

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **The Evolution of Rachmaninov's Pianistic Style from 1892 to 1941 as Seen in Selected Original Works and Transcriptions for Piano**

Alexei Gulenco, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2008

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Unlike some other major composer-pianists (Franz Liszt and Alexander Scriabin being the most notable examples), Sergei Rachmaninov did not experience any dramatic changes in his compositional style; one can, however, notice certain stylistic differences between piano works composed during different periods of his long creative life. This dissertation argues that a clear evolution of Rachmaninov's pianistic style through his three creative periods can be traced by examining a selection of his compositions, from his first significant cycle for piano, *5 Morceaux de fantaisie*, Op. 3 (1892), all the way through to his last piano work, a transcription of P.I.Tchakovsky's *Lullaby*, Op. 16, No. 1 (1941).

Rachmaninov's life as a composer can be divided into three periods. His early period was ended abruptly by the disastrous premiere of his First Symphony in 1897, which caused a deep psychological crisis in the life of the young composer. Piano works of this period are often characterized by relatively simple homophonic texture,

when Rachmaninov was clearly influenced by some of his Russian predecessors, most notably Tchaikovsky. His second and most productive period, also known as the period of “Russian maturity,” started in 1900, when he began working on the Second Suite for two pianos, Op. 17, and the Second Concerto, Op. 18; this phase ended with the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Works of this time exhibit a mature style of piano writing, with rich, virtuosic – often considered excessive by many critics – texture and ever-increasing use of chromatic harmonies. Rachmaninov’s works of the third period are limited in number owing to the composer’s preoccupation with a career as pianist. Original works for piano now give way to revisions of earlier compositions and transcriptions: Rachmaninov’s piano writing becomes more efficient and economical without losing any of its virtuosic brilliance.

This dissertation project examines in detail, over the course of three piano recitals, a variety of works composed during the “Russian maturity” period, from several *Preludes* from Op. 23 (1903), the first major cycle for solo piano of the period, to 9 *Études-Tableaux*, Op.39 (1917), the last one; the early period is represented by 3 of 5 *Morceaux de fantaisie*, Op. 3 (1892), while the late period is shown through several piano transcriptions and revised versions of the remaining 2 pieces from Op. 3.

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By

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