

**FROM PIANO TO STAGE: A GENEALOGY OF MUSICAL  
IDEAS IN THE PIANO WORKS OF SERGEI PROKOFIEV  
(1900 – C.1920)**

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**From piano to stage: a genealogy of  
musical ideas in the piano works of  
Sergei Prokofiev  
(1900 – c. 1920)**

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Degree: PhD**

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## Preliminaries

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I, Christina Guillaumier, hereby confirm that I am solely responsible for the production of this submission which consists of:

Thesis

Appendix of Musical Scores

and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 30 June 2010 Signature of candidate [REDACTED]

I was admitted as a research student in September 2005 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in June 2007; the higher study for which this is the outcome was carried out at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama between 2005 and 2009.

Date 30 June 2010 Signature of candidate [REDACTED]

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St. Andrews and any additional requirements of the regulations of the RSAMD as approved by the University and that the candidate is qualified to make this submission application for that degree.

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This thesis is dedicated to Joe, Emma and Stephanie in small recognition of their inexhaustible patience and loving support.

And last but most importantly, to Ron: without you, this work would never have been completed.

## **Note on transliteration**

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The Library of Congress transliteration system has been used throughout the thesis except for well known names such as Prokofiev, Miaskovsky and Diaghilev for example.

## **Abstract**

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This thesis is a study of Prokofiev's musical ideas as they emerge in his early writing for piano. It is concerned with elucidating the connections between Prokofiev's pianistic technique and his compositional technique. In doing so, the study explores the genealogy of composer's musical gestures and thematic ideas. Both his playing and his compositional styles have been labeled as distinctive: the thesis attempts to deconstruct that distinctiveness by pinpointing the origins of the composer's playing and compositional styles, tracing their gradual evolution into a mature idiom. The first chapter is concerned with Prokofiev's juvenilia (1898 to c. 1906). Drawing upon a large amount of previously unpublished archival resources, this chapter uncovers the original gestures and thematic ideas which characterize Prokofiev's early style. The next chapter focuses on Prokofiev's period at the St Petersburg Conservatory, tracing his development into a virtuoso pianist, examining the nature of that virtuosity and chronicling the creation of Prokofiev's performing persona. The gestures and idea-types identified in the first chapter are then examined within the context of Prokofiev's works for solo piano, his early works with orchestra and his first two major operas. Conclusions are then drawn about the nature of Prokofiev's distinctiveness, his compositional legacy and about his current position as a major twentieth-century composer.

## Introduction

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This thesis is concerned with the significance of the piano in Prokofiev's compositional thought, tracing the evolution of his musical thinking and examining the genealogy of musical ideas that constitute the Prokofievan idiom from the juvenilia through to around 1920, the year he completed *Love for Three Oranges*. Although Prokofiev's compositions for the instrument have been discussed in musical scholarship, and although his role as composer-pianist has also received some attention from both Western and Russian sources<sup>1</sup>, little focus has been placed on understanding the connection between Prokofiev's pianistic and compositional techniques. Perhaps surprisingly for a composer of his stature, Prokofiev scholarship is something of an under-developed field. More than a century on from his birth, there are still blanks in the composer's biography that are only now being filled. While the composer's complex biography is gradually being uncovered, bringing to light previously unknown facts about his life, the study of his music itself is not undergoing regeneration to the same extent. This may in large part be due to the highly distinctive nature of the writing which does not lend itself easily to theoretical applications. It is therefore hoped that this study marks a step toward enlivening and rejuvenating the discussion of Prokofiev's music.

Initially, the dissertation started as a quest to understand a highly distinctive writing style for the piano. Prokofiev's output for the instrument was prolific: it is also idiosyncratic. From personal experience of playing his music, it seemed to me that in order to understand the way the narrative flowed within any given Prokofiev piece, it was necessary to understand or at least to get a feel for the way it was put together. Clearly, a very particular technique was needed to play his piano works. It was also evident that the type of virtuosity demanded by this writing was different from that of his predecessors, mocking even of the very concept of virtuosity. And so it was with some hesitation that I initially used the term virtuosity to describe a technique and a vital, almost primitive, energy needed to play these compositions. However, as time progressed, and my understanding of this distinctive idiom deepened, it became clear that virtuosity was indeed a suitable term to apply to this

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<sup>1</sup> See Marina Nest'eva, *Sergei Prokof'ev* (Chelyabinsk: Arkaim, 2003), 52 – 61 and Boris Berman *Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

writing. The issue of Prokofiev's specific type of virtuosity will be engaged with in the third chapter and explored through the study of specific works for piano.

It is also impossible for a pianist not to be sensitive to the imagination inherent in Prokofiev's compositional style: imagination that was not only written into the scores, but that would need to be brought by the performer to his/her interpretation of the music and particularly of the piano music. The intrinsic rhythmicality of some of the music is particularly challenging. It is not gratuitous but rather an integral feature of his writing style for the instrument. As a pianist, Prokofiev's playing was technically virtuosic, colourful in terms of its touch, beat-driven, and above all rhythmic. The current exploration has much to do with understanding Prokofiev's type of pianism, not necessarily as it emerges through his few recordings, or as it is described in contemporary reports, but, more importantly, as it is *inscribed into his music*.

Playing Prokofiev's compositions also brings to light the related issue of performability and in deconstructing Prokofiev's specific kind of virtuosity,<sup>2</sup> this thesis engages with the reason why the music's performability was at various times called into question. When he sent some of his early works to the publishers, the scores came back with comments that the music was 'unplayable'. Contemporary reports, such as those discussed in the second chapter, suggested that they were indeed playable. The number of contemporary recordings of Prokofiev's complete works for the instrument supports this. They also go beyond mere finger technique and dexterity: a pianist needs to think in orchestral terms to interpret these pieces. The works appear unplayable because they force the pianist away from the usual technical challenges and pose new ones instead. There seems to be a connection between the piano writing and orchestral sonorities. The physical nature of the writing is not only evident in the piano compositions but is also inherent in the orchestral ones. Conversely, in order to understand the piano music, one needs to be able to imagine the multiplicity of sonorities that the writing suggests.

It was apparent from the outset that in order to understand the way that Prokofiev was writing in for instance 1910, I would need to explore what came prior to that. Therefore I would need to examine the beginning of the composer's relationship with the instrument. It is my belief that the piano provides the clue to

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<sup>2</sup> This concept is discussed in the third chapter.

comprehending his compositional thinking more generally, that, on looking at the piano pieces, one comes face-to-face with his orchestral textures and sonorities, and vice versa. The interconnecting point between the piano music and the rest of his output lies, I will argue in a system of gestures and thematic prototypes<sup>3</sup> that creatively generate his entire musical idiom. The exploration of this system of gestures and musical ideas ultimately drives the dissertation and aims to lead to a deeper understanding of his idiosyncratic writing style.

The dissertation engages with Prokofiev's distinctive idiom, exploring its links not only to his pianistic technique, but also to issues of theatricality. By examining the origins of Prokofiev's musical thinking and tracing its evolution into a mature idiom, we come a little closer to understanding the nature of Prokofiev's distinctiveness. The composer's juvenilia has never been examined in the context of his later idiom. This study will start by contextualising these under-rated works and elucidating their role in Prokofiev's compositional process. Unearthing the composer's early works is not merely an archaeological exercise, but aims to provide the starting point for a more unified approach to Prokofiev's output. By scrutinizing the composer's early development, it is possible to trace the embryonic beginnings of a compositional style. Within those beginnings we may find the origins of musical ideas and gestural thinking that would remain a staple part of Prokofiev's idiom and be carried through to maturity. These ideas and gestures remained constant throughout the composer's stylistic re-evaluations. In the course of tracing the evolution of his idiom, the thesis also engages with the issue of Prokofiev's orchestral style, yet another area of Prokofiev's music that remains both controversial and largely unexamined.

### Perspectives on Prokofiev scholarship

In the years following Prokofiev's death, most scholarship focused on his biography. Prokofiev's life may be split into three phases - but only for the sake of convenience, as these phases do not exactly correspond with developments in Prokofiev's compositional style: Russia (c.1902 – 1918), Europe and USA (1918 – c.1936) and the Soviet Union (1936 – 1953). Prokofiev left Russia for the USA in the spring of 1918, eventually settling in Paris with his wife and mother in October 1923. During the early twenties the composer assiduously maintained his contacts in Soviet Russia. He remained interested in going back and performing as well as staging his

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<sup>3</sup> See 14 for a full definition of these terms.

own works there. His first return to Russia was in 1927, after a long absence, when he gave his first tour as pianist and conductor of his own works. Prokofiev would not return to settle in the Soviet Union with his wife and sons until 1936. This marks the beginning of the Soviet period in his writing. The composer remained in the Soviet Union until his death in 1953.

For a long time, biographical discussion of Prokofiev was split into two opposing camps. On the one hand, Soviet musicology claimed that Prokofiev's best work was written after his return to the Soviet Union through the creation of a "simpler" musical language, while Western biography argued that the composer's return to the Soviet Union was a catastrophe with hugely detrimental effects on his music and his position as a prominent composer of the twentieth century. This politicized interpretation of the composer's œuvre does not do justice to, or truly reflect the nature of, Prokofiev's creative output. For example, the composer's concern with achieving a "new simplicity"<sup>4</sup> in his composition dates to the mid 1920s and was on one hand a response to specific trends in Western music such as serialism, on the other a reaction to his own experimental second symphony. As recent research has shown, it was also influenced by his interest in Christian Science. This recent revelation about Prokofiev's preoccupation with religion has been discussed in great detail in the journal dedicated entirely to Prokofiev studies, *Three Oranges: the Journal of the Serge Prokofiev Foundation*.<sup>5</sup> Leon Botstein has also discussed the issue at length in his article "Beyond Death and Evil: Prokofiev's Spirituality and Christian Science".<sup>6</sup> This stylistic change was not, as Western musicology at the time would have had us believe, simply the imposition of Soviet cultural policy upon Prokofiev's return to the USSR but rather a combination of financial as well as artistic

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<sup>4</sup> Nest'ev ascribes the "new simplicity" trend in the composer's music as a positive result of his return to the Soviet Union. He is critical of Prokofiev's idiom before his return to his homeland and refers to that period in the composer's life as "years of wandering". Conversely, Harlow Robinson characterises Prokofiev's return to simplicity as a negative effect on the composer's idiom caused by the constricting cultural environment of the Soviet Union. In a recent article on the issue of "new simplicity" in *The Prodigal Son* and *On the Dnieper*, Andrew Grossman has suggested that the composer achieved this simplicity not through "a reduction of musical complexity" but through an "unashamed extrapolation of the latent emotional content" in the ballet. He suggests that in these two ballets "emotional effects are achieved with remarkable motivic economy". See "New Simplicity as Humanist revolution: the Case of 'The Prodigal Son', 'On the Dnieper' and 'Désir' at American Ballet Theatre", *Three Oranges* No. 19, May 2010: 20-25.

<sup>5</sup> Natalia Savkina, "The significance of Christian Science in Prokofiev's life and work", *Three Oranges* No. 10, November 2005: 18-24.

<sup>6</sup> In *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 530-561.

factors. The matter was made even more complicated because of Prokofiev's rather disingenuous understanding of the policy of Socialist Realism.

Typical of these polarised viewpoints are two of Prokofiev's early biographers: Israel V. Nest'ev and Victor Seroff. Nest'ev was Prokofiev's first and official biographer and his first edition of Prokofiev's biography, *Sergei Prokofiev: His Musical Life*, was published in 1946 and also translated into English for publication in America.<sup>7</sup> However, following the 1948 resolution on music spearheaded by Andrei Zhdanov<sup>8</sup>, the biography had to be re-written with a view to emphasising the beneficial influence that Prokofiev's return to the Soviet Union had on his music.<sup>9</sup> This version of the biography became the official version. In the post-Stalin thaw, Prokofiev became a Soviet composer who was officially 'canonized' by Soviet cultural authorities. In this revised version, Prokofiev's years abroad were called "years of wandering"; during this time Prokofiev had composed "formalist" music, formalism being the ultimate condemnation that could be applied to an artist's work in the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, apart from such value judgments and some deliberate mistruths, Nest'ev's biography remains a valuable source for scholars today because, although it took a very specific political slant on the composer's output, the musical analysis is often penetrating and insightful.

Victor Seroff's biography<sup>10</sup>, on the other hand, takes a completely divergent position, arguing that Prokofiev's return to the Soviet Union was a tragic mistake which had negative repercussions on the composer's compositional style, with the music becoming very simplistic and losing its former brilliance. Unfortunately, both Nest'ev and Seroff's critiques are first and foremost political ones – they do not,

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<sup>7</sup> Israel V. Nest'ev, *Sergei Prokofiev: His Musical Life* trans. Rose Prokofiev (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946).

<sup>8</sup> One of the main aims of the Resolution of the Central Committee entitled "On V. Muradeli's Opera 'The Great Friendship'" was to impose structure on what the Communist Party perceived as a decadent and rapidly deteriorating musical scene and to reiterate the qualities that Soviet music should possess in order to 'merit' being called Soviet Music. The resolution highlights the proposed basic elements of Soviet music such as melody, simple harmonies and use of polyphony. "Formalist" music was characterised by "rejection of the basic principles of classical music; a doctrine of atonality, dissonance, and disharmony [...] rejection of [...] melody; [...] undue concern with monotone and unisinous music and singing, often without words". In this Resolution the party agreed that the trend toward formalism "found its fullest expression in the works of such composers as Comrades D. Shostakovich, S. Prokofiev, A. Khachaturyan, V. Shebalin, G. Popov, N. Myaskovsky". (See "On Muradeli's Opera 'The Great Friendship'", 10 February 1948 in ed. Robert H. Mac Neal *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Vol. 3 'The Stalin Years: 1929-1953'*, (Toronto and Buffalo, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 249-251.

<sup>9</sup> Israel V. Nest'ev, *Prokofiev* trans. Florence Jonas (Stanford University Press and Oxford University Press, 1960).

<sup>10</sup> Victor I., Seroff, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Soviet Tragedy* (London: Leslie A. Frewin, 1969).

particularly in the case of Seroff, aid our understanding of Prokofiev's music much. Rather they position it and evaluate it politically, but that political position has long been superseded and there is room now within the field of Prokofiev scholarship to re-evaluate the composer's biography particularly in the light of the newly published *Diaries*. Later biographies have moved away from such limited political interpretations and provide a more objective reading.

David Nice's biography of Prokofiev, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West 1891 - 1935* provides an account of the composer's life, although incomplete, as it only covers Prokofiev's life until 1935.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, it is extremely detailed, containing several analytical passages and draws upon various sources; most notably the composer's own autobiography and the Nest'ev biography, as well as correspondence<sup>12</sup> between Prokofiev and his lifelong friend Miaskovsky.<sup>13</sup> Nice also relies on two Russian collections of articles edited by Shlifstein and Victor Varunts. The usefulness of the Nice biography is limited as it ends with an evaluation of Prokofiev's Western period, and also does not take into account the Prokofiev *Diaries*.

More recently, Simon Morrison's *Sergei Prokofiev: The People's Artist* provides a lucid and objective account of the composer's Soviet period.<sup>14</sup> A chronological follow up on the Nice biography, this work sheds new insight into the reasons behind Prokofiev's much-debated move to the Soviet Union. Morrison's narrative is a perceptive, detailed and influential addition to Prokofiev biographical scholarship, not least because the author has access to previously unexamined archival materials.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the author who has written most profusely about Prokofiev is Prokofiev himself. His reminiscences as related in his *Autobiography*<sup>15</sup> and *Prokofiev by Prokofiev*<sup>16</sup> are a valuable source for autobiographical details. This latter volume of memoirs, as the editor David H. Appel observes, was compiled

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<sup>11</sup> David Nice, *Prokofiev: from Russia to the West 1891 – 1935* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> S.S. Prokofiev i N.Ja. Miaskovskii: *Perepiska* ed. Dmitri Kabalevsky (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Nikolai Miaskovsky (1881 – 1950), Russian composer and close lifelong friend of Sergei Prokofiev.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Morrison, *Sergey Prokofiev: The People's Artist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* ed. S. Shlifstein, trans Rose Prokofieva (Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Sergei Prokofiev, *Prokofiev by Prokofiev: a composer's memoir* ed. David H. Appel, trans. Guy Daniels (New York: Doubleday, 1979). Hereafter shortened to *Memoir*.

retrospectively in two different periods: between 1937 and 1939 and then again from 1945 onwards. Prokofiev divides his autobiography into two sections entitled “Childhood” and “The Conservatory”. The memoirs provide us with a useful insight into Prokofiev’s upbringing, relationship with his parents, early education and first music teachers, taking his biography all the way into the Conservatory period, until the composer was 17 years old. Perhaps the most useful feature of these reminiscences is the extraordinary amount of detail and musical examples that support Prokofiev’s narrative. He was a dedicated diarist and kept notes of most of the important episodes in his life right from the moment that, as a thirteen year old, his mother gave him a diary and instructed him to keep records of his experiences. This record-keeping habit lasted a lifetime. It enabled him to go back using his diaries as aide-memoires and to write his reminiscences, decades after the events actually happened.

The recently published, multi-volume Prokofiev *Diaries* are the most detailed and chronological autobiographical source we have to date. They are also the most groundbreaking development in Prokofiev biographical scholarship in recent years. Spanning the period between 1907 until 1933 they were published in Russian, the language they were originally written in.<sup>17</sup> Prokofiev had developed his own form of Russian short-hand in writing the *Diaries*. The Russian version of the *Diaries* contains two volumes of text, and one photographic volume.<sup>18</sup> The first volume covers Prokofiev’s youth, his studies at the Conservatory and first trip to the USA while the second volume spans from 1918 to 1933. The second volume covers Prokofiev’s “Western” period, his working relationship with Diaghilev as well as his life in the USA and the West. Anthony Phillips’ meticulous translation of the first two volumes of the *Diaries*<sup>19</sup> means that scholars will have access to primary materials that are crucial to gaining an understanding of Prokofiev both as man and as composer.<sup>20</sup> Prokofiev’s *Diaries* are personal and do not deal purely with composition and performance: they also give us a glimpse into a young composer’s

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<sup>17</sup> Sergei Prokofiev, *Dnevnik 1907-1933* (Paris: SPRKFV, c.2002), Volumes 1-3.

<sup>18</sup> The third volume is available online, with English text through the Serge Prokofiev Foundation website: <http://www.sprkfv.net/diary/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Sergey Prokofiev, *Diaries 1907-1914: Prodigious Youth* trans. Anthony Phillips (London: Faber & Faber, 2006) and *Diaries 1915 - 1923: Behind the Mask* trans. Anthony Phillips (London: Faber & Faber, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> New materials continue to be released by the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI). (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, РГАЛИ).

psyche. They provide us with valuable insights into his early education and the formative years of his career.

The most useful Russian compilations on the composer remain those by Shlifstein, Blok and Varunts.<sup>21</sup> The Shlifstein collection, of which there are two editions<sup>22</sup>, brings together a large selection of articles written by Prokofiev himself, as well as those written by his contemporaries. These include writings by his close friend and composer Nikolai Miaskovsky, the modernist critic Vasily Karatygin (one of the first champions of the young Prokofiev), and Boris Asaf'ev critic, composer, musicologist and Prokofiev friend. Shlifstein's compilation also includes reminiscences by Mira Mendelson-Prokofiev, Reinhold Glière, Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khatchaturian, Emil Gilels, Sviatoslav Richter and Serafina Birman among others. The collection also includes some letters from Prokofiev's correspondence with Miaskovsky. Vladimir Blok's compilation<sup>23</sup> similarly provides a selection of articles, some by Prokofiev on various topics, but mostly dating from the Soviet period, when Prokofiev consequently became more vocal though not necessarily more frank about his work. Blok also enclosed a selection of comments by various important Soviet figures including Sviatoslav Richter, David Oistrakh and Ilya Ehrenburg.

The composer was an assiduous letter writer throughout his life and various correspondence collections between him and friends and colleagues are available to scholars. Harlow Robinson's compilation of selected letters is currently the only one available in translation.<sup>24</sup> This includes letters from Prokofiev to Sergei Diaghilev, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Boris Asaf'ev, Sergei Eisenstein and Nikolai Miaskovsky. This translated and edited collection of correspondence is only a very small sampling of the copious correspondence. For a more complete picture of the composer as correspondent, we must turn to a Russian publication: *S.S.Prokofiev i*

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<sup>21</sup> *Prokof'ev o Prokof'eve: stat'i i interv'iu* ed. V.P. Varunts (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> *Prokof'ev: materialy, dokumenty, vospominanii* ed. S. I. Shlifstein (Moskva: Muzgiz, 1956) and *S. S. Prokof'ev: materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniia* (Moskva: Gosudartsvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1961).

<sup>23</sup> *Sergei Prokofiev: Materials, articles, interviews* ed. and trans. Vladimir Blok (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> *Selected Letters of Sergei Prokofiev* trans. Harlow Robinson (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998). Other letters have been occasionally translated in *Three Oranges* and most recently, Simon Morrison translated correspondence between Prokofiev and Levon Atovmyan in *Sergei Prokofiev and His World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

*N.Ja.Miaskovskii: Perepiska*<sup>25</sup> which chronicles the copious correspondence between Prokofiev and his close friend Nikolai Miaskovsky, starting with letters dating from 1907, right up until Miaskovsky's death in 1950. An enormous amount of correspondence, which remains unpublished, is to be found in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art.<sup>26</sup>

The singular and idiosyncratic quality of Prokofiev's compositional language has always exerted a fascination on scholars while Prokofiev's compositional strategies continue to absorb music theorists. Various analytical approaches have been applied to Prokofiev's music - set theory, 'wrong' note theory and traditional harmonic analysis - all with varying degrees of success.

In an article entitled "Prokofiev's Technique of Chromatic Displacement"<sup>27</sup> Richard Bass rightly notes that his harmonic vocabulary displays "an ostensibly inveterate commitment to tonality in the traditional sense" and consequently invites "a more conventional analytical approach than is wholly adequate". The study engages with precisely this problem in Prokofiev scholarship: so far, largely inadequate analytical and sometimes even distorting methods have been used in the interpretation of the music. My work suggests that the application of a thematic and gestural analytical approach, endemic to the compositional language itself, may be more successful.

Bass analyses Prokofiev's technique of chromatic displacement, arguing that "it is the displacement of individual notes within the system that is fundamental to the technique". He notes that chromatic 'wrong' notes in the harmony appear instead of their diatonic equivalents and that "chromatic displacement depends heavily on perception in the illusion it creates". This appraisal of individual chromatic notes is appropriate for Prokofiev's music and it is particularly applicable to larger gestures, such as cadences with which Bass does not engage. Indeed, the composer's use of fleeting tonalities does cause us to interpret aurally a displaced note in terms of a "subsequent structural event" or even, in terms of a subsequent tonality.

Bass suggests that the chromatic notes may be interpreted either as "altered notes", in which case they have no "motivic significance" or as "displacements" in

<sup>25</sup> S.S.Prokofiev i N.Ja.Miaskovskii: ed. Dmitri Kabalevsky (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> Prokofiev's letters to Asaf'ev, Miaskovsky, Kabalevsky, Stravinsky, Taneyev and several other correspondents are to be found in Fond 1929, opis 1, 2 and 3 of the RGALI holdings.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Bass, "Prokofiev's Technique of Chromatic Displacement", *Music Analysis* Vol. 7 No. 2. (Jul., 1988): 197 – 214.

which case they represent an unheard “shadow” note. The suggestion of the unheard sounds is, I would argue, a key feature of Prokofiev’s harmony, which plays on defamiliarisation<sup>28</sup> strategies. Chapter 3 will discuss the importance for example, of the ‘phantom cadence’ in the composer’s harmonic language. The usefulness of Bass’ theoretical application to Prokofiev’s music is nonetheless restricted as he notes himself: “applications of chromatic displacement are so widely varied as to be virtually limitless [...] selected excerpts which illustrate only a few of the ways in which this technique serves to unite diverse elements within the framework of local and long-range structural designs”.

More recently, Mark Aranovsky’s article “Observations on Prokofiev’s Sketchbooks”<sup>29</sup> scrutinizes these processes through an examination of Prokofiev’s musical notebooks. The author claims that the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art houses a total of eleven of Prokofiev’s musical sketchbooks starting from the late 1920s through till the early 1950s.<sup>30</sup> Aranovsky focuses on three of these and goes through them in detail piecing together thematic materials from, among other works, the Fifth Piano Concerto, the piano sonatinas (op. 54 and last part of op. 59), isolating prototypes of melodies, such as what he calls “the theme of passion or rapture”<sup>31</sup> in the process drawing conclusions about Prokofiev’s compositional processes. Significantly, the notebooks start from the late 1920s, a time when like the 1911 transitional juncture I suggest occurs earlier on, Prokofiev felt the need to re-evaluate his compositional style. The notebooks concretely display several musical ideas and gestures that Prokofiev thought important enough to make note of. They are in many ways a barometer of his musical thinking and reveal many of the musical methods and compositional strategies he relied on throughout his life. Aranovsky notes that the

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<sup>28</sup> A term drawn from Russian Formalist theory, it was first used by Viktor Shlovsky. Shlovsky employed the concept “ostranenie” in 1914 with reference to the work of Leo Tolstoy. Bertolt Brecht used the device in his work for the theatre in the twenties, though he first called it “verfremdung”, a translation of the Russian, after 1935 when he encountered it in Russian theatre practice on his second trip to Moscow. [Marjorie L. Hoover, *Meyerhold: the art of conscious theater* (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 327]. In this dissertation the term is used to refer to the way that Prokofiev’s music reconfigures tonal harmony to include added notes and also manipulates our expectations, particularly at cadential moments.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Aranovsky, “Observations on Prokofiev’s Sketchbooks,” trans. Jason Strudler in *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 401- 422.

<sup>30</sup> In reality, my research has identified over sixteen of these notebooks, some of which are not numbered and not dated.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Aranovsky, “Observations on Prokofiev’s Sketchbooks,” trans. Jason Strudler in *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 401- 422.

sketchbooks only start in the late 1920s but these methods had roots in Prokofiev's earliest compositional efforts and within this context, Prokofiev's juvenilia may be seen as his earliest and, as yet, unexamined musical sketchbooks.<sup>32</sup> They too offer us crucial insights into his compositional strategies and foreground the musical ideas that were important to him.

Aranovsky focuses on two connected issues: that of Prokofiev's "creative process" to be explored in terms of what he calls Prokofiev's "accretive technique" and the issue of the composer's "stylistic change". The author is right to highlight one of the composer's compositional strategies as that of accretion of materials. As will be seen in Chapter 3, Prokofiev preferred working with small blocks of material, which functioned like musical cells. These cells were then expanded and/or extended through an array of techniques, such as repetition, sequence and variation. Aranovsky notes that Prokofiev's working method depended upon his talent for "melodic invention" which Prokofiev had cultivated as early as childhood. My thesis addresses this critically important starting point of his compositional career and shows that it became a working compositional method that Prokofiev took with him into musical maturity. It is also a method that shaped his choice of compositional devices.

As Aranovsky rightly suggests, Prokofiev had no problem with transference of musical ideas as he often transplanted material from stage to concert works, such as *Fiery Angel* into the third symphony. According to the author, in this context the "leitmotifs" "lose their human associations, instead becoming symbols of abstract spiritual concepts. Through recontextualization, the music acquires new expressive properties". In Aranovsky's view, Prokofiev's "thematic invention was a spontaneous, unconscious process" while his sketches "nonetheless suggest an a priori stylistic context". What Aranovsky fails to note however is that it was not just the context that shaped the composer's thematic invention: the genre, form and instrument also conditioned the shape and nature of the thematic material. Therefore, to suggest that Prokofiev merely assimilated musical ideas and accrued them for later use is somewhat misleading. The composer attained musical maturity by around 1920, the cut-off point of this thesis, and it is surely no co-incidence that he started keeping musical notebooks in the late 1920s, when he was once again faced with a challenging stylistic self re-evaluation. As Prokofiev matured, he became more aware of his own

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<sup>32</sup> The SPA lists a much earlier sketchbook, dating from 15 December 1919.

instinctive processes and the musical notebooks provided a way of cataloguing ideas and gestures as compositional aids.

Boris Berman's volume on the composer's piano sonatas is another recent and important contribution to Prokofiev scholarship.<sup>33</sup> It is written from the point of view of a performing pianist and is ultimately aimed at pianists interested in studying and performing the composer's sonatas. In this respect Berman addresses a crucial issue in the music and one which the dissertation is engaged in defining: its 'performability' and issues raised when performing Prokofiev's piano music, such as its inherent aggressiveness, its particular type of virtuosity and the technique required to play his work. The author first provides a portrait of Prokofiev as a pianist assimilating comments from the composer's piano teachers at the St Petersburg Conservatory, Alexander Winkler and Anna Esipova, bringing to light some intriguing aspects of Prokofiev's technique, including his supposedly 'careless playing' and unpianistic hand positions.

Berman identifies two main textures in Prokofiev's piano music: "motoric" ones and "meditative, lyrical" ones. He notes that these textures are based on "well-articulated, active fingers" while the "wrist is frequently employed as well" and "when Prokofiev aims for a more powerful sound, he usually turns to scales and arpeggios, often spanning a wide range of the keyboard".<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing perspective offered by Berman on Prokofiev's music is the concept of fairy-tale "skazka" imagery: "Many pages of Prokofiev's œuvre continue the important tradition of Russian music based on fairy tale-inspired imagery. Prokofiev often employs opposite ends of the piano range or sustains the same type of texture or uniform rhythmic patterns for evoking the feeling of a spell or an enchantment, as well as for creating a mysterious, frightening atmosphere".<sup>35</sup> This juxtaposition of registers is originally a pianistic gesture that Prokofiev applied to his orchestral writing, which, as will be seen in *Love for Three Oranges* for example, makes for effective conjuration of the supernatural atmosphere. Berman identifies the third movement of the second sonata as a "skazka" and notes that its characteristic features are "monotonous, soothing harmonies; an unhurried unfolding of the melody;

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<sup>33</sup> Boris Berman, *Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 29 – 31.

a mysterious ostinato; ‘frozen’ sonorities, which descend chromatically; a weaving accompanying line that suggests the patina of a distant time’.<sup>36</sup>

The chromatic lines, the ostinato, the repeated sonorities and the long melodic lines are indeed constituent gestures of Prokofiev’s musical language and will be examined in great detail in this thesis. It will be seen that they are gestures that not only appeared early on in Prokofiev’s writing, but remained crucial components of his musical language across different genres and different timbres. Prokofiev was easily able to transfer these gestures to a different context, and furthermore, to use them within a very different network of gestures so as to replace the atmosphere of a ‘skazka’.

The concept of “polypersonalia”, which Berman cites from Givi Ordzhonikidze<sup>37</sup>, is also a useful term to describe Prokofiev’s themes. In his discussion of the second piano sonata, Berman notes that “this work pushes the limits of contrasts more than any other Prokofiev sonata [...] from Romantic lyricism to aggressive brutality, from Schumann-esque soaring to a parody of the cabaret or of musical automatons.”<sup>38</sup> Although “polypersonalia” is an adequate way of describing what Berman calls “Prokofiev’s irreverent treatment of musical material in his early years”,<sup>39</sup> Prokofiev’s handling of his musical and thematic ideas needs to be examined within the context of an entire style. His musical motifs for example developed within the context of other gestures and ideas: the principle of the ostinato was one of the earliest gestures to be found in Prokofiev’s writing and became crucial in the way the composer manipulated his musical ideas. The fact that Prokofiev’s musical ideas are many-sided and versatile is not in question: however Prokofiev’s “treatment of musical material” was dependent on genre, context and the network of gestures surrounding one specific idea.

Similarly, analysis of Prokofiev’s music by Russian musicologists and analysts has been traditional and is written in the descriptive and non-evaluative style typical of much Soviet writing on music. Unlike Western analysis, very little of it may be classified as recent. Prokofiev’s harmony and structural processes consistently attract the greatest interest. The most prolific and authoritative author on this subject

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>37</sup> Givi Ordzhonikidze, *Fortep’iannye sonaty Prokofieva* (Moskva: Gosudartsvennoe Muzykal’noe Izdatel’stvo, 1962).

<sup>38</sup> Boris Berman, *Prokofiev’s Piano Sonatas*, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 58.

remains Iurii Kholopov, who discusses harmonic and tonal features of Prokofiev's style in great detail in his *Sovremennye cherty garmonii Prokof'eva*.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately however, Kholopov approaches Prokofiev's music from a traditional analytical point of view, isolating the main chords that constitute Prokofiev's harmonic vocabulary, analyzing his use of linear harmony and discussing dissonance in terms of Prokofiev's use of chromaticism. Orelovich<sup>41</sup> has discussed Prokofiev's early music for piano, noting the importance of the march genre in his early writing and thus making some attempt to trace the origins of Prokofiev's style in these early ideas. He discusses the harmonic and rhythmic revisions that Prokofiev makes in 1913 to a march initially composed in 1906, identifying markers of the composer's later style. He also analyses *Sarcasms* in terms of their tonality, use of modulation and structural forms. Unfortunately, however, the initial implied link between Prokofiev's early writing and his later development of those ideas is not developed.

### Toward a critical interpretative approach

This study of Prokofiev's compositional language aims to contribute towards the development of theoretical scholarship of the composer's music. It suggests a new way of examining Prokofiev's output by putting forward a critico-analytical method that may be better suited to understanding the composer's particular musical language. The main primary sources for this dissertation are various unpublished manuscripts of the early works, housed in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art in Moscow<sup>42</sup> as well as Prokofiev's own *Diaries*.<sup>43</sup> The first of these sources form the basis of the research presented in the first chapter, while the *Diaries* are scrutinized in the second chapter.

Throughout the thesis, the constituent components of Prokofiev's style have been characterised as *idea-types* and *gestures*. They have been highlighted (through the use of bold type) for ease of identification throughout the dissertation. The use of the term *gesture* in this study refers to a particular musical cell which is a constituent component of the compositional language but which has great physical and tactile

<sup>40</sup> Iurii Kholopov, *Sovremennye cherty garmonii Prokof'eva* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Muzyka, 1967).

<sup>41</sup> A. Orelovich, "O fortepiannoi muzyke rannego perioda tvorchestva S. Prokof'eva" in *Cherty stilia Prokof'eva, sbornik teoricheskikh statei* ed. L. Berger (Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1962), 116-138.

<sup>42</sup> A detailed summary of these sources is provided in Appendix B.

<sup>43</sup> Sergei Prokofiev, *Dnevnik 1907-1933* (Paris: SPRKFV, c.2002), Volumes 1-3.

value. Included in this category are all types of bass lines and the repeated notes and chords. The term *idea-type* is used to invoke musical materials that are also constituent components of Prokofiev's musical language but in which the physical element is no longer fore-grounded. These include scalar patterns and figures<sup>44</sup> and the semitone shift.<sup>45</sup> Some materials, like the presentational<sup>46</sup> ones, belong to both camps. Many of the presentational ideas discuss in the thesis have an undeniable tactile quality: in this respect they qualify as gestures. But Prokofiev also uses presentational material to direct our attention: in this respect, it has a functional purpose and qualifies as an *idea-type*. All the gestures and idea-types introduced here and that will form a crucial part of the interpretative discussion throughout this thesis are drawn from the composer's corpus of unpublished juvenilia, which will be examined in depth in the ensuing chapter. It will be seen, throughout the course of the next chapter, that they are the constituent elements of Prokofiev's original musical language. The following chapters will demonstrate that the composer, despite developing and refining some of these original materials, stayed true to these original building blocks to a surprisingly large extent.

The critical approach adopted to the music in the ensuing chapters seeks a unified understanding of Prokofiev's musical thinking: it searches in particular for physical patterns and manifestations of the composer in the score and traces the developing inscription of Prokofiev the pianist into his own music. The link between Prokofiev's playing style and his compositional technique has been acknowledged but not yet explored. Kholopov and Kholopova suggest that "Prokofiev's particular playing style is indissolubly linked to his compositional aspirations."<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the link between Prokofiev's pianistic and compositional technique remains unexamined. In particular, I am interested in the way ideas are recontextualised, and

<sup>44</sup> Prokofiev's use of scalar figurations and alberti-bass types can also be seen as markers of an earlier, post-Classical, possibly even Lisztian virtuosity in Prokofiev's textures. They also provide examples of the composer-pianist 'thinking with the fingers'.

<sup>45</sup> My use of the term semitone shift throughout this dissertation is not to be aligned with what Richard Taruskin calls the "nega progression", in other words a chromatic sideslip to the relative minor. In this study the semitone shift refers to Prokofiev's preference for semitonal relationships both in terms of key centres and harmonic modulation but also as they may be incorporated into a horizontal line. In the latter case, the semitone shift may also be perceived as an appoggiatura figure.

<sup>46</sup> These presentational gestures often function as "musical cues", a term borrowed from Byron Almen. [See "Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis", *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), 1-39]. Their role is often to direct the listener's attention to the narrative possibilities of an oncoming section; they are also used as framing devices.

<sup>47</sup> Kholopov and Kholopova, *Fortep'iannya Sonaty S.S.Prokof'eva* (Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1961), 9.

the thesis will engage with the way gestures and idea-types are transferred across genres and sound combinations. In a recent article on Prokofiev's sketchbooks, Mark Aranovsky notes that with Prokofiev "thematic material is borne of its own accord, without an a priori plan, as an independent musical phenomenon."<sup>48</sup> This study aims to show the origins of that thematic material and Prokofiev's manipulation of it.

Although the analytical approaches to Prokofiev's music discussed in the previous section are all valid, they necessarily position the music as tonal. The interpretation and results of the analyses show Prokofiev to be an imaginative composer who ultimately uses classical rules and forms but manipulates them to suit his own musical purposes. Other analyses have looked at Prokofiev's music in terms of set theory, but that too has yielded little that is informative and that strikes at the heart of Prokofiev's unique compositional style. My research suggests that such a distinctive compositional style as Prokofiev's needs a less orthodox approach, one that is endemic to the music itself and one that takes as its basis the same starting points that Prokofiev himself had as a composer.

The critical interpretation provided in this dissertation does not seek to deconstruct these pieces in traditional analytical terms and moves away from formal and harmony-based analyses or descriptions typical of Russian scholarship.<sup>49</sup> Rather, the analysis takes a different path toward uncovering the gestures, ideas, motifs and themes that underpin Prokofiev's compositional style. This will provide a unified analytical approach to the music allowing us to see particular transition points in the evolution of his idiom and providing us with new perspectives on Prokofiev's development of a distinctive compositional voice. Ultimately, this analysis identifies key compositional structures and thematic ideas discussing their contexts across the piano works and then across other genres with the aim of defining their role more precisely and assessing the success of their transference across different genres.

The approach therefore draws both from critical hermeneutics and traditional analytical approaches such as those discussed above.<sup>50</sup> Such an approach implicitly

<sup>48</sup> Mark Aranovsky, "Observations on Prokofiev's Sketchbooks," trans. Jason Strudler in *Sergey Prokofiev and His World*, ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 401- 422.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Iurii Kholopov, *Sovremennye cherty garmonii Prokof'eva* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Muzyka, 1967); G. Ordzhonikidze, "'Mimoletnosti' S.Prokof'eva" and N. Zaporozhets, "Nekotorye osobennosti tonal'no akkordi struktury muzyki S.Prokof'eva" both in *Cherty stilia S. Prokof'eva* (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1962), 139-179 and 218-252 respectively.

<sup>50</sup> Kofi Agawu, "Music analysis versus musical hermeneutics", *The American Journal of Semiotics* Vol. 13, Nos. 1-4 (Fall 1996 [1998]), 9-24.

suggests that the various analytical methods that have been applied to Prokofiev's music thus far have proved to be somewhat inadequate. It is hoped that the approach adopted here, which draws directly upon the composer's own creative characteristics, can yield more fruitful results while also complementing and illuminating existing analyses of Prokofiev such as those of Richard Bass, Yuri Kholopov and Mark Aranovsky. The aim of such an interpretative strategy is not to discount traditional analytical approaches such as that of harmonic analysis; rather the method applied here will make use of harmonic analysis together with other interdisciplinary concepts that may help us shed new light on Prokofiev's compositional language.

The approach used in this study calls into play four specific concepts: *theatricality*, *narrative*, *grotesque* and *carnivalesque*. These are concepts that would not normally form part of a more conventional analytical approach to the music's textures and harmonic basis. Three of these terms - *narrative*, *grotesque* and *carnivalesque* - are drawn from literary theory and have increasingly become significant terms in the theoretical discourse of music. They are useful terms with which we can broaden our critical and theoretical understanding of Prokofiev's music and their specific use within the confines of the dissertation will be defined below.

The usefulness of the term *narrative* as it applies to music has been persuasively critiqued<sup>51</sup>, and indeed, its validity as an analytical device continues to be questioned.<sup>52</sup> It may, however, still be of use here. Within the narrow confines of my study, I have employed the term *narrative* to broadly designate what Michael Klein calls the "emplotment of expressive states rather than a sequence of actors and their actions".<sup>53</sup> This is especially relevant to Prokofiev's piano music which is described in this study, especially in the *Sarcasms*, as a series of physical and pianistic gestures that may suggest a narrative to the listener. Adorno's comment with reference to Mahler's music that "It is not that music wants to narrate, but that the composer wants to make music in the way that others narrate"<sup>54</sup> may be usefully invoked here. One of

<sup>51</sup> Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Fondements d'une Sémiologie de la Musique* (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1975); Michael Klein, "Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative", *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 26 No. 1 (Spring 2004), 23-55.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Byron Almen, "Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis", *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), 1-39 and *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Michael Klein, "Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative", *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 26 No. 1 (Spring 2004): 23-55.

<sup>54</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1992), 62.

the premises of the critical approach adopted toward Prokofiev's music in this study is that the composer himself was acutely aware of the effect his music had on the audience and that this was, in the early stages of his career at least, an important compositional stimulus.<sup>55</sup>

In the piano works discussed in the third chapter Prokofiev, as composer, is foregrounding his *alter ego*, the pianist, in the process drawing in the listener and the audience as crucial shaping elements. Contrary to Adorno's thoughts outlined above, it may be the case that it is not Prokofiev's music that wants to narrate, but that we as listeners want to construct a narrative. This thesis proposes that Prokofiev's manipulation of gesture types and his play with their physical and sonic attributes may still suggest a narrative to the listener.

Another term crucial to my critical discussion in the ensuing chapters is the *grotesque*, which, in this dissertation, has a much more circumscribed application than that explored by either Esti Sheinberg or Julie Brown. Sheinberg notes that the grotesque communicates through "visual images and physical empathy".<sup>56</sup> This formulation is particularly relevant to Prokofiev's use of the pianist's body in his writing for piano: it will be seen for example that much of the piano music discussed in the third chapter almost revels in physically challenging positions for the pianist, in the process elevating the purely physical prowess implicit in piano playing to a virtuosic status.<sup>57</sup> In her recent monograph on the grotesque in Bartók's music, Julie Brown persuasively argues that the application of the term 'grotesque' to Bartók's music depends on the composer's "interest in the overlapping discourses of the grotesque and hybridity".<sup>58</sup> Prokofiev's brand of the grotesque especially as it emerges in the piano writing is more concerned with surface oppositions and contrasts in the music. In this way it is akin to that of the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, with whom Prokofiev had become acquainted during his work on the first version of *The Gambler*. Marjorie Hoover defines the grotesque in Meyerhold's work as "strange, incongruous, monstrous [...] a sense of quick unexpected shifts from one

<sup>55</sup> Specific attention-grabbing devices as well as disruptive gestures remind us that Prokofiev was indeed thinking about the effect his music would have on an audience. This will become clear as our analysis progresses from the composer's solo piano works into his operatic writing.

<sup>56</sup> Esti Sheinberg, *Irony, satire, parody, and the grotesque in the music of Shostakovich: a theory of musical incongruities* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, c2000), 215.

<sup>57</sup> The privileging of the physical element of piano playing may also be explained by linking it with the carnivalesque, as defined below.

<sup>58</sup> Julie Brown, *Bartók and the grotesque: studies in modernity, the body and contradiction in music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, c2007), 3.

extreme to another".<sup>59</sup> In Prokofiev's music this may be seen in his preference for extremities in harmony and texture: the underlying effect of both Meyerhold's theatre and Prokofiev's music is that of surprise and alienation.

This study further suggests that in Prokofiev's music, at least in the music explored in the following chapters, the *grotesque* is best seen as a kind of musical montage where contrasting musical elements are juxtaposed, often to alienating effect. The *grotesque* in Prokofiev's writing is imbued with a celebratory and positive value and thus belongs to the second of Sheinberg's two categories of the grotesque: it celebrates the physical act of making music and it foregrounds the sonic qualities of music by drawing our attention to aberrations in sounds, chordal reconfigurations and recontextualisation of musical gestures (the disruptive tuba gesture which will be discussed in the ensuing chapters is one example of this).<sup>60</sup>

The related concept of the *carnivalesque*, borrowed from the writings of the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, is also invoked in my critical approach to the music.<sup>61</sup> He argued that in carnivalesque literature social hierarchies and established etiquettes are overturned, allowing for a reversed interpretation of normality. Prokofiev's music is suggestive of the carnivalesque in the way it challenges established technical truths of piano-playing and treats them with irreverence. Examples of this will be provided in the third chapter of the dissertation. Through this 'carnivalesque' approach, Prokofiev continues to challenge and test piano technique, often privileging displays of technique for their own sake and in the process endowing his piano music with a physical dimension.

In an article which addresses the "connotative context" of the term 'theatrical', Tracy C. Davis rightly notes that "the terrain of theatricality is claimed and debated by disciplines as far-ranging as anthropology, political science, and literary studies, increasing recourse is made to the dictionary to find out what the resulting usages denote."<sup>62</sup> Of all the terms that will feature in my critical approach to Prokofiev's music, the term *theatrical* is possibly the most problematic because definitions of it

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<sup>59</sup> Marjorie L. Hoover, *Meyerhold: the art of conscious theater* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 328.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, 172 of the dissertation.

<sup>61</sup> See *Rabelais and His World* translated by Helene Iswolsky, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984). Bakhtin used the term *carnivalesque* to invoke the spectacle that was immediately inherent in Mardi Gras. In contrast, the Medieval carnival that he discusses in *Rabelais and His World* was a potent creative event.

<sup>62</sup> "Theatricality and civil society" in *Theatricality* edited by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 127.

continue to proliferate. Within the context of this study, *theatricality* is narrowly defined as a mode of presentation of musical material, whether this be through compositional methods or through performance itself. Theatricality through performance will be explored in the second chapter which examines the way that Prokofiev gradually discovered himself as a pianist and began to create a suitably appropriate performing persona. Theatricality as part of the compositional process is explored throughout the thesis, but its most clear examples are presented in the last chapter, which situates Prokofiev's idea-types and gestures within the broader context of writing for the stage.

## Dissertation overview

The dissertation is divided into five chapters which are largely chronological. The works that constitute Prokofiev's juvenilia will be examined in the first chapter. This chapter will demonstrate the composer's early connection with the piano in the context of his first compositional experiments. Distinctive Prokofievan gestures and musical ideas will be identified. The second chapter provides a detailed examination of the composer's diary entries and letters, illuminating aspects of Prokofiev's grooming as a virtuoso pianist as well as his relationship with the stage and the limelight, revealing how the young composer meticulously planned his performance style to foreground his playing, and by extension, his compositions. The third chapter will then examine key works in Prokofiev's 'elemental' phase, focusing on the concept of virtuosity, the carnivalesque and the theatrical as they emerge in selected works of the period. Prokofiev's compositional strategies in these works will be examined with a view to highlighting the crucial role his performing self, developed in the second chapter, had on the evolution of a mature writing style for the instrument. The fourth chapter will scrutinize Prokofiev's compositional insecurities through the examination of *Piano Concerto No. 1* and the opera *Maddalena*. The *Piano Concerto* sees him juxtaposing his favourite texture, the piano, with the texture he is hoping to master, and consequently the *Piano Concerto* unfolds as a struggle between two forces, with the piano gaining the upper hand. Finally, through a gestural analysis of *The Gambler* and *Love for Three Oranges*, the last chapter will examine various gestures and idea-types within the context of Prokofiev's writing for stage.

Stylistically, this thesis will trace three phases in Prokofiev's writing as it developed between 1900 and 1920:

a) **the juvenile period: 1900 - c. 1907**

Even in this early period, Prokofiev was writing works for stage at the same time as he was writing works for solo piano. The first chapter will elucidate and evaluate the differences, if any, in the types of musical ideas that characterize these different genres.

b) **the 'elemental' phase: 1907 – 1914 (including the stylistic transition of c. 1911)**

The second phase is perhaps the most crucial to Prokofiev's development as a composer. During this period, Prokofiev was largely concerned with writing works for the piano and these demonstrate what I refer to as Prokofiev's 'concentrated' writing for piano.<sup>63</sup> The works of this period are also autobiographical in that they map Prokofiev's development both as a pianist and as a composer. The 'elemental' phase is the period during which Prokofiev was writing almost exclusively for himself to play and in response to his physical connection to the piano. Intended to showcase the performer, these pieces are intimately connected to Prokofiev the pianist and thus provide an appropriate theatre for the pianist's performing self. The works of the 'elemental' phase expose the way that Prokofiev's pianistic technique became a compositional driver and a means of generating musical material. It is through these pieces for piano that Prokofiev came into his own as a composer. The works of the 'elemental' phase privilege the performer but also portray Prokofiev as a technically confident composer for the piano. Works from the 'elemental' phase were accepted almost immediately for publication and it was through these pieces that Prokofiev began to gradually make a name for himself as a composer. The stylistic quality of the

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<sup>63</sup> The term 'concentrated' will be fully explored and illustrated with musical examples in the third chapter. At this point however, it is useful to point out that term is used in connection with Prokofiev's most typical and idiomatic writing for the piano: in other words, this kind of writing includes specific Prokofievan markers such as ostinatos and various bass types to be identified in the first chapter, various technical passages designed to test the performer's physicality as well as other gestures, both physical and visual that define his kind of writing.

'theatrical' in these works is prevalent: their aim is to draw the listener's attention to Prokofiev's persona as composer-pianist.

c) the transference of these ideas in the '**post-elemental**' phase: 1914 onwards

The 'elemental' phase discussed in the third chapter was followed by what may be perceived as a transitional juncture period for Prokofiev. This moment of transition falls within the 1907 – 1914 'elemental' phase discussed above. Following the hugely successful performances of his own works, and the brilliant end to his piano course at the Conservatory, where he won the First Prize playing *Piano Concerto No. 1*, Prokofiev the composer found himself in a difficult place. It is clear that he wanted to write serious compositions for the stage and for the orchestra, but in many ways, his success as composer-pianist may have held him back. Therefore, during his 'elemental' phase, although he was largely preoccupied with writing for the piano, Prokofiev was simultaneously writing for orchestra or for forces with orchestra such as the *Sinfonietta*<sup>64</sup>, *Dreams*<sup>65</sup>, *Autumnal Sketch*<sup>66</sup> and two poems for female chorus and orchestra: *The White Swan* and *The Wave*.<sup>67</sup>

The intensity with which Prokofiev worked on developing his orchestral idiom is intriguing because underlies a split in Prokofiev's composing personality. On the one hand, by around 1911, Prokofiev's idiom for the piano had in many respects reached maturity. On the other hand, he was still struggling with developing a similarly unique and technically confident orchestral voice, whether this was in the context of stage works or in purely orchestral writing. The works mentioned above, such as the *Autumnal Sketch* and the two poems for female choir, display – surprisingly, for a composer with such anti-Romantic tendencies – a completely different composing persona. They betray Straussian and Scriabinesque<sup>68</sup> influences

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<sup>64</sup> Composed in 1909, revised 1914-1915 but remained unpublished, then eventually reworked as Op. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Symphonic tableau, composed in 1910, remains unpublished.

<sup>66</sup> Written for small orchestra in 1910, revised 1915 and 1934.

<sup>67</sup> Composed between 1909 and 1910.

<sup>68</sup> Kholopov and Kholopova note the importance of Scriabin's influence on Prokofiev. See *Fortep'ianyye sonaty S.S. Prokof'eva* (Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1961).

that were to prove strong but short-lived and they were soon replaced by a distinctive Prokofievan sound.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The composer's early influences will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

## **Chapter 1: Prokofiev's Early Years**

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### **First works: brief overview and chronology of works**

Within the context of Prokofiev's early music-making no real distinction can be made between his piano playing and his compositional experiments. For a young Prokofiev playing the piano and experimenting with creating his own melodies was one and the same. He started 'composing' little pieces at the piano as an outlet for his musical enthusiasms. Quite simply, he wanted to write pieces that he could play and these were mostly influenced by the works he heard his mother perform. The juvenilia, the *pesenki* in particular, are thus largely the result of his experimenting and trying out musical ideas and figurations on the piano often while his mother was doing her own practice.<sup>1</sup> A thorough examination of these works is indispensable because Prokofiev's imprint of style is already evident in these pieces and will help elucidate the development of his style. Furthermore, as Prokofiev was largely a self-taught pianist during his childhood, many of the mannerisms and other peculiarities that emerged as the result of unsupervised playing, and which are first manifest in these early pieces, remained, as will be seen in the next chapter, despite his piano tutor's best efforts.

Starting from the first piece composed for piano in 1896, Prokofiev's childhood compositions span nearly a decade. This dissertation takes c. 1908 as the end of Prokofiev's juvenilia phase: this moment coincides with the start of Prokofiev's public appearances both as a performer and more importantly, as a composer. The first composition was entitled *Indiiskii Galop* (*Indian Galop*) and seemingly influenced by the adults' conversation he heard on the subject of the Indian famine.<sup>2</sup> Almost all of the works belonging to this period are unpublished.<sup>3</sup> These early works chart a young composer's journey through personal expression, reveal his developing engagement with imagery and fantasy and also trace his response to the rigours of formal compositional training, which he started at an early age.

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<sup>1</sup> Prokofiev gives a detailed account of his early years in *Memoir*.

<sup>2</sup> Noted in *Memoir*, 14. Presumably Prokofiev is here referring to the famine of 1896 – 1897 which affected various provinces under British rule as well as other Indian states and claimed the lives of an estimated six to ten million people.

<sup>3</sup> Shlifstein's catalogue of Prokofiev's complete works remains the most useful: S. S. Prokof'ev: *Notograficheskii spravochnik* (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1962). Another catalogue by L. Gakkell also provides a listing of all Prokofiev's work for piano. See *Fortepiannoe tvorchestvo S.S. Prokofieva* (Moskva: Gosudartsvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1960).

For the purposes of this thesis I have divided the corpus of early works into three different groups.<sup>4</sup> My survey will single out a specific work or type of work within each group in order to examine musical idea-types Prokofiev uses in each category. The first group, categorised as miscellaneous (MIS), comprises experimental and often one-off short pieces for different instrumental combinations. Among Prokofiev's juvenilia are works for violin and piano, piano and zither, as well as a number of pieces for voice and piano. Such pieces were composed in an experimental spirit, reflecting the composer's need to try out new sound types and different musical ideas. In comparison to the *Little Songs* listed below, they seem less of a compositional task and more an exercise in imagination. It is in these and the theatrical pieces that Prokofiev's fantasy ran unchecked.

The second group of my classification is entitled *Little Songs* (LS), also known as *Pesenki*. This is the name that Prokofiev gave to various short piano pieces that he wrote regularly and grouped in sets of twelve. The first of these dates from July 1902. He was to compose a total of five sets of these *Little Songs*, each set comprising twelve pieces. Very few of them are incomplete and most of the incomplete ones occur in the very last set, written in 1906. This suggests that by this time, the composer had outgrown his interest in this type of short piece for piano although his predilection for the miniature piece remained and may be seen in the works discussed in the third chapter. The first of these *Little Songs* coincide with the beginning of the composer's formal training in composition with Reinhold Glière, who encouraged him to write regularly and systematically. In this way, the *Little Songs* may be seen more as formal composition exercises, although they are imbued with so much Prokofievan rhythmic energy and melodic ideas that it is impossible to view them simply as exercises. Certainly there is no indication that the composer himself treated them as a chore. Rather, he took pleasure in writing them, and many are dedicated to different members of his family on their name days. Particularly between 1902 and 1903, Prokofiev took these little songs very seriously, and during those couple of years his compositional output is almost entirely limited to writing in these forms.

The final group in my classification are works for the theatre (TW). These are Prokofiev's most experimental and appealing pieces in which the fantastic and the

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B for details of the manuscripts consulted in the course of this research.

childish co-exist. These works were meant to be staged in front of an audience: in this sense they constitute a form of childhood play through their enactment on stage. Prokofiev wrote a total of four operas before his conservatory opera *Maddalena*.<sup>5</sup> The first one, written in 1900 to the composer's own libretto, when he was just nine years old is entitled *Velikan (The Giant)*. The operas that followed have similarly fantastic or literary titles: *Na pustynnykh ostrovakh (On Desert Islands)*,<sup>6</sup> *Pir vo vremya chumy (A Feast in Time of Plague)*<sup>7</sup> and *Undina (Undine)*.<sup>8</sup>

This mode of classification maintains a distinction between the different genres Prokofiev was writing in – a particularly crucial distinction for this study which seeks to determine whether Prokofiev's idea-prototypes were influenced by such elements as genre, for example. The classification system accounts for the piano works, the stage works as well as other miscellaneous works and takes the following format: 1929/MIS/1, 1929/LS/1 and 1929/TW/1. The first number represents the Fond number that is assigned to Prokofiev manuscripts by the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art<sup>9</sup> in Moscow, where most of Prokofiev's original manuscripts are held. MIS represents the miscellaneous category, LS represents the category of Little Songs and TW represents the category of Theatrical Works. The last number indicates its position in the catalogue which accompanies this chapter.<sup>10</sup>

## Miscellaneous Works

Prokofiev gave many of the works for piano written between 1896 and 1900 descriptive titles such as *Indian Galop, March, Waltz, Rondo, Polka and Song*. *Indian Galop* was followed by three pieces in 1897, two in 1898, three written between 1898 and 1899, three in 1899. The genre titles chosen for these pieces were not arbitrary –

<sup>5</sup> Prokofiev's first recognised opera is *Maddalena*, an opera written during his conservatory years (between 1911 and 1913) but which was never staged in his lifetime. The stage premiere of the opera occurred in the Opernhaus, Graz, Austria November 28, 1981. Prior to that however, the opera was recorded by Edwin Downes with the BBC Northern Symphony on December 22, 1978 in Manchester and was first broadcast on March 25, 1979. This work will be discussed in the fourth chapter of the dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> Unfinished opera dedicated to his father on his name day, composed between 1900 and 1902.

<sup>7</sup> This was composed in 1903 and is based on Pushkin's play of the same name.

<sup>8</sup> The libretto was compiled by Mme Kilschedt, an acquaintance of the Rayevskys' (Prokofiev's relatives) based on the narrative poem by Friedrich de La Motte-Fouqué. It was composed intermittently between 1904 and 1907; only Acts 3 and 4 survive.

<sup>9</sup> Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva, РГАЛИ (RGALI).

<sup>10</sup> A catalogue of all the works consulted can be found in Appendix B. It provides full details of each piece consulted as part of the research for this chapter.

they were structural and musical forms that the composer continued to work with throughout his compositional career. Three of them – the march, waltz and polka – suggest physical movement through specific rhythmic patterns – a key quality of Prokofiev's writing more generally. The titles indicate that rhythm and beat were important compositional starting points for the composer, right from the start. The physical movement suggested by the rhythmic patterns at the heart of these forms underlines a more fundamental concern with rhythm as well as with the actual physical exertion involved in piano playing. As Prokofiev matured, piano playing gradually became much more than a physical activity but the elemental and almost primitive energy involved in piano playing continued to be an inspirational springboard for Prokofiev in his piano writing and beyond.

The habit of assigning titles to pieces also remained: perhaps it was the composer's way of exercising power over his own creations and of suggesting a possible narrative or image. Later on he would use titles, such as *Navazhdenie* (*Diabolical Suggestion*) and *Sarkazmi* (*Sarcasms*), to direct the audience's imagination, to add an extra layer of drama when he was performing his own works and also to suggest a particular, if unspecific, narrative. *Indian Galop* is written in F major, although it was his mother, as the composer notes in his autobiography who inserted the B flat into the piece.<sup>11</sup> If left to his own devices, he would simply written it in the key of C major, a key that was and would remain a firm favourite with Prokofiev. In fact, the *March*, *Waltz*, *Rondo*, all written in 1897, are also in C major. It seems to have taken the composer about a year to realise that he could write in other keys too. As from 1898 onwards, although he continues to make use of the C major key, he begins to use various other keys, some more adventurous than others: G major, F major followed by a more frequent use of flat key signatures, C minor being one of the most common.

In 1898 Prokofiev wrote the first piece for four hands and within three years he had written seven pieces for this combination.<sup>12</sup> His early interest in four-hand writing for piano is significant: on the one hand it points to an early and enduring interest in playing with bigger sounds, on the other it indicates the beginning of Prokofiev's preoccupation with sound layering and exploitation of the full range of keyboard sound. He wrote pieces for violin and piano as well as pieces for voice and

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<sup>11</sup> *Memoir*, 14 - 15.

<sup>12</sup> Two examples, *Bagatelles Nos. 1 and 2*, are attached in Appendix D.

piano which he usually entitled *Romans* (*Romance*). These pieces further indicate his predilection to explore different sound combinations. The outward expansion from two-stave piano writing became a feature of his textures and his standard process of orchestrating.<sup>13</sup>

Among the most important works of the miscellaneous category were Prokofiev's compositions for four hands, his orchestral writing and his last solo pieces for piano: these works indicate the extent of the composer's development. It is worth pausing here to briefly outline some features of style in one of these early symphonies. Gestures that emerge in this work are also used in contemporary compositions. The juvenilia include two symphonies, the first written in 1902 and the second in 1908.<sup>14</sup> His first *Symphony* was a one-movement work written in 1902 and scored for a full orchestra.<sup>15</sup> The opening presentational gesture<sup>16</sup> is based on the repeated note played by bassoons and horns while the entire string section introduces the main thematic material. The bassoon is also used to accompany the full string section, playing an octave below the cellos and double basses. Solo melodic moments are assigned to cellos and bassoons while the strings play the repeated note gesture resulting in very sparse orchestral writing. A gentle precursor of the disruptive tuba gesture that will be heard in Prokofiev's mature writing may be heard in this work when the tuba plays a *pianissimo* sustained note on the dominant of G major.

Pianistic alberti-type gestures are assigned to the double bass while the other strings play sustained notes. This figure becomes an *ostinato* bass and is heard across 21 bars.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Prokofiev's later notebooks, such as those examined by Mark Aranovsky have various examples of this form of "extended" piano score.

<sup>14</sup> Only the first violin part of the second juvenile symphony survives in RGALI. It was a three movement work written in E minor. The second movement of Prokofiev's fourth piano sonata is based on the slow movement of this symphony.

<sup>15</sup> The first symphony is 233 bars long, the second 790.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout the thesis, gesture and idea-types are highlighted through the use of bold for ease of reference. A selection of these is included in Appendix C.

<sup>17</sup> All the musical examples end with a double bar line for consistency. When the example is extracted from the end of a piece, this is indicated in the text.

The familiar Prokofievan orchestral texture of upper woodwinds playing double thirds may already be heard in this early symphonic experiment while the bass trombone and tuba are assigned a **chromatic motif**, another familiar gesture.

Similarly, the repeated note emerges again in the cello and double bass parts:

A musical score for piano, featuring two staves. The top staff uses a bass clef and has a key signature of one sharp. The bottom staff uses a bass clef and has a key signature of one sharp. The score consists of six measures, each starting with a quarter note followed by an eighth note. The first measure has a fermata over the eighth note. The second measure has a fermata over the eighth note. The third measure has a fermata over the eighth note. The fourth measure has a fermata over the eighth note. The fifth measure has a fermata over the eighth note. The sixth measure has a fermata over the eighth note.

The full orchestra is used only very sparingly: Prokofiev prefers to use individual strands of sound types weaving around each other. The **repeated chord** figure spread over the strings accompanies an **appoggiatura gesture** played by the woodwinds, over which is heard an accented motif played by tenor trombones:

The musical score shows two measures for the bassoon. The first measure starts with a rest followed by a sixteenth note. The second measure begins with a quarter note, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note sharp, another sixteenth note sharp, and a sixteenth note with a fermata. The bassoon part is written on a bass clef staff.

Later on, against a straightforward accompaniment in minims by bassoons and horns, the clarinet part plays a winding quaver line:

A musical score consisting of four staves of music. The top two staves begin with a treble clef, while the bottom two begin with a bass clef. Each staff is in common time (indicated by a 'C'). The music consists primarily of eighth-note patterns, with some sixteenth-note figures and occasional grace notes. The key signature changes between staves, with the first two staves having one sharp (F#) and the last two staves having no sharps or flats.

The orchestra plays *tutti* again in the bars leading up to the end of the symphony.

This survey of Prokofiev's miscellaneous works concludes with a discussion of a selection of Prokofiev's 1907 pieces for the piano, works that to date remain

unpublished.<sup>18</sup> They are entitled: *Upryok (Reproach)*, *Chant sans paroles*<sup>19</sup> (*Song without words*), *Intermezzo*, *Humoresque* and *Vostochnaya pesenka (Eastern Song)*. These works are well worthy of our scrutiny as they were composed at an important point in Prokofiev's career: it was during this period that he was beginning to appear on public concert platforms, forging a name for himself as a pianist. These pieces, of which the completed five will be discussed below, would often form part of his recital programme and together with the two early sonatas for piano were the only free-standing compositions for the instrument written by the composer in 1907. Among other things, they demonstrate the way Prokofiev structures entire pieces of music from small cells of musical material. They also demonstrate the composer's ubiquitous use of chromaticism which, by the time these pieces were composed in 1907, had reached an intensity which makes tonality just a fleeting impression and hardly ever an established tonal centre.

The first of these, *Upryok*, "was well received whenever I played it, probably because I wrote very few lyrical things, so that it was a pleasant surprise for a good many people".<sup>20</sup> This short piece built on a motif first heard in bars 1 – 4, is written in the style of a song with accompaniment. The melody is written to be played by the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand while the inner accompanying thirds are played by the thumb, second and third fingers.

The piece is ostensibly written in A minor, as it has no key signature, however, the profusion of chromatic notes suggests a number of fleeting modulations. Significantly, the chromatic inflections always appear as part of an **inner chromatic line**, a gesture that is prevalent in Prokofiev's 'elemental' phase and beyond. This occurs in bars 1 and 2, lowest voice in the treble clef, bars 7 – 8, 8 - 9 highest voices in treble clef, bars 11 – 12, 15 – 16, 19 – 20, 23 – 24, 24 – 25, 27 – 28, 30 – 32, 33 and 34, lowest voice in the treble clef and 34 – 35 bass clef. The motif unites the entire piece and constitutes the backbone of its cellular four- bar structure. The bass is written largely in octaves, a textural constant in Prokofiev's writing, while the middle section is characterised by a **bass of broken octaves** that spans intervals larger than the octave, as at bars 19 – 23. The notation of the bass part between bars 24 – 26 and

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<sup>18</sup> The Serge Prokofiev Archive has grouped a selection of piano pieces under the title of *Seven Pieces*. There is no evidence to suggest that these pieces were written or intended to be played as a set. They are as yet unpublished, but all have been included in Appendix D of the dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> Prokofiev assigns French titles to *Chant sans paroles* and *Humoresque*.

<sup>20</sup> *Memoir*, 187.

28 – 30 suggests a sonority to be achieved by using a sustaining pedal, although this is not indicated in the score.

The inner textures of the piece are built on **repeated triadic chords** (bar 4), **first inversion chords** (bars 7 and 12) **sustained thirds** (bars 6 – 10, 13 – 14, 24 – 26, 28 – 30), **repeated fourths** (bars 5, 8, 12, 24) and **repeated fifths** (bars 11, 15, 27, 31). Prokofiev would use such harmonic intervals as textural fillers with more sophistication in his ‘elemental’ phase. In his later works for piano, such as ops. 2, 3 and 4 for example, which are discussed in the third chapter, the intervals used will be less varied within such a short space of musical time, favouring instead a repeated insistence of one harmonic interval over the other. Furthermore, Prokofiev would use such intervals repetitively, a key characteristic of the percussiveness and aggressiveness of his music.

The *Chant sans paroles* is split into six sections corresponding with six changes of tonality as follows: D flat – A – A flat – A – A flat – D flat. The choice of modulation already reveals Prokofiev’s predilection for the **semitone shift**: the traditional move to the dominant of the home key i.e. A flat is arrived at through the neighboring A major key. Prokofiev’s preference for neighboring keys and progressions will remain a crucially distinctive feature of his idiom and the **semitone shift** thus constitutes an important gesture in his writing.

The framing D flat major sections share the same texture. While the accompaniment is built on an **arpeggio bass**, the melody in the right hand is again made up of smaller musical cells. The opening figure (bars 1 – 4) is repeated and then decorated through a scalar figure at bar 8. At bar 47, the concluding D flat major section is written in the same texture but integrates the texture of the other sections from bar 63 onwards. The texture of the A/A flat sections is still built around a melody with accompaniment: the bass accompaniment is written in **octaves**, that again features the chromatic inflection (see, for example, bars 17, 19, 25). The right hand melody is played with the fourth and fifth fingers while an **ostinato of parallel thirds** constitutes the inner texture, and is also played by the right hand.

Prokofiev also approaches this cadence through neighbouring chords: bar 74 is built around an F – A flat– C chord, bar 75 on a C – E flat – G flat chord while the bass moves from A flat to D flat in a final perfect cadence flourish at bars 76 – 78. The bass in octaves at bar 75 jars with the C – E flat – G chord sustained in the treble clef but outlines a descending chromatic pattern that leads to the dominant, A flat.

Consisting of 46 bars, the *Intermezzo*, is divided into two distinct sections: the first section is written in A major, the second in D flat. Although Prokofiev still uses plenty of chromatic notes in this piece, the tonality is clear by virtue of the constituent chords opening each section. The concision of Prokofiev's writing is already evident in the bass types used for each section. Section A features the **repeated note**, on pitch A (bars 1 – 4), while bars 5 – 8 outline a **rising scalar pattern** with chromatic twist at the end as follows: E – F sharp – G sharp – A – A sharp – B. Similarly bars 10 – 12 outline basic chords ascending chromatically: D – F – A, D sharp – F sharp – A, E – G sharp – B. The bass part of the second section of the piece is entirely built around an **ostinato** pattern, except for bars 31 – 34, which outline a descending chromatic pattern: G flat – F – E – E flat.

The musical material presented in the treble clef is made of two distinct motifs: the first being a motif written in **parallel thirds** (bars 1 – 4) the second a two-octave **over-arching figure** (bars 19 – 20). Variations of the first motif appear in bars 13 – 14 where the parallel writing in thirds is now replaced by sixth and again in bars 21 – 24. The chromatic pattern is used again but it is not fully integrated into the texture of the piece. Its function is that of a joining figure, where it precedes a repetition of the opening motif at bars 7 – 8 and prepares us for the cadence at bar 17. It is also used in the four bars where, apart from the ostinato figure, the texture is changed: this occurs in the highest line in the treble clef where a four-note chromatic motif is heard. The right hand writing in this part is awkward and demands that the pianist's stretch reaches a ninth.

Despite the key signatures at the beginning of each section, the use of chromaticism erases any impression of a home key. This is clear in the final part of the piece, between bars 31 until the end. The cadence is unprepared and unresolved. The repeated chords in the last bar outline a G sharp minor chord in the right hand part while the bass is written in chromatic broken octaves ending abruptly on E natural, the raised supertonic of the section's key.

The *Humoresque* is remarkable for its economical use of musical materials. It has a tripartite structure and is built over an **ostinato** pattern in the bass part. The opening four bar melody in the treble clef is the source of further motifs that will be used in the piece. For example the leaping dotted quaver – semiquaver pattern (bar 2, 1<sup>st</sup> beat) features throughout the piece, as does the crotchet tied to four quavers idea (bar 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> beats). The upbeat rhythmic inflection of the melody, inherent in the

first bar and suggested more forcefully in bars 3 and 4, is retained throughout the piece (See, for example, bars 9, 11, 12).

As was the case with the other pieces in this set, tonality is transitory. It is written in a four flat key, which suggests A flat major. However, the frequency of the raised 5<sup>th</sup> note indicates that F minor is a more likely candidate. The opening pattern of ostinato bass is built on pitches of C and G, which suggest the dominant chord of F minor. The move into a sharp key signature at bar 17 makes for a definite modulation away from the A flat/F minor tonalities. The ambiguous relationship between major and minor is especially prominent in the last 5 bars of the piece where bars 46 – 48 are a I – V pedal in the key of A flat. Bar 49 introduces the raised leading note in the right hand part but not in the left hand part. The final chord is the root position tonic chord in F minor.

### **The *Little Songs* for piano**

In the year 1902, Prokofiev began composing the first set of 12 *Little Songs* for piano. The diversity of Prokofiev's output might erroneously suggest that his first attempts at composition were random. From 1902 onwards, his compositional attempts become very systematic: over time these short compositions become more organised especially in terms of form and compositional techniques employed. The sets are not linked together in any thematic, tonal or rhythmic way but rather, they are held together by the evolving yet unmistakable imprint of Prokofiev's style. This is clearly manifest in a network of gestures, physical, rhythmic and otherwise that underpin these pieces. Through these gestures, such as **insistent repeated notes**, the **juxtaposition of opposing registers** and **ostinato basses**, the Prokofiev gradually idiom begins to evolve and define itself. Many of the rhythmic and harmonic ideas as well as the melodic shapes that the composer uses in these early works were never discarded. A few were adopted practically wholesale into his mature period; others undergo significant changes before being incorporated into his mature style.

Written in the summer of 1902, the first series of *Little Songs* reveals the embryonic origins of Prokofiev's contemporary writing style for piano. The start date coincides with the beginning of his tuition with Reinhold Glière, who was employed to teach Prokofiev the basic principles of form, structure and harmony. The organisation of pieces into sets showed that, under his new tutor, Prokofiev was

beginning to view composition seriously, as something that needed to be done diligently and regularly. In the process he was also disciplining himself to spend time composing on a daily basis, a habit that was to last a lifetime. Writing a song to celebrate someone's birthday or name day became a family tradition until the moment Prokofiev began to see it as "a duty against which I finally rebelled".<sup>21</sup> At this point, the composer informed his mother that he wanted to compose whenever he felt like it and not merely for somebody's name day. For the best part of four years, between 1902 and 1906, Prokofiev was composing songs on a regular basis.

The *pesenki* average around sixty bars each and are mostly written in ternary form, a structural favourite with Prokofiev because of its repetitive qualities, its 'closed' nature and its ability to accommodate two contrasting musical ideas within each piece.<sup>22</sup> Within the confines of this form, and through the processes of thematic confrontation and juxtaposition, two thematic ideas are usually explored in different sections of the piece: the *pesenki* are like snapshots of the young Prokofiev's compositional concerns. These pieces are based on the principle of contrast: in some cases the contrast is between two musical ideas, in other cases it is between two (musical) textures or pitch ranges. As time progresses the pieces become more sophisticated: the musical ideas explored within them become increasingly complex and the contrasts between the varying ideas within each piece are more defined.

These early songs demonstrate the building blocks of Prokofiev's style, in the form of gestures and idea-prototypes, and already exhibit his particular gift for melody. An example of this can be found in the seventh song of the second series which features a simple melodic line set against a flowing quaver accompaniment in the bass.<sup>23</sup> This melody shape, though limited in range, and based on octaves, already shows a propensity for the lyrical and possesses a yearning and lilting shape. In time, although Prokofiev's melodies would still possess these qualities, they would also acquire distinctive and often dissonant intervallic patterns. In several of these short pieces, Prokofiev's melodic line is fairly short and the phrases are evenly balanced.

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<sup>21</sup> *Memoir*, 188.

<sup>22</sup> This use of a structural form that allowed for repetition is in turn related to Prokofiev's understanding of the concept of development, which, as will be discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, tends to be sequential and uses repetition and variation as structurally elongating strategies.

<sup>23</sup> The *Melody in E flat* appears in both published editions of Prokofiev's early works: *Manuscritti Infantili* (Milan: Ricordi, 1987) and *Erste Klavierstücke* (Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, c.1977).

Significantly, as yet the piano pieces show little evidence of the long-limbed lines that would characterise mature Prokofievan writing.

Prokofiev's awareness of the colourful and dramatic possibilities afforded by chromaticism is gradual. While the very early pieces tend to be written in sharp key signatures, especially until c.1902/3, the pieces themselves do not incorporate much chromatic colour and are largely diatonic. By 1907, chromatic inflections become a feature of Prokofiev's work: in several of the piano pieces chromaticism is integrated into the melodic line and into the texture of the harmonies. His harmonic progressions, up to 1906 are fairly basic. Indeed the harmony of the *pesenki* gives no indication of the biting and experimental vocabulary that would emerge within a very few years. At this early stage it is largely made up of I, IV and V chords. The sequential relationships of chord progressions were as yet, of little interest to Prokofiev but in his later works he would come to privilege neighbouring progressions above these traditional progressions. In the *Little Songs* Prokofiev's use of harmony is directional and tonally unambiguous. Nonetheless, his penchant for the unexpected cadential progression is already apparent.

Many of the *pesenki* consist of a melody with accompaniment, and the harmony is by no means radical in the first and second series. It is only when Prokofiev adds to the essentially triadic nature of his harmony that chromatic notes are used. This type of harmony may be observed in *The Giant*, where chromaticism becomes an important part of the dramatic atmosphere. It is likely that the concept of the dramatic played an important part in jolting Prokofiev's harmony forward. The *pesenki* are made up of largely introspective and Romantic<sup>24</sup> harmonic textures, a far cry from the avant-garde and deviceful sounds he was creating by 1908.

Rhythmically, there are many features, such as the strong down-beat quality of the writing, that are already present in these early pieces. The *pesenki* continue to highlight the composer's obsession with rhythm and beat, in particular the clear-cut march and waltz rhythms. The rhythm used is metrical: at this stage he worked around the bar-line, coinciding main melodic emphasis with the downbeat as far as possible. He preferred to use rhythmic patterns and forms, such as those that I mentioned above, which would highlight the main beats of each bar and outline a

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<sup>24</sup> Throughout this study, the term Romantic is used when the music under discussion evokes Chopinesque or Lisztian musical textures and, to a lesser extent, harmonies. Chopin's mazurkas, waltzes and nocturnes and the textures of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* spring to mind within this context.

clear metric shape. As he matured, Prokofiev would later build melodic shapes that would often be far from metrical. The ensuing tension resulting from a wayward melodic line being set against a rhythmic and metric frame is one of the key qualities of Prokofiev's melodies.

The manipulation of rhythm in the *pesenki* is already bold, innovative and full of personality and bears the imprint of the mature Prokofiev. It is characterised by incisive and repetitive as well as ostinato rhythms, pianistic figurations full of rhythmic energy, syncopations, dotted rhythms and the interplay of rhythmic layers. To take an example from the first series of *Little Songs*, the first song is interesting from a rhythmic point of view because of its use of dotted rhythms and syncopation which is further through the use of the tremolo figure. The piece is divided into four-bar phrases and the fourth bar of each phrase is a semibreve chord. This *Little Song* also makes extensive use of the repeated note/chord.<sup>25</sup>

The second piece of the series features a **leaping bass**, shown below, of repeated thirds and a melody built around a dotted rhythm.<sup>26</sup>



The fourth piece is constructed around **repeated notes** and a **chromatic scalar figure**.<sup>27</sup> A rhythmic figure that is reminiscent of the March from *Love for Three Oranges* is accompanied by a bass written in octaves. This repeated note figure, which has a rhythmic function in the early works, but which would also acquire a melodic function in later Prokofiev, is a staple idea-type.<sup>28</sup>



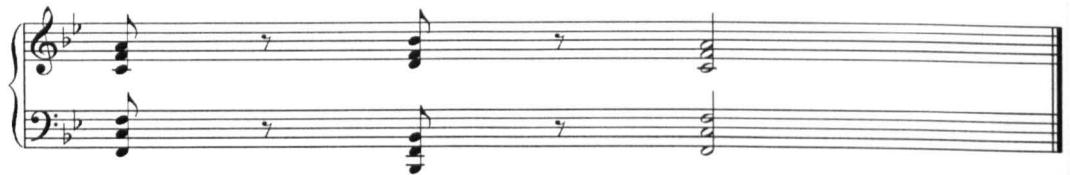
<sup>25</sup> The complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

<sup>26</sup> The complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

<sup>27</sup> 1929/LS/4 ; the complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

<sup>28</sup> This bass pattern will feature in 1929/LS/3, 7, 18, 23, 35, 37.

The piece ends on an imperfect cadence, already suggestive of Prokofiev's later non-cadences such as the “phantom cadence” which will be discussed in the third chapter.



The fifth song is largely constructed around an **arpeggiated bass** while the right melody is built on chords, most of which are in first inversion, another familiar Prokofievan hand position. This song is again written in the Romantic style, with a sweeping arpeggio-like accompaniment over which a chordal melody is layered.



The song with accompaniment texture allows Prokofiev to develop his distinctive bass lines in a variety of ways: **leaping chords**, **leaping single line**, **repetitive chords**, **ostinato patterns**, **alberti-bass patterns**.<sup>29</sup> Some examples are provided below:

Piano sonata, first movement, 1903.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> 1929/LS/2, 18, 23, 40, 42, 45

<sup>30</sup> The blank bars in this example are copied from Prokofiev's manuscript. It is likely that the composer planned on going back to fill in the gaps or to establish a numbering system whereby this could be done by a copyist. He used a similar numbering system for blank bars for other songs, for example, Series III: Song 3.



Series IV, Song No. 8, 1905.

*Undina*, Act III, Scene 2, 1907.



Series II, Song No. 4, 1903.

A typical **waltz-like bass** may be found in the sixth song of the first series:



Tremolos as well as fast demisemiquaver passages are used for effect, particularly in the seventh song of the first series which Prokofiev had intended to write “in the grand style, but it had come out rather stilted”.<sup>31</sup> The composer also uses this ‘effect’ feature in his writing for the stage. The seventh song<sup>32</sup> is built entirely on a triplet rhythm and is again written in the Romantic style with **repeated chords** in the right hand for the first six bars and then in the left hand for the rest of the piece. This piece also makes use of the left hand over the right hand position: a physical movement that would become a crucial visual component of Prokofiev’s performing style. This song is the longest piece of the set and contains several of Prokofiev’s typical gestures apart from the **repeated note**, such as the use of **scalar figurations** in quintuplets; loud climactic moments built entirely on **repeated chords**; whole-bar silences to break up such climactic build-ups; descending and ascending **scalar figurations** in

<sup>31</sup> *Memoir*, 58.

<sup>32</sup> The complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

the bass, **tremolo figurations** in either hand; repeated note figurations foregrounded rather blatantly six bars from the end of the piece.

The eighth song of this series is characterised by the use of a ‘**walking bass**’.<sup>33</sup> It is divided into six sections and features the **repeated note**, the **leaping bass** as well as the ‘walking bass’, which is then used as an **ostinato**; playing in octaves as well as carefully crafted crescendo dramatic moments. Prokofiev uses key as a **presentational strategy** in the opening of this piece: the first eight bars of the piece are written in F major before the piece modulates to B flat major.

The second series of *Little Songs* is a little more adventurous. The first song has an opening four-bar **presentational figure** built on repeated octaves: this is a different texture from the rest of the piece. The bass part is constructed on a repetitive **alberti bass** which spans around one and a half octaves. The melody, although simple, is extended to cover around two octaves and is one of the earliest types of longer melody.



It gradually becomes more complex, incorporating semiquaver figurations and long trills, alternating between 3/2 and common time.

The second song has a seven-sharp key signature and is written in 7/8 time, the first occurrence of a time signature other than the simple duple or triple.<sup>34</sup> The opening two-bar **presentational gesture** is both rhythmic and dramatic:



<sup>33</sup> The complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

<sup>34</sup> 1929/LS/14; the complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

Following this opening presentational figure, the piece is written in the Romantic style with the melody written in octaves switching between treble and bass clefs. The middle section of the piece moves to B major and is written in 5/8 time. It is in this part that we have another example of Prokofiev's early melodies: simple in structure and tonality but extensive in scope.



Prokofiev himself detects the influences of Brahms, Liszt and Chopin in these early *pesenki*, but notes that the influence of the latter in his work was merely incidental.<sup>35</sup> The Romantic influence is present in most of the early *pesenki*. Whether this influence is a result of the music heard at home or whether he was being guided by adults to write in the style of Chopin is not clear. The seventh song<sup>36</sup> from the second series, which is a melody with accompaniment in the key of E flat major, was written as a result of the pressure put upon him by his mother to compose something tender in a Chopinesque vein. It was also a response to Goldenweiser's comment that his style would become more pianistic if he were to write the accompaniment "in the form of broad arpeggios sweeping from the left hand to the right, with the melody flowing in between."<sup>37</sup> But the young composer disliked these suggestions to write in a Romantic style: he felt much "freer" and more able to experiment in the second and eighth songs of the second series.

The tenth song opens with a **presentational gesture** and starts with the **repeated leading note**.



<sup>35</sup> *Memoir*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> *Manuscritti Infantili* (Milan: Ricordi, 1987), 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Memoir*, 63.

Intriguingly this piece provides us with the first example of Prokofiev's 'skazka' or fairy tale textures: the creation of atmosphere relies entirely on the use of repeated and syncopated chords that evoke stillness.

The third series marks the beginning of a subtle turn in Prokofiev's compositional style: the use of specific forms like the March and the Romance now becomes more frequent but the Romantic influence remains prevalent. The third song in this series is again written in a Romantic style for piano.<sup>38</sup>



The manuscript for this piece is particularly interesting as it sheds some light on Prokofiev's early compositional processes: the piece is strung together in one-bar cells. The composer assigns each bar a number and later on in the piece, rather than writing the music out in full, he simply wrote the bar numbers on each individual stage so that his copyist (in this case Louise Roblin, his nanny) would be able to write out the piece in full from the specific bar numbers. Such a process of composing in small units remained: Mark Aranovsky notes this accretive quality of Prokofiev's later writing but it is already in evidence in these early manuscripts.<sup>39</sup>

The third set of songs gradually reveals Prokofiev's burgeoning piano technique. He played the eighth song from this series in his conservatory entrance exam.<sup>40</sup> Dedicated to his father on his fifty-eight birthday, this one song represents the huge step forward that Prokofiev's writing made in a couple of years. Simply titled *Vivo*, it brings together many of the gestures that had emerged in the composer's writing this far.

<sup>38</sup> The complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Aranovsky, "Observations on Prokofiev's Sketchbooks," trans. Jason Strudler in *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 401- 422.

<sup>40</sup> 1929/LS/32

The use of **ostinato bass** is one example, as it replaces the more childlike alberti bass, instead emphasising the interval of the second (from bar 3 onwards). The **repeated note** is now played by the right hand crossing over the left (bar 12). The acciaccatura adds crispness to the texture and is in itself a play on the appoggiatura figure so favoured by Prokofiev. This occurs in bars 3 – 7, 16 – 20, 25 – 48. It becomes the figure that characterises the whole first section of this piece.

The second section, starting at bar 50, introduces another aspect of Prokofievan writing: the lyrical song lines and the gentler swaying textures of the Romantic song with accompaniment. This section's melody is written in two-bar phrases, which usually start on the third and fourth beats of the bar and continue over the bar line. This gives the melody line a yearning shape as well as a sense of continuity as the bass continues with its metrical accompaniment. The section is marked *Moderato* while the melody is marked *p dolce e legato*. The use of ornaments like the turns in bar 64 and the written out mordent shapes in bar 63 place this section of the piece firmly within the conventions of Romantic writing for piano. This atmosphere lasts until the return of the opening *Vivo* section, with its incisive rhythms and off-beat bass chords, which dispels the Romantic lyrical aura of the piece.

The *Little Songs* gradually become more complex, revealing Prokofiev's maturing sense of style and a more sophisticated use of rhythm and piano textures. The fourth series continues developing various compositional techniques. The lyrical

vein is never abandoned however. It is present in the opening of the Romance in D minor<sup>41</sup> which was composed on the occasion of his mother's name day and which was written in a "serious style".<sup>42</sup> The accompaniment is based on repeated and sustained chords, creating a static harmony that would become a feature of his piano works, particularly in his piano sonatas. The *Lento* section of this romance features a seven-bar phrase that covers a two-octave range. Again, this **over-arching melodic line** is a definitive feature of Prokofiev's mature writing and it is already in evidence in the juvenilia. The ubiquitous **repeated note** is used as an accompanying figure in the central *Più animato* section as well as in the *Tempo I*. In the last section the melody is played by the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand while the rest of the hand plays the accompanying thirds and fourths. Although this division of the hand into melody and accompaniment is simple here, the idea would feature in Prokofiev's later works for piano such as those discussed in Chapter 3 and became a particularly important feature of his playing technique, as it enabled the composer to layer textures one above the other.

The **repeated note or chord gesture** features in many of these *pesenki*:



Theme from Prokofiev's childhood catalogue of compositions, 1898.<sup>43</sup>



March for 4 hands, 1899.

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<sup>41</sup> 1929/LS/38

<sup>42</sup> *Memoir*, 127.

<sup>43</sup> Fond 1929, opis 1, yed khra 208. See Appendix B for details of its contents.



*The Giant*, 1900.

Sometimes it is used as accompaniment, at other times it is incorporated into the melody. In the third song of the fourth series, written in A minor, it is used as an accompaniment and extended tonic pedal.<sup>44</sup> Because this song was quite short, Prokofiev notes that “it held up better than the others of that period” presumably because longer pieces such as the tenth song of the fourth series, discussed below and reproduced in Appendix C, were structurally diffuse and thematically less well-organized.<sup>45</sup>

**Repeated chords** sustain the sixth song of the same series against which Prokofiev sets a short two bar motif built on the up-beat.<sup>46</sup> In more mature works, Prokofiev would continue to use short motifs as the building block for larger pieces; this is an important compositional technique. This process of working with short motifs will be explored further in Chapter 3, in discussing Prokofiev’s first works for piano from the ‘elemental’ phase. Prokofiev notes that the long and not very shapely

<sup>44</sup> 1929/LS/39; see Sikorski, 15 -16.

<sup>45</sup> *Memoir*, 127.

<sup>46</sup> 1929/LS/41

nature of this piece made it more like the “piano score of an orchestral piece than a piece conceived for piano”.<sup>47</sup>

The tenth song of the fourth series<sup>48</sup> starts with an opening five-bar appoggiatura figure, showcasing Prokofiev’s **presentational gesture** clearly. In his *Memoir*, the composer notes that “the tenth took up thirteen pages and was broadly conceived with dramatic shifts in mood, harmonic inventions, and even a combination of two themes”.<sup>49</sup> Various gestures come into play in this piece such as the ‘**walking bass**’:



Prokofiev also makes use of alternating thirds written in semiquavers and sustained in the inner voices of the right hand for an extended length of time so that it begins to sound like a tremolo and functions as an independent line. The piano’s **high registers** are used to create variations in texture. Both texture and rhythm are built up gradually as the inner voices transform into a triplet figure which is then taken up by the left hand. The quiet *calando* section in the middle is built on sustained chords.

The fifth and last series of songs for piano was composed in 1906. This set reveals the extent of the evolution of the Prokofiev idiom. Through this last series we can also see how the composer had both outgrown this short form and simultaneously made it his own. Over the years, the *pesenki* provided the composer with a working canvas equal in importance to the later musical notebooks. Many of the gestures that emerge in these works become more sophisticated musical ideas that will be used in his later works for piano and even in his orchestral writing.

As the next two chapters will demonstrate, Prokofiev’s compositional and performing practices were not separate, nor could he ever conceive of them as such. An example of the synthesis between practice and performance occurs in the first scherzo Prokofiev ever wrote. It occurs here as the second song of this series and the composer notes that “from the viewpoint of piano technique; it is written in double thirds in the right hand, and in this respect one feels the influence of certain technical

<sup>47</sup> *Memoir*, 163.

<sup>48</sup> The complete piece is attached in Appendix D.

<sup>49</sup> *Memoir*, 165.

pieces I learned or heard at the Conservatory. Schumann's *Toccata* made a special impression upon me".<sup>50</sup> Although the mature memoir-writing Prokofiev suggests the influence of the *Toccata* on this *pesenka* which is evident in the way it engaged with various issues of piano technique, Prokofiev's real engagement with Schumann's *Toccata* would not occur until years later, through his own *Toccata* for piano. Ostensibly this scherzo is written in C major, but Prokofiev's penchant for chromatic notes emerges right from the outset. The first bar begins on the lowered submediant followed by the raised subdominant before coming to rest on the dominant of C major. The opening three bars function as a **presentational gesture** along the lines of similar gestures heard in the early series of the *pesenki*. The piece is written around **swift passages of double thirds** – another of Prokofiev's staple pianistic gestures.

This scherzo has a tripartite structure and the middle section being written in the key of F minor. This ternary type structure allows for the introduction of a longer melodic line, to be played *p dolce*. A simple four-bar melody with chordal accompaniment is gradually extended to a six-bar phrase, then to an eleven-bar phrase, then to a six-bar phrase in the double third textures. A somewhat odd feature of this piece is the sudden appearance of a bar written in 5/4 seven bars from the end: this is one of the very few appearances of an irregular time signature in Prokofiev's early phase.

The fourth song relies on **ostinato bass**. This is again one of the first instances that Prokofiev uses the ostinato bass as a strategy with which to structure a whole piece. Of course, the composer had used the ostinato bass in earlier works, but with this little song, which is not written in the usual tripartite form, Prokofiev uses this type of bass as a structuring device, which is precisely what it would become in the 'elemental' phase and beyond.

In the sixth song, Prokofiev turns to the dotted note motif as the basis of his musical material.<sup>51</sup> The composer dedicated this march to his friend Morolev,<sup>52</sup> who loved this particular piece and made Prokofiev play it over several times. Yet again, this song is in tripartite form and since this song is a march, written in the key of F

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<sup>50</sup> *Memoir*, 167.

<sup>51</sup> This song was revised and included as the "March" in *Ten Pieces for Piano Op. 12* and Prokofiev notes that the "first version did not have the shocking harmonies I devised for the second: it was simpler and more naive." (*Memoir*, 178)

<sup>52</sup> Vasily Morolev was a veterinarian and life-long friend of the Prokofievs. He particularly enjoyed listening to the young Prokofiev play the piano and also played chess with him.

minor, the dotted note figure fits neatly into the character of the work. The bass is written in octaves outlining the intervals of the third, fourth and fifth but in the middle section of the piece, the main emphasis on the left hand is on the **semitone shift**. Bars 16 – 19 feature an **embedded chromatic line**, one of the most fundamental gestures in Prokofiev's musical language. It will appear in different contexts and with different functions.

Although the chromatic line has appeared several times in Prokofiev's juvenilia, its appearance in this specific context signals its integration into the bass line and its importance as a compositional device. The third section of the piece is, somewhat bizarrely, written in D flat major. This seemingly awkward choice of keys, F minor – C major – D flat major, is yet again a feature of Prokofiev's later works. While the first and last keys signatures are flat key, the white note C major key may be seen as providing a respite from the surrounding tonality. The composer's use of chromaticism, however, blurs any perception that the central tonality is in fact C major. The preference for modulating to neighbouring keys that the composer will explore more fully in the 'elemental' phase is already evident here. The texture of this piece gradually thickens so that toward the end of the piece, and prior to the *Da Capo* repeat, the chords are fuller and there are now chords of the seventh, and four-note chords rather than simple octaves in each hand.

This last series of the *Little Songs* shows Prokofiev turning ever more toward virtuosic writing. As with the previous series, the fifth series places great emphasis on speed, but in addition, this series demands a more challenging pianistic technique, and one which relies upon complete finger independence. There are more complex configurations in these pieces and they are also rhythmically more challenging. Prokofiev's training as a pianist at the Conservatory gradually empowered him to write more technically demanding pieces and indeed to write pieces that would flaunt his technique to the best possible advantage. This creation of a performing self through the act of composition will be examined in more detail in the next chapter, but its embryonic origins may already be perceived here.

The seventh and twelfth song of this series, *Prestissimo* and *Vivo* respectively are essentially studies in speed. The latter is actually titled *Study Scherzo* in C major, thus making two scherzos in this set of *pesenki*. The title that Prokofiev gave this piece also indicates that he must have been thinking of piano technique differently from when he started writing these pieces in 1902 and this development in his musical

and creative thinking is reflected in the quality of the pieces. Both pieces are written in *Da Capo* form, which again allows the composer to introduce two contrasting ideas in the one piece.

In the seventh song, Prokofiev uses the **repeated note** as accompaniment and a directional bass line in octaves as well as **repeated chords**. The lyrical theme in the central section is built round a descending four-note **scale pattern** that gradually travels down one octave. Prokofiev also uses the technique of having the right hand playing a melodic line with the third, fourth and fifth fingers along with an accompaniment in quavers in the thumb and second fingers. The middle section also provides a very lyrical interlude and in it can already be seen the origins of Prokofiev's winding melodic lines that stretch across around two octaves and that are occasionally played in contrary motion.

The musical score consists of four staves of piano music. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The key signature changes from C major to F# minor. The first staff has a tempo marking of '8' over the staff. The second staff has a dynamic 'f sempre'. The third staff has a dynamic '8va'. The fourth staff has a dynamic 'p'.

Conversely, the twelfth song is built on a short staccato motif accompanied by a staccato **broken octave pattern in the bass**. The restless movement is maintained throughout the piece, making this particular song more about stamina than any other

technical concern. In this piece too, the **semitone shift** is evident and is showcased in bars 39 – 41 through the use of accents.



Asaf'ev notes that this song reflects the Prokofiev "manner": "élan, impetuosity, compression, distinct accentuation, no decorations: only that which is necessary for finished utterance".<sup>53</sup> Indeed the unmistakeable traits of later Prokofiev writing are clearly exposed in this work.

The *Little Songs*, which were composed over the period of four years, may therefore be seen as the working canvases of Prokofiev's apprentice years. The last of the series shows how far the composer has come in terms of compositional technique. In time Prokofiev's gestures would be bolder and more expansive, for example the repeated note would become more insistent and would often generate musical content; the lyrical lines would expand.

The alberti bass which is often used here to structure a whole short song, transformed into an ostinato, would become a structural feature of Prokofiev's music. Not only would it hold together complete pieces, but it would also be used to structure entire scenes in operas as well as to suggest and generate specific images. The tripartite structure and ternary forms favoured by the composer in the early pieces remained. Later on, Prokofiev would turn to similar structures such as the rondo and variation form because they accommodated his use of repetition as a compositional device.

## Theatrical Works

Prokofiev's interest in the theatre came early and lasted a lifetime. Although this early period remains largely undocumented, the composer's love for the stage is a crucial component of his artistic aesthetic: as early as 1903, his preference for big

<sup>53</sup> Asaf'ev drew up a list of Prokofiev's manuscripts entitled "A List of the Manuscripts of S. Prokofiev in the Custody of B.V. Asafyev (Years of Childhood and Youth: 1896 – 1910)". Cited in the Editor's Preface to the notes of *Memoir*, 323 – 4. The list was then returned to Prokofiev.

sounds was evident in his critique of a chamber music concert which he calls “boring” because he was “looking for bright colours and dramatic moments.”<sup>54</sup> The early works number amongst them four operas: *The Giant*, *On Desert Islands*, *A Feast in Time of Plague* and *Undina*.<sup>55</sup> By 1900, Prokofiev was writing his first opera, *The Giant*.

As a work written for the piano, specifically for himself to play, *The Giant* gives a crucial insight into what Prokofiev’s early piano playing was like and complements the evidence available to us from our previous examination of the *pesenki*. More importantly, in terms of the theatrical nature of the piece, Prokofiev would continue to engage with qualities already evident in *The Giant* even in his mature phase. Written in piano score, with the voice parts superimposed on top, this work reveals the origins behind the lasting love-affair that Prokofiev was to have with the stage.

*The Giant* seems to have been inspired by Prokofiev’s first trip to Moscow with his parents which took place in January 1900. This was possibly the young composer’s first experience of the stage. He was taken to see Gounod’s *Faust*, Borodin’s *Prince Igor* and Tchaikovsky’s *Sleeping Beauty*. Prokofiev himself notes that this marked an important landmark in his relationship with music, and this is evident in his compositions of the period, which begin to reveal a heightened interest in the dramatic and the theatrical: “I began to stage plays. The plots were wretched and invariably included a duel with swords. In terms of form, this was *commedia dell’arte*: we would think up a skeletal plot, and then the actors would improvise.”<sup>56</sup>

During his first four years of composing, between 1896 and 1900, Prokofiev had written only music for piano, possibly because that was the only instrument he was familiar with. After his trip to the opera his imagination turned towards the stage and its newfound possibilities. The process of writing for the stage meant that the young composer could play and act out little shows with family and friends. It gave him the freedom to create exciting and imaginative music to support a fantasy storyline he had designed, initially with the participation of friends. And finally, writing music for the stage almost automatically assumed the presence of a captive audience, an element of performing that already fascinated the composer.

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<sup>54</sup> *Memoir*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> The length of these works is hard to gage because none of them is complete. I have, as far as possible, provided full details for each work in Appendix B.

<sup>56</sup> *Memoir*, 22.

Prokofiev's first encounter with the theatre captured his imagination. *Faust* in particular gripped his attention. In his own words "the duel with swords and the death of Valentine impressed me".<sup>57</sup> This swashbuckling and energetic quality of stage works found its way into his first opera *The Giant* and remained a crucial aspect of his compositions for the stage. This was his first and earliest 'large-scale' work and is written in three acts and six scenes.<sup>58</sup>

The plot of *The Giant* is a simple one that appealed to the imagination of a child and allows for the integration of childish play into the scenes. A giant is terrorising a kingdom and an army is dispatched to capture and kill him in order to restore peace to the realm. The plot has plenty of room for battle scenes, always a particular favourite with Prokofiev, as well as a young lady's fainting fit. In short, the plot possesses everything necessary to create an exciting and theatrical work for the stage. The composer does not assign his character names but simply uses the participant's first names in the opera, Ustinya becoming Stenya for example.<sup>59</sup>

The last scene shows a precocious understanding of the dramatic elements necessary for a theatrical work. During a party taking place at the rescued lady's home, a dishevelled King bursts onto the scene declaring that he cannot fight the giant any more, curses everyone and kills himself. Following this shocking outburst, and in a dramatic *volte face*, the King's subjects surround the giant and ask him whether he would like to be their new king. He agrees and the opera ends with everyone singing "Long live our Giant". The violent ending of this opera caused the adults concern. Why they asked, does the King have to kill himself? But there was no reasoning with the young Prokofiev – he had set his heart on this dramatic moment and was unwilling to let it go. The opera needed to finish on a theatrical high note. The theatrical gesture with which he ended his first opera is already indicative of Prokofiev's concern for the dramatic image.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Memoir*, 21.

<sup>58</sup> The composer's catalogue (f. 1929, op. 1, yed. khr. 208) lists 6 bars from the overture, 6 bars from Act I Scene I, 10 bars from Act I Scene II, 5 bars from Act II Scene I, 5 bars from Act II Scenes 2 and 6 bars from Act III. The manuscript pages of *Velikan* are in RGALI f. 1929 op. 1 yed. khr. 1. The RGALI catalogue indicates that the following pages remain: 1, 2, 14 – 17, 20 – 23, 26, 27. The first two pages, although numbered consecutively, do not appear to be musically consecutive.

<sup>59</sup> Prokofiev's childhood companions, as he recalls them in his *Memoir* were Serezha, Stenya, Sasha, Kolya, Marfusha and Egorka. The first four were the housekeeper's children, while Marfusha was his mother's maid. Egorka was two years older and was the son of the estate's "chief overseer". (*Memoir*, 18)

<sup>60</sup> Both *The Gambler* and *The Fiery Angel* end on cinematic high notes of action.

One striking quality about the first act of this opera is the frequency of tempo changes. There are no fewer than ten tempo indications: minim = 72 (7 bars), crotchet = 88 (9 bars), crotchet = 160 (19 bars), crotchet = 96 (5 bars), crotchet = 92 (22 bars), crotchet = 100 (5 bars), crotchet = 116 (19 bars, 3 of which are completely silent), crotchet = 96 (15 bars), crotchet = 168 (18 bars), minim = 208 (26 bars). In this work, the composer uses tempo changes to suggest corresponding shifts in mood and atmosphere. The frequent changes create an ongoing flow to the work, ensuring that one change of mood is followed by the other almost in breathless succession. Thus, the young Prokofiev's audience would have been held captive while the children participating in the opera are kept on their toes by the quick succession of events. Not all of the tempo changes indicated above are co-ordinated with a pause in the action of the music, which was usually signified by a double bar-line. Sometimes, the tempo marking occurs randomly, in the middle of a phrase<sup>61</sup>.

The score shows a good grasp of key signatures. Although *The Giant* is classified by Shlifshtein as being written in F major, Prokofiev touches on various other keys in quick succession: D minor (C sharp inserted just once, other Cs left natural), moves to C major. The composer adds in F sharps into this section, even though it otherwise appears to be written in C major.<sup>62</sup> This appears to reflect an early penchant for the quirky and the unusual and displays the beginnings of Prokofiev's exploration of tonality. The use of the black keys in an otherwise all white key section livens things up. The fleeting reference to C major<sup>63</sup> in line 2 is followed by G major,<sup>64</sup> then back to C major. Intriguingly C major then moves down by a tone to the key of B flat major<sup>65</sup> before going through the keys of F major<sup>66</sup> and G major. Already, Prokofiev's preference for neighbouring tonalities for modulation is evident.

This flirting with different tonalities indicates that Prokofiev is slowly becoming aware of the importance of modulation both as a directional process and as a means of chromatic and dramatic colour. Although I have only outlined the key changes for one section of *The Giant*, it is already apparent that not only did the

<sup>61</sup> 1929/TW/1 (SPA, 1929/001-100/006)

<sup>62</sup> *The Giant*, Act I. (SPA, 1929/001-100/002, lines 2-5).

<sup>63</sup> Prokofiev only adds naturals to the B flats in the right hand part, the left hand part plays B flat. This is another subtle indication of Prokofiev's linear thinking where the treble and bass lines are treated as separate entities.

<sup>64</sup> SPA, 1929/001-100/002, line 6, all of the next page (SPA, 1929/001-100/003) and line 1 of SPA, 1929/001-100/004.

<sup>65</sup> SPA, 1929/001-100/004, line 3.

<sup>66</sup> SPA, 1929/001-100/004, line 6 SPA, 1929/001-100/005, line 3.

young composer have a good understanding of key signatures, he was also sensitive to the fact that their different colourings could be put to theatrical use.

The second act of *The Giant* shows the same attention to detailed dynamic markings, key signatures and tempo indications. Act II begins with a 14 bar dramatic introduction prior to the curtain being raised. This introduction is based on a **chromatic sextuplet figure** played *forte* and increasing in loudness. The key is C major, but this changes to F major as soon as the curtain is raised. This little overture to the act is a theatrical underlining of the curtain-raising convention and already highlights Prokofiev's fascination for the dramatic gesture and the emphasis on theatricality that was to feature in *Love for Three Oranges*.

In moments of purely instrumental (i.e. piano) music, various musical shapes and gestures jump out of the score. The **leaping bass line** is a particularly interesting figure because, prefiguring his later genius for caricature and characterisation, Prokofiev uses it to outline the character of the giant. Throughout the score, this leaping bass line sounds like the giant's footstep trampling all over the opera. Similarly, there are other dramatic gestures: figures, which like the chromatic sextuplet discussed above, flag up dramatic moments. Such moments are overtly theatrical, but they fit in well with the magic wonderland *The Giant* inhabits. It is no coincidence that in the earlier part of his career Prokofiev would favour supernatural or fantastic themes for his operas: the theme of the fantastic and the supernatural occurs in *Maddalena*, *Love for Three Oranges* and *Fiery Angel*. Such themes allowed him to play with a theatrical mode of writing, and especially in these childhood works, it is clear that he was wont to let his imagination run free. This imaginative quality which originates as a musical idea in these childhood works, runs through all of Prokofiev's work.

*The Giant* was written and performed as an opera, but, like *Undina*, another of Prokofiev's early operas, it is essentially a piano score. The musical shapes and motifs that inhabit the work are drawn from the piano and are inspired by the act of playing the piano. The very texture of the piece is drawn from the pianistic idiom. It could equally have been a dramatic work written for the piano. Again, the bass line (which is such an important feature of the *pesenki*) has an important role – it is almost like a character in its own right. Prokofiev uses it in different ways: in **broken chord type patterns**, as an **ostinato bass** and as a **leaping bass**. The **chromatic line** is also used – this is another easily transferable gesture that is clearly inspired by a simple

pianistic figuration but which becomes integral in Prokofiev's thought and emerges very often in his orchestration.<sup>67</sup> Again, this is a favourite pianistic figure with Prokofiev and will be discussed in greater detail in the third chapter. And finally, there are also some occasional big flourishing gestures that seem to indicate the end of a mini section. These gestures are theatrical and aim to indicate the end of an act and to encourage audience applause. This attention-grabbing quality is one that Prokofiev refined in his later work but which has its roots in the juvenilia.<sup>68</sup>

Prokofiev describes his compositional process in great detail in his autobiography. Amusingly, he notes that his "skill at notation lagged behind my ideas, which in *The Giant* made a leap ahead of my earlier pieces."<sup>69</sup> He ran into rhythmic difficulties particularly when trying to decide which beat of the bar to start the music on and which time signatures to assign the piece. He also experienced problems writing modulations and poignantly notes "the curious sensation" of wanting to express something but being unable to define exactly what that was.

Between *The Giant* and the opera *Maddalena* (which coincides with the composer's stylistic transition), Prokofiev wrote three other operas: *On Desert Islands*, *A Feast in Time of Plague* and *Undina*. Only fragments of *On Desert Islands* and *A Feast in Time of Plague* survive.<sup>70</sup> The plot of *On Desert Islands* was that of a shipwreck where the main characters, who were the same as those in *The Giant*, find themselves stranded on a desert island. Unlike *The Giant* however, the music was more dramatic (portraying the elements) and the opera was a much longer work. In his own analysis of this work, Prokofiev notes the influence of Beethoven and identifies echoes of Chopin's *Etude* No. 12. In his view, this work represented an improvement on *The Giant*: there were no errors in time signatures and diminished seventh chords begin to make their appearance in this work. Intriguingly, Prokofiev

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<sup>67</sup> An important example of this "filler" line, which is not always chromatic, occurs in Prokofiev's handwritten orchestration of the second movement from Piano Sonata No. 4. See SPA, R8825/501-581/067 line 2, bar 2 and line 3, bar 2.

<sup>68</sup> In a letter to his friend the composer Nikolai Miaskovsky, Prokofiev writes about the final scene of *The Fiery Angel* and the difficulty of maintaining dramatic interest: "If the audiences starts nodding off somewhere in the middle of the opera, then at least they will wake up for the final curtain." (in Robinson, *Selected Letters*, 273, April 5, 1928)

<sup>69</sup> *Memoir*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Five bars of the overture, twelve bars of Scene 1, four bars of Scene 2, and five bars of Scene 3 survive from *On Desert Islands*. Nine bars of the overture (in a four-hand arrangement for piano) to *A Feast in Time of Plague* and fifteen bars of the subordinate theme Prokofiev discusses in *Memoir* have been preserved. These entries are to be found in Prokofiev's catalogue of his early compositions started in 1902 (f. 1929, op. 1, yed. khr. 208) which proved to be very useful for Prokofiev when he came to compile his memoirs.

also notes that *On Desert Islands* “continued to swallow up my lighter pieces”.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that he worked with interchangeable ideas in his piano and theatre works: in his mind there was no distinction between the types of ideas to be used in each genre. The difference between the piano and theatre genres resided only in the sound-types used.

Prokofiev identifies *A Feast in Time of Plague* as an important work in his development. Studying with Glière in the summer of 1903, the young composer insisted that he wanted to write an opera, and eventually Glière suggested that he use Pushkin’s one-act play as a subject as it would eliminate the need of writing a libretto. The plague music was built on “diminished sevenths and chromatic scales in triplets”.<sup>72</sup> For Prokofiev, the most important part of this work was the overture which was long in comparison with the opera itself. In fact, the composer describes it as “a big head on a small body.”<sup>73</sup> It was written in sonata form and “remained unsurpassed for several years”.<sup>74</sup> Although Glière emphasised the importance of the lyrical element in the work, the composer cannot resist critiquing the Glière influence: “The fragment came out well – although further on, under Glière’s influence, it went into a rather stereotyped sequence”.<sup>75</sup> The composer and sometime teacher of Prokofiev, Mikhail Chernov, was also pleased with the quality of the overture: the young composer remembers with pleasure Chernov referring to it as a “full-fledged overture”.<sup>76</sup>

Prokofiev was to revisit this work a few years later, in 1909, for presentation in Wihtol’s<sup>77</sup> composition class at the St Petersburg Conservatory. He notes that while Glière had suggested that the priest’s music be depicted against “a background of liturgical organ harmonies”, the teenage composer now felt that the priest should be depicted in a melodramatic fashion, as “a medieval prelate who foamed at the mouth as he railed against the feasting sinners, and that therefore the entire scene should involve raging and gnashing of teeth. This gave me a justification for building it with many dissonant chords. But at the same time my striving for the dramatic made the

<sup>71</sup> *Memoir*, 40 (A handwritten note to this effect exists in f. 1929, op. 1, yed. khr. 201).

<sup>72</sup> *Memoir*, 66.

<sup>73</sup> *Memoir*, 71.

<sup>74</sup> *Memoir*, 71.

<sup>75</sup> *Memoir*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> *Memoir*, 99.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Wihtol (1863-1948) was a Latvian composer and teacher who studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory with Rimsky-Korsakov. He was a professor at the St Petersburg Conservatory from 1901 to 1918.

vocal part insufficiently vocal. [...] when I presented this scene at the exam, the entire Conservatory council gasped and raised a hue and cry.”<sup>78</sup>

Two acts survive from the next opera, *Undina*, which makes it possible for us to understand how far Prokofiev’s dramatic thinking and compositional style had developed in four years. The composer worked on *Undina* in fits and starts between 1904 and 1907 and, because of this, as the composer himself notes in his autobiography, it is stylistically inconsistent. Prokofiev worked on the libretto with Mme Kilschtedt;<sup>79</sup> they settled on dividing the libretto into five acts and six scenes. A Knight, Sir Hildebrand, emerging from the woods, comes upon Undine (the adopted daughter of a fisherman) and the old fisherman. He tells them how he is being tested by the beautiful Bertralda. At the mention of the name, Undine “plays all kinds of pranks, first splashing water, then fleeing. When a storm breaks, she hides herself in the pelting rain and in the water of the lake”.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile the Fisherman and the Knight run off in search of Undine while the rainfall is transformed into a ballet of rivulets, with which the first act ends.<sup>81</sup> In his autobiography Prokofiev notes that “the second act was less naïve than the first: it has more harmonic ideas, and even inventions”.<sup>82</sup>

He returned to working on the last act of the opera in 1907 although he wryly notes that “the fact that I had written the fifth act did not mean that I had finished the opera: there were unfinished bits in some of the earlier acts, and Act I, composed at the age of thirteen, was in a more childish vein than the others, differing from them so much that I planned to compose it again from scratch.”<sup>83</sup> In the last Act, Hildebrand has withdrawn to the solitude of his room after celebrating his marriage to Bertalda. Undine emerges from her underwater kingdom and lulls Hildebrand in a deathly embrace. Prokofiev ends the opera on two quiet chords which earns him the criticism of his old friend Morolev who demands to know “how can you possibly end a long

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<sup>78</sup> *Memoir*, 304.

<sup>79</sup> See footnote 8 of this chapter. Mme Kilschtedt was writing out the libretto in verse.

<sup>80</sup> *Memoir*, 93.

<sup>81</sup> Prokofiev notes in his *Memoir* that he finished the second scene of *Undine* but provides no further information on the story line (93). A letter from his M.G. Prokofieva to her husband, dated January 10, 1905 notes that Chernov did not like *Undine* and that this negatively affected Prokofiev’s desire to compose. (Letter cited in *Memoir*, 122) She also notes that Prokofiev had composed a ballad for *Undine* at the start of the second act. (*Memoir*, 128)

<sup>82</sup> *Memoir*, 142.

<sup>83</sup> *Memoir*, 197.

five-act opera with two quiet chords that don't even involve a real cadence?"<sup>84</sup> The composer's penchant for the pseudo-cadence and his preference for unexpected dramatic moments is already evident.<sup>85</sup>



Despite the criticism, Prokofiev thought his ending was "very interesting and even touching". He "liked the idea of ending a long five-act opera with only a simple lyrical phrase and no embellishments". He was particularly annoyed as he had been criticised "all too often for my lack of lyricism" and now that he "he devised a lyrical ending for an opera, no one appreciated or accepted it. I was put out."<sup>86</sup>

Like *The Giant*, *Undina* is written in piano score with the voice parts written above. The score reads like a longer dramatic piece written for the piano, rather than the vocal score of an opera, especially in the use of specific hand positions and finger patterns. As in *The Giant*, the writing in *Undina* is highly pianistic. The bass line appears in several guises: **broken chord accompaniment, leaping bass, ostinato bass**, writing in **octaves** and **repeated chords** in the bass. The composer also began to experiment with the technique of structuring an entire section through the use of a particular bass type, such as the ostinato bass. This structural feature would be carried over into his mature operas.

It is evident, from the surviving two acts of the opera, that *Undina* is characterised by the declamatory nature of the vocal lines. This would also account for them appearing to be written as an after-thought.<sup>87</sup> Rather than having a flowing

<sup>84</sup> *Memoir*, 198.

<sup>85</sup> The pseudo-cadence will be discussed in the third chapter.

<sup>86</sup> *Memoir*, 198.

<sup>87</sup> Declamation, Prokofiev's way of achieving a certain degree of realism on stage, remained an integral feature of his operas and was often harshly criticized. Even during his Soviet period, when he was especially careful to highlight and foreground the melodic quality of his work, he still used declamation. Richard Taruskin identifies "melodic molds" into which the composer pours his text. In Taruskin's view, Prokofiev achieves a lyrical quality in his vocal writing because he "often invents a

melodic line, or an aria in the traditional sense, Undina sings her way through the first scene sustained by a bass of leaping broken chords. There are some sections of vocal writing in Act 4 where the voice parts are unaccompanied. *Undina* was Prokofiev's fourth opera so that by the time he started work on it in 1904, he had also composed a romance for voice and piano called *Skazhi mne, vetka Palestini* (*Tell me, little twig of Palestine*). Although his experience of writing for the voice was not vast, it nevertheless would have shaped his writing of the vocal lines in *Undina*. The preference of declamation rather than a chain of conventional arias sets the trend for Prokofiev's later operas: *The Gambler* and *The Fiery Angel* in particular are entirely declaimed.

Structurally, the composer seems to have been concerned with the pacing of these two acts, changing the time signature every four bars. The tempo indications also alter very frequently. In one act alone there are ten tempo changes: *Andante non troppo*, *Moderato*, *Poco più mosso*, *Più lento*, *Moderato*, *Più mosso ma non troppo*, *Tempo I*, *Andante*, *Allegro Assai*, *Andante*. This is carried over from *The Giant* where scene and mood changes are indicated through tempo changes. The tempo shifts thus reflect the changes of mood within the scene.

Prokofiev uses chromatic writing particularly intensely in the *Più Lento* passage mentioned above, thus highlighting a dramatic moment. It is difficult to ascertain tonality with any certainty and it is evident that in this work, chromaticism is used for colour and drama. This chromatic and textural quality is worked particularly effectively into *Maddalena*. Chromatic writing characterizes his depiction of the main character of the work, Undina. A specific texture is used to outline her character – a procedure Prokofiev used many times over in his mature operas. Her vocal part is usually accompanied by thick full dramatic textures and fast demisemiquaver passages, as though to highlight her hysterical nature and feminine qualities. Similarly, Bertralda, the other female character in the work, is accompanied by arpeggios. In so doing, the composer displays the beginnings of his interest in the depiction of the feminine in his operatic style.

Prokofiev uses a constantly moving bass to sustain the ongoing movement of the work: it often structures entire sections. Especially in the first scene of Act III, the bass consists of arpeggio-bass patterns in descending double thirds as well as

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melodic idea quite independently of his text". [Richard Taruskin, *Studies in the History of Music - Music and Drama* Vol. 2, (New York: Broude Brothers Limited, 1988, 219-220)]

**repeated chords** as accompanying figures; the bass part also moves in **chromatic octaves** to create the typical Prokofievan winding chromatic line. Sometimes the treble part takes over the accompaniment of ostinato alberti bass. The tremolo is used in the bass for dramatic purposes.

The texture of the second scene of Act III is similar to that of a *pesenka* with a treble part built on chords and **repeated ostinato notes** in the bass. The *Allegro Appassionato* episode below is just one example of the pianistic texture of the work.



In comparison with *The Giant*, the sections in *Undina* are longer and written in contrasting textures. In the second scene for example, the tempo divisions are as follows:

*Allegro non troppo*: 62 bars

*Allegro appassionato*: 34 bars

*Più mosso*: 32 bars

*Doloroso*: 14 bars

*Più mosso*: 16 bars

*Tempo I*: 16 bars

*Allegro non troppo ma poco più mosso*: 29 bars

*Allegro*: 39 bars

*Allegro non troppo*: 50 bars

The texture of *Undina* includes all of the thematic ideas and gestures that Prokofiev had already explored in shorter compositions and that we have already discussed: pianistic figurations and flourishes; repeated ostinato notes and chords; dramatic tremolos; long chromatic lines; broken chord bass. *Undina* is the last of Prokofiev's hybrid works, although this opera, like the ones that came before it, is written for piano and draws upon pianistic gestures for its thematic inspiration, it is dramatic both in its ideas and in its scope. Prokofiev would further develop this dramatic score in

later stage works. The interconnections between pianistic gestures and theatrical ideas would be explored in the more mature *Maddalena*.

### The juvenilia as musical sketchbooks

The survey of Prokofiev's childhood compositions suggests that these works became sketches of ideas and musical material that the composer continued to draw upon in his 'elemental' phase and beyond. It is also clear that many of the gestures which appear in these works, such as the use of different bass patterns, the use of the insistent repeated note, the chromatic motifs, the juxtaposition of opposing registers, pianistic figurations, the preference for tripartite structures, the fundamental concern with rhythm and meter and the penchant for neighbouring chords particularly at cadential points, remained an integral part of his compositional style and language.

Apart from revealing early specific gestures and thematic material that would become a crucial part of the mature composer's language, these early works reveal the origins of Prokofiev's distinctiveness. Many of the compositional ideas and techniques that emerge in these works remained: the process of composing in small musical cells; the need to write music outwardly from a piano stave; the early transcription of piano works into an orchestral medium and the importance of the physicality of piano playing perhaps being the most important. The juvenilia take us back to the physical origins of many of these gestures and thematic prototypes which were then to take on a life of their own and become independent musical entities. Far more important to this study than the actual gestures and thematic ideas themselves, are the composer's early compositional and orchestrating processes present in the juvenilia.

Prokofiev took many of these musical thoughts with him into the 'elemental' phase, refining them as he went along to achieve a far more sophisticated language: the bass line remained the main driver of Prokofiev's harmony; the repeated alberti bass and other accompanying patterns are transformed into aggressive ostinato rhythms, the preference for neighbouring chords becomes ever more pronounced as it is incorporated at cadential points and beyond. The chromatic line is also used in the 'elemental' phase, not so much for colour as for its physical properties in a piano score: it appears sometimes as a winding line, sometimes as a repeated motif in an

inner texture. The repeated note idea also becomes more sophisticated. As the last three chapters of this thesis will show, the persistent repeated note remains an important gesture; sometimes it changes into a repeated chord but its function as a presentational and attention-grabbing gesture not only remains, it is foregrounded, not just in the piano compositions, but in Prokofiev's writing more generally. This study will trace the evolution of these early gestures and ideas, exploring them first within the context of purely piano music, then within the writing for the stage.

The childhood compositions show that Prokofiev's interest in the piano and in the stage developed contemporaneously, which meant that he was composing music for different genres almost simultaneously. Thus, the gestures used in the *pesenki* were not differentiated from those used in *The Giant*, for example. As yet, the genres that he was composing for had little influence on the way he managed his musical material. During the 'elemental' period this would change. Nonetheless writing for the theatre freed Prokofiev's writing as he deliberately broke away from the forms advocated by Glière in the *pesenki* and explored his preference for dramatic and the theatrical in works like *The Giant*. Although the gesture types were no different, the beginnings of a difference in compositional style may already be detected. In the 'elemental' phase, to be discussed in the third chapter, Prokofiev tapped into his early understanding of the theatrical and incorporated it as a stylistic trait.

## **Chapter 2: Prokofiev the performer**

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### **Early music lessons**

Prokofiev's first contact with the piano came through listening to his mother's playing. He describes Mariya Grigoryevna Prokofieva as being an amateur pianist who had three musical virtues: "persistence, love, and taste".<sup>1</sup> Her son grew up listening to the music of Beethoven<sup>2</sup>, Chopin, Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Anton Rubinstein. The young Prokofiev often sat by his mother while she was practising, picking out tunes and short motifs on the piano and improvising while she played. He soon learned to write music down and was especially intrigued by four-hand music, writing a March for four hands as early as 1898. Under the tutelage of his mother who strived "to make things interesting, to expand my horizons, to develop skills gradually, and above all not to alienate me with drudgery"<sup>3</sup>, Prokofiev took his first steps at piano playing. This liberal teaching system worked well in some respects: it allowed the young composer enough freedom to experiment with his own little tunes and motifs but its lack of discipline resulted in the development of an idiosyncratic mode of playing and careless placing the hands on the piano.

As a child Prokofiev appears to have enjoyed improvising, a practice he did not take with him into adulthood, noting in a Diary entry from 1913 that he "never discovered any useful material for my compositions by means of improvising."<sup>4</sup> In his autobiography, the composer also notes that he would transpose pieces in different keys, trying to find the one that sounds best. He went through a lot of repertoire, becoming a skilled sight-reader in the process. His mother also fostered a sense of critical independence, urging him to discuss the pieces he was playing. Intriguingly, in spite of the fact that she was clearly an influential figure in his life and one who nurtured his musical talent and supported his fledgling career, Prokofiev does not write much about her in the *Diaries*, nor do the composer's biographers provide much information about this influential figure. Her role appears to be that of a guardian,

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoir*, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Prokofiev notes that his mother particularly liked playing Volume 1 of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoir*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Sergey Prokofiev, *Diaries 1907- 1914: Prodigious Youth* trans. Anthony Phillips, (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), 445. Hereafter shortened to *Diaries*, Vol.1.

patiently guiding and protecting her son's prodigious talent.<sup>5</sup> One memory comes from M.K Moroleva's *Recollections*. She notes that the young Prokofiev was particularly sensitive to music, being an impulsive and impressionable child. His mother tried to manage his upbringing without affecting his appetite for music; her intention was to give him a gently structured education which would also allow him the freedom to develop his own musical personality. According to Moroleva:

It wasn't necessary to 'teach music' to Serezha. All he had to learn was the technique of playing. From earliest childhood, the world of sounds was his own world – one that he understood as a person understands his native tongue [...] it was essential, [...] to safeguard the *uniqueness of his development*, at the same time guiding it and providing a framework for it – but to do this in such a way that he never noticed.<sup>6</sup>

The disadvantage of this broad-minded teaching approach was that he "didn't learn any pieces thoroughly, and tended to play carelessly. And I was sloppy in another way: in positioning my fingers on the keys. My thoughts would run ahead, and my fingers would follow somehow or other."<sup>7</sup> The quality of slovenly playing brought him grief during his conservatory years – it would take several years of disciplined practice before he would acquire a detailed and painstaking approach to piano playing and piano technique.

Since Prokofiev developed relatively early as a composer and started writing music for the piano well before he had himself approached some sort of technical mastery of that instrument, piano playing was often a case of forcing his fingers to follow the thoughts that "ran ahead" and finding imaginative, if not always pianistic, ways of achieving the sounds that he envisaged. His first piano playing consisted more of an 'accompaniment' to his mother's playing – this allowed him to imagine a variety of sound layering possibilities: this layering quality would become an integral feature of his textures.

Prokofiev's comment about his thoughts "running ahead" is intriguing not least because it reveals much about the way he conceived of composition and his use of the piano as part of his compositional process. Already at such an early age, the

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<sup>5</sup> Pamela Davidson's translation of a literary notebook belonging to Prokofiev's mother is one of the resources available to researchers. It is dated 1917 and records various "items of relevance to her son's creative work and reading". See Pamela Davidson, "Look after your son's talents: the literary notebook of Mariya Prokofieva" in *Sergey Prokofiev and his World*, ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3 – 59.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in *Memoir*, 177 (my emphases).

<sup>7</sup> *Memoir*, 19.

fingers were a slave to his musical thinking: ultimately they were a means to an end. His compositional technique, at least in this early period, was very dependent on trying to transcribe sounds that he heard in his head and playing them out on the piano to see if they would work. The piano functioned as a sounding board for musical ideas and themes explored mentally before they were written down and transcribed for the piano. It also meant that his fingers were at the service of his ideas, and that his idiosyncratic way of playing the piano is rooted in his early need to use the piano as a testing ground for his ideas.

As early as 1900, Prokofiev's output is distinguished by two different tendencies: compositions for piano and compositions for the theatre. In the period of the juvenilia, these tendencies are in their embryonic stages. On the one hand, the piano compositions are almost an exercise in musical and pianistic discipline: in writing for the piano, Prokofiev writes for the only instrument and soundscape that he is, as yet, familiar with. On the other hand, composing for the stage allowed Prokofiev more freedom to experiment with various sound combinations, effects and structures that he sought as part of his theatrical presentations. Though the young Prokofiev must have had but a dim understanding of the theatre and its conventions, it is clear that he was drawn to the stage at such an early age because it opened up dramatic and fantastic possibilities for his musical thoughts. The stage offered him a fantastical world into which he could take his musical experiments, play with the visual element and within which he could command people's attention.

It is no coincidence, then, that many of Prokofiev's operas are strongly rooted in the fantastic, particularly with the "extravagant fancy" and "eccentric" connotations of the term rather than in the moment of hesitation as described by Todorov in his seminal treatise on the fantastic.<sup>8</sup> The fantastic became crucial to Prokofiev's understanding of the concept of theatricality and its integration in his compositional style is particularly evident in his operas. It emerges in the juvenile operas, *The Giant* and *Undina* for example, and is then developed in his later works. *Maddalena*, *The Gambler*, *Love for Three Oranges* and *The Fiery Angel* all use the fantastic, albeit in various ways and to different extents. Prokofiev's version of the fantastic in his stage works has much to do with extravagance, the absurd and the grotesque, but also plays

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<sup>8</sup> See *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1970). Todorov describes the fantastic as the moment of hesitation experienced by readers when they are faced with a situation that conflicts with their perception of reality.

upon the ‘quaint’ aspect of the term. *The Fiery Angel* is a prime example of extravagance and grotesque but *The Gambler* and *Love for Three Oranges* are the composer’s subtler take on the fantastic: they play upon the ‘eccentric’ and also ‘imaginary’ nuances of the definition. Before Prokofiev developed such a sophisticated understanding of the fantastic as he was later to incorporate into his operatic and stage writing, the juvenilia were the first arena of his experimentation and exploration of the fantastic as well as the theatrical. As his early theatre works were written as piano scores, during this developing period, the piano functioned as a bridge between the two genres of stage and piano writing.

Although Prokofiev wrote his stage works in piano score, this did not mean that his imagination was limited by the geography and capabilities of the piano. Rather, he used his hands to create the sounds that he heard in his head and this technique just reinforced his idiosyncratic piano playing style. He continued to write out his compositions in piano score first and then later expanded the score indicating the instrumentation to be used. The musical sketches of a stage work would usually take place in piano score first. Gradually, Prokofiev went beyond thinking in terms of piano sound and began to conceive his sound in orchestral terms. This transformational moment in Prokofiev’s compositional process is explored in Chapter 4 through an analysis of *Maddalena* and *Piano Concerto No. 1*.

### Glière, Taneyev and the start of organised music learning

In January 1902, Prokofiev was again taken to Moscow, this time to meet with the composer Sergey Taneyev.<sup>9</sup> This introduction was secured through a family friend, Yury Pomerantsev, who was himself studying at the Moscow Conservatory. David Nice notes that Taneyev was impressed by the young Prokofiev’s talents, noting in his diary that the boy had “outstanding talent...he played his compositions – absolute pitch, he recognises intervals, chords”.<sup>10</sup> Taneyev recommended that Prokofiev take lessons with Pomerantsev insisting on the “correct instruction of harmony” to prevent bad habits settling in.<sup>11</sup> Pomerantsev gave Prokofiev a few lessons, explaining four-voice counterpoint and setting him assignments in harmony

<sup>9</sup> His first visit to Moscow is described in Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> David Nice, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West 1891 – 1935* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Nice, 15.

but the young composer bristled at what he thought were pointless exercises, noting in his autobiography that he “wanted to compose operas with marches, storms and complicated scenes”.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually Taneyev recommended that Prokofiev spend a summer studying music with Rienhold Glière. The latter took charge of Prokofiev’s piano playing, starting him off with Beethoven sonatas. He also introduced him to musical literature and used the Beethoven sonatas to explain elements of form. Curiously, under Glière’s guidance, Prokofiev’s piano playing improved to such an extent that his mother stopped playing altogether!<sup>13</sup> Glière also taught his pupil how to write in four part phrases and how to modulate, also explaining the song form to him, which Prokofiev then proceeded to work with in his first set of *Little Songs*. In these pieces, Glière instructed Prokofiev to create variations upon the basic elements that he had taught him until he was satisfied that the young composer had mastered the song form. After that, they moved on to orchestration, with Prokofiev deciding to orchestrate the storm music (which does not survive) from his *On Desert Islands*. Following this, the ambitious young composer wanted to write a symphony and although Glière thought it was too soon for the exercise he eventually gave in to the persistent Prokofiev.

Glière’s influence on the composer’s musical education was tremendous and not all of it was positive. The composer notes in his autobiography that there also were some harmful influences, influences that he would have to outgrow. In particular he berates Glière’s proclivity for regular four-bar phrasing which “should be learned only to be forgotten later.”<sup>14</sup> Prokofiev notes that prior to his lessons with Glière his themes were of different lengths, varying from three to nineteen bars, but all mostly unequal in length.

This penchant for the unexpected is an important trait across Prokofiev’s writing, whether it is in his harmony or structure, or in his use of musical materials and can be seen as a theatrical quality in his writing. And certainly, Prokofiev’s attention to the role of melody in his writing and the very nature and shape of his melodic lines were of paramount importance to him. It is therefore intriguing to see that, in retrospect, Prokofiev the mature composer felt the need to discuss such a

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<sup>12</sup> *Memoir*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Memoir*, 54 – 55.

<sup>14</sup> *Memoir*, 53.

technical point and to isolate specific negative effects of the Glière influence. The need to add an unexpected twist to a melody or cadence or even simply to a turn of phrase is characteristic of Prokofiev's music. In discarding Glière's suggestions at a later date, Prokofiev was deliberately going back to his untamed roots. After Glière introduced the concept of modulation to the young composer, stereotypical modulations start appearing in his early *pesenki*. The mature Prokofiev looked back with concern at the detrimental influence such predictability might have had on his early compositions.

And finally, Prokofiev identifies one last problem with Glière's influence concerning the use of sequences, which, as the older Prokofiev notes, should be "used with caution".<sup>15</sup> These problems may be traced in the sets of *Little Songs*, where the young composer usually tested the ideas he had just learnt. After he had learnt the "proper" way of modulating and writing harmony, he then proceeded to discard the rules in order to go back to creating the sounds that he desired. This conscious need to create something 'different' both on macro and micro levels in his music, would characterise all of his output and is a crucial Prokofiev trait.

### The birth of a pianist: from Winkler to Esipova

Prokofiev's entrance into the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1904, at the age of thirteen, marks a new stage in the awareness of himself both as composer and perhaps more importantly, as a pianist. As one of the youngest students at the Conservatory, Prokofiev apparently found it hard to make friends. In his autobiography he notes that he had no friends of his own age although he "established good relations with Miaskovsky, Zakharov, and Kankarovich, but we talked only about music".<sup>16</sup>

His first piano teacher at the Conservatory was Alexander Winkler,<sup>17</sup> while he studied solfeggio and harmony with Anatole Lyadov who "taught according to Rimsky-Korsakov's system".<sup>18</sup> Lessons with Lyadov proved to be boring for Prokofiev who notes in retrospect that Lyadov should have explained to students what

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<sup>15</sup> *Memoir*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Memoir*, 191.

<sup>17</sup> Prokofiev describes Winkler in his *Memoir* as "untalented but extremely conscientious". (*Memoir*, 150)

<sup>18</sup> *Memoir*, 112. In the Rimsky-Korsakov system, students were taught to use the I, IV and V degrees first before proceeding to use the rest of the degrees of the scale. The Moscow system (which would have been adopted by Glière) allowed the use of all the degrees of the scale from the outset.

harmony really was and “how those dry rules would give us greater scope in our subsequent composing”.<sup>19</sup> Prokofiev thus regarded his harmony work as a “tedious chore” and much less interesting than geography! He claimed that “I made no attempt to apply what I had learned in harmony class to my composing. On the contrary, while composing I strove to get away from all that – which was roughly the same thing I had done two years before”.<sup>20</sup> Prokofiev maintained this opposition between his conventional harmony classes and his own, till then, largely private practice of composing. His desire for innovation not just in terms of harmony but in the practice of composition more generally is evident as early as 1902, but the Conservatory period only served to strengthen his resolve to be innovative and individual in his writing.

For his entrance exam in obligatory piano, Prokofiev played scales, arpeggios, scales in thirds, a Bach fugue and a Beethoven sonata and was also given a sight-reading piece. At the end of the exam, Winkler’s assessment was that “You read music rather well, and you don’t play badly, although you need more technique”.<sup>21</sup> The issue of technique would surface time and again during his years at the Conservatory: Prokofiev’s technique started off being idiosyncratic out of necessity but persisted as idiosyncratic out of choice.

Prior to his Conservatory studies, playing the piano was not a priority in his home-schooled music education. He played the piano because it was his only way of familiarising himself with a vast repertoire. It was the only way he could hear music he had written and after all, it was the only instrument he knew how to play. Prokofiev had never thought of piano playing as a skill to be mastered in and of itself. While it is arguable that he would never think of it as such, his exposure to many excellent pianists at the Conservatory, Esipova’s influence, his driving ambition as well as his appetite for competition caused him to think about the concept of the virtuoso pianist differently. There is no doubt that this new penchant for piano performing gradually acquires greater importance as he progresses through his Conservatory education. This comes across particularly clearly in the first volume of Prokofiev’s *Diaries*.

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<sup>19</sup> *Memoir*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> *Memoir*, 113. Two years earlier, Prokofiev had been taught simple rudiments of harmony by Glière and had consciously tried to discard his teaching.

<sup>21</sup> *Memoir*, 109.

Winkler worked Prokofiev hard and the composer notes in his autobiography that his teacher was “conscientious and attentive to his students’ needs”<sup>22</sup>. In the first semester they went through four Beethoven sonatas and several Bach fugues. Prokofiev does not chronicle his lessons with Winkler in any detail, unlike his meticulous attitude while under Esipova’s supervision.<sup>23</sup> We therefore do not have as much detail about the content and style of these lessons. This lack of information could be due to the fact that the move to Esipova came at a later date by which time the composer was keeping far more detailed records. I would suggest, however, that this lack of detail on his relationship with Winkler was due more to the fact that Prokofiev was rather uninspired by his teaching and that as a pianist, he had a lot of technical work to do before he could enjoy the benefits of a piano lesson as much as he would when working with Esipova. Winkler’s lessons may well have bored Prokofiev but they were a necessary step in his pianistic education. Certainly, Prokofiev’s confidence in himself as a pianist increased toward the end of his time with Winkler, and was partly responsible for the move to Esipova.

One of Prokofiev’s few comments on his time with Winkler comes after his first piano lesson where he was told that “for some two weeks I would have to play only exercises aimed to strengthen the fingers and to develop the wrist [...] until then I played everything but did it rather carelessly, holding my fingers straight, like sticks. Winkler insisted on my playing accurately, holding my fingers in the rounded shape and putting them down with precision.”<sup>24</sup> Prokofiev soon began to see that this painstaking approach paid off. After his piano exam in April 1908 he notes that “It’s clear that I do have abilities as a pianist”.<sup>25</sup> He also mentions that thirds are his technical speciality: these are a prominent idea in his writing for the piano. In spite of the fact that Prokofiev may have been improving technically as a pianist under the careful eye of Winkler, he still could not rid himself of various bad habits such as his body posture, in particular that of hand and feet placement. In his public examination a couple of weeks later, Prokofiev’s playing was praised but one of his examiners noted he had the “most peculiar way of arranging his legs under the piano”.<sup>26</sup> This

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<sup>22</sup> *Memoir*, 149.

<sup>23</sup> A detailed description of Esipova’s teaching methods is provided later in this section.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Boris Berman, *Prokofiev’s Piano Sonatas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 50.

comment is also indicative of Prokofiev's pedalling problems, of which we become aware through Esipova's criticism.

The move from Winkler's piano class to that of Anna Esipova was an important event in Prokofiev's development as a concert pianist. He notes in his *Diaries* that he had come to a point in his studying with Winkler where he was no longer challenged by their piano lessons. As Prokofiev's lessons progressed, he acknowledges that he began to lose confidence in him, noting that there was an "unbridgeable gulf in understanding" between them. As time went on,

he [Winkler] ceased to give me any new ideas, he often repeated himself and was not coming up with interesting new insights. Sometimes I would challenge him, sticking up for my own opinions and as often as not prevailing; occasionally I could even show him nuances he had not thought of.<sup>27</sup>

Prokofiev was at a stage where becoming a pianist was a possible career option: "What is the point of my sitting for another two or three years to stay effectively in the same place, when I feel that I have great potential for the piano and my ambition is to be a good pianist?"<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, he was at first extremely reluctant to change his piano teacher even though people around him were trying to persuade him that he could never become a virtuoso if he remained with Winkler. He had settled into a comfortable pattern of piano playing with Winkler where he could anticipate what his teacher would say to him and was also allowed to get away with his own interpretation of things.

Prokofiev made his first approach to Esipova through a friend of his, Boris Zakharov, who was one of her students. Although Esipova knew of Prokofiev immediately and was willing to take him on as her student, she was unwilling to take Winkler's student on without the latter's permission and the negotiations to change teachers were rather protracted but eventually, in June 1909, Prokofiev was able to move to Esipova's class and spent the summer working on the classics – Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven - as she requested him to do in preparation for the next Conservatory year.

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<sup>27</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 100.

<sup>28</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 71.

Anna Esipova was a legendary performer and an influential teacher who taught an entire generation of pianists.<sup>29</sup> She was particularly famed for her singing tone and fine touch. Apart from Prokofiev, among her more famous students were Maria Yudina, Isabelle Vengerova, Leo Ornstein and Thomas de Hartman. She was a popular teacher at the Conservatory and her classes were large. She was a dedicated and persistent teacher who according to Berkman,<sup>30</sup> gave each student due attention, regardless of the number of students in the class. Esipova treated her piano classes as university lectures: she never cancelled them and she expected students to write down their observations and perceptions while she was teaching. Other guests who sat in on Esipova's class included Glazunov, Godowski and Schnabel.

According to Esipova, a good pianist was characterised by a "love for music, the strength of an ox, a brain and a lot of patience". It is hardly surprising then that such an independent-minded student as Prokofiev would eventually argue with her. As a teacher though, she was far from close-minded: for example, she was against the "hundred times" approach and advised her students to limit their practice to 3 or 4 hours a day and to practise in small sections of about two bars. These small sections should be practised slowly and carefully and with dynamics. Once students had mastered this small section, they should go back to the beginning and start the practising afresh. This thorough practice method was possibly not something that Prokofiev adhered to religiously. In spite of the obvious need for a more disciplined approach to his piano studies, he remained erratic with his practice; working on his repertoire for Esipova's class in intensive bursts of ten and twenty days rather than regularly and steadily.

In terms of technique, Esipova advised her students to work on scales, chords and arpeggios, thirds and octaves as well as ornaments. She taught them to work on precise legato and staccato articulation, to cultivate a cantilena touch, to pay careful attention to dynamics and pedalling. These were all qualities that would be useful to Prokofiev but although he did focus much on his technique, the cantilena touch was something that Esipova would continue to urge him to work on.

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<sup>29</sup> Anna Nikolayevna Esipova (1851 -1914) was a Russian pianist and renowned pedagogue who joined the teaching faculty of the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1893. She trained at the St Petersburg Conservatory under Theodor Leschetizky whom she married in 1880. Her London début came in 1874, followed by Paris in 1875 and the USA a year later.

<sup>30</sup> T. Berkman, *A.N. Esipova: Zhizn', deiatel'nost' i pedagogicheskie printsipy* (Moskva, Leningrad, 1948). See 65-70 for further detailed explications of Esipova's teaching methods.

Nonetheless, despite the erratic practice and his selective acceptance of Esipova's teaching methods, Prokofiev seemed to have acquired a new inspiration to work. This move was an important stepping-stone in his piano playing life. With Winkler, the young composer had become quite complacent, but with Esipova things were different. In the first instance, most, if not all, of Esipova's students wanted to become piano virtuosos and their piano playing was at an extraordinarily high level: her students were generally regarded as the best pianists in the Conservatory. Prokofiev notes that "the high point began from the day I returned to St Petersburg, with my initiation into Esipova's class, the success of my studies with a marvellous new professor who motivated me to work with enthusiasm, an interesting class of fellow students".<sup>31</sup> Prokofiev responded to this challenge in kind by taking the "greatest pains" in the preparation of his lessons.<sup>32</sup> This confirms that with Winkler Prokofiev had not been meticulous either in preparation of his pieces or in their execution.

Various new technical problems came to light under Esipova's guidance. He began to focus on his sound and in his general rehearsal performance of the Liszt sonata the day before his piano exam, he came under criticism for playing too noisily and loudly which he candidly reports in his diary: "I played really well, except that my breathing was rather noisy and I exaggerated the *fortissimo* passages. I was quite rightly criticised for this, and told that a powerful *fortissimo* is good, but it is unpleasant if it is allowed to become harsh."<sup>33</sup> This quality of Prokofiev's playing was often chided and he continued to struggle with it during his training at the Conservatory. For example, years later, in 1913, Esipova is still urging him to play Chopin's A flat Polonaise "piano". A little later, when he plays his own pieces he notes that while the compositions themselves were well-received, his performance of them was not because he played so "loudly".<sup>34</sup>

Prokofiev also needed to work on his hand positioning. Esipova made him play with curved fingers, a position that arguably, from later pictures we have of Prokofiev's hand positions on the piano, he never quite mastered.<sup>35</sup> She also worked

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<sup>31</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 124.

<sup>32</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 119.

<sup>33</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 215.

<sup>34</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 509.

<sup>35</sup> For pictures of Prokofiev at the piano, refer to Appendix A. Unfortunately, many of the pictures are publicity shots and they do not reflect his exact playing positions. Nevertheless, it is still possible to

with him on his pedalling, which “caused her to cry out in dismay”.<sup>36</sup> Prokofiev notes her comments on his performance of his own music: “It’s all very well to have accents, but you mustn’t play *fortissimo* all the time. And you constantly overpedal.”<sup>37</sup> The problem with posture came to the fore in Prokofiev’s conducting attempts. His conducting teacher, Tcherepnin, gave him “a real dressing-down for my frightful gestures and my contorted body: when I’m concentrating on the music I forget about what I look like. He suggested that is something I should pay more attention to.”<sup>38</sup> And indeed, from this point onwards Prokofiev becomes ever more aware of his own image, his physique and bodily gestures.

Reports of his piano playing show that Prokofiev was keenly aware of the physical aspect of playing the piano. In fact we could even go so far to say that initially this was the main defining feature of piano playing for him – its physicality. But with this new emphasis on gestures while conducting, Prokofiev acquired a more complete awareness of his own body – an awareness that he was able to transport into his piano playing. He began to practise conducting in front of a mirror with a view to ameliorating the fluidity of his gestures and was pleased to note that his improved “plasticity” was beginning to be felt.

When Prokofiev transferred to Esipova’s class, his repertoire changed to become more mainstream, in keeping with the traditional concert pianist’s route. Among the works he studied with her are Bach’s Fugues, Beethoven and Mozart sonatas, Chopin’s second sonata and *Polonaises*, Liszt’s sonata, ‘Feux Follets’ and ‘Tannhauser’ transcription, Schumann’s *Toccata* and F minor piano sonata and Tchaikovsky’s piano concerto.<sup>39</sup> This fascination with the pianistic virtuoso tradition was reflected in Prokofiev’s passion for Liszt. He notes that Liszt’s sonata “was the very piece I should learn and perform at the exam: it very much fits my style and is the perfect work for me to demonstrate my powers in their best light”.<sup>40</sup> This intense interest in Liszt’s compositions suggests that Prokofiev was engaging with the idea of virtuosity in a personal way. Virtuosity<sup>41</sup> now became a site of negotiation between

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observe that Prokofiev adopted a rather low position with respect to the piano and that he held his wrists quite low.

<sup>36</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 118. When the composer brings her his First Piano Sonata she takes it home with her and inserts detailed pedal markings.

<sup>37</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 129.

<sup>38</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 244.

<sup>39</sup> Prokofiev mentions the repertoire he was working on at various points in his *Diaries*.

<sup>40</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 212.

<sup>41</sup> This term, as it applies to the dissertation, will be explored in the third chapter.

Prokofiev's individual playing technique and that of the Romantic tradition of which Esipova was a representative. A rethinking of virtuosity is evident in the pieces he was writing while studying with Esipova, such as Op. 3 and Op. 4 which include his early signature performing piece *Diabolical Suggestion*.

By 1913 however, Prokofiev had outgrown his enthusiasm for Esipova's teaching and indeed for the Conservatory more generally, increasingly feeling that he was ready to embark on his own career independently of the establishment. His most telling indictment of Esipova comes in a diary entry from 1913 where he notes that he had come "to the conclusion that overall Esipova had done me more harm than good, putting me off performing on stage and taking away from me much of my love for and joy in the instrument."<sup>42</sup> It is fortunate that Prokofiev makes this comment as he approached the end of his piano studies at the Conservatory. Since he was just about to immerse himself in preparing for the final exam in piano, he was too busy to get into many arguments with Esipova.

### For love of an audience: Prokofiev's first public performances

Prokofiev was a born performer. From a very young age, he was used to having an audience – whether it be for his short music plays, or for his piano playing. This love of an audience is best summed up in Prokofiev's own comments prior to a conducting appearance in December of 1912: "There was a noisy hubbub in the Conservatoire and the hall was full to capacity, in short the Conservatoire was present *in corpore*, the way I like it best."<sup>43</sup> The fact that he was a doted-upon only son, used to having the full attention of his parents, meant that if he did not get the attention he wanted, he would seek it. This attitude was manifest in his behaviour at the Conservatory. As one of the youngest students studying there, his childish behaviour often caused irritation. The attention-seeking alternated with him seeking approval and needing to prove his uniqueness, as both composer and performer.

Prokofiev's conflicting attitudes toward his own talent and to his position as a student at the Conservatory translated themselves into an *enfant terrible* persona. Gradually, he discovered that he could manipulate this image and continued to

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<sup>42</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 315.

<sup>43</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 261.

cultivate it as a way of enhancing his public performing persona. It was certainly a good way to generate publicity. In later years, this image of him as the eccentric prodigy of Russian avant-garde music was to pursue and even precede him wherever he went. It became a defining quality of his performing character but it was also very clearly worked into his own music. His appearances on stage were nothing short of iconoclastic, often provoking very heated reactions from both critics and audiences: these reactions will be explored in the next section.

In December of 1907, Prokofiev received an invitation to participate in a gathering of emerging composers at the Conservatory. In January 1908 then, he played some of his shorter pieces for piano as well as *Reproach*, *Eastern Song*, *Tragedy*, *Humoresque démoniaque*, *Fairy Tale* and *Phantom*.<sup>44</sup> A couple of weeks after this meeting, there was a second gathering at which Prokofiev's music was under discussion: the beginnings of the dual personality he was to take great pains cultivating can already be perceived in a contemporaneous diary entry where he gleefully notes a "legend about me is already in circulation: that Prokofiev cannot bear to hear two consonant notes in succession!"<sup>45</sup>

Prokofiev first gained attention for his piano playing when he was performing his own works. This attention came before he had changed piano teachers, and thus before he systematically started to work on improving his technical deficiencies. This reveals the start of what would, perhaps unconsciously, become a preoccupation with his own performing style. This "way" of playing the piano garners him attention.<sup>46</sup> His first compositions were naturally written for himself out of necessity. The music integrated his own piano playing style into the compositions, his idiosyncrasies and strengths were written into the music and attention was drawn to them.

There is no doubt that Prokofiev's piano technique and his approach to piano playing and sound production generally was unorthodox. Initially, this unorthodox approach and jarring dissonance might have drawn puzzled attention – something that

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<sup>44</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 28. *Reproach* and *Eastern Song* are reproduced in Appendix D. Although one of the unpublished pieces of 1907 is entitled *Humoresque* and is also in the appendix, I am unable to determine whether this is the same work as the *Humoresque démoniaque* Prokofiev mentions in this diary entry. *Fairy-tale* and *Phantom* were revised to form Op. 3. I can find no information about *Tragedy*. It is not listed in the catalogues of Shlifstein, Gakkel' or Nice. I was also unable to track down this piece during the course of my research.

<sup>45</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 30.

<sup>46</sup> Taneyev praises Prokofiev's "piano technique and my way of performing the work". The work in question was Prokofiev's *Étude* No. 3 (*Diaries*, Vol.1: 211). Elsewhere, Taneyev again praises Prokofiev's playing style.

Prokofiev was aware of and quite proud of. He asks Lyapunov to “trust to the composer’s [i.e. Prokofiev’s] sincerity and seriousness of purpose in creating sounds that may on first hearing sound peculiar”.<sup>47</sup> In a much later interview he gave to *The Musical Observer*, Prokofiev described dissonance as “the combination of movements of sound in quantity which are more complex than consonant combinations. As a result it is more difficult for the ear to seize and follow them; yet, once grasped, they afford a richer and more subtle appreciation than simpler harmonies can give.”<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately, however, it was Prokofiev’s playing that turned those early pieces into musical events. At first this happened because he was the only person who could play these piano pieces in such a way that the music started to make sense, if not harmonically, then as a sequence of gestures and theatrical moments whose energy and personality could not be denied. The agogic accents, the rhythmic energy, the technically demanding passages in thirds and octaves, the sheer physical strength needed to play this early piano music testifies to the fact that not only was Prokofiev writing his own strengths into the pieces, he was the only one who could do them justice on the performing platform.

As he continued to perform his music in public, Prokofiev paid increasingly more attention to the theatrical and ‘event-like’ quality of each performance as a way of enhancing his growing image as a performer. Listening to Prokofiev play at his home, the composer Sergei Taneyev praises his piano technique as well as his “way” of performing the work.<sup>49</sup> Prokofiev realises that it is his “way” of playing the music that makes his music successful and consciously develops his stage skills: this “way” of playing also writes itself into his compositional style for the instrument. Yurasovsky, an acquaintance of Prokofiev, intimates this after hearing the composer play his second piano sonata; he noted that “while of course it was very interesting and inventive, it had not a scrap of real melody in it, just a series of ‘tigerish leaps’”.<sup>50</sup> The physical element of Prokofiev’s playing and his incorporation of various bodily gestures into the score were integral to his performing style.

In this sense, Prokofiev was the author of his own performing tradition and continued to perform his own works well into the 1930s and after his return to the

<sup>47</sup> Inscription on Lyapunov’s copy of Prokofiev’s first Piano Concerto. (*Diaries*, Vol.1: 643) Sergey Mihailovich Lyapunov was a gifted pianist and also a (minor) composer. He was on Prokofiev’s examining panel for the concerto competition.

<sup>48</sup> *The Musical Observer*, November 1918.

<sup>49</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 211.

<sup>50</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 324.

Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup> During his lifetime, he was the ultimate performer of his piano music - towards the end of his life and after his death, pianists picked up a tradition of performing his music that was largely based on anecdotes, written reports and first-hand accounts of people who had seen him play. Such accounts often privilege the energetic, driving playing, foregrounding its aggression and sheer physical power. These are qualities embedded in the music itself; they are not purely features of Prokofiev's playing style. Thus, the powerful impression made by the scores themselves affected the way people perceived Prokofiev's playing, and this in turn became the image that was retained of his playing style. The recordings he made are very few and can only be considered partially representative of his piano playing style. Nevertheless, this posthumous performing tradition that was to characterise generations of Prokofiev pianists had its roots, however far removed, in the perceived playing of Prokofiev himself. It was continued by Soviet pianists like Emil Gilels and Tatyana Nikolaeva was then exported out of the Soviet Union and into the West.

In February 1908, Prokofiev was invited to play for the organising committee of *Evenings of Contemporary Music*. Larry Sitsky notes that the *Evenings of Contemporary Music* was really the precursor to the Association of Contemporary Music (ACM) and came into existence in 1901.<sup>52</sup> The society was loosely affiliated with Diaghilev's *Mir iskusstva*, was disbanded in 1912. A hotbed of contemporary music, the society also invited composers from abroad to their musical soirées. Music by Schoenberg, Mahler, Strauss, Debussy and Ravel among others was performed. The evenings also supported local talent however, and Prokofiev's early music was played alongside that of Stravinsky and Miaskovsky. Prokofiev's introduction to the Society must have played an important part in widening his knowledge of modernist repertoire, although he never elaborates on this in any detail in his writing.

Prokofiev's invitation to play for the group was secured through the composer Mikhail Chernov with whom he had had some lessons in composition.<sup>53</sup> He played some of his shorter piano pieces and these met with success. The people who were listening to him play were important figures in the St Petersburg cultural scene:

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<sup>51</sup> On his permanent return to the Soviet Union in 1936, other pianists, such as Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels premiered his works for piano, such as the seventh and eighth piano sonatas respectively.

<sup>52</sup> See *Music of the repressed Russian avant-garde, 1900-1929* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, c1994), 5 – 6.

<sup>53</sup> In his *Memoir* Prokofiev calls Chernov a "modest" talent (88). He was recommended as a teacher for Prokofiev by Glazunov and at the time of meeting Prokofiev he was a composer in his penultimate year at the Conservatory.

Alfred Nurok, Walter Nouvel, Alexander Medem and Vladimir Senilov among others. The first two were music critics and writers who had ties to *Mir Isskustva* and Sergei Diaghilev. Richard Taruskin describes Nurok as the “spiritus rector” of the organization and a “highly cultivated musical dilettante”.<sup>54</sup> Medem was a pianist, composer and Professor at the St Petersburg Conservatory. Senilov was a composer. They were surprised to note that Prokofiev was still on the junior piano course at the Conservatory and praised his technique, in particular his octaves, at which the young composer wryly noted that he had just had a lesson with Winkler where he came to grief with his octaves!<sup>55</sup>

Of course, Prokofiev only played his own music at this meeting while with Winkler he was working on different repertoire. It would take him a while before he had the temerity and self-assurance to play any of his own works in front of his piano teachers. Nevertheless, this introduction would prove to be invaluable, marking the beginning of his foray into the musical world and opening him up to the cultural influences, both musical and otherwise of St Petersburg.<sup>56</sup> Nurok and Nouvel would continue to champion his music as being the prime example of contemporary Russian modernism. So would the critic Vladimir Karatygin. The composer Gnesin described Nurok, Nouvel and Karatygin as fanatical music lovers with a taste for Western modernist music (sometimes regardless of its quality). They were however, enormously supportive of Russia’s “young innovators”. Their support of the young Prokofiev would do much to launch his image as an avant-garde composer.

Prokofiev’s first official appearance under the auspices of the *Evenings of Contemporary Music* occurred in December that same year where he played some of his pieces.<sup>57</sup> This first appearance was rather inauspicious. Despite playing well, the applause he received was not “wildly enthusiastic” but

people clapped my pieces more than the other items in the programme. [...] In general, even if not everything I did met with universal approval, different pieces were liked by different people, and I was listened to with great interest, which is what I need.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian traditions: a biography of the works through Mavra* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1996), 372.

<sup>55</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:41.

<sup>56</sup> Such influences are discussed at greater length in Suzanne Moisson-Franckhauser’s *Serge Prokofiev et les courants esthétiques de son temps (1891-1953)* (Paris: Publications orientalistes de France, c 1974).

<sup>57</sup> In his diary entry for the occasion Prokofiev only mentions two of these pieces by name: *Fairy Tale* and *Snow*, the first composed in 1907 and later revised to form part of Op. 3, the second composed in 1908.

<sup>58</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:72.

The entry goes on to describe the way his friend Miaskovsky's songs were performed. Such a comment highlights some of Prokofiev's concerns as a composer-pianist. He is clearly pleased to note that his music has caused debate, and he is also happy to note that his pieces were the ones that received most applause. The need to obtain approval from his public goes hand in hand with the provocative nature of his writing. The fact that his music causes lively debate only enhances his reputation as a modernist, a reputation he was keen to sustain and promote. Later on he would relish the fact that his music was often misunderstood and was keen to emphasise this fact in interviews he gave. Even as early as 1914, in a discussion with his friends after a private performance of *Sarcasms*, he notes with pride this difficulty people have in understanding his music which "provoked much lively discussion" while he "defended it vigorously".<sup>59</sup> Prokofiev generally preferred to play his own music in public and it appears at this stage that he seemed to be cultivating two types of concert programmes: on the one hand he would play traditional concert pianist repertoire for performances and exams at the Conservatory, on the other hand, he would often play his own music outside the comfort zone of the Conservatory.

The 1908 performance at the *Evenings of Contemporary Music* had marked the first of these appearances as composer-pianist. In February 1910, while a guest of the Glières in Moscow, Prokofiev played his piano sonata and three of his études.<sup>60</sup> In his *Diararies* he notes that he "had a great success, and was called back three times. Taneyev, Lavrovskaya<sup>61</sup> and Deisha-Sionitskaya<sup>62</sup> all sang my praises and said that I excelled as a performer. This was particularly pleasing to hear, since my Petersburg friends are always criticising me for being such an atrocious interpreter of my own works."<sup>63</sup> Prokofiev does not explain why his colleagues think this way about his playing, but the difference in reception between the Moscow and the St Petersburg audiences may be a telling one. At the St Petersburg Conservatory Prokofiev feels he has to sustain a dual role as composer-pianist excelling equally at each. The Moscow audiences do not know much about Prokofiev other than what they see on stage and so their judgement of him as pianist is likely to be a more objective one.

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<sup>59</sup> *Diararies*, Vol.1:581.

<sup>60</sup> *Diararies*, Vol.1:153. Prokofiev does not specify which of the *Études* he played.

<sup>61</sup> I was unable to find any information relating to Lavrovskaya during the course of my research.

<sup>62</sup> Maria Deisha-Sionitskaya was a soprano, teacher and organiser of 'Musical Exhibitions' – a series of chamber music concerts which took place in Moscow.

<sup>63</sup> *Diararies*, Vol.1:153.

I have already noted that once he joined Esipova's piano class, Prokofiev acquired a new perspective on piano playing. Prokofiev began to compare his technique to his colleagues, doing his best to match them and follow in the set steps of a student aiming to become a concert pianist. Following the piano exam he sat in May 1910, he notes that although he had achieved a 5, other students who played less well than he did also achieved a 5. So it seemed that all the students got the same mark while only 2 students taking the exam that day achieved a 5+. This result rankled with Prokofiev, who always wanted to perform better than his class mates, but he was pleased to note that Anna Esipova's son Ilyin said to him: "Your stock has risen greatly in my eyes: I thought you were just a composer who played the piano a bit, but you clearly have the ability to turn into a marvellous pianist".<sup>64</sup> Prokofiev was haunted by this desire to fight the stereotype of being either a good composer or a good pianist – he wanted to prove that it was possible to be both. He made this his mission in the last few years of his Conservatory training. The first instalment of Prokofiev's *Diaries* is indeed characterised by these two needs.

The moment he is first recognised as a composer by the Conservatory establishment was a very exciting one for him. This occurs early in 1910, two years after his official debut as a pianist, when his chorus *The White Swan*<sup>65</sup> was performed at an evening concert accompanied by orchestra: "I was transmogrified into 'the composer'; 'the maestro', my stock in the Conservatoire rose rapidly, and I became a well-known figure within its walls, just as I had dreamed of before writing *The White Swan*. I was 'a composer' who had written a 'very beautiful' chorus."<sup>66</sup> That month was a particularly successful one for Prokofiev the composer because his Sinfonietta<sup>67</sup> was also to be performed in a subscription concert series and he excitedly notes these events as marking the start to his compositional career. In November of that same year, his music is included in a concert held at the Conservatory and he was to appear "in all my capacities simultaneously, as composer, conductor and pianist."<sup>68</sup> He played his own first Sonata and notes with pride that "even the most inveterate critics of my pianism, Miaskovsky and Zakharov"<sup>69</sup> for instance, had nothing but praise for

<sup>64</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:161.

<sup>65</sup> *The White Swan* and *Wave* were female choruses with orchestra set to Balmont's words.

<sup>66</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:144.

<sup>67</sup> Sinfonietta for orchestra in five movements composed between 1909-14.

<sup>68</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:189.

<sup>69</sup> Miaskovsky would go on to write several articles in which he extols the quality of Prokofiev's pianism as it is inscribed in his music. See for example various articles in Shlifstein, 293 – 300.

my performance. The public liked the Sonata well enough, and I was called back to the platform.”<sup>70</sup>

As a composer-pianist Prokofiev’s best and perhaps most supportive platform proved to be the *Evenings of Contemporary Music*. He performed here again in December of 1910, playing three of his *Études*. He notes that although he played “effectively” it was not “by the sternest critical standards as impeccably as I had played the Sonata in November. *My Études and I both had success*, succeeding in rousing the audience from the torpor in which they had heard the other works in the programme [...] Those critics and musicians I knew there showered praise on me.”<sup>71</sup> Entries like this reveal the hidden insecurity in Prokofiev, characterised by the need to enumerate how many people praised his performance. As a performer, Prokofiev often sees himself through other people’s eyes: he is able to detach himself from his own performance and take into account the effect that he wants his interpretation to have on his audience. This calculation endows his performances with a heightened sensitivity to his audience and their expectations. Such an empathy with the audience as well as his taking into consideration their reaction would remain a constant of Prokofiev’s musical persona. For him it was just as important that his compositions were as successful as he was as a pianist. Perhaps unconsciously, Prokofiev made this distinction between himself as composer and himself as pianist, assessing his performance in each role individually.

In a performance at the *Evenings for Contemporary Music* in 1911, Prokofiev played some works by Schoenberg. He was selected to play them because none of the other pianists wanted to and he notes that he found it intriguing getting to grips with them. “Although I could not see any music in them, here and there were glimpses of atmosphere, or something very like it. I determined to draw out this atmosphere in my performance.”<sup>72</sup> Prokofiev’s performance of the pieces won the respect of the audience, who did not understand Schoenberg’s music but responded enthusiastically to his performance. The organisers of these musical evenings were also suitably impressed: “My performance had caused a sensation among them they had not anticipated that it would be possible to make of such pieces, no three bars of which any of them had had the patience to work out, something that would be listened to as

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<sup>70</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:189.

<sup>71</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:193, my emphases.

<sup>72</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 214.

'real' music'.<sup>73</sup> From this point on, he almost makes it a point that every performance of his creates a sensation, and because he mostly played his own music, this would prove to be a fairly effortless task.

Prokofiev's enjoyment of performing was obvious and informed his compositional practice so that during this period the two roles overlap. In a diary entry from February 1913 Prokofiev's enthusiasm for the instrument is infectious and reflects his commitment to performing:

I love to see a grand piano with the lid open, in position on the stage in front of the orchestra, ready for the concert. I felt this surge of affection [...] The thought came to me that in the course of my life I should no doubt be both playing and conducting a great many concerts. Which of these activities would I be doing more often, it would be interesting to know?<sup>74</sup>

### Constructing the legend: selected Western responses to Prokofiev

Prokofiev's debut abroad came in 1915, in Rome, where he played his *Piano Concerto No. 2* but his 'real' and publicised Western debut happened when he burst on the American concert scene in the year 1918. The *New York Herald* notes that he was introduced to American audiences as a representative of the "ultra modern revolutionary and even incendiary Russian composers best represented, as perhaps best known, by Stravinsky and all his works."<sup>75</sup> The comparison with Stravinsky would probably have irked Prokofiev who, above all, desired to be considered original and unique, but it certainly did him no harm in term of enhancing his reputation as a modernist composer. Together with Stravinsky and Ornstein, American critics saw Prokofiev as a modernist composer and different from the "classic" Rachmaninov.

In his role as composer-pianist Prokofiev's authoritative performances made a definite impact on his audiences. The critic Reginald de Koven noted his "supple fingers and ample technical facilities"; he also appeared to have "an almost aggressive command of pianistic dynamics" but lacked "a very wide range of emotional nuance and contrast. As a composer, my general impression was that his music, with certain exceptions, was on the whole artificial and deliberately sought for."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:215.

<sup>74</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:319.

<sup>75</sup> *New York Herald*, 2 November 1918.

<sup>76</sup> *New York Herald*, 2 November 1918.

This comment underlines the theatrical aspect, which is discussed in more detail in the next section, of Prokofiev's playing: his aggressive and uncompromising technique combined with features of his pure and 'concentrated' writing style for the instrument may well have come across as a deliberate and artificial effect.<sup>77</sup> But to what extent was the artifice a result of the performance, and to what extent was it written into the individual scores? This dialectic typifies Prokofiev's dual position as composer and pianist and it is a contributing factor to the uniqueness of his piano compositions. As I will argue in the next chapter, some of the piano works, such as the *Sarcasms* have a number of effects and carefully articulated moments of artifice written into the scores. These moments are drawn from piano technique and are essentially pianistic utterances: their position within Prokofiev's work as theatrical gestures is entirely dependent on context.

Prokofiev's preference for the miniature form meant that each piece was an intense snapshot of his compositional style for the piano. Ironically for Prokofiev, who aimed for clarity and transparent textures in his compositions - especially in the early works for piano from the 'elemental' phase - the *New York Herald* critic thought that some of his pieces came across as "formless and impressionistic vapourings". The *Four Études* appeared "decidedly vague in form and melody, effective from their force and original rhythms rather than their intrinsic musical value". Of the Second Piano Sonata, the Scherzo was "really a musical incident rather than a developed movement, was nevertheless both attractive and impressive by reason of its characteristic rhythmic qualities."<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately however, it was Prokofiev's incredible prowess as a pianist that seemed to overwhelm the audience: "he possesses enough personal magnetism intensity, power and verve in his playing to impress an audience with his work independent of their musical or melodic content as was simply evidenced by the enthusiasm that he aroused in his audience yesterday".<sup>79</sup> His forceful musical personality made for a powerful performance.

Prokofiev also played some Rachmaninov *Preludes* in the Aeolian Hall concert and these were thought to have been played "with much appreciation and

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<sup>77</sup> This 'concentrated' writing style will be fully explored in Chapter 3.

<sup>78</sup> *New York Herald*, 2 November 1918. The critic's comment that the Scherzo was not a "developed movement" is justified as Prokofiev used his compositional techniques of repetition and variation as elaboration even with the larger and more conventional forms such as the sonata.

<sup>79</sup> *New York Herald*, 2 November 1918.

rhythmic spirit, except the last, which, for me, was brutally hurried out of existence although it seemed to impress the audience". His idiosyncratic piano technique is acknowledged: it is a "technique all his own".

He can create big sonorities, sometimes mellow to richness, more often brittle and raucous. His fingers are steel, his wrists steel, his biceps and triceps steel, his scapula steel. He is a tonal steel thrust. He has speed, surely, but a narrow gamut of dynamics, all trash or whisperings; no tonal gradations, with a special aptitude in the performance of double notes, octaves and chords taken at a dizzy tempo.<sup>80</sup>

This is possibly the most well-known description of Prokofiev's playing and is frequently quoted in biographies of the composer. The impression of Prokofiev's fingers and arms as being made of steel corroborates the perceived image as a Bolshevik Russian pianist. It is of course, a Western, mythologized construction of the composer-pianist and one that reflects the general perception of his individual playing style. He is considered to be both a 'virile' pianist and a 'cerebral' composer.<sup>81</sup> This understanding of his playing and this image of him as a 'typical' Bolshevik pianist remained. It seems that the features of his playing that were attracting most attention were (a) his capacity for playing technically difficult passages at particularly high speeds and (b) his "sonorities" by which the reviews often meant to draw attention to the more percussive qualities of his sound. The reports on his performances also indicate that he had a magnetic personality that created a theatrical atmosphere surrounding the performance.

Technical proficiency was the overwhelming impression that audiences took away from Prokofiev's recitals. This impression was enhanced by the fact that his pieces were written in such a way as to play up the pianistic quality in his writing, and, as the next chapter will show, they also laid bare the essential compositional techniques holding them together. Nonetheless, the music came across to contemporary critics as "volitional and essentially cold [...] The lyric themes are generally insipid [...] Immense technical difficulties deafen one to the intrinsic poverty of ideas in his music." One critic even considered his music to be "an example of bad language" noting that "the work itself and the manner in which Mr Prokofieff played it moved us to pity for the beautiful instrument which he belaboured".<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *New York Times*, 21 November, 1918

<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, 21 November, 1918.

<sup>82</sup> *New York Tribune*, 11 December, 1918.

Ironically, Prokofiev's music is likened to that of Arnold Schoenberg, another comparison that he would not have appreciated. But that interpretation is probably due to the fact that post World War I American audiences were not yet exposed to the various avant-garde musical trends of Western Europe. The comparison merely shows that his music was largely misconstrued. The failure of American audiences to understand the music to some extent played into Prokofiev's hands because after all, he did strive to make his music complicated and yet, paradoxically, there is much in his creative methods that is entirely instinctive and based on pure pianism as he understood it. Regardless of his American and even Russian critics, Prokofiev was happy to see his music generate debate and challenge trends.

### **Forging a performance style: Prokofiev's public persona**

Prokofiev's image was reliant on two crucial elements: the music that he wrote and the way that he performed it on stage. He created himself as a composer-pianist and achieved his notoriety by playing his own music because this was the music that could show his skills off to the best advantage, and not the music of Liszt, as he had thought during his Conservatory period.<sup>83</sup> This image, constructed by Prokofiev himself during his formative years, continues to influence the way we perceive Prokofiev and play his music. This chapter is also concerned with deconstructing the way that his received performing persona has generated an entire performance practice of the music. Contemporary performances of Prokofiev's piano music are often aggressive and percussive, highlighting the rhythmic quality of the music above other attributes such as its sometimes muted lyricism. During his Conservatory period, he transformed himself into a compositional and performing anti-establishment figure with consequences that shaped his entire career.

The composer's physique necessarily became a determining part of the creative process. It was an important source of originality in his piano writing. Because he was writing primarily for himself, he was playing on his own technical strengths and the music is the ultimate representation of his physique. Writing about Prokofiev's performance several years later, the critic Boris Asaf'ev, writing under his pseudonym of Igor Glebov, notes that Prokofiev the composer and Prokofiev the

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<sup>83</sup> See my earlier discussion, 12.

performer are one and the same and that the strength of his art lies in the connection between these two aspects of himself.<sup>84</sup>

Prokofiev's music does have a "shocking" element to it, and it pleases him to see that his music annoys the more conservative authorities of the Conservatory. Alexander Glazunov, the head of the St Petersburg Conservatory, who had been one of the thirteen year old Prokofiev's foremost champions, could not understand the music. When the aspiring composer showed him his (juvenile) symphony, Glazunov "approved the first movement least, the second movement more so and the third still more. The first movement was too dissonant for him, particularly the second page of the exposition."<sup>85</sup>

Prokofiev's appearances as a pianist seem to acquire a certain theatrical staginess in that his main concern in choosing repertoire was that his playing was heard at all times and that there was ample room in the piece for him, as a pianist, to shine. He notes for example that there was little opportunity for this in the Glazunov piano concerto, which he was learning at the time. This overwhelming desire to showcase his own skill and to seize and maintain his audience's attention is another crucial feature of Prokofiev's writing style, and one that never really changed. In composing the first piano concerto he "took pains to ensure that the piano would at all times be heard and would always be pleasing to the ear when combined with the orchestra. In this I was successful, but there are places where from a purely pianistic perspective the piano part is not particularly interesting. Nevertheless to the listener it sounds effective and impressive."<sup>86</sup>

Similarly when composing the second piano concerto he notes that, "the pianist, once having started to play does not cease until the final bar. This is surely no bad thing; on the contrary, I feel that it creates a certain tension in the listener and *fixes his attention irrevocably on the soloist*".<sup>87</sup> With this piano concerto he "paid a great deal of attention to the challenges of the solo part, but even so there are times when the composer-musician in me prevails over the composer-pianist, and I have not been able to avoid dull or, so to say routine, passages for the soloist."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> See "Prokof'ev ispolnitel'", *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 1927, No.7 (1136), 4-5, in Shlifstein, 325 – 328.

<sup>85</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 67.

<sup>86</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:237.

<sup>87</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:359, (my emphases).

<sup>88</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:281.

Prokofiev's performing self was a crucial and participatory part of the compositional process. Neither stage nor audience held any fear for Prokofiev. If anything he revelled in the attention of the public and one of the features of his performance style was that he often tried to direct the audiences' attention. This he achieved through various attention-seeking devices he wrote into the score, whether these were physical gestures (such as hands crossing over), rhythmic (such as the repeated note gesture that opens the *Toccata*) or melodic (such as the distorted melody that occurs in *Sarcasm* No. 2<sup>89</sup>). Prokofiev's music has an element of 'performativity' written into the score that each performer responds to differently. His compositions for piano require a pianist able to perform to an audience as he himself had done when he was first playing his music in public. This does not mean that his music is full of empty physical and theatrical gestures but rather that these gestures are cleverly embedded in the score, through its various rhythmic, melodic and harmonic layers in such a way that this aspect of his theatricality is effortlessly integrated into the score.

There is no need for the performer to resort to physical gestures and grimaces to create an effective atmosphere in and surrounding the music. In fact, from the limited visual evidence we have of Prokofiev playing his own music this is clearly not the case. The existing footage shows him playing with a still and controlled upper body, low wrists and slightly arched fingers. Commenting on a Prokofiev performance from 1927, Asaf'ev notes the peculiarly "masculine" character of his piano playing; the impassive and calm demeanour and the self-confidence and strength that characterise the playing. He praises the simple and clear sound and the nuanced use of accents. Furthermore, Asaf'ev notes that years later, the aggressive and driven qualities of the composer's early playing were not lost; rather they were tempered by the qualities of humour and his more mature worldview.<sup>90</sup>

Kabalevsky notes with admiration that Prokofiev's performance "was distinguished by a quiet reserve, a total absence of any external pianistic effects [...] With his extraordinary pianistic talents Prokofiev revealed that rich lyrical feeling in his music which we had failed to notice until then."<sup>91</sup> Played by Prokofiev then, the music acquired new meaning. His musical personality emerged through the command

<sup>89</sup> See my later discussion in chapter 3.

<sup>90</sup> See "Prokofyev' ispolnitel'", *Zhizn' isskustva*, 1927, No.7 (1136), 4-5, in Shlifstein, 325 – 328.

<sup>91</sup> Dmitry Kabalevsky, "Postscript" in *Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings*, translated and edited by Oleg Prokofiev (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), 160.

of various constitutive elements, such as dynamics, rhythm and technique. Stravinsky notes that Prokofiev's "performance was remarkable - but I have always liked his music hearing him play it - and the music had personality".<sup>92</sup> In Stravinsky's view, he "had personality; one that was in his every gesture - biological personality let us call it".<sup>93</sup> His playing self was an extrovert one: it was shaped by the sound he was able to produce. When performing to an audience, his main aim was to communicate – more often than not he communicated his musical personality across to an audience through playing his own music, which is why he made such an impact as a performer. It was no coincidence that he was usually considered to be the best performer of his own music. Many eye witnesses of Prokofiev performing have noted this highly energised and dramatic sound that contrasted with the restrained physical movement of his playing style. Such a playing style is corroborated in the visual evidence<sup>94</sup> available to us of the composer's playing. The *New York Times* critic noted "his impassibility contrasted with the volcanic eruptions he produced on the keyboard".

By 1927 then, the interpretation of Prokofiev's music had already been distorted to such an extent that when the composer played his own music to a Soviet audience, which included Kabalevsky, it gave them "an entirely new understanding of his music, very different from that gained from the performance of other musicians, who tended to emphasize the elemental quality of the music, the dynamic contrasts and the *mechanical* elements."<sup>95</sup> This comment sheds welcome light on the beginnings of a performance practice of Prokofiev that has yet to be researched. Mark Arnest is indeed right to speculate about where our ideas about performing Prokofiev come: while they did not come from his contemporaries such as Demetrescu or Moiseiwitsch, they equally did not come from his own performance style as it can be heard in the few recordings made by the composer himself.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber, 1960), 66.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>94</sup> The following visual material is available at the Serge Prokofiev Archive: 1. Section on Eisenstein. Shows plans and drawings for Ivan Grozny and a scene with Prokofiev at the piano; 2. Persimfans, 1927, with Prokofiev playing (silent); 3. Prize giving ceremony with Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Shebalin etc.(silent); 4. Prokofiev at his dacha in 1946. Plays an extract from the Waltz Suite and is then interviewed (with sound).

<sup>95</sup> Dmitry Kabalevsky, "Postscript" in *Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings*, translated and edited by Oleg Prokofiev (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), 159 - 160.

<sup>96</sup> A detailed chronology of Prokofiev's recordings for the New York Duo –Art Aeolian Company and account of his relationship with them has been provided by Rex Lawson, "Prokofiev and the Player Piano" in *The Pianola Journal* No. 15 (2003): 3 – 16.

It seems more likely that our understanding of the way Prokofiev played his music is based on a constructed image that has only very little relation to the composer's actual playing style or sound. His initial casting as an iconoclastic and modernist pianist with an unerring sense of rhythm has shaped entire generations of mechanical interpretations of his music. But as Ernest rightly notes, Prokofiev was a "transitional" pianist with "both romantic and modern traits".<sup>97</sup> The forward-looking and modernist quality of his playing is related to the very nature of the music: it is not so much the steel biceps and triceps of Prokofiev as performer that impress us but the way he has written himself into the actual score. Tempered with that modernist quality however, Prokofiev's interpretations of his own music reveal a delicate shaping of dynamic nuances, a quality not often mentioned in the American reviews of his playing, for example. Rather, critics noted that he "never coaxes a luscious tone".<sup>98</sup>

When Prokofiev played *Diabolical Suggestion* for a group of Futurist poets in Moscow, among who was Mayakovsky, the poet Vasily Kamensky remembered the composer's brilliant performance. The poet notes that when Prokofiev played "the whole café seemed to be on fire; it was as if the very beams and rafters were in flames yellow as the composer's hair, and we stood there ready to be burnt alive in the fire of his astounding music".<sup>99</sup> Even if we take into consideration that such a vivid and self-consciously symbolic narrative is the work of a Futurist poet, the essence of it - Prokofiev's energetic playing and the particular impact that his compositions had when he played them himself – is still relevant.

Francis Poulenc particularly loved Prokofiev's playing style, likening it to that of Alfredo Casella. As the visual evidence we have of Prokofiev corroborates, he played on level with the keyboard, possessing "an extraordinary sureness of wrist, a marvellous staccato".<sup>100</sup> The composer did not attack the notes from "on high" to produce sounds but rather was able to coax a "sonority of fantastic strength and intensity" while remaining level with the keys. While rehearsing the fifth Piano Concerto with the composer, Poulenc noted that his "tempo never, never varied. [...] Prokofiev's rhythm was relentless, and sometimes, in the Fifth Concerto, when a very

<sup>97</sup> Mark Ernest, "Serge Prokofiev: The Composer as Interpreter" *Three Oranges* No. 3 (May 2002): 23.

<sup>98</sup> *The New York Times*, Wednesday 11 December, 1918.

<sup>99</sup> Vasily Kamensky quoted in David Nice, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West 1891 – 1935* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 139.

<sup>100</sup> *Francis Poulenc: My Friends and Myself* assembled by Stéphane Audel, trans. James Harding, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), 120.

difficult passage cropped up, I'd say to Serge: "That's the orchestra, I'm doing what I can". He'd say to me: "Never mind, don't alter the tempo..."<sup>101</sup>

Prokofiev's playing possessed a theatrical quality built into his specific sound and even into his manipulation of dynamics, among other things. One of the important technical issues that Prokofiev struggled with under the tutelage of Esipova was the control of dynamics. He also worked hard to bring a certain hardness of touch under control, preparing his performances with a painstaking attention to detail. When practicing his second piano sonata he decides that in the first movement "the nuances should be in half-tones, the *forte* passages restrained, likewise the tempo, and the whole movement should be played with a delicate patina of sadness".<sup>102</sup> Contemporary pianists would surely find such interpretative performance advice useful, particularly as the second sonata - one of Prokofiev's popular piano concert works - is often performed very fast and almost mechanically. By the time he came to take his final exam before graduating as a fully-fledged pianist from the St Petersburg Conservatory, Prokofiev was in total control of his dynamic palette. In fact, this was an element of piano playing that he had subsumed into this theatrical way of playing. As he prepared to play *Tannhäuser* for the final year Concerto competition at the Conservatory<sup>103</sup>, Prokofiev finally decides to play a very quiet opening, different to the dynamic suggested by Liszt in his score:

For some days I had been turning over in my mind whether to begin the piece *piano e cantabile*, as Liszt marks it, or *pianissimo* and almost inaudible, as of the chorus of pilgrims heard from afar in the opera. Resolved on the latter, I began very quietly, and heard later that the opening of *Tannhäuser* had been judged the best playing in the whole piece.<sup>104</sup>

Prokofiev's interpretation is imaginative and takes the stage and its imagery as its reference point. This imagination appears all the more clearly when he performs his own works for the instrument. Prokofiev likens his choice of dynamics to that of off-stage singing of an opera chorus. This is an intriguing comparison suggestive of his orchestral imagination. His vision, whether he was playing the piano, composing for the piano or for any other instrument, was more often than not, a broader and

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:581.

<sup>103</sup> Although this was a concerto competition, since Prokofiev chose to perform his first piano concerto and this was the first time such a thing had been done at the Conservatory, he was asked by the judging panel to play *Tannhäuser*, (which he had already performed in his solo recital), before playing his first piano concerto.

<sup>104</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:660.

theatrical vision that encompassed not only the effect of aural image but that also the visual image. Right from his early compositional attempts, he strove to imagine sound possibilities beyond those offered to him by the piano and was constantly looking for effects that go beyond those achievable on his instrument. The theatre and the stage itself was an important source of inspiration for Prokofiev both as pianist and as composer.

In the interpretative decisions that he made, Prokofiev looked beyond the instrument's traditional role and within this context, would have appeared to be a raging and violent modernist to a contemporary audience. By the time he left the Conservatory, he was able to combine the softest *pianissimo* with a percussive sound, depending on what needed to be achieved in the piece. All of this combined to enhance his reputation as a significant modernist figure of Russian music and, as the exacting Miaskovsky noted on Prokofiev's performance at the concerto competition, in which the composer was awarded the first prize, he "had no real competitors: everyone else played like a student, I as a fully-fledged musician".<sup>105</sup> His only flaw was "a hardness of attack, not just in cantilena, but all the time".<sup>106</sup> Despite Esipova's exhortation to control his attack, Prokofiev must have continued to experience difficulties in this area until late in his career. There is no doubt that his time at the Conservatory strengthened his technical abilities and enhanced his dramatic performing style. By the end of his piano course, his technical abilities were quite impressive: several of the early published works, such as *Four Études* Op. 2, *Four Pieces* Op. 4, and the *Toccata* Op. 11, display the extent of his technical virtuosity.

Prokofiev's detailed chronicling of his years at the Conservatory omits to discuss one very important aspect of his musical education: that of rhythm, tempo and its manipulation through *rubato* for example. His teachers and colleagues never bring up the issue of rhythm in his piano playing. Clearly, his grasp of rhythm when playing the piano was impeccable. His critics could not deny the power of his "tremendous rhythmic urge"<sup>107</sup> and "his extraordinary gift in rhythms".<sup>108</sup> This aspect of his playing also left an indelible impression on his friend Poulenc. Arnest notes that of all of Prokofiev's piano rolls, the most complex manipulation of tempo occurs in the Andante of Piano Sonata No. 4. The movement is marked *Andante assai* and

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<sup>105</sup> Miaskovsky, quoted in *Diaries*, Vol.1:664.

<sup>106</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:664.

<sup>107</sup> *New York Times* 21 November, 1918.

<sup>108</sup> *New York Times* 11 December, 1918.

although there are only two episodes marked *ritardando* Arnest acknowledges that “Prokofiev’s performance contains many changes of tempo that make for a considerably richer aural experience”.<sup>109</sup>

Such changes in tempo are there to enhance the narrative element of the composer’s playing. Although Arnest is right in noting that he “fuses characteristic tempi with psychological relationships”, Prokofiev’s interpretation also outlines a narrative and the numerous performance directions in the score of the *Andante* from Piano Sonata No. 4, such as *serioso*, *molto tranquillo*, *tranquillo e dolce*, *mp espress.*, *Poco più animato che la prima volta*, *Poco meno mosso*, *molto leggiermente*, *pp tranquillissimo*, *piano ma pesante*, all serve to delineate the shape of the musical narrative suggested by the piece. Arnest’s astute analysis of Prokofiev’s tempo changes does not take into consideration the importance of musical narrative in his interpretation of his own music as well as its significance in the score itself. He was nothing if not painstaking in his performance directions, making sure to indicate the various nuances of the piece. To separate his tempo indications from other performance directions is to misunderstand his essentially theatrical mode of piano playing and sound production. Nonetheless, Arnest is correct to note that despite such fluctuations in tempo Prokofiev’s playing reveals an essential “unity of tempo”.<sup>110</sup>

Conversely, this is not the case with his conducting experiences. Miaskovsky notes on numerous occasions that Prokofiev’s conducting was not rhythmically strict. While his piano playing was often recommended for its rhythmic rigour and “vitality”<sup>111</sup>, Miaskovsky criticises his conducting on the grounds that it is “lacking in rhythmic stability”.<sup>112</sup> This peculiarity of his rhythmic sense probably had much to do with the fact that he had difficulty in mastering the very technique of conducting, and therefore keeping rigorous time for a whole orchestra must have seemed like a daunting task. This also suggests that rhythm was an inbuilt element of Prokofiev’s music and that it was not something that he thought about separately. But in conducting an orchestra, attention to rhythmic accuracy is a fundamental technique that often needs to be enforced. There is also no mention of Prokofiev using *rubato*:

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<sup>109</sup> Mark Arnest, “Serge Prokofiev: The Composer as Interpreter,” *Three Oranges* No. 3 (May 2002): 23-25.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Arnest, “Serge Prokofiev: The Composer as Interpreter,” *Three Oranges* No. 3 (May 2002): 23-25.

<sup>111</sup> The Russian avant-garde critic Nurok praised Prokofiev’s works for their “rhythmic vitality”. (See *Diaries*, Vol.1: 498)

<sup>112</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 404; see also 320, 345, 542 and 590.

the manipulation of time in this way does not seem to be part of Prokofiev's playing style. His rhythmic precision was definitely crucial to his playing style – as we have already seen in the reviews discussed above.

As Asaf'ev, Stravinsky and others noted, Prokofiev's playing also possessed a very physical quality – a sense in which the sheer enjoyment of playing the piano as a childish physical exercise transferred itself into his mature performing self. This self-taught aspect of his playing must have made his performing style stand out because despite Esipova's best efforts, she never managed to completely subdue this peculiarity. Prokofiev notes that one of the examiners on the final exam, Lyapunov, noted that Prokofiev did not play in the style of Esipova at all. In fact, he claims that this is one of the reasons why Lyapunov awarded him such high marks in his final exam. He notes that Lyapunov said he played “extremely well, one could hear every last note in it. It was excellent, I gave you a 5 with a star; you have great gifts as a pianist [...]”. I heard that one reason he gave me a 5+ was precisely because I did not play like a Yesipova student”.<sup>113</sup>

In spite of years of study with Esipova then, Prokofiev retained a uniqueness of playing style with gestures that dated back to his early days of piano playing – when playing was more of a game or a sport than anything else. Even Debussy confirms this unusual playing technique. In November 1913, Prokofiev played his *Étude* No. 3 and *Legenda* in front of a St Petersburg audience that included Claude Debussy. In his *Diaries* Prokofiev notes that the French composer “praised the pieces and the individuality of my technique”.<sup>114</sup> Even after rigorous training with Esipova, his instinctive way of playing the piano still characterised his music and indeed, his performances. The constituent elements of his performing style were a unique balance of technique, rhythmic drive, manipulation of touch with theatricality and a selection of narrative devices.

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<sup>113</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:621.

<sup>114</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1:553; *Legenda* is the sixth piece in Op. 12, *Ten Pieces for Piano*.

## . Chapter 3: Re-interpreting Virtuosity: Prokofiev's piano music

### Introduction

During the ‘elemental’ phase Prokofiev’s confidence in himself as a pianist grew. As his technique strengthened and developed under Esipova, he looked for a way of projecting this power in the music he was writing at the time. And, given his personality, it became ever more evident that this so-called *enfant terrible* of the Conservatory would put all his energies into creating music that would shine and dazzle. During this phase, Prokofiev deliberately developed compositional techniques that were designed not only to showcase his performing talent but also, and perhaps more importantly, to capture the audience’s attention. These pieces are self-consciously innovative works, aimed at highlighting the pianist’s skill and virtuosic dexterity, but they also display a playful and theatrical side to the composer, a side which will be explored more fully in the last chapter.

By the time Prokofiev came to write the pieces discussed in this chapter he was confident enough as a composer to let his compositional strategies speak on their own terms. The term ‘concentrated’ refers to a specific writing style in which the gestures and idea-types identified in the first chapter, and that now occur in a refined form, constitute the entire basis of the writing. Such gestures are used repeatedly, sometimes for physical and/or visual effect upon an audience. This type of writing is characteristic of the ‘elemental’ phase and will emerge clearly in the ensuing discussion of the piano works.

This phase provides us with the purest examples of Prokofiev’s particular pianism. It was a period of experimentation during which the composer played with musical ideas and compositional strategies that emphasized the physical nature of piano playing. Once this ‘elemental’ and experimental phase had gone through a transitional period,<sup>1</sup> he was able to integrate those physical connections, and specifically pianistic gestures, into his own compositional idiom no matter what medium he was writing for. He would never write like this for the piano again, probably because he would never again have such a pressing need to invest in himself as pianist-composer.

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<sup>1</sup> The stylistic transition of c. 1911 will be discussed in the next chapter.

The extrovert and ‘concentrated’ style of writing finds its earliest representation in the first version of what would later become the *Four Pieces* Op. 4. These were first composed in 1908 but revised between 1910 and 1912, when they became Op. 4. Together with the *Four Études* Op. 2 (1909), the *Toccata* Op. 11 (1912) and the *Sarcasms* Op. 17 (1915), these are the defining works of a highly significant phase in Prokofiev’s musical career.

This chapter will examine the *Four Études* Op. 2, the *Toccata* Op. 11, the *Sarcasms* Op. 17 as well as making a case study of *Diabolical Suggestion* (from *Four Pieces* Op. 4). It is in these works that we see Prokofiev the composer endeavour to create a new kind of music, mostly by relying on his own peculiar type of virtuosity and through the development of a distinctive harmonic palette. Some of the important compositional principles to emerge at this point include: the use of thematic and rhythmic conflict and collision; the layering of musical sounds; and the preference for repetition and variation as developmental strategies.

Prokofiev worked through all of his musical ideas in this period. He developed a personal musical language, sometimes unconsciously, at other times (as the previous chapter has shown), deliberately, through these works for piano. The prototypes for musical ideas and specific techniques would form the foundations of an entire compositional style. Each work selected for inclusion in this chapter highlights a particular aspect of the composer’s development and sheds light on his musical identity. The virtuosic is explored in the *Four Études* and the *Toccata*, the grotesque and the carnivalesque in the *Sarcasms*.

The piano sonatas are not analysed in this dissertation; rather, I have focussed on Prokofiev’s shorter pieces for piano, as the complete fingerprints of his compositional language already exist in these works. As such, the piano sonatas do not provide us with any new or different ideas. Many of them were recycled by the composer himself from what he refers to as ‘old notebooks’: the first, third and fourth sonatas are a case in point. The material for these three sonatas was originally composed between 1906 and 1909 and is thus similar in nature, style and idiom to ideas that Prokofiev explored in the shorter pieces examined here. The first piano sonata that he composed from scratch was the second piano sonata, completed in 1912 and although this work is ostensibly written in a traditional form – the sonata form – the musical ideas in the work and the way that he develops them locate the work firmly in the ‘elemental’ period. Despite the fact that this is one of Prokofiev’s longer

works of the period, being written in four movements, each movement may be seen as an independent entity, written in much the same style as the shorter compositions.

The composer's favourite genre both in the juvenilia and 'elemental' period was the miniature piece for piano. It was not simply a means of expression for his own virtuosity, it also allowed him to experiment with gestures and musical ideas within a compressed medium and within a limited space of time: this accounts for the dense nature of the writing. The miniature piece also influenced the very type of ideas that he used in those works. For example, most pieces are constructed around two or so short musical motifs, often chromatic and with distinctive rhythmic traits.

As these dramatic miniature works unfold, they suggest a narrative through the physical and musical gestures composed into the score. The pieces are concise and structurally compact so the narrative devices and effects that Prokofiev relied on are both deliberate and noticeable. Changes of mood and registers, theatrical effects – all of these generate surprise more effectively in such short pieces. The way that these are then linked together may suggest possible narratives.

Short pieces such as those examined here do not provide enough room for motivic or structural development and this suits Prokofiev's purpose well. As he was not concerned with conventional musical development and motivic musical arguments, he applied the conflict concept to his themes and musical ideas, pitching them against each other, and pushing them to extreme limits of register, dynamics and pitch. Such moments of conflict are a crucial part of the dramatic and also of the theatrical idiom in Prokofiev's writing style. They were well-suited to his performing style too, as they played upon his physicality, his formidable technique and powerful personality. Disruptive and surprising musical moments, such as unexpected cadences and dissonant harmonies create theatrical moments within the piece: moments during which he is mostly interested in gaining the audience's unqualified attention.

It will be seen that in most of these works, the melodic motifs are short and often incisive. In cases where they are slightly longer, they are either not used frequently in the piece or distorted at some point, after which it is the distorted version that is heard more often. And yet, all is not chaos and dissonance in Prokofiev's musical world. Often quite unexpectedly, moments of calm pierce the energetic world of these pieces and suddenly he plunges us into what can only be experienced as a surreal world. These effects are usually achieved by quick changes of tempo and texture or even register.

Also associated with this principle of conflict and play is the related issue of humour. Prokofiev's musical humour is hard to define, being dependent on both context and the performer's and listener's familiarity with his compositional style. Humour in these short works is related to the geography and colours of the piano, intimately connected to timing and is concerned with the process of defamiliarisation and deflating our expectations. Within this context, the pseudo-cadence, discussed below, becomes particularly meaningful.

### The 'elemental' stage as gestation period

Prokofiev's initial bond with the instrument was primarily a physical one. His virtuosity on the piano was first and foremost a physical test which progressed to become a compositional concept that embraced his own technique as generator of musical material. His technique was egocentric as it was entirely built on his identity as a pianist. As the previous chapter has shown, despite Esipova's best efforts, Prokofiev maintained his idiosyncratic technique and way of playing. His compositions for piano were all written for him to play and he took pride in their difficulty and complexity. Prokofiev favours various mobile hand positions: hands crossing over, hands playing at opposite ends of the piano, the contrary motion position as well as hand-to-hand positions. His preference for particular triadic positions is evident: his preferred physical position is the first inversion. This may be seen in the first inversion triads used in *Four Pieces* Op. 3 Nos. 1 and 3, *Visions Fugitives* Nos. 1, 3, 4, *Four Pieces* Op. 32 No. 2, to cite just a few examples from his compositions for piano.

*Four Pieces*, Op. 3 No. 3, bars 1 - 4

In all of these pieces, Prokofiev chooses the first inversion of a chord as his basic position and sound, thus privileging a specific hand position and a particular sound over the more basic sounding triad in root position.

The ‘elemental’ stage of Prokofiev’s writing was a gestation period for various compositional techniques that would only be explored in greater detail in the ‘post-elemental’ phase. The compositional techniques used in the works discussed below, such as the uses of motivic variation, sequences to create tension, ternary forms that allow for recapitulation of original material, ostinato to structure entire sections – would be fully developed in his orchestral and stage writing, the subject of the next two chapters, as well as in his later piano writing.

### **The virtuosic in Prokofiev’s piano writing**

The term virtuosity when applied to performance may, as Jane O’Dea points out, bring to mind “exaggerated gestures, pretentious facial expressions – in sort the ostentatious theatrics we more usually associate with crass entertainers than with serious, committed performing artists”.<sup>2</sup> Romantic composers for the piano such as Chopin and Liszt strove to do for the piano what Paganini had done for the violin: for them technique came at the service of the music, it was not an end in and of itself, rather it was a way of enhancing or deepening musical expression. Prokofiev continued a pianistic tradition of technical daredevilry that was a Romantic legacy: in this sense both his playing style and many of the works discussed in this chapter are virtuosic. But he was also the product of modernist times: he may have been trained as a pianist in the Romantic tradition of Theodore Leschetizky via his teacher Esipova, but his music, especially the works for piano that are discussed here, were modern and avant-garde. They strived to explore a new form of pianistic technique that elevated the physical aspect of piano playing to new heights. For all his attempts to complicate his music and to write himself into his piano scores, Prokofiev never turned his back on traditional piano technique. Neither did he shun virtuosity in his own playing and in his compositions. Rather, he reinterprets virtuosity through his

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<sup>2</sup> *Virtue or Virtuosity? Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut and London, 2000), 40. The concept of the virtuosic has been discussed in depth by, among others, Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Lawrence Kramer, “Franz Liszt and the Virtuoso Public Sphere”, in Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 68-99; Richard Leppert, “Cultural Contradiction, Idolatry, and the Piano Virtuoso: Franz Liszt” in *Piano Roles: Three Centuries of Life with the Piano*, ed. James Parakilas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 252-281; Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

own physicality and through an almost constant dialogue with traditional Romantic virtuosity as though he were re-writing and modernising that virtuosity through his compositions.

In some of these works, technical exuberance and agility is written into his music purely for its physical and tactile qualities. In a few cases, which will be discussed below, technical facility was not a means to an end but indeed, perhaps an end in itself. This is not to suggest that Prokofiev's playing style or by extension his compositions are devoid of what O'Dea has called "poetic expression",<sup>3</sup> but rather that he valued technical brilliance as an integral and refined quality of his writing. It forms part of the 'theatrical' trait integrated into both his performing style, as the previous chapter has demonstrated, but also in his compositional style, as we will discover in the ensuing discussion. Technical competence, for Prokofiev, combined finger agility with qualities of tone and touch. His own playing style was shorn of all unnecessary artifice. There were no "exaggerated gestures" or "pretentious facial expressions" in his playing, the performing excess of breaking hammers and strings did not appeal to him. Rather, the physical aspect of his playing came naturally to him and was necessarily to become an integral component of his writing style for the instrument. This physicality lies at the foundation of Prokofiev's kind of virtuosity.

Contrary to the suggestion made by some contemporary reports of his playing such as those discussed in the previous chapter, he was not a showman whose merit lay exclusively in his physical feats of brilliance. Neither was he a performing charlatan whose amazing physical capabilities drew attention away from the content of the music. In actuality, he was able to serve the music he wrote for his instrument through the physical technique that came to him, after years of study, with considerable ease. As a virtuoso performer, Prokofiev is inevitably grounded in what Susan Bernstein calls the "politics of entertainment and spectacle". Indeed, his performing virtuosity has much to do with the theatrical, that is to say, with the presentation of musical material through performance. But although in his compositions he made use of certain strategies that held the audience's attention, these gestures were written into the score and are thus available to any pianist performing the works; they were not the result of his particular playing style and were not artificial performing gestures in response to playing for an audience.

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<sup>3</sup> *Virtue or Virtuosity? Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut and London, 2000), 42.

This brief summary of Prokofiev's virtuosity suggests that he was sensitive to the performer's dilemma as articulated by Anton Rubinstein to Eugène Ysaye: "your one main objective [...] must be to express the music according to your understanding and feelings, and not merely to give pleasure to those who listen".<sup>4</sup> Prokofiev performed himself as a composer, not purely himself as virtuoso. In other words, although he wrote with his audience in mind, he did not, in performance, *play to* that audience but rather played to his own strengths regardless of the effect this had on his audience. To what extent then was Prokofiev simply playing his music, and to what extent was he performing it? Stravinsky was right to suggest that the music made musical sense when the composer was performing it himself: this was because he had successfully managed to synthesize the 'composing' and 'performing' parts of his persona.

Like Liszt and Chopin before him, Prokofiev was able to bring together the supreme technical capabilities needed to play the music while also bringing to light their poetic expression and staying true to his compositional intentions. For him too, physical prowess was secondary to musical content. Contemporary reception of the composer's playing style has erroneously suggested that the technical showmanship was its most endearing quality: in reality, critics were blinded by the brilliant technique of the performer and failed to scrutinise the musical content on its own terms. This oversight may be forgiven when we realise how closely the musical material and the performing style are linked to each other. As the following discussion will show, the works of the 'elemental' period were written with one performer in mind and it is inevitable that content and execution would be so subtly interlinked. Nonetheless, the unfortunate result of such reports, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, is that in today's performances of Prokofiev's music, echoes of the importance of the physical element above the musical, remain. When the composer played his own music however, the relationship between physical technique and musical material was delicately balanced. The subsequent discussion will demonstrate the way that musical material and technique shaped each other. The issue of the 'theatrical' as it pertains to and determines musical content will also be discussed.

Prokofiev's virtuosity, being primarily of a physical nature, tests the pianist's stamina and is inseparable from his pianism and technical capabilities. Such virtuosity

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in O'Dea, *Virtue or Virtuosity? Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut and London, 2000), 46.

may be associated with, for example, quick and abrupt changes of register. Physically, such quick changes mean that the pianist needs to cover large areas of the piano quickly, with hands sometimes crossing over, moving in contrary motion or playing at the very opposite ends of the keyboard. This physical movement is combined with dexterous finger patterns, passages in thirds or octaves, most usually performed at high speed and sometimes played detached. His repeated note patterns and ostinato basses, often used to hold a piece together structurally, and sometimes melodically, can be quite difficult to sustain physically over the long periods that is often required: this physical quality of Prokofiev's writing incorporates a percussive element. Stamina, an important quality of Prokofiev's virtuosic idiom is also related to the physical aspect of piano playing, an aspect that, especially during the 'elemental' phase of Prokofiev's career, was foremost in his mind.

Apart from the physical nature of the virtuosic however, Prokofiev's writing for the piano in the 'elemental' phase represents a new definition of the relationship between performer and audience as well as an innovative approach to piano playing. Jim Samson notes that virtuosity "draws the performer right into the heart of the work, foregrounding presentational strategies that are hard to illuminate through the familiar, pedigree methods of musical analysis."<sup>5</sup> The quality of the virtuosic in the writing for piano defined his works as events and emerges as a specific feature of his performing persona.

His use of such physical techniques as those outlined above are not simply intended to dazzle his audiences: they also become important compositional drivers, perhaps none more so than the ostinato, which often runs throughout an entire piece, holding it together. This chapter will demonstrate the different types of ostinato that emerge in the compositions for piano. The last chapter will then explore the different kinds of ostinato patterns Prokofiev used in his stage works. In the piano works, the ostinato emerges as being built of a repeated note/chord/octave or as a broken chord type bass while the stage works will show a more diversified selection of ostinatos in use. Prokofiev assigns this particular compositional technique different roles. It may be used as a rhythmic driver, a test in physical stamina and also has a structural purpose.<sup>6</sup> It is also used as a generator of musical material (e.g. *Étude* No. 3), as a structural building block (e.g. *Sarcasm* No. 3) and as part of the dramatic register (e.g.

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<sup>5</sup> Jim Samson, *Virtuosity and the Musical Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Étude* No.1 for example, will demonstrate all three roles.

*Diabolical Suggestion*). Such presentational gestures as the repeated note for example, are more than ostinatos: they become part of the musical material and are often used to frame other musical material. Similarly, pianistic figurations such as scalar and chromatic figurations, rapid passages in thirds and sixths are not merely a nod in the direction of traditional pianistic technique: they become musical materials.

The *Four Études* present a study of the virtuosic in Prokofiev's compositional style and show how constituent elements of the virtuosic idiom are used as musical material. Perhaps nowhere else is the link between the virtuosic and musical material so clearly foregrounded as in these works. In other works, such as *Sarcasm No.2* the virtuosic idiom comes across as more of an aside: a nod in the direction of traditional piano technique, rather than constituting a crucial part of the composition.

### **Issues of tonality and harmony**

The piano works belonging to Prokofiev's 'elemental' phase are harmonically experimental, and tonality is most usually transitory. Although Prokofiev does assign key signatures, his use of accidentals and chromatic notes is so intense that any references to tonality are fleeting and almost immediately destabilized. This makes the establishment of a 'home' key virtually impossible. Less often, Prokofiev makes use of bitonality, as is the case with *Sarcasm No. 3*, where the driver of the composition is a combination of the motivic ideas, the choreography of the hands and individual make-up of specific chords such as the inbuilt dissonance of the minor second running through the piece's opening section (bars 1 – 17).

**Allegro Precipitato**  
ostinato a

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 3, bars 1-11

Prokofiev's harmony has a strong linear impetus because it is based on gestures drawn from his piano playing: a clear example of this is to be found in the long chromatic line. This is often used as a base on which sequential progressions are built. Examples occur in *Sarcasm* No. 1 between bars 35 and 38 and then again between 85 and 88 where the two hands are moving in contrary chromatic motion building up to a transient cadential point at bars 39 and 89 respectively.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No.13, bars 85-89

Similarly in *Reminiscences* Op. 4 No. 1, the decisive opening gesture on the dominant of F major is immediately destabilised by the elongated chromatic descending line in the bass. Similar descending chromatic lines are then embedded in the left hand texture throughout the piece (see, for example, bars 3 – 5).



*Reminiscences* Op. 4 No. 1, bars 3-5

The chromatic line is later taken up by the right hand textures, but its driving harmonic role remains: the entire piece is built on sequential progressions that gradually escalate the tension as the line ascends by increments of a semitone. Progressions that involve neighbouring chords are built on a winding, driving bass: they are key gestures in Prokofiev's compositional language. Hence the difficulty of examining Prokofiev's scores using traditional analytical methods. For example, in bar 2 of *Reminiscences* the chords are as follows with the pitches constituting the bass line in bold:

1<sup>st</sup> quaver: **B** flat

2<sup>nd</sup> quaver: **A** – C sharp - E

3<sup>rd</sup> quaver: **G** – B – D – F

4<sup>th</sup> quaver: D sharp – **F** sharp – A sharp

5<sup>th</sup> quaver: E – G – B – [D]<sup>7</sup> – **F**

6<sup>th</sup> quaver: **C** – [E] – G sharp – B flat – D

The progressions used in the above sequence are built on neighbouring chords and harmonic sequences are directly generated by the Prokofievan gesture of the chromatic line. The physical movement involved in playing a chromatic line thus generates the particular harmonic pattern.

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<sup>7</sup> Bracketed pitches are not written into the score, merely implied.

## The pseudo-cadence, the ‘phantom’ cadence and the importance of the ‘false tonic’

One of the most distinctive things about Prokofiev’s cadences is that although they appear unorthodox within the context of the traditional harmony they are seemingly written in, they always sound well-defined and convincing because of the way they must be played: they are written like cadences and therefore must be played as though they are traditional cadences. At a cadence point, Prokofiev maintains a balance between the inclusion of new notes within a chord and sustained notes from the previous chord. For example, at the end of *Reminiscences* Op. 4, No. 1, in the key of F major, the last four chords may be read as a seventh chord based on the lowered submediant; a minor chord based on the lowered supertonic; a mediant minor chord of the seventh followed by a tonic chord.<sup>8</sup>



The  $\text{iii}^7 - \text{I}$  cadence sounds and functions like a perfect cadence because the bass line outlines the expected  $\text{V} - \text{I}$  fall (i.e. C moves down to F). The chords above the C in the bass however do not create the expected V chord, but rather, the unusual  $\text{iii}^7$ . Two of the pitches in each chord, A and C are the same, but the E and G in the  $\text{iii}^7$  move to F in the I chord.

The overall progression appears to work and functions similarly to a perfect cadence but sounds unexpectedly different, creating a distinctive Prokofievan sound. I have labelled these types of cadences that function as cadences but do not appear to be cadences in terms of traditional analytical methods as **pseudo-cadences**. The changes to expected chord progressions, and alterations to the sounds of particular

<sup>8</sup> The cumbersome quality of such a chord labeling system in an analysis of these works only serves to underline its limited usefulness.

chords, have led to Prokofiev's music being labelled as full of 'wrong' notes.<sup>9</sup> These altered notes sound like wrong notes because they are not what we expect to hear given the context of a perfect cadence. Nonetheless, Prokofiev builds up the endings of his pieces in such a way that it leads us to expect the strong perfect cadence, but at the last minute, in its place, he presents us with the pseudo-cadence. Examples of this cadence occur at the end of Op. 4 No. 2, *Élan* and No. 3, *Despair*.



*Élan* Op. 4 No. 2, bars 60 - 64

The effect of this type of cadence is intriguing because although it sounds final and is an appropriate ending to the climax the ending was working up to, it almost stuns the listener by virtue of its unfamiliarity: ultimately it was not the cadence that the listener was expecting.

Theoretically speaking, Prokofiev's preference for transitory tonalities and the ambiguity surrounding the 'home key' should make it difficult for the ear to register the presence of the tonic chord: intriguingly however, the music never lacks harmonic direction. How then, within the context of fleeting tonalities, does Prokofiev contrive to achieve the distinctly solid presence of the sound of a tonic chord? Prokofiev's use of the 'false tonic', I argue, is fundamental to the aural perception of harmonic direction in the music. The 'false tonic' is a chord that Prokofiev uses as a surrogate for the tonic chord. To all intents and purposes it functions exactly like a tonic chord, but is different in its pitch make-up. In *Sarcasm* No.3, despite the piece's bitonality, the F natural occurring in the bass part at bar 57 assumes the role of a 'false tonic'. Prokofiev indicates that the note is to be played *fortissimo* and accented seven out of the nine times that it occurs between bar 57 – 69.

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Jonathan D. Kramer's discussion of Prokofiev's Classical Symphony in *Listen to the Music: A Self-Guided Tour through the Orchestral Repertoire* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 518.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 3, bars 57-69

The accented repetition of this note marks it out as a ‘false tonic’ and within its context, the final note of the piece, B flat, functions as a pseudo-cadence as it outlines the fall of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Although the F natural in the left hand part is set against an F sharp in the right hand part, creating a harshly dissonant embedded minor 2<sup>nd</sup>, the powerful repetition of the F natural takes precedence in our aural experience of the ending, paving the way for the pseudo-cadence with which the piece ends.

Sometimes, a cadence may be conspicuous by its absence: in this case it is a ‘phantom cadence’. The key difference between a pseudo-cadence and a ‘phantom cadence’ is the latter’s lack of resolution; indeed, the ‘phantom cadence’ does not function or sound anything like a cadence. The only reason I have called it a cadence is that Prokofiev often ends pieces on this progression. Such a cadence occurs in *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22 Nos. 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 to mention but a few examples.



*Visions Fugitives* Op. 22 No. 3, bars 25-28



*Visions Fugitives* Op. 22 No. 5, bars 16-19

In No. 8, Prokofiev creates a I – V preparation for the cadence in bar 20, followed by a IV – V in bar 21. This is then resolved onto a II chord, thus concluding the piece with an incomplete, practically nonexistent cadence, the ‘phantom cadence’. This type of cadence is in fact the one that sounds least like a cadence in that it is only after we have already heard it that it becomes clear that it was some type of cadence. Its retrospective effect is typical of Prokofievan humour in that the piece’s ending catches the listener practically unawares: we do not recognise the cadence until it is too late. The effect takes us aback and the success of the cadence is entirely dependent on the ability of the performer to take the listener by surprise.



*Visions Fugitives* Op. 22 No. 8 bars 20-22

Another ‘phantom’ cadence occurs at the end of *Sarcasm* No. 2 where the tremolo gesture and the ending on the pitches of F and E merely highlight the eccentricity of this cadence. Nonetheless, Prokofiev has prepared the tonality for the cadence through his use of the ‘false tonic’ between bars 29 and 36 where the insistent repetition of the pitch E suggests to us its new role as surrogate tonic. Within this context the final chord of the piece is merely a retrospective reference to a tonal pitch whose importance was established through repetition. Furthermore, cadential gestures in Prokofiev may sometimes be limited to the insistent repetition and elaboration of a single chord. This occurs in *Étude* No. 1 where the last nine bars are built around an elaboration of the tonic chord.

### ***Four Études* Op. 2: a study of the virtuosic**

Composed in 1909, the four études are the only set of studies that Prokofiev ever wrote. He composed these challenging pieces at a time when he was working on strengthening and perfecting his own pianistic technique. Prokofiev himself notes that a new period began with the composition of Op. 2.<sup>10</sup> It is not difficult to see how these uncompromising works challenge the pianist’s stamina and technique while focussing

<sup>10</sup> S. Prokof’ev: *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* ed. S.I. Shlifstein, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), 32.

on a few technical but repeated concerns throughout the set. The études were clearly written with his own technique and playing style in mind. They focus on the use of double thirds in ascending and descending forms, scales in octaves, octave leaps (that cover a large range of the piano in a very short time), strengthening of the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand. The concision of these pieces makes them sound direct and at times, abrasive. Their pacing is for the most part energetic, leaving little opportunity for the pianist to rest. Prokofiev clearly relished the challenge of exhibiting his own technique: these works provide ample opportunity for contemporary and modern-day pianists to display their technique proficiency

## No. 1

Written in a ternary structure dependent upon the interpolation of two different sections which provide contrast and momentum, this study is built on two short motifs *x* and *y*. Through its economical use of themes and musical ideas it lays bare the performer's technique. Motif *x*, which is nothing more than a minor triad, becomes a motif by virtue of its ostinato nature. Within this étude, the ostinato is not simply used to test the performer's stamina, but also to provide texture and body to the piece. Here the ostinato itself is a motif which becomes the rhythmic driver of the work. On the other hand, motif *y* is based on the composer's love of big leaps in octaves. Throughout the study, this motif will be heard over again, in the highest and lowest registers of the piano. The octaves are set at the interval of a descending major 3<sup>rd</sup> apart.

The development in this piece occurs sequentially. As the piece progresses in time, new challenges are added for the performer and the continuous stamina required by the ostinato patterns becomes more physically taxing and difficult to sustain. The piece starts on a *ff* dynamic, plunging both performer and listener into the piece with the insistent repetition of motif *x*. Two bars into the piece, motif *y* is added on. By the last beat of bar 6, the octave motif is taken up by the right hand, played staccato and transformed to become a lilting, impish pattern *z*.



*Four Études Op.2 No.1, bars 6-8*

Through the piece, this pattern is heard either in octaves, or in the top line of the treble clef, thus needing to be played by the 5<sup>th</sup> finger of the right hand. The gradual pacing of the themes demonstrates Prokofiev's technique of textural and motivic layering.

A moment of respite from the thick textures of the piece occurs between bars 32, last beat, till bar 40, where the staccato and delicately light motif *z* is accompanied by another typical Prokofiev gesture – the **broken chord bass**.

*Four Études Op.2 No.1, bars 32-39*

The above ostinato pattern holds this lighter section together and its increase in intensity is subtly graded through the **semitone shift** whereby each bar undergoes a very slight change. The second semiquaver of each bar ascends by semitone as follows: G – G# - A, revealing yet another instance of the embedded **chromatic motif**. This slight change in harmony creates rhythmic counterpoint with the melody played by the right hand (but written in the bass clef). Such rhythmic interplay continues to sustain the rhythmic tension of the piece even through this ostensibly *tranquillo* section of the study. The same thing happens at bar 46 last beat, till bar 54

which is a repeat of the passage. The *tranquillo* episodes provide some respite from the frenetic pace of the étude, but, since they are held together using the same techniques as are used throughout the rest of the piece, in particular the ostinato, respite is only superficial while the weaving together of various gestures makes this a dense and compact work.

The juxtaposition of opposing registers of the piano is again used to create momentum at climactic moments: this occurs most clearly in the last 5 bars of the piece where the two hands are playing as far away from each other as possible. Such an enormous gap in textures foregrounds the performer and the physical aspect of piano playing. In this instance, the performer creates a visual image which is an important constituent element of Prokofiev's virtuosic idiom. More generally, Prokofiev uses this technique of *8va sopra* and *bassa* to create gaps in texture that sometimes can metamorphose into grotesque writing. Prokofiev's use of the higher registers of the piano, as it occurs in bars 9, 13 - 14, 43, 57 - 58, 61 - 62, 72 - 74, creates physical movement: the pianist is forced to move very quickly and lightly over these passages as often, the melody moves down by an octave again right after the sections just noted. Such quick interchange of registers does not only produce a contrasting effect on the piano, it also physically challenges the pianist's stamina and sustains the listener's attention. The quick register change shows that much of the piano's geography is being covered quickly and easily: an important aspect of Prokofiev's virtuosity.

## No. 2

This étude is of a completely different nature to the previous one. Although one of its main concerns is rhythm, on which it relies for an effective performance, the atmosphere is lighter and the texture much less dense than the previous piece. Different time signatures are assigned to the two themes, and the time signatures move clef as necessary, in keeping with the register the motifs are written in. Right from the outset, this piece highlights Prokofiev's concern with rhythm and beat stress. The piece is constructed round two very simple motifs: *x* and *y*, *x* being the descending scale-like figuration that first appears in the treble clef and *y* the ostensibly simple four crotchet accompaniment. More than a simple descending pattern, *x* is suggestive of the fall of gravity and the rhythmic patterning that

Prokofiev has chosen for this motif is suggestive. By writing it in the unusual time signature of 18/16, the composer draws immediate attention to the rhythmic ambiguity of this motif. Written in groups of three semiquavers, the motif is actually made up of 10 semiquavers, an irregular grouping which results in each bar carrying an ‘extra’ semiquaver beat that cannot be neatly fitted into the groupings in threes. The melodic line descends from B to A # then ascends to B, the first semiquaver of the next rhythmic set.

**Moderato**

A sense of incompletion causes both performer and listener to expect a resolution of this descending line. This occurs on the high E on the second semiquaver of the second set of semiquavers. The circularity of movement created by this motivic gesture is embedded in the pianist’s physical movement but also perceived by the listener as an ongoing circular idea. This motif, repeated throughout the piece, has the character of a subtle **ostinato**. It creates an ongoing sense of movement in the piece right from the outset, movement that may be belied by the *Moderato* indication at the start of the étude but which provides a rhythmic pace to the piece.

In comparison to the previous étude, this piece is tightly structured around the two main gestures *x* and *y* played simultaneously. The continuous descending scale pattern drives the piece forward. Here too, Prokofiev uses the ostinato concept to provide rhythmic impetus but also to function as a structural buttress for the étude, so that it is entirely constructed around this figuration. Around the two main motivic gestures, are clustered a number of smaller motifs like the embedded dotted motif first heard in bar 9. This **chromatic motif** provides an added layer to the texture and heralds the beginning of the more developmental episode at bar 23. This section which is not so much developmental as it is an exploration of various textures and timbres that have already been introduced in the piece, lasts until the reprise of the

open figuration at bar 45, clearly signalled by a return to the soft and light textures of the beginning.

The start of the exploratory section is indicated by the *f poco agitato* performance direction. As suggested earlier, Prokofiev often makes subtle changes to texture to build up intensity and also to indicate the beginning of a ‘developmental’ process. Once again, the piece’s development occurs sequentially through repetition: this is a compositional strategy particularly favoured by Prokofiev. From bar 23 onwards, the speed of the piece is increased and motif y is broken up into ascending quavers. Motif x remains almost unchanged except for the doubling of the first note of each descending pattern into a third thus giving that first note greater physical weight. The slight alteration to y provides momentum to the section but also works in contrary motion to the descending motif x. Motif x acquires a rambling and virtuosic character in this episode: again this is emphasised by the motif being played in the piano’s **higher registers**, thus making it sound more dreamy and reminiscent of Romantic piano textures. This happens in bars 26 and 30. Because these higher registers are used very sparingly in this étude, they only occur on two occasions, their effect is more intense. In keeping with the sequential development of the piece, the texture becomes thicker as the dynamics rise.

From bar 37 onwards there is recurring use of the **white note triad** coupled with accents and tension markings on the first and second beats of the bars. This use of forceful accents to indicate the approach of the climax is a Prokofievan technique of dramatic tension and one that he also applied to his playing. It is particularly effective here where it follows a process of gradation between bars 37 and 44. Bars 37 and 38 are played loudly and forceful accents occur on the first and second beat triads. In contrast, bars 39 and 40 are played quietly and tension is applied only on the first triad of each bar. Finally, at the tensest moment of the étude, in bars 41 and 42, which are played loudly, the accents occur on three triads in the bar as follows:

*ff*

*rit.*

Bars 43 and 44 are a winding down of this forceful physical tension in preparation for the reprise at bar 45.

The reprise marked *dolce* undergoes subtle changes which sustain the momentum that has been achieved in the previous exploratory section. The second

and fourth beats of the previous four crotchet bass figurations are now quavers. This gives the bass line a sense of lengthening and stretching that was not present in the earlier appearance of this motif. Harmonically, the motif *y* is still built around the same triads: the newly acquired fluidity makes it sound less rigid and creates the illusion of speed. Motif *x* also undergoes slight alteration in the reprise as the top note of every descending scale is now a crushed note. This emphasizes the actual descent of the line, highlighting the descending direction of the pianist's hand and again drawing our attention to the visual image created by the performer.

### No. 3

Of the four études, this is the one with the deepest connections to the Romantic virtuoso tradition, and can be justifiably seen as Prokofiev's take on the romantic études: the big sonorities, the introspective moments, flashes of technical virtuosity, the build-up of speed: all are qualities to be found in the Romantic étude. In making references to the Romantic piano virtuoso tradition, albeit perhaps unconsciously, Prokofiev is locating his own works within the very tradition he is trying to subvert.

Structurally, and like the other études of this set, the work is built on the principle of contrast, i.e. through the juxtaposition of motifs of highly differing character: an opening lyrical one – *x*, a light **chromatic motif** in thirds – *y* first heard in bar 14. Its overall structure is determined by a sequence of *crescendo* moments, which build up tension, release it and then rebuild that tension again. As in the previous piece, this étude has two disparate moods: the opening *Andante semplice* and *Presto*. For an effective performance, the piece depends on the careful execution of the different speeds as they occur throughout the piece. Prokofiev provides several performance directions: *rubato*, *accelerando assai al presto*, *prestissimo*, *Moderato tranquillo*, *crescendo e accelerando*. This étude is in fact the only one of the four that has such detailed directions and it is no coincidence that almost all of Prokofiev's directions relate to the pacing of the piece. If this étude is to come across as a dramatic crescendo, then changes in pacing are crucial. The étude is a good example of the way that Prokofiev builds the theatrical mode into his writing. Careful rhythmic pacing is necessary in order to prevent the piece merely sounding like technical bravura but more like an unfolding of various gestures in musical time.

Prokofiev plays with sonorities in a Chopinesque way. This is most evident in bars 10 - 13 and 34 - 37, where an **arpeggio** pattern, starting from the depths of the bass register, elaborates on a C minor chord. The effect of this gesture is almost to lull us into a false sense of security – it has a clear dramatic purpose in that it lays a harmonic platform from which the chromatic motif *y* can take off. The C minor sonority is then destabilized by the tongue-in-cheek motif which is to be played lightly and slowly gathers in momentum. Against this motif, the bass has a gradually ascending **chordal · accompaniment** that is also ascending in **chromatic steps**, heightening the dramatic tension of the piece, melodically. By the reprise of *x*, at bar 30, this motif has established its importance as a rhythmic, melodic and dynamic driver of the étude and has already sketched the outline of the étude's structure.

Following the reprise, motif *y* is developed as before, with a gradual increase of dynamics and speed but always played with a light touch. The development section coincides with an increase in the layering of texture and with the appearance of *x* as an embedded motif. Prokofiev's development of the two motifs starts in bar 46, at which point the study is written out on three staves. This highlights the importance of the motif and indicates that it needs to be voiced accordingly: this **embedded motif** can only be played by the thumb and index finger of the right hand, while the other three fingers play motif *x* at a *Presto* pace. Prokofiev's technique of layering textures, and more significantly of layering registers, means that both hands are stretched to their limits in order to cover as much of the piano range as possible.

Choice of register and abrupt changes of it are key features of Prokofiev's compositional style and of his virtuosic mode. At bar 54, we see an abrupt shift of both hands to a lower register to be played softly. Following the loud chord played on the first beat of that bar, Prokofiev surprises both performer and listener with this sudden shift in dynamic range. And almost in complete contradiction with the few bars that preceded this moment, the textures here are very dense and the hands are now playing much closer together. This closeness of the hands, as they move up and down the piano in rhythmic unison, lasts for twenty bars.

Between bar 54 and 89 there is a type of textural development section. An expanded version of the **chromatic motif *y*** occurs in the top line of bar 54. This section outlines the importance of the chromatic idea in Prokofiev's musical textures. Here it appears in all the layers of this four part writing. The motif runs through the entire étude gradually gaining in intensity and defining itself as an essentially pianistic

gesture. It consists of a **repeated accented note** followed by the leap of a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> after which it bursts into motif y. This motif acquires a hugely important role in the concluding part of the étude and first makes its appearance in bar 54, after which it has great potential for climactic development. The chromatic motif is linked with another specifically Prokofievan idea, the repeated note, to create a tense gesture. It is used here as a way of continuing the momentum that now has to be built up again. This repeated note idea is used in the *Presto* section starting at bar 100 on a quiet dynamic note.

As far as theatrical gestures go, the *Moderato tranquillo* section between bars 89 and 99 provides another distinctive Prokofievan moment. This section, contrasting hugely with the previous frenzied section, appears almost out of nowhere and provides a dramatic change in texture. It is the reappearance of motif x, accompanied by a **trill like figure** in the lowest registers of the piano. At bar 97, the trill-like bass transforms into a taxing **passage in thirds**, another of Prokofiev the pianist's greatest technical strengths. This is now played three octaves above the trill gesture, necessitating an extremely fast move on the part of the pianist, as this whole section is to be played in one *crescendo* gesture.



*Four Études Op.2 No.3, bar 97*

This passage in thirds for the left hand and sustained chords for the right hand only lasts for two bars before diminishing, as slowly and quietly as it appeared, into the recapitulation of the main ideas of the étude.

Bar 100 until the end of the piece functions as a recapitulation. Here Prokofiev's main concern is to once again build the unrelenting tension that will provide enough momentum to get the performer through to the end of the piece. In this concluding section of the étude marked *Presto*, Prokofiev draws upon his main stock of techniques. The **repeated note** motif is extended over a very quiet six bars before layering itself against motif y and its associated textures.



*Four Études Op.2 No.3, bars 100-105*

Ultimately, the repeated note motif is sounded all the way to the end, gaining in dynamic intensity and frequency of appearance in different registers. As the texture of the recapitulation is thickened once again, the speed is gradually increased, as is the sound level. Furthermore, as is usual at climactic moments, the **uppermost registers** of the piano are used for a sparkling and intense effect. This happens between bars 139 – 140.

#### No. 4

The last étude is the most dramatic and theatrical of the set and shares many of its distinctive qualities with *Diabolical Suggestion* and the later *Sarcasms*. It belongs to a mode of Prokofiev's writing for the piano that is best called the 'theatrical'.

The piece is built on three main motifs, *x*, *y* and *z*, and a variation of that last motif, *z'*. The first motif, constructed on one of Prokofiev's favourite pianistic gestures – the **octave** – is based on the first three notes of the key of C minor, ostensibly the home key of this étude. These **broken octaves** provide the *moto perpetuo* structure for the whole piece. The octave as such is heard in each bar of the piece, although the *moto perpetuo* itself is disrupted between bars 32 - 35, 40 - 43, 76 - 79. In some instances, the *moto perpetuo* is not heard in the bass, but moves to the treble and is played by the right hand. This allows the pianist some relief from the strain of the ostinato movement, while also being a registral variation on the same. With motif *x*, Prokofiev has again given the **ostinato** figure a dual role – on the one hand it functions as an ostinato pure and simple, providing the rhythmic impetus of the piece, and used as a **presentational** figure in the first three bars of the piece, on

the other hand it is also a melodic motif, a grating reminder of the C minor key. The second motif, y, is short, accented and incisive and falls on the last semiquaver of the bar. The main role of this motif is to ensure rhythmic drive and impetus.

*Four Études Op.2 No.4, bars 3-7*

Motif z is simply an octave followed by a falling **tritone** played with the hands crossed over. This motif is as much a physical motif as it is melodic one. While the use of the tritone suggests the theatrical and diabolical nature of this étude, the fact that the motif needs to be played with the hands crossing over indicates that the physical quality of this gesture is just as crucial to the performance. This gesture is worked through the instrument's different registers.

Structurally, this piece is held together by different ideas that are explored sequentially. It is built of dramatic crescendos that reduce their tension before building up to a new climactic moment. This is effectively achieved through the sequential exploration of ideas but also through the interplay of various motifs that maintain the listener's interest. The *moto perpetuo*, motif x holds the piece together. The rhythmic and incisive motif y provides an added rhythmic impetus layered on top of the ostinato. In bar 16, Prokofiev makes use of the **major third** to destabilize the tonality of the piece. While the *moto perpetuo* suggests the key of C minor, these sets of staccato and forceful thirds reinforce the sound of the major third, create a shift in tonality, and thus inject a tonal ambiguity that will characterize the whole piece. Motif z plays upon two significant intervals: the **octave** and the falling **tritone**. This motif

appears at bars 28, 36, 72, 80. The motif is spread across both hands, with the hands needing to cross over in order to play the complete motif while the other hand continues to play the *moto perpetuo* in octaves.

Rhythmically, the main emphasis lies on the strong beats of the bar. Clear-cut accents combined with the *Presto energico* direction at the start of the piece, endow the etude with a continuous rhythmic burst of energy that tests the performer's stamina. The only disruption to the *moto perpetuo* movement occurs in bars 28 – 43 and 68 – 87. In these sections, the broken octave ostinato pattern in the bass is exchanged for the hand-crossing motif z. But the accompaniment to this motif is still the repeated octave on B natural in the first instance, and A natural in the second.



*Four Études Op.2 No.4, bars 28-31*

Motif z', the **repeated note** motif, is related to z in that they are both highlighting the octave, although z' is a more insistent motif. This embedded repeated note idea is stated clearly and stridently in bars 68 – 72, where the repeated note is now in a low register and against which Prokofiev places his characteristic **finger pattern** flourishes.

*Four Études Op.2 No.4, bars 68-72*

The function of the repeated note motif is to reiterate and expand a musical moment in such a way that it seems almost as though time has stopped or been slowed down, and all we can hear is this one definite image sustained over quite a few bars. This occurs first with motif z, for example in bars 28 – 31, 36 – 39, 68 – 75, 80 – 83. At these points, we are engaged by the sonorities we hear and against these octave sonorities Prokofiev either places the staccato, crossing-hands octave and tritone motif or the *sforzando* finger patterns. This last juxtaposition of favourite Prokofiev gestures only happens once in this piece and could justifiably be called the climactic moment of this étude.

The *Études* provide a clear snapshot of Prokofiev the pianist's technical strengths as well as musical concerns. The playing of thirds and octaves is particularly tested in these pieces. There are also sections in sixths, as well as scalar patterns that sometimes require imaginative fingering. Naturally, the high speeds at which these études are mostly played indicate that as a pianist Prokofiev must have been particularly agile with very strong fingers. The drivers behind Prokofiev's technique are rhythm and physical stamina, a stamina which goes beyond mere fingerwork, while his concept of virtuosity takes into account the importance of the visual image created by the performer.

### ***Sarcasms Op. 17: the carnivalesque mode***

Of all the works belonging to this ‘elemental’ phase, the set of five *Sarcasms* bring to the forefront Prokofiev’s unique understanding of the carnivalesque and lead to a deeper understanding of what constitutes his humour. In the *Sarcasms* Prokofiev subverts the conventions of traditional pianistic virtuosity, elevating the physical and the technical to a virtuosic plane. Technique is no longer, as in the case of Liszt and Chopin, exclusively at the service of art; here technique and physical displays become an end in themselves. The *Sarcasms* are a study of the carnivalesque, the humourous and the grotesque, not least because they play up Prokofiev’s physical connection with the instrument. In no other works are the musical themes, motifs, ideas, physical gestures and rhythmic energy brought together in such a tumbling clash of colours,

energy, euphoria and personality. Nowhere else can we study Prokofiev's humour and carnival modes in such concise forms.<sup>11</sup>

## No.1

The best way of describing the construction of this piece is to view it as a series of pianistic gestures, which Prokofiev has used in his earlier pieces, but which are maturely strung together in a montage-like fashion to create a tightly knit series of interconnecting motifs. It is in a work such as this that my earlier suggestion, borrowed from Adorno, that "the composer wants to make music in the way that others narrate", comes into play. These motifs are linked by virtue of their origins, which in all cases are pianistic. Their integration into a series of interrelated motifs is suggestive of a musical narrative whereby meaning is derived from the underlying physicality at the basis of each gesture. Their meaning is derived from their local context but also from their more general integration into a piece that is indeed a theatrical *tour de force*.

Motif *x* is the opening descending interval of a tritone played accented and *fortissimo*. This motif functions both as an opening **presentational figure**, designed to grab the audience's attention and to plunge us into the carnival atmosphere that will ensue. Further, the tritone figure is used throughout the piece at moments where an **ostinato bass** is used.

The next motif, *y*, is a four crotchet accented idea that covers a little more than an octave. At first sight the notes appear quite random – C - A - D - B natural – but on closer look they can be juggled to form a cluster of **adjacent dissonant white keys** with just the one black key to outline a typically Prokofievan hand cluster position. This same hand position makes another appearance as a finger pattern in Sonata No. 4, third movement, bars 1 – 2 and 176 – 177 where the four finger scalar pattern repeats the same contours spread over both the hands. In this case, this gesture is the first theme of the piece. Crucially, Prokofiev notes that this motif as it occurs in the *Sarcasm*, is to be played *ironico*.<sup>12</sup> Such performance indications continue to suggest

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<sup>11</sup> For a while, Prokofiev considered orchestrating the *Sarcasms* but nothing came of that idea (see *Diaries*, Vol.1: 613 and 750), which suggests that although he was writing for the piano, he was not limited by the instrument's sound and was able to visualize his piano works through the soundscape of an orchestra.

<sup>12</sup> Prokofiev's use of the ironic mode is far more straightforward than that of Shostakovich. The former uses it as a technique of musical debunking; for the latter irony was, in the words of Richard Taruskin in Sheinberg's work "a detached and melancholy world view". ("When Serious Music Mattered" in A

a narrative is in play. This gesture makes its appearance in various registers throughout the piece (bar 13 – 14, 39 – 40, 89 – 90, 111 – 114) and consistently evokes the image of a tense musical chuckle. This motif endows the piece with a Mephistophelean sense of humour and impresses upon us the underlying carnival atmosphere that brings this piece to life.

Motif *z* has its origins way back in the first piano pieces that Prokofiev ever composed. The **trill figure**, written as a sextuplet, is often used in association with the supernatural or to suggest a frightening or surreal atmosphere. Within this context, and following hard on the forceful and terrifying motif *x*, this trill figure is used to maintain the narrative atmosphere of the surreal and the grotesque especially as it always lands on a note that forms part of an ascending **chromatic scale**. This gesture is a startling one that creates a sense of unrest throughout the piece, and once it is played within the context of motif *x*, it acquires a deeper significance.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 1, bars 1-10

The use of **ostinato bass** in this piece is intriguing. It is made of two separate figures that alternate between themselves but that together constitute an ostinato bass. Motif *a* is the interval of the **falling tritone**. This is used in the opening 4 bars and from bar 104 until the end. Motif *b* is that of the **repeated chord**, where it is not so much the note pitches that make up the chord that matter, but the role of the chord itself. This repeated chord, whose function it is to provide background rhythm in the

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*Shostakovich Casebook* ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 371. Esti Sheinberg has called this kind of irony “existential irony.” *Irony, satire, parody, and the grotesque in the music of Shostakovich: a theory of musical incongruities* (Aldershot England: Ashgate, 2000), 319.

manner of an ostinato pattern can be found throughout the whole piece; bars 5 – 12, 19 – 22 where it occurs as a repeated note and again between 53 – 56. Variations on this repeated note chord idea are the **reiterated dissonant seconds** and **major thirds**. These occur in bars 57 – 70 and 92 – 94. These two different figures function as ostinato bass and hold the piece together so that the momentum of this *Sarcasm* never relents.

There are no openly virtuosic moments in this piece but the pianistic gestures remain at the forefront: 7, 15, 41, 49 where the descending **arpeggiated pattern** is reminiscent of Motif *b*. In this guise however, it appears more as an impish reference, a debunking as it were, of the tense overtones of that motif. Thus, this arpeggiated figure takes us right into the carnivalesque atmosphere of the piece where ideas are not what they seem, and where things are distorted and viewed through different prisms. Other virtuosic occur between bar 67 and 72, and more obviously in the passage marked *con gran effetto* starting at bar 86 and going all the way through to the end of the piece, thus culminating in a grandiose and final chordal gesture.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 1, bars 81-90

The *gran effetto* passage signals the beginning of the conclusion of this composition. It is really a recapitulation of the motifs that we have already heard but they are now played with greater intensity and with more urgency. Played closer together, they sound almost as though they were falling upon each other in their haste to be heard and this heightens the effect of the carnivalesque in the piece. The juxtaposition of completely **opposite registers** between 102 – 104, and the ensuing creation of emptiness in between the two lines in either hand, creates an ironic texture.

## No. 2

The second piece in this collection brings to the forefront the physical nature of piano playing. It is a piece that calls for flexibility on the part of the performer reminiscent of the physical activity of the *saltimbanque* and thus in keeping with the carnival like atmosphere of these pieces as a set. The piece demonstrates the tension between the physical and virtuosic aspects of piano playing. Pianistic figurations such as *a* and *b* come across as virtuosic asides. They are incidental to other physical gestures, such as hands crossing over, that constitute the fabric of this piece. Simple in its conception, this piece is a pianistic elaboration of a short motif *x* that runs throughout the entire piece.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 2, bars 1-8

This is Prokofiev at his most minimalist. *Sarcasm* No. 2 provides an excellent illustration of the composer's use of motivic development in the works belonging to the 'elemental' phase. One way that Prokofiev develops, or rather, explores the theme is through the manipulation of **register**. This manipulation distorts the main motif of the piece, and gives it an impish character. Between bars 29 – 35 for example the motif is stretched across three octaves.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 2, bars 29-35

This sprawling use of registers creates an aural sense of instability and displacement. The motif, which is in different registers, emphasises the importance of the physical aspect of piano playing. The instruction to play the third note of the motif by the left hand crossing over when it could just as easily have been played by the right hand, has a rhythmic role to play too. The note is the highest pitch of the motif and will stand out the most. Prokofiev plays up this quality to make the motif grotesque: the third note now carries an accent and is also pitched an octave above the rest of the theme. Sometimes Prokofiev elongates his motif, as is the case in bars 21-25 where the motif is insistently played over an ostinato bass at a gradually increasing speed.

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 2, bars 21-25

Although this piece is built on only one motif, the development of that motif brings back a familiar Prokofiev gesture – the **repeated note**. At bars 29 – 36 for example, the repeated note is E. Since the right hand chords play an E flat, the dissonance is particularly harsh, and together with the stretching of the motif, plays upon our feeling of displacement.

Prokofiev's many performance directions are of particular interest. As was the case in *Étude* No 3, the directions are mostly to do with the pacing of the work and with its suggested narrative rather than with characterization, as with motif *b* in the first *Sarcasm*. The pianistic figurations *a* and *b* need to be played in time: Prokofiev marks these *a tempo* (b.19), *feroce* (b.20 and b.46) and *molto precipitato* (b.50). Within a traditional virtuoso pianist approach, such passages are usually left to the imagination of the performer, and more often than not, variations to the tempo of such passages, such as *rubato* and/or *accelerando*, are a matter of course. Here Prokofiev places this musical moment in direct opposition with its Romantic predecessors. Although these passages belong to an established virtuosic tradition that requires finger agility, Prokofiev contests their essentially virtuosic nature by denying the performer any flexibility in tempo and thus any opportunity for a personal interpretation. They are also to be played with a dry hard touch, *secco e senza pedale*. Further, Prokofiev presents these virtuosic and pianistic moments as musical asides – they have no harmonic significance and as such are musically expendable. In terms of their gestural nature however, they are essential to Prokofiev's writing for piano because they allow him to play with the physical nature of piano playing. They are a source of activity and physical movement on the instrument, sometimes forcing the pianist's hands through various acrobatic positions.

The piece shows Prokofiev at his most physical and athletic. Right from the outset, in motif *x*, the performer needs to cross the left hand over the right hand – it is a physical gesture built into this main motif and will thus happen every time that motif is heard. This keeps the performer on his toes, but also refers back to Prokofiev's own performing personality, one which would revel in such physical efforts at the piano while at the same time debunked those very efforts through the simple motif chosen as his theme. In this *Sarcasm* Prokofiev is directly mocking the conventional musical establishment of piano playing. So much physical effort and movement is written into the piece which could easily be played without the hands crossing over. This writing in of such 'unnecessary' physical movement must have irked members of the St Petersburg Conservatory like Glazunov, but delighted the modernists. The piece thus comes across as a parody of virtuosic playing. Its carnivalesque overtone is unmistakeable.

## No. 3

The third *Sarcasm* of the set explores a darker imagery. Economical in its use of materials, it is almost entirely concerned with the structural concept of stringing together a number of specifically Prokofievan effects. The performance directions go beyond mere tempo and pacing instructions focussing in particular on the character that is ascribed to specific themes and even specific moments throughout the piece.

The piece sets off at a hectic pace as it is marked *Allegro precipitato*. As early as bar 3, the entrance of motif *x* is marked as *serioso*, which indicates that the composer is just as concerned with the musical character of the piece as he is with its pacing. The building blocks of the piece are an **ostinato** line, *a* and **chromatic motif x**.

**Allegro Precipitato**  
ostinato a

*Sarcasm* Op.17 No.2, bars 1-10

The ostinato line is the driving force behind this piece. Motif *x* is written below this line, and the low register of this piece gives it a menacing and fearsome tone. The independence of the two lines is demonstrated by their different key signatures.<sup>13</sup> This two-tiered combination is split into six-bar sections. Such sectional division allows for a gradual and systematic heightening of intensity. Each six bar phrase starts with

<sup>13</sup> The linear quality of Prokofiev's writing and the complete independence of the hands may perhaps be an example of the 'unpianistic' quality of the music, or at least, it is one of the technical challenging the Prokofiev repertoire poses the pianist.

motif y (bar 7), which is best described as a dramatic and theatrical **appoggiatura** gesture. The *fortissimo* gesture, which outlines an ascending **perfect 5<sup>th</sup>** in the bass (left hand) and a descending **gesture** in the upper line (right hand) has no harmonic or even rhythmic value. Its sole purpose to create a brash sound, a disruption of the momentum and simultaneously, as it heralds the beginning of each six bar section, it continues to drive the whole piece forward.

As in other pieces, Prokofiev resorts to a heightening and layering of pitches to create intensity. In bars 3 – 10, motif x is a single line played in the **low registers** of the piano. In the answering phrases, motif y appears between bars 10 – 14, the lower melody is played in sixths (bars 11-13), and then in thirds (bars 14-16) before returning to its original detached form, motif x, in bar 17.

The climactic moment is diffused in a sobbing, *singhizzando* passage. This section is entirely based on pianistic gestures, clearly marked with *crescendo* and *decrescendo* marks and within which is embedded a four note descending pattern which function as subsidiary thematic material.

This climatic display of pianism is followed by a quieter section, marked *Un poco largamente* (bar 37), written in four voices. It is the only lyrical moment of the piece and as a break in the tension of this *Sarcasm*, it is short-lived. The top line plays a melody featuring the leap of a fifth followed by a **descending scalar pattern** which gradually acquires greater emotional intensity. The range of the melody is limited and is played on the piano's middle registers. The accompaniment in the bass is made up of a **chromatic line** written in minims, and a **repetitive broken chord** type accompaniment above this. The conclusion of the piece, from bar 57 onwards forcefully establishes some sense of tonality by means of the 'false' tonic.<sup>14</sup>

#### No. 4

The fourth pieces in this collection is divided into two sections of contrasting character, starting with a *smanioso* section that explores the **higher registers** of the piano. Until this point, Prokofiev has used these higher registers at very specific instances: to suggest virtuosity and to create registral contrast particularly at climactic points. Here however, Prokofiev turns to the high registers of the piano to create an

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<sup>14</sup> Please see the earlier discussion of the ending, 95-96.

impish, almost devilish texture and it is this quality of the upper registers that Prokofiev draws upon in his operas.<sup>15</sup> The overall effect is bright and light: the gestures in the right hand are pianistic and typical of Prokofiev's writing.

The piece starts at a high registral point on the piano, a regular feature of the composer's writing of the period. The pieces belonging to the theatrical vein tend to start either above or below the piano's middle register: crucially, they do not start within the pianist's comfort zone. Similarly, in the first movement of the fifth piano sonata, the accompaniment is played by the left hand over the right hand, an unnecessary and unbalancing position for the pianist. This ensures that the performer must physically prepare for the displacing registral opening, and oftentimes, this is accompanied by quick crossing-over hand movement. With *Sarcasm* No. 4, Prokofiev turns to explore the higher registers of the piano, in the process creating a texture that suggests a world of fantasy and recalls the atmosphere of the fantastical that Prokofiev uses in the opera *Love for Three Oranges*.

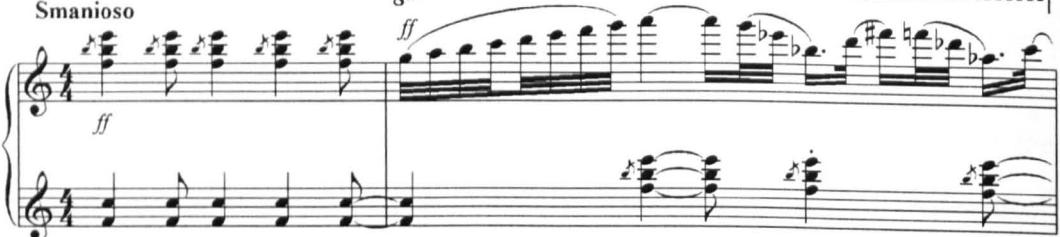
The first bar, with its repeated emphasis on the interval of the open fifth and crushed note effect has a presentational function. It is a brief but peremptory call to attention. This section is made up of two gestures *x* and *y*, *x* (bar 2) being an almost purely pianistic flourish and more of a physical gesture than a melodic one; *y* (bar 9) reinforces the impish nature of the section as this little detached motif, plays on an ever increasing interval gap and in doing so, heightens our sense of expectation for what is to follow.

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<sup>15</sup> The supernatural imagery in Prokofiev's operas will be discussed in the last chapter.

**Smanioso**

motif x

8<sup>me</sup> 

8<sup>me</sup> 

8<sup>me</sup> 

**Piu Mosso**

motif y



*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 4, bars 1-10

The contrasting *Poco più sostenuto* section that follows evokes a darker and more introspective atmosphere. Much thicker in texture, it is based on the white note triad over which is superimposed a **long and sustained melodic line** (bar 16). Through its **repetitive chords** and elongated melody, this passage creates a sense of time standing still – this use of repetitive chords to sustain and pace a dramatic moment would serve Prokofiev well in his writing for the stage. It creates a sense of expectation in the listener where we are waiting for the dramatic moment we are sure will ensue; it also positions this section within what Berman has called the genre of the ‘*skazka*’.<sup>16</sup>

Prokofiev uses this ostinato chord pattern for dramatic reasons as well as textural ones. The score supplies very detailed directions about the dynamic grading of this ostinato pattern, on which the narrative qualities of this section rely. There are abrupt changes to a quiet sound, indicated by the *dim. subito* direction as well as a number of *crescendo* and *decrescendo* markings that Prokofiev uses to define the elongated melody.

The return of the magical texture of the beginning signals the end of the piece. Against the sustained chordal accompaniment of the same repeated minor triad, this time played almost entirely on black keys, the opening gesture *x* is recalled, played *ppp*. This quiet appearance of the opening gesture fits in with the surreal world the piece inhabits. It is prefaced by a gentle glissando and played *una corda*, while the piece dies away gradually, almost as though it were expiring.

## No. 5

Of all the set, this *Sarcasm* is the one with the strongest and most persuasive narrative qualities. Like most of the other pieces in the set, it is built using three main motifs, *x*, *y* and *z*. The narrative qualities of this piece are suggested by its clear division into three main sections with corresponding moods and by the careful pacing of the main motivic elements throughout the piece. For instance, while in the other pieces the main motifs are introduced early on in the piece, this time the main motifs are well spaced out and occur in clear-cut sections rather than being closely woven together, thus enhancing the work’s narrative qualities.

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<sup>16</sup> Boris Berman, *Prokofiev’s Piano Sonatas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 29-31.

This piece goes through several changes of mood, each of them clearly indicated in the score: the initial *Precipitissimo* gives way to a gentler section, *Meno mosso subito, con grande espressione*, followed by an *Andantino* section that goes all the way to the end. Significantly, Prokofiev has provided several other performance cues in the score and this lends the piece a greater narrative authority. Motif z (bars 25-26) for example is marked to be played *irresoluto* while motif y, when it returns in the *Andantino* section, is to be played *lamentevole* (bar 39). Further into the piece, when motif x is recalled, it is to be played *con duolo*. From these score indications which outline the character of the various motifs, it is clear that Prokofiev is suggesting the playing out of a musical narrative. The gestures that he uses in this piece are not new, but within this context they acquire narrative possibilities.

Motif x is the basis of the entire opening section which lasts twenty bars. It consists of a *ff* repeated and accented chordal figure in the right hand and accompanying accented chords in the bass clef. Within this accompaniment is embedded a **chromatic four note motif a** (A flat, A natural, B flat, B natural, bars 1-4).<sup>17</sup> From the opening chord till bar 16, each chord in this passage has been marked with an accent and the embedded chromatic figure is heard insistently. The time signature in this opening section alternates at almost every bar shifting between 2/4 and 3/8. As it is sustained over 16 bars, this repeated chord motif works as a larger **presentational gesture**. Not only does it have the attention-seeking qualities that the composer was constantly searching for, but it is also a gesture that brings out the percussive nature of Prokofiev's compositional and possibly playing, style.

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<sup>17</sup> Subsidiary motif.

Precipitosissimo

*Sarcasms* Op. 17 No. 5, bars 1-16

This introductory passage leads gradually into the *Meno mosso* four-bar episode built on motif y: an accented 5 note descending quaver pattern built around black keys, played *sf* in the bass clef. This short episode functions as a link between the two main sections of this *Sarcasm*. A variation of motif y will also be used in the *Andantino* section as part of the *lamentevole* gesture in bar 39.<sup>18</sup>

The *Andantino* section has a light feel to it, especially in comparison to the heavier opening **presentational** section. The off-beat staccato **chromatic motif z** tip-toes gently into the piece, functioning as a character within its own right. Prokofiev notes that it is to be played *irresoluto, pp* and *una corda*. The combination of all these suggests a character entering Prokofiev's musical stage as quietly as possible, trying very hard not to be noticed. The left hand takes up the motif z gently building it into an **ostinato pattern**, over which, at bar 39, the right hand enters with a **descending melodic fragment**, y. This 3 bar melodic fragment is developed between bars 50 and 58 after which motif x is recalled.

From bar 59 until the end, the main motivic material is drawn from motif x through the related motifs of  $x^1$  and  $x^2$ . The first recollection,  $x^1$ (bar 59), is marked *con duolo* and *pp* and is supported by a repeated chordal accompaniment which again

<sup>18</sup> This motif bears remarkable resemblances to other motifs appearing in Prokofiev's *Visions Fugitives*, notably Nos. 2 and 5.

functions as an ostinato. Below the middle layer provided by the ostinato lies the chromatic four note motif *a* (A flat, A natural, B flat, B natural) which has moved from the middle textures of its first appearance (bars 1 – 16) to the lowest layer of the texture here. Another inner chromatic motif in minims *b*, runs through this section (from bars 59 – 73). Whilst adding another layer to the texture and thus creating a thick though quiet sound, the sustained minims imbue the passage with a sense of stasis and of slow-moving time.

Motif *x*<sup>2</sup> (bar 74) is a variation of the ostinato chords that first accompanied the chordal gesture *x*. The semiquaver pianissimo chords are accompanied by demisemiquaver thirds played in the piano's lowest registers. The effect is still that of an ostinato as this broken chord gesture will be heard all the way until bar 90, where motif *a* reappears, marked *lugubre*, followed by a chromatic scale – D flat, C, B, B flat, A in minims, often tied over bar lines. This ending presents us with Prokofiev's technique of elongation as a narrative technique. By stretching out motif *a* and almost distorting it in the process, Prokofiev signals the end of the narrative. The repetition of the chromatic musical idea leads to the slow and quiet expiration of this last *Sarcasm*, in what can only be seen as an ironic comment on the whole cycle.

### Case study of *Diabolical Suggestion*: the site of theatrical performance

In his first public appearances, Prokofiev used *Diabolical Suggestion* as his signature piece. He included it in several of his recital programmes, playing it as a stand-alone piece, without the other three pieces that make up Op. 4 and he also recorded it for the Aeolian Duo-Art reproducing piano company. It continued to form part of his recital programme long after his position as a piano virtuoso was established: he included it in a recital he gave in Budapest with Robert Soetens in 1936.<sup>19</sup> *Diabolical Suggestion* demonstrates the duality of Prokofiev's ability and draws his separate roles as pianist and composer together. It will be discussed here as a stand-alone work, separate from Op. 4 with a view to highlighting how Prokofiev used specific gestures to create a theatrical piece charged with momentum and fantastic imagery.

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<sup>19</sup> See David Nice, *Prokofiev: from Russia to the West 1891 – 1935* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 367–370 for a list of Prokofiev's recordings and samples of his recital programmes.

The building blocks of *Diabolical Suggestion* are two physical gestures, referred to during this discussion as *x* and *y*. Gesture *x* is a repeated, detached crotchet idea against which the **tritone** interval is held. This opening motif makes immediate impact.

**Prestissimo fantastico**

Op. 4 No. 4 *Diabolical Suggestion*, bars 1-5

The *Prestissimo fantastico* indication plunges us into a surreal atmosphere from the outset and the pianist commences playing with hands crossed over: a gesture that refers back to Prokofiev's days as a performer by virtue of its exhibitionism. Physically, the hands play right on top of each other, so that geographically the pianist occupies a very small space on the piano.

Gesture *y* is a **dramatic tremolo** played *ff* which involves a very quick changeover of hand positions: it has a melodramatic and menacing effect, especially as it follows the ominous previous gesture *x*.

Op. 4 No. 4 *Diabolical Suggestion*, bars 6-11

The **tremolo** emphasises the semitone relationship, an important one in Prokofiev's musical language. Here it is played up to maximum dramatic effect. These two main gestures are expanded on in the piece's opening but when *x* and *y* are repeated in bars

13 – 20 and 20 – 25 respectively, the intensity is heightened by shortening the note values, changing the harmonies more frequently and by moving everything to a higher register, which normally equates with the beginning of a musical frenzy, thus creating a dramatic crescendo. The first repetition of *x* moves higher up in pitch, and becomes more compact as shorter note values are used. The accompanying tritone intervals alternate more frequently, thus creating a subtle sense of unrest and the promise of further movement to follow.

Gesture *z* is a combination of motifs that we have already heard, namely the **chromatic figuration** *x*, which is now conflated with the chordal ostinato pattern *a*; resulting in gesture *z*, below.



Op. 4 No. 4 *Diabolical Suggestion*, bars 27-30

The **ostinato** in this piece holds shorter sections of the piece together. Economical and effective, ostinato patterns feature all throughout the work; it is an important constituent of Prokofiev's dramatic register. The main chromatic motif *x* is at all times accompanied by an ostinato pattern *a*, which is just a triad in either root position or first inversion. This particular triadic ostinato pattern becomes almost a component of *x* although harmonically, it is not related to it. In terms of texture however, this ostinato pattern endows *x* with a weight that it did not have when it first appeared. The combined ideas make up gesture *z* which also adopts the physical crossing over of hands. From bar 29 onwards the patterns are inverted: the right hand now plays the chromatic motif, and the left hand plays the repeated chord patterns. Gesture *z* is then elaborated on right until the last 2 bars, where there is an eerie return to the opening chromatic motif. In fact, from the moment of its first appearance in bar 27, the same musical motif is played 13 times until in bar 49 physical frenzy is unleashed and the motif is developed in a virtuosic **sequence of thirds**. Throughout those 13 repetitions of the motif, it goes through various subtle changes.

The development of the chromatic motif from bar 27 onwards is intriguingly related to pitch, shifts in rhythm and to the piano's geography. Firstly, the chromatic motif is played in different pitch ranges, in a type of call and response pattern. The central register of the piano, around middle C, is used for providing rhythmic impetus through the repeated triads while in the lowest register the semitone shift is played out in octaves, always occurring on the same beats of the bar. The culmination of the repeated chromatic motif *x* occurs in bar 52 with a repeated chord that is extended over four bars, a sustained aural image designed to suggest the freezing of time. While this chord is extended, the bass repeats a pattern of accented open fifths in three different registers. Again, pitch is used to enhance the intensity of a climactic musical moment. Further use of ostinato is related to the heightening of tension which is most clearly observed in bars 46 – 55. In this passage, *x* is repeated in thirds, and against the same ostinato pattern in the bass culminating at bar 52 on a *fff* chord. Both hands thus play in counterpoint with each other. Ostinato becomes an integral part of the structure because from bar 56 onwards, with the repetition of *x* in minor 9ths in the bass, the continuously heightening intensity of the piece is almost entirely dependent on the ostinato effect.

Following this episode, at bar 56, motif *x* is played in accented crotchets, in minor 9<sup>th</sup> intervals in the bass. This is a transposed motif of the first appearance of *x* in bars 1 – 5. Against this, Prokofiev places a repetitive diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord, played over 2 bars. This then breaks into another clear pianistic flourish - an arpeggiation of the chord – before moving on to the next chord which then undergoes a similar treatment of repetition and arpeggiation.

At bar 67, this arpeggiation feature takes off, played across 4 octaves. Within the space of a bar, the music has covered a huge span of the piano, at high speed and in an ever increasing crescendo. Meanwhile the bass is playing an ostinato figure in the piano's lowest register: the distance between the ostinato idea and the arpeggiation figure in the right hand is at its most extreme, as the pianist must play at opposite ends of the piano. Physically, it is a grandiose gesture of control over the instrument, it is also visually impressive. As a way of marking the beginning of the last climax for the piece, at bar 70, the main theme is played in triads, completely accented and an octave higher than written. Prokofiev uses high registers as a way of signaling a hysterical or climactic moment in the piece.

Neither does the climactic moment stop here. Prokofiev now needs to find a means of sustaining the momentum he has built up and keep it going for a further 51 bars. From this moment however, the main theme of the piece does not undergo any significant changes, rather, the passage starts from scratch, trying to rebuild a momentum that has paradoxically just climaxed. Prokofiev makes use of highly contrasted dynamics to create dramatic and menacing moments in the piece, to sustain the piece's momentum and to save the performer's energy. He also utilizes *glissandos*: there are two four octave glissandos in this piece, and their function is to herald the last 16 bars, i.e. the dénouement of the piece.

Structurally, the piece is built on one basic musical pattern: the **chromatic motif**, which is expanded, repeated and distorted in different ways, but it holds the piece together. Prokofiev here relies on his virtuosic register to work out an elaboration of motif *x*. This is developed in a characteristic sequence of thirds that gradually rise in pitch.

Whenever there is a musical idea that needs developing, Prokofiev resorts to a vocabulary of virtuosic gestures. Examples of virtuosic moments in this piece can be seen in bars 67 – 69, 81 – 84, first beat, 94 – 109. The salient qualities of these episodes are their ‘pianism’ – a pianism that is directly related to Prokofiev’s playing strengths. The semiquaver grace note gesture used between bars 94 – 109 appears superfluous because it has no harmonic role and it does not affect motif *x* being played in the bass. It is merely a sound effect that adds yet another layer to the accumulating build-up of tension, in the process making the piece a little more difficult, and virtuosic to play.

Similarly, at bars 99 – 100, the arpeggiated elaboration creates an aural effect, as it spans over a large part of the piano’s range in a very short time. This is another aspect of Prokofiev’s virtuosity and is related to the need to exercise control over the instrument. At bars 105 – 110 first beat, the **chromatic motif** is embedded in a ferocious semiquaver run with accents falling on the motif’s notes. Again, very fast scale patterns are played on the piano’s higher registers culminating in the *glissandi*. Overall, this creates a dramatic effect on the listener and showcases the pianist’s virtuosity. It also has a structural significance as this brilliant passage leads into the concluding 16 bars of the piece, which die away gently to a recalling of *x*: this functions as a ‘phantom cadence’ on which the piece ends.

## *Toccata* Op. 11

Prokofiev's *Toccata* Op. 11 was completed in 1912, published by Jurgenson in 1913 and premiered by the composer himself four years later, in 1916. The *Toccata* may well have been composed in response to Prokofiev's intense practice of Schumann's work of the same name, which he was preparing under Winkler's supervision. Of the Schumann work, Prokofiev notes that it "demanded good technique and posed quite a number of challenging musical problems. The technique involved much that was *pleasurable for the fingers*, and gradually let me to compose my own toccata. Although with its chromaticism it did not rise to the level of Schumann's diatonism, it was consistently successful with the public."<sup>20</sup> The compositional impetus behind the *Toccata* is largely physical: Prokofiev was interested in working with patterns that were "pleasurable" in a tactile sense and that allowed him to think through his fingers. The composer's physical connection to the piano is paramount in this work.

Prokofiev appears to have composed the *Toccata* not just for his own performing alter ego, but also as a way of undertaking to present and solve various "challenging musical problems". For indeed, this work is a manifesto of Prokofiev's compositional style for piano at the time and is thus an appropriate composition with which to finish this chapter. It not only exemplifies Prokofiev's pure 'concentrated' writing for the piano, but also presents the ideal piano technique that Prokofiev himself may have aspired to. Arguably, this may be the one piece that Prokofiev composed for the piano but not necessarily for himself to premiere: this work was just as important for Prokofiev from a compositional point of view as it was from a pianistic and technical point of view. As it happened, Prokofiev started studying this piece in 1914, after he had graduated from the Conservatory with the first prize in piano performing. The composer notes in his *Diaries* that he only started practising this work as part of his repertoire for his London debut.<sup>21</sup> The *Toccata* would take his technical achievements to another level and prepare his pianistic technique for export to the West.

The *Toccata* is crafted in such a way that pushes the composer's distinctive traits to incredible technical and compositional heights. Asaf'ev praises its "elastic

<sup>20</sup> *Memoir*, 299 (my emphases). Prokofiev was playing Schumann's *Toccata* in February 1909.

<sup>21</sup> *Diaries*, Vol. 1: 664.

and well-defined rhythm” and its “well-proportioned and clear form”.<sup>22</sup> The work unabashedly proclaims its compositional strategies, such as repetition and variation, which he also used in his earlier works. Because of the very nature of the *Toccata*, and in view of the genre it pertains to, Prokofiev had no compositional complications: when composing the piano concerto he needed to pay attention to orchestration as well as larger issues of sound and architecture, but with this work the composer was in his element. He was concerned only with crafting an exposition of the composer’s ideal piano technique in the best possible “Prokofievan” compositional style. In this work, the composer was chiefly concerned with the physical activity of piano playing, with the technique involved in the practice of playing and with choreographing different hand positions. He did this with the sparsest of musical means. Zimmerman notes that the pure physical energy needed to play this work is suggestive of “acrobatics, juggling, or tight-rope walking” and that “the combination of ostinato, chromaticism, sequential development, and incessant activity brings to mind the frantic hilarity of circus music”.<sup>23</sup> The *Toccata* belongs to the same theatrical mode of writing as the *Sarcasms*.

Essentially, the *Toccata* is based on two main ideas: an elaborate and dramatized version of the **over-arching figure** first used by the composer in *The Giant* and the **repeated note** gesture with the piece starts. This particular pianistic gesture forces the hands to play in rapid, alternate succession and establishes a percussive, though light touch from the beginning. Such a gesture is appropriate given that the *Toccata* is a piece meant to display a pianist’s technical prowess. Prokofiev’s main concern is the relationship of the hands to the piano. Indeed, throughout the entire piece we can see an ongoing concern with the way that the hands interact with the piano, adopting various positions on the instrument. As the piece progresses the specific choreography of the hands determines musical material as well as issues of register and texture. This work may be perceived as Prokofiev’s ideal vision of piano technique and virtuosity at a time when he was seeking to define new parameters for himself as a pianist. In a way, it is the projection of an ideal technique that Prokofiev might have expected a contemporary virtuoso pianist to possess.

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<sup>22</sup> Programme notes for Persimfans Moscow concerts of 28 – 30 January and 22 February 1927. The notes are written under his pseudonym of Igor Glebov. In *Sergei Prokofiev 1953 - 1963: Stat'i i materialy* (Moskva: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962) ed. Israel Nest'ev, 330.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel J. Zimmerman, *Families without clusters in the early works of Sergei Prokofiev* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2002), 174.

The repeated note motif *x*, the main thematic material with which the work opens, is then used as an **ostinato**. Structurally, it holds the piece together; it is the central point of energy around which the *Toccata* is constructed, while physically, it is a gesture that continually challenges the pianist's stamina. The composer uses the percussive motif to structure the piece and for the purposes of this analysis, this **repeated note section** (bars 1 – 24) is entitled A. After the opening 24 bars of A, the motif transforms itself into another motif, *x'*. This is also a repeated chord motif based on the tonic triad of D minor. During section A' (bars 24 – 76), a variety of smaller gestures are layered against this repeated tonic triad pattern. These consist of chords that outline the **embedded chromatic motif**, **leaping octaves** and chords that require quick crossing over of hands and successive **broken octaves** in the bass line (from bar 57). Running through all of this section is the repeated note (bars 59 – 60, 63 – 64, 71 – 72, 75 – 76) which no longer occupies pride of place as a single gesture (as was the case in section A) but is now the third strand of the thickened texture of B.

In Section B (bars 77 – 96) the *Toccata*'s texture thickens. This part, together with its variant Section B' (bars 173 – 192) provides the climax that the whole work has been building up to. Both privilege the **contrary motion** position. Right from the very start of the work, texture has been a crucial driver – the one note repeated motif with which the work starts progressively becomes texturally more complex, with voices being added on incrementally and musical motifs layered on. Prokofiev uses various physical gestures such as the **crossing over of hands** from bar 25, the **appoggiatura** from bar 35, consecutive **broken octave** passages from bar 57 and the introduction of theatrical trills in bar 66.

All of these physical gestures are crucial in the gradual crafting of a dramatic textural crescendo which embarks on its first climactic passage in bar 77. Short but intensive, this twenty bar section starts with the pianist's hands positioned at opposite ends of the piano, the complete geographical opposite of the opening gesture, where the hands need to be placed directly over each other for the repeated note motif. This open physical gesture of domination over the instrument gradually closes in as the hands move closer toward the original starting point, D, and thus toward the opening gesture of the *Toccata*. More than in any other piece written in the 'elemental' phase, in this piece Prokofiev explores and tests the pianist's physical stamina and technical strength.

At Section B and also at B', each hand is split into two different positions. The inner chromatic filler line is played by the thumb and second finger of the left hand while the rest of that hand plays an ascending white note **scalar line**. In B' this scalar pattern is not played exclusively on white notes but has an additional C sharp and F sharp. The right hand, moving in contrary motion, plays a scale in **double thirds** with the thumb and second finger while the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand carve out a two-bar melodic fragment, motif y. In both cases the passage is marked *f*, a further test to the pianist's stamina and there are no indications that the dynamics should be quieted down during this twenty bar passage. The technical difficulty of the piece is increased as accents are added to the **embedded motif** between bars 81 – 87 as well as bars 177 – 183. As the piece progresses there is more use of the hands crossing over and bigger leaps: this creates a **counterpoint of registers** and enhances the feeling of ongoing movement while playing with the layering of textures to create climactic moments: this is a typically Prokofievan developmental technique.

Prokofiev's liking for the rondo structure is particularly evident in this work. While repeated sections and preference for the ternary form have already emerged in the juvenilia phase as well as in the 'elemental' phase, in this longer piece for piano, the structure becomes particularly important as it is closely linked to the musical material. Furthermore, the use of repeated sections, such as Section A, and A', Section B and B' allowed Prokofiev to fully test the pianist's physical stamina. It is an important reminder of the physical qualities of Prokofiev's music and his love for gymnastic movement on the piano. When Prokofiev first started playing the piano, the quality he was most attracted to was its physical nature. In the *Toccata* he pays homage to his aspect of piano playing and personalizes it by incorporating it with his specific type of virtuosic writing. It is these qualities of the *Toccata* that make this piece such a popular competition staple and *tour de force* piece for pianists today. Its percussive qualities no doubt helped create the image of Prokofiev as a pianist made of steel and equally, it tested and developed his own pianistic technique.

In this work, Prokofiev's choice of motifs is influenced by the form of the piece and by what it is trying to achieve. Ultimately, the *Toccata* is one big long dramatic crescendo. As Asaf'ev notes, the work's momentum develops gradually,

with conviction and with “rhythmic and concentrated restraint”.<sup>24</sup> There is no room here for long-limbed melodies. Instead, the ‘elemental’ side of Prokofiev prevails: this is evident in his preference of short incisive motifs that privilege the physicality of piano playing above all else. The pianist’s body is integral to the *Toccata* as Prokofiev writes in plenty of physical movement into the piece: enormous leaps in the bass line, hands crossing over, movement in contrary motion, other specifically Prokofievan gestures such as the appoggiatura, octave playing, chromatic scales in thirds and in contrary motion. It is almost as though Prokofiev drew together what he saw as the pianist’s greatest technical challenges in piano playing and decided to tackle them directly and even aggressively in this one piece.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined Prokofiev’s ‘elemental’ compositional phase. During this period, he relied heavily on his primal physical connection with the piano and it became an important generator of musical material as well as a characteristic of his own pianism. Rhythm was a definitive constituent element of this early music. The role of the visual aspect of his playing and the way that this was written into his scores has also been demonstrated: physical gymnastics on the piano provided visual imagery for the audience but was also an important constituent feature of the virtuosic. This physicality in turn generated a specific type of musical material as Prokofiev wrote his own physique into the compositions. His virtuosic mode is therefore distinctive in its use of the composer’s physique, idiosyncrasies and in the way it is in constant dialogue with traditional piano virtuosity.

The analysis demonstrates the way Prokofiev draws upon traditional piano technical virtuosity – as exemplified by Liszt for example – and personalizes it. Virtuosic passages that are traditionally the domain of the virtuoso are deliberately understated. They are written almost as an aside – a gentle mocking of conventional piano virtuosity. The chapter demonstrates the meaning of the term ‘theatrical’ in its application to Prokofiev’s playing and writing. It refers to the compositional choices made by the composer being thus both a visual and a stylistic element in his writing.

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<sup>24</sup> Programme notes for Persimfans Moscow concerts of 28 – 30 January and 22 February 1927. The notes are written under his pseudonym of Igor Glebov. See *Sergei Prokofiev 1953 - 1963: Stat'i i materialy*, ed. Israel Nest'ev (Moskva: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962), 330.

The ‘theatrical’ aspect of Prokofiev’s writing draws the concept of the audience into it: his ‘elemental’ phase in particular foregrounds and presupposes the presence of an audience. The chapter has demonstrated the application of various terms elaborated on in the introduction – narrative, carnivalesque, grotesque – to the music. Detailed reference has also been made to the ‘theatrical’ nature of Prokofiev’s playing and compositional strategies. The issue of virtuosity, always a contextual and somewhat contentious issue in Prokofiev studies, has also been engaged with. Its explication has not been limited to the *Four Etudes*, which are its most obvious musical incarnation, but has also been demonstrated in other works discussed in this chapter. Prokofievan virtuosity is not limited to specific works but is ingrained in the actual vocabulary of musical gestures the composer used.

As he matured into a composer-pianist, he became one in the line of many other such figures who made a career for themselves out of playing their own music. In Russia, Alexander Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninov and Nikolai Medtner were his direct and possibly most influential predecessors. But it seems that for no other composer-pianist was playing technique so closely intertwined with compositional technique. This chapter has demonstrated how his pianistic technique generated and supported his compositional technique and vice-versa. In attempting to synthesize what was for a while a divided artistic self, Prokofiev brought together the separate practices of performing and composition in his own works, thus creating a compositional style of writing that was shaped by his identity as a performer. The evolution of Prokofiev as a pianist had important compositional consequences: among other things, he wrote for the piano in theatrical and orchestral ways because the music had become a platform for his musical self. Technical strategies such as the use of ostinato, manipulation of cadential moments were theatrical because they showcased Prokofiev while simultaneously engaging with audience.

However, the performer’s deep connection with the instrument, which translated itself into a particular writing style for piano, limited Prokofiev’s development in other areas and exposed his compositional insecurities. His virtuosity and constant search for innovation was highly successful: his compositional talent was never in doubt. But Prokofiev faced a much greater challenge when it came to writing for orchestra. He mentions some of the initial difficulties that characterise the transition period in his *Diaries*: “I thought out the conclusion of the Sinfonietta’s Scherzo and buried myself in Rimsky-Korsakov’s course on orchestration, thinking

about the conclusion both from the musical and the instrumentation points of view, but did not write a single note.”<sup>25</sup> The ‘elemental’ phase was followed by a transition period, during which the composer needed to find a way of successfully forging a distinctive orchestral idiom. The next chapter is concerned with this transitional stage that started c.1911 and lasted until approximately 1915.

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<sup>25</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 750, entry of October 5, 1914.

## **Chapter 4: The emancipation of the orchestra**

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### **Introduction to orchestral processes in the early works**

The previous chapter has shown that Prokofiev was comfortable writing for the piano because it was his instrument and, most significantly, because he was usually composing for his own performing *alter ego*. Writing for orchestra offered Prokofiev no such security: rather he had to take his performing self out of the compositional process and find a way of liberating his orchestral textures from his early influences. He was sensitive to the textural possibilities the orchestra provided and was also absorbed by the issue of creating a personal sound. This chapter will demonstrate the way Prokofiev approached orchestral composition, in the process engaging with his ideas about orchestration, the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov in his work<sup>1</sup> and the translation of previously exclusively pianistic gestures into orchestral textures. The medium of the orchestra offered Prokofiev compositional possibilities well beyond those he could explore in piano textures. Its sonic potential forced him away from the almost abrasive concision of his ‘elemental’ phase and gradually opened up the path to lyricism. It is a common theme in Prokofiev scholarship to ascribe the composer’s lyricism to a later phase in his career: the composer’s notorious comment that he had to simplify his music for the American public and his later statements that he was searching for a ‘New Simplicity’ all suggest that he began thinking about lyricism *after* he became known as a modernist and perhaps even as an antidote to his ultra modernist image. I would suggest however, that Prokofiev came to lyricism via the orchestra: in the process of learning to write for forces that were more expansive than the piano, he simultaneously developed a lyrical line to counter the brasher, harsher and dissonant orchestral sound he was gradually developing in works like *Scythian Suite* and *Seven, They are Seven*.

During this transitional phase, Prokofiev cultivated two very different sound worlds: an innovative, radical and sometimes abrasive one, which we have explored in detail in the previous chapter, and another, that may be heard in his early orchestral works such as *Dreams* Op. 6 and *Autumnal Sketch* Op. 8. The long lyrical lines that occur in these works are a faint preview of the long-limbed melodic ideas that would characterize

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<sup>1</sup> In order to elucidate the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov’s music on Prokofiev, reference will be made, over the next two chapters, to Rimsky-Korsakov’s seminal orchestration manual, *Principles of Orchestration* ed. Maximilian Steinberg, trans. Edward Agate (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1964).

Prokofiev's mature orchestral writing. The harmony is also markedly different and more Romantic than the harmony of the contemporary pieces for piano. This suggests that Prokofiev had not outgrown the combined influences of Strauss, Scriabin and Tchaikovsky (via Rachmaninov) in his orchestral writing, despite the compositional independence he achieved in the piano compositions. The luscious orchestration and chromatic harmony of *Autumnal Sketch*, for instance, is in direct contrast to the biting sonorities, unexpected cadences and dissonant harmonies that occur in the piano works of the 'elemental' phase.

These early works reveal the technical gap between his piano and orchestral compositions and exemplify the two different Prokofiev sound worlds I mentioned above. In a later interview, the composer himself notes the lacuna in his compositional technique. "When I first left the Conservatory" he tells Frederich H. Martens, "I had so many ideas, and not enough technic [sic] to express them as I wished". It was only years later, after a period of "unremitting struggle", that Prokofiev realised his own "salvation in composition".<sup>2</sup> That salvation was the attainment of an independent orchestral sound that followed on from the radical ideas he had already explored in his 'elemental' piano writing.

This chapter is concerned with elucidating the process of emancipating his orchestral sound. Ultimately, Prokofiev's orchestral writing would only begin to assume a separate identity from his piano writing when the piano was no longer part of the texture, as in the opera *Maddalena*. Even then, this would be a gradual and painful process. The opera draws upon the kind of textures and harmonies that are present in the early orchestral works and does not yet provide any indication as to Prokofiev's development of an individual orchestral technique. It is nevertheless an important work to examine, not just because it was the composer's first mature theatrical work but also because it shows the composer elaborating on musical thoughts that belong to a different sound world than that he was exploring in his piano works. It represents a post-Romantic soundscape that Prokofiev *might have* developed had his pianistic performing and composing persona not jolted his writing away from the chromatic writing and progressive modulation typical of Richard Strauss. The importance of this work cannot therefore be underestimated.

*Maddalena* was both the theatrical precursor of *The Gambler* (usually characterised as Prokofiev's first mature opera), and also the musical conclusion to his

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick H. Martens, "The Last Word in Russian Music: An Interview with Serge Prokofiev", *The Musical Observer*, November 1918.

earlier operatic experiments. It thus deserves to be examined on those terms. The opera represents a musical bridge between Prokofiev's juvenile phase and the onset of his 'elemental' phase. It also provides us with the opportunity to examine the composer's ideas explored through the medium of the orchestra: this in itself yields interesting insights into the way Prokofiev developed his orchestral thinking.

This chapter thus presents the composer at a compositional cross-road: he needed to liberate himself from what had become the constricting writing conditions of the piano and to simultaneously go beyond the sound that he created in his first orchestral textures. Furthermore, it became imperative for him to forge an idiom which would combine the harmonic palette and bright textures of the 'concentrated' piano writing with the lyricism present in the early orchestral works. In other words, this transitional period shows Prokofiev trying to locate his musical distinctiveness in a broader orchestral context.

The works under discussion in this chapter – *Piano Concerto* No.1<sup>3</sup> and *Maddalena*<sup>4</sup> – represent a critical point in Prokofiev's compositional thought. The *Piano Concerto* was composed between 1911 and 1912, while the opera was composed between 1911 and 1913. This chapter examines the way certain pianistic gestures and ideas are transferred and/or distilled into orchestral textures. Are the same kinds of musical ideas as emerged in the previous chapter now being orchestrated in the *Piano Concerto* and in *Maddalena*? Is Prokofiev's writing for the piano solo in the *Piano Concerto* different from the writing style that characterised the 'elemental' phase? What differences between orchestral and piano textures begin to emerge in both of the works under discussion? The *Piano Concerto* unites Prokofiev's favourite medium, the piano, with the orchestra, while *Maddalena* is the composer's first mature stage piece, based on a libretto of his choice and contains some characteristic features of style that Prokofiev would continue to use in later works. The beginnings of Prokofiev's musical imagery and network of associations find their first synthesis in this work. This aspect of the work in particular makes its examination in this chapter indispensable.

The *Piano Concerto* demonstrates the role of the piano textures in the creating and generating of orchestral ones, an issue that is central to this chapter. It was not the composer's first work with orchestra, but it was the first one that juxtaposed his strongest element to date, i.e. his writing for piano, with what was perhaps his most challenging

<sup>3</sup> The subsequent discussion of the *Piano Concerto* refers to the edition published by Kompozitor Publishing House: Sankt Petersburg, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Prokofiev, *Maddalena* Op. 13, English translation and orchestration completed by Edward Downes, (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1990).

musical problem: composing for orchestra. It is fitting therefore, to explore this moment in Prokofiev's compositional style by bringing together two works that may be different on the surface, but that show the composer struggling with similar issues. Both works make use of the orchestra but they do so in very different ways. It is by exploring the difference between the two that we may begin to discover how Prokofiev went about locating his distinctive orchestral sound. It is also by examining these disparate works that we may begin to see the influences of the piano and pianistic ideas in the composer's orchestral sonorities and textures. The role of the piano in his compositional thought is after all, an integral one to this thesis.

Prokofiev was thinking about orchestration as early as the juvenilia. Glière, for all the drawbacks as a teacher that Prokofiev points out, incorporated orchestration as part of his piano lessons. The composer notes in his *Memoir* that while working on Schumann's *Warum* Glière would highlight particular timbres and possible ways of orchestrating the piece and "this method was still fruitful, even though during the past year I had learned more about orchestras, having the opportunity that past winter to verify a good deal at concerts and rehearsals".<sup>5</sup> On looking at the overture to *A Feast in Time of Plague*, the renowned pianist Alexander Goldenweiser<sup>6</sup> told Prokofiev that his orchestral writing was actually better than his writing for the piano in the *pesenki*: "He said I wrote as if for the right and left hand and not as for a single instrument; also, that I wrote better for the orchestra".<sup>7</sup> Goldenweiser was right in pointing out this specific feature of Prokofiev's piano writing. In many of the early *pesenki*, especially those that take the format of a melody with accompaniment, the difference between the two hands is palpable and it sometimes sounds as though the young composer conceived of each line as inhabiting a different sound world. This differentiation between separate lines remains a key feature of his orchestral textures; sometimes it is further emphasized by enormous gaps in register that create de-centralised textures. This separation of the piano's textures is a key feature of his piano writing and may be one of the reasons why Prokofiev's piano music is sometimes described as 'unpianistic'.

The *Piano Concerto* is integral to our study as it placed Prokofiev in the limelight in the dual role of pianist and composer. It also forced him to think about the role of the

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<sup>5</sup> *Memoir*, 67.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Goldenweiser (1875 – 1961) was a Russian composer and pianist who studied at the Moscow Conservatory with Ippolitov – Ivanov, Taneyev and Arensky and later became a teacher at the same institution.

<sup>7</sup> *Memoir*, 81.

orchestra within the context of the longer form of the concerto: this was to be the work that joined the two aspects (composing and performing) of his musical identity together. As the second chapter illustrated, Prokofiev was aware of this division and often pondered on the need to synthesise his artistic self. His use of the orchestra in this work is pivotal to our understanding of his own incipient identity as a composer of importance. In the *Piano Concerto*, the two different textures of the piano and the orchestra confront each other, with the orchestra struggling for its autonomy. The piano part is the locus of dizzying technical fireworks and exhibitionism while the orchestra is the site of quiet lyricism.

As I have already noted, by the time Prokofiev came to write this concerto, his writing for the piano was highly developed. It was perhaps to be expected that the orchestral writing in this work would still have been written through the prism of the piano. The orchestra's role is largely to accompany and only comes into its own on very rare occasions. In those instances however, the origins of the composer's later orchestral writing emerge as he entices orchestral timbres out of his pianistic textures. There are already indications of Prokofiev's mature orchestral textures, such as the long sinewy melodic lines played by woodwinds and the sustained ostinatos for orchestra.

Several gestures that were present in the piano writing from the 'elemental' phase are naturally still present in the writing for solo piano. For example, virtuosic moments such as the use of higher registers and passages marked *con brio* and *brillante* foreground passages of pianistic bravura. Other gestures, such as the repeated note and the ostinato, also present in the 'elemental' phase, are transferred with ease to the orchestral writing. In this work, Prokofiev struggles to achieve a balance between the two very different forces and he orchestrated many ideas that were pianistic, which makes it difficult to draw a clear distinction between exclusively pianistic ideas and purely orchestral ones. The contrary motion gesture, which was an important visual part of his pianism, is transferred into his orchestral writing. Similarly, many of the orchestra's main gestures – the repeated note; the appoggiatura figure; passages in double thirds; the presentational gesture; the ostinato – were drawn from his writing for the piano.

During the process of writing for the combined force of piano and orchestra however, some distinctively orchestral ideas begin to emerge. The use of disruptive

gestures such as that of the tuba at RN 10 + 1 is surprising,<sup>8</sup> and although the element of surprise might link it to his writing for piano which favoured such shock tactics, it is an orchestral idea, completely dependent for its effect on the timbre Prokofiev assigns it. A similar playful gesture is theatricalised in *Love for Three Oranges*, where the trombonist comes on stage to play his part. This gesture acquired its presentational and fanfare-like qualities due to its particular type of orchestration on the brass; passages in double thirds were transferred to the agile woodwinds<sup>9</sup> and dialogues between brass textures were a specifically orchestral idea where Prokofiev privileges the rich warm brass sound. Longer melodies are often assigned to woodwind timbres: this endows them with an ethereal quality. Furthermore, in the *Piano Concerto*, the melodies are elongated. This expanded development of lyrical musical material was very unusual in the ‘elemental’ phase, mainly because the short pieces he was writing could not accommodate lengthier melodic lines. The *Piano Concerto* provides Prokofiev with a larger canvas and a variety of sonorities to expand and develop his lyricism.

Gestures which were originally pianistic are used again in *Maddalena*: the chromatic motif, the leaping bass, the use of tremolos and ostinatos are musical ideas drawn from the piano works but when Prokofiev uses them in this stage work, they acquire an image. For example, Maddalena’s theme is built on a chromatic motif, suggesting her status as a *femme fatale*. The tritone has an important role in the opera: as with *Gambler* and *Love for Three Oranges*, the tritone represents evil, darkness and despair. It is often associated with the supernatural and is usually connected to a feeling of general malaise and foreboding. The tremolo has the dual function of being a dramatic or theatrical affect while also accompanying narratives. In *Maddalena* then, ideas that were originally pianistic are used associatively. The orchestra gradually becomes an independent character, but may also function as an extension of the characters’ psyche.

## Early musical influences

At the Conservatory, Prokofiev studied orchestration with Rimsky-Korsakov and although he retrospectively notes that his teacher was a most interesting man, the young composer seems to have taken in very little of Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestration classes.

<sup>8</sup> No musical examples will be provided in the next two chapters but precise reference to rehearsal numbers, hereafter shortened to RN, will be provided at every stage of the discussion.

<sup>9</sup> This is a classic Rimsky-Korsakian recommendation. Rimsky also suggests that brass instruments are best suited to playing “fanfare figures”. See *Principles of Orchestration*, 54.

He indeed goes into painstaking detail to justify his lack of enthusiasm for the subject. He notes that “tremendous fervour was required to concentrate throughout those four hours. Unfortunately, I possessed no such fervor – all the more so, since Rimsky-Korsakov did little explaining, and most of the four hours was spent correcting assignments [...] It seemed to me that if he had told me to orchestrate my own pieces, and had explained why such-and-such a passage should be scored in such-and-such a way, I would have been excited by his teaching”.<sup>10</sup>

Prokofiev was too self-engrossed to care about orchestrating Beethoven sonatas for chamber orchestra and seems to have paid little attention to Rimsky-Korsakov’s classes. His first attempts at orchestration appear to be a combination of thoughtlessness and wilful idiosyncrasy. Prokofiev relates the humorous yet revealing story of having his orchestration corrected by Rimsky-Korsakov: the venerable teacher criticised Prokofiev for assigning a melody to an oboe rather than the clarinet and for having a cello play solo rather than *tutti*. In response to his teacher’s insistent questioning, Prokofiev replied bluntly: “I wrote it for solo cello because I don’t like the sound of all the cellos playing in unison”.<sup>11</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov’s verdict on Prokofiev’s student work was that he was talented but “did not produce much work”.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, Rimsky-Korsakov’s influence on Prokofiev is not one that can be ignored.<sup>13</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov’s invocation of the fantastic, such as the underwater scenes of *Sadko* and scenes in *The Invisible City of Kitezh* find echoes in passages of Prokofiev’s music and evoke fantastic moments such as those that occur in *Love for Three Oranges* (to be discussed in the following chapter) and in many of the piano works. *The Invisible City of Kitezh* is a through-composed work with a strongly symphonic character provided through its orchestral tableaus. It provides ample examples of the creation of the ‘skazka’ textures as well as the composer’s penchant for specific wind combinations to create this. At RN 39, for example, a predominantly wind sound accompanies Feroniya’s singing.<sup>14</sup> The miraculous and magical moment that the city of Kitezh is shrouded by a mist, a tremolo figuration built around a major 3<sup>rd</sup> and perfect 4<sup>th</sup> may be heard on

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<sup>10</sup> *Memoir*, 219.

<sup>11</sup> *Memoir*, 220.

<sup>12</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 51.

<sup>13</sup> Neither is it one that Prokofiev tried to deny. Indeed, he thought that his Sinfonietta could be traced to Rimsky-Korsakov. [See, *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* ed. S. Shlifstein, trans Rose Prokofieva (Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 189]

<sup>14</sup> Flutes, clarinets and bassoons accompany the voice line, and solo lines are assigned to the oboe and the bassoons at RN 41 + 2.

clarinets, harps and first violins.<sup>15</sup> In the same section, the sustained notes on flutes, alto flutes over which an oboe solo is suspended create an ethereal and ‘skazka’ atmosphere. Gradually the texture is thickened to include all strings, bassoons and double bassoons while the tremolo figure is sustained until the end of the scene.

Rimsky’s gift for painting a self-enclosed magical world such as that of *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*, *Kashchey the Immortal* and *The Golden Cockerel* are reflected in Prokofiev’s harmonic palette, which favours, for example, diminished seventh chords and use of octatonic sequences. Where Rimsky uses key centres that are a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> away from each other, Prokofiev prefers those that are at a distance of a minor or major second: this has been and will continue to be highlighted in my discussion of the music.

Other Rimsky-Korsakovian features may be heard in Prokofiev’s orchestral writing, although very often, the younger composer put these features to a different use. One such example is the presentational gesture which occurs in Rimsky-Korsakov as a dramatic tremolo.<sup>16</sup> Rimsky also uses scalar figures as textural fillers<sup>17</sup> that heighten the intense exuberance of the opening guest scene in *The Tsar’s Bride*. Further examples (from the same opera) of these scalar figures used as accompanying textural figures occur in Lyubasha’s recitative at RN 23 + 9. Here the filler lines accompany Lyubasha’s thoughts and their function is in line with operatic recitative conventions.

Rimsky also makes use of the repeated note gesture as an accompanying figure.<sup>18</sup> Here it is used for dramatic effect and again in keeping with operatic conventions. Prokofiev turns it into an integral feature of ‘artifice’ in his writing. It has a rhythmic quality and is often used for comic effect. Similar moments of artifice can equally be heard in Stravinsky’s *The Firebird*.<sup>19</sup> This occurs at RN 27 where *fortissimo bouché* and *cuvré* sustained notes on the trombone accompany the capture of the firebird by Ivan Tsarevich; RN 46 where the interruptions of muted trombones herald the appearance of

<sup>15</sup> See RN 184 + 7 onwards.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *Tsar’s Bride*, RN 26 + 17 and RN 29 immediately before the three part *fughetto*.

<sup>17</sup> *Tsar’s Bride*, RN 30 + 3 – RN 30 + 8, and again at RN 47 + 4 – RN 47 + 11. Other accompanying (septuplet) filler lines on violins and flutes occur at RN 128 + 1 until 128 + 10.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, RN 127 + 17 where the figures accompanies a conversation between Lyubasha and Bomelius.

<sup>19</sup> The influence of Stravinsky over Prokofiev will be discussed in some detail in my conclusion. Scholars like Stephen D. Press however, suggest that the early influence has been ‘overstated’. Press is referring specifically to the ballets that Prokofiev wrote for Diaghilev, but the works discussed in this chapter and the next belong to the same period. The composer had seen ballet productions of *Petrouchka*, *Firebird*, *Schéhérazade*, and *Le Coq d’Or* during the 1913-1914 season. [For an indepth discussion of the issue of influence, see Stephen D. Press, *Prokofiev’s Ballets for Diaghilev* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 116-128 and elsewhere. Intriguingly, although Press tried to underplay the Stravinskian influence, he engages with it overtly and implicitly through his book.]

the thirteen princesses; RN 105 where sustained notes on the muted tubas off-stage announce the appearance of Kashchei the Immortal; RN 110 where the muted trombones articulate an accented figure built around a repeated note during the dialogue between Kashchei and Ivan Tsarevich. In all of these examples, Stravinsky makes use of specific disruptive or fanfare-like gestures to announce that something will happen. Prokofiev uses his presentational gestures in the same way but also makes use of such gestures on their own terms when they are an integral part of the texture.

It is possible that Prokofiev initially experienced technical difficulties in orchestrating purely because he was primarily used to working with piano scores. Despite this initial difficulty however, he had always thought in terms of different sound combinations and conceived of sound possibilities beyond those possible on the piano. Although piano textures were a dominant feature of his writing, the sounds he created went beyond the limits imposed by such textures. His use of the extreme registers of the piano, for example, was mirrored by his use of low bassoon textures, high strings, flute and clarinet combinations in his orchestral writing. In the juvenilia Prokofiev experimented with voice and other instruments in combination with the piano and he also tried his hand at orchestrating some of his own early songs. Therefore his exploration and gradual manipulation of these different sound worlds occurred contemporaneously. Prokofiev's musical imagination had orchestral scope from its inception even though he was only writing for piano. During this Conservatory period, however, his compositional technique for the piano overtook his composing technique for the orchestra. As he strengthened and perfected his craft as a pianist, he was able to put that technique at the service of his compositional technique. It was at that point in his writing that his expertise as a performer became a crucial factor in the compositional process.

Although Prokofiev's orchestration processes were criticized during his time at the Conservatory his early works with orchestra indicate that he had a good understanding of the orchestra's sound possibilities. His compositions played with textural and registral differences, as well as with various other sound effects. He was to develop sound effects as moments of artifice in the later works creating a dramatic and sometimes theatrical effect. Prokofiev's early works for orchestra went largely unrecognised, and it was not until the *Scythian Suite*, composed between 1914 and 1915, that he was to write an orchestral work for which he gained some recognition. Significantly, this suite was drawn from the ballet *Ala and Lolli*, set to a scenario by Sergei Gorodetsky, and was therefore written to a specific scenario and to an agreed set of visual images. Arguably,

Prokofiev's first "independent" work for orchestra would be the first Symphony Op. 25, composed between 1916 and 1917.<sup>20</sup> His earlier works for orchestra included two juvenile symphonies, a Sinfonietta in five movements (which he would eventually revise to become Op. 48 in 1929), a symphonic work for orchestra titled *Dreams* Op. 6 (1910), *Two Choral Songs* Op. 7 (1909 – 1910) and *Autumnal Sketch* Op. 8 for small orchestra (1910).

In *Dreams* Prokofiev draws upon familiar gestures such as the appoggiatura figure and the ostinato bass to create a Scriabin-esque texture. Indeed it is possible to hear the fascination Prokofiev had with Scriabin's music in these early orchestral works. Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* was composed between 1905 and 1908, and Prokofiev heard the work in rehearsal in May of 1909. He described it as "elaborately majestic music with its colossal layers of complexity, its maelstrom of confusing tempi, its gripping climaxes culminating in ecstatic outbursts".<sup>21</sup> It is lusciously scored<sup>22</sup> and replaces formal structure with transitional movement from one chromatic phase to another. Its intense chromaticism marks it as a work of tonal suggestion as Scriabin was mainly preoccupied with the presentation and manipulation of harmonic color and not with tonal progression. This same intense chromaticism may also be heard in *Maddalena* where Prokofiev uses chromaticism to paint scenes and sketch characters. *Maddalena*'s music is, for example, highly chromatic and this chromaticism is used to suggest character traits like her unpredictable and devilish nature.<sup>23</sup>

Echoes of the ephemeral colours suggested by the opening of *Poem of Ecstasy* may also be heard in Prokofiev's *Dreams*. His use of harp glissandos as well as the

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<sup>20</sup> Even with the "Classical" Symphony however, Prokofiev was not really writing abstract music as the entire purpose of the work was to write in the style of Haydn. This came with its own "programme" and set of stylistic images. Nevertheless, in his *Diaries*, Prokofiev notes that this symphony marked the first time he had composed something away from the piano: "Musically I also took an important decision: to do without a piano. For some time I had contemplated composing my 'Classical' Symphony away from the piano, and the work I had so far done on it I had done in my head. Now I resolved to finish it. It seemed to me that composing with or without a piano was purely a matter of habit, and it would be good to gain more experience with a work as uncomplicated as this symphony." (*Diaries*, Vol.2: 194)

<sup>21</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 99.

<sup>22</sup> It is scored for 3 flutes, piccolo, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, small and large bells, tam-tam, celesta, organ, 2 harps and strings. *Dreams* is scored equally sumptuously for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoon, double bassoon, 6 horns, 3 trumpet, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, triangle, 2 harps, strings. *Autumnal Sketch* is on a smaller scale and is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 1 trumpet, harp and strings.

<sup>23</sup> The comparison between Scriabin and Prokofiev has its limitation and it is only in the sound world of the early work that we can hear its influence. The differences between the two are very pronounced: Scriabin's vertical harmony is blurred while that of Prokofiev is horizontal and based on an independent bass strand with a preference for neighboring progressions.

addition of the triangle provides an ethereal, almost magical atmosphere. This work also contains echoes of Rachmaninov<sup>24</sup> and Rimsky-Korsakov. Prokofiev may not have paid much attention to Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration lectures, but he was nonetheless appreciative of the older composer's orchestral mastery and certainly not immune to his influence. Long melodic lines are assigned to each member of the woodwind family. Rimsky-Korsakov's suggestive use of woodwind may be heard in *The Snow Maiden*'s bird music and throughout the score. His preference for the clarinet would later be shared by Prokofiev.<sup>25</sup> Prokofiev's penchant for quirky timbral moments may be clearly heard in the use of muted trumpet playing detached quavers, a motif which is heard against a full string accompaniment of flowing chromatic patterns: Prokofiev juxtaposes two different thematic ideas and two different textures. The impressionistic orchestral texture of *Dreams* is characteristic of early Prokofiev orchestral writing. In the 'post-elemental' phase the composer would manipulate many of the same gestures and ideas for a completely different effect. This will be evident in his later operas such as those discussed in the last chapter.

### Piano Concerto No.1

This piano concerto, the first of five, was composed between 1911 and 1912 and first published by Jurgenson in 1913. The work is dedicated to Nikolai Tcherepnin, possibly the composer's most important influence during his time at the conservatory. Tcherepnin was not just Prokofiev's conducting teacher: he also thought highly of Prokofiev's abilities as a composer and among other things, encouraged him to continue writing operas. The influence of Tcherepnin on Prokofiev's development has been somewhat neglected in discussions on the composer. Nonetheless, he was a mentor for the young composer. Diaghilev noticed this influence and fretted about its detrimental

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<sup>24</sup> Prokofiev notes there are some "extraordinarily beautiful" melodic turns of phrase in the second symphony. In comparison to Scriabin, Rachmaninov did not, according to Prokofiev, strive "for novelty and harmonic invention". (*Memoir*, 274). But he also notes parallels between *Autumnal Sketch* and what he refers to as Rachmaninov's 'moods' as they may be heard in *Isle of the Dead* and the second symphony. [Sergei Prokofiev: *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* ed. Shlifstein, (Hawai: University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 29].

<sup>25</sup> The clarinet solo that opens the scene with Lel and the Snow Maiden is just one example. (See *The Snow Maiden*, Act I, Scene I). The Prologue to Act I demonstrates the way Rimsky-Korsakov used wind and brass combinations with strings. The melodic figurations are assigned to horns and oboes while the string sound is used merely as a textural filler.

effect<sup>26</sup>. Prokofiev claimed that Tcherepnin played an important role in his musical development, crediting him with his interest in Haydn and Mozart. Under Tcherepnin's watchful eye, Prokofiev 'made up for the time wasted in Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration class'.<sup>27</sup>

The concerto sits on the cusp of Prokofiev's mature phase: by the time he came to write this work, he had written some of his best and distinctive work for the piano. The work's premiere, conducted by Saradzhev, with Prokofiev as pianist, in Moscow on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1912, had a mixed reception. Prokofiev decided that he would play this work in his final piano exam at the Conservatory. Hearing the concerto two years later in 1914, Glazunov informed Prokofiev that the examination committee thought that it was "not in principle an appropriate work" because "it is a difficult and unsuitable work on which to judge you as a performer".<sup>28</sup> Prokofiev's virtuosic technique was not appreciated by the Conservatory's old guard who may have been alienated by its particularly physical qualities and its implied mockery of traditional pianistic virtuosity. Even the music publisher Jurgenson thought that parts of the concerto were unplayable.<sup>29</sup>

This work fits the Prokofiev prototype of pianistic writing for the 'elemental' period but the orchestral writing itself belongs to the transitional juncture since it reveals the processes behind Prokofiev's forging of a distinctive orchestral idiom. The piano part is representative of the composer's purest 'concentrated' writing for the piano. He had already showcased his distinctive piano technique in the shorter pieces: this concerto presents his technique as a virtuoso pianist and brings the various fundamentals of his own personal piano playing style to the fore.

However, the concerto, being of a larger and more traditional structure than Prokofiev had previously worked with, stretches his compositional techniques almost to their limit. It naturally develops compositional strategies that he had already experimented with in the piano miniature pieces and contextualizes them within a larger form. In a way, it also proves to be the testing ground for Prokofiev's technique as a

<sup>26</sup> Stephen D. Press notes that Tcherepnin was employed by Diaghilev as a composer and conductor. Later on however, after Tcherepnin had been dismissed from his employ, the impresario would mock Prokofiev's association with Tcherepnin. [Prokofiev's *Ballets for Diaghilev* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 120.]

<sup>27</sup> *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* ed. S. Shlifshtein, trans Rose Prokofieva (Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 651. It was the first time in the Conservatory's history that a student played their own work as part of the final exams for the piano class. The preliminary hearing was intended to give the examining committee some familiarity with the work in advance of the actual examination. Despite Glazunov's misgivings, Prokofiev played this concerto for his final exams as there would not have been sufficient time for him to learn a new one.

<sup>29</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 544.

composer. His strategies of repetition, variation, preference for rondo-like structures will be used in this concerto.

At various points, the concerto develops as a struggle between Prokofiev the composer and Prokofiev the pianist. This aspect of the work was picked up by his American audiences. James Gibbons Hunker notes that the audience “followed through the heat and fray of the battle a very logical scheme of development”.<sup>30</sup> The need to refine his compositional technique had been a constant preoccupation during Prokofiev’s years at the conservatory. With this work, he struggled to find the appropriate balance between his performing and compositional personae. Overall it is the pianist who wins this conflict – the work is structured round the piano and the piano part is written with the aim of exploring and testing the limits of pianistic prowess, while the orchestra writing displays the beginnings of specific orchestral gestures that were later to become a staple part of his compositional style.

## First Part of the Piano Concerto

The concerto’s opening first theme, *a*, is almost childlike in its simplicity and is largely an elaboration of a four note chromatic motif (bars 2 – 3) that runs throughout the whole work. In granting the chromatic motif such crucial thematic status in this work, Prokofiev plays upon a musical gesture that has occurred under many guises and is a distinctive feature of his language. This is a ubiquitous figure in Prokofiev’s writing and one of his most fundamental gestures: here he uses it thematically. As if to underline the importance of the semitone shift, Prokofiev inserts a harshly dissonant G natural in his theme. In doing so, he gives the theme a dissonant downturn and this grating, raised subdominant note is repeated several times as it weaves itself around the first theme of the concerto. The hands play in unison, and thus nothing distracts the listener from the insistent dissonant repetition. With such wilful emphasis on this dissonant note, Prokofiev was not only drawing attention to his persona of musical *enfant terrible*, he was foregrounding it.

The first theme, pitched in the treble clef beyond the pianist’s comfort zone, is written in octaves and continues to rise to the higher registers of the piano where it remains for a full 16 bars. This is yet another of Prokofiev’s strategies to emphasize his

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<sup>30</sup> James Gibbons Hunker, “Music and Something Else at a Concert of the Russian Symphony Society”, *New York Times*, December 11, 1918.

distinctive playing style. In keeping with the ‘elemental’ phase, he plays up the performer’s physical discomfort. The different registers also function as symbols - the top register, in Prokofiev’s writing, tends to refer to virtuosity, while the lower registers suggest a darker, possibly demonic tone. In choosing to start the piano concerto with the **high register**, Prokofiev is unconsciously positioning this work firmly with his virtuosic pieces, and considering that this concerto was the work with which he won the Conservatory First Prize for Piano, the emphasis on virtuosity and showcasing of technical ability must have been paramount in the composer’s mind. As themes *b* and *c* will show, even the choice of musical material was built around pianistic figurations.

The theme itself starts on the dominant note, but the almost immediate appearance of the raised subdominant cancels out any stabilizing tonality and at once suggests the gravitas of the **semitone shift**. This tension between the harmony that the listener expects and the one that Prokofiev actually writes, characterizes the whole work. This experience of Prokofiev’s sounded harmony being in constant dialogue with unsounded/unheard but suggested and expected harmonies, characterizes any listening experience of Prokofiev’s music. It is a quality that has already emerged in my discussion of his works for solo piano, but this is the first time that Prokofiev applies the principle of deflating expectancy on such a large scale.

The opening three chords of the orchestra repeat the tonic chord, and this **presentational gesture**, which looks like a gesture lifted from the *pesenki*, emphasizes the prevalent tonality of the concerto. And yet, the raised subdominant heard immediately after, destroys that tonal experience. The first note of the piano part, and thus the first note of the theme is the dominant, A flat, and in the fleeting opening moments of the concerto, we are tempted to think that the tonality is clear. But the persisting dissonance only continues to emphasize other harmonic possibilities that Prokofiev has chosen *not* to use. It is often the chords that are not heard, the sounds that seem to be absent, that drive Prokofiev’s harmony forward. His ability to create tension and excitement in his harmonic writing by deflating our expectations depends almost entirely on the ability of his music to suggest an alternative harmonic sequence simultaneously to that which we can actually hear. This play between absent harmonies and present sounds is a crucial aspect of Prokofiev’s piquant harmonic writing. At times, the compositions’ harmonic alternative can almost be palpably felt and heard. While the piano part plays up the raised subdominant as part of a descending chromatic motif, the orchestra continues to elaborate on the D flat major tonic chord, which, as the opening bars progress, further

heightens the sense of the chromatic notes functioning merely as an **appoggiatura** gesture. This establishes a confrontation between piano and orchestra from the outset and synthesizes two fundamental gestures: the chromatic idea and the appoggiatura figure.

The concerto's opening presentational figure builds, right from the start, a sense of conflict between orchestra and piano that is to characterise the whole work. Following that cry to battle, the piano takes over the main thematic material while the orchestra continues to play a supportive role. The cellos and double basses outline the tonic harmonies through repeated D flat – F – A flat sustained notes. The orchestra continues to give the concerto its harmonic direction, outlining a chordal bass built on thirds. From RN 5 onwards, each bar sequentially outlines a chord built on stacks of thirds e.g. C – E – G – B – D; D – F – A – C – E; B – D – F – A – C; all based entirely on white notes, matching the white note virtuosic figurations in the piano part. The textures of the orchestra share the same harmonic and chordal make up as his piano writing. The orchestral textures built as they often are, on thirds, octaves and layering of intervals such as the fourth and fifths, have roots in Prokofiev's writing for piano. At RN 6 + 4 the cello and bass textures outline the semitone shift: – A → G sharp against the **appoggiatura figure** of C – B played by the horns. This A → G sharp **ostinato** bass pattern is sustained across 12 bars to the end of the section.

The second theme, *b*, which is played by the solo piano (RN 3), plunges us immediately into the world of the piano virtuoso. Again, this theme is removed from the pianist's comfort zone as it starts in the piano's low regions and works its way up to A''''. It is a totalizing gesture – one that symbolizes Prokofiev's dominance and control of the whole instrument. This section, written in the key of C major, presents us with some of Prokofiev's most 'concentrated' writing for the piano.<sup>31</sup>

For 47 bars, the piano's part is a sequence of typically pianistic gestures that form the foundation of Prokofiev technique: staccato double thirds, octaves, flighty scalar figurations all set against an ostinato bass. Virtuosity in this section is built gradually. As the work progresses, more and more notes are fitted in, the register becomes ever higher and the rhythm gradually more complex through the use of the three against two patterns from RN 5. Prokofiev uses complexity, rhythmic and otherwise, together with register changes as markers of virtuosity. Rhythmic ambiguity is further heightened by Prokofiev's use of phrasing (RN5 + 5). The phrase marks here run across the bar-line so

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<sup>31</sup> The term 'concentrated' writing as it refers to the composer's idiom for piano has been defined in the third chapter, 94.

that the phrase begins on the lowest note (E', right hand note) of the phrase, regardless of its position within the bar. Prokofiev generally respects the bar-line and writes metrically, in other words, his the interplay between the physical rhythm created by this specific hand pattern and the first beat accent, adds another layer of rhythmic tension, albeit subtly.

An important gesture present from the start of this piano concerto is the **over-arching figure**, one that dates back to Prokofiev's juvenilia, where the composer used it as early as *The Giant*. In this instance, RN6 + 9, Prokofiev uses the idea as a flourish with which this section closes before moving back into the key of D flat major for the third theme of the work.

As with the second theme, the next theme to emerge at RN 7, c, is a musical idea built around the **repeated note**, pitch class F.<sup>32</sup> This is played by the piano solo, which allows the pianistic character of the gesture to emerge clearly. It often appears as a dotted quaver in this section and yet again, this is an idea that is prominent in the early pieces, particularly the *pesenki*. The arpeggio-like flourish attached to the opening statement of this idea (RN 7) is again a figuration reminiscent of the early works, see for example Series III No. 4; a similar dotted noted idea occurs in the March in F minor (Series V No. 6 and reworked version of this in Op.12).

For the next 31 bars of this section, the **repeated note** is the most crucial figure: it is played against a backdrop of staccato double thirds and also in simple unison with the left hand. The motif is played by the horns, thus playing up its fanfare-like quality, a quality that was already evident in the works for piano pertaining to the juvenilia phase. In its minimalist use of musical ideas, this section is theatrical as it gently mocks the conventions of the virtuosic piano concerto. Prokofiev's performance directions of *con brio* and *brillante* clearly indicate that this work is meant as a virtuosic piece, although his definition of the virtuosic is different from the Romantic definition. The virtuosic marker of register is again a useful indication as almost all of this *Tempo Primo* section is written in the treble clef, and often with both hands playing in the **higher registers** of the piano. The left hand triplet gesture at RN 9 adds yet another layer to the texture and supports the directional shape outlined by the scalar runs played in the right hand.

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<sup>32</sup> In his *Diaries*, Prokofiev notes that while a theme for the Introduction came to him very quickly, the main subject was drawn from an earlier piece that he had written entitled "Carnaval". Anthony Phillips notes that while this piece from the *Little Songs* was lost, the Prokofiev-Miaskovsky correspondence reveals that this was composed in 1907 (and thus after the completion of the fifth series of songs). It was in fact Miaskovsky who gave the piece the name "Carnaval". See *Diaries*, Vol.1: 235 and *Perepiska*, 39, 45. Prokofiev writes out this theme in *Memoir*, 199.

At RN 8 long descending scalar lines in parallel and later in **contrary motion**, as well as **double thirds**, characterise the orchestral texture. Although they are played detached, these sinewy melodic lines counterbalance the lively dotted material played by the piano. While the texture of double thirds was originally a pianistic idea, Prokofiev incorporated this into his orchestral textures, especially woodwind textures, very early on.

At RN 9, the repeated-note dotted figure (third theme, *c*) is taken up by the horns and as soon as Prokofiev assigns this motif such a specific timbre, it acquires the connotations of a fanfare. It works like a rhythmic driver, pushing the piano part forward. The figure moves from the horns to the muted trumpets and then to the **higher register** of the flutes, where, at RN 9 + 10, it is doubling the piano part, at the interval of the third.

The *Più Mosso* section at RN 10 provides the first instance in this piano concerto of Prokofiev's percussive touch. The indication of *ff sempre* and *martellato* draws attention to the almost perverse repetition of the tonic chord of D flat major. The repeated and dotted note motif has thus given way to insistent and percussive chords. The tuba entry on G natural RN10 + 1 (the raised subdominant from the beginning) is a typical Prokofievan disruptive gesture. It is totally unexpected in that the rest of the harmony is focused around the tonic chord of D flat major and thus the entrance of the raised subdominant is a humorous, if somewhat grotesque, surprise. It also functions as a synecdoche, a mnemonic reminder of the home key. The ensuing passage of chromatic double thirds reiterates the importance of the **semitone shift**, while the sustained raised subdominant in the tuba against the tonic harmony marks the orchestra out as a site of conflict.

The *Più Mosso* (RN 10) section is characterised by very different textures in the piano and orchestral parts: an insistent tonic chord in the piano part and accompanying open fifths in the orchestra. The flutes and strings play **appoggiatura-like figures** on the tonic and dominant of D flat major, supported by the pizzicato cellos and basses. The violins play **extended chromatic lines**, which look like pianistic figurations drawn out of one of Prokofiev's piano pieces. The piano's texture here is rich while orchestral sound is contrastingly comparatively sparse. This ensures that the piano part remains the centre of attention while the orchestral writing displays some embryonic Prokofievan orchestration techniques. For example, the pizzicato accompaniment,<sup>33</sup> the solo tuba intervention at RN 10 + 10 as well as the chromatic and scalar **figurations** at RN 10 + 4 and RN 10 + 12

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<sup>33</sup> According to Rimsky-Korsakov, pizzicato playing "is used chiefly as a colour effect". (*Principles of Orchestration*, 27) Prokofiev does indeed generally use pizzicato for atmospheric or timbral reasons.

become characteristic orchestral textures, especially when the orchestral role is more an accompanying one. Similarly, the short dialogues between the horns and the solo trumpet at RN 11 and RN 11 + 1 are important orchestral gestures.

The key of this passage is D flat major but it gives way to a C major full of chromatic inflections (RN 10 + 12). The chromatic double thirds and running scalar patterns are still the main gestures in the piano part while the orchestra continues its open fifth gestures combined with an embedded chromatic motif line on the horns. This section finishes with a trill-like flourish, another of Prokofiev's theatrical gestures and heralds the way for the next *Meno Mosso* section at RN 12 in the appropriately subdued key of E minor.

The first time that the orchestra introduces a section is at RN 12. In this *Meno Mosso* section, the orchestra introduces the fourth theme, *d*, in the low registers which creates a stark contrast to the preceding section and simultaneously slows down the pace of this first section of the concerto. For most of this part, the orchestra plays the thematic material while the piano plays a rather subordinate role. At RN 13 for example, the dotted note motif played by the violins is a central textural motif. It refers back to the dotted note motif in the previous section but here it functions as a decorated appoggiatura with the corresponding crescendo and decrescendo dynamics. Throughout this section, the piano is merely elaborating on secondary musical material, while the orchestra comes into its own with new musical themes and motifs. The use of the orchestra to introduce the new material at this point comes as a refreshing change. Up until this point, each of the preceding four sections was introduced by the piano, while the orchestra played a subordinate role.

The gesture of leaping octaves in unison across the higher ranges of the piano at RN 13 continues to suggest, through the marker of register, the virtuosic aspect of the work, while in itself, it is actually occupying the subsidiary role of accompaniment, which provides yet another subtle debunking of the virtuoso concerto tradition. The hands play in unison, which gives the whole passage an air of simplicity and the main harmonic emphasis of this gesture is on the tonic and dominant of E minor. This 9 bar phrase gradually descends to the lower regions of the piano where a new accompaniment figure is used after the orchestra restates the theme again. This time (RN 13 + 10) Prokofiev turns to the over-arching gesture which has been a feature of his work right from the juvenilia, and turns that gesture into a mellow accompanying figure built around scalar and triadic hand positions, repeated notes that focus on the tonic note, finally using

*glissandos* to gradually build up the theatrical and dramatic effect of this section. The *glissandos*, while they are used for effect as a way of decorating the tonic and dominant pitches of the section, also help Prokofiev pace and heighten the excitement of his narrative. As such Prokofiev's use of *glissandos* is always measured, and he uses them only for moments of heightened effect.

This section acts as a welcome oasis of calm prior to the next *Più Mosso* section at RN 15. The use of the orchestra to introduce quieter and sombre material suggests that Prokofiev viewed the piano as the locus of energy and dramatic virtuosity. As the previous chapter revealed, Prokofiev considered the piano to be a force of physical stamina and acrobatics, which at times, are not the most comfortable for the pianist. His specific type of virtuosity played upon a combination of physical challenges as well as complex technical feats. The piano concerto embraces this concept of virtuosity and the orchestra's material comes as a moment of respite for both performer and listener, which indicates that Prokofiev's vision for the orchestra was not merely one of accompaniment. Although throughout this piano concerto, which Prokofiev composed as a specific medium for his virtuosity the orchestra has a subordinate role, certain parts of the concerto, such as this *Meno Mosso* section, indicate that Prokofiev may have been starting to think of the orchestra as an entity in its own right, rather than simply as an object of contrast.

RN 15 + 2 shows Prokofiev's application of the *ostinato* principle to the orchestra. This entire section is held together by cellos and divided basses playing repeated octaves that emphasize the interval of the falling second. Syncopated lines played by the violins are layered over the *ostinato* figure, a strategy favoured by Prokofiev to build up orchestral textures. The resulting rhythmic tension between the *ostinato* and syncopated lines creates a cumulative build-up to the *Animato* section at RN 17, where both orchestra and piano play fortissimo as they near the end of the concerto's first section.

The *Più Mosso* and the ensuing *Animato* section (RN 15 and 17 respectively) are the last flash of virtuosity in this section. This is a typical example of Prokofiev's writing for piano at its best – it provides the pianist with ample opportunity to display his skills and demonstrates the main strategies that underpin Prokofiev's writing for the piano. It also has much to say about Prokofiev's understanding of the virtuosic. The last part of the first section is built on classic Prokofiev staples: the ubiquitous chromatic line, shorter chromatic and scalar figurations, embedded descending scales as well as plenty of writing

in unison octaves. This occurs at the *Animato* section at RN 17. It also demonstrates the importance that Prokofiev attaches to repetition as a compositional device. The indication of *ff con brio* and the later *mf marcato* indication again positions this concluding section of the concerto's first movement in the virtuosic range of the composer's vocabulary.

The concluding section of the first part of the piano concerto, to be played *Animato*, is a building up of previous melodic material, doubled up and played *con brio* and for the most part, *fortissimo*, providing a good illustration of Prokofiev's conflict and collision technique. The orchestra's role in this section is one of textural and dynamic support. Marked *Tutti*, it provides chordal support all the way through while the bass line continues to emphasise the chromatic pull through the chromatic motif E – D sharp – D – C sharp. As part of the layering of sonorities Prokofiev includes the chimes at RN 18. This is a specifically Russian sonority and draws attention to the combined sonic capabilities of the orchestra at that point. It is also a reference to the composer's legacy of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky and an implied reference to the Russian 'skazka'. The chimes outline major and minor broken chords alternately: E – G sharp – B then E – G – B, thus creating a tense ambiguity between major and minor sonorities.

The gradual build-up toward a climax is achieved through repetition, which is structured around the descending chromatic pattern (see RN 17). This is moulded into four bar phrases in the first instance and then repeated twice. The third time it occurs (RN 18), the one bar pattern is repeated three times and then extended. In its appearance at RN 18, the chromatic pattern has undergone one crucial change. Its last note was changed to a crotchet beat marked *sf*, which places emphasis on the least important beat of the bar. In the ensuing repetitions, Prokofiev changes this last note of each bar, raising it up by step so that it is only at the end of the bar that we realize that the repetition has gone somewhat awry. This emphasis on the last beat remains a crucial feature of this concluding section. From RN 20 onwards, a new pattern, centered on the tonic chord of D flat major, emerges. This descending and accented triadic pattern in octaves gradually ascends in register as well as in dynamic volume over the course of 24 bars, before it quietly subsides into a toccata like pattern (RN 20 + 8), marked *dim*. It is strongly reminiscent of the patterns around which the *Toccata* Op. 11 is structured. The first section thus ends on the quiet repetitions of the tonic and dominant notes, as though to stabilize the tonality of the home key that was challenged almost constantly throughout the movement.

## Second part of the Piano Concerto

Prokofiev's appropriation and personalization of Romantic piano music is evident in this part of the concerto. Written in B major, it is an excellent example of the way that Prokofiev integrates texture, tempo changes and thematic material to create a soulful and melodic section in the tradition of romantic piano textures while still playing up the qualities of his piano playing that are most distinctive.

The thematic material *x* is first introduced by the orchestra (RN 21). This is one of the very few times in the piano concerto that the orchestra is given a distinctive voice of its own. The texture of this material is nonetheless extremely pianistic: individual lines are layered over each other in typically Prokofievan piano writing style, with an ostinato pattern in alternating thirds, fifths and sixths being used for the inner voices. These repeated ostinato triplets are played by the strings, while the melodic figures are played mostly on the woodwind, creating a dreamy texture suggesting the “patina of distant time”<sup>34</sup>. This sustained and muted ostinato does indeed create the sensation that we are in a musical time warp, while the melodic material, first played by muted first violins and then by clarinets and horns adds a specific warmth to the texture. Coming right after the previous demonic and pianistically virtuosic section, this *Andante Assai* passage makes a welcome change in mood and provides a dreamy atmosphere which is also a particularly Prokofievan trait. The harmony is very slow moving, and this contributes to the sensation of time standing still.

Prokofiev gradually builds up the texture, starting from the basic string sound, layering on woodwinds at RN 21 + 4 and horns RN 21 + 6. The theme is based around a falling seventh and descending semiquaver chromatic pattern (RN 21). The falling intervals of seconds and sevenths are typical of Prokofiev's writing and are often used in slow and romantic-type textures. They are counterbalanced by the direction and shape of the answering thematic phrases on the clarinets and horns. When at RN 21 + 5, the clarinet takes up thematic material *x*, that material is inverted. In this passage, Prokofiev draws out orchestral timbres and colours from what was essentially a pianistic configuration. The piano's entry with the contrary motion gesture is gentle and lingering: *poco rit.*, and *dolcissimo* at RN 22. The theme is then played by the topmost registers of the piano with two layers of semiquaver textures running below it. These

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<sup>34</sup> Boris Berman, *Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 62

semiquaver textures gradually become more intricate, with the lower half of the right hand playing three semiquavers against the two played by the left hand. The left hand's undulating pattern is gently reassuring.

The piano texture expands vertically at RN 23: this expansion of staves often happens in Prokofiev's more emotionally expanded pieces.<sup>35</sup> Here he layers the levels of complexity – at this point the piano part is made of three separate strands: the main theme, an ascending scalar pattern and accompanying arpeggio-like figurations in the bass. Dramatically speaking, Prokofiev needs room to elongate and lengthen his ideas. He achieves this sense of space elongation by taking a cell out of the thematic material (for example RN 23 + 1) which the bassoons and muted trumpets play from their opposing registers and timbres. This contrasting projection of thematic materials creates a sense of distance and space, and although the piano still retains control of the major musical themes, the movement has a very distinct ethereal feel to it.

This sense of interplay between the piano and the individual textural strands of the orchestra is reflected in the direction of the melodic shapes. The piano plays ascending scale patterns while the orchestral solos usually play descending patterns. In doing so, Prokofiev maintains a sense of balance which is then upset when the piano abandons its layered textures for chordal writing while the woodwinds take up the texture the piano was playing earlier (see RN 25). At RN 23, the muted trumpet, bassoon and horn play the piano's plaintive (dotted crotchet – quaver – crotchet motif). From a particularly pianistic texture, Prokofiev draws out the various colours and timbres of the orchestra. The semitone shift retains its importance and Prokofiev underlines it by having the double basses play pizzicato octaves from B to A sharp.

At RN 24, Prokofiev thins out the orchestral texture, reducing it first to a single appoggiatura figure played by the violins, then the cellos. This sudden thinning of the texture creates an imbalance, where the orchestra is simply doubling the piano's inner melody. Gradually Prokofiev layers on the timbres: woodwinds and strings come in at RN 25, the former playing scalar lines that create an airy texture which counterbalance the thick romantic chordal structures in the piano part. At RN 25, the orchestra takes over the piano's texture, so that the piano can have a thicker, chordal, pseudo-romantic texture instead. A typically Prokofievan long-limbed melody is played by the clarinets at RN 25 + 4 and then taken over by the flutes. This woodwind timbre is a favourite of Prokofiev –

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<sup>35</sup> Such extended piano score writing is also used in Prokofiev's short score sketches of orchestral and stage works, where he adds on staves above and below the piano staves.

he often assigns long and winding melodies to the woodwinds – this ensures that they stand out of the orchestral texture and acquire a mellowness that would not have been possible were such melodies to be played only on strings.

The piano's chordal writing, based entirely on the tonic chord of G sharp minor, serves to thicken the texture and thus reinforces the tension before the piano reverts back to playing the three-layered texture, this time with a loud and accented theme *x*. This is the climactic point of the section as from this moment on, Prokofiev will be gently drawing us away from such a tense climax to the quiet end of the movement. This begins at RN 26 and is aptly marked *tranquillo, decrescendo e ritardando*. Ostensibly written in the key of C major, the piano now has a completely different texture based almost wholly on triplet semiquavers to be played *piano, tranquillo* and *ad libitum*. This recaptures the same stillness that characterized the opening harmonies of this movement over which *x* was superimposed. Against this undulating movement in the piano part, the woodwind and brass play a scalar pattern in double the time values of previous similar patterns, thus again endowing the theme with a sense of elongation, as well as a stopping of time that indicates the end of the movement.

The last section of the second part of the concerto, RN 26, is not much more than a series of **contrary motion** gestures played jointly on the woodwind and strings. The contrasting textual natures of the orchestra and the piano stand out: the piano part is concerned with exhibiting yet more pianistic figurations, while the orchestral part, built on **scalar** lines in contrary motion, gently fades into nothingness. The piano's figurations are nothing more than elaborations on the scalar figures played by the orchestra. Appropriately, this part ends on yet another chord built on thirds with the dominant note of D flat major, the main key of the work, in the bass line. There is no sense of traditional cadence at this juncture: Prokofiev almost never delivers a cadence when it is expected. Rather the sequence of chords (themselves built on thirds) leading to the final chord of this first section of the piano concerto move down to the A flat by chromatic step and create a pseudo-cadence: RN 26 + 2 (beat 1): B – D – F – **C sharp**; beat 2: **C natural** – E – G; beat 3: **B flat** – D flat – F – A flat; beat 4: D – F sharp – **A natural**; RN 26 + 3: F sharp – **A flat** – C – E flat – G.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Pitches constituting the bass line are highlighted in bold.

### Third part of the Piano Concerto

The third part of the piano concerto is quite simply a mischievous synthesis and compression of musical material that has already been heard in the previous sections. The material in this movement is reworked in such a way that it plays out Prokofiev's main thematic ideas and gestures within a short space of time. The chromatic line makes its appearance in various guises: it appears at RN 30 in exactly the same way as it appeared in RN 15. In this appearance however, it is developed differently as it is seamlessly followed by the third theme from the first movement, the dotted note motif.

The section opens with a **presentational gesture** from the orchestra which emphasizes the two important beats of the bar. Like the presentational gesture which opened the first part of the concerto, the main aim is to lay out the rhythmic downbeats. This is a strategy that Prokofiev employs most frequently in the *pesenki* and as a rhythmic gesture, it sets the pace, which is usually a fast one, of the piece to come. With the presentational gesture, Prokofiev symbolically winds up his metric timer which then unwinds as the section progresses. In both the first and third parts, where this presentational gesture is used, the tempo is quick: *Allegro brioso* and *Allegro scherzando* in the first and third part respectively. The tempo of the third part combined with the overall detached articulation throughout the section creates a light and airy texture that fits in well with the impish and scherzo-type nature of the piece. Again, the opening presentational idea is played by the orchestra, thus establishing a light and airy texture against which the piano's frolicking **chromatic motifs** may play. Ultimately, the orchestra's role is to accompany and to highlight specific gestures in the piece. This occurs at RN 27 + 5 for example, where the horns play the **repeated note motif**, joined by the trombones a bar later. Whenever the repeated motif occurs in this concerto, it is assigned to a brass instrument and thus the fanfare-like nature of the gesture is reinforced.

The first appearance of the **chromatic motif** in this section is at RN 27, where it takes the shape of an ascending scale in D flat major which starts on the sub-mediant pitch, B flat. The second appearance, which follows on from this (RN 27 + 2) is a shorter descending chromatic motif pattern. The bass is built around continuously ascending and descending arpeggios based on an alternation of **major** and **minor** chords. Similarly, the chromatic motif in the right hand ascends and descends in turn. This creates an ongoing sense of urgency throughout the movement against which the orchestra only provides

interjections and a repetition of the chromatic motif and thematic idea that had first appeared in the first part of the concerto (see RN 12 and RN 27 + 17). Dialogues between the solo piano and the orchestra are few in this concerto as for the most part, each entity develops musical material independently of the other. Nevertheless, at RN 28, such a dialogic passage between the two textures ensues. The piano part is built on accented and *ff* chords to which the orchestra responds in an appropriately exuberant manner, with the accent falling on the third beat of the bar (RN 28 + 5) while the piano places the accent neatly on the first beat of the bar. The rhythmic interplay in this passage, as is quite often the case with Prokofiev, is metric.

The pizzicato passage that follows this interchange at RN 29 is really an *ostinato* bass on the notes G sharp and E, which suggests that this section has moved to the E minor key from the first movement (RN 12). There too the mood was a little sombre and the tempo somewhat slower than the preceding section. Such quieter and slower moments allow Prokofiev to put the breaks on what is sometimes a hurtling, breakneck speed established by the piano part. It is always the orchestra that introduces the slower part, functioning as it were, as the voice of musical reason, amidst the energy and ebullience of the piano part. This will in fact be the last moment of respite for the pianist in the concerto. While the cellos and basses repeat G sharp – E, the rest of the strings alternate an F sharp – A – C – E chord with pitch class E. Meanwhile, the trumpets and horns alternately repeat the fanfare-like motif, which first occurred at RN 7, facetiously insisting on the tonic note of this section – E. The cellos and double basses continue to sustain the tonic note in gradually expanding intervallic patterns as follows: G sharp – E, A sharp – E, C – E, D – E. Four bars before RN 30, horns and tuba play a long an accented E.

Following the previous few bars' insistence on E, this disruptive gesture comes as no great harmonic surprise. Nevertheless, after a *Tutti* rest, it comes across forcefully and dramatically creates a bridge between the previous orchestral passage and the oncoming piano solo passage which starts at RN 30. This horn and tuba gesture is a presentational one, simultaneously grounding the passage in E minor while directing our attention to the piano virtuosity that is about to follow. The long note is a perverse interpretation of the previous fanfare-like motifs that characterised this orchestral section. A similar **presentational gesture** occurs at RN 10 + 1, where the tuba sustained an accented note across three bars. In heralding the ensuing piano part, Prokofiev places the orchestra firmly in the subordinate role of creating a framework for the piano part.

A recalling of the fanfare-like **repeated note** pattern which was the third theme from the first section occurs at RN 29 + 2. This gesture is then taken up by the piano at RN 30 + 2 after a 22 bar section of purely orchestral music. As though to mock the return of previously heard material, this section concludes with a disruptive gesture on the brass, mirroring the one heard in the first section at RN 10 + 1. Disruptive gestures are only really possible in orchestral writing as their effectiveness depends on the timbre assigned to it. This disruptive gesture draws attention not only to itself but also to the material that follows it and to the strategy of repetition that Prokofiev uses in his compositions as a developmental technique. What follows at RN 29 + 2 and at RN 30 is a variation on material that we have already heard.

The relation between register and the virtuosic mode in Prokofiev's piano writing is again evident at RN 30 + 10 where repeated, dotted thirds and fast finger figurations, pitched in the piano's **higher registers** are accompanied by the indication *con effetto*. In this instance, the bigger gesture of the pianist playing at opposite ends of the piano is a crucial part of the virtuosic in Prokofiev and adds a visual dimension to the performance.

The **contrary motion** gesture that occurs at RN 30 + 14 has its origins in gestures occurring in the second part, RN 21 + 7. The gesture only appears once in the second part of the concerto, but it is developed here as it gradually expands into a long descending line in the left hand texture as at RN 30 + 22, 30 + 26, 30 + 27, 30 + 28, 30 + 29, 30 + 30. At these points, this long **scalar** line becomes a crucial part of the texture: significantly, this all occurs during the piano's solo part, at a time when the pianist's technique and virtuosity are displayed during a 'concentrated' writing moment for piano part. The hands play this long line alternately, as though they were physically pulling the piano apart in different directions. The importance of the line is further highlighted by its prominence: it is supported only by double dotted thirds in each hand.

This is the last solo section in the concerto: it is only fitting therefore, that this concluding solo piano section emphasizes those gestures that are specifically pianistic and particular to Prokofiev. It draws together yet again a set of crucial Prokofievan gestures that distinguish the pure writing for piano: the chromatic scale, the dotted note motif played in thirds, the octaves playing the interval of a fifth, the leaping and accented bass in octaves, the accented triadic patterns in the right hand, the theatrical trill-like gesture that conclude the piano solo section. In this work, as we have seen in the earlier works for piano, they are not simply physical gestures, they are transformed into thematic material.

From RN 31 the orchestra reiterates the theme that is first heard at RN 12 in the first section. This time it is in the key of E major. Marked *Poco più sostenuto*, this section marks the beginning of the concerto's short but intense climax. Following the solo piano section, the orchestra returns with a theme from the first part of the piano concerto at RN 31. The deeper and brassier texture of the orchestra in this passage balances the flighty yet virtuosic playing of the piano whose right hand part is played in the **higher registers** of the instrument, creating fantasy-like sonorities and again making reference to the virtuosic nature of the writing.

As was the case with the end of the first section, this last section displays Prokofiev's use of the dramatic crescendo as a compositional strategy: the elements that characterize his pure, 'concentrated' writing for piano are layered and paced in such a way that it is transformed into a dramatic crescendo. The pacing of this section is of paramount importance because it articulates the theatricalisation of this crescendo. The tempo indications underscore this: *Poco più sostenuto* changes to *poco a poco accelerando*, *Più mosso, sempre accelerando al animato*, leading to the *Animato* section at RN 34. The dramatic crescendo however does not rely exclusively on tempo build up. Layers of complexity – rhythmic, gradation of accents, use of dynamics and layering of textures - are added incrementally and serve to carve and tighten the shape of this dramatic climax.

Prokofiev varies the thematic material from previous sections in this cadenza-like episode. The dotted note motif is now no longer based on a **repeated note** but becomes part of a descending scale in octaves (RN 31). The insistent repeated note has given way to an undulating scale pattern. Against this, the left hand plays in triplets, thus giving the piece subtle rhythmic impetus. The bass line also retains the undulating movement. Further rhythmic complexity is added on at RN 33 where the *Più mosso* section sees the three against two rhythmic pattern intensified. The left hand's accented finger pattern at RN 33 changes to staccato which is easier on the pianist's stamina. The scalar pattern that had already featured at RN 30 + 14 is used here in a similar to its occurrence in the second movement.

The concluding flourish of this concerto reaches its apotheosis at RN 34 where Prokofiev brings in the definitive gestures of his pianistic idiom. The *Animato* pacing of the work is particularly conducive to the display of dazzling pianistic virtuosity that follows. Still in E major, the piano part outlines an accented tonic triad split between the two hands, which plays up the visual element of this essentially simple gesture. This is

followed by the repetition of the chromatic octaves gesture that was heard in at RN 17, played *f marcato*, then *ff* and *fff* progressively. The concerto comes to a blistering and gymnastic end with the return to D flat major. It thus concludes with accented octaves in each hand playing tonic triad and scalar patterns as well as leaping chords covering the entire range of the keyboard in the pianist's final gesture of complete domination of the instrument.

Here as at RN 17 and RN 34, Prokofiev begins to articulate a dramatic climax for the concerto, during which he layers different orchestral sonorities: for example the use of chimes at RN 35 and sustained flute trills at RN 33 + 11. These give the section a magical sense of ethereality, and in doing so refer back to the 'skazka' image. From RN 33, which is marked *Più Mosso*, the concerto gradually picks up speed and energy. The insistent accents and repeated scale patterns of the piano part join with the **ostinato** motif, outlining the interval of a descending fourth played by the violas, cellos and basses. The woodwinds play scales in double thirds in **contrary motion** to the lower brass, which creates dense textures and simultaneously suggests a pulling apart of textures. The piano meanwhile plays far above the orchestra in pitch, as though caught in a last minute frenzy to draw attention to itself. From RN 34 onwards, the orchestra's role is to provide texture, power and rhythm to the climax of the concerto. **Ostinato** chords support the piano writing and the return to the opening key at RN 36 + 3 brings with it a return to directed tonality via Prokofiev's cellos and double basses.

### Tonality and Use of Key

Prokofiev himself referred to the use of tonality in this piano concerto as "harmonic imbroglio" because of its transitory nature.<sup>37</sup> The first movement is in the key of D flat major but shifts to C major with the piano solo's entry of theme *b*. The move from D flat major to C major thus emphasizes the way the gesture of the **semitone shift** is integrated into the very tonality of the work. This semitone relationship is used in different contexts, sometimes it is embedded into the textures of the work, sometimes it is a tonal driver; in this case it constitutes a structural link. The importance of C major as a key cannot be underestimated as it often defines Prokofiev's 'concentrated' writing. It is a key that defines Prokofiev's pianistic writing as it provides a pure platform from which the pianist's hand choreography takes off. The alternation between the keys of D flat and

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<sup>37</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 485

C major characterizes the section until the use of E minor at RN 12. This radical change of key emphasizes the entry of the orchestra, the first time in this concerto that it has an autonomous presence.

The main key of the second section is B major, yet another black key tonality. This allows for a more poised position on the piano's black keys for the rippling semiquaver accompaniment that runs through the movement. Black key signatures (whether sharp or flat) are often used in Prokofiev's pseudo-romantic textures; they appear as early as the juvenilia.<sup>38</sup>

In the third part of the piano concerto, Prokofiev uses tonality as a way of referring back to the previous sections. For example, although it starts off in the key of C major, the motif at RN 27 is in D flat major, thus referring to the key of the whole concerto. Tonality is never established for long however, it is merely a fleeting reference point to what has gone on before. At RN 29, the key is E minor, another reference to the first section. The next major tonal landmark of this section is RN 31, where the key is E major, and finally, at RN 36 + 2, the section returns to D flat major, the concerto's home key. Prokofiev's choice of keys revolves around the interval of a major third: this section moves between the keys of C and E major.

This limited and neighboring modulation is typical of Prokofiev's harmonic writing. In the first place, he is never too concerned with establishing a tonality to run throughout a whole piece. Rather, if he does establish tonality, as he ostensibly does with the opening presentational gesture of this section, as well as the gesture that opens the first part, it is always with the intention of debunking it soon after. Prokofiev's choice of neighboring keys has a lot to do with his privileging of the semitone, which in the course of this thesis has been referred to as the semitone shift. Prokofiev's choice of tonality thus depends on direction, ultimately it drives not only the main structure of the piece, but more importantly, it works on a very local level. Specific gestures that form a crucial and staple part of his thematic material, such as the embedded chromatic motif, scalar patterns and figurations that fall comfortably under the pianist's hand: all of these generate thematic ideas that rely on such fine tuning and chromatic changes of tonality.

## Maddalena

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<sup>38</sup> See for example Series III: Song 3.

Prokofiev's first complete opera to survive was *Maddalena*, written between 1911 and 1913. The plot is built around a love triangle involving the protagonist, her husband the painter Genaro and her husband's friend, the alchemist Stenion. The male figures kill themselves just as they discover that they both love the same woman. Maddalena herself proves to be indifferent to both men. The opera was never staged in his lifetime. With the composition of *Maddalena* we get a clearer idea of how Prokofiev approached the genre of opera. In his diary entry he notes that the very suggestion to write an opera "had a galvanizing effect on me".<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that the composer had not previously thought about opera composition and its theatrical possibilities. After all, prior to *Maddalena*, Prokofiev had written four operas which indicate that his concern with opera was not only long-standing – it was to a large extent, almost instinctive.

Tcherepnin gave him some tips about opera composition. He suggested that the subject should be simple and intimate: "The most important thing for an opera is that it should have plenty of life and movement, otherwise the characters run the risk of simply turning into wax figures."<sup>40</sup> As Prokofiev read the libretto by Baron Lieven<sup>41</sup>,

"something hit me right between the eyes: *Maddalena* was not a play for the legitimate theatre, it was a pure-blooded libretto crying out to be set to music. To elaborate: it contained many passages which in a theatrical production would not be interesting and would pass unnoticed, whereas treated operatically and set to music they would gain enormously in interest. [...] operatically it could evoke a marvellous atmosphere, a magnificent canvas on which to portray the character of *Maddalena*: beautiful, inconstant and remote."<sup>42</sup>

In this telling passage from his diary, Prokofiev engages with dramaturgical and staging issues that would remain principal concerns for him throughout his compositional career. Primarily, he speaks of the importance of evoking an atmosphere that goes beyond the text and the need to create images that music may suggest but that a drama production would not be able to. Furthermore, he is concerned with characterization and the effective depiction of his main character. The ability to define a character through specific musical figurations is already a principal quality of Prokofiev's output and has emerged very clearly in the previous chapter, where particular musical themes and gestures in his piano music acquire their own personalities. Prokofiev would easily transfer such musical ideas as he used in his piano works to specific characters in his operas.

<sup>39</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 217

<sup>40</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 217

<sup>41</sup> This was the *nom de plume* of Magda Gustavovna Lieven-Orlova.

<sup>42</sup> *Diaries*, Vol.1: 218

Underlying the above quotation from Prokofiev's *Diaries*, we can already see the composer's growing concern with issues of theatricality as well as with the importance of maintaining action on stage, which would be of huge concern to him in the composition of *The Gambler* and beyond. By noting that music is to set the atmosphere, Prokofiev is already suggesting that specific scenes in the opera must become overtly theatrical, contrived even, in his dramatisation of the script.

Prokofiev's relationship with *Maddalena* was never an entirely comfortable one. As his *Diaries* attest, he was fully absorbed in its composition and invested much energy into it – the fact that the students at the conservatory found it too difficult to perform came as a huge disappointment to the young composer and after orchestrating the first scene in 1912, he never went back to orchestrate the whole work. His friend Miaskovsky however, felt that the opera, with its Straussian overtones, deserved to be orchestrated and he even suggested to Prokofiev that he would orchestrate it himself, within the space of three weeks.<sup>43</sup>

As events turned out however, Prokofiev never got round to completing the orchestration, neither did Miaskovsky, partly because Prokofiev did not have the time to dedicate to its orchestration, but more importantly, because as he points out: "my ideas about opera have advanced considerably in the two years since I composed 'Maddalena', which now in many respects fails to satisfy my present demands." It remains in piano score although Boosey and Hawkes published an orchestrated version of the opera made by Edward Downes, in 1979. This remains the only orchestrated version of *Maddalena* available today.

Although not an entirely successful operatic work, *Maddalena* was a crucial milestone for the composer: it was the testing ground for his ideas on dramaturgy, theatre and staging. Furthermore, it is in this work that Prokofiev begins transferring pianistic gestures and ideas into his writing for the stage. Even from the only scene that Prokofiev managed to orchestrate, much can be deduced about the composer's current thoughts and particular approach to orchestration. The orchestration of the first scene is sometimes very sparse with individual strands of sounds heard in dialogue with each other (see bars 67 – 73 where solo lines are assigned to the flute, clarinet and first violin). His preference for certain timbres above others is already evident and he makes consistent use of the woodwind and string textures, the latter often being heard as entire and undifferentiated

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<sup>43</sup> *Diaries*, Vol. 1: 467

blocks of sound. This makes the orchestra sound more like a chamber orchestra than the full orchestra it is.<sup>44</sup>

The string sound is used dramatically and for effect: he uses the tremolo on strings as a means of creating a melodramatic atmosphere. Uncharacteristically for Prokofiev's orchestral textures, the harp has a strong presence in this work,<sup>45</sup> as it does in other orchestral works of the period such as *Dreams* Op. 6 and *Two Choral Songs* Op. 7. Woodwind instruments are assigned solo moments: an example of this occurs in bar 9 where the oboe plays the chromatic Maddalena motif. The association of playful moments with the woodwind sounds is evident in the *pp scherzando* section at bar 146. Muted trumpets playing *pp dolcissimo* (bars 22 – 24) are also important for the creation of atmosphere.

In a striking difference from his later scoring, the tuba is heard infrequently. Furthermore, Prokofiev never uses all of the brass instruments together: the horns are used most of the time and the trumpets are used only occasionally. The repeated note gesture does however make an appearance on the horn at bar 187: it accompanies Maddalena's pensive singing after Romeo and Gemma have departed. At this point in the score, the repeated note is the most important gesture and is written in the lowest register. The repeated note is used to provide textural as well as rhythmic impetus. Prokofiev's use of the brass section in this work is very different from the dramatic manipulation of it in later orchestral writing.

Prokofiev's use of the bass line in this work is different from his manipulation of it in *The Gambler* and in *Love for Three Oranges*. In *Maddalena*, the bass line lacks the character and driving impetus that it would have in his later orchestral writing. Here, Prokofiev uses it as a harmonic though largely static harmonic driver: he often assigns it a number of long sustained notes such as at bars 32 – 37; 41 – 43; 48 – 58.

The preference for particular intervals is already evident in the orchestration of this scene: the clarinets and horns often play at the interval of the sixth (bars 13 – 16)

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<sup>44</sup> Downes' instrumentation is as follows: 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, Cor anglais, 3 clarinets in B flat (3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons, 6 horns in F, 4 trumpets in C, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, side drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, 2 harps, piano, strings. Prokofiev does not provide a list of instruments on the front of the manuscript but the score makes use of this instrumentation. No percussion is indicated in Prokofiev's score. (Information courtesy of Fiona McKnight, Archivist, Serge Prokofiev Archives, London).

<sup>45</sup> Harp writing of the period generally elaborates florid figurations on chords, as suggested in Rimsky Korsakov's *Principles of Orchestration*, 29. In later writing, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cinderella* and *War and Peace*, the harp writing became more complex.

while as the curtain is being raised, the orchestra plays in unison at the interval of a third apart.

### Scene 1

The musical material of this opening orchestral interlude is based around the descending chromatic theme that is associated with Maddalena (bars 1-3), which is set against a sustained **tremolo** accompaniment. The texture of the section is lush and thick with **chromatic motifs** that play against each other constantly so that the swirling motif is heard virtually continuously, appearing in different layers and commencing on different beats of the bar. Such a presentation of the main thematic material ensures that the drama inherent in the descending chromatic motif is foregrounded. The repetition of the motif which occurs in different registers thickens the texture and more importantly, underlines the sense of melodrama and theatricality suggested by the nature of the theme. The gradually layered chromatic motif associated with the character of Maddalena creates the impression of a descending swirl of downward movement which intensifies throughout the opening orchestral section and thus sets up the theatrical drama that is about to unfold.

The choice of a chromatic motif for Maddalena is an intriguing one. As will be seen in his later operas, particularly in *Love for Three Oranges* and *Fiery Angel*, and as has already been demonstrated in the previous chapter, chromaticism in Prokofiev is related to the suggestion of atmosphere: it is often associated with the supernatural and with magic, and is almost always assigned to evil characters. The use of a chromatic motif for the main character of the opera suggests that there are hidden complexities to the character of Maddalena. All her statements, as for example the love speech in the next scene, need to be considered with some degree of scepticism. Furthermore, the use of the descending motif to create the image of a downward spiral of evil is well chosen: those who associate themselves with Maddalena are driven to despair and death. Although there is nothing overtly supernatural about Maddalena, the implication that she is somehow a devious femme fatale is present right from the start. Prokofiev's stage directions indicate this in a later scene where she is to be "illuminated by lightening". There is certainly something otherworldly about her, a malicious shadow that the male characters around her fail to see and that is only obvious to the audience and suggested through the music.

Prokofiev's characterisation of Maddalena will prefigure other female figures in his later operas, most notably Polina in *The Gambler*, Fata Morgana in *Love for Three*

*Oranges* and Renata in *Fiery Angel*. None of these three characters are from the world of the supernatural, and yet they all hover dangerously close to the border that separates their human world from that inhabited by spirits and shadows. All three are ambiguous characters and prone to hysteria and unexpected mood swings. Naturally, Maddalena is the least well-defined of them, partly because the character is rather one-sided and this limits Prokofiev's possibilities of musical characterisation. But Prokofiev's music successfully suggests the image of a half-witch, half-madonna character, which immediately implies similarities with two other female characters in Prokofiev's operas, namely Polina and Renata. In particular, they all share a need to dabble in and with human emotions, especially love, with detrimental consequences for themselves and those around them.

At bar 21, the chordal motif, which is repeated three times and which has a presentational function, hides an embedded interval of the tritone (see bars 22 – 24, A to D sharp, and bars 26 – 28, G to C sharp). The tritone becomes a significant interval in Prokofiev's musical dramaturgy as it suggests the presence of evil or points to the underlying supernatural qualities of a scene. Prokofiev does use it in his piano works but within the context of a stage work, its connotations of evil become more defined. This descending interval is set against Maddalena's motif thus creating a subtext of danger and evil surrounding her before she has even started singing.

The theatrical quality of the scene is further enhanced visually when the curtain opens on a sunset-filled room and a pensive Maddalena. Prokofiev isolates the Maddalena theme and freezes it in musical time – this draws our attention to it and all other music fades while the Maddalena theme casts its unwelcome spell over the audience. Between bars 89 and 94 for example, the theme is played in a high register and against continually sustained chords: in this way Prokofiev has insulated the musical essence that characterises Maddalena and zooms in on it. By bar 95, the descending chromatic lines rest on a repeated octave of F sharp while the C sharp pedal first heard in bar 89 is now played an octave higher. At bar 85, the opposing registers and textures come together into the piano's middle registers with a series of spread chords between bars 98 and 99.

The construction of this repeated chord is yet another of Prokofiev's typical ones, built on a series of intervals in thirds: B – D – F sharp – A and set against a pedal note on C. This thickening of texture and repeated chords creates the illusion of time being suspended and sets the scene for Maddalena's next utterance. The orchestral interludes of the opera are enormously significant as the music will gradually become a character in

and of itself. Although this quality of the music will be more obvious in the later scenes, in this scene Prokofiev uses the orchestra to drive the movement forward at those moments when there is nothing much happening on stage or when we are faced with a tableau, as is the case in the first part of this scene. It is also used as an extended musical canvas, where Prokofiev musically draws in ideas that are not physically manifest on stage but which may be suggestive of the character's psychology.

The Chorus of Gondoliers, heard off-stage right after Maddalena declared she was bored, provides the first interruption in the scene. It is a chorus entirely written in thirds (similar to a chorus that occurs in *Undina*) and accompanied by semiquaver figurations that work around the interval of the second. The first 16 bars of this chorus are based on a white-note melody. Crucially, once the Maddalena theme is heard at bar 120, the white-note melody is symbolically tainted with chromaticism: the link between Maddalena and chromaticism is completed at an early stage in the opera and will condition our perception of her character.

Prokofiev makes Maddalena different even in terms of the musical material he uses: while the ordinary characters in the opera have a certain lightness emanating from their textures, Maddalena's texture is heavier and darker. This subtle characterization continues to mark her out from the rest of the characters in the opera. For example, Romeo and Gemma's voices off-stage are accompanied by lighter textures, which prefigure the kind of texture that will be associated with Genaro. At bar 150, when the chorus of Gondoliers sings with Romeo and Gemma, the writing becomes chromatic and features the appoggiatura figure favoured by Prokofiev (see bar 151). The chorus only returns to its white-note writing at bar 158, which concludes this Gondolier interlude.

In this scene's concluding section, from bar 170, the texture is much thinner than in the opening section while the thick tremolo has been replaced by a single note tremolo. There is also a repeated appoggiatura figure in the inner parts. The long note on G at bar 172 is transformed into a repeated note, from bar 174 onwards, with a specific syncopated rhythmic pattern. This gives the section momentum, while the repeated Maddalena theme in the high registers, as at bar 185 and again at bar 195, creates an uneasy sense of ethereality. This goes well with the atmosphere of waiting, both for Genaro and for something to happen, that characterises this first scene.

## Scene 2

Prokofiev's ability to suggest a particular character's mood through a specific musical gesture is evident in this scene through Genaro's motif, which is light-hearted and reminiscent of the textures associated with Romeo and Gemma. It also stands in direct contrast to Stenio's gloomy portrayal which is yet to come and the hysterical characterisation of Maddalena. Genaro's greeting of his wife (bar 6) is accompanied by a **leaping bass** accompaniment, which in Prokofiev's language usually signifies energy and movement: both qualities that characterise Genaro's love for his wife.

Maddalena's tender affirmations of love are prefaced by a yearning and soulful melody, where the drop of the compound minor second is followed by a rising pattern (bar 34). This melody shape, where a descending, wide interval is followed by a series of rising small intervals is a typical one for Prokofiev and one that was used in the abstract context of the piano works but is also used in his operas, where it is usually associated with the themes of love and yearning. Maddalena's first utterance in this scene is based around **major thirds**. Her theme is heard in bar 38 right after she has welcomed her husband home.

In this instance, the Maddalena theme, positioned in between Maddalena's utterance and Genaro's forthcoming one, becomes ambiguous. The music seems to be functioning as an extension of their consciousness. It could be that Maddalena's feelings for Genaro are expressed through the music that follows her utterance rather than through the words themselves. On the other hand, the sound of that theme right before Genaro's narrative of how much he missed her throughout the day and how she was constantly in his thoughts, could be construed as an extension of his thoughts – a way for the audience to tune into his psyche and to his love for his wife. In either case, the music acquires an independent personality as it becomes an outering of the characters' innermost thoughts and emotions.

Genaro's motif continues to emphasise the yearning nature of his love for Maddalena even in the way the accent is placed on the third beat of each bar. Each bar thus unfolds as a little heart tremor that reflects his passion for his wife. One example of this occurs between bars 42 and 47 where the emphasis is purely on the **tremolo** and the accompanying staccato **leaping bass**, which in this opera, is associated only with Genaro. Interestingly, and as will be seen in the next chapter, the leaping bass was originally a

pianistic idea - one that is found both in his works for piano, and also in his early stage works like *The Giant* - which becomes associative over time. In *Maddalena*, the only character to be associated with this type of bass is the husband. Besides providing contrast to Maddalena and Stenio, there is also a hidden implication that Genaro is a rather shallow and one-sided character who is only defined by his love for Maddalena. It almost comes as no surprise that the dramatic and intense Maddalena is looking to make her life more interesting by having an affair with her husband's best friend. Over the tremolo and bass, Prokofiev then doubles Genaro's singing line so that as the character's narrative progresses, his emotions gradually become more intensely reflected in the music.

The descending four note chromatic pattern in semiquavers (bars 68 – 73), a ubiquitous figure in Prokofiev's writing, here acquires a gentle mocking quality as he describes how his friends mock his love for Maddalena and that his love for her overshadows everything else. This pianistic figuration possesses a playful nature, as it does even when it is used in piano textures. Long sustained trills accompany Genaro's happiness at the day's end and the prospect of the oncoming night to be spent with Maddalena. The tempo slows down accordingly while Genaro dwells fondly on his anticipated return to his wife. This affirmation of love is followed by an instrumental interlude before Maddalena responds to her husband's declaration 15 bars later.

A more mature Prokofiev would probably not have allowed such a long interlude in between his declamatory conversations, rather, his main aim was always to keep the action going, be it through the music or through the characters' onstage conversation. In *The Gambler* for example, Prokofiev revised his first version of the opera to include interruptions in the first act that would break up the main conversation between Polina and Alexei. Here however, Prokofiev seems to bowing to the conventions of an operatic love scene, allowing time for the characters' emotions to come across to the audience through the musical interlude. This is yet another example of the way Prokofiev assigns the orchestral music enough room to emerge as a character in its own right.

Maddalena's response to her husband's declaration of love is accompanied by arpeggio-like figurations (bar 184) over which Prokofiev layers a chromatic motif, a texture reminiscent of that associated with Undina. This type of texture, with its gentle and flowing qualities, suggests a subtle femininity to Maddalena's character. Harmonic direction is provided by the long notes which often simply outline a four note chromatic pattern (bars 184 – 187, 192 – 195).

The harmony is almost entirely triadic – both horizontally through the broken chords, and vertically, through the intertwining layered textures. Triadic chords often characterise the downbeat. For example, between bars 188 – 195, the chords are as follows:

Bar 188: F – A flat – C – E

Bar 189: D flat – F – A – C and E flat – G – B flat

Bar 190: D flat – F – A – C and E flat – G – B

Bar 191: E – G – B

Bar 192: G – D flat – F – B flat and A flat – E – B flat

Bar 193: B double flat – G – D flat – F

Bar 194: G – D flat – F – B flat and A flat – E – B flat

Bar 195: B double flat – G – D flat – F

The harmonic make-up of Prokofiev's chords is dictated by the importance he assigns particular intervals: the third in particular. Chapter 3 has already shown the importance of the third in his piano writing, both in a vertical and a horizontal way. Here Prokofiev takes the same idea and applies it to bigger chordal gestures that have structural meaning, as in the examples cited above.

As Maddalena reaches the climactic point of her love speech, her descending chromatic theme is doubled in sixths, as if to highlight the intensity of her passion. Simultaneously however, this impression is debunked as the chromatic theme associated with Maddalena has already acquired a dangerously ambiguous subtext.

### Scene 3

A tremolo on strings underscores the conversation between Genaro and Maddalena which causes a feeling of suspense and frozen time. The chord is based on thirds with an embedded tritone: D – F – A flat – C sharp (bar 1). In this opera, the tremolo motif is usually associated with Maddalena and its function is theatrical. For example, at bar 19, when she hastens to leave the room before Stenio's arrival, her singing line sounds ominous particularly in comparison to Genaro's light-hearted welcome of Stenio. Contrast is an integral part of her characterization.

An ascending chromatic line accompanies Stenio's entry on stage at bar 26. This moment is texturally hollow as only the tremolo on D flat is heard against this ascending

chromatic line in the lowest registers. The crawling chromatic line reflects his heavy heart and desperation. Similarly, a winding chromatic line accompanies Genaro's response and the narrow and limited intervals explored by the bass line – C – C sharp – D – C sharp – suggests the dark nature of the conversation that is to follow. While the semitone shift is particularly emphasised in such an accompaniment, it is also a mirror of Stenio's agitated and trapped mental state.

Stenio's motif (bars 54 – 55) is a rhythmically ambiguous two-bar figuration concluding on a semitone appoggiatura. His narrative is accompanied in the most economical of ways – this motif and a tremolo in alternating major/minor thirds which are more than an octave apart. This type of ostinato bass also traces the outline of a leaping bass. In later operas, this figure is often associated with a blustering or comic character and may suggest a particular gait or physical trait. The doubling of this leaping bass in thirds and the fact that it is written as a tremolo highlights Stenio's depressed state and characterises his narrative.

The repeated chords and accompanying crawling bass line at bar 78 establish an atmosphere of paranoid suspicion around Stenio's character. It is also a veiled reference to Maddalena. Stenio's description of Maddalena is accompanied by the same gestures of repeated chords and crawling bass while his narrative is accompanied by an ostinato bass, which should be performed *drammatico*. During the narrative, Stenio's vocal range is limited: minor 3<sup>rd</sup> between bars 100 – 104; 112 – 116. The minor thirds to the command "Slushai" (Listen) acquire a presentational function. It is a theatrical device used to draw the audience's attention to the narrative and simultaneously provides a way of framing that same narrative.

From bar 133, the music becomes a character in itself. It suggests what seems to be going through the characters' minds – it externalizes their thoughts, and is sometimes a musical foreboding of what is to come. For example, at bar 133, the repeated chords against the crawling chromatic line hint at an unspoken menace and latent evil. This is a theatrical moment and the contrived drama of that gesture runs through the entire scene. As a gesture, it aptly accompanies Stenio's narrative but is also overtly suggestive. The ominous repetition of the E to D flat, bar 138 – 140 is another example of a theatricalised gesture.

The tremolo is again used to set the scene for the narrative (bar 141). Stenio's descending chromatic line complements Maddalena's own chromatic motif. The entire narrative is based on chromatic lines while the bass sustains an A flat for 6 bars which

then begins its ascending chromatic motif. The whole section is harmonically pinned together not by chromatic chords, but by chromatic lines, juxtaposed and layered over each other. This is how Prokofiev creates both atmosphere and texture: the composer endows chromatic writing with an atmospheric function. The chromatic chords used between bars 155 – 157 are again built on thirds. B flat – D – F – B flat (major chord) C flat – E flat – G flat – C flat (major chord), A – D flat – F – A (augmented chord); their lowest notes also trace an embedded rhythmic motif. Prokofiev enhances the theatrical atmosphere by filling in each of Stenio's sustained high notes between bars 161 – 174 with descending chromatic lines.

The ominously accented leaping bass at bar 204 changes to a lighter and detached one to accompany Genaro's questions. Genaro acts as a foil to Stenio, and also to Maddalena. His music is always lighter and airier, hailing the joys of love. In contrast the music associated with both Stenio and Maddalena is more intensive.

Prokofiev often uses **ostinato** to accompany a narrative. This is true for example of Stenio's downhearted narrative of his meeting with Maddalena between bars 218 – 238. The **tremolo** sound runs continuously but its suggestive power is lost in this context as here it only acts as a background to the narrative and enhances the dark atmosphere of the scene. The falling interval of a third, as for example at bar 331, is symbolic of Stenio's torment. It is not merely used in the orchestral textures, but incorporated into his voice line too. The most prominent interval in this entire scene is that of a falling third.

Between bars 384 and 416 both characters reflect on the story they have just heard and the music comes into its own as an extension of their consciousness and function as the musical surrogate of an omniscient narrator. As they wait, “The room is sporadically lit by lightening” – this is Prokofiev at his most melodramatic and theatrical, setting the scene for the climactic “unmasking” scene.

#### Scene 4

The scene is set using the ubiquitous semitone shift: the dramatic **trill** in triplets creates a dark and menacing atmosphere in keeping with the gothic nature of this work. During this melodramatic scene, the music takes on a distinctive voice separate from that of the individual characters, suggesting the audience's reaction and guiding our emotions. The **ostinato** accompaniment comes across as a crystallization of the characters'

paralysis. It represents the overriding emotion of this scene – fear. Furthermore, the ostinato heralds the approaching storm.

The triplet movement in quavers changes to semiquavers at bar 14 as the tension mounts gradually, creating a cumulative build-up to the moment that Maddalena is discovered hiding behind the curtain. An ascending chromatic scale accompanies the theatrical moment that Stenio draws back the curtain and discovers Maddalena “illuminated by lightning”. Prokofiev’s talent for musical depiction and literalisation of things happening on stage is evident in stage moments like these.<sup>46</sup> The “unmasking” moment is accompanied by a *fortissimo* white note chord built on thirds (bar 22). Chords that punctuate Stenio’s exclamations are similarly based on thirds (G – B – D flat – F – A flat) bars 25, 26, 27, 30.

The dramatic moment that Genaro and Stenio discover that the former’s wife and the latter’s lover are one and the same, in other words, the “unmasking” of Maddalena, is accomplished against an ostinato bass pattern. This is consistent with Prokofiev’s use of ostinato to indicate a sudden flurry or activity, surging emotion, and an oncoming dramatic climax. Ultimately, the ostinato holds the first part of the scene together. This ostinato pattern is based on diminished chords (E – G – B flat → F – A flat – C flat). Between bars 36-37 the crawling chromatic line reaches and accents the minor third, E flat to G flat. The chromatic line itself outlines a diminished octave. Similarly, between bars 46 – 47, A – A flat is a diminished octave and F to A flat a minor third. The climactic chord of discovery, the chord that reflects their horror as they find out the truth about Maddalena is suitably ambiguous. A sharp – D flat – E – G can be read as a series of layered minor thirds while the underlying tritone between A sharp to E cannot be ignored. The D flat in the chord clashes with Stenio’s sustained long note of E which heightens the discordant atmosphere.

Despite some brief recalls of the love theme at bar 73, this part of the scene is primarily about fear: Stenio’s fear of Maddalena, whom he views as a sorceress, Genaro’s fear of the truth and Maddalena’s fear of retribution. This intensive and emotional scene would become an essential staple in Prokofiev’s operatic scenarios. The developing

<sup>46</sup> On this topic Prokofiev was sensitive to Stravinsky’s gift for depicting images in music, declaring himself enraptured by Stravinsky’s *Pribaoutki*, a set of four songs for solo male voice and eight solo instruments. He was particularly captivated with its realistic sound effects. “I was genuinely enthralled by his new *Pribaoutki*, which he performed in a highly amusing style.” (*Dairies*, Vol. 2: 29) In a letter to Stravinsky, Prokofiev notes his favourite was “‘Uncle Armand,’ in which oboe and clarinet are like the gurgle of an emptying bottle”. Cited in Stephen D. Press, *Prokofiev’s Ballets for Diaghilev* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 28.

dramatic moment, the concern for the dramatic image and its sustainability through the use of **ostinato** were compositional techniques that Prokofiev would refine and use in his operas. Various Prokofiev gestures sustain this scene. Most notably, the **chromatic line** functions as textural filler that accompanies Genaro and Stenio at bars 148 -153. This chromatic line, which is an essentially pianistic idea, is used here as a dramatic driver. It accompanies the long notes and hints at further oncoming agitation. In this case, the chromatic line has an associative function because of its suggestive nature. The repetitive use of the chromatic line culminates in both men drawing out their daggers and pointing them toward Maddalena, whom they have decided to kill.

Similarly, the **repeated note** itself is a feature of Genaro and Stenio's melodic lines as they jointly curse Maddalena at bar 142. As will be seen in the next chapter, Prokofiev often uses the repeated note in moments when incantation or bewitching is taking place on stage. It thus takes on supernatural overtones. In this particular instance, Maddalena's suggested quality as some sort of supernatural enchantress is merely implied by the stage directions and by the gothic nature of the opera itself. Prokofiev's interpretation of the libretto, as it comes across through the score's musical ideas, endows the entire scene with a supernatural edge. The stage directions to create thunder and lightning at the same time as the call upon the heavens to witness Maddalena's death, are theatrical and melodramatic.

The **repeated note** itself is one of the key gestures in Prokofiev's writing, and occurred as early as the juvenilia. It is usually used as a **presentational gesture**, as a prelude to what is to come and is often incorporated in fanfare-like motifs, not only in orchestral scores, but also in the piano writing. Of its very nature, the repeated note is an associative musical idea as it automatically directs our attention to what is to come. The joint decision to kill Maddalena and her subsequent horror are encapsulated in yet another chromatic chord built on thirds and played *fortissimo* (bar 154).

Maddalena's plea to save herself is accompanied by long **scalar** figures which suggest that she may be bewitching Genaro and Stenio (bar 171 – 173). Her theme is played on a **high register** suggesting that something unearthly, or perhaps her fatal feminine charms, had enchanted them. Genaro is persuaded by his wife to kill Stenio, as her lover first, and then to kill her. His decision is accompanied by a swirling scalar figure, marked *tempestoso* (bar 285) which encapsulates his confused thinking. It is also a veiled reference to Maddalena, whose main theme, first heard at the start of the opera, is based upon a descending and swirling chromatic line. The swirling figures outline the

repeated pattern of F – B, i.e. the **tritone**, an interval intimately associated with the supernatural in Prokofiev's writing.

The opera ends with Prokofiev's traditional dramatic moment: the two men have been tricked into turning their swords upon each other. Maddalena then opens her window to cry out for help as a stranger killed Genaro! Maddalena's callous and cold treatment of the male characters in this opera is a prelude to Prokofiev's other female figures such as Polina and Renata who both have tempestuous and volatile relationships with men. This moment of heightened intensity which is captured and sustained as the stage curtains come down on the opera becomes a defining feature of many of Prokofiev's operas and possesses a certain cinematic quality about it.

### **The development of gestures beyond the 'elemental' phase**

This chapter of the dissertation has located and analysed a crucial compositional juncture in Prokofiev's career, where he needed to make the transition from writing within the prism of the piano to writing for orchestral forces. Although his concept of musical imagery did not undergo any fundamental change as he moved from one medium to the other, he gradually began to extrapolate exclusively orchestral ideas from the pianistic textures that had dominated the 'elemental' phase and through which he developed his musical ideas.

In the orchestrated scene of *Maddalena* some orchestral processes, such as his use of specific orchestral sounds to create particular effects, are already in evidence. The differences between Prokofiev's early orchestrating process and his later technique also come to the fore in this work: he had not yet divided his orchestral sound into independent strands; his bass-line is also not well-defined and it is not yet used as a rhythmic driver. In the early orchestral works, Prokofiev draws upon the same gestures of the juvenilia and 'elemental' phase but creates an entirely different orchestral sound. The appoggiatura figure, the ostinato and alberti bass – these are all gestures that Prokofiev used across his different periods – in a work such as *Dreams* these gestures create a different affect and sound impressionistic. Ultimately however, through the different periods that this thesis examines: the juvenile phase, the 'elemental' and 'post-elemental' phase, the musical gestures and thematic ideas remain a common denominator. Other compositional processes such as his practice of working with small cells of musical

material which are then layered and strung together as well as his use of repetition as a developmental process are already evident in the early orchestral writing.

In his *Principles of Orchestration*, Rimsky-Korsakov suggests that his treatise is concerned with the “fundamental principles of modern orchestration from the standpoint of brilliance and imagination”.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Rimsky was mostly concerned with colouring and with obtaining particular orchestral timbres. In this Prokofiev is also a master. The younger composer would also have agreed with Rimsky that “orchestration is part of the very soul of the work”<sup>48</sup>. As this chapter has shown, and as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, Prokofiev thought in orchestral colours and in particular instrumental combinations. Gradually these specific combinations were used to flesh particular gestures. Like Rimsky then, Prokofiev thought of his work in orchestral terms: “certain tone-colours being inseparable from it [the orchestra] in the mind of its creator and native to it from the hour of its birth”.<sup>49</sup>

The ideas that Prokofiev developed in this ‘elemental’ phase were enormously powerful and imaginative, and they naturally spilled over into his writing for the orchestra and of course, that for the stage. One of the main reasons behind the selection of *Maddalena* and the *Piano Concerto* as the discussion works in this chapter was that they draw upon the same kinds of ideas and gestures, such as the chromatic line, the semitone shift, the over-arching gestures and the repeated note idea among others, all of which had become part of Prokofiev’s compositional language. The writing for the piano in the concerto is not any different from the writing style that has already been discussed in the third chapter. The pianist is at the very heart of the piano concerto and the writing reflects the uncompromising and idiosyncratic virtuosity that became a defining feature of his writing style in the ‘elemental’ phase.

Prokofiev scholarship has often noted that the music is inhabited by different characters, in other words, what Givi Ordzhonikidze calls “polypersonalia”.<sup>50</sup> Within a dramaturgical context it is inevitable that certain gestures acquire or suggest particular images that may refer to something outside of the music itself. The multitude of characters that manifest themselves as musical themes and ideas in the music of the ‘elemental’ phase, are given life and sometimes physical shape in Prokofiev’s stage

<sup>47</sup> *Principles of Orchestration*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Principles of Orchestration*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Principles of Orchestration*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Boris Berman, *Prokofiev’s Piano Sonatas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 58.

works. Many of them are assigned an image, and although this image is by no means fixed, it may be representative of a character type. This aspect of musical imagery will be discussed in the following chapter. One example that will be explored is the use of the leaping bass (essentially a pianistic idea that has its origins in the juvenilia phase) which is used in the operas to accompany the appearance of a blustering character, such as the General in *The Gambler* or Leandre in *Love for Three Oranges*.

Other ideas, such as the long lyrical melodies that would come to characterise Prokofiev's later writing,<sup>51</sup> make their first appearance in the *Piano Concerto*, which confirms the crucial transformational role this work occupies in Prokofiev's œuvre. The piano works discussed in the third chapter do not privilege longer melodic lines, rather they are built on shorter musical motifs. The *Piano Concerto* provided Prokofiev with the opportunity to expand and elongate his melodic material. This was not a regular feature of his early writing, although an example of an over-arching melody does occur as early as *The Giant*.

This chapter has demonstrated the gradual shift away from the abrasive concision of the 'elemental' phase toward a style that foregrounds lyricism. This heightened lyricism occurs in the aftermath of the 'elemental' phase, and therefore at a time when Prokofiev no longer needed to use his performing self and his specific technique as impetus for his compositions. An emphasis on melody and a less exhibitionist technical compositional style gradually began to emerge.

Lastly, in writing works for the stage, the orchestra became a new sonic force for Prokofiev to manipulate and within it he could explore and develop specific timbres. Writing for the stage allowed Prokofiev to dramatize and even 'theatricalise' his writing, a process which has its roots in the transformational phase explored in this chapter. Some of Prokofiev's particularly pianistic textures, such as passages in sixths and in thirds were consistently played by the same orchestral timbres, such as the woodwinds. In a way, the composer was prising open the possibilities of a piano score and equating particular textures with definite timbres. This transfer of timbre became a distinctive feature of Prokofiev's orchestrating process and denotes the moment an originally pianistic idea becomes independent of its source. The isolation and 'theatricalisation' of certain gestures such as the repeated note and the disruptive interventions on brass are gestures that could

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<sup>51</sup> Examples of his long-limbed melodies occur in works written in *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, (see, for example, Nos. 18 and 20), in the *Tales of the Old Grandmother* Op. 31 (No. 1, bar 29 onwards; No. 4, bar 2 onwards.) and in *Four Pieces* Op. 32 (No. 2 and No. 4.)

only have been conceived through the orchestra. These specifically orchestral gestures, together with those gestures that remained tied to their pianistic origins, will be examined in the course of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Contextualizing the musical idea

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This chapter follows on from the analytical approaches of Chapters 3 and 4 in that its focus is primarily to isolate specific musical gestures and ideas that are a crucial component of Prokofiev's musical language. But beyond that, the aim of this chapter is to examine these musical ideas within the context of an opera, scrutinizing the way Prokofiev develops or simply works with the ideas within a different context to that which we have previously examined. Except for the discussion of *Maddalena*, chapters 3 and 4 have dealt with Prokofiev's absolute music, looking at the way ideas and gestures were transferred from the juvenilia into his later idiom. In this chapter, the context for these ideas is very different as it automatically entails a programme: the absolute nature of the ideas thus changes to become programmatic. In the following discussion of Prokofiev's use of these ideas within the operas, it will be seen that, unwittingly or otherwise, certain gestures are assigned an image or associated with a specific character. The two operas discussed in this chapter, *The Gambler* and *Love for Three Oranges*, were written in what I have identified as the 'post-elemental' phase in Prokofiev's writing, the former being written between 1915 and 1917, the latter completed in 1919.

This chapter is therefore concerned with the way that specific gestures, already identified in previous chapters, such as the ostinato, the tritone, the chromatic motif and the presentational gesture among others, gradually lost their purely physical identity and became independent generators of meaning or suggestion dependent upon their context. Nowhere is this more evident than in Prokofiev's stage works, in particular the operas. Furthermore, it is not merely the gestures and ideas that are developed in these stage works. Features that were once used by Prokofiev for their physical qualities, as is the case with the ostinato, are now put to a structural and theatrical use.

Other compositional strategies such as the use of sequence, variation and layering of ideas as well as the use of conflict and collision as a developmental strategy become crucial features of his dramaturgy. Narrative devices and effects utilized in the miniature pieces for piano, abrupt changes of musical mood and register, special effects, all are developed in his orchestral writing. Such narrative techniques are best discussed within the context of Prokofiev's operas as they allow

us to trace the contextualization of various musical ideas more clearly. The operas make the transference process of the pianistic idea into an associative one easier to perceive. Hence, the discussion of the two operas will be a chronological one: this will allow the story-line to be explored at the same time as the musical ideas that constitute the narrative.

Throughout this chapter, frequent reference will be made to Prokofiev's pianistic ideas and to his pianistic textures. These ideas and textures reflect the composer-pianist's presence in the score and are thus closely connected to Prokofiev's technique as a pianist, typifying his writing from the 'elemental' phase. Such traces of Prokofiev the pianist in the score, explored in detail in chapters 3 and 4 may be characterized by quick physical movement, sometimes forcing the pianist to play from physically uncomfortable positions. Abrupt changes of register, dexterous scalar patterns, often using irregular rhythmic groupings, passages in thirds, sixths or octaves, chord clusters, acciaccatura and appoggiatura figures, repeated note and ostinato patterns: these ideas all feature in Prokofiev's writing for piano and they are clear references to his technical ability as a performer. This chapter explores the way that such overtly pianistic features were integrated into Prokofiev's orchestral writing. It will also examine the way these musical ideas and gestures were explored in different contexts.

### ***The Gambler***

Prokofiev saw in *The Gambler* an opportunity to put to the test various ideas he had formed on staging and the operatic genre. In an interview he gave in 1916 Prokofiev noted that with *The Gambler* he had been "paying particular attention to the scenographic plasticity of opera because in recent times the interest of composers in this aspect appears to have declined markedly".<sup>1</sup> His main preoccupation was to maintain continuous action through a sustained rhythmic drive. Prokofiev's music defines key statements in the text around which the action hinges. These moments then direct the course of the action and acquire a structural role, transforming such statements into cinematic close ups. Prokofiev's opportunity to write *The Gambler*

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in *Sergey Prokofiev: Diaries 1915 - 1923: Behind the Mask* trans. Anthony Phillips (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), Appendix 5.

came after Siloti introduced him to Albert Coates, an English conductor at the Maryinsky Theatre, who reportedly told him “Write your *Gambler*, we’ll stage it.” Accordingly, Prokofiev set to work on both the libretto and the music. The piano score was presented to the Maryinsky Theatre Directorate for inclusion in the 1916-1917 season.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately following the disruptive political events of 1917, plans for staging the opera were shelved and it was not until autumn 1927 that Prokofiev revisited his first version of the opera with a view to preparing it for a performance at the Maryinsky Theatre in Leningrad. After their successful run with *Love for Three Oranges*, the theatre had shown an interest in staging *The Gambler*. The revised orchestral score of the opera was ready by February 1928, but *The Gambler* finally had its first performance on 29 April 1929 at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, running for two years.<sup>3</sup>

## Act I

*The Gambler* plunges into its energetic and riveting atmosphere right from the opening sounds. The music often functions as though it were a disembodied character, sometimes commenting on what is happening on stage, sometimes providing intimations of what is to come. The first three acts of the opera are structured around conversations between the various characters, with the occasional reflective solo and interspersed with high notes of action. The first conversation occurs between Alexei and Polina. The quick rhythms and ongoing movement through scalar lines that characterize the orchestral textures suggest that their meeting is a furtive one. Such fast patterns and relentless rhythms are used by Prokofiev to reflect the characters' emotional heights.

Prokofiev's use of the tritone carries particular significance. Here, it is embedded in the opera's first highly significant utterance, “I've lost it all”, a reference to the money that Polina had asked him to gamble with on her behalf (RN 10 + 1). Alexei's line incorporates and emphasizes the tritone. In the earlier works, particularly in the compositions for piano, Prokofiev often assigns the tritone a dark symbolism. It is connected variously with the suggestion of evil, as in *Diabolical*

<sup>2</sup> “Autobiography”, in *Sergey Prokofiev, Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings* translated and edited by Oleg Prokofiev (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 253.

<sup>3</sup> The opera was performed a total of eight times during the 1928 - 1929 and 1929 - 1930 seasons.

*Suggestion.* Here, Prokofiev uses the tritone to suggest different things: on the one hand, the anguish in Alexei's voice reflects his despair at having failed Polina, on the other hand, it suggests his obsession with gambling, the ultimate source of his downfall.

At RH 11 Prokofiev creates a specific sound to accompany the appearance of Blanche, the Marquis, the General and Astley. Musical atmosphere is an integral part of Prokofiev's characterization process. The music, which now also changes time signature, is a three note detached motif which develops into a short, six note quaver pattern that brings a lighter texture into play. It aptly characterizes the vacuous Blanche and her friends. From within that pattern emerges the characterization of the General, in distinctive Prokofievan style. His theme is played by the trombones, thus providing a debunked reference to his status as a general. The repeated interval of the major 7<sup>th</sup> characterizes the orchestra's response to his pompous statements. The General's music is written in 3/4 time but sounds like a march in terms of its constituent texture. This suggests an ambiguity to his character: the waltz time links him with Blanche's frivolous world (he is in love with her) while the march rhythm is a reference to his military position.

The repeated note continues to occupy an important role in Prokofiev's writing. For example, the tuba plays a repeated note throughout the entire section where Alexei is being questioned about his gambling losses (RN 23 + 4). At RN 31, the importance of the semitone shift is heard through the repeated trill-like pattern of E flat to D. When Alexei's narrative reaches the "Blessing of the Son", all orchestral writing is in the **high registers**. A single note ostinato on C sharp accompanies the episode. Ascending and descending **chromatic lines**, somewhat reminiscent of Maddalena's theme, provide the second layer of textures. The inner registers are filled with diminished seventh chords: C sharp – E – G – B flat. From RN 38 onwards, while the main texture in the high registers is a scalar pattern written at the interval of the sixth, the chordal make up of each bar privileges the interval of the 3<sup>rd</sup> as follows:

RN 38: diminished 7<sup>th</sup> (**C sharp**<sup>4</sup> – E – G – B flat)

RN 38 + 1: minor 3<sup>rd</sup> (F sharp – A - C sharp)

RN 38 + 2: diminished 5<sup>th</sup> (A – C sharp – E flat)

RN 38 + 3: minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ( G sharp – B – C sharp)

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<sup>4</sup> Repeated note running between RN 38 and RN 38 + 3.

The first of the General's sighs occurs at RN 43. This "sigh" is a crucial part of the General's characterization as it marks the extent of his love for Blanche. The "love sigh" motif climbs from C to D, a 9<sup>th</sup> above, and suggests the General's vulnerability, despite his often pompous words and music. In assigning the General this vulnerable quality, Prokofiev does not allow this character to be a mere caricature.

Alexei's intense feelings for Polina first make themselves heard at RN 55, where he is asking about her feelings for the Marquis. The appoggiatura figure, crucial to the accompaniment, supports his singing line. A ubiquitous figure in Prokofiev's writing style, the appoggiatura has its origins in his piano compositions but is used here to gently drive Alexei's music forward. In this context, it may be seen as the equivalent of a gentle musical sigh, similar to the "heart tremor" motifs heard in Genaro's accompaniment in *Maddalena*. The figure itself is suggestive of Alexei's feelings, which he has not yet spelled out for Polina. The accompanying double minor 3rds thicken the texture. Their alternation and revolving around the D – F – A flat diminished chords are used by Prokofiev to suggest the obsessive nature of Alexei's psychology. His two passions – Polina and gambling – are both addictive.

A few bars later, at RN 57 + 2, the texture hints at the urgency and emotional aspect of his comments. It is a type of *ostinato* bass texture that plays around the intervals of the third and fourth. This same texture, only in a higher register, accompanies the "mute" scene where Alexei and the Marquis theatrically stand and glare at each other (RN 70). The equation of the higher registers with theatrical moments is a ploy used frequently by Prokofiev. It is found in his juvenilia as well as in works of the 'elemental' phase, i.e. in exclusively abstract music. While in the piano music, Prokofiev used the higher registers as a reference to the virtuosic, here register is used to pace a narrative, be it musical or dramatic as in this case, and through registers often highlights salient points of action.

However, as Alexei skirts around the question of Polina's feelings for him, (RN 63) and as he suggests the extent of his love for her, his "cantabile" singing line becomes exclusively white note, and loses any chromatic inflections, in what is surely a suggestion of the purity of his love for Polina. This is an emotional moment for Alexei, as he asks Polina whether she is able to see him as more than a "slave". The association of a white note melody with such a pivotal emotional moment in the opera

indicates that Prokofiev used his white note melodies, both sparingly and within very precise contexts. Here, the white note melody is associated with love.

Prokofiev also uses **ostinato** to pace a conversation. For example, at RN 84, the tension in Alexei's agitated speech, marked *Più mosso*, lies in the three against two quaver rhythm. The repeated ostinato broken octaves on C sharp sustain the momentum of his conversation. From RN 84 onwards, the chordal texture is built on a major triad per bar.

The "mute" scene at RN 105 was created to break up the tension of the conversation between Alexei and Polina. It also instills some variety in a scene that was exclusively built around the act of conversation. It is accompanied by the barest of textures so as not to draw attention away from the "scene" enacted on stage. This simple texture is made up of **lines layered in contrary motion**. The same happens with the next "mute" scene at RN 107. The "mute" scenes sound like an ambiguous and incomplete cadence and they are in complete contrast with the textures that go ahead and those that go later.

Alexei and Polina resume their conversation at RN 109 and Polina tests Alexei's professed love for her by asking him whether he would go so far as to kill someone if she asked him to. Such a bizarre request is reflected in winding chromatic lines which add an eerie touch to her words and further characterize Polina as an unpredictable and possibly dangerous, force in the opera. The bass, written in octaves, focuses on the **semitone shift** e.g. F to F sharp, G sharp to G, with the strings playing muted. Again, this circular and repeated chromatic motif gives some indication as to the psychological state of the characters. Gradually, Alexei is drawn into her dangerous and manipulative world. Prokofiev gradually builds up the tension in this scene by moving the bass up by sequential step: for e.g. B flat at RN 110 and B natural at RN 111.

Polina's teasing of Alexei (RN 117) is done to the accompaniment of pizzicato 2nds, accompanied by bass intervals of compound 7ths, in a section that resembles Renata's argument Ruprecht in *The Fiery Angel*.<sup>5</sup> This section is light in texture and bears a resemblance to some of Prokofiev's piano textures from his 'elemental' phase which involve similarly light and detached notes clusters. Played *piano*, it belies the dangerous effects this conversation will have on Alexei and consequently is

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<sup>5</sup> *Fiery Angel*, Act II, Scene 1; see for example the inner part-writing from RN 196 onwards.

suggestive of the manipulative hold Polina has over Alexei. The passage is interspersed with exclamations from a muted tuba. The accompanying intervals change from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup>, a hollow interval, which underwrites Polina's teasing request. From RN 119 onwards, the 5<sup>th</sup> is used in the lower registers. As Paulina feverishly goes on, the chromatic lines, indicative of her frenzied psyche, are now played by the violins two octaves higher than their first occurrence. This is yet another instance of Prokofiev using register to depict a mental state or specific moments of heightened emotion. Spurred on by her own enthusiasm at her idea, the accents now start to occur on the unimportant beats, as at RN 121, 121 + 2, 121 + 3. The woodwinds are the dominant sound as is usually the case in Prokofievan passages of great speed and exuberance. At RN 124, Polina's texture takes on the same rhythmic ambiguities as those of Alexei at RN 84. The harmonic make-up of both sections is similar: the **ostinato** broken quavers being layered against a largely triadic higher register. Her exclamatory statements are musically accompanied by scalar gestures as at RN 126, and 127 + 3 that dissolve into a **pseudo-cadence**. This creates a sense of incompleteness, the cadence being noticeable by its absence. Within such a specific context, the lack of closure or stabilization brought about by this absence of a cadence could be read as yet another subtle comment on Polina's unhinged mental state.

The fanfare that introduces Alexei's difficult task is played on the trombone, which has the dual effect of sounding both sinister and mocking. His mental preparation and determination to get on with the unpleasant task at hand is signaled by the accented **ostinato** pattern at RN 131. The tripping scalar figure at 131 + 4 has echoes of the later gambling motif. This motif thus acquires a double meaning: on the one hand it suggests that there may be something light-hearted about this youthful prank. Its use as a gambling motif however, suggests that Alexei was drawn to the unpredictability of the situation Polina put him in. Dostoyevsky's Alexei says as much himself. Although he knows that the task was a "stupid" one, he felt something urging him on, "an impulse of schoolboyish mischief".<sup>6</sup> His gambler's instinct responds almost immediately to the situation. Alexei's last two pitches of the scene are F sharp to E sharp – the Act thus ends with an emphasis on the semitone shift.

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<sup>6</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Gambler* trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1996), 28.

## Act II

Prokofiev uses various textures and timbres as part of his characterization process. The General's pedantic nature comes across in the opening two bar gesture. (RN 137) This is orchestrated in the lower strings while Alexei's textures at RN 138 for example, used woodwind. Prokofiev's use of orchestral timbre is a crucial aspect of characterization: certain instrument groups became associated with characters and with qualities of character. Blustering or caricature characters like the General and the Baron in this opera, and the Cook in *Love for Three Oranges*, are characterized variously by the trombone and the tuba. Prokofiev's ability to manipulate orchestral colour to create or suggest different characters shows how sophisticated his orchestration has become in comparison to *Maddalena*. His orchestral ideas in these operas have achieved a large measure of independence from the piano.

The triplet figure on timpani at RN 139 + 3 is used to punctuate the General's statement about the Baron's importance. Prokofiev uses this gesture frequently, and it will occur to great theatrical effect in *Love for Three Oranges*. It is a theatrical gesture that dates back to the early *pesenki*. Here it is used to dramatise the conversation. It also occurs at RN 155, thus becoming a gesture entirely associated with the General. The figure that accompanies the General's criticism of Alexei's actions suggests that the orchestra functions as an independent commentator on the on-stage action (see RN 140). The drawn-out trill on the clarinet infuses the conversation with a degree of humour, perhaps even gentle mockery. The descending arpeggio-like figures, played staccato on the bassoons as well as the pizzicato leaping bass, endow the conversation with a humorous undertone. The use of horns and the accented writing at RN 143 continue to suggest there is a pompous side to the General. The use of percussion is another reference to his military position. The chromatic winding line, a texture emerging directly from Prokofiev's pianistic textures is here assigned to the bass clarinet. In the piano works, it was used for its textural qualities and also for its virtuosic ones. In this case, because of the instrumentation assigned to it, it is used suggestively.

Alexei's first lyrical lines in the scene occur at RN 145. The continuous quaver accompaniment in open fifths, and the woodwind writing in thirds create a mellow atmosphere. The nature of the phrasing suggests an inbuilt rhythmic

ambiguity with the accents in the higher registers falling on the unimportant beats while the bass has a steady six quaver accompaniment with beats falling regularly on the first beat of the bar. The lyrical texture occurs again at RN 149.

Leaping chords at RN 151 are almost a nod to traditional piano technique exercises, but they function here in the same way as the leaping bass. Their aim is to characterize the General as a pompous character and there is, consequently, the impression that the Baroness, whom he is talking about, is equally pedantic. The leaping bass motif that was immediately associated with the General (at RN 13) runs through his speech at 153 and the **ostinato** accompaniment at RN 154 reflects his increasing agitation. Tremolos accompany the General's final "tragic" pronouncements at RN 156, in an overt theatricalisation of the General's character.

The **ostinato** bass that accompanies the General's agitation at RN 166 is again, pianistic in origin but in this instance, through its orchestration on *spiccato* strings, it acquires its own momentum and personality, pushing the conversation forward and heightening the sense of agitation. The sequential patterns of the entire section at RN 167 play around the interval of the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the bass. The same happens in the section at RN 168 – 168 + 3. From RN 168 + 4, Prokofiev gradually tightens and heightens the tension by ascending sequentially and by step between RN 168 + 4 – 169 + 2, at which point the final chord is repeated on each main beat of the ensuing 2 bars – to dissolve into a quiet, white note C-E-G chord. The comic effect of this section is enhanced by Alexei's tranquil response to the General's furious outburst.

Prokofiev's characterization of the Marquis is equally effective: this character's first long speech occurs at RN 177, at which point he has been asked by the General to help smooth over the scandal with Alexei. His part is orchestrated predominantly on winds with the repeated notes running through it, thus creating an airy and light texture in keeping with his supercilious character.

Theatrical gestures such as the **tremolo** figure at RN 201 + 3 and the repeated notes on trombones at 201 + 2 dramatise their conversation. This is a convention Prokofiev also used in *Maddalena*. With *The Gambler* it is especially necessary since the first two acts are based largely on continuous conversations which needed to be dramatized.

As Alexei speaks about Polina, his melodic lines seem more elongated, partly through the *Meno Mosso* indication, partly due to the nature of the orchestral accompaniment which consists mainly of chords except for an alternating trill-like

**figure** and an inner quasi-chromatic line. As his thoughts progress, and the passage picks up tempo, the accompanying woodwind registers become higher and less chromatic. The harmonic underpinning is the hollow interval of the fifth. It is smooth harmony, moving by step, with very smooth inner part-writing that suggests the sincerity of his feelings for Polina.

The sparse accompaniment of the Marquis (RN 210) is based on a leaping bass articulating the interval of an augmented 5<sup>th</sup>. The sparse accompaniment highlights the mocking nature of the characterization as all we can hear is the clash of the interval of the augmented 5<sup>th</sup> against that of the perfect 4<sup>th</sup>: both of which are traditionally considered to be empty harmonic intervals. The general pause and the length of time it takes the Marquis to speak to Alexei, reflects the difficulty he is having in conducting this conversation. This impression is corroborated by Prokofiev's performance directions which indicate that the Marquis should sing "through his teeth". The accompaniment at RN 210 + 2 is reminiscent of the presentational gesture that Prokofiev uses at the start of many of his *pesenki*. Its function in the juvenilia was purely presentational: it functioned as a rhythmic introduction. It also possessed an attention-seeking quality in those early works, here Prokofiev uses it as an integral part of characterization, thus transforming an early pianistic idea into an associative one. A similar presentational gesture occurs at RN 235 and at RN 235 + 3 as it frames Alexei's realization that Polina's letter to him was to be produced only as a last resort and thus highlights the dramatic turn the conversation is about to take.

Babulenka's unexpected appearance at RN 248 is accompanied by an orchestral presentational gesture in the form of a chord built around thirds in the upper register (E flat – G – B flat – D flat) which clashes with accented octaves on E natural in the bass. This dissonant moment catches both the characters and the audience by surprise: it heralds the unforeseen appearance of Babulenka, supposedly on her death bed. Her lines are supported by the lower strings, brass and woodwind to create a menacing but also shrill texture that is an important part of her characterization. The ostinato here is built on the tritone. At RN 249 the chord is built on a triad: E – G – B flat with an added F sharp. This creates a pianistic cluster chord: one which features regularly in the 'elemental' period of Prokofiev's writing

for the piano.<sup>7</sup> The repeated F sharp jars with the E natural in the lower registers. Two bars later, the chord changes to C sharp – E – G sharp with an added F. The F sharp in the previous chords becomes an F, thus very subtly, parts of the harmony move down by step. As Babulenka launches into her tirade, she is accompanied by repeated *tenuto* chords and an inner broken chord line. Again, the chords here are based on 3rds: D – F sharp – A sharp – B (RN 250). The tritone is associated with Babulenka's arrival, which upsets the plans of the General, the Marquis and Blanche. The association of the tritone is not so much with the character, but rather with the impact of that character upon unfolding events. Prokofiev also uses the tritone to refer to evil characters. In *Love for Three Oranges* for example, it is most usually associated with the practice of magic and especially with the figure of Fata Morgana. His use of it here is more sophisticated as the tritone refers us to events resulting from Babulenka's presence rather than a direct reference to her as a character.

Babulenka's entrance and her subsequent musical characterization is based on many familiar gestures. The harmony, as already pointed out above, is based on 3rds with the lowest registers outlining sustained notes on D, B and G. The tritone is not only present in the *ostinato* chordal make-up of these bars, but also in the inner broken – chord type texture: for example, at RN 250 + 1 through the presence of D and A flat. The semitone shift is particularly evident in this passage. It manifests itself as an *ostinato* at RN 252 and as a linking figure at RN 250 + 5, last beat, and RN 251. A soulful melody on strings accompanies Babulenka (RN 251 + 1). This is typical of various shorter melodies that occur in the works discussed in Chapter 3.

The depiction of the General's surprise at Babulenka's appearance is truly a masterstroke in characterization. It is orchestrated on the clarinet and pizzicato strings, playing a staccato *ostinato* bass pattern. The D flat runs through all the "babbling" passage at RN 253 + 5 over which are alternately superimposed the intervals of major 2<sup>nd</sup> and major 3<sup>rd</sup>. Again at RN 258, we are faced with a texture that would not have seemed out of place in the *Visions Fugitives*, based on the alternation of minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and perfect 4<sup>th</sup> harmonic intervals with long sustained trills on woodwinds. The long trills, often used to suggest a gentle mockery, suggest Babulenka's suspicions of the Marquis.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example *Four Pieces* Op. 3, No. 3 bar 4, 12, 16.

Babulenka's gentle appraisal of Polina's good looks is accompanied by an over-arching melody at RN 281 + 1, played by woodwinds and strings. This lyrical figure is repeated sequentially moving by step, while the lower lines sustain a trill-like figure (*ostinato*) over which the melody sounds as though it were soaring. The semibreves that sustain the texture are intervals of the 5<sup>th</sup>. This hollowness in texture brings out the lyrical nature of the melody. As she comments on Polina's difficult nature, the sustained tremolos on the strings dramatise her statements (RN 283 + 3).

The act closes with Babulenka's dramatic statement that the General will not be getting a penny of her money (RN 291). The statement is prefaced by dramatic descending octaves marked *pesante* in the low registers. Prokofiev frames his utterances, dramatizing them and flagging them up for our attention. Babulenka's dramatic announcement is followed by scalar flourishes in **high registers** and the act ends on a *ff* flourish and an extended trill in octaves in the lower registers.

### Act III

The third act opens with the General agitatedly walking around the waiting room close to the gaming halls. Even as he is worrying about Babulenka, his character is still depicted through the use of leaping bass and its stomping nature is played out through accented octaves on C and alternating an E/E flat on the unimportant beats. This shows the General developing as a character. Prokofiev shows us a weaker side to him – a man frightened that he is about to lose everything he holds dear: it is an important part of the characterization process as the General is now not merely a caricature. As he goes on to describe Babulenka's newly-discovered penchant for playing roulette, the General's narrative is accompanied by an *ostinato* bass revolving around the minor 2<sup>nd</sup> (RN 391). His anguish is reflected in his rising sequential patterns at RN 302 + 1 until he reaches a feverish sustained note at RN 303 + 5. Prokofiev often uses the technique of moving the harmonies up by step in order to suggest the escalating tension. The General's long note is further emphasized by the accented chords, built exclusively around thirds and played by the brass as follows:

RN 303 + 5: C – E – G – B – D – F sharp

RN 303 + 7: major 3<sup>rd</sup> alternating with minor 3<sup>rd</sup>

The first appearance of the roulette motif, which will become very significant in the next act, occurs at RN 308 accompanying the General's music. This suggests that roulette and its attendant problems are troubling the General and the music becomes a way of exposing the character's innermost thoughts. As I pointed out earlier, the General is now no longer merely a caricature: Prokofiev treats his characterization with painstaking detail and the introduction of the roulette motif at this stage is part of that process.

The ostinato at RN 328, is based around the semitone: it accompanies the General's pleas to Alexei. The *Allegro* indication reflects the General's agitation. Their conversation is supported by this ostinato and as the conversation gradually progresses, slowly and painfully for the General, the ostinato descends first by step at 329, then by a tone at RN 330 + 1. The chromatic lines on muted violins (see RN 328 + 3, 329 + 5) suggest a sense of impending disaster – again the orchestra is hinting at a possible outcome of the conversation and in the process, it sets a darker atmosphere.

A moment of action (RN 357) is depicted by a repeated two chord pattern with accompanying semiquaver figure. Both are pianistic ideas, the latter being a figuration to be found in Prokofiev's piano works. Similarly the repeated F played by the trumpets and the embedded tritone alternating with major 3<sup>rd</sup> is a typical Prokofievan dramatic moment. It signifies a moment of tense activity and emotion as the General makes up his mind to go into the gaming rooms to seek out and stop Babulenka's playing.

The textures at RN 359 + 5 are pianistic, reminiscent of some of the textures discussed in Chapter 3, although these are smoother in that they are largely white note patterns. The semiquaver patterns here are the precedent of the later roulette motif which is similarly built on quick semiquavers. They accompany Alexei's thinking, suggesting his racing thoughts as he struggles to make out the full import of the General's conversation with him. The love theme is heard at this point (RN 360) – a depiction of Alexei's psychological dilemma. This will be fully explored in the next act, but is already hinted at here.

The tremolo at RN 365, which Prokofiev used quite frequently in *Maddalena*, makes its appearance here, creating an eerie background to Alexei's musings on his calm state of mind, despite his current position as recently unemployed and desperately lacking in funds. As he thinks of how Polina must be feeling, his heart

becomes heavy – this is suggested by the repeated chords on the first and third beats of the bar.

The sudden appearance of Polina at RN 372, in response to Alexei's invocation of her name, is marked by **tremolos**. Because they are accented, they give a sense of heightened theatricality, which was a technique Prokofiev also used in *Maddalena*. Her unexpected appearance shocks both Alexei and the audience. Accompanying Alexei's pacing on stage (RN 374) is a texture that shows great affinity with Prokofiev's writing for piano - a leaping bass accompaniment to a musical idea in double 3rds and one in staccato 7ths. Prokofiev orchestrates this texture using bassoons, violins and horns. Similarly, Babulenka's tiredness and exhaustion after her long stint at the gaming tables is also indicated in her texture. It incorporates long melodic and soulful lines played on the woodwinds to accompaniment by a slow-moving **ostinato**, again around the minor 2<sup>nd</sup> (RN 381).

From RN 410 onwards, a gentler accompaniment sustains the General's musings about his love for Blanche – this time the accompaniment is the repeated note - a gesture that first appears in the juvenilia but that may acquire different functions dependent on context. It seems to be used to accompany the gentler moments of the characters' reflection. It occurs at RN 311 onwards, where he is thinking about Blanche and at RN 341 where he explains to Alexei the dire state of his financial affairs.

Prokofiev often highlights his most dramatically important moments, which could just be simple utterances, with clashes on the brass. The General's agitation at Babulenka is accompanied by trombones and tubas playing sustained notes on G and C with embedded seconds in the accompanying chords. Repeated chords at RN 412 are based on thirds, and emphasis is also made on the interval of the 5<sup>th</sup>. This also occurs at RN 303 + 5. An example of **ostinato** being used to structure an entire section occurs at RN 416. The repeated octaves on B flat sustain the confrontation between the General and Popatich. The off-beat chords and the repeated two bar phrase characterize the entire texture of this section.

As the General addresses himself to an absent Blanche (RN 421), a change in texture occurs. The short two bar phrases are written in 6ths, again a typical pianistic texture, while a **tremolo** in the lower strings dramatizes his words. This is the first time that the General's love for Blanche has been orchestrated in this way. Prokofiev here uses his orchestration to subtly create a presentiment of things about to happen.

Gradually, the General's musings take on a desperate turn. His singing disintegrates to despairing, inarticulate cries of anguish. His cry, at RN 425, is written around the interval of a major 2<sup>nd</sup>. Act III thus concludes with repeated chords in a strong gesture that reflects the General's emotional pain.

#### Act IV: Scene I

The leaping bass idea is used at RN 433 not to suggest the outline of a particular character but to accompany Alexei's surprise when he realizes Polina is sitting in his room, in the dark, waiting for him. The shock of her presence (similar to that of Genaro and Stenio discovering Maddalena behind the curtain) translates itself into the musical texture through a four semiquaver pattern of C - E. This sounds almost like a **tremolo**. It is after all, a trill-like figure, but it is more defined than a tremolo due to its particular musical shape, giving a very prominent articulation to Alexei's surprise.

Polina's singing line at RN 434 + 3 is an elongated melodic line typically found in Prokofiev's longer pieces for piano. Here, her line sounds as though it is suspended in time (because of the repeated accompanying chord) and in space (due of the difference in registers). The suspension of time is in fact a purely pianistic idea that was characteristic of the piano works from the 'elemental' phase. The pizzicato bass line (RN 434 + 7) which outlines a falling **tritone**, adds a sense of anguish.

Alexei's reading of the Marquis' letter is sustained by a **tremolo**, which provides continuity and some dramatic effect. Meanwhile the bass outlines chromatic motifs. Important announcements are framed by high register tremolos as at RN 441 while three octaves lower, the hollow chords based around the **tritone** (F sharp – C – F sharp) are the only supporting sound. This gap in textures results directly from Prokofiev's piano textures, which are often characterized by huge differences in register.<sup>8</sup>

At RN 445 + 5, a long *ff* trill on D – C sharp heralds, in a theatrical fashion, Polina's emotional outburst. The accompaniment to her lines almost always includes the **tremolo** figure: it adds an extra layer of mystery around her. In this respect her characterisation is similar to that of Undina and Maddalena. Another highly

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 2, bars 7, 9 – 10 and No. 4, bars 17, 20 – 22.

theatricalised moment occurs at RN 454, following Alexei's suggestion that Polina asks Astley for the money she needs. Her response is accompanied by a repeated note pattern decorated by trills. This suggests the height of her emotional agitation.

The theme at RN 456, which is one that will feature often in this act, is a circular and restricted one built around the interval of a third set against that of a fifth. It represents Alexei's mounting excitement at the thought of his bright idea (to win money for Polina at the gambling tables). It is a musical depiction of his heady exuberance, his feverishness even, at the prospect of gambling. Prokofiev subtly musicalises Alexei's dilemma. The sounds of this motif, following the realization that Polina came to him for help and must therefore respect, perhaps even love him, spurred him on. The use of this theme at this point in the opera confirms that his obsession with Polina and his addiction to the tables are almost interchangeable. The playful acciaccatura/appoggiatura figures that occur at RN 458 through to the end of the first scene are also pianistic ideas. The texture is based on open fifths and major thirds – this texture, originally a pianistic one, is used to accompany Alexei's frenzied exit toward the gaming hall.

## Scene 2

The gambling theme is the most important motif in this scene. Texturally, it is made of octaves and a semiquaver figure built on an appoggiatura and repeated note. The motion of the roulette's silver ball as the wheel comes to the end of its spin is realistically captured at RN 477 + 2 – 5. The various constituent elements of the scene are pianistic but their orchestration endows them with a completely different character.

**Ostinatos** structure the entire scene. The staccato alberti bass type ostinato provides the background for the characters' conversation as they place their bets. This allows Prokofiev to sustain the scene's rhythm: in fact, this figure ensures that the scene's pacing never loses its momentum. Ostinato is thus used here as a structural driver. The gambling scene is made up of a set of musical ideas used interchangeably and in such a way that whole sections may be entirely built on a specific idea. Prokofiev breaks the act of gambling itself into its smallest constituent parts and

through his use of specific gestures and musical ideas, zooms in on the various stages of gambling at the tables in great detail. There are five main musical ideas:

A: RN 474 + 3: this idea is heard as the characters are asked by the croupier to place their bets

B: RN 477 + 1 – 477 + 4: the “roulette theme”

C: RN 478 + 4: repeated chords emphasizing the 3<sup>rd</sup>

D: RN 479: the croupier’s line “Faites vos jeux” where the bass articulates a descending 4<sup>th</sup>, orchestrated with horns

E: RN 480: as the players wait for the roulette wheel to complete its spin, a staccato alberti bass figure and a repeated chord built on perfect 4ths (F sharp – B – F sharp) is heard. The F sharp in combination with the C heard on the main beat of the bar, creates a tritone: a subtle indication that the game being played may prove to be dangerous or even, evil. The tension is enhanced as this pattern moves by semitone shift at RN 480 + 4. These five constituent musical ideas are used in a kaleidoscopic manner – carefully pieced together to make a musical texture that runs through the entire scene, in the process of which they sustain the dramatic rhythm of that very scene.

Alexei’s solo material at RN 483, written in 5/4, stands out from the rest of the scene, which gradually acquires manic energy. The rhythm of this section clashes with the precisely and meticulously assimilated rest of the scene. It suggests Alexei’s building feverishness and intensifying emotions. The writing is in unison, which draws our attention to Alexei’s voice line: its use of the semitone shift at RN 483 (C sharp to D) and appoggiaturas of tritones (RN 483 + 3 are used here to depict Alexei’s intensity).

Again, at RN 507, the ostinato figure holds together the conversation between the gamblers. It functions both as a rhythmic background, providing the impetus for their conversation, but also, within the context of the entire gaming scene, it sustains the ongoing tension, so that the momentum of the scene is never lost.

The croupier’s announcement that the table is closed (RN 516 – RN 517) is set against three musical strands: a descending ostinato that works around the interval of the falling 5<sup>th</sup>. Descending scalar lines move in contrary motion to a short melodic motif. The players’ joy at the breaking of the bank is emphasized through the timpani’s insistent pattern (RN 518 + 3). The ostinato accompaniment continues to emphasize the interval of the 5<sup>th</sup>.

Alexei hurries to find another table with the other gamblers following close behind. This is an energetic process (RN 519 + 2), powered by Alexei's feverishness. It is based on descending triplet chords built on 4ths, rather than 3rds, for example at RN 519 + 3: C natural – F – B; B – E – A; A – D – G; G – C – F.

The articulation of these clashes of descending chords emphasizes the first note of each group, which is slurred to the next note, while the last chord of each triplet is played staccato. The woodwinds play ascending scales, in contrary motion, at the distance of an octave. The energy and turbulence of this passage reflects Alexei's psychological state.

At RN 520 the **ostinato** bass is used to announce the arrival of the casino director. The staccato **ostinato** pattern, played on bassoon, is immediately suggestive of a character type. It is a device that attracts the audience's attention especially as Prokofiev assigns the bassoon a couple of bars of solo playing – transforming the **ostinato** pattern into a **presentational** figure. The brass triads superimposed above this suggest that something of consequence is about to unfold. The same figure is used to herald the King's onstage appearance in *Love for Three Oranges*.

The Pale Lady's narrative (RN 526) is accompanied by harp **glissandos** – a figure Prokofiev uses quite rarely. The use of the harp to accompany a female line provides a contrast to the texture and timbres used in the previous section with the casino director. Here, the harp imbues her character with a softness and femininity supported by her words. She speaks of Alexei's qualities of goodness of heart and fears that he does not yet know how cruel fortune can be.

The **ostinato** bass pattern in thirds returns at RN 529 with vicious energy, accompanying the glee of the gamblers at another table. The repeated A flat clashes with the B flat in the **ostinato** pattern, heightening the sense of excitement. The director's line is still orchestrated using the bassoon, with an **ostinato** written in thirds. The detached bassoon sonority suggests that the figure of the director is one to be mocked at – the other players cannot hide their delight at the fact that the bank was made bankrupt and forced to close. After all, Alexei's success at the gaming tables offered possibilities for them all to do the same.

The concluding section of this scene (RN 549), where the gamblers are trying to come to terms with the enormous sum of money Alexei won at the next table, is sustained by two **ostinato** ideas: the one being a staccato **alberti-bass**, the other being a whimsical three-note figure using the **acciaccatura** on its high notes and spanning a

little less than two octaves. The first ostinato idea follows on the ostinato types that Prokofiev has already used in this scene – its primary role is to sustain ongoing movement and rhythm while the second idea suggests the possibility that this scene is unreal, possibly a dream. The scene is gradually merging into a nightmarish vision: the repeated layered ostinatos, while the gamblers deal with their shocked surprise, give the scene an atmosphere of unreality. This section reaches its climax with another short **ostinato** at RN 554 + 3 and ends with the Director's premonition that Alexei would come back to the gaming tables – the sure sign of an addict. This is accompanied by a two-bar motif played on the horns and marked *f espress.* The curtain comes down on this prophetic statement.

The motif at RN 556 is used to suggest an atmosphere of feverish activity. Against a sustained repeated note on B, the motif rises gradually by step and increases in volume, while voices are heard off-stage. The section is sustained through **ostinatos** while the choir sings a short commentary on Alexei's lucky win. Previous material is used again here but it is collated together in such a way that this interlude is a kaleidoscopic mirage of various musical ideas, that follow on each other's heels in quick succession, endowing the scene with a breathless and restless quality. The swirling scalar lines add to the atmosphere of mad excitement RN 562 + 1, RN 563 + 2 and RN 565. This nightmarish moment brings together the musical ideas heard in the gambling scene, juxtaposing them so that the croupier's cry of "Faites vos jeux" is followed on closely by snatches of the gamblers' conversations.

### Scene 3

The presence of Polina in Alexei's room, of which he is at first unaware, is signaled by a change in orchestral texture (RN 588). A sustained trill on the major second, a figure that Prokofiev uses to signify a dramatic moment, runs through the first part of this scene. The sustained chords on the trombones and then on the woodwinds are again built around thirds. The trill seems to embody or symbolise Polina's shiver – this sound acquires a menacing edge as we wait for her response to Alexei's offer of money. Her peals of laughter are sustained against a background of trills, ascending and descending scalar patterns as well as double thirds – all gestures crucial to Polina's characterization.

Embedded and over-arching melodic lines support Polina's refusal of Alexei's money, providing a tenderness that marks a stark contrast to her previous reaction and which also suggest that her feelings for Alexei may be different to those she overtly professes or implies through her actions. RN 599 + 3 sees a return to the previous melodramatic textures of *Maddalena*: her cries are accompanied by a dramatic insistence on the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and the repeated note. Again, her statements and their conversation are accompanied by dramatic trills.

Their embrace is similarly accompanied by frenzied repeated figures alternating a major sound: E – F sharp – G sharp – A with a minor one: E – F – G – A (RN 615 + 2). This is followed by an orchestration of the love theme, distorted by its harmonizations at RN 616, where it stops, incomplete, acting as a powerful suggestion that their love will similarly remain unrequited. Polina's proud final gesture of defiance, which is that of throwing the money to Alexei's face, is accompanied by a sextuplet of ascending semiquavers. This is followed by the return of a savage ostinato bass line against which Alexei's final state of mind is revealed as his music returns to his amazing win at the roulette tables – a fitting end to the opera and one that engages directly with Dostoyevsky's ambiguous text.

### *Love for Three Oranges*

Prokofiev was introduced to Carlo Gozzi's libretto by the innovative theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, with whose work he was already familiar.<sup>9</sup> As Pisani notes, it is a "fantastical libretto"<sup>10</sup> and it appealed to Prokofiev's sense of fun and appreciation of the fantastic. *Love for Three Oranges* played with the boundaries of reality, allowing for plenty of imagination in the scoring and staging. The creation of worlds within worlds, the depiction of fantastic characters, the foregrounding of the unexpected and the theme of the supernatural fascinated Prokofiev. The surreal qualities of *The Gambler*'s gambling scene and its imaginative inhabitants are fully developed in *Love for Three Oranges* which thrives on the qualities of the fantastic, the unexpected, the magical and the surreal.

<sup>9</sup> Vsevolod Meyerhold was one of the earliest supporters of *The Gambler*, having listened to the composer play it at a hearing organised by the conductor Albert Coates. (*Diaries*, Vol. 1: 141)

<sup>10</sup> Michael V. Pisani, "'A Kapustnik' in the American Opera House: Modernism and Prokofiev's 'Love for Three Oranges'", *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 81 No. 4 (Winter, 1997), 487 – 515.

Pisani notes that the theatrical style of *Love for Three Oranges* puzzled the opera's first American audiences<sup>11</sup>: "Despite the opera's musical sophistication, the royal characters onstage behaved like clowns. Prokofiev's histrionic orchestral effects only intensified the incongruities".<sup>12</sup> The opera's libretto and its subject gave the composer free musical rein. Its overtly theatrical qualities and "sharply defined gestures"<sup>13</sup> offered Prokofiev enormous potential for the use of various musical gestures, most of which were already a staple part of his idiom. Ultimately the opera is a self-consciously theatrical work that draws attention to its own compositional devices and displays Prokofiev's sophisticated manipulation of thematic materials and orchestral sound.

## Prologue

The opera opens with a presentational gesture built on a repeated note and orchestrated on trombones and percussion. It is a fitting start to the opera and self-consciously draws the audience's attention to the ensuing quarrel between the "Tragedians" and the "Comedians". The gesture built around a repeated octave and four note chromatic figuration, ending on an upbeat chord at RN 1 + 2 functions as a "punctuative" gesture: it shapes conversations and complements the declamatory singing line that Prokofiev uses in his operas. While creating a thicker texture and thus counterbalancing the singing line, it provides rhythm and pacing to the conversation, emphasizing the third beat of the bar in a rhythmic dialogue with the singing part. This device is used several times throughout the opera to the same effect. Another example of this occurs at RN 98, where the statements of the "Tragedians" are similarly punctuated. A distinctive ostinato occurs at RN 10: it is built on a white note chord of thirds, C – E – G – B, in its last inversion (B – C – E – G). Played staccato by the double basses and bassoons,<sup>14</sup> this is a particularly pianistic position and may already be seen in compositions belonging to Prokofiev's 'elemental' phase.

<sup>11</sup> The opera was performed on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1921 by the Chicago Opera Company and conducted by Prokofiev.

<sup>12</sup> Michael V. Pisani, "'A Kapustnik' in the American Opera House: Modernism and Prokofiev's 'Love for Three Oranges'", *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 81 No. 4 (Winter, 1997), 487 – 515.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> This is also a classic combination of instruments recommended by Rimsky-Korsakov. He notes that "all combinations of strings and wood-wind are good" and the object of these combinations is threefold: "a) to obtain a new timbre of definite colour; b) to strengthen the resonance of the strings; to

Another **ostinato** figure occurs at RN 16, this time written around an **appoggiatura figure**. This figure itself is one that Prokofiev uses often and its roots may be traced back to his juvenilia. Here, an entire ostinato bass section is structured around it. Prokofiev's use of the **semitone shift** and his preference of particular intervals is evident in the Prologue. At RN 16, against this ostinato, a continuous sounding of the interval of the major second runs through the entire passage. It is only broken up by the use of another interval, played in an appoggiatura-like fashion at RN 17 + 2 (minor 3<sup>rd</sup>) for example, again at RN 18 + 1 (major 3<sup>rd</sup>). Both figures are marked *crescendo* and cover the span of three octaves within little more than a bar. The figures draw attention to the onset of the first beat of the following bar, which is played *forte* and accented so that in a way, they function as extended decorative figures, their main aim being to draw attention to the onset of the next main beat and to break the continuity of the embedded trill-like figure running through the passage.

Various pianistic figurations are used in this opera to enhance orchestral textures. Altogether they endow the opera with light and playful moments. At RN 9 + 2 for example, the rising semiquaver triplet figure, which is an integral part of the texture, lies well under the hand and may in that sense be considered pianistic. Although Prokofiev uses the triplet figure very sparingly in his 'elemental' phase, he finds a use for it here where it maintains the ongoing rhythmic momentum in preparation for the oncoming **ostinato**. Being written in the higher registers, it also heightens the drama and participates in the accumulation of excitement. Similar pianistic figurations written in the **high registers** occur at RN 11. Further figurations occur later on, at RN 42 + 1, where the semiquaver pattern climbs up to reach an accented third beat. Their overall effect is to create a humorous and effervescent atmosphere. Such ideas are often orchestrated on the higher woodwinds. At RN 46 + 1, another important high register figuration is heard on the flutes and clarinets. It consists of two short notes at the interval of a 2<sup>nd</sup> falling onto a 9<sup>th</sup> below. This jocose figure, which may also be found in the *Visions Fugitives*,<sup>15</sup> accompanies Pantalon's dialogue with the King as they discuss how best to make the Prince laugh.

The **repeated note motif** acquires specific overtones in this opera. It is heard as a disruptive figure at RN 15 where it is played by a trombonist who creeps out

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soften the quality of the woodwind". (*Principles of orchestration*, 59) Since the passage is also played staccato, the added effect is one of urgency and tension.

<sup>15</sup> No. 2, bars 1 – 2.

from behind the stage curtain. The self-consciously playful nature of this moment disrupts the general flow of the music and is entirely unexpected. In this short episode, the trombonist becomes an onstage character, and the boundaries between on stage and off stage reality are blurred.

## Act I

The opening chords of the act herald the arrival of the King on stage. A repeated C minor chord is alternated with an A flat major chord. This presentational gesture is orchestrated on the horns and woodwinds which endow it with a fanfare-like feel. The alternation of minor/major chords is suggestive of a cadential gesture and in this respect may be heard as a pseudo-cadence. The accompanying octaves in the low registers, outlining the descending intervals of an augmented second, followed by a major third, sound almost like a cry, which reflects the King's sad and weary state of mind. The King's line is a vocalization of the repeated note idea. His first words in the opera are sung to the one pitch: C. Singing lines set to a repeated note are usually used by Prokofiev when the characters are delivering a statement or invocation.<sup>16</sup> The embedded chromatic line that is such a staple part of Prokofiev's writing for the piano is used more frequently in *Love for Three Oranges* than in *The Gambler*. It makes an appearance at RN 26, in the lowest register of the orchestra. Here, played by the bassoons, it supports the King's sad melody while simultaneously providing a menacing edge to his words. Against this embedded motif, the orchestral texture is made of a tremolo built on the tritone (RN 26) followed by tremolos on the intervals of a minor 2<sup>nd</sup>, major 2<sup>nd</sup>, minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, major 3<sup>rd</sup>, perfect 4<sup>th</sup>, tritone respectively. This incremental graduation is often used when Prokofiev means to heighten the tension in a particular sequence.

The first example of an over-arching melody in this opera occurs at RN 34. This melody, which is played on the cellos and then taken up by the violins is associated with the Prince's unhappiness. It has a yearning quality, mostly due to its descending and then ascending shape.

Another of Prokofiev's pianistic configurations occurs at RN 36. This chromatic scalar figure, played by the flute, spans three octaves. It is ultimately a scalar flourish

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<sup>16</sup> See Tchelio's invocation of Farfarello at RN 257. This is similarly built on one pitch.

that dies on a quiet acciaccatura figure. Prokofiev uses it in this episode to theatrically link three statements made by the King and Pantalon.

An example of the transference of pianistic ideas to orchestral ideas, and even more importantly, to associated images, occurs with the agitated **ostinato** figure at RN 40. This broken chord type figure, played detached, is constructed from the intervals of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>: B flat – D flat – A flat. It can also be seen as the melodic interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup> followed by that of a 5<sup>th</sup>. On the piano, this is an entirely black key position, a particular favourite with Prokofiev. It is played on the lower strings and exudes energy and movement through the *Poco più mosso* indication. It also contrasts with over-arching melody played by the cellos at RN 39.

A longer melody line occurs at RN 43 + 2. Here again it is played by the strings, in this case the muted violins. The fall of the 7<sup>th</sup> is followed by an ascending chromatic pattern and the melody gradually climbs up to the register it started in, where it rests for a full ten bars. As was the case in the other melody discussed above (RN 34 and RN 39), the yearning quality of the melody is determined by its shape.

Another **ostinato** pattern occurs at RN 48, in what is clearly a piano texture. It would not seem out of place in one of Prokofiev's piano sonatas, and bears a striking resemblance to one of the textures in the fifth piano sonata.<sup>17</sup> While the inner textures play around the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the outer lines outline the interval of a descending 4<sup>th</sup>, and the lowest texture plays with both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup>. This short section is built entirely around a layering of Prokofiev's favourite intervals. It accompanies the King and Pantalon and is followed immediately after with the invocation of Truffaldino.

The **tremolo** is an integral part of the invocation. At RN 51, the violins play a minor second detached tremolo which accompanies Pantalon's line. Similarly, in the card game between Tchelio and Fata Morgana, pianistic ideas will come to the fore. This suggests an important link between Prokofiev's writing for piano from the 'elemental' period and his writing for the stage, particularly that writing which deals with the supernatural or the fantastic. *Love for Three Oranges* deals with both of these themes, and especially in Act II, we are able to see exactly how Prokofiev puts these originally pianistic ideas to associative ends. For example, the ascending scale that accompanies Pantalon's invocation of Truffaldino suggests some sort of supernatural conjuring (RN 54). It is used again during the card game in Act II.

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<sup>17</sup>See Piano Sonata No. 5 in C, opening 6 bars.

As with *The Gambler*, the ostinatos in this opera are used to pace a narrative, to structure entire sections and to suggest and heighten emotional involvement at particular dramaturgical points. The King's line, at RN 55, is accompanied by a light, almost lopsided ostinato that is based entirely on the pianistic idea of a broken triad. This kind of writing is found as early as the *pesenki*. Here Prokofiev uses it to sustain and maintain the King's narrative.

The characterization of Leandre is based upon the originally pianistic idea of the leaping bass against a chromatic, dotted rhythm pattern. The chromatic pattern is repetitive and restricted, constructed around just four notes: E flat – D – D flat – C. Interestingly, this image of Leandre is first introduced through other characters: it is Pantalon who first mentions Leandre at RN 61 and immediately, the dotted motif is played on the cellos. The King follows on from this and the leaping bass is now added to the repetitive chromatic motif to accompany the King's singing line. The chromatic motif is of a light and tripping nature, due to its dotted rhythm, and this debunks the menacing edge suggested by the leaping bass. This type of leaping bass, which goes all the way back to *The Giant* plays up the character's buffoonish qualities. It is an effective musical caricature, and one beloved by Prokofiev. It simultaneously debunks the menace provided by the Leandre motif as it mocks the very pomposness of the characters it depicts. While the first and third beats of the leaping bass pattern outline the interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup>, B flat – C – D flat – C – B flat, the second and fourth beats of each bar are harmonic intervals of a 3<sup>rd</sup>. As the section progresses (RN 62 + 4), the first and third beat pitches are changed to B – C – D – C, the white note version of the previous pattern while the second and fourth beats become chords rather than double thirds. These minor chords are all in first inversion, a chord position that features often in Prokofiev's writing for piano as the distribution of the fingers for inverted chords is an uneven one.<sup>18</sup>

The characterization of Leandre is thus particularly sophisticated: when he appears on stage at RN 63 + 3, his singing line is accompanied by a repeated bass of double thirds and some short chromatic motifs, which are not as significant as the shuffling, dotted motif. The appearance of Leandre's imagery in the lines of both the King and Pantalon is significant. It suggests that they are aware of his malicious character and desire to become King. Leandre's appearance on stage, with a different

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<sup>18</sup> Please refer to the third chapter for a detailed discussion of this concept.

accompanying texture, indicates that he is double-faced and is showing a different side to his character to the world at court.

## Scene 2

Prokofiev sets the scene for the ensuing war of magic between Tchelio and Fata Morgana with a variety of figures designed to suggest the presence of the supernatural. The **tremolo** octaves provide an underlying menacing feel not least because they outline an implied **tritone** (E to B flat). The scalar lines played by the horns and bassoons make up a sequence of chords again structured around the interval of a **3<sup>rd</sup>**. The ascending and descending **scalar patterns** carve swelling *crescendo* and *decrescendo* patterns which add to the general feeling of darkness in the scene. The score also suggests an added line of descending patterns of semiquavers to be played by the clarinet. The first beat of each of these would highlight the ascending **chromatic line** that holds the layers together: RN 68: B – C – D – E flat, RN 68 + 1, F – G flat – G sharp – A. This pattern is then repeated in descending form. The undulation and swirling movement suggested by the very selection of pitches and the way that these are used creates the atmospheric effect of a hidden incantation, some means by which the music itself casts a spell on the audience and even on the characters. In this way, Prokofiev introduces the supernatural element into his opera.

At RN 69, an embedded **chromatic line** emerges from the nether regions of the orchestra, played by the tuba. The line makes its way up across four octaves before it erupts into a big chordal dramatic gesture at RN 70 + 4. Marked *pesante*, the ascent of this chromatic line, which is used here to suggest the presence of the supernatural, enhances the growing tension and unrest of the scene which is dramatically announced at RN 71. Trombones, horns and timpani play an accented triplet figure while the bass line continues with a **tremolo** based on the harmonic interval of the **tritone** (C and F sharp). The tritone is also present in the voice line: RN 71 + 2, F sharp to C and RN 72 + 4, E to B flat.

The next section, marked *Poco più mosso* is a masterpiece of Prokofiev's imagination. The introduction of the **triadic figure** at RN 73 is built on the ubiquitous broken triad, here it is the B flat major triad with the addition of E natural in the lower registers. This tonal ambiguity, which is a key feature of Prokofiev's harmonic writing in general, is here put to a specific use. As the Imps articulate "ee" to this

triadic pattern, the clash between the B flat and E natural is repeated as part of their incantation. This musical gesture is played almost continually through this scene. The gestures that make up the music of the Imps are entirely pianistic, being a mixture of broken chords and scalar patterns. The dramatic tremolo on the woodwind (RN 76) and the use of quick descending and ascending scales (RN 76 + 6) imbue the texture with a theatrical quality. Similarly the descending chromatic pattern that punctuates the card game (RN 78) continues this theatricalisation of musical gestures. Fata Morgana's winning of the card game is played out through repeated C major seventh chords. The scene ends with a variation of the opening presentational gesture already heard at RN 68. The descending lines at RN 87 are now no longer descending by step but rather revolve around the interval of a third to create the following sequences: B – B flat – G – G flat; D sharp – D – B – B flat.

### Scene 3

Leandre's motif comes into its own in the opening of the scene. As Leandre is on stage alone, he has no need to hide his true nature and his dotted motif and leaping bass theme accompany his singing line. The entrance of Clarice brings back the tremolo gesture and a two-bar figuration typical of Prokofiev's piano lines (RN 89). The long note falling down by an octave to a winding chromatic line built around the 4<sup>th</sup>, is played by the oboes.<sup>19</sup> As Clarice unveils her plans for her and Leandre's future, a repeated harmonic major third is heard to a rhythmic pattern presaging the "March" theme which will be heard in the next act. This figure accompanies Clarice on several occasions in this scene. Their conversation is also characterized by the use of the dramatic trill of a minor 3<sup>rd</sup>.

As happened in *The Gambler* where the characters' private conversation was often interrupted by other characters coming on stage or through the use of theatrical "mute" scenes, here the plotting of Leandre and Clarice is interrupted not only by the "Eccentrics" but also by the music associated with Truffaldino and his entertainments which are being prepared as Clarice and Leandre speak.

The appearance of Smeraldina on the scene is a prime example of Prokofiev's theatrical instinct. Prokofiev uses various gestures and ideas as part of the theatrical

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<sup>19</sup> See also *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 2, bars 1 and 13 for a similar shape.

mode: the dramatic tremolo on strings (RN 115) and on trombone (RN 116), long sustained trills (RN 116 + 3) on the bassoons and double bassoons, dramatic repetition of the interval of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (RN 117), chromatic figurations (RN 118 + 5)<sup>20</sup>, triplet motif on muted trombones (RN 122) repeated chords built on the 5<sup>th</sup> (B flat – to F) with an added 6<sup>th</sup> (G) (RN 126). A long and winding melodic line, spanning almost two octaves is played by cellos and bassoons at RN 127. It incorporates the intervals of the minor 2<sup>nd</sup>, the **tritone** and the 5<sup>th</sup>. Hidden chromatic patterns support Smeraldina's line at RN 128. The trio's repeating of Fata Morgana's name suggests that they too have fallen under her spell. Their invocations are framed by an ascending accented chromatic line marked *pesante*, in the orchestra's lower registers, as well as a winding chromatic figuration on the violins and woodwinds (RN 132 + 2, 3).

## Act II: Scene 1

The setting for this first scene is the Prince's bedroom. His lament, an ascending perfect 5<sup>th</sup> followed by a descending minor 6<sup>th</sup> occurs at RN 139 + 2 and again at RN 139 + 8 where it takes the form of a descending perfect 4<sup>th</sup>. An **ostinato** pattern, similar to the bass line in *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 2 accompanies his line at RN 140. The Prince's vocal range is limited and his melodic line emphasizes the semitone shift and the **appoggiatura**. Prokofiev uses this restricted range to exploit intervals like the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> as at RN 142 for example. This moaning sound, similar to the General's cry in *The Gambler* is also reminiscent of the Imps' incantation in the first act. In limiting the Prince's range in this way, Prokofiev restricts his character to an almost specific and pre-set group of intervals around which his line works. This circularity resonates with the character's internal world of madness and malaise. The moaning is taken to ridiculous lengths at RN 144 + 1 – 4.

The orchestral writing at RN 148 shows affinities with Prokofiev's writing for the piano. The writing in double thirds, here played by the woodwinds is typical in his compositions for piano.<sup>21</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, playing passages in rapid thirds was a technique that he mastered while studying at the Conservatory and which

<sup>20</sup> Similar figurations will occur in *The Fiery Angel* Act II Scene 1 during the séance scene (from RN 210) and also during the meeting between Ruprecht and Agrippa von Nettesheim, Act II Scene 2. See for example, RN 259 + 3, lowest registers.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, *Four Pieces* Op. 3, No. 1 and *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No. 4, bars 5 – 8.

became one of his greatest technical strengths. He uses this to great effect in the piano textures. The appearance of such a texture in his orchestral writing is almost always assigned to the wind instruments.

At RN 151 the texture is based on detached sixths and allows for the insertion of the minor 2<sup>nd</sup> interval in the textures. Played by the bassoons and accompanied by acciaccaturas in the higher woodwind registers, it suggests a playful atmosphere which is associated with the figure of Truffaldino in this opera. The triadic texture at RN 153 set against the octaves in the lower string registers of the orchestra again draws upon Prokofiev's technique as pianist and bears a slight resemblance to Prokofiev's use of triads in the virtuosic *Étude* No. 1.

The memorable *Love for Three Oranges* march is first heard in the background as a prelude to the ensuing festivities. Truffaldino draws the Prince's attention to it at RN 157. This enduring theme is first played off-stage on the brass. Rhythmically, the first eight bars of the theme are very energetic. Although its metric qualities are strongly in evidence, the emphasis falls on the unimportant beats, which gives it a playful and quirky quality. The **chromatic motif** is subtly woven into the theme (see RN 157 + 4). The second part of the theme is constructed around the **repeated note** which is a gesture dating back to the juvenilia (RN 158). The scene ends with an exuberant reiteration of the complete theme on the full orchestra.

## Scene 2

This scene is held together by various gestures: all are pianistic in their inception but they come into their own in this scene as they are an integral part of what unfolds onstage, becoming associative gestures in the process. The fanfare on trombones with which the scene opens is built around the accented repetition of dotted major thirds. Accompanied by a drum-roll, this is a **presentational fanfare-like gesture**, designed to introduce the ensuing entertainment. The dramatic **tremolo** on the major 3<sup>rd</sup> also plays an important part in this scene as it is used to introduce all of the other entertainments.

The first piece of entertainment (RN 175) is accompanied by an accented bass, marked *molto pesante*, which builds up into an ascending **chromatic scale** across the orchestra with the bass textures playing a 3<sup>rd</sup> apart from the higher textures.

The octaves in the treble register are filled in with chromatic notes which themselves outline chromatic patterns. In this way, Prokofiev avoids using a clichéd ascending line in octaves to create a build-up of excitement. The purely orchestral section at RN 178 plays with various pianistic figurations in an almost kaleidoscopic manner. The repeated bass, played by trombones, timpani, bassoons and double bassoons, ascends very gradually and provides excitement. The triplet scalar figurations played on the winds endow the texture with a sparkle that has come to characterize Prokofiev's imaginative writing and also add to the cumulative tension and mounting exuberance of the scene.<sup>22</sup> These figurations, which were first used in his works for piano, acquire a different meaning when they are associated with specific themes as happens in this scene where Truffaldino sets up various shows in his attempt to make the Prince laugh. Prokofiev also uses these musical ideas in connection with the themes of black magic and the supernatural, as was the case with the card game between Tchelio and Fata and will again be used in *Fiery Angel*.

The appearance of Fata Morgana at the entertainment (RN184) is signalled by a two- bar octatonic<sup>23</sup> melody on the strings and provides a short dark interlude in the scene. In an aside, she briefly interjects to tell Leandre that as long as she is present at the entertainments, the Prince will not be able to laugh, in spite of all of Truffaldino's best efforts. Her vocal line is yet again characterized by the tritone: it is written between B flat (her lowest pitch) and E (her highest).

The entertainments resume and the music goes back to its imaginative and playful mode. **Glissandos** (RN 188) and **long sustained trills** (RN 188 + 1) accompany the appearance of two fountains on stage. The **appoggiatura** figure is used in contrary motion (RN 190) and the **trill** gesture is used at length at RN 194 + 1 as we wait in suspense to see whether the Prince has laughed yet. When the Prince finally laughs, it is at Morgana herself. The Prince's laughing motif is built on the falling major 3<sup>rd</sup> (RN 203 + 6) while the light detached accompaniment on the violins

<sup>22</sup> *Sarcasms* is an example such devices used to achieve an imaginative, carnivalesque effect. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of how the carnivalesque is written into the score, especially in the case of *Sarcasm No. 2*.

<sup>23</sup> While Michael V. Pisani has gone so far as to suggest that the entire opera is built on the octatonic, I would argue that Prokofiev uses the scale for colour and effect rather than as a driver for tonal organization. (Michael V. Pisani, "A 'Kapustnik' in the American Opera House: Modernism and Prokofiev's 'Love for Three Oranges'", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Winter, 1997): 487-515, 495). Richard Taruskin rightly calls the the scale "baldly expressed" at this point in the opera, further confirming the gesture's colourful effect. See Richard Taruskin, "Chernomor to Kashchei: Harmonic Sorcery; Or, Stravinsky's 'Angle'", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1985): 72-142, 134.

and clarinets centres around the ascending 4<sup>th</sup> (RN 203 +1). The latter motif is yet another **ostinato** figure. The **lines moving in contrary motion** foreground the Prince's laugh. As the episode progresses, more layers are added to the ostinato at the interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> below while the Prince's laugh becomes ever more frantic. At RN 207, the laugh has taken the shape of a descending triad built around the **tritone** (G – E – C sharp). The use of the tritone foreshadows the spell that Morgana will cast on him.

The theatrical use of the gong at RN 216 serves as a painful reminder that laughing at Fata Morgana cannot but have dire consequences. The **triplet motif** played on a muted trombone at RN 216 + 1 heralds the presence of Morgana and frames her bewitching of the Prince. This section starts in the lowest registers of the orchestra and gradually ascends just as Morgana begins her octatonic conjuration. Her line uses the falling 3<sup>rd</sup>, the same interval as the Prince's laugh. At RN 219, the Imps accompany her using the same semiquaver patterns to the sound of "ee" while the orchestral writing is entirely built around pianistic figurations such as those at RN 219 and interspersed with the menacing triplet motif on the brass (RN 219 + 2).<sup>24</sup> Various rhythmic patterns are used in the Imps' line: triplets, sextuplets, septuplets. Prokofiev often employs the triplet and other irregular groupings in passages that are thematically linked with the imagination, the occult and the supernatural.<sup>25</sup> Such irregular rhythmic groupings allow for the incantation to be repeated with differing rhythmic emphasis. As Prokofiev's compositional development is based on sequential repetition, such variations in rhythmic emphasis are often to be found in his writing.

The Prince's bewitchment is suggested through the extended use of the dramatic **trill** to accompany his line at RN 224 and the continued effect of his enchantment is reflected in the **repeated notes** and chords that run through the rest of the scene (for example RN 231 onwards, RN 236 + 1 onwards etc.). As he sings of his love for the three oranges, the Prince is accompanied by **scalar patterns** on the violins (236 + 4) and the upper woodwinds (RN 217) which continue to reflect his enchantment. As the Prince gets progressively more agitated and is chased around the stage by Truffaldino, humorous **glissandos** are sounded on the trombones (RN 250); the texture is built on descending and ascending **scalar patterns** divided into triplets

<sup>24</sup> Similar quintuplet figurations occur in Piano Sonata No. 4, third movement, composed in 1917.

<sup>25</sup> An example of a chromatic triplet figure occurs in *Fiery Angel* Act III, Scene 2.

and groupings of eight notes; a thick chordal version of the menacing triplet motif is heard as part of Fata Morgana's textures; repeated note on horns and strings (RN 252 onwards) as well as the use of the tremolo (RN 253 +2). The scene ends on a repeated and accented G flat – B flat – D flat chord which resolves on a C – E – G chord. The traditional V chord is thus adjusted through the use of the semitone shift: rather than the expected G – B – D to C – E – G cadence, the dominant chord is lowered by a semitone, ending the scene on a quirky note. This is a variation of Prokofiev's pseudo-cadence: it functions exactly like a cadence, but makes use of the semitone shift in its approach to the final chord. The comic atmosphere is further enhanced by the repeated note on C, played by the trumpets and tambourines, reinforcing C as the home tonality.

### Act III: Scene 1

The curtain opens on an invocation scene. The sorcerer Tchelio is summoning Farfarello. The orchestra sets a dramatic atmosphere: the repeated tremolos outlining a falling 5<sup>th</sup> have a theatrical effect as they move up in slow chromatic steps. This tremolo figure replaces the more powerful presentational figure with which Prokofiev often starts a new scene. The opening bars of the scene are written in the orchestra's lowest registers out of which Tchelio's voice articulates itself on the repeated note of C sharp (i.e. a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> higher from the C major with which the previous scene ended). The first part of this scene is based on various figurations that have already been discussed above such as the descending bass line in the orchestra's lower textures (RN 260), descending scalar patterns on the woodwinds and violins, other decorative figurations that have clear pianistic origins such as those at RN 260 + 4 as well as those comically orchestrated on the trombones at RN 273 + 2.

The orchestration is appropriately dramatic: the *col legno* effect on the chords at RN 260 sounds eerie. It is a technique that Prokofiev would use again in *Fiery Angel* in the séance scene and is ultimately a self-conscious gesture that reminds the audience of the essentially theatrical and fictional nature of what is happening on stage. Accented downbeats (RN 259 + 2 etc.) heighten the occult and magical overtones of the atmosphere. The accompaniment of Tchelio's line by the tuba and double bassoon at RN 268 + 2 lends his words a grotesquely menacing power, while he describes himself to Farfarello as an enormously powerful and fearsome sorcerer.

The **ostinato** at RN 277 is built on a short three-quaver motif played by the bassoons, double bassoons and basses. The muted trumpet plays a repetitive but again pianistic figuration over this comic bass line. The **repeated note** acquires a powerful presence in Farfarello's response at RN 279 where it echoes his laughter and ensuing vocal line. Yet another amusing **ostinato** follows on shortly at RN 282. Made up of two repeated motifs layered over each other, it suggests and accompanies the entrance of the Prince and Truffaldino who are on their search for the three oranges. The chromatic motif has an accent over every main beat and played by the bassoon, it has a somewhat comical effect. The pizzicato cellos and double basses provide an airiness to the orchestral texture while propelling the movement forward, mirroring the Prince's burning desire to keep moving forward to obtain the three oranges at all costs.

## Scene 2

Prokofiev once again uses the **trill** to create a mysterious and other-worldly atmosphere which prepares both the audience and the characters for the perilous and magical world they are about to enter. It thus functions as a **presentational figure**, whose task it is to intimate the magic that will unfold. It is thus an atmosphere that will terrify the characters and the music reflects this darkness. At RN 314, the trill is played by the violins and clarinets set against a short **chromatic motif** on the lower strings.

The agitation and fear of the Prince and Truffaldino is reflected in the use of a gradually ascending chromatic motif in 6/8 time set against an accompanying **leaping bass pattern** in 2/4 (RN 318). This passage is marked *Più Mosso* and the rhythmic tension that results from the two against three quaver movement in the texture amply reflects the conflicting characters of the Prince and Truffaldino, the latter being desperate to leave and the former being equally desperate to find the three oranges. This staccato chordal passage accompanies their arguing all the way until they face the terrible Cook whose presence is heralded by *ff* chords made of a minor triad with an added 7<sup>th</sup>: F sharp – A – C sharp – E sharp. The Cook's formidably terrifying character is suggested by the solo tuba motif at RN 329, accompanied by a repeated chord on the horns.

As the Cook orders them to come out of hiding, he is accompanied by an **ostinato** figure of alternating 6ths in the lowest registers and 3rds alternating with octaves in the upper registers. The moment when the Cook spies the magical ribbon is musically depicted in the sustained trill on the violins and short melody on solo flute (RN 339). The bewitching effect of the ribbon is captured on a long **over-arching melody** played by the flutes and muted violins in a very high register (RN 341 + 2). The **repeated note** embedded in the ostinato bass which accompanies this high pitched melody seems to symbolize the stopping of time: this is a moment of enchantment. The concluding part of the scene is prefaced by an ostinato bass built on an **appoggiatura** figure at RN 348. The ensuing conclusion of the scene is constructed around this ostinato as well as a number of other pianistic figures, all of which have previously been discussed in the context of this opera.

### Scene 3

The opening ostinato, four detached crotchets a 3<sup>rd</sup> apart, suggest physical movement. Here, the Prince and Truffaldino are trudging the desert carrying three very heavy oranges. The detached nature of the motif suggests that they are being quiet to avoid alerting the ferocious cook to their presence. This **ostinato** gives way to another at RN 359 + 2 again based on the interval of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which is then followed by yet another ostinato of the broken chord type (RN 360).

Truffaldino's agitation at the Prince's ability to sleep while he himself is dying of thirst is reflected in the quiet but emphatic use of the **repeated note** at RN 364. Combined with the rising **appoggiatura** figure it reflects Truffaldino's agitated state of mind as he bursts out into a repeated cry for drink. Most of his singing line at this point is an invocation, a plea for help, sustained on just the one repeated pitch. Both the repeated note and the appoggiatura figure feature throughout most of this scene. The use of the glissando in this context suggests an as yet latent magical side to the three oranges. Marked *Pochissimo più largamente*, this section contrasts with the previous hectic music that accompanied his agitation. A decorated cadential gesture occurs at RN 378. Prokofiev uses only two chords between RN 378 and RN 380 + 3: E – G sharp – B – D sharp – F sharp and F sharp – A – C sharp. The first chord is repeated six times before the second one is heard. This repetition aurally creates a

“false tonic” against which the new chord (F sharp – A – C sharp) is contextualised. The first chord is repeated another five times to be followed again by the second chord. The overall aural effect of this progression is one of a cadence: the repetition of the first chord ensures that the listener absorbs it so that when the second chord is heard, and it is only heard once, the effect is that of the **pseudo-cadence**.

The appearance of Princess Linette from the first orange is introduced through a dramatic, chromatic theme played *forte* (RN 381). Her line is accompanied simply by a C major chord and her vocal line traces a G – B – D triad. Her singing part is accompanied by triadic shapes while Truffaldino’s interjections bring back the **ostinato** pattern. Princess Nicolette is similarly accompanied by a triadic figure as well as the interval of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (RN 391 + 2). The same figure will accompany Princess Ninette’s line.

Truffaldino’s agitation, following the death of the first two Princesses, is accompanied by the pianistic and dissonant gesture of harmonic 2<sup>nd</sup> intervals (RN 397).<sup>26</sup> Played on the trombones initially, this gesture has a very eerie effect. The short lyrical interlude between Ninette and the Prince develops some very melodious ideas in the orchestral textures, for example RN 416 + 5 on cellos. Their love song is rudely interrupted by the repeated chords that accompany the “Eccentrics”. Ninette’s repeated pleas for water are accompanied by a dramatic **tremolo** and descending scalar lines on the muted violins. Prokofiev combines two of his staple gestures here: the dramatic tremolo and the appoggiatura motif (RN 420). At RN 431, the texture includes long swirling lines played on the strings. These long winding lines on strings occur again at RN 441 when Ninette is sitting alone contemplating her happiness.

A layered **ostinato** gesture at RN 443 represents the presence of black magic through the silhouettes of Smeraldina and Fata Morgana. The repeated triplet or “magic motif” is again played on muted trombones and the short written out trills at RN 446 are again used to bring back the presence of magic. A pianistic texture and dramatic and menacing gestures accompany Smeraldina on stage. It consists of alternating octaves and thirds. This dark texture is interspersed with the repeated triplet menacing motif that symbolizes the effect of Morgana.

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<sup>26</sup> Some examples include *Visions Fugitives* Op. 22, No 3, bars 13 – 22; No. 14, bars 1 – 6; *Four Pieces* Op. 4, No. 4, bars 20 – 24.

## Act IV: Scene 1

This scene draws us back into the world of black magic. Marked *Furioso*, the swirling chromatic theme, a purely pianistic figuration, is layered against the menacing magic motif played on the trombones. As with the card game scene, the figurations used for this scene are originally pianistic ideas. All of the figurations and devices that Prokofiev uses in the supernatural scene are to be found in his piano writing. Here however, they are orchestrated in a way that creates visual images from the sounds that we hear. The sound of the piccolo playing the whirling chromatic patterns at the start suggests impending danger or excitement of some sort – the insistent shrill, high pitched sound jars against the brass' menacing idea.

Most of the gestures in this scene have been heard before however, the orchestration of them is markedly more intense because Prokofiev pushes the instruments to their limits using them for their effects. For example, the strings play *col legno* at RN 473 + 2 as they provide accompaniment to Tchelio's agitated repeated-note line. The tension of the scene is further enhanced by the use of the side drum from RN 473. The bass clarinet and trombones are muted at RN 473 + 1 and RN 473 + 7 respectively. The violins, also muted, outline a menacing glissando-like triplet figure. The tam-tam at RN 478; 479; 481 + 5 - 6 provides theatrical effect in the midst of the swirling washes of sound that accompany Tchelio and Morgana. The effect is one of controlled chaos: Tchelio and Morgana's lines can still be clearly heard above the intensely busy textures. The stage instruction for thunder and lightning to accompany Tchelio and Morgana, from RN 478 onwards, adds to the theatrical effect produced on stage: Prokofiev's manipulation of the orchestration adds force to that effect.

This dramatic and theatrical episode is followed by a quiet *Andante Scherzando* section which provides complete contrast with the drama we have just heard. The "Eccentrics" are accompanied by a pizzicato bass line that moves in thirds thus creating an airy, light and almost comic texture especially in comparison with what has gone on before. The dramatic gestures return to create a menacing atmosphere at RN 487: the **repeated note**, followed by the dramatic tremolo and the repeated accented chords on the brass. The scene concludes on another **pseudo-cadence**, the constituent chords of which are as follows:

RN 491 + 6: G – B flat – D – F

RN 491 + 7: G sharp – B natural – D – F

RN 491 + 8: F – A – C

Prokofiev thus approaches the final chord tangentially: the chord at RN 491 + 7 functions as a decoration of the chord at RN 491 + 6, working like an appoggiatura. Essentially the cadence moves from G – B flat – D – F to F – A – C: it simply moves down by step to the final chord. The chromatic inflections created by the middle chord: G sharp – B – D – F, serve to highlight the need for a resolution. The only link between the chords is the pitch F, which here functions as a repeated tonic since the octave F is accented on the first beat of each of the last four bars of the scene.

## Scene 2

The **repeated note** makes its appearance here as a **presentational gesture**. Played initially on violins, oboes and horns (RN 493 + 2) it is given a new rhythmic twist at RN 494 when the *Love for Three Oranges* march theme is heard in the background. This juxtaposition of the march theme with the repeated note constitutes an important Prokofievan developmental strategy. Rather than working with the original march theme and developing that into new material for this scene, Prokofiev retains the theme in its original form and layers another texture against it. This secondary texture, which is foregrounded and is more prominent in sound than the march theme (which is heard off stage), is built on a variation of the repeated note pattern and a **triadic pizzicato bass** (RN 494). This episode introduces the royal procession during which the repeated note gesture achieves a climactic effect. At RN 497 the repeated note on C is taken up the brass, percussion and strings creating a dramatic gesture leading toward the theatrical moment of unveiling of the Princess-turned-rat at RN 498. Tchelio's stage exit is marked by a dramatic version of the repeated note, played in triplets on timpani (RN 500+1).

A lyrical moment occurs when the Prince sees Princess Ninette (RN 501): his singing line is lyrical and supported by winding lines on the violins, typical of some of Prokofiev's later lyrical writing. His declaration of love is accompanied by gentle arpeggio-like figurations on the woodwind and harp. The King's moment of realization, when he understands the deception that has been going on between

Leandre, Clarice and Smeraldina, is accompanied by a staccato ostinato figure, a device that Prokofiev uses when a narrative needs a musical backdrop (RN 508). This time the ostinato figure is in the **higher registers** of the orchestra, creating an unusual sound as Prokofiev's ostinato basses are usually in the low registers. Below this ostinato is a tremolo around the interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup> and a long sustained note, functioning like a drone, in the lowest orchestral registers. The drone descends by step in two bar sequences. From RN 516 onwards, the orchestral writing is based on various gestures already discussed in detail above: the pianistic figurations and the various gestures and ideas associated with magic and the supernatural are all brought into play in the opera's concluding moment. The last four bars present another of Prokofiev's **pseudo-cadences**. Their constituent chords are as follows:

RN 527 + 1: F sharp – A sharp – C sharp - E

RN 527 + 2: G – B – D – F; G sharp – B sharp – D sharp – F sharp

RN 527 + 3: E – G sharp – B

RN 527 + 4: E – G sharp - B

Prokofiev's approach to the chord is again tangential: the final chord is introduced a bar before the end. The second chord in RN 527 + 2 is simply a chromatic variant of G – B – D – F: it heightens the tension before resolving it on the last chord of the opera.

## Gestures of orchestration

Prokofiev's greatest love was the stage. In spite of the fact that throughout his lifetime he was known mostly as a composer-pianist, Prokofiev explored the medium of opera in his early and formative years and he continued to be fascinated by its possibilities, right until his death. This chapter has looked at the way Prokofiev adapted his compositional language for the stage. The stage provided Prokofiev with a way of articulating and 'theatricalising' images that had already appeared in his piano music, and which his own performances of his music brought to life. During this process, many ideas that may have started off being essentially pianistic became associative, acquiring images and sometimes characters to go with them. This thesis has examined the composer's ideas within the context of the stage, locating several of

the gestures and idea-types that feature in his ‘elemental’ phase in two of his mature operas, thus highlighting the consistency of Prokofiev’s musical language.

The operatic works provide us with the opportunity of exploring Prokofiev’s adaptation of his exclusively musical ideas within a new context. The musical gestures and ideas that have been discussed individually became the very building blocks of Prokofiev’s writing style: crucially these ideas only became independent through the orchestration process.

The repeated note is a case in point. Originally a physical and pianistic idea, it is used both as thematic material and as a rhythmic driver: its inherent fanfare-like qualities lend themselves well to being orchestrated. The specific timbres that Prokofiev chooses for the repeated note in his orchestral writing maximize its dramatic and theatrical potential. He often assigns it to the brass instruments, which sometimes endows the gesture with comic qualities, at other times it is meant to sound menacing: its effect is entirely dependent on timbre. Such a gesture is a key idea of Prokofiev’s orchestral writing and can also be heard to great effect in Prokofiev’s abstract writing for orchestra, such as the opening six bars of the Sixth Symphony where the introductory detached quavers, having a presentational function, are played only by the brass.

Several of Prokofiev’s orchestral gestures are related to the way he engages with the geography of the piano keyboard: his over-arching and extended melodic lines are an example of this. In the piano works, Prokofiev often used the piano’s extreme registers to stretch his motifs, trying as it were to go beyond the keyboard’s limitations. One such example occurs in *Sarcasm* No. 2.<sup>27</sup> The orchestral palette provided Prokofiev with an escape from the limitations of the piano’s geography although, as the previous chapter has shown, his distinctive orchestral style did not begin to emerge until c. 1914. The experiments with register that Prokofiev was carrying out in his piano works of the ‘elemental’ phase acquired a greater scope in his orchestral writing. In his mature orchestral textures, Prokofiev would often assign the over-arching melodies to the woodwinds creating a warm registral sound that was easily aurally extricable from the accompanying orchestral textures. At these moments, Prokofiev zooms in on the melody, suspending it above the rest of the

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of this piece.

textures and orchestrating the ‘skazka’ image so often heard in his writing for the piano.

Also related to Prokofiev’s spatial understanding of the piano’s sound is his combination of high register melodies and various bass patterns (whether it be an ostinato, leaping or ‘walking’ bass). This combination of opposing registers and timbres creates a particularly distinctive Prokofievan texture. The gap in textures, which is often considered an ironic or even grotesque feature of Prokofiev’s writing, is a descendent of Prokofiev’s idiosyncratic pianism and is directly connected to the composer-pianist’s particular geographical positions on the keyboard.

The ostinato is another crucial gesture of Prokofiev’s compositional process as he usually uses it as a foundation over which he layers various other textures. Through his extensive use of the ostinato, Prokofiev is able to develop his ideas sequentially. Rather than developing his musical themes organically, he uses repetition, sequence, melodic and rhythmic variation as well as variation of timbre to expound on his thematic material. Prokofiev had perfected his technique as early as the works of the ‘elemental’ stage. It remains his most important compositional technique of development throughout his entire composing career. In his orchestral writing, sequential development is manipulated across various sound types and juxtaposed in different registers.

Since this chapter has engaged with Prokofiev’s orchestral processes in some detail, it is now possible to conclude with a brief summary of his thoughts, outlining the way that the composer personalized his Rimsky-Korsakopian sound gestures that he inherited both from his knowledge of Rimsky’s music but also via Stravinsky’s early work. In the operas, Prokofiev used orchestration in three main ways (a) to portray character (b) to suggest atmosphere (c) as a framing device or (d) for ‘effect’. The characterization of the General and Babulenka provides clear examples of (a). Prokofiev was right to think his portrayal of Babulenka was especially successful.<sup>28</sup> It is a complex characterization: in the first instance he assigns her the most lyrical lines. Her singing line is often supported by lower strings, brass and woodwind which creates a warm and rich accompanying tone. Babulenka is also given over-arching melodies as well as soulful melodies played on the strings. The General’s characterization is equally well-thought out: he is often accompanied by lower strings,

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<sup>28</sup> He composed Babulenka’s part “with love” and a genuine sensitivity to her characterization, making sure to portray her as “the genuine article”. (See *Diaries*, Vol. 2: 100-101)

horns and timpani, which refer to his military status, while mocking moments are played out on bassoons and bass clarinets. The composer uses the bassoon in classic Rimsky-Korsakovian style: with a hint of mockery, or even, in the case of the General, senility: it is a favourite Prokofiev sound. Muted strings and muted tuba are suggestive of specific mental states<sup>29</sup>: it is also a sound that projects eccentricity and helps the composer's outlining of caricatures.

One example of (b) may be found in the use of dramatic tremolos on strings and trombones to create a menacing atmosphere, as happens, for example, when Smeraldina makes her first appearance on the stage. As has been demonstrated, this is a staple strategy of Prokofiev's theatre. Lastly, presentational gestures such as those identified in the first chapter, are used as framing devices in the operas. They are usually orchestrated on trombones, horns and percussion but intriguingly, rarely on strings. Several other such instances have been identified in the discussion above. Prokofiev may have indeed been a careless orchestration student but he nonetheless draws many of his orchestration lessons from Rimsky-Korsakov, personalizes them and adapts them to his own theatrical ends.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, they accompany Alexei's tense and often furtive conversations with Polina.

## **Positioning Prokofiev: thoughts on the composer's legacy**

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### **Beyond the piano: a compositional approach**

One of the main aims of this dissertation is to locate the connection between Prokofiev's pianistic and compositional technique, scrutinizing the inter-relations between the two and examining the consequences such a relationship had for his orchestral writing. For there can be no doubt that Prokofiev's early and continued use of the piano as a springboard for ideas and perhaps more importantly, as a testing ground for the sound types of these ideas, had an enormous influence on the development of his compositional idiom, not just in his works for piano, but also in his other compositions. Prokofiev's later development into a virtuoso pianist only served to intensify the link between his piano and his compositional technique. Within this context, Prokofiev's the composer's of a distinctive orchestral idiom acquires a deeper significance. The relationship between Prokofiev's writing for the piano and his writing for the orchestra has rarely been acknowledged, much less examined. This research has demonstrated that the two media cannot really be separated as they both evolved from the same compositional ideas, gestures and techniques.

Playing the piano gave Prokofiev confidence both as a performer and as a composer. Initially, Prokofiev found it hard to outgrow this powerful connection with the piano. Nonetheless, during the 'elemental' phase, he instinctively felt that the time had come for him to sever his direct connection with the instrument in order to develop his orchestral writing. In many ways, this was perhaps not as difficult as he had anticipated: after all, his piano writing had revealed, all throughout the 'elemental' phase, a specific desire to break away from the limitations of the keyboard's space and sound.

This study offers performers new insights into the piano writing of Prokofiev and provides some explanation of its 'performative' nature. By analyzing Prokofiev's specific type of virtuosity, we are now a little closer to understanding why Prokofiev's compositions may have at first seemed 'unplayable', and still do not lie easily under the fingers of even the most technically athletic pianist. Prokofiev's virtuosity may now be understood through the mediating concept of the theatrical. His passion for the theatrical and his specific understanding of it underpins many of the works for piano. The gestures that make up the basis of Prokofiev's idiom are often used in a theatrical

manner in these works; they are often strung together in a montage-like fashion and do not, for the most part, follow a particular developmental logic.

The dramatic nature of Prokofiev's writing and his theatrical manipulation of textures, motifs and gestures to create visual images has often led to exaggerated performances of the music, where a percussive touch is preferred over a more subtle one, and where the tempo is unnecessarily stretched through the use of *rubato*. While the piano rolls of Prokofiev's own performances only reflect his playing style very inaccurately, we have enough information to corroborate the image of Prokofiev as a controlled but expressive pianist, with an impeccable sense of timing and an acute feeling for the overall image of a performance. Prokofiev's writing for the instrument reflects the way he played. His scores suggest performances should have a narrative feel to them, or at least should suggest an image or idea to the listener. His detailed performance directions need not be added to or modified by the performer: all the directions a performer needs are already *inscribed* into his scores.

My research has elucidated features of Prokofiev's early style as they appear in the juvenilia and then isolates the constituent elements of such a style in the gestures and idea-types that remained a feature of Prokofiev's musical language all throughout his career. Indeed, the genealogy of an entire musical language lies in these fundamental components. The works that I have discussed as belonging to the 'elemental' phase are a natural exploration and expansion upon ideas that first emerged in the juvenilia. The use of these gestures and idea-types through his entire career endowed his musical language a consistency that has not gone unnoticed. Suzanne Moisson-Frankhauser notes that "The composer Serge Prokofiev has an entirely personal musical language. This original language characterizes all his works throughout his entire career. It is therefore easy to recognize his musical writing whatever the work we are examining and whatever the period of its composition".<sup>1</sup> Moisson-Frankhauser is right in noting Prokofiev's consistency of musical language but this consistency is tempered with stylistic development and eclecticism.

By examining the way constituent components of Prokofiev's musical idiom were developed early and gradually evolved as the composer matured, it is now possible to understand the balance between Prokofiev's consistency of language and

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Moisson-Frankhauser, *Serge Prokofiev et les courants esthétiques de son temps 1891 – 1953* (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, c1974), 305.

his varied stylistic directions. This balance is sustained only because his gestures and idea-types are malleable and may be recontextualised; thus the ideas that Prokofiev utilizes in the piano works may be transferred into any other medium. Through the different periods that this thesis has examined - the juvenile phase, the 'elemental' and 'post-elemental' phase - the musical gestures and thematic ideas remain a common denominator of Prokofiev's language. In demonstrating the consistency of Prokofiev's means of musical expression however, this thesis also engages with Prokofiev's ability to write in different styles and in different genres. His consistency is thus paradoxically linked to his stylistic innovations.

### **Prokofiev and the anxiety of influence<sup>2</sup>**

Prokofiev's musical legacy is harder to define than that of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Unlike the former, Prokofiev did not create a new musical method. And unlike the latter, Prokofiev was never at the forefront on musical innovation. Nevertheless his subtle influence was present and widespread, reaching beyond the corners of classical Western music. Interest in Prokofiev's music, both from the performing arts and scholarly communities, is strong and appears to be getting stronger now, certainly more than it was in the years immediately after his death. The continued popularity of his music today is testament to the fact that his writing style avoids cliché and is not easily replicated, hence its distinctiveness. It is my belief that this distinctiveness needs to be engaged with if we are to gain a clearer understanding of Prokofiev's position in twentieth-century music. The lyrical quality of his writing as well as its energetic and rhythmic aspects is loved by performers and listeners alike. His almost chameleon-like ability to write in different styles while remaining true to his own artistic voice lies at the source of his music's appeal.

Prokofiev's music is individual because it is based on his particular idiosyncrasies of thought, yet the music remains relevant to twenty-first century musicians and audiences. The combination of traditional elements (such as his preference for the rondo structures) with modernist tendencies sits uneasily with

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<sup>2</sup> The term "anxiety of influence" was coined in 1973 by Harold Bloom, as part of a revisionist movement in literary criticism, to describe the ambiguous and hindering influence poets had on subsequent generation of poets. See *The anxiety of influence : a theory of poetry*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Prokofiev's critics and analysts, but not with his listeners. This balance between traditional elements and innovation continues to generate misunderstanding and bemusement in those scholars who approach it from a traditional point of view: in their eyes Prokofiev is a twentieth-century musical misfit.

As early as 1918, Prokofiev declared in an interview that he had "always felt the need for independent thinking for pursuing my own ideas [...] in essence, I am the student of my own ideas."<sup>3</sup> It would seem that from the outset, the composer strove to maintain a balance between his creative instincts (which encompassed both his performing and compositional personas) and with the forging of a musical language, idiom and style specific only to him. This research has been concerned with deconstructing the nature of Prokofiev's distinctiveness by retrieving and examining its origins and tracing its evolution into maturity and within different media. In the process of doing so, it also addressed the connecting points between Prokofiev's pianistic and compositional technique.

This composer's idiom is a personal one: there is so much of Prokofiev himself invested in the music. One of the main aims of this dissertation has been to engage with Prokofiev's personal writing style by suggesting that the best way to understand its evolution and maturity is to turn to the early musical materials that constitute the building blocks of his style. The early development of the composer's musical language, and his precocious musical evolution, first as a composer and then as a pianist endowed Prokofiev with an independent musical identity.

This early individuality manifested itself in public through an *enfant terrible* image and in what appeared to be an iconoclastic way of performing: this was the composer-pianist's way of imprinting his own personality on an audience and ultimately of creating a name for himself. To contemporary audiences then, Prokofiev *looked* like an iconoclast. This early iconoclasm was the combined result of his distinctive playing and writing style. Following such an auspicious start to his career the musical world expected him to become a pathfinder and an avant-garde innovator. This however, did not happen; at least, not in any conventional way. After he left his native Russia in 1918, Prokofiev was faced with different musical contexts and, arguably, he would never again enjoy an acclaim similar to that accorded to him in his

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<sup>3</sup> From an interview published in *The Musical Observer* by Frederick Martens, New York, 1918. Cited in *Sergei Prokofiev: Materials, Articles, Interviews* ed. Vladimir Blok, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978, 27. The article was retranslated from the Russian by Andrew Markow.

early years. The composer's self-confident 'elemental' phase was followed by a period of self-doubt and re-evaluation: experiments like those he undertook with the Second Symphony<sup>4</sup> and *Fiery Angel* temporarily shook his usual self-confident faith in his own individuality. It is surely not a coincidence that this moment in his career occurred at a time of turbulent musical trends such as that of inter-war Paris. Thrown into the cultural milieu that included musical trailblazers like Stravinsky, thinkers like Souvchinsky and artists like Diaghilev, Prokofiev needed to prove that his musical identity was both original and self-confident. His credibility as a composer depended upon it.

Uncovering Prokofiev's musical language has also made it possible for us to trace a direct line of development from his early works through to his later Soviet period ones. This does not mean that Prokofiev's musical language did not evolve after the period covered in this thesis, or that it evolved in a straight line. Rather, it is important for the development of Prokofiev scholarship that musical influences are indeed identified and their effect assessed. The difficulty that we face at the moment is that, for the most part, scholars have been looking for the origins and influences of such a language in the wrong places. Salzman notes for example that "It is difficult to say what exactly are the sources of Sergey Prokofiev's early music – partly Scriabin perhaps",<sup>5</sup> but the truth is that the early Scriabin influence, though strong, was not a lasting one. Apart from Scriabin however, the dissertation has shown that the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral effects is strong. And, to a lesser extent, the influence of Rachmaninov is present in the early works too.

Perhaps Prokofiev's most direct influence was his contemporary, Igor Stravinsky. As a composer, from the outset, Prokofiev was compared to Stravinsky. Of course, his relationship with Diaghilev only served to cement this comparison. Prokofiev was most certainly not immune to the influence of Stravinsky's writing, much as he would have denied it. He was sensitive to the other's flair for the theatrical moment, his gift for orchestration and his ability to create musical caricatures, singling out this feature of his music for particular praise. Intriguingly, although Stravinsky and Prokofiev may have used similar building blocks, such as the rhythmic cell and the ostinato, they developed these gestures in very different ways.

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<sup>4</sup> Intriguingly, even during his troubling Soviet phase, Prokofiev had not given up on this work. Sketchbooks, dating from 1950, exist in RGALI with his revised sketches for the symphony.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Salzman, *Twentieth Century Music: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 76.

While in Stravinsky's music one ostinato is often transformed into another, with Prokofiev, the ostinato remains true to its rhythmic and physical origins. The 'shocking' quality of Stravinsky's music and its innovative ideas may also have appealed to Prokofiev's *enfant terrible* nature.

Prokofiev was never able to replicate Stravinsky's experiments. He appeared disdainful of Stravinsky's stylistic phases, seemingly unappreciative of the latter's ability to don masks as suited him, such as that of neo-classicism. Prokofiev did not approve of what he saw as a stylization of Bach rather scornfully noting that "although I love Bach, and believe that to compose according to his principles isn't a bad thing, it doesn't follow that one should produce a stylized version of Bach".<sup>6</sup> Ironically, Prokofiev himself was also master of stylistic change<sup>7</sup> and like his colleague Stravinsky, he was able to maintain a distinctive style even through the changes: both their musical fingerprints remain unmistakable. It is even possible that in view of Stravinsky's successful musical experiments, Prokofiev saw that the only recourse left to him to avoid direct comparison was to remain ever more stubbornly faithful to his own ideas. Perhaps it was only in staying true to his musical integrity and personal idiom that Prokofiev felt he was more than a second rate composer. The second chapter has shown that the composer was assigned various labels during the early part of his career: his critics were eager to explain him and his music, to find a way of categorizing him, whether it was as a "Bolshevik pianist" or as a modernist. Asaf'ev noted very early on in Prokofiev's career that his music is difficult to come to terms with "from the viewpoint of its proximity to one or another school, circle or tendency".<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Western critics thought that he was "not yet to be compressed into a critical formula."<sup>9</sup>

To this day, Prokofiev's appearance in academic music history books or music history surveys is circumspect. He is most usually categorized as a Soviet composer, which discounts a major part of his career and fails to engage with the significance of the composer's output prior to his return to the Soviet Union. This need to categorise Prokofiev's music and to explain his continued popularity in terms of his

<sup>6</sup> Cited in David Nice, *Prokofiev: from Russia to the West 1891 – 1935* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 200.

<sup>7</sup> The 'Classical' Symphony was after all, written in the style of Haydn and is a classical pastiche.

<sup>8</sup> Boris Asaf'ev cited in Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: from Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* trans. Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans. (Berkeley, California and London: University of California Press, 2001), 230.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 12 December, 1918.

contemporary context is still present even in the work of established Prokofiev scholars. Neil Minturn, for example, points out that “Prokofiev is widely admired, but he has not had the clear and profound impact on subsequent composers that for example, Schoenberg has had; he has spawned no clear-cut isms (such as impressionism or expressionism, or serialism, or primitivism”).<sup>10</sup> What Minturn fails to note is that although Prokofiev’s impact was perhaps less conventional or groundbreaking than that of Schoenberg, it was nonetheless significant.

When Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union in the 1930s he was welcomed with open arms, not least for the positive publicity such a move had for the country’s cultural life. Prokofiev became an iconic figure for an entire generation of Soviet composers, Shostakovich included. Until the events of 1948, his works were performed frequently and he was interviewed by the press on a regular basis. Especially after his death, Prokofiev truly became an exemplary figure for young upcoming composers; he was considered to be one of “the best composers in the nation”.<sup>11</sup>

Surely the striking thing about Prokofiev and his music is that in a century of iconoclasts like Stravinsky and in a century of ‘isms’, he did not belong: he never tried to belong. The experiments of the 1920s, such as the Second Symphony, were short-lived: ultimately Prokofiev was not one to follow trends. Rather, he jealously guarded his idiom from any such possible contamination. Essentially he never compromised what he perceived as his own distinctive musical aesthetic. Prokofiev’s approach to musical composition started out as an idiosyncratic and individualist. Yet no writer has adequately defined that individuality, preferring instead to classify Prokofiev as a composer writing in different styles but not subscribing or belonging to any one of them. While this thesis does not claim to define the composer’s individuality or deconstruct his distinctiveness in a definitive way, it does provide a different and unifying approach to the music that places his distinctive writing style at its centre. This study thus puts forward an analytical approach which is personal and

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<sup>10</sup> Neil Minturn, *The music of Sergei Prokofiev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 207.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Morrison, *Sergey Prokofiev: The People’s Artist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 214. For an astute evaluation of the posthumous reception of Prokofiev’s music in the Soviet Union, see Peter J. Schmelz, “After Prokofiev” in *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* ed. Simon Morrison (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 493-529.

particularly suited to Prokofiev's music and which tries to address the delicate balance of tradition and innovation that lies at the heart of this language.

Prokofiev did not feel the need to subscribe to contemporary aesthetics and yet he did not completely reject them either: rather he personalized them. It is this personalization that presents the serious scholar with various problems. The application of traditional analytical tools to his music does not yield satisfying results. Similarly, historical context provides us with only an imperfect insight into Prokofiev's œuvre as he worked independently of the aesthetic trends of his time. This might not endear him to the writers of our music history books, but it is arguably the single quality that makes Prokofiev a giant of twentieth-century music.

Following the self-confidence of the 'elemental' phase, Prokofiev's career went through a phase of self-evaluation during which the compositional insecurities with which he battled during the composition of *Maddalena* came back to haunt him. Having left Russia and settled in Europe, Prokofiev seemed to have hit, yet again, a compositional cross-road. For a while, the self-confidence that had characterized the 'elemental' phase looked as though it were shattered. The 'elemental' phase had emphasized his personality and played up his idiosyncrasies: but would this be enough to carry him through into the next compositional phase? Therefore, in the mid to late 1920s, Prokofiev's compositional career went through its most difficult phase, during which he found that he had to reevaluate his artistic aesthetics. The analytical and hermeneutic approach presented in this dissertation provides us with a way of understanding Prokofiev's options at various compositional cross-roads. It is hoped that new perspectives provided by this thesis will be useful in determining the reasons behind some of the compositional decisions made by Prokofiev in the late 1920s and beyond, through a deeper understanding of Prokofiev's stylistic directions. It might also be possible to re-evaluate the musical reasons behind his arguably ill-advised return to the Soviet Union.

## **Appendix A**

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Figure 1. Serge Prokofiev, 1910, aged 19, at the height of his Conservatory career. Vasily Morolev leaning on the piano. Photo courtesy of the Serge Prokofiev Estate.



Figure 2. Serge Prokofiev, 1929, aged 38. Although this is a publicity photo, Prokofiev's low wrists and flat hand positions are unmistakable. Photo courtesy of the Serge Prokofiev Estate.



Figure 3. Serge Prokofiev, 1929. Photo courtesy of the Serge Prokofiev Estate.



Figure 4. Serge Prokofiev, 1929. Photo courtesy of the Serge Prokofiev Estate.

## Appendix B: Chronological Catalogue of Early Works<sup>1</sup>

yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
208 <sup>5</sup>	MIS 1 <sup>6</sup>	1896	Indian Galop <sup>7</sup>	F major	5 <sup>8</sup>		
208	MIS 2	1897	March	C major	4		
208	MIS 3	1897	Waltz	C major	6		
208	MIS 4	1897	Rondo	C major	10		
208	MIS 5	Jan 1898	March	B minor	5		
208	MIS 6	Feb 1898	March, 4 Hands	C major	5		
198	MIS 7	1898-1899	Polka	G major	25		
208	MIS 8	1898-1899	Waltz	G major/ C major	10		
208	MIS 9	1898-1899	March, 4 Hands	C major, Andante	4		
208	MIS 10	1899	Waltz	C major, Allegretto	10		

<sup>1</sup> This catalogue includes all the early works consulted in the course of my research.

<sup>2</sup> All the manuscripts outlined in this catalogue, except those indicated as SPA , are part of the Prokofiev holdings in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art. These holdings are identified by the number 1929, known as *fond* 1929, followed by the catalogue number, know as *opus* 1 and the individual file number known as the *yednitsa khranenia*, detailed in this table for each work consulted. SPA manuscripts are housed at the Serge Prokofiev Archive, Goldsmiths, University of London and are marked SPA here.

<sup>3</sup> The tempo marking for each work has been indicated wherever it was available.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated all the manuscripts appear to be in Prokofiev's hand.

<sup>5</sup> This file (*fond* 1929, *opus* 1, yed. khra 208) is Prokofiev's catalogue of childhood works and contains the opening bars of works of the period. It was to be very useful to Prokofiev when he came to write his *Autobiography*. The Soviet editor Miralda Kozlova notes that Prokofiev began to draw up this catalogue in 1902, entering compositions written between 1896 and 1903. She goes on to suggest that the handwriting of this catalogue indicates that Prokofiev filled in some of the blank spaces left in the catalogue during the time that he was writing the *Autobiography*. (See, 'Preface to the Notes' in *Prokofiev by Prokofiev: a composer's memoir* ed. David H. Appel, trans. Guy Daniels (New York, Doubleday, 1979), 323.

<sup>6</sup> MIS refers to the Miscellaneous category of works outlined in Chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the compositions are for solo piano.

<sup>8</sup> The bar numbers indicated do not include repeats, neither do they include penciled indications by Prokofiev for the repetition and juxtaposition of various bars in some of the manuscripts.

yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
199	MIS 11	Sep 1899	March, 4 Hands	F major, Allegro, "Skoro"		Dedicated to his mother. Fair copy by Louise Roblin. <sup>9</sup>	
208	MIS 12	Nov 1899	Song, 4 Hands	F major, Allegro	9		
SPA	WwO <sup>10</sup>	1899 or 1900	Preobrazhenski Marsh <sup>11</sup>	Key & time signatures unclear.	29		
SPA	WwO	1900	Marche and Piece <sup>12</sup>	Marche: G major; Piece: F major	119		
1	TW 1 <sup>13</sup>	Feb-Jun 1900	Opera <i>Velikan (The Giant)</i> piano score <sup>14</sup>	3 Acts, 6 Scenes			
200	MIS 13	Feb-Jun 1900	Piece for 4 Hands	D minor		Fragments remaining; incorrectly catalogued.	
208	TW 2	1900-1902	Opera <i>Na pustynnykh ostrovakh</i> ( <i>On Desert Islands</i> ) piano score	F major; E flat major/C minor	26 bars surviving	The surviving bars are to be found in catalogue of early works.	
201	MIS 14	25 <sup>th</sup> September 1901	Song in three parts; untitled	1.) D minor; 2.) C major, Maestoso; 3.) D minor, Allegro (Tarantella)	175	For father on his name day. There is a note on the manuscript indicated that the themes of this piece, apart from the Tarantella, were also used in <i>On Desert Islands</i> .	
202	MIS 15	1902	Bagatelle No. 1 for 4 Hands	C minor, Vivo	46	Note in the manuscript indicates that this was "probably" composed in 1902 and copied out by Louise Roblin.	See Appendix D
202	MIS 16	1902	Bagatelle No. 2 for 4 Hands	A minor, Prestissimo	104		See Appendix D

<sup>9</sup> The note in the manuscript indicates that the work was taken down by Louise Roblin, Prokofiev's governess between 1898-1900 and 1903-1904.

<sup>10</sup> Work without opus.

<sup>11</sup> Title assigned to the manuscript by Prokofiev.

<sup>12</sup> Title assigned to the manuscript by Prokofiev.

<sup>13</sup> TW refers to the category of Theatrical Works outlined in Chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> This work is written as a piano score with vocal parts written out above the right hand part.

yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
205	LS 1 <sup>15</sup>	Jul-1902	Pesenka No. 1, I serii	E flat major, Allegro	40		Appendix D
205	LS 2	Jul-1902	Pesenka No. 2, I serii	A major, Andante	48		Appendix D
205	LS 3	Jul-1902	Pesenka No. 3, I serii	F major, Vivo- Presto	48		
205	LS 4	Jul-1902	Pesenka No. 4, I serii	B flat major, Vivo	40		Appendix D
205	LS 5	Jul-1902	Pesenka No. 5, I serii	C major, Maestoso	48		
205	LS 6	Jul-1902	Pesenka No. 6, I serii	D major, Tempo di mazurka	48		
112	MIS 17	Jul-Nov 1902	Symphony <sup>16</sup>	G major	223	Dedicated to Glière	
205	LS 7	Sep-1902	Pesenka No. 7, I serii	C major, Allegro con fuoco	107		Appendix D
205	LS 8	Nov-1902	Pesenka No. 8, I serii	F major, B flat major, Lento	80		Appendix D
205	LS 9	Dec-1902	Pesenka No. 9, I serii	C major	70		
	MIS 18	Dec-1902	Bagatelle No. 2	A minor, Presto	104		
205	LS 10	Dec-1902	Pesenka No. 10, I serii	A major, Lento	45		
205	LS 11	Dec-1902	Pesenka No. 11, I serii	G major, Allegro	59		
205	LS 12	Dec-1902	Pesenka No. 12, I serii	E flat major,	68		
205	LS 13	Jan-1903	Pesenka No. 1, II serii	C minor	62		
	MIS 19	Jan - Feb 1903	Violin Sonata in 3 parts	C minor, I, II (Menuetto), III (Finale, Prestissimo)			
205	LS 14	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.2, II serii	A sharp minor, Andante	113		Appendix D
205	LS 15	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.3, II serii	C major, Allegretto	55		
205	LS 16	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.4, II serii	B minor, Lento	56		
205	LS 17	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.5, II serii	F major, Moderato	53		

<sup>15</sup> LS refers to the category of Little Songs as outlined in Chapter 1.

<sup>16</sup> Scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in A, 2 bassoons, 3 trumpets in B, 4 horns, 2 tenor trombones, bass trombone and tuba, bass drum, timpani, first and second violins, violas, cellos, doubles basses.

yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
205	LS 18	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.6, II serii	D major, Grave	52		
205	LS 19	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.7, II serii	E flat major, Lento	60		RIC/SK <sup>17</sup>
205	LS 20	Mar-1903	Pesenka No.8, II serii	C major, Presto	65		
205	LS 21	Aug-1903	Pesenka No.9, II serii	A major, Andante	141		
205	LS 22	Sep-1903	Pesenka No.10, II serii	D flat major, Prestissimo	93		
208	TW 3	July-October 1903	Opera <i>Pir vo vremya chumy</i> ( <i>Feast in Time of Plague</i> ) piano score	E flat major	28	The surviving fragments are from the Overture and Act 1. <sup>18</sup>	
208	MIS 20	Oct-1903	Sonata in B major for piano 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2nd parts	I: B major, Presto, II: F major, Vivo	19	Only fragments of the work survive as part of the catalogue.	
205	LS 23	Nov-1903	Pesenka No.11, II serii	F major, Andante	100		
266	MIS 21	Nov-1903	Romans <i>Skazhi mne, vetka</i> <i>Palestina</i>	F minor	43		
205	LS 24	Dec-1903	Pesenka No.12, II serii	B flat major	124		
207	LS 25	Dec 1903- Jan 1904	Pesenka No.1, III serii, (Marsh No.1) <sup>19</sup>	G minor, Presto	188		
207	LS 26	Jan-1904	Pesenka No.2, III serii (Marsh No.2)	E flat major	54		
207	LS 27	20 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1904	Pesenka No.3, III serii (Pesenna No.2)	D flat major, Allegro con fuoco	90	Dedicated to Aunt Katya & Uncle Sasha	Appendix D
207	LS 28	20 <sup>th</sup> March 1904	Pesenka No.4, III serii (Presto)	C major, Presto	63	Dedicated to Aunt Tanya	RIC
207	LS 29	22 <sup>nd</sup> March 1904	Pesenka No.5, III serii (Romans No.1 for piano)	E flat minor, Andante	35	Dedicated to his mother	
207	LS 30	28 <sup>th</sup> March 1904	Pesenka No.6, III serii (Marsh No.3)	E flat major, Allegro	42	Dedicated to his father	
207	LS 31	26 <sup>th</sup> May 1904	Pesenka No.7, III serii (Marsh No.4)	F major, Allegro	25	Dedicated to his godfather	RIC
207	LS 32	8 <sup>th</sup> July 1904	Pesenka No.8, III serii (Vivo)	G minor, Vivo	78	Dedicated to his father	RIC/SK

<sup>17</sup> *Manoscritti Infantili* (Milan: Ricordi, 1987) abbreviated to RIC and *Erste Klavierstücke* (Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, c.1977), abbreviated to SK.

<sup>18</sup> These are to be found in the catalogue of childhood works, f. 1929, opis 1, yed. khra 208.

<sup>19</sup> Bracketed entries are the titles that Prokofiev assigned to each specific work.

yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
207	LS 33	Sep-1904	Pesenka No.9, III serii (Marsh No.5)	F major, Andantino	27	Dedicated to Marya Grig. Kipshtett	
207	LS 34	16 <sup>th</sup> October 1904	Pesenka No.10, III serii (Romans No.2 for piano)	F minor, Allegretto con espressione	75		
207	LS 35	24 <sup>th</sup> November 1904	Pesenka No.11, III serii (Waltz)	D major, Allegro con brio	293		Appendix D
207	LS 36	25 <sup>th</sup> December 1904	Pesenka No.12, III serii (Marsh No.6)	C major, tempo di Marcia	57	Dedicated to his parents	
207	LS 37	Jan-1905	Pesenka No.1, IV serii	F sharp minor, Presto con brio	66	Dedicated to his mother on her birthday.	
207	LS 38	26 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1905	Pesenka No.2, IV serii (Romance No.3 for piano)	D minor, Lento	134	Dedicated to his mother.	RIC
207	LS 39	Feb-1905	Pesenka No.3, IV serii	A minor, Allegretto	33		RIC/SK
207	LS 40	Feb-1905	Pesenka No.4, IV serii	D minor, Energico	113	Dedicated to Aunt Katya and Uncle Sasha.	
207	LS 41	Mar-1905	Pesenka No.5, IV serii	C minor, Allegretto	42	Dedicated to his godfather.	RIC/SK
207	LS 42	Apr-1905	Pesenka No.6, IV serii	A flat major, Allegro	115	Dedicated to Aunt Katya and Katusha. <sup>20</sup>	RIC/SK
207	LS 43	8 <sup>th</sup> July 1905	Pesenka No.7, IV serii (Romans No.4 for piano)	B major, Allegro con fuoco	90	Dedicated to his father.	
207	LS 44	13 <sup>th</sup> September 1905	Pesenka No.8, IV serii	A minor, Presto	51	Dedicated to his father.	
207	LS 45	Nov-1905	Pesenka No.9, IV serii	D minor, Andante	26		
207	LS 46	Dec-1905	Pesenka No.10, IV serii	C minor, Presto	191	Dedicated to his mother on her birthday.	Appendix D
207	LS 47	Dec-1905	Pesenka No.11, IV serii (Minuetto)	F minor, Allegretto	31		RIC/SK
207	LS 48	Dec-1905	Pesenka No.12 IV serii (a la Mendelssohn)	E flat major, Moderato	46		
207	LS 49	12 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1906	Pesenka No.1, V serii	C minor, Moderato	46	Dedicated to Aunt Tanya.	
207	LS 50	26 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1906	Pesenka No.2, V serii (Scherzo)	C major, Allegro	77	Dedicated to his mother.	RIC/SK
207	LS 51	9 <sup>th</sup> April 1906	Pesenka No.3, V serii	E flat major, Presto	33		

<sup>20</sup> Katusha was Aunt Katya's daughter and Prokofiev's cousin.

yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
207	LS 52	Apr-1906	Pesenka No.4, V serii	D minor, Allegro non troppo	49		RIC/SK
207	LS 53	May-1906	Pesenka No.5, V serii (Waltz)	G minor, Allegro	41		RIC/SK
207	LS 54	May-1906	Pesenka No.6, V serii (March)	F minor, Tempo di Marcia	64	Dedicated to Vassily Mitrofanovich Morolev.	RIC
207	LS 55	8 <sup>th</sup> July 1906	Pesenka No.7, V serii	C major, Prestissimo	53	Dedicated to his father.	RIC
207	LS 56	1906	Pesenka No.8, V serii	E flat major, Allegretto	24	Incomplete	
207	LS 57	1906	Pesenka No.9, V serii	E flat major, Allegro con fuoco	13	Incomplete	
207	LS 58		Pesenka No.10, V serii			Manuscript non-existent. <sup>21</sup>	
207	LS 59		Pesenka No.11, V serii			Manuscript non-existent.	
207	LS 60	21 <sup>st</sup> September 1906	Pesenka No.12, V serii	C major, Vivo	77		RIC/SK
2	TW 4	1907	Opera <i>Undina</i> Acts III and IV (piano score)				
SPA	MIS 22	1907	Upryok	A minor, Andante	36		Appendix D
SPA	MIS 23	1907	Chant sans paroles	D flat major	78		Appendix D
SPA	MIS 24	1907	Intermezzo	A major, Allegretto	46		Appendix D
SPA	MIS 25	1907	Humoresque	F minor, Allegro	50		Appendix D
SPA	MIS 26	1907	Untitled piece	B minor, Molto Energico	60		Appendix D
SPA	MIS 27	1907	Vostochnaya pesenka	G minor, Andante	47		Appendix D
SPA	MIS 28	1907	Untitled piece	C minor	36		Appendix D
210	MIS 29	11 <sup>th</sup> May 1908	Exam Fugue <sup>22</sup>	Moderato	79		RIC/SK
210	MIS 30	1908	Andante	C minor	18	Incomplete	
230	MIS 31	1908	Two Pieces for Piano I.Snezhok II. Molby				
211	MIS 32	1908-1909	Sonata for Piano No. 4		12		

<sup>21</sup> There are no surviving manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh song of series V. Their existence is nevertheless implied by the fact that Prokofiev wrote a twelfth song, presumably to complete the series. I was unable to recover the manuscripts, if they exist, during the course of my research.

<sup>22</sup> Fugue composed from exam material, 11 May 1908.

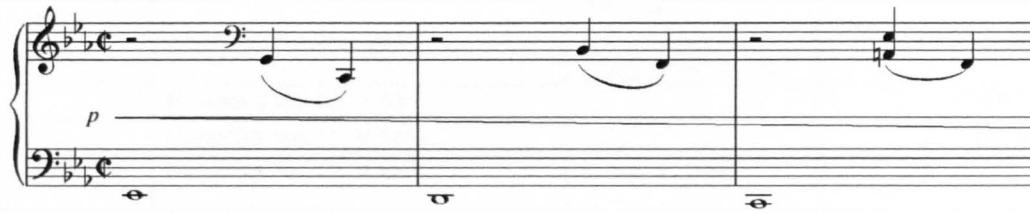
yed. khra. <sup>2</sup>	Classification number	Date of Composition	Title of Piece	Key, Tempo <sup>3</sup>	Length in bars	Manuscript details <sup>4</sup>	Published by
211	MIS 33	1908-1909	Sonata for Piano No. 6		15		
113	MIS 34	1908	Symphony (in three movements)	E minor ; 1) Andante; 2) Andante; 3) Allegro	790	Only the first violin part of this work survives intact.	

## Appendix C: Sample idea-types from early works

Appoggiatura  
figure



Bagatelle No. 1, 1902



Series IV: Song 10, 1905



Series V: Song 12, 1906

**Trills and dramatic tremolos**



Series I: Song 7, 1902



Series II: Song 11, 1904

**Chromatic line**



Series I: Song 4, 1902



Series IV: Song 9, 1905

**Presentational  
gestures**



March for 4 hands, 1899



Series I: Song 8, 1902



Series II: Song 4, 1903



Series II: Song 10, 1903

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**Over-arching  
gesture**



Intermezzo, 1907

**Repeated note  
gestures**



March, 1898



Series I: Song 4, 1902



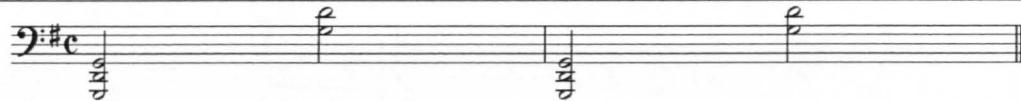
Series II: Song 2, 1903

**Leaping bass**

Series I: Song 2, 1902



Series I: Song 6, 1902



Series II: Song 5, 1903

**Ostinato bass**

Series I: Song 10, 1902



Series IV: Song 8, 1905

**Walking bass**

Series I: Song 8, 1902

**Alberti bass**

Humoresque, 1907

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### Visual Materials consulted<sup>1</sup>

Section on Eisenstein. Shows plans and drawings for Ivan Grozny and a scene with Prokofiev at the piano.

Persimfans, 1927, with Prokofiev playing (silent).

Prize giving ceremony with Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Shebalin etc.(silent).

Prokofiev at his dacha in 1946. Plays an extract from the Waltz Suite and is then interviewed (with sound).

### Aeolian Duo-Art piano rolls of Prokofiev playing his music

*Prelude*, Op. 12, No. 7 (May 1919) 6153<sup>2</sup>

*March*, Op. 12, No. 1 (June 1919) 6160

*Sarcasms*, Op. 17, Nos. 1 and 2 (December 1919) 6210

<sup>1</sup> These are available, listed as here, at the Serge Prokofiev Archive, Goldsmiths, University of London.

<sup>2</sup> Roll number as it appears in the Duo-Art Piano Music illustrated catalogue published by the Aeolian Company in New York in 1927. This list is reproduced in Rex Lawson, "Prokofiev and the Player-piano", *The Pianola Journal* (No. 15: 2003): 3-16.

- Gavotte*, Op. 12, No. 2 (March 1920) 6253  
*Rigaudon*, Op. 12, No. 3 (October 1920) 6344  
*Toccata*, Op. 11 (February 1921) 6391  
*Love of Three Oranges – Intermezzo* (October 1921) 6477  
*Scherzo*, Op. 12, No. 10 (July 1924) 6744  
*Tales of the Old Grandmother* Op. 31, No. 3 (December 1924) 6826  
*Love of Three Oranges – March* (1965) 8018<sup>3</sup>

- Aeolian Duo-Art piano rolls of Prokofiev playing varying composers**
- Rachmaninov, *Prelude in G minor*, Op. 23, No. 5 (November 1919) 6198  
Glazounov, *Gavotte in D*, Op. 49, No. 3 (December 1920) 6377  
Scriabin, *Prelude*, Op. 45, No. 3 and *Winged Poem*, Op. 51, No. 3 (March 1922) 6512  
Mussorgsky, *Pictures from an Exhibition – Bydlo, Ballet of Chickens in their Shells*  
(January 1912) 6591  
Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherezade – Fantasia*, trans., Prokofiev (May 1926) 7001  
Mussorgsky, *Pictures from an Exhibition – Promenade, An Old Castle* (July 1926)  
7029  
Miaskovsky, *Grillen (Whims)*, Op. 25, Nos. 1 and 6 (March 1930) 7388

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<sup>3</sup> This roll survived as an unissued copy in the collection of the chief Duo-Art recording producer in New York, W. Creary Woods. It later became part of the International Piano Archive at the University of Maryland. It was copied and issued in limited quantities on a subscription basis by Gerald Stonehill and Gordon Iles in Great Britain.