

A STYLISTIC AND TECHNICAL ANALYSIS OF

SKRYABIN'S ETUDES OP. 8

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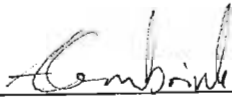
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by

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I DECLARE THAT, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED,

THIS IS MY OWN ORIGINAL WORK.

 (Signed)

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Preface

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr David Smith for his constant enthusiasm, interest and excellent advice in all stages of the preparation of this study. I also want to thank my piano teacher Mrs Isabella Stengel without whom I could not have come this far. The skills I applied in this study were acquired directly through her.

My gratitude extends also to the staff of the Eleanor Bonnar Music Library, especially Mrs Rika Engelbrecht, who could, with unfailing patience and accuracy, track down any sources I required, and would even point out some I might have been unaware of.

Thank you to my parents, for their constant support, encouragement and interest.

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INTRODUCTION

In preparing Skryabin piano works for performances, I was confronted by a wholly unique approach to the keyboard. A new way of treating the learning process was revealed to me in my efforts to enter fully into the composer's world. My interest in Skryabin's music led me to many discoveries which are included in this study. As a result of these discoveries my performances were altered.

My research was performance-oriented : the study serves as a "handbook" to Skryabin's 12 Etudes op. 8 (1894) of use to pianists and teachers. Wherever possible I have tried to point out different technical and interpretative options. As I am a small-handed pianist, others with a similar affliction will find many comments aimed at transcending this perceived limitation. These comments are the results of my personal practical experience with the etudes.

The study aims at presenting Skryabin's very important contribution to the piano literature, and avoids the concentration of most writers on his accredited mystical and spiritual beliefs. In some quarters Skryabin used to be regarded as "slightly suspect" and many hold the view that he went "quite off the rails". His works are often dismissed as Chopin imitations. This study challenges these views by examining the true stylistic and technical heritage of Skryabin's work. I wanted to release Skryabin from the incense pit into which he had been flung by the likes of Austin, Asafyev and Blyth, there to be devoured by sphinxes, demons and other representatives of late nineteenth-century decadence.

The study falls into two chapters. The first deals with general stylistic and style-technical issues. The second chapter concentrates on the technical issues, with reference to the matters of interpretation not yet discussed in the first chapter. This chapter includes suggested practice methods to overcome specific technical issues. Many of these were taught to me by Mrs Isabella Stengel. The study does not degenerate into a purely harmonic or synaesthetic analysis, but these issues are taken into account where they could affect the outcome of the actual performance.

While the study is profusely illustrated with musical examples, it is advisable to have to hand a copy of the score, preferably with bar numbers. The editions dealt with are :

the Dover Edition	:	Igumnov and Milstein (eds.)
the Belayev Edition	:	Belayev (ed.)
the Kay Edition	:	Paul Kay (ed.)
the Peters Edition	:	Günter Phillip (ed.).

Abbreviations used throughout this study include :

LH Left Hand
RH Right Hand
B Bar
b Beat

for example (B10 b2) (Bar 10 beat 2)
for example (B10 b2-3) (Bar 10 beats 2 to 3).

I humbly wish that this study might encourage performance of not only this opus, but all of Skryabin's works. Admittedly concert artists cannot explore unfamiliar works as freely as they might like. Teachers in universities and colleges can and should have the broadest possible knowledge of the repertoire. Students' and lecturers' recital programmes, however, often only duplicate the standard programmes found in concert halls and on recordings. Actually, the performed piano repertoire has changed very little in over half-a-century. The constant repetition of a core repertoire causes the core to be trimmed at the edges. If we do not actively expand the standard repertoire, we face the real prospect of a dying art.

Chapter 1

1. PEDALLING

Skryabin's particular use of the sostenuto and una corda pedals was apparent already in his youth. He understood the mechanical action from an early age and he improvised so much that he wore holes in many of his shoes [Brook, p.174]. Wilfred Mellers comments on the use of pedal in the later works : "It depends on the pedal effects of the modern grand piano, which dominates all Skryabin's musical thought, even that of the orchestra" [Mellers, 1952, p.121]. The same can apply to the earlier music. The sostenuto pedal fulfills a timbral function in Skryabin's music. Its use is closely linked to the harmonic nature of Skryabin's style. The ability of the pedal to sustain notes no longer held by the fingers is employed by Skryabin to create rich, full sounds not limited by the reach of the hand, or by what can be played in quick succession. It creates a canvas onto which various colours can be added without eliminating the existing ones. A flat canvas is however far too concrete an example of the sound the pianist is required to conjure from the instrument. The adding of tones held in the pedal creates a harmonic richness that is central to Skryabin's writing throughout his life.

Pedalling in late romantic piano music is so complex that it often resists notation and is so basic to the style that its use is often taken for granted. Composers appeared not yet to have reached the need for the complex indications often found in twentieth century music. The paucity of pedal indications in Skryabin's scores presents the pianist with formidable interpretative and notational problems. The pedalling that is indicated can often be quite startling in its effect. It appears that specific pedal indications were given by Skryabin to avoid confusion, as in the Feuillet d'album op. 58. Example I contains Skryabin's own pedal indications which demand the depression of the pedal for relatively long periods of time.

EXAMPLE 1

Feuillet d'album op. 58, Bars 1-3

Con delicatezza.

pp p

legato

3

* Ped

If pedalling which aims at extreme clarity of the melodic line - such as may be suited to a Chopin Nocturne - is adopted, the pedal would be lifted more often, erasing from the palette the colours just created. The pedalling in Example 2 might bear

closer resemblance to performance practice at the end of the twentieth century than to Skryabin's intention.

EXAMPLE 2

Feuillet d'album op. 58, Bars 1-3

Con delicatezza.

The musical score for Example 2 consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked 'Con delicatezza'. The piano part begins with a *pp* dynamic, followed by a *p* dynamic. The bass part is marked *legato* and *p*. Below the bass staff, there are several groups of dynamic markings: 'P', 'P P P', 'P P P', and 'P P P P P'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and a triplet in the piano part.

Yet, the experience of melodically clean playing of music from different periods could influence the pianist to reject Skryabin's pedalling in favour of a "cleaner" result. Performance of the above two examples will conjure up two markedly different worlds of sonority. Randlett describes Skryabin's pedal notations as "cautionary in nature" [Randlett, 1970 - 71, p.23]. They do indeed tend to remind the performer not to release certain notes, often bass notes, which harmonically support the entire sonority. Various examples exist where the length of the written note does not necessarily indicate the length of the sound. Rich and lengthy pedal marks are also not a feature only of the late works but occur as early as the Mazurkas, op. 3. Example 3 contains examples of Skryabin's specific pedal indications.

EXAMPLE 3

3(a) Mazurka op. 3 no. 4, Bars 1-2

The musical score for Example 3(a) consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is marked 'dolce'. The piano part begins with a *p* dynamic. The bass part has several notes with specific pedal markings: a wavy line, an asterisk, and another wavy line. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs and ties.

3(b) Prelude op. 22 no 4, Bars 1-4

The musical score for Example 3(b) consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is marked 'Andantino' with a tempo of 160. The piano part begins with a *p* dynamic. The bass part has several notes with specific pedal markings: a wavy line and an asterisk. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and triplets.

3(c) Sonata no. 7 op. 64, Bars 1-4

Allegro

mp *cresc.* *f*

m.s. *mysterieusement sonore* *m.s.*

Ped ** Ped*

3(d) Sonata no. 5 op. 53

Ped *

3(e) Etude op. 8 no. 10, Bars 11-13

Ped

Half- and quarter-pedalling are said to have been used by Scriabin in performance of his own works, yet are not indicated anywhere in his music. These can lighten the texture somewhat while maintaining the authority of the bass note. Their indication could prove helpful in throwing some light onto the "colouristic vagueness" that Daniel regards as the opposite extreme to Stravinsky [Daniel p.165] yet it is precisely that "vagueness" that is associated with Scriabin and which

influenced so many musicians including Bix Beiderbecke, especially the 1927 song In a Mist [Schuller, p.191].

In the available editions it appears that the pedalling marks are the composer's : it is however possible that engravers' errors were not corrected by Skryabin.

Playing Skryabin without pedal is virtually inconceivable, yet the Etude op. 8 no. 7 can take on an unusual character if the pedal is used sparingly in its outer sections. His liberal use of the pedals can also be interpreted as a means of conquering limitations in himself and his instrument. The pedal extends the reach of the hand. Notes played in succession in the same pedal create a harmonic simultaneity that includes possibilities beyond the capabilities of the hands. It creates the illusion of legato over wide leaps and stretches which adds body to the texture. The pedal is also a means of retarding the piano's very obvious limitation : that of immediate decay of the tone once it is produced.

The pedal, though, temporarily sustains only the initial attack. Skryabin constantly devised figurations to prevent the sound decay. These include trills, tremoli, reiterated arpeggi, repeated chords and melodic lines supported by pulsing chords. These are discussed under styles of accompaniment. Their reliance on the pedal goes without saying. Bowers identifies the pedal as the main means of Skryabin's quest "*for non-piano effects, to make the piano a kind of celestial orchestra of unearthly sounds*" [Bowers, 1970 - 1971, p.14].

Virtually no information exists on Skryabin's use of the *una corda* pedal, other than that he did use it. The sound quality of the Welte-Mignon recordings of his own works are such that it is all but impossible to discern its use. It is therefore to be considered a possibility where appropriate while bearing in mind that that pedal dampens the sound. The muffled quality that results might contrast overly with Skryabin's concept of a bright piano tone - so discernible in his own playing - if it were to be inappropriately applied.

It is also to be noted that Skryabin was not totally reliant purely on the pedal and played works such as Haydn's F minor Variations (1793) without pedal. This suggests that the pedal was used with purely colouristic intent and rarely as a crutch to support a mediocre technique.

2. TEMPO

Tempo is not a musical parameter that can be isolated from other factors such as sound quality, volume, character or even pianistic figuration. Yet in Skryabin's music such variation is possible that some of the metronome markings pose more questions than they answer. This fact is testified to by different performance timings of the Sonata no. 8 op. 66. Michael Ponti's recording for Turnabout has a duration of 8'40". Igor Zhukov's Melodiya performance lasts 16'28". Yet, according to Michael Stewart, "both have the power to excite and compel" [Stewart, 1991, p68]. There are no metronome markings in this work, Skryabin's longest in the genre. Skryabin's tempo indications are given as each new section commences : Lento, Allegro Agitato, Molto più vivo, Allargando, Allegro and so on. Often these tempo indications are guides towards the interpretation of rubato, which by virtue of its complexity is discussed separately. The changes of tempo are often, but not always, accompanied by a double bar line. Frequent examples of this occur in the Sonata no. 8.

The Etudes op. 8 are formally much simpler works and their relative brevity makes them structurally much clearer than the later sonatas.

As far as can be ascertained the metronome markings are Skryabin's own. These were added to his works on the insistence of his first patron and publisher, Mitrofan Belayev. In a letter dated 1895 Skryabin writes to Belayev : "Will send the *impromptus* today [later published as op. 12]. I put metronome marks as you suggest, although it is virtually useless to do so. In the second one, the tempo constantly changes" [Bowers, 1969, vol. 1, p.194]. This example suggests that Skryabin's indications can be seen as little more than a rough guide to the overall impression of the tempo. The majority of Skryabin's tempo markings appear to fall in either the very slow or very fast speeds. Skryabin's dissatisfaction with the potential rigidity of metronome markings is evident in the later works : the last 6 sonatas and all the preludes from opp. 51 to 74 contain no metronome markings. In these works Skryabin's indications such as "joyeux", "trionphant" and "mystérieuses" indicate the emotional communication required. The tempo is therefore determined by the need for a specific mood to be conveyed.

In the earlier works Skryabin's indications are remarkably consistent, despite their apparently extreme demands. It is to be noted that Skryabin often considered "Andante" to mean a slower speed than "Lento". The third movement of his Symphony no. 2 op. 29 is marked "Andante", yet with a very slow metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 44$. This tempo is not unusual in Skryabin whose Andante can be as fast as $\text{♩} = 96 - 100$ in the Prelude op. 11 no. 11. The metronome markings cannot simply be removed from their musical context. The hearer might experience two works as being

remarkably similar in content and character even if the basic speeds are mathematically different.

Skryabin's Andantes are usually of a slow, unhurried and reflective nature. The literal meaning of the Italian term Andante, which is "going" or "walking" is related to the broader social and national context by Eaglefield-Hull who writes : "*[W]e must remember that the Russian - even the soldier on the march - walks very slowly*" [Eaglefield-Hull, 1927, p.174]. This perception is shared by Vladimir Ashkenazy who feels that "*everything there moves so slowly, just like a lumbering bear*" [Mach, 1981, p.22].

There are occasional discrepancies in metronome markings in the same tempo designation such as Andante Cantabile. The Prelude op. 11 no. 5 is marked $\text{♩} = 40$ and the Etude op. 8 no. 11 is marked $\text{♩} = 63$. This knowledge suggests that the prelude could conceivably move more quickly and performances have shown that it is indeed desirable to play the etude slower than the tempo indication, within the limits of good taste and the requirements of the music. A distinction should also be made between works designated as Andante Cantabile and those designated as Andante, with Cantabile as a technical instruction such as the Etude op. 42 no. 4. The exact metronome marking then seems to be of less importance than the terms designating the mood or character such as "A capriccio" (op. 8 no. 2) "Tempestoso" (op. 8 no. 3) or "Con grazia" (op. 8 no. 6) as much in the slow as in the fast speeds.

The danger exists of dragging even the slow tempi. Bowers relates an incident when a young Julius Isserly played the Prelude op. 11 no. 5 to Skryabin himself. He took it at half the speed, roughly $\text{♩} = 20$ instead of $\text{♩} = 44$. Skryabin said "You should play it twice as fast." "But this is my interpretation," Isserly retorted. "But this is MY music," Skryabin shouted back [Bowers, 1970 - 1971, p.14].

Many of Skryabin's fast tempi seem excessive due to the tremendous difficulty they often present. The above incident should prevent excess trimming of the tempo in service of "interpretation". It should also be borne in mind that Skryabin was often criticised for playing too softly [Bowers, 1969, vol. 2, p.233]. An additional characteristic of his playing was that his hands were always close to the keyboard, giving the appearance of letting his fingers "lightly flutter over" the keyboard [Pasternak, 1972, p.1173]. As Skryabin could give the impression of big sounds in this way, it suggests that he did not lift his arms to get more volume, but kept the vertical distance from the keyboard as close as possible. Pianists often misconceive the means for producing big tone and use too much height to add more force to the downward thrust of the arm. While this does produce more volume, it has a negative influence on the speed as more time is needed for the vertical movements. It is therefore advised that pianists observe the quality of

sound and the technique they use before they reduce the metronome marking, however relative it may be.

It is also suggested that fast passages be practised softly at first until the desired tempi are reached and only then gradually increase the arm/hand weight to eventually reach the required dynamic.

The complexity of his music might raise the issue of performing fast music at a slower speed to enhance audience perception and assimilation. It stands to reason that the faster the speed the clearer the pedalling and structure of a work should be to make it comprehensible to a first-time hearer. The fast tempo is not the priority however, but the communication of the music. The tempo should be viewed as only one of various tools to achieve that end.

A study in Skryabin's melodic tempi done in the then Soviet Union rather naively suggests that 60% of his music is "fast", 30% "slow" and 10% "medium" [Bowers, 1969, vol. I, p.90]. One has severe doubts that such information would be of any use whatsoever to a pianist in performance.

To MacDonald, "a certain mindless abandon always adds a dimension to this music" [MacDonald, 1983, p.554]. This, he feels, lies partly in the tempo. "Playing it safe" can make the music lose much of its spark and vitality.

The issue of Skryabin as performer is discussed later, but it is interesting to note that he seems in performance to have changed as many of the tempo markings as those he did not. His Welte-Mignon recording of the Etude op. 8 no. 12 is played at $\text{♩} = \text{ca.}88$ rather than his designated $\text{♩} = 100 - 112$, while his performance of the Poème in F[♯] major op. 32 is played at the designated $\text{♩} = 50$.

The metronome markings also do not take into account Skryabin's tendency to treat *accelerando* and *crescendo* as synonymous. This appears to be a pianist's flaw rather than a composer's concept. Skryabin's reason for placing so few indications in the score is partly due to the fact that he changed so many details in performance.

There occasionally occurs the need to change tempo in a work which is not accounted for by the tempo indications or the use of *rubato*. These changes are related to the form of certain works such as the Etudes op. 8 as well as the material. Skryabin's penchant for ternary forms will become apparent in the technical analysis of the etudes. It is characteristic of this set that the middle section contrasts with the outer sections and tends to contain more lyrical material. It is often very passionate, but inhabits a new emotional world, one which the listener is not always invited into fully if it is played at the same speed as the outer sections. (The linking of the

sections is discussed in the analysis.) It is often acceptable - if not desirable - to play the middle section slower. Bridge passages on either side provide ample opportunity for tempo adjustments. These should of course not be exaggerated but will reflect an awareness of the emotional content of the music and the most appropriate form and tempo through which it finds expression.

The middle sections of op. 8 nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 12 are good examples of appropriate tempo changes not indicated directly in the score as is done in nos. 7, 8, and 9.

3. PERFORMANCES BY SKRYABIN AND OTHERS AS A GUIDE TO INTERPRETATION

3.1 RECORDING AND TRADITION

Faubion Bowers points out the need for familiarising oneself with the tradition of Skryabin interpretation when he writes : "*It is obligatory to hear good Scriabin before tackling it yourself: not only because there is a Scriabin tradition and past experiences to counter any helter-skelter approach to him, but especially because there is a good deal of abusive, poor playing of Scriabin at present*" [Bowers, 1978, p.123]. That statement, two decades old, still holds true today, though there are many more recordings entering the catalogues in the present Skryabin "revival".

Distinguishing mannerism from tradition is an issue pianists must tackle to determine the validity of their own performances. The "Skryabin Tradition" is discerned via a thorough gleaning of recordings and concert reviews. A question raised by Julian Haylock in an article on the reviewing of recordings is whether the standard for judging a recording is actually how it matched up to the composer's concept or merely how it compares with other performances. He claims that we "*instinctively adjust our standard to a mean recording norm If people feel they can produce something which will stand up to repeated inspection one should expect only the very best. Yet in the whole of recorded history, how many recordings truly satisfy all the major parameters and do so consistently?*" [Haylock, p.6]

3.2 RECORDING EXPERIMENTS

In judging Skryabin recordings, one deals with different traditions : it is obvious that contemporary culture is much more recording-oriented than was the case at the beginning of the century. The wealth of modern commercial recordings does not always give a true reflection of the performance situation or tradition. It is notable that in operatic works singers tackle works they could never perform on stage. (This is especially noticeable with lyric singers recording the more dramatic repertoire). In certain chamber music recordings problems of balance are often solved by adjusting recording levels, thus creating a musical realisation impossible in a concert hall.

Glenn Gould made some highly controversial experimental recordings of some Skryabin piano works including the Sonata no. 5 and selected preludes, in which, unlike most commercial recordings, including most of his own, a whole sequence of different microphone perspectives was employed. Microphones were placed at different positions and distances from the instrument, some very close like

jazz pickups, some right inside the piano, some further away (as Gould put it, "a nice view from the balcony") [Friedrich, p229]. The various perspectives were then electronically manipulated to provide a recording which no pianist could hope to reproduce in a concert hall. The results were positively received though they have never been made commercially available. In answer to the question of the need for such creative electronics Gould merely replied that it was done "because I don't think that any other composer has ever needed that help from technology as badly as Scriabin does" [Friedrich, pp.229-230]. In praising the results of his recording broadcast on television, Joseph McLellan of the Washington "Post" quotes sound technician Andrew Kazdin : "Kazdin calls it 'acoustic orchestration' and explains that the performance was recorded 'in a simultaneous variety of perspectives' and then edited to give each passage its ideal acoustic context, like a movie camera shifting from long shots to closeups It works particularly well with Gould's performance, which also examines the music in a simultaneous variety of perspectives" [Friedrich, p.254].

It appears pointless to muse on what Skryabin's reactions might have been to all this, but given his extremely self-centred nature one cannot help thinking that he might have been terribly pleased with all the loving care, devotion and above all, attention that was lavished on his music!

3.3 SKRYABIN AS PIANIST

It then appears ironic that Skryabin's recorded legacy suffers from the most primitive of recording situations. His only recorded performances were seven playerpiano rolls for Phonola and the Welte-Mignon Company in Leipzig recorded in 1910. In 1903 Welte-Mignon invented a machine to be attached to a piano which paper-recorded a performance by means of keys puncturing holes. These rolls, performed by a modern piano, have recently been made commercially available. They reflect the dynamics and actual time lapse from note to note quite accurately. According to advertising material the pedalling is said to be authentic, although this is not easily verifiable. We still hear only an approximation of Skryabin's actual playing. At the time of the recording Skryabin was physically unwell, his marriage was under strain, and he was exhausted from an excessively arduous concert tour. His performance turned out to be highly erratic.

He recorded the following works : Sonatas nos. 2 and 3, 4 Preludes op. 11 (G^b major, E^b minor, C[#] minor, G[#] minor), 2 Preludes op. 17 (D^b major, B minor), Prelude op. 22 (G[#] minor), 2 Etudes op. 8 (A^b major, D[#] minor), 3 Mazurkas op. 25 (F major, E minor, C[#] minor), Mazurka op. 40 (F[#] major), 2 Poèmes op. 32, Albumleaf op. 45 and Désir op. 57.

Skryabin's choice of erratic tempos are astounding. The rhythms is distorted to such an extent that the musical sense in today's perception is frequently disregarded. The sound is intimate even if the Welte-Mignon effects a dehumanisation of the performance. These brief recordings confirm many of the writings on Skryabin as pianist. Although he never played any music but his own after his graduation recital he was still considered a concert pianist who also composed. There can be no question that Skryabin as a performer suffered from certain defects. His curious rhythmic distortion is frequently noted. [See also section on *Tempo Rubato*.] It adds to the free improvisatory feeling he was often praised for. He changed details in the score from performance to performance.

Skryabin's playing technique is discussed in The New Enigma [Bowers, 1973, pp.119-202]. It appears that Skryabin had serious technical difficulties : tension, absence of true legato and limited dynamics appear to be the main trouble areas. Bowers quotes the highly respected Russian teacher N.N. Cherkass in a published monograph Skryabin as Pianist and Piano Composer (1916) who warns dryly that Skryabin's own "*performances should not be the authority for playing his music ... better pianists can better sculpture his music*" [Bowers, 1973 p.201]. Cherkass comments on Skryabin's innate sensitivity to harmonic clarity and separation of voices : "*When you look at his harmonies, they seem muddled, and yet, when you hear him play, they for some reason sound clear*" [Bowers, 1973 p.202].

He was much praised for his pedal effects (see the section on pedalling) and for his decisive approaches to climaxes. Skryabin rarely played on exclusive invitation : his socialist ideals caused him to refuse to play for Tsar Nikolai II for example, but he did play for Tolstoy who commented on his "sincerity" [Bowers, 1969, vol. 1 p.197]. His patron Belayev wished that Skryabin might play his compositions so superbly "*that his performances will form the basis of a future tradition*" [Bowers, 1969, vol. 1 p.197]. Belayev's comments appear to reflect his doubt as to the validity of the tradition ensuing from Skryabin's performances.

Skryabin's recordings of some of the preludes document another of his pianistic mannerisms. Skryabin appears to equate crescendo with accelerando. Occasionally this need not be a great shortcoming as in the case of the Prelude op. 11 no. 1, bars 14 to 18. Only crescendo is indicated in the score but Skryabin increases speed throughout the entire passage, to a climactic point in the work. Here the mannerism makes musical sense and the climax is well judged. In the same prelude the rhythmic interplay between

groups of two and three quavers is emphasized.

Skryabin's poignant performance of the Prelude op. 11 no. 2 reveals that his music need not always be awash in abundant pedal. John Clark feels that this is unusual for Skryabin, and that, combined with the use of the *una corda* pedal, this approach "intensifies the bleak emotional atmosphere of the work" [Clark, p.265]. Whatever the state of Skryabin's technical hygiene, his performance of the difficult fourteenth Prelude from op. 11 is exciting and full of élan. His playing is never perfunctory and his performance of the Prelude op. 22 no. 1, a melancholy Russian dirge, is exceptionally moving. The sound is bright but rarely overbearing. Perhaps the amount of sound used depended on the work. A New York critic commented on the crispness of his playing and noted that he played the solo Allegro de Concert "with more body of tone than he used in his concerto" [Bowers, 1969, vol. 2, p.151].

It should also be mentioned that two events directly affected his pianistic ability and his compositional development. Skryabin damaged his right hand on two occasions : once as a child he was knocked down by a taxi and his right collarbone was broken. The other occasion was in 1891 when he developed severe tendonitis in the right hand which almost destroyed his career as virtuoso. For the rest of his life Skryabin was neurotic about the possibility of the tendonitis returning and frequently complained of pain in the hand. This could be why some critics remarked on his right hand often being too soft. The result of this incident on Skryabin's state of emotions is to be seen much more directly in the defiant Piano Sonata no. 1 op. 6 than in the more often- quoted Prelude and Nocturne op. 9 for the left hand alone. These were Skryabin's only contributions to the left-hand repertoire, apart from a concert-waltz which he destroyed out of embarrassment at its superficiality.

Skryabin's performances attracted wide attention. Boris Pasternak wrote of Skryabin : "He played - it can't be put into words!" [Mallac, p.36] Pasternak's infatuation with Skryabin is well documented. Pasternak hinted that Skryabin's technique resulted in his style and praised him for being "successful in fostering the irruption of reality into the texture of [his] art, without being primarily concerned with technical innovation" [Mallac, p.355]. References to Skryabin's technical regime and practice methods reveal a similar dissatisfaction with the perfection of technical means for their own sake. As performer and teacher Skryabin was far more concerned with the emotional communication and sound variants available to the performer than the advancement of motor ability.

Skryabin was - by his own admittance as well as others' -

a bad sight reader. He had an extremely acute ear and would reproduce music heard once, at the keyboard, often with improvements and, notably, often in a different key [Mallac, p.47]. Information is scarce on Skryabin's views on performing his works from memory.

The need for colouristic variety is stressed by the criticism that Skryabin received in London in 1914, for being "*colouristically monotonous*" [Bowers, 1969, vol. 2, p.268]. His exhaustion and boredom with concertizing and his irritation with the conservative British public's insistence on hearing only familiar works is cited by Prokofiev as a possible reason for the degeneration of his colouristic gifts [Bowers, 1969, vol. 2, p.233].

3.4 RACHMANINOV'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE TRADITION

Another valuable source for musicological endeavour was the concert tour given by Sergei Rachmaninov after Skryabin's death. In his memoirs Rachmaninov describes in detail the impact that Skryabin's funeral had on him and how he decided to learn the music of his friend and conservatoire colleague [Rachmaninov, 1934, p.178]. In the light of the press feud over Rachmaninov and Skryabin evident at the time one might assume that their personal relationship had been none too friendly. Yet, though a deep friendship between these two widely contrasting personalities was impossible, their intentions were more than amiable. The press feud makes it difficult to assess objectively the concert reviews of Rachmaninov's interpretations. They were an undoubted success with the public, but not with the Moscow critics who considered themselves Skryabin's disciples - briefly after his death. Rachmaninov was publicly abused.

Through the haze of mysticism and "sacred consecrations" of the critics the following points emerge : Rachmaninov generally played much louder than Skryabin ever did, his rhythm was much more stable than Skryabin's and his tempi much slower. Oddly enough, no comments have arisen concerning their different hand sizes. Rachmaninov had enormous hands which would have enabled him to strike chords in unison which Skryabin might have arpeggiated. [See also the section entitled **ARPEGGIATION**.]

Rachmaninov was also criticised for "making Skryabin sound like Rachmaninov". This could be a comment on Rachmaninov's compositional style or more likely on his tendency as a pianist to "flatten out" the emotions of a work and imbue them with a cool, melancholy atmosphere.

Other negative comments include those from Grigori Prokofiev who missed "*the unprecedented emotional saturation of Scriabin's creative power ... the vital*

spirit was gone" [Bertenson, p.196]. Paradoxically Joseph Yasser felt that Skryabin had been transformed, with justice, into a fundamentally Russian composer with all the characteristics of the Moscow School [Bertenson, p.197]. The sources fail to mention exactly which characteristics Yasser had in mind. The situation degenerated into a battle of music critics, which, characteristically, had less and less to do with either Skryabin or Rachmaninov, but in which the latter was left looking the villain.

It should also be borne in mind that, while in Skryabin's lifetime his music was performed occasionally by the likes of Vera Skryabina and Josef Levine, the works were known mainly from Skryabin's performances.

Yet, a year after Skryabin's death a deputation of society ladies representing a committee for the preservation of Skryabin's memory asked Rachmaninov to join them, as conductor, concert organiser and pianist. The deputation included one of the music critics who, in Rachmaninov's words "*had been particularly prominent in impressing upon his readers my futility and complete unimportance in comparison with Scriabin*" [Rachmaninov, pp.181-182]. In true gentlemanly fashion Rachmaninov threw them out of his house.

It appears then that the demolition of Rachmaninov as Skryabin interpreter was more political in nature than musical. Experiencing Skryabin's music from the other side of the footlights made an impression on Rachmaninov, most notably in the Etudes-Tableaux op. 39 where the piano figuration, (especially the styles of accompaniment and hand rotation) is reminiscent of Skryabin's op. 42 Etudes. Rachmaninov's songs op. 38 are settings of symbolist poets, and the touch of Skryabin in the harmonic language especially is discernible. Yet they are not imitations : the Skryabinesque touches are incorporated into an already mature musical language. Rachmaninov's was a very valuable contribution to the Skryabin tradition. While Rachmaninov's interpretations, in their "*magnitude and grandeur, were diametrically different*" from Skryabin's [Bowers, 1973 (1), p.27], they revealed other possibilities of playing the music and, in a sense, broke Skryabin's monopoly on his own music.

Rachmaninov also appears to have had a better all-round piano technique. N.N. Cherkass blamed Skryabin's excessive rubato on muscular defects. Rachmaninov had fewer defects and avoided Skryabin's extreme gestures. Cherkass further blames Skryabin's rhythmic irregularities on the attributes of Jewish pianists and Jewish teachers, which is strange as neither Skryabin nor his teachers were Jewish. Anti-semitism prevalent in Russia at the turn of

the century appears to cloud Cherkass' argument. It should be noted that while the 1897 Census revealed that Russia had half the world's Jews within her borders, anti-Jewish laws were enforced, such as one that stated as late as 1903 that only apostates could join the Bolshoi Orchestra. Cherkass writes, "*Scriabin received his musical training in the atmosphere of deformed rhythm, absorbed it despite his musical sensitivity, and allowed it to spoil his rhythmic taste*" [Bowers, 1973 (1), p.201]. Cherkass's explanations are unsatisfactory, as both Skryabin and Rachmaninov had identical musical backgrounds. Both lived with their teacher Sverev, a highly respected and - due to his flamboyance - much talked-about teacher. The only difference in their upbringing was that Rachmaninov was regarded as a composer and Skryabin as the virtuoso. Skryabin's highly original style of playing confirms pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy's view on the Russian music education system at the turn of the century, "*when regimentation might not have been so severe.*" Commenting on the teaching received by amongst others, Vladimir Horowitz, Ashkenazy states that "*he [the student] might have developed his own idiosyncrasies generally without any direct attention being paid to them either by himself or his peers. Secondly, even though there is this concept of a 'Russian School', there are many different teachers and it is virtually impossible to keep all individuality out of their pedagogy. Consequently, any pianist might develop an individual style of playing based on what his teacher directed him to do*" [Mach, 1981, p.17].

3.5 OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TRADITION BY SKRYABIN'S CONTEMPORARIES

Skryabin's son-in-law, Vladimir Sofronitzky, was a noted Skryabin interpreter and regarded as a torch-bearer of the tradition. Comparing his recordings with those of Skryabin's reveals just how insubstantial the content of the tradition actually is. Their playing differs remarkably. Certain rhythmic eccentricities are shared by both pianists, but Sofronitzky's concept of rubato is different to that of Skryabin's. In fact his approach to rhythm is often marred by too little rubato and pedal and occasionally comes across as staid. Similar to Rachmaninov, his playing tends to be slower and louder. Yet, while his playing differed so much from the composer's performances, he was hailed as the Skryabinist of his time. So it appears that even the Skryabinists were happy to accept new contributions to the tradition.

Skryabin himself disliked most performances of his own piano music by other pianists. It is then significant that he praised the playing of Samuel Feinberg (1890 - 1962) who was the first Soviet pianist to record Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. In contrast to Skryabin, he was devoted

to every detail of the score. Murray McLachlan enigmatically describes his rhythmic understanding as "breathhtaking" [McLachlan, p.65].

3.6 PERFORMANCE OF COMPLETE OPUSES

Inspection of Skryabin's own recital programmes both in Russia and abroad reveals that he often did not perform complete opuses. Movements from sonatas were interspersed with smaller works. Of the larger opuses such as the sets of preludes, etudes or mazurkas, Skryabin would perform only a selection but he would group them together, for example, a selection from the Preludes op. 11 or a selection of etudes from opus 8. It was rare that an opus would be repeated in the same recital, even if the selection were different. He also mixed opuses and classed them under genre. He would occasionally perform a set of preludes drawn from 4 or 5 opus numbers. Skryabin never performed entire opuses such as op. 11 or op. 42 in one recital. Vladimir Sofronitzky did, but the composer's opinions are recorded nowhere other than in his recital programmes.

The question arises whether the pieces collected under a single opus number - often composed at different times and in different places - are unified by a single "germ" idea. There is every indication that Scriabin conceived of his small pieces as independent of others in the same collection. It is to be noted that the works separately performed by Skryabin, successfully stand on their own, as structural units and in their tonality. Nevertheless, motivic materials do sometimes link adjacent pieces in a set. These opuses are not conceived as movements of a larger work or miniature sonatas. Even the motivic links do not effect large scale continuations between the compositions. They rather seem to facilitate transition, should a performer wish to play a complete opus. Such linkings occur for example in op. 52, where Enigme (No. 2) is "connected motivically with Nos. 1 and 3" [Baker, 1986, p.79].

Skryabin himself also did not confine recitals to works from a specific compositional period; he performed early and later works side by side. He did however express his dissatisfaction with the British and American audiences especially, who insisted on hearing mainly the earlier works, while he, having developed radically in the later works and being deeply immersed in their language, was no longer eager to perform them to the exclusion of his new works.

For all the attention Skryabin's synaesthesia (colour hearing) has received, it does not appear to have affected his selection of works to be performed in succession. [See

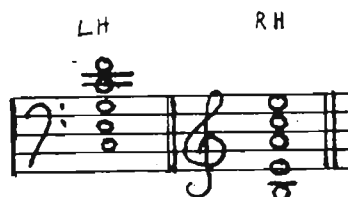
also the section on *Synaesthesia as a guide to interpretation.*]

4. ARPEGGIATION AND GRACE NOTES

It is a characteristic of Skryabin's calligraphy that arpeggiation is not always clearly indicated in his scores. It is not as simple a matter as only arpeggiating chords where it is indicated and striking all other chords in unison. The main evidence for this lies in Skryabin's own hands. It is easy, perhaps, to misconceive the size of Skryabin's hands by looking at the often huge chords in his scores. They are characterised as much by the broad extension of the entire hand, as by the extension between individual fingers.

Contrary to appearances in the scores, Skryabin had small hands, so small in fact that he never played his Etude in major ninths op. 65 no. 1 in public. Paradoxically he did play Adolf von Henselt's Piano Concerto in F minor. Henselt as pianist was known for the tremendous extensions between his fingers. He could reach the following chords:

EXAMPLE 1



Anton Rubinstein commented on the need for dexterity, stretches, widely spread chords and jumps in Henselt's music. Rubinstein gave up work on the concerto as he felt that "it was a waste of time, for they [Henselt's works] were based on an abnormal formation of the hand. In this respect, Henselt, like Paganini, was a freak" [Schonberg, 1964, p.203]. Yet Skryabin was never described as that in discussion of his hand size. It should be noted that Skryabin's teacher Sverev was himself a Henselt pupil, and it is possible that the obsession with hand extension and covering as much of the keyboard as possible was passed on from teacher to pupil.

A broad handsread is not necessarily dependent on long fingers. It is something that most pianists long for [Mach, 1981, p.59]. Alicia de Larrocha is of the opinion that the stretch can be developed to a small extent, but that it is a slow process, with regressions, i.e. contraction, being held at bay through daily work on extensions [Mach, 1981, p.59].

Yet at some point a pianist reaches a limit beyond which the hands cannot extend. If the hand is still small individual techniques are often developed by pianists to enable them to perform a certain repertoire. Left-handed pianist Paul Wittgenstein developed a technique of arpeggiating leaps downwards rather than up [Findell, pp.118-119]. Vladimir Ashkenazy comments on his approach to the problem : " I can't

play a certain chord because my hand just won't reach. A certain stretch I can't do because my fingers won't take it. So it's not just a question of being difficult, it's a question of being impossible. I have to drop some notes. I have to spread some things, help with the other hand if it's possible" [Noyle, p.6].

Skryabin's own Welte-Mignon piano-roll makes it clear that he himself could reach no more than a tenth in the left hand, and then only strike it in unison if it was on a comfortable position (such as on black notes) and if there was time to prepare the handstretch. It is difficult to discern between a compositional style and a technical style. Large chords requiring arpeggiation occur usually in the left hand but occasionally in the right. Both hands sometimes roll the notes of one large chord. The romantic and potentially less crisp and percussive effect of arpeggiation suits Skryabin's musical style beautifully. He appears to make a virtue of necessity in that it thickens the texture. It also has harmonic functions allowing Skryabin to build multi-layered structures.

For all the abundance of extended chords in the Etudes op. 8, arpeggiation is indicated only twice, both at cadences at the end of an etude. Example 2 is from op. 8 no. 2.

EXAMPLE 2

Etude op.8 no. 2, last bar



Example 2 admits of the following possible realisations when modern notational interpretation is applied.

EXAMPLE 3

3(a)



3(b)

Musical notation for example 3(b) showing two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature. The notation includes a piano (p) dynamic marking and a slur over the final notes of both staves.

3(c)

Musical notation for example 3(c) showing two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature. The notation includes a piano (p) dynamic marking and a slur over the final notes of both staves.

Yet, from Skryabin's notation in later works and his recordings other arpeggiation realisations are possible. Skryabin occasionally notated arpeggiated notes as grace notes. Example 4(a), the final bar of his Sonata no. 8 op. 66, indicates the desire for some bass notes to be retarded and some anticipated. The final LH note to sound would be the extreme bass. It seems to be from this tradition that Paul Wittgenstein developed his tendency to arpeggiate towards the bass note.

EXAMPLE 4

4(a) Sonata no. 8, op. 66, final bars

Musical notation for example 4(a) showing two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The notation includes the tempo marking *doux, languissant* and a piano (p) dynamic marking. The final bar shows a complex arpeggiated chord with a slur over the notes and a fermata over the final bass note.

Given this knowledge, new interpretations for Example 2 are possible :

4(b)

Naturally these depend on the context of the chord, its harmonic implications and its inversions. The above examples all establish the key on the first note sounded (F# in the bass). The first chord of the Etude op. 2 no. 1 (see example 5) is slightly more problematic.

EXAMPLE 5

Etude op. 2 no. 1, in C# minor, bars 1 and 2

Andante

Using the arpeggiation system illustrated in example 4b will result in a weaker establishment of the tonality than if the systems illustrated in example 3 are applied.

The other notated arpeggio in op. 8 occurs in the tenth etude.

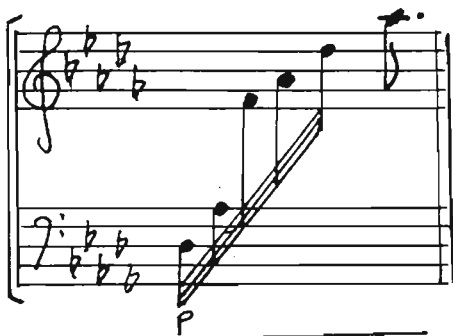
EXAMPLE 6

Etude op. 8 no. 10, bars 121 - 122

The current interpretation of the arpeggiando sign is that if it continues unbroken throughout the two clefs, the chords be arpeggiated strictly from the bottom note to the top as in the following example.

EXAMPLE 7

Etude op. 8 no. 10, bar 121.



Yet Skryabin appears to have interpreted this notation differently. He even interpreted the same notation in various ways depending on the context. His recording of the Morceau op. 57, no. 1, Désir, reveals evidence of this fact. Three chords end this work (see example 8).

EXAMPLE 8

Désir op. 57 no. 1



Contemporary performance practice suggests the following realisation :

EXAMPLE 9

Musical score for Example 9, showing a piano performance realization. The score is written for piano (P) and consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music features a series of ascending and descending melodic lines, with slurs indicating phrasing. Dynamics include piano (P) and a crescendo leading to a forte (f) section. The piece concludes with a fermata over a final chord.

Skryabin's performance is as follows:

EXAMPLE 10

Musical score for Example 10, showing Skryabin's performance realization. The score is written for piano (P) and consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music features a series of ascending and descending melodic lines, with slurs indicating phrasing. Dynamics include piano (P) and a crescendo leading to a forte (f) section. The piece concludes with a fermata over a final chord.

This knowledge suggests the following possible realisations of example 6:

EXAMPLE 11

11(a)

Musical score for Example 11(a), showing a possible realization of example 6. The score is written for piano (P) and consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music features a series of ascending and descending melodic lines, with slurs indicating phrasing. Dynamics include piano (P) and a crescendo leading to a forte (f) section. The piece concludes with a fermata over a final chord.

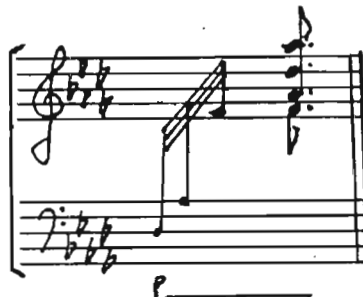
11(b)

Musical score for Example 11(b), showing a possible realization of example 6. The score is written for piano (P) and consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music features a series of ascending and descending melodic lines, with slurs indicating phrasing. Dynamics include piano (P) and a crescendo leading to a forte (f) section. The piece concludes with a fermata over a final chord.

and possibly but unlikely :

11(c)

11(d)



Skryabin also arpeggiated chords which could be played in unison even with his small hand. It therefore appears that the device was used for textural reasons as well as for those usually quoted which involve the extension of the hand span, i.e. giving the impression of covering large spans of the keyboard. Skryabin combines the arpeggiation with a clear delineation of the melody note. It appears that the intention was also to ensure that all the notes of the chord, irrespective of the style of arpeggiation, would be caught in the pedal, adding to the harmonic dimension of the sound picture.

MacDonald regards the necessity of arpeggiando, especially in the large left-hand chords, as "merely rapid versions of the left-hand arpeggios which are found everywhere in his music There is no clear distinction between an arpeggiated figure and an arpeggiated chord, so that they are both to be executed with generous, even unlimited, rhythmic freedom" [MacDonald, 1980, pp.61-2]. MacDonald's view certainly points out the structural connection between the arpeggiation of single chords and of an accompaniment style based on arpeggio figuration. But MacDonald's view is clouded by his attempt to illuminate his theory on Skryabin's music as an eradication of the time-dimension, achieving in its spiritualisation an "unimaginable conquest of time" [MacDonald, 1980, p.65]. In doing so he completely disregards the rhythmical function of both figurations. Far from emphasising the "timeless instability" of chords, the arpeggiando can actually emphasize the arrival of the next note, chord or beat, and as such can add rhythmical impetus to a passage.

Arpeggiation and grace notes are also a way of lightening the sound quality used by the pianist, affecting the dynamic and textural balance, even to the point of kinaesthetic sensations familiar to experienced pianists. In the words of Kiorpes, "the holding of notes tends to promote power or a 'thick' sonority, whereas release tends to promote lightness or at least a more pronounced discrimination between soft ornamental tones and

stronger melodic ones" [Kiorpes, p.54].

The harmonic function of the arpeggiation determines the pedalling. The need for catching all the notes of a chord in the pedal often results in difficulty in achieving a legato soprano line. This "defect" is inherent in the music and Skryabin was criticised for it, but the effects can be alleviated by adjusting the basic tempo of a passage or speeding up the arpeggiando. Where doubt occurs as to the appropriate performance style the guidelines should be the establishment of the harmony, the clarity of the melody, and rubato, tempo and dynamics employed.

Grace notes are another way of widening the effective range of the hand. These may be single notes, octaves, or in later works full chords, sometimes in both hands. Technically, the device requires a rapid skip down to the grace note and an even more rapid skip away from it. Dynamically it is treated as a short upbeat. It is fundamental to much of Skryabin's writing. The density of the grace notes increases in the later works. In the Etude op. 8 no. 11 its use is particularly effective as the basis for a pedal point.

Skryabin was a notoriously bad proofreader; of his own scores as much as others'! In desperation his publisher Belayev approached Rimsky-Korsakoff to assist Skryabin in proofreading, to which he replied: "As for me, I have cleaner work to do. I have no time to scrub Scriabin" [Bowers, 1969, vol. I p.237]. There appear to have been many errors in the original Belayev edition and the analysis of the Etudes points some of these out as well as a few in the manuscript. Yet one has to accept the variability of Skryabin's notation, and occasionally corrective editing is in order as in the final bar of Etude op. 8 no. 4. In the manuscript the bass cleff is omitted in the RH of the last bar.

EXAMPLE 12

Etude op. 8 no. 4, last bar



The spacing of the first chord is similar to example 6. It therefore has the same potential realisations as example 11. The fact that example 12 is in a different inversion could even point to a combination of effects - of upward, downward and

chordal arpeggiation.

Arpeggiation, in its harmonic and colouristic function, blends and softens dissonance, as in the following example :

EXAMPLE 13

Etude op. 8 no. 5, B41 b2 LH



It appears that despite his excessive rubato Skryabin's arpeggi usually started before the beat so as not to distort the rhythm of the melody.

An example of such a spread chord is the following :

EXAMPLE 14

Etude op. 8 No. 2, B9 b3 RH

Musical notation for Example 14, showing a spread chord in the right hand of Etude op. 8 No. 2. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The chord is a B9 b3, consisting of the notes B, D, E, F#, G, and A. The notes are spread across the piano keyboard, with the B in the bass and the A in the treble. The notation includes fingerings (1, 5, 1, 5) and a dynamic marking of *p*.

Some pianists could strike the chord on beat three in unison. Yet it would be stylistically entirely appropriate and even "more correct" to play it like this:

EXAMPLE 15

Etude op. 8 No. 2, B9 b3 RH

Musical notation for Example 15, showing a rolled chord in the right hand of Etude op. 8 No. 2. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The chord is a B9 b3, consisting of the notes B, D, E, F#, G, and A. The notes are rolled, with the B in the bass and the A in the treble. The notation includes a dynamic marking of *p* and a fermata over the chord.

Stryabin occasionally builds a held note into a subsequent rolled chord as in the following example :

EXAMPLE 16

Etude op. 8 no. 1, Bar 42

Musical notation for Example 16, showing a rolled chord in the right hand of Etude op. 8 no. 1, Bar 42. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The chord is a B9 b3, consisting of the notes B, D, E, F#, G, and A. The notes are rolled, with the B in the bass and the A in the treble. The notation includes a dynamic marking of *dim.* and a fermata over the chord.

The need to establish strong harmonic awareness in this example indicates that the arpeggiando could start on the beat.

The Sonata no. 8 op. 66 provides an interesting example of a rolled chord, which appears first (see example 17), contrasted with a measured broken chord. The exact rhythm of the rolled chord is not notated, but it is meant to begin before the RH chord that it accompanies. The broken chord follows, using exactly the same LH notes. Its rhythm is strictly notated and is meant to begin at the same time as the double notes it

accompanies.

EXAMPLE 17

Sonata no.8 op. 66

The image shows a musical score for piano accompaniment. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The treble staff features a melodic line with a long, sweeping slur over the first few measures, followed by a more rhythmic passage. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines, including some rests in the later measures.

5. RHYTHM, RUBATO, AND RELATED ISSUES

Polyrhythms are a stylistic feature in Skryabin's works throughout his life. 5 against 3 or 5 against 4 and similar examples are found in works from all creative periods. The most significant influence on Skryabin's polyrhythmic interest appears to be the work of Anatoly Lyadov (1855 - 1919), pupil of Rimsky-Korsakoff and later professor of composition at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. Lyadov himself was obviously influenced by Frederic Chopin (1810 -1849). Lyadov's polyrhythms appear slightly mechanical. The rhythmic pattern often persists throughout entire works or large parts of them. Examples are the Preludes op. 40 nos. 1 and 3, Variations on a theme by Glinka op. 35 nos. 9, 10 and 11, or nos. 1 and 5 of the Variations on a Polish Theme op. 51. The devices are Chopinesque of course, but Lyadov manages to impart an individual character to these works albeit less poetical than Chopin. Gerald Abraham is of the opinion that Skryabin had "*picked it up through Lyadov rather than direct from Chopin*" [Abraham, 1968, p.215]. The mutual admiration between Skryabin and Lyadov is generally acknowledged. This is significant as Skryabin dismissed the music of most of his contemporaries as brashly as some of them dismissed his.

The performance of polyrhythms is closely linked to Skryabin's desire for activity, or apparent activity, in registrally or harmonically static music. They are also associated closely with his accompaniment figures, discussed elsewhere.

The problem of rhythmic interpretation in Skryabin's works becomes apparent when hearing his works played by himself, his pupils and pianists of the day regarded as fine interpreters. Skryabin as pianist is discussed elsewhere. His recordings reveal more than merely a capricious nature. They reveal a rhythmic flexibility, not to say distortion, of written note values and the total inadequacy of conventional notation to educate generations of pianists no longer familiar with the tradition passed down by apostolic succession, from well-versed masters. A specific kind of rubato was the vogue at the turn of the century, and Skryabin as pianist suffered as much from certain of its excesses as did many other pianists of the time. The term rubato, as applied today, has a meaning radically different from earlier centuries. Certain contemporary styles of rubato are being applied to all music of earlier periods by many pianists, and in so doing they eliminate much of the individuality of different styles.

Our perception of earlier styles of rubato styles is that they were pervasive where ours are selective. Earlier styles appear to have been personal to the performer where present day application has become "conventional" such as our approaches to cadences, for emphasis on colouristic harmonies or to underline heavily rhetorical passages such as quasi-recitatives.

Rubato styles are descendants of oral tradition, more so than might be expected. It appears that a work is indeed rarely freed from the rubato prevalent in the performer's environment. The rubato style contemporary with the composition obviously influenced the notation of it, but to what degree is virtually impossible to ascertain precisely.

It is possible that what are perceived as "excesses" in romantic music, which were spurned in our century by composers, such as Webern and movements such as Neo-Classicism, include not only the vast forces (huge orchestras and vocalists etc.) or the rich harmonic language, but also the style of performance i.e. rubato, concert situation or the appropriateness of the instruments used. The reaction of certain twentieth-century musicians against the variability of performance - which includes the subjective interpretation of agogic and dynamic effects - is one of the reasons why these very parameters are often so minutely notated that it makes performance of them even more difficult. The limitations of human execution of these demands, in part, led to experiments with electronic music, and it has also led to exclusion of much music from the concert repertoire due to its complex performance nature.

The chosen performance practice applied to a work can influence its acceptance as was the case with Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911) whose admirers during the first half of the century were restricted to a relatively small group. His conducting skills were never contested, yet his works were neglected by a large group of musicians. However, the championship of certain conductors and critics led gradually in the late 1950's to a fervent revival of interest. His works were frequently recorded and entered the repertoires of the world's leading orchestras to public acclaim. Yet this acceptance into the performed concert repertoire was accompanied by changes in performance practice, specifically changes in the application of rubato. Mahler made piano-roll recordings of some of his own works including the 4th and 5th symphonies. The rubato style in Mahler's piano version (conceivably influenced by pianistic limitations and performance style) differs radically from orchestral performances heard today. The contemporary aural concept of Mahler differs from the way Mahler appears to have performed his works, and from many quarters the opinion is that it is an improvement, albeit rhythmically more conservative. Contemporary performers escape the rhythmic criticism levelled against Mahler's conception of his works (as played on a piano), by avoiding excessive rhythmic distortion. With stricter tempi the works have become acceptable to the contemporary audience.

It appears to be much the same with Skryabin. In the opinion of Sergei Rachmaninov, Skryabin's death was overshadowed by the horrors of the First World War [Rachmaninov, 1934, p.178]. After his death his music was revered by a small group of ecstatic Skryabinists. Yet we are currently experiencing a major revival

of interest in this composer, so long regarded "as curious and isolated figure" [Brook, p.79]. As in Mahler's case, this revival is accompanied by a modification of rubato, that vital musical parameter. The question remains to be answered whether all these modifications are improvements and to what extent they assist audience comprehension.

In order to appreciate these modifications of rubato styles, and just how relevant seemingly minor adaptations can be, a brief discussion is necessary. Sandor writes : "*Rubato and agogic effects are essentially free, imaginative alterations of metric values that create flexible enunciation and parlando effects*" [Sandor, p.214]. Simply, they can be described as the musical equivalent of breathing and are related to an interplay between tension and release, effected through *accelerandos* and *ritardandos*, alternating ideally according to the expression of the music. Rhythmic flexibility is not confined to any one period of music. Walter Robert stresses the avoidance in early Greek music, as far as can be ascertained, of the monotonous dactyls associated with Homer [Robert, 1981, p.42]. Indications of rhythmic freedom exist in the Toccate e partite (1614 - 1616) by Girolamo Frescobaldi. The distinguished Bolognese singing teacher Pierfrancesco Tosi (1647 -1732) gave one of the first clear explanations of tempo rubato (though he did not use that term) [Robert, p.42]. Tosi recommended that coloraturas be performed freely over a steady bass pulse. This Italian rubato style is known as "melodic rubato" as it affects the melodic part and appears to have been used till late in the eighteenth century (by Mozart as late as 1777). It appears that by then, at least in Germany this style of rubato had fallen into disuse as Mozart's rubato was considered foreign [Gerig, p.53]. C.P.E. Bach emphasized that all embellishing tones of the same rhythmic value should be accorded the same amount of time [Bach, p.161]. Towards the end of the eighteenth century various forms of rubato were then in use.

In the nineteenth century performers increasingly began to equate tempo rubato with a modification of the basic tempo, by definition similar to Tosi's suggestions yet essentially different in that this practice came to replace earlier rubato styles, and is today the only rubato many musicians know, and which they apply to music from all periods.

How these tempo variations are executed is often difficult to determine. Skryabin's concepts of rubato stem from late nineteenth-century performance practice. It appears that composers from the romantic era used rubato indications sparingly. This could mean that rubato should be avoided unless specifically indicated, or more likely, that the rubato was indicated only where a modification of tempo might for some reason be avoided by the performer. And whether the modification or "bend" is up or down on the metronome often proves a bone of contention. Robert observes that in Chopin's Mazurka op. 24 no. 2 the passage marked rubato occurs between two *ritenutos*

[Robert, p.44]. This could indicate that Chopin intended accelerando or merely a return to the former tempo. This concept is at odds with general performance practice of the late twentieth century where the term rubato has become associated with a ritenuto. Dorian associates rubato with "free declamation," giving rise to analogies with the spoken word, its rhythm and pauses [Dorian, p.185].

Yet the dynamic ebb-and-flow characteristic of much romantic music, in contrast with the clear rhythmic structure of the Viennese classical composers, was at the end of the nineteenth century frequently misinterpreted as accelerandos and ritardandos. This concept combined with the flourishing cult of personality exemplified by Liszt, Chopin and also Skryabin. The resultant coupling sanctioned all sorts of interpretative licence and often faithful adherence to the text was considered uncreative. The fluid rhythmic organisation of much Romantic music was distorted by virtuosi. In the words of Robert : *"Flowing rhythm became a vortex in which powerful swimmers splashed around. Chopin [and not only he] was often submerged in the foam"* [Robert, p.44].

And Skryabin the pianist did his share of splashing as his recordings testify. Two articles dating from 1913, two years before Skryabin's untimely death of a bacterial infection, complain about the negative effects of the rubato in vogue at the time. Frederick Nieks claimed that the rubato was so excessive as to dislocate the beat completely [Nieks, 1913 (2), p.145]. Nieks also felt that the distortion of rhythm was merely a fashion, indiscriminately applied [Nieks, 1913 (1) p.117].

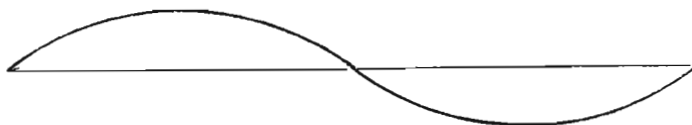
The rubato currently understood as allowing the music to breathe tends to be focused on taking time ('stealing time'), yet even in our generation this definition has changed. What the present generation used to regard as rubato was a concept of "stealing time" and at the appropriate moment to "give it back". This is a vague description, which probably explains why it could change so fundamentally without redefinition. This concept, which at present is falling more and more into disuse, relies on ritardandos and accelerandos - as usual - yet proportionately employed. For every ritardando, a subsequent accelerando was introduced so that the longer phrase structure was not distorted or vice versa. It could be indicated thus :

EXAMPLE 1

Phrase Length

Accel. beyond tempo

TEMPO

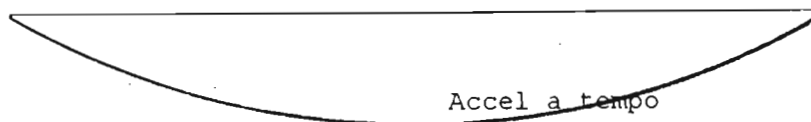


Rit. below a tempo

The ritardando naturally falls below the tempo while the accelerando is to a tempo faster than the prevailing pulse to make up or give back the 'stolen time'. This involves a slight ritardando back to the "a tempo". Yet towards the end of our century the rubato becoming more commonly used appears as such :

TEMPO

Rit. below tempo



Accel a tempo

The reader is reminded that these diagrams are crude and simplified in the extreme. (A complete study of the history, nature and notation of rubato goes beyond the scope of this paper). At present both these styles are applied to Skryabin performance, yet the second is already more prevalent. The rubato has most noticeable impact at the beginnings and ends of phrases, with some kind of turning point where the tempo adjustment changes its nature, either pushing forward or receding.

The judgement of appropriate adjustments in the current rubato style is, contrary to certain opinions, something that can be taught and must be acquired. Maria Callas puts it this way : "I have heard people say that tradition is last night's bad performance. But tradition does exist, ways of performing music that are passed on from one generation to another. Tradition is good or bad depending on who has had good taste and who has not; good taste is that which respects the spirit of the composer and his music" [Ardoin, p.99]. This contests the notion that rubato should not be taught. In performing a work there exists a hierarchy of values pertaining to study - the notes, metre, tempo, dynamics, phrasing, pedal and rubato. Works are prey to the rubato style in vogue at the time of the performer. Again the question arises as to how much rubato? Schnabel states quite plainly : "Rubato is a permission, never an order" [Wolff, p.7]. It is also true that rubato relies on the rhythmic firmness of the surrounding structure. The inner ear can identify a basic

pulse and follow deviations from it. That is the nature of contemporary rubato and appears to be different from that used by Skryabin and certain of his contemporaries.

As has been pointed out in the section on Skryabin the pianist, rhythmic distortions are an integral part of his playing. And as these distortions were subject to change depending on his mood and emotional state, they appear not to be a fixed part of his compositional practice. He appears to have used the score as a basis for emotional improvisation, communicated through altering the parameters such as dynamics and tempo. According to Bowers : "He would play his *Prelude, op. 74 no. 2* first so that it meant "heat ... a scorching desert;" the second time it would mean the cool of "white radiance ... death .. lovelessness" [Bowers, 1970 -1971, p.15].

Examples of rhythmic distortion accepted as authentic at the time of performance include the following :

EXAMPLE 2

1. Prelude op. 11 no. 18, bars 12 to 15

1(a) As written

Musical score for Example 1(a), showing bars 12 to 15 of the Prelude op. 11 no. 18. The score is in two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo/mood is marked *rubato*. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *dim.* (diminuendo).

1(b) As played by Sofronitzky in 1946

Musical score for Example 1(b), showing bars 12 to 15 of the Prelude op. 11 no. 18. The score is in two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo/mood is marked *non rubato*. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *dim.* (diminuendo).

2. Etude op. 8 no. 12, bars 2-3

2(a) As written

Musical score for Example 2(a), showing bars 2-3 of the Etude op. 8 no. 12. The score is in a single staff (treble clef). The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo/mood is marked *non rubato*. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *dim.* (diminuendo). There are fingerings 4 and 5 indicated above the notes.

2(b) As played by Skryabin in 1911

Musical score for Example 2(b), showing bars 2-3 of the Etude op. 8 no. 12. The score is in a single staff (treble clef). The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo/mood is marked *non rubato*. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *dim.* (diminuendo). There are fingerings 4 and 5 indicated above the notes.

It is clear from these examples that some rhythmic modification is essential and that the performances cited represent an exaggeration which appears amateurish. The pianist is faced with choices concerning rubato: restoring the rubato which Skryabin appears to have been brought up with, or imposing a rubato style learnt almost a century later, onto those works. Defining the authenticity of the original rubato style is no easy task, given the scant evidence of how it can systematically be applied. Did Skryabin distort more in the early or later works? What determined why the distortion would vary so considerably from one performance to the next? The lack of answers to these

questions causes one to doubt the useful validity of authenticity as a goal. Authenticity appears unattainable and at times quite undesirable. Certain musicologists and other conservationists, as seen in the field of Early Music, reflect an attitude which stems from that tendency of Romanticism which held the past up as an ideal.

The pianist can either restore the work to mint condition, in the way it was envisaged, directed, taught or performed by its creator, or preserve it in a form more acceptable to modern taste, in a condition which would allow further adjustments by future generations, of our music or that of the past. Naturally consistency is a complex problem. Today in opera, for example, the fidelity to the musical text is so frequently ignored that now few object if operas are translated or updated to modern settings. The concert repertoire is no less confused in its outlook. Study of interpretation is supposed to be composer-oriented, yet the constant repetition of a core repertoire suggests that it is the individuality of the performer or performance which provides the principal interest and commercial incentive. In addition performers today are under pressure, as never before, to be accurate. In the words of Peter Hill, acclaimed interpreter of modern piano repertoire : "*The stand against interpretation (of a personal sort) is a logical conclusion of the crusade against self-indulgence (using music as a vehicle), and a natural consequence of the objective research behind performances*" [Hill, p.3]. Hill also points out the possibility that a gifted musician can see further into a work than its creator, given the learning acquired in the interim. But purifying a work of later editorial accretions, while assisting in acquiring relative authenticity, poses the danger that valuable as well as corrupt traditions are discarded. Hill relates the process to a deep-seated loss of confidence "so that we rely increasingly on 'rules' and 'evidence' as a means to evading personal responsibility for artistic judgement" [Hill, p.7].

The pianist can deduce much from the context in which the potential rubato would occur. The Allegro Appassionato op. 4 (see example 3) indicates the difficulty of using precise notation for imprecise music.

EXAMPLE 3

Allegro Appassionato op. 4

The excerpt shows two bars in $\frac{3}{4}$, changing to $\frac{6}{8}$. In the two bars preceding the double bar line Skryabin has seven notes to sound. He puts three in the first and 4 in the second. Then follow six quavers in the 3rd bar. He might have put a bracket around all thirteenth notes with some indication of rubato implying an accelerando to the new speed at the 4th bar of the example. The left hand texture continues unchanged across the bar line, leaving the rhythmic adjustment to the right hand. It would be absurd to play all the rhythmic values exactly as notated. They need to tumble forward into the new tempo, and Skryabin could not find a more accurate notation for his intention at the time. In the words of MacDonald, "*the tyranny of a regular beat is undermined*" [MacDonald, 1928, p.24]. This will add to the improvisatory quality required by his style.


Certain issues are less conducive to varied interpretation such as the execution of triplets and dotted notes occurring simultaneously. It is generally accepted that in the earlier music of the 18th century and had to synchronise where they appeared simultaneously. The continuation of this "tradition of convenience" was sustained quite naturally, given standard performance practice of the time. The subject is discussed by Leopold Mozart in the some detail [Mozart, op cit.] Its use is noted as late as 1904 in Debussy's L'isle Joyeuse. Rachmaninov's Prelude in B^b op. 23 no. 2 shows examples which may admit of more than one possible interpretation. Beechey is of the opinion that Rachmaninov's conservative nature as a composer lends weight to the view that synchronisation of rhythms that seem to conflict is intended there too. It would appear that, although Skryabin was undoubtedly familiar with the practice, he avoided it in his own compositions. An example from the Prelude op. 13 no. 1 indicates that Skryabin intended no synchronisation

where this rhythm appears.

EXAMPLE 4

Prelude op. 13 no. 1



The division between notation and rubato is slightly blurred in the rhythmic figure  which appears so often in Scriabin's work that it warrants mention. It is considered a written-out rubato, communicated by slight hesitation. MacDonald is of the opinion that it is "more of a player's mannerism than a composer's" [MacDonald, 1978, p.25]. Yet it is an integral aspect of Scriabin's musical style. It occurs in works of all his stylistic periods from its first appearance in the Allegro Appassionato op. 4 to the last Etude op. 65 no. 3. MacDonald traces its origin to Chopin's Nocturne op. 27 no. 2 or the Prelude op. 28 no. 22. This figure can be traced back to Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893) who associates the figure with fate, as in brass fanfares in the 4th symphony. Tchaikovsky wrote : "This is fate ... a force which, like the sword of Damocles, hangs perpetually over our heads and is always embittering the soul" [Tchaikovsky, pp.275-6]. The treatment of the dotted figure in Scriabin's op. 8 no. 12 can be interpreted as bellicose and pathetic.

The rhythm is also closely associated with the term "pathetic". It must be pointed out that the Russian "pafos" is not the English "pathos". Its Russian meaning is closer to the Greek, "away from suffering," rather than the English sense of "pitiful" or "wallowing in pain".

MacDonald considers it a "melodic tic" which "in a large work such as the Divine Poem ... may seem a deliberate structural unit when in fact it is no more than the composer's signature writ large" [MacDonald, 1978, p.26].

See also the section on **ARPEGGIATION** for a discussion of its implications for rubato.

6. STYLES OF ACCOMPANIMENT

6.1 Skips

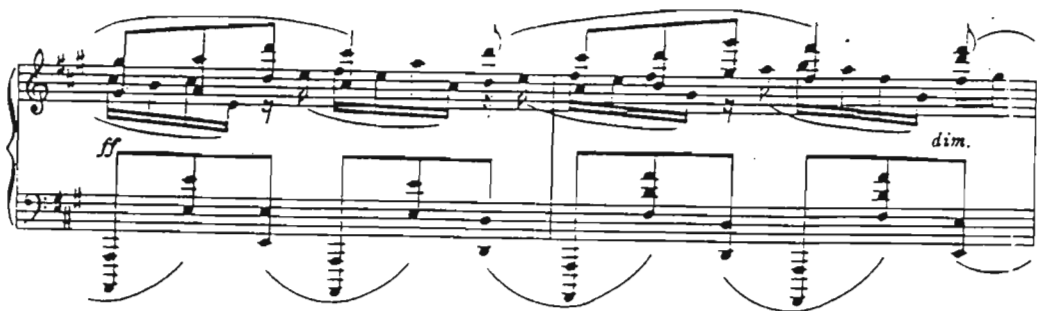
One of the most noticeable aspects of Skryabin's piano writing is the activity of the left-hand. Wide skips abound in the left hand writing. Difficult though these may be to execute, their function is not the display of virtuosity. They outline the harmony and the widely spaced bass sonority adds richness and depth of tone which, with the use of the pedal, gathers successive notes into rich chords. Examples include the following :

EXAMPLE 1

1(a) Etude op. 8 no. 5, bar 47



1(b) Prelude op. 11 no. 7



6.2 Widely-spaced Chords

One type of widely-spaced chord, usually containing three but occasionally four different notes, occurs so often in Skryabin's works that it merits special attention.

It comprises, in its simplest form, a minor seventh below a tritone. Harmonically it can be described as an incomplete dominant seventh, and already appears in one of his earliest works, the Mazurka op. 3 no. 8.

EXAMPLE 3

Mazurka op. 3 no. 8, third bar of illustration.



It appears to be derived from the French sixth and has a similar shape to the "mystic" chord. The harmonic function appears to be of less importance than the sonority generated by the intervallic arrangement. This chord appears with increasing frequency in Skryabin's works. In early works such as the Etude op. 8 no. 1 it appears almost incidentally, but in the final Etude op. 65 no. 3, almost the entire accompaniment is built on this chord.

EXAMPLE 4

4(a) Etude op. 8 no. 1, bar 42



4(b) Etude op. 65 no. 3, bars 1-6

Molto vivace $\text{♩} = 144$ Op. 65 Nr. 3

23

5

6.3 Repeated Chords

Repeated chords are part of Skryabin's pianistic vocabulary from the first works to the last. These chords produce a rhythmic pulsation within a fundamentally static sonority. The harmony, chord spacing and register are saved from inactivity by the vibration the repetition creates. When a chord is repeated while the pedal is depressed the sympathetic resonance of the piano strings are increased. This adds to a musical communication unique to Skryabin. Through intelligent use of the pedal it not only allows opportunity to pile up the sonority but also to decrease it gradually. These chords can provide a neutral accompaniment as in the Etude op. 2 no. 1.

EXAMPLE 5

Etude op. 2 no. 1

Andante

p

In the Sonata no. 1, chords that are neither mere accompaniment nor melodic in function are used to build the first of several big climaxes in the sonata.

EXAMPLE 6

Sonata no. 1

The musical score for Example 6 consists of two systems of music. The first system features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a chordal accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar textures. Performance markings include 'p', 'cresc.', 'accel.', 'lento', 'fff', and 'pp'. A section marked '8' is indicated above the first system.

Rapidly repeated chords provide much of the élan and excitement in the Etude op. 8 no. 12.

EXAMPLE 7

Etude op. 8 no. 12, Bars 34-35

The musical score for Example 7 consists of two systems of music. The first system features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a chordal accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar textures. Performance markings include 'ff' and 'a tempo'.

The repeated chords are sometimes combined with leaps in different rhythm in the other hand (Example 8a) or repeated chords occur in different rhythm in both hands as in

(Example 8b):

EXAMPLE 8

8(a) Etude op. 8 no. 12, Bars 44-45

8(b) Impromptu op. 12 no. 2

Instead of being played together, the chords are staggered. The rhythmic effect becomes less definite yet more active. In the late works repeated chords tend to serve as fleeting gestures in complex structures rather than unifying whole sections as in the earlier works.

It is of these repeated chords that Skryabin cautioned :
"Even your forte must sound piano Don't pound the piano so that your playing sounds like a chest of drawers toppling down the stairs Don't play as if you were washing laundry ... no passage work! Everything must live Above all the thrill (upoitel'nost), the excitement" [Bowers, 1978, p.14].

6.4 Arpeggio figures

Skryabin's wide-ranging bass figures are fundamentally broken-chord figurations that provide rhythmic and harmonic propulsion, and are described by Randlett as "of a quasi-ostinato character" [Randlett, 1971 (2), p.20]. Like its ancestor, the Alberti bass, it provides an active, constantly self-renewing bass sonority. Examples include :

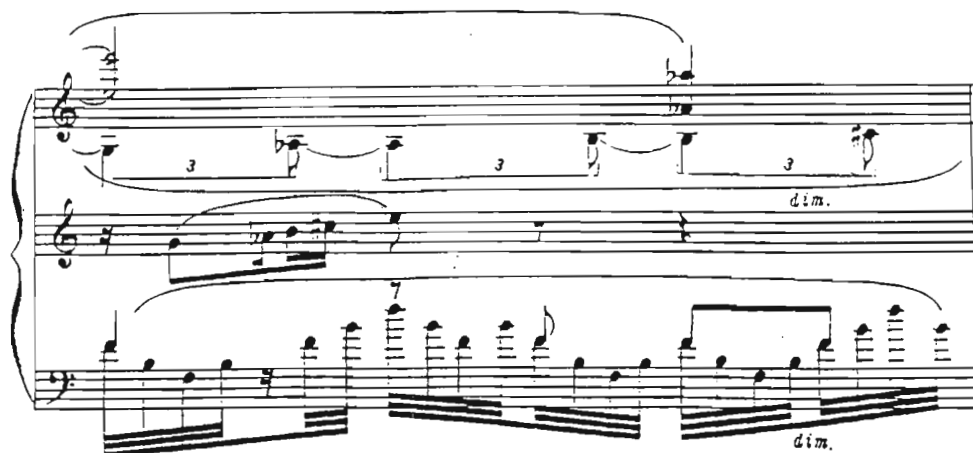
EXAMPLE 2

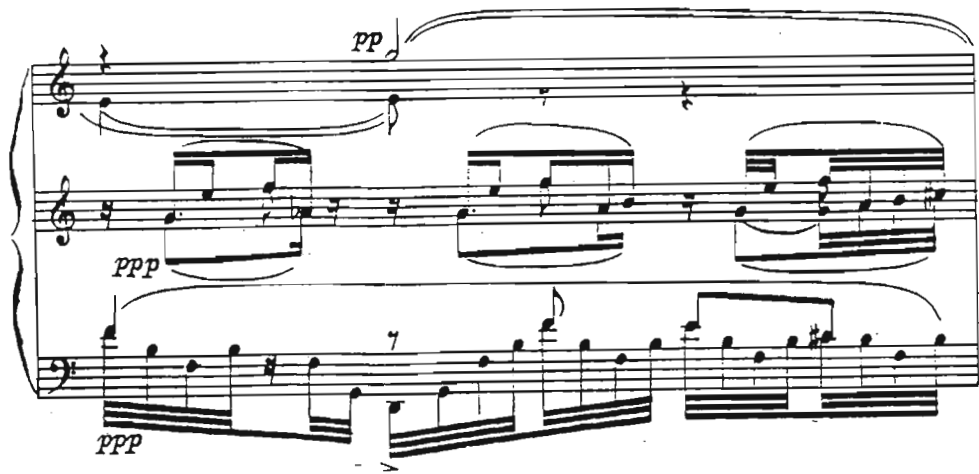
2(a) Etude op. 8 no. 4, bar 1

Piacevole $\text{♩} = 100$



2(b) Sonata no. 6 op. 62





Occasionally these figures contain tenor melodies played by the thumb. This is a contrapuntal device of great flexibility.

Arpeggios play an important role throughout Skryabin's output. These share the common purpose of enlivening a sustained sonority. Skryabin's inventiveness is revealed when the variety of technical variants is studied. Some arpeggios contain a repeated note, which is usually the upper part of a broken octave in the bass. They are accompaniment figures, confined mostly to the left hand. The repeated note produces an irregularity that stimulates the ear and intellect, and avoids the blandness of a simple arpeggio.

EXAMPLE 9

9(a) Etude op. 8 no. 4, bar 6



9(b) Etude op. 8 no. 7, bars 45-47

35

cresc.

The style increases in complexity toward the late works and continues to vary right up to the last works.

Skryabin sometimes uses unremarkable arpeggio figures in a most unusual way. The arpeggio proceeds in one direction for about two octaves and then stops abruptly. Usually, but not always, the figure is repeated after a brief rest. This results in a nervous and energetic accompaniment. Such an example occurs in the Etude op. 8 no. 11:

EXAMPLE 10

Etude op. 8 no. 11, bars 37-38

a tempo

3

Faubion Bowers defines these accompaniment figures as attempts at defying the piano's laws : ways of keeping its evanescent tone from disappearing, giving the impression that the piano can hold and sustain long lines and notes at the same intensity with which it starts, "how to make the resonance last, and last, and last" [Bowers, 1978, p.14].

The pedal sustains only the initial impact, the first of a series of rapidly diminishing decibels. Skryabin devised figurations to prevent this - trills, reiterated arpeggi and repeated chords, and melodic lines intensified by clusters of notes. A grasp of Skryabin's harmonic processes is essential to imbue these figurations with expressive content.

Styles of accompaniment are also discussed in the analysis of the individual etudes.

7. OTHER PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

7.1. Octaves and Double Notes

The sonority of single lines is enriched by octaves and double notes. These add to the harmonic texture and have colouristic functions. Octaves are often used on melodic material, enriching the tone rather than merely adding volume. The Etudes op. 8 contain many bravura octave passages but no showy, virtuoso, quasi-cadenza passages.

7.2. Interlocking Thumbs

The voices of Skryabin's part-writing often overlap in the middle register, producing a smooth and compact sonority. The use of interlocked thumbs on the keyboard is usually the result of an overlapping of doublings in his part writing. The doublings are notated literally, i.e. the chords are not rearranged. This notation makes the doublings clear to the eye, but has practical value as well. Playing the notes exactly as written, with interlocking thumbs, assists in separating the lines into their proper tonal levels. The voicing of chords is subject to an extremely subtle control. Overlapping thumbs tend to occur less in the late works of Skryabin than in the earlier works as doublings themselves are less frequent in the late works. They occur in both slow, "static" progressions and in fast "active" progressions.

EXAMPLE 1

1(a) Op. 8 no. 11, Bar 1

Andante cantabile $\text{♩} = 63$



1(b) Op. 8 no. 3, Bar 82 to 84



7.3 STACCATO AND TENUTO MARKINGS

Tenuto markings (- - -) appear to indicate appropriate moments for rubato interpreted as a slight ritardando. They have melodic function, indicating notes to be emphasized dynamically as well as rhythmically.

Chords with staccato dots are found occasionally in Skryabin's early works but are more typical in the middle and late works. The use of pedal with staccato is sometimes explicitly indicated as in the coda of the Sonata no. 7 op. 64. In the last page of Vers la Flamme op. 72 the pedal sustains chords to their full value underneath staccato notes. It therefore follows that staccato dots are instructions to the pianist concerning the correct approach to the keyboard, i.e. the "touch" rather than a literal indication of how short and crisp the notes are to sound. The tone quality is being indicated.

When these staccato indications appear under slurs, they could be interpreted as tenuto markings, depending on the context. Controversy exists on this point. Skryabin is said to have struck the keys briskly, "when he wanted a certain 'ping' or 'zing' in the sound" [Bowers, 1970-1971 p.16]. Bowers quotes the staccato dots under a slur plus the pedal in the Sonata no. 3 op. 23 as an example.

EXAMPLE 1

Sonata no. 3 op. 23 movement 2

Allegretto m.m. ♩ = 160

una corda stacc. *stacc. stacc.

7.4 TRILLS

The trills and tremoli of which Skryabin was to become so fond in the late works are completely absent from the op. 8 set. The reason for this is partly to be found in the function of the trill. Similar to its function in Baroque harpsichord music, the trill in Skryabin extends a particular note or set of notes in terms of their sounding length and sonority. It extends the "shelf-life" of a sonority, so to speak.

Trills are a feature of harmonic stasis in certain passages in the later works where they provide textural continuation. Due to the totally different harmonic concept of the earlier works such as op. 8 fewer devices of continuation are required. The harmony of op. 8 is functional though colourful and does not extend colouristic and harmonic effects unchanged for a long period of time. That provides some explanation for the absence of vibrating and shuddering trills in op. 8.

7.5 GLISSANDOS

Quasi-glissando effects occur in Skryabin's orchestral writing but never his writing for the keyboard. The possible explanation for this - that his models avoided them - is not altogether true as they are found in the works of Liszt and earlier Russian composers. Another reason is that they cover too many registers for Skryabin's registrally relatively static language and are harmonically one-dimensional. He obviously did not feel the colouristic need for them.

7.6 HORN CALL MOTIFS

A motif identified by MacDonald as a "horn call" has significance in Skryabin's output [MacDonald, 1978, p.22]. It occurs constantly through his entire output. A significant example occurs in op. 8 no. 11. The horn call appears in the LH in bars 48 and 50.

EXAMPLE 1

Op. 8, no. 11, bars 48 and 50.

The musical notation shows two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. A box labeled '48' is above the first measure. The left hand (LH) plays a sequence of chords in the bass register, starting with G2-B2-D3. The right hand (RH) plays a sequence of chords in the middle register, starting with G3-B3-D4. Dynamics include 'pp' (pianissimo) and '>>' (fortissimo) markings.

8. SYNAESTHESIA AS A GUIDE TO PERFORMANCE

Skryabin, along with other composers such as Olivier Messiaen and Rimsky-Korsakoff, experienced sounds synaesthetically; that is associating sounds with colours. The subject, as well as its relevance to Skryabin's attempts at creating a "colour-organ" in his Prometheus, has been discussed in depth by various writers. It is difficult to assess the contribution to a performance situation that can be made by close familiarisation with specific key-colour relations, as each relation can be experienced differently depending on the synaesthetic orientation of the performer.

Skryabin's synaesthetic experience is as follows:

Key (major)	Colour	Meaning
C	red	Determination
C [#]	purple	Will of creative spirit
D	yellow	Joy
D [#]	flesh	Mankind
E ^b	steely and metallic	Humanity
E	pearly-blue	Dreams
F	red	Diversification of will
F [#]	violet	Creativity
G	rosy-orange	Creative play
G [#]	lilac	Descent of spirit into matter
A ^b	purple	Warmth
A	green	Materialism
A [#]	rose	Pleasure
B ^b	steely and metallic	Strength
B	pearly-blue	Contemplation

[Ruckman, 1986, p. 220]

It should be noted that Skryabin occasionally transposed works from one key to another (transposing also the colour) and often the final work is in a different key to the sketches.

What would perhaps be helpful is to bear in mind the quality of the colour, for example, the difference between pearly-blue and bright blue, or between red and dark red. In the interpretation of the Etude op. 8 no. 7 in B^b minor, Skryabin's colouristic association with steely and metallic colours could support a sharp, clear and angular interpretation. Yet, a gentler and more moulded vision of the same etude is just as acceptable. While correlation does occur among the associations of composers from Rimsky-Korsakoff to Schoenberg, much remains highly subjective. Though they could provide interpretational insights and

imaginative objectification of the desired tone-colour, they are in no way definitive.

9. SKRYABIN AND SYMBOLISM

Various artistic movements developed c.1870 which influenced art forms of the times. "Les Parnassiens" was a group of poets working together from 1866 to 1876 to give a new classical direction to poetry. To this group belonged Leconte de l'Isle (1818 - 1894) and Théophile Gautier (1811 - 1872), with works such as "Poèmes Antiques" and "Emaux et Camées" (both 1852). "Naturalism" was a literary current in France c.1870. It strove to illustrate mankind as a will-less product of his inheritance and environment. It created a kind of "art of fate". Gustave Charpentier (1860 - 1956) was an exponent of naturalism, as in his only opera "Louise".

Impressionism also emerged at this time. The art form resulted in music and canvasses that valued colour and light above form. "Symbolism" belongs to the last two decades of the 19th century. In essence it is a reaction against the above-mentioned movements. It touches firstly poetry, and surfaces in the visual arts through painters such as Schwabe and Redon, and the dramas of Maurice de Guérin.

Symbolism extended its influence also to Russia, noticeably in the paintings of Mikhail Vrubel (1856 - 1910). The symbolists were less concerned with the object than with the atmosphere of the object. There appears the desire to discover meanings behind sensual and sensory perceptions. Their search for deeper meanings had a profound influence on Skryabin and his work is closely associated with the movement. None of his works is painting expressed in music and, despite his synaesthetic perceptions, he appeared not to encourage the reverse.

Symbolism is associated more with painters than with musicians as it could translate into quickly accessible visual terms a thought which otherwise could be absorbed only by study of books or magazines [Anon., p.2].

The works of Schwabe, with all their mawkish religious allegory and overly meticulous execution, reflect artistic urges shared by Skryabin. "The Marriage of the Poet and the Muse", painted in c.1900, represents *"one of the most typical characteristics of the Symbolist movement, a flight with passionate determination from the contingencies of the modern industrial, and commercial world"* [Clay, p.73].

Vrubel, probably the greatest Russian symbolist, was influenced deeply by the works of Lermontov, especially the poem "The Demon". With him Skryabin shares a fascination with the darkly compelling. Jean Delville's painting "The Treasures of Satan" shares more than just an obvious sensual quality with Skryabin's music. The lines, though carefully contrived, have a volatile and unpredictable atmosphere and one can see *"an accumulation of forbidden acts, guilt, and frustration of a*

period that fostered the invention of psychoanalysis" [Clay, p.80].

It is curious that, for all his fascination with Russian symbolist writers such as Konstantin Balmont, Andrei Belyi and Alexander Blok, he did not directly set their texts to music, as did his contemporaries Rachmaninov, Medtner or Tanayev. Skryabin's vocal output is limited to one song, now lost, and choral parts in the orchestral work Prometheus. Eberlein suggests that Skryabin was educated in the Moscow Conservatoire which produced mostly instrumentalists, unlike the St. Petersburg Conservatoire which brought forth three generations of opera composers including Glinka, Moussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff [Maur, 1985, p.340]. Significantly, Skryabin was praised by Pasternak for being "*successful in fostering the irruption of reality into the texture of [his] art, without being primarily concerned with technical innovation*" [Mallac, p.355]. As a mature artist Pasternak believed that excessive preoccupation with technical experiments is characteristic of a sickly or dying art while great art, is "*that which is so possessed by the overwhelming force of experience and feeling that it forgets the technical aspects of expression*" [Mallac, p.355].

Paradoxically, while denouncing what he labelled "romantic" art, Pasternak continued a typically romantic attitude by valuing content over form. Such is also the case with Skryabin and this is to be seen as much in the Etudes op. 8 as in the formal experiments of the late sonatas.

Chapter 2

ETUDE NO. 1 IN C² MAJOR

Technical issues addressed :

1. Quick repetition of thumb; LH and RH in varying dynamics.
2. Quick repetition of double notes or chords, LH and RH.
3. Cantabile melody over moving accompaniment.
4. 3 against 2 rhythmical pattern alternating between the hands.

The etude can be divided into 3 sections :

A B1 to B16 b3

B B16 b4 to B32 b3

A B32 b4 to B52

The difficulties encountered in this etude will depend largely on the abilities of the performer, ranging from hand size to lack of tension. Certain fingerings in the etude will vary with different hand sizes. Alternatives for small hands will be discussed, as often alternative fingerings present technical difficulties of their own not at first apparent. The following fingering is suggested for the first phrase, RH:

EXAMPLE 1

B1-2 RH

Allegro ♩ = 168
p
Op. 8 No. 1

Fingering can be discovered by playing each triplet figure as a chord, in the following way :

EXAMPLE 2

B1-2

etc.

The advantage of fingering the RH as legato chords is that it will encourage minimum shifts of hand position and that it links two or more chords in the mind of the performer as illustrated in example 2.

Thinking of each triplet as a chord also encourages a good legato between the second and third quaver.

It is important that the wrist be totally flexible as it will be responsible for much of the action required for the two repeated quavers. The wrist should be quite highly arched and the fingers flexible. It could help to think of "flattening" the palm into the keyboard, while maintaining a raised wrist. The repeating action is quite taxing on the thumb, and some pianists might find it necessary to use preparatory exercises to ensure that the thumb remains perfectly relaxed. These could include examples from the literature such as the opening of the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata in C Major, op. 2 no. 3.

EXAMPLE 3

Beethoven Sonata op. 2 no. 3, B1-3

Assai Allegro.

The musical score for Example 3 shows the beginning of the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata op. 2 no. 3. It is in 6/8 time and marked 'p' (piano). The treble staff starts with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and then continues with a series of chords. The bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated above the notes.

The movement of the thumb on the repeated quavers can be seen in the following exercise. Place the fingers and elbow on a table. Release all tension from the wrist and fingers so that the whole arm is completely relaxed. Now lightly tap the table a few times with the thumb, rhythmically even, and without tensing the wrist. Now repeat the exercise using thumb and second finger. The pianist should then transfer these relaxed movements to the piano, practising the repeated notes separated from the third quaver, in the following manner :

EXAMPLE 4

The musical score for Example 4 shows a single staff with a treble clef. It features a series of repeated notes with accents. The notes are G4, A4, B4, and C5. The exercise is marked 'etc.'

Practise the repeated notes with accents, initially on the first and then on the second note. Accents on the first note will assure dynamic

control of the first quaver of each beat. Accents on the second note will secure the movement constituting the second difficulty of each triplet, that is, moving from the second to the third quaver. This movement could be practised in the following way :

EXAMPLE 5



This example should be practised with accents first on the second quaver of the beat and then on the third. It is important in obtaining a good quality of sound that these two quavers be as legato as possible. This might in some cases be very difficult for small hands. Occasionally the left hand could help the right hand by taking the lowest of the repeated notes as in B2 b3.

EXAMPLE 6



The advantages of this fingering include a chance for the hand to take a brief rest thanks to the different position, before starting the second phrase (B2 b4). It allows the last two quavers to be played legato and espressivo, both qualities of sound which will enhance the effective closing of the first phrase. The resulting jump on the thumb from B[#] to F[#] is a technical problem solved by keeping the wrist and thumb relaxed. For musical reasons it might prove necessary to make a very light ritardando on the 3rd beat. This fingering also ensures accuracy of the D[#], which (with the thumb on the F[#]) can be reached by the 3rd or 4th fingers. Some might find this more secure on the black note than the 5th finger. Smaller hands might wish to use the thumb on two white notes in B3 b4, if the C[#] proves to be insecure when approached from the second finger.

EXAMPLE 7



For small-handed pianists the RH of B41 b3-4 and B42 b1-2 might prove to be the most taxing of the whole etude (see example 8). If the stretch proves too large for a small hand, one alternative is playing each quaver staccato, while staying close to the keyboard. This might necessitate a ritardando to ensure accuracy on the 5th finger. This could be musically defensible as the phrase culminates in the C[#]-major chord (B43 b1). However, some pianists might actually prefer to do the opposite, that is, move towards the C[#]-major chord through a slight accelerando. In that case the small-handed pianist might wish to experiment with using the whole length of the thumb to play the two black notes in B42 b1-2.

EXAMPLE 8



This position could ultimately provide more strength and accuracy for smaller hands. It is important to keep the wrist as low and the palm as flat as possible. The wrist should be lowered only for this position on these two chords.

The big chord progressions in B24 b1, B25 b2, and B26 b4 to B27 b1 will be played arpeggiato by all but the largest of hands. See example 9.

It is impossible to play the two successive chords (B24 b4 - B25 b1 and B26 b4 - B27 b1) completely legato but, if the common tone in each of these two progressions (F[#] and B respectively) is held for as long as possible, the sound will be more legato. A bad tendency with rolled chords is to rotate the wrist too much to the right. This will result in a stiff and insecure 5th finger, especially on the black notes, as well as endangering the security, not to mention the quality of sound, of the next note the thumb has to play.

The melody is in the soprano and should come on the beat, the arpeggiato being played before the beat. Since the rolled chords change the harmony, very quick pedal changes are required. The tendency is to catch only the top two notes of the arpeggiato in the pedal. This will obscure the harmony. It is important to pedal more often than usual in the beat before the roll. The pedalling of most of the etude will be found amongst the following :

EXAMPLE 9

9(a)

Musical score for Example 9(a), starting at measure 24. The score is in treble and bass clefs. The melody in the treble clef consists of a series of eighth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure. The bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piece is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

9(b)

Musical score for Example 9(b), starting at measure 24. The score is in treble and bass clefs. The melody in the treble clef is similar to 9(a) but with a different phrasing. The bass clef accompaniment features a more complex rhythmic pattern. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piece is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

In B24 b3 and B26 b3 it is important to pedal twice in each triplet rather than once, in order to catch the RH thumbnote in the pedal after the harmony of the previous beat has been cleared.

The melody which occurs in the B section (B16 b4 to B30) should be cantabile and as legato as possible but not too loud. The dynamic markings do not exceed *mf* and the crescendos always start from a *p* and return to it. Care should be taken not to accent the beginning of each melodic phrase with its characteristic falling shape. Skryabin determines the shape of the phrase by marking crescendos and decrescendos and even an accent in bar 18. The melodic contours should be adhered to also in bars 23 to 30 where they are not specifically marked. Note the smaller phrase fragments of bars 29 - 30 and the change to a longer phrase in bar 31. These subtle differences in phrase-lengths should be audible.

While the melody should receive most attention in the chordal texture of bars 24 to 30, the expressive quality of the chords underneath the melody should not be underestimated. Note, for example, the A[#] going to A natural in B25 b3-4.

The bass of the LH provides the harmonic structure of the etude. It is important that the bassline be as clear and defined as possible. The rolls in the first 3 bars should be played in such a way that the bass is caught in the pedal.

The seemingly logical fingering for the passages such as B4 b3 to B5 b2 would seem to be the following :

EXAMPLE 10



This however necessitates awkward lateral movements for the hand in order to execute the thumb jumps. The following fingering is much more natural and far easier than the above, if executed with a relaxed, raised and rotating forearm and wrist and without using the elbow.

EXAMPLE 11



Notice that the *sf* given in bar 5 is omitted in similar instances such as bars 13 and 14, while they are accented in bars 37 and 38. This same rotation movement can be used in bars 39 to 40 using the following fingering :

EXAMPLE 12



It could be helpful to think of the passage in chords. This will clarify both fingering and hand position.

EXAMPLE 13

B39 LH

B39 b1-2

B[#] maj 7^{b5}

(F[#], B[#], D[#], A[#])

B39 b3-4

G[#] min (^{#6})

(E[#], D[#], B, G[#])



etc.

The wrist rotation technique can also be used where a small-handed pianist has trouble with the repeated note patterns in the LH of the B section (bars 16 to 30) and preferably when the top note of the rotation is black, as in the following example :

EXAMPLE 14

14(a) B17 b3



14(b) B21 b3



A pianist experiencing difficulty in the RH in bar 38 between beats 1 and 2 could play the RH C' with the left hand. If the rotation technique is used, this should be quite simple for the LH. This gives the RH a whole quaver's time to prepare the hand-position required for the second beat.

EXAMPLE 15

B38 b1-2



The rhythmical difficulty is solved if the two sharps are treated as two semiquavers.

As the triplet pattern of the left hand is not geographically a mirror image of the right hand, but rather a motion from the repeated 5th finger to the thumb, it is possible for the thumb of the RH to occasionally take the third quaver of a LH hand triplet group as in bars 18 and 22.

EXAMPLE 16

B18 b2-3



This will also free the pianist to play the repeated notes of B18 b2-3 and B22 b2-3 using the LH thumb on the D[#] rather than the 2nd finger, facilitating the stretches on the third beats of each bar.

The same approach applies to the LH triplet figure as with the right hand but with one marked difference. In the LH it is sometimes possible to subdivide the triplet figure as follows :

EXAMPLE 17

Bars 27 to 29



The aim is not to accent the thumb, but it should be played legato. This mirrors the RH action of the beginning of the etude.

Bars 41 and 42 present a difficulty often encountered in the works of Beethoven : that of tying a single note into a subsequent chord in the same hand. The difficulty is increased by the fact that the chord is quite large and in most cases would need to be rolled. The answer is slow practice, perfecting the co-ordination at a much reduced speed. It is important that neither 5th finger nor thumb be held too long on the chord and that especially the thumb be relaxed immediately after it has extended itself to play the top note of the chord. It might also prove helpful to practise the rolled notes separately from the held note. At all times keep the wrist and forearm as relaxed as possible and high enough to provide extra weight and support to the middle fingers.

Co-ordination is also required for alternating the 3 against 2 rhythmical pattern between the hands, especially in the B section. Skryabin makes this alternation easier by always preparing the duplet

through a crotchet. Mentally this crotchet provides a rhythmic "common ground" acting as intermediary between the two patterns. These occur in the following places :

B16	b4	RH	
B18	b4	LH	
B20	b4	RH	
B22	b4	LH	
B24	b4	RH	(See asterisked notes in example 18)

The pianist should mentally prepare the duplet rhythm while playing these crotchet beats. The only instance where the alternation is unprepared is between bars 30 and 31. The pianist can also practise the transitions between the hands separately in the following manner :

EXAMPLE 18

Play without a break only the following :

RH	B16	b1-3		18	b4 to 20	b3		
LH		B16	b4 to 18	- 3		B20	b4 to 22	b3

Duplet alternation can be practised in ways similar to example 18.

Probably the most lighthearted of the opus 8 etudes, this etude needs to be played with lightness and clarity and the minimum of pedal.

It contains hints of much of the musical language that is to follow, and the surprisingly passionate melody that seems to appear out of nowhere in the B section.

ETUDE NO. 2 IN F[♯] MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Broad arpeggiated LH figures.
2. Changing rhythmic patterns.
3. Combining different rhythmic patterns in both hands.
4. Legato passage work.

The etude can be divided into 3 sections.

A	-	Bars 1 - 8
B	-	Bars 9 - 16
A(varied)	-	Bars 17 - 24
Coda	-	Bars 25 - 26

This etude presents similar difficulties to those of op. 8 no. 4. Although the character of these two studies differs greatly, the rhythmic complexity of no. 4 is slightly more advanced than that of no. 2 and it is therefore suggested that no. 2 be studied first.

The major difficulties of the etude present themselves from the first bar. Absolute security in each hand is required before the hands can be successfully combined. The problem of the combined rhythmic patterns is furthermore complicated by the need for a subtly expressive rubato.

The LH will (eventually) reveal itself as the rhythmic anchor of the etude. It provides most of the harmonic structure and at times provides quasi-orchestral textures. It is possible to clarify the broad LH arpeggiated figures which occur in every single bar of the etude save for the last two, by dividing the work into hand positions and chords. By treating the LH as broken or rolled chords, a logical legato fingering will reveal itself; the attendant difficulty of jumps on the thumb and fifth finger will be dealt with later. An example of how the LH can be broken into two chords is the following :

EXAMPLE 1

Bars 1 - 2

l(a)



l(b)



The student then has 3 options : arpeggiating the chords either down or up, or up and down on one chord. This will reveal how the lowest note of each chord is used as a springboard for passages. It is interesting to note that in each bar in the etude the LH starts on the 5th finger. The general motion of the LH is a rolling from the 5th finger at the bottom of the pattern, to the thumb at the top. It is important to the smooth execution of this etude that this free-flowing motion be understood and that the constant "up-down" action be performed as smoothly and evenly as possible. It is therefore imperative to secure the individual passages which move from 5th to thumb, or vice versa, individually before they are combined. In order to minimise movement in the LH the following notes in bar 1 can be taken with the right hand, as can similar examples in bars 2, 4, 5, 6, 17 and 18.

EXAMPLE 2

Bar 1 RH



Other instances where the RH could take some LH notes include the following :

B 8 b3-4

B10 b4

B11 b4

B20 b4

B22 b3-4

B23 b3-4

(Extreme) B24 b3-4

Care should be taken to ensure that alternative fingerings do not disturb the held notes of the RH, and that the flow from one hand to the other is even and **imperceptible to the ear**. The purpose of alternate fingerings is to facilitate performance, not to add difficulties. Many performers might well prefer to ignore this alternative; but others might be advised to do so.

Exercises may be devised to ensure clarity as to the "from where" and "to where" of each passage. Examples are the following :

EXAMPLE 3

Bar 1 LH

3(a)



3(b)



Students should not ignore the "by way of" of each passage, that is, the middle note of each of the patterns which generally consists of 3 notes. In bars 2 and 3 the following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 4

Bars 1-4 LH

This will avoid unnecessary LH thumb jumps resulting from a 1 2 alternative.

The 2 3 fingering will also heighten a student's awareness of the legato quality of sound which this accompaniment requires. Care has to be taken when moving from one hand position to the next that the transition is not jerky or accented. One wishes to avoid incessant accents, either on the thumb or the main beats of the bar. It is therefore necessary to keep the thumb flexible. The legato thumb-slide in bar 1 between the C# and B# is a perfect example of the need for a controlled, flexible thumb, without which the slide could sound chopped and accented.

The technical work required in this etude is similar to that in the first Debussy etude.

A difficulty which recurs quite frequently in Skryabin's works is the need to jump on the 5th finger or the thumb :

EXAMPLE 5

5(a) Bars 3-4

or between the two.

5(b) Bar 9



Controversy exists as to whether black notes should be played right on the fingertips, using curved fingers, or with the cushion of the first joint using flat fingers. Not wishing to resurrect the controversy or add to it, I prefer to analyze each example individually.

In searching for a solution to the downward LH jump on the F sharps between bars 3 and 4 (see example 5) the pianist is at liberty to simply perform a downward octave jump from one F# (or any other black note for that matter) to the next, using both methods and to then exercise a choice based on personal preference. But the solution is not nearly as simple as that. The jump should not be seen in isolation. The position of the fingers in the jump will to a large extent be governed by what preceded the first 5th finger and by what follows the second.

The last crotchet of bar 3 is an F# minor-7th chord, requiring a more extended LH spread than the closed "five finger" position which allows the fifth finger to play on its tip. The first crotchet of bar 4 requires a large spread in B minor which only the largest of hands could execute as a chord. After playing the F# minor 7th in bar 3, very few pianists will prepare the hand for the entire B minor chord, which would automatically result in playing the bass with a flat finger. Most pianists will prepare the position of the minor 6th, which could encourage playing on the fingertip, as the hand position is smaller.

The pianist should also let the choice of hand position be determined by a search for the correct quality of sound required. The needs of the music must take precedence over any textbook. Flat-finger players most often encourage their style of playing in passages requiring strength, power and volume. Notice then that the first indication of a forte occurs only in bar 11; furthermore, the delicate texture of bars 3 and 4 does not yet require a full-powered sound.

The difficult LH jumps that occur in bars 10 and 12 become a Skryabinesque signature in many works written in the same period. Compare this passage with those found in the Etude op. 8 no. 3, bars 29 to 37 and 109 to 117, and the Prelude op. 11 no. 18, bars 39 - 42.

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 10 and 12

The passage can be seen to consist of an upper and a lower octave, the upper being a broken octave. While it is impossible to play absolutely legato from the first quaver to the second, the aural effect must be legato. The secret of a smooth transition lies in a relaxed thumb and wrist. It is suggested that, if difficulty is encountered in playing the passage accurately, it be practised in the following ways, amongst others :

EXAMPLE 7

Bar 10

7(a)

7(b)

etc.

7(c)

etc.

etc.

The thumb on the 3rd quaver should not be accented. Notice also how Skryabin eases the difficulty of this passage by marking the second quaver of each pattern as a crotchet. Studying bars 10 and 12 in this way will reveal most of the hand movements and processes required by the passage in bars 13 to 16. It is suggested that this passage be practised also by omitting the jumps to the octave D's which create such an effective pedal point. The awkward arpeggio in fifths on the 3rd beat of bar 16 can be turned into a useful exercise by extending the passage over 3 or 4 octaves and perhaps even transposing it into different keys.

Careful fingering lies at the root of performing the RH accurately. The fingering given in the Paul Kay edition favours the "five finger" position, though the fingering is in certain cases rather skeletal. The following fingering is suggested for bar 1 :

EXAMPLE 8

Bar 1 RH



and the following for bars 3 and 4 :

EXAMPLE 9

Bars 3-4 RH



To facilitate learning the RH, its passages can be broken up into the following "practice-phrases", each to be perfected before connecting them into a long phrase :

EXAMPLE 10

Bars 3-4 RH



The RH is highly chromatic and requires much movement between black and white notes. The best hand position for achieving comfort in the

passages of the A and C sections (bars 1 to 8 and bars 17 to 24) as well as bars 9 and 11 of the B section, is a slightly raised wrist with the palm quite close to the keys. It is essential that the fingers be curved and that care be taken to articulate each note on the fingertips. Negotiating these passages with flat or straight fingers with the wrist either too high or too low becomes virtually impossible.

A rhythmic difficulty featuring in both hands is the alternation of successive rhythmic groupings required on different beats, for example,

bar 1 RH

beat 1 - quintuplet (in semiquavers)

beat 2 - sextuplet (in semiquavers)

or bar 1 LH

beats 1 and 2 - triplets (in quavers)

beats 3 and 4 - quadruplets (in semiquavers)

One of the most effective ways to ensure an even transition from one grouping to the next is by working with a metronome. At first, all rubato should be avoided to ensure complete rhythmical accuracy and evenness. The aim is to achieve a clean, even and unaccented legato line. This will provide a firm foundation for the varied articulation and dynamics required, as well as for eventually combining the hands. Avoid merely outlining the melody in the RH in the following way :

EXAMPLE 11

Bars 3-4 RH



It is important to discover and control the expressive quality of the chromaticism and to avoid misreadings.

Marta Deyanova (Nimbus) misreads the first beat of bar 9, playing a D[#] instead of the printed D natural on the last semiquaver of the quintuplet. Vladimir Sofronitzky (Le Chant du Monde) misreads the second beat of bar 8 playing D[#] instead of the printed D natural on the last note of the quintuplet.

There is no textual evidence to support either of these readings. Deyanova's D[#] confuses the A major/A dominant-seventh harmony of B9 b1-2, while Sofronitzky misses the expressive value of the flattened

second in C# minor cadencing on B8 b3.

Skryabin echoes this particular melodic contour in various places.

- B 4 b2-3
- B 9 b2-3
- B11 b2-3
- B23 b2-3
- B24 b2-3

The only place where this contour changes is deliberately marked in B20 b2-3, where it serves not merely as expressive variant, but enforces the key of F# minor in preparation for the poignant change of harmony to F# major 7th in bar 21. It must be added that both pianists misread very musically!

The RH of bars 9 and 11 (beat 3) presents the difficulty of widespread rolls. The roll should be executed quickly, but without accenting the thumb. Care should also be taken to keep the melody note on the fifth finger, within the dynamic scope of the phrase.

In bars 10 and 12-16 Skryabin himself outlines a chromatic melody within the quintuplet. In fact, he outlines two melodic aspects within this pattern, one being an alto thumb melody and the other a soprano melody. Skryabin is very explicit in his markings; crotchets on the thumbs, and accents, phrase marks and held notes in the soprano. To facilitate legato and hold the notes that Skryabin intended the following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 12

Bars 10 - 16 RH

The passage is simplified if one notes that the thumb and second finger both remain in their same positions for each quintuplet and that the soprano melody line moves consistently in semitones except at those places marked ÀÀÀÀÀÙ in example 12. Note that the thumb should where possible be held for its full value. The following practice methods are suggested for strengthening the passage :

EXAMPLE 13

13(a)

Handwritten musical notation for Example 13(a). It features a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bass line consists of chords: G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3. The notes are grouped into quintuplets with curly braces. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

13(b)

Handwritten musical notation for Example 13(b). It features a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bass line consists of chords: G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3. A slur is drawn under the bass line, connecting the two chords. The notes are grouped into quintuplets with curly braces. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

13(c)

Handwritten musical notation for Example 13(c). It features a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bass line consists of chords: G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3. The notes are grouped into quintuplets with curly braces. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

13(d)

Handwritten musical notation for Example 13(d). It features a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bass line consists of chords: G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3; G2, B2, D3. A slur is drawn under the bass line, connecting the first two chords. The notes are grouped into quintuplets with curly braces. The word "etc." is written to the right of the staff.

The task of combining the different rhythmic groupings of the two hands presents probably the biggest difficulty of the etude. This psychological mountain of complication can be diminished by bearing in mind the following :

1. the basic pulse is 4 crotchets per bar and stays that way for the entire etude;
2. both hands almost always play together on the beat;
3. there are only 4 difficult rhythmic combinations to learn :

- 6 against 3
- 6 against 4
- 5 against 3
- 5 against 4

The simpler of these rhythmic combinations present little difficulty. In B1 b2 the 6 against 3 requires a straightforward subdivision of each triplet quaver into two semiquavers.

The second beat of bar 9 is best viewed not as 6 against 4, but as two consecutive 2 against 3 patterns.

The pianist who wishes to tackle this standard of repertoire should be comfortable with a 2 against 3. Dealing with 5:3 and 5:4 requires a very clear sense of the pulse. It should not at this stage be considered unmusical to practise with accents on the beat, so long as they are made with deliberate intent. This will strengthen a sense of beat as well as the flow from one pulse to another. It is wise to separate each beat and perfect it individually, while taking care not to shorten the beat in such a way that, when the etude is played through, it consists of a series of combined groupings with gaps in between. In order to avoid these gaps the pianist can practise not only from the beginning of a beat to the end of it,

EXAMPLE 14

B17 RH



but also from the beginning of a beat right up to the beginning of the next one :

EXAMPLE 15

B17 RH



That will ensure that the last note of each grouping is given its full attention and will facilitate smooth transition from one beat to the next. The distance between the last note of a grouping and the first note of the next is vital.

A method for a desperate student to conquer this kind of passage, is by mathematical division. The mathematics are simple : one multiplies the number of notes in one grouping by that of the simultaneous grouping. In the case of B1 b1, (see example 4) $5 \times 3 = 15$. Draw a line 15cm long and divide it in multiples of each number, as follows :



1 and 16 represent the distance between 2 pulses. 1, 4, 7, 10 and 13 represent the RH and 1, 6, 11 the LH. Counting evenly from 1 to 16, the pianist then plays the notes on the given counts. This very slow deliberate method is frowned upon by pianists with poetic ideals, but presents at least a workable approach to passages like these. Any student might benefit from using it, even if only very briefly in the initial stages of study, discarding it later, as it reveals the logic behind the "mysterious" and gives the performer a certain confidence, however marginal. Obviously, in performance the listener must not for a moment get the impression of over-studious correctness or metric quality in the playing. This must be countered by sensitive use of rubato, a strong legato and the avoidance of accents and other such traces of practising methods. The impression the listener must get is that of the process of slight intensification and subsequent relaxation of the pulse - pushing and pulling of the tempo so to speak.

Possibilities for slight accelerandos and ritardandos abound in the etude and the student should be guided by an instinctive response to the music. If the pianist experiences what the work is trying to communicate and tries to understand the language of the harmonies and melodic intervals, these occasions for tempo fluctuation will reveal themselves. The accelerandos and ritardandos cannot function separately. They are inextricably linked in phrases where they occur.

Skrjabin's rhythmic indications should be clearly executed as they have definite musical reasons for existing. The unexpected "a tempo" on the 2nd beat of bar 20 is definitely not two beats early, but prepares the way for a highly espressivo quality of sound on the key change, which might otherwise be intensified by its alter ego, the ritardando. Care should be taken to ensure a clean unbroken legato between a ritardando and an "a tempo". See bars 8 into 9, 16 into 17, and 20 and 21.

Skryabin's pedalling has been discussed earlier. In this etude the harmonic function of the pedal is very important and will be decided as much by the harmonic implications as the melodic, if not more. The harmonic pulse is dictated by the bass, and is never shorter than a full beat. However, the solution is not as simply defined as one pedal per beat. Flutter-pedalling is needed in B1 b4 and similar examples, to ensure continuation of the harmony, while filtering out the E[#] in the third beat. Notice also the staccato markings in bar 1, 2, 5, 6, 17 and 18 as well as the non legato indication at bar 17.

B4 b1-2 reveal the expressive differences between a quintuplet held in one pedal and a quintuplet, whole or in part, with each semiquaver pedalled separately.

EXAMPLE 16

Bars 3-4

Similar examples in bars 8, 20, 22, 23 and 24 allow an expressive opportunity to the performer.

Flutter-pedalling is also advisable in the B Section (bars 9 to 16) where phrasing and articulation can easily be smeared by a pedal held down for the entire harmonic pulse. During the decrescendo in bar 15 and the ritardando in bar 16 beat 4, the pedalling should be of a melodic nature, giving preference to a clear melody over the harmonies of the left hand. The final two bars must be linked with a legato pedal. This will be achieved by starting the rolled chord exactly on the beat.

Information on Skryabin's use of the una corda pedal is less than abundant, but given the range of colour required its use is often highly appropriate. Possible moments for using the una corda include bars 23 to the end. It could be used to enhance the change of colour in bar 21 although some pianists might feel that the una corda would be ineffective in that particular register, causing dullness rather than mellowness. Bearing in mind that F[#] major was for Skryabin synaesthetically associated with a bright, clear colour (it happens to be blue, but emphasis is on the quality of blue), and that a pianissimo follows in bar 24, the una corda is perhaps best avoided in bar 21.

This is a very refined piece which allows much scope for delicate and imaginative expressivity as well as dramatic outbursts. It provides a

good introduction to Skryabin's emotional language.

ETUDE NO. 3 IN B MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Legato alternation between the octave and a single note, in both hands simultaneously.
2. Co-ordinating diametrically opposed hand movements.
3. Cantabile melody in the RH over an active asymmetrical base.
4. Alternation between duplets and triplets.

When studying this etude for the first time, the technical difficulties are best solved in each hand separately. The first point to clarify is that of fingering. This might differ given various hand sizes. The student should try to choose the fingering that will allow the fewest number of movements, either in the hand position or the wrist. One way of finding the most convenient fingering is to reduce the movements to chords as follows :

EXAMPLE 1

Bar 1

etc.



These chords should be played as legato as possible. Throughout most of the etude, the fingering will be 2 on the inner note and ⁵1 on the

octave. However, a very legato approach can reveal moments where a change of fingering facilitates phrasing, memory, legato, quality of sound, or giving certain muscles a moment of respite.

The etude is in A B A Varied form.

TECHNICALLY

MUSICALLY

A B1-40

A B1-28, Link B29-40

B B41-72

B B41-72, Link B73-80

A Varied B73-122

A Varied B81-108, Coda B109-122

The fast vibration between the fifth and thumb on the octave, and the finger in the middle, usually the second but sometimes the third, or even both the second and third, requires the utmost independence of action of the concerned fingers. At the outset it could prove valuable to concentrate on single movements perfected separately before they are connected. The smallest building block of the phrases is the alternation found right at the start of the etude, on the first two quavers in each hand.

A method of clarifying the movements is to practise with a stop-start method, one building block at a time, very slowly and breaking or stopping between, in the following way :

EXAMPLE 2

Bars 1-3

Tempestoso $\text{♩} = 80-92$

etc.

This will mentally reduce a very long and difficult phrase to a series of smaller and more manageable manoeuvres. This dissection will define individual movements to be perfected.

In order to increase the individual action of the fingers the following ways of practising are suggested, which are to be applied to both hands :

EXAMPLE 3

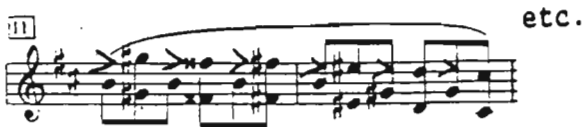
3(a)



3(b)



3(c)



3(d)



3(e)



Once security in the separate two-quaver pattern is established the student should try and identify "phrase fragments" comprising joined two - quaver patterns. The "joins" are governed by the principle of hand position. These joins should not be too long, and should then be practised using the stopping method, that is, pausing in between

phrases and mentally rehearsing the next fragment during the pause.

Examples of these phrases include :

EXAMPLE 4

Bars 6-10



The advantage of this approach is the clarity concerning the hand positions and movements it gives the student.

Before linking all the smaller subdivisions of Skryabin's long phrases, it might prove useful to separate the two notes of the octave for practising purposes (see example 5). This will reinforce a good legato as well as the independence of the finger-action. It will also be easier to pay attention to the individual attitude of the fingers : for example, the etude can never be played with a stiff or flat thumb, or a thumb that is locked at the joint. Accuracy on the little finger is also much more secure if it remains flexible and if special effort is made to play only on the fingertips. It is not possible to play legato in all the two- quaver figures due to awkward stretches such as in bar 8 LH.

In order to clarify points such as these the etude could be practised in the following way :

EXAMPLE 5

5(a) Bar 20



5(b)



This might seem excessive, but in performance it does prove necessary

to occasionally shorten one note of the octave pair. Unless the pianist has very large hands and can play stretches such as bar 8 LH, bar 16 LH, or bar 20 RH legato, the result can be dryly percussive, staccato and very often inaccurate. Sometimes a note or two can be taken by the right hand such as bar 16 (A[#]) but there can be cases such as bars 78 and 87 where the left hand is on its own.

The chordal passages in the LH in bars 17 to 27 and 97 to 107 are difficult to execute as each chord (with the exception of the second beat of bars 20 and 100) requires a jump to a new hand position. If the student has difficulty executing the passages cleanly the cause could be two-fold : either the octave orientation on the keyboard is unclear, or the inner voice of the chord could be insecure. A good way of remedying this is to separate the aspects involved. Practise first the passage in bare octaves, without the middle note of the chords. Practise the thumb and fifth (or occasionally the fourth, depending on choice of fingering) separately. Then practise the inner note of the chord. Develop as many variations and combinations of notes as possible.

At first, this may seem time-consuming, but the benefit will be enormous in terms of clarifying the relation of the chords to each other, the alternation of chords with octaves, which notes are repeated by different fingers, and so on.

Learning of the LH in the B section can be facilitated by a harmonic analysis of this passage. A simple harmonic reduction of the LH only is the following :

Bar 41 - D major	Bars 57 to 58 - F [#] minor
Bar 42 - F [#] minor	Bar 59 - F [#] diminished
Bar 43 - D major	Bar 60 - B major
Bar 44 - B minor	Bars 61 to 62 - E minor
Bars 45 to 47 - E minor	Bars 63 to 64 - A major
Bar 48 - A major	Bar 65 - D major
Bar 49 - E minor	Bar 66 - F [#] minor
Bar 50 - Eb augmented	Bar 67 - D major
Bar 51 - G major	Bar 68 - B minor
Bars 52 to 54 - B minor	Bars 69 to 70 - E minor
Bar 55 - E major	Bars 71 to 72 - C [#] diminished
Bar 56 - A major	

It should also be noted that the left hand harmonic-scheme is indicated directly in the RH on the first chord of the following bars, (which could be a safeguard against memory-lapse in performance) : Bars 41, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 52, 57, 58, 59, 61, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, and 72.

Legato fingering is very important to the quality of the sound required in the heart-felt melody of the B section. It is advisable to start bar 41 using the 4th finger on the F[#]. An awkward technical device, especially for smaller hands, is to be found in bars 42, 44, 46, 50, 52, 54, 60, 64, 66, 68, 71 and 72 in the large RH chord. An example of how this may be solved is a relatively simple dovetailing

of legato slurs giving the impression of a long legato line. Bar 42 is to be played with the following legato :

EXAMPLE 6

Bar 42 RH



The F# on the thumb should be played staccato, without accent, as an appoggiatura. It is very important to the legato effect to sustain the C# with the second finger to the end of the bar.

The difficult RH chord-progressions between bar 46 and 47, 54 and 55 as well as 70 and 71 are to be solved by dividing them up into hand positions.

EXAMPLE 7

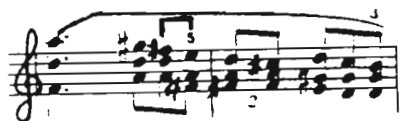
Bars 44-48



For any size of hand the chord change in bars 54 and 55 presents difficulty, especially at high speed.

EXAMPLE 8

Bars 54-55



The difficulty lies in the last two quavers of bar 54 in the RH where the jump on the thumb is accompanied by a 2nd finger shift from a perfect 4th to a minor 3rd, as well as the varying outer limits of the chord, from a major sixth to a minor seventh. The danger is that the E in the soprano could sound strangled. If the passage as it stands proves too uncomfortable, an alternative is to take the F# of the last chord with the left hand. A slight ritardando to accommodate the resulting octave jumps in the LH could be used to musical effect by emphasising the ii, V, I cadence to bar 56.

There remains the danger of jerkiness and accents. As the F# sounds in the bass anyway it is not inconceivable to omit it in the service of a legato line with a good sound in the soprano.

Dynamic markings, though expressive indications are also a technical device requiring much control. Skryabin's marking should be observed meticulously. A wealth of technical work is revealed on observation of the dynamics such as the melodic crescendo over sustained notes in the same hand (bars 41 and 43), as a means of achieving expressive individuality of the finger. Observing the accents in the varied repetition of A (from bar 79 to 107) is vital to the character to the piece and as easily justifiable in terms of maintaining the two main beats in a bar. It is just as important to avoid 3 beats per bar right from the start. With the cross-rhythm of bars 23 to 27 and the accents in the right hand, the left hand has to exert control over the rhythmic structure of two beats per bar.

It is also as much a matter of technical control of the individual requirements of each hand, as a musical one, to produce different articulation simultaneously, as in bar 17 to 27 and the B section.

One of the major difficulties in the etude manifests itself in the seemingly awkward crossing and uncrossing of hands which occurs when the A and A varied sections are played with both hands. The mechanical possibilities of the thumbs crossing each other is masterfully exploited by Skryabin.

The process is virtually impossible to describe but will be perceived if the first 4 bars are played though slowly, while the action of the thumbs is closely observed at the following points :

EXAMPLE 9

Bars 1-4

It is very important to memorise when each thumb-crossing takes place. It could be helpful to raise slightly the wrist of the hand whose thumb is passing over the other thumb, and lowering the other wrist. It is vital that this process be clear in the mind of the pianist.

Overcoming this difficulty is related to overcoming the problem of the asymmetrical movements of the hands throughout the entire A section. These become completely symmetrical in the A varied section, from the inside (thumb and 2nd finger) outwards, (to the 5th finger). Slow practice is a sure way to secure the different movements. These must be as smooth as possible, without jerks or overarticulation of finger movements.

The metronome indication of $\text{♩} = 80 - 92$ is extremely fast, perhaps excessive. It is not merely a study, it is a piece of music. Skryabin was not satisfied with the designation *Tempestoso*, since he did not think it captured the spirit of the etude. This invites the question what the character really is. *Tempestuous* it certainly is. The accented cross-rhythms which crescendo from a *f* (bars 17 to 26) are stormy and the outbursts on bars 27, 28 and 29, or even more, the silences between the outbursts, are violent. The rhythmic patterns are insistent and to a point, obsessive. But notice that most of the etude contains markings that indicate a different character. It opens *p* and remains below *f* for 16 bars. The dramatic link section (bars 29 to 40 and 73 to 80) might start *f* with tenuto markings on the first three quavers (according to the Dover edition these are the composer's instructions), but a diminuendo is marked from the second bar of the link. This diminuendo lasts for 11 of the passage's 12 bars with the exception of a *fp* lasting just one quaver in bar 39. A passage need not be loud to be tempestuous.

The character of the etude is fluid, almost flammable. It flows and is unstable, yet it searches for inner peace. This search for equilibrium is evident in much of Skryabin's music.

The impetuosity seems to be retrained somewhat in the B section. The tender, yearning quality of the melody requires delicate yet very passionate treatment; some interpreters may find it imperative to take this section at slower speed, in order for the melody to bloom and the harmonic rubato to develop naturally and unhurriedly. However, a sudden change of tempo in bar 41 will jar the listener to the extent of completely ruining the effect of relative serenity. In order to overcome this, a slight and carefully paced ritardando throughout the entire link section aided by the broad pedal point, will make the lead into the new section less jarring. The same care can turn bars 73 to 80 into a return to the A varied section. Here one has the added advantage of bars 79 to 80 providing a point where slight rhythmic relaxation can prepare the listener perfectly for the return to the A varied section. This section is marked *pianissimo*, requiring a different character from the A section.

In order to avoid rhythmic monotony controlled use has to be made of rubato. At the risk of offering "rubato to order", the following are a few suggestions as to where a slight easing of the speed can be very effective in clarifying the structure of the phrases : bars 4, 8, 16, 40, 63, 80, 84, 88 and 96.

Naturally, the impetus of the work should not be completely destroyed by the rubato, but a rhythmic flexibility is imperative.

Sometimes it can also be effective to start slightly below tempo and accelerate. Examples of this, which should be used very sparingly - and with such care that they are dangerous to mention and would be disastrous in all but the most sensitive of hands - are bars 1, 29, 57, 81 and 109. The acceleration is almost imperceptible and should not exceed the maximum speed.

The B section requires the RH to alternate smoothly between duplets and triplets. The metronome is the most effective means of achieving even transitions.

The chord in bar 28 presents a problem as it can be musically interpreted in various ways, each having a different technical realisation. If it is treated as an upbeat to bar 29 it could be rolled, with 1 2 3 5 fingering. If it is viewed as the climax of an $\begin{smallmatrix} 6 & 5 \\ 3 & 3 \end{smallmatrix}$ cadence (bars 27 to 28) this fingering will not provide enough power. The A[#] could then be played as a thumb-appoggiatura, resulting in a jump on the thumb from A[#] to E. It is a matter of preference.

The A varied section requires mostly three pedallings due to the harmonic changes, but these should not disturb the pulse-rate of two per bar.

ETUDE NO. 4 IN B MAJOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. RH legato melodic passages.
2. LH broad arpeggiated figures.
3. Hand rotation movements.
4. Quintuplets and polyrhythms.

The character of this etude contains no hint of the demon that Anthony Leonard claims to hear in Skryabin [Leonard p.412].

The etude, one of the shortest in the opus, can be divided into 3 sections.

A - B 0 to B8 b3

B - B8 b4 to B15 b3

A₁- B15 b4 to B24

This etude is devoted to what has been described as Skryabin's compositional practice of "*melodic garlands in the style of two-part invention in rhythmic counterpoint*" [Somers, p.46]. A feature of this style of writing in Skryabin's output is his inability to integrate it into extended works, or combine it with other styles. It is therefore usual that these "spinning" passages dominate smaller forms such as etudes or preludes. As is the case with the Prelude op. 13 no. 4, the passage work is briefly interrupted by a RH cantabile melody during which the passage work is concentrated in the LH. This etude marks the first appearance of this style in Skryabin's output.

The technical demands of the hands differ markedly from each other. The continuous quintuplets in the RH of the A sections require a different technical approach from the LH quintuplets of the B section, while the LH of the A section reveals Skryabin's constantly evolving LH technique with its unique thumb and rotation movements.

Fingering is of the utmost importance in this etude and is closely linked to the movement of the wrist and forearm. Legato fingering is suggested for as many successive notes as possible. The following fingering is suggested for bars 0 and 1 :

EXAMPLE 1

Bars 0-1 RH

Piacevole ♩ = 100 Op. 3. Nr. 4

1(a) 1 2 3 5 4 2 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 5 4 2 4 3 2 1 2 3 5 4



1(b) 1 1 2 1 2 3 5 3 2

1(c) 1 3 1 3 2 1 3 1 2 3 1 3 1 4 3


The fingering suggested in example 1 (a) requires a large number of notes to be played without a change of hand position or the passing under of the thumb. The first seven semiquavers form a technical unit which overlaps the rhythmic unit. Thomas Fielden argues that finger passages such as these be "led by the forearm conducting the larger rhythmic unit" [Fielden, pp.114-115]. Thus these passages become forearm co-ordinations. The fingers therefore act as bridges, carrying the weight transferred by the forearm and wrist. This movement appears to be similar to the "continual shift of inclination" observed in the playing of Franz Liszt [Fay, p.291].

In order for the fingers to accurately bear the weight transfer, the finger-action has to be secured. This is achieved by breaking the rotation movement up into smaller events before executing it as a whole, and through securing of the finger-work. Frank Merrick recommends the following processes for the mastering of finger passages : (1) Hand Staccato, (2) Group practice, (3) See-sawing, (4) Practising with one finger, (5) Marking the beats with your other hand, and (6) Practising in rhythms [Merrick, p.27].

1. Hand staccato is excellent for strengthening the fingers and engraving notes and fingering on the memory. This work is purely mechanical and the student should therefore not lose sight of Leschetizky's observation : "The object of slow practice is to study the melodic elements in the passage work" [Merrick, p.27].
2. Group practice involves breaking up longer passages by placing pauses at significant moments such as at the end of a hand position, on every 3rd or 4th note, or every time a specific finger plays. Although continuity is the requirement of these passages, this procedure not only encourages learning, memory, mental preparation and the forward planning necessary, but also provides moments of active relaxation for the mechanism. In fast playing these "stops" (pauses) do not occur but they provide moments where tension can be released and the hand prepared for the next group. This occurs very fast.

3. See-sawing merely encourages the release of tension or excessive muscle activity from the playing mechanism. The danger with this suggestion of Merrick's is that it could encourage excessive arm movement or a slowing down of activities to the point of actually discouraging alertness and attention.
4. Practising a passage with one finger is merely beneficial in testing memory divorced from automatic motor activity inspired by the fingers [Shaffer, 1981, op cit.].
5. Marking the beats with your other hand bears superficial resemblance to practising with a metronome. The advantage is that the beats are "man-made" by the pianist and encourages an inner awareness of the pulse.
6. Practising in rhythms (for example ) bears resemblance to practising in groups (no. 2 above); here the group consists of 2 notes. The small group encourages perfection of the actions over a shorter period. It also teaches the student to "throw" concentration from one group to the next. The requirement is that every longer note receive major attention at the expense of the shorter note. Therefore it is essential, especially in the unequal rhythmic figures of this etude, also to practise the reverse () to ensure that concentration on each note is consciously studied.

Once the individual finger-action is secured the memorization of wrist and forearm rotation units is required. For examples of these units, see the phrasing marks over the fingerings in example 1. The hand position of example 1 (a) requires a broad palm. For smaller hands example 1(b) might prove easier, despite the difficulty of the thumb jumps. Given the fact that the opening quintuplet and its counterpart in B1 b4 have crescendos marked that seem to propel them to the beginning of the next bar, and the need for rhythmic flexibility, it is not inconceivable that the first two semiquavers containing the thumb jump could be played a fraction slower. If the thumb jumps prove to be a mental stumbling block, using the second finger on the first semiquaver of the etude, combined with a loose wrist rotation action similar to the LH action of Etude no. 2 B10, could prove the answer.

The fingering suggested in example 1(c) () is similar to a fingering option in B2 b3 (see example 2(a)) requiring two separate rotation movements.

EXAMPLE 2

Bar 2



2 (a) 4 1 2 1 5

2 (b) 4 1 2 3 5

Example 2 (b) also requires a large stretch or an insecure jump from third to fifth finger while examples 1(c) and 2(a), superficially appearing treacherous, might be preferable, as they require slower and fewer movements, and allow the hand to function in a narrower span and not at its fullest extension. Pianists should base their choice from the above options on careful examination of their hands : the extension, width of the palm and flexibility of the thumb.

An exercise beneficial for memorizing notes and fingers requires playing an extended passage such as the first phrase in the RH, and placing a special emphasis decided beforehand on a specific note or finger, for example, playing a pause, accent or even an acciaccatura on every note played by the fifth finger, and repeating the process on the other fingers. Another example is to play an accelerando up to each appearance of a G[#] (or other chosen note). Far from disrupting the concept of the music this form of practising teaches analysis that structures the physical approach to the passage. Students should always be aware that exercises developed from a difficulty in the repertoire are designed to solve a musical problem - in this case the even flow of quintuplets - with a high level of technical, mental and, for want of a better term, mechanical mastery. These constitute the equipment employed in musical expression.

While rubato is essential in the rendering of this work, it can be used as an excuse for uneven playing. Pianists experiencing difficulty in rendering the passage-work evenly should try to find musical solutions first. The pianist should become aware of the musical concept of evenness, in other words, what it could and should sound like, taking care to avoid mindless imitation and mechanicalness. The tenuto indications suggesting melodic treatment of certain notes can cause nebulous rhythmic rendering. The tenuto marking does not indicate a pause on a note. Some pianists do however in performance play the quintuplet rhythm in bar 1 of the RH as a sextuplet : , which clearly was caused by a misconception of the melodic treatment of certain notes or by the insecurity of playing the hands together. This kind of inaccuracy, Neuhaus points out, is due in fact to an insufficient understanding of the composer's spirit and style [Neuhaus, p.64]. If the artistic image is not clear, neither can the rhythmic element be. Rubato has been discussed earlier. Neuhaus also points out the need for learning from good singers, violinists or

cellists a mastery of cantilena and how to "extract the full cantabile quality out of short notes ...". (Neuhaus, p.64]

If the rhythm remains suspect, even though the musical concept has been tested, the technical problem must be discovered. B1 b1 presents the difficulty - depending on the choice of fingering, as has been discussed - of rotating the hand across the thumb evenly (see example 1(a)). The amount of tension in the hand should be monitored and corrected. Students might find it helpful not to treat the tip of the thumb as the pivot of rotation movement, but rather the joint where the thumb joins the hand. To avoid an accent on the third semiquaver of bar 1 the "landing" or "flying" finger should be kept as flexible as possible.

Instability in the rhythm of passage-work might also be caused by weakness of a certain finger-action which the pianist might not be conscious of. This often occurs where a stronger finger is followed by a weaker one or vice versa, for example 345 or 543 fingering occasionally allows the fourth finger to rush. Strengthening exercises such as trills could prove useful. Another solution is merely to choose alternate fingering.

Balancing the tenuto notes within the texture of the surrounding passage requires careful aural monitoring. Tenutos have been shown not to indicate pauses. They do not indicate accents either. Physically these notes need not be played detached, but slightly increased weight should be sufficient. Their treatment within the context of the work is similar to the tenutos observed in the Etude op. 8 no. 2, although here the aural image is completely different.

The alternation of dynamics is important in both hands and is controlled largely by weight from the wrist. Neuhaus discusses the link between tone and rhythm extensively [Neuhaus, pp.52-53]. The temptation to link rubato to dynamics is justifiable up to a point. That point seems to be transgressed where an accelerando is automatically associated with a crescendo and a ritardando with a diminuendo. This is a very basic musical difficulty especially for young musicians, but the active application of rubato can easily fall into a formula which makes inaccurate rhythm very difficult to discover or to rectify.

Another feature of rhythmic inaccuracy has been mentioned by Artur Schnabel in his teaching, described as "*the magical attraction towards the barline*" [Schnabel, p.70] Schnabel refers to the tendency to accelerate through the last beat of the bar. This tendency is curbed with the use of the metronome and "fine-tuning" of the inner rhythmic sense.

The importance of a clear rhythmic sense is stressed by Neuhaus : "*The mistakes made by a musician performer in the organization of time are akin to the mistakes of an architect in solving problems of space and architecture*" [Neuhaus, p.40-1].

The RH melody in the B Section (B8 b4 to B14 b3) requires a richer quality of sound than the passage work, while not being pushed too loudly. It should be legato as marked. A round sonorous sound similar to that of the B Section of Etude no. 3 is required. Sandor advocates a "*responsive springy action in the wrist and the other joints*" [Sandor, p.179].

It should be noted that B15 b4 to B19 b3 is an exact repetition of B0 b4 to B4 b3. One difference between the end of the A section (B4 b4 - B8 b3) and the end of the etude (B19 b3-24) lies in the altered LH technique.

B18 b4 to B21 present a technical pattern found only occasionally elsewhere in the etude : B0 b4, B3 b4, B4 b1-2, B4 b4 and other possible examples depending on fingering. Example 3 (B18 b4 to B19 LH) requires large LH rotation movements to accommodate the wide span. Fingering suggested is that which treats each triplet as a broken chord. This is done chiefly because the leap between the third quaver of each triplet and the first of the following triplet are too far away to suggest alternatives. The difficulty of the RH does not readily allow it to take the third quaver of each triplet group.

EXAMPLE 3

B18 b4 to B19



For a full discussion of LH rotation technique the reader is referred to the section on the Etude op. 8 no. 7, specifically examples 5 (n) to (r). Quick leaps are required between the triplet groups. These are facilitated by quiet dynamics. The leaps can actually assist in creating an even crescendo if the distance is used to add controlled weight to the fifth finger.

The rotation of the wrist and forearm from left to right is also a feature of the LH of the B section (B8 b4 - B15 b3). Different technical difficulties are suggested by different fingerings. Example 4 indicates various possible technical analyses of the LH of the B section :

EXAMPLE 4

Fingering indicated from B8 b4 - B9 LH :



- 4(a) 5 2 1 2 3 5 2 1 2 3 5 2 1 2 3 5 2 1 2 3 5 2 1 2 3
4(b) 5 3 2 1 2 5 3 2 1 2 5 3 2 1 2 5 3 2 1 2 5 3 2 1 2
4(c) 2 1 5 2 1 2 1 5 1 2 2 1 5 1 2 5 1 4 2 3 5 1 4 1 2

Example 4 (a) divides the quintuplet into two groups of three and two notes each. This choice of fingering has the advantage of giving chord- position fingering to the first three notes of each quintuplet. This greatly facilitates learning. The crossing of the second finger resulting in 2-3 fingering is preferable to the lateral jerk caused by 1-2 fingering. The former is difficult to execute at speed but the chordal position of the first three notes of each group could be used as mental preparation for the leap.

The combination of a leap with a rotational movement is characteristic of Skryabin's style, and this passage is a good introduction to similar and more complex examples that abound in his output. The same technical approach is also evident in the fingering suggested in Example 4(c). Here the last three notes of each group are treated as a unit (hand position and chord). The difficulty here is accurately placing the fifth finger while at the same time avoiding an accent on the landing and resisting the temptation to hold the finger down for the length of three semiquavers. As usual, accents can be lessened by keeping the "flying" finger relaxed and by treating the passages as a horizontal activity rather than two vertical movements on the first and third semiquaver. The fifth finger, necessarily detached from the thumb note, should not be banged down, but merely touch the key while the wrist retains most of its weight. This procedure is further removed from the weight transfer procedure of example 3 than might at first be expected.

Example 4b is suited to a broad hand, specially since it enables legato playing of the entire quintuplet. Smaller hands may experience difficulty in playing the first two notes of each quintuplet legato, and mostly require an extension between the fifth and third fingers. Cases such as B12 b1 and possibly B9 b4 and B10 b1 could prove to be beyond the stretch of a small hand. Here a Chopinesque device is called for : playing the first semiquaver staccato (catching it in the pedal, though) and playing the last four notes legato. This might also encourage jumps on, for example, the fifth finger, as in example 5(a) :

EXAMPLE 5

B10 b1 LH



- 5(a) 5 5 4 1 2
- 5(b) 5 4 3 1 2
- 5(c) 5 3 2 1 2
- 5(d) 5 1 4 1 2
(2 1)
- 5(e) 2 1 5 1 3

In the quintuplets in both hands, it is important to achieve a legato sound even if true legato playing is made impossible by leaps. Pay attention to the note before the leap so that it is not shortened. Otherwise the gap will be audible, especially if it is created by tension in the finger.

The following fingering is suggested for the LH of the opening bars :

EXAMPLE 6

B0 b4 - B1 LH



- 6(a) 5 3 1 | 2 4 1 2 | 5 3 1 | 2 3 1 5 | 4,5 3 1
- 6(b) 5 3 1 | 1 2 1 2 | 5 2 1 | 2 3 1 5 | 4 1 2
- 6(c) 5 1 2 | 1 2 5 1 | 5 1 5 | 1 2 1,5 | 5 4 1 2

Example 6(a) again combines a rotation movement with a leap (B1 b2-3). The changes of direction in the passage have to be clear to the performer. These rotational actions should be separated and perfected individually.

Memorising the hands separately is the most valuable step to performing them together. Another is to ensure the even transition from one rhythmical grouping to another - from 4 semiquavers to

triplets in B1 LH and B11 RH or from triplets to quintuplets in B8 LH and B15 RH. The metronome can prove very valuable. The sense of pulse is vital, not only for the musical communication but also for the technical execution. Often rhythmical ability is perceived as a purely natural ability and this misconception that one either "has it or doesn't" in some quarters even has racial implications. Yet it has been proved time and again that one's rhythmic sense can be refined. Matthew Montford mentions that the human ear can start to distinguish separate distinct pulses at an upper limit of about twenty pulses per second. *"The lower limit varies with training"* [Montford, p.3]. Montford's book discusses the rhythmic training of Western musicians through the traditions of Africa, Bali and India and illustrates how precise and accurate the results can be. Unlike African or Balinese percussion ensembles the Western musician in this case performs all the different rhythmic structures at once, or, in the case of an orchestra, follows a pulse rate indicated by the conductor. Therefore a well-defined sense of pulse as a metric division of time is vital, as well as a perfect sense of the subdivision of each pulse.

As the rhythmical and technical difficulties are combined when playing a passage, it is wise to separate the study of the rhythm by means of clapping or tapping the hands on a table (or any percussive activity without association with the pitches). Before the interaction of the two hands is attempted it is a good idea to practise alternating the pulse divisions between the hands in the following way :

EXAMPLE 7

Bars 0-1

Variants on the above example should be devised. This will ensure an even transition of the pulse from one hand to the other. Once this is secured the rhythmic work can be combined with the notes, playing the etude in the following way and with variants on it :

EXAMPLE 8

Bars 6-7

5 etc.

This is excellent for rhythmic and memory work. It is advised that the polyrhythms be mastered individually - in other words do not try to master B1 b2 and B1 b3 at once - as the transition from one structure to another is a difficulty all of its own. The arithmetical method using fractions and common denominators proves quite unsuitable in many of the polyrhythms present in this etude. 3 against 5 (B0 b4) is frequently met with in Skryabin and Liadov. Heinrich Neuhaus advises that the RH and LH of a beat be played alternately, several times, without interrupting the flow of the pulse [Neuhaus, p.42]. Accents should not at this stage be considered unmusical, provided that they are consciously applied as study tools and do not appear at random. Josef Hofmann advocates a semi-automatic way of attempting the hands combined. Frequent correct repetition, he advocates, will change the semi-automatic state into a conscious one. He also advocates not thinking of either rhythm but concentrating on the "dead points" of the two motions where the hands meet, and to rely on automation until, by frequent hearing the student has learnt to listen to two rhythms at once [Hofmann, pp.96-7]. The above method is successful only if the transition is made from automation to musical expression.

According to the Dover and Peters editions Skryabin implied that the diminuendo in B15 should actually start in B14, from *mp* [Dover, p.166 and Peters, p.19]. The Dover edition also attributes tenuto markings to Skryabin in the following places : B15 b1 f 3, B15 b2 f 3, B15 b3 f 3, B22 b2 f 1, B22 b4 f 1, B23 b2 f 1, B23 b3 f 1 and B23 b4 f 1. The tenutos in bars 15 and 23 indicate subtle tenor melodies. An indication of the rhythmic flexibility Skryabin had in mind occurs in bar 4 where the Dover edition reports the composer's instructions thus : *accelerando* on B4 b1 and *ritardando* on B4 b3.

Some pianists take the final bar in one pedal. Care must then be taken to give enough weight to the final bass note or the low F[#] on beat 2 could give an unpleasant unresolved 6/4 harmonic effect.

ETUDE NO. 5 IN E MAJOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Leaps in both hands.
2. Octaves.
3. Moving from duplets in the exposition to triplets in the recapitulation, in the original tempo.
4. Chopinesque accompaniment patterns.

The etude is divisible into 3 sections.

A - Bars 1 - 16

B - Bars 17 - 32 (including a bridge : Bars 29 - 32)

A (varied) - Bars 33 - 58 (including a coda : Bars 49 - 58)

The original tempo indication was Allegro. Skryabin crossed out Allegro in the manuscript, replacing it with *Brioso*. This later designation, however, did not satisfy him either, as he later felt "that it did not correspond to the character of the etude" [Dover, p.167]. *Brioso* might be considered too optimistic an indication for the B section especially.

The most obvious technical demand in the A sections is the rapid changes of register in both hands. The temptation is therefore great to commence study with this aspect of the etude. However, as is usual with Skryabin, the leap is less important than what happens once one has leapt. Therefore it is advisable to study the hands and register separately (to be discussed). This might seem a disjointed study method, but it is only the first step of many, and the results will be valuable. Once again legato fingering is advised wherever possible. As so much of the etude depends on octave playing the reader is referred to a full discussion of the subject in the section on op. 8 no. 9. The exercises for octaves in that piece apply to the study of this etude.

The following fingering is suggested for bars 1 to 3 RH :

EXAMPLE 1

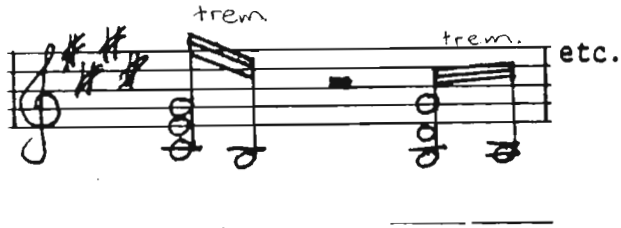
Bars 1-3



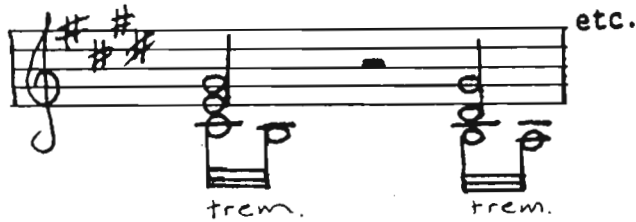
The hand position on B1 b1 and b3 of the RH may prove awkward for weak or small hands. The exercises in example 2 are suggested to strengthen the individual fingers.

EXAMPLE 2

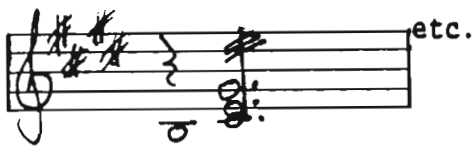
2(a)



2(b)



2(c)



For the variant of the A section which commences in bar 33 the above exercise can be adjusted as follows :

EXAMPLE 3

3. B33 b1



This will strengthen the fingers tremendously. It is inadvisable in the early stages of learning this etude to practise the jumps between registers at too fast a tempo. The reason for studying the registers separately is that it teaches one not to neglect the last note of a hand position before the leap, for example B1 C2 and B1 F8. Ways of practising continuity in one register at a time include the following :

EXAMPLE 4

Practise only the beats marked :

4(a) Bars 1-2, Lower register RH :

Briosissimo $\text{♩} = 72$

mf semplice

4(b) Bars 1-2, Upper register RH :

Briosissimo $\text{♩} = 72$

mf semplice

4(c) Bars 1-2, Lower register LH :

Briosissimo $\text{♩} = 72$

mf semplice

4(d) Bars 1-2, Upper register LH :

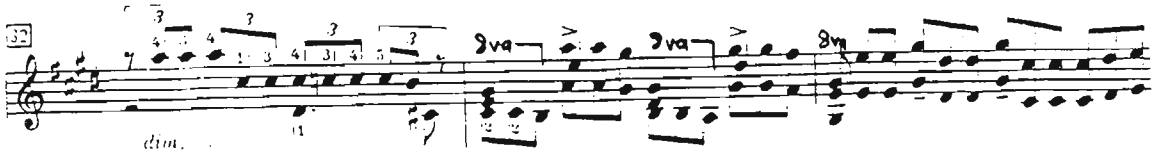
Briosissimo $\text{♩} = 72$

mf semplice

To prepare linking the registers into an uninterrupted passage it might be helpful to combine them in the following way :

EXAMPLE 5

Bars 32-34 RH



This will enforce the concept of the soprano melody, of which the octave displacement of alternate beats is just an embellishment. The previous exercise also reveals an alto line which often falls on the RH thumb :

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 1-2 RH



This subsidiary structure can prove a valuable aid in learning the etude. Exercises for combining the two registers in an uninterrupted flow should aim at consciously linking the different elements involved in each passage. Similarities or continuations of patterns should be noticed. The leap should be seen as a unit, of course, as is the hand that has to execute it. But each unit consists of subdivisions and a premeditated adjustment of mind and hand is required to prepare whatever follows the jump. Such links, including the instance in example 6, enhance mental clarity. Examples in the first bar include :

EXAMPLE 7

7(a) Melody :

etc.



7(b) Repeated notes with mainly harmonic function :



7(c) Similar intervals RH :



7(d) Repeated notes with a mainly melodic function :



7(e) Arpeggiating chords and octaves up or down continuously clarifies the upper and lower melodies.

As in examples 5, 6 and 7, the following example is designed to assist in continuity.

EXAMPLE 8

Bar 1

8(a)



8(b)



8(c)



The leaps in the LH are more traditionally inherited from Chopin and Liszt than those of the RH. József Gát advocates reducing the arm movement to a minimum in skips [Gát, p.186] while Frank Merrick advocates preparing the hand positions [Merrick, p.76]. Neither of these will succeed unless used in conjunction with other factors, nor if they are applied too severely. The matter of skips is further discussed in the section on the Etude op. 8 no. 10.

The technical demand becomes much greater when the hands are played together, as they sometimes have to jump simultaneously. It might prove useful to recognize that these jumps occur only in three registers (see example 9). Deliberately moving into the new register will add security to the leaps.

EXAMPLE 9

9(a) Bass register, Bar 1 LH



9(b) Alto register, Bar 1 both hands

RH LH RH LH
b1 b2 b3 b4



9(c) Soprano register, Bar 1 RH



It thus becomes clear that the alto register is shared by both hands, while the LH reigns in the bass register and the RH in the soprano. Methods of practice as described in example 10 are attempts to clarify preparation and execution of leaps in terms of register.

EXAMPLE 10

Bars 1-2

Play only the beats indicated, in an even tempo, and omit the unmarked beats :

10(a)

Musical notation for Example 10(a). It shows two staves (treble and bass clef) in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Briosissimo' with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The dynamic is 'mf semplice'. The notation includes various articulations such as accents and slurs. The first two measures are shown, with 'etc.' written at the end of the second measure. The bass line features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

10(b)

Musical notation for Example 10(b). It shows two staves (treble and bass clef) in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Briosissimo' with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The dynamic is 'mf semplice'. The notation includes various articulations such as accents and slurs. The first two measures are shown, with 'etc.' written at the end of the second measure. The bass line features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

10(c)

Musical notation for Example 10(c). It shows two staves (treble and bass clef) in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Briosissimo' with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The dynamic is 'mf semplice'. The notation includes various articulations such as accents and slurs. The first two measures are shown, with 'etc.' written at the end of the second measure. The bass line features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

10(d)

Musical notation for Example 10(d). It shows two staves (treble and bass clef) in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Briosissimo' with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The dynamic is 'mf semplice'. The notation includes various articulations such as accents and slurs. The first two measures are shown, with 'etc.' written at the end of the second measure. The bass line features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

10(e)





Neuhaus points out that frequently "passages that are not difficult rhythmically are distorted by pianists because of their technical 'acrobatic' difficulty" [Neuhaus, p.44] and quotes a passage from Liszt's "Mephisto" Waltz (see example 11) with simultaneous leaps in both hands, much more difficult but not unlike the simultaneous leaps in this particular etude.

EXAMPLE 11

From Mephisto :



[Neuhaus, p.44]

Neuhaus suggests a variant to solve the rhythmic inaccuracy of the LH sounding as  rather than  (see example 12).

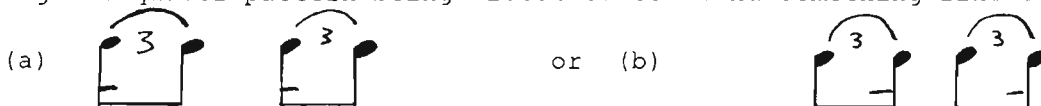
EXAMPLE 12

From Mephisto :



[Neuhaus, p.44]

Neuhaus further states : "It is enough to note this inaccuracy, to hear it, in order to find the means of remedying it " [Neuhaus, p.44]. "Noting this inaccuracy", however, is not always so obvious to the player, especially not when it stems directly from the difficulty of executing a passage. Preparation for a leap could result in the regular quaver pattern being distorted to sound something like this :



depending on the passage. A rhythmic variant which emphasizes the opposite of these effects might be the answer, which means turning (a) into (b) or vice versa. However, in this case strict concentration on

the evenness of the rhythm, and more importantly, the quality of sound will create the rhythmic control to correct the error.

B9 b2 presents the interesting possibility of playing the LH D with the RH, resulting in the fingering 1 2 3 5 or 1 1 3 5 on the first quaver of beat 2. The second fingering requires C# and D natural to be played by the same finger - the thumb. If the hand is turned in such a way that the tip of the thumb plays the D and the first knuckle from the tip plays the C# this position could be natural and very helpful.

The tremendous difficulty of the RH leaps in bar 7 - another example of "*Skryabin's most vertiginous zig-zag style*" [Morrison, p.1] - can be relieved slightly by taking some notes with the LH which will shorten the RH leap. Aiming the leap with the arm in conjunction with the wrist and fingers could prove helpful.

EXAMPLE 13

Bar 7

13(a)



13(b)



The Paul Kay edition contains phrasing slurs in bars 4, 8, 15, 36 and 40 which occur neither in the Dover nor the Belayev editions (see example 14) [Kay, pp.15 ff].

EXAMPLE 14

Bar 36

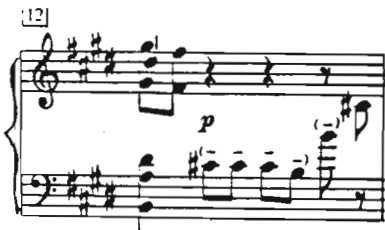
[Kay, p.16]

These slurs seem to indicate that Kay treats the RH E (B4 last quaver) as a melody note belonging to B5, although he does not indicate this by means of another slur. That a melody note does appear in bar B36 b4 as a crotchet could suggest that bar 4 contains the seed from which example 14 grows. However, B42 b4 and B44 b4 seem to return to the model of B4 b4 though the composer was not specific in his notation. It is up to the performer to shade the quality of tone in such a way that it is clear whether it is intended as a melody note or merely a continuation of the accompaniment texture.

Skryabin indicates crescendo in bar 9 and decrescendo to *p* in bars 11 and 12. This would seem to imply a *f* in B10 b1 and that the volume should be maintained until B11 b3. However, according to the Dover edition, Skryabin instructed that B11 b1 should be *p* [Dover, p.167]. This means a rapid diminuendo through B10 b2 to b4. A similar case appears in bars 41 to 44, but the Dover edition does not indicate that Skryabin intended a return to *p* as in the previous example. The Dover edition however does suggest additional dynamic indications. These are : B30 - *p*, B 31 - *pp*, B41 b2 - *p*, B51 - *pp* (unlike the *mp* in the Paul Kay edition) [Dover, pp.167-169]. Added tenuto markings are also given by the Dover edition : B12 b2-4 LH (see example 15(a)), B36 b2-3 LH (see example 15(b)) and similarly in B40 b2-3 LH, and B48 b1-2 RH.

EXAMPLE 15

15(a) B12 b2-4 LH tenuto



15(b) B36 b2-3 LH tenuto (see also B40 b2-3 LH)


The tenuto markings in examples 15(a) and (b) require a richer quality of tone than in the preceding and succeeding chords. A Straussian "hervortretend" is suggested by the register and changed

texture. The tenuto sign does not however imply an accent. Tenuto notes are to be held for their full value. As with the portato touch to be discussed in the section on op. 8 no. 8, the marking affects what happens between the notes. Successive tenuto notes are not to be played legato. In the words of György Sandor : "*In legato we connect the notes with an upward arm motion and by letting the dampers fall slowly; in tenuto we let the dampers fall freely. This will create a slight disconnection between the notes that is characteristic to tenuto*" [Sandor, pp.141-2]. Sandor seems to suggest a rapid movement of the finger or hand so that the key returns to its non-depressed position and the piano mechanism functions unrestrained by finger control. He continues : "*The damper falls without impediment, and the sound ends distinctly with the lifting of the finger*" [Sandor, p.142].

Skryabin indicates tenuto markings to emphasize certain notes, for example B44 b2-3 RH, B38 b2-3 RH. These are not to be confused with the accents in the bars preceding these tenutos, i.e. B33 b3-4 and B37 b3-4. These tenutos indicate lifting the notes out of the texture through added weight, but not as much forearm movement as is required for the accents. One would presume that similar tenuto markings are applicable in B46. Tenuto markings also suggest themselves in the performance of bar 47, where the first quaver of each triplet outlines the melody. For that reason the tenutos in B48 are pertinent, as they indicate a change of the melodic contour. Bars 45 to 47 are shaped by slight stresses on the first quaver of each triplet. The temptation exists to accent bar 48 correspondingly. Skryabin's tenuto indications however directly contradict this possibility by suggesting melodic treatment, in this case through dynamic continuity through at least the first four quavers of bar 48.

The B section (Bars 17 to 28) applies the legato octave procedures to be discussed in the Etude op. 8 no. 9. Care must be taken not to accent the RH fourth beat of bars 17 to 19 or bars 21 to 23. The accents in bar 20 RH suggest a shift of melodic emphasis from the LH to the RH. A light forward propulsion in tempo will save the B section from pedestrian banality. Indeed, Skryabin himself deemed an unprinted accelerando necessary in B18 b2. Rubato in bars 20, 24 and 32 can effectively restrain an excessive accelerando.

The etude reaches its dynamic climax on the *ff* in bar 25. The B section is the emotional pivot of the work, the A sections being of a much lighter character.

Both the manuscript and the Belayev edition indicate the rhythm in B22 b1 LH. The Dover edition suggest that this is a slip of the pen and corrects it to  in accordance with similar passages in the B section [Dover, p.168]. It should also be noted that both the Belayev and Kay editions incorrectly omit the F clef before the last two chords. Skryabin's music is harmonically very inventive and claims have been made that he invented a tonal system to challenge Schoenberg's, but this etude really does end in E major!

ETUDE NO. 6 IN A MAJOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Sixths in the RH in varying dynamics.

Familiarity with sixths scales and passages will greatly facilitate the learning of this etude.

As the sixths in the RH are extremely difficult most pianists would find it helpful to do preparatory exercises for sixths before attempting the etude.

The RH fingering for a scale in sixths will usually be made up of 3 groups of fingering :

one group of $\begin{array}{c} \text{3 4 5} \\ \text{1 1 2} \end{array}$

and two groups of $\begin{array}{c} \text{4 5 4 5} \\ \text{1 2 1 2} \end{array}$

These groups can be used in any order depending on the pianist or the passage involved (see example 1). The pianist will need to know the fingering for most of the scales and, indeed, familiarity with all of them is advised.

The following fingering is suggested for A major, the key of the etude :

EXAMPLE 1

A major in 6ths



Using the fingering : $\begin{array}{c} 4 5 3 4 5 3 4 5 \\ 1 1 1 1 2 1 1 2 \end{array}$

Fingering is of the utmost importance in this etude. It might seem excessive, but it is suggested that every single quaver sixth be fingered. This is the best way to point out different hand positions. The quickest way to learn the etude is not to start right at the top, as the first phrases present sixths of a very advanced technical difficulty by nature of their non-scalewise movements, but with easier patterns found later in the etude. The opening passage presents the RH with difficulties far more taxing than those in the opening bar of Chopin's Etude op. 25 no. 8 in D^b.

EXAMPLE 2

Chopin : Etude op. 25 no. 8 in D^b, bars 1-3

As can be seen in example 2, Chopin approaches the problem by using few changes of hand position. The hand position (and consequently the fingering) stays the same for the first two complete beats of bars 1 and 2. Debussy's approach is similar in much of his Etude no. 4. It is suggested that the pianist first master easier passages in the etude, progressing gradually to more difficult passages until the whole etude has been covered.

The opening of the Chopin etude presents the co-ordination problem of sixths in its simplest incarnation. It is therefore suggested that similar passages in the Skryabin etude be sought out and mastered separately. It is helpful to search for the longest unchanged hand position, usually three or four quavers. An example of these little phrases is the following :

EXAMPLE 3

Bars 17-19

Each hand position should be practised separately in all its appearances throughout the etude. Ideas on practising sixths will be discussed later.

Then examples of legato sixths on 4 5 only should be marked.

EXAMPLE 4

Bars 10-12



In similar fashion all the different progressions from one sixth-fingering to the next should be sought out and practised as if one were preparing the shapes of individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Ways of practising these pieces can be improvised to suit the pianist, but here are a few suggestions :

1. Practise the parallel lines of the sixths separately, first the top part by itself, then the bottom.

A student experiencing difficulty with sixths might well find that much of the problem lies in a lack of finger independence on single notes; therefore practising in this way will quickly reveal the problems.

2. Practise the legato movement in one line at a time :

2(a)



2(b)



3. Practise an interlocking legato :

3(a)



3(b)



4. Practise with accents :

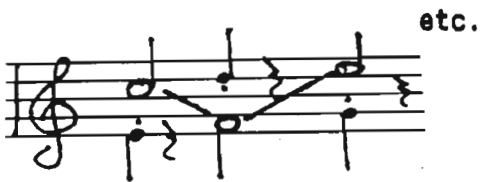
4(a)



4(b)



5. Practise legato extension between the top note of one sixth and the bottom of the next :



6. Practise the stretch between, for example, the 2nd and 4th fingers, to facilitate extension of the hand during the execution of sixths :



7. Practise a sixth progression in all the keys, using the original fingering.

8. Practise a variety of scales with fingerings encountered in the etude.

9. Practise a combination of 6ths and single notes :

9(a)



9(b)



10. Practise two successive sixth progressions as accelerating trills.

All these suggestions could be practised in any key, with any progression of sixths, applying any fingering, and could also be used for working on dynamics : forte, piano, crescendo, decrescendo, accents and so on.

When combining the separate hand positions in sequence in the etude, a myriad of new combinations will present themselves, all of which can be studied in the manner suggested above. It is important to remember that, while it is sometimes impossible to play a real legato in both voices, as in bar 2, the above exercises will equip the student with the technical ability to play as many notes legato as possible, or at the very least to give the impression of legato.

In each of these isolated little motifs the pianist should avoid accents on the first or last quavers. Accents on the first quavers are usually solved by keeping the fingers very close to the keys, and by avoiding a sharp downward pull of the wrist. The key to avoiding an accent on the last quaver lies in keeping the fingers totally relaxed, and in giving the quaver as much of its value as possible before moving to the next motif. It may help to think of finishing one progression before lifting the wrist and fingers in preparation for the next one. The same standard of phrasing is required as for repertoire from the classical period.

The frequent use of the thumb necessitates a conscious process of constantly monitoring the state of tension in the thumb. The aim is to release all tension the moment the thumb has played. The pianist could also use the quavers where the thumb does not play to relax it. The joint of the thumb where it joins the hand should never be locked and the palm and wrist should be kept as flexible as possible. A slightly raised wrist will cause inflexibility of the fingers and a flat wrist will impinge on the room to move the fingers, requiring excessive finger articulation to combat it.

Given the extreme difficulty of the RH it is a relief to find that Skryabin uses a simple LH accompaniment, unlike the double notes in the Chopin Etude op. 25 no. 8 (see example 2).

The harmonic patterns of the LH are for the most part quite simple, for example :

BAR	LH KEY
1	A major
2	E dominant seventh
3	F [#] minor
4	C [#] minor - A major

Wide stretches such as B15 b2 should be attempted in the same way as those in the LH of Etude no. 2.

There are opportunities for the LH to play some of the lower notes of the sixths written for the RH, for example :

EXAMPLE 5

B4-B5 b1



These could give the RH opportunity to rest and change its position. Similar examples include B7 b3 and B12 b3 among others. Care should be taken to avoid accents on the LH thumbs and/or second fingers on the first of a triplet figure on the second beat of most bars. Similar cases are B8 b3 and B16 b3.

A difficulty in co-ordinating the two hands lies in the contrary motion of the hands in B1 b2 and B3 b2 and similar cases. Here it might prove necessary to practise one crotchet at a time, until the contrary motion is secure.

Accents should be avoided on the opening and closing notes of phrases. It is dangerously easy for the etude to be played like this :

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 33-41

X

Accents on the first notes of phrases are usually caused by attacking the keys from too high, or with inflexible fingers. The phrases end repeatedly on a crotchet. Accents here can be caused by exaggerating the emphasis noticeable in the change from triplet quavers to a crotchet. The accent may also result from exaggerating the moment of rest provided by the crotchet. Another cause of accents might be clumsy fingering or exaggerated hand motions which accompany the fingering. In the two sixths marked 'X' in example 6 (B34 b1), the pianist is required to swing the hand across the thumb (which acts as an axis) to bring it in position to play the 2nd finger on the B. By swinging the hand across too fast, the note could be accented. Along with carefully controlling the speed of the hand rotation and consequently the speed with which the fingers are brought down on to the keys, the pianist should ensure that the fingers are relaxed and flexible at the point of impact. Straight fingers, especially at speed, could add many unwanted accents.

Skryabin's dynamic markings should be noted. The opening indication is *p* and reaches *f*, and only *f*, in bar 41. Skryabin indicates the dynamic contour of the phrases with crescendos and decrescendos (see for example bars 1 and 2). These indicate all the high and low points of the melody. It is very difficult to control the dynamics in the RH and, though the LH is of limited help it is essential that its dynamics not be ignored.

Bars 47 and 48 require different pedalling than the rest of the etude so as not to obscure the different phrasing marked in the RH. Scrupulous attention to details such as these is the key to realising

the con grazia character of the etude.

Pianists might also like to peruse Skryabin's Prelude op. 13 no. 5 in D major, composed in Moscow in 1895, as this, along with the etude, represents Skryabin's sole foray into the world of sixths. These are not to be found anywhere else in the etudes, preludes or sonatas. Skryabin's preludes, like the etudes, often consist of one major tonal or technical device and the distinction between the two genres is sometimes blurred. Given the fact that Skryabin showed such limited interest in this style of technical writing, one can only assume it to be a homage to the legacy of Chopin's Etudes, which include a study of sixths, the op. 25 no. 8.

There exists a discrepancy between editions in B45 b3 the second quaver. In the manuscript, the Belayev and Kay editions a D natural is printed while the Dover edition prints a D sharp.

ETUDE NO. 7 IN B FLAT MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Wrist rotation in opposite directions in quick succession.
2. LH arpeggiated figures.
3. Thumb in extended positions.
4. Changing from one rotational pattern to another.

The etude can be divided into three sections.

A - Bars 1-26

B - Bars 27-50 (Meno vivo)

A - Bars 51-77 (Tempo I)

This ternary structure can further be divided into sections identified by technical execution :

A - Bars 1-26

B - Bars 27-44 (Meno vivo)

C - Bars 45-49 b3 (Accelerando bridge passage)

A - Bars 49 b3-77 (Tempo I)

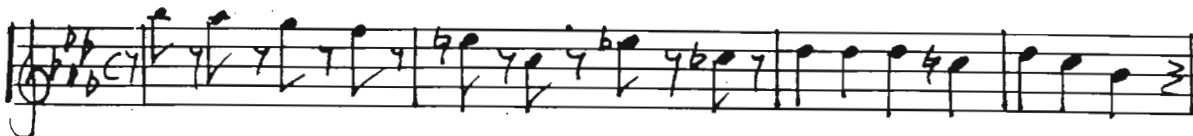
The LH of this etude provides an excellent remedial opportunity for pianists who suffer from stiffness in the wrist and forearm. It deals precisely with the element of rotation that was so prominent an aspect of Tobias Matthay's teaching, in particular that contained in The Act of Touch in All its Diversity (1903).

The LH is based on repeated broken chord patterns in various positions. In this etude the chords are treated as motifs, especially in the A sections. Carl Dahlhaus writes : " *To use the language of Gestalt psychology, chord and motif are like ground and figure, clearly distinguished from one another. But in Scriabin, on the other hand, the chords also perform the function of motifs, if a 'motif' is a structure whose repetition and variation, expansion and contraction provide the basis for the development of a movement*" [Dahlhaus, 1987, pp.204-205]. This becomes pervasive in Scriabin's late works.

The LH also provides texture for a rather uninteresting RH melody :

EXAMPLE 1

Bars 1-4, soprano melody :



The texture functions harmonically and rhythmically but, as we shall see, a performer can make it function dynamically as well.

According to József Gát, the playing of broken chords "is based also on uniform chord touch, but the active swinging motion is executed by the fingers and not the arm" [Gát, p.165].

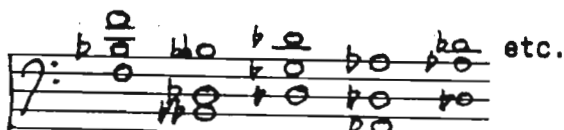
Fingering for the etude therefore should be devised in accordance with chord positions which will reduce excess hand movements. Two types of broken chords reveal themselves in this etude : (1) those that could be played as one chord, having all the notes within the reach of extension of a normal hand from thumb to fifth finger and, (2) those that could only be played as an arpeggiated chord, where the distance between the highest and lowest note surpasses the span of a normal hand. Examples of the former include bars 7 to 9 (see example 2) and the latter includes bar 1 (see example 3).

EXAMPLE 2

2(a) Bars 7-9 LH with fingering and phrasing.



2(b). Bars 7-9 LH written as chords.

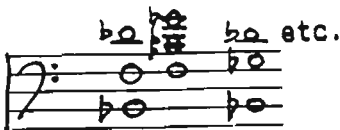


EXAMPLE 3

3(a) Bars 0-1 with fingering and new phrasing.



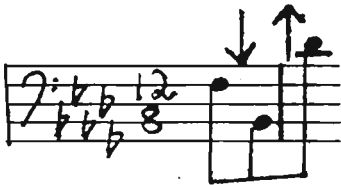
3(b) Bars 0-1 written as arpeggiated chords.



These identified chords will form the basis of practice methods for this etude. Examining the first group of three quavers reveals that rotation movements in opposite directions have to be executed in quick succession (see example 4).

EXAMPLE 4

First three semiquavers LH



It is advisable to separate the two rotational directions for practice purposes. The exercises in example 5 are aimed at securing finger independence and acquiring comfortable wrist and forearm rotational abilities. The pianist has to learn a choreographed hand-movement whose separate elements should be secured before the entire movement is executed. Example 5 provides exercises in weight transferral, much as a dancer transfers weight from one leg to another. By analogy certain principles of classical dance apply to the piano. Joan Lawson writes : "When transferring weight from one foot to the other, the dancer must be sure that the entire body goes over to the new supporting leg through the centre line of balance; therefore adjustments have to be made throughout the whole body, even if only minimal ones" [Lawson, p.39]. In piano-playing and especially in this etude, weight has to be transferred from one finger to another, through the centre line of balance - governed by the wrist - and adjustments have to be made especially in the wrist and forearm. As with the dancer, if the change is not accurate, the pianist cannot

move smoothly nor maintain speed.

The reader's patience is requested for one more dance analogy. Joan Lawson continues that *"the dancer should never be afraid of too wide a position when transferring weight as it lends spaciousness to the dance when this is needed. It always helps to stretch a dancer who is tight or not too generous in movement"* [Lawson, p.40]. Similarly this etude, with the aid of exercises in example 5, will loosen the wrist and forearm action, resulting in increased confidence on broken chord patterns regardless of their span, and will improve the quality of sound by encouraging its production with a relaxed wrist. While the etude is a potentially exhausting test of endurance, it will strengthen the hands, wrists and forearm muscles.

In broken chord patterns the outer fingers require more support than usual, especially in the extended positions described in example 3. This support is provided by the wrist, executing a series of adapting movements. These rotatory and vertical adjustments shift the centre of gravity which assists in *"counterbalancing the differences of force caused by the various finger positions"* [Gát, p.165].

Acquiring the correct wrist position is not as simple a matter as raising the wrist, since a high wrist puts the finger flexor in its weakest position. Certain self-defence techniques involve bringing an attacker's wrists to this position in order to disarm him or her, since the flexors lose their grip. Thomas Mastroianni points out that *"an excessively high wrist impedes the straight line emergence of nerves and tendons passing through the carpal tunnel in the wrist"* [Mastroianni, p.56]. However, the remedy is far more complex than Mastroianni's general suggestions of *"a slower tempo and well-focused musicianship"* [Mastroianni, p.57].

The work of the wrist is emphasized by Alfred Cortot :

"It is a widely spread error to think velocity of execution -that formidable ideal of pianistic studies - depends solely on the rapidity of movements of the fingers. In the execution of any passage requiring the displacement of the hand (in fact in the whole literature of the pianoforte, excluding that of the harpsichord which is ruled by other technical conventions) the fingers are, in truth, constrained to follow the impulsion given them by the wrist."

[Cortot, p.72]

The exercises in example 5 apply to both chord types described in examples 2 and 3. Each exercise should be applied to both chord positions in the etude. It is important not to stiffen any muscles nor to overstrain any part of the mechanism. Muscle-building exercises are included and students should use their discretion concerning their own strength and endurance. Conscious relaxation (active de-tensionising) and frequent rests are advised. The muscle-building exercises might at first appear superfluous but they are necessary, as the sensations of

tension and fatigue are often confused. The latter can be reduced by strengthening exercises. The exercises are illustrated on random chord positions; these should be applied to those found in the etude.

EXAMPLE 5

5(a) Wrist octaves to strengthen wrist and forearm.

etc.



5(b) Wrist chords to strengthen wrist and forearm.

etc.



To strengthen individual finger action, finger and hand positions, and endurance :

5(c)



etc.

5(f)



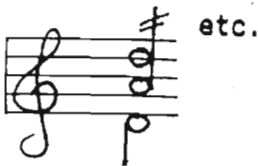
etc.

5(d)



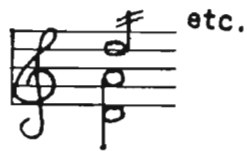
etc.

5(g)



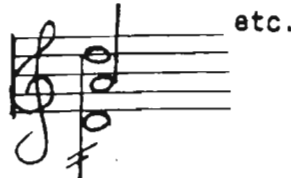
etc.

5(e)



etc.

5(h)



etc.

For rotation between two notes, as well as muscular strength :

5 (i)  etc.

5 (l)  etc.

5 (j)  etc.

5 (m)  etc.

5 (k)  etc.

For rotation and strength in one direction on three notes.

5 (n)  etc.

5 (o)  etc.

5 (p)  etc.



5(s) Exercises 5(n) to 5(r) in the opposite direction, from top to bottom, for example, 5(n) :



For rotation and strength in two directions, on three notes in each direction :

5(t) Exercises 5(l) to 5(s) in two directions, starting from the top or the bottom, for example, 5(o) :

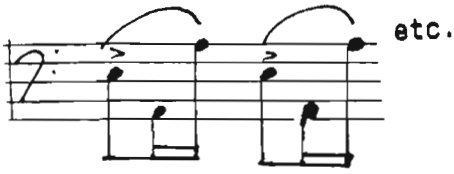


and

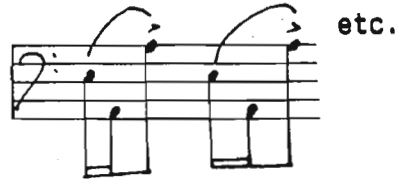


For rotating in two directions within a three note group, rotating first left, then right :

5 (u)



5 (w)



5 (v)



5 (x)



5 (y)



5(z) For rotating in two directions within a three note group, rotating first to the right and then left, use exercises 5(u) to 5(y) adapting the first rotation in the following way :

5(u) (for example)



It should be noted that exercises 5(u) to 5(y) constitute the rotational progression in the Skryabin etude, and that its opposite 5(z) is given for the sake of completeness rather than its immediate application to this specific etude. 5(z) will be referred to in the section on the Etude op. 8 no. 12.

It is sincerely hoped that the above exercises will destroy the misconceptions deposited by the old school described by Frank Merrick and György Sandor, which "demanded that a book be placed under the arm" [Sandor, p.80] to immobilize it, or advocated "the placing of a coin where your hand joins the forearm to prevent the tiniest rotary movement of the forbidden and dreaded kind" [Merrick, p.85]. Such fits

of academic fervour completely disregarded the basic anatomic function of the radius and ulna and the natural pronation and supination of the forearm that forms part of adjusting the hand position for everyday tasks such as lifting a cup, turning a doorknob or punching someone in the stomach.

Once the rotation of each separate three-note group within the etude has been secured, the next step is to link these smaller groups. Opportunity to relax the hand anew occurs in between the three-note groups. As Hymnovitz describes : "Each time the hand re-attacks our mechanism catches breath at the wrist" [Hymnovitz, p.49]. This instantaneous recovery is essential to the performance of this etude, and is achieved by releasing all tension from the mechanism on the last note of each group. For an instant between each group the forearm acts as a crane [Neuhaus, p.100] rather than a bridge, leaving the hands with an opportunity to relax briefly. The valuable linking exercises in example 6 might at a superficial glance seem to contradict this "catch of breath". But these are aimed at achieving mental clarity and will aid memorisation and learning.

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 8-9 LH

6(a) etc.

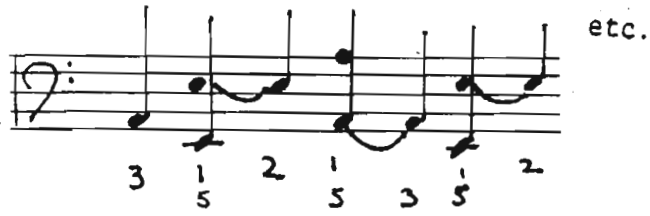
6(b) etc.

6(c) etc.

6(d) etc.

Detailed description of musical notation: The image shows four examples of musical notation for the left hand, labeled 6(a) through 6(d). Each example is written on a single bass clef staff. Exercise 6(a) shows a sequence of notes with slurs connecting them in groups of three. Exercise 6(b) shows a similar sequence but with different note values and slurs. Exercise 6(c) shows a sequence with slurs connecting notes across bar lines. Exercise 6(d) shows a sequence with slurs connecting notes across bar lines. Each exercise ends with the word "etc." to indicate it continues.

6(e)



A characteristic of Skryabin's accompaniment is its use of all fingers on all the keys, including the thumb on black notes. For some pianists the quick movements from white to black notes might prove difficult. To enhance finger-action as well as for those aims set out in example 6, the method suggested in example 7 is very helpful. A similar method by Merrick called "the postman's knock" has been described in detail [Merrick, Chapter 9].

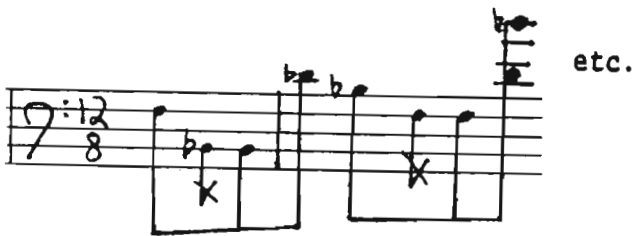
EXAMPLE 7

Bars 0-1

7(a)



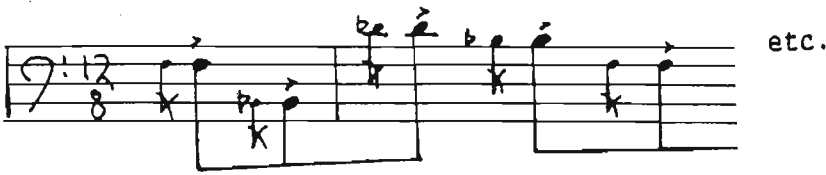
7(b)



7(c)



7(d)

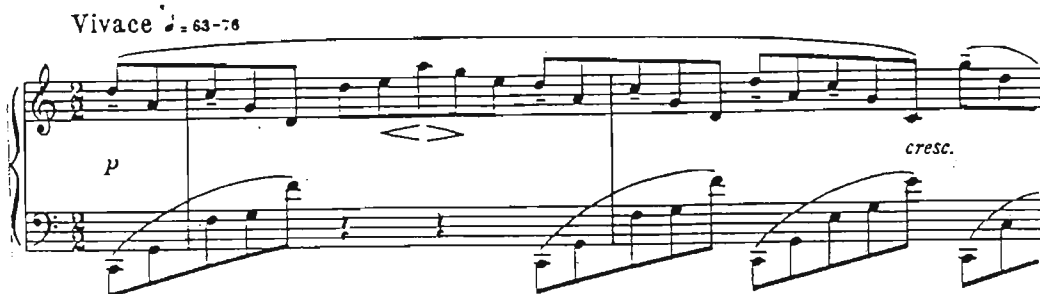


On returning to the passage as written, having removed all accents and extra notes, it will appear much simpler, as the brain and fingers have been encouraged to plan further ahead.

The LH is further complicated by two factors : the highly subdued dynamics and the manner in which it is overlapped by the right hand. The first factor is to be controlled by the weight of the wrist and arm. The dynamics in the A sections never exceed *m/f* and *f* is reached for barely one full beat in bar 50. Accents are to be avoided, especially where leaps occur and no change in the texture is indicated by altered dynamics. The overlapping accompaniment reflects the influence of Skryabin's teacher Taneyev, but it is also a feature in some works by Medtner. Skryabin's structural units often extend over a bar line as they do in the Prelude op. 11 no. 1 in C major :

EXAMPLE 8

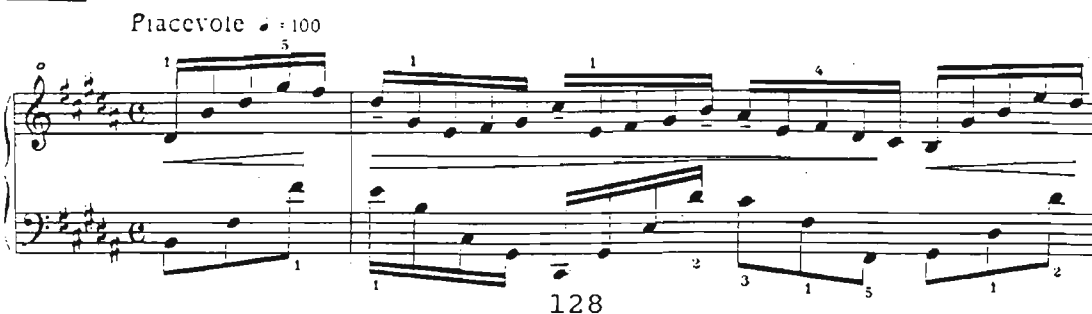
Prelude op. 11 no. 1, bars 1-2



However, in the above example, the two hands are still co-ordinated comfortably, and they start and end each structural unit together. The same structural unity of the hands is still possible even if the two hands are playing different rhythmical sets, as in the Etude op. 8 no. 4 :

EXAMPLE 9

Etude op. 8 no. 4, bars 0-1



With the possible exception of the syncopated accompaniment of the *Meno vivo* section of the *Etude* op. 8 no. 9 in G minor, this etude presents the only example of this kind of overlapping accompaniment found in opus 8. This style appears to occur more frequently in triple metre than duple and is more common in, but not restricted to, the early works : it appears for the first time in the two *Impromptus* op. 12, in various preludes including op. 11 nos. 19 and 21, op. 17 no. 2 and op. 31 no. 1, "delicious in its curves and long drawn breaths" [Eaglefield-Hull, 1916, p.607], and is seen as late as the *Etude* op. 42 no. 8.

In the present etude the execution is slightly simplified by the fact that the LH thumb usually plays on the beat simultaneously with the RH. Given the relatively stronger action of the thumb the pianist is helped by the fact that each triplet figure moves towards the beat as well as to the stronger finger, and the action is the same for virtually every beat in the A sections.

For the RH a fingering is suggested that will effect the least change in hand position in consecutive chords.

EXAMPLE 10

Bars 1-4, RH



Do not forget the A natural in B2 b4; it is not an A^b. Opportunity exists for the RH to play some notes written for the LH. Those indicated in example 11 are merely suggestions. Especially the suggestions for bar 1 could be helpful as the thumb returns to the same D^b on all 4 main beats of the bar.

EXAMPLE 11

Bars 1-2



B1 b2 of example 11 might require the use of the RH thumb on two black notes : the bottom A^b and B^b.

Pianists should make a clear difference between the detached and the legato chords. While dynamic indication is relatively sparse the phrases have to be shaped. The tenuto and accent marks in bar 4 give clear indication of the direction of the phrase. Paul Kay's is the only edition that offers a poco ritardando indication in bar 16. There is no evidence that this is Skryabin's marking, but it could well have been his intention. Kay suggests the same in bar 50. These two examples of editorial licence do make sense as they prepare a return to the opening material. The suggestion in bar 50 might seem to contradict the possibility of an accelerando beyond the Tempo I (already in bar 49). Bar 50 can be used to fall back slightly below the Tempo I.

The LH of the Meno Vivo - a much calmer version of similar chromatic passages by Skryabin such as op. 11 no. 18 or op. 17 no. 2 - requires legato fingering of the kind to be discussed in op. 8 no. 9.

Similarly the highly chromatic RH line in, for example, bars 37 and 38 and its duple rhythm against the triplets of the LH, suggest the Prelude op. 11 no. 18, albeit in this case in much more restful clothing. Chord voicing becomes a concern, especially in the low register. For the most part legato playing in the soprano is quite simple but the chords in bars 28, 32 and 40 present a problem, though not a major difficulty. For bar 40 the following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 12

Bar 40

The image shows a musical score for Bar 40. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The treble clef staff has a melodic line with a slur over it and a fingering of 4 5 5 5 4 above the notes. The bass clef staff has a chordal accompaniment. A box labeled '40' is in the top left corner of the staff.

A case could be made for an inner melody in the tenor on the thumb of bars 45 and 46 moving to the second finger at bars 47 to 49.

The LH of Bars 45 to 49 b2 presents a relatively simple hand rotation pattern. Fingering of a chordal position can be maintained by using the second finger on the first quaver of bar 46, 47 and 48. Bar 49 presents the difficulty of switching from one pattern to the other.

For the very industrious student the following exercise could prove to be enjoyable as well as educational and are excellent for checking memory.

EXAMPLE 13

13(a) Bar 1



Musical notation for Example 13(a) Bar 1. The score is in 3/4 time and features a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part consists of chords and single notes, with dynamics *pp* and *sotto voce*. The bass clef part features a melodic line with fingerings 2, 3, 5, 2, 2. The notation ends with "etc."

13(b) Bar 10



Musical notation for Example 13(b) Bar 10. The score is in 3/4 time and features a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part consists of chords and single notes, with dynamics *dim.* and *p*. The bass clef part features a melodic line. The notation is marked with a box containing the number 10 and ends with "etc."

13(c) Bar 13



Musical notation for Example 13(c) Bar 13. The score is in 3/4 time and features a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part consists of chords and single notes, with dynamics *pp*. The bass clef part features a melodic line. The notation is marked with a box containing the number 13 and ends with "etc."

Performers will no doubt notice how slow the harmonic movement is in successive bars, as in the closing of the A sections. Variety and propulsion is created mainly through the texture. In the words of Bryce Morrison : "Scriabin's intricacy within an often static harmonic language is uniquely his own" [Morrison, p.2].

ETUDE NO. 8 IN A^b MAJOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Chord voicing.
2. Polyrhythms.
3. Melody and accompaniment simultaneously in the RH.
4. Portato touch in both hands.
5. Thumb moving between black and white notes.

The etude can be divided into the following sections :

- | | |
|----------|----------------------------|
| A | B1 (plus upbeat) to B16 b2 |
| B | B16 b2 to B34 b2 |
| C | B34 b2 to B42 b2 |
| D | B42 b2 to B54 b2 |
| Coda (A) | B54 b2 to B60 |

The etude presents two ideas of contrasting nature (A - Lento and B - Poco più vivo) and then proceeds to develop the material from the A section in the form of two variants (C - Tempo I, and D). The variation is mainly rhythmic, intensifying from two quavers per beat (A), to three quavers per beat (C) and to four semiquavers per beat (D).

Certain pianists might need to take some notes of the RH with the LH instead (suggestions for these will be made later), and therefore fingering has to be worked out by slowly sight-reading both hands together. It might seem logical to finger the LH first, as it does not change its rhythmical or technical character throughout the variations. Compare the LH of the A section with the C and D sections and this will become apparent. But where the LH has to help out the RH, the LH patterns and fingering will become irregular; these need to be seen as part of the LH work. Therefore it is advisable to start with the RH. The aim of the fingering is to play as legato as possible without the pedal and for held notes to sound for as long as required (or at least, for as long as possible without help from the pedal). Possible fingers for the first phrase include the following :

EXAMPLE 1

Bars 1-2, RH



Examples of cases where the LH can take notes of the RH in the A Section occur especially in bar 7.

EXAMPLE '2

Bars 4-7

Similar examples are to be found in bars 15, 41, 49 and 53.

The advantage of the above alternatives is that they make it possible to play at least the melody line in the RH legato and remove the temptation of an exaggerated arpeggiando, especially for small-handed pianists.

Incidentally, on the matter of arpeggiandos, pianists might like to use an arpeggiando in B7 b1 and B15 b1 to emphasize the rising melodic intervals. It could be permissible to add an arpeggiando on the third beat of both bars 7 and 15, for the same reason. If the arpeggiando is not too slow or accented it could throw a different light on the character of the melodic line.

An expressive marking that requires technical understanding is the portato (indicated in, for example, bars 1 and 3). The portato marking indicates notes of a length somewhere between a dry staccato and a legato, or as Sandor calls it "sort of a semi-legato or semi-staccato" [Sandor, p.142]. Sandor's book is generally sound and informative. He distinguishes between four distinct touch forms : legato, staccato, portato and tenuto. He emphasises the importance of understanding the differences between them, but some of his descriptions of the exact motions of the hands are somewhat unclear. Portato is described as indicating "a vertical wrist motion on each note and gentle finger activity" [Sandor, p.142]. Correct as this may be, it would seem necessary to involve the whole of the forearm as well and even occasionally assist with the elbow, either for rotating

the forearm freely or pushing the hand into the keys. The wrist action is slow and gentle. Sandor points out that the action of the wrist is applied in a manner directly affecting the action of the dampers, which are slowed down "to the point where the notes are barely separated gradually, not suddenly" [Sandor, p.142]. The portato then seems to indicate the length of silence between notes determined by when the note ends. But of equal importance is the quality of sound at the beginning of each portato note. The note must have a clear, detached attack and the key should not be depressed too quickly.

Like a staccato, a portato, unless specifically marked to the contrary, is detached on both sides, before and after it has been sounded. The differences between the two include the length of these silences and the speed of the wrist action. It could help the pianist to think of the portato and staccato as technical opposites : staccato as "up" or "out" of the keys and portato as "down" or "into" the keys. It should also be stressed that portato does not mean all the notes have to be attacked with the same dynamic intensity. Details of dynamic phrasing and shading definitely apply to portato passages.

It should be noted that the expressive portato occurs rarely in the etudes but is of vital importance when it does. It is used most extensively in this etude, but is also found in the Etudes op. 8 no. 11, bars 16 and 18 and the Etude op. 42 no. 4, bars 13; 17, 21, 37 and 41:

EXAMPLE 3

3(a) Etude op. 8 no. 11 bars 16-18

46

The musical score for Example 3(a) shows two systems of piano and bass staves. The first system covers bars 16 and 17, and the second system covers bars 17 and 18. The piano part features a series of chords and single notes, while the bass part has a more rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics range from *mf* to *ppp*. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. A box highlights the final notes of bar 18 in both systems, showing a portato effect with a final fingered note (1) and a final fingering (1) below it.

3(b) Etude op. 42 no. 4 bars 13-14

The portato also occurs in the preludes, in only 7 out of the 90.

In the case of the abovementioned etudes and in preludes where the expressive portato is used, the dynamic markings are very quiet and the tempo not too fast.

<u>WORK</u>	<u>TEMPO</u>	<u>DYNAMIC MARKINGS</u>
<u>Etude</u> op. 8 no. 8	Lento	<i>P</i>
<u>Etude</u> op. 8 no. 11	Andante Cantabile	<i>PPP</i>
<u>Etude</u> op. 42 no. 4	Andante	<i>PP</i>
<u>Prelude</u> op. 15 no. 1	Andante	<i>mp</i>

The quality of sound required in these examples differs markedly from the forte portato required for declamatory passages as can be found in the Sonata no. 7 ("White Mass").

EXAMPLE 4

Sonata no. 7

Skryabin uses the portato to heighten the expression or to emphasise the climax of a musical argument, as in the following example from the Sonata no. 7 where the portato changes the quality of sound from legato espressivo to that of a more emphatic nature.

EXAMPLE 5

Sonata no. 7



This "heightened expression" has to be mastered and available to the pianist where the Skryabinesque recitative requires it. It is necessary to distinguish between the motions of the two hands where Skryabin marks the portato, as in this case it is marked only in one hand at a time, while the other hand is either playing legato (bars 1, 3, 5, 9, 11 and 13) or is holding a long note (bars 6, 14, 17, 19, 25 and 27). The different articulation in each hand reveals the need for absolute individuality of sound quality and independence of each hand. Therefore it is essential that the fingering be decided on without pedal.

The following fingering is suggested for the LH :

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 1-3 LH



This fingering makes a legato possible without relying on the pedal. Even pianists with small hands can execute the downward arpeggiated figure on the first two beats of bars 1 and 3. There are two technical approaches to this passage. The one requires the wrist to be held high enough for the thumb to play right on its tip with the nail facing almost squarely to the right. First the second finger is used as a pivot for the movement 1 2 3, and then the rolling leftward of the wrist transfers the position of the pivot to the 3rd finger for the movement 2 3 5 (see example 6).

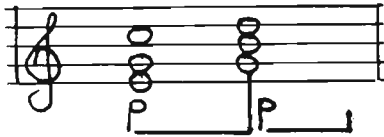
The other approach requires a wrist low enough for the thumb to play on its side. Again the 2nd and 3rd fingers are used as pivot points, but the wrist rotates horizontally.

The reason for this insistence on a perfect finger legato is that the pedal should be free to assist the RH in the portato touch, by using "portato pedalling".

In order to play two chords legato it is necessary to delay lifting the pedal on the first chord until the second chord has been sounded, so that there is no break between them :

EXAMPLE 7

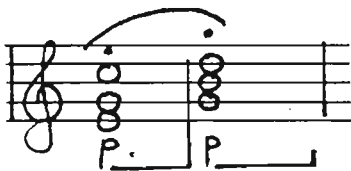
2 Legato Chords



In portato chords there has to be a break, however short, or at the very least, a suggestion of a break. This requires lifting the pedal shortly before the playing of the next portato chord :

EXAMPLE 8

2 Portato chords



A slight break occurs between the up and down movements of the foot. The speed of the foot movements may differ, depending on the length of the silence required between two notes.

The alternation between legato and portato pedalling has to be clear and deliberate. It is important to hold down long notes as long as possible, and not to rely only on the pedal. An example is the soprano B^b in bar 2 RH.

EXAMPLE 9

Bars 1-2



Similar examples appear at cadence points in bars 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, 38, 42, 44, 46, 50, 54, 56.

The structure of the LH stays very much the same throughout the C and D sections (Tempo 1 B34 ff.). Note the differences between B1 b3 to B2

and B3 b3 to B4 and their parallels in bars 35 to 38, and 43 to 46.

But possibly the answer lies not so much in the texture of the RH. How the LH approaches these passages is of some significance. If the LH were to play the dynamics of the opening bar as follows :

EXAMPLE 10

Bars 1-2

the last E^b of the bar would most probably be played diminuendo. But if the LH plays the phrasing as marked by Skryabin, it might prove necessary to slightly accent the last E^b, in order to sound sufficiently in the held long note :

EXAMPLE 11

Bars 1-2

Given also the portato articulation of the RH, the held note in the LH has to carry the legato of the phrase from bar 1 to bar 2. The slightly detached first beat of bar 2 RH, clearly articulated due to the preceding portato, marks the strong beat of bar 2. The desire to avoid repeated E flats may explain the added tie in bar 10.

The C section is built on 2 against 3 rhythm in the right hand. The ear has only one and a half bars to get used to the new rhythmical texture before it reaches the cadence in bar 36. It is therefore important that the main beats be marked clearly, so that the listener

can comprehend the combined rhythmical patterns. The effects of the rhythmic variation depend largely on the moments where they start together. This means that the first beat of bar 36 should be more marked than the last quaver of bar 35, and similarly in bar 37 and 38. The need for rhythmic comprehensibility could explain the textural difference. In the D section the rhythmic pattern is simply divided and the pulse is quite clear, and the same expressive value is accorded the LH as it is in the A section.

The portato that is so important to the A section disappears in the C and D sections and only reappears 4 bars from the end. The articulation becomes legato. Again it is important to choose a fingering that will ensure the most secure finger legato. The position of the RH hand is often spread in a way that requires legato playing from the thumb, as for example in bar 45 :

EXAMPLE 12

Bar 45 RH



Students might find the following preparatory exercises helpful in acquiring an ability to play legato lines on all the fingers :

EXAMPLE 13



Fingering :

1 1	1 1	1 1
2 2	2 2	2 2
3 3	3 3	3 3
4 4	4 4	4 4
5 5	5 5	5 5

Exercises can be done in all dynamics and keys, and pianists are encouraged to make up their own. While the above example is aimed at securing the thumb legato, it can also be adapted to form exercises for all the fingers. The sliding thumb legato requires a very relaxed thumb, palm and wrist. The wrist should not be too low. Sliding from a black note to a white note can be facilitated by raising the wrist

during the movement to the white note. This will alter the position of the thumb and it will achieve much of the slide by itself.

A difficulty of the C and D sections is playing both voices legato in the same hand. Pianists might find it helpful to separate the work of each voice by altering the articulation, or practising the two voices separately, with the correct fingering in the following ways :

EXAMPLE 14

Bars 34-35

14(a) etc.

Musical notation for Example 14(a) showing a single voice in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. The notation consists of a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes, with a final quarter note marked with an 'x' above it. The word 'etc.' is written to the right of the staff.

14(b) etc.

Musical notation for Example 14(b) showing a single voice in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. The notation consists of a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes, with a final quarter note marked with an 'x' above it. The word 'etc.' is written to the right of the staff.

EXAMPLE 15

15(a) Bar 43

Bar 43

Musical notation for Example 15(a) showing a complex passage in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. The notation includes a box containing the number '41' at the start, and various fingering numbers (1-5) and slurs above the notes. The word 'etc.' is written to the right of the staff.

15(b) Bar 45

Bar 45

Musical notation for Example 15(b) showing a complex passage in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. The notation includes a box containing the number '44' at the start, and various fingering numbers (1-5) and slurs above the notes. The word 'etc.' is written to the right of the staff.

Some pianists might find that they have insufficient muscular strength and independence of finger movements, or even co-ordination problems. In order to individualise the muscular movements the following

exercises can prove helpful even to very advanced pianists :

EXAMPLE 16

16(a) Bars 42-43




16(b) Bars 44-45



16(c) B45 b1



The problem in the C section of playing 2 quavers against 3 in the same hand can be simplified if thought of as a continuous rhythm of  underlying the RH :

EXAMPLE 17

Bar 34



A technical problem that needs to be addressed musically is that of chord voicing. A mistake that even accomplished pianists make - not only with Skryabin, but many other composers - is that they allow themselves to become so intoxicated by the melody, its line, shape and emotional content, that they ignore the vital inner voices. The same danger of neglected supportive voices is to be found in the opening phrase of the Etude op. 8 no. 11 in B^b minor. Pianists wishing to

acquire tonal control and balance might wish to practise sections A, C and D in ways that differentiate the tonal colour required for each voice. Emphasis could be placed on a different voice each time.

This kind of practice will enable the performer to give an individual character to each of the three voices in the RH, bar 36. The danger exists that the melody will be "over-sung". The result is a thickness in texture which can become monotonous. The supporting harmonies have an expressive contribution of their own which should not be neglected. One technical means of achieving well-balanced chords is to keep the fingers very flexible, and to rely on a raised wrist, using the forearm to articulate the chords rather than mechanical finger movements. This enables the weight of the forearm to be distributed evenly across the hand, through the knuckles to the finger-tips. This slight up and down movement of the hand will ensure that for example the 2nd finger replays each of the repeated A^b s in bar 1.

Bearing in mind that the etude was written as a love song to a girl six years his junior whom Skryabin wished to marry [Nicholls, p.3], and that it was written in the key of A^b, which Skryabin synaesthetically associated with a purple-velvet colour of tender or reflective nature, a mellow balancing of voices rather than a passionate emphasis of the melody in the A, C and D sections is indicated.

Technically the melodic material of the B section does not pose much of a problem. To assure that the bass notes are held for as long as they are written, while not smudging the melody notes in the pedal, it might prove necessary to take some of the LH notes with the RH. Examples include the following :

EXAMPLE 18

Bars 21 to 34

Example 18 (... continued)

The musical score for Example 18 consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand (RH) and the lower staff is the left hand (LH). The RH part features a melodic line with several slurs and accents, including a triplet of eighth notes. The LH part has a more complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. The tempo is marked 'Tempo I' at the end of the piece.

The same approach to portato in the LH of the B section is required as for that of the RH of the A section.

In the B section the following misreadings occur in recordings, for which there is no textual evidence : Ponti (Vox) plays B18 b3 as semiquavers,

EXAMPLE 19

B18 b 2 as played by Ponti :

The musical score for Example 19 consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand (RH) and the lower staff is the left hand (LH). The RH part features a melodic line with several slurs and accents, including a triplet of eighth notes. The LH part has a more complex rhythmic pattern with slurs and accents.

and Lane (Hyperion) plays these bars similarly. Deyanova (Nimbus) treats the LH C in B24 b2 as a melody note, instead of the printed RH A^b. In the A section (B13 b1) Sofronitzky (Melodiya) adds a D^b grace note before the RH second quaver C^b. While this grace note pre-echoes the grace notes of the C section, there is no evidence to suggest that Skryabin played it, or intended it to be played like that.

The etude employs, for the first time in op. 8, marked tempo changes. It is therefore important to choose a tempo for the A section that will also be suited to the C and D sections, and care should be taken that the Tempo Primo of the C section is really the same as for the A section. The changes in tempo, though marked and definite, should occur smoothly. The Poco più vivo should not be too fast, and the new tempo should start on the 3rd beat of bar 16, with the C upbeat of the melody played virtually in tempo. The previous tempo should last right to the end of the phrase in beat 2 of bar 16. The same applies when returning to the Tempo Primo in bar 34.

ETUDE NO. 9 IN G[#] MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Octaves with various dynamic levels and articulation in both hands.
2. Fast-moving chords in both hands.
3. Polyrhythms.
4. *ppp* staccato passages.

The etude can be divided into 3 sections :

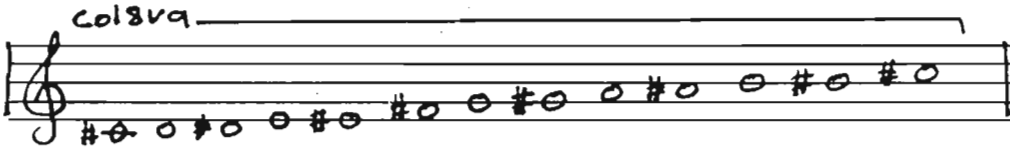
- A - Bars 1 to 48
- B - Bars 49 to 80 (including a bridge passage from bar 77 to 80)
- A - Bars 81 to 103

The G[#] minor etude, "alla ballata", is considered by musicologist David Dubal to be the crowning etude of the series. Skryabin seemed to have shared this view as he concluded many of his earlier recitals with it, rather than with what today is often regarded as the consummation piece, no. 12 in D[#] minor. Skryabin left no clue to the programme of the "ballad". It is a highly dramatic work in ternary form making formidable demands on the pianist.

The pianist should be sure of the fingering of different scales in octaves before attempting this etude. Naturally certain details of fingering will differ amongst pianists. Those with a stretch large enough to play octaves using 1 and 3 are encouraged to do so, as this fingering will greatly facilitate legato playing as well as fast detached octaves.

The following fingering is suggested for legato chromatic octaves :

EXAMPLE 1



- 1(a) C[#] chromatic scale RH with fingering : $\hat{4}53\hat{4}5\hat{4}5\hat{4}5\hat{3}4\hat{5}4$
 $\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow$
- 1(b) C[#] chromatic scale LH with fingering : $\hat{3}4\hat{5}4\hat{5}4\hat{5}3\hat{4}5\hat{4}54$
 $\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow\uparrow$

Major and minor scales and arpeggios should also be practised in octaves.

Exercises for octave jumps should be practised to improve co-

ordination.

Such exercises include the following, which is to be practised in both hands in all keys :

EXAMPLE 2

2(a)



2(b)

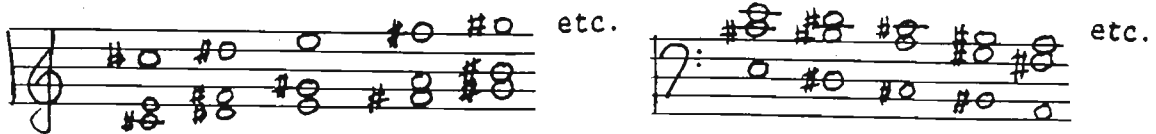


This etude, like the Chopin Etude op. 25 no. 10 in B minor, also for octaves, requires not only the playing of octaves, but also passages with a held or repeated note. Preparatory work for this difficulty should include the following, or similar variants, aimed at co-ordinating the relation between the inner note and the octave in the same hand :

EXAMPLE 3

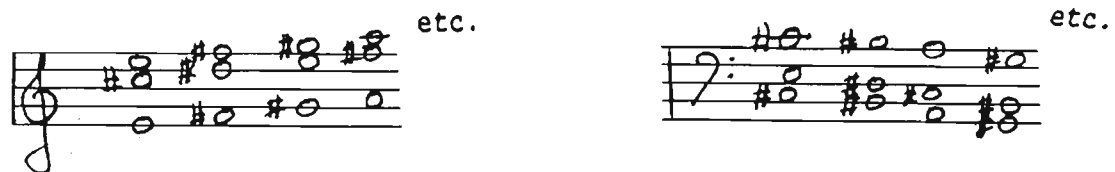
3(a) RH

LH



3(b) RH

LH



3(c) RH

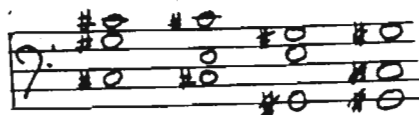
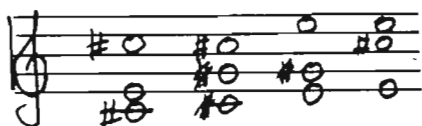
LH



3(d) RH

LH

etc.



3(e)

etc.



Exercises for strengthening octave playing include Heinrich Neuhaus' unusual but brilliant suggestion of playing the Two-Part Inventions of J. S. Bach in octaves. Neuhaus also suggests working on octave passages from the repertoire : passages from the Schumann Toccata, Beethoven Sonatas and Chopin Polonaises through Prokofiev sonatas and Messiaen's Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus all provide suitable material for octave passages. Some pedagogues look upon this practice of selective study with disdain. Neuhaus, whose credentials as pianist and teacher hardly need any elucidation - he was the first pianist to programme all ten Skryabin sonatas in one concert, and taught pianists of the stature of Gilels, Lupu and Richter - does not understand why this method of practice is frowned upon.

Neuhaus writes : "Am I really going to 'forget', to 'lose sight of' Liszt's Sonata [in B minor] 'as a whole' if, on certain occasions, I practise only its octave passages, together with octave passages from other pieces which I am just as incapable of 'forgetting' as a whole, as the Liszt Sonata? Will this really make me stupid, whereas I shall not become stupid from learning dozens of boring octave etudes which I shall never need, either on the concert platform or for my private delectation, while the octave passages from these beautiful compositions I need desperately?" [Neuhaus, p.127]

Some pianists would benefit from exercises aimed at strengthening the octaves. These include those in example 4.

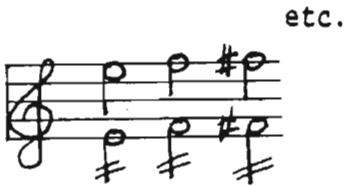
Care must be taken, especially with smaller hands, not to damage the hand through excessive tension. The muscles controlling the 5th fingers can become painful if there is insufficient relaxation between exercises. The main factors involved in these exercises are strengthening the muscles, as well as learning how to relax them the moment the sound has been produced. The wrist and forearm should relax after the notes have been sounded. These exercises can be done in all keys, and can be applied to passages in the etude. The examples given are to be played with one hand at a time. If only RH or LH examples are given, it is taken for granted that students will apply them equally to both hands, using variations of their own invention.

EXAMPLE 4

4(a)



4(b)



4(c)



4(d)



4(e)



4(f)



4(g)



4(h)



4(i)



4(j)

See discussion on "drawer movements" below



4(k)



4(l)

(Repeated octaves)
See discussion of repeated octaves below



4(m)

See discussion of "drawer movements" below.



4(n)

See discussion of the illustration of legato octaves below.



4(o) Practising the upper and lower voices of the octave separately.

4(p) Practising arpeggios and broken chords in octaves.

Many variations of these exercises are possible.

Repeated octaves as in example 4(l) and the oft-quoted opening measures of Schubert's lied "Der Erlkönig" can prove exhausting, especially on the modern piano with its heavier action. Artur Schnabel played these "keeping the arm high, the fingers loose and the wrist and elbow sufficiently fixed to permit a shake from the upper arm" [Wolff, p.177]. Fatigue in these passages is normally caused by excessive muscular contraction. Stiffness of the wrist decreases blood flow to the fingers, creating the sensation of muscular fatigue. Alteration of the hand position is suggested by Josef Hofmann as a means of combatting fatigue not only in repeated octaves, but in all octave passages. He stresses the importance of a flexible wrist : "In extended octave playing it is well to vary the position of the wrist, now high and then low. The low position brings the forearm into action, while the whole arm co-operates when the wrist is held high" [Hofmann, p.32].

Passages such as example 4(m) could benefit from the slight movements towards and away from the piano which Alfred Cortot described as "drawer movements" (presumably as they echo the arm movement involved in opening and closing a drawer) [Cortot, p.90]. These movements are propelled by the elbow and can alter the position where the fingers employed in the octave make contact with the keyboard. They can strike right at the edge of a key or millimetres away from a black note. According to Cortot these "in-out" movements "facilitate the displacement of the hand in passing from the black keys to the white, and vice versa, and in the latter case, allow the thumb to slide from one to the other, thus ensuring an almost perfect legato in both voices" [Cortot, p.90]. The implied horizontal movements can be alternated with vertical actions to avoid fatigue.

In octaves, legato playing is necessarily illusory, since it is impossible for the thumb to produce a true legato when moving from one note to the next. The ear can be tricked into accepting successive octaves as legato by assuring that the part of the octave which can be fingered, and therefore played truly legato, is slightly louder than the thumb. A slight leaning of the wrist toward the 5th finger should produce a weightier tone on the fingered notes. Conscious lightening of the thumb action will aid in achieving the correct "imbalance".

Staccato octave passages benefit from the systematizing demanded from legato octaves.

The fingering suggested for the first LH phrase is the following :

EXAMPLE 5

B1 to B2 b1 LH



The phrase occurs in virtually unchanged form in various keys throughout the etude. Similar fingering is suggested where these occur :

- B3 to B4 b1
- B9 to B10 b1
- B35 to B36 b1
- B37 to B38 b1
- B85 to B86 b1
- B87 to B88 b1
- B98 to B99 b1

The choice of fingering in example 5 is determined by how many notes in succession can be played legato, and in this case it is usually the first two quavers of each triplet. It would help the performer to think of slurs over the notes where legato fingering is used, in the following manner :

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 19-20 LH



This will encourage a mental connection between the physical action and the printed notes, and absolute clarity as to where the legato fingering occurs.

Exercises for the strengthening of octaves have been discussed in example 4, and should be applied to all octave passages in the etude.

Another method of practising not only the first LH phrase but all the

octave passages, is the adapting of rhythm for practising purposes. The aims of the following exercises are (i) to encourage mental resting positions throughout a passage, (ii) to encourage mental forward planning in the passage, (iii) to maximise concentration by applying it to shorter segments at first, (iv) to facilitate memory by combining motor action and active memorisation skills, and (v) to divide the passage into individual technical aspects to be developed separately.

Examples of rhythmic adaptation practicing include :

EXAMPLE 7

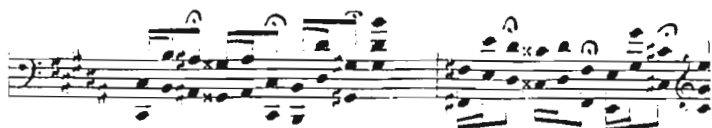
7(a) B1-B2 b1



7(b) B10-B12 b1



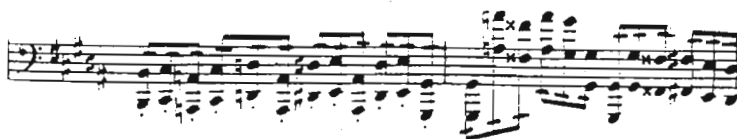
7(c) B13-B14



7(d) B19-B20



7(e) B25-B26



It is recommended that all the passages using this figuration (see example 5) be practised first so as to attain the maximum clarity of execution. It should also be noted that staccato markings were given

by Skryabin only in certain passages. Attention must be paid to the articulation as well as the dynamic marking. It is difficult to change abruptly from one articulation and dynamic to another, and before the change from one to the other can be managed, the different sections to be contrasted have to be perfected separately. Practising the first three bars in their entirety is not advisable, as it contains two separate passages.

Similar work can be applied to bars 19, 23 and 25.

The second LH passage, B3 b2-4, has its parallels :

- B 4 b2-4
- B10 b2-4
- B12 b2-4
- B36 b2-4
- B38 b2-4
- B86 b2-4
- B88 b2-4

The technical approach to bars- 2 and 4 (as to bars 12 and 38) is slightly different from that of the other examples, due to its different articulation. The former are to be played legato, while the articulation in the other examples is portato. The melodic curves of bars 2 and 4 are virtually identical and could be studied together. The following fingering is suggested for the LH of B2 b2-4 :

EXAMPLE 8

B2 b2-4 LH



It is suggested that the octaves should be legato, rather at the expense of the legato crotchets on the 2nd finger than vice versa. Treatment of this passage is similar to Chopin's Etude op. 25 no. 10 in B minor (see example 9) where octave triplet passages are combined with held crotchets in the same hand.

EXAMPLE 9

Chopin Etude op. 25 no. 10 in B minor, bars 6-8.



In both these studies it is permissible and often advisable not to hold the inner notes too long; often a length of two quavers will suffice.

By indicating portato in bar 10 and similar examples to the end, Skryabin reveals much of the technical solution to these passages. Portato has been discussed in the section on the Etude op 12. no. 8. The answer then lies in not playing legatissimo, but also not too detached. This will require lifting the whole hand, from the forearm, from one octave to the next. This lifting will facilitate the replaying of the middle note, usually on the second finger.

The fingering suggested for the LH of B10 b2-4 is :

EXAMPLE 10

B10 b2-4 LH

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords in the left hand. A slur is placed over the entire passage. Below the notes, the following fingering is indicated: 2, 4, 5, 4, 5, 3, 4, 5. The notes are: G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5.

It is suggested that the passage be divided into crotchets (groups of three quavers each), for practising purposes, and that each crotchet be perfected separately before being returned to its context within the passage. A difficulty in this passage is the changing relation between the middle note and the outer octave. The following sample exercises are aimed at strengthening the 2nd finger in different hand positions :

EXAMPLE 11

11(a) B10 b2-4 LH.

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords in the left hand. The notes are: G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5.

11(b)

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords in the left hand. The notes are: G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5; G4, B4, D5; F#4, A4, C5.

11(c)



11(d) (Just the top two notes.)



11(e) (Just the bottom two notes.)



11(f) Example 10 with each chord arpeggiated upwards or downwards.

(No illustration)

11(g)



11(h)



Bar 5 similarly contains more than one technique. B5 b1-2 contains elements of chromatic fingering and B5 b3-4 contains jumps. It is advisable to solve these difficulties separately.

The reader is referred to example 1 in respect of legato chromatic octaves. B5 b1-2 has its parallels in following :

- B 6 b1-2
- B 8 b3-4
- B13 b1-2
- B14 b1-2
- B39 b1-2
- B40 b1-2
- B89 b1-2
- B90 b1-2

The fingering suggested for B5 b1-2 is the following :

EXAMPLE 12

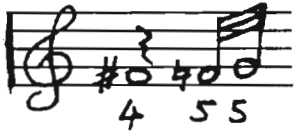
Bars 4-6 LH



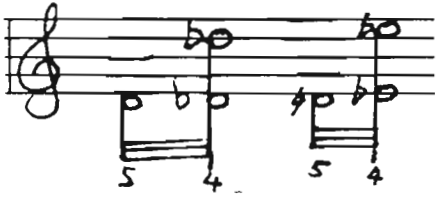
Weakness of the 4th and 5th fingers will complicate these passages and the following remedial exercises are suggested and would benefit the hands of even advanced pianists :

EXAMPLE 13

13(a) etc.



13(b) etc.



13(c) etc.



13(d) etc.



13(e) Legato chromatic scales, with 4th and 5th fingers :



13(f)

etc.



The methods of example 13 should be applied to LH chromatic and scale passages in the etude, as in the following :

- B16 b3-4
- B20
- B24
- B26 to 31 (passim)
- B34
- B42 b3-4
- B44
- B84

B5 b3-4 has its parallels in the following :

- B 6 b3-4
- B 7
- B 8 b1-2
- B13 b3-4
- B14 b3-4
- B15
- B39 b3-4
- B40 b3-4
- B41
- B89 b3-4
- B90 b3-4
- B91

Pianists might find it helpful to make a harmonic analysis of these passages to facilitate learning and memory.

For example :

B5 b3 LH - G# minor, first inversion

B5 b4 LH - G# minor, root position

These jumps appear on black and white notes. Sometimes they culminate in rolled chords for small hands, as in B6 b4 and similar examples.

These rolled chords require slightly different treatment from the unrolled chords at the culmination of these passages.

It is advisable to start with the rolled chord. The following exercises are aimed at securing the hand position of B14 b4, and should be applied to similar examples elsewhere, as in B34 b1-2 RH, B50 b2 LH, B52 b2 LH, B60 b2 LH and B76 b2 LH.

EXAMPLE 14

14(a) etc.



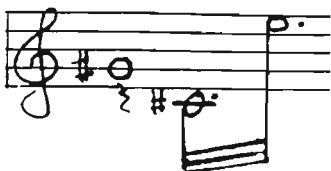
14(b)

etc.



14(c)

etc.



14(d)

etc.



Exercise 14(d) stresses the need for a mental and physical pivot note.

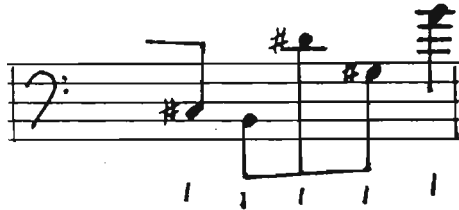
In the execution of B14 b3 and similar examples, it is important to avoid lifting the hands and arms too high. Staying as close to the keyboard as possible is vital to precise, fast execution.

Practice methods to secure the jumps and finger movements include the following as for B5 b3-4 and similar examples :

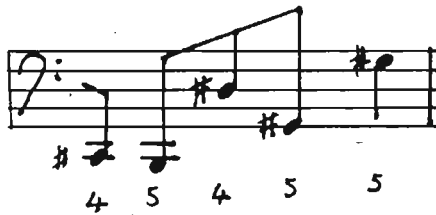
EXAMPLE 15

B5 b3-4

15(a)



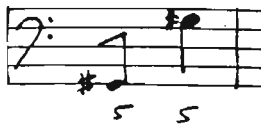
15(b)



15(c)



15(d)



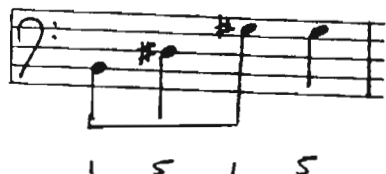
15(e)



15(f)



15(g)



The large leaps and chords in the LH of B18 b2-4 also occur at B22 b2-4. This passage does not return in the A¹ Section (Bars 81 to 103) and the performer should be conscious of the significance of these *sf* outbursts. The following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 16

B22 LH



Very small hands might have difficulty with the chord on beat two, as it requires a large stretch between the 2nd and 4th fingers, with a strong, sharp attack. To aid the musical requirements a small hand might be permitted to leave out one note of the chord, preferably the LH D (as the D is already doubled in the RH). Alternatively the G[#] could be left out. The hand movements should not be too high.

The same advice applies to a passage with octave jumps, B26 b2-3. These jumps might provide more of a psychological hurdle than a physical one. Skryabin assists the player by placing many of his leaps on black notes, thus making it easier to aim through visual means. Suggestions for practice include the following :

EXAMPLE 17

17(a)



17(b)

etc.

Musical notation for exercise 17(b) showing a sequence of notes on a grand staff. The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: (5 5, 5 5 5 5, 5 5, 5).

Bar 83 presents the LH with a challenge of its strength and independence of finger movement.

The following strengthening exercises are suggested :

EXAMPLE 18

Bar 83

18(a)

Musical notation for exercise 18(a) showing a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Fingerings are indicated below: 2, 1, 3, 1. The word "etc." follows.

18(b)

Musical notation for exercise 18(b) showing notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. Fingerings are indicated below: 5, 4. The word "etc." follows.

18(c)

Musical notation for exercise 18(c) showing notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Fingerings are indicated below. The word "etc." follows.

18(d)

Musical notation for exercise 18(d) showing notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Fingerings are indicated below. The word "etc." follows.

18(e)



Example 4(d) can be applied to the RH repeated octaves in bars 1, 3, 9, 11, 35, 37 and 87 and the LH repeated octaves in bars 17 and 21.

Students are encouraged to explore structural analysis as a means of identifying the technical devices in the etude. Once the individual passages have been mastered they can be linked systematically. The student can then discover the structural elements of the etude, which will aid the learning, memorizing and performing of the work. The structural elements revealed could include the following :

A two-bar phrase (bars 1 and 2) is repeated (bars 3 and 4), followed by two bars with virtually the same melodic contour (bars 5 and 6). Another two-bar phrase (bars 7 and 8) leads back to a repeat (slightly varied) of the structure of the first four bars. It then becomes clear that the first 16 bars of the etude can be divided into 2 sections, very similar in appearance. Then follows an eight-bar phrase divided into two phrases similar in contour (bars 17 to 24). Then follows an irregularity of a $1\frac{1}{2}$ bar phrase - based on the previous two bars - followed by an eight-bar phrase (bar 25) which brings us back to a repeat of the first 8 bars of the etude, with the same structural divisions as at its first appearance.

Similar structural analysis of the rest of the etude will do much to hone the observation skills of the pianist, as well as clarify the succession of technical devices throughout the piece.

Principles of legato fingering also apply to the RH bar in B2 b2-4, and similar passages in :

B 4 b2-4
B10 b2-4
B12 b2-4
B36 b2-4
B38 b2-4
B86 b2-4
B88 b2-4

The following fingering is suggested for B10 b2-4 :

EXAMPLE 19

B10 b2-4 RH

This fingering enables the soprano line to be as legato as possible. Notice should be taken of the dynamic indications in these passages, in this case, a crescendo from fortissimo. These passages are similar in technique to the RH of the following :

- B 5 - 6
- B13 - 14
- B26 - 34
- B39 - 40
- B89 - 90

The following fingering is suggested for B5 :

EXAMPLE 20

B5 RH

The practising methods and exercises suggested in examples 4, 7 and 11 can be applied in examples 18 and 19, and their related bars. In addition the following sample exercises would prove helpful :

EXAMPLE 21

21(a) Practising only bare octaves without the middle note.

21(b) Practising only the middle note without the octaves, as in B5 RH:

and B10 RH

21(c) B10 b2-4 RH



A textual question arises in bars 16, 42 and 92. Evidence suggests that in performance Skryabin himself added an extra note to some chords, though these notes do not appear in the manuscript or any of the editions studied [Dover, p.182].

As the Dover edition suggests, Skryabin played the first quaver of bars 16, 42 and 92 thus :

EXAMPLE 22

22(a) Bar 16



22(b) Bar 42



22(c) Bar 92



It is, however, unclear whether the added note was played as a quaver or a crotchet, as might be suggested by the fact that the middle notes of the whole passage are all marked as crotchets.

EXAMPLE 23

Bars 41 and 42 RH



The interpretation of this note as a quaver, in the Dover edition, suggests the possibility that the inner notes of similar passages also be treated as quavers, as in B2 b2-4, B4 b2-4 in the LH and B7 - 8 and B27 - 29 in the RH.

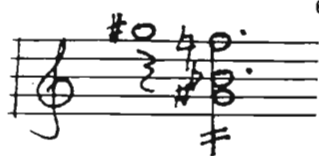
The two RH passages in B17-18 b1 and B21-22 b1 suggest similar treatment to the LH passage in B1-2 b1. The difficulty is compounded by the position of the hands low down on the keyboard.

The difficulty can be lessened by leaning the upper body to the left while trying to keep the shoulders relatively straight, facing the keyboard. Very short pianists might even require to move to the left on the seat to achieve a more comfortable position. It is suggested that, if necessary, the fourth beat of bar 16 be used to move slightly to the left using the right leg to push the pianist to the left, with the right heel as anchor. Similarly a return to the normal playing position for the pianist is suggested in the latter part of bar 26.

The RH of bars 19, 23 and 25 presents a problem to small or weak hands. The following exercises suggest ways in which the strength of the hand position and individual fingers can be increased :

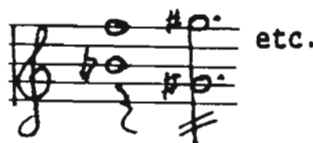
EXAMPLE 24

24(a)



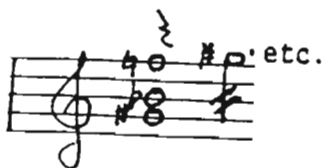
etc.

24(e)



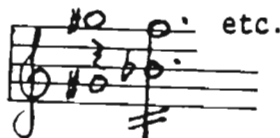
etc.

24(b)



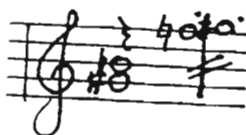
etc.

24(f)



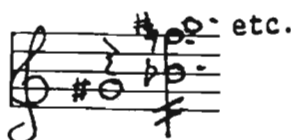
etc.

24(c)



etc.

24(d)



etc.

Similar exercises can be applied to other chords with awkward stretches as in B27 b2.

In bar 25 it is possible to use the thumb on the bottom two notes of the right-hand chord on the first beat of the bar.

EXAMPLE 25

B25 b1 Thumb on A and F*



Other examples where the RH thumb could take two notes, white or black, are the following :

- B 7 b1
- B29 b1
- B32 b4
- B49 b4
- B50 b1
- B57 b4
- B58 b1
- B69 b2
- B73 b4
- B74 b1

It is also possible for the thumb to play a black and a white note together as in B64 b1 and B56 b1.

EXAMPLE 26

B56 b1 RH



The matter of rolled chords has been dealt with in example 14. There are however examples where the RH can play notes of the LH to avoid the difficulty of LH arpeggiandos as in the following example :

EXAMPLE 27

Bar 66



The same approach can be applied to B70.

More problematic chords, especially for small hands, occur in B55 b3-4, B63 b3-4 and B23 b1. The difficulties in B55 b3 will depend largely on the individual hand, but smaller hands will experience difficulty either with the stretch from 2nd to 3rd finger or the 2/3/5 position. If the stretching and strengthening exercises in example 24 do not remedy the situation of a chord which lies awkwardly for small hands the alternatives are only to roll the chord, distribute it between the hands or in extreme cases, leave out the least harmonically or melodically important note. Example 14 dealt with legato rolled chords and could be applied here. Example 28 contains possible realisations of this technical problem. The performer is urged to make the chosen realisation as natural and musical as possible.

Neither the melodic line nor the rhythm should be disturbed. It should also be borne in mind that it might prove necessary to use two different solutions in the same bar because the chords on the 3rd and 4th beats of both bars 55 and 63 are not treated identically; the last dotted crotchet of each bar is tied over to the next bar, requiring the left hand to stay on the keys and not to lift. This suggests a realisation in the RH chord that does not involve the LH.

Possible realisations for B63 b3 (and similarly B55 b3) that involve the LH include :

EXAMPLE 28

B63 b2-3

28(a)



28(b)

Possible realisations that involve only the RH in B55 b4 include :

EXAMPLE 29

RH B55 b4

29(a)

29(c)

29(b)

29(d)

The syncopated bass line that characterises the *Meno vivo* (from B46 to 80) requires the RH to play *molto legato* whenever possible, without help from the pedal. Where finger legato is not possible, legato should be suggested by depressing the keys till the very last moment before the next chord is played. The fingers should stay close to the keys. Tension must be avoided at all costs. It can be lessened, if not avoided completely, by relaxing the fingers, hands, wrists and arms the moment the chord has been sounded. The hands should also be as relaxed as possible while the chord is struck. The chords extend the hand for long periods at a time, which could prove tiring. Tightening of the palm should be avoided. For uncomfortable chords the exercises in examples 11 and 14 are suggested. Example 4 can also be adapted to provide exercises for chords.

The difficulty of playing two rhythmic divisions of the beat simultaneously in the same hand is presented in the RH B50 b3. The realisation of this bar is in fact much simpler than it at first

appears. Pianists would find it much simpler to think of the passage as this :

EXAMPLE 30

B50 b3



Neither the melody (marked *cantabile*) nor the melodic rhythm of B50 b2-4 should be disturbed. The melodic rhythm is :

EXAMPLE 31

B50 b2-4



This passage has its parallels in the following bars, where the rhythmic treatment is similar to example 31 :

- B52 b3
- B58 b3
- B60 b3
- B74 b3
- B76 b3.

The combination of the two different rhythms in the same hand which appears in the RH of B98 b2 (see example 32) seems to provide a difficulty which even Skryabin could not overcome. Skryabin played it differently from what is printed [Dover, p.187].

EXAMPLE 32

32(a) B98 b2 as printed



32 (b) B98 b2 according to Skryabin's instructions



PEDALLING

Bars 46 (3 bars before the *Meno vivo*) present a pedal difficulty which will only become apparent when the hands are played together. In bar 49, at the beginning of the *Meno vivo*, both hands have to play *legatissimo*, holding each chord or octave until the pedal has been depressed again. Playing detached notes caught in the pedal is used to assure legato in both hands alternately. The following pedalling is suggested for B49 :

EXAMPLE 33

Meno vivo bar 49



The pedal in the *Meno vivo* here is connected with what the fingers are doing, not merely what the ear is expecting to hear.

A slightly different situation appears in bar 73 and similar examples in bars 75, 77, and 78 to 80. Because of the pedalling required for clean legato bass and soprano lines, it is impossible to play the tenor chords legato, or even to hold them for the written length. The only pedalling that is really satisfactory is that suggested in example 33.

The resultant gaps in the tenor chords will not be so obvious if the *legatissimo* lines are sustained in the outer parts. The purpose of the tenor chords is to add power and resonance to the RH pattern, at the climax of the middle section - which for the first time in the *Meno Vivo* reaches *fortissimo* - and not to create a third line.

After all the contrary-motion passages, differing articulation in each hand and large chords, the unison double-octave passages in B44 b2 - B45 and B94 b2 - B97 come almost as a relief. The articulation is the same in both hands and the motion is parallel. Yet, bars 96 - 97 contain not only a *sforzando*, but also a rapid *diminuendo* to *pp*. These

dynamic indications have to be practised until they are completely under control. The entire passage can be practised at various dynamic levels before progression from one level to another is attempted. Note also the accents on beat 2 of both bars 94 and 95, as well as bars 44 and 45. Rapidity in these passages will be easier if they are not played too heavily or loudly.

Skryabin anticipated this passage by an *accelerando* in bar 43 [Dover, p.184]. Although a slight *rit.* in bars 47 and 48 is necessary to prepare the *Meno vivo* the performer must remember that the *Meno vivo* starts only in bar 49 and not bar 46. The *diminuendo* only starts after the first chord of B46. Skryabin's *cantabile* markings in bars 50 and 58 in the Kay, Dover and Belayev editions suggest their application also to bars 52, 60 and possibly B74 b2-4 and B76 b2-4. This means that the pianist has to use a different quality of sound on the chordal material - B49 to B50 b1, B51 to B52 b1, B53 to B57 b1, B59 to B60 b1 and similar examples of this texture - to that of the *cantabile* melodic material - B50 b2-4, B52 b2-4 and similar examples.

Skryabin relieves possible monotony caused by the constant alternation of chordal and melodic texture in the *Meno vivo* section, through harmonic inventiveness and use of cadences. In the case of B56 b3-4 the cadence is slowed down and emphasized by means of a *ritardando* combined with *portato* whereas in B64 b3-4 the cadence is not slowed down and is in fact used to modulate. In the previous example modulation only occurred in the bar following the cadence.

The *Meno vivo* can become too slow-moving and pedantic. *Rubato* should be led by the harmonic changes of the chordal material as well as their implied melodies. The LH off-beats should not be accented. The dynamic level of the chords should intensify and relax with the *rubato* and not merely stay on the same level.

After the *fortissimo* indicated in B73 there are no dynamic indications until the recapitulation of the A section in B85, except a *crescendo* (bar 77) and dynamic waves in bars 81 and 82 - Skryabin himself played *p* in bar 83. The performer has to make interpretative decisions regarding dynamic indications, i.e. where to depart from the markings (or simply add them where they seem to be lacking). The length of the "*crescendo ed accelerando*" is very vague, and the only guide is the "*a tempo*" in bar 81. Various options are open to the performer :

- *accelerando* to the "*a tempo*",
- *accelerando* to beyond the "*a tempo*" speed with a *ritardando* before the "*a tempo*",
- starting the *crescendos* in bars 77, 81 and 82 at a much lower level,
- making a *crescendo* through bar 83 and *decrecendo* through bar 84, or vice versa,
- or to make a *rit.* in bar 84 b4,
- or to treat bar 81 as the recapitulation as two big *ritardandos* in bar 80 b4 and bar 84 b4 could seem pedantic.

The dynamic level should bear relation to its position in the tempo changes, and a structural analysis will aid in making musical decisions.

For rhythmically complex patterns as in B1 b2 and similar examples the reader is referred to the points on rhythm made in the Etudes nos. 2 and 4.

One final point is that of tonality. Paul Kay gives the tonality of this etude as C# minor [Kay, p.1 and p.28] whereas the key signature definitely indicates G# minor. This latter choice of key is supported by the Dover edition [Dover, p.181].

ETUDE NO. 10 IN D^b MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Thirds
2. Broad LH arpeggiated accompaniment.
3. Polyrhythms

The RH is required to play major thirds in every bar (save the final three chords) of this etude. Given its extreme difficulty, preparatory work is essential. It seems best to discuss thirds in general before applying their principles to this specific etude.

For the purposes of this etude, examples and exercises will deal mainly with thirds in the RH. Students would be wise to apply these to the LH in their practising. Exercises should also be applied to all twelve keys, major and minor, not only in the keys indicated in the examples.

Major and minor thirds can occur in three progressions : diatonic and chromatic scale progressions, alternating or trill progressions, and leaps. Fingering is of vital importance to the preparation and execution of all passages in thirds. Merrick divides fingering into three classes : recurrent groups, mixed groups and what he calls "organ fingering" [Merrick, p.35 and p.39]. This division however proves inadequate, as it ignores most chromatic progressions and alternating thirds in trill progressions or hand-rotation progressions.

Recurrent groups include groupings of 2, 3 and 4.

EXAMPLE 1

1(a)



1(b)



1(c)

etc.

2 3 4 5 2 3 4 5 2 3
 1 1 2 3 1 1 2 3 1 1

Mixed groupings prove most effective for scale passages. Fingering is sometimes more easily decided upon if the scale is played from the top rather than the bottom, for example :

EXAMPLE 2

2(a) B MAJOR in thirds

etc.

2 5 4 3 2 5 4 3
 1 3 2 1 1 3 2 1

2(b) C[♯] MAJOR in thirds

etc.

3 4 2 3 4 5 3 4
 1 2 1 1 2 3 1 2

3 4 5 3 4 5 3 4
 1 2 3 1 2 2 1 2

For chromatic scales the fingering in example 3 is suggested. Although this etude concentrates mainly on major thirds the fingering for chromatic minor thirds is given as well, for the sake of completeness.

EXAMPLE 3

3(a) C chromatic scale in major thirds

etc.

3 4 3 4 3 4 5 3 4 3 4
 1 2 1 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 2

3(b) C chromatic scale in minor thirds



Alternating and trill positions can occur on many fingerings. György Sandor suggests four different fingerings for one passage at the start of Chopin's *Etude* op. 25 no. 6 [Sandor, p.137] (See example 4 (a-d)), while Ian Hobson suggests yet another for the same passage [Elder, p.28] (see example 4(e)).

EXAMPLE 4

Chopin *Etude* op. 25 no. 6, bars 1-2
Allegro. ♩ = 69.



- 4(a) B1 b1
 with fingering 3 4 3 4
 1 2 1 2

- 4(b) B1 b1
 with fingering 4 5 4 5
 1 2 1 2

- 4(c) B1 b1
 with fingering 3 5 3 5
 1 2 1 2

- 4(d) B1 b1-3
 with fingering 3 4 3 5 4 5 3 5 3 4
 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 etc.

- 4(e) B1 b1
 with fingering 3 5 3 5
 2 1 2 1 etc.

The choice of fingering will depend on the particular passage and the shape, size and capabilities of the individual hand.

Although hand rotation progressions in the present etude require different muscular involvement, including the forearm, finger independence is required.

EXAMPLE 5

Bars 38-40

5(a)



5(b) Bar 45



The exercises in example 6 should also be applied to examples 1 to 5. These are aimed at strengthening the fingers, enhancing independence and strength of finger-action, creating a security of execution through combining motor actions with mental preparation, memorizing different fingering options, teaching analysis of the technical structure of a passage and achieving even legato thirds. These exercises should all be transposed into the twelve keys, using the fingering of the original.

EXAMPLE 6

6(a) Practising the top and bottom line separately, but with specific fingering chosen for a particular progression as in 1(a) :



6(b) Practising one line legato and the other staccato, then vice versa.

6(c) Practising in rhythms, as in 1(c) :



6(d) Trill action and measured tremolo patterns in chromatic major thirds :



2 3	5 2	5 4
1 1	1 2	2 1
2 4	5 4	5 3
1 1	1 2	2 1
2 5	5 3	5 3
1 1	1 4	3 1
3 4	3 4	5 2
1 2	2 1	3 1
3 5	3 5	3 2
1 2	2 1	1 1
4 5	4 5	3 4
1 2	2 1	1 1
4 5	4 5	3 5
1 3	2 3	1 1

6(e) Trill action and measured tremolo in diatonic major thirds with semitone soprano :



Using the following fingering :

3 4	5 4	3 4	4 5	5 4
1 2	1 2	2 1	1 1	2 1
4 3	5 3	3 5	5 2	4 3
2 1	1 2	2 1	3 1	1 2
4 5	4 5	5 4	5 3	3 4
2 3	1 3	2 1	3 1	1 4
4 5	4 5	2 3	4 1	3 2
1 2	2 1	1 1	2 3	1 1

6(f) Measured tremolo and trill passages on diatonic major thirds with whole tone in the soprano :



Using the following fingering :

3 4	2 4
1 2	1 1
3 5	3 4
1 2	2 1
4 5	3 5
1 2	2 1
4 5	4 5
1 3	2 3
5 2	4 5
3 1	2 1
2 3	4 3
1 1	1 2
5 3	3 2
3 1	1 1

6(g) Measured tremolo and trill progressions in a minor key with the 6th and leading tone in the soprano :



Using the following fingering :

2 3	3 4
1 1	2 1
2 4	3 5
1 1	2 1
2 5	4 5
1 1	2 1
3 4	4 5
1 2	2 3
3 5	4 5
1 2	1 2

6(h) Rotational hand movements in third passages :



Using the following fingering :

2 5

1 3

3 5

1 4

3 5

2 4

3 5

2 1

2 5

1 4

6(i) Employing wrist and forearm rotation in non-adjacent thirds :

etc.



Using fingering as in 6(h).

6(j) Oscillating patterns in a diatonic progression with a tonic in the bass :

etc.



Using the following fingering :

3 5 3 4 4 3 4 3
1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1

4 5 4 5 4 3
2 2 2 3 2 1

4 5 4 5 3 4 3 2
1 2 1 2 1 2 1 1

 3 5 3 5 3
 2 2 1 2 1

6(k) Oscillating patterns in a diatonic progression on the subdominant bass with a sharpened 5th :



Using the following fingering in F# major :

3 5 3 4	4 5 4 3
1 2 1 2	1 3 1 2
3 4 3 4	4 5 4 3
1 2 1 2	2 3 2 1
4 5 4 3	4 5 4 3
1 2 1 2	2 1 2 1
4 5 4 5	
1 2 1 2	

6(l) Oscillating patterns in a chromatic progression in major thirds :



Using the following fingering :

For this example	In other keys
3 4 3 4	4 3 4 3
1 2 1 2	1 2 1 2
3 5 3 5	5 4 5 4
1 2 1 2	1 2 1 2
3 5 3 4	4 5 4 3
1 2 1 2	2 3 2 1
4 5 4 5(3)	4 5 4 3
1 2 1 2(2)	2 1 2 1
4 5 4 3(5)	4 3 4 3
1 3 1 2(2)	2 1 2 1
4 5 4 5	
1 3 1 2	

6(m) Exercises for independence of finger action excluding thirds that use the thumb :

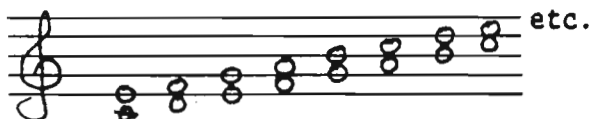


(6n) Exercises for finger independence on thirds excluding the use of fifth finger :



Merrick's so-called "organ fingering" is another option open to the pianist in passages of thirds (see example 7). This fingering is ideally suited to slow passages requiring a tranquil legato, and can therefore be of little use in this etude.

EXAMPLE 7



7(a) C major scale in thirds, using the following fingering :

3 4 3 4 3 4 3
1 2 1 2 1 2 1 etc.

7(b) and

3 4 5 3 4 5 3 4
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 etc.

Jumps sometimes have to be executed on the same fingers where a legato progression is rendered inapplicable by what precedes the jump or what follows it. Example 6 (d) to (j), if executed staccato with only one fingering such as :

3 3 4 4
1 1 2 2

or any useful combination of two fingers, will provide effective preparation for small jumps.

It can also be required of the fingering to change while repeating the same third. The following exercise is suggested. It should be practised on as many combinations of two fingers as possible.

EXAMPLE 8

8(a)



3 5 3 5
1 3 1 5

4 3 4 3
2 1 2 1

When playing thirds it is important to relax the hand consciously, and the position of the wrist should not be too low. The fingers should be bent and kept as near to the keys as possible.

Most of the solutions to the technical problems presented in this etude are likely to be found in the previous eight examples. In this etude especially, fingering is of the utmost importance. Without a mental grasp of the finger patterns involved the etude is virtually impossible to play. Pianists are urged to work out consistent fingering and are not to be daunted by a few unconventional progressions. These often provide the means for acquiring flexibility and security in technical matters that are perhaps not evident immediately. Students are advised not to choose fingering comfortable in an Adagio which might prove cumbersome in an Allegro.

Once again it is suggested that passages be systematically studied in "families", identified by their similar technical or mechanical approach. This process depends on being as specific as possible in one's mind as to what the actual demands are in different parts of the etude, and grouping together passages with comparable demands. This ratiocination is a helpful learning device that aids memorising and fluency.

Passages that can, because of their technical requirements, be classed together are : bars 1-3, 5-7, 17-19, 21-23, 61-63, 65-67, 89-91, 93-95, 97 and 99. Except for bars 97 and 99 all these examples can be grouped into three bar successions. For bars 1 and 2 and its corresponding (chromatic scale) passages the following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 9

Bars 1-2



with fingering

3 4 3 4 3 5
1 2 1 2 1 2

or

4 3 4 5 3 5
1 2 1 2 1 2

B3 RH can use the same fingering as B1 RH.

The change to a minor 6th on the last semiquaver remains a constant in all the passages in this technical group. It should also be noted that every group starts with the third on white notes, the thumb note being the major seventh step of the basic harmony of the bar :

Bar 1 - D^b major (min. 7) - RH thumb on C

Bar 2 - G^b minor over D^b pedal - RH thumb on F natural.

Bar 3 - A^{b7} over D^b pedal - RH thumb on G natural.

Bars 118 to 120 RH are based on a similar ascending chromatic scale.

Bar 4 has its parallels in the following bars : 8, 20, 24, 64, 68, 92, 96, 98, 100, 101, 102 and 103. These bars all deal with descending chromatic scales in major thirds. For that reason B51 b3 can be included in this list, but the following discussion does not regard this bar as belonging to the same group. The fingering of chromatic scales has already been discussed, but various options are still open to the performer. For bar 24 RH the following fingerings are suggested :

EXAMPLE 10

Bar 24 RH

10(a)	5 4 3 4 3 4
	3 2 1 2 1 2
10(b)	4 3 3 4 3 4
	2 1 1 2 1 2
10(c)	4 4 3 4 3 4
	2 2 1 2 1 2
10(d)	3 4 3 4 3 4
	2 1 1 2 1 2
10(e)	4 5 4 5 4 3
	2 1 2 1 2 1

The articulation indicated by Skryabin is staccato and therefore the detached repetition of the same fingers on different notes is permissible. Example 10 indicates groups of notes that form one particular finger grouping. All the passages in this group have identical notes comprising six descending steps of a chromatic scale always starting on G^b and B^b. When placed in their context within the etude it becomes clear that these bars form part of a repeated four-bar phrase, which demands two different technical elements : three successive bars of ascending chromatic scales plus one bar which descends chromatically. These two separate technical elements must be perfected before they are attempted in succession. Difficulties revealed by moving from one progression to the next might call for special attention. Pianists should heed the various articulation and dynamic markings of these apparently identical passages, and not be lulled into a false sense of security and accomplishment by succeeding in the staccato piano indicated in the first phrase. More about articulation appears later in this discussion.

Exercises for the smooth linking of bars 1 and 2 include :

EXAMPLE 11

Bar 1 going to bar 2.





11(a) 

11(d) 

11(b) 

11(e) 

11(c) 

11(f) 

Bar 10 RH corresponds to bars 12, 26, 28, 70 and 72 in a figuration not to be confused with the 4th bar of the Chopin *Etude* op 25 no. 6 : there exists the temptation to play a minor third on the first semiquaver, a la Chopin instead of the major third Skryabin asks for. Suggestions for fingering of the first four semiquavers of bar 10 can be found in example 6 (k). Choice of fingering will depend partly on what precedes the progression rather than what succeeds it, as in all these bars the hand comes to rest on the third quaver of the bar, usually on a downward octave jump, relieving the *moto perpetuo* briefly.

Analysis reveals that passages belonging to the B10 RH group are preceded by two different patterns and from two different directions : from an octave below and from a semitone above. The former occurs in B9 and in similar passages in bars 25 and 69. These bars also demand attention to the fingering of the last semiquaver of the previous bar, though the bars are detached through indications of either *staccato* (bars 8, 24) or *portato* (bar 68).

The following fingering is suggested for B9 RH :

EXAMPLE 12

Bar 9, RH



3 1	5 2 5 2
1 2	3 1 3 1
2 1	5 etc.
1 1	3
3 2	5 etc.
1 1	3
4 3	5 etc.
2 1	3

A slight break between bars 9 and 10 is virtually unavoidable due to the jumps in both hands, but at the speed required this is hardly noticeable. bar 11 approaches bar 12 (from the bar 10 RH group) from a semitone above, as do bars 27 and 71. Pianists following the general rule of maximum number of notes with the same hand position will see the logic of subdividing for practice purposes bars 11 and 12 as follows :

EXAMPLE 13

B11 and 12 RH



13(a)

2 3 5 3 5
1 1 4 1 4

13(b)

3 4 5 2 5
1 2 4 1 4
(3) (3)

Hand and forearm rotational exercises to benefit passages such as B9 b2-3 have been given in examples 6(h) and (i). Examples of RH thirds in progressions involving hand rotation and proportionately more arm rotation for larger intervals occur in the following bars : bars 11,

15, 16, 25, 27, 31, 32, 37-40, 45-47, 53-54, 55-60, 69, 71, 72, 76, 82, 84, 85-88 and 104-117. Further examples will be discussed where they occur with alternating patterns.

Examples of a passage containing only alternating or trill-related material include bars 13 and 48.

EXAMPLE 14

Bar 48 RH



Other examples of passages built on the alternation of two sets of fingers are RH bars 29-30, 73-76, and 77-85. Fingering and practice methods are suggested in example 6 and specifically examples 6(d) to (g).

The pianist's choice of fingering can influence the technical classification of certain passages. For example, the RH of bars 48 and 49 can be seen as a measured tremolo of a bar and a half followed by a wrist rotational pattern :

EXAMPLE 15

Bars 48 and 49



5	3	5	3	5	3	5	3	5	2	5	3
1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	3	2
							(4)				
							(2)				

This fingering has the advantage of placing strong fingers on a repeated and potentially tiring passage in crescendo. It has the distinct disadvantage of a leap on the thumb from a white note to a black note. The passage can also be treated as a measured tremolo in its entirety, and be fingered as follows :

EXAMPLE 16

Bars 48 and 49 (See musical illustration of example 15).

5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	1	5	3
3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2

This fingering eliminates the thumb jump, but places much more responsibility on the alternation of the 5th and 4th fingers in the soprano, and on the change of pitch on the 4th finger in B49. Very agile pianists with smaller fingers might even play it like this :

EXAMPLE 17

Bars 48 and 49 (See musical illustration of example 15).

17(a)

5	3	5	3	5	3	5	4	5	2	5	3
1	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	1	3	2

17(b)

5	3	5	3	5	3	5	4	5	2	5	3
2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	3	2

17(c)

5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	2	5	3
3	1	3	1	3	1	3	2	3	1	3	2

Bar 49 is similar to bars 33, 35, 41, 43, 53, 55, 82, 84 and 85. Performers should ultimately decide which realisation suits their own musical purpose.

Bar 34 and its parallels in bar 36, 42, 44, 78 and 80 present the pianist with various combinations. The following example includes some of the possibilities of bar 34 RH :

EXAMPLE 18

Bar 34 RH



18(a)

4	3	4	5	2	5
2	1	2	3	1	3

18(b)

4	3	2	5	2	4
2	1	1	3	1	2
					(1)
					(3)

18(c)

(4)	(3)				
3	2	2	5	2	4
1	1	1	3	1	2

Repeating the same note with different fingers occurs in bars 81 and 82. Examples 7 and 8 provide technical work for the repeated notes (marked x) in the following passage :

EXAMPLE 19

Bars 78-83, RH



Oscillating patterns in chromatic major thirds occur only twice in the etude : B14 b2 - B15 b1 and B30 b2 - 31 (see example 20). For further fingering suggestions the reader is referred to example 6(j).

EXAMPLE 20

Bars 14 and 15 (see 14 b2 - 15 b1)



One possible example for employing the "organ fingering" set out in example 7 occurs in bar 50 where it facilitates a legato cantabile.

EXAMPLE 21

Bars 48 - 52



"Organ fingering" has the inherent ability to prepare new hand positions, thus smoothing the transition from one to the next, if there is enough time to do so. It encourages the fingers to stay close to the keyboard.

The first beat of bar 55 appears relatively simple to reach as it involves the jump of only a major third. It is for that reason that some pianists in performance lift their hands too far off the keyboard and miss the first semiquaver of bar 55, as Sofronitzky does (Chant du Monde). The following "organ fingering" is suggested :

EXAMPLE 22

Bars 53-55, RH



The change of fingering on B54 b3 cannot occur simultaneously as this will cause a replay of the notes. Move the thumb first and then the third finger, like this :

5 5 3
3 1 1

If the action is performed smoothly, with minimum finger distance from the keys, most of the preparation for the next bar's hand position has been done. Legato finger substitution can also be applied in bars 86 to 88 where only one finger is moved to prepare its replay.

EXAMPLE 23

Bars 84-88, RH



The fingering suggested in the above example encourages thinking and planning ahead and can be executed by feeling the keyboard under the fingers. One need not look at the RH at all for the first two and a half bars. Given the extreme difficulty of the LH this point is important. The leaps in the LH will often cause the eye to be diverted from the RH. While the eye does leap frequently between the hands it is necessary not to rely purely on the visual directive from the eye. Visualisation is a practice most musicians perform subconsciously.

Separating the technical demands into categories - as has been done - is also a form of visualisation. While pianists often visualise the printed notes as an aid to memory, this etude provides an excellent opportunity to go a step further; visualising the actual hand movements and individual differences between the physical approaches

to different passages. Pianists might even go as far as to practise with their eyes closed. The memorisation of shorter phrases is encouraged. This will also minimize dependence on the eyes caused by practising hands separately and looking only at the hand that is playing, and not taking into account the fact that actual performance practice requires alternate visual concentration on both hands.

In the first stages of studying this etude students are encouraged to treat it as a *molto legato* study. This will aid memorisation of fingering. Students should ensure that a good sound is used on each note to lessen the danger of notes "disappearing" in performance. Playing too fast too soon is disastrous, resulting in rhythmic and tonal unevenness that conveys hysteria rather than drama.

The LH is written in a broken chord style characteristic of Skryabin. It is used in one form or another from the early works to the last.

The division of chords into LH arpeggiated accompaniment figures has been encountered in the Etudes no. 2 in F[#] minor, no. 7 in B^b minor and to a lesser degree, no. 6 in A major. While these are by no means easy, their figuration is relatively consistent, the directional movements of the hand are predictable, and there are few alterations of the basic technical concept and execution. In the D^b major etude, however, the harmonic progressions are less obvious and the technical approach varies virtually from bar to bar.

Skryabin's arpeggiated accompaniment reaches new heights in this virtuosic landmark. With the exception of the octaves in Etude no. 9 in G[#] minor, the present work arguably represents Skryabin's most difficult LH music to date. It also contains some of Skryabin's most unpianistic writing. It reveals innovation and experimentation, not all equally successful. It is beyond the scope of this study to formulate a developmental theory of Skryabin's arpeggiated style of accompaniment (as one of various styles) but the etude can be seen in the broader context of the evolution of Skryabin's writing. A comparison of passages from earlier and later works (see example 24) suggests a development from simple arpeggiated accompaniment from the Allegro appassionato, op. 4 through to the fluidity of the Etude op. 42 no. 5. In the late works this style displays a penchant for pivotal notes and rotation movements as in the Vers la Flamme op. 72.

EXAMPLE 24

24(a) Allegro appassionato op. 4

Allegro appassionato. ♩: 152-160.

The image shows a musical score for the left and right hands of a piano. The right hand (RH) part is written in a treble clef and consists of a series of arpeggiated chords, each with a slur over it. The left hand (LH) part is written in a bass clef and consists of a series of broken chords, each with a slur over it. The tempo is marked 'Allegro appassionato' and the measures are numbered 152-160. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

24(b) Op. 8 no. 10 B68-72



24(c) Op. 42 no. 5 Bl.



Artur Schnabel often spoke of "handings" in preference to fingering as he worked out his fingering in terms of hand positions [Wolff, p.178]. In studying the LH of this etude, one can indeed speak of "handings". The correct choice of hand position for any succession of notes is vital. Pianists have to make choices with regard to which fingers to use in specific jumps where often a variety of possibilities exist. These may include jumps on the same finger. Pianists are urged to be led by the most natural hand position for a jump, and as is so often the case, by what precedes and succeeds the actual jump.

It has been pointed out that the first eight bars consists of two identical RH phrases of four bars each, with the second phrase starting an octave higher than the first. This eight-bar phrase occurs four times throughout the etude, commencing in bars 1, 17, 61 and 89. One might assume identical treatment of its accompaniment, but this is not the case. The LH of the first eight bars can similarly be divided into four bar phrases but with the difference that the second phrase is not a repetition of the first, and for reasons of technical execution have to be classified separately. Bar 1 can be grouped with bars 3, 17, 19, 61 and 63.

The LH of bar 1 presents the pianist with the first of many choices throughout the etude which will be made from personal preference. Fingering the bar according to hand positions (or alternatively chord positions) reveal two options :

EXAMPLE 25

Bars 1 and 2



25(a) Bars 1-2 LH with fingering :

2 5 1 5 2 5 1 5 1 3 1 3

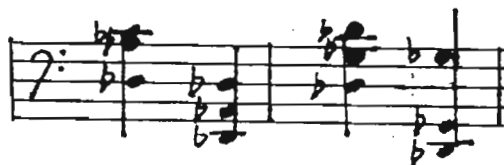
as 4 chords



25(b) Bars 1-2 LH with fingering :

2 5 1 1 2 5 1 2 5 1 3 5

as 4 chords



Example 25(a) requires a skip from 5th to 2nd finger and example 25(b) requires a skip on the thumb. Technical approaches to skips will be discussed later. The following fingering is suggested for bars 3 - 4 :

EXAMPLE 26

Bars 3-4 LH

2 5 1 1 2 5 | 2 1 5 2 1
 (5)

Bars 6, 22 and 66 are easily divided into three groups of a minor tenth and two octaves.

EXAMPLE 27

Bar 6



Some of Skryabin's figurations are remarkably pianistic and call for even arm-rotation movements with fingering based on chords which could be played with one stroke or arpeggiated without too much difficulty, as in the following examples :

EXAMPLE 28

28(a) LH Bar 31



28(b) LH Bar 48

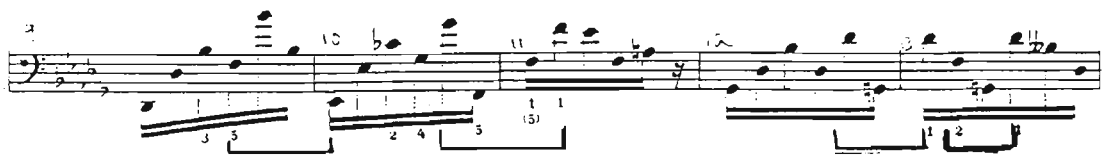


The passages in example 28 fall easily under the hand. Those in example 29 certainly do not.

EXAMPLE 29

Especially the progressions marked :

29(a) Bars 9-13



29(b) Bars 14-18



29(c) Bars 23-27



There are no simple solutions to these difficulties. Students are advised to place the skips as far away from each other as possible. Bars 10 to 11 (example 29) and its parallels in bars 26 to 27, 51, 54 to 55 and 69 to 70 illustrate this quite clearly. Compare example 30(a) to example 30(b) and it becomes clear that in the latter the skips are closer together.

EXAMPLE 30

(See musical illustration in example 29(a)).

30(a) Fingering in B10 b3 - B11 b1 : 1 5 1 1

30(b) Fingering in B10 b3 - B11 b1 : 1 5 5 1

While example 30(b) is not impossible and might even be preferred by some performers, example 30(a) has the advantage of giving the hand and more importantly, the mind an extra semiquaver to prepare and plan the next jump. That one semiquaver might make all the difference in the final performance. The same applies to bar 93.

B12 b3 to B13 b3 (example 29(a)) and bars 14 and 15 (example 29(b)) require quick changes of direction. For these as well as the skips of up to four octaves (as from bar 24 to 25) a relaxed yet responsive elbow is of vital importance. On the quick transfer of the hand over a large distance, Heinrich Neuhaus advises that "*the shortest path between two points on the keyboard is a curve*" [Neuhaus, p.132]. The curve represents an integration of the horizontal movement (distance) and the vertical movement (sound production). Neuhaus advocates executing leaps so that the final contact with the keyboard is perpendicular. This is achieved by a slight grasping action of the fingers : "*It is enough to make a small movement inwards with the fingers and sometimes the whole hand, towards oneself (only not outward, away from oneself!) and on no account to take the note - the key - sideways*" [Neuhaus, p.132].

József Gát distinguishes "*the real skip (when the two tones of the skip belong together) from the case when one tone of the skip is the end of a musical phrase and the other is the beginning of another phrase*" [Gát, p.177]. The four-octave leap in the LH from bar 24 to 25 (see example 29(c)) belongs to the latter group. Mentally separating the top and bottom notes can prove helpful. The same procedure can not be applied as easily in, for example, B12 b5 to B13 b1 (LH).

Ian Hobson suggests a silent-note technique for the secure execution of large skips, which relies on the octave position : "*Place the fifth*

finger on each extreme note with the thumb placed silently on the octave above (left hand) or below (right hand)" [Elder, p.28] (See example 31).

EXAMPLE 31

Chopin Etude op. 25 no. 5



[Elder, p.28]

While this example from a Chopin etude differs radically from the Skryabin it could have limited but valuable application in that it encourages preparation of hand positions. Passages where it might be successfully applied include the following :

EXAMPLE 32

◇ Show silent thumbs or fifth fingers :

32(a) Bars 43-47 LH



32(b) Bars 28-29 LH



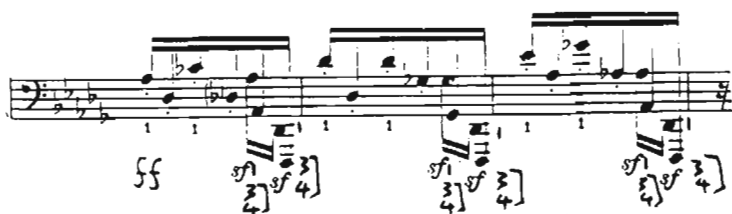
The above method could prove detrimental if it causes stiffness of the wrist and forearm.

Visual guidance is extremely helpful. Looking at the note before it is played will activate "your experienced nerves and muscles" [Curwen, p.53]. This emphasizes yet again the need for maximum fluidity of the RH actions in order to leave the eyes free to pay as much attention to the LH skips as possible. Choice of fingering on certain skips will depend on personal preference but for the *s/* octave leaps in the LH of bars 89 to 91, (93 to 95, 97 and 99) the use of two fingers on the bottom note of each octave is suggested (see example 33). Using the 3rd and 4th fingers together has the benefit of producing greater volume and percussiveness while the resultant change in hand position from

a conventional 1/4 and 1/5 octave position subconsciously forces the brain to direct a more deliberately accurate arm movement to the correct notes.

EXAMPLE 33

Bars 89 - 91



Franz Liszt's excellent advice should be remembered when playing especially the LH of this etude : "*Die Hände müssen mehr schweben, als an den Tasten kleben*" [Neuhaus, p.133]. This delightful little rhyme translates roughly as, "The hands should float over the keyboard, rather than cling to the keys." -

The rotational thirds encountered in bars 58 and 60 can be approached as in examples 6(h) and 6(i). Descending chromatic thirds in bars 118, 119 and 120 require similar treatment to RH ascending chromatic thirds. The following fingering is suggested for these bars :

EXAMPLE 34

Bars 118-120 LH



or with the alternative fingerings :

2 1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1
 3 4 5 3 5 3 4 5 3 5 3 4 5 3

and

2 1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1
 4 3 4 3 5 4 3 4 3 5 4 3 4 3

Given the extreme difficulty of the RH there are virtually no effective opportunities for the RH to take over notes written for the LH. Possible examples for very flexible hands include the following :

EXAMPLE 35

35(a) B10 b3

Musical score for Example 35(a) in B-flat major, 3/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures and fingerings 3, 1, 5, 3, 3, 1. The bass staff contains a bass line with fingerings 3, 5 and 2, 4, 5.

35(b) B54 b3

Musical score for Example 35(b) in B-flat major, 3/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures and fingerings 5, 3, 5, 3. The bass staff contains a bass line with fingerings 3, 5, 2, 1, 1, 3, 2, 5.

35(c) B59 b3

Musical score for Example 35(c) in B-flat major, 3/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures and fingerings 3, 1, 2, 5, 3, 1. The bass staff contains a bass line with fingerings 3, 5, 5 and dynamic markings *pp* and *pp*.

Examples of where the LH could possibly play notes written for the RH :

EXAMPLE 36

36(a) Bars 101-103, divisi

Musical score for Example 36(a) in B-flat major, 3/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures and fingerings 3, 1, 2, 4, 3, 1, 1, 1, 4, 2, 1. The bass staff contains a bass line with a dynamic marking *dim.* and *pp*.

36(b) B88 b3

The image shows a musical score for example 36(b), labeled 'B88 b3'. It consists of two staves, a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 2/4 time signature. The score is marked with a box containing the number '84' in the top left corner. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including quintuplets and sextuplets, with various fingerings indicated by numbers 1-5. There are also dynamic markings such as *sf* and *rit.* (ritardando). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with some measures containing multiple notes and rests.

The suggestions in examples 35 and 36 are optional but provide the necessary rest or mental clarity in certain cases. Many pianists would find in example 36(a) the only means of executing a perfectly smooth, unaccented passage as Skryabin indicates.

An editorial discrepancy exists in the passage from bar 89 to 99. The Dover and Belayev editions are in agreement that the *sf* markings appear on the octave leaps only in bars 89 to 91. Neither have *sf* markings on similar passages in bars 93 to 95, 97 and 99. The Paul Kay edition, however, persists with the *sf* in bars 93 to 95 and also in bar 97, but omits it in bar 99. Paul Kay also adds a "sempre marcato" in bar 93 which is in evidence neither in the Dover nor the Belayev edition. Given the intended decreasing volume - *ff* in bar 89, *f* in bar 93, *p* in bar 97, *pp* in bar 101 to *ppp* in bar 103 - the editorial suggestions in the Paul Kay edition are suspect. They are not completely invalid but they are examples of editorial licence none the less.

In some instances "editorial licence" is necessitated by actual performance practice, as in the realisation of the LH quintuplets that appear in bars 4, 20, 34, 36, 42, 44, 64 and 84. The treatment of combined rhythmical patterns has been discussed in most of the etudes, especially op. 8 no. 4. However, given the metronome marking of C=184, the aural result of the 5 against 6 rhythm in the abovementioned bars can sound untidy and disorganised, characteristics perhaps of Skryabin's playing but never of his concept. Some performers tend to emphasize the rhythmic irregularity of these bars by playing more loudly and with a more percussive attack than in the preceding bars (Vladimir Horowitz on CBS for example). The result is unpleasantly mechanical and clangy. Vladimir Sofronitzky (Chant du Monde) solves the problem with greater musical success, by playing the LH much softer than the RH, and making a marked crescendo in the previous bars as indicated. The combined rhythm can also be "altered", as it invariably is in actual performance, to approximately the following :

EXAMPLE 37

37(a) Bar 34 RH and LH



1 2 3 4 5 6

1 2 3 4 5

It is musically preferable to place the rhythmic irregularity towards the end of the bar, where it can make its intended effect with less danger of destroying the rhythmic continuity.

The matters of Skryabin's pedalling and virtual total lack of pedalling instructions have been discussed earlier. The odd indication by the composer, however, often poses more questions than it answers :

EXAMPLE 38

Bars 12 and 13



Here the articulation is legato, in contrast with the staccato of the first eight bars. There is no clear indication in the manuscript of the length of the indicated pedal marking. It could possibly indicate Skryabin's desire for a harmonic pedal, rising from the tonic D^b to the dominant, from bars 9 to 16, as indicated in example 39.

EXAMPLE 39

Bars 9 to 18



Whether the pedal is to be held from one pedal note to the next is debatable. Various factors have to be considered : the volume of the pedal note in relation to the rest, overall volume, the individual resonance of a specific piano, the speed, the quality of articulation and the relative need for attaching the bass notes to each other.

Skryabin's articulation indications are quite deliberate and the difference between staccato and legato should be clearly audible. Pianists should avoid a secco approach. Royal S. Brown comments on a recording of this etude by Horowitz : "There is a dryness to Horowitz' style here that does not seem altogether appropriate to the piece's more full-bodied romanticism" [Brown, 1973, p.63].

An important and effective counter-melody in the tenor range played by the LH thumb occurs in bars 80 to 84 (see example 40) and it in accordance with the composer's wishes to set it in relief [Dover, p.191].

EXAMPLE 40

Bars 78-88

Some pianists, including Horowitz, play a crescendo through the last five bars ending forte. There is no evidence to support a big crescendo in these bars. The reasons are none other than indulgence and the perceived need for a virtuosic end. Pianists are referred to the last two bars of op. 8 no. 9 where a similar subito forte or crescendo is contrary to the composer's indications. At the end of this capricious etude a Gnomenreigen-like *pp* is most effective. The alternatives remain unsatisfactory.

ETUDE NO. 11 IN B^b MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Large chords.
2. Chords and legato melody in the same hand.
3. Separating the harmonic and melodic functions of the pedal.
4. Cantabile
5. Portato

This etude, like many of Skryabin's early works, is in ternary form. Skryabin's rapid and constant compositional development is often evident within the same opus, and op. 8 is no exception. A new treatment of ternary form in Skryabin's work occurs in this etude. Skryabin's predilection for ternary form in these etudes and other early opuses reveals yet again his "*absolute mastery and reverence for form and clearness of construction in music*" [Eaglefield-Hull, 1927, p.52]. Clarity of form is a very important aspect of Skryabin's style. Predictability is avoided through his imaginative preparation of the recapitulation of the original material. In this aspect the influence of the great Belgian poets Maeterlinck and Verhaeren is not to be ignored.

In the first ten etudes of op. 8 (with the possible exception of nos. 2 and 10) and virtually all the previous opuses in ternary form, the return to the original A section involves a return to the character of the original, either through direct repetition (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10) or slight variation in rhythm or figuration (nos. 5 and 8). In this etude the recapitulation yields a new emotional content more impassioned and imploring than that of the original, the level of which will depend on the performer. Skryabin thus reaches a new stage of maturity (only hinted at in nos. 2 and 10). The form has to be grasped and communicated by the interpreter. Jean Delville the symbolist painter who created the cover design for Skryabin's Prometheus [Eaglefield-Hull, 1927, p.51] and with whose thoughts and ideals Skryabin was very closely associated, wrote : "*If ugliness has replaced beauty in art nowadays [c. 1900] it is because art has lost the abstract and vital sense of Form*" [Delville, p.47].

The etude can be divided into the following sections :

- A - Bars 1-14
- B - Bars 15-28 (Bridge passage - Bar 28)
- A Varied - Bars 29-54 (Coda - Bars 46-54)

In this etude it is suggested that the fingering should, for the most part, be chosen with the hands together. The reason for this is that some pianists might feel the need to rearrange the chord voicing between the hands in order to secure a clean legato melody line. While

widely spread chords form an integral part of so much of the piano literature and are an aspect of technique not to be ignored, the danger exists that musicians attempt this repertoire before their mental concept of the technique has matured and they have acquired the required control of the hands. The results can be very negative : tense hands and fingers, tension in the palm muscle, stiff wrists and forearms, a twisted hand position and locked joints such as the thumbs, all of which impede a good quality of sound and a flexible mechanism and could lead to tendonitis. Overeager pianists can do more damage than they realise. Skryabin's performing career was interrupted and nearly destroyed by tendonitis in his right hand. It never fully recovered. Tendons are like vocal chords : once damaged beyond a certain point they can never be repaired [Matheopoulos, p.77].

Pianists are encouraged to discover for themselves the two different sensations of tension and fatigue. It is a rule of thumb that if tension exists anywhere in the mechanism it is affected by something behind it : a stiff wrist often indicates a tense forearm or a locked elbow. Hofmann therefore encourages the playing of all chords, with few exceptions dictated by specific characterizations, with a loose arm, in all dynamics [Hofmann, p.12].

Many pianists agree that a certain amount of muscular activity - which is not to be confused with tension, but all too often is - is evident both during the preparation of a chord's hand-position and at the moment of impact. The amount of muscular activity will depend largely on the pianist's ability to use the arm weight. Tension occurs when the fingers carry the main responsibility for chord playing and the pianist subconsciously tries to reduce the arm weight. This causes a slight pulling up of the muscles of the forearm which affects the state of the wrist. The pianist might be doing this hoping to allow the fingers more freedom to find the notes, but the effect on the playing is detrimental. This often results from textual insecurity. Tension is controlled by the conscious as well as the subconscious mind and being unsure of the notes can communicate itself to the physical mechanism as tension.

Relaxation however does not imply musical inactivity, and the activity of the fingers should not be ignored. As Neuhaus writes : "*Anyway the best advice one can give someone who plays chords, is the advice of Liszt : grab the chord, drawing the fingers slightly inwards towards the palm, and do not let them fall on the keys like lifeless pokers*" [Neuhaus, p.131].

Pianists have more opportunity to rest and relax than they might realise. The obvious chances are rests, or during leaps, or between one passage or hand position and the next - in other words, when the hands are not producing a sound. Yet it is possible to relax also while the fingers are on the keyboard, while a note is sounding. This involves releasing all tension from the hands. All extraneous muscular action should cease the moment the sound has been produced. The pianist has therefore to acquire the ability to consciously release tension from the mechanism. This is not to say that all positions have to feel easy and comfortable. Playing with ease and comfort is neither

the aim nor privilege of musical study.

Controlled piano playing consists of a constant alternation between activity and rest, tension and relaxation. Neuhaus likens it to the action of the heart "(which beats without interruption from birth and even earlier, until death) or the action of the lungs in inspiration and expiration. Diastole and systole - this is a very appropriate image for the piano" [Neuhaus, p.129].

Pianist Isabella Stengel uses the highly effective visual image of a little light in the wrist, which switches on at the moment of impact and immediately switches off, indicating the musculature at rest, even if only for a brief instant, completely free. The pianist is conscious of the natural weight of the arm from shoulder to finger tips. A chordal passage would then constitute a series of "blips" from the little bulb in the wrist. This image effectively sums up the action that Neuhaus describes as to "sit on a chair" [Neuhaus, p.129]. This technical control is vital to the performance of the etude as much as it is to the whole gamut of piano repertoire.

Active relaxation is the most important aspect of pianism. This technique has to be secure in order to deal with the practicalities such as nerves and stage fright in a performance situation. All too often stage fright is a term used to disguise the deeper emotion : **guilt**. Guilt is caused by lack of adequate preparation. Only thorough work can provide complete mental and physical security. Contrary to views held in certain quarters, the "tension" literally has to be practised out of a work.

Fingering in this etude can not be divorced from the pedal. Revoicing of chords is suggested to place less strain on especially smaller hands. Placing chords within the handspan arguably allows more tonal control. The revoicing suggested for the first three bars (see example 1) can be applied to other examples in the etude. This will enable the pianist to use fingering which allows more frequent pedalling, thus ensuring a cleaner legato melody line and more expressive freedom.

EXAMPLE 1

Bars 1 to 3 with chord rearrangement and pedalling.

Andante cantabile *♩ = 53* Op. 5 No. 11

The musical score for Example 1 consists of three measures. The right hand (treble clef) has a melody with a slur over the first three notes, with fingerings 2, 3, 2, 3. The left hand (bass clef) has a series of chords. The dynamic markings are p, p, p, p, p, pp, p, p, p, p, p. Pedal markings are indicated by vertical lines with the letter 'P' below them.

The above arrangement and fingering allows the pedal more melodic independence than if it were to be pedalled as it is written (see example 2). It is especially important to use the pedalling suggested in Bar 3 of example 1 rather than that in Bar 3 of example 2.

EXAMPLE 2

Bars 1 to 3, as printed, with longer pedalling.

Andante cantabile *♩ = 63* Op. 5, Nr. 11

P P P P (P) P

The long pedals are necessary to sustain the B^b pedal throughout the example. This might be a case where half- or quarter-pedalling could prove useful to "clarify melodic and rhythmic progression and polyphony which should be audible at all times even though the music is bathed in pedal" [Somers, 1976, p.47]. The mixing of harmonies in an impressionistic way often enhances the sound of strange harmonic modulation. It is characteristic of Scriabin to catch a harmonic flavour in the pedal and to enrich it by "dropping" new colours into it as in the following sections from the Sonata no. 10 op. 70 and the Sonata no. 5 op. 53.

EXAMPLE 3

3(a) Sonata no. 10 op. 70, Bars 7-14

poco rit. *avec une ardeur profonde et voilée*

poco poco

(Example 3a continued .../)

Example 3a (... continued)

Musical score for Example 3a. The score is in three staves. The top staff is marked *cristallin* and has a triplet of eighth notes. The middle staff is marked *m.s.* and contains a complex rhythmic pattern. The bottom staff features a series of triplet eighth notes. The key signature has two flats.

3(b) Sonata no. 5 op. 53

Musical score for Example 3(b). The score is in three staves. The top staff is marked *a tempo*. The middle staff is marked *m.s.*. The bottom staff is marked *rall.* and *a tempo*. The key signature has two flats.

However, the colours implied by Skryabin can be altered by a performer as Vladimir Horowitz does in his recording of the Sonata no. 5 (RCA Victor). Example 4 indicates the pedalling used by Horowitz and its result on the passage.

EXAMPLE 4

Sonata no. 5

Musical score for Example 4. The score is in three staves. The top staff is marked *molto rit.*, *cantabile*, and *molto rallentando*. The middle staff is marked *pp*. The bottom staff shows a series of pedalling marks (P) under the notes. The key signature has two sharps.

This choice of pedalling is as much linked to technical execution as it is to musical interpretation. For further discussion on pedalling

possibilities, the reader is referred to the section on **Pedalling**, Neuhaus [p.160], Gát [p.275] and Sandor [pp.161-179].

Throughout this etude chord-voicing is very important. As preparatory work, pianists are advised to peruse the Saint-Saëns Etude op. 52 no. 2. Pianists may find that a slight leaning of the wrist to the right will transfer enough weight to the weaker fingers of the RH, which are to play the melody, reminiscent of the bel canto singing style. There is a tendency though, amongst even very accomplished pianists, to over-emphasize the melody, not taking into account the sound world within which it lives. Deyanova's otherwise superb rendition of this etude (Nimbus) is marred by this tendency. The supportive harmonic cushion unfortunately appears in her recording only after a beat and a half. All notes of each chord must speak through sufficient weight from the wrist. This is a musical as well as technical concern.

Yet the accompaniment should not sound thick. Performers are encouraged to judge the texture with the ear, the weight from the wrist and the pedal. Chord voicing does not only apply to the RH. Tenor lines should be made audible, as for example in bars 5-6, 13-14, 29-30, 33-34 and 37-38. Generally in this etude the tenor melodies fall on the thumb, a finger with potentially the most strength. Bars 5 - 6 present the problem of which melody to emphasize : tenor or soprano.

Faubian Bowers identifies two schools of Skryabin playing : "emphasizing the uppermost melody in the right hand, and emphasizing the inner or lower melodic voice" [Bowers, 1970-71, p.17]. Bowers further claims that tenor emphasis is a Western trait, exemplified by Giesecking and that treble emphasis stems from Neuhaus, and is therefore a particularly Russian trait. However, it seems that Skryabin wanted both lines (and often more than two) to be clear as can be deduced from his marking in the score of "that early, erotic and affectionate Poème op. 32 no. 1" [Bowers, 1970-71, p.17] : "Le due voce ben marcato", as well as his own playing of Désir, op. 57 no. 1. In Skryabin's playing, however, the tenor, though very distinctly heard as a counter-melody, is still subordinate to the emotional demands of the soprano line. It is not unreasonable to assume that this should also be the case in bars 5-6.

The quality of the treble melody and the many tenor counter-melodies made this piece ideal as a transcription for 'cello and piano made in 1943 by Gregor Piatigorsky (1903 - 1976), a Russian-born cellist, graduate of the Moscow Conservatory and principal cellist of the Moscow Orchestra. His arrangement of bars 29 - 30 and 33 - 34 gives the soprano melody to the 'cello and tenor to the piano and vice versa in bars 37 - 38. In the latter case the reason for this distribution is more obvious as Piatigorsky reinterprets Skryabin's dynamic indications and demands a *ff* from the piano.

The pedalling for bar 3 (see example 1) also applies to bars 11 to 14. This affects the technique of the LH. In bars 11 and 12 the fingering replacement suggested in example 5 will enable at least some notes to be played legato. These are marked with a slur.

EXAMPLE 5

Bars 10 to 12 with LH fingering.

Bar 11	2	1	2	1	1	2		1	2	1	1	1	2
	5	5	5	4	3	5		3	5	2	5	2	5
												4/2	
													Bar 12

Bars 11 to 14 underline yet again the need for the fingers to function independently from the pedal. If the LH of bars 13-14 is played on its own it could be performed in the following way :

EXAMPLE 6

B13 b1 LH

The detached articulation, encouraged by the leaps, could be treated colouristically as in example 3. However this pedalling is unsatisfactory for the RH, as has been illustrated in bar 3 of example 1. Using the pedalling suited to the RH while articulating the LH as in example 6, will result in gaps and bumps and a total disruption of the intentions of the composer. The LH therefore has to practise its articulation with the pedalling suited to the RH, rather than that suggested by separate-hands practising. The result will be a much more tenuto approach to the keys. Each note will be held until the pedal has been changed a second time, as indicated in example 7. The jumps will therefore have to be accomplished in a shorter space of time.

EXAMPLE 7

B13 to 14 LH with RH pedalling :

The image shows a musical score for Example 7. It consists of two staves: a right-hand (RH) staff and a left-hand (LH) staff. The RH staff contains three measures of music, each with a slur over a group of notes. The LH staff contains three measures of music, each with a slur over a group of notes. Below the LH staff, there are several 'p' markings indicating pedalling. The first measure has two 'p' markings, the second has two, and the third has one. The RH staff has a 'p' marking at the end of the first measure and another at the end of the second measure.

Dealing with pedalling also implies dealing with the rhythm. This is one of the examples in Skryabin's music which, in Neuhaus' words, reveals the need for the pianist to acquire "the ability of the foot to keep up with the sixteenths and thirty-seconds" [Neuhaus, p.166]. Example 8 suggests a possible rhythmic learning aid to the passage, which relies on 4 against 3 rhythm.

EXAMPLE 8

The image shows a rhythmic learning aid diagram for Example 8. It consists of two horizontal lines representing the right-hand (RH) and left-hand (LH) parts. Above the RH line, there are four groups of notes, each with a number above it: 1, 2 3 4, 1, 2 3 4. Below the RH line, there are four 'x' marks, each with a vertical line pointing down to the RH line. Below the LH line, there are four 'x' marks, each with a vertical line pointing down to the LH line. The first 'x' on the LH line is aligned with the first '1' on the RH line. The second 'x' on the LH line is aligned with the second '1' on the RH line. The third 'x' on the LH line is aligned with the third '1' on the RH line. The fourth 'x' on the LH line is aligned with the fourth '1' on the RH line.

This passage and its counterpart in the A (varied) section lends itself to a stringendo aptly described by Maria Callas as a gradual "squeezing" of the tempo [Ardoin, p.300]. This stringendo should be reversed before the start of the B section (bar 15). Skryabin here thought it wise to insert a caesura between bars 14 and 15 [Dover, p.166]. Four bars of the same type of melody, rhythm and texture can become pedantic if not alleviated by rubato and good phrasing. The four-bar phrase can be broken into two two-bar phrases, first culminating in B12 b3. Again, in Callas' words : "In music, when you have the same phrase twice, one must be less important than the other, or else neither will make an effect. Plan the return ... so that it forms a balance with the first part" [Ardoin, p.228]. The phrasing should be chosen to communicate the Tchaikovskian *Weltschmerz* inherent in the chromatic line and the turbulent cross rhythms.

The association of this melody with the music of Tchaikovsky and Skryabin's position in the Russian musical tradition has been discussed earlier, as has the accompaniment style, prevalent in this etude, characterized by the prominence given to the thumb and its rotational figures. This characteristic accompaniment - much more pianistic than the experimental op. 8 no. 10 - sometimes requires dynamic variation on individual notes and in bars 29 and 30 LH (and similar passages elsewhere) the melodic and accompaniment functions are combined. The following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 9

Bars 28-30

Musical score for Example 9, bars 28-30. The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. Dynamics include "staccato" and "cresc.". A fingering sequence "5(5 2 1 3 2 1)" is shown at the bottom right.

Dynamic chord control is effected by a combination of wrist weight and finger action. Some pianists might find it useful to practise dynamic control of the thumb by itself, as in the following example :

EXAMPLE 10

Musical score for Example 10, showing a single melodic line with dynamic markings. Below the staff are four diagrams illustrating dynamic control of the thumb using wedge-shaped lines.

It is important not to bang the thumb but it must be clear and have resonance to it like a bell. This quality of sound is not obtained by a light staccato caught in the pedal, but in a full movement of the hand, as if one were playing a true legato.

Dynamic control is also a major difficulty in this etude. Again the editors differ on certain details. Belayev and Dover indicate a diminuendo in B16 b1 while in the Kay edition it starts one beat earlier, B15 b4 :

EXAMPLE 11

Bars 15 and 16

46

The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano and left hand. The score covers bars 15 and 16. Below the score, three different dynamic markings are shown, labeled 11(a), 11(b), and 11(c). 11(a) shows a long, gradual decrescendo. 11(b) shows a shorter decrescendo. 11(c) shows a very short decrescendo, with a forte (sf) marking at the end.

11(a) Kay :

11(b) Belayev and Dover :

11(c) Interpretational option impossible in Kay :

This might seem an insignificant difference. However, the Dover and Belayev editions make possible an interpretational option excluded in the Kay edition (see example 11(c)). This option shortens the length of the decrescendo, which makes it potentially easier to execute.

Alterations of dynamics such as in B15 b4 -16 b2, B18 b1, B20, B21 b3, B22 b2-3 and B28 b2-3 present great technical difficulty to the pianist. Louis Crowder discusses in great detail sonic experiments aimed at determining what aspects of piano playing affect the quality of sound. He comes to the conclusion that the only variable is the speed of key depression, i.e., "*the hammer's speed at the moment it leaves the escapement*" [Crowder, p.22]. His experiments and conclusions are remarkably scientific, yet his academic logic centres on the production of a single note - *senza ped.* - and in no way relates it to a musical phrase or succession of pitches or to the communication of any musical, emotional or spiritual intention. He also simplifies tone colour as a concept, merely to a degree of loudness and "*one combination of harmonics*" [Crowder, p.27].

Crowder admirably dismisses attempts at altering the tone after it has been produced, but to classify as self-deception a perceived varying tone quality seems highly suspect. Crowder's basic premise that the volume is dictated by hammerspeed is correct. This is controlled by the weight and speed with which the forearm and wrist descend on the keys.

Pianists should bear in mind that the pedal plays a great role in the crescendo or decrescendo. The rate of decay of a note held in the


pedal is considerably slower than that of a note held by only keeping the key depressed. It is therefore suggested that the pedal be changed, either half or full, on every semiquaver of the decrescendos cited above.

Legato fingering is also suggested for the RH melody in the B section. The following fingering is suggested for bars 19-20 :

EXAMPLE 12

Bars 19-20, RH



For a discussion of the portato touch in bars 16 and 18 the reader is referred to the treatment of the *Etude* op. 8 no. 8. Care should be taken to execute correctly and clearly the  rhythm in the LH in bars 15, 17, 23 and 25; pianists should also pay attention to the length of the note held in the LH thumb in those same bars.

Bars 41 to 44 present a clear example of the importance accorded the left hand in propelling many of Skryabin's works. The LH here provides variation of dynamics, speed and colour. This passage culminates in a **ppp** in bar 44. According to the Dover edition this implied diminuendo is evident from the manuscript. However, Skryabin allowed a crescendo from bar 43 followed by a subito **pp** [Dover, p.197]. This crescendo would be largely dictated by the LH. Some pianists do not hold the rest in bar 46 for its full length and anticipate the entry of bar 47. Skryabin believed that the rests would not bore and that the music would communicate its message through that bar : the pianist must have faith in that bar, too. Cutting short the silence destroys the continuation of the line. In the words of Callas : "*There is always a rhythm to a pause; it must be measured inside yourself, so that the pulse of the music will continue even through the rest*" [Ardoin, p.163].

The interpretational option exists either to keep the pedal down through the bar's rest, or to clear it and have complete silence. Vladimir Horowitz retains the colour of one bar through a bar's rest in a recording of the *Sonata* no. 5 (RCA Victor) to quite good effect.

EXAMPLE 13

Sonata no. 5



In the above example the tempo is faster than in the etude and is followed by a "Presto con allegrezza" that announces a completely new character. In the etude however the succeeding passage is a resolution of the suspended harmony on the flattened second in bar 44. It is therefore an answer to the question of the previous phrase. This dark answer should have the effect of finality, and tragedy is more easily suggested by projecting the sound into a cavernous silence. The performer should make a choice on preference.

Finally, it is suggested that the rests in the last two bars be respected as silences.

ETUDE NO. 12 IN D[♭] MINOR

Technical difficulties addressed :

1. Broad LH figuration in various dynamic levels.
2. Repeated LH chords.
3. Chord jumps LH.
4. Full arm vibrato.

Skryabin wrote an alternative version of this etude, which made its way onto Michael Ponti's recording of Skryabin's complete piano works (Vox). It was published separately. As their technical demands are virtually identical duplication would be pointless.

The etude can be divided into the following sections :

- A - B 1 to 17 b2
B - B17 b3 to 33 b2
A (varied) - B33 b3 to B55 (including coda - B51 b3 to B55)

The broad LH figuration in the A and B sections makes use of the same rotation techniques as in the Etude op. 8 no. 7. In the present etude however the rotation figures are developed further to include the "snatching bass" technique so prominent in Skryabin's writing. The following fingering is based on Skryabin's own indications in the manuscript :

EXAMPLE 1

Bars 1-3, LH

Patetico $\text{♩} = 100-112$

Bar 1 is a nucleus containing most of the difficulties encountered in the LH of the first 33 bars. Students are expected to transfer technical work and discoveries to other similar bars. Exceptions will be dealt with in due course.

The first difficulty encountered is the repeated octaves that open the etude. Similar technical situations exist in the RH at the upbeats to, and first beats of, bars 3, 5, 7 and similar cases. Described by Edwin Hymnovitz as a full arm vibrato, this motion is similar to that of cracking a whip, being "*the simultaneous contraction of both the triceps and brachialis muscles that flings the forearm forward and immediately arrests it*" [Hymnovitz, p.44]. Between the semiquavers and demisemiquaver upbeats and the succeeding downbeats, there is no time for an up-down co-ordination of the arm. Both octaves are played in a single stroke. Down-beat recovery is needed to release tension from the hand in order to prepare for the next difficulty : the LH thumb jump to the second quaver of the bar.

It is characteristic of vocal music that a note is always affected by its predecessor, which is a preparation for breath control, voice placing and even dynamic control. With piano music, and especially fast writing such as this, it is characteristic that the treatment of a note is almost always affected by its successor. The movement from the first quaver is affected by the movement from the second to the third and even further. Therefore, instead of concentrating only on the thumb jumps from quaver 1 to 2 it might be helpful to think of an octave movement from D[#] to A[#], with the second octave arpeggiated downward. The result is that three leaps are mentally reduced to two.

The pianist has the option of treating quavers 2 to 5 as one rotation movement. For a discussion of the technical approach to such rotation movements the reader is referred to the discussion on the LH of op. 8 no. 7.

It might prove necessary, as was the case with op. 8 no. 3, to separate the registers and movements when practising, in ways suggested in example 2. These suggestions divide the passage up into manageable units and the occurrence of similar technical elements can be memorized in the context of the passage.

EXAMPLE 2

Bars 1-3

Patetico Op. 8, Nr. 12

5 5 5 4 5 4 5 4

Op. 8, Nr. 12

The above exercises provide the opportunity to combine various technical elements. Further exercises to strengthen individual fingers might be necessary. For insecurity of the thumb action, the following exercises are suggested :

EXAMPLE 3

B1 b1-2

3(a)

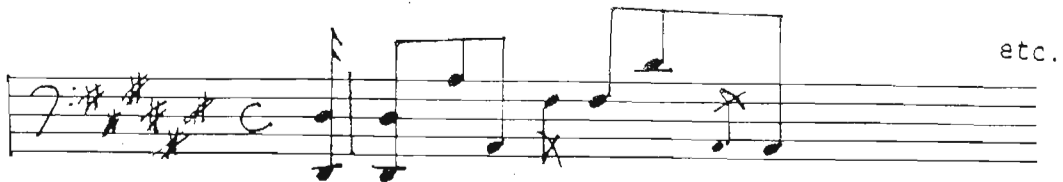
3(b)

For securing of the position of the second finger the following is suggested :

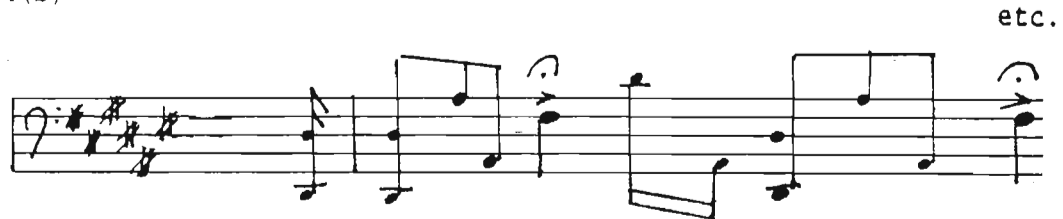
EXAMPLE 4

B1 b1-2

4(a):



4 (b)



Similar exercises can be devised for strengthening the position of other fingers encountered in different passages. A high wrist and large forearm rotation is important in the execution of these figures. Very big leaps occur in the second beat of bars 2, 4, 6, 10, 12, and 14. It is quite possible for these to be played by the RH :

EXAMPLE 5

Bars 4-6



Occasions exist where the "snatching bass" can be combined with the rotational leap figure already encountered in many of the earlier etudes, as in bar 8 :

EXAMPLE 6

Bars 7-9

This associates the tenor fingering with a chord position that falls naturally under the hand, and therefore onto the memory.

Although the movement from the 2nd to the 3rd beat in the LH is usually effected by a movement from the second finger to either an octave on 5th or just to the thumb, there are notable exceptions which should be firmly implanted in the memory :

B 8	-	Octaves
B 9	-	Octaves
B15	-	Octaves
B16	-	Octaves
B19	-	1 → 5
B20	-	Octaves
B21	-	1 → 5
B23	-	1 → 5
B24-31	-	Octaves

The octave leaps in these cases can be facilitated by a mental awareness of the harmonic line of the bass as indicated in example 7 :

EXAMPLE 7

Bars 19-27

Treating this line as a separate instrument in an orchestral score, such as a tuba or double-bass section, will encourage horizontal thinking and building of longer lines. It will also encourage awareness of the harmony as an expressive element. This will counteract the tendency to play all the extreme bass notes at the same, unvarying dynamic level. The influence of Adolf van Henselt on this style of Skryabin's writing is discussed earlier.

Small hands might experience difficulty in performing the large stretches on beat 1 and 3 of the bars 4 to 6 (see example 8(a)). Arpeggiation is the only solution. The bottom note should preferably come before the beat, since the D[#] is merely a pedal while the thumb G[#] outlines the harmony. Example 8(b) presents a possible realisation of the arpeggiando.

EXAMPLE 8

8(a) Bars 4-6

8(b) B4 b3 to B5 b1



The D# pedal should be caught in the sostenuto pedal. It is characteristic of the main melodic material that the last RH note of a bar is repeated on the first beat of the next - the full-arm vibrato stroke. If the first note of the RH arm vibrato is treated as belonging to the next group, the same can apply to the bottom arpeggiated note in the LH in the above example.

Since the chord positions in the LH of the A (varied) section (bars 34 -43 and 48 - 51 specifically) rely so much on the extension of the hand to the octave position the reader is referred to the discussion of octave and chord technique in the section on the Etude op. 8 no. 9, especially examples 4 (octaves) and 11 (chords). The chordal passages are mechanically much easier to execute than in the ninth etude, as in this case the chords do not change position as often or as quickly. The same chord is repeated as often as six times. If the harmonic movement is memorised these passages are relatively simple. Voicing is of no particular importance in the LH so the pianist has not even that difficulty to contend with.

The real difficulty lies in the repeated action required for the chords, combined with awkward hand positions. The movements required are slower than for a true octave or chord vibrato such as in Schubert's lied "Der Erlkönig".

A high, flexible wrist is important to support the fingers. It is advantageous to keep the hands and arms close to the keyboard but the tendency must be avoided of clinging to the chords. This will only place excessive tension on the muscles of the palm and create stiffness and fatigue which could easily overstrain the tendons of the hand.

Contrary to expectation the fingers should not be too curved, as this can cause the hands to remain fixed in one position as if grabbing onto the notes. A moment of relaxation is required between each individual chord. Occasions do exist where the RH can take some notes of the LH, which will lessen the movement of the LH, for example B34 b3, (see also similar examples in bars 36 ad 38) :

EXAMPLE 9

Bar 34



Bars 44-47 bear resemblance to B18 b2-4 and B22 b2-4 in the Etude op. 8 no. 9. Whereas in the latter the forearm movement is from right to left, in the former it is in the opposite direction. The pianist is encouraged to think in terms of horizontal movements guided by the forearm rather than individual vertical movements, which would slow down the process of mental and physical preparation for the next action. Once again an awareness of "orchestral" textures such as the chromatically rising bass line from bar 44 to 48 will facilitate execution :

EXAMPLE 10

Bars 44-49

The pianist should be able to perform all passages in the A (varied) section at different dynamic levels. This etude is a favourite concert piece among frustrated heavy-weight boxers, and the repeated chords can be painful on the ear. Such mistaken musical (or unmusical) renditions could stem from an interpretative misconception, as much as from indulgence in the physical aspect of playing the instrument.

But very often it is caused by inferior technique. Peter Katona, Administrator of the Royal Opera, comments on the expressive freedom allowed coloratura soprano Edita Gruberova by her superb technique : "She has total vocal flexibility at any tempo or dynamic range. If, like Gruberova you do have this choice (of technical possibilities) you can decide to sing a phrase or passage in a certain way because you feel it is the right way. But if, as most singers are forced to do, you sing it a certain way because it is the only way you can manage to get those notes out, there is little merit to your

interpretation because it springs from necessity" [Matheopoulos, p.96].

The RH of this etude makes extensive use of octave technique. Therefore the reader is referred to the discussion on the Etude op. 8 no. 9 where the matter is dealt with in detail. The difference between the technical approach to octaves in the two etudes (nos. 9 and 12) is that no. 12 requires many more legato and lyrically expressive passages than no. 9. To this end Tobias Matthay stresses the need for making proper contact with the keys. That might seem obvious, but in legato playing deficiencies in octave technique are more easily observed than in detached octaves. Matthay further states that the fingertips must "take hold" of the keys at their surface level before they are used for the production of sets of sounds (the amount varies according to the fingering, 4 5, 3 4 or even 3 4 5). Matthay claims that this "preparation" determines the speed at which one can accurately perform octave passages [Matthay, 1908, p.90].

The attention paid to key-contact also suggests the importance of attending to resting or instantly relaxing on the key. Auguste Boissier quotes Franz Liszt as maintaining that octave playing was the basis of a good technique and that octaves should be played with great flexibility of the wrist [Boissier, op cit].

The following fingering is suggested for bars 2 and 3 RH :

EXAMPLE 11



The manuscript indicates the 4th finger on the last octave of bar 2. As no fingering is given on B3 bl one has to deduce that as a result of the full-arm vibrato stroke, Skryabin intended a legato 4-5 fingering on the soprano of the first 2 crotchets.

The A (varied) section is similar to the coda of the Sonata no. 4 op. 30 and is composed in a style that occurs frequently in Skryabin's writing. Voicing of the RH chords is of the utmost importance and a strong yet flexible little finger is required to sing the melody notes at varying dynamics and tempo. Rubato and altered dynamics would avoid a mindless hammering away in predictable fashion and provide a sense of élan and forward propulsion to the entire section.

The RH of the coda requires a full-arm vibrato stroke only if the performer chooses a speed fast enough to warrant it. An accelerando is in order, but the change from forearm stroke to vibrato stroke must be consciously done. The LH of the coda presents the difficulty of repeated notes. The following fingering is suggested :

EXAMPLE 12

Bars 52-53, LH



A slow piano action can make the above passage more intricate than it needs to be. Stiffness in the fingers, palm or wrist will render a pianist incapable of performing this passage. The action of the fingers is described by Josef Hofmann : "Furthermore, you should not, in repetition technique, let the fingers fall perpendicularly upon the keys, but with a motion as if you were wiping the keys with the finger-tips and then pull them quickly toward the palm of the hand, bending every joint of them rapidly" [Hofmann, p.35].

The arpeggiation of the second to last chord, based on Skryabin's own technique of arpeggiating chords as discussed earlier, is as follows :

EXAMPLE 13

Bar 54



The manuscript indicates different dynamics for the final 6 bars :

EXAMPLE 14

Bars 50-52

Musical score for Example 14, Bars 50-52. The score is in 7/8 time and consists of two systems. The first system (bars 50-52) features a treble and bass staff. The treble staff begins with a forte (fff) dynamic and a 'dim' (diminuendo) marking. The bass staff has a piano (p) dynamic. The second system (bars 53-56) features a bass and treble staff. The bass staff starts with a piano (p) dynamic, followed by 'cresc.' (crescendo), 'f' (forte), another 'cresc.', and 'ff' (fortissimo). The treble staff starts with a piano (p) dynamic, followed by 'cresc.', 'ff', and 'p'. The system concludes with a double bar line and a 'p' dynamic marking.

Students are encouraged to consider Otto Ortman's idea that quality of sound is a psychological reaction that has no independent physical component. Yet the myriad subjective images we receive in this work, of which the Patetico is one, are the result of minute adjustments in amplitude and duration [Ortman, 1937, p.3]. A good measure of mental control is necessary to convey the spirit of the music : an over-emotional approach can prove very damaging to the final product.

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