



Music

Russian composer's music to be performed Saturday at Music Mansion

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By Channing Gray

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Russian composer Alexander Scriabin was just 43 when he died in 1915 from a blood infection contracted from a shaving cut, but he left an indelible mark on 20th century music.

Saturday you can catch an overview of this remarkable composer's work, when Providence pianist Haig Yaghoobian performs a program at the Music Mansion of shorter Scriabin scores that cover his musical output.

The concert, which is a benefit for the Armenian Cultural Association of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Church, will open with a series of Chopin-esque etudes and close with a set of pieces written shortly before his death that have no key or time signatures.

About the turn of the century, Scriabin began to develop his own system of harmony, one just as involved as the 12-tone system of Arnold Schoenberg. But it never really caught on. Much of his music is based on a chord produced from stacked fourths that was known as the Mystic Chord.

While the chord rarely appears in his music in its entirety, its striking intervals can be heard throughout his music, which was designed to create moods and colors. Scriabin, in fact, experienced synesthesia, or associating colors with certain keys. He even wrote a symphony for a color organ that was played like a piano but projected light instead of sound.

He was also a devotee of Theosophy and Eastern mysticism. Yaghoobian performed part of his program last weekend and said that audience members told him afterward that they felt under a spell while listening to the pieces. They said the music was transcendent and transportive.

"He had a foot in both worlds," said Yaghoobian. "He was the last great Russian romantic, but also the father of modern harmony.

Yaghoobian will play about an hour's worth of music Saturday and there will be two 15-minute talks about the music by pianist Irina Tchantceva, co-chair of the piano department at the Rhode Island Philharmonic music school.

The program will be repeated Sunday, Oct. 26, at noon at the Bell Street Chapel off Broadway. Donations are welcome for Saturday's concert at the Music Mansion; a \$10 donation is suggested at the Bell Street concert.

Yaghoobian, who grew up in the area, spent the last decade or so in California and New Hampshire working as a management consultant. He began playing the piano at 7 and studied through high

school, performing often at the Music Mansion. But when it came time for college, he decided music would have to take a back seat to business.

But even in college he gave concerts and performed on WGBH radio.

About a year ago, he began researching Scriabin's music and learning the 20 pieces that offer a representative sampling of Scriabin's output.

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