

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE BREADTH OF CHOPIN'S INFLUENCE ON  
FRENCH AND RUSSIAN PIANO MUSIC OF THE  
LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

Jasmin Lee, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2015

Dissertation directed by: Professor Bradford Gowen  
School of Music

Frederic Chopin's legacy as a pianist and composer served as inspiration for generations of later composers of piano music, especially in France and Russia. Singing melodies, arpeggiated basses, sensitivity to sonorities, the use of *rubato*, pedal points, and the full range of the keyboard, plus the frequent use of character pieces as compositional forms characterize Chopin's compositional style. Future composers Claude Debussy, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, Nikolai Medtner, Gabriel Faure, and Maurice Ravel each paid homage to Chopin and his

legacy by incorporating and enhancing aspects of his writing style into their own respective works. Despite the disparate compositional trajectories of each of these composers, Chopin's influence on the development of their individual styles is clearly present. Such influence served as one of the bases for Romantic virtuoso works that came to predominate the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century piano literature.

This dissertation was completed by performing selected works of Claude Debussy, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, Gabriel Faure, Nikolai Medtner, and Maurice Ravel, in three recitals at the Gildenhorn Recital Hall in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center of the University of Maryland. Compact Disc recordings of the recital are housed in the University's Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library.

**The Breadth of Chopin's Influence on French and Russian  
Piano music of the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

By  
Jasmin Lee

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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Advisory Committee:  
Professor Bradford Gowen, Chair  
Professor Denny Gulick, Dean's Representative  
Professor Rita Sloan  
Professor Mayron Tsong  
Professor Gran Wilson

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## **RECITAL PROGRAM- First Dissertation Recital**

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. 2:00 PM  
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center,  
College Park, University of Maryland

Jasmin Lee, Piano  
Fanny Nemeth-Weiss, Cello

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (1910)  
Étude 6 pour les huit doigts (1915)  
La fille aux cheveux de lin (1910)  
Feux d'artifice (1913)

Arabesque No.1 (1891)

L'isle Joyeuse (1904)

### **INTERMISSION**

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano, Op.19 (1901)

- *Lento-Allegro moderato*
- *Allegro scherzando*
- *Andante*
- *Allegro mosso*

## **RECITAL PROGRAM- Second Dissertation Recital**

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014. 5:00 PM

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

Jasmin Lee, Piano  
Nadezhda Christova, Piano

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Sonata No.4 (1903)

- *Andante*

- *Prestissimo volando*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Images Book I (1905)

- *Reflets dans l'eau*

- *Hommage à Rameau*

- *Mouvement*

## **INTERMISSION**

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Concerto No.2 in C Minor, Op.18 (1901)

- *Moderato*

- *Adagio sostenuto*

- *Allegro scherzando*

## **RECITAL PROGRAM- Third Dissertation Recital**

April 4th, 2015. 5:00 PM

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

Jasmin Lee, Piano

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Prelude Op.11 No.2 in A Minor (1896)

Prelude Op.11 No.8 in F-Sharp Minor (1896)

Prelude Op.11 No.16 in B-Flat Minor (1896)

Etude Op.2 No.1 in C-Sharp Minor (1887)

Prelude Op.11 No.1 in C Major (1896)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Nocturne No.13 in B Minor, Op. 119 (1921)

Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)

Fairytale Op. 26 No.1 in E-Flat Major (1912)

### **INTERMISSION**

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Gaspard de la Nuit (1908)

-*Ondine*

-*Le Gibet*

-*Scarbo*



**RECORDING TRACK LISTING**  
**First Dissertation Recital- CD 1**

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

[CD 1, Track 1] Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (1910)

[CD 1, Track 2] Étude 6 pour les huit doigts (1915)

[CD 1, Track 3] La fille aux cheveux de lin (1910)

[CD 1, Track 4] Feux d'artifice (1913)

[CD 1, Track 5] Arabesque No.1 (1891)

[CD 1, Track 6] L'isle Joyeuse (1904)

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano, Op.19 (1901)

[CD 1, Track 7] - *Lento-Allegro moderato*

[CD 1, Track 8] - *Allegro scherzando*

[CD 1, Track 9] - *Andante*

[CD 1, Track 10] - *Allegro mosso*

**RECORDING TRACK LISTING**  
**Second Dissertation Recital – CD 2**

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Sonata No.4 (1903)

[CD 2, Track 1] - *Andante*

[CD 2, Track 2] - *Prestissimo volando*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Images Book I (1905)

[CD 2, Track 3] - *Reflets dans l'eau*

[CD 2, Track 4] - *Hommage à Rameau*

[CD 2, Track 5] - *Mouvement*

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Concerto No.2 in C Minor, Op.18 (1901)

[CD 2, Track 6] - *Moderato*

[CD 2, Track 7] - *Adagio sostenuto*

[CD 2, Track 8] - *Allegro scherzando*

**RECORDING TRACK LISTING**  
**Third Dissertation Recital – CD 3**

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

- [CD 3, Track 1] Prelude Op.11 No.2 in A Minor (1896)
- [CD 3, Track 2] Prelude Op.11 No.8 in F-Sharp Minor (1896)
- [CD 3, Track 3] Prelude Op.11 No.16 in B-Flat Minor (1896)
- [CD 3, Track 4] Etude Op.2 No.1 in C-Sharp Minor (1887)
- [CD 3, Track 5] Prelude Op.11 No.1 in C Major (1896)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

- [CD 3, Track 6] Nocturne No.13 in B Minor, Op. 119 (1921)

Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)

- [CD 3, Track 7] Fairytale Op. 26 No.1 in E-Flat Major (1912)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Gaspard de la Nuit (1908)

- [CD 3, Track 8] -*Ondine*

- [CD 3, Track 9] -*Le Gibet*

- [CD 3, Track 10] -*Scarbo*

## **PROGRAM NOTES**

### **Background on Frederic Chopin**

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) is considered to be by many, one of the most influential composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout his life, he was innovative in his musical style and pushing the boundaries of piano technique in his time. Born in Żelazowa Wola, Poland, he was a child prodigy at the piano. As a pianist, he began to tour across Europe, and, due to war, left Poland for Paris, France in 1831, never to return. For the remainder of his life, Chopin yearned for his native country, and this yearning found itself drawn into his compositions. His works are strewn with Polish folk rhythms, dances, and forms.

Chopin's largest compositional output was for piano, an instrument which allowed his strengths as a composer to be most clearly noticed. One of Chopin's innovations was pushing the limits in testing virtuosity and high technical demands that were not mainstream in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote two sets of twelve Etudes, Op. 10 and Op. 25. Each etude addresses a specific technical issue, but unlike other study pieces written in his time, Chopin's etudes also serve as musical, performable works. Thus, Chopin "concertized" the etude, creating a technically functional work that was also sufficiently rich musically, to be performed in concerts on its own, or in a set. (oxford) Previous composers including Johann Cramer, Carl

Czerny, and Muzio Clementi also wrote technical exercises that strengthened the virtuosic technique of the pianist, but such works lacked the artistic substance required of concert pieces.

Chopin was also innovative in his 24 Preludes, Op.28. He gives a new definition of what a prelude is. His preludes do not precede a work, like Bach's Preludes and fugues, however they are the first preludes that are "cycle of self-contained pieces", where each of the works can be stand alone pieces, getting rid of the assumption that small works are not substantial, neglected. <sup>1</sup>

Chopin also wrote pieces in new and different genres, such as the nocturne, ballades, scherzi, Polish dances (mazurkas, polonaises), and waltzes. These new genres, which came to be called character pieces, were relatively short, single movement works that capture a specific scene or mood. <sup>2</sup> Character pieces became a staple in early- to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century European musical culture, due to the rising popularity of the piano, and the availability of the instrument in middle class homes. While requiring both technical facility and musical depth to perform well, these character pieces were also generally accessible to the amateur musician, thereby

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Chopin, Fryderyk Franciszek," accessed April 10, 2015, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51099?q=chopin&search=quick&pos=2&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51099?q=chopin&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit).

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Characteristic Piece," accessed April 20, 2015, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05443?q=character+piece&search=quick&pos=2&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05443?q=character+piece&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit).

increasing their popularity. Stylistically, these pieces typically consisted of a lyrical, singing melodic line juxtaposed against some type of bass accompaniment. For example, in a nocturne, the bass line would likely be flowing arpeggios, whereas in a mazurka, polonaise, or waltz, it would be some sort of dance rhythm. Chopin's style, largely arising from these character pieces, became characterized by his beautiful phrasing and bel canto style of writing and playing.:

“Chopin's advice was, that this theory [of musical declamation] should be grounded upon the rules which guide vocalists, and that it should be perfected by hearing good singers” as quoted in – Chopin: pianist and teacher, as seen by his pupils by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger.<sup>3</sup>

The only duo instrumental chamber works that Chopin wrote are for cello and piano. The first is a very early work, the Introduction and Polonaise Brillante op.3, while the second is the final work he would see published before his death, a four-movement Sonata in g minor op.65. Other instrumental works include two piano concerti, op.11 in e minor and op.21 in f minor, and a piano trio, op.8 in g minor. While these works are scored for different instrumentation and span his compositional career, they still feature the lyrical lines that define his writing style.

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ed., *Chopin as Seen by His Pupils: Pianist and Teacher*, trans. Naomi Shohet, Krycia Osostowicz, and Roy Howat Dr. (1989: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 44.

The development of Chopin's writing style correlates to the development of the piano as an instrument. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the piano was being re-worked to include features unseen in any previous keyboard instrument. For example, the addition of pedals, specifically the damper pedal, allowed composers in this time period to write with a completely new palette of sounds and colors. Unlike works by composers of the previous generation, a great number of Chopin's works include pedal points that sustain throughout several phrases, made possible by the damper pedal. In addition, the damper pedal allowed him to write piano music that included a much more active bass line, as figures such as the Alberti bass were no longer necessary to sustain the harmony throughout a phrase.

Although Chopin's music was not overtly programmatic, the accessibility to a new sound world through the damper pedal allowed him to create specific moods and scenes to go along with his music. This variety in mood and color often manifested in his character pieces, particularly the nocturne, which in connection with the night, evokes a certain sense of both calm and melancholy.

This ability to manipulate color and touch on the piano also allowed Chopin to explore *legato* writing, just as the *bel canto* era of opera was finding strong footing.

In fact, Chopin's writing style "tried to give the impression of human breathing"<sup>4</sup>, and his melodic lines were meant to highlight "intense legato, long phrases"<sup>5</sup>.

Chopin's piano writing thus became linked to a singing, *cantabile* style made possible by the innovations to the piano. In performance, this style highlighted vocal *rubato*, the "push and pull of tempo, and emphasizing certain notes in the melody, or dissonances, while keeping a pulse"<sup>6</sup>. One example of Chopin's works that incorporates his use of pedaling, mood setting, and a singing melodic line with *rubato* is his Nocturne in Db major op.27 no.2. The melody sits over an arpeggiated bass line filled with leaps. Despite the rather fragmented bass, however, the pedal points for the harmony often last an entire measure or more. Additionally, Chopin utilizes runs in the melodic line that create *rubato* by stretching the bass line underneath it.

In addition to mood and color, the newly-developing piano also allowed Chopin to experiment with different textures. For example, he wrote music that was intended to imitate the sounds of water. With regard to his Etude op. 25 no.1, Chopin described it as "a shepherd getting shelter in a cave from an approaching storm.. he gently plays the melody on his flute.. while you can hear wind and rain

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, ed., *Chopin as Seen by His Pupils: Pianist and Teacher*, trans. Naomi Shohet, Krysia Osostowicz, and Roy Howat Dr. (1989: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Eigeldinger, 50-51.



approaching.”<sup>7</sup> In this instance, the rolling piano texture imitates the oncoming rain. Chopin’s contemporaries, such as Alfred Hopkins, described the inner arpeggios as swelling up and down like waves in the ocean.<sup>8</sup>

Chopin’s writing style, directly informed by the many new capabilities of the piano, played a large part in influencing the musical output of future composers. Particularly, French and Russian composers of the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries drew heavily upon Chopin’s piano music.

### **Claude Debussy (1862-1918)**

Claude Debussy is considered to be the closest heir to Chopin’s tradition<sup>9</sup>. Some of his major solo piano compositions include two books of twelve preludes each, two book of six etudes each, two *Arabesques*, *Images* Book I and II, *L’isle Joyeuse*, and *Estampes*. Such works mirror Chopin’s output: most are single-themed character pieces, and the etudes’ musical substance allows them to be readily concertized.

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<sup>7</sup> Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin (Cambridge Companions to Music)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 247.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Paul Badura-Skoda, “Chopin's Influence,” in *The Chopin Companion: Profiles of the Man and Musician*, ed. Alan Walker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 269

Like Chopin, Debussy was innovative in the way he created new sonorities and sounds. Much of Debussy's piano music is intended to imitate string playing, "as if he made it sound like the pianist was playing directly from the strings, without any hint of mechanism, of the hammer hitting the string."<sup>10</sup> Debussy was an avid performer of Chopin's music<sup>11</sup>. In addition, both Chopin and Debussy loved exploring the quieter sounds of the piano, and the effects of the instrument in that dynamic range. Marguerite Long, reminiscing Debussy's pianism as: "While floating over the keys with a curiously penetrating gentleness, he could achieve an extraordinary power of expression... There lay Debussy's individual technique: gentleness in a continuous pressure gave the color that only he could get from his piano."<sup>12</sup>

Arguably, Chopin's largest and most direct influence on Debussy was manifest in the latter composer's twelve etudes, which were dedicated to Chopin. Similar to Chopin's etudes, each etude by Debussy was intended to serve a specific, technical purpose. Debussy gave titles to each of the etudes outlining the pianistic goals for the works, for example "pour les tierces" (for thirds), "pour les sixtes" (for

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003), 180.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003), 181.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003), 178-9.

sixths), and “pour les huit doigts” (for eight fingers). Similarly, while Chopin did not title his works in such a manner, his etudes show similar pianistic goals: op.25 no.6, for instance, focuses on thirds, and op.10 no.7 focuses on sixths. Debussy’s etude “pour les huit doigts” specifically poses a new technical challenge, as the pianist is to play the work without using any thumbs. This work also deals with delicate passage work, along with a controlled use of the pedal (including use of the half pedal and the *una corda* pedal), and evenness of sound<sup>13</sup>. Thus, Debussy continues Chopin’s exploration of piano technique by addressing new technical challenges that arose from the continual development of the piano as an instrument. Besides finger technique, Debussy also continued to experiment with the use of the pedal, specifically regarding different pedal lengths, the use of *una corda*, and overall dramatic effect. For example, in the opening of *La cathédrale engloutie*, Debussy manipulates the pedal to create a very specific sunken *lontano* color that envelops the work.

Debussy’s prelude, *Feux d’artifice*, and his *L’isle Joyeuse*, display enormous amounts of technical difficulty. Like Chopin, Debussy wanted to create a delicacy and facility of playing, without any hardness of attack<sup>14</sup>. Specifically, *L’isle Joyeuse*

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003), 310.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003), 178.

creates a celebratory, joyous mood, as the title suggests, without any sort of physical struggle that the technicality of the work may indicate<sup>15</sup>. In addition, *Feux d'artifice* describes the explosions of rockets, and abounds with visual imagination, without reference to any technical struggle. Rather, such difficult passages are intended to create excitement and recreate the noises of an actual fireworks display, as indicated in the title. Other new innovative techniques, such as the black key glissando, only add to heighten the effect<sup>16</sup>.

Unlike Chopin with his works, Debussy gave *L'isle Joyeuse* a descriptive title. However, both composers used color and imagination as the inspirational basis of their works; in other words, Chopin's music is descriptive in spirit and intention, which Debussy emulated to create overtly descriptive works. *L'isle Joyeuse* is also comparable to Chopin's works in the sense that the slower middle section is comprised of a lyrical melody accompanied by an arpeggiated bass. (Example 1) The melody is akin to Chopin's *bel canto* style of piano writing<sup>17</sup>. Debussy also utilized polyrhythms between the two hands, such as his early work, *Arabesque* which sets two against three, much like Chopin often did in his works, for example in his *Fantasie-impromptu*. (Example 2) *L'isle Joyeuse* also presents technical challenges,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Paul Roberts, *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003), 108.

because the writing requires that the pianist have a strong independence between the hands. Finally, Debussy was influenced by the idea of pedal points found especially in Chopin's Barcarolle<sup>18</sup>. His use of the pedal point is particularly evident in ms. 67 in *L'isle Joyeuse* and ms. 30 of 'Mouvement' in Images Book I.

Example 1: *L'isle joyeuse*, Measures 67-70.



Example 2: *Fantasia-Impromptu*, Measures 6-7.



<sup>18</sup> Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge Companions to Music) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 258-9.

Debussy also experimented with the idea of the character piece, such as with his Images Book I. Though the exact title of Images was new, reflecting Debussy's fascination with imagery, the idea of a single-movement work that captures a scene was very similar to Chopin's conception of the character piece. The last movement, *Movement*, is very technical, almost an etude, allowing the genre of the character piece to transcend the amateur standing that it may have enjoyed during Chopin's time. In addition, passages in the first movement, *Reflets dans l'eau*, (Example 3) have similar right hand patterns to some of Chopin's etudes, specifically op.10 no.8 in F major. (Example 4) This movement is also comprised largely of black-key figurations, akin to Chopin's "Black Key" etude op.10 no.5. Debussy's penchant for using black keys also ties in with his exploration of the whole tone and pentatonic scales found in gamelan music. Like Chopin, he was attempting to create a certain mood and sound world using the developing capabilities of the piano.

Example 3: 'Reflets dans l'eau, Measure 24.



Example 4: Chopin Etude Op.10 No.8 in F major, Measures 4-5.



Debussy also took inspiration from Chopin with regard to setting tempi for different sections within a single musical work. For example, the final two works in his Images Book I ‘Hommage a Rameau’ and ‘Mouvement’ appear to have two very contrasting tempi, but are actually comprised of the same inner pulse, similar to Chopin’s c minor and E major nocturnes<sup>19</sup>. In addition, Debussy also utilizes pedal points and bass drones, such as in his orchestral work, *La mer*, similar to Chopin’s use of bass drones in his c# minor nocturne, op.27 no.1<sup>20</sup>. The specific inspirations for the drones differ between the two composers: Chopin likely found inspiration from the European bagpipes, while Debussy found his in the Indian *tambura*<sup>21</sup>. The underlying incorporation of non-classical influences in classical works, however, tie the two together with regard to this point.

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<sup>19</sup> Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (*Cambridge Companions to Music*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 262-4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff loved performing Chopin<sup>22</sup> and the latter's second sonata was a staple in his repertoire. In fact, Rachmaninoff himself is quoted as saying, "It seems somewhat astonishing that since the time of Chopin no master has arisen to enrich the literature of the piano in such magnificent manner... His exquisite sense of tone colour, his gorgeous harmonies and his always pianistic realization of the possibilities of the keyboard, make his works a kind of Bible for pianists." <sup>23</sup>

As in Chopin's case, war forced Rachmaninoff into exile from his home country (in the latter's case, the Russian Revolution in 1917), and, like Chopin, Rachmaninoff longed for his homeland for the remainder of his life. Both composers incorporated traditional and folk influences from their birthplaces in their works.

Rachmaninoff's cello sonata has many parallels with Chopin's written half a century previously. Rachmaninoff wrote the cello sonata for his friend, cellist, Anatoly Brandukov and dedicated the work to him<sup>24</sup>, much like Chopin did for his friend, Auguste Franchomme. Like Chopin's cello sonata, Rachmaninoff's is written

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<sup>22</sup> Andreas Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov (Haus Publishing - Life ×)* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005), XI.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov (Haus Publishing - Life ×)* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005), 95.

<sup>24</sup> Andreas Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov (Haus Publishing - Life ×)* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005), 41.



in g minor and organized into four movements: a first movement in sonata-allegro form, a scherzo movement, a slow movement, and a spirited finale that ends in the parallel major. The cello's melodic lines are expressive and lyrical, while the piano is extremely complicated and virtuosic<sup>25</sup>. Neither Chopin nor Rachmaninoff composed a large amount of chamber music, yet both cello sonatas remain major works in solo cello repertoire. Both pieces are equal in scope, and take approximately 30 to 35 minutes to perform.

Like Chopin and Debussy, Rachmaninoff utilized the form of the character piece in his solo piano works, and wrote several sets of preludes and, etudes, and some early nocturnes. In addition, Rachmaninoff also composed two piano sonatas and several concerti, again similar to Chopin's output. Stylistically, Rachmaninoff's piano concerti are similar to Chopin's in the sense that both composers favor lyrical, pianistic lines and very effective virtuosic passages that ride on top of a rich, orchestral texture.

### **Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)**

Alexander Scriabin's early musical output was heavily influenced by Chopin. His compositions up to his fourth piano sonata (1904) feature a highly romantic style in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century sense, which he later abandoned, preferring ambiguous tonal centers

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

and experimenting with atonality. Among his early works, the Op. 11 preludes, have the same number of preludes, 24, as well as the same structural organization as Chopin's set. Both sets are ordered such that they each begin with C major and its relative minor, then go through the circle of fifths in this manner. In addition, both sets are comprised of preludes that are relatively short in length, and can be played either individually, in smaller sets, or as an entire, large-scale work. Scriabin furthers Chopin's innovations into different harmonic worlds by exploring different key relationships, and profound use of chromaticism.

A direct correlation to Chopin can be found in Scriabin's prelude in B-flat minor op.11 no.16. (Example 5) The piece has a constant rhythmic motive, made up of a dotted-eighth note followed by a sixteenth note. This same motive serves as the basis for the theme in the funeral march of Chopin's second piano sonata, incidentally also in b-flat minor. (Example 6) In addition, the rhythmic ostinato found in the bass and alto lines of the prelude, doubled in both hands, is suggestive of the fourth movement of Chopin's second piano sonata, in which the entire movement is comprised of melodic doubling between the hands. This final movement of Chopin's sonata, the most controversial in Chopin's time, exhibits extremely chromatic writing, and does not settle or cadence until the very end of the piece, a departure from the rondo form used for the final movement of most sonatas. Yet, it fulfills a specific function of heightening the mysterious quality introduced to the work by the funeral

march in the second movement. This same mood is featured in Scriabin's prelude, as Scriabin's expressive marking for this prelude, is *mysterioso*, indicating that the piece is to emulate the same kind of mysterious, somber character found in a funeral march. In addition, the idea of the mysterious character is also shown through Scriabin's use of alternating meters, between 5/8 and 4/8, throughout the piece.

Example 5: Scriabin Prelude Op.11 No.16 in B-Flat Minor, Measures 1-2.



Example 6: Chopin Sonata No.2, Movement 3, Measures 1-2.



Such intricate similarities between the two works suggest that Scriabin used Chopin's second piano sonata as direct inspiration for this prelude.

### **Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)**

Medtner's Fairytale are musical manifestations of Russian folklore, and are inherently programmatic in nature. Medtner took Chopin's idea of the character piece and weaves them together to make large-scale, sonata-like narrative works. The Fairytale are most closely related to the ballades in all of Chopin's musical output, as both types of works strike up a narrative tone that is carried by a lyrical line<sup>26</sup>.

Medtner takes the idea of the narrative a step further than Chopin, however, and does

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Holt, ed., *Nikolai Medtner: A Tribute to His Art and Personality* (London: D. Dobson, 1955), 81.

“occasionally give the listener a tiny clue to the poetic subject in his mind”<sup>27</sup>. While not explicitly narrative, Chopin’s ballades are narrative in scope, and convey a sense of journey for the listener. Also similar to Chopin, Medtner uses “polyphonic, thematic, and rhythmic forms of expressions” on the piano to convey his musical ideas<sup>28</sup>. In his Op. 26 No.1 Fairytale, Medtner uses a song-like melody and a flowing arpeggiated accompaniment, similar to Chopin’s writing style. (Example 7)

Example 7: Medtner Fairytale Op.26 No.1, Measures 3-4.



### Gabriel Faure (1845-1924)

Faure wrote in the same compositional forms as Chopin, specifically, nocturnes, barcarolles, impromptus, and waltzes, for the piano<sup>29</sup>. Unlike the other

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Holt, 105.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Bricard, ed., *Faure: Selected Piano Works*, Alfred Masterwork Edition (n.p.: Alfred Music, 2007), 11.

composers featured on this dissertation, Faure was born when Chopin was still alive. Though Faure eventually became deaf, (perhaps explaining his later, extremely chromatic compositional style), his early works are focused on vocal literature, and, like Chopin, he wrote non-vocal works with a lyrical melody in mind<sup>30</sup>

Faure's predilection for vocal writing sets him apart from Chopin, whose output did not contribute significantly to the French song tradition. However, Chopin's *bel canto* style contributed to Faure's writing style, which consisted of lyrical melodic lines and extremely long phrases juxtaposed over an arpeggiated but fluid bass line<sup>31</sup>. Both composers shared a compositional feature, in which however rich or polyphonic their music was, it was basically a song and accompaniment.<sup>32</sup>

Example 8: Faure Nocturne No.13, Measures 63-65.



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<sup>30</sup> Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge Companions to Music) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 237.

<sup>31</sup> Bricard, 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> Samson, ed., 247.

### **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

Unlike his fellow countrymen, Debussy and Faure, Ravel's relationship to Chopin is much harder to trace<sup>33</sup>, however, he does have several harmonic and tonal links with Chopin (pg 268 cambridge). Perhaps most of the similarities between Ravel and Chopin can be found in the former's 'Ondine' from his large-scale work, *Gaspard de la nuit*. 'Ondine' tells the story of a water fairy who hopes to lure a bystander to the depths of the lake in which she resides<sup>34</sup>. The climax of the work (Example 9) is very similar to measure 30 of Chopin's etude op.25 no.1 (Example 10), both of which feature a flurry of arpeggios that turns into a shower of laughter before disappearing<sup>35</sup>. Both of these examples experiment with ideas of color and water-like texture in piano writing in order to evoke a sense of imagination and pianistic sound effects<sup>36</sup>.

Example 9: 'Ondine' from *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Measure 67.

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<sup>33</sup> Samson, ed., 268.

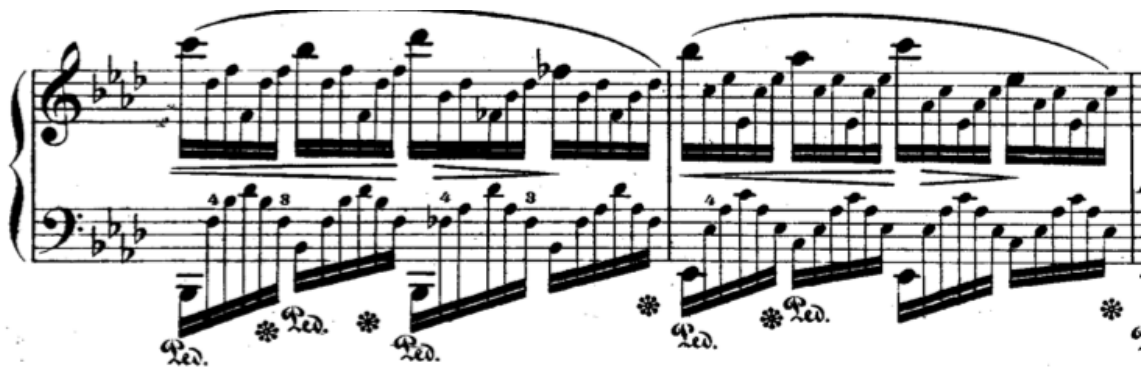
<sup>34</sup> Nancy Bricard, ed., *Ravel: Gaspard de La Nuit*, Alfred Masterwork Editions (n.p.: Alfred Music, 1990), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Samson, ed., 270.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Bricard, ed., *Ravel: Gaspard de La Nuit*, Alfred Masterwork Editions (n.p.: Alfred Music, 1990), 6.



Example 10: Chopin Etude Op.25 No.1, Measures 30-31.



In addition, Ravel (along with Debussy) is credited with early instances of the octatonic scale, however, Chopin was also somewhat of a pioneer<sup>37</sup>. For example, measure 77 of Chopin's Nocturne op.15 no.3 and measure 91 of the first movement of his second piano sonata feature instances of this scale. (Example 11) The latter

<sup>37</sup> Samson, ed., 275.



example also features rearrangement of chords of the same key, which Ravel takes further to create “strategic re-ordering” of the same chord, for instance, in measure 23 of the second movement of *Gaspard de la nuit*, ‘Le Gibet.’

Example 11: Chopin Piano Sonata No.2 in Bb Minor, Op. 35, first movement, Measure 91-92.



Example 12: ‘Le Gibet’ from *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Measure 23.



Finally, the sheer amount of virtuoso playing coupled with the delicacy of texture of sound found throughout *Gaspard de la nuit* finds roots in Chopin's writing style, which was the first to synthesize such extremes of piano playing to create an imaginative whole.

## Conclusion

Chopin's stylistic influences as a composer trickled down through several generations of western classical music composers. His ability to incorporate the many new features of the piano left a palpable mark on piano music. Pushing the limits of the piano and finding different sound world capabilities of the instrument served as a foundational compositional tenet for future composers of piano music. Each of the six composers above who succeeded Chopin took this compositional foundation and

developed unique styles. Though the styles, compositional techniques, and musical purpose ultimately differ among the six composers, their piano writing all shows links back to Chopin.

### Annotated Bibliography

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Badura-Skoda describes Chopin's influence in his musical style and pianistic technique on his successors. Examples of Debussy and Ravel are linked to Chopin.

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Bricard gives a detailed background in musical style, interpretation, and performance practices. She addresses his innovative melodic and harmonic language that distinguished him as a composer.

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This is a collection of documents edited by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, from friends and students who knew or studied with Chopin. They give a first-hand account to Chopin's style, technique, and interpretation.

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Roberts, Paul. *Images: the Piano Music of Claude Debussy*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003.

English Pianist, Paul Roberts, discusses the sources of Debussy's inspirations. Roberts goes into detail with many of Debussy's piano works, discussing technique, style, inspiration to gamelan music, impressionist paintings, and experimentation of sound on the piano.

Samson, Jim, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin (Cambridge Companions to Music)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

This book talks about Chopin's musical style, his use of "small forms", such as nocturne, preludes, and etudes, use of Polish dance forms. It also goes into detail about Chopin's influence on future composers.

Wehrmeyer, Andreas. *Rachmaninov (Haus Publishing - Life x)*. London: Haus Publishing, 2005.

This book chronologies Rachmaninoff's life and his compositional works during each period of his life. It provides a personal connection linking Rachmaninoff the man, and his music.