

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: RACHMANINOFF AND MEDTNER: SELECTED
WORKS FROM THE SOLO AND COLLABORATIVE
PIANO REPERTOIRE

Oleksiy Ulitin, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2016

Dissertation Directed by: Professor Rita Sloan
School of Music, Piano Division

Sergei Rachmaninoff and Nikolai Medtner occupy a special place in the history of Russian music. Both composers were exceptional pianists and left us some of the greatest works in the piano repertoire. Although these composers shared many similarities, and were often compared, their musical languages and views on composition were very different. Unfortunately, Medtner's music, which Rachmaninoff admired greatly, has remained neglected for several generations of performers and listeners. In my dissertation I will explore the similarities and contrasts in Rachmaninoff's and Medtner's music. Through these performances, I hope to encourage other musicians to discover the imaginative power of Medtner's music. Of course, no such encouragement is needed for Rachmaninoff's extremely popular music; however, the technical and musical challenges of performing that repertoire are an invaluable part of every pianist's education.

This dissertation project was presented in three recitals which were performed in Gildenhorn Recital Hall at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center of the University of Maryland on May 8, 2014, December 5, 2014 and March 21, 2016. The following pieces comprised the survey of Rachmaninoff music: *Vocalise* Op. 34, *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* Op. 42, Piano Concerto No. 2 Op. 18, Selected Songs Opp. 4 and 8, and two *Moments Musicaux* Op. 16 - Nos. 3 and 4. The following pieces were included to represent Medtner: Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 57 in E minor “*Epica*”, *Fairy Tales* for solo piano Op. 20 No. 1, Op. 26 No. 3 and Op. 51 No. 1, and Selected Songs Op. 6 and 15. My partners in this project were Lilly Ahn, soprano, Jennifer Lee, violin and Nadezhda Christova, piano. All three recitals can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

**RACHMANINOFF AND MEDTNER: SELECTED WORKS FROM
THE SOLO AND COLLABORATIVE PIANO REPERTOIRE**

by
Oleksiy Ulitin

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
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FIRST DISSERTATION RECITAL PROGRAM

May 8, 2014. 8:00 PM
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing
Arts Center College Park, University of Maryland

Oleksiy Ulitin, piano
Jennifer Lee, violin
Lilly Ahn, soprano

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Vocalise for Soprano and Piano Op. 34

Variations on a Theme of Corelli Op. 42

INTERMISSION

Nikolai Medtner (1880 – 1951)

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 3 in E minor *Epica*

- *Introduzione: Andante meditamento - Allegro*
- *Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace e leggero*
- *Andante con moto*
- *Finale: Allegro molto*

SECOND DISSERTATION RECITAL PROGRAM

(A LECTURE RECITAL)

December 5, 2014. 5:00 PM

Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing
Arts Center, College Park, University of Maryland

Oleksiy Ulitin, piano
Nadezhda Christova, piano

Presentation about Sergei Rachmaninoff and his *Second Piano Concerto*

INTERMISSION

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

- *Moderato*
- *Adagio sostenuto*
- *Allegro scherzando*

THIRD DISSERTATION RECITAL PROGRAM

March 21, 2016. 5:00 PM

Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing
Arts Center, College Park, University of Maryland

Oleksiy Ulitin, piano
Lilly Ahn, soprano

Nikolai Medtner (1880 – 1951)

Fairy Tale Op. 20 No. 1, in B-flat minor

Fairy Tale Op. 26 No. 3, in F minor

Fairy Tale Op. 51 No. 1, in D minor

Selected *Goethe Lieder*

- *Mailed* Op. 6 No. 2
- *Im Vorübergehen* Op. 6 No. 4
- *Inneres Wühlen* Op. 6 No. 6
- *Sieh mich, Heil'ger* Op. 6 No. 7
- *Der untreue Knabe* Op. 15 No. 10
- *Gleich und Gleich* Op. 15 No. 11
- *Sie liebt mich* Op. 15 No. 4

INTERMISSION

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Selected Songs

- *Sing not, o lovely one* Op. 4 No. 4
- *A dream* Op. 8 No. 5
- *Prayer* Op. 8 No. 6
- *How long, my friend* Op. 4 No. 6

Moments Musicaux Op. 16 No. 3 in B minor

Moments Musicaux Op. 16 No. 4 in E minor

RECORDING TRACK LISTING
FIRST DISSERTATION RECITAL - CD 1

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Vocalise for voice and piano Op. 34 [CD 1, Track 1]

Variations on a Theme of Corelli Op. 42 [CD 1, Track 2]

Nikolai Medtner (1880 – 1951)

Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 57 in E minor “*Epica*”

[CD 1, Track 3] – *Introduzione: Andante meditamento - Allegro*

[CD 1, Track 4] – *Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace e leggiro*

[CD 1, Track 5] – *Andante con moto*

[CD 1, Track 6] – *Finale: Allegro molto*

RECORDING TRACK LISTING
SECOND DISSERATATION RECITAL – CD 2

[CD 2, Track 1] – Presentation about Sergei Rachmaninoff and his *Second Piano Concerto*

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 Op. 18 in C minor

[CD 2, Track 2] – *Moderato*

[CD 2, Track 3] – *Adagio Sostenuto*

[CD 2, Track 4] – *Allegro Scherzo*

RECORDING TRACK LISTING

THIRD DISSERTATION RECITAL – CD 3

Nikolai Medtner (1880 – 1951)

Fairy Tale Op. 20 No. 1 in B-flat minor [CD 3, Track 1]

Fairy Tale Op. 26 No. 3 in F minor [CD 3, Track 2]

Fairy Tale Op. 51 No. 1 in D minor [CD 3, Track 3]

Selected *Goethe Lieder*

[CD 3, Track 4] - *Mailed* Op. 6 No. 2

[CD 3, Track 5] - *Im Vorübergehen* Op. 6 No. 4

[CD 3, Track 6] - *Inneres Wühlen* Op. 6 No. 6

[CD 3, Track 7] - *Sieh mich, Heil'ger* Op. 6 No. 7

[CD 3, Track 8] - *Der untreue Knabe* Op. 15 No. 10

[CD 3, Track 9] - *Gleich und Gleich* Op. 15 No. 11

[CD 3, Track 10] - *Sie liebt mich* Op. 15 No. 4

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Selected Songs

[CD 3, Track 11] - *Sing not, o lovely one* Op. 4 No. 4

[CD 3, Track 12] - *A dream* Op. 8 No. 5

[CD 3, Track 13] - *Prayer* Op. 8 No. 6

[CD 3, Track 14] - *How long, my friend* Op. 4 No. 6

Two *Moments Musicaux* Op. 16

[CD 3, Track 15] – No. 3 in B minor

[CD 3, Track 16] – No. 4 in E minor

Program notes

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff was born in the small town of Oneg, near Novgorod on March 20, 1873. From early childhood, Sergei exhibited extraordinary musical talent and started taking piano lessons first with his mother, then with Anna Ornatskaya, a graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatory. When Sergei was nine, his parents had to sell the family estate and moved to St. Petersburg, where he had the opportunity to take piano lessons at the conservatory. In 1885 Rachmaninoff moved to Moscow to study piano with the famous and demanding teacher Nikolai Zverev, and in 1888 he began to study composition with Sergei Taneyev and harmony with Anton Arensky. Rachmaninoff graduated from the Moscow Conservatory as a pianist 1891 and as a composer a year later, receiving a gold medal for his one-act opera *Aleko*. In the next few years after his graduation, Rachmaninoff quickly gained recognition as a composer, pianist and conductor.

Rachmaninoff's compositional style changed throughout his life. Although it always remained within the late Romantic tradition, his harmonic language evolved significantly. For example, if one compares his songs opp. 4 and 8, completed in 1893, to his *Vocalise* Op. 34 written in 1915, it becomes clear how the piano texture in the latter is much denser and filled with counterpoint and chromaticism.

Op. 4 No. 6 *How Long, My Friend*

Andante tranquillo

The musical score for Op. 4 No. 6 is presented in two systems. The top system features a vocal line in G major, 3/4 time, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The lyrics are "Дав - ноль, мой друг, твой взор пе -". The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment, starting with a *pp* dynamic. The piano part consists of a flowing eighth-note melody in the right hand and a simple harmonic accompaniment in the left hand.

Op. 34 No. 14 *Vocalise*

The musical score for Op. 34 No. 14 is in G major, 2/4 time. It begins with a *ritenuto* marking. The score is divided into two systems. The top system shows a vocal line with a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment, which is highly intricate with many accidentals and dynamic markings, including *p*. The piano part features a complex, chromatic accompaniment that supports the vocal line.

М. 26012 Г.

In Rachmaninoff's songs Opp. 4 and 8, the lyricism typical of Tchaikovsky is very evident. These romances are a wonderful example of how Rachmaninoff could achieve powerful musical substance with the simplest compositional means. Rachmaninoff's songs, unlike Medtner's, are now considered a part of the standard vocal repertoire. Some of them are more popular than others, but all of them have been recorded many times.

The *Moments Musicaux* Op. 16 includes six pieces and is one of the most brilliant works written in the piano miniature genre. Nos. 3 and 4 are,

perhaps, the darkest in the set. Besides the *Moments Musicaux*, Rachmaninoff also wrote many other short piano works. His first set of miniatures was *Morceaux de Fantaisie* Op. 3, which included one of the most famous of his compositions, the *Prelude* in C sharp Minor, nicknamed by American audiences “*The Bells of Moscow*”. Years later he composed another twenty-three preludes, Opp. 23 and 32 to complete a set of *Twenty-Four Preludes* in all keys, following the example of Bach and Chopin. Other works in the piano miniature genre are the *Morceaux de Salon* Op. 10 and the *Etudes-Tableaux* Opp. 33 and 39.

For Rachmaninoff, producing small-scale pieces for piano solo was always an essential part of his composition and the result of very hard work. “...*I have often found that a short piece for the piano has always given me much more pain, and has presented to me many more problems, than a symphony or a concerto.*¹” The musical colors of various instruments in the orchestra helped bring new ideas and inspiration to the composer.

Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 18 in C Minor is perhaps the most famous of his compositions and arguably the most frequently performed piano concerto. Since this work has become such an iconic representation of Rachmaninoff’s compositions, an in-depth discussion of his compositional style in the concerto with a focus on melodic and harmonic usage and motivic

¹ Interview with Sergei Rachmaninoff, *The Etude. Music Magazine*, December 1941, Philadelphia, 848

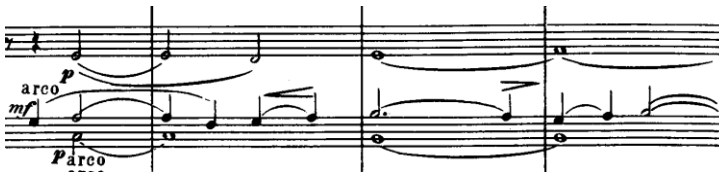
development follows.

Rachmaninoff uses an interesting approach to link all three movements of the piece together. The second movement starts in C minor (the key of the first movement) and the third movement starts in E major (the key of the second movement). He connects all the movements harmonically as if the whole concerto is meant to be played continuously with no stops. The first movement has quite an unusual opening – eight bars of just piano alone. There are not many piano concerti that begin with solo piano; the best known being the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major. The opening chords in the piano are often associated with the sound of Russian bells. The harmonic structure of those opening chords is quite symmetrical. It is written like a palindrome – regardless of whether one would play it from the beginning or from the end, it would sound the same. This harmonic progression appears again at the beginning of the third movement but this time in the strings. After the opening chords, the piano accompanies the main theme in the orchestra with arpeggiated chords.

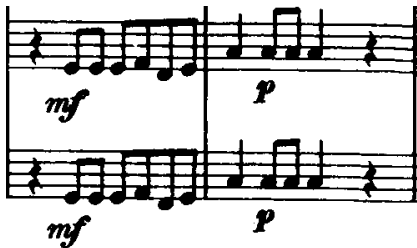
The main theme of the first movement is an excellent example of Rachmaninoff's melodic writing. Like many of his other melodies, it follows a similar melodic pattern as the Russian Orthodox Church chants in which the melodic motion is usually based on the interval of a second. These chants are always based on diatonic scales and have quite a limited melodic range.



The shape of many of Rachmaninoff's melodies including the opening theme of the first movement could visually resemble a spiral. Before the melody takes two steps up, it goes one step down, and vice versa. When a melody takes a leap of a fourth or fifth it often represents a significant musical event. Therefore, reaching the high point of a phrase usually takes some time, and as a result, Rachmaninoff's melodies tend to be very lengthy.



The lyricism of Rachmaninoff's melodies appears even more prominently in the second theme, allowing the piano to take a leading role in it. At the beginning of the development section, the orchestra introduces a new motive:

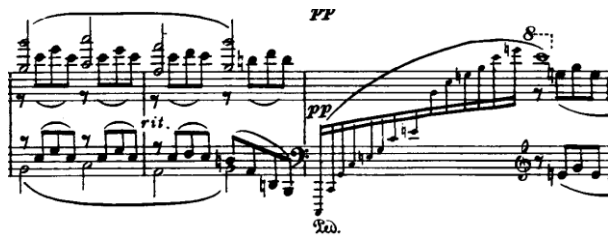


In the development Rachmaninoff juxtaposes both the first and the

second themes, but the little rhythmic motive is the one that dominates throughout the development and then is hammered out on the piano at the arrival of the recapitulation.



Later in the movement this motive appears in augmentation and has a sad lyrical quality.



This fragment is heard again at the very beginning of the third movement – another linking device to give the piece even more unity.

The opening of the second movement can be quite deceiving rhythmically for the listener. Although it is notated in 4/4, we hear three distinct groups of four rising notes in every bar, which makes the listener think that it is in 3/4. Only when the flute comes in four bars later it becomes obvious that the movement is in 4/4 meter. In this movement, which serves as a beautiful

intermezzo, the piano again begins as an accompanist, first for the flute, then the clarinet. Rachmaninoff allows the piano to comment between the first two phrases of the clarinet, then reversing these roles allows the orchestra to comment between phrases of piano *cantilena*. The music builds to a brief *scherzando* - an idea that Rachmaninoff perhaps borrowed from the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto and would use to fuller effect in the Third Concerto and Third Symphony. A short piano cadenza prepares us for the flute entrance that brings the music back to the soft figures that opened the movement.

The main theme of the third movement, a fast Ukrainian styled *Hopak*, is another example of Rachmaninoff's connection to Russian Orthodox sacred traditions. The *Hopak* melody was composed and used in one of his sacred choral works that he composed years before the Second Concerto. Of course, in the choral piece the melody demonstrates an entirely different tempo and mood.

Due to the failure of Rachmaninoff's First Symphony, the composer, who was prone to depression in any case, went into a decline. With major psychiatric assistance from the well-known Dr. Dahl, the Second Concerto was written and was a huge success from the very beginning. The following years were fruitful ones both compositionally and personally. However, with the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Rachmaninoff immigrated to the United States. Despite the beautiful environs of Beverly Hills, California and his continuing success as a pianist, Rachmaninoff composed only six more works

during his time outside of Russia. The *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* Op. 42 was one of Rachmaninoff's last works. The title is not exactly accurate because the theme was not composed by Corelli. An old Portuguese dance *La Folia* was used by Corelli in his set of sonatas for violin and continuo Op. 5. Rachmaninoff, of course, was aware of that but did not change the title, perhaps indicating that the original inspiration for him was Corelli's composition, not the fifteen-century dance. Most likely, Rachmaninoff became familiar with Corelli's works through the great violinist Fritz Kreisler to whom he dedicated the *Variations*.

Nikolai Medtner

Nikolai Medtner was born in Moscow January 5, 1880 to a family of German descent, and was encouraged by his family from an early age towards music. Also, like Rachmaninoff, he graduated as a pianist from the Moscow Conservatory with the highest honors. Even though he won the Rubinstein Prize in piano and had the reputation of a virtuoso, Medtner decided to devote himself fully to composition, rejecting the career of a concert pianist. He quickly became highly regarded as a composer as well as a teacher. Finally leaving Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, he hardly received any recognition in the West, unlike Rachmaninoff. His conservative compositional style was of very little interest first in Germany and later in France, where Modernism dominated the music world at that time. In 1935 he settled in England where he received a little more

attention as a composer. Constantly struggling financially, during these years Medtner received generous help from Rachmaninoff on several occasions.

Medtner, like Chopin, did not write a single composition which did not include the piano in it. Like Rachmaninoff, he was a master of the miniature: *Fairy Tales* for piano and more than one-hundred songs for voice and piano are examples of this. He also wrote distinctively in larger forms, often experimenting with the sonata genre. His compositions in the larger forms include fourteen Piano Sonatas, three Violin Sonatas, three Piano Concerti, a Piano Quintet, the *Sonata-Vocalise* and the *Suite-Vocalise*. Medtner's compositional style did not change much throughout his life, although in the later works the influence of Russian folklore becomes evident.

In the early 1930's, observing the development of contemporary compositional techniques, Medtner decided to express his own aesthetics in print, despite the fact that his contemporaries considered them too conservative. In his book *The Muse and the Fashion*, published in 1935 in Paris, the composer presented his views on the canons of art. He argued that fashionable contemporary trends in music are nothing more than delusions, destroying the connection between the soul of the musician and his work.

Song-writing was an important part of Medtner's life. One of his earliest compositions was a setting of Lermontov's poem *The Angel* Op. 1a and one of his last works is a collection of songs *Sieben Hinterlassene Lieder* (*Seven Left Behind*

Songs) Op. 61. Medtner published one hundred and six songs; sixty of them are settings of Russian texts and the remainder are in German. His favorite poets were Pushkin and Goethe. The choice of these Russian and German literary masters reflects not only Medtner's ancestry but also the two main traditions that had a tremendous influence on his musical style in general.

Although Medtner is often called the "Russian Brahms", the connection between the two can be found only in certain similarities in piano texture and in the frequent use of cross-rhythms. A much greater Germanic influence on Medtner's music came from Beethoven. Continuous motivic development and mastery of sonata structure can be found in Medtner's songs almost as much as in his large instrumental works². It is difficult to point out specific Russian traits in his songs; his idols were Bach and Beethoven, not Glinka and Mussorgsky. According to Malcolm Boyd, folk song was relatively unimportant to Medtner's own composition³. Many of his songs, especially the German ones, are often compared to the *Lieder* of Brahms and Wolf. As Boyd mentions "Although the lyricism of Medtner's vocal line is in general less rich than Brahms', his songs abound in melodies which haunt the memory in a way that Wolf's very rarely do⁴". Dense and contrapuntal writing is prominent in almost every Medtner song.

² Boyd, Malcolm. 1965. "The Songs of Nicolas Medtner". *Music & Letters* 46 (1). Oxford University Press: pp. 16-22 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/731919>.

³ Boyd, 16

⁴ Boyd, 17

Inneres Wühlen Op. 6 No. 6

mp *poco a poco cresce.* *agitato* *ff*
Hül - lische Qual,
Ско-ро-лько-нечъ

Medtner has been criticized for the heavy texture of the piano writing in his songs. Certainly, at first glance, many of Medtner's songs can seem overwhelmed by the dense piano part which can appear a bit chaotic and unnecessarily difficult. However, after a closer look, the logic of the piano texture becomes very clear. And, if played with great clarity, shaping each line of the counterpoint melodically, as Medtner himself did⁵, the piano writing appears to be clear and complementary to the voice part.

Im Vorübergehen op. 6 No. 4

affanato con rimprovero *cresce.*
kann nicht lie-beln, ich kann nicht schran - zen;
раи не-точ-ка ты для за-ба - вы;

Without a doubt, performing Medtner's songs requires a very fine singer and a very skillful pianist, often a virtuoso.

⁵ Selected recordings of Medtner songs with the composer at the piano are available at www.medtner.org.uk.

Winter evening Op. 13 No. 1

allargando *mf*
бы - лет по - се - дей!
уи, ко - го и - ст - дер - жув?

ed accelerando al fine *sf*

sotto sopra sotto

con ra.

Medtner wrote thirty-eight *Fairy Tales* (*Skazki*) for piano solo. The *Tales* are perhaps the most immediately attractive of his compositions. Possessing unique musical and pianistic qualities as well as immense imaginative power, they represent some of the greatest examples of the piano miniature.

The pieces are not programmatic although occasionally Medtner provides a poetic epigraph or a subtitle for some of them. For example, in the *Tale* Op. 20 No. 2 *Campanella* the subtitle says: “Song or Tale of the bell, but not *about* the bell”.

Tales Op. 20 No. 1 in B flat minor and Op. 26 No. 3 in F minor were some of the most popular of Medtner’s pieces during his lifetime and some of the most appealing to audiences. The B-flat minor *Tale* was the first piece of Medtner’s that Rachmaninoff performed during his concert tour in the United

States in 1918-1919.⁶ The F minor *Tale* is a wonderful example of Medtner's intimate lyrical miniature. Rachmaninoff, after hearing Medtner play his *Fairy Tales* Op. 51, exclaimed that "no one tells such tales as Kolya"⁷. The first one in this set in D minor is a vigorous dance and shows the distinct influence of Russian folklore.

The Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 3 in E minor "*Epica*", Op. 57 was completed in 1938 and dedicated to Nikolai's brother Emil Medtner, who passed away in 1936. Consisting of four large movements, Sonata *Epica* is one of the most monumental works in the genre; the performance usually takes 45-50 minutes. Initially Medtner thought of it as an orchestral work, but anticipating that the orchestration would take too much effort, decided to stay in a more familiar vein and settled on writing it for violin and piano.

Although in many places, the sonata is overly elaborate, it contains innumerable poignant and wistful melodies which seem to come directly out of Medtner's Russian background. Regardless of its unwieldy length, it is an immensely moving work of art. Unfortunately, Medtner was unlucky in the timing of the work's publication: this sonata, published in 1940, was practically unnoticed due to the European disaster that was the Second World War.

⁶ Barrie Martyn, *Nicolas Medtner: His Life and His Music*, Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1995, 68

⁷ Hamish Milne, *Nikolai Medtner. Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano*. Dover Publication Inc, Mineola, New York.

Hopefully, as musicians and audiences continue to discover the power of Medtner's music, the sonata will have many more champions.

Medtner and Rachmaninoff

*"Why nobody plays Medtner? He is wonderful composer. Piano composer – in some ways deeper than Rachmaninoff"*⁸ – Vladimir Horowitz.

Sergei Rachmaninoff and Nikolai Medtner are two extremely unique figures in early twentieth-century musical history. Both held similarly conservative views on music and the compositional process and consequently both were accused of composing for the wrong time, or century. They both lived approximately through the same tumultuous time period and in relatively close geographical proximity to each other for a number of years in Russia. Medtner, only seven years Rachmaninoff's junior, was just starting his career as a composer when Rachmaninoff was already a popular member of the Russian musical establishment.

They also had great respect for each other, often visiting each other's homes. Rachmaninoff referred to one of Medtner's works Op. 14 No 2, "*March of the Paladin*" as "a miracle"⁹. In 1926 Rachmaninoff composed his *Fourth Piano*

⁸ Istomin Eugene, Introduction to *Nikolai Medtner. The complete Piano Sonatas*, Dover Publication Inc, Mineola, New York.

⁹ Marc-André Hamelin, *Nikolai Medtner. Complete Fairy Tales for Solo Piano*. Dover Publication, Inc, Mineola, New York.

Concerto in G minor and dedicated it to Medtner. In return, the following year Medtner completed his *Second Piano Concerto* and dedicated it to Rachmaninoff.

It is perhaps inevitable that the listener, upon hearing Medtner, immediately recognizes certain similarities to Rachmaninoff's music. There is much commonality. Both studied in the same place (the Moscow Conservatory) and were influenced by the same teacher (Taneyev). Neither of them particularly wanted to display Russian Nationalism in their piano music, nevertheless the influence of Russian folklore is obvious in many of their works. The contrasts between them, however, are significantly more evident than the similarities. Their philosophy on the process of composition differed as well. In Medtner's book *The Muse and the Fashion* he discusses, in a detailed and analytical manner, many elements of music and composition, as well as various concepts such as the balance between complexity and simplicity, unity and diversity, contemplation and action in music, etc. On the contrary, Rachmaninoff discusses his approach in a much simpler way:

“What I try to do, when writing down my music, is to make it say simply and directly what is in my heart when I am composing. If here is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become a part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious”¹⁰.

Hamish Milne, the British pianist and one of the most passionate of

¹⁰ Interview with Sergei Rachmaninoff, *The Etude. Music Magazine*, December 1941, Philadelphia, 848

Medtner's advocates, admits that his first encounter with Medtner's music was "a disappointment"¹¹. When heard for the first time, it often comes across as cold and abstract, overwhelming the listener with its counterpoint and unexpected modulations. Unlike Rachmaninoff's music which makes an immediate impact on the audience, Medtner's requires very active listening and a receptive ear. As Marc-André Hamelin, one of the greatest interpreters of both Medtner and Rachmaninoff, said:

"...Medtner's music unfortunately is of the kind that rarely makes the best impression at first hearing. It is not particularly melodically generous like, for example, Rachmaninoff tends to be, but I've found time and again that if you give Medtner time, and if you give him a second chance and a third chance, if you listen and listen and listen again, he will reveal himself to you, and you will not be able to get rid of him afterwards. He will be always part of you."¹²

Few composers for the piano have written as beautifully for the instrument as both Rachmaninoff and Medtner. These composers have often been compared to Chopin and Liszt in their treatment of the piano. They both masterfully used *cantabile* melodic lines, chordal textures, complex inner voices and technical virtuosity. The musical and technical challenges of performing works by these two composers should be an invaluable part of every pianist's education.

¹¹ Hamish Milne, *Medtner and the Muse*, inaugural lecture to the University of London, available on medtner.org.uk

¹² The quote is from Japanese documentary *Marc-André Hamelin – Supervirtuoso*. The documentary is available in parts on Youtube website.

TRANSLATIONS

Medtner

Op. 6 No. 2 *Mailed*

Zwischen Weizen und Korn,
Zwischen Hecken und Dorn,
Zwischen Bäumen und Gras,
Wo geht's Liebchen?
Sag' mir das!

Fand mein Holdchen
Nicht daheim;
Muß das Goldchen
Draußen sein.

Grünt und blühet
Schön der Mai;
Liebchen ziehet
Froh und frei.

An dem Felsen beim Fluß,
Wo sie reichte den Kuß,
Jenen ersten, im Gras,
Seh' ich etwas!
Ist sie das?

Op. 6 No. 4 *Im Vorübergehen*

Ich ging im Felde
So für mich hin,
Und nichts zu suchen,
Das war mein Sinn.

Da stand ein Blümchen
Sogleich so nah,
Daß ich im Leben
Nichts lieber sah.

May Song

Between wheat field and corn,
Between hedgerow and thorn,
Between pasture and tree,
Where's my sweetheart
Tell me!

Sweetheart caught I
Not at home;
She's then, thought I.
Gone to roam.

Fair and loving
Blooms sweet May;
Sweetheart's roving,
Free and gay.

By the rock near the wave,
Where her first kiss she gave,
On the greensward, to me,
Something I see!
Is it she?

In Passing

In meadows roaming
Idly I went,
On seeking nothing
My mind was bent.

A little flower
Was growing there.
Never yet saw I
A bloom so fair.

Ich wollt es brechen,
da sagt es schleunig:
Ich habe Wurzeln,
Die sind gar heimlich.

I stooped to pluck it.
And heard it say;
My roots are secret,
Deep in the clay.

Im tiefen Boden
bin ich gegründet;
Drum sind die Blüten
So schön geründet.

In the good earth
I am safely grounded;
That's why my blossoms
Are sweetly rounded.

Ich kann nicht liebeln,
Ich kann nicht schranzen;
Mußt mich nicht brechen,
Mußt mich verpflanzen.

I cannot trifle,
One favor grant me;
You must not break me,
You must transplant me.

Ich ging im Walde
So vor mich hin;
Ich war so heiter
Wollt immer weiter
Das war mei Sinn.

In woodlands roaming
Idly I went,
My spirits lifting,
On further shifting –
My mind was bent.

Op. 6 No. 6 *Inneres Wühlen*

Inner Searching

Inneres Wühlen
Ewig zu fühlen
Immer verlangen,
Nimmer erlangen,
Fliehen und Streben
Sterben und Leben
Höllische Qual
Endig' einmal

Inner searching
Eternally to feel
Always to desire
Never to obtain
To flee and to strive
To die and to live
Hellish torment
Ends someday!

Op. No.7 *Sieh mich, Heil'ger*

See me, Holy one

Sieh mich, Heil'ger, wie ich bin,
Eine arme Sünderin!
Angst und Kummer, Reu und Schmerz
Quälen dieses arme Herz.

See me, Holy one, as I am
A poor sinner
Fear and sorrow, remorse and pain
Torment this poor heart

Sieh mich vor dir unverstellt,
Herr, die Schuldigste der Welt!

Ach, es war ein junges Blut,
War so lieb, er war so gut!
Ach, so redlich liebt' er mich!
Ach, so heimlich quält' er mich!
Sieh mich, Heil'ger, wie ich bin,
Eine arme Sünderin!

Ich vernahm sein stummes Flehn,
Und ich konnt' ihn zehren sehn;
Hielte mein Gefühl zurück,
Gönnt' ihm keinen holden Blick.
Sieh mich vor dir unverstellt,
Herr, die Schuldigste der Welt!

Ach, so drängt und quält' ich ihn,
Und nun ist der Arme hin,
Schwebt im Kummer, Mangel, Noth,
Ist verloren, er ist todt!
Sieh mich, Heil'ger, wie ich bin,
Eine arme Sünderin!

Op. 15 No. 10 *Der untreue Knabe*

Es war ein Knabe frech genug,
War erst aus Frankreich kommen,
Der hatt ein armes Mäd'el jung
Gar oft in Arm genommen
Und liebgekost und liebgeherzt,
Als Bräutigam herumgescherzt,
Und endlich sie verlassen.

Das braune Mäd'el das erfuhr,
Vergingen ihr die Sinnen,
Sie lacht' und weint' und bet't' und
schwur;
So fuhr die Seel von hinnen.
Die Stund, da sie verschieden war,

See my before you as I am
Lord, the guiltiest person in the world

Ah! It was a young blood,
He was so dear, he was so good!
Ah! He loved me so honestly
Ah! He bore his torment in silence!
See me, holy-one, as I am
A poor sinner.

I perceived his mute pleading
And I could see him weakening
I held my feelings back,
Bestowed on him no sweet glance.
See me before you as I am.
Lord, the guiltiest person in the world

Ah! I pressed and tormented him so.
And now is the poor-man gone!
He floats on grief, lack, distress.
He is lost! He is dead!
See me, holy one, as I am
A poor sinner!

The Unfaithful Boy

There was a lad, a saucy knave,
Just come from France a-pace
Who took to him a poor young maid
With many a fond embrace,
And many a kiss and hug he gave,
Just like a bridegroom did behave,
At last he did forsake her.

The dark young maiden's heart grew
sore,
She fell into a swoon;
She laughed and cried and prayed
and swore,
Gave up her sprit soon.

Wird bang dem Buben, graust sein
Haar,
Es treibt ihn fort zu Pferde.

Er gab die Sporen kreuz und quer
Und ritt auf alle Seiten,
Herüber, hinüber, hin und her,
Kann keine Ruh erreiten,
Reit't sieben Tag und sieben Nacht;
Es blitzt und donnert, stürmt und
kracht,
Die Fluten reißen über.

Und reit't in Blitz und Wetterschein
Gemäuerwerk entgegen,
Bind's Pferd hauß' an und kriecht hinein
Und duckt sich vor dem Regen.
Und wie er tappt, und wie er fühlt,
Sich unter ihm die Erd erwühlt;
Er stürzt wohl hundert Klafter.

Und als er sich ermannt vom Schlag,
Sieht er drei Lichtlein schleichen,
Er rafft sich auf und krabbelt nach,
Die Lichtlein ferne weichen,
Irrführen ihn die Quer und Läng,
Trepp auf, Trepp ab, durch enge Gäng,
Verfallne wüste Keller.

Auf einmal steht er hoch im Saal,
Sieht sitzen hundert Gäste,
Hohläugig grinsen allzumal
Und winken ihm zum Feste.
Er sieht sein Schätzkel untenan
Mit weißen Tüchern angetan,
Die wend't sich.

And at the hour of her death
The lad took fright, he caught his
breath,
He had to flee on horseback.

He spurred his horse, tugged on the
tack,
He rode like one possessed,
Up, down and sideways, forth and
back,
Yet never could find rest;
Rode seven night and seven days,
Through tempest, thunder, lighting
rays,
The flood rose up above him.

At last he came unto a place
Where his horses could tether,
He crept inside and found a space
To shelter from the weather.
Blindly he groped from side to side
The earth beneath him opened wide
He fell a hundred fathoms.

When he recovered from the fall
He saw three lights a glowing,
He staggered up, began to crawl,
The lights just kept on going,
They led him ever more astray,
Upstairs, downstairs, this way, that
way, in narrow, ravaged cellars.

At last he came into a hall
Where hundred guests were resting
With hollow eyes and grinning skulls
They bade him join their feasting.
He saw his sweetheart there with
them,
All wrapped in long white shrouds,
She turned.

Op. 15 No. 11 *Gleich und Gleich*

Same and Same

Ein Blumenglöckchen, Vom Boden
hervor
War früh gesprosset in lieblichem Flor;
Da kame in Bienchen und naschte fein.
Die müssen wohl beide für einander
sein.

From the ground, a little flower-bell
Had sprouted early in lovely
blossom;
Then came a little bee and sipped
from it gently
They surely must have made for each
other.

Op. 15 No. 4 *Sie liebt mich*

She loves me

Sie liebt mich!
Sie liebt mich!
Welch schreckliches Beben!
Fühl' ich mich selber?
Bin ich am Leben?
Sie liebt mich!
Sie liebt mich!

She loves me!
She loves me!
What terrible trembling!
Can I feel my own being?
And I still living?
She loves me!
She loves me!

Ach, rings so anders!
Bist du's noch, Sonne?
Bist du's noch, Hütte?
Trage die Wonne,
Seliges Herz!
Sie liebt mich!
Sie liebt mich!

All around me is changed!
Sun, are you still shining?
Hut, are you still there?
Bar this rapture,
Blissful heart!
She loves me!
She loves me!

Rachmaninoff

Op.4 No. 4 *Не пой, красавица*

Sing not, O lovely one

Не пой, красавица, при мне
Ты песен Грузии печальной;
Напоминают мне оне
Другую жизнь и берег дальний.

Sing not, O lovely one, In my
presence
Your melodies of sorrowful Georgia
They recall in me
Another life and a distant shore.

Увы, напоминают мне
Твои жестокие напевы
И степь, и ночь, и при луне
Черты далекой, бедной девы!

Я призрак милый, роковой,
Тебя увидев, забываю;
Но ты поёшь, и предо мной
Его я вновь воображаю.

Не пой, красавица, при мне
Ты песен Грузии печальной;
Напоминают мне оне
Другую жизнь и берег дальний.

Op. 8 No. 5 *Сон*

И у меня был край родной;
Прекрасен он!
Там ель качалась надо мной...
Но то был сон!

Семья друзей жива была.
Со всех сторон
Звучали мне любви слова...
Но то был сон!

Op. 8 No. 6 *Молитва*

О, Боже мой!
Взгляни на грешную меня;
Я мучусь, я больна душой,
Изрыта скорбью грудь моя.
О, мой Творец, велик мой грех,
Я на земле преступней всех.

Alas, your cruel song
Recalls in me
The steppe, the night, and in the
moonlight
The features of a maiden, sad and far
away!

I see you and forget
That dear and fateful vision
But you sing
And it comes to me anew.

Sing not, O lovely one, in my
presence
Your melodies of sorrowful Georgia,
They recall in me
Another life and a distant shore.

A Dream

And I had a motherland
So beautiful was she!
There spruce trees swayed above...
But it was a dream!

There our family friends still lived.
From every side about me
Were heard sweet words of love...
But it was a dream!

Prayer

Oh, my God!
Look at sinful me;
I suffer, I am ill in my soul,
Sorrow tortures my breast.
Oh, my Creator, great is my sin,
I am the worst criminal on earth.

Кипела в нём молодая кровь,
Была чиста его любовь,
Но он её в груди своей
Таил так свято от людей.
Я знала всё... О Боже мой!
Прости мне, грешной и больной.

Young blood boiled in him,
Pure was his love,
But he kept it in himself
So holy, from people.
I knew it all... Oh my God!
Forgive me, sinful and ill.

Его я муки поняла;
Улыбкой, взором лишь одним
Я б исцелить его могла,
Но я не сжалилась над ним.
О мой творец, велик мой грех,
Я на земле преступней всех.

I understood his sufferings;
With only the sign of smile
I could have cured him,
But I didn't pity him.
Oh my creator, my great sin.
I am on the ground all the more
vicious.

Томился долго, долго он,
Печалью тяжкой удручён;
И умер, бедный, наконец,
О Боже мой, о мой Творец!
Ты тронься грешинцы мольбой
Взгляни, как я больна душой.

He suffered long, long,
With sadness and heavily depressed
And died, miserable at last,
Oh my God, Oh my Creator!
Be touched by my sinful prayer
Look how I am ill in my soul

Op.4 No. 6 Давно-ль, мой друг

How long, my friend

Давно-ль, мой друг, твой взор
печальный
Я в расставанья смутный миг ловил.
Чтоб луч его прощальный
Надолго в душу мне проник.

How long, my friend
Since I searched for your melancholy
gaze
In the dark moment of our
separation?
Its last ray pierced my soul forever.
How long, since while wandering
alone,
Surrounded by a bustling unfamiliar
crowd.
I flew to you, my distant beloved
On the wings of a melancholy
dream?
My desires were fading...

Давно-ль, блуждая одиноко,
В толпе теснящей и чужой
К тебе желанной и далекой
Я мчался грустною мечтой.

Желанья гасли...

Сердце ныло...
Стояло время...
Ум молчал...
Давно-ль затишье это было?
Но вихрь свиданья набежал...

Мы вместе вновь, и дни несутся,
Как в море волн летучих строй,

И мысль кипит, и песни льются
Из сердца, полного тобой!
Из сердца, полного тобой!

My heart was aching...
The time stood still...
My mind was silent...
How long since I was at peace?
But our reunion came like a storm...

We are together again
and the days are fleeting by,
Like an array of the flowing waves of
the sea.

My mind is excited and the songs are
pouring out
From the heart that is full of you

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