

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

Visions of the Pianistic Self:
Don Shirley, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Music Performance Studies

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Musicology

by

Pheaross Graham

2022

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Visions of the Pianistic Self:

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Pheaross Graham

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Raymond L. Knapp, Co-Chair

Professor Mitchell Bryan Morris, Co-Chair

This dissertation pairs together two contrasting concert musicians, African American pianist-composer Don Shirley (1927-2013), revived by the 2018 film *Green Book*, and Russian pianist-composer Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943). Both faced aspects of erasure, reducing the likelihood of being heard or understood on their own terms. Rachmaninoff's erasure stemmed from a Slavic alterity assigned to him outside of Russia and class differences within Russia during the turbulent inter-revolutionary period. Shirley's arose from anti-Black barriers barring him from performing European classical music on concert stages. Both pianists, facing reductive assumptions, created musical dualities, enabling them to hold onto core, authentic realities as they shaped their careers, even if the public might read their presentations alternatively, perhaps through initial biases.

I study Rachmaninoff's 1930 recorded performance of Frédéric Chopin's *Second Sonata in Bb Minor*, Op. 35, focusing on the first three movements, using Rachmaninoff's composed sequel *Second Sonata in Bb Minor*, Op. 36 as a guiding Rosetta Stone. I identify Rachmaninoff's performance as an artifact of the Russian Revolution's "losing side"—the aristocracy. I fill a gap surveying wordless instrumental music and identify, through the trope of illness, the Eastern Orthodox hope of recovery—deification—of resurrecting Mother Russia, which embodied Rachmaninoff's attempt to preserve "true Russianness" during his perpetual exile. Considering selections from his 1955 album, *Tonal Expressions*, among others, I examine how Shirley, through developing what I term the "*Green Book Style*," inched as close as he could to the category of classical music while pushing against the limits of the sonic color line. I consider how Shirley called upon aspects of the *Werktreue* ideal, putting himself in line with "serious" music-making to stimulate more engaged, idealized listening, even when performing in nightclubs. This dissertation seeks to contribute to dismantling the problematic musical "middlebrow," a category that consigns racial and ethnic misfits into the category of "all others" relative to the hegemony. My work contributes to the emerging subdiscipline of music performance studies; my assessments move from micro-readings of "data" as concrete performance analysis to corporeal, intertextual, and subject position queries about culture, race, and personhood. [Components: Written Dissertation + Performance Video]

The dissertation of Pheaross Graham is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2022

— DEDICATION —

To my mother and in memory of my father

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At UC Irvine, I am grateful for Cecilia Sun, who pointed me toward UCLA. She particularly intrigued me, being a musicologist-pianist herself. Also, Colleen Reardon and Amy Bauer were valuable to my growth. At UC Berkeley, I trace the origins of my musicological orientation to Richard Taruskin, who published his massive *Oxford History of Western Music* while I was an undergraduate and inspired me with his sage-like knowledge. Davitt Moroney, an exemplary harpsichordist-musicologist, advocated for me. I am grateful to the entire faculty I studied under at Berkeley.

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———. Review of J.Q. Davies' *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*, *ECHO: A Music-Centered Journal* 13.1 (2015)

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"I Am Not an Entertainer": Donald Shirley, Green Book Piano Style, and the Middlebrow Problem," *American Musicological Society Annual Mtg.* ("Chicago") Nov. 20, 2021

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“Sonic Erasure of Subject Position in the Reception of Rachmaninoff’s Pianism: A Performance Analysis Study” (Conference Paper), MPST, UCLA	April 30, 2021
“Affirmations of Death & Life: Chopin-Rachmaninoff Sonata No. 2 in B \flat Minor, Opp. 35-36: A Hybrid Performance” (MPST)	April 28, 2021
“The Desire of Illusion: Wagner’s <i>Tannhäuser</i> , Telescoping Listening, and Cultural Resonance” (Opera for Educators Series, LA Opera)	Oct. 10, 2020
“Orchestrating Isolation, Isolating Race: Musical Interventions in the COVID-19 Fallout” (Talk/Roundtable) Joint: Royal Holloway/Goldsmith, University of London	June 22, 2020
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UCLA, Division of Humanities: Graduate Student Researcher, Step VII

PROLOGUE

Within the past 25 years, the emerging subdiscipline of music performance studies has blossomed with an array of diverse approaches, aims, and methods. Some focus on data and empirical analysis of sound recordings, considering parameters of tempo, timing, articulation, and dynamics, as encountered in the work of John Rink and others.¹ Other scholars, like William Kinderman, have moved toward genetic criticism—studying sketches and the like to understand how a composition came to be—which can disclose “the fluid, blurred boundaries between biography and art, genesis and structure, historical and analytical concerns.”² Kinderman’s approach to sketch studies can inform perspectives on how to perform a work like Beethoven’s enigmatic *Diabelli Variations*.³ Resonating with Kinderman, but in a different register, Luca Chiantore has adopted parallel approaches with the addition of organology and historical performance practice. His work, however, aims to “subvert” contemporary performances of more familiar repertory, offering unconventional interpretations and readings on stage.⁴

As another example, Mine Doğantan-Dack has considered phenomenological possibilities from the standpoint of the “music making body” and materiality to make sense of Beethoven’s unusual dynamic markings, as in his Piano Trio, Op. 70, No. 2, ultimately aiding

¹ John Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Rink, ed., *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

² Quoted from William Kinderman, “Genetic Criticism as an Integrating Focus for Musicology and Music Analysis,” *Revue de musicologie* 98 (2012): 15-42. See also William Kinderman, “Recentering Music: Sketch Studies and Analysis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Creative Process in Music*, by William Kinderman, ed. Nicolas Donin (Oxford University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190636197.013.1>.

³ William Kinderman, “The Performance of Beethoven’s ‘Diabelli Variations’: Continuity, Discontinuity, Cyclic Integration, Irony,” *Zeitschrift Der Gesellschaft Für Musiktheorie [Journal of the German-Speaking Society of Music Theory]* 18, no. Sonderausgabe [Special Issue] (2021): 209–28, <https://doi.org/10.31751/1126>.

⁴ Luca Chiantore, *Beethoven al piano: improvisación, composición e investigación sonora en sus ejercicios técnicos* (Barcelona: Nortedur, 2010); Luca Chiantore, *InVersions*. CD202101. (Barcelona, Spain: Musikeon, 2021), <https://www.in-versions.com/>.

performance.⁵ At a more telescoped perspective, Kenneth Hamilton counters clinical notions of performance sterility that underlie textualist paradigms today by turning to diversely rich accounts of concert life and multifaceted performance practices in the 19th century.⁶ His interlocutor, Robert Philip, has commented on the problem of technologically-induced expectations of perfection, narrowing acceptable bands of performing agency.⁷ Corroborating this is Neal Peres da Costa's research on historic sound recordings, which highlight a great diversity of performance approaches, mostly obscured by the mists of time.⁸

Despite encouraging work within the field of music performance studies, some circles of classical performers especially continue to perpetuate reductive notions that performers are mere executants rather than participants in creation. Doğantan-Dack links this unfortunate tendency to the *Texttreue* variant of *Werktreue* ideology, fortified by neoliberal impulses constraining freedom of interpretation and thought.⁹ One might connect such textualism, in part, to the suppression of the sonic subject position, entailing that a concert artist's individual performance might not register as ontologically thick, being in the shadow of sacrosanct scores. Commenting on "authentic" music specialists beholden to the *Texttreue* paradigm, Richard Taruskin writes about the effects of objectivist motives dispensing with the human beings behind performances:

What is thought of as the 'dirt' when musicians speak of restoring a piece of music is what people, acting out of an infinite variety of motives over the years, have done with it. What is thought of as the 'painting' by such musicians is an imaginary rendering in

⁵ Mine Doğantan-Dack, "Article Performing Beethoven's Musical Dynamics," *Music Performance Research*, December 17, 2020, 1–35, <https://doi.org/10.14439/mpr.11.1>.

⁶ Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008).

⁷ Robert Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁸ Neal Peres Da Costa, *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹ About the "*Texttreue*," see Alfred Brendel, *Musical Thoughts & Afterthoughts*, Princeton Essays on the Arts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Mine Doğantan-Dack, "Artistic Research in Classical Music Performance: Truth and Politics," *PARSE*, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 32. <http://parsejournal.com/article/artistic-research-in-classical-music-performance/>.

which ‘personal choices’ have been ‘reduced’ to a minimum’, and, ideally, eliminated. What this syllogism reduces to is: *people are dirt*.¹⁰

In arguing against claims to solely unique, fundamentalist authenticity in performance, Taruskin points out, boldly, an emperor without his clothes, thereby advocating for further investigation into the intersections of personhood and sounded musical acts if reading between the lines.

Historically, performers whose ethnic origins placed them well outside the dominant Austro-German sphere have particularly faced creative and self-erasure as the price of admission to the mainstream. This dissertation pairs two musicians ostensibly dissimilar, African American pianist-composer Don Shirley (1927-2013), revived by the 2018 film *Green Book*, and Russian pianist-composer Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943). I ask how “micro” considerations of their sounded and felt musicianship might link to “macro” concerns tied to identity, race, class, religion, philosophy, belonging, and culture. Broadly, a spirit of intertextuality underlies much of my approach, which Michael Klein, looking toward literary criticism, sees as a “constellation of texts speaking both with us and among themselves.”¹¹ Both Rachmaninoff and Shirley as pianists faced aspects of erasure, resulting in not being heard or understood on their own terms. Shirley could not launch himself into a career as a classical concert pianist proper due to outright anti-Black barriers, despite early, high-profile performances and formidable endorsements. Because he performed mainly in alternative venues, Shirley was understood as an entertainer rather than an artist, which for him, compromised his dignity as a Black performer. Rachmaninoff faced different but resonating difficulties brought by the Russian Revolution and exile, being of the “Former People”—the disbanded and loathed *dvoryantsvo* (aristocracy). In America, he had forced on him a one-dimensional Slavic alterity. In different ways, the music of both figures,

¹⁰ Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 150.

¹¹ Michael Leslie Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1.

from compositional standpoints, has suffered disrespect by being consigned to the status of “middlebrow”—a problematic classification deriving from racialized 19th-century phrenology.

Donald Shirley and the “*Green Book* Piano Style”

The 2018 film *Green Book* reintroduced African American pianist-composer Don Shirley to the general public, recounting his concert activity largely in the American South during the 1960s as he relied on the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, a life-saving travel guide. The film garnered polarized reception, with laurels for its “feel good” narrative and condemnations for reinscribing racial hierarchies. Missing from discussions have been direct considerations of Shirley’s substantial music output and larger history. African Americans have consistently been pushed out of solo, classical instrumental performance. Despite Shirley’s earlier, high-profile orchestral engagements and “virtuosity worthy of Gods” (per Igor Stravinsky), noted impresario Sol Hurok advised Shirley that America was not ready for a “colored pianist” and denied him concert management. With no viable options for a career on the art music stage, Shirley turned to nightclubs, performing as a classical pianist cloaked in more popular music.

I consider his “middlebrow” music (as labeled by official culture) as a workaround to anti-Blackness barring African Americans from the classical concert stage. Deriving from 19th-century phrenological concepts, notions of the “middlebrow”—conceived as a middle ground between the highbrow (European, White) and lowbrow (“primitive” races) strata—retain racial undertones. For a Black performer, entering middlebrow space, while opening opportunities, was also devaluing, lessening the possibility of being taken seriously by “highbrow” listening audiences. Shirley’s case study points to larger musical and cultural theorizations of “middlebrow” music, specifically regarding how marginalized performers might find their way by navigating between their ideals and the necessity of finding an audience.

Considering selections from his 1955 debut album, *Tonal Expressions*, among others, I examine how Shirley, through developing what I term the “*Green Book Style*,” inched as close as he could to the category of classical music while pushing against the limits of the sonic color line. Alongside classical inflections came evocations of the ecclesiastic, which he used as a gesture toward respectability. Despite his fusion approach, Shirley called upon aspects of the *Werktreue* ideal, putting himself in line with “serious” music-making. Ultimately, Shirley’s approach, stimulating more engaged and therefore ideal listening, navigated race, art, and social station, establishing a unique niche along the intersections of segregated White-Black audile spaces. This study signals the dangers of dismissing middlebrow music as inconsequential and trivial.

Countering Subject Position Erasure: Interpreting Rachmaninoff’s Pianism

While empirical and systematic studies in performance analysis rationalize sound recordings in some dimensions, their conclusions run the risk of being overly reductive, since they rarely consider the human beings behind recordings in making sense of a given performance. A gap thus remains for exploring the hermeneutics of the complex, emergent meanings found in the sounded traces of the artists themselves. In the shadow of absolute music paradigms, performers’ biographies, lived experiences, temperaments, cultural dispositions, and physicality have not routinely figured into complex, multidimensional assessments of performances, although there is some progress. Considering the potentially rich interpretive impact of such considerations, I propose a revised, humanized approach that unites these factors with empirical observations to explore novel areas of the hermeneutics of recorded performances.

As a pianist-musicologist, I shuttle between theory and praxis in my investigations as I examine Sergei Rachmaninoff's lauded 1930 recording of Frédéric Chopin's *Sonata No. 2 in B♭ Minor*, Op. 35, focusing on the first three movements as my central case study. I identify this recorded performance as an artifact of the Russian Revolution's "losing side," the disbanded *dvoryantsvo*, which has received relatively little attention in historical inquiries of this period. In this vein, I fill a remaining gap surveying wordless instrumental music with this study, and identify through the trope of illness the Eastern Orthodox hope of recovery, of resurrecting *Matushka Rossiya* (Mother Russia). These projections of illness and hope embody Rachmaninoff's attempt to preserve "true Russianness" during his perpetual exile.

Of the destruction of the Russian nobility, Douglas Smith concludes that their doomed fate was among the first groups to foreshadow future atrocities of the 20th century, "when race, class, ethnicity, and religion were used to incite and to justify oppression and mass killing, from Hitler's Germany to Pol Pot's Cambodia and Kambanda's Rwanda."¹² Because this history is underreported, I quote Smith directly, writing about the *dvoryantsvo*: "Chased from their homes and their property expropriated, forced to clean the streets as a form of public humiliation, sent to labor camps, killed with a bullet to the back of the head for the crime of their social origin, Russian nobles were one of the first groups subjected to a brand of political violence that became a hallmark of the past century."¹³ Martin Latsis, a colleague of Peter Cheka, said in locating enemies against the people in launching the Red Terror: "Ask him instead to which class he belongs, what is his background, his education, his profession. These are the questions that will

¹² Douglas Smith, *Former People: The Final Days of the Russian Aristocracy*, First edition. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

¹³ Smith, 8.

determine the fate of the accused.”¹⁴ He continued that such identified enemies would find themselves “immediately arrested and placed into a concentration camp,” ultimately to “be destroyed and crushed by the heavy hammer of the revolutionary proletariat.”¹⁵

My analysis of Rachmaninoff’s performances depends on data I gather as score annotation from close listening aided at times by computerized sonic visualization. But I also draw from insider, practitioner’s knowledge through pianistic emulation, as I attempt to recreate Rachmaninoff’s performance on a modern grand piano. (See Appendix A –Chopin-Rachmaninoff Hybrid Sonata No. 2 in B \flat Minor, Opp. 35-36 and Appendix B – Annotated Score of Chopin’s Sonata No. 2, as Recorded by Rachmaninoff for RCA Victor (1930). Mikuli Edition. will be my reference score I use throughout my explications.) This approach resembles, in part, those of Anna Scott and Sigurd Slåttembrekk, who have turned to recreating performances of the past to internalize stylistic tendencies for more firsthand insight of historical musicianship.¹⁶ Pianistic emulation affords me an embodied understanding of Rachmaninoff’s own corporeality, recalling Elisabeth Le Guin’s notion of “carnal musicology.”¹⁷ In becoming Rachmaninoff, as it were, I render myself as a vulnerable observer in the spirit of Ruth Behar and her anthropological methods, which partially shapes my relationship with Rachmaninoff and his revolutionary angst.¹⁸ Combining these approaches and forms of knowledge does not simplify but necessarily complicates the understanding of a recorded performance. Through this

¹⁴ All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, or the “Cheka.”

¹⁵ As Quoted in Smith, *Former People*, 6.

¹⁶ Anna Scott, “Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the [De]Construction of Brahmsian Identity” (Leiden University, 2014), <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/29987>; Sigurd Slåttembrekk and Tony Harrison, “Chasing the Butterfly,” *Chasing the Butterfly: Recreating Grieg’s 1903 Recordings and Beyond*, accessed September 17, 2021, <http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no/>.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

case study, I advance my larger project of acquiring more multidimensional understandings of historical recordings.

Because notions of transcendence during the inter-revolutionary period surrounded Rachmaninoff, both with contemporaries and predecessor musicians, I examine what sorts of Russian cultural elements influenced him. Clearly, nostalgia was a constant, regarding a way of life that existed only in his memory. In particular, the Russian Orthodox Church was a staple cultural force shaping his disposition (as with many around him), both in composition and performance, more so than alternative musical metaphysics, such as with theurgy of Medtner and Scriabin.¹⁹ Since Rachmaninoff was unwilling to participate in philosophical discussions breaking down music's function and place in the world,²⁰ I turn to what was closer to him, the pervasive doctrine of deification, which although relatively unknown in the Western world and Western Christianity, is central to Eastern Orthodoxy.²¹

As Rachmaninoff was intensely reluctant to speak about personal viewpoints or specific inspirations underlying his musical output, lived practice, and creativity, I study, as a Rosetta Stone, his own Second Sonata in B \flat minor, Op. 36, his maximalist advanced solo work, which densely concentrates many aspects of his aesthetics, compositional approach, and latent ideals. In lieu of otherwise scant primary evidence, I use the sonata itself as a springboard to corroborate some of the notions I detail above through an Orthodox system of signs. Considering applied aspects by engaging with his music, I also detail embodiment, cognition, and "living in" the sonata through detailing my own process of learning and performing the original 1913 version of the work, which will provide additional aspects and insights and contribute to a theory of Rachmaninoff. In this case, I contemplate "pianoing" (to adapt "musicking" from Christopher

¹⁹ Mitchell Bryan Morris, "Musical Eroticism and the Transcendent Strain: The Works of Alexander Skryabin, 1898-1908" (Ph.D. Dissertation in Music. University of California, Berkeley, 1998), 14, 55, 367.

²⁰ Rebecca Mitchell, *Nietzsche's Orphans: Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire*, Eurasia Past and Present (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 139.

²¹ "Deification" – Russian: *обожение*, Greek: *theosis*

Small) as religion for the composer-pianist—a path for deliverance.²² For Rachmaninoff, this was not only spiritual but also nationalist, in envisioning an everlasting, transcendent Old Russia tied firmly to its roots by divine appointment. With a multifactorial theory in hand, I then engage in extensive performance analysis of his 1930 Chopin recording and weave together a functional tapestry of his pianism from a phenomenological perspective, with these two intertwined works as the centerpiece.

Rachmaninoff's recorded performance of Chopin's Second Sonata, Op. 35 affirms death; on its own, nothing redemptive or hopeful arises. Rachmaninoff's sequel of his own Second Sonata, Op. 36, affirms life, redemption, and renewal, especially important during the twilight of Imperial Russia. Rachmaninoff signaled this by grafting compositional elements from Chopin's *marche funèbre* into his own sonata and transforming them into their polar opposites. As will emerge in my analysis, elements of Eastern Orthodoxy married to constructs of Imperial Russianness guided Rachmaninoff in his recorded interpretation of the Chopin sonata, reflecting on the tumultuous change that began with and followed the revolution. In recovering the subject position behind Rachmaninoff's performance practice and sonic details, we begin to rediscover a sensibility—a personhood—otherwise lost or not registering.

More complete history, especially that tied to the “former people”—equivalent to the *ci-devants* of post-Revolutionary France—was suppressed in the USSR. Outside scholars would have difficulty during the Cold War in accessing archives until after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. With the resurgence of yet another Iron Curtain following Vladimir Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine, which is making Russia an isolated pariah state, contemplating this history

²² Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998).

becomes more relevant than ever in understanding deep cultural aspects that affect the lives of millions, if manipulatively co-opted by a dictator.

I therefore view Rachmaninoff's performance of Chopin's Second Sonata, along with his own Second Sonata as a sequel to Chopin's, as cultural artifacts along the lines of Ruth Coates's *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905-1917*,²³ which argues (without considering music) that, with the demise of the old world and the approach of uncertainty during the period, the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification began to surface widely in manifest response to turbulence. Coates identifies three modernist discourses linked to deification: Marxism, Symbolism, and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. A number of thinkers, including novelist Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, theologian and economist Sergei Bulgakov, and Russian Orthodox theologian Pavel Florenskii apply the concept of deification across a spectrum of disciplines.²⁴ My work adds music to this list of potential applications.

Deification, in essence salvation as defined by the Church, is the single most important end goal for Orthodox adherents. The concept, as well as Orthodoxy generally, has been foreign and not well understood by the Western world. Putting aside dogma and theology, save for the basics, we might better understand deification as becoming like God in essence, nature, or makeup. Attaining godhood is not a matter of egotism, rather a course of dedication and humility. Maximus the Confessor, in the *Philokalia*, writes:

We receive Salvation by grace and as a divine gift of the spirit. But to attain the full measure of virtue we need also to possess faith and love, and to struggle to exercise our

²³ Ruth Coates, *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905-1917* (Oxford: University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198836230.001.0001>.

²⁴ Transliterations appear here as written by Coates. In other places, transliterations, especially for names, follow most commonly forms.

free will with integrity. In this manner we inherit eternal life as a consequence of both grace and justice. We do not reach the final stage of spiritual maturity through divine power and grace alone, without ourselves making any effort; but neither on the other hand do we attain the final measure of freedom impurity as a result of our own diligence and strength alone, apart from any divine assistance.²⁵

In deification, one must dedicate oneself to a process of striving in faith while holding onto one's core individuality, so as to exercise free will. In aiming to understand Rachmaninoff's musicianship beyond empty virtuosity, I turn to his lived realities and experiences, focusing extensively on the inter-revolutionary period, the twilight of the aristocracy, and Russianness expressed through Orthodoxy.

Summation

In my extended analyses of Shirley and Rachmaninoff's recorded performances, I unite the artists' idealist subject positions with close sonic readings, employing fine-graded performance transcription, topic theory and cultural semiotics, artistic practice as research, recreated performances, corporeal embodiment, physiology, and history. Shirley's idealism entailed moving away from entertainment, stimulating seriously engaged listening through the "Green Book Style" as he approached the category of classical music, pushing against the sonic color line, able to cleave to his inner ideals while also triggering idealized listening. Rachmaninoff's idealism led him to preserve "true Russianness" in exile by shaping his performances through Eastern Orthodox principles. In his recorded performances, I identify a nationalistic hope for the restoration of *Matushka Rossiya* (Mother Russia). For both figures, my investigations aim to show the many complexities behind recorded performances, through understanding the performers themselves as creative artists.

²⁵ Nicodemus et al., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text / Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth; Translated from the Greek and Edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware with the Assistance of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline) [and Others].*, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 134.

CHAPTER ONE

Rachmaninoff as Master Pianist: Modernity, Orthodoxy, and Dualities

Chopin, Sonata No. 2: I. Grave—*Doppio movimento*

A Musical Trauma

*There are serious illnesses and deadly blows from fate which entirely change a man's character. This was the effect of my own Symphony on myself. When the indescribable torture of this performance had at last come to an end, I was a different man.*¹

The failure of Rachmaninoff's First Symphony impacted not only his compositional approach but also his interpretative disposition as a concert pianist, markedly shaping the trajectory of his career. With Tchaikovsky's advocacy and high support of his earlier efforts, this *magnum opus* was supposed to lift Rachmaninoff to the ranks of other celebrated symphonists, one might extrapolate.² The Symphony's calamitous reception shattered Rachmaninoff's self-esteem as an enterprising composer. He later described his depression: "I did not live; I vegetated, idle and hopeless. The thought of spending my life as a piano-teacher gave me cold shudders."³ Years later, he reminisced, "After that Symphony I composed nothing for about 3 years. I felt like a man who had suffered a stroke and for a long time had lost the use of his head and hands."⁴ Critics mercilessly derided the work of the 23-year-old composer as "modernist trash."⁵ César Cui infamously compared the Symphony to the "Seven Plagues of Egypt" and scorned its "sickly perversity of harmony."⁶ The premiere performance was terrible:

¹ Sergei Rachmaninoff, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections: Told to Oskar von Riesemann*, trans. Dolly Rutherford (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 98.

² See *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*. (London, New York: Continuum, 2005), 76.

³ *von Riesemann*, 102.

⁴ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music. With the Assistance of Sophia Satina*. (New York: University Press, 1956), 74.

⁵ Bertensson and Leyda, 71.

⁶ Bertensson and Leyda, 71–72.

the orchestra was under-rehearsed, while Alexander Glazunov was likely drunk as he conducted, as Rachmaninoff's wife later reported.⁷ Years later, Dmitry Shostakovich's memories of Glazunov would corroborate the possibility of an alcoholically inflected performance.⁸ Compositionally, Alexander Ossovsky attributed the unhappy fate of the Symphony to the audience's dislike of musical modernism.⁹ Robert Simpson singles out the First Symphony as Rachmaninoff's best, calling it "convinced, individual, [and] finely constructed," finding no fault at all with the work for its poor reception.¹⁰

Rachmaninoff was deeply impressionable, easily swayed to others' opinions, so rather than follow through and explore compositional modernism in alternative ways, he staunchly committed himself to a more conservative, tried-and-true path. Ultimately, this entailed a sense of lineage in acting as the last composer in the direct line of the Romantic tradition, diametrically opposing him to avant-gardists like Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg. The immediate result of taking this not-so-new path, coupled with repetitive, Orthodox-like "chants" of reassurance by his psychiatrist, Dr. Nikolai Dahl, was the Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18, consistently remaining in the world's Top-3 of the most frequently performed concerti.

⁷ Geoffrey Norris, *Rakhmaninov*. The Master Musicians Series (London: Dent, 1976), 25.

⁸ Shostakovich recalled, "My good relationship with Glazunov developed on an excellent basis—alcohol. [...] I must add that Glazunov didn't simply enjoy drinking. He suffered from incessant thirst. Some people have such unfortunate constitutions." Quoted in Dmitrii Dmitrievich Shostakovich, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related to and edited by Solomon Volkov; Translated from the Russian by Antonina W. Bouis*, First Limelight edition. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1984), 47.

⁹ Alexander Ossovsky, quoted in Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Aldershot, Hants, England : Brookfield, Vt., USA: Scolar Press ; Gower Pub. Co, 1990), 97.

¹⁰ Simpson goes on to write about Rachmaninoff, simultaneously praising and debasing him, "if Rachmaninoff had followed this work with advancing successors, he would have been one of the great symphonists of the first half of the twentieth century. In Robert Simpson, "Ch. 22, Sergei Rachmaninoff," in *The Symphony: Volume 2, Mahler to the Present Day*, ed. Robert Simpson (New York: Drake Publishers, Inc., 1972), 128–31.

Rachmaninoff developed an aptitude for discerning the public's musical desires following his great humiliation, which steered him to direct his music away from the cutting edge toward more direct emotional expression. He looked toward the music of his youth, Tchaikovsky and Chopin, besides that of his teachers, as inspirational models for his own writing. Rachmaninoff's unfiltered appeal to sentiment evoked nostalgia for a world rapidly vanishing, a world steeped in the Imperial Russia of the 19th century.

Rachmaninoff was burned by attempting compositional modernism with the First Symphony, which led him to frequently voice negative opinions about the movement. Arthur Rubinstein recounted a strangely ironic exchange with Rachmaninoff about modernism following his live performance of Stravinsky's piano setting of *Trois mouvements de*

Pétrouchka:

He said angrily, "Don't play in America dirty stuff like *Petrushka*, they don't like that kind of modern music." While he was talking, [Sol] Hurok appeared and shouted, "Go and take a bow. They are screaming." Now there was a roar in the audience. Back in the wings, Rachmaninoff warned me again quietly, "Now and then, small piece modern, that is all right, but not long, horrible piece like this." Hurok pushed me on the stage and the people wouldn't let up. This time, Rachmaninoff said, a little impatiently, "Play encore!" and left.¹¹

Even the comparatively urbane composer, Karol Szymanowski, did not impress Rachmaninoff.

Szymanowski recalled:

They talked at length and Rachmaninoff was terribly critical of contemporary music, putting down the Stravinskys, Ravels, etc. But when Arthur mentioned my name, he suddenly brightened up and started inquiring about me in a very friendly way, calling me a most charming man. Arthur was triumphant. "Then you like his music?" he asked. Rachmaninoff replied, "What? His music is shit[;] it is the man who is very nice."¹²

¹¹ Artur Rubinstein, *My Many Years*, 1st ed (New York: Knopf, 1980), 428.

¹² Rubinstein, 399.

Following his aversion to compositional modernism, Rachmaninoff's professional contemporaries active in America would characterize him as possibly middlebrow with respect to his compositions. Rubinstein remarked, "In my strong opinion, he was a greater pianist than a composer. I fall, I have to admit, under the charm of his compositions when I hear them but return home with a slight distaste for their too brazenly expressed sweetness."¹³ Similarly, Aaron Copland remarked in a lecture he gave at the University of New Hampshire:

Rachmaninoff's characteristic tone is one of self-pity and self-indulgence tinged with a definite melancholia. As a fellow human being I can sympathize with an artist whose distempers produced such music, but as a listener my stomach won't take it. I grant you his technical adroitness, but even here the technique adopted by the composer was old-fashioned in his own day. I also grant his ability to write long and singing melodic lines, but when these are embroidered with figuration, the musical substance is watered down, emptied of significance.¹⁴

Copland was a composer who had his hands in many different types of music throughout his life, frequently searching for respectable popularity. He experimented with jazz in the 1920s, and worked with folk-like materials, serialism, accessible music, and utility music ("Gebrauchsmusik"). However, Copland could not allow himself to write a Tin Pan Alley song; he found jazz and folk resources limiting in their unaltered forms. Leaning toward acerbity, Copland experimented with rhythm and sonority, approaching modernism. Possibly owing as well to his homosexuality, Copland was especially motivated to work in a realm of musical advancement commanding masculinist readings, writing music that spoke to "masculine ideas of purity, industry, rationality, and hard work," as Louis Niebur summarizes.¹⁵ As a browbeater

¹³ Rubinstein, 88.

¹⁴ Aaron Copland, as quoted in Josiah Fisk and Jeff Nichols, *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writings*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 348–49.

¹⁵ Louis Niebur, "Music" in *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* / Bret E. Carroll, Editor (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2003).

seeking credibility, Copland disparaged Rachmaninoff for cleaving to and intensifying a late Romantic style replete with emotional expression.

For Copland and others, the resulting emotionality set by 19th-century traditions led to the categorization of Rachmaninoff's music as cloying, characteristic of spoiled tsarinas from a backward Russia. Slavic alterity notwithstanding, Rachmaninoff's appeal was strong, even drawing popular musicians like Eric Carmen to adapt the *Adagio sostenuto* movement of the Second Concerto to "All by Myself," and Buddy Kaye to use the second theme from the *Allegro sostenuto* movement for the popular song, "Full Moon and Empty Arms." Frank Sinatra recorded the latter in 1945, which went on to reach No. 17 on the Billboard charts. Rachmaninoff's tendency toward a late-Romantic modality forced him to contend with issues of respectability, Otherness, and gender, as heightened emotional expression would delegitimize him and move him closer to the orbit of another Slavic composer, Frédéric Chopin, a salon miniaturist. Rachmaninoff's music entering the popular realm uncomfortably complicated claims to elitism.

Femininity and Performance

In much of the piano's history, a conquering pianist trope repeatedly appears. The Romantic concerto especially foregrounds this, with the pianist battling both the grand orchestra and behemoth piano, almost always the largest and heaviest instrument on stage. One of my teachers summoned the trope in my own lessons, proclaiming, "You play the music; don't let the music play you." Practically speaking, this entailed exerting constant executorial mastery at all times and imperturbable self-control, as another of my teachers advised me not to allow myself to get swept into the music and the vortex of its drama in real-time. I was to command the interpretation from a measured distance, keeping constant watch over the unfolding of my

performance. Of course, some would blur distinctions, like Glenn Gould, who performed being taken over by the music after meticulously engineering his interpretations.

Wagner did not invent the trope that music is feminine but advanced the notion, writing that “music is a woman.” Wagner’s writings, although often problematic, reflected tendencies and characteristics of his surroundings; they also exerted influences on culture to certain degrees. In a 19th-century patriarchal mindset, Wagner’s *Opera and Drama* offers a snapshot of this often-unspoken notion, where he dedicated a section to the concept, writing:

The nature of Woman is *love*: but this love is a *receiving* (*empfangende*), and in receipt (*Empfängniss*) an unreservedly *surrendering*, love. [...] A woman who loves not with this pride of surrender, truly does not love at all. But a woman who does not love at all, is the most odious, most unworthy spectacle in the world. Let us adduce the characteristic types of such ladies!¹⁶

For Wagner, music as a woman would need a man—“a poet”—to become complete. While Wagner’s implications point to somewhat different stakes, being partially figurative, the earlier, long-standing tradition of all-male orchestras in Austria and Germany attests to strongly gendered manifestations in musical spheres.

Playing the piano was more characteristic of the domestic sphere and salon, not necessarily viewed as the most professionalized of vocations. Charles Ives, Rachmaninoff’s younger contemporary, recalled, “As a boy, [I was] partially ashamed of music [...] an entirely wrong attitude but it was strong—most boys in American country towns, I think felt the same... And there may be something in it. Hasn’t music always been too much an emasculated art?”¹⁷ Maynard Solomon wrote that “To ward off such feelings, Ives would eradicate the traces of the ‘soft-bodied’ and the ‘decadent’ in his own work, perhaps employing the techniques of

¹⁶ Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama: Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, Vol. 2*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 68.

¹⁷ Charles Ives. *Memos*. Ed. John Kirkpatrick. New, 100-101.

modernism to conceal the atmospheric, lyrical, yielding strata which often underlie his first ideas.”¹⁸ The notion that music was not the most masculine of activities took firm root well before Rachmaninoff’s birth. In *The Polite Lady*, for example, a mid-18th century conduct guide, an author wrote as follows regarding musical proficiency:

Mrs. B writes me, that you are become a great proficient both in vocal and instrumental music. This, though not the most useful, is certainly one of the most genteel qualifications which a young lady can possess. It is, of all others, the most agreeable amusement, the most pleasant recreation; and she that understands music, need never complain that her time lies heavy on her hand.¹⁹

Learning the piano, however, was not to be pursued beyond a dilettante level; music studied was thus not to be too difficult. Elizabeth Morgan summarizes, “the overachieving woman was an affront to the feminine ideal, the truly passionate woman a subject for derision.”²⁰ As an example, she includes a passage, also from *The Polite Lady*:

It is no shame for a young lady to be out-done in music by an opera-singer; in dancing, by a stage-dancer; nor, indeed, in any other art, by one who is a **complete master of it**, who has employed the greatest part, if not the whole of **his** time, in learning it, and gets **his** livelihood by practicing and teaching it. Perhaps, on the contrary, it would be a shame for her to be equal to any one of these in their respective arts; because, in that case, she must be supposed to have employed more time in it, than is consistent with her learning all the other parts of a *complete education*.²¹ [Boldness added.]

With aspects of Rachmaninoff’s compositions being more generous emotionally, they might seem to have points of convergence to the sentimentality of simple domestic piano pieces.²²

Because the imputation of saccharine domesticity would lower his prestige as a composer,

¹⁸ Maynard Solomon, “Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40, no. 3 (1987): 468, <https://doi.org/10.2307/831676>.

¹⁹ Charles Allen, *The Polite Lady, or a Course of Female Education in a Series of Letters, from a Mother to her Daughter* (London: Printed for J. Newberry, 1760), 21-22.

²⁰ Elizabeth Natalie Morgan, “The Virtuous Virtuosa Women at the Pianoforte in England, 1780-1820” (Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA, 2009), 7.

²¹ *The Polite Lady*, 24.

²² See Craig H. Roell, *The Piano in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

preemptive action was required of Rachmaninoff, the pianist. Thus, Rachmaninoff turned to alternative forms of masculinization to maintain respectability as a performer.

In masculinizing his pianism, writing transcendently complex music surpassing the challenges of Franz Liszt, he distinguished himself as a suffering professional pianist who dedicated tremendous amounts of time to hone his craft. To speak of the difficulties Rachmaninoff's high virtuosity music (*concerti*, some *Études-tableaux*, and large solo works like sonatas), the challenges arise from his scores functioning more like descriptive rather than prescriptive blueprints. Thus, the "master pianist" must, as a structural engineer, work out technical and intellectual solutions to unusual problems. While performing, physical and mental taxation arise. In cognitive psychology, "cognitive load" describes a human being's mental resources available for working memory.²³ Given the great number of voices appearing and disappearing in Rachmaninoff's music, moving abstractly and sometimes unpredictably, and the frequent, significant hand position changes, calling for more use of non-specialized large muscle groups, the cognitive load increases significantly relative to most other composers of the piano's canon. Rachmaninoff's works of high virtuosity generate what might be called a "cognitive burden," a mental taxation whose surmounting might contribute to a professional and therefore "manly" performance milieu. In his more extreme moments, Rachmaninoff's wide-reaching maximalism stretches the limits of one's humanity in terms of emotional, physical, and cognitive elements.

Within Rachmaninoff's patriarchal cultural environment, burdens necessitating significant practice would urgently call for the resources of a professional, not an individual

²³ See John Sweller, "Cognitive Load During Problem Solving: Effects on Learning," *Cognitive Science* 12, no. 2 (1988): 257–85, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1202_4.

preparing for marriage and domesticity. Rachmaninoff tapped into a general binary sentiment characteristic of others' views on music. In his introduction to his piano arrangements of the choruses of his most popular songs, his younger contemporary, George Gershwin, identified himself as composing "manly" music, writing in the 1920s:

Sheet music, as ordinarily printed for mass sales, is arranged with an eye to simplicity. The publishers cannot be blamed for getting out simplified versions of songs, and since the majority of the purchasers of popular music are little girls with little hands, who have not progressed very far in their study of the piano.²⁴

He described greater, legitimizing technical difficulties in these arrangements, as they more closely represented his preferred performance practice as a professional. Others, like the great Beethoven interpreter, Artur Schnabel, who performed more "manly," intellectual music, hurled invective to his students in misogynistic terms. He once ridiculed Leonard Shure, saying, "you have the brain of a little baby girl," an insult so grave that Shure became a wreck, unable to touch the piano for six weeks.²⁵

"Masculinity" might better be replaced by "masculinities" when probing the construct across time, location, class, and milieu. The masculinity that surrounded Rachmaninoff culturally was, in some ways, foreign to that of the United States' dominant majority, although aspects converged. Yet, Rachmaninoff had to find a way to appeal to the prevailing ethos of American masculinity to negotiate respectability when he settled in the United States as an exile. The so-called "American Dream," which touted the United States as a land of opportunity limited only by one's imagination, entailed an ascending middle-class climbing by might. With that came an influx of individuals from backgrounds less privileged relative to aristocratic classes assigned at

²⁴ George Gershwin, *Gershwin at the Keyboard: 18 Song Hits Arranged by The Composer for Piano* (Alfred Publishing, 1995).

²⁵ Leonard Shure, "The Psychology of a Friend," *The Piano Quarterly*, Winter 1973-74.

birth, as was historically the case in Europe. American culture tended to value “hard work,” characterized by physical toil. With more economically diverse concertgoers listening to his performances, Rachmaninoff found himself needing to relate to “hard work” precepts, which led to an unusual musical synthesis in conjunction with his aristocratic, Russian, and Orthodox worldviews. Especially in the context of dominant American religious leanings, Rachmaninoff’s approach to respectability took extraordinary turns that resulted in multivalent meanings, some particular to him and others particular to his listening audiences.

Niebur writes that by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fears of “overcivilization” and Victorian sentimentalism weakening and feminizing American middleclass men led to an emphasis on physical might.²⁶ Thus, in the United States during this period, the intersection of Protestant Christianity with masculine, physical toil saw the proliferation of so-called “Muscular Christianity,” which had its beginnings in England. Some of the original key figures included authors Thomas Hughes, Charles Kingsley, and Ralph Connor. Its basic ideologic tenets combined athletic games, vitality, and virtue with Protestant pronouncements.²⁷ An especially significant American exponent of the movement was Endicott Peabody, a minister who influenced Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who himself had grown up in a household practicing Muscular Christianity.²⁸ Noting that “One sometimes hears it asserted that religion is effeminate [...],” Peabody sought to propagate the reach of churchgoing to a populace beyond women and

²⁶ Louis Niebur, “Music” in Bret E. Carroll, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2003), 326.

²⁷ John J. MacAloon, “Games” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, eds. Mircea Eliade and Charles J. Adams, vol. 5 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 477.

²⁸ 8. Endicott Peabody sermon, February 5, 1882. As quoted in Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

children, rendering religion more masculine.²⁹ He later linked “manliness” to a basic sense of morality in a sermon:

[The] Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ presents to us the perfect man and I know not that effeminance, is inherent in perfection. If manliness consists in assenting in a reckless way to any deposition however immoral or wrong, if manliness is a total disregard for the feeling of others and doing whatever one chooses, if to indulge all one’s tastes and to let oneself go, is manly then religion is not manly. But if true manliness has in it cleaving to that which is right and abhorring which is wrong, in helping others in trouble or sorrow, in mixing with the world and sympathizing with the world and yet trying to make the world better it be only by a little, or in being ready to give up one’s life for another because one has so great a love for his friend and then, I say that religion is truly manly.

Peabody segued from this to urge physical upkeep, purporting that Christ leaned toward simplicity, a “life of toil” and a “life of health.” Characterizing Peabody’s views on Jesus’s physiognomy, Hunter Hampton suggests that his racial ideology was dominant in 1880s America. Peabody claimed that Jesus had “Hellenistic” features that distinguished him, pointing



Figure 1. *Laocoön and His Sons*, ancient Greek statue found in Rome. On display at the Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

²⁹ Hunter M. Hampton, “‘RELIGION IS TRULY MANLY’: Endicott Peabody, Muscular Christianity, and Reform in Tombstone, Arizona,” *The Journal of Arizona History* 57, no. 2 (2016): 197–220.

to idealized male physical form as depicted in ancient Greek statues, similar as seen in Laocoön and His Sons.³⁰

The imprint Muscular Christianity left behind did not quickly recede; well into the late 20th century, the movement's ideals persisted. At the erstwhile Crystal Cathedral campus in Garden Grove, California (now the [Catholic] Christ Cathedral), for example, where one of the most widely televised Protestant church services, "The Hour of **Power**" [boldness added] aired from 1981 to 2013, lies a striking statue of Job emerging out of marble in agony. (To recall, the Old Testament story of Job is one of struggle. God accepts a wager from Satan to test Job's faith by afflicting him with disease; death of his children, servants, and livestock; among other calamities.) In depicting the story, Dallas Anderson opted not to show an emaciated body replete

³⁰ Hampton, 205



Figure 2. Job: carved wooden figure, possibly German, c. 1750-1850 (left & center); Job by Dallas Anderson, Christ Cathedral, Garden Grove, CA (right).

with legions, as in the wood carving shown, but rather a of neo-Attic Adonis (Figure 2).³¹ The sculpture’s message suggests a nobility of struggle represented physically, as with ancient Greek statues.

More immediately, the statue elevates a value for maximal masculine might—or “**power,**” which paralleled some of the musical performance values of the church.

This was to such an extent that inside the Crystal Cathedral resides one of the largest instruments and machines in the world, a pipe organ boasting nearly 16,000 pipes, including some at the length of 32-feet. The vast array of pipes in that physical space suggests power,



Figure 3. Hazel Wright Pipe Organ, Christ Cathedral, Garden Grove, California.

given the extremely high wind pressures needed to fill the Cathedral's space, and might, through the engineering marvel of the complicated machinery of the complex instrument. The console itself is reminiscent of a cockpit (Figure 3).³²

Peabody's mission to masculinize church and move it away from the stodgy, sourpuss yet sentimental Victorian matriarch pushed a heightened value for physicality and complexity into the public consciousness, influencing class structures.³³ With various forms of physical-laden values stemming from Muscular Christianity circulating throughout the United States, Rachmaninoff's music, both compositionally and performatively, resonated well with the cultural majority working to attain the American Dream with toil and might. Compositionally, writing such pianistically maximalist music implied mastery not only of musicality but mastery of the physical body. Alongside the relentless cultivation of the physical body came a sense of personal mastery and temperance.

In preparing for his extensive American concert tour in 1909, Rachmaninoff composed his notoriously complicated and challenging Third Concerto. For most classical pianists, the concerto became the monarch of core repertory in terms of maximalist impulse and demands. The dedication to perform even a satisfactory reading in terms of general accuracy is staggering, given its technical conundrums, challenges on cognition, length, pacing, emotional demands, quick shifts in qualities, and stamina required. These qualities would also characterize the original 1913 version of the Second Sonata he would later write. Learning the concerto requires

³² Photograph from "Christ Cathedral, Garden Grove, Rededication Events." *The Diapason*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.thediapason.com/news/christ-cathedral-garden-grove-rededication-events>.

³³ See Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, 1st Noonday Press ed. (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), chap. 6.

significant practice and high maintenance levels, inducing Rachmaninoff to say that he “wrote it for elephants.”³⁴ He dedicated it to the living pianist he most respected, Josef Hofmann, proudly flexing his bicep in the photo, seemingly up to the Herculean task (Figure 4). Although arguably the most accomplished technician of his era, the sporty Hofmann declined to play it, saying it “wasn’t for him.” In truth, his refusal to learn the work was likely due to his tiny hands, so petite that Steinway custom-constructed a piano for him with a keyboard $\frac{7}{8}$ the standard size.

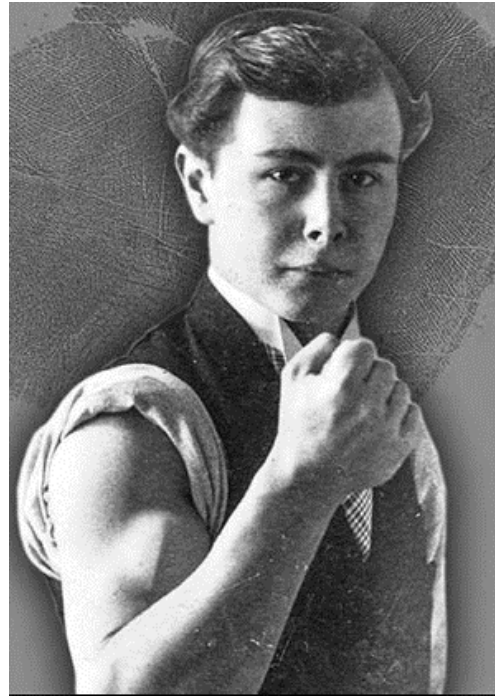


Figure 4. Pianist Josef Hofmann “flexing” around age 15 (c. 1891). [Original source not identified but taken from *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Rendered back to black and white.]

Notably, Rachmaninoff wrote this concerto specifically for a fiscally rewarding concert tour in the United States, which opens the possibility that he deliberately appealed more directly to the general American concert audience. Perhaps thinking of America’s penchant for work, he remarked that he was “like a man doing hard labour” during the compositional process.³⁵ So demanding was the piano part that as he embarked to the United States, he practiced for two weeks on a dummy keyboard on a boat to prepare for its premiere at Carnegie Hall, even though he composed the work himself.³⁶ Rachmaninoff was not alone in his toils; the formidable Alexis Weissenberg later remarked in his liner notes about the “long weeks of applied hard labor” when practicing the concerto.³⁷ In

³⁴ As he told Vladimir Horowitz. (Commonly found in program notes.)

³⁵ Rachmaninoff in a letter to Pressman in 1909, as quoted in Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield, Vt.: Scolar Press Co., 1990), 210.

³⁶ Martyn, 210.

³⁷ Liner notes in Alexis Weissenberg, Georges Prêtre, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Concerto no. 3 in D minor, op. 30* (New York, N.Y: RCA Victor, 1968).

my private lessons with Ann Schein, she dramatically recounted the “dark period” of her youth when she “saw all black” after her teacher, Mieczysław Münz, gave her the score to strengthen her hands. Münz would hover over her for six hours every day as he drilled every note into each of her fingers, inducing her to bite the piano when he left; she recalled, having “never worked like that.” One hundred performances later, she still feels the concerto’s physical demands, nearly collapsing after rehearsals, she remarks.

Masculinizing Chopin

While the poor reception of his First Symphony disheartened him, Rachmaninoff maintained respect for different aspects of his musical sense of self, which simultaneously included late Romantic impulses and forward-looking modernism. His expression of performative modernism as a concert pianist, ironically, was fueled by the rumblings of Alexander Ossovsky, who, in many ways, planted the seed for what would underlie Rachmaninoff’s performing approach in writing about the premiere of the First Symphony:

The performance was raw, unthought out, unfinished, and it produced the impression of a slovenly play-through and not of the realization of a definite artistic idea, which the conductor clearly lacked. Rhythmic vitality, so essential in the works and performances of Rachmaninoff, weathered. Dynamic shadings, gradations of tempo, nuances of expression—everything in which this music is so rich—disappeared. A kind of shapeless, turbid sound-mass dragged on interminably. The torpid character of the conductor completed the whole agonizing ghastliness of the impression.³⁸

Rachmaninoff, after that, became an empirically leaning musical architect as a performer, carefully thinking of how to realize “a definite artistic idea” presenting itself as absolute and impervious to criticism. An invulnerable interpretative plan would entail that if objectively realized on stage, a poorly received performance would still count as a good performance; the

³⁸ Alexander Ossovsky, in Z.A. Apetyan *Vospominaniya o Rakhmaninove* [Reminiscences about Rachmaninoff], 2 vols., 5th ed., Moscow, 1988. As appearing in translation in Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 97.

ignorant audience would be at fault for their obstinateness. In conversation with Marietta Shaginyan, Rachmaninoff said about the idea of a definite “point”:

“Did you really not notice that I missed the point? I let the point slip, you understand!” Later he told me that, for him, every piece he performed was a structure with a culminating point. One must so measure out the whole mass of sounds, give a depth and strength of sound in such frequency and with the greatest naturalness though in fact with the greatest art, this point should sound and flash like the tape falling at the end of a race or glass breaking from a blow. Depending on the actual piece, this culmination may be at the end or in the middle; it may be loud or quiet, but the performer must know how to approach it with absolute calculation, absolute exactness, because if it slips the whole structure goes to pieces, the piece becomes disjointed and scrappy and does not convey to the listener what it should convey. Rachmaninoff added: “I am not alone in feeling this; Chaliapin also feels the same thing. Once at a concert of his, the public was wild with enthusiasm, but backstage he was tearing his hair out because the point had slipped.”³⁹

Such calculated absolutism acted as a self-protective measure in performing authority. On the whole, Rachmaninoff’s pianism is marked by a spirit of structuralism, calculation, and restraint, specifically pointing to a matter of professionalism, which in Rachmaninoff’s intensely patriarchal world, entailed cleaving a spot for himself in a realm otherwise dominated by genteel, feminine sensibilities. Rachmaninoff was especially in danger of receiving rebuke as his music continued in the trajectory of Chopin, whose dandified small forms—nocturnes, waltzes, mazurkas, and some polonaises—kept him in salon parlors with princesses, duchesses, countesses, and other eligible young ladies. Chopin was often preoccupied inordinately with his appearance, spending fortunes on the latest fashion and white gloves. He would not be caught dead without having curled his hair before giving a piano lesson.⁴⁰ (His significant other, novelist Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, known by her pen name, “George Sand,” made up the gender difference as a cigar-smoking, somewhat butch, cross-dressing woman.)

³⁹ Marietta Shaginyan, as she recalled seeing Rachmaninoff after a concert. Quoted in Martyn, 401.

⁴⁰ Beckie Strum, “An Ailing Frédéric Chopin Found Respite at This Newly Listed Scottish Home,” accessed April 21, 2022, <https://www.mansionglobal.com/articles/an-ailing-frederic-chopin-found-respite-at-this-newly-listed-scottish-home-221247>.

Of one of his favorite piano composers, Rachmaninoff said, strangely, “Chopin! [...] He is today more **modern** than many **moderns**. It is incredible that he should remain so **modern**. His genius is so tremendous that not any composer of today is more **modern** in style [...]”⁴¹ (Boldness added.) More than anything else, this reveals a basic predilection for modernism, even in viewing composers categorically not modern. In this sense, Rachmaninoff’s views of Chopin reveal more about Rachmaninoff than they do Chopin. Rachmaninoff “masculinizes” Chopin by creating a careful structure, appealing to aesthetic modernism. Such moves were not foreign to the era. Heinrich Schenker would legitimize the music of his favorite performers through seemingly objective abstractions, showing a composer’s genius in maintaining attention to fundamental, “natural” listening. Despite his allegiance to the parlor, Chopin’s music made Schenker’s list. In doing so, Chopin’s music displayed “structural virility,” as Susan McClary notes.⁴² Similarly, Brahms’ legacy was scrutinized, which Schoenberg attempted to rescue with his article, “Brahms the Progressive.”⁴³ Schoenberg launched a passionate defense by highlighting Brahms’ innovations within the confines of more conventional harmony and formal processes, appealing thus to masculinist ideals.

Western classical music’s most respected form—sonata-allegro form—tests composers in writing rigorous, and therefore legitimate, “manly” music. Rachmaninoff’s interpretative disposition, especially after he left Russia for good, reflected tendencies he absorbed from his motherland, tendencies largely encapsulating Russianness through inescapable Orthodoxy. In the United States, the results of his Orthodox leanings, I argue, would be re-read as more austere,

⁴¹ Rachmaninoff in “Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality” in *The Etude*, April 1931, 240.

⁴² Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105.

⁴³ Arnold Schoenberg, “Brahms the Progressive,” in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York, 1975).

professional, and therefore masculine, ultimately fighting against implicit middlebrow categorizations tacked onto him from certain compositional standpoints. Rachmaninoff's handling of Chopin's Sonata demonstrates an unflinching commitment to Orthodox-like principles that govern long-term hearing and commitment to a vision, especially in fashioning connections to his sequel Second Sonata, Op. 36. Although appealing to American listening preferences in particular ways, Rachmaninoff found a way to shape musical space that would be true to his inner being without compromise. The ethos of Rachmaninoff's articulation of Orthodoxy would manifest itself not only by sharp interpretative dispassion but also mastery of the self in perfecting his expressive capacity at the piano, beginning with a monk-like dedication he learned as a child waking up at 6 a.m. to begin his practice under his severe teacher, Nikolai Zverev.

Eastern Orthodox Deification

In Eastern Orthodox thought, deification, humanity's chief goal and the central point of human existence, is complex in doctrine and praxis. Deification is the equivalent of "salvation" in Western soteriology, but the path toward deification is not passive, by faith alone, but active in simultaneously requiring work. Eastern Orthodoxy's compendium of religious texts by Church fathers between the 4th and 15th centuries, the *Philokalia*, speaks of the virtues of dispassion, self-control, and self-restraint as being key to attaining deification, as seen in the following selections:

- (1) To have faith is to die for Christ and for His commandments; to believe that this death brings life; to regard poverty as wealth [...] To have faith in Christ means not only to stand aloof from the delights of this life, but also to endure patiently every temptation and test that brings upon us distress, affliction and misfortune, for as long as God wishes and until He comes to us. "I waited patiently for the Lord and He heard me" (Psalms 40:1).
- (7) When you are courageously impervious to all the pleasures of this life, then the demons will promote in your relatives a spurious compassion for you, making them weep

and lament over you before your eyes. You will realize that it is spurious when you stick firmly to your purpose, for you will then see them becoming suddenly infuriated with you: they will no longer want to set eyes on you and will reject you as if you were an enemy.

(12) [...] On the contrary, always be ready to fast, to endure hardship, to exercise the utmost self-control. By keeping to this rule, you will find that always, in every situation, you are abstinent and self-controlled, prompt to renounce your own will in all things.

(17) Even if you are burning with thirst, do not ask for a drink of water until on his own initiative your spiritual father urges you to drink. Constrain yourself, force yourself in all things, prevail over yourself, saying to yourself: "If God wills"

(26) We cannot both sate ourselves with food and spiritually enjoy divine and noumenal blessings; the more we pander to the stomach the less can we experience such enjoyment. But to the degree that we discipline the body we are filled with spiritual nourishment and grace.

(32) Do not place yourself in the hands of an inexperienced master or one subject to the passions [...]

(33) Implore God with prayers and tears to send you a guide who is dispassionate and holy. But you yourself should also study the divine writings – especially the works of the fathers that deal with the practice of the virtues.

(34) Passions acted out can be cured by action. Dissipation, sensuality, gluttony and a dissolute, profligate life produce a passion charged state of soul and impel it to unnatural actions. On the other hand, restraint and self-control, ascetic labour and spiritual struggle translate the soul from its passion-charged state to a state of dispassion.

(85) [...] For the ground and principle of the four cardinal virtues, both natural and divine - sound understanding, courage, self-restraint and justice, the progenitors of all the other virtues - is the divine Wisdom that inspires those who have attained a state of mystical prayer.

(121) The quickest way to ascend to the kingdom of heaven by the short ladder of the virtues is through effacing the five passions hostile to obedience, namely, disobedience, contentiousness, self-gratification self-justification and pernicious self-conceit.⁴⁴

Rachmaninoff relates to this through his performance values and structural unfolding, manifest in musical self-restraint and adherence to larger, external principles, which he terms "the point."

The point, as will become apparent, can extend even between works that interrelate. He said "the

⁴⁴ From "One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts" from Nicodemus et al., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*. Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth; Translated from the Greek and Edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware with the Assistance of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline) [and Others], vol. 4 (London ; Faber and Faber, 1979).

point” represented “a liberation from the last material obstacle, the last barrier between truth and its expression.”⁴⁵

Attempting to reflect on major German philosophies as underlying Rachmaninoff’s work may be productive in some ways, but it is also inevitably reductive in missing something so close to him as Orthodoxy. German philosophy resonated particularly strongly with his friend Nikolai Medtner (steered by his brother Emilii) and colleague Alexander Scriabin, who infused German Idealist thought into their music.⁴⁶ Rachmaninoff generally eschewed philosophical conversations, especially about his music, although he was adjacent to them.⁴⁷ Given the system of signs that will become clearer in his answer to Chopin’s Second Sonata, his Rosetta Stone sequel, Op. 36 (to be discussed) invites investigation into Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy accounts for much native Russianness that typically evades Western musicological discourse, being distinctively different in worldview and pull over aesthetics, even if not wed to fanatical, diehard faith.



⁴⁵ Sergei Rachmaninoff in Sergei Bertensson, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*. (New York: University Press, 1956).

⁴⁶ See Ryan Isao Rowen (Shiotsuki), “Transcending Imagination; Or, An Approach to Music and Symbolism during the Russian Silver Age” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015); See also Morris, “Musical Eroticism and the Transcendent Strain.”

⁴⁷ Mitchell, *Nietzsche’s Orphans*.

Performance Explication: First Movement

Exposition: Introduction (mm. 1-4)

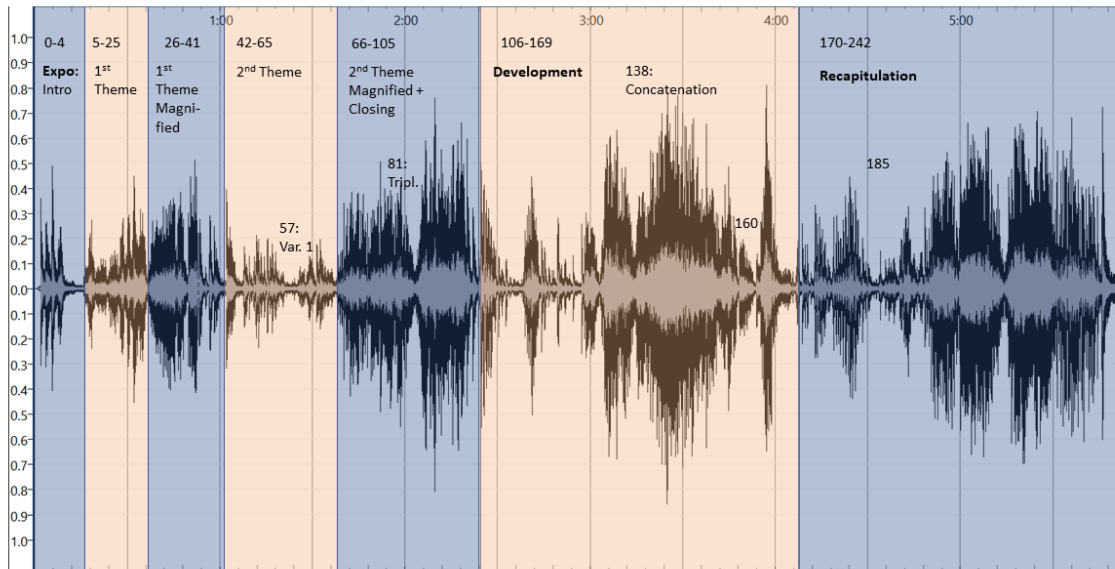


Figure 5. Waveform of Rachmaninoff's recording of the 1st movement (Chopin's Sonata 2). Measure numbers and key moments labeled.

From his very first gesture, Rachmaninoff immediately sets course to reinvent the sonata's first movement by using an interpretive germ that will, in its burgeoning, constitute much of his approach in ultimately linking the Chopin-Rachmaninoff Opp. 35-36 as a diptych. Eschewing overwhelming sounds and outward displays of skill, Rachmaninoff calculates his interpretation of Chopin's Second Sonata, Op. 35 to establish a loss to be filled spectacularly through his own Second Sonata, Op. 36. Rachmaninoff fashions an anticlimax by constructing a structural and ideological vacuum that his Sonata, Op. 36, fills as its converse. Rachmaninoff realizes the movement largely through moves of expressive inversion that often take the mirrored opposites of performance instructions. If Chopin indicates "*forte*," for instance, Rachmaninoff will play *piano*. If convention calls for an outwardly reaching *bel canto* simulation at the piano, Rachmaninoff subdues the tone instead, retreating toward introversion and intimacy. Where most

pianists may create big, “impressive” *bravura* sounds, Rachmaninoff attenuates, sharply redirecting semiosis and listeners’ hermeneutics. Rachmaninoff devises a musical program of resurrection, glorification, and deified rebirth, which I propose connects to *Matushka Rossiya* on an ideal basis on the eve, during, and after the great revolution. In calculating “the point,” as will be seen, this relates not only locally to the movement in question but across compositions in Rachmaninoff’s inner musical universe.

Rachmaninoff inflects Chopin’s opening four-bar gesture with a self-legitimated, aristocratic authority of recomposing his predecessor’s expressive parameters, ultimately setting the stage for loss in need of fulfillment. Playing as such contrasts to most other pianists’ readings, which usually establish formidable presences through greater assertiveness. For example, Alfred Cortot, who made the first commercial recording of the Sonata in 1928 (preceding Rachmaninoff by about two years), commences the work through bold, louder, brass-like, and dramatic musical gestures. Vladimir Horowitz, Rachmaninoff’s good friend, consistently performed with even greater bravado than Cortot. Although this interpretative approach was in Rachmaninoff’s orbit, Rachmaninoff explored marked alternatives that preserved visions of Russianness as he knew it while appealing to modernist demands of more progressive audiences.

Rachmaninoff thus emphasizes the severity of Chopin’s opening phrase by way of comparative contrast with other musicians. In the phenomenological notions of Thomas Clifton, Rachmaninoff foregrounds a sense of spatial depth with the first D \flat descending to the E \sharp octave. His opening dynamic is *mezzo forte* relative to the rest of his performance, and he suggests a *crescendo* by placing more weight on the lower E \sharp octave, which adds to the sound profile a physical depth, which a pianist would already feel in moving the arm to the left. In restraining

the arm’s weight to produce physical movement toward the second octave, which is what Rachmaninoff would have likely done, the physical feeling adds to a sensation of gravity bearing down, intensifying the seriousness of Chopin’s indication, “grave.” Perhaps this might foreshadow a descent into a final resting place to be portrayed in the *marche funèbre*, as Rachmaninoff buoys Chopin’s composed reference to Beethoven’s final piano sonata (No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111), which similarly descends to the piano’s depths (Figure 6), closing his immense cycle with the antipode of the “rocket” figure that launches his first piano sonata (Op. 2, No. 1 in F Minor) dedicated to his teacher Franz Joseph Haydn.⁴⁸ Immediately, Chopin signifies finality and fate, which appealed strongly to Rachmaninoff contemplating his own nation’s destiny and realizing that in sound.



Figure 6. Bottom: Beethoven, Sonata No. 32, opening. (Schenker Ed.); Top: Chopin, Sonata No. 2, opening (Mikuli Ed.)

⁴⁸ Wayne Petty also hears this as an allusion to Beethoven’s Sonata No. 32, and reminds his readers that James Huneker’s preface to the Schirmer edn. of Chopin Sonatas, ed. Carl Mikuli (New York, 1895) also points out this possibility. See Wayne C. Petty, “Chopin and the Ghost of Beethoven,” *19th-Century Music* 22, no. 3 (1999): 289, <https://doi.org/10.2307/746802>.

Proceeding forward, Rachmaninoff maintains a preponderance to hold back considerably. Rather than emphasize what many pianists treat as a deep sigh with the C# octave with G# interspersed, Rachmaninoff disregards the marked accent and plays slightly softer with a “*mezzo, mezzo forte*,” which follows a larger *diminuendo* from C# to Db and finally Cb. He performs Chopin’s smaller-sized notes evenly and unaffectedly softer, placing the first of the notated quarter notes with the left hand’s downbeat, maintaining even time and ignoring Chopin’s notated *crescendo*. At m. 4, Rachmaninoff’s final Cb octave follows expectations that a harmonic resolution of a dissonance will be softer; however, his right hand is so *pianississimo* that it approaches the margins of hearing. In what amounts to a great inversion of Chopin’s marking is a nearly inaudible climax to a *pianissimo*, which follows as a move Rachmaninoff will also make elsewhere in his performance of this movement.

Michael L. Klien contends that the opening of this sonata shows a peculiarity of notation (Figure 6), arguing that it presents an interpretative conundrum. Chopin starts with a Db, enharmonically reinterprets it as a C#, and then moves back to Db. Klein writes, “The enharmonic riddle so soon in the text opens a rift in tonality through which we glimpse an uncanny world.”⁴⁹ Rachmaninoff reacts strongly to these opening bars, sensing Chopin invites speculation as to the meaning of his strange herald. Thus, Rachmaninoff’s interpretative inversion plays with “uncanny” perceptions, which make further appearances thought his performance of other movements, notably the *marche funèbre* and *presto finale*.

Although there is no evidence that Rachmaninoff was a proponent of Heinrich Schenker’s analytic approach, Rachmaninoff’s belief, “big line, big musician; small line, small

⁴⁹ Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, 91–92.

musician” opines a value of long-term structural hearing that was common in an era appreciating apparent logic and organicism.⁵⁰ Accordingly, it is convenient to speak of Rachmaninoff’s performance using some of Schenker’s terminology. First, in a short-term, micro-sense, Rachmaninoff breaks from Schenkerian aural expectations that outline a clear, 3-2-1 *Ursatz*-like resolution, which pianists routinely mark with the B \flat octave in the left hand at m. 5, marked *forzato*. The B \flat octave Rachmaninoff plays there is *piano* and not affirming a satisfying tonic, even though this belongs to a relatively brief introduction. Moreover, the D \flat -C-B \flat descending line would typically suggest a self-contained gesture to pianists. On the contrary, Rachmaninoff breaks the line with an interrupting *caesura* between mm. 4 and 5—between the C \sharp and B \flat , or degrees 2 and 1, offering a moment of composure before beginning a long-term quest for the tonic. In combination with other elements that will bring clarity to my reading, this tonic is a metaphor ultimately for Mother Russia. Rachmaninoff’s move here commences a narrative of loss and a search for completion through his interpretative choices. The impetus of what will characterize his structure acts as a metaphor for aligning to his lived experiences. Rather than subscribing to conventional playing, he composes his interpretation from a distance, launching an inverted voyage into his own psychologic interiority, as it would seem. Over the course of his performance of the Sonata, he never provides a satisfying tonic, which becomes something he saves for the finale of his sequel to Chopin’s Sonata, his Sonata No. 2 in B \flat Minor, Op. 36. As will become more apparent, the satisfying tonic occurs specifically with the glorification of the “feminine” second theme, multivalently functioning as a feminine trope of restoration or

⁵⁰ “Big Line” quoted by Ruth Slenczynska, Rachmaninoff’s last living pupil, in *Clavier*, October 1973, 15.

idealization, in the context of Orthodoxy's *Theotokos* ("The God Bearer," Mary) or the restored holy city, New Jerusalem, "coming down from God out of heaven" as described in Revelation 21:2, ameliorating the sense of encroaching apocalypse brought by the destruction of pre-revolutionary Russia. Following the aggrandization of the second theme near the end is a two-page elaboration of the B \flat tonic pedal that was withheld throughout his interpretation of Chopin's sonata. Thus, in a cyclical, aerial view, the two sonatas may be considered as follows (Figure 7):

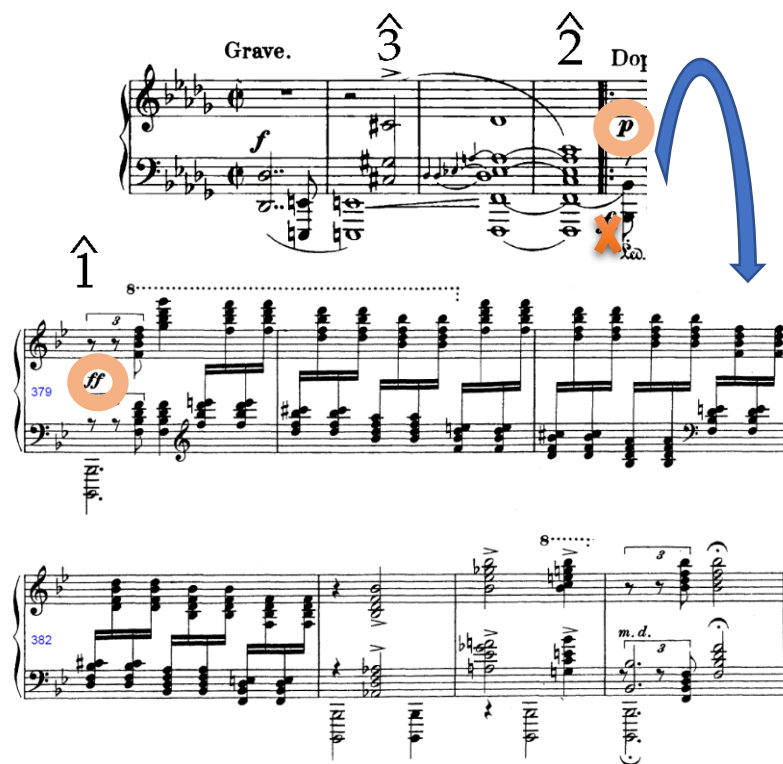


Figure 7. Chopin's "problem" of the missing tonic; Rachmaninoff's "solution" of the tonic. (Top: Chopin, Sonata No. 2, Opening with Rachmaninoff's weak B \flat octave. Bottom: Rachmaninoff's insistence of a fulfilled, satisfying tonic B \flat .) [Color annotations are mine.]

Rachmaninoff's system of signs, as I will further explain regarding his own sonata in Chapter 3, acts as a bridge directing a more concrete interpretation, which I present throughout this explication.

From a corporeal perspective I gained by emulating Rachmaninoff's performance, I sensed his slowness and deliberateness entailed an unusually high level of physical energy, which ran contrary to immediate intuition afforded by listening alone. (See Appendix A – Chopin-Rachmaninoff Hybrid Sonata No. 2 in B \flat Minor, Opp. 35-36, for a performance I recorded involving aspects of emulation.) If following the score and Chopin's performance instructions, the pianist's unseen energy might more readily dissipate through the resolving C to the lower B \flat octave. However, Rachmaninoff disrupts this movement between scale degrees 2 and 1, while maintaining quiet intensity. In reconstructing his performance through my hands, I noticed consistently that almost automatically, my diaphragm and abdominal muscles contracted slightly, accompanied by a slight jerk of posterior neck muscles when I reached the C-octave in the right hand. As I could not release the energy through the keys due to holding energy back as through an internal dam, it had to dissipate somewhere else, which occurred in my upper body. In some ways, this resembled a shudder ushering in a directness I felt in my core. As I will detail in the next chapter, shuddering figures prominently in Rachmaninoff's performance of the subsequent *scherzo* movement and opens the door to larger signification. Because the amount of planning of the four-bar phrase is great, and because the stakes are high, slightly playing any part too loudly would derail the exhibition of the introductory interpretative seed.

Exposition: 1st Theme (mm. 5-41)

As he proceeds, Rachmaninoff disregards the score's notated use of profuse pedal, favoring greater clarity of emerging rhythmic textures. Where many pianists create a cloud of sound in the left-hand part from mm. 5-8 through an untampered realization of Chopin's long pedal marking, Rachmaninoff does the opposite. With this greater clarity of the attack of each figure, for which he adds *tenuti* on the left hand's B \flat octave downbeats, Rachmaninoff highlights

Chopin's evocation of extra-musical connotations. Considering the prevalent *topoi* of his time and taking Chopin's surroundings into account, this may function as a Peircean icon representing a horse. (As a reminder, an icon in semiotics has qualities that resemble the signified.) Although Chopin indicated pedal use for these measures, following his instruction precisely might not necessarily translate well on a modern Steinway D, which has far greater resonance. Rachmaninoff probably sensed this, and for this reason, went the opposite direction to make this a matter subject to his own discretion.

According to Raymond Monelle, the horse topic is almost always associated with the aristocracy.⁵¹ The topic of the "noble horse," a cultural unit conveying sound and more prominent notions, would have appealed to Rachmaninoff from the vantage point of the dissolution of his aristocratic status. Rachmaninoff latches onto these elements that evaded contemporaneous recognition on account of a modern instrument obfuscating them and due to varying dispositions among pianists. Simultaneously, however, given his more strikingly faithful realization of Chopin's *crescendo* followed by a *diminuendo* after an inflection point at the downbeat of m. 7, an updated locomotion might suggest the sound of a steam train starting, moving, and proceeding away. By 1930, Rachmaninoff certainly used trains for transportation, as seen in the photograph of him on a car of the Great Northern Railway (Figure 8). Might have

⁵¹ Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral*, Musical Meaning and Interpretation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 25.

Leonard Frank, the photographer of this image, especially drawn to industrial subjects, seen in Rachmaninoff a facet of modernity?

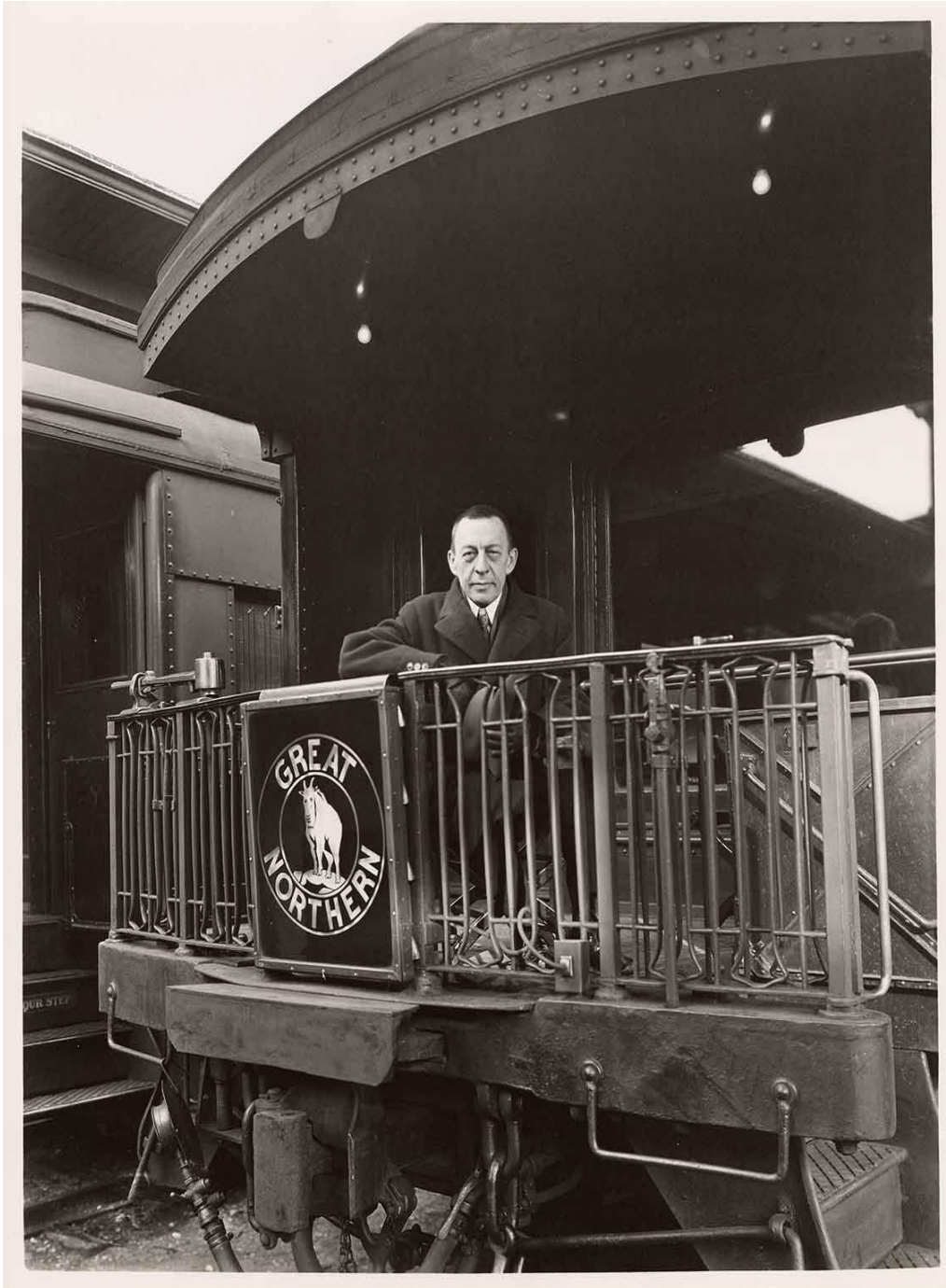


Figure 8. Sergei Rachmaninoff, Monday 11 March 1929. The Great Russian composer at the Great Northern Railway Station. Source: Photo by Leonard Frank, Jewish Museum & Archives of BC #LF.00221

A musical gesture can, of course, represent multiple possibilities. Rachmaninoff's pronounced wedge shape of the *crescendo* followed by a *diminuendo* anticipates the large-scale structural design that will characterize his entire performance of the *marche funèbre*, which will imply a processional and recessional with a funeral *cortège* ceremonially transporting a body in its coffin. In this case, it can be both. Because Rachmaninoff was a composer, his written musical works also shed light on his musical thinking. In many cases, in large-scale forms, Rachmaninoff uses thematic connections to bind different movements together. In his Second Piano Concerto in C Minor, Op. 18, Rachmaninoff's second theme of the first movement sees



Figure 9. Rachmaninoff Concerto 2: Second Theme of 1st Mvt. (Continued at a tempo)



Figure 10. Rachmaninoff Concerto 2: End of 2nd movement. Thematic element begins at G-sharp. (Key of E)



Figure 11. Rachmaninoff Concerto 2: 2nd theme of 3rd movement. The figure begins at the third measure with the F-octave.



Figure 12. Rachmaninoff Concerto 2. 3rd Mvt. Thematic element in orchestra. (Key of C)

numerous appearances and transformations throughout the entire concerto, including the second and third movements (Figures 9-12).⁵²

Moreover, in his Third Piano Concerto in D Minor, Op. 30 (1909), he reintroduces the first movement's Orthodox-like chant (Figure) both in the second movement in a waltz realization (Figure), and in the third movement, where the orchestra takes it up for the last time as the piano accompanies in E \flat minor (Figure).



Figure 13. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 3: I. Allegro ma non tanto. Piano's opening theme.

⁵² For a demonstration of thematic organicism in Rachmaninoff, view Frederick Viner, *How Rachmaninoff Writes a Melody | Piano Concerto No. 2 Analysis*, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoO_q1-rF_Q.

The image displays a page of a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 3, II. Intermezzo. It features five staves. The top two staves are for Clarinet (Clar.) and Bassoon (Fag.), both marked with *poco cresc.* and *p*. The third staff is for Piano (Pfte.), marked with *poco cresc.* and *mf*. The bottom three staves are for the piano accompaniment, marked with *pizz.* and *pp*. The music is in 3/4 time and features a waltz-like melody in the woodwinds.

Figure 14. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 3: II. Intermezzo. 1st Theme reappearing in the clarinet and bassoon lines in waltz form and with altered rhythm, this time in triple rather than quadruple time.

The image displays a page of a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 3, III. Finale. It features two systems of staves. The top system has two staves for the piano accompaniment, marked with *a tempo poco a poco accel.*, *mf*, *cresc.*, and *f*. The bottom system has two staves for the piano accompaniment, marked with *a tempo poco a poco accel.* and *mf cantab.*. The music is in 4/4 time and features a waltz-like melody in the piano.

Figure 15. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 3: III. Finale. 1st theme appearing in the orchestra; the piano accompanies. (Edition Gutheil, Moscow. Engraved by Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig.)

Also in that concerto, the first movement's *ossia* cadenza (Figure) reappears identically harmonically and melodically in different figuration just before the work's grand call-and-response climax near the end (Figure). This material derives from an earlier instance in the first movement's dizzying, almost psychotic frenzy of multiple voices (Figure). In his Fourth Concerto in G Minor, Op. 40, the opening fanfare material of the first movement (Figure) appears near the latter portion of the third movement (Figure 20).

The image shows a page of a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 3, I. Allegro ma non tanto. The score is written for multiple instruments and includes various performance instructions. At the top, there is a section labeled 'Ossia' with a piano part. Below this, the 'Pflte.' (Piano) part is marked 'mf'. The string parts are marked 'div.' and 'pp'. The piano part is marked 'Cadenza Piano' and 'Allegro molto.' The score includes dynamic markings such as 'dim.', 'p', and 'cresc.'.

Figure 16. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 3: I. Allegro ma non tanto. Note the ossia cadenza, especially.

Vivace. (♩ = ♩)

69 Vivace (♩ = ♩)

ff p

ff dim.

8.....

pp

Figure 17. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 3: Finale. Accompanied cadenza from the first movement, now in militaristic topic.

Più vivo.

mf

3 3 3

1 2 2 1 1 2 2 1

6 6 6

Figure 18. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 3. First instance of thematic material. Note the similarity by the contour.



Figure 21. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: Opening Mvmt. (1913 version)



Figure 22. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2 (1913 version): III. Allegro molto. 1st movement material.



Figure 20. Rachmaninoff, Concerto No. 4: III. Opening fanfare material

Likewise, in his Second Sonata in B \flat Minor, Op. 36, Rachmaninoff grafts in slightly altered transitional material from the beginning of the first movement (Figure) to the middle of the third

movement (Figure). The instances of Rachmaninoff foreshadowing what is to come seems to arise from a desire to bind and unify musical elements across a work and would extend to his practices in constructing his interpretations. Rachmaninoff's tendency to write "organically" is perhaps strongest in his Second (1901), Third (1909), and Fourth (1926, rev. 1941) Concerti, and may stem from his tendency to push against delegitimizing notions of problematic femininity that characterized his works, given their intense lyricism. At the same time, this would align to internal ideas of fate and destiny, which he sensed from the collapse of his homeland. The seed he clarifies and intensifies in his performance of Chopin's Sonata functions similarly, which in this context hermeneutically signals fate as death. However, it is not just any death; it is the death of the *dvoryantsvo*, the aristocracy, which would align well with a ceremony marking one's belonging to this social class, as Lawrence Kramer notes of the third movement.⁵³

Simultaneously, Rachmaninoff rationalizes Chopin's music in applying larger musical adhesives.

At the point where Chopin indicates "*agitato*," starting at m. 9, Rachmaninoff highlights the asymmetrical nature of the figuration often eluding other pianists. Chopin includes dyads, which tilts the figuration, on the *alla breve* offbeats (the "ands" of the two main beats). Even more strongly than before, Rachmaninoff calls upon the "noble horse" topic in an uncertain voyage searching for an attenuated tonic—the "soul" of Russia. Adding to this disturbing atmosphere are the tritones in the left hand at mm. 13-14, which emerge as sonorities that he quickly brings back as ghostly apparitions that do not quite exist in one plane or another.⁵⁴ While the tritones are already there, pianists typically subsume them into the texture non-distinctly and without emphasis. In Rachmaninoff's case, the emphasized tritones contribute to his

⁵³ Lawrence Kramer, "Chopin at the Funeral: Episodes in the History of Modern Death," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54, no. 1 (2001): 97–125, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2001.54.1.97>.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ewelina Boczkowska, "Chopin's Ghosts," *19th-Century Music* 35, no. 3 (2012): 204–23.

performance of an uncertain journey—tinted with evil at this point, considering the interval’s long association with the diabolic.

Chopin correlates the precarity suggested by the harmony physically through his figuration. For most pianists, the left-hand part feels awkward and can be physically deleterious, with uncomfortable stretches, with filled-out 10ths reaching to diminished 12ths, as seen in the score excerpt (Figure). With



Figure 23. Chopin, Sonata No. 2: I. Grave--Doppio movimento. Left hand stretches. (Key=b♭)

careful adjustments in piano technique, the stretches can disappear; however, that does not always factor into

performers’ playing arsenal. Without adjustment, executing the left-hand part can bring on varying forms of tendonitis, among other issues. Changing the basic forearm position, which would involve aligning the arm behind each played note or dyad, played successively without using a physical *legato*, is a way to assuage the figure’s harm, likely the only viable solution for most pianists. Doing so also increases power behind each note or dyad, as the forearm’s weight may transfer easily to the fingers and ultimately to the keys. Rachmaninoff’s unique handspan, however, allows him to keep most of his palm at the center of the figure without much difficulty. Without needing to rely as much on the arm, Rachmaninoff’s playing would be more finger-based, which assists him in achieving his remarkably quiet execution, contrasting to many other pianists. However, the sensation of outstretching the hand would not wholly subside, even with his handspan. A low-grade feeling of discomfort would remain, likely guiding Rachmaninoff’s felt sense of the interpretation as he proceeds forward.

By this point, Rachmaninoff has established his interpretation as both going against and with conventions, while being sharply aware of them. Within this frame, he presents a rationalized performance, which sets out a ghastly journey through culturally known codes and

avoids running off the rails, so to speak, with unbridled passion, showing a restraint that will later become more associated with Orthodox virtues found in the *Philokalia*. Rachmaninoff's liberties fall within, I suggest, conventional modes of late-19th- and early 20th-century masculinity. Rachmaninoff's masculine markers are of a broad spectrum within this movement. In examining his sympathy toward the "noble horse," a topic Monelle points out as masculine, Rachmaninoff further emphasizes this aspect, making it even more performatively male-leaning through simulations of industrialization.⁵⁵ His ascetic tendency toward winnowing away the use of the pedal removes an element of "excess," traditionally considered feminine.

Furthermore, by removing the more immediately "warm" qualities afforded by the pedal, he achieves a mechanized characteristic that further evokes "maleness" in historically conventional terms. In this vein, his performance reflects a more significant trend of professionalization seen in the male-dominated career of concert pianist. His performance shuns more domestic aesthetics of free fancy in deference to other elements associated with "professionalism," as he will elucidate through suggestions of contrapuntal awareness, constant calculation, and a certain asceticism in holding back a definite arrival on the tonic.

Rachmaninoff outlines many of his unique performance practices in the exposition of this Sonata. Agogics and other manipulations of time stemming from more typical examples of *tempo rubato* are among the keystones of his ways of highlighting structure and working with a goal-oriented dynamic profile. Just before Chopin reintroduces the first *agitato* theme again at m. 25, Rachmaninoff punctuates the end of the phrase at m. 21, where he slightly lengthens the right hand's two eighth-note figures agogically, inserting a *ritardando* and *diminuendo* from m. 23-24,

⁵⁵ Monelle, *The Musical Topic*.

thereby intensifying the arrival of the theme at m. 25. Rachmaninoff amplifies this approach at m. 39 when he turns the two quarters to stressed halves, highlighting structural changes to come. This approach allows him to avoid relying on large dynamic inflections to demarcate structure, which would obfuscate his view of the point, if used unreservedly. He saves this dynamic high point for the development section, to specific effect.

Exposition: 2nd Theme (mm. 42-80)

Theorist A.B. Marx designated “feminine” and “masculine” themes in music in the 19th century; his designations remained popular in music pedagogy until the 1960s, when they were seen, not in historical terms, but in terms of contemporary gender politics. Relating to sonata-allegro form, he wrote:

The second theme, on the other hand, serves as contrast to the first, energetic statement, though dependent on and determined by it. It is of a more tender nature, flexibly rather than emphatically constructed—in a way, the feminine as opposed to the preceding masculine. In this sense each of the two themes is different, and only together do they form something of a higher, more perfect order.⁵⁶

Chopin moves to a more “feminine” second theme, which customarily entails greater lyricism through *legato* touch, conjunct motion, and an overall lush emotion in the solo line, allowing for the emulation of women sopranos singing Italian opera. Chopin paces this section to burgeon in intensity by first introducing the second theme in a chorale-like setting, which invites contemplations of more inward, churchly themes. Chopin then introduces two variations of the theme’s setting, which usually leads pianists to project operatically and dramatically, as the music ascends in pitch and volume, thereby evoking hyper-expressive, *bel canto* qualities to fill a concert hall. Despite what may otherwise seem to be immutable musical features in this section, once again, Rachmaninoff does not completely follow Chopin’s prescribed parameters of

⁵⁶ A.B. Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1845), quoted in James Webster, “Sonata Form,” *New Grove* 17, 498.

execution in realizing his interpretation. Rather, he continues to hold back, staying in line with his general tendency to prepare for the specific effect of carefully calculating and approaching “the point.”

Having a dynamic and emotional climax occur too soon would cause the structure to collapse, rendering the performance, from his stated viewpoints, shapeless and patchy, like student work. These values stem from even deeper core beliefs and values. The Orthodox Church has strict *decora* with music, where a measure of restraint follows as a prevalent expectation. Expressly, as only music coming from living souls is permitted inside church buildings, vocal music, especially choral music, predominates. To this respect, favoring inwardness stemming from an Imperial Orthodox temperament, from before churches were repressed during the Soviet years, bore upon his interpretation. It may follow that Chopin’s chorale setting of the second theme would appeal to Rachmaninoff in treating his performance as a private, inward devotion, refusing to push boundaries out of sacred humility.

His larger interpretive prerogatives parallel Russian Orthodox Church values, as recorded in the *Philokalia*. Rachmaninoff will once again play with such religious strictures in mind in the *marche funèbre*, as I will further illustrate in Chapter 3. With a keen sense of fatalism regarding his country’s destiny—likely intensified by that of the ruling tsar—“the point” metaphorically aligns itself to a grand restoration of pre-revolutionary Russia. Thus, guarding himself from tempting passions of extroverted display that may ordinarily move an audience quickly, Rachmaninoff holds back and keeps smaller musical goals carefully weighed. Overall, this gives Rachmaninoff extensive license in introducing changes, and to invert much of Chopin’s instructions. At m. 40, he sits on the downbeat slightly longer, introducing a *fermata* so as to mark a structural change at m. 41, where he is in *tempo* and plays two half notes at m. 89 beats

per minute, contrasting to the previous value of ~126 bpm. In rejecting *bel canto* conventions, Rachmaninoff performs the inner chorale voices much the same in terms of volume, expelling the *diva* inhabiting the right hand's fourth and fifth fingers. To a similar effect, Rachmaninoff inverts the *crescendo* hairpin, turning it into a *diminuendo*, likewise doing the same at m. 52. To avoid overtaxing his dynamic resources, Rachmaninoff works with time instead, introducing a *ritardando* starting at m. 54 and extending widely at m. 53.

Setting his performance up to avoid structural failure, Rachmaninoff begins the first variation of the theme starting at m. 57 with a *piano* dynamic rather than Chopin's prescribed *forte*. His left-hand accompaniment is *pianissimo*, elusive, and nearly faint. Rachmaninoff does feature lyricism, but it is not akin to that of a projecting *bravura* singer. The differential of sonority between the right and left hands, where the former was greater, in physical terms meant that the amount of effort needed for me to produce sound for the left hand was minuscule. In avoiding more extroversion in projection, my hand stayed nearly stationary, which made the sense of singing feel more improvisatory. The accompaniment, as I emulated Rachmaninoff's performance, simply existed, without a sense of self-preoccupation, hinting toward a different variety of *cantabile*, thereby working with "feminine" conventions of the second theme, albeit with different means. As will be seen, calling upon gendered differences within exacting strictures will open possibilities for narrative interpretations.

Given his purposefully winnowed dynamic range in this section, Rachmaninoff manipulates time to render distinct Chopin's first variation. Rachmaninoff augments the downbeat of each bar of the left-hand part from mm. 61-64 by a quarter-beat and renders the following two eighth-notes as sixteenth-notes. As before, Rachmaninoff avoids monotony while avoiding a premature dynamic climax.

Despite these self-imposed dynamic limits, Rachmaninoff suggests growth and structure through alternative means. At mm. 78-79, Rachmaninoff plays with a distinctive evenness that draws attention to the right hand. Chopin's figure is somewhat awkward, with inner notes being held among quickly moving octaves, which strike upward from white to black keys (rather than sliding down from raised black keys through micro *glissandi*). Conforming to descriptions of his playing involving mostly forearm motion down to the hands, rather than the upper arm, Rachmaninoff achieves a greater sense of precision, almost as if the elbows are pinned to the waist (looking to earlier 19th-century conventions of pianism).⁵⁷ Through a performance of mastery, almost as a *topos*, Rachmaninoff's physicality directs attention to the structural dimension of his playing.

Exposition: Transition & Codetta (mm. 81-105)

With an almost complete, determined shift in musical character starting at m. 81, Rachmaninoff plays with *più mosso* and minimal pedal, which gives relief to the music's previous tendency of breaking to the surface through a luxuriant grandeur in the previous phrase from mm. 77-80. At m. 85, his touch becomes *leggiere*, which appears to coincide with an apparent use of the *una corda* pedal. As I hear it, the section develops an aspect of modernist mechanization in the *agitato* section of the first theme. His firm beat, which avoids inflections, pushes through to reach what will become an apparent first point. Rachmaninoff adds to this signification of mechanical modernity by executing the passage based on an A[#]⁰⁷ chord (mm. 91-92) in the right hand, rather than playing five two-note slurs as suggested by the left-hand part, more ergonomically accommodating. In terms of technique, both hands would fall on the first of each figure of the two-note slur, followed by slightly rolling the back of the hands toward

⁵⁷ Christina Kobb, *Piano Technique and Posture in the Early 19th Century*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1-PUB_e3vE.

the piano's fallboard. Doing so relieves what would otherwise present significant difficulties in employing more of a finger-based approach while attempting to play *legatissimo*. Rachmaninoff, partly on account of his handspan, does not do this, preferring instead to execute a hyper-realization of Chopin's long-phrase mark found over the right hand's material. He assimilates the left hand to adopt this phrasing, notwithstanding the challenges presented. Accordingly, Rachmaninoff plows through difficulties almost like a machine, without breathing, propelling the first climax of the piece to follow with triplets. All the more to this effect is the *accelerando* he introduces, which increases the difficulty of the passage but allows him to perform a modernist aspect of professionalism and mechanization that does not concern itself with ordinary human limitations.

What also stands out is the sheer evenness in tone in this awkward passage that normally prompts pianists to employ a fall-and-forward-roll approach. Rachmaninoff controls the tone without adding extra variables introduced by the damper pedal. For me to replicate the absolute evenness of this tone, marked with a *legato* featuring minimal overlap between the various keys, I turned to his propensity to create exercises out of material to achieve mastery of a special effect. Achieving Rachmaninoff's tone here is "high maintenance," and requires a measure of consistent practice of regularizing exercises. I practiced the passage in the following rhythmic formulations: long-short and short-long. These practice-patterns are fairly common among various instrumentalists, adopted to gain control and regularity in their playing. The patterns are formulaic and fit prescribed metronome values, which lead to an overall increased resultant tempo if stepped up incrementally.⁵⁸ Rachmaninoff would have practiced similar exercises set to

⁵⁸ For a table of these special rhythms, see Burton Kaplan, *Practicing for Artistic Success: The Musician's Guide to Self-Empowerment* (Morris, NY: Perception Development Techniques, 2004), 75-77.

this gesture, which with the performance of the overall Sonata, points toward a more “professional” sensibility, with aristocratic confidence in introducing changes elsewhere while also signifying a modernist impulse.

Moving forward in Chopin’s marked *stretto* section (m. 93), Rachmaninoff measures himself, maintaining self-discipline—possibly following Orthodox virtue principles—as he approaches his first structural climax near the end of the exposition. Again, rather than turning to sheer dynamics in realizing his plan, Rachmaninoff downplays Chopin’s notated accent marks, preferring instead to hold onto the chords slightly, which he precedes with a micro-*accelerando*. Rachmaninoff works closely with what Richard Hudson terms “later Romantic *rubato*,” where the performer will balance any time taken and then recompensate it elsewhere.⁵⁹ Rachmaninoff does play *pesante* with his left hand but relies more overtly on agogics and *rubato* to signify climaxes.

Finally, Rachmaninoff reaches the structural climax of the exposition at mm. 97-100, and once again calls upon manipulations of time to give a sense of arrival. Rachmaninoff renders the second beat as a dotted quarter (within a larger triplet figure) and plays the following two octaves as eighths. Just before, he plays the first downbeat of each measure as anacrusis to the second figure, which results in a metrical shift by one-third of a beat. Rachmaninoff appears aware of the traditional climax at this point, and he respects it but approaches it differently to keep his bigger point in clear view, which is yet to come.

In the most conventionally “feminine” section of the Sonata thus far, Rachmaninoff avoids opportunities to play as such, as it would obscure both his point and his strategy of

⁵⁹ Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato*. (New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1997), 300–355.

withholding tonic arrivals, which stand in metaphorically for *Matushka Rossiya*. He heightens a “masculine” approach through sheer calculation and restraint, which in his free authority combats otherwise distracting notions of hysteria as magnified by stereotypes affixed to Chopin. Through this approach, he preserves his sense of self in being able to express musical autonomy in the face of destructive modernity.

Charles Rosen vociferously advocated for observing the first movement’s repeat at the start of the *grave* marking rather than at the *doppio movimento*, which he argues made no sense musically. In giving his rationale, he cites Rachmaninoff’s apparent solution.⁶⁰ Rachmaninoff skipped the repeat altogether, presumably to avoid nonsense perpetuated by an editing error of the music score. I do not believe musical nonsense was Rachmaninoff’s motivation. Rather, I believe that by 1930, he became increasingly influenced by the neoclassicism then *en vogue*, which shaped the works of Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev, and Maurice Ravel, among others. As he would later reduce and simplify his fantastically difficult Second Sonata in 1931—for various reasons, as I will highlight—this move is an example of him trying to conform to this tendency. His other works became leaner in texture, too, as seen in his *Corelli Variations, Op. 42* and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43*. Again, his reasons were varied for taking this stylistic turn. However, “the point” meant to Rachmaninoff that he would avoid anything superfluous, which would entail excising any and all repeats. As “the point” was sometimes dynamic, he would skip variations mid-performance if an audience coughed too much, fearing that he was losing their attention. To this end, in a problematic interview, he advised that student pianists not overestimate an audience’s intelligence when selecting musical works to perform.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 279.

⁶¹ Rachmaninoff interview in James Francis Cooke, ed., *Great Pianists on Piano Playing: Godowsky, Hofmann, Lhévinne, Paderewski, and 24 Other Legendary Performers* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1999).

Broadly considering time-limited focus as an indicator of intelligence, he apparently considered redundancy, length, and the like as potentially jeopardizing an audience's perception of "the point," factoring their attention span into his calculations. Performing the repeat would not only disrupt the trajectory of his carefully planned performance but would also potentially push a listening audience to the point of inattentiveness.

Development (mm. 105-169)

Preferring economy and getting to "the point" more directly, Rachmaninoff skips the first ending, immediately launching into the development. What stands out as perhaps most distinctive in this section is the strong musical polarity he maintains throughout. Rachmaninoff enhances Chopin's two composed opposing forces of the introductory and first themes vying with each other to prevail in typifying the overall character of the section. Although Rachmaninoff maintains this motivic material's patent qualities, he morphs each into another with phrase reconceptualization, as if subsuming one into the other. As with his approach elsewhere, Rachmaninoff recomposes expressive parameters not indicated in the score to heighten his performance aims.

Considering Rachmaninoff's lived experience and larger cultural codes, which point ultimately to "*Matushka Rossiya*," invites an extrapolation of discerning possible programmatic inclinations, as elsewhere in this performance of the Sonata. Might, for instance, the pull and tug between the binary forces establishing supremacy between one nature over another correspond to the spirit of change and revolution acting against "true Mother Russia," as if vying for her soul? The possibilities are many; Rachmaninoff's clear differentiation in distinctly rendering each motivic group structures oppositional listening in this musical struggle.

While Rachmaninoff generally maintains the integrity of each motif's character in development, at m. 137 his dynamic treatment through inversion gives a preview of which one will "win" in this section. As elsewhere, he performs the opposite of Chopin's dynamic indications and realizes the theme in the left hand extrovertedly, performing it *fortissimo* rather than "*sotto voce*" as prescribed (m. 107). His performance is severe, given the gravity of a shocking *pesante* touch he uses to contrast with the opposing *grave* theme. Moving this theme to the fore, Rachmaninoff treats it as agitated, playing with much greater intensity. Rachmaninoff also works extensively with differing temporal spaces, dropping in speed, approaching the original *grave* tempo, with the introductory motivic elements performed almost *a piacere* at mm. 107-108, 116-117, and 119-120. His approach sharply differs from the implied and more straightforward single tempo of Chopin's score. In the complementary measures featuring the first theme, Rachmaninoff snaps into tempo, pushing the phrase forward with agitation.

This is not Rachmaninoff's only strategy. He also inverts Chopin's two-note slur, where conventions would call for more gravity on the first of two notes, with the second counting as a softer sort of resolution. Rachmaninoff heads directly to the lower $f\sharp$, which also analogizes this point of the Sonata to mm. 25-32, where Chopin himself emphasizes the offbeat of the motivic material by writing in additional chord members and accenting them. This corresponds to Rachmaninoff's belief that calculating an interpretation should be informed directly by the score itself.⁶²

Fate and destiny follow as qualities that map onto Rachmaninoff's construction of inevitability, given his lifelong preoccupation. Determinedly, Rachmaninoff plays the left hand

⁶² Rachmaninoff interview in Cooke.

featuring the first theme from mm. 121-124 with a *pianissimo* instance of its anxious quality, avoiding an overwhelming use of pedal until mm. 125-128, where he uses it for sonority and accumulating sound rather than as a means to play *legato*. Precisely here, this shift in otherwise transparent sound acts as a herald to prepare the arrival of the dynamic climax. However, just before, Rachmaninoff holds back through a *ritardando* at m. 128, adding to a frustration that must eventually be resolved. Rather than following Chopin's notated *piano* at m. 129, he plays *mezzo forte*, keeping the volume's momentum up at the transitory bars approaching m. 137. Besides using full pedal, accumulating sound, and slowing down at m. 136, Rachmaninoff also adds inner chord member voices, forming sixths with the thumbs to punctuate the long-awaited arrival of what may seem like his ultimate climax. Here, the inevitability of reaching the following section where the first true dynamic climax resides can no longer be delayed or halted. Rachmaninoff sets up the approaching pinnacle of an intense climax into a musical event horizon, where the pull of the structure's gravity becomes inescapable.

Fate manifests itself in the movement's largest climax, as it were, where Rachmaninoff commences an intensity valley at m. 137 until approximately m. 150, where the right hand plays the first theme in double notes (thirds and fourths) while the left supplies both the harmony in triplet sixths and the introductory theme in the bass in octaves. Rather than playing a derivative of 3:4, Rachmaninoff assimilates the two otherwise pure eighth figures in the right hand into two eighths that fit into each of the single quarters that are part of the three triplets in the left hand. Doing so moves away from Chopin's written quality of intertwining the figures into each other to form a larger, interlocked composite. While this reduces the impact of the rhythmic contrast, it ratchets up the tension by intensifying the *agitato* quality of the right hand's thematic area through diminution, creating greater autonomy of both hands, which retain their independent

rather than interdependent nature. Rachmaninoff marks this section by introducing a *ritardando* on the second half of the proceeding measure while adding inner chord members in the right hand on the second and fourth beat subdivisions, with a B \flat and D, respectively.

In keeping a retrospective check of his intensity valley, Rachmaninoff inverts Chopin's notated directions in the music immediately following. Chopin indicates *fortissimo* and *stretto* at m. 161, followed by a *crescendo* at m. 162 to create a highpoint at m. 163 on the G \flat octave at the end of the measure. Instead, Rachmaninoff precedes this with a *pianissimo* at the end of a *diminuendo* at m. 160, delaying the *stretto* until m. 164, followed by a *piano* highpoint with the falling chromatic line with alternating intervals below. Just before, at m. 159, Rachmaninoff introduces a *diminuendo*, which, as seen in the waveform, initiates a left-facing wedge (>). Doing so acts to keep the largest dynamic highpoint at the concatenation point clearly in focus. His descending figure also paves the way, as a retransition, to the recapitulation, in what will soon lead to "the point" of his performance. Rachmaninoff converges to Chopin's *diminuendo* from mm. 166-167 and extends the idea to solidify further his strong sense of architecture.

In terms of tone, Rachmaninoff's performance of this figure is highly consistent in its evenness and rhythmic integrity, acting as a signifier that adds to his performance of professionalism that counters the more stereotypically feminine, "hysterical" traits that became affixed to both his and Chopin's music. As before, for the diminished-seventh passage, I turned to exercises of special rhythms to gain mastery of Rachmaninoff's characteristic tone. The following were the formulations I used: 1) long-short-short, 2) short-long-short, and 3) short-short-long, while working through three general metronome domains of slow, medium, and fast *tempi*. Like the diminished-seventh sequence, this passage requires a certain amount of proficiency distinguished from stereotypical notions of domestic music-making during

Rachmaninoff's period. Rachmaninoff uses this gesture of "masculinized" mastery to shuttle in what had been missing all along—a satisfying return of the lyrical, "feminine" second theme, as at the recapitulation. The falling chromatic figure from mm. 165 to 168 acts as a herald for the return of the second theme at the start of the recapitulation in Rachmaninoff's performance, given its relative inwardness in its quietude and more pronounced *ritardando*.

Recapitulation (mm. 170-229)

Carefully setting up and approaching "the point" was among Rachmaninoff's chief concerns in constructing an interpretation, especially pertinent to the "organic" sonata-allegro form. In attempting to legitimize his interpretation publicly as irrefutably logical, Rachmaninoff found himself able to introduce often significant musical changes that afforded him personal, guarded space in carving his performance. Rachmaninoff found a way to exist on stage, true to himself, in the open, while avoiding the kind of slander that mired his compositions and reputation from the voices of more "serious" critics, as he would have rationalized to himself. The question in beginning to summate his performance concerns, is where exactly "the point" lies. I present two possibilities to consider, although Rachmaninoff would have likely felt disillusioned that the question was up for debate in the performance of his first movement, being that its logic would be so blatantly obvious from his viewpoint. Nonetheless, I favor the second possibility.

What would seem to be Rachmaninoff's principal "point" may lie within the heightened tension of the development where the first two themes concatenate. From the standpoint of intensity as charted in the graph (Figure 5) this is indeed the case. Rachmaninoff does not upset his structure by surpassing the limits he already established. Rather, weighing prior peaks and subsequent structural requirements, Rachmaninoff presents one further climax, here an

anticlimax, that gives the complement of the movement's high point in framing the arrival of the long-awaited tonic of B \flat , this time framing the missing second theme area. To extrapolate in conjunction with Rachmaninoff's own composed Second Sonata, a listener might ask if this correlates to tropes of the divine feminine representing *Matushka Rossiya* in metaphor. Following his development climax, Rachmaninoff eventually performs an inverted climax, which in many ways runs contrary to conventional notions of how climaxes ought to work. This is a climax of inversion, directly tied to the germ he had presented in the introduction.

To keep the principal intensity point that he had set up earlier in relative focus, Rachmaninoff plays the recapitulation nearly as a mirrored sonic image of the exposition. His large, performed symmetry keeps a clearly defined, conceptual structure sharply in perspective. The seemingly slight yet crucial musical differences he introduces relative to the exposition evade perfect symmetry, however, and establish a path forward to the movement's anticlimax, which fulfills the trajectory of attenuation launched by the exposition's introductory seed. In particular, the anticlimax, or "the point" at the phrase lies between 185-188.

Relative to the exposition, Rachmaninoff plays the second thematic area slightly faster, beginning with the chorale, performing around 85 to the quarter, with widespread *tempo rubato*. With this increased speed, Rachmaninoff establishes a point of departure to reach his anticlimax through a *ritardando*, which he also accompanies with a *diminuendo* and highlighted bassline from mm. 181-184. Rachmaninoff does this to mark the start of the anticlimax at m. 185. To this end, he also heads toward "the point" notably at m. 180, where he plays a complete rather than half arpeggiation at the second beat commencing from the bottom of the chord in the left hand. Arpeggiating quickly upward, Rachmaninoff heightens listening expectation and underscores his idea of inversion again, this time the complement of the 3-2-1 falling line he had upset in the

opening. Here at the second beat of m. 180 to the downbeat of m. 181, he highlights a quick 1-2-3 line in the soprano, where he heads toward the third scale degree, which over the next four bars descends more satisfactorily to the long-withheld tonic of the “saving” second theme, now presented without a hiccup between 2 and 1 as originally presented in the introductory bars.

Indirectly, Rachmaninoff introduces greater lyricism in the first variation of the theme following the chorale. While Rachmaninoff plays *cantabile*, his style remains inward, even intimate, distinguished by his subduing those elements that would force it toward a projecting, *bel canto* operatic emulation that would in turn derail his previously set point. The way Rachmaninoff arrives at this place underlies his setup of this inverted climax—the anticlimax—holding back composed musical elements ultimately takes him to a place of simplicity and near neutrality at mm. 185-189.

Leading to this, in the second instance of the second theme area in the recapitulation, besides previously mentioned elements, Chopin composes a slight but important difference in the left-hand part in mm. 175-176, where he begins with two quarters comprising beat 1 and then moves into three triplet quarters comprising beat 2. In the analogous location in mm. 47-48 of the exposition, he only partially does this; in m. 47 he writes a whole note, which ties to the following quarter in m. 48. After that, he writes a corresponding quarter followed by triplet quarters comprising beat 2. Hence, Chopin increases the activity of the left hand in the recapitulation area, along with the relative complexity. While a seemingly minute detail, Rachmaninoff renders even quintuplets through the entire measure, followed by a *ritardando* at m. 176, which points to the entrance of the second iteration of the phrase.

The significance of this Rachmaninoff makes clear at mm. 189-192, where he alters his re-composition of Chopin’s rhythm. In the corresponding area in the exposition (mm. 61-64) he

played a dotted quarter followed by two sixteenths rather than Chopin's quarter followed by two eighths, but he here reverts to Chopin's originally composed rhythm. The function of this is twofold. First, it conforms to the idea of inversion he presented in the introductory germ, by presenting here complements of rhythmic pairs. More important, however, is that in performing it this way, Rachmaninoff reduces the complexity of the left hand, directing the listening interest to the right hand's melody, since a more elaborate left-hand rhythm would divert the focus from the right hand. Rather than using the more immediate means of voicing the right hand over the left hand—which he does do to an extent—Rachmaninoff calls on further means to frame the prominence of the theme, thereby indirectly making the area *cantabile* without resorting to more characteristic operatic-like projection in sonority. Keeping master calculations in mind throughout the movement, in the exposition area, Rachmaninoff there steers listening focus away from the melodic line, shifting attention to the left hand to attenuate Chopin's originally composed high points.

Starting at m. 185, Rachmaninoff works especially closely with modesty and lack of grandiosity, playing the left hand *sotto voce* to provide a simple accompaniment completely at the service of the right hand, establishing grounding without battles between registers. He abjures more copious resonance afforded by the pedal, preferring a straightforward melody with soft accompaniment. Compared to his intensity climax in the development section, Rachmaninoff functions here articulates “the point” by withholding, allowing him to advance toward “the point” without forcing it through might. In some ways, he musically translates a tendency often found in the Russian language, where descriptions take on qualities through what they are not. Accordingly, for instance, Rachmaninoff will at times give performance instructions analogously in Italian, as with “*non allegro*” and the like. In some ways, my

explanation calls upon the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which explains that an individual's language shapes their perceptions of the world surrounding them.⁶³ Rachmaninoff's disposition of working with opposites directs perception to "the point" in a way that would ordinarily defy how climaxes ought to function.

Elsewhere, much of Rachmaninoff's performance of the recapitulation mirrors the same material Chopin presented earlier in the key of the mediant, Db. Having attained "the point," however, Rachmaninoff is now able to increase slightly more the intensity of subsequent material and appeal to previously thwarted conventions of operatic projection, albeit within proportional moderation. Rachmaninoff picks up speed at m. 197 in speed and grows in volume at m. 199. New here, in the parallel major section compared to the same material in the exposition's mediant, is a line that Rachmaninoff creates in the lowermost notes of the left hand in mm. 201-204, which simulates a different kind of virtuosity, in sensing and elaborating counterpoint. For pianists, rendering clear, distinct lines connotes more cerebral and engaged listening, as such appeals to the cultural prestige of rigorous fugues and the like characteristic of seriousness and professionalism. Rachmaninoff's voicing of this contrapuntal line creates contrary motion relative to the falling material found in the right hand, which taken together creates a higher level of complexity, husbanded until now. In using a calculative approach broadly with the performance of a counterpoint Chopin had not indicated, Rachmaninoff reifies his larger ideals of fore-planning. Rachmaninoff thus devises a more intense cascade of sequential, successive musical events, to propel the music forward while carefully balancing to other areas in the movement.

⁶³ "The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis," in Hoijer, Harry, ed. (1954), *Language in Culture: Conference on The Interrelations of Language and Other Aspects of Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 92-105

Within the mindset of regimenting his interpretation to demarcate structure, Rachmaninoff now treats mm. 205-208 as a pivot point in a well-delineated cadential phrase that he broadens especially from 207-209, snapping into rhythm, *a tempo*, starting at m. 210. Again, Rachmaninoff mirrors much of what he does in subsequent sections transposed up a major sixth from the exposition, but with slightly greater intensity. In the diminished-seventh sequence at mm. 219-220, Rachmaninoff plays with a slightly greater *accelerando*, having reached a structurally safe area that would not result in collapse of his sonic architecture, while simultaneously allowing the music to proceed forward without stagnation.

Coda (mm. 230-242)

In more predictable sonata-allegro form, a final *coda* may appear at the very end. Chopin follows suit and uses this section to present the first theme, which has yet to appear in the recapitulation. His move is to a specific effect. He reintroduces the first theme with great volatility, as if setting a crusade against the more subdued right-hand part, recalling in nature the sustained chorale second theme section. His strategy notably increases dramatic tension, as Chopin has to this point pitted the first theme against the introductory theme only in the development. Chopin's indication of *stretto* and *crescendo* adds sharply to a sense of growing musical strife, which usually sees pianists dutifully pushing the climax to the antepenultimate bar, marked *fortississimo*, the singular peak dynamic notated in the movement.

Rachmaninoff sets this section apart, snapping into the *coda a tempo* following his *ritardando* in the previous bar at m. 228. His left hand dominates as he emphasizes the original *agitato* quality by sternly observing Chopin's short phrasing. However, Rachmaninoff largely dispenses with a drastic *crescendo* and acceleration; at m. 235, he broadens slightly and performs, relatively speaking, at *forte* instead. To give a sense of finality undercut by his re-

working of the dynamics, Rachmaninoff descends to the piano's lowest B \flat octave with his left hand instead of following Chopin's printed indication.⁶⁴ Rachmaninoff calls upon various means to foreground musical peaks and valleys without crossing the internal threshold of limits he established in his organic-aspiring interpretation. As in other places, Rachmaninoff keeps his goals in check by retrospectively contemplating his previous loud and soft climaxes. While this might sound square in comparison to other, perhaps more feral pianists, Rachmaninoff's balance and restraint align with Orthodox-leaning virtue, not surrendering to whimsical temptations that would otherwise thwart a "masterful," calculated interpretive vision. Simultaneously, he comments on modernist airs that threatened the existence of the Russia he knew, semiotically using as a signifier his uncompromising, severe performance, pushing through and against conventional expectations of how the piece ought to sound.

Rachmaninoff's recorded performance—in effect an alternative text to Chopin's Second Sonata—sets the stage not for immediate satisfaction but an eventually realized hope to be fulfilled with an idealized Russia. For some, Rachmaninoff's quality of constant planning and inversion may come across as cold and calculating, which during his time would have been read as legitimizing. Simultaneously, this quality aligned to his internalized sense of Russianness as he processed the revolution through Orthodox-like principles that had surrounded him in his pre-exile life. Doing so ultimately acted as a means to protect space for himself and for the world that had vanished before his eyes, while viably appearing before a judging public.

⁶⁴ NB: Chopin's piano descended only down to C₁.

CHAPTER TWO

Recovering a Subjectivity: Performed Illness and Revolutionary Angst

Chopin, Sonata No. 2: II. *Scherzo*

PART A

Illness & Corporeality

The “RED DEATH” had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.¹

Epidemiologists today would consider a range of hemorrhagic viral illnesses upon encountering the relics of Edgar Allen Poe’s richly active, Romantic imagination.² A public health servant might contemplate the Ebola virus disease proliferating more recently in the 1970s, which, like Poe’s “Red Death,” Black Death’s apparent successor, is a highly contagious, virulent, and bloody illness with morbidity rates climbing to 90% and bats counting among its chief suspected reservoirs.³ Fears of uncontrolled transmission of ghastly maladies and epidemics routinely entertain rich literary expressions, as seen in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*:

The epidemic even seemed to be undergoing a revitalization; the tenacity and fertility of its pathogens appeared to have redoubled. Recovery was rare: eighty out of a hundred of those infected died, and died a horrible death, because the disease would strike with the utmost ferocity, often taking its most dangerous form, the “dry” form, as it was called. In such cases the body was unable to expel the massive amounts of water secreted by the blood vessels, and within a few hours the patient would shrivel up and choke—convulsed and groaning hoarsely—on his own blood, now thick as pitch. He was fortunate if, as occasionally happened, after a slight indisposition he fell into a deep coma, from which he

¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales* (Vintage Books/Library of America, 1991).

² Setu K. Vora and Sundaram V. Ramanan, “Ebola-Poe: A Modern-Day Parallel of the Red Death?,” *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 8, no. 12 (December 2002): 1521–23, <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid0812.020176>.

³ Eric M. Leroy et al., “Fruit Bats as Reservoirs of Ebola Virus,” *Nature* 438, no. 7068 (December 1, 2005): 575–76, <https://doi.org/10.1038/438575a>.

seldom if ever awoke. By early June the isolation wards of the Ospedale Civile had quietly begun to fill up; room in the two orphanages became scarce, and there was an eerily brisk traffic between the quay of the Fondamente Nuove and San Michele, the cemetery island.⁴

Associative trends emerge in creative fiction and portrayals of illness. The two excerpts above recount *collective* diseases that strike not individuals in isolation but masses simultaneously, according to Susan Sontag. Epidemics are indiscriminate forces that strip away unique and distinctive qualities of an individual; they, like COVID-19, become, in principle and earlier popular discourse, “great equalizers,” rendering both the rich and poor susceptible to mortality if left without vaccinations. (Of course, the poor and marginalized continue to suffer greater tragedy than the wealthy, statistically speaking.) Sontag heads toward these conclusions in *Illness as Metaphor*, where sicknesses take on larger, stand-in meanings limited not solely to collections of physical symptoms but moral problems and societal issues.⁵

In her theorizations, Sontag argues that “feelings of evil are projected onto a disease” and that epidemics figuratively represent social disorder.⁶ The “Red Death” devastates an entire country in Poe’s account. The disease invites the reader to regard more significant, associatory stand-in meanings or allegorical commentaries tied to collectives rather than individuals.⁷ Sontag interprets Mann’s epidemic as a contributing force that stripped the distinguished, ennobled protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, of his singularity—his reason, inhibition, and fastidiousness. The disease invites the reader to meditate on the implicit abjection of Aschenbach’s serious downfall, as in the end, he dies indiscriminately, like anyone else.⁸ Mann

⁴ Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 121-122.

⁵For parallel studies, see also: Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death, Texts and Contexts*, v. 17 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁶ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 58.

⁷ H. H. Bell, “‘The Masque of the Red Death’: An Interpretation,” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (1973): 101–5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3197091>.

⁸See Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 37.

metaphorically associates the epidemic with a more significant eroding force than of an individual. Beyond the cultivated, erudite, and civilized German von Aschenbach visiting Southern Europe—Venice—the disease “emanating from the humid marshes of the Ganges Delta” undoes society itself. In Mann’s portrayal, the epidemic disgraces the Venetians through the disease of a “swarthy” people. A threatening India undoes Western civilization, seen first by the killing and undoing of one its most refined and accomplished members, von Aschenbach. The depiction of disease in literature is widespread and boasts rich symbolism. Consider also Joseph Conrad, who similarly introduces malaria as a disease that usurps civilizing ambitions in *Heart of Darkness*, as Kurtz deteriorates in health among the Congolese. Such examples are plentiful.

Can one hear illness in a musical performance in a parallel art form, and might that metaphorically suggest more extensive meanings, just as in literature? Thomas Mann, like fellow German novelist Lion Feuchtwanger, composer Arnold Schoenberg, composer-pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff—a robust Poe devotee, as many Russians were in the period—among many others all escaped to Los Angeles County from harsh political realities at home.⁹ Mann fled the powers of Hitler, as did Schoenberg; Rachmaninoff dodged the targeted violence against and general ruin of the former *dvoriantsvo* following the assassination of Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Rachmaninoff and Mann lived through the effects of a world not shielded from the horrors of individual and collective death, which their work reflected. Seeing the impact of illness on literature, I query in this chapter how illness, in particular, might shape music without words and

⁹ Mann and Rachmaninoff’s homes would eventually sit nine miles apart in the early 1940s, the former on 1550 N. San Remo Dr. in Pacific Palisades and the latter on 610 N. Elm Dr. in Beverly Hills. The ideal climate of Los Angeles County might seem to encourage a convenient amnesia regarding horrors in Germany and Russia.

what that might suggest, particularly in understanding Sergei Rachmaninoff's performance of the scherzo movement from Chopin's Sonata No. 2 in B \flat Minor, Op. 35.

Chopin & Instability

"As this cough will choke me, I implore you to have my body opened, so that I may not be buried alive"¹⁰ were the final penciled words of a consumptive Chopin as he lay dying on his deathbed. Earlier, Chopin escaped to Majorca, trusting that the favorable Mediterranean climate—similar to the one Rachmaninoff would encounter a century later in Beverly Hills—would offer him respite for the hope of recovery. The 19th century had glamorized tuberculosis, associating with it an attractive languor—a "romantic agony."¹¹ Camille Saint-Saëns had written, "Chopin was tubercular at a time when good health was not chic," and in 1913 noted this as a more prevalent tendency in the aristocratic circle, connecting it to one of Chopin's patrons: "It was fashionable to be pale and drained; Princess Belgiojoso strolled along the boulevards ... pale as death in person."¹² The abundance of *morbidezza* and "żal," in Chopin's writing, offers a constant reminder of the mortality he felt hovered over him.¹³ That tuberculosis struck Chopin was more of a personal tragedy, something that slowly took him out individually rather than an epidemic affecting everyone. Thus, with associations of the disease pointing to burning passion, Chopin's chronic illness made him more of an individual. The question I ask, however, considers how listeners might hear such conditions in music and interpret meaning.

¹⁰ Frédéric Chopin. *Chopin's Letters*. Edited and translated by Ethel Lillian Voynich. Compiled by Henryk Opieński. (Courier Corporation, 1988), 420.

¹¹ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 29.

¹² Quoted in Sontag, 28.

¹³ Franz Liszt, *Liszt's Chopin: A New Edition*. Meirion Hughes, editor. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 84. Liszt recalled Chopin could "find no appropriate expression except in his own language, no other possessing a term equivalent to the Polish word: Żal" As if his ear thirsted for the sound of this word, which expresses the whole range of emotions produced by an intense regret, through all the shades of feeling, from hatred to repentance, he repeated it again and again.

The aura of a morbid, physically weak Chopin hacking blood into a handkerchief by the piano continues to preoccupy thoughts surrounding this composer. Physical illness beckons considerations of more outwardly pointing mental illness as understood today, as did erstwhile-termed melancholia and hysteria, which relate to his music. The conditions may also point metaphorically to societal commentaries. Robert Schumann was among Chopin's most ardent supporters, oft-quoted for exclaiming, "Hats off, gentlemen—a genius!" in a glowing review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.¹⁴ For the *Second Sonata in B♭ Minor*, Op. 35, his backing wobbled, his appreciation cooled, and he slipped into ambivalence. About the Sonata, Schumann declared that Chopin had "bound together four of his maddest children."¹⁵ Niecks cited Liszt as saying, "*Plus de volonte que d'inspiration*" ("more will than inspiration") about the sonata, pointing to a similar positioning as Schumann.¹⁶

In the 19th century, an ostensible lack of cohesion coupled with unprecedented musical techniques might not have necessarily signaled artistic innovation, but perhaps also (or rather) a worrisome and insidious irrationality. Perhaps Schumann was one to speculate lunacy (the term preferred in the 19th-century), since he would himself eventually be diagnosed with "psychotic melancholia" after plunging himself into the Rhine in a botched suicide attempt. Schumann lived the remainder of his days in a sanatorium at his own request, removed from his family and society. Nervous about his legacy and long-term reception, his wife, Clara, took it upon herself to destroy manuscripts bearing apparent signs of insanity, attempting to preserve his good name,

¹⁴ Robert Schumann, *Schumann on Music: A Selection from the Writings* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1988), 15–16.

¹⁵ Quoted in Frederick Niecks. *Frederick Chopin As a Man and Musician Volumes 1-2 Complete (Illustrated)* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), chap. XXX.

¹⁶ Quoted in Niecks. chap. XXX.

suppressing such late works as his *Five Romances* for cello (1853).¹⁷ In part because of assertions of Chopin's sonata not quite cohering—claims that were not unique to Schumann—the work did not achieve its widespread repertoire status until the start of the 20th century.¹⁸

By the 19th century, as Michel Foucault claims, mental instability and madness began to pester society enough to implement widespread treatment of individuals deemed crazy. Those labeled “insane” were removed from regular society, locked away from plain sight in mental institutions and asylums, which greatly contrasted to the societal integration found in the Renaissance. The authority to deem someone mentally unfit troubled Foucault, since the evaluative criteria were tenuous and dependent on the structures of dominant values, religious doctrine, and class. He argued that such labels amounted to arbitrary social constructs and could not support notions of immutable, cut-and-dry diseases.¹⁹ In an age in which diagnoses were tenuous and fickle, a much larger perception of what was normal or not would have a bearing on the reception of artistic works, frequently clouding perceived meaning. Claiming a work of art as lacking reason was to cut off attempts to understand it. Although “madness” was often linked to creativity, too much of the former might prevent public appreciation of the latter. For this work of Chopin to have received even a casual judgment from Schumann, who himself eventually was labeled insane, prompts asking more probing questions about creativity and received meanings.

Depicting madness rather than embodying it was acceptable, given general societal curiosity. Consider *Lucia de Lammermoor*, where Gaetano Donizetti, as Susan McClary interprets, explicitly demarcates Lucia's madness through an excess of chromaticism and

¹⁷ Caitlin Miller, “Research Guides: Clara Schumann: A Guide to Resources: Introduction,” research guide, accessed July 4, 2021, <https://guides.loc.gov/clara-schumann/introduction>.

¹⁸ Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 283–84.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

“extravagant virtuosity.”²⁰ Conventional form, as the audience would typically understand it, “refuses to accommodate her,” so Lucia transcends the mundane into “coloratura delirium” to “challenge the very limits of human ability,” having lost touch with “outer reality” in the Mad Scene.²¹ Lucia provides many interpretative possibilities, including feminist readings that see her as sexually liberated after she kills her husband. Mary Ann Smart points out the irony that in Donizetti’s old age, when he was dying of syphilis in an asylum, his sexual appetite was voracious, finding uncanny his adjacency in lived experience to his female characters in their societally unacceptable states of dementia.²²

Madness becomes a vehicle for spectacle but remains thoroughly scripted by someone hierarchically more stable, a male mastermind of Italian opera. Other men have similarly written, composed, and orchestrated female insanity. In *Salomé*, originally Oscar Wilde’s French-language play, Richard Strauss represents feminine madness with his maximalist harmony, as Richard Taruskin maintains was at the source of controversy surrounding the reception of his German music drama setting of *Salome*.²³ Indeed, in her climactic section set in C# major, Salome exclaims with a look of transcendence on her face, per Strauss’s directions (and following Wilde), calling for her to kiss the mouth of Jokanaan. She declares, “the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death.”²⁴ Soon thereafter, Strauss oversaturates the orchestra’s

²⁰ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 92.

²¹ McClary.

²² Mary Ann Smart, “The Silencing of Lucia,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 2 (1992): 98.

²³ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36–48.

²⁴ For context, Salome demanded from her stepfather Herod as the reward for her “dance of the seven veils” the severed head of Jochanaan, known commonly as John the Baptist. Earlier, the locust eating and God fearing Jochanaan, covered in overwhelming filth, had rejected the lustful advances of the beautiful and charming Salome. Upon receiving Jochanaan’s head on a silver charger, she gratifies herself with it, satiating her depraved, libidinal desire.

harmony with clashing chords containing A \flat and A \sharp marked *sforzato* under a *fortissimo* dynamic. At this point, Salome is completely detached from reality and monstrous; Herod abruptly brings the scene back to reality, ordering the guards to crush her under their shields. Strauss accompanies this through a swift, non-indulgent, and non-luxurious chromatic frenzy that brusquely concludes the music drama in C minor, putting an end to Salome's psychotic wickedness set in C \sharp major. (Figure 1a.) One perspective would argue the person with the most significant power—Herod, the tetrarch—stops this weird, reprehensible derangement. Notwithstanding his being an ogling, old pervert, he reinscribes patriarchal power differentials of calling out insanity. Ultimately, Strauss contains mental illness without placing himself vaguely in its shadow, which contrasts to how Chopin's Second Sonata was received earlier.

The image shows a musical score for the conclusion of Strauss's *Salome*. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is the vocal line for Salome (S. Sal.), starting at measure 360. The lyrics are: "küsst, Jo-cha - na - an. Ich ha-be ihn ge-küsst" and "mouth, Jo-ka - na - an. I have now kissed". The second system is the piano accompaniment, featuring a complex, chromatic texture with triplets and a *dim.* marking. The third system continues the piano accompaniment with a *molto espr.* marking. The score is in C major and concludes with a final chord. The publisher's information "A. 5503 F." is printed below the piano part.

Figure 1a. Strauss: *Salome* (conclusion; follows to next page).

Sal. *ritard.* *molto largo* sehr breit 361 *(A moonbeam falls)* Der Mond bricht

dey - - - nen Mund.
thy - - - mouth.

Herod (turning round)
on Salome, covering her with light.) *Herodes (sich umwendend)* *schneller*
wieder hervor und beleuchtet Salome.) *frei*

Man tö - - - te die-ses
Go, kill - - - at once that

ritard. *più mosso*

dim. *sfz.* *dim.* *ff*

Molto allegro *Sehr schnell.* (Die Soldaten stürzen sich auf Salome und begraben sie unter ihren Schilden.) 362

Hero. des. Weib! weuch!
M. ♩ = 80.

(The soldiers rush forward and crush Salome under their shields.)

ff

(Curtain.)
(Der Vorhang fällt schnell.)

Chopin's association with *salon* culture has placed him uncomfortably close to women and the domestic sphere in the public imagination, so that his contiguity to rampant 19th-century ideas of feminine incoherence and hysteria has helped shape the reception of his works. This was also augmented by his being exotically Polish, thus ranked lower on Anglo-Saxon racial hierarchies, which contributed to the critical view of Chopin as a salon miniaturist rather than an adept, manly composer of complicated, large-scale works. Schumann condemning Chopin's Second Sonata on account of heterogeneity and impenetrability signaled a larger 19th-assessment of a reluctance to engage. In essence, Schumann diagnosed this work as itself insane, which resulted in a tendency for serious musicians and listeners to refrain from giving it closer scrutiny. Foucault wrote about the cessation of dialogue with the mentally ill:

In the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: on one hand, the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorizing a relation only through the abstract universality of disease; on the other, the man of madness communicates with society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity.²⁵

In the case of Chopin, labeling the sonata as “mad” resulted from apparently jumbling four disparate movements together indiscriminately. The movements' complementarity aside, to play devil's advocate in labeling the work as crazy, the one movement particularly drawing upon a nervous, perhaps psychotic energy is the second, the scherzo, which Chopin positions immediately after the first, thereby going against established conventions with its more typical placement following the slow second movement in a four-movement layout.²⁶ The scherzo's

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. (New York: Random House, Inc. 1965), x, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015026059926>.

²⁶ There was precedent; Beethoven did do this earlier with his Piano Sonata No. 12 in Ab major, Op. 26.

development into a movement or piece type, and its overall multifarious nature, lent itself to Chopin expressing musical ideas that, without context, would seem unstable, volatile, or ultimately irrational, which may represent larger societal metaphors, which I will connect to revolution and sharp change in social order. In his recording, Rachmaninoff resonates with Chopin's "scherzo" energy and augments it through his own subjective lens. From two angles, the nature of the scherzo as a discursive genre, and Rachmaninoff's relation to the scherzo as a site of lived subversion in his performance has led to bracketing off a fuller understanding on account of an unwillingness to consider what might perhaps add up to illness, even mental illness. The scherzo as a site of willful experimentalism lending itself to extreme expressions of personal subjectivities reveals itself through a comparative historical study.

The Scherzo, Perpetually Dialectical

Generic terms pointing to form, genre, or type—sonata, rondo, concerto, suite, and the like—routinely skirt levels of sure and predictable classificational meaning, given many divergent instantiations formulating their corpora. This is particularly true of scherzi, a piece-type designation with examples differing so greatly that attempting comparative studies can be frustrating and inconclusive. The very multiplicity of scherzi as a "genre" points somewhat frequently to a quality of experimentalism, which puts the form as perpetually reacting against, redefining, remaking, and overhauling itself at many turns. Ontologically, I argue the scherzo is a genre of change and difference that expressly disdains previously set standards. The cognizant composer and musician in performance maintain a retrospective sensitivity in the contemporary expression of the genre; in some ways, a scherzo cannot properly be a scherzo should an instantiation nearly perfectly reproduce what had preceded it or approach what is already familiar, although there are many examples of scherzi falling into subgenres.

An irreconcilable problem emerges if adhering to the *Texttreue* paradigm, as the scherzo demands a reactionary dialectic responding to previous performances to function appropriately. With issues of interpretative homogeneity—back-and-forth reproductive tendencies, digital editing, high-stakes competitions demanding perfection, and so forth—a perfectly “good” performance may lose its meaning and effect if too similar to previous performances, especially to listeners well aware of antecedents. Thus, in many cases, the genre demands that the instrumentalist intervenes in co-creating with a level of originality that challenges the notion of the textually faithful “executant.”

Despite difficulties of typification, within this vein of ontological re-definition emerge at least seven sub-types to consider, which I categorize as: 1) Beethovenian, 2) Mendelssohnian, 3) Chopinian, 4) a quick basic piece, 5) Schubertian type, 6) odd and old types, 7) waltz-type (which may overlap with No. 5 as Viennese). These general types have tended to take on specific characteristics or qualities, including 1) the supernatural, 2) the revolutionary or national, 3) the ironic, and 4) the lighthearted. I will avoid going through all these exhaustively, but, sympathetic to Chopin’s personal history, explore connections in conjunction with specific examples to approach general ontological self-redefinition. Doing so opens the door to understanding Rachmaninoff’s unprecedented and perhaps unequalled performance of the scherzo from Chopin’s Second Sonata.

Most germane to the scherzi of my study here includes everything but the “basic quick piece” and “odd” types. The old types include early examples by Claudio Monteverdi, like his *Scherzi musicali* (1607), vocal scherzi of the early 1600s, and J.S. Bach’s sole scherzo from his

Partita in A minor.²⁷ Opposed to the old *scherzi*, more relevant to Chopin's examples is its immediate precursor, the minuet. The minuet notably juxtaposes relatively simple dance music with relatively complex step patterns; the charm results from dancing gracefully and effortlessly.²⁸ The minuet was not necessarily a dance for all; it functioned as a signifier for aristocratic tendencies.

Signaling tensions in social order through dance forms had been common among many composers. Take, for instance, the closing ballroom scene in Act II of W.A. Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787), which notably superimposes three dances, the polished and refined *menuet*, the more rustic *contredanse*, and the *Deutscher*, a rather coarse, vulgar dance, comparatively.²⁹ Mozart jests at the untidy conflicts between people of disparate social rank and their rather unusual couplings and love triangles.³⁰ Before *Don Giovanni*, Haydn, even more prone to displaying musical wit, likewise played with social rigidities by sneaking in *Ländler*s in the stead of dignified minuets, and designating more playful minuets as *scherzi*. The suggestion of the *Ländler* might perk ears, as this relatively rustic Austrian folk dance in triple time, marked by foot-stomping with hardened shoes, would suggest strata of classes not aristocratic. In his final three London symphonies, Nos. 102-104, Haydn shuttles in this dance form by suggesting its characteristic foot-stomping effects.³¹ In differing usage, Haydn brings in the *Ländler* in conjunction with Janissary effects in his "Military" Symphony. Raymond Knapp reasons such

²⁷ George Grove and Stanley Sadie, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Washington, D.C.: Macmillan Publishers; Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1980), vol. 16, 634.

²⁸ George Grove and Stanley Sadie, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 12, 353.

²⁹ Daniel Hertz and Thomas Bauman, *Mozart's Operas*, Centennial Books (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 190.

³⁰ Hertz and Bauman, *Mozart's Operas*.

³¹ Raymond Knapp, *Making Light: Haydn, Musical Camp, and the Long Shadow of German Idealism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 73–74.

functions as a parody in juxtaposing the refined with the unrefined.³² He suggests a possible case of assimilation in “teaching” those who cannot appreciate cultivation. In this case, the Other standing in for the “lowbrows” are the Turks, who had attempted invading Western Europe. The strange end result, he queries, might be a joyous coexistence. In another work, the Piano Sonata in B minor, HOB XVI:32, Haydn inserts a violent trio, striking as the parallel minor sharply contrasts with the extreme preceding grace. Regardless of the precise, complex meaning, Haydn and Mozart’s minuet “opportunities” cause the listener to pause and unpack.

Beethoven’s Scherzi

In a move possibly nodding to his teacher, Haydn, Beethoven incorporates a fast, rustic dance into the scherzo of his Sixth Symphony, the “*Pastorale*.” While its emphasis on depictions of bucolic life and depictions of earthly people may seem straightforward, they invite a range of interpretations, with some suggesting political commentaries of threatening, encroaching forces (as depicted by the storm), especially given possible ties to the French Revolution in the preceding Fifth and the hymnic allusions of the Sixth’s birdcalls.³³ On first hearing, again, the immediate irony of the scherzo lies with a clash of social expectations—folk music replacing aristocratic minuets. Might the entire symphony, tied to nature and the environment, push against the rigid confines of structured, developed cosmopolitan life, a kind of social subversion?

Haydn was relatively content with his status as a composer in the Esterházy but broke away from the aristocratic toward a national, folk category with the *Ländler*, influencing Anton

³² Knapp, 74.

³³ William Kinderman, *Beethoven: A Political Artist in Revolutionary Times* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), 149; See Raymond Knapp, “A Tale of Two Symphonies: Converging Narratives of Divine Reconciliation in Beethoven’s Fifth and Sixth,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 2 (2000): 291–343, <https://doi.org/10.2307/832010>; See also Owen Jander, “The Prophetic Conversation in Beethoven’s ‘Scene by the Brook,’” *The Musical Quarterly*, no. 77 (1993): 508–59.

Bruckner and Gustav Mahler symphonically down the line. Antonín Dvořák followed suit with his own folk bent with the Bohemian furiant. Haydn did compose movements he labeled “scherzo,” but termed as such, they did not quite take on the commentary positions that his more present minuets did. In many ways, the few *scherzi* he wrote were simply faster pieces that did not quite move with impulses to suggest social or possibly political commentary. An example of his use as a sonata movement is in XVI:9, where the piece amounts to a faster minuet. Beethoven was the first who made the scherzo a regular part of his larger works, with his symphonies, concerti, sonatas, and chamber works replacing the former minuets, sometimes modified with a “*scherzando*” performance instructions.³⁴ Within these settings, almost always in four movements, the scherzo comprises the third movement.

What distinguishes Beethoven’s markedly from the earlier, variable types of *scherzi*, was the suggestion of political subversion. In his symphonies, particularly, Beethoven gives subtle political messages, as in the scherzo (or scherzo-like) symphony movements of the “*Eroica*” (Third), the Fifth, and the “*Pastorale*” (Sixth) Symphonies. In the *Eroica*, Beethoven, a “woke” political commentator, famously slashed out the dedication to Napoleon upon his self-declaration as Emperor. Beyond dedications, titles, and the overtly political, William Kinderman notes programmatic possibilities of the reincarnation of Prometheus, signified by the scherzo’s subtle opening with “soft indistinct stirring that starts *pianissimo* and *staccato* with strings in the lower registers,” especially as the scherzo follows the *Marcia funèbre*. For Kinderman, Beethoven uses the scherzo as an allegory of his own life struggle, following his suicidal inclinations, which ultimately led to a “new path” as a composer.³⁵ The scherzo for Beethoven functioned as a

³⁴ Russell, Tilden A., and Hugh Macdonald. "Scherzo." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 4 Jul. 2021. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000024827>.

³⁵ Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 106.

harbinger of experimentation and innovation in reacting against himself, broadly forming an emerging trait in scherzo ontology. Extending to more recent times, features of his *scherzi*, particularly in the realm of rhythm and hypermeter, have sparked debate in interpretation.³⁶

Mendelssohn

Following Beethoven, the Romantic generation further reified the scherzo's dialectical auto-redefinition. Notably, Felix Mendelssohn advanced this tendency, influencing Rachmaninoff stylistically, who later transcribed for piano the scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mendelssohn opened the genre to an entirely novel conceptualization via the hyper-imaginative William Shakespeare, so widely fashionable in the Romantic era that commentators declared "no great acting drama was written during the 19th century," according to Arthur E. Dubois (1934). Accordingly, playwrights commonly imitated Shakespeare, "or else they wrote only potboilers, curtain-raisers or after-pieces for Shakespeare."³⁷ In this vein, Mendelssohn wrote concert music for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a 17-year-old in 1826 (Op. 21) and later incidental music for the play near the end of his career in 1842 (Op. 61). Riding the wake of Shakespeare's unfading popularity, Mendelssohn's musical translation found immense fame to the extent that the "Wedding March" became a thoroughly traditional, if not trite, recessional for newlyweds. The scherzo from his Op. 61 suite is nearly as famous.

³⁶See Reed J. Hoyt, "Rhythmic Process in the Scherzo of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 110: Analysis As a Basis for Interpretation and Criticism," *Indiana Theory Review* 9, no. 2 (1988): 99–133.

³⁷ Arthur E. DuBois, "Shakespeare and 19th-Century Drama," *ELH* 1, no. 2 (1934): 163–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871696>.

Critics commonly marked the development of his “elfin” scherzo style, noting its “transparent orchestration and fleeting staccato string and woodwind writing.”³⁸ In translating this play to sound, Friedrich Niecks ascribed to Mendelssohn’s opening music the realm of fairies.³⁹ Henry Chorley wrote of Mendelssohn’s compositional proclivities in changing “like a dream, into showers of dew amid moonlight—bearing the delicate and freakish burden of ‘a roundel and a faëry song to the most exquisite faëry poetry in the world, that of Shakespeare's ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream.’”⁴⁰ Also in this vein is Hector Berlioz’s “Queen Mab” scherzo from his orchestral suite, *Roméo et Juliette*. Especially in this example, Berlioz’s orchestral treatment opens the realm to fantastical sounds and timbres, as exemplified by, for instance, harps playing harmonics. Mendelssohn’s “elfin” scherzo style connotes the supernatural, in turn opening further possibilities for both composers and pianists in continuing to define the scherzo against itself.

Liszt & Alkan’s *Scherzi*

Mendelssohn’s contemporary, Chopin, was responsible for transforming the scherzo into a substantial composition, both in standalone and movement forms. Chopin’s *scherzi* served as vehicles inviting hyper-virtuosity, which, combined with Mendelssohn’s “supernatural style,” enabled a confluence of vastly different musical temperaments. Consider Liszt’s gargantuan *Scherzo und Marsch*, distinguished by a plethora of varying moods and *topoi*. Here, the diabolic

³⁸ Marian Wilson Kimber, “Reading Shakespeare, Seeing Mendelssohn: Concert Readings of ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, ca. 1850-1920,” *The Musical Quarterly* 89, no. 2/3 (2006): 199–236. See also Douglass Seaton, “Mendelssohn's Dramatic Music,” 204–22, and Thomas Grey, “The Orchestral Music,” in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 460–65 and 493–98.

³⁹Friedrich Niecks, “On Mendelssohn and Some of His Contemporary Critics,” *Monthly Musical Record* 5 (1875): 162–64, reprinted in *Mendelssohn and His World*, 383.

⁴⁰ Henry Chorley, *Modern German Music*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1854; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 2:413.

finds expression through Niccolò Paganini by Mendelssohn's opened door of the supernatural. The syphilitic and consequently demonic-looking Paganini—who had an anathema placed on his name by the Catholic Church for allegedly selling his soul to the devil—invites contemplations of evil through the topic of virtuosity. The notion of transcending one's human limits in playing ability has often conjured devilish, Faustian pacts, or in other cases, divine blessings bestowed by God, as culturally prevalent through the "Parable of the Talents." In continuing in the manner of Chopin and Liszt in exploring hyper-virtuosity and supernatural qualities, Charles-Valentin Alkan composed two lengthy and extremely difficult scherzi occupying opposing poles of good and evil with his transcendent, glorious *Scherzo focoso*, Op. 34 (1847) and *Scherzo diabolico*, Op. 39, No. 3 (1857?), with its hollow, upwardly ascending Paganini arpeggios.

Other Later Romantic *Scherzi*: Brahms and Schumann

Other composers explored differences primarily through differing formulations, as Brahms in his *Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 2 in A Major*, Op. 100, where he combines what would have been both the slow second and quick scherzo third movements into one, using an alternating structure: "Andante tranquillo — Vivace — Andante — Vivace di più — Andante — Vivace." Ryan McClelland's *Brahms and the Scherzo: Studies in Musical Narrative*, intensely examines the great diversity of Brahms' *scherzi*, further attesting to the notion of the scherzo as a site of experimentation.⁴¹ Schumann also experimented with form. After sight reading at the last moment for a performance, Mendelssohn suggested that Schumann add a second trio to his *Piano Quintet in E♭ Major*, Op. 44. As Beethoven's *scherzi* often featured rhythmic peculiarities, *Trio II* of Schumann's scherzo movement follows suit, taking advantage of an opportunity for

⁴¹ Ryan C. McClelland, *Brahms and the Scherzo: Studies in Musical Narrative* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

contrast relative to *Trio I*. The result is an emergent corporeality suggested by dance characteristics marked by a shift to simple from compound duple time. Here, the piano part plays a brusque rhythmic *ostinato* not providing the strong downbeats at the start of each measure (Figure 1b).

The image shows a musical score for the Trio II section of Schumann's Piano Quintet, III. Scherzo. The score is in 2/4 time and marked 'L'istesso tempo.' It features a piano part with a rhythmic ostinato pattern of eighth notes, and other instruments (violin, viola, cello, and double bass) with more complex rhythmic patterns. The piano part starts with a dynamic marking of 'mf'.

Figure 1b. Schumann: *Piano Quintet: III. Scherzo (Trio II)*

The performing musicians (or even listeners) may supplement these rhythmic gaps with their own movement, especially now in the momentary, unusual key of $A\flat$ minor. Continuing with the momentum of pushing against the overly formal minuet, bodily movement through this dance takes the stage, subconsciously posing subversive sensuality.

Moral Panic & Dance: Evilness & Sensuality

Dance, in general, had long been a site of serious concern for threatening virtue, chastity, and honor. For example, William Cleaver Wilkinson writes in 1869 of the waltz:⁴²

My accusation is that the dance, instead of affording an opportunity for mutually ennobling companionship between man and woman, inspired with a chaste and sweet interfused remembrance of their contrasted relationship to each other—that the dance, instead of this, consists substantially of a system of means contrived with more than

⁴² See also Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics, Key Ideas* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

human ingenuity to excite the instincts of sex to action, however subtle and disguised at the moment, in its sequel the most bestial and degrading.⁴³

Such writings were common during the period, which expressed concern about social dances.

The Immorality of Modern Dances (1904) followed, picking up anxieties in the era.⁴⁴

Theologians had similarly issued warnings against dance, viewing it as leading to sin.⁴⁵ Liszt, accordingly, called upon the diabolic multiple times after his composition of the Chopin-Mendelssohnian *Scherzo und Marsch* in 1851. In the period of 1859-1862, Liszt kept in line with the ontological practice of pushing against the scherzo from its own terms. As the scherzo replaced the minuet, the waltz, for Liszt, eventually replaced the scherzo. The allegorically-minded Liszt—Abbé Liszt as he later became known—composed four “Mephisto” waltzes and a Mephisto Polka, which extensively explored new harmonic and psychological frontiers prompted by Mendelssohn’s “elfin” scherzo type foregrounding the supernatural. In many ways, this path, first opened by Mendelssohn, encouraged anticipation of the alternative-universe harmonic practices of Rachmaninoff’s contemporary, Alexander Scriabin, through a forward-thinking Liszt, well ahead of his time. The scherzo through these developments participated in explorations into social order subversiveness, embracing the holy, the evil, the ironic, and the lighthearted, mostly through the topic and practice of pianistic virtuosity.

Chopin’s Scherzi

Beethoven, “among the most political of artists,” per Kinderman, stirred Emperor Franz to remark about his music, “*Es steckt was revolutionäres in der Musik!*” (“Something revolutionary lurks in the music!”⁴⁶) Nervous, Emperor Franz wished to prevent Austrian

⁴³ William Cleaver Wilkinson. *The Dance of Modern Society*. (New York: Oakley, Mason & Co., 1869), 64.

⁴⁴ “Immorality of Modern Dances, Ed. by Beryl and Associates...,” n.d., 57.

⁴⁵ Francois Xavier Schoupe, *Abridged Course of Religious Instruction*. (Burnes & Oates), 349. (n.d.)

⁴⁶ Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 3.

revolutions in the wake of those in the United States and France. Franz had good reason; his aunt, Marie Antoinette, was beheaded by French revolutionaries.⁴⁷ Beethoven's transformation of the scherzo as poking fun at the turgid minuet—the only well-represented holdover of older dances found in Baroque suites—continued in Chopin's politically motivated treatment of the scherzo genre. Counterbalancing the notion of Chopin as a feminine, *salon* composer, was the emergent trope of Chopin as a nationalistic, Polish revolutionary, which today shapes the interpretation of his music.

Chopin and Exile

The notion of Chopin as an inconsolable exile destroyed as a human being frequently appears in discourse surrounding the inspirational genesis of his music. Franz Liszt's biography on him serves as a prime period example, as does the published music criticism of Robert Schumann. Part of Chopin's romantic suffering tied to the existential angst of being ripped from his homeland, never able to return, and longing for a sovereign Poland not under the thumb of alien powers, specifically Russian. A testament to Chopin's apparently unshakable, nationalistic affinity to Poland ultimately found manifestation with the interment of his heart in a pillar of the Holy Cross Church in Poland. His sister, Ludwika Jędrzejewicz, smuggled his organ in cognac to honor his apparent final wishes, further adding to narratives about his fervor regarding the land of his birth.

Leon Botstein deemphasizes the nature of Chopin's wretchedness—or “disorienting loss”—on account of being exiled.⁴⁸ He argues that Chopin largely chose to leave Poland to

⁴⁷ Kinderman, *Beethoven*.

⁴⁸ Leon Botstein. “Chopin and the Consequences of Exile.” In *Chopin and His World*, edited by Jonathan D. Bellman and Halina Goldberg (Princeton University Press, 2017), 315-354.

search for better cosmopolitan opportunities and to associate himself with the elite of Western Europe. The nationalistic zeal frequently surrounding Chopin was asynchronous with his time, Botstein maintains, countering with more contemporary understandings of nationalism, particularly pushing against Edward Said's ideas of exile. Said's exile was drastically different as a Palestinian Arab whose homeland basically ceased to exist, becoming the State of Israel in 1948. In a documentary, he speaks just after performing Schumann's *Romanze* in F# Major, Op. 28, No. 2 on the piano in his living room, using the music to contemplate his existence:

Here I am, a child of a people kicked out of its own land, forbidden to return. [...] I was born there, my father was born there, my grandfather, great grandfather, and so forth, and I can't return. I don't have the same right. I mean, the law of return somehow covers them [those of Jewish ancestry] over my people. My family was kicked out of there [...]. The enormity of the whole thing just baffles me at the same time that it strikes me very strongly.⁴⁹

Said could not return to the land of his birth; Chopin technically could. As Botstein argues, Chopin's experience of this state contributed more to a romanticized notion aiding him in compositional efforts and public image. As a social butterfly in Parisian circles, spending his time among aristocratic circles and the artistic elite, Chopin never openly declared himself a revolutionary and identified himself as a voluntary rather than an involuntary political exile.⁵⁰ The type of exile Chopin faced thus was not consuming to the point of being cut off, like Said. Nonetheless, if taking note of Botstein's understanding of Said's idea of an exile acquiring a "contrapuntal" perspective, the following thought would entail that Chopin was able to leap from imitation to originality, not being tied to "inherited practices and styles."⁵¹ Removed from partisan politics, Chopin's patriotism was more based on a charm of the "landscape, history,

⁴⁹ Edward Said in *Exiles: Edward Said*. TV Documentary, Directed by Christopher Sykes. 1988.

⁵⁰ Botstein, 323.

⁵¹ Botstein, 323

language, and people” of Poland, not a “resentment” of non-exiles. In the end, Botstein purports that Chopin’s “music was a nostalgic projection, an act of imagining life *not* in exile.”⁵²

All of this is not to say that Chopin did not feel sadness or angst—he did—but some of this was selective regarding the degree to which he resonated personally. His “*zł*” was often a means to an end; about the *Fantaisie* in F minor, Op. 49, Chopin wrote, “Today I have finished the *Fantaisie*—and the sky is blue, and my heart is sad—but that doesn’t matter. If it were otherwise, my existence wouldn’t be of use to anyone.”⁵³ While romantically charming, there was a utility in his latching on to regret in stimulating compositional genesis, which he titrated carefully in synthesizing novel forms of musical expression.

Avoiding overly reductive assumptions about the centrality from Chopin’s lived experience of his music being pure manifestations of nationalistic expression and wretched exile is important. Nonetheless, the public’s consistent associations of these qualities have become centrally and firmly affixed to his corpus of music so as to affect the sounded interpretation of his music by pianists. Rachmaninoff would have been privy to these notions, especially given Russia’s historical presence in Poland (if, ironically, as the perpetrator of the Poland’s collective angst). Would the revolutionary aspect of Chopin have resonated with Rachmaninoff, especially in constructing pianistic interpretations of the former’s music? I strongly suggest this was unsurprisingly the case, especially as Rachmaninoff’s own exile, which was, in many ways, more severe than Chopin’s more tempered experience.

⁵² Leon Botstein. “Chopin and the Consequences of Exile.” In *Chopin and His World*, edited by Jonathan D. Bellman and Halina Goldberg (Princeton University Press, 2017), 321.

⁵³ Frédéric Chopin in a letter from Nohant to Julian Fontana in Paris, October 20, 1841. Quoted in *Dzieła różne = Various works. [redakcja tomu, Jan Ekier, Paweł Kamiński]*, Wydanie narodowe dzieł Fryderyka Chopina = National edition of the works of Fryderyk Chopin 28 (Warszawa: Fundacja Wyd. Narodowego, 2010).

Despite exile, Chopin continued to use his “native language” of music. While likewise did Rachmaninoff, he lost his musical circle back in Russia, which partially accounts for why he virtually gave up composing for more than a decade when settled in America. There was a tendency to preserve what he had learned as cultural artifacts, which, in this case, was pre-composed piano repertoire that had surrounded him in Imperial Russia. His Chopin recording was an Imperial-inflected interpretation, with ties and awareness going back to Anton Rubinstein, who influenced many of the aspects found in Rachmaninoff’s recording of Chopin’s Second Sonata, per recorded accounts.⁵⁴ But, in being an exile and having a metaphorically “contrapuntal” understanding (in Said’s sense), Rachmaninoff would have had opportunities to modify such an interpretation, reflecting on his own experiences. By 1931, this would have been the case, especially following the Russian Revolution. Likely seeing an entry point in the interpretation, Rachmaninoff would have found viable space for remaining true to his aristocratic, Imperial memories while also bringing an awareness of never being able to return to his homeland, whose social order was completely altered for good. As he recounted in 1930, “only one place is closed to me, and that is my own country—Russia.”⁵⁵ Rachmaninoff, being of the *dvoriantsvo*, was a pariah and in physical danger. Attesting to this, as he made ready to leave Russia, a furious crowd of peasants led by a “Bolshevik agitator” confronted him at his Ivanovka countryside estate. He felt his time was up for good.⁵⁶

After he left Russia, following the Great October Socialist Revolution, his countryside estate, Ivanovka, was destroyed. From 1931-1933, the Moscow and Leningrad Conservatories

⁵⁴ See Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 298.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Norris, *Rakhmaninov*, The Master Musicians Series (London: Dent, 1976), 69.

⁵⁶ Rakhmaninov, ‘Ivanovka’, in ‘Recollections of a Vanished World’, LCRA 50/2. On the history of these *vospominaniia*, see Apetian (ed.), *Rakhmaninov: Literaturnoe nasledie*, 1, pp. 487–88. This incident is also hinted at in Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff’s Recollections*, pp. 184–85. [

boycotted his music, suspending its instruction and performances.⁵⁷ This followed after he signed his name, along with Ivan Ostromislensky and Count Ilya L. Tolstoy, on a *New York Times* editorial critiquing the 1913 Bengali Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore for “his evasive attitude toward the Communist grave-diggers of Russia, [...] the quasi-cordial stand which he [had] taken toward them, [...] and] strong and unjust support to a group of professional murderers.” (In Spring 2021, might this resonate to those indifferent to the Russian Régime’s attacks on Ukraine?) The editorial voiced that he had “inflicted, perhaps unwittingly, great harm upon the whole population of Russia, and possibly the world at large.”⁵⁸ Further, it underscored a theme of deterioration (interestingly enough, using an apparently “primitive” India, by way of Tagore, as a symbol for regression, as Mann depicted in *Death in Venice* a year prior in 1912.)

Pravda retaliated, writing:

Rachmaninoff, the former bard of the Russian wholesale merchants and the bourgeoisie—a composer played out long ago, whose music is that of an imitator and reactionary. A former estate owner who, as recently as 1918, burned with a hatred of Russia when the peasants took away his land—a sworn and active enemy of the Soviet government.⁵⁹

Rachmaninoff reminisced nostalgically, saying, “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.”⁶⁰ Being exiled from his home country, Rachmaninoff said, “Perhaps no others can understand the hopeless homesickness of us older Russians,” remarking, “even the air in your country is different. No, I cannot say just how.”⁶¹ Losing a vital source of inspiration

⁵⁷ Sergieï Bertenson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), 274; Andreas Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov. Translated by Anne Wyburd ; Introduced by Aaron Shorr, Life & Times* (London: Haus, 2004), 126.

⁵⁸ Sergei Rachmaninoff Iwan I. Ostromislensky, “Tagore on Russia: The ‘Circle of Russian Culture’ Challenges Some of His Statements.,” *New York Times*, 1931.

⁵⁹ Michael Scott, *Rachmaninoff*. (Stroud: History Press, 2007), 160.

⁶⁰ Ewen, David: “Music Should Speak from the Heart,” Rachmaninoff interview in *The Etude*, No. 59, December 1941, pp. 848.

⁶¹ Rachmaninoff interview in *New York Evening Post*, 26 December 1933.

from his place of birth, Rachmaninoff lamented, “For when I left Russia, I left behind me my desire to compose: losing my country I lost myself also. To the exile whose musical roots, traditions and background have been annihilated, there remains no desire for self-expression.”⁶²

On more absolute terms of his inability to return, more widespread loss of cultural and musical circles, a degree of vilification, and the general irrevocable dissolution of a way of life, even if privileged and hard to sympathize with from contemporary perspectives, exile was firmly a state of being for Rachmaninoff, more emphatically so than for Chopin. Nonetheless, given the sturdy cultural associations of exile and revolution that had attached to Chopin, Rachmaninoff would look to his music as to a beacon, almost demanding the meeting of kindred spirits. Chopin’s most overtly revolutionary works, such as the popularly titled “Revolutionary” *Étude* in C minor, Op. 10, No. 12; the “Tragic” *Polonaise* in F# minor, Op. 44, distinguished by a militaristic, monophonic drum roll section preceding a central mazurka; the “Heroic” *Polonaise*, Op. 53, distinguished by an unrelenting left-hand octave section summoning the Polish cavalry; the “Military” *Polonaise*, Op. 40, No. 1, which Chopin himself told a student not to apologize when he had broken a piano string when performing the because he wished he had such—presumably patriotic—strength, and so forth: all would impress on the interpretative mind other sorts of revolutionary aspects in other works not explicitly bearing such titles or associations.⁶³ To this effect, Chopin himself added to the sentiment that would circulate about his music, as he commented when instructing Adolf Gutmann on the *Étude* in E Major, Op. 10, No. 3, “O, ma

⁶² “The Composer as Interpreter,” Rachmaninoff interview by Norman Cameron in *The Monthly Musical Record*, November 1934, 01.

⁶³ A variant of this story about Chopin’s “Heroic” *Polonaise* specifies the young man breaking several hammers. See William Smythe Babcock Mathews, *The Masters and Their Music: A Series of Illustrative Programs, with Biographical, Esthetical, and Critical Annotations, Designed as an Introduction to Music as Literature, for the Use of Clubs, Classes, and Private Study* (T. Presser, 1898), 103.

patrie!” (“Oh, my fatherland!), further titillating ambiguous hermeneutics toward nationalistic longing and revolutionary sentiments.⁶⁴

Relative to his peers, Chopin’s harmony was particularly daring, which was in some way revolutionary. Rellstab wrote that of his “modulations [...] one feels himself in a labyrinth.”⁶⁵ Less generous commentators wrote, “The entire works of Chopin present a motley surface of ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony.”⁶⁶ Another wrote, “The wildness of both the melody and harmony of Chopin is, for the most part excessive... We cannot imagine any musician, who has not acquired an unhealthy taste for noise, and scrambling, and dissonance, to feel otherwise than dissatisfied [with his music.]”⁶⁷ Another claimed, “M. Chopin increasingly affects the crudest modulations.”⁶⁸

Perhaps the most vehement of his revolutionary-leaning works is his *Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20*, given the title “*Le banquet infernal*” by one of Chopin’s first London publishers (Figure 1c).⁶⁹ As if amplifying the angst of social unrest through changes of musical social order,



Figure 1c. Chopin, *Scherzo No. 1*, opening

⁶⁴ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ed., *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 68.

⁶⁵ L. Rellstab, *Iris*, Berlin, August 2, 1833, translated from German in Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective: Critical Assaults on Composers since Beethoven’s Time*, 2d ed, Washington Paperbacks, WP-52 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 84.

⁶⁶ *Musical World*, London, October 28, 1841.

⁶⁷ *Dramatic and Musical Review*, London, November 4, 1843.

⁶⁸ H.F. Chorley, *The Athenaeum*, London, December 20, 1865.

⁶⁹ “Fryderyk Chopin.” Accessed May 17, 2021. <https://chopin.nifc.pl/en/chopin/kompozycja/65>.

which James Huneker labeled as “savage,” “barbaric,” and surely lacerating the eardrums of his contemporaries, Chopin heralds the scherzo with a *fortissimo* ii^{\flat}_5 chord and maintains a dissident tendency throughout, approaching at times the edges of noise (Figure 1). For this reason, Huneker branded Chopin as “bold to excess,” which would easily suggest a reaction to the failed Polish uprising against the Russians.⁷⁰ Expanded to an unprecedented nine minutes, with turbulent outer sections played “*presto con fuoco*,” violence gives way to a nostalgic, nationalistic trio, which incorporates the Polish Christmas carol, “*Lulajże Jezuniu*” (“Sleep, Little Jesus”), a relatively unusual move for Chopin in using an actual folk tune, rather than his more usual use of folk-like elements.

Recalling happier memories of Christmas in a thoroughly Polish context, the trio enables the feeling and sense of violent contrast. Such would become a trait that would characterize Chopin’s other *scherzi*. Chopin’s adoption of this Christmas carol also points to the more significant messianic notion of Poland as “Christ of Europe,” being a nation suffering for the benefit of all.⁷¹ Chopin consequently interrupts the dream of the trio by the same chords of the opening violent dissonance, which gives rise to a coda marked “*risoluto*,” with insistent, pedaled dissonances pitting leading-tones against their resolutions, climactically ending with a shriek of a physically stretched chord pulverizing the musical texture nine times before hurdling to a fire and brimstone cataclysm, as it were, which pianists frequently play with chromatic interlocking

⁷⁰ James Huneker in the introduction to Frédéric Chopin, *Complete works for the piano. Edited and fingered, and provided with an introductory note by Carl Mikuli. Historical and analytical comments by James Huneker*, Schirmer’s library of musical classics, v. 29, 35, 1546-1558 (New York: G. Schirmer, 1895).

⁷¹ See also Waldemar Chrostowski, (1991) “The Suffering, Chosenness and Mission of the Polish Nation,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 4 , Article 1. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol11/iss4/1>

octaves (Figure 2 and 3). In this scherzo, Chopin rails against the political order that surrounds him.

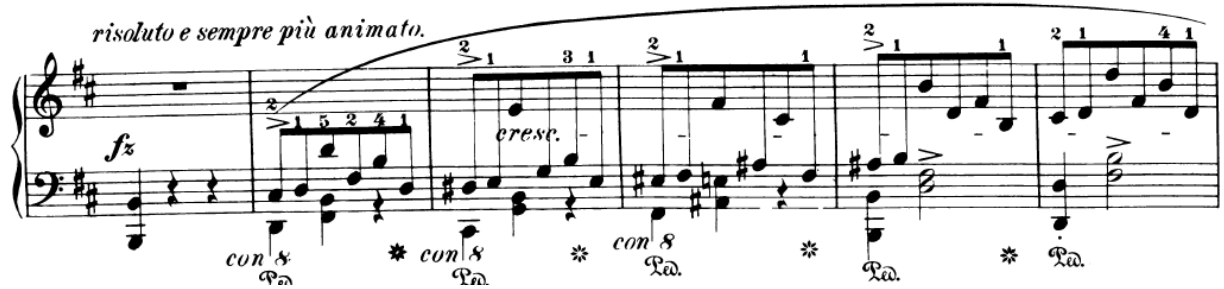


Figure 2. Chopin, Scherzo No. 1, coda: risoluto

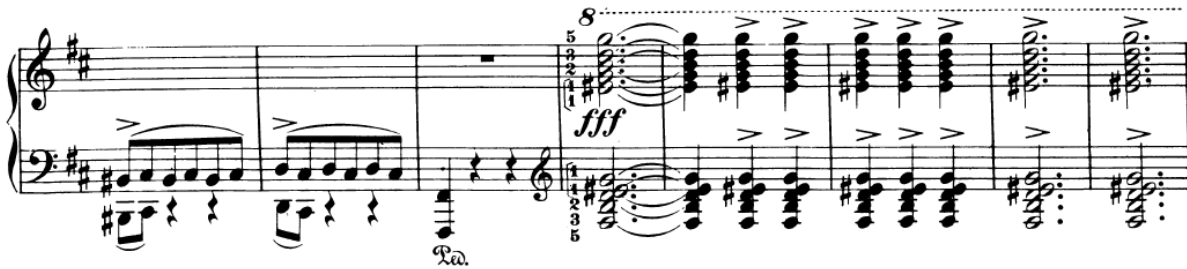


Figure 3. Chopin, Scherzo No. 1, cataclysmic chords

Political subversion likely best characterizes Chopin’s first scherzo and similarly epitomizes the scherzo movement of his Second Sonata. Written in the uncommon key of E \flat minor, a striking sound in the unequal temperament Chopin used, the scherzo movement pushes against basic sonic expectations.⁷² That aspect is reduced in equal temperament. However, recognizing the revolutionary spirit in this movement, Rachmaninoff-the-composer interprets, using what he terms his “imaginative gift”—strongest among composers—in constructing his interpretation through a common link of a war-subjected homeland.⁷³ In taking the score as descriptive rather than prescriptive, Rachmaninoff performs a vision lost in history, re-imagining

⁷² To provide a sense of historical tunings on the modern piano, *Six Degrees of Tonality: A Well-Tempered Piano*, with Enid Katahn (Precision Piano Work, 2009) features several systems. Although she does not discuss this work specifically, her exploration of the diversity of the operative tunings and their resulting sounds bring to the fore this somewhat forgotten historical reality of the piano’s development.

⁷³ Rachmaninoff in “The Composer as Interpreter,” Interview with Norman Cameron in *The Monthly Musical Record*, November 1934, 201.

music that otherwise might have become stale and meaningless through over-familiarity. (This sonata eventually became a warhorse in concert halls and competitions.) Rachmaninoff accomplishes his transformation by musically heightening widespread associations of political subversion attached to Chopin.

A facet of Rachmaninoff's interpretation relative to other pianists performing this scherzo draws from his aristocratic status, interestingly resonating with the implications of the minuet-scherzo genre play. In Rachmaninoff's case, the *loss* of his aristocratic distinction with the collapse of Imperial Russia follows here, therefore moving oppositely relative to moves toward equalizing democracy. Although the nature of Rachmaninoff's reaction sharply differs from the spirit behind replacing the minuet with the scherzo, reacting to a different social order remains the common denominator. Here, this would count as Rachmaninoff the pianist finding the same "inspiration" as the original composer once had, even if the end musical result would be categorically different.⁷⁴ The overall result is an interpretation that may count as subversive, going against the strictures of prevailing interpretative communities, as Rachmaninoff introduces sharp divergences relative to the text, which I will argue amounts to a portrayal of illness, metaphorically standing in for the Bolshevik infection of his nation.

While metaphorically speaking about such an "infection" may seem a mere rhetorical convenience, there are numerous clues pointing toward a sense of Russia being gravely ill among the aristocracy and higher circles of the elite. Even before the Russian Revolution, Russian

⁷⁴ Sergei Rachmaninoff. "Essentials of Artistic Playing." Edited by James Francis Cooke. *Great Pianists on Piano Playing: Godowsky, Hofmann, Lhévinne, Paderewski, and 24 Other Legendary Performers* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1999), 218.

nobles looked at the French Revolution just over a century before as a prophesy to what would happen in Russia.⁷⁵ Count Semyon Vorontsov wrote (1792):

France will not calm down until its vile principles have established themselves in Russia. As I have already told you, this will not be a war for life, but a war till death between those who have nothing and those who own property, and since the latter are few in number so must they inevitably perish. This infection shall become universal. Our distance from this turmoil will protect us for a time; we shall be the last ones, yet nonetheless we shall be victims of this worldwide plague. We shan't witness it; not you or I, but my son will.⁷⁶

Marietta Shaginian, “Ré,” as Rachmaninoff knew her, wrote to him, saying that his music was a cure for her ailments from contemporary society.⁷⁷ Rachmaninoff responded back, “Write to me. . . .what is wrong with you? With what are you ill, and why does your letter evoke such a sorrowful impression?”⁷⁸ Rachmaninoff also wrote to her at one point, saying, “I myself am spiritually sick, dear Ré, and consider myself weaponless and also quite old.”⁷⁹ Thinkers in this circle thought of this infection as connected to a larger spiritual decline of Russia, with the cultural products of some being tokens of this degeneracy.⁸⁰

Scriabin, Rachmaninoff’s classmate, viewed himself a harbinger of spiritual uplift to come, as Ryan Shiotsuki (né Rowen) details extensively in his chapter, “Towards the Flame: Approaching Scriabin’s Apocalypse.”⁸¹ The Philosopher Sergei Bulgakov thought of the craze surrounding Scriabin as catastrophic to Russia, with Scriabin himself ultimately being seen as a

⁷⁵ Smith, *Former People*, 11–12.

⁷⁶ Nonna Marchenko, *Byt i Nruy Pushkinskgo Vremeni.*, trans. Douglas Smith (St. Petersburg, 2005), 268–69.

⁷⁷ Rebecca Mitchell, *Nietzsche’s Orphans: Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire*, Eurasia Past and Present (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 144.

⁷⁸ Sergei Rachmaninoff to Marietta Shaginian (February 14, 1912), in Apetian, ed., *S. Rakhmaninov: Literaturnoe nasledie*, II. Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1979-1980, 42-43. (Trans. Rebecca Mitchell.)

⁷⁹ Mitchell, 162.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Rebecca Mitchell, “Musical Metaphysics’ in Late Imperial Russia,” *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, September 4, 2020, 12, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198796442.013.15>.

⁸¹ Ryan Isao Rowen (Shiotsuki), “Transcending Imagination; Or, An Approach to Music and Symbolism during the Russian Silver Age.” (Ph. D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2015), chap. 2.

Satanic figure on account of materialist egocentrism.⁸² Spiritual sickness affected Rachmaninoff, as did two epidemics. By 1930, fans fashioned Rachmaninoff as a preserver of true Russianness, a role that he came to embrace.⁸³ Nonetheless, although he likely drew upon aspects of Anton Rubinstein's interpretation of the Sonata, especially in the third and fourth movements, Rachmaninoff, believing himself a creator whose energies should not reduce piano performance to reproduction, brought considerable innovation to his recordings.⁸⁴

The Soviet music theorist Boris Asafiev would later develop ideas of a cultural theory of music, which would relate strongly to his concept of "intonation" (*"intonatsia"*). Musical intonation—not necessarily the type that musicians (especially, perhaps, string players) relentlessly pursue through playing in tune with themselves and others—entails a "complex of musical thoughts, persistently occurring in the consciousness of a given environment."⁸⁵ With culture determining musical hermeneutics, music reflected its current environment. Thus, a piano performance, in this instance, may or may not be "in tune" with the current circumstances and may be dead if not. Although Rachmaninoff does not seem to have consumed Asafiev's theory, his instinct in recognizing the scherzo's ontology of perpetual redefinition would fit in well with Asafiev's semiotic theorizations from a nationalistic perspective. Rachmaninoff's scherzo performance reflects the cultural intonation of his time, working through an "intonational crisis" in which prior replicas of interpretative instantiations would have lost their meanings. His performance, so different from those of others, amounts in my view to an expression of illness as

⁸² Mitchell, 9–12.

⁸³ Sergei Rachmaninoff in a letter to Marietta "Ré" Shaginian. Quoted in Rebecca Mitchell, "In Search of Russia: Sergei Rakhmaninov and the Politics of Musical Memory after 1917," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 97, no. 1 (2019): 136–68, <https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.97.1.0136>.

⁸⁴ See *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*. (London, New York: Continuum, 2005), 286.

⁸⁵ Gordon D. McQuere, ed., *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, Russian Music Studies; No. 10 (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1983), 239.

both a phenomenon and a metaphor for the destructive “evil” seen corrupting Russia, which led to not only the dissolution of Orthodox spirituality but also the dissolution of an empire and life attack. Can one indeed hear this in his performance?

Part B: Performance Analysis

Perhaps most unusual about Rachmaninoff’s recording of the scherzo is his tempo, which clocks in at 78 beats per minute to the dotted half note. Rachmaninoff augments the gestural aspect of the quick Mendelssohn-type “elfin” scherzo by performing to one large beat per bar, reconceptualizing the original $\frac{3}{4}$ (simple triple meter) as $\frac{3}{8}$ (compound single) in diminution. Rachmaninoff’s pushing the scherzo toward this heightened motion, throwing rhythmic emphasis to a broader plane, corresponds to his remark, “Big musical line, big musician; small musical line, small musician.”⁸⁶ Rachmaninoff performs with a resulting hypermeter in common time over four bars, greatly challenging typical phrase conceptualization. According to expected metrical stress, his first and third bars, reduced to single beats, receive heightened dynamic gravity, thereby sonically transforming an ordinarily heavy-handed approach to perpetual lift. Rachmaninoff ever so slightly elongates the down beat and accelerates the subsequent octaves to produce forward thrust, snapping each measure to the next.

Pulling off such a performance is neither intuitive nor facile; playing at such a brisk tempo jeopardizes successful execution and would jeopardize biomechanical health for many pianists. For a petite to average-sized hand, outstretching the fingers to play the octaves quickly can result in a loss of control or debilitating injury. Most perform with three large beats to the bar

⁸⁶ Sergei Rachmaninoff quoted by Ruth Slenczynska, Rachmaninoff’s last living pupil, in *Clavier*, October 1973, 15.

at a slower tempo out of physical limitation, thereby standardizing interpretations, making Rachmaninoff's performance an outlier. Estimates of Rachmaninoff's hand span claim it to have been at least a perfect 12th, so studying from a corporeally informed perspective can present challenges if attempting to gain understanding through direct emulation of his performance.⁸⁷ Seeing my own handspan of a comparable 12th as offering an unusual research opportunity, I moved to recreate his performance at the instrument, with simple anatomy giving me an advantage in directly examining Rachmaninoff's technical approach as a musicologist-pianist.

With Luca Chiantore's idea of "*Ur-Technik*" ("pure" or "original" technique, analogous to reliable *Urtext* performing editions true to the composer) in mind, I internalized historical accounts of Rachmaninoff's playing to guide myself at the instrument.⁸⁸ To approach Rachmaninoff's speed, I considered how he held himself at the piano, following accounts by observers. Rachmaninoff abstained from engaging his upper body, keeping his motion focused through his fingers. Biomechanically, this runs contrary to contemporary thought of technique, which emphasizes a system of coordinated motion of multiple body areas simultaneously. At 6'6", his towering stature compensated for some of the loss of physical power resulting from playing mostly from the hands and fingers rather than engaging the forearm and upper body. In my case, I stand at 6'1."

In reducing bodily motion, except in my forearms and hands, I began filling in gaps where old descriptions did not provide ample information in order to deduce Rachmaninoff's playing approach. Through trial and error, I eventually discovered an overall lightweight

⁸⁷ Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield, Vt., USA: Scolar Press ; Gower Pub. Co, 1990), 397.

⁸⁸ Luca Chiantore. Prepared with Peter Wix. *Tone Moves: A History of Piano Technique* (Barcelona: Musikeon Books, 2019), 431–41.

technique, an approach greatly contrary to those underlying most typical commercial recordings. This technique entails playing largely within the first escapement of the piano's double escapement action, mostly from the wrist down to generate motion. Modern pianos, including the Steinway D Rachmaninoff used for his recording, have two "escapements," which entails that the piano's hammer resets halfway before hitting the bottom of the key bed. This allows for the quick repetition of a single key without the hammer getting stuck, which would force the pianist to reset the instrument's action to its original at-rest position. To feel the first escapement at the piano, a pianist may depress a key slowly, which will lead to a slight point of resistance that servicing technicians call "aftertouch." The piano requires little physical expenditure in arriving at this point—too much, and the escapement point is easily surpassed. However, it is possible to perform fast repetitions beyond the first escapement, which would result in a more strident tone. A reason for heading to the first escapement is to husband physical energy, so as to make it through the entire movement without debilitating exhaustion.

As is more typical with performing this movement, incorporating more of the body aligns topically to the "*bravura*" pianist model with an impressive sonority filling the concert hall. Rachmaninoff does gain sound, but his variety of tone color paints a different picture, running contrary to assumptions of what would result from such a gigantic presence at the piano. Rachmaninoff's interpretation compels more creative listening possibilities due to his novelty. I conserved my energy as I considered Leonid Pasternak's description of Rachmaninoff: "bolt upright, his head slightly bent, his body rigid. All the strength of his touch was concentrated in his hands, his body apparently playing no part in his extraordinary *fortissimo*."⁸⁹ Quickly noticing the unusual motions my hands began making under these restrictions, I considered the

⁸⁹ As cited in Chiantore, 434.

implications of a physically informed semiosis shaping the overall hermeneutic picture of Rachmaninoff's performance.

In striving to access Rachmaninoff's private world of felt physical sensations at the piano, I query what may have passed through his mind and body as he performed and made sense of the scherzo. Recreating Rachmaninoff's unconventional speed, touch, and overall sound, I observed that the nimbleness of the quickly repeated octaves was not possible if relying passively on only the gravitational acceleration of 9.8 m/s^2 . I supplemented gravity by intervening with the acceleration of my arm directly by muscular action. I played with fingers 2-3-4-5 together as one unit on the upper note—almost like a flipper in water—to aid in moving mostly from the wrist down with a minimal range of motion (Figure 4.) For the other keys, I did not necessarily use as many fingers but maintained a similar wrist motion. In all, the position is



Figure 4. Integrated 2-3-4-5 unit for the scherzo's repeated octaves

unusual and not ergonomically healthy, as the fingers bend to the right, creating embodied tension that required that I budget my practice to avoid injury. There was, thus, an underlying cost behind performing in this way.

Combined with playing within an exceedingly small margin of motion to produce sound—between the first and second escapements of the piano’s action, it appeared as if my hand trembled in a controlled manner, nearly vibrating as I became more fluent. This technical approach lent itself to interpretation, resembling a Peircean sign, perhaps a shivering or shuddering response. Querying its contextual meaning, terror, the fight-or-flight response, nervous dread, physical coldness, or illness, as when experiencing high fever, seemed to be possibilities within the larger landscape of dreariness in Chopin’s Sonata. I considered further elements of Rachmaninoff’s biography to arrive at a more specific possibility germane to his recording.

Rachmaninoff’s Brushes with Mortality

Rachmaninoff had seen the face of death itself on several occasions, both with his immediate family and with the demise of Imperial Russia. Because a performer’s relationship to a given composition is incredibly personal, as Elisabeth Le Guin has demonstrated, Rachmaninoff likely channeled a trembling response as a mode of autobiography, using Chopin’s scherzo as a mirror. Rapid octaves and urgency tied to physical illness were not entirely new in musical representation by 1930. Coming immediately to mind is Franz Schubert’s *Der Erlkönig*, where the pianist performs rapid triplet octaves at excessive length. Pianists either avoid this work, believing it to be crudely written, or embrace it without reservation, as did Franz Liszt with his solo transcription. There are five characters in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem, each set differently in Schubert’s music: 1) a gravely ill boy, 2) his father rushing him to safety on horseback, 3) the evil Elf King cajoling the boy to his death, 4) the narrator, and 5) a galloping horse. What often does not register to the audience beyond the page or through sound are the physical sensations of the pianist’s part, which can lead to

tendonitis or another inflammation disorder, even if not at quite the same speed of the octaves Rachmaninoff employs in his performance of the Sonata's scherzo. Audiences are aware that the pianist's part is difficult but may not know what it feels like. Nonetheless, some may reasonably speculate during a performance, "Will the pianist make it?" The pianist, who physically experiences real physical tension, becomes the child imperiled by the Elf King. At the conclusion, the pianist's arms, fatigued, fall into his lap, as does the boy, "dying" in his father's arms (Appendix C – Der Erlkönig).⁹⁰

In *The Romantic Generation*, Charles Rosen claims that the origin of "inflict[ing] pain on keyboard performers" originates with der *Erlkönig*.⁹¹ He speaks at greater length of Chopin calling upon physical anguish, writing that some music, like the "Winter Wind" *Étude* in A Minor, "twists both hands unmercifully" at the climax. Rosen concludes that "the very positions into which the hands are forced here are like gestures of exasperated despair," concluding that "it would seem as if the physical awkwardness is itself an expression of emotional tension." For Rosen, muscular sensation—pain—becomes a mimesis of passion.⁹²

Even though Rachmaninoff did stand a greater chance of being able to perform the scherzo without "dying," that would not mean he felt nothing. Rachmaninoff suffered from a plethora of physical ailments with his hands, Barrie Martyn details.⁹³ He suffered from neuralgia and complained of tiredness in his hands for the duration of his career.⁹⁴ Rachmaninoff moreover suffered from his fingertips bruising from breaking capillaries, extremely painful for a practice

⁹⁰ Goethe's poem may be found in Appendix C.

⁹¹ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 383.

⁹² Rosen, 382-383.

⁹³ Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield, Vt.: Scolar Press; Gower Pub. Co, 1990), 397.

⁹⁴ Martyn, 397.

requiring many repetitions at the keyboard.⁹⁵ In one of the few videos of him, Rachmaninoff appears with one of his fingers repeatedly moving in isolation, suggestive of an ailment, possibly trigger finger, or the beginnings of focal dystonia (Figure 5).⁹⁶ Rachmaninoff's approach



Figure 5. Video footage of Rachmaninoff. Observe the index finger of his left hand, which he bends unusually in isolation.

accepted discomfort, inevitably shaping his musical disposition and discernment in performance. His sensation was such that when he died, he cried, “My dear hands. Farewell, my poor hands.”

Resolutely, Rachmaninoff played through pain. Such an approach would entail at least two possibilities: 1) a negligent or labored-sounding performance or 2) a performance so strong in conviction that sheer willpower would push through any barriers, thereby reinforcing commitment to a musical ideal or inner blueprint in an additive feedback cycle. I defer more to the second possibility while interpreting the first on intentional grounds but aim to move beyond the mystification that often accompanies high-profile pianists. Attesting to an absolute commitment to a musical goal is Rachmaninoff's critique of the well-celebrated playing of Alfred Cortot. Rachmaninoff said cynically, “Whenever it gets difficult, he adds a little sentiment,” possibly to alleviate sensations of pain.⁹⁷ Rachmaninoff, in effect, discerned

⁹⁵ Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 397.

⁹⁶ Video footage of Rachmaninoff in John Gielgud et al., *Rachmaninoff: The Harvest of Sorrow*. Produced by Mike Bluett and Eleanor Berrie; directed by Tony Palmer (West Long Branch, N.J: Kultur, 2007).

⁹⁷ Sergei Rachmaninoff, cited by Rosen in *The Romantic Generation*, 383.

virtuosity and physical feeling as corresponding to emotional tension and, perhaps, to Rosen's characterizations.⁹⁸

Rachmaninoff links physical to emotional tension and does not back away as Cortot purportedly did. Rachmaninoff augments difficulty as an expressive device in his recording of the scherzo movement; in his compositions, he writes in manual and cognitive hardship to this effect, particularly in his Second Sonata (1913 version), which forms the sequel to Chopin's Second Sonata. Even if the performing pianist does not necessarily feel pain on stage, telegraphing it to the audience, then the near-religious devotion needed to overcome difficulty to develop a responsive, well-oiled technique testifies to an extended physical involvement. Rachmaninoff's predisposition to prizing music as especially sensed physically stems, in part, from living in a land of bells that tolled nonstop before the October Revolution, making the ground itself move with felt vibrations. In the religious services he frequented with his grandmother, there were traditionally no pews, especially significant for sacred holiday services lasting over six hours, making the experience physically taxing while vocal music reached the ears of congregants involved in ritual fasting. This ethnoreligious physicality would have contributed to Rachmaninoff's propensity toward corporeal involvement with the piano.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Cf. J. Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 57.

⁹⁹ In general, for an extended theorization about vibrational listening, cf. Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

Rachmaninoff faced mortal illness and resulting tragedy early on, perhaps not far off from the sort of sickness behind by Goethe’s poem. In an epidemic in St. Petersburg, Sergei Rachmaninoff, his brother, Vladimir, and younger sister, Sophia, all contracted diphtheria, which killed Sophia in 1883.¹⁰⁰ A serious disease, diphtheria involves in its respiratory type a host of symptoms, including a sore throat, weakness, fever, shivering, swollen lymph nodes, chills, cyanosis, myocarditis, renal failure, and most characteristically a foul-smelling pseudomembrane of necrosed tissue near the trachea that makes breathing and swallowing difficult (Figure 6).¹⁰¹



Figure 6. A child with a pseudomembrane. CDC.

Even in his adulthood, Rachmaninoff was a man easily scared by thunder, beetles, and robbers.¹⁰² The loss of physical constitution, marked by physical changes and depletion of energy, would have especially affected the imagination of an impressionable Rachmaninoff during his youth. With such a high mortality rate, diphtheria brought about very real life-and-death battles among those afflicted. Considering these strong, indelible experiences, I propose a through-line—an extrapolation—that links Rachmaninoff’s performance of the scherzo, along with its implied techniques, to his lived experience of illness. Doing so acknowledges that pianists often freely associate and curate music to personalized aspects, sometimes making concrete, easy-to-trace associations less applicable to others. A pianist’s mind processes enormous sets of variables that evades most reductive, linear analysis. I extrapolate from an inferred disposition that shaped the musical and

¹⁰⁰ Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005), 9.

¹⁰¹ “Symptoms of Diphtheria | CDC,” March 17, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/diphtheria/about/symptoms.html>.

¹⁰² Sergei Bertensson, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*. (New York: University Press, 1956), 180.

hermeneutic imagination of Rachmaninoff, which involves informed imagining and projection in drawing relations.

Losing a younger sibling in an epidemic after having survived the mortal ailment that led to her demise would have contributed to a sense of protracted, persistent trauma. Considering Rachmaninoff's longstanding anxiety and nervousness, eventually leading to a mental collapse and obsession with end-of-time matters, the phenomena of shivering and breathing problems brought about by diphtheria's pseudomembrane and the like may have contributed, as a felt echo, to the unusual trembling technique creating the brisk octaves in Rachmaninoff's scherzo performance, a movement preceding the *marche funèbre* commemorating an actual picture of a memorial. Other than diphtheria, another candidate contributing to a strong, haunting experience directing Rachmaninoff's interpretive disposition is his experience of the Spanish Flu in 1918. Both Rachmaninoff and his daughters fell ill to the virus, which infected about a third of Earth's population, leading to the expiration of 50 million globally.¹⁰³ The virus sometimes led to secondary infections of bacterial pneumonia, with grisly physical symptoms.

Moreso than somatic disease, Rachmaninoff had other strong experiences that shaped his interpretations, such as fleeing his dying Russia as the aristocracy quickly became targeted for terrorism by an angry and uprising proletariat infected, like a virus, by Lenin's ideology. From a phenomenal consideration, might his technique involving shivering motions embody a kind of a musical-physical reenactment of illness or revolutionary violence?¹⁰⁴ Illness stands in as a metaphor for larger societal critiques, as Susan Sontag has explicated; a musical equivalent to a

¹⁰³ "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 Virus) | Pandemic Influenza (Flu) | CDC," June 16, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Rachmaninoff, as translated by Rebecca Mitchell from Rakhmaninov, 'Ivanovka', in 'Recollections of a Vanished World', Library of Congress Rachmaninoff Archive 50/2.

literary exploration to music, even wordless instrumental music, would expand such a conceptualization.

It would be hard to imagine the purpose of Rachmaninoff's performance to have been solely to evoke sickness or dread; one only needs to visit a hospital for that. Multidimensionally, his performance creates a larger tapestry of drama in which underlying, oppositional forces entail brushes with mortality. Rachmaninoff's performance encompasses, phenomenologically speaking, taking on distinct qualities that yield themselves to interpretation on the listener's end. Thinking in more concrete terms of "characters" or mood becomes analytically useful, especially given the distinct qualities, not typically evoked by other pianists, deriving from his tendency to pre-plan his interpretations, to a degree almost approaching composition. Striking within the context of Rachmaninoff's recording are the (at least) four distinctive characters or types, which I will explore accordingly: 1) Evil Spirit or Death Force, 2) Protagonist, 3) Fate, and 4) Nostalgic Delirium. These emerge through a level of contrast that other recordings, tending toward a more singular affect, typically do not feature.

Character: Evil Spirit or Death Force

A death force may be a candidate as a character type emerging from Rachmaninoff's performance, implying a protagonist on which it acts, as implied by the subsequent funeral march that Rachmaninoff shapes as an approaching and receding processional with a funeral *cortège*. As marked in Chopin's score, the quick shift to the mediant, G \flat , in a floating second inversion with a different texture and figuration in the right hand, alternates between fifths and sixths (Figure 7).

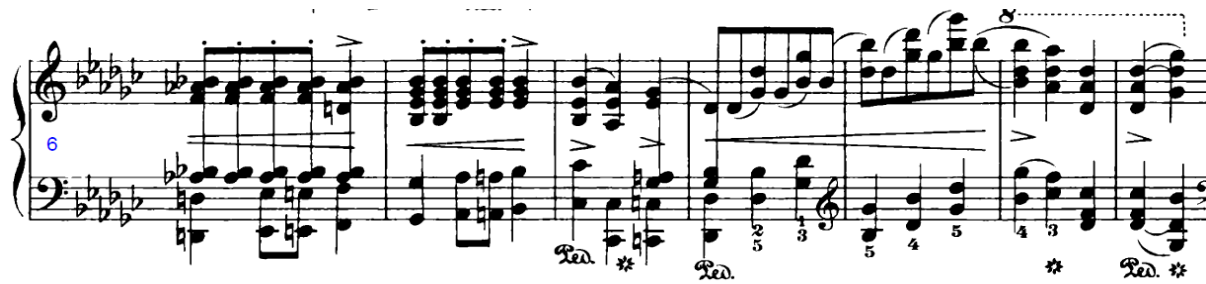


Figure 7. Shift to Gb Major at m. 9. Note the less stable second inversion of the mediant.

In his mortal struggle with the shivering octaves just before, Rachmaninoff takes to heart Chopin's performance instructions of heading toward the third beat of each measure, propelling the music forward. Many performances today may not realize this direction successfully; the slower speed disintegrates the gesture.

In emulating Rachmaninoff's performance, my hands moved closer to the fallboard, starting with my wrists slightly rolling forward, which contrasted to a simpler execution of one up-down movement per octave. The larger resulting gesture entailed a finite range of motion starting from its beginning to its end. As if to balance his performance in subsequent bars, seen in some respects in the *marche funèbre*, Rachmaninoff goes against Chopin's instructions in the subsequent Gb major section starting at m. 9. Here, Rachmaninoff introduces a *decrescendo*, contrary to Chopin's *crescendo*, plays without pedal, contrary to realizing Chopin's long pedal marking, and performs with an evenly realized *leggiero* touch. Rachmaninoff plays the left hand with an almost flawlessly consistent, *secco* touch as he gets lighter. Antithetical to its antecedent, the consequent's quick shift in sound profile suggests moving to another area of musical space, from a phenomenological sense, by way of sheer contrast. The same is true of the physicality, where the wrist led before in a forward, propelling motion, quickly shifting to an entirely different touch, where the wrist's motion contrasts to the antecedent, remaining unusually still as it ascends the piano's register.

To play accurately, I discovered in my emulation an unflinching focus, needed to actuate extremely quick motions to be played only within a small margin of the key's motion. To achieve consistency of touch, the hands must be well-centered over each key, keeping a keen sense of physical balance and centeredness in moving from one interval to the next. Part of the difficulty lies in losing a physical anchor in the right hand in moving from the eighth figure to the next. The danger in executing this figure is greater without the physical security of playing *legato*. Rachmaninoff eliminates the two-note slurs through connection.

Trembling Technique

This passage may appear harmless and benign, but manifests in the pianist's body and mind a risk of not making it, especially as the performer must quickly shift from activating the muscular shiver response to reengaging a use of the arm broadly. From a bodily perspective, the change in sensation is drastic and terrifying, requiring a hasty shift between techniques. This innocuous figure may function like the Elf king character in *Der Erlkönig*, with his promises of marvelous experiences and splendor. In this instance, Rachmaninoff adheres more to a lighthearted sense of a scherzo, possibly looking back to Felix Mendelssohn, recalling that, in 1932, Rachmaninoff wrote a piano transcription of Mendelssohn's scherzo from the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Characteristically, Rachmaninoff translates to the piano a lightness prevailing in the orchestral version. Remarkably, Rachmaninoff's writing is complex, yet his playing maintains a gossamer quality, distinguished by extreme precision. Programmatically, the music draws from Shakespeare's play of the same title, characterized by its supernatural cast of characters of sprites and fairies. That Rachmaninoff was motivated by this fantastical, literalistic version of Mendelssohn's genre points to internal associations he had with the scherzo within his own mental and physical world.

Evil Spirit

Rachmaninoff had long been fixated on malevolent forces imperiling human life. In his First Sonata, for instance, he had originally conceived of it along the lines of Goethe's *Faust*. Rachmaninoff did not disclose a one-to-one text-to-music translation; however, his most important biographer, Barrie Martyn, concedes that the features of the sonata are difficult to explain except through a program, as it avoids typical formal practices.¹⁰⁵ In later contemplating his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* as a ballet, Rachmaninoff wrote, "Why not recreate the legend of Paganini selling his soul to the Evil Spirit for perfection in art and also for a woman? All the variations on *Dies irae* represent the Evil Spirit."¹⁰⁶ Adding to his panoply of Faustian inclinations, Rachmaninoff also included Liszt-Gounod's *Valse de "Faust"* in his repertoire.¹⁰⁷ Within the context of a trembling technique discussed above, and of the funeral procession to come, Rachmaninoff's markedly divergent character in the G \flat major and F \sharp minor passage may suggest an intermediary connection to an idea, a fantastical sprite of sorts within the Mendelsohnian scherzo paradigm, but menacingly, as a fiend or demonic presence behind the shiver-inducing mortal illness.

With Chopin's innocuous figures in G \flat and f \sharp understood as the "Evil Spirit," Rachmaninoff presents a false sweetness, making a mockery of life, analogous to the Erlking or the demon Mephistopheles promising wonders in exchange for everything. Rachmaninoff's obsession with Faustian elements further points to a fatalism he would have absorbed from Tsar Nicholas II, whose obsession with predetermined fate, many have argued, was among the

¹⁰⁵ Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 188.

¹⁰⁶ Martyn, 327.

¹⁰⁷ Martyn, 426.

principal elements that led to the demise of pre-revolutionary Russia.¹⁰⁸ The Latin end-of-time hymn, *Dies irae—Day of Wrath*—nearly ubiquitous in Rachmaninoff’s works, suggests a similar preoccupation with fate, which in this case resonates with his strong lived experience of Imperial Russia’s demise.¹⁰⁹ Rachmaninoff’s “Evil Spirit” compels a realization of this fate. Contrary to most other pianists, Rachmaninoff drops the tempo decidedly, moving abruptly to half the original speed and proceeding to an entirely different musical character. In rupturing the prior temporality and moving toward contemplation, Rachmaninoff foreshadows what is to come in the trio, whose material Chopin uses again to end the scherzo in its entirety just before the *marche funèbre*, acting as the moment before bereavement (Figure 8).

¹⁰⁸ Saint John the Forerunner Monastery of Mesa Potamos, *The Romanov Royal Martyrs: What Silence Could Not Conceal*. (Limassol, Cyprus: Saint John the Forerunner Monastery of Mesa Potamos, 2019).

¹⁰⁹ See Helen Rappaport, *Ekaterinburg: The Last Days of the Romanovs* (London: Hutchinson, 2008), 147.

Figure 8. Chopin, Sonata No. 2: Scherzo. Conclusion.

Human Limits

Conventional perceptions of Rachmaninoff as a pianist observe that his performing prowess boasted an exceptionally high level of command relative to most others, distinguishing

Figure 9. Chopin, Sonata No. 2: II. Scherzo. Ascending chromatic fourth passage (Mikuli edition.)

him as being among the top ten most technically accomplished ever. I do not wish to contradict this but rather to add nuance this understanding. Rachmaninoff's performance of the scherzo does show him approaching the limits of his abilities. This implies, given his choice in having smoothed over difficulties, that the life-death battle he simulates in his sounded interpretation simultaneously worked itself out in the battlefield of his own body. Rachmaninoff's slight failures in performance keep some of the difficulty on the surface, acting as a metaphor for mortality.¹¹⁰ His quick execution of Chopin's ascending sequence of chromatic fourths particularly demonstrates this (Figure 2). Contrary to most of his other passagework, Rachmaninoff performs here with an unusually reduced clarity, which suggests more of a finger-based approach that bypasses assistance from the arm, thus aestheticizing physical strain internally.

In Karol Mikuli's edition, particularly relevant to Rachmaninoff as it was one he would have had easy access to, a fingering that increases tension through a high frequency of using 3-2 (middle and index fingers) requires that the digits must extend laterally outward, a less-than-optimal motion biomechanically (Figure 9).¹¹¹ Better solutions to avoid this problem would include the following pairs: 5-1|4-2|5-1|4-2|4-2| and so forth. Here, the pianist can slide over the keys and engage greater arm weight to alleviate the otherwise burdened fingers, as 4-2 will slide from the black to the white keys, thereby eliminating a finger stroke. At Rachmaninoff's speed with his likely chosen strained fingering, playing perfectly clearly is not entirely possible, which

¹¹⁰ Cf. Richard Taruskin's discussion of Cantata No. 179 where the oboes da caccia cannot play in tune to purposefully "loathsome and disgraceful" effect. Taruskin argues Bach set this against the extreme words, "My sins sicken me like pus in my bones. Help me, Jesus, Lamb of God, for I am sinking in deepest slime." *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 313.

¹¹¹ For a general overview to a physiologically-informed piano approach to piano technique, see Therese Elaine Milanovic, "Learning and Teaching Healthy Piano Technique: Training as an Instructor in the Taubman Approach" (Griffith University, 2011), https://www120.secure.griffith.edu.au/rch/file/ee07feda-cb4d-6c45-b9fa-c7180d3bb35e/1/Milanovic_2012_02Thesis.pdf.

likely was the point overall. With some physical limitations peeking through in rare moments, Rachmaninoff increases the perilous nature of his recording, suggesting that the struggle of survival is not only performed but is also felt and real. Such an aesthetic approach would contribute to an urgent vulnerability, entailing the possibility of not “making it.

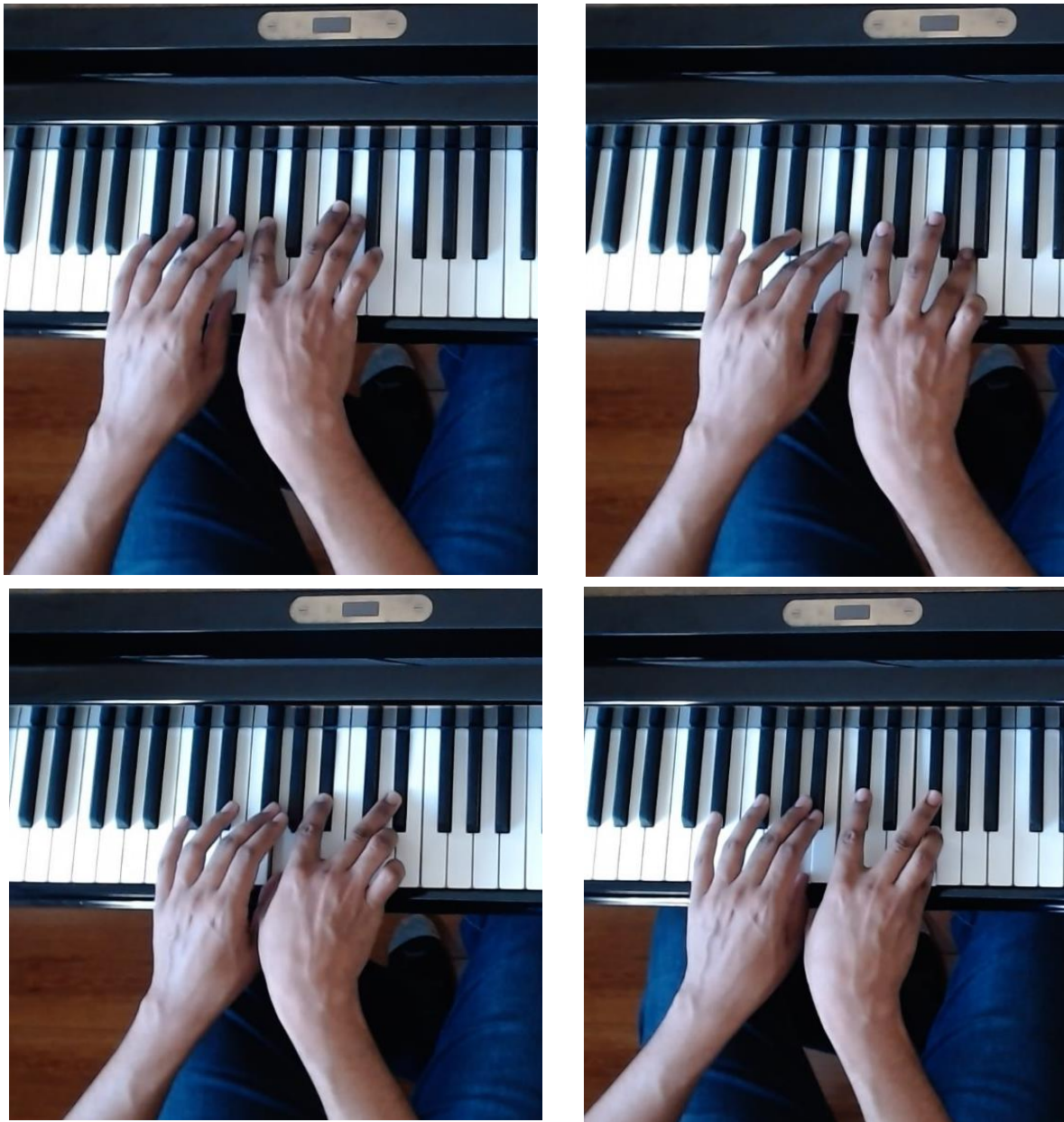


Figure 9. Ungainly lateral stretching between index and middle fingers (2 & 3)

Affannato

Just beyond the passage of chromatic fourths, Rachmaninoff continues his performance of somatic distress. Rachmaninoff avoids accents in mm. 45-49, giving a sense of moving breathlessly with altered temporality. In effect, Rachmaninoff plays the passage as one large phrase over the odd span of five measures, going against the norm of Chopin's four. Typically,



pianists will play beats two and three as anacrusis to mm. 46-49, keeping regularity. With Rachmaninoff not observing Chopin's two-note slur markings and accents, he does not afford himself the luxury to allow his hands to reset to neutral tension. Pianists usually perform in larger gestures, which entails gradually guiding the forearm up or down over a phrase. In doing so, pianists trace their wrists in various shapes just above the keyboard, often semicircles, or will move toward or away from the fallboard spread out over time while playing. Such allows not only for guiding the overall direction of a phrase dynamically but also for husbanding physical exertion. These larger gestures act like respiring.

As the single continuous phrasing Rachmaninoff employs without observing Chopin's expressive marks predominates, he does not and cannot "breathe." Indeed, each of Chopin's two-note slurs on the first beat of mm. 46-49 culturally corresponds to a "sigh" (also known more commonly as a "*Seufzer*" in German), normally played with a decrease in volume following the first tone, directly corresponding to breath. Rachmaninoff's performance nearly suffocates in his obliteration of the sighing opportunities, making the sympathetic listener almost panic. Havi Carel devotes an entire chapter to the phenomenology of breathlessness and describes the sense

as follows: “Trapped. That is what breathlessness feels like. Trapped in the web of uncertainty, bodily doubt, practical obstacles, and fear. The deepest fear you can think of. The fear of suffocation, of being unable to breathe, the fear of collapsing, desaturated to the point of respiratory failure.”¹¹² Those with dyspnea (difficult or labored breathing) can do nothing except for hoping for eventual relief, which is what his phrasing evokes. In this evocation, Rachmaninoff brings his hands to the point of repetitive muscular movement, recalling the intense sensation of acid buildup in the bloodstream, or chronic lactic acidosis at its worst, a medical condition causing a burning feeling in the muscles, exhaustion, and cramps. The condition can be caused by a variety of other life-debilitating disorders, including cancer, seizures, liver failure, sepsis, or shock.¹¹³

Rachmaninoff simulates an aspect of illness within his own body, moving his empathic listeners as tethered proxies. Coupled with shivering from illness or terror, this adds to an implied death force acting on the protagonist. Carel writes of “one’s first and last breath marking the beginning and ending of life and a baby’s first breath marking their joining humanity.”¹¹⁴ Disrupting the very source of life, Rachmaninoff’s interpretation is an assault—a precarious battle ultimately lost just before the *marche funèbre*, maybe a memory of his sister Sophia suffocating by aspirating the pseudomembrane she likely had. Or, Rachmaninoff may have reflected on the secondary pneumonia that the Spanish Flu could easily have led to with both him

¹¹² Havi Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness*, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109.

¹¹³ Jr. DuBose Thomas D., “Acidosis and Alkalosis,” in *Harrison’s Principles of Internal Medicine*, ed. J. Larry Jameson et al., 20th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2018), accessmedicine.mhmedical.com/content.aspx?aid=1165777984; Amanda Gardner, “Exercise-Related Lactic Acidosis: Symptoms, Treatment, Causes, and More,” WebMD, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/guide/exercise-and-lactic-acidosis>.

¹¹⁴ Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness*, 128.

and his daughters. The points of speculation are plural but bounded within the context of his biography.

A further source, among numerous possibilities, for the mortal breathlessness to which Rachmaninoff was sensitive may have been the expansion of his repertoire in 1915 with the music of his peer, Alexander Scriabin. Scriabin died in 1915 while writing what was to have been his magnum opus, *Mysterium*, a work that he theorized would bring about the apocalypse—which never happened, as he died of sepsis before he could complete it.¹¹⁵ Scriabin’s leaning toward new world orders resonated with the spirit of deification of the time, although not translated into Orthodox terms. One particular work that entered Rachmaninoff’s repertoire, Scriabin’s *Étude in C# Minor*, Op. 42, No. 5, includes the performance instruction of “*affannato*,” or “breathless” in Italian. Tongue-in-cheek, Rachmaninoff remarked, “It’s a difficult *étude* – it took me a whole hour to learn it,” significant, considering his prodigious gifts of quick learning.¹¹⁶ For many, gloom, despair, and damnation characterize this smoldering composition. The famous Russian Soviet piano pedagogue, Lev Naumov, student of Heinrich Neuhaus, a contemporary of Rachmaninoff, said in a masterclass about the *étude*, highlighting specific passages and motifs:

So anxious in character, of course. Delirious, even. Crazy. I don’t know how you find it, but for me—I see a big, wounded bird, which embarks on its death-rattle flight. It can’t even flap its wings, trying to just make it really. A great suffering, which should make a great impression. [...] As if it’s fighting a battle of life-and-death, but just... [...] Pain of some kind, pulsating pain.

This wail. If you’re very sick, the first wail comes out. But the second is weaker...no strength left. Climbing, struggling, wanting, wanting, wanting... This music breathes such tendencies. Life, then death, then life, then death again. And death wins out in the end. Alas! [...]

¹¹⁵ See Rowen (Shiotsuki), “Transcending Imagination; Or, An Approach to Music and Symbolism during the Russian Silver Age,” chapter 2, esp. 150–51.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 377.

Do you know a cantata by Rachmaninov? Based on a Balmont poem. [Referring to *The Bells*, Op. 37.] Of course, bells are typical for Rachmaninov. But [they're] different kinds. Funeral bells... Jubilant bells of [Easter], wedding bells... Little spring bells... Our bells here are dark, doubtless. Funereal. [...] You'll forgive me for mentioning Rachmaninov, but in the first place—they studied together. And in the second—both Russian devils, dammit, and their ideas overlapped in certain ways.... Though also diametrically opposed in others. [...] Right before death, things become softer, perhaps. [...] The death leitmotif. Everything else, play softer! [...] The whirlpool of death. A crater sucking in man, horse, tree... conjure up a whirlpool.¹¹⁷

The significance of this points to a shared *intonatsia* (“intonation”), a semiosis of character, mood, nationalism, belonging, and so forth, a concept explained by Boris Asafiev, as noted. As Naumov asserts that Scriabin and Rachmaninoff’s “ideas overlapped in certain ways,” looking for a composition of Scriabin that Rachmaninoff himself performed would elucidate a shared cultural semiosis.

Commonalities pointing to a shared *intonatsia* occur particularly on the second page, where the *étude* presents an almost insurmountable riddle. If adhering to the score prescriptively, the pianist must hold down the right hand’s fifth and first fingers while performing an active, whirling inner line of sextuplets, which does not lend itself to efficient performance (Figure 10). The options include sliding, which compromises the tone, using pedal to compensate, which creates an undesirable blur, or playing the inner line with 3-2-3-2-4-3, which creates an ungainly staccato, as the hand must reset its position at each repetition, destroying a legato line. There is no solution other than rewriting the music, as did Vladimir Horowitz. The chief aesthetic experience behind such an impossible page may be between the composer and the pianist and no one else. The befuddled pianist begins a descent into madness as there is no direct, viable solution to the technical problem. Scriabin inflicting real harm onto the pianist resonates with

¹¹⁷ Sasha Beresovsky, *Lev Naumov Teaches Scriabin’s Op.42 No 5 Étude in C# Minor*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkdXzTjPr18>.

Naumov's imagery of illness and unlikelihood of making it, asphyxiating metaphorically with a lack of available fingers figuring as a lack of oxygen.



Figure 10. Scriabin, Etude in C# Minor, Op. 42, No. 5.

So very intoned to breathlessness, Rachmaninoff momentarily breaks the cycle of asphyxiation in his performance of the scherzo in the following passage, if only for a brief moment. In mm. 50-56, his performance runs against the gravitational weight favoring the first beat, emphasized especially in the measures with two-note slurs. Hinting back to the “Evil Spirit” or malevolent force, Rachmaninoff places the listener into a temporal space removed from the previous flow of time. He introduces a near-hemiola by accenting the outward octaves occurring on the weak second beats, confusing Chopin’s meter. In emulating his performance, I

found the physical feeling awkward and rigid, which in a larger interpretation suggests twisted humor.

If one voices the left hand's thumb of the music as written, a melodic line results, which aligns to the falling fifths sequence. The atmosphere is momentarily grand with Chopin's pedal marks, coupled with lush harmony of dominant seventh chords descending through a waltz-like formulation (although not of the "oom-pah-pah" variety.) Further resisting this, through avoiding use of the pedal to bloom the piano's sound, pushes against the most common interpretative expectations of the scherzo relative to the printed text, thus recreating the sense of subversiveness. Not following Chopin's phrasing, coming out of the breathless moment just preceding, offers scant relief from accumulated physical tension. Rachmaninoff quickly gasps physically, so to speak. Throughout the scherzo and especially in this section, Rachmaninoff keeps the protagonist alive enough to endure the destructive force that will eventually lead to the funeral march.

Before moving to the trio, Chopin introduces contrary motion figures that present challenges in performance, being that they begin with both hands near the center of the keyboard and progress immediately to the extreme opposite ends of the piano's register. Chopin repeats the gesture six times quickly (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Chopin, Scherzo concluding passage before the trio.



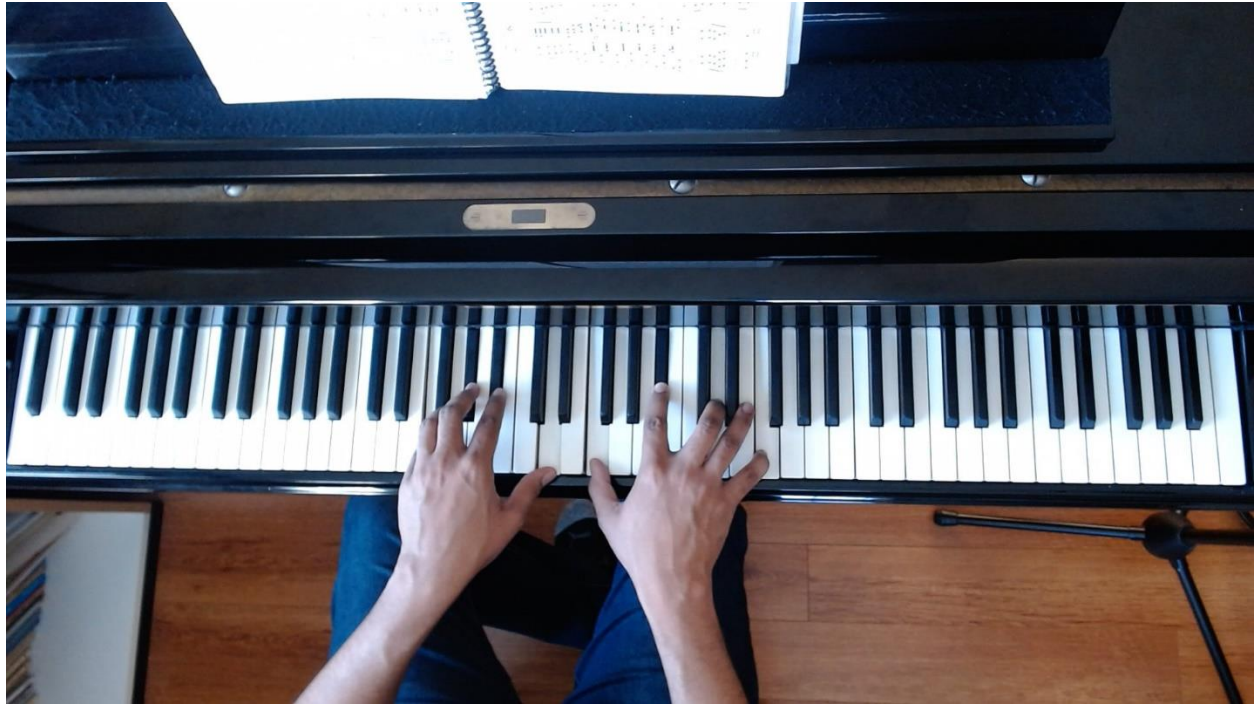




Figure 12. Scherzo - Contrary motion jumps (photos of the author)

As the pianist cannot look in opposite directions simultaneously to ensure accuracy, entraining into muscle memory proprioceptive movements is obligatory. One practice strategy involves playing quick-long and long-quick rhythmic versions of the passage, where the pianist will touch

the chords or octaves just before depressing the keys. For instance, at m. 73, the pianist might play the chord on beat 1 as a dotted half followed by playing the octaves of the second beat a sixteenth or smaller; he would continue doing the same with the rest of the passage. After that is mastered, the pianist reverses the rhythm, playing the chord on beat 1 of m. 73 as a sixteenth, the octaves on beat 2 as a dotted half, and so forth. Each time, the pianist would practice with the metronome, going up progressively and at intervals playing the passage as written. Given the rather pedantic technical training Rachmaninoff received, and his tendency to invent exercises to reduce technical insecurities, this strategy would have been entirely conceivable for him to use. As I emulated his performance, this strategy granted me a level of security that playing as written would not have allowed, as it trained my reflexes in manageable increments. (Granted, this is not foolproof.)

This passage presents challenges to most pianists. Chopin's contemporary Robert Schumann famously wrote an even more haphazard passage near the conclusion of the second movement of his *Fantasy in C*, Op. 17 (Figure 13). Some of the delight an expecting listener would have arises from the sense of mystery in seeing just how accurately a performance would unfold in live circumstances. In facing the risks starting at m. 73 of Chopin's scherzo, Rachmaninoff shifts the temporality from triple to duple time—revving the energy up proportionally—and lands with utmost security on its targets. Rachmaninoff increases the difficulty, contributing to a heightened spectacle of wonder regarding just how battered the protagonist will be by the end of the passage.

Viel bewegter.

The image displays a page of musical notation for Schumann's Fantasia, Op. 17, Part II. The score is written for piano and consists of seven systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The music is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, including numerous triplets and sixteenth-note passages. Performance markings such as 'ritard.', 'ff', and 'f' are present. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Mäßig. Durchaus energisch.' and 'Viel bewegter.'.

Figure 13. Schumann's *Fantasia*, Op. 17: II. *Mäßig. Durchaus energisch. Contrary motion jumps.*

In the face of uncertainty, Rachmaninoff maintains definiteness, which points to a programmatic spirit of determination that defies the odds of the “Evil Spirit,” suggesting a stalwart heroism. Contributing to this intrepidity is the uniqueness of Rachmaninoff’s tone. Where other pianists may unintentionally allow murky qualities to creep in, Rachmaninoff typically does not, barring the comparatively rare exception as discussed earlier. This tone may be traced to a practice regimen of almost monastic, virtuous dedication, which he never gave up, even in older age. Recalling Orthodox ideals, Rachmaninoff’s embodied faith commands technical risks of mishaps, metaphorically standing in for life-death perils.

Despite his monk-like preparation signaling Orthodox virtues, Rachmaninoff also evokes a sardonic character, which—just before the more subdued trio with a more “human” vocal line—threatens life. His re-metering (marked by inserted lines in Figure 11) relates to the scherzo’s tendency as a genre to redefine itself. In pushing against codified laws ordinarily obeyed dutifully, Rachmaninoff’s rhythmic practice is subversive, opening the possibility to adopt one of the genre’s political tendencies to comment on the revolution that changed his way of life. In all, for these first two pages, Rachmaninoff does not smooth over subsections to weave together one unified character, but rather maintains differences so as to narrate different characters lending themselves to a dramatic interaction within his constructed sound world.

Nostalgic Delirium

Where illness may underlie Rachmaninoff’s physical technique, it may also open doors to altered states of consciousness and presence of mind. As discussed earlier, composers had explored illness through the idea of madness, as in both Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Strauss’s *Salome*, where the women hysterics brazenly and bizarrely become detached from reality, retreating into a pernicious delirium. There would be no reason to assume such kinds of

depictions are restricted to opera. To purposeful effect, I propose composers and performers manifest it through wordless instrumental music, although more difficult to elucidate in perfectly clear 1:1 relations.

Delirium's causes may include systemic infections, lack of sleep, physical trauma, severe emotional turbulence, intense pain, high fever, and so forth.¹¹⁸ When the body shuts down, cerebral metabolic decline follows, leading to the condition.¹¹⁹ Notable symptoms may involve slipping in and out of clear consciousness with possible hallucinations or distorted, imperfect memories. In viewing illness as a metaphor, I suggest it may well be Mother Russia—*Matushka Rossiya*—who is delirious and slipping away in Rachmaninoff's mind as he performs, especially likely given the subsequent *marche funèbre*.

In Chopin's first standalone scherzo, the *trio* was the position where he introduced the Polish Christmas carol to invite nostalgic reflection on happier times through a nationalistic reference. In this vein, Rachmaninoff's treatment of this section in the Sonata's scherzo stands out for its altered, unusual temporality relative to most other performers. Although Chopin wrote the *trio* in triple time, Rachmaninoff suggests a pseudo-duple time by playing faintly the low G \flat pitches in the left hand, which snap to an elongated second beat. The faint quality may align to notions of an evanescent memory. Overall, the rhythmic inflections may suggest a vague, possibly delirious meditation of a Polish nationalistic characteristic. In mazurkas, notably, the second or third beats may be elongated to give the impression of four. When performing a

¹¹⁸ Mayo Clinic, "Delirium - Symptoms and Causes," accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/delirium/symptoms-causes/syc-20371386>.

¹¹⁹ W. A. Newman Dorland, *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*. Vol. 32nd ed. Philadelphia: Saunders, 2012. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=445313&site=ehost-live>.

mazurka for his friend, Chopin remarked that this practice was native and automatic to Polish musicians.¹²⁰

In a twist of irony, Rachmaninoff appropriates Polish history to process the downfall of the Russian *dvoryantsvo* through his performance of Chopin's Sonata, likely looking to Poland's failed November Insurrection (1830-1831), meant to overthrow Russia's rule of the region. In paradoxically looking at Poland as part of Imperial Russia, Rachmaninoff calls upon this rhythmic aspect in his *trio* performance, which, vaguely and deliriously, may take on aspects of a mazurka specifically in his performance. In translating a meter in a multiple of three to two as a possible ethnic performance practice, Rachmaninoff simulates aspects of this Polish—and by an ironic, nostalgic extension—Imperial Russian performance practice. Adding to this Polish sense are dotted figures he introduces, elongating the first quarter to a dotted quarter and shortening the second quarter to an eighth, as in mazurkas. Much of Rachmaninoff's rhythmic treatments are imperfect; they are not robust and do not last very long, evocative of a faint memory in a state of delirium as the body begins shutting down.

At the conclusion of the *trio* comes a re-transition back to the same material that commenced the scherzo, this time with more virulence, as if the lethal infection—the revolution—has progressed. Rachmaninoff plays slightly faster and with more urgency, possibly more warmed up after having played through the preceding sections. Though similar, the repeated gestures now have greater, feverish urgency. The conclusion Chopin employs derives directly from the *trio*, and in Rachmaninoff's treatment, fulfils a musical prophecy he introduced

¹²⁰ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ed., *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by His Pupils* (7New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

by slowing down drastically at mm. 15-20. Rachmaninoff thereby achieves a rounded coherence that adheres to a blueprint of long-term planning.

I have proposed that underneath Rachmaninoff's performance lurks sickness and the process of dying in his interpretation of the scherzo. If considering the notion of illness here as a metaphor, I suggest an ailing Mother Russia—*Matushka Rossiya*—whose burial in *marche funèbre* follows immediately after her death in the scherzo. Her demise toward oblivion works its way through Rachmaninoff's revolutionary angst and memory of lived sickness. Sontag writes about tuberculosis being associated with the lungs, "part of the upper, spiritualized body" as opposed to more disgraceful diseases, some forms of cancer, which "is notorious for attacking parts of the body (colon, bladder, rectum, breast, cervix, prostate, testicle) that are embarrassing to acknowledge." In comparison, she writes that lung cancer is "less shameful than rectal cancer."¹²¹ Ultimately, Sontag concludes in her observations that "A disease of the lungs is, metaphorically, a disease of the soul."¹²² If we are to take seriously the possibility of interpreting, through a tubercular Chopin, an honorary aristocrat, a performance of respiratory illness in Rachmaninoff's conception, retroactively looking back at his cases of diphtheria and the Spanish Flu, these elements may suggest a more noble, honorable, and aristocratic infection—not a disgraceful disease associated with sexually transmitted infections and vice. Metaphorically, given the scherzo's tendency to reflect upon social order and its ontological propensity to redefine itself perpetually, Rachmaninoff's performance of Chopin's scherzo movement here stands in, I suggest, for the infection of the Bolshevik revolution that killed *Matushka Rossiya*.

¹²¹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 17-18.

¹²² Sontag.

Summation

To better understand Rachmaninoff's performance of the scherzo from Chopin's Second Sonata, I studied representative cross-sections of the genre to scratch at its ontology, perceiving a great diversity of examples despite a fairly restrictive title. This led me to notice a larger historical propensity of perpetual, dialectic redefinition in compositional practice, a tendency that also extends to performances. Of several resulting characteristic types, one includes a socially and politically transgressive mode, which extends back to a revolutionarily disposed Beethoven. Tackling Rachmaninoff's take on Chopin's likely socially conscious scherzo led me to a lens of illness to contemplate his interpretation in sound.

I began this chapter by looking at an author who gripped Russian imagination in translation—Edgar Allan Poe. As Richard Taruskin offered in his closing remarks in a 2015 UCLA musicology symposium dedicated to Rachmaninoff's classmate Scriabin, his firsthand recollections of his time in Russia entailed hearing very dramatic readings of Poe's works aloud. Strikingly dynamic and serious, the Russians Taruskin met insisted such was how Poe's writings ought to be read aloud, contrasting to the "singsong" qualities typifying American readings. The tradition of this rhetorical intonation, he reminisced, had no direct parallel among native Anglophones, and ultimately made Poe an author to take more seriously.

The Russian fascination of performing Edgar Allan Poe reveals a temperament, perhaps, of reinventing. Rachmaninoff was, like other Russians Taruskin would encounter decades later, a fan of Poe, as he set to music to *The Bells* as his Op. 35. Rachmaninoff revealed that this was one of his two favorite works, along with the *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37. Sandwiched in between the two, Rachmaninoff composed his Sonata No. 2 in B \flat Minor, Op. 36, during a period of intense

inspiration. This makes Poe a reasonable person of interest in considering Rachmaninoff's recording of Chopin's scherzo, which took place in 1930, just a year before he revised his Op. 36 sonata in the orbit of Poe. As an alternative to Poe's *The Bells*, I opened the chapter with the excerpt from *The Red Death*, considering that epidemics may stand in for larger societal meanings, while valuing heightened rhetorical deliveries in performance. As a score can dictate only so much in performance, a concert artist often brings in aspects of his own life—his environment, hope, politics, literature read, religion, and so forth, as Rachmaninoff reminisced. Poe's artistic expression through illness raises a question of how that might look in solo instrumental performance, what it might stand in for, and what sorts of hermeneutic clues to consider when usual signs and signifiers may not be entirely apparent.

In thinking about the heightened qualities Taruskin reported of sounded Russian readings of Poe, I began to consider if the gestures of my hands as I emulated Rachmaninoff's performance may have carried embodied meaning. Would this be analogous to the sense of illness in *Red Death* and others, including those of his contemporary expatriate living only a few miles away, Thomas Mann? Susan Sontag's study of illness acting metaphorically functions as a useful vanguard in further querying about this in instrumental music. Where I depart from Sontag, however, is with her moralistic charge to dismantle the mystification of illness, which she believes is pernicious to the unwell. Tied to illness is often death, of which Rachmaninoff became obsessed with to the dismay of his supporters, like Marietta Shaginian, who worried that an overabundance of gloominess revealed a succumbing to modernism.¹²³

¹²³ Mitchell, *Nietzsche's Orphans*, 153.

For Rachmaninoff, death lies not only with the individual but also with Imperial Russia itself. Rebecca Mitchell, who surveyed archival material, particularly correspondence at the Library of Congress, among other locations, wrote that much of this material revealed Rachmaninoff as “a site of memory, a nostalgic symbol of ‘true Russian’ identity that existed in an idealized past, eternally distinct from the desacralized present.”¹²⁴ Among surviving examples of his fan mail, Duchess Elena Altenburg wrote to Rachmaninoff from Copenhagen in 1921, “Let your strength be preserved until that bright day, when it will again be possible to work for Russia, recovering from communism, to praise national art. I fervently wish to live to see this epoch [...] But until this, one must endure and deal with *toska* for the motherland.”¹²⁵ Rachmaninoff was seen as an *émigré* who preserved Russianness until it could return safely back to its place of origin. To write of Imperial Russia’s national history, meant to write of its illness afflicted through the revolution. The resolution—“recovery”—from this illness was to be a restoration and perhaps improvement of Russia as it had been; Rachmaninoff represented hope for this future. Along similar lines, Mitchell discovered a person who claimed that Rachmaninoff had reinstalled her faith in God, after having lost her faith and ability to pray.¹²⁶ Rachmaninoff, whose works cleaved to Russian Orthodox sentiments, represented a true Russianness for many steeped in domestic spirituality. His works, guarding Russianness, worked up an intense expression of exile, which he latched on to in Chopin’s revolutionary scherzo movement. The possibilities in exploring his complicated subconscious push us to ask about the revolution that so altered his way of life, a revolution that in the scherzo movement might manifest itself as a musical illness.

¹²⁴ Duchess Elena Altenburg to S. Rakhmaninov, 6 November 1921, Library of Congress Rachmaninoff Archive 40/3 as cited in Mitchell, “In Search of Russia,” 138.

¹²⁵ E. Romanchuk to S. Rakhmaninov, 3 March 1929, LCRA 47/37. See also Mitchell, 149.

¹²⁶ Mitchell, 148.

As I will detail, Rachmaninoff's very own composed sequel response to Chopin's Second Sonata was to be a consummation and fulfillment of faith, specifically through a patently clear depiction of resurrection in the second movement and the Orthodox concept of deification (*obozhenie/обожение*), the kind represented by Scriabin that some felt coincided with Russia's demise. Ultimately, Rachmaninoff represents this by a musical translation of the feminine second theme in a glorified way, perhaps as *Theotokos*, or the God-bearer, one of the titles for Mother Mary, who logically stands in for *Matushka Rossiya*, as I will detail in my assessment of his Second Sonata.

The next chapter focuses on Rachmaninoff's portrayal of a burial service, whose carefully constructed performance dynamics depict a procession leading to a viewing of a body lying in state, followed by a recession that segues to "night winds sweeping over the church graveyard" in a nod, à la Anton Rubinstein, to Imperial pianism. The experience of exile—bereft cultural destruction, erasure, and suppression—finds full expression through the undercurrents of his performance, semiotically conceived and phenomenologically experienced in his hands.

CHAPTER THREE

*Death-Life Affirmations:
Deification and Renewal in the Chopin-Rachmaninoff Diptych, Opp. 35-36*

Chopin, Sonata No. 2: III. *Marche funèbre*
Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: II. *Non allegro* & III. *Allegro molto*

Indeed, the funeral march of an entire nation, solemn and grief-stricken, weeping at its own demise, is to be found in this lament. The essence of mystical hope, the holy appeal to divine mercy, to infinite leniency, and to a justice that embraces every tomb and cradle – the exalted resignation of so many sorrows born with heroism inspired by Christian martyrs – all resounded the song of grieving supplication. The music quivers indescribably with all that is most pure, holy, resigned, believing and hopeful in the hearts of women, children and priests. We feel it is not the death of a single warrior that is mourned, but rather the death of an entire generation. And yet this funereal and pitiful chant is of such penetrating sweetness that it does not seem of this world.¹

—Franz Liszt on Chopin’s Funeral March

Enabled and empowered by aristocratic entitlement, Rachmaninoff sets out in his performance of the Funeral March to realize “the point” by disregarding Chopin’s precisely notated musical changes, including most phrase marks and dynamic indications. Rachmaninoff’s alterations in dynamics strictly follow a right-facing wedge, resolutely plowing through Chopin’s specifications with his own pre-set program. Thus, for some, it might sound “wrong.” Rachmaninoff’s clear sense of trajectory brings knowability to the listener by placing death into containment, bearing upon the imagination an ecclesiastic office brought to the composition within strict interpretative guiderails. Rachmaninoff’s clear musical trajectory may map onto an Orthodox ritual—a funeral service with a pre-set liturgy clearly known to many. In

¹ Franz Liszt and Meirion Hughes, *Liszt’s Chopin*, New ed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010). 63-64.

superimposing this rigid musical structure, Rachmaninoff effectively declares that everything, even Chopin's music, is subject to a higher, perhaps even divine, purpose.

Rachmaninoff's interpretative assuredness and definiteness were keenly felt, even in live circumstances. In a review for *The Sun*, the New York critic William James Henderson wrote about Rachmaninoff's Carnegie Hall recital on February 15, 1930, which included Chopin's Second Sonata:

For one listener this interpretation of Chopin's B-flat minor sonata – in which even the funeral march was played differently – closed itself with a magisterial *quod erat demonstrandum* which left no ground for argument. The logic of the thing was impervious; the plan was invulnerable; the proclamation was imperial. There was nothing left for us but to thank our stars that one had lived when Rachmaninoff did and heard him, out of the divine might of his genius, recreate a masterpiece. It was a day of genius understanding genius.²

Are these just words? The question that governs what follows is whether one can make sense of this empirically.

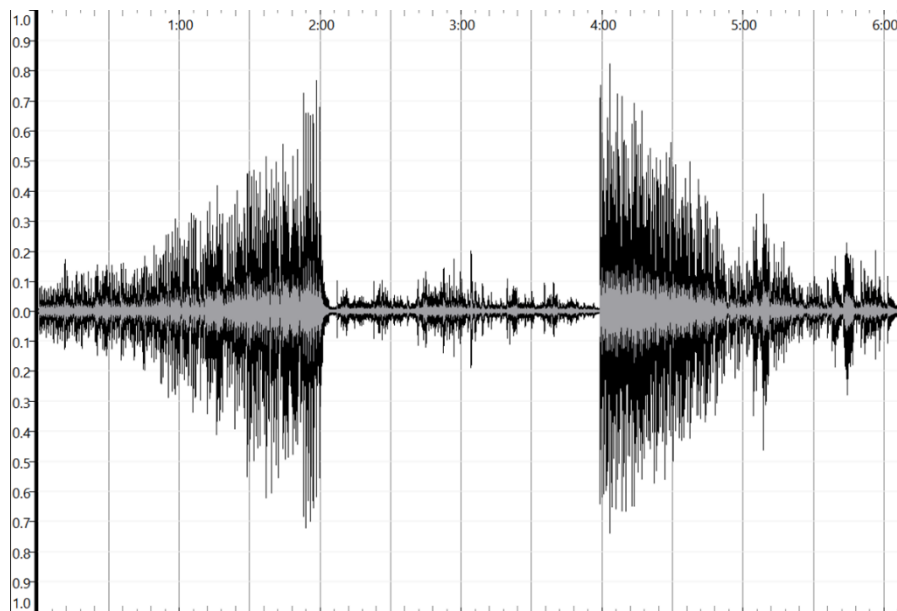


Figure 1. Waveform: Rachmaninoff's Funeral March

²A review of Rachmaninoff's performance in Carnegie Hall by W.J. Henderson in *The Sun*, New York, February 16, 1930.

The image of this sonic waveform represents the displacement of the audio output's voltage (y-axis) against time (x-axis) (Figure 1). The resulting diagram provides a quick visual representation of changes in volume across the movement. Other performances will have some measures of similarity, but the strict, uncompromising musical shape seen here distinguishes Rachmaninoff's plan, sharply distinct from Chopin's indications. Especially noteworthy are the sudden, drastic shifts from his *fortississimo* to *pianissimo* and *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* in the outer sections seen around 2:00 and 4:00. For ease of viewing, I have simplified the waveform into an abstracted image. While "the point" may be approached by a variety of means, one clear parameter Rachmaninoff shapes here is sound amplitude, compounded by transpositions of the left hand an octave lower, combined with an increased pulse (Figure 2). I have denoted "the point" by using red, which marks the peak of his aggregate sound before it begins to recede.

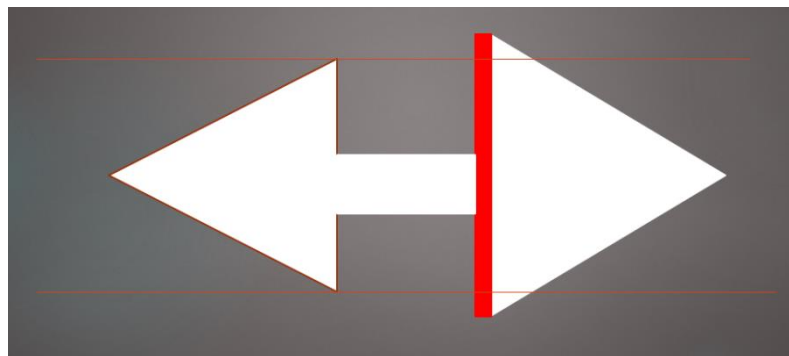


Figure 2. Simplified Waveform: Rachmaninoff's Funeral March

As Rachmaninoff commences his performance, a definite vision unfolds, clarified by a forthright tempo markedly faster relative to most other commercial recordings. This tempo marks his interpretation as deterministic at a higher level, where proceeding forward without hiccoughs suggests a clear, fatalistic destination. Rachmaninoff's relatively brisk tempo narrows the margin for overt, passionate expressivity while highlighting the topical aspect of a march. With this tempo, the dotted eighth followed by sixteenth figures punctuate Rachmaninoff's

texture as militaristic, as he carefully and consistently subdivides to the sixteenth. In submitting himself to such strictures without compromise, he performs the virtue of dispassion, aligning himself to Orthodox principles.

1907 saw the publication of *L'Évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*) by French philosopher Henri Bergson. In it, he writes about the concept of the “*élan vital*,” or the “vital impetus,” which attempts to explain life from a standpoint of spontaneous orthogenesis, the tendency to evolve teleologically. This book and concept were once immensely popular; related discourse extended widely. Given the wording and the timing, Rachmaninoff’s concept of the “vital spark” may be understood in Bergsonian terms. Rachmaninoff elaborates his concept in a published interview as underlying “all good pianoforte playing,” distinguishing two otherwise technically equal performances from another. The “vital spark,” he contends, “seems to make each interpretation a masterpiece—a *living thing*. It exists only for the moment [...]”³ He recalled the case of Anton Rubinstein performing Mily Balakirev’s *Islamey*. In the middle of the performance, Rubinstein had a memory lapse apparently lasting for four minutes. Rather than become flustered, Rubinstein improvised in the spirit of the original composition. Rachmaninoff recalled his performance glowingly; of Rubinstein, he wrote, “for every possible mistake he may have made, he gave, in return, ideas and musical tone pictures that would have made up for a million mistakes.”⁴ Something unplanned and decidedly not tied to the score signified vitality—life—for Rachmaninoff, who, elsewhere in his own performance of the sonata, simulates aspects of improvisation. Thus, this “vital impetus” genuinely involved spontaneous creation.

³ James Francis Cooke, ed., *Great Pianists on Piano Playing: Godowsky, Hofmann, Lhévinne, Paderewski, and 24 Other Legendary Performers* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1999), 169.

⁴ Cooke 169.

Noteworthy, however, within his exceedingly stringent and exacting performance of the *funeral march*, is the lack of outward signs of spontaneity or improvisation, being that his structural boundaries are tight and restrictive. Rachmaninoff in many ways devises a purposefully dead performance, so to speak, leaving the listener with nothing but an empty shell of fore-planning. Within Rachmaninoff's structure, evoking a lack of life appears especially noticeably in the trio, which by traditional reasoning might offer a glimpse of the figuratively departed. Commonly, Russia had long been personified in feminine terms, taking the name of *Matushka Rossiya* [Матушка Россия] or "Mother Russia." Joanna Hubbs describes Mother Russia as "central to Russian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a literature which served as the principal outlet for the political, social, and religious aspirations of the educated classes" [...] "The persona of woman as priestess and redeemer, the chief repository of virtue in the form of agape [...]." ⁵ Given Rachmaninoff's class and social circle, inside the coffin of his performance lies likely Mother Russia during the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, coinciding with the "feminine" trio converging to salon music reminiscent of a character piece like a nocturne, as Lawrence Kramer notes. ⁶ However, the way Rachmaninoff realizes this embedded nocturne is distinguished by what is lacking, as with the outer sections.

Tempo rubato, entailing spontaneity in musical decision-making, involves in the most common usage a temporal give-and-take, where if the performer slows one region down, he makes up for it somewhere else. Rachmaninoff's temporality does not follow this procedure. As death may involve a fading away, near the ends of the phrases in the most "human" section of the *funeral march* Rachmaninoff tends to slow time, as if to suggest a fading away of life. Here

⁵ Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 230.

⁶ Lawrence Kramer, "Chopin at the Funeral: Episodes in the History of Modern Death," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54, no. 1 (2001): 97–125, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2001.54.1.97>, 103.

is a graphical representation of all the beats per minute in each measure for the entire movement (Figure 3). The distance between each stem indicates more time between each beat. Zooming

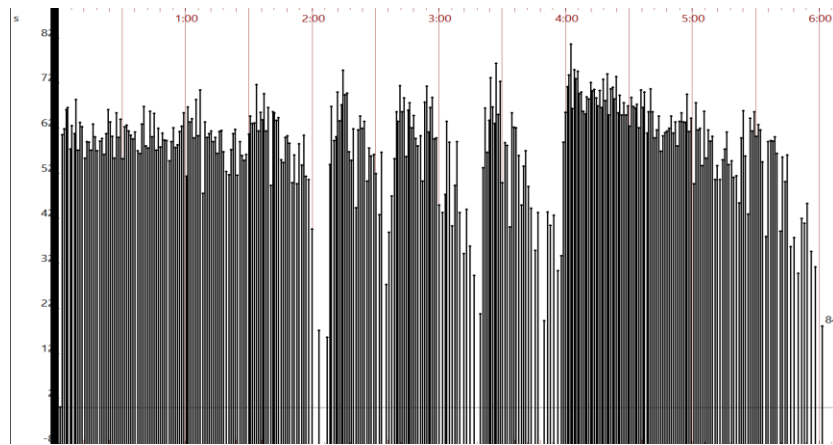


Figure 3. Rachmaninoff - All BPM Graphed. Y-axis in increments of 10 BPM.

outward allows for visualizing the structural regions where Rachmaninoff inflects time. As shown, within the *trio*, three domains emerge, where Rachmaninoff employs not a true *tempo rubato* but long-term retardations of the tempo, suggesting the evanescence of life.

In divergence with his interpretation elsewhere, Rachmaninoff obliges Chopin's marked *pianissimo* and remains at this level for the duration of the trio. Relative to most other pianists, his level of softness is far lower, indicative of an extreme level of hyper-willful technical control and conscientiousness. Rachmaninoff augments this effect by the trio's interspersal between the re-conceptualized *fortissimo* outer sections preceding and following the trio (Figure 2). The generally narrow range of dynamics within the trio distinguishes this section as being in another realm of musical space. The lack of a wider dynamic range suggests something is missing and hence points to death, compounding the attenuation of a true *tempo rubato*.

In this way, Rachmaninoff strips away this internal nocturne's expected *bel canto*, as more impassioned changes in sonority are less feasible. Playing against anticipations, Rachmaninoff creates a haunting memory—a topic explored further in the fourth movement—as

the nocturne's expected musical presence has lost dimensionality, becoming flattened, like looking at a two-dimensional painting of a person once living in three. Gazing into the casket at Mother Russia about to be buried in the events leading to the 1917 Revolution, the simulated musical memory is imperfect, having latched onto only some aspects of the once-living presence. Rachmaninoff's extreme softness suggests a distinction between sound in the physical world and

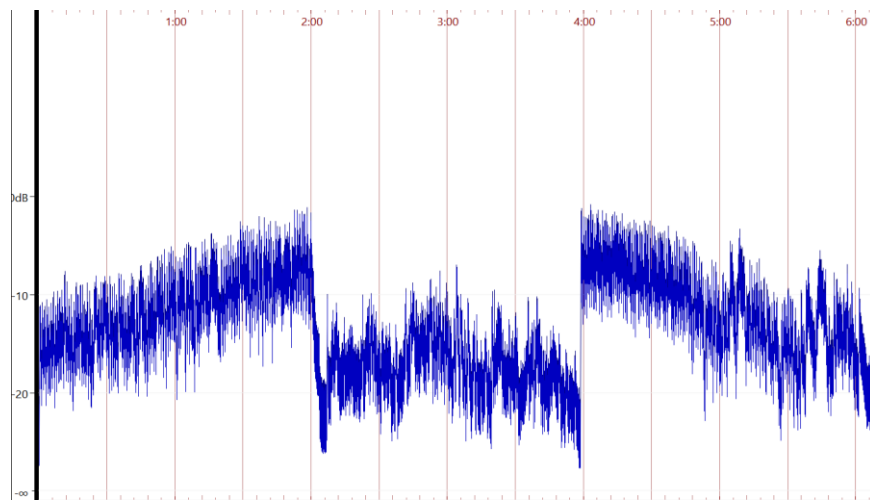


Figure 4. dB Scale of Rachmaninoff's Funeral March Performance

sound existing only in the mind's ear. By design, Rachmaninoff's imperfect *cantilena* seems to assume a haunting quality, acoustically suggesting a disembodied voice not residing entirely in one plane of existence or another.

Abruptly after the trio's dissipation into the infinite, the march returns, this time functioning as a recessional. Figure 4 presents a logarithmic way of visualizing the movement. The funereal procession, which had approached from afar, now leaves the observer, forming a near mirror image of Rachmaninoff's original dynamic plan, with a wedge closing to the right as previously seen (Figure 2). In terms of Rachmaninoff's calculated master "point," the march's return takes on this function, as the absolute maximum dynamic shift lies here slightly exceeding the dynamic just before the trio. Compounding this is his transposing of the strong beats, 1 and 3,

one octave lower. Here, Rachmaninoff goes completely against Chopin's printed marking of *piano*, again favoring instead his pre-set structural plan.

Chopin's oscillating left-hand part, evocative of bells to some, including Huneker and Liszt, likely enticed Rachmaninoff to heighten the simulation of this sonority, especially with his Orthodox disposition. Bells as a topical feature coincide with his own Second Sonata, which recreates bells throughout while directly mirroring Chopin's harmonic moves, as in the *finale*. On a Steinway D concert grand, the piano on which Rachmaninoff recorded this movement, the power and richness of the longer strings under transposition not only surpass the compass of Chopin's own piano but also add to the complexity of sound, with the duplex scaling adding harmonics in simulation of the large bells of Russian Orthodoxy.⁷ The resulting physical shock jars the listener lost in inner reminiscence, rudely awakened to the harsh, unforgiving Angel of Death. Adding to this intensity is the slightly faster tempo relative to the processional, as seen in

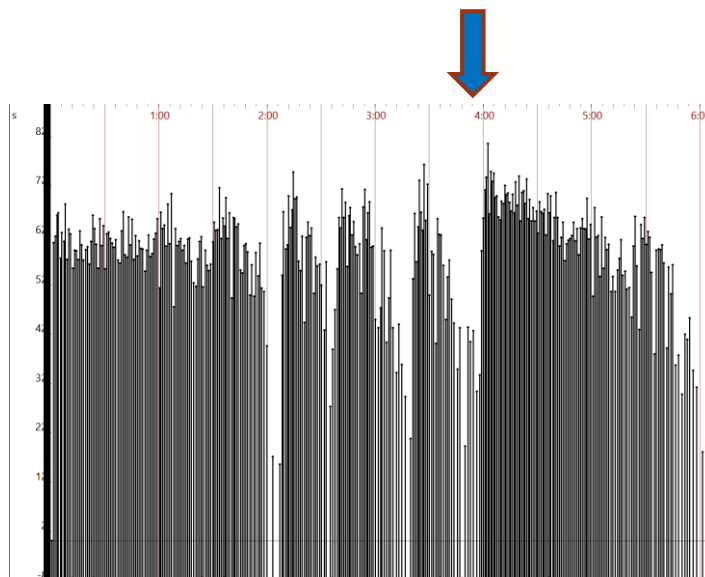


Figure 5. Rachmaninoff - All BPM Graphed. Increased bpm marked by arrow.

⁷ Gregor Benko, "Rachmaninoff on Records." Booklet from International Rachmaninoff Festival-Conference. April 18-26, 1998, 36. Benko notes, "Rachmaninoff utilized Steinway D grands 147681 and 194597 for most of his Victor recordings."

the figure, where the vertical lines appear closer together, corresponding to increased beats per minute at around 4 minutes, marked by the arrow (Figure 5).

The idea of a structure of growth and antigrowth (as diminution) goes back to Anton Rubinstein, a founder of the Russian School of piano playing fostered through the St. Petersburg Conservatory.⁸ As a nod back to an earlier time of golden-age pianism during the Russian Silver age, Rachmaninoff was not only working with a musical idea but also looking back nostalgically to Imperial Russia during the inter-revolutionary period. Continuing with the idea of interpretative inversion immediately established in the opening bars of the first movement, Rachmaninoff works against what Maynard Solomon calls the “adagio/andante” archetype found in Classical slow movements, such as in the music of Mozart and Schubert.⁹ In his chapter, “Trouble in Paradise” in *Mozart: A Life*, he describes the archetype in Mozart’s characteristic *adagios* and *andantes* as having a “calm, contemplative, or ecstatic condition [that] gives way to a troubled state—[which] is penetrated by hints of storm, dissonance, anguish, anxiety, danger—and [...] in turn is succeeded by a restoration of the status quo ante, now suffused with and transformed by the memory of the turbulent interlude.”¹⁰ Examples include the *Andante cantabile* movement of Mozart’s Piano Sonata in A Minor, K. 310 and the *Andantino* movement of Schubert’s Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959. Chopin inverts that model with his revolutionary First Scherzo in B Minor, Op. 20, and Rachmaninoff takes Chopin’s lead, enhancing revolution through his own dynamic scheme, placing the most striking, dark energy as the frame touching the internal nocturne. Might this not be a kind of “trouble in paradise,” but momentary escapist nostalgia amid a tumultuous reality? As noted, Rachmaninoff was of the *dvoryanstvo*—the

⁸ Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*.

⁹ Maynard Solomon, *Mozart: A Life* (HarperPerennial, 2009), 194.

¹⁰ Solomon, 187.

aristocracy. During the especially turbulent years between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, Imperial Russia was beginning to crumble, moving toward an apocalypse, and those of the privileged classes especially felt this.

Rachmaninoff-Chopin Connection

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

—John 12:24

Coincidental might it seem that Rachmaninoff composed his Second Sonata in B \flat Minor with the same general title, order number, and unusual key as Chopin’s Second, which, as his Op. 36, followed his predecessor’s Op. 35, suggesting a response and in combination creating a diptych. Comparison reveals aspects of compositional modeling in a dialogue-like reaction, with points of relation including analogous bell-like figures, similar harmonic moves, and comparable length, which Rachmaninoff particularly took pains to achieve when preparing his second edition and excising material in 1931. Fundamentally, Rachmaninoff deemed Chopin’s sonata a perfect work, concluding that “all has been said” in 19 minutes when comparing it to his own.¹¹

Of all the movements, relations between the third movements of both sonatas emerge more immediately. Chopin’s *marche funèbre* incorporates an obsessive, bell-like *ostinato*

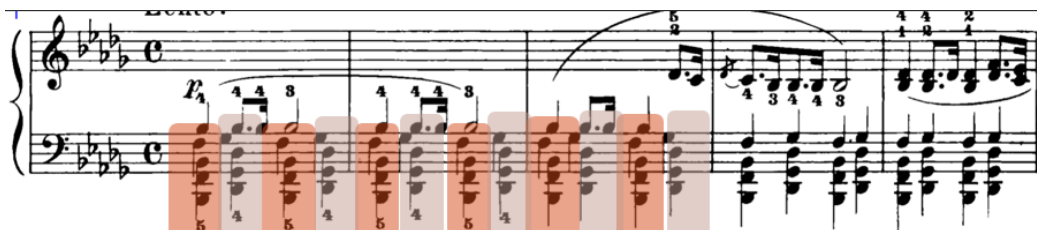


Figure 6. Chopin, *Sonata No. 2, III. Marche funèbre*, opening

¹¹ Alfred and Katherine Swan, “Rachmaninoff. Personal Reminiscences” (Part I), in *The Musical Quarterly*, January 1944, 8.

alternating between a B \flat octave with an inner F—creating a hollow fifth—followed by a D \flat octave with an inner G \flat (Figure 6). In context, Chopin shifts from the tonic to the submediant. While G \flat , the submediant, does not markedly stand out in the minor mode, its presence is arresting in the parallel major, as the flattened submediant, which Rachmaninoff features in the final, third movement of his sonata, grafting in Chopin’s harmony (Figure 7). This is especially significant, considering the nearly identical initial hand positions in the same location of the bass-baritone region of the piano in both movements. Specifically, in the opening of Chopin’s *marche funèbre* and Rachmaninoff’s finale (m. 101), both hands occupy the same space. The left hand in each sonata plays open fifths with B \flat_1 and F $_2$; the right hand extends upwardly to the same middle region of the keyboard. Figure 6 and Figure 7 illustrate the convergent mapping of the hand positions, marked with salmon highlighting. (The light brown highlighting corresponds to the shared harmony.)



Figure 7. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2, III. Allegro molto. NB: I have continued measure numbering directly from the second movement, which connects through a short chorale-like interlude, leading to the next movement attacca.

In addition to his fantastical grafting of the flattened submediant, Rachmaninoff supplies the interval of a third missing in Chopin’s movement—an idealized Picardy third that never

substantiated either in the funeral march or the enigmatic fourth movement written in monodic octaves. Rachmaninoff further brightens Chopin’s material by redirecting the martial funereal rhythm adapted from the French overture. In particular, he mirrors a snapping gesture comparable to Chopin’s ubiquitous dotted rhythm figures, $\text{♩}.$, and anticipatory melodic grace-note figures, as in m. 4. Rachmaninoff introduces two tied triplet eighths followed by another eighth in his *finale*, and the brisk *allegro molto tempo* heightens the effect of his near grafting of Chopin’s martial rhythm (Figure 7).¹²

The Bible verse, John 12:24 at this section’s heading, is often recited in Orthodox memorial services and may be accompanied by the ritual consumption of *koliva*, a dessert made of boiled wheat (Figure 8). Accordingly, the foodstuff nourishes mourners while also



Figure 8. Various images of koliva in different forms and presentations. (Photographers not identified.) (Bottom right, top left: Vassi “In Service and Love by Presvassi: Koliva-A Memorial Tradition of the Orthodox Church” In Service and Love by Presvassi (blog), March 13, 2013, <http://presvassi.blogspot.com/2013/03/koliva-memorial-tradition-of-orthodox.html>. Top right, bottom left: sources not known.

¹² Cf. Kramer, “Chopin at the Funeral.”

metaphorically suggesting forward-looking optimism, with hope for eventual recovery and renewal. Analogously, likely as an Orthodox trait, Rachmaninoff's sonata takes the seeds of death from Chopin's *marche funèbre* and transforms them to elevated life in his own *finale*, or "much fruit," as sensed by the radical change in temperament.

Michael L. Klein quotes Günter Grass's comment, "Funerals always make you think of other funerals," soon thereafter quoting Harold Bloom's aphorism, "the meaning of a poem can only be another poem."¹³ That Rachmaninoff grafts in material from Chopin is likely not coincidental, considering that Chopin himself composed his Second Sonata by conspicuously adopting traits from Beethoven's Sonata No. 12 in A \flat Major, Op. 26 (1800-1801). Beethoven's Sonata No. 12 contains four movements, and, unusual relative to more common practice, features the scherzo as the second movement, the slow movement as the third, notably titled, "*Maestoso andante, marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe*," and a perpetual motion *finale*. Four-movement sonatas typically take on the order of: I. Fast (sonata allegro form), II. Slow movement, III. Scherzo, and IV. Fast movement. Chopin adopts Beethoven's same framework, notably placing his *marche funèbre* after the second movement scherzo, and ultimately concluding with his own *presto* perpetual motion *finale*.

A symbolic meaning emerges, given the points of relation between the two third movements. Rachmaninoff does not copy Chopin; he *corrects* him emphatically, refuting the sense of death and demise that characterizes the gloom of the *marche funèbre*. This move, nonetheless, is not antithetical to Chopin if reading the music intertextually; the need for a resolution originates out of a trajectory already well-established in a long chain of cultural works going back at least to Beethoven's funeral march. This march was the only sonata movement

¹³ Both quoted in Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, 1.

Beethoven orchestrated and one that was performed in his funeral procession in 1827. His orchestration is titled “Eleonore Prochaska,” after the German woman soldier who fought against Napoleon in the War of the Sixth Coalition, ultimately losing her life. The heroine tied to the movement after the initial act of composition reflects Beethoven’s sensitivity toward revolutionary energies.

Rachmaninoff added Beethoven’s Sonata No. 12 to his concert repertoire a century later in 1927, but likely would have been familiar with the work earlier, common among studying pianists, for example, at the Moscow Conservatory, where he had trained in his youth.¹⁴ If picking up on the air of revolution Beethoven felt when composing the funeral march, Chopin likely linked his own to Poland’s plight and failed revolution of the November Uprising that strove to overthrow Russian rule. Rachmaninoff, ironically, appropriated Chopin’s revolutionary energy to his own revolutionary angst with a hope for reconciliation following the plight of Imperial Russia.

Rachmaninoff cut away pages from his own sonata, excising entire sections and reducing it to 19 minutes from approximately 28, the length of Chopin’s sonata without repeats.¹⁵ (In performing Chopin’s Sonata, Rachmaninoff would omit them.) He also simplified some of the pianistic challenges to make the work more accessible and likelier for a greater number of pianists to adopt into their repertoire. Presently, the second edition is by far the most frequently performed version and is particularly likely to be encountered on competition stages. The sonata remains infrequently encountered elsewhere. One of the most notable changes Rachmaninoff instantiated was a cut of the theme in mm. 76-80 (Figure 10). The source material of this cut is,

¹⁴ Regarding piano repertoire, see Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 418.

¹⁵ In his 2019 studio recording, Ivo Pogorelich takes a shocking 29:37 minutes to perform the shortened, revised version.

perhaps, the keystone unlocking overarching symbolist and programmatic inclinations. This keystone renders the entire sonata a Rosetta stone allowing for understanding the hermeneutics of Rachmaninoff's recorded performance of Chopin's Second Sonata. Rachmaninoff directly quotes the Orthodox chant, "Christ is Risen," an Easter theme sung in the most elaborate and lengthy service on the Church's calendar (Figure 9).¹⁶ For Orthodox Christians, Easter is the most important holiday, as it points to the fulfillment of the most essential pillars of Christianity: resurrection after death and the promise of eternal life. In Eastern Orthodoxy, this is known as deification, the ultimate stage of humanity's transition to godlike essence.

Χριστός ἐβίβρε
Hristos voskrese

Common variant of Bakhtmetev arrangement
Arranged by Peter Jermihov

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 104$

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Хри - стось во - скре - се изъ мер - твѣхъ, смер - ти - ю
Hri - stós vos - kře - še iz mēr - tvih, smēr - ti - yu

смерть по - правъ, и су - щимъ во гро - бѣхъ жи - вотъ да - ро - вавъ.
smert' po - prav, i sú-shchim vo gro - béh zhī - vót da - ro - váv.

Figure. 9 Eastern Orthodox Chant, "Christ is Risen"

¹⁶ I thank Ryan Shiotsuki for bringing this to my attention.

Tempo I.

The image shows a musical score for the "Christ is Risen" theme from Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2, 2nd Movement. The score is in 12/8 time and D major. It consists of four systems of piano and bass staves. The first system starts with "Tempo I." and "pp" dynamics. The second system has an orange arrow pointing to a measure with "p dolce" dynamics. The third system has "mf" dynamics. The fourth system has "dolce" and "p" dynamics.

Figure 10. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2, 2nd Mvmt. "Christ is Risen" theme, marked by the arrow (1913 edition; excised in 1931.)

Bells signifying this momentous day mark the start of celebrations and continue for the week. In Rachmaninoff's earlier work, the *Fantaisie Tableaux* for two pianos, Op. 5, he entitles his *finale* "Pâques" ("Easter") and "СВѢТЛЫЙ Праздникъ" in Russian (pre-reform spelling). In this movement, he directly quotes the theme twice, set in a simulation of bells (Figure 11). A quotation appears at the heading by Alexei Khomyakov, which steers the program (taken from the original edition of the score):

Across the earth a mighty bell is ringing
 Until all the booming air rocks like the sea

As silver thunderings sing forth the tidings
 Exulting in that holy victory...

И мощный звонъ промчался надъ землею,
 И воздухъ весь, гудя, затрепеталъ,
 Пѣвучіе, серебряные громы
 Сказали вѣсть святого торжества...

The image shows a complex musical score for piano and voice. It consists of four systems of staves. The top two systems are for the piano, with a treble and bass clef. The bottom two systems are for the voice, with a bass clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *sf* and *ff*. There are also performance instructions like *pesante* and *Son basso*.

Figure 11. Rachmaninoff, "Pâques." "Christ is Risen" Orthodox chant.

Rachmaninoff precisely creates an enormous din spectacularly emulating the bells that surrounded him, employing various rhythmic patterns suggesting musical rubrics used by monks

The image shows a musical score for piano, focusing on the bass clef. It features three measures of music, each with a *fff* dynamic marking. Below the notes, there are three tritone symbols (♯ and ♭) indicating the specific intervals.

Figure 12. Rachmaninoff, "Pâques." Large tritone bells.

The image shows a musical score for piano, focusing on the treble clef. It features a series of notes with a *ff* dynamic marking. Above the notes, the tempo marking *Allegro maestoso* is visible.

Figure 13. Rachmaninoff, "Pâques." Tritone motif.

in bell towers. He also simulates unusual tonal characteristics, as with tritones near the beginning, which some pianists, presuming the writing is in error, try to “correct” by changing the clef of the right hand from the treble to the bass, rendering a perfect 5th C-G rather than a diminished 5th A-E^b (Figure 12). Doing so is a blunder, as a tritone logic permeates the entire movement, given the jump down in an augmented fourth in the opening motif (Figure 13).

During the time of the Second Sonata’s compositional genesis, Rachmaninoff was particularly engrossed by bells, and ultimately composed *The Bells*, Op. 35, simultaneously. Russians had a strong tradition of bells; Rachmaninoff said about them, “they accompanied every Russian from childhood to grave, and no composer could escape their influence.”¹⁷ In part, the bells of Rachmaninoff’s earlier “*Pâques*” were likely influenced by the coronation scene in Modest Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*, which symbolically elevates the Tsar’s position as theocratically ordained (Figure 14). Rachmaninoff may have drawn further influence in using the theme from his composition teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, who quoted it in the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*. While Rimsky was not a professed religious believer, his quoting of the chant more likely stemmed from a nationalistic desire to fortify the Russian School of composition.



Figure 14. Modest Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov* (1869-1872), Prologue, as arranged for piano solo by Konstantin Chernov (1865–1937). St. Petersburg: W. Bessel et Cie., 1909. Plate 6470.

¹⁷ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*.

Reflecting the enormity of the Easter celebration, Rimsky called upon a familiar cultural pillar to suggest Russianness. While nationalism may underlie part of Rachmaninoff's spirit, his specific excision of the theme altogether in the 1931 revision of the sonata suggests a greater personal significance—a loss of hope of the resurrection of the Russia he once knew.

By 1931, Soviet Russia was well established and set in its atheism, determined to erase state Orthodoxy. There was no chance that the Russia Rachmaninoff once knew would revert to how it was within his lifetime of exile. A resurrection of old Russia, seen by Orthodox believers as divinely appointed, did not happen. When he composed the sonata during the inter-revolutionary period, however, hope was still present amid apocalyptic turbulence, and saw various forms of expression, as Ruth Coates has detailed in *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905-1917*, including both religious and secular forms.

Before the revolution, in commemorating the inauguration of Russian history, the fantastically expensive *Millennium of Russia* monument was unveiled in 1862. Shaped like an immense bell, the monument prominently unites famous scenes of Russian history with Orthodoxy, as seen by the crosses and guiding angels (Figure 15). Rachmaninoff would have had opportunities to see this bell monument regularly, since it was close to where he was born, Novgorod. On the very top of the bell monument is a cross, signaling that the country was intimately entwined with the Russian Orthodox Church as a fundamental way of being. As the revolution entailed the toppling, burial, and melting of many church bells, a huge shift in basic Russianness ensued.



Figure 15. Millennium of Russia monument. Novgorod, 1862. Sculptor: Mikhail Mikeshin. (Various views)

Bells in Imperial Russia served numerous forms of communication; they not only made announcements as a form of mass communication, but pointed to the Second Coming of Christ, especially with the notion of Moscow being the Third Rome. The religious-sonic significance traces directly from the Church's historical use and prominence of the Greek *semantron*, a large suspended wooden plank, later metal, that was beaten by sticks rhythmically. In some capacities, besides making announcements, these instruments were seen to symbolize trumpets described in the Book of Revelation, which announce Armageddon and Christ's return. Russian

Archimandrite Leonid (Lev Aleksandrovich Kavelin) said:

In Russia our motherland...the variety of our calls to church, at first with wooden, and then with cast iron, beams and finally with the ringing of bells, has its own significance and deep meaning, even an acoustical one between our time and that more distant – the past and future.... The weak sounds of the wood and iron remind us of the prophets' vague, cryptic language, but the clamor and harmonious ringing of bells is a proclamation of the Gospel, its exultation to the ends of the universe, and reminds us of the angel's trumpet on the final day.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Pis'ma sviatogortsa k druž'iam svoim o Sviatoi Gore athonskoi*, pt. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1850), 78, 79-80: letter no. 6: July 29, 1846, St. Panteleimon Monastery, Mount Athos, as excerpted and translated in Edward V. Williams, "Aural Icons of Orthodoxy," in *Christianity and the Arts in Russia.*, ed. William Craft Brumfield and Miloš Velimirović (Cambridge, England.: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

The Messianic iconography of both semantrons and bells was widely understood, which precisely necessitated their destruction and repression according to a Soviet ideological perspective.

A bell sensibility permeates the sonata, as Rachmaninoff expressed his surroundings and lived experiences. Two years before he died, Rachmaninoff said:

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. Study the masterpieces of every great composer and you will find every aspect of the composer's personality and background in his music.¹⁹

In the larger harmonic motion, he often moves at the tritone, mirroring the bells he heard, as moving from B \flat minor (movement I) to E minor (movement II) and finally to B \flat major (movement III). Where Western semblances have more aptly labeled the interval as "*Diabolus in Musica*"—the "Devil in Music"—for its hidden dissonance of a minor second within the overtone series, the sonority essentially means the opposite in many Russian Orthodox settings. Rachmaninoff set to music his surroundings not in deference of what sounded correct to a more widely dominating Western disposition.

In the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Sonata, just before he quotes "Christ is Risen," the music begins with an elaborate simulation of repetitive bell rubric. The left hand more directly simulates alternative bell sonorities, alternating between open fourths and fifths (Figure 19). The section is not entirely driven by tonality but by conventions of bell performance. In terms of choreography of the hands, Rachmaninoff crosses them to cover

¹⁹ Rachmaninoff, as quoted in David Ewen, "Music Should Speak from the Heart," Rachmaninoff interview in *The Etude*, No. 59. December 1941, 804-848.

different areas of the register, somewhat unusual for him in the corpus of his compositions, where the number of instances are not especially frequent. For comparison's sake, I provide some of their occurrences. In his Third Concerto, for

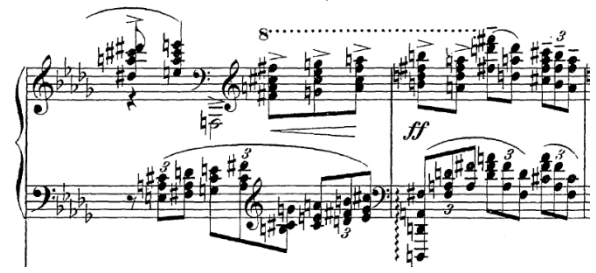


Figure 16. Rachmaninoff, *Concerto No. 3: II. Intermezzo*. Hand crossing at beat 3.

instance, he crosses the right hand once to cover a lower A—strictly for utilitarian reasons—as the left hand is otherwise occupied (Figure 20). In the first movement of the same concerto, Rachmaninoff indicates a crossing of the left hand over the right just before the recapitulation; however, in his recording, he expressly does not cross the left hand over, omitting the 1st-inversion Eb major triad in open position (Figure 17).

In his 2nd Concerto, the closest form of hand crossing is found in the third movement's two brief



Figure 18. Rachmaninoff, *Sonata No. 1, III. Allegro molto*.

glissandi-like cadenzas, which do not really correspond to true hand crossing, as both hands end up moving in the same linear direction. An exception is his Prelude in C Minor, whose melody

functions as a Lisztian hocket between the hands, as *Un Sospiro*. Somewhat similar would be the in the *finale* of his First Sonata, where the right hand (marked, *m.d.*, *mano destra*) crosses over the left. However, as shall be seen, the proximity to an Orthodox sign of the movement's concluding B \flat major bell may shed further significance to this gesture (Figure 18).

Throughout the rest of his works, other forms of hand crossings less common. Following the hand crossing of the second movement of his Second Sonata, a crashing climax of many bells sound simultaneously; Rachmaninoff takes the pianist down to the depths, ending on the piano's lowest pitch, A $_0$. Might this correspond to a figurative hell or grave (Figure 23)?

The image displays a page of musical notation for the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2, titled "Bells". The score is written for piano and consists of five systems of music. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a tempo marking of "Non allegro" and a dynamic of "mf". The notation features a complex, multi-measure melodic line in the right hand, often with multiple beams and slurs, and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The piece includes various dynamic markings: "poco a poco cresc." (first system), "mf" (first system), "cresc." (third system), "ff" (fourth system), "dim." (fifth system), and "p" (fifth system). The score concludes with a double bar line and a final chord. The bottom left corner of the page is labeled "8va... bassa".

Figure 19. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: II. Non allegro. Bells.

Eventually, Rachmaninoff moves to contemplation, giving a tintinnabulation of “Christ is Risen,” the same theme he used in his “Easter” movement in the *Fantasia-tableau* earlier. There is meaning to be found in viewing this technique as a signifying gesture, given the number of times the hands cross. With the close proximity to quoting the chant “Christ is Risen,” the hand crossings visually suggest making the sign of the cross, a gesture Orthodox Christians make

when venerating icons, praying, acknowledging a spiritual declaration, or entering religious spaces. Moreover, the perpendicular nature of the arms resembles the letter “X” from the liturgical language of Church Slavonic. “XB,” for example, commonly adorns church walls (Figure 226). XB is an abbreviation of the Paschal greeting, “Христосъ воскрес!” (“Khristos voskrese!”) meaning “Christ is Risen!,” a commonly used greeting (Figure 20). As an object, the cross functions as the most important image in Orthodox Christianity, representing Christ’s victory over death, which in this case likely corresponds to the nationalistic renewal of Mother Russia for Rachmaninoff during the inter-revolutionary period, as he gazed upon an endangered Moscow, Third Rome. I therefore include a series of stills showing my hands tracing the sign of the cross, and ultimately looking like the first letter of XB found on church walls (Figure 21).



Figure 20. Icon with "Christ is Risen" for the Easter Service of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (May 3, 2021). (Video frame)



Figure 21. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: II. Non allegro. Hands crossing during bell section, just before the "Christ is Risen" chant is quoted. NB the “X” formed in the third image to the right, signifying “XB” for “Христосъ воскрес!” in Church Slavonic.



Figure 22. Easter Service Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (May 3, 2021.) NB the abbreviation "XB" just above the "Beautiful Gates" of the iconostasis, as well as the painting of Mary behind. (Frame from video)

Additionally, the crossed arms may resemble the practice of churchgoers crossing their arms over their chests before taking communion for divine reconciliation. In sum, the point at which Rachmaninoff quotes the chant, "Christ is Risen," is not far from the hand and arm crossing, immediately following a modulation from E minor to the parallel E major, occasioning the addition of three sharps to the key signature (Figure 10). This might also bear further significance, as the sonata's place of genesis occurred in Berlin, just after Rachmaninoff had relocated from Rome after his daughters contracted typhoid fever. One wonders if Rachmaninoff, who also spoke some German, had thought of the word for cross in that language, "*Kreuz*"—which also signifies the sharp sign in German—as his daughters faced illness and

supplications for healing were in his prayers. While speculative, such might correspond to signs pointing toward renewal as associated with the resurrection. Certainly, as a precedent, Johann Sebastian Bach incorporated arcane, religious symbolism in his compositions, such as the cross subject in his Fugue No. 4 in C# minor from Book I of the Well-tempered Clavier, a work many serious classical pianists encounter at some point in their studies.²⁰

This may encourage consideration if Rachmaninoff did the same while writing the sonata in Germany, given his occasional fascination with seemingly small, compulsive details. Possibly supporting this may be a related form of esotericism, where numerological leanings occupied Rachmaninoff's thinking. Beyond the Opp. 35-36 connection, the year Rachmaninoff completed his revision of the Second Sonata, 1931, is significant, as it reverses the last two numbers of the original 1913 version, possibly nodding to his spirit of compositional inversion relative to Chopin. Similarly, Rachmaninoff reversed numbers in other collections, as with the Op. 32 set of preludes following his Op. 23 set, which follows in line with his famous *Prélude in C# Minor*, Op. 3, No. 2.²¹ Together, these three *opera* contain a bounded set of preludes encompassing all the 24 major and minor keys, in the final prelude reproducing the main motive of the first in the parallel major.

Besides Rachmaninoff's system of signs stimulating piety, Rachmaninoff directs further ecclesiastic contemplation just after the second movement by using a connecting interlude written in a 4-part texture, reminiscent of a chorale hymn, as ubiquitously encountered in Orthodox church services. Having a moment of devotional respite, he moves into the third

²⁰ Bach's tendencies toward esotericism are commonly encountered in discussions surrounding the hermeneutics of his works, both in scholarly and public orientations. See, for instance, Peter Libby, "Johann Sebastian Bach," *Circulation Research* 124, no. 9 (April 26, 2019): 1303–8, <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCRESAHA.119.315025>; and "The Esoteric Bach," accessed March 27, 2022, <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Articles/Esoteric.htm>.

²¹ I thank Ryan Shiotsuki for pointing out the numbering of the preludes to me.

movement finale, whose unusual hyper-virtuosity, even relative to the corpus of Rachmaninoff's writing, surpasses that of the first two movements, suggesting a transformation. In coordination with further Orthodox iconology, the virtuosity, I propose, corresponds to an underlying kind of sign—virtue of self-mastery in conjunction with faith, corresponding to humanity's utmost goal in Orthodoxy: deification.

Semiotics of Virtue and Virtuosity

Performing such an unusually demanding movement that stretches one's human limits results from a lived, sustained belief that daily toils will add up to a performance. Much of the drive behind a pianist's work mirrors that of lived Orthodox faith, in which the most devout work toward a transformation leading to deification. Rachmaninoff's performance of Chopin's sonata is an exercise in extreme restraint, following "higher" principles in arriving at "the point." In the Opp. 35-36 diptych, the larger "point" between the two sonatas lies in the *finale* of the third movement, which he magnifies through increasing virtuosity, thus signifying the metaphor of human super-ability, obliquely suggesting a deified state.

Rachmaninoff, an aristocratic son with inherited privilege, largely wrote the sonata's *finale* for himself in its original version, as if capturing aspects of an improvisation. Although the final movement is in sonata allegro form, its specific pianistic writing lacks a kind of predictive simplicity in some of the details that might aid in the learning and memorization process, as in a work like Chopin's Second Sonata, already considered a bear of a work. Almost moment to moment, Rachmaninoff introduces slight changes in his figuration that preclude the kind of patterning analogous to the highly repetitive figures that were conventional in Classical practice. Rachmaninoff prefers, instead, a highly variable, chromatic counterpoint that appears and disappears with sometimes great inconsistency, creating an awkwardness in higher speeds.

Such may not be the case with every pianist, but judging on the work's infrequent performances, it is out of reach except to a few, being onerous to learn and impractical to maintain. Memorizing the sonata, particularly the third movement, can involve a steep learning curve relative to his other works, which begins to flatten only after living in and with the sonata. Simply understanding Rachmaninoff's graspable compositional principles of harmony, counterpoint, form, and rhythm does not necessarily translate to the kinesthetic sense of secured playing. The physical and mental repetition involves a willfully directed osmosis over a period of months of constant practice, making this work difficult to learn, especially if only sitting in an armchair reading the score or with haphazardly inconsistent practice periods.

The monk-like devotion required in practice parallels the repetitive aspects of the frequent repeating of the Orthodox liturgy, as that of St. John Chrysostom, which Rachmaninoff had set to music as his Op. 31. The high maintenance and tilling of the score becomes the pianist-monk's liturgy in enacting a lived musical religion as an extreme form of "musicking." "Living in" the sonata so wholly and repetitively may also recall the Orthodox "Jesus Prayer," which is repeated with a prayer rope like the Catholic Rosary. The difference is that in some cases, reciting the Jesus Prayer may become even more engrossing as a hesychast practice, a kind of spiritual contemplation involving "stillness and silence of the soul."²² In practice, hesychasm involves very particular forms of breathing, especially while reciting the Jesus Prayer repeatedly while both inhaling (thus *sotto voce*) and exhaling, with the possibility of

²² See Mary Cunningham and Mariamna Fortounatto, "Theology of the Icon," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Elizabeth Theokritoff and Mary Cunningham, 1st ed., Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 142; see especially the *Philokalia*.

synchronizing the words to heartbeats.²³ Possibly coming from influences further east relative to Russia, the prayer, enveloping the individual in all, would be recited repetitively as:

||: EXHALING (full voice): “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God”

INHALING (*sotto voce*): “Have mercy on me, a sinner.” :||

In the 19th century, religious practices ordinarily found in monasteries began to spread, shaping the lives of the laity, Irina Paert writes.²⁴ Lay men and women often developed “strong personal bonds” with spiritual elders.²⁵ Rachmaninoff would have been in the sphere of such spiritual guides, having frequented Orthodox churches since his youth. Rachmaninoff trekked to churches frequently as a boy; his time there affected him immediately and deeply, to such an extent that when he returned home with his Grandmother Butakova, he would play the entire service’s chants back from memory to her on their small piano, an act for which she rewarded him with a coin.²⁶ What other kinds of practices he may have picked up or have been exposed to may now be irretrievable in history, but the larger patterns affecting lay people’s lives would suggest an immersion of the self in mirroring some of the wholly consuming practices originally found in monasteries. That Rachmaninoff could play back services from memory on the piano suggests this kind of possibility of immersion, which would open the likelihood of those experiences manifesting themselves in his pianism both compositionally and in sustained practice.

²³ Bishop Kallistos-Ware, “Jesus Prayer - Breathing Exercises,” accessed April 2, 2022, https://www.orthodoxprayer.org/Articles_files/Ware-7%20Breathing%20Exercises.html.

²⁴ Irina Paert, “Letters to and from Russian Orthodox Spiritual Elders (Startsy),” in *Orthodox Christianity in Imperial Russia: A Source Book on Lived Religion*, ed. Heather J. Coleman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 59.

²⁵ Paert, 60.

²⁶ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff*, 4–5.

Writing from the perspective of a musicologist-pianist, getting to the place where I might simply have a chance to perform the work at all entailed an extreme measure of self-discipline, much greater than that I found when preparing other pieces of the piano’s core repertory. Through my own learning, I experienced aspects of Rachmaninoff’s lived experiences of pre-revolutionary Russia and immersion in Orthodox virtues and values. The virtues of self-restraint involving faith leading to eventual self-mastery and eventual transcendence in performing the instrument emerge from learning this sonata, which may resemble the praxis metaphorically leading to Orthodox deification. I discovered these traits in sometimes monk-like isolation, making glacial progress with particularly the third movement and emulating Rachmaninoff’s performances of Chopin’s Second. In my preparations, an irony I felt arose from sensing myself wanting to “perform” too early, before I was ready. Performing too soon, as if in a recital, risked engraining habits that would preclude an eventual performance.

Explaining one’s work process in learning such a composition is almost impossible, given endless variables; the data required to give a halfway adequate account would require many tomes drawing from a lifetime of experience going into the sonata, as well as new discoveries. While this is not practical for the present purposes, I mention a moment in practicing the celebratory third movement briefly. Frequently, I planned at the micro-level minute angles of my fingers in small working margins while coordinating more extensive forearm rotations, ultimately employing a hyperawareness of proprioception involved with rapidly changing basic hand positions. This was the case with several changes of the center of gravity occurring within one second. At m. 125, for instance,



Figure 23. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: III. Allegro molto, mm. 125-126.

the left hand must pre-conform to the upcoming chord just after the low E \flat within a minuscule time interval, which involves simultaneous relaxation to avoid accumulating physical tension. The precision of performing the right hand, which interlocks with the left hand in 3 against 2, involves a highly cramped position for a large hand, giving a sense of running on delicate eggshells (Figure 23). The quick change of the right hand's configuration in octaves with a falling inner line presents a challenge in shifting immediately to a different form of technique, moving more from controlled forearm weight to the weight of the palm in the subsequent measure. The vast collection of demands occurring at almost every subsection of each bar involves unique challenges in juggling swift changes at a great *tempo*. While the sonata movement may sound difficult to the listener, the difficulties are much greater even than they seem. Much of the experience the sonata affords is between the composer and the pianist, not necessarily the composer and the audience. Little could be taken for granted in preparation; submitting to the passions, as cautioned at a broader level by the *Philokalìa*, would hinder deliverance to the stage.

In a musicking capacity, the virtuosity underscoring Rachmaninoff's pianism, as suggested by both his scores and recordings, resulted from a way of life that demanded constant striving toward musical salvation. Even in his last years beyond retirement age, he would not miss practice sessions.²⁷ Later in Rachmaninoff's life, Abram Chasins, who listened with amazement when he was to meet him in Hollywood. His account reads as follows:

Arriving at the designated hour of twelve, I heard an occasional piano sound as I approached the cottage. I stood outside the door, unable to believe my ears. Rachmaninoff was practising Chopin's etude in thirds, but at such a snail's pace that it took me a while to recognise it because so much time elapsed between each finger stroke and the next. Fascinated, I clocked this remarkable exhibition; twenty seconds per bar

²⁷ See Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1990), 365.

was his pace for almost an hour while I waited riveted to the spot, quite unable to ring the bell. Perhaps this way of developing and maintaining an unerring mechanism accounted for his bitter sarcasm towards colleagues who practised their programmes “once over lightly” between concerts.²⁸

Analogous to restraining oneself from worldly vices in hopes of eventual religious deliverance through self-perfection, the demanding nature of Rachmaninoff’s piano music metaphorically stands in for spiritual struggles in moving toward sanctification and transformation of the self to another state of being. The third movement of the sonata, standing at the peak of difficulties, features sacredness behind the virtuosity and requisite devotion required for execution. Rachmaninoff’s reduction of the sonata’s complexities and length in 1931, including the deletion of the “Christ is Risen” theme, points accordingly to a loss of hope. The sacredness behind the extravagant virtuosity shifted in meaning as he accepted that the Russia he once knew would never return; thus, the sonata became more proletariat.

Whereas Chopin’s bells are rudimentary in his march setting, Rachmaninoff’s are elaborations with expanded reach over a more spread-out keyboard compass. Rachmaninoff imitates the uneven swaying of church bells pulled by ropes in a tower, suggested chiefly by his triplet subdivisions, some of which he ties together to create asymmetry (Figure 7). Throughout, Rachmaninoff develops the idea of sounding bells through various treatments, especially notable at the second theme’s magnified recapitulation, which ideally would resolve the revolutionary angst that had engulfed him. Considering the meanings of the Opp. 35-36 diptych, the third movement ultimately holds the master “point” between the two sonatas, functioning as a personal and nationalistic glorification of Mother Russia, or deification per Orthodox doctrine.

²⁸ Abram Chasins, *Speaking of Pianists* (New York: Alfred A. Knoph Inc., 1957), 44.

An intervallic third relationship arises in coordination with the move to the flattened submediant from the tonic. Rachmaninoff, thus, introduces aspects exploring an emergent “threeness,” which may represent the Trinity. Besides the third relations in the third movement, Rachmaninoff writes in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter with triplet subdivisions, possibly suggestive of an underlying esoteric symbolism of Russian Orthodox mysticism that made its way to the laity starting in the mid-19th century, ultimately manifesting through broad-faceted deification during the inter-revolutionary period, according to Ruth Coates.²⁹ While the surety of such associations is debatable, their coordination with the more overt sonic iconology of bells, following Rachmaninoff’s use of “Christ is Risen,” points toward such a possibility. An examination of an earlier composition fortifies this prospect all the more.

Besides dialoguing with Chopin’s Second Sonata, Rachmaninoff’s own Second Sonata answers the programmatical problem posed by his First Sonata in D minor, Op. 28, which prominently quotes *Dies irae* in the third movement (Figure 24). The sonata was composed in 1908, also during the inter-revolutionary period. The first and third movements of Op. 28 are of

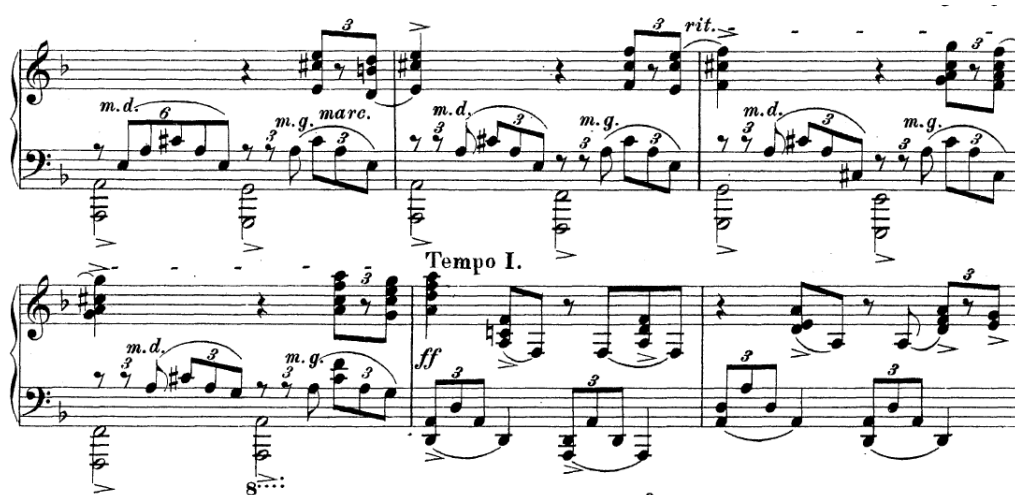


Figure 24. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 28. III. Allegro molto. Climactic *Dies irae* theme in half notes. (First edition. Moscow: Gutheil, (1908). Plate A. 9030 G.

²⁹ See Coates, *Deification in Russian Religious Thought*.

relentless severity, austerity, and sternness, which, along with its difficulty and length, accounts for its infrequent performance. The third movement, notably, ends in apocalyptic doom and starkness (Figure 25), with an elemental, medieval simplicity presenting a coda that progresses to arpeggiated open D-A fifths, hinting of the internal anxiety that plagued Rachmaninoff during this turbulent period. In the final few measures, prior to this, Rachmaninoff moves to bell-tolling on B \flat major—the submediant—repeating the gesture four times, which stands in sharp contrast to the intense activity of a somber D minor.



Figure 25. Rachmaninoff, *Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 28. III. Allegro molto*. Bells in B \flat Major, pointing to recovery in *Sonata No. 2*. (At *meno mosso*.)

The Faust legend ultimately leads to redemption through divine grace, a facet of the story Rachmaninoff does not fully explore in this sonata. Momentarily breaking out of the prevailing texture, however, Rachmaninoff points to this possibility by solemnly tolling on B \flat major bells (Figure 25), which comes from a harmony and octave placement he directly symbolizes as redemption and deliverance in the Opp. 35-36 diptych, pronounced most fully in the final movement of the Second Sonata. The low B \flat octave that precedes the half note B \flat major chords

is the same low, *pianissimo* B \flat octave Rachmaninoff adds to the conclusion of Chopin's *marche funèbre*, which relates to the distinctly attenuated B \flat octave in the very opening of his performance of Chopin's first movement. This B \flat octave comes from the falling 3-2-(1) line, generating a quest for a satisfying tonic of Mother Russia, as elaborated in Ch. 1.

Form begets meaning in achieving divine grace, particularly notable in Rachmaninoff's treatment of the second "feminine" theme, which offers a contrasting relief to the highly fragmentary, preceding writing. The theme is extremely long and intensely lyrical, suggesting traditional notions and associations with femininity. Mary is often depicted in immensely large images in Eastern Orthodox churches, often front and center as the most prominent of images among many icons, behind the iconostasis and inner sanctuary, holding the Christ Child in her lap. Furthermore, Mary holding the infant Jesus is on one of the left side of the "Beautiful Gates" leading to the sanctuary, understood as the "Holy of Holies." In Solomon's temple in ancient Jerusalem, this section was seen as the meeting place of heaven and earth, a location of God's presence. The veil of the temple separated the Holy of Holies from the people, accessible only by the High Priest on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The Eastern Orthodox tradition follows the "renting of the veil in twain" following Christ's crucifixion, so as to offer more direct access to the Most High. Still, it maintains symbolism of the ancient temple to suggest continuity in progression of pre-Messiah Judaism to Christianity. Thus, the "Beautiful Gates" in the center of the iconostasis typically not completely obstruct view of the Holy of Holies, which is now open to humanity. (Nonetheless, there may be some differences in construction between cathedrals in practice, stemming more from artistic decisions.) As the "God-bearer" ("*Theotokos*"), Mary reveals the gift of Christ to humanity, ultimately offering salvation from the kind of destruction inter-revolutionary Russian Orthodox believers sensed. In calling upon a feminine, saving trope,

Rachmaninoff may also be calling upon Divine Wisdom, also known as “Sophia,” standing in for Christ returned in feminine form, bringing humanity into a godlike state.³⁰

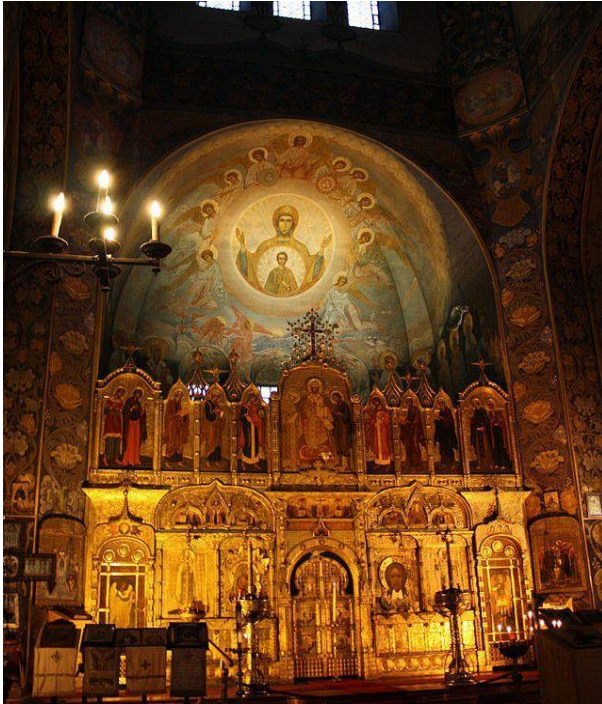


Figure 28. "Russian Orthodox Cathedral, Nice." Funded by Tsar Nicholas II; opened in 1912.



Figure 26. St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, Northridge, California.



Figure 27. A representative Eastern Orthodox church, following the same layout as most others. (Photo: St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, Tucson, Arizona.)

³⁰ See Robert Powell, *The Sophia Teachings: The Emergence of the Divine Feminine in Our Time* (New York: Lantern Books, 2001).

Rachmaninoff prepares for the exaltation of the second theme as divine grace through contrast, hinting back to the inverted climax he constructed at the beginning on the first movement in his recorded interpretation of Chopin's sonata, as a problem to fulfill. In mm. 255-278 of the third movement of his sonata, Rachmaninoff vastly alters the sense of temporality to create his inverted sub-climax precisely at m. 275 following a *rallentando* (Figure 29). At the head of the section, Rachmaninoff moves into a stasis set apart in time from the reality of the rest of the sonata movement. There is a pedal from 258-262 on B, and C from 259-260. The grounding is vastly different, as the downbeat occurs on the second of the triplet subdivisions while the right hand's pick-up gestures remain generally unsupported. Rachmaninoff heads toward his composed inverted climax, making the music quieter and quieter and slower and slower.



Figure 29. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2, III. Allegro molto. Anti-climax at m. 275.

Rachmaninoff cut the *meno mosso* section out entirely in his 1931 revision—a significant two pages—probably, in part, because the material was greatly sensual and did not follow prevailing neoclassical impulses of simplicity and objectivity. Sullen, in his sealed exile, Rachmaninoff would later characterize much of the sonata as “superfluous” to “the point,” as his worldview drastically shifted in ideology after the execution of the Romanov family. Thus, this section did not fit into his way of looking back at *Matushka Rossiya*. His excised section lends itself to multifarious interpretations, with one possibility ensuing from the reduced energy and delirium following the intense physicality of the preceding material. In linking a similar

“*intonatsia*” of the trio section of his *scherzo* movement recording to this part of Rachmaninoff’s movement, the overall context would suggest a spiritual exhaustion tied to the performing pianist mystically experiencing the sonata as Orthodox praxis. The movement’s inverted sub-climax’s shift between E \flat major and minor between mm. 271-275 (*meno mosso*) corroborates this, as E \flat minor was the key of revolutionary angst in Rachmaninoff performance of the *scherzo* movement of the Chopin sonata.

The recapitulation following the 1913 version’s excised section is heralded by a D Major fanfare, directly transposing the opening motive by a major third (m. 285). This transposition could suggest a Trinitarian “threeness” through its third relation, allowing for the possibility of esoterically contemplating Russia as an Orthodox state. Rachmaninoff shifts quickly to B \flat major after the fanfare, his key of redemption. Once again, this is the flat sixth (now of D major), which similar mirrors the beginning of the movement derived from Chopin’s harmonic moves in the *marche funèbre*. After that, as in other places before, there is a quick shifting of technique between mm. 297 and 320, which borrows in spirit from the quick shifts he introduces in the *scherzo* movement, if in a reduced way. The high chromaticism and awkwardness, combined with rampant instability involving quick shifts in touch and constant shifts of hand positions, reaffirm virtuosity as spirituality in praxis.

From mm. 325 to 328, an immense pedal point leads to an aggrandizement of the second theme (Figure 30 – first appearance, and Figure 31 – second appearance, aggrandized), which resembles the precedent of Tchaikovsky’s treatment of the second theme in the *finale* of his First Concerto in B \flat Minor just after the famous “speed” octaves (Figure 32 – first appearance, and Figure 33– second appearance, aggrandized). Rachmaninoff’s nod to Tchaikovsky was the result

of his boyhood obsession with his musical hero and an internalized desire to adopt certain successful elements, which was undoubtedly the strong case with his earlier compositions.

a tempo, poco meno mosso

180 *mf* *p*

184 *dim.* *p*

Figure 30. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: III. Allegro molto, Second Theme (1st appearance)

324 *f* *cresc.* *rit.*

328 *ff* *Tempo rubato.*

332

Figure 31. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: III. Allegro molto, Second Theme (2nd appearance, glorified)

Figure 32. Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1. III. *Allegro con fuoco*. Second theme marked piano in the orchestra

Figure 33. Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1. III. *Allegro con fuoco*. Second theme aggrandized. Piano and orchestra, *fff*.

It was also nationalistic, especially pertinent given the sense of Russian apocalypse in the air. Because the second theme traditionally bears “feminine” qualities within erstwhile mindsets, associated Divine Feminine tropes illumined by the network of the many other Eastern Orthodox elements within the sonata would suggest several possibilities: *Theotokos*, Sophia (Christ as Wisdom and *Logos* in Feminine Form), and the New Jerusalem as the “bride of Christ”

descending from heaven, as described in the Book of Revelation.³¹ All of these possibilities would nationalistically stand in for the female personification of *Matushka Rossiya* in a religious-cultural glorification.

Rachmaninoff announces the Divine Feminine, *Matshuka Rossiya*, with the lowest B \flat octave in the left hand marked *fortissimo*, suggesting the sonority of a great bell. The impact of this moment at m. 329 comes as the fulfillment of the missing tonic from the beginning of the Opp. 35-36 diptych, namely as devised through his characteristic interpretation of the opening bars of the *Grave—Doppio movimento* movement (Figure 31). There, Rachmaninoff embarks on a journey in search for an attenuated tonic from the 3-2-1 melodic gesture, a tonic so notably weakened that he again reemphasizes its hollowness at the final, dreariest moment of the *marche funèbre* by adding a *pianissimo* B \flat octave. To further reaffirm the *fortissimo* tonic octave starting the section, Rachmaninoff introduces an effect suggesting a lyre along the lines of heavenly, often feminine tropes. In the 1913 version, Rachmaninoff indicates only the left hand to arpeggiate the widely spread chords; in the 1931 version, he also includes the right hand, which produces an especially unusual effect (mm. 331-332, 1913 ed.). For the feature to register, the pianist must play with a slower tempo, which renders the extremely dense writing amenable to a solo line and vocality, further suggesting femininity behind an ultimate Russian salvation and transformation.

³¹ See Judith Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) and Samuel Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977). See also Ryan Isao Rowen, "Transcending Imagination; Or, An Approach to Music and Symbolism during the Russian Silver Age" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015), 151-152.

In its final appearance in the movement, Rachmaninoff's larger-than-life treatment of the second theme, with abstracted bell sonority, corresponds to bells signifying the resurrection. Rachmaninoff heightens and glorifies the theme with the most extreme, full textures of the piano utilizing the instrument's greatest resonance. The writing of this section's second theme stands in stark contrast to his subdued approach to performing the second theme of Chopin's Second Sonata in the first movement's recapitulation. As detailed in Ch. 1, Rachmaninoff achieves an inverted climax that functions as "the point"—a point that acts as a placeholder for a master climax articulated referentially between the two works. Here, Rachmaninoff provides the extroverted complement as a consummation fulfilling the forward motion of the Op. 35-36 diptych's implicit death and renewal programs. To leave no doubt as to the inversion of the first movement's anticlimax encountered in his performance of Chopin's sonata, the final two pages of Rachmaninoff's Second Sonata feature a sustained pedal point reemphasizing the fulfillment of the missing tonic. This feature "solves" the problem of death posed by Chopin, who alluded to Beethoven's Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111, his final opus of the genre closing a lifetime of growth and development. Where Chopin Sonata celebrates death, Rachmaninoff's celebrates eternal, deified life, standing in for the secured renewal and glory of a Russia he knew and one that never quite existed, existing in his mind as idealization, shielding him from an eternal apocalypse threatened by the inter-revolutionary period and subsequent perpetual exile.

CHAPTER FOUR

Toward Serious Listening: “Art” Music Color Line and Black Audibility

I am not an entertainer. But I’m running the risk of being considered an entertainer by going into a nightclub because that’s what they have in there. I don’t want anybody to know me well enough to slap me on the back and say “hey, baby.” The black experience through music, with a sense of dignity, that’s all I have ever tried to do.¹

—Don Shirley

The 2018 film *Green Book* saw its theatrical release just before the rekindling of a civil rights era fervor, consummated in 2020 by worldwide antiracist demonstrations. Racialized killings have long haunted American life, with routine passage from one point to another presenting considerable challenges to Black travelers, particularly before the Civil Rights Movement.² For Blacks in America, moving about often required deliberate consideration, especially in areas with sundown laws and rigidly enforced segregation. Although the Civil Rights Movement



Figure 1. Theater Poster of *Green Book* (2018)

¹ Donald Shirley, as quoted in Bruce Weber, “Donald Shirley, a Pianist with His Own Genre, Dies at 86,” *The New York Times*, April 29, 2013, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/29/arts/music/donald-shirley-pianist-and-composer-dies-at-86.html>.

² Throughout this text, I have opted to capitalize “Black” and its associated derivatives. (Exceptions follow in quoted material, where I maintain the original usage.) This decision has presented challenges, as I do not wish to suggest that Blackness is monolithic; indeed, there is great diversity in the lived experiences and cultures of peoples labeled “Black.” Those originally from sub-Saharan regions before the widespread institution of chattel slavery did not

saw the repeal of Jim Crow laws, it could not easily expunge internalized, caustic racial sentiments that lingered, affecting every aspect of life, including “high art” musical culture. *Green Book* follows the real-life story of the African American pianist Donald (“Don”) Shirley during his 1960s concert activity primarily in the South, as he struggled for parity within the sphere of concert art music (Figure 1).

The Film

Green Book garnered polarized reviews, ranging from powerhouse accolades to scathing, ireful reproaches. The film received 16 nominations for major awards and won eight, including three Academy Awards (Original Screenplay, Best Picture, Actor in a Supporting Role), one British Academy of Film and Television Arts (Supporting Actor—Mahershala Ali), one Screen Actors Guild (Outstanding Performance By a Male Actor in a Supporting Role—Ali), and three Golden Globes (Best Motion Picture, Best Performance By An Actor In A Supporting Role In Any Motion Picture for Ali, Best Screenplay—Motion Picture).³ Yet, the backlash against the film has been considerable, particularly regarding its perpetuation of racialized problematics such as White savior tropes, its biographical inaccuracies, and its ultimately passing on its opportunity to tell Shirley’s story from a Black perspective.

necessarily think of themselves as “Black,” which was a construct applied to them by White Europeans. Nonetheless, there are common experiences among Black people that do justify collective aspects of shared identity.

Similarly, I have decided to capitalize “White” so as not to reinscribe a racial hierarchy. Additionally, capitalizing White, in my present opinion, lessens the risk of perpetuating the notion that Whiteness is universal and normal, making Blackness aberrant, especially when appearing side-by-side as such: “white-Black” or “Black-white.” I recognize that there are other compelling arguments about this issue, and may even change my mind in the future.

³ “Green Book: Nominations and Awards - The Los Angeles Times,” *latimes.com*, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://envelope.latimes.com/awards/titles/green-book/>.

Donald Shirley's family was furious with the film's depiction of him. Dismayed, his brother Maurice E. Shirley, Sr., referred to *Green Book* as a "symphony of lies."⁴ Many of the film's issues trace to director and writer Peter Farrelly, and writers Nick Vallelonga and Brian Hayes Currie, who did not consult with the surviving Shirley family for the finer-graded understanding of Donald Shirley they might have provided. Not unnaturally, the Shirley family's hurt stemmed from sensing that the director and screenplay writers stepped over their family's legacy, freely appropriating Donald Shirley's life story to foreground a perhaps less extraordinary character, Tony "Lip" Vallelonga, Shirley's White chauffeur. The Shirley family, particularly Maurice, pointed out inconsistencies and inaccuracies, like relatively minor issues of the color of the car Donald Shirley had in his possession to more pointed matters, like the depicted alienation of Donald Shirley from the rest of his family (Appendix F – Jeremiad by Maurice E. Shirley, Sr., Sibling of Don Shirley).⁵ Karole Shirley Kimble, Donald Shirley's niece, remarked, "Clearly, our family has a legacy of black excellence and family pride. Our concern is that (this) white director presented one person's perspective."⁶ A representative reviewer asked, "When will Hollywood stop centering white people in Black stories?" and titled her piece, "'Green Book' is a Poorly Titled White Savior Film."⁷ In terms of pacing, nearly twenty minutes pass before Don Shirley appears on screen.

Peter Farrelly and Tony "Lip" Vallelonga's son Nick Vallelonga defended themselves in not consulting the Shirley family, claiming it was not Don Shirley's wish. Vallelonga remarked:

⁴ Hamil R. Harris, "Don Shirley's Family Dismayed by 'Green Book' Oscar Wins, Calls Portrait of Pianist False," USA TODAY, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/academy-awards/2019/02/25/don-shirleys-family-green-book/2979734002/>.

⁵ See Appendix F for an extended jeremiad against the film by Maurice E. Shirley posted to Facebook.

⁶ Harris, "Don Shirley's Family Dismayed by 'Green Book' Oscar Wins, Calls Portrait of Pianist False."

⁷ Brooke Obie, "'Green Book' Is A Poorly Titled White Savior Film," Shadow and Act, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://shadowandact.com/green-book-film-review-White-savior>.

If you're discussing the Don Shirley family thing, that falls on me; but Don Shirley himself told me to not speak to anyone. He told me the story that he wanted to tell, [...] He told me, "If you're going to tell the story, you tell it from your father. No one else. Don't speak to anyone else. That's how you have to make it." And, also, he told me, "Don't make it until after I pass away." So, I just kept my word to that man. I wish I could have reached out to Don Shirley's family. I didn't even know they really existed until after we were making the film, and we contacted his estate for music; and then the filmmakers, we invited them all to screenings and discussions. But I personally was not allowed to speak to his family, per Don Shirley's wishes... I kept my word to the man, and that's the reason for that.⁸

Shirley's posthumous wishes, likely unverifiable, may corroborate his will, which specified, "I have my family and relatives in mind, but make no bequest for them as they are already taken care of." The lot of Shirley's estate, valued between \$500,000 and \$1 million, was left to the Dutch financier Michiel Kappeyne, now its executor. Kappeyne reports that "He trusted me with his legacy" and reflected, "Dr. Shirley was a very complicated figure. The solitude, the wariness – it was very much him up there on the screen. He would have been very pleased with the way Mahershala played him."⁹

Amid the conflicting praise and disappointment, reviewers have generally not discussed the film's music. Despite Shirley's prolific performing career distinguished by abundant recordings (Appendix D – Selected Albums Recorded by Don Shirley), his music takes a comparatively miniscule role within the vista of the compilation score supervised by Tom Wolfe and Manish Raval. The film did employ Juilliard graduate Kris Bowers, a younger, accomplished African American composer, who wrote the interstitial music and realized some of the selections by Don Shirley.¹⁰ However, a telling sign of the film's relationship to Shirley's music lies with the ending credits, which, notwithstanding all of Shirley's musical transcriptions performed in

⁸ Harris, "Don Shirley's Family Dismayed by 'Green Book' Oscar Wins, Calls Portrait of Pianist False."

⁹ Seth Abramovitch, "'Green Book' Subject Don Shirley's Heir Speaks Out for First Time," *The Hollywood Reporter* (blog), February 19, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/green-book-subject-don-shirleys-heir-speaks-first-time-1187655/>.

¹⁰ See the Appendix for a list of recordings made by Don Shirley.

the film, do not include his name, even as an arranger, whereas Bowers is listed, for example, as an arranger of Frédéric Chopin’s “Winter Wind” Étude, for what amounts to a simple abridgement in a key scene. The sole exception of crediting Shirley’s music is for an historical recording that plays during the end credits. An unfamiliar but curious listener would have to track all the music selections by comparing what was used in the film to what had been released by the Cadence record label to learn what was Shirley’s and what was not. The end credits illustrate the dearth of credit given to Shirley (Appendix G – End Credits of *Green Book*).

In the United States, copyright conventions have received criticism for being reductively crude, privileging only the master recording and composition in terms of lyrics and melody. Further aspects of music, such as harmony, rhythm, and timbre, do not factor into copyright.¹¹ This has long been an issue in recognizing creativity: that any innovation a performer would bring to a pre-composed melody, no matter how original or inventive, would not receive copyright recognition. In practice, copyright law has little to do with originality, as such; musicians elaborating pre-set melodies would not necessarily be protected. Musical output working under parameters diverging from specified copyright protections point to systemic injustices historically tied to White ownership of Black cultural production. As Shirley came out of classical practice, and as the film comes close to being a biopic, if heavily circumscribed—accordingly, “inspired by a true story,” as the opening titles state—reviews might have expanded their critique that the film stepped over his legacy in assigning credit, even if only on a moral rather than legal basis steeped in racial hegemony.¹²

¹¹ Joanna Teresa Demers, *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Affects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

¹²Cf. Richard Schur, *Parodies of Ownership: Hip-Hop Aesthetics and Intellectual Property Law* (University of Michigan Press, 2011).

In classical piano practice, arrangers are almost always hyphenated or linked in commercial recordings, recital programs, broadcasts, and the like. For instance, Franz Liszt's name normally follows the original composer's name in his transcriptions of the nine Beethoven symphonies. With Liszt's operatic fantasies of other composers' music, he is usually recognized



Figure 2. Sample album covers of Beethoven-Liszt Transcriptions

as the primary composer, with the name of the opera's composer possibly appearing in the title, if at all. No equivalent dignity is afforded to Shirley and his treatment of popular tunes.

In some registers, the arranging performer may receive even greater recognition than the original composer. Consider the title page for Liszt's *Réminiscences de Norma* (Figure 3), where Vincenzo Bellini's name does not appear. Similarly, the title page of Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* (Figure 4) does not even feature W.A. Mozart's name despite that the source of the melodic material comes from his opera *Don Giovanni*. Liszt's use of Mozart's musical material is abundant; he transforms music sung by the Commendatore warning Don

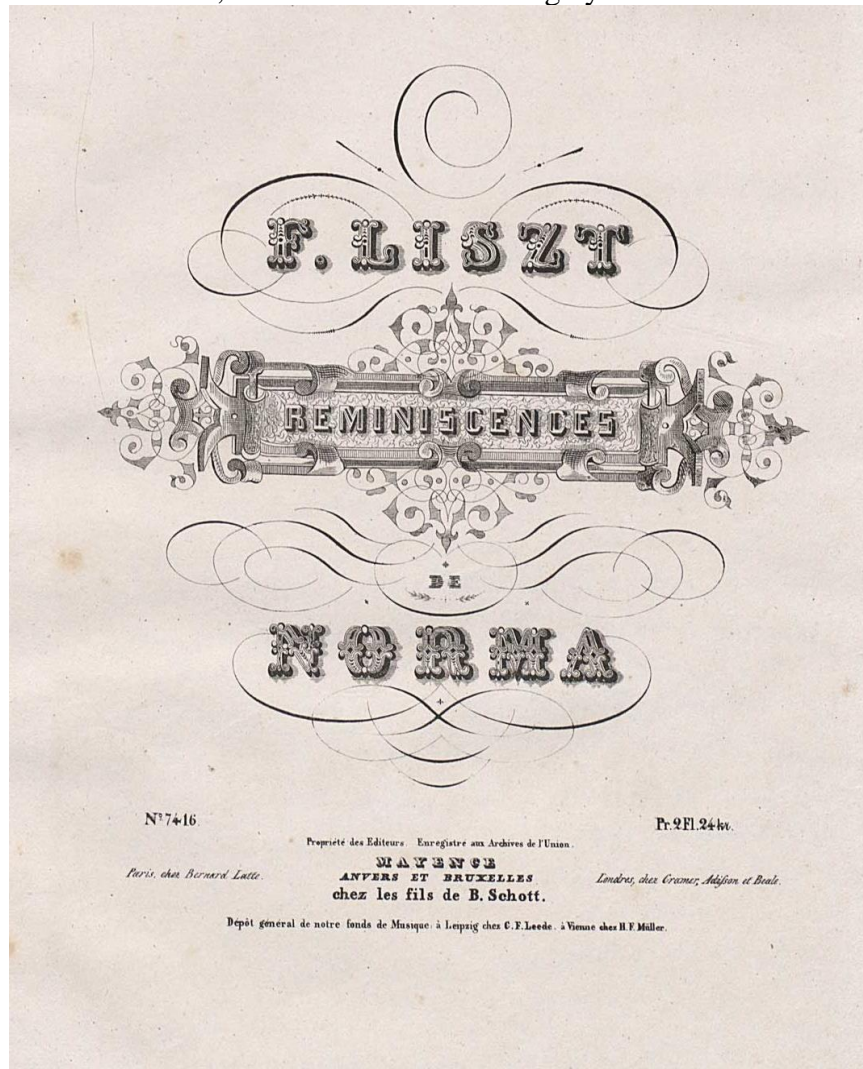


Figure 3. Franz Liszt's *Réminiscences de Norma*. First Edition. Mainz: B. Schott [1844]

Giovanni, the Commendatore's subsequent damnation of Don Giovanni, the seduction duet between Don Giovanni and Zerlina, among other selections, to form constituent parts of a larger virtuoso fantasy. The focus is on Liszt's treatment of the material, which informs the allure of the work, seen as one of the pinnacles of demanding piano repertoire.



Figure 4. Franz Liszt's Don Juan Fantasy. First Edition. Berlin: Schlesinger [1843].

Recorded jazz improvisations challenge the work concept of Western art music; attribution becomes complicated relative to classical practice, tying implicitly to race. Because Shirley was automatically associated with jazz on account of his skin color, his due recognition was constrained along structural limits, notwithstanding his categorizing his music as “transcriptions,” similar to Liszt.¹³ Perhaps for this persistent reason, he expressed discontent in being labeled a jazz musician, which he was manifestly not, given his overall approach.

Most of the film’s music consists of a compilation score of earlier popular music—rock and roll, R&B, and the like, which places the film within a general era. It is not until nearly 40 minutes into the film that viewers finally get to hear one of Shirley’s performances. In all, there are five brief instances of Shirley’s music actually being used. Their function is nebulously suggestive, as given by the lyrics of the corresponding showtune, popular song, or folk song. The music’s use tends to be diegetic, showing Shirley performing in a civic auditorium, a restaurant-club, and a private event in a mansion. In the film’s first instance, Shirley performs a composed fantasy on Irving Berlin’s 1926 song, “Blue Skies.” While Shirley’s trio format might point toward a simple arrangement, it is an entire re-composition that directly uses classical techniques, including counterpoint, in a late Romantic style. As the most prominent excerpt in the film, the materializing semblance of Western art music strongly directs the scene’s audience to listen to Shirley intently with a basic affordance of dignity. As in a concert hall, the audience exhibits stately decorum and remains silent, focusing on his performance. Yet, after this scene, Shirley’s music is only incidental and fragmentary; the implications behind his music are not

¹³ Weber, “Donald Shirley, a Pianist with His Own Genre, Dies at 86.”

explored, nor is there any true contemplation of the musical story that might have been told. In what follows, I will redress this by examining what the film disregarded musically.

Chapter Aims

Widespread beliefs around Western art music hold the category as universal and free from societal imperfections. Much of these notions trace to Romantic era ideas of transcendence, especially as detailed by the Austrian music critic Eduard Hanslick.¹⁴ Richard Dyer has argued, “as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.”¹⁵ Whiteness assumes a kind of neutrality; anything deviating from it is abnormal. As classical music has stood in “as a form of quintessential white European culture,” Mari Yoshihara argues; classical music’s universalism is anything but.¹⁶ Long-standing tendencies of neither valuing nor including racial outsiders testify to surrounding structures that challenge universalist notions. African Americans have consistently been pushed out of solo, classical instrumental performance. Despite Shirley’s earlier, high-profile orchestral engagements and “virtuosity worthy of the gods” (per Igor Stravinsky during a rehearsal in Chicago in 1954), noted impresario Sol Hurok advised Shirley that America was not ready for a “colored pianist” and denied him concert management.¹⁷ With no viable options for a career on the art music

¹⁴ See Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*. Translated and edited by Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1986).

¹⁵ Richard Dyer, *White* (Routledge, 2013), 1.

¹⁶ Mari Yoshihara, *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁷ C. Gerald Fraser, “Don Shirley at Cookery Making a ‘Comeback,’” *The New York Times*, November 12, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/12/arts/don-shirley-at-cookery-making-a-comeback.html>; Weber, “Donald Shirley, a Pianist with His Own Genre, Dies at 86.”

stage, Shirley turned to nightclubs, performing as a classical pianist cloaked in more popular music.

My work on Donald Shirley investigates his substantial music output and larger history, specifically considering his classical-popular fusion approach as a workaround to the anti-Black barriers that otherwise barred him, like other African Americans, from the classical concert stage. As a Black performer, however, his approach brought about a designation of “middlebrow,” presenting different difficulties in negotiating respectability to be taken seriously by listening audiences. My work also examines how Shirley, through developing what I term the “*Green Book Style*,” inched as close as he could to the category of classical music while pushing against the limits of the sonic color line.¹⁸ Also figuring into this study is how Shirley stimulated “serious,” idealist, and engaged listening, moving away from dismissive notions of “entertainment.” His approach, I argue, navigated race, art, and social station, establishing a unique niche along the intersections of segregated White-Black audile spaces.

My work also moves past the reluctance of musicology to study music whose practitioners blur the line between performer and creator. As Mina Yang has written, “classical music, as arguably the most prestigious of European arts, proves rather more resistant to sociopolitical analysis than popular music, and performers in the classical field are generally considered to play a secondary function to the composer as a reproducer of the authorial text rather than the originating producer.”¹⁹ In this light, Shirley’s case points to larger musical and cultural theorizations of “middlebrow” music, showing how marginalized performers might find

¹⁸ For an explication to the sonic color line, see Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

¹⁹ Mina Yang, “East Meets West in the Concert Hall: Asians and Classical Music in the Century of Imperialism, Post-Colonialism, and Multiculturalism,” *Asian Music* 38, no. 1 (2007): 67.

their way by navigating between their ideals and the need to find an audience. My study addresses musicology's reluctance to explore the musical "middlebrow," seemingly lying between classical and popular, or "lowbrow," musics. Providing a precise definition of music of the middlebrow remains challenging, given the vast diversity within this huge category, and its tendencies to subdivide along racial and socioeconomic lines.

Who was Don Shirley?

Currently, there is no scholarly biography for Don Shirley, but from various collections of periodicals, social media posted by his family, recordings, and information on his album covers, an image emerges. (For a large listing of his recordings, see Appendix D – Selected Albums Recorded by Don Shirley.) Donald Walbridge Shirley, 1927-2013, was born to Jamaican parents in Pensacola, Florida. The Shirley family was educationally accomplished, with three of its members having earned doctorate degrees. Donald's eldest brother was Dr. Calvin Hylton Shirley (1921-2012), one of the first Black medical doctors in South Florida and largely active in his community. The middle brother was Dr. Edwin Samuel Shirley, Jr., another physician. His uncle, Dr. John Wallbridge Shirley, also was a practicing physician.²⁰ Sources are inconsistent regarding Donald's own graduate degrees. *USA Today*, which included in its obituary numerous direct quotations from his surviving family, reports that "Shirley earned three doctorates" in "music, psychology and liturgical arts."²¹ However, *New York Times*' Giovanni Russonello writes that he "had never been to graduate school but was known to audiences and friends as 'Dr.

²⁰ The source of this material comes from a community database compiled from various contributors. See "Shirley Association Genealogical Research Website," sec. Shirleys of Jamaica, accessed February 4, 2022, https://www.shirleyassociation.com/NewShirleySite/NonMembers/UnitedStates/africanamerican/african_american_shirley_lineage.htm.

²¹ Harris, "Don Shirley's Family Dismayed by 'Green Book' Oscar Wins, Calls Portrait of Pianist False."

Shirley,” stating he received two honorary degrees.²² More readily available documentation reveals that Shirley attended the Catholic University of America for his undergraduate studies. Despite these discrepancies in the published historical record, it is clear that his family valued erudition, a disposition evident in his pianistic approach.

Being born to Jamaican parents who had relocated to the United States, with an Episcopalian preacher for a father, may have meant that Shirley was more shielded within his family circle from the endemic and systemic racism that continues to plague African Americans. Racism curtailed his career, but perhaps less so his proclivity to envision the American Dream in relation to his music education accomplishments. In the Caribbean, Christian churches were among the main providers of education, which constituted the means by which most Blacks could enter the middle class.²³ Especially in the Caribbean, those who pursued higher educational opportunities found themselves more advantaged socially and were seen as more culturally refined.²⁴ There was a very practical reason to pursue educational opportunities as related to European mores, which also followed internalized expectations that through cultivating his performance ability of the piano Shirley would also advance middleclass and upper-class ideals. Thus, as he began his lifelong keyboard affair, including pipe organ and piano lessons, he went on to study with French Canadian organist Conrad Bernier and George Thaddeus Jones for composition at the Catholic University of America.²⁵ Nevertheless, despite his disposition

²² Giovanni Russonello, “Who Was Don Shirley? ‘Green Book’ Tries to Solve the Mystery,” *New York Times* (Online) (New York, United States: New York Times Company, November 2, 2018), <https://www.proquest.com/nytimes/docview/2127945293/abstract/7BC4E063179D4954PQ/2>.

²³ Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, “Blacks and the British Empire: An Introduction” in *Black Experience and the Empire*. Philip D. Morgan, Editor and Sean Hawkins, Editor. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15, 27.

²⁴ Howard Johnson, “The Black Experience in the British Caribbean” in *Black Experience and the Empire*. Philip D. Morgan, Editor and Sean Hawkins, Editor, 319.

²⁵ Catholic University of America, “CatholicU Alumnus Donald Shirley Celebrated in Oscar-Contender Green Book,” *CatholicU Magazine*, November 12, 2018. <https://communications.catholic.edu/news/2018/11/catholic-alumnus-oscar-contender.html>.

toward and cultivation of classical music, the barriers he faced forced him to find and forge alternative paths.

Negro Travelers' Green Book

Widespread, portable technological advancements, as with camera phones, meant that common racialized abuse of Black civilians, especially at the hands of power figures like law enforcement, might more readily become exposed to a larger, critiquing public. The slaying of the unarmed George Floyd in 2020 by a White police officer kneeling on his neck for nearly ten minutes, was an instance documented by such footage, which led to Darnella Frazier, an 18-year-old, being awarded a Pulitzer Prize. She was cited “For courageously recording the murder of George Floyd, a video that spurred protests against police brutality around the world, highlighting the crucial role of citizens in journalists’ quest for truth and justice.”²⁶ Her footage, combined with bodycam recordings, led ultimately to worldwide outrage calling for reform of a diehard racist America. But most racialized deaths like Floyd’s slipped through mainstream cracks, media coverage, and prosecution because of the lack of documentation and a more frequent, plain indifference of the public at large, shaped by long-standing power structures.

The maltreatment of Black people by the police has been so ordinary that the mordant phrase, “driving while Black” or “DWB,” entered common parlance as wordplay on the “DWI” police code. The idea characterizes a tendency for profiling, where the principal suspected crime is being Black. Such biases leading to profiling directly stem from Jim Crow era laws and unspoken restrictions on African Americans’ movement, where traveling freely from one destination to another, especially over long, unfamiliar stretches of road, presented significant

²⁶ “Darnella Frazier,” accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/darnella-frazier>.

challenges. “Sundown towns” are, as James W. Loewen writes, “any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it [... being] thus “all-white” on purpose.”²⁷ Sundown towns are ubiquitous, although not typically discussed today; because of their prevalence, Loewen calls the United States a “Sundown Nation.”²⁸ From areas in the Midwest, from coast to coast, humdrum places like Glendale, California, to areas in the South, sundown laws forbade Black Americans from remaining in public areas past sunset.²⁹ Well-known public figures, including Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Dale Carnegie, Woody Guthrie, Emily Post, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Ernest Hemingway, lived in such areas.³⁰ Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort is in a sundown town, a fact especially predicted with a town or city name containing the word “Palm.”³¹ (Mar-a-Lago is in Palm Beach, Florida.) Especially in earlier decades, those caught Black while driving may have been harassed, jailed, beaten, or possibly lynched. Figure 5 shows a relatively polite version of a sundown sign appears; according to Loewen, the bulk of such signs read, “N*****, Don’t Let the Sun Go Down On You In ____.”³² The truly wide-reaching extent of sundown counties is



Figure 5. A sundown town sign. (Shown in Loewen, 2005).

²⁷ James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. (New York, NY: New Press, 2005), 4.

²⁸ Loewen, 12.

²⁹ <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-green-book-the-first-b-4549962>

³⁰ Loewen, 13.

³¹ Loewen, 12.

³² Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, Plate 7.

detailed in the table compiled by Loewen (Figure 6), in which a low number of African Americans indicates the status of a sundown county.

56 SUNDOWN TOWNS

Table 1. Counties with No or Few (< 10) African Americans, 1890 and 1930

STATE	1890	1890	1930	1930
	0 BLACKS	<10 BLACKS	0 BLACKS	<10 BLACKS
Arizona	0	1	1	1
Arkansas	0	1	3	8
California	0	4	0	8
Colorado	5	19	8	28
Connecticut	0	0	0	0
Delaware	0	0	0	0
Idaho	1	9	14	33
Illinois	0	6	6	17
Indiana	1	14	6	20
Iowa	13	28	12	38
Kansas	6	20	6	23
Kentucky	0	0	0	4
Maine	0	2	0	5
Maryland	0	0	0	0
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0
Michigan	4	23	7	26
Minnesota	22	57	16	61
Missouri	0	8	12	28
Montana	0	2	11	41
Nebraska	9	41	28	64
Nevada	1	6	1	8
New Hampshire	0	0	0	2
New Jersey	0	0	0	0
New Mexico	0	9	3	11
New York	0	0	0	1
North Dakota	13	26	20	42
Ohio	0	1	1	2
Oklahoma	2	10	4	11
Oregon	1	16	4	24
Pennsylvania	0	3	1	4
Rhode Island	0	0	0	0
South Dakota	19	37	23	52
Texas	3	20	8	29
Utah	5	16	15	22
Vermont	0	3	1	4
Washington	5	16	6	20
West Virginia	1	3	1	4
Wisconsin	8	27	16	42
Wyoming	0	5	1	11
Total	119	456	235	694

Boldface indicates states with more counties with 0 or few blacks in 1930 than in 1890.

Figure 6. Table of counties with no or few African Americans by James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. (New York, NY: New Press, 2005), 56.

Victor H. Green, an African American postal worker, created *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (also known as *The Negro Travelers' Green Book*) to protect Black drivers from Jim Crow laws, problems arising from sundown restrictions present in certain areas, and other predictable race-based hostilities. Published from 1936 to 1966, the guide worked around the tight restrictions burdening African American travelers by listing relatively safe and hospitable establishments catering to Black people throughout the United States (Figure 7).³³ Every year, an updated edition was published, which was guided by feedback provided by its many users. With laws of segregation and rampant racial hostility restricting equal and stress-free access to hotels, dineries, and the like, Black travelers

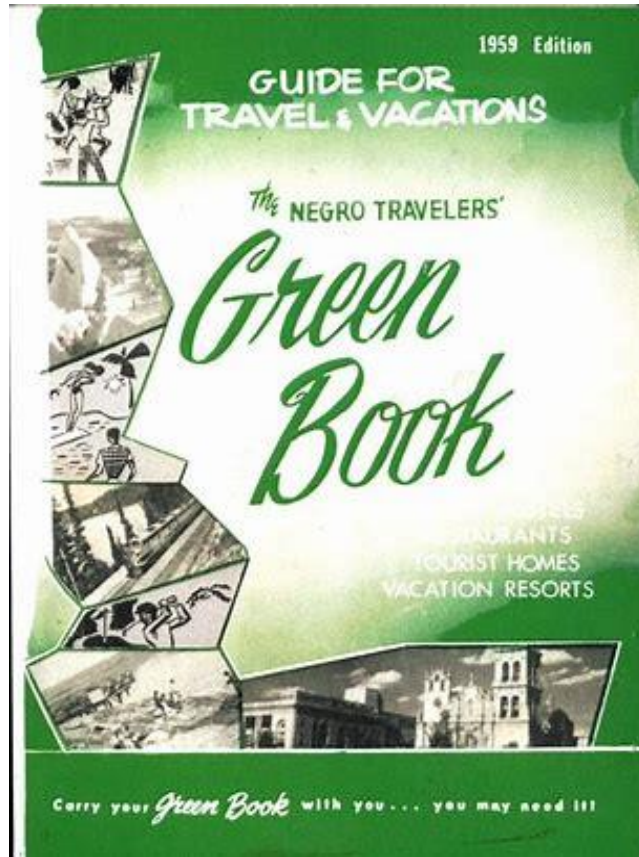


Figure 7. *The Negro Travelers' Green Book*. (New York: Victor H. Green & Co., 1959).

without the guide could quickly run into situations that might ruin a trip or lead to life-threatening scenarios. Without the guide, a weary driver unable to rest in an accommodating hotel, for instance, might have no choice but to risk an automobile wreck. Another facing engine troubles might be met with a beating if approaching an unreceptive innkeeper in the wrong part of town. Those seeking pure diversions might face contempt, disregard, or refusal of service at an unwelcoming establishment. Without the guide, long-distance drivers more often had to face

³³ “The Green Book - NYPL Digital Collections,” accessed June 12, 2019, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book/#/?tab=about>.

the indignity of storing buckets of urine and feces to dispose of later, as restroom facilities were out of the question. The guide thus sought “to give the Negro traveler information [to] keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trip more enjoyable.”³⁴

The *Green Book* revealed an American phase II underground railroad system that guided drivers to pockets of liberty. Green wrote, “there will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go as we please, and without embarrassment.”³⁵ While the guide’s final year of publication was 1966, signaling perhaps moves toward fulfilling Green’s hopes, structures remained in place that would continue to impose restrictions on the lives of African Americans, raising the question as to other areas in life might require careful deliberation to navigate successfully to a desired destination. Within a racially restrictive area like classical music, how might an African American chart a course toward a degree of career viability?

Threats to Shirley’s physical safety were considerable; however, racial blockades that curtailed his career and closed paths to becoming a classical concert pianist were more insidious. Prejudiced assumptions and racially rigged systems meant that his ability to find a way in, possibly by securing support from a prominent advocate—a well-connected concert manager—was less probable. Acquiring concert management is crucial for gaining a steady stream of performance opportunities in representative, prestigious venues. Concert managers and impresarios work out the logistics behind performances, such as contracts, financial details, hotel accommodations, and so forth, while putting performers onto event calendars. Because pianists

³⁴ Franz, Kathleen (2011). "African-Americans Take to the Open Road". In Franz, Kathleen; Smulyan, Susan (eds.). *Major Problems in American Popular Culture*. Cengage Learning.

³⁵ “The Green Book - NYPL Digital Collections.”

may neither have the social network needed to gather an audience nor ample administrative time otherwise required for precious practice, they will rely upon a more well-connected impresario or manager with direct ties to house managers, wealthy donors, and planning boards to manage the business of performing.

Sol Hurok was among the most prominent impresarios of the 20th century, representing Van Cliburn, Arthur Rubinstein, Isaac Stern, Sviatoslav Richter, Ann Schein, Arturo Benedetti Michalengeli, Emil Gilels, Mstislav Rostropovich, David Oistrakh, and others. In his 20s, Shirley contacted Hurok, hoping that he would include him on his performing roster. Without hesitation, Hurok advised him that audiences in the United States were not ready for a “colored pianist” performing on stage.³⁶ Denying him management, Hurok suggested that he pursue popular music and jazz. Harlow Robinson argues that Hurok, more of a capitalist than a musical idealist, kept his eyes firmly set on profit.³⁷ That he would have experienced anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe did not seem to affect his refusal to help Shirley. In her book *How Jews Became White Folks*, Karen Brodtkin examines Jewishness and Whiteness in the 1950s and 1960s, arguing a “hegemonic version of Jewishness as a model minority culture that explained the structural privileges of white maleness as earned entitlements.”³⁸ Brodtkin brings into her deliberation as a primary source example the views of sociologist Nathan Glazer, a representative Jewish intellectual speaking on American Jews’ perspectives on African Americans who attributed African American inequality to cultural deficiency.³⁹ In discussing notions of Blackness in public Jewish intellectual discourse, Brodtkin considers model minorities and deficit cultures as

³⁶ Weber, “Donald Shirley, a Pianist with His Own Genre, Dies at 86.”

³⁷ Harlow Robinson, *The Last Impresario: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Sol Hurok*. (New York: Viking, 1994).

³⁸ Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 139.

³⁹ Brodtkin, 144; Nathan Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. 2nd ed., Publications of the Joint Center for Urban Studies (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1970).

complimentary. In the process of becoming White, some Jews in America aligned themselves to the more mainstream tendency to use African Americans as a necessary scapegoat, providing a contrast that highlighted their model status and worthiness of hegemony.⁴⁰ Hurok's behavior is consistent with such an alignment, predetermining his treatment of Shirley as a pianist. Attesting to this may be the preponderance of performing artists of Jewish background, indicating a preference in selecting artists to manage. Glazer cited "community bonds" as a dominant unifying trait among Jewish people. In Hurok's view, extrapolating the cultural cost of representing Shirley as a concert pianist may have been too much. Shirley, in that sense, was a liability to Hurok's Whiteness, being more on the fringes himself.

It might seem that Hurok representing Marian Anderson as the first African American *Lieder* singer evidenced progressiveness. In his memoir, *Impresario*, Hurok recounts his remarkable discovery of Anderson, billing himself as a genius with an uncanny ability to recognize and see talent where others could not.⁴¹ Notions of "universalism" surpassing and transcending racial blockades would prevail, making his collaboration with Anderson a testament to his commitment to artistic authenticity. However, Violinist Isaac Stern detailed that Hurok was prone to exaggerations and fabrications in his stories and recollections to benefit his image.⁴² In Anderson's case, it was Rubinstein who convinced Hurok to listen to her, remarking that she was the best *Lieder* singer he had ever heard." At that point, increasingly promising opportunities were already springing up for her throughout Europe. Accordingly, Hurok did not necessarily take a huge risk on Anderson; he simply took credit for her, sensing a viable business opportunity already wrapped up in a different racial context abroad. Perhaps taking another

⁴⁰ Brodtkin, 150

⁴¹ Robinson, *The Last Impresario*.

⁴² Robinson

Black musician on may have tipped the scales from artistic integrity to undesirable fraternalization with someone who might make him seem less White.

Because securing concert management presents challenges for most musicians, international competitions eventually came into greater prominence. The most rewarding competitions offer concert management for a set period to launch an emerging pianist's career. In principle, competitions serve democratically in providing sustained access to the concert stage. During the 1940s, there were fewer competitions than in the 21st century; because few prominent competitions were on offer, bias often sprung up through undisclosed personal relations and high stakes for national pride.

As Shirley would not have even qualified for one of the rare competitions due to racial barriers, the lack of access to an advocate possibly won through a competition route meant that certain paths before him were closed. Not having the most well-connected celebrity teacher meant that influential correspondence would not have been made on his behalf. The same would follow in not having access to the amplest of institutional resources, having studied earlier at the Catholic University of America. Shirley's story paralleled that of Nina Simone, who was denied admission to the Curtis Institute of Music, despite an apparently well-received audition suggesting promise. Simone attributed her rejection to racism, and for the rest of her life, she grieved about this. Simone remarked later in a spoken interview about the injustice she felt:

[Racism] touched me [the] first time when I gave a concert, a recital, at age 12, and they wanted to put my mom and daddy in the back row in the concert—the little recital hall. I remember standing up, quite brave, and said, “oh, no, my mom and dad will sit in the front row.” The second [time was] when I went to Curtis, and I passed the test [entrance audition], and it was good. [...] I didn't understand it; I was playing Czerny, and Liszt, Rachmaninoff, and Bach, and it was good. [...]. There were people around me who knew about my talent, and they said, “Nina, it's because you are Black.” And I – it shocked me – and I didn't take the time to let it sink in. I said, well, I'll just go where I can make some money to help my parents who had moved from North Carolina to Philadelphia at

that time to be with me as I studied [at Curtis.] [...] I took a job two weeks later in a popular studio playing for kids who couldn't sing worth a damn half an hour popular music. And that's how I crept in show business.⁴³

Gatekeepers at representative classical music institutions such as conservatories may sometimes be seen as embodying and manifesting pure performance values and set aesthetics, being themselves the source of authority.⁴⁴ As such, conservatories can be cesspools of abuse, despotism, and toxicity made in the name of authority, as concert pianist Walter Ponce, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of UCLA, has detailed in his book, *The Tyranny of Tradition in Piano Teaching*. Such would follow even if such faculty could not necessarily perform to their professed ideals.⁴⁵ Any maltreatment of a person of color can easily be dodged in defense of artistic integrity. Complaints are not typically heard or taken seriously.⁴⁶ The Curtis Institute's likely racially biased faculty failed Nina Simone on her entrance audition, dismissing any potential she had; her massive success would testify to their error, as she became one of the most influential musicians of her generation. Seemingly acknowledging this, in recent times, it would appear Curtis tried to atone for their past wrongdoings, hiring Michelle Cann, a Black pianist with origins from the West Indies. Cann specifically holds the Eleanor Sokoloff Chair in Piano. Eleanor Sokoloff was the wife of Vladimir Sokoloff, Simone's teacher and examiner. Vladimir Sokoloff said of Simone:

She was not a genius, but she had great talent. I accepted her on the basis of her talent, and with the understanding that I would prepare her for [another] audition at Curtis. It was during that early period that she demonstrated, at one lesson, her ability to play jazz.

⁴³ Recording Session: Interview, November 17, 1984, at Ronnie Scott's in London. Transcribed from Nina Simone, *Nina Simone on Her Experience of Racism as a Child*, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvByxvEd8qA>.

⁴⁴ Henry Kingsbury, *Music Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

⁴⁵ Walter Ponce, *The Tyranny of Tradition in Piano Teaching: A Critical History from Clementi to the Present*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2019).

⁴⁶ See Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

I remember distinctly telling her, “Why don’t you pursue this as your profession?” And she said, “Oh no, my first love is classical music, and I want to be a pianist.”⁴⁷

Racist systems of expectation often directed Black musicians to “Black” genres in this way, often in the name of authenticity, making it extremely difficult for most to enter the world of Western art music. While Sokoloff did take Simone under his wing—an initially encouraging act—he ultimately ceded to the collective discrediting of a Black woman, as would be expected in such an environment. As Sokoloff constructed genius as is usually done within the context of a conservatory, it may seem that he left certain matters of his worldview unexamined, not critiquing his personal judgments about something so elusive as “genius.”⁴⁸

Race and Authenticity

Practicing authorities claiming authenticity in the mid-20th-century often castigated the liberties of earlier generations, prizing the location of genuineness through ultra-textual fidelity. Historical documentation shows a plurality of performing approaches, with both unrestrained and restrained leanings. Realities of early music performance practices, listening dispositions, and abilities similarly entailed many possibilities, pushing against the myopia of the authenticity movement Richard Taruskin has described.⁴⁹ Earlier periods were not monolithic in the predominance of a general sense of performance approaches; many greatly opposed each other.⁵⁰ After the First World War, musical tides began changing, yielding eventually to a tendency for pianists to sound more alike than not.⁵¹ Prominent discussions of this tendency have centered on

⁴⁷ Vladimir Sokoloff, quoted in Alan Light, *What Happened, Miss Simone? A Biography* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2016).

⁴⁸Cf. Kingsbury, *Music Talent, and Performance*, chap. 3; Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Taruskin, *Text and Act*, chap. 6. "The Modern Sound of Early Music."

⁵⁰ Hamilton, *After the Golden Age*, 2008.

⁵¹Broadly, see Peres Da Costa, *Off the Record*.

the effects of high-stakes, juried competitions; editable recording technology that shaped listeners' expectations; and scientism that prompted musicology to produce critical, objective *Urtext* editions for performers.⁵² As composers began saturating scores with ever greater detail, culminating more recently with compositions of the "New Complexity," textual fundamentalism came to predominate even more strongly.

Pianos surged in popularity in marking American families as middle class after World War II. With seemingly greater numbers of Americans attempting performance, militant textualism became an answer for those less encultured and habituated to orally transmitted stylistic conventions and sensibilities. This paralleled changes in literary studies, which similarly saw more students enrolling in English literature programs after the war to earn their baccalaureates through the G.I. Bill. Many enrollees were perhaps not culturally literate enough to grasp well-established, multi-dimensional literary criticism, turning instead to closed readings that considered only the text immediately before them without many outside factors and contexts, including the author's subject position.⁵³ Such an approach to literary analysis collapsed the range of interpretive meanings. Similarly, in Western classical performances guided by textualism, the bands of permissible expression shrank toward conformity. With a greater abundance of commercial recordings, a developing pianist might essentially copy the performance of a given piano star of their day blindly, thereby influencing the rest of a studio in a back-and-forth chain of reproduction, producing a sort of musical inbreeding.

Beyond increasingly homogenized interpretative expectations in sound, standardization extended to race almost without exception. Although textualist ideology would maintain that

⁵² See Kenneth Hamilton; Robert Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁵³ In conversation with Mitchell Morris c. 2015.

only music existing in sound influences listening, the act of hearing can involve greater variables. Yet concert traditions indicate otherwise. Unless a performance lands on a “Casual Friday” (a practice only recently introduced in some venues), performers wear formal attire. In symphony halls, orchestral members wear typically formal black; soloists wear high-end and typically conservative selections. Wearing anything else runs the risk of skewing the perception of the sounded performance of a musical work. Sight influences sound. Thus, nebulous evaluation categories along these lines may include “stage presence,” “poise,” or “professionalism,” which can be formalized into a competition score digit and thus pseudo-objectified. These qualities implicitly tie to race, where ideals of beauty, dress, and even mannerisms influence how a performer is heard, for better or worse—typically worse for those of the lowest social castes.⁵⁴

Musicologist and contemporary music singer Nina Eidsheim has been subjected to awkward racialized assumptions, being a South Korean adoptee raised in Norway in her earliest years, eventually settling in the United States. Her extraordinary life experiences guided her research to consider essentialism within the field of voice studies. She explores the “acousmatic question,” which queries who a speaker is, typically race-wise. Eidsheim writes that asking this question entails that the listener expects to learn something about the individual. Ultimately, she argues that individual voices are not intrinsically racial, and that there is no essential Black or White voice and identifies how sociophysical conditioning structures the naming of race.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Cf. Jennifer L. Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do*. (New York: Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2019); Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, First edition (New York: Random House, 2020).

⁵⁵ Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2019), 7.

Eidsheim paired with linguist Jody Kreiman in examining larynxes, noting no identifiable racial differences that would predetermine a stable racial sound.

Black people are not born with “chocolaty” voices, Eidsheim would say. “Talking white,” a criticism directed toward Barack Obama, followed as if he had no right to perform such sonorities under the deep beliefs of race and sound.⁵⁶ The implications of Eidsheim’s voice studies perspective could also extend to similar assumptions about interpretative sounds coming from a pianist. As the Bolivian-born concert pianist Walter Ponce recounts, “administrators in many colleges and universities have higher regard for candidates with French or Russian accents but harbor skepticism—even occasional hostility—to someone with [a] Spanish accent—as has been my painful experience at UCLA.”⁵⁷ A pianist with sub-Saharan African ancestry may create cognitive dissonance by “playing White” if performing core works of the classical repertory. Assumptions of jazz pianism would follow, which for the Black classical pianist would produce a parallel set of problematic issues that might not be overcome readily. Because jazz had (especially in earlier decades) stirred unease around the corruption of White culture, a Black body producing White-associated European music garners suspicion on stage.

Jazz and Blackness

In more recent decades, jazz has taken on the status of “America’s classical music.”⁵⁸ Jazz pianist Billy Taylor (1921-2019) suggested that, like classical music, jazz was universal and deserved further legitimization. In drawing analogies, he noted that the most “universal” composer of all, J.S. Bach, shared similarities with earlier jazz musicians, being an improviser

⁵⁶ Eidsheim, 10.

⁵⁷ Ponce, *The Tyranny of Tradition in Piano Teaching*, 200.

⁵⁸ William “Billy” Taylor, “Jazz: America’s Classical Music,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 14:1 (Winter 1986), pp. 21-25.

who did not go to college. But because jazz was mostly an African American practice, racial animosity earlier entailed drawing noxious associations with the artform. Accordingly, during its proliferation during the 1920s, jazz saw moral panics develop around its reception, which touted fears of youth corruption and degeneration. Stanley Cohen describes moral panics thusly:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions [...]⁵⁹

A 1921 *Ladies' Home Journal* article, "Unspeakable Jazz Must Go!," warns of "sensual stimulation of the abominable jazz orchestra with its voodoo-born minors and its direct appeal to the sensory centers," admonishing the reader, "if you can believe that youth is the same after this experience as before, then God help your child."⁶⁰ The operative "Voodoo-born" label aligns with Cohen's "folk devil" notion, identifying Black people as societal miscreants threatening time-honored, decent White values.

Similarly, in a 1924 article, "What's the Matter with Jazz?" the author writes, "Jazz, at its worst, is often associated with vile surroundings, filthy words, unmentionable dances and obscene plays with which respectable Americans are so disgusted that they turn with dismay at the mere mention of 'Jazz,' which they naturally blame for the whole fearful caravan of vice and near-vice."⁶¹ The threat of Black primal jazz hexes apparently encouraging unbridled sexual relations, threatening moral decency, prompted many similar written indictments, as evidenced by another Voodoo theme, "Jazz originally was the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer,

⁵⁹ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

⁶⁰ General Research Division, The New York Public Library. John R. McMahon, "Unspeakable Jazz Must Go!" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/7f1d6e7d-d376-fbc2-e040-e00a18063dc4>

⁶¹ "What's the Matter with Jazz?" in *Etude*, XLII (January 1924), 6.

stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds.... [It] has also been employed by other barbaric people to stimulate brutality and sensuality.”⁶² The source of this quotation, “Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?” summed jazz’s basic polarity against White American religious values. With jazz threatening Christian morality, Dr. Francis E. Clark, president of the Christian Endeavor Society, saw jazz dancing as presenting “an offence against womanly purity, the very fountainhead of our family and civil life.”⁶³ Following these manifestations of moral panic, some thought jazz might be controlled like alcohol in the prohibition, writing, “this nation has been fighting booze for a long time. I am just wondering whether jazz isn’t going to have to be legislated against as well” (Figure 8).⁶⁴

The value and religious seeds of such moral panics stemmed from the lingering aftermath of slavery justification that categorized sub-Saharan African descendants as inhuman and fundamentally corrupt. Forms of mainstream racist, White Christian theology concluded that Blacks held the “curse of Ham,” an idea stemming from Genesis 9:18-25. The story tells of Ham announcing to his brothers Shem and Japheth the nakedness of their drunk father,

Wants Legislation to Stop Jazz as an Intoxicant

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Feb. 11.—Jazz music has much the same effect on young people as liquor, and should be legislated against, I. I. Cammack, Superintendent of Schools here, asserted in a speech before 1,000 public school teachers today.

“The nation has been fighting booze a long time,” Mr. Cammack said. “I am just wondering whether the jazz isn’t going to have to be legislated against as well. It seems to me that when it gets into the blood of some of our young folks, and I might add older folks, too, it serves them just about as good as a stiff drink of booze would do.

Figure 8. *New York Times*, February 12, 1922, p. 1.

Noah. Upon waking up, an angered Noah transfers his wrath to Ham’s son, crying, “Cursed be

⁶² Anne Shaw Faulkner, “Does Jazz Put the Sin into Syncopation?” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, August 21, 1921, pp. 16 & 34.

⁶³ Quoted in Frederic Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday*. New York: Bantam Books, 1931, 92.

⁶⁴ [No author] “Wants Legislation to Stop Jazz as an Intoxicant,” *New York Times*, 1922, p. 1.

Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers” (KJV). This specific curse has been used to justify much anti-Black ideology and slavery. Similarly, other racist Christian theology argued that Blacks bore the “curse of Cain,” as recounted in Genesis 4:11-16. Through this line of thinking, Blacks were slotted into the category of a dangerous folk devil, having received divine curses running through generations, thus, in part, seeding a fear of the decay of White society through jazz and “its voodoo born minors.” With religion being so firmly ingrained into individuals’ core beliefs, the associations of decay and evil with Blackness would manifest through superimposed assumptions of corrupting Black sound.

Blackness in Non-American Contexts

In Europe, Blackness did not necessarily stir the same moral panics and fears of spiritual and moral degeneracy as they did in the United States among Whites. Earlier in France’s art music scene, for instance, there were some, but not plentiful opportunities for musicians of African descent to find a measure of public success. Violinist Joseph Bologne, Saint-Georges de Chevalier (1745-1799), was an example, as was the British violinist George Bridgetower (1778-1860), the original dedicatee of Beethoven’s Kreutzer Sonata. In a non-music sphere, concurrent with America’s transition toward the one-drop rule was the 19th-century Alexandre Dumas, the famous mixed-race author of *The Count of Montecristo* and *The Three Musketeers*, whose works remain firmly in the literary canon. With a relative scarcity of Black people in Europe, encountering such a musician was uncommon; Blackness was seen as more exotic than something to disparage. Kira Thurman’s investigations reveal that the German and Austrian

presses sexualized and fetishized Black men and women. On the stage, especially in opera, this led to specifically Black women dominating opera.⁶⁵

Certain African American musicians, artists, and authors found greater acceptance in Europe, as stifling racial legalities like those in the United States were not as widespread. Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and William Johnson encountered a different kind of acceptance in France. While France's colonial brutalities were not trivial, its domestic treatment of Black Americans was perhaps cursorily more welcoming due to aspects of "negrophilia," which involved racialized fetishization. African Americans were seen as breaths of fresh air on a culture long stultified by grandiose formalities, answering orientalist desires for cultural Others.⁶⁶ About the entertainer and later civil rights activist Josephine Baker, a writer penned that her "physique and extraordinary dancing represented a cultural antidote to a civilization that had produced an effete aristocracy, flaccid bourgeoisie, and the catastrophic 'Great War.'" For others, Baker symbolized the menace of degeneration.⁶⁷ Others would expect rawness in performances by Black performers. Gérard Le Coat, disappointed about a performance not meeting his expectations, wrote, "'their show, 'done with great precision and nuance, had nothing 'truly *négre*' about it.... On one side were professionals seeking respectability that the American context refused them... [Blacks who wanted to] show Whites that they [were] just as refined. On the other side, Parisian *Gentlemen* who 'wanted' *the savage*, who [imagined] natives who have just stepped out of virgin forests. Baker and the troupe were directed by the French directors and their consultant Jacques-Charles to enact the 'primitive' in

⁶⁵ Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 9, <https://doi.org/10.7591/j.ctv1fkgt2>.

⁶⁶ Eilen Julien in "Josephine Baker's Films and the Problem of Color." In Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 49.

⁶⁷ Julien, 49-50.

the performance they would do.”⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, applying dark makeup to portray Blackness persists to the present day for characters in *Otello* or *Aida*; in American culture, the practice is often not even questioned.⁶⁹

The primal bore its mark most extensively in opera, the arena within which Black musicians have had the greatest visibility the past century. Singers, generally irrespective of race, have frequently been classified as not truly musicians and continue today to be the butt of jokes—especially sopranos—no matter their extensive training or life on the stage. Some of this may stem from the fact that singing is often a person’s first musical experience, even before reading or writing. The great Luciano Pavarotti, for instance, apparently could not read music, despite being the world’s most famous operatic tenor.⁷⁰ Singing took the status of a “natural” activity that would bypass practical training and erudition, a fact contested by walking by a singer’s studio and hearing the wide variety of vocalises and sometimes odd-sounding exercises to become more adept at singing. Essentialized views of Black musicians contributed to notions of a wonderful, direct rawness that ultimately opened the door to the operatic stage, particularly in typecast roles calling for cultural outsiders, such as the harlot “Gypsy” (Romani) Carmen, Egyptian Aida, and African American Porgy. Black women would have been seen to connect to primal and nature, as pre-conditioned listeners would have heard almost anything they sang as such.

⁶⁸ Gérard Le Coat. “Art nègre revue nègre: Esthétique primitiviste et syndrome raciste en France (1905-1935).” In *Carrefour de cultures: Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Leiner*. Ed. Régis Antoine. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993. 23-24. Trans. By Eilen Julien in “Josephine Baker’s Films and the Problem of Color.” In Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁶⁹ Naomi Adele André, Karen M. Bryan, and Eric Saylor, eds., *Blackness in Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 2.

⁷⁰ Tom Huizenga, “Pavarotti Documentary Misses All The Right Notes,” *NPR*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2019/06/07/730363989/pavarotti-documentary-misses-all-the-right-notes>.

African Americans journeying to Germany or Austria during the interwar period garnered varying responses from critics, generally faring better than they would at home, although nearly always racialized. Many reviews played on tropes of primality. Responding to a performance by Aubrey Pankey, a critic from Berlin wrote:

That which we love about the voices of a people so young at heart and in touch with nature—the smooth, unspoiled sound, the sophistication that does not allow any ugly sound or anything tasteless or violent to emerge—Mr. Pankey possesses to a high degree. Also surprising in his case, his empathetic understanding of our language, tone, and sentiment.⁷¹

Kira Thurman points out how critics heard Black singers' voices as "more anthropoidal or primal than white voices," citing a critic in the *Wiener Zeitung*, "The guttural quality of Anderson's expression lends her organ the timbre of an Italian viola."⁷² How critics would respond to a Black pianist would be complicated, as the piano—a machine of wood, steel, cast iron, and felt—was not as "natural" as the voice.

Donald Shirley had a measure of success in Europe, playing as the third pianist ever (and, needless to say, first Black pianist) at Milan's Teatro alla Scala. The opportunity to perform at a venue of this prestige and magnitude was less likely to happen in the United States. Given the associations of Blackness and the voice with rawness, Shirley's performance opportunity, although through the medium of the piano, may have appealed along similar points of interest, especially considering that La Scala was a long-established opera house that housed other Black singers satisfying fetishized gazes. With Shirley, essentialized expectations of primality would preclude the refinement expected for finely honed classical music.

⁷¹ J.S., "Ein Negerbariton," *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung*, May 14, 1932. Trans. Kira Thurman in "Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 855, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2019.72.3.825>.

⁷² "Brahms Abend Bruno Walters," *Wiener Zeitung*, June 19, 1936, 8. Trans. Thurman, 854.

Shirley prided his classical background yet went to lengths to amplify his background by distorting his training, especially where his pedigree might not carry validating name recognition. In claiming to have studied intensely at the Leningrad Conservatory, which was false according to his brother Maurice, Don Shirley probably knew it would be nearly impossible for his audience to verify, while working to his advantage by appealing to greater authority. This ploy points directly to his valuation of classical training, toward which he aspired his entire musical life, evidenced by later concerts at Carnegie Hall, where he performed a slate of classical compositions in their original forms ranging from Bach, Handel, and Chopin to Rachmaninoff. Nonetheless, the power of racially based assumptions would prove to be impossible to ward off, directly influencing Shirley's musical strategies.

Toward the “*Green Book* Style”

In the documentary film *Lost Bohemia*, Don Shirley recalls an instance of being pressured to present a contrived persona that played to stereotypes, which he found degrading. About photographs he was to take for an album cover, he reminisced, “You know what they wanted me to wear? Overalls, a red kerchief around my neck, and a sun hat. I said, ‘Are you out of your damn mind?’ I said, ‘No. I’m not that; I never have been.’” He reflected on a larger pattern of awkward racial formulae forced onto him, “I didn’t grow up in the *ghet-to*. I am not hip-hop; they didn’t even have hip-hop at the time. But they would love that. They’ve been trying to do that to me ever since I’ve been in this business.”⁷³ The “they” he was referring to were the White powerholders granting controlling access to an audience, who were also the ones who slotted him according their views of how an African American man should present himself

⁷³ Josef Astor et al., *Lost Bohemia*, Documentary (Laszlo Pictures, 2011).

along the lines of revised minstrel stock character types. Similar to the singers in the opera world, Shirley as a pianist was expected to play to preconceived paradigms.

Pianos and Social Positioning

*“Come on, man. These coons can play on anything you put in front of them.”*⁷⁴

Despite the imperfection of the focus on and detail of Shirley’s life in *Green Book*, one scene that aligns to his biography in spirit gives a clear indication of the type of pianist he was, pushing against typical racialized expectations. At the McAlister Auditorium in Hanover, Indiana (which in reality is the McAlister Auditorium at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana), Tony Lip walks into the hall before Shirley’s concert, observing a dilapidated baby grand piano on stage with discolored keys and garbage inside (Figure 9). The piano does not have its lid properly folded with the fully raised stick for a performance, a sight any experienced concert-goer would recognize as off. The stage manager refuses to furnish the stage with a Steinway, despite Shirley’s written contract and being reminded of pre-set details; he asks if it really matters for “coons.” When he insults Tony Lip, he is met with a smack on the face, and the film cuts to Shirley performing on a Steinway before the audience (Figure 10).

⁷⁴ Peter Farrelly et al., *Green Book* (Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2019), secs. 41:30–47:30. (Dialogue from Film)



Figure 9. *Green Book* (Film, 2018) - Frame of piano with garbage



Figure 10. *Green Book* (2018). Frame of the hands of Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali) playing a Steinway.

Relative to Shirley's recorded performances, the music of this selection would have been perhaps the simplest for Kris Bowers to write down in dictation and for the non-pianist actor, Mahershala Ali, to simulate in performance. What Shirley plays here in the film is "Happy Talk" from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, with the piano playing in monodic octaves in a string trio format with upbeat punctuations of occasional seventh chords. Although not Shirley's most representative work, which will be studied in the following chapter, the selection underscores a possible reference to civil rights inclusivity for which he had been fighting. Juanita Hall, the original star playing Liat's mother, known as "Bloody Mary" in the musical, was of African American descent. Her Tonkinese daughter, "Liat," was played by France Nuyen, a pioneering Vietnamese actress, and Liat's lover Lieutenant Cable was played by John Kerr, a White American actor. The scene amounts to an implied informal wedding ceremony, officiated by Bloody Mary, who stands as a figure smoothing over racial differences while also exhibiting racialized traits of unscrupulousness.

Despite its blatant orientalism, *South Pacific* was progressive for its exploration of race relations for its time. In the South, the musical incurred accusations of communist sympathies, then considered anti-American and treasonous. Georgia state legislators said that one of its numbers "contained an underlying philosophy inspired by Moscow" and set to introduce a bill to outlaw it.⁷⁵ Although Shirley was not so bold as to perform "You've Got to be Carefully Taught," the number that sparked this controversy, playing anything from *South Pacific*, especially this interracial number, pointed to visions of inclusion. The film successfully

⁷⁵ *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 March 1953 (Clipping in Box 4, Folder F, South Pacific Correspondence Files, Oscar Hammerstein collection, Library of Congress).

highlighted an aspect of fighting reductive assumptions that would not even afford him an instrument responsive to his pianism.

From a sociological standpoint, the exclusionary elitism behind Western classical music contributes to its appeal and function, signaling wealth, cultivation, and refinement. As class often overlaps with race, classical music often stands in for proper Whiteness, as opposed to fringe Whiteness, such as the idea of so-called “White trash.”⁷⁶ In the booming economy of the postwar years, pianos and piano teachers entering American homes that followed became frequent. The costs of becoming even a moderately accomplished musician are high. In today’s currency, weekly or biweekly piano lessons given by a well-credentialed teacher typically run between \$70 and \$250 per hour in a region like Los Angeles or the San Francisco Bay Area. Over the years, additional costs accumulate, through such things as summer programs, which require long-distance airfare and high tuition, along with competition fees, a costly performing wardrobe, and fetish objects such as Henle *Urtext* or Bärenreiter editions that adhere to the greatest textual fidelity.

As repertoire becomes more advanced during training years, the variables of expression increase. If a pianist is to perform with a wide palate of “tone colors”—such as absolute volume levels modified by the depth of pedal use (thus affecting sympathetic vibrations) and various factors of touch and dynamic shading—the pianist can quickly run out of options with an inadequate instrument. Similar factors are associated with keys. For fast-tempo pieces, a pianist might have the sensation of flying off if the keys are too light, leading to fatigue or a loss of control. Higher speeds are also compromised if the keys are too heavy, which additionally can be

⁷⁶ For a larger study on “White trash,” see Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

deleterious to the body. Not all pianos lend themselves to the same results. For a pianist to have a larger set of options for expressive purposes, generally, the more expensive the piano, the better. As the student progresses, not just any piano will suffice; a decent entry to a mid-range piano in acceptable condition will run from \$10,000 to about \$35,000.

On concert stages, the standard piano is the Steinway D; in music studios, professional practice spaces, or possibly smaller recital halls, the B dominates. Other high-end piano manufacturers are mostly Austro-German, including Bösendorfer, Blüthner, Grotrian-Steinweg, and Bechstein. Prominent exceptions include the flagship models of the Italian Fazioli and Japanese Shigeru-Kawai and Yamaha (CFX). Collectively, these represent the most capable and prestigious pianos; others are rare in serious in Western classical spaces. New, the prices for these instruments range from ca. \$80,000-\$275,000+, prohibitively expensive for many.⁷⁷

The impulse behind creating ever more responsive instruments that offer affordances to the most discriminating musician has moved in lockstep with the development of the *Werktreue* paradigm in expressing a composer's supposed ideals. Faithfully realizing a musical work set to notation implies a listening base who may perceive subtle differences. And, hearing such differences implies an engaged form of listening where the auditor gives undivided attention to a performance primarily based on sound. Thus, the listener carefully follows matters tightly related to the score—development, growth, harmony, counterpoint, musical *topoi*, touch, and tone—and pays mind to how the performer elucidates such elements, establishes interrelations, or

⁷⁷ For estimates of piano prices, see the more recent versions of Larry Fine, *2008-2009 Annual Supplement to the Piano Book: Buying & Owning a New or Used Piano / Larry Fine*. (Boston, Mass: Brookside Press, 2008); and “Blue Book of Pianos,” 2015, <http://www.bluebookofpianos.com/pin.htm>.

introduces differences. The nature of an aesthetic experience involving hyper engagement along the dimensions of sound entails idealized listening.

Shirley's preferred instrument was the 8'11 3/4" Steinway D concert grand. In his apartment over Carnegie Hall, this instrument was the focal point of his living space, acting like a mandala—an object of fundamental, near-religious devotion. Shirley was a Steinway artist for forty years, which entailed that he, as with anyone with the title, owned and exclusively performed on a Steinway whenever possible. Performing as a Steinway artist was one way to situate oneself socially within the sphere of concert music. As with other performing artists, Shirley turned to all means possible to give himself an edge in favorable reception. Steinway's amassed social capital comes from years of endorsements and aggressive marketing, which made the firm a monopoly of sorts in the area of hierarchical instrumental legitimacy, which some could leverage to their benefit.

Today, Steinway's instruments continue to command near idolatry in the world of classical piano, acting as social tokens attesting to membership in an exclusive club. A status symbol, like an expensive luxury or sports car, the Steinway is an object that places one within a very particular social niche, regardless of performing prowess.⁷⁸ To be a "Steinway Artist" is to gain social and musical credibility of standard recognition. With an ever-increasing level of homogenization in piano performance moving along the lines of the *Werktreue* and *Texttreue* paradigms, certainly true by the 1940s for Shirley during his launch, performing as a classical

⁷⁸Some pianos may entail even more elite automobile comparisons. Concert pianist Garrick Ohlsson, once called the Bösendorfer the "Rolls Royce of pianos." Just before performing, Steinway hauled away the piano he was to play for his recital, which Ohlsson remarked "was enormously vindictive." Steinway thus carefully constructed an idea that one should not even call him or herself a concert pianist who does not perform and practice on Steinway instruments alone. See Michael Z. Wise. "Piano Versus Piano." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 08 May 2004.

concert pianist was to have a style somewhat on par with other well-received pianists. The instrument itself contributed to this. According to Steinway, their pianos were the preferred instruments of 97% of concert pianists, a number released just a year before Shirley died.



Figure 11: "Steinway Sets the Stage" from <http://www.steinway.com/artists> Accessed 13 March 2015

Besides social clout, the sonic dimension of playing on a Steinway pointed in Shirley's case to a very niche space of music performance of idealized listening, most readily encountered with classical music. To Shirley, performing beyond the bounds of entertainment-based music meant approaching the ideals of Western classical concert music to realize fine-grained subtlety

in expression. Access to a finely capable piano was crucial to him. In Steinway's online, overt promotional material, Shirley's executor, Michael Kappeyne, said:

This was important to him because he consciously constructed harmonies with as much overlap in the overtone series as could theoretically be achieved. It is this technique that allowed him to devise a breathtaking dynamic range, from pppp to ffff, filling the largest concert hall, without ever making a banging or unpleasant sound. When he performed with bass and cello, he mentally considered the overtone series these instruments produced and made them resonate with the piano soundboard, creating that amazing sound and dynamic range he was known for.⁷⁹

Although strongly oriented to marketing and pitched toward selling pianos, Kappeyne's words point toward Shirley's performing disposition. About sonority, John Scoulios recounted of his time in Shirley's apartment, "I was over there every day for many years, and I think — during those times I was under the piano studying [mathematics]— I heard sonorities in Doc's music that nobody else has ever heard. It was magical."⁸⁰ The associations of a Steinway distinguishing Shirley in the public's eye made it likelier that he would be heard seriously through greater engagement. Away from the public's gaze, Shirley could return to his Carnegie Hall apartment to remind himself of his ideals and better shape and structure his performances with a greater variety of tone colors and responsiveness of the instrument's action. Such might especially be the case after potentially performing a less-than-optimal piano in a non-concert hall venue.

Because pianos were incredibly popular, initially preceding radio as instruments to perform popular Tin Pan Alley music, and because of their boom following the Second World War, mass-produced, consumer-grade instruments were made available to shoppers looking for a bargain while trying to gain some of the social prestige associated with ownership. Therefore, different sensitivities to listening would result. The finest concert grands offering many musical

⁷⁹ Laura Smith, "Alone with Bess - Donald Shirley's Life on His Steinway - Steinway & Sons," accessed September 8, 2021, <https://www.steinway.com/news/features/don-shirley-green-book>.

⁸⁰ Smith.

affordances contrasted to upright and spinet pianos, the latter of which were mass manufactured to meet the demands of an aspiring and upwardly mobile middle class, especially from ca. 1940-1970. Spinet pianos—small instruments with cumbersome indirect blow actions— however, cannot play any kind of music well, as key response is greatly diminished and inharmonicity due to small-scale design adversely affects tone. Music with great sonority, many simultaneous contrapuntal lines, high speed, or great delicacy may be next to impossible to perform on spinets or other inexpensive pianos. Such a piano would bring a level of associated mediocrity and lack of accomplishment, which might arise from playing habitually to a hypothetical, proverbial middlebrow audience. Shirley had to distinguish himself sonically and socially by establishing the right company with an appropriate instrument.

The problem with music of the middlebrow, namely in the venues where Donald Shirley performed, is that it often meant he would not be heard or afforded respect. Popular American forms like minstrelsy and vaudeville functioned at the expense of the respectability of Black people, jesting through dehumanizing stock character types, which presented African Americans as lazy, stupid, buffoonish, subservient, morally deficient, and sex-crazed.⁸¹ The problem of the middlebrow for Donald Shirley was that in not performing in a concert hall on an ideal instrument, demanding silence and reverence for the music and performance, he ran higher risks of not being seen as an artist, but rather as an entertainer, providing a means to indulge in baser sentiments. With the automatic assumptions of music of the middlebrow entailing historically racist undertones (the basis for the term in the first place), the challenge for classically leaning Donald Shirley was to ward off debasing prejudgment. Considering the implications of his

⁸¹ See Robert C. Toll, *Blackening up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* / Robert C. Toll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

apartment above New York's Carnegie Hall aids in attaining a richer understanding of his dispositions that departs from a reductive categorization.

A Carnegie Hall Disposition



Figure 12. Carnegie Hall Studio Towers. Photo: Josef Astor, as appearing in Wendy Goodman, "Bohemia in Midtown," New York Magazine, December 27, 2007, <https://nymag.com/homedesign/greatrooms/42385/>.

For most of its existence, Carnegie Hall's incorporated property counted nearly 170 studios serving as apartments, community teaching spaces, and the like from 1894 (beginning of construction) to 2010 (Figure 12). Musicians, visual artists, actors, writers, and other creative practitioners renting these studios formed a Bohemian artists' colony, following the original desire of Andrew Carnegie. Located in two side towers and in a space directly above the hall, the studios provided a revenue stream that supported the concert hall and also an opportunity for like-minded individuals to ally together in mutual inspiration. Prominent tenants included Leonard Bernstein, Marlon Brando, Yves Saint-Laurent, and other influential figures. With

commercialization eventually taking over through the newer Carnegie Corporation, the hall's original mission moved away from its original ideals. Beholden to a masterplan of renovation, the Carnegie Corporation would eventually push out its renters through eviction and other coercive measures. By 2010, Elizabeth Sargent, its final tenant, vacated her studio and demolition crews moved in. In the name of profit, this was preceded by an earlier attempt decades earlier to tear down Carnegie Hall altogether to build a high-rise in the 1960s, which violinist Isaac Stern thwarted by raising funds for New York City to purchase the site.⁸²

Don Shirley was among the tenants who had such an apartment studio, living above Carnegie Hall in Apt. 130 on the thirteenth floor (Figure 13) for over 50 years beginning in 1956. The space was unusual, especially given its desirable midtown location, with its 34-foot ceilings accommodating the sound of his Steinway D and its natural light; Shirley was ideally set up to practice, and on several occasions, perform downstairs.⁸³ Although he was an outlier in many ways, having a set of unlikely material factors working in his favor gave Shirley social position and social distinction, placing him among the kinds of musicians who might arise only once a generation.⁸⁴ Carnegie Hall's studios defied convention and were crucial to enabling Shirley to feel camaraderie with kindred neighbors and enjoy the constant company of world-class artists performing just beneath his living room. Thus, having frequent interaction rituals, to evoke sociologist Randall Collins, Shirley would have had ample opportunities to replenish his

⁸² Associated Press. "Last Carnegie Hall Tenant Forced from Studios That Nourished a Century of America's Top Talent." (Fox News, March 26, 2015), <https://www.foxnews.com/us/last-carnegie-hall-tenant-forced-from-studios-that-nourished-a-century-of-americas-top-talent>.

⁸³ Wendy Goodman, "Bohemia in Midtown," New York Magazine, December 27, 2007, <https://nymag.com/homedesign/greatrooms/42385/>.

⁸⁴See Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, First Back Bay paperback edition (New York: Back Bay Books, 2011); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Routledge, 2014).

emotional energy in an exchange of cultural capital that would invigorate him as he pursued his pianism at a high level over five decades.⁸⁵

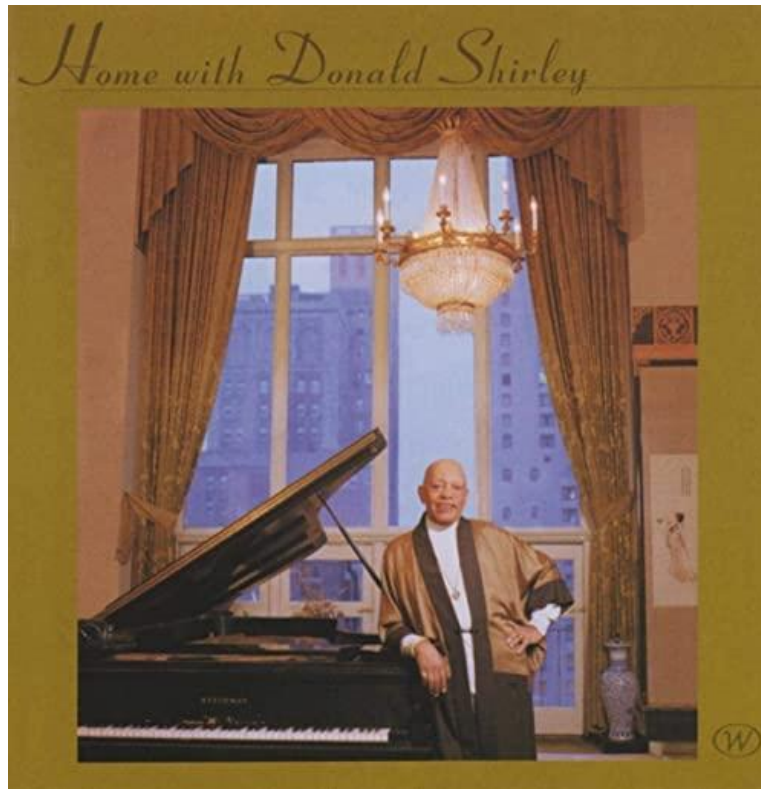


Figure 13. *Home with Donald Shirley*. (Walbridge Music Company, 2001)

Performing live has long been at the core of a classical pianist's activity. In Shirley's case, actively strategizing through touring was a necessary means to push against the color line and create some kind of career. Before the recording era, some audiences might hear a staple work only once in their lives, as opposed to having the convenience to push a play button at their will. Travelling concert pianists provided a vital, practical service to music. While the 19th century gave birth to the *Werktreue* paradigm, the era still lent itself more to the personality of the performer, at whose mercy it existed. Less standardized than today, the span of virtuoso pianism ranged from a cold, calculating Sigismund Thalberg to a free-spirited Franz Liszt, who

⁸⁵ Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 1, "Coalitions of the Mind."

commanded a large fandom, with women fighting over his discarded cigar butts and other odd paraphernalia. Romantic pianists connected more directly to their audiences, becoming huge public presences in large settings or cultivating often-keen intellectuals in salon circles.

After the Romantic era, performing live before different audiences remained crucial to success. As radio gained more and more steam during Shirley's career launch, audiences could conceivably become acquainted with broadcasted recordings, bypassing some of the immediate assumptions that might accrue to seeing a person of color perform, and fostering greater receptiveness for in-person performances. Relative to the Civil Rights Movement, Don Shirley's concert activity was his form of activism; his presence contradicted race-based assumptions. He developed a *Green Book* Style to approach being heard as a classical concert pianist, avoiding the overt "Blacksound," which necessitated that Shirley show his face as a Black man in the flesh so listeners would register his presence.⁸⁶ Touring in person meant he could connect to audiences as human beings and, in turn, find greater points of similarities rather than differences.

Youth's naïveté typically does not constrain dreaming, yet during his formative years, Shirley would not have imagined the shape his future music career would take, nor would he have necessarily aspired toward it by choice, despite its innovation. His résumé shows earlier high-profile appearances with the Boston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, Hollywood Bowl, and Chicago Orchestras, with performances of his compositions by the London and New York

⁸⁶ See Matthew D. Morrison, "Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 781–823, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2019.72.3.781>. Morrison defines "Blacksound" thus: "Blacksound is the sonic and embodied legacy of blackface performance as the origin of all popular music, entertainment, and culture in the United States. The term does not purport to stand in for the myriad of complex black sounds produced by black people. Rather, it reveals the material and ephemeral remnants of the sounds and performances (what I refer to as "intellectual performance property") produced by African Americans since the antebellum era, from their development in localized contexts to their "popular" or seemingly race-neutral packaging in the commercial music industry."

Philharmonic orchestras.⁸⁷ Also, he purportedly had a session with “Mr. Rachmaninoff,”⁸⁸ and received praise from Igor Stravinsky. However, without classical concert management, Shirley’s constraints led to a very particular musical strategy and style, which I will discuss in the next chapter through considering several examples. He made the best of a bigoted situation through innovation. Although his musical directions were novel, he would primarily perform in venues he would grow increasingly to despise: nightclubs. Reflecting on his musical life at the age of 55, he noted that basic respect was of continual importance to him, as quoted at the head of this chapter.

In dodging labels regarding his specific repertoire, the pianist said, “I got around this business of what kind of music I play by calling it the music of Don Shirley, a miniconcert series.”⁸⁹ Nonetheless, because classical music generally discourages the alteration of original works as artistic heresy, Shirley lay outside the sacrosanct realm of the officially sanctioned musical highbrow. Not strictly playing “covers” of various hits from popular music, this would likewise take him out of a lowbrow musical realm, and possibly place him somewhere in the middle, a no-man’s land where decoding who he was continues to pose challenges.

Shirley cleaved closely to his originally cherished body of canonic classical performing repertory, although among the 35 albums (with further reissues), none were completely dedicated to the category.⁹⁰ Shirley desired greatly to distance himself from anything that removed him from consideration as a classical performer, but especially from alignment with myopic, anti-

⁸⁷ Fraser, “Don Shirley at Cookery Making a ‘Comeback.’”

⁸⁸ Quoted in Anthony Weller et al., “Op-Ed: ‘Green Book’ Doesn’t Do Justice to Don Shirley’s Brilliant Musicianship,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-weller-don-shirley-green-book-20190203-story.html>.

⁸⁹ Fraser, “Don Shirley at Cookery Making a ‘Comeback.’”

⁹⁰ This number comes from Nathan Kramer’s website, “Don Shirley - Recordings,” accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.nathankramer.com/donshirley/recordings.htm>, which comprehensively lists Shirley’s albums.

Black stereotypes. Reportedly, he almost changed his name twice due to problematic associations related to performing in nightclubs. Shirley eschewed the title “jazz musician,” saying of jazz pianists that they “smoke while they’re playing, and they’ll put the glass of whisky on the piano, and then they’ll get mad when they’re not respected like Arthur Rubinstein. You don’t see Arthur Rubinstein smoking and putting a glass on the piano.”⁹¹ Because musical copyrights and legal sidelining would treat jazz musicians as second class, Shirley resented being labeled as one. He lamented:

The musicians’ union, right this minute, does not regard jazz as art, they regard it as labor. I even have to get a new union card. I don’t have to worry about this kind of mess when I’m on the concert stage, but the moment I go into a club I have to have all this stuff - a cabaret license and all that mess. No concert artist in the world has to have that.⁹²

Caught between a social world with which he did not identify and one that would not quite have him, Shirley’s pianism would innovate through forced compromise, ultimately reflecting a greater diversity of Blackness than often assumed of him.

In her *Esquire* review of *Green Book*, Gabrielle Bruney writes, “Though Dr. Shirley was certainly more talented than all but a few of his contemporaries, the film’s insistence that a black man who appreciates well-tailored suits, speaks Italian, and is fond of French Opera was something akin to a UFO is its most insidious suggestion of all.”⁹³ Shirley was not trying to be something he was not, or “uppity” and “bougie.” Unfortunate stereotypes about Black people preclude that there are various levels of wealth and social distinction, especially a level of Black elite who may have great affluence, connections, and education. African American psychiatrist Dr. Carlotta Miles lamented about this, remarking, “We’re invisible because we don’t match the

⁹¹ Fraser, “Don Shirley at Cookery Making a ‘Comeback.’”

⁹² Fraser.

⁹³ Gabrielle Bruney, “The Problems With ‘Green Book’ Start with Its Title, and Don’t Stop Coming,” *Esquire*, February 23, 2019, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/movies/a26486233/green-book-true-story-explained/>.

stereotype. The stereotype for Black Americans is poverty, failure, victimization, and mediocrity.”⁹⁴ Harvard Law School graduate, Lawrence Graham, an African American of upper-crust Black society, detailed much of the history and cultural dynamics of this group. In more recent decades, this social bracket would hold debutante balls and exclusive networking events, own high-priced homes, and have vacations at Martha’s Vineyard.⁹⁵ Those of this social class might have partaken in weekly piano lessons and enjoyed culture more often linked to Europe, listening the music of Wagner, Mozart, or Coleridge-Taylor⁹⁶ Willard B. Gatewood refutes the idea of a homogenous Black people, suggesting even a “black aristocracy.”⁹⁷ Some cultural traits were shared with middleclass Blacks.⁹⁸ Earlier in the 19th-century antebellum South, some Black women, including mixed race women of color, “performed” gentility and took to taking lessons featuring notated music, even if enslaved in some cases. Candace Bailey’s studies reveal, through archival research, microhistories of several case examples of this, through her consideration of notices in wills, inventory, receipts, photographs, sketches, and so forth.⁹⁹

Acknowledging the diversity of African American cultural strata is key to assuaging reductive bias in listening. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Shirley’s music, innovative as it was, would have been slotted into the so-called “middlebrow” category by official culture,

⁹⁴ TalkBLACKAtl, *CNNs Black in America 2 Black Upper Class*, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhol7BFBxTk>; “Black in America 2 - Stories on Family, Education, and Employment - Civil Rights, Racial Discrimination, and Violence - CNN.Com,” accessed February 18, 2022, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2009/black.in.america/>.

⁹⁵ Lawrence Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

⁹⁶ Lura Beam, *He Called Them by Lightning: A Teacher’s Odyssey in the Negro South, 1908-1919* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 40; Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington: Ransdell, 1940), 246, 248; Daniel Murray to George A. Myers, January 21, 1901, George A. Myers Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus. As referenced in Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Fayetteville, Ark: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).

⁹⁷ Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 7.

⁹⁸ See E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisier*. 1st Free Press paperbacks ed. (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997).

⁹⁹ Candace Bailey, *Unbinding Gentility: Women Making Music in the Nineteenth-Century South*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021, Chap. 2.

presuming either that 1) his performances were unsatisfactory dilutions of classical masterworks or 2) his music was meant for entertainment, not to be listened to actively or seriously. Shirley expanded the definition of art music, adopting similar ideals and goals that paralleled more mainstream expressions and canonical works. Studying Shirley opens up the possibility of a more probing consideration into the middlebrow problem, where, to an extent, Shirley was damned if he did, and damned if he didn't, no matter his strategies and musical results. The purpose of this study is not to focus solely on an unfortunate situation but to grasp how his music might be heard more appropriately and more richly through understanding his aesthetics, his semiosis, and his translation of unique experiences into sound. Shirley as a case study opens further questions to approaching such a large body of musical work—the musical middlebrow—that normally evades discussion entirely. Moving past normally myopic assumptions behind one-dimensional monolithic Blackness, leaving no room for examining broader expressions approaching the category of “classical music,” Shirley’s music testifies to broader tastes and cultural proclivities of African Americans that resist common stereotypes defining an apparent sonic color line.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Middlebrow Problem

The musical “middlebrow,” an awkward catch-all term lumping many dissimilar musics and musicians together not fitting neatly into “high art” or popular music designations, offers much to study (Figure 1 and 2). The terms “highbrow,” “middlebrow,” and “lowbrow” derive from the long-discredited pseudoscience of phrenology, which linked intelligence to skull shape and size. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* lays out, the middlebrow, a derogatory term, categorizes one as only moderately intelligent and having only average cultural interests. Phrenology placed different peoples and races along a spectrum of mental superiority based on skull shapes, measured with “craniometers.” Northern Europeans put themselves on top of the totem and placed sub-Saharan Africans on the bottom. The matter of Black classical musicians attempting to dodge persisting, antiquated phrenological notions remained a challenge, particularly in being heard. Shirley’s story is one of negotiating his way through what I call the “middlebrow problem,” an issue of being taken seriously enough to be heard with active engagement by a listening audience.

Despite his auspicious launch onto the classical stage as a concert pianist with nowhere to go but up in his growth as an artist—Igor Stravinsky declared Shirley’s “virtuosity worthy of the gods”—Shirley could not quite overcome the racism tied to white European-based high culture in the United States. He met various flavors of racism throughout his musical career, including overt Jim Crow restrictions, outright bigotry, and a lack of support from those who might have forged paths and career possibilities for him. Thus, Sol Hurok, one of the most prominent

impresarios of the 20th century, unreservedly told Shirley that audiences in the United States would not accept a “colored” pianist performing on stage.

EVERYDAY TASTES FROM HIGH-BROW TO

	CLOTHES	FURNITURE	USEFUL OBJECTS	ENTERTAINMENT	SALADS
HIGH-BROW 	 TOWN Fuzzy Harris tweed suit, no hat COUNTRY Fuzzy Harris tweed suit, no hat	 Eames chair, Kurt Verson lamp	 Decanter and ash tray from chemical supply company	 Ballet	 Greens, olive oil, wine vinegar, ground salt, ground pepper, garlic, unwashed salad bowl
UPPER MIDDLE-BROW 	 TOWN Brooks suit, regimental tie, felt hat COUNTRY Quiet tweed jacket, knitted tie	 Empire chair, converted sulphure lamp	 Silver cigaret box with wedding uhers' signatures	 Theater	 Same as high-brow but with tomatoes, avocado, Roquefort cheese added
LOWER MIDDLE-BROW 	 TOWN Splashy necktie, double-breasted suit COUNTRY Sport shirt, colored slacks	 Grand Rapids Chippendale chair, bridge lamp	 His and Hers towels	 Musical extravaganza films	 Quartered iceberg lettuce and store dressing
LOW-BROW  <i>Tom Perle</i>	 TOWN Loafer jacket, worn shoes COUNTRY Old Army clothes	 Mail order overstuffed chair, fringed lamp	 Balsam-stuffed pillow	 Western movies	 Coleslaw

Figure 1. Life Magazine's Brow Categories (Apr. 11, 1949, pp. 100)

LOW-BROW ARE CLASSIFIED ON CHART

DRINKS	READING	SCULPTURE	RECORDS	GAMES	CAUSES
 <p>A glass of "adequate little" red wine</p>	 <p>"Little magazines," criticism of criticism, avant garde literature</p>	 <p>Calder</p>	 <p>Boch and before, Ives and after</p>	 <p>Go</p>	 <p>Art</p>
 <p>A very dry Martini with lemon peel</p>	 <p>Solid nonfiction, the better novels, quality magazines</p>	 <p>Maillol</p>	 <p>Symphonies, concertos, operas</p>	 <p>The Game</p>	 <p>Planned parenthood</p>
 <p>Bourbon and ginger ale</p>	 <p>Book club selections, mass circulation magazines</p>	 <p>Front yard sculpture</p>	 <p>Light opera, popular favorites</p>	 <p>Bridge</p>	 <p>P. T. A.</p>
 <p>Beer</p>	 <p>Pulps, comic books</p>	 <p>Parlor sculpture</p>	 <p>Jukebox</p>	 <p>Craps</p>	 <p>The Lodge</p>

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE 101

Figure 2. Life Magazine's Brow Categories (Apr. 11, 1949, p. 101)

Defining the Green Book Style (GBS)

Shirley steered his musicianship with *Green Book*-like principles, inventing what I call the “*Green Book*” style of piano playing, which, like the travel guide, attempted to rescue dignity and livelihood in an impossible situation. Ultimately, the “*Green Book Style*” served to stimulate engaged, serious listening practices more emblematic of classical rather than entertainment-leaning music. Speaking directly about his style, Shirley remarked that he attempted “[to utilize and exhaust existing forms of serious music, applying them to American popular music.]”¹ This led to his approach to arranging: blending the classical and popular elements within his transcriptions, in effect presenting “high art” shibboleths, which appropriately disposed listeners might hear as such, leading them to reclassify Shirley as a more serious performer. Sprinkling snippets of the piano’s core repertory throughout his performances, like Easter eggs, allowed him to adapt musical techniques from European classical music so that encultured listeners might recognize flashes of an emergent classical musicality that would ordinarily not be heard in the venues he frequented as a performer, such as nightclubs or private house parties of the wealthy.

This resulted in an approach to re-composition and arranging that incorporated Tin Pan Alley songs, Broadway showtunes, and folk music, as well as jazz and blues, which placed him on the right side of the color line in racialized audile space. In carving a unique, hybridized repertory through piano fantasies and arrangements in chamber settings, using classical techniques to modulate popular material, Shirley crafted a career as a concert pianist, even if it did not follow his initial hopes.

¹ From “Don Shirley Plays “How High The Moon” - 1955 TV Program - YouTube,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6XZ7XiNdi8>

Shirley's *Green Book* Style relies centrally on maintaining and promoting basic respectability, which for him meant creating the possibility to be heard as a human being worthy of dignity. Focal to a classical concert pianist is subtle nuance. To hear and discern an interpretation, a listener must follow closely, paying heed to sensitive musical differences. A classical pianist not given basic respect cannot exist fully as a sensitive artist. Having had the lowest bestowal of dignity conferred by dominant society, African Americans have not been able to exist in classical piano culture with a degree of international success. As classical music forms its very foundation on social, racial, and class differences, automatically, "Black concert pianists" as a concept has quietly been deemed oxymoronic. Largely, Black classical pianists cannot be heard because of unequal, biased listening, conscious or unconscious. As Nina Eidsheim argues, it is not the individual performing, rather the individual listening who answers what she calls "the acousmatic question" regarding the nature of the person performing.² A Black pianist expected to entertain—provide background music for ambience, dancing, eating, smoking, drinking, or conversing—would not be necessarily heard as one would be in a classical concert hall marked by silence, stillness, and focused attention. For Shirley, playing in a nightclub almost meant not being heard as a musician presenting ideas, but as a generic prop to disregard altogether.

² Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 9–14.

Reading Shirley's Artistry through his Living Space



Figure 3. Shirley's Carnegie Hall apartment. Photo 1.



Figure 4. Shirley's Carnegie Hall apartment. Photo 2.



Figure 5. Shirley's Carnegie Hall apartment, Photo 3.

The sources of Shirley's "serious Easter eggs" that would render him audible may trace to his living space itself. Shirley's apartment, marked by a sundry assortment of knick-knacks,

may seem of dispensable importance (Figures 3-5). The objects, however, shed insight into his artistic disposition and pianism. Each object tells a story and holds personal significance, even if no unified theme prevails. Among the most conspicuous of his apartment's objects is the grand crystal chandelier hanging above his piano, which recalls a pre-war disposition for luxury and extravagance. In Shirley's private living space, the chandelier would remind him of his ideals where his music was best situated, Carnegie Hall, which just below him had numerous chandeliers that illuminated the spaces for the great artists of his time.

Liberace, Shirley's philosophical nemesis, placed a variant of the chandelier—a candelabra—on his piano to signify gentility. Liberace took inspiration from the 1945 biographical film about Chopin, *A Song to Remember*, which prominently displayed one in an elegant, 19th-century decorative aesthetic.³ Liberace utilized candelabras for his glittery public persona, which lent itself to an equivalent piano style bedecked with sparkling arpeggios running up and down the length of the keyboard, wowing bedazzled audiences.⁴ Shirley's private chandelier reflected not calculated brilliance of a Vegas-like surface but inward authenticity, as it illuminated the musical works of "the greats" he so valued. The chandelier's light shone on Shirley's burnished interiority and Truth, aligning to the musical mores of idealism.

Shirley's menagerie showcased a myriad of other objects, including big and bright candelabras, glass, Chinese lanterns, paintings, books, framed photographs, a mannequin with ethnic garb, a rice hat, and plush chairs. Posing with his fine articles, Shirley sports a regal robe. These mementos, souvenirs of a life well-lived, would have become easy talking pieces when

³ Darden Asbury Pyron, *Liberace: An American Boy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 94.

⁴ See Pheaross Graham, "Liberace's Surfaces: Democratic Virtuosity, American Fantasies, and Vegas Pianism." *Viva Las Vegas: Music and Myth in America's City of Second Chances*, edited by Jake Johnson (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2022) [Forthcoming]

showing hospitality to guests. Collectively, Shirley's home items may suggest a level of personal sophistication to an unassuming visitor and possible latent peculiarity on second glances.

Donald Shirley married Jean C. Hill in 1952. Their marriage did not last, and he attributed its dissolution to a lack of time due to professional obligations. In his words, he said, "I didn't have the constitution to do a husband act as well as a concert pianist act because I was dead set on being what I had been trained all my life to be."⁵ Ultimately, he never confirmed his sexuality one way or another, although *Green Book* presents him as a closeted homosexual, an interpretation supported in part by his interest in décor and exotic objects. This possibility might well have informed other aspects of his life, including his musicianship.

Camp normally functions within oppositional frameworks contrary to "serious," classical music. In many cases, camp exists in seemingly serious spaces, pointing to subtexts not registering to all.⁶ Camp offers a means for marginalized groups to recognize each other in otherwise unexpected places, aiding in building community. Camp can thus be beneficial to psychological health in otherwise restrictive environments not offering inclusion.⁷ In Shirley's case, his performance approach relied on aspects of camp to an unusual effect.

Shirley's living space and failed marriage open discussions centering around possible dispositions toward camp. Rather than covertly signify queer subculture through his music via camp, I propose that he used modes of camp as an analogous means to signal his membership to "high" musical art, thus changing perceptions of him and his artistry. Shirley employs what I call "serious camp," which does not suggest high art music for the sake of jest but to reorient and

⁵ Don Shirley in Josef Astor, *Lost Bohemia* (DVD) 2010.

⁶ For a clear discussion on camp, see Raymond Knapp, *Making Light: Haydn, Musical Camp, and the Long Shadow of German idealism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 218.

⁷ Knapp, 218.

recalibrate his auditors' listening disposition to hear him as a classical musician functioning within musical idealism. Shirley's use of serious camp amounted to an act of sincerity, which aligned to further acts of the middlebrow in elevating the prestige of popular music he had used as source material.

In appealing subtly to listeners to recognize that he indeed had "high art" musicianship, Shirley sprinkled throughout his performances snippets of the piano's core repertory, and incorporated as well musical techniques adapted from European classical music. This paralleled the objects sprinkled throughout his Carnegie Hall apartment. Accustomed and cultured listeners might recognize sparks of a classical musicality that would ordinarily not make its way into the venues he regularly performed in. To offer a general camp-analogue theory of the operation of his pianism, his classically inflected musicality functioned like hidden, serious "Easter eggs," which listeners would find to their delight like lures on a fishing line. Because the sorts of musical quotations Shirley includes in his performances are not from the "25 greatest classical hits," as might have been the case with Liberace, Shirley piques the ears of listeners not swept away by the surface gloss of those aspiring to classes not quite theirs. However, most of his quotations are not so esoteric as to be recognized by an elite few; Shirley abstained from the likes of William Byrd, Josquin, Olivier Messiaen—or, put differently, "Before Bach, after Ives."

The kinds of musical quotations Shirley incorporated reside firmly within the works of the core repertory. These snippets, recognizable to regular listeners of concert music, stimulate the ears to more engaged, idealized listening, functioning as sonic shibboleths, recreating the environment of Carnegie Hall just below his apartment. At times, as well, Shirley does include snippets that are less recognizable to even more experienced listeners, which function more as an extension of his own personal idealism.

In the sorts of social situations where he performed, one might imagine the socializing that would follow his recently engaged listeners. One might come up to him and say, “I thought I heard some Bach in your performance.” Shirley would then reply affirmatively, now positioned as a more classically oriented pianist, not a non-literate nightclub performer blending into the background. Alternatively, if Shirley did not encounter listeners able to discern what he was doing, he could still expand on his musical quotations as talking pieces to illuminate his more engaged listeners following his performance, as he might have done with visitors as he talked about the items adorning his home. Conceivably, as evidenced by his few Carnegie Hall concerts, he would have been able to play works more in their original forms when the timing was right.⁸ In any case, his listening possibilities, even if only rationalized in his mind, would have aligned to German musical idealism. His “serious Easter eggs” served him as a Black man finding audibility as a musician within the high art space of Whites, thus building community and making recognition possible.

There is a certain irony of his approach, as the music he desired to head toward eschewed referential material. Employing quotations or borrowed techniques functioned as referential signposts, directing idealist, engaged listening. This contrasted to using classical music to signify, perhaps in a generic sense, haute culture and class fantasizing, as would be encountered more readily with Liberace, Vegas-type musical entertainment. Serious camp within the *Green Book* Style finds further corroboration in conjunction with his promotional materials. With his background in psychology, Shirley devised a study that tested audience responses to different musical stimuli. Even such a purported study, notwithstanding the actual results, indicates a

⁸ Example concerts at Carnegie Hall took place in 1977, 1978, 1981, 1985, 1986, and 1992. (Carnegie Hall Archival Collections)

larger tendency to consider ways of communicating with listeners creatively to reach them. Liner notes characterize the experiment:

It was by serendipity that Don got back into music. He was given a grant while teaching Psychology at the University of Chicago in the early '50s to study the relationship, if any, between music and the juvenile crime wave that had recently erupted in New York. He proved that certain tonal combinations affected the audience's reactions. No one in the audience, except some of his students who were planted to help with the project, knew of the experiment, but the small club became known for employing an excellent pianist.⁹

Not Entertainment

Although Shirley utilized popular melodies and turned to jazz, he was careful to avoid taking on the title of “entertainer,” which for him amounted to adulterating his ideals and principles. Classical concert culture favors quiet, serious, and attentive audiences who follow a performer's unfolding realization of a musical “masterwork,” sensitive to inspired insight into the deep mysteries of a composition yet discriminating against artistic foibles. This culture ultimately does away with non-musical elements, which under the *Werktreue* paradigm, includes those tied to outside subjects. Knapp analogizes non-musical elements to the “precipitate” of a solution, which a chemist may filter away, as it never truly forms into an integrated whole.¹⁰ Along with this comes the dismissal of the audience as inessential. Expanding on Knapp's “precipitate” analogy might extend to spectator ions, which do not participate in a chemical reaction to affect the equilibrium, as they exist unchanged on both sides of the equation. The net ionic equation ignores spectator ions entirely, which, if analogized to classical culture,

⁹ Rebecca Celebreeze. Liner notes for *Don Shirley: Concert Series, Volume 5*. (First American Records, 1980.) PiccADilly 3427.

¹⁰ Knapp, *Making Light*, 7.

corresponds to abstract musical masterworks being oblivious to audiences, who simply are in a concert hall before and after a performance, not affecting any change.

Popular music culture, on the other hand, often involves the audience taking part directly in the musical reaction to various degrees, which affects the nature of how music is experienced. Their audiences are not spectator ions. Audiences may dance to the music, talk over it, participate in a call-and-response, and so forth, directly altering the unfolding of the music. Because audiences may experience music along these parameters more aptly, their “nonessential accretions,” as Eduard Hanslick might say, would contribute to the dimension of entertainment, which would mean that the music itself was not necessarily front and center.¹¹ For a classically leaning musician like Don Shirley, this was devastating, as entertaining an audience meant ultimately not being heard. As tied to race, the assumptions meant that Shirley was not heard along absolutist paradigms; he ran the risk of being seen as an entertaining “boy.” Entertainment, for a Black musician, would have entailed some connection to possibly humiliating minstrelsy or the like—or an assault on dignity. Shirley developed his *Green Book* Style as a way around this problem.

Immanuel Kant’s German idealism connects to music along absolutist paradigms. Knapp writes “*Listening* [sic] to music became the most privileged musical activity, the focal point for what music was deemed, in essence, to *be*.” Music provided opportunities for active contemplation, connecting the soul to the Infinite, and satisfying Kant’s categorical imperative as a means for self-improvement.¹² Classical concert decorum demands, on a moral basis, that

¹¹ Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Aesthetik der Tonkunst* [On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music] (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1854). Translated by Geoffrey Payzant. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1986.

¹² Knapp, *Making Light*, 21.

listeners remain quiet and still, so as not to ruin the music and harm fellow audience members reaching toward the eternal. In a pre-concert talk at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2010, concert pianist André Watts—the most prominent Black classical piano artist working today—spoke to the amount of work involved in following a performance (and pertinent to him, Brahms’s *Second Piano Concerto in Bb*) for greater enjoyment and benefit. However, he cautioned the audience passively sitting “like cabbages in the field waiting to be watered,” and advocated for an active engagement, although silently and within one’s mind. The audience was not to allow their participation to interfere with the performance of the music lest their presence spoil the concert. Subsequently, during his performance, Watts swatted toward the audience to keep quiet at the *Andante* third movement’s conclusion. The effect was to move transcendently to the *finale* after basking in the halo of the sacred, momentary pause.

More entertaining forms of listening would pay less mind, presumably, to the fine minutiae of a performer’s art that could collapse as easily as a house of cards. A Black pianist automatically expected to be an entertainer, in Shirley’s eyes, would have less of an opportunity to work within painstaking aesthetic parameters. Although Shirley used popular source material in part, his aim in inflecting it with classical techniques was not only to move toward stimulating German idealist modes of serious listening but also to open more accessible entry points to the Infinite.

Examination of Sound Recordings

“I Cover the Waterfront”

Don Shirley’s 1955 début album, *Tonal Expressions*, conscientiously presents him as fully devoted to the Western classical order—a “serious” pianist—significant since, for the

duration of his musical life, he held steadfast to such a categorization notwithstanding most of his performances taking place in establishments typically wedded to more popular music. This was despite Shirley constantly resisting such categorizations, preferring instead the publicly facing novelty of being unclassifiable. The album lends itself to understanding how he crafted his pianistic approach in such a way to perform classical music off-limits to Black performers through an internalized *Negro Pianist's Green Book*, thus navigating deftly through a musical underground railroad.

On the cover of his LP, released on the Cadence record label, Shirley stands upright with countenance of deep study marked by absorption into a musical score (Figure 6) Although the score's title page is not visible, the especially striking visuals, with characteristically sinuous



Figure 6. Donald Shirley, *Début Album, Tonal Expressions*, with Richard Davis (Bassist)

64th-notes reveal Maurice Ravel's "*Une barque sur l'océan*" ("A Boat on the Ocean") from the larger collection, *Miroirs (Mirrors)*.

Presenting himself as a musician well-versed in Western concert repertory guards him against automatic assumptions that he, a Black performer, must obviously be a jazz pianist or some kind of folk musician. The photograph acts as a performance itself, constructing the

persona of an erudite, serious pianist who, through careful study, meets composers in idealized space, presenting authentic realizations as opposed to fleeting, self-serving performances. Shirley is ready to meet spiritually the very souls of the composers whose music he will perform.¹³ Shirley's pose is not without precedents. Earlier photographs of the violinist Joseph Joachim, as Karen Leistra-Jones demonstrates, were carefully staged to suggest an authentic performer oblivious to his surroundings, absorbed in the musical work



Figure 7. Joachim. Photo: W & D Downey (London)



Figure 9. Joachim posing seriously (ca. 1903)

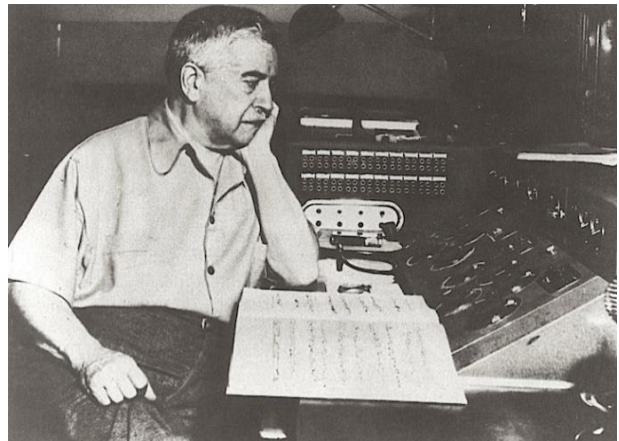


Figure 8. Schnabel in deep, truthful study.

(Figure 7 and Figure 9). This engrossment entailed restraint, specifically contrasting to Lisztian theatricality and its catering to audience fandom.¹⁴ Following Joachim and others of Brahms'

¹³ Mary Hunter, "'To Play as If from the Soul of the Composer': The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58, no. 2 (August 1, 2005): 357–98, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2005.58.2.357>.

¹⁴ Amy Fay and George Grove, *Music-Study in Germany: From the Home Correspondence of Amy Fay*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1886), 248–49.

serious circle was Artur Schnabel, especially known for performances of high textual fidelity of the German-Austro canon. Thus, a photograph showing him reviewing a recording against a score similarly reveals a serious demeanor that added to perceptions of musical authenticity (Figure 8).¹⁵ In Schnabel's reception history, Edward Crankshaw characterized him as "a man who was totally wrapt away from all the world, oblivious to the world, engaged in the most intimate dialogues with the dead."¹⁶

The German ideology of the *Werktreue* describes performances that show faithfulness to the work (the noun, "*Treue*," is "faithfulness.")¹⁷ At the simplest ideal level, the *Werktreue* entailed realizing the written score with supreme textual fidelity, contrasting to the more rampant liberties of free choice inherited from the Romantic era. (*Urtext* editions arose in the mid-20th century with the aim of better distinguishing between substantial editorial emendations that often obscured composers' original notation. Producing clear, perfect editions remains elusive, as the primacy of original sources is often unclear, being there are often numerous manuscript variants extant. Also, not all nuance is possible to include in a score.¹⁸) Attaining an ideal performance beyond textual fidelity meant meeting the composer spiritually by merging the genius, sympathetic performer with the seer composer.¹⁹ Authentic performers, ultimately, became

¹⁵ Cf. Karen Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity: Joachim, Brahms, and the Politics of *Werktreue* Performance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66, no. 2 (August 1, 2013): 397–436, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2013.66.2.397>.

¹⁶ Edward Crankshaw, 1961. Quoted in Artur Schnabel, *My Life and Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), xii.

¹⁷ See Kinderman, "Recentering Music," 8.

¹⁸ See Kinderman, "Recentering Music."

¹⁹ Hunter, "'To Play as If from the Soul of the Composer.'"

curators of imaginary museums of musical works, and unveiled pure, unadulterated performances before a listening public.²⁰

Shirley's staged photograph conforms to principles of the *Werktreue* ideal. Analogous to Leistra-Jones's characterization of Joachim, Shirley similarly lacks "external markers of emotion and expression."²¹ Shirley's gaze is lowered with his eyes affixed on Ravel's score; a neutral, non-affected expression characterizes his face, complemented by a routine, conservative suit. While Shirley does not present a *Texttreue* performance—one that maintains high fidelity to the *printed* score—Shirley's aspiration to the *Werktreue* points to his visions that meet with the ideals of the true musical work, even in greatly different, manifested transformations.²² Shirley's understanding of this paradigm allows him to meet Ravel authentically on a level transcending a paper score, legitimized by a thorough saturation of the work's essence.

Ravel contrasted to his contemporary Claude Debussy as he favored greater definiteness over suggestion and vague insinuation. Having great faith in his scores' ability to transmit musical ideas clearly, he exclaimed, "do not interpret my music, just play it!"²³ Debussy preferred open-endedness. Take, for instance, his omission of a French definite article indicating gender ("la" or "le") for his second *prélude*, "*Voiles*," which left open the two possibilities of interpretation: "sails" or "veils."²⁴ Compounding the vagueness was the propositional nature of his title, which he placed at the very end of the composition with ellipses. Ravel, on the other hand, aimed for a degree of exactness, acting like a musical translator of the natural world to the

²⁰ See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in The Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Taruskin, *Text and Act*, 149.

²¹ Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity," 406.

²² Brendel, *Musical Thoughts & Afterthoughts*.

²³ Alfred Cortot, *La Musique française de piano*. (Paris: Les Éditions du Rieder, 1932), 13.

²⁴ Richard Taruskin, ca. 2006, in his lecture for the 20th-century course at the University of California, Berkeley. See also Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

piano. Emile Vuillermoz emphasizes Ravel’s definiteness when he writes, “there are many ways to perform Debussy, but there is only one way to play Ravel.”²⁵ Recognizing his exacting margins, Stravinsky called Ravel a “Swiss clockmaker.” Shirley’s decision to open with Ravel thus suggests a penchant for precision, technique, aversion to impulsiveness, and purposeful deliberateness—qualities that would distinguish him from an improvising musician not, adhering to the “recital” halls’ expectation that a performer realized a written text. Shirley’s oblique alignment with Ravel was part of his self-fashioning as a “serious” musician.



Figure 10. *Bosquet des Trois Fontaines, fontaine inférieure, château de Versailles.* Photo: Rene Boulay (2012). <https://web.archive.org/web/20161029144943/http://www.panoramio.com/photo/102681026>

²⁵ Vuillermoz in *Revue musicale*, 1925 in H  l  ne Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et nous* Gen  ve:   ditions du Milieu du Monde, 1945), 179.

In 1901, Ravel composed *Jeux d'eau* (*Fountains*), and later remarked that it was “inspired by the sound of water and the musical sounds emanating from fountains, waterfalls and brooks” set essentially in sonata-allegro form.²⁶ The painstakingly crafted “real” sets the tone for the work, with the score functioning as a kind of *Augenmusik* (“eye music”); it visually looks like what it depicts sonically. If we compare the sprays of a fountain to the last two pages of the score, we see that both have regularity in ascending and descending patterns; in the score, each note head resembles the end of a water spray that traces a sinusoidal shape (Figures 10 and 11). Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* takes inspiration from Franz Liszt’s *Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este* (*The Fountains of the Villa d’Este*, 1887), which also makes use of ascending and descending figures that suggest fountain sprays. Ravel’s musical sprays, however, are even more pronounced.



Figure 11. Ravel, *Jeux d’eau*. (First edition, Paris: E. Demets, 1902. Reprinted by Dover Publications, Mineola, 1986)

Liszt quotes Christ directly in his score of *Les jeux d’eaux*, “*Sed aqua quam ego dabo ei, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam* (“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I

²⁶ Quoted from *Maurice Ravel. Letters, Écrits, Entretiens*, présentés par Arbie Orenstein, Paris, 1989, 44.

shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.²⁷) Ravel, as his pianistic counterpart, however, includes a line from Henri de Régnier: “*Dieu fluvial riant de l’eau qui le chatouille...*” (“River god laughing at the water that tickles him...”). Rather than offering promises of eternal life, in line with Abbé Liszt, Ravel favors the more fleeting and sensual water of the observable world—choosing a mythic god instead of the God of eternal promises.²⁸

Dialectically, Debussy responded to Ravel by reversing course and heading back to a less tightly defined world in 1903 with *Estampes* (*Engravings*). The title likely refers to impressions of carved wood on a material such as paper, where resulting images gave snapshots analogous to tourist postcards capturing ephemeral images. Debussy indeed resides within a sensual world but plays with the “explanatory gap” that arises from differences in sensory organs discerning phenomena.²⁹ In his first piece of the three, “*Pagodes*” (“Pagodas”), Debussy simulates the

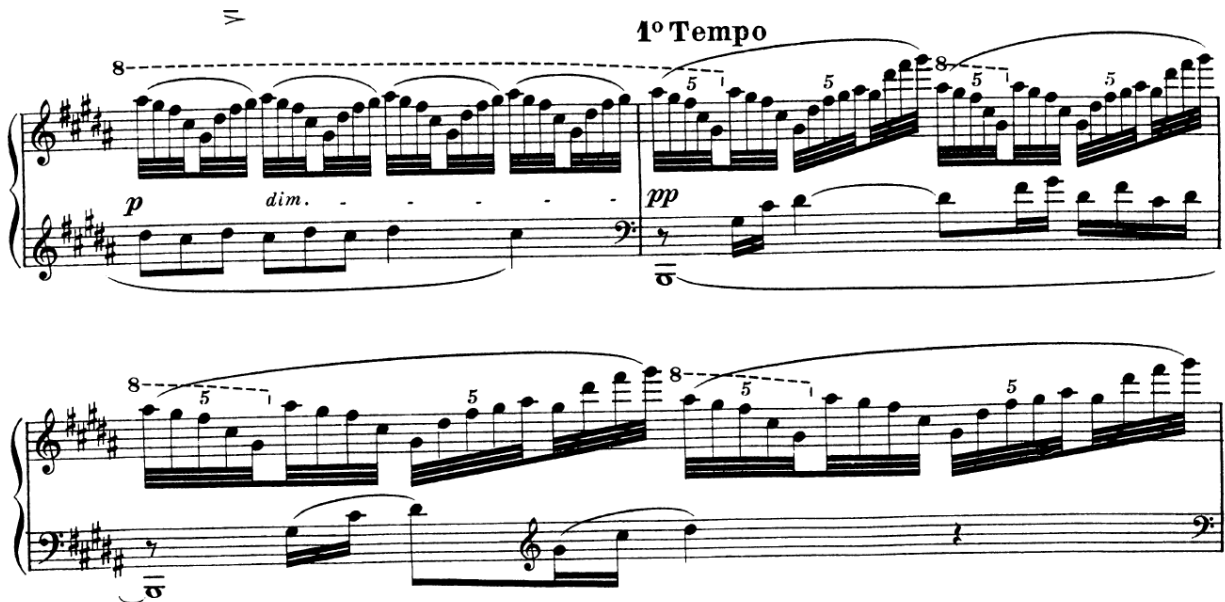


Figure 12. Debussy, “*Pagodes*” from *Estampes*. (Edition Durand & Fils, 1903)

²⁷ Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. From the Gospel According to John (4:14), King James Translation, 1611.

²⁸ Siegfried Schmalzriedt, *Ravels Klaviermusik: ein musikalischer Werkführer* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2006), 44–45.

²⁹ Michael Tye, “Qualia,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2021 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/qualia/>.

sounds of the Javanese gamelan heard at the 1889 *Paris Exposition Universelle*.³⁰ Notably, he adapts Ravel's ascending and descending figuration appearing at the end of *Jeux d'eau* (Figure

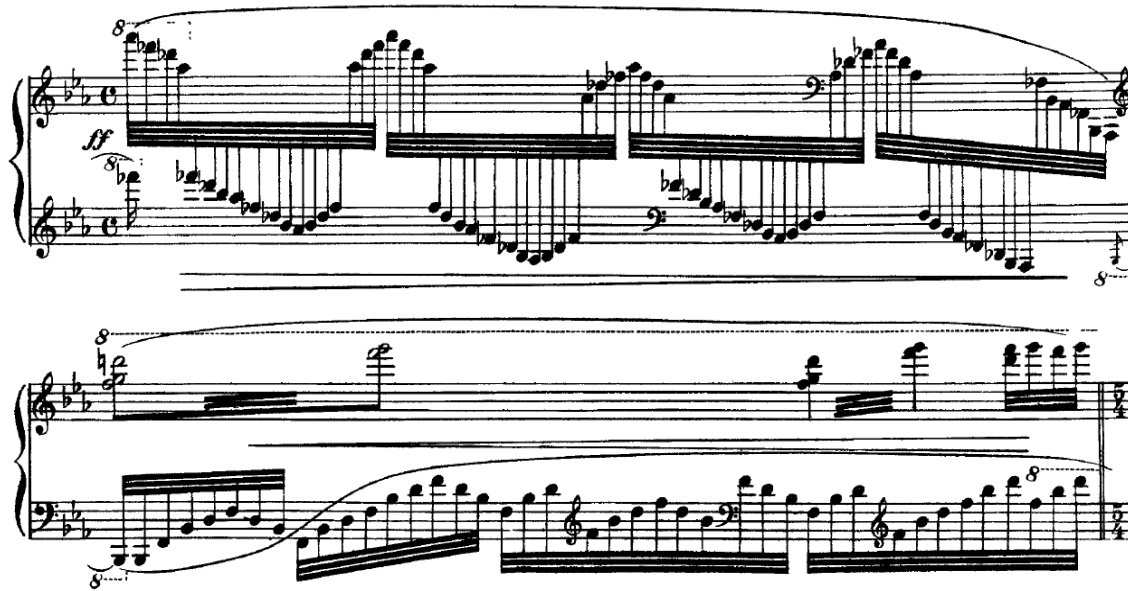


Figure 13. Ravel, *Une barque sur l'océan* (excerpt)

11), but does not situate it in the context of water (Figure 12). Pagodas are not commonly associated with Java, a Muslim land atavistically Hindu. Pagodas typically have Buddhist associations, and so, Debussy works with a theme of religion and pseudo-Eastern mysticism. His water-sprays at the conclusion neither reproduce Ravel's translation of real phenomena nor recapitulate Liszt's vision of an eternal hereafter. The figuration, however, reflects a free and vague reality of an orientalist Frenchman swept away by imagination of the exotic. In another dialectic move, Ravel may have responded against Debussy's vague sensuality with a more definite variety through *Une barque sur l'océan*, once again translating the swells of a discernable boat on a majestic, powerful ocean (Figure 13).

³⁰ Sylvia Parker, "Claude Debussy's Gamelan - College Music Symposium," accessed December 24, 2021, <https://symposium.music.org/index.php/52/item/22-claude-debussys-gamelan>.

He distinguishes himself as a composer of order and deliberateness rather than one subject to human whims and caprices with his tone poem. Even more than *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel assuredly takes pains to translate as closely as possible the sound of a natural environment.

In fashioning himself as a serious pianist-composer-type performer, Shirley places himself directly in the line of Liszt, Debussy, and Ravel with his performance as another response along this chain of compositions. In using *Une barque sur l'océan* as the foundation of his performance of the popular song, "I Cover the Waterfront," Shirley devises flexibility that would allow him to reach both audiences of concert halls and nightclubs. In his responsive arrangement, Shirley continues within the vein of sensual longing associated with the popular standard. Yet, he grounds this music, associated with entertainment venues, in a "respectable" tradition, by placing his interpretation into a network of composition and reaction. Ravel's *Miroirs* suggest a mirrored reflection of the sensed world. In Shirley's dialectic, his reflections are not necessarily limited to the natural world's sensoria, but rather reflect his own idealized, inner reality in being a concert pianist.

Although Shirley concatenates "I Cover the Waterfront" into a framework of Ravel's *Une barque*, his performance, overall, favors Ravel's style compositionally and pianistically. Shirley's performance is of painstaking, technical accomplishment, distinguished by consistency in tone suggesting fastidious control, deliberate pacing to create a structure, subtle finesse in tempo, and varied tone colors. A serious classical pianist with many tools at his disposal, Shirley's pianism meets the promises made by his album cover in attaining a measure of *Werktreue* authenticity, evoking religion and the metaphysical as co-extensive. Shirley's vision of the *Werktreue* and concert-pianist leanings reflect his inner, idealized reality.

With no direct way to perform the concert hall staple *Miroirs* as a classical pianist proper, Shirley tried the next best course of action through repurposed appropriation, or perhaps un “affirmative sabotage,” in the vein of Guyatri Spivak’s concept, as he was so intimately familiar with the work as to make it serve his aims.³¹ In his musical castings and re-interpretations, however, his uniting of classical and popular genres was not done gratuitously, but in response to deeper affinities.

Shirley’s reading of “I Cover the Waterfront” connects directly to the image of the score on the album’s cover. Initially a popular 1933 song by Johnny Green, “Waterfront” became a well-known jazz standard for musicians like Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong. Shirley caters to the expectation that he would be a jazz pianist in making such a selection. His treatment of the standard, however, separates him from celebrated jazz performers. Although Shirley avoids overt flavors of jazz, he often utilizes more complex harmonies that parallel those of jazz, complementing Ravel’s. Hence, Shirley titled the album *Tonal Expressions. Une barque sur l’océan* features chords marked by higher extensions beyond the seventh, such as ninth or eleventh chords, with added chromatic alterations typical of jazz harmony since the 1920s. *Miroirs*, which appeared in 1905, itself begins with several measures “vamping” on alternating F#m⁷ and AM⁷ chords (Figure 14).

³¹ I am indebted to Kira Thurman for bringing Spivak into discourse about Black musicians in her lecture, “On Beethoven, Blackness, and Belonging: Debating Classical Music in the Black Atlantic” given for the Robert U. Nelson Lecture Series on May 5, 2021 in coordination with UCLA’s Music Performance Studies Today Conference in Spring 2021.

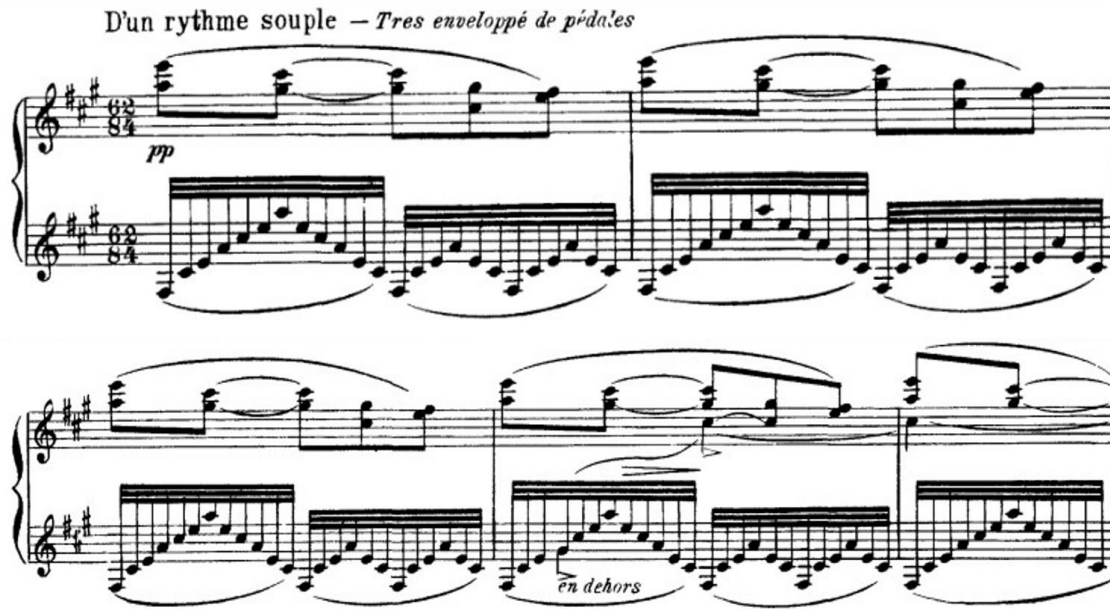


Figure 14. *Une barque sur l'océan* (opening)

Shirley notably sidesteps explicit Afro-diasporic rhythmic traits, such as syncopations, relative to his contemporary's performances of "I Cover the Waterfront." Ravel's unusual pairing of both compound and simple duple meter (6/8 and 2/4) simultaneously in "*Une barque sur l'océan*" gives rise to a rocking feeling that suggests the experience of being on a ship at sea. In the context of Shirley's performance, as compared to others', Ravel's composed rocking feeling translates somewhat to the homologous idea of "swing" in jazz rhythm, which in technical terms involves lengthening and shortening certain note values. Moreover, as Shirley punctuates portions of his version of "I Cover the Waterfront" with a sped-up treatment of the right hand of Ravel's "*La Vallée des cloches*" from the same cycle, Shirley indirectly suggests

quartal harmony, another jazz hallmark with correlatives in 20th-century classical practices (Figure 15).

In employing “*Une barque sur l’océan*” in his conception of “I Cover the Waterfront,” Shirley works topically in calling upon Ravel’s aquatic piece to enhance the literal meaning of

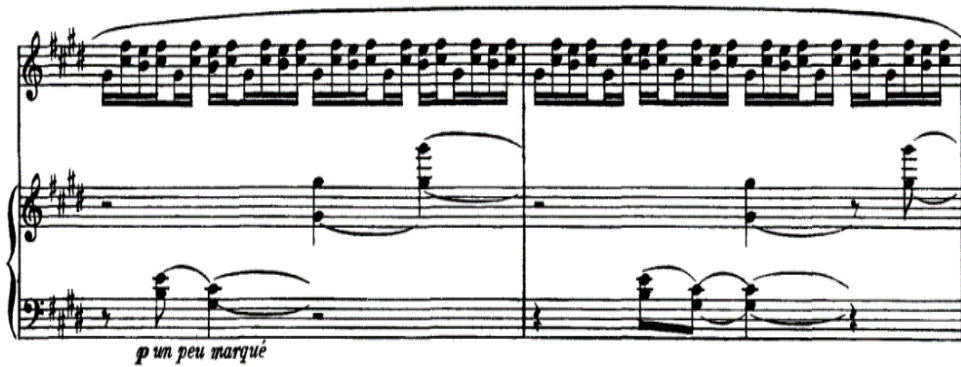


Figure 15. Ravel, *La Vallée des cloches* (excerpt)

the song’s program. There are also kindred autobiographical elements suggested by the lyrics’ unrequited longing.

I cover the waterfront	Oh, how I yearn
I’m watching the sea	Where are you?
Will the one I love	Have you thought back time?
Be coming back to me	Will you remember?
I cover the waterfront	Will you return?
In search of my love	I cover the waterfront
And I’m covered	I’m watching the sea
By a starlit sky above	Will the one I love
Here am I	Be coming back to me
Patiently waiting	Will the one I love
Hoping and longing	Be coming back to me ³²

In another recording of a live performance from 1968, Shirley experiments with introducing additional sonorities and pianistic effects, consistent with Ravel’s compositional

³² Lyrics: Edward Heyman (1933)

tendencies.³³ Consider Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and *Tzigane*, where he includes the rarely heard luthéal to add coloristic effects. (The luthéal, a modified piano, is reminiscent of the Hungarian cimbalom, as special stops alter the sound of the strings.) Speaking further to his sensitivity to color, Ravel features muted trumpets and string *tremoli* in *Une barque sur l'océan*. In *Jeux d'eau*, perhaps to simulate a plunge from a waterfall ending punctuated by hitting rocks at the depths, Ravel proceeds with a descending black key, pentatonic *glissando*, concluding with calling for the piano's lowest note, a non-harmonic tone of A against an implied G# pedal. Ravel repeats a black key glissando again in *Une barque*. Residing within his stylistic parameters, Shirley takes Ravel's lead and employs multiple soft black key *glissandi* in quick succession. In performing within the general compositional parameters of Ravel, Shirley crafts a transcription that may pass in many respects as thoroughly that of Ravel.

According to Shirley's executor, Michael Kappeyne, Shirley carefully precomposed the bass and cello lines for his transcriptions.³⁴ Despite the string players having often performed in jazz contexts, they did not improvise with Shirley. In a later recording of "Waterfront" (1968), Shirley expanded the music to a trio format, with the cello and bass providing an abundance of sustained tones, mostly to provide harmonic support. Near the end of this recording, the cellist strums and plucks non-harmonic tones (presumably) from the non-tuned portion of the strings below the bridge, adding an exotic sound effect much in the spirit of Ravel's use of the luthéal. These more experimental sounds beg for interpretation because of their unexpected nature. Contextualizing Shirley's mindset, he was predisposed to the ancient Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice, as seen in 1956, when he recorded *Orpheus in the Underworld* as a completely

³³ Don Shirley (pianist), *Don Shirley Trio in Concert*, with Gilberto Munguia (cellist) and Henry Gonzalez (bassist). Recorded 1968, from *La damnation de Faust*, Atlantic SD1605.

³⁴ Email correspondence.

original, non-amalgamated project. A listener following his career might reasonably make the connection that “Waterfront’s” unusual cello sounds point to a similar programmatic basis.

This connection further solidifies Shirley’s place in an intertextual Liszt-Ravel-Debussy line of aquatically associated spirituality. At the head of his first chapter, Klein quotes Umberto Eco, who writes in *The Name of the Rose*, “Until then I had thought each book spoke of things, human or divine, that lie outside of books. Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves.”³⁵ Here, music speaks among itself; Shirley is a master coordinator continuing a line of dialogue. In this performance, the sound effect may likely signify Orpheus’s lyre.³⁶ According to the legend, Orpheus journeys to the underworld to bring his dead wife back to the land of the living. He crosses the infernal River Styx and through his music successfully persuades the Furies to allow him to take Euridice back. The legend complements Heyman’s lyrics of “Waterfront” with its longing. Along more idealist notions, the River Styx lends itself to transcendence, aligning to Shirley’s predilection for more contemplative listening and imagination rather than entertainment. Consistent with German idealist listening, the multilayered nature of Shirley’s performance directs listening to a more engaged type while also connecting to Shirley’s quest for musical deliverance against an infernal reality of discrimination preventing him from playing his proverbial lyre as a near-supernatural virtuoso.

Acting against expectations of being a jazz musician, Shirley takes biased, assumptive entry points and reverses their polarity to recast perceptions along more classical lines. In his

³⁵ Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, 1; Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), 286.

³⁶ See the liner notes for Shirley and Manuel Komropp’s telling (and translation) of the Orpheus legend in *Don Shirley: Orpheus in the Underworld*. (Cadence CLP1009, 1956).

bait-and-switch, Ravel and proto-jazz-like harmony follow as he performs a unique version of a jazz standard. Where he may be considered more of an entertaining musician, he plays against the paratext associated with Jacques Offenbach's comic opera *Orphée aux enfers* and brings his performance greater gravity. As with his other performances and arrangements, Shirley's use of the *Green Book* Style moved him sharply against disengaged entertainment and loss of respectability through careful calculation. About "I Cover the Waterfront," the original album cover notes read:

"I Cover the Waterfront" will remind you of a Debussy or Ravel. It has their qualities of delicacy, contemplation and sensitivity. There is a certain majesty to it, too. His ability to 'concertoize' this makes something more of it than a lover lamenting a lost love on the waterfront and becomes instead, a personal experience with the sea . . . the water becomes the main theme of this, much like *La Mer*.³⁷

Central to Shirley's approach, "concertoizing," brings more serious registers into play than might be expected for a cover of a conventional love song.

"Secret Love"

To dedicated listeners of the piano's core repertoire, the melody of Sammy Fain's "Secret Love," made famous by Doris Day in the 1953 film musical *Calamity Jane*, bears a striking resemblance to the opening theme of Schubert's "Little" A Major Piano Sonata (Figure 16). Rather than jazzing this melody up, fulfilling expectations based on the color of his skin, as with "I Cover the Waterfront" Shirley takes a different approach in creating a song without words,

³⁷ [Presumably written by] Al "Jazzbo" Collins in the liner notes for *Donald Shirley: Tonal Expressions*. (Cadence CLP1001: 1956).

here reminiscent of a Schubert *Lied* performed in an intimate, non-spectacle, and therefore non-overtly entertaining manner. This setting, played in his version of a *Liederabend*—an evening of art songs—opens the possibility to explore his innermost musical desires and idealized reality, providing a pathway into noumenal space resonating with aspects of German idealism. Once again, Shirley’s performance follows the tenets of “serious” pianism so important to him.



Figure 16. Schubert, “Little” A Major Sonata. Opening from I. Allegro moderato (1819. Epstein edition.)

Shirley undoubtedly heard echoes of Schubert’s sonata in the song and took them as an opportunity for expansion in shaping his pianistic vision. Rather than adhere solely to Schubert’s A Major sonata, Shirley instead begins with an introduction derived from the opening of



Figure 17. Schubert, Impromptu in A b Major, Op. 142, No. 2 (1827. Epstein Edition)

Schubert’s Impromptu in A \flat Major (Figure 17), transposed up a half-step to the key of *The “Little” A Major Sonata*. Opening with the first four measures of the impromptu, modestly altered, Shirley not only sneaks in a performance of classical piano repertoire but also demonstrates a level of erudition that would conceivably engage Shirley’s target audience.³⁸

Remarkable about Shirley’s setting of “Secret Love” is that he may have had two basic options of settings for the music, either an art song (without words), or something in more of a jazz idiom. For the latter, Shirley would have had precedent not only from representative musicians of the genre but also from Western art music, notably Stravinsky, whose endorsement Shirley cited. While the original melody of “Secret Love” strongly resembles the opening melody of Schubert’s “Little A Major” sonata, one further source of similarity may come from Stravinsky’s conclusion to his ballet, *The Firebird* (1910) (Figure 18). Both *Firebird* and “Secret

Figure 18. Stravinsky, *The Firebird*. Near conclusion. (1910)

³⁸ Don Shirley, *Secret Love*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox4I3XnZ_As. (00:00-00:51)

Love” open with atmospheric strings playing tremolos, a lone brass instrument playing the principal theme, prominent use of the harp, and melodies that can match to each other in contour.

As Shirley took the melody of “Secret Love” as a cue to steer his piano version into a broader direction based in Schubert, he could have likewise done the same had he latched onto the Stravinsky elements. Whereas the *Firebird*’s final number eventually grows more and more in intensity, moving toward a brass fanfare, Shirley moves in an opposite direction and avoids repurposing this material, as it could easily shift by common association to the sonority of big band jazz. In keeping true to avoiding overt jazz insinuations, and in acting as a composer carefully balancing musical ideas to contribute to a larger unified purpose, Shirley avoids presenting musical choices that listeners might reinterpret as jazz (Figure 19).

206 Doppio valore (♩=104). Maestoso. 207

The image displays a complex musical score for a "Big Band" arrangement of the near conclusion of Stravinsky's "The Firebird". The score is organized into two systems, each labeled with measure numbers 206 and 207. The tempo and dynamics are marked as "Doppio valore (♩=104). Maestoso." and "ff" (fortissimo). The score features multiple staves, including woodwinds, brass, and strings. The woodwinds and brass parts are characterized by dense, rhythmic patterns, often with slurs and accents. The string parts provide a harmonic and rhythmic foundation, with some sections marked "non div." (non-diviso) and "sim." (simile). The score is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, typical of Stravinsky's style.

206 Doppio valore (♩=104). Maestoso. 207

Figure 19. Stravinsky, *The Firebird*. Near conclusion, "Big Band"

Others reinterpreting “Secret Love” presented realizations in big band jazz idioms. Later, for instance, pop superstar George Michael in the 1999 album *Songs from the Last Century* went in this direction, perhaps influenced by co-arrangers Rob Mathes and Rob Mounsey, who were former students of the Berklee College of Music, where they would have certainly encountered Stravinsky’s staple concert work.

In this premiere album of Don Shirley, his own “secret love” is, in fact, not limited to the meaning behind the lyrics of Paul Francis Webster, but reasonably extends to his real “love” of the classical piano repertoire. Autobiographical, Shirley’s performance may more likely relate to his relationship to this world and “impatience to be free” as a classical concert pianist.

Once I had a secret love
That lived within the heart of me
All too soon my secret love
Became impatient to be free
So, I told a friendly star
The way that dreamers often do
Just how wonderful you are
And why I am so in love with you
Now I shout it from the highest hills
Even told the golden daffodils
At last my heart’s an open door
And my secret love’s no secret anymore³⁹

Evoking Schubert’s milieu, the drawing room or salon, provides the intimacy necessary for Shirley to share his innermost musical desires, a theme that returns in his other interpretations. Thus, in performing inwardness and thus advancing a persistent strain of German idealism, marked here by his articulation of the song’s melody through a Schubertian flavor, suggests a kind of sincerity and authenticity, elevating the popular source material he used to a more

³⁹ Lyrics by Paul Frances Webster (1953)

respectable, noble space, connected to a nonmaterial noumenal space closer to Shirley's inner reality.⁴⁰

“No Two People”

In further tracks of *Tonal Expressions*, Shirley again pivots his audience's assumptions to his advantage, fashioning respectable entry points to encourage serious listening engagement. In performing Frank Loesser's "No Two People" from the 1952 musical *Hans Christian Andersen*, Shirley expands upon an idea introduced in the musical fabric of the original. In this duet, Mr. and Mrs. Andersen often complete each other's musical lines, sometimes overlapping, suggesting aspects of counterpoint. In Shirley's setting, he incorporates J.S. Bach's Fugue No. 21 in B \flat Major the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (Book I). The second most performed of the set (after No. 2 in c minor), this fugue may be expected to be familiar to many listeners, either specifically or in general terms. With it, Shirley pledges "serious" musical allegiance while crafting alternative paths exploring popular source material. His overall setting of "No Two People," is most characteristically jazz, and in his treatment, Shirley diverts unwanted associations tied to performing in nightclub settings.

Bach—then as now—specifically appealed to "highbrow" musical taste, as *Time* laid out in their assessment, "Bach and before, Ives and after" (Figures 1 and 2.) Even among those engaged consistently with Western art music, Bach is considered the preeminent master of counterpoint, which has long carried a level of prestige because of its exacting, almost mathematical rules. As the liturgical musical language of antiquity, counterpoint also has long commanded reverence. Through his relatively brief quotation, lasting only from mm. 1-12

⁴⁰ See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972).

(Figure 20), Shirley secures a measure of respectability that would allow him to perform in a jazz idiom with less stifling, anti-Black prejudice.



Figure 20. Fugue No. 21 from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bk. 1., Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe. Franz Kroll, editor, 1866.

Shirley's inclusion of this upbeat Bach selection legitimizes humor and lightheartedness. Often, jazz can be endearing in breaking overbearing formalities through jesting commentary. Shirley mirrors such qualities to match those of "No Two People," as Fugue No. 21 has a playful and lively subject. Shirley takes Bach's ebullient lead in his reading of the standard with a prevailing tone of jocularly. Shirley starts with the fugue's opening subject and countersubject, suggesting that the performance will be an unaltered, complete reading of Bach's fugue. Such is the case until the bassist enters, playing the subject's third entrance *pizzicato*. Little by little, both the pianist and bassist push the tempo until instability ensues. That both rush might seem strange for such finished musicians, but this more likely suggests intentionality in maintaining a blithe, comical ambiance. In a rupture, both instrumentalists lock solidly together and segue with their

jazz treatment of “No Two People.” Through this approach, Shirley evokes respectability but avoids stuffiness.

J.S. Bach added the most sparsely minimal of performance instructions to his scores beyond rhythm and pitch, not specifying tempo, articulation, volume, phrasing, character descriptors, or fingering. Bach’s music has amassed a slew of individuals claiming unshakable authority in their views of performance practice, testifying to great interpretative flexibility relative to the music of other canonical composers. Part of this entailed that there have been varying conceptions of Bach throughout time along with different revivals of his music. There was the (unknowable?) Bach of his day, Bach of the Romantic generation and Mendelssohn’s 1829 resurrection, Bach of Wanda Landowska’s harpsichord revival, and Bach of the 1980s authenticity movement. His keyboard scores—partitas, English and French Suites, *French Overture*, *Chromatic Fantasy*, *Goldberg Variations*, and so forth share, in some ways, performance open-endedness of jazz lead sheets. This is not to mention even more skeletal *basso continuo* parts that invite variable levels of extemporization.

Due perhaps to its relatively modest demands of sonority, Bach’s music has been seen to be able to assimilate to, flirt with, or at least anticipate a variety of genres. Concert pianist and multi-keyboardist Rosalyn Tureck, commonly dubbed “The High Priestess of Bach,” spoke of the supposed universality of his music as she made an outreach to the masses through a television broadcast. She said:

And the fact that they [his compositions] work on different keyboards and other instruments demonstrates that the primary composing conception is organization and not music as sounds requiring specific sonorities and a particular instrument. Now, I’ll demonstrate a totally opposite type of composer, Chopin, who was totally dependent on piano sonority. Then, I shall, with the best will of the world, play the same excerpt on the Moog. [...Tureck plays Chopin’s Nocturne in E Major...] You see, this is impossible.

Chopin was not capable of writing that kind of abstract music. The idea that Bach lived too early for the piano must be dispelled. [...] Bach's genius was what is usually called of a universal kind; specifically, his genius generated so many ideas that there are portions of his work that sound like later composers.⁴¹

Such notions—that Bach's music was flexible precisely because he avoided timbral specificity—contributed to notions of Bach's music having attained the most basic essence of human expression. In opening with an excerpt of the fugue, Shirley opens a line of discourse that promises to place his own music as wide-reaching in potentially being able to reach an audience.

In its later, less Romantic manifestations, performance ideals of Bach became drier with an abstinence of the pedal and sober, steady *tempi* that, in general, dismiss *rubato*. Such an incarnation of Bach resonates with aspects of jazz performance. The opening of the fugue can invite well-articulated, detached linearity, as might be found in the *pizzicato* style of string basses in trios with a piano and drum set. Friedrich Gulda, the Austrian classical and later jazz pianist who recorded the complete *Well-Tempered Clavier* with a predominately clear, dry, biting, and almost harsh sound, with the microphones placed close to the strings, sensed this homology. Shirley's approach to "No Two People" contrasts to the more overt lyricism in his ballad treatments of standards by finding commonality with this latter Bachian ideal.

As time ensued, *The Swingle Singers* would specifically give Bach an even more thorough jazz treatment with their 1963 album, *Jazz Sébastian Bach*. The SSAATTBB octet sang portions of *Well-Tempered Clavier* generally faithfully textually but adding elements of scat singing and jazz rhythm, complete with a string bass and drums.⁴² While tracing lineage of

⁴¹ Rosalyn Tureck, "Bach at the Frontier of the Future," January 31, 1980 (Television Broadcast. Camera Three Productions, Inc).

⁴² Smolko, Joanna R. "Swingle Singers." *Grove Music Online*. 6 Feb. 2012; Accessed 4 Jan. 2022. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002219587>.

inspiration and influence may be moot, it remains true that Bach has, perhaps more than other canonic composers, been heard as a figure inviting jazz, something associated in the widespread listening subconscious. For Shirley, this offered another path with his *Green Book* Style to establish himself as a performer of “serious music,” tapping into longstanding tropes of German universalism through, perhaps the most “universal” composer of all, J.S. Bach, especially as rationalized by Rosalyn Tureck. German musical universalism had long been attractive to African American musicians mistreated in their own home country; Germany was seen as a location where the music was so transcendently universal that any petty differences based on skin tone were non-issues, as Kira Thurman has found argued, based on her archival work.⁴³ In this sense, Shirley performed Bach to reassure himself and resonate with the listening minds of his audience, constantly making determinations as to points of commonality or lack thereof.

“Over the Rainbow”

The American disposition toward Russian classical music fluctuated during the Cold War, especially in the decade following the Second World War. Some African Americans saw the Soviet Union as a promised land offering a kind of life that was impossible in the United States, where in principle, equality was for all. Some notable African American performers were believed to be associated with socialism and possibly the Communist Party USA, such as singer Paul Robeson, pianist Hazel Scott, and others who were forced during the McCarthy era to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee.⁴⁴ Some African Americans escaped

⁴³ Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 5–9; 57–58.

⁴⁴ Karen Chilton, *Hazel Scott: The Pioneering Journey of a Jazz Pianist from Café Society to Hollywood to HUAC*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), chap. 11; ““You Are the Un-Americans, and You Ought to Be Ashamed of Yourselves’: Paul Robeson Appears Before HUAC,” accessed January 10, 2022, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6440>.

to the Soviet Union for equality.⁴⁵ While the benefits of Shirley (falsely) claiming to have studied at the Leningrad Conservatory may have been to cover his tracks, due to the difficulty of verifying direct musical lineages to legitimize himself, he may have also looked at the Soviet Union as a bastion of hope.

In imbuing his performances with Rachmaninoff on several occasions, Shirley may have looked at him as a figure standing in for Soviet ethos of equality, notwithstanding Rachmaninoff's aristocratic background and exile following the Revolution. Despite his exile and background, the Soviet Union eventually embraced Rachmaninoff's music. Although his background would suggest an out-of-touch privilege, Rachmaninoff possessed a degree of openness that contrasted with the racial animosity prevalent among Americans concerned with elite music. Rachmaninoff once said, "there is a strong national characteristic in America, a characteristic of her broad democracy, the gathering together of many nations, a cosmopolitan note which your composers must catch and write in your music. How it will be done, or when, or where, no one knows. I am convinced, however, that the plan of taking Indian themes and Negro themes is scarcely likely to produce the great distinctive American Music, unless, indeed, these themes are developed by Indian or Negro composers."⁴⁶ Rachmaninoff's sentiment, much to the antipathy of those who rejected Antonín Dvořák's similar feelings, would reinforce the notion of a value for a plurality of voices contributing more equally to composition in the Western art tradition. Whether or not Shirley read this quotation by Rachmaninoff, he heard points of

⁴⁵ Paul Barton, *Stories of Black Americans, Who Fled to the USSR to Escape Race Discrimination* / RT Documentary, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZqR2KEd_hk&t=177s&ab_channel=RTDocumentary.

⁴⁶ Quoted in *The Etude*, October 1919.

convergence in his music that opened more possibilities for representation on the classical stage, which, in principle, seemed more possible in Soviet Russia in years to come.

Shirley's manifestation of this brand of Russian music would resonate with audiences invested in the dynamics between the United States and its Slavic nemesis. In 1958, Van Cliburn won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. A momentous victory, he was presented with a ticker-tape parade in New York City, an unheard-of honor to bestow on a pianist. "The Texan who conquered Russia" was seen as an American patriot who infiltrated the Soviet Union and defeated it from within by mastering a very Russian art form (Figure 21).

Simultaneously, Shirley, as a Black man finding inclusion difficult within American society, may well have looked toward Russia as a promised land over a proverbial rainbow.



Figure 21. Van Cliburn on the Cover of Time Magazine (May 19, 1958), "The Texan Who Conquered Russia"

In the 1950s, Shirley was to produce a commercial recording of Rachmaninoff's Fourth Piano Concerto with Eugene Ormandy, which would have made it the second after Rachmaninoff's inaugural version on 78 from 1941. Unlike his other works for piano and orchestra, Rachmaninoff's Fourth lacks the Tchaikovskyan melodic appeal and direct emotionality that audiences so valued in his previous *concerti* and subsequent *Rhapsody*, effecting instead an ascetic, dry, even modernist style—qualities shared with Rachmaninoff's failed First Symphony, a work that brought him to near depressive catatonia and crippling self-doubt. In Shirley's transcription of "Over the Rainbow," part of the

1956 album *Improvisations*, he nonetheless quotes a passage near the conclusion of the concerto's second movement. Shirley's approach, especially here, was not geared to garnering immediate popularity, but toward maintaining a space for himself to thrive in an idealized reality; hence his choice in referring to this relatively unpopular concerto (Figure 22).

The image displays a musical score for the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 4, specifically an excerpt near the conclusion. The score is arranged in four systems, each containing staves for the first piano (I) and second piano (II). The first system shows the first piano (I) and second piano (II) parts. The second system shows the first piano (I) and second piano (II) parts, with a measure number 39 in a box. The third system shows the first piano (I) and second piano (II) parts. The fourth system shows the first piano (I) and second piano (II) parts. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf pesante*, *pp*, *p pesante*, and *cresc.* The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 3/4.

Figure 22. Rachmaninoff: Piano Concerto No. 4, II. Largo, excerpt near conclusion (1926)

Rachmaninoff responded to the concerto’s lukewarm reception by working on revisions after its première, producing different editions in 1926, 1928, and 1941. Within “Over the Rainbow,” Shirley uses the same musical passage Rachmaninoff had grafted from his *Étude-tableau* in C minor, Op. 33, No. 3 (1911) (Figure 23). Rachmaninoff never published the *étude-tableau* in his



Figure 23. Rachmaninoff, *Étude-tableau* in C Minor, Op. 33, No. 3 (excerpt)

lifetime, presumably to “earmark” it for use as the climax of the concerto’s second movement.⁴⁷

What is noteworthy is that the erudite Shirley, musicologically oriented and likely aware of Rachmaninoff’s transference, opts not to perform it in its original version but in its concerto manifestation. This reinforces the idea that this performance has autobiographical aspects, which

ought to inform our study of Shirley’s performance.



Figure 24. Rachmaninoff, *Prelude in C-sharp Minor, Opening.*



Figure 25. Rachmaninoff, *Sonata No. 2, Opening.*

⁴⁷ Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield: Scolar Press, 1990), 297–98.

Don Shirley largely casts his realization of “Over the Rainbow” within Rachmaninoff’s stylistic parameters. He opens with a brief allusion to Rachmaninoff’s most popular work, the *Prélude* in C# minor, Op. 3, No. 2 (Figure 24). Shirley recasts the opening bars in a manner similar to the opening of Rachmaninoff’s *Second Sonata* in Bb minor, Op. 36 (Figure 25), but in C# minor, with the long-sustained tones in the bass recalling the long pedal tones featured in the prelude. In gesturing to the prelude, Shirley orients the ear toward Rachmaninoff, as if making a promise to be fulfilled later in the performance. Once Shirley establishes a point of comparison with Rachmaninoff, he continues performing with similar compositional resources. In representative works, Rachmaninoff incorporates a level of complexity involving a high degree of voice independence and interdependence with chromatically spinning counterpoint coming in and out freely.

The original Tin Pan Alley score for “Over the Rainbow,” unlike many other contemporaneous examples, also had a level of harmonic exploration that aligns it to the practices of classical composers (Figure 27).⁴⁸ As a standard, it lent itself well to jazz-based complexities, encouraged through the relatively sophisticated harmony of its original score. Perhaps, also, Shirley’s borrowing from the second theme from the *finale* of Rachmaninoff’s *Second Sonata* was influenced by this quality in the original song (Figure 27). The basic contours of both sections invite comparison. Both feature a compass of about an octave, and within that range both leap up from the downbeat of the first measure, remain near the top on the second, and by the third, move to lower registers before climbing back up in pitch. At that point, both move to slower durational values. Rachmaninoff maintains a descending chromatic line near the

⁴⁸ Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 4, pp. 5–15.

tenor region played by the left-hand thumb. “Over the Rainbow” also has a falling chromatic line, although not as clearly delineated as in Rachmaninoff’s treatment.

Chorus, Moderately (*Not fast*)

Some-where O-ver The Rain-bow way up high,

There's a land that I heard of once in a lull-a-by,

Figure 27. “Over the Rainbow.” Chorus.

a tempo, poco meno mosso

180

184

187

Figure 27. Rachmaninoff, Sonata No. 2: Finale’s 2nd Theme

There is no direct evidence that Rachmaninoff’s sonata begat “Over the Rainbow,” but the general convergence of stylistic commonalities is not random. In cosmopolitan locales, there

was cross-pollinating permeability between different listening audiences; jazz pianists and their predecessors would have listened to art music and vice versa, with composers developing a fondness for certain stylistic features across the divide. Rachmaninoff appreciated jazz; every month, he sent his daughter records of Paul Whiteman's band.⁴⁹ Some of the most prominent jazz pianists would have listened to Rachmaninoff's music, adopting aspects of his pianism.

Consider an excerpt from an obituary for Erroll Garner:

Mr. Garner had an uncanny ability to absorb and retain everything he heard. He once amazed a photographer who was an amateur pianist by playing Chopin and Mozart flawlessly during a long picture-taking session. After hearing the Russian pianist, Emil Gilels, at Carnegie Hall, Mr. Garner rushed to his apartment in the Carnegie Building and, it was reported, replayed a large part of the concert from memory.⁵⁰

Jazz, being capable of absorbing many influences, would sometimes adapt classical works and reinterpret them compositionally. Earlier, Art Tatum played his own take on Chopin's Waltz in C# Minor, Op. 64, No. 2 and Antonín Dvořák's "Humoresque." Oscar Peterson performed similarly.

⁴⁹ Sergiĭ Bertenson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), 237.

⁵⁰ John S. Wilson, "Erroll Garner, Jazz Pianist, 53; Composed 'Misty,' That's My Kick'," *The New York Times*, January 3, 1977, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/01/03/archives/erroll-garner-jazz-pianist-53-composed-misty-thats-my-kick.html>.

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Figure 28. Rachmaninoff, *Paganini Rhapsody*, Var. IX.

More than Rachmaninoff's other works for piano and orchestra, his Fourth Concerto and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* commonly receive assessments that they are jazz inflected. The latter's Variation IX: *L'istesso tempo*, for example, prominently features a syncopation in the piano's part (Figure 28). With the Fourth Concerto, completed in 1926, Rachmaninoff certainly would have had the opportunity to think about adopting jazz elements as viable source material, having heard the première of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* in Manhattan's Aeolian Hall in 1924. If Rachmaninoff did have jazz in mind when composing the concerto, his stride style, possibly deriving from ragtime (Figure 29) and a big band semblance of the *finale*'s coda (Figure 30), marked by heavy brass orchestration and unusual modal explorations, offer further examples.

90

The image shows a page of musical notation for Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 4, Finale, in a 'big band' style. The page is numbered 90 at the top left. The score is arranged for two grand pianos, labeled I and II. It features complex chordal textures and rhythmic patterns, including triplets and octaves. A section is marked with a box containing the number 80 and a forte (ff) dynamic marking. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 30. Rachmaninoff, *Concerto No. 4: Finale*, "big band" style

With

automatic

typecasting of Black pianists entailing that they fit into jazz molds, Shirley's likelihood of traversing the sonic color line to reach more varied audiences oftentimes called for performing compositions that seemed themselves to reach across the partitions of race.⁵¹ Extending to the present day, most Black pianists are expected to perform Gershwin's works, especially his *Rhapsody in Blue*. André Watts, Leon Bates, Isata Kanneh-Mason (notably, a British pianist), Michelle Cann (of the Curtis Institute), Shirley himself (taking excerpts in "The Man I Love"), and so forth, all featured the work in their repertoire. In the opera world, Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* has taken a similar function among Black singers, set into motion by the Black casting obligations Gershwin himself set.⁵² Although Rachmaninoff's Fourth Concerto never entered the

⁵¹ For an introduction to the concept of the "sonic color line," see Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line*, 1–28.

⁵² See Naomi Adele André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), chap. 4.

repertory of the small group of Black pianists in the present day, Shirley's evident affinity for the work would have led him to see it as a viable resource for his crossover *Green Book* style.

The commercial recording of Rachmaninoff's Fourth Concerto with Eugene Ormandy never happened. As this recording would have strongly directed the course of his musical profile in the years to come, its lack of materialization would haunt Shirley, and the concerto takes on an air of wistfulness in his recording of "Rainbow," especially since he inserts the Rachmaninoff quotation precisely at the final word of the phrase "And the dreams that you dare to / Dream really do come **true**," and again at the end of "Why then, oh why can't **I**."

Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come **true**

Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly
Birds fly over the rainbow
Why then, oh why can't **I**?

Like many other contemporary African Americans, Shirley's dream was constantly deferred—much as Langston Hughes expressed in his well-known poem, "Harlem." As a simultaneous reading, given the ambiguity of Shirley's personal life, his use of the tune may also align to the *Wizard of Oz*'s standing metaphor for the persistent marginalization of the proverbial friends of Dorothy Parker and Dorothy Gale.

At the point in the song where these words appear, Shirley's quotation would point to his internal queries of why he could never have a career as a classical concert pianist because of the impenetrable discrimination he faced as a Black man. At that point, the bassist, Richard Davis, who had generally been playing an accompanying role, takes the prominent theme that closes the concerto, marked by a heightened *doloroso* vibrato. Davis proxies for Shirley's voice; Shirley likely wrote the part out by hand. Moreover, Shirley could have easily played the 1911 version of the original *Étude-tableau*, which would have entailed that he would have been the soloist,

similar to elsewhere in his performance and throughout his albums. In selecting the concerto version, which accompanies the orchestra, Shirley recedes into the background, having a perhaps secondary part in ranked prominence, suggesting in its gesture of deferral the concerto performance he dared to dream but never realized. In quoting this portion of Rachmaninoff's Fourth Concerto, Shirley's ideal listening is perhaps strongest for himself and less concerned with catering to his audience, thus reflecting his sense of artistic integrity.

Further Thoughts

Around the launch of Don Shirley's career, as well as before and much after, African Americans seeking gainful, publicly oriented vocations in classical performance did not fare well, despite presentations of promise or their possession of cultivated skill. With few avenues, many had no choice but to abandon performance altogether. Most who attempted careers never made it to the world stage, even if accomplishing much artistically within smaller circles. Other aspirants followed paths toward more popular idioms. Popular music explorations were not all the same, as was the case of Shirley's practice of blurring genres. His story demonstrates unusual ways in which "serious" music might exist within overlapping spheres of varying musical genres.

Shirley's *Green Book* Style was idealist. In the recorded examples explored within this chapter, "I Cover the Waterfront" established Shirley as a serious, contemplative pianist connecting to infinite, pure space tied to the *Werktreue* paradigm. In elaborating his stylistic fusion, Shirley placed himself directly in the dialectical spiritual line extending from Liszt, Ravel, and Debussy. "Secret Love" saw Shirley safeguarding sincere, interior Truth through an emulation of a German *Lied*. "No Two People" connected Shirley to German universalist

notions. And “Over the Rainbow” became a veritable musical autobiography, contemplating the promises of equality and potential for African Americans realizing dreams in an oblique, kindred resonance with Soviet ideals.

Shirley generated his own brand of concert art music but inevitably faced problems of middlebrow appellations, stemming directly from the ethos of the *Werktreue* paradigm he so valued. Shirley did not conflate the *Werktreue* with the *Texttreue*; the former, flexibly realized, was of far greater importance in reaching ideal states in performance for him. Because listeners within official culture did not necessarily recognize the two as separate, Shirley’s alterations to texts meant that his performances would have been heard as “less than” among conservative musical fundamentalists. Being a Black man only compounded these challenges, as further assumptions would tie to the mired legacies of race-based American entertainment. This entailed overcoming middlebrow labels through his unique, strategic *Green Book* Style to stimulate engaged, serious listening. As early 20th-century values of dominant piano culture demanded uninterrupted concentration and cerebral engagement of the audience, a piano interpreter had to receive a certain amount of respect in order to be heard at all, even if in the presence of physical bodies sharing the same space.

While Shirley eschewed notions of the middlebrow and entertainment for greater respectability and authenticity in expression of his inner ideals, he could never be regarded as a timeless, flagship classical concert pianist on the world’s stage because of racist assumptions. Despite his ingenuity and cultivation, his blend of classical approaches with popular music consigned him irretrievably to the middlebrow, creating a paradoxical problem. While classical music has often been “just about the music,” resistance to forthright discussions of race has led to a dismissal of creativity in figures like Shirley. Maneuvering around the limits of the sonic

color line was not really an option, except perhaps among listeners not entirely wedded to the bonds of bona fide “high art” music. Shirley’s story is one of a subaltern voice finding an alternative path toward the idealist basis of the classical tradition, in the face of his automatic rejection by a prominent impresario—Sol Hurok—as a “colored” pianist. Nonetheless, Shirley did find a loyal following and left behind a unique recorded legacy. And his story is but one of many within a space that rendered Black classical musicians inaudible by the forced, reductive label of “middlebrow.” In moving past prejudiced markers and assumptions, one may hear the output of Shirley not as a testament of dead-end racialized misfortune but, in its own right, of innovative synthesis and aesthetic ingenuity warranting closer study and a willingness to engage experientially.

EPILOGUE

Pairing Donald Shirley and Sergei Rachmaninoff together in the same dissertation might seem unexpected, perhaps even peculiar. Under different degrees of marginalization, both had no choice but to devise ways to perform and survive under the yokes of steeply reductive assumptions. In the United States, most likely due to not being taken seriously, Rachmaninoff sharply decreased his compositional activity, moving to find a more permissible career likelihood as a concert pianist. While achieving what remains a coveted dream to many, Rachmaninoff was compelled to perform under the stipulations of adhering to an allure of Russian exoticization, in contrast to a more legitimate career as a “masterful” composer at the cutting edge of musical advancement. Shirley, worse off as a Black man under Jim Crow restrictions and facing outright discrimination, could not find a place on “legitimate” concert stages; he could not even enter certain halls that showcased the music he most cherished, even as a listener. Unlike Rachmaninoff, Shirley could not function as a concert pianist, since there were no open places there for an African American man. Contrary to “natural” Black women opera singers finding success with operas like *Aida*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Carmen*, with stereotypes involving gendered, exotic sexualization, Shirley was at a disadvantage, not having externally ascribed racialized “feminine wiles” at his disposal. As a Black male pianist performing an “unnatural” instrument and repertory—each requiring a kind of mastery coded Whiteness—prevailing racial paradigms meant that he could not enter the spaces of constructed genius as a calculating, cerebral, modernist architect of abstract musicality.

Both Shirley and Rachmaninoff found ways to carve careers for themselves while holding onto semblances of who they were as idealists in complicated musical ecosystems.

Shirley's pianism stimulated idealized, "serious" listening as he approached the category of "classical music" through his *Green Book* style pianism. Rachmaninoff's idealism preserved the Russia he once knew while catering to a larger, perhaps oblivious listening public that would read his pianism through more rational, "masculine" values that intersected with stereotypes of Russian alterities of sternness and a forbidding, severe nature. Both figures' idealism grew from a desire to live without restraint, as with Shirley's visions of a land free from stifling anti-Black racism and Rachmaninoff's visions of a restored, godlier Russia—*Matushka Rossiya* that neither hated him nor forced him out for good at the revolution.

Both saw the slotting of their music, compositionally, into the so-called "middlebrow" category, untouchable by serious intellectuals. Some of this attitude has prevented intertextual examination of Rachmaninoff's recorded pianism that manifestly resists this categorizing, which often does not register in its full richness in normal listening circumstances. Shirley's "*Green Book Style*" would be dismissed as committing adulterations along textualist paradigms. Frank Patterson, in polling so-called "academic musicians," as Neil Leonard described them, summarized his findings of their sentiments about improvisation in *The Musical Courier* in 1922:¹

They all agreed that the 'adlibbing' or 'jazzing' of a piece is thoroughly objectionable, and several of them advanced the opinion that this Bolshevistic smashing of the rules and tenets of decorous music, this excessive freedom of interpretation, tended to a similar letting down on the part of the dancers, a similar disregard for the self-contained and self-restrained attitude that has been prescribed by the makers of the rules of dignified societal intercourse.²

¹ See Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 42–43.

² Frank Patterson, "Jazz'—The National Anthen(?)," *Musical Courier*, LXXXIV (May 11, 1922), 6.

This would later be heightened by what would have been sensed (although not explicitly labeled) as an “Afrological” proximity to practices resonant with improvisation.³ As jazz began to proliferate, its associations with Black performance practices were increasingly seen as less prestigious and less tied to “genius”; Blackness itself was not regarded as fully human by hegemonic cultural forces for most of American history. As classical improvisation and Lisztian approaches to rearrangement and re-composition had died out by Shirley’s time, Shirley himself as a Black man could not be seen as a bastion preserving and buttressing such an approach, even if by convergence along the lines of ostensibly universalist textualism.

With Shirley’s leanings favoring classical music and classical dispositions, his reception, in some ways like Rachmaninoff’s, was not deemed progressive for the times. From liberal, alternative perspectives of viewing and receiving Black musicians as more *avant-garde* through jazz, especially in Manhattan, Shirley would have been labeled as regressive. The listening base of the more “progressive” jazz music from the 1920s on would have seen Shirley as a problematic figure working against “the cause,” bowing to restrictive notions of respectability tied to repressive Western classical music. Nonetheless, Shirley did maintain relations with jazz musicians, including Duke Ellington, whose near piano concerto, *New World A-Comin’*, he performed in Carnegie Hall in 1955.

Shirley’s career followed a galvanized era about 25 years preceding him, as Ann Douglas details in *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. While Shirley did intermingle different musical forms, the direction *toward* rather than *away from* classical music imposed a glass ceiling. Rejecting Victorian values prevalent throughout American Society was key to the

³ See George E. Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 91–122, <https://doi.org/10.2307/779379>.

progressive era, Douglas argues, contending that “going public with one’s animal nature became a popular pastime.”⁴ Mingling Freudian reading with racialized undertones that preferred the “primitive” and “animalistic,” Douglas writes that the thrust of the era entailed rejecting apparent common decency and stuffy, old-world values. Ultimately, this led to a form of cultural “matricide” and repudiation of frumpy grannies.

In not performing strictly Black-derived musical forms and using “Afrological” techniques, he would not have the cutting-edge appeal that might electrify the essentialized expectations of mainstream White listeners. This points to a directionality in tendency, where one straddling the racial audile color line may “aspire” toward Whiteness or “decline” away from it. Declining away from Whiteness or “respectability” hurt Donald Shirley. Similarly, it also hurt others, including Aaron Copland and the “Dean” of African American composers, William Grant Still. George Gershwin was the exception, moving *toward* respectability. In his case, the American music critic Olin Downes wrote about Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, saying it “shows extraordinary talent, just as it also shows a young composer with aims that go far beyond those of his ilk, struggling with a form of which he is far from being master.”⁵ Richard Taruskin interpreted this as equating to “upward mobility” in aspiring beyond his background to teach jazz how “to read,” thereby marking it with ascendant, respectable gentility.⁶ Gershwin became “the man who made an honest woman out of jazz” according to a 1930s radio introduction; the success of Gershwin lay in an implicit valuing of European forms as ultimately superior.⁷

⁴ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 48.

⁵ Olin Downes, as quoted in Edward Jablonski and Lawrence D. Stewart, *The Gershwin Years*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958), 95.

⁶ Richard Taruskin. “Chapter 11, In Search of the ‘Real’ America.” In *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Oxford University Press. (New York, USA, 2010), from <https://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume4/actrade-9780195384840-div1-011004.xml>

⁷ Cf. Rudy Vallee Hour, broadcast 10 November 1932, on *Gershwin Conducts Excerpts from Porgy and Bess*, Mark 56 Records 667 (1974).

Had Gershwin started from a complete mastery of classical practice and form, the opposite would have resulted, Taruskin argues, namely in situating his work as degrading respectability rather than ascending to it. Taruskin points this out about Copland, who in *Music for Theatre* appropriated jazz through modernist values and degraded classical music with his elite training. Similarly, although more strikingly, heading from a more “White” to a more “Black” musical direction presented William Grant Still, an African American composer, a considerable problem. Originally taught *avant-garde* techniques by Varèse, Still worked within the modernist realm in advancing music through electronic and other advanced techniques. Although working well within the direction of advancement of Western art music, he was met with considerable negativity, as Olin Downes, critic of the *New York Times*, wrote in 1925, “Is Mr. Still unaware that the cheapest melody in the revues he has orchestrated has more reality and inspiration in it than the curious noises he has manufactured?” However, when he resolved to write “race music,” as he would put it, and endeavored to bring in more African American elements into his music, some, like Aaron Copland, would say that his music was “often based on the slushier side of jazz” going on to wish that his “musical content [was] more distinguished.” Feeding the desire for the “primitive African,” Still projected to write an opera (in his own words) to be set in Africa, where the “music will, in as far as artistically possible, reflect the primitive and barbaric nature of the African savage.”⁸ In Still’s case, damned if he did, and damned if he didn’t, he recognized racial bias skewing perceptions to favor the worst possible view from those in power.

Beyond Shirley playing what some might interpret as grandma’s music, his readings of more popular music and the like through lenses of European classical music signaled sympathy

⁸ Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), 61.

for the oppressor in some ways. Thus, the more “respectable” Shirley became, the further away from a wider public acceptance he found himself, in terms expected of a cutting-edge Black musician. Like Still, Shirley was also damned if he did and damned if he didn’t, finding himself in an impossible situation as an African American performer striving to be heard along the lines of engaged musical idealism.

Rachmaninoff had constantly been in lockstep with cultural commentators in presenting a public persona. Concert reviewers frequently compared his appearance and countenance to that of an escaped convict, as was the case with Harold Schonberg:

There was nobody like him. Rachmaninoff would come on stage stiff and severe, never smiling, with his hair cropped as close as a convict’s. With terrible dignity, he would seat

himself and wait for the audience to quiet. He played with a minimum of physical exertion, brooding over the keys.

His former piano student Eugene Istomin said:

He looked like a convict. He was so big, so large, that the keyboard looked like a little checkerboard in front of him. I wasn't frightened at how he looked, but I was impressed.

Carl van Vechten also contributed to a penitentiary-convict trope, racializing it:

A plaintive Russian note wandered through all this music. In fact, towards the end of the program, many of the listeners began to feel as if they were prisoners bound for Siberia.⁹ Russian music in general, and Rachmaninoff's music in particular, is weighted down with a melancholy, which seems to be racial in its insistence.¹⁰

And Joseph Horowitz more recently:

"In his own music, Rachmaninoff is, again, an unsentimental Romantic, as ruthless as his convict's haircut and gimlet eyes."¹¹

Horowitz may have been referring to the work of the Luxembourgish American photographer Edward Steichen, who captured Rachmaninoff in a *noir* style (Figure 31). The photograph uses high contrast, creating a long, dark shadow covering the center of his face, revealing two intense black voids of eyes with infinitesimal white specks formed by reflecting the camera's flash mimicking pupils. Leaning forward, his pose augments the many heightened, harsh, and deep wrinkles and pensive furrows covering his face; his interlaced hands suggest he is contemplating something bad—something best left unstated. The photograph is grim. But, Steichen designed this intentionally according to the paradigms of *film noir's* styles, whose visual dreadfulness had tight associations with the criminality of mobsters, gangsters, and other dangerous scoundrels

⁹ From the *New York Times*, November 21, 1909. Quoted in Carl Van Vechten, *Caruso's Mustache Off: And Other Writings about Music and Musicians*, Edited by Bruce Kellner. (New York: Mondial, 2010), 10.

¹⁰ From the *New York Times*, January 28, 1909. Quoted in Vechten, 11.

¹¹ Joseph Horowitz, "Re-Encountering Rachmaninoff." Online. [n.d.] New Jersey Symphony/Gilmore Festival/Stresa Festival. (from http://www.josephhorowitz.com/up_files/File/archives/RE-ENCOUNTERING%20RACHMANINOFF.pdf)

committed to malfeasance. For Rachmaninoff, invoking this trope would not only suggest Slavic otherness but an irresistibly attractive Russophobia.



Figure 31. *Rachmaninoff* by Edward Steichen, 1936.

Orientalism had become wedded to Russianness from outside perspectives, especially as the Russian Empire had many different cultures within its reach, some with origins very far from an already remote Eastern Europe, which added to a sense of exoticness as Russian composers had many sources of inspiration from which to draw.¹² Francis Maes wrote:

¹² See Norio Umetsu. “Oriental Elements in Russian Music and the Reception in Western Europe: Nationalism, Orientalism, and Russianness.” From https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/rp/publications/no13/13_2-2_Umetsu.pdf. *Orient on Orient: Images of Asia in Eurasian Countries* by the Slavic Research Center. No. 13, 2013.

At about the turn of the twentieth century, Russian music first came to the attention of the Western public in Paris. Presented chiefly with oriental works, the Parisians, unprompted, considered them to be “typically Russian.” Understandably so: to them, Russia herself was part of the mysterious East, of oriental “otherness.”¹³

Under an infantilizing assessment that followed the appellation of “Oriental,” Arthur Symons wrote about the Ballet Russes and the Russians’ propensity to accept fiction as true:

The primitive and myth-making imagination of the Russians shows a tendency to regard metaphors as real and share these tendencies with the savage, that is to say with the savagery that is in them, dependent as they are on rudimentary emotions. Other races, too long civilized, have accustomed themselves to the soul, to mystery. Russia, with centuries of savagery behind it, still feels the earth about its roots, and the thirst in it of the primitive animal. It has lost none of its instincts, and it has just discovered the soul.¹⁴

Later, Igor Stravinsky’s caricatures as in the *The Rite of Spring*, struck Aaron Copland with its “neoprimitive style [...] based on native Russian sources,” marveling at a “general feeling of mystification that followed the initial hearing.”¹⁵ As Taruskin argues, “Stravinsky’s name had been synonymous with ‘savage’ Russian (read: semi-Asiatic) maximalism at its most exotic, obstreperous, even orgiastic.”¹⁶ Stravinsky’s earlier success was largely attributable to an outrageous Othering. From a Western European perspective, many Russian composers moved opposite from the summit of Whiteness, thereby making themselves less “civilized,” “advanced,” or “normal.” At the same time, with a voracious appetite for exoticized artistic capital, Western non-Russian listeners, critics, and the like, would not readily encourage or allow Russian composers to explore alternatives other than tropes highlighting primitive savageness.

Considering overarching generalizations again, Walter Durante wrote in *The New York Times* that Russia had its own

¹³Francis Maes. *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 80-81.

¹⁴ Arthur Symons, *Dramatis Personæ* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923), 287.

¹⁵ Aaron Copland, *The New Music 1900/60* (London: Macdonald, 1968), p. 72

¹⁶ Richard Taruskin. "Chapter 8 Pathos Is Banned." In *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*. (New York: Oxford University Press 2010) 4:447.

racial needs and characteristics, which are strange and peculiar, and fundamentally more Asiatic than European ... Old Russia was an amorphous mass, held together by a mystic, half Asian idea of an imperial régime wherein the emperor was exalted to the position of God's vice regent, with limitless power over the bodies, souls, property and even thoughts of his subjects. That, at least, was the theory, and it was only when the Czars themselves began to question it and "act human" that a spirit of doubt and eventual rebellion became manifest.¹⁷

Much of the sense of inferiority affixed to Russia's people stemmed from what David Engerman attributes to the scientific racism of the late 19th to early 20th centuries, which steered the views of many American pundits.¹⁸ Under such hierarchical thinking, Russia found herself relatively low on racial totems. Ultimately, prejudgment of those listening to Russian art entailed problematic reception and perceptions, including such with Rachmaninoff. Because his music did not deliver in moving toward reductive exoticism (or high modernism), it was disparaged as cloying and saccharine. Rachmaninoff compensated for this as a performer in appealing to brutal severity.

Hypersensitive to what others thought of him, Rachmaninoff was aware of the difference in how American audiences would perceive him; he thus played to dualities—one side for the audience and the other for himself, which was necessary, as, at the conspicuously late age of 45, Rachmaninoff set out to become a professional concert pianist. Feeling that the United States would lend a greater likelihood of financial success, he planned accordingly, in consideration of how his approach to pianism would be understood, especially after leaving Russia for good in 1917. With the majority of his significant concert tours in North America and recordings for the American label, RCA Victor, Rachmaninoff, perhaps business-minded, appealed to Anglo Saxon American, not Russian, norms of "manly" musical behavior. Yet ironically, on the other side of

¹⁷ Walter Duranty, "Operating Principle Is Russian." in *The New York Times*. [1931?] As quoted in Gareth Jones. https://www.garethjones.org/soviet_articles/duranty_1931_1.htm

¹⁸ David Charles Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard U Press, 2003).

his performative duality, through his cleaving to Eastern Orthodoxy to preserve true “Russianness,” he ultimately drew the multifaceted Sacred Feminine out of its apocalypse in his pianism.

Through his severe demeanor and serious performance style, Rachmaninoff legitimized himself despite his emotionally laden music, while also creating space for himself to realize his inner pianistic visions, adherent to an idealized Russia just out of grasp. Russian Orthodoxy forms the bedrock of his pianism, although not often seen as such. Religion for Rachmaninoff was not necessarily analogous to the unshakable expressions of faith of a “born believer” like Olivier Messiaen, a proselytizer of the concert hall. Rather, Rachmaninoff’s religious expressions might be seen as tightly entwined with cultural Russianness, which had been steeped in Orthodoxy for centuries.

Rachmaninoff’s legacy as a pianist generally remains very high. But as a Black man, Shirley could never be regarded as a flagship classical concert pianist. Despite his ingenuity and recognized promise, his blend of classical approaches with popular music consigned him irretrievably to the middlebrow. Daniel Pollack, the well-known piano pedagogue at the University of Southern California, linked unprofessionalism and not being serious with the instrument to Broadway show tunes played on the piano, as he reflected disdainfully on contemporary piano study:

Today, a lot of them [younger pianists] study in a dilettante, amateur fashion, which means, the repertoire is completely different.

[Gesturing a hypothetical student:] “You know, I can play Broadway show tunes.”

[Pollack gesturing himself:] Well, not exactly. I didn't play Broadway show tunes. I was playing pieces by traditional composers—Mozart, Schubert, Haydn, Mendelssohn, [...] I was not doing watered-down versions.¹⁹

Although Shirley found an alternative way to reshape the ideals of his musicianship along the tenets of Western art music, his “watered-down versions” would be dismissed by official culture, lumped into a pile of triviality. Any creativity or maneuvering around the limits of the sonic color line would not register with many, save some not entirely wedded to the bonds of bona fide “high art” music. Shirley’s story is one of a subaltern voice finding a different path toward the German Idealist basis of the classical tradition in the face of his automatic dismissal by gatekeepers. Nonetheless, as did Rachmaninoff, Shirley found a loyal following and left behind a unique recorded legacy. Shirley and Rachmaninoff’s stories are two of many concert artists whose music became inaudible due to receptive modes attached to the historically reductive label of “middlebrow.” In a time of ethnic and racial reckoning, continuing to add to more contemporary efforts in vigorously unpacking and retiring tired terms like “middlebrow” is in order, especially with broad efforts moving to undo longstanding power structures holding many within that problematic category.

¹⁹ “ARTS: Pianist Daniel Pollack on Piano Education Today - YouTube,” accessed June 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmNf30U7FD8&t=257s>.

APPENDICES

Appendix A –Chopin-Rachmaninoff Hybrid Sonata No. 2 in Bb Minor, Opp. 35-36

[Included with E-Scholarship/ProQuest as a separate audio-video file.]

This recording, combining movements from both Chopin and Rachmaninoff's Second Sonatas was preceded by my paper, "Sonic Erasure of Subject Position in the Reception of Rachmaninoff's Pianism: A Performance Analysis Study," given at UCLA's *Music Performance Studies Today* Conference. Brief spoken remarks introduce the performance and paper. The first three movements were influenced, in part, by Rachmaninoff's performance practice. The *finale* represents Rachmaninoff's "correction" to Chopin's sonata.

Original link [subject to expiration]:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHbt8ADsTVI&t=1222s> (20:22-46:26)

Place of Recording: Schoenberg Hall

Recording Premiered April 28, 2021; Recorded on April 16, 2021

Instrument: Steinway D

Audio Technician: José Carrillo

Movements

- I. Chopin: *Grave—Doppio movimento*
- II. Chopin: *Scherzo*
- III. Chopin: *Marche funèbre*
- IV. Rachmaninoff: *Finale. Allegro molto* (Original 1913 Version)

NB: For the conference at large, panels included:

1. Performing Capitalism and Neoliberalism
2. Anti-Blackness in Western Classical Music
3. The Ephemerality of Musical Hearing
4. 21st-Century Pianism: Retrospection, New Directions, and Interpretative Communities – Performances ("Watch Party") & Paper Panel
5. Methods in Music Performance Studies
6. Performance, Gestures, Electronics.
7. Coordinated with Robert U. Nelson Lecture by Kira Thurman: "On Beethoven, Blackness, and Belonging: Debating Classical Music in the Black Atlantic."

Appendix B – Annotated Score of Chopin's Sonata No. 2, as Recorded by Rachmaninoff for RCA Victor (1930). Mikuli Edition.

35

Sonate. *Quiet Climax*
time → *New Start*
Breathe

F. CHOPIN. Op. 35.

2. *Grave. Reluctant* *Softer Under 5th* *ad lib mp* *pp* *Motion* *Contrast RH*

uneasy - Nervous *on beat* *Fairly Dry* *Deep, Rich* *Emphasized* *Agitato. No ped.* *Dance. Emerging B♭ Line* *cresc. by LH.*

Toward fall board *Simple & bare. Plauding; inwardly.* *unimp D.M.*

7 *mf* *mp* *less*

11 *less* *ten. ten. ten.*

15 *mf* *mp* *Hold over & slightly*

19 *mf* *mp* *Rit* *a tempo*

23 *cresc.* *w/ ped. stretch* *Pushing More*

Handwritten annotations for measures 27-30: *pass. fe.* (green), ** tea* (black), *5 3 1* (black), *5 4 3* (black), *5 3 4* (black), *5 3 4* (black).

Handwritten annotations for measures 31-34: ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), *5 3 1* (black), *5 4 3* (black), *5 3 4* (black), *5 3 4* (black), *5 3 4* (black).

Handwritten annotations for measures 35-38: *cresc.* (black), *Mend. Mosso* (red), *ff* (black), *Inner Line* (blue), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black).

Handwritten annotations for measures 39-46: *ten. ten.* (red), *Rit. a* (blue), *p = 89* (blue), *sosten.* (blue), *Not Much pedal* (blue), *Inward Quick* (green), *All the same volume* (green), *As half notes* (red), *pp* (red), *Slower* (red), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black).

Handwritten annotations for measures 47-53: *Inward* (green), *Simple. Hymn-like* (green), *Inward* (green), *Slowing* (green), *Rit. "Secret"* (blue), *Molto* (blue), *a tempo* (purple), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black).

Handwritten annotations for measures 54-57: *Simple, Peaceful* (purple), *Dim.* (green), *No. cresc.* (green), *Almost Firm Lh* (green), *Rit* (red), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black), ** tea* (black).

59 *Poco Rit.* *Var. II*

59 *Poco Pushing*

63 *Poco rit.* *Poco up* *cresc.*

63 *Poco up* *cresc.*

67 *poco più mosso* *più mosso*

67 *poco più mosso* *più mosso*

70 *Line in Lt* *Poco sotto voce*

70 *Line in Lt* *Poco sotto voce*

73 *Soft* *Push*

73 *Soft* *Push*

77 *Even & Firm*

77 *Even & Firm*

11744

Complete shift
piu mosso

81 *f* *f* *p*

Mix. ped. segue leggiero

86 una corda tre corde


90 One large phrase / sweep hold stretto *f*

94 *cresc.* Huge gestures Rhythmic 1st 2nd 3rd 4th * See below

99 *rit.* *mf* Arrival * * as on 8th

105 *riten. ped. encl.* Almost ugly Rich Dark pesante sotto voce *rit.* *lento* *pp* faint?

1774

* Rhythm:  Another realm of musical space

111 *a tempo* *More intense* *Push* *Passade* *molto rit.*

116 *a piacere* *slowly* *Big Bass No tie* *Sf* *quasi a tempo* *a piacere* *no.* *cresc.*

har *a tempo* *Sing K.H.*

121 *secret* *line* *latent* *vecode*

rhythmic *Una coda* *heart throbbing* *clear-not mixing* *Perfect triplets*

125 *full* *faster* *cresc.*

Can pedale *rit.*

128 *a tempo* *mf*

132 *cresc.* *ped.* *Bring out*

Glass New Plane Climax Hear 2nd Theme

136

ff High Point

Not 3:4

Not harsh Hear Theme

add. inner Notes (above)

2 1

2 1

139

Still loud

142

Dark sub

145

Dim.

R4. calando

148

clear

152

Quick

Push

No cresc.

156 *stretto* *a tempo* *Echo softer* *pp* *dim* *41*

160 *rit.* *pp* *stretto.* *New tempo ten. Slower ten!* *pp* *mp* *cresc.* *accel.*

163 *Stretto* *Rit.* *p* *ped. up* *(1st time)*

167 *sostenuto.* *faster than before, but slower*

173 *Quick Roll* *rit.*

174 *Quick & Rich More Notes?* *Quick Roll* *Emergence* *Bring out*

42

185

189

193

198

202

207

11744

mf

rit.

a tempo

cresc.

a tempo

stretto

clear

2 elements

come sopra

Not a big ped. sound

Bigger

Noble, Not fast

Pick up

Simple & intimate

212

segue.

slightly less

one phrase sweep accel.

216

cresc.

Big phrase

220

[same as before]

cresc.

Ped *

224

New Phase - sub Climax

f

Ped *

229

a tempo

stretto.

poco accel.

LH Dominants

posante LH

cresc.

New Phase

Hold tempo

Ped *

234

f

Ped *

Cadenza

11744

* See analog. section for rhythm.

44
 Scherzo.
 1 Measre = 1 Beat
 p = TB

Propel LH
 softer / commentar /

1
 mf

LH More Not a Prominent pickup ↑
 Deep Sound

Legiero →

8

pp

No ped.

(acc)

22
 ten. More

ten.

Para rit.

28

No ped.

a tempo

34

Some bar

11744

Detailed description of the handwritten musical score: The score is for a piece titled 'Scherzo.' in 3/4 time, marked 'p = TB' and '1 Measre = 1 Beat'. It consists of six systems of music, each with a system number (1, 6, 13, 22, 28, 34) in the left margin. The notation includes treble and bass staves with notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as 'mf', 'pp', and 'f'. Numerous handwritten annotations in various colors (blue, green, purple, red) are present. These include performance instructions like 'Propel LH', 'softer / commentar /', 'LH More Not a Prominent pickup ↑', 'Deep Sound', 'Legiero', 'ten.', 'More', 'Para rit.', 'a tempo', and 'Some bar'. There are also technical notes like 'No ped.' and 'pp'. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. A circled section in the first system is labeled 'Propel LH'. A blue circle around a note in the first system is labeled 'softer / commentar /'. A green arrow points to a measure in the first system labeled 'Propel'. A purple arrow points to a measure in the second system labeled 'LH More Not a Prominent pickup ↑'. A purple circle around a note in the second system is labeled 'Deep Sound'. A green arrow points to a measure in the second system labeled 'Legiero'. A red arrow points to a measure in the third system labeled 'pp'. A red 'X' over a measure in the third system is labeled 'No ped.'. A green arrow points to a measure in the third system labeled '(acc)'. A blue arrow points to a measure in the fourth system labeled 'ten.'. A green arrow points to a measure in the fourth system labeled 'More'. A blue arrow points to a measure in the fifth system labeled 'Para rit.'. A red 'X' over a measure in the fifth system is labeled 'No ped.'. A red arrow points to a measure in the sixth system labeled 'a tempo'. A green arrow points to a measure in the sixth system labeled 'Some bar'. The number '11744' is written at the bottom left of the page.

Bigger

Quick

Hemiola

off beats

Poco rit.

2 True hemiola

4 4

4 4

Blankly pushing

a tempo

11744

(in background)
Più lento.

81 *Prominent* *p*

90

99 *a tempo* *ma più lento*

109

118 *dimin.*

127

136 *Rit.* *Sit* *legato Rit* *a tempo* 47 *Simple!* *off*

144b *p* *no* *Voce* *foro più lento*

153 *en dehors* *Slower* *Rit.* *a tempo* *a tempo ma più lento*

162 *Rit.* *a tempo* *a tempo ma più lento*

173 *Rit.* *a tempo* *a tempo ma più lento*

183a *1.* *2.* *accelerando* *cresc.* *f* *off* *ben secco*

11744

48 Similar to the beginning.

Poco più mosso
Tempo I.

Musical score for measures 189-194. The score is in G major with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It features a complex texture with many chords and moving lines in both hands. Handwritten annotations include 'Ped.' and '*' in the bass line.

Musical score for measures 195-202. The score continues with similar complexity. Handwritten annotations include 'leggiere' in blue above the treble staff and 'p' in the bass line. Pedal markings 'Ped.' and '*' are present.

Musical score for measures 203-211. The score shows a change in texture with some sustained notes in the treble. Handwritten annotations include 'Knocking' in green above the treble staff and 'pp' in the bass line. Pedal markings 'Ped.' and '*' are present.

Musical score for measures 212-216. The score continues with dense chordal textures. Pedal markings 'Ped.' and '*' are present.

Musical score for measures 217-224. The score features dynamic markings 'p' and 'f'. Handwritten annotations include 'leggiere' in blue above the treble staff. Pedal markings 'Ped.' and '*' are present.

11724



Risolto

223

f_x

228

f_x

Blurred, slightly

233

leggiero

cresc.

clear

238

f

Hemiola ↑ as before but less pronounced

244

pp

Slower

Slowing

7 7
Bigger

a tempo

253

Rea *

Rea *

ff hemiola...

258

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

263

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

p

dimin.

Sotto voce

269

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Rea *

Lento a tempo

smorz.

278

Rea *

Rea *

Slowing

Not the other variant with Bb (as Ip in Rtt)

Marche funèbre.

F. CHOPIN. Op. 35.

Lento.

1 *Con Moto* *f = 62* *Steady* *Like chanting* *Same phrase* *No inflection* *Same volume*

6 *No Bend* *No change*

11 *No Db* *fz* *mp*

16 *mp* *Bland* *Quick / Subtle* *sempre Ped.* *Stacc* *before*

21 *mp* *tre corde* *ff* *sempre forte.* *dym.* *before* *ff* *8-1* *8-1* *8-1* *999*

26 *sempre forte.* *dym.* *before* *ff* *8-1* *8-1* *8-1* *999*

41748

60 *softer*

65 *fz* *softer* *Tempo 2 (32)* *rit.*

69 *f=63* *Tempo 2 (32)* *mp* *rit.*

73 *f=56* *sempre f* *dim.* *p* *rit.* *e von softer*

77 *f=53* *mp* *rit.*

81 *f=45 rit. al fine* *No F*

84

11744

The image shows a handwritten musical score for piano, spanning measures 60 to 84. The score is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It includes several systems of music with various annotations in different colors (blue, purple, red, green). Key annotations include:

- Measure 60:** "softer" written in blue above the staff.
- Measure 65:** "fz" (forzando) in black, "softer" in green, and "Tempo 2 (32)" in red. There are also "rit." (ritardando) markings in blue.
- Measure 69:** "f=63" in blue, "Tempo 2 (32)" in red, and "mp" (mezzo-piano) in red.
- Measure 73:** "f=56" in blue, "sempre f" (sempre forte) in purple, "dim." (diminuendo) in black, "p" (piano) in black, and "rit." in blue. A green note "e von softer" is written to the right.
- Measure 77:** "f=53" in blue, "mp" in blue, and "rit." in blue.
- Measure 81:** "f=45 rit. al fine" in blue.
- Measure 84:** "No F" in red.

 The score also features various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. There are some handwritten symbols like "8" and "Loo" in purple. The page number "53" is in the top right, and "11744" is in the bottom left.

"Preluding" on chords: Introductory-like

Presto. *sotto voce e legato.*

Play w/ Percussions
 • Ghostly
 • Not all there *pp*

like an arpeggio

Echo

This system contains the first three measures of the piece. The notation is in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has two flats. The tempo is marked 'Presto' and the performance instruction is 'sotto voce e legato'. Handwritten notes include 'Play w/ Percussions', 'Ghostly', 'Not all there pp', and 'like an arpeggio'. The word 'Echo' is written in blue above the first measure. Red vertical lines are drawn between measures 1 and 2, and 2 and 3. Green arrows point from the first measure to the second and third. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5.

Echo

Here "start"

This system contains measures 4 through 6. The word 'Echo' is written in blue above the first measure. A red vertical line is drawn between measures 5 and 6, with the handwritten note 'Here "start"'. Green arrows continue from the previous system. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5.

Voiced. Not held.

This system contains measures 7 through 9. The handwritten note 'Voiced. Not held.' is written in blue above the first measure. Green arrows continue from the previous system. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5.

This system contains measures 10 through 12. Green arrows continue from the previous system. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5.

off beat ten. More intense

ten. ten. ten.

This system contains measures 13 through 15. The handwritten note 'off beat ten. More intense' is written in red and purple below the first measure. The word 'ten.' is written in red below measures 14 and 15. Green arrows continue from the previous system. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5.

Sotto voce.

Push →

Poco → → → →

ten. ten. ten. ten.

This system contains measures 16 through 19. The performance instruction 'Sotto voce.' is written in blue above the first measure. The word 'Push' with an arrow is written in blue below the first measure. The word 'Poco' with four arrows is written in purple below the first measure. The word 'ten.' is written in red below measures 17, 18, 19, and 20. Green arrows continue from the previous system. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5.

19

Handwritten annotations: purple line above measure 19, red lines connecting notes across measures, dynamics *pp*, *mp*, and *mp*.

21

Handwritten annotations: *mf*, red lines, and *ten.* (tenuendo) markings under measures 24-25.

23

Senza pedale.
Sotto voce

Handwritten annotations: *Senza pedale.* and *Sotto voce* in green.

26

Handwritten annotations: blue lines above and below the staves.

29

Echo

Handwritten annotations: *Echo* in green, red accents, and a red bracket.

32

Echo

Handwritten annotations: *Echo* in green, red accents, and a red bracket.

56 *3/3* *As above*

35

38 ? *As written*

41 *start*

44

47 *all*

50 *1* *Softly* *tenuto line*

②

③ More sound

57

53

56

59

62

65

68

71

11744

dim.

softer

softer

dim.

ppp.

Almost "Vamping"
fade to nothing

ff

space

fade
* off
wiped.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score consists of eight systems of piano music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The systems are numbered 53, 56, 59, 62, 65, 68, and 71. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. Performance instructions are written in various colors: blue for 'More sound' and 'dim.', green for 'softer', red for 'ppp.', and purple for 'space'. A large green note at the end of system 71 says 'Almost "Vamping" fade to nothing'. At the bottom right, there are handwritten notes: 'ff', 'space', 'fade * off', and 'wiped.' with arrows pointing to the final notes of the piece.

Appendix C – Der Erlkönig

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1853)

*Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er faßt ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.*

*Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein
Gesicht? –
Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif? –
Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif. –*

*"Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir;
Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand."*

*–
Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du
nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht? –
Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind;
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind. –*

*"Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen
Reihn,
Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich
ein." –
Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du
nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort? –*

*Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau. –*

*"Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne
Gestalt;
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich
Gewalt." –
Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt faßt er mich
an!
Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan! –
Dem Vater grauset's; er reitet geschwind,
Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not;
In seinen Armen, das Kind war tot.*

Who rides there so late through the night dark and
drear?¹
The father it is, with his infant so dear;
He holdeth the boy tightly clasp'd in his arm,
He holdeth him safely, he keepeth him warm.

My son, wherefore seek'st thou thy face thus to hide? –
Look, father, the Erl-King is close by our side!
Dost see not the Erl-King, with crown and with train? –
My son, 'tis the mist rising over the plain. –

"Oh, come, thou dear infant! oh come thou with me!
For many a game, I will play there with thee;
On my strand, lovely flowers their blossoms unfold,
My mother shall grace thee with garments of gold." –

My father, my father, and dost thou not hear
The words that the Erl-King now breathes in mine ear? –
Be calm, dearest child, 'tis thy fancy deceives;
'Tis the sad wind that sighs through the withering leaves.
–

"Wilt go, then, dear infant, wilt go with me there?
My daughters shall tend thee with sisterly care;
My daughters by night their glad festival keep,
They'll dance thee, and rock thee, and sing thee to sleep."
–

My father, my father, and dost thou not see,
How the Erl-King his daughters has brought here for me?
–
My darling, my darling, I see it aright,
'Tis the aged grey willows deceiving thy sight. –

"I love thee, I'm charm'd by thy beauty, dear boy!
And if thou'rt unwilling, then force I'll employ." –
My father, my father, he seizes me fast,
For sorely, the Erl-King has hurt me at last. –

The father now gallops, with terror half wild,
He grasps in his arms the poor shuddering child;
He reaches his courtyard with toil and with dread, –
The child in his arms finds he motionless, dead.

¹ "The Erl-King." *The Poems of Goethe*. Trans. Edgar Alfred Bowring. p. 99

Appendix D – Selected Albums Recorded by Don Shirley

The following is a list of the most representative albums made by Don Shirley from 1955 to 2001. Reissues do not appear below.²

Donald Shirley - Tonal Expressions

Cadence CLP1001 [1955]

with Richard Davis (Bassist)

1. I Cover the Waterfront
2. No Two People
3. Secret Love
4. The Man I Love
5. Love Is Here to Stay
6. Dancing On the Ceiling
7. They Can't Take That Away from Me
8. Answer Me My Love
9. Medley From "New Faces": Love Is a Simple Thing / I'm In Love With Miss Logan / Monotonous / Bal Petit Bal / The Boston Beguine.
10. My Funny Valentine

Don Shirley - Piano Perspective

Cadence CLP1004 [1955]

1. Someone To Watch Over Me
2. Love for Sale
3. Blue Moon
4. How High the Moon
5. I Can't Get Started with You
6. I Can't Give You Anything but Love
7. I Let a Song Go Out Of My Heart
8. Makin' Whoopee
9. Lullaby of Birdland

Don Shirley - Orpheus in the Underworld

Cadence CLP1009 [1956]

1. Genesis
2. Misfortune
3. Litany
4. The Journey
5. Pleading
6. Retrospect
7. (Dies Irae) Expectation
8. The Condition

9. Susser Tod (Sweet Death): Warum? (Why?)-Reconciliation

Don Shirley – Improvisations by the Don Shirley Trio

Cadence CLP1015 [1956]

1. Sometimes I'm Happy - Don Shirley, Youmans, Vincent
2. But Not for Me - Don Shirley, Gershwin, Ira
3. Tenderly - Don Shirley, Gross, Walter
4. What Is There to Say? - Don Shirley, Harburg, E.Y.
5. Autumn Leaves - Don Shirley, Kosma, Joseph
6. Atonal Ostinato Blues in B
7. When I Fall in Love - Don Shirley, Young, Victor
8. Over the Rainbow - Don Shirley, Arlen, Harold
9. Let's Fall in Love - Don Shirley, Arlen, Harold
10. Walkin' by the River - Don Shirley, Carlisle, Una Mae

Don Shirley Solos

Cadence CLP3007 [1958]

1. It Could Happen to You
2. Laura
3. I'll Be Around
4. Bewitched
5. Something to Remember You by
6. Ill Wind
7. Little Girl Blue
8. I'm In the Mood for Love
9. And This s My Beloved
10. April in Paris
11. It Never Entered My Mind

² For a more complete listing (which also was the principal source of information for this compilation) see Nathan Kramer's website, "Don Shirley - Recordings," accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.nathankramer.com/donshirley/recordings.htm>. As the albums list the names of the various tunes' composers and other performers is maintained here.

12. Don't Worry 'Bout Me

Don Shirley With 2 Basses

Cadence CLP3008 [1958]

1. Porgy & Bess Suite
2. Polka Dots & Moonbeams
3. Walkin My baby Back Home
4. These Foolish Things
5. Honeysuckle Rose
6. September Song
7. Body & Soul
8. I'll Be Seeing You

Don Shirley

Audio Fidelity AFSD5897 / CLP1897 [1959]

Side 1

1. One More for the Road (Arlen)
2. Satin Doll (Ellington)
3. Somebody Loves Me (Gershwin)
4. Nearness of You (Carmichael)
5. Easy Living (Robin)
6. The Way You Look Tonight (Kern)

Side 2

7. Blues for Basses (Fricker, Shirley, Frey)
8. Happy Talk (Rogers, Hammerstein)
9. The Nearly Was Mine (Rodgers)
10. Dites Moi (Rogers)
11. I Remember April (Raye, dePaul, Johnston)
12. Black is the Color (Shirley, Frey)

Don Shirley Trio

Cadence CLP3036 [1961] Stereo CLP25046

Includes Don Shirley, piano, Ken Fricker, bass, and Juri Taht, cello.

The version of "Water Boy" here is longer than the 45rpm hit version. The 45 was a shorter, complex edit of this LP track.

1. Water Boy - Avery Robinson
2. Oh Bess, Oh Where's My Bess? - George Gershwin
3. In a Moorish Market Place - Don Shirley

4. The Man I Love - George Gershwin
5. This Nearly Was Mine - Richard Rodgers
6. Blue Skies - Irving Berlin
7. Adieu Madraz - Don Shirley
8. Tribute to Billy Holiday/Traveling Light/Don't Explain/Easy Living/God - Mercer
9. By Myself/I Know Where I'm Going - Howard Dietz
10. Freedom/I'm on My Way - Don Shirley
11. When Your Lover Has Gone - Einar A. Swan

Don Shirley - Pianist Extraordinary

Cadence CLP3048 [1962] Stereo CLP25048

Side A

1. How Deep Is the Ocean (How High Is the Sky). Irving Berlin, Irving Berlin Music Corp., ASCAP 3:34
2. I Understand K. Gannon - M. Wayne, Leo Feist, Inc., ASCAP 2:58
3. My Ship K. Weill - I. Gershwin, Chappell & Co., Inc. ASCAP 3:19
4. Time After Time J. Styne - S. Cahn, Sands Music Corp., ASCAP 3:51
5. Love Walked In G. Gershwin - I. Gershwin, Gershwin Publ. Corp., - Chappell & Co., Inc. ASCAP 4:23
6. It's The Talk Of The Town J. Livingston - M. Symes - A. I. Neiburg, World Music, Hallmark Music ASCAP 3:47

Side B

1. Lady Be Good. George Gershwin, Harms Inc., ASCAP 3:25
2. I Cried for You. G. Arnheim - A. Lyman - A. Freed, Miller Music Corp., ASCAP 4:37
3. Russian Folk Song. Traditional, Walbridge Co., BMI 2:06
4. Mack The Knife. M. Blitzstein - K. Weill, Harms Inc., ASCAP 3:08
5. Trust In Me. N. Wever - M. Ager - I. Schwartz, Advanced Music Corp., ASCAP 2:58
6. In Other Words. Bart Howard, Almanac Music Inc., ASCAP 2:48

Don Shirley – Piano Arrangements of Famous Piano Spirituals

Cadence CLP3049 [1962] Stereo CLP25049

1. Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child
2. Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen/Heaven

3. Were You There?
4. Swing Low Sweet Chariot
5. My Lord It's So High
6. Take My Hand Precious Lord
7. In-A-My Soul
8. Go Down Moses
9. Even Me
10. God Be with You
11. Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho
12. When The Saints Go Marching In
13. It's Me Standing in The Need of Prayer
14. Let Us Break Bread Together
15. Every Time I Feel the Spirit

Don Shirley Presents Martha Flowers

Cadence CLP3055 [1962] Stereo CLP25055

Side A

1. Anytime Any Day Anywhere, L. Wiley - V. Yong - W. Washington
2. Dancing On the Ceiling, R-Rodgers - L. Hart
3. I Had Myself A True Love, H. Arlen - J.H. Mercer
4. Fools Rush In, R.Bloom - J.H. Mercer
5. Love Walked In, G. Gershwin - I. Gershwin

Side B

6. Porgy And Bess Suite

Don Shirley - Drown In My Own Tears

Cadence CLP3057 [1962] Stereo CLP25057

Side A

1. Drown In My Own Tears. (Henry Glover). Jay & Cee Music Corp., BMI 2:14
Piano and Organ: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker; Cello: Juri Taht; Percussion: Ted Sommer
2. Margie. (B. Davis -- C. Conrad -- J.R. Robinson). Mills Music, Inc., ASCAP 4:25
Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker. Cello: Donald Anderson
3. Stand By Me. (B.E. King -- E. Glick) Trio, ADT, BMI 2:13. Piano and Organ: Don Shirley' Bass: Ken Fricker; Cello: Donald Anderson· Percussion: Ted Sommer

4. Willow Weep for Me. (Ann Ronell). Bourne Inc., ASCAP 5:09. Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker; Cello: Donald Anderson
5. I Got Rhythm. (G. Gershwin -- I. Gershwin). New World Music Corp., ASCAP 2:12
Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker' Cello: Juri That.
6. Georgia On My Mind. (H. Carmichael -- S. Gorrel). Peer International Corp., ASCAP 7:33. Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker· Cello: Donald Anderson

Side B

1. The Lonesome Road. (G. Austin -- N Shilkret) Paramount Music Corp., ASCAP 2:21. Piano and Organ: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker; Cello: Juri Taht· Percussion: Ted Sommer.
2. At Last. (M. Gordon -- H. Warren). Warren Leo Feist Inc., ASCAP 4:02. Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker. Cello: Donald Anderson
3. Amen (Don Shirley). Walbridge Co., BMI 4:00. Piano and Organ: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker; Cello. Donald Anderson· Percussion: Ted Sommer.
4. Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe. (H. Arlen - E. Y. Harburg). Leo Feist Inc., ASCAP 3:52 Piano and Organ: Don Shirley.
5. One for My Baby (And One More For The Road) (J. Mercer - H. Arlen). Edwin H. Morris & Co., Inc., ASCAP 5:12Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker· Cello: Donald Anderson; Percussion: Ted Sommer
6. Just for a Thrill. (L. Armstrong - D. Raye). Leeds Music Corp., ASCAP 4:57
Piano: Don Shirley; Bass: Ken Fricker· Cello: Donald Anderson; Percussion: Ted Sommer

The Don Shirley Point of View

Atlantic SD1605

Don Shirley on piano & organ, with Kenneth Fricker on bass, and James Boyd and Juri Taht on cello.

Side 1

1. The Warning, by Don Shirley
2. Carry me Back to Old Verginny, by James A. Bland

3. Bridge over Troubled Water, by Paul Simon
4. The Shadow of your Smile, by Paul Francis Webster & Johnny Mandel

Side 2

5. Alfie, by Burt Bacharach & Hal David
6. Gershwin Medley, by George Gershwin
7. By the Time I get to Phoenix, by Jim Webb

The Gershwin Medley includes the melodies from the following: 1) May Man's Gone No, 2) I Got Plenty O' Nuttin', 3) It Ain't Necessarily So, 4) Strawberry Women, 5) Summertime, 6) Oh Bess Where's my Bess, 7) I Loves you Porgy, 8) Bess you is my Woman Now, 9) Clara, Clara, 10) Bess you is my Woman Now

Don Shirley Trio in Concert

Atlantic SD1605 [1968]

Side 1

1. I Can't Get Started
2. I Feel Pretty (from "West Side Story")
3. My Funny Valentine
4. Yesterday
5. I Cover the Waterfront

Side 2

6. Georgia on my Mind
7. Lullaby
8. Water Boy
9. One Man's Hand
10. By Myself
11. Happy Talk (from "South Pacific")

Personnel:

Don Shirley, Pianist
 Gilberto Munguia, Cellist
 Henry Gonzalez, Bassist
 Engineering: Edward T Graham, Stan Weiss

The Gospel According Don Shirley

[1969] Columbia CS9723

Side 1

1. I'll Drown In My Tears
2. Climb Ev'ry Mountain
3. Trilogy
4. Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross, arranged by Don Shirley
5. Glory Burdens Down Lord, arranged by Don Shirley
6. When the Saints Go Marching In, arranged by Don Shirley

Side 2

7. I've Been 'Buked, arranged by Don Shirley
8. He's Got the Whole World in His Hands, arranged by Margaret Bonds
9. I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free
10. Blowin' In the Wind
11. Dream Of a Time

Produced by Teo Macero

Engineering: Stan Tonkel, Arthur Kendy, Don Meehan

Personnel: Don Shirley, Piano

Gilberto Munguia, Cellist

Henry Gonzalez, Bassist

*With orchestra, arranged and conducted by Archie Bleyer

Home with Donald Shirley

Walbridge Music Company - CD Released December 2001

1. This Little Light of Mine*
2. The Flight of the Bumblebee
3. 'Round Midnight
4. Divertimento for Duke by Don
5. Lotus Blossom*
6. Feelings
7. Where or When*
8. Jesus Keep Me near the Cross
9. Good-bye John*
10. Liberation Day
11. O'Freedom
12. Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye*
13. Blue Skies
14. Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult

(The titles with an asterisk (*) are piano solos. The others feature the Donald Shirley chamber trio of piano, cello, and double bass.)

Appendix E – Sample Carnegie Hall Programs of Don Shirley

Sunday, May 19, 1985 at 8 PM
Main Hall

PRESENTED BY
Today's Artists, Inc.

Don Shirley, Piano

Dieterich Buxtehude
(1637–1707)

Nun bitten wir den heiligen Geist

Don Shirley, **Piano**

George Frideric Handel
(1685–1759)

Suite No. 5 in E Major, HWV 430: Air with Five Variations
in E Major, "Harmonious Blacksmith" (1720)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Sonata for Flute and Harpsichord in E-flat Major, BWV
1031: 2. Siciliano (1730-1734 arr. Wilhelm Kempff)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Nun freut euch, lieben Christen, BWV 734 (c. 1708-1717)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Vernon Duke
(1903–1969)

I Can't Get Started (1936 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Juri Taht, **Cello**

Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**

Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

Leonard Bernstein
(1918–1990)

West Side Story: I Feel Pretty (1957 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Juri Taht, **Cello**

Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**

Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

Irving Berlin
(1888–1989)

Blue Skies (1927 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Juri Taht, **Cello**

Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**

Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

Randy Goodrum
(1947–)

You Needed Me (1978 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Juri Taht, **Cello**

Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**

Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

Various Composers

Trilogy (arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Juri Taht, **Cello**

Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**

Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

Spiritual

Oh! Freedom (arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**

Juri Taht, **Cello**

Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**

Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

Spiritual

I Wants To Be Ready (arr. Don Shirley)

Juri Taht, **Cello**
Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**
Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**
Don Shirley, **Piano**

George Gershwin
(1898–1937)

The Man I Love (1924 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, **Piano**
Juri Taht, **Cello**
Kenneth Fricker, **Double Bass**
Don Shirley Trio, **Jazz Trio**

CARNEGIE HALL

Sunday, January 19, 1992 at 8 PM
Main Hall

PRESENTED BY TODAY'S ARTISTS, INC.

Don Shirley, Piano

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873—1943)

Vocalise (1912 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Frederic Chopin
(1810—1849)

Prelude in G Minor, Op. 28, No. 22 (1838-1839)

Don Shirley, Piano

Frederic Chopin
(1810—1849)

Étude in C-sharp Minor, Op. 10, No. 4 (1832)

Don Shirley, Piano

Frederic Chopin
(1810—1849)

Étude in E Major, Op. 10, No. 3 (1832)

Don Shirley, Piano

Frederic Chopin
(1810—1849)

Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20 (c. 1835)

Don Shirley, Piano

Frederic Chopin
(1810—1849)

Étude in A-flat Major, Op. 25, No. 1 (1836)

Don Shirley, Piano

Frederic Chopin

Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 31 (1837)

(1810—1849)

Don Shirley, Piano

Vernon Duke
(1903—1969)

I Can't Get Started (1936 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

George Gershwin
(1898—1937)

Porgy and Bess (A Suite) (1935 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Spiritual

I'll Never Turn Back No More (arr. Don Shirley arr. R.
Nathaniel Dett)

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Jonas Gwangwa
(1941—)

Liberation Day (arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Robert Lowry
(1826—1899)

I Need Thee Every hour (1872 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Spiritual

Oh! Freedom (arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

George Gershwin
(1898—1937)

The Man I Love (1924 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Richard Rodgers
(1902—1979)

ENCORE:

Happy Talk (1949 arr. Don Shirley)

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Don Shirley, Piano

Henry Glover
(1921—1991)

ENCORE:

Drown in My Own Tears (1951 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Marisol Espada, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

CARNEGIE HALL

Sunday, May 18, 1986 at 8 PM
Main Hall

PRESENTED BY TODAY'S ARTISTS, INC.

Don Shirley, Piano

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685—1750)

Herzlich tut mich verlangen, BWV 727 (arr. Don
Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685—1750)

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1: Prelude in B Minor,
BWV 869 (1722 arr. Alexander Siloti)

Don Shirley, Piano

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873—1943)

Prelude in C Major, Op. 32, No. 1 (1910)

Don Shirley, Piano

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873—1943)

Prelude in F-sharp Minor, Op. 23, No. 1 (1903)

Don Shirley, Piano

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873—1943)

Prelude in B-flat Major, Op. 23, No. 2 (1903)

Don Shirley, Piano

Vernon Duke
(1903—1969)

I Can't Get Started (1936 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio

Don Shirley, Piano

Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Leonard Bernstein
(1918—1990)

West Side Story: I Feel Pretty (1957 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano
Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

George Gershwin
(1898—1937)

Porgy and Bess (A Suite) (1935 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley, Piano
Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Juri Taht

Today's Artist Flight 1985 (1985)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano
Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Duke Ellington
(1899—1974)

Divertimento for Duke by Don (arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano
Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Spiritual

Oh! Freedom (arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano
Juri Taht, Cello

Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Thomas A. Dorsey
(1899—1993)

Sunday Morning at Big Bethel (arr. Don Shirley)

Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass
Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano

Will L. Thompson
(1847—1909)

Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling (c. 1880 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano
Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

George Gershwin
(1898—1937)

The Man I Love (1924 arr. Don Shirley)

Don Shirley Trio, Jazz Trio
Don Shirley, Piano
Juri Taht, Cello
Kenneth Fricker, Double Bass

Appendix F – Jeremiad by Maurice E. Shirley, Sr., Sibling of Don Shirley

*Publicly posted to Facebook on November 18, 2018, to Facebook by Karole Shirley Kimble, the former’s daughter and latter’s niece.*³

As the only living brother of Dr. Donald W. Shirley, I, Maurice E. Shirley, Sr. am compelled to respond to this article. In agreement with Malcolm X who proffered that “every White man in America profits directly or indirectly from his position vis-a-vis Negroes, profits from racism even though he does not practice it or believe it”.

This movie, “The Green Book” is NOT about MY brother, but about money, white privilege, assumption and Tony Lip! This is supported by some of the lies in the movie - some of which I shall address.

My brother never considered Tony to be his “friend”; he was an employee, his chauffeur (who resented wearing a uniform and cap). This is why context and nuance are so important. The fact

³ URL: <https://www.facebook.com/karole.shirley.kimble>. Accessed April 14, 2022. Set the “posts” filter to November 18, 2018.

that a successful, well-to-do Black artist would employ domestics that did NOT look like him, should not be lost in translation.

My brother NEVER had a teal blue Cadillac, it was always a black limousine.

The movie, supposedly; asserts that he said he had a brother, Maurice, but he "...didn't know where he was..."

Our Mother died when I was 2 days old, my brother was 9, he never lost touch with me as the movie purports...he was my Best Man when I was married in 1964. Our 2 brothers, Dr. Calvin H. Shirley and Dr. Edwin Shirley, Jr. were in attendance. He attended most, if not all, of the important events in our children's lives. We saw each other often and talked, by phone, on a regular basis!!

My brother was NEVER beaten up as was so falsely depicted.

Insulted, discriminated against, disrespected as a man and an artist, rejected...YES.

No one, EVER, had to teach my brother how to eat fried chicken. Nor would he have allowed "lessons" of such by a white man (given stereotypes). Lest one forgets, our Father was an Episcopal Priest, born in Jamaica and our Mother, likewise was from Jamaica, and when we moved to the States, we were in the South.

Further, to dispel any lies that he had no family or contact with us, I have his ashes - his remains - in my home, per his (and my) wishes.

Yes, this film is from the lens of the Vिलлелонга Family, and should never have been entitled "The Green Book". "Green Card" may have been more accurate... Oops, they already made that film, didn't they!!

That no one in our family was contacted until AFTER the film was made, could never be misconstrued as an oversight.

If the motive was to tell a true and authentic story, either about "The Green Book" and/or Donald Shirley, they clearly missed the mark!! But that's what the White Savior has promulgated!!

From Maurice E. Shirley, Sr.

Appendix G – End Credits of *Green Book*

Items boxed in red were transcriptions played by Shirley, as re-realized by Kris Bowers.

Note that Shirley's name does not appear. (NB: some of these were condensed down to appear on one page.)

Music Editor	MANISH RAVAL
Music Coordinators	JONATHAN LEAHY ALISON ROSENFELD
Music Executive	LINDA COHEN
Music Consultant	PAUL KATZ / EAR 2 EAR MUSIC
Music Clearances	JULIE SESSING / SESSING MUSIC SERVICES
Dr. Donald Shirley Piano Double	KRIS BOWERS
Assistant to Mr. Bowers	LOGAN NELSON
Music Contractor	PETER ROTTER
Score Coordinator	EMMA VIVIAN
Orchestrators	ED TRYBEK HENRI WILKINSON JONATHAN BEARD
Music Copyist	BOOKER WHITE
Score Engineer / Mixer	ALAN MEYERSON
Score Pro-Tools Operator	KEVIN GLOBERMAN
Pre-Record Recording Engineer	STEPHEN KAYE
Music Contractor (NOLA)	JAY WEIGEL
Pre-Record Recording Engineer / Mixer (NOLA)	MISHA KACHKACHISHVILI
Digital Dailies By	FOTOKEM NEXTLAB
nextLAB Senior Dailies Colorist	ILYA LANEY
nextLAB Dailies Operator	STACEY ENGLAND
Dailies Producer	DAVID B. HALL
Digital Intermediate By	FOTOKEM CREATIVE SERVICES
Digital Intermediate Colorist	WALTER VOLPATTO
Digital Intermediate Editor	ERIC WOOD
Digital Intermediate Producer	PAMELA SCOTT-FARR
Digital Intermediate Coordinators	ROBERT GARCIA DANIEL HARRIS

Line Executive Producer JEFF KLIYNDER
Title Producer TROY JAMES MILLER
Additional Animation ABBY CHEN
Clearance Coordinator ASHLEY KRAVITZ / CLEARED BY ASHLEY
Insurance LIDA DAVIDIANS & JOHN HAMBY
DEWITT STERN OF CALIFORNIA
Production Legal Services DAVID J. BLOOMFIELD & EDEN COHEN
Music Legal Services KEVIN BREEN
Payroll Services Provided By ENTERTAINMENT PARTNERS

Second Unit

Second Unit Director JOSH KLAUSNER
First Assistant Directors ALAN BRETON
ANDREW SHEPHERD
Second Assistant Director SHANNON PARKER
Director of Photography MICHAEL MERRIMAN
First Assistant Camera BRYAN DELORENZO
LOUIS LEROY
Second Assistant Camera ZANDER WHITE
Location Manager DAVID MCCARTY
Costumer SUSAN THOMAS
Costume Supervisor DAN MOORE
Tony Lip Driving Double NICK BORDELON
Dr. Donald Shirley Driving Double CHRIS MORELAND
Sprinter Driver JOHNNY FOSTER
Scorpio Head Tech MIKE KENNEDY
Seeker Car Driver DANIEL WAGHORNE
Set Production Assistant BOB SHAMBO

New York Unit

"THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC"
Written by Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer

"ONE MINT JULEP"
Written by Rudolph Toombs
Performed by The Clovers
Courtesy of Atlantic Recording Corp
By arrangement with Warner Music Group Film & TV licensing

"THROW IT OUT OF YOUR MIND"
Written by Jake Hammonds, Jr., James A. Bennett
and Johnnie Mae Matthews
Performed by Timmy Shaw
Courtesy of Jamie / Guyden Dist. Co.

"LET ME FEEL IT"
Written and Performed by Elgie Brown
Courtesy of RAM Records
By arrangement with Fervor Records

"GOODBYE, MY LOVER, GOODBYE"
Written by Lamar Simington, Lerot Swearingen and Robert Mosley
Performed by Robert Mosely
Courtesy of Capitol Records
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"TIRED OF HANGING AROUND"
Written by Ernest Suarez and Harry Simoneauz, Jr.
Performed by Bobby Page & The Riff Raffs
Courtesy of RAM Records
By arrangement with Fervor Records

"PRETTY LIL THING"
Written by Jeff Williamson
Performed by Sonny Boy Williamson
Courtesy of RAM Records
By arrangement with Fervor Records

"SO LONG LOVER'S ISLAND"
Written by Leon Peels
Performed by The Blue Jays
Courtesy of CAPP Records Inc. & Music Supervisor, Inc.

"A LETTER FROM MY BABY"
Written by Jake Hammonds, Jr., James A. Bennett
and Johnnie Mae Matthews
Performed by Timmy Shaw
Courtesy of Jamie / Guyden Dist. Co.

"YOU TOOK ADVANTAGE OF ME"
Written by Ronald Blackwell
Performed by The Blackwells

"DRIFTING HEART"
Written and Performed by Roosevelt Nettles
Courtesy of Fervor Records

"AFTER YOU'VE GONE"
Written by Steve Gray
Courtesy of APM Music

"LUCILLE"
Written by Albert Collins and Richard Penniman
Performed by Little Richard
Courtesy of Sony / ATV Music Publishing obo Dominion Entertainment

"WON'T BE LONG"
Written by J. Leslie McFarland
Performed by Aretha Franklin
Courtesy of Columbia Records
By arrangement with Sony Music Entertainment

"HAPPY TALK"
Written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II
Performed by Kris Bowers

"COOKIN'"
Written by Brad Bauder, Al Casey and Robert Taylor
Performed by Al Casey Combo

Courtesy of Jamie / Guyden Dist. Co.

"WHAT'CHA GONNA DO"
Written by Lea Lendon
Performed by Bill Massey with Lea Lendon
and the Rite Timers
Courtesy of Jamie / Guyden Dist. Co.

"BLUE SKIES"
Written by Irving Berlin
Performed by Kris Bowers

"SLOW TWISTING"
Written by Kal Mann
Performed by Chubby Checker
Courtesy of ABKCO Records

"TROUBLED ROMANCE"
Written by Jean-Philippe Audin
Courtesy of APM Music

"BA DA"
Written by Ernest Suarez
Performed by Roy "Boogie Boy" Perkins
Courtesy of RAM Records
By arrangement with Fervor Records

"GO TO THE MARDI GRAS"
Written by Henry Roeland Byrd
Performed by Professor Longhair
Courtesy of Rounder Records
A Division of Concord Music

"OVER MY BROKEN HEART"
Written by Donald Rollins
Performed by Dave & Don
Courtesy of Fervor Records

"WHY OH WHY"
Written by Lionel Russ
Performed by Little Alice
Courtesy of The Numero Group
By arrangement with Bank Robber Music

"WATER BOY"
Written by Avery Robinson
Performed by Kris Bowers

"THAT LOOK"
Written and Performed by Jerry Kalaf

"I LOVE MY BABY"

"DEAREST ONE"
Written by David Valad
Performed by Jack's Four
Courtesy of Fervor Records

"YES YOUR HONOR"
Written by Jack Curtis and Roosevelt Nettles
Performed by Roosevelt Nettles
Courtesy of Fervor Records

"LULLABY OF BIRDLAND"
Written by George Shearing and George David Weiss
Performed by Kris Bowers

"VALE BALLET"
Written by Erik Satie
Courtesy of Extreme Music

"I'LL NEVER LET YOU GO"
Written by Sandra Rewis
Performed by Sue Winford
Courtesy of Jamie / Guyden Dist. Co.

"ARABESQUE NO. 1"
Written by Claude Debussy
Courtesy of Extreme Music

"I LOVE MY BABY"
Written by Valery Junior Boulet
Performed by Bobby Page & The Riff Ruffs
Courtesy of RAM Records
By arrangement with Fervor Records

"O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL JAZZ TRIO"
Written by John Francis Wade
Arranged and Performed by Stephen J. Rice
Courtesy of Crucial Music Corporation

"WHAT CHILD IS THIS?"
Arranged by Lennie Moore
Courtesy of APM Music

"ÉTUDE OP. 25, NO. 11 IN A MINOR ("WINTER WIND")"
Written by Frédéric Chopin
Arranged and Performed by Kris Bowers

"RUSHIN'"
Written by Elgie Brown
Performed by Banny Price
Courtesy of RAM Records
By arrangement with Fervor Records

"HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS"

Courtesy of Extreme Music

"THE LONESOME ROAD"
Written by Gene Austin and Nathaniel Shilkret
Performed by Kris Bowers

"O CHRISTMAS TREE"
Arranged by Lennie Moore
Courtesy of APM Music

"LET'S ROLL"
Written and Performed by Kris Bowers

"BACKWOODS BLUES"
Written and Performed by Kris Bowers

"YOUR REPLACEMENT IS HERE"
Written and Performed by Edd Henry
Courtesy of The Numero Group
By arrangement with Bank Robber Music

"MMM LOVE"
Written and Performed by Bob Kelly
Courtesy of Fervor Records

"SANTA CLAUS IS COMIN' TO TOWN"

"HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS"
Written by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane
Performed by Frank Sinatra
Courtesy of Capitol Records
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"TU SCENDI DALLE STELLE"
Traditional

"THE CHRISTMAS SONG"
Written by Robert Wells and Mel Torme
Performed by Nat King Cole
Courtesy of Capitol Records
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"SANTA CLAUS IS COMIN' TO TOWN"
Written by J. Fred Coots and Haven Gillespie
Performed by Franki Valli & The Four Seasons
Courtesy of Rhino Entertainment Company /
The Four Seasons Partnership
By arrangement with Warner Music Group
Film & TV Licensing

"THE LONESOME ROAD"
Written by Gene Austin and Nathaniel Shilkret
Performed by Don Shirley
Courtesy of Barnaby Records, Inc.
By arrangement with Ace Music Services LLC

"RICH WOMAN"
Written by Dorothy Labostrie and McKinley Millet
Performed by Li'l Millet And His Creoles
Courtesy of Specialty Records
A Division of Concord Music

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