolls were recorded by Scriabin in early 1910 upon his return to Moscow (the dates of the recordings were inscribed on the rolls).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, *Recorded Treasures Album* 681 (P. O. Box 1278, North Hollywood, CA 91604, n.d.); *Scriabin Plays* (Melodiya D-0008867-8, n.d.); *Composers Playing Their Own Works* (Telefunken HT 38, n.d.); *A. N. Scriabin: 120th Anniversary* (Russian Disk R 1001071, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 198; John W. Clark, "Divine Mysteries," 265.



## The Welte-Mignon Player Piano

Of all the reproducing-piano systems available at the time the Welte-Mignon was the most sophisticated. In order to record a music roll, the pianist played on an ordinary grand piano that had electric wires attached to the keys. The wires led to a row of either pencils or ink markers above a paper roll which was pulled at a constant speed. As long as the key was down, a marker drew a line on the paper. Afterward, the master roll was perforated wherever the melographic traces were visible.

Other systems had perforating machines hooked up to the recording piano; as the keys were pressed, the moving paper roll was punched simultaneously. The length of each perforation was determined by the time the key was held down, while the spaces between perforations corresponded to musical rhythm. The perforations of the master roll were precisely duplicated, and its copies were sold along with reproducing pianos. In these instruments, the perforated paper was pulled from one spool onto another, sliding across a tracker bar situated between the two spools. Air was admitted to the partial vacuum inside the instrument through the perforations. A system of bellows was thus set into motion and, in turn, actuated the piano hammers.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to pitches, rhythm, and tempi, the Welte-Mignon recorded dynamic nuances and pedaling. These two features were transmuted into two separate rows of perforations on both margins of the music roll. During the playback, some of these perforations regulated the power with which the hammers were striking the strings, while others activated the pedals. The reproducing Welte-Mignon mechanism existed in two versions—one was built into a piano, while the other was constructed as a separate cabinet, sitting in front of a piano (the Welte *Vorsetzer*). When the Russian audio engineer and reproducing-piano expert Vasily Lobanov recorded Scriabin's rolls for the Melodiya in the 1960s, he used a *Vorsetzer*. It was rolled up to a regular Steinway piano in such a way that the machine's wooden fingers, with soft felt cushions at the ends, were positioned above the corresponding keys; two levers below operated

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<sup>6</sup> For more details, see Arthur W. J. G. Ord-Hume, *Pianola: The History of the Self-Playing Piano* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

the right and left pedals. After painstaking adjustments of the pneumatic relays, bellows, valves, etc., Scriabin's playing was reproduced and the recording was made.

In 1910, the effect of the recreated piano performance was quite overwhelming. The Welte-Mignon replayed with great accuracy the most rapid notes, the most complex rhythms, and the most subtle tempo changes. Expressive features and pedaling were also clearly discernible (with other automatic pianos of that period, including the Hupfeld phonola, the "performer" controlled the flow of air, changing the volume and moving the dampers to and from the strings according to the marks on the roll and his or her personal inclinations).

### Shortcomings of the Welte-Mignon Player Piano

The dynamic range of the Welte-Mignon was considerably narrower than that of a live performer. Lacking the finger-tip sensitivity in *pianissimo* and the full upswing of the pianist's hands in *fortissimo*, the player piano covered only the middle range of the potential dynamic span of a concert grand. While the player piano could reproduce the artist's dynamics, it could only do so in a general sense; it missed the minute, barely perceptible nuances that are crucial for expressive delivery, especially in the shaping of phrases.<sup>7</sup> For Scriabin, the lack of thunderous *fortissimo* on the reproducing piano was perhaps not as damaging as for other pianists. A frail, diminutive man, standing just one inch over five feet, with small hands that could play intervals no wider than an octave, Scriabin (according to contemporary accounts) never had a massive sound. His *pianissimo*, on the other hand, was exceptionally refined. One critic, in fact, marveled at Scriabin's ability to create ethereal sounds that nevertheless continued to reverberate and did not vanish quickly in the

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<sup>7</sup> A limited spectrum of dynamic shadings apparently was responsible for Artur Schnabel's eventual disillusionment with the player-piano. When the Aeolian firm invited Schnabel to record for the company, proudly informing him that their new machines offered sixteen shades of nuance from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, Schnabel replied that in his playing he used seventeen shades, and declined the offer (Ord-Hume, *Pianola*, 263).

**Vasily Lobanov preparing the Welte-Mignon  
for a recording at Melodiya (Moscow, 1971)**





hall.<sup>8</sup> Listening to the composer's recordings quite clearly demonstrates the lack of such finesse in *pianissimo* on the player-piano.

The dynamic differentiation between various layers of musical texture was particularly problematic. The entire diapason of the Welte-Mignon was divided into two halves. Each half (above or below the f# in the first octave) had an independently operating mechanism for dynamics. As long as the treble and the bass did not cross the f# borderline in the middle, they could be performed with autonomous dynamics. But voicing two parts differently was impossible if they both moved within the same half of the diapason. The thicker the texture, the more dynamically distorted the recording became compared with the original performance. This, as we shall see, also impaired Scriabin's pianistic art, which depended greatly on the differentiation of multiple textural strands.

Another shortcoming may be seen in the pedaling mechanism. Although the Welte-Mignon indicated precisely just when the damper and soft pedals were pressed or released, it could not specify the exact positions of the pedal (half, quarter, etc.). The simplistic pedaling of the Welte-Mignon could hardly have captured Scriabin's well-known wizardry of pedaling, for he used not only half and quarter pedals, but also what he called a "pinpoint" pedal, a "vibrating" pedal, and "pedal mist."<sup>9</sup> The last two terms probably involved a technique that made the dampers flutter just above the strings without pressing them all the way down. As a result, the strongest vibrations were clipped, while more delicate resonances remained intact. His pedaling "enveloped the notes with layers of uncanny resonances that no other pianist could reproduce later."<sup>10</sup> Vasily Safonov, a pianist, conductor, and Director of the Moscow Conservatory, sometimes invited Scriabin to play for his class. During one of these ses-

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<sup>8</sup> *Russkie vedomosti*, 28 Jan. 1915, No. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Nemenova-Lunz, "Iz vospominaniy uchenitsy" (From Reminiscences of a Student), typescript; The State Memorial Museum of A. N. Scriabin, No. 8, pp. 5, 8, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominanya o Scriabine* (Remembering Scriabin) (Moscow: Muzsektor Gosizdata, 1925), 44-45.



sions, Safonov yelled at his students: "What are you looking at his hands for? Look at his feet!"<sup>11</sup>

But perhaps the most critical loss of all involved the music-roll's inability to do justice to Scriabin's wide-ranging sense of touch. Scriabin's pianistic fame was largely based on his inimitable spectrum of tone colors. Fragile, mysterious, yet electrifyingly intense, they often did not even resemble a piano sound. Leonid Sabaneev remarked that Scriabin's "intimate, tender, and mesmerizing tone defied descriptions . . . as if he touched the keys with kisses."<sup>12</sup> It is clear that the "wooden fingers" of the Welte-Mignon were incapable of capturing such subtleties as "kissing" the keys.

### **Scriabin's Performance (as Revealed by the Piano Rolls)**

The limitations of Welte-Mignon are now too often perceived as faults of the pianist rather than technological flaws. This is understandable. In contrast to the hiss and muddiness of old phonographic recordings, the quality of sound on piano-roll LPs and CDs is impeccable. The beautiful tone of a concert grand is fully preserved in a high-tech recording that creates an illusion of a normal performance, comparable to other modern recordings. One has to bear in mind, though, that the dynamics and pedalization of Scriabin's performance in a Welte-Mignon reproduction are drastically reduced to the most rudimentary *crescendi*, *diminuendi*, and foot-down/foot-up pedaling; and that the myriad effects of Scriabin's pianistic touch, the cornucopia of tone colors, are replaced with mere key pushing.

It is indeed difficult to listen to the piano-roll recordings selectively, separating out the elements of performance that faithfully reflect Scriabin's playing from those that can only approximate what he did. There is, however, a way to single out the veritable elements of his performances and present them without distortion. These elements—pitches, rhythms, tempi, and the rudimentary dynamic and pedal indications—can be deciphered directly from the piano rolls and laid out on a page. Each pitch, as well as the dynamics and pedaling, have fixed positions alongside a piano roll. Measurements across the roll show whether the notes of a chord are taken simultaneously

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<sup>11</sup>Heinrich Neuhaus, *Iskusstvo fortepiannoy igry*. English translation: *The Art of Piano Playing* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 166.

<sup>12</sup>*Vospominanya o Scriabine*, 44-45.

or in a staggered manner. Similarly, the transverse relationships between the endings of preceding perforations and the beginnings of subsequent perforations show whether the consecutive notes are played legato or non-legato. The tempo fluctuations can be determined by measuring the distances between the commencements of the perforations corresponding to musical beats. On the Welte-Mignon, the speed of the moving piano roll during a playback is 60mm per second. If, for example, the distance on the roll between two adjacent beats is 60mm, the tempo of performance at this particular point is 60 M.M. If the distance between two neighboring beats is 50mm, the tempo is 72 M.M.; the distance of 75mm between the beats indicates the performing tempo of 48 M.M., etc.

Pavel Lobanov, the engineer who recorded Scriabin from the Welte-Mignon rolls for Melodiya, published a transcription of Scriabin's recording of *Poema*, Op. 32, no. 1 in the form of a music score.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, a music score lacks the precision of mathematical graphs and formulae, but, on the other hand, has the advantage of being easily accessible to musicians. To facilitate the comparison between Scriabin's recording and the standard printed edition, each bar of Lobanov's transcription is situated above the corresponding bar of the standard edition. At the top of the transcription we find "the tempo part," or a graph of tempo changes (see Ex. 1). I.e.

tempo graph  
Scriabin's recorded performance  
Scriabin's published score

Scriabin's use of the pedals is also indicated in the transcription, and despite the primitive pedal operation of the player-piano, we can extract two useful pieces of information concerning his pedaling. First, a single pedal habitually covers several adjacent notes (for instance, mm. 13-14 were played by the composer on one pedal). Evidently, the vibrating pedal ought to be applied throughout *Poema*

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<sup>13</sup> Alexander Scriabin, *Poema op. 32, no. 1* (Moscow: Gosmuzizdat, 1960). *Poema* was written in 1903 and initiated a new genre in Scriabin's music: the instrumental poem. Even though he later wrote eighteen more piano poems and three orchestral works also entitled "Poem," Scriabin remained affectionately attached to the F#-major *Poema*. He included it in most of his concert programs and recorded it for both the Hupfeld and the Welte firms (see fn. 3).

so that “pedal mist” does not turn into “pedal glut.” Second, the soft pedal is used quite generously; overall, he played only 12 out of 48 bars *tre corde*.

### Example 1. Alexander Scriabin, *Poema* (m. 1-6)

A measure-by-measure comparison of Scriabin's original score with his own performance. (A tempo graph is added above.)

*tempo graph*

*Scriabin's recorded performance*

*pp* *accel.* *mp*

*una corda* *ta* \* *ta* \* *ta* *tre corde* \* *ta* *una corda* *tre corde*

*Scriabin's published score*

Авторский текст по изданию Музыка 1948 г.

*Andante cantabile*  
M.M. J. = 50

*ben marcato* *lo due voci, ma dolce*  
*p*

*legato* *rubato*



100

rit. mp accel.

3.

*una corda* *rit.* *rit.* *rit.* *rit.*

3

*pp*

100

rit. . . . .

5

*p* *pp* *tra corde*

5

*pp*



The differences between the printed and the performed versions of the *Poema* are startling. While playing, Scriabin added extra notes in mm. 7, 21, 22, 38, 45, 46, and 48, and omitted some notes in mm. 2, 13, and 37. He also replaced or interchanged notes in mm. 10, 26, 31, 32, 34, and 38.<sup>14</sup>

**Example 2. *Poema* (m. 37-38, and m. 47-48).**

The image shows a musical score for two systems of piano and right-hand parts. The first system covers measures 37-38, and the second system covers measures 47-48. The piano part is in the lower register, and the right-hand part is in the upper register. The score includes various performance markings: 'f' (forte), 'dim.' (diminuendo), 'pp' (pianissimo), 'rubato', and 'una corda'. There are also dynamic markings like 'accel.' (accelerando) and '5' (fingerings). The score is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. The piano part has a '5' marking above the right hand in measure 38, and the right-hand part has a '5' marking above the left hand in measure 38. The piano part has a 'rubato' marking in measure 47, and the right-hand part has a 'f' marking in measure 47. The piano part has a 'una corda' marking in measure 48, and the right-hand part has a 'pp' marking in measure 48. The score is labeled 'Ex. 2' in the top left corner.

<sup>14</sup> Since 1992 I have been working with Pavel Lobanov on transcriptions of Scriabin's other recordings. The composer's renditions of faster and more agitated works (Etude, Op. 8, No. 12; Preludes, Op. 11, Nos. 1 and 14) contain even more radical departures from the printed text than his recording of *Poema*.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The upper system features a graphic representation of a piano keyboard at the top, with horizontal bars indicating the placement of notes on the keys. Below this is a standard musical score with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a measure number '47' and contains a melodic line with a *pp* dynamic marking. The bass staff contains a bass line with a *\* 2a* marking. The lower system is another standard musical score, also starting at measure 47, with a *ppp* dynamic marking in the treble staff. The key signature for both systems is three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

Another difference between the transcription and the printed edition is the replacement of sustained notes with rests (see the right-hand part in mm. 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). Scriabin did not like lingering on the keys; he maintained the sound with the pedal, while his hands hovered above the keyboard. Leonard Pasternak, a prominent Russian painter (and father of poet and novelist Boris Pasternak), recalled that Scriabin's fingers seemed to extract sound "not by falling on the keys, not by hitting them (which in reality they did) but in the opposite way, by pulling them away from the keys and lightly soaring

above them.”<sup>15</sup> This was not a mannerism, nor was it merely a matter of a special piano technique. Scriabin was obsessed with the idea of flight (he actually conducted experiments in levitation). According to Nemenova-Lunz, “flight” was one of the terms Scriabin used most frequently in his piano teaching.<sup>16</sup>

These digressions from the score may come as a surprise to some, but Scriabin’s “irreverent” attitude toward the score stemmed from a long Romantic tradition. Virtuosi like Liszt and Tausig felt it was their indisputable prerogative to enhance the music they played so that their expressiveness and mastery of the instrument could shine through more brightly. And one can hear echoes of this approach in old recordings by Raoul Koczalski, Moriz Rosenthal, Ignacy Paderewsky, and Vladimir de Pachmann.

### **Symmetry or Asymmetry? Concerning Scriabin’s Rubato**

In recent years Scriabin’s music has occasionally been criticized for a certain dryness of musical expression caused by many literal or sequential repeats of two- and four-measure symmetries, which “in the course of five minutes or more . . . has appalling results.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Scriabin’s scores have been said to be awash with “long cycles of four-measure phrases”<sup>18</sup> developed through “sheer repetition and sequence.”<sup>19</sup> Intriguingly, no one during Scriabin’s life or some time after seems to have noticed this serious drawback to his inspiration. If anything, some contemporary commentators rebuked Scriabin’s music for the very opposite flaw: a lack of balance and proportion (*stroynost*). They complained that his music was chaotic

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<sup>15</sup> Leonid Pasternak, “*Leto 1903*” (Summer of 1903). *Novy Mir* 1 (1972), 209-10.

<sup>16</sup> Bowers, *Scriabin*, I, 290.

<sup>17</sup> William W. Austin, *Music in the 20th Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966), 72. See also Richard Anthony Leonard, *A History of Russian Music* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), 220.

<sup>18</sup> David Burge, *Twentieth Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 56.

<sup>19</sup> Austin, *20th Century*, 71.



and therefore too difficult to follow.<sup>20</sup> Are the modern and the early critics discussing the same music?

A clarification of this discrepancy may be found in the tempo graph, which presents a fascinating picture of Scriabin's rubato shifts (see Exs. 1 and 2). The composer's published metronome indication is dotted quarter = 50; this performing tempo, however, ranges from 19 (m. 46) to 110 (m. 19). (Despite the sharp tempo fluctuations, the average tempo equals 51, which is practically identical to the printed metronome marking.) Tempo shifts occur with mercurial quickness. Within a single bar the tempo can pick up from 35 to 85 (m. 7) or drop from 100 to 30 (m. 42). Finally, one cannot help but notice the incessant changeability of the tempo. Scriabin simply does not sustain a steady pulse for more than two beats (two dotted quarter notes); the tempo is in a perpetual flux. At the same time, there is not one *accelerando* or *ritardando* in the printed score.

As a result, therefore, even though Scriabin's phrases may look symmetrical on paper, their actual duration in performance was sharply dissimilar. He stretched and compressed his seemingly "square" phrases to such an extent that some hostile reviewers in his time characterized his playing as arrhythmic.<sup>21</sup> Scriabin did occasionally write irregular meters and phrase structures.<sup>22</sup> But examples of this comprehend a relatively small portion of his *œuvre*. Unlike Stravinsky, who expanded or shortened musical phrases by means of precise notation in his quest for greater rhythmic flexibility, Scriabin achieved motivic asymmetry and rhythmic elasticity through his *rubato*.

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<sup>20</sup> *Rus'*, 13 February 1894; and Sergei Ivanovich Taneev, *Dnevnik* (Diaries) (Moscow: Muzyka, 1981-82), I, 74.

<sup>21</sup> *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 14 Feb. 1894; and Cesar Cui, "Nachinayushchy kompozitor." (A Young Composer), *Nedelya*, 12 March 1895.

<sup>22</sup> Like his countrymen Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, and others, Scriabin emulated the asymmetrical rhythms of Russian folk songs in several of his compositions. Preludes nos. 1, 14, and 24 (Op. 11) are based on 5/8 motivic structures. In Prelude no. 21 (Op. 11) the meter changes every measure except for two short stretches of 5/4 bars. Complex polyrhythmic combinations replenish the first movement of his Fourth Piano Sonata and Piano Poem *Vers la flamme*.



The quickening or retardation of pulse was not the only means by which Scriabin introduced *rubato*. Occasionally he changed actual rhythmic values during a performance (compare, for instance, the right-hand part in mm. 2-3 in the transcription and the printed edition, Ex. 1). He also staggered notes that were ostensibly supposed to sound simultaneously (see the tied grace notes in Exs. 1 and 2). These two manifestations of rhythmic freedom further intensified the spontaneous, improvisational quality of Scriabin's playing.

There was also another reason for Scriabin to desynchronize textural parts in performance. Those who heard the composer play noticed that even in the most intricate musical fabric he separated the layers of texture so that all of the voices were clearly enunciated. Certainly, various shades of dynamics and tone coloring helped create this effect; but even on the Welte-Mignon rolls, with their limited capabilities to recreate the pianist's touch and finest nuances, the clarity of every textural tier is remarkable. Scriabin accomplished that lucidity primarily by desynchronizing the different parts of the musical texture. It is known that dissimilar rhythm patterns help differentiate between polyphonic voices. Scriabin took this idea one step further: he slightly displaced the parts in time so that each voice stood out more prominently than when played simultaneously—a simple yet strikingly effective device.

The linear dimensions are paramount in Scriabin's music. From his early days of musical studies with the renowned polyphonist Sergei Taneev, Scriabin acquired formidable contrapuntal skills (although this counterpoint strayed away from the forms of conventional polyphony). During Scriabin's life, his polyphonic prowess was widely recognized. Anatoly Liadov, a grumbling purist, who found contrapuntal faults in Schubert, Beethoven, and, occasionally, Bach, acknowledged only two masters to be above reproach: Mozart and Chopin. Scriabin, in Liadov's opinion, was the only contemporary composer who could be held up to the same high standards, although Liadov did not relish the younger composer's later works.<sup>23</sup>

Scriabin's polyphony disperses the thematic material among the parts in such a way that it is often difficult to determine the location of the main and the secondary levels. In his works, every textural

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<sup>23</sup> Sergei Prokofiev, *Prokofiev by Prokofiev: a Composer's Memoir* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 238.

component becomes thematic to such an extent that the boundaries between the melody and the accompaniment virtually dissolve. Scriabin recognized his own amalgamation of melody with harmony, which he called *melodiye-garmoniya* (loosely translated as “meloharmony”). The composer himself went so far as to proclaim that there was no difference between melody and harmony in his music, for “melody is unfurled harmony, and harmony is furled melody.”<sup>24</sup> Scriabin's special form of polyphony depended heavily on his own performance; otherwise, it would simply have gone unnoticed.

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Scriabin's performances, as revealed by his piano-roll recordings, provide us with precious insights into vital aspects of his music that are not manifest simply through editions of his music. Even though some features of his performing style remain somewhat elusive, two major ingredients of his pianism (each reflecting a different kind of rubato)—the continuous shifting of tempi and the desynchronization of individual textural strands—were captured in minute detail in his recording of the *Poema*. Armed with the knowledge extracted through a comparison of the printed and performed versions, a pianist today can create a truly Scriabinesque interpretation. At the same time, since the guiding principle of Scriabin's performance is freedom rather than constraint, the personal style of the performer need not be impeded.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A. Nikolaeva, “Fortepianny stil rannich proizvedeniy Skryabina” (The Piano Style of Scriabin's Early Compositions), in *A. N. Scriabin*, ed. S. Pavchinsky (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompositor, 1973), 209-16.

<sup>25</sup> I have had many opportunities to witness the audience's transformed perception of Scriabin's music when I performed the same compositions first strictly by the score, and then again by applying the principles of Scriabin's interpretation.