THE INFLUENCE OF CHOPIN IN PIANO MUSIC ON THE TWENTY-FOUR PRELUDES FOR PIANO, OPUS 11 OF ALEXANDER SCRIBIN.

D.M.A Document

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Music Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2002

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This document discusses how Chopin's influence marked a point of departure in Scriabin's compositional style. I will identify in particular the similarities between Chopin's works and Scriabin's 24 Preludes, Op. 11, by the following categorization: Form, Melody, Harmony, Texture, Rhythm, and Pianistic difficulty. Scriabin's early style may be described as Chopinesque. Because of this borrowed style, Scriabin's early works are frequently overlooked. This study conducts a critical examination of Scriabin's early works, specifically his 24 preludes, Op. 11, in the context of Chopin's influence, and discusses the possible implications of their common pianistic style. This document contains three chapters and a conclusion: Chapter 1, biography of Alexander Scriabin; Chapter 2, historical background of Scriabin's Preludes; Chapter 3, the similarity of stylistic characteristics between Chopin and Scriabin's piano preludes, Op. 11.
Dedicated to those

loved ones

who have prayed

for me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the guidance, encouragement, and support of Professor Steven Glaser. Thanks to Professor Glaser I was able to expand the range of my musical imagination and experience during my years as a doctoral student. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Kenneth Williams, who was gracious enough to instruct me in the class piano teaching. In addition, I would like to thank the members of my committees: Dr. William Conable and Dr. Arved Ashby. I owe also my deepest gratitude to my previous teachers, Dr. Steven Smith and Dr. Mie Ja Ahn. I would not be able to accomplish my studies without the dedication of Dr. Smith. I am keenly aware of my debt to Dr. Ahn at the Ewha Women’s University in Korea, whose warm-hearted, patient, and positive teaching opened my eyes and ears to a new approach to playing the piano.

Finally, I extend to special thanks to my family, Dr. Salido’s family, Ms. Cathy Anderson, Ms. Rena Iwai,
and Ms. Perry Miller, who helped me with English writing style and grammar. I could never thank them enough for their constant love.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.......................................................iii
DEDICATION....................................................iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.............................................v
VITA............................................................vii

CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION.................................................1

1. BIOGRAPHY OF ALEXANDER SCRIBE#IN......................3

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SCRIBE#IN’S PRELUDES....14
   2.1 The first period (1886-1899).........................14
   2.2 The middle period (1900-1905)......................19
   2.3 The late period (1906-1914).......................25

3. THE SIMILARITY OF STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS
   BETWEEN CHOPIN AND SCRIBE#IN’S PIANO PRELUDES,
   Op. 11....................................................30
   3.1 Form....................................................31
      3.1.1 Through-composed in a single section......32
      3.1.2 One-part form..................................32
      3.1.3 Two-part form..................................33
      3.1.4 Ternary form...................................33
   3.2 Harmony................................................34
      3.2.1 Diatonic tonality................................35

viii
3.2.2 Tonal ambiguity.......................... 37
3.2.3 Chromaticism.............................. 39

3.3 Melody.................................... 44
3.3.1 Vocal style............................... 44
3.3.2 Repetition................................ 46
3.3.3 Ornamentation............................ 50
3.3.4 Octave-doubling.......................... 51

3.4 Texture.................................... 53
3.4.1 Inner voicing............................. 53
3.4.2 Nocturnal style accompaniment.......... 56
3.4.3 Waltz style accompaniment............... 57
3.4.4 Repeated chords.......................... 59
3.4.5 Octave passage........................... 60

3.5 Rhythm.................................... 62
3.5.1 Tempo marking............................ 62
3.5.2 Rubato.................................. 63
3.5.3 Mazurka rhythm........................... 65
3.5.4 Polyrhythm................................ 66
3.5.5 Multimeter................................ 67
3.5.6 Syncopation............................... 69
3.5.7 Ostinato.................................. 71

3.6. Pianistic difficulty....................... 72
3.6.1 Rapid leaps in wide register............ 72
3.6.2 Widely ranging bass figuration........... 74
3.6.3 Tone color................................ 75
3.6.4 Pedaling.................................. 82

CONCLUSION................................... 89

BIBLIOGRAPHY.................................. 91
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Scriabin, early period preludes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Scriabin, middle period preludes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Scriabin, late period preludes</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF EXAMPLES

2.1.1  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 16, No. 1, mm. 4-7...17
2.1.2  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 13, No. 4, mm. 17-20..17
2.1.3  Chopin, Etude Op. 10, No. 11, mm. 1-3.....18
2.1.4  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 15, No. 3, mm. 1-2...18
2.2.1  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 27, No. 1, mm. 1-6....20
2.2.2  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 31, No. 1, mm. 1-25...21
2.2.3  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 48, No. 1, mm. 1-6...22
2.2.4  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 37, No. 4, mm. 1-2...23
2.2.5  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 49, No. 2, mm. 1-3...23
2.3.1  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 74, No. 3, mm. 4-7...27
2.3.2  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 59, No. 2, mm. 8-11...27
2.3.3  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 74, No. 1, mm. 6-9...28

3.2 HARMONY
3.2.1  Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 1, mm. 7-11.....36
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 1, mm. 1-2....36
3.2.2  Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 2, mm. 1-4.....38
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 18, mm. 1-5...39
3.2.3  Chopin, Nocturne Op. 15, No. 3, mm. 69-80...40
       Chopin, Mazurka Op. 30, No. 40, mm. 129-32...40
       Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 21, mm. 41-44...41
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 9, mm. 6-10...41
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 22, mm. 13-17...42
       Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 6, mm. 1-3.....42
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 4, mm. 5-8...42
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 17, mm. 1-4...43

3.3 MELODY
3.3.1  Chopin, Nocturne Op. 27, No. 1, mm. 43-45...45
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 5, mm. 1-2....45
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 13, mm. 1-6...45
3.3.2  Chopin, Scherzo Op. 31, No. 2, mm. 665-94...46
       Chopin, Ballade Op. 38, No. 2, mm. 1-4, 7-9...47
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 7, mm. 1-17...47
       Chopin, Sonata Op. 58, 3rd mvt, m. 1, m. 17...48
       Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 22, mm. 1-26...49
       Chopin, Sonata Op. 35, No. 2, mm. 37-46...49

xi
3.3.3  
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 5, mm. 13-14...51
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 23, mm. 18-20.51

3.3.4  
Chopin, Etude Op. 25, No. 10, mm. 107-08...52
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 20, mm. 9-11.52

3.4  TEXTURE

3.4.1  
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 8, mm. 1-2......54
Chopin, Nocturne Op. 15, No. 2, mm. 25-27...55
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 11, mm. 4-7...55

3.4.2  
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 13, mm. 1-3......57
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 13, mm. 28-31.57
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 8, mm. 1-4......57

3.4.3  
Chopin, Waltz Op. 34, No. 2, mm. 125-28.....58
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 2, mm. 25-28..58
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 17, mm. 5-6...58

3.4.4  
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 4, mm. 1-3......59
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 15, mm. 18-21.59
Chopin, Polonaise Op. 26, No. 2, mm. 111-13.60
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 14, mm. 22-24.60

3.4.5  
Chopin, Polonaise Fantasie Op. 61, m.266......61
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 18, mm. 39-42.61

3.5  RHYTHM

3.5.2  
Chopin, Nocturne Op. 9, No. 3, mm. 80-81....64
Chopin, Nocturne Op. 32, No. 1, mm. 18-20...64
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 17, mm. 1-2...65
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 22, mm. 20-28.65

3.5.3  
Chopin, Mazurka Op. 59, No. 1, mm. 7-12......66
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 2, mm. 59-65..66

3.5.4  
Chopin, Etude Op. Posthumous, No.2 mm. 1-4..67
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 8, mm. 33-35..67

3.5.5  
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 16, m. 1......69
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 24, m. 1......69
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 21, mm. 1-3...69

3.5.6  
Chopin, Rondo Op. 5, mm. 181-85............70
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 4, mm. 18-19..70

3.5.7  
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 19, mm. 1-3...71
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 24, mm. 1-4....71

3.6  PIANISTIC DIFFICULTY

3.6.1  
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 17, mm. 34-39...73
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 10, mm. 13-16.74

3.6.2  
Chopin, Ballade Op. 52, No. 4, mm. 156-58...75
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 11, mm. 35-39.75

3.6.3  
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 15, mm. 1-4....77
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 2, mm. 1-4...77
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 17, mm. 1-2...78
Chopin, Berceuse Op. 57, mm. 1-6............78
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 21, mm. 23-26.79
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 23, mm. 1-2...79
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 23, mm. 1-2.....80
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18, mm. 1-2.....81
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 6, mm. 35-39..81
Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 16, mm. 19-20...83
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 7, mm. 10-12..84
Chopin, Andante Spianato Op. 22, mm. 5-8....85
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 11, mm. 23-26.85
Chopin, Polonasie Op. 53, mm. 100-103.......86
Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 24, mm. 29-32.86
INTRODUCTION

The majority of Scriabin’s compositions are written for the piano. His 213 piano works demonstrate his compositional evolution from a Chopin-like style to an original style involving innovative ideas, breaking away from traditional harmony, and amplifying his own philosophy through music. Scriabin’s early piano pieces (Op. 1-26), which precipitated in the stylistic transition evident in his later works, display the most significant influence of Chopin. Scriabin’s early works (1872-1900) are exclusively for the piano; his style is as pianistic as Chopin’s style—written to suit the pianistic abilities of the composer. Even titles used during the early period are virtually identical to those used by Chopin: a set of twelve etudes, Op. 8 (1894), a set of twenty-four preludes, Op. 11 (1888-96), waltzes, nocturnes, mazurkas, impromptus, and a polonaise. This first period (1886-1900) exhibits a firm grasp of the Romantic compositional technique.
No study has shown the influence of Chopin in particular on Scriabin’s piano preludes, although there are a number of analyses of Scriabin’s preludes and sonatas. This document will examine and focus specifically on the piano preludes, Op. 11, and draw comparisons to Chopin’s works to discover what their common pianistic style implies.
CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY OF ALEXANDER NIKOLAEVICH SCRIBABIN

This chapter comprises a brief biography of Alexander Nikolaevich Scriabin. The historical information in this chapter is drawn from existing sources: the chapter on Scriabin compiled by Jonathan Powell in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2001); The New Scriabin by Faubin Bowers (1973); and Skryabin by Hugh Macdonald (1978). Alexander Nikolaevich Scriabin (1872-1915) was born on December 25, 1871 in Moscow. In later years, he would attach mystical importance to this date, viewing himself as the Messiah. The only child in his family, Scriabin inherited his musical talent from his mother, a pianist who had won a gold medal winner at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and was the most exceptional student of Theodore Leschetizky. Shortly after giving birth to Nikolai, Scriabin’s father, entered the Diplomatic
service, serving as an ambassador and coming home to see
the young Scriabin only on brief occasions. Due to the
absence of his parents, Scriabin was doted upon by his
aunt and grandmother. He became their sole reason for
living. His aunt Lyubov, who was twenty years old when
Scriabin was born, remained unmarried to care for him.
Aunt Lyubov made the following statement:

From the moment Shurinka—I always called him that—
entered the world, my memory is vivid. I am now
seventy [1922] and my mind often fails me, but when
I recollect my life, that day of his birth springs
to my head...all the strength of my love for the
other members of my family fastened onto him alone.
I even forgot that I was young and that I could
still bear a child of my own. Whenever a proposal
of marriage was expressed, I had only to take a
look at that infant and realize that I would be
separated from him. I could not face such
loneliness, however rosy the future might
seem.2

It is quite evident that Scriabin’s childhood and
adolescence were set in a feminine and overprotective
environment.

In spite of regular attendance at concerts by the
Russian Musical Social Society and operas at the
Bolshoi, Scriabin’s musical interest centered primarily
on the piano. He had an acute ear, and his aunt was
astonished to listen to the five-year old Scriabin sit
down at the piano and immediately reproduce what he had
heard. His aunt took him to Anton Rubinstein, who evaluated Scriabin’s gifts as excellent, especially his improvisation. However, Scriabin entered the Cadet Corps at the age of ten in preparation for a military career; nevertheless he continued playing the piano and found time to compose. At the age of twelve, Scriabin began serious composition studies with his music theory lessons with Sergei Tanayev. In 1883, Scriabin had formal piano lessons with Georgi Conus, who was a theorist at the Moscow Conservatory. A carriage accident in 1884 left him with a broken collarbone and a temporarily incapacitated right arm. During his recovery he forced himself to practice his left hand exclusively, developing incredible dexterity. In 1886, Scriabin was accepted as a student of Nikolai Zverev, the famous pedagogue who taught prospective students at the Moscow Conservatory. Scriabin entered the conservatory in January 1888. Weekly performances were required of each Zverev student in front of invited audiences that included personages such as Tchaikovsky and Dostoyevsky. Performance under pressure became second nature to Scriabin. His musical expression, which at age eleven had already blossomed in the
melancholy of the d-minor Canon, was allowed free reign only in his composing, and the rest of his daily routine consisted of rules, regulations, and pressure. Scriabin’s years at the conservatory were fruitful. To Scriabin, Vassily Safonov, the senior piano instructor at the Moscow Conservatory, was both a teacher and an inseparable friend. As a former Leschetizky student, he had known Scriabin’s mother. Scriabin became his favorite pupil particularly for his remarkable pedaling. Scriabin also had continued composition studies with Tanayev, who was deeply imbued with the influence of Chopin; he was even labeled “Russia’s Chopin.” A bout of jealousy of his colleagues—especially of Josef Lhevine’s technique—inspired Scriabin’s summer 1891 attempt to learn all of the Beethoven sonatas, Liszt’s Don Juan Fantasia, and Balakirev’s Islamey. He injured his right hand severely, causing temporary paralysis. As a result he had to abandon hopes of a career as a pianist. His letter to his sweetheart Natalya Sekerina states that God had destroyed his goal of worldly fame and glory. In later years he would refer to this injury as the most serious event of his life. His sonata, Op.
6 in f-minor, is autobiographical in this regard, with its unrelenting seriousness and dolor.

Recovery from this injury was slow. Scriabin used the time to practice his left hand alone, developing an extraordinary technique that would characterize nearly all his compositions. The hand injury, Natalya’s rejection of his marriage proposal, and a general lack of understanding from his teachers and fellows may have contributed to his subsequent introversion.

At the age of twenty he found a publisher, the Jurgenson publishing firm in Moscow, for his early compositions. These early works were mostly short pieces, mazurkas, nocturnes, preludes, and were firmly rooted in diatonic harmony, which demonstrated the influence of Chopin. In 1894, M.P. Belyayev, the wealthy publisher, took on Scriabin’s works and established Scriabin’s recital tour of his own works in Russia and Western Europe.

Three years later, Scriabin married Vera Isakovich (1875-1920), a brilliant pianist at the Moscow Conservatory who collaborated with him in his recitals. She was the fourth woman to whom Scriabin had proposed marriage. However, Scriabin regretted his marriage. In
1898, he was invited to join the composition faculty at the Moscow Conservatory and resided there until 1903 as the youngest professor. This was a particularly unproductive period of his life during which he only composed only two symphonies. The lack of time for composing, the drudgery of teaching at the Conservatory, and mounting disappointment with his marriage were all sources of frustration for Scriabin. In 1903, Scriabin left his family for Tatyana Schloezer, a former pupil. Their relationship apparently encouraged his musical creativity, and he composed approximately forty new piano pieces from Op. 30 to 42, which possibly reflect the intense sensuality of this relationship. From 1903 until 1909, Scriabin went on extensive tours of Europe and the United States.

His resignation from the Conservatory in 1903 allowed him to focus his attention on finding a more personal idiom in his. Preoccupied since his student years with ideas of extreme self-significance, he became very interested in the writings of Nietzsche and other philosophers. In 1905 he accepted theosophy, the mystical movement founded in New York in 1875 and led by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Finally Scriabin
proclaimed he was the God Almighty, and that everything which existed did so through his own consciousness. He described himself in these words: “I am the magician of a powerful heavenly harmony, lavishing caressing dreams on mankind...I am the apotheosis of world creation, the aim of aims, the end of ends.” He began calling the creative force within himself “the God.” Scriabin imagined his role as a world Messiah, as the vehicle through whom God would change the world. He freely borrowed from the ideas of Schopenhauer, Paulsen, Plato, Fouillee, Nietzsche, Trubetskoi, and theosophists in order to further validate his own ideas about himself. Scriabin states that “there will be a time when every person will skip from one pole of the earth to the other just to hear a pause in a composition of mine.” In 1906 the eminent scientist Serbsky declared that Scriabin was insane. The fact was that whatever the state of his mental health and in spite of his acute egomaniac, Scriabin functioned well in society, his music from this year onward became substantially more idiosyncratic and interesting, and the general pace of his life quickened dramatically.
After Belyayev’s death, Scriabin could get financial support from Margarita Morozova. Finally eight years and four children later, Scriabin lived with Tatyana Schloezer in Switzerland without a legal divorce from his wife. In Switzerland, Scriabin met many Russians in self-exile because of the 1905 revolutionary uprising. Scriabin claimed that his music had predicted the revolution. He had a naive view of political events, seeing them purely in artistic terms and in the light of his own world view with himself at its center. Years later, he commented with all seriousness that World War I was simply a necessary purifying of the world, which he had created.

In November 1906, Scriabin came alone to America to perform recitals in New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Cincinnati. In the following year Tatyana Schloezer arrived in America to accompany him, but a hasty press had revealed that Tatyana was not his legal wife. The couple was forced to return to Paris, where Scriabin gave a performance of the Piano concerto on a concert that also featured his third symphony.

In 1908 Scriabin met Serge Koussevitzky, who offered generous financial terms in return for the
publishing rights to Scriabin’s planned Mysterium, which was a manifestation of theosophy immersion and Scriabin’s belief in himself as the central axis around which several art forms would be united to form one complete expression. The Mysterium was to be performed in the span of seven days and a seven nights, including the sunsets and sunrises as part of the event: it would be a combination of the arts and the senses—music, dancing, poetry, colors, and aromas. This monumental combination of the arts, philosophy, and religion would take place in a temple in India with the Himalayan Mountains serving as a background, all mirrored in a large nearby lake. Scriabin declared, “There will not be a single spectator at this artistic event. All will be participants.” The remaining years of Scriabin’s life were spent preparation for it.

In Scriabin’s final years, his style began to solidify with the writing of the Poem of Ecstasy and the Fifth Piano Sonata, op. 53, which was one of the last Scriabin’s works to carry a key signature. Without using key signatures any longer, but with a strong reliance on traditional form, he began basing all
melodic and harmonic materials around a certain harmony
introduced from the Op. 59 works.

In 1910, Scriabin traveled to Brussels and worked on his last orchestral work, Prometheus: The Poem of Fire Op. 60 and used the opportunity to discuss his 'synthesis of the arts' philosophy. In 1912, Scriabin had broken his relationship with Koussevitzky, but immediately received another set of financial terms from the Jurgenson publishing firm.

He spent his final five years concertizing in both Russia and abroad. He drew many avid followers, particularly the symbolist poets, who met nightly at his apartment for philosophical discourse. He started yoga training and sat for hours on end in the sun, readying himself for the imagined heat of the Orient.

In 1915 Scriabin gave his last three piano recitals in St. Petersburg before undergoing unsuccessful operations on his upper lip to stem septicemia. He had begun some work on the score for the Mysterium—-which required an astounding seventy staff lines—-but his death in Moscow on April 27th 1915 left only a short piece and a few fragments of music in manuscript form his great project, The Mysterium.
Endnotes -- Chapter 1:

1 This is by the Julian calendar; by the Gregorian calendar, his birthday is on January 6, 1872.


4 Bowers. p. 47.


6 Bowers. p. 49.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SRIABIN’S PRELUDES

Scriabin composed piano preludes throughout his career, from the earliest set, Op. 2 to his final set of five preludes, Op. 74. These preludes demonstrate his compositional evolution from a Chopin-like style in his early preludes to an original style in his late works—embracing innovation, abandoning traditional harmony, and amplifying through music his own philosophy. As defined by the Russian critic Boris de Schloezer, Scriabin’s life is divided into three basic style periods.¹

The First Period (1886-1899)

The first period (1886-1899) is characterized by the influence of the Romantic idiom. From his youth Scriabin idolized Chopin. According to biographer A. Swan, during his days as a student Scriabin was so enamored with Chopin that he slept with the music of the
Polish master under his pillow. In Scriabin’s early twenties, devotees called him “a modern Chopin.”

Scriabin’s early Chopinesque titles reveal that Scriabin composed almost exclusively for the piano and used the same generic titles for pieces—nineteen mazurkas, thirteen etudes, nine impromptus, three waltzes, three nocturnes, and one polonaise. These genres are generally a continuation of pre-established styles, especially those of Chopin. In this respect Scriabin is linked to Chopin, who was interested only in creating pure piano music: both were initially pianistic composers. Scriabin composed forty-seven preludes in the first period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Age, Scriabin Opus</th>
<th>Work</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>17</td>
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Figure 2.1. Scriabin, early preludes

The set of 24 preludes, Op. 11 is regarded as the quintessential early Scriabin. The pieces were composed in the years 1888-1896, which Scriabin spent mostly as a
student at the Moscow Conservatory. During those years Chopin’s influence was very strong, evident first of all in Scriabin’s decision to produce a set of twenty-four preludes (Op. 11) which parallels the famous Op. 28 of Chopin. The key scheme of Scriabin’s Op. 11 resembles Chopin’s; this similarity will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Scriabin was influenced not only by the harmonic and rhythmic aspects of Chopin’s music, but by Chopin’s aesthetic ideals as well.

Chopin’s influence is clearly seen in Scriabin’s preference for miniature forms, which are one-part form, two-part form and ABA form in his early preludes. Following Chopin’s tradition, Scriabin’s chords are based on triadic structures and tonic-dominant harmonies. Another similarity is the use of chromatic and other non-harmonic tones.

The sustained vocal style of Chopin’s melodies is evident in the preludes Op. 16, No. 1 in B-Major, and Op. 22, No. 1 in g-sharp minor. [Example 2.1.1]

Scriabin’s early preludes have consistent textures, with steady accompaniment and melodies recalling Chopin. Interestingly enough, in this period Scriabin was not concerned with contrapuntal writing. One example is prelude Op. 13, No. 4 in e-minor. [Example 2.1.2]

Ex. 2.1.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 13, No. 4.

He was very skillful in using wide-ranged sonority to encompass the different registers of the piano by the sustaining pedal. An example of this in Scriabin
appears prelude Op. 15, No. 3 in E-Major, which is very similar to Chopin’s Etude, Op. 10, No. 11 in A-flat Major. [Example 2.1.3]

Ex. 2.1.3. Chopin, Etude Op. 10, No. 11.

Ex. 2.1.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 15, No. 3.
The Middle Period (1900-1905)

In the middle transitional period the Chopin influence diminished, and there emerged a more individual approach to the problems of harmony, tonality, and color. After 1900 Scriabin's style progressed in a new direction. Many critics have stated that the works from this period are most suggestive of the style of Liszt and Wagner. Although Scriabin continued to use the titles such as "prelude" or "étude" in this period, they no longer functioned as vestiges of the Chopin heritage. By this point in Scriabin's career, those titles and short forms were very much his own, an indelible signature of the developing Scriabin style. He composed twenty-three preludes during this middle period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Age, Scriabin</th>
<th>Opus</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Two Preludes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Four Preludes</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>45 #3</td>
<td>Four Preludes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Prelude</td>
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</table>

Figure 2.2. Scriabin, middle period preludes
Scriabin's second period preludes exhibit harmony leaning increasingly toward the chromatic and nonfunctional harmonies, thereby showing Wagnerian influence. Triads become less common due to the heavy chromaticism and the frequent use of seventh and augmented sixth chords which do not always resolve. The preludes from 1903, Opp. 31, 33, 35, 37, and 39 can be seen as a "sort of preparation for Scriabin's new harmonic system." The prelude, Op. 27, No. 1 in g-minor contains a great deal of chromaticism. An abundance of half-diminished seventh chords in bars 1-7 and augmented sixth chords in bars 9-22 are the prevalent sonority. [Example 2.2.1]

Ex. 2.2.1. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 27, No. 1.
The first measure of Op. 31, No. 1 in D-flat Major contains "Whole-step" chords which Hugh Macdonald calls the "Scriabin Sixths"; these consist of "an augmented triad with one of the additional whole-tone intervals added." The Scriabin sixths can be found on the beats of bars 1, 7, 19, and 25. [Example 2.2.2]

Ex. 2.2.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 31, No. 1.

The prelude in E-flat Major, Op. 45, No. 3 consists mostly of augmented sixth chords—French sixth and Scriabin sixth. Some of these augmented sixth chords resolve to triads, but many of them precede other augmented sixths. This lack of resolution tends to generate the obscure tonality. Scriabin begins to use in particular the tritone bass movement in Op. 48, No. 1 in F-sharp Major and No. 4 in C-Major. [Example 2.2.3]
Ex. 2.2.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 48, No. 1.

Works of the middle period exhibit denser texture and fuller sonorities through the use of arpeggiated chords and octave grace notes in the bass. The piano writing, involving thicker textures and greater use of octaves, reveals Liszt's influence: Liszt's orchestral piano style in particular, is recalled in the showy, virtuosic style (Op. 33, No. 4 in A-flat major, Op. 37, No. 2 in F-sharp Major), massive, wide-spread chords (Op. 33, No. 3 in C-Major, Op. 48, No. 1 in F-sharp Major and No. 4 in C-Major), and driving, impulsive musical character (Op. 37, No. 2 in F-sharp Major and 4, Op. 48, No. 1 in F-sharp Major). [Example 2.2.4]
Ex. 2.2.4  Scriabin, Prelude Op. 37, No. 4.

The Chopinesque melody of the first period disappears with the appearance of a fragmented style based on shorter motives. The examples are in the prelude Op. 27, No. 1 in g-minor, Op. 31, No. 4 in E-flat Major, Op. 33, No. 3 in C-Major, Op. 37, No. 4 in g-minor, Op. 48, No. 1 in F-sharp Major, and Op. 49, No. 2 in F-Major. [Example 2.2.5]

Ex. 2.2.5. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 49, No. 2.

Increasing intricacy in rhythmic textures through cross rhythms, syncopation, and shifting meters dominate
the middle period preludes.
The late Period (1906-1915)

In the late mature period of Scriabin, his compositions continue and expand the techniques previously established in the middle period. Scriabin no longer employs key signatures in his preludes, Op. 51, 59, 67, and 74. The idea of the "key," in the classical sense, becomes meaningless in most of his later preludes. Scriabin's self-significance had a profound effect on his music in the last period. In his search for a more eloquent means of musical expression, Scriabin became deeply interested in sonorities spaced in fourths, especially those featuring the tritone, resulting in his invention of what was later dubbed the "Mystic Chord." Hull points out that Scriabin creates a certain new chord best suited for a desired expression of particular feelings, and evolves the whole composition out of this one extended harmony. Also significant in his decision to use the mystic chord was the traditional avoidance of the tritone; it therefore offered a previously unexploited harmonic resource.
Celebrating his novel harmonic vocabulary, ten preludes of the last period thus point in a new musical direction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Year</th>
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<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>59 #2</td>
<td>Prelude</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Two Preludes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Five Preludes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3. Scriabin, late period preludes

Scriabin uses non-diatonic harmonies in the last period preludes. A whole-tone pentachord is employed throughout the entire piece in Op. 67, No. 1. The pitch content of Op. 74, No. 3 illustrates a harmonic ambiguity which contains transpositions and enharmonic spellings of the Mystic Chord.

Counterpoint also assumes great importance in Scriabin’s final works. A rather strict four-part contrapuntal setting is maintained throughout the set of five preludes, Op. 74. [Example 2.3.1]
Ex. 2.3.1. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 74, No. 3.

Continuing the trend that had begun in his second style period, Scriabin employs fragmentary melodic motives. The preludes Op. 59, No. 2, and Op. 74, No. 4 demonstrate a motivic melody. [Example 2.3.2]

Ex. 2.3.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 59, No. 2.

Rhythmic devices such as cross rhythms, syncopation, and shifting meters are frequent in the last period preludes. Syncopation is particularly prominent in Op. 59, No. 2, Op. 74, No. 1 and 3. [Example 2.3.3]
Ex. 2.3.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 74, No. 1.
Endnotes -- Chapter 2:


6 Scriabin did not give a name to the chord. The earliest mention of the term “Mystic Chord” was made by Hull in *The Musical Times* in 1916.


CHAPTER 3

THE SIMILARITY OF STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS
BETWEEN CHOPIN'S WORKS AND SRIABIN'S PIANO
PRELUDES, Op. 11

A composer can start from a certain stylistic base authored by predecessors and later develop these existing patterns to his/her own purposes. Because of such a development of musical traditions, there are stylistic links between the different generations of composers. This is the case between the music of Chopin (1810-1849) and Scriabin (1872-1915). Both composers played the piano as their instrument and as a principal vehicle in the development of their musical imagination. Scriabin’s early style may be described as “Chopinesque.” Because of this borrowed style, Scriabin’s early works are frequently overlooked. In this chapter, I will discuss how the elements of Chopin’s style influenced Scriabin’s 24 Preludes, Op.
11, discussing the similarities in their works with the following categorization: Form, Harmony, Melody Rhythm, Texture, and Pianistic difficulty. Specific examples will be cited for illustration and reference.

3.1 Form

Chopin’s 24 Preludes (1836-38) represent a unique contribution to the genre and the evolution of the preludes. With Chopin’s Preludes, the genre became a non-programic character piece without a prefatory function and were grouped into simple collections of short pieces—typified his 24 Preludes, Op. 28—exploring particular moods, musical figures, or technical problems.¹

Scriabin followed the same grouping of 24 Preludes, Op. 11 from Chopin. Chopin’s 24 Preludes, Op. 28 are invariably short in length and have a variety of small forms. Scriabin in his preludes follows the same formal structures employed by Chopin. Structurally, Scriabin’s Preludes are very simple. Chopin’s influence is clearly evident in Scriabin’s preference for small forms such as through-composed in a single section, one-part form, two-part form, and ternary form. Both Scriabin’s
Preludes Op. 11 and Chopin’s Preludes Op. 28 are
structured entirely in four or eight bar phrases.

Scriabin’s twenty-four preludes, Op. 11 present
numerous stylistics suggesting a variety of emotion and
moods; each prelude has a miniature form. This is very
similar to Chopin’s 24 Preludes, Op. 28. The following
are examples of each of the forms from Chopin’s and
Scriabin’s Preludes.

### 3.1.1 Through-composed in a single section

The unity of the piece is derived from the
expansion and development of a single motive within a
single section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chopin’s Preludes Op.28</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.1</td>
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<td>No.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.2</td>
<td>a-minor</td>
<td>No.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.3</td>
<td>G-Major</td>
<td>No.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.4</td>
<td>e-minor</td>
<td>No.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.9</td>
<td>E-Major</td>
<td>No.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.14</td>
<td>e-flat minor</td>
<td>No.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scriabin’s Preludes Op.11</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 3.1.2 One-part form

The piece as a whole could have separate sections
using the repetition or variation of the theme, but the
overall structure is cast in one-part.
### 3.1.2 One-part form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chopin's Preludes Op. 28</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Scriabin's Preludes Op. 11</th>
<th>Key</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>f-sharp minor</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>G-Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>g-sharp minor</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>e-minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>A-Major</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No. 21</td>
<td>B-flat Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 22</td>
<td>g-minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 23</td>
<td>F-Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>No. 24</td>
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### 3.1.3 Two-part form

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<th>Chopin's Preludes Op. 28</th>
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<th>Key</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
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<td>No. 20</td>
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<td>g-flat minor</td>
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### 3.1.4 Ternary form

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>No. 11</td>
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<td>No. 18</td>
<td>f-minor</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. 12</td>
<td>g-sharp minor</td>
<td>No. 19</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. 15</td>
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<td>No. 21</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 22</td>
<td>g-minor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Harmony

Scriabin's harmonic vocabulary in preludes, Op. 11 was strongly influenced by Chopin. Rey M. Longyear illustrates this connection:

Chopin's harmony had some influence on that of Liszt and Wagner..., but had its strongest impact on early twentieth-century composers like Ciurlionis and Skryabin, who extended Chopin's ideas to perhaps the ultimate reaches of tonal harmony.²

The complexities of Scriabin's later harmonies make those of his early period appear quite simple by contrast. In the context of harmony, Scriabin's early preludes display key scheme and chord vocabulary already made familiar by Chopin. Following the example of Chopin's 24 Preludes Op. 28, Scriabin's Op. 11 was arranged according to a simple tonal plan in pairs, with each prelude in the Major followed by one in the relative minor beginning with C Major, then ascending a fifth and repeating the pattern.

Scriabin's chords are fundamentally diatonic, based on triadic structures and tonic-dominant harmonies. Scriabin has further enriched the harmony with the use of secondary dominant chords, chromatic and non-harmonic tones, and dissonances, which create tonal ambiguity.
3.2.1 **Diatonic tonality**

Predominantly diatonic tonic and dominant simultaneity is a common device in many of Chopin’s Preludes. Consistently diatonic and simple harmonic structure which Chopin bequeathed to Scriabin appears in Chopin’s Preludes Op. 28, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 3 in G-Major, No. 7 in A-Major, and No. 23 in F-Major, and in Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 3 in G-Major, No. 7 in A-Major, No. 8 in f-sharp minor, No. 11 in B-Major, No. 13 in G-flat Major, and No. 15 in D-flat Major.

For instance, Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28, No. 1 in C-Major stays in the key of C-Major throughout the entire piece, using only a very basic I- (IV) - V - I harmonic movement. Chopin uses the upper and lower neighbor tones as ornamentation and then as passing tones. He also uses a prolonged passing sequence in bars 12-24 built first around the subdominant and later around the dominant harmonies. [Example 3.2.1]
Ex. 3.2.1. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 1

A comparison of this piece with Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major reveals similarities: the major key areas are tonic in the beginning and the end, with movement to the dominant key area in bar 15, so that the overall progression is an extremely traditional I-V-I. Scriabin colors the piece with neighbor notes.

[Example 3.2.1]

Ex. 3.2.1. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 1.

Some of his preludes are virtually identical to Chopin’s in their harmonic plan. In both Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28 No. 6 in b-minor and the similarly styled Scriabin’s
Prelude Op. 11, No. 4 in e-minor, the tonality throughout stays within the original key. The climax in both preludes is realized at the respective Neapolitan chords, and the final cadence is followed by extended measures in which the melody evaporates into the tonic chord.

The nocturne-like character in Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 13 in G-flat Major and Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28, No. 13 in F-sharp Major is harmonically straightforward, staying in the original key. There is also the frequent use of secondary dominants have traditional resolutions.

3.2.2 Tonal ambiguity

Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28, No. 2 in a-minor, one of his most bizarre, is vague in tonality, beginning in what appears to be e-minor; only in the final cadence is the tonality of a-minor clearly heard. In the left hand, the use of undulating dissonances caused by neighboring tones contributes to the prelude’s unsettling, frightening mood. These non-harmonic tones alternate chromatically in every measure until the tonic of the original key of a-minor in bar 23. The G chord
in bars 6-7, the E’s and Eb’s alternating as Major and minor mode sixth-degree upper neighbors to D especially contribute to an ambiguous mixture of G-Major and g-minor. [Example 3.2.2]

Ex. 3.2.2. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 2.

Tonal ambiguity in Scriabin results from non-tonic harmony and chromaticism. The non-tonic chord in Scriabin’s Preludes, Op. 11, No. 18 in f-minor is captivating. This prelude begins with an off-beat on the leading tone, visually anticipating the subsequent resolution to the tonic in bar 1. However this dissonance also serves aurally as the beginning of his exploration of dissonances throughout the piece. The use of sequences which delay tonic resolution increases the tension throughout the piece. Descending two-hand chromatic movement in bars 12-15 and 35-37 reinforces its turbulent character. [Example 3.2.2]
3.2.3 **Chromaticism**

Many of Chopin’s works exhibit a highly chromatic nature, employing the harmonic procedures of which Chopin himself was the innovator. One such example of densely chromatic harmony appears in his Nocturnes, Op. 15 No. 3 in g-minor in bars 69-79. The chromaticism in this example is achieved by the use of secondary diminished seventh chords. [Example 3.2.3]
Ex. 3.2.3. Chopin, Nocturne Op. 15, No. 3.

The use of a chromatic descending bass line is also occasionally encountered in Chopin's music. In Mazurka Op. 30, No. 4 in c-sharp minor, Chopin shifts whole chords down chromatically through bars 129-32. The most extensive example appears in the prelude, Op. 28, No. 21 in B-flat Major. The bass moves chromatically from G-flat with only two interruptions, both between C and B-flat. [Example 3.2.3]
Ex. 3.2.3. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 21.

The chromaticism in Scriabin’s Preludes, Op. 11 is not as pronounced as in Chopin’s. However, he does use short chromatic segments in his preludes, often to create a sorrowful and melancholy mood. The Preludes of Scriabin Op. 11, No. 4 in e-minor, No. 9 in E-Major, and No. 22 in g-minor are reminiscent short pieces.

[Example 3.2.3]

Ex. 3.2.3. Scriabin, Preludes Op. 11, No. 9.
Ex. 3.2.3. Scriabin, Preludes Op. 11, No. 22.

In particular, the subtle chromaticism in the bass and the repeated chords accompaniment pattern in Scriabin's Prelude Op. 11, No. 4 in e-minor are recollective of Chopin's Prelude Op. 28, No. 6 in b-minor. [Example 3.2.3]
The bass line of Scriabin’s prelude No. 17 in A-flat Major contains a quasi-chromatic succession of descending chords. [Example 3.2.3]

Ex. 3.2.3. Scriabin, Preludes Op. 11, No. 17.
3.3 Melody

Scriabin’s melodies in Preludes, Op. 11 show his adoption of Chopin’s technique, especially in their lyrical composition. Chopin’s long sustained vocal style melodies, inspired by the bel canto tradition of Italian opera, are echoed in Scriabin.\(^3\) The following devices are common to the works of both.

3.3.1 Vocal style

Chopin exhibits the vocal idiom cantilena on the piano. These qualities of elegance, delicacy, and lyricism are Chopinesque. The idea of vocal imitation remained essential to the nocturne style, and the idiom was facilitated technically by the development of the sustaining pedal.\(^4\) Sometimes the vocal style of flowing melody forms relatively static motion in comparison to the more active bass. Examples of this in Chopin include the Nocturnes, Op. 27, No. 1 in c-sharp minor, Op. 9, No. 3 in B-Major, Preludes Op. 28, No. 13 in F-sharp Major, Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op. 22 in E-flat Major, and Fantasie-Impromptu, Op. 66, in c-sharp minor. [Example 3.3.1]
Ex. 3.3.1. Chopin, Nocturne Op. 27, No. 1.

Scriabin absorbs Chopin's lyrical melody style. In Scriabin's Prelude No. 5 in D-Major, and No. 13 in G-flat Major, he exhibits lyrical, nocturne-like melodies.

[Example 3.3.1]

Ex. 3.3.1. Scriabin, Prelude No. 5 and No. 13.
3.3.2 Repetition

The repetition of melodies—at least twice sequentially and with the same motive—is another striking similarity between the two composers. Chopin avoided exact repetition in both composition and in performance of his works, varying both according to the mood at the moment. Samson states that the re-scoring of Chopin’s melody is the characteristic formal plot of his work. The repetitions of the melody appear in the trio section in Chopin’s Scherzo Op. 31, No. 2 in b-flat minor, and the first theme of Ballade, Op. 38, No. 2 in f-minor. However exact repetition is avoided by the addition of notes, such as by octave doubling. [Example 3.3.2]

Ex. 3.3.2. Chopin, Scherzo Op. 31, No. 2.
Several of Scriabin’s Preludes are closely related by the use of the same method to enhance a climax and increase the dynamic level. These examples are Scriabin’s Preludes, Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 6 in b-minor, No. 7 in A-Major, No. 16 in b-flat minor, No. 19 in E-flat Major, and No. 24 in d-minor. [Example 3.3.2]
The first theme of the third movement in Chopin's Sonata Op. 58 in b-minor starts with pianissimo in bar 17. Chopin changes the dynamics when the melody repeats. [Example 3.3.2]

Ex. 3.3.2. Chopin, Sonata Op. 58, 3rd. mvt.

Scriabin similarly employs a dynamic contrast between repetitions: the first eight bars of the prelude, Op. 11, No. 13 in G-flat Major, and the four bars of the prelude, Op. 11, No. 22 in g-minor have piano, and repetition is initially marked with a pianissimo. It is therefore evident that Scriabin also marked repetitions with dynamic change so that they function more as an echo than as a mere repetition of the preceding four bars. [Example 3.3.2]
Ex. 3.3.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 22.

The second theme of the first movement in Chopin’s Sonata, Op. 35, No. 2 in B-flat minor repeats several times. Chopin uses a series of slight rhythmic changes, beginning with triplet figures in the bass and continuing with a flow of eighth notes. [Example 3.3.2]

Ex. 3.3.2. Chopin, Sonata Op. 35, No. 2.

These slight alterations of accompaniment provide the restatement of the melody with rhythmic momentum.
Scriabin also employed slight changes in rhythm: the original melody begins on two against three in Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 18 in f-minor. The repetition follows in bar 34 using constant triplets.

[Example 3.3.2]

Ex. 3.3.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 18.

3.3.3. **Ornamentation**

A considerable amount of ornamentation appears in Chopin’s works. Scriabin however uses only a few ornamentations in his preludes, Op. 11. Scriabin employs mordents in his preludes in Op. 11, No. 23 in A-Major, and he writes out the rolled chords as ornaments in small notes in his prelude No. 5 in d-minor, which
lightly decorates and fills the sonority. [Example 3.3.3]

Ex. 3.3.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 5.

Ex. 3.3.3. Scriabin, prelude Op. 11, No. 23.

3.3.4 Octave-doubling

Some of Chopin’s works rely heavily on octave doubling to produce a dramatic, intense mood. The examples are Chopin’s etude Op. 25, No. 10 in b-minor and the prelude Op. 28, No. 22 in g-minor.

Interestingly enough, Scriabin’s Preludes which have fast, furious, and emotional character are also dominated by octave doubling of the melody. These
include Op. 11, No. 6 in b-minor, and No. 20 in c-minor.

[Example 3.3.4]

Ex. 3.3.4. Chopin, Etude Op. 25, No. 10.

Ex. 3.3.4. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 20.
3.4 Texture

Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11 demonstrate a consistent texture based on steady accompaniment and melody, recalling Chopin. Interestingly enough, although the Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11 are of a distinctively keyboard style, they do not contain fast-running or scale-like passages, which are Chopin’s most usual pianistic textural device. Another significant difference in Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11 is the absence of contrapuntal writing, which is so prevalent in Chopin. However both composers were highly skilled in using widened sonority to compass the different registers of the piano by the sustaining pedal. Richard Anthony Leonard gives the following description of Scriabin’s piano sonority:

The composer displays, first of all, his intuitive knowledge of piano sonorities. He is playing with the sheer beauty of piano sound, and the infinity of technical means which may be used for its exploitations.⁶

3.4.1. Inner voicing

Ratner identifies Chopin as the quintessential pioneer of coloristic piano texture.⁷ For instance, Chopin is remarkable particularly for his use of the inner voice for color. In Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28, No.
8 in A-Major the entire melodic content is developed from a simple motive (\[\text{music notation}\]) which appears in the inner voices with the thumb of the right hand. It is ornamented by a figuration of thirty-second notes: the second and eighth notes double the melody at the octave. [Example 3.4.1]

Ex. 3.4.1. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 8.

This technical device is clearly exemplified in Chopin’s Nocturne Op. 15, No. 2 in F-sharp Major, where a total of four motives are presented simultaneously in the right hand alone: The melody doubled in staggered octaves in the upper voice and one inner voice (\[\text{music notation}\]) accompanied by two inner voices (\[\text{music notation}\]). [Example 3.4.1]
Ex. 3.4.1. Chopin, Nocturne Op. 15, No. 2.

Scriabin similarly uses the inner voice for color in the left hand in his prelude Op. 11, No. 11 in a-minor, but not to the extent and complexity of Chopin. [Example 3.4.1] In Scriabin’s preludes, the inner parts as harmonic, and the outer voices are melodically active. The inner voices are heard more as coloristic atmosphere than clear lines. For example, the left hand supports the lyrical melody in the right hand. The inner voices provide harmonic progression in the outer voices in Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 4 in e-minor, No. 5 in D-Major, No. 9 in E-Major, No. 13 in G-flat Major, and No. 22 in g-minor.

Ex. 3.4.1. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 11.
3.4.2 **Nocturnal style accompaniment**

One characteristic of the accompaniment pattern in Chopin’s Nocturne is that the expressive, vocal style melodies are presented with widely spaced accompaniment, bound together by the sustaining pedal, which can exploit the piano’s various ranges. This accompaniment pattern generates the sound so characteristic of Chopin. Examples of this pattern occur in Chopin’s Nocturne Op. 9, No. 1 in B-flat minor, and Prelude Op. 28, No. 13 in F-sharp Major. [Example 3.4.2]

Scriabin also uses arpeggiated figures in the left hand to effect the tranquil mood of the nocturnal style. Examples are his preludes Op. 11, No. 13 in G-flat Major, No. 12 in g-sharp minor, and No. 21 in B-flat Major. [Example 3.4.2] A noteworthy deviation from the nocturne character occurs in Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11, No. 8 in f-sharp minor and No. 19 in E-flat Major where he sets this accompaniment pattern in fast tempo and forte, which creates intensity. [Example 3.4.2]
3.4.3. Waltz-style accompaniment

Chopin’s waltz usually presents a periodic cantabile melody in the right hand with frequent changes in register and voicing, supported by the drone bass accompaniment in the left hand. One such example is
found in his Waltz, Op. 34 No. 2 in a-minor. [Example 3.4.3]

In Scriabin's Preludes Op. 11, No. 2 in a-minor and No. 17 in A-flat Major, the rhythmically stable and drone-like bass accompaniment similarly helps support the melody in illustrating a subtle allusion to the waltz character. [Example 3.4.3]

Ex. 3.4.3. Chopin, Waltz Op. 34, No. 2.

Ex. 3.4.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 2.

Ex. 3.4.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 17.
3.4.4 Repeated chords

Chopin demonstrates his fondness for repeated chords with the sustaining pedal. They produce a rhythmic vibration within a single, static sonority, fully exploiting the piano’s resonance. The repeated chords accompaniment in Chopin’s Prelude, Op. 28 No. 4 in e-minor, and No. 6 in b-minor builds the sonority to reinforce a plaintive, anguished, and altogether unsettled feeling. [Example 3.4.4]

In Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11, No. 4 in e-minor and No. 15 in D-flat Major he uses continuous chord patterns to express serenity. [Example 3.4.4]

Ex. 3.4.4. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 4.

Ex. 3.4.4. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 15.
Chopin and Scriabin also use repeated chords to generate exciting and powerful climaxes with vibrating sonority. Examples are Chopin’s Polonaise, Op. 26, No. 2 in e-flat minor, Scriabin’s Prelude, Op. 11 No. 14 in e-flat minor and No. 24 in d-minor. [Example 3.4.4]

Ex. 3.4.4. Chopin, Polonaise Op. 26, No. 2.

Ex. 3.4.4. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 14.

3.4.5 Octave passage

However, Chopin relies less than Scriabin on passages with leaps or a texture dominated by octaves to achieve dramatic intensity. [Example 3.4.5]

In Scriabin's Preludes Op. 11, No. 18 in f-minor and 24 in d-minor, he evidently enjoys using octave passages with leaps for the richness of sonorities which strengthen the ominous character. These sonorous settings using octave passages extend widely from the lower to the upper range of the piano, arpeggiating the chords and creating a denser texture. [Example 3.4.5]

Ex. 3.4.5. Chopin, Polonaise Fantasie, Op. 61.

Ex. 3.4.5. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 24.
3.5 Rhythm

In 24 Preludes, Op. 11, Scriabin writes rhythmic patterns that demonstrate the influence of Chopin in polyrhythms and rubato. The following rhythmic devices are common to both composers.

3.5.1 Tempo Marking

Tempi in both sets of preludes are generally fast or slow, with frequent fluctuations between the two. The tempo indication combined with the rhythmic figuration serves to establish and clarify the mood. Lento indication with slow rhythmic figuration creates a somber and nocturnal mood in Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 4 in e-minor, No. 5 in D-Major, No. 13 in G-flat Major, No. 15 in D-flat Major, and No. 21 in B-flat Major, and in Chopin’s Preludes Op. 28, No. 6 in b-minor, and No. 13 in F-sharp Major.

The passionate mood takes an allegro, presto and vivace tempo marking with restless, driving rhythmic figuration. Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 6 in b-minor, No. 8 in f-sharp minor, No. 14 in e-flat minor, No. 18 in f-minor, and No. 24 in d-
minor, and Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28 No. 16 in b-flat minor and No. 24 in d-minor are examples.

3.5.2 Rubato

Many performers tend to apply rubato inaccurately to Chopin’s pieces. Contrary to the common belief that a performance of Chopin can always use more rubato, the indications for it are surprisingly infrequent in his works. This may mean that he did not want rubato except where specifically marked, or that he had marked rubato only in places where a performer might not expect to use it.⁹ In either case, the question over Chopin’s desired definition of rubato is left unresolved. However, Chopin dictated adherence to strictest rhythm, and disliked all lingering and dragging, misplaced rubatos, as well as exaggerated ritardandos.⁹

The question of rubato will always arise in Scriabin. In addition to the terms calling for flexibility of tempo, Scriabin writes rubato, accelerando, and ritardando like Chopin. Tempo rubato is indicated at various points in an almost arbitrary manner, and the constant fluctuation of tempo frequently appears within short phrases in both their works.
Examples are Chopin’s Nocturne, Op. 9 No. 3 in B-Major, and Op. 32, No. 1 in B-Major. In Scriabin’s Prelude No. 22 in g-minor, *accelerando* and *ritardando* indications are followed by a *tempo* and *rubato* within one phrase. In Scriabin’s Prelude No. 17 in A-flat Major, an *accelerando* precedes *ritardando*, and then another “a tempo.” The extended use of these terms implies flexibility of tempo and rhythm. The influence of Chopin’s tempo rubato is thus made apparent. [Example 3.5.2]

Ex. 3.5.2. Chopin, Nocturne Op. 9, No. 3.

Ex. 3.5.2. Chopin, Nocturne Op. 32, No. 1.
Ex. 3.5.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 17.

Ex. 3.5.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 22.

3.5.3 Mazurka rhythm

Chopin adapted the mazurka dance character from his native Poland to the piano. The simple quarter-note melody is combined with dotted rhythm and melodic accents in Scriabin’s Prelude, Op. 11, No. 2 in a-minor. The melody’s accentual stress is a strong implication of the Mazurka, which features accents on metrically weak beats. [Example 3.5.3]
Ex. 3.5.3. Chopin, Mazurka Op. 59, No. 1.

Ex. 3.5.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 2.

3.5.4 Polyrhythm

One can easily perceive the abundant polyrhythms in Chopin’s works such as his Sonata Op. 58 in b-minor 4th movement and Fantasie-Impromptu, Op. 66 in c-sharp minor, which are set in a four against three, and Etude, Op. Posthumous, No. 2 with a two against three hemiola throughout. [Example 3.5.4]

Randlett identifies Scriabin’s interest in polyrhythms as a portion of his debt to Chopin. The Chopin influence is clearly illustrated in Scriabin’s
Prelude Op. 11, No. 3 in G-Major, No. 8 in f-sharp minor, No. 18 in f-minor, and No. 20 in c-minor, based on a polyrhythm of two against three. Through polyrhythms, both composers play with the stability of the meter to create a sense of agitation. [Example 3.5.4]

Ex. 3.5.4. Chopin, Etude, Posthumous, No. 2.

Ex. 3.5.4. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 8.

3.5.5 **Multimeter**

Chopin's rhythms range from simple polyrhythms to more complex configurations such as melody flourishes and embellishments of extended asymmetrical groupings.
Chopin also uses the conventional simple duple and triple meter. However he had the challenge of using an unusual 5/4 time signature in the third movement of the Sonata, Op. 35 in b-flat minor and 2/8 in the Prelude Op. 28, No. 1 in C-Major.

Scriabin adopted and extended the rhythmic freedom and rhythmic complexity found in Chopin’s works. For example, meter changes occur infrequently, though occasionally unconventional meters are used in his preludes Op. 11. But though the works are still clearly metric, elasticity of motion is created by the use of certain types of rhythmic patterns. Specific gestures that enhance the rhythmic flexibility and obscure meter are sweeping off-beat bass lines and cross-rhythms of numerical combinations such as 2+3, 4+3, 6+4.

Multimeter invites particular attention in Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 24 in d-minor, which are indicated 6/8 and 5/8, and No. 16 in b-flat minor, which are indicated 5/8 and 4/8 respectively in the treble and bass. In both parts these meters are used alternately. [Example 3.5.5] The prelude, Op. 11, No. 21 in B-flat Major is unique in its featuring meter changes every bar (3/4 and 5/4). [Example 3.5.5]
It seems that Scriabin uses multimeter to produce an interesting rhythm that captures the listener by breaking the expectation for more conventional duple and triple meters.

Ex. 3.5.5. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 16.

Ex. 3.5.5. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 24.

3.5.6 **Syncopation**

A notable aspect of Scriabin's rhythm is the use of syncopation. Chopin's Prelude Op. 28, No. 16 in b-flat
minor, No. 22 in g-minor, and Rondo "A la Mazar," Op. 5 in F-Major, contain syncopation patterns which begin on the last beat of the preceding measure and overlap over the bar line, enhancing the agitato effect. [Example 3.5.6]

Similar syncopation accompaniments occur in Scriabin's Preludes, Op. 11 No. 6 in b-minor, and No. 14 in e-flat minor. [Example 3.5.6]

Ex. 3.5.6. Chopin, Rondo "A la Mazar", Op. 5.

3.5.7 Ostinato

The ostinato employed in Scriabin's Preludes, Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 8 in f-sharp minor, and No. 19 in E-flat Major generates a relentless, driving character. [Example 3.5.7]

This technique is also found in Chopin's works, such as in his prelude Op. 28, No. 24 in d-minor and sonata Op. 58, in b-minor 4th movement. [Example 3.5.7]

Ex. 3.5.7. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 19.

Ex. 3.5.7. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 24.
3.6 Pianistic difficulty

It is known that Scriabin had small hands and endured several injuries in the right hand. Scriabin had practiced with only the left hand during these injury periods and thereby attained great dexterity of the left hand. As a result, the performer of Scriabin’s piano compositions is faced with formidable left-hand parts. In Scriabin’s 1906 concert tour in America, he was even billed as “the left hand Chopin”.  

His preludes Op. 11 require excellent technique of the pianist, especially for rapid leaps in wide register and widely ranging bass figuration in the left hand. A pianist must also have considerable versatility and skill in pedaling to achieve the effect of Scriabin’s piano textures.

3.6.1 Rapid leaps in wide register

The most frequently employed technique in Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11 is the rapid internal leaps which requires awkward changes of hand positions, especially in the left hand. It is very difficult to maintain the flow of these passages due to wide register changes and two-and-three octave jumps. The leaps in
the left hand in Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 7 in A-Major span a daunting five octaves through bars 16-18. Here the technique in the left hand requires precise arm shifts and velocity. The pianist should watch the left hand firmly bouncing at the wrist while the flexible and relaxed upper arms move forward and feel the interval for accuracy of reposition. To maintain a full sonority in executing these rapid, wide register leaps, the manipulation of the pedal is required; this will be discussed further in pedaling (3.6.4).

Examples of accompaniment featuring difficult skips are in Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11, No. 6 in b-minor, No. 7 in A-Major, No. 10 in c-sharp minor, No. 18 in f-minor, and No. 24 in d-minor. Chopin’s works, such as Allegro de Concert, Op. 46 in A-Major, and Prelude Op. 28, No. 17 in A-flat Major also feature this device, although not as frequently as in Scriabin’s works.

[Example 3.6.1]

Ex. 3.6.1. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 10.

3.6.2 **Widely ranging bass arpeggiations**

A wide range of bass arpeggiations which extend the span of the hand is found regularly in both composers’ works. The awkward stretches and leaps in rapid, continuously moving bass lines require extraordinary agility of the left hand. The demanding, fast stretching and shifting ability of the left hand are technically difficult for the pianist.

The extended left-hand finger positions for the widely-spanning legato intervals and a comfortable, circular motion in the arms are essential for the successful execution of this accompaniment. The repetition of this accompaniment in faster tempo often creates nervous and energetic drive.

Examples are found in Chopin’s Etude Op. 10, No. 9 in f-minor, Ballade, Op. 52 No. 4 in f-minor, Sonata,
Op. 56 No. 3 in b-minor, 4th movement, and in Scriabin’s Preludes, Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 8 in f-sharp minor, No. 11 in B-Major, and No. 19 in E-flat Major.

[Example 3.6.2]

Ex. 3.6.2. Chopin, Ballade Op. 52, No. 4.

Ex. 3.6.2. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 11.

3.6.3 Tone color

Chopin’s piano style is different from that of his contemporaries due to the genuinely pianistic atmosphere of his works. To realize this pianistic sound, the performer must first find an appropriate tone color;
such discretion is also necessary in performing
Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11.

Both Chopin and Scriabin display a variety of
articulation markings such as having many notes and
chords with specific accents, tenuto dashes, staccato
dots, and sforzando. It proves that they attempted to
communicate to the performer about tone color and mood
as well as the subsequently necessary “touch.”

Chopin even utilizes each finger’s individual
qualities to produce a variety of touches, using the
weaker fingers for producing softer sound and the third
finger for a singing tone.

Scriabin also had an infinite variety of touches.
What is so remarkable then about Chopin and Scriabin’s
tone color? One of the emotional qualities of their
works is the sensitivity and lyricism in the melody,
which requires a constant, delicate tone. For instance,
in Chopin’s Preludes, Op. 28, No. 15 in D-flat Major,
referred to as “Raindrop,” the performer is challenged
to maintain lightness with absolute control, leaving a
persistent pedal point A-flat in the left hand and a
lyrical melody in the right hand. [Example 3.6.3]
Ex. 3.6.3. Chopin, Preludes Op. 28, No. 15.

A pianist faces difficulty in enunciating the redundant subtle nuances of the lyrical and sentimental melody within the piano dynamic in Scriabin's Prelude, Op. 11, No. 2 in a-minor, and in attaining a graceful legato touch in the right hand with contrasting articulation in the left hand in Prelude No. 17 in A-flat Major. [Example 3.6.3]
Ex. 3.6.3. Scriabin, Preludes Op. 11, No. 17.

Loyalty to the sensitivity and lyricism of Scriabin and Chopin demands a particularly excellent legato touch from the pianist. The pianist should use not only stretched fingers to connect notes, but also imagine phrasing with a vocalist’s legato sound. These singing legato lines occur in Chopin’s Berceuse Op. 57 in D-flat Major, Nocturne Op. 9, No. 2 in E-flat Major, and in Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11, No. 5 in D-Major, No. 13 in G-flat Major, and No. 21 in B-flat Major. [Example 3.6.3]

Ex. 3.6.3. Chopin, Berceuse Op. 57.
Ex. 3.6.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 21.

The elegant, light sound quality—which is generally quite straightforward and accessible to the ear—is found in Scriabin’s Preludes, Op. 11, No. 23 in F-Major, and in Chopin’s Prelude, Op. 28, No. 3 in G-Major and No. 23 in F-Major. These works require delicacy and subtlety in the pianist’s stroke. [Example 3.6.3]

Ex. 3.6.3. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 23.
Ex. 3.6.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 23.

The intense, emotional sound quality in their works also demands a balanced and carefully chosen tone. There is significant evidence suggesting Chopin’s playing was uniquely soft. Thalberg stated after a concert by Chopin’s that “he needed to hear forte.”

It seems obvious that Chopin had a soft touch. Supporting comments were made by the title Moscheles: “He needs no powerful forte to produce the necessary contrast.” One might assume that Chopin was able to effect a sufficiently forte sound without actually producing it.

In Scriabin’s instructions to his pupils, he told them “Even your forte must sound piano....Don’t pound the piano so that your playing sounds like a chest of drawers toppling down the stairs...Don’t play as if you were washing laundry.” Therefore the turbulent mood in Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28 No. 18 in g-minor and in
Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 6 in b-minor should be a rich sound attained without the suggestion of heaviness or violence. [Example 3.6.3]

Ex. 3.6.3. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 18.

Ex. 3.6.3. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 6.

In these works the careful changes in sound level and the tone control are managed not only by the appropriate use of fingerings and the wrist, forearm and upper arm, but also by inner listening and empathy. One with only hard mechanical perfection in his/her technique cannot produce the variety of pianistic sound qualities in his/her piano music.
3.6.4 Pedaling

Chopin was very careful with the pedal in performance and would often advise his student Mme. Streicher thus, "The correct employment of damper pedal remains a study for life." According to Marmontel, no pianist before Chopin had used the pedals with such skill. 16

Scriabin himself was a great manipulator of the pedals. Scriabin knew and understood every part of its action and loved to improvise with such liberal use of the pedals that he wore holes in many of his shoes even during his childhood. 17 Safanov, who was Scriabin’s teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, praised Scriabin for his mastery of the pedal:

Scriabin made the instrument breathe, ‘Scriabin-like pedaling’... 'Don’t look at his hands; look at his feet,’ 18

Scriabin left few pedal markings in his 24 Preludes, Op. 11. The lack of pedal markings is typical of Scriabin and perhaps reflects his intent to liberate the performer’s freedom to use the proper pedaling, depending on the instrument used, the size and acoustics
of the room, and even the size of the audience. Wilfred Mellers gives this insight on pedaling for Scriabin:

It depends on the pedal effects of the modern grand piano, which dominates all Skryabin’s musical thought, even that for orchestra.\(^{19}\)

Scriabin’s sonorities depend on careful yet generous pedaling—this is true for all the majority of his piano works.\(^{20}\) For instance, Scriabin frequently uses wide skips in the left hand to outline a widely spaced bass sonority in his prelude Op. 11, No. 6 in b-minor, No. 7 in A-Major, No. 10 in c-sharp minor, No. 14 in e-flat minor, and No. 20 in d-minor; the pianist must therefore apply the sustaining pedal appropriately. Similar attention to pedaling is required in Chopin’s Prelude Op. 28, No. 16 in b-flat minor and Polonaise, Op. 44 in f-sharp minor where wide skips in the left hand as reinforcement of the full bass sonority is used.

[Example 3.6.4]

Ex. 3.6.4. Chopin, Prelude Op. 28, No. 16.
Ex. 3.6.4. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 7.

Chopin used the sustaining pedal, especially in the left-hand arpeggio passages to have an effect of surging and waning motion of waves in an ocean of sound. This wide-ranging bass accompaniment requires the pedal to support the span. Arpeggios in Scriabin’s prelude Op. 11, No. 1 in C-Major, No. 5 in D-Major, No. 8 in f-sharp minor, No. 12 in g-sharp minor, No. 11 in B-Major, No. 19 in E-flat Major, and in Chopin’s Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op. 22 in E-flat Major serve to extend and expand the sonority, which is simply an irregular arpeggio figure featuring a repeated noted within its pattern. [Example 3.6.4]

Ex. 3.6.4. Scriabin, Preludes Op. 11, No. 11.

Like Chopin Scriabin embellishes his sonority using the sustaining pedal with repeated chords. They often employ repeated chords to build exciting climaxes. Their vibrating, powerful resonance enhance the brilliant and dramatic climaxes such as in Scriabin’s preludes, Op. 11, No. 18 in f-minor, and No. 24, in d-minor and Chopin’s Polonaise, Op. 53 in A-flat Major and Prelude Op. 28, No. 17 in A-flat Major. [Example 3.6.4]
Ex. 3.6.4. Chopin, Polonaise Op. 53.

Ex. 3.6.4. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 24.

Skilled and versatile pedaling is essential for Scriabin’s and Chopin’s sonorities: a simple up-and-down manner is inappropriate. A pianist should adjust the use of the pedal in various ways according to context. One might meet the same resistance if the pedal is pressed down and up with different speed, and pressure which is similar to keyboard action on the piano. In this manner a pianist could create every possible tone and sonority.


5 Ibid. p. 172.


16 Marmotel. Ibid., p. 51.


CONCLUSION

Chopin was the dominant influence on Scriabin’s early music; this influence is undeniably manifested in the Op. 11 Preludes: in their twenty-four distinct moods in compact forms; the harmony and especially the key scheme derived from Chopin’s romantic idiom (in particular, the key scheme is identical to Chopin’s Op. 28) melodic lyricism; extreme rhythmic elasticity evident in rubato, and the sustaining pedal’s function in creating pianistic textures, from widely ranging bass arpeggiation accompaniment, the full bass sonority resulting from rapid leaps in the left hand, and the resonance of repeated chords.

The link from Chopin to Scriabin is clearly revealed in the virtually identical performance aspects that the pianist encounters in both composers works: refined control of touch and particular attention to the nuances of the pedaling are just as necessary for the appropriate selection and variety of tone colors in
Scriabin’s Preludes Op. 11 as they are in Chopin’s works.

There exist slight differences between Chopin’s works and Scriabin’s 24 preludes, examples being the utter absence in Scriabin’s Op. 11 preludes of fast running or scalar passages, which are Chopin’s most usual pianistic textural device, as well as the use of multimeter, which can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of Scriabin’s later style. In conclusion, however, it is demonstrated that the majority of compositional stylistics employed throughout his 24 Preludes Op. 11 are distinctly Chopinesque.


Bertoni, Andrew Lee. “Influence on the Development of Skriabin’s Three Compositional Style Period in His Preludes for Piano.” Master Project. The University Texas, 1990


