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An Annotated Catalogue of the Major Piano Works of Sergei Rachmaninoff

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AN ANNOTATED CATALOGUE OF THE MAJOR PIANO WORKS OF
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

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ABSTRACT

This treatise catalogues the major solo piano works of Sergei Rachmaninoff. Each entry gives the length in measures, approximate performance time, and when known, date of composition, date of publication, date of first performance and dedication of the work. An opening musical example is followed by a brief summary that emphasizes pedagogical issues and performance problems. The following works are covered in this treatise: Morceaux de Fantaisie op. 3, Moments Musicaux op. 16, Preludes op. 23 and 32, Etudes-Tableaux op. 33 and 39, Sonatas op. 28 and 36, Variations on a Theme of Chopin op. 22, and Variations on a Theme of Corelli op. 42.
INTRODUCTION

Sergei Rachmaninoff was undoubtedly a pianist of the highest order. Because of his skill as a pianist, his piano works demonstrate his enormous technical prowess along with an understanding of the full capabilities of the modern piano. In spite of his command of pianistic writing, musicians and critics frequently underestimate the significance of his compositions.

In a work as lengthy as Donald Grout’s *A History of Western Music*, Rachmaninoff’s musical contribution is summarized in only two sentences (779). The fifth edition of *Grove’s Dictionary of Music* (1954) states that Rachmaninoff’s music wouldn’t last and “was artificial and gushing.” Later editions have omitted that statement. Even great pianists who have performed his works extensively have added to the criticism. Some have referred to his music as being accessible, light, and trivial. Artur Rubenstein stated “Rachmaninoff was a pianist after my heart...he was a greater pianist than a composer. I fall, I have to admit, under the charm of his compositions when I hear them, but return home with a slight distaste for their too brazenly expressed sweetness” (Dubal 206).

Fortunately, others have taken the opposite view. In his book *The Art of the Piano*, David Dubal writes Rachmaninoff’s works are “often dense in number of notes per measure, forming a tapestry of unusual effects and counterpoints” (206). Additionally, Maurice Hinson’s *Guide to the Pianist’s Repertoire* describes Rachmaninoff’s melodic writing as being “of the highest order and supported by sonorous harmonies with florid decoration, resulting in unusually effective music for the instrument” (576). In an interview with Vladimir Ashkenazy concerning concerts he presented as part of the *Rachmaninoff Revisited Mini-Festival* (New York, January 5-9, 2002), Ashkenazy said Rachmaninoff’s music has been “undervalued to a dangerous extent. Rachmaninoff is not sufficiently recognized as a composer on purely musical and certainly not on spiritual terms. People tend to overlook that” (Norris 1).

Regardless of these varying opinions, the music of Rachmaninoff has become a staple in the pianist’s repertoire. This treatise catalogues each of the significant solo piano works of Rachmaninoff. Each entry gives the approximate performance time, length in measures and dedication of the work. An opening example of the piece is followed by a brief summary of the work emphasizing pedagogical issues and performance problems. Works not covered in this treatise are *Morceaux de Salon op. 10, Three Nocturnes* (1887), *Prelude in F* (1891), *Four Pieces* (1887), *Four Improvisations* (1896), *Two Fantasy-Pieces* (1899), *Polka de W. R.* and *Oriental Sketch* (1917). Rachmaninoff recorded the following compositions: *Polka de W.R.; Oriental Sketch; Polka op. 3, no. 4; Melody op. 3, no. 3; Serenade op. 3, no. 5; Humoreske op. 10, no. 5; Barcarolle op. 10, no. 3; Moments Musicaux op. 16, no. 2*;
Preludes op. 3, no. 2; op. 23, nos. 5 and 10; op. 32, nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, 12 and Etudes-Tableaux op. 33, nos. 2, 6, and 7.
CHAPTER ONE

MORCEAUX DE FANTAISIE OP. 3

Date of composition: Autumn, 1892
Dedication: Anton Arensky

Morceaux de Fantaisie is a set of five pieces that was Rachmaninoff’s first publication for solo piano. Rachmaninoff composed the work shortly after he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory. This very difficult time of his life found him in bad health, experiencing depression and financial hardship (Matthew-Walker).

Perhaps as a device to increase sales, his publisher, Gutheil, entitled the work Morceaux de Fantaisie (Fantasy Pieces) (Thiollier). Additionally, Rachmaninoff included “fashionably French, [. . .] self-explanatory titles” that were “classical lyric or dance forms” (Thiollier). The only descriptive title contained in the set is “Polichinelle”.

Morceaux de Fantaisie contains the famous C-sharp Minor Prelude. Rachmaninoff wrote it first and probably arranged the other works around it. “THE Prelude,” as it was referred to, eventually became a burden to Rachmaninoff due to its enormous popularity (Keeley). It is possible that its popularity is also the reason Morceaux de Fantaisie is rarely played in its entirety.

Rachmaninoff gave Tchaikowsky a copy of Morceaux de Fantaisie. This resulted in Tchaikowsky’s remark to Alexander Siloti, Rachmaninoff’s teacher, that he was impressed with the pieces, primarily the “Prelude” and “Mélodie” (Matthew-Walker). Even though Morceaux de Fantaisie was written during Rachmaninoff’s teenage years, the compositional style it utilizes is characteristic of his later works.

Rachmaninoff premiered the work in Kharkov on December 27, 1892. Eventually Rachmaninoff revised all of the pieces in this set (Norris 39).

Elégie in E-flat Minor op. 3, no. 1

Date of composition: 1892
Number of measures: 106
Approximate performance time: 6:00
“Elégie” is an expressive work that exhibits the young Rachmaninoff’s gift for romantic melody and pianistic writing. In this work, the rich sonorities of the piano are enhanced by his choice of key and placement on the keyboard (Baylor 6).

The work is in ternary form. It begins with short phrases that make up a long melodic line in the right hand, a characteristic of Rachmaninoff’s music. The left hand contains an arpeggiated accompaniment that spans two and one-half octaves. The middle section, marked piu vivo, contains contrasting thematic material in the left hand and an alternating, double note accompaniment in the right hand. A lento improvisatory section appears before the return of the first section. In this restatement, the melody is presented in double notes and is marked pianissimo.

The melody and accompaniment appear in cross rhythms, creating the need for strong rhythmic control while projecting the expressive line. The accompaniment figure encompasses wide intervals that require careful manipulation and possible division between the hands. Proper voicing and phrasing, especially when the melody is presented in chords or double notes, is required for projection of the long melodic line.

**Prelude in C-sharp Minor op. 3, no. 2**

- Date of composition: 1892
- Number of measures: 62
- Approximate performance time: 5:30
This work became Rachmaninoff’s most popular piece. It was composed when he was nineteen and in desperate need of money. The first performance was on September 26, 1892 at the Moscow Electrical Exposition.

It is a highly chromatic work that is presented in ternary form with a coda. The A section contains bell-like, sonorous chords that have become a trademark of Rachmaninoff. The B section, marked *agitato*, is passionate and climaxes with “Lisztian interlocking triplet chords and thirds” (LaMagra 57). The A section returns with a thicker texture utilizing four staves instead of the traditional two. The short five-measure coda contains a common C-sharp in all of the chords, creating a calming mood, despite the changing harmonies that occur within it.

When asked for an explanation of what was expressed in this prelude, Rachmaninoff responded that it was not connected with any history; he simply “wrote the music” (LaMagra 41). It is much less demanding than most of Rachmaninoff’s piano music, which is one of the reasons for its performance by so many inadequate pianists.

For a successful performance of the work, it is important to maintain tonal balance between the inner voice melody and the chordal accompaniment. This involves careful use of the pedal and dynamic control. It is especially important to keep the passages involving interlocking hands even. Additional requirements involve proper use of the sostenuto pedal, voicing (both within the large chordal sections and in the agitato triplet section), and sufficient use of arm weight to achieve a resonant sound in large chordal sections.

**Mélodie op. 3, no. 3**

- Date of composition: 1892
- Number of measures: 60
- Approximate performance time: 5:30
This work was one of Rachmaninoff’s favorite pieces. It begins with a melody, made up of duplets, triplets, and dotted rhythms, presented in the tenor. The right hand contains an accompaniment consisting of chordal, eighth-note triplets. These triplets frequently include rests on the first eighth value and provide momentum to the work. The middle section contains triplet chordal figures that move chromatically against the tenor melody. In addition to this, an added texture of pedal tones appears in the bass. The restatement of the first section appears with the melody in octaves accompanied by the original triplet chordal figure and the added texture of pedal tones. The coda is marked ppp and ends with widely spaced chord tones in single notes.

The work requires an expressive, singing tone and careful pedaling. In some instances, division between the hands will help sustain long bass notes. The sostenuto pedal should be utilized to avoid blurring in sections that contain melodic octaves. If a sostenuto pedal is not available, careful shading can create the illusion of continuation of these notes “in the imagination” (Baylor 7). Voicing and phrasing must be carefully thought out especially when the melody appears in octaves.

**Polichinelle in F-sharp minor op. 3, no. 4**

- Date of composition: Unknown date, 1892
- Number of measures: 130
- Approximate performance time: 3:11
“Polichinelle” is a small-scale “scherzo” that is written in a brilliant, virtuoso style (Thiollier). Rachmaninoff’s fellow student, Mikail Slonov, suggested the descriptive title of the piece. “Polichinelle” or “Punch” was a character in the “Punch and Judy Puppet Show” that was popular in Europe during Rachmaninoff’s time. “An ugly puppet with a hump back and hook nose and chin,” he was arrogant and beat his wife. The music depicts Punch, appearing and disappearing in a rage, boasting loudly and making “sly threats.” Rachmaninoff uses “brilliant chordal fanfares, deep bell-like pedal tones and lightening-fast figurations” to portray this in the music (Baylor 7).

The piece is in ternary form. It begins with an introduction containing sfff single notes, followed by short, embellished chords. The opening section consists of an articulated, rapidly paced chordal motive that appears in both hands. The middle section is more melodic, containing a double stemmed, quarter-note melody that appears within broken chord sixteenth figures. The introduction and opening section are restated within a texture made up of thicker chords. The work ends abruptly with eleven eighth-notes, constructed by the perfect fourth, C-sharp to F-sharp.

The introduction contains embellished chords in each hand that move in contrary motion. These figures, as well as the chordal thematic material of the opening section, contain leaps that require careful gauging. The melody of the middle section, which is doubled in the bass, must be carefully voiced and projected. Care should be taken in shaping each of the four-measure phrases to accentuate the longer notes. Thicker chords, presented in the return of the first section, are particularly challenging to those who have small hands (Baylor 7).

Sérénade in B-flat Minor op. 3, no. 5

Date of composition: 1892
Number of measures: 155
Approximate performance time: 4:00
Rachmaninoff originally intended to write four pieces for this opus, but after reading an interview with Tchaikowsky that revealed the admiration Tchaikowsky had for him, Rachmaninoff composed a fifth piece (Matthew-Walker). “Sérénade” begins with an improvisatory introduction that contains a single voice, scalar phrase played in the central register of the piano. The phrase alternates with a chordal texture that appears in both hands. The first section is song-like and contains the scalar phrase in the right hand accompanied by a waltz bass, made up of rolled chords, in the left hand. It is interrupted by a ppp interlude that continues the waltz-like feel and contains thick, chromatic chords and misplaced accents. This interlude is written in the same meter, but contains misplaced accents that create an illusion of a change in rhythm. This device prevents “rhythmic monotony” within the work (Keeley). The alternating song and interlude pattern continues, with the song appearing in the tenor voice until a point, near the end of the piece, where it moves to a higher octave. The coda follows, utilizing material from the interlude. It contains a delicate ppp quality that contrasts with the ff b-flat octave and chord that ends the work.

The Spanish character of the piece calls to mind a song accompanied by a guitar (Baylor 7). This mood should be created by the use of color, as well as articulation, within the different textures. Tonal balance between the melody and accompaniment is necessary especially during sections that involve cross hand technique. These sections require careful voicing and phrasing as well. Rachmaninoff’s articulation marks are detailed and must be followed carefully.
CHAPTER TWO

MOMENTS MUSICAUX OP. 16

Date of composition: October-December 1896
Dedication: A Monsieur A. Zatayévitch

Moments Musicaux is a set of six pieces that revisits forms used by earlier composers. These forms include the nocturne, song without words, barcarolle, virtuoso etude, and theme and variations. The set was inspired by Franz Schubert’s piano cycle, Moments Musicals, a work that also contains six character pieces. Even though Schubert used an incorrect French spelling (Apel 537), he was the only significant composer prior to Rachmaninoff to use this title to designate a set of pieces (Hancock 1, 4).

Moments Musicaux was dedicated to Alexander Viktorovich Zataevich, a folk song collector and composer Rachmaninoff had met before he composed the work (Norris 65). Even though it was written quickly to replenish money that had been stolen from Rachmaninoff while he had been on a train trip, it is a work of the highest quality (Matthew-Walker). It was composed at the mid-point of his mature compositional piano-style and possibly served as a preliminary study for the Preludes op. 23 (Anderson).

Moments Musicaux is longer, possesses thicker textures, and displays more virtuosic writing than Rachmaninoff’s earlier works. In addition to being more difficult than Morceaux de Fantaisie and Morceaux de Salon, it contains an unique and individual style. Within the set are pieces that are accessible to both amateur and concert pianists.

In the dissertation “Rachmaninoff’s Six Moments Musicaux, Op. 16, Tradition of the Nineteenth-Century Miniature,” Robin Hancock states:

It is clear that Rachmaninoff intended to present each of these pieces as “musical moments” from the nineteenth-century piano repertoire [. . .] He may have recognized that these genres were rapidly disappearing in the face of oncoming trends in modern music, trends he could not or would not personally accommodate. (2)

Andantino in B-flat Minor

Date of composition: 1896
Number of measures: 113
Approximate performance time: 8:30
This song-like opening piece is the longest of the set. It contains a form that is a “generic hybrid,” combining the nocturne with the theme and variations (Hancock 11). Matthew-Walker suggests that the theme of this work, based on the minor sixth, becomes a motive for the entire set. This theme is chromatic, gently syncopated, and contains the characteristically long melodic line of Rachmaninoff.

This work has been called an extension of the Nocturne op. 10 due to its improvisatory effect (Matthew-Walker). The Andantino is written in three-part form and contains recitative-like sections and a small cadenza. A pause is placed strategically in the piece that is analogous to the pause in the first piece of Schubert’s Moments Musical, showing a strong link between the two works (Hancock 12).

The many tempo and meter changes contained in the work require careful consideration to present a cohesive performance. The long melodic lines that appear in cross rhythms with the accompaniment need to be maintained, properly phrased and rhythmically controlled. The accompaniment frequently utilizes double notes that require proper voicing and a true legato sound. Prior to the cadenza a 7/4 section marked Con moto contains a melody that is frequently divided between the hands. Careful manipulation and voicing is necessary to project this melody. The cadenza and the section that follows require a delicate, fast-finger technique.

**Allegretto in E-flat Minor**

- Date of composition: 1896, revised 1940
- Number of measures: 131
- Approximate performance time: 3:15
This “glittering showpiece” presents an abrupt contrast to the “atmospheric” mood of the first piece of this set (Darrell). In ternary form with a coda, it is a highly chromatic work that contains cascading broken chord figures. Possibly the best known of the set, it contains a long melodic line presented in octaves. This melody is made up of rising and falling two note motives that move primarily in half steps. Along with the melody a thick sextuplet figure is doubled in both clefs, creating a perpetual motion effect.

This piece represents a typical nineteenth-century etude. The first section contains the octave motive interspersed with the sextuplet figure in the right hand. The left hand also contains the sextuplet figure, which is continuous and involves large spans and the occasional use of double notes. Even though these passages are idiomatic, they require careful fingering and articulation. The appearance of the octave motive and sextuplets in the right hand creates the need for strong voicing. A supple wrist with sufficient transfer of arm weight, to project the melody, will be helpful in keeping the hand relaxed to avoid tension. The thick texture created by the appearance of the sextuplet figure in both hands requires clear articulation and clean pedaling. The piece employs a wide range of dynamics, from the pianissimo at the beginning to the culminating fortississimo in the middle section. These dynamics need proper attention to maintain variety within the work. Finally, the endurance that the piece requires demands adequate pacing and a technical approach that stresses relaxation and flexible wrists and arms.

**Andante Cantabile in B Minor**

- Date of composition: 1896
- Number of measures: 55
- Approximate performance time: 7:00

The “moto perpetuo” character of the second piece is dramatically relieved by this “introspective reverie” (Matthew-Walker). The piece is a lament that combines the forms of a song without words and a funeral march (Hancock 33).
Possibly the most Russian of the set, it utilizes a three-part form. The entire melody of the first section is presented in consecutive thirds, supported by an accompaniment made up of open fifths and octaves. The middle section presents the melody in sixths along with a staccato octave bass, creating the funeral march-like effect (Hancock 40).

The piece is written in the lower register of the piano and possesses a rich, chordal texture. This creates the need for proper voicing and projection while maintaining the dark mood of the piece. Strict adherence to Rachmaninoff’s use of rests at the ends of phrases will aid in the pacing of the work. The mood of the piece should be sustained by the use of color, dynamic contrasts, and most importantly a covered sound, that later contrasts with the large resonant sound needed in *forte* and *fortissimo* sections.

**Presto in E Minor**

Date of composition: 1896  
Number of measures: 67  
Approximate performance time: 3:00

![Presto in E Minor notation](image)

This piece is a dramatic work, written in the form of an etude. It is similar to Chopin’s “Revolutionary Etude” in its heroic style and extremely taxing, left hand passagework.

The piece is in ternary form with a coda. Its *fortissimo* beginning contains a thick texture consisting of a chromatic, sextuplet figure in the left hand and a “rising quasi-military” idea in the right hand (Matthew-Walker). The dotted note figure in the right hand appears in thirds and contains an opening interval of a sixth. The middle section that contains *pianissimo* dynamics and a thinner texture contrasts with the opening. The return of the opening section is marked by the unison presentation of the sextuplet figure. By utilizing “registral displacement” this restatement presents the figure in a more dramatic form that increases the intensity of the ending (Hancock 47).

Endurance and accuracy are the primary technical problems encountered in this work. The opening three notes of the left hand sextuplet figure contain the span of a tenth that creates a problem with accuracy as well as tension. The pianist should consciously maintain a relaxed, flexible wrist to avoid any problems with tension. A frequent compositional device of Rachmaninoff’s, doubling passages to “keep both hands
occupied”, appears in this work and creates difficulties for the right hand in projecting the melody while maintaining even sextuplet passages (Hancock 46). Once again, the pianist must utilize flexible wrists and arms to avoid creating tension in these sections. Close key finger technique to maintain delicacy and evenness in the pianissimo middle section will aid in its execution. Other technical problems encountered in the work are sextuplet figures presented in cross rhythms with sixteenth-notes and maintaining accuracy within the “registral displacement” of the sextuplet figure at the end of the piece. Large, sweeping sonorities require a colorful and clean pedal.

**Adagio sostenuto in D-flat Major**

- Date of composition: Unknown date, 1896
- Number of measures: 53
- Approximate performance time: 4:45

Hancock’s dissertation includes a chapter on this piece that contains an epilogue referring to a quote from 1Kings 19:12, “and after the fire a still small voice.” The positioning of this contemplative work between the two pieces of “incredible pyrotechnics” that surround it inspired this reference (55).

The piece is similar in nature to a barcarolle, due to its rising and falling accompaniment. It is in ABA form with a chordal theme presented in the first section. This same texture continues in the B section, but the theme becomes more emphatic, with chromatic modulations that increase the drama of the work. The quiet opening mood is recreated with the return of the A section. With this restatement, a descant triplet figure appears in double notes above the melodic line creating a trio effect.

This work is an example of Rachmaninoff’s concern with musical ideas as opposed to virtuosic technical displays. The mood of the piece must be sustained by employing dynamically restrained, even triplet figures that appear in the accompaniment. The chordal texture of the melody requires a singing tone and careful voicing with special attention given to Rachmaninoff’s articulation marks. Short phrases must be projected as long melodic lines. Adherence to the detailed dynamic markings, along with the use of color, will help in projecting contrasts within the work.

**Maestoso in C Major**
This finale is written in a form characteristic of a tradition that prevailed throughout the late nineteenth century. Hancock defines this tradition, an “apotheosis or completion of struggle,” and summarizes it:

The final piece or movement of a cycle that is virtuosic and brilliant, employing the entire range of dynamics and sonorities available to the piano, bringing a set of pieces to a glorious conclusion. (57)

This stormy, agitated work contains a “vehemently triple-dotted main theme and only some brief mid-section hazy sunshine [that lightens] the storm before ffff thunders return and finally dominate” (Darrell).

Written in the form of an etude, the work includes a thick chordal melody that is doubled in both hands and appears in counterpoint against impetuous thirty-second-note broken chord figures. An eighth-note motive that is double stemmed appears within the thirty-second figure, creating another motivic element. This gives the work three elements that create an extremely thick texture. The ff marking at the beginning is maintained throughout the opening section, with only an occasional decrescendo to mf. The middle section contrasts with softer dynamics and contains two “false starts” followed by dynamic contrasts that further increase the mounting tension and create an even greater “apotheosis effect” with the return of the opening section (Hancock 60). At this point, the theme is manipulated contrapuntally to present a canonic effect. This “triple counterpoint…is titanic both in size and impact, and in potential for disaster” (Hancock 61). Prior to the coda the thick texture and canon disappear quickly with a piano indication. The coda presents a forte theme that climaxes to a triumphant ending marked ffff.

Technical difficulties abound throughout this work. Tremendous strength is required to sustain a full, resonant sound. The continuous thirty-second figure is taxing and requires a flexible wrist. Maintaining this flexibility while dropping the wrist on the
eighth-note motive will aid in reducing tension and in producing desired voicings. Transfer of weight must be employed to produce the sound indicated by the $f$ to $ffff$ markings. Large leaps that appear in the chordal melody must be carefully gauged and practiced so that the pulse is constant. The thick texture of the work requires clean and colorful pedaling. Maintaining accuracy while handling all of the above matters and presenting a musically cohesive performance remains the ultimate challenge of all (Hancock 61).
CHAPTER THREE

PRELUDES

Rachmaninoff composed two sets of preludes. The first set, Opus 23, contains ten preludes and was written between the years of 1901 and 1903. The second set, Opus 32, contains thirteen preludes and was written in 1910. With the addition of the Prelude op. 3 no. 2 in C-sharp minor all of the twenty-four major and minor keys are represented. This continued the tradition of the Well-Tempered Clavier of Bach and the Preludes of Chopin; however, the keys of Rachmaninoff’s Preludes are not presented in a systematic order with regard to relationship or key.

It has been said that these brilliant pieces may be the culmination of the romantic tradition of pianism begun with Liszt and Chopin (Matthew-Walker). In them one hears Rachmaninoff’s “command of form, unique harmonic concept, distinct melodic style, awareness of rhythmic possibilities, and general versatility in compositional technique” (LaMagra 3). In comparison to the Chopin Preludes, they are longer and more texturally complex, with technical difficulties comparable to the Chopin Etudes (Faurot 235).

After the first performance of some of the Preludes, Russian critic Yuli Engel wrote:

Rachmaninoff inclines towards a solid and often polyphonic treatment, a broad structure, or towards clear contrasts of musically independent sections [. . .] Instead of Chopin’s two page or even one-half page works, Rachmaninoff’s Preludes grow into four, six, or even eight pages.

(Bertensson 175)

The Preludes contain “an unmistakable Russian intensity, strong lyrical melodies, and changes of character that range from sublime sweetness to passionate virtuosity” (Ashkenazy). They are among the finest examples of 20th century romanticism.

There is a consistency of style between the Preludes op. 23 and 32 despite the fact that they were written seven years apart. Norris suggests that the writing found in the first set of Preludes is comparable to the Second Piano Concerto, while the writing in the Preludes, op. 32 is reminiscent of the Third Piano Concerto.

Rachmaninoff composed the Preludes, op. 23 during a burst of creativity after his marriage to Natalia Satin. Preludes no. 1, 2, and 5 were premiered by Rachmaninoff in Moscow on February 10, 1903. He wrote the remaining seven while he and his wife waited the birth of their first child in May. The complete set was published later the same year (Matthew-Walker). Despite this happy time in Rachmaninoff’s life, he confided in a letter to a friend that he wrote the pieces because he needed to make money. The years prior to his marriage found Rachmaninoff seriously depressed and in the care of a hypo-therapist. After successful treatment, Rachmaninoff’s virtuoso-cousin and teacher (who served as best man at his wedding), Alexander Siloti, supported him financially for a few
years so that Rachmaninoff could compose. Consequently, the Preludes op. 23 bear a dedication to Siloti (LaMagra 43-44).

Matthew-Walker cites several characteristics found in Opus 23 that suggest the possibility of playing them as a set. These include the stepwise motion of Prelude op. 3, no. 2 that is common to all of them, subtle relationships between each of the Preludes, such as the existence of a common note or chord connecting two preludes, and the presentation of the first and last preludes, both marked Largo, in keys that are enharmonically the same although in different modes, the first in F sharp minor and the last in G flat major.

The Preludes op. 32 were written in 1910 and show Rachmaninoff at the “height of his compositional powers” (Matthew-Walker). Rachmaninoff was more confident at this period in his life. He had successfully premiered the Third Concerto a year before in New York and had just finished one of his large-scale sacred works, The Liturgy of St. John of Chrysostom, op. 31 (Norris).

This Opus was written very quickly. The entire set was finished in nineteen days; three of them written in one day. In spite of this, they are of the highest quality. In addition to Rachmaninoff’s characteristic ascending and descending chromatic line, a siciliano rhythmic figure is found in several of them (Ashkenazy). The final Prelude, op. 32, no. 13 is in the same key as the early Prelude op. 3, no. 2 but in the major tonality.

The Preludes op. 32 are “often bolder in technical challenges and stylistically more exploratory” than the earlier opus (Ashkenazy). These “powerfully evocative, miniature tone-poems” make extreme demands on the performer, both technically and musically (Anderson). Matthew-Walker has concluded that the first performance of the complete Opus 32 probably took place on Alexander Siloti’s concert series, December 5, 1911 in St. Petersburg.

Prelude op. 23, no. 1 in F-sharp Minor

Date of composition: 1903
Number of measures: 41
Approximate performance time: 3:30

This sorrowful, reflective piece contains a rare combination of ternary and variation form with an epilogue at the end that is characteristic of many of the preludes (LaMagra 68). It is primarily homophonic in texture with occasional references to counterpoint. As is characteristic of several preludes, Rachmaninoff’s trademark, an ascending and descending chromatic figure unifies the work. In this piece the figure appears in the accompaniment and produces captivating sonorities (LaMagra 65).
This delicately repeated, sixteenth-note pattern is presented in close-position in the left hand. The right hand contains a “bare, intense” melody that consists of short, slow moving two bar phrases (Ashkenazy). This melody is made up of short phrases that need to be shaped and projected as a long, smooth line. This is especially difficult when cross-hand technique is required. The accompaniment requires proper voicing and control to maintain evenness and ensure a warm performance. Tonal balance between the hands and rhythmic control are essential. The coda contains four-note chords in both hands. The left-hand chord spans a tenth and is usually rolled when played by average or small hands.

**Prelude op. 23, no. 2 in B-flat Major**
- Date of composition: 1903
- Number of measures: 61
- Approximate performance time: 3:30

With its commanding and noble style, this prelude has been compared to the Revolutionary Etude of Chopin (Matthew-Walker). The opening and closing sections contain a “jagged” melody supported by dynamic, sweeping arpeggios (Anderson). A central section presents a contrasting inner voice that consists of a stepwise, lyrical melody. This brief expressive section becomes a lyric trio, created in Rachmaninoff’s own elaborate style (Anderson). A coda ends the work utilizing a unique embellishment of the tonic chord. Probably inspired by Rachmaninoff’s excellent chord playing technique, this work makes tremendous demands of the performer. These include arpeggios containing block chords that span several octaves and rapid successions of four-note chords. With the thick texture of the piece tonal balance must be maintained. This is especially important in the middle section, where inner voices must be heard. The piece requires rhythmic perception and control and careful pedaling within quick harmonic changes. The full dramatic effect of the piece requires maintaining the tempo at the metronome marking given by Rachmaninoff (LaMagra 77).

**Prelude op. 23, no. 3 in D Minor**
- Date of composition: 1903
A solemn, chordal, march-like motive against a staccato, scale-like passage creates a contrapuntal texture throughout this prelude. Clever fugal devices are included in the work, such as diminution, augmentation, stretto, canonic imitation, and fragmentation (Baylor 3). In ternary form with a coda, the piece is extremely intricate and involves interplay between different voices. It is one of the best examples of harmonic and rhythmic vitality in Rachmaninoff’s music (LaMagra 77-78).

Contrasts between the two textures must be shown by articulation and voicing. The staccato passages require clarity and in many instances a delicate touch. The performer must shape the four and six-note phrases indicated by the composer. There are several chords with large stretches that need to move quickly and clearly. Long pedal points at the end of the work must be clearly sounded and heard through the thick counterpoint above it (LaMagra 84).

**Prelude op. 23, no. 4 in D Major**

Date of composition: 1903
Number of measures: 77
Approximate performance time: 4:45

This quiet, nocturnal study contains the characteristics of a cradle song or barcarolle. It is introspective, lyrical, and simplistic. Written after the composer’s recent marriage, it “evokes the idyllic happiness” of this event (Ashkenazy). The prelude contains a captivating, expansive melodic line supported by a wide ranging arpeggio accompaniment that “evolves into a complex ensemble of melody, counter-melody, canons, and chiming treble echoes” (Faurot 235).

The piece consists of three variations and a coda (La Mara 84). The first variation presents the theme in the alto voice with a triplet descant in the treble. The second variation contains three voices and presents a rhythmically altered melody. A chordal
climax of the piece occurs here involving cross rhythms of duplets and triplets. The third variation is quieter with the theme presented in chords and an added descant in the treble. A five measure coda ends the piece.

Although homophonic in texture, there are contrapuntal implications that require proper voicing. Color and variety must be expressed within the diverse accompaniment styles (LaMagra 84). The performer must maintain a sustained, lyrical quality within the long melodic lines despite the interweaving of melody and accompaniment between the hands. A successful performance of the piece requires tonal balance, control of dynamics, effective use of the pedal, and a wide use of nuances. Passages that range from pianissimo to fortissimo in a short period of time demand careful manipulation (LaMagra 91).

**Prelude op. 23, no. 5 in G Minor**

Date of composition: 1901  
Number of measures: 86  
Approximate performance time: 4:15

*Alla marcia. \( \text{\textbf{\textpress}} = 108 \)*

![Sheet Music](image)

This prelude is second in popularity to the famous Prelude in C-sharp Minor. It has been described as a “contrast of stern reality with a central episode of haunting, nostalgic lyricism; its beauty intensified by a second voice echoing the first” (Ashkenazy).

The form of the piece is similar to the classic rondo: A—B—transition—A (LaMagra 91). The A section is a march that is chordal and richly sonorous. The B section is ethereal and poignant and has a somewhat Spanish flavor (Thiollier). A counter melody appears in this section that results in the appearance of three voices that create a trio effect. Josef Hofmann said of this section, “anyone who could write this must be noble” (Anderson).

Rachmaninoff uses the driving rhythmic device of an eighth-note followed by two sixteenth-notes in the A section as well as the triplet figure in the B section to unify the piece. Along with off-beat chords and syncopations these give direction to the line (LaMagra 97). The variety of chords, propelling rhythms, and rich sonorities embody a true romantic spirit.

This prelude is not considered to be one of the most difficult. It does require a supple wrist and large tonal range. Restraint is needed to control the sound of repeated chords. Some attention needs to be given to the technically, awkward passage in the B section played by the left hand. The long melodic line at the beginning of this section must be properly projected and maintain a true legato feeling. Interplay between the
main theme and the counter melody that appears later should be adequately voiced (LaMagra 98).

**Prelude op. 23, no. 6 in E-flat Major**
- Date of composition: 1903
- Number of measures: 43
- Approximate performance time: 3:45

This prelude is a passionate piece with a slow but moving melody. The tranquil character is similar to that of the Prelude in D Major. Both the opening melodic motif and accompaniment suggest that Rachmaninoff “knew and loved Chopin’s last E major Nocturne, opus 62, no. 2” (Ashkenazy).

In this piece, Rachmaninoff combines two divergent elements, the recurring, linear, sixteenth-note accompaniment and the syncopated three-note melodic idea, and presents them in repetition, sequence, extension, and variation (LaMagra 99). Along with the harmonic color of this piece, the flowing melodic line is reminiscent of themes from the Second Piano Concerto (Glennon 55). These characteristics, along with the use of the minor second and minor third give the piece the famous “Rachmaninoff sound” (LaMagra 99).

Both this prelude and Prelude no. 7 are constructed from a sixteenth-note linear accompaniment. The two preludes complement each other and are frequently performed together (LaMagra 100). One of Rachmaninoff’s strengths, the ability to turn an accompaniment into a melody, is heard in a counter-melody towards the end of the piece (Ashkenazy).

Harmonically this work is more complex than the earlier preludes. Interweaving lines and imitative suggestions contrast with rich sonorities found in the octave chords that create an interesting contrapuntal texture (LaMagra 101).

The piece is rich in pianistic color and requires sensitivity from the performer. The left hand accompanying figure is intricate and must be delicate and carefully pedaled. Two of Rachmaninoff’s strong points, dynamic shading without blurring and variation in sound to prevent monotony, are needed to ensure a sensitive performance (LaMagra 104).

**Prelude op. 23, no. 7 in C Minor**
- Date of composition: 1903.
- Number of measures: 91
- Approximate performance time: 2:30
Like the Prelude in E-flat Major, this prelude is built on a sixteenth-note figure and has the “spirit” of the Second Piano Concerto, which was written two years earlier (LaMagra 104). In this work the figure is rushing, tempestuous, and virtuosic. The relentless theme, sustained by the left hand within rapid, alternating configurations, moves quickly and ends surprisingly and triumphantly on a C major chord. This unexpected conclusion results in one of the most unique endings of any of the Preludes (Ashkenazy).

The form is an unusual treatment of ternary form, with the A section made up of a single long phrase. The B section consists of a descending half-note melody in the bass against the running sixteenth-note accompaniment. With the return of A, the sixteenth-note section is intensified by pronounced harmonic progressions, an eighth-note arpeggiated left hand accompaniment, rhythmic changes, and the addition of octaves (LaMagra 106).

Subtleties such as the interplay of underlying rhythms that provide color and give directional flow to the piece provide rhythmic interest. In addition to this Rachmaninoff “weaves chromaticism into a diatonic context using the laws of natural voice leading” (LaMagra 108). There is a contrapuntal texture due to the presence of melody and accompaniment in the same figure, giving a sense of several voices (LaMagra 111).

This piece requires a technique that is able to project all of the above elements within the tempo indicated. Pedaling is problematic due to the tempo, delicacy of complex figurations and the necessity to hold certain notes through several measures. The middle sostenuto pedal can be used to sustain the organ points. Voicing is important to differentiate the melody and accompaniment, especially when they are included in the same figure (LaMagra 112).

**Prelude op. 23, no. 8 in A-flat Major**

Date of composition: 1903
Number of measures: 78
Approximate performance time: 3:30
This prelude is similar in quality to Prelude no. 7 with its etude-like characteristics (LaMagra 112). It contains “rapidly changing colors and subtly shifting rhythmic patterns” (Baylor 3). The persistent effect of the sixteenth-notes and the sonorities produced by them give the piece its passionate quality (LaMagra 117).

Written in three part form with a coda, it gives the impression of being monothematic. Each section of the piece grows from elements found in the introduction and first measure. Short combinations of ascending and descending chromatic scale fragments found throughout the prelude unify the piece.

Although this prelude has been described as “a melody that flows happily amidst rippling semiquavers” (Ashkenazy), it has been criticized by some who say it defeats its own purpose with monotony “because the sound of the piece remains essentially the same despite the accompaniment style changing occasionally and the texture thinning out” (Thiollier).

Meter changes are frequent and present subtle implications of six, three, or two beats per measure (LaMagra 118). Additionally, long melodic lines alternate with shorter phrase groups to create rhythmic variety.

A successful performance of the piece requires building interest within a uniform textural quality (LaMagra 119). Finely shaded dynamics and clear voicings will help avoid monotony. Control is needed to shape the lively, arpeggiated sixteenth-note figure introduced at the beginning of the piece. This becomes even more difficult when the tenor eighth-note melody appears, requiring a fuller tone in the left hand and a restrained right hand. Attention to dynamics will help show textural changes as well as distinguish tonal colors (LaMagra 119).

**Prelude op.23, no. 9 in E-flat Minor**

- Date of composition: 1903
- Number of measures: 51
- Approximate performance time: 2:00

This prelude is a study of double notes that some say is “difficult and not worth attempting,” while others, such as Culshaw label it as “one of the best preludes” (LaMagra 119). It is the shortest in this opus and vies with the B-flat Major as the most difficult to play. It has been described as a “restlessly searching outpouring of double notes for the right hand in a manner possibly suggested by the Chopin Etudes” (Ashkenazy). Equally reminiscent of Liszt’s “Feux follets,” it is marked Presto and contains a highly chromatic melody, moving primarily in sixteenths (Baylor 3).

It contains an unusual form that develops out of two-measure phrases, and is noted for its fine sense of harmonic direction (Baylor 3). Various combinations of thirds, sixths, seconds, and fourths make up the right hand melody. This is supported by a wide
arpeggiated figure in the left hand that also contains major and minor seconds. Changes of mood are found in unexpected additions of new themes over the original double note figuration.

This prelude should only be attempted by those who possess a tremendous technique and have a grasp of playing double notes. Executing these double notes at the required tempo requires endurance. This problem can be helped by adhering to softer dynamic markings and phrasings while relaxing the wrist (LaMagra 125).

**Prelude op.23, no. 10 in G-flat Major**

- Date of composition: 1903
- Number of measures: 62
- Approximate performance time: 4:00

This heartfelt meditation develops from a “monologue into a dialogue” and may be counted along with Preludes op.23, no. 4 and 6 as Rachmaninoff’s inspired “Spring Preludes” (Ashkenazy). One can almost “see the boundless flowing Russian fields and meadows that moved the composer so” (Anderson).

After a short introduction, the first theme is presented in a lyrical manner and is accompanied by syncopated chords. As is characteristic of the other two “Spring Preludes,” a peaceful recapitulation follows a more dramatic middle section. The last section of the piece contains contrapuntal suggestions and a complex coda that presents the only true technical problems in the work (LaMagra 131).

Other than the large chords presented in the coda, this work is primarily musically challenging. It is essential to present the proper mood while maintaining rhythmic accuracy. It is also important to voice the melody and accompaniment, successfully execute cross rhythmic sections, and carefully control the pedal (LaMagra 132).

**Prelude op. 32, no 1 in C Major**

- Date of composition: August 30, 1910
- Number of measures: 41
- Approximate performance time: 1:15
This declamatory, introductory prelude is brilliant and difficult. Reminiscent of the first Transcendental Etude of Liszt, it offers a dramatic opening for the set. It is similar to the Third Concerto, with its intricate chromaticism, interplay between major and minor, flexibility of rhythm, complex textures, and especially the chord sequence that appears at the end of the prelude (LaMagra 135).

Written in ABA form, it is unified by the triplet figure that first appears in the right hand, the ascending and descending chromatic movement, and the clever use of intervals. Its driving rhythms give the feeling of moving forward until the long, quiet, closing chords of the Coda. This prelude usually requires pairing with another piece, because it doesn’t “stand alone” well (LaMagra 137).

The primary performance problem with this piece is endurance. Passages containing single notes as well as double notes and continuous triplet figures can easily cause tension in the wrists and arms. Adherence to Rachmaninoff’s detailed phrasings and fingerings will aid the pianist in these sections. Again, piano sections should be used as moments of repose and relaxation. Melodic lines consisting of two or more notes must be properly voiced with special attention given to held notes. In addition to the above, other requisites include dexterity, proper use of the pedal and rhythmical control (LaMagra 138).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 2 in B-flat Minor**
- Date of composition: September 2, 1910
- Number of measures: 54
- Approximate performance time: 4:00

This prelude contains profound lyricism possibly inspired by the bells of Moscow (Matthew-Walker). The thoughtful, “lilting” motif that unifies the piece is a siciliano rhythm (Anderson). It is considered a leit-motif of this opus and appears again in several preludes that follow. These include Preludes nos. 9, 11, and 13 (Ashkenazy).

The contrapuntal texture and harmonic variety contained in this prelude provide interest and movement in spite of the monothematic nature of the work. Several tempo and meter changes create differing moods and add variety to the work. The pianist needs to be sensitive to these considerations and adhere to Rachmaninof’s detailed indications concerning articulation and dynamics. Phrases must be shaped and projected to prevent interruption of the long, melodic lines (LaMagra 144).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 3 in E Major**
- Date of composition: September 3, 1910
- Number of measures: 63
- Approximate performance time: 2:15
This prelude is a brilliant toccata that rejects any “nostalgic introspection” associated with Rachmaninoff’s music (Ashkenazy). Along with Preludes no. 4, 6, 8, and 9 it is one of the more “ostentatiously dramatic” of Rachmaninoff’s pieces and is set in the intense “impassioned idiom” of this set (LaMagra 138-139).

Written in ABA form, the piece is unified by three repetitions of the tonic note. The prevalent chromaticism found in most of the other preludes is not found in this one. Instead, Rachmaninoff utilizes rhythmic variety and subtlety to create interest within the work. The texture is primarily chordal with occasional references to counterpoint (LaMagra 139).

This work requires great endurance. The pianist needs to maintain relaxed and flexible wrists as in Opus 23, no. 5. Fast finger technique within rapid, changing chordal passages creates technical difficulties that are unique to this prelude. Other problems presented in the prelude include cross hand technique with hands presented in close proximity and leaps involving large chords. The pedal must be clear and articulations must be carefully adhered to (LaMagra 144).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 4 in E Minor**

- Date of composition: August 28, 1910
- Number of measures: 155
- Approximate performance time: 5:15

This is the longest and most multifaceted of all of the preludes. Some feel it may suggest an unrevealed visual or literary inspiration, with its histrionic character being compared to Chopin’s Scherzo in E Major (Anderson). Full of ingenious ideas, it contains a variety of colors, phrasings, and sonorities. It is brilliant and extremely difficult.

The technical nature of the piece may have caused its careful craftsmanship to be overlooked (LaMagra 152). Along with tempo changes, from Allegro con brio, to Piu vivo, Lento, and finally Presto, Rachmaninoff uses changes of meter and rhythmic
devices to vary the mood and content of the work. Texturally, the music is chordal with contrapuntal sections (LaMagra 152).

The three sections and coda of the piece are based on a three-note motive and a staccato triplet figure (LaMagra 153). In the B section the triplet figure begins in single staccato notes that build in passion with the addition of double notes in intervals of thirds, sixths, fifths, and octaves. A lento section follows that presents the triplet figure as a gentle accompaniment interwoven between the hands. The three-note phrase becomes a slow melody above this figure. A return to the virtuosic section begins gradually and continues through the coda.

One of the main problems in performing this work is maintaining unity within the diversified sections. Rachmaninoff’s careful markings between meter changes and in transitory passages will aid the pianist with this problem. In addition to this, the detailed articulation and dynamic marks in contrapuntal sections will help with proper voicings. Rhythmic control must be sustained especially in triplet figures and with syncopations. Other technical considerations include executing rapid octaves, chords, and double notes, adequately presenting cross rhythms between the hands, projecting melodic lines and accompaniments that interweave between the hands, and creating a full, sonorous tone that is never harsh (LaMagra 152).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 5 in G Major**

Date of composition: August 23, 1910  
Number of measures: 41  
Approximate performance time: 3:00

This quiet, mysterious prelude contrasts significantly with the rest of the Opus. “It evokes the idyllic peace and purity of the Elysian Fields” and is a “kind of fantasy in keeping with the song cycle without words character that exists in these later preludes” (Ashkenazy). It is another prelude that is a musical picture of Spring.

Written in a form much simpler than most of the Preludes, it contains a reflective melody sustained against a rising and falling broken chord accompaniment in quintuplets.
The middle section of the piece retains its serene nature and simply moves to G Minor as a means of contrast.

This work is primarily musically challenging. The pianist must be sensitive in presenting the smooth, melodic line while keeping the accompanying, rhythmical figure delicate and even, especially in sections containing cross rhythms. Restraint must be used to create the calm mood and control the sound in leggiero sections. In addition to this the pianist must use rhythmic control, show dynamic contrasts and maintain tonal balance (LaMagra 152-163).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 6 in F Minor**

- Date of composition: August 25, 1910
- Number of measures: 60
- Approximate performance time: 1:30

This prelude was written within two days of the preceding prelude but creates a total contrast with it (LaMagra 174). Ashkenazy describes the piece as “stormy and tragic, plunging into abysses of frenziedly jagged, chromatic despair” (Ashkenazy).

In ABAB form the work contains thick harmonies and unusual modulations (LaMagra 172). It is unified, primarily by a persistent triplet figure and a repeated, syncopated F that occasionally moves in skips up or down. It is rhythmically complex, with syncopations and over the bar phrasings that suggests meter changes, although its 2/4 meter is continuous throughout the piece (LaMagra 175).

With the complicated characteristics and thick texture of this prelude, the performer must isolate material and discern what should be “brought out” (LaMagra 176). Careful, slow practice will help with this. The triplet figure that frequently interweaves between the hands must be even and subdued to show thematic material that is held within the fingers. These held notes are occasionally presented as three-note chords not only when the left hand takes over the triplet figures, but sometimes as the right hand contains them. Technically, these are awkward and must be voiced and phrased properly. The endurance required to play this piece at the fast tempo that Rachmaninoff indicated may be the biggest problem of all to overcome (LaMagra 176).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 7 in F Major**

- Date of composition: August 24, 1910
- Number of measures: 45
- Approximate performance time: 3:00
This prelude has been described as a nocturne-like song without words in an appeasing duet, supported by a regular rhythm (Ashkenazy). It is a brief, delicate, and charming work that was composed two weeks after the completion of the First Concerto and contains music that is reminiscent of its slow movement. The work was originally published as the first of Two Pieces for Cello and Piano, op. 2 (Haylock).

It contains an unusual variation form utilizing three different elements: a quarter-note melody presented first in the left hand, a syncopated melody presented first in the right hand, and a rhythmic double note accompaniment divided between the hands (LaMagra 176). As with many of the other preludes the use of chromaticism is the primary harmonic feature.

Technically, this prelude is not as demanding as many of the others. The primary obstacle to overcome is differentiating between the three different elements mentioned above. Sensitive pedaling, voicing, phrasing, and the use of color will help with this. Rachmaninoff’s suggested fingerings provide “finger-pedaling” with long notes being held within the fingers (LaMagra 182). Quintuplets that appear in cross rhythms toward the end of the piece require rhythmic control.

**Prelude op. 32, no. 8 in A Minor**

Date of composition: August 24, 1910  
Number of measures: 51  
Approximate performance time: 1:45

This prelude is a delightful, “toccata like, scherzo” in the tradition of Felix Mendelssohn, a composer Rachmaninoff greatly admired (Chesky). It is in the form of free style variations, with thematic material taken from the first two measures of the piece.

The work is based on a rhythmic motive of two eighth-notes followed by a quarter-note. Although the texture is linear with occasional contrapuntal sections, it gives the impression of being chordal due to the fast passagework it contains (LaMagra 182). Chromaticism is used as an embellishing tool rather than as a basis for harmonic structure.
It is highly original due to the many pianistic effects Rachmaninoff presents, including a shimmering coda that utilizes the upper register of the piano. There are passages that do not easily fit within the hand especially at the tempo indicated. Rachmaninoff’s fingerings in these passages are helpful primarily for those whose hands are as large as his, creating a problem for many pianists with average or small hands. The running sixteenth-notes that are consistent throughout the work appear primarily in the right hand. These passages are presented in double notes that require independence of the fingers especially when the rhythmic motive moves between the hands. Accuracy is needed in passages that require cross hands, as well as those that present the hands in close proximity. Other technical demands include large stretches within double note sections and wide leaps between octaves and large chords. Pedaling must be colorful and clean (LaMagra 189).

Prelude op. 32, no. 9 in A Major

Date of composition: August 26, 1910
Number of measures: 58
Approximate performance time: 3:00

In this mysterious and spiritual prelude Rachmaninoff seems to be more concerned with musical content than virtuoso displays of technique (LaMagra 189). The long melodic line, rich texture, rhythmic vitality and unusual embellishments give the piece its emotive character.

The piece is essentially a set of variations based on three motives found in the first measure: a long melodic line in the right hand, the bass line in octaves, and the sixteenth-note accompaniment consisting of double notes and broken chords. Exploiting the lower register of the piano, this prelude actually includes the lowest key on the piano (LaMagra 196).

While this prelude does not demand the fast finger technique presented in some of the other preludes, it requires independence of the fingers and proper voicing to differentiate the three motives. This is especially true when the melodic line is presented in double notes along with the accompaniment in the right hand. The thick texture of the piece, along with the low register it is written in, requires clean pedaling as well as proper projection (LaMagra 196). The pianist should produce an individual character and sound for each motive and determine which motive should take prominence. It is essential to gauge dynamics in sections that build in intensity. While the technical aspects of the piece are not as demanding as other preludes, fingering and articulation must be well thought out (Guy).

Prelude op. 32, no. 10 in B Minor
The inspiration of this prelude was discovered by chance when pianist, Benno Moiseiwitsch, told Rachmaninoff that he had a “sensation almost as strong as seeing a vision when he played it” (Matthew-Walker). Rachmaninoff then revealed that the piece was inspired by a painting of the Swiss artist, Arnold Bocklin, entitled “The Return” (Matthew-Walker). With this Rachmaninoff acknowledged that visual images had become a large part of his inspiration. It is possible that this “tone-poem” may be a forerunner to the next large set of piano pieces he composed, the Etudes-Tableaux (Matthew-Walker).

The piece is dominated by a lilting rhythm that is interrupted by a central section containing “massive chords in pounding triplets” (Ashkenazy). Containing sonorities that suggest bell-like motives, it is a “sad mournful song that gradually turns into a tragic even funereal outburst of despair as a remote knell tolls in the distance” (Matthew-Walker). One of Rachmaninoff’s few dancing preludes, it exhibits a very flexible harmonic and rhythmic structure (Anderson).

Thought by some to be the finest of all twenty-four preludes, this work develops the siciliano motif introduced in Opus 32, no. 2 into one of “climactic, tragic, nobility” that eventually descends to a somber low register (Matthew-Walker). “The brief gleam of B major within the basic B minor tonality of the last three bars is like a last poignant glimpse of all things loved and lost” (Ashkenazy).

In ABA form with a short cadenza before the return of A, the homophonic texture of the piece is thick with chords used in all sections. The similar texture between melody and accompaniment creates performance problems with regard to voicing and tonal balance. Additionally, the performer must show restraint and gauge dynamic levels within the work to maintain the “child-like, simplistic, nature of the piece” (Ashkenazy). It is essential to adhere to Rachmaninoff’s indications, especially when there are dynamic markings for certain voices only. The main technical problem appears in the awkward cadenza. This passage requires careful attention to fingering and pedaling (LaMagra 205). Primarily musically challenging, this prelude shows Rachmaninoff’s careful craftsmanship and attention to detail (LaMagra 197).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 11 in B Major**

Date of composition: August 23, 1910
Number of measures: 98
Approximate performance time: 2:30
This prelude utilizes the siciliano rhythm, heard in Prelude op. 32, no. 2, and presents it in a chordal texture. The simple melodic line of the piece gives it the characteristics of a folk-song (Baylor 6). The work is monothematic, making use of rhythmic variety as its primary source of variational technique. Its form is an irregular ABACA form with a coda (LaMagra 203).

The clearly diatonic main theme is introduced in the A section. The B section repeats a fragment of the A section, varying it in a series of chromatic modulations. The C section contains a sustained figure presented in a higher register in thirds. This figure creates an interesting pianistic device that interrupts the flow of the piece (LaMagra 206).

Technical challenges are not as obvious in this prelude as musical considerations are. The chordal texture of the piece requires careful voicing and tonal balance. The pianist should maintain strong rhythmic control during the many meter changes. These changes should never sound calculated, but should have an almost improvisatory feeling to sustain the flowing nature of the piece. The many short phrases that the piece is built upon must be projected as a long line. A warm sound that is full, but not harsh must be consistent throughout the piece (LaMagra 212).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 12 in G-sharp Minor**

Date of composition: August 23, 1910
Number of measures: 48
Approximate performance time: 2:30
The “elegant and shimmering” nature of this prelude presents a vital long, melodic line against an arpeggiated accompaniment, based on an open fifth (LaMagra 213). It is comparable to the Prelude in G Major, but possesses a greater “variety of moods, ideas, and pianistic color” (LaMagra 214). In his dissertation on the preludes of Rachmaninoff, Anthony LaMagra states that it is one of the best preludes with regard to formal craftsmanship and shows Rachmaninoff’s “natural command of pianistic tonal color” (212, 214).

Its ABA form is unified by the sixteenth-note accompaniment. A four-note descending motif is later heard in the left hand that connects this prelude with other works, such as “Tears” in the Suite for Two Pianos, op.5 and the second scene of the opera, *The Miserly Giant* (Matthew-Walker). Possibly the most popular of opus 32, the emphasis of this prelude is placed on melody, with rhythmic and textural changes used as primary elements for development.

The key to a successful performance of this piece is tonal balance between the melody and accompaniment, with special care to subdue the accompaniment when the melody and accompaniment interweave through the hands. Due to the length of the theme, it must be controlled and intensify only when suggested. Awkward skips in the left hand require flexibility and a loose wrist. Trills need to begin at the same dynamic level as the music preceding them and gradually decrescendo to create an overall arch (Doulis 42). In the coda, dynamic control of the upper registre will create an effective, fading away effect (LaMagra 221).

**Prelude op. 32, no. 13 in D-flat Major**

- Date of composition: September 10, 1910
- Number of measures: 62
- Approximate time of performance: 6:00

Ashkenazy calls this prelude a “heartfelt hymn of thanksgiving for life itself.” It is a fitting conclusion for the set and actually recalls several of the more intriguing preludes. As early as the first two measures the Prelude in C-sharp Minor is quoted and references to it can be heard throughout. A dotted siciliano figure is similar to the B Major Prelude and triplet chords recall the B Minor Prelude (LaMagra 228). The relationship of the key of this prelude, D-flat Major, to the key of the earliest prelude, C-sharp Minor seems to be deliberate and with it a full circle of the major and minor keys has been made (Ashkenazy).
The work consists of a large ABA form with a coda. It summarizes compositional techniques Rachmaninoff used in earlier preludes. These include thematic, rhythmic, and harmonic unifying devices, effective use of the entire keyboard with regard to tone color, diatonic as well as chromatic elements, varieties of moods, and above all imaginative writing to exploit all of these qualities (LaMagra 227-228).

This piece is considered the most technically challenging of this set. The large chords may need to be rolled while maintaining careful pedaling to sustain the first note of the chord. Proper tonal balance requires well thought out dynamics as well as voicings. Restraint must be used prior to the final climax to allow it to soar. Tempo changes and rhythmic intricacies require careful manipulation. At times there are three different rhythms and articulations presented simultaneously that present unique problems to the performer. As in many of the other preludes endurance is needed to successfully perform the work (LaMagra 231).
CHAPTER FOUR

ETUDES-TABLEAUX

Rachmaninoff wrote two sets of Etudes-Tableaux. The first set, Opus 33, originally conceived as a series of pieces, was written at Rachmaninoff’s estate, Ivanovka, in the months of August and September of 1911 and premiered by Rachmaninoff on December 13, 1911. Of the nine pieces composed in August 1911, only six were originally published under this opus number. The fourth in A minor was withdrawn from the set, revised, and became the sixth Etude of Opus 39. What we now know as Etudes three and five were published posthumously. This has resulted in a sequence of pieces that was unknown to the composer and probably not what he intended (Matthew-Walker). The final versions present eight Etudes-Tableaux from Opus 33 and nine from Opus 39.

The title “picture etudes” was apparently “coined” by Rachmaninoff, although this form is not unique to him (Matthew-Walker). It is possible that the Transcendental Etudes of Liszt served as a forerunner to the Etudes-Tableaux (Haylock 2). Each piece presents a pianistic problem, in the tradition of the etude. In addition to this, an extra-musical idea is implied, although Rachmaninoff was reluctant to reveal any program associated with the Etudes-Tableaux. He stated, “I do not believe in the artist disclosing too much of his images. Let them paint for themselves what it most suggests” (Bertensson and Leyda 218). It was only when Ottorino Respighi orchestrated five of the pieces for the Boston Symphony Orchestra that Rachmaninoff supplied programs to the Italian composer (Bertensson and Leyda 162).

Rachmaninoff found the writing of the Etudes-Tableaux very difficult after composing several large-scale masterpieces including the Third Piano Concerto and the Second Symphony. He stated, “(they) presented many more problems than a symphony or a concerto . . . after all, to say what you have to say and say it briefly, lucidly, and without circumlocution is still the most difficult problem facing the creative artist” (Haylock).

Several Etudes-Tableaux contain references to the Dies irae chant. These include Opus 33, nos. 1, 4, 5 and Opus 39, nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Rachmaninoff’s characteristic use of bell-like tones can be heard in Opus 33, nos. 1, 4, 5, 6, 8 and Opus 39, nos. 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 (Brady 80).

The Etudes are written primarily in ABA form. Of these, Opus 33, nos. 1, 2, and Opus 39, nos. 3, 5, and 8 include a coda. Opus 33, no. 3 is in AB form with a coda. Opus 39, no. 4 is in rounded binary form with a coda and Opus 39, no. 7 is in AB form.

The unity of the six originally published as Opus 33 has been compared to that of the Symphonic Études of Schumann. “Melodic–cellular connections” exists in the original six that are not contained in the two posthumous etudes (Matthew-Walker 26).
The unusually quiet ending of Opus 33, no. 1 is echoed in the opening of Opus 33, no. 2, which is a variation on it and this aspect continues throughout the work. The final C-sharp Minor “is almost a parodia of the most famous of Rachmaninoff’s Preludes” (Matthew-Walker).

The second set of Etudes-Tableaux, composed between September 1916 and February 1917, is much more demanding of the performer than the first set. These pieces are “virtuosic in the extreme” (Matthew-Walker). Some of the technical demands contained in them require unconventional hand positions, wide leaps for the fingers, and tremendous physical strength from the player. As well as technical difficulties, the individual mood and passionate character of each piece present musical problems that tend to “prohibit performance of them by anyone except those who possess a tremendous virtuoso technique” (Matthew-Walker).

The Etudes-Tableaux were the last works Rachmaninoff composed in Russia. Author of Rachmaninoff: His Life and Times, Robert Matthew-Walker writes that they mark the “virtual end of the nineteenth-century tradition of virtuoso writings of the great composer-pianists” (28). He further states that Opus 39 is a “hidden set of variations on the composer’s idée-fixe, the Dies irae, parts of the plainchant being quoted directly in all of the nine studies, particularly obviously in the first five” (28). He adds that in these compositions Rachmaninoff seems to be writing less in the Russian tradition and more in the Central and East-European tradition (28).

The entire collection contains a vivid rhythmic life of its own. A different harmonic language including modal harmonies is used and can be compared to that of the Third Concerto. Rachmaninoff’s characteristic writing, at times “virile and commanding, at others subtle and understated is an aspect […] which also ensures the immortality of his music” (Matthew-Walker 28).

The Etudes-Tableaux Opus 33 were composed in the months of August and September of 1911 and were premiered by Rachmaninoff on December 13, 1911 in Moscow. They were published in August of 1914. Rachmaninoff composed the Etudes-Tableaux Opus 39 between the years of 1916 and 1917.

The first publication of opus 39 was in 1917. Rachmaninoff premiered the set prior to its publication in Petrograd on November 29, 1916. Neither set contains a dedication (Norris 105).

**Etude-Tableaux Op. 33, no. 1 in F Minor.**

Composed: August 11, 1911
Number of Measures: 74
Approximate performance time: 2:00

![Allegro non troppo](image)
This etude is a short march-like piece and consists of a sustained melody in the right hand against a contrasting chordal figure alternating between both hands (Faurot 238). The forte, molto marcato beginning requires adequate arm-weight to produce a full tone. In addition to this, proper voicing, skill in rapid octave and chord playing, independence of the fingers, and strong rhythmic control are essential. Technical problems arise in the right hand with voicing a sustained legato melody while playing a detached off-beat choral accompaniment in the same hand. It is important to maintain tonal balance between the melody and the alternating accompaniment. A step-wise contrapuntal motive appears in the left hand that requires special attention to voicing. Four and five-note chords, sometimes in close position, appear in passages with quick harmonic changes. Playing these at the tempo indicated can be problematic. It is interesting that the coda of this piece is marked pianissimo. Delicacy is required while playing bell-like chordal figures with wide leaps and fast harmonic changes. Precision is needed in passages containing cross hand technique. It has been mentioned before that some see the ending of this piece as a foreshadowing of the next etude (Brady 173).

**Etude-Tableaux Op. 33, no. 2 in C Major.**

Composed: August 16, 1911  
Number of measures: 42  
Approximate performance time: 2:00

This etude fluctuates between major and minor modes and has a nocturne-like quality, containing “menacing shadows and disquieting murmurs” (Burnett). It consists of a long, intense melodic line accompanied by an insistent arpeggiated figure. Its “coloristic” modal feeling is created by the use of flatted and natural scale degrees of thirds and sixths, along with the open fifths contained in the accompaniment (Brady 107). The rapid accompaniment pattern is consistent throughout the work and requires endurance of the left hand. When the right hand briefly takes over the figure, the left hand needs to consciously relax, to reduce tension (Brady 177). The awkward positions and large spans in the left hand are especially difficult at the tempo indicated and require careful work. Both voices of the left hand figure require proper voicing, especially in the climax, with the appearance of ascending and descending chromatic melodies. When this arpeggiated pattern appears in the coda, presented in unison between the hands, it must be exact. Well-shaped phrases along with excellent legato playing will help project long melodic lines and create a sense of continuity throughout the work (Brady 178). Although the right hand contains the rapid sixteenth-note motion at the veloce marking at the end, it fits well within the hand. More problems are found, at this point, in the left hand, due to awkward jumps and sustained dotted quarter-notes. The final measures of the work are dominated by a sustained right hand trill that, along with the chordal left
hand, requires finger independence as well as control of sound, tempo, and articulation.

**Etude-Tableaux Op. 33, no. 3 in C Minor**

Composed: August 18, 1911  
Number of measures: 44  
Approximate performance time: 4:15

This Etude was written in one day, along with numbers four and five of this set. It was published posthumously, having been omitted from the original publication of the opus. The fact that it later provided material for Rachmaninoff’s Fourth Piano Concerto may be the reason for its omission in the first publication (Brady 84). With its demonic character, it “unleashes a wild series of chromatic scales and arpeggios from which the composer molds overpowering waves of sheer sound” (Burnett). Presented in two sections with a coda, the first section is reminiscent of Liszt. It contains dramatic and abrupt pauses, makes use of modal and chromatic harmonies, and involves sudden leaps with changes of register (Brady 179). Rhythmic and dynamic variance are used to create mood changes. Large, thick chords require legato articulation and may need to be broken or arpeggiated for proper execution. The use of proper spacing and color will add to the effectiveness of this section. The contrasting second section is quiet and melodic, containing several tempo changes. The right hand contains the melody as well as an accompaniment of widely spaced broken chords. These widely spaced broken chords appear in the left hand accompaniment in contrasting inversions. The performer must maintain the melodic line while supporting a legato, accompaniment that is rhythmically and dynamically controlled. Contrapuntal sections with inner melodic lines that need to be heard should be voiced well. The long melodic line should be maintained, in spite of the tempo changes. The final chord of the piece contains a total of nine pitches, divided between the hands. This must be carefully executed while maintaining the quiet and serene mood of the ending.

**Etude-Tableaux op. 33, no. 4 in D Minor**

Date of composition: August 18, 1911  
Number of measures: 62  
Approximate performance time: 2:50
This etude, also published posthumously, is based on material from the first movement of the First Piano Sonata and provides rhythmic and melodic material for the opening of Rachmaninoff’s song “Krisolov” (Haylock). Once again this may be the reason Rachmaninoff did not publish it. Containing a figure harmonically associated with the French horn, it is march-like and involves driving rhythms and rapid chord playing (Brady 183). The opening measures provide a single rhythmic and melodic motive upon which the piece is built. This is supported by a continuous eighth-note accompaniment consisting of octaves and chords. The right hand consists of staccato double notes in fifths and sixths, along with double thirds. Within the tempo indicated these figures are not technically difficult but require strong rhythmic control. Both hands contain intricate figurations, with opening motivic material contained in the inner voice. This creates unique voicing problems. At times the right hand must project a legato melody, while maintaining a detached accompaniment figure. Clean pedaling is essential in sustaining these melodic lines and maintaining detached, rhythmical figures. Other technical difficulties include large awkward leaps and quick harmonic changes in chords played with both hands, as well as chords with unusually large spans. Some pianists have handled these large chordal spans by playing them as octaves and lowering the top note by a third (Thiollier). Other pianists choose to arpeggiate the chords. In addition to endurance, this etude requires control, strength, dexterity and tonal balance (Brady 188).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 33, no. 5 in E-flat Minor**

- Date of composition: August 18, 1911
- Number of measures: 30
- Approximate performance time: 1:30
After an introduction made up of two opening measures, marked *non Allegro*, this etude in *Presto* tempo is essentially a study in “perpetual motion.” Its tumultuous character is suggested by quick chromatic scale passages, presented in triplet sixteenth-notes. These passages are supported by an accompaniment of large, angular leaps, consisting of octaves, single notes, and chords. It is one of the most chromatically interesting of all the etudes, including the use of dissonant intervals, such as major and minor sevenths, minor seconds, and tri-tones (Brady 190).

The close proximity of the hands sometimes involves cross-hand playing, requiring careful manipulation. Additionally the piece requires dexterity, rhythmic and dynamic control, fast chord playing skills (with chords containing large spans and up to five-notes), skillful pedaling, and endurance. In addition to the use of color, the fast passagework requires evenness to avoid individual notes “sticking out.” The complete range of the piano is utilized, from the highest register to the lowest (Brady 190).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 33, no. 6 in E-flat Major**

Date of composition:  August 17, 1911  
Number of measures:  56  
Approximate performance time:  1:30  

This etude is one of five later orchestrated by Respighi. Rachmaninoff revealed to Respighi that the inspiration for this piece was a scene at a fair (Brady 191). It contains similarities with the *Finale* of the Third Piano Concerto and the *Toccata* of
Nicolai Medtner’s Second Concerto (Tirucit). It is one of Rachmaninoff’s most musically uncomplicated works with clear, melodic lines, regular rhythms, and well marked articulations (Brady 191). The texture is chordal and begins with a “fanfare” that is followed by strong accented rhythms consisting of repeated tonic triad figures, broken chords in sixteenth-notes alternating with other chord tones, and tremolo figures (Brady 191). These figures occasionally appear in close proximity and pose a problem for the performer. The B section includes large leaps involving chordal motion in both hands, primarily moving in parallel motion. The span of the chords, sometimes a tenth, makes these passages difficult to execute. This section also includes large leaps that are problematic within the indicated tempo. The piece requires endurance, rhythmic control, strength, precise articulations, and dynamic and tonal balance (Brady 192).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 33, no. 7 in G Minor**

- **Date of composition**: August 15, 1911
- **Number of measures**: 45
- **Approximate performance time**: 3:20

This sorrowful etude contains a continuous sixteenth-note accompaniment that, along with the melody interweaves between the hands. Tonally it suggests the Phrygian mode due to the use of flatted second degrees and chords (Brady 108). The A section is lyrical with register changes that sometimes suggest contrapuntal textures. The B section is similar to a cadenza, and uses quick alternations of the hands, with scale passages and broken chords in thirty-second-notes. In addition to dexterity, clean alternations between the hands and rhythmic control, this section requires a sustained chromatic line. The ending consists of an ascending G harmonic minor scale that recalls the ending of the *Ballade in G Minor* of Chopin, except that Chopin uses the melodic form of the scale (Brady 196). It is important to maintain a rhythmically and dynamically controlled accompaniment figure, in spite of sixteenth rests that appear within the figure, primarily on the downbeat. The dramatic, closing measures must be carefully paced with regard to pauses and dynamics (Brady 193).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 33, no. 8 in C-sharp Minor**

- **Date of composition**: August 13, 1911
This etude has been criticized for its lack of melodic and harmonic variety. The introduction of the piece is dramatic and intense, reminiscent of the famous C-sharp Minor Prelude (Brady 198). The A section repeats the material of the introduction and is interrupted by a dramatic cadenza. The B section is contrapuntal and utilizes melodic leaps and “iambic” metric patterns (Brady 198). The final section contains elements of both of the earlier sections. The piece concludes with repeated, first inversion tonic chords and ends with both hands playing C-sharp octaves.

A full, resonant sound, utilizing proper arm weight is required throughout the work, especially considering that the dynamic range of the piece is from mezzo-forte to fortississimo. The performer needs imagination and creativity to create changes of color and maintain the drama of the piece. Other difficulties include precision and dexterity with regard to large leaps involving register changes and open-fifth arpeggiated figures that span two to three octaves, finger independence to successfully execute contrapuntal sections, proper voicing and projection, tonal balance between the hands, rhythmic drive and control, and endurance (Brady 200).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 1 in C Minor**

Date of composition: October, 1916
Number of measures: 78
Approximate performance time: 2:50
This etude “poses virtually every difficulty a virtuoso pianist is capable of conquering” (Burnett). It contains a brief reference to Rachmaninoff’s idée fixe, the *Dies irae* chant, prior to the final section (Brady 200). Marked *Allegro Agitato*, it requires immediate virtuosity from the performer. It is one of Rachmaninoff’s most chromatic compositions (Brady 201). The right hand of the A section consists of tempestuous, arpeggiated patterns that include large stretches within the hand supported by leaping octaves and single notes in the left hand. At the end of the A section climactic block chords and tremolo figures contrast with the earlier music. A mixture of arpeggiated figures and scale passages, along with a melodic line in the left hand are found at the beginning of the B section. A second part of the B section is marked *scherzando* and contains repeated chordal figures that interrupt the flow of the running triplet figures. With the return of A the left hand assumes a more prominent position amidst the turbulence.

This etude is similar texturally and emotionally to Opus 33, no.5, especially with the use of a continuous moving figuration contrasted with block chords in both hands and tremolo figures (Brady 201). Its performance requires stamina, strength, and flexibility. The stretches within the introductory right hand passages are within reach, but require dexterity and precision within a legato line. Some passages require the hands to be closely positioned, presenting additional difficulties. Proper voicing of underlying chromatic pitches will provide continuity to the piece. A clear, unblurred pedal is essential. The contrapuntal textures found in the piece require finger independence and proper projection. Long melodic lines need to be sustained and articulations should be precise. Careful gauging of the increase in dynamics and accelerando at the ending will help in the successful presentation of “one of the most exciting and brilliant endings found in the etudes” (Brady 203).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 2 in A Minor**

- Date of composition: 1916
- Number of measures: 141
- Approximate performance time: 5:45
To assist Respighi’s orchestration of this work, Rachmaninoff gave this etude the subtitle “The Sea and Seagulls” (Tircuit). It is a dramatic work that is desolate in nature and contains a characteristic reference to bells (Brady 203). It is constructed with melodic sources from three motives. The first appears in the right hand and involves register changes and the crossing of hands. It is followed by the second, presented in stepwise motion, also in the right hand. The third appears in the broken chord triplet accompaniment figures found in the left hand. This theme is based on the Dies irae chant and becomes an ostinato throughout the piece as well as appearing briefly in the middle section in the right hand (Brady 203).

One of the least difficult and complex etudes, the repetitious nature of the work achieves variety through shifts in tonality (Brady 204). The tranquil A section is followed by a B section that is more contrapuntal and rhythmic. A left hand figuration, made up of chromatic scales in triplets, supports the Dies irae chant which has now become the melody in the right hand. The resulting two against three figure creates passion and intensity in the climax of the piece. The ending is gentle and poetic.

A sensitive performance is needed to avoid monotony throughout the etude. The pianist will need to carefully think through articulation, dynamics, and color. Projecting the sedate mood of the piece requires restraint from the performer. In the same vein, proper release during passionate sections is a necessity. Sustaining melodic lines that consist of short, fragmented motives requires careful planning. The triplet figure accompaniment must be presented without accent. Large chords consisting of five notes cover a large span. These are especially problematic for those with an average or small hand (Brady 205).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 3 in F-sharp Minor**

- Date of composition: October 14, 1916
- Number of measures: 152
- Approximate performance time: 2:30
This etude has a satanic character with a “toccata-like brilliance” (Haylock). It is extremely difficult with fragmented passages of double notes consisting of octaves and smaller intervals alternating in contrary motion. Possibly inspired by Chopin’s Etude op. 10, no. 7, it is among many of the etudes Rachmaninoff wrote utilizing double notes. These include Opus 39, nos. 1, 5, 6, and 9 (Brady 205-206). The double note passages are presented in sixteenth-notes that contain duplets and triplets, appearing in cross rhythmic patterns. These appear in both short and long phrases and must be presented as such.

This work is considered one of the most taxing and technically demanding etudes of Rachmaninoff. Hemiola figures, irregular metric accents, and added beats without a meter change require strong rhythmic control (Brady 206). Precision is needed in octaves and single notes that appear in cross hand leaps encompassing up to three octaves. Agility, rapid chord playing technique, proper voicing in imitative textures, endurance, flexibility, strength, and careful articulation are necessary and are especially difficult within the Allegro molto tempo indicated (Brady 209).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 4 in B Minor**

Date of composition: September 24, 1916  
Number of measures: 109  
Approximate performance time: 3:00

This etude is unusual in that it lacks a time signature, and consists of a form different from any of the other etudes, a sectional rounded binary form with a coda (Brady 209). It is scherzo-like, and has been frequently labeled a humoreske (Darrell). It contains a strong rhythmic drive and utilizes a rhythm common to many of Rachmaninoff’s works, consisting of two sixteenths followed by an eighth-note. This rhythm is followed by a repeated note passage. It makes use of chromaticism and is surprisingly contrapuntal in texture with motivic imitation in up to three parts (Brady 209).
The piece is marked *senza pedale*. Staccato chords and repeated notes present the primary technical device to be mastered in the etude. Rhythmic control and rapid chord playing technique is essential with chords containing three or four pitches played in close proximity along with chords that span a tenth. In addition to this, agility, independence of the fingers, voicing and tonal balance are required throughout the piece (Brady 210).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 5 in E-flat Minor**

Date of composition: February 17, 1917  
Number of measures: 83  
Approximate performance time: 4:45

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The largest of the group, this is one of the most popular etude written by Rachmaninoff. Its “brooding, Slavic” melodic line is characteristic of Rachmaninoff and communicates the “impassioned” quality of the composer’s work (Crociata). Inspired by Scriabin, it is one of the richest etudes both melodically and harmonically (Brady 214). It is marked *Appassionato* and contains a driving, martellato character within a chordal texture that contains counterpoint that increases as the work continues (Brady 214). The first section marked *molto marcato* includes a lyrical melody with an accompaniment figure of repeated chords in triplets. The second section contrasts with the first and is more contrapuntal, containing a quieter melody accompanied by arpeggiated chords. While chromaticism creates color within this section, the use of flatted II and flatted VII chords along with seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords create a modal effect (Brady 214). After the return of the first section, the thin texture of the coda leads to a quiet ending in E-flat major.

Problems encountered within the work include executing rapid repetitions of chords and carefully voicing contrapuntal themes within a thick texture that sometimes involves interlocking hands. In addition to this, both hands must move quickly over a wide range of the keyboard while sustaining long melodic lines and maintaining smooth and even broken chord patterns. The tone of the piece must be full, sonorous and never harsh.

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 6 in A minor.**

Date of composition: September 8, 1911  
Number of measures: 121  
Approximate performance time: 2:20
One of the etudes orchestrated by Respighi, this piece depicts “The Tale of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf” (Darrell). The introduction consists of chromatic scales and repeated tonic chords. The A section follows with staccato broken chord patterns in sixteenths that contain repeated notes on the second and third sixteenth-notes. This passage alternates with the material from the introduction. The middle section opens with short motives that contain suggestions of the Dies irae theme. This section contains three different indications: poco meno mosso, presto, and marcato. The piece ends with the chromatic scale figures heard in the introduction.

Articulation in the sixteenth-note repeated figures contained in the right hand require endurance as well as a loose and relaxed wrist. The contrasting, contrapuntal accompaniment figure includes staccato leaps that create the need for accuracy and a strong, independent left hand. Later, large octaves with an added inner note appear in leaps that necessitate flexibility and precision. Voicing of principal and secondary melodic lines demands finger independence and tonal balance (Brady 220).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 7 in C Minor**

Date of composition: 1916  
Number of measures: 109  
Approximate performance time: 6:30

“(This etude is) a funeral march…let me dwell on this a moment longer,” Rachmaninoff stated, “The initial theme is a march; the other theme represents the singing of a choir. Beginning with the movement in sixteenth-notes in C Minor and a little further in E-flat minor, a fine rain is suggested, incessant and hopeless. This movement develops culminating in C minor—the chimes of a church.” (Burnett)

The piece was written in 1916, the year after Scriabin died. In A Lifetime in Music, Bertessen and Leyda wrote:

On April 14, at the age of forty-three, Alexander Scriabin died of blood poisoning, the tragic result of a trivial accident. Years later Rachmaninoff
recalled the most minute details of Scriabin’s funeral—the rain, the crowd, the rain pouring down on the coffin and on the fresh grave—and his decision that day to devote his recital and tour of the coming season to Scriabin’s piano works...Another who stood in the rain to watch the burial of Scriabin was Taneyev, and a cold that he caught that day worsened and developed into a fatal illness. (192)

These two deaths had a tremendous effect on Rachmaninoff. After promising to perform and study the works of Scriabin, Rachmaninoff undoubtedly incorporated many of the characteristics of his music (Bertensson and Leyda 192).

The motive in this etude, marked *lamentoso*, is similar to some of Scriabin’s melodies (Brady 221). Other consistencies between this work and Scriabin’s compositions are the dark mood, intense chromaticism, “wailing” themes, and sudden rhythmic and dynamic changes (Brady 221). The opening section is marked *Lento* and has a thick chordal texture with short, abrupt motives. Within this section, Rachmaninoff uses the indications *lugubre*, *lamentoso*, and *pesante*. A chorale-like passage in the A section contains a modal feeling as in earlier etudes, employing the flatted II and flatted VII chords (Brady 222). The passage is chant-like and contains irregular metric accents. The B section contains continuous, soft, sixteenth-notes that eventually build, chromatically and texturally. A “climactic bell-like figure” appears before the end of the piece (Brady 222). The ending consists of two quiet, staccato chords.

Fine chord playing technique is essential in this etude. Large, thick chords consist of up to four notes in each hand and at times span a tenth. Legato passages containing these chords contrast with light staccato chord passages involving large leaps. In both of these instances it is necessary to voice well and maintain rhythmic and dynamic control. The inner voices marked by contrasting stems are especially significant and require good voicing and projection. In addition to this, the left hand is challenged to maintain pedal tones in the midst of staccato broken chords and both hands are positioned closely with awkward crossings. This is the only etude that contains a true “programme,” as the other etudes orchestrated by Respighi only contain suggested titles (Brady 227).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 8 in D minor**

Date of composition: 1916  
Number of measures: 106  
Approximate performance time: 3:30

This etude is a lyrical and expressive study in double notes. Although the double notes are primarily legato, contrasting sections appear with some accented and staccato passages. The double notes that require a true legato within the fingers are especially difficult.
A contrapuntal texture is suggested that requires proper voicing and projection. The character should be maintained by the use of adequate spacing and a sense of repose that contrasts with passionate playing in climactic sections. Other technical requisites include flexibility, agility, finger independence, and clear pedaling. As in other etudes, long melodic lines must be maintained despite the fact that they are made up of short, restated themes (Brady 226).

**Etude-Tableaux op. 39, no. 9 in D Major**
- Date of composition: February 2, 1917
- Number of measures: 97
- Approximate performance time: 3:20

This culminating etude, later orchestrated by Respighi, depicts an Oriental march. It is extremely technically demanding and requires strength and endurance. “Heroic in character,” it is a fitting ending for the etudes (Brady 229). It is constructed on a single rhythmic motive, consisting of two sixteenths followed by an eighth-note. In Patricia Brady’s dissertation on the Etudes-Tableaux, she notes that although the piece is extremely rhythmic, the “rhythmic accents seldom correspond with metric accents [. . .]. It may have been Rachmaninoff’s purpose to provide interesting syncopation and metric ambiguity in this piece, rather than adhere to a squarely metric pulse” (Brady 229-230). Sequential passages, stepwise descending diatonic scales, arpeggiated figures, octaves, broken octaves, and alterations between octaves and single or double notes, rapid successions of chords with large spans, sometimes containing leaps, and melody and accompaniment appearing in the same hand are all technical challenges to the performer. In addition to this the need for tonal balance, meticulous voicing, a strong control of rhythm and dynamics require that this piece should only be attempted by pianists with an extremely strong command of the instrument (Brady 235).
Rachmaninoff composed two large, virtuoso Sonatas that are fine examples of the romantic piano sonata. They were written six years apart, the first in 1907 and the second in 1913. Matthew-Walker suggests that similarities, contained in both Sonatas, such as the inclusion of comparably constructed second themes and a three movement cyclic form connect them to the Second Symphony and the Third Concerto.

It is possible that Rachmaninoff only composed two Sonatas because of the criticism he received concerning his use of large-scale form or his own dissatisfaction with both Sonatas, primarily because of their length (Pickard). There has been some controversy over the significance of the Sonatas. Culshaw dismisses them with only one paragraph, while Gordon suggests they are works that “show Rachmaninoff in full command of his style” (434). Faurot probably exaggerated when he ventured to say, “If [the Sonatas] had been written one hundred years ago, instead of seventy, the archeologists would already be programming them, for none of the forgotten nineteenth century sonata makers equaled them (Who, after Beethoven, did write great Sonatas?)” (240).

Sonata no. 1 in D Minor, op. 28

Date of composition: November, 1906-May 14, 1907
Number of measures: 1021
Approximate performance time: 37:15
Dedication: none

Rachmaninoff began composing this Sonata in Dresden, at the same time he was working on the opera, Monna Vanna and the Second Symphony. He considered recreating the Sonata as a Symphony, but chose not to after realizing the pianistic nature of the piece. Konstantin Igumnov gave the work its first performance on October 17, 1908 in Moscow, making this the first piece of Rachmaninoff’s to be premiered by someone other than himself. It was only after Igumnov played the Sonata in Berlin and Leipzig that Rachmaninoff told him that the three movements of the work were inspired by Liszt’s Faust Symphony. The first movement depicts Faust, the second Gretchen and Mephistopheles, and the third the flight to Brocken (Darrell).

Maurice Hinson summarizes the significance of the work well. He states, “The extreme demands on the pianist’s technical skills and the relentless emotional intensity make this Sonata one of the most challenging works in the solo piano repertoire” (578). It is one of Rachmaninoff’s most ambitious endeavors for solo piano. It is unusual in that it has not experienced any “clear cut success or failure, only a kind of dead-end limbo” (Darrell).

Allegro moderato
Number of measures: 357
Approximate performance time: 13:45

**Allegro moderato (d = 76)**

Darrell summarizes this complex movement:

> [It contains] arresting piano/forte contrasts, the impetuosity of the ensuing drive, the rich variety of thematic materials, and the complexities of the formal structure that grips attentive listeners throughout the movement’s undeniably demanding length.”

It is written in Sonata-Allegro form and contains an unusual compositional device that is found in the Second Symphony. This device is the presentation of two main themes that contain the same tonal root (Matthew-Walker).

The opening motive contains a rising and falling fifth, followed by a variety of chordal cadences. This motive is expanded throughout the work, occasionally over a pedal point. A large cadenza appears two-thirds of the way through the movement. Instead of being merely a virtuoso style cadenza, this cadenza forms the climax of the development section. It is followed by a comparatively short recapitulation. The movement ends in D major. It is interesting that material taken from this movement is found in the Etude-Tableaux opus 33 no. 5 in D minor (Norris).

The movement is both technically and musically demanding. It includes large leaping chords of up to five voices that contain spans larger than an octave. Additionally, cross rhythms of continuous scalar and chordal passages occasionally interweave between the hands creating technical demands as well as problems of tonal balance. One also finds stemmed held notes that should be sustained as well as voiced. A sense of cohesiveness is essential within the tempo and meter changes that occur within this movement.

**Lento**

Number of measures: 159
Approximate performance time: 9:30

The triplet accompaniment presented at the beginning of this movement becomes
the foundation of a scherzo-like section that appears in the middle of the movement. John Pickard describes this middle section as a “fleet footed waltz of almost Mendelssohnian delicacy.” This form, a slow movement that contains a scherzo in the middle section, is used frequently by Rachmaninoff and can be found in the Second Piano Concerto as well as the Third Symphony (Norris).

The movement begins tranquilly in the key of D major, with an unusual introduction made up of single note triplets in the right hand and a bass consisting of a single, descending line, made up of consecutive fifths. The theme begins in F major and is accompanied by the triplet figure that first appeared in the introduction. This theme bears some similarity to the theme found in the second movement of the Third Concerto. The theme grows in intensity, continuing through the middle section, and leads to a short cadenza that recalls the second subject of the first movement (Anderson). The return of the main theme leads to a quiet ending in F major.

This expressive movement requires a cantabile, singing tone. Voicing and tonal balance are essential, especially as the texture thickens and the work becomes more intense. Rhythmic control is necessary to maintain the pulse, which remains constant throughout the scherzo section. This section contains passagework that requires fast finger technique and accuracy, especially in passages that contain large intervallic spans. There are unusual trills, contained in the alto voice of large octave chords that are extremely difficult to execute.

**Allegro molto**

Number of measures: 505  
Approximate performance time: 14:00

This is the most complex movement in the Sonata. Its fortissimo opening contains a brief introduction made up of octaves. The main theme follows, presented in quarter-notes that are played simultaneously with thick, chordal triplet figures. The development section is scherzando-like. It is unusually long and contains themes heard in the first movement. The recapitulation presents the opening section with more drama and intensity. The second subject appears in full romantic style, another characteristic of Rachmaninoff’s larger works. Additional themes from earlier movements as well as the dies irae theme appear before the movement ends with fortissimo D major chords (Norris).

This movement is one of the most difficult in Rachmaninoff’s large-scale piano works. The primary challenge is endurance while executing the exceptional technical feats presented in the movement. Additionally the movement requires a strong, rapid,
chordal technique that includes voicing held notes, sometimes presented in the inner voices. Accuracy is difficult to maintain in sections that contain large leaps involving thick chords and octaves. The many meter and tempo changes must be rhythmically controlled to maintain cohesion within the work. Other details that must be addressed in this treacherous movement are articulation, dynamic contrasts and control of cross-rhythmic passages.

**Sonata no. 2 in B-flat Minor, op. 28**

- Date of composition: January-August 1913, revised 1931
- Number of measures: 814 (original version), 643 (revised version)
- Approximate performance time: 26:15 (original version)
- 19:20 (revised version)
- Dedication: Matvei Pressman

This Sonata was begun during a visit Rachmaninoff made to Rome and completed later when he returned to his estate, Ivanovka. It was published by Gutheil in June 1914, bearing a dedication to a childhood friend and fellow pupil, Matvei Pressman (Norris 115).

Even though it is by no means short, it is less massive than the First Sonata. Rachmaninoff was dissatisfied with its length and created a revision of the piece in 1931 that cut approximately seven minutes from its performance time. He expressed his displeasure with the work:

> I look at my earlier works and see much that is superfluous. Even in this [Second] Sonata so many voices are moving simultaneously, and it is too long (Swan 8).

This Sonata is more popular than the First Sonata, possibly because it provides the performer and audience more drama and virtuosity within a more compact form (Darrell). Additionally, it has experienced a revival in the past few years, being heard frequently at major piano competitions and played by most well-known performing pianists.

It was written at the same time as Rachmaninoff’s choral symphony, *The Bells*. Rachmaninoff premiered the Sonata in Moscow, December 16, 1913, three days after he conducted the first performance of *The Bells*. In the same way the Second Symphony overshadowed the First Sonata, *The Bells* became more influential than the Second Sonata (Matthew-Walker).

It contains three movements, although it is essentially a continuous work. The second movement is treated as a short intermezzo that connects two larger movements (Norris). Throughout the work a cyclic form is created by thematic cross-references. This tradition is found in the Third and Fourth Piano Concerti. The Sonata is also similar to the Third Concerto in the continuous movement between the slow movement and the finale as well as the appearance of a large, romantic melody as the second subject of the finale that eventually climaxes before a final presto section (Pickard).

**Allegro agitato**

- Number of measures: 179 (original version), 137 (revised version)
- Approximate performance time: 11:15 (original version) 8:00 (revised version)
This powerful movement is dramatic as well as virtuosic. The introduction begins with a cascading, chromatic, arpeggiated figure that ends in the lower register of the piano with a B-flat octave. The main theme begins with thick octave chords in dotted rhythms supported by triplet figures that are divided between the hands. Docheva suggests that even though the movement is in Sonata-Allegro form, the middle section is treated as a free variation instead of a traditional development section. This section contains a reference to bells that is reminiscent of the choral symphony, *The Bells* (Pickard). After the recapitulation the movement ends with an “unanswered question” that leads to the second movement (Matthew-Walker).

The thick texture of the movement requires a large, resonant sound and proper voicing and tonal balance to project melodies and countermelodies. Contrasting piano sections should be played with delicacy and evenness. Passages that contain large intervalllic spans and leaps are challenging. Other problems in this movement are characteristic arpeggiated figures that include double notes and rapid successions of four-note chords.

**Non allegro-Lento**

Number of measures: 291 (original version), 266 (revised version)

Approximate performance time: 7:30 (original version), 6:00 (revised version)
This movement epitomizes Rachmaninoff’s exquisite lyricism and passionate climaxes. There is a tenderly descending modulation that connects the first movement to the second. It begins in D major and moves to E minor, the key of the opening section. Marked Lento, this opening section contains a gently lilting theme based on a descending progression. A romantic G major section follows that begins in the new meter of 4/4. The original E minor theme returns with an added texture that contains a triplet descant in the soprano. The return of the opening section later climaxes dramatically with the descant becoming octave chords. A reminiscence of the first movement follows that builds to a cadenza like section before the movement ends with a Non allegro section that quotes extensively from the first movement and begins in the new key of C major. The movement ends on an E major chord.

This movement requires a command of expressive playing that includes a cantabile singing tone and well-projected voicings. Several textures are presented simultaneously that require different varieties of tone, dynamics, and articulations. Voicing becomes even more important in these sections as well as the large chordal section of the climax. The cadenza like section fits well within the hand, but requires evenness and rhythmic control.

**Allegro molto**

Number of measures: 344 (original version), 240 (revised version)
Approximate performance time: 7:15 (original version), 5:45 (revised version)
A brief bravura passage at the beginning of this movement connects the final chord of the second movement, marked \textit{attacca}, to this movement. The movement opens with a descending passage that is taken from the introductory passage of the first movement. This time it ends on a B-flat major chord. The main theme is presented in a chordal, triplet texture. It is followed by a march like section in D major. A lyrical, romantic, middle section marked \textit{a tempo, poco meno mosso}, appears prior to the return of the first tempo. With the \textit{a tempo}, several sequences of the introductory passages are presented. Statements of the triplet material of the opening section interrupt these sequences. A final climax marked \textit{Tempo rubato} presents all of the textures mentioned above. This is followed by a \textit{Presto} triplet section that contains material derived from the opening triplet section. A final dramatic cadence to B-flat major ends the movement.

This is the most challenging movement of the Sonata, due to the problem of logistics, i.e. playing large, leaping four-voice chords at a rapid speed. Other performance problems include the execution of arpeggiated figures that contain large intervallic spans. The different textures presented in the work require proper articulation and dynamic variety. The meter and tempo changes require a strong rhythmic pulse control and lyrical sections must be expressive and well-voiced. Delicacy and evenness must be maintained in the \textit{Piu mosso} section presented prior to the recapitulation. Presenting the entire sonata continuously is taxing and demands endurance. Summarizing the importance of this movement, Dubal states, “The finale must be counted as one of the composer’s most electrifying works.” (387)
Rachmaninoff wrote two sets of variations: Variations on a Theme of Chopin op. 22 and Variations on a Theme of Corelli op. 42. These were written twenty-eight years apart, the first set in 1903, and the second set in 1931. It is interesting to note that the Chopin Variations were Rachmaninoff’s first attempt at large-scale form for the piano while the Corelli Variations constitute his last work for solo piano.

The two sets show a considerable difference in Rachmaninoff’s compositional style. The Chopin Variations are longer, containing a performance time of approximately ten minutes more than the Corelli Variations. While the first set of variations only contains two more variations than the second set, the longest variation of the Chopin Variations is one-hundred twenty measures compared to the longest of the Corelli Variations, twenty-seven measures. Geoffrey Norris states, “Rachmaninoff’s mode of expression in the Chopin is more indirect than in the Corelli set, a characteristic that also imbues his set of Preludes op. 23” (87). The Corelli Variations contain greater rhythmic and harmonic freedom and a clarity of texture that was displayed in Rachmaninoff’s mature orchestral style of the 1930’s and 1940’s (Norris 87).

Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22

Date of composition: February 1903
Number of measures: 620
Approximate performance time: 28:00
Dedication: Theodore Leschetizky

These variations were composed while Rachmaninoff’s patron and former teacher, Alexander Siloti, was supporting him. In exchange for Siloti’s financial support, Rachmaninoff was expected to spend his time composing and thereby not spend time with Natalia Satin, whom he would later marry. This arrangement resulted in the composition of the Sonata for Violoncello, the Spring Cantata, Twelve Songs, and the first set of Preludes (Culshaw 163).

The Chopin Variations are an example of Rachmaninoff’s mastery of large form. Matthew-Walker suggests the work was conceived in sonata form and can be grouped as follows:

First movement: Variations I-X  
Second movement: Variations XI-XVIII  
Scherzo: Variations XVIV-XXIV  
Finale: Variations XXI-XXI  

Rachmaninoff included optional cuts of Variations VII, X and XII as well as the Coda of Variation XXII.

Theme: Largo
Number of measures: 9
The theme Rachmaninoff used in this set of variations is the Prelude op. 28, no. 20 in C minor by Chopin. Maurice Hinson describes the prelude, “massive and majestic chords dissolve to tranquil calm...a grand chorale chord study” (191). It is a dark, thick-textured, chromatic work made up of large chords in the right hand and octaves that occasionally contain an added note in the left hand. The fortissimo opening contrasts with the marking of piano contained in the last five measures. A successful performance of the work requires a large, resonant sound, proper voicing, well-shaped phrases and dynamic variety.

**Variation I – Moderato**
Number of measures: 8
Var. I

This variation is a quiet “arabesque of sixteenth-notes” that contrasts with the theme in dynamics, texture, and harmony (Keeley). It contains melodic material, derived from most of the original notes of the theme, presented in a single voice. In the fifth measure, a bass pedal point on C is added to the single voice texture. The occurrence of frequent passing tones “obscure” the strong harmonic structure of the theme and create a lack of emphasis on the “original harmonic plan” (Boldt 6). The original meter and key of the theme are retained in this variation as well as the two that follow it. The pianissimo section can be enhanced by a change of color.

**Variation II. Allegro**
Number of measures: 8
This variation increases in texture to include two voices. The movement within
the work becomes more agitated with the appearance of a bass line, which assumes an
important role in its presentation of the sixteenth-note melodic figure of Variation I. The
right hand contains a new motive, made up of the four descending notes and dotted
rhythms of the theme (Boldt 7). The variation ends on the leading tone and moves
without a pause to the next variation. Voicing and tonal balance are important
throughout the variation, especially as the two voices interweave between the hands.

**Variation III. Allegro**

Number of measures: 8

The sixteenth-note motive found in Variations I and II is presented in imitation in
this variation. It appears first in the right hand with the left hand statement occurring on
the second beat. The texture increases to three voices with the addition of an important,
double-stemmed melody in the bass that is built on the major and minor seconds included
in the theme. The final sixteenth-note is stated on the dominant, leading to the next
variation without a pause. It is interesting to note that the structure of the theme and
variations so far, a chordal theme followed by three consecutive variations based on
“running figurations,” is similar to the structure found in Beethoven’s Thirty-two
Variations (Boldt 8).

The canonic texture of this variation requires proper projection and voicing.
Special care should be given to the held, quarter-note material that is presented within the
sixteenth figures in the bass line. Independence of the fingers becomes more important in
this extremely chromatic variation that requires close positioning of the hands.

**Variation IV. Allegro**

Number of measures: 24

This variation continues in the key of the theme and first three variations, but
changes to ¾ meter. A new syncopated, chordal melody that suggests “bell-like sounds”
is played in the right hand (Boldt 8). This figure builds in intensity and drive throughout
the variation. The tenor voice contains fragments of the theme, marked by double-
stemmed eighth-notes. These appear within a moving sixteenth pattern that consists of
broken chordal figures. The texture continues to thicken with the appearance of pedal
tones that utilize the lower register of the piano and extend the pianistic range of the
variation. These pedal tones eventually evolve into large chords divided between the
hands that are sustained throughout each measure. The variation climaxes in a
“thunderous” way as the texture thickens and the dynamics increase (Boldt 9).

The sixteenth-note pattern in the left hand fits well within the hand, but is difficult
to execute due to the large spans contained in it. Voicing and sustaining the tenor
melody, while executing these figures, presents an additional challenge. Dynamically the
beginning piano increases to fortissimo at the climax of the variation. This fortissimo is
the first to appear since the opening theme and requires extra attention in projecting a
full, resonant sound within the drama and intensity of the variation.

**Variation V. Meno mosso**

Number of measures: 8

This variation contrasts with Variation IV in its thinner texture and more melodic
quality. It returns to common time and contains a similar harmonic plan as the theme.
The simple nature of the theme is recaptured by the utilization of the treble register in this
variation as in Variations I through III. The single note, left hand melodic material is
derived from an inner voice of the theme (Boldt 9). The right hand consists of
arpeggiated sextuplets that contain a sixteenth rest on the first sixteenth value. This
expressive variation presents few technical challenges. It requires a cantabile, singing
tone, carefully shaped phrases and projection of thematic material.

**Variation VI. Meno mosso**

Number of measures: 12

This variation is unusual in its lack of chromaticism. The elements of the theme
almost disappear with a “refreshing addition of new countermelodies” within the work
(Darrell). The expressive nature found in the previous variation continues in triple meter.
A tender melody containing duplet eighth-notes appears in cross-rhythm with a triplet,
arpeggiated figure in the bass. The melody that appears in the right hand is an expansion
of the melody found in the left hand of the previous variation. A third “inner melody” is
presented in the middle of this variation, followed by the opening melody in octaves (Boldt 10). After this, the octave melody appears along with the “inner melody” and rolled chords divided between the hands.

This variation requires the presentation of an expressive, flowing style while maintaining duplet against triplet cross-rhythms. This becomes more difficult when rolled chords are added and the inner melody appears, requiring projection and voicing. The most challenging part of the variation may be executing the rolled chords that are divided between the hands and encompass three octaves.

**Variation VII. Allegro**

Number of measures: 8

This is one of the variations that Rachmaninoff allowed to be omitted if cuts were necessary. It is a “one voice virtuoso display of lightning-fast triplets” that alternate between the hands (Thiollier). These triplet figures, presented in the opening measures, are continuous throughout the variation. A quarter-note melody that is built on the falling second interval of the theme is added in the third measure. At this point, a simple bass line is added as well. An important melody that is parallel to the theme is heard in the last two measures (Boldt 11).

This variation requires a delicate fast finger technique to execute the closely-spaced notes of the triplet figures. The hands are placed in close position, which makes alternation of these figures between the hands problematic. Additional challenges appear when the added motive in the third measure must be sustained and voiced.

**Variation VIII. Allegro**

Number of measures: 8

This variation contains highly chromatic figures that continue the delicate, fast finger technique employed in the previous variation. The texture is increased to include three elements: rapid sextuplets in sixteenth-notes that are presented in the alto voice at the beginning of the variation, staccato eighth-notes that appear in the soprano and an arpeggiated figure that outlines the original harmonies of the theme in the bass. (Boldt 12). All three elements are presented simultaneously.
Projecting these three elements by utilizing voicing, tonal balance and articulation is the primary challenge of the variation. The right hand figure is especially difficult due to the legato sextuplet figure in the alto that is presented along with the staccato figure in the soprano. The left hand contains large spans within the arpeggiated figure that require proper manipulation. Double notes in the right hand appear in the last three measures against left hand blocked intervals that exceed the span of an octave.

**Variation IX. Allegro**

Number of measures: 8

This thick textured, chordal variation is marked fortissimo and contrasts with the delicate piano quality of the previous variation. It is highly rhythmic, “ponderous and violent” due to the alternations of four voice chords with octaves that appear “antiphonally” between the treble and bass (Thiollier). The two motives developed in this variation are distinguished by offbeat rhythms of eighth-notes or two sixteenth-notes followed by a quarter-note. The first idea is based on a rising second and contains large chords, divided between the hands. This texture is answered by the second motive, made up of octaves in both hands. The rhythmic drive that leads to the fourth beat is characteristic of the theme (Boldt 13). A strong chordal technique is necessary to execute the rapid, thick chords in both hands that move by large leaps.

**Variation X. Piu vivo**

Number of measures: 14

This is another variation Rachmaninoff suggested as an optional cut if needed. It is a “furious display” of staccato broken chords that builds by increasing intervallic leaps (Thiollier). These broken chord figures are presented in single, accented, sixteenth-notes that appear in an “imitative texture” between the hands (Boldt 14). The variation continues to build with full chordal figures followed by passagework similar to that found in the Etude op. 25, no. 11 of Chopin. Large leaps containing strategically placed
accents, double notes, and chordal figures in this variation result in an extremely demanding etude. The variation ends on a fortissimo C minor chord with a fermata.

**Variation XI. Lento**

Number of measures: 15

This canonic variation is presented in the key of E-flat major, presenting the first key change so far. Its “mysterious” nature contrasts in mood and dynamics with the previous variation (Thiollier). It contains a “slowly paced chromaticism” that utilizes half-steps, derived from the main theme (Boldt 14). The right hand begins with eighth-note figures in the soprano and held notes in the alto. The eighth-note figures initially appear as an ascending chromatic scale. The left hand enters on the sixth beat at the interval of a fourth. These entrances are similar to those found in the previous variation (Boldt 14).

The variation is expressive, containing long, *legato* melodic lines that must be sustained and phrased. This becomes more difficult in sections where the extremely chromatic line requires the hands to be closely positioned. Rachmaninoff indicates voicings with articulation marks that require careful attention.

**Variation XII. Moderato**

Number of measures: 32

This variation “assumes the proportions of a small piece” (Boldt 16). Returning to the key of the theme, it is an elaborate four voice imitative work that is the result of Rachmaninoff’s canonic treatment of the opening five notes of the theme (Boldt 16). Towards the end of the variation a chordal section appears, consisting of rolled chords that sometimes contain as many as nine pitches. These are followed by passages in thirds that appear imitatively between the hands. A brief cadenza-like passage that contains thematic material in the bass is presented before the *pianissimo* C minor chord at the end.

The variation requires proper voicing of each subject in all four voices within the legato texture. This becomes especially demanding in the section containing double thirds. The large rolled chords and cadenza-like passage require careful manipulation.

**Variation XIII. Largo**

Number of measures: 16
Composed of large, thematic, block chords divided between the hands, this variation is given new harmonic interest by consistent root movement in descending thirds and “fleeting three-note interjections” in the treble (Boldt 17). The variation returns to the Largo tempo of the theme and involves a meter change to 3/4. It contains two elements found in the theme. The first is a chordal figure, built on the interval of the minor second at the beginning of the theme. This texture is reminiscent of that found in Variation IX, however this later variation differs in its Largo tempo and use of complete chords. Additionally, upbeat rhythmic devices used in the earlier variation are not found in this one. The second device is the dotted rhythm of the theme. In Variation XIII, these chords appear antiphonally with a figure consisting of thirty-second-notes followed by a quarter-note. The chordal figure contrasts dynamically to the pianissimo thirty-second-note figure, giving the work a “subtle and expressive color” (Boldt 17). A successful presentation of this variation should include proper voicing of large chords that sometimes span a tenth and creative use of color within dynamic contrasts.

**Variation XIV. Moderato**

Number of measures: 25

This variation contains a four-voice texture. The first voice of the texture is a light countermelody that begins in the soprano and consists of descending eighth-notes built on a diatonic scale. The melody of the theme in whole-notes, “quadruple augmentation,” presented in the alto voice is the second voice (Boldt 18). The third voice first appears in the tenor and is made up of the thirty-second-notes found in Variation XIII. A pedal point on C is the fourth voice. Rachmaninoff indicates that the melody should be properly voiced and projected while maintaining a marcato touch. The melodic references are no longer used after measure twelve. With the expansion of the thirty-second figure that includes chords with stressed melodic tones, the texture thickens and the dynamics increase. The climax occurs with the presentation of large, Brahmsian chords that appear in contrary motion to the ascending left hand double
notes. After this, the dynamics decrease and the variation ends on a C dominant-seventh chord marked *piano*.

The four voice texture utilizes a wide pianistic range that is hard to manipulate while maintaining the pianissimo, *legato* passages of the soprano and tenor and projecting the *mezzo-forte* melody of the alto. Sustaining a long line in the alto is also problematic due to the whole-note presentation of the melody. The thirty-second figure, presented in double dotted, thick chords in the treble, is an additional challenge. Other technical problems encountered in this variation include cross hand technique within the four voice texture and maintaining a legato line within passages that contain large, thick chords.

**Variation XV. Allegro scherzando**

*Number of measures: 43*

![Variation XV. Allegro scherzando](image)

This variation is a “lengthy, symphonic scherzo, worthy of any Rachmaninoff Concerto” (Thiollier). Contrasting with the previous “orchestral” variation, it begins with a “shattering outburst of bells” in the new key of F minor and contains a characteristic dotted rhythm figure that moves skittishly around the keyboard, similar to the fifth Symphonic Etude of Schumann (Thiollier).

The variation is freely developed, containing a variant of the original theme (Boldt 18). The predominant dotted rhythms evolve into even triplet eighth-notes, presented in cross rhythms against duplet figures. The texture increases to include chords and arpeggiated figures. The coda, continuing with the even eighth-note figure, contrasts with a more rapid tempo. After a cadence, the variation ends on a F octave in the left hand and a single C in the right hand, creating an open fifth in the bass. This is followed by the tonic chord in the treble. Both are marked with fermatas.

The performance problems encountered in this “scherzo” are successfully executing and voicing the rapid eighth-note figures that contain staccato and legato articulations, while sustaining longer thematic notes that appear in the same hand. Maintaining a delicate touch within leaps that cover a large range of the keyboard is equally demanding.

**Variation XVI. Lento**

*Number of measures: 14*

![Variation XVI. Lento](image)
This Variation is “another full-fledged expressive tune in the most eloquent Rachmaninoff style” (Darrell). It continues in the key of F minor, but contrasts in tempo and texture with the previous variation. The melodic character of the theme is emphasized, by presenting a variant of the theme in single notes (Boldt 21). The left hand contains an accompaniment of arpeggiated figures in sixteenths. Eventually the left hand moves to the bass, even though it continues to weave throughout the melody, frequently moving above the soprano note. This cross hand utilization creates problems in projecting the melody. The variation moves continuously into the next variation, containing its upbeat. The expressive nature of the variation requires a beautiful singing tone, full resonant sound within forte sections, and projection of the long melodic line.

**Variation XVII. Grave**

Number of measures: 18

This variation contains the character of a funeral march and utilizes two ideas from the theme: the rising second and the dotted figure of the third beat. It contains a dark character that contrasts dramatically to the preceding variation. This variation continues in the triple meter of the previous variation, but moves to the key of B-flat minor. It contains a thick, chordal texture that builds in intensity to include “Rachmaninoffian” chords, presented in triplets (Boldt 23). These chords contain up to four voices in each hand. With the restatement of the opening material, the texture is thicker and the melody appears in octaves in both hands. The variation ends pianissimo. The chromatic nature of the variation creates difficulty in its harmonic analysis (Boldt 23).

The dark mood of the variation requires a covered tone even within fortissimo passages. Large octave leaps appear that require proper gauging. Some of these octaves must be sustained throughout the measure, which may require the sostenuto pedal.

**Variation XVIII. Piu mosso**

Number of measures: 12

Continuing in B-flat minor, this variation returns to the common time of the theme. It begins with highly chromatic, triplet chordal figures in the right hand and duplet single notes in the left hand. The melody, presented in the tenor, is another
variant of the theme. Toward the end of the variation, the triplet chords are accompanied by a left hand line that includes large, rolled, five voice chords that span over two octaves. The variation ends quietly on a B-flat minor chord in first inversion.

The chromaticism of this variation creates chordal movement that is tedious to read in the right hand. The melodic material contained in the left hand must be properly voiced and projected even though it appears within a chordal texture. Tonal balance is a primary concern due to the thick texture of the work.

**Variation XIX. Allegro vivace**

Number of measures: 35

This variation, in the surprising key of A major, contrasts strongly with the B-flat minor key of the previous variation. It is another lengthy variation of “martial bombast” (Darrell). It is reminiscent of the “Marche des Davidsbundler contre les Philistins” contained in Schumann’s *Carnaval*. The variation begins with octaves on the opening downbeat, answered by large chords that are derived from the stepwise motion of the theme. It contains a thick, chordal texture, presenting chords with as many as five voices in each hand. This variation is closely related to Variation IX due to its offbeat chordal usage (Boldt 25). A contrasting section appears after the opening statement that is a “syncopated derivative” of the melody presented at the opening of the variation (Boldt 25). The opening section returns with some embellishment in a thicker texture. The maestoso ending quotes directly from the main theme’s ending in the soprano voice. The harmony of the original theme, which is now presented in a major mode, is obscured by the presentation of new chords (Boldt 26).

This variation requires strong chordal technique. Large, leaping chords and octaves must be accurately executed within the rapid tempo Rachmaninoff indicates. The middle section contains a sixteenth-note, left hand accompaniment that contains large intervallic spans. Within this figure thematic material is presented in double-stemmed eighth and quarter-notes in the tenor that must be sustained and voiced. Detailed articulation markings included in the work present additional technical challenges.

**Variation XX. Presto**

Number of measures: 107
This “demonic toccata” appears in the key of C-sharp minor (Darrell). Each measure of the original theme expands to eight measures in this variation (Boldt 26). The melodic element of the theme is presented in the tenor accompanied by a passage in the right hand that resembles the top voice of a “lopsided Minute Waltz with shifting accents” (Darrell). The double-stemmed quarter-notes of the theme occur on every other note within the 3/4 meter, creating a syncopated feeling. Broken chord figures appear simultaneously with the theme in the left hand. A cadenza is presented in the middle of the variation. The piece ends on a single C-sharp followed by a fermata over the last quarter rest.

The beginning right hand chromatic figure requires fast finger technique, while contracting the hand. When the right hand assumes the thematic material an extended hand position must be utilized. This creates difficulties due to the large leaps that must be played while sustaining held notes. Additionally difficult is the voicing required in these sustained, double-stemmed notes.

**Variation XXI. Andante. Piu vivo.**

Number of measures: 53

This variation consists of two sections: the opening expressive *Andante* section, presented in common time in the key of D-flat major, and a second *piu vivo* section, written in 3/4 time in the key of C major. The first section is marked cantabile and contains the theme in the tenor followed by imitation in octaves in the soprano. Each presentation of the thematic material appears simultaneously with broken chord sextuplets in the bass and chromatic, quintuplet figures in the alto. This treatment of an inner voice melody surrounded by figurations is similar to that found in Variation XVIII (Boldt 29). The figurations used in Variation XXI recall Variation VI (29).

The second section begins with an “ostinato” figure made up of dotted rhythms and built on the minor second contained in the opening of the theme. The right hand enters with descending chords in octaves that outline the minor second as well. A
staccato, sixteenth, double note passage appears in the right hand that is further
developed along with the figures originally presented in the right and left hand. This
increases in tempo and dynamics. The variation ends on a G major chord followed by a
sixteenth rest with a fermata.

The opening section of the variation presents cross rhythms of sextuplet and
 quintuplet figures. The thematic material presented within these figures must be
 adequately voiced, projected and sustained with the use of careful pedaling. The second
 section contains detailed articulation marks that must be adhered to within a texture made
 up of chords and double notes. Virtuosic passages of double notes are demanding,
especially within the tempo indicated.

**Variation XXII. Maestoso**

Number of measures: 120

This variation is the longest of the set and begins with the theme presented in thick
chords utilizing a double dotted rhythm. It is written in the form A, B1, B2, Interlude, A,
B and Coda (Boldt 31). It contains “its own derivative material [and] recapitulates
material from several other variations.(Boldt 31). The A section contains the opening
Maestoso section. The B1 section is found after the first repeat sign and is marked piano
and contains legato sextuplet sixteenth-notes. B2 contains the pianissimo, *leggiero*
section that consists of legato sixteenth sextuplets in the right hand and staccato chordal
figures of two sixteenths and an eighth in the left hand. The interlude is marked *un poco
piu vivo* and recalls material from Variation X and Variation XXI. (Boldt 31). B occurs
nine measures after A and contains three four bar phrases patterned after measures
twenty-one through twenty-four. The coda is marked *meno mosso* and starts pianissimo
with the theme in rolled chords accompanied by triplets in the bass and dotted rhythms in
the soprano. Eventually the coda presents a *Presto* section, containing sixteenth-note
chords in alternating hands. This section may be omitted if cuts are utilized. The ending
consists of C major chords interspersed with chromatic sixteenth figures that culminate
on repeated C major chords, followed by a grace-note made up of the C major chord in
second inversion and a C octave in both hands.

This variation contains large, thick chords that require a resonant sound.
Sextuplet figures consist of thematic, double-stemmed notes that must be properly voiced
and projected. The section marked *un poco piu vivo* contains quick passage work that
consists of double notes and rapid successions of large chords in both hands. Large
chordal leaps and thick, rolled chords that span three octaves require careful
manipulation. The final interlocking chordal figures are followed by thick chords and
sixteenth-note chromatic figures that demand exact articulation.

*Variations on a Theme of Corelli op. 42*
Rachmaninoff composed the Corelli Variations fourteen years after he wrote the Etudes Tableaux op. 39. During the period of time between the two works, his only compositions were the Fourth Piano Concerto op. 40 and Three Russian Songs for Chorus and Orchestra op. 41. With the composition of the Corelli Variations, Rachmaninoff began a period where “he remained true to himself, but... [utilized] a paring down of excess, both in his emotionalism and in the density of the music” (Dubal 388). This “simple, succinct and straightforward” work foreshadows the important Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini op. 43 (Keeley).

The Corelli Variations consist of twenty variations that are “conceived as a unity, with an intermezzo, in fact a cadenza, before the fourteenth variation and final rapid variations lead to a gentle coda” (Anderson). The first thirteen variations are all in D minor. They are followed by an Intermezzo that precedes two more variations in D-flat major. These D-flat major variations are the “heart of the work” (Matthew-Walker). The last five variations and coda return to the original key of D minor. Rachmaninoff premiered the work in Montreal on October 12, 1931. His biographer, Oskar von Riesemann, wrote of the New York premiere of this work, “It can claim a place of honor among the best and most famous variations, such as those of Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms” (238). Rachmaninoff offered optional cuts of Variations XI, XII and XIX.

**Theme:** Andante

Number of measures: 16

The theme of this set is “La Folia,” an early Portuguese dance. It was not composed by Corelli, but was a well known work that many composers of the baroque period used. These composers include J. S. Bach, Cherubini, D’Anglebert, Pasquini, and A. Scarlatti (Boldt 33). Later it was used by Liszt in Rhapsodie Espagnole (Boldt 33). Rachmaninoff mistakenly attributed it to Corelli, because of its use in one of his violin sonatas (Norris). Rachmaninoff’s use of the theme includes some supplementary notes that are usually chromatic (Boldt 33). Additionally, he changed the Adagio tempo contained in the violin sonata to Andante in this set of variations.

**Variation I. Poco piu mosso**

Number of measures: 16
This variation maintains most of the harmonies of the theme, presenting the melody in a lower register. Some altered rhythms added to the melody create syncopation. A texture contained in the inner voice consists of sixteenth-note figures that interweave through the melodic material. A third texture marked marcato appears in the bass, consisting primarily of single notes. It is presented after sixteenth rests, again creating a syncopated feeling.

Successful voicing of the theme is important, especially when the sixteenth-note figure interweaves through it. Tonal balance is necessary in projecting the three different textures that appear within the variation. Contrasting articulations between the top two legato textures and the bass staccato figure must be maintained.

**Variation II. L’istesso tempo**

Number of measures: 16

Continuing the sixteenth-note motion of the first variation, this variation returns to the original register of the theme and becomes more chromatic. A new dotted-note rhythm composed of an eighth-note followed by a sixteenth rest and sixteenth-note is emphasized throughout the variation. The outline of the melody is embellished by a texture that includes the dotted rhythm (Boldt 35). The primary challenge of this variation is projecting the detailed articulations while maintaining the delicate, leggiero touch indicated.

**Variation III. Tempo di Menuetto**

Number of measures: 16
In this variation Rachmaninoff uses melodic transformation to compress the theme’s two measure fragments into two or four beats (Boldt 36). The texture is thickened to include embellished, blocked chordal figures that are interrupted by sixteenth-note interjections. The register moves from the treble of the previous variation to include bass tones, primarily presented in octaves. The sixteenth-note interjections that contrast with thick chordal textures require dynamic variety and the use of color. Large blocked chords must be properly voiced and articulated. There are leaps between the textures that must be carefully gauged to keep the pulse constant within the work.

Variation IV. Andante
Number of measures: 16

This variation is similar to Variation XII of the Chopin Variations (Boldt 38). It becomes more solemn, returning to the original harmonic rhythm of the theme; however the harmonies are changed considerably. The altered harmony includes chords that are embellished with chromatic, grace-notes. These grace-note figures, related to the interjected material found in the previous variation, serve as a second texture presented along with the thematic material. As the variation continues the register expands between the two textures. Contrasts of sound must be utilized between the two textures. The mysterious nature of the variation should be enhanced by the careful use of pedal, color, and phrasing.

Variation V. Allegro (ma non tanto)
Number of measures: 16
This is the first fast variation that has appeared so far. It is marked *forte* and contains a highly articulated, *marcato* touch throughout. The first beat of each measure contains chords that continue in the harmonic structure of the theme (Boldt 39). These chords are followed by staccato triplet figures that frequently move quickly between registers.

It is important to maintain the *marcato* indication throughout the variation especially while adhering to detailed articulation marks. Quick register changes require careful gauging and manipulation. Strong rhythmic control is needed within meter changes.

**Variation VI. L’istesso tempo**
Number of measures: 16

Embellishing the harmonic aspect of the theme, this variation presents rapid, chromatic, chordal figures that continue the triplet motion of the previous variation. The *piano, leggero* and *staccato* indications show a contrast with the previous variation in dynamics as well as touch. The primary technical challenge of this variation is executing the fast chordal and double note triplet figures in an even and rhythmically controlled manner while the hands are closely positioned. Flexible wrists will help in avoiding tension.

**Variation VII. Vivace**
Number of measures: 18
The length of this variation is extended to eighteen measures, as opposed to the sixteen measure presentation of the theme and six previous variations. Sforzando pedal points, marked Laissez vibrer, occur at the beginning and middle of the variation. These are immediately followed by sixteenth figures that include double-stemmed held notes. The melody that appears in the double-stemmed notes is derived from the theme and bears some resemblance to Variation II (Boldt 43). The final chord is marked by a fermata, indicating the first definite ending so far.

Pedal points should be sustained by the sostenuto pedal or the coloristic use of the damper pedal. The sixteenth figures that appear in unison between the hands require a strong ensemble and careful articulation. Double-stemmed melodic notes must be carefully voiced and projected.

**Variation VIII. Adagio misterioso**

Number of measures: 15

Marked *Adagio misterioso*, this variation begins *piano*, contrasting with the previous variation in tempo and dynamics. It utilizes a lower register than the previous variation, giving a “keyboard color” that contrasts with the earlier one (Boldt 45). The melodic line is present in this variation but is carefully obscured within a new melody made up of chromatic triplet figures and a dotted figure derived from Variation IV (Boldt 45). The bass consists of staccato octaves that contain quarter-notes and a double dotted rhythm. The chromaticism of the second part of the variation allows the tonal center to “stray from a firm D minor” before it ends on a D octave (Boldt 45). A dark, covered sound is needed to project the mysterious nature of this variation. This is the first variation to contain the terms *ritardando* and *a tempo* and these markings must be carefully adhered to.

**Variation IX. Un poco meno mosso**

Number of measures: 19
This variation continues in the mysterious mood of the previous variation. It consists of a chordal texture, primarily in the left hand and sixteenth-note melodic arpeggiated figures in the right hand. The left hand chordal treatment contains an emphasis on half-step chromaticism in the outer voices. The right hand figure is atmospheric in nature, containing very little melodic interest. The variation ends on the leading tone of C-sharp. The relationship between this variation and the theme is minimal (Boldt 47).

This variation primarily deals with interpretive ideas. The mysterious and coloristic mood should be carefully projected within a true legato sound. Eventually the arpeggiated figures include held notes that require voicing and projection.

**Variation X. Allegro scherzando**

Number of measures: 25

In his dissertation on the Variations, Kenwyn Boldt states that this is the most improvisatory and free variation with respect to the theme’s structure so far (49). It contains a scherzo character and begins in the treble register as in Variations, II, IV and VI. This character is created by the use of a new rhythmic pattern consisting of sixteenths and eighths, divided between the hands. A “measured cadenza” appears in the middle of the variation that offers the most technically challenging material thus far, a double note descending scalar passage presented in both hands (Darrell). Strong rhythmic control must be maintained in presenting this highly rhythmic variation. Other technical challenges occur in the cadenza. These are repeated note figures, chromatic scales with the hands in close position and interlocking, alternating double note figures.

**Variation XI. Allegro vivace**

Number of measures: 16
Rachmaninoff indicated that this variation might be omitted if cuts are needed. It is another variation that includes a strong rhythmic figure that permeates the work. This figure is made up of sixteenths and eighth-notes, divided between the hands. The variation also contains an arpeggiated figure, similar to the one found in Variation IX (Boldt 49). Technical challenges in this variation are the quick movements between registers, cross rhythms, rapid execution of double notes and chordal figures and the presentation of interlocking, alternating chords.

**Variation XII. L’istesso tempo**

Number of measures: 23

This variation may also be omitted if necessary. Continuing in the rhythmic character of the previous two variations, it presents a left hand figure made up of “thunderous” marcato octaves in the bass (Matthew-Walker). These alternate with right hand chords that move chromatically. The bass line of the last six and a half bars is derived from the marcato bass line of Variation I (Boldt 53). Articulation and dynamics are important in maintaining the marcato indication of the variation. Later there are notes that appear in the right hand that must be sustained during the execution of three-note chords within the same hand.

**Variation XIII. Agitato.**

Number of measures: 17
The constant dotted rhythm figure of an eighth-note followed by a sixteenth rest, a sixteenth-note and an eighth-note permeates this variation. The right hand contains a thick texture of chords that contain up to four voices. The left hand figure includes large leaps that contain double notes and octaves. At the tempo indicated, these figures are difficult to execute and require a strong chordal technique and rhythmic control. Gauging leaps will be benefited by voicing both figures to the top note.

**Intermezzo. A tempo rubato (marcato)**

Number of measures: 13

Matthew-Walker states that this Intermezzo is actually an improvisatory cadenza in the form of a recitative that introduces the “heart of the work,” the two variations that follow in D-flat major. Presented in the form of a free fantasia, this interlude serves as a dividing point in the set of variations. The basic melodic idea of the interlude is an embellished half-step (Boldt 57). This idea alternates with rolled chords divided between the hands, giving the impression of a recitative. Brilliant cadenzas interrupt the recitative sections that contain arpeggiated and chromatic scalar figures. The cadenzas contained within the variation consist primarily of arpeggiated figures and chromatic passages. These fit well within the hand, but require careful articulation and delicacy when indicated.

**Variation XIV. Andante (come prima)**

Number of measures: 16
This variation contains “rich block harmonies” and presents the melody of the theme with embellishments in the new key of D-flat major (Boldt 58). It is highly expressive and requires a singing, cantabile tone. It is important to voice the melody that appears in the chordal texture as well as properly maintain the long, melodic line. The use of color will help with dynamic variance.

Variation XV. L’istesso tempo
Number of measures 26

This variation maintains the original contour of the melody but elaborates on it (Boldt 59). The melodic material is presented in moving eighth-notes within a 9/8 meter, creating a triplet effect. The left hand contains a broken chord triplet figure that contains double-stemmed quarter-notes on the first eighth-note of each triplet.

This variation is a typical Rachmaninoff nocturne that requires a singing tone and projection of the long melodic line. The left hand figure contains double-stemmed notes that must be sustained as well as voiced. This is challenging due to the double notes contained in the triplet figure. The span of the left hand figure gets larger and more difficult to sustain as the variation progresses.

Variation XVI. Allegro vivace
Number of measures: 15

This variation returns to the highly rhythmic character presented in the four variations that preceded the Intermezzo. The rhythmic figure contained in Variation XVI includes eighth-note upbeat and dotted rhythmic figures followed by interjections of chromatic triplet sixteenths in the bass. The use of interjections of this nature can be found in Variations II, X, and XI (Boldt 60). The interjections of Variation XVI are expanded later in the work to include cross hand technique.

This variation moves about the keyboard freely, requiring rapid shifts and positioning of the hands. Control is needed to maintain the strong rhythmic pulse of the
variation. Careful tonal shading and articulation will enhance the presentation of the three textures that appear in the variation.

**Variation XVII. Meno mosso**  
Number of measures: 23

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\[ \text{Meno mosso} \]
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This variation contains very simple harmonies and presents a rhythmic figure that expands on the rhythm of two sixteenths and an eighth presented in the previous variation (Boldt 61). The melody, an augmentation of the theme, is accompanied by the bass figure that contains the new rhythmic figure of an eighth-note and triplet sixteenths followed by three more eighth-notes. The melody disappears in the final four measures, which now presents the rhythmic figure consisting of thirty-second-notes. The primary challenge of this variation is maintaining the articulated rhythmic figure of the left hand while projecting the long, expressive, melodic line of the right hand.

**Variation XVIII. Allegro con brio**  
Number of measures: 12

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\[ \text{Allegro con brio} \]
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This variation presents the same rhythm of Variation XIII and corresponds harmonically with the theme. Both variations contain rapid, chordal movement within the rhythmic figures; however the chordal figures presented in Variation XVIII involve larger leaps. An example of this is the chordal figures of the first two measures that cover an interval of a twelfth (Boldt 62). An unusual aspect concerning this variation is that its only dynamic marking is the forte at the beginning and middle of the work.

Technical problems of this variation are similar to Variation XIII; however the demands of this later variation are much greater. In addition to the utilization of a larger keyboard range, it contains more successions of thick chords. A strong chordal technique as well as rhythmic control is necessary to successfully perform the variation.

**Variation XIX. Piu mosso. Agitato**  
Number of measures: 17

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\[ \text{Piu mosso. Agitato} \]
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This variation is another that may be omitted if necessary. It continues in the rhythmic tradition of the previous variation, presenting a similar pattern but expanding the sixteenth-note of the former variation to two thirty-second-notes. The chordal figures become wider in range and more difficult to execute due to the rapid shifts of the hands. Delicacy, required within several sections marked \textit{piano}, must be maintained and an additional challenge is presented in the chordal figures. Eventually the dynamics increase to a fortissimo \textit{marcato} ending. The beginning eighths of each triplet figure contain a thick texture of chords that sometimes contain four notes. Approximately halfway through the variation the texture changes to include sextuplet broken chord figures in the right hand, accompanied by blocked chords and double notes in the left hand. The variation ends with a chromatic descending figure made up of large four-note chords in the right hand and chords that vary between three and four voices, as well as octaves in the left hand.

This variation is highly demanding due to the opening thirty-second note figures that appear in several different registers. The second section contains rapid sextuplets that consist of double notes and chords. In addition to being technically difficult these passages require adequate voicing and projection. The final descending chromatic chordal passage involves rapid successions of thick chords that contain quick harmonic changes. The composer offers a simpler optional version, if needed.

\textbf{Variation XX. Piu mosso}

Number of measures: 27
This final variation continues to exploit the rhythmic figure found in Variations XVIII and XVIV, as well as Variation XIII. It is considered by some the most demanding of the set because of its extreme leaps. The rhythmic figure in the variation contains leaping octaves. Eventually thick chords on the downbeat of each measure are sustained while the dotted rhythm figures continue. The triplet figures evolve into rapid successions of thick chords, which require careful manipulation. The variation ends with D octaves in the lower register of the piano, beginning fortissimo and eventually getting softer and slower. The last resounding D octave moves continuously to the coda.

**Coda. Andante**

Number of measures: 17

The coda returns to a slower, melodic presentation in the right hand accompanied by a triplet figure in the left hand containing large intervallic spans. Eventually the last four measures of the original melody are stated at the end of the variation (Boldt 65). The piece ends with two D-minor chords presented pianissimo. The harmony contained in this coda is varied, containing many non-chordal tones. The performance of the coda should be lyrical and include projections of the long melodic lines. Proper emphasis should be given when the theme appears in the last measures and concludes this “brilliant, well-rounded work” (Faurot 237).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Angela Edwards Glover received the Bachelor of Music degree from Peabody Conservatory of Music and the Master of Music degree from Florida State University. Both of these degrees are in piano performance. She has studied with Fernando Laires, Elizabeth Katzenellenboggen, Ellen Mack, Richard Cass, Mary Lou Wesley Krosnick, Edward Kilenyi, and James Streem. She has performed in master classes under such renowned pianists as Leon Fleisher, Gilbert Kalish, and Natalie Hinderas. Glover was awarded the Alexander Sklarevski Piano Award for excellence in performance by the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music. She has received additional prizes in the Naftzger Competition, the International Piano Recording Competition, the Florida Symphony Young Artist Competition, and the Jacksonville Music Teachers Association Young Artist Competition. As a result of winning the Doctoral Concerto Competition at Florida State University, she performed the Rachmaninoff Third Piano Concerto with the University Symphony Orchestra. In addition to her many appearances as a soloist and chamber musician throughout the United States, she has premiered new piano works at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery, Alabama and the New Music Festival in Tallahassee, Florida.

Glover was selected for the position of staff accompanist for the Jacksonville Opera Company and has held ranked teaching positions on the piano faculties of Gunston School in Centreville, Maryland and Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, Missouri. Currently she resides in Dothan, Alabama with her husband and two children and is Associate Professor of Piano at the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville.