

COMMENTARY: COMPOSERS

Russian and Lithuanian composers

Alexander Skryabin Sonatas no.7, 8 & 10 (1911,13)

Aleksandr Nikolayevich Skryabin [or Skryabin] (1871/2,1915) is one of the most extraordinary figures musical culture has ever witnessed. He has remained for a century a figure of cultish idolatry, reactionary yet modernist disapproval, analytical fascination and, finally, aesthetic re-evaluation and renewal. The transformation of his musical language from one which was affirmatively Romantic to one which was highly singular in its thematism and gesture and which had transcended usual tonality, but which was not atonal, could perhaps have only occurred in Russia where Western harmonic mores, although respected in most circles, were not so fully entrenched as in Europe. While his major orchestral works have fallen out of and subsequently into vogue, his piano compositions inspired the greatest of Russian pianists, including Feinberg, Goldenweiser, Horowitz, Neuhaus, Richter and Sofronitsky, to give their most noteworthy performances. Skryabin himself was an exceptionally gifted pianist, but as an adult he only performed his own works in public. The cycle of ten sonatas is arguably of the most consistent high quality since that of Beethoven and has acquired growing numbers of champions throughout the 20th century.

Life. The Skryabin family has been traced back to the 13th century; its first recorded member was described as a boyar and Aleksandr Nikolayevich himself liked to stress that he came from a noble family. Hailing originally from the Nizhny-Novgorod region they moved to Moscow in the 16th century and by the 19th century were established as a respected military family; the composer's grandfather, Aleksandr Ivanovich (1811,79), is said to have run his immediate family like an army platoon. His son, Nikolay Aleksandrovich (1849,1914), broke away from the military tradition to train as a lawyer but abandoned his studies soon after marrying Lyubov' Petrovna Shchetinina (1849,1873). She was one of the first recognized female musicians in Russia, a pianist and composer who had studied with Leschetizky, knew Anton Rubinstein and garnered high praise from Tchaikovsky. She played a recital of works requiring a virtuoso technique five days before Aleksandr Nikolayevich was born, on Christmas day, 1871. Her husband returned to study diplomatic jurisprudence at Moscow University, but by September of 1872 Lyubov' Petrovna was so ill (she had been weak since giving birth) that he again abandoned his studies to take her to Italy where she soon died. Nikolay Aleksandrovich eventually finished his university course and, after studying oriental languages for two years, was sent as an interpreter to the Russian Embassy in Constantinople. Father and son had little contact for the entirety of their lives; Aleksandr Nikolayevich's upbringing was entrusted to his two doting grandmothers and to the infatuated aunt Lyubov' Aleksandrovna, herself an amateur musician who gradually gained total control over and responsibility for the child.

The child Skryabin attended concerts held by the Russian Musical Society and operas at the Bol'shoi, he could also play melodies he heard and improvise at the piano aged five, his first teacher being his aunt. He wrote plays, made toy pianos, enjoyed needlework and read Shakespeare and Molière soon thereafter. Although at this age, he was nervous, thin, delicate and unhappy, in 1896 Boris de Schloezer was struck by 'his frail and delicate appearance, his intense nervousness' ('Skryabin: artist and mystic'), ambitious Lyubov' took him for assessment to Anton Rubinstein who guardedly confirmed her hopes in the boy's gifts. Meanwhile, in 1880 his father married an Italian, Olga Fernandez, and had been appointed to the post of consul, working in a variety of countries where Turkish was spoken. Contrary to his father's and certainly his aunt's wishes, Skryabin expressed a desire, encouraged by his elder cousin Mitya, to attend the Cadet Corps. Skryabin became the 'only cadet of the Russian Army never to carry arms throughout five years of training' (Bowers: 'Skryabin') but he amused his contemporaries (and the director, another amateur musician) by his piano playing and even had enough time to start composing.

In the summer of 1883 Skryabin received his first formal music lessons from Georgy Konyus who was a neighbour to the dacha the old Skryabin ladies had hired at Khovrino, near Moscow. He studied Weber, Mendelssohn and Chopin on the piano and began to compose in a more controlled fashion. Through a family connection, Skryabin was prepared for entrance to the Moscow Conservatory by the 28-year-old Taneyev, and through him was introduced to the formidable Zverev. This influential piano teacher had studied with Henselt and was a flagrant homosexual who insisted that his teenage piano pupils live in his own house and subject to the most disciplined of regimes. Under his guidance, Skryabin learnt not only French and German but also the manners of high society, he was shown great literature and also how to drink vodka. Although Skryabin studied with a group of boys of similar age who included Rachmaninoff and Goldenweiser, he soon became Zverev's favourite. However, when Skryabin dedicated a Nocturne in F sharp minor to his teacher (later published as op.5 no.1 but, typically for Skryabin, without the inscription), Zverev attempted, unsuccessfully, to dissuade his pupil from composition. Skryabin's right arm was injured in an accident involving a horse carriage, and although this event had the undesirable effect of intensifying his aunt's coddling, it did, like the hand strain in 1893, act as a catalyst to further composition.

In 1886, he composed his first significant work, the Etude in C sharp minor (published as op.2 no.1); in 1887 had started to write poems that spiritually coexist with particular musical works as well as noting down his ratiocations regarding religion.

Skryabin entered the Moscow Conservatory in January 1888, avoiding entrance examinations because the director Safonov had heard him play at one Zverev's salons years earlier. Like Zverev whom he hated, Safonov adored Skryabin on account of his sensitive pianism but despite his laziness and wilfulness towards other aspects of study. Lessons learnt in Taneyev's polyphony class reverberate throughout Skryabin's output while Safonov's insistence on tonal variety, subtle pedalling and legato playing were to become the hallmarks of Skryabin's performing style. He became one of the conservatory's foremost piano students and, in a fit of competitiveness, set about learning Beethoven's complete sonatas stopping, however, at the tenth out of sheer boredom. His attacks of nervousness increased, especially during times devoted to composition, and he appears to have lived much of the last decade of the 19th century on a Dostoyevskian knife edge, precipitously close to breakdown. In 1891, in a further bout of pianistic competitiveness, Skryabin overstrained his right hand practising Liszt's 'Don Juan' fantasy; when forbidden to play by a doctor, Skryabin turned to practising with his left hand and elaborated a virtuosic left-hand paraphrase of a Strauss waltz. The strength and subtlety he subsequently developed in his left-hand technique is reflected in much of his later writing. The final year at the conservatory, 1892, was marked by a series of disagreements between Arensky (who was attempting to teach fugue to Skryabin) and his pupil and the latter's supporter Safonov; problems also arose because Skryabin wanted to graduate a year early as Rachmaninoff was doing. Skryabin graduated with a Small Gold Medal (as opposed to Rachmaninoff's Great Gold Medal) mainly on account of Arensky's intransigence and probable jealousy.

In Spring of 1892 Skryabin gave a private concert under the auspices of the Circle of Music Lovers; Boris Jurgenson, present in the audience, agreed to show some of the young composer's works to his father Pyotr the publisher. Thus, 14 pieces were published without opus number and without remuneration to the composer; that summer, Skryabin composed the First Sonata in one short burst. The next year, Skryabin did receive 50 rubles for four mazurkas (later to form op.7 and part of op.2). During the summer of that year, 1893, he made his first trip abroad to Finland and Latvia, strengthening his yearning to leave Russia and giving him his first impressions of the sea. Later that summer he was deemed unfit for military service and returned to Moscow where he visited friends such as the Monighettis, Emil Rozenov, Taneyev and Safonov and where he also gained the habit of staying out all night drinking, a tendency which was to increase before it subsided in later years. He read Schopenhauer and met Leonid Sabaneyev (his first biographer) and Paul de Schloezer (son of Boris). Skryabin had become enamoured of the 15-year-old Natal'ya Sekerina but the affair was forbidden by her parents; their subsequently painful friendship lasted for several years and it was probably through disappointment and desperation over this separation that he later married inadvisably. Mitrofan Belayev became acquainted with Skryabin's work through Safonov and agreed to publish it in 1894. He arranged for Skryabin to play in St Petersburg (where he greatly impressed Vladimir Stasov), to Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana and, in the summer of 1895, enabled him to travel to Europe where much music was written (many of the 'Preludes' op.11 are inscribed with the location of their completion). Back in Russia, he completed more works , nearly all 'preludes' as a result of a bet with Belayev that he would write 48 such works within a given period , before the latter took Skryabin off to Paris. There, he mingled with the symbolist demi-monde and played in a number of private houses before making his European debut in the Salle Erard on 15 January 1896 to general acclaim.

Skryabin remained in Paris long after Belayev returned to Russia and his dealings with his publisher soon became characterized by the strains which continued to act upon their relationship over the next few years. Skryabin's pleas for money caused by his hopeless accounting and Belayev's demands that Skryabin finish works on which he has been working for months (as well as his requiring that they are marked and edited properly) form a pattern which constituted only one part of the confusing relationship between the physically huge maecenas and the effete, nervous composer. Skryabin travelled to visit his father in Rome where he sketched a symphonic allegro (several themes of which would later reappear in a sophisticated form the Third Symphony) before returning via Paris , where his hedonism continued unabated , to Russia. Here he wrote the Concerto op.20 at phenomenal speed. In August 1897 . he married, against the wishes of almost all who knew him, a pianist called Vera Ivanovna Isakovich (1875,1920) whom he had met through de Schloezer. The newly-weds travelled to Odessa where Skryabin played his Concerto in a concert arranged by Safonov before travelling to Vienna and Paris where Skryabin struggled to find engagements but also started work on the Third Sonata. He was saved once more from destitution by Belayev, this time through a Glinka Prize, a form of supposedly anonymous financial supplement given mostly to Belayev's composers and on which Skryabin relied on numerous occasions. Vera and Aleksandr gave a joint recital in January 1898 featuring solely the latter's works including the recently-finished 'Polonaise' and the Second Sonata. Vera's pregnancy forced their roundabout return to Russia; a daughter, Rimma, was born on 15 July 1898. A few weeks later, Skryabin met Boris de Schloezer's 15-year-old sister, Tat'yana.

By September 1898, Safonov and Belayev had arranged for Skryabin a piano professorship at the Moscow Conservatory; until 1904 he frequently travelled between Moscow and St Petersburg, performing (the Russian première of the Concerto took place in St Petersburg in November 1898), teaching, composing and attempting to accustom himself to his new role as family man. His workload at the conservatory burgeoned, during the 1899,1900 academic year he had 21 pupils, but it enabled Skryabin to support his family and left the summers free to compose. Over the summer of 1899 he wrote the six-movement First Symphony, which was first performed in St Petersburg in November 1900 without the chorus parts in the last movement. The performance was largely regarded as a failure, as was the follow up in Moscow the next year. Meanwhile, Vera gave birth to another daughter, Yelena, in February 1906 amidst difficulties regarding the publication of the symphony. In June Skryabin set off for Paris with Belayev where he again performed to critical approval. Returning to Russia Skryabin accepted another job, as Inspector of Music at St Catherine's Institute, and worked on an opera which, although never finished, sowed the seeds which were to implant in Skryabin's mind the concept of the 'Misteriya'; he also composed the 'Fantasie' op.28, which was first performed by Goldenweiser as late as 1907 (Skryabin apparently having forgotten that he had written the work). Since a disagreement with Belayev dating from May 1900 Skryabin had been less inclined to keep his protector astride with every detail of his composing plans; he presented him with the completed Second Symphony in September 1901 with scarcely a word of warning. The première of this work, in St Petersburg in January 1902, elicited hissing and catcalls and this (along with its equally dismal reception in Moscow a year later) upset Skryabin considerably; he also decided to leave the conservatory and obtained a promise of a much larger stipend from Belayev. His spirits were lifted by the first all-Skryabin concert of orchestral and piano works held in Moscow in March 1902, two months before he formally resigned from the conservatory.

Freed from his teaching duties, Skryabin spent the summer of 1902 at Obolenskoye with Vera, starting work on his Third Symphony, the 'Bozhestvennaya poema' or 'Poème divin', along with several shorter works. In August Vera gave birth to a fourth child, this time a boy, Lev, but soon after was nonetheless asked by Skryabin to start preparing the score of the Second Symphony for a performance by Lyadov the next March. Skryabin took a brief cure in Yal'ta before resuming work in earnest on the Third Symphony; the composition would not be completed until 1904. He began to read more philosophy and Greek myth (often in Solov'yov's translations) and joined the Moscow Philosophical Society founded by Prince Sergey Trubetskoy with whom he became friendly. During the summer of 1903 the Skryabins were neighbours of the Pasternaks at Obolenskoye; Leonid Pasternak later made a famous drawing of the composer at the time when Skryabin had become musical mentor to his son Boris. Long after he had abandoned his ambition to compose, Pasternak fils wrote a memoir of Skryabin which is probably the finest of the many which have come to light. During that summer Skryabin saw much of Boris de Schloezer and, more importantly, his sister Tat'yana. She had been instantly captivated by Skryabin's music in 1901 when she heard Buyulki play the Third Sonata; she was thus deeply flattered when Skryabin seduced her in late summer or early autumn of 1903. The group of works from op.30 to op.43 reflect the intense sensuality which had enveloped the composer's spirit; these compositions were all presented to Belayev on his nameday in November of that year. Scarcely a few days after this event, Skryabin accepted an offer from the recently-widowed Margarita Morozova, a former student, of a monthly income of 200 rubles. Little more than a month later Belayev died at the age of 67 and Skryabin was grief-stricken.

After Belayev's death, the monthly payments from the publishers ceased and a row ensued; to add to this difficulty Skryabin seduced a former pupil, Mariya Bogoslovskaya, still in her teens, and he was forced to resign from St Catherine's Institute. The move abroad he had long dreamed for was now necessitated; ten days after he had arrived in Switzerland (in March 1904), Vera and the children did so. He had arranged for Tat'yana to live in a neighbouring village and explained her presence through reasons of health. Vera, however, was soon informed of the real state of affairs and after she had left Tat'yana took her place in the Villa des lilas in Vézenaz. There, Skryabin finished the Third Symphony in November before setting off for Paris where, with difficulty, he arranged for the work to be conducted by Nikisch in May 1905. He wrote in a letter to Morozova that the performance would be 'the first proclamation of my new doctrine', more than hinting that music was by then not the only expression of his intellect and creativity and also that the doctrine and the music were two different forms of expression of the same entity, Aleksandr Skryabin. The reception of the work was mixed; when it was heard in St Petersburg in 1906 it prompted an outburst of enthusiasm from the 80-year-old Stasov.

Skryabin returned to Italy, worn out by Paris and the stress surrounding the première of the symphony; he and the pregnant Tat'yana lived in the village of Bogliasco on the Riviera. Skryabin was overcome by guilt when his favourite and first child, Rimma, died in July but was reassured when Vera returned to Moscow having been offered a post in the conservatory. Tat'yana gave birth to their daughter Ariadna in October; meanwhile, Skryabin had become acquainted with Georgy Plekhanov with whom he discussed his doctrine and the coming revolution. Despite the obvious disparity in philosophical approach between the impractical and mystic Skryabin and the man who invented dialectical materialism, they respected each other and their friendship lasted well over a year. Skryabin's material situation had worsened: the Belayev board was sending him less money per composition than before, and in his fury at what he imagined was lack of

respect for his talent, Skryabin broke with the publishers altogether in early 1906. Jürgenson could no longer afford Skryabin's terms, Zimmerman was too musically backward to appreciate his current language, and, after an unsuccessful attempt to publish his own works in Geneva Skryabin found himself without a publisher. He and Tat'yana had moved to Geneva at the time of the break with Belayev and, in penniless desperation, asked Stasov to intervene in the publication problem. Skryabin was welcomed back into the Belayev fold by Lyadov, who was promised a 'big poem for orchestra', the 'Poema ekstaza' ('Poem of Ecstasy').

In October 1906 Skryabin was invited to America by Modest Altschuler, a cellist who he had known as a student. He made his debut on 20 December with an orchestra and then performed a solo programme two weeks later to mixed reviews. Tat'yana, against Skryabin's wishes, arrived in America in February 1907; a year earlier Maksim Gor'ky and his mistress had been hounded out of Puritanical New York on account of their marital status and Skryabin feared a similar reaction. They returned to Paris, their domestic irregularities having already lost Skryabin Safonov's friendship and support. There, Diaghilev was organizing his first 'Saison Russe' and hired Nikisch to conduct the Second Symphony but the impresario soon fell out with Skryabin who had, when patronized by Diaghilev, informed him that 'without us [artists] ... You would be less than nothing on this earth!' The 'Poema ekstaza' was only finally sent to Belayev's in December by which time Skryabin was living in Lausanne and writing the Fifth Sonata. In January 1908 he cut several piano rolls of his own works for the Welte-Mignon firm and in February a son, Julian, was born. Soon after, he met Koussevitzky who had invited him to join the advisory board of his newly-founded Edition Russe de Musique. Skryabin expounded to him his ideas for a multi-media 'Misteriya' and his theories on colour and music; the entranced but astute Koussevitzky offered financial terms which Skryabin, again in poverty, could not refuse. Skryabin moved to Brussels where he met the painter Jean Delville (who later designed the cover for 'Prometey') and other Theosophists in whose circle Skryabin felt able to propound his doctrine. Homesickness eventually drove Skryabin and Tat'yana back to Moscow in January 1909.

His return to Russia was heralded by a concert in St Petersburg which included the 'Poema ekstaza' (conducted by Felix Blumenfeld) and solo piano works. Widespread critical acclaim, for so long denied Skryabin in Russia, finally arrived; Skryabin turned down the offer of a post as superintendent of the Imperial Chapel while Koussevitzky organized a 'Skryabin Week' in Moscow. Through the summer and winter of 1909 Skryabin worked on 'Prometey'; in this work he systemized more thoroughly than before the 'principles' (as he called them) by which he was to write his remaining music, the crystalline and technically unimpeachable piano works opp.61,74, unique in their luminosity. Skryabin moved to a flat in the Arbat; here, his visitors included the poets Bal'mont, Baltrushaitis and Vyacheslav Ivanov, the composers Drozdov, Gnesin, Krein and Sabaneyev (also a musicologist and one of Skryabin's first biographers), the photographer Mozer, the painter Sperling, the pianist Goldenweiser and the eccentric anglophile Bryanchaninov, one of Skryabin's oldest friends. In mid-1910, Koussevitzky accompanied Skryabin on a tour of several Russian towns, while in early 1911 a tour of Germany was completed soon after the birth of Skryabin's last child, Marina. Koussevitzky and Skryabin soon quarrelled so vehemently, over money, that their relationship was damaged irreparably. Again, Skryabin had outraged a patron by considering him an employer, an agent or an administrator rather than an artist in his own right; after handing over several more compositions to the Edition Russe de Musique in order to fulfil a contract, Skryabin was again without a publisher. Siloti and Rachmaninoff soon rushed to Skryabin's aid and proposed several lucrative concerts. Alluding to his time spent in Koussevitzky's mansions, Skryabin sarcastically remarked to Rachmaninoff that it was 'pleasant for an artist to be a guest of an artist'.

By October 1911, Skryabin completed a circle by accepting Jürgenson's terms to publish his music; his financial situation was also improved by increased numbers of concert appearances which he largely did not enjoy giving. When the concerts subsided he was able to write the sixth and seventh sonatas, the latter being among his favourite works. He and Tat'yana took a holiday in Switzerland in 1912, where Skryabin wrote the '3 études', op.65, before returning to Moscow where they moved to no.11, Bol'shaya Nikol-Petrovskaya Pereulka; the lease expired on the day of Skryabin's death. In early 1913, Skryabin gave a succesful series of concerts in London. Henry Wood conducted 'Prometey', no doubt encouraged to do so by Rosa Newmarch who wrote the programme notes for the concert. The summer of that year was spent in the Kaluzhskiy province and there, as plans for the 'Misteriya' fermented further, Skryabin finished the eighth, ninth and tenth sonatas. At the end of the summer he went alone to Switzerland, where he made peace with his father over Tat'yana and was visited, after a lot of pestering, by Stravinsky. He heard Skryabin play his late sonatas and found them 'incomparable'; Skryabin later claimed that Stravinsky's music possessed a 'minimum of creativity'. Returning to Moscow, Skryabin became increasingly convinced that India would be the most suitable venue for the performance of the 'Predvaritel'noye deystvo', a preparatory act which would ready the human race for the 'Misterya' itself. In early 1914 Skryabin wrote 'K plyameni' ('Vers la flamme') before returning to London where he was afflicted by a furuncle on his upper lip. His earlier successes were improved upon; the reception to Skryabin was ecstatic in most quarters. The summer was spent in a dacha near Podol'sk accompanied by an entourage of disciples. There he finished his last works and laboured over the text of the 'Predvaritel'noye deystvo'. Back in Moscow he gave a

number of concerts which included works from every stage in his life, ranging from the 'Val's', op.1 to some of the op.74 'Preludes'. Skryabin made his last public appearance in St Petersburg on 2 April 1915; the praise from the press reached new heights. Returning to Moscow, he noticed a pimple on his upper lip reminiscent of the one which had afflicted him in London; by the 7th he was bed-ridden and his temperature rose rapidly. By the 11th crowds thronged the staircase of his flat, the situation had gravened. One incision was followed by others but by then two types of blood poisoning had set in. Skryabin died on 14 April, with the manuscript containing sketches for the 'Misteriya' open on his piano.

Music & philosophy. Skryabin can be considered unique among composers not only because of his obsession with philosophy and mysticism but also on account of the global nature of his imagination. Through being, in Pasternak's words, 'more than just a composer', Skryabin's protean intellect and creativity forced him to justify and rationalize his work as a musician; the maximalism so favoured by Russian artists of the Silver Age engendered in Skryabin not only an interest in unorthodox aspects of musical creativity such as synaesthesia, but also, and more importantly, a desire to articulate by means of a metaphysical doctrine the ultima ratio of his creative existence. His philosophical tenets were reasons for, commentaries on, justifications of but not programmes for his music and were not secondary nor auxiliary to his artistic creativity; although the discourse had a purely practical end it developed independently and in parallel to the music. When he is considered in the context of the literature of the time and the art of the Russian Silver Age as a whole, Skryabin loses much of the alien quality he assumes when compared with other musicians. Skryabin's aesthetic code, wrote de Schloezer, 'is remarkably similar to that of the vast intellectual and artistic movement which animated Russia' during the pre-Revolutionary era. Like Skryabin, Bal'mont, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Bryusov considered art to be a 'superior form of knowledge, an intuition analogous to that of the mystics, bearing the promise to reveal true reality and provide a passage to a transcendental world, to divinity' ('Skryabin: Artist and Mystic'). Mallarmé occupied a position analogous to Skryabin's in the canon of Symbolism, and as he idealized beauty, Skryabin sanctified ecstasy and the act of creation by which this state is achieved; for both artists this process represents a means of passage to and a form of self-identification with the divine, or, in essence, a form of gnosis. Skryabin demiurge sought to convey the listener, or in the case of the 'Misteriya', participant, on a journey to a supernaturally heightened plane of existence by means of a language of symbols, a language in which conventional musical phenomena are dislocated from their usual significance by means of an extraordinary departure from traditional tonal procedures.

Skryabin's works of his early period reveal him to have assimilated a complex late Romantic language, to be frequently experimenting in formal matters (only the Third Sonata possesses the conventional four-movement format) and forging a personal harmonic language. The least convincing aspects of the early style, such as the bombastic octave passages in the 'Allegro de concert' and the insipid vacuity of salon pieces such as the 'Impromptu en forme de mazur', are largely absent in the most successful works of this period such as the Piano Concerto, the '24 Preludes' and the second and third sonatas. The works Skryabin wrote up until 1903 (the year in which he completed his Fourth Sonata) bear witness to the immense influence the piano writing of Chopin and Liszt had not only on Skryabin but also on earlier Russian composers such as Balakirev, Glazunov and others whose manner of piano writing formed the basis of the contemporary Russian style. Also common in Skryabin's early works is the use of *ostinati*, a particularly Russian trait in itself, and these are often combined with other layered and rhythmically independent voices. Even though it has been said that Skryabin 'owed nothing to his predecessors nor to his Russian contemporaries' (de Schloezer), and that the early works bear the imprint of Skryabin's hand, they are not stylistically unusual for the period in general; the harmony is chromatic but not daring and in many ways represents the *lingua franca* of the era.

However, from 1903 onwards, Skryabin began to make significant departures: in the sonatas, single-movement structures became the norm and although sonata form was largely adhered to, the variations and mutations of it that came about in the later sonatas and especially in the last two orchestral works parallel only those made by Schoenberg and his pupils. Skryabin, however, was arguably better placed to expand this form because he had not, unlike the Viennese, removed from his language that aspect which lends the form its dynamism, namely sense of tonal centre. From the middle of the first decade of the 20th century, Skryabin used with less frequency genre designations such as 'impromptu' and 'mazurka' which had been applied to earlier works (and which largely belonged to the previous century and Chopin in particular) in favour of the 'poème or poema'; this genre, while not being of his invention, was made his own and, in a sense, nearly all of his works written in the middle and late periods could be described as such. Titles such as 'Poème fantasque' or 'Poème languide' are not merely descriptive; rather, they represent microcosmic manifestations in language of the same world occupied by the composition itself. During the middle period, and especially in the *poèmes*, Skryabin extended his gamut of expression markings as no composer had done before; his remarks, rather than being mere instructions to the performer, are signposts for the psyche in its journey to lands previously uncharted and forbidden to musicians. The major works of the central period exude confidence, both musical and spiritual, and display an ever-widening range of contrapuntal and harmonic devices.

Skryabin's development towards the later style, used from the 'Feuillet d'album', op.58 onwards, was seamless and was not punctuated by a series of technical discoveries; just as he accepted and rejected various facets of other people's thinking for his own doctrine, its face changing only gradually, his musical language refined itself through the jettisoning of the irrelevant and the perfection of those elements appropriate to the needs of the moment. The later music has been rightly called 'an act that performs his desires', an act integral to the 'ceremony in which the entire universe takes part and which culminates each time in an ecstatic dance' (de Schloezer: 'A. Skryabine'); this pattern is evident in the sonatas five to ten and, most spectacularly, 'Prometej'. Although in the sequence of events representing the philosophical starting point of this last work, namely the birth and development of human consciousness, there can be seen an analogy to the seven races depicted in Blavatsky's 'Secret Doctrine' (the work which Skryabin claimed had most deeply affected the formation of his own doctrine), by this point both musical language and accompanying rationale, however irrational it may seem today, were inextricably intertwined, enhancing (some would claim cannibalizing) and justifying each other. Many terms such as 'pleroma' which became important for Skryabin he first encountered in Blavatsky's work; his desire for his music to inhabit, and to coax the listener to, a region divorced from human physical reality probably stems from early readings of her 'Secret Doctrine'. But as he had done with others' music and others' philosophies, Skryabin soon amalgamated those aspects of her doctrine which were consonant with his own temperament into his far more grandiose yet specific theories (and with many more Russian ones: it should be stressed that Blavatsky was the assumed name of an Englishwoman) to such a degree that to call his own methods and aims theosophical would be inaccurate.

Skryabin had discussed colour and music with Rachmaninoff and Rimsky-Korsakov in 1907, and from that time onwards his desire increased to formalize these ideas and then manifest them in a work. Initially, Skryabin assigned particular colours to particular keys, and he was similar to Rimsky-Korsakov in this respect (except that the colour-key assignments were not the same in each case). When writing 'Prométhée', Skryabin, like other synaesthetics who assign particular colours to letters of the alphabet, would complete a circle of correlations with a chord represented by both light and by the vowel vocalized by the wordless chorus, with the latter two thus also referring to each other. Taking these patterns of reference a stage further, the series of colours projected by the 'tastiera di luce' (designed by Skryabin's friend the photographer Mozer) during the course of the work were symbolic of the psychological states implied by the music's 'alter ego', in its philosophical-literary manifestation. Colour, the 'tastiera di luce' and synaesthesia have played a prominent place in popular Skryabin mythology lending him, amongst composers, an otherness that increases his attraction and mystique but that has often detracted from him being taken seriously.

Already in 1905 when composing the 'Poème de l'extase', Skryabin enthused that the work would be 'a great joy, an enormous festival'; this concept of his music to be not only a source of artistic celebration but a participatory act of celebration grew throughout the following years of the decade. 'Prométhée' was at one point considered by Skryabin to be a section of a much larger 'Misteriya' ('Mysterium') which would occupy his creative efforts from that time onwards. Later, the incorporation of 'Prométhée' into the larger work was abandoned in favour of the creation of an intermediate 'Predvaritel'noye deystvo' ('Acte préalable') which would prepare an as yet unready public for the 'Mysterium'. In 1914 Skryabin bought a piece of land in Darjeeling; for him, India was the 'land of sages, sadhus, magical and mystifying attainments' (Bowers, II, 254) and its backdrop of the Himalayas would form a natural temple at which the selected participants could attain Skryabin's prescription of 'samadhi', an Indian word for the spiritual ecstasy central to Skryabin's artistic aims. The colour organ used in 'Prométhée' was to have been only the beginning of a vast synaesthetic experiment: Skryabin intended the 'Mysterium' to consist of music (with chorus, solo voices, orchestra and, of course, himself centre-stage at a piano), dance, lights and perfume, augmented by 'bells suspended from the clouds'. The sketches for the music of the 'Acte préalable' (the text was completed in 1915) contain several allusions to the later piano works as well as a simultaneity, consisting of two French 6th chords and one diminished 7th, in which each pitch of the chromatic scale appears once only. (This tantalizing glimpse into a future that was not to be was elaborated by the Russian composer Aleksandr Nemin into an extended, three-movement work.) To paraphrase Skryabin's close friend Vyacheslav Ivanov, Skryabin's music and therefore also its logical culmination in the 'Mysterium' 'would not wanted to be and could not have been "only art"' (V. Ivanov: 'Borozdi i mezhi', Moscow, 1916), an assertion which although made with reference to the Russian symbolist movement as a whole, is particularly pertinent to Skryabin's example.

Much has been made of the stylistic disparity between the language of the early compositions and that of the later works; more relevant to a musical definition of Skryabin, however, are the similarities in technique between the two extremes and the connexities and continuities within various modes of expression which are recognizable as uniquely his. Elements in early- and mid-period works are transformed while still retaining their character as Skryabin's language became more complex while attaining, paradoxically, greater transparency. The outbursts of repeated chords in works such as the 'Étude' op.8 no.12 and the 'Impromptu' op.12 no.2 are frequently bombastic. By the time of writing of the fourth and fifth sonatas, similar writing is less oppressive (due partly to the abandonment of minor keys) and there it serves a

different purpose: when this figuration appears in the Tenth Sonata and 'K plyameni', the effect produces an aura of radiance and not doom. Likewise, an element which, retrospectively, could be labelled saccharine, with its preponderance of dominant harmonies and lyrical melody, found in early works (such as the second subject of the 'Fantasie' op.28) mutates into the otherworldly (such as the opening material of the 'Poème' op.69 no.1). The lugubrious element of many of Skryabin's early miniatures (such as the B flat minor prelude in the op.11 set) disappears altogether after the 'Prelude' op.56 no.2, the last work composed in a minor key. This lugubriousness was superseded by the languour which is the hallmark of nearly all the slower music written after 1902, from the 'Poème' op.32 no.1 of 1903 to the 'Prelude' op.74 no.2 of 1914. A element noticeable in later works which can be described as fantastic, evident in compositions such as 'Étrangeté'; and in the music of the allegro sections of the Tenth Sonata, is a logical development of the nervous, skittish, often explosive but sometimes filigree gesture found in works such as the 'études' op.8 no.10, op.56 no.4. More generally, the triple metres which predominate in Skryabin's output, from the 'Valse' op.1 onwards, are gradually refined (especially by means of dotting the second quaver) and developed into the compound elided formations of the Tenth Sonata. Complexity of texture had become a feature of his work early in his career: the dense polyphony found in the 'Polonaise', several of the mazurkas of the op.27 set, and in much of the writing of the 'Fantasie' was to have direct repercussions in the music composed later. Such density is always imagined and executed with remarkable clarity; Taneyev's lessons in strict counterpoint were not, in Skryabin's case, learnt in vain. A common feature of this polyphonic writing is rhythmic complexity, involving the piling up of irrational rhythmic groupings which often start rather individually on the upbeat to a bar. This was an early development, as can be seen in the closing section of the 'Impromptu' op.7 no.2.

Melodies, especially in the mid-period works, frequently commence with a rising third and thence proceed along rising contours. The interval of a third often serves as an impetus for modulation and also as a signpost delineating phrasal structure, as in the 'poèmes' op.32 and op.34. The intervals of a minor and major third are the building blocks of dominant sonorities; these intervals are respectively the distance between every other pitch on octatonic and whole-tone scales. Skryabin's fondness for symmetrical constructions in composition (and this extends beyond the symmetrical division of the octave by the tritone link) and his tendency to arrange long-term harmonic progressions in steps of thirds (a logical subdivision of the pairs of tritones) can be traced to his tendency to become obsessed with various intervals in a work; in the 'Prelude' op.74 no.4 is every intervallic detail has been traced to the opening two bar melody.

Clues to the factors linking Skryabin's eschatological thinking and the music which the composer so closely related to it can be found in some of the most noticeable stylistic hallmarks of Skryabin's work. The phenomenon of upward contours (which are often dovetailed into the subsequent phrasal unit) is a technical manifestation of Skryabin's desire for music to deliver a sense of uplift (towards flight, 'polyot') and eventually 'poriv', ('a transporting burst'); linked to the perpetually dominant harmonies, these melodic shapes suggest Skryabin's 'constant strivings to transcend the human' (Taruskin: 'Defining Russia Musically') through music. Even though the literary companion piece to 'The Poem of Ecstasy' is of Skryabin's own creation, it has been said that the content of the text is reminiscent of Bal'mont's 'Budem kak solntse' ('We shall be as the Sun') in which creation is identified with ecstasy and escape into the air. The sanctification of a creative process in which the sensation of uplift (pod'yom) towards otherworldliness and ecstasy (often symbolized by the sexual act) is central to Skryabin's mature output.

For Skryabin, the horizontal and vertical in music were almost one and the same; when he stated that 'melody is unfurled harmony ... harmony is furled melody' Skryabin was simply showing that his 'methods ... had their basis ... in the same practices as Stravinsky's' (Taruskin: 'Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition') and those of most of his Russian contemporaries. Skryabin's penchant for dominant sonorities can be traced back to his earliest works: the Valse op.1 contains a passage in which a dominant chord (with an added sixth, a device which was to gain great significance in his later works) is superimposed over the tonic, D flat. The entire first line of the 'Impromptu' op.12 no.1 is written in the dominant (of F sharp major), with only cursory and passing resolution onto the tonic. By the time he was writing the 'Poème' op.32 no.1, Skryabin was in the habit of resolving one dominant onto another. These 'chords take on an independent, self-sustaining life' (Bowers: 'The New Skryabin'), and are frequently presented with a flattened fifth, which itself is sometimes found as the lowest pitch of the chord. This constant use of dominants at first leaves the listener with a heightened sense of expectation, which in Skryabin's terms symbolizes desire. Eventually, due to the persistent lack of traditional resolution, a sense of alienation from normal harmonic procedure is produced. This removal of a sense of musical normality can be linked to the sensation of otherworldliness which Skryabin strove to achieve. The shift from using a tonic underpinning a dominant resonance (c-g-b-f-d#-a) to using an enharmonic, symmetrical pair of dominant chords (d flat-g-c flat>-f-e flat/e-a and g-db flat-f-b-e flat/e-a), a transition which occurred most blatantly between the last two orchestral works, results in a significant alteration of the principal sonority.

The mystic chord (c-f#-b flat-e-a-d) was for a long time regarded as the starting point of all of Skryabin's later experiments and has, like theosophy, colour, and his supposed effeminacy, contributed greatly to his mystique and, to some extent, diminished his status. This chord is in fact one of many based on dominant

and French 6th chords which Skryabin employed after 1908. This chord, rather than the host of others he used, has been particularly associated with Skryabin because, when presented horizontally, while being neither whole-tone nor octatonic (scales which figured prominently in the works of Debussy and Stravinsky of the same period and which are both mathematically consistent) it contains elements of both. Latterly, instead of possessing a conventional and tonally responsive perfect fifth at its base, the chief chordal element is propelled into the outer reaches of harmonic stratosphere by the insatiable and ultimately unresolvable diminished fifth. In his inextinguishable thirst for light, Skryabin, like a character in a Dostoyevskian parable, brandishes the 'diabolus in musica' and flirts with the infernal with the 'Satanicheskaya poema' (and through acquiescence to Podgayetsky's lasting appellation of the Ninth Sonata), invoking the 'necessary presence of evil at the gates of knowledge' (G. Steiner: 'Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky').

Reputation & influence. By the time of his death, Skryabin's following was such that his funeral has been described as the most fashionable event in Moscow for years. Boris Pasternak described the beginning of the 20th century as the 'era of Skryabin' ('I Remember'); during the last ten years of his life, Skryabin was seen as the modernist composer of Russia, and even during his prolonged stay in Europe (1904,09) he was regarded by his contemporaries as a glamorous and almost mythical figure. Older composers such as Rimsky Korsakov, while questioning Skryabin's interest in the extra-musical facets of creativity, still considered him 'impeccable as a harmonist, not a trifler like Reger or Strauss' (Taruskin: 'Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition').

The messianic and egotistical nature of Skryabin's philosophy was such that although in itself it had no obviously discernible influence upon younger Russian composers, it clearly had some appeal and resonance for artists working in the era of early soviet Russia which, like Skryabin's music, may well have seemed apocalyptic and revolutionary. During the early Soviet era, Skryabin was regarded as the composer who most convincingly represented the revolutionary character of the era and thus appealed not only to musicians, but also to the fledgling authorities and the newly widened concert-going public. Only the works of Beethoven were heard more frequently than Skryabin's during this period, and the last piano sonatas were often heard at recitals. The Commissar for Public Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, was well known for his boundless admiration for Skryabin as man and composer. He still wrote about him in 1930, the year after his resignation from officialdom: 'Skryabin well understood the instability of the society in which he lived ... he felt the electricity in the air and reacted to its disturbance. In his music, we have the great gift of the Revolution's musical Romanticism' ('V mire muziki'). Skryabin's singular political beliefs have been described as a vein of socialism and these, along with his friendship with Plekhanov have been stressed by Soviet biographers such as Del'son. Skryabin's revolutionary, apocalyptic and essentially optimistic vision had great appeal and resonance for artists working in a society which in many senses was post-apocalyptic, revolutionary in political and social terms and which initially engendered optimism in large parts of the creative community and intelligentsia.

The cultural change which had occurred by the 1930s brought an end to the official favour in which Skryabin was held posthumously. After World War I and the deprivation of the civil war years, Skryabin's vision began a slow decline. By the later 1920s Skryabin's mysticism found far fewer sympathisers and had less resonance in a radically changed society. Two comments, one anonymous, the second from Shostakovich, sum up the attitudes of the Stalinist era. Skryabin was criticised for his 'acute and morbid neuropathic egocentricity, [for being] totally un-Russian in his themes, and more anti-people than anything in the whole of Russian music'. By then, he was their 'bitterest enemy' (Bowers: 'The New Skryabin'). This fall from grace was subsequently reversed: by 1972 his rehabilitation was so complete that a four-kopec stamp depicting Skryabin was issued in the Soviet Union on the occasion of the centenary of his birth.

The official view propagated during the later soviet period towards Skryabin is however neither one of the unconditional condemnation nor the idolatry that characterized the three decades after his death. In the ongoing process of revising and rewriting the cultural history of Russia, Skryabin was eventually publicly heroized. However, the curious attitude of institutions such as the conservatories is demonstrated by the fact that while every student pianist will learn the op.8 and then the op.42 sets of 'études', Skryabin's later music, and the accompanying philosophy, tended to be viewed with nervous suspicion. It took 20 years for Varvara Dernova, for a long time the foremost Russian Skryabin scholar, to publish her work on the late music.

The peculiarly paradoxical and irrational aspects of soviet attitudes to Skryabin are illustrated by the lionization of his nephew by marriage, the pianist Vladimir Sofronitsky. His pianistic rivals were Neuhaus, Goldenweiser, Feinberg and, later, Richter and Gilels, but Sofronitsky was revered far and above these more reliable musicians. His position was made more paradoxical by his own decidedly un-soviet behaviour; the only conceivable reason for his favour was his familial connection which served as an incontrovertible status as a later figure in the Skryabin mythology.

Skryabin's influence on Russian composers of the early 20th century was as strong as it was on poets such as Vyacheslav Ivanov and Konstantin Bal'mont. The clearest demonstration of this is the fact that many composers simply imitated Skryabin, his later style in particular. Indeed, Skryabin's influence was so pervasive that he not only served as a direct model from which less individual composers could copy, but also held a fascination for the more outstanding composers of the era following his death such as Stanchinsky, Roslavets, Lourié, Krein, Feinberg and Lyatoshyne, many of whom, along with a handful of other figures less directly influenced by Skryabin, occupied central positions in Russian musical life from after Skryabin's death until the late 1920s.

In one way or another, Skryabin affected the development of nearly every Russian composer of the first half of the 20th century. That people were attempting to write music actually exactly as he had done more than a decade after his death demonstrates that Skryabin became an idol during the early Soviet era. Indeed, Skryabin's influence began to take effect during his own short life: during the first decade of the century, it can be seen in works by composers such as Catoire, Glière, Medtner and Vasilenko to name but a few. More importantly, it was in this period that elements of Skryabin's style became discernible in the early works of Prokofiev and Stravinsky, both of whom arguably subsequently developed creative personalities as strong as that of Skryabin. Other composers active in Russia in the 1910s and beyond, ranging from Aleksandrov, Myaskovsky, Polovinkin, Shaporin and Shebalin to Mosolov and Shostakovich, all took one or more aspects of Skryabin's music and all later defined various aspects of soviet music in different ways. Thus, Skryabin's influence reached out to the broader field of soviet music. Some of the composers listed above were aesthetically quite distant from Skryabin. However, his influence was so pervasive that in the 1910s and 20s it affected even those composers who pursued the most different creative aims from his, and whose music rarely, if ever, sounded like his. Perhaps the most spectacular example of the unexpected nature of Skryabin's influence can be found in the case of Stravinsky, whose early works rarely sounded like Skryabin's and were generally thought to have been products of the St Petersburg traditions of Rimsky-Korsakov. But recently, Stravinsky too has been demonstrated to have been influenced by Skryabin. That later soviet music was dominated by Shostakovich (the only composer who remained in Russia who achieved the status and position of artistic influence that Skryabin had until 1930) is paradoxical, and perhaps typically Russian, because in many respects he was the composer who was most dissimilar to Skryabin in terms of output, philosophy, aesthetic character and musical technique. Those composers actively eschewed Skryabin's influence in the later 1920s and beyond did so because of its pervasive nature; they made themselves artistically conspicuous in doing so. The evolution of Russian music in the 20th century can therefore be seen not merely as having been defined by ideology, as is frequently claimed, but by the paradox of and fundamental shift between two opposing personalities, Skryabin and Shostakovich. In essence, Skryabin is the most representative and composer of the Russian Silver Age, arguably one of the most remarkable periods in the development of human culture.

Samuil Feinberg Sonata no.6

Samuil Yevgen'yevich Feinberg (1890,1962) was regarded as one the most gifted pianists of his day; his compositions, however, have only recently begun to be heard after many years of silence. His parents were of Jewish origin and in 1894 they moved to from Odessa to Moscow. There, Feinberg entered the conservatory where he studied the piano with Goldenweiser and composition (privately) with Zhilyayev, graduating in 1911. Over the course of the next few years he started performing as a pianist, and continued to compose. Around this time he played to Skryabin who declared Feinberg to have given the most convincing performance of his Fourth Sonata. In August 1914, he was sent to the Polish front and fell seriously ill, he was then sent to a military hospital where he contracted typhus. He returned to Moscow, where he convalesced for the rest of World War I. He was appointed professor of piano at the conservatory in 1922. He became a member of the circle which met at Pavel Lamm's flat; musicians he encountered there included Myaskovsky and Anatoly Aleksandrov both of whom wrote works for Feinberg. During the second half of the 1920s, Feinberg achieved significant success abroad: he gave concerts in Italy, Austria and Germany. He also took part in the International Festival of Contemporary Music in Venice in the September of 1925, arousing great interest with his Sixth Sonata. During the 1930s, he was jury member of several international competitions, but his concerts abroad appear to have ceased around the middle of 1929. Despite suffering from heart trouble from 1951 onwards, he performed, recorded and composed up until a few days before his death.

As a pianist, Feinberg was considered an equal of Goldenweiser, Sofronitsky, Neuhaus and Ginzburg; in addition to the composer himself, the latter two, his Feinberg's pupil Viktor Merzhanov and Mikhail Sokolov are known to have played Feinberg's works during his lifetime. Feinberg held in his memory Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier (he was the first Russian pianist to play the entire cycle in public), Beethoven's 32 sonatas and most of the output of Chopin, Schumann and Skryabin whose ten sonatas he often performed in a series of two concerts. Although Prokofiev, whose Third Concerto Feinberg was the first to play in Russia, considered his interpretation too nervous and Romantic in approach, Feinberg's playing is notable

for its clarity, quality of legato playing, range of tone and rhythmic subtlety. The obscurity of Feinberg's compositions, even in his own lifetime, may be traced to his 'deep antipathy to any form of self-advertisement' which he 'stretched to its very limits' (L. Feinberg, 1984). He was a member of the ASM (The Association of Contemporary Music) in Moscow in the 1920s and was considered by some members to be on the more conservative wing of the organization; but despite the outward lack of a brazenly modernist aesthetic, many of his works contain harmonic, gestural and formal innovations. If he used the mid-period works of Skryabin and, to a lesser extent, rhythmic and textural properties of Schumann's piano music as models in early works such as the First Sonata, then by the Fourth Sonata (1918) he had developed a highly singular style into which he had assimilated much of the prevailing atonal harmonic experiment of the era as well as his considerable contrapuntal technique. The sixth and seventh sonatas are perhaps his finest achievements: while the former employs a vast, mosaic-like structure of cellular motifs all based on the same two intervals, the latter explores linear progressions in textures of considerable complexity. Although his works of the 1920s are tragic in expression in contrast to the ecstatic nature of his earlier Skryabin-inspired works, both share an apocalyptic and virtuosic complexity. In the mid-1920s he experimented, along with Anatoly Aleksandrov, with Schoenbergian 12-note serialism but he considered the sketches unsatisfactory. The première of his First Piano Concerto aroused vilification from critics of the proletarian camp. This event caused Feinberg to almost cease performing his works in public; the seventh and eighth sonatas were not published until the mid-1970s. Problems arose for Feinberg in 1936 because his close friend (and former teacher) Zhilyayev was arrested in the Tukhachevsky affair; Zhilyayev and Sollertinsky who was also implicated both died in prison. Zhilyayev was also the editor at Muzgiz of Feinberg's; this explains of course the non-publication of 7th and 8th sonatas, as does the style of these works, both aesthetically distant from the musical atmosphere of the late 1930s. In later years he turned, like his friends Myaskovsky and Goldenweiser, to a quasi-diatonic polyphonic language which, while displaying on the surface comparative simplicity, retains much of the intellectual rigour that characterizes his best work of the 1920s.

Mikolajus Ciurlionis Preludes (1900,09)

Mikolajus Konstantinas Ciurlionis (1875,1911) is regarded as the founder of both Lithuanian composition and painting. About two years after his birth, his family moved to Druskininkai, a spa town on the Nemunas river. There, his father was appointed church organist and remained there for the rest of his life. From the age of four, Mikolajus played the piano by ear and by seven could read music fluently. In 1889, he was sent to Plunge where he studied at the orchestral school founded by Prince Michal Oginski who, having noted the boy's outstanding abilities, paid for him to enter the Warsaw Conservatory in 1894. There, he initially studied the piano with Sygietyński (who was, besides, an influential critic and novelist), and later entered Zygmunt Noskowski's composition class. Warsaw offered Ciurlionis the opportunity to hear the works of Wagner and become acquainted with the writing of Hugo, Ibsen, Merezhkovsky, Nietzsche, Poe, Przybyszewski and Wilde. In Warsaw he met Eugeniusz Morawski, a young Polish composer with an interest in modernist and symbolist art who became Ciurlionis's closest friend. (Ciurlionis fell in love with Morawski's sister Maria and fell into a deep depression when her father would not permit her to marry him.) He composed the cantata 'De profundis' for his graduation from the conservatory in 1899 and was subsequently offered the directorship of a newly-founded music school in Lublin. But Ciurlionis turned down this offer, preferring instead to devote more time to composition, his first major work 'Miske' ('In the Forest') was written in 1900 and won first prize in a competition organized by Count Zamoiski; its performance, however, was cancelled because its composer was not Polish. Ciurlionis then entered the Leipzig Conservatory in 1901, studying with Jadassohn and then Reinecke. Although Ciurlionis valued Reinecke's insistence on the acquisition of a sound technique through the studying of Classical works, he soon found his conservative attitudes stifling. Despite the death of his benefactor Prince Oginski, Ciurlionis managed to complete his second course of studies and returned home to Druskininkai in the summer of 1902. Back in Warsaw, he continued to refuse regular employment and instead earned money from private lessons. Around this time, the urge to paint took a stringer hold on him; when the Warsaw School for Fine Arts opened in 1904 both Ciurlionis and Morawski enrolled.

In 1905 Ciurlionis travelled to the Caucasus and the landscape there had a profound effect on him. Equally, the revolutionary turmoil which erupted in Russia during that year caused Ciurlionis to reflect on his own national identity and on the political situation in Lithuania. This new consciousness developed into an active concern for Lithuanian culture; by the time he finally returned to the country and settled in Vilnius in the autumn of 1907, he had already organized the First Lithuanian Art Exhibition where 33 of his works were shown. He instilled his nationalist feelings into his own family: his father lost his job because the Polish pastor approved of neither his organist's newly found passion for speaking the Lithuanian language (instead of the Polish preferred by the Lithuanian middle and upper classes), nor of the interest aroused in the local population by the family's singing of Lithuanian folksongs. Ciurlionis conducted the choir of the society Vilniaus Kankles, the first officially sanctioned organization devoted to Lithuanian music, and became involved in plans to create a centre of Lithuanian culture in Vilnius. He met Sofija Kymantaite, a woman ten

years his junior who also had a passion for the development of a national culture. She agreed to teach him Lithuanian (he had previously been embarrassed by his lack of fluency) and eventually became his wife. Meanwhile, Ciurlionis painted rapidly, organized a second exhibition and made plans with Sofija for an opera entitled 'Jurate' based on a myth concerning a queen of the Baltic Sea. Just as Aleksandr Blok and his wife identified themselves with characters from Wagner's 'Ring', Ciurlionis and Sofija saw themselves as incarnations of figures from Lithuanian folklore, namely Kastitys and Jurate. In the autumn of 1908 he went to St Petersburg where he was warmly received by the 'Mir iskusstva' artists and Mtsislav Dobuzhinsky in particular. They were entranced by what they perceived to be Ciurlionis's attempts to depict music in painting on cycles of canvasses with names such as 'Sonata of the Stars'. He was joined by Sofija early in 1909 and flung himself into the cultural life of the Russian capital: several of his works were heard in February 1909 in one of the Evenings of Contemporary Music in a programme containing works by Medtner and Skryabin, while his paintings were seen in a salon organized by the Union of Russian Artists. He was acclaimed as an original by members of the Russian symbolist movement who regarded him as a long lost relative for a variety of reasons. After spending the summer in Druskininkai, he returned to St Petersburg where he slowly sunk into depression. By the end of the year he was found by a friend completely oblivious to the world. He was sent back to Druskininkai and despite a temporary improvement he lapsed into deeper apathy. Ironically, his work was by then receiving greater acclaim: he was elected into the revived 'Mir iskusstva' group in 1910 and his admirers sent money for his care in a sanatorium near Warsaw. While walking in woods he caught a cold that developed into pneumonia. He died in April 1911 having never seen his daughter Danute born 11 months earlier.

That Ciurlionis spent his creative life in three main places, his student years in Warsaw (and Leipzig), his short but significant Lithuanian period and his final years in St Petersburg prior to his collapse, is symbolized in the phases of and influences on his creative development and in a consideration of the significance of his work as a whole. During his years in Warsaw Chopin's music was heard everywhere and this led to Ciurlionis forming a piano style that, while being the starting point for the modernist experiments of his contemporaries Skryabin and Szymanowski, was to a certain extent rooted in folklore. But Ciurlionis shared with these two other composers an apprenticeship during the years in which west European symbolism and modernism were taking roots in eastern Europe and Russia. One of the perpetual paradoxes of Ciurlionis is that while he is regarded as the founder of both Lithuanian painting and music, and while he employed Lithuanian folk motifs in his work in both genres, he is nonetheless an artist of cosmopolitan sympathies and his work is symptomatic of trends that operated in not only those Russian and Polish artistic circles with which he had contact but were also in evidence in Germany, France, Britain, Scandinavia and America.

Ciurlionis's years in Lithuania had greater historical significance than other periods of his life; even though he never succeeded in establishing a centre for Lithuanian culture, his activities in Vilnius were responsible for his subsequent near sanctification in the country. His symbolic adoption of the Lithuanian language was reflected in his interest in the folksong and art of the country. He wrote that 'the unaccustomed ear of the foreigner is struck at first by a great deal of a monotony of rhythm [which] is one of the most peculiar and beautiful features of our songs. [ä] They have a simple melody that does not embrace even the whole octave and is often limited to four or five notes, and their rhythm is even simpler, consisting of notes of two durations or, frequently, of just one' (quoted in Landsbergis, 1992). These views on Lithuanian folksong in fact articulate the stylistic features of much of his own music. Ciurlionis made a large number of arrangements of folksongs for chorus and for solo piano in which the folk material is scarcely developed. However, the extent to which he used folksong in his other compositions is hard to define: although he hesitated to employ actual folksongs directly into his compositions, like Bartók and Enescu he absorbed the essential qualities of the material to such an extent that all those characteristics identified above are also hallmarks of his mature style. Even in early works such as the 'Preludes', op.7, in which a harmonic and textural idiom close to that of Chopin is employed, the lapidary yet melancholic essence of Lithuanian folksong, the presence of which is also signalled by drones and terse, unresolved melodic fragments, leaves a marked impression. Likewise, Ciurlionis's growing fascination with ostinati and repeated patterns of pitches can thus be traced to the nature of Lithuanian folksong: the widespread employment of rhythmic ostinati and the use of 'series' of between six and nine pitches (often derived from a name) in a passacaglia manner, and thus in a melodic ostinato, both point towards the outward simplicity of the folksong that surrounded the composer at Druskininkai. The intonation of Lithuanian folksong as absorbed into his mature style is one element that lends Ciurlionis's work its melodic, harmonic and phrasal singularity. Likewise, Lithuanian folk art informed much of his painting on a variety of levels: while actual depiction of the iconography of folk art is not very common, even if it figures prominently in better known works such as 'Lietuviskos kapines' ('A Graveyard in Zemaitija: Lithuanian Graveyard') alongside Japanese influences, many other works pay homage to the legendary, mystical and animist elements of Lithuanian tradition.

That Ciurlionis should go to St Petersburg, the fermentation pot of Russian Symbolism, was almost inevitable considering his activity in two different artistic realms, his penchant for a mythicized and highly symbolic presentation of nature, and the long established cultural links between Lithuania and the northern Russian city. His later paintings inhabit the same visionary but nebulous twilight world that informed the

work of artists as diverse as Vrubel', Somov, Kuznetsov and Bakst. It is known that Skryabin was impressed by his painting and that Stravinsky bought a canvas in 1908. Ciurlionis's musical language, however, was distinct from that of most Russian composers and had developed along a highly personalized trajectory since around 1903. What it did share in common with traditional Russian methods was a tendency to avoid Germanic development of themes in favour of a diversive, constant variation method similar to the varied repetition formula initiated by Glinka in his 'Kamarinskaya'.

From around 1904, Ciurlionis had employed an increasingly polyphonic language which was notable for a high degree of chromaticism. But this chromaticism is not of usual variety (as found in the harmony of Wagner and Strauss, for example) but is brought about sometimes by the presence of chromatic scales in supporting polyphonic lines (initially in 'In the Forest' and in many subsequent pieces including the 'Besacas' variations), and at others by the independent (and, again, often stepwise) linear progression of voices. Atonal harmony often results from one of or a combination of these factors; atonal structures arise when ostinati are played off against each other resulting in harmonic progressions while not necessarily dissonant are far removed from tonal procedure. This paradox lends much of Ciurlionis's later work an unearthly, unexpected nature. Much has been made of Ciurlionis's supposed use of quasi-serial methods, atonal harmony not to mention the presence of abstract forms in his painting and supposed synaesthetic translation between his paintings and compositions. After all, that an artist of his imaginative powers should not experiment in these comparable, though not necessarily parallel, avenues is surely more, rather than less, predictable. Although discussions of these specific features of his style have clouded some evaluation of his work, his experimental and radical character, as well as his fantastical and national persuasion, are all refracted in his work as painter, composer as well as in the pieces of verse and prose he left in notebooks at his death. For all the criticisms of desultory technique, Ciurlionis expressed in his paintings and music not only his extraordinary personal sensibility to nature and a strangely illuminated, mythical world; despite his alien nature, he actually epitomized many of the aesthetic concerns of Symbolism and Modernism, and, possibly unwittingly, came to symbolize the starting point of professional art in Lithuania. At its most effective, Ciurlionis's music is notable for a disarming gestural simplicity, charming in its unexpected and original melodic or harmonic turns, and comparable to that of Musorgsky, Janáček and Stanchinsky in its naïve, folksong-inspired directness. Above all, Ciurlionis 'had the rare gift of concentrating multiple and very varied ideas into very little pictorial space and very little musical time' (V. Landsbergis, 1986). Ciurlionis's protean nature is exemplified by comparisons with figures as diverse as Blake and Klee; that he was admired by Rolland, Sartre, Messiaen, Ivanov, Skryabin, Stravinsky, Eisenstein and Gor'ky is further testament to his uniqueness.

Leonid Sabaneyev Sonata 'in Memory of Skryabin'

Leonid Leonidovich Sabaneyev (1881,1968) is best remembered today as one of Skryabin's first biographers. He trained as a mathematician and physicist and gained a master's degree in these subjects from Moscow University. At the same time, however, he studied composition with Taneyev and the piano with Paul de Schloezer, the father of not only Skryabin's second wife, Tat'yana, but also of another early Skryabin scholar, Boris de Schloezer. From around 1905 he became one of the earliest champions of modern European and Russian music in Russia: he was acquainted with the works of Debussy, Sibelius, Strauss, Schoenberg and others long before their music had been heard in his home country. He worked as a critic for a number of pre-Revolutionary newspapers and journals such as 'Russkoye slovo, Muzika, Appollon' and 'Muzikal'niy sovremennik'. He also contributed an article on Skryabin's 'Prometheus' for the influential artistic journal 'Der blaue Reiter', published in Munich. After the Revolution, Sabaneyev was a founder member and later president of the Association for Contemporary Music, and spent much energy protecting professional composers from attacks by so-called proletarian groups, who labelled the music of composers such as Roslavets, Feinberg, Sabaneyev and others as élitist and anti-people. These factionalist and philistine attitudes eventually persuaded Sabaneyev to leave Russia: he first lived abroad as a foreign correspondent for Russian music journals, but failed to return, living in Germany and the US before settling in France. After emigration, he was regarded with great suspicion by the Soviet establishment and his music was never performed.

Sabaneyev's output includes a ballet, 'L'avatrice' (1928), an oratorio based on the Revelation of St John, a symphonic poem entitled 'Flots d'azur', several chamber works and much piano music. Although the imprint of Skryabin on Sabaneyev's style is very strong, a number of strong characteristics not present in Skryabin's music are quickly discernable. Sabaneyev, unlike Skryabin, conceived of his music in huge paragraphs, rather than as a mosaic of tiny interrelated motifs and structures. His harmonic palette is a great deal darker and, while not being traditionally tonal, tends towards minor sonorities. Additionally, the gestures and textures employed by Sabaneyev are often a great deal more virile and overpowering than Skryabin's ever tend to be. The Sonata 'In Memory of Skryabin' was written in 1915, in the immediate wake of the death of Sabaneyev's idol. Sabaneyev had been introduced into the circle around Skryabin in around 1908?; later the circle included the painter Sperlberg, the musicians Alexander Krein, Goldenweiser, Gnesin,

Olga Nemenova-Lunz and Anotoly Drozdov, the mystic Podgaetsky, the anglophile Bryanchaninov, the poets Ivanov, Bryusov and Baltrussaitis; callers to the flat included Casals, Isadora Duncan, Busoni, Feinberg, Merezhkovsky, Ciurlionis and Meyerhold. Sabaneyev's sonata is cast in three large sections, with the second culminating in a passage of searing intensity and orchestral sonority, the third becoming increasingly spare and transparent. The work, in its first (and only) publication in 1924, is prefaced by a quotation from Skryabin's sketches of his 'Predvaritel'noye deystvo' or 'Acte préalable'.

Georgy Catoire Prelude, op.10 no.2; Etude fantastique, op.12 no.4; Crépuscule, op.24 no.1 (1899,1914)

Georgy L'vovich Catoire [or Katuar, as spelt in Russian] (1861,1926) was born into a naturalized French family in Moscow. He studied the piano with Carl Klinworth who introduced his pupil to the music and theories of Wagner, then largely unknown or derided in Russia. Catoire attended Bayreuth in 1879 and in many ways can be considered Russia's first Wagnerian. He subsequently graduated from Moscow University with a degree in mathematics and started working in his father's business, an environment with which he felt little affinity. Meanwhile, Tchaikovsky's compositions had made a great impression on the young man: when Catoire first showed him his own work, Tchaikovsky immediately felt that 'it would be a sin if he [i.e. Catoire] did not devote himself to composition'. After a period of study in Berlin, Catoire returned to Russia in 1887 and went to study with Rimsky-Korsakov in St Petersburg, where he also met and benefited from instruction from Lyadov. But acceptance came very slowly to Catoire; in 1889 he withdrew to the countryside and almost severed all his links with music. His first success came with a set of romances, op.9. The set of piano pieces, op.10, demonstrate that Catoire had found a personal style: the limpid but often complex harmonies, multi-layered textures and mastery of form all contribute to his unique but rarely recognized voice. Although largely forgotten today, during his own lifetime his works were performed by Goldenweiser, and later by Rostropovich and Oistrakh.

Alexander Krein Sonata (1922)

Aleksandr Abramovich Krein (1883,1951) was born in Nizhniy-Novgorod. His father Abram had moved from his native Lithuania in 1870. He was a collector of Jewish folk music and was active as a 'badhan' and klezmer musician. He gave his seven sons their first musical education and three of these became well-known musicians: in addition to Aleksandr, David (1869,1926) was a violinist, leader of the orchestra of the Bol'shoy and a member of the Moscow Trio while Grigory (1879,1955) was a noted composer (as was his son, Yulian, born in 1913). At the age of 14 Aleksandr entered the Moscow Conservatory where he studied the cello with Aleksandr von Glehn; he also took composition classes with Leonid Nikolayev, Sergey Taneyev and Boleslav Yavorsky. He then studied music theory for one further year at the music school attached to the Moscow Philharmonic Society. His first works were published by Jurgenson in 1901 and by the end of that decade his music was regularly heard at chamber concerts in Moscow. He became a member of the Society for Jewish Folk Music which commissioned a set of 'Yevreyskiye eskizī' ('Jewish Sketches') for clarinet and string quartet. This work met with such success that another set was requested; this Krein dedicated to his parents and the writing, with its direct allusion to Jewish domestic music, vividly recreates the sounds which must have filled the Krein household when Aleksandr was growing up. Krein returned to teach at the conservatory (1912,17) before he was appointed secretary of the artistic section of Muzo-Narkompros; he later served as the secretary of the academic and ethnographical sections of that organization. From 1922 he held a post as a jury member of the State Publishing House. During the 1920s, he wrote music for several plays staged in the Habimah, the Ukrainian, the Moscow and the Belorussian Jewish theatres. The opera 'Zagmuk' (1929,30) concerned the Jewish uprising in Babylon in the 8th century BCE and was his last work to show Jewish influence openly. That such subject matter was to be avoided as early as 1934 is demonstrated by the publication, in that year, of a 'Melodiya' ('Melody'), op.43, for cello and piano; five years previously, Sabaneyev had listed this work in his book on Krein as 'Yevreyskaya melodiya'. The Spanish-influenced ballet 'Laurentsiya' written in the mid-1930s enjoyed some success but it, while colourfully scored and undoubtedly the work of a talented composer, is devoid of the singular harmonic and melodic invention of Krein's earlier music. Although some of Krein's later works (such as his Second Symphony written during his evacuation to Nal'chik during World War II) demonstrate his interest in Armenian, Syrian and Turkish folksong, they possess little of the colour and vitality which were derived from his Jewish roots and his harmonic adventurousness.

Krein's finest works were written between 1910 and about 1928. In these, Krein absorbed the contours and inflections of Jewish folk music into a harmonic language which, being characterized by the use of altered dominant ninth and eleventh chords, is clearly related to that of Skryabin with whom Krein became acquainted around 1910. Even Krein's earliest works display the fervently passionate expression which dominated his works from the 1910s and 20s. Relatively complex harmony, often based on dominant sonorities, is frequently presented within parallel octaves which delineate melodies. As in the 'Elegiya' for

piano trio and many works of his earlier period, a slowish triple metre is ornamented with chromatic voice leading between harmonies and arpeggiated melodic fragments. Krein used with growing frequency and confidence both secular and sacred Jewish material from 1910 onwards. While he had previously been attracted to symbolist poetry in his songs, he later wrote cycles to words by Jewish poets and in these used a variety Jewish musical material within a harmonic context of considerable subtlety. When writing his arguably most impressive works, the First Symphony and Piano Sonata (1922 and 1923,5), Krein employed ancient Hebrew melodies in a harmonic system which manages to organically combine, by virtue of their shared intervallic properties, elements of Skryabin's late language and modes found in Jewish folk music.

Nikolay Obukhov Icons (1915)

Nikolay Obukhov (or Nicolas Obouhow, as he spelt his name after emigration to France) (1892,1954) studied for a while at the Moscow Conservatory from 1911 (counterpoint with Il'insky and the piano with Strakhov) before entering the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1913 where he studied with Kalafati, Maksimilian Steinberg and Nikolay Tcherepnin. His first acknowledged works date from 1913, and some of them were published as 'Quatre mélodies' by Rouart et Lerolle in Paris in 1921. In 1915 he developed his own form of notation in which the use of accidentals is obviated by the use of noteheads in the shape of crosses; after this system, which is similar to one invented in Russia by Golishev during the same period, was demonstrated by the composer it gave rise to a great deal of journalistic polemic. All of his works written after the middle of 1915 were notated using this method. The only performance his works received in Russia during his lifetime took place at an evening sponsored by the journal *Muzikal'niy Sovremennik* in 1916. Boris de Schloezer, a close friend of Skryabin's who later knew Obukhov in Paris, was present at the concert and described the composer as 'a pale young man, with gazing eyes' who 'confused the audience' (de Schloezer, 1972). In 1918 he left St Petersburg with his wife and two children; they eventually settled near Paris a year later. There, he encountered financial difficulties which were only alleviated by the intervention of Ravel who found Obukhov a publisher (who actually only printed a small number of his works) and introduced him people who gave him 'the possibility to devote himself to his work in peace' (de Schloezer). The 1920s saw a handful of performances, most notably that of the 'Predisloviye knigi zhizni' ('Introduction to the Book of Life') under Kussevitzsky. During this and the next decade he put into practice ideas for electronic instruments Obukhov had conceived as early as 1917: the 'efir' and 'kristal' ('ether' and 'crystal') he had described in Russia eventually gave rise to the *croix sonore*, and even though he built and wrote for the ether, it was with the *croix sonore* that he gained most attention. He found an exponent of the instrument in his pupil Marie-Antoinette Aussenac-Broglie who had also performed some of his piano music; she demonstrated the instrument around France and Belgium. Similar to both the theremin and the *ondes martenot* in that pitch production is reliant upon the distance of the performer's arm from the instrument, the *croix sonore* was the subject of a film of 1934. During the mid-1940s his notation again provoked heated discussion, this time in Paris; a book containing works from the 18th to the 20th centuries in Obukhov's notation was published by Durand. In 1947, his 'Traité d'harmonie tonale, atonale et totale', which had already interested Honegger, was published, while a year later he lectured on this subject in the Russian Conservatory in Paris. Obukhov spent his last years incapacitated by a mugging which occurred in 1949; he composed only a few works after the incident.

Obukhov's output is dominated by vast works of which the most notorious, notwithstanding the gargantuan 'Troisième et dernier testament' and 'La toute puissance', is the 'Kniga zhizni' ('The Book of Life') on which he worked from around the time he left Russia until at least the mid-1920s. Described by the composer as 'l'action sacrée du pasteur tout-puissant regnant' it was intended to be performed (or 'accomplished') uninterruptedly every year on the night of the first and on the day of the second resurrection of Christ. Obukhov did not consider himself the composer of this work; instead, he saw himself as the person permitted, by divine forces, to 'show' it. Parts of the score, one version of which is nearly 2000 pages in length, are marked in the composer's blood. The music is preceded by a lengthy exposition in archaic Russian, while the work concludes with one section the score of which unfolds into the form of a cross and another, taking the shape of a circle, which is fixed onto a golden and silver box decorated with rubies and red silk. (Nicholas Slonimsky, in his memoir 'Perfect Pitch' relates that the composer's wife, driven to despair by Obukhov's obsessive behaviour regarding this piece, attempted to burn, or 'immolate', in the composer's terminology, the manuscript but was interrupted in her crime.) Much of the instrumental writing is characterized by the alternation of chorale-like material (often ornamented by filigree arpeggiation) with tolling patterns, building to textures of considerable rhythmic and contrapuntal complexity. The vocal parts, as with his writing for the voice in most of his other works, have huge tessituras and are bespattered with glissandi and instructions for screaming or whispering. The style which is consistently applied in this magnum opus is prevalent in all of his mature works and has its roots in the songs and piano miniatures written in Russia. Taking as a starting point the language employed by Skryabin in his mid- and late-period works, Obukhov evolved a harmonic technique based on the systematic configuration and manipulation of 12-note chords or harmonic areas. The sonorities resulting from this 'total harmony' are often broadly

octatonic and frequently have a quasi-dominant character due to the prevalence of diminished fifths in the lower elements. Although longer structures appear to unfold in a schematized yet organic manner, the detail of musical procedure is curiously static. Obukhov saw his work as a musical articulation of his strongly-held religious beliefs and would sometimes sign his manuscripts 'Nicolas l'illuminé' or 'Nicolas l'extasié'. Possibly inspired by Vladimir Solov'yov's idea of 'sobornost' (collective spiritual or artistic experience), Obukhov sought to abolish the traditional performer-audience polarity in favour of a merging of these previously mutually exclusive groups into one of participants. Obukhov mostly used his own texts which are frequently inspired by the Book of the Revelation or the Apocrypha. It is thus no coincidence that the only poets whose work appealed to him spiritually and compositionally were Solov'yov and Bal'mont, since it was the former's orthodox mysticism that significantly informed the apocalyptic vision of the latter. In addition to these sources, mention should be made of Obukhov's use of two verses by Musorgsky; it is between his work and that of Messiaen that Obukhov's visionary language can be placed.

Alexey Stanchinsky Sonata no.2 (1913)

Aleksey Vladimirovich Stanchinsky (1888,1914) composed and performed his first compositions at the age of six. In 1899 he moved with his family to the village Logachyovo, near Novospasskiy where Glinka had collected folksong. From 1904 onwards, he made frequent visits to Moscow where he took private lessons with J. Lhévinne and Konstantin Eiges (piano), Zhilyayev (harmony and counterpoint) and Grechaninov (composition). The latter introduced Stanchinsky to Sergey Taneyev; in 1907 he entered the Moscow Conservatory where he continued his studies with Taneyev and Igumnov (piano). At Taneyev's house Stanchinsky met Sabaneyev who 'instinctively felt that here was a victim of a highly nervous and unbalanced temperament' (Sabaneyev, 1927). On the death of his father in 1908, Stanchinsky's creative flow temporarily ceased and he began to be subject to hallucinations and religious mania. He was confined to a clinic for a year and despite periods of lucidity, he was pronounced incurable. When he resumed composition, his style was markedly more mature and freer from the influences detectable in his previous works. He became the rising star of Moscow musical circles and manuscript copies of his works were circulated by admirers. During 1910 it is known that he collected and wrote down folk songs in the Smolensk province, and around this time became he appears to have formed some form of acquaintance with Skryabin and Medtner. In late 1913 he resumed his studies with Eiges and in 1914 he performed some of his works in the Maliy Zal of the Moscow Conservatory; their favourable reception had a tonic effect on the composer's health. However, this turn-about occurred too late to avert what was to many inevitable. In the October of 1914 he returned from a visit to the Crimea to Logachyovo. However, he left the house in order to wander across the countryside and several days later was found dead by a river. Investigation revealed that Stanchinsky had told the inhabitants of a nearby village that he was in search of 'white clouds'; later research by Irina Lopatina has suggested that the proximity of the Russian words 'beliye oblaki' ('White clouds'), to the name of a nearby monastery 'Beloblakovo', coupled with Stanchinsky's stated desire to devote his life to Christianity, leads to the conclusion that Stanchinsky died from a heart attack or exposure crossing a river in order to reach the Beloblakovo monastery situated on the other side. Medtner wrote his 'Three Pieces', op.31, in memory of Stanchinsky while Anatoly Aleksandrov and Zhilyayev edited Stanchinsky's works. Many of these appeared separately in the 1920s and a complete edition was issued in 1960.

Stanchinsky was initially very productive and his first works reflect a variety of influences. The first subject material of the Sonata movement of 1906 is highly reminiscent of that of the opening movements of Skryabin's second and third sonatas, while the second subject is similar to many passages found in Grieg's 'Lyric Pieces'. In other earlier works there are harmonic progressions and nuances borrowed from folksong that recall the music of Musorgsky. The numerous preludes written during these years demonstrate a widening harmonic palette, increasing rhythmic inventiveness and a growing sensibility for polyphonic piano writing. In the 'Etude' in G minor of 1907, the economical use of motifs goes beyond that found in the Sonata movement, while subtle shifts of rhythmic emphasis transform motivic cells without changing their essential character. In his later works, written after 1908, Stanchinsky explored uncharted ground. His experiments with asymmetrical metres (such as in the second movement of the Second Piano Sonata, notated in 11/8) had only been hinted at by 19th-century Russian music. Phrasing became even more laconic and at times tended towards a then non-existent neo-classicism. He relied less on harmonies defined by chromatic voice leading; instead, sections with no definable tonality are rudely juxtaposed with extended passages which occupy a single harmonic area and which could be described as pandiatonic. As Stravinsky would in the later 1910s, Stanchinsky made structural use of the tensions between diatonic, octatonic, whole-tone and other modal collections in works which employed the intonations of Russian folksong as their primary melodic source ('Eskizi', op.1). Perhaps the most striking aspect of the later works is the abundance of polyphonic writing and the finest examples are to be found in the 'Tri prelyudii v forme kanonov' ('Three Preludes in Canonic Form', 1913,14). Here, his obsession with 'objective', formalized musical structures reaches its apex; the vibrant yet selfless spirit of these strictly canonic works would not

be matched again until Nancarrow's experiments of the 1940s. It is generally regarded that Stanchinsky's early death deprived Russian music of a figure of very considerable stature.

Some aspects of the Russian symbolist movement as reflected in the life and work of the composer Alexey Vladimirovich Stanchinsky

Vladimir Solov'yov was a 19th-century philosopher who formulated many concerns crucial to Russian Symbolism. He extolled artists to reach beyond the notional confines of their activities, defining art as a process of 'materialization of spirit (i.e. incarnation or voploshcheniye) and the spiritualization of matter (i.e. transfiguration or 'preobrazheniye)'. This conflation of the material and spiritual, the actual and the conceptual, was central not only to writers such as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Andrey Bely and Alexander Blok, but also to contemporary musicians.

For nearly three decades after 1900, the "mutual penetration" of ... antithetical entities and realms' propped by Solov'yov became evident not only in the interdisciplinary nomenclature of Bely's poetical symphonies, Medtner's pianistic fairy tales or Skryabin's poems, but in the very structural fabric of musical compositions. The scope of many genres was broadened: 'études' became 'tableaux', while sonatas became narrative poems or nocturnes. One composer, however, was fascinated by the ideal of the consolidation of antagonistic formal realms. He was Alexey Vladimirovich Stanchinsky. Regarded as an outsider, or even a radical by his contemporaries, he had fallen into obscurity by the mid-1920s. Since the early 1990s his works have experienced a renaissance, with increasing performance and critical discussion.

To find the immediate roots of Stanchinsky's music, one must look to the two most significant musicians of the Moscow school of his day: Skryabin and Taneyev. Skryabin, with his obsession with the mystical and his desire to formulate a theurgic art form that sought to transport the participant, not merely the audience or performer, to a state of enlightenment, possessed a great deal in common with many of the symbolist poets, several of whom were friends of his. These aspects of his art also link him strongly to Solov'yov's ideals, not least because it was Solov'yov who first promulgated the idea of 'sobornost', or collective artistic experience. Partly because Skryabin was so emblematic of the visionary aspects of Russian Symbolism, and also because he was a highly charismatic figure and a composer of readily apparent originality, he was anointed figurehead of Russian musical modernism and, as such, was idolised by a younger generation of composers. Even during his own lifetime, Skryabin's philosophically seductive example successfully tempted many composers to copy him. They aped not only his penchant for sonata forms, but also borrowed heavily on his sonatas' dramaturgy, formal schemes, thematism and grandiose qualities. Skryabin's spell was already cast by around 1905: works by Akimenko, Krein, Dobroven and others attest to this. By the time of World War I, the mania for Skryabin had intensified with the appearance of new followers including Roslavets, Lourié, Obukhov, Feinberg, Alexandrov and Sabaneyev; by the early 1920s, arguably the peak of Skryabin's influence, this already substantial group was further augmented by Melkikh, Protopopov, Kryukov and others.

Even if Skryabin's ego was substantially massaged by this adulation, he was still mostly caustic about the music of his admirers. We are reminded, now after Stravinsky's death, of that composer's infatuation with Skryabin's late work, and the latter's rebuffs to the younger composer and his finding 'Petruška' 'very busy'. Stanchinsky was introduced to Skryabin, and played some of his works to him; unusually, Skryabin exclaimed that the music was 'excellent, and quite like my own'. Indeed, Stanchinsky's early works demonstrate that he was compositionally in awe of the older composer. A Sonata Movement, written in 1906, demonstrate the extent of the influence. This essentially immature work contains little material that would be stylistically incongruous in Skryabin's second or third sonatas, both written around a decade before. The initial I-V gesture mirrors the opening gesture of both Skryabin's second and third sonatas. Even the subsequent II-III movement in the alto voice is calls to mind the analogous III-IV gesture in the treble in Skryabin's Third Sonata. The similarity between the chief melodic material of the first subject and that of the D sharp minor 'Etude' in Skryabin's op.11 set is also striking. The enharmonic relationship between the 'Etude' and Stanchinsky's early essay is surely no coincidence. The 'Etude' in B, written in 1908, shows Stanchinsky experimenting with patterns of rhythmical combinations similar to those employed by Skryabin ten years previously, in his Concerto and Second Sonata. The multi-layered ostinati create a diatonic harmonic aura onto which Stanchinsky superimposes a melody surprisingly reminiscent of folksong. Significantly, this material is subjected to canonic treatment later in the work. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this and Stanchinsky's other works are their exquisitely wrought polyphonic textures. While Stanchinsky moved away from Skryabin's influence in many ways after 1908, it is clear that both composers continued to think in polyphonic terms. After all, Skryabin's late sonatas are all highly polyphonic, if not actually contrapuntal (he maintained that the voices worked 'with' rather than 'against' each other).

Though Skryabin's influence was probably the dominant musical force operating in Russia for almost the first quarter of the 20th century, it was not the only one. Half embarrassed by their self-perceived, and often real, lack of technique (although sometimes feigning pride in lacking this emblem of Western music), many 19th-century Russian composers made an intense, if unstructured, study of counterpoint. Rimsky-Korsakov, Lyadov and Arensky all wrote fugues and canons as exercises. But as Taneyev's stature as teacher and contrapuntist grew during the first decade of the 20th century, polyphonic genres gained greater prominence. After Taneyev's 'Prelude and Fugue' for piano, followed Stanchinsky's 'Preludes in Canonic Form' and his fugal Second Sonata. So, along with his much older teacher Taneyev, Stanchinsky became the first Russian composer to produce non-didactic, purely contrapuntal works intended for the concert platform. These works laid the foundations of a tradition which continued through Goldenweiser, Zaderatsky (the first Russian composer of a set of 24 preludes and fugues), and most notably Shostakovich. For all of these composers, the writing of polyphonic music was an intensely personal affair: Zaderatsky composed his works in a prison camp, Goldenweiser did not choose to publish his until the year of his death even though they had been written decades before, while Shostakovich's set represents a return to creative work after officially-enforced silence.

Sabaneyev described Taneyev as a 'shining ideal of the musician as priest' who 'locked himself up in his inner world ... almost an anchorite, a rigid ascetic', living in a 'lone little house .. without running water, without electricity'. In his 'dreams, he was Palestrina or Bach' and 'shared the theories and ideas of Lyof Tolstoy'. He considered that within the rules of strict counterpoint were to be found the 'keys to musical beauty'; in short, counterpoint served Taneyev as ecstasy did Skryabin, as a form of gnosis. The ease with which Sergey Taneyev introduced contrapuntal textures and episodes into larger forms certainly contributed to the surprisingly polyphonic nature of the music of his pupils who included Medtner, Rachmaninoff, Skryabin and Stanchinsky.

Stanchinsky turned to the composition of polyphonic works at times of spiritual crisis and intense religious speculation. This suggests that he saw the composition of these works not only as a kind of catharsis, but as a means of passage from crisis. After 1911, as he found himself being drawn closer to religion, his music became increasingly contrapuntal. Sabaneyev wrote that towards the end of Stanchinsky's life, 'the periods of lucid states grew rarer and rarer ... [his friends] asserted that he was full of musical ideas and still more of interesting "ideas about music"'. Canonic genres have long been regarded as having spiritual and even specifically religious significance. The very nature of canonic composition is one in which usual creative processes, those related to compositional choice, are bypassed by a systemization which, once set into motion, makes many choices for the composer. In some senses, the 'rational' front lobe of the brain, usually active during composition, is temporarily shut down, leaving the rear lobes, those associated with the irrational, the unknowable, free to operate. The canon is, after all, the most obvious musical manifestation of Solov'yov's spiritualization of matter, transfiguration or 'preobrazheniye', in which the 'real' element, i.e. the subject, once heard at the outset, is transformed and dissolved into a geometric web of constellations. Various authors have discussed the symbolic nature and religious significance of canonic procedure in works by Beethoven (the 'Missa solemnis'), Bach and others.

Stanchinsky wrote his Second Sonata in 1913 and gave its first performance in the Maliy Zal of the Moscow Conservatory in April 1914, in a concert that also featured works by Krein and Sabaneyev. The work consists of two movements: a slow, intricate fugue and a presto in 11/8 time. Solov'yov's ideal of 'mutual penetration' of opposites operates on several levels in Stanchinsky's Second Sonata. The fugue and sonata form-movements reinterpret the same material along radically different lines: for example, the rising subject of the fugue is reversed in the downward initial gesture of the Presto, and the stately falling sequence of the countersubject is transformed into a pie-seller's street call. In other words, at the outset of the second movement, the heaven bound is moved down to earth, and the stately becomes commonplace. At the very end of the piece, though, a massive rising gesture brings the music to a soaring conclusion. While the possibility of divine significance in the fugue has already been hinted at, the appearance of the 'varenki' motif in the second movement of Stanchinsky's sonata underlines this section's worldly and material context, inviting comparison with the music and subject matter of 'Petrushka' and 'Les noces'. While the fugue incorporates elements of sonata form, with an extended central section employing contrasting tonal centres and an emphatic and extended final entry that approaches an entire recapitulation, the 'presto' is written in a consistently polyphonic texture, often inverting material heard previously between the hands; both movements absorb the characteristic aspects of the other.

In Skryabin's later work, the musical creation of the sensation of 'poriv', 'a transporting burst' fulfils the role of giving the music 'pod'yom', or uplift towards ecstatic moods and divine transfiguration. The most famous example of this is found at the opening of his Fifth Sonata. Stanchinsky reinterprets this passage incorporating his own harmonic and rhythmic peculiarities in the Presto of his Second Sonata, in a what seems to be an attempt to imbue a heavenly upsurge into the midst of his bustling, secular vision.

With his frequent hospitalisation, Stanchinsky became personally and artistically isolated from his composer-colleagues in Moscow; meanwhile, his musical preoccupations, such as the use of folksong and

irregular metre, became closer to those associated with the nationalist St. Petersburg school. When employing irrational time values, Moscow composers almost exclusively did so within the framework of traditional bar lengths. Stanchinsky combined asymmetrical time signatures with internal changes of metre, both of which were uncommon in the work of composers influenced by Skryabin, but avoided tuplets. This rhythmic practice is also common in Stravinsky's Russian output; but he, while admiring and being influenced by Skryabin, was a composer with strong roots in the St Petersburg tradition.

When he wrote his Second Sonata, Stanchinsky no longer directly relied on Skryabin's example in matters of harmony and thematism, but several other aspects of the language of the two composers still bear direct comparison. If the opening fugue is to be regarded in some respects as a type of sonata form, then the bipartite, extended development section set in contrasting harmonic areas follows the same pattern as those of all Skryabin's later works. Likewise, the manner in which Stanchinsky employs tonal areas across the duration of a movement, G, F sharp, A flat, D flat, C, and then uses chords based around these pitches in the most significant resolutions is also close to Skryabin's structural practice. In this way, the movements echo each other not only in structural and thematic terms, but also in their intonation and means of resolution.

Fugal form took canon one step towards sonata form with central episodes, final entries and overall teleological and hierarchical strategies. By emphasising these shared aspects between the genres, by anchoring the structure more tightly by tonal conflicts and resolutions, and by placing the genre at the outset of a sonata itself, Stanchinsky breaches the aesthetic dichotomy between fugue and sonata form. Stanchinsky therefore stands astride the Classical and Baroque eras, the Apollonian and Faustian forms of expression, the humanist and the religious. Equally, the rapprochement of the Europeanism of Skryabin and post-Musorgskian nationalism is yet another instance of the 'mutual penetration' of opposite entities found in Stanchinsky's work.

* * *

In his book simply entitled 'Simvolizm', published in 1910, Andrey Bely took Solov'yov as his starting point in a theory unifying art and life. Arguing that 'art is the creation of life' ('iskusstvo yest' tvorchestvo zhizni') and that all artistic creation has a religious quality with the creative act becoming in itself a theurgic one, Bely maintained that the borders between the art and the life of an artist were non-existent, quite literally 'the Word become flesh'. Among musicians, Skryabin provides the most well-known of this phenomenon: at first the hedonist rebel, then the glamorous aesthete, and finally the distant demiurge, obsessed with the apocalyptic. Just as Skryabin's writings were not commentaries on but reflections of the same entity which also produced music, his life was yet another manifestation of the same creative force. Although we should not be greatly surprised at the manner in which shifts in a composer's style of and attitude composition may be affected by events in his or her life, aspects of Stanchinsky's outward and inward existence are presented in his relatively few works with a vitality so exceptional that an conscious identification with Solov'yov's 'materialization of the spirit' is suggested.

'Zhiznetvorchestvo', or 'life-creation', as the phenomenon came to be known, took on a variety of forms, and each artist responded to its challenges in his or her own way. By the beginning of the 20th century, the piano had gained an extraordinary prominence in Russian musical culture; 'life-creation', it could be argued, is quite blatantly reflected in the maximalist approach of creator-performer or composer-pianist. Composers became the exclusive interpreters of their works and thus the not only the source but also the vessel of direct communication with their public. Comparably, the 'relationship of the poet to the people was the subject of extensive Symbolist discussion. It would be hard to think of a Symbolist who did not urge the poet to interact, and ultimately merge, with the masses'. Solutions sought by the poet Aleksandr Dobrolyubov and Stanchinsky brought this theoretical tenet to its most radical realization. Both artists left the world of art and wandered through the peasant society of the countryside in order to join a religious community. Like Dobrolyubov, Stanchinsky gradually redirected his creative interests to folklore: although folksong is apparent in works dating from 1908 (the date of his first crisis), near the time of his death he had been contemplating a stage work based on folk song and legend. Most symbolists were reluctant to repudiate their artistic milieu, but Stanchinsky took this integration one step further than even Dobrolyubov: he is rumoured to have married, in secret, a woman from a village near Novospasskiy.

The Romantic separation of art and life was seen by Russian symbolists as an obstacle to their goals; by lending spiritual attributes, or symbols, to the real, they attempted to 'resolve the conflict between the secular and religious that had plagued Russian culture'. Viewed in the light of the Solov'yovian aesthetics that also informed the work of his one-time model Skryabin, Stanchinsky's attempts to unify in his Second Sonata the spiritual (in the guise of the geometric constellations of the canon and fugue) with the worldly (in the form of the confrontational dramaturgy and folksong-inspired sonata-form movement) during the period of his most intense spiritual searching is not so surprising. Solov'yov's models of art, with their insistence on the paradox of the unification of the inward and outward realities, were been associated with definitions of Christ as the inseparable union of the divine and the human, two natures united yet distinct and

autonomous. Stanchinsky wrote his Second Sonata immediately before deciding to devote his life to Christianity and in this work he brought together the heavenly with the worldly, the mystic with the positivist in its united yet distinct parts. With this act of artistic 'mutual penetration', and with the striking coalescence of his life and art, Stanchinsky demonstrated himself to be not an isolated figure, as was initially thought, but actually a particularly characteristic representative of Solov'ov's ideals and Russian Symbolism. Because of his musical connections with not only Skryabin and Taneyev but also folklorism, Stanchinsky is also emblematic of many of the phenomena appearing in Russian music during the early 20th century.

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S.Ye. Feynberg: pianist, kompozitor, issledovatel'; [Pianist, composer, researcher], ed. I. Likhacheva (Moscow, 1984) [includes a reminiscence by T. Nikolayeva among others, articles on the piano works, vocal compositions and transcriptions, and Leonid Feinberg's 'Neskol'ko stranits iz zhizni moyego zhizni' [Several pages from my brother's life]]
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