A Performance Analysis of Scriabin's Early Piano Works: *Sonata-Fantaisie* (1886), *Allegro Appassionato*, *Allegro De Concert*, and *Fantaisie*

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FANTAISIE

by

SOYEON KATE LEE

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

A Performance Analysis of Scriabin’s Early Piano Works:  
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by

Soyeon Kate Lee

Advisor: Geoffrey Burleson

The piano works of the fascinating and enigmatic Alexander Scriabin have become an integral part of twentieth-century concert repertoire. A prolific composer, these works span his entire compositional life beginning from his adolescent years. Scriabin’s output consists of more than a hundred works for solo piano, mostly miniatures in the form of mazurkas, poems, preludes, waltzes, etudes, nocturnes, impromptus, character pieces, and dances. The ten sonatas have found an enduring place in the repertoire, and have been championed by pianistic giants of the twentieth century, including Horowitz, Rachmaninoff, and Richter. There have been numerous recordings and research devoted to the works of Scriabin, in particular the Sonatas, Preludes, Op. 11, Etudes, Op. 8, as well as a shorter works from his later period, such as the *Vers la flamme*, Op. 72. However, with the exception of the Preludes, Op. 11, Etudes, Op. 8, and the early sonatas, very little attention, both in the way of recordings and scholarly writings, have been garnered by his other works from his early period up to 1900.

Often dismissed as too Chopinesque and yet lacking an individual voice, four substantial sonata-inspired opuses from his younger years will be explored in this dissertation, ranging from 1886-1900: *Sonata-Fantaisie* in G-sharp minor, Op. posth. (1886), *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4
(1894), *Allegro de Concert*, Op. 18 (1896), and the *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28 (1900). These pieces have remained relatively unknown and thus have been neglected in recital programs and in educational settings.

Each chapter will be devoted to one of these works. A brief introduction and pertinent background of the piece will be presented, followed by performance analysis, which will focus on the design and architecture of the work, notable and unusual material (harmonic, motivic, and dynamic), resulting interpretative and technical challenges, and references and relationships to other works – particularly those of Chopin.
I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Prof. Geoffrey Burleson, for his unwavering support and guidance throughout this journey. I am also grateful to Dr. Norman Carey for his encouragement and understanding throughout my years of study at the Graduate Center, to my musical heroes, Ursula Oppens and Richard Goode, and to Dr. Sylvia Kahan for helping me hone my dissertation in the final stages. Thank you and love to my husband, Ran Dank, to our little ones, Noah and Ella, my sister and brother-in-law, Soeun and Eddie, and my aunts, Lynn and Olivia.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, with infinite gratitude.
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Introduction

The study of Alexander Scriabin’s music for piano is arguably among the most adventurous undertakings for a pianist. His compositional style spans a broad spectrum, beginning with the early works, rooted in the harmonic, melodic, and pianistic language of Chopin and Liszt, to the strikingly individual and avant-garde sound world of the late works.

Following the established practice of the composer-pianists of the nineteenth century, Scriabin was a gifted virtuoso who enjoyed considerable international success and was admired greatly by notable figures in the Russian music circle of his time, such as Sergei Rachmaninoff, Josef Hoffman, and Sergei Taneyev. He worked with Vasily Safonov, one of the leading pedagogues of the Russian School, whose own impressive pedagogical lineage could be traced back to Czerny and Beethoven through his studies with Theodor Leschetisky (who also taught Scriabin’s mother, Lyubov Petrovna, herself a gifted pianist). It is probably in no small part due to Scriabin’s own mastery of the instrument as a pianist (and the injury to his right hand which propelled him to concentrate on the strength and independence of the left hand), that his scores often present daunting technical challenges, particularly for the left hand.

Scriabin’s output consists of more than a hundred works for solo piano, mostly of miniatures in the form of mazurkas, poems, preludes, waltzes, etudes, nocturnes, impromptus, character pieces, and dances. The ten sonatas, many of which have found an enduring place in the repertoire (primarily due to the Russian musical giants such as Rachmaninoff, Horowitz, Sofronitsky, and Richter, who have championed his works) have also become the subject of much analysis and study. And while such early works as the Sonata-Fantiasie in G-sharp minor, Op. 19, Third Sonata in F-sharp minor, Op. 23, and the Preludes, Op. 11 have received attention regularly
in concert halls as well as in scholarly circles, a significant number of pieces from this period have been largely neglected. These include four substantial sonata-inspired opuses from his younger years, ranging from 1886-1900: Sonata-Fantaisie in G-sharp minor, Op. posth. (1886), Allegro Appassionato, Op. 4 (1894), Allegro de Concert, Op. 18 (1896), and the Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28 (1900), which comprise the subject of this dissertation.

Keith Salley’s thesis, “Scriabin the Progressive: Elements of modernism in the early works of Alexander Scriabin”, provides an excellent overview of the different versions of Scriabin’s style periods as viewed by many scholars including Samson, Kelkel, Baker, and Macdonald, each with slightly differing divisions of his early, transitional, and mature styles. Although the transitional and later divisions seem to occupy a more ambiguous area of the debate, Salley concludes that there is a consensus on the dates of the early period, which ends around 1902, roughly covering his Opp. 1-29.

As Salley points out, scholars often regard Scriabin’s early works as uninteresting, too Chopinesque, and lacking in innovation and imagination. Hugh Macdonald states that the Allegro de Concert, Op. 18, Polonaise Op. 21, and the Fantasie, Op. 28, while making huge technical demands on the player, maybe not be “thought of as good advertisements for Scriabin’s

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7 Ibid., 22.
gifts”, and dismisses the *Allegro de Concert* as “bombastic.”

Baker focuses his book only on Scriabin’s music written from 1903 “because his early music continues the late romantic tradition and bears no direct relation to his highly innovative later work,” thus implying the lack of innovation in his earlier works. In fact, as will be discussed throughout this dissertation, Scriabin’s inspiration from Chopin is merely a part of the individual Scriabinic language, which is apparent from earliest works.

Scriabin’s early works have acquired some deserved praise as well. Alfred Swan offers the following assessment, which highlights Scriabin’s distinctiveness:

> But in no one was there a closer assonance of spirit with Chopin than in the young Scriabin…. Scriabin is far from being a mere imitator. He is Chopin’s rightful successor, and, as such, carries to an extreme certain peculiarities of Chopin’s style. What lay in the background with Chopin comes to the fore in Scriabin: the music grows in nervousness…; the tissue becomes closer and more compact, the writing neater and more scrupulous than even Chopin’s. The number of dissonances increases as a result of an almost boundless use of suspensions: hardly has one little knot been untied in one of the parts when one or two more crop up in another. This, however, only enhances Scriabin’s formal purity and the exceeding polish of his style.  

There is surprisingly scant material, analytical or historical, regarding the four pieces that will be examined in this dissertation. Scholarly writings that provide some insight into these four larger-scale early works are limited to those by Macdonald (1978), Hull (1970), Swan (1923), and Hayashida (2007).

While Macdonald focuses on Scriabin’s later works, he devotes the first chapter of his book to the *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4, offering an interesting analysis of its structure,

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phrasing, and its harmonic and rhythmic makeup. He also gives an entertaining, although somewhat derisive, overview of Scriabin’s compositional and pianistic development, highlighting Scriabin’s closeness to and influence of Chopin. His discussion of the Allegro Appassionato often references other, and, in his view, more successful works, such as the Preludes, Op. 11 and the Third Sonata in F-sharp minor, Op. 23.

Hull’s more sympathetic but relatively brief examination of Scriabin’s early period focuses again mostly on his Preludes, Op. 11 and the Piano Concerto, Op. 20. Although he offers only a very general overview of his entire oeuvre, it is nonetheless notable for the chronological discussion of nearly his entire output for piano.

Although there does not exist a direct reference to any of the works discussed in this paper, Scriabin’s affinity with Chopin is not criticized, but rather celebrated in Swan’s above-quoted book, Scriabin. He highlights the individuality of Scriabin compared with the composer’s early idol, especially in regards to richness of sonority and what Swan refers to in the quote above as the “nervous” temperament of the music. While he, too, singles out the more successful and popular Second and Third Sonatas and the Preludes in his praise of Scriabin’s early years, his general insight into the ingenuity of the composer can be applied to the understanding of other works during the same period.13

Hayashida explores the genre of the fantasy in the lesser-known fantasies and sonata-fantasies, in which the Sonata-Fantaisie (1886), a work of the fourteen-year-old Scriabin, is examined. The conclusions offered by the author are that the character of the fantasy is confined to only a few components, namely, the one-movement design and the improvisatory character of

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13 Swan, Scriabin, 70–74.
the introduction, and that the *Sonata-Fantaisie* is merely “a simple piece by a fourteen-year-old boy who is trying to find his own voice as a composer.”\(^{14}\)

Whether the lack of scholarly interest in the early works of Scriabin correlates to their similar fate among pianists remains unclear. The works chosen for this dissertation are, with the small exception of a slightly more familiar *Fantasie* in B minor, generally overlooked in concert programming. It is difficult to explain the overwhelming discrepancy of the performing pianists’ preference for a small number of earlier works (such as the sonatas and the preludes) and the later works. However, there are three main challenges, which are particularly more acute in Scriabin’s earlier works, that could contribute in part to the lack of favor on the concert stage in the instances of the four works, which will be discussed in detail throughout this paper. First is the technical difficulty with particular emphasis on left hand dexterity and large chords. Given Scriabin’s own smaller hand size,\(^{15}\) the active nature of the left hand, in particular, often requires a more generous employment of *rubati*. Secondly, the thick texture necessitates the highest level of voicing and “weeding” out of the less consequential material (which raises some interesting pedaling issues), and lastly, both the excessive number of dynamic markings which can sometimes hinder the architecture and its coherence of the work, and the unusual dynamic markings that frequently go against the natural tendency of a performer, which is particularly notable in his *Sonata-Fantaisie*.

It is the goal of this dissertation to focus on the relevant musical and technical features of these rarely performed works that mark them distinctively as belonging to Scriabin’s early style period and shed light on these rarely performed pieces through performance analysis. As

\(^{14}\) Hayashida, “From Sonata and Fantasy to Sonata-Fantasy: Charting a Musical Evolution.,” 51.  
Scriabin’s early output has been criticized for his idolization of Chopin, the analysis will show how Scriabin, without denying the debt to Chopin, which will be evident in some of the relationships explored within these works, already casts himself as forging his own pianistic and compositional voice during the early period. This dissertation is intended to assist scholars and performers to navigate and interpret these relatively unknown works through examination of the structure, motivic and rhythmic relationships, phrasing, dynamics, and the technical challenges as they pertain to the a more successful and convincing performance.

With the exception of the posthumous Sonata-Fantaisie, these works were first published by Scriabin’s publisher, mentor, and financier, Mitrofan Belaieff, and later republished by Muzgiz (Muzsektor State Edition) in Moscow, which from 1964-2006 was known as Muzyka. The publication information is as follows:

- Sonata-Fantaisie (1886): Manuscript No.1011 (Scriabin State Museum) is the second and finished manuscript (after the first rough sketch, No. 647). This was first published in the Sovetskaya Muzyka (Soviet Music) journal No.4 in Moscow in 1940.


Each of the four works will be discussed in its own chapter. A brief introduction and pertinent background of the piece will be presented, followed by performance analysis. All four
of these works are a variation on sonata form and contain many unique and unusual elements, which often have a direct bearing on interpretive decisions. The performance analysis will focus on these features: design and architecture of the work, notable and unusual material (harmonic, motivic, and dynamic), resulting interpretative and technical challenges, and references and relationships to other works – particularly those of Chopin. In the discussions of the Allegro Appassionato and Sonata-Fantaisie, I will also offer observations and assessments in reference to the available scholarly analyses by Macdonald and Hayashida.

The chapters will also include discussions of technique, as these four early works demand a comprehensive pianistic arsenal. Where pertinent, I will attempt to offer solutions and practice suggestions to address various technical issues, many of which fall under three categories that relate to much of Scriabin’s music: left hand-centric writing, big chords (to roll or not to roll), and the problem of voicing present inherent in the extremely dense texture.
Chapter 1: Scriabin’s *Sonata-Fantaisie* (1886)

Scriabin’s *Sonata-Fantaisie* is a remarkable work of an enormously gifted fourteen-year-old. Written in 1886 and dedicated to his then sweetheart, Natalya Sekerina, it was not published until 1940, more than two decades after Scriabin’s death. Interestingly, it is in the same key, G-sharp minor, as his more popular *Sonata-Fantaisie*, Op. 19. Although there is little evidence to connect these two works, there are some thought-provoking similarities that suggest that Scriabin’s later sonata-fantasy was in some ways, a continuation of this youthful work. And despite its more introverted character, the piano writing of the 1886 *Sonata-Fantaisie* contains challenging passages that require an unusually high degree of finger dexterity, which foreshadows the second movement of the *Sonata-Fantaisie*, Op. 19.

Mami Hayashida’s analysis attempts to explain Scriabin’s reason for the compound title. She states that while the “sonata” characteristics are easily discernable, the “fantasy” elements are less apparent, and concludes that there are only a few characteristics that identify this piece as a fantasy: the one-movement form and the improvisatory quality of the introduction (Andante), namely, in the ascending arpeggiations and the short phrases, which seem fragmentary.

Although stylistic characteristics of what constitutes a fantasy have fluctuated over time, the general sense of freedom and improvisatory nature of the music have remained its key traits since the Renaissance. C.P.E. Bach, in discussing the genre of fantasia in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (1753), provides an enlightening explanation of the expressive ability of the fantasy genre:

> It is principally in improvisations or fantasias that the keyboardist can best master the feelings of his audience... It is especially in fantasias, those expressive not of memorized
or plagiarized passages, but rather of true, musical creativeness, that the keyboardist more than any other executant can practice the declamatory style, and move audaciously from one affect to another... Unmeasured free fantasias seem especially adept at the expression of affects, for each meter carries a kind of compulsion within itself.\textsuperscript{16}

The idea of “mov[ing] audaciously from one affect to another” is best exemplified in Scriabin’s often unpredictable and capricious dynamic markings throughout. As will be discussed, these dynamic markings also shape the timing of phrases and \textit{rubatos} which lends itself to a more improvisatory character.

Structurally, the \textit{Sonata-Fantaisie} is in sonata form. Its introduction is unusual both with respect to its length and the importance of its musical material. The introduction (Andante) makes up the first fifty-six measures of the piece, which lasts 148 measures. The structural make-up of the piece can be outlined as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Introduction} (mm. 1–56)
\item \textbf{Exposition} (mm. 57–89)
\begin{itemize}
\item First theme area in G-sharp minor: mm. 57–66
\item Second theme area in B major: mm. 67–75
\item Closing theme: mm. 75–89
\end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Development} (mm. 90–109)
\item \textbf{Recapitulation} (mm. 110–148)
\begin{itemize}
\item First theme area in G-sharp minor: mm. 110–118
\item Second theme area in G-sharp major: mm. 119–126
\item Closing theme: mm. 127–134
\end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

The introduction itself is in ternary form:

A: mm. 1–16

B: mm. 17–36

A’: mm. 37–56

The A section begins with a straightforward eight-measure phrase in the tonic key of G-sharp minor, with an antecedent (mm. 1–4) followed by the consequent (mm. 5–8). There is not much that one might find particularly interesting or inspired harmonically or melodically. However, Scriabin’s unusual and precise dynamic and tempo indications, when observed accurately, offer a radically unpredictable and gripping performance. The opening of this introduction is immediately intriguing for its dynamic markings. (Example 1.1)
Ex. 1.1. Scriabin, *Sonata-Fantaisie*, mm. 1–12 with unusual dynamic markings

In the first eight-measure phrase, there is a dynamic marking, accent or mood indication in every measure that provides a succession of dramatic contrasts. When compared to Scriabin’s other works from this period— the impromptus, nocturnes, and even the slightly larger work, the *Variations on a theme by Mlle Egorova* (1887), such meticulous and precise instructions to the performer are atypical. Furthermore, his dynamic markings here often go against the natural tendency of the musically trained performer, as illustrated in the following example. Here are the first two measures of the introduction without any dynamic indications. (Example 1.2)

Ex. 1.2. Scriabin, *Sonata-Fantaisie*: mm. 1–2 without dynamic markings.

Barring a case of eccentric musicianship, there are two natural ways to shape the phrase in the example above: 1) Deeper sound on the first G-sharp with a decrescendo over the rest of the slur, with the rest of the two measures as an aftermath of the initial G-sharp impulse; or 2) A crescendo towards the downbeat of measure 2 (B) and then a decrescendo outlining the motivic descent, B–A-sharp–G-sharp.
Contrary to these two natural options of phrasing, Scriabin specifies a dynamic contour that is entirely extemporaneous. The capricious dynamic markings that are sometimes pulled back unexpectedly (as in the transition between measures 1 and 2) achieve a wonderful hesitancy. This uncertainty is further enhanced by the rests that occur every two measures in the rest of this A section. Many phrases unfold with an uncertain intensity that is fueled by the dynamic markings throughout this piece.

The B section begins immediately with the markings, *inquieto* and *forte*. Unlike the harmonically simple opening of the A section, it begins dramatically with ascending appoggiaturas in the treble, juxtaposed with descending octaves in the bass. Whereas the four-measure phrase structure dominated the A section, the appearance of two- and three-measure phrases in the B section heighten the effect of the *inquieto*. (Example 1.3)
Ex. 1.3. Scriabin: *Sonata-Fantaisie*, mm. 13–28, appearance of two-measure and three-measure phrases

The opening three note motif (B–A-sharp–G-sharp) is spelled out again in measure 18 at a *subito* piano dynamic. This is followed by the restlessness of the eighth-note accompaniment that nervously dominates all but four measures of the B section, with the embellished arpeggiatic upward flourishes supplied by the right hand.

Measures 23–24 present the connection between the introduction and the first theme of the exposition. The accented notes in the top voice (B-sharp and D-sharp) and the following unaccented dissonance in top voice (E) on the downbeat of m. 24, spell a three-note ascending contour (B-sharp–D-sharp–E), which bears striking resemblance to the accented notes in the top
voice in the first two measures (first theme) of the exposition (mm. 57–58) — a rising leap of a third followed by an upward step. Compare Example 1.3 and Example 1.4. Thus, in order to relate these motivic ideas, the marcato in the introduction and the accents in the exposition must be exaggerated in their execution, ringing out above in a different tonal sound world from the rest of the texture.

Ex. 1.4. Scriabin: Sonata-Fantaisie, mm. 57–59, accented motif reminiscent of mm. 23–24

Throughout the introduction, the unusual dynamic placements create a technical need for the pianist to take a split second of time in order to execute the subito changes. The pair of two-measure phrases that follow the three-measure phrases at the onset of the B section (m. 25–26, m. 27–28) force the pianist to take even more time to set both the subito pianissimo immediately following the crescendo to forte, and the dotted rhythm that breaks away from the stable eighth-note chordal accompaniment. This rhythmic complication presented in the left hand in conjunction with the dynamic notations illuminate the character of the inquieto shown in Example 1.5.

Scriabin’s pedal markings are also noteworthy. The pedal indications in mm. 19–24 are rather generous, often blurring the melodic contour. For example, in m. 24, the general inclination would be to change the pedal in the second half of the measure to have the clarity of the resolution, whereas Scriabin deliberately marks the pedal to be held throughout the measure.
This brings up an interesting question in regards to the subito dynamic changes that follow in measures 25–28. Although there is no direction of how to pedal these measures, the bass note (E4), which is tied over, makes a strong case for the use of pedal on that E, as it would be not be possible to hold the note otherwise. This would create a soft, glowing color for the pianissimo floating above the more prominent E. (Example 1.5.)

Ex. 1.5. Scriabin: Sonata-Fantaisie, mm. 24–28, pedal suggestion

The introduction ends with the restatement of the A section with a more predictable dynamic shape. The four measure codetta (m. 53–56) uses the same material as the B section as if to restate the inquieto, but trails off to end on the dominant 7th.

The “sonata” section of the Sonata-Fantaisie can be seen as more clear-cut and conventional, specifically with regard to structure. However, a detailed look at the plethora of dynamic and tempo eccentricities and technical hurdles testify to the fantasy elements of improvisation and virtuosity, expanding on what was presented in the introduction.

With the exception of the codetta and the coda, all three sections of the sonata movement proper display continuous sixteenth-note accompaniment. The Sonata-Fantaisie is arguably more technically challenging than the later Sonata-Fantasie, Op. 19. Whereas the difficulty of Op. 19 is primarily in the right hand, the Sonata-Fantaisie requires dexterity in both hands via
the broad intervallic distances within the constant sixteenth note texture. The opening left-hand figuration is comparable to that of Chopin’s Etude Op. 10, No.9 in F minor, which also requires big stretches. (Ex.1.6 and 1.7)

Ex. 1.6. Chopin: Etude Op. 10 No.9, left-hand stretches

Ex. 1.7. Scriabin: Sonata-Fantaisie, mm. 57–62, left-hand and right-hand stretches
These passages demand a flexible left hand, in particular, between fingers three and one. There is an inherent danger in this type of passage to concentrate too much on the rotations needed in order to reach the notes played by the thumb. Over-rotations would then create unnecessary accents on the thumb and impede the shape of the phrase.

A possible technical approach to the beginning of the exposition, for example, would be to think of the first three sets of sixteenth notes as one group. This prevents the wrist from hiking up too much with each smaller rotation, as the first two sets do not require much height in the wrist and therefore, the wrist would be raised more deliberately for the last set. The wrist would move in an overall gradual upwards direction in one long gesture throughout these three sets, instead of isolating each set as an individual unit. This will also allow for the bass line (G-sharp–A-sharp–B) to come through naturally, while avoiding a mechanical execution of the sixteenth notes, and to shape the entire group to support the melodic material in the treble. (Example 1.8)

Ex. 1.8. Scriabin: Practice groupings for left hand, mm. 57–58
The third finger of the left hand, which is the pivot note on D-sharp, changes positions slightly with each set. The D-sharp of the first set would be rather flat, using the surface of the third finger. On the next D-sharp, the finger would move slightly more upward (played with the tip of the finger), then the actual pivot (and a thrust to the right with the wrist) would only occur to reach the D-sharp octave leap in the third set.

The rolled right hand octave and tenth in m. 58 necessitates a slight *rubato* after the rolls, both due to the physical constraint of having to jump up a fifth from the fifth finger and to bring attention to the enlarging accented rolls through from the preceding measure. The expressive quality of the rolls would be compromised in trying to deliver the passage strict tempo. The leap of a fifth between the first two sixteenths of the right hand in m. 58 would also allow for a little flexibility of time between the second and third sixteenth notes of the left hand. For smaller hands, as the stretch from the third finger to the thumb might be particularly challenging in the left hand, the *rubato* employed in the right hand also ease the timing of this stretch. (Example 1.9)

Ex. 1.9. Scriabin: *Sonata-Fantaisie*, mm. 57–58, right hand built-in *rubato*

The virtuosic writing is woven together with the improvisatory quality that continues from the introduction. The first theme consists of three voices; the top two voices passing the melodic
material back and forth, with the third voice in the left hand providing the harmonic accompaniment. This is a challenge for the interpreter, as the sixteenth notes in the right hand must continue melodically while simultaneously dealing with the simpler, accented motivic line, demanding the voicing of two independent voices within the same hand.

The second theme is similarly idiosyncratic, and conveys a feeling of spontaneity. Here is the second theme without any interpretative directions (Example 1.10):

Ex. 1.10. Scriabin: Sonata-Fantaisie, mm. 66–71, without any markings

Looking strictly at the contour of the first four measures of the second theme (m. 67, second beat–m. 71, downbeat), one would reasonably assume a general shape of moving towards the downbeat of m. 69 and closing the phrase with a diminuendo, with a slight tenuto on the diminished seventh chord in measure 70. Contrary to what a typical approach might be to this
phrase, Scriabin’s directions are, once again, seemingly capricious. Example 1.11 shows the second theme with the markings restored.

Ex. 1.11. Scriabin: *Sonata-Fantaisie*, mm. 66–71, with the composer’s markings

Sudden shifts in dynamics (notably in m. 69), the marcato on the last note (and resolution) of the four-measure phrase, and the constant animation of the sixteenth notes heightens the extemporaneousness of a fantasy in *un poco meno*. For the sake of interesting performance, these unexpected turns should not be ironed out into a predictable and generically beautiful shape, but should rather be exaggerated.

A motif consisting of three repeated notes, often found in Scriabin’s early works, is identified by Macdonald as Scriabin’s favorite “horn-call” fingerprint. Macdonald defines these as
“three stressed notes in the middle texture with no apparent melodic reference.”\textsuperscript{17} Hull recognizes this three-note motif as bearing some relationship to the “fate theme” of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.\textsuperscript{18} While this motif will be discussed in greater detail in the \textit{Allegro Appassionato}, Op. 4 and the \textit{Fantasie}, Op. 28, the motif makes its first appearance in the \textit{Sonata-Fantaisie}. Although the musical message it conveys is different from his later uses, it is worth noting the deliberate emphasis on this motif in both the exposition, recapitulation, and particularly in the coda (where the three notes are disguised in augmentation.) Here, perhaps in an outwardly similar declaration to the “fate theme,” is an example from the exposition in measure 75 (Example 1.12), which is heard again in the recapitulation in G-sharp major. Both iterations of the three \textit{sforzati} notes occur within \textit{piano} and \textit{pianissimo} dynamics, respectively, which further highlights the three-note motif from the musical context.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[scale=0.5]{example112.png}
\caption{Ex. 1.12. Scriabin: Exposition: mm. 75–77, \textit{sforzati} three-note motif}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{17} Macdonald, \textit{Skryabin}, 22.
\textsuperscript{18} Hull, \textit{A Great Russian Tone-Poet Scriabin}, 122.
The development is an artful synthesis of the materials of the first and second themes, rhythmic motifs from the introduction, and the sixteenth accompaniment figures. A convincing execution of the development requires control over the awkward passagework and distinguishing between main and subsidiary material to execute in a musically coherent manner.

The first two sequences of the development (mm. 90–93) combine the first theme and the left-hand figure, which is expanded to leaps of tenths at a *fortissimo* dynamic. Then, the next set two four-measure phrases (beginning in m. 94, second half) is a combination of the first and second themes placed simultaneously in the right hand. It is tremendously difficult to execute the written notation with the grace-note turns without taking time. Interestingly, Scriabin does not notate *un poco meno* or *espressivo* as indicated in the second theme. Although it is nearly impossible to accomplish, it is arguable, considering the *espressivo* marking found in the next two iterations of the same material (m. 99 and m. 101) that this first statement should not be as slow as the two following it, and should be played with more directness in approach. (Example 1.13)
Measure 97 presents an even more taxing technical challenge. Here again, Scriabin has built in the *rubato* within the texture. The right-hand writing requires large stretches of tenths with the lower voice marked *forte* and the upper *pianissimo*, which, given Scriabin’s small hands, is a deliberate non-notated *rubato*. In discussing Scriabin’s music in relation to the romantic influences of Liszt, Chopin, and Wagner, Rudakova and Kandinsky state that “the whimsical metric-rhythmical breath of Chopin’s music, its “rubato” nature, which had never been notated, was more individualized and even “written-in” by Scriabin.”¹⁹ In this example, and throughout this *Sonata-Fantaisie*, “written-in” *rubati* are disguised in difficult technical passages.

In the above passage, the dynamic notation and the huge leaps necessitate a general augmentation, and specifically, it lengthens the C-sharp (first note of m. 97 in the lower right

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hand) due to the leap in contrary motion, and the A natural octave (first note of the second half of the measure) as the mordent in the lower voice needs time to register. A possible solution to getting around the consecutive tenths in the right hand would be to take over the bottom treble clef line with the left hand (m. 97, third 16th note) until the mordent. This would still require a great amount of dexterity in the left hand thumb, as it would have to maneuver the middle voice alone in tempo. Regardless of the fingering and hand division, this passage still necessitates a level of rubato in the two strong beats of m. 97.

The recapitulation unfolds in a typical sonata-form manner, with the recapitulation of the first and second themes in the tonic key of G-sharp minor, but with much less dynamic intensity. Different gradations of softer dynamics, which pervade the recapitulation, and the absence of much of the striking accents and sudden fortissimos of the exposition should be noted.

The final coda (mm. 143–148) presents the three-note motif on the tonic note, G-sharp, this time augmented, in the tied notes of the right-hand thumb. This recalls the writing discussed earlier in Example 1.5 (the tied note in the left hand ringing through the measure line). The G-sharps need to be tied over and heard through to the end of the next measure. This warrants more sound in the two G-sharps, which would create two poignant iterations of the G-sharp. The third and final G-sharp follows, marked with a sforzando, and the piece ends with the eerie tolling of the three-note motif. This is an artistically more convincing closure to the piece than voicing the melodic echo of the earlier material, and perhaps points to the same G-sharp three-note motif that opens the Sonata-Fantaisie, Op. 19 some twelve years later, in the same key of G-sharp minor. (Example 1.14 and 1.15)

Ex. 1.15. Scriabin: *Sonata-Fantasie*, Op. 19: mm. 1–2, three-note G-sharps
Chapter 2: Scriabin’s *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4

According to Hugh Macdonald, “Skryabin’s career as a composer springs to life with one work, the piano sonata in E-flat minor written probably between 1887-1889.”\(^{20}\) The early version of the *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4 comprises the first movement of this unfinished sonata in E-flat minor (Scriabin’s second work with the ‘sonata’ in the title, following the *Sonata-Fantaisie* in G-sharp minor [1886]). This first movement was revised extensively as a separate one-movement concert piece in 1892, and was published by Belaieff in 1894 as the *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4.\(^{21}\)

The *Allegro Appassionato* is the first published work that departs from the miniature genre to which Scriabin was devoted during the large part of his early compositional period, and explores the dark, passionate, and brooding atmosphere that dominates many of his late works. Macdonald notes that Scriabin “rarely bothered with introductions,” and hence “plunges into a turbulent allegro” in this work.\(^{22}\)

The sonata-form structure of the *Allegro Appassionato* is as follows:

**Exposition:**

First theme area in E-flat minor: mm. 1–35

Second theme area in G-flat major: mm. 36–81

Closing material: mm. 82–98

**Development:** mm. 99–163

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\(^{20}\) Macdonald, *Skryabin*, 16.


\(^{22}\) Macdonald, *Skryabin*, 16.
Recapitulation:

First theme area in E-flat minor: mm. 164–185

Second theme area in B-flat major: mm. 186–238

Closing material: mm. 239–258

Coda: mm. 259–309

However tempestuous the writing may seem at the opening, replete with the driving triplets that only abate in the bridge to the second theme and the melody resounding in the lowest register of the piano, it is essential to note the absence of any dynamic marking (Example 2.1). The treatment and the interpretation of this opening must be informed by the return of the first theme in the recapitulation, where the bass is doubled in octaves in addition to the fortissimo marking, clearly signifying a more heightened and emphatic version of the theme.

This lack of dynamic markings is also evident in the original first movement of the E-flat minor Sonata. Thus, despite the natural tendency towards a louder dynamic, given the low register, thickness of texture, and the Allegro appassionato marking, a slightly subdued dynamic intensity in the opening statement of the theme would make for a more coherent execution. The turbulence of the opening can be brought out by starting measures 1 and 5 at the piano or mezzo piano range, with room to build the crescendo towards mm. 2–4 and mm. 6–8, respectively.

From a purely technical point of view, the passage is much more manageable at a softer dynamic, both to voice the melody above the tricky right hand accompaniment and to maintain stamina throughout this section. In fact, the first occurrence of a forte dynamic does not occur until m. 25, where it is only sustained for two measures before it recedes again.
For the performer, the challenge of the first theme is in its intervallic, angular, and rhythmic nature, which can easily lend itself to a square, heavy execution. The *Allegro Appassionato* begins with two eight-bar phrases, with the melodic line found, atypically, in the lowest register. (Example 2.1)
Ex. 2.1. Scriabin: *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4, mm. 1–19, opening sixteen-measure phrase

The first four measures consist of an E-flat minor triadic ascent in the bass to C-flat, followed by accented downbeats that outline the chromatic descent. This is answered immediately in the following four measures by a downward E-flat minor triad in the melody that subsequently reasserts the E-flat three times on the downbeats of the following three measures, increasing in intensity through augmenting intervallic leaps downward. Scriabin’s markings in the following eight measures (mm. 9–16) supply the pianist with a different set of interpretative tools to avoid the potential rigidity of another triplet-driven eight-measure phrase. Instead of following the pattern of the crescendo moving to the accented downbeat, the accent shifts to the second beat in m. 10 via F1, the lowest pitch in the piece thus far. The effectiveness of the “misplacement” of the accent can be achieved by elasticizing and maintaining the crescendo through the downbeat of m. 10 and thus allowing the second beat (F) to arrive with a slight delay. Measures 11 and 12 are presented with no dynamics markings; therefore, the ascending quarter notes of m. 11 should resist any crescendo to the G\(^6\) in m. 12. The hemiola in the bass (mm. 13–14), which is hidden under the same driving rhythmic pattern (B-flat–G -flat–F) can be highlighted by emphasizing the first of each two-note pair. (Example 2.1) Bringing out the hemiola, in conjunction with the avoidance of the crescendo in m. 11, provides a respite from the angular, downbeat centered line, and lends itself to a more linear closing of this first statement.
Although the texture remains largely the same in the restatement of the first theme (mm. 17–33), attention to an important rhythmic detail can enhance the interpretation of a seemingly redundant section. The dotted rhythmic motif that appears frequently in the opening sixteen measures of the piece (with the exception of m. 10 and 12) has its final note lengthened, and becomes \( \text{\textbullet} \). The contrast between these two manifestations can be projected by a different approach to pedaling. The figure requires the pianist to change the pedal on the third beat of each of these measures, honoring the quarter-note rest in the bass. The variation that is presented in the next phrase starting in m. 17, \( \text{\textbullet} \), demands that the pedal be held through the third beat. (Example 2.2 and 2.3) The dynamic intensity is thus further augmented by the fuller use of pedal.

Ex. 2.2. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, mm. 1–3, pedal change

Ex. 2.3. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, mm. 16–19, pedal hold
The dominance of the bass in the first theme and much of the development in the *Allegro Appassionato* combines the challenges of negotiating the thick left hand writing with careful voicing. Because the bass is intrinsically murkier, the melodic voice in the lowest register of the texture is susceptible to being overpowered by the accompaniment in the treble. Voicing this opening (which can be applied to all related passages in this work) requires mapping out the hierarchy of all the elements of the texture.

The voicing of the left hand is straightforward. But as the thumb, which is naturally prone to more sound, is placed immediately following the melodic fifth finger, it is important to avoid a direct repetition of the melodic line by drastically lowering the dynamic in the thumb. The issue of how to voice the right hand is debatable, as most well-trained pianists would typically be inclined to voice the right hand to the top. However, in doing so, this passage would suffer from too much prominence of the less important and busy material (despite the interesting dissonant passing tones). The lower voice of the treble clef, on the other hand, harmonizes and supports the melodic line of the bass without competing in the same register as in the left hand; the first of each pair is marked in the score with a double beam, naturally suggesting the second note to be less prominent than the first. Therefore, it would logical to hear the continuation of the triplet after the initial melodic bass in the lower right hand (Example 2.4).

Hence, the level of voicing (and therefore dynamics) from most prominent to peripheral would be as follows: 1) melodic bass (in blue), 2) lower voice of the right hand (red), 3) upward minor seconds in the treble, then 4) upward triplet figure in the bass.
In addition to providing more prominence to the bass theme, without competition from too many other elements of the texture, this approach to voicing the first theme would provide greater contrast to the second theme, as the long-awaited upper register blooms from the dark, brooding texture of the first theme. (Example 2.5)

Furthermore, using this voicing strategy would result in a more powerful impact of the return of the first theme in the recapitulation, due to the variation in texture that allows for a more direct voicing. Following the sweeping cadenza, the melody is doubled in the bass without the triplets, in contrast to the exposition. The lack of the triplets in the bass provides the needed clarity in the melodic material. Highlighting its dissonant struggle by voicing the top line of the
right hand in the recapitulation is also more persuasive within this musical context. (Example 2.6)

Ex. 2.6. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, end of cadenza and recapitulation (mm. 163–169)

The subsequent second theme group is marked by a complete change of character. The driving, rhythmic, and urgent nature of the first theme is contrasted by a second theme, which is linear, lyrical, and improvisatory. The contrast is heightened in part by the transfer of the melodic material from the deep bass register to the treble clef. To further amplify this registral contrast, Scriabin opens his second theme with two treble clef staves, and both hands remain predominantly in the upper register of the piano. The melody moves primarily in step-wise motion, with abundant chromatic intertwining. Additionally, the dynamic marking does not depart from the muted pianissimo of m. 29 for the entire unfolding of the second theme. The combination of these features inform the pianist to approach the second theme section with an ethereal sound—unhurried and unfolding in an improvisatory manner.
The subtle and extemporaneous character of the second theme is also enhanced by Scriabin’s postponement of “landing” in the relative major (G-flat) until the end of the exposition in m. 67 (reminiscent of the elusiveness of the tonic in the first movement of Beethoven Sonata No. 28 in A Major, Op. 101), before finally and resolutely arriving at the expected goal of a clearly established modulation to G-flat major. The previous G-flat major arrivals (m. 41 and 49) are transitory in nature due to constant emphasis on the D-flat’s, which are doubled in two voices in measure 41, and in measure 49, where the tonic is concealed furthermore by the accented D-flat three-note motif (which will resurface in the recapitulation with greater insistence, in B-flat) in the inner voice (Example 2.7).

Ex. 2.7. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, Exposition: mm. 47–51, three-note motif

The analysis of the Sonata-Fantaisie in the previous chapter touched on Scriabin’s three-note motif, which Macdonald refers to as his “horn-call” fingerprint. Macdonald states that “these horn-calls have significance… they are constantly close to the surface of Skryabin’s mind and thus recur frequently.” Hull, in his discussion of Scriabin’s Sonata No.2 in G-sharp minor, Op. 19 (noted at the end of the previous chapter) writes that “the last three notes of the first

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23 Macdonald, 22.
subject are significant, as the little motif appears to have obsessed Scriabin’s mind all his life…[They are] destined to become a regular feature of Scriabin’s works.”

Indeed, Scriabin’s distinctive three-note motif seems to signify a personal commentary that weaves in and out of many of his compositions, as in the opening of the Second Sonata in G-sharp minor, the climatic A sections of the Impromptu in B-flat minor, Op. 12, No. 2, and in Preludes, Op. 13, No. 5, and Op. 49, No. 2. As such, the occurrence of these motifs would be best brought out by implementing a specific tone color as to stand out from the general atmosphere/dynamic. Therefore, in some contradiction to Scriabin’s precise markings here in Example 2.7, tenuto–tenuto–marcato, if the first note is stressed with slightly more emphasis, the listener will perceive this motif with more clarity. While Macdonald’s assertion that these three-note motifs do not carry melodic reference may be true, they represent an undeniably recognizable Scriabinesque hallmark.

Macdonald observes the presence of the dominant pedal in the recurring D-flats in the last eighth-notes of each measure (m. 58–64), which has been foreshadowed by the D-flat three-note motif. In fact, the suggestion of the dominant pedal continues throughout this entire second theme section (marked with a circle throughout Ex. 2.8), beginning with the brief three measure transition at m. 34. (Example 2.8) Attention to the persistent, albeit subtle, D-flats will imbue the section with a more fantastical sound world as the dominant pedal, particularly as it is placed here almost as an upbeat, creating a sense of levitation and suspension.

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Scriabin reaffirms the arrival of the long awaited perfect authentic cadence by placing G-flat in three voices in measure 67, and excluding the D-flat in the downbeat tonic chord, although it appears again immediately following the downbeat in the middle voice (left hand thumb). These two reoccurring D-flats in the middle voice should be articulated with clear voicing, despite its auxiliary role, so that the soft tolling of the D-flats can continue to be heard through m. 80.
(Example 2.8)

The following closing section, marked both dolce and tranquillo (mm. 67–80), bears a similar sound world to the magical dolce sfogato section of Chopin’s Barcarolle, Op. 60, (Example
2.9) where the arpeggiated bass writing gives way to a lone, ethereal, cadenza-like right hand in a gentle rocking pulse. Here, the reassuring, tender presence of the G-flats anchors and concludes the next twenty-two measures of the exposition.

Ex. 2.9. Chopin: *Barcarolle*, Op. 60, Chopin’s use of *dolce sfogato*

The development begins mysteriously with a haunting eight-measure phrase, which, following the lengthy closing material (mm. 83–98) can be problematic for two reasons: the stop-and-start phrases, and the leaner texture that is predominately in the low register of the piano in octave unisons. The cohesion of these measures, which are essentially the bridge into the development proper, can be achieved by exaggerating the crescendo hairpins in the first and third two-measure sub-phrases, followed by the second and fourth two-measure phrases that answer in stark contrast with a completely flat, uninvolved, and distant delivery, and finally, by resisting the inclination to slow down in mm. 101–102 — and rather saving it for mm. 105–106 in order to keep the eight fragmentary measures as one phrase group. Additionally, the composer’s
marking *una corda* in m. 105 seems to mark the moment of the most suspense and mystery in this 8 measure phrase, and given the deep register of the piano, the change in color can be enhanced by employing a slight *calando*. (Example 2.10)

Ex. 2.10. Scriabin: *Allegro Appassionato*, mm. 98–107, beginning of development

In the next four measures (m. 107–110), Scriabin masterfully weaves together four elements from the exposition: first theme, second theme, the accompanying triplets in the bass,
and the ascending gesture of triplets that seems to drift off (as in mm. 101–102). The conflict between the two themes pervades much of the development and is presented here with the first theme in the bass and the second theme above it in the top voice. The two themes unfold concurrently but at two different dynamic speeds; Scriabin does not mark a crescendo in the treble clef of measure 107, which contains the second theme, despite the natural tendency to build the crescendo simultaneously with the first theme in the bass. Scrupulous attention to the autonomy of these two crescendo markings would prevent an unnecessary accent in the middle of the second theme (first beat of measure 108). Conversely, the second theme material and the accompaniment crescendo in tandem in the subsequent four-measure phrase with growing momentum and dynamic intensity into the last measure. (Example 2.11)

Ex. 2.11. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, development, mm. 111–114

Harmonic turns and surprises abound throughout this development, meandering through various keys. Scriabin’s Chopinesque tendencies surface in the return to E-flat minor (mm. 135–154). Here, the long ascending scalar lines juxtaposed with the bell-like melody is strikingly reminiscent of the passage from Chopin’s Ballade in F minor, Op. 52. (Examples 2.12 and 2.13)
Ex. 2.12. Chopin: Ballade in F minor, Op. 52, ascending scalar lines in the bass

Ex. 2.13. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, Op. 4, mm. 147–156, ascending scalar lines in the bass
The development, which extends to measure 163, is extraordinary for its culminating
cadenza— the only one Scriabin wrote in any work explicitly labeled as such.26 Lisztian technical
demands and the influence of Rachmaninoff are evident in the ensuing cadenza. (Example 2.14)

When Scriabin revised and published the Allegro Appassionato in 1894 as a separate work
from his unpublished and unfinished four-movement sonata in E-flat minor, Rachmaninoff had
already composed his Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 1 (1891). The cadenza-like piano
opening of Rachmaninoff’s first concerto demands similar sweep, intensity, and technique, and is
also written in triplet octaves, with intermittently appearing inner voices. (Example 2.15) Scriabin,
Rachmaninoff’s classmate, most certainly would have been familiar with the work, and therefore
could have been inspired to add a cadenza (which did not exist in the earlier sonata version). The
cadenza is impressive for the technical challenges requiring speed, large expansion, and massive
volume.

Ex. 2.14. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, cadenza, m. 163

26 Scriabin, Garvelmann, and Scriabin, Youthful and Early Works, 53.
Ex. 2.15. Rachmaninoff: Concerto No.1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 1, opening (mm. 1–11)

Macdonald is dismissive about Scriabin’s works such as the *Concert Allegro, Fantasie, Polonaise*, and the *Allegro Appassionato*, which make “massive demands on the player.” He claims that “none of these may be thought of as good advertisements for Scriabin’s gifts...for all their dynamic drive and pianistic satisfactions, these massive works lend right to the suspicion that
Scriabin was more individual and telling when speaking with a hushed voice, when delicacy supplanted bombast.\textsuperscript{27} This seems an unwarranted criticism, as this would be true for a rewarding interpretation and performance of any work that imposes high technical demands on a pianist (certainly not confined to the music of Scriabin) be it Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, or Schumann. Without the discerning and well-trained ear, the Schumann player could sound equally bombastic and would not be able to advertise Schumann’s gifts.

What is breathtaking about the arrival of the cadenza in the \textit{Allegro Appassionato} is the meticulousness with which Scriabin notated the dynamics throughout the piece to this point. The first \textit{fortissimo} of the work occurs at the end of the development, just four measures from the outburst of this powerful cadenza. The four measures that precede the cadenza are notable for the transformation of the second theme. (Example 2.16) Thus, the gentle, ethereal second theme comprises the material used for the first \textit{fortissimo}, and this augmentation of the second theme in its \textit{fortissimo} iteration serves as the starting point for the climax of this work (which continues through the recapitulation), with a thunderous arrival at the return of the first theme in octaves.

Ex. 2.16. Scriabin: \textit{Allegro Appassionato}, mm. 157–162, augmentation of the second theme

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{27} Macdonald, \textit{Skryabin}, 26.
\end{quote}
The first theme in the recapitulation is easier to execute than the opening, despite its similar degree of intensity. By replacing the triplet melodic figure in the bass with two eighth-notes (which falls very comfortably in the hand with the octave and then the inner voice), Scriabin allows the performer to concentrate solely on dramatic effect of this reprisal of the theme.

As if the appearance of the cadenza has altered the landscape of this piece, the recapitulation is heightened in every respect. Aside from the intensified first theme, the second theme in the tonic major is no longer predominantly in the upper register, with the accompanimental materials thickened. The primarily chromatic ascending octaves darken the lyrical line. The three-note motif rings again here twice — as B-flat octaves, in mm. 199 and 201.

Immediately following the first iteration of the three-note motif, Scriabin pays a more direct homage to the aforementioned Chopin Barcarolle, with the same rare and elusive marking, \textit{sfogato}.\footnote{The rarely used \textit{sfogato} marking in this passage is defined by \textit{The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music}, 5th ed. as “airy and evaporated.” It is a term used by Chopin indicating need for delicate touch in his music.} This approach to mm. 200–201 gives instruction for a specific ethereal tone, in addition to the marked decrease in dynamic to \textit{pianissimo}, to the hushed echo of the three-note motif. (Example 2.17)

![Ex. 2.17. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, Op. 4, recapitulation, mm. 197–201](image)

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Some of the most awkward left hand passages are presented in the recapitulation of the second theme, consisting of huge leaps that constantly change direction. The challenge lies in executing these leaps in the pianissimo dynamic linearly and with as much agility as if it were a single-note accompaniment (Example 2.18).

Ex. 2.18. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, Op. 4, recapitulation, mm. 207–210

Uncomfortable leaps, particularly in the left hand, are part of Scriabin’s language, and will be visited again later in the discussions of the Fantasie in B minor and the Allegro de Concert. However, navigating the leaps in a softer dynamic as in the above example adds another layer of complexity as it requires more control of both the movement and the height of the hand, as the hand cannot simply “drop” after a leap. Scriabin’s Prelude Op. 11, No. 7 demands similar dexterity and control of the left hand in a more subdued dynamic. (Example 2.19)

Ex. 2.19. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 7, mm. 19–21, large left hand leaps in soft dynamic

Ex. 2.19. Scriabin, Prelude Op. 11, No. 7, mm. 19–21, large left hand leaps in soft dynamic
This type of passage, as in the second theme of the *Allegro Appassionato*, can be worked out more easily with a clear mental choreography of the hand. For example, in m. 208, the directional shifts can be facilitated by alternating from the thumb to the pinky as a point of center, which would minimize the psychological distance between the leaps. Focusing purely on either the thumb or the fifth finger for the entire duration of a passage like this can amplify the distance and the difficulty. Thus, isolating the fingering in practice to minimize the distances of the leaps is a helpful tool in solidifying such a passage, along with grouping the notes that move in the same general direction, as shown below. (Example 2.20)

Ex. 2.20. Scriabin: *Allegro Appassionato*, Op. 4, mm. 207–210, technical approach

Scriabin delays the arrival of the E-flat tonic in root position even longer in the recapitulation. The dominant B-flats that have been so prominent throughout this section are given an even longer pedal point, with six additional measures (mm. 216–221), which prolong the journey towards the E-flat tonic—this time with the pedal marking on the bass octave B-flats to add to the resonance of the B-flat. Interestingly, the pedaled bass B-flats resound three times, in equal intervals, augmenting the three-note motif heard in m. 199 and m. 121. (Examples 2.21 and
The closing material, too, is altered. There is an absence of the *mezzo forte* in the five eighth-note pick ups to measure 239. The extreme *pianissimo* markings in this entire closing section, which range between *pp* and *pppp*, is indicative of spirit of the *sfogato* that seems to haunt the second theme’s return.
The agitated and fiery coda displays all of the principal motivic and thematic materials. It is in two sections (mm. 259–282, and mm. 283–311)—the second section more nervous, and faster (più mosso) than the first. The first part of the coda highlights the first theme in canon, giving the right hand the first thematic material for the first and only time. Scriabin marks a sforzando at the top of this first iteration in the right hand instead of the simple hairpin. Both peaks of the first theme in the right hand in m. 261 and m. 265 should be exaggerated with enough time to emphasize the intensity of finally hearing this in the upper register. (Example 2.23)

Ex. 2.23. Scriabin: Allegro Appassionato, Op. 4, mm. 259–266, first theme in the upper register

The second più mosso section of the coda outlines a fragment of the second theme in the right hand, interrupted violently by the subito forte fragment of the first theme in the bass. A convincing performance should capture the essence of the second theme, despite its busyness, at a noticeably faster tempo so that the struggle between the two thematic fragments can be even more pronounced. The first two four-measure phrases (mm. 283–286 and mm. 287–290) unfold...
in a similar manner with the interruption of the first theme material in the fourth measure. However, the next four measures display a sense of delirium towards the final outburst, and include the following features: the inversion of the fragment of the second theme and moving it to the left hand, the continuation of the accompanimental triplet figures from the previous measure (m. 290), and the sudden use of the *una corda*. These elements infuse this penultimate passage with restless energy, thereby preparing the final eruption of the tonic. (Example 2.24)

Ex. 2.24. Scriabin: *Allegro Appassionato*, mm. 283–294, inversion of the second theme material

The final surge (m. 295) towards the end outlines the E-flat minor chord encompassing the entire keyboard before the finally arriving at the *fortississimo* E-flat minor chord with all the momentum from the previous twelve measures. And, as if everything has been exhausted, the
piece concludes with two more tonic chords in the opposite extreme dynamic, dropping even further from within from *pianissimo* to *pianississimo*. These two hushed chords are taken from the ending of the third movement of the E-flat minor sonata, the only material that he reused outside of the original first movement.
Chapter 3: Scriabin’s *Allegro de Concert*, Op. 18

The premiere of Scriabin’s largely neglected *Allegro de Concert* was given by the composer in Paris on January 15, 1896. According to Macdonald, “It is not difficult to see here signs of impatience with the piano’s resources, and at least a determination to exploit them to their outer limits, nor is it surprising that he then took the decisive step into orchestral composition.”29 This statement seems to build on Macdonald’s notion that “the grossly overwritten sonorities of the *Concert Allegro*, Op. 18 and the *Fantasy*, Op. 28 inherit the textures of Liszt’s orchestral transcriptions.”30

That Scriabin testing the sonic limits of the piano becomes more apparent in his later works, where he becomes increasingly unsatisfied with the inability to sustain the intensity of sound. Accordingly to one of the first Scriabin biographers, Faubion Bowers, this unabating desire to defy the laws of physics to make the instrument retain the intensity of sound after the hammers strike the strings propelled Scriabin to “constantly devise extended figurations to prevent this—trills, reiterated arpeggi, repeated chords, and melodic lines intensified by clusters of notes which flicker like fires to radiate steady heat.”31

Scriabin’s thick but glorious sonorities present in the *Allegro de Concert* are indeed headed in the direction of being orchestral in scope, and therefore pose the challenge to the pianist of achieving its intended magnitude with clear voicing and time, as will be discussed later in this chapter. It is possible that the title was influenced by Chopin’s lesser-known *Allegro de*

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30 Macdonald, 14.
Concert, Op. 46, which began life, scholars have assumed, as a concertante piece. The defining features of these two Allegros de Concert are not connected; however, elements in Scriabin’s Allegro de Concert can be linked to Chopin’s Second Sonata, Op. 35, by virtue of key relationships and the similar treatment in the unfolding of the second theme. Yet Scriabin may have chosen to use the same title because of his intention to create orchestral textures in the piece’s climactic moments.

The general sonata-allegro structure of the Allegro de Concert, Op. 18 is as follows:

**Exposition:**
- First theme area in B-flat minor: mm. 1–28
- Second theme area in D-flat major: mm. 29–51
- Closing material: mm. 51–59

**Development:** mm. 59–80

**Recapitulation:**
- First theme area in B-flat minor: mm. 81–88
- Second theme area in B-flat major: mm. 89–103
- Extended closing material: mm. 103–128

**Coda** in B-flat minor: mm. 129–142

In a fashion similar to the Allegro Appassionato, composed six years earlier (1894), the piece begins immediately with the high drama of the passionate and restless opening theme—almost Lisztian in writing, spanning the entire keyboard in two short measures. The first gesture presents the rhythmic motif of , and its variant, , which dominate much of the piece. While the introductory rhythmic motif includes the ascending minor second gesture (which is a unifying intervallic feature throughout the piece), the motif appears is presented in multiple
intervalllic variants as the piece unfolds. The struggle inherent in the minor second dominates the piece both melodically and in its accompaniment. The opening upward motion is immediately answered by a unison cascade downward featuring the same minor 2nd (E natural– F), linearly outlining an alternation between B-flat minor and G-flat major harmonies. The two-measure gesture is repeated in measures 3 and 4, with the second through fourth notes raised a half-step higher. (Example 3.1)

Ex. 3.1. Scriabin: Allegro de Concert: mm. 1–5, unison cascade with E-natural-F motif

The subsequent descending triplets recall the slurred, unison, downward gesture in triplets in Chopin’s music that conveys a sense of drama and declamation. The coda of Chopin’s Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52, and the B section of the Nocturne in F minor, Op. 55, No.1, for example, both employ this kind of writing in the heightened dramatic moments (Examples 3.3
and 3.4). This spirit is presented at the onset of the *Allegro de Concert* with comparable expressivity. Rather than producing the effect of a gestural flurry of notes, a convincing delivery requires melodic listening, with sensitivity to noting the E–F tension within the passage. A slight *tenuto* can be employed on the first D-flat, with pedal on the E–F to highlight the relation to the ascending minor second to the initial motif while making a natural gravitational *accelerando*.

(Example 3.2)

Ex. 3.2 Scriabin: *Allegro de Concert* mm. 1–2, performance suggestion
Ex. 3.3. Chopin Nocturne in F minor, Op. 55, No.1 (mm. 44–55), melodic unison cascade

Ex. 3.4. Chopin: Ballade in F minor, Op. 23, melodic unison cascade

The ascending minor second appoggiatura continues throughout the first sixteen-measure phrase; the left hand accompaniment in measure 5–8 and the first part of the right hand melodic material are built around the ascending minor seconds. The ascending minor seconds continue to anchor mm. 9–12 with insistence on the second and third beats of each measure. The agitation provided by the tension between the E and F reaches an initial climax in mm. 13–15 where
Scriabin highlights the half step motion with dynamically turbulent 6-5 and 3-2 motions through the Gr\textsuperscript{+6}–V cadence in mm. 13-14. (Example 3.5)

Ex.3.5. Scriabin: *Allegro de Concert* mm. 3–14, build up of tension via motivic minor seconds
The dissonance of the accented chords in right hand are startling with the inclusion of the E–F minor second comprising the top two notes. Furthermore, the dynamic shifts in the left hand that alternate quickly between piano and forte, and the rhythmic instability created by using the fragment of the motif separated by eighth rests, provide this opening with restless energy. Given that Scriabin has marked only a mezzo piano in the opening sweeping gestures, the quick crescendo to forte movement in the left hand octaves in these two measures presents a feverish accompaniment, and could yield a forward movement through the hairpin so that broadening slightly on the dissonant, accented German sixth (with the dissonant F) can be justified.

Aside from the two Chopin examples that recall the aforementioned triplet passage, the general spirit of the first movement of Chopin’s Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35 pervades the Allegro de Concert. Set in the same key of B-flat minor, the first theme of Chopin’s sonata also explores the tension created by an ascending minor second. It is interesting to note that the peak (and the highest point) of the first theme in the sonata also outlines the E–F tension, albeit switched in its direction. (Example 3.6)
Ex. 3.6. Chopin: *Sonata No2.* in B-flat minor, Op. 35 mm. 7–22, build-up via minor/major second intervals

The relationships to Chopin’s sonata continue via the key, atmosphere, and the pacing of the second theme. After the agitation of the first theme, the second themes, both in D-flat major, begin in a spacious setting, employing larger note values of half notes and whole notes, which have been almost entirely absent in the first themes. (Example 3.7 and 3.8)
Ex. 3.7. Chopin: Sonata No. 2, Op. 35, mm. 39–46, second theme employing longer note values

Ex. 3.8. Scriabin: Allegro de Concert, mm. 28–34, second theme employing longer note values

Like Chopin, Scriabin’s reiteration of the second theme is also placed one octave higher, marked *forte*, and is accompanied by triplet figures in the left hand, conveying a similar sense of movement and openness. (Examples 3.9 and 3.10)
Ex. 3.9. Chopin: Sonata No.2, Op. 35, mm. 54–62, employment of triplets in the accompaniment

Ex. 3.10. Scriabin: Allegro de Concert, mm. 35–39, employment of triplets in the accompaniment
The left-hand difficulty in Scriabin’s *Allegro de Concert* is easily discernable in the above example, and resembles the climax of Chopin’s *Barcarolle*, Op. 60. (Example 3.11) The similarity is even more pronounced in the recapitulation, posing a musical challenge to the performer to keep the right hand melodic line unaware of the difficult left hand and navigating the large leaps with power and fluency, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Ex. 3.11. Chopin: *Barcarolle*, Op. 60, mm. 93–99, large left-hand leaps

The exposition’s closing section concludes with the first theme’s motif, presented in D-flat (m. 59). The development begins as this D-flat is immediately enharmonically respelled as C-sharp on the last eighth note of measure 59 (which belongs motivically to the next measure), and repeats the rhythmic gesture in C-sharp minor.

The imitative writing of the development is notable because it is a relatively rare instance in Scriabin’s sonata-form works where such an extended passage is found. While imitative
writing is certainly a part of his compositional language and can be found in the various other early works (such as the Second, Third, and Fourth Sonatas, as well as the Fantasie in B minor), these episodes are much more brief. In the Allegro de Concert, the two-measure fugal theme is taken from the first two measures of the second theme, and presented eight times over the course of the first twelve measures of the development.

The development can be divided into two sections: the canonic section (m. 61–73) and the variant of the second theme and closing sections from the exposition. The first part is organized in 4+4+2+2 measure phrases. The opening four-measure phrase (mm. 61–64) is a canonic presentation of the second theme in C-sharp minor. There are three entrances of the second theme variant in each of the first three measures in stretto-like presentation, followed by four measures (mm. 65–68) that enter a fourth below (in G-sharp minor) in the same manner. The remaining two entrances occur only in the bass voice, growing in dynamic intensity, with the first one beginning a fourth lower (in D-sharp minor) then lastly, moving just a half step lower with a slightly altered iteration towards F-sharp major. (Example 3.12)
Ex. 3.12. Scriabin: *Allegro de Concert*, Op. 18, mm. 57–73, imitative counterpoint
The exactitude of the dynamic markings in this development is a trait shared by the earlier *Sonata-Fantaisie*. Implementing the precise dynamic markings is essential in bringing out the phrase structure (4+4+2+2). Each four-measure phrase builds methodically (*pianissimo, piano, mezzo forte* as in the first group) toward the third entrance of the motivic fragment, and then subsides, perfectly closing off each of the four measure phrases. The next set of two-measure phrases breaks away from the canonic writing — here, the second theme variant is accented and is repeated immediately in the same bass voice, a semitone down.

The erratic dynamic markings of the subsequent measures lead to a haunting and unexpected recapitulation that is presented in a manner contrary to the expectations of the listener. Given the vigorous sweep of the opening motif in the exposition and the meandering quality of a large part of the development section, the four measures leading towards the recapitulation (mm. 77–80) signal a movement towards a certainty of the return. However, by marking *diminuendo* in the last beat of m. 79, Scriabin surprisingly removes the expected dynamic climax from the arrival of the recapitulation (m. 81), and, as we shall see, convincingly prepares for the climax of the glorious second theme. (Example 3.13)
Ex. 3.13. Scriabin: *Allegro de Concert*, Op. 18, mm. 74–82, unexpected dynamic marking at the recapitulation

The uncertainty of the arrival of the recapitulation is also achieved by avoiding the tonic root (B-flat) in the bass and supplanting it the with dominant pedal underlying the first theme. Although the rhythmic motif of the first theme remains, its character is transformed: the right hand B-flat minor chords that rang in root position in the exposition are now in second and first inversion, respectively, and the overall dynamic is *piano*. This modified and truncated first theme subverts the strength of the tonic and therefore builds more excitement towards the second theme, arguably the crux of this piece.

Whereas the second theme in the exposition was initially stated in introverted, chorale-like writing, the opposite is true for the return of this theme in the recapitulation. Scriabin omits the chorale-like presentation, and delves straight into the effusive and soaring theme in the tonic major. Jim Samson, in *The Music of Chopin*, notes that Chopin’s intensification of returning
thematic material through the use of a “new textural background” in place of ornamentation, particularly in his *Polonaise-Fantasy*, becomes an essential feature later in the music of Scriabin. This “new textural background” seems to come to the fore particularly in this apothecotic return of second theme. (Example 3.14)


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Of particular note are the large leaps in the recapitulation of Scriabin’s second theme (m. 92). Whereas Chopin’s difficult leaps (Barcarolle, mm. 97–98) stretch the distance between the bass notes to a twelfth, Scriabin makes nearly impossible demands on the hand in measure 92 with the jumps of a thirteenth, two octaves, and two octaves and a second, particularly difficult in the prescribed fortissimo dynamic. Furthermore, the last beat culminates in a chord spanning an eleventh.

The tempo marking of \( \text{}\text{=} 72 \) is challenging given the left hand leaps.\(^\text{33}\) However, Scriabin’s marking, Maestoso, is helpful, as it allows the pianist to apply rubato rather generously to capture the spirit of the marking, and to not sound frantic or too busy.

The ritard indicated on the last beat of m. 92 further amplifies the expansion of the material to accommodate the large left hand chord on the last beat of the measure. The effort necessary to play this chord seems to be part of Scriabin’s intention, as it is not only possible, but easier, to take high the B natural with the right hand (as the pedal would sustain the melodic line). However, the presence of an actual written out ritard in conjunction with the span of the chord (which is unmanageable for most hands and certainly Scriabin’s) make a strong case for the chord to be rolled, and not facilitated with the division of hands. The roll would create a much more convincing pacing of the ritard (and maximize the resonance of the chord), as the

\(^\text{33}\)The presence of metronome markings found in much of Scriabin’s earlier music can be attributed his financier and publisher, Belaieff, who evidently demanded metronome markings from his protégé prior to the publications despite Scriabin’s reluctance to do so. And while Scriabin did away with providing metronome markings for his later freer-form works after the passing of Belaieff, and his reluctance to attach precise metronome markings allow these markings to be interpreted with some flexibility—the markings, especially in light of the gradations of tempo within the overall structure of the piece (particularly in the discussion of the Fantasia in B minor in the last chapter of this dissertation) are invaluable in understanding Scriabin’s intentions within the context of the idiomatic fluidity and fluctuations in his music. See Lincoln Ballard, Matthew Bengtson, and John Bell Young, The Alexander Scriabin Companion: History, Performance, and Lore (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 322.
following leap down to the octave G would further broaden the pacing initiated by stretch of the roll. Aware of the danger of the textural density in this passage, Scriabin carefully notates a *mezzo forte* in the inner voices.

The large leaps in the left hand doubtless require diligent repetition to internalize the choreography of the motions. However, much of the difficulty can be managed by shaping the left hand to avoid “landing” on the beats that do not support the melodic contour. For example, in measure 89, Scriabin marks the second and fourth beats *mezzo forte* to avoid the feeling of square four beats, and allow the melodic half notes to soar in the line above. If the left hand is shaped solely based on its down–up–down shape, it would result in a swell towards the second the fourth beats, which directly contradict the composer’s dynamic intentions. Hence, the glowing second theme would get completely buried by a plodding accompaniment. Interestingly, shaping the dynamic against the contour by moving towards the first and third beats via *crescendi* through the second and fourth beats will prevent squareness and ease the physical tension, as the *decrescendo* in the figure will free the hand from trying to reach up. It is naturally more taxing to increase volume in the upward direction as the thumb is bound to lock and hold tension. The author suggests the following approach to the passage (Example 3.15):
Ex. 3.15. Scriabin: *Allegro de Concert*, Op. 18, suggested dynamic contour, mm. 88–93

To convey a sense of space demanded by the *maestoso* marking, the half notes of the theme need to be sustained with a generous amount of pedal. A dynamic decrease in the second and fourth beats, as stipulated by Scriabin’s dynamic markings, with the dynamic inflections described above, will allow the pianist to change the pedal less frequently as the cumulative sound of the weak beats will not overwhelm the projection of the theme.

Measure 102 contains large, repeated chords that may not be playable for pianists who cannot reach a minor 10th that includes interior voices. For such pianists, rolling all of these chords might present itself as the initial solution. (Example 3.16) However, rolling each chord would negatively affect the timing of the natural denouement of the line, drawing too much attention to the chords that only serve a function of sustaining the dotted half note. As the G-flat
is doubled in the inner voices of the right hand, and the pedal can preserve the sound of the initial G-flat, the passage could be dispatched convincingly as follows for those with a span that cannot accommodate this stretch:

1) Roll the first chord followed by repetitions of just the E-flat minor triad without the G-flat.

2) Another fast roll on beat three, again followed by the omission of the top G-flats.

3) Roll the last two chords, bringing out the thumb (G-flat–F.)

4) Avoid changing the pedal with the harmonic change on the third beat as this would break the line

Ex. 3.16. Scriabin: Allegro de Concert, Op. 18, mm. 102–103, left hand performance suggestion

The closing section of the recapitulation has fourteen added measures (m. 115–128) that serve as a build up towards the final coda (compared with the closing section of the exposition). The *accelerando* marked in m. 122 adds increasing urgency to the ascending four-note groupings in the left hand that continues until the *ritard* in m. 127 — at which point the left hand moves in the opposite direction and prepares for the final release to the ensuing coda. The five measures that conclude this passage (mm. 124–128) consist of minor and German 6th chords that provide
the final drive. The four-note octave groupings that make up this *portato* passage in the left hand throughout the *accelerando* (E–F–G-flat–G-flat) is answered declamatorily by the top voice through the *ritardando*. There is a natural, implied dynamic growth within the five measures preceding the coda to the *fortissimo* downbeat of the coda. (Example 3.17)
Ex. 3.17. Scriabin: Allegro de Concert, Op. 18, mm. 113–130, accelerando of four-note grouping

The placement of this *portato* passage recalls the more elaborate (and harmonically more adventurous) staccato section before the coda from Chopin’s F-minor *Ballade*, Op. 52.

(Example 3.18) The two passages share a similar temperament in the direction of the tempo: Chopin utilizes the *stretto* followed by the *ritard*, while Scriabin marks *accelerando-presto-*
ritardando.\textsuperscript{34} This results in a similar effect. The passage in Scriabin’s Op. 18 should be played with as much drama and intensity as is required in the similar passage in Chopin’s Op. 52, as both passages come to a dramatic halt on the dominant before the ultimate push towards the end.\textsuperscript{35}

Ex. 3.18. Chopin \textit{Ballade} in F minor, Op. 52, mm. 197–203, similar accelerando before the coda

The powerful coda begins with the unexpected absence of the appoggiatura in the left hand (E–F), which is replaced by a direct B-flat octave on the downbeat of the measure, immediately reaffirmed by the B-flat minor root position chord on the second beat. The absence of an upbeat gives more definition to the finality of the coda. There is an overwhelming sense of

\textsuperscript{34} Although Chopin’s \textit{ritard} occurs during an ensuing cadence of different material, and Scriabin marks his \textit{ritardando} through the final measure of his quarter note chordal passage, both \textit{ritards} serve to create tension to the dominant.

\textsuperscript{35} Although the fermata in the Chopin \textit{Ballade} is followed by the delicate chorale, it merely delays the ensuing final, climatic passage after the prolonged dominant.
confrontation in these last measures; the upward gestures of the diminished 5ths (m. 132) pull against the downward gestures that have pervaded the entirety of the piece to this point. It is no accident that the upward flourishes are deliberately marked *fortissimo* each time in all three of its iterations in measures 132, 136, and 138. The struggle between the E natural and F is intensified still in the final measures, alternating first in quarter notes, then heightened to eighth notes, all ringing in a deafening *fortississimo*, only breaking free from the shackles of the E-natural–F in the last two measures. (Example 3.19)
Ex. 3.19. Scriabin: *Allegro de Concert*, Op. 18, mm. 129–142, appearance of the upward gesture with reinforced dynamic
Chapter 4: Scriabin’s *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28

Scriabin composed the *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28 (1900) in the interim between the creation of his two symphonies: Symphony No.1 in E Major, Op. 26 (1899-1900) for orchestra and chorus (an ambitious first symphony in six movements) and Symphony No.2 in C minor, Op. 29 (1901). The placement of the *Fantasie* between the first two symphonies is significant; as Hull points out, the *Fantasie* is a piece on “full symphonic lines,”\(^{36}\) and the influence of his symphonic ideals is discernable in the sonic scope of the *Fantasie* as will be explored in the discussion of the coda.

Among his works for piano, the *Fantasie* comes between the Third and Fourth Sonatas, a period that marks a significant divergence in compositional direction. The *Fantasie* is the last substantial work for piano that Scriabin penned before his Fourth Sonata in F-sharp major, Op. 30, in which a “magnificent new harmonic kingdom is invaded…contains no trace of earlier influences,”\(^{37}\) and which “marks a turning point in Scriabin’s evolution…and unveils for the first time the true nature of Scriabin’s art . . .”\(^{38}\) It is the “first work to bear these fanciful terms, such as ‘quietissimo’, ‘rattenendo’, and finally and very fittingly ‘focasamente, giubiloso’.”\(^{39}\) With the *Fantasie*, Scriabin bids farewell to the harmonic and pianistic language he inherited from Chopin and Liszt.

Scriabin gives the title *Fantasie* to two earlier compositions — the early *Sonata-Fantasie* in G-sharp minor (the subject of Chapter 1 of this dissertation) and the *Sonata-Fantasie No.2* in

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G-sharp minor, Op. 19 (1897). But the Fantasie in B minor, a single-movement work in modified sonata form, is the first and only piece that bears the title without the sonata counterpart. The employment of the single-movement sonata-form, which has been highlighted throughout this dissertation, continues to permeate his thought, and a few years after the completion of the Fantasie, it becomes the sole form for the remainder of the sonatas, beginning with his Sonata No.5, Op. 53.

The Fantasie was premiered by Alexander Goldenweizer—Scriabin’s classmate at the Moscow Conservatory and a staunch supporter of Scriabin’s music who later headed its piano department (and who, incidentally, was responsible for introducing Scriabin’s works to Leo Tolstoy) — on November 11, 1907. Bowers writes that the “Fantasia, Op. 28 pleases the virtuoso and is today one of Scriabin’s most likeable compositions. Its turgid and pompous flaws can be overlooked.”

The Fantasie’s elusive and lengthy coda makes it difficult for the performer to present a coherent overall architecture. The difficulty of the piece is compounded by the thorny writing, particularly with its demands on the left hand, thick texture, and the large span required amidst the dynamic intensity. The essential elements to examine in order to better understand the structure and to connect the seemingly disparate sections include principal motivic units, tempo indications, and dynamic pacing.

The form of the Fantasie can be outlined as follows:

Exposition (mm.1-72)

First theme area in B minor: mm. 1–29

Second theme area in D major: mm. 30–54

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Closing theme in D major: mm. 55–72

Development (mm. 73–92)

Recapitulation (mm. 93–150)

First theme area in B minor: mm. 93–108

Second theme area in B major: mm. 109–132

Closing theme area in B major: mm. 133–150

Coda (mm. 151–197)

The three themes of the Fantasie in B minor (first, second, and closing) are all unified by a rhythmic motif with some variants, which are presented right away in the first theme. The motivic unit of the first five notes of the first theme (grouped in red in Example 4.1) can be divided into two parts: ascending (x) and descending (y). (Example 4.1) Scriabin uses the descending rhythmic component, \( \text{\textit{\textbf{rr.g q}}} \) (y) in the second and the closing themes and thus unifies all three thematic groups.

Ex. 4.1. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 1–2, first theme

Each theme presents the same motif rhythmic motif, \( \text{\textit{\textbf{rr.g q}}} \), and its variant, \( \text{\textit{\textbf{dfGfS}}} \) in striking transformations of atmosphere and mood. Hull describes the characteristics of the three
themes as follows: the first theme expresses noble melancholy, the second theme conveys an exquisite tenderness, and the third (closing) theme projects majestic grandeur. Schloezer asserts that Scriabin’s “newly won independence” from Chopin (through the Preludes, Op. 11 and Op. 15, and the Etudes, Op. 8) is most notable in his rhythmic freedom, and that while “Scriabin rarely resorts to changes of meter…he embroiders subtle, capricious rhythmic figures, which he, as one of the greatest pianists of his time, knew how to project to perfection in his own playing.”

Effectively assimilating this particular brand of rhythmic freedom in performance can further highlight the character differences between the variations of the same rhythmic motif throughout the Fantasie.

The themes of the exposition are as follows: first theme in B minor (mm. 1–13), second theme in D major (mm. 30–38), and the closing theme also in D Major (mm. 55–69). The incorporation of the shared rhythmic motif is shown in Example 2. The second theme uses \( \text{\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet\textbullet} \) in a lyrical, step-wise ascending gesture (Example 4.2) whereas the third theme employs the motif in an arpeggiated downward figure (Example 4.3).

Ex. 4.2. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Second theme with the same rhythmic motif, mm. 30–34

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41 Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, 328.
Despite the subsequent variations of the same motif, the timing of each figure should relate and respond to the character of each theme. For example, the falling gesture of the first theme may give way to a slight double dotting, whereas the ascending second, lyrical theme may allow for a *tenuto* effect on the sixteenth note to capture a more singing line. Conversely, the motif in the first theme could have more *rubato*, which would highlight its somber quality, and the second theme, yearning and hopeful, could move forward by shortening the sixteenth note. The interpretative decision regarding the closing theme is more straightforward with the march-like employment of the motif that pervades the section. Regardless of the different approaches to these themes, it is crucial that each presentation of the rhythmic motif portrays a distinct character through a musically flexible treatment of the rhythm.

The first theme features intervallic leaps in the melodic line, which start small (initially as a minor second) and grow larger, with intermittent returns to motion by half steps. The bass also expands intervallically after its initial whole step descent, and is filled with descending figures, in contrast to the right hand’s rising gestures.

The execution of the initial rhythmic motif can be problematic without careful listening to the tied note (G octave), as the pianist can produce an unnecessary accent on the F-sharp (which
should be softer than the G.) An ideal delivery of this passage would be to play as if the second note of the tied octave was restruck, so that the performer can gauge a more natural decrescendo in the F-sharps that follow. This approach effectively conveys the shape of the first gesture. In addition, a slight expansion of time in the first two beats would project the tension felt in the minor second ascent, before the release of falling back to the F-sharp.

The second gesture reaches higher (F-sharp–B–F-sharp) with the newly enlarged interval propelling the following F-sharps with a crescendo. It is necessary that this crescendo towards the V7 (m. 4), which initiates the chromatic ascent be indeed realized through the F-sharps as the natural falling shape of the triplet gesture on the third beat of m. 3 makes a diminuendo more instinctive. The downbeat octave of each intervallic leap in the theme moves up chromatically (m. 5: G, m. 6: G -sharp, m. 7: G, m. 8: A-sharp) until the arrival of the G Major harmony (VI) in measure 9. (Blue, Example 4.4) Consequently, applying tenuto to highlight the rising chromatic octaves to the B natural propels the intensity and holds the phrase under one long slur. (Example 4.4)

The first theme is noteworthy for its numerous motions to the dominant harmony (m. 2, m. 4, m. 7, m. 11, m. 12, m. 13, m. 14, m. 16, m. 20), which are never satisfied with a strong tonic harmony in B minor. (Red boxes, Example 4.4) In fact, a strong arrival of the tonic is only heard in the coda. Because of the deliberate avoidance of the B octave bass on the strong beats, the mysteriousness and instability of the first theme is immediately perceived by the listener.
Ex. 4.4. Scriabin: *Fantasie in B minor*, Op. 28, mm. 1–2, motions to the dominant harmony and chromatic ascent to G major

The first theme section (mm. 1–29) can be divided into two parts: measures 1–13 and measures 13–29. The first seven measures have much in common — melodically, harmonically, and dynamically. Subsequently, there is a change in harmonic direction in the last beats of m. 9 and m. 19–20 to G major and F-sharp major, respectively. Whereas the first part moves from the arrival of G major to F-sharp major in two-measure units (mm.9–10, mm. 11–12) then returning to the opening motif in m. 13, the second part is elongated: the arrival of the F-sharp major in m. 20 moves over the course of the following four measures chromatically towards the climax in A major in m. 25, the dominant of the ensuing second theme in D major (Example 4.5).
As discussed above, the *crescendo* in measure 3 occurs in the last beat through mostly F-sharp octaves in the melodic material. In the second presentation of the same material beginning in m. 13, Scriabin adds accented syncopations in the accompaniment (mm. 14 and 15) and the *crescendo* appears one beat sooner, propelled by the accented left hand (Example 4.6). When the accents in the left hand are emphasized to help highlight the descending counter line (E-D-C-sharp) and voiced sharply against the otherwise repetitious rhythmic and textural casting of these measures, they provide the extended climax in measure 25 with more agitation and excitement. Although Scriabin does not mark an accent on the C-sharp (last eighth note, measure 16), the preceding two accents (in addition to the continuous crescendo) allow our ears to lock into the bass line until the tonic B in measure 17.
Ex. 4.6. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28, bass line delineation, mm. 12–18

The second theme is singing and lyrical, the left hand accompaniment very much in the modality of the Chopin Nocturnes. Unlike the first theme, there is reassurance of the tonic (D major) in the bass of every measure within the first four measures (mm. 31–34). The unifying rhythmic motif is ingeniously blended within the theme, adding a hopeful lilt to the ascending line. (Example 4.7)
Ex. 4.7. Scriabin: *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 30–41, unifying rhythmic motif and its variant in the second theme

After the initial statement of the second theme, the alto voice is introduced in an imitative passage incorporating slight alterations of the soprano voice’s line (mm. 35–39). Beginning with the rhythmic motif (without the opening rising third), the entrance of the alto voice is placed wonderfully for the hand, as the thumb will automatically display the alto voice’s first appearance with a little more volume than the soprano voice. The modulating sequences in measures 39–40 and measures 41–42 retain the unifying rhythm, adding a slight variation to the character by adding
the sixteenth rests and imbuing it with a capriciousness as the sequence moves towards the sustained note. (Example 4.7)

The climax of the second theme (mm. 51–54) features melodic octaves in the right hand accompanied by full triplet chords in both hands—a texture Scriabin uses often, as in the climax of the first movement of the Sonata-Fantasie in G-sharp minor, Op. 19 and the coda of Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30. For pianists with smaller hands (like the composer himself), the left hand chords in measure 51 would necessitate taking the top G-sharps with the right hand. Whereas this solution cannot apply to the second beat, since the melodic octave in the right hand does not free the thumb to take over the G-sharp, it is arguably easier to roll this chord (E-sharp, C-sharp, G-sharp) than the previous chord in the downbeat of m. 51 (E-sharp, B, G-sharp), as it sits more comfortably in the hand due to the two black keys. Thus, it seems that one convincing choice is to interpret this as a written-in *rubato* with a roll, especially in conjunction with his marking, *appassionato*. (Example 4.8)

Ex. 4.8. Scriabin: *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 49–51, performance suggestion for large span in the left hand
The closing theme begins at the \textit{più vivo} in m. 55. This is not the first intensification of the tempo, as the second theme is also marked \textit{più vivo}. The increasing momentum that is built through the themes contradict Hull’s description of the third theme in particular as “majestic,” which generally would not connote a faster tempo. The character of the closing theme is a culmination of the two previous themes; yearning quality of the first is answered with the passionate hopefulness of the second, and finally, the excited triumph of its realization.

The tempo acceleration of the themes unfold as follows: first theme (\textit{Moderato}) \( \text{\textit{M.M.}} \quad j=56 \), second theme (\textit{Più vivo}), \( j=76 \), then the closing theme (\textit{Più vivo}), \( j=126 \). The contrast in tempo between the second and closing themes is quite drastic, made even more prominent by the accelerando into the \textit{Presto} from mm. 60-64. This march-like theme in triple meter is less conventional, dignified, and ceremonial, and moves towards a triumphant delirium. (Example 4.9)
The idea of the continuous accelerando persists within this theme until the *allargando* in measure 68. The fastest tempo of this piece arrives in measure 64 and is ironically followed by two measures of some of the thickest chromatic writing. Although the clarity of the harmonic changes within this frantic speed demands attention to pedaling, the overriding factor in this presto is conveying the sense of madness that wanes only when the march-like motif is taken over by the right hand (mm. 69–72). The constant forward motion from the beginning up to this point pulls back only in these last four measures of the exposition—a short closing section that is striking for its simplicity of the harmonic material (two measures each of D major and D minor harmonies), absent of any chromatic elements.

Despite its short length (lasting just under twenty measures), the development section knits together the three themes in an impressively seamless and cohesive fashion. The first two
measures (mm. 73–74) are a combination of elements from all three themes. The right hand continues the march-like triadic descent followed by a fragment of the opening of the second theme (although in minor) while the bass weaves in pieces of the first and second themes underneath. (Example 4.10)

![Ex. 4.10. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28, Development: mm. 73–74](image)

Another continuous accelerando poco a poco begins almost immediately after the onset of the development, which is emphasized again in the middle of the development (m. 86) until the final two measures before the recapitulation. Carefully marked terraced dynamics also accompany the accelerando, culminating in its first arrival point in measure 81. The strength of this initial arrival is due to the immediate repetition of the two measures (mm. 81–82, mm. 83–84)— an emotional outburst that seems to demand time despite the accelerando marked throughout this section, which can be achieved by stretching out the upward leap and the first two notes of following sixteenth-note gesture to make it more emphatic. (Example 4.11)
Ex. 4.11. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 79–84, expansion of the second upward leap

A brilliant amalgamation of elements of the second and closing themes proceed from the first climax to the shattering arrival in m. 89; the march-like octaves in the bass from the closing theme, stated in upward motion conveying a greater sense of exultation (m. 85), is combined with the slightly augmented outline of the second theme as highlighted in Example 4.12.
Ex. 4.12. Scriabin: *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 85–90, augmented second theme and inverted closing theme

A vivid sense of delirium is generated largely by the fluttering sixteenth and thirty-second notes that accompany much of the recapitulation and coda. The three themes are presented in a more intense and powerful restatement than in the exposition. The lone octaves of the first theme are harmonized by sweeping sixteenth-note accompaniment and, unlike the barren opening, Scriabin sustains the tension and fights the natural decay of the piano sound by filling in the silences. (Example 4.13)

Ex. 4.13. Scriabin: *Fantasie* in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 93–94, recapitulation
The immediate repetition of the first theme, which, in the exposition, began anew in measure 13, is absent, and instead is consumed by the conflagration of initially chromatically driven sixteenth-notes, featuring chromatically ascending augmented triads, that accelerate towards the climactic second theme in the tonic major. Scriabin marks piano at the onset of this transition (measure 100), a restarting point in preparation for the climb towards the glorious restatement of the second theme. Due to the ensuing measures of continuous accelerando and crescendo, a persuasive realization of this measure would be somewhat slower than the original Tempo II, and not quite yet at a fortissimo dynamic level.

The exhilarating return of the second theme in B major is reminiscent of the climax of Chopin’s Barcarolle, Op. 60, both in its emotional impact and the density (and difficulty) of the writing—left hand leaps (as discussed in the analysis of the Allegro de Concert) and melodic material of the right hand are intertwined with accompaniment. The right hand carries two voices simultaneously: the second theme is presented in octaves and the triplet accompaniment in thirds, fourths, and fifths intervals are mapped on top of the melodic line. Additionally, the lean nocturne-like accompaniment of the exposition is maximized with thick chords that seem to compete in density with the right hand.

The clarity of voicing in the melody can be achieved by a lessened volume of the inner intervals of the right hand, so that the weight of the hand will be placed in the thumb and fifth fingers only. This will also facilitate the uncomfortable placement of the third at the beginning of m. 110 that requires a strenuous stretch between fingers two, three, and five. The danger inherent in this type of writing (both in the Barcarolle and the Fantasie) is that the volume and the technical difficulties can easily make the passage sound square and plodding, whereas it should give the feeling of lifting off. This can be mitigated by varying the dynamic shaping of the left
hand in each measure (as it remains autonomous from the shape of the melodic material) as shown in Example 4.14, eliminating the pianists’ natural tendency to similarly mark each beat of the measure.


As in the bridge to the second theme, Scriabin marks a downward shift in intensity in measure 117, marked *mezzo forte*, and reinstates the whirlwind of sixteenth-note figures in the left hand that encompass more than four octaves. Considering the speed of the passage, and more importantly, to achieve the aggregate dynamic of only a *mezzo forte*, the awkwardness of the left hand can only be eased when played at a maximum dynamic of *piano* immediately following the deeper tone of the first bass sixteenth of each measure. The lowered dynamic would also display the interplay of the rhythmic motif with in measures 118 and 120 with more clarity,
delineating the more compressed and agitated version of the motif in the left hand. (Example 4.15)

Ex. 4.15. Scriabin: *Fantasie in B minor*, Op. 28, mm. 116–121, interplay of rhythmic motives

The four measures, initiated by the arrival of the *fortississimo/appassionato* in measure 129 are arguably one of the most technically daunting passages in Scriabin’s output. Replete with huge leaps in the left hand chords (the difficulty compounded by the sheer stretch of the
chordal figures as in the third beat of the left hand in m. 129), *fortississimo* dynamic, and melodic line that needs to cut through the texture, this passage requires the pianist to slow down and expend a great deal of effort just to play the notes. Of course, the *fortississimo* should not be taken literally and applied to every note of these four measures as the passage will sound more intense (and louder) when there is an audible aural space between the melodic material (and harmonically supportive bass line) and the rest of the harmonic filler, as the latter should only contribute to sustaining the intensity of the melody.

Another hurdle to executing this thorny passage with the needed explosiveness and ecstasy is the missing bass in the second beat of this massive arrival (m. 129) where the A-sharp octave in the treble is completely on its own to carry the strength of the preceding beat. While the reason for the missing bass in beats two and three of measure 132 seems logical (as there is a sense of winding down), the reason for the absence of the bass in m. 129 seems oddly elusive. In order to compensate for the lack of support, the second beat needs to serve as the point of actual arrival, with the entirely of the first beat building a *crescendo* to the high A-sharp, which should played as if marked with a *sforzando*. The decision to maximize the thinner second beat also makes sense when one considers the tie through which the lone octave needs to maintain its sound. (Example 4.16)
Ex. 4.16. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28, mm. 128–134, passage requiring careful voicing

The ensuing closing theme needs to keep the restlessly passionate spirit from losing momentum. On the surface, Scriabin demands this purely by the metronomic intensification employing the same tempo marking as the previous march-like section, *Più vivo* $\overline{=126}$ and increasing the dynamic to *fortissimo*. However, there is already a built-in thrust in the shift from the highly dense and problematic writing of the *appassionato* (and the natural broadening created by the left hand) to the reduction of the difficulty and texture at the arrival of the closing theme, which allows the pianist to move forward with much more ease.

The most problematic interpretative challenge lies in the long coda. Having already reached the dynamic apex of the piece, the forty-two measure coda can easily seem too pale and extended in comparison. Nevertheless, it is in the coda that Scriabin reaches the emotional
pinnacle of the *Fantasie*, where the thematic elements resurface in delirium until colossal orchestral culmination is reached. The coda incorporates all three themes and is divided into three sections as follows:

mm. 151–164: Theme 1 in the upper voice, and the Closing Theme in the lower voice

mm. 165–180: Theme 2

mm. 181–197: Theme 1 in both voices

Certainly it would have been architecturally convincing (and arguably much less difficult to hold together) to skip from the end of the recapitulation (m. 146) to the last B major section of the coda (m. 181), with the momentum of recapitulation carrying to the end. The diversion to distant key areas and receding dynamics at the beginning of the coda can be perceived as yet another (predictable) beginning of terraced intensification, which describes the general contour within the exposition, development, and recapitulation. Yet, attention to Scriabin’s meticulous metronomic indications as it relates to the rest of the *Fantasie* is crucial to approaching the coda. The metronome markings of the *Fantasie* are mapped as follows:

**Exposition**

1st theme: $\frac{64}{8} = 56$

2nd theme: $\frac{64}{8} = 76$

3rd theme: $\frac{64}{8} = 126$

**Development**

$\frac{64}{8} = 56$ (Tempo I) with continuous *accelerando*
Recapitulation

1st theme: \( \mathcal{J} = 56 \)

2nd theme: \( \mathcal{J} = 76 \)

3rd theme: \( \mathcal{J} = 126 \)

Coda

1st and 3rd theme section: \( \mathcal{J} = 76 \)

2nd theme section: \( \mathcal{J} = 88 \)

1st theme section: \( \mathcal{J} = 56 \)

As can be gleaned from above, the tempo markings in the coda depart from the tempi already established in association with each theme. This immediately creates an unsettling mood. Having previously stated the first theme material three times in the same tempo \( \mathcal{J} = 76 \), the increase of twenty metronomic notches at the beginning of the coda of the first theme material feels as if something has been taken out of context. This tempo change is also heightened by continuously running sixteenth notes beginning in m. 153, magnifying the sense of anxiety. In addition, foreign material interrupts the first two-measure theme in A minor at the onset of the coda—a sudden interjection of Scriabin’s three-note motif, followed by a haunting drop in dynamics. (Example 4.17)
Beat 2 of m. 153 launches the flurry of sixteenth notes (and thirty second notes in the last section) from that point until the final measures towards the end. The sudden dynamic drop at the start of the sixteenth note figures in m. 154 requires the pedal to continue so that the pianissimo passage can sneak in without much clarity; use of pedal can be reduced from the top of the hairpin in beat 2, with attention to holding tied A in the right hand as to hear the A minor harmony throughout.

Almost the entirely of the coda lies against the backdrop of the relentless running notes, shaped nervously by the hairpins in the first section of the coda. Pedal should be blurred without completely losing the clarity of the two simultaneously occurring themes through the use of a fluttering quarter pedal. In examining Scriabin’s own playing of his music, Leikin advises the following, which can be applied throughout this coda: “to create necessary exquisite sound effects, the pedal must flutter somewhere in the upper part of the moving range, so that Scriabin’s famous ‘pedal mist’ would not become a pedal mess.”\(^{42}\) The idea of producing some level of intentional

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blurring is apt here as Scriabin frequently blended several notes together under one sustaining pedal, “creating fascinating harmonies and, as Sabeenov put it, ‘some strange resonances’.”

Two-measure phrases continue through various keys (A minor, B minor, C Major) and increase in tempo and dynamic until yet another sudden dynamic drop in measure 165 (Più vivo), at the arguable height of the work’s delirium. Here is the “arrival” of the first pianissimo of the Fantasie, with murmuring sixteenth notes that permeate the entire section in the left hand with an eerie dominant F-sharp harmony. A sense of intoxication and inevitability is powerfully achieved through the gentle tolling of the F-sharp pedal, combined with the fleeting passagework and an increase in the metronome marking. (Example 4.18)

Ex. 4.18. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, mm. 165–167, second thematic material over F-sharp pedal

The aforementioned section is comprised of two eight-measure phrases (2+2+4, 2+2+4). Like the first section of the coda, much of it is built on the two-measure sequences; the first two-measure phrase (mm. 165–166) is repeated immediately a major second lower (mm. 167–168). In

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43 Ibid., 35.
m. 171, the C-sharps evoke the tail of the original five-note motif, but this time in rhythmic augmentation. The sound of the C-sharps should resonate to recall and relate to the opening. (Examples 4.19 and 4.20)

Ex. 4.19. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, m. 1, opening theme and rhythmic motif

Ex. 4.20. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, coda: mm. 168–172, augmented rhythmic motif

The second eight-measure phrase is further ornamented by the canonic treatment of the melody in the middle voice and the eighth note staccato leaps in the bass. In contrast to the first
part of this section, the second half of the phrase tightens the material; the two-measure phrase shortens to one-measure in mm. 177 and 178, and eliminates the yearning leap of the third, which is delayed until the very end of m. 178 into the downbeat of m. 179. The last statement of the second theme is intensified further by the chromatic addition of the A-sharp (m. 178, second beat). The enormous technical difficulty of negotiating the huge intervals in the right hand, which contains this chromatic ascent (m. 177-178), demands a preemptive allargando, whose placement a measure later can sound unconvincingly abrupt. (Example 4.21)

Ex. 4.21. Scriabin: Fantasie in B minor, Coda: mm. 177–181, suggested preemptive allargando

The third and final section of the coda is of symphonic proportions—virtuosic, arpeggiated Lisztian flourishes span the entire keyboard in both hands, evoking sweeping gestures of an entire string section. The same murmuring motif from the opening of the coda is
transformed into a fiery, declamatory outburst, first in B minor, then heightening into B major. An orchestral image of this passage would likely include the brass ringing out the sustained notes.

Unlike the presentation of the first themes throughout the *Fantasie* where the tonic is eluded to but not pronounced, this final section of the coda boldly emphasizes the B major tonic in its strong beats repeatedly (m. 181, m. 185, m. 189, m. 192, mm. 195–197).

The symphonic nature of this coda is best exemplified in the last six measures. After eight measures of dense and explosive writing, the texture thins to a single major chord, followed by five repeated octave Bs in unison, which, if thought of in pianistic terms, could fall flat without careful consideration of options for execution (m. 192). These accented Bs demand the intensity and the volume of a brass section. If we consider the thundering timpani-like flourishes in the succeeding two measures as well, Scriabin seems to be reaching far beyond the limits of the piano in this passage’s orchestral expansiveness. (Example 4.22)
Ex. 4.22. Scriabin: *Fantasie* in B minor, Coda: mm. 190–197, brass and timpani-like writing

The coda as the crux of the *Fantasie* is compelling especially in light of his later works, which drive inevitably towards the end (Sonata No. 4, Sonata No. 5, *Vers la flamme*, and even Sonata No.9 “*Black Mass*”, though it quickly dissipates and ends in a haunting pianissimo). When looked upon as a kind of a genesis of an idea, one can notice how this compositional element of the *Fantasie* becomes more and more prominent within his idiom, becoming a substantial dramatic tool for Scriabin’s musical narrative.
Conclusion

Scriabin’s output for the piano remains among the most important contributions to the concert repertoire of the twentieth century. The combination of his idiosyncratic personal, philosophical, and musical ideals permeate his works from his earliest compositions. Despite the pervasive criticism of much of his earlier works as not innovative and too Chopinesque, and the dearth of attention both in the scholarly circles and concert halls, his early works, particularly the larger-scale works examined in this dissertation, are notable for Scriabin’s individual artistic voice and pianistic writing.

The precocious technical demands and unpredictable nature of the dynamic turns in the Sonata-Fantaisie are impressive for a work of a fourteen-year-old. The dynamic contour and the pianistic writing is strikingly different in many aspects from that of his idol, Chopin, with arguably much more emphasis in the agility and independence of the left hand. The written pedal indications to create a deliberate harmonic blur also point towards a hazy sound world of his later works.

The propulsive Allegro Appassionato is an effective, virtuosic concert piece. While the writing is dense, adhering to Scriabin’s precise dynamic markings can create an organic architecture of the piece, and lend explosive power to the breathtaking cadenza (in itself a sweeping romantic gesture, which tests the pianists’ technical prowess along the lines of Liszt and Rachmaninoff). The Allegro Appassionato also offers two starkly contrasting themes; Scriabin amplifies the dramatic differences between them not only via melodic contour and character, but also within his dichotomy of registers: the first theme wholly in the bass versus the second theme continuously in the treble.
The *Allegro de Concert*, a piece the composer often included in his recitals, takes inspiration from Chopin’s *Sonata No. 2* in B-flat minor, Op. 35 in its key and many aspects of its content. The first theme of Scriabin’s Op. 18 in B-flat minor presents an agitation similar to the opening of Chopin’s Sonata No. 2, while the second theme of the *Allegro de Concert*, in D-flat major, unfolds in a conspicuously similar manner to the opening movement of the Chopin, from the chorale-like simplicity to the undulating triplet accompaniment of the flowering melody. The placement of the chordal accelerando before the final coda and the canonic writing of the development also recall Chopin’s Sonata No. 2. The technical difficulties, most evident in the large hand leaps, and the orchestral sound of the climatic return of the second theme with which Scriabin pushes the drama can be approached more successfully by avoiding the squareness of the melody by the way of shaping the left hand, both with dynamics and flexibility of pulse.

With the *Fantasie*, Scriabin closes the early chapter of his pianistic output. Ingeniously designed with three themes that share the same rhythmic kernel, these are each presented with a distinct temperament. His use of precise, accelerating metronome markings is for each theme particularly noteworthy, as it impels the delirium achieved in the coda. A piece of orchestral proportions, the *Fantasie* is fraught with a sense of reaching beyond the limits of the piano sound and technique, after which he finally enters a new sonic world with the Fourth Piano Sonata.

I have endeavored throughout this dissertation to bring attention to the details, both musical and technical, through performance analysis so that these findings and thoughts can directly support a more successful and meaningful study and performance of these works. The study of negotiating the technical hurdles, listening for the aggregate dynamic of a dense passage through artful voicing and pedaling, and presenting a more cohesive architecture of a work through careful attention to pacing and timing are as valuable as learning tools as they are
applied to other mainstream works in the repertoire studied in music conservatories. These four works certainly merit attention, especially in the concert and study repertoire. They are impressive works in their own right, and the connections to other composers, especially that of Chopin, should be celebrated rather than dismissed. It is my hope that the insights offered in this dissertation will inspire more pianists and scholars to champion these works.
Bibliography


