

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SERGEI RACHMANINOFF'S PIANO
 CONCERTOS: THE ODYSSEY OF A
 STYLISTIC EVOLUTION

Anastassia Ivanova, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2006

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Cleveland L. Page
 School of Music

The story of Rachmaninoff's life and career is perhaps one of the most unusual among those of famous composers. Not only did Rachmaninoff live in two centuries, experiencing many changes in music, literature, theatre and art, but he also witnessed momentous changes in Russia, as well as the impact of world events on Russian history: the end of the Tsar's Russia with the Revolution of 1917 and the First and Second World Wars.

Numerous identified and unidentified sources have called Rachmaninoff "the last Romantic of the twentieth century," implying that his style remained firmly in the Romantic tradition throughout his career, untouched by twentieth century musical influences. In fact, though, his style did evolve, but it did so in ways which were so smooth and subtle that the changes were almost unnoticed.

This dissertation project focuses on the evolution of Sergei

Rachmaninoff's musical style as illustrated by his four Piano Concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, comparing different stylistic features such as orchestration, harmonic and melodic language, and the relationship between the piano and the orchestra. The writer used piano and orchestra scores of Rachmaninoff's four piano concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, as well as on many recordings of these works, books and many released research works which are currently available.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF'S PIANO CONCERTOS: THE ODYSSEY OF A
STYLISTIC EVOLUTION

by

Anastassia Ivanova

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland at College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
2006

Advisory Committee:

Professor Cleveland L. Page, Chair
Professor Larissa Dedova
Professor Santiago Rodriguez
Professor Mikhail Volchok
Professor Kira Gor

© Copyright by
Anastassia Ivanova
2006

DEDICATION

Like many of the accomplishments in my life, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of my committee, not only for their assistance in the completion of this step towards my degree but also for their invaluable guidance throughout my years at the University of Maryland. I want to first thank my principal advisor Prof. Cleveland L. Page for his generosity with his time and effort. People that have helped me academically along the way include Prof. Larissa Dedova, Prof. Mikhail Volchok, Prof. Santiago Rodriguez and Prof. Shelley Davis. I would like to also thank Lucia Leith, Joan Holly, Julia Shevchenko and Katya Naman, in helping me to accomplish this major goal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	iii
CHAPTER I. Introductory Overview.	1
CHAPTER II. Piano Concerto No. 1, F-sharp minor, Op. 1, 1893: A First Step.	13
CHAPTER III. Piano Concerto No. 2, C-minor, Op. 18, 1900: Worldwide Acclaim.	32
CHAPTER IV. Piano Concerto No. 3, D-minor, Op. 30, 1909: A Crowning Achievement.	46
CHAPTER V. Piano Concerto No.4, G-minor, Op. 40, 1926: A New Musical Language.	65
CHAPTER VI. Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43, 1935: The Perfect End of the Journey.	76
CHAPTER VII. Summary and Conclusions.	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

As in the old Russian saying,
I have chased three hares
(composing, conducting, and
playing the piano). Can I be
certain that I have captured
one?

Sergei Rachmaninoff¹

One of the brightest lights in music of the twentieth century, Sergei Rachmaninoff was a great composer of his time, a masterful symphony conductor and a legendary pianist. Rachmaninoff is considered the last in the great tradition of Russian romantic composers. His profoundly emotional and passionate music may well be among the most recognizable “classical” music ever written. His famous *Prelude in C-sharp minor* has appeared in Hollywood cinema and has been arranged for such disparate instruments as organ, accordion, banjo, guitar, voice, military band, trombone quartet, among many others. His work carries on the best traditions of Western and Russian classical music of the nineteenth century and particularly those of Liszt, Chopin, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Rubinstein, Taneyev and Arensky, and develops them. At the same time, his works reflect the unsurpassed individuality of a compelling musical style.

¹ Culshaw, John. *Rachmaninov: The Man and His Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950, Introduction

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born on April 1, 1873² to a well-to-do family. He was not the first musician in his family: his great-grandfather was an accomplished violinist and his grandfather was a brilliant pianist who studied with the noted Irish composer John Field. At the age of nine, Rachmaninoff entered the preparatory division of the St. Petersburg Conservatory on full scholarship.

In 1885 his family moved to Moscow, where the young Rachmaninoff encountered a brilliant cultural environment eminently suited to the development of his musical talent. He enrolled in the prestigious Moscow State Conservatory, where he studied piano with acclaimed teachers Nikolai Zverev and Alexander Siloti³, and composition with renowned Russian composers Alexander Taneyev and Anton Arensky. At the Moscow Conservatory, Rachmaninoff met and played for many legendary Russians, including Tchaikovsky, who became his musical idol. He graduated as a pianist in 1891, the year he completed his First Piano Concerto, and as a composer in 1892, winning the Great Gold Medal for his opera, *Aleko*.

Rachmaninoff's Conservatory years mark the beginning of the first period in his compositional career. During this period, he composed, in addition to the *Piano Concerto No. 1* and the opera *Aleko*, such works as *Morceaux de fantaisie*, Op. 3 (1892), which included the famous *Prelude in C-sharp minor*, *Elegiac Trio* in D minor, Op. 9 (1893), written to commemorate Tchaikovsky's death,

2 Some sources list the date for Rachmaninoff's birth as April 2. However, according to the latest research, the date of Rachmaninoff's birth is April 1, 1873.

3 Siloti, who had studied with both Liszt and Tchaikovsky, was one of the most brilliant figures of that time in Moscow. He left Russia after the Revolution of 1917 and taught eventually at the Juilliard School.

Morceaux de salon, Op. 10 (1894), *Symphony No. 1*, Op. 13 (1895), and the *Moments musicaux*, Op. 16 (1896).

These promising early years came to an abrupt end in 1897 with the disastrous failure of Rachmaninoff's First Symphony. Sunk into a deep depression and fearing—at the age of 24—the loss of his ability to compose, Rachmaninoff sought treatment from the famous psychotherapist Dr. Nicholas Dahl. After months of therapy, Rachmaninoff regained his compositional voice and wrote his immortal Second Piano Concerto⁴. The worldwide success of this composition in 1900, when Rachmaninoff was 27, was undoubtedly the most important point in his life and career. The Second Piano Concerto symbolized his dazzling recovery from the three long years of depression and silence, and established his international reputation as a composer.

Rachmaninoff was now entering on what was to be the most productive period of his career as a pianist, composer and conductor—the first two decades of the twentieth century. Many of his best compositions, including the *Sonata for Piano and Cello*, Op. 19 (1901), two sets of piano preludes, Op. 23 (1903) and Op. 32 (1910), the *Symphony No. 2*, Op. 27 (1906-1908), the symphonic poem, *The Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29 (1909), the *Piano Concerto No. 3*, Op. 30 (1909), the two sets of Etudes-tableaux for piano, Op. 33 (1911) and Op. 39 (1916), *The Bells*, Op. 35 (1913), the *Piano Sonata No. 2*, Op. 36 (1913) and a few sets of songs for voice and piano, Op. 21 (1900-1902), Op. 26 (1906), Op. 34. (1912) and Op. 38 (1916) were written during these fruitful years.

⁴ Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto is dedicated to Dr. Dahl

But again, events brought an abrupt change to Rachmaninoff's life. The revolution of 1917 forced the composer to leave Russia and pursue a full-time career as a concert pianist in the West, a career which continued till his death in 1943. Rachmaninoff first lived in France and Switzerland, eventually moving to the United States. In light of his heavy concertizing schedule, it is remarkable that he composed to the extent that he did in this final period of his life. Among his later compositions are numerous piano transcriptions, the *Piano Concerto No. 4*, Op. 40 (1926), *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43 (1935), the *Symphony No. 3*, Op. 44 (1935-1936), and *Symphonic Dances*, Op. 45 (1941).

During his lifetime, it was his pianism, rather than his composing, that brought Rachmaninoff the greatest acclaim. Known as a powerful and aristocratic keyboard artist, he was considered one of the best pianists of the twentieth century. Audiences were often fascinated by his exquisite playing. Elena Somova, Rachmaninoff's friend and the daughter of the Russian painter Konstantin Somov, said in March 1944 in Pasadena, California:

The first time I heard Rachmaninoff in recital in October of 1909, I was immediately conquered by his genius. His superb mastery, severe nobility of the style, deepness and richness of the content and his trademark sound were astonishing. . .⁵

Ernest Newman (1868-1959), the English critic and music writer, said after attending one of Rachmaninoff's first recitals in London:

Slowly he came out to the stage, sadly looked at the packed hall, took a bow. . . sat at the piano. . .and

⁵ Z. Apetian. *Anthology: Vospominaniya o Rachmaninove*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzikal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1961, p. 85.

such music started, that all the other pianists seemed secondary compared to him. I have never heard anyone play like this. . .⁶

As a pianist, Rachmaninoff was admired not only by audiences, but also by his fellow musicians and even his enemies:

Even those who dislike Rachmaninoff's music—Stravinsky is the most extreme example—nevertheless acknowledged his genius at the piano. His colleagues were unanimous in their respect. It was not just for Hoffman that he was a “supreme artist”: for Horowitz he was a musical god whose memory never dimmed with the passing of the years, in retrospect “surely the greatest of all pianists”; for Arthur Rubinstein, “the most fascinating pianist of them all since Busoni”; for Claudio Arrau, “one of the greatest pianists of all time and one of the very truly worthy of immortality.” Even artists not associated with the Romantic repertoire in which Rachmaninoff so excelled were no less respectful. For Gieseking, Rachmaninoff was simply “the greatest pianist of his time” and Artur Schnabel, in a posthumous tribute wrote: “I shall never forget the admiration I felt when I first heard Rachmaninoff play. His sovereign style, a combination of grandeur and daring, his naturalness and the giving of his whole self—all this was absolutely inimitable.”⁷

Rachmaninoff himself said to pianist Gina Bachauer:

When performing at a concert, a musician must always have the feeling that the particular work he is playing at that moment is the greatest music ever written. Also, the performer must give the best that is in him, even if he is playing in the smallest town in the most terrible theater, even if the audience is only one person—the doorman, holding the keys, waiting for the concert to finish as soon as possible, so he can lock the doors.⁸

⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁷ Martyn, Barrie. *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*. Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, Gower Publishing Company, 1990, p. 396.

⁸ Gina Bachauer. *My Study With Rachmaninoff*. Clavier magazine, October 1973, p. 14.

His most productive years as a pianist began after his exile from Russia in 1917. Concert engagements throughout Scandinavia mark the early months of his exile. His American career began in 1918 with performances in Providence, Boston, and in New York's Carnegie Hall. From 1918 onwards, he performed about fifty concerts each year. According to Barrie Martyn in his book *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, by the end of his career, Rachmaninoff had made 1,457 appearances as a pianist, of which 1,189 dated from the launching of his career in America in 1918.

As a symphony and opera conductor, Rachmaninoff was a unique interpreter of a vast range of works: his own, works by fellow Russians; Glinka, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, and works by Western composers. His brief collaboration with famous Russian opera companies such as the Bolshoi Opera and later the Mamontov Opera marked a highly successful period in the history of Russian opera.

In 1909, Rachmaninoff made his acclaimed American tour, conducting in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and Boston—where he was immediately offered a conducting position with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Rachmaninoff's success as a symphony conductor was growing rapidly and he was soon being compared with the greatest European conductors:

Musical history has many examples of musicians with dual careers, such as composers-conductors Strauss and Mahler and all the composers-pianists from Bach on, but few have spread their energies at all extensively or successfully in three directions;

only the names of Liszt, Dohnanyi and Benjamin Britten come readily to mind alongside that of Rachmaninoff. It is tantalizing to know that Rachmaninoff was assuredly one of the truly great conductors...⁹

Stylistically, Rachmaninoff's works are not usually programmatic, though they are filled with images recalling distinctively Russian sounds. Russian bells, for example, are evoked in compositions of various genres throughout Rachmaninoff's career, beginning with the famous *Prelude in C-sharp minor* and continuing in the Second Piano Concerto, in his Preludes, piano Etudes-tableaux and in *The Bells*:

. . . Rachmaninoff's consciousness was penetrated. . . by the sound of church bells, which ring out in many of his compositions, whether written in Russia (First Suite for Two Pianos, Preludes, Op. 32, Second Sonata), Dresden (Second Symphony) or even Italy (*The Bells*).¹⁰

Themes redolent of Russian Orthodox chants can be found in the opening of the Third Piano Concerto and the first theme of the First Symphony as well as in many other compositions:

The Orthodox Church Chant laid down that, in order to avoid jarring intervals between adjacent notes, liturgical music should move by adjacent steps in the scale, and it is in the gently undulating contours of many of Rachmaninoff's most characteristic melodies—the mottoes of the Second and Third Symphonies, the opening themes of the Second and Third Concertos are but four of many examples—that its influence is most persuasive. The chanting of church choirs is imitated in the closing pages of both *Aleko* and the cantata, *Spring*,

⁹ Martyn, 523.

¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

and the ancient chants themselves provided the thematic material of the First Symphony.¹¹

However, unlike other composers, Rachmaninoff never used any direct quotes from Russian folk music, a compositional trait noticed by many scholars and music critics, for instance, Ernest Newman:

Specifically he is perhaps more Russian than the composers who coquet with Russian folk music. But in a deeper sense he is perhaps more Russian than they. . .¹²

Barrie Martyn quotes Medtner in his book *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist and Conductor*. Martyn writes:

The peculiarly Russian quality of every bar Rachmaninoff wrote originates within the music rather than being imposed from without by what Medtner dismissively used to call “ethnographical trimmings.” Rachmaninoff makes virtually no use of Russian folk music and yet, as Medtner again said, “[He] is so profoundly Russian himself that he has no need of folk music.”¹³

Melody was always the most important expressive tool in Rachmaninoff’s music. John Gillespie states in his book *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music*:

Rachmaninoff had a special skill as a melodist. His songs contain some of the most hauntingly beautiful passages to be found in vocal literature.

His famous use of long themes possessing “great, seemingly endless, arching melodies”¹⁴ sound-paint the endless landscapes of Russian nature. John Culshaw says:

11 Ibid., 30.

12 Ibid., 27.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 22.

His melodies fall into two distinct types. These are strongly contrasted, one being long, flowing melodies with a tendency to progress by intervals of a third, and the other being short, tight melodies which hover continually around one note.¹⁵

Rachmaninoff usually preferred the minor keys for his music. His favorites were A minor, C minor and D minor. However, as Barrie Martin points out:

The apparent preponderance of minor keys in which Rachmaninoff chose to write is not the unequivocal evidence of a one-tracked melancholy mind it at first seems, for although it is true that all three symphonies, four concertos and the Paganini Rhapsody are in the minor key, not to mention fourteen out of seventeen Etudes-tableaux, two sonatas for piano and one for cello and piano, one half of the Preludes and not fewer than thirty-four of the eighty-three songs in the Soviet collected edition are in the major key, and a further nine end that way.¹⁶

Some of Rachmaninoff's works were inspired by fine poetry and paintings: his opera *Aleko* was based on Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies*, and many of his art songs were based on poetry: for example, poems by Goethe, Heine, Schevchenko, Tutchew, Alexei Tolstoy, Fet, and Bunin. Despite Rachmaninoff's well-known dislike for new, "popular" schools in literature, including "symbolism," some of his compositions are inspired by works of the then-popular symbolists. His symphonic poem, *The Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29, for example, is inspired by symbolist Arnold Boklin's painting of the same title and his *Prelude in B minor*, Op. 32 is inspired by Boklin's painting *The Return*. His cantata, *The Bells*, is based on a poem by American poet Edgar Allan Poe, which was

15 Culshaw, 50.

16 Martyn, 30.

translated by Russian poet-symbolist, Constantine Balmont. Finally, the group of Songs, Op. 38, is based on poems by symbolist poets, Avetik Isaakian, Andrey Bely, Igor Severyanin, Valery Bryusov, Fedor Sologub, and Constantine Balmont.

Rachmaninoff's enormous talent as a pianist strongly influenced his numerous piano compositions. He was especially attracted to the large forms of piano music, creating two piano sonatas, two sets of variations, two suites for two-piano duos and, finally, the four piano concertos and the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. Together with the symphony, the piano concerto was his primary symphonic genre.

According to the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* a piano concerto:

. . . is a composition for orchestra and a solo instrument. . . An essential trait of the concerto is that the soloist(s) and the orchestra are not in master-servant relationship. . . but compete on equal terms. This meaning is implied by the name itself, which is usually thought to be derived from *L. concertare*, "to fight," "to contend." Recently, another derivation has been suggested, from *L. conserere*, "to join together," "to unite". . .¹⁷

Throughout the history of the piano concerto, different types of relationships can be found between piano and orchestra: for example, Bach's concertos are predominantly orchestral pieces with a featured piano solo part, while Chopin's two Piano Concertos are primarily solo piano compositions with a relatively supporting orchestra part.

Rachmaninoff's Piano Concertos do not conform to either of these types.

¹⁷ *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Fourth Edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

Rather, following the traditions of the piano concertos by Grieg, Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein—and in particular Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto in B-flat minor, which Rachmaninoff also successfully performed—Rachmaninoff composed concertos featuring a leading piano with an orchestra that is not limited to the role of accompaniment. The piano and the orchestra are really “competing,” making the concertos symphonic in nature. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that Rachmaninoff himself called his concertos “symphonies.” His writing for the piano had a thick, “symphonic” texture, which later became a Rachmaninoff trademark. Gradually, the symphonism in Rachmaninoff’s concertos increased, while the form of his concertos also evolved—from the early Grieg-like First Concerto to his last composition in this genre, *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*.

Rachmaninoff was the first composer-pianist to make the piano concerto his primary genre. Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt were also remarkable pianists who created outstanding examples of piano concertos, but none of them made the concerto his primary genre. In Rachmaninoff’s case, many different factors no doubt drew him to the piano concerto: his phenomenal career as a pianist and conductor, his talent as a melodist, and his desire to combine a symphony and instrument into one.

While many research works by Soviet and Western authors focus on Sergei Rachmaninoff’s life, career, and compositions, few of those works are dedicated solely to his piano concertos. Among such works are: *Piano Concertos by Rachmaninoff* by A. Solovtsev, *Rachmaninoff and His Pianoforte Concertos*

by W. R. Anderson, and an unreleased candidate dissertation, *Piano Concertos by Rachmaninoff* by noted Russian musicologist Vera Briantseva. Some other works simply contain chapters on Rachmaninoff's piano concertos: for instance, *Rachmaninoff's Orchestral Music* by Patrick Piggot or *Rachmaninoff: The Man and his Music* by John Culshaw.

The following dissertation project focuses on the evolution of Sergei Rachmaninoff's musical style as illustrated by his four Piano Concertos and *The Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*.

This research work is based on piano and orchestra scores and two-piano reductions of Rachmaninoff's four Concertos and the Rhapsody, as well as on many of the recordings, books and released research works currently available. Some of them can be found in the bibliography.

**CHAPTER II. PIANO CONCERTO NO. 1, F-SHARP MINOR, OP. 1,
1893: A FIRST STEP**

It is the shortest of the Concertos, lasting little more than than twenty minutes in performance, and is characterized by a youthful vigour which to some extent disguises the thinness of the material. The First Concerto is certainly not as important as the others, but as an example of the melodic gift, the exuberance and the brilliance of a Russian student-composer at the end the last century it is surely unsurpassed.

John Culshaw¹⁸

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor is considered the first official composition written by Rachmaninoff: it is marked Opus 1. Rachmaninoff composed it in 1891 when he was only 18. At that time he was a student at the Moscow Conservatory and already the author of a number of compositions in various genres, most of which had remained unpublished until very recently.

Few Russian piano concertos were composed before Rachmaninoff. The most famous were Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1* and five Piano Concertos by Anton Rubinstein. Rachmaninoff's teachers, Taneyev and Arensky, attempted

¹⁸ Culshaw, 14.

the concerto genre, with differing outcomes. Taneyev's Piano Concerto was never completed, while Arensky's *Fantasia on a Theme by Ryabinin*, Op. 2, written in 1881, became one of his most famous compositions.

Rachmaninoff conceived the idea of composing a concerto in 1886, when he was 13. He had attended a recital given by a visiting pianist, Alexander Siloti, who performed pieces by Schubert, Chopin, and Liszt, as well as Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Although Rachmaninoff had heard the Tchaikovsky Concerto before, Siloti's performance was the first time he had heard the composition with a full orchestra. Rachmaninoff was captivated by the piece. He abandoned his previous goal of composing an opera and decided that he wanted to compose a piano concerto: this became more interesting since it would allow him to both conduct the orchestra and play the solo part.

From that moment, Rachmaninoff started to listen to all the piano concertos he could and, by coincidence, during that season, piano concertos were performed frequently. He heard Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 4*, Liszt's *Piano Concerto No. 2*, Rubinstein's *Piano Concerto No. 4*, Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 23*, and Saint-Saëns' *Piano Concerto No. 2* with the visiting Saint-Saëns himself at the piano and Alexander Siloti conducting. Later, Rachmaninoff heard Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A minor* and was very impressed; it became one of his favorite compositions.

In addition to listening to piano concertos, Rachmaninoff prepared himself to compose a piano concerto by beginning with less complicated pieces for piano

solo. His first works were three Nocturnes, because he admired the Nocturnes by Chopin. Among his other early compositions, most of which were never performed at that time, the most interesting were a group of solo piano pieces and an unfinished quintet. Later, Rachmaninoff composed a *Piano Trio in G minor*, the *Prelude for Cello and Piano*, the *Russian Rhapsody*, *Romance* for six hands, some songs, and a few opera excerpts. In 1889, now 16 years old, Rachmaninoff sketched a draft of a *Piano Concerto in C minor* which was never completed. At this time he was also performing frequently, most often his own compositions, but also works by Chopin, Liszt and Tchaikovsky.

Rachmaninoff started to work on the first movement of his First Concerto in June, 1890 at Ivanovka, the family estate. That was a very happy summer for the young composer, during which he developed a close friendship with the three charming Scalon sisters who were his neighbors, as well as distant relatives. Not surprisingly, he eventually fell in love with one of the sisters, fifteen-year-old Vera. During that summer, Rachmaninoff finally found a main theme for his Piano Concerto—his own unique melody, a melody not similar to or inspired by any others:

Example 1. First movement, main theme. ¹⁹



19 Martyn, 50.

He threw out the first draft of the concerto that he had started the previous fall and focused on his new theme. During that summer of 1890, Rachmaninoff also composed the second theme for the concerto's first movement, as well as a main melody for the second movement. These two themes were very different: if the first one was anxious and sorrowful, the other one was peaceful and dream-like.

The first performance of his *Piano Concerto No. 1* took place almost one-and-a-half years later, in a student recital on March 17, 1892, with Rachmaninoff at the piano and the Conservatory director Vasily Safonov conducting:

At the premiere of his First Concerto he confidently overruled the conductor, the fearsome martinet Safonov, who happened to be the conservatoire's Director.”²⁰

That night only the first movement was performed. It was a very successful debut for Rachmaninoff. Even the reviewer from the magazine *Artist's Journal* noticed that the first movement had “taste, tension, youthful sincerity and obvious knowledge.” He also noted, “already there is much promise.”²¹

The opening of the First Concerto, consisting of an orchestral fanfare and a descending cascade of chords in the piano, is reminiscent of Grieg, Schumann, and Liszt piano concertos:

²⁰ Ibid, 22.

²¹ Alekseev, A. D. *S. V. Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzikal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1954, p. 33.

Example 2. First movement, opening.²²

The image displays a musical score for the opening of the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 1, First Version, for two pianos. The score is written for Piano I (left hand) and Piano II (right hand). The tempo is marked 'Vivace'. The music features a main theme characterized by anxious, tense, and melancholic undertones. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'ff' and 'f'.

The main theme—anxious, tense, yet with hidden sorrow—is one of the best examples of the youthful romanticism of the composer: “It shows that the strain of yearning and melancholy was not missing in the young Rachmaninoff.”²³

²² Rachmaninoff, Sergei. *Concerto No. 1, First Version*. Reduction for two pianos. Moscow: Muzika, 1966, p. 3.

²³ Culshaw, 77.

Example 3. First movement, main subject. ²⁴

The image displays a musical score for the main subject of the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 1, First Version, reduction for two pianos. The score is written for two pianos (piano and bass clef) and consists of four systems of music. The key signature is two sharps (D major), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff contains a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a fermata over the first measure. The bass clef staff contains a bass line with a dynamic marking of *p* and a fermata over the first measure. The second system features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a bass line. The treble clef staff has a dynamic marking of *f* and a fermata over the first measure. The bass clef staff has a dynamic marking of *p* and a fermata over the first measure. The third system continues the melodic and bass lines. The fourth system concludes the main subject with a final chord in both staves.

In opposition to the main theme, the second subject, consisting of two themes, takes us to the world of sweet love dreams:

24 Rachmaninoff, Sergei. *Concerto No. 1, First Version*. Reduction for two pianos. Moscow: Muzika, 1966, p. 5.

Example 4a. First movement, second subject, first theme.²⁵

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece, consisting of two systems of staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked "Meno mosso".

The first system includes the following markings and features:

- Tempo:** *Meno mosso*
- Dynamic:** *mf*
- Performance instruction:** *idolce e la melodia ben marcato*
- Notation:** The right hand features a melodic line with frequent triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above a bracket). The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth-note patterns.

The second system includes the following markings and features:

- Tempo:** *Meno mosso*
- Dynamic:** *mf legato*
- Notation:** The right hand continues the melodic line with some triplet markings. The left hand features a more active accompaniment with eighth-note patterns and some triplet markings.

25 Ibid., 9.

Example 4b. First movement, second subject, second theme.²⁶

The image displays a musical score for a piano accompaniment. It is divided into three systems. The first system is marked 'Allegro moderato' and 'ppp'. The second system is marked 'Allegro moderato' and 'p'. The third system is marked 'mf'. The score consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff contains a complex, rhythmic melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The bass clef staff contains a steady accompaniment with a triplet arpeggio pattern. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4.

The second movement, *Andante* in D major, is written in a simple and condensed form. Relatively short, this movement is stylistically closer to chamber music than to concertos. The movement could also be compared to a Chopin nocturne, albeit “Chopin filtered through the works of Tchaikovsky and Arensky, who were the two principal influences on Rachmaninoff in his early years.”²⁷ The second movement’s expansive, slow melody in the upper voice is supported by the triplet arpeggio accompaniment:

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁷ Piggott, Patrick. *Rachmaninoff: Orchestral Music*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974, p. 43.

Example 5. Second Movement. ²⁸

Andante cantabile

The musical score is presented in five systems, each consisting of a piano (p) and grand staff. The tempo is marked 'Andante cantabile'. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, and *mf*, as well as performance markings like *cresc.* and fermatas. Triplet figures are prominent throughout the piece.

Rachmaninoff rejects everything that can cover the clarity of the melody. And the melody, simple by itself, sounds different every time it occurs because of the constant harmonic changes in the accompaniment.

²⁸ Rachmaninoff, Sergei. *Concerto No. 1, First Version*. Reduction for two pianos. Moscow: Muzika, 1966, p. 45.

The last movement, *Finale*, is a scherzo-like movement in rondo sonata form which seems to be modeled on Grieg's piano concerto in A minor:

Example 6. Third movement, main theme²⁹

The musical score is for the third movement, main theme, in 3/8 time. It is written in A major (one sharp) and consists of two systems. The first system is marked "Allegro scherzando" and features a piano introduction with a *pp* dynamic and a first ending bracket. The second system continues the "Allegro scherzando" section with various dynamics including *p*, *mf*, and *pp leggiero*. The score includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp, and a 3/8 time signature.

The middle section—*Andante espressivo*, with a big piano solo—takes us to a more tranquil mood:

²⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

Example 7. Second movement, middle section. ³⁰

The image shows a musical score for the second movement, middle section of Rachmaninoff's First Piano Concerto. The score is in 3/4 time and D major. It features a piano and a violin. The piano part has a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The violin part has a melodic line. The tempo is marked 'Andante espressivo'. Dynamics include *mf*, *pp*, and *ppp*. There are triplets and a *cresc.* marking.

Barrie Martin states in his book *Rachmaninoff: composer, pianist, conductor*:

Rachmaninoff's First Concerto is not only a remarkable achievement for a seventeen year-old, a work which can stand on its own feet and be judged on its own merits, but proof that the composer had come of age and that his own musical personality was emancipating itself from youthful influences.

However, Rachmaninoff himself was never satisfied with the original

³⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

version of his *Piano Concerto No. 1*. He even refused an invitation to perform it in London in 1899. Later, in 1908, he mentioned in a letter to his friend Morozov:

There are so many requests for this concerto, and it is so frightful in its present form—that is the main thing—that I should like to work at it and, if possible, get it into shape. Of course, it will have to be written afresh, for the orchestration in it is worse than the music.³¹

Certainly, this is an early piece and echoes the work of other composers: the romantic piano concertos of Schumann, Chopin, and Grieg, for example. It is especially close to Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A minor* in its harmonic and melodic material. And although single episodes already show elements of Rachmaninoff's unique style, which will be found fully developed in his later concertos, nevertheless, the language of his *First Concerto* seems rather simple in comparison to his later compositions. The piano leads almost constantly and the role of the orchestra is very modest, sometimes just a simple supporting part, a light and clear background for the piano similar to the orchestrations in Chopin's concertos. In his later piano concertos, Rachmaninoff would make the orchestral part much richer and the collaboration between piano and orchestra much more extensive .

A quarter of a century later, in 1917, Rachmaninoff made major revisions to the *Concerto*:

Rachmaninoff's revision were extremely drastic. Not only he gave the original material a new and improved presentation, but he reworked it in infinitely more subtle ways than formerly, clarified

³¹ Martyn, 278.

the orchestration, and recast the the solo part in such a manner that it demands the utmost panache and bravura from the pianist. A great cadenza plays an important part in the first movement, occupying more than a quarter of its length. . . The slow movement needed much less revision, and its charming theme, presented by the soloist without accompaniment, remained virtually unchanged. . . The Finale, which in its original form seems to have been modeled on Grieg's Concerto in A minor was the movement to which he gave the most drastic revision, both its form and its texture being entirely reworked from beginning to end.³²

Example 8a. First movement, main subject, original version³³

³² Ibid., 42.

³³ Rachmaninoff. *Piano Concerto No. 1, F-sharp minor, Op. 1*. Reduction for two pianos. Original version. Moscow: Musika, 1966, p. 5.

Example 8b. First movement, main subject, revised version.³⁴

The image displays a musical score for the first movement, main subject, revised version of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 1. The score is written for two pianos and consists of five systems of staves. The key signature is F-sharp minor (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system features a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking and includes triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. The third system continues with complex rhythmic figures and includes a *P* (piano) marking. The fourth system is marked *P dolce* (piano dolce) and features a long, sustained melodic line in the right hand. The fifth system is marked *poco cresc.* (poco crescendo) and includes a *5* fingering. The score is a reduction for two pianos, with the right hand of each piano playing the main melodic lines and the left hand providing harmonic support.

34 Rachmaninoff. *Piano Concerto No. 1, F-sharp minor, Op. 1*. Reduction for two pianos. Revised version. Moscow: Musika, 1972, pp. 3-4.

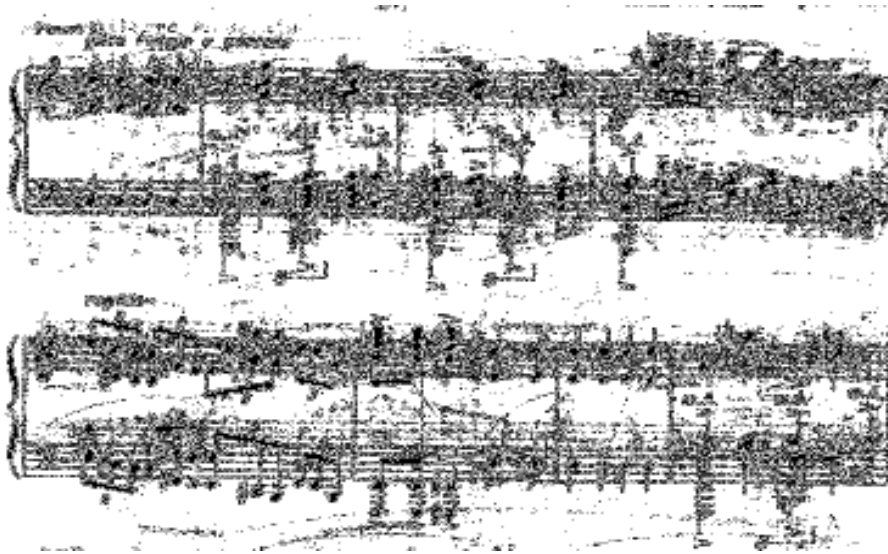
Example 9a. First movement, cadenza, original version. ³⁵

CADENZA
con agitazione

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system begins with a whole rest in the treble staff and a series of chords in the bass staff, marked *ff*. The second system features a melodic line in the treble staff and chords in the bass staff, marked *fff*. The third system continues with a melodic line in the treble staff and chords in the bass staff, also marked *fff*. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, notes, and dynamic markings.

35 Original version, 36.

Example 9b. First movement, cadenza, revised version.³⁶



³⁶ Revised version, 34-35.

Example 10a. Third movement, main subject, original version³⁷

The image displays a musical score for the main subject of the third movement, original version. The score is written for piano and is divided into two systems. The tempo is marked "Allegro scherzando". The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff features a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by a series of eighth notes. The bass clef staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern. The second system continues the piece, showing a more complex melodic line in the treble clef staff and a more active bass clef staff. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *pp*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp leggiero*. There are also performance instructions like "1 4" and "8" indicating fingerings or articulation. The score is marked with double bar lines and repeat signs.

37 Original version, 53.

Example 10b. Third movement, main subject, revised version³⁸

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Allegro vivace'. The first system shows the original material, while the second system shows the revised version. The revised version features more complex and colorful piano accompaniment, with a more varied and elegant harmonic structure compared to the original.

The original material and structure remain, but harmonies became richer, the piano part more colorful and elegant, and the orchestration more diverse:

The original orchestration had been solidly four-square, whereas in the revision it is infinitely more varied, flexible and clear, with much orchestral interplay and enterprising writing for solo instruments, though he used essentially the same forces...³⁹

³⁸ Revised version, 54.

³⁹ Martyn, 278.

Rachmaninoff finished the revision on November 10, 1917 and sent it to the publisher just prior to leaving Russia. The concerto in its revised version was first performed on January 18, 1919 in New York with the Russian Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Modest Altschuler, and Rachmaninoff himself at the piano.

With this revision, Rachmaninoff was at last satisfied with his First Concerto. At the same time, though, he was highly disappointed that audiences preferred his other concertos over his *Concerto No. 1*. He said:

I have rewritten my First Concerto, it is really good now. All the youthful freshness is there, and yet it plays itself so much more easily. When I tell them in America that I will play the First Concerto, they do not protest, but I can see by their faces that they would prefer the Second or Third.⁴⁰

40 Ibid., 286.

CHAPTER III. PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2, C MINOR, OP. 18, 1900: WORLDWIDE ACCLAIM

The theme of the inspired Second Concerto is not only the theme of his life, but always conveys the impression of being one of the most strikingly Russian of themes, and only because the soul of this theme is Russian; there is no ethnographic trimming here, no dressing up, no decking out in national dress, no folksong intonation, and yet every time, from the first bell stroke, you feel the figure of Russia rising up to her full height.

Nikolai Medtner⁴¹

In its maturity and accomplishment, *Piano Concerto No. 2* in C minor differs radically from the “juvenile” First Concerto written a decade earlier and is considered to be Rachmaninoff’s most enduring and popular work. This Concerto brought the composer long-awaited worldwide success. In his own lifetime, Rachmaninoff saw it become one of the preeminent pieces in the world concert repertoire. Its preeminence continues to this day: it is often performed in the most prestigious concert halls and regularly recorded by the best performers and

41 Martyn, 127.

orchestras.

The composition and success of the Second Concerto is widely regarded as marking the turning point in Rachmaninoff's life and career. It signaled his recovery from three years of debilitating depression and resulting severe compositional crisis occasioned by the failure of the First Symphony, and heralded the start of a richly productive period in his career. The Second Concerto was followed in quick succession by a number of significant compositions: the *Sonata for Piano and Cello*, Op. 19 (1901), the *Suite No. 2 for Two Pianos*, Op. 17 (1901), and the *Ten Preludes*, Op. 23 (1903).

Rachmaninoff had begun working on his Second Concerto in 1900. He composed the second and third movements prior to the first movement, which he finished in 1901. Rachmaninoff credited his sessions with the prominent psychotherapist Dr. Nicholas Dahl as helping to alleviate his depression, reinvigorating his creativity and enabling him to begin work on the Second Concerto. He wrote:

I heard the same hypnotic formula repeated day after day while I lay half asleep in an arm-chair in Dr. Dahl's study. "You will begin to write your concerto—You will work with great facility—The Concerto will be of an excellent quality." It was always the same without interruption. Although it may sound incredible, this cure really helped me. Already at the beginning of the summer I began to compose again. The material grew in bulk, and new musical ideas began to stir within me—far more than I needed for my concerto. By autumn I had finished two movements of the concerto—the [Adagio] and the Finale. . .

The premiere of the Second Concerto took place in Moscow on December 2, 1901, in a performance by the Moscow Philharmonic Society conducted by Alexander Siloti, with Rachmaninoff himself as the soloist. The performance was a complete success: even Rachmaninoff's former composition teacher, Sergei Taneyev, who was notorious for his harsh criticism, wept during the second movement, calling Rachmaninoff "the genius."⁴² Later, composer Sergei Prokofieff called this Concerto "a work of exceptional, astonishing beauty. . ."⁴³

Other early performances took place in England. Rachmaninoff's first London performance of the Second Concerto occurred in 1908 with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sergei Koussevitsky. The work was also performed at the Queen's Hall in London with the Philharmonic Society Orchestra conducted by Frederic Cowen, with Basil Sapellnikoff at the piano, and later in Birmingham and Manchester with Siloti as a soloist.

The structure of the Second Concerto is a distinctive mix of the classical three-movement concerto form and the romantic tone poem of continuous development. The opening of the first movement is very unusual. It forgoes the orchestral introduction typical of concertos. Instead, the introduction is a bell-like piano solo:

One of the most original features of the Second Concerto is its opening—the chain of alternating chords and deep bass notes for the piano, beginning softly in F minor and swelling to an enormous volume of sound as the harmony shifts about semitonally towards a final resolution into the

⁴² Kandinsky, Alexei. *S.V. Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Muzika, 1982, p. 64.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 65.

real tonic, C minor (a passage which, incidentally, bears a curious likeness to the conclusion of the notorious C-sharp minor Prelude, but seen, as it were, in reverse). This introduction is now so familiar that one takes it for granted and forgets too easily its novelty in 1901.⁴⁴

Example 11. Second Concerto, opening.⁴⁵

The image shows a musical score for the opening of the Second Concerto, featuring two piano parts. The top system is for the 1st Piano, and the bottom system is for the 2nd Piano. Both parts are in C minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' with a quarter note equal to 66 beats per minute. The 1st Piano part begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a 'poco a poco cresc.' instruction. The 2nd Piano part is mostly silent, with some notes appearing in the final bars. The score ends with a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking.

Many other sources state that the opening is clearly related to the famous C-sharp minor Prelude:

Rachmaninoff may have derived this opening from his Prelude in C sharp minor by inverting the layout and dynamics of its final bars, where the bass octaves recede and do not follow the chords.⁴⁶

One notices this similarity by looking at both scores, specifically, the opening of the Second Concerto and the end of the *Prelude in C-sharp minor*:

⁴⁴ Piggot, 47.

⁴⁵ Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18*. Reduction for two pianos. New York: Carl Fischer Music Library, 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Martyn, 126.

Example 12a. Second Concerto, opening⁴⁷

Moderato (♩ = 66.)

1st Piano

pp *poco a poco cresc.*

Moderato (♩ = 66.)

2nd Piano

rit.

Example 12b. Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2, ending.⁴⁸

dim. *mf* *ppp*

dim. *mf* *ppp*

Even as the first movement's introduction turns the typical concerto format upside-down, so, too, does the introduction of the first theme. This C minor theme is introduced not by the piano, as would ordinarily be the case, but by the strings with the piano as accompaniment:

47 Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18*. Reduction for two pianos. New York: Carl Fischer Music Library, 2003, p. 3.

48 Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2*. www.everynote.com, p. 1.

Example 13. First movement, main subject.⁴⁹

The musical score is a reduction for two pianos. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the main subject in the right hand of the first piano, marked 'a tempo' and '> con passione', with a forte dynamic. The second system shows the main subject in the right hand of the second piano, also marked 'a tempo' and '> con passione', with a forte dynamic. The third system shows the main subject in the right hand of the first piano, marked 'a tempo' and '> con passione', with a forte dynamic. The score is in E-flat major and 2/4 time.

The second subject, in E-flat major, is first hinted at by the violas followed by the full statement of the theme played by the piano:

49 Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18*. Reduction for two pianos. New York: Carl Fischer Music Library, 2003, p. 3.

Example 14. First movement, second subject.⁵⁰

This theme, rhapsodic in style, develops to a great dynamic climax. Unlike the first movement of Rachmaninoff's other concertos, the first movement of the Second Concerto does not contain a virtuoso solo cadenza. However, the difficulty of the whole concerto fully compensates for the absence of a cadenza:

... unlike its neighbors among Rachmaninoff's concertos, the Second has no first movement cadenza in which the soloist's virtuosity can be unleashed and exploited to the full: nevertheless the work is difficult, both technically and musically, demanding brilliant pianism as well as the musicianship and finesse of an experienced chamber-music player who is prepared both to listen and to lead.⁵¹

The slow movement can truly be considered one of Rachmaninoff's

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁵¹ Piggot, 48.

masterpieces. The orchestra moves from C minor to E major. For the introduction, Rachmaninoff used one of his early melodies—the theme of the six-hands piece, the *Romance* in A major, composed in 1890 for his special friends, the Scalon sisters:

Example15a. *Romance* for six hands, A major, main theme⁵²

The image shows a musical score for the main theme of the *Romance* for six hands in A major, marked *Andante sostenuto*. The score is written for two grand pianos, with each piano having a right and left hand. The tempo is *Andante sostenuto*. The music features a prominent triplet pattern in the right hands of both pianos, with the left hands providing a harmonic accompaniment. The notation includes dynamic markings such as *ff* and *pp*, and the instruction *pp armonioso [sic]*. The score is presented in two systems, each with two staves per piano.

⁵² Ibid., 45.

Example 15b. Second Concerto, second movement, main theme. ⁵³

It will at once be recognized that this, though an accompaniment figuration and not a melody, is the very essence of the slow movement of the Second Concerto, and it was with this part of the work and not the first movement (which was written last) that Rachmaninoff began his new concerto. In the Romance written for the Scalon girls, the passage introduces a different melody from that of the concerto, and it is, of course, in another key; nevertheless it is this passage, with its interesting rhythmic ambiguity, which is really the vitalizing element in the concerto's slow movement, and it was from this seed, sown ten years previously, but since then lying fallow, that the glowing Second was eventually to come to fruition.⁵⁴

The second movement is written in ABA song form with a contrasting central section and a powerful piano cadenza.

⁵³ Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18*. Reduction for two pianos. New York: Carl Fischer Music Library, 2003, p. 25.

⁵⁴ Piggot, 45-46.

In the Finale, *Allegro scherzando*, written in rondo form, the orchestra modulates to the main key of C minor. The piano part starts with a solo cadenza that leads to the main theme—a light, dance-like melody which is the most cheerful theme in the whole Concerto:

Example 16. Third movement, main subject. ⁵⁵

The image shows a musical score for the main subject of the third movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto. The score is in C minor and 3/4 time. It features a piano solo cadenza leading into a main theme. The piano part is marked with dynamics such as *f*, *dim.*, *p*, and *mf*. The score includes a boxed number 28 and a sequence of fingering numbers: 5 3 1 2 3 5 3 1 2 1 5.

The second theme is announced by the oboe and violas and later taken up by the piano. With its sweet lyrical melody accompanied by orientally harmonized chords, it is one of Rachmaninoff's greatest melodies;

⁵⁵ Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18*. Reduction for two pianos. New York: Carl Fischer Music Library, 2003, p. 40-41.

Example 17. Third movement, second subject.⁵⁶

The musical score for Example 17, Third movement, second subject, is presented in four systems. The first system features a melodic line in the right hand with a *dolce* marking and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The second system begins at measure 31 and includes a *dim. e rit.* marking. The third system continues the melodic and accompanimental lines. The fourth system shows the right hand playing a sustained chord and the left hand playing a rhythmic pattern. The score concludes with a *pp* marking in the right hand and a *p* marking in the left hand.

The Concerto ends with an exultant proclamation of the second theme in the triumphant tonality of C major:

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44-45.

Example 18. Third movement, climax.⁵⁷

The image shows a musical score for the climax of the third movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. The score is in 3/4 time, marked 'Maestoso' with a tempo of quarter note = 60. It features a complex texture with dense chords and rapid sixteenth-note passages in the right hand, and a more melodic line in the left hand. The music is written for piano and includes dynamic markings like 'fff' and 'ff'.

Generally, the Second Concerto is much closer to a symphonic poem than to a traditional instrumental concerto. The competition between the soloist and the orchestra is almost nonexistent and rarely does one find solo episodes in the piano part. This break with the traditions of the concerto style did not go unnoticed by Rachmaninoff's contemporaries:

Rachmaninoff steps away from the virtuoso concerto and the piano is not the leading instrument anymore, but just a first one among equals."⁵⁸

Rachmaninoff's teacher Taneyev wrote in his diary on October 26, 1901,

⁵⁷ Ibid, 61.

⁵⁸ Keldysh, Yuri. *Rachmaninoff and His Time*. Moscow: Muzika, 1973, p. 179.

after attending a rehearsal of the Symphony of the Philharmonic Society, which premiered the Concerto: “Every time I listen to Rachmaninoff’s Concerto, I like it more and more. The only thing that could be criticized is that the piano doesn’t play at all without the orchestra.” Another source says:

The solo part is largely accompanimental or decorative, the burden of melody remaining with the orchestra to a very great extent. Indeed, the orchestra is silent less often than the soloist. . . ⁵⁹

The colors in the orchestra, while warm and rich, lack brightness. Tutti are infrequent and brass instruments, such as trombone and trumpet, are used only in climaxes. Rather, the orchestration is predominantly for strings and woodwinds in different combinations.

The new melodic and harmonic features Rachmaninoff introduced in the Second Concerto, as well as his previously untried methods of instrumentation, inaugurated a new period in his writing style which was destined to last for years. Whereas Rachmaninoff’s earlier compositions were praised primarily for their colorful harmonies, now, beginning with the Second Concerto and continuing with subsequent compositions, reviewers would point to Rachmaninoff’s gift for creating melodies. The melodic pattern became more precise and accomplished and attained a flexibility that was lacking in some of his earlier compositions.

Rachmaninoff had a special skill as a melodist. His songs contain some of the most hauntingly beautiful passages to be found in vocal literature. In transferring this talent to the keyboard, the composer managed to create a characteristically limpid,

⁵⁹ Piggot, 48.

nostalgic melodic line.⁶⁰

Harmonic features used by Rachmaninoff in his Second Concerto did not exceed those typical for late romanticism: as a base, he used the major-minor tonal system with broad use of alterations. However, the manner in which he used this system was different. The harmonies became smoother and calmer and he rejected some of the color effects which play an important role in his earlier compositions. In Rachmaninoff's harmony as well as in his melody, diversity of shadows are played out within an essentially unified and consistent setting. The harmony is characterized by long stays in the same key; all modulations are very smooth and gradual, without sudden changes to distant keys.

Like most of Rachmaninoff's piano music, the Second Concerto is very difficult technically and pianistically, which Rachmaninoff admits himself:

Rachmaninoff himself once said that his Second Concerto is more "uncomfortable" to play than his Third. This is a statement with which few professional pianists will agree, but he probably had in mind this very matter of close integration between piano and orchestra and the need for absolute rhythmic security (the fugato passage in the finale is a pitfall to this respect) rather than the degree of pianistic virtuosity required.⁶¹

Many years later, the discussion continues among musicologists and performers: which one of the two concertos is more accomplished, more popular, more difficult to play—the Second or the Third Piano Concerto? The answer is yet to be determined.

60 Gillespie, John. *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music*. New York. Wadsworth Publishing Co. Inc., 1965.

61 Piggot, 48.

**CHAPTER IV. PIANO CONCERTO NO. 3, D-MINOR, OP. 30, 1909: A
CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT**

The new concerto mirrored the best sides of [Rachmaninoff's] creative power—sincerity, simplicity, and clarity of musical thought. . . it has a freshness of inspiration that does not aspire to the discovery of new paths; it has a sharp and concise form as well as simple and brilliant orchestration, qualities that will secure both outer success and enduring love by musicians and public alike.⁶²
Barrie Martyn

The Third Concerto is considered to be one of Rachmaninoff's most successful creations. Rachmaninoff wrote it in early 1909 especially for his first American tour, which was to take place later that year. The Concerto was first performed on November 28, 1909 in New York City with the New York Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Walter Damrosch. A few weeks later, on January 16, 1909, it was performed again, this time with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Gustav Mahler.

From 1909 to 1917, Rachmaninoff also composed such works as the symphonic poem *Isle of The Dead*, Op. 29, (1909), the set of *Thirteen Piano*

⁶² Martyn, 210.

Preludes, Op. 32, (1910), *The Bells*, Op. 35, (1913), the *Piano Sonata No. 2*, Op. 36, (1913), and *Nine Etudes-tableaux*, Op. 39, (1917).

Most of these pieces—like the Third Piano Concerto—were completed at Rachmaninoff's estate, Ivanovka. Rachmaninoff described Ivanovka's importance to him:

To that place [Ivanovka] I was always attracted, whether to get complete rest and quietude, or to be able to concentrate on my work for which that quietude is very helpful.⁶³

After the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, his estate was overtaken by the Bolsheviks and Rachmaninoff had to leave his beloved home.

During Rachmaninoff's lifetime, the Third Piano Concerto was performed infrequently because only a few pianists could perform it adequately. Technically, the solo parts of the Third Concerto are extremely difficult for the performer, demanding high virtuosity. Rachmaninoff used all the existing features of the virtuoso technique in this Concerto—double notes, runs, polyphony, massive chords, *martellato* and many other technically difficult features. Rachmaninoff had enormously big hands and a remarkable technique. For his level of pianism, his own compositions were not difficult, but for pianists of his day, the Third Concerto proved an intimidating work. Today as well, Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto is probably one of the most problematic pieces to play, and therefore one of the most desirable to master. The recent film *Shine*, for example, relates the experience of a pianist who virtually sacrifices his emotional and physical

⁶³ Sokolova, O.I. *Sergei Vassilievich Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Muzika, 1983, p. 62.

health in order to reach perfection playing Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto.

Barrie Martyn, author of the book *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, states that response to the Third Concerto fell short of Rachmaninoff's expectations.

Although Rachmaninoff dedicated it to Josef Hofmann, that renowned artist never performed it. When Rachmaninoff first played it through to him, in November 1911, Hofmann, whose small hands would in any case have found some of the massive figurations of the piano layout difficult to handle, thought the work rather cut up. . . Of course, the composer frequently played it himself, both in Russia and abroad, over the next thirty years, but it was not until the advent of Vladimir Horowitz, who made the work his own, that the work took off. . . Rachmaninoff told Horowitz that his only success with the concerto had been his performance with Mahler. Musicians loved it but not the audiences or the critics. "They thought it was too complicated."⁶⁴

Another source says:

During the earlier years of its existence this now extremely popular concerto was seldom performed. This was not because it lacked any of those notable qualities—romantic melody, virtuoso piano writing, exciting rhythms—which had at once placed the Second Concerto among the first half dozen of the world's most beloved piano concertos, but because the sheer physical staying power and digital brilliance needed for an adequate performance of it were too demanding for all but a few pianists of the time. Rachmaninoff's own playing of the work set a standard other pianists rarely cared to challenge. (Even its dedicatee, Josef Hofmann, considered by Rachmaninoff the greatest pianist of the day, never assayed it). It was not until the 1930s that the extraordinary mastery of piano-playing (mastery which encompasses every subtlety of tone-gradation

64 Ibid., 216-217.

and pedaling as well as formidable manual dexterity and untiring muscles) found adequate representation in such pianists as Vladimir Horowitz, the short-lived Alexander Helman, Walter Gieseking (whose amazing performance of the concerto Rachmaninoff admired more than any others) and later some of the younger pianists of the British and Soviet Schools. Even today it remains a testing undertaking, but with a new race of virtuosi who can meet this trial of strength and emerge from the experience unscathed, the Third Concerto is now almost as frequently played as the Second.⁶⁵

The Concerto starts immediately with the main theme, which is prepared only by a simple accompaniment-like orchestral introduction, rather than by the impressive, brilliant introduction typical of Rachmaninoff's other Concertos. The theme is a simple and long melody reminiscent of folk songs or ancient church chants, in particular an old Russian chant, "Thy tomb, O Saviour, soldiers guarding":

Example 19a. Third Concerto, main theme.⁶⁶



⁶⁵ Piggot, 51.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 50.

Example 19b. “Thy tomb, O Saviour, soldiers guarding.”⁶⁷



However, Rachmaninoff himself would always deny any such correspondence:

The first theme of my Third Concerto is neither borrowed from folkloric nor from liturgical sources. It just created itself. I just wanted to sing this melody on the piano, the same way a singer would sing it.⁶⁸

Gina Bachauer, a well-known pianist and a student of Rachmaninoff recalls:

It has been often suggested that the first theme in the Third Piano Concerto was taken from an old Russian folk song or liturgical melody. Rachmaninoff, to the contrary, told me that “the first theme of this concerto wrote itself. When I was composing this theme, I was thinking only of sound. I wanted a melody that would sing on the piano and an accompaniment that would not overpower the piano melody.”⁶⁹

Rachmaninoff’s presentation of this theme is quite unusual. The theme is first played by the soloist in simple octaves—one note in each hand. It is accompanied by a constant orchestral pulse which gives the theme considerable

⁶⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁸ Kandinsky, 91.

⁶⁹ Bachauer, 12.

rhythmical energy:

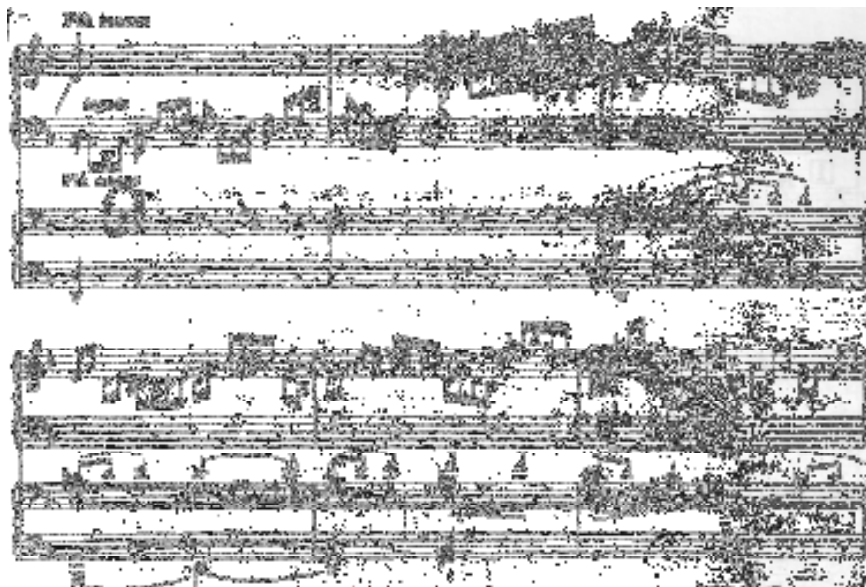
Example 20a. First movement, first theme, first appearance. ⁷⁰

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, labeled 'Pianoforte I' and 'Pianoforte II'. The score is for the first movement, first theme, first appearance. The tempo is 'Allegro ma non tanto' and the dynamics are 'p' (piano), 'dim' (diminuendo), and 'pp' (pianissimo). The score shows the first three measures of the piece, with Piano I playing a simple melody and Piano II playing a complex, rhythmic accompaniment.

In its second appearance, the theme is played by the orchestra accompanied by light piano figurations:

⁷⁰ Rachmaninoff. *Third Concerto for the Piano, Op. 30*. Reduction for two pianos. Schirmer, Inc., 1976, p. 2.

Example 20b. First movement, first theme, second appearance.⁷¹



This main subject is very important for the dramatic conception of the entire Concerto: not only is the main subject extensively developed in the first movement, it also returns in the second and third movements:

The three movements of the Third Concerto are interrelated, with motifs from the first recurring in the second and third movements. In the second, it occurs most clearly in the F-sharp minor waltz-like section near the end, and in the third, most obviously in the central E-flat section and in the D minor preparation for the final climax. These carefully positioned reappearances help create a highly unified and architectonic design.⁷²

The second subject comprises two images that are similar melodically, but contrast emotionally. The first image is a virtual dialog between an agitated

⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

⁷² Karin E. Thompson. *Third Piano Concerto, Op. 30*. Concert Notes. International Rachmaninoff festival conference, p. 51.

orchestra and a more settled soloist—disturbed and anxious sharp staccatos from the strings alternating with calmer answers from the piano:

Example 21a. First movement, second subject, first theme ⁷³

The second image is one of dream-like serenity, created by a lyrical, tender and charming melody:

⁷³ Rachmaninoff. *Third Concerto for the Piano, Op. 30*. Reduction for two pianos. Schirmer, Inc., 1976, p. 9.

Example 21b. First movement, second subject, second theme⁷⁴

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 40-43) shows the piano part with dynamics *rit.*, *a tempo*, and *espresso*, and the violin part with *rit.* and *a tempo*. The second system (measures 44-47) shows the piano part with *poco rit.*, *a tempo e un poco cresc.*, and *dim.*, and the violin part with *poco rit.*, *a tempo*, *p dolce*, and *dim.*

The development of the first movement is based predominantly on the main theme and culminates in a big dramatic climax similar to the tragic climaxes of Tchaikovsky's music. It concludes with a large and unusual piano solo cadenza:

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

Example 22. First movement, cadenza.⁷⁵

The image shows a musical score for a piano cadenza. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto' and the mood is 'Ostinato'. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p', 'dim.', and 'cresc.'. The second system also has three staves, with the top two staves continuing the piano part and the bottom staff being empty. The word 'Cadenza' is written above the bottom staff in the second system.

Customarily, the cadenza functions solely to demonstrate the virtuoso abilities of the performer. Here, however, the cadenza's more important role is developmental: it leads us out of the tragic and sorrowful mood of the first movement to a victorious and joyful state. Pianist Gina Bachauer recalls:

The cadenza in the first movement of this concerto is one of the most brilliant cadenzas ever written for the piano and, as played by Rachmaninoff, absolutely breathtaking.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁶ Bachauer, 14.

Rachmaninoff originally wrote two cadenzas for this concerto. Although the second version was a first played only rarely, its popularity has grown and it is now played more and more often.

The second movement, *Adagio*, Rachmaninoff called *Intermezzo*. It is a group of variations on a choral theme, full of simple sorrow. This theme is played by the oboe, recalling the Russian folk pipe and transporting us to the villages and fields of the Russian countryside. When the piano later takes up the theme from the orchestra, it does not change the musical material, but brings out new colors:

Example 23. Second movement, main theme⁷⁷

34

II
Intermezzo

Pianoforte II

Adagio *mf* *espress.*

24 *ben tenuto*

dim.

25 *Un poco più mosso*

dim. *mf* *cresc.* *mf* *dim.*

Piano I

Più mosso

Più mosso *mf* *dim.*

Interestingly, the variations develop only the first part of the main theme.

As a result, the variations are not comprised of the sequential changes customary

⁷⁷ Ibid., 34.

for variations. Rather the variations function more as an improvisation on the theme, illustrated by the abrupt key change from A major to D-flat major and subsequent modulations to distant keys such as F minor, B minor and E-flat minor.

When all the variations are completed, a new musical image appears: a graceful and dream-like waltz:

Example 24. Second movement, middle section⁷⁸

As Tchaikovsky had done in his First Concerto, so too here Rachmaninoff inserts a fast episode—the waltz—into a slow second movement. The integration of a fast section with slow ones, moves the concerto form towards the symphony.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 42.

The second movement concludes as it began, with an orchestral solo, thus making the movement's form remotely similar to ABA.

The third movement, *Finale*, is:

. . . one of the most dashing and exciting pieces of music ever composed for piano and orchestra. Every possibility of the modern piano is exploited in it: the tempestuous opening theme in D minor; the rhythmically urgent theme in C and its variant, the happy, soaring melody in G—all are carried forward on wave after wave of dazzling passage-work, backed by an ever widening range of pianistic resonances, by Rachmaninoff's characteristic rhythmic verve, and by effective orchestration.⁷⁹

As in the finale of the Second Concerto, the main subject of this third movement in the Third Concerto is a very energetic and rhythmical theme, consisting of heavy chords in the piano:

79 Piggot, 52.

Example 25. Third movement, main subject.⁸⁰

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, labeled 'Pianoforte I' and 'Pianoforte II'. The tempo is 'Allegretto' and the time signature is 3/4. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the beginning of the main subject, with Pianoforte I playing a melodic line and Pianoforte II providing a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system continues the piece, showing further development of the melodic and harmonic material. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings like 'ff'.

The second subject, like the first theme, is also very bright and joyous, but more lyrical than the first subject:

80 Rachmaninoff. *Third Concerto for the Piano, Op. 30*. Reduction for two pianos. Schirmer, Inc., 1976, p. 47.

Example 26. Third movement, second subject.⁸¹

The image shows a page of a musical score for the third movement, second subject, marked "Meno mosso" and page 53. The score is in E-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a piano introduction with "dim." and "p" markings, followed by a series of variations. The first variation is marked "mf" and "p". The second variation is marked "pp". The third variation is marked "mf" and "p". The fourth variation is marked "mf" and "p". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

The middle episode of the third movement is quite unusual, being set in a key—E-flat major—that is so distant from the movement’s home key of D minor. This middle episode is a “mini” set of four variations. The theme of the variations includes material heard earlier: portions of both the second subject of the first movement and the main subject of the third movement. A short interlude between the second and third variations also include material heard earlier: the first movement’s first and second subjects. As can be seen, then, the Finale’s middle section plays a significant role in the dramaturgical concept of the entire Concerto, serving to interrelate all the movements.

Following the four variations, both the main and second subject of the

⁸¹ Ibid. 53.

third movement are heard again, with the second subject now being presented in F major, rather than in G major, the key in which it was presented in the exposition. This last section propels the movement towards its brilliant conclusion, a feature similar to the closing of the *Finale* of the Second Concerto. Here in the Third Concerto, the climax is a majestic hymn based on the second subject:

Example 27. Third movement, climax. ⁸²

The image displays a musical score for the climax of the third movement, featuring piano and violin parts. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes a piano part (left) and a violin part (right). The piano part begins with the tempo marking 'Vivacissimo (♩ = 120)' and the dynamic 'ff molto marcato'. The violin part starts with 'Un poco meno mosso' and 'mf'. The second system continues with the piano part marked 'Vivacissimo (♩ = 120)' and 'ff', and the violin part marked 'Un poco meno mosso' and 'cresc.'. The score concludes with a section marked 'Tempo precedente' and 'ff', indicating a return to the previous tempo and a fortissimo dynamic. The score is numbered 74 in the first system.

As in the Second Concerto, the Third Concerto *Finale* concludes with a coda that consists of a rapid sequence of octaves and chords in the piano.

Despite the similarity between the codas of the Second and Third Concertos, the coda of the Third is obviously more accomplished:

⁸² Ibid., 77.

The coda of the Second Concerto is static; it is simply yet another statement of a theme we already know, its sole distinction being the fact that it is noisier than its predecessors. In the Third Concerto it is not only the tune that impresses; it is the knowledge that we have felt it grow from the opening of the work, and that it has been realized the moment for which the Concerto was waiting and without which the work must fail.⁸³

Many sources agree that the Third Piano Concerto is the true highlight of Rachmaninoff's compositional career. It is free of the weaknesses that one finds in his earlier concertos, such as imperfections in form and an overuse of repeats:

Anything less similar in form to the Second Concerto it would be difficult to imagine. Where the Second is straight forward and even commonplace—it is not without some rough edges—the Third is a masterpiece of conciseness.⁸⁴

In the Third Piano Concerto, dramatic contrasts increase and deepen, lyricism becomes more restrained, sometimes even severe. There is no dream-like and love-like passion here, as there is in the Second Concerto. Whereas the Second Concerto is characterized by a complete mixing and blending of piano and orchestra, in the Third Concerto the piano solo unconditionally dominates. The form of the Third Concerto combines rhapsody with symphony: the solo cadenzas for the piano are perfectly blended with the development of the form. The piano alone presents the climax points of all the main themes, except for the theme of the second movement. It is as if the orchestra is suddenly shutting down, giving way to the soloist. The piano is not competing with the orchestra here; it is

83 Culshaw, 84.

84 Ibid.

dictating.

The Third Concerto was so skillfully written that one would expect Rachmaninoff's next Piano Concerto to have the same, if not better, success:

The Third Concerto. . . is the ultimate in romantic virtuoso pieces—the kind of work which it would be extremely difficult to follow with another essay in the same manner. Rachmaninoff must have been very conscious of this. He must have realized that in his next concerto, should he ever write another, he would have to adopt quite a different approach to the form, and that in following a completely unfamiliar path he might meet pitfalls which would be difficult to negotiate. It was perhaps the reason that so many years elapsed between the composition of the Third Concerto and its successor, and that when the Fourth Concerto appeared it caused surprise and failed to please admirers of the earlier Concertos.⁸⁵

85 Piggot, 53.

**CHAPTER V. PIANO CONCERTO NO. 4, G MINOR, OP. 40, 1926: A
NEW MUSICAL LANGUAGE**

Those who wish to understand Rachmaninoff's limitations should study the Fourth Concerto. It shows, perhaps more clearly than other of his works, his powers and his weaknesses. There are moments of blinding beauty, and there are pages and pages of arid, empty virtuoso writing not worthy of his lesser piano pieces.⁸⁶

John Culshaw

The Fourth Concerto was completed 33 years after the First Piano Concerto. Although Rachmaninoff started writing the Fourth Concerto in 1917 before he left Russia, he did not complete it until 1926, when he was living in the United States. It was dedicated to Nikolai Medtner and its first performance took place in 1927 by the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Leopold Stokowsky, with Rachmaninoff at the piano. After leaving Russia, Rachmaninoff did not compose for almost ten years, probably due to his heavy concertizing and post-emigration depression. Although he wrote numerous piano transcriptions, his only original compositions during those years were the Fourth Concerto and the *Three Russian Songs*, Op. 41, written the same year as the Fourth Concerto.

⁸⁶ Culshaw, 95.

Unfortunately, despite the many new features Rachmaninoff brought to his Fourth Piano Concerto—more economical orchestration, new harmonies, humorous motives— it did not have as much success as either the Second or Third Piano Concertos.

Considered a “terrible failure” by some critics, this concerto prompted John Culshaw to write in his book *Rachmaninoff: The Man and His Music*:

The Fourth then is the weakest of the Concertos. It shows the composer in an uncertain state of mind. We must remember that twenty years separate the Third and Fourth Concertos, and that at the time of the composition of the latter, Rachmaninoff’s creative powers were showing almost definite decline. One wonders, on hearing this work, exactly what made the composer decide to write another Concerto after so long an interval.⁸⁷

Many Soviet musicologists criticized the Fourth concerto as well, relating its “weakness” to the composer’s emigration from Russia. In fact, in general most of the Soviet research works written during the Soviet era state that Rachmaninoff’s best works were composed while he lived in Russia. For instance, a noted musicologist and the author of several books on Rachmaninoff, Nikolai Solovtsev, wrote in his book, *Piano Concertos by Rachmaninoff*:

This concerto cannot begin to be compared with his two previous concertos, created in Russia— it has strong and deeply emotional parts, but in general it does not rise to the level of Rachmaninoff’s best compositions. Rachmaninoff’s famous gift for writing melodies is present here, but the melodies are not so bright as in the Second and Third Concertos. Also, the work lacks integrity of form. Because of excessive harmonic and melodic artificiality and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

occasional harshness, the music loses its naturalness. The piano writing makes a mixed impression here— it close to his early compositions in its excessive elaboration , but, on the other hand, the piano texture becomes somewhat dry and colorless. This is especially obvious in the first and the third movements, less so in the second movement.

Other Soviet scholars—for instance, Yuriy Keldysh in his book *Rachmaninoff and His Time*—even go so far as to omit from their research the Fourth Concerto and other compositions written after Rachmaninoff's emigration, stating that Rachmaninoff composed nothing of significance after 1917, the year of the composer's departure from Russia.

The first movement, *Allegro vivace: Alla breve*, starts with a theme more typical of Rachmaninoff's codas and climaxes than of his introductions. The long, sweeping melody of the piano is presented in a dense chordal texture supported by a rich orchestral accompaniment which provides the harmonic base:

Example 28. First movement, main subject.⁸⁸

The image displays a musical score for the first movement, main subject, of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 4. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system features a piano part on the left and an orchestral part on the right. The piano part begins with a long, melodic line. The orchestral part includes woodwinds and strings. The second system continues the piano and orchestral parts, showing a dialog between the piano and woodwinds. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The first movement opens with a long melody which combines a characteristically Rachmaninovian mixture of energy and pessimism. The theme almost certainly dates from 1917, and is doubtless a reflection of the composer's state of mind during that last anxious autumn in Russia.⁸⁹

The second subject combines transparent solo piano writing with sophisticated orchestral harmonization: it is a dialog between the piano and woodwinds:

⁸⁸ Rachmaninoff. *Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40*. Reduction for two pianos. New corrected edition. Boosey and Hawkes, 2003, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Piggot, 54.

Example 29. First movement, second subject.⁹⁰

It still has Rachmaninoff's typical warmth and sincerity, but, compared to other Rachmaninoff second subjects, it sounds tired.

The development reveals and explores both main themes: the first and the second subject. In the way it expands and contracts, with a growing energy bringing us to a climax, the development is similar to the development of the first movement of the Third Concerto. But its climax is not so tragic and emotionally deep as that in the Third Concerto. However, as in the Third Concerto, so too here

⁹⁰ Rachmaninoff. *Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40*. Reduction for two pianos. New corrected edition. Boosey&Hawkes, 2003, p. 8.

the development plays the role of the recapitulation, with the recapitulation playing the role of the coda.

The second movement, *Largo*, is a conversation between the orchestra and the soloist. Slow and unadorned, the sequence of precisely rhythmical chords in the orchestra recalls the measured pace of a funeral procession:

Those who expect a Rachmaninoff slow movement to sound something like a glorified Chopin nocturne will be disappointed by the strangely austere *largo* of the Fourth Concerto. It is, for the most part, very simple in texture, and Medtner was probably right when he suggested that it [the second movement] might have some extra-musical inspiration such as a solemn religious procession. Rachmaninoff freely admitted that he was often inspired by a picture or a poem, although he usually kept these sources of his inspiration in close secret.⁹¹

With the entrance of the piano, the theme gains another character—a lone mourner's sorrowful and pensive recitative:

⁹¹ Ibid., 55.

Example 30. Second movement. ⁹²

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, PIANO I and PIANO II, in the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40. The tempo is marked 'Largo'. The score is in 2/4 time. PIANO I has a melodic line with various dynamics (p, pp, mf) and articulations (div., poco cresc., mf espressivo). PIANO II provides harmonic support with chords and arpeggios, marked 'pp misterioso'. The score includes measures 33 and 34.

In the third movement, the musical language becomes overly complicated.

Its harmonies often lack cohesion—very simple harmonies suddenly alternate either with sophisticated harmonies more typical of impressionism or with the

⁹² Rachmaninoff. *Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40*. Reduction for two pianos. New corrected edition. Boosey & Hawkes, 2003, p. 32.

harsh, sharp harmonies of expressionism. The dominating image of the *Finale* is its first subject: a sharp and precisely rhythmical theme. Etude-like and brief, this theme features light and rapid runs:

Example 31. Third movement, main subject.⁹³

The musical score for Example 31, Third movement, main subject, is presented in three systems. The first system is marked with a box containing the number 41 and the tempo marking *leggiero*. The right-hand part (treble clef) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a rapid, light run of eighth notes. The left-hand part (bass clef) provides a simple accompaniment of quarter notes. The second system is also marked with a box containing the number 41 and a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The right-hand part is silent, and the left-hand part continues the accompaniment, with a *staccato* marking. The third system continues the rapid run in the right hand and the accompaniment in the left hand.

The contrasting second subject is a singing, lyrical piano melody similar to some of Rachmaninoff’s art songs, in particular, “How fair this spot”:

93 *Ibid.*, 41.

Example 32a. Third movement, second subject.⁹⁴

The image displays a musical score for the second subject of the third movement. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features a complex texture with many beamed notes and rests, and is marked with 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'div.' (divisi). The vocal line is marked 'cantabile' and contains several notes with fingerings (1-5) and slurs. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with similar complex textures. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

94 Ibid., 50-51.

Example 32b. "How fair this spot.", Op. 27, No. 7⁹⁵

„Здѣсь хорошо.“ “How fair this spot!”

Слова Г. Галиной.
Words by G. Galina.
English Version by Rosa Newmarch.

Сопрано.
Soprano.
(Original.)

С. Рахманиновъ, Соч. №7.
S. Rachmaninoff, Op. 27 No. 7.

Moderato. *p dolce e espressivo*

Canto.

Здѣсь хо - ро - но... Вагля - ня,
How fair this spot! I gaze

Piano.

вдѣ - ли Ог - немъ го - рятъ рѣ - ка; Цвѣтнимъ ко - ромъ лу - га зер -
to where The gold - en brook runs by. The fields are all in - laid with

This song-like second theme is also similar to the main subject of the first movement, as well as to the main subjects of his other piano concertos. But unlike the other concertos, where a lyrical theme determines the mood of the whole movement, here in the Fourth Concerto's finale the themes that dominate are dark, anxious, and mysterious ones. Yet, as he has done before, Rachmaninoff concludes the *Finale* not with one of these ominous themes, but with joyful and victorious music. At the end of the movement, he repeats the majestic and hymn-like theme of the first movement, thus concluding the Concerto cyclically with one of his typically brilliant endings.

Rachmaninoff later revised this Concerto, making it shorter and more

⁹⁵ Rachmaninoff. *How fair this spot*, Op. 21, No. 7. Complete Songs for voice and piano. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998, p. 103.

compact: he reduced the total length by 114 bars. “After 1 ½ months of hard work I have finished the corrections to my concerto. . . The first twelve pages have been rewritten, as also the whole coda,” states the composer in the summer of 1927. Later, still dissatisfied with this composition, Rachmaninoff decided to revise it even further, but this revision also failed to secure the Concerto’s success:

In the late thirties Rachmaninoff had notions of returning to work on it again, evidently still believing that its failure was mainly due to weakness in the structure of the third movement. When he at last found time for the work, in the summer of 1941, he took the revision of 1927 further, reducing the work by another 78 bars, concentrating particularly on the latter half of the last movement but also tinkering generally with minor details of piano and orchestra layout. However, the reception accorded the revised version was as disappointing as before, and after seven performances in American cities the composer tried no more. The recording he made of the work in December 1941 was his last performance of it.⁹⁶

However, despite the Fourth Concerto’s shortcomings and overall disappointment as a piano concerto, the work can be seen as playing a highly significant role in Rachmaninoff’s compositional career. The new features Rachmaninoff introduced in the Fourth Concerto—e. g., more economical orchestrations, new harmonies, humorous motives—were to be more fully developed in his last concert work, *The Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. Thus the Fourth Concerto can be seen as a preparation for, and link to, the Rhapsody.

⁹⁶ Martin, 300.

**CHAPTER VI. RHAPSODY ON A THEME BY PAGANINI, OP. 43, 1935:
THE PERFECT END OF THE JOURNEY**

Its form is admirably planned, its scoring is a triumph of skill, and its solo part as rewarding to play as to hear; added to which it has wit, charm, more than a dash of romance, and an unfailing rhythmic excitement. Even people who dislike Rachmaninoff's music in general are known to admire this work: they cannot, in honesty, deny the originality of its conception or its brilliantly successful execution.

Patrick Piggot⁹⁷

In 1935, eight years after the fiasco of the Fourth Concerto in 1927, Rachmaninoff created the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 43—his last work in the concerto genre. From 1927 to 1941, Rachmaninoff also composed *Variations on a Theme by Corelli*, Op. 42 (1931) for solo piano, his *Symphony No. 3*, Op. 44 (1935-1936), *Symphonic Dances*, Op. 45 (1940), and revised his *Piano Sonata No. 2* (1931), the *Piano Concerto No. 4* (1941), and four of his early piano pieces, (1940).

Composed in 1934 at his new home, “Villa Senar” in Hertenstein, Switzerland, the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* was first performed in

⁹⁷ Piggot, 56.

Baltimore on November 7, 1934, with Rachmaninoff himself as soloist, and the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowsky. The premiere was a huge success. Later the same year, the Rhapsody was recorded for the RCA label with the same orchestra and conductor, and Rachmaninoff again as soloist. Later that same season, Rachmaninoff performed the Rhapsody six more times in the United States, in such cities as New York, Chicago, Minneapolis, Washington DC, St. Louis, and twice in Europe—in Manchester and London. In total, Rachmaninoff performed the Rhapsody 46 times throughout his career

This composition was so accomplished that it prompted many critics to praise it. Even musicologist John Culshaw, author of the book *Rachmaninoff: The Man and His Music* who was famous for his harsh criticism of Rachmaninoff's concertos, was fascinated with this composition:

... in 1934 he deserted the Concerto form and wrote the Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, which from many points of view surpasses anything he wrote for piano and orchestra. After 1934 he wrote no more in that medium because, one suspects, he dare not; the Paganini Rhapsody contained all he had tried to express since the Third Concerto. And it is a wonderful thing that whereas the public has shown no interest in the lush emptiness of the Fourth, they have taken Rhapsody to their hearts.⁹⁸

The Rhapsody is sometimes called Rachmaninoff's Fifth Piano Concerto, because it is a large composition for piano and orchestra. But Rachmaninoff himself did not name this work a Concerto: the Rhapsody is a set of variations, a very rare compositional form for piano and orchestra. Only a few other composers

98 Culshaw, 95.

explored this genre: for example, Liszt in his *Tötentanz* for piano and orchestra; Franck in the *Symphonic Variations* for piano and orchestra; and Tchaikovsky in his *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for cello and orchestra.

For the main theme of his Rhapsody, Rachmaninoff used Niccolò Paganini's famous violin *Caprice in A minor*, No. 24, which was composed in 1805:

Example 33. Violin Caprice No. 24⁹⁹



This Paganini theme became a popular source for many composers. The most famous works it inspired which predate Rachmaninoff are the final etude of Liszt's *Grandes études d'après Paganini* and two volumes of *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*, Op. 35, by Brahms. Many authors contemporary to Rachmaninoff used this theme for their variation sets as well: for instance, the Polish composer, Lutoslawski, wrote a set of variations for two pianos (1941) and Boris Blacher composed a set of variations for orchestra. Since the Paganini theme had already been used by Liszt and Brahms, it might seem that it would be difficult to add anything new, but Rachmaninoff succeeded in treating it

⁹⁹ Paganini, N. *Caprice in A minor*, Op 1. No. 24. www.everynote.com

differently, showing it from a different angle:

The composer began with the same theme that Brahms used in his celebrated set of thirty variations, the last of Paganini's twenty-four published caprices for solo violin. Paganini wrote variations of his own. Rachmaninoff followed in the footsteps of both men, his work consisting of twenty-four Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra. Paganini considered only the violin. Brahms committed his studies solely to the piano. Rachmaninoff wrote for the whole ensemble.¹⁰⁰

For his Rhapsody's secondary theme, Rachmaninoff also turned to an earlier source, the no less famous *Dies irae*, which he employed as a contrast to the more light-hearted Paganini tune. The Rhapsody is not the only time Rachmaninoff used the *Dies Irae*:

. . . he had one especial favourite which appears frequently in his music: it is the plain-song melody "Dies irae." One can imagine that in this wonderful theme Rachmaninoff saw the quintessence of his message, and its quiet, terrible entrance in *The Isle of the Dead* is one of his finest inspirations.¹⁰¹

Rachmaninoff had also envisioned the Rhapsody as a ballet about Paganini. He discussed this idea with the famous choreographer Mikhail Fokine, who choreographed a ballet to the Rhapsody in 1939.

Rachmaninoff imagined the ballet as a story about love, art, an evil spirit, and above all, as a story about Paganini himself, "the demonic violinist."

In spite of insisting that this work is not programmatic music, he evidently did feel that a program could be attached to it. For in one of his letters to Fokine, great Russian choreographer, who

100 Concert Review: *Rachmaninoff and Two New Works*. Musical America, January 10, 1935.

101 Culshaw, 51.

wanted to create a ballet on these Paganini variations, Rachmaninoff described each variation in detail, as a visual picture based on the Paganini legend—i.e., Paganini’s selling his soul to the devil in exchange for perfection in his art and the love of a woman.¹⁰²

As Rachmaninoff himself described the ballet’s scenario:

Why not recreate the legend of Paganini selling his soul to the evil spirit for perfection in art and also for a woman? All the variations on *Dies irae* represent the evil spirit. All those in the middle, from variations 11 to 18, are the love episodes. Paganini appears (for the first time) in the “Theme” and, defeated, appears for the last time in the 23rd variation—the first 12 bars—after which, until the end, it is the triumph of his conquerors. The first appearance of the Evil Spirit is the 7th variation, where at figure 19 there can be a dialog with Paganini, when his theme appears alongside *Dies irae*. Variations 8, 9 and 10 are the progress of the Evil Spirit. The 11th variation is the transition to the realm of love; the 12th variation, the minuet, is the first appearance of the woman, up to the 18th variation. The 13th variation is the first appearance of the woman with Paganini. The 19th variation is the triumph of Paganini’s art, his diabolical pizzicato. It would be good to represent Paganini with a violin, not a real one of course, but some kind of made-up, fantastical one. Another thing: it seems to me that at the end of the play some of the characters [representing] the evil spirit in the struggle for the woman and art should look like caricatures, absolute caricatures, of Paganini himself.¹⁰³

However, the program of the ballet is not, of course, intended to be the program of the Rhapsody. The music of the Rhapsody is typical of Rachmaninoff’s late style—very energetic, masculine, sometimes severe, dark colored, with a strong and sharp rhythmical pulse. One also recognizes images in

102 Bachauer, 12.

103 Martyn, 328.

the Rhapsody that were typical for Rachmaninoff's second subjects: soft, lyrical, romantic melodies.

Rachmaninoff first called the Rhapsody, *Symphonic Variations on a Theme by Paganini*. He wrote to his cousin Sophia Satina:

I have not written to you in a long time, but from the very day of my return to Lake Como in Monte Carlo, that is 1 July, I've been hard at work "from morning till night", as they say. The work is quite a large one and I finished it only yesterday, late in the evening. . . the piece I have completed is written for piano and orchestra and is about 20-25 minutes long. But it is not a "concerto", and its name is "Symphonic Variations on a Theme by Paganini."¹⁰⁴

Rachmaninoff tried yet another, even more elaborate interim title—*Fantasia for piano and orchestra in the form of variations on a theme by Paganini*—before settling on the title by which we know it today.

The Rhapsody's structure—comprising an introduction, 24 variations and a coda—is reminiscent of the traditional three-movement concerto. The Rhapsody's first ten variations symbolize the first movement; the 11th variation is a transition to the slow movement, which is represented by variations 12-18; the remaining variations comprise the last movement.

The orchestra here is quite large, but Rachmaninoff uses it economically, a tendency derived from the Fourth Concerto. The Rhapsody has more humorous motives than any of his previous compositions.

The Rhapsody's introduction is only nine measures long and leads directly into the first variation. Only after the first variation is completed is the theme

104 Ibid., 326.

heard by itself:

The very ghost of Paganini—pale, angular, emaciated—is conjured up for us by the masterly opening of the work, in which the theme is anticipated by a “skeletonised” version of it—a trimmed down outline which is played by the orchestra and then used by the piano to add bony edges to the theme itself...¹⁰⁵

The first six variations explore and develop the rhythmic aspects of the theme. The piano writing, breathtaking in its simplicity, gradually gains complexity. There is a constant dialog between the piano and the orchestra which always remains in strict tempo.

Dies irae appears for the first time in variation 7, where it is presented by the piano in chant-like and plain harmonies, in counterpoint with fragments of the Paganini theme in the cellos and bassoons:

Example 34. Variation 7.¹⁰⁶

The image shows a musical score for Variation 7, divided into two parts: PIANO and ORCHESTRA. The tempo is marked "Meno mosso, a tempo moderato". The PIANO part is in the upper system, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It is marked "mf poco pesante" and consists of a series of chords. The ORCHESTRA part is in the lower system, with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It is marked "p" and consists of a series of notes, with a "tra basso" label at the end.

105 Piggot, 57.

106 Martyn, 329.

The tempo slows to *Moderato*. The *Dies irae* theme reappears in variations 10, 22 and 24, but this does not mean that the Rhapsody becomes a set of variations on both themes; rather the Paganini theme remains the main theme of the work. Variation 8 is built completely on the Paganini theme and resumes the initial tempo, while variation 9 is very complex, with descending piano triplets played by both hands two octaves apart, accompanied by *col legno* strings and a drum. In the midst of this complexity, the theme is almost lost. Variation 10 combines the Paganini theme in the orchestra and the *Dies irae* in the piano, where it is presented in octaves:

Example 35. Variation 10¹⁰⁷

VAR. X (♩, ♩):
 a2 poco marcato

Clarineti I, II (in B)
 Fagotti I, II
 I, II
 Corni (in F)
 III, IV
 Flauto
 Violini I
 Violini II
 Viola
 Violoncelli
 Contrabbassi

27 poco a poco cresc.
 Flauti I, II
 Oboi I, II
 Clarineti I, II (in B)
 Fagotti I, II
 I, II
 Corni (in F)
 III, IV
 Flauto
 Violini I
 Violini II
 Viola
 Violoncelli
 Contrabbassi

27 poco a poco cresc.
 poco a poco cresc.

R1 F 101

The variation grows to a climax with *ad libitum* piano and an inverted

Dies irae in the woodwinds.

107 Rachmaninoff. *Rapsodie sur in theme de Paganini, Op. 43, pour Piano et Orchestre*.
 Miniature Score. Miami: Warner Bros Publications, 1985, pp. 31-32.

Variation 11 is improvisatory, with a cadenza for the soloist that is reminiscent of Liszt:

Example 36. Variation 11.¹⁰⁸

The image shows a musical score for Variation 11, consisting of two systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef staff. The first system includes markings for 'moderato', 'a capriccio', and 'a capriccio'. The second system includes a marking for 'a capriccio'. The score features various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

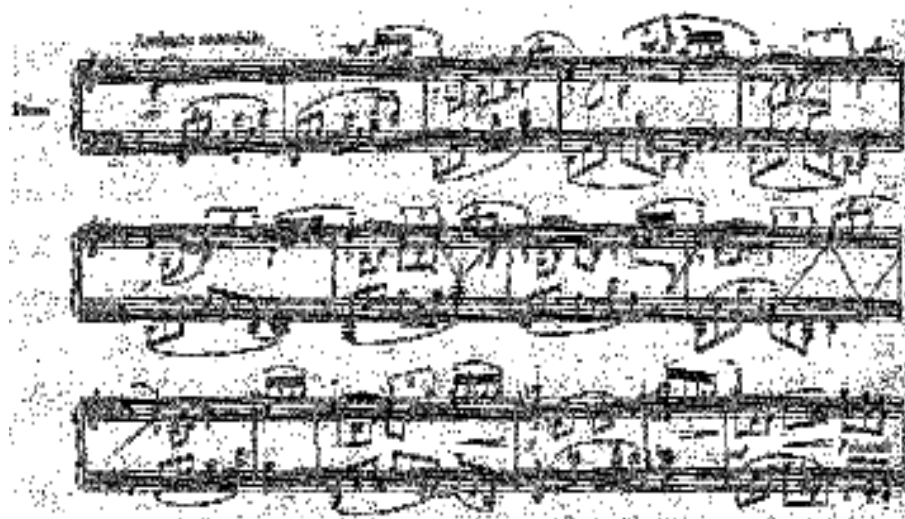
Starting with variation 12, the set develops greater tonal freedom. The key changes to D minor in variations 12 and 13. Variation 12 is an elegant minuet decorated with a cello solo. In variation 13, *Allegro*, the Paganini theme appears in 3/4 time with the full string orchestra accompanied by octaves and heavy chords in the piano. The key changes again—to F major—for the next two variations. Variation 14 consists of triplets derived from the Paganini theme, with a minimal role for the piano. In variation 15, on the other hand, although it is very similar to the previous variation, the role of the piano increases significantly. For fully half of the variation, the piano is completely unaccompanied and is only lightly supported by the orchestra for the remainder of the variation. In variation

108 Rachmaninoff. *Rapsodie sur in theme de Paganini, Op. 43, pour Piano et Orchestre*. Miniature Score. Miami: Warner Bros Publications, 1985, pp. 38-39.

16, *Allegretto*, the music moves to B-flat minor, with a time change to 2/4. This variation, which develops the figure from the first two bars of the Paganini theme, feels like chamber music—subtle and intimate. By the next variation, number 17, only three notes of the Paganini motif remain; they serve as the basis of the variation.

The constant key changes eventually bring us, in variation 18, to D-flat major—the key of love and romance. This variation, which is one of Rachmaninoff's most recognizable tunes, is an example of exquisitely beautiful and romantic music:

Example 37. Variation 18¹⁰⁹



109 Rachmaninoff. *Rapsodie sur in theme de Paganini, Op. 43, pour Piano et Orchestre*. Miniature Score. Miami: Warner Bros Publications, 1985, p. 70.

Written in the lyrical style so typical of Rachmaninoff's earlier concertos, but which had become almost forgotten in his late music, variation 18 illustrates the ease with which Rachmaninoff could return to his earlier style. According to Horowitz, Rachmaninoff said of variation 18: "I have composed this one for my manager; well, maybe this will save the piece."¹¹⁰ In fact, the ballet about Paganini concludes with this variation. In this variation, the Paganini theme is inverted and becomes an intensely romantic melody, with warm harmonies. The theme is presented three times—first, as a piano solo; next, by the violins and cellos with liberal piano accompaniment; lastly, by soaring strings with a richly harmonized piano accompaniment. The variation concludes with a coda echoing the Paganini motif.

Variations 19-24 correspond to the third movement of a three-movement concerto form and bring us back to the original key, A minor. The first three of these final variations (19, 20, 21) are all short and based on the rhythm of the main theme. In variation 22, *Marche au supplice*, the *Dies irae* reappears. According to many sources, this march-like variation was influenced by a piece called *Parade*, written in 1930 by the American composer-pianist Abram Chasins.

In the final two variations, the tempo gradually increases; each of these variations contains a small cadenza. In the Coda, the Paganini and *Dies irae* themes are masterfully merged, with the Paganini theme occurring in the piano and *Dies irae* in the brass and strings. The whole work appears to be heading towards the conclusion one would expect: a huge build-up leading to a likely

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 330.

resolution on an A minor chord. But suddenly the orchestra stops and the piano concludes the Rhapsody with a last fragment of the Paganini theme:

Example 38. Ending. ¹¹¹

The image displays a musical score for the ending of Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of notation. The first system shows the right hand playing a melodic line with a 'glissando' marking and the left hand playing a bass line. The second system shows the right hand playing a complex chordal texture and the left hand playing a bass line. The third system shows the right hand playing a melodic line and the left hand playing a bass line. The score concludes with a final chord.

111 Rachmaninoff. *Rapsodie sur in theme de Paganini, Op. 43, pour Piano et Orchestre*. Miniature Score. Miami: Warner Bros Publications, 1985, pp. 117-119.

CHAPTER VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The story of Rachmaninoff's life and career is perhaps one of the most unusual among the histories of famous composers. Not only did Rachmaninoff live in two centuries, surrounded by many dramatic changes in music, literature, theatre and art, but he also witnessed momentous change in Russia, as well as the impact of world events on Russian history: the end of the Tsars' Russia with the Revolution of 1917, and both the First and Second World Wars. Profoundly Russian, born in the deeply provincial town of Oneg and having spent his youth in Moscow, Rachmaninoff in 1917, had to undergo the upheaval of forced exile from his homeland. After some years of wandering, he eventually found his home in the United States. His extraordinary life ended in Pasadena, California, far from his beloved estate of Ivanovka.

Rachmaninoff was born in 1873, one year before the first performance of *Boris Godunov*, forty years before *Rite of Spring*; Tolstoy was starting to work on *Anna Karenina*. His close Russian contemporaries include Scriabin and Chaliapin, Diaghilev and Benois, Stanislavsky, Gorky, Rasputin and Lenin. The interval between the births of Glinka and Rachmaninoff—sixty-nine years—is almost the same as Rachmaninoff's own life span: he died a few days before his seventieth birthday, in 1943, in which year Shostakovich composed his Eighth Symphony and Miaskovsky his Twenty-fourth; Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony

appeared the following year. Thus the fundamental fact about Rachmaninoff's place in Russian musical history is that he stands Janus-like between the Old Russia and the new, looking back to the flowering of Russian nineteenth-century "classical" music and also ahead to the first generation of Soviet composers.¹¹²

Numerous identified and unidentified sources have called Rachmaninoff "the last Romantic of the twentieth century," implying that his style remained firmly in the Romantic tradition throughout his career, untouched by twentieth-century musical influences. In fact, though, his style did evolve, as will be seen. Yet, compared to many other composers of his time, particularly Scriabin, whose musical style evolved through clearly defined stages, the evolution of Rachmaninoff's musical style was so smooth and subtle, from the beginning to the end, as to change in ways sometimes all but unnoticed.

Like Sibelius and Elgar, but unlike his contemporaries Scriabin and Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff continued to write in a style basically unchanged from first to last, so carrying over for forty years in to the twentieth century the musical tradition he had inherited in the nineteenth.¹¹³

Rachmaninoff's four Piano Concertos and his *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* were not only the most famous of his piano works, they also stand out in the evolution of his musical style as landmarks among his smaller, though not unimportant, piano pieces.

Traditionally, the Grieg-like First Concerto symbolizes the early "youthful" or "student" period of Rachmaninoff's compositional career. The

112 Martyn, 3.

113 Ibid., 13.

“mature” Second Concerto symbolizes the start of the composer’s “central” period (1900-1909) that leads to the Third Concerto—another important point in Rachmaninoff’s career—and the start of a new compositional period (1909-1917), the composer’s last years on Russian soil. The Second and the Third Concertos are widely considered to be the high points of Rachmaninoff’s career. The Fourth Concerto and the Rhapsody relate to the composer’s late period, with the Fourth Concerto marking a turning point in the composer’s style. Although not the most successful of Rachmaninoff’s compositions, this last Concerto foreshadows a major change in Rachmaninoff’s musical language, from romanticism to twentieth-century expressionism, a change coming to full flower in the *Rhapsody on Theme by Paganini*, which is considered the climax of Rachmaninoff’s late period and style.

These changes in the composer’s style become obvious through analysis of significant features of Rachmaninoff’s works: features such as harmony, melody, form, orchestration and piano texture.

In his early compositions, Rachmaninoff’s harmonies are typically very colorful and rich. Starting with the Second Concerto, his harmonic language becomes calmer, with Rachmaninoff rejecting his earlier coloristic effects, though staying within the traditional “Romantic” major-minor system. Beginning with the Fourth Concerto, his harmony gradually moves away from romanticism towards expressionism, with the Rhapsody representing the climax of Rachmaninoff’s expressionistic harmonies.

Striking melodies were always the strongest assets in Rachmaninoff's musical language. His First Concerto and especially the Second Piano Concerto, contain significant examples of Rachmaninoff's "big" melodies. In the Third Concerto, the melodies gradually become shorter, tighter, and more folk-like in quality. In the Fourth Concerto, Rachmaninoff shortens his melodies still further: the style of their presentation becomes more recitative-declamatory, rather than song-like. Finally, in the Rhapsody, the famous Paganini theme in A minor is, in some variations, distilled to mere three-note fragments.

Regarding the treatment of form in his Concertos, Rachmaninoff employed primarily a cyclic form, which he sometimes combined with that of the symphonic poem, and in the Rhapsody, with variations. As John Culshaw states:

Symphonic form was not one of his strong points; the Second Concerto is about as near as he could get. In the Third Concerto he used a kind of cyclic form of his own invention.¹¹⁴

The themes of Rachmaninoff's first three Concertos are uninhibitedly romantic and lyrical: "themes of the homeland," as they are typically called by Soviet Era scholars. These themes, so much loved by audiences, almost disappear in his late compositions, being replaced by the small motives so typical of the late Rachmaninoff. These humorous motives begin to appear in the Fourth Concerto and are fully developed in the Rhapsody; but they are nowhere to be found in the three early Concertos. Yet, the Rhapsody's lyrical and famous variation 18, in D-flat major brings us back to the familiarly romantic Rachmaninoff, proving that

114 Culshaw, 49.

his ability to write such lyrical themes was still alive and always would be.

Rachmaninoff's orchestration in the Concertos demonstrates a progression in style. In the First Concerto, the orchestration is minimal and strictly accompanimental, while in the Second Concerto, the orchestration swings to the other extreme becoming almost too assertive and prominent. In the Third Concerto, Rachmaninoff achieves a good balance between orchestra and solo piano. And in the Fourth Concerto and Rhapsody, Rachmaninoff shows the mastery of a mature composer with an orchestration that is both colorful and at the same time economical:

The First Concerto, because it was extensively revised by the composer in 1917, is not entirely representative of his early style, but the Second is definitely too heavily scored. The most pianists usually manage to get enough tone from their pianos to cope with the huge orchestral climaxes is largely to their own credit and not to any consideration on the part of the composer. The Third Concerto shows a much greater appreciation (probably gained from the composer's own experiences with the Second Concerto) of the relative values of piano and orchestra. The orchestral texture is thinner and generally more lucid, and the climaxes with solo and orchestra are more capably handled. The Fourth Concerto, although inferior musically to the other works, is if anything the most carefully written of all from the point of the soloist.¹¹⁵

The relationship between the piano and orchestra was not always ideal in Rachmaninoff's Concertos: if the First Concerto is Chopin-like with a strong piano solo supported by a solely accompanying orchestra, then the Second Concerto shows complete blending of the orchestra and the piano, with an almost

115 Culshaw, 52.

complete absence of competition between orchestra and piano, and with almost no solo episodes. Among the Concertos, it is in the Third Concerto that the piano has its strongest role: here the piano does not compete with the orchestra, it dictates to the orchestra. However, in the Fourth Concerto and in the Rhapsody the reverse is true and the orchestra assumes a very strong role: there are even solo orchestral variations in the Rhapsody.

As has been mentioned, Rachmaninoff was a brilliant pianist with unusually big and flexible hands and a superb technique. In his Concertos, he uses virtually all the technical tools available to a composer, making the Concertos difficult for performers to master. This is especially true of the Third Concerto, where the piano texture becomes very virtuosic. Comparing his two most often played Concertos—the Second and the Third—we find that the Second Concerto has more lyricism, while the Third Concerto displays more energy and virtuosic writing. Lyricism and virtuosic writing are probably the two major features of Rachmaninoff's piano writing:

Like Chopin, Rachmaninoff explored both the percussive and lyrical aspects of piano writing, and succeeded in both. Towards the end of his career there was a marked difference in his piano style, and he turned quite definitely towards a more percussive idiom, his music “thinning out” in the process. Compare, for instance, the texture of the piano parts in his Second Concerto and the Paganini Rhapsody. One is thick with notes, no opportunity being lost to provide complex inner parts in the piano writing—often in places where such parts could be nothing but ineffective because of the heavy orchestral scoring; the other uses not one note too

many.¹¹⁶

Turning to the Fourth Concerto in the context of the evolution of Rachmaninoff's style, one suddenly finds that this Concerto, even though it has been much criticized, actually occupies a very important moment, for it is in the "imperfect" Fourth Concerto that all the new features which will appear in such a perfect and accomplished work—the Rhapsody—are born. In the Fourth Concerto, all the most important features of musical style are starting to change: the orchestration, harmony and melody. Even rhythmic interest is beginning to vary here, becoming sharper and more syncopated, paving the way towards the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. Unlike his previous Concertos, the Fourth contains a few lyrical love-like and romantic themes and the leitmotifs, that serve to unite the form of the Second and Third Concertos are absent. But many new stylistic features appear in the Fourth Concerto: the angular, "broken" melodic line, and the combination of the anxious, nervous and sometimes colorless and mechanical music so typical of expressionism.

As we can see, Rachmaninoff did gradually step away from romanticism. Indeed, with the Rhapsody, one could easily prove the composer's evolution from romanticism towards a twentieth-century style. Yet suddenly we come upon the Rhapsody's variation 18, probably one of the most recognizable of Rachmaninoff's tunes and certainly one of his most lyrical. It seems like a farewell song to the composer's romanticism—a backward glance of a master

116 Barrie Martyn, 380.

romantic to what had been his signature style, before he allows his creative impulses to urge him on towards new means of expression.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alekseev, A.D. *S.V. Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Musicalnoie uzdatelstvo, 1954.

Antonova, E. Piano Concertos of S. Rachmaninoff. *Role of Rachmaninoff in the musical culture of his times*. Summary of lectures from scientific conference. Rostov State University Press, 1994.

Bachauer, Gina. *My Study with Rachmaninoff*. As reported by Dean Elder. Clavier, October 1973. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Bazhanov, Nikolai. *Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983.

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

Biesold, Maria. *Sergei W. Rachmaninoff: 1873-1943; Zwischen Moskau und New York; Eine Künstlerbiographie Weinheim*. Berlin: Quadriga, 1991.

Bogdanov-Bereznitky, V. M. *Rachmaninoff's Youth. Letters and Recollections*. Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Musikalnoie Izdatelstvo, 1949.

Briantseva, Vera Nikolaevna. *Sergey Vassilievich Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Sovetsky Kompositor, 1976.

_____. *The Childhood and Youth of Sergei Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Sovetsky Kompositor, 1970.

_____. *Piano Pieces by Sergei Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Musika, 1966.

_____. *About the realization of waltz features in compositions by P.I. Tchaikovsky and S.V. Rachmaninoff*. Rachmaninoff conference "120th Anniversary" Volume 7, Moscow, 1995.

Butzbach, Fritz. *Studien zum Klavierkonzert Nr. 1, fis-moll, Op.1*. Custav Bosse Verlag Regensburg, 1979.

Chesnokova, N. "Selected aspects of interpretation of S. Rachmaninoff's Fourth Piano Concerto in the context of 20th century music." *Role of Rachmaninoff in the musical culture of his times*. Summary of lectures from scientific conference. Rostov State University Press, 1994.

Culshaw, John. *Rachmaninoff: The Man and His Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950.

Cunningham, Robert. *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Bio-bibliography*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Davis, Shelley G. *International Rachmaninoff Festival-Conference*. Program Booklet. University of Maryland, College Park, 1998.

Demchenko, A. "Rachmaninoff and the 20th century." *Role of Rachmaninoff in the Musical Culture of his Times*. Summary of lectures from scientific conference. Rostov State University Press, 1994.

Gillespie, John. *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music*. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Co. Inc., 1965.

Gliadeshkina, Zoya. "The harmony of S. Rachmaninoff." *Essays on the history of harmony in Russian and Soviet music*. 3rd edition. Moscow: Mysika, 1989.

Gronowicz, Antoni. *Sergei Rachmaninoff*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1946.

Harrison, Max. *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*. London-New York: Continuum, 2005.

Holoman, Kern D. *Writing About Music: A Style Sheet from the Editors of 19th-Century Music*. Berkley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988.

Kandinsky, Alexei. *S.V. Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Musyka, 1982.

Kandinsky-Rybnikov, A. *Images of Destiny and Features of Autobiography in Works by S.V. Rachmaninoff*. Rachmaninoff conference "120th Anniversary" Volume 7, Moscow, 1995.

Keldysh, Yuriy. *Rachmaninoff and His Time*. Moscow: Mysika, 1973.

Martyn, Barrie. *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*. Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, Gower Publishing Company, 1990.

Nikitin, Boris. *Sergei Rachmaninoff and Feodor Shaliapin*. Moscow: OT&SS, 1990.

Norris, Geoffrey. *Rakhmaninov*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976.

Palmieri, Robert. *Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninoff: A Guide to Research*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1985.

Piggot, Patrick. *Rachmaninov*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1978.

_____. *Rachmaninov's Orchestral Music*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974.

Piskunova, N. "S.V. Rachmaninoff and the native pianistic culture" *Role of Rachmaninoff in the musical culture of his times*. Summary of lectures from the scientific conference. Rostov State University Press, 1994.

Ponizovkin, Yuri. *Rachmaninoff-pianist, the interpreter of his own works*. Moscow: Muzyka, 1965.

Rachmaninoff, Sergei. *Complete Songs for Voice and Piano*. Voice/Piano score. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 1 (First Edition)*. Reduction for 2 Pianos. Moscow: Muzyka, 1966.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 1 (New Edition)*. Reduction for 2 Pianos. Moscow: Muzyka, 1972.

_____. *Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 4, Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. Sound Recording. Sergei Rachmaninoff, Piano. The Philadelphia Orchestra/Leopold Stokowski/Eugene Ormandy. ©1999, NAXOS of America, Inc. 8.110602 AAD.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18*. Dover Miniature Scores. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 3, Op. 30*. Reduction for 2 Pianos. G. Schirmer, Inc., 1967.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40 (Revised Version, 1941)*. Reduction for 2 Pianos. Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, Ltd., New Corrected Edition, 2003.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40, for Piano and Orchestra*. Mini

score. New York: Charles Foley Music Publisher, 1944.

_____. *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3*. Sound Recording. Vladimir Ashkenazy, Piano. Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra/Kirill Kondrashin. © 1999, The Decca Record Company Limited, London. 289 466 375-2 DM.

_____. *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3*. Sound Recording. Sergei Rachmaninov, Piano. The Philadelphia Orchestra/Leopold Stokowski/Eugene Ormandy. ©1999, NAXOS of America, Inc. 8.110601 AAD.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 3*. Sound Recording. Vladimir Viardo, Piano. Dallas Symphony/Eduardo Mata. ©1989, Intersound, Inc. Printed in U.S.A. CDD 442 DDD.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 30*. Sound Recording. Arcadi Volodos, piano. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra/ James Levine. © 2000, Sony Music, Inc. NYC. D136919.

_____. *Piano Concerto No. 4*. Sound Recording. Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, Piano/Klavier. Philharmonia Orchestra/Ettore Gracis. ©2000, EMI Records Ltd. 7243 5 67258 2 9 ADD.

_____. *Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2*. Piano score.
www.everynote.com

_____. *Rapsodie sur un theme de Paganini, Op.43, pour Piano et Orchestre*. Miniature Score. Miami: Warner Bros. Publications, 1985

_____. *Second Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18*. Reduction for two pianos. New York: Carl Fischer Music Library, 2003.

_____. *Articles, Letters, Interviews and Recollections*. 1st volume. Moscow: Sovetski Kompozitor, 1978.

Satin, Sophie. *Pamiati Rachmaniova (In memory of Rachmaninoff)*. Anthology of recollections. Edited by Sophie Satin. New York, 1946.

Seroff, Victor. *Rachmaninoff*. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.

Schonberg, Harold C. "Mysticism and Melancholy. Scriabin and Rachmaninoff." *The Lives of the Great Composers*. 3rd Edition. New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

Sokolova, Olga Ivanovna. *Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninov*. Moscow: Musyka, 1983.

Solovtsev, Anatoli Alexandrovich. *S.V. Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Musyka, 1969.

_____. *Piano Concertos by Rachmaninoff*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Musicalnoie uzdatelstvo, 1961.

Threlfall, Robert. *A Catalogue of the Compositions of Sergei Rachmaninoff*. London: Scolar, 1982.

_____. *Sergei Rachmaninoff. His Life and Music*. London: Boosey & Hawkes, Music Publishers Ltd., 1973.

Ulrich, Homer. *A History of Music and Musical Style*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963.

“Vospomonania o Rachmaninove,” Anthology. 2nd Edition. Edited by Z. Apetian. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Musicalnoie uzdatelstvo, 1961.