ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: RACHMANINOFF'S PERFORMANCE STYLE
AS HEARD IN HIS RECORDINGS:
AN ARTISTIC AND TECHNICAL SURVEY

David Henry, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Professor Bradford Gowen
School of Music

This dissertation explores the piano recordings made by Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff, in particular the works he recorded multiple times, identifying the larger developmental arc of his playing during the twenty-four years of his latter career. We show that the common axes of **technique** and **interpretation** provide an insufficient lens through which to understand his changing style; instead, we propose an additional dimension of **identity** which better captures Rachmaninoff's evolution as a performer. Furthermore, this point of view allows a separation of his recordings into three distinct periods.

Rachmaninoff stands as a unique figure in modern musical history, reflecting an improbable convergence of events:

1. he was a world-renowned composer for the first half of his career.
2. upon the emergency of the Russian revolution in 1917, he emigrated with his family to America at the age of forty-five, industriously working to become one of the leading concert artists of his generation.

3. he was one of the first pianists to leave a recorded legacy.

Appropriate historical and biographical context is provided to better understand Rachmaninoff and his times, and to place his recordings in a fuller context.

We also present the current state of knowledge and availability of Rachmaninoff's extant recordings, the various technologies by which they were made, and the recording companies with which Rachmaninoff chose to work. We describe the importance of matrix numbers, alternate takes, potentially unreleased recordings, piano rolls, and unintentional recordings. Rachmaninoff's recordings currently exist across many fragmented sources, some difficult to learn of and acquire. This dissertation thereby provides a modern guide to these recordings in hope of aiding future scholars.

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by

David Henry

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Cyril Baker, my first piano teacher, who introduced me to the music of Sergei Rachmaninoff, in that instant changing my understanding of what piano music could be.

To my parents, who always wanted the best for me.

And specially, to Mrs. Christine and the late Peter Potter, who always believed in me.

Acknowledgements

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I am indebted to the assistance of many of the musicians at the forefront of Rachmaninoff scholarship, who were kind enough to respond to my emails, and in some cases, meet in person. My special thanks to Mark Obert-Thorn, Donald Manildi, Maxwell Brown, Gregor Benko and Francis Crociata for their patience and insightful contributions to this work. I am also grateful to the International Piano Archives at Maryland for their hospitality and responsiveness during my research.

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Introduction

Overview

This dissertation explores the piano recordings made by Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff, in particular the works he recorded multiple times, identifying the larger developmental arc of his playing during the twenty-four years of his latter career. We show that the common axes of **technique** and **interpretation** provide an insufficient lens through which to understand his changing style; instead, we propose an additional dimension of **identity** which better captures Rachmaninoff's evolution as a performer. Furthermore, this point of view allows a separation of his recordings into three distinct periods.

Rachmaninoff stands as a unique figure in modern musical history, reflecting an improbable convergence of events:

1. he was a world-renowned composer for the first half of his career.
2. upon the emergency of the Russian revolution in 1917, he emigrated with his family to America at the age of forty-five, industriously working to become one of the leading concert artists of his generation.
3. he was one of the first pianists to leave a recorded legacy.

Appropriate historical and biographical context is provided to better understand Rachmaninoff and his times, and to place his recordings in a fuller context. As is customary in texts which refer to the Russian revolution, we note that from on February 1, 1918, Russia changed its calendar system from the archaic Julian calendar to the modern Gregorian calendar. This moved the Russian calendar ahead by thirteen days. This text aligns all dates with the modern calendar, for example we state that Rachmaninoff was born on April 1, rather than March 20, 1873.

We also present the current state of knowledge and availability of Rachmaninoff's extant recordings, the various technologies by which they were made, and the recording companies with which Rachmaninoff chose to work. We describe the importance of matrix numbers, alternate takes, potentially unreleased recordings, piano rolls, and unintentional recordings. Rachmaninoff's recordings currently exist across many fragmented sources, some difficult to learn of and acquire.

This dissertation thereby provides a modern guide to these recordings in hope of aiding future scholars. Appendix A provides a full listing of the currently known recordings, as well as the piano rolls, and Appendix B provides a listing of the works Rachmaninoff recorded, but for which no take is known to have survived.

A Composer's Approach to Τεχνε

Heinrich Neuhaus observed that "the word for 'technique' comes from the Greek word *τεχνε*, and that *τεχνε* means art. Any improvement of technique is an improvement of art itself and consequently helps to reveal the 'content'"[1] of a work.

Neuhaus was primarily a piano teacher, and his statement was aimed at instrumentalists in training. How might we consider his statement from the point of view of a genius composer-pianist such as Rachmaninoff? Rachmaninoff clearly understood the "content" of his own works, and furthermore he would naturally compose his works to be comfortable within his own personal technique. We should expect that Rachmaninoff's understanding of *τεχνε* was *total* with respect to his own works.

Our later analysis will begin with Neuhaus' frame of reference, and explore the separate axes of "content" and "technique" as we analyze the recordings Rachmaninoff made of his own works, and works by other composers, made across the twenty-four years of his latter performing career.

[1] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1993), 2.

Rachmaninoff's Conducting Career

We must also acknowledge that Rachmaninoff was regarded as a world-class conductor. This is a fact little known by audiences today. It is an irony that during his performing years he was held in greater acclaim as a pianist than as a composer, and today he is primarily known to the public as a composer. A more balanced general appraisal may never occur, reminding us of Bernard Shaw's advice to Ferruccio Busoni that he should compose under a pseudonym since "the public could never be induced to believe that one man could be so supremely great in two departments of music at once."[2] As Max Harrison subsequently observed, "Rachmaninoff's case was even worse than that, besides being a fine composer and one of the greatest pianists in the history of an instrument that has never lacked for outstanding players, he was also a fine conductor."[3]

Rachmaninoff was so highly regarded that in 1910 he was offered conductorship of the Boston Symphony Orchestra; in 1918 he received this offer again along with a similar offer from the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. He declined on both occasions, taking a longer view on his career and family life. Recognizing this unusual confluence of musical ability, Rachmaninoff told Neuhaus: "I am 85% a musician; there is only 15% man in me."[4]

This dissertation will make reference to Rachmaninoff's conducting career with respect to his compositional development, however his major conducting achievements will not be

[2] E. Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London: Eulenburg, 1974), 246.
[3] M. Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (London: Continuum, 2005), 2.
[4] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 28.

discussed. Interested readers should be directed to any of the significant Rachmaninoff biographies for more details on this aspect of his life.

Chapter 1

Before the Recordings

This chapter provides an outline of Rachmaninoff's life before 1918, describing the key events which shaped his personality and outlook. Chapters 2 and 3 will further detail his development as a composer and pianist, respectively. Chapter 4 closes the biographical aspect of this dissertation by reflecting upon his legacy. These four chapters provide foundational points of view which will be used when considering his recordings.

A Note on Sources

Rachmaninoff's Recollections[5], a biography published in 1934, requires special comment. As the only biography written during Rachmaninoff's lifetime, this has become a major source of many 'facts' about Rachmaninoff and is significantly quoted by texts and studies either directly or indirectly. While Riesemann was a close friend of Rachmaninoff, his biography is of mixed reliability. On reading the initial proofs, Rachmaninoff was extremely unhappy at its largely improvised and inaccurate nature, in particular with sections where he was quoted as praising himself. As we will learn, Rachmaninoff was a very modest person. He later told an interviewer: "The writer states that I dictated it all myself. If so, something must have gone wrong with my mind at the time."[6]

Riesemann was financially unable to make the changes Rachmaninoff requested, and to make matters worse Riesemann suffered a severe heart attack shortly thereafter. Rachmaninoff, taking a practical approach, paid the publisher directly to perform major cuts from the text, and allowed the book to be otherwise released. One should therefore read between the lines of Rachmaninoff's letter of endorsement which opens the book: "If you have over-emphasized the importance of some of my modest achievements I am sure it is only because of our long and close friendship."[7] This dissertation quotes Riesemann where such excerpts align materially, or in spirit, with historical events and Rachmaninoff's character as reported by other sources.

This dissertation is biased towards concrete historical artifacts rather than later recollections where possible. For example, consider Rachmaninoff's recording of his transcription of the *Scherzo* from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Victor

[5] Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections* (New York: Macmillan, 1934).
[6] M. D. Calvocoressi, "Rachmaninov interviewed in Holland," *The Musical Times*, May 1938, 361.
[7] Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections*, front matter.

recording log shows that Rachmaninoff took seven takes, and that he was satisfied with the sixth[8], is preferred over the more sensational claim by Horowitz, as reported by David Dubal, that Rachmaninoff required forty-eight takes[9] of this famously difficult work.

Clearly unsympathetic sources, such as the autobiographies by Artur Rubinstein[10], have been considered with caution, given their largely uncharacteristic portrayal of Rachmaninoff as compared to other sources.

It is also of note that Rachmaninoff's tone in interviews markedly changed after his emigration from Russia, where he formerly took a harder line against other contemporary composers, and of American culture; he afterwards spoke with far greater diplomacy. This dissertation interprets both positions accordingly.

[8] B. Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (London: Ashgate, 1990), 483.
[9] D. Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz* (New York, Citadel Press, 1991), 179.
[10] A. Rubinstein, *My Young Years* (New York: Knopf, 1973) and *My Many Years* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

Early Life

Rachmaninoff was born on April 1, 1873, in Oneg, Russia to an upper-class family, one of six children. His family was unusually musical. His paternal grandfather was a virtuoso pianist and a student of John Field; his father was an amateur pianist; his mother had taken lessons with Anton Rubinstein; his cousin was the great Alexander Siloti, a favorite student of Liszt. While some accounts suggest early displays of musical talent, such as his early lessons from his mother at four years old, the larger consensus is that there was no demonstration of anything remarkable from the young Rachmaninoff. Martyn observes: "Neither his father … nor his mother … recognized any outstanding pianistic aptitude in their son."[11]

His father, an ex-army officer, had inherited five estates as a wedding dowry. Unfortunately, these were quickly mis-managed and lost, partly due to his temperament such that he "would give all the money in his pocket to stop the tears of a child on the street."[12] Financially strained, the parents separated in 1882, and Rachmaninoff moved with his mother and siblings to St. Petersburg at eight years of age. Shortly thereafter, one of his sisters died of diphtheria.

Studying under scholarship at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, the young Rachmaninoff, receiving little attention at home, quickly learned he could falsify his school grades and be fully delinquent with his studies (he easily hand-corrected the lowest '1' grade into to the highest '4' before showing his mother). All this was found out in the spring of 1885, when a Conservatory teacher visited his home to personally inform his mother that he had failed all his general

[11] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 362.
[12] S. Bertensson & J. Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University, 1956), 2.

examinations and faced expulsion. "I could manage only the music without studying" Rachmaninoff later recalled[13].



Figure 1. Sergei Rachmaninoff, circa 1886.
Image source: https://senar.ru/photos/p001

[13] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences," *The Musical Quarterly*, April 1944, 182.

The advice of his cousin, Siloti, was urgently sought, and it was his judgement that Rachmaninoff was a greatly talented musician but needed discipline. Siloti had recently returned from his studies with Franz Liszt. He made a bold recommendation: Rachmaninoff should apply to live with, and study under, Nikolai Zverev, as a preparatory student at the Moscow Conservatory; Siloti was himself a former Zverev pupil. Upon leaving his family to live in Moscow for study with Zverev, Rachmaninoff's only consolation was that his elder sister Yelena, a talented contralto of sixteen years old, would also be in Moscow to keep him company. This was not to be. Yelena died of pernicious anemia that summer, reinforcing the young Rachmaninoff's early experiences of loss and isolation.

Given this early background, we gain some insight into Rachmaninoff's often contradictory personality and outlook as an adult. While he inherited upper class privileges, allowing him to later travel internationally with ease, and build a successful modern life, he also demonstrated a constant sense of paranoia and distrust in the world and his achievements. Vladimir Horowitz said of Rachmaninoff: "He was a gloomy man. He told me that all his life he had tried to succeed in three things – composition, piano playing, and conducting – and had succeeded in none."[14] Riesemann presents the more widely known account: "I have never been quite able to make up my mind as to which was my true calling – that of a composer, pianist or conductor. These doubts assail me to this day. There are times when I consider myself nothing but a composer; others when I believe myself capable only of playing the piano. Today, when the greater part of my life is over, I am constantly troubled by the misgiving that, venturing into too

[14] H. C. Schonberg, *Horowitz* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 112 – 113.

many fields, I may have failed to make the best use of my life. In the old Russian phrase, I have 'hunted three hares.' Can I be sure that I have killed one of them?"[15]

[15] Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections*, 205.

Two Crises

Two major life events further shaped Rachmaninoff. The first was the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony. Having completed his studies at the Moscow Conservatory, receiving the highest grades as both pianist and composer (his 'graduation piece' was the opera *Aleko*, which he completed in just seventeen days including its full orchestration and binding), Rachmaninoff was awarded the Great Gold Medal. Following the example of his role model Tchaikovsky, he then turned his mind to writing a Symphony. Upon its completion, the first public performance was a fiasco. While we can observe some clearly unfavorable factors, such as the premiere being held in St. Petersburg to an unsympathetic if not hostile audience to this young Moscow composer, and that Glazunov, the conductor, appeared drunk in rehearsals, and even insisted on cuts to the work, the larger observation is that Rachmaninoff had never experienced musical failure.

He ignored early warnings from his mentor Taneyev that the Symphony was "flabby, colorless,"[16] and stronger caution from Rimsky-Korsakov that "I do not find this music at all agreeable."[17] Martyn observes: "In the history of Russian music only Glazunov had experienced such uninterrupted success so young, and at this stage in his life Rachmaninoff lacked the strength of character to cope with it … he was psychologically devastated by the failure of the First Symphony."[18] Rachmaninoff, so far spoiled by his incredible talents, had arrived at the inevitable moment of adversity.

Rachmaninoff's Symphony, labeled "modernist trash" by the St. Petersburg critics, was most famously dismantled by César Cui: "If there's a Conservatory in Hell, and one of its gifted

[16] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 70.
[17] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 71.
[18] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 23.

pupils should be given the problem of writing a programmatic symphony on the Seven Plagues of Egypt, and if he should write a symphony resembling Mr. Rachmaninoff's symphony – his problem would have been carried out brilliantly and he would enchant all the inmates of Hell."[19]

Rachmaninoff, then aged twenty-three, took this critical response to heart, and suffered from depression for the next four years. He composed little, and primarily worked as a piano teacher and conductor. Only after receiving hypno-therapy treatment under Dr. Nikolai Dahl could he return to composing; his international fame as a composer swiftly followed.

The second major crisis was the 1917 social revolution in Russia, culminating in the midst of the First World War. Russia "at one bound leaped from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century"[20] and Rachmaninoff, then aged forty-four and a world-renowned composer, was compelled to leave his homeland for the safety of himself and his family. Rachmaninoff told *Musical America* in 1921:

> I had a big, beautiful summer farm at Ivanovka, where I went with my family every summer, and before the revolution I never had difficulties of any kind with the peasants. Our relations were always friendly (Rachmaninoff's kindly smile is a warrant for the fact that his personal creed is one of good will). Well, shortly after the revolutionary disorders began, while we were living at Ivanovka, a party of some 200 peasants came there. They did no damage and made no threats, but their leader, in the most good-natured way, drew me aside and said: 'Sir, I am going to give you some good advice: Leave this place.' He smiled at me and added: 'We know you make a great deal of money. How and where you make it we do not know, nor do we care. What you should do is to go away from this place

[19] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 71.
[20] J. Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 36.

to the place where you make your money and stay there – and leave this farm to us. And – I tell you as a friend, sir! – you would do best to go away soon!'[21]

Facing an improbable financial future as a composer in exile, Rachmaninoff considered a second musical career as either conductor or pianist. "Faced with a decision as to what specific direction his career should take here, Rachmaninoff sought [Josef] Hofmann's opinion by transatlantic correspondence. Hofmann warned Rachmaninoff that 'the power politics of an orchestral organization' would plague his life, and urged him to seek a pianistic future in the United States."[22] Rachmaninoff gave Howard Taubman an additional point of view: "When I composed, I was told that I was a good pianist. When I played the piano I was told I was a good composer. Why conduct and give them a chance to device further variations on the theme?"[23]

Arriving in New York City on November 10, 1918, after a nine day journey by sea, Rachmaninoff told the *Musical Courier*: "I have come to look upon myself as a pianist in these last few years and have not considered conducting, so it is as a pianist I hope to appear here first, if anyone wishes me to."[24] He told *The New York Times*: "I have come to America to rest and work."[25] Rachmaninoff would begin making his piano recordings the following year.

[21] F. Martens, "What Can Come from Russia Musically with most of its Creative Forces in Exile?", *Musical America*, April 9, 1921, 9.
[22] A. Chasins, *Speaking of Pianists* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 40.
[23] H. Taubman, "Musical Triple-Threat," *Collier's*, December 16, 1939, 62.
[24] "Rachmaninoff Arrives in America," *Musical Courier*, November 14, 1918, 8.
[25] "Rachmaninoff is Here," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1918, 5.

Chapter 2

Rachmaninoff, the Composer

A Career Cut Short

It is especially tragic when the output of a creative genius is ended at a time of stylistic development. Unlike Schubert and Chopin, who were both evolving their style by learning from past musical forms when illness ended their lives and work, Rachmaninoff's composing career was effectively ended when his country collapsed around him.

The development of Rachmaninoff's compositions was one of a continued widening of scope; from the early piano works to the *Preludes* of Opus 23 and Opus 32, and then the *Etudes-Tableaux* of Opus 33 to Opus 39; each work tends towards an ever-larger sense of expression, while demonstrating a natural idiomaticity to the piano and to the hand, revealing innovation of piano technique itself. In other genres, he had evolved from early tone poems, to Operas, Symphonies, then to his larger choral works, *The Bells*, Opus 35 and the *All-Night Vigil*, Opus 37, innovating in larger forms, structures, and harmonies. One can only wonder what a third collection of *Etudes-Tableaux* might have contained, perhaps completed at Ivanovka in 1920 … however, this was not to be. One is struck by a profound sense of loss that Rachmaninoff was not permitted to go further.

Throughout his lifetime, Rachmaninoff always regarded himself as a composer first and foremost, writing in 1922 of his new performing career: "I dislike my occupation intensely! For this whole time I have not composed one line. I only play the piano and give a great many

concerts."[26] Later, in 1933: "For seventeen years, since I lost my country, I have felt unable to compose. When I was on my farm in Russia during the summers I had joy in my work. Certainly I still write music – but it does not mean the same thing to me now."[27] In 1941, he would say: "composing is as essential a part of my being as breathing or eating."[28] The energies and time needed to build and sustain a performing career left little remaining for composition. Basil Maine interviewed Rachmaninoff on his desire to compose while maintaining a performing career:

> "But how can I find the time to write the music I want to write," Rachmaninoff replied. "I am not Richard Strauss you know, who can write music at any time and in any circumstances. No. I can do only one thing at a stretch. When I am on a concert tour, I must give my whole self to that alone. My composing I must do in my summer vacations, and sometimes they are very short. At least I can say this for my music: it is written from an inner motive. It is not written from unmusical and ulterior motives as so much present-day music is."[29]

After leaving Russia, Rachmaninoff would publish only five more opus numbers, of which only his *Third Symphony* and *Symphonic Dances* may be considered truly original works. He had otherwise started his *Fourth Piano Concerto* before leaving Russia, and his *Corelli* and *Paganini* variations were, by definition, not based upon themes of his own. His remaining compositions during this time were smaller works, including his many piano transcriptions.

Alfred Swan wrote in 1927:

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[26] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 227.
[27] H. E. Wortham, *Daily Telegraph.* April 28, 1933.
[28] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 368.
[29] B. Maine, *Basil Maine on Music* (London: John Westhouse, 1945), 120.

Writing about Rachmaninoff in the western capitals is a thankless task. One has to contend against his enormous reputation as a pianist, a reputation that in people's minds finally places him on a level with the great virtuosi, precluding any serious approach to him as a composer. … Then came the abrupt end, and for the last eight years not a note has fallen from Rachmaninoff's pen. And herein lies the clue to Rachmaninoff's failure. He was made for a quietly constructive epoch, for which his noble lyric and emotional talent would have been a beautiful complement. As it is, he has been rent to pieces and silenced by the cruel psychology of our times.[30]

Victor Seroff recalled discussing this topic with Rachmaninoff:

Was Rachmaninoff forced to sacrifice his composing because of a lack of free time? "Yes, of course," was the reply. "It is not easy to be a conductor, a composer, a concert pianist, and a father all at the same time."[31]

[30] A. Swan, "The Present State of Russian Music," *The Musical Quarterly,* January 1927, 33 – 34.
[31] V. Seroff, "Sergei Rachmaninoff as I Knew Him, A Reminiscence," *Stereo Review*, May 1973, 63.

A Visual Composer

Rachmaninoff was an intuitive and visual composer, stating that once he had the image in mind for a work, the music would naturally follow. "A poem, a picture, something of a concrete nature at any rate, helps me immensely. There must be something before my mind to convey definite impressions, or the ideas refuse to appear."[32] This suggestive approach is demonstrated by his innovation of the genre '*Etude-Tableau*', translated as '*image study*', similar in spirit to Debussy's *Preludes*, except that Rachmaninoff did not directly reveal the inspiration behind each piece to the listener as Debussy did.

Ottorino Respighi was given a rare insight into Rachmaninoff's ideas behind the *Etudes-Tableaux* in 1930, when he was engaged Koussevitzky to orchestrate several of them. Rachmaninoff wrote to him: "The first [Opus 39, No. 2] … represents the Sea and Seagulls. The second [Opus 39, No. 6] … was inspired by the tale of the Little Red Riding Hood. The third [Opus 39, No. 4] … is a scene at a Fair. The fourth [Opus 39, No. 9] … has a similar character, resembling an oriental march. The fifth [Opus 39, No. 7] … is a funeral march."[33]

Another major influence was the artist Arnold Böcklin, who inspired two of Rachmaninoff's most famous works, the *Isle of the Dead*, Opus 29, and the *Prelude in B Minor*, Opus 32 No. 10. Benno Moiseiwitsch, a contemporary pianist who Rachmaninoff greatly admired, related a remarkable story regarding this.[34] He asked Rachmaninoff:

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[32] "Modernism is Rachmaninoff's Bane," *Musical America*, November 20, 1909, 23.
[33] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 262 – 263.
[34] See also Moiseiwitsch's video interview on this topic within 'The Art of the Piano' (directed by Donald Sturrock, 1999). This particular excerpt may also be viewed on YouTube, currently at this location: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFobyhwznng.

whether the B minor *Prelude* was program music. He said slowly, 'Yes, why do you ask?' I promptly retorted that I had a vivid picture in my mind, which probably did not coincide with his. He laughed at that and asked me to tell him what was in my mind, and he would tell me what was in his mind. We started quibbling about who was going to tell first, and in my desperation I said, 'Oh, mine is a long story. You had better tell me yours first.' Upon which he said, 'if yours is a long story, then it cannot coincide with mine because mine can be told in one word.' So I sat back despondently in the armchair and started 'I visualize *The Return* …'. He stretched out his left arm full length and said in his gruff bass voice: 'Stop!' So I leaned forward and said 'Why? What have I done?' And then quietly he said 'That's it. It is *The Return*.' He was inspired to write this *Prelude* after seeing a painting *The Return* [Figure 2] by Böcklin.[35]



Figure 2. Arnold Böcklin, *The Return*, 1887.

[35] B. Moiseiwitsch, "Rachmaninoff Remembered," *Musical Courier*, May 1962, 15.

Reflecting on Böcklin's painting '*The Isle of the Dead*' [Figure 3], Rachmaninoff wrote: "I go for a long walk in the country. My eye catches the sharp sparks of light on fresh foliage after showers; my ear the rustling undernote of the woods. Or I watch the pale tints of the sky over the horizon after sundown, and they come: all voices at once. Not a bit here, a bit there. All. The whole grows. So '*Todteninsel*.' [English translation: 'Dead Island']"[36]



Figure 3. Arnold Böcklin, *The Isle of the Dead*, 1883.

[36] "How Inspiration Comes to Rachmaninoff," *Musical America*, January 8, 1910, 32.

The resulting tone poem, *The Isle of the Dead*, Opus 29, is a rare example of Rachmaninoff naming a work directly after its inspiration; in general, a work's meaning would not be revealed. Rachmaninoff also spoke rarely about his actual compositional process, even to other musicians. Composing was a private and personal process for him. Nikolai Medtner, speaking in relation to his long friendship with Rachmaninoff, said: "all my life has passed parallel to his, but with no one have I talked so little about music as with him. Once I even told him how I wanted to discuss with him the subject of harmony. Immediately his face became very distant and he said: 'Yes, yes we must, some time.' But he never broached the subject again."[37]

Rachmaninoff described his approach to composing to Glenn Quilty:

> "I reflect the philosophy of old Russia – [Eastern] Russia – with its overtones of suffering and unrest, its pastoral but tragic beauty, its ancient and enduring glory. With this comes my own personal feeling I am a Victorian-Edwardian – actually the last of the romantic composers."
> "In no way modern?"
> "Not in my harmonic arrangements and tonalities. They are in the genre of flowing, lush effects and illuminated vistas viewed from a romantic point. I like to unfold pictures in sound. But my melodic line is quite up-to-date if you analyze it and realize its declaration and spartan economy. Sibelius has this also. But Schonberg and Hindemith have an entirely different approach."
> "How so?"
> "They are more incisive; they declare themselves in shorter phrases; there is a sharpness and a decided strong accent felt throughout. … I am not an intellectual composer, rather an emotionalist. I do not deal in abstractions or cerebral torturings and posturings. I utilize musical narrative, telling a story in musical terms as writers do in words. I wish to

[37] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences," *The Musical Quarterly*, April 1944, 7.

encompass the listener in warmth, and to reveal and open to him rich landscapes, to transport him to an ideal planet. Not utopia, for there is an undercurrent of sorrow in my work. But a place where suffering and peace are transcended into a healing whole."[38]

At the height of his success, Rachmaninoff told of his ability for extreme focus: "During the progress of a new composition I can without exaggeration call myself a perfect slave. … Beginning at nine in the morning I allow myself no respite until after eleven in the evening."[39] As the streets of Moscow seethed with unrest in 1917, he later told Riesemann: "I sat at the writing-table or the piano all day without troubling about the rattle of machine-guns and rifle-shots. I would have greeted any intruder with the answer that Archimedes gave the conquerors of Syracuse."[40] This alludes to the demise of one of the most famous mathematicians of antiquity, when Syracuse fell to the Romans in 212 B. C. To quote Petr Beckmann:

Inside the city was the 75-year old thinker who had grasped the secret of the lever, of the pulley and the principle of mechanical advantage. Plutarch tells us that "it chanced that he was alone, examining a diagram closely; and having fixed both his mind and his eyes on the object of his inquiry, he perceived neither the inroad of the Romans nor the taking of the city. Suddenly a soldier came up to him and bade him follow to Marcellus, but he would not go until he had finished the problem and worked it out to the proof."

"Do not touch my circles!" said the thinker to the thug. Thereupon the thug became enraged, drew his sword and slew the thinker.

The name of the thug is forgotten.

The name of the thinker was Archimedes.[41]

[38] G. Quilty, "Rachmaninoff – The Last Romantic Composer," *HIFI Review*, October 1959, 26 - 28.
[39] "Modernism is Rachmaninoff's Bane," *Musical America*, November 20, 1909, 23.
[40] Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections*, 185.
[41] P. Bekmann, *A History of Pi* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 61.

Regarding differences of genre, Rachmaninoff also revealed:

> I have often found that a short piece for the piano has always given me much more pain, and has presented to me many more problems, than a symphony or concerto. … when I write a small piece for the piano, I am at the mercy of my thematic idea which must be presented concisely and without digression. … every small piece I have produced is the result of great care and hard work. For, after all, to say what you have to say, and to say it briefly, lucidly, and without any circumlocution, is still the most difficult problem facing the creative artist.[42]

Most of Rachmaninoff's music was composed at his Ivanovka estate, with a brief relocation to Dresden between the years 1906 – 1909. Ivanovka allowed him to be surrounded by, and influenced by, nature. Rachmaninoff genuinely enjoyed tending to the farming duties on his estate, writing in 1910: "I often fish, and plant willows. The latter occupation was and still is fascinating. … I've set out 120 of these. I watered and continue to water them with an accuracy and patience and persistence worthy of a better cause. But how great is my rapture when I see a fresh bud of a young green leaf. I keep a strict account of the trees that take root. There are now 43 of these. Congratulate me!"[43]

Rachmaninoff would later recollect: "In the spring of 1914 I almost realized my oldest dream for Ivanovka – the purchase of a good American tractor." In argument with one of the directors of the Ministry of Agriculture, he was asked "But if you did get it, what would you do with it!?" Rachmaninoff answered: "I'll drive it myself."[44]

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[42] D. Ewen, "Music Should Speak from the Heart", *The Etude*, December 1941, 848.
[43] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 168.
[44] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 189.

The loss of his country also meant the loss of Ivanovka, and a style of life (figure 4). Later, in 1932, Rachmaninoff invested a considerable amount of money to purchase a rural estate in Switzerland, which he named *Senar* (after **SE**rgei and **NA**talia **R**achmaninoff), which would recall many aspects of Ivanovka for him, despite his ongoing second career and its relentless commitments.



Figure 4. Hunting in Russia.
Semyon Bogatyryov, Maximilian Kreutzer and Sergei Rachmaninoff hunting near the Krasnenkoe estate, round 1900. Image source: https://senar.ru/photos/g019.

Rachmaninoff and 'Modern Music'

While of questionable authority and intention, Artur Rubinstein's recollection of Rachmaninoff's views on 'modern music' gets straight to the point: "Music finished with Schumann and Tchaikovsky."[45] This perfectly captures Rachmaninoff's rejection of the majority of musical styles being developed around him, on the basis that "the new kind of music seems to come not from the heart but from the head. Its composers think rather than feel. They have not the capacity to make their works 'exult,' as Hans [von] Bülow called it. They meditate, protest, analyze, reason, calculate, and brood – but they do not exult. It may be that they compose in the spirit of the times; but it may be, too, that the spirit of the times does not call for expression in music."[46] In an earlier interview, he was even more direct: "The Futurists, on the other hand, openly state their hatred for anything faintly resembling a melody! They clamor for 'color' and 'atmosphere', and, by dint of ignoring every rule of sane musical construction, they secure efforts as formless as fog, and hardly more enduring."[47]

Rachmaninoff told *The Etude* in 1941: "I have no sympathy with the composer who produces works according to preconceived formulas or preconceived theories. Or with the composer who writes in a certain style because it is the fashion to do so. Great music has never been produced that way – and I dare say it never will. … In my own compositions, no conscious effort has been made to be original, Romantic, or Nationalistic, or anything else. I write down on paper the music I hear within me, as naturally as possible."[48] He would similarly tell *The New York Times*: "The poet Heine once said, 'What life takes away, music restores.' He would

[45] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 221.
[46] L. Liebling, "Variations," *Musical Courier*, April 5, 1943, 17.
[47] S. Rachmaninoff, "National and Radical Impressions in the Music of To-Day and Yesterday", *The Etude*, October 1919, 615.
[48] D. Ewen, "Music Should Speak from the Heart," *The Etude*, December 1941, 804, 848.

not be moved to say this if he could hear the music of today. For the most part it gives nothing. Music should bring relief. It should rehabilitate minds and souls, and modern music does not do this."[49]

Rachmaninoff was possibly shaped by an earlier experience where he met one of his heroes, Leo Tolstoy, only to be crushed by his comments after hearing Rachmaninoff's music. The singer, Feodor Chaliapin, recalls the incident: "Tolstoy looked Rachmaninoff straight in the eye and asked, 'Tell me, does anyone want this type of music? … What kind of music do people need, more folk music, or the cerebral, clever scientific offerings?'"[50] Rachmaninoff later told Swan: "[Tolstoy] came up to me and declared excitedly: 'I must speak to you. I must tell you how I dislike it all!' And he went on and on: 'Beethoven is nonsense, Pushkin and Lermontov also.' It was awful. … And just think, the first time I went to him, I went to him as to a god."[51] We should note that this took place in 1900, at the height of Rachmaninoff's depression, and was arranged by his friends in hopes of inspiring a recovery. Rachmaninoff would later recall this as one of the major moments of his personal development.[52] Perhaps this left a deeper and longer-term impression on Rachmaninoff than is commonly thought, influencing his later affinity with, and insistence upon, music 'from the heart' more than anything else.

Rachmaninoff rarely commented on other contemporary composers by name, and certainly not in public articles, but our retrospective position allows us to read accounts left by others. Horowitz recalled that after having performed the Brahms *Piano Concerto in D Minor*, Rachmaninoff "telephoned me, asking how I could ever play this awful music. It is poorly

[49] Amusements, "Rachmaninoff Assails 'Heartless' Moderns," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1932, 17.
[50] M. Gorky, *Chaliapin as Told to Maxim Gorky* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 278.
[51] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 89.
[52] S. Rachmaninoff, "Some Critical Moments in My Career," *The Musical Times*, June 1, 1930, 557.

orchestrated and poorly written for the piano, he said."[53] Rachmaninoff commented on Stravinsky to Milstein: "I adore *Firebird* and *Petrouchka*. Sheer genius! But after that came artificial works."[54] Rachmaninoff also had a strong sense of humor. Horowitz recalled: "He once learned a few Debussy pieces. Debussy was a composer he never had any sympathy for, and I asked him why he put the Debussy on his program. 'I want to prove to the public that this is not good music.'"[55] Horowitz also recalled: "I once asked him why he never gave interviews. I said 'A whole generation would be interested in your views on music and life in general. Nobody knows what you think about composers.' Rachmaninoff looked at me with a very hard face and said, 'Mr. Horowitz, I must tell you something. I was brought up never to lie, and I *cannot* tell the truth.'"[56]

[53] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 144.
[54] N. Milstein & S. Volkov, *From Russia to the West* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 127.
[55] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 112.
[56] Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz*, 180.

Early Fame

As a composer somewhat 'out of fashion' with his times, Rachmaninoff also suffered from another 'problem', in that two of his earliest works had become incredibly popular in the music world.

The first of these, his *Prelude* in C sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2, was written at the age of nineteen, and was then championed by his cousin Siloti on his London and American concert tours. Every amateur pianist soon wanted to learn this piece, and Rachmaninoff's oversight in establishing copyright of this work resulted in many editions swiftly bringing this music to such enthusiastic pianists. This piece has seen extraordinary fame, being arranged for all kinds of ensembles, and the British Library catalog of all such editions occupies over six pages alone[57]. Rachmaninoff mostly took a balanced view, recognizing that his unintentional oversight of copyright allowed his *Prelude* to sell easily, to which he largely owed his early career; however, he often wondered how much money, which he desperately needed at the time of its composition, he might have made instead.

The story takes another surprising turn later, when the conductor Serge Koussevitzky purchased the publisher Gutheil, who owned the copyright to Rachmaninoff's *Prelude*, when its owner died in 1914. Of Koussevitzky, Horowitz said: "Rachmaninoff couldn't stand him. It was all on account of Rachmaninoff's famous *Prelude* in C sharp minor. The Gutheil publishing house in Russia bought it from Rachmaninoff at a small flat fee. Later Koussevitzky purchased the Gutheil company and made a fortune out of the C sharp minor *Prelude*. Rachmaninoff got sick every time he thought about it and could never forgive Koussevitzky."[58]

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[57] R. Threlfall & G. Norris, *A Catalog of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff* (London: Scolar Press, 1982), 10.
[58] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 115 – 116.

This work so dominated public perception of his compositional merits, such that no matter what Rachmaninoff played, or what innovative work he composed decades later, audiences would not be satisfied at any concert until he played *The Prelude* as encore. While the public attached nicknames to the work, such as "The Burning of Moscow" and "The Day of Judgement,"[59] Rachmaninoff himself was far less enthusiastic, and in an interview with *The Delineator* in 1910 dedicated a full page to discussion of this *Prelude*. Rachmaninoff is almost trying to discourage the reader, writing of his creation:

> When I graduated from the Moscow Conservatory, I was a boy of eighteen. Music is not a lucrative profession … After a year I found myself out of pocket. I needed money, and I wrote this *Prelude* and sold it to a publisher for what he would give. I realized, all told, forty roubles out of it – that is, about twenty dollars in your money – very little compensation, you will admit, considering the sums the piece has earned for publishers. … My only inspiration, aside from the pressing necessity to make some money, was the desire to create something beautiful and artistic.[60]

The remainder of this article is a truly banal outline by Rachmaninoff of the work's structural elements, including some remarks about performance with respect to what is marked on the score. For more commentary on the *Prelude*'s assumed inspirations, such as "The Exile", see W. M. Goatman's sincere but speculative article.[61] Only Rachmaninoff's sense of humor provided him some relief, as Swan relates of a 1933 concert, "When he had played his *Humoresque* and the '*Daisies*' as encores, the applause would not subside. He came out again, sat down at the piano and looked pensively at the keys. Then he turned round to the public and

[59] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 85.
[60] S. Rachmaninoff, "My Prelude in C Sharp Minor," *The Delineator*, February 1910, 127.
[61] W. M. Goatman, "The Story of the Prelude," *The Musical Mirror*, December 1929, 324.

made a bewildered gesture with his hands as if to say: 'I don't seem to remember anything else.' This scene was so charming, so human, so intimate, after the glamor of the concert, that the people went wild over it. A voice shouted: 'C-sharp minor!'"[62]

A similar concert review of 1922 reads:

> It was clear that the bulk of those who filled Queen's Hall at Rachmaninov's first recital on May 6 came to see the composer of a certain *Prelude* rather than to hear a pianist of unusual excellence. … The real business of the afternoon, we knew, was to come at the end. And it was so. … Rachmaninov knew what was coming, if his depressed air was any guide. He had hardly sunk on the piano-stool when cries of 'C sharp minor!' were fired at him, and he got to work with it at once, not even making a fresh start when the mob broke in on the opening notes with applause. … He gave a second recital on May 20, when Queen's Hall was again crowded. They got that *Prelude* again.[63]

[62] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences," *The Musical Quarterly*, April 1944, 182.
[63] H. G. "Rachmaninov." *The Musical Times*, June 1, 1922, 418.

The following contemporary newspaper sketch shows the widely known resignation which Rachmaninoff brought to his *Prelude*, which is attributed to the *Musical Courier* in *The Harry L. Anderson* collection at the International Piano Archives at Maryland (Figure 5).

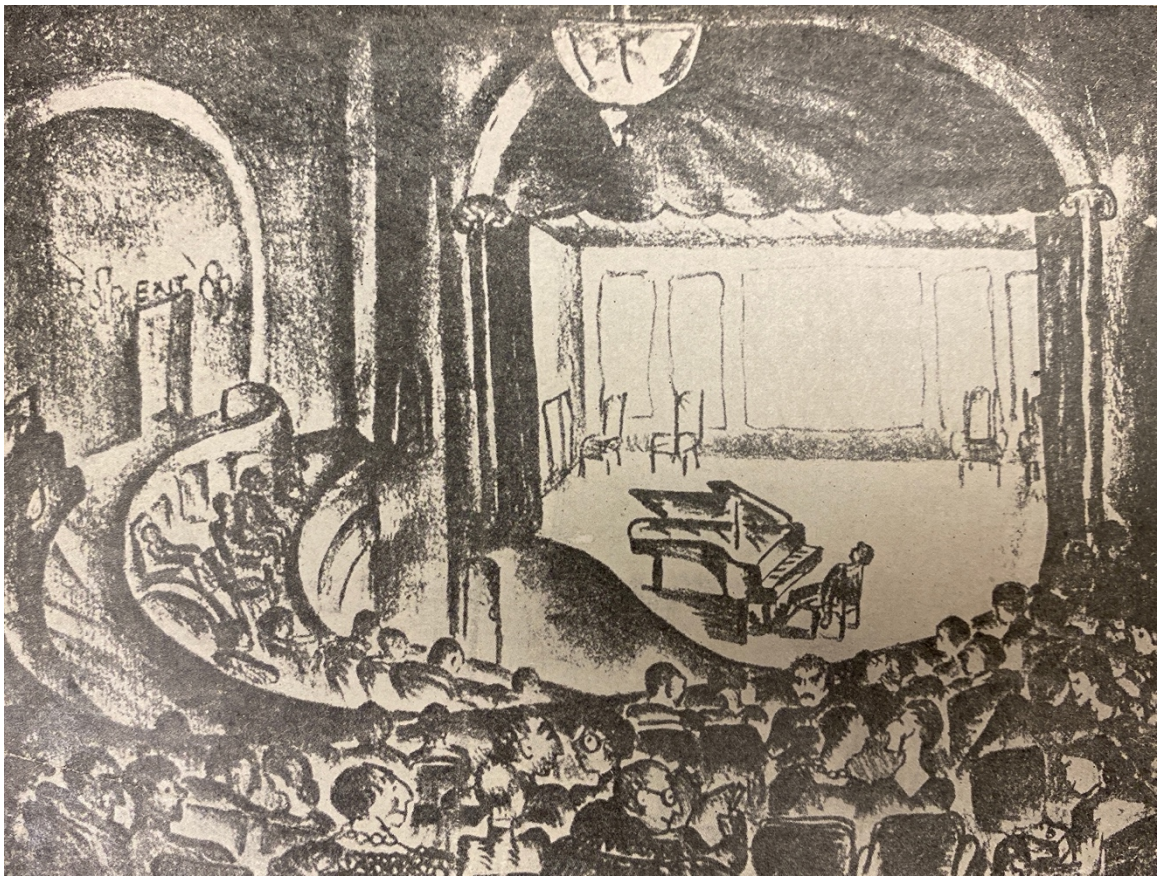


Figure 5. "Rachmaninoff waiting for his audience to quiet down."
From the Harry L. Anderson collection at the International Piano Archives at Maryland, attributed to the Musical Courier.

The music critic Howard Taubman wrote: "In the days when [the *Prelude*] was inescapable at his recitals, he decided to vary the monotony by revising it. He played the rewritten version at a recital, whereupon the critics declared that he did not know his own piece. He decided that it would be futile to tell them about the revision."[64] Rachmaninoff revealed during an interview: "Asked why, when playing his famous C sharp minor *Prelude*, he did not follow the published text, he replied: 'A composer is entitled to take such liberties. Critics and performers are always squabbling. In London, after I had played one of my own Concertos, critics said all the tempos were wrong!'"[65]

The *Prelude* even appeared in Disney's 1929 cartoon short *Mickey's Opry House,* a rendition of which Rachmaninoff whole-heartedly approved. He told Walt Disney: "I have heard my inescapable piece done marvelously by some of the best pianists, and murdered cruelly by amateurs, but never was I more stirred than by the performance of the great maestro Mouse."[66]

In an additional moment of irony, Frederick Gaisberg wrote of Rachmaninoff's Switzerland home, Senar: "He had a fine retreat on beautiful Lake Lucerne, where he and his family regularly spent their summers. Unfortunately, in selecting the site he overlooked its proximity to a girls' seminary and their youthful tribute to him in daily pounding out the C sharp minor *Prelude*!"[67]

The second work which the public associated so strongly with Rachmaninoff was his *Second Piano Concerto*, the first major work he wrote following his recovery from depression in

[64] H. Taubman, *Music on my Beat* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943), 18.
[65] M. D. Calvocoressi. "Rachmaninov interviewed in Holland." *The Musical Times*, May 1938, 361.
[66] L. Liebling, "Variations," *Musical Courier*, July 1942, 23.
[67] F. W. Gaisberg, "The Last of the Three giants of the Volga has Departed," *The Gramophone*, August 1943, 37-38.

1900. This Concerto presents a new synthesis of Rachmaninoff's styles and techniques, borrowing fragments and ideas from earlier works. For example, the slow movement opening was written a decade earlier as a six-hand piano work for the three Skalon sisters, with whom he formed a close friendship while studying at the Moscow Conservatory, especially Vera, the youngest. This concerto was a sensational success for Rachmaninoff, again being championed by Siloti, generating an enthusiasm to hear the composer performing it directly. As a composer, this was a highly favorable situation, as Rachmaninoff had little inclination to publicly perform works by any other composers. It was only later, as a dedicated pianist, that Rachmaninoff became frustrated with the public's obsession with his *Second Piano Concerto*, while he personally preferred his First, and he also wished to perform his Fourth more often. As with the *Prelude*, Opus 3, No. 2, Rachmaninoff begrudgingly accepted reality, and performed this work as his career required.

Handling Criticism

While Rachmaninoff's career from 1917 was primarily as a pianist, some observations have been made regarding his sensitivity to criticism when he did compose. A surprising anecdote is shared by Nathan Milstein, who inspired Rachmaninoff to make a transcription of the Bach *Violin Partita in E Major*, BWV 1006. According to Milstein:

> Rachmaninoff said to me "Nathan Mironovich, I'm giving a concert in Paris. I'll be playing the Bach prelude in my transcription for the first time there. You come hear it. And in the intermission, tell me your opinion." Oh, I was so proud. … Rachmaninoff was interested in my opinion of his work! … There was one passage in the transcription of the prelude I didn't like; I didn't think it sounded 'Bachian' enough. … I went back to see Rachmaninoff, as he had requested, and now I was afraid! Afraid to tell the truth. But I just couldn't not tell it. Only what should I say? I made a bashful face and began, "Sergei Vasilyevich, I have some doubts; in the prelude, it seems to me, you have a chromatic sequence, which doesn't sound just right" - Rachmaninoff interrupted angrily "Go to hell!"[68]

Later that evening all was forgiven, Rachmaninoff inviting him to his suite after dinner, loudly declaring: "Come in, come in! You were right!"[69] As we will see later, Rachmaninoff was also extremely self-critical of his own performances, and perhaps there were other things on his mind in the concert intermission; we may also consider that criticism from an esteemed musician such as Milstein was likely far more affecting than as from a normal newspaper critic.

A more typical example of Rachmaninoff's low expectations of modern listeners is told by Deems Taylor with respect to his final work, the *Symphonic Dances*: "Vincent Youmans, the

[68] Milstein & Volkov, *From Russia to the West*, 110.
[69] Milstein & Volkov, *From Russia to the West*, 111.

popular [Broadway] composer, who was a friend of his, was in the house and, going backstage, told him how much the piece had moved him, what subtle and beautifully wrought music it was, and added a few uncomplimentary remarks regarding the musical perception of the audience. Rachmaninoff said, very simply and sincerely, 'Well, at least the orchestra liked it.'"[70]

Rachmaninoff was more attentive to the reactions of his audiences than to critics, saying in 1939: "the people in an audience may all be poor critics of music, but as a complete body the audience never errs. It is never wrong in its reaction to a performance."[71] The composer Harl McDonald recalled that Rachmaninoff "would ignore the comments of the most influential music-critics when a new work was performed, but he would ask the stage-hand's opinion of a performance. That complete honesty and sincerity won an equally honest and sincere reply and I have heard stage-hands make suggestions to him that no musician or critic would dare to offer."[72]

[70] D. Taylor, *Music to my Ears* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 132.
[71] Unidentified Article, International Piano Archives at Maryland, *Newsweek*, December 4, 1939.
[72] H. McDonald, The Philadelphia Orchestra – 14th Broadcast, March 20, 1948.

Chapter 3

Rachmaninoff, the Pianist

Rachmaninoff is today recognized as one of the leading pianists of his generation, if not of all time, but, as we have seen, his original intention was to be a composer. With this in mind, we open this chapter with an illuminating comment by Mikhail Bukinik, a fellow student of Rachmaninoff's at the Moscow Conservatory:

> And in this throng is Rachmaninoff. … He smokes a lot, speaks in a bass voice, and though we know he is our age, he seems an adult to us. We all heard of his successes in Arensky's free composition class, we know his ability to grasp quickly the form of any composition, we know what an extraordinary sight reader he is, what a perfect ear he has, and we are infected by his love for Tchaikovsky. We are amazed by his keen analysis of each new composition by Tchaikovsky or Arensky. But as a pianist he made less of an impression on us.[73]

Rachmaninoff's greater accomplishments with the piano were to come later; in his student and composer years, he was merely an excellent pianist, utilizing his instrument in service of musical creativity rather than to exemplify technical perfection, or to build celebrity.

We will now explore how Rachmaninoff's identity and development as a pianist owed an incalculable debt to two individuals: Nikolai Zverev, and his cousin Alexander Siloti. The following sections outline their influence on Rachmaninoff's education and career. However, it should be noted that Rachmaninoff was fiercely independent, and he acknowledged the early

[73] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 28.

impact of hearing such artists as Anton Rubinstein in concert more frequently than he spoke of any appreciation of having studied with either Zverev or Siloti. The following interview, given in 1927, shows how Rachmaninoff regarded his personal development:

> Something went wrong with our family fortunes. So trouble began. As a boy I made good progress in music, and began giving lessons in piano when I was only sixteen years old. It was necessary for me to earn money by this means in order to continue my musical education … In order to be able to teach conscientiously, I had to know much more than my pupils and I learned how to solve many problems of technique. My forced pedagogy was certainly a blessing in disguise in my development. For I am proud to say that I am a self-made musician.[74]

It is unclear if Rachmaninoff was truly ungrateful towards his earlier teachers, or if examples like this interview reflected a heightened independence that was expected from a musician of such world renown. Perhaps Rachmaninoff simply had a different meaning by the term "self-made musician" than we do today. In any event, we now explore his studies, and relationships, with both Nikolai Zverev and Alexander Siloti.

[74] B. K. Roy, "Rachmaninoff is Reminiscent," *The Musical Observer*, May 1927, 16.

Nikolai Zverev



Figure 6. Nikolai Zverev and his students, 1886.

Left-to-right: Leonid Maximov, Rachmaninoff, Matvei Pressman, Nikolai Zverev.

Source: https://senar.ru/photos/g001

Nikolai Zverev became Rachmaninoff's piano teacher after the catastrophe of his near-expulsion from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Zverev taught preparatory students at the Moscow Conservatory, in addition to teaching privately for considerable fees; he also taught talented young boys for free on one condition – they would live as full-time wards in his house, where he and his unmarried sister could govern their musical and cultural education. Rachmaninoff, at the age of twelve, would join fellow students Leonid Maximov and Matvei Pressman for the next four years under this program, which included the restriction that the boys "must have as little as possible to do with their parents and relatives, not even going home during their vacations."[75]

It is hard to imagine a larger contrast to Rachmaninoff's former life of chaos and laziness. "Zverev believed in strict convictions and correctives. … They had to rise at 6am, clean their rooms, and start practicing. … Three hours was the acceptable minimum."[76] The boys learned musical repertoire from four-hand arrangements of symphonies, and they attended concerts in the evening. Zverev taught them how to behave in cultured settings, eventually including fine restaurants and night clubs. On Sundays the boys would perform for visiting artists, which included such people as Anton Rubinstein, Taneyev, Arensky, Safonov and Tchaikovsky.

Zverev had an effective approach to teaching technique, all the more remarkable as he never seemed to play the piano himself. Seroff writes:

> Zverev was ruthless with a pupil who played with tense wrists and arms and whose touch was rough and ugly. To avoid all unnecessary movements of the elbows and to achieve complete relaxation in order to develop varied technical skills, he insisted that his pupils

[75] V. Seroff, *Rachmaninoff* (London: Cassell and Company, 1951), 16.
[76] F. Bowers, *Scriabin* (New York: Dover, 1996), Book 1, 130.

> practice a great many exercises, and etudes. He did not allow them to play unrhythmically – 'illiterately without punctuation,' as he said – maintaining that in a clearly defined rhythmical approach lay the foundation of every musical structure. Those who heard Rachmaninoff later as a concert pianist could easily recognize this Zverev training in his playing.[77]

Zverev's technical regimen included studies by Hanon, Bertini, Heller, Clementi, Kullak and Cramer, then moving on to Tausig, Moszkowski, and Czerny. Matvei Pressman recalled that one of his working methods was to place a copper coin on the wrist of a student to develop a control which "united the melodic contour and phrase."[78] Gerard Kimeklis wrote of Zverev:

> [He was not the ordinary tutor whose erudition did not stretch beyond primitive exercises for five fingers. The talent of Nikolai Sergeevich [Zverev] was a multifaceted and very complicated phenomenon. It can be measured not only by its depth but by its breadth, because he did not think that the education of an artist was possible without the formation of their human qualities and self-esteem due to the fact that if the person does not have them then aesthetical perception is faceless and dead.][79]

Unfortunately, "Zverev was also a tyrant and subject to hysteria. He sadistically punished boys for the slightest infractions, for a wrong note, for inattention. There were also humiliations for the boys. They had to light his constant cigarettes, carry an ashtray around for him, and arrange his chair wherever he sat. He forbad any form of athletics for fear of an injury to their hands. Yet he beat them and threw vases at them recklessly."[80] Seroff writes of Zverev's teaching style, "'My dear sir,' he would remark to a pupil as he majestically tossed his head

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[77] Seroff, *Rachmaninoff*, 12.
[78] Z. A. Apetyan, *Vospominaniya o Rakhmaninove* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1961), 152.
[79] J. A. Rego, *Skryabin, Rakhmaninov, and Prokoviev as Composer-Pianists: The Russian Piano Tradition, Aesthetics, and Performance Practices*, Princeton University, 2012, 222.
[80] Bowers, *Scriabin*, Book 1, 131.

against the back of his armchair next the grand piano, 'you are playing like a cobbler!' The 'dear sir' might have been eight years old, frightened out of his wits, and completely unable to take in *why* he was 'playing like a cobbler.'"[81]

While the young Rachmaninoff made outstanding progress as a pianist, by the age of sixteen he had discovered his greater need to compose. He asked Zverev if he might have some private space where he could focus on his composing, as the constant piano practicing from the other boys made this impossible for him. Zverev took great personal offence at this request, to which Rachmaninoff in response "added fuel to the fire by remarking that, as I was no longer a child, the tone he adopted towards me did not seem very suitable. The whole scene ended disgracefully."[82] Rachmaninoff left Zverev's shortly thereafter; Zverev would not even speak to him for the next three years.

Upon his graduation from the Moscow Conservatory, having been awarded the Great Gold Medal, Zverev broke the silence and congratulated him. Zverev then gave Rachmaninoff his gold watch, which Rachmaninoff held with some affection. However, despite this reconciliation, and later efforts by Zverev to aid Rachmaninoff's career, Max Harrison observed "it is noteworthy that he never dedicated a composition to Zverev as he did to many of his close associates."[83]

For more commentary on this complex and formidable personality, readers are directed to *Scriabin*[84] by Bowers and *Rachmaninoff*[85] by Seroff.

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[81] Seroff, *Rachmaninoff*, 12.
[82] Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections*, 72.
[83] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 23.
[84] Bowers, *Scriabin*.
[85] Seroff, *Rachmaninoff*.

Alexander Siloti

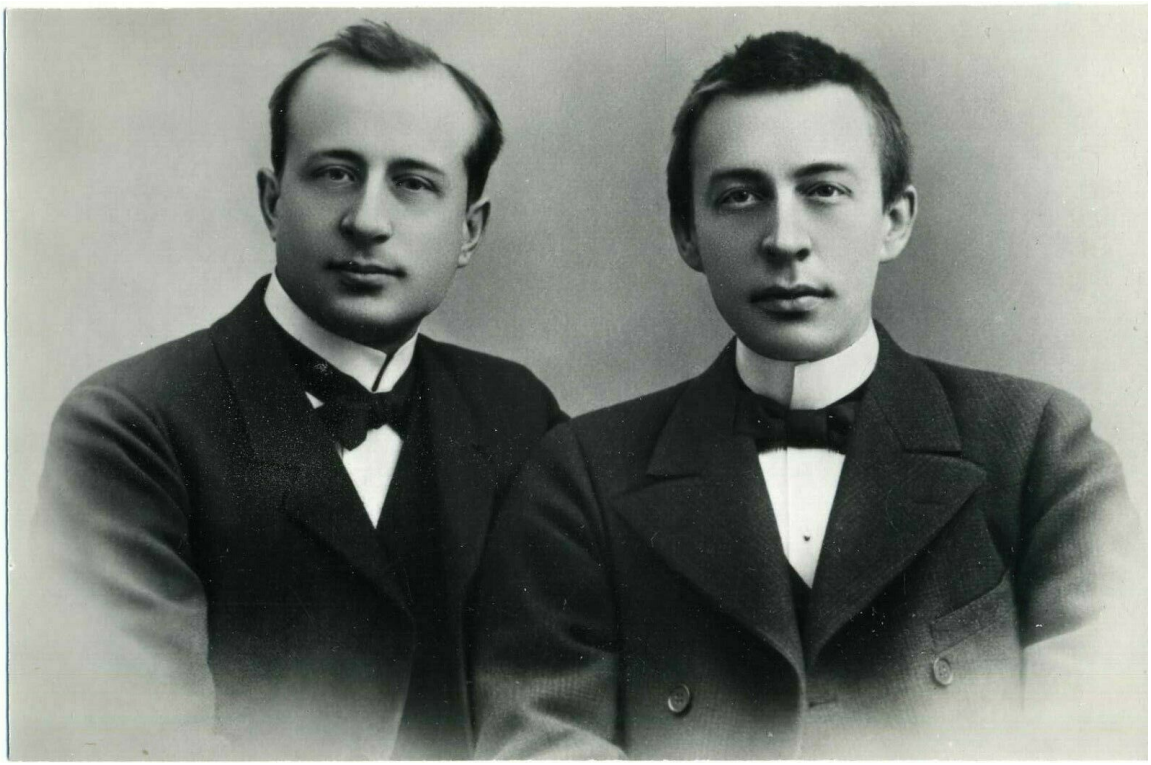


Figure 7. Alexander Siloti and Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1902.
Source: https://senar.ru/photos/w003

Alexander Siloti, Rachmaninoff's cousin and ten years his senior, was a constant source of support and guidance during Rachmaninoff's early career. As we have seen, Siloti provided the early suggestion that Rachmaninoff should study with Zverev, setting his crucial musical foundations.

From 1888 Rachmaninoff also studied piano directly with Siloti in the upper division of the Moscow Conservatory until his graduation in 1892, where his final piano examination involved such advanced works as Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata and Chopin's *B-flat minor sonata*, and which he passed with the highest grades. This performance exam was also held under difficult conditions – Siloti had chosen to retire early from the Conservatory due to dispute with its new

director, Vasili Safonov, and so Rachmaninoff had to decide if he should switch teachers to Safonov or aim to graduate early. Rachmaninoff later said: "I refused to be transferred to anyone and declared my intention of finishing under Siloti. I was told that if I prepared the *B-flat minor Sonata* of Chopin, the *Waldstein* Sonata, and some smaller things, I could have my way. Only three weeks were left before the examination, but I managed it."[86]

Given the significance of these four years, it is highly surprising that neither Rachmaninoff nor Siloti have left any public record of how they worked together over this period. Siloti was an unusual 'teacher' in that he was also maintaining a highly demanding concert schedule at the time. However, both seemed reluctant to refer to each other as a 'student' or 'teacher'; Siloti made the following minimal, almost insignificant comments, in an interview with *The Etude*:

> The pupil often does well when he has a teacher of opposite temperament. The effervescent pupil needs the hard training that a serious minded, patient master can give, while the sluggish pupil benefits from having a brilliant alert teacher always ready to spur him on. When I was teaching my cousin Rachmaninoff, he already manifested some of the somber, almost pessimistic traits which marked his early career. On the other hand, I was an optimist. To me it was always the gold of morning sunshine - to him it was the black of midnight."[87]

One aspect of this curious relationship was later revealed by Siloti's daughter, Kyriena, who said "Rachmaninoff and Siloti esteemed each other, but did not actually like one another's playing, you know."[88]

Siloti provided significant financial support for Rachmaninoff on several occasions, most importantly after his graduation. Rachmaninoff said, "I talked to Siloti, my well-to-do relative,

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[86] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences, Part 1," *The Musical Quarterly*, January 1944, 14.
[87] A Siloti, "Many Roads to Artistic Playing," *The Etude*, May 1922, 299.
[88] C. Barber, *Lost in the Stars* (Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2002), 86.

and asked him if he believed in my future as a composer. … Could he help me for the next two years? He agreed to my request without hesitation, and gave me money on a regular basis for the next two years."[89] This investment would repay both of their careers as Rachmaninoff wrote the aforementioned *Prelude*, Opus 3 No. 2, and shortly thereafter his *Second Piano Concerto*, each of which Siloti used in his concert programs to great success.

As Rachmaninoff's international fame quickly grew, both cousins were likely surprised to find their relationship changing. Charles Barber writes: "As a teacher, mentor, and sponsor, Siloti did as much as any man to make Rachmaninoff's career possible. In the last three decades, their roles gradually reversed, and for a time awkwardness and even bitterness was clearly felt. … there were undercurrents of mutual resentment and envy."[90]

As a demonstration of this latter point, an astonishing article appears in *The New York Times* in 1929, titled "Alexander Siloti Returns."[91] This article, almost a full-page, details Siloti's life and achievements as a musician, his upcoming New York City concerts, teaching activities, and memoirs. The article picture shows the young Siloti with Liszt, but upon close inspection of the text we find no mention of Rachmaninoff at all! At this point in time, Rachmaninoff was at the very pinnacle of his career. The article even states:

> Mr. Siloti has been active not only as a pianist, but as a conductor, and, following the noble Liszt tradition, especially a conductor for new composers and little-known music. The list of new works he produced in the fourteen years of his orchestra concerts in Russia is commentary upon the breadth, authority and enterprise of his mind. Albeniz, Bruckner, Debussy, Delius, Dukas, Gedike, Cui, Liadoff, Ravel, Reger, Sibelius, Roger-Ducasse,

[89] Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections*, 113.
[90] Barber, *Lost in the Stars*, 85.
[91] O. Downes, "Alexander Siloti Returns," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1929, Section X, 9.

> Stravinsky, Schonberg, Chausson, Tcherepnine, Enesco are among composers who he made known in Russia.[92]

Siloti, the most consistent champion of Rachmaninoff from the start, no longer even mentions his name.

Artur Rubinstein contributes an additional point of potential discord between Rachmaninoff and Siloti, an anecdote some hold in dispute as misrepresentative of Rachmaninoff's character. Nonetheless, Rubinstein tells of when Siloti sought to leave Russia in the 1920s, writing that Siloti

> brought me one morning a long letter in an opened envelope addressed to Rachmaninoff and said to me, "Artur, I want you to add some of your own words to this letter. As you know, Rachmaninoff is my cousin. With his great name, it would be easy for him to help me to get concerts or a professorship." … I was not particularly happy about this mission. Rachmaninoff had never shown a special interest in me. When I arrived in New York, … I appeared at his home with the fat envelope in my hand. The Russian master received me very politely, made me sit down on the other side of his desk, and quietly took the letter without comment. After reading the twenty-odd pages he turned to me without a smile. "I say: Can one recommend Siloti as a pianist?" He dismissed me politely without another word on the matter.[93]

Like most complex relationships, Siloti and Rachmaninoff remained friends overall, and respected each other. When Siloti later taught at Juilliard, "students found it an astounding

[92] O. Downes, "Alexander Siloti Returns," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1929, Section X, 9.
[93] Rubinstein, *My Many Years*, 112 – 113.

experience to play the *Sonatas* or *Etudes-Tableaux* only to have Siloti introduce the composer, quietly smoking on a sofa in the corner of the room."[94]

[94] Barber, *Lost in the Stars*, 96.

Pianistic and Musical Genius

Upon being provided structure and discipline from Zverev, and then Siloti, it did not take long for Rachmaninoff's musical genius to emerge. It became intimidatingly clear that Rachmaninoff had a memory which allowed him to absorb music instantly and completely. Patrick Piggott writes:

> It happened that the celebrated St. Petersburg composer, Alexander Glazunov, came one evening to Taneyev's flat to play through a symphony he had just completed – his fifth. Many of the leading musicians in Moscow had been invited to hear the new work, which had yet to be performed in public. After Glazunov had played his symphony, tea was served, and then the company fell to discussing the music. Presently Taneyev left the room and returned, bringing with him the fifteen-year-old Sergei. "This is my pupil, Rachmaninoff" said Taneyev, "He too has composed a symphony. Now Sergei Vasilyevich, play us your symphony." So Sergei sat at the piano and played, but the music he played was – Glazunov's new symphony! Glazunov was almost speechless with astonishment. "How could you know it?" he exclaimed. "Nobody has seen or heard a note of it until this evening." "Sergei Vasilyevich heard it through the door while you were playing it," said Taneyev.[95]

Alexander Goldenweiser, who was a fellow pupil of Siloti, recalled: "Rachmaninoff's talent bordered on the miraculous,"[96] and that "Siloti, who taught us both, once assigned him on Wednesday, the Brahms *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, and Rachmaninoff gave a finished performance at the next lesson on Saturday."[97] Olga Conus similarly recalled: "On another

[95] P. Piggott, *Rachmaninov* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 21 – 22.
[96] D. Zhitomirsky, "Russia Honors Memory of Rachmaninoff," *Musical Courier*, January 15, 1946, 36.
[97] D. Zhitomirsky, "Russia Honors Memory of Rachmaninoff," *Musical Courier*, January 15, 1946, 36.

occasion, I overheard Sergei Vasilyevich grumble 'how difficult is Scriabin's *C-sharp minor Etude*! It took me two or three hours to learn it.' What might have sounded like a boast coming from someone else was for him a genuine indication of effort."[98]

Goldenweiser relates another extraordinary tale:

> After the death of Scriabin [1915], Rachmaninoff decided to give concerts in his memory. … I remember that three or four days before the first recital Rachmaninoff was at my place. He said that the first program as planned seemed a little too short and asked me to suggest something he might add. I asked him if he knew the *Fantaisie*, Opus 28. He said he didn't. I got the music and showed it to him. He played it through. The *Fantaisie*, one of the extremely difficult works of Scriabin and rather long (thirteen pages) pleased him very much and he decided to play it in his recital. This he did, three or four days later.[99]

As with all things, there was a double edge to this gift. Charles O'Connell, head of the Artist and Repertoire department at RCA from 1930 to 1944, recalled a rare instance of Rachmaninoff struggling with musical memory, in one of his own works no less - his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Opus 43.

> This happened at Minneapolis a few years ago when Ormandy was conducting there. At a certain point Ormandy noticed that the pianist had departed far from the score and was wandering from one modulation to another in a very curious way. This happened during the solo passage and Ormandy, in alarm, stole a look at Rachmaninoff's face. The pianist was obviously in great distress and his expression said to Mr. Ormandy, as it would to any conductor, 'For God's sake, go on.' Ormandy consequently quickly indicated the next tutti to the orchestra, and with the first note, of course, Rachmaninoff's memory functioned

[98] O. Conus, "Sergei V. Rachmaninoff", *International Rachmaninoff Festival-Conference, University of Maryland*, April 1998, Introduction Letter, 2.
[99] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 371.

> again. He afterward said that he nearly always got into trouble at that particular point in the Rhapsody because the first time he heard Moiseiwitsch play the piece he too went astray at that particular point. Rachmaninoff claimed that ever afterward he had great difficulty getting past the measure in which Moiseiwitsch had made this error without doing the same thing himself.[100]

It would appear that the impression made by hearing Moiseiwitsch's live playing superseded his intellectual understanding of his own work.

[100] C. O'Connell, *The Other Side of the Record* (New York: Knopf, 1947), 164.

Public Reception

While we will see that Rachmaninoff did not always play what was on the score, and made deviations we might not consider acceptable today, in his time he represented a new, more strict, school of playing. Zverev's insistence on rhythmic consistency, evenness of tone, and accuracy of fingers, was a sharp contrast to the emotional exaggerations of the high Romantic style of earlier generations. Harold C. Schonberg wrote of James Huneker, a famous music critic of the day: "Rachmaninoff's playing disturbed him … Huneker's tastes were more toward Joseffy, Godowsky, Rosenthal and others of that school. For [Josef] Hofmann and Rachmaninoff represented something new, and something that Huneker found inhibiting. They were the new breed of pianists who adhered much more closely to the notes than did the old-timers: new pianists whose rhythm was tight and whose rubato was restrained."[101]

Rachmaninoff's concert style was modest, precise, and in an unusual sense, non-personal. Rachmaninoff preferred the music itself to be the center of focus. H. T. Parker wrote in 1918 that

> once embarked upon performance … he neither regards nor disregards his hearers; he merely bids them hear. With hands, with body he has not a trick of physical or technical display. There he sits, wholly absorbed in his task, entirely concentrated upon it, summoning, marshalling into it all that his faculties may give. … With grave good will he fulfills every obligation to his hearers – and vanishes.[102]

[101] H. C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 397 - 398.
[102] H. T. Parker, Concert Review, *Transcript*, December 9, 1918.

The New York Times would write in 1930:

> He does not smile once through the whole occasion. In no way does he gesticulate or parade. All that he communicates he says with two wrists and ten fingers, without the raising of an eyebrow. The performance is one of mind sovereign over matter, spirit that transfigures digital gymnastics. So it has always been with Rachmaninoff, and so it will be for the years to come.[103]

Rachmaninoff's stage demeanor became legendary, and the word 'gloomy' was often used to describe the public's impression of him, and of much of his music. Victor Seroff wrote extensively on this point, that Rachmaninoff

> wore his hair cropped, although he knew that to some people it looked 'like a convict's … whatever the lineage, the combination of his physical appearance and his stolid behavior on stage gave an impression of an extremely unhappy and gloomy man …
>
> "Sergei Rachmaninoff is the archetype of the grim Russian." "He looks as if he carries all the burdens of Mother Russia on his shoulders." "He looks like an undertaker." These and other impressionistic remarks appeared regularly in journalists' and music critics' articles about him. "Does Rachmaninoff ever smile, does he ever laugh?" One heard such questions over and over again.
>
> "You know," he once told me, "Chaliapin tried to teach how to come on stage, how to bow, and how to accept applause gracefully: always smiling. But I couldn't. Why, I would have looked like a grinning idiot. I must admit I failed completely in those lessons, but he did try hard to teach me."[104]

[103] O. Downes, "Audience Stirred by Rachmaninoff," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1935, Section N, 5.
[104] V. Seroff, "Sergei Rachmaninoff as I Knew Him, A Reminiscence," *Stereo Review*, May 1973, 60.

There was some effort to publicly address this reputation, to the point of publishing an article in the *Philharmonic Review* entitled "RACHMANINOFF NOT GLOOMY, HIS FAMILY SAYS," as follows:

> Sergei Rachmaninoff is not the gloomy man many people picture him to be. Members of his family say that he is gay and jovial with his relatives and close friends.
>
> For years the legend has been current that the tall, solemn-faced composer-pianist never laughs. His audiences have found this easy to believe, for on the concert stage he rarely smiles. His usual demeanor is austere and often melancholy.
>
> "He's not at all gloomy," insists his sister-in-law, Miss Sofia Satin. "In public he is modest and reticent, and people think he is gloomy. But he really has a wonderful sense of humor and can laugh heartily. You should see him when he and Chaliapin get together. Chaliapin is always up to pranks and Rachmaninoff often laughs until the tears stream down his face."[105]

Regardless, upon reflecting on Rachmaninoff's legacy, Benno Moiseiwitsch later named him "The gloomy dean of pianists."[106]

Considering the later career he would build, it is of some surprise that while he was a young composer and in poverty, it had never occurred to Rachmaninoff that he might make some additional money as an occasional concert pianist. One concert opportunity he did agree to while in Russia was a three-month tour with the violinist Teresina Tua in 1894. Rachmaninoff did not enjoy this work, and of his music partner he wrote: "Incidentally, she does not play particularly well; her technique is middling. But with her eyes and smiles she plays magnificently for the

[105] "Rachmaninoff not Gloomy, His Family Says," *Philharmonic Review*, January-February 1937.
[106] B. Moiseiwitsch, "Rachmaninoff Remembered," *Musical Courier*, May 1962, 41.

public. As an artist she is not serious, but she has talent. … She is charming to me – very afraid that I'll scamper away."[107] Scamper away he did, on the pretext that he had not been paid a promised advance; Rachmaninoff returned once more to his more fulfilling life of composing.

Rachmaninoff held a similar opinion of his concert tour of America in 1909, which he loathed so much that he declined lucrative return invitations for subsequent years. His mindset towards a concert life was not much different after leaving Russia, and he found the constant traveling extremely draining. Horowitz recalled that "once, when Rachmaninoff was leaving on a tour, someone said to him, 'when will you be home?' and he looked at the train, saying 'Home, home, this train is my home.'"[108] On a similar note, Horowitz recalled: "Once I asked him if the acoustic was good at some hall somewhere. He said 'I don't remember the acoustic, but the money was good.'"[109]

This is not to say Rachmaninoff did not enjoy the actual concerts; he did. Near the end of his life, as doctors suggested he should perform fewer concerts, he retorted: "If you deprive me of them, I shall wither away … It is best to die on the concert platform."[110] He told Victor Seroff that giving up concerts would be difficult, for "what life will I have without them?"[111] *Musical America* reported in 1939 that he was simply "tired, not retiring."[112]

While Rachmaninoff would develop a legendary reputation as a pianist, we should remember the circumstances of how his concert career began, and that he likely did not play the same way in his earlier concerts as he did later. After all, a large reason he declined the

[107] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 67.
[108] Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz*, 184.
[109] Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz*, 81.
[110] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 383.
[111] V. Seroff, "Sergei Rachmaninoff as I Knew Him, A Reminiscence," *Stereo Review*, May 1973, 65.
[112] "Personalities," *Musical America*, November 10, 1939, 16.

conducting positions also offered to him in 1918 was that "the number of concerts [110 concerts in thirty weeks] disturbed Rachmaninoff; he had no programs ready, and time would be too short to prepare so extended a schedule."[113] As a composer who had primarily performed only his own music until this time, he likely held similar concerns regarding his solo piano repertoire. And yet, a pianist's career seemed the safer path to him, a decision upon which his family's livelihood depended, and which he had to make while also coming to terms with losing his country, his belongings and his former career.

Rachmaninoff's solo concert schedule from 1918 was relentless, averaging around fifty concerts a year, every year, with a high point of seventy-one concerts in 1922.[114] Leslie Hodgson wrote in 1943 that Rachmaninoff "mellowed with a passing of time,"[115] and that:

> his evolution as a pianist was singularly interesting. In the earlier years of his career as such he was by no means the consummate artist that he eventually became. His playing was frequently criticized for being hard in tone and austere in feeling. There was one recital at Carnegie Hall a number of years ago when an almost repellent bitterness pervaded his reading of the Chopin *B-flat minor sonata* and tinged almost everything else as it came from under his fingers … By many he was considered at one time a purely cerebral player, an opinion that sporadically renewed itself. There was even one occasion, several years ago, if the record demands complete candor, when his playing of an entire program scarcely rose above the level of the commonplace. But it is known now that not infrequently he was in great physical discomfort when he gave his concerts.[116]

[113] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 212 - 213.
[114] For more details, refer to Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 387 – 395.
[115] L. Hodgson, "Rachmaninoff, The Pianist," *Musical America*, April 10, 1943, 26.
[116] L. Hodgson, "Rachmaninoff, The Pianist," *Musical America*, April 10, 1943, 26.

As can be heard in his recordings, Rachmaninoff had a penchant for speed, while still respecting the structure, overall text, and meaning of the works he played. Richard Bailey wrote: "Sometimes when he started to play I thought 'My God! That's too fast!' but I came to realize it made no real difference. His performance always remained so clean, so clearly balanced, so completely comprehensible architecturally, harmonically, melodically, and rhythmically, that there was never any question as to what he was doing."[117] Eugene Istomin would similarly reflect: "But you know, he played very fast, terribly fast at times, sometimes too fast. Today his music is played too slowly. So there you are."[118]

Schonberg wrote in his centenary retrospective of Rachmaninoff:

> The playing was at all times elegant. But it had inevitability rather than spontaneity. Rachmaninoff never gave the impression that he was doing something on the spur of the moment. His interpretations sounded as though they had been worked out in collaboration with God – the final statement of a work, to be played eternally this way and no other. … Rachmaninoff played as strongly before his death as he ever did. The last time I heard him, in 1940 or 1941, there was no deterioration in his split-second responses, or the way he was able to get over the keys, or the patrician mind that was applied to the music.[119]

Evaluations of Rachmaninoff's later style were often aligned in their judgement by both musicians and critics and alike, most famously captured by Josef Hofmann's touching tribute that "Rachmaninoff was made of steel and gold; steel in his arms, gold in his heart."[120] His penchant for speed has already been discussed; his reputation of arriving at a single interpretation

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[117] R. Bailey, "Remembering Rachmaninoff," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, June 1986, 110.
[118] D. Dubal, "Eugene Istomin," *Reflections from the Keyboard* (New York: Summit, 1984), 211.
[119] H. C. Schonberg, "Did Rachmaninoff Collaborate with God?", *The New York Times*, April 1, 1973, 167.
[120] Josef Hofmann's tribute to Rachmaninoff, May 16, 1945, as reprinted in *The Complete Rachmaninoff* (RCA, 1973 LP), booklet.

of the works he played was also observed by Jan Holcman: "Rachmaninoff never changed a conception once acquired. His mood might determine the temperature, but never the character, of his interpretations."[121] Harris Goldsmith wrote of *The Complete Rachmaninoff*, released in 1973, noted that "his style became bolder, less yieldingly lyric, more relentless and 'orchestral' in his later years. … What profile and personality he had – the recognizable imprint of a motoric, infallible rhythm – and what masculinity. … And even at its most violent Rachmaninoff's tone – for all its mettle and metal – was pure velvet."[122]

Critics, by their nature, review performances through the lens of their own training and experience, and so some outliers are found from time to time. Dean Elder, making a different evaluation of Rachmaninoff wrote in 1993: "Rachmaninoff changes rhythms ad libitum, seldom playing a triplet or two sixteenth notes in time. The opening of the Chopin *Nocturne* in E-flat, Op. 9, No. 2 is a simple but far from isolated example. The result is often sentimental and even annoying."[123] Such commentary is more a reflection of our modern expectations of rigid fidelity to the Urtext of a work, and is thankfully not the common point of view on Rachmaninoff's legacy.

[121] J. Holcman, *Pianists: On and Off the Record*, (Maryland: University of Maryland, 2000), 25.
[122] H. Goldsmith, "The Complete Rachmaninoff," *High Fidelity Magazine*, January 1974, 59 - 60.
[123] D. Elder, "The Art of Sergei Rachmaninoff," *Clavier*, March 1993, 31.

On Technique

One key to understanding the recordings, and performances of Rachmaninoff, was the standards he held himself to. One of these standards was the piano technique of Josef Hofmann. As Harold C. Schonberg related, "Rachmaninoff always said that Hofmann was the greatest pianist of the day. Hofmann always said Rachmaninoff was."[124] Rachmaninoff, armed with his transcendental musical mind, was able to focus on developing his piano technique almost in isolation of being concerned with such trivialities as memorization or determining the meaning of a work; this recalls the musical partitioning of *τεχνε* to which Neuhaus alluded in our introduction, and Rachmaninoff's unique perspective of it. Bailey, who studied composition with Medtner, related that "Medtner told me in 1945 … that Rachmaninoff's memory was extraordinary and that he practiced very little for that aspect of his playing. But every day he did scales, arpeggios, octaves, etc."[125]

Rachmaninoff's reputation towards his work ethic, to those who knew him, was fearsome. Olga Conus recalled: "Every morning at least half an hour Rachmaninoff spent on Czerny *Etudes*, Op. 740 polishing his trills and arpeggios. … It was so beautifully done that all of us begged him to put them on his program."[126] Horowitz spoke of Rachmaninoff practicing scales for three hours every morning.[127] Chasins tells of another occasion:

> Rachmaninoff was a dedicated and driven perfectionist. He worked incessantly, with infinite patience. Once I had an appointment to spend an afternoon with him in Hollywood. Arriving at the designated hour of twelve, I heard an occasional piano sound

[124] H. C. Schonberg, "Did Rachmaninoff Collaborate with God?", *The New York Times*, April 1, 1973, 167.
[125] R. Bailey, "Remembering Rachmaninoff," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, June 1986, 111.
[126] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 398.
[127] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 112 – 113.

as I approached the cottage. I stood outside the door, unable to believe my ears. Rachmaninoff was practicing Chopin's etude in thirds, but at such a snail's pace that it took me a while to recognize it because so much time elapsed between each finger stroke and the next.[128]

Ruth Slenczynska, who studied with Rachmaninoff in 1934 as a child prodigy of nine years of age, recalled complaining to him that she had to practice nine hours a day: "'Why, that's nothing,' he said, 'at one point I worked seventeen hours a day.' And I said, 'Well, what made you work so hard?' He said he 'wanted to have a technique that would approach that of Josef Hofmann.'"[129] It is highly likely that Rachmaninoff was recalling the early years of his American concert career.

Rachmaninoff told Victor Seroff of this time in his life:

When we first arrived in this country [1918], I had to make a very serious decision about which of three professions to pursue: should I devote myself to composing, or to conducting, or entirely to a career as a concert pianist? For reasons of financial security, the last one seemed to be the best choice, but I soon realized that it was not enough just to play my own compositions – and I did not have a large repertoire otherwise. So, you can easily imagine that, in order to get a large repertoire at my fingertips, I had to practice a great deal. You see, when you are young you don't realize that the older you become the more difficult it is …. Not so much to learn new pieces, but to have them sit firmly in your fingers and your memory. And so, of course, you have to devote more time to them.[130]

Alfred Swan related the integration of Rachmaninoff's piano work with his later home life:

But after tea, no matter how many guests there were, the big house would plunge into silence. Quietly and very inconspicuously, Rachmaninoff closed the doors of the drawing-

[128] Chasins, *Speaking of Pianists*, 44.
[129] Eloquence Classics, *Ruth Slenczynska and Josef Hofmann video interview*. Timestamp: 27:00.
[130] V. Seroff, "Sergei Rachmaninoff as I Knew Him, A Reminiscence," *Stereo Review*, May 1973, 62 - 63.

> room and sat down at the piano. He did not practice in the strict sense of the word; he played something through, went with his fingers over the keyboard meditatively, and then suddenly the loud and victorious sounds of Beethoven's "*Les Adieux*" would be heard. Then he would again appear in the garden or in the dining-room.[131]

Rachmaninoff was extremely humble about his technical achievements, which could border on the ridiculous to those around him. Marie Eustis Hofmann wrote of a visit from Rachmaninoff to her husband, Josef, in 1907:

> Nov. 27th. Raining. … Rachmaninoff comes in. He is really a dear. He wanted J[os]ef to hear him play the Tchaikovsky *Concerto* which he has to play in Moscow. He says he has no conception how to play it, and wants to take an hour's lesson. Jef told him he couldn't do it. He had too much admiration for him as an artist to be able to teach him anything.[132]

Rachmaninoff also went to Godowsky to ask for special piano exercises,[133] no doubt in service of 'improving his technique' to the impossible standard set by Hofmann.

Eugene Istomin studied with Siloti as a young boy, and so: "when he was seven, Istomin went to play for Rachmaninoff. Kyriena Siloti had taken him, and he played one of the little Beethoven Sonatas from Op. 49. Rachmaninoff treated him very kindly, kissing him on the forehead and obviously happy with what he had heard. He complimented the young pianist, but then asked Kyriena Siloti: 'Are you giving him technique?' He probably thought it was

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[131] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences, Part 1," *The Musical Quarterly*, January 1944, 5.
[132] N. Graydon & M. Sizemore, *The Amazing Marriage of Marie Eustis & Josef Hofmann* (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 1965), 160.
[133] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 112 – 113.

absolutely necessary from that age to be already spending long hours practicing scales and all kinds of exercises."[134]

Rachmaninoff spoke, and wrote of, the importance of technique frequently. He would write: "Training in technique is the first necessity, for obviously, if a player has not the technical means for expressing the composer's ideas, there can be no possibility of interpretation. The technic must be so great, so perfectly at command, that the composition to be performed need not be practiced for technic but for interpretation only."[135] Similarly, "the first thing a pupil should seek is to acquire as much technic as he can possibly comprehend. This is the reason why it is necessary to start at a very early age. A technic must be built, just as a house must be built. It takes years to do this. There are no real short cuts. The muscles grow in power and dexterity, through a course of years of daily hard work."[136]

Writing later, Rachmaninoff would say "Chopin is so 'comfortable' for the hand that most students seem to fail to realize that his works should be studied with patience and diligence. Patience, patience, patience and then more patience is the great asset of the student who would acquire finished performance. Chopin must be studied with precisely as much patience and care as Bach."[137]

One is reminded of similar comments from Josef Hofmann:

> Now, I hear it so often said of this and that pianist that 'he plays with *so* much feeling' that I cannot help wondering if he does not, sometimes at least, play with '*so* much feeling'

[134] E. Istomin, transcribed radio interview, source: https://www.eugeneistomin.com/the-musician/favorite-composers/rachmaninov/.
[135] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 239.
[136] S. Rachmaninoff, "New Lights on the Art of the Piano," *The Etude*, April 1923, 223.
[137] S. Rachmaninoff, "How Russian Students Work," *The Etude*, May 1923, 298.

> where it is not in the least called for and where '*so* much feeling' constitutes a decided trespass against the aesthetic boundaries of the composition. … This fault reveals that the pianist' spirit – of adventure – is too willing, but the flesh – of their fingers and their technic – too weak.[138]

In other words, Rachmaninoff recognized that being 'musical' was not enough. The hands, the fingers, the wrists, the totality of a pianist's physical equipment, requires its own dedicated focus to achieve any level of excellence. Rachmaninoff wrote: "As a special message to students, to every one, in fact, I would say, 'Work! Work!' One must play a piece a thousand times, making a thousand experiments, listening, comparing, judging effects. … only through unceasing labor can he accomplish such a mission."[139]

[138] J. Hofmann, *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered* (New York: Dover, 1976), 10 – 11.
[139] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 240.

On Standards

Given the preceding section, we can intuit some idea of the standards Rachmaninoff held himself to. As we will see in our exploration of his recordings, Rachmaninoff would make many takes of the works he recorded, sometimes over the span of years, before considering a take to be acceptable. In some cases, this would not occur, and Rachmaninoff would instead wish to see all the takes destroyed, such that the public would never hear that work on gramophone.

While Josef Hofmann presented a contemporary technical standard, Rachmaninoff held another standard to be equally high, if not higher – that of Anton Rubinstein. Having attended Rubinstein's famous 'historical concert' series at the age of twelve, where Rubinstein performed [166][140] works, spanning the entire history of keyboard music, over [seven] lectures,[141] the young Rachmaninoff attended both the evening recitals, and the repeat concerts given by Rubinstein the next morning for students. Rachmaninoff would compare all later piano performances to the impression Rubinstein had made upon him. Rachmaninoff wrote:

> To my mind, no pianist of the present day approaches the playing of the great Rubinstein, whom I heard many times. … When Rubinstein played in Moscow 'everybody was there', and the concert sold out weeks in advance. Shortly afterward, Rubinstein went to hear a new pianist … when he was asked after the recital what he thought of the newcomer's playing, Rubinstein wrinkled up his heavy brows and then said earnestly, 'Oh!

[140] In *The Etude*, the original text states that Rubinstein performed 857 works, and thirty-six concerts, in this series, however inspection of Rubinstein's programs in Maurice Hinson's *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1145 – 1147, reveals this smaller, although still extraordinary, number. Readers may also reference George Kehler's *The Piano in Concert* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 1096 – 1097 for a similar listing. My thanks to Donald Manildi for advising on this correction.

[141] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 240.

> Nowadays everyone plays the piano well.' That was the point. 'Everybody plays the piano well!' But how few – how very, very few – even approach the greatness of Rubinstein?[142]

We might even take an appreciative view that Hofmann gave Rachmaninoff something to aspire to, or at least measure himself against, since it is often forgotten how lonely it can be for someone who is supreme in their craft. This rivalry of admiration would combine humorously with Rachmaninoff's dour outlook, as Chasins related:

> Some years later, at one of Hofmann's memorable recitals in New York's Carnegie Hall, following a truly bedazzling performance of Chopin's *B minor Sonata*, Sergei Rachmaninoff sat silent for a few moments and then said: 'Well, there goes one more composition out of my repertoire. Not since Anton Rubinstein have I heard anything like this. There's no use. It is the music itself and the only way to play it, and nobody else can do it.'[143]

Rachmaninoff did indeed no longer perform this work. A heightened level of paranoia affected Rachmaninoff regarding his own concerts, and the quality of his playing. He told Horowitz in 1930 of his previous tour: "I played seventy concerts and only three of them did I play well."[144] After one recital, which included his transcription of the Bach *Partita in E Major*, BWV 1006, Cyril Smith recalled interacting with Rachmaninoff, then forty years Smith's senior:

> Without wasting much time over greetings, he turned to me, demanding anxiously in his broken English, 'The Bach, the Bach, was it all right?' I said I thought his performance

[142] S. Rachmaninoff, "National and Radical Impressions in the Music of To-Day and Yesterday", *The Etude*, October 1919, 616.
[143] Chasins, *Speaking of Pianists*, 15.
[144] Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz*, 179.

had been wonderful. Rachmaninoff went back to his other guests, obviously preoccupied, and a few minutes later he returned to me with the same question. I gave him the same answer. In the meantime, the artist's room had become very much more crowded, and before long the two of us were separated in the crush. But later, when I was least expecting it, he bore down upon me again, guided me into a corner where no-one else could hear us and whispered urgently, "Really, the Bach, it was all right?" This was true modesty. He honestly believed that his own work was capable of much improvement and that I was a fit judge of it.[145]

Naturally, Rachmaninoff held those around him to the same standards which he applied to himself, and this attitude emerged while he was still a student. Mikhail Bukinik recalls Rachmaninoff rehearsing his *First Piano Concerto* at the Moscow Conservatory with Safonov as conductor; Safonov was also the Conservatory director:

At rehearsals, the eighteen-year-old Rachmaninoff showed the same stubbornly calm character that we knew from our comradely gatherings. Safonov, who … conducted the compositions of his students, would brutally and unceremoniously change anything he wished in these scores, cleaning them up and cutting parts to make them more playable. … But Safonov had a hard time with Rachmaninoff. This student not only refused categorically to accept alterations, but also had the audacity to stop Safonov (as conductor), pointing out his errors in tempi and nuance … Besides, Rachmaninoff's talent as a composer was so obvious, and his quiet self-assurance made such an impression on all, that even the omnipotent Safonov had to yield.[146]

A similar encounter with Stokowski is told by Charles O'Connell:

[145] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 413.
[146] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 43.

> I remember once when he had been called for rehearsal at eleven in the morning, he appeared with his customary punctuality and found Mr. Stokowski in the midst of rehearsing a Tchaikovsky symphony. Rachmaninoff, who in spite of his apparent sang-froid had a very sensitive nervous system, paced up and down off stage for perhaps three minutes while Stokowski continued to rehearse; then, as if suddenly coming to a conclusion, he ambled out onto the stage, sat down at the piano and banged out a few thunderous chords in the middle of Stokowski's Tchaikovsky. The conductor, of course, stopped the orchestra immediately. Rachmaninoff, looking up at him with a face of stone, rumbled in his basso-profundo, "The piano is here; I am here; it is eleven o'clock. Let us rehearse." The maestro meekly obeyed.[147]

Rachmaninoff held his fellow pianists to a similar account, even his friend Vladimir Horowitz. After Horowitz's electrifying performance of the Tchaikovsky *Piano Concerto No. 1* with Sir Thomas Beecham in 1928, when Horowitz used the occasion to show audiences his raw technical abilities, Rachmaninoff wrote him a letter: "Mr. Horowitz, you have won the octaves race. Nobody has ever played them like you. But I will not congratulate you because it was not musical."[148]

Alfred Cortot emerges as an unfortunate foil to Rachmaninoff's uncompromising views on technical standards, after all Rachmaninoff himself took *seven years* of recording sessions before considering his performance of the Chopin *Waltz in C sharp minor*, Opus 64 No. 2, acceptable. Eugene Istomin recalled:

> I remember a rather naughty anecdote Horowitz told me. One day [Rachmaninoff] called Horowitz on the phone … "Come over immediately, I have something I want you to hear." Horowitz dropped everything and ran over to Rachmaninoff's. When he arrived,

[147] O'Connell, *The Other Side of the Record*, 169.
[148] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 109.

> Rachmaninoff said: "Sit down for a minute!" and he put on a recording of Alfred Cortot playing some Chopin, a ballade. There were so many wrong notes, so many mistakes! The old boy was slapping his thighs and roaring with laughter, making so much fun of Cortot's wrong notes, while exclaiming "But can you believe it? Can you believe it?" Beyond the sense of humor, it reveals also Rachmaninoff's concern for perfection. Today, we don't even have to play well – we just paste in the correct notes in place of the wrong ones. It is a totally unreal, artificial, fake, phony thing. But in the twenties and thirties, you had to play up to four and a half minutes at a time and you couldn't do anything about the notes you missed, you could only choose the takes. Rachmaninoff was an incredibly accurate player.[149]

Horowitz also told of a similar story: "Once I visited Rachmaninoff in Switzerland at his house. When I walked in he was laughing so loud his false teeth were coming out. I asked him what was so funny. 'I have just been listening on the radio to Cortot playing all the Chopin etudes.' 'That was so good?' I asked. 'Wonderful. But, you know, the most difficult of the etudes were the ones he played most 'musical.'"[150]

Milstein tells of an unfortunate encounter that the pianist Karol Szreter had with Rachmaninoff, after a salon concert with Piatigorsky; Rachmaninoff was in the audience. "Szreter wanted to approach Rachmaninoff and ask for his impressions. Piatigorsky warned, 'I don't recommend it. Rachmaninoff might tell you the truth!' … But Szreter simply had to find out Rachmaninoff's opinion. Trembling, he approached him and said, 'Sergei Vasilyevich, how did I play?' The reply was brief and to the point: 'Very badly.'"[151]

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[149] E. Istomin, transcribed radio interview, source: https://www.eugeneistomin.com/the-musician/favorite-composers/rachmaninov/.
[150] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 90 - 91.
[151] Milstein & Volkov, *From Russia to the West*, 116.

On Teaching

Rachmaninoff had little interest in individual teaching, although he took piano students early in his career for the sole purpose of earning money. From 1894 until 1901 he taught at the Mariinsky Academy for Girls; Maria Chelishcheva recalled of his teaching style there:

> "He would come into the class," reports one of his pupils, "with a soft, slow tread, sit down at the desk, quite often take out his handkerchief and wipe his face for a long time; then, dropping his head into the fingers of his hands, he would summon a pupil, sometimes not raising his head or looking at her, and ask for her homework. Rachmaninoff, like Tchaikovsky, did not like teaching work, and did it because he needed the money."[152]

Rachmaninoff evidently remembered this experience with some indignity, later telling the nine-year-old Ruth Slenczynska that when she was clumsy, she was "'slower than the over-privileged young ladies at Mariinsky Institute,' whom he had had to teach to earn money as a young man; this rebuke was the greatest possible insult."[153]

From 1910 until 1912 Rachmaninoff also served as Vice-President of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, which gave him license to oversee and advance musical education throughout Russia. One of the highlights of his influence was the establishment of the Kiev Conservatory in Ukraine. Rachmaninoff's duties also involved visiting music schools and evaluating the teachers there. Nikolai Avierino, then director of the Rostov Music School, wrote of Rachmaninoff's inspection:

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[152] G. Norris, *The Master Musicians: Rachmaninoff* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 19 – 20.
[153] R. Slenczynska, "Grandfatherly Guidance," *Clavier*, October 1973, 15.

> Sergei Vasilyevich was very conscientious: he inspected the accounts, making our lady bookkeeper terribly uneasy with queries on various items. Then, after examining a complete inventory, he attended the classes, sometimes remaining in the classroom of each teacher for as much as half an hour, his presence considerably unnerving both teachers and students. Finally, on the third day, his visit ended with a concert by the students, with chorus and orchestra conducted by me.[154]

Rachmaninoff concluded this inspection by telling Avierino: "All that I've seen and heard here, in respect both to order and discipline, exceeded all my expectations!"[155] Things did not go so well for others; Rachmaninoff had Vladimir Puchalsky fired from his directing position at the Kiev Conservatory in 1914, and replaced by Reinhold Glière, a curious overlap in the life of Vladimir Horowitz who was studying with Puchalsky at the time.[156]

[154] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 172.
[155] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 172.
[156] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 45 - 46.



Figure 8. Inspection at the St. Catherine School, Moscow.
Rachmaninoff and Goldenweiser seated center-right at the table, early 1900s.
Source: https://senar.ru/photos/senar.ru_g005.jpg

Rachmaninoff had a special aversion to child prodigies, and effectively turned away the young Shura Cherkassky having stated his teaching condition that "he avoided concert appearances for three years and changed his finger technique."[157] Ruth Slenczynska was a rare exception to his work with such young people, and Rachmaninoff gave her a few lessons in Paris when she was nine years old.

Slenczynska's lessons began when "Mr. Rachmaninoff heard that his place on stage was 'filled' by a 9-year-old. Perhaps out of curiosity, the next spring, when we were all living in

[157] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 415, reference 44.

Paris, he phoned our apartment and invited me to come play for him."[158] Slenczynska recalled of his teaching:

> Once he said, "You played that as if you were a little girl."
> "But I *am* a little girl!"
> "No you're not. When you sit in front of that piano you are a pianist whether you're nine, nineteen, or ninety. Play like a pianist!"
> …
> Rachmaninoff's most often repeated phrase – "Big musical line, big musician; small musical line, small musician" – haunts me today as I search for the true climax of every composition and strive for clear musical delineation. "Play for the man in the last row of the gallery; the real climax will reach him *after* the sound leaves the piano. The musical arch is shaped like an ocean wave which falls on the beach *after* it reaches its highest peak."[159]

Rachmaninoff similarly attempted to discourage her father from concertizing her: "I warned him that she should not play so much. She should practice, practice, practice, all the time through these years. … Besides, the audience applaud even when there are mistakes, and eventually the child will not bother to correct mistakes at all."[160] Rachmaninoff was also truant to an appointment to hear the eleven-year-old Vladimir Horowitz, after the boy had played for Scriabin earlier in the day. Rachmaninoff later apologized to Horowitz, telling him: "I hated prodigies. And I began worrying that if you were no good, I would have to tell your mother, and so I left. I cannot lie."[161]

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[158] R. Slenczynska, "Grandfatherly Guidance," *Clavier*, October 1973, 15.
[159] R. Slenczynska, "Grandfatherly Guidance," *Clavier*, October 1973, 15.
[160] Amusements, "Prodigy's Playing Decried by Pianist," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1934, 22.
[161] Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz*, 175.

Fidelity to the Score

We now make some comments regarding how Rachmaninoff, a composer from nineteenth century Russia, approached the performing career of a twentieth century pianist. We have established above Rachmaninoff's primary goal that a work represent a feeling or an image, and so we now consider how this might affect the details as marked on a score. While Rachmaninoff, as we have described, embodied a new, and stricter, school of playing, this was still a pre-Urtext era. Such things as phrasing, dynamics, ornamentation, and even tempo markings, would vary between editions in deference to the musical wisdom of the editor, often an artist of the highest caliber such as Liszt, Brahms, Busoni, Tausig, and Anton Rubinstein; the composer's original text was usually not presented, commented upon, or perhaps even known by such editions. Clearly, these scores would not agree with each other on many details.

As a composer of genius, Rachmaninoff then regarded a score as *one possible interpretation* of many. A fully annotated score could allow an amateur to deliver a balanced and sufficiently artistic performance, if the score instructions were carefully followed. However, to the master musician, who might perceive other aspects behind the notes of a work, and for whom recognized individuality was essential for a successful concert career, the task at hand was to re-balance the details within a score towards this different idea, without requiring permission from either the composer or any particular score. This might include significant elaborations of sections of a work, or at minimum some octave doublings for dramatic effect. The notion of score fidelity, established by late-Classical composers such as Beethoven, had yet to become widely understood; our Urtext philosophy of today has been built upon this. Harrison comments

that Rachmaninoff learned much of his Chopin from the Anton Rubinstein edition,[162] which may explain his rendition of the *B-flat minor Sonata* aligning with how he heard Rubinstein play it himself.[163]

Rachmaninoff expanded on this point of view in *The Etude* in 1910: "Unfortunately many editions of good music are found wanting in proper phrase markings. Some of the phrase signs are erroneously applied. Consequently the only safe way is for the student to make a special study of this important branch of musical art. In the olden days phrase signs were little used. Bach used them very sparingly. It was not necessary to mark them in those times, for every musician who counted himself a musician could determine the phrases as he played."[164]

While Rachmaninoff aspired to what we would today call a 'historically informed' performance of his repertoire, musicians from later generations identified some occasional stylistic misjudgments. Horowitz recalled: "I heard him in his last years play the Beethoven *First Piano Concerto*. He made the slow movement sound like a Chopin nocturne. This was not Beethoven, although I heard him play other Beethoven things wonderfully, like *Opus 111*."[165]

Neuhaus even took Rachmaninoff somewhat to task on his playing of Chopin: "Rachmaninoff, playing Chopin as a genius but not à la Chopin, arouses admiration, in spite of his obvious departure from the composer's spirit … 'For him it is permitted' is what we feel."[166]

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[162] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 251.

[163] In particular, Rubinstein treated the outer sections of the Funeral March as a procession approaching, then departing from the listener, culminating at the arrival of the B section as a *fortissimo*. Upon returning to the A section, Rubinstein would open *fortissimo*, to create the impression of the procession now moving away from the listener. This is in stark contrast to the *piano* dynamic marking by Chopin at this point in the score.

[164] S. Rachmaninoff, "Ten Important Attributes of Beautiful Piano Playing," *The Etude*, March 1910, 153.

[165] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 112.

[166] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 226.

We are perhaps more critical of Rachmaninoff in this aspect of his playing because we simply cannot compare his playing to that of earlier generations – for example, how did Liszt really perform Bach, Mozart or Scarlatti? Every generation has its own idea of standards and style, and so we cannot objectively compare first-hand accounts left by listeners; we must compare the performances themselves to form an accurate judgement.

We should thereby expect that Rachmaninoff's mindfulness reflected a major step forward in historical awareness. He wrote:

> With regard to Bach, for instance, one must never forget the character of his medium. Bach did not have the grand piano of today with its extended keyboard, and above all, its great sonority of tone. Bach's piano was the clavichord. It was small; its tone was small and intimate in character. It was for such a tone that Bach composed the "*Inventions*", the "*French Suites*" and "*English Suites*", the "*WTC*" the "*Italian Concerto*." Therefore in those compositions the student should avoid a big tone, with its great resonance. He must remember to hold back a little and to make a restrained, intimate tone, such as may be suggested by the feeling in the position of these hands. He may approach thus the quality which Bach had in mind and produced on his own clavichord.[167]

Furthermore:

> Early classic music requires that the interpreter shall keep close to the original. He may not indulge in so much sentiment and rubato as is permitted in the later, romantic music. Indications of tempo and marks of expression such as crescendo and diminuendo must not be exaggerated. The music does not need such extremes of treatment.[168]

[167] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 240.
[168] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 240.

Rachmaninoff spoke extensively on the topic of general interpretation with Frederick Martens in 1921:

> Have I any special feeling as to how other pianists play my compositions? To be quite honest, no. You see, when it comes to the average pianist, I am perfectly willing to let him play my pieces just as he chooses – especially if I am not there to hear him! I know that the composer is often supposed to have a definite feeling as to just how one or another of his compositions should be played. I know how I would play them myself, but it is all one to me how someone else chooses to interpret them. For any master pianist, any really fine pianist, is justified in finding his own interpretation, and putting his own personality into the rendering of a composition. I indicate my own feeling about tempo, phrasing and dynamic shading in the music itself, and this is the outline of my conception. But some great pianist may play my piano pieces with many differences of detail, with nuances and shadings I might not use myself; and yet his conception of the piece as a whole will never be wrong, because his own good taste and musical instinct would guard against it. And it is most interesting, at times, to see how some other pianist will give a piece you have written yourself an entirely different musical color or present it from quite another angle of interpretation than your own.
>
> I cannot say that I take any great interest in hearing my own things played in public, except, of course, in the case of some great artist, whose perfection of playing is going to show me something new in my own work.[169]

Leslie Hodgson wrote of Rachmaninoff's approach to interpretation in 1943: "As a pianist he was always first and foremost the composer. There was an orchestral quality in his playing natural to one whose destiny it was to be a composer and a conductor as well as a pianist."[170] Regarding separation of vocal and supporting elements of a work, Rachmaninoff wrote:

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[169] F. H. Martens, "Sergei Rachmaninoff talks of Russia and America," *Musical Observer*, April 1921.
[170] L. Hodgson, "Rachmaninoff, The Pianist," *Musical America*, April 10, 1943, 26.

"The accompaniments of the left-hand, for waltzes, mazurkas and the like, require very subtle treatment. To work these out musically I must hear melody, feel it musically, must hear it singing. That is the chief thing. The accompaniments are not practiced especially; but, with the control of the hand acquired by previous practice, I adjust the supporting chords in right proportion to the melody."[171]

[171] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 240.

Approach to Performing

Rachmaninoff viewed a performance as a narrative, and similar to most stories, sought to identify and express 'the point' of a work. The 'point' might have been at the beginning, middle, or end of a work, and the crucial responsibility of the performer was to ensure the listener experienced such an arrival, and thereby understand the whole composition with respect to it. This was of such importance to Rachmaninoff that failure in any performance to achieve this was equivalent to a failure of the entire work. The writer Marietta Shaginyan, a close friend of Rachmaninoff's, wrote of a concert she attended:

> During the interval, when there was a storm of wild enthusiasm in the hall and it was difficult to force one's way through the crowd, going to him in the green room we saw from Rachmaninoff's face that he was in a frightful state: he was biting his lip, angry, pale. Before we had a chance to open our mouths to congratulate him, he began to complain that he was most likely going out of his mind, that he was getting old and needed putting on the scrap-heap, that we had to prepare an obituary to the effect that there had once been a musician but that now nothing was left of him, that he could not forgive himself, etc. "Did you really not notice that I missed the point? I let the point slip, you understand!" … he was tearing his hair out because the point had slipped.[172]

A rarely discussed aspect of Rachmaninoff's performances is whether he was ever nervous while playing for audiences. His stage demeanor, as now frequently mentioned, was one of stoicism and focus. Victor Seroff recalled the following:

> Continuing on this subject of stage demeanor and stage nervousness, I wondered whether the fact that Rachmaninoff was nervous off-stage didn't add a disturbing edge to his

[172] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 401.

feelings while playing on-stage. He quickly picked me up on this: "I am *never* nervous on stage. Those who are should never play in public. There is no cure for it, and it is not true that eventually, after having played a great deal in public, one can get used to it. Chaliapin sang all his life before all kinds of audiences, and he was always nervous before his performances."

"Still, I argued, "Chaliapin managed to control it well enough to go on performing. Perhaps you yourself control it too, though you cannot completely disguise it."

"What do you know about it?" he asked.

"Well, for one thing, before you play the first piece in a program, you keep adjusting the cuff of your right sleeve over and over again; I have seen you do this at so many of your concerts that I could not ascribe the gesture to anything else but nervousness. And I also have felt that you play – of course not always, but very often – the first piece on your program much faster than I imagine you would have played it had you scheduled it for later in the concert, when you had already accustomed yourself, so to speak, to your audience."

"Is that so?" he said. That – plus a smile and a shake of the head – was the only reply I got.[173]

Rachmaninoff held the highest respect for his audiences, no matter how large or small. He told Gina Bachauer, another occasional student:

> 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.[174]

[173] V. Seroff, "Sergei Rachmaninoff as I Knew Him, A Reminiscence," *Stereo Review*, May 1973, 63.
[174] G. Bachauer, "My Study with Rachmaninoff," *Clavier*, October 1973, 14.

Chapter 4

Reputation and Legacy

Reputation

Reading historical commentary on Rachmaninoff, one can observe the tension between him and his contemporaries, and that his honest nature would not have endeared him to many of them. Rachmaninoff had to endure his music being often called hackneyed and sentimental; he responded in kind by warning readers of modern music: "Life is too short to spend it wandering in the barren Saharas of musical trash."[175]

One can also sense his being 'damned by faint praise' when other leading musicians would credit him as a pianist, but say nothing of his compositions. The well-known quote from Artur Rubinstein is but a partial one: "He had the secret of the golden, living tone which comes from the heart and which is inimitable."[176] The actual quote directly continues: "In my strong opinion he was a greater pianist than a composer. I fall, I have to admit, under the charm of his compositions when I hear them but return home with a slight distaste for their too brazenly expressed sweetness."[177]

Rachmaninoff's close circle was a relatively small one. Medtner, Chaliapin, and the pianists Hofmann, Moiseiwitsch and Horowitz, were amongst those he trusted most. Nathan Milstein wrote, in comparison to Stravinsky: "No matter what he was talking about,

[175] S. Rachmaninoff, "Ten Important Attributes of Beautiful Piano Playing," *The Etude*, March 1910, 154.
[176] Rubinstein, *My Many Years*, 88.
[177] Rubinstein, *My Many Years*, 88.

Rachmaninoff was always totally honest. … direct, severe, honest. His opinion of a person usually was formed instantly and forever."[178]

Rachmaninoff's capacity for friendship, despite his austere reputation, was genuine and without pretension. Bill Hupfer, who served as his Steinway tuner, affectionately called him 'old Rocky.' Henry Beckett writes on when Hupfer first met Rachmaninoff:

> Rachmaninoff said to Hupfer, "Let me know when the piano is ready." Hupfer went to the concert hall, sweated over the instrument for some time, and then, fearing the worst, called up Rachmaninoff at his hotel and told him that he thought it was all right. Rachmaninoff went right over, sat down, and played a few bars. 'Then he got up and he said 'That's fine,' Hupfer recalls. "I couldn't tell anything from his face. That's all he said."[179]

Hupfer would travel with the Rachmaninoffs for thirteen years of concert tours, and he told of his working relationship with the pianist:

> The theory was that if anything went wrong with the piano, Hupfer could leap out and repair it. 'It was a pretty funny idea,' Hupfer says. 'I figure old Rocky must have picked it up somewhere in Europe, where a piano might need retuning during the intermission, or break a hammer, or something of the sort. But these old babies of ours are built to last, so nothing like that ever happened. I was always standing there ready, for all those years, and I never had a thing to do except listen.[180]

Rachmaninoff's laconic brusqueness was however the common first impression for those he did not know, as told by John Rosenfield when Rachmaninoff visited Dallas for a concert:

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[178] Milstein & Volkov, *From Russia to the West*, 128.
[179] H. Beckett, "Rachmaninoff as Seen by His Own Piano Tuner," *New York Evening Post*, December 26, 1933, 9.
[180] H. Beckett, "Rachmaninoff as Seen by His Own Piano Tuner," *New York Evening Post*, December 26, 1933, 9.

> Dean Paul van Katwijk of [Southern Methodist University], who plays much Rachmaninoff music effectively, wanted to query him on the proper pedaling for the opening chords of an *Etude-Tableau*. Of course, his hotel phone was blocked out. Dr van Katwijk sent him a telegram, giving his phone number, stating his purpose and politely asking the great man to call.
>
> Two days later Dr. van Katwijk's telephone rang.
>
> "I am Rachmaninoff. Did you want to talk to me?"
>
> Dr. van Katwijk then asked his question. It was traditional that the chords should be opened to simulate the toll of a bell.
>
> "Is this correct?"
>
> "No." was the answer.
>
> Then the telephone clicked. He had gone.[181]

In later years, Rachmaninoff softened this side of himself in public, as Alfred Swan recalled: "Having reached the top, he probably realized that a man in his position is much less independent than an obscure person. He must also have seen much flattery, envy, vanity around him, and so he shut himself up. It was easier and wiser to do so."[182] Rachmaninoff wrote to Leonard Liebling on the same subject:

> Is it necessary to add that I do not mind telling you all this confidentially as a friend, but that I would not under any circumstances like you to publish it – at least, not while I am alive, for I would not enjoy having some of the 'modernists' rap me over the fingers, as I need them for my piano-playing? It is not politic for me even to have written to you as I did. I mostly keep my opinions to myself, and in consequence I am generally regarded as a silent man. So be it. In silence lies safety.[183]

[181] J. Rosenfield, "Rachmaninov's Music May Now Reach Level," *Dallas Morning News*, April 1943.
[182] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences, Part 1," *The Musical Quarterly*, January 1944, 18.
[183] L. Liebling, "Variations," *Musical Courier*, April 5, 1943, 17.

In a rare display of political statement, Rachmaninoff attached his name to a letter, alongside Ilya Tolstoy, "Tagore On Russia"[184], which was published in the New York Times in 1931. This article paints a terrifying picture of the Soviet regime, naming them "a group of professional murderers." This article resulted in Rachmaninoff's music being banned in Russia for the next two years; this was his only major political statement during his lifetime.

[184] I. Ostromislensky, S. Rachmaninoff, I. L. Tolstoy, "Tagore on Russia", *The New York Times*, January 15, 1931, 22.

The Rachmaninoff Competition

On his passing in 1943, the Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund was formed[185], with Mrs. Natalia Rachmaninoff serving as honorary president, and Koussevitzky as chairman of the artist's advisory committee. Scans of the booklet published for this new organization is presented in Appendix C.

One of the Fund's first goals was to launch a national competition which would span the disciplines of composing, conducting, and pianism. This reflected the breadth of Rachmaninoff's own achievements, and established a national framework for a formal 'standard' of excellence against which all musicians could then measure themselves. The 'Rachmaninoff Competition' was an ambitious venture, forming five regional committees across the country - Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles. It aimed to hold the competition for piano biannually, with composers and conductors to compete in the intervening years. The first contest, held in 1946-47, was for pianists, open to American citizens aged 17-25. The first prize was an American concert tour and a recording contract with RCA Victor, similar to how Rachmaninoff began his own concert career.

As one might expect, the standards of this competition were extremely high, and Gary Graffman was elated to be the first regional winner in Philadelphia. He later wrote: "However, as each subsequent competition took place my position became more enhanced because – to everyone's surprise and to the consternation of the Rachmaninoff foundation – there were no other winners."[186] The finals were therefore delayed a year, resulting in a second season of regional competitions in 1947 to select an additional four winners, who could then compete with

[185] "Russian Fund Announced," *The New York Times*, Amusements, L, June 11, 1943, 23.
[186] G. Graffman, *I really Should Be Practicing* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 77.

Graffman in a final round in 1948. Seymour Lipkin was the winner of this competition, with Graffman winning the "Special Award," effectively a prize for second place.

Olin Downes wrote of the Competition Finals in 1948:

> The principle holds at this final contest which was held through the Rachmaninoff regional contests of two seasons, namely, that the judges award no prize if they conclude that no candidate has measured up to the very exacting and exceptional standards, which will be maintained. … In most of the regional contests no winner was selected to come to the national finals. This was of course a bitter disappointment to many a competitor, but standards were unalterably maintained. These young people, as it has been fortunately phrased, were competing less with each other than with an established level which has been held very high.[187]

Vladimir Horowitz served as president of the Competition Jury; Mrs. Rachmaninoff also served on the panel. Despite, or perhaps because of, its ambition, the Competition did not continue beyond its inaugural year.[188] Graffman summarized his thoughts on the Competition as follows:

> … never within living memory (and probably never since) had a musical competition drawn such an illustrious audience. The very idea of stepping out on the Carnegie Hall stage to face this gala, expectant and musically knowledgeable crowd would have made me uncomfortable under the best of circumstances.
>
> Therein lay the fatal flaw in the idea of the Rachmaninoff Competition. Since the only performers eligible to enter it were those with virtually no professional experience, it

[187] O. Downes, "Contest Finals," *The New York Times*, April 25, 1948, Section X, 7.
[188] Schonberg, *Horowitz*, 192.

was unlikely that any victors would be able to sustain the excellence of performance expected. The first prize had been designed to involve them in the kind of grueling schedule, both in quantity and quality of appearances, that even a veteran would find taxing.

In any event, Seymour played the concerts that were his due, I played the Carnegie Hall recital that the Foundation sponsored, and the Rachmaninoff Competition folded its tent and was never heard from again."[189]

The Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund itself was discontinued after six years for lack of sufficient public support. This was reported accordingly in the *New York Times*:

The Rachmaninoff fund, founded in memory of the noted pianist to provide career opportunities for young musicians, has been abandoned.

The announcement, made last night, followed a meeting of the board of directors held at the Lotus Club in the afternoon. Reasons for dissolving the fund were given as lack of sufficient public support and inability to carry out fully the purposes for which the fund was founded.

Original plans, when the organization was set up in 1943, had international scope. Young pianists of promise were to be discovered by regional and national contests both here and in Russia, and national winners were to tour in each other's country.

As it developed, there was only one national contest here, for the regional juries set up across the nation failed to unearth pianists able to meet the uncommonly high standards until last year. No word has come from Russia.

Last year's winner was Seymour Lipkin, who competed with four others not only as recitalist but with a symphony orchestra at Carnegie Hall. His prize was further appearances with orchestras and in recital halls of the nation, following the fund's plan to let audiences be the ultimate judge. A special award of a Carnegie Hall recital was also made to Gary Graffman.

[189] Graffman, *I really Should Be Practicing*, 83.

> The decision to discontinue the fund was made "with great regret" according to a statement by Mrs. John T. Pratt, chairman of the board. "The work of the Rachmaninoff fund has been, we feel, of material benefit not only to those who were declared winners in the fund's competitions, but also to all those who participated and received the counsel and criticism of the board of judges in shaping their professional careers."[190]

The music world moved onwards, its composers were no longer concerned with Rachmaninoff's anachronistic, yet piercing, presence, and pianists were allowed to breathe more easily. Rachmaninoff's piano recordings continued to sell, but his compositions mostly fell into disregard, besides of course his famous *Prelude* and *Second Piano Concerto*.

As has been mentioned several times at this point, Rachmaninoff always enjoyed great popularity with the public, both as a composer and as a pianist, however this unusual level of success made other composers and musicologists suspicious. Popularity, after all, does not often equate with quality. A low point of regard towards Rachmaninoff from the music world itself is captured in Eric Blom's article on the composer, which appeared in the fifth edition of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1954):

> As a composer [Rachmaninoff] can hardly be said to have belonged to his time at all …. Technically he was highly gifted, but also severely limited. His music is well-constructed and effective, but monotonous in texture, which consists in essence mainly of artificial and gushing tunes accompanied by a variety of figures derived from arpeggios. The enormous popular success some few of Rachmaninoff's works had in his lifetime is not likely to last, and musicians never regarded with much favor. His third pianoforte Concerto was on the whole liked by the public only because of its close resemblance to

[190] Amusements, "Music Fund Forced to Abandon Work," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1949, 29.

> the Second, while the Fourth, which attempted something like a new departure, was a failure from the start.[191]

A significant turning point was when Van Cliburn won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1958, where one of the works in the final was Rachmaninoff's *Third Piano Concerto*. This major event, in addition to the fact that all of Rachmaninoff's major works had been recorded by 1954, allowed the modern public to become more familiar again with Rachmaninoff as a composer, as well as a pianist.[192]

Remembrance

Rachmaninoff is now remembered as a musical treasure not fully recognized in his own lifetime. Philippe Entremont said in an interview: "I think we are very unfair to Rachmaninoff. I remember a conversation I had with Zino Francescatti a very long time ago. I told him I tired of playing the Rachmaninoff Concertos. And Zino said, 'Don't ever say that. We violinists would be so glad to have had a violin concerto by Rachmaninoff.'"[193]

Contemporary writers eventually came to recognize the significance that Rachmaninoff's passing had occurred during the catastrophe of the Second World War. William Anderson poignantly wrote in 1973:

> The real "generation gap" in the lives of people my age (I'm fifty) is, I think, that period of suspended animation we call World War II : there seems to be a great gulf separating almost everything that went on before then from what has gone on since. Owing

[191] E. Blom, "Rachmaninoff," *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1954), Vol. 7.
[192] My thanks to Donald Manildi for sharing his insights on this historical point with me.
[193] Dubal, "Philippe Entremont," *Reflections from the Keyboard*, 158.

to my own four years of hibernation / estivation in the Army, I reached our centers of cultural gravity only in the mid-Forties, too late to hear Sergei Rachmaninoff, for example, in live concert. Rachmaninoff died in 1943, and, aural memory being both short and fickle, it is perhaps inevitable that we should now have lost most of our sense of him as a performer. That faded image is all but invisible on the other side of the gulf, and what we are left with on this side is another one entirely : Rachmaninoff as composer.

…

He was also something of a dinosaur, among the last representatives (only Hofmann and Grainger outlasted him) of an illustrious line of composer / pianists stretching back down the years to Mozart.

...

It takes not great exercise of the imagination to see that all this must have been terribly exciting for audiences of the time as well, nor any excess of sentimentality to regret that the tradition is, for our time, quite dead. Our modern virtuosos, if they are to work up the chilly efficiency critics seem to require of them, have no time left – even if they have the talent – for composing, conducting, or anything else. … Rachmaninoff was perhaps the last of the great virtuosos who could afford such 'waste'; he played all the respectable, obligatory monuments of the literature – Brahms, Beethoven, Chopin, - but he also played the bon-bons his audience clamored for : a Tausig transcription, a Henselt etude, his own C-sharp Minor *Prelude*."[194]

There is also a fairer assessment of Rachmaninoff's personality now thanks to collected reminiscences, in particular those gathered by Zarui Apetyan, *Vospominaniya o Rakhmaninove*[195] (Memories of Rachmaninoff) a two-volume set comprising over 1,000 pages of recollections shared by those who knew him. Feodor Chaliapin was one of his closest musical friends, and a contemporary wrote: "Watching these two Russian geniuses … I was struck by

[194] W. Anderson, "Editorially Speaking," *Stereo Review*, May 1973, 6.
[195] Apetyan, *Vospominaniya o Rakhmaninove*.

their 'dissimilarity': Rachmaninoff – concentration, calm, absorption. Chaliapin – talked incessantly, gesticulated, 'acted'. Rachmaninoff just listened and smiled his gentle smile."[196]

The composer Harl McDonald shared his final tribute to Rachmaninoff:

> One anecdote, beyond the dozens I am thinking of, gives a picture of Rachmaninoff, the man. We were on a short tour and Rachmaninoff was the soloist. Also we were doing his choral-symphony "The Bells." This involved a university chorus of a hundred-fifty in considerable bus-travel, which of course, they thought of as fun. But when Rachmaninoff discovered that the chorus members would not get home until two-thirty or three the next morning, he went through the five buses, shook hands with each member and apologized for the inconvenience and discomfort that his music had caused them.[197]

Rachmaninoff's documented negativity did not seem to extend beyond his own self-reflection; Frederick Gaisberg wrote that "the Rachmaninoffs have two daughters and are one of the happiest and most devoted families I have ever met."[198]

We allow Rachmaninoff himself to close the biographical aspect of this dissertation with an aptly final example of his ironic humor:

> Medtner once asked Rachmaninoff what a composer must do to be appreciated. The answer came 'He must die.'[199]

[196] V. Borovsky, *Chaliapin* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 205.
[197] H. McDonald, The Philadelphia Orchestra – 14th Broadcast, March 20, 1948.
[198] F. W. Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 187.
[199] R. Bailey, "Remembering Rachmaninoff," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, June 1986, 111.

Chapter 5

The Piano Rolls

Rachmaninoff created thirty-five piano rolls between the years 1919 and 1929 for Ampico [American Piano Company]. Spanning the first half of his American concert career, Rachmaninoff's piano roll output provides us some additional insight into his performance style, as well as his views of the music industry at that time. This chapter will explore the piano roll as a medium, and Rachmaninoff's relationship with it.

Historical Overview

A piano roll is a continuous roll of paper with perforations punched into it; these perforations minimally indicate which notes should be played when, and more ideally express additional aspects of the playing such as pedaling and dynamics. A roll is loaded into a mechanical reproducing instrument, and as each paper hole moves over a "tracker bar," a pneumatic action results in a note being played by the instrument.

Ampico's piano rolls were sold for the relatively new, and expensive, *reproducing piano*, a great advance on the earlier *player piano*. The difference between these two machines was the level of detail which could be automated:

> The ordinary player-piano would reproduce all the notes, but left the actual expression (soft and loud, pedaling […] and phrasing) to the performer who achieved these effects by small levers on the piano which operated pneumatic bellows controlling the actual action of the piano and quite independently of the musical playing action … as early as 1904 the German firm of Welte built a Reproducing piano known as the Keyless Welte since it had no keyboard but was purely mechanical. [The piano maker] Hupfeld followed with an electric reproducing piano of more conventional layout in 1906. However, it was not until just before the first [world] war that the Duo-Art reproducing action was perfected in America, followed soon afterwards by the Ampico.[200]

Robert Berkman provides a modern retrospective of these technologies:

> The player piano was initially marketed as a new idea in piano playing, enabling people who were not pianists to express themselves on the piano, and the operator was essential to the music making. This is in stark contrast to the concept of the reproducing piano, which was marketed as an instrument that could reproduce – without intervention or participation

[200] A. Ord-Hume, *Player Piano* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1970), 34.

– the playing of a human pianist. Here, the idea of the roll as a recording of a performance has its origin.[201]

While audio recording technology would quickly advance after Rachmaninoff's arrival in America, in 1919 piano rolls were regarded by many as state-of-the-art in reproduction of an artistic performance. Of the contemporary gramophone technology, Rachmaninoff later said that "when I was making my first records with Edison in America [also 1919], the piano came out with a thin, tinkling tone. It sounded exactly like the Russian balalaika, which, as you may know, is a stringed instrument resembling the guitar."[202]

There was a great fascination with player pianos at the turn of the twentieth century, since they represented a relatively new technology – machines which would behave differently depending on the input they were provided. Such devices reflected a revolution in thinking, which had started with the Jacquard loom of 1801, and was quickly followed by Charles Babbage's exploration of his Analytical Engine in 1843. Both machines were highly sophisticated and were controlled by punched paper cards. The Jacquard loom produced cloth; the Analytical Engine produced mathematical computations; the player piano, as a direct descendant, produced music.

Alfred Dolge, a German industrialist, anticipated in 1911:

> The player piano is the musical instrument for the home of the future, barring all others. … Eventually a player piano will be evolved with an action which will be capable of producing the long-sought-for-effects of tone sustaining, losing its mechanical character

[201] R. Berkman, "The Player Piano and the Reproducing Piano," from S. Siek, *A Dictionary for the Modern Pianist* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), Appendix E, 277.
[202] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," *Gramophone*, April 1931.

entirely, and thus becoming the superior of the present-day piano, as that instrument has superseded the clavichord.[203]

The ascendancy of the player piano, and then the reproducing piano, eventually outpaced sales of conventional pianos in the United States, this trend only coming to an end only with the stock market crash of 1929. Dick Price elaborates:

> Some figures from the American trade are eye-openers. In 1909, 330,000 conventional pianos were manufactured in the United States, compared with only 34,000 automatic pianos. Five years later, in 1914, the figures were 238,000 conventional pianos, 98,000 automatics. In 1919, the tide came to its highest point, with 180,000 automatic pianos manufactured to only 156,000 conventional ones. In 1925 … the automatics were still ahead in a somewhat reduced output, 169,000 to 136,000 conventional instruments. With the stock-market crash in 1929 and the ensuing depression, piano manufacture went into a tailspin, and the 1930s saw the disappearance of the player piano.[204]

Price continues to comment on the demise of these automated instruments:

> But the depression explains no more than the decline of piano production in general. The automatic piano succumbed, most scholars agree, to the competition of the radio and the phonograph, technologies of which Dolge could have had little inkling in 1911. For all their early faults, they did for the household listening public more than the player piano did, were packaged in much smaller spaces, and as the technologies developed, did all this at lower prices. The radio and the phonograph provided entertainment of an extremely varied sort. The player piano, for all its virtues, has the limitation that it can produce only the sound of a piano.[205]

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[203] A. Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers* (California: Covina Publishing Company, 1911), 160.
[204] D. Price, "From a Technological History of the Piano," *The AMICA News Bulletin*, May/June 1988, 82.
[205] D. Price, "From a Technological History of the Piano," *The AMICA News Bulletin*, May/June 1988, 82.

Thousands of piano rolls were created in the early 1900s, made by every leading pianist of the day, and are now conserved at various private and institutional collections, some of which express goals of digitizing the rolls for long-term preservation of the data they contain.[206]

[206] https://exhibits.stanford.edu/supra

Piano Rolls and Authenticity

While the Ampico piano rolls were sold to owners of the reproducing piano, and thus the rolls contained the complete data necessary for mechanical reproduction without the need for manual assistance, it was not until 1926 that a piano roll would achieve its most accurate representation of an artist. Before that time, it was not possible for the input piano, which the artist performed on, to capture the volume of the notes being played. Instead, "this was obtained by a musician (who was also a skilled technician) annotating a score while the recording artist played."[207] The finalized roll would then be carefully reviewed by the artist before release, allowing Ampico to build a high level of trust:

> While Edgar Fairchild was with Ampico he laid down that no important classical recording should even be advertised until the editing process, which involved both his and the artist's final approval of the finished roll, was completed. This degree of care is apparent in virtually all Ampico recordings and it must also have been a great comfort for artists to have a measure of control over the issue of their rolls.[208]

After 1926 dynamics were captured on the principle of the 'spark chronograph,' which leveraged the direct relationship between the loudness of the note produced and the piano hammer velocity in its final half-inch of travel towards the strings, resulting in volume data being captured on the paper roll. The capturing and reproduction of the performance could now be fully automated and reasonably precise, within the constraints of such reproducing technology which would be soon superseded by the gramophone and radio.

[207] D. Hall, Liner Notes, *Rachmaninoff plays Rachmaninoff*, (Decca D-105619, 1979), 3.
[208] D. Hall, Liner Notes, *Rachmaninoff plays Rachmaninoff*, (Decca D-105619, 1979), 8.

This means that piano rolls created prior to 1926 do not accurately represent what the performer played, but rather a close approximation as judged by a nearby listener. A great deal of nuance, and precision of dynamics and pedaling, is either lost or incorrect, albeit within small margins. Importantly, as the above indicates, Rachmaninoff gave his approval to his pre-1926 piano roll releases, so we should believe that even if these rolls diverged from his actual playing, it would have done so within his standards.

The artistic integrity of piano rolls as a medium has always been held in mixed regard. Since each note is literally represented as a hole-punch in paper, it is very easy to correct a wrong note for a right one by moving the hole; in fact, this was expected to be done by artists who made such recordings. "If Rachmaninoff objected to something, Fairchild … would paste over the holes with little pieces of gummed paper and cut new holes in the roll until it met with Rachmaninoff's approval."[209] However, it turns out that Rachmaninoff was regarded as an exceptional pianist even at Ampico. Physicist and Ampico engineer Clarence Hickman wrote that of all Ampico pianists, Rachmaninoff was "the only one that was very particular."[210] Hickman added "[He was the only pianist] who could play 10-note chords one after another with every single note happening at exactly the same time because that's what sounded right to him. But nobody else could do it. And that's what made him the greatest."[211] Julius Chaloff, a fellow recording artist and Ampico editor, would add that the notes of large chords lined up so perfectly that "you could lay a ruler across them."[212] Chaloff added that on "rainy Thursday afternoons" the Ampico editors would try to do the same, but "not one of us was ever able to do it."[213] This

[209] B. Jepson, "Inching Closer to the Impact of Rachmaninoff," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1999, Section 2, 22.
[210] R. J. Howe, *The AMPICO Reproducing Piano* (Musical Box Society International, 1987), 279.
[211] Howe, *The AMPICO Reproducing Piano*, 88.
[212] N. Barden & J. Morgan & R Howe, "Fidelity and the Ampico," *AMICA Bulletin*, November 1969, 174.
[213] Barden & Morgan & Howe, "Fidelity and the Ampico," 174.

would lead us to expect a closer fidelity of Rachmaninoff's playing in the piano rolls than perhaps most other pianists.

The piano roll editing process would also explicitly involve correcting other details such as rhythm and touch under the artist's supervision.[214] Of piano rolls, Percy Grainger commented that "his records on Duo-Art represented him not merely as he did play, but as he 'would *like* to play.'"[215] The similarity to our modern recording process is clear, and so we should be careful in our judgement.

A measured view of piano rolls is that they capture the *essence* of an artist's performance, if not the authentic details. Gregor Benko, one of the original founders of the International Piano Archives at Maryland, chooses the term "reminiscences" to describe their nature.[216] After all, while an editor, or team of editors, might have corrected almost everything within smaller margins, the larger interpretive arcs must remain across the structure of the music that was played.

[214] Ord-Hume, *Player Piano*, 39.
[215] Ord-Hume, *Player Piano*, 39.
[216] My thanks to Gregor Benko for sharing his thoughts on this matter with me over email correspondence.



AMPICO PIANO AT WHICH THE ARTIST RECORDS



AMPICO RECORDING MACHINE WHICH FAITHFULLY RECORDS
THE BEGINNING, DURATION AND FORCE OF EVERY NOTE

Figure 9. Ampico Sales Manual UK, 1927, Page 9.

Rachmaninoff and the Piano Roll

Since the reproducing piano market in 1919 was highly lucrative, Rachmaninoff wisely sought to be involved. He asked Fritz Kreisler's advice when choosing between piano roll firms, which included Welte-Mignon, the Aeolian Company's Duo Art, and Ampico. Max Harrison notes that

> all could distinguish clearly between the dynamic levels of melody and accompaniment but Welte-Mignon and Duo-Art were more limited than Ampico in their capability of rendering the exact volume of each note in a relatively complex texture. One result is that performances on Welte-Mignon and Duo-Art can sound clumsy in rhythmic terms whereas Ampico, while conveying greater subtlety, tends to smooth out rhythmic irregularities in quick passages.[217]

Arthur Ord-Hume, who has written extensively on mechanical music machines including reproducing pianos, writes that while Rachmaninoff visited Ampico, he

> made four test rolls, and … when he came to hear the proofs he sat impassively, smoking. At the end he got up and went to the door, still saying nothing. Then he turned and calmly remarked: "Gentlemen, I have just heard myself play." This one comment supposedly triggered off a sensational rise of Ampico stock on Wall Street.[218]

Rachmaninoff regarded making piano rolls as an addition to his musical activities and income, although not a replacement for any of them. He told Elizabeth Toombs: "The mechanical piano and other reproducing machines have a splendid place – and they are

[217] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 222.
[218] Ord-Hume, *Player Piano*, 97.

invaluable in their place as aids to the student isolated from large cities – but they do not take the place of the human performer."[219] Rachmaninoff did not consider piano roll reproductions as concert performances, but rather the closest emulation that could be considered acceptable in the setting of a small room, an unknown instrument, and an amateur listener. To this purpose, Rachmaninoff recorded his piano rolls on a 6'6" Mason and Hamlin grand piano, rather than a full concert grand, as this was the expected size of piano that most reproducing piano customers would own.

Rachmaninoff could not have imagined the modern trend of recording 'performances' of the piano rolls in concert halls on full grand pianos, and then making these recordings available for wider audiences. While one might accept, and allow, the difference of instrument, the change in acoustic space introduces an almost unthinkable degree of incompatibility to the artist's original intentions. Rachmaninoff, speaking to the topic of performance in general, expressed the importance of adjusting to an instrument and acoustic:

> I am well aware that my playing varies from day to day. A pianist is the slave of acoustics. Only when I have played my first item, tested the acoustics of the hall, and felt the general atmosphere, do I know in what mood I shall find myself at a recital. In a way this is unsatisfactory for me, but, artistically, it is perhaps a better thing never to be certain what one will do than to attain an unvarying level of performance that may easily develop into mere mechanical routine.[220]

[219] E. Toombs, "America must have a National Conservatory, says Rachmaninoff," *Good Housekeeping*, February 1922, 134.
[220] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 301.

While made with the best of intentions, such recordings of piano rolls must be listened to under caution, and perhaps not at all where a gramophone recording exists as an alternative.

There is now contention with regard to Rachmaninoff's first experiences with piano roll technology. Gregor Benko wrote in 1973 that:

> we know from the reminiscence of Sophie Satin that his first were piano rolls of his own *Second Concerto*, recorded for a German firm prior to 1918. Dr. Satin remembers Rachmaninoff pumping the foot pedals of the upright piano at Ivanovka, smiling gleefully as his machine played away. These rolls were probably non-expression rolls, and it is likely they were never issued to the public. The composer made no other [piano rolls] before leaving Russia.[221]

Barrie Martyn indicates this roll was given a performance on July 16, 1983, alongside the American Chamber Symphony Orchestra under Robert Frisbie.[222] However, Mr. Benko now believes this attribution of the playing on the roll to Rachmaninoff is the result of a misunderstanding between him and Sophie Satin, on the basis that "It's inconceivable that a German piano roll firm would have made rolls of the *second concerto* (whether reproducing rolls or non-expression '88 note' rolls) of the composer and not have issued them to the public."[223] The reminiscence is likely accurate, except that performer on the roll was not Rachmaninoff. Further research is recommended to future scholars before assuming this piano roll represents Rachmaninoff's earliest known recording.

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[221] G. Benko, "Rachmaninoff on Records," *The Complete Rachmaninoff* (RCA, 1973 LP), booklet.
[222] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 505.
[223] From direct email correspondence with Gregor Benko on this matter.

Rachmaninoff and Ampico

As stated at the start of this chapter, Rachmaninoff created thirty-five piano rolls between the years 1919 and 1929 for Ampico. His first piano roll was made on March 17, 1919, a month ahead of his first recording session with Edison on April 18 of the same year. Rachmaninoff quickly became one of Ampico's most celebrated artists, and his *Prelude*, Opus 3 No. 2, was a best seller (figure 10).



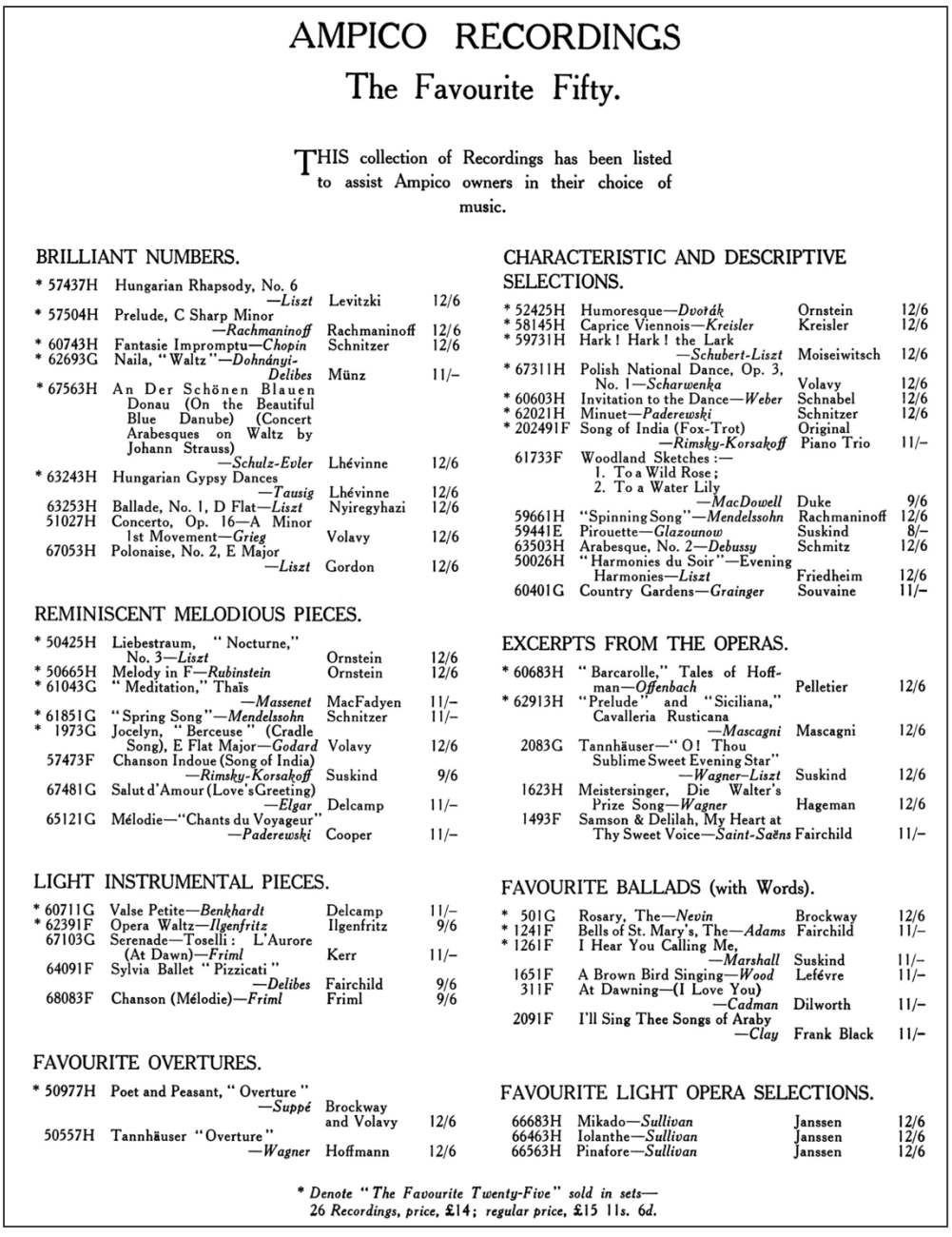
Figure 10. *Prelude* piano roll box end-face.

Ampico was serious about its marketing, resulting in placements such as the following (figure 11):



Figure 11. Ampico Advertisement, 1933.
Unidentified newspaper, October 3, 1933, courtesy of IPAM. Seated is the conductor Willem Mengelberg, and standing is the pianist Mischa Levitzki.

The 1927 Ampico Sales Manual also provides a summary of its 'Favorite Fifty' piano rolls, of which Rachmaninoff's *Prelude* is second from the top (figure 12). This listing also makes for a fascinating snapshot of the most popular works and artists held in regard by the British musical public of that time.



AMPICO RECORDINGS

The Favourite Fifty.

THIS collection of Recordings has been listed to assist Ampico owners in their choice of music.

BRILLIANT NUMBERS.

* 57437H	Hungarian Rhapsody, No. 6 —*Liszt*	Levitzki	12/6
* 57504H	Prelude, C Sharp Minor —*Rachmaninoff*	Rachmaninoff	12/6
* 60743H	Fantasie Impromptu—*Chopin*	Schnitzer	12/6
* 62693G	Naila, "Waltz"—*Dohnányi-Delibes*	Münz	11/–
* 67563H	An Der Schönen Blauen Donau (On the Beautiful Blue Danube) (Concert Arabesques on Waltz by Johann Strauss) —*Schulz-Evler*	Lhévinne	12/6
* 63243H	Hungarian Gypsy Dances —*Tausig*	Lhévinne	12/6
63253H	Ballade, No. 1, D Flat—*Liszt*	Nyiregyhazi	12/6
51027H	Concerto, Op. 16—A Minor 1st Movement—*Grieg*	Volavy	12/6
67053H	Polonaise, No. 2, E Major —*Liszt*	Gordon	12/6

REMINISCENT MELODIOUS PIECES.

* 50425H	Liebestraum, "Nocturne," No. 3—*Liszt*	Ornstein	12/6
* 50665H	Melody in F—*Rubinstein*	Ornstein	12/6
* 61043G	"Meditation," Thaïs —*Massenet*	MacFadyen	11/–
* 61851G	"Spring Song"—*Mendelssohn*	Schnitzer	11/–
* 1973G	Jocelyn, "Berceuse" (Cradle Song), E Flat Major—*Godard*	Volavy	12/6
57473F	Chanson Indoue (Song of India) —*Rimsky-Korsakoff*	Suskind	9/6
67481G	Salut d'Amour (Love's Greeting) —*Elgar*	Delcamp	11/–
65121G	Mélodie—"Chants du Voyageur" —*Paderewski*	Cooper	11/–

LIGHT INSTRUMENTAL PIECES.

* 60711G	Valse Petite—*Benkhardt*	Delcamp	11/–
* 62391F	Opera Waltz—*Ilgenfritz*	Ilgenfritz	9/6
67103G	Serenade—Toselli: L'Aurore (At Dawn)—*Friml*	Kerr	11/–
64091F	Sylvia Ballet "Pizzicati" —*Delibes*	Fairchild	9/6
68083F	Chanson (Mélodie)—*Friml*	Friml	9/6

FAVOURITE OVERTURES.

* 50977H	Poet and Peasant, "Overture" —*Suppé*	Brockway and Volavy	12/6
50557H	Tannhäuser "Overture" —*Wagner*	Hoffmann	12/6

CHARACTERISTIC AND DESCRIPTIVE SELECTIONS.

* 52425H	Humoresque—*Dvořák*	Ornstein	12/6
* 58145H	Caprice Viennois—*Kreisler*	Kreisler	12/6
* 59731H	Hark! Hark! the Lark —*Schubert-Liszt*	Moiseiwitsch	12/6
* 67311H	Polish National Dance, Op. 3, No. 1—*Scharwenka*	Volavy	12/6
* 60603H	Invitation to the Dance—*Weber*	Schnabel	12/6
* 62021H	Minuet—*Paderewski*	Schnitzer	12/6
* 202491F	Song of India (Fox-Trot) —*Rimsky-Korsakoff*	Original Piano Trio	11/–
61733F	Woodland Sketches:— 1. To a Wild Rose; 2. To a Water Lily —*MacDowell*	Duke	9/6
59661H	"Spinning Song"—*Mendelssohn*	Rachmaninoff	12/6
59441E	Pirouette—*Glazounow*	Suskind	8/–
63503H	Arabesque, No. 2—*Debussy*	Schmitz	12/6
50026H	"Harmonies du Soir"—Evening Harmonies—*Liszt*	Friedheim	12/6
60401G	Country Gardens—*Grainger*	Souvaine	11/–

EXCERPTS FROM THE OPERAS.

* 60683H	"Barcarolle," Tales of Hoffman—*Offenbach*	Pelletier	12/6
* 62913H	"Prelude" and "Siciliana," Cavalleria Rusticana —*Mascagni*	Mascagni	12/6
2083G	Tannhäuser—"O! Thou Sublime Sweet Evening Star" —*Wagner–Liszt*	Suskind	12/6
1623H	Meistersinger, Die Walter's Prize Song—*Wagner*	Hageman	12/6
1493F	Samson & Delilah, My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice—*Saint-Saëns*	Fairchild	11/–

FAVOURITE BALLADS (with Words).

* 501G	Rosary, The—*Nevin*	Brockway	12/6
* 1241F	Bells of St. Mary's, The—*Adams*	Fairchild	11/–
* 1261F	I Hear You Calling Me, —*Marshall*	Suskind	11/–
1651F	A Brown Bird Singing—*Wood*	Lefévre	11/–
311F	At Dawning—(I Love You) —*Cadman*	Dilworth	11/–
2091F	I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby —*Clay*	Frank Black	11/–

FAVOURITE LIGHT OPERA SELECTIONS.

66683H	Mikado—*Sullivan*	Janssen	12/6
66463H	Iolanthe—*Sullivan*	Janssen	12/6
66563H	Pinafore—*Sullivan*	Janssen	12/6

** Denote "The Favourite Twenty-Five" sold in sets— 26 Recordings, price, £14; regular price, £15 11s. 6d.*

Figure 12. Ampico Sales Manual UK, 1927, Page 41.

As a final example of Rachmaninoff's public recognition as a piano roll artist, we observe the following Ampico advertisement of his famous Prelude (figure 13):



Figure 13. Ampico Advertisement from the 1920s.

Source: http://www.pianola.com/ampico2.htm.

Recording Sessions

Since we will see that Rachmaninoff regarded his gramophone recordings as his more definitive recorded legacy, it is appropriate to provide some comment on the frequency of his Ampico recording sessions. Starting in 1919 he went to Ampico's New York recording studio mostly every second year, ending with his final session in February 1929, for a total of eleven recording sessions. Unlike his gramophone recordings, there is no record of works he 'recorded' as piano rolls which he wished destroyed, nor any record of multiple takes for any given work. We may thereby assume that the significant editing possibilities of the piano rolls, and the lowered expectations of their true artistic value – in addition to the income they would provide – enabled Rachmaninoff to be more comfortable in releasing what he recorded in these sessions, which would effectively have been 'single takes,' and perfected later during the editing process. This also makes us consider what Rachmaninoff might have recorded on gramophone had such editing possibilities also existed in that medium, as we will see in the next chapter the extent of his perfectionism, being constrained to a single non-interrupted take of up to four and a half minutes at a time.

Accordingly, it is of some relative surprise that in this first Ampico session alone Rachmaninoff recorded no fewer than nine works, seven of which were his own compositions, one of which was his transcription of *The Star Spangled Banner*, and the remaining work was Tchaikovsky's *Troika*, Opus 37, No. 11. Included in his own works was his *Prelude*, Opus 3 No. 2, which Ampico then published later that same year.

To capture a sense of Rachmaninoff's focus on the piano rolls between 1919 and 1929, we now list his recording session dates, and the works he recorded on those dates. Please refer to Appendix A which details each piano roll published and its recording date.

Also note the following corrections to prior texts:

1. Martyn indicates that Rachmaninoff recorded Anton Rubinstein's *Barcarolle No. 2*, Opus 45b on February 1, 1929 (roll 69893), however this work is in fact Rubinstein's *Barcarolle No. 5*, Op. 93.[224]
2. Harrison omits Rachmaninoff's recording of his *Etude-Tableau,* Opus 39 No. 6 on March 5, 1921.[225]

Readers should also note that Rachmaninoff recorded Mendelssohn's *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67 No. 4, on March 5, 1921, and this was released as roll 59661 in 1921; this same roll was re-released by Ampico in 1933 as roll 71521. The studio sessions were as follows:

March 17, 1919

S. Rachmaninoff. *Prelude* in C-sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2

S. Rachmaninoff. *Mélodie*, Opus 3, No. 3

S. Rachmaninoff. *Polichinelle*, Opus 3, No. 4

S. Rachmaninoff. *Barcarolle*, Opus 10, No. 3

S. Rachmaninoff. *Humoresque*, Opus 10, No. 5

S. Rachmaninoff. *Prelude* in G minor, Opus 23, No. 5

[224] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 504.
[225] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 392.

S. Rachmaninoff. *Polka de V. R*.

J. S. Smith, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *The Star Spangled Banner*

P. I. Tchaikovsky. *Troika*, Opus 37, No. 11

March 5, 1921

F. Mendelssohn. *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4

F. Chopin. *Waltz* in E flat Major, Opus 18

S. Rachmaninoff. *Etude-Tableau* in A minor, Opus 39, No. 6

M. Mussorgsky, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *Hopak* from *Sorochintsy Fair*

April 6, 1922

F. Kreisler, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *Liebesleid*

G. Bizet, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *Minuet* from *L'Arlésienne Suite* No. 2, Opus 23

S. Rachmaninoff. *Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5

April 13, 1923

S. Rachmaninoff. *Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5

P. I. Tchaikovsky. *Waltz* in A-flat major, Opus 40, No. 8

F. Chopin. *Waltz* in F major, Opus 34, No. 3

November 13, 1923

F. Chopin, arr. F. Liszt. *The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1

A. v. Henselt. *Si Oiseau J'étais*, Opus 2, No. 6

January 14, 1925

F. Schubert, arr. F. Liszt. *Das Wandern*, D. 795, No. 1

C. W. Gluck, arr. G. Sgambati. *Mélodie*, from Orfeo

December 22, 1925

J. S. Bach. *Sarabande*, from Partita No. 4 in D major BWV 828

F. Schubert, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *Wohin?*, D. 795, No. 2

F. Kreisler, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *Liebesfreud*

February 1, 1927

F. Chopin. *Nocturne* in F major, Opus 15, No. 1

I. J. Paderewski. *Minuet* in G major, Opus 14, No. 1

L. v. Beethoven, arr. A. Rubinstein. *Turkish March* from *The Ruins of Athens*, Opus 113

March 27, 1928

F. Schubert. *Impromptu* in A-flat major, D. 899, No. 4

S. Rachmaninoff. *Etude-Tableau* in B minor, Opus 39, No. 4

April 4, 1928

S. Rachmaninoff. *Élégie*, Opus 3, No. 1

February 1, 1929

F. Chopin. *Scherzo* No. 2, Opus 31

N. Rimsky-Korsakov, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *Flight of the Bumblebee* from *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*

A. Rubinstein. *Barcarolle* No. 5 in A minor, Opus 93

The Piano Rolls as Unique Artifacts

Twenty-nine of Rachmaninoff's piano rolls have a gramophone recording counterpart. The remaining six works, listed as follows, are artifacts of Rachmaninoff's playing which only exist as piano rolls:

F. Chopin. *Nocturne* in F major, Opus 15, No. 1

F. Chopin. *Scherzo* No. 2, Opus 31

S. Rachmaninoff. *Élégie*, Opus 3, No. 1

S. Rachmaninoff. *Etude-Tableau* in B minor, Opus 39, No. 4

A. Rubinstein. *Barcarolle* No. 5 in A minor, Opus 93

J. S. Smith, arr. S. Rachmaninoff. *The Star Spangled Banner*

As a curiosity, it is of note that the existence of the *Élégie*, Opus 3, No.1 as a piano roll allows us to hear Rachmaninoff perform his complete Opus 3 set, with the other four items having been recorded on gramophone.

The remaining twenty-nine piano rolls were often recorded near the same time that the gramophone recordings were made. For example, his studio recording of the Bach *Sarabande*, BWV 828 was made on December 14, 1925, and his piano roll was recorded on December 22. Some recordings were made over larger time periods, for example his *Etude-Tableau* in a minor, Opus 39 No. 6, recorded on piano roll on March 5, 1921 and on gramophone on December 16, 1925. The greatest duration between such examples is his *Mélodie*, Opus 3 No. 3, which he

recorded on piano roll on March 17, 1919, and on gramophone on April 9, 1940. Chapter 7 will expand on this type of analysis.

Chapter 6

The Gramophone Recordings

We now explore the gramophone recordings, which Rachmaninoff began making upon his arrival in America in 1918. As we will learn, the majority of Rachmaninoff's recordings were made for the Victor Company between 1920 and 1942. This chapter outlines Rachmaninoff's approach to gramophone recordings, and includes details about recordings which exist outside of his work for the Victor Company.

This chapter will also discuss the early radio medium, since it is closely related as a technology, and Rachmaninoff's unique view of it relates to his view of gramophone recordings.

Development of the Recording Process

Rachmaninoff's gramophone recording career, similar to his career with piano rolls, took place during a time of rapid technological development. He made his first gramophone recordings in 1919, which were made via the 'acoustic' process, by which the recording horn would be directly coupled to the cutting stylus, which would then engrave onto a wax disc the audio vibrations detected as the performer played.

This was superseded in the mid-1920s by the 'electric' recording process, which involved more advanced equipment such as microphones, vacuum tubes and amplification, which would then drive the cutting stylus with far greater precision, hence allowing for a wider range of frequencies and dynamics, and which produced recordings that sounded more natural to the listener. Rachmaninoff's first electric recording was of the Gluck (arr. Sgambati) *Mélodie* on April 13, 1925. All of his recordings after this date were electric.[226]

Rachmaninoff's 1924 recording of his *Second Piano Concerto* serves as a good example of the acoustic process. Max Harrison writes:

> The limitations of recording 78 rpm discs were such that works had to be split into segments of little more than four minutes and the further limitations of acoustic recording meant that the power of a symphony orchestra had to be much reduced. Also, foreign instruments had sometimes to be introduced to achieve a just balance. In this case the Philadelphia Orchestra, under Stokowski, was taken down to seven first violins, four seconds, three violas, two each of cellos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones, one each of baritone horn, bass saxophone, contrabassoon,

[226] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 469.

percussion. This would have involved someone, presumably Rachmaninoff though possibly Stokowski, making adjustments to the orchestration.[227]

Furthermore, for this recording Rachmaninoff "played a Steinway grand piano, but a smaller model - a Steinway Model B which was raised on a platform to allow the recording horn to have better access to the piano sound."[228] This recording would become commercially redundant when in 1929 Rachmaninoff made a second recording of this concerto, again with Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, but now using the electric process. This second recording was to become one of Rachmaninoff's most famous, benefiting from the confluence of superior recording technology, superlative playing, and the immense popularity of the concerto itself.

[227] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 243.
[228] https://www.stokowski.org/1924_Stokowski_Rachmaninoff_Acoustics.htm.

Takes and Matrix Numbers

Many texts and studies tend to be oriented around Rachmaninoff's recordings as they were publicly released, such as singles and LP albums[229] in the spirit of documenting his career, rather than discuss when his playing was actually captured in the studio. Such an approach generally overlooks the varying levels of effort invested into each recording by Rachmaninoff, since only the final approved product is discussed. Albums and studios change over time, however, so this can lead to problems of ambiguity, and of accessibility, in how the recordings may be discussed. For example, many listeners at this time of writing (2022) are more comfortable streaming digital audio than they are acquiring sometimes rare LPs from the second-hand market, let alone acquiring the equipment to listen to them; fifty years hence, our technological conventions will likely change again. Many extant recordings of Rachmaninoff are not yet easily accessible to the public.

This dissertation generally ignores specific albums and public releases, or any specific medium of public distribution, but instead focuses upon the original recordings of works which survive in terms of their takes and associated matrix numbers, which is to say the designation of the original wax record upon which physical audio was imprinted by the recording equipment used in the studio. This allows us to make more accurate judgements about Rachmaninoff's recorded playing in terms of the actual dates the playing occurred, and helps to avoid confusion between recording dates, release dates, re-issue dates, and so on.[230]

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[229] For example, see Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, R. Palmieri, *Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninoff: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), R. Cunningham, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Bio-Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001).

[230] Also see Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* and Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* for more details on this aspect of Rachmaninoff's recordings.

Following this approach, we can then identify additional patterns behind Rachmaninoff's recordings, which we could not so easily ascertain from the final released product. The number of takes Rachmaninoff made for each work was quite varied; for example he required eighteen takes for Mendelssohn's *Spinnerlied* in 1928, while on the other hand he was satisfied with a single take of his own *Etude-Tableau* in A minor, Opus 39, No. 6 in 1925. The time spent across these takes is another dimension of interest. For example, although the Chopin *Mazurka*, Opus 63, No. 3, is only two minutes in length, Rachmaninoff took eight takes over three years before he was satisfied with a single take for public release.

Once a take had been recorded in the studio, the performer would then listen to it, and if satisfied, the take could be marked as either 'm' for *master* or 'h' for *hold*. A take marked 'm' was one which the performer approved for commercial release, and a take marked 'h' was considered an acceptable alternative should the *master* become degraded or fail to be achieved. Any take not marked 'm' or 'h' was expected to be destroyed, if not explicitly marked so in the recording logs. Each take could be no longer than around four and half minutes, and recording technology of the early twentieth century did not allow for editing should wrong notes occur.

As an example, consider Rachmaninoff's 1923 recording of Chopin's *Nocturne* in F sharp, Opus 15, No. 2. The take which we listen to today has the matrix number C 27118-8. We read the matrix designation as follows:

- the 'C' indicates the wax record was 12-inches, and that the process was acoustic
- 27118 indicates the index number of the disc being recorded on
- the suffix 8 indicates this was the eighth take, or the eighth such disc

This take was marked ‘m,’ and was recorded on December 27, 1923. In typical Rachmaninoff perfectionism, the first take had been made over a year earlier, on November 4, 1922. He made a total of ten takes, one marked ‘m’ and one marked ‘h’ over this thirteen-month period.

The *held* take, while never officially issued, we should assume physically survives today in a studio archive, since there was no reason to destroy it; this take could be made available in the future should there be public interest. The same is true for all *held* takes made over Rachmaninoff’s recording career. For historical completeness of this example, this recording was first released to the public in 1924 as the B-side of Victrola-6452.[231]

Approved takes would be used to create commercial records, which were then sold to the public at scale. Over time, when re-issues occurred for popular records, *master* takes might degrade after each re-printing, eventually requiring their replacement with a *held* take, if it existed, for the record’s next re-issue.

The matrix numbers used were usually printed in some way upon the consumer record. As an example, the 1929 release of the *Second Piano Concerto* printed the matrix number used at the three o’clock position of the disc label (figure 14).

[231] As detailed here: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/objects/detail/41140/Victor_6452.



Figure 14. RCA Victor record label details.

Reading the numbers at the three o'clock position, 16773-A signifies the album and disc number respectively; 8148-A signifies the original manual sequence number of this automatic sequence copy disc; 48963 signifies the matrix number used.[232]

For more details on the historical development of such disc labeling conventions, of which there is much to learn, see online articles by Howard Friedman,[233] William Moran,[234] as well as the comprehensive works by Barrie Martyn[235] and John Bolig.[236]

[232] My thanks to Mark Obert-Thorn for providing accurate wording and understanding of these details over email correspondence.
[233] H. Friedman, "Matrix and Catalog Numbers in G & S Discography," http://gasdisc.oakapplepress.com/matrix1.htm
[234] Details here: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/resources/detail/57
[235] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*
[236] J. Bolig, *The Victor Red Seal Discography* (American Discography Project, 2020)

Since the matrix number was usually printed on these earlier discs, an observant collector would be able to know when the discs contained a different performance, should a re-issue require the source matrix be replaced by a *held* take.

Recording engineer Mark Obert-Thorn has provided direct insight into this topic, with respect to the 1929 recording of the *Second Piano Concerto*, of which he produced an album in 2018 containing the original version, the re-issue version (from *held* takes) made in the early 1940s, as well as an additional third take that was issued of Side 9 from the third movement. The album, *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov*,[237] presents these versions together for the first time, and clarifies for once and for all which recordings are which of this concerto.

Sound engineers at Victor would use 'blue history cards' to document every original recording made by performers. Of the card presented below (figure 15), Obert-Thorn writes that this card:

> documents *Side 9* of the 1929 recording of the *Second Concerto*. It shows the matrix number and disposition of every take, including which takes were used for mastering (marked "M"), which takes were held ("H") and which were destroyed ("D"). If you look in the upper left-hand corner of the card, you will see that some takes moved from being held to being used for mastering at various points. Take 2 was originally chosen for mastering, but if you look in the lower left-hand corner you will see a note saying "#2 worn out." At that point, Take 2 is shown as destroyed, and Take 1 was substituted. That looks like it was done on the second of the listed dates, 3/29/40. This take didn't stay in print long, though, as it was in turn replaced by Take 3 on 4/24/42. This is the only side in which all three recorded takes were issued.[238]

[237] *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov*, Pristine Audio (PASC 521), 2018.
[238] From direct email correspondence with Mark Obert-Thorn.

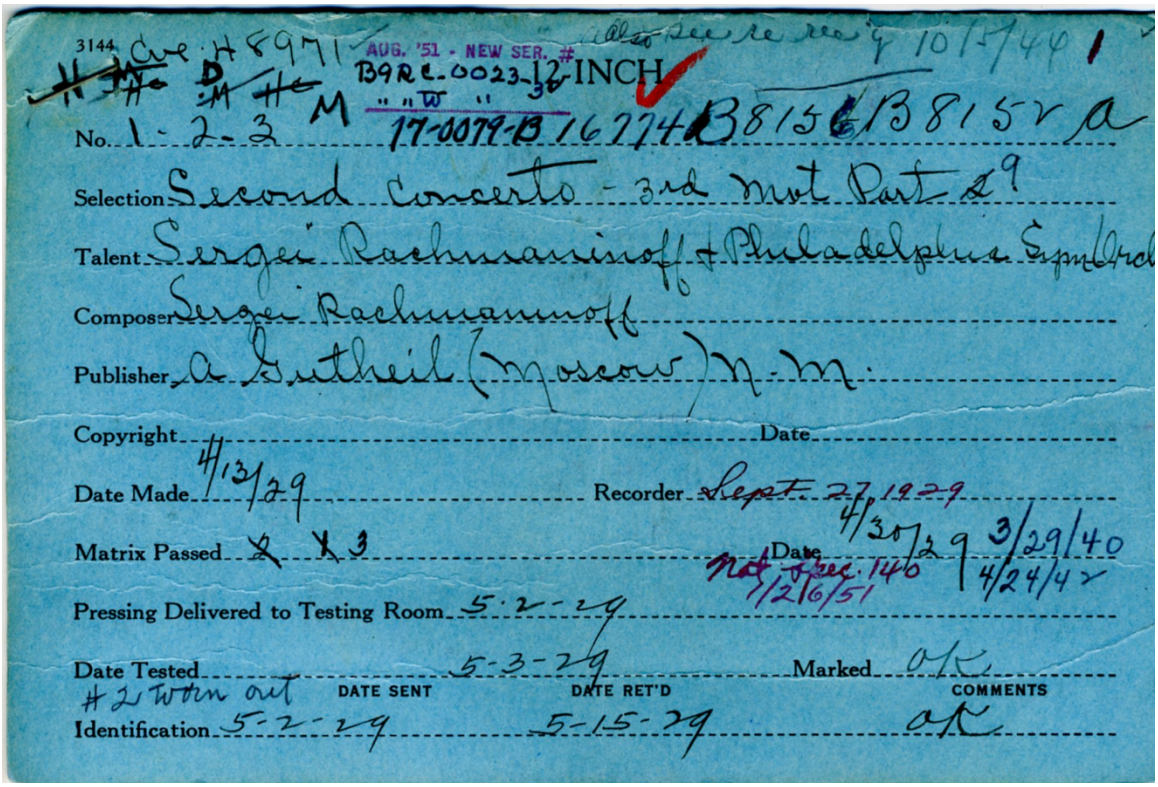


Figure 15. Victor Blue History card for the Second Piano Concerto.

The 'blue history card' for Side 9 of the 1929 recording of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, as provided by Mark Obert-Thorn.

Rachmaninoff and the Gramophone

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in 1918 the reproducing piano was regarded by many as the state of the art in recording technology. Rachmaninoff was not impressed with the relative quality of early gramophone technology, telling an interviewer in 1931 that the "results produced by the acoustical process in use when I began to record for His Master's Voice [Victor Company] in 1920 were far from satisfactory. It is only the perfecting of electrical recording during the last three years combined with recent astonishing improvements in the gramophones themselves that has given us piano reproduction of a fidelity, a variety and depth of tone that could hardly be bettered."[239]

Rachmaninoff, like most performers, did not enjoy the actual recording process. He told Alfred Swan: "I get very nervous when I am making records, and all whom I have asked say that they get nervous too. When the test records are made, I know that I can hear them played back to me, and then everything is all right. But when the stage is set for the final recording and I realize that this will remain for good, I get nervous and my hands get tense."[240]

Unlike the piano rolls, which served as a relatively easy commercial complement to his musical activities, Rachmaninoff took his gramophone recordings extremely seriously, recognizing that they would become his legacy. Sophie Satin wrote of Rachmaninoff's relentless standards:

> Always demanding of himself, Rachmaninoff became still more severe when he listened to a recording, vetoing and destroying test records mercilessly. Many of the rejected

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[239] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone", *Gramophone*, April 1931.
[240] A. Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences," *The Musical Quarterly*, January 1944, 11.

> recordings were for the most part very good, but because of one chord or one passage which did not entirely satisfy him, they were there and then destroyed.[241]

It would seem that this ability to continually destroy recordings, until he was satisfied with a final take, eventually provided Rachmaninoff a sense of comfort. He told Gramophone in 1931 that "when making records it is actually possible to achieve something approaching artistic perfection. If once, twice or three times I do not play as well as I can, it is possible to record and re-record, to destroy and remake until, at last, I am content with the result."[242]

Rachmaninoff also spoke, with a touch of humor, about his recording work with Fritz Kreisler, where we learn of the contrasting temperaments of these two legendary musicians:

> Do the critics who have praised those Grieg records so highly realize the immense amount of hard work and patience necessary to achieve such results? The six sides of the Grieg set we recorded no fewer than five times each. From these thirty discs we finally selected the best, destroying the remainder. Perhaps so much labor did not altogether please Fritz Kreisler. He is a great artist, but does not care to work too hard. Being an optimist, he will declare with enthusiasm that the first set of proofs we make are wonderful, marvelous. But my own pessimism invariably causes me to feel, and argue, that they could be better. So when we work together, Fritz and I, we are always fighting.[243]

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[241] Apetyan, *Vospominaniya o Rakhmaninove*, Volume 1, 109.

[242] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," *Gramophone*, April 1931.

[243] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," *Gramophone*, April 1931. Rachmaninoff was horrified at how his comments read in retrospect, in particular implying that Kreisler "does not care to work too hard." He wrote to *Gramophone* immediately, and as a result of a letter exchange *Gramophone* printed a reply from the editor in their June issue as follows:

> > No one in his wits would have inferred from the paragraph on P. 526 (April) about Kreisler that Rachmaninoff was speaking seriously about his colleague's optimism or his laziness; but since its publication he has written to his interviewer, "I am not only a personal friend of Mr. Kreisler but also a very great admirer of his genius as an artist, and never for a moment did I intend to criticize him. My sentence about his not liking to repeat *records* when playing for the gramophone, which I meant as a joke, has become a serious criticism of his work in general. … I never meant to say such a thing."
> >
> > Of course he didn't; but the interviewer wants us to explain the matter, so we do.

Rachmaninoff and the Radio

Rachmaninoff's relationship with the radio presents us with one of the greatest *what-ifs* of his recording career. Rachmaninoff took a hard position against live broadcasts, convinced that listeners would hear second-rate playing over a low-quality technology; more curiously, he questioned the philosophy of someone listening to music in a way that was so far removed from the experience of a real performance.

To the latter point, Rachmaninoff said in 1932: "I cannot conceive of playing without an audience. … If I were shut in a little 'cigar-box' of a room and were told that my audience was listening somewhere outside I could not play well. The most precious thing for me is the feeling of contact established with my audience."[244]

While there is a logical similarity in this regard between performances on gramophone and on radio, Rachmaninoff seemed to consider gramophone acceptable, since at least those recordings could have some quality assurance as well be presented in packaging which set some idea for the listener about what they were listening to. Radio, on the other hand, was live, allowed errors and randomness in playing, suffered from extremely variable sound quality, and as a continuous flow of sound it did not separate different types of content from each other, all becoming commonplace as a result.

For more details, see R. S. Gehl, *Reassessing a Legacy: Rachmaninoff in America*, *1918-43* (University of Cincinnati, 2008), 90.

[244] "Rachmaninoff looks at Radio," *The New York Times*, December 11, 1932, Section XX, 6.

We have since then become accustomed to the idea that a concert can be experienced remotely, and retrospectively, and at any time and any place through many types of media. We can no longer even imagine that a concert, or experience, could not be recorded and then re-experienced. We have become normalized to the idea that a recording is a substitute, or even equivalent, to experiencing a live concert; this broadens equality of access to the arts, but perhaps we are mistaken in our equating of concerts with recordings (whether live or otherwise). Rachmaninoff held the view that nothing could substitute for a real performer, communicating with a real audience as an ephemeral experience. He told B. K. Roy in 1927:

> The personality of a musician has a great deal to do with it. If personality does not count, then why not listen to the phonograph or radio? Why go to concerts at all? … The personality of a musician influences the audience, consciously or unconsciously, in the appreciation of music. In the enjoyment of music human hearts play a more important part than human brains.[245]

Rachmaninoff refused to have his live playing broadcast on radio. Gregor Benko writes that

> Rachmaninoff often did appear during the broadcast performances of many symphony orchestras, but invariably the radio network would have to switch transmission (upon the pianist's strict orders) from the live broadcast to the electrical Victor recording of the *Second Concerto*, just at the moment Rachmaninoff began his public performance of whatever concerto he happened to be playing on that occasion.[246]

[245] B. K. Roy, "Rachmaninov is Reminiscent," *The Musical Observer*, May 1927, 16.
[246] G. Benko, "Rachmaninoff on Records," *The Complete Rachmaninoff*, RCA, Booklet.

Rachmaninoff spoke candidly against the radio, telling *Gramophone* in 1931 that "to my mind, radio has a bad influence on art: that it destroys all the soul and true significance of music."[247] He also appealed to his fellow musicians, asking whether "the radio artist, who has no opportunity to hear how his performance comes through, ever know a similar satisfaction in his work?"[248] He did acknowledge the benefits of radio to those truly remote from cultural centers, saying

> I can well imagine that if I were exiled in Alaska, for instance, I might be grateful for even the pale ghosts of music the radio would bring me. But to listen-in in great cities like London or New York when one could actually be present in a concert hall – to me that would seem sacrilege. Radio is a very great invention, but not, I think, for art.[249]

Rachmaninoff was, typically for him, the exception to his era; many of those around him urged him to broadcast his playing. Leopold Stokowski said of Rachmaninoff: "He is very peculiar. … He is very hard to persuade. If he doesn't want to do something, he doesn't want to do it. Paderewski played over the radio yesterday for the first time in his life. Rachmaninoff has never played over the radio. I've tried over and over to persuade him, but he won't do it."[250]

And so we are left with the opening question: *what if* Rachmaninoff had allowed his performances to be broadcast? We will never know.

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[247] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," *Gramophone*, April 1931.
[248] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," *Gramophone*, April 1931.
[249] S. Rachmaninoff, "The Artist and the Gramophone," *Gramophone*, April 1931.
[250] O. Daniel, *Stokowski – A Counterpoint of View* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1982), 384.

The Edison Recordings

Rachmaninoff's first recordings were made for the Edison Company, across four sessions on April 18, April 19, April 23, and April 24 of 1919. The following works were recorded (including extant takes):

Chopin, *Waltz* in A flat, Opus 42 (2 takes)

Chopin, *Waltz* in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3 (3 takes)

Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* (with cadenza by Rachmaninoff), S. 244 (3 takes)

Mozart, *Sonata* in A Major, K. 331, first movement (2 takes)

Scarlatti (arr. Tausig), *Sonata* in E minor, K. 9 / L.413 (2 takes)

Rachmaninoff, *Barcarolle*, Opus 10, No. 3 (3 takes)

Rachmaninoff, *Polka de V. R*. (3 takes)

Rachmaninoff, *Prelude* in C sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2 (2 takes)

Given Rachmaninoff's later strictness to management of his recorded takes, the Edison recordings stand today as an incredible historical artifact; for some of the works it is not known which of these takes Rachmaninoff preferred (if any), and Edison for his part "ignored his artist's wishes about approved takes and issued all three of each recording."[251]

As such, these recordings provide an invaluable insight into Rachmaninoff's playing at the very beginning of his American career, especially since they are given to us unfiltered and unvarnished. They also present us with performances of works he never recorded again, for

[251] G. Benko, "Rachmaninoff on Records," *The Complete Rachmaninoff*, RCA, Booklet.

example the Scarlatti and the Mozart, providing an example of how Rachmaninoff played such older music at that time. The Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody* is also of great interest, as Rachmaninoff plays his own cadenza which he never published. Jan Holcman would later transcribe this from the Edison recording in 1955.[252]

Edison was in this sense pragmatic. He recorded multiple takes to ensure he had backup recordings should re-issues be needed, and his approach of publishing them all anyway resulted in strong sales. The Edison recordings contributed towards Rachmaninoff's American career perhaps similarly to how his non-copyrighted *Prelude* in C sharp minor had contributed to his initial fame; in each case, conventional rules were flouted to Rachmaninoff's indignation, but the results were ultimately to his longer-term benefit.

These recordings were likely performed on a Lauter upright piano, built in New Jersey.[253] Edison, who attended the recording sessions, was clearly attentive to details in this still-nascent technology, and he wrote in his notes that this piano "seems wrong for this powerful player."[254] The eventual nature of recordings, and of recording studios, was still being discovered.

Phonographs, being a relatively new consumer product, were heavily advertised (Figure 16). Edison introduced "a follow-up to the famous 'Tone Test' demonstrations […] conducted since 1915 in cities throughout North America, in which audiences were invited to compare live performances with Edison recordings."[255]

[252] Threlfall & Norris, *A Catalog of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff*, 196.
[253] Great Pianists, Rachmaninov 4, *The Edison Recordings* (Naxos, 2017), Liner Notes, 2.
[254] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 226.
[255] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 440.



Page 796 DECEMBER 1920 THE ETUDE

From an actual photograph taken in Mr. Rachmaninoff's home, in New York City

Hear Rachmaninoff on the New Edison

NOW you can make a straightforward comparison and find out which is the best phonograph. Rachmaninoff himself, the great Russian pianist, gives you this opportunity.

He has made recordings for one of the standard talking-machines. We are very glad that he has done so. For now you can compare.

Your Edison dealer will gladly play Rachmaninoff's RE-CREATIONS on the New Edison for you. Watch for his announcements in your local newspaper. You *must* hear this most astonishing phonograph comparison,—before you buy your Christmas phonograph.

The photograph, from which this illustration is reproduced, was taken in Mr. Rachmaninoff's home, in New York City. It shows the great Russian pianist playing the Second Hungarian Rhapsodie *(Liszt)*, while the New Edison RE-CREATED his previous rendition of the same composition.

The three music experts who listened from behind the screen, were amazed and astounded at the absolute fidelity of the RE-CREATION to the artist's original performance. Once more, the New Edison's perfect Realism triumphed in the test of direct comparison.

Be sure to look for your Edison dealer's announcements. Hear Rachmaninoff on the New Edison. THOMAS A. EDISON, INC., Orange, N. J.

Edison
Rachmaninoff RE-CREATIONS
Now on Sale

No. 82169 Second Hungarian Rhapsodie *(Liszt)* Part 1
No. 82169 Second Hungarian Rhapsodie *(Liszt)* Part 2
No. 82170 Second Hungarian Rhapsodie *(Liszt)* Part 3
(With Mr. Rachmaninoff's Cadenza)
No. 82170 Pastorale *(Scarlatti-Tausig)*
No. 82187 Prelude in C Sharp Minor, Op. 3 *(Rachmaninoff)*
No. 82187 Polka de W. R. *(Rachmaninoff)*
(Others to be released later)

The NEW EDISON "The Phonograph with a Soul"

Figure 16. Edison Advertisement, 1920.

Despite strong sales, Rachmaninoff was dissatisfied with the way he had been treated by Edison, and sought a stricter contract which would give him more control over his recordings, likely including veto power over takes. Edison apparently agreed to Rachmaninoff's request

verbally, but provided him a contract which did not include the same terms. Rachmaninoff instead decided to sign a recording contract with the Victor Company on April 21, 1920.[256]

An examination of surviving legal letters show considerable drama at this moment, as Edison realized they had lost their star pianist. Edison sent Rachmaninoff a revised contract on April 22, however it was too late. Attorneys from both companies were promptly involved, and the most illuminating letter on the affair is from S. Stanwood Menken, Rachmaninoff's personal attorney, who wrote[257] to Victor on May 20:

> Dear Sir:
>
> Mr. Rachmaninoff has handed me your letter to him of May 17th and I would say that I have talked with both Mr. Holden and Mr. Gaylor relative to the ground on which the Edison Company bases its verbal agreement with Mr. Rachmaninoff.
>
> It would seem as if the whole difficulty is due to a misunderstanding – that the Edison Company made an offer verbally which Mr. Rachmaninoff was willing to accept, but that they failed to embody the same in the writing which they submitted to Mr. Rachmaninoff. Naturally, he expected whatever they submitted to him as an agreement to conform to his idea of the oral understanding, and upon the failure of the Edison Company to do so, he terminated negotiations with them. They seemed very much upset about the matter and when I saw them they were apparently anxious to make a contract even upon the terms understood by Mr. Rachmaninoff, but I advised them that in view of the change in his position, the same could not be considered.
>
> Very truly yours,

[256] While a relatively minor detail, some texts get this date wrong, stating April 22 instead. Legal letters on the matter, from Victor, indicate April 21 is the correct date.

[257] This letter, amongst others, is to be found in the *Thomas L. Dixon Collection* at the International Piano Archives at Maryland.

Rachmaninoff would make recordings with the Victor Company for the next twenty-two years.

Edison would likely not have been a suitable long-term partner for Rachmaninoff, in either business or music. While listening to Rachmaninoff record his *Prelude*, Opus 3, No. 2, Edison wrote in his notebook "This tune is unattractive."[258]

[258] Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*, 226. For a full transcription of Edison's notes of the recording sessions with Rachmaninoff, which are otherwise of a technical nature, see X. Ding, *Rachmaninoff Plays Rachmaninoff* (Boston University, 1991), 33.

Unofficial Recordings

There has always been hope of discovering lost recordings, or lost takes, that Rachmaninoff may have made. This hope been consistently met with disappointment, with one major exception as this section will outline.

Gregor Benko writes that Rachmaninoff "was meticulous about the destruction of any Victor 'masters' of his rejected records, and consequently none survives in the company's vaults. Sophie Satin was delegated by the composer to smash his copies of the shellac pressings made from those masters, and she remembers his approving nods as she reported the deed done."[259]

It was therefore astonishing when Jay Reise, a faculty composer at the University of Pennsylvania, noticed a catalog entry for an item in his University's *Ormandy collection*: two ten-inch double-sided aluminum based, lacquer coated discs entitled

> 33 1/3; 12/21/40; Symphonic Dances … Rachmaninoff; Rachmaninoff in person playing the piano.[260]

The guidance of Ward Marston, of Marston Records, was sought, and subsequently this recording, of Rachmaninoff demonstrating his *Symphonic Dances* at the piano himself, was finally released to the public in 2018.[261] In this almost miraculous finding, Rachmaninoff plays through the entire work for an unknown professional audience, who are presumably hearing this for the first time. While the exact date, place and setting of the recording remains unknown,

[259] G. Benko, "Rachmaninoff on Records," *The Complete Rachmaninoff*, RCA, Booklet.
[260] *Rachmaninoff plays Symphonic Dances*, Marston Records (Marston 53022-2), 2018, Liner Notes, 30.
[261] *Rachmaninoff plays Symphonic Dances*, Marston Records (Marston 53022-2), 2018.

Rachmaninoff himself was likely unaware that this recording had been made. "Had he known […] he would likely have insisted upon its destruction after it had served its purpose."[262]

We may speculate that Eugene Ormandy himself made this recording in secret, given that it was found within his personal collection.[263] As further supporting evidence of this theory, Ormandy wrote in his tribute to Rachmaninoff:

> He composed his last great work, *The Symphonic Dances*, during the summer of 1940. When the composition was almost finished, but not yet copied, he asked me to come to his summer estate on Long Island to go over it with him. He wanted me to tell him what I thought of the work. He also wanted to explain his own thoughts and describe what he had in mind when he composed the *Dances*. I went, of course, and while I was there he said "I will dedicate this composition to you, and to your great Orchestra, if you will allow me." I replied that nothing would give me greater pleasure and that the members of the Orchestra would feel honored with the dedication.[264]

On the same album are partial recordings of the Brahms *Ballade*, Opus 10, No. 2, and the Liszt *Ballade No. 2* in B minor, S. 171. These were recorded by accident on December 5, 1931, in Philadelphia as sound engineers were preparing to record a concert later in the day, while Rachmaninoff was performing the matinee concert. Unlike the *Symphonic Dances*, however, the discovery of these recordings were made too late, as "the one metal master which survives […] has irreparably rusted away."[265]

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[262] *Rachmaninoff plays Symphonic Dances*, Marston Records (Marston 53022-2), 2018, Liner Notes, 30.
[263] My thanks to Donald Manildi for an enjoyable discussion on this subject.
[264] E. Ormandy, "Sergei Rachmaninoff," *The Russian Orthodox Journal*, March 1944, 4.
[265] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 445.

The album also includes Rachmaninoff accompanying the folk song *Bublichki* ("bagels") in an informal setting, and a partial recording of his *Italian Polka* duet, with his wife Natalia playing the upper part. Both recordings are of extremely poor audio quality, but the personality and style of the player is undeniable.

The playing on this album is, as one would expect, truly virtuosic and representative of Rachmaninoff's large orchestral tone and style, with an additional sense of freedom as he is playing in the moment to a real audience, without an awareness of it being recorded. These recordings provide us a rare glimpse into Rachmaninoff's playing and personality outside of the recording studio, and must be studied by any serious Rachmaninoff scholar.

Extant Multiple Takes

We outline here the publicly available recordings which exist today as multiple takes. This allows us to inspect the similarities and differences between how Rachmaninoff played the same work multiple times in a given recording session, or sessions some days apart. This is different from comparing performances which are months or years apart, as the later Analysis chapter of this dissertation will do.

The multiple takes available today are all mostly prior to 1930. It should be noted that additional takes may become public in the future, since the *held* takes of many of Rachmaninoff's recorded works should still exist, as mentioned earlier.

Unlike more spontaneous performers such as Josef Hofmann, Rachmaninoff's takes are generally very similar to each other, the differences being in minor timings, phrase shaping or technical details such as a missed note. This confirms our expectation of Rachmaninoff's consistency towards an interpretation he had arrived at.

These works are as follows, ordered by composer:

Item	Composer	Work	Year	Studio	Takes
1	Bach, arr. Rachmaninoff	*Preludio* from Violin Partita in E major, BWV 1006	1935	Victor	2
2	Beethoven	*Violin Sonata* in G, Opus 30, No. 3	1928	Victor	2 (entire work)
3	Chopin	*Waltz* in A flat, Opus 42	1919	Edison	2
4	Chopin	*Waltz* in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3	1919	Edison	3
5	Liszt	*Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 2, S. 244	1919	Edison	3
6	Mozart	*Sonata* in A, K. 331, first movement only	1919	Edison	2
7	Rachmaninoff	*Barcarolle*, Opus 3, No. 3	1919	Edison	3
8	Rachmaninoff	*Piano Concerto* No. 2, Opus 18	1924	Victor	1, plus an additional take of the first movement
9	Rachmaninoff	*Piano Concerto* No. 2, Opus 18	1929	Victor	2, plus an additional take of the third movement
10	Rachmaninoff	*Polka de V. R.*	1919	Edison	3
11	Rachmaninoff	*Prelude* in C sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2	1919	Edison	2
12	Scarlatti (arr. Tausig)	*Sonata* in E minor, K. 9 / L. 413	1919	Edison	2

Missed Opportunities

As Rachmaninoff neared the end of his career, additional opportunities for recordings were missed, in addition to Rachmaninoff's refusal to broadcast his concerts on radio. The first is a fascinating proposition made in 1938 by HMV with respect to the growing costs of recording his *Third Symphony*. Martyn writes that

> At a gramophone conference in November 1938 an official from HMV explained that the company was still willing to record the Symphony, but to balance the expense involved it had asked Rachmaninoff to in return to make a recording of all twenty-four of his *Preludes*. This Rachmaninoff had refused to do.[266]

Considering Rachmaninoff's ruthless perfectionism, and the number of takes over many years he would invest in even a single short work, the idea of him agreeing to record all his *Preludes* does seem unlikely. Nonetheless, he was sixty-four at the time and evidently still at the height of his technical powers; such a recording project would have made for a remarkable and definitive legacy.

RCA Victor made their own share of tragically short-sighted decisions. Vladimir Horowitz, speaking to David Dubal, said that "Rachmaninoff, a few years before he died, wanted to record his two suites for two pianos with me, but RCA didn't want them."[267]

Perhaps taking a tentative step in the direction of radio broadcasting, Rachmaninoff eventually decided it might be a good idea to have his concerts recorded. Harris Goldsmith wrote an apt summary RCA's almost unthinkable handling of this question:

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[266] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 447.
[267] Dubal, *Evenings with Horowitz*, 154.

It is known that Rachmaninoff proposed that his 1942 recital tour be recorded for possible future release. The great pianist / composer / conductor evidently sensed that time was running out for him, and it is to RCA's eternal discredit that his suggestion was turned down.[268]

[268] H. Goldsmith, "The Complete Rachmaninoff," *High Fidelity Magazine*, January 1974, 58.

A Rachmaninoff Discography

The recordings which Rachmaninoff made for Victor from 1920, and then RCA Victor after their merging in 1929, form almost the entirety of Rachmaninoff's recorded legacy, with the exception of the Edison recordings discussed earlier. Most of the Victor recordings were made on Steinway D grand pianos 147681 and 194597.[269] This section outlines how a modern reader may become familiar with the actual recordings on the public market, in terms of released albums.

The primary source for the majority of the recordings is the original Victor 'blue history cards', which usually contains the recording date, matrix number, recording title, recording artist, instrumentation, publisher, author, take number, disposition, and location of a particular recording. All surviving takes of the Edison recordings have already been issued by Edison to the public, now available on Naxos,[270] and so do not present us with much ambiguity; therefore the primary source recording logs for Edison are not explored further here.

The Victor blue history cards are currently stored in the Sony Archives in New York City, and may only be reviewed in person.[271] Since this is not practical for most people, we must usually depend upon second-hand transcriptions of those cards into other formats.

The first such recommended second-hand source is Barrie Martyn's scholarly text,[272] where Chapter 14 provides a transcription of every take made by Rachmaninoff either for Edison

[269] G. Benko, "Rachmaninoff on Records," *The Complete Rachmaninoff*, RCA, Booklet.
[270] See the Discography section of the dissertation.
[271] My thanks to Mark Obert-Thorn for this information over email correspondence.
[272] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 451.

and Victor, in terms of date, matrix number, disposition ('master', 'hold', 'destroy'), as well as a designated record the take was publicly released on. This is an excellent starting point.

Martyn presents his data in matrix ordering, as aligned with each given composition being recorded, and the date, matrix and take dispositions are its most valuable information. One should read his Victor and HMV releases table cautiously, since an omission does not mean that a given take was never issued to the public. For example, Rachmaninoff's 1935 *held* take of his transcription of the Bach *Preludio* from the Violin Partita in E Major, BWV 1006, was in fact issued,[273] along with another take from the same year[274] (not marked *master* or *held*!). This particular example provides hope that additional takes of many works may yet survive for possible future release.

The second comprehensive resource is the online *Discography of American Historical Recordings* (DAHR)[275], where any matrix number may be queried and inspected. For each matrix number, similar data is provided as by Martyn, but also includes the location of each recording. DAHR, in its effort to digitize over 350,000 such history cards, as they report in 2022, does have occasional errors in their data, such as Rachmaninoff being listed as the composer of *Coppélia*, a comic ballet in fact written by Léo Delibes in 1870.[276] This is an expected defect of such human or automated effort at scale. Thus, a Rachmaninoff scholar should trust, but verify, this source.

[273] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 483, item 155.
[274] See the recording on *RCA Red Seal Century, Soloists and Conductors* (09026-63861), 2001, which is a different performance than that on the MJA take listed by Martyn.
[275] Currently located at: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php.
[276] Details online here: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/2000226546/E27482-Copplia_ballet_Entracte_and_valse.

The October 1966 issue of the *American Record Guide* (ARG) provides a helpful summary of all recommended physical releases at that time across seven pages.[277] For each recording, its recording date, matrix and take number is provided, along with an associated Victor, HMV, or re-issue vinyl album available at that time. This issue also provides an introductory article on the history of the recordings in its 'da capo' column by Steven Smolian,[278] as well as a biographical outline of Rachmaninoff by Rafael Kammerer, *The Golden Art of Sergei Rachmaninoff*. Unfortunately, the ARG does not provide back-issues online, so an interested reader must reach out to libraries, or the second hand market, to review this.

The major item in any Rachmaninoff discography is RCA's *The Complete Rachmaninoff* album, initially released in 1973 as five multi-disc LP volumes. The included booklet, researched and written by Francis Crociata and Gregor Benko, provides a wide survey of Rachmaninoff's life and recordings, an (almost) complete listing of his recordings, including recordings unpublished before that time (for example, Chopin's *Ballade* No. 3, Opus 47). As we will see later, still missing from this collection is the 1935 *held* take of Rachmaninoff's transcription of the Bach *Preludio* from the Violin Partita in E, BWV 1006.

The RCA *Complete Rachmaninoff* edition was then issued as a 10-CD set in 1992, and its booklet provided truncated versions of the original texts provided in the LP booklet,[279] and the

[277] *The American Record Guide*, October 1966, 159 – 165.
[278] S. Smolian, "Da Capo," *The American Record Guide*, October 1966, 54.
[279] Specifically truncated are 'Portrait of a Great and Modest Master' by Francis Crociata, and 'Rachmaninoff on Records' by Gregor Benko. Missing from the CD booklet is a letter from Sophie Satin describing her friendship with the composer, a chronology of Rachmaninoff's life, and additional pictures of the composer at various stages in his life.

recording dates, matrix and take numbers are listed for each track in the closing section of the booklet.

This collection was then re-released as new edition in 2005 which unfortunately failed Albert Einstein's aphorism to 'make things as simple as possible, but not simpler'[280]; the booklet provided by RCA in this edition has removed all recording dates and details of the tracks, and provides a mere six page biography to describe the totality of Rachmaninoff's life and achievements. This is a challenging place to start for the modern listener. For example, after noticing that Rachmaninoff performs his *Prelude*, Opus 3, No. 2 on tracks:

- CD7 track 9
- CD8 track 5
- CD10 track 3
- CD10 track 17

there is no immediate way to identify which is which! Without access to the earlier edition's booklet, the listener must painstakingly compare these tracks with other albums to ascertain which are the 1919, 1921 or 1928 recordings of this work. This is also true for the other works which Rachmaninoff recorded multiple times as captured by this album. Appendix A of this dissertation provides this information.

The RCA edition is also missing many of the Edison takes, for which a listener should be directed to the Naxos series of Rachmaninoff discs[281], which includes all the originally published takes in a clean remastering. Missing also is the 1935 recording of the Bach *Preludio*, BWV

[280] Albert Einstein did not literally say this, but this saying is paraphrased from his lecture 'On the Method of Theoretical Physics,' presented as the Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford on June 10, 1933.
[281] Great Pianists, Rachmaninov, Volumes 1-6 (Naxos 8.112020, 8.112058, 8.111397, 8.111407, 8.111408, 8.111413).

1006, as mentioned above, as well as the alternate takes of the 1924 and 1929 recordings of his *Second Piano Concerto*; also missing is the alternate take of the Beethoven *Violin Sonata*, Opus 30, No. 3, as recorded with Fritz Kreisler. For these, listeners are directed to Naxos[282] and Pristine Audio.[283]

It appears that the discography summarized here reflects the entirety of the works Rachmaninoff officially recorded for which any takes survive. We should expect further alternate takes may be released in the future as historical curiosities, but it is unlikely that we will uncover a recording of any additional works, or that an alternate take should reveal a significantly different style of playing or interpretation, given the general similarity of the multiple takes which are available today.

In this way, the complement of gramophone recordings, unofficial recordings, and the piano rolls present us an unusually rounded view of Rachmaninoff, which is doubly interesting given the overlap with technological changes which occurred during his recording career.

[282] Great Chamber Music Recordings, *Violin Sonatas* (Naxos 8.110968, 2017).
[283] *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov*, Pristine Audio (PASC 521), 2018.

Chapter 7

Analysis

With our understanding of Rachmaninoff's life and personality, his artistic development, and his recorded legacy both on piano roll and gramophone, we now turn to an analysis with respect to our original question – Rachmaninoff's evolution as a performer over his American career, framing our analysis in terms of *τεχνε* as proposed by Neuhaus.

We begin by outlining the works recorded multiple times, and then identify a selection of those works to consider.

Works Recorded More Than Once

We will begin by outlining the works which Rachmaninoff recorded multiple times, and which were recorded some time apart from each other. We will not include recordings of a work less than a year apart, of which there are many, since such recordings will not likely provide us any significant developmental insight. The piano rolls are within scope for our consideration, and we will use the date of the roll recording, not its release. We also include the Edison recordings since they provide insight into Rachmaninoff's playing at the beginning of his American career, even though they do not likely represent his own preferred performance of any work.

We will separate the recordings into two groups:

1. Recordings of works composed by Rachmaninoff, including his transcriptions of his own works.
2. Works by other composers, including transcriptions of those works by either Rachmaninoff or others.

Our criterion for this division is whether Rachmaninoff is performing music which he created, or if the music was created by others. This dissertation considers that transcriptions maintain the creative authorship of the original composer, not the transcriber. As we will see, this separation is not necessarily how Rachmaninoff regarded his own recorded legacy.

Works by Rachmaninoff

The table below lists the nine works by Rachmaninoff which exist as multiple recordings, ordered by length of time between recordings.

Item	Work	Date Recorded	Type
1	*Mélodie*, Opus 3, No. 3	March 17, 1919	Piano roll
		April 9, 1940	Studio
	Total	21 years, 1 month	
2	*Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5, arr. S. Rachmaninoff	April 6, 1922	Piano roll
		December 27, 1923	Studio
		February 26, 1942	Studio
	Total	19 years, 10 months	
3	*Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5	November 4, 1922	Studio
		April 13, 1923	Piano roll
		January 3, 1936	Studio
	Total	13 years, 2 months	
4	*Polka de V. R.*	March 17, 1919	Piano roll
		April 24, 1919	Studio (Edison)
		October 12, 1921	Studio
		April 4, 1928	Studio
	Total	9 years, 1 month	
5	*Prelude* in C sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2	March 17, 1919	Piano roll
		April 24, 1919	Studio (Edison)
		October 14, 1921	Studio
		April 4, 1928	Studio
	Total	9 years, 1 month	
6	*Piano Concerto No. 2*, Opus 18	December 22, 1924	Studio

		April 13, 1929	Studio
	Total	4 years, 3 months	
7	*Etude-Tableau*, Opus 39, No. 6	March 5, 1921	Piano roll
		December 16, 1925	Studio
	Total	4 years, 9 months	
8	*Polichinelle*, Opus 3, No. 4	March 17, 1919	Piano roll
		March 6, 1923	Studio
	Total	4 years	
9	*Prelude* in G minor, Opus 23, No. 5	March 17, 1919	Piano roll
		May 17, 1920	Studio
	Total	1 year, 2 months	

Aiming for a balance of distribution of dates, and type of composition, we will select the following for analysis:

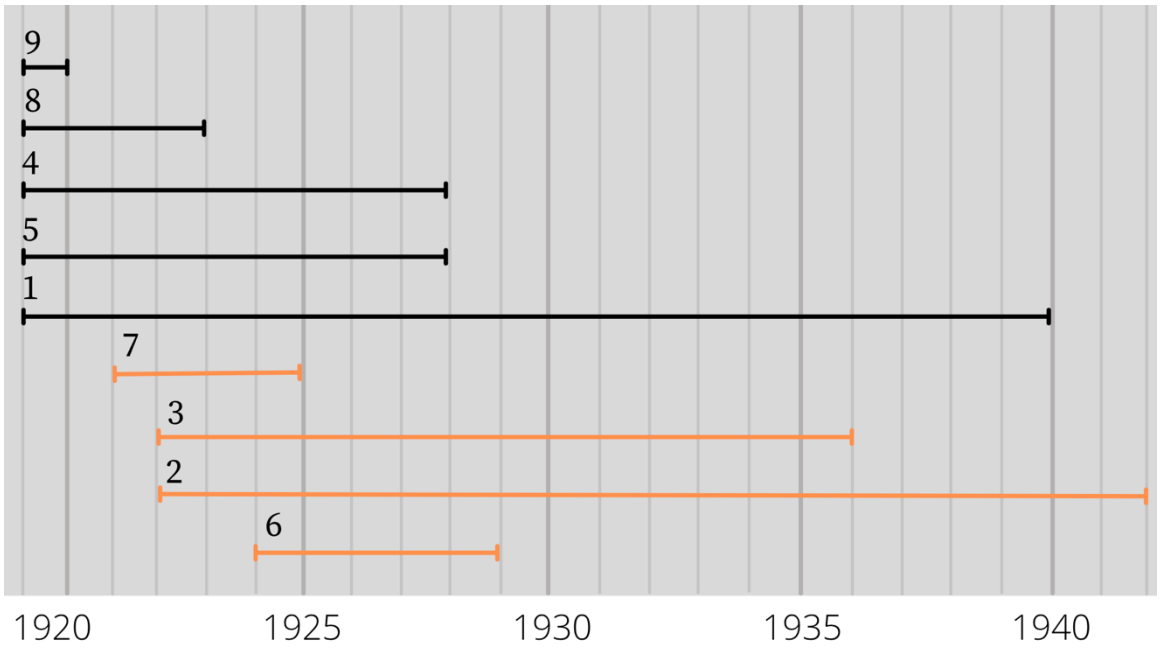
Item 2: (1922 – 1942) *Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5

Item 3: (1922 – 1936) *Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5

Item 6: (1924 – 1929) *Piano Concerto* No. 2, Opus 18

Item 7: (1921 – 1925) *Etude-Tableau*, Opus 39, No. 6

We may visualize these as follows, with the selected works for Analysis in orange:



This provides us examples of Rachmaninoff's playing at roughly five-year intervals, includes a piano roll, a transcription, and an example of his large-scale playing in his *Second Piano Concerto*.

Works by Other Composers

The table below lists the ten works by other composers which exist as multiple recordings, ordered by length of time between recordings. Transcriptions of such works are included here, including those made by Rachmaninoff.

Item	Composer	Work	Date Recorded	Type
1	F. Chopin, arr. F. Liszt	*The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1	November 13, 1923	Piano roll
			February 27, 1942	Studio
		Total	18 years, 3 months	
2	F. Kreisler, arr. S. Rachmaninoff	*Liebesfreud*	December 22, 1925	piano roll
			December 29, 1925	Studio
			February 2, 1942	Studio
	Total		16 years, 2 months	
3	P. I. Tchaikovsky	*Troika*, Opus 37, No. 11	March 17, 1919	piano roll
			May 3, 1920	Studio
			April 11, 1928	Studio
	Total		9 years, 1 month	
4	F. Chopin	*Waltz* in A-flat, Opus 64, No. 3	April 19, 1919	Studio (Edison)
			April 5, 1927	Studio
		Total	8 years	
5	F. Mendelssohn	*Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4	November 3, 1920	Studio
			March 5, 1921	piano roll
			April 25, 1928	Studio
	Total		7 years, 5 months	

6	J. S. Bach arr. S. Rachmaninoff	*Preludio* from Violin Partita in E, BWV 1006	January 8, 1935	Studio
			February 27, 1942	Studio
	Total		7 years, 1 month	
7	M. Mussorgsky arr. S. Rachmaninoff	*Hopak* from *Sorochintsy Fair*	March 5, 1921	piano roll
			April 13, 1925	Studio
	Total		4 years, 1 month	
8	F. Chopin	*Waltz* in F, Opus 34, No. 3	November 4, 1920*	Studio
			April 13, 1923	Piano roll
		Total	2 years, 5 months	
9	F. Schubert	*Impromptu*, D. 899, No. 4	December 29, 1925	Studio
			March 27, 1928	piano roll
	Total		2 years, 3 months	
10	F. Chopin	*Waltz* in D-flat, Opus 64, No. 1	April 2, 1921	Studio
			April 5, 1923	Studio
		Total	2 years	

* According to the booklet notes of the RCA *Complete Rachmaninoff*.

Aiming for a balance of distribution of dates, and type of composition, we will select the following four for our analysis:

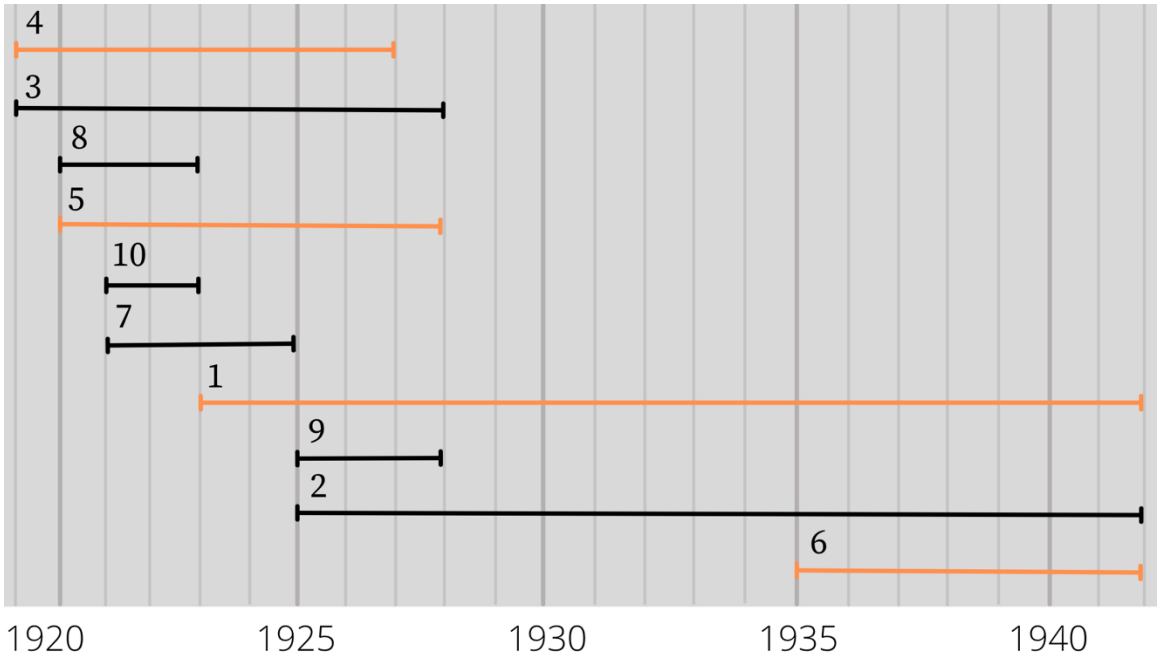
Item 1: (1923 – 1942) Chopin (arr. Liszt), *The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1

Item 4: (1919 – 1927) Chopin, *Waltz* in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3

Item 5: (1920 – 1928) Mendelssohn, *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4

Item 6: (1935 – 1942) Bach, *Preludio* in E, (arr. Rachmaninoff), BWV 1006

We may visualize these as follows, with the selected works for Analysis in orange:



Similar to the selections of Rachmaninoff's compositions, this provides us additional examples of Rachmaninoff's playing at roughly five-year intervals.

This includes the Edison recordings of the Chopin *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 3, the piano roll of *The Maiden's Wish*, and Rachmaninoff's own arrangement of Bach's *Preludio* BWV 1006, providing us perhaps some additional insight into his approach to baroque historical context, which as this dissertation has made clear, he had an awareness of.

Observations

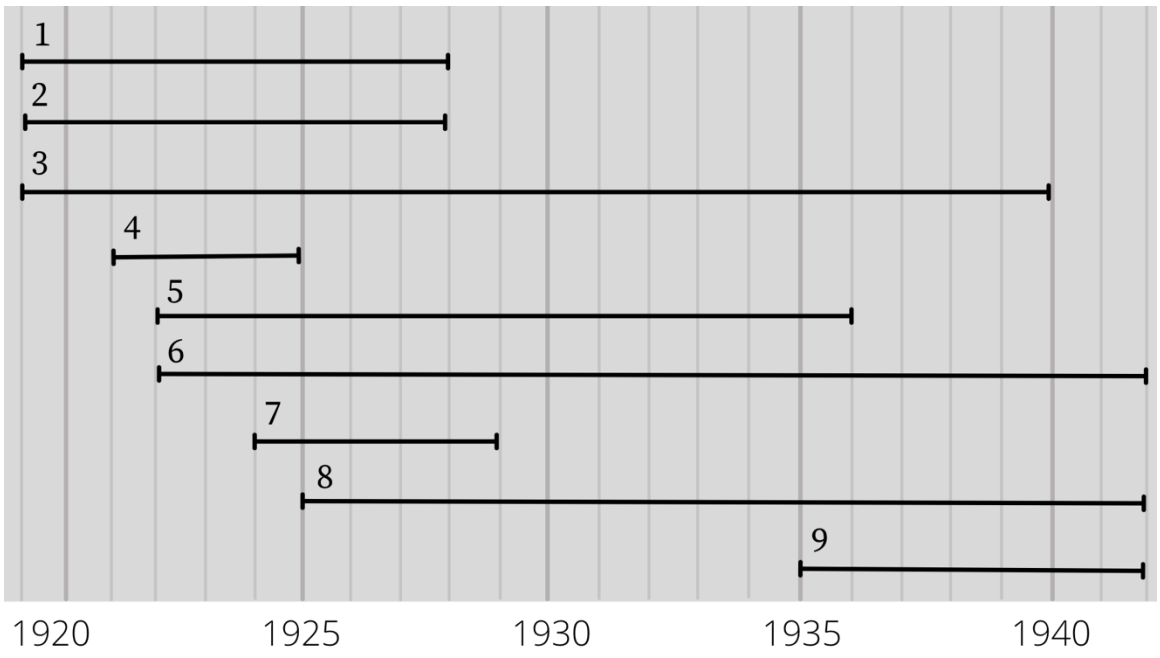
The tables and graphs above outline the works which Rachmaninoff recorded multiple times at greater than one year apart. We would not expect any major developmental change in a performer within a single year, and thereby would assume that the goal of such re-recordings would be to refine details.

The graphs above reveal a curious separation between Rachmaninoff's recordings of his own works, versus those of other composers. If we include his transcriptions alongside his own works, we get quite a different understanding – that he made a much more significant effort to make additional recordings of those works, and over longer periods of time.

We should also note that the electric recording process became available to Rachmaninoff from 1925, and so many of the re-recordings from that year may have been done simply to improve the quality of the record being sold, rather than to improve any artistic or technical aspect. This is especially interesting when considering that his *Piano Concerto* No. 2 was recorded in 1924 right before this technological change, hence the desire to re-record shortly afterwards in 1929. From a pragmatic point of view, better-sounding records would make for better sales with the public, even assuming identical playing.

If we accept this fact, then we can conclude that Rachmaninoff was satisfied with his original recordings of most works by other composers, and certainly where the first recording was not a piano roll.

We may thereby re-visualize the re-recordings of Rachmaninoff's works, which now include his transcriptions:



Works described in the graph above:

Item 1: (1919 – 1928) *Polka de V. R.*

Item 2: (1919 – 1928) *Prelude* in C sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2

Item 3: (1919 – 1940) *Mélodie*, Opus 3, No. 3

Item 4: (1921 – 1925) (Mussorgsky, arr. Rachmaninoff) *Hopak*

Item 5: (1922 – 1936) *Sérénade* Opus 3, No. 5

Item 6: (1922 – 1942) (Rachmaninoff, arr. Rachmaninoff) *Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5

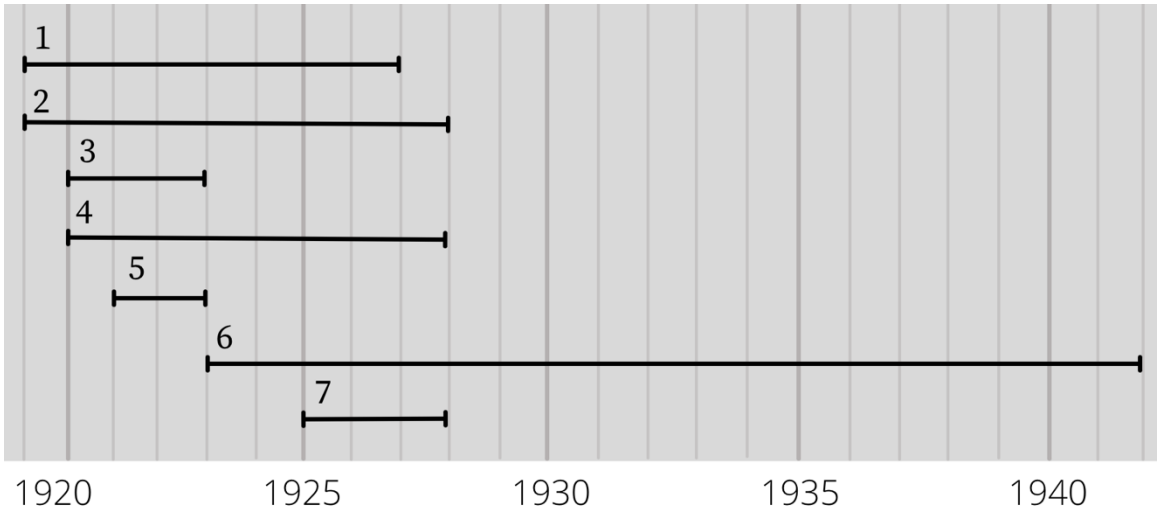
Item 7: (1924 – 1929) *Piano Concerto* No. 2, Opus 18

Item 8: (1925 – 1942) (Kreisler, arr. Rachmaninoff) *Liebesfreud*

Item 9: (1935 – 1942) (Bach, arr. Rachmaninoff) *Preludio* in E major, BWV 1006

We can see that the three works of most importance to Rachmaninoff would appear to be his *Mélodie* and *Sérénade* from his Opus 3 set, as well as his *Lilacs* transcription. We also observe that, outside of the 1925 change to electric recording, most of his re-recordings occurred after 1936 at which point he was sixty-three years old. Rachmaninoff at this point in his career may have been thinking more seriously about his recorded legacy, and thereby prioritized these works in particular. This implies that Rachmaninoff regarded his transcriptions as equally 'his' compositions as those of the original composers. Perhaps this was a form of compensation for the fact he was unable to compose many large-scale works after leaving Russia, and that his transcriptions were nonetheless pianistically innovative.

Reconsidering his re-recordings of works by other composers, removing Rachmaninoff's transcriptions, we now see the following graph:



Item 1: Chopin, *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 3

Item 2: Tchaikovsky, *Troika*, Opus 37, No. 11

Item 3: Chopin, *Waltz*, Opus 34, No. 3

Item 4: Mendelssohn, *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4

Item 5: Chopin, *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 1

Item 6: Chopin (arr. Liszt), *The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1

Item 7: Schubert, *Impromptu*, D899, No. 4

We can ignore the Schubert impromptu (item 7), since its 1928 re-recording is, unusually, a piano roll, and therefore of less artistic value to the gramophone recording as Rachmaninoff himself has been documented stating in this dissertation. The same is true of the *Waltz*, Opus 34, No. 3 by Chopin (item 3), where the later recording is also a piano roll.

The *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 1 is an unusual example of Rachmaninoff re-recording for Victor two years apart the same work, prior to the switch to electric.

The Maiden's Wish, as arranged by Franz Liszt, appears as an outlier, recorded as a piano roll in 1923, and for gramophone in 1942. The three remaining works (items 1, 2 and 4) we can see were re-recorded shortly after the 1925 switch to electric.

Selected Works of Focus

Our treatment of arrangements as primarily the work of the original composer would appear to be inconsistent with Rachmaninoff's recording efforts, in that he treated his transcriptions with the same importance as his original works. We will bear this in mind while drawing conclusions from the analysis of the individual works. Our overall question remains the same, which is to explore the evolution of his performing style across his American career. We will test the above insight against the recordings themselves.

We will now proceed to analyze following eight works:

Item 1: (1919 – 1927) Chopin, *Waltz* in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3

Item 2: (1920 – 1928) Mendelssohn, *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4

Item 3: (1921 – 1925) Rachmaninoff, *Etude-Tableau*, Opus 39, No. 6

Item 4: (1922 – 1936) Rachmaninoff, *Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5

Item 5: (1922 – 1942) Rachmaninoff (arr. Rachmaninoff), *Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5

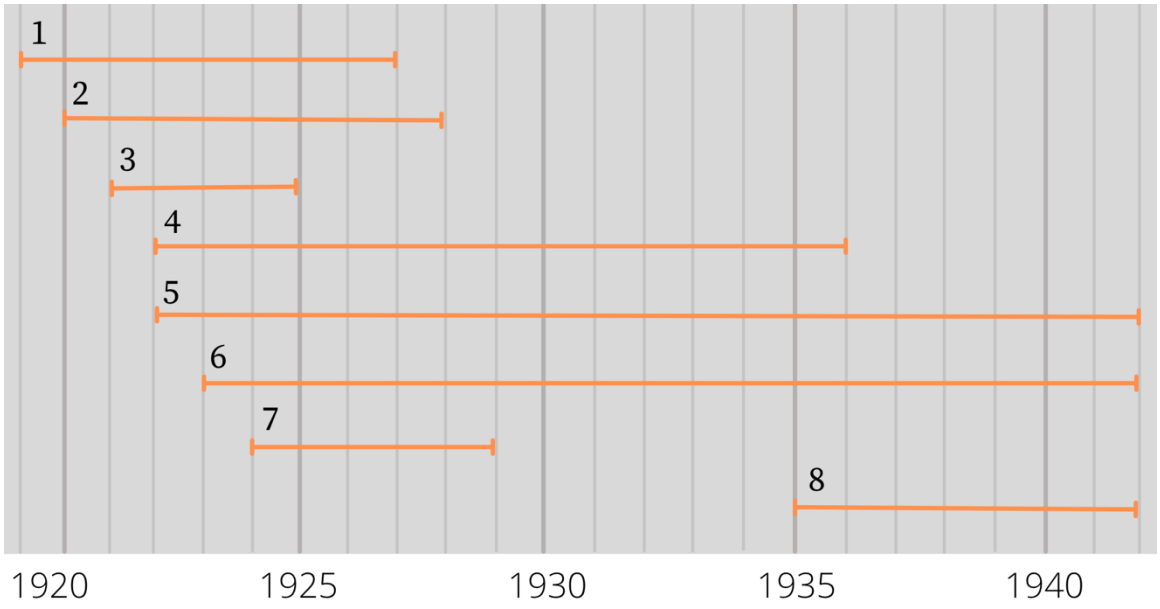
Item 6: (1923 – 1942) Chopin (arr. Liszt), *The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1

Item 7: (1924 – 1929) Rachmaninoff, *Piano Concerto* No. 2, Opus 18

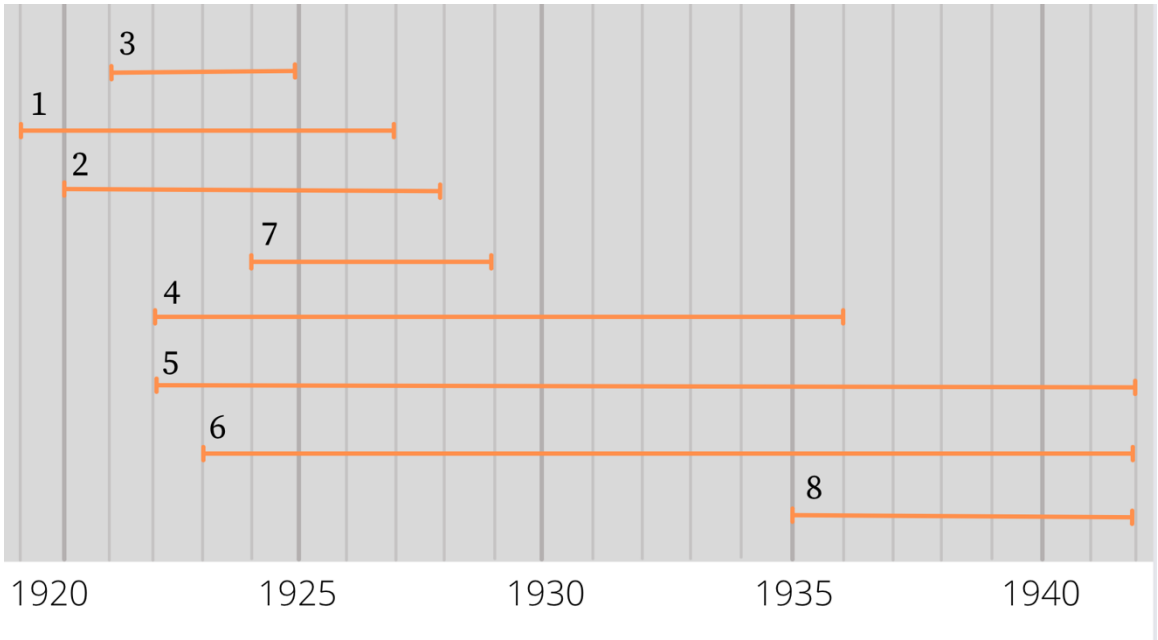
Item 8: (1935 – 1942) Bach (arr. Rachmaninoff), *Preludio* in E, BWV 1006

The following two graphs show these works ordered firstly by date of first recording, and then by date of last recording, to set some expectation of how we might also relatively compare the first recordings against the second recordings of these works as a collection.

Selected works ordered by date of first recording:



Selected works ordered by date of last recording:



Item 1: Chopin, Waltz in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	April 19, 1919	46	Gramophone	2:49	Naxos, Rachmaninov 4, The Edison Recordings, Track 7 (Matrix 6736A)
2	April 5, 1927	54	Gramophone	2:48	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD6 Track 29

Gramophone recording details[284]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
Waltz in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3	April 19, 1919	3	3 (Edison)
	March 19, 1927	2	
	April 5, 1927	3	1m
Totals	8 years	8	1

Score referenced:

Editor	Carl Mikuli
Publisher	Schirmer
IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/Waltzes%2C_Op.64_(Chopin%2C_Fr%C3%A9d%C3%A9ric)
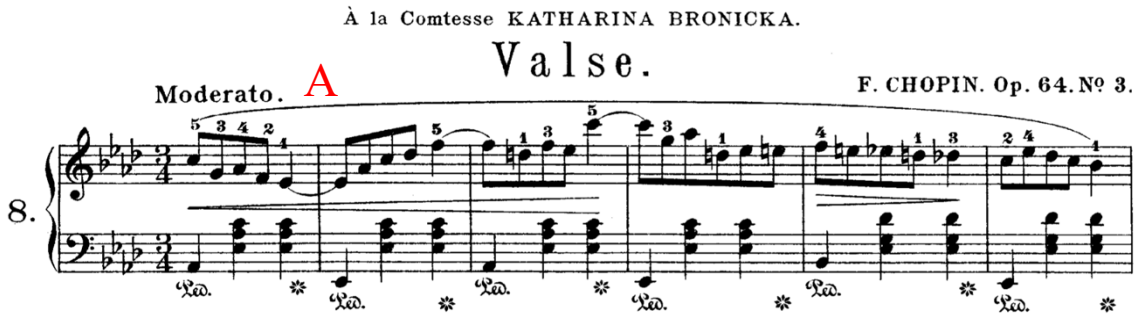
[284] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 453.

Analysis

Our first recording will be one of the Edison takes, of which Rachmaninoff's disposition is not known. We must also remember that the Edison takes were performed on an upright piano.
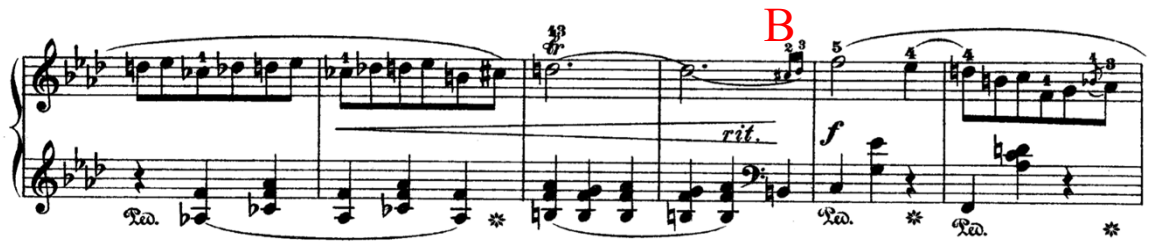
Of the second recording for Victor, we observe that Rachmaninoff did this relatively quickly in five takes over three weeks.

Our first observation is that the Edison takes are all highly accurate, with only one wrong note detected in the coda of the 6736B take. It is also of note that both the 1919 and 1927 recordings are of essentially the same length, although as we will see, there is a stylistic re-balancing of which sections have energy, and where additional time is taken. The 1927 recording in particular is more fluid, with less signaling to the listener of modulations by way of *ritenutos*.
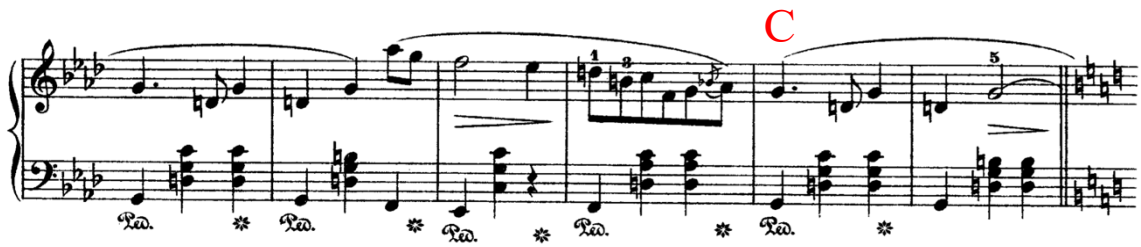


The theme of this waltz requires the left-hand to outline the main beats of the theme after the first measure, as the right-hand sustains across the bar-line (marking A). This is a challenge to the player, since the left-hand of any waltz is usually the least interesting thing about it. In the 1919 recording the left-hand is quite prominent, and the tempo is slower than in 1927. This sets a fairly pedestrian effect, despite the accuracy noted above.
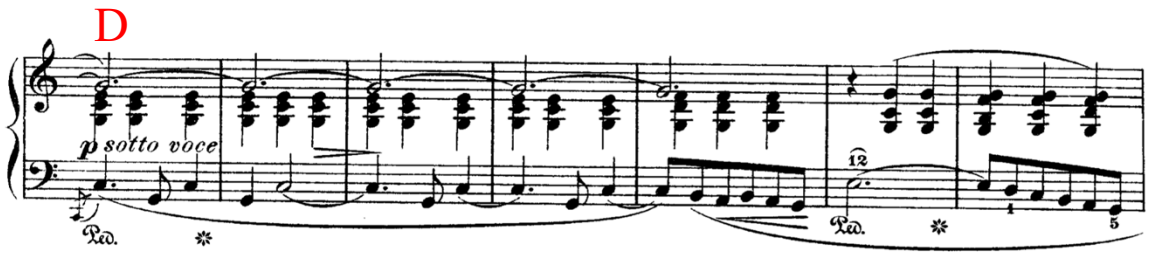
In the 1927 playing, the left hand is more subdued, and the right-hand takes an almost matter-of-fact approach at a faster tempo, which allows for a more natural sense of movement. The insight would appear to be that the establishment of pulse in the first measure does not require special highlight of the left-hand on beat one of later measures, since the listener already expects something to occur at that point in time. There is more of a sense of the right-hand leading this section.
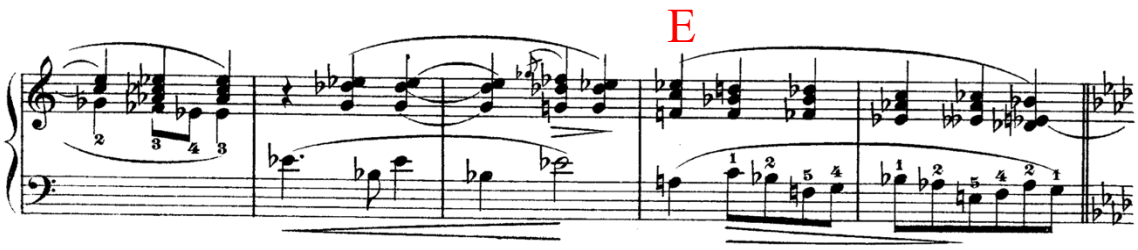


The A section arrives at a trill with a modulation (marking B), and in the 1919 playing this becomes quite slow and sentimental, especially as we modulate to C minor. In the 1927 playing, this moves a little faster, allowing the work to move ahead with less interruption.



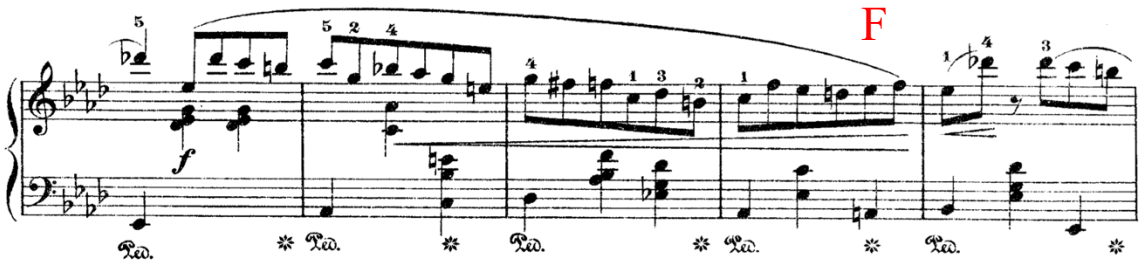
As we approach the B section, Rachmaninoff quite ignores the *legato* marking of the score (marking C), playing the G and D notes in particular a sharp staccato, and this occurs in both performances.



In the B section, Rachmaninoff re-interprets the piano *sotto voce* (marking D) as a forte in 1919, and **fortissimo** in 1927! Not only is there dynamic change, but the 1927 playing moves faster, with a far stronger sense of voicing in specific places.



Returning to the A section, the closing left-hand figure, with chordal accompaniment, is quite slow and exaggerated in the 1919 performing; in the 1927 playing Rachmaninoff breaks the left-hand into duplets (marking E), coloring them with each right-hand chord, navigating towards the original key. The difference is subtle, but it is one of voicing and structure, which is generally independent of instrument and recording technology. Once arriving at the A section again, the 1919 performance has the same subdued energy as at the beginning, while the 1927 performance moves ahead.



In the coda, we find that the 1927 performance positions the E-flat seventh chord far more carefully than in the 1919, and furthermore that Rachmaninoff adds additional notes to the F major-seventh, first inversion chord (marking F), and combines the left hand of the next measure into a single chord! This shows a far greater sense of ownership of this music, and a further refinement of the role of the left-hand throughout.

We finally observe, that from the *poco a poco accel*, Rachmaninoff ignores the smaller phrase markings in the score, but treats the entire section as a large sweep until the end of the

work, where he varies his approach in the 1919 recordings, but in 1927 he treats it as a graceful ending, with the final arpeggio figure closing with a quiet consonance.

Summary

While this waltz is a relatively simple ternary work, there is a clear change in playing between 1919 and 1927.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. more awareness and control of right-hand leading in this type of music, allowing the left-hand to be less prominent
2. more straight-forward playing of the main theme, allowing a heightened contrast in the B section
3. generally faster tempi, although the total runtime does not change
4. far stronger projection of voicing, in particular the B section left-hand
5. more sophisticated textural support, including the addition or re-arrangement of notes to capture a more interesting tone-color

Item 2: Mendelssohn, Spinnerlied, Opus 67, No. 4

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	November 3, 1920	47	Gramophone	1:56	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD9 Track 13
2	April 25, 1928	55	Gramophone	1:43	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD5 Track 34

Gramophone recording details[285]:

Composer	Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
F. Mendelssohn	*Spinnerlied* from *Songs without Words*, Opus 67, No. 4	October 10, 1920	1	
		November 3, 1920	3	1m
		March 21, 1928	4	
		April 4, 1928	3	
		April 11, 1928	6	2h
		April 25, 1928	5	1h, 1m
	Totals	7 years, 6 months	22	2m, 3h

Score referenced:

Editor	Theodor Kullak
Publisher	C. F. Peters
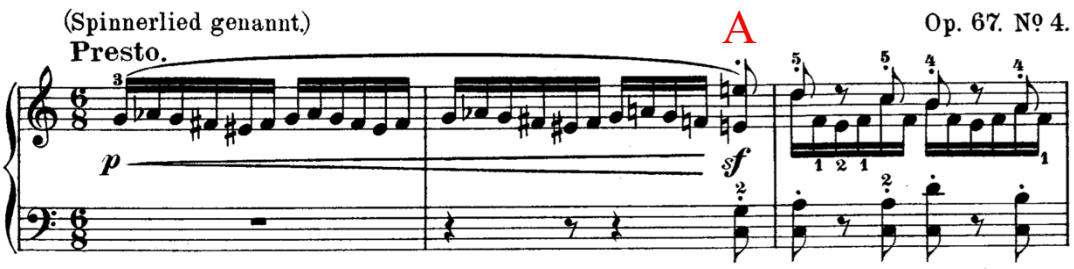
[285] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 460.

IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/Lieder_ohne_Worte%2C_Op.67_(Mendelssohn%2C_Felix)

Analysis
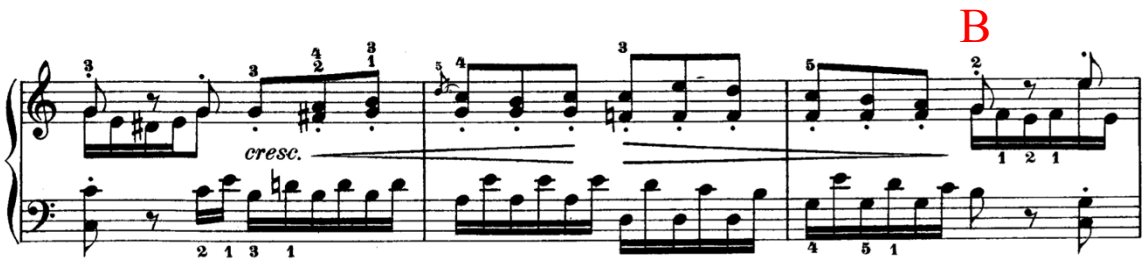
While a short work, and one which focuses on virtuosity, there are some interesting things we can learn from this example. As the recording logs, above, show, Rachmaninoff approved his 1920 version after only four takes, within a fortnight of recording. His 1928 version required eighteen takes over almost seven months, suggesting an increased sense of personal standards of a work he had already recorded at an excellent quality.

There is also a piano roll of this work, recorded on March 5, 1921, however since that is within the date range of the two gramophone recordings, we need not consider it for this analysis. Our scope will be focused on the outer recordings of 1920 and 1928.
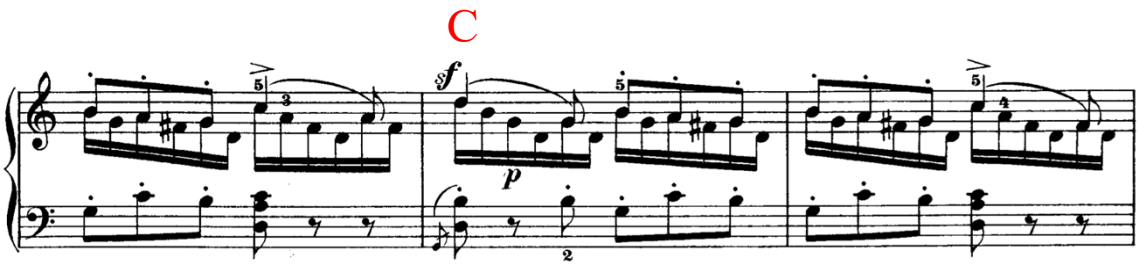


We firstly note that in both recordings Rachmaninoff adds two additional measures to the chromatic introduction, and similarly within the piece where the theme returns. At the *sf*, there is a graceful articulation (marking A) before the theme proper begins.
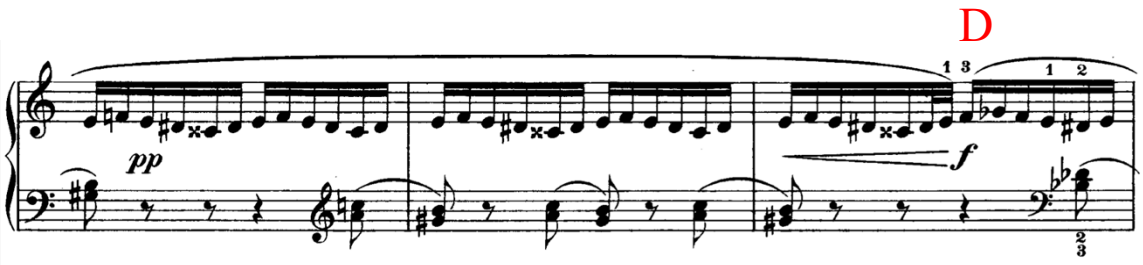
The 1928 recording is significantly more interesting as Rachmaninoff utilizes pedaling so that the introduction makes a more textural impression, bringing a greater contrast to the clarity of the theme. The 1928 is also a touch faster than the 1920 rendition, concluding thirteen seconds earlier than the 1920 recording.
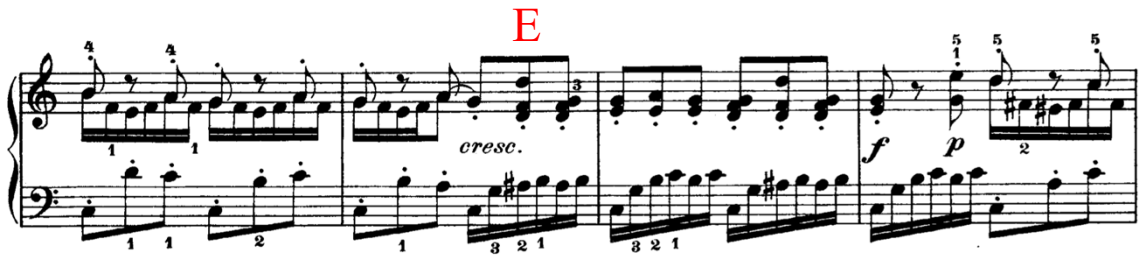


We also note that the left-hand is punchier, for example striking the closing B in the left-hand (marking B) for a touch of dramatic interest in the 1928 recording.
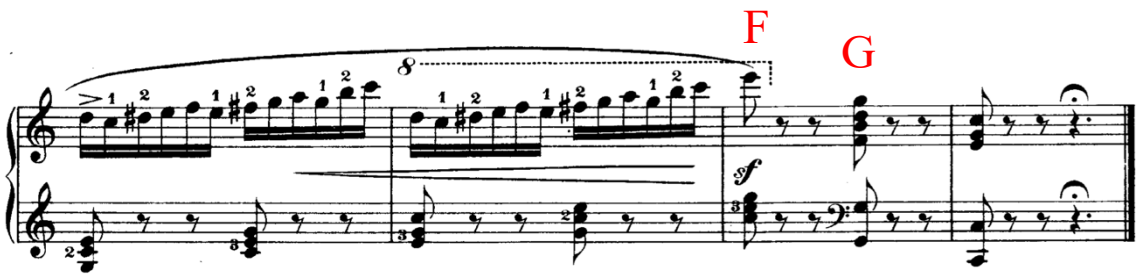


We also note that *sforzandi* are louder (marking C) in the 1928 recording.



Similarly, the chromatic transitions are louder (marking D) in the 1928 recording.



The left-hand adds further interest in the dominant G-seventh harmony (over the tonic pedal point), striking the A-sharp (marking E) as the most prominent note of the texture in the in the 1928 recording, whereas in the 1920 recording this dissonance is quite subdued.



In the 1920 recording, the closing flourish ends with the *sf* (marking F), with the subsequent closing chords disconnected from the gesture. In the 1928 recording, the G-seventh chord (marking G) continues more naturally from the *sf*, allowing the closing C major chord, played piano, to be more of a surprise.

Summary

As a character piece, this work is on the one hand quite simple, but on the other it was a highly popular work at the time, and Rachmaninoff took its recording very seriously.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. more use of pedaling for textural effect
2. faster tempo
3. more prominent left-hand coloring and voicing
4. more organic shaping of larger arcs

Item 3: Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau, Opus 39, No. 6

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	March 5, 1921	47	Piano roll	2:40	Telarc, A Window in Time, (CD-80489), Track 17
2	December 16, 1925	52	Gramophone	2:33	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD7 Track 8

Piano roll details (extracted from Appendix A):

Roll	Work	Recorded	Released
60891	*Etude-Tableau* in A minor, Opus 39, No. 6	March 5, 1921	1922

Gramophone recording details[286]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
Etude-Tableau in A minor, Opus 39, No. 6	October 21, 1920	1	
	December 16, 1925	2	1m
Totals	5 years, 2 months	3	1

Score referenced:

Editor	Pavel Lamm
Publisher	Muzgiz
IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/Etudes-tableaux%2C_Op.39_(Rachmaninoff%2C_Sergei)

[286] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 461.

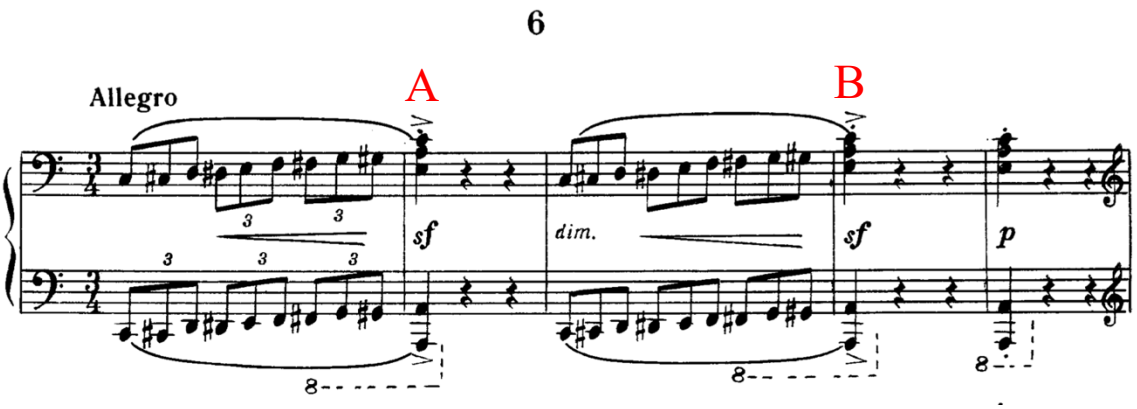
Analysis

We can see that Rachmaninoff made an unapproved studio take of this work in 1920, five years before the take he approved in 1925, which implies that he was significantly dissatisfied with the earlier take. This may have been due to pianistic technical accuracy in this complex work, its artistic impression, or the pre-electric recording medium. He made his piano roll only six months after that first take, which would have allowed significant correction of notes, rhythms, and other details.
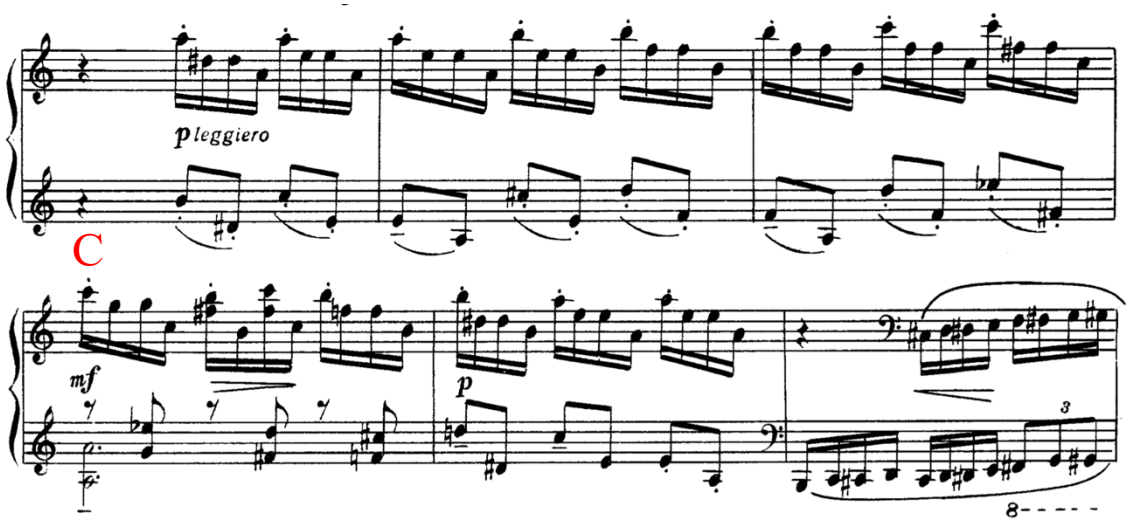
Overall impressions of the piano roll, when compared to the later gramophone recording, reveal differences some of which appear technological, and others which appear artistic. It should also be noted that different 'recordings' of the piano roll vary in significant ways, including tempo. This analysis uses the Stahnke realization.

The technological differences take the form of greater clarity in the roll on a per-note basis, but also a consistent deficiency of nuance both dynamically and rhythmically, which result in the gramophone recording creating a stronger impression of energy and structure. The piano roll also lacks detailed pedaling, where half- and quarter-pedaling seem absent. There is less sense of 'weight' of the performer; the editing process would also likely have evened out many of the notes and the timings, removing some sense of the performer's individuality in the process. As contrast, the gramophone recording demonstrates brighter finger-work, more contrast of voicing, and recognition by the ear of the last note of a phrase before beginning the next one.

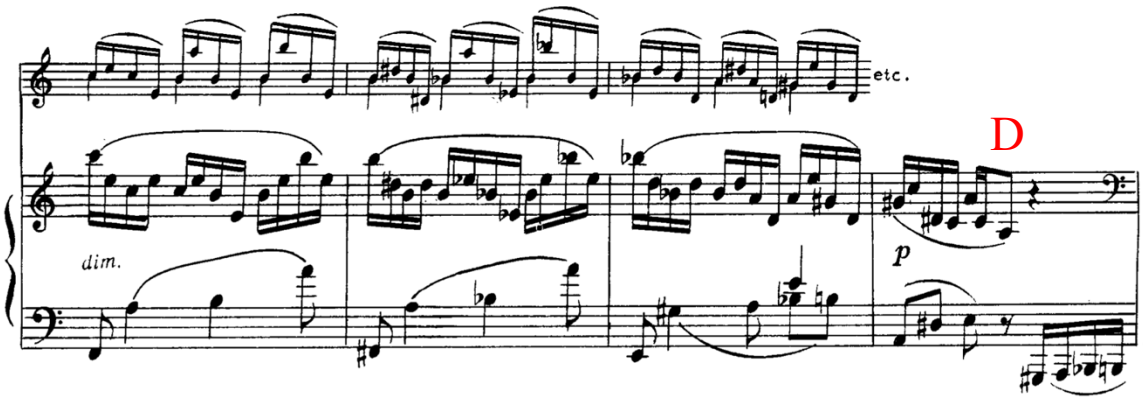
However, this is clearly the same performer playing in a largely similar way, and so we will now outline the major points of the work where differences appear.
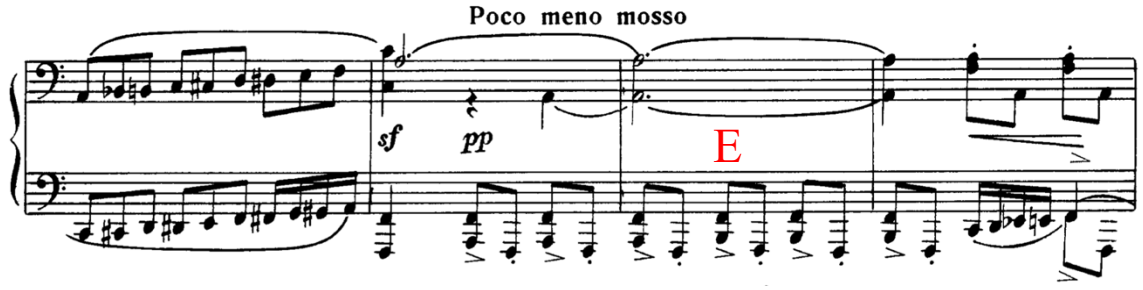


In the piano roll, there is extended pedaling on the first *sf* chord (marking A), whereas in the gramophone there is less. In the second phrase, Rachmaninoff ignores his own dynamic marking, and performs a diminuendo instead in both recordings. The second *sf* (marking B) is performed staccato in both recordings.
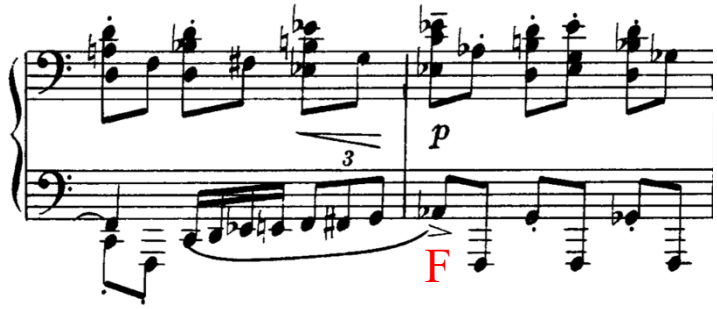


Rachmaninoff applies a touch of pedal on several of the first beats of the *leggiero* measures (marking C), where this is more effective in the gramophone recording.
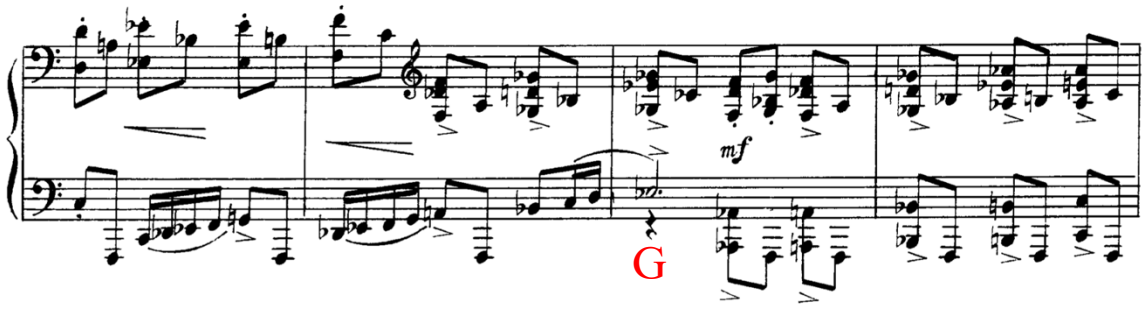


As we approach the *poco meno mosso*, we observe a different approach to pedaling, which may be due to a technical limitation of the piano roll. In particular, in the closing of the final piano figure (marking D), Rachmaninoff applies some pedal overlap into the left-hand figure, whereas in the piano roll there is an audible gap between the two, breaking the continuity of narrative.
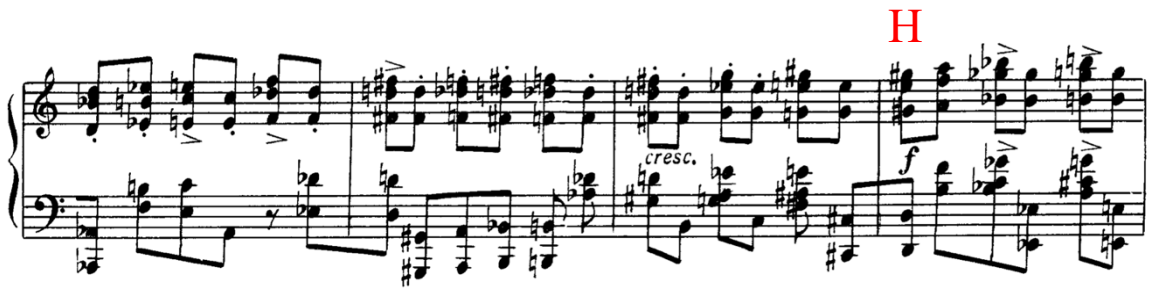


In the *poco meno mosso*, we note a huge difference in energy of the left-hand, with significant drive in the gramophone recording where the inner voice moves from the low A to the B (marking E). This energy, and rhythmic drive, is missing from the piano roll, resulting in an accurate, but bland, rendition. Dynamically, the piano roll is much more subdued.
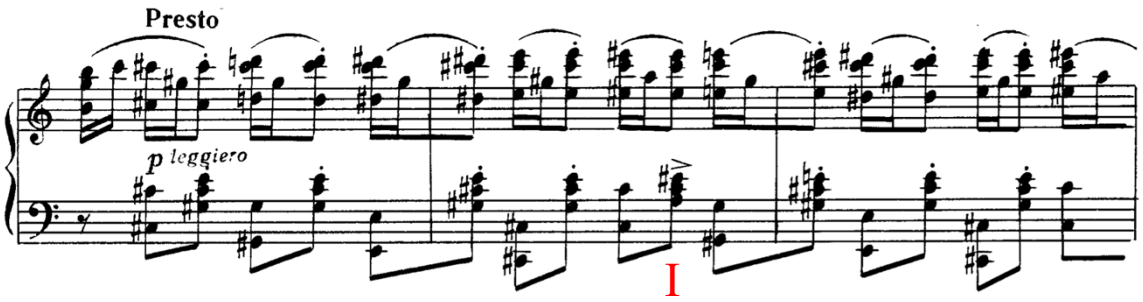


Building to the *piu mosso*, we note that the piano roll ignores the crescendo as the left-hand rises to the A-flat (marking F), instead performing a diminuendo. The gramophone recording follows the score more closely.



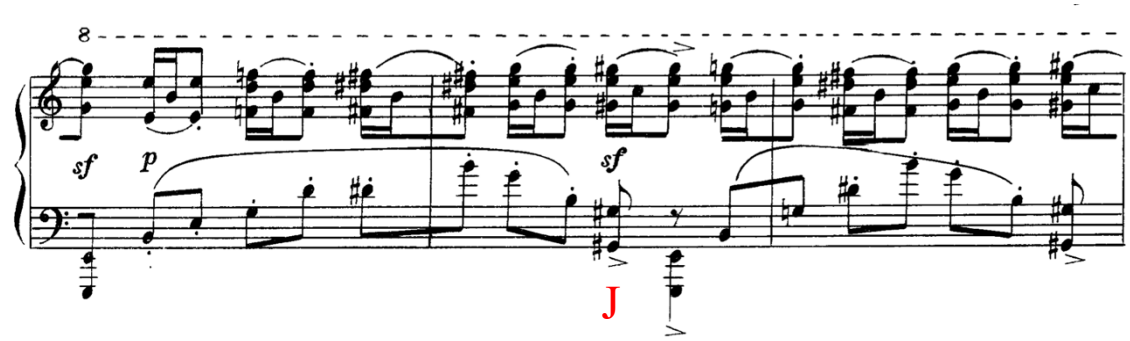
Shortly afterwards, it is of note that in both recordings Rachmaninoff ignores his own dotted half-note E-flat (marking G) in the left-hand, letting it vanish on beat two as the sharp piano writing there would appear to require. This clearly demonstrates Rachmaninoff's orchestral approach to his composing, where the E-flat might reflect an extended first-cello line; however this presents an unfortunate conundrum to amateur players – and teachers – lacking the insight that Rachmaninoff did not intend, or require, his scores to be performed literally.
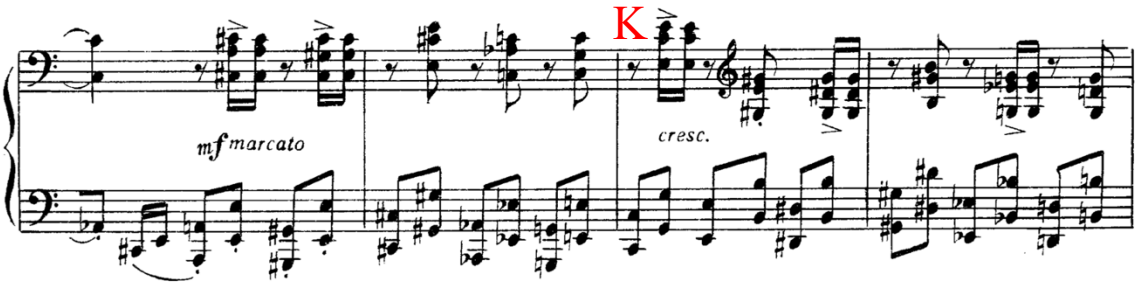


As we approach the *Presto*, we observe that Rachmaninoff performs more of a diminuendo on gramophone than in the piano roll, which maintains the *forte* for longer (marking H). The effect of the gramophone recording is of a more organic continuity from one section to the next.



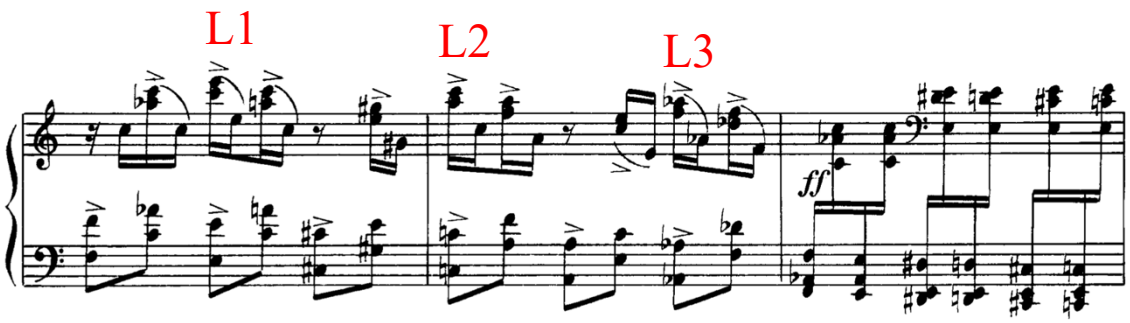
In the *Presto*, a curious deficiency of the piano roll becomes clear, which is the rendering of cross-rhythms. In the gramophone recording, Rachmaninoff treats the right-hand figures as strong-weak phrases, allowing the staccato marking to assist in this shaping, however the left-hand must counter this on selected accent figures (marking I). The piano roll rendition is less clear in its discernment of this concurrency, with the left-hand accent dominating the effect more as an interruption.
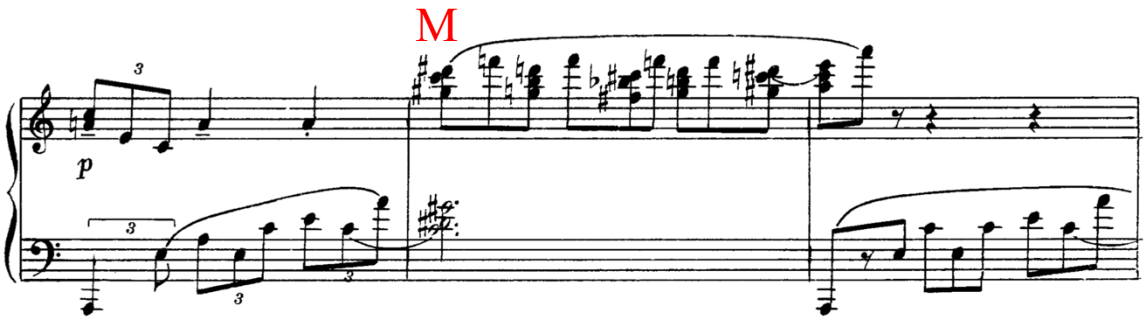


Shortly afterwards, we note a larger stylistic difference in his treatment of the left-hand *sforzandi* (marking J). In the piano roll, these are performed with little rhythmic consequence, but in the gramophone recording there is a sizeable pause before the lower E octaves are played. This gives a much greater sense of dramatic weight to these moments.



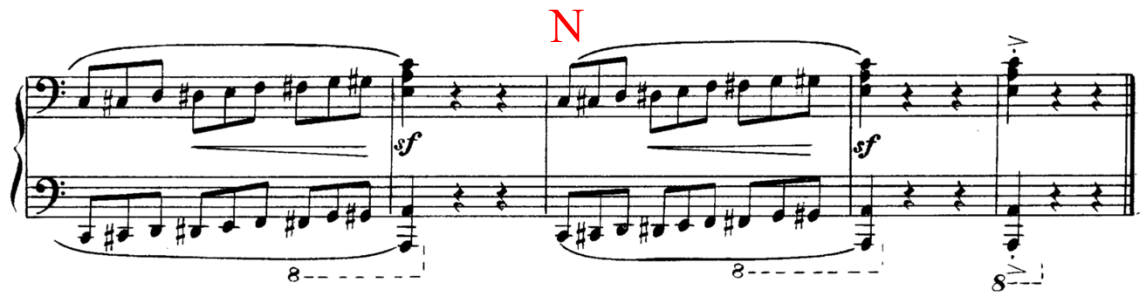
As we close the B section, we note at the *marcato* section that Rachmaninoff applies pedaling to the first beat of each measure in general in both recordings (marking K).



This pedaling is then adapted to Rachmaninoff's inverted hemiola (three two-beat figures spread across two measures of three beats), where he pedals the second beat of each phrase (markings L1, L2, L3) in both recordings.



In the coda section, we see another stylistic divergence. In the piano roll, a larger *ritenuto* is applied (marking M), whereas in the gramophone recording this section is played in a more straight-forward manner.



As we close the work, we note that the final figure (marking N) is played slightly staccato on the piano roll, whereas on the gramophone recording it is played legato. In both cases, as in the opening, Rachmaninoff again ignores his own crescendo, applying instead a diminuendo.

Summary

Ignoring minor or technological deficiencies, such as the rendering of cross-rhythms, we can observe that the 1925 recording is more energetic and technically dramatic, yet architecturally more straight-forward in its rendition, than the earlier piano roll.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. more effective pedaling, including for purposes of sectional continuity
2. more motivic energy, especially in the left-hand
3. greater agreement with the score
4. greater delivery of dramatic effect of *sforzandi*
5. less sentimental exaggeration of closing coda sections

Item 4: Rachmaninoff, Sérénade, Opus 3, No. 5

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	November 4, 1922	49	Gramophone	3:10	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD10 Track 5
2	January 3, 1936	62	Gramophone	2:55	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD8 Track 13

Piano roll details (extracted from Appendix A):

Roll	Work	Recorded	Released
62441	*Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5	April 13, 1923	1923

Gramophone recording details[287]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
Totals	5 years, 2 months	3	1
Sérénade, Opus 3, No. 5	November 1, 1922	3	
	November 4, 1922	2	1m
	December 23, 1935	2	
	January 3, 1936	6	1m
Totals	13 years, 2 months	13	2

Score referenced (note, two versions: 1892, 1940):

Editor	Pavel Lamm
Publisher	Muzgiz

[287] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 465.

IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/Morceaux_de_fantaisie%2C_Op.3_(Rachmaninoff%2C_Sergei)

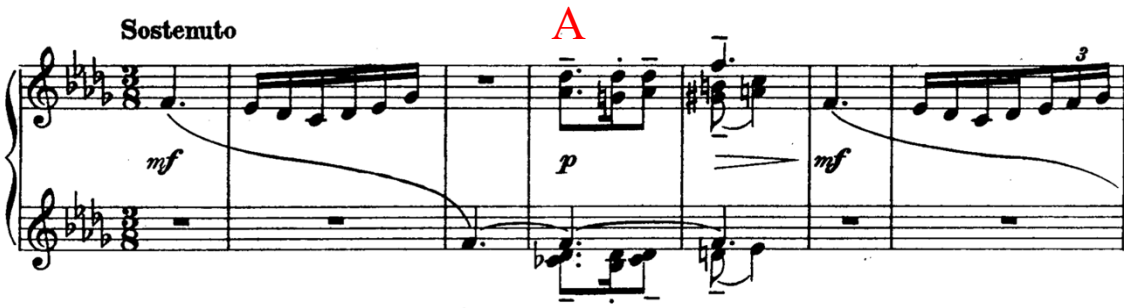
Analysis

This work was clearly a favorite of Rachmaninoff's, as not only did he record it twice (1922 and 1936), and created a piano roll (1923), but this is also a work which exists in two versions. Like the *Prelude* from the same Opus, this would have been a popular work for amateurs, as it contains large scope for interpretation while not being too technically challenging.

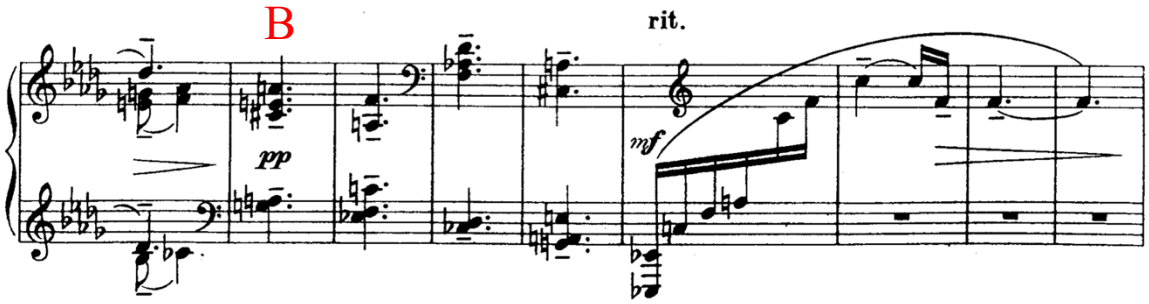
As noted by Norris and Threlfall,[288] in his 1922 recording Rachmaninoff is already mostly playing what would be published in 1940 as the revised version, and so that is the version used by this analysis. In the 1922 recording, a few of the later decorations are missing, but it is otherwise the updated work.

These performances are further apart than most, by fourteen years. The second recording is significantly faster by fifteen seconds, implying a continuation of the trend seen so far; that Rachmaninoff tended towards faster tempi throughout his performing career. The piano roll is even slower than the 1922 recording by three seconds, making for quite interesting listening, although it is not discussed here further.

[288] Threlfall & Norris, *A Catalog of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff*, 39.
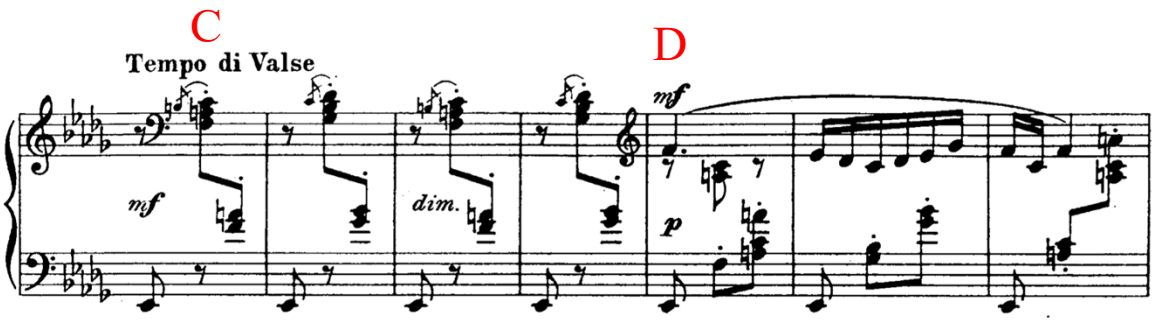


While the opening melodies of this work are similar in both recordings, we quickly observe the change in tempo once the answer motif appears; the 1936 performance is considerably faster. The answer (marking A) moves more naturally, which is perhaps being considered now more as an orchestral wind texture. Hence it is the contrast of color and voicing that is of interest, rather than the underlying harmonies, which in the 1922 performance are drawn out quite slowly, almost as if for their own interest to the listener, creating a static sense of mystery. The 1936 performance seems more interested in presenting the work as a whole.
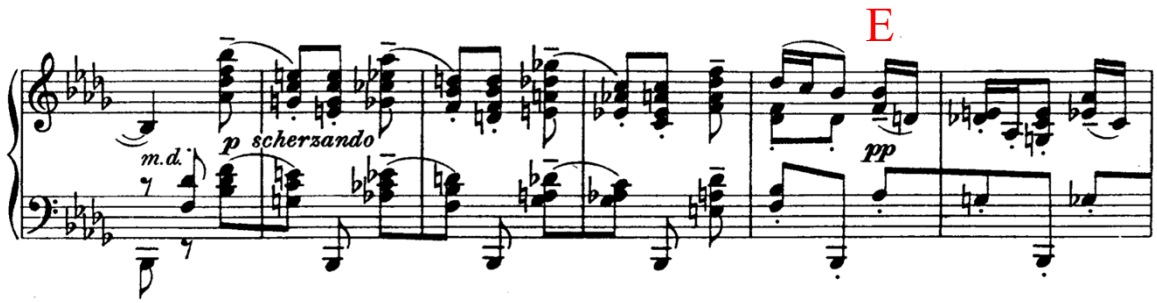


This is made even more clear by the closing of the introduction (marking B), where the chords, a descending augmented triad of sevenths (naturally, in their third inversion), are quite drawn out in the 1922 performance, whereas the 1936 performance treats the four measures leading to the final E-flat octave as a single arc. The slightly faster tempo allows for a

connectivity of phrasing for the listener. We should note that this introduction section alone is six seconds faster in the 1936 version.

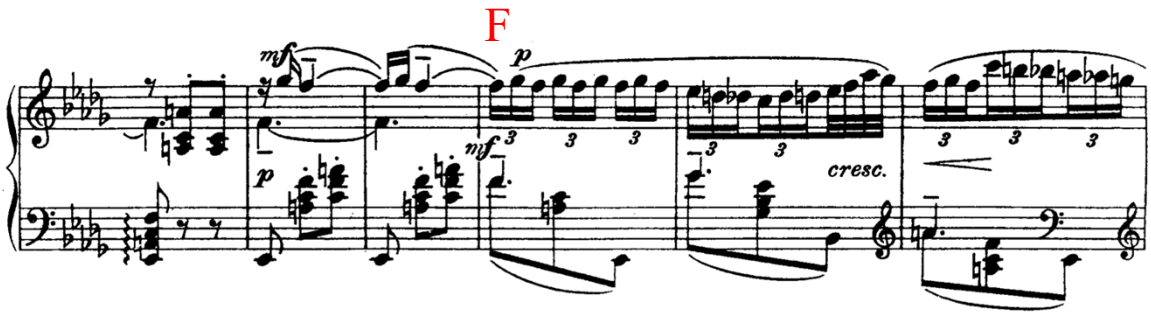


In the quasi-waltz theme, we notice again a more sophisticated use of pedaling for color in the 1936 recording, in particular Rachmaninoff overlaps the acciaccatura with the second eighth note (marking C), treating this decoration as a simultaneous dissonance, and hence a coloring, rather than a strict anticipation of the chord. This certainly makes for a more interesting texture and sound, and demonstrates a re-prioritization of the elements in the performance.

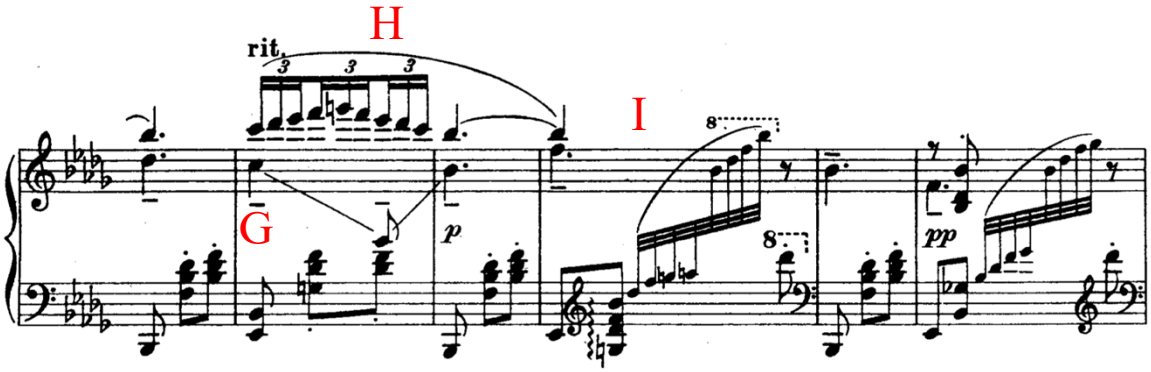
We also note that the right-hand voicing (marking D) is stronger than in the 1922 performance.



We next note that Rachmaninoff's use of left-hand brings more interest in certain moments in the later recording, for example in the *pp* closing of the theme (marking E), certain chromatic notes are now strongly accented similar to what we have seen in previous works so far.



Rachmaninoff's playing of the sixteenth triplets (marking F) is also considerably faster in his 1936 recording, whereas in the 1922 recording these notes are played again with more interest appearing to be placed on their harmonic curiosity to the listener. In the 1936 recording, this playing focuses instead on texture and color, hence allowing the structure of the work to appear more connected.



Given the tendency of the 1936 recording to generally move faster, with less moments for sentimentality, it is of note that in the E-flat seventh chord (with an additional major sixth) is

held on its third beat (marking H) for a longer tenuto than in the 1922 recording. The middle voice of the C octave (marking G) is played earlier than the upper note noticeably on both recordings.

Finally, in the arpeggiated figures (marking I), Rachmaninoff plays roughly arpeggios in his 1922 recording, but in 1936 he actually groups them as chords, which again removes any surface distraction from the underlying structure of the work, with its new focus on directness and color.

Summary

These two recordings clearly demonstrate a movement towards faster tempi, but it would appear motivated by the wish to reveal the underlying structure of the work without distracting the listener with smaller details along the way. Rachmaninoff is far more selective in his 1936 recording about which moments he brings to the listener's attention, and one might say he considers his exemplary technique now as a standard expectation of the playing, without the need to bring special attention to it with pauses, sudden ritenutos, etc.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. faster tempi
2. a greater focus on presenting the structure of the work without distraction
3. more sophisticated pedaling
4. more interesting use of the left-hand for accenting certain chromatic notes, as opposed to just being the 'accompaniment'

Item 5: Rachmaninoff (arr. Rachmaninoff), Lilacs, Opus 21, No. 5

Comparison Summary

Item	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	December 27, 1923	50	Gramophone	2:33	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD10 Track 6
2	February 26, 1942	68	Gramophone	2:21	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD8 Track 15

Piano roll details (extracted from Appendix A):

Roll	Work	Recorded	Released
61761	*Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5	April 6, 1922	1923

Gramophone recording details[289]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
Lilacs, Opus 21, No. 5	May 17, 1920	1	
	February 24, 1922	2	
	October 24, 1923	3	
	October 25, 1923	1	1h
	December 27, 1923	2	1m
	December 28, 1923	3	1h
	February 26, 1942	1	1m
Totals	21 years, 9 months	13	2m, 2h

Score referenced:

Editor	Pavel Lamm
Publisher	Muzgiz

[289] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 456.

IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/12_Romances,_Op.21_(Rachmaninoff,_Sergei)

Analysis

Rachmaninoff composed his song *Lilacs* in April 1902, and it was published in a collection of twelve songs for soprano and piano as his Opus 21. This song inspired the famous "white lilacs lady," who would deliver a bouquet of white lilacs to every concert or recital that Rachmaninoff gave soon after its publishing. These flowers "were also delivered on every birthday, every saint's day; and if he happened to be abroad on these dates, the white lilacs would just as surely arrive at his hotel or the compartment of his train."[290] The admirer, a Mrs. Rousseau, remained unknown to Rachmaninoff while he was in Russia. For further historical details, see Bertensson and Leyda.[291]

Rachmaninoff wrote this transcription in either 1913 or 1914,[292] and as we can see above, he made a piano roll in April 1922, but began making gramophone takes from 1920. His first approved take was in December 1923, and he made an additional recording in February 1942, where in Barrie Martyn's listing[293] Rachmaninoff's disposition to this later recording is not captured; given its wide release, we will assume he approved it.
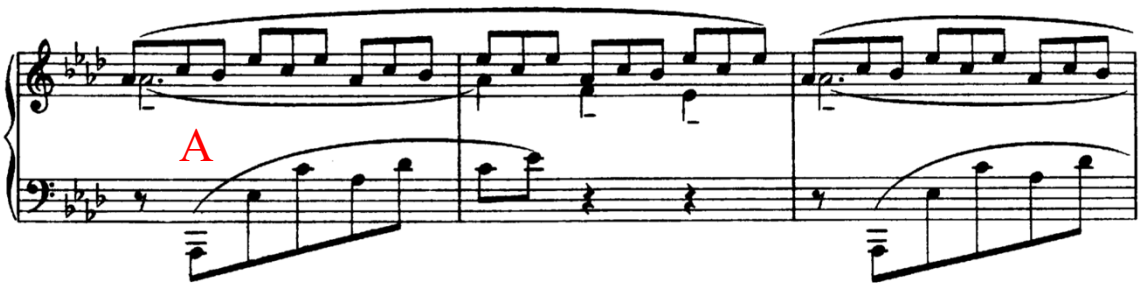
The transcription is generally a faithful elaboration of the original song, where the vocal soprano part remains present and the center of the composition; the answering melodies are similarly represented. The pianistic additions begin in earnest in the second half of the work, with decorative trills, arpeggiated figures, and a closing flourish as a coda; these additions are most remarkable since they do not disturb the essentially calm nature of the work, but generally extend it.

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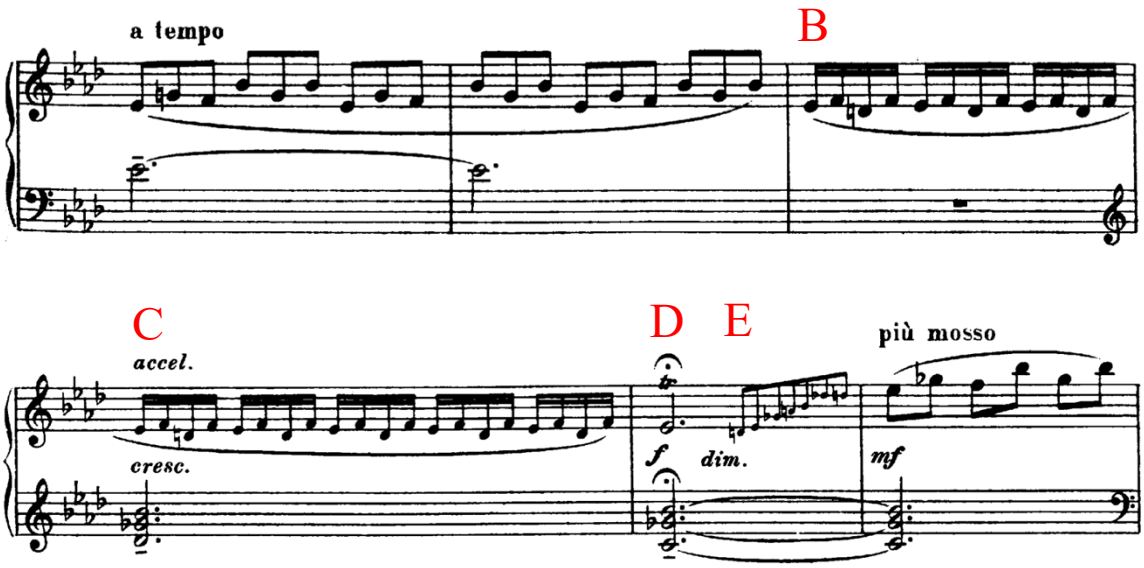
[290] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 166.
[291] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*.
[292] Threlfall & Norris, *A Catalog of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff*, 77.
[293] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 491.

This analysis will compare the two gramophone recordings, since the nature of this work is very sensitive to texture and piano color; while the piano roll was made over a year earlier than the first gramophone recording, the time between the two gramophone recordings remains so significant that an analysis will yield more insight than if the piano roll were to be used.

We can see from the table that the 1942 recording is 12 seconds faster than the 1923 recording, however both recordings open at essentially the same tempo. We can observe that the left-hand melodies, and all melodies in general, are given far stronger voicing throughout the 1942 recording, allowing the accompaniment figures, and their multiple rhythms, to be less distracting to the listener.

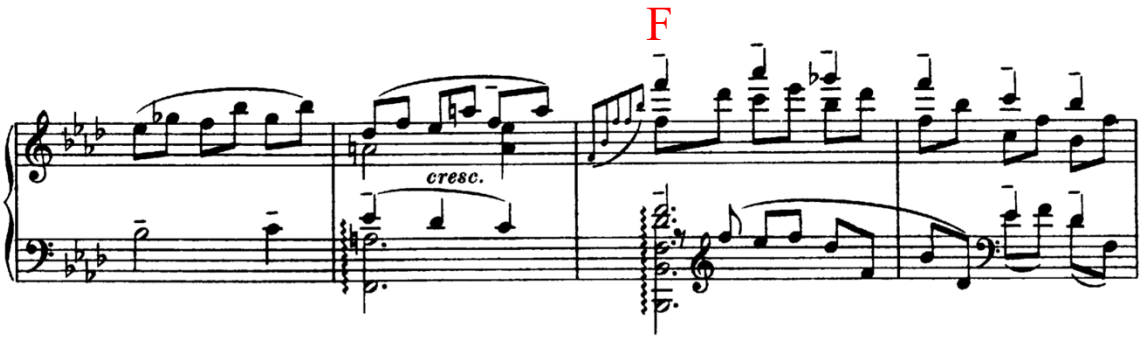


Once the opening theme has been stated, we note that where the counter-rhythm enters (for example, marking A), Rachmaninoff pauses quite significantly in his 1923 playing on the A-flat, however in his 1942 playing this is much more refined.

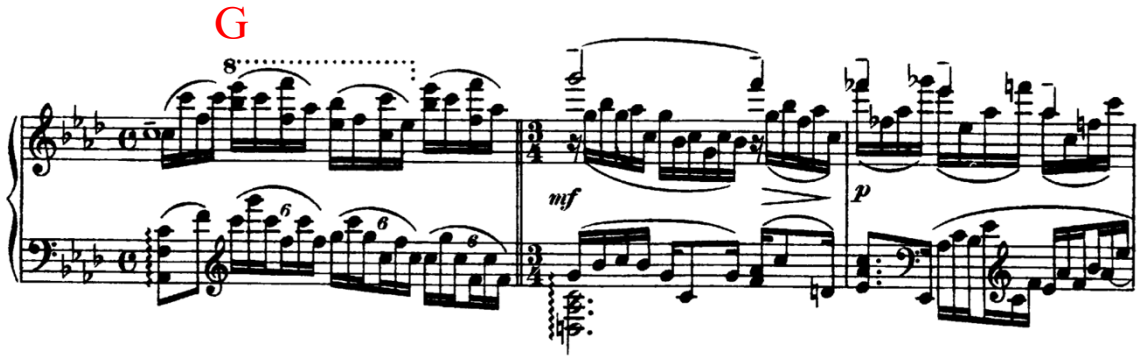


As we close the main verse, and approach the B section, there is a textural section where triplets move to sixteenths (marking B), then to a tacit sixteenth-note measure (marking C), and then to a trill (marking D). In the 1923 recording, the sixteenths are very clear to the listener, but in the 1942 playing there is a greater interest in texture, and a sense of movement aided by more pedaling, such that the arrival at the trill is more organic; Rachmaninoff employs a notable accelerando and crescendo moving towards the trill in his 1942 recording.

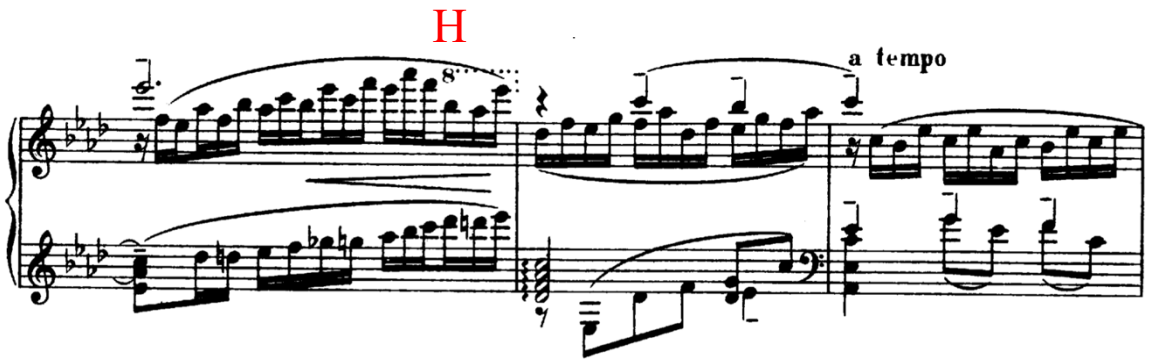
Curiously, the flourish before the *più mosso* (marking E) is played as a *forte* disruptive figure in the 1923 recording, whereas in the 1942 recording it acts more as a connection between the trill and the E-flat from the *più mosso*, attracting far less attention to itself.
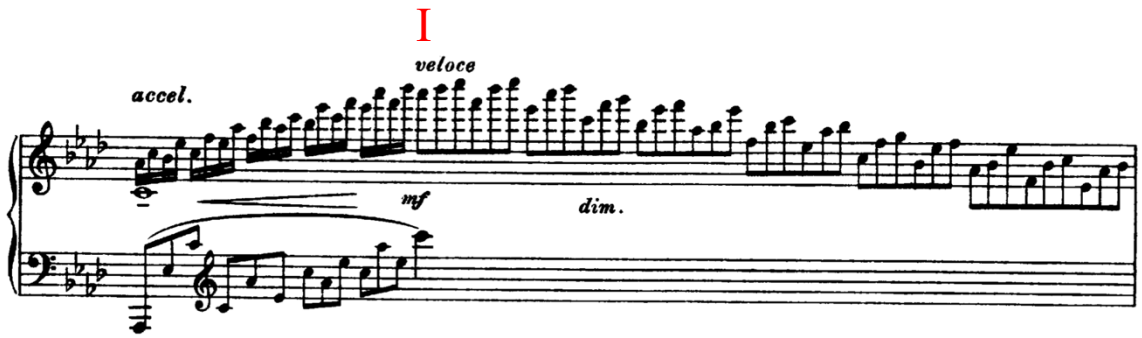


We note that in the subsequent section, many notes are held for expressive effect, for example the high F (marking F), and this is done in both recordings, although more in that of 1923.



The 1923 recording seems to get slower as more notes are added to the texture, for example the six-versus-four rhythms (marking G), and onwards; the 1942 recording generally moves faster throughout such textures, which works as the melody is made more prominent.



We note that in the 1942 performance, the two measures anticipating the return to *a tempo* are different from the score; in particular the rising flourish (marking H) has been replaced by a simpler texture in the central piano register, which solves the unnecessary pause that Rachmaninoff makes in his 1923 recording to accommodate the original scoring. The next measure is also modified.



The final *accel* into *veloce* is a remarkable close to this transcription, and the 1923 recording, while beautiful, treats this section in a quite straightforward manner, and it passes without incident. In the 1942 recording, Rachmaninoff not only renders a far greater *crescendo* and *accelerando* leading into the *veloce* moment (marking I), where he also adds a climactic A-flat chord into the texture, and holds this momentarily before allowing the subsequent high B-flat note to proceed, from which the remainder of the passagework flows.

Summary

As in other analyses so far, we can see a large difference in Rachmaninoff's approach not only to voicing of individual phrases, but to treatment of larger structural arcs, between his early and later recordings. This example stays at the overall tempo in both cases, but the later recording shows great refinement in which moments Rachmaninoff draws attention to, and also how many.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. stronger voicing of main melodies, with less exaggeration of phrasing
2. presentation of larger structural arcs
3. a more elegant and purposeful coda

Item 6: Chopin (arr. Liszt), The Maiden's Wish, Opus 74, No. 1

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	November 13, 1923	50	Piano Roll	3:30	Telarc, A Window in Time, (CD-80491), Track 8
2	February 27, 1942	68	Gramophone	2:42	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD5 Track 30

Piano roll details (extracted from Appendix A):

Roll	Composer	Work	Recorded	Released
62803	Chopin, Arr. Liszt	*The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1	November 13, 1923	1924

Gramophone recording details[294]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
The Maiden's Wish (arr. Liszt)	November 1, 1922	2	
	November 4, 1922	2	
	February 27, 1942	1	1m
Totals	19 years, 3 months	5	1

Score referenced:

Editor	Leopold Godowsky
Publisher	Costallat
IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/6_Polish_Songs,_S.480_(Liszt,_Franz)

[294] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 465.

Analysis

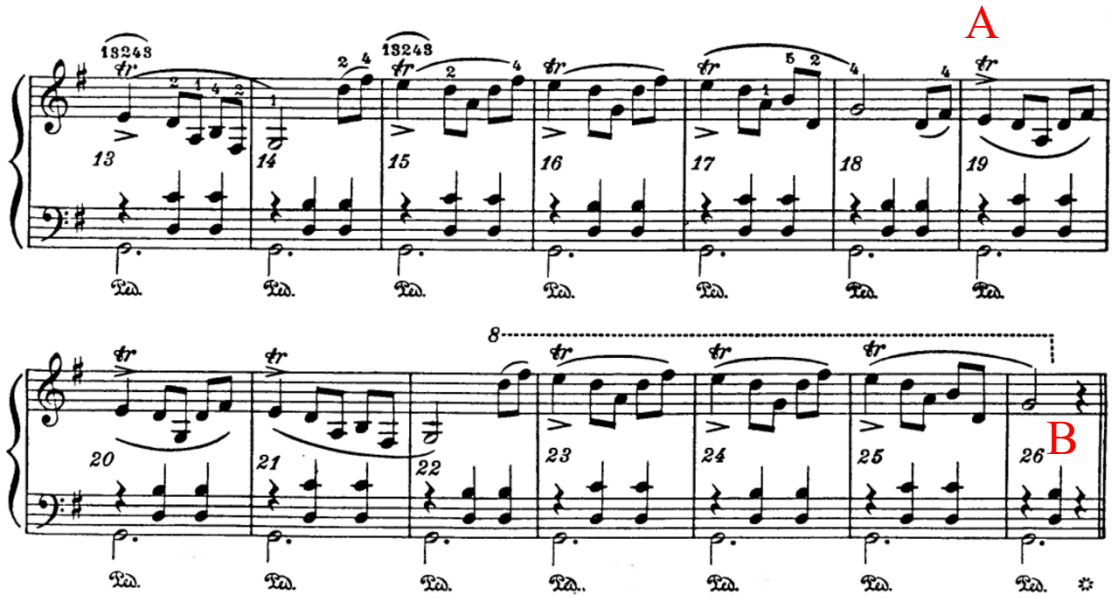
This work exists as a 1923 piano roll and a 1942 gramophone recording. As we can see from the recording logs, Rachmaninoff made four gramophone takes in November 1922 of this work, but was not satisfied with any. The piano roll was created a year later, and was released to the public in 1924.

The work, originally a Polish song, is transcribed as a theme and variations upon the main verse, with a short coda. The three variations are based on the verse, and the introductory theme is only heard again at the close of the first variation, and is the basis of the *Vivace* coda, although it is not directly stated.

The 1942 performance is nearly a minute faster, although this is not a strict comparison of the same material, since in the 1942 recording Rachmaninoff omits both the first eighteen measures in the latter recording, accounting for some sixteen seconds in the gramophone recording, and a repeat from Variation 1, which would account for an additional 14 seconds. We therefore consider the comparative difference to be twenty-two seconds, which is still significant for such a relatively short work.

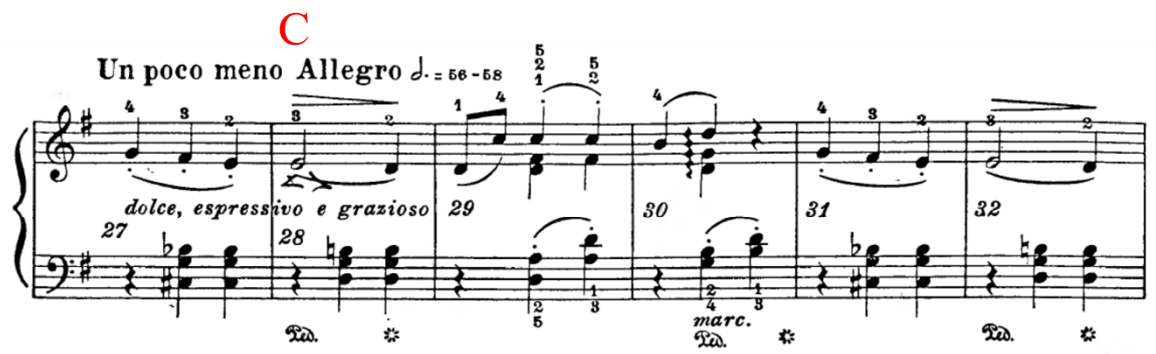
We must also remember that when Rachmaninoff made this gramophone recording he was sixty-eight years old.

Introduction *(1923 duration: 24 seconds, 1942 duration: 9 seconds)*
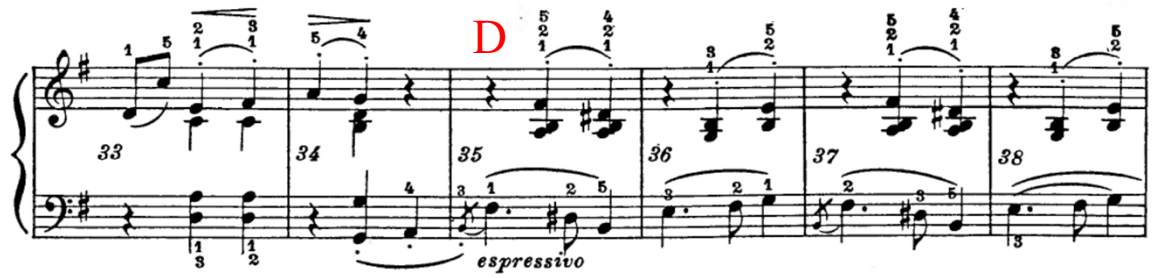


The gramophone recording begins on the upbeat to measure nineteen (marking A), whereas the piano roll plays the complete transcription text. The playing of this introduction is quite similar in both recordings, except that in the piano roll there is a longer pause before the last chord (marking B).

Theme (*1923 duration: 46 seconds, 1942 duration: 41 seconds)*
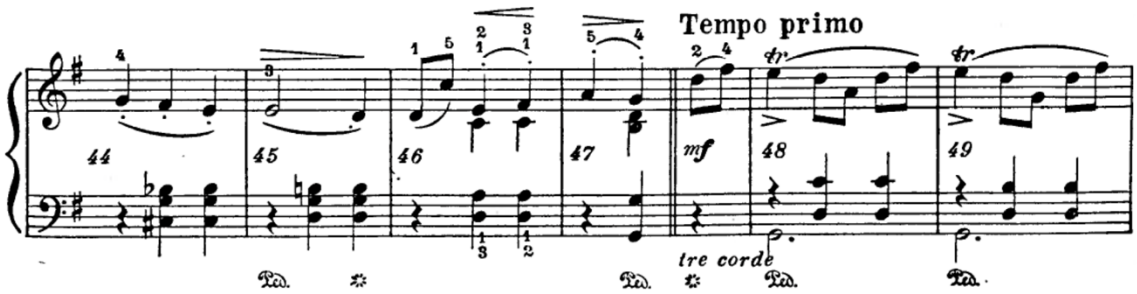


The piano roll shows the more typical melodrama expected in Liszt playing, with exaggerated pauses on the first beat of many measures (Marking C). This makes for stylistic theatricality, but is more removed from how a singer might actually perform this work in its original setting, and style of Chopin. In the 1942 recording Rachmaninoff seems more inclined to this thinking, with more straight-forward playing in general. The same inflections still exist, but in a more understated fashion.



We note that the 1942 playing thereby allows groupings of phrases to become a larger structural arc (marking D), whereas in the piano roll each measure is less connected to the next due to its rhythmic exaggerations.

E
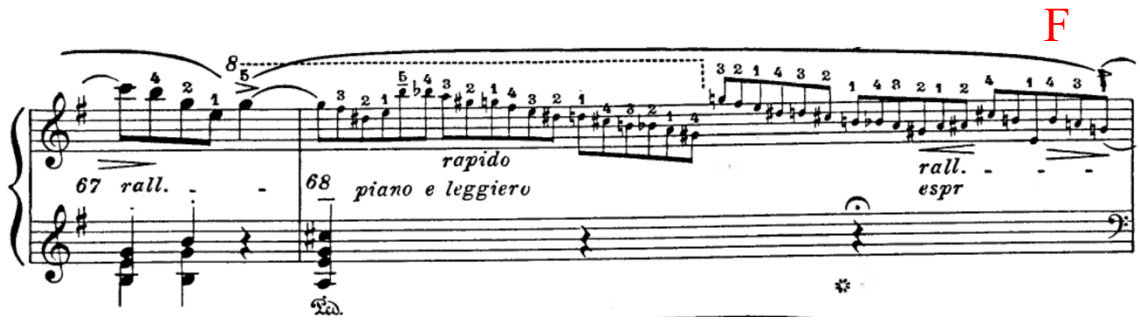


As we return to the introductory theme (marking E), the piano roll takes a great deal of time to play the D and F-sharp before returning to the theme; in the 1942 playing the normal tempo returns immediately from the D without distraction.
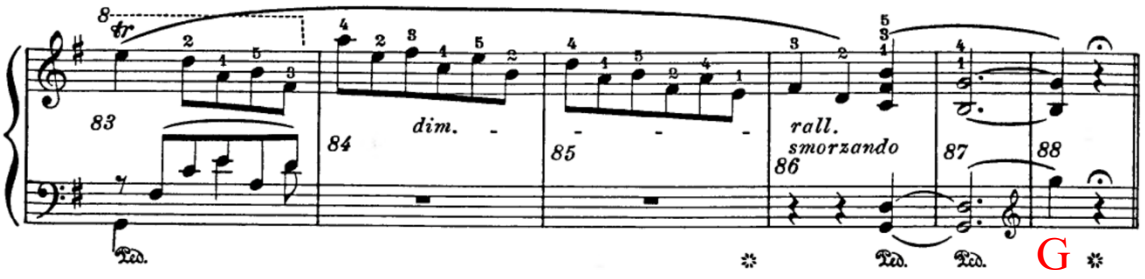
Variation 1 *(1923 duration: 49 seconds, 1942 duration: 32 seconds)*

As stated above, in the 1942 recording, Rachmaninoff omits the repeat in this variation, the first statement of which takes fourteen seconds. So, if we assume the repeat to be the same length, the 1942 recording would still be three seconds faster.

This variation is played quite similarly on both recordings. In the 1942 playing there is a stronger sense of voicing from the right-hand, and the playing is more straight-forward.



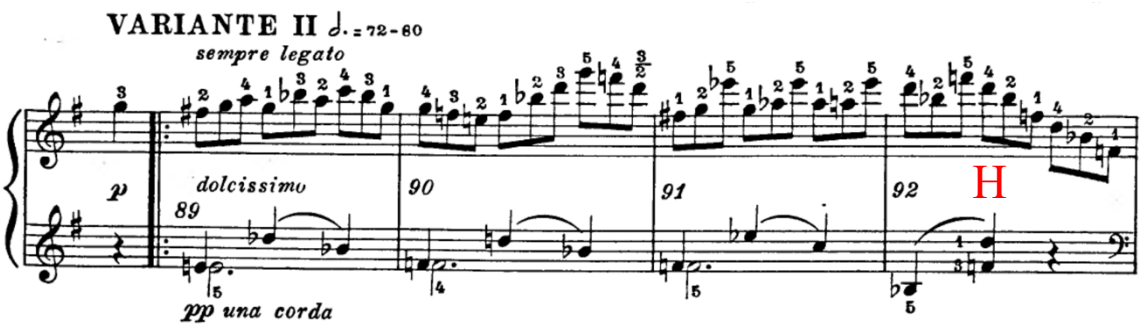
As one point of interest, at the end of the *piano e leggiero* cadenza (marking F), Rachmaninoff resumes the normal voicing of the theme from the B natural in his 1942 playing, whereas in the 1923 piano roll he takes longer, and on the next A natural, making this a more theatrical moment, returning to a normal voice only on the last G.
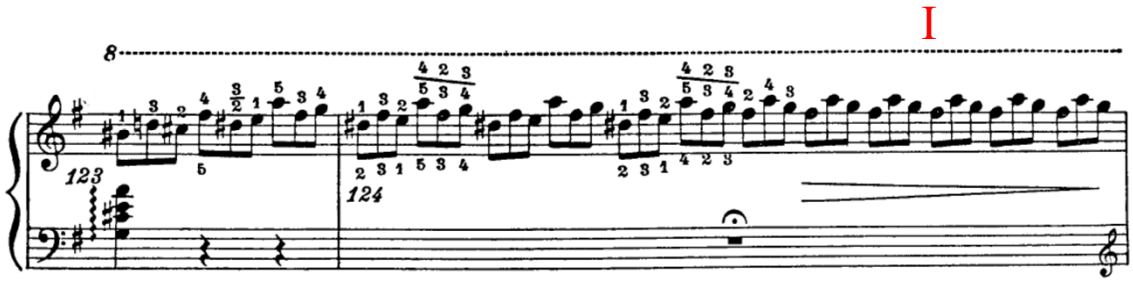


At the recap, another minor difference is that Rachmaninoff takes longer in 1923 to play the final G (marking G) than in the later 1942 recording.

Variation 2 *(1923 duration: 41 seconds, 1942 duration: 39 seconds)*

We note that the 1942 playing of this variation is a lot faster, with less interest in demonstrating right-hand virtuosity, but more focus on the textural effect of such movement. The 1942 playing is surprisingly metronomic given its overall brilliant effect on the listener.
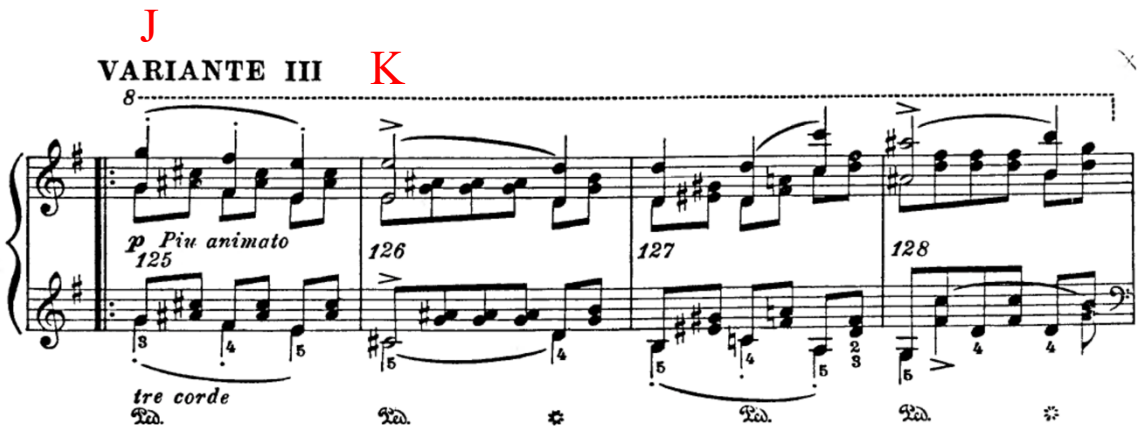


We note the left-hand is given more interesting work in this playing, in particular Rachmaninoff adds a dynamic 'kick' to the final chord of each section (marking H). In the 1923 playing there are also small pauses at certain moments in contrast.



At the end of this variation, Rachmaninoff makes a very large ritenuto before beginning Variation 3 (marking I), which as a result must start at that introductory tempo in his 1923 playing, whereas in the 1942 performance there is no such interruption to the flow.

Variation 3 *(1923 duration: 24 seconds, 1942 duration: 21 seconds)*

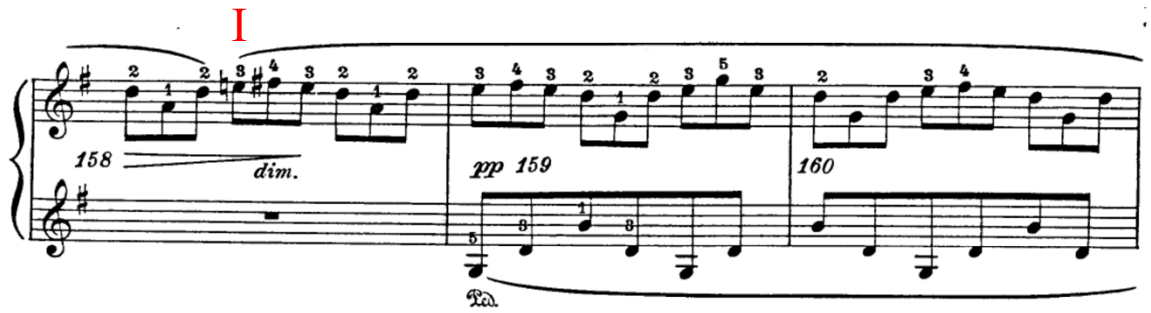


As noted above, the 1923 recording starts this variation quite slowly, before it starts moving ahead. There is great exaggeration of the first notes of many smaller phrases, for example measures 125, 126 (markings J and K).

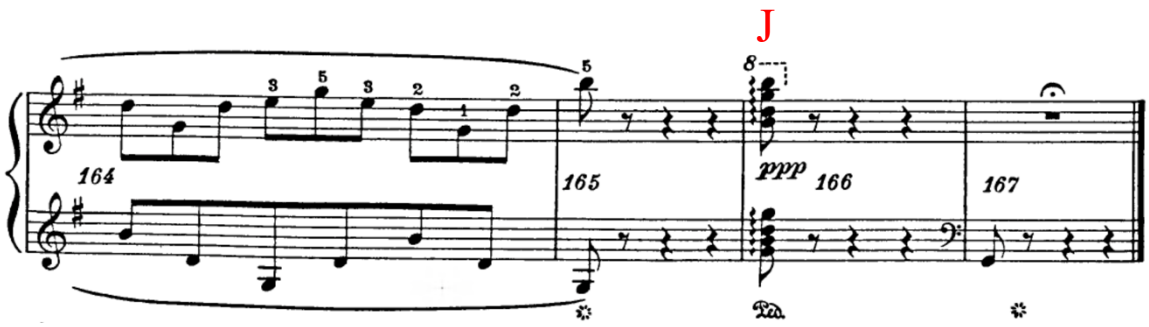
The 1942 playing, similar to the previous variation, is straight-forward, much faster overall, with the timing inflections still present but less perceptible to the listener.

Coda *(1923 duration: 26 seconds, 1942 duration: 22 seconds)*

Interestingly, the 1923 recording is quite metronomic, which gives some impression of speed and virtuosity, but the 1942 recording is yet faster and driven, almost with a sense of urgency.



Another difference is the use of pedal for coloring effect in the 1942 performance on the closing D minor-D major alternation before the final sweep, where the major tonality (marking I) is pedaled for notable effect.



Finally, the pianissimo chord at the very end is played as a forte flourish (marking J) in both recordings.

Summary

The comparison of these recordings appear to show a growing appreciation that a transcription should reflect the original work more than serve as a vehicle for the pianist, illustrated in the more natural rendering of melody in the later performance.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. more straight-forward playing overall
2. faster tempi
3. more prominent left-hand coloring and voicing

Item 7: Rachmaninoff, Piano Concerto No. 2, Opus 18

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	December 31, 1923 – December 22, 1924	51	Gramophone	9:36, 10:15, 10:40	Naxos, Rachmaninov 6, *Victor Talking Machine Company Recordings*, Tracks 13, 15, 16
2	April 10 – April 13, 1929	56	Gramophone	9:48, 10:42, 10:55	Pristine Audio, *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov*, Tracks 1-10

Gramophone recording details[295]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
Piano Concerto No. 2, Opus 18	December 31, 1923	8	
	January 3, 1924	12	6m
	December 22, 1924	7	2h
Totals	1 year	27	6m, 2h
Piano Concerto No. 2, Opus 18	April 10, 1929	12	5m
	April 14, 1929	13	5m
Totals	4 days	25	10m

[295] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 467.

Score referenced:

Editor	n/a
Publisher	A. Gutheil
IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No.2%2C_Op.18_(Rachmaninoff%2C_Sergei)

Analysis

Rachmaninoff's recordings of his *Second Piano Concerto* hold a special place his discography, as both were made relatively early in his American career. As stated earlier, the 1929 performance became one of his most successful recordings. Both the 1924 and 1929 recording have interesting histories, which will be briefly outlined here.

The 1924 recording was made at the end of the acoustic era, and while Rachmaninoff approved takes of the second and third movements by March of 1924, he did not record the first movement until December of that year. The second and third movements were therefore released to the public[296] in May of 1924,[297] but the first movement was not to be issued for two reasons: firstly, Rachmaninoff did not approve any takes of the final part of this movement, and secondly the advent of the electrical recording process removed any motivation to re-record with this now deprecated technology.

Later, it was not known whether all the takes of the first movement had survived, and as Jonathan Summers wrote:

> When the complete Rachmaninov recordings were issued for the first time on LP (to commemorate his centenary in 1973) only the two twelve-inch sides of the previously unpublished first movement of the 1924 *Concerto* recording could be found, so the end of the movement (the ten-inch side) was substituted using the later 1929 recording. The producers of the 1973 issue had probably not realized that the third side was a ten-inch disc. When Ward Marston was asked to make new transfers for release on CD in 1992 he had recently discovered that the third side was a ten-inch master and this was duly located in the Victor archive.[298]

[296] Bolig, *The Victor Red Seal Discography*, 204.
[297] See also https://www.stokowski.org/1924_Stokowski_Rachmaninoff_Acoustics.htm.
[298] J. Summers, *Great Pianists, Rachmaninov 6, Victor Recordings* (Naxos, 2020), Liner Notes.

The 1924 recording is now therefore available in its entirety, and with an additional take of the first movement.[299]

The 1929 recording was completed more efficiently, over four days, but its public availability has an even more surprising story. The original release of this recording, in 1929, was assembled from the takes which Rachmaninoff himself approved of, however, the incredible success of this recording brought its own problems:

> By the early 1940s, Victor began drawing on saved alternate takes to replace sides in some of their best-selling older recordings, due to increased wear on the original metal 'mothers' which had been used for years to grow new stampers. … these replacements were made in 1942 and continued to be employed for the remainder of the set's catalog life during the 78rpm era. The recording logs also state that the substitute takes were used for all of RCA's LP releases, from the first in 1951 to *The Complete Rachmaninoff* 15-LP set issued in 1973. It was not until 1987 that the original takes were first reissued on CD by RCA. Thus, for 45 of its 89 years in the catalog (1942 to 1987), entire generations only got to know this performance from the substitute takes.[300]

The 1929 recording is now thankfully available to listeners today as both versions, plus an additional take of a section of the third movement.[301]

The following analysis will compare the original versions, which Rachmaninoff preferred, of both the 1924 and 1929 recordings.

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[299] *Great Pianists, Rachmaninov 6, Victor Recordings* (Naxos, 2020).
[300] M. Obert-Thorn. *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov* (Pristine Audio, PASC 521, 2017), Liner Notes.
[301] *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov* (Pristine Audio, PASC 521, 2017).

Our first observation is that, unlike all other comparisons made in this text, the later recordings are longer, on a movement-by-movement basis, than the earlier. There is a major improvement in sound quality between the two, although differences in performing style are also clear. The faster performance in the 1924 recording might be attributed to either uncertainty with the recording process for such a large ensemble (Rachmaninoff's first such recording, and likely one of the earliest recordings of such large instrumental forces), or the inelegant methods by which the recording was made (as described earlier in this text regarding re-scoring the work to accommodate the modest recording capabilities, as well as the need to perform on a more modest Steinway B).

In his 1973 review of the 1929 recording, John Culshaw speculates that the speed of the finale was "determined by technical consideration. In 1929, let alone 1924, no engineer would have liked that long, loud C major climax to get any nearer to the label than could possibly be helped."[302] However, presenting this question to sound engineer Mark Obert-Thorn, he shared his view on this subject:

> … about avoiding loud passages toward the ends of sides, it's true that as the cutting stylus tracked toward the end of a side, even though the turntable speed is constant, the stylus is traveling more slowly relative to the beginning of the side, where it has to traverse a greater area in the same one-revolution time it takes to go through a smaller area toward the end. The ends of sides thus have less fidelity than the beginnings. This was a problem in cutting LPs as well as 78s. When Stokowski recorded his transcription of *Pictures at an Exhibition* with the All-American Youth Orchestra in 1941, Columbia allowed it to run to nine sides with a blank filler just to have the last minute of *The Great Gate of Kiev* at the start of a separate disc, so that it would not be sonically compromised. It was the only

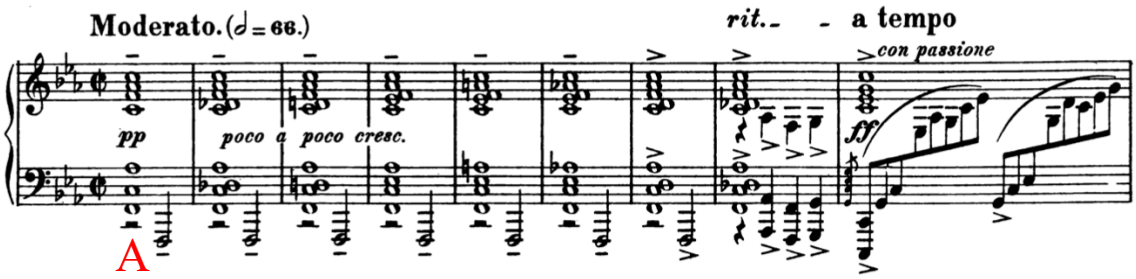
[302] J. Culshaw, "The Complete Rachmaninov – Volume Five, *Gramophone*, July 1975, 192.

> version in the catalog that went over eight sides. In the case of the Rachmaninoff *Second Piano Concerto*, though, the last side was not all that long (3:24 in the original version, 3:25 in the alternate take version), so a climax toward the end should not have raised the same concern that, say, a side running 4:30 or 4:45 would have. I don't think the tempo was sped up to avoid overloading in this case, but was rather an artistic judgment.[303]

We now turn to our analysis proper of each movement.

[303] Direct email correspondence with Mr. Obert-Thorn.

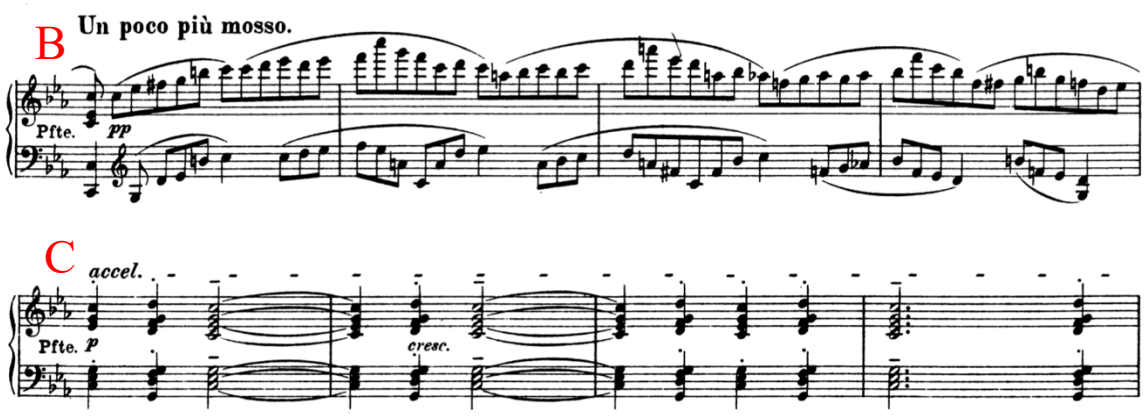
First Movement



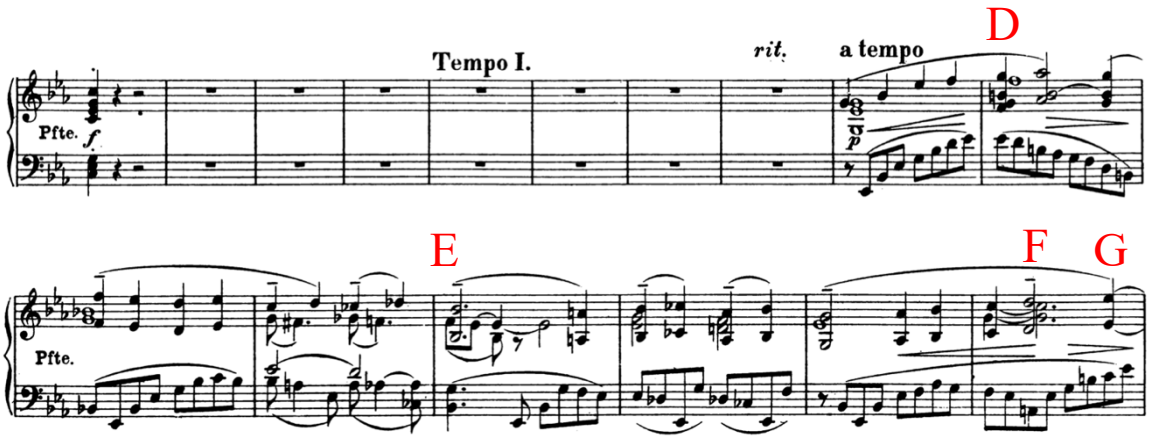
As is well known, Rachmaninoff breaks the opening chords (marking A) in both recordings, playing the lowest note of each chord before the others are played in unison, even though he was known to have remarkably large hands.[304] Rachmaninoff could certainly have played these chords in unison had he wished to. This was probably a concession to nineteenth century performing style, as well as providing an example to his public on an acceptable way to break the chords, given that most other pianists (both professional and amateur) would not have been able to reach them.

The subsequent opening section is played in a quite straight-forward manner in both recordings, serving its role as background texture, and not intruding on the orchestral melodies.

[304] Pertinent to Rachmaninoff's famously large hands, see the following article: D. A. B. Young, "Rachmaninov and Marfan's Syndrome," *British Medical Journal*, December 20, 1986, 1624.
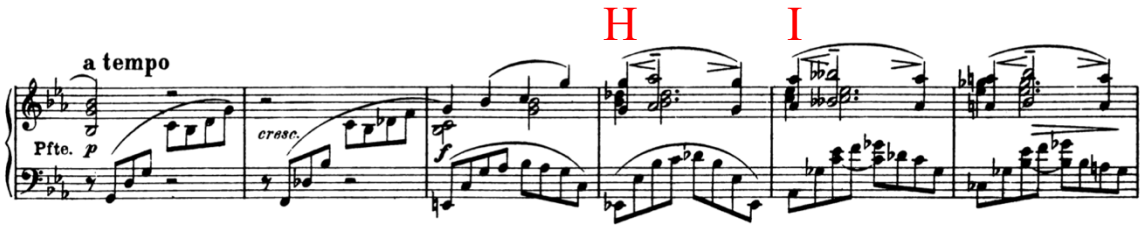


Rachmaninoff shows in his playing a curious approach to some of his score markings. At the *poco più mosso* (marking B), in the 1924 performance he immediately performs the *accel* which is meant to occur four measures later (marking C), such that at the *accel* he is already at the new tempo. He follows the score more closely in his 1929 playing. We will see other examples of this later.
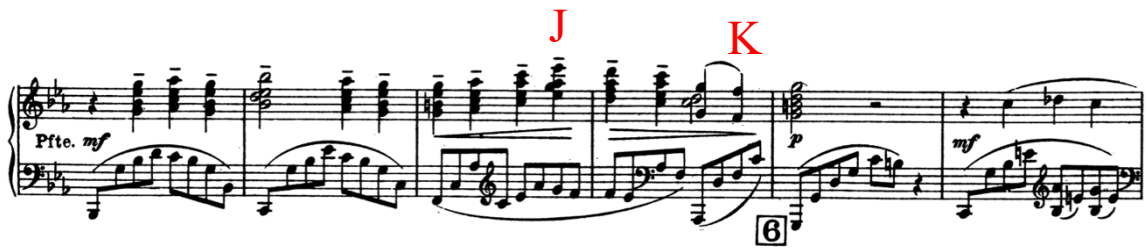


We see a minor stylistic difference in his rendering of the lyrical theme, where in his 1924 playing he makes a large *ritardando* into the fifth measure (marking E), whereas in his 1929 playing he makes a larger *ritardando* on the eighth measure (marking G).
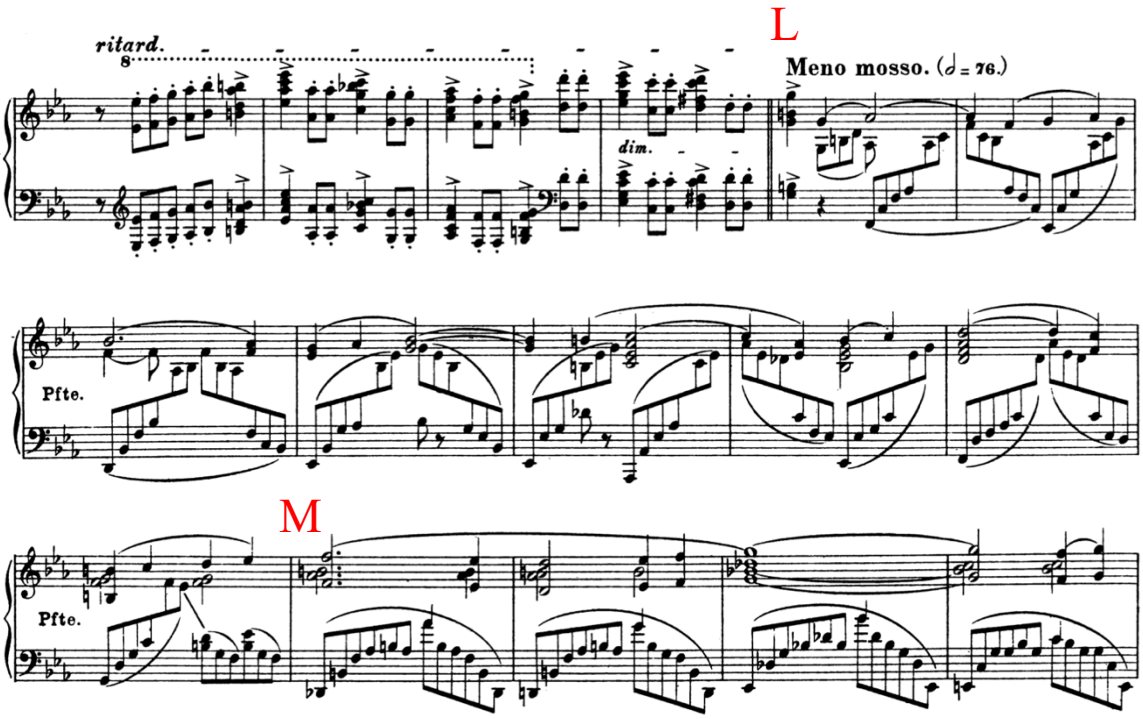
Regardless, we can infer from this playing some larger stylistic characteristics from both recordings which any Rachmaninoff player should note. Firstly, Rachmaninoff tends to emphasize the first note of significant phrases (regardless of which beat it begins upon), perhaps emulating a speaker who emphasizes the first word of an important sentence. As such, in the first phrase, the intensity of the phrase falls off after the G (marking D), such that the following A-flat is very quiet. While this aligns with the written phrase mark, we should note that six measures later he plays in the same way as he leads to the high D (marking F), ignoring the longer written phrase mark, the *crescendo* and *tenuto*!
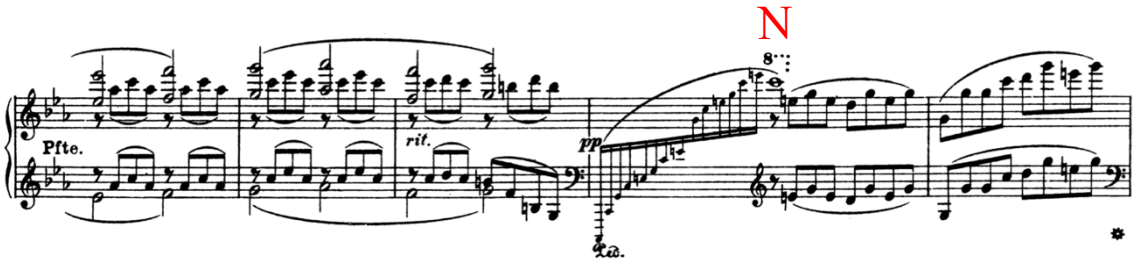


Shortly thereafter, Rachmaninoff again ignores his dynamic markings (markings H, I, and so on).
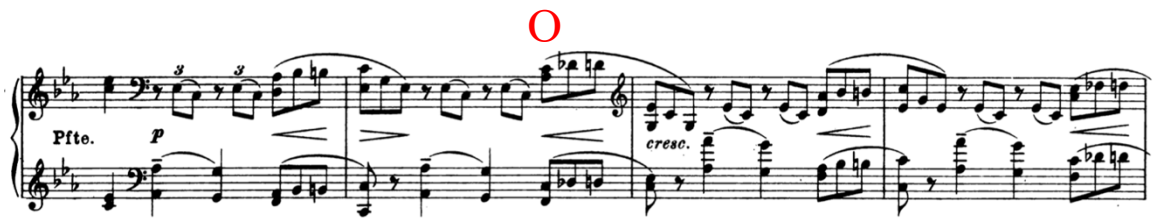


Similarly, Rachmaninoff performs a *diminuendo* into the lyrical climax (marking J), ignoring his written dynamics, and furthermore delays the penultimate F (marking K).



We then note another example of Rachmaninoff's delayed handling of tempi and character changes, in this case the *Meno mosso* (marking L) only takes effect after eight measures (marking M). Rachmaninoff's example seems to say that such score indications are instructions for the performer to begin thinking about, but not necessarily invoke immediately.
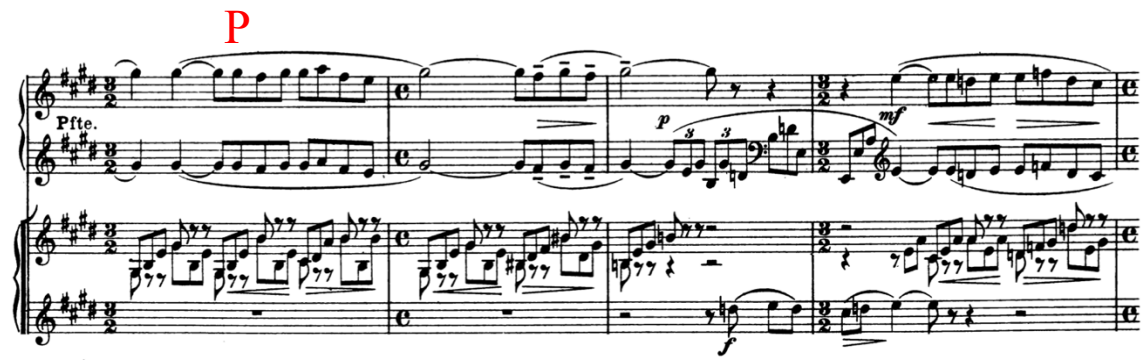


As we approach the coda of the first movement, we note that in his 1929 playing there is a sharper kick in his piano voicing in the C Major flourish (marking N), where in particular he strikes the top C much more distinctly than in his 1924 playing. We will see this again later in this performance.

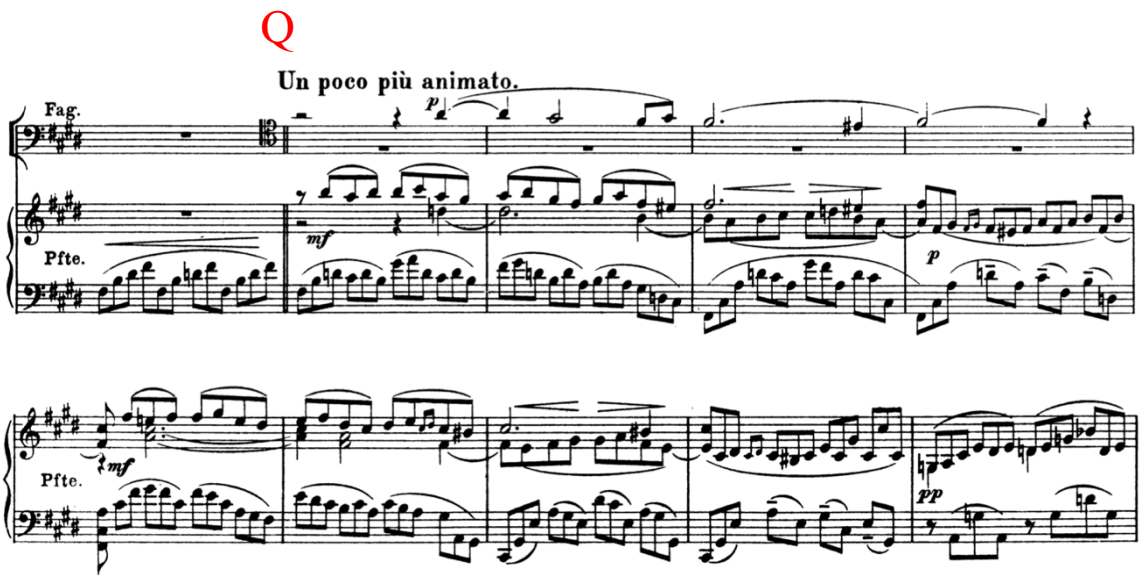


Finally, we note that Rachmaninoff makes an articulation before the anacrusis (marking O) of the closing motif in both recordings, which is clarifying musically, and more natural pianistically than playing, as most do, as a single uninterrupted passage.
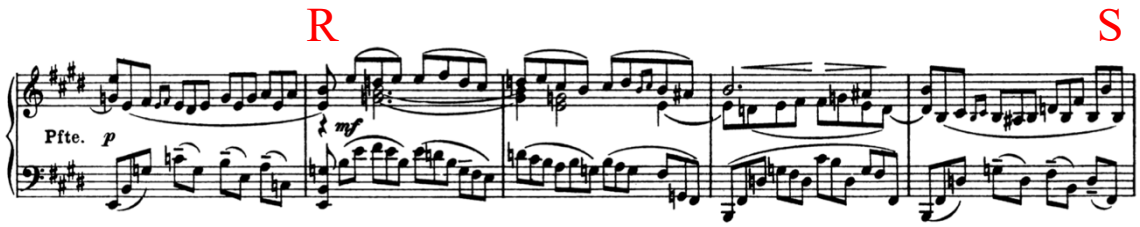
Second Movement



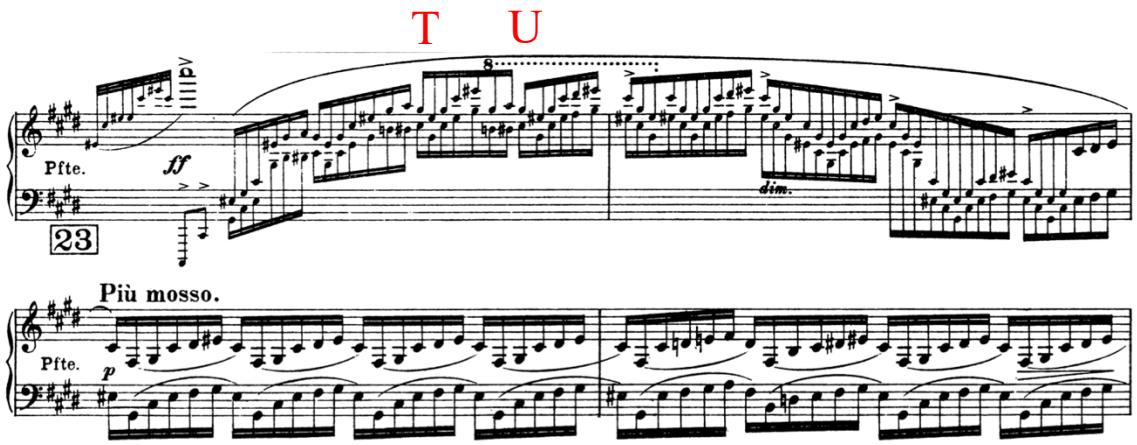
In the second movement, our first difference appears once the piano begins voicing the main theme, where in the 1924 playing Rachmaninoff pushes the orchestra (marking P), which is an unusual decision since the part of the ensemble with the most notes (in this case the strings) have the greater influence on tempo. The resulting impression is either lack of preparation or of alignment between the pianist and the orchestra, and it is of note that in the 1929 performance the orchestra and piano agree more cleanly on tempo and phrasing in these moments, making for a more unified expression of this theme.
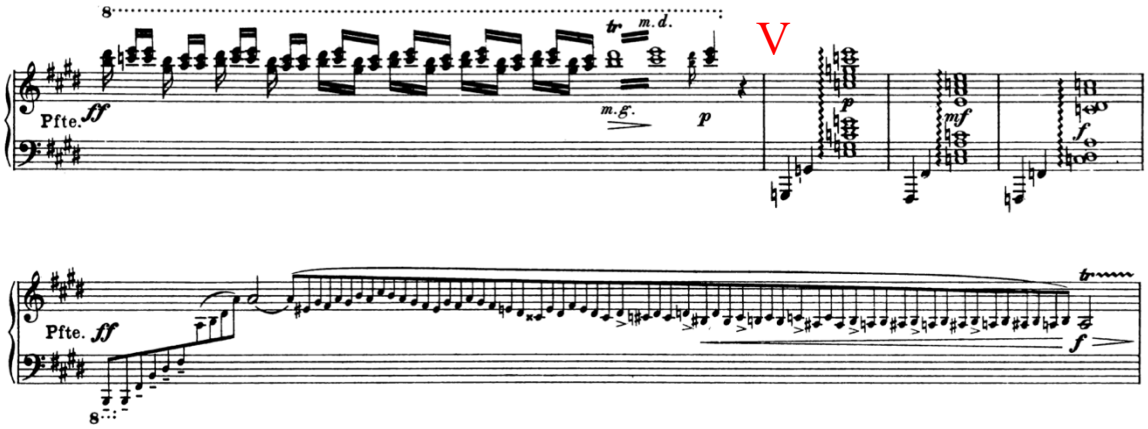


At the *Un poco più animato* (marking Q), Rachmaninoff plays the prior section quite fast, such that the *animato* is actually slower than what preceded it, and the 1929 playing is even slower than the 1924.
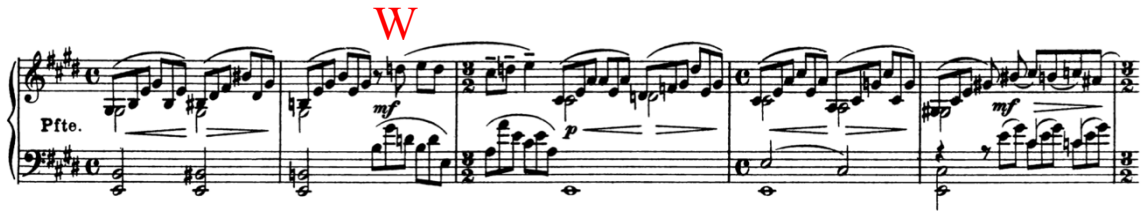


Rachmaninoff seems more poised in his 1929 playing, making an especially beautiful closing of phrase as we approach the cadenza (marking R), and making a very large ritardando four measures after that (marking S).



In the cadenza we again hear Rachmaninoff's 'rhythmic kick' in his 1929 playing, which is not heard in his 1924 playing in the cadenza flourish (markings T, U, and so on).
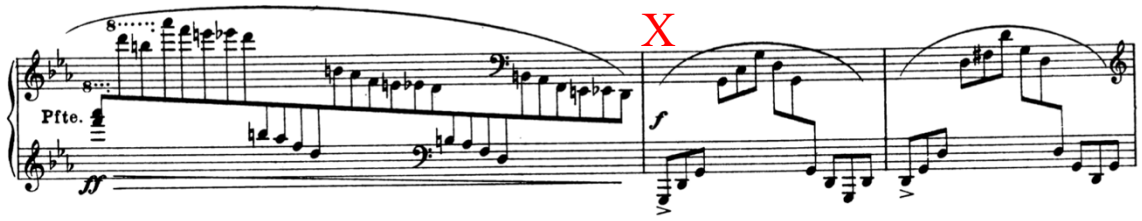


In both performances Rachmaninoff inverts the dynamic sequence at the end of cadenza section (marking V), written as a growing *crescendo* to *fortissimo*, instead making a *diminuendo* from an initial *forte* dynamic to a *piano*.
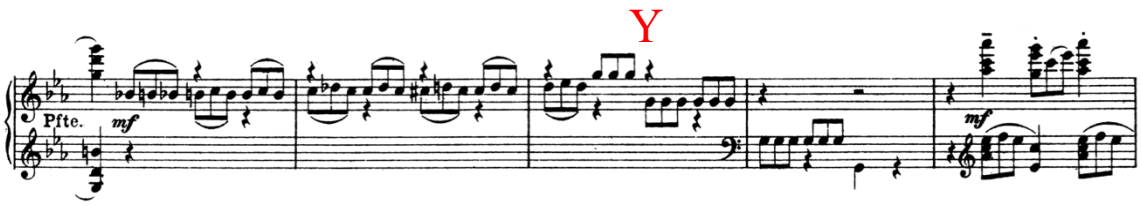


In the closing restatement of the theme, Rachmaninoff's piano accompaniment is much less present in both performances, and his answers to the orchestra are unusually sentimental (marking W).

Third Movement
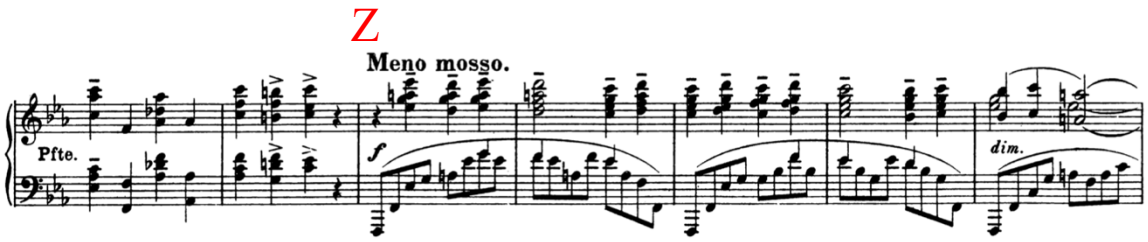
The finale is structurally the most straight-forward of the three, and so we have less to comment upon than the other movements.



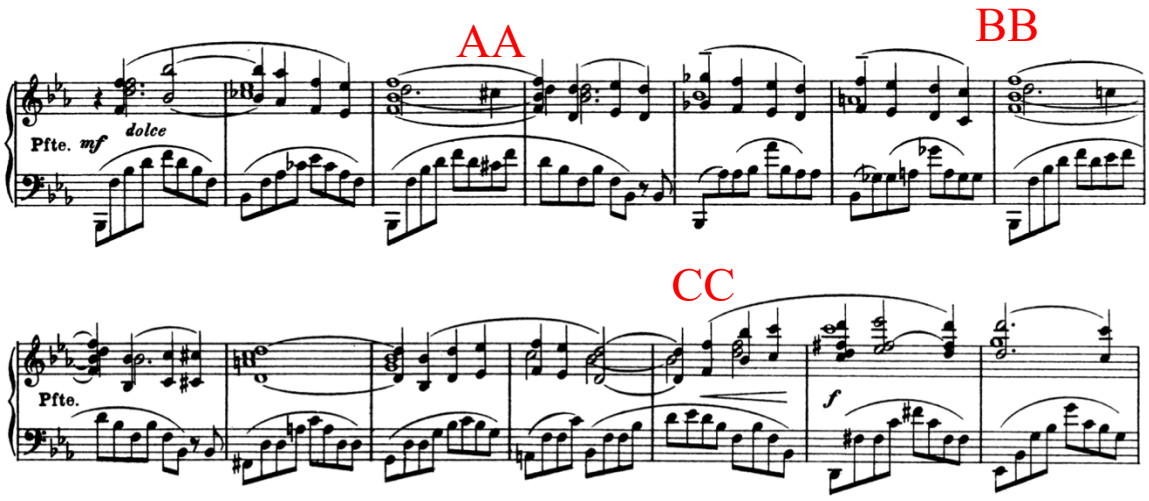
The movement opens with Rachmaninoff showing us his interpretation of accents in both recordings, in particular that they may be held for effect (marking X), adding a more interesting shape to the overall sequence for the listener.



Shortly afterwards we observe Rachmaninoff's 'rhythmic kick' again as the introduction closes (marking Y), which is not heard in the 1924 playing.



The *Meno mosso* (marking Z) which introduces the main theme is in fact played faster in both performances than what came before, and fastest in 1929.



In the main theme of this movement, in both recordings the chromatic minor inflection (marking AA) is treated as an internal passing note and is not exaggerated.

In his 1929 performance, the closing of the phrase (marking BB) is approached with an exceptional *diminuendo* and *ritardando*, which makes for a greater contrast at the conclusion of the work, where this theme is triumphantly presented by the entire orchestra. In this spirit, Rachmaninoff in both recordings ignores his *crescendo* in the answering statement (marking CC), maintaining the *dolce*.



Our last comment on the finale applies to both performances and requires some speculation. The *Meno mosso* motif, which acts as a bridge between major sections, arrives at a trill several times (marking DD). This bridge section occurs a second time later in the work. In almost all cases, in both the 1924 and 1929 performances, Rachmaninoff does not conclude his trill on the first beat of the next measure! The most curious detail is that Rachmaninoff does not do this consistently, creating the effect that the trills usually end late, and that this is unintentional.[305] It seems improbable that this reflects a defect of Rachmaninoff's technique (as a pianist), or his ear for ensemble (as a conductor), and so we may speculate that piano trills in the nineteenth century may have been performed with some independence from meter. Perhaps this was an aspect of Rachmaninoff's personal style which he was continuing to explore at the time of these recordings.

[305] Mark Obert-Thorn was the first person to mention this curious detail to me in our email correspondence.

Summary

Comparing performances of such a large a multi-movement work across five years, and across recording technologies, reveals many points of interest. It would seem that Rachmaninoff, Stokowski and The Philadelphia Orchestra are much better aligned musically, and as an ensemble, in the 1929 recording. Rachmaninoff himself plays with more poise, and we can hear a more commanding approach to the instrument; these points are independent of audio quality.

It is also curious to see where Rachmaninoff consistently ignores his own score markings in both cases, and where the 1929 performances are more observant, although this point is less relevant to Rachmaninoff's art as a pianist.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. more commanding approach to the instrument, in particular his 'rhythmic kick' in faster sections
2. more poised rendering of slower themes
3. more observant of the written score, and more aligned with the ensemble
4. faster playing in the bravura and cadenza-like sections

Item 8: Bach (arr. Rachmaninoff), Preludio from Partita No. 3 in E Major, BWV 1006

Comparison Summary

Recording	Date Recorded	Age	Type	Length	Recording Referenced
1	January 8, 1935	61	Gramophone	3:33	MJA-19662, private LP at IPAM[306]
2	February 27, 1942	68	Gramophone	3:13	RCA, Rachmaninoff, His Complete Recordings, CD7 Track 1

Gramophone recording details[307]:

Work	Recording Date	Takes	Results
Preludio in E Major From *Violin Partita* No. 3, BWV 1006	January 8, 1935	4	1h
	January 10, 1936	8	
	February 25, 1942	1	
	February 26, 1942	1	
	February 27, 1942	1	1m
Totals	7 years, 1 month	15	1m, 1h

Score referenced:

Editor	n/a
Publisher	Charles Foley
IMSLP Link	https://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Partita_No.3_in_E_major%2C_BWV_1006_(Bach%2C_Johann_Sebastian)

[306]Also listed in *The American Record Guide*, October 1966, 159 – 165.

[307] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 483.

Analysis

Rachmaninoff completed this transcription on September 9, 1933, alongside the *Gavotte* and *Gigue* from the same *Violin Partita* by Bach. The trio of movements, as transcribed by Rachmaninoff, was met with mixed appreciation in his concerts; Henry Simon wrote in 1942 that it had "too many inner voices and harmonies that the organist from Eisenach couldn't have dreamed of."[308]

We see this in conflicting reviews of one of its earliest performances in 1933. Linton Martin wrote:

> Rachmaninoff presented his own transcription of the Bach E-major Sonata for violin alone, as the opening number. Considering the fact that this work was written for unaccompanied stringed instrument, it is a remarkably resourceful and thoroughly musicianly version that Rachmaninoff has prepared. Indeed, so pianistic is its quality in the present version that it is difficult to conceive of the work as written in any other form, and Rachmaninoff made it thoroughly his own in his performance.[309]

Samuel L. Laeigrin held a different view of the same performance:

> The program opened with the recitalist's own transcription of three of the seven movements of Bach's E major sonata for violin unaccompanied. Although skillfully and reverently made, the translation for piano added nothing to the value of the original, which is essentially violin music and not well adapted to transcription.
>
> In the Prelude, which, with its constant succession of sixteenth notes, is a kind of "perpetual motion," Mr. Rachmaninoff has retained most of the original violin figures but

[308] Bertensson & Leyda, *Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 377.
[309] L. Martin, "Rachmaninoff in a Notable Recital," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, November 14, 1933.

has added others – taken, however, from the Bach themes – with the result that in many places the work is very unlike the original.[310]

The two recordings compared here are of particular interest, since the release – and existence - of the 1935 *held* take is not common knowledge today. It was released on the record MJA-19662, as indicated in the *American Record Guide* discography from 1966,[311] however no text reviewed by this writer has made mention of it. The 1973 *Complete Rachmaninoff* by RCA omits it, and knowledgeable listeners at the time took note,[312] such that the 2001 *RCA Red Seal Century*[313] chose to include it for this reason. However, upon careful listening, the *Red Seal Century* presents a different take than the MJA release! With respect to this analysis and dissertation, this 1935 take is a crucial datapoint, providing a comparative performance by Rachmaninoff in the mid-1930s.
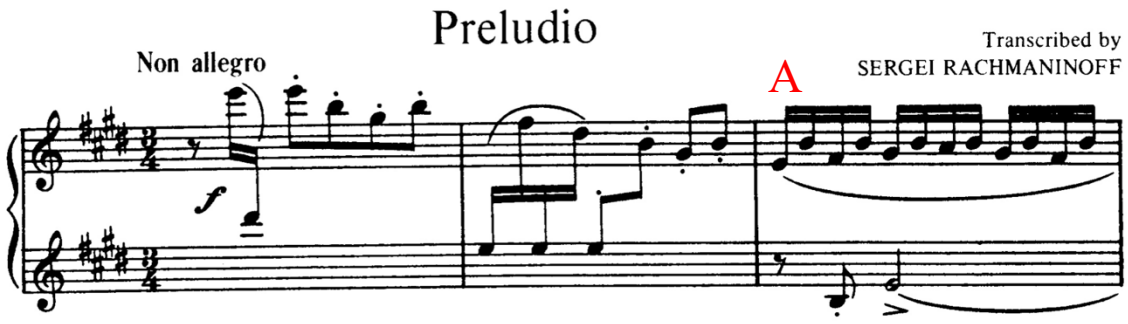
The following analysis chooses the original MJA take in comparison to the 1942 recording, which we assume is the *held* take as indicated by Rachmaninoff in the Victor recording logs, and which this writer personally prefers.

Similar to previous examples, the later recording is faster by a significant margin, and each recording seems to reflect a different conception of the work itself. It should also be stated that the 1935 playing is more accurate on a per-note level, although the misses in the 1942 playing are only occasional.
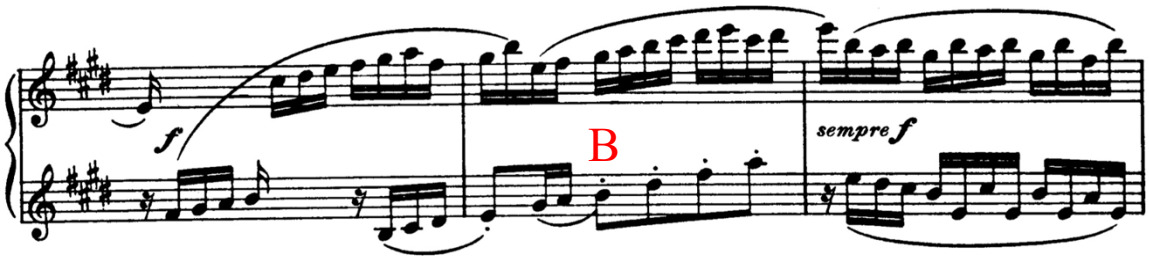
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[310] S. L. Laeigrin, "Forum Hears Rachmaninoff," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, November 14, 1933.
[311] *The American Record Guide*, October 1966, 159 – 165.
[312] Donald Manildi of IPAM kindly provided me extensive background on the history of this particularly illuminating recording by Rachmaninoff.
[313] *RCA Red Seal Century, Soloists and Conductors (09026-63861), 2001.*

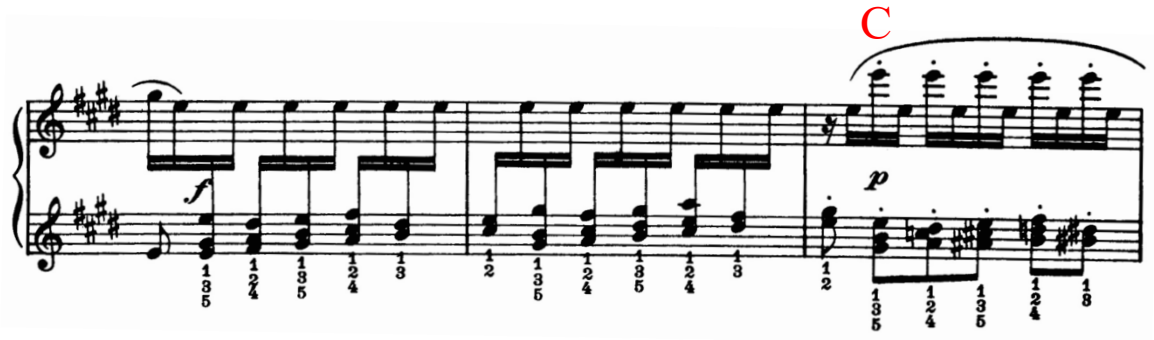
Baroque music presents a conceptual challenge for any romantic player, such as Rachmaninoff, since such music expresses a single idea or emotion. The structural contrasting of themes within a single movement was yet to develop in the Classical era, and so any modern player of this music must strive to make these works interesting while maintaining thematic and emotional consistency throughout. We will see that Rachmaninoff is more successful, in this respect, in his 1942 playing than in 1935.
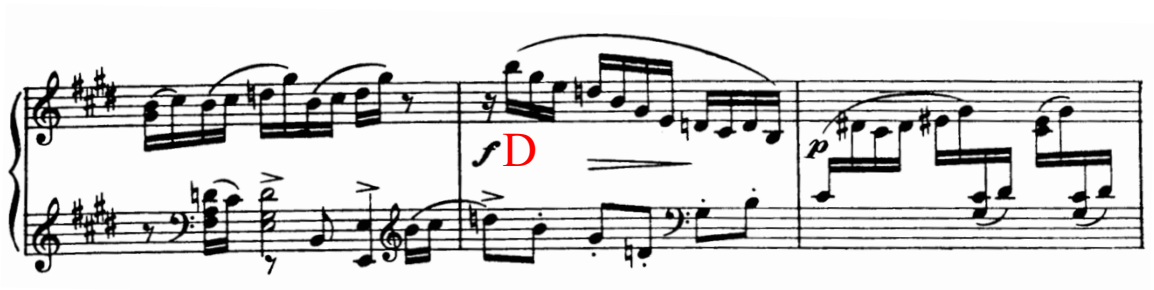


As the Preludio opens, it is immediately clear that the 1942 performance is faster. This difference leads to an almost contradictory effect for the listener, in that the 1935 playing sounds more 'notey' and busy, despite being slower and using more pedaling, for example measure 3 (figure A) is fully sustained. The 1942 playing, by contrast, uses pedaling more judiciously, and the faster tempo allows a larger sense of kinetic energy at the meter level, rather than the note level. Rachmaninoff allows the passagework in the 1942 playing to be less pronounced, instead focusing on certain melodies.
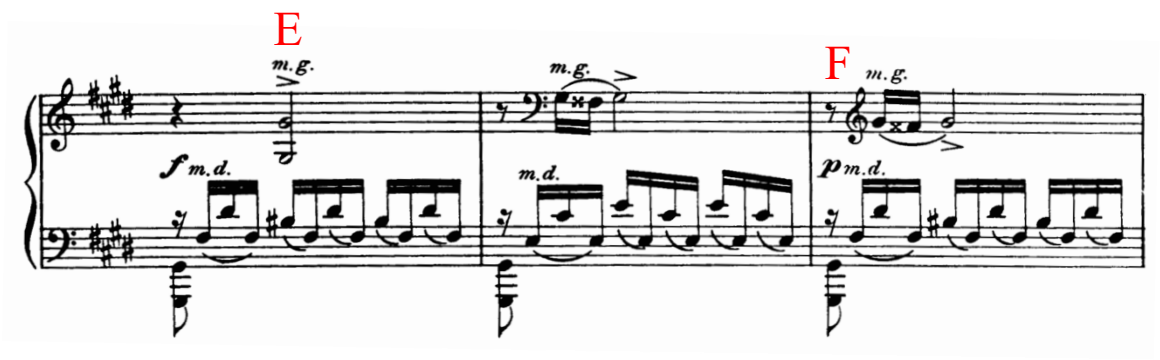


In the 1942 playing, Rachmaninoff also adds a 'dynamic kick' to many second beat notes (figure B) of sixteenth-note passagework, adding to the sense of momentum.
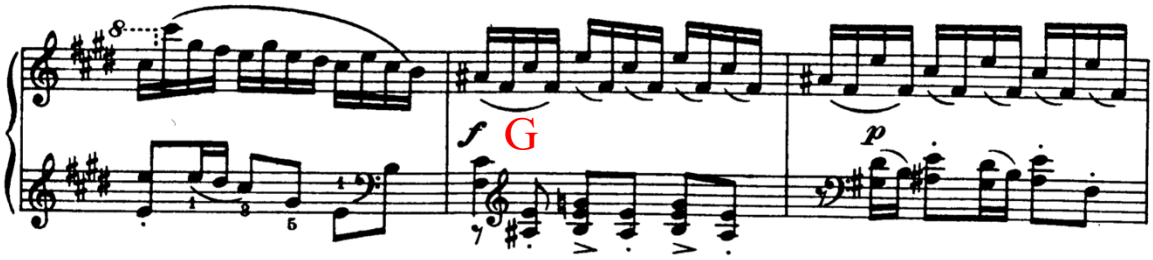


Another major difference between the two recordings is the approach to voicing. In the 1942 playing, the high E notes (figure C) are highlighted like bells, and Rachmaninoff treats the sound they make as the primary interest, whereas in the 1935 playing they are barely audible, the interest being given instead to the chromatic harmonies beneath. The difference is quite remarkable, raising the question whether this reflects an evolution in Rachmaninoff's thinking of the *Preludio* as a composition, or of the piano's expressive capabilities.
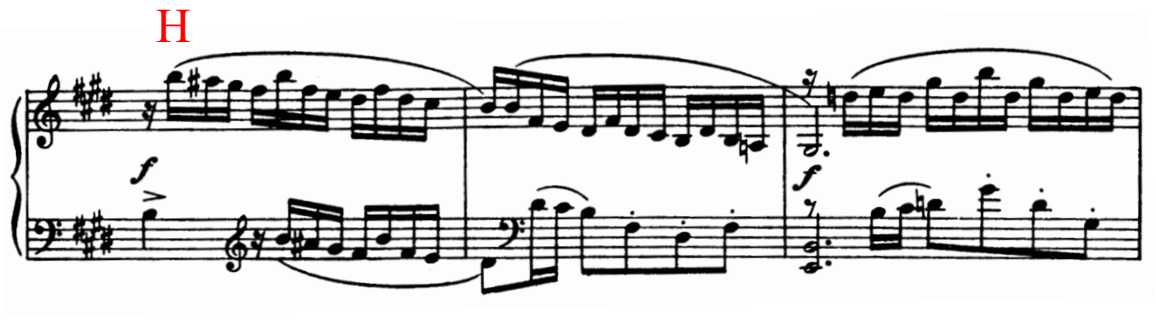


We see another example soon after of the difference in pedaling effects (figure D), where in 1935 the texture changes as contrast, whereas in 1942 it serves to add a touch of color without interrupting the character of the work.
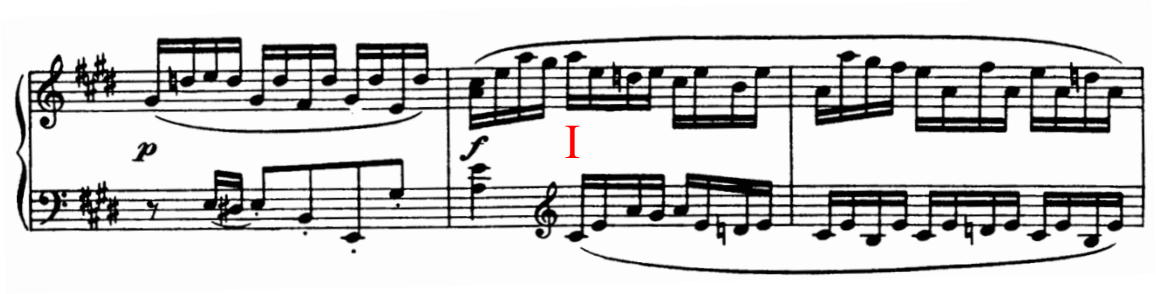


The slower tempo in 1935 has an adverse effect where longer pedal points are introduced, forcing the sixteenth notes to be more present for the listener (figure E). Not only is this problem solved by the faster tempo in 1942, but Rachmaninoff also is able to apply more pedaling here, further moving the overall effect from one of notes, to one of texture. Subsequently, the contrast in dynamic (figure F) is also much more effective in the 1942 playing.
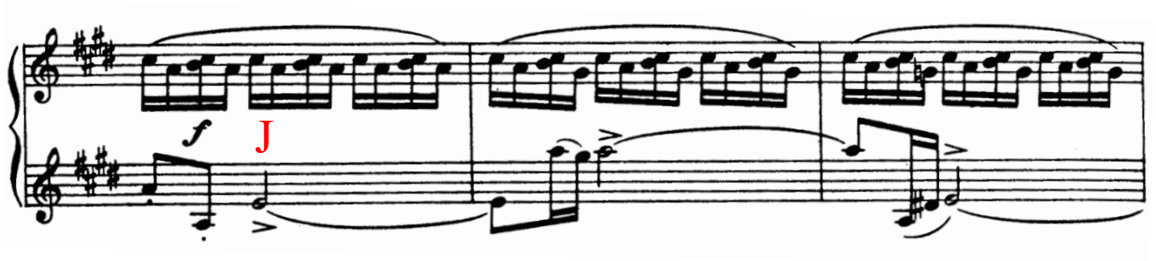


The 1942 playing is more selective in when voicing should be articulated, and so there are sections such as (figure G) where the overall texture is quite subtle, and Rachmaninoff instead makes the sense of movement the point of interest.
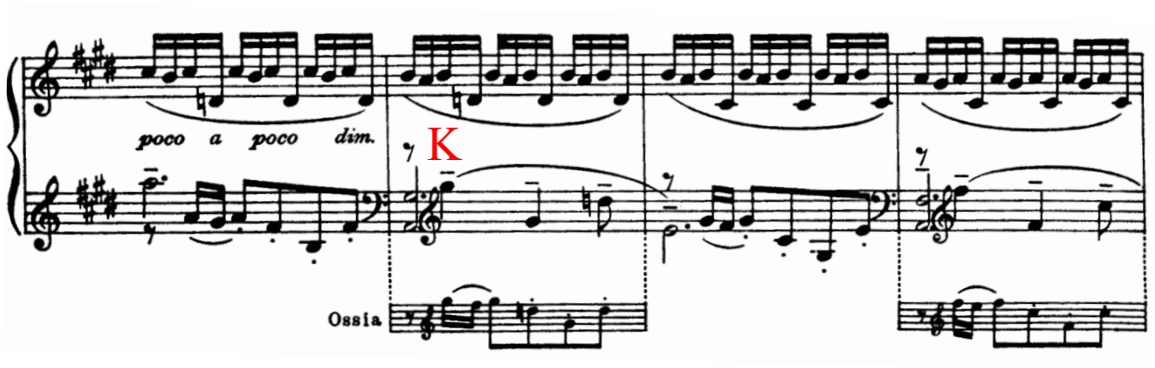


The 1935 playing uses pedaling quite generously in places, for example (figure H).
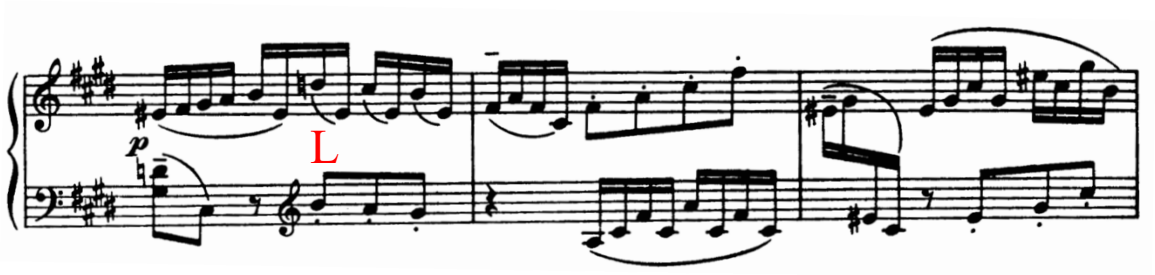


The next section (figure I) demonstrates the note-heavy playing of 1935.
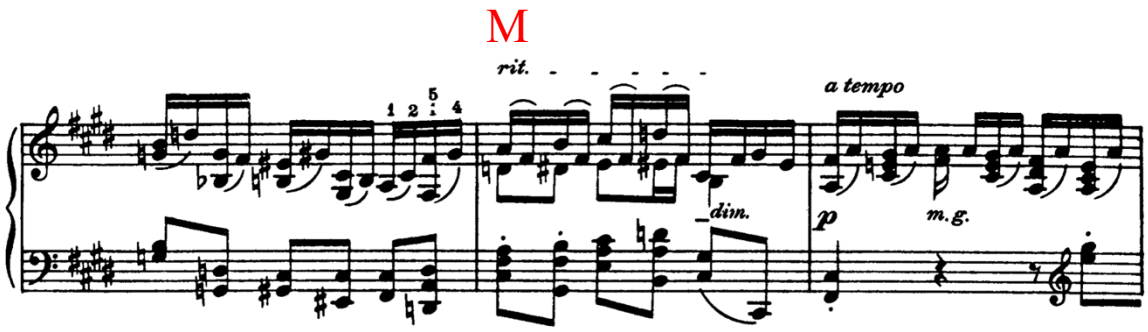


We then hear another example of Rachmaninoff's bell-like sonority in his 1942 voicing of melodies (figure J).



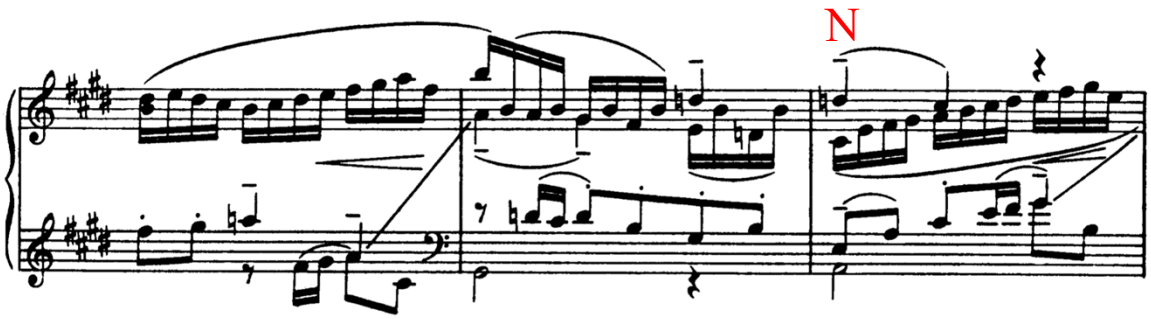
Another example of this follows shortly afterwards (figure K).
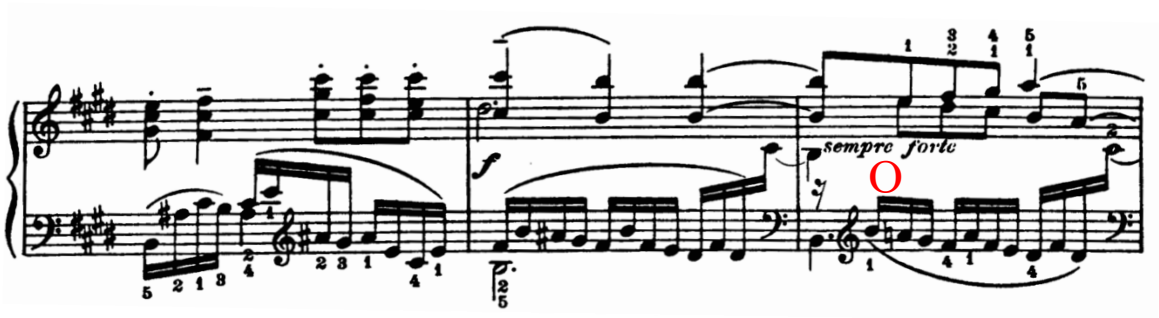


The 1935 playing creates the impression of baroque passagework, closer to what one might hear on a harpsichord than a piano at times, for example (figure L).
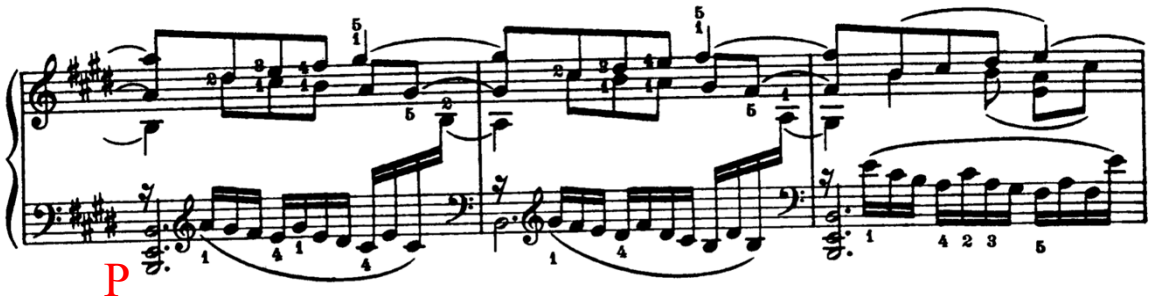


We then find that the 1942 performance uses the *ritenuto* to create structural interest before the final section (figure M), whereas the 1935 playing essentially ignores this, proceeding without any noticeable change in tempo.



In the 1942 playing, Rachmaninoff tends to bring focus on the sixteenth notes when they are in clear melodic runs (figure N), but otherwise allows them to largely remain within the background texture.



Another interesting difference is where, on the final page, more dense counterpoint is introduced (figure O), and in the 1935 playing things slow down slightly to ensure everything can be heard; in the 1942 playing Rachmaninoff instead moves ahead a little faster!



Subsequently, Rachmaninoff in the 1942 playing can allow the listener to focus on the low dominant B pedal points (figure P), like lower bells in the texture, bringing the work to its climax, since the faster-moving notes are less prominent.

Summary

In comparing these two performances, one senses a different conception of the work overall, and of the piano's role in it. To re-quote Rachmaninoff from earlier in this text, "With regard to Bach, for instance, one must never forget the character of his medium. Bach did not have the grand piano of today with its extended keyboard, and above all, its great sonority of tone. Bach's piano was the clavichord. It was small; its tone was small and intimate in character."[314]

Rachmaninoff gave this interview at the time he was writing this transcription, and we must remember he was friends with baroque scholars such as Wanda Landowska[315], so he fully understood the historical distance in style and idiom of such music.

[314] S. Rachmaninoff, "Interpretation Depends on Talent and Personality," *The Etude*, April 1932, 240.
[315] See plate 4, Rachmaninoff in the background, D. Restout, *Landowska on Music* (New York: Stein and Day, 1964).

We could therefore reasonably assume that Rachmaninoff had imagined his transcription as a clavichord work in spirit. Comparing the performances, it would seem that over time Rachmaninoff found an alignment between the structure of the music Bach had originally composed, and the idiomatic possibilities of the modern piano, allowing him to re-interpret Bach while retaining its essential character.

Highlights of the later recording include, comparatively:

1. faster tempo
2. more bell-like voicing, particularly in higher registers
3. more organic adaption of the modern piano to this style of music
4. more judicious use of pedaling
5. larger structural awareness, utilizing ritenutos for this effect

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Before presenting our conclusion, we shall re-state the opening question of this dissertation:

> Heinrich Neuhaus observed that "the word for 'technique' comes from the Greek word *τεχνε*, and that *τεχνε* means art. Any improvement of technique is an improvement of art itself and consequently helps to reveal the 'content'"[316] of a work. Neuhaus was primarily a piano teacher, and his statement was aimed at instrumentalists in training. How might we consider his statement from the point of view of a genius composer-pianist such as Rachmaninoff?[317]

To best frame our answer, we will now collect and re-summarize what we have learned from the individual analyses of Rachmaninoff's recordings. As outlined in the Analysis chapter, we will consider these summaries in two groups: the works which Rachmaninoff composed, and the works which he did not. We will consider whether there is a difference in his development as a performer and artist between the two groups.

As a reminder, we consider Rachmaninoff's transcriptions of works by other composers as belonging to the latter group, even though our earlier insights suggest Rachmaninoff considered them equally his own for the sake of posterity. We maintain our position; transcribing a work for

[316] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 2.

[317] Introduction, *A Composer's Approach to Τεχνε*.

a different instrument cannot be an exercise in ‘content,’ since it would otherwise result in a new and independent work.

General Observations

As has been discussed earlier, most of Rachmaninoff's re-recordings of works are largely divided by the transition from acoustic recording technology to electric around 1925. He also re-recorded many of his own works for the sake of posterity near the end of his career, resulting in second recordings occurring either shortly after 1925, or around 1940.

This being said, the works Rachmaninoff recorded multiple times do provide illumination into his development as a musician and pianist. The first is that all recordings prior to 1925 are vastly superseded by Rachmaninoff's later playing, both pianistically and in terms of musical delivery. This appears to be co-incidental with the technological switch to electric recording around the same time, and we might consider if the perceived improvement is due to audio quality alone. This is easily refuted however, since Rachmaninoff's acoustic recordings are sufficiently clear that we can hear he is simply playing the piano in a different way.

We should take the perspective instead that the switch to electric recording around 1925 was a fortuitous historical event, which motivated Rachmaninoff to re-record certain works, and that his playing need not necessarily have changed. Rachmaninoff himself may not have been fully aware of the changes in his playing, since self-awareness is famously difficult for most people, especially perfectionists. An inversion of the psychological 'Dunning-Kruger Effect'[318] may also be applicable in this case, which is where those with the highest skills tend to underestimate their abilities, hence driving further perfectionism.

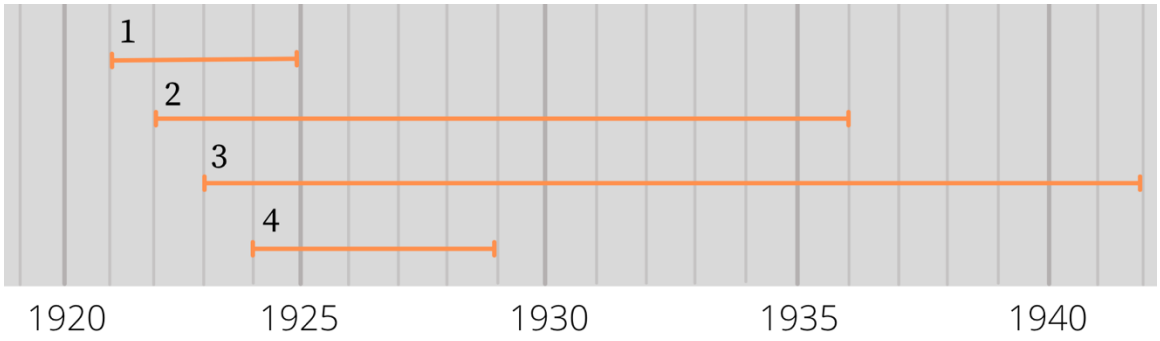
[318] For more information on this, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect.

Works by Rachmaninoff

The works we analyzed were as follows:

Item	First Date	Second Date	Work
1	1921	1925	*Etude-Tableau*, Opus 39, No. 6
2	1922	1936	*Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5
3	1923	1942	*Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5
4	1924	1929	*Piano Concerto No. 2*, Opus 18

The recording dates of these works may be visualized as follows:



We now re-state our summaries, comparing the second recording with the first.

Item 1: *Etude-Tableau*, Opus 39, No. 6

1. more effective pedaling, including for purposes of sectional continuity
2. more motivic energy, especially in the left-hand
3. greater agreement with the score
4. greater delivery of dramatic effect of *sforzandi*
5. less sentimental exaggeration of closing coda sections

Item 2: *Sérénade*, Opus 3, No. 5

1. faster tempo
2. a greater focus on presenting the structure of the work without distraction
3. more sophisticated pedaling
4. more interesting use of the left-hand for accenting certain chromatic notes, as opposed to just being the 'accompaniment'

Item 3: *Lilacs*, Opus 21, No. 5

1. stronger voicing of main melodies, with less exaggeration of phrasing
2. presentation of larger structural arcs
3. a more elegant and purposeful coda

Item 4: *Piano Concerto No. 2*, Opus 18

1. more commanding approach to the instrument, in particular his 'rhythmic kick' in faster sections
2. more poised rendering of slower themes
3. more observant of the written score, and more aligned with the ensemble
4. faster playing in the bravura and cadenza-like sections

Observations

Recalling that Rachmaninoff composed these works, we cannot presume that changes in performance reflect an improvement of his understanding of his own music; this is more likely a consequence of his extensive solo concert experience from 1918 onwards. The *Second Piano Concerto* recordings are of particular interest, since in 1924 his playing is certainly excellent, but his 1929 playing demonstrates his later pianistic voice, including what this dissertation has named his 'rhythmic kick' which he later brings to many virtuosic sections. This kick allows him to play even faster, while simplifying the listener's understanding of what they are hearing.

We note an even greater development of this in his playing after 1936, with more emphasis on a work's overall structure, rather than exaggerating individual themes and motifs, as exemplified in his *Lilacs*. His sophisticated use of pedal to soften complex textures, for example in the *Sérénade*, allows for clearer voicing.

All these qualities are hinted at in his *Etude-Tableau*, which is admittedly not a work that allows demonstration of pianistic nuance or lyricism. It does seem that the greater development of Rachmaninoff's playing begins sometime after this work was recorded in 1925.

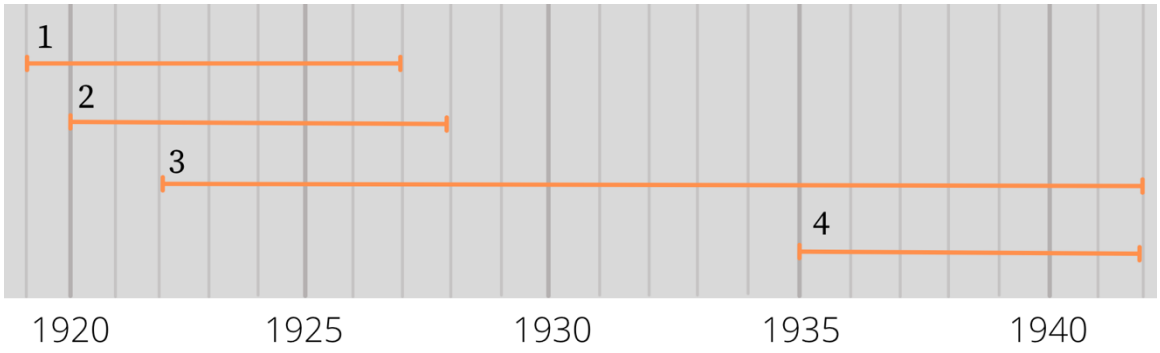
An overall summary might be that Rachmaninoff's approach to playing of his own works evolves from that of a pianist to that of a conductor.

Works by Other Composers

The works we analyzed were as follows:

Item	First Date	Second Date	Work
1	1919	1927	Chopin, *Waltz* in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3
2	1920	1928	Mendelssohn, *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4
3	1923	1942	Chopin (arr. Liszt), *The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1
4	1935	1942	Bach (arr. Rachmaninoff), *Preludio* from *Partita No. 3 in E Major*, BWV 1006

The recording dates of these works may be visualized as follows:



We now re-state our summaries, comparing the second recording with the first.

Item 1: Chopin, *Waltz* in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3

1. more awareness and control of right-hand leading in this type of music, allowing the left-hand to be less prominent
2. more straight-forward playing of the main theme, allowing a heightened contrast in the B section
3. generally faster tempi, although the total runtime does not change

4. far stronger projection of voicing, in particular the B section left-hand
5. more sophisticated textural support, including the addition or re-arrangement of notes to capture a more interesting tone-color

Item 2: Mendelssohn, *Spinnerlied*, Opus 67, No. 4

1. more use of pedaling for textural effect
2. faster tempo
3. more prominent left-hand coloring and voicing
4. more organic shaping of larger arcs

Item 3: Chopin (arr. Liszt), *The Maiden's Wish*, Opus 74, No. 1

1. more straight-forward playing overall
2. faster tempi
3. more prominent left-hand coloring and voicing

Item 4: Bach (arr. Rachmaninoff), *Preludio* from *Partita No. 3 in E Major*, BWV 1006

1. faster tempo
2. more bell-like voicing, particularly in higher registers
3. more organic adaption of the modern piano to this style of music
4. more judicious use of pedaling
5. larger structural awareness, utilizing ritenutos for this effect

Observations

This collection of recordings provides similar insights into Rachmaninoff's playing before and after 1925, with the additional example of the Bach *Preludio* transcription, the first recording being from 1935.

The Chopin *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 3, and the Mendelssohn *Spinnerlied* show a dramatic improvement in pianism between 1920 and 1927, which is fully expected if we consider Rachmaninoff's personal circumstances and sudden change of career from 1917. The playing becomes faster, but also clearer, with more a sophisticated approach to the instrument in terms of voicing, texture and pedaling.

The Chopin-Liszt *Maiden's Wish*, and Bach *Preludio*, are interesting because they are both transcriptions, and reveal a different side to Rachmaninoff's development. The later recordings, both from 1942, show a more objective style, simplifying the pianist's role to effectively allow the music to speak for itself. The *Maiden's Wish* benefits greatly from this focus on overall structure, whereas the Bach *Preludio* almost changes in its entire conception, moving from an emulation of a clavichord toccata into a work which truly belongs in the modern piano repertoire. The *Preludio* reveals a more advanced approach to voicing and texture which, once again, allows the music to move at a faster pace, and yet become clearer to the listener.

Three Performing Periods

The observations stated by this point show a clear development in Rachmaninoff's approach to the piano through his recording career. From the comparative data we have examined, we can identify three artistic periods of his recordings.

1919 – 1926: Excellence

In these years, Rachmaninoff is an excellent pianist, and evidently fully deserving of the career he established upon leaving Russia. However, he plays quite conventionally, exaggerating pianistic details at the expense of the larger structure of works, as heard in the Chopin-Liszt *Maiden's Wish* (1923). His treatment of voicing, and of the left-hand in particular, is given much less thought, such that in the Chopin *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 3, (1919) the left-hand is too prominent, at the expense of the right-hand voicing, and in the Mendelssohn *Spinnerlied* (1920), the left-hand is subservient to the right-hand at the expense of latent textural and rhythmic interest.

This is also true in his playing of his own music, for example in his *Sérénade* (1922), Rachmaninoff takes much longer on chromatic or harmonic moments, almost for their own sake, and this theatricality is, again, a distraction from the larger structure of the work. In his *Lilacs* (1923), and his *Etude-Tableau* (1925), this conventionality is also evident. The *Second Piano Concerto* (1924) provides additional insights, for example an apparent lack of alignment with his orchestra at some points, and less poise overall in his playing.

While the playing is excellent, it is clear that Rachmaninoff has yet to discover the advanced voicing, pedaling and texture which makes the piano such a unique vehicle of

expression in a concert hall, and furthermore how these idiomatic elements of the instrument should best serve a composition, rather than its performer.

1927 – 1935: Maturity

In this middle period, we see dramatic improvement in every respect of Rachmaninoff's art with the piano. The Chopin *Waltz*, Opus 64, No. 3 (1927) and Mendelssohn *Spinnerlied* (1928) demonstrate an extraordinary sophistication with the instrument, even more exceptional given the miniature nature of these works. Rachmaninoff has transformed the role of the left-hand in his playing, becoming an equal to the right-hand in all important respects.

In his *Second Piano Concerto* (1929), we can see a more natural approach to large-scale structure, and the piano's role within an ensemble. In this recording we also clearly hear his 'rhythmic kick' in fast sections, where either the right-hand or left-hand contribute in this way to simplify the texture and sense of momentum.

The Bach *Preludio* (1935) reveals that Rachmaninoff is still actively exploring technical and conceptual approaches to the piano, in particular with music from earlier epochs.

1936 – 1942: Mastery

From 1936 Rachmaninoff has transformed his conception of the instrument, and his role as performer, almost into the role of conductor. This is consistent with his stage demeanor, musical outlook, and reputation for letting music speak for itself.

In his *Sérénade* (1936), the performer almost becomes invisible, as the structure of the work logically presents itself with minimal interruption or distraction. Both hands participate equally to create an almost orchestral approach to its interpretation. In his *Lilacs* (1942), the

same is true, and this work reveals Rachmaninoff's development of the piano as an idiom, such that the transcribed vocal line remains clearly voiced, and yet the accompaniment strikes a balance between voicing and texture, again in support of the larger structure of the work. Rachmaninoff also modifies the coda of this transcription to be pianistically simpler, so avoiding an interruption to the flow in the earlier writing which required a larger jump of the hands.

In the Chopin-Liszt *Maiden's Wish* (1942), Rachmaninoff brings clarity to the structure of what is effectively a theme and variations, recognizing that a transcription should serve the original music first and foremost. While perhaps counter-intuitive, Rachmaninoff's faster, more straight-forward playing of this work is also more enjoyable and engaging.

Finally, in his rendition of the Bach *Preludio* (1942), there is an acceptance that the piano has different qualities from the clavichord, and an interpretation of what Bach might have intended on this modern instrument. Rachmaninoff merges sixteenth notes into a texture with pedaling, allowing his melodies to project with a bell-like texture, and yet at a faster tempo thanks to his rhythmic clarity; there is no impression of any loss of detail.

The overall sense is that Rachmaninoff has evolved his treatment of the piano, and his technique accordingly, such that it serves him as an orchestra would serve a conductor.

Neuhaus Revisited

We opened this dissertation with Neuhaus' insight that the definition of art encompasses both the 'content' and 'technique' within a performance. Neuhaus argued that work on the 'technique' of a composition is equally work on its 'content.' We recognized that Rachmaninoff, as a genius composer-pianist, was probably not the target of this statement, but if not, why not? And if not, how should we modify Neuhaus' statement?

Our primary observation is that Rachmaninoff, as heard in his recordings, was an excellent pianist from his earliest such work in 1919. As an émigré, recording for Edison on an upright piano with primitive acoustic technology and questionable business terms, we should marvel at the accuracy of Rachmaninoff's playing alone, before even considering the musicality. If no other recordings had survived of Rachmaninoff's playing, he would still be regarded today as a truly outstanding pianist of his time.

The analyses presented in this dissertation indicate that the development of Rachmaninoff's playing is one of pianism, although not strictly of technique. There is no evidence that the 'content', or artistic understanding of works, was at any point insufficient, or that it radically changed. Even the Bach *Preludio* transcription, the most interesting example of development of performing style, was one of historical interpretation more than anything else, in the opinion of this writer. While considering the three emergent periods of Rachmaninoff's recordings, one is reminded of Pablo Casals' invention of his own technique for the cello, single-handedly re-inventing what that instrument could do.[319] Rachmaninoff similarly re-invented his approach to

[319] For more on the incredible life story of Pablo Casals, refer to A. Kahn, *Joys and Sorrows* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).

the piano, although he did so when his change of career required him to use the piano to more fully express his ideas, and mostly in a soloist capacity.

Rachmaninoff's three identified periods of **Excellence**, **Maturity** and **Mastery** increasingly tend towards the invisibility of the performer, and towards the treatment of the piano as an idiomatic equivalent of an orchestra. It turns out that this aligns with Rachmaninoff's musical identities, respectively **Composer**, **Pianist** and **Conductor**.

It is therefore logical that Rachmaninoff started his American performing career as primarily a composer-pianist; that he then became a truly outstanding pianist; and that he could then refine his pure piano technique towards his internal goals of acting as conductor to the music he performed.

In conclusion, this dissertation proposes to augment Neuhaus' definition of *τεχνε*, adding to **content** and **technique** the third dimension of **identity**. Every pianist develops a unique relationship between the instrument and their audience, which is independent of piano technique and the music itself. Rachmaninoff's musical identity was one of perfectionism and humility, as shown by his stage demeanor and disinterest in celebrity, and in this dissertation the term *invisible* has emerged several times; this was noted where he gradually removed theatricality, excess sentimentality, and other soloistic distractions from his performances, while treating the instrument more like an orchestra than a piano.

The most likely reason that Neuhaus does not speak much about this aspect of playing is that it assumes, and requires, absolute mastery of the instrument and of music before it may even be considered. It requires that a pianist may choose the manner in which they perform their repertoire from a wide range of possibilities. A typical piano student must wait a very considerable time before such choices become apparent.

Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff now enjoys continued appreciation of both his music and his recorded legacy, and the eminence of his recordings will only continue to grow in the future. Heinrich Neuhaus commented that for "talented and advanced pianists, recordings are now probably the most powerful means of education."[320] Neuhaus, whose definition of *τεχνε* inspired this dissertation, provides our closing comment:

> Even now it happens very often that some talented and wide-awake pupil comes to my class with a record of Rachmaninov's *Second Concerto* and ask me for advice. "What do you need me for" I tell him, "when Rachmaninov himself can give you all the advice you

[320] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 233.

want. Listen to your record some ten or twenty times, then I shall hear you once to see what effect this 'listening to music' has had on you.[321]

[321] Neuhaus, *The Art of Piano Playing*, 234.

Appendix A

Extant Piano Recordings and Piano Rolls

We here present a complete list of works which Rachmaninoff may be heard performing, either as a gramophone recording or as a piano roll. We indicate, where applicable, the date of the recording (whether at Edison, Victor or Ampico), the Matrix number, and a contemporary CD track for each item.

More details about the takes which were not approved as *hold* or *master* by Rachmaninoff may be found in the comprehensive work by Martyn.[322] We also list the works which Rachmaninoff is known to have recorded in the Victor studios, but which are believed to have now been destroyed. Details on reading Matrix numbers is provided in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Given that it is now some eighty years since Rachmaninoff's passing, it grows increasingly unlikely that recordings of new works will be found. However, the evidence of the Bach *Preludio* transcription existing publicly on two separate takes of its 1935 recording, despite the Victor logs showing only one take marked *hold*, does give some hope that more takes of Rachmaninoff's playing of his currently available works exist, and that they may be publicly released at some point in the future.

For works which Rachmaninoff recorded, but for which no extant take is known to exist, see Appendix B.

[322] Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 453 – 491.

Record albums referenced:

CR = *The Complete Rachmaninoff*, RCA, CD, 2005. Catalog 82876-67892-2.

MJA = MJA-19662. Private LP at the International Piano Archives at Maryland.

NX4 = Naxos. *Great Pianists, Rachmaninov 4.* CD, 2017. Catalog 8.111407.

NX5 = Naxos. *Great Pianists, Rachmaninov 5.* CD, 2018. Catalog 8.111408.

NX6 = Naxos. *Great Pianists, Rachmaninov 6.* CD, 2020. Catalog 8.111413.

NXC = Naxos. *Great Chamber Music Recordings; Kreisler and Rachmaninoff.* CD, 2003. Catalog 8.110968.

PA = Pristine Audio. *Rachmaninov plays Rachmaninov.* CD, 2017. Catalog PASC-521.

RS = *RCA Red Seal Century, Soloists and Conductors*, CD, 2001. Catalog 09026-63861-2.

SR = Marston. *Rachmaninoff Plays Symphonic Dances*. CD collection, 2018. Catalog 53022-2.

WT1 = Telarc. *A Window in Time.* CD, 1996. Catalog CD-80489.

WT2 = Telarc. *A Window in Time*. CD, 1996. Catalog CD-80491.

Bach, Johann Sebastian

Sarabande from Partita No. 4 in D, BWV 828			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 16, 1925	CVE 34143-3		CR, CD5, 1
December 22, 1925		66483	WT1, 11
Preludio from Violin Partita in E, BWV 1006, trans. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
August 1, 1935	CS 87284-3		MJA
August 1, 1935	unknown		RS, CD1, 9
February 27, 1942	PCS 072127-3		CR, CD7, 1
Gavotte from Violin Partita in E, BWV 1006, trans. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 27, 1942	PCS 072127-3		CR, CD7, 2
Gigue from Violin Partita in E, BWV 1006, trans. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 27, 1942	PCS 072127-3		CR, CD7, 3

Beethoven, Ludwig van

Violin Sonata in G, Opus 30, No. 3 (with Fritz Kreisler)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 22, 1928	multiple		CR, CD4, 1 - 3
March 22, 28, 1928	multiple		NXC, 4 – 6, alternate version
32 Variations in C minor, WoO 80			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 13, May 14, 1925	multiple		CR, CD5, 4 - 28
Turkish March, from *The Ruins of Athens*, Opus 113, arr. Anton Rubinstein			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording

December 14, 1925	BVE 39387-1		CR, CD7, 13
February 1, 1927		68771	WT2, 14

Bizet, Georges

Minuet from *L'Arlésienne Suite* No. 2, Opus 23, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 24, 1922	B 26134-3		CR, CD9, 11
April 6, 1922		61601	WT1, 15

Borodin, Alexander

Scherzo			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 23, 1935	BS 98394-1		CR, CD9, 11

Brahms, Johannes

Ballade, Opus 10, No. 2 (partial recording)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 5, 1931			SD, CD3, 5

Chopin, Frederic

Ballade No. 3, Opus 47			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 13, 1925	multiple		CR, CD6, 30
Mazurka in C sharp minor, Opus 63, No. 3			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 27, 1923	B 24644-8		CR, CD9, 1
Mazurka in A minor, Opus 68, No. 2			

Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 23, 1935	BS 98385-1		CR, CD6, 31
Nocturne in E flat, Opus 9, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 5, 1927	CVE 37465-3		CR, CD6, 27
Nocturne in F, Opus 15, No. 1			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 1, 1927		67673	WT2, 12
Nocturne in F sharp, Opus 15, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 27, 1923	C 27118-8		CR, CD9, 2
The Maiden's Wish, Opus 74, No. 1, arr. Liszt			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
November 13, 1923		62803	WT2, 8
February 27, 1942	PCS 072671-2		CR, CD5, 30
Return Home, Opus 74, No. 6, arr. Liszt			
February 27, 1942	PCS 072671-2		CR, CD5, 29
Scherzo No. 2, Opus 31			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 1, 1929		71173	WT2, 16
Scherzo No. 3, Opus 39			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1924	multiple		CR, CD9, 8
Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Opus 35			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 18, 1930	multiple		CR, CD6, 1 – 4
Waltz in E flat, Opus 18 "Grand valse brilliante"			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 21, 1921	C 24903-1		CR, CD9, 3
March 5, 1921		59743	WT2, 6

Waltz in F, Opus 34, No. 3 "Valse brilliante"			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
November 4, 1920	B 24639-4		CR, CD69, 4
April 13, 1923		63311	WT2, 9
Waltz in A flat, Opus 42 "Two-four"			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 18, 1919	6731-A		NX4, 1
April 18, 1919	6731-C		NX4, 2
Waltz in D flat, Opus 64, No. 1 "Minute"			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 2, 1921	B 24192-3		CR, CD9, 5
April 5, 1923	B 24192-5		CR, CD9, 9
Waltz in C sharp minor, Opus 64, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 5, 1927	BVE 24645-5		CR, CD6, 28
Waltz in A flat, Opus 64, No. 3			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 19, 1919	6736-A		NX4, 7
April 19, 1919	6736-B		NX4, 8
April 19, 1919	6736-C		NX4, 9
April 5, 1927	BVE 37455-6		CR, CD6, 29
Waltz in B minor, Opus 69, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
October 24, 1923	B 23962-11		CR, CD9, 6
Waltz in G flat, Opus 70, No. 1			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 2, 1921	B 24904-3		CR, CD9, 7
Waltz in E minor, Opus Posth.			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 18, 1930	BVE 59415-3		CR, CD6, 32

Daquin, Louis-Claude

Le Coucou			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
October 21, 1920	B 24635-2		CR, CD9, 10

Debussy, Claude

Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 21, 1921	B 24906-1		CR, CD9, 19
Goliwogg's Cakewalk			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 21, 1921	B 24906-1		CR, CD9, 20

Dohnányi, Ernst von

Etude in F minor, Opus 28, No. 6			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
October 26, 1921	B 25652-6		CR, CD9, 16

Gluck, Christoph Willibald

Mélodie, from Orfeo, arr. Sgambati			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 14, 1925		64921	WT2, 3
May 14, 1925	BVE 31558-4		CR, CD5, 37

Grieg, Edvard

Waltz from *Lyric Pieces,* Opus 12			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
October 12, 1921	B 23963-4		CR, CD9, 14
Elfin Dance from *Lyric Pieces,* Opus 12			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
October 12, 1921	B 23963-4		CR, CD9, 15
Violin Sonata in C minor, Opus 45 (with Fritz Kreisler)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
September 14, 15, 1928	multiple		CR, CD4, 8 – 10

Handel, George Frideric

Air and Variations "Harmonious Blacksmith"			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 3, 1936	CVE 98393-3		CR, CD5, 2

Henselt, Adolf

Si Oiseau J'étais, Opus 2, No. 6			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
November 13, 1923		62971	WT2, 1
December 27, 1923	B 28691-5		CR, CD9, 17

Kreisler, Fritz

Liebesfreud, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 22, 1925		66143	WT1, 6
December 29, 1925	multiple		CR, CD7, 5

February 26, 1942	PCS 072133-1		CR, CD5, 42
Liebesleid, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
October 25, 1921	C 25653-5		CR, CD10, 9
April 6, 1922		62103	WT1, 7

Liszt, Franz

Ballade No. 2, S. 171 (partial recording)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 5, 1931			SD, CD3, 5
Gnomenreigen, S. 145, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 16, 1925	BVE 34146-3		CR, CD5, 36
Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2, S. 244 (cadenza by Rachmaninoff)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 22, 1919	6739-C		NX4, 10
April 22, 1919	6740-C		NX4, 11
April 22, 1919	6741-C		NX4, 12
Polonaise No. 2, S. 233			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 13, 1925	multiple		CR, CD5, 33

Mendelssohn, Felix

Etude in F, Opus 104b, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 5, 1927	BVE 37453-4		CR, CD5, 38
Etude in A minor, Opus 104b, No. 3			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording

April 5, 1927	BVE 37454-4		CR, CD5, 39
Spinnerlied, Opus 67, No. 4			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
November 4, 1920	B 24646-2		CR, CD9, 13
March 5, 1921		59661 (re-released as 71521)	WT2, 5
April 28, 1928	BVE 24646-21		CR, CD5, 34
Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 23, 1935	CS 87283-6		CR, CD9, 18

Moszkowski, Moritz

La Jongleuse, Opus 54, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 6, 1923	B 27109-7		CR, CD9, 18

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus

Sonata in A, K. 331, 1. *Theme and Variations*			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 18, 1919	6732-A		NX4, 3
April 18, 1919	6732-C		NX4, 4
Sonata in A, K. 331, 3. *Rondo alla Turca*			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
May 14, 1925	BVE 24638-6		CR, CD5, 3

Mussorgsky, Modest

Hopak from *Sorochintsy Fair*, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 5, 1921		60641	WT1, 16
April 13, 1925	BVE 25108-10		CR, CD7, 10

Paderewski, Ignace Jan

Minuet in G, Opus 14, No. 1			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 1, 1927		68283	WT2, 13
April 5, 1927	CVE 24651-5		CR, CD5, 41

Rachmaninoff, Sergei

Barcarolle, Opus 10, No. 3			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57604	WT1, 5
April 24, 1919	6743-A		NX5, 1
April 24, 1919	6743-B		NX5, 2
April 24, 1919	6743-C		NX5, 3
Bublichki (Bagels), private recording accompanying friends			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
Circa 1942			SD, CD3, 4
Daisies, Opus 38, No. 3, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048184-2		CR, CD8, 10
Elegie, Opus 3, No. 1			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 4, 1928		69253	WT1, 4

Etude-Tableau in C, Opus 33, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048182-2		CR, CD8, 8
Etude-Tableau in E flat, Opus 33, No. 7			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048183-2		CR, CD8, 9
Etude-Tableau in B minor, Opus 39, No. 4			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 27, 1928		69593	WT1, 9
Etude-Tableau in A minor, Opus 39, No. 6			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 5, 1921		60891	WT1, 17
December 16, 1925	BVE 34156-1		CR, CD7, 8
Humoresque, Opus 10, No. 5			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57965	WT1, 18
April 9, 1940	BS 048175-2		CR, CD8, 14
Lilacs, Opus 21, No. 5, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 6, 1922		61761	WT1, 2
December 27, 1923	B 24123-9		CR, CD10, 6
February 26, 1942	PCS 072132-1		CR, CD8, 15
Mélodie, Opus 3, No. 3			
March 17, 1919		57545	WT1, 8
April 9, 1940	BS 048174-4A		CR, CD8, 12
Moment Musical in E flat minor, Opus 16, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048176-1		CR, CD8, 16
Oriental Sketch			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording

March 18, 1940	BS 048185-2		CR, CD8, 11
Piano Concerto No. 1, Opus 1			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 4, 1939, February 24, 1940	multiple		CR, CD2, 1 - 3
Piano Concerto No. 2, Opus 18			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 3, December 22, 1924	multiple		NX6, 13 – 16, Additional take of first movement
April 10, 13, 1929	multiple		PA, two versions, including additional take from third movement
Piano Concerto No. 3, Opus 30			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 4, 1939, February 24, 1940	multiple		CR, CD1, 4 - 6
Piano Concerto No. 4, Opus 40			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 20, 1941	multiple		CR, CD2, 4 - 6
Polichinelle, Opus 3, No. 4			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57905	WT1, 11
March 6, 1923	C 24643-2		CR, CD10, 7
Polka de V. R.			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57275	WT1, 12
April 24, 1919	6744A		NX5, 4
April 24, 1919	6744B		NX5, 5

April 24, 1919	6744C		NX5, 6
October 12, 1921	C 25651-2		CR, CD10, 8
April 4, 1928	CVE 25651-6		CR, CD7, 7
Polka Italienne (private recording with Natalia Rachmaninoff)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
Circa 1938			SD, CD3, 3
Prelude in C sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57504	WT1, 1
April 24, 1919	6742A		NX4, 13
April 24, 1919	6742C		NX4, 14
October 14, 1921	B 25650-3		CR, CD10, 3
April 4, 1928	B 25650-23		CR, CD7, 9
Prelude in G minor, Opus 23, No. 5			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57525	WT1, 13
May 17, 1920	C 23984-4		CR, CD10, 1
Prelude in G flat, Opus 23, No. 10			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048177-1		CR, CD8, 4
Prelude in E, Opus 32, No. 3			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048178-1		CR, CD8, 5
Prelude in G, Opus 32, No. 5			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
May 3, 1920	C 23985-1		CR, CD10, 4
Prelude in F minor, Opus 32, No. 6			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048179-2		CR, CD8, 7
Prelude in F, Opus 32, No. 7			

Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 18, 1940	BS 048179-2		CR, CD8, 6
Prelude in G sharp minor, Opus 32, No. 12			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 21, 1921	B 24642-5		CR, CD10, 2
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Opus 43			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 24, 1934	multiple		CR, CD2, 7 - 32
Sérénade, Opus 3, No. 5			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
November 4, 1922	B 27110-5		CR, CD10, 5
April 13, 1923		62441	WT1, 14
January 3, 1936	BS 98396-3		CR, CD8, 13
Symphonic Dances, Opus 45, private demonstration to unknown audience			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 20, 1940			SD, CD1, 1 - 6

Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolai

Flight of the Bumblebee from *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 1, 1929		70301	WT1, 3
April 16, 1929	BVE 51085-1		CR, CD7, 12

Rubinstein, Anton

Barcarolle No. 5 in A minor, Opus 93			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 1, 1929		69893	WT2, 2

Saint-Saëns, Camille

The Swan, from *Carnival of the Animals*, arr. *Siloti*			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 30, 1924	B 31557-1		CR, CD9, 12

Scarlatti, Domenico

Pastorale in E minor, arr. *Tausig* after *Sonata, K. 9 / L. 413*			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 19, 1919	6735A		NX4, 5
April 19, 1919	6735C		NX4, 6

Schubert, Franz

Das Wandern, D. 795, No. 1, arr. Liszt			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
January 14, 1925		64561	WT2, 10
April 14, 1925	BVE 31564-4		CR, CD5, 31
Impromptu in A flat, D. 899, No. 4			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 29, 1925	CVE 34144-5		CR, CD5, 35
March 27, 1928		69373	WT2, 15
Ständchen, D. 957, No. 4, arr. Liszt			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 27, 1942	PCS 072138-1		CR, CD5, 32
Violin Sonata in A, D. 574 (with Fritz Kreisler)			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 20, 1928, December 21, 1928	multiple		CR, CD4, 4 – 7
Wohin?, D. 795, No. 2, arr. Rachmaninoff			

Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 19, 1925	BVE 34145-7		CR, CD7, 6
December 22, 1925		65771	WT1, 10

Schumann, Robert

Carnaval, Opus 9			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 9, 10, 12, 1929	multiple		CR, CD6, 5 - 26
Der Kontrabandiste, Opus 74, No. 10, arr. Tausig			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 27, 1942	PCS 072137-1		CR, CD5, 40

Scriabin, Alexander

Prelude in F sharp minor, Opus 11, No. 8			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 16, 1929	BVE 51806-1		CR, CD7, 16

Strauss II, Johann

Man lebt nur einmal (One lives but once), Opus 167, arr. Tausig			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 5, 1927	CVE 37466-1		CR, CD7, 17

Smith, John Stafford

The Star Spangled Banner, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57282	WT1, 19

Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich

Humoresque, Opus 10, No. 2			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
December 27, 1923	B 28690-4		CR, CD9, 22
Lullaby, Opus 16, No. 1, arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 26, 1942	PCS 072131-1		CR, CD7, 11
Troika, from *The Seasons*, Opus 37, No. 11			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
March 17, 1919		57914	WT2, 4
May 3, 1920	C 23983-1		CR, CD9, 21
April 11, 1928	CVE 23983-8		CR, CD7, 15
Waltz in A flat, Opus 40, No. 8			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
April 5, 1923	B 27117-3		CR, CD9, 23
April 13, 1923		62531	WT2, 7

Traditional

Powder and Paint (with Nadezhda Plevitskaya), arr. Rachmaninoff			
Date	Matrix	Piano Roll	Recording
February 22, 1926	BVE test-1		CR, CD7, 18

Appendix B

Lost Piano Recordings

This appendix lists the works which Rachmaninoff is known to have recorded, according to the Victor studio logs, but for which no surviving take has been yet discovered. Such takes have most likely been destroyed.

Discovery of any of these recordings would be incredibly exciting for Rachmaninoff scholarship, and pianists at large, and so we here list the works. Primary sources for this list include the Discography provided in the October 1966 issue of the *American Record Guide* (ARG),[323] as well as detailed transcription of Victor studio logs in Martyn's work.[324]

[323] *The American Record Guide*, October 1966, 159 – 165.
[324] B. Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (London: Ashgate, 1990), 453.

Beethoven, Ludwig van

Piano Sonata No. 6 in F, Opus 10, No. 2. 3: *Presto*	
Date	Matrix
May 13, 1920	B 23961

Chopin, Frederic

Etude in F (unspecified)	
Date	Matrix
May 17, 1920	B 24116
Etude in F minor (unspecified)	
Date	Matrix
May 17, 1920	B 24116
Etude in G flat, Opus 10, No. 5	
Date	Matrix
May 3, 1920	B 23982
May 17, 1920	B 23964
Etude in G flat, Opus 25, No. 9	
Date	Matrix
May 3, 1920	B 23964
Mazurka in A minor (unspecified)	
Date	Matrix
December 23, 1935	BS 98395
Prelude in E flat (unspecified)	
Date	Matrix
December 27, 1923	B 29223

Debussy, Claude

Serenade of the Doll, from *Children's Corner*	
Date	Matrix
January 21, 1921	B 24902

Liszt, Franz

Au bord d'une Source, from *Années de Pèlerinage*	
Date	Matrix
January 21, 1921	B 24902
Liebestraum in A flat, S. 541, No. 3	
Date	Matrix
May 18, 1924	C 2967
Rhapsodie Espagnole, S. 254	
Date	Matrix
December 27, 1923	B 29224
"La Campanella" from *Grande études de Paganini*, S. 141, No. 3	
Date	Matrix
May 5, 1920	C 23986

Mendelssohn, Felix

Rondo Capriccioso, Opus 14	
Date	Matrix
May 17, 1920	B 24117

Rachmaninoff, Sergei

Etude-Tableau in G, Opus 33, No. 8	
Date	Matrix
October 21, 1920	B 24650

Schumann, Robert

Novelette in F, Opus 21, No .1	
Date	Matrix
February 25, 1942	PCS 072125-6

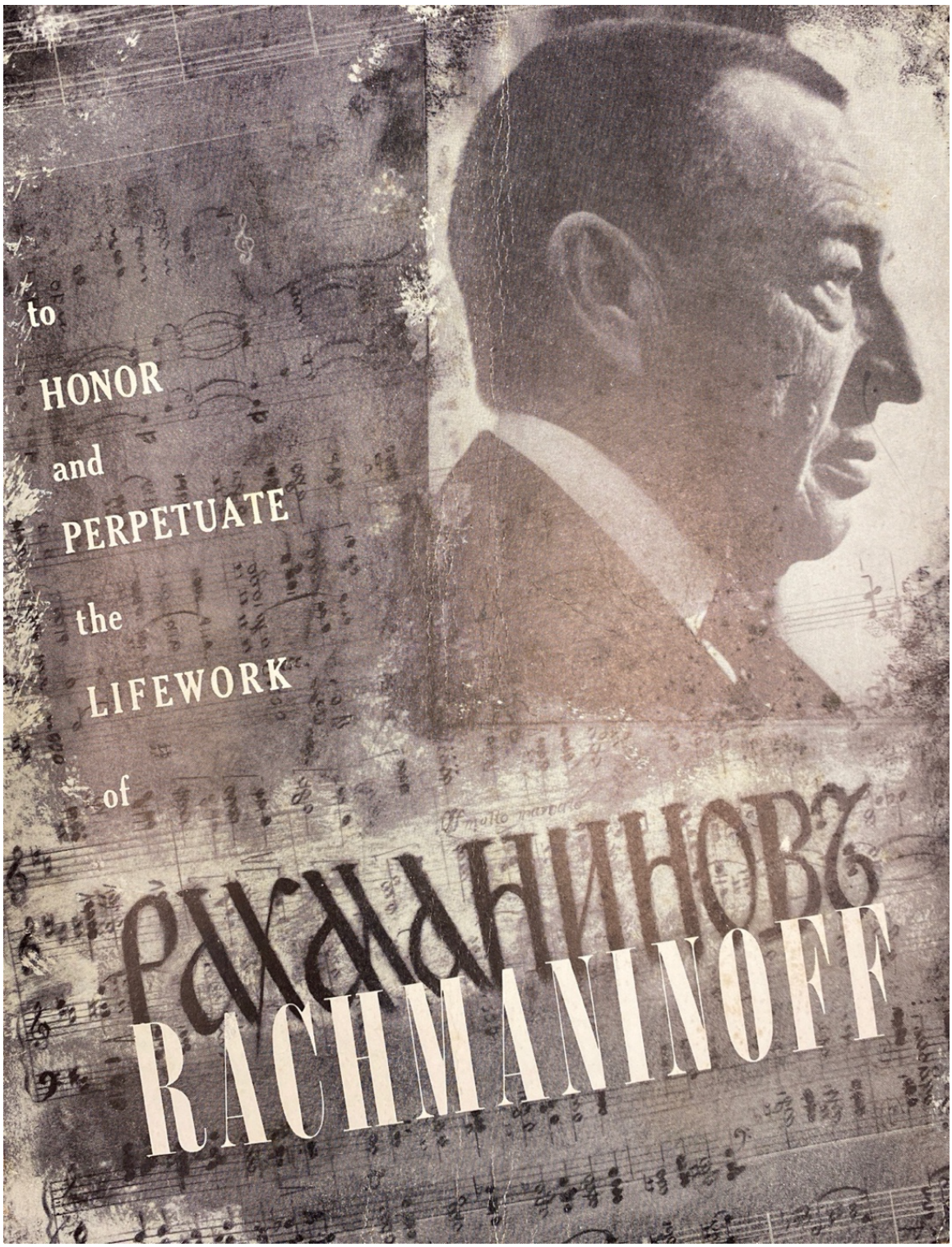
Strauss, Johann

Waltz on the Blue Danube, arr. Schulz-Evler	
Date	Matrix
April 5, 1923	C 27732

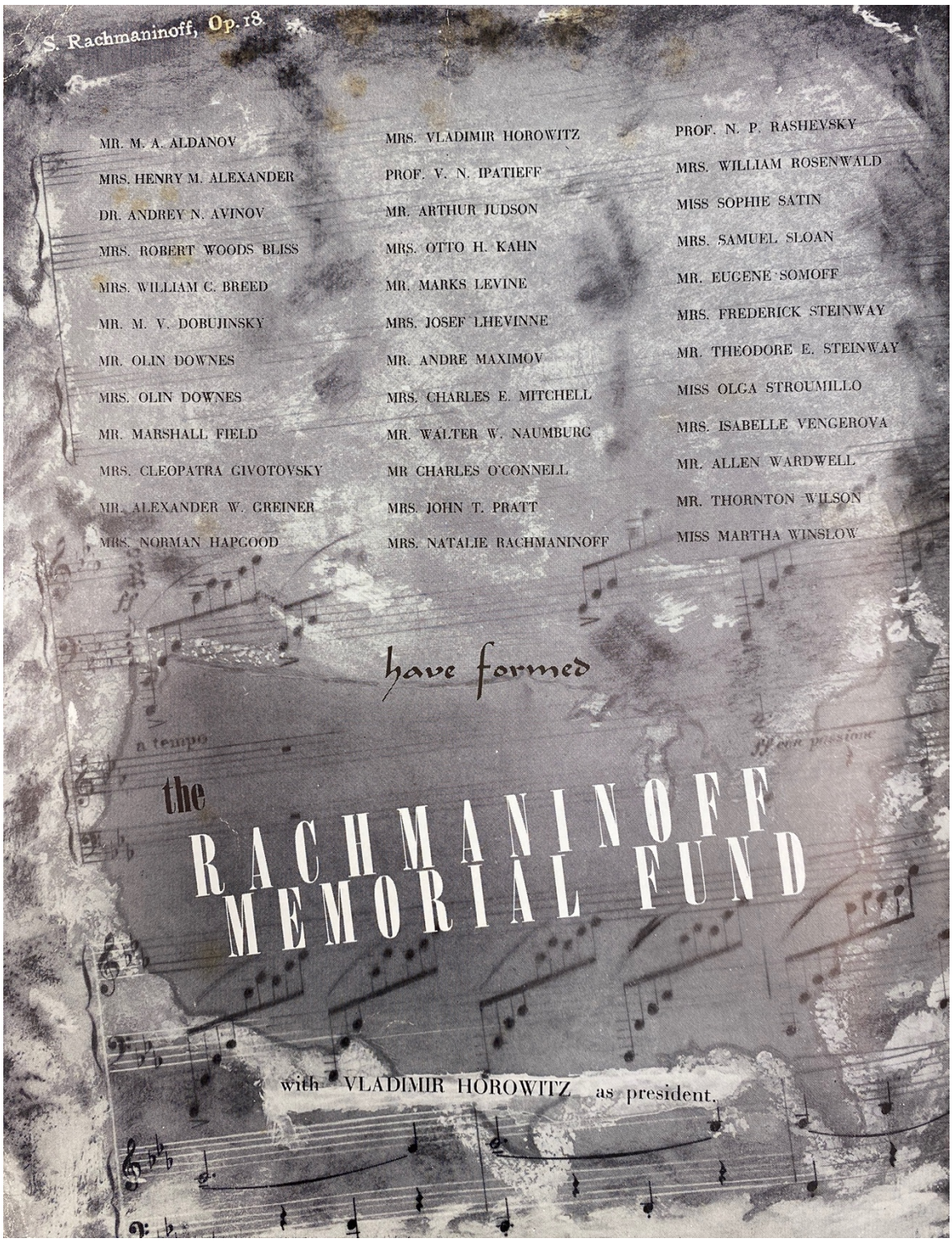
Appendix C

The Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund Booklet

The following eight scans are of the booklet produced upon the composer's passing in 1943. The booklet referenced here is to be found in the *Thomas L. Dixon Collection* at the International Piano Archives at Maryland.



The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Front page.



The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Inner page.

The purpose is to discover and encourage exceptional talent in the three fields in which Rachmaninoff was eminent: pianist, conductor and composer; and to help effect cultural interchanges and understandings between the peoples of Russia and America.

Rachmaninoff, as pianist, revealed a titanic mastery of the keyboard; as conductor, he interpreted with evocative power; as composer, he strikingly embodied characteristics of the Russian genius. In each capacity he served with humbleness, nobility and exacting reverence.

The man, as the artist, had grandeur. In the years of revolution his sensitive mind could not come to peace with Russia. But when evil, monstrous and soul-destroying, fell upon the land of his fathers, he did not isolate himself. He took a stand and helped. In the crucible of his spirit bitternesses vanished, and in the crisis which confronted not only Russia, but civilization and the very existence of art, he listened only to the call of humanity. The Soviet Union reciprocated by instituting festivals in his honor.

Such acts kindle the imagination, and the Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund desires to keep that spirit alive.

The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Inner page.

In making and executing its plans the
RACHMANINOFF MEMORIAL FUND
will have the benefit of the advice and the co-operation of:

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who constitute the
ARTISTS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Inner page.

The plan is to hold nationwide contests for pianists, and later for conductors and composers.

The contests will be held biennially, beginning with pianists, and will be open to candidates between the ages of 17 and 25, excepting for candidates who have served with the armed forces, whose age limit will be 28.

The award will be a season's tour of concerts and appearances with the leading orchestras of America.

The conditions will be rigorous, since the Society purposes to keep Rachmaninoff's standards in force, and thus to maintain the tradition of great piano playing.

Detailed conditions for the contests will be given special announcement.

The Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund desires to obtain the approval of the Soviet Government for a tour of Russia by the winner of the contest, following the American debut. It also hopes to interest the Soviet Union in establishing contests of similar purpose in Russia, whereby the winner would tour America under the sponsorship of the Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund at the same time that the American winner is in Russia.

The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Inner page.

Special provisions of the Society exclude domination by any individual or group who might seek to use it for self-interested objectives.

Rachmaninoff's integrity impressed everyone who had any contact with him. His lifework enhanced in thousands of listeners their sense of beauty. His art gave so much joy to so many people that some may be moved to aid an undertaking which will provide a well-planned opportunity for young musicians to prove their worth and may well afford to future audiences the thrilling experience of witnessing the advent of great interpreters of great music.

The Rachmaninoff Memorial Fund, Inc., is supported by voluntary contributions only.

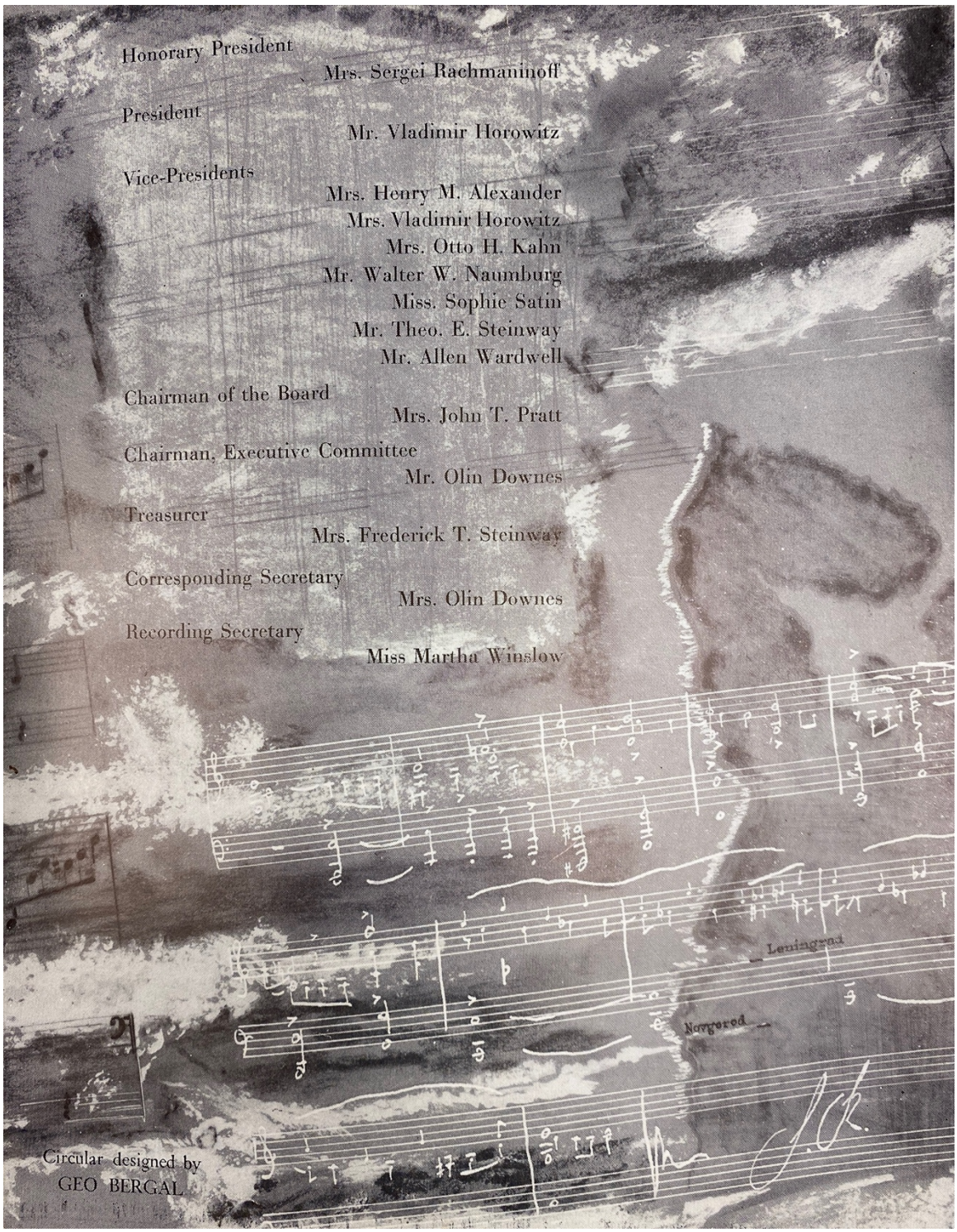
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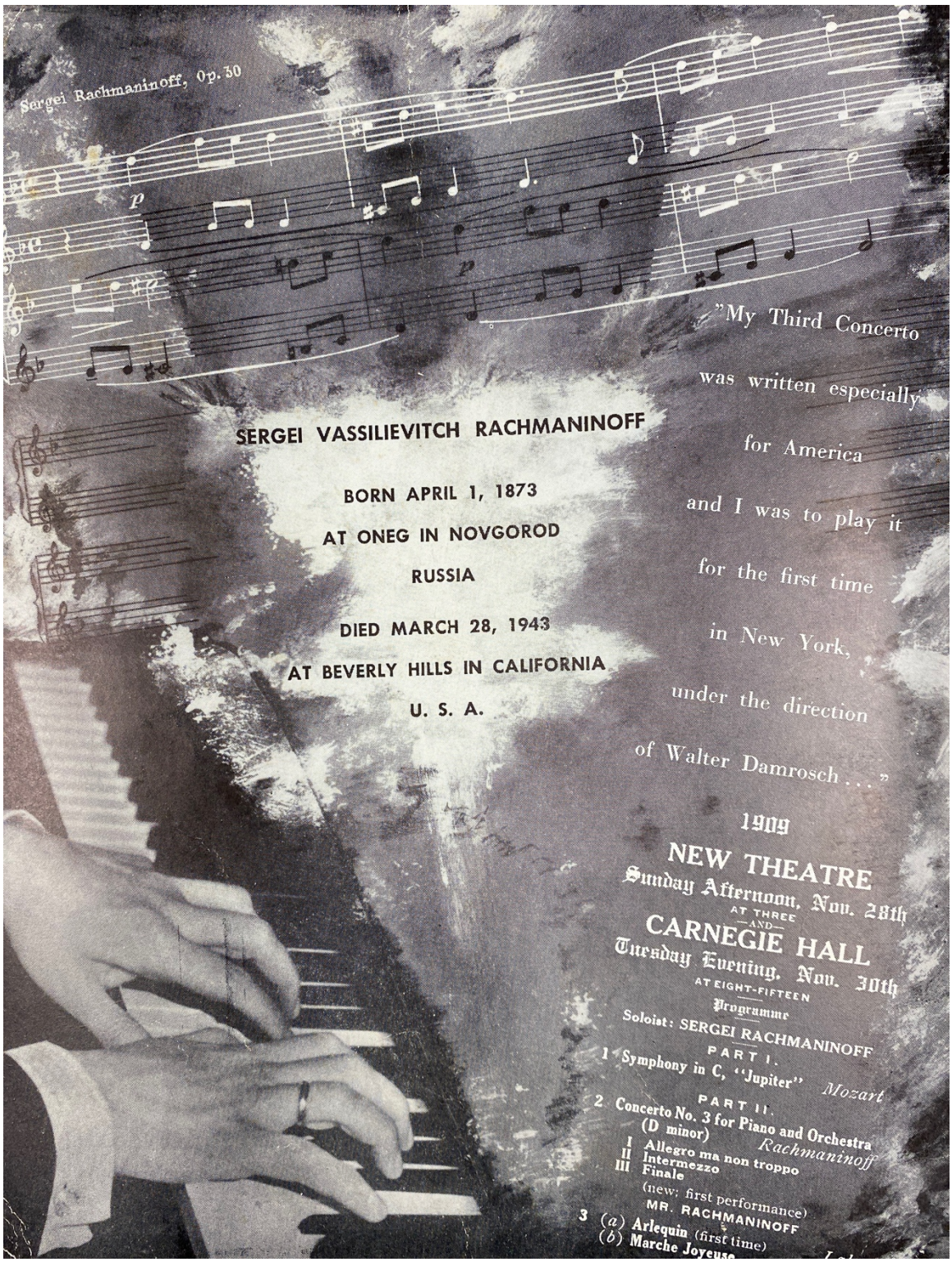
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The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Inner page.



The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Inner page.



The Rachmaninoff Fund Booklet. Back page.

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