

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TWENTY-FOUR PRELUDES OF
ALEXANDER SCRIABIN AND SERGEI RACHMANINOFF**

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Preface

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) and Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) are two of the most celebrated pianist-composers in history of Russian classical music. They were close friends, colleagues, and on some occasions, rivals who motivated each other. Despite their similarities in upbringing, the two were different in terms of their musical esthetics. One particularly useful way of demonstrating the similarities and differences between these two figures involves analysis of each figure's Twenty-Four Preludes written in every major/minor key. The Preludes can be considered encyclopedias of each composer's compositional language: tonality, harmonic language, form, sonorities, incorporation of other genres, and pianistic tone colors are all uniquely represented. Among their great works, their Preludes have been favored and are often performed by pianists to the present day.

To both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, the prelude was more than a short appetizer preceding a major work. Preludes were a platform on which to display virtuosity, reference other genres, explore the limits of the instrument, and develop a single idea to the maximum, while being concise and economical in structure. Following in the footsteps of J.S. Bach and Chopin, both composers use their 24 preludes to form a full story made of 24 different momentums.

This essay will examine the Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 11 by Scriabin and Preludes Op.3 No.2, Op.23, and Op.32 by Rachmaninoff. Its purpose is to contrast the two composers within the single genre of preludes for piano. Although both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff wrote other preludes, this essay will only compare the preludes that were written as a cycle. Since Rachmaninoff wrote a total of 26 Preludes (one in each of the twenty-four keys except for two posthumous ones: Prelude in E-flat minor from the *Four Pieces for Piano* in 1887, and Prelude in F major in 1891), while Scriabin wrote a total of 90 (Op.11 and the non-cyclic

Preludes of Op.13, 15, 16, 17, 22, 27, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 45, 48, 67, and 74), the composers' similarities and differences are best exemplified by a comparison of their Twenty-Four Preludes.

The essay does not attempt to provide bar-by-bar harmonic analysis of each Prelude. Instead, it considers particularly useful examples—specifically, those that display similarities and differences within distinct harmonic languages—in detail. It compares the melodic contours and phrase structures favored by each composer, in addition to the overall form of their Preludes. The essay also examines the ways in which both composers employed other genres in their Preludes.

The Twenty-Four Preludes are a challenge for pianists, due to their technical difficulty and their use of complicated pedaling. The hand coordination for both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin's Preludes requires switching of hands and unusual fingering adjustments for passages with rapid figurations and accompanying figures with extremely large intervals. Sophisticated pedaling is compulsory for the Preludes. Both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin were masters of pedaling, and thus, the Preludes provide a challenge for pianists striving to achieve the correct color and effect.

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Chapter I. Background

Biographic comparison of Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff

Scriabin & Rachmaninoff – Encounters and early education

Scriabin and Rachmaninoff shared many life experiences in their youth. Scriabin was born in 1872, just one year earlier than Rachmaninoff. Both were exposed to the piano by their family members: Scriabin's mother was a concert pianist who studied with Theodor Leschetizky and won the gold medal at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Rachmaninoff took his first lesson from his mother at the age of four, and occasionally took lessons from his grandfather, who was a former student of John Field.

Scriabin's mother passed away from tuberculosis when he was barely six months old, and he was sent to live with his aunt and grandmother. The two women encouraged him to pursue music. He started improvising on the piano at the age of five, and started composing simple pieces at the age of eight. By 1883, he had started his formal lessons and was studying the music of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Weber. Scriabin entered the Cadet school in spite of oppositions from both his aunt and father. However, during the Cadet years, he met Taneyev and Nikolai Zverev, both of whom paved the way for young Scriabin to pursue music. Zverev was known to enforce strict discipline with his chosen prodigies, a group that included Sergei Rachmaninoff and a number of others.

Rachmaninoff first entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory as an aspiring pianist in 1883. Although he showed promise, he lost interest in music and grew lazy for some years, resulting in a threat from the conservatory to revoke his scholarship. His cousin, Alexander Siloti, suggested Zverev as a teacher, and under Zverev's guidance, Rachmaninoff entered

the Moscow Conservatory in 1886. Scriabin followed in 1888, studying piano with Safonov and counterpoint with Taneyev.

As they studied advanced theory and composition at the conservatory, both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin's passion for composition grew, against Zverev's wishes. Zverev was unhappy to see how both students' talents for the piano were sacrificed to composition, despite the fact that both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin would continue to pursue their pianistic careers throughout their lives. Zverev's opposition towards composition eventually broke the teacher-student relationship in both cases, but especially for Rachmaninoff. By 1888, Rachmaninoff completed his piano study with Zverev; he double-majored in piano and advanced theory with Siloti, Taneyev, and Arensky. His compositions matured under their tutelage, and under them he completed his first Piano Concerto in F-sharp minor and the Prelude in F (not included in the set, as they were published posthumously).

Scriabin and Rachmaninoff both graduated from the conservatory in 1892 with gold medals. However, Scriabin graduated with the Little Gold Medal in piano performance, and did not complete a composition degree. This was due to a dispute with Arensky, who taught fugue; Scriabin's unwillingness to compose pieces in forms that disinterested him infuriated Arensky. Rachmaninoff, meanwhile, took the Great Gold Medal; he was only the third in the conservatory's history to do so.

Although Scriabin and Rachmaninoff shared many similar experiences in their early education period, their personalities and interests were very different. Scriabin, who was considered "little and fragile"¹ in his youth, focused on writing smaller works for solo piano in his early period. He didn't write his first symphony, Op.26, until 1900. Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, wrote his first orchestral work in 1886 and his first symphonic attempt (the

¹ Fabion Bowers, *Scriabin: A Biography of the Russian Composer, 1871-1915* Vol.1 (Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International, 1969), 118.

unfinished *Youth Symphony*) in 1891. Upon graduation from the conservatory, he completed his first opera, *Aleko*, for which he earned the highest rating along with the medal.

Emanuel E. Garcia, a psychologist-researcher, has pointed out an important disparity between the two composers' musical esthetics: "Tchaikovsky was for Rachmaninoff an idol and mentor; for Scriabin he meant a kind of music to avoid. They respected each other's talents, however different their musical sensibilities were to become."²

Life after the Conservatory

After graduation, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin's lives steered in different directions: Scriabin focused on the piano, while Rachmaninoff focused on composition. In 1894, Scriabin made his debut as a pianist in St. Petersburg, performing his own works and garnering positive reviews. His performance tour began upon his recovery from serious hand injuries due to excessive technical playing. In Vitznau, Switzerland, he underwent treatment for his right hand, which was injured in overplaying Balakirev's *Islamey* and the Liszt transcription of *Don Giovanni*.

During the same year, he met Belaiev, who owned a music-publishing house in Leipzig that issued works only by Russian composers. Belaiev became Scriabin's publisher and continued to publish his works until 1907. Belaiev also organized and sponsored Scriabin's concert tours in cities such as Paris, Amsterdam, Heidelberg, and Vitznau.

In August 1897, Scriabin married the young pianist Vera Ivanovna Isakovich and toured in Russia and abroad, culminating in a successful 1898 concert in Paris. That year he also became a teacher at the Moscow Conservatory and began to establish his reputation as a

² Emanuel E. Garcia, "The Psychology of Creativity: Distinction Between Talent and Genius," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 91, no. 3 (2004): 427-8.

composer. He had several well-known affairs, which resulted in divorce with Vera. Until his unexpected death at age 43, he only performed his own works, building a cult-like circle of followers. His last public performance was in St. Petersburg on April 2, 1915, just 12 days before his death.

Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, had significant success as a composer following his graduation from the conservatory. His first Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op.3 No.2, became so famous that he grew tired of playing the piece countless times for an encore. In 1895, however, Rachmaninoff's compositional career took a turn when his first symphony had an unsuccessful premiere. It took him three years of compositional withdrawal to recover from the unfavorable reviews. After extensive hypnosis therapy with Dr. Dahl, Rachmaninoff regained his confidence and returned from his depression with the highly praised Second Piano Concerto.

Soon after completing the Second Piano Concerto, Rachmaninoff wrote ten more preludes in different keys. It is unclear whether he planned to write preludes in all 24 keys at this point, although he had already composed eleven preludes. His Op.23 was written from 1901 to 1903. Between writing these preludes, Rachmaninoff married Natal'ya Satina, his cousin, and had his first daughter in May 1903. The years that immediately followed saw many of his great works come to life: two operas in 1904, *Francesca* and *The Miserly Knight*; Second Symphony (1906-7); First Piano Sonata (1907); and *The Isle of the Dead* (1909).

Rachmaninoff toured America in 1909 with his newly composed Third Concerto, which was a great success. Although he had several contracts lined up for him in the States, he declined the offers and returned to the Ivanovka estate. In Ivanovka, he wrote the 13 Preludes, Op.32, completing the full Twenty-Four Preludes in every major and minor key, along with *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* in 1910. During his stay in Ivanovka over the next few years, he wrote Etudes-tableaux; Op.33, 14 Songs, Op.34; and the Second Piano Sonata.

Rachmaninoff continuously performed as a pianist in order to maintain a steady income for his family. In some seasons, such as 1912-13 and 1923-24, he had to cut back from the extensive performances. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, he and his family permanently left Russia, but his rigorous performing career continued until January 1943, just two months before his death.

Garcia described both composers as pianists:

As a performing pianist Rachmaninoff tended to arrive at a reading and stick with it, focusing on achieving the “culminating point” in a piece. Scriabin, who played only his own music, apparently took liberties with his scores, coloring and even changing notes improvisatorily as the mood moved him. Where Rachmaninoff took pains to adhere to convention, Scriabin was unconventional – not out of affectation, but independence, as in his predilection for going bareheaded at a time when hats were de rigueur for any gentleman, or in refusing to dedicate his compositions, contrary to custom.³

³ Ibid., 429-430.

The genre of “Preludes”

Prelude: an independent genre

A prelude, as the name suggests, is a short piece that precedes a larger work or collection of works. Such pieces are generally implicative and evocative in nature. However, after the composition of Frederic Chopin’s monumental Twenty-four Preludes, Op.28, the prelude became an independent genre. Each individual prelude in Chopin’s cycle is capable of standing alone, without the need for a larger companion piece.

Unlike J. S. Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, which appears in the order of alternating parallel major and minor keys, Chopin’s Twenty-four Preludes, *Op.28*, follows the ascending circle of fifths in pairs of relative major-minor. After Chopin, many composers have written preludes in every major and minor key organized in various ways. Charles-Valentin Alkan and César Cui were his immediate followers, writing preludes in every major and minor key in the order of chromatic ascent. Beginning in the later half of the nineteenth century, Russian composers joined the trend. In addition to Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff, Dmitri Shostakovich and Nikolai Kapustin wrote preludes in every major and minor key. Both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin regarded the prelude as a significant and freestanding genre of music. Rachmaninoff defined the prelude in an interview with *The Delineator*. He stated,

By its very nature the Prelude is absolute music, and it cannot be confined within the framework of programme music or impressionistic music. Commentators have attributed all kinds of meanings to the Preludes of Chopin. ... Absolute music (to which this Prelude belongs) can suggest or induce a mood in the listener; but its primal function is to give intellectual pleasure by the beauty and variety of its form. This was the end sought by Bach in his wonderful series of Preludes, which are a source of unending delight to the educated musical listener. Their salient beauty will be missed if we try to discover in them the mood of the composer. If we must have a psychology of the Prelude, let it be understood that its function is not to express a mood, but to induce it.⁴

⁴ Victor Seroff, *Rachmaninoff* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 51

Materialization of the 24 Preludes of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff

Scriabin wrote 90 preludes in his 43 years of life. His first was Op.2, in 1888 at the age of 17, and his last was Op.74, his final piece. Throughout his compositional career, he was constantly writing preludes. Scriabin's output in the genre reflects the gradual evolution of his harmonic language, as well as stylistic changes borrowed from different influences. In his early period, he was heavily influenced by Chopin and generally imitative of pre-established styles. In his middle period, he was influenced by Liszt and Wagner, although it was also in this period that Scriabin started to show his own voice. His late period was more experimental, exploring new sonorities and atonality.

The Twenty-Four Preludes, Op.11, is often regarded as one of the best of Scriabin's early works. It has been said that he made a bet about the composition of two sets of twenty-four preludes with Mitron Belaiev, his patron and publisher. Although there is no indication that they had J.S. Bach's 48 Preludes in mind, it can be assumed that the first model for Scriabin's Preludes is Bach's. In the end, Scriabin did not write all 48 preludes (he wrote 47 from 1888-1896). He put 24 of the preludes in Op.11, dividing the remaining 23 into different opus numbers.

In the first edition, Belaiev divided the preludes into four parts: Nos.1-6 (1888-1896), Nos.7-12 (1894-1896), Nos.13-18 (1895), and Nos.19-24 (1895-6). Scriabin put the date and place of composition at the end of each prelude. He did not compose the Preludes chronologically. Most were composed during the three years following his graduation from the Moscow Conservatory (1892), and only two were written between the ages sixteen and seventeen. Half of his preludes were written as "souvenirs of holidays" spent touring Paris, Amsterdam, Heidelberg, Vitznau, and other European cities. He composed the first of these, No.4, in 1888 in Moscow at the age of sixteen. No.6 followed, composed in Kiev in 1889,

then No.10, composed in Moscow between 1893 and 1894. In 1895, he wrote No.14 in Dresden; No.3, No.19, and No.24 in Heidelberg; and No.17, No.18, and No.23 in Witznau, Switzerland, where he underwent treatment for his right hand. He composed the others during the following year.

Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, had no initial plan to write a full cycle of preludes in every major and minor key. The first prelude of the cycle, the infamous “Bells of Moscow” Prelude, Op.3 No.2, was published as a part of Op.3 *Morceaux de Fantaisie* (1892). The first edition is dedicated to Anton Arensky and was published by A. Gutheil in 1895. This edition is missing No.1, *Elégie*, and the second and third pages of No.2 *Prélude* are damaged. The premiere of Op.3 No.2 was given in Moscow at the Moscow Electrical Exhibition, with Rachmaninoff himself at the piano, in September 1892. When Rachmaninoff signed the contract for the publication of Op.3, he did not secure the international copyright, which resulted in diverse editions with rather peculiar arrangements.

By the time he wrote *Ten Preludes*, Op.23, Rachmaninoff was aware of Chopin’s and Scriabin’s *Twenty-Four Preludes* in each key. Although Rachmaninoff still had doubts about writing the full set, he deliberately differentiated the keys of the *Ten Preludes* in Op.23 and gave them a frame structure by starting and ending with enharmonically related keys and tempo markings (i.e., F-sharp minor – *Largo*, G-flat Major – *Largo*). Op.23 was dedicated to Alexander Siloti and published by Y.A. Gutheil in February 1904. Rachmaninoff premiered the set in Moscow on February 10, 1903.

The *Thirteen Preludes* in Op.32 were written in 1910, seven years after the previous set. Op.32 displays further development of Rachmaninoff’s style in both technical and musical languages. His mature style came to fruition in closely preceding works such as *Piano Concerto No.3*, *Second Symphony*, and the tone-poem “*The Isle of the Dead*.” The stylistic features of these works significantly contributed to the *Twenty-Four Preludes*, with

their signature use of extensive chromaticism and ever-flowing melodic lines. Like to his previous sets, the publisher A. Gutheil first published Op.32 in Moscow on September 1911, without dedication.

Major Influences – Chopin and Liszt, Russian nationalism, literature, and art

Frederic Chopin and Franz Liszt

Chopin

Chopin had a significant influence on Russian music: the composer's Slavic origin made his music easily comprehensible to Russians.⁵ Chopin's music was introduced into Russian society in 1829 and 1830 from the home concerts of Maria Sczymanowskaya, a Polish pianist living in St. Petersburg. By the 1840s, many pianists, including Adolph Henselt, performed Chopin's pieces, especially the etudes.⁶ Henselt was the teacher of Zverev, which naturally paved the way for Rachmaninoff and Scriabin to learn Chopin's music from an early age. Through great performances by eminent pianists of the time, such as Franz Liszt and Anton Rubinstein, Chopin's music was met with high acclaim in Russia, not only by performers, but also by critics and publishers.

To Russian society, Chopin was one of the most original musicians of the period.⁷ Chopin's frequent use of national dances and rhythm distinguished him from other Western composers as a modern nationalist composer. His music inspired many Russian composers to take up national dance in their own musical styles.

Chopin had significant influence on the young Scriabin. Scriabin idolized Chopin from his youth, to the point that he slept with Chopin's Nocturne score under his pillow. Many of the Scriabin preludes recall Chopin's signature styles in their harmonic progressions and formal approach. Like many of Chopin's preludes, most are based on a single idea or

⁵ Gennadi M. Tsipin, "Chopin and the Russian Piano Tradition," trans. Beatrice L. Frank, *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 37 (1995): 67.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷ *Illustrirovannaia gazeta*, 13 March 1869, p.173, cited in Swartz, "Chopin as Modernist in Nineteenth-Century Russia," in *Chopin Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 42.

style. Scriabin adopted the characteristics of waltz, mazurka, etude, and prelude. Through Chopin, Scriabin learned to shape small, subtle, and basic motivic ideas through the use of extension, added tones, and harmonic treatment. Scriabin's use of dissonance and chromaticism on traditional progressions is reminiscent of Chopin in many ways. In addition, Scriabin follows traditional formal structures similar to those used by Chopin.

The musicologist Richard A. Leonard has pointed out that "Scriabin's playing style and appearance very much reminded Parisian audiences of Chopin."⁸ However, Scriabin later denied this similarity with Chopin's works and Rudakova and Kandinsky share the same point of view:

Scriabin developed the "pure" lyrical element of Chopin's music, its psychological nature-but not the genre and objective side, nor the national epic folklore figurativeness. Nor did Scriabin take up Chopin's cantilena, although he enriched the Chopin instrumental melodies. The whimsical metric-rhythmical breath of Chopin's music, its "rubato" nature, which had never been notated, was more individualized and even "written-in" by Scriabin. In particular, he gave freedom to the polyphonic "life" of voices, and a peculiar *recherché* quality to the piano coloring.⁹

Rachmaninoff studied Chopin's music from an early age as well. His teachers Siloti, Taneyev, Zverev, and Safonov were admirers of Chopin's music. By the time Rachmaninoff and Scriabin were attending the conservatory, Russian society was filled with Chopin's music. His classmates in the conservatory, including Scriabin and Anatoly Liadov (1855-1914), adored Chopin. This was true especially of Liadov, who was one of the performers who spread Chopin's music in Russian society. Furthermore, frequent travels to Western Europe to give recitals, especially in Paris and Switzerland, paved the way for the young composer to study further.

Throughout his career, Rachmaninoff championed Chopin's music. In an interview

⁸ Richard A. Leonard, "Chapter XI: Scriabin," in *A History of Russian Music* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 236

⁹ Ye Rudakova and A.I. Kandinsky, *Scriabin*. trans. Tatyana Chistyakova (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, 1984), 26.

with Florence Leonard, Rachmaninoff admires Chopin's music by stating, "Chopin! From the time when I was nineteen years old I felt his greatness; and I marvel at it still. He is today more modern than many moderns ... he remains for me one of the greatest giants."¹⁰

Rachmaninoff's concerts frequently included Chopin's works (as well as his own and, on some occasions, those of Scriabin), and recorded performances of Chopin's music by Rachmaninoff remain favorites among musicians today. Tsipin quotes Asafyev, Rachmaninoff's biographer, as saying that "Rachmaninoff created the life of melody in which the melodies of Chopin saturated his works with his courageously epic coloring and his special quality of song. Each sound beautifies itself, sings around itself."¹¹

Liszt

Franz Liszt also significantly influenced Russian musical circles. After successful concerts in Russia in 1842, 1843, and 1847, Liszt was considered the most eminent, world-famous pianist in Russia, along with Rubinstein. Leonid Sabaneyev claimed that Liszt represents the true father of the "Russian School," insofar as he disseminated new musical ideas such as symphonic poems, program music, and broadening the methods of orchestration.¹² As for pianistic vocabulary, Liszt introduced new innovations in piano writing with technical virtuosity and an orchestral sound.

Liszt's influence on Scriabin was most recognizable during his second compositional period. However, Scriabin's earlier output, as early as Op.4, *Allegro Appassionato*, shows evidence of Lisztian influence. Lisztian virtuosic techniques, such as three-hand technique,

¹⁰ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 279.

¹¹ Gennadi M. Tsipin, "Chopin and the Russian Piano Tradition," trans. Beatrice L. Frank, *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 37 (1995): 80.

¹² Leonid Sabaneyev, "Liszt and Scriabin," trans. Don Louis Wetzel. in *Journal of The Scriabin Society of America* 6, No. 1 (Winter 2001-2002): 84.

accompaniment figures in wide-leaping arpeggios, and rapid ascending/descending lines in octaves, can be found in Scriabin's Preludes Op.11, Nos. 6, 7, 14, 20, and 24. As Rudakova and Kandinsky wrote, "Liszt's oratorical pathos and the orchestral nature of his piano compositions were harmoniously interlaced in the Scriabin style."¹³

Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, was indirectly influenced by Franz Liszt through his own cousin and teacher Alexander Siloti. A disciple of Liszt, Siloti was a living example of Liszt's virtuosic piano playing; through him, Rachmaninoff inherited Lisztian characteristics. Like Liszt, Rachmaninoff challenged the piano to create symphonic sounds. Liszt's use of texture, sonority, and melodic gestures, moreover, directly inspired Rachmaninoff's Russian imagery in the Twenty-Four Preludes.

Rachmaninoff's way of embodying dramatic devices within each prelude closely resembles Liszt's cyclic work *Années de pèlerinage*. As Valentin Antipov, editor of the critical edition of Rachmaninoff's Twenty-Four Preludes, claims,

...since the spirit of wandering and searching (primarily creatively and spiritually) is reflected in a concealed way in the cycle of 24 Preludes, Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* comes to mind as the closest dramaturgical prototype, defining and determining the diversity of genre and style in the cycle. Only no doubt not in the literal, illustrative-programmatic sense but primarily on the level of a "wandering musician", as Rachmaninoff called himself, searching for and attaining new artistic boundaries; this was in fact the main distinguishing feature of the composer's works in this period.¹⁴

Russian Nationalism

Following Mikhail Glinka's (1804-1857) successful attempt to employ traditional Russian music in his compositions, many composers incorporated Russian tunes and themes in their work. This trend of popularizing Russian national traditions continued with two

¹³ Ye Rudakova and A.I. Kandinsky, *Scriabin*, trans. Tatyana Chistyakova (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, 1984), 26.

¹⁴ Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff, *Critical Edition of the Complete Works, Series V: Works for Piano Solo, Vol. 17: 24 Préludes*, ed. Valentin Antipov (Moscow: Russian Music Publishing, 2005), 23.

groups of composers who identified themselves as “the Mighty Five” (Balakirev, 1837-1910; Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844-1908; Mussorgsky, 1839-81; Borodin, 1833-87; and César Cui, 1835-1918) and the “Russian Music Society” (Anton, 1829-94, and Nikolay Rubinstein, 1835-81). The former focused on nationalism, and the latter were musically conservative. Scriabin and Rachmaninoff were direct disciples of this lineage through the Moscow Conservatory, which was established by Rubinstein.

Despite sharing this single root, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff contrasted in terms of their musical style. Scriabin was recalled as “the most unusual composer ever nurtured on Russian soil,”¹⁵ and is categorized along with Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich as part of “the third wave” of Russian composers, who experimented with new styles.

Rachmaninoff was the most famous successor of Tchaikovsky, in the Russian Musical Society. As Faubion Bowers explains, ‘On one side were the nationalists, with Rachmaninoff espousing Russian themes and folk music as a source of inspiration. On the other, Scriabin and the cosmopolitans, universalists, and internationalists in music. Once in a bilious moment and with pointed reference to Rachmaninoff, Scriabin wrote to his publisher, “Is it possible that I am not a Russian composer, just because I don’t write overtures and capriccios on Russian themes?”’¹⁶ Bowers further quotes Scriabin, criticizing Chopin for being too “overpowered by nationalism.”¹⁷

Despite Scriabin’s efforts to be excluded from Russian nationalism, the influence of Russian traditions prevailed in his music, seeping in from different angles. Scriabin’s inspiration came from Russian literature, paintings, and images, especially poetry, symbolism, and philosophy. As Rudakova and Kandinsky state, “Scriabin’s compositions were in harmony with the era of the first Russian revolution. It appeared and flourished on

¹⁵ Bowers. 76.

¹⁶ Faubion Bowers. "Scriabin Again and Again" (1966), *Journal of The Scriabin Society of America* 8, No. 1 (Winter 2003-2004): 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12

the crest of the “Romantic Wave” that arose in the art of Russia at the time – in literature, music, and painting – and became a reflection of the contemporary social atmosphere, being born of a presentiment of the imminent radical changes in the political and spiritual spheres of life.”¹⁸

As for Rachmaninoff, images of Russia and his idol, Tchaikovsky, paved a way for integrating Russian nationalism into his European-style background in composition. The entire cycle of the Twenty-Four Preludes holds definite images of Russia: the bell sound of Russian Orthodox Church, the March and Russian dance rhythms, and depiction of nature in Russia. Indeed, such images inspired Rachmaninoff to write his Twenty-Four Preludes.

In an interview with David Ewen in 1941, Rachmaninoff spoke about Russia:

A composer’s music should express the country of his birth, his love affairs, his religion, the books which have influenced him, the pictures he loves. It should be the product of the sum total of a composer’s experiences. I am a Russian composer, and the land of my birth has influenced my temperament, and outlook. My music is the product of my temperament, and so it is Russian music... What I try to do, when writing down my music, is to make it say simply and directly that which is in my heart when I am composing. If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become a part of my music.¹⁹

Literature and Art

After the 1820s, Russian literature flourished in the hands of Pushkin, Gogol, and Mikhail Lermontov, as well as the next generation of writers, such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev. There is no doubt that these writers had significant influences on Russian composers, and Scriabin and Rachmaninoff were no exceptions.

¹⁸ Ye Rudakova and A.I. Kandinsky, *Scriabin*, trans. Tatyana Chistyakova (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, 1984), 20.

¹⁹ Serge Rachmaninov. “Music Should Speak from the Heart,” interview with David Ewen, *The Etude Music Magazine* 59, No.12 (December, 1941).

There are several examples of how literary influence is portrayed in the Twenty-Four Preludes of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff: first, the Preludes use direct quotation of texts; second, they use poetic meter (this is true especially in Scriabin's work); third, they employ the genre of "song without words."

Scriabin

Scriabin's creative process drew inspiration from poetry and philosophy. Although the Twenty-Four Preludes, Op.11, was written in his early period and thus does not reflect his association with Russian symbolism or his theosophy like his later works, his Preludes closely adhere to the influence of Russian poetry. Scriabin wrote poems throughout his life, and many of his works bear an association with poetry directly or indirectly. Direct association with poetry can be found from the first prelude written in the cycle, the Prelude in E minor, No.4 (1888).

Another example of how Scriabin employed poetry in his preludes is related to rhythmic patterns. The most common meter in Russian poetry is iambic tetrameter, where a short syllable is followed by a long syllable, four feet in a row:

da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM
U - U - U - U -
Come live with me and be my love
(Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love")

Accents are given on the second syllable and are repeated four times. This pattern appears in Scriabin's Preludes Op.11 No.6, No.14, No.17, No.18, and No.24.

Example 1. Scriabin, Prelude No.6 in B minor, mm.1-9

The image shows the first nine measures of Scriabin's Prelude No. 6 in B minor. The score is written for piano in 2/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf* at the beginning and a *cresc.* marking. The lower staff (bass clef) provides a harmonic accompaniment with a *dim.* marking. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the piece concludes with a *mf* dynamic marking.

Example 2. Scriabin, Prelude No.14 in E flat minor, mm.1-3

The image shows the first three measures of Scriabin's Prelude No. 14 in E flat minor. The score is written for piano in 15/8 time. The upper staff (treble clef) has a melodic line starting with a *mf* dynamic. The lower staff (bass clef) has a more complex accompaniment with a *sf sf* dynamic marking. The key signature has five flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb), and the piece ends with a *mf* dynamic marking.

Lastly, Scriabin utilizes the genre of “song without words.” Like those of Mendelssohn, his preludes have a separate melodic line with an accompaniment. Each phrase in the melodic line contours according to the starting and ending points of verses of poetry, with clear distinction between line and stanza. Preludes No.4 in E minor, No.9 in E major, No.13 in G-flat major, No.15 D-flat major, and No.22 in G minor are representative examples.

Example 3. Scriabin, Prelude No.4 in E minor, mm.1-4

op. 11 Nr. 4

Example 4. Scriabin, Prelude No.22 in G minor, mm.1-9

p rubato

Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninoff also employs the “song without words” in several of his preludes. Similar to those of Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff’s preludes assign endless melody on top of lavishing accompaniment. Rachmaninoff’s preludes differ from Scriabin’s in that the melodic lines of the former tend to be longer, without frequent interruptions or stops. Prelude Op.23 No.1 in F-sharp minor, No.4 in D major, No.6 in E-flat major, and Op.32 No.5 in G major reflect these characteristics.

Example 5. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.23 No.1 in F-sharp minor, mm.1-6

The image displays the first six measures of Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op.23 No.1 in F-sharp minor. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time, marked 'Largo' with a tempo of quarter note = 58. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first system (measures 1-2) features a right-hand part with a whole note chord in measure 1 and a half note chord in measure 2, both marked *mf*. The left hand plays a continuous eighth-note accompaniment, starting with a *pp* dynamic. The second system (measures 3-4) continues the eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand, marked *pp*, while the right hand has a half note chord in measure 3 and a quarter note chord in measure 4, both marked *mf*. The third system (measures 5-6) shows the left hand's eighth-note accompaniment marked *dim.* in measure 5, and the right hand playing a half note chord in measure 5 and a quarter note chord in measure 6, both marked *pp*.

Example 6. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.32 No.5 in G major, mm.1-6

The musical score for Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op.32 No.5 in G major, measures 1-6, is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *dolce* marking. The second system continues the piece. The third system features a piano (*p*) dynamic, a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic, and a *leggiero* marking. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, sextuplets, and dynamic markings.

The literary influence on Rachmaninoff's Preludes can also be found in his use of motives from his own songs. The accompaniment of Rachmaninoff's songs adheres to the text, while providing the sub-melody on its own. The accompaniment is able to stand alone without the vocal line while still conveying the same atmosphere. "Spring Waters," Op.14 No.11, can be seen as the predecessor of the Prelude Op.23 No.2 in B-flat major in terms of its arpeggio pattern with a descending line in sextuplet rhythm. Songs such as "Before my window," Op.26 No.10, and "Lilacs," Op.21 No.5, share with the Prelude Op.23 No.6 in E-flat major and Op.32 No.12 in G-sharp minor a similar accompanimental gesture.

Example 7. Rachmaninoff, "Lilacs," Op.21 No.5

Ev'-ry li-lac bush wakes, And I drink of the cool morn-ing

mp un poco tenuto

cantabile mp (colla voce)

air. 'Neath the branch-es I glance,

a tempo p a tempo p

Example 8. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.32 No.12 in G-sharp minor, mm.1-6

S. Rachmaninow, Op.32 N^o 12.

Allegro.

p f mf

p rit. meno mosso

dim. p ten.

a tempo rit.

accel. dim. pp sf

Example 9. Rachmaninoff, "Before my window," Op.26 No.10

- дум - чиво - подри - зой се - ре - брис - той... И вет. кой све - жей
 и ду - шис - той окло - ни - лась и зо - вет... Е - е тро -

cresc. *mf* *mf*
la melodia ben marcato
mf *p* *dim.* *p*

Example 10. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.23 No.4 in D major, mm.1-11

Andante cantabile. (♩=50) *mf*
pp *sempre cantabile* *cresc.*

Both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff had personal accounts with Leo Tolstoy. Especially for Rachmaninoff in his youth, Tolstoy was a “god.” When Rachmaninoff was suffering setbacks due to the poor reception of his First Symphony, his friends arranged for both to meet. After Rachmaninoff and Chaliapin sang his song “Fate,” which was based on the opening theme of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and included words by Tolstoy, the old man said, “I have to tell you how I dislike it all,” and gave a critical speech about Beethoven, Pushkin, and Lermontov.²⁰ The incident put Rachmaninoff off permanently, despite Tolstoy’s apology years later.

Meanwhile, Tolstoy recognized Scriabin as a great composer as soon as he encountered his music. As Garcia states, “When Leo Tolstoy was first introduced to Scriabin’s music by Alexander Goldenveizer, he was effusive in praise, calling it a sincere expression of genius. This is all the more remarkable given Tolstoy’s reactionary artistic devolution, which resulted in his repudiating his own masterpieces.”²¹

²⁰ Victor Seroff, *Rachmaninoff* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 72-73.

²¹ Garcia, 440

Chapter II. Twenty-Four Preludes

Key Scheme and tonality

Order of keys

Scriabin

Scriabin's Op.11 was written in his early period, over a span of 8 years from 1888 to 1896. Scriabin follows the order of Chopin's Twenty-Four Preludes, Op.28: an ascending circle of fifths with the related minor. However, he did not write the Preludes in the order of the keys. The earliest prelude in Op.11, No.4 in E minor, appeared in 1888 in Moscow when he was barely sixteen. From 1893 to 1896, Scriabin's extensive performance tour began under the sponsorship of Belaiyev. Between tours he completed the set in the following order:

Table 1. The order of the Preludes according to composition year

1893	No.3 in Heidelberg (May) No.2, No.15 in Moscow (November)
1894	No.10 in Moscow
1895	No.14 in Dresden Nos. 19 and 24 in Heidelberg Nos.12, 17, 18, and 23 in Witznau (June) Nos. 1, 7, 9, 11, 13, 20, and 21 in Moscow (November)
1896	No.5 in Amsterdam No.8, No.22 in Paris

Table 2. Published order of Twenty-Four Preludes Op.11

Number	Key	Year	Location	Tempo
No.1	C Major	Nov. 1895	Moscow	Vivace
No.2	A minor	Nov. 1893	Moscow	Allegretto

No.3	G Major	May 1893	Heidelberg	Vivo
No.4	E minor	1888	Moscow	Lento
No.5	D Major	1896	Amsterdam	Andante Cantabile
No.6	B minor	1889	Kiev	Allegro
No.7	A Major	1895	Moscow	Allegro Assai
No.8	F-sharp minor	1896	Paris	Allegro Agitato
No.9	E Major	Nov. 1895	Moscow	Andantino
No.10	C-sharp minor	1894	Moscow	Andante
No.11	B Major	Nov. 1895	Moscow	Allegro Assai
No.12	G-sharp minor	June 1895	Vitznau	Andante
No.13	G-flat Major	1895	Moscow	Lento
No.14	E-flat minor	1895	Dresden	Presto
No.15	D-flat Major	1893	Moscow	Lento
No.16	B-flat minor	Nov. 1895	Moscow	Misterioso
No.17	A-flat Major	June 1895	Vitznau	Allegretto
No.18	F minor	June 1895	Vitznau	Allegro Agitato
No.19	E-flat Major	1895	Heidelberg	Affetuoso
No.20	C minor	1895	Moscow	Appassionato
No.21	B-flat Major	1895	Moscow	Andante
No.22	G minor	1896	Paris	Lento
No.23	F Major	1895	Vitznau	Vivo
No.24	D minor	1895	Heidelberg	Presto

Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninoff composed his Twenty-Four Preludes over a much longer time period, a period encompassing much of his compositional career. The first was written in 1892, during his conservatory years; Op.23 was completed in 1903; and the last was written in 1910, after his second symphony was completed. After writing his first Preludes, Rachmaninoff took a ten-year hiatus before deciding to write Op.23. The decision came after his Variations on a theme of Chopin, Op.22, in which he took the theme of Chopin's Prelude Op.28 No.20 and developed it into 22 variations, experimenting with many different tonalities.

However, Rachmaninoff wrote each set of the Preludes Op.23 and Op.32 at a brisk pace, especially Op.32. Some of them were written in the same day, and most of them were

written in two to three days. The chronology of Rachmaninoff's Twenty-Four Preludes is listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Chronology of Rachmaninoff's Preludes Op.3 No.2, Op.23, and Op.32

Opus and Number	Key	Year	Tempo Marking
Op.3 No.2 "Bells of Moscow"	C# minor	Fall 1892	Lento
Op.23 No.1	F# minor	1903	Largo
Op.23 No.2	Bb Major	1903	Maestoso
Op.23 No.3	D minor	1903	Tempo di minuetto
Op.23 No.4	D Major	1903	Andante cantabile
Op.23 No.5	G minor	1901	Alla Marcia
Op.23 No.6	Eb Major	1903	Andante
Op.23 No.7	C minor	1903	Allegro
Op.23 No.8	Ab Major	1903	Allegro vivace
Op.23 No.9	Eb minor	1903	Presto
Op.23 No.10	Gb Major	1903	Largo
Op.32 No.1	C Major	8/30/1910	Allegro vivace
Op.32 No.2	Bb Major	9/2/1910	Allegretto
Op.32 No.3	E Major	9/3/1910	Allegro vivace
Op.32 No.4	E minor	8/28/1910	Allegro con brio
Op.32 No.5	G Major	8/23/1910	Moderato
Op.32 No.6	F minor	8/25/1910	Allegro appassionato
Op.32 No.7	F Major	8/24/1910	Moderato
Op.32 No.8	A minor	8/24/1910	Vivo
Op.32 No.9	A Major	8/26/1910	Allegro moderato
Op.32 No.10	B minor	9/6/1910	Lento
Op.32 No.11	B Major	8/23/1910	Allegretto
Op.32 No.12	G# minor	8/23/1910	Allegro
Op.32 No.13	Db Major	9/10/1910	Grave

Special keys in association with other art form

Poetry in <E minor> Preludes

The key of E minor held special meaning for Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. Both composers adopted their main themes and literary associations from earlier works. Scriabin's E minor bears the poem and theme originally intended for his unfinished Ballade in B-flat minor.²² The poem reads:

O country of visions!
 How different from this life
 Where I have no place
 But there, I hear voices,
 A world of beatific souls
 I see.....

The theme of the E minor Prelude is as follows:

Example 11. Scriabin, Prelude Op.11 No.4 in E minor mm.1-3



The theme of the unfinished Ballade is almost identical to that of the E minor Prelude.

Example 12. Scriabin, unfinished Ballade



²² Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 137

Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op.32 No.4 in E minor is highly reminiscent of his choral symphony, "The Bells," Op. 35 (1913). Although "The Bells" was published three years after Op.32 No.4, its main theme was written concurrently with the Prelude. The depiction of the bell sound and alternating rhythmic figure in thirds create an unsettling atmosphere reminiscent of a scene in a national opera setting. The words in the choral symphony are from a poem by Edgar Allan Poe translated into Russian by the symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont. A section of the poem reads:

Hear, oh hear the brazen bells,
The loud, the loud alarm bells!
In their sobbing and their throbbing
What a tale of terror dwells!
How beseeching sounds their cry
Neath the naked midnight sky,
Through the darkness wildly pleading
In affright,
First approaching, then receding,
Rings their message through the night!²³

²³ Peter Katin, Liner Notes, *Rachmaninov: The Complete Preludes*, Peter Katin (piano), SOMM 0110, 2011, compact disc.

Example 13. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in E minor Op.32 No.4, mm.1-9

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a piano introduction in common time (C) marked *f*. The second system starts at measure 3, marked *f marcato*, and features a prominent triplet pattern in the bass line. The third system continues the triplet pattern, marked *f m.f.*, and concludes with a *rit.* (ritardando) and *a tempo* marking. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 14. Rachmaninoff "The Bells" Op.35 1st movement mm.1-6.

Allegro, ma non tanto.

Allegro, ma non tanto.

Picture association

In a dialogue with the pianist, Benno Moiseiwitsch, Rachmaninoff admitted that his Prelude Op.32 No.10 in B minor was written under an impression made on him by "Die Heimkehr" ("The Homecoming" or "The Return"), a painting by the Swiss symbolist painter Arnold Böcklin.²⁴ Regarding the placement of the Prelude as fourth to last in the cycle,

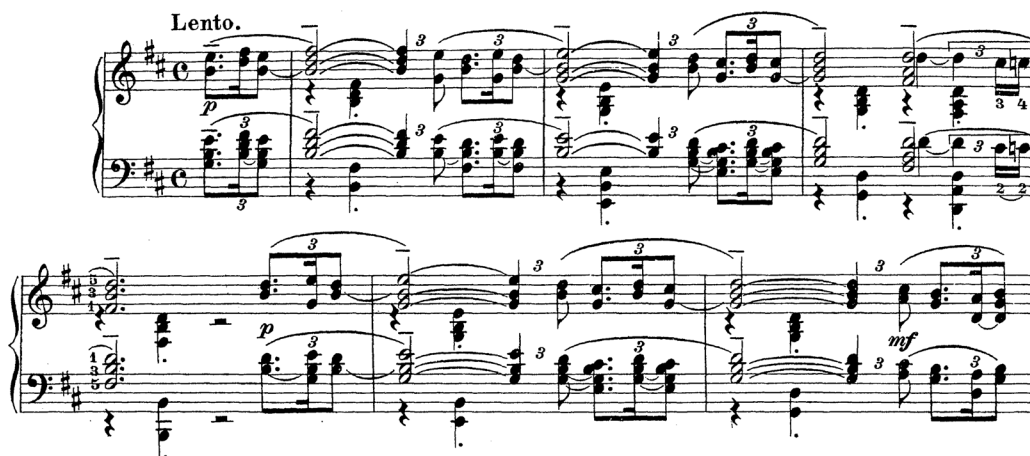
²⁴ Sergei Bertenson and Jay Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff: a Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 296.

Antipov claimed that the title of the painting, “The Return,” is significant for understanding the cycle’s general dramatic plan.²⁵

Example 15. Arnold Böcklin, “Die Heimkehr” (1887)



Example 16. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.32 No.10 in B minor



²⁵ Antipov, 2

Unity of the cycle

Preludes can be performed individually, or a few might be selected as part of a group, or the entire set might be played as a cycle. The advantage of programming preludes as part of recitals is that performers can personalize the selection and order the preludes according to their preference. However, when performed as a cycle, the Twenty-Four Preludes of both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin take on new meaning; played in their entirety, they only make sense when performed in order. But Scriabin and Rachmaninoff use different methods to hold their cycles together.

Scriabin

One of the devices that Scriabin frequently uses is connecting the last note of one piece with the first note of the following piece. The ending note or chord, in other words, encompasses the beginning note or chord of the following piece. For example, in No.3 in G major, the last note heard of the chord is B on both hands (due to the tied D). The first note that starts No.4 in E minor is B on the right hand, functioning as a basic pulse for the work. Also, No.7 in A major ends with the chord I6/4, with low A as both the pedal tone and the top note of the chord. No.8 in F-sharp minor receives the lingering A in the first note of the right-hand melody and takes off from that note.

Example 17. Scriabin, Prelude No.3 in G major/ Prelude No.4 in E minor

No.3 in G major ending

No.4 in E minor beginning

The image displays two musical staves. The left staff shows the ending of Scriabin's Prelude No. 3 in G major, featuring a final chord with a tied D in the bass. The right staff shows the beginning of Prelude No. 4 in E minor, starting with a piano (p) dynamic and a melodic line in the right hand that begins on a B note, which is the same pitch as the tied D in the previous piece.

Example 18. Scriabin, Prelude No.7 in A major/ Prelude No.8 in F-sharp minor

No.7 in A major ending

No.8 in F-sharp minor beginning

The image displays two musical excerpts. On the left is the ending of Scriabin's Prelude No. 7 in A major, featuring a piano with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of two measures of a descending eighth-note scale in the right hand, followed by a final chord in the left hand. On the right is the beginning of Scriabin's Prelude No. 8 in F-sharp minor, shown in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, featuring a descending eighth-note scale in the bass and a more complex melodic line in the treble.

Another main aspect that holds the Twenty-Four Preludes together as a cycle is the climatic point in Preludes No.18-20. No.18 in F minor starts with motoric motion, which is unsettling due to a constant syncopated rhythm that accelerates to presto and ends with the triple forte in octaves of F. The climatic motion is continued in No.19 in A flat major, where a constant wander is caused by off-beat accompaniment culminating in a lavish flow of chords. The chords advance to the passionate No.20 in F minor with virtuosic leaps in octave, finally settling down in the last five measures. The technical demands, dynamics, and tempo indications (*Allegro agitato*, *Affettuoso*, and *Appassionato*) of these preludes mark the summit of the entire cycle, offering it coherence and unity as a whole.

Rachmaninoff

Because Rachmaninoff did not originally plan to write twenty-four preludes—indeed, scholars still disagree about the point at which he made the decision—his cycle lacks the initial scheme of construction evident in Scriabin's composition. However, by the time he wrote Op.23, the plan for the entire cycle had become predictable in its tonal relationship. The tonal relationship of the opening and closing preludes lends important unity to the cycle.

First, the keys in Op.23 is occasionally paired with those that have a tonal relationship of major and minor. The groups of preludes that are paired in major/minor are Op.23 Nos.3 and 4, Op.32 Nos.3 and 4, Nos.6 and 7, Nos.8 and 9, and Nos.10 and 11. This pairing allows

for coherent and continuous melodic flow as a cycle. Op.23 No.3 ends with a single note—D1 on the bass—and No.4 starts with the single note D2 on the bass. Op.32 No.3 ends with an open E (in octave) and B (which makes it possible to ring B as the very last note) on the bass, as well as an E major chord on the pianissimo. No.4 starts with three Bs (B3, B4, B5) in different octaves. Similar techniques are used in Op.32 Nos.6 and 7, Nos.8 and 9, and Nos.10 and 11, each ending with a single note in octaves (or pedal tones) and continuing into the next prelude with the note that ended the previous one.

Another device that Rachmaninoff cleverly used to bring the cycle together is putting the outer preludes in a tonal relationship. Within Op.23, and indeed in the whole cycle, the outer preludes are in an enharmonic major/minor tonal relationship. Ten Preludes, Op.23, starts in F-sharp minor and ends in the enharmonic G-flat major. The Twenty-Four Preludes starts with the key of C-sharp minor and ends with the enharmonic D-flat major. This gesture frames the Preludes, forming the cycle's systematic structure.

Antipov pointed out that in “the final Prelude in D-flat major, the composer does not merely hint – and moreover, more than transparently – at the thematic material of the C-sharp minor Prelude, but has recourse to an entirely meaningful authorial reminiscence. This is testified to more than once by the repeated opening motive in the middle voice (Bb, Ab, Db, in m.1-2, 2-3); furthermore, the Bb is emphasized by a tenuto mark, and a line clarifying the part-writing leads from it to the Ab. ... The Prelude in D-flat major is thus the arch-like completion of the entire integral and unified cycle of ‘24 Preludes’ and simultaneously a kind of variation on the theme of the Prelude in C-sharp minor.”²⁶

²⁶ Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff, *Critical Edition of the Complete Works, Series V: Works for Piano Solo, Vol. 17: 24 Préludes*, ed. Valentin Antipov, (Moscow, Russian Music Publishing, 2005), 16.

Harmonic language

Signature chords in Scriabin

In terms of harmonic language, Scriabin is known for his ‘Mystic’ chord based on the interval of augmented fourth, diminished fourth, augmented fourth, and two perfect fourths. This is also called a six-note synthetic chord; his final Prelude Op.74 is based upon this chord. One can identify in his Preludes Op.11, moreover, the embryo chord of what would later become the ‘Mystic’ chord.

In his first composition period, Scriabin commonly used extended dominant chords, following in the footsteps of Chopin. Scriabin uses seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth expansions from the dominant, especially favoring the thirteenth sonority spelled in fourth. Enharmonic spelling of the extended eleventh and thirteenth also appear frequently.

Example 19. Frequently used harmonies in Scriabin’s early composition period

(b) 9 #11 b5 (b) 13 #5

spacing in 4ths

enharmonic b 13 and #5 enharmonic

The best example of a dominant chord extended to the ninth in Scriabin’s work can be found in the Prelude in C major. The ending of each section employs a perfect cadence in dominant harmony extended to the ninth in measures 7-8 and 17-18.

Example 20. Scriabin, Prelude No.1 in C major mm.7-8, 17-18



Eleventh and thirteenth extension can be found in the Prelude No.7 in A major. The constant leaps of the bass with upper chords in various inversions show a dominant chord extension progressing from the ninth to the thirteenth in m.15-16.

Example 21. Scriabin, Prelude No.7 in A major mm.15-16



The altered dominant chord that later became Scriabin's signature was evident in No.6 in B minor m.53. The chord in the measure is dominant seventh with a raised fifth degree.

Example 22. Scriabin, Prelude No.6 in B minor mm.50-58



... Kiew 1899

Another significant chord to point out occurs in the Prelude No.24 in A minor m.23. It is built entirely of fourths, G-C-F sharp-B flat-E flat. Except for the altered E flat, it is the same as the infamous ‘Mystic’ chord that would later become Scriabin’s trademark. Here, already in 1895, traces of the ‘Mystic’ chord and his signature style emerge in the Preludes.

Example 23. Scriabin, Prelude No.24 in A minor mm.21-24



The extended chromaticism of Rachmaninoff

In contrast to Scriabin, Rachmaninoff did not develop one particular harmony as his trademark. Instead, he used chromatic patterns as his signature gesture. His chromaticism evolved from the multi use of altered chords within the boundaries of a single key. Rachmaninoff employed several chromatic patterns in the cycle to give phrases a natural flow, transition into or end sections, and intensify climaxes: the first such pattern is a four-

note descending/ascending chromatic pattern, the second is a chromatic inner voice movement in chord progression, the third is a chromatic figuration in phrase/section endings for effective sequencing, and the fourth is a chromatic climax built up from hyper dissonance (also known as 'Fantastic Harmony').

Four-note descending/ascending chromatic pattern

The first pattern Rachmaninoff employs frequently is the four-note descending/ascending chromatic pattern. The pattern occurs in groupings of four, and it descends or ascends without changing the bass harmony. The first example can be found in the Prelude in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1. The short ascending/descending chromatic pattern occurs in the accompaniment in groupings of four notes.

Example 24. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1 mm.6-8

The image displays a musical score for Example 24, Rachmaninoff's Prelude in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1, measures 6-8. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 6 and 7, with a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) at the beginning. The second system shows measures 7 and 8, with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) at the beginning. The bass line features a four-note descending chromatic pattern in measures 6 and 7, and a four-note ascending chromatic pattern in measures 7 and 8. The treble clef part is mostly silent, with a few notes in measure 8.

The next example displays a descending chromatic line over a dominant pedal. The chromatic pattern in measures 29-30 of the Prelude in G minor, Op.23 No.5, function to prepare the arrival of the theme in B in measure 35.

Example 25. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in G minor, Op.23 No.5 mm.29-35

The last example chosen for the four-note pattern is the Prelude in E-flat minor, Op.23 No.9. The chromatic descending line in groupings of four highlights Rachmaninoff's technique of employing altered chords within the boundaries of a single key. The right-hand descending line in the chromatic pattern contours around the third beat, creating a wave effect.

Example 26. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in E-flat minor Op.23 No.9, mm. 30-31

Chromatic inner voice movement in chord progression

Rachmaninoff utilizes subtle inner voice movements within his chord progressions. The opening eight measures of the Second Concerto represent the most famous example of

such a progression. He uses the technique at the ending of the Prelude Op.3 No.2 in double staves.

Example 27. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C-sharp minor Op.3 No.2, mm.55-61



Another instance can be found in the Prelude in C major, Op.32 No.1. The pattern also appears at the end of the Prelude, descending from E to C on the bass.

Example 28. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C major Op.32 No.1, mm.37-41



The subtle chromatic movement within the chord progression is disguised in etude-like runs in the Prelude in C minor, Op.23 No.7. Here, the first ten measures display a chromatic descending line through an interchange of voices. The lowest and highest notes of the measure (in the first note of the down beat and the first note of the third beat), performed

in a right-hand virtuosic run, constitute a descent in the chromatic pattern. The function of this pattern is to drive the passage to G.

Example 29. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C minor Op.23 No.7 mm.1-10

Allegro. ($\text{♩} = 80$)

The musical score consists of four systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a right-hand run starting on a piano (*p*) dynamic, moving through a chromatic descent and reaching fortissimo (*f*) before returning to piano. The second system continues the run with alternating piano and fortissimo dynamics. The third system shows the run continuing with piano dynamics. The fourth system concludes the passage with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic, followed by a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

The skeleton version that highlights the chromatic movement is as follows:

The skeleton version is a single staff of music in C minor, 4/4 time. It shows a descending chromatic scale in the right hand, starting on G4 and moving stepwise down to G3. The notes are: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The notes are grouped into measures: G4-F4-E4-D4 in the first measure, C4-B3-A3 in the second, and G3 in the third. The final note G3 is followed by a quarter rest and a quarter note G4.

Chromatic figuration in phrase/section endings

Another chromatic figuration Rachmaninoff preferred in endings of a phrase or piece is the ephemeral effect of chromatic sequences in the upper register, often utilizing the main

motive of the Prelude to create compelling gesture. The figuration in measures 35 to 36 of the Prelude in C major imitates the main motive and transforms into cross-hand motion in thirds.

Example 30. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C major Op.32 No.1 mm.35-36



Similar figuration elaborates the bridge passage in measures 35 to 36 of the Prelude in A minor, Op.32 No.8. The figuration is derived from the main motive of the piece, with descending thirds and octaves. The left-hand chromatic pattern descending in thirds brings the piece back to the main theme. The gesture is rhythmically grouped in threes, twos, then ones, also decreasing in dynamics.

Example 31. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in A minor Op.32 No.8, mm.35-37



The final example of this type can be found in the ending gesture of the Prelude in G-sharp minor Op.32 No.12, measures 47 to 48. Here again, the main melody is adopted with reinforcements of D sharp, dominant of G sharp, which oscillate between the chromatic ascending line. The gesture in a single measure brings the piece to closure, as if evaporating into thin air.

Example 32. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in G-sharp minor Op.32 No.12, mm.47-48



Signature progression in phrasing

Scriabin

Scriabin employs three different types of distinctive chord progression in his Twenty-Four Preludes. The first type is avoiding tonic until the end of the phrase or piece. Scriabin starts the phrase with ambiguous harmony, progressing towards the clear tonic. The length of the process to reach the tonic varies from piece to piece. The Prelude No.2 in A minor features the abovementioned technique from the beginning of the piece. The first phrase starts with an unstable bass motion that briefly lands on the first inversion of a minor chord. The bass then progresses into the French augmented sixth chord in the second measure. The clear arrival of the tonic occurs at the third beat of m.4.

Example 33. Scriabin, Prelude No.2 in A minor, mm.1-6



Also, the Prelude No.18 in F minor utilizes a similar method of masking the clear arrival of the tonic. The first period of the piece avoids the tonic triad until measure 16, the end of the period. Harmonically, F minor is suggested throughout the period, but the augmented chords and non-tonic harmonizations of the pitch F successfully delay the stableness of a home key. Furthermore, the first phrase ends on a secondary dominant V/V in measure 8 to escape from the expected arrival.

Example 34 Scriabin, Prelude No.18 in F minor, mm.1-16

The musical score for Scriabin's Prelude No. 18 in F minor, measures 1-16, is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a treble and bass staff. The key signature is F minor (three flats) and the time signature is 2/4. The first system (measures 1-5) shows the initial chords and a secondary dominant in measure 8. The second system (measures 6-10) includes a 'dim.' marking. The third system (measures 11-15) includes 'cresc.' and 'ff rubato' markings. The fourth system (measures 16-16) includes another 'dim.' marking and a 'p' marking at the end.

No.20 in C minor avoids the tonic most impressively. The whole piece is composed as if it were in F minor, and C minor functions as the tonic only in the final plagal cadence. The first phrase starts with the first inversion of the sub-dominant and ends with V7 of G minor. The harmonic progression of the first phrase is iv – V/V. The second phrase starts in F minor

again and moves to V/iv in m.8. After the second phrase, the new section brings back the illusory F minor. The reprise occurs on the dominant of C minor, which comes closest to achieving a cadence in C minor. However, reinterpreting C as the root of a dominant ninth chord of F minor avoids the cadence in measure 17. Finally, after the long wandering of subdominant and dominant, the first clear C minor tonic triad appears in m.21, only at the second-to-last measure of the piece. Despite the delay, the cadential progression is given as a plagal cadence, rather than as the perfect authentic cadence.

Example 35. Scriabin, Prelude No.20 in C minor

The second characteristic of Scriabin's harmonic progression exhibited in the Preludes is transposition to the sub-dominant. Generally, Scriabin modulates to the sub-dominant degree when the main phrase or statement is repeated. When the modulation takes place, it is done suddenly, without anticipated progression. The most distinctive examples of this characteristic can be found in No.1 in C major, No.3 in G major, No.10 in C-sharp minor, and No.21 in B-flat major.

Example 36. No.1 in C major mm.1-4, No.3 in G major mm.20-23, No.10 in C-sharp minor mm.5-8, and No.21 in B-flat major mm.5-8

No. 1

Vivace ♩ = 63-76 Op.11 Nr.1

No. 3

cresc.

No.10

pp mf pp rit.

No. 21

a tempo (rit.)

Scriabin favored constant tension between dominant and tonic throughout the Preludes. The perpetual conflict of dominant versus tonic is a common device that Scriabin used in his early period to achieve a weakening of the strong tonal center. The technique becomes a signature characteristic of his later works. The Prelude No.3 in G major and No.5 in D major employed this relationship of tonic and dominant. The G major Prelude oscillates between tonic and dominant consistently, blurring the tonal center and accumulating an unsettling wave motion.

The main statement of No.5 in D major opens with the dominant progressing through V-IV-(vi)-V-I to tonic. There is a constant pull between tonic and dominant distributed in both voices of treble and bass. The main statement is repeated three more times while maintaining the same chord progression. As it repeats, elaborations on the melody and the ostinato accompaniment figure occur throughout the piece. As the piece progresses towards its end, the tonal center is clearly identified and the tension built from the struggle between dominant and tonic dissolves.

Rachmaninoff

Other than the aforementioned chromatic gestures that Rachmaninoff employed throughout the Preludes, there are two frequently used harmonic progressions: first is the harmonic progression to the third above the tonic, paired as either I – iii or i – III, and second is the harmonic sequence built up of seconds and thirds. The first type is prominent in Op.23 Nos.2, 3, 4, 6, and 9, as well as Op.32 Nos. 5, 7, and 12, often gliding to the median chord from the tonic or directly moving to its parallel major or minor. The second type is well-illustrated in Op.3 No.2; Op.23 Nos.1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8; and Op.32 Nos.1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 13. It is commonly used to color melodic lines or embellish melodies as an accompaniment figure.

Rachmaninoff frequently employed a harmonic progression from the tonic to median in both combinations of major-minor and minor-major. The progression is often used to reinforce the triadic outline of the theme, and the formula is repeated throughout the prelude. In contrast to Scriabin's avoidance of traditional progressions emphasizing tonic, Rachmaninoff strived to establish strong tonalities.

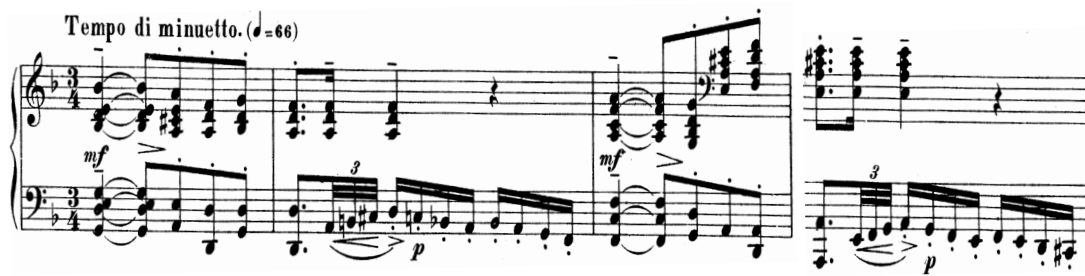
The first example of I – iii progression can be found in the Prelude in B-flat major, Op.23 No.2. The first instance of this progression occurs in measures 6 to 7, and it reappears in measures 14-15, 20-21, 41-42, and 49-50. By repeating the tonic-median harmonic progression as the theme evolves in same pattern, the Prelude achieves a sense of unity.

Example 37. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in B-flat major, Op.23 No.2, mm.5-7



The next example to introduce is the Prelude in D minor, Op.23, No.3. In this Prelude, Rachmaninoff embellishes the tonic-median progression with seventh chords. The main theme starts with an ii6/5 chord on the first measure, which progresses to tonic in measure 2. The same figuration is restated in III at measure 3, advancing to the dominant at measure 4. However, when the main theme is repeated, the III chord is altered in measures 11, 35, and 47. To smooth out the transition, the embellishing seventh chords replace the III chord.

Example 38. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in D minor Op.23, No.3, mm.1-4



Another trademark of Rachmaninoff's harmonic progression is the sequence of seconds and thirds. The combination of seconds and thirds forms a pattern and often occurs as an embellishment to the melodic lines or accompaniment figure. The first Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op.3 No.2, introduces a second-third sequence over the tonic pedal in measures 6 to 7.

Example 39. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C-sharp minor Op.3 No.2 mm.6-7



The pattern can be varied and reiterated in different formations. For example, the Prelude in B-flat minor, Op.32 No.2, employs minor-seconds and minor-thirds in dotted rhythm to create a wave-like flow in melody. The Prelude in A minor, Op.32 No.8, uses a second-third sequence as an accompaniment figure, which is derived from the main motive of the piece. In the Prelude in A major, Op.32 No.9, the sequence is transformed into chords in second and third intervals. The pattern consistently prevails in the middle voice as part of a harmonic basis. It embellishes the main harmonic progression given by the octaves in bass.

The final example is the Prelude in B major, Op.32 No.11. Here, the interval sequence of seconds and thirds forms the main melody.

Example 40. Rachmaninoff, Prelude, Op.32 No.2 mm.9-13, No.8 mm.6-7, 12-13, No.9 mm.1-2, and No.11 mm.1-6

Op.32 No.2, mm.9-13

Musical score for Rachmaninoff, Op.32 No.2, mm.9-13. The score is in B-flat major (two flats) and 9/8 time. It features a piano (p) dynamic and a tempo marking of "Tempo I." The music consists of two staves, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand providing harmonic support. The key signature is B-flat major, and the time signature is 9/8. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, and *mf*, and a tempo marking of "Tempo I."

Op.32 No.8, mm.6-7

Musical score for Rachmaninoff, Op.32 No.8, mm.6-7. The score is in B major (no sharps or flats) and 2/4 time. It features a piano (p) dynamic. The music consists of two staves, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand providing harmonic support. The key signature is B major, and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and fingering numbers 5, 4, 5, 4, 4, 4, 3.

mm.12-13

Musical score for Rachmaninoff, Op.32 No.8, mm.12-13. The score is in B major (no sharps or flats) and 2/4 time. It features a piano (p) dynamic and a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking. The music consists of two staves, with the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand providing harmonic support. The key signature is B major, and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *cresc.*, and a *dim.* marking at the end.

Op.32 No.9, mm.1-2

Musical score for Op.32 No.9, mm.1-2. The score is in 3/8 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked "Allegro moderato." The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic in the bass clef, followed by a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in the treble clef. The score includes markings for mezzo-dolce (*m.d.*) and crescendo (*cresc.*). The notation features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some chords and slurs.

Op.32 No.11 mm.1-6

Musical score for Op.32 No.11 mm.1-6. The score is in 3/8 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The notation consists of chords and single notes, with slurs and accents. The bass clef contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment, while the treble clef features more complex chordal textures.

Structure

Economic form of binary and ternary

Although the genre of the prelude is free in its form, both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff favored the ternary form. In Scriabin's Op.11, sixteen out of twenty-four Preludes take the ternary form. Others use adjusted binary form with uneven repetitions of different sections. Most of the Preludes encompass an emphatic reprise and immediate repetition of the first phrase.

Rachmaninoff used ternary form extensively as well. Fourteen out of twenty-four Preludes were written in ternary form, and three other Preludes were written as combinations of variation form and ternary form. Variation form was used in four of the Preludes; the three remaining Preludes take a binary or irregular form.

In order to be expressive and effective in such economical forms, both composers took great care with the phrase structure and overall balance of each Prelude. Furthermore, maintaining a single theme while varying the harmony, rhythm, and melodic gestures required precise plans for structure and refined timing techniques.

Rachmaninoff once stated, "When I write a small piece for piano I am entirely at the mercy of my theme, which has to be expressed briefly and precisely. Many places in my concertos and symphonies were written in one breath, whereas each one of my small pieces required special care and hard work... The most difficult problem confronting every creative artist even today is how to be brief and clear."²⁷

The formal structures of each composer's Twenty-Four Preludes can be categorized as follows:

²⁷ Antipov, 15.

Table 4. Formal structures used in Scriabin's Op.11

Ternary Form	A(a-a') – B(b) – A'(a'') (- Coda) A – A' – A'' A – A' – B A – B – C	Nos.1,2,6,7,16,18,19,20,24 Nos.3,5,8,14 No.9 Nos.11,12
Rounded Binary Form	A(a-a') – B(b-a'') (- Coda) A – BA' A – BA – BA' (- Coda)	Nos.10,15 No.13 No.23
Binary Form	A – A' (- Coda) A(a) – B(b-b') A(a-a'-b) – B(a-a'-b)	Nos.4,22 No.17 No.21

Table 5. Formal structures used in Rachmaninoff's Op.3 No.2, Op.23, and Op.32

Ternary form	A – B – A' – Coda	Op.3 No.2, Op.23 Nos.2,3,5,7,8,10 Op.32 Nos.1,2,3,5,10,12,13
Variation form	Theme – variations	Op.23 Nos.4,6, Op.32 Nos.7,8
Variation in Ternary	A – B – A - (Coda)	Op.23 No.1, Op.32 Nos.4,9
Other forms	ABAB Irregular ABABA	Op.23 No.9 Op.32 No.6 Op.32 No.11

Asymmetry within symmetry in Scriabin

Within the strict boundaries of binary/ternary outer form, Scriabin engages various irregular structures of phrase, meter, and rhythmic gesture. There is a constant pull between regularities and irregularities in his Preludes. Scriabin always found a way to avoid traditional clichés in phrase structure and rhythm: notes in groups of five were one of his favorite ways to deter from conventional regularity. Alternation of meter was another method he used to achieve the atmosphere of unstableness or mysteriousness. Furthermore, Scriabin often varied the number of beats in a measure spontaneously or used an irregular number of measures in a phrase to successfully achieve an astounding effect.

Irregular groupings of notes

Irregular groupings of notes appear from the very beginning of Op.11. In the C-major Prelude, the basic motive consists of five eighth-notes grouped in one, along with contrary arpeggiated motion. The motive in 2/2 meter starts with two eighth-notes out of five from the incomplete measure and cuts across the bar throughout.

Also, within the traditional ternary form of ABA', the number of measures in the phrase is irregular: Phrase A consists of a 2+2+4 unit, B has 2+2+2+4, and A' has 2+2+2+1. There are four groups of quintuplet figure in each phrase. However, phrase B is extended with the series of chromatic ascending bass building up to the climax in measure 18. The last phrase is shortened with a brief coda.

Example 41. Scriabin, Prelude in C major, Op.11 No.1, m.15-25

The image displays a musical score for Scriabin's Prelude in C major, Op.11 No.1, measures 15-25. It is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 15-18) features a quintuplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a chromatic ascending bass line in the left hand. The second system (measures 19-25) continues the quintuplet and chromatic bass line, ending with a brief coda. Dynamics include 'ff' and 'accelerando'.

Groupings of five also appear in the Prelude No.14 in E-flat minor. The time signature is 15/8, in three groups of five eighth-notes starting with an eighth-note upbeat in incomplete measure. The grouping of the quintuplet is usually 3+2 throughout the piece, except for the octaves in sforzando at measures 2, 4, 10, and 12. These octaves in sforzando disturb the

unstable pulse of the quintuplet, stirring the regularity barely formed by the accented downbeats of the bass.

Example 42. Scriabin, Prelude in E-flat minor, Op.11 No.14 m.1-5

The musical score for Example 42 consists of three systems of music. The first system shows measures 1 and 2, with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second system shows measures 3 and 4, with dynamic markings of *sf sf*. The third system shows measures 5 and 6, with a *cresc.* marking. The score is in E-flat minor, 8/8 time, and features a complex, irregular rhythmic pattern. The right hand plays a melody with various rhythmic subdivisions, while the left hand provides a bass line with accented downbeats.

The final example of irregular groupings of notes in Scriabin's Preludes is well displayed in the Prelude in E-flat major, No.19. The E-flat major prelude is especially significant within the set due to its unconventional rhythmic complexity and harmonic language. In terms of irregular rhythms, the bass accompaniment constantly crosses the bar line in a wave-like pattern. The two groups of ascending quintuplet arpeggios form the basic foundation for this Prelude. On top of the fluctuating bass line, the right-hand melody sits unstably on top, while varying in its rhythmic subdivisions: it features duplets, triplets, and quintuplets.

In addition to having irregular groupings of notes, the Prelude No.19 is the only one in Op.11 to indicate key signatures for sections in a different key – the A-major key signature in measures 13 to 15. The unconventional harmonies employed in the Prelude affect the phrase structure of the piece. Despite the overall traditional form in ternary, A (m.1-8) – B

(m.9-24) – A' (m.25-32) – Coda, the length of each section is unbalanced, with special emphasis in the B section where most of the innovative harmonies occur. Section A can be divided into 2+2+2+1+1, depending on the melodic line, and harmonic wandering begins as early as measure 5. The B section is rather regular in its division of phrase structures, 2+2+2+1+1+4+4. However, the descending chromatic progression in bass is a decisive factor that brings with it irregularity in structure: E ♭ (m.9-10) - E ♭ ♭ (m.11) - D ♭ (m.12) - C♯ (m.13-14) – C (m.15) - C ♭ (m.16) - B ♭ (m.17~).

Example 43. Scriabin, Prelude in E-flat major Op.11 No.19, m. 8-17

Alternations of meter

Alternations of meter occur in three of the Preludes: the Prelude in B-flat minor, No.16; the Prelude in B-flat Major, No.21; and the Prelude in A minor, No.24. The B-flat minor Prelude employs a duple meter, which alternates between 5/8 and 4/8. However, the order of alternating meter varies within the phrases.

Table 6. Number of beats in each section of the Prelude in B-flat minor, Op.11 No.16

A (m.1-16)	•a - 54545554 •a' - 54545554
B (m.17-32)	•b - 55545554 •b - 55545555
A' (m.33-48)	•a - 54545554 •extension - 54545454
Coda (m.49-53)	•55544

As seen above, the B-flat minor Prelude has a balanced, traditional ternary form (each section lasts for sixteen measures) with a coda. A regular pattern is achieved by the persistent ostinato in alto and bass octaves apart, along with the melodic line presenting repeated notes with a dotted rhythm, also in octaves. However, Scriabin structures the sections with different phrase lengths: the A section includes two phrases (each in 2+2+1+1+2) in sentence form, the B section is comprised of two short phrases (4+4+2+2) and a bridge segment (4), and A' returns heroically to the two eight-measure phrases with a coda. Also, the bridge segment from measures 29 to 32 displays Scriabin's subtle implantation of irregular groupings of eighth notes: 3-2-3-2-3-3-3, adding a syncopated notion to disturb the pattern.

Example 43. Scriabin, Prelude in B-flat minor Op.11 No.16 m.25-35

The musical score shows two systems of music. The first system (measures 25-30) features a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note ostinato in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with repeated notes and dotted rhythms. Dynamics include 'cresc.' and 'mf'. The second system (measures 31-35) continues the accompaniment and melodic line, ending with 'ff' and 'con sord.'.

The last prelude of the set, Prelude in D minor, No.24, is another example that employs alternating meters. The alternation of meters is between 6/8/ and 5/8, and as in No.16, variants occur at the end of phrases: at measures 8, 16, 24, 26, and 34-36. The D minor prelude is also in the ternary form of A (m.1-16) – B (m.17-26) – A' (m.27-37). Within this set ternary form, the length of phrases differs by subdivision. The A section divides into two eight-measure phrases, each composed of a 6+2 unit. The B section, however, is where the phrase subdivision becomes irregular. The barely ten-measure-long section is comprised of 2+2+2+1+1+1+1 groupings. The return of the A' section is the climax of the piece, and the phrase structure extends to 6+5 rather than 6+2. The last five measures restore harmony back to its original key of D minor (from F major – G minor), set rhythmic fluctuation at 6/8, and end with a powerful PAC in triple forte.

Example 44. Scriabin, Prelude in D minor, Op.11 No.24 m.17-28

Expressive structure in Rachmaninoff

For Rachmaninoff, the importance of melody overrides harmony or form. A simple melody/motive becomes into lengthy and complex work, and the development of melody is a decisive factor in the overall form of the piece. The prelude's structural emphasis is in its expressive drama and climatic point. The main melody (or simple motive) departs in bare format and then continues to develop through extensions and subtractions. After the added intensity reaches its highest tension, the climax (or the high point) is delivered with structural logic and conviction. One reviewer of Rachmaninoff's compositional style is quoted in the biography by Bertensson and Leyda:

“[Rachmaninoff] has the composer's instinct for what is important in a structure: he seems to see the end in the beginning and to lay out his proportions accordingly. Yet we never get the effect of a merely studied interpretation; the sense of form is quick and instinctive with Rachmaninoff.”²⁸

Rachmaninoff's preferred expressive structure, generally involving introduction – development – climax – conclusion, best suits the ternary form, which is the most frequently employed form in his Preludes. However, analyzing each phrase structure without contemplating the melody will result in a rather ambiguous analysis that does not illustrate the complete picture. The purpose of form is different for Rachmaninoff, and thus, criticisms of Rachmaninoff's music as “formless” are inaccurate. For Rachmaninoff, the main purpose of form is to serve the expressivity of the music, specifically in using melody to achieve dramatic structure.

There are three main factors to take into account when determining phrase structure and overall form: first, melody augmentation – long, flowing lines; second, melody reduction

²⁸ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff: a Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 260.

– short figuration, usually intertwined with harmonic motion; and lastly, the “high point” – the climax or goal of the piece.

The first concept to explore is expanded melody. Augmentation of a melody starts with a simple line, independent from other voices. The melody then transforms by involving other voices, varying the length and register. As the piece develops, the initial melodic line integrates into the dramatic scheme of the piece, generally intensified and amplified with doubling octaves or doubling lines. Rachmaninoff’s Preludes in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1, and in G major, Op.32 No.5, best illustrate the expansion of melody in this manner.

Example 45. Preludes in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1; G major, Op.32 No.5; and F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1 m.1-8

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece in F-sharp minor, Op. 23 No. 1, measures 1 through 8. The score is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and is divided into four systems, each consisting of two staves. The tempo is marked "Largo" with a quarter note equal to 58 (♩ = 58). The key signature is F-sharp minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a *pp* dynamic. The second system features a *mf* dynamic. The third system includes a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The fourth system concludes with a *mf* dynamic. The music consists of a series of chords and arpeggiated figures, characteristic of the style of the composer.

G major Op.32 No.5, m.1-8

Moderato.

p *dolce*

p *pp* *leggiero*

pp *dim.*

The perspective is well described in the liner notes written by Alexander Ivashkin.

Very often Rachmaninoff's preludes are based on his almost endless melodic lines (in the Preludes in F sharp minor and E flat major in particular) with which the composer creates a 'soaring effect' – the melody flowing with no interruption, no dropping, and no stops. He often uses one particularly characteristic element or mood for an entire prelude, creating an impression of improvisation unconstrained by any pre-composed, rational form. It is indeed hard to define the exact structure of the preludes; in most, a steady and gradual increase in dynamics and expression, like a rising wave (or two waves), augments the density of texture.²⁹

²⁹ Alexander Ivashkin. Liner Notes, *Rachmaninov: Complete Piano Preludes*, Rustem Hayroudinoff (piano), Chandos CHAN10107, 2003, compact disc.

The second common melodic structure pattern is reduction/fragmentation. In this pattern, the length of the melody is short and is often intertwined with the harmonic motion. While developing, the melodic fragment varies in length and creates an irregular number of beats in each phrase. Two Preludes that well illustrate the point are the Prelude in B-flat minor, Op.32 No.2 and the Prelude in B minor, Op.32 No.10.

Example 46. Prelude in B-flat minor, Op.32 No.2 and Prelude in B minor, Op.32 No.10

B-flat minor, Op.32 No.2, m.1-10

The musical score for the first 10 measures of the Prelude in B-flat minor, Op.32 No.2, is presented in four systems. The key signature is B-flat minor (three flats) and the time signature is 9/8. The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *dolce* marking. The second system (measures 5-7) features a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The third system (measures 8-9) is marked *un poco più mosso* and *rit.* (ritardando), with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The fourth system (measures 10) is marked *Tempo I.* and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes various melodic fragments and harmonic textures characteristic of the piece.

B minor Op.32 No.10, m.1-18

Lento.

p

mf

pp

m.d.

dim.

m.g.

poco più mosso

pesante

A. 9624 G.

One of Rachmaninoff's credited biographers, Geoffrey Norris, has supported the view of preludes developing from a small seed of melody or motivic element. He states, "Varied though these pieces are, they all have a common characteristic in that they show Rachmaninoff's ability to crystallize perfectly a particular mood of sentiment: each prelude


grows from a tiny melodic or rhythmic fragment into a taut, powerfully evocative miniature. They are, in effect, small tone poems.”³⁰

The most important aspect in determining the structure of Rachmaninoff’s music is the dramatic climax, or ‘high point’. Rachmaninoff claimed that successful performance relies on the proper deliberation of climax. As Bertensson and Leyda write,

The whole mass of sounds must be so measured, the depth and power of each sound must be given with such purity and gradation that this peak point is achieved with an appearance of the greatest naturalness, though actually its accomplishment is the highest art. This moment must arrive with the sound and sparkle of a ribbon snapped at the end of the race – it must seem liberation from the last material obstacle, the last barrier between truth and its expression. The composition itself determines this culmination; the peak point may come at its end or in the middle, it may be loud or soft, yet the musician must always be able to approach it with sure calculation, absolute exactitude, for if it slips by the whole structure crumbles, the work goes soft and fuzzy, and cannot convey to the listener what must be conveyed.³¹

The peak point prevails in all of the Preludes, as Rachmaninoff emphasized its importance consistently. It may be soft or loud, once or multiple, in various positions. According to a thesis by Jason Stell, Rachmaninoff utilizes the ‘high point’ in the following method:

Rachmaninov recognized that a work’s inner “compositional dynamic” – as opposed to external conventions of form – determines the Point’s location (middle or end) and treatment (loud or soft). The shape of dramatic action suggested by Rachmaninov’s Point-based aesthetic is a gesture: an arch of continuous motion toward the highpoint and subsequent relaxation. By employing a gestural type as a structural model, Rachmaninov gives each composition a palpable dramatic design in addition to logic and continuity.³²

There is a hierarchy to these climaxes, in other words, and the point usually presents itself in the last third or quarter. The hierarchy of peak points can be proven by the presence of dynamic intensification throughout every piece, usually represented as a curved line of the following shape:  However, the most important factor determining the placement of the highpoint is the dramatic tension created by opposing components of preceding material.

³⁰ Geoffrey Norris, *The Master Musicians Series: Rakhmaninov* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1976), 42.

³¹ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, 195.

³² Jason T. Stell, “Rachmaninov’s Expressive Strategies in Selected Piano Preludes: Highpoints, Dramatic models, and Dynamic Curves” (MM Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1999), 14.

In the preface to the manuscript of Rachmaninoff's Preludes, Antipov compares the melodic structure of preludes by Scriabin and Rachmaninoff,

The musical idea in them <Prelude> comes, however, in the shape of an embryo which only from time to time unfolds into a magnificent flower (as, for instance, in the D-flat major Prelude of Rachmaninoff), but for the most part remains a half blossoming but nevertheless charming bud – sometimes even especially so. This is obviously how Scriabin looks at the matter: His Preludes are almost always exactly such buds or even just petals. Rachmaninoff's Preludes are of a different kind. For the most part they incline towards solid, often polyphonic working, to broad construction, and even to the precisely executed contrast of sections independent in musical content; in a word, as far as form is concerned, they approach Chopin's exceptions like the D-flat major Prelude.³³

Through examining each composer's compositional structure, one can better understand the difference in their esthetics. The Preludes of Scriabin aim to grasp the moment and its colors in concise and effective composition, while the Preludes of Rachmaninoff aim to express drama, developing the melody/motive to reach its culmination.

³³ Antipov, 18

Incorporation of other genres and styles

Both Rachmaninoff and Scriabin frequently employed various genres or compositional styles in their Preludes. Many genres were adopted from Chopin's oeuvre, such as etude, mazurka, and nocturne. Also, diverse compositional styles, such as variation, counterpoint, and polyphony, were often used, especially in Rachmaninoff's Preludes, to serve the expressive musical drama. Below is a survey of genres and styles frequently used by both composers in their Preludes.

Etudes

Table 7. Preludes in the style of the Etude

Scriabin	No.6 in B minor No.11 in B major No.14 in B-flat minor No.18 in F minor No.24 in D minor	Recollection of Chopin's F-minor Etude Resembles Liszt's Etude in F minor
Rachmaninoff	Op.23 No.6 Eb minor Op.23 No.7 in C minor Op.23 No.8 Ab major Op.23 No.9 in Eb major Op.32 No.1 C major Op.32 No.6 F minor	Resembles Liszt's "Feux Follets" Recollection of Chopin's Etude Op.10 No.12 Pattern is derived from Chopin's Op.10 No.7 Resembles Chopin's Etude Op.25 No.6

Dance/Nocturne/March/Barcarolle

Table 8. Preludes in the style of Dance, Nocturne, March and others

Scriabin	Op.11 No.2 in A minor	Waltz/Mazurka
	Op.11 No.5 in D major	Nocturne
	Op.11 No.7 in A major	Barcarolle
	Op.11 No.8 in F# minor	Nocturne with Etude elements
	Op.11 No.9 in E major	Nocturne/Mazurka
	Op.11 No.10 in C# minor	Waltz/Barcarolle
	Op.11 No.13 in Gb major	Nocturne
	Op.11 No.16 in Bb minor	Resembles Chopin Sonata No.2 3 rd mvt. “Funeral March”
	Op.11 No.21 in Bb major	Nocturne
	Op.11 No.23 in F major	Mazurka
Rachmaninoff	Op.23 No.3 in D minor	Minuet, pace of a sarabande
	Op.23 No.4 in D major	Nocturne/Barcarolle
	Op.23 No.5 in g minor	March, with Russian Trepak
	Op.32 No.2 in Bb minor	Sciliana rhythm

Homophonic/Contrapuntal

Table 9. Preludes in the style of homophony and/or contrapuntal

Scriabin	Op.11 No.1 in C major	Chordal passages in solid or arpeggio format
	Op.11 No.8 in F# minor	
	Op.11 No.10 in C# minor	
	Op.11 No.12 in G# minor	

	Op.11 No.13 in Gb major Op.11 No.17 in Ab major Op.11 No.21 in Bb major	Melodic line with independent accompaniment
	Op.11 No.2 in A minor Op.11 No.4 in E minor Op.11 No.9 in E major Op.11 No.15 in Db major Op.11 No.22 in G minor	Duet with two more or less equally important melodies Inner parts of four-voice texture Inner four-part harmonic voices
Rachmaninoff	Op.32 No.5 in G major Op.23 No.2 in Bb major Op.23 No.5 in G minor Op.23 No.8 in Ab major Op.32 No.1 in C major Op.32 No.4 in E minor Op.32 No.9 in A major Op.32 No.11 in B major	Fairly simple homophony Rich homophony
	Op.23 No.3 in D minor Op.23 No.6 in Eb major Op.23 No.7 in C minor	Strict counterpoint
	Op.3 No.2 in C# minor Op.23 No.1 in F# minor Op.23 No.4 in D major Op.23 No.10 in Gb major Op.32 No.3 in E major Op.32 No.6 in F minor Op.32 No.8 in A minor Op.32 No.10 in B minor	Combination of homophonic and contrapuntal styles Resembles “Lilacs” op.21 no.5

	Op.32 No.12 in G# minor	
	Op.32 No.13 in Db major	Resembles “No Prophet I” op.21 no.11

Depiction of nature and the seasons

Table 10. Preludes depicting nature and the seasons

Scriabin	Op.11 No.4 in E minor	Depiction of utopia
	Op.11 No.19 in Eb major	Depiction of Heidelberg Castle and the torrent stream rocking the castle
	Op.11 No.24 in D minor	
	Op.11 No.17 in Ab major	Souvenirs of holiday – Vitznau, Switzerland tour of 1895
Op.11 No.18 in F minor		
Op.11 No.23 in F major		
Rachmaninoff	Op.3 No.2 in C# minor	Church-bell-like sonorities
	Op.23 No.7 in C minor	Winter snowstorm
	Op.32 No.3 in E major	Resemblance of “Easter Day” from two piano suite
	Op.32 No.5 in G major	
	Op.32 No.10 in B minor	Autumn

Performance Practice

Performers often face various challenges when learning the Preludes of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. Being great pianists themselves, both composers wrote preludes with vigorous technical and musical demands. Each Prelude comes with its own set of challenges, but there are few underlying difficulties that every performer has to overcome. First is the coordination of hands: the preludes often require performers to adjust fingerings and re-distribute melodic lines to both hands. Wide leaps and chords that require the division of hands are also techniques frequently employed by both composers.

Second is pedal mastery. Both composers had a complete understanding of the pedal and of how to use its range to accomplish the desired sonority. Replicating the pallet of sound colors that both composers were able to achieve as pianists presents a vital task for all performers. Despite the difficulty of achieving such sophisticated pedal use, there are only few pedal markings written in the scores. Both composers carefully notate the use of damper pedal with reserve, and it is expected of performers to masterfully use the pedal according to differences in instrument and acoustics.

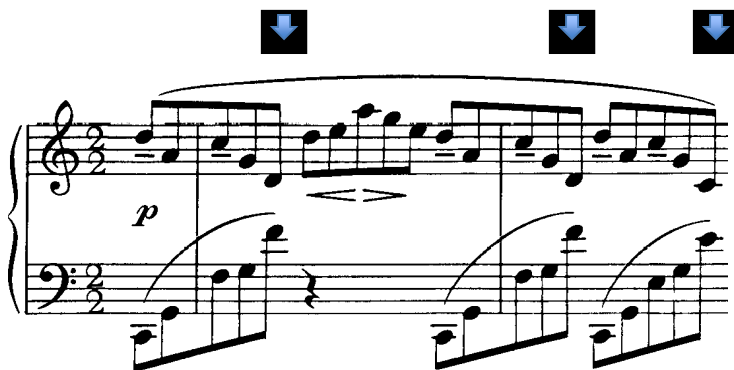
The last challenge to point out is the voicing of the chords and melodic lines. The chord texture of many of the Preludes is immensely thick. This is especially true of Rachmaninoff's Preludes; without properly balanced voicing the audience is at a loss. The required sophistication of voicing is more difficult to achieve when dealing with extremes of dynamics. In addition, achieving masterful voicing of accompaniment underneath the melody draws out infinite possibilities for sonority within the Preludes.

Hand coordination

Scriabin and Rachmaninoff took different approaches when dividing hands for different voices. Scriabin frequently uses voice crossover that requires careful distribution of hands, while Rachmaninoff often employs Lisztian three-hand technique or a sequence that demands the alternation of hands at fixed intervals. There are several examples in Scriabin's Twenty-Four Preludes that call for rearrangement of the hands and fingerings: C major Op.11 No.1, A major Op.11 No.7, D-flat major Op.11 No.15, and D minor Op.11 No.24 offer few options for hand distribution.

In Scriabin's Prelude in C major Op.11 No.1, the end of the main motive in the quintuplet figure is written to require overlapping fingerings, exchanging the hand position. Since the exchange of hands occurs at the thumb, it is difficult to end the quintuplet motive without adding an undesired accent. Here, a simple solution can be achieved by utilizing the left-hand thumb and index finger to play both ending notes. For example, when playing the quintuplet motive in contrasting motion in the first four measures, performers can use their left hand to play C-G-F-G-D/F together instead of crossing their thumbs over each other. With such alternation, phrasing can be smooth and natural.

Example 47. Scriabin, Prelude in C major, Op.11 No.1 mm.1-3



The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of Scriabin's Prelude in C major, Op.11 No.1. The score is in 2/2 time and features a quintuplet figure in the right hand. Three blue arrows point to the notes in the quintuplet that require overlapping fingerings. The left hand plays a bass line with a similar rhythmic pattern. The score is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

A major prelude, the Prelude Op.11 No.7, is technically strenuous to perform as written. The accompaniment figure underneath the top melody is in the style of polyphony, and the leaps in both the middle voice and bass frequently evade the range of each voice. The last note of the five-note figure in the middle voice requires substitution by the left hand. For example, when taken by the left hand, the middle voice—E in measure 1 and F sharp in measure 3—eases difficulties of hand coordination, since it is same repeated note as the preceding one in the bass.

Example 48. Scriabin, Prelude in A major, Op.11 No.7 mm.1-4

Allegro assai M.M. ♩=152

pp *cresc.* *dim.* *p*

The simple D-flat major, No.15, requires utmost control over the accompaniment figuration in thirds. The performer can choose whether to divide his or her hands for the first eight measures. The purpose of hand division in this Prelude is to voice the two lines of accompaniment independently with continuous flow. However, as the melody enters in measure 9, the accompaniment figure is solely dependent on the left hand. Maintaining the

same delicate voicing in a single hand in addition to the main melody requires masterful control on the part of the pianist.

Example 49. Scriabin, Prelude in D-flat major, Op.11 No.15, mm.1-9

The musical score for Example 49 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1-4, and the second system covers measures 5-9. The key signature is D-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is common time. The score is written for piano. The first system shows the left hand playing a series of chords and the right hand playing a melodic line. The second system shows the left hand playing a series of chords and the right hand playing a melodic line. Dynamics include *pp*, *cresc.*, *dim.*, *mf*, and *pp*.

The final prelude of the cycle, Op.11 No.24, presents a similar case to the A-major prelude. The range of voice overlaps, and the bass frequently intervenes with right-hand chords. For example, in measures 4, 6, 12, and 14, placement of the first note in the left hand (the top note at the down-beat) is between the chords on the right hand. The invading note completes the chord with the right hand, yet, because that bass line serves the function of sub-melody, it has to be heard separately from the chords. Hence, dividing hands as it is written and not taking the note with the right hand as part of the chord accomplishes clear voicing of the sub-melody.

Example 50. Scriabin, Prelude in D minor, Op.11 No.24, mm.1-8



As mentioned earlier, the challenges to hand coordination posed by Rachmaninoff's Twenty-Four Preludes are different than those associated with Scriabin's Twenty-Four Preludes. In Rachmaninoff, hand division is inevitable due to the difficult pianistic techniques he favors, and the division is mostly clear as the stems of the notes are written in opposite directions. Also, he separates the notes that require hand division into different staves, although the line continues in the same pattern. Due to his frequent employment of thick chordal texture and rapid figuration, exact fingerings and efficient hand coordination are prerequisites for performance.

The first example to examine is the first Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op.3 No.2. In measures 35 to 42, the sequence shows how Rachmaninoff employs a long descending line with alternating hand coordination. It is written out in different registers, with stems going in opposite directions but connected in groups of three. By distributing the hands in alternating motions, Rachmaninoff achieves the accurate accentuation of triplets in a virtuosic descending voice line.

Example 51. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op.3 No.2, mm.35-44

In the F-sharp minor Prelude, Op.23 No.1, the right-hand melody leaps over the bass line frequently. The soprano melody is answered by the bass melody, which occurs in a register lower than the prevailing left-hand accompaniment. From measures 14 to 23 and 35 to 36, the performer has to challenge his or herself to accurately and rapidly jump over the left hand without disturbing the accompaniment figure. The intensified leaps in measures 20 to 23, especially, require agile hands.

Example 52. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.1, mm.13-22

Like Scriabin's work, Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op.23 No.10 displays a range overlap between the bass and tenor voices. The notes in the bass melodic line frequently become part

of the accompanying right-hand chords. However, Rachmaninoff distinguishes the bass separately with the left hand by placing the bass melody on a downbeat with clear markings of slurs starting on the overlapping note. In measures 20 to 44, slurs articulate the bass melody, and the leaping figure often causes crossover of the hands at the third beat of every measure.

Example 53. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in F-sharp minor, Op.23 No.10, mm.17-35

The best example of interlocking hands, a technique that Rachmaninoff frequently used for virtuosic passages, is presented in the Prelude Op.32 No.1. In measures 35 to 36, a sequence of ascending lines in triplets is divided into both hands. The right hand starts with the two-note falling gesture, and the left hand intervenes by switching direction in thirds. The passage sounds more difficult than it actually is.

A similar technique is also evident in the Prelude Op.32 No.8. The sequence in measures 35 to 36 involves alternation of hands with a more complex left hand. The interlocking left hand outlines the descending chromatic scale motion in thirds and octaves. The interlocking hand technique highlights virtuosity and brilliant sound effect. The passage then brings the work to a sequence requiring left-hand cross-hand technique, leaping two-octaves over the arpeggio in the right hand.

Example 54. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in A minor, Op.32 No.8, mm.35-40

Pedal

Mastering the pedal is one of the most essential qualities for performing the Preludes. Performers are expected to control the pedal with their ears, depending on the instrument and the ambience of the hall. Despite the fact that both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff were famous for their use of the pedal, they did not write enough pedal markings into their scores. As Randlett has pointed out, pedal markings are rarely written out in the music because notating such extremely complex pedal workings is just not possible. He writes,

The utter dependence of Scriabin's sonorities on skilled and generous pedaling remains a fixed feature of his style throughout his life. But the use of damper pedal in late romantic piano music is so complex that it resists notation, and so basic to the style that its use is most

often taken for granted. Scriabin's scores contain relatively few pedal markings. Where the notations do appear, they are almost always cautionary in nature, instructing the performer not to release the bass note prematurely because of exaggerated respect for printed note-values and rests. The bass supports the entire sonority, and it must be sustained so that this sonority can accumulate above it.³⁴

Scriabin was highly acclaimed for his pedal use from an early age. There is a famous story about how his teacher, Safonov, praised Scriabin for his pedal control. The occasion is illustrated in the biography written by Calvocoressi and Abraham:

In January 1888, at sixteen, Scriabin entered the Moscow Conservatoire. ... His piano professor, V. I. Safonof, who succeeded Taneief as Director the following year, was delighted with him, above all with his pedaling. "He made the instrument breathe." "Sasha-like pedaling" was the highest praise Safonof could give. "Don't look at his hands; look at his feet", he told the class once when Scriabin was playing particularly well.³⁵

Further evidence attesting the importance of pedal use for Scriabin can be found in the biography written by Rudakova and Kandinsky. As a teacher, Scriabin instructed his students on various pedaling techniques, using his own terminology:

From 1898 to 1903, Scriabin was a professor of the piano class at the Moscow Conservatory. Teaching was a burden to him, but he established a reputation as a remarkable pedagogue. "All his remarks were very concise: 'One must extract sound from a wooden instrument like precious ore from the dry earth...'" Scriabin's instructions concerning the pedal, of which he was a virtuoso master, were exceptionally interesting... Alexander had his own special types of pedal: the 'vibrating,' the 'pin pedal,' the 'pedal mist.'³⁶

Nonetheless, Scriabin only wrote few pedal markings throughout the Preludes Op.11: at the end of the Prelude in C-sharp minor, No.10, and in the Prelude in B-flat minor, No.16. Between the two preludes with pedal markings, the pedal function in the C-sharp minor Prelude is to simply hold the bass. However, the B-flat minor Prelude has unconventional function due to its use of 'una corda.' Scriabin wrote 'con sordino' from the beginning of the Prelude and as the piece develops, the dynamic markings grow louder. At the climatic point

³⁴ Samuel Randlett, "The Nature and Development of Scriabin's Pianistic Vocabulary" (DM dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966), 11.

³⁵ M. D. Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), 456-57.

³⁶ Rudakova and Kandinsky, 72.

from measures 32 to 40, Scriabin writes ‘con sordino’ in the fortissimo section for six measures, and finally without the soft pedal for the last two measures of the climax. The use of the soft pedal in the loudest dynamic aims for contrasting sonority, and it highlights the whole passage in fortissimo with two different sound qualities.

Example 55. Scriabin, Prelude in B-flat minor, Op.11 No.16, mm.30-43

Like Scriabin, Rachmaninoff was a master of the pedal. Although his piano works often involve thick texture and complex counterpoint, Rachmaninoff was highly praised for his clear voicing and phrasing when performing his own works. In the Twenty-Four Preludes, Rachmaninoff utilized delicate pedaling techniques such as using the sostenuto pedal along with the damper pedal, flutter pedal (multiple pedal changes with a half or less-pressed pedal), and proper finger pedal.

Two of Rachmaninoff’s preludes require delicate use of the sostenuto pedal: the Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op.3 No.2, and the Prelude in C minor, Op.23 No.7. In the C-sharp

minor Prelude, the dominant pedal point that prevails throughout in half or whole notes must be held with the sostenuto pedal while carefully using the damper pedal. The damper pedal must be pressed after securing the sostenuto pedal, and effective use of both pedals on each of the accompaniment chords prevents blurring of the chord progression.

The C-minor Prelude poses a similar issue of long-held pedal tone. However, the etude-like rapid figuration, along with the alternation of hands, considerably complicates the pedaling. The C pedal point must be held with the sostenuto pedal, while the melodic figure in octaves of the right hand also needs to be held in measures 17 to 23 (also 53 to 62). At the same time, the persistent figuration must be clearly articulated. Hence, the performer has to prioritize voicing and the timing of the sostenuto pedal.

Example 56. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in C minor Op.23 No.7 mm.15-23

The image shows a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C minor, Op. 23 No. 7, measures 15-23. The score is written for piano and features a complex pedaling system. The right hand plays a melodic line in octaves, while the left hand plays a rapid, repetitive figuration. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'pp', 'p', 'm.g.', and 'm.d.', and various pedal markings including 'sostenuto' and 'damper'.

Another type of pedaling technique employed in Rachmaninoff's Preludes can be found in the Prelude in E-flat major, Op.23 No.6, and the Prelude in E major, Op.32 No.3. Both preludes consist of rapid left-hand figuration in sixteenth notes: the first in a scalar motion and then, later, in an arpeggio motion. Both Preludes have prevailing melody in long phrases. In order to connect the melody in legato while articulating the figuration in the left hand without blurring, shallow pedaling with exceedingly frequent change is needed. Also, careful fingering arrangements are required for longer-held notes. The use of the finger pedal will prevent the performer from abusing the pedal and blurring the voices.

Example 57. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in E major, Op.32 No.3 mm.31-39

The musical score for Rachmaninoff's Prelude in E major, Op.32 No.3, measures 31-39, is presented in three systems. The key signature is E major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written for piano, with the left hand in the bass clef and the right hand in the treble clef. The left hand features rapid sixteenth-note figuration, starting with a scalar motion and later moving to an arpeggio motion. The right hand has a more melodic line with long phrases. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *cresc.*, and *f*. Fingering is indicated by numbers 1-5 for both hands. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

Voicing and chords

Every performer inevitably faces challenges in voicing when studying the Twenty-Four Preludes of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. The Preludes often involve multiple voices in counter point, full chords in bass, interweaved melodies that force crossed hands, extreme dynamic contrasts in a demanding range, and complex rhythms with tempo fluctuations. In Scriabin, voicing issues appear when the range of voices overlaps or the bass has technically challenging leaps with loud dynamics. Also, when all voices interweave closely together, the performer has to pay special attention to the prioritization of voices.

To illustrate this point, I will provide three groups of preludes as examples. The first type has a fast tempo bass accompaniment in octaves often occupied by leaps and a wide range of notes. As the piece develops, extreme dynamic marking is employed towards the climax, reaching as far as triple forte. These can be found in the following preludes: the Prelude in B minor No.6, the Prelude in E-flat minor No.14, and the Prelude in F minor No.18.

In the B minor prelude, the technical difficulty is extended due to the melodic line reaching up in alternate hands. The accented notes in the left-hand thumb and right-hand thumb constitute an ascending melodic line and need to be heard clearly. The E-flat minor Prelude requires similar voicing to that of the B minor Prelude. The melodic figure starts with the leaping fourth in the left hand and then hands the melody to the right hand. In addition, the Prelude utilizes accentuation through dynamic markings. The accented notes in sforzando mark the highpoint of the swirling figuration and shift the rhythm in a quintuplet division. However, due to the fast tempo, the accented notes also serve to break the turbulent flow of octaves. In most of the chords, the top voice in the right hand has the melody and needs clear voicing as well as the top of the octaves in the left hand to thin out the bass. In the F minor

Prelude, the importance of clear voicing is intensified as the piece has an unsettling pulse in *agitato* throughout. The fluctuation of tempo with 2:3 rhythmic distributions in multiple voices will easily blur the voicing and chord progression. In addition, the main melody is ambiguous to define; it shifts the multiple voices from the left hand to right hand.

The second type to examine involves preludes with polyphonic writing, accompaniment in thick chords and wide leaps, and extreme dynamic markings. The Prelude No. 7 in A major, No.20 in F minor, and No.24 in D minor are great representatives of this type. The A major Prelude has the apparent main melody in the soprano voice and an independent middle voice that supports the melody. Concurrently, the bass is in the style of *barcarolle*, with different slur markings from other voices in addition to huge leaps. Despite having multiple voices with independent articulations, the dynamic marking is also extreme and challenging. For measures 16-24, the performer has to bring the dynamic of *fortissimo* down to *pianissimo* within two measures, and the piece ends with triple piano without blurring the four-voice writing.

Compared to the A-major Prelude, No.20 in F minor has fewer homophonic features. However, the middle voices in both hands have longer note values with stems in opposite directions, clearly an indication of independent voicing. As with the other preludes in this group, the bass is full of octaves that leap on every beat. The technical difficulty of reaching the right note in bass is immense with the provided tempo marking. Also, the dynamic marking at the end of the Prelude is *sotto voce* and *pianissimo*, while the bass is almost at the end of the keyboard, ranging from C1 to C5.

The voicing issues in the D minor Prelude, No.24, closely resemble the first group of preludes discussed above: leaping octave accompaniment in fast tempo. However, with the D minor Prelude, there are evident double melodic lines, with the bass leading the progression with an ascending line in tenuto markings. There are two main melodies in alternate hands:

from measures 1 to 6, the downbeat of the bass accompaniment is the main melody, and from measures 7 to 8, the soprano voice in right hand takes over. This alternation of voices prevails until the end of the Prelude; the shifting of melodies, along with a wide dynamic range from piano to triple forte, challenge the performer to have skillful voicing technique.

The last group to discuss is No.11 in B major and No.19 in E-flat major. Both are nocturne-like preludes with lyrical melodies and bass accompaniments. The melody generally requires a longer line in a single breath, and the accompaniment supports the melody by staying under dynamic while providing continuous flow. The voicing issue in the B-major Prelude occurs due to the sub-melody figure in the tenor line of the accompaniment. The tenor line is clearly articulated by slur staccatos and stems in opposite directions. To secure the accompaniment in soft dynamic while articulating the tenor line without disturbing the main melody is a difficult task for performers.

By the same token, No.19 in E-flat major poses voicing problems similar to those of the B major Prelude. Among the notes in accompaniment, Scriabin differentiates a single note with its stem in the opposite direction and longer note values. These separated notes create ascending line through the measures and supports the melody by intensifying or reducing the tension. Also, disposition of the rhythm adds to the difficulty and complexity of the voicing. As the accompaniment figure crosses the bar line while the melody stays within, distribution of finger weight has to be carefully examined in order to bring out all necessary lines.

Multiple independent melodic lines, counterpoint, and extremely thick chord textures often cause voicing issues in Rachmaninoff's Twenty-Four Preludes. One of Rachmaninoff's signature compositional languages involves the middle-range voice(s) that are hidden among the chords or outer melodies, moving in chromatic or stepwise motions. Generally, these lines are placed in the mid-registers of the piano and form a dialogue between the main melodies

as a sequence of the counterpoint passage. Properly voicing the interaction between melodic lines is essential for a great performance. Exemplary preludes with multiple interactive voices are as follows: Op.3 No.2; Op.23 No.3, No.6, No.8, and No.10; and Op.32 No.1, No.2, and No.13.

To highlight the most illustrative sections among the above-mentioned examples, partial scores of Op.23 No.2, measures 20 to 29; Op.23 No.3, measures 24 to 32; Op.32 No.2, measures 25 to 30; and Op.32 No.9, measures 15 to 23 are provided below. Op.23 No.2 has a tenuto marking over the main melody in the tenor voice. The sub-melodies at the top of the right hand and the arpeggio figure in bass must be voiced according to the hierarchy of melodic importance for each line.

The second example, Op.23 No.3, is the example with counterpoint. The subject starts with measure 25 in alto and is immediately followed by the bass. However, the tenuto marked notes in the tenor line also show a hidden step-wise descending motion of G-F-E flat-D. Also the outer voices are in counterpoint, initiated by the D-C-B flat in the bass in measure 24, and immediately followed by the soprano voice D-C-A-B flat. Both outer and inner voices descend in a step-wise motion.

Articulation markings, such as tenuto, accent, longer-note values, stems written in opposite directions, and slurs, must be strictly obeyed to clearly voice the multiple layers. Op.32 No.2 shows an inner melody separated by the stems written in opposite directions. Outer chords and inner melodies are tightly interwoven in chromatic motions. Similarly, Op.32 No.9 also has an ascending inner sub-melodic line, which initiates the main chordal melody in the top voice to imitate the ascending motion.

Example 58. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.23 No.2, mm. 20-23, Op.23 No.3, mm. 24-32, Op.32 No.2, mm. 25-30, Op.32 No.9, mm 15-23.

Op.23 No.2, mm. 20-23

Musical score for Op.23 No.2, mm. 20-23. The score is in B-flat major and 4/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 20-23. The second system shows measures 24-27. The right hand features a complex, chromatic arpeggiated texture with many accidentals. The left hand has a more melodic line with some triplets and slurs. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). A fermata is present over the final measure of the second system.

Op.23 No.3, mm. 24-32

Musical score for Op.23 No.3, mm. 24-32. The score is in B-flat major and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems. The first system shows measures 24-27. The second system shows measures 28-31. The third system shows measures 32-35. The right hand has a melodic line with many accidentals and slurs. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and dynamics. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano), and *f* (forte). A *cresc.* (crescendo) marking is present in the third system.

Op.32 No.2, mm. 25-30

Allegro. 7

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system begins with a treble clef staff containing a series of eighth-note chords, and a bass clef staff with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. A *dim.* marking appears in the second measure of the first system. The second system features a treble clef staff with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a bass clef staff with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The third system continues with a treble clef staff featuring a *dim.* marking and a bass clef staff with a consistent eighth-note accompaniment.

Op.32 No.9, mm 15-23

The musical score for Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op. 32 No. 9, measures 15-23, is presented in three systems. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written for piano. The right hand (RH) features a complex texture of thick chords, often spanning an octave or more, with many notes. The left hand (LH) features a rhythmic bass line consisting of eighth-note patterns, often with five-fingered chords. Dynamics include *p*, *cresc.*, *mf*, *dim.*, and *ff*. The piece concludes with a fermata on the final chord.

The sequence of chord successions in Rachmaninoff's Preludes also highlights the performer's voicing skills. Because Rachmaninoff frequently employed chord progressions comprised of six-to-ten notes per chord, big hands are certainly an advantage when performing these Preludes. Clearly distinguishing the top note of these chords while using the other notes to support the full texture is a highly difficult task, especially when the chords are moving rapidly in an extreme dynamic. Preludes Op.3 No.2; Op.23 No.2; and Op.32 No.3, No.4, and No.13 are good examples of the voicing issues caused by the thick texture of the chords.

Example 59. Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op.23 No.2, mm.51-52, Op.32 No.4, mm.107-109,
Op.32 No.10, mm.21-36, Op.32 No.13, mm.56-57

Op.23 No.2, mm.51-52

Musical score for Rachmaninoff, Op.23 No.2, mm.51-52. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple layers of chords and arpeggiated figures. The right hand has several sixteenth-note runs and chords, while the left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked *marcato*. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5, and accents are placed over many notes.

Op.32 No.4, mm.107-109

Musical score for Rachmaninoff, Op.32 No.4, mm.107-109. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple layers of chords and arpeggiated figures. The right hand has several sixteenth-note runs and chords, while the left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked *presto possibile* and the dynamics are *ff*. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5, and accents are placed over many notes.

Op.32 No.10, mm.21-36

Musical score for Op.32 No.10, mm.21-36. The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece features a complex texture with frequent triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. Dynamics include *ff* (fortissimo), *m.d.* (mezzo-dolce), *m.g.* (mezzo-giove), *dim.* (diminuendo), and *rit. e dim.* (ritardando and diminuendo). The score concludes with a fermata over a final chord. A small number '4 9224 G' is visible at the bottom of the fifth system.

Op.32 No.13, mm.56-57

Musical score for Op.32 No.13, mm.56-57. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two flats (Bb, Eb) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece features a complex texture with frequent sixteenth-note patterns and triplets. Dynamics include *ff* (fortissimo). The score concludes with a fermata over a final chord.

Chapter III. Conclusion

Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff spent a significant part of their youth together as friends, classmates, and inspiring competitors. They had the same teachers, classes, and the same year of graduation from the Moscow Conservatory with medals of honor (despite the fact that Scriabin's was smaller, due to unfortunate discord with Arensky). They shared a similar interest in literature and an idol and model, Chopin, using both as compositional inspiration. However, their stylistic traits in piano composition are different. The Twenty-Four Preludes exemplify the differences between both composers. Their use of harmony, form, adaptations of other genres, and piano techniques are manifested in unique ways, written with each composer's signature progressions. One of the reasons why both composers wrote such different music lies in their opposing personalities. As Seroff details in his biography of Rachmaninoff, Scriabin was highly sociable and spontaneous, while Rachmaninoff was careful and deliberate. Seroff compared their personalities as follows:

The very natures of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin had become diametrically opposed. Rachmaninoff was an introvert, closed upon himself and modest, while Scriabin was of an expansive nature, spoke freely of all his artistic plans and could not hide his feelings of superiority to those around him. He was proud and arrogant even in his relation to his former comrades. Rachmaninoff spoke little; Scriabin loved to talk. Rachmaninoff had no desire to compose anything extraordinary; Scriabin thought of nothing else. Rachmaninoff was sentimental and very friendly, while Scriabin was sensual and rather cold. Rachmaninoff gained his popularity through his simplicity; Scriabin's was a complicated nature, which did not evoke sympathy at first meeting: he was all a pose, like a man walking on stilts. Rachmaninoff was not interested in philosophy and knew very little, while Scriabin became a philosopher-musician right from the start. However, Rachmaninoff recognized Scriabin as an important composer in spite of their dissimilar tastes, while Scriabin was indifferent toward Rachmaninoff because he considered his music only an imitation of Tchaikovsky's, which he hated. He listened to Rachmaninoff's music with difficulty and only when it was necessary. While Scriabin was all *Vers la Flamme*, all *Exstase*, Rachmaninoff brooded in his gloom with only an ultimate version of *Dies Irae*.³⁷

Scriabin's music is often associated with colors. His musical inspirations come from nature, love, and human desire. Therefore, the focus of his music is in the very moment

³⁷ Seroff, 71.

– it is instantaneous and highly evaporative in atmosphere. Also, with reference to his philosophical approach, his themes and melodies incorporate feelings of longing for an ideal utopia or heaven. In summary, Scriabin’s Preludes are pictorial, evocative, and uplifting.

Rachmaninoff, on the other hand, was grounded on earth. Motives must be developed. In his Preludes he used forms that included serious counterpoint, fugues, and variation. Everything he wrote had to mean something as a statement, regardless of the lightness of the genre. Of all of the compositional techniques he used, nothing was done without a plan. Main melodies and sub-melodies/counter melodies were carefully placed and developed to their climatic point. The structures of his preludes were built according to the high point of the music, and the musical journey involving introduction, adequate development, and a conclusion was always evident.

Every prelude has an individual story and as a cycle of twenty-four with its own ordering system, the overall structure is complete. Thus, the significance of the Twenty-Four Preludes as a cycle multiplies as that cycle progresses, following the great predecessor, Chopin’s Op.28. As François-Sappy has written, illustrating the importance of both Twenty-Four Preludes to the late-Romantic period, “The whole cycle offers a fine illustration of the ‘new poetic age’ of Schumann and the *Lieder ohne Worte* of Mendelssohn as revisited by a Slavic, post-Chopin sensibility, and the energy of a pianistic thoroughbred.”³⁸

In summary, the Twenty-Four Preludes by Scriabin and Rachmaninoff display contrasting musical atmospheres of the spontaneous versus the deliberate, the evaporative versus the solid, and the dream-like versus the real. The outcomes of stylistic difference in both composers suggest the infinite possibilities of music. Within the limitations of key and harmonic progression, and within traditional boundaries of form and phrase structure, both

³⁸ François-Sappy, 14

composers drew completely different pictures, and their Twenty-Four Preludes display unique compositional signatures.

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