

“Mystical” Motivation: Introducing Scriabin to the Advancing Pianist

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Introduction

Frequently heard in today’s concert halls, the music of Russian pianist and composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) captivates audiences with its soaring melodies and vivid musical coloring. The lush harmonic language, including the famed “Mystic Chord,” infused with romantic ideals create a unique sound landscape that is unmistakably Scriabin.

Although much of his piano repertoire demands mature technical skills and musicianship, Scriabin’s early phase of composition (1880’s-1903) offers several Preludes appropriate for teaching the advancing pianist. This survey hopes to explore Scriabin’s most accessible solo piano compositions from his early phases, identify potential technical challenges, and encourage teachers to incorporate Scriabin’s music in their studios.

Early Phase Piano Compositions

- Preludes Op. 2, Op. 11, Op. 13, Op, 15, Op, 16
- Preludes Op. 17, Op. 22, Op. 27
- Etudes Op. 8
- Piano Sonatas No. 1, 2 and 3

Prelude in B Major, Op. 2/2

- Level 8*
- Compact length of 17 measures
- Predominantly triplets in RH with quarter pulse in LH
- Two against three occurs only once
- Finger substitution required



*Leveling suggestions are from Jane Magrath’s *A Pianist Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*

Prelude in D-flat Major, Op. 11/4

- Level 8
- Compact length of 24 measures
- Repetition
- RH accompaniment and LH melody
- Set in 6/4 time
- Melody alternates between duple and triplet figures



Prelude in D-flat Major, Op. 11/15

- Level 8
- Compact length of 28 measures
- Melody and accompaniment is alternate between hands
- Moments of melodic syncopation
- Opportunity to teach redistribution between hands
- Lento tempo marking of eighth note equalling 76-80



Prelude in G Major, Op. 13/3

- Level 8
- Parallel unison melody introduction
- RH melody with LH steady quarter accompaniment
- LH accompaniment is either a 6th or octave throughout
- Sensitive pedaling needed



Prelude in E Major, Op. 11/9

- Level 9
- Compact length of 36 measures
- Chordal RH requires careful voicing
- Lyrical LH accompaniment with chromaticism and leaps
- Frequent use of rubato markings
- Sensitive pedaling and finger substitution required



Pianistic Characteristics

- Widely spaced writing
- Sensitive pedaling
- Melodic leaps
- Irregular rhythmic groupings
- Frequent use of 4ths

Level 8

- Prelude in B Major, Op. 2/2 (from Trios Morceaux)
- Prelude in E Minor, Op. 11/4
- Prelude in D-flat Major, Op. 11/15
- Prelude in G Major, Op. 13/3

Level 9

- Prelude in A Minor, Op. 11/2
- Prelude in E Major, Op. 11/9
- Prelude in G-flat Major, Op. 16/3

References

Hinson, Maurice. *Guide to the Pianist’s Repertoire*. Blumington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Magrath, Jane. *A Pianists Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 1995.

Scriabin, Alexander. *Selected Works for the Piano*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 2002.