Rubato and Climax Projection in Two Piano Sonatas by Scriabin

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Graduate Department of Music

University of Toronto

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Abstract

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) is well known as a composer for his inventive tonal language and as a performer for his approach to rubato. As is evident through his piano roll recordings, Scriabin's pianism epitomizes the performance practice of the early twentieth century and raises significant issues for the modern interpreter of Scriabin’s scores.

The diversity in Scriabin's compositional style has prompted a variety of analytic approaches. Chapter one surveys Scriabin’s stylistic development in terms of his piano music and explores relevant analytic and interpretive approaches. Chapter two explores Scriabin's pianism as described by his close friends, pupils, and critics of the time. These reports characterize Scriabin's playing as rhythmically flexible, sensitive to different layers of voicing, and subtle in its dynamic nuances. In Chapter three, the two central topics of the dissertation—rubato and climax—are explored in general and in relation to Scriabin’s music. In Scriabin’s early piano music the indication for rubato correlates with a specific melodic contour, and the broader connection between rubato and melodic contour is explored. The study of climax draws
on Austin T. Patty’s theory of pacing, in which climaxes of different types arise through different handling of various musical parameters. The musical components of Scriabin’s climaxes evolve during his output. Chapters four and five examine the Piano Sonata No. 4, Op. 30, and Piano Sonata No. 10, Op. 70, respectively. These case studies provide a formal-thematic overview of each work, consider the use of rubato and the handling of climaxes with respect to the theoretical frameworks established in Chapter three, and assess performance choices with reference to several recorded performances.

This dissertation provides an alternative outlook to the performance of Scriabin's music. Tempo graphs reveal the pacing between phrases and sections and permit comparisons among artists from different generations. The recordings surveyed for both sonatas indicate that the flexibility in timing within individual phrases or thematic sections is much greater in the earlier recordings compared to more recent ones, as is the degree of tempo contrast between slow and fast sections.
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Chapter 1

Scriabin’s Compositional Style and Analytical Approaches to his Music

Scriabin’s music represents a body of creative work with a unique use of sound, harmony and influence of his philosophy. His music is commonly divided into three periods—early, transitional, and late—in which his sense of tonality dissipates starting from the transitional period. In this chapter, Scriabin’s stylistic change will be studied from the lyricism of Chopin and heroic gesture of Liszt to the philosophical influence of Nietzsche, and finally the pioneering application of his unique harmonic system in later works. Available literature in regard to Scriabin’s transitional and late harmony will also be surveyed. This will include James Baker’s analyses, where he uses a Schenkerian voice-leading approach to analyze Scriabin’s tonal/transitional works and also employs the set theory described by Allen Forte to study Scriabin’s late works. Another theory widely acknowledged was set forth by a Russian musicologist, Varvara Dernova. Most of her studies on Scriabin’s music were conceived in the 1940s, but the further development and detailed explanations came with her publication of “Garmoniya Skriabina” in 1968. She emphasized Scriabin’s use of dual-modality in his music. Since the book was never published in English, my study of her work will be based on Roy Guenther’s dissertation, “Varvara Dernova’s ‘Garmoniya Skriabina’: A Translation and Critical Commentary.” The Soviet musical research concentrated on Scriabin’s works before 1905 and
concluded that Scriabin never left the traditional harmonic system, and that he only came to the border of atonality. This point of view may be influenced by their anti-modernism movement.¹

It is a great paradox that the Soviets recognized Scriabin as a national treasure while opposing his ideology and philosophy. They disregarded completely any sexual and mystical contexts and made Scriabin into a revolutionary figure, who successfully synthesized the meaning of art and revolution: during the Soviet era, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to circle the planet in outer space, “All-Union Soviet Radio beamed* The Poem of Ecstasy into the universe as an emphatic and hopeful accompaniment.” During the triumphant celebration three days later, it was again Scriabin’s music that was showcased.² The official Soviet view regarding Scriabin’s music can be observed from a Soviet musicologist, Sergei Pavchinsky:

Scriabin’s heroic and lyrical music has earned its ‘citizen’s rights.’ We must reexamine those aspects which the composer himself regarded as Mystical. The fact of the matter is that Scriabin as a great artist unhesitantly used the feelings associated with the real world. His commentaries and remarks on many of his compositions are full of weird and fantastic images. But they all retain a connection with the magnificence of nature…As a consequence of the expressiveness of Scriabin’s music, he shows how it pushes away from a realistic succession of picturizations. This is why, regardless of the indications of the composer, we accept his ‘mysticism’ as contemplation of nature’s greatness, as pictures of cosmic colors, the acceptance of which enriches the spiritual life of man.³

An alternative analysis that is more accepted in America than in Russia is one that focuses on the sensuous spiritual ecstasy in Scriabin’s music. In Stephen Downes’ book *The Muse as Eros: Music, Erotic Fantasy and Male Creativity in the Romantic and Modern Imagination*, the author offers a new perspective on the shift from the styles and aesthetics of

Romantic idealism to modernist anxiety in music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The juxtaposition of the feminine and masculine gesture creates a dynamic polarity in the Romantic style, in which Scriabin’s Fantasy Op. 28 and Sonata no. 4 Op. 30 exemplified such opposition. In similar regard, Robert Rimm also dedicated an entire chapter in his book *The Composer-Pianists* on Scriabin’s “erotic” gestures in his music. Rimm claims that the polarity of gender is closely related to Scriabin’s growing enthusiasm with theosophy and the teaching of Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant.⁴

Scriabin started to be fascinated in philosophy; he read authors like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Plato and Schelling. Shortly after his acquaintance with philosophy, Scriabin went through a ‘religious crisis’ which destroyed his youthful beliefs. At the same time, he became more aware of his creative power, as he wrote in one of his notebooks:

> I will go forth to warn them not to place their hopes in you, not to expect anything from life, except what they can create for themselves…You endowed me with creative power. I will go forth to carry to all humanity the message of strength and power, tell them that they should not despair, that nothing is lost.⁵

Scriabin felt a sense of obligation that he was given the creative power by God, and through his music, he will be able to reunite humankind. He wrote to Tatyana (his mistress, later second wife):

> I bow before the great sensitivity you tender toward HE Who dwells within me. You know believe in Him. HE is Great, though I am at times poor, little, weak and weary. But you forgive me all this because HE lives in me. I am Not yet HE, but soon I will become HE!⁶

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The term Theosophy means “any of various philosophies professing to achieve a knowledge of God by spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations.”

The Theosophy Society was created in 1875 and their objectives include:

1. To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color.
2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.

Philosophy and Theosophy play an important role in the inspiration of Scriabin’s music. He had ideas from different writers on philosophy; however, with the influence of Theosophy, the ideals and principles became ever so clear to Scriabin. According to Schloezer, Scriabin “experienced the Infinite as a dynamic existence, a living flame; he actively strove to reach the elevated mystical plane by willing it. His mystique was a masculine and volitional, rather than a feminine or receptive, character; it was marked by a strongly pronounced pragmatism that rendered his contemplations dynamic, their power being derived from his visions…reality was to him an act in which he was a participant…” Scriabin’s music reflects his character and background. The development of his personality and the progression of his style illustrate a significant parallel.

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8 The Theosophical Society website [see section under Objects], http://www.ts-adyar.org/content/objects, accessed July 31, 2011.
Stylistic Change in Scriabin’s Piano Music

Scriabin’s works before 1903 reflect a true Romantic style clearly rooted in the tradition of the nineteenth century. An influence of Chopin is undeniable, most obviously from the genres in which Scriabin chooses to write: Valses, Mazurkas, Nocturnes, Preludes and Impromptus. Within the first twenty published works, there are two phases: the first is demonstrated by the clarity of cantabile line over accompaniment and with an unreserved rubato exemplify Scriabin’s youthful obsession with Chopin’s work. This can be heard from Scriabin’s Op. 1.

Example 1.1: Valse, Op. 1, measures 1-6

This phase was quickly overcome by Scriabin’s individualism. In the second phase of Scriabin’s pre-1903 works, the subdominant chords became equal in importance to the dominant chords. In the third movement of the First Sonata Op. 6 in f minor, a series of B♭ function as pedal point starting in measure 73, and implies the subdominant harmony. The B♭ then alternates chromatically to C♭ and to B♭ in measure 77. The harmony shifts from an altered subdominant seventh chord in measure 79 to a secondary dominant seventh with a 7V in measure 80. The clear
dominant chord finally arrives in the last measure and attacca to the tonic F in the following movement.

Example 1.2: Op. 6, Sonata no. 1, third movement, measures 72-86

Scriabin’s unique sense of rhythmic grouping also distinguishes himself from Chopin’s influence, evident as early as Op. 11 no. 14 and 18. For example, the time signature of the prelude no. 14 is 15/8 and groups into three sets of five eighth notes. In Prelude no. 18, the two
against three sustain all the way through until the last twelve measures. This rhythmic complexity continues to grow throughout the years.\textsuperscript{10}

The transitional period, which begins with the Fourth Piano Sonata (1903) until 1910, is characterized by a tremendous excitement and energy in Scriabin’s writing. In this period, the yearning lyricism becomes agitated and pianistically athletic. For example, in the Etudes Op. 42 no. 5 in c# minor, which Scriabin marks \textit{Affannato} (panting, breathless): the rapid arpeggiation in the left hand and the repeated chords in the right hand create a thicker texture than his earlier works. From his Op. 30 to Op. 40, the dominant harmony seems to surpass the subdominant harmony. For example, in Poem Op. 32 no.1, the dominant pedal lasts through the entire ‘development’ type section, and yet there is no clear cadence that leads back to the tonic of F#; instead, the return of the opening, starting from the end of measure 24, continues the dominant harmony.

Example 1.3: Poem Op. 32 No.1, measures 21-25

\textsuperscript{10} Boris de Schloezer, \textit{Artist and Mystic} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 328.
Starting in the Fifth Sonata, Op. 53 (1907) the interval of a tritone starts to be more prominent. By this point, Scriabin has abandoned the key signature and the sonatas are now condensed into one movement. Scriabin often said, “I want the maximum expression with the minimum means.”

From Op. 50 and onwards, the dominant seventh chords and tritone surpass all other harmonies. The tonality is even more unstable; the resolution is avoided. The tritone became the crux of Scriabin’s compositions. It was criticized by composers such as Paul Hindemith that “music without the interval of the perfect fifth was static, passive and suffered from a loss of tension.” However, Bowers argues that the tritone “posited perfectly a system not dependent on the release of tension yet containing within itself all the necessary tension.”

The influence of his philosophy and ideals became the most important inspiration of his late compositions from 1910 onwards. Since Nietzsche’s death in 1900, Europe was still under the spell of Wagner and Nietzsche. However, as Bowers stated, Wagner with his “supernatural gardens of worldly temptations...and his intellectual unfolding of the profound ethic concealed in myths, still is depicting rather conjuring up the experience itself, as Scriabin claimed he himself did.” The view of art as an alternative for religion was shared by the two composers, but Scriabin went further to attempt the execution of the “religious rite” of his *Mysterium*. In Scriabin’s late style, a recurring chord in *Prometheus* known as *Prometheus chord* or *Mystic chord* (C, F#, Bb, E, A, D), became the core of his melodic and harmonic material. As Schloezer describes:

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12 Ibid., p. 149.
13 Ibid., p. 149.
14 Nietzsche led a small music and literature club named “Germania,” and became acquainted with Richard Wagner’s music through the club’s subscription to the *Zeitschrift für Musik*. He finally met Wagner in November of 1868. The Nietzsche-Wagner relationship affected Nietzsche deeply and vice versa.
[the Mystic chord]—which, in various transpositions, constitutes the foundation of the entire melodic and harmonic structure of the score. This musical system…is based on a hexatonic irregular scale differing fundamentally from the classical diatonic scale both structurally and in the manner of employment. None of its six component tones assumes the function of the tonic; there is no hierarchy or attractive force among them…The music moves as a concatenation of chords, disregarding any preconceived rules (within the limits of the mode) and ignoring what is described as tonal logic.  

In the sixth sonata, where Scriabin marks ‘joyous, triumphal’, there are constantly two tritones linked to each other:

Example 1.4: Op. 62, Sonata No.6, measures 180-185

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Scriabin’s Harmonic System and Theoretical Approaches

Scriabin was trained in and composed in conventional tonality, and through a period of several years starting as early as 1903, he succeeded in breaking away from the traditional tonal system. He was fascinated by Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, and he believed through his Divine Poem Op. 43, Poem of Ecstasy Op. 54 and an unprecedented multimedia composition, Mysterium, he would transcend and unite all humanity.

The “system” of Scriabin’s composition was never explained by the composer; Scriabin always said that “everything in his later compositions was strictly according to ‘law’…”\textsuperscript{18} Scriabin invited Taneyev (his composition teacher from his days at the Conservatory) to his house, and was going to explain everything, but the day came, Scriabin had a “headache,” and the demonstration of his “system” never happened. Even though Scriabin remained mysterious about his creative process, the characteristics of his evolving harmonic preferences can be drawn from his works. The following discussion will explore several elements of Scriabin’s harmonic system with special references to the work of James Baker and Varvara Dernova.

In Scriabin’s tonal compositions, he often used the bII and augmented sixth chord. The bII chord is placed in root position and rarely as a traditional Neapolitan sixth chord to prepare the dominant. The bII in root position to V creates an interval of a tritone, which became an important interval in Scriabin’s compositions from the transitional to the mature period. The bII also serves as a chromatic leading tone into the tonic. The intricate and complex sonorities of

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 129.
Scriabin’s harmonic system are arguably more important as by-products of linear motion, as Baker suggests they are best analyzed in terms of their voice-leading contexts and therefore uses the “prolongational procedures” which are essentially the same as those described by Heinrich Schenker. The augmented sixth chord is another important harmony in Scriabin’s music. The sonority plays a traditional role of preparing the dominant; however, he often concealed the chord by using enharmonics.

Baker also observes the compositional procedures of Scriabin’s late tonal and transitional compositions, and concludes that the repetition of musical material is often the basis to the organization of the majority of Scriabin’s compositions. The repetition can either be at the same pitch level, or at another level with a transposed literal repetition. This leads to Baker’s analysis using set theory. Baker examines the pc-set structure of Scriabin’s late tonal music as well as his later works and brings forth a more precise trace of Scriabin’s tonal evolution. Scriabin’s late tonal music often achieves unity through the recurrence of a significant pitch class set.

A statistical study in the occurrence of a particular sonority described by a pitch set is outlined in Baker’s study: between the years of 1903 and 1910, the most frequent sets amongst Scriabin’s shorter works, excluding Sonatas are: 5-33 [02468], 6-34 [013579] and 4-26 [0358]. In other words, the harmonies of a Whole-tone pentachord, the Mystic chord and the Minor-seventh chord are the most used sets in the transitional period of Scriabin’s compositional output. In Scriabin’s atonal period of 1911-1914, the most frequent sets (excluding sonatas) are: 5-32 [01469], 6-34 [013579] and 5-26 [02458]. The respective harmonies are described as the

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20 Ibid., p. 7.
Neapolitan pentachord, Mystic chord and Diminished-augmented ninth chord.\textsuperscript{21} The study also reveals a significant decrease in the occurrence of the same harmony toward his mature style. Faubion Bowers makes a similar claim that in his last opuses, “almost none of his harmonies is ever repeated”\textsuperscript{22} and he continued to disclose newer possibilities within his harmonic language. The purpose of Baker’s study is to trace Scriabin’s harmonic vocabulary, since the melodic segment is increasingly difficult to analyze with Scriabin’s atonal works; the set-theory assures the maximum organization of analytical data. Baker argues that Scriabin created new sonorities at the same time he worked within the traditional form.

The enharmonics in Scriabin’s music often lead to two different spellings of an altered dominant seventh chord: with either a b5 or a #4. It has a double resolution characteristic that became the core of Dernova’s dual tonality theory on Scriabin’s music. For example: GB Db/C# F. The chord consists of two interlocking tritones, and therefore, the same chord can resolve to two different tonics.\textsuperscript{23} In addition to the tritone connection speculation, Dernova includes discussion of many different altered-dominant chords using traditional harmonic analysis, and she interprets the “tritonal progression of the Dominant-Neapolitan-Dominant as a functional, harmonic progression”.\textsuperscript{24}

Scriabin created a fascinating philosophy around his music. Mysterious, fantastic and at the same time expressively sensuous characteristics of his works were unimportant to Dernova,

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 106-109, 148-151.
who believed they served nothing but to obscure the important substance of music. Therefore, she has provided an analytical system that deals strictly with the music itself, and for the most part, excludes the poetic imagery, or any philosophic implications of Scriabin’s compositions.  

Dernova’s analytical system proves that under the seemingly static harmonic realm of Scriabin’s music, an extreme logical organizational process was at work. She declares, “Scriabin’s harmonic system is a unique phenomenon in the history of Russian music at the beginning of the twentieth century. All his creative work in the last years of his life was determined by one, very strict, thought-out, and unusually logical system...”  

The following figure is given by Dernova to show the properties of altered dominant chords:

Figure 1.1: Altered dominant chords (Dernova)

The enharmonic equivalence can be used to modulate to a distant tonality; it can “likewise lead to the union of two tonalities a tritone apart.”  

The polarities of two tonalities became characteristic of Scriabin’s late style. It is also true to conclude that the composer’s unique harmonic process manages to avoid expected resolution of traditional sonorities. The unique timbre of Scriabin’s harmony also lies on the distribution of the chord, according to Dernova, as described by Guenther and Bowers, a minor ninth chord with a perfect and diminished fifth is often built from three augmented fourths, with a perfect fifth between the

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27 Ibid., p. 87.
lower and middle tritones, and a minor third or major sixth between the middle and upper tritones. Here is an example given by Bowers:

**Figure 1.2: Distribution of a minor ninth chord**

Both Baker and Dernova hope to separate the analysis of Scriabin’s harmony from his intentions and implications from his philosophy. Dernova creates an analytical system that is strictly substance based, and shuns the ideological aspect and the poetic imagery. Baker, similarly concludes:

As we become more separated from the era in which [Scriabin] flourished, it is increasingly difficult to comprehend his grandiose self-image as high priest of an art which would bring about the end of the world, uniting all mankind…Although his visions were the primary motivation for his experimentation and innovation, what remains today is his music…it is through the study of his musical structures that we can best know him today.

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28 Ibid., p. 41.
29 Ibid., p. 137.
Scriabin the Symbolist: Philosophical Implications

As explored in the preceding sections, many writers attempt to understand Scriabin’s music only through a certain consistency in his harmonic system. However, several musicologists consider his music in terms of poetic imageries, and the linkage between sensuality and inspiration. Susana Garcia, for example, has stated, “the separation between technical means and poetic intention results in an incomplete understanding of the music.”

Indeed, the complete appreciation of the music should be reflected through the study of the content, the context, and the inspiration. It is like teaching piano technique alone without teaching the music, or vice versa. It simply cannot be done. Scriabin’s visions were certainly unique in the present century but not uncommon in early twentieth-century Europe. His beliefs were not the only motivation of his music. Another inspiration of his music was an artistic movement known as symbolism, which was a phenomenon during Russia’s Silver Age (1898-1917).

The mainstream symbolist movement was set forth by Vladimir Solovyov, a Russian philosopher, who had exhorted Russia to be a nation of “god-seeking, god-building, god-bearing and god-haunted ‘all-humans’ belonging in an ‘all-unity.’” He provided the high circle, at the time an artistic purpose, he wrote that the artist is the “instrument of God’s revelation of his unified existence…[an artist links the] visible world or sensual phenomena and the world of

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32 Ibid., p. 274.
This idea was taken a step forward by Vyacheslav Ivanov, a Russian philosopher and poet. He proposed that the only way one can surpass the physical existence and ascend to a higher consciousness is through rituals of “drunken intoxication, ecstatic dancing and sexual activity.” This eventually was condemned as “decadent” by critics.

The controversies over Scriabin’s particular musical colors were documented by two different biographers, Schloezer and Sabaneeff. Schloezer, being a brother-in-law to Scriabin, had an intention of protecting the reputations of his sister Tatyana, and their children. Sabaneeff on the other hand, describes Scriabin’s musical image as “diseased” and rather than describing a sublimely ecstasy familiar to mystical saints, he referred to it as being “sexual.” In one account, Sabaneeff even called Scriabin as being “clinically insane.” Bowers described the inclination in the West to accept Sabaneeff over Schloezer, perhaps the idea of the fine line between genius and insanity is somewhat Romantic in a modernist’s point of view. In Russia, neither was championed: Schloezer because he emphasizes Scriabin’s irrationality and his “idealistic philosophy”; and Sabaneeff focuses too much on the negative aspects of the composer’s personality such as insanity and excessive sexuality. Schloezer explains Scriabin’s use of ecstasy as an artistic representation:

Scriabin’s doctrine of ecstasy combines elements of both Christian and mystic teachings, forming a rather curious synthesis whereby the state of blessedness is included in dissolution and personal will is identified with the divine command. Ecstasy, which is the crucial point of Scriabin’s

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eschatology, inspired almost all his major works—The Divine Poem, The Poem of Ecstasy, Prometheus, and the Acte praelable—expressive of that final moment of blessed liberation inherent in the Dionysian cults.\textsuperscript{37}

Scriabin’s music created a mixed reaction in the musical scene in Europe and Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the critics deemed his music ‘distasteful’ while others gave him the highest praise. British composer Alexander Brent-Smith described Scriabin’s later works as "monotonous and senseless noise."\textsuperscript{38} The author especially criticized the sexual nature of Scriabin’s music:

Throughout his work we notice the emphasis he lays upon the sensual nature of his art—a never-far-distant, quickly stirred eroticism. Indeed the expression marks in his tenth Sonata, when read consecutively, give an unpleasant suggestion of grossness.\textsuperscript{39}

Others cherished the limitless sound possibilities in Scriabin’s music. Russian pianist-composer Samuel Feinberg (1890-1962) wrote:

He refined methods of composition to such a degree of perfection and exquisiteness that his creative work touches extreme boundaries, beyond which here is a mystery of sound that has not yet been discovered.\textsuperscript{40}

British musicologist Sir Henry W. Hadow wrote in 1910:

[Scriabin’s music] is no laggard or timid art….As his work proceeds it grows more sonorous, more impetuous, more passionate… It is music as free in thought and as vigorous as life, which has won strength, the rough

\textsuperscript{37} Boris de Schloezer, \textit{Scriabin: Artist and Mystic} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 223. In Greek mythology, Dionysus is the god of wine and fertility and drama. The Dionysian Mysteries were a ritual of ancient Greece and Rome which used intoxicants and other trance-inducing techniques (like dance and music) to remove inhibitions and social constraints, liberating the individual to return to a natural state. In the final phase of the Mysteries shifted their emphasis to a transcendent, mystical one.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 594.

discipline and liberty, through reverence for law…
Amid the younger composers of Europe there is none
whose present achievement holds out greater promise for
the future.41

Critics may have judged Scriabin based on his openness of the sensuality and ideal
philosophy within his music, but “eroticism is only a part of love, and thus not all love music is
erotic.”42 In Downes’ book, he identifies the forms of expressions and interprets it in relation to
the cultural constructions of eroticism and creativity.

In Scriabin’s tonal and transitional works, the ever-changing characters within a piece
showed both ‘control and abandon’, ‘obligation and freedom’, and most of all, the reference
from Lisztian ‘keyboard heroism’ to the Chopinesque ‘feminine’ lyricism.43 During this period
of his life, Scriabin’s music became preoccupied with the mystical and the erotic elements. This
principle of masculine and feminine is what Scriabin described as ‘active’ and ‘passive’, or
‘divine’ and ‘human’. The two forces became the subjects in an intimate musical drama.
Schloezer described this in a similar fashion: “if we draw our categories according to the
relationship between the mystic and the Unique, it is possible to posit two types of mystical
experience, passive and active, feminine and masculine.”44

Scriabin developed a series of musical symbols to depict certain types of images and
erotic encounters. The type of symbolic musical language has a long tradition in opera where it
often involved two characters in experiencing love, struggle, conflict, anguish, lament and

resolution. A prime example of this plot can be found in Sonata no. 4. Two important elements in this sonata are the chromaticism and the recurring interval of fourths and fifths.

Example 1.5: Op. 30, Sonata no. 4, opening of first movement

![Example 1.5: Op. 30, Sonata no. 4, opening of first movement](image)

The opening chromatic descent in the left hand is described by Susan McClary as a common trope for female seduction in nineteenth-century opera. It is also mentioned by Downes that the “erotic charm is engendered by the chromatic inner line.” The rate of the chromatic descents displays the feminine control, representing the seductiveness similar to Bizet’s Carmen theme. This feminine symbol is juxtaposed by the rising fourths and fifths that are masculine in nature; it associates with horn calls for military and a degree of triumphant. Both motives play an essential role in works of Scriabin’s middle period.

In the opening of the Fantasy, Op. 28 the chromaticism is hidden but outlined as a result of an emphasis on the longer note value in the left-hand octaves as well as the chord in each downbeat of measures 2-4 (see example 1.6). The resulting intervals were at first in the right

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hand in measure 3, a rising fourth, and then it corresponds in the left hand in measure 4, a falling fourth.

Example 1.6: Fantasy Op. 28, measures 1-4

![Example 1.6: Fantasy Op. 28, measures 1-4]

In Sonata no. 3 (see example 1.7), the rising fourths in the opening in octaves are a premonition to his next sonata. This motive can be found throughout the piece.

Example 1.7: Op. 23, Sonata no. 3, first movement, measures 1-4

![Example 1.7: Op. 23, Sonata no. 3, first movement, measures 1-4]

The ‘masculinity’ of the rising fourths reaches its highpoint in The Poem of Ecstasy. It is commonly known as the trumpet’s “I am” theme, here is an excerpt of the Poem:

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I am come
To dazzle you
With the marvel
Of enchantment repeated;
I bring you
The magical shiver
Of scorching love…
I am the affirmation.
I am Ecstasy.
The universe
Is embraced in flames…
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The gender opposition can also be observed in terms of the melodic shaping. In the late tonal work of Scriabin, his second theme often evokes “erotic techniques [that] are entirely characteristic of mid- and late nineteenth century music.”48 Downes compares the second subject of Scriabin Fantasy Op. 28 with the second Un poco meno mosso theme in Liszt Mephisto Waltz: both melodic lines are models of seductive, erotic dissonance. The melodies both emphasize diatonic or chromatic motions with the melody dips down into a gradually more dissonant context. The G-Bb-C#-F# chord over the tonic pedal in measure 33 of the Fantasy marks the sensuous high point in the “theme’s gently erotic tone”. This is perhaps related to Liszt’s theme shown below here: the melody falls to the A natural then to A flat with an octave displacement, the element forms a “sensual” and “yearning” musical image.49

Example 1.8: Fantasy Op. 28, measures 30-37

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49 Ibid., p. 17.
Example 1.9: Liszt Mehpisto Waltz, measures 341-348

The Fantasy Op. 28 evokes the relationship similar in a sonata design where the contrast between the first and second theme characterizes the opposite genders.

Motivic Analysis and Scriabin’s Symbolism

Scriabin, in the middle period of his creative life, composed in a style that is in transition from the characteristic of the mid-late nineteenth century to new pianism and harmonic substance. The instability of tonality begins to be more prominent, harmonies are suspended for many measures before they resolve; this represents Scriabin’s stylistic progress where cadences are constantly being denied, and the uncertainty prolonged. This creates a sense of anxiety, anticipation and implies an insistence of a romantic journey rather than a destination.

Recent studies have shown an increasing curiosity with Scriabin’s musical language, and particularly relation to its explicit imageries. Contrary to the statement by Pavchinsky mentioned earlier in this chapter, the titles Scriabin gave to his compositions shed light on the meanings behind some of his works: the second movement of Divine Poem (1903-1904) was entitled Sensual Pleasure, Poem of Ecstasy (1905-1907), Desire and Danced Caress (1908). As he tuned in more toward his belief in theosophy, his objective was to experience God through spiritual
ecstasy created by his music and the purpose of music is “revelation.” As Faubion Bowers describes it: “In thought-form, ecstasy is the highest synthesis. In the guise of feeling, ecstasy is the highest bliss. In the guise of space, ecstasy is the highest development and destruction. Generally, ecstasy is the summit, the last moment which comprehends the whole history of humanity as a series of appearances.” At the turn of the twentieth century, Scriabin was transforming from a late nineteenth century Romantic composer into an avant-garde artist.

Already as a young man, Scriabin has shown signs of his philosophy that became so prominent later in his life and music: In a form of a song, he wrote to Natalya (a girl that Scriabin was in love with during his conservatory years as a student), “…by the power of the mind [Scriabin] can enter her soul, and that this idea of ‘creativity’ will reveal to her a ‘universe of delight.’” Scriabin later discovered Helena Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy* in 1905, and incorporated theosophical vocabularies into his philosophy such as “plane,” “astral body,” and “cycle.” He was already associating color with sound, but now he added Theosophy’s association of color for sounds and emotions. For example, “red for anger, yellow for intellect, grey-green for deceit, and black for hatred.” Not only with color, he also developed a series of mystic-symbolic intervals: the descending leap of a minor ninth represents the “descent of spirit into matter,” or the alternating whole tone up and down signifies the breathing in and out of Brahma (the Creator of the Word believed by the Brahman). In Scriabin’s last few years, he identified with the Indian religious philosophers, the grammarians; where they built their entire system of thought founded on sound. Vast amounts of works have been written about grammar

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51 Ibid., p. 118.
52 Ibid., p. 34.
53 Ibid., p. 122.
54 Ibid., p. 111.
and its relation to theology by Indian grammarians. The tradition of studying language, sound and communication in India dated back before the time of Jesus Christ. They believed in the divinity of language and sound, similar to the ancient Greeks with their beliefs in the power of music. Scriabin had said, “Holy men today are ignorant magicians, having forgotten their magic.” He believed that men had certain powers that were neglected through time, and through the influence of his art, he can reawaken their “magic”.

It is clear that Scriabin was in the midst of forward-thinking philosophers, poets, and mystics. At the time of religious-philosophies outburst of Europe and Russia, these ideas became a springboard for Scriabin’s late works. Garcia’s theory of mystic symbols in Scriabin’s late sonatas are based on his notebooks, letters and biographers; there are six categories representing Scriabin’s philosophical ideas through his music:

1. Notion of Mystical unity
2. The divine summons
3. The eternal feminine
4. Motive of light
5. Motive of flight
6. Vertiginous dances

As Garcia describes it, the opening ‘mystic’ chord (C-F#-Bb-E-A-Db or D) of the late sonatas sets the character or atmosphere of the piece. Every note, melody, and harmony comes out of the initial chord like an after-thought. It represents the notion of Mystical unity which is described much by Scriabin himself, as well as Solovyov. The ‘fanfare motive’ is symbolic for the divine

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55 Ibid., p. 106.
summons. This motive is described as “calls” or “invocations.” It typically consists of “one to three notes anacrusic to a sustained tone.” See below for examples:

Example 1.10: Op. 62, Sonata no. 6, measures 1-6

![Example 1.10: Op. 62, Sonata no. 6, measures 1-6](image)

The motive is a particular character and gesture rather than a particular interval. However, in Scriabin’s transitional works most of the motifs are based on intervals of fourth or fifth (even in as late as the Seventh Sonata, the opening fanfare motive in the right hand outlines a diminished fourth and, in the next measure, a fifth).

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The eternal feminine represents Scriabin’s idealization of eroticism. V. Bobrovsky, a musicologist, describes “the highest delicacy” or “intangible but lofty.” It can be found at places where Scriabin marks “languor,” “volupte douloureuse,” or “joyeuse exaltation.” His last sonatas have a lot more indications than his earlier sonatas. They are influenced by his philosophical ideas. Musically, it is often improvisatory, lyrical “upward reaching” melody mixed with chromaticism.

In Theosophy, light is said to represent the spirit matter, the waves and particles that compose the universe. Scriabin uses trills and tremolos to symbolize the flashes of lights. Trills to Scriabin were “palpitation…trembling…the vibration in the atmosphere, and a source of light.” The trills became a recurring theme in the late sonatas. Another motive that is well documented is the motive of flight. Scriabin was always fascinated by flying. It is well known that Scriabin had done flying experiments and used to tell his friends that if he was able to run really fast, and at the right angle, he would be able to take off and fly. This flying motive is associated with a “rapid, five note arpeggios,” or a “quick upward leap.” See below for example:

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Lastly, the vertiginous dances motive describes a ritual of spinning dance, often involving the person being intoxicated, and finally collapsing in exhaustion, as a result, becoming more susceptible to divine influence. The passages that symbolize the ritual often depict with detailed indications such as *imperioso*, *en un vertige*, *fulgurant*, *avec une joie debordante*, and *en delire*, such as in Sonata no. 7. See example below:

Both Baker and Dernova provide harmonic analysis of Scriabin’s music. They are the front runners that develop an analytical system to organize Scriabin’s music harmonically. In our present culture it is difficult to consider an idea of the self-proclaimed musical messiah as acceptable; without the study of the context of Scriabin’s beliefs, his music would lack meaning.

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61 Ibid., p. 285.
Using the intervallic analysis that identified the polarity described as 'masculine' and 'feminine'; or the analysis that revealed the erotic theme that is similar to a Romantic composer such as Liszt; or the more systematic motivic analysis based on the symbolic rituals – these are all explorations that include Scriabin’s absorption with the Theosophy, as well as the philosophical and psychological states he was in. Therefore, they represent a more comprehensive study of his music.
Chapter 2

Interpretations of Scriabin’s Piano Music

The study of the interpretation of Scriabin’s piano music requires research into his life as a performer and as a composer. He was an active performer who generated heated discussions by the musical critics of his time. His playing was unique and especially praised for his tone color production and the unpredictability of his timing. He recorded his own piano music in 1908 and 1910 on piano rolls. These recordings can be used to study his interpretation of his music. The advantages and shortcomings of the piano roll recordings will also be considered. Since Scriabin’s death in 1915, the perception of freedom in music has changed greatly. The modern interpretations of Scriabin’s music gradually became more reserved. In this chapter, Poem Op. 32 no.1 and Prelude Op. 11 no.1 will be examined. The comparison of the transcription from the piano roll of the Poem with the published score will reveal the specific alterations of Scriabin’s interpretation. These tendencies may provide a guideline for other works that have not been recorded by the composer. Tempo analysis will be undertaken to compare Scriabin’s recording of his Prelude Op. 11 no.1 with those of Horowitz, Zhukov and Pletnev. Lastly, the interpretive authority of the composer and pianist and the issues of authenticity and the emphasis of current performance practice will be discussed.
Scriabin entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1887; his entrance to the Conservatory had been arranged by Sergei Taneyev and Vassili Safonov. Taneyev, who taught Scriabin composition beginning in 1884, was a strict contrapuntalist, and he had great influence over a number of composer-pianists such as Rachmaninoff and Medtner. While the polyphonic nature in both Rachmaninoff and Medtner’s music remains throughout their composing lives, the influence of Taneyev seems to dissolve as Scriabin develops a rather unique individual style.¹

Safonov had been a pupil of Leschetizsky (as was Scriabin’s mother), and Safonov especially praised Scriabin’s “touch” and “pedaling”. Safonov recalled that by the time Scriabin came to him there was nothing to teach, that is “how to make the piano sound not like a piano.”²

Scriabin subsequently studied with the famous pedagogue, Nicolai Zveryev (who was also the teacher of Sergei Rachmaninoff). In Scriabin’s early years, he was thought of mainly as a pianist, whereas Rachmaninoff thought of himself solely as a composer. This situation eventually reversed itself as Scriabin’s approach to composition outshone his ability as a concert pianist, and Rachmaninoff’s extraordinary concert career took off through a tour in Russia with all-Scriabin programs. The impression of Scriabin as a performer rather than a composer persisted in Russian circles.³ Igor Stravinsky described Scriabin’s fame “more to his phenomenal

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³ Ibid., p. 27.
abilities as a pianist than to whatever new qualities there were in his music.”

Regardless of Scriabin’s reputation as a concert pianist or as a composer, he was only absent from giving recitals from 1902 to 1905.

Scriabin made his first extensive tour as a pianist three years after graduating from the Moscow Conservatory. He played in Germany, Belgium and France. Upon returning to Russia, he gave numerous recitals of his own works. In 1906, he was invited to New York to perform his Piano Concerto. He also played recitals in several cities including Chicago and Boston. In 1909 he performed frequently in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 1911, he played concerts in Leipzig and Berlin. Early in 1914, Scriabin gave recitals in London, UK. His last three recitals took place in St. Petersburg in 1915.

Scriabin’s pianism frequently received the highest praise. His pianistic recognition was based mainly on the unique spectrum of his tone colors and was often described as “delicate, mysterious, yet electrifyingly intense.” Seroff explained that Scriabin had a magical touch on the keys and used pedal with the utmost care, which was especially captivating when he played softly. He hated pianists who played “as though they were washing laundry or smelling the instrument.” Scriabin’s main criticism against most pianists was that “their styles were too much like Prokofiev’s: steely and hard, more concerned with realism than fantasy.”

A more descriptive recollection of Scriabin’s playing came from Leonard Pasternak, a prominent Russian painter, upon hearing Scriabin firsthand in his drawing room:

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4 Ibid., p. 27.
As soon as I heard the first sounds on the piano, even if I was sitting with my eyes shut not looking at Scriabin’s hands and fingers, I immediately had the impression that his fingers were producing the sound without touching the keys, that he was (as it were) snatching them away from the keyboard and letting them flutter lightly over it. This created an extraordinary illusion that his fingers in some strange way were drawing the sound out of the instrument.\(^8\)

Student of Scriabin, Maria Nemenova-Lunz talks about Scriabin’s teaching:

One often hears from the school of “shattering pianism” how Scriabin lacked strength. It is true that he did not have a “frightening fortissimo.” He did not much like “materialistic” sonority. He always said that the deepest forte must always sound soft. “This chord must sound like a cry of happy victory, not like a toppling chest of drawers”… He worried more about sound than anything else.\(^9\)

In 1940, the director of the Scriabin Museum, Tatyana Shaborkina, wrote an article “Scriabin the Performer,” in which she charted all the reviews ever written of Scriabin’s concerts. She compiles a list of words used most frequent to describe Scriabin’s playing: “arhythmic,” “nervous,” “magical,” “wizard-like colors,” “pedalization,” “tonal lights,” “pauses,” and “silences full of thought.”\(^10\) Scriabin as a performer was mesmerizing but not entirely perfect. In 1895, publisher Belaieff wrote about Scriabin of his debut concert in St. Petersburg:

\(^8\) Cited in Rimm, *Composer-Pianists*, p. 110.


As a performer he is regarded less trustfully than as a composer. It seems to me that this is not without foundation. Is this the result of his nervousness? Is it because he never plays with partners but always solo? Sometimes he confuses the auditor by the way he ruffles through a piece. You can’t follow either the melody or the meter, and there seems, sometimes, to be a kind of studied affection about the way he plays. This is not his true nature. My desire is for him to play his music so superbly that his performances will create a tradition for posterity.¹¹

In 1915, a review of Scriabin’s last concert by Grigori Prokofiev, a critic for the Russian Musical Gazette, wrote:

…great success and the impression that lingers is one of ravishment. What makes Scriabin’s music “ravishing” is simply the enchantment of his performance. The tone is marvellous, despite a continuous sharpness, even clanging mezzo piano, but he achieves extraordinary effects. Don’t forget he is a wizard with the pedal, though his ethereal sounds cannot quite fill the hall. He captivates his audience, too, by giving the impression of improvising. He breaks the rhythmic flow and something new comes out each time. This suffuses the performance with freshness. Never has he played his Fourth Sonata with more mastery or sincerity as he did yesterday. What power he put in the theme in the second movement! Yet the actual sound was not big. The secret is in the energetic rhythm.¹²

Despite the somewhat surprising mention of “sharpness” in Scriabin’s mezzo piano, this review from the very end of Scriabin’s performing career reiterates the centrality of subtleties in tone, pedalling and rhythm to his playing.

Scriabin refers to his harmonies as “sensation”¹³ and his performances as the “art of experience.”¹⁴ Scriabin’s aesthetics manifest themselves in his performance interpretations. His

¹² Cited in Ibid., p. 197.
playing has been described as “elegant, light-fingered pianist, most at home in the shallower side of the repertoire, …gifted with a fluent technique.” The spontaneity in Scriabin’s playing creates an almost improvisatory effect in his performances, and he reportedly said, “A composition is many faceted…alive and breathes on its own. It is one thing today, and another tomorrow, like the sea. How awful it would be if the sea were the same every day and the same forever, like a movie film!” This modification in performances is documented by Yavorsky, who attended every single performance by Scriabin; “Scriabin always plays more or less as he has written his pieces. On occasion he plays them entirely different…and opposite from the way they are marked…more important is that when he changes them, it is always for the best.” This somewhat inconsistent assessment suggests that Scriabin’s freedom moved within a range accepted as appropriate, except for the very occasional performance.

While the musical public attributes his interpretation as a pianist to his mysticism, some were not convinced. In 1916 N. N. Cherkass, a renowned piano teacher who was the first to write about scientific pianism, published an article “Scriabin as Pianist and Piano Composer”, where he wrote: *Scriabin was a bad pianist*. He explained how Scriabin’s awkward walk to the piano was clearly a sign that he was “a sick man, with an inner sickness that disturbed his entire nervous system”, that the “defects of technique” affected the nuances of his playing, and that Scriabin’s excessive *rubato* was compensating for these muscular and technical defects. In order to understand Scriabin’s pianism comparatively, first, one needs to study the piano roll

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17 Ibid., p. 198.
18 Ibid., pp. 199-204.
recordings of the composer playing his own music and become familiar with the mechanism of
the piano rolls.

Understanding Piano Rolls

In 1904, the German firm of Welte & Sohne developed the first Welte-Mignon
reproducing player piano. It was a full reproducing machine, which plays on an ordinary piano
with recorded dynamic nuances and pedaling in addition to pitches, rhythm and tempi.\(^1\) The
Welte-Mignon is said to have the ability to “capture the personal interpretations of the great
keyboard wizards of the day.”\(^2\) The rival of the Welte-Mignon was the Hupfeld. The difference
between the two mechanisms is that on the Hupfeld, the “performer” during the replay process is
required to change the volume and move the dampers to and from the strings according to the
marks on the roll and to their inclinations, while the Welte-Mignon provides a ‘super-score’ of
the exact timing of pitch, rhythms, tempi and to some extent dynamics and pedal indications.\(^3\)
In other words, the Welte-Mignon has a much better accuracy as a recording device, and that by
studying the recording, we can learn a lot about Scriabin’s \textit{rubato} tendencies in a particular
performance. Scriabin made recordings with Welte-Mignon dating from 1910; he also made a
few recordings with Hupfeld in Leipzig a couple of years before that. For the purpose of this
study, I will be using recordings transferred from the Welte-Mignon piano rolls.

According to Roehl, each different company used a slightly different mechanism, but the basic idea remained the same for all reproducing piano: each note on the reproducing piano is connected by an electric wire and attached to a row of pencils which were pressed on a strip of paper rolling on a drum. Every time a note is struck, the corresponding pencil draws on the paper. As long as the note is pressed, the pencil produces a line on the paper. Therefore, even if the pianist plays a chord with the slightest arpeggio effect, it is recorded on the paper. The same observation can be made for the use of finger legato: studies on how long each note is held and overlaps. The Welte-Mignon also records the pedal as well as the force of each note. Edwin Welte, the founder of Welte-Mignon, described that beneath the keyboard, a trough of mercury is attached. Each key had a light carbon prong that dips into the mercury when each note is played, and the depth of penetration of the carbon rod in the mercury varied with the force with which the key was depressed. However, as accurate as it can be, there are limitations of the reproducing piano. Even in the most sophisticated mechanism, the reproducing pianos replicate the ‘action of the pianist’ rather than the sound the pianist made. Another factor into the reliability of the piano roll is that the piano roll cannot record and reproduce precisely the volume of each note in a complicated texture, as a result, the rolls often sound “rhythmically clumsy.” Therefore, the examples used in the investigation of the piano rolls will be limited to shorter, texturally simpler pieces such as Poem Op. 32 no. 1 and Prelude Op. 11 no. 1. As mentioned earlier, the actions of a pianist are recorded; therefore, the piano rolls make it easier to compare recordings because rather than relying only on the ears, the roll visually provides more concrete material to study the difference (see Figure 2.1). In the following example, the piano

23 Ord-Hume, Player Piano, 97.
roll of Chopin’s Nocturne in F# minor is provided. This comparison shows that no two pianists render the same composition exactly alike. Saint-Saens plays the Nocturne the quickest, and Pugno takes the most time.

Figure 2.1: Piano roll of Chopin’s Nocturne in F# minor played by Pugno, Busoni, Scharwenka and Saint-Saens

The same can be said about Scriabin’s piano rolls. It gives us tremendous insights into how his music was interpreted. Leikin uses the piano rolls as his original source and compares it with the printed score of Poem Op. 32 no. 1 in his article: “The Performance of Scriabin’s Piano Music: Evidence from the Piano Rolls.” The score was transcribed from a piano roll and subsequently published in Russia by Lobanov. Below is an excerpt of Scriabin’s Poem Op. 32 no. 1. The top graph is the tempo graph, which determines the speed of each interval. The score on top is the transcription taken from Scriabin’s own performance on the piano roll (Welte-Mignon 1910) and the bottom score is the printed score by Scriabin’s publisher.

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Figure 2.2: Comparison between Scriabin’s own performance transcription of Op. 32 no.1, measures 1-2 and the published score.

In the printed score, Scriabin notated the D♭ in the left hand and the B♯ in the right hand in the incomplete measure. In the performance, Scriabin played the bass note first before the right hand, and again in the beginning of measure 2, the bass note A♯ was played before the grace notes in the right hand. This *rubato* practice was common in the nineteenth century, as we will discuss further in Chapter 3. Two other important observations are Scriabin’s interpretation of rhythm and the frequent use of *una corda*. In measure 2, the eighth notes in the left hand and the right hand quarter note with an eighth note are aligned. In Scriabin’s performance, he interpreted the rhythm in hemiolas: dotted eighth notes against three eighth notes. The *una corda* was consistently used, except at the end of measure 1, where he creates a slight *crescendo* that leads into the next measure. Even then, he quickly puts down the *una corda* again. In the next four measures, the *una corda* persists until the end of measure 6.
Figure 2.3: Comparison between Scriabin’s own performance transcription of Op. 32 no.1, measures 3-6 and the published score.

In measure 3, the chromatic descending line of D♯, D♭ to C♯ in the left hand was interpreted very differently in Scriabin’s performance: instead of the principal note on the beat, Scriabin emphasizes the second eighth note of each beat going into the principal note on the beat, therefore creating two-note slurs of B - D♯ and B - C#. The stress on B might be explained as leading to the A♯ grace note in the right hand in the next measure. Even though the A♯ is not the principal note, it still creates a cadential effect, resolving the preceding seventh of the dominant harmony. Another fascinating observation is the interpretation of the staccato notes. In measures 4 and 5, Scriabin wrote ascending staccato notes which he did not do in his own performance. In measure 4 he accelerates to the top while in measure 5 he took a *ritardando*. 
This rubato tendency is prominent in Scriabin’s music, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Contrary to Scriabin’s own interpretation, in Horowitz’s 1965 recording of the Poem, he performs the staccato notes literally, and without any alteration in the speed of the rising notes.

The question arises how to balance the freedom of interpretation with what a composer wrote on the score. In one incident, a young aspiring pianist, Julius Isserlis, played the Op. 11 preludes for Scriabin. Mid-way through Scriabin stopped him and said, “You’re playing it at half tempo,” but the young pianist maintained, “This is my interpretation,” and finally the composer replied, “but it’s my music.”27 In this case, if Scriabin wanted the staccato notes to be played legato, why did he write staccato notes in the first place? The answer perhaps lies in the pedaling. A series of notes played by finger legato or played detached with a pedal creates a different sound. Perhaps Scriabin wanted a particular sound that is created with the quick release of the notes while connected by a blanket of pedal.

When in concert, Scriabin’s playing was always full of intensity with rhythmic energy, but not big in volume. Similar to Chopin, he preferred a more intimate, salon setting for his music. The difference between the printed score and the transcribed one reveals a sense of freedom in the written notes; he often re-arranges, omits or replaces the notes completely. In fact, he seldom plays exactly as written when he performs, as we can see in the following figure.

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Figure 2.4: Comparison between Scriabin’s own performance transcription of Op. 32 no.1, measures 37-38, 47-48 and the published score.

The transcription of the piano roll is a very useful tool to identify Scriabin’s interpretation. The tempo graph also helps in studying his tempo-rubato. In the Poem Op. 32 no. 1, the given metronome marking is 50 to a dotted quarter: While he gives no indication of *rit.* or *accel.* at times he accelerated to 90 to a dotted quarter, other times, he slowed down to 20. The unpredictable tempo rubato he took gives his playing a uniquely improvisatory quality. In the last two measures, one can also observe the tendency of maintaining the sound using pedal rather than lingering on the keys with the fingers. The chords are often arpeggiated as well. In the following section, detailed analysis adapting Leikin’s method will be applied using excerpts from Prelude Op. 11 no. 1 (recorded on Welte-Mignon and Sohne in 1910, digitally remastered by Pierian Recording Society in 2004.)

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28 This recording analysis was done prior to the release of Anatole Leikin’s book, *The Performing Style of Alexander Scriabin* in May 2011.
Using the software *Transcribe!*\(^{29}\), music can be slowed down without altering the pitch. Each beat or measure can be mapped out on the visual sonic graph, and tempo can be calculated. This software started out as a tool for amateur musicians to write out tunes from popular music, or as play-along practice, and it is also used for speech transcription. In the process of determining the tempo for each measure, the music was slowed at a 45% rate. Each measure line was manually inserted, and the speed was calculated. In the following figure, the tempo graph of Scriabin Prelude Op. 11 no. 1 is given corresponding to each measure.

**Figure 2.5: Op. 11. no. 1, Tempo graph corresponding to each measure**

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<td>52.0</td>
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\(^{29}\)http://www.seventhstring.com
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<td>48.2</td>
<td>53.0</td>
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<td>53.1</td>
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![Musical notation](image1)

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![Musical notation](image2)
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Scriabin was sometimes criticized as a pianist with “arhythmical” playing. Perhaps this is related to the unconventional freedom in his perception of time. The indication for the C major prelude is Vivace with quarter note equals 63-76. Scriabin’s use of rubato in this recording is considerably extreme; his tempi range from 42.6 to 127.5. The average tempi collected however (adding all the tempi data collected and divided by the number of measures) is 68.136 beats per minute, which is the midpoint of his tempo indication. An important conclusion drawn from this study is that perhaps Scriabin’s flexibility in tempo has an organic sense of give and take that moves in a natural yet spontaneous way.

From the comparison of the tempo graph with the written music we can also draw conclusions on Scriabin’s interpretation of phrasing. From measure 1 to 2, Scriabin’s tempo goes from 60.3 to 42.6. This change corresponds to his phrase marking that ends at the end of the second beat. The same phrase structure continues with measure 3 and 4 with the tempo 56.8 to 52. The second phrase suggests Scriabin’s intention of continuation in creating a seemingly longer phrase. The sense of growing carries on through measure 5 with a tempo of 76.8 and into the first three eighth notes in measure 6, then the tempo dropped to 48.2. It is interesting to note that even though Scriabin marked Rubato and tenuto on the high C, B, and A in measure 7, he stretches and slows down more at the end of measure 6 than measure 7. Scriabin created an asymmetrical phrase of 2 + 3+ 3, which is different than what is written on the score (2 + 2 + 1 + 1 + 2).

The build up to the first climax from measure 13 to 18 also reveals Scriabin’s association of crescendo with accelerando. He appears to express the two indications interchangeably. The faster tempo is then counterbalanced by the time he took to prepare the climactic octaves in both
hand: at the end of measure 18 where the tempo dropped drastically from 99.7 to 58.1. Scriabin seems to anticipate the *accelerando* as well: even though he marked *accel.* at the end of measure 22, he starts to speed up in measure 12 to the climax at the end of measure 18. From measure 18, he picks up the tempo again from 64 to 83.7 until measure 22. From the end of measure 22 to measure 23, he speeds up to 127.5 in one single measure for the final *accel.*

The same tempo study was done on the same piece but with different recording artists: Vladimir Horowitz (1903-1989), Igor Zhukov (1936- ) and Mikhail Pletnev (1957- ). All three artists took a much slower tempo. The average tempo for each performance is 61, 58.4 and 51.4 respectively. It seems that the further away the generation of artists from Scriabin’s they tend to interpret his music at a much slower and steadier tempo.

Both Horowitz and Zhukov share the similar phrase structure to Scriabin’s. In Pletnev’s recording, the tempo in measures 1 and 3 is identical to each other. The consequent measures of the mini-phrase (measures 2 and 4) also reflect a similar speed. This seems to take away the spontaneity and improvisatory nature of Scriabin’s music. In the aspect of rhythmic freedom, Horowitz’s interpretation is perhaps closest to Scriabin’s while Pletnev’s recording shows the steadiest tempo throughout the prelude. Current performance practice emphasizes moderation in all musical parameters, and *rubato* is done with reservation rather than with a sense of tremendous freedom, or “flight”, as Scriabin often expressed to his pupils.

Studying Scriabin’s playing from the piano roll recordings is by no means suggesting there is only one possible interpretation. Its purpose is to further enhance our understanding of the tendencies of his phrasing, freedom of timing and perhaps the connection between the written music and his musical intentions. Regardless that composers are not always the greatest
performers, the gap between composers and performers widened as virtuosos became a separate category. The recording of a composer playing his own piece represents what was done in one particular occasion, and their views may or may not be fixed in all situations. However, it gives us valuable evidence beyond the notation on the score. Performance interpretation issues therefore arise as how to interpret notation and how to assume what was meant by the composer.
Issues of Interpretive Authority: Composer vs. Pianist

The debate between the two aesthetic views of letting the music speak for itself versus creating an individual interpretation dates back to the early nineteenth century, when the roles of composer and pianist separated. Instead of having composers play their own works, virtuoso pianists started to take over the stage. Pianists would perform mostly other people’s works rather than their own. It was unusual for composer-pianists to play only their own works. In this regard, Scriabin was atypical of his generation. He played his own music exclusively since he left the Conservatory.

The interpretive challenge of playing works that the composer himself frequently performs is the fine line between authenticity and individuality. Even though studying the composers’ own recordings leads to a greater understanding of a distinctive approach to the performance of their own music, the performance style may not be applicable to the present time. The advances in the technology of music recording and editing shape the current performance practice and style: the obsession with the perfection in tempo, rhythm, dynamics, phrasing and proportion. The element of restraint and control becomes the norm of the interpretations. As we saw in the tempo analysis of Prelude Op. 11 no. 1, the flexibility of tempo becomes more reserved. The difference between the faster and the slower sections are much slimmer, anything that disturbs the evenness and the flow of the piece is not favored. The rhythm, dynamics and phrasing in general become somehow more predictable. The overall performance practice prefers subtlety in the interpretation rather than extreme contrast. Also, the aspect of improvisation was

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completely taken away from the classical performances. The score itself seems to speak the whole ‘truth’ in the contemporary performance practice, even though the composer himself in the early twentieth century would rarely follow it exactly. And, because of the ‘perfect’ technology, it is then difficult to imagine the impact that the early recordings must have made in their time and the value they possess in the present century. In this case, Scriabin’s own recordings provide the key to a more comprehensive understanding of his works, as Yelena Bekman-Shcherbina recalled:

Scriabin’s performance was characterized by an amazing finesse on nuances. The notation could not convey all the shadings, capricious tempo fluctuations, and the right tone. One had to read much between the lines, and the composer himself often changed the text.³¹

If the notation on the score does not represent the whole truth about Scriabin’s intention, the value of these piano roll recordings becomes essential to study Scriabin’s piano music.

Each performance carries a different interpretation. The pianist interprets the notations on the score into sounds, and the audience then decides if that particular performance is convincing or not. As Leonard Meyer describes, “the performance of a piece of music is…the actualization of an analytic act – even though such analysis may have been intuitive and unsystematic. For what a performer does is to make the relationships and patterns potential in the composer’s score clear to the mind and ear of the experienced listener.”³² This observation is incomplete in that the interpretation is more than just an “analytic act.” Pianists make interpretive choices based on their knowledge of the composer, particular performance style in the composer’s time, their own

pianistic and personal/emotional background. Rothstein also disagrees, arguing that most listeners do not go to concerts or listen to recordings to hear any specific analytical demonstrations, but rather for the ‘magic’ that is necessary for a successful performance.\textsuperscript{33} The ‘magic’ Rothstein refers to is perhaps the marriage between the analytical and the spontaneous, order and freedom. The difference between a pianist and a composer-pianist is that a pianist must create a thought-out concept of interpretation after a comprehensive study of the piece (which, unfortunately too often tends to be restrictive), while the composer-pianist has the concept already in him – it is within him since the moment of creation. While the interpretation changes from pianist to pianist, once the interpretation of a certain piece has come to life, a pianist tends to be less flexible. Composers, on the other hand, rarely have rigidly fixed ideas of how their music should be performed. For the same reason, Scriabin rarely plays exactly as written from the score, his interpretation changes from performance to performance, but the essence of his artistic interpretation remains distinctive. But, what exactly is the essence of Scriabin’s interpretation? As Cherkass points out, the “dynamic relative shading within a simultaneous concord of voices,”\textsuperscript{34} as well as Scriabin’s sensitivity to harmonic clarity examplifies the character of Scriabin’s interpretation. The unusual quality of his playing is described by Sabaneeff as “a secret liturgical act” that touches the listeners as they felt “electric currents touching their psyche.”\textsuperscript{35} Some of the descriptions by his biographer might be an exaggeration or an act of mystifying the composer, but many of Scriabin’s contemporaries refused to hear any pianist other than Scriabin himself perform his own music, precisely for the reason that no other pianists could deliver the same effect.

\textsuperscript{35} Cited in Ibid., p. 198.
Scriabin never liked anyone’s interpretations of his piano music. Only in “certain pieces” were his friends able to please him with their interpretations (Samuel Feinberg was one of the few whom Scriabin liked, especially his interpretation of the Fourth Sonata).\(^{36}\) His attitude toward his music and subsequently interpreting it changed as he developed his philosophy. He said to Sabaneeff: “I cannot understand how to write *just* music now. How boring! Music, surely, takes on idea and significance when it is linked to a single plan within a whole view of the world. People who just write music are like performers who just play an instrument. They become valuable only when they connect with a general idea. The purpose of music is revelation. What a powerful way of knowing it is!”\(^{37}\) For Scriabin, an important—and perhaps central—reason why he concertized was because he realized in order to persuade to the public his ideas as a mystic, he first needs to “subdue” them with music.\(^{38}\)

The creative process of Scriabin’s compositions also reflects in his approach to performance. The rays of lights translate into sound, and therefore, there is already an added visual dimension to his compositions. Similar to Messiaen, Scriabin associated lights/colour with sound, and both of them depict religious symbolism in their music. Scriabin’s ultimate aesthetic ideal was to transcend imagery through music. He said: “Through music and color, with the aid of perfume, the human mind or soul can be lifted outside or above merely physical sensations into the region of purely abstract ecstasy and purely intellectual speculation.”\(^{39}\)

In the end, it would be impossible to know exactly how to realize these abstract ideas in actual performance. However, the essence of Scriabin’s music lies within the freedom and

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 196.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 108.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 108.
improvisatory character; therefore, the one way not to suggest these ideas is through the type of rigid performances currently considered mainstream. In the next chapter, the history of rubato will be discussed in relation to the performance practice of Scriabin's time, as well as Scriabin's rubato tendency as he indicates on the scores. In Chapters 4 and 5, the application of rubato in Scriabin's Sonata no. 4 and 10 will be studied using score analysis as well as through a detailed comparison between recordings of the early twentieth century and the present time.
Chapter 3

Rubato and the Creation of Climax in Scriabin’s Piano Music

Background History of Rubato

According to the *Oxford Companion to Music*, rubato is “the practice in performance of disregarding strict time, ‘robbing’ some note-values for expressive effect and creating an atmosphere of spontaneity.”¹ *Rubato* is usually achieved in two ways: “First, the pulse remains constant but expressive nuances are created by making small changes to the rhythmic values of individual notes [in the melody]… Second, changes in tempo are made to all parts simultaneously, the performer applying *accelerando* and *ritardando* at his or her own discretion.”² This definition embraces the different perspectives of writers on such subjects. Modern writers also refer to the earlier and later types of rubato as “melodic and structural, borrowed and stolen, contrametric and agogic, or bound and free.”³

The earliest recognition of rubato or tempo rubato seems to be documented in *Musical Ornamentation*, principles laid down by singer, composer and writer on music, Pier Francesco Tosi (c. 1650 – 1730):

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² Ibid.
In this place speaking of stealing the time, it regards Particularly the Vocal, or the performance on a single instrument in the Pathetic and Tender; when the Bass goes at an exactly regular Pace, the other Part retards or anticipates in a singular manner, for the sake of Expression, but after that returns to its exactness, to be guided by the Bass.4

The early rubato for singer and violinist involves an alteration of note values in the melodic line, for the keyboard player, it engages a certain displacement between the melody and the accompaniment (usually in the left hand). C.P.E. Bach wrote in his Versuch, “if the executants upon the clavier manages matters in such [a way] that one hand appears to play against time whilst the other hand strictly observes the beat, then the right thing has been done.”5 Chopin intended to carry out the same principle: where ‘rubato’ appears in his scores, “the singing hand may deviate, the accompaniment must keep time.”6 This presented a great difficulty for keyboard players. Most pianists ended up producing a general adjustment in the tempo of the entire musical substance, which became the later type of rubato. The two types of rubato “co-existed in keyboard music until at least the middle of the nineteenth century.”7

In 1801, English composer Thomas Busby described rubato as “time alternately accelerated and retarded for the purpose of enforcing the expression.”8 In 1802, Türk described rubato as a performance practice: “only seldom in the new compositions for keyboard may an appropriate opportunity occur, since the composer indicates the tempo rubato, for the most part,

5 Cited in Ibid., pp. 9-10.
6 Ibid., p. 10.
himself.” Instead of referring to rubato as the shortening or lengthening of notes, he describes rubato as “the displacing of notes by means of their anticipation and retardation.” However, in the “manner of execution neither the tempo nor the meter as a whole is disturbed.” Rubato was also referred to by Koch in 1802 as “dynamic accent on a weak beat” for a very brief period. Both earlier and later types of rubato were used to enhance particular moments in “musical architecture: at cadence, fermatas, repeated phrases…”; it also engaged performer’s emotions in response to the music. The later type of rubato involves rhythmic flexibility of the entire material, rather than strict rhythm presented in the accompaniment of the early rubato.

The later type of rubato was a method associated with the nineteenth-century virtuosos such as Liszt, where his ‘deceptive’ and ‘seductive’ rubato technique was described by his students like “a sudden light suspension of the rhythm on this or that significant note.” John McEwen summarizes the difference between the two types of rubato, where in the early rubato, the regular steady tempo is always audible in the background while in the modern rubato, the steady tempo should still remain, but it is now inaudible, pursuing its course only in the mind of the performer.

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10 Ibid., p. 120.
12 Cited in Ibid., pp. 137-139.
13 Ibid., p. 151.
14 Ibid.
The actual application and meaning of the word rubato was confusing to composers and performers alike. In the process, the composers exerted more controls by indicating more specific tempo changes, while the performers also incorporated tempo changes at places not marked. Therefore, the unnotated performance practice of rubato became the shared responsibility between performers and the composers. By the twentieth century, composers would indicate rubato in their scores, but more often, implied ‘written-in’ rubato where the change of time signature was used to indicate a very precise duration of notes rather than using a fermata or relying on a performer’s own musical intuitions.\(^\text{16}\) Rit. and A Tempo signs are frequently used, as well as a range of tone variation indications that might imply use of rubato. For example, Hummel’s Sonata in F minor, written in the late 1790s, indicates tempo rubato leading up to a fermata in measure 28, and A Tempo in the following measure. By the time he published it in 1807, he replaced tempo rubato with Adagio,\(^\text{17}\) assuming the expressive and lyrical nuances are associated with the slow tempo.

Some early twentieth-century composers apply both “momentary (early type rubato) and the more continuous type (later) rubato”\(^\text{18}\) but the Russian rubato is almost “exclusively continuous.”\(^\text{19}\) McEwen wrote in 1928: “modern taste, however, demands not only the employment of constant gradations and contrasts of tone quantities and qualities, but also a considerable use of variations in time-values.”\(^\text{20}\) Indeed, for expressive purposes, rubato became

\[\text{\footnotesize 16} \text{ Ibid., p. 309.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 18} \text{ Ibid., p. 300.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 19} \text{ Ibid., p. 301.}\]
broaden and included tone and time variations. The performance practice of tempo rubato in the turn of the twentieth century can be understood through the following statement:

Now, of recent years there has been a considerable extension of the principle, which has carried the use of Tempo Rubato far beyond that indicated by the dicta and recorded practice of classical musicians. Observance of the practice of any great modern artist will show that these tempo variations are not wholly nor even usually confined to one part of the musical structure. On the contrary, the whole structure, melody, accompaniment and harmony, is subjected to rhythmical stresses which produce fluctuations of time affecting the music as a whole.²¹

The applications of rubato by the late Romantic performers often included arpeggiated left-hand figures to enhance a certain sound quality in the chord, or to mark the return of a thematic idea.²² The melody was often delayed, thus creating a displacement between the bass and the top note. The use of rubato by early twentieth-century performers creates a flexible rhythmic style. It was a topic that musicologists frequently discussed in the early to mid-twentieth century. The British violinist Achille Rivarde wrote in 1922:

Rhythm is elasticity of movement. In physical life when the arteries harden and lose their suppleness, old age sets in and the decrease of vitality begins, and in music the analogy holds good. When the natural rhythm ebb and flow, the elastic give-and-take of movement is resisted, the performance is characterised by a certain lifelessness and effects the listener as being spiritless. This elasticity of movement, this rhythm should be felt in every bar.²³

²¹ Ibid., p. 10.
²² Ibid., p. 332.
Even though the freedom of timing in performances was generally practiced and accepted, there were still considerable controversies on the topic. English pedagogue Tobias Matthay cautioned against the extreme freedom in timing, stating that it should always be balanced out by returning to the original pulse. He wrote in 1921:

> The most usual is that in which we emphasise a note (or a number of notes) by giving more than the expected time-value, and then subsequently make-up the time thus lost by accelerating the remaining notes of that phrase or idea so as to enable us accurately to return to the pulse… This return to the pulse must always occur at the most important point of note of the phrase – that is, near its end. Remember, this law is inexorable, we must always look ahead, and come back to the pulse at the chief syllable of the phrase, however much we may have swerved from it beforehand.24

This ‘compensating’ idea of rubato where the lengthening of a note must be subsequently made up by acceleration was acknowledged by pianists such as Paderewski, who in 1909 stated that this “principle of equity” has “high moral motives”, which are admirable. At the same time, however, performers’ “ethics” rarely rise to such a high level. He feels the notes that were rushed through *accelerando* cannot always be made up through *ritardando*. “What is lost is lost.”25

Recent writers adopt the same generalized view of the ‘compensating rubato’ as Paderewski and regard its notion as a “pedagogical hoax”26, that is “a maxim or rationalization which was useful as an explanatory device but which had little to do with actual performance style.”27 Richard Langham Smith also states in regards to the compensating rubato,

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26 Hudson, *Stolen Time*, p. 320.
Contrary to the oft-repeated imagery of piano pedagogy – streams being the captive of their banks, candle flames wavering, or firmly rooted trees waving their branches in the breeze – [Robert] Philips shows what we all knew: that robbed time is robbed time, more usually lingering than lurching forward, dwelling on certain things but not making it up. Perhaps the emphasis on a mythical equilibrium of rubato is ultimately a teacher’s ploy: pianists don’t really do it, but they play better if they think of it…

Many scholars attempted to theorize the exact nature of rubato, but the limitation of describing such musical phenomena in words alone makes it almost impossible to describe actual practice in performance. Nicholas Cook compares such depictions to “old-fashioned grammar books, which prescribed ‘correct’ usage, rather than to the abstract grammars of structural linguistics; its meaning resides in its illocutionary force…It follows that the significance of a prescriptive model lies precisely in the gap between theory and practice.” Therefore, it is critical to study the application of rubato through both a historical perspective as well as a practical analysis of different recordings.


Musical Climax

Musical climaxes are structural highpoints in a composition. The process of achieving the peak of interest usually involves three stages: intensification, climax and abatement.\(^{30}\) During the intensification, the tension increases and reaches its peak at climax and subsequently produces a sense of relaxation in the “abatement phase.” The climax is commonly accepted as the result of heightened intensity through an increase in dynamics, texture, register range and an overall rising trajectory. Leonard B. Meyer describes climax as “gradually rising pitches, increasingly loud dynamics, faster rates of motion, and a growth in the number of textural strands heighten excitement and intensity; while descending pitches, softer dynamics, slower rates of motion, and so on, lead toward relaxation, repose, and cessation.”\(^{31}\) Joseph P. Swain notes that “motion creates musical tension, and the faster the motion, the greater the tension.”\(^{32}\) Austin T. Patty gives a clear insight on the same matter:

The sense of tension and relaxation in performing [music] is probably due in large part to the greater energy, both mental and kinetic, needed to execute the quick succession of [faster notes] as compared to, say, the slower succession of [notes]. Perhaps a listener can share this sense because more mental energy is needed to attend to the [sound] as they speed up and because the kinetic energy exerted by the performer may be experienced vicariously.\(^{33}\)


Even though the increase in tension is generally associated with the accelerations in different musical parameters (dynamic level, pace, textural density and melodic register), the deceleration can also be a contributing factor in the intensification phase. Patty creates an interesting model that illustrates the different scenarios, summarized in Table 3.1. It is important to bear in mind that Patty’s “acceleration” and “deceleration” refer to musical parameters such as rhythm and rate of harmonic change, not interpretive tempo rubato supplied by a performer.

Table 3.1: The four main pacing (of the climax) scenarios described by Austin T. Patty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intensification</th>
<th>Abatement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceleration</td>
<td>Surge</td>
<td>Tumble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceleration</td>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td>Settle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The acceleration in successions of chords or motives combined with gradual intensification toward a climax forms a “surge” scenario. In some cases, the deceleration of the harmonic progression, “expansion of a motive” or “lengthening melody notes” in combination with intensification of other musical parameters such as “melodic ascent and crescendo”, creates a sense that “strenuous effort is exerted in attaining the climax” and therefore it outlines the “struggle” scenario. In the abatement phase, the intensity level decreases to express the relaxation and is accompanied by either an acceleration or deceleration in one or more of the musical parameters. In a “tumble” scenario, the pace increases while the intensity decreases, while in the “settle” scenario, both pace and intensity weaken. A few musical examples will demonstrate these four scenarios.

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34 Ibid., p. 329.
In Liszt Sonata, the first climax is prepared from measure 44 through 55 and arrives at measure 56. The climax is prepared by the crescendo and the rising thirds motive first in the treble, then in the bass. The sixteenth-note motive in measure 51 groups into two in a bar, by measure 53, the
motive is shortened and becomes four in a bar. The acceleration caused by this changing pattern combined with the increasing speed and dynamics creates the perfect example of the ‘surge’ scenario.

Example 3.2: The “Struggle” scenario: the preparation of climax in Scriabin Prelude Op. 11 no.1, measures 10-25

Scriabin Prelude Op. 11 no.1 illustrates the ‘struggle’ scenario in the achievement of climax. Starting from measure 13 the harmonic pace quickens and the dynamic level increases. The chromatic ascent in the bass intensifies the momentum through measure 16, but right before the climax, the harmonic progression becomes static in measure 17 on the dominant pedal point of G. The combination of this harmonic slowing with the intensification of the rising pattern in the right hand (E-D to A-G and higher D-C) and the marked crescendo forms the ‘struggle’
scenario. Using the same example, we can observe “tumble” abatement right after the climax at the end of measure 19 (continued to the end of the prelude). The deceleration is carried out by the registral descent from high D to middle D at the end of measure 22, and the thinning of texture due to the lack of octave doubling in the bass. However, the intensity was still increasing due to the *accelerando* and the repetition of short melodic pattern (in measures 23 to 24). The combination of deceleration in the register and texture and the acceleration of speed (where Scriabin marks *accelerando* in measure 22), creates the ‘tumble’ abatement scenario.

The ‘settle’ scenario can be seen after the energy is heightened in the climax in measures 53- 54 of Scriabin’s Etude Op. 42 no.5 (Example 3.3). The abatement phase is outlined by the descent of register, thinning of texture and *diminuendo*, which Scriabin marked twice both in measure 55 and again in measure 56, and finally ends with a single chord in *pianissimo*.

Example 3.3: The “Settle” scenario in abatement phase after the climax, Scriabin Etude Op. 42 no.5, measures 52-57
The treatment of the different scenarios of achieving climax is distinctly diverse with different composers and styles. In the early twentieth century, a method of climactic treatment that appears very often is the one that “states the melody in full at several earlier opportunities under much quieter and calmer circumstances” and eventually at the climax, the “re-statement of this melody” combines with several sub-themes in one “grand simultaneous statement”.\(^{36}\) As the listeners get familiar with the theme (through repetition), expectations are created. When the theme does come back in the form of a climax, the arrival creates a greater sense of satisfaction. For example, in Scriabin’s *Poem of Ecstasy*, the last pages include different melodic ideas that are now “coagulated”, “crystallized” and “adjoined”.\(^{37}\) The climax of the Fourth Sonata also uses the same technique, which will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

Musical climaxes can be created through different levels of structure in a piece. However, the placement of the main climax in an entire movement or piece affects the whole narration of

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 293.
the work. Often, a parabola is used to illustrate the “curve of force”, where the climax is placed right in the middle of the highest point. However, as Newman describes, in an art form projected in space (painting, artworks, etc.), the effect of the artwork lies in the symmetry of which the centre is the climax. In an art form projected in time (music, drama, etc.) however, the placement of the climax is closer towards the end for two reasons. First, the listener must be able to remember the beginning, middle and the end to perceive the musical composition as a whole. Therefore, the climax can stand out even more if it is a recent experience for the listener. Second, the expectation of the climax concerns the psychology of “anticipation and resolution.”38 This is the same idea as the avoidance of cadence in many of Scriabin’s works, which makes the arrival of cadence much more effective.

In the next chapter, I will employ traditional harmonic analysis as well as “symbolist” motivic analysis to offer perspectives on rubato and climax in various interpretations of Scriabin’s Fourth Sonata. But first, we need to investigate what rubato means to Scriabin based on analysis of the score as well as survey the different techniques he used to achieve musical climax. Analysis of all of Scriabin’s rubato indications and their settings in the context of the phrase/section will result in the development of a system, in which the style of execution of rubato depends on the “motivation provided by the sense of the music before and after the rubato.”39 Conclusions derived from the application of the system can serve as a tool in preparation of performance of his music.

38 Ibid., p. 285
Rubato and Climax in Scriabin’s Piano Works

According to my count, Scriabin has written sixty-six rubato and three Ad libitum markings in the solo piano repertoire. The last instance of rubato in his Sonatas was placed in the Fifth Sonata in 1907. It marks the abandonment of the characteristic Romantic style and practice, as well as the desertion of tonality. Studying the use of rubato in Scriabin’s early and transitional works may shed light on the approach to rubato in his later works. However, before the use of rubato can be fully understood, the difference between rubato and ad libitum must be clarified. Scriabin used ad libitum early in his career, and he seldom used it again after Op. 9 (except for Poem Op. 59, No. 1). The meaning of ad libitum may be understood as a reinforced rubato. It literally means ‘at pleasure’, “an indication that the performer is at liberty, according to the context, to vary the tempo, or to improvise, embellish, or devise a cadenza.” It mostly refers to music with free rhythm and expression (such as dynamics and nuances) at the performer’s discretion. This is slightly different from the term rubato, where it usually refers to only the manipulation of the speed of the notes. Scriabin used it in his Valse, Op. 1 and Prelude and Nocturne for Piano, for the left hand, Op. 9 No. 2. In both pieces, the indication of ad libitum seems to suggest a slight ritardando to place the end of a phrase, or section.

Example 3.4: Valse Op. 1, measures 27-41

Example 3.5: Nocturne for the Left Hand, Op. 9 No. 2, measures 53-58

In the Valse, the motive of eighth rest followed by three eighth notes and a quarter note is repeated three times starting from measure 33, the fourth repetition falls in the *ad libitum*
measure (also the only 2/4 time measure in the entire Valse). It acts as the end of the phrase from the previous measures before the C becomes the starting point of the next phrase. The missing downbeat (that was an eighth rest) is finally replaced by a half note. The musical content suggests a tendency to take a slight ritardando until the main theme comes back in measure 39 to end the phrase. The usage of *ad libitum* in the Nocturne also suggests a similar function as in the Valse (to mark the ending of a phrase or section). The chord starts with four notes, then increases to six and ends with seven notes with a fermata. Considering the fact that the Nocturne is written for the left hand only, technically, the rolled chord is not going to be a tempo, but in order to accommodate the increasing number of notes, each chord gradually requires more time. As mentioned before, the *ad libitum* indicates the liberty of dynamics and tempo. Since Scriabin is very specific about the dynamics, it suggests here, again, the alteration in timing. Harmonically, the V7/vi first resolves to VI/vi (with a seventh added) then crescendo into the viiø7. This final crescendo (measure 55) implies an extroverted, triumphant, open ending, which is unexpectedly substituted by a reflective one, marked with fermata and pianissimo possible. In both cases, the *ad libitum* indications are placed in a cadential passage where the ritardando is implicit.

As mentioned earlier, the “Russian rubato” is usually continuous, rather than momentary. In fact, rubato is one of the most useful means in shaping phrases. This technique, which is based upon “subtle readjustments in the timing of the rhythmic patterns directly reinforces the amount of tension that is generated from within the musical impulse.”

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41 Even though Scriabin wrote *ad libitum*, he exerts more control by changing the time signature from 3/4 to 2/4, rather than utilizing the tied notes and makes the following C a quarter note tied over the bar to another quarter note.

rubato is expected as a performance practice, then, when a composer, such as Scriabin, indicates ‘rubato’ what does it mean to him? Based on my study of rubato markings in Scriabin’s scores, it is apparent that most of the rubato indications correspond to a particular melodic contour that involves the changing direction of the melody. This is especially evident in his early works with either a leap up followed by a stepwise motion down, or a leap down followed by a stepwise motion up. The following table presents various melodic contours corresponding to Scriabin’s rubato indications and frequency of their occurrences throughout his entire piano solo output. I will examine musical excerpts that demonstrate various types of rubato.

Table 3.2: A summary of rubato indications in Scriabin’s solo piano works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of occurrences</th>
<th>Melodic Contour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Leap and stepwise motion in opposite direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leap and stepwise motion in same direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Stepwise motion in both direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Leaps in opposite direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Leaps in same direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rubato accompanied with tenuto signs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rubato often marks a sudden change of dynamics and texture, but Scriabin’s rubato passages often happen in the middle of a phrase (as well as the peak of the phrase). Both Mazurka Op. 3 no. 10 and Prelude Op. 11 no. 11 set the typical placement of rubato in Scriabin’s music. In the Mazurka, the rubato (measures 13-14: F-E♭ and leap up to G♭ and A leap up to F and step down to E♭ in measure 14) highlights the F as a highpoint of the phrase; it also brings out the change of direction in the melody. It initiates a particular nuance to emphasize the leap from A up to F and comes back down by a step to E♭. The rubato treatment in this passage seems

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to suggest the use of vocal rubato, where the melodic emphasis is based on the distance of the interval: the bigger the interval, the more time it needs to reach up or down.

Example 3.6: Mazurka, Op. 3 No. 10, measures 10-17

Example 3.7: Prelude, Op 11 No. 11, measures 16-18

In the Prelude Op. 11 no. 11, the rubato is placed under the same melodic contour.

However, it is interesting that Scriabin placed the rubato in the second half of the measure rather in the beginning of the measure. The rhythmic structure of the quadruplet against the left hand sixteenth notes in a 6/8 time naturally slows down the notes, emphasizing the downbeat. This is also enforced by the melodic leap over the barline (from A# at the end of measure 17 to D# in
measure 18). In the second half of the measure, the rubato nuance is placed between the end of the first and second subdivision rather than on the beat, as shown in Figure 3.1. Again, due to the intervallic realization (G# to B# below) and the change of melodic direction, the pacing of this measure would sound more improvisatory.

Figure 3.1: The rhythmic emphasis of the Prelude Op. 11 No. 11, measure 18. The red arrow marks the melodic and rhythmic stress of the measure.

At some instances where the rubato is placed in the beginning of a phrase, this often signifies a structural importance. For example, in the Mazurkas, Op. 25 no. 1, every time the lyrical theme comes back (as opposed to the con affetto theme marked f), Scriabin marks rubato. This occurs especially in the Mazurkas.

Example 3.8: Mazurka Op. 25 No. 1, measures 1-17
Scriabin adapted Chopin’s Mazurka form, which contains plenty of repetition. This structural repetition coincides with the repetition in the rubato indications. Therefore, the rubato indications represent a character change (tone colour, subtle expressivity nuances), where the dotted rhythm with eighth and sixteenth rests and accents (measures 1-4) are replaced with eighth notes without any accent (measures 5-8).

Another observation on Scriabin’s score indications is that he often includes tenuto signs on the notes in the measure where he marks rubato. Instead of manipulating the rhythm, the rubato refers to a “special type of articulation” that is more concerned with “declamatory emphasis” rather than with the acceleration or ritardando. The result of such “touch” on the piano to each note demands special attention from the listeners. In fact, most of the rubato indications he wrote starting in 1903 were accompanied by tenuto signs.

In the following example, Prelude Op. 37 no. 1, it shows another type of rubato indication in Scriabin’s music: which are accompanied by tenuto signs. One can see the detailed indication Scriabin writes in his works of the transitional period, especially the manipulation of

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Ibid., p. 339.
the tempo (*poco rit.*, *a tempo, poco accel.*, *rit.*, *a tempo*...). This seems to indicate that the meaning of rubato in this case is no longer exclusive to the variation on the speed of the notes, but rather a certain emphasis in the tone, hence the *tenuto* signs.

Example 3.9: Prelude Op 37 No. 1 (1903), measures 1-12
In measure 1, the rubato indicates specifically for the left hand where the melodic contour, again, involves a leap down and back up by a step. The second rubato marked in measure 9 coincides with the repetition of the melodic motive, where in measure 7, the $E_b - B_b - A$ are in dotted quarter notes, the second appearance in measure 8 it is diminuted. Finally, in measure 9, the $E_b$ is replaced by a higher $G_b$ and the motive’s rhythm is further diminished. At this highpoint ($G_b$), the phrase also reaches its peak before it winds down with a rit. This peak in the phrase illustrates the first climax of the prelude. This example also shows the close connection between the use of rubato and the achievement of climax in Scriabin’s music. This connection exists even after Scriabin ceased to use the rubato indication, as we will see in the analysis of Sonata no. 10.

As seen in example 3.9, the first climax was created by the *poco accel.* in measure 8 and subsequently marked with rubato before the *rit.* in measure 10. The second, which is the main climax of the Prelude, is created in a similar fashion in the last page of the piece.

Example 3.10: Prelude Op. 37 No. 1, measures 13-22
The climax of Prelude Op. 37 no. 1 fits in the “surge” scenario, where the dynamic increased from $p$ in measure 15 to $mf$ in measure 17 and finally reaches the highpoint in measure 19 with $ff$ (see example 3.10). The accelerando also helps the tension to build up until the climax, where he marked with *tenuto* signs for a declamatory emphasis. As in the preceding example, the rhythmic tension also accelerates, since the note values of the repeated melodic motive diminishes and quickens the pace again (measures 17-19 in Example 3.10). While most of the musical parameters accelerate, the texture and density remains the same throughout the piece, thus creating an almost hypnotic swaying motion (especially from the left hand triplets) until the ‘abatement phase’ starting in measure 21. The recurring $C_b$ where both climaxes build up from measure 5 and 18 creates an unsettling tension throughout the piece. The foreign note ($C_b$), in a $B_b$ minor prelude, is “creating tension by departure from a norm in any direction...”\(^{45}\) and therefore, it contributes to the intensification of the climax. The $C_b$ eventually resolves down to $B_b$ in the last chord of the piece. This climactic treatment is typical of Scriabin’s shorter works.

Even as late as the Preludes Op. 74 (1914), Scriabin’s treatment of climax in the shorter pieces somehow remains the same. The shorter pieces often contain two reprises of the theme (mostly binary form), each of them containing a climax (with the second climax being the main climax). The second climax often rises higher in melodic contour to achieve the final structural and emotional highpoint of the performance.

Example 3.11: Prelude, Op. 74 No. 1, measures 1-16

The first highpoint of the prelude occurs only three measures into the work, partly due to the stylistic condensation of musical material presented in Scriabin’s late preludes, but also because of the rapid change of dynamics in the first phrase that creates a paramount tension already by the fifth measure. In measures 11 to 12, the climactic treatment is the same as the first climax, but the dynamic now increases to $f$ instead of $mf$ and the highpoint of the phrase raised by a tritone (B₅ up to E).
In Scriabin’s larger works of the early and transitional period, the climaxes are often achieved by the dense texture made of chords and octaves doubling, especially at the cadential pedal points. The two climaxes in the Allegro de concert, Op. 18 (1896) share the same theme, derived from the slow theme marked *Meno mosso* in measure 29. This climax fits into the ‘struggle’ scenario, where the deceleration of the harmonic progress (due to the pedal point of F starting from measure 84) is accompanied by the acceleration in the dynamic. The register is widened at the climactic moment (so is the distance between the hands, measures 88 to 89,) the texture is thickened and the melodic motion slows (especially with the onset of half notes in measure 88).

Example 3.12: Allegro de concert, Op. 18, measures 77-89
This example also shows the “single consummating” chord, which cultivated Scriabin’s method of climactic treatment (preparing the climax through a new “exploitation of chromatic harmony.”)\(^{46}\) Starting at the end of measure 86, the octave in the right hand outlines a scalar ascending motion that reaches C in measure 88 in a F\(_7\) chord, further intensified by a chromatic ascent to C\(\#\). The same climactic treatment can be seen in Fantasy Op. 28. Again, the climactic material is taken from the slow theme previously presented in a single note melody texture primarily in triplets (from measure 30, refer back to Example 1.8 on page 21) and transformed into a dense texture with added chords in leaps in the left hand, and repeated inner chords in the right hand (see Example 3.13). The acceleration is achieved through the rhythmic unit of sixteenth notes, as well as the \textit{cresc. ed. accel. poco a poco} indication eight bars before the climax. Scriabin often intensifies the climax by using chromaticism. During the last eight measures of the intensification phase, the chromatic ascent creates D- D\(\#\)- E- E\(\#\)- F\(\#\) in the right hand, while the left creates a subtle chromatic motive (B\(b\)- B, F\(x\) to G\(\#\)) that does not always fall on the downbeat.

Example 3.13: Fantasy Op. 28. first climax, measures 109-111 (shows the similar treatment to the climax with acceleration in dynamics, register and texture)

In Scriabin’s late works, the climaxes do not always follow the anticipations and releases as described by previous methods. Very often, the climaxes are constantly being denied. In Poem, Op. 69 no. 2, the quick ascending notes with crescendo in the right hand exert energy and build up the expectation of arriving at a climax, but instead, the crescendo in measure 4 in the ascending motive takes the passage into a subito pianissimo (see Example 3.14a).

Example 3.14a: Poem, Op. 69 No. 2, measures 1-5

The same pattern of anticipation is denied once more in later measures. Finally, at the very end of the work, the crescendo is at last combined with acceleration in the speed, dynamics and texture of a higher register, but only to reach a fermata on a sixty-fourth rest, and immediately conclude with a broken chord in pianissimo. The way Scriabin generates energy and momentum in his late works is achieved with the use of trills, rather than the thick chordal textures that were shown in the previous examples. In the Poem Op. 69 no.2, the trills from measures 8 to 10 create natural momentum to the Più vivo section. At measure 11, the rhythmic unit undergoes acceleration from ascending eighth notes to triplet sixteenth notes, and eventually
to a thirty-second septuplet. The energy generated is once again brought to a halt by the dotted half note in the left hand and the descending notes in the right hand.

Example 3.14b: Poem Op. 69 No. 2, measures 8-15

Example 3.14c: Poem Op. 69 No. 2, measures 36-43

The later works of Scriabin evoke symbolic meanings that represent his ideology. The quick ascending motive in the right hand is a depiction of “flight”. The reaching motive is also present in the left hand with a leap of Db-G, Db-Ebb, Db-higher G and lastly Db-E (in measures 37 to 42). The tritone, again, is the basis of the motive. This emphasis on motive of a smaller scale,
rather than the overall structure contributes to the lack of structural climaxes in the later works of Scriabin.

**Summary**

The concept of rubato changes throughout different centuries. The one understanding that remains the same is that rubato is a tool for performers in creating an effective and convincing performance. In Scriabin’s music, the use of rubato cannot be defined strictly as a push and pull or the *accelerando* and *ritardando*, but rather as an invitation to a thorough analysis of intervallic relations, which create different emotions and effects. Still, one cannot deny that the interpretation of different intervals will result in a slight *accel.* and *ritard.*, but the motivation of such tempo adjustment is due to an intervallic realization, rather than a compensation of shortening and prolonging gestures. Rubato and climax are closely related. For instance, Scriabin often writes in *tenuto* signs along with the *rubato* indication to put emphasis on particular notes, usually in the peak of a phrase, to create a declamatory climax. The changes in Scriabin’s treatment of climax evolves with the different approach and style of his music. The big Romantic gesture and sweeping trajectory of powerful climaxes are rarely seen in his later works. The thick chordal structure with octaves outlining the long, expressive melody is reduced to transparently recurring motives. The climaxes are consistently being denied until the very end of the composition. Scriabin became obsessive with the use of trills, which develop into the key ingredient of the creation of climax in his later works.

The following two chapters will focus on the analysis of rubato and climax projection in the Fourth Sonata and Tenth Sonata. The two sonatas represent Scriabin’s middle and late styles
respectively. In essence, both sonatas manifest the one-movement sonata form (through *attacca* in the fourth sonata), the cyclic idea within each work is similar in structure; however, the tonal language is completely different. Therefore, the two chapters will also investigate the rubato application in the ‘Romantic’ style of the Fourth Sonata as well as the theosophically inspired Tenth Sonata.
Chapter 4

Rubato and Climax Projection of Fourth Sonata Op. 30

The Fourth Sonata was composed in 1903, the first of thirteen opuses Scriabin composed in this year, which is generally considered to begin his middle stylistic period. His publisher Belaieff was extremely satisfied in both “quantity and quality”, and according to Bowers’ observations, the group of piano pieces were “diamonds of a very clear water” and “pearls for the piano.”1 Scriabin conveyed a programmatic concept in Op. 30 through an unpublished free verse poem written in French. The poem describes a sense of evolving mannerism: from the “faint shine of a far-distant star into the flashing sun.”2 The poem mirrors the structure of the work: from the “highest refinement (of the Andante movement) to the absolute Grandioso imageries of ecstasy (as in the coda of the second movement).”3

Figure 4.1: Excerpts from the unpublished poem for Op. 304

In a Light mist, transparent vapour
   Lost afar and yet distinct
   A star gleams softly…

   Sharp desire, voluptuous and crazed yet sweet
   Endlessly with no other goal than longing
   I would desire…

   But no! I vault in joyous leap

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2 Ibid., pp. 332-333.
Freely I take wing
Mad dance, godlike play!
Intoxicating, shining one!

Toward thee, created freely for me
To serve the end
My flight of liberation!

I have myself in thy chaning waves
O joyous god
I swallow thee Sea of light
My self-of-light
I engulf Thee!

The impressionistic character of the Andante movement evokes the ethereal, contemplative atmosphere that slowly expands into jubilant triumph. The Fourth Sonata is the first sonata Scriabin wrote with a programmatic poem in mind. The main theme of the sonata is transformed and heard throughout the entire sonata: Delson describes this construction the “most important innovation in terms of the content and the form”; Scriabin also used a similar treatment in Vers la flamme, Op. 72, where the main material is compressed while developing throughout the piece. In both works, the climax of the entire piece is placed at the very end, “from the initial to the final solidification of ecstasy.”

The Andante movement is in variation form. It consists of one main theme and four variations organized in two major sections. The theme is eight measures long, and it has been characterized by many writers with Hull’s metaphorical description of “striving towards the attainment of the ideal” followed by the “languor or exhaustion” of the next four measures. This melodic shape of a rise and a subsequent fall is typical of Scriabin’s works especially in his

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5 Alexejew and Delson, p. 181.
middle period, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The following table offers the detailed form and total outline of the Andante movement of Op. 30:

Table 4.1a: Formal Analysis of *Andante*, Op. 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure 1~34</th>
<th>Measure 35~66</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>8+9</td>
<td>8+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6+2)+(4+5)</td>
<td>F#→ A#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation 1</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>4+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variation 2</td>
<td>F#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(sequence a whole tone apart)</td>
<td>Transition into 2nd movt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1b: Harmonic Analysis of *Andante*, Op. 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>IV M7</td>
<td>vii #7</td>
<td>iii 7 – bIII M7/#5 (chromatic voice leading in the bass)</td>
<td>bIII M7/#5 – I6</td>
<td>b VI M7/#5</td>
<td>V9 /V</td>
<td>Mystic Chord: (C#/Fx-B- Eb-A#-D#) Function as Dominant</td>
<td>VII #6/#4/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>IV7 (without the 5th)</td>
<td>vii #7</td>
<td>iii 7 – bIII 7#5 (chromatic voice leading in the bass)</td>
<td>bIII b7/#5 – I6</td>
<td>b VI M7/#5 (with chromatic motion)</td>
<td>b vii #7 (with b3) – Bb: V7</td>
<td>Bb: I</td>
<td>Bb: I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phrase structure is almost entirely symmetrical: the first section includes the theme and two variations; the bridge is one measure long that connects into the second section. The sequential thematic repetitions dominate each variation: The first four measures of Variation I, is
built upon measures 7 and 8 from the theme, and the latter four measures share the same motivic idea, but a whole tone apart. Similar sequential treatment is used in Variation II, but a semitone apart. The phrase structure of each variation becomes increasingly fragmented: the theme consists of the longest phrases (8+9), in Variation I (4+4) the phrase is half the length, and finally in Variation II (2+2 and 2+2), the phrase becomes even more compact. The decreasing phrase lengths create a sense of breathlessness that comes to a halt in the Bridge measure, where Scriabin indicates *calmando dim*. This phrasing structure may provide pianists with different interpretations and rubato.

The harmonic progression of the first movement of Op. 30 consists of a series of seventh chords, continuously linked by chromaticism. The half-step motion captures the longing and the slowly evolving character described in the poem. Tonally, the two sections are connected by the resemblance of the key relation, noticeably in the Theme and Variation III: while the theme (measures 1 to 17) modulates from F# to B♭, in Variation III (measures 35 to 50), it modulates from F# to the enharmonic of B♭ = A#. Even though enharmonically it is the same note and tonality, the interpretation and nuance of B♭ and A♯ can vary greatly depending on the context. Later in this chapter, the modulatory measures (measures 13 to 15) will be discussed and comparisons between pianists interpretation from different decades will be made.

Another interesting feature that constructs the first movement of Op. 30 is a particular interval Scriabin used for each variation. In Section I (measures 1 to 34), both Variation I and II are based on the falling minor sixth motive of the theme. Only at the end of the movement in Variation IV does Scriabin focus on the rising perfect fourth motive from the opening of the theme. The chromaticism in the bass that links the seventh chords together in the theme returns
in the Transition in the opposite direction (with rising half-steps in the Transition, measures 59 to 62). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the chromatic descent can be a feminine symbol. However, it has been documented that Scriabin developed a series of mystic symbols, in which “descending half-steps embodied human sorrow.”\(^7\) One can assume the opposite description for the succession of ascending half-steps. The scenario of both the intervallic relation and the key relation seems to be precisely planned, and descriptively relevant to the free verse poem. However, despite the symmetrical structure, the musical content remains sounding improvisatory.

It seems that Scriabin denies the climax in the first movement (despite the thickening of the texture and the increasing rate of motion in the right hand in Variation III, Scriabin indicates *dolce cantabile* and *pp* throughout), transferring the climactic energy to the second movement, where the theme from the Andante comes back twice (from measures 66 to 73 and measures 144 to the end). The second movement, *Prestissimo volando*, is in sonata form. It begins *attacca* from the first movement. The C# ninth chord that ends the first movement is carried over to the start of the second movement, which might cause an interpretational ambiguity. The Transition of the first movement is indicated *poco accel.*, suggesting that by the end of the accelerando, the tempo should reach the *Prestissimo volando* tempo of the second movement. For this movement, Scriabin indicated to a student that the tempo should be “as fast as possible, to the limit of possibility, so that it will be flight, the speed of light, straight to the sun, to the sun!”\(^8\)

Table 4.2 provides the formal analysis of the second movement.

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 15.
Table 4.2: Formal Analysis of *Prestissimo volando*, Op. 30

**Exposition:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Secondary Theme</th>
<th>Closing (K)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1~16</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>4+6</td>
<td>2+4 2+2 4+4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phrase Structure

Key: I (F#) → V (C#)

**Development:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Based on P theme</th>
<th>Based on T theme</th>
<th>1st Climax based on Theme from 1st movt.</th>
<th>Based on S theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48~55</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>56~65</td>
<td>66~73</td>
<td>74~81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phrase Structure

Key: D → F#

**Recapitulation:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Secondary Theme</th>
<th>Closing (K)</th>
<th>Extended K material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82~97</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>4+6</td>
<td>2+4 2+2 5+3</td>
<td>2+5 2+2 2+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coda:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Final Climax based on Theme from 1st movt.</th>
<th>Based on the chromatic ascend of the end of 1st. mvt.</th>
<th>Emphasis on the Tonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>144~155</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>4+2</td>
<td>4+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156~161</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162~169</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to the first movement, symmetrical phrase structure occurs throughout the second movement. The number of measures is identical between the Exposition and the Recapitulation, except the K (closing material), which is extended in preparation of the final climax and coda of the work. Tonally, the second theme is in C# major (dominant of the tonic F#), however, it ends with the tonic chord (measures 21 to 30). Interestingly, the development begins in D major, a minor sixth above the F#, an interval emphasized in the entire first movement.

Scriabin’s Fourth Sonata marks the beginning of a new stylistic period. Its inter-movement connections unify the work into a quasi-single-movement sonata. Several features create a stronger connection between the first and the second movements. First, the *attacca* carries the chord from the end of the first movement until it becomes the first harmony of the second movement. Second, within the boundary of sonata form, the expansions and variations of thematic material in the second movement are similar to the previous movement. Third, the theme of the first movement appears in the two climaxes of the second movement. Fourth, the minor sixth, perfect fourth and perfect fifth are motivic intervals throughout the entire sonata. Op. 30 establishes the formal shift into a one-movement sonata cycle in Scriabin’s sonata output, and it is intensified by the repetition and variation of the motivic cells employed through variety of textures and rhythmic patterns.

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9 Baker gives a different approach to his analysis of Op. 30. He marks the first movement in its entirety as first theme of the *Exposition*, the second movement begins with the second theme up to measure 47, the *Development* then begins in measure 48 until measure 81 and a *reversed Recapitulation*, the return of the second theme followed by the first theme in the form of a climax. See Baker, pages 196-197.
In the following section of this chapter, the interpretation of the notated rubato will be discussed. In addition, unnotated rubato will be studied through the analysis of Scriabin’s compositional style: rhythmic complexity between the hands (parts) and textural change between sections. The arrival of climaxes will also be analysed using Austin T. Patty’s harmonic pacing theory as well as rubato interpretations in the few measures leading up to the climaxes. The performers’ aims and issues of rubato and climaxes will be discussed by means of score analysis as well as comparing different recordings by artists of various generations.
Rubato and Climax Interpretation of the Fourth Sonata

Andante

The number of rubato indications remains frequent in Scriabin’s character pieces such as in the Poems, Preludes and Mazurkas. In the lengthier genre of sonatas composed around the same time (early 1900s), he limits the rubato indication and completely stops after the Fifth Sonata. There are several possibilities for explaining the diminished number of rubato indications. First, the sonata genre as such allows less freedom than other independent genres. In the sonata, more focus is placed on formal conventions rather than on compositional, and, by extension, interpretative freedom. Neither Chopin nor Liszt used the indication *rubato* in any of their sonatas, and Scriabin’s contemporary and schoolmate Rachmaninoff indicates only one in his Second Sonata. Second, the performance practice of the early twentieth century encourages the use of rubato regardless of the indications (as evident in the early recordings before 1950s). Scriabin assumed that rubato would be applied to the work without any written instruction. Third, composers increasingly were preferring to inform performers of the nature of frequent tempo changes as, for example, Berg in his Piano Sonata, Op. 1 (written between 1907 and 1908), shown in Example 4.1 below.

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10 While the composers mentioned did not write any rubato in their sonatas, there are indications that have similar effect to tempo rubato, such as in Liszt piano sonata in b minor, the *Recitativo*, and the frequent use of *poco ritenuto...a tempo* in Chopin piano sonatas.

Example 4.1: Berg, Piano Sonata Op.1 measures 1-7

In the Fourth Sonata, Scriabin writes only one Rubato indication in the first movement (in measure 7), but the rubato-effect seems implicit in his writing of the variations, particularly evident throughout the several textural and rhythmical developments of the same material. The application of rubato can also be viewed as a changing perspective of the composer: the precise indication of rubato in the earlier works (top of the treble or below the bass clef) points towards a particular interval or pattern. The indication of rubatos in these instances seems to indicate a rather momentary effect. After Op. 30, the indications are mostly placed in between the staves. This placement suggests a prolonged application of rubato. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent discussion of early twentieth-century recordings, the employment of rubato has diminished throughout the twentieth century, significantly changing the public’s artistic expectations. While assuming that in the case of Scriabin’s Op. 30, the entire sonata can be approached with rubato throughout, the presence of the lone rubato marking in the first movement of Op. 30 poses questions of its significance.
As noted above, the only written indication of rubato in Op. 30 takes place in measure 7, the first iteration of one of the movement’s principal motives (see Example 4.2 below). The melodic shape in which Scriabin placed the rubato is recognizable in most of his rubato indications, where the timing between the larger intervals is interpreted differently than for the smaller intervals. In this case, the descending sixth requires more time while the ascending step-wise figure is comparably effortless.

The phrase markings also suggest a similar interpretation: Scriabin ends the long slur of the first phrase in measure 6 (where the harmony lingers on V\(9\)/V), while measure 7 functions as a resolution to the dominant. However, the exclusion of the first two eighth notes from the slur in measure 7 creates a quasi interruption rather than a tonal destination. The rubato indication in this measure can be attributed to both the specific melodic contour as well as the harmonic significance of its statement of the “Mystic Chord,”\(^\text{12}\) which eventually dominates his late works.

Lastly, the tenuto markings that accompany the descending sixth necessitate a certain touch on the keyboard that demands extra time to execute. Furthermore, in Scriabin’s own recordings (as seen in Prelude Op. 11 no, 1 tempo study presented in Chapter 2), rubato demonstrates the composer’s association of crescendo with accelerando, which can be applicable in the rising quintuplet eighth notes in measure 7 of Op. 30, and the subsequent slowing down of the next measure. Therefore, a likely interpretation of this passage (from the

\(^{12}\) It should be noted that Scriabin did not coin the term “Mystic Chord”. The name came from Scriabin’s disciples, which was documented by music writer A. Eaglefield Hull in 1916 in his article “A Great Russian Tone Poet”: Scriabin takes from the harmonic series, and arranges them as a “foundation chord” and adopts it “wholeheartedly” throughout his later works. He simply says: “Take the sounds from the natural series and build them up in a structure of 4ths.” Theorists later describe this harmonic process as an adaption to both whole tone and octatonic scales, rather than chords build from the harmonic series. The Mystic chord had been used in his earlier works, but it would be resolved like any other chord, in his later works, the suspension of the chord would continue without any resolution.
measure preceding the rubato and the measure follows it) is shown by the annotations added above the score in Example 4.2.

Example 4.2: Op. 30 first movement, measures 6-8

The “V” in between measures 6 and 7 indicates a slight pause to separate the end of the first phrase, the arrow pointing forward represents a sense of moving forward, while the arrow pointing backward shows a slight restraint in the tempo.

The rise and subsequent falls of Scriabin’s melodies create a naturally balanced rubato. This method of melodic treatment seems to dominate his writing in his middle period. In the following examples 4.3a and 4.3b, the excerpts are taken from Scriabin’s works around the same time. They show the similar melodic treatment and the tempo variations (rit. and then a tempo) according to the melodic shapes. In Op. 38, Scriabin indicates rit. and a tempo with the rise and fall of the melody. In Op. 45 no. 1, he indicates poco cresc. in the highest point of the melody in the first phrase (measure 3) and a subsequent fall of melody coincides with a diminuendo marking. Again, in Scriabin’s own playing, the dynamics are often implied as a way of tempo modification.
Example 4.3a: Valse, Op. 38 measures 1-6

Example 4.3b: From 3 Morceaux, Op. 45 no. 1, measures 1-8
The idea of a balancing rubato has perhaps been more widespread in theory than in practice. As seen from the previous examples, Scriabin’s writing promotes such rubato treatment through the natural rise and the consequent falls. Therefore, the application of rubato is a direct result of the melodic shaping as opposed to a theoretical principle (mentioned in chapter 3) to ‘make up’ the time ‘lost’. The same type of melodic shaping seems to dominate throughout the Andante, Op. 30.

In Scriabin’s earlier works, he often indicates rubato over the same material, and since his writing thrives on sequential repetitions, most of the time, the rubato indications are in pairs of two, as in the following examples from the Nocturne, Op. 5, No. 2 and the Mazurka, Op. 25, No. 1.

Example 4.4a: Nocturne, Op. 5 no. 2, measures 1-2 and 43-44

Example 4.4b: Mazurka, Op. 25 no.1, measures 5-6 and 13-14
In Op. 30, the lack of consistency in the rubato indications over similar material suggests three principles: first, the nuance of each return should be approached differently; second, the actual indication of ‘rubato’ should be emphasized; and third, the rubato is evident through the variation of texture, rhythmic values, and accents. The performance practice of the early twentieth century encourages constant use of rubato, which has eventually become excessive in the ears of the subsequent generations; however, it was perfectly acceptable in Scriabin's time. Perhaps it is similar to Scriabin's reasoning for scarce pedal markings. He writes ‘rubato’ as a precautionary tool: already assuming the pianists are taking liberty in the timing throughout the piece, Scriabin likely writes ‘rubato’ to indicate that the passage should be played with even more variation in the speed. Contrary to the composer’s indication, a survey of recent recordings of Scriabin's music reveals a lack of acknowledgment to indications that have rubato effect, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Throughout the first movement, the momentum is gradually increased through the intensification and repetition of the thematic idea presented in the first eight measures. Using measures 7 to 8 as example (where the composer marks rubato), one can trace the evolving pattern of the same material as well as the changes in the pacing of the motive. In examples 4.5a through 4.5i, the rubato motive is traced throughout the first movement.

Example 4.5a: Op. 30, Andante, measure 7-8
Example 4.5b: Op. 30, Andante, measures 15-17

Example 4.5c: Op. 30, Andante, measures 18-19

Example 4.5d: Op. 30, Andante, measures 22-23

Example 4.5e: Op. 30, Andante, measures 26-27
Example 4.5f: Op. 30, Andante, measures 28-29

Example 4.5g: Op. 30, Andante, measures 30-31

Example 4.5h: Op. 30, Andante, measures 32-34
Example 4.5i: Op. 30, Andante, measures 41-42

Scriabin employs written-in rubato in the same motive by changing the texture: each time the same pattern comes back, the texture is slightly different and the rhythm between the hands becomes more complex. From measure 15, the same motive modulates to Bb major. This modulation is emphasized by the grace notes of Bb and F to the downbeat. In Variation 1 (measures 18-25), the same motive is elaborated by the downward quadruplet eighth notes in both measures 18 and 22, creating a three-against-four rhythm between the hands. The tenuto sign on each of the two eighth note motives in the right hand varies throughout the transformation of the theme. In measure 18, the addition of accents starts to appear, first in conjunction with the tenuto sign, and by measure 22, the tenuto signs are taken out completely, and left with only an accent at the end of two-note slur. The removal of tenuto signs indicates a greater sense of forward motion, whereas the placement of the accent seems a deliberate effort to further intensify the rhythmic displacement between the hands. The intensity of this passage is elevated by the persistent recurrence of the motive in direct transposition while varying the nuance of the falling eighth-note motive. In Variation 2 (measures 26-33), Scriabin marks animando poco a poco, further indicating the gradual intensification through the repetitions of the motive. By the end of Variation 2, the accent at the end of the two-note slur is also removed, signifying a smoother and more melodic approach to the same motive. The connecting passage
between recurring motives consistently becomes shorter and shorter: there are six measures between the first and second occurrences of the motive, and in Variation 1, they are two measures apart. In Variation 2, the motive repeats itself without any gap. Both intensity and tempo increase through the urgency of the recurring motives until the *rit.* in measure 29 and *calmando dim.* in measure 34. In the motive in Variation 3 (measures 41 to 42), both the notes and articulations are exactly the same as in measures 7 to 8, with the addition of quadruplet eighth-notes chords in the upper register, creating a shimmering texture. The final appearance of the motive occurs in the last four measures of Variation 3, where the descending leap and the rising steps are joined rhythmically under a single slur. The first eighth note of the motive is also elongated into a quarter note (measure 48) and the grouping of the notes is now without any rhythmic displacement. From measures 47 to 49, Scriabin creates a resolution to the disjunctions within the motive throughout the movement.

Example 4.6: Op. 30, Andante, measures 46-50
Scriabin intensified the rhythmic complexity throughout the movement, creating a *rubato* effect without having to indicate *rubato*. The performance indications between sections also provide the narration of timing: Scriabin indicated *animando poco a poco* in the beginning of Variation 2, *calmando dim.* just before the entrance of Variation 3, and *poco accel.* eight measures before the *attacca* to the second movement. The variety of rhythmic flow creates an improvisatory character to the monothematic movement.
In the *Prestissimo volando* movement, it is important to understand that the lack of rubato indication does not suggest a restriction of any tempo fluctuation. It is documented that Scriabin would seldom hold a steady tempo for “two or three beats in a row”\(^\text{13}\) in performances of his own works. The seemingly symmetrical and sequential phrase structure should still convey a sense of improvisation, with the variation of tempo and nuance. In the second movement of Op. 30, the first thematic material is characterized by a sense of exhilaration, which contrasts the preceding movement. The four-measure phrases establish a juxtaposition between rhythmic and melodic elements. The first measure of the phrase is interrupted by eighth rests, which oppose the melodic long notes in the top layer of the subsequent measure. This opposition of the two-measure phrases dominates the entire first theme, and is apparent throughout the movement.


\(^{13}\) Anatole Leikin, *The Performing Style of Alexander Scriabin* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 27.


The textural difference between the two elements is enhanced through the rubato interpretation in some performances, such as in Mikhail Pletnev’s recording released by Virgin Classics, Grigory Sokolov’s recording by Russian Radio Archive as well as Emil Gilels’ live recording released by Pipeline Music. All three pianists emphasize the element of energy and direction in the ‘rhythmic’ bar while taking the liberty of prolonging the ‘melodic’ bar: the three eighth notes rising chords in the second beat of the compound meter is slightly rushed, while the quarter note of the fourth beat is somewhat stretched. This reading reflects the freedom and variety of rubato through the textural disparity; it may be intended through Scriabin’s writing. This textural opposition also plays a role in the creation of the first climax starting in measure 60, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The formal realization is particularly significant to rubato interpretation in the second movement of Op. 30. In a sonata form, Scriabin counted his measure numbers exactly: “I need to
be exact so as to make the form crystal clear.” In other words, the foundation of the interpretation should be built on the comprehension of formal analysis, and therefore, influence the decision on the alteration of timing. In Scriabin’s own recordings, he “separates phrases and sections by fermatas which further clarify the formal design…the tempo may speed up in the middle and drop down at the end (of a phrase).” The following discussion of rubato interpretation will focus on the transition into the secondary theme (measures 17 to 20), the passages leading up to the first climax and final climax from measures 60 to 73 and 136 to the end.

The transition into the secondary theme begins in measure 17; however, it is also a continuation of a series of sequences from the last two measures of the primary theme.

Example 4.8: Op. 30, Prestissimo volando, measures 13-21

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The *rattenendo* indication confirms again, Scriabin’s association of *crescendo* with heightened energy and *accelerando*: presuming the slightly faster tempo accumulated over the four bars from measure 13 to 16, the *rattenendo* indicates a preparation into the secondary theme in measure 21. The *rattenendo* marking also coincides with the highest point of the sequence, which is defined by the higher register, the use of accents in the middle voice and the arrival of *forte* in the following measure. The transition area winds down to characteristics associated with the secondary theme, such as the slower rhythm, chordal texture and the use of lower register. The tendency of the secondary theme in a sonata is inclined to be less active and interpretively slower in tempo. Figure 4.2 provides my tempo graph of Samuel Feinberg’s studio recording of 1947, Ashkenazy’s studio recording made between 1972 and 1984 and Hamelin’s studio recording of 1995. These recordings are showcased to represent the different generations: Feinberg’s interpretation is said to have been Scriabin’s personal favourite. Both Ashkenazy and Hamelin recorded all ten of Scriabin’s sonatas.
Both Feinberg and Ashkenazy interpreted the sequence starting in measure 13 with an increase of speed. In Feinberg’s interpretation, the accelerando continues through measure 15, while in Ashkenazy’s version, the tempo drops (in measure 15) to a similar range to the beginning of the sequence in measure 13. Both pianists have great contrast between the fast and the slow, however, the latter (1972-84) explores the slower tempi much more so than the previous generation (1947). In Hamelin’s recording, he has the least contrast between the fast and the slow. The tempo throughout is considerably steadier than the other two. Instead of slowing into the secondary theme, Hamelin speeds through measure 20 into the secondary theme. Hamelin’s interpretation seems to suggest a shorter phrase of two bars rather than four bars: a pattern of fast – slow alternate each measure. However, this reading creates an ambiguity in the formal structure. The phrase structure from measures 13 to 16 indicates a four-bar phrase. First, the ascending chromatic line in the top (G#-A-A#-B) and the cresc. poco a poco creates a clear trajectory. Second, the accelerando into the secondary theme blurs the boundary between sections. Another observation from this example shows the lack of awareness to the rallentando.
marking in the score in the interpretation of contemporary pianists. In Hamelin’s recording, starting from measure 16 to 18, the tempo is surprisingly steady, and he used the last bar of the transition to speed into the original tempo for the secondary theme.

As mentioned before, the contrast between the rhythmic bar and melodic bar dominates the entire movement. This persists in the making of the first climax (at m. 66).

The pacing of this passage is governed by the alternation between the rhythmic and the melodic elements. Measures 60 to 61 mirror the exposition (as shown in the previous Examples 4.7a through 4.7c). The next two measures are a sequential repetition a semitone higher. In the last two measures before the climax (measures 64 and 65), Scriabin combines both elements into one measure and restates it in a sequence; see the outer-voice reduction in Figure 4.3. This changing pattern increases the intensity and an element of drama in preparation of the climax. Other elements that increase the intensity in this passage include the series of ascending chromaticism in octaves of the left hand from measure 61 until the end of measure 65, which quicken the harmonic pacing; dynamically, the passage grows from piano with cresc. poco a poco until it reaches the climax of fortissimo. Combining all elements of this passage, this forms--in Patty’s terminology--a ‘surge’ type climax.

Figure 4.3: Outer-voice reduction of Op. 30, Prestissimo volando, measures 60-66
The rubato in this passage leading up to the climax (in measure 66) should reflect the acceleration of intensity. The harmonic progression is linked with the use of chromaticism in the bass. In the top layer, there is also a steady ascending motion from E-F-G-A-B♭-B⁷. The trajectory of the crescendo and the rising gesture suggests a slight *accelerando* in measure 61, 63, 64 and 65 through the chromaticism.

In terms of rubato interpretation, the question arises as to the timing between the arrival of the first climax and the measures before it. Even though the surge type climax simply shows the trajectory of the preparation of climax, rather than any implication of rubato interpretation, the style of writing indicates a certain effect and direction. As shown in the previous example, the chromatic link extends and carries into the first note of the first climactic measure from E♯ to F♯, which indicates the sense of *accelerando* continuing right into the first climax. This intensity accumulated through the passage does not dissipate until the end of the first climax, in measure 73, where Scriabin marks *decrescendo*. Ashkenazy slows down right before the climax through the octaves in measure 65 (refer back to Example 4.9), and plays the climactic passage with a slower tempo. His interpretation marks the importance of the return of the first theme from the first movement. However, this climactic theme comes back at the end of the movement with even more prominence. Therefore, the first climax, considering a bigger climax at the end of the movement, might be approached relatively strictly in timing.

Harmonically, the final climax (measure 144) lingers on the dominant pedal point throughout. The passage leading into the final climax emphasizes the key of C♯ with the repeated B♯ (measures 141 to 143), creating a dramatic cadence that almost feels like a resolution to the tonic. Structurally, the interpretive tendency is to decelerate at the end of measure 143 to give the
tonal arrival extra emphasis. Comparing the two climaxes, the final climax carries a stronger cadential polarity. Not only does the bass octave of F# move to C#, creating a quasi V-I cadence, but the sixteenth rest that separates the preparation material to the actual arrival of the climax (in measure 143) also marks and defines a greater arrival. Contrastingly, in the first climax, the arrival is approached by an ascending semitone octave in the left hand (Eb-E-E#-F#) in the key of D major (minor sixth of F#). In addition, the arpeggiated pattern in the left hand of the first climax has less impact than the repeated chords in the final climax.

The preparation of the second climax exemplifies Patty’s ‘struggle’ scenario of climax, where the distance between the two hands is expanded, the crescendo poco a poco starts from pp (measure 136) to fff (measure 144) in less than ten measures. These accelerating parameters are combined with the slowing of harmonic change, creating a sense of struggle and great effort to attain the climax.

The passage leading into the end of the work is typical of Scriabin. The preparation of climax is almost exactly the same as in Etude Op. 8 no. 12 (Example 4.11) where the drama is brought forth by the repetition of previous theme with repeated chordal accompaniment.

Example 4.11: Etude Op. 8 no. 12 measures 43-55
In the final climax of Op. 30, the dominant (C#) octave resonates throughout the climax as a pedal point. The pedal point (C#) is frequently embellished by a sixteenth-note low F# octave, but a dominant to tonic bass motion is withheld until measure 163, as can be seen in Example 4.12. It alternates between V-I and #IV-I from measures 162 to 165 with a final surge of tonic chords from measure 166 until the very end. If Scriabin had given the V-I bass line from the
beginning of the measure 144, the intensity of the last sweeping tonic chord would not reach the same level of excitement.

Summary

Scriabin’s radical manner of rubato playing is evident in the piano rolls recorded in the early 1900s. The spontaneity and flexibility of timing is hardly translatable onto the score; therefore all the performance indications become even more significant in gaining an insight into the interpretative nuances of Scriabin’s rubato. The *Andante* of Op. 30 provides a perfect example of the composer’s unique way of incorporating rubato into the score: the rise and fall of the melody associated with slight accelerando or ritenuto, and the textural complexity together with the meticulously detailed markings reflecting a variety of touches and flexibility of rubato. In the *Prestissimo volando*, the interpretation of rubato is based on the formal analysis, which exposes Scriabin’s use of *decrescendo* and restraint in speed in marking of the structural breaks between the formal sections. The rubato is also interpreted through the use of contrast in Scriabin’s writing, where the rhythmic bar is juxtaposed by the melodic measure. In comparing recordings of the pianists of different generations, it is evident that in the early twentieth century pianists tended to employ rather drastic changes of tempo, while the majority of pianists in the present time focus on maintaining a steadier speed throughout.

The two climaxes in the Sonata Op. 30 represent a unification of the two movements into a cyclic idea. The rubato in the preparation of the climax is defined by the harmonic and formal element. The first ‘surge’ type climax delivered through a series of ascending chromatics creates a sense of drive and direction into the first climax, whereas the final ‘struggle’ type climax has a strong element of cadential purpose.
The improvisatory character brought forth by the rubato which Scriabin indicated, as well as the written-in rubato realized from score analysis, is in conjunction with the climaxes driven by cadential function. They reflect the duality of the unpublished poem, where the drifting star “lost” with “no other goal” gives the improvisatory character while the “flight of liberation” signifies a clear trajectory to ecstasy.
Chapter 5

Rubato and Climax Projection of Tenth Sonata Op. 70

Scriabin’s last Sonata, Tenth Sonata Op. 70, was completed about the same time as the Eighth and Ninth Sonatas in late summer of 1913. Scriabin then premiered it in December of the same year in Moscow’s Great Noblemen’s Hall and later performed it in a series of six concerts in southwest Russia.¹ The Tenth Sonata is also called the “Insect Sonata” or “Trill Sonata.” In Scriabin’s own words, “My Tenth Sonata is a sonata of insects. Insects are born from the sun…they are the sun’s kisses…How unified world-understanding is when you look at things this way. In science all is dis-unified, not made into one…all is analysis, not synthesis.”² The recurring use of trills is a motivic link throughout the sonata. These trills to Scriabin were “palpitation…trembling…the vibration in the atmosphere, and a source of light.”³ Unlike the previous sonatas where one will notice all the “evil powers”⁴ and mystical forces that were identifiable in sonatas six through nine, the Tenth Sonata is perceptibly pure, with “ languorous” emotions. The tender opening of Op. 70 eventually transforms into gleaming, jubilant and ecstatic musical material, which symbolizes the “exaltation…experienced in the approach of the moment of dematerialization.”⁵ The term “dematerialization” is used by Scriabin to describe the moment of blissfulness where the spirit leaves the “physical” world, enters the “cosmic” one, and

⁵ Elizabeth Barany-Schlauch, "Alexander Scriabin's Ten Piano Sonatas: Their Philosophical Meaning and its Musical Expression" (The Ohio State University, 1985), p. 166.
unites with the “Supreme Being”. The following section of the chapter will focus on the analysis of the Tenth Sonata through an investigation of the motivic links and the transformation of thematic material. The chapter then examines the use of rubato and the interpretation of climaxes, using score analysis as well as a comparison of recordings throughout different decades.

**Analysis of Tenth Sonata**

The Tenth Sonata begins with a calm introduction, similar to the opening of the Fourth Sonata. Both openings have an improvisatory quality. In Op. 70, Scriabin marks *très doux et pur* which translates into ‘very soft and pure’; this delicate opening is marked with veiled, intense ardor eight measures later. A French description seems to coincide with each new thematic section, emphasizing the transformation of motivic gesture and implying Scriabin’s philosophical ideas. Since 1903, Scriabin employed precise and evocative terminology, using mostly Italian language. By the time of his Sixth Sonata, coinciding with the abandonment of key signature and tonality, the terminology is almost exclusively French. These indications give clues to their implied philosophical meanings. For example, in Op. 70, Scriabin introduced the term *élan*, which he associated with “‘inspiration’ of profoundly spiritual import.” The association of light with the trills is also clearly indicated by their markings: ‘luminous, vibrant’

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6 Barany-Schlauch, “Alexander Scriabin’s Ten Piano Sonatas,” p. 16.
8 Faubion Bowers, *Scriabin*, p. 49.
in measure 37, ‘more and more radiant’ in measure 148, and ‘powerful, radiant’ at the climax in measure 212.

Regardless of the philosophical meanings and symbolisms represented through each motive in Op. 70, the sonata remains highly structured and formally balanced. The Tenth Sonata is a single-movement sonata form that remains close to the classical structure. The sonata opens with an introduction and transition into the exposition with tremolos. The exposition has distinct primary and secondary themes. The development section centres on the constant transposition of themes and the overlapping of fragmented thematic materials. The recapitulation closely resembles the exposition, and the coda brings back the introductory themes, hence creating a balanced overall structure. The formal analysis is given in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Formal Analysis of Op. 70

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>P¹</th>
<th>P²</th>
<th>P¹</th>
<th>Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1~8</td>
<td>9~28</td>
<td>29~32</td>
<td>33~36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meter</td>
<td>9/16</td>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>9/16</td>
<td>9/16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exposition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Secondary Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>P¹</td>
<td>P²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>37~58</td>
<td>59~70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While each section of the sonata is distinct in its character and atmosphere, Scriabin’s meticulous use of thematic transformation is seen through the entire work. In the present section of this chapter, the motivic links within the introduction and the exposition will be surveyed first,
and then each thematic section of the movement will be analysed, still highlighting the motivic links.

The introduction of the sonata creates a sub-form of A-B-A (for uniformity of labeling, it will be referred to as I¹-I²-I¹). The two themes contrast each other greatly: in I¹, the interval of thirds appears throughout, noticeably in the melody of the right hand as well as in the bass (Gᵇ to Eᵇ, first as single notes, then in octaves). In the subsequent I² theme, chromaticism saturates all layers (with the right hand ascending chromatically, while in the left hand the middle layer descends chromatically, resulting in a voice exchange of Eᵇ to G and G to Eᵇ). The calm and openness of the sound (highest register in the right hand is juxtaposed with the lowest register in the left hand) characterize the atmosphere in I¹. The sense of suspension also differs significantly with I², where the motion accumulated through the chromatics formulates a sense of tension.

Example 5.1: Op. 70, measures 9-12, voice exchange of I² theme
Throughout this single-movement sonata, new themes are embedded with metamorphosis of previous motivic cells in different layers and textures, creating a complex sonority that is both new and familiar at the same time. The introduction of the sonata presents all the motivic ideas that will be used and transformed throughout the sonata, described by Garcia as the element of ‘mystical unity’ presented through an inversion of the mystic chord: Bᵇ, Eᵇ, Aᵇ, D, F#, C.\(^9\) It serves as the source from which all melodic, harmonic and rhythmical structure derives. These motivic ideas include the major third and minor third (measures 1 and 2), the pattern of three sixteenth notes followed by the dotted quarter note (measures 3 and 7), the winding chromatic passages in P (starting from measure 9) and the use of tremolos and trills (at the end of introduction and the beginning of exposition). The introduction is explained by Scriabin as the “sounds and moods of the forest…here there is true dissolution in nature.”\(^{10}\) These motivic ideas are shown in examples 5.2a through 5.2d.

Example 5.2a: Op. 70, measures 1-2, the use of major and minor thirds

\[\text{Moderato} \quad \text{très doux et pur}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Moderato} \\
\text{très doux et pur}
\end{array}\]

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\(^9\) The ‘Mystic Chord’ consists of C-F#-Bᵇ-E-A-D, the opening of the Tenth Sonata reveals an inversion of the sequence: Bᵇ-Eᵇ-Aᵇ-D-F#-C

Example 5.2b: Op 70, measures 3-4 and 7-8, motivic rhythmic pattern

Example 5.2c: Op. 70, measures 9-10, winding chromaticism

Example 5.2d: Op. 70, measures 33-38, tremolos/trills
Starting in the primary theme (P¹), the inner layer in the right hand creates a series of downward major thirds (the motivic idea from I¹), but interjects sixteenth rests resulting in a greater sense of anxiety and momentum (example 5.3a). Furthermore, the same recurring intervals of major and minor thirds seep into the secondary theme (S²) in the top layer of the right hand: Eᵇ-C-Eᵇ-F#-Eᵇ-G (example 5.3b).

Example 5.3a: Op. 70, measures 39-40 (P¹)

Example 5.3b: Op. 70, measures 84-87 (S²)

The second of the motivic ideas, namely the pattern of three sixteenth notes followed by a dotted quarter note in the middle layer in measure 3 (refer to example 5.2b) from I¹, becomes an important element in I², although renotated into triplet sixteenths in 3/8 time and later triplet eighths in 2/4 time. First, this figure appears in the top layer where Scriabin indicates ‘crystalline’ in measure 11, embellishing the chromatic theme of I² (example 5.4a). Eventually,
this triplet figure takes over and becomes the main thematic motive as it winds down from triplet sixteenths to triplet eighths (example 5.4a). The pulse of the group of three notes remains the same due to the different time signature\textsuperscript{11}, but the notation itself and the decreasing dynamics (Scriabin marks \textit{dim.} and \textit{pp} from measures 25 to 28) convey a sense of broadening. The third motivic idea, the chromatic element from \( \text{I}^2 \), is also transformed into the thematic material for \( \text{P}^1 \) in the top layer of the right hand (refer to example 5.5a), and appears again in the middle layer of the left hand in the secondary theme, as shown in example 5.4b.

Example 5.4a: Op. 70, measures 11-12, 19-22 and 25-28 (\( \text{P} \)), renotation of same rhythmic figure

\textsuperscript{11} The interpretation of tempo relation between the triplets in different time signatures will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.
Example 5.4b: Op. 70, measures 92-95 (S²)

The motivic link of trills begins two measures before the exposition (measures 37 to 38, see example 5.5a). However, there are traces of the trill element already surfacing as early as measure 11 where the middle layer creates an alternation between G⁸ and G♭ (refer to example 5.4a) in sixteenth notes (in 3/8 time), and later in measure 15 with the alternation between D♭ and C of the same note values. By the end of the introduction, the G⁸ and G♭ become sets of thirty-second tremolos for four measures (in 9/16 time). The interpretation of the quickened sub-pulse intensifies through the change of time signature, described by Scriabin as “vibration of the atmosphere”. This trajectory continues and finally reaches the trills in full luminosity in measures 37-38 (example 5.5a).

The trill pattern includes two short rising notes anacrusic to the main trills. This combines both the ‘light’ motive (the trills) as well as ‘fanfare’ motive (the quick rising notes), both
important elements of the Tenth Sonata. The trill figure recurs also as an upbeat in both the primary theme (example 5a) and the secondary theme (example 5.5b).

Example 5.5a: Op. 70, measures 37-48 (P¹)
Example 5.5b: Op. 70, measures 71-74 (S¹)

Now that a sense of the motivic relationships presented early in the movement is in place, it is possible to return to surveying the entire movement. The P¹ theme is characterized by a series of downward chromatics. The phrase structure outlines measure groupings of 2+2+6. It starts with two-measure units from measures 39 to 42 (refer back to example 5.5a), and the following six measures create a single unit connected through a series of tied notes over the barlines. The left-hand arpeggio patterns also change as the phrase gets longer: instead of the grouping of 4+5 sixteenth notes under one slur, starting in measure 45 (where the series of tied notes begins), it becomes four sixteenth notes under one slur. The shortening of the left-hand slur contrasts the elongated phrasing in the right hand. The second part of the primary theme (P²) is characterized by the use of trills and the three triplet sixteenths pattern that is transformed from the introduction. As described by Scriabin, “the sound becomes more and more refined. These trills represent dematerialization of sound. Everything becomes winged flight. Everything becomes delicate…One should play these trills in a very special way…winged.”

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The secondary theme \((S¹)\) marked ‘with joyous exaltation’ evokes a more expressive and yearning quality created through the initial semitone and the subsequent ‘upward reaching’ melody. The longing attribute of this theme is described by Garcia as the ‘eternal feminine’, which is Scriabin’s representation of eroticism. In comparison to the primary theme, the secondary theme exhibits a much more improvisatory rhythmic style, exhibited through the fluid arpeggiated chords between the triplets and the sixteenths. The trill motive heard as a pickup beat into the primary theme, is present here in the secondary theme. The first two trills are notated in two measures, creating a phrase structure of 6+4+4. Each of the trills lasts the length of a quarter note in 3/8 time. The secondary theme proper begins in 3/4 time. Therefore, the trills can be heard as a one-measure length of 3/4 time and contribute to a phrase structure in a symmetrical fashion of 4+4+4. The second phrase of this theme (from the second beat of measure 76 to the downbeat of measure 80) is a direct transposition of the first phrase, a minor third apart. Again, this interval weaves itself throughout the whole sonata, either as relations between sequential phrases or as a feature incorporated into the melody. By the end of the exposition, thematic ideas from \(I¹\), \(P¹\), \(P²\), \(S¹\) and \(S²\) occur simultaneously within measures 108 to 113, as shown in example 5.6.

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13 According to Garcia (p. 281), “Scriabin confirms the philosophical importance of ecstasy in copious notebook entries. The late sonatas contain numerous verbal references to erotic longing in terms such as *ardeur profonde et voilée douceur et pur* (Sixth Sonata), *céleste volupté* (Seventh Sonata), *langueur naissante, volupté douloureuse* (Ninth Sonata), *joyeuse exaltation* (Tenth Sonata), and many others.”
Example 5.6: Op. 70, measures 108-113

The development section can be divided into three parts. In part I, themes from P¹, P and P² are presented in the given order from measures 116 to 131. The following sixteen measures are an exact repetition transposed four semitones higher (a major third). Most of the dynamics, pacing and descriptive indications given by Scriabin are exactly the same as well. The comparison between the two phrases is shown in example 5.7a and 5.7b.

Example 5.7a: Op. 70, measures 124-129
After the sequential phrase ends in measure 147, the $P^2$ theme extends into stacks of trills and triplet sixteenth notes (measures 148 to 153), accompanied by Scriabin’s markings of *more and*
more radiant and molto crescendo. The return of I¹ material manifests itself as a typical climax texture of repeated sixteenth chords in quadruplets in forte (see example 5.8). Measures 154-157 mark the first climax of the sonata and the end of part I of the development section. This climax uses the end of I¹ theme (measures 7-8 of the introduction), which, interestingly, is the only transformation of the I¹ material in the whole sonata.

Example 5.8: Op. 70, measures 154-156, (first climax)

In part II of the development, the thematic materials are increasingly fragmented. From measures 158 to 171, the P¹ theme and I¹ theme are ongoing simultaneously. The primary theme is presented in the top layer of the right hand, before the end of the phrase (measures 158-159), the I¹ theme interrupts and overlaps in the top layer of the left hand. Similarly, exchange between the inner layer of the right hand and the top layer of the left hand is visible in measures 160-161. Finally, by measure 172, the I¹ theme takes over in original form for two measures, and alternates with two measures of P¹: I¹-P¹-I¹ in a total of six measures. In measure 178, the primary theme (P¹) returns in a transformed rhythmic diminution, where the triplet sixteenth note pattern becomes a duple sixteenth note and the sets of sixteenth-note arpeggiation accompaniment in the left hand becomes eighth note quintuplets, as shown in example 5.9.
Example 5.9: Comparison of P¹ theme between Exposition (measures 39-40) and Development (measures 178-179) * both share the same time signature 9/16 right hand; 3/8 left hand.

Throughout the second part of the development section, the tension slowly dissipates through the declining melodic highpoint as well as the indications of *very gentle* (measure 172), *murmuring* (measure 178), *gradually fading out* (measure 184), and *ppp* (the quietest moment of the entire piece, measures 188 to 191). The gradual decrease of volume and intensity creates a phrase overlap between part II and part III of the development section, in which, due to the continuation of the dynamics, the beginning of part III can be interpreted as the ending of part II. However, structurally, the returns of I¹ and of the subsequent modified P are reminiscent of the opening, creating almost an illusion of the recapitulation from the introduction.

The return of I¹ theme in part III of the development introduces an extra layer of motivic transformation in the left hand. In the original theme, the left hand layer produces an interval of the minor third from Gb to Eb repeated through doubling in octaves (measures 1-8). In measures
184 to 191, the left hand, instead of repeating the same interval, it initiates a rhythmic augmentation mirroring the right hand motive: Ab-F-E-C#, as seen in example 5.10.

Example 5.10: Op. 70, measures 184-189

The themes in the development section are based on both introduction and primary themes until measure 183. In part III of the development, the secondary theme comes in the form of the final climax, and is prepared especially through the appearance of the I² theme, starting in measure 192. The preparation of the climax and the climactic theme will be discussed later in this chapter. In each section of the development, the emphasis seems to occur in the end through contrast within each section. For example, in part I, the first climax appears in the last section (measures 154-157), where the transformation of the theme is based on the last five notes of I¹, which henceforth does not occur. In part II, the extremely fragmented themes between P¹ and I¹ overlap each other as mentioned before (measures 158 to 177). However, towards the end of part II (measures 178 to 184), the P¹ theme appears by itself, in contrast to the rest of the section.
In part III of the development, the final climax is based on the S¹ theme, marking its first appearance throughout the development section.

The recapitulation section of the sonata is very straightforward: the number of measures in each theme is almost identical to the exposition, with the exception of the addition of the I² theme at the end of the recapitulation, which builds up to the last climax before the coda (measures 294 to 305).

The coda of the sonata begins in measure 306 where Scriabin marks *Più vivo*. The themes are rhythmically compressed (incorporating 32\textsuperscript{nd} and 64\textsuperscript{th} notes) and disjointed by rests. The notes are transposed and the rhythm is altered, but the material is recognizable through the same intervallic sequence and the melodic shape.

Figure 5.1a: Comparison of S¹ theme in exposition and in coda

![Comparison of S¹ theme in exposition and in coda](image)

Figure 5.1b: Comparison of S² theme in exposition and in coda

![Comparison of S² theme in exposition and in coda](image)
Starting in the coda, the rate of meter changes increases, alternating between 3/16 and 2/8. In addition, Scriabin incorporates the use of dotted barlines, mainly for the ease of reading, especially the faster notes; rather than notating any note value smaller than the 64th note, the use of 3/16 keeps the notation more conventional. The dotted barlines are counted as separate measures in the analysis and discussion of the coda. The use of dotted barlines also creates a sense of phrase grouping without the use of slur (therefore, maintaining the character of trebling and fleet that is carried out by the short gesture of quick notes and interjects with rests). It takes the sense of downbeats to a lesser degree, resulting in a more flowing gesture in a seemingly scattered texture. For example, the material in measure 308 belongs with measure 309, which is notated with dotted barline and a meter change (example 5.11).

Example 5.11: Op. 70, measures 306-309

14 The bar numbers indicated in Edition Peters, Leipzig, 1972, edited by Günter Philipp also take the dotted barline as a separate measure. Some editions of the Tenth Sonata replace the dotted barlines with solid ones, but this entails a significant loss of meaning as the larger organization of the music becomes less clear.
The end of the coda brings back the introductory themes in a reversed order. The return of I² and the subsequent I¹ is taken directly from measures 17 to 31 in the introduction, albeit transposed down a minor third. The ending surprisingly creates a cadential feeling in C major, where the inner layer of the right hand moves from F-G♮-C, and a ‘plagal cadence’ in the left hand bass from F octave to C octave.

Example 5.12: Op. 70, measures 372 to end
Rubato and Climax Interpretation of the Tenth Sonata

Scriabin’s Tenth Sonata is characterized by polyrhythm, layers of different sonorities and extensive motivic links—all within the structure of sonata form. The artistic aim of the Tenth Sonata is similar to that of the Fourth Sonata: the “creation through music of the effects of light.”15 Even though atonal in design, the approach of rubato interpretation is not much different from the Fourth Sonata. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Scriabin’s music relies heavily on the interpretation rather than the musical notation alone. Scriabin’s own recordings of his compositions reveal a continuous freedom in the tempo and the type of rubato that emphasizes the formal structure of the entire work. These tendencies last throughout his entire output. As pianists abandoned the previous ‘overly intimate’ manner of performance during the 1930s, this new style of performance (perhaps led by Stravinsky, who promoted the execution of his music exactly as it was notated, insisting that no ‘interpretation’ would be required) generates a negative impact on the performance of the music of most Romantic composers, including Scriabin.16 There are two approaches to the discussion of rubato interpretation. First, one can study rubato interpretation as an improvised, genuine reaction during an active performance. Second, the investigation of rubato interpretation as analysed through the detailed reading of the score: a study of the pacing between sections, recurring motives, and the comparison of recordings based on structural understanding. In this chapter, the discussion of the rubato interpretation of the Tenth Sonata will use the latter method, but will refer to recordings as illustrations of particular interpretations. A topic of particular emphasis will be the handling of

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rubato around the climactic passages that occur in the development and the recapitulation. The other main areas of discussion will be the interpretation of the meter change in creating the rubato effect in the Introduction and the interpretive challenges in creating sudden dynamics and character changes between sections.

The improvisatory spirit that pervades this sonata is achieved through the constant changes in articulation, dynamics and registers. In the I¹ section, the phrases are symmetrical (4+4), but other features nevertheless suggest a completely different character for the second phrase (see example 5.13). The opening four measures share the same material as the subsequent four-measure phrase, but manipulation of momentum and pacing allows a different interpretation. First, the crescendo and decrescendo signs marked in measures 1 and 3 in the first phrase, are removed in the second phrase where the dynamic level stays pianissimo. As discussed in the previous chapter, the association of crescendo and decrescendo with the speeding up and slowing down respectively, is present here. Second, the subsequent phrase explores the open octaves in pp in the left hand, creating the spaciousness and a sense of suspension brought forth by the juxtaposition with the higher register in the right hand. This open atmosphere discourages a great sense of direction and momentum created in the first phrase, and is further emphasized by the poco rit. in measure 7 (of the subsequent phrase). The same treatment of these two phrases, with respect to dynamics, is evident in the next two four-measure phrases in I as well.
Example 5.13: Op. 70, measures 1-8: comparison between the first and second phrase

The P theme poses a great challenge in the rubato interpretation toward its end. The changing time signature (triple to duple) in measure 21 in the right hand, and subsequently, both hands by measure 25 (in duple), creates a timing ambiguity. Even though there is no indication of any tempo change, the progression in the left-hand melody from quintuplet eighth notes (measure 18) to quadruplet eighth notes (measure 20) to three eighth notes in measure 21 suggests a ‘written in’ *ritardando* (see example 5.14). This assumes, of course, that the length of the measure is the same throughout.
Example 5.14: Op. 70, measures 15-28

The left-hand’s chromatically undulating motive is not the only important motive in this passage. The right hand features the three quick notes followed by a long note, and if one focuses on this motive a different interpretive possibility emerges. In 3/8 meter, this motive is notated as triplet sixteenth notes, filling in one third of the measure length. If this motive maintains the same pulse in 2/4 time (♩ at measure 21), it now fills one-half of the measure length, meaning
that the total length of the measure must decrease. This reading promotes the continuity of the three-note motive in the right hand; maintaining its speed requires the left-hand chromatic passage to compromise the steadiness of its triple meter (in measure 21). Therefore, in order for the right-hand triplet to carry through in the same pulse, the quadruplet eighth notes in measure 20 will sound slower than the three eighth notes in the subsequent measure (in measure 21). In this interpretation, the actual ‘slowing down’ does not occur until toward the end of P, where the left hand adopts the right hand’s 2/4 meter and moves only in quarter notes.

The rubato interpretation that maintains a relatively consistent speed in the right-hand three-note figure is reflected in several recordings, including Vladimir Horowitz, Igor Zhukov, Vladimir Ashkenazy, and Mikhail Pletnev. Contrary to this reading, the chromatic motive in the left hand shows a dominating role in other recordings: the chromatic passages create a sense of continuity by diminishing at a steady pace. The decreasing number of notes per measure shows the following: six sixteenth notes (in measure 16), five eighth notes in a quintuplet (in measure 18), four eighth notes in a quadruplet (in measure 20), three eighth notes (in measure 21), two quarter notes (in measure 25) and finally, one half note (in measure 27). This interpretation is adopted in both Vladimir Sofronitzky and Marc-André Hamelin’s recordings.

18 Recorded in 1972 for Melodiya.
19 *Scriabin: The Piano Sonatas*, Decca Records, recorded in All Saints’ Church, Petersham, Surrey between 1972 and 1984.
21 Recorded for MK USSR (Melodiya), D 08779-80, around 1961.
The interpretive decision of measures 17 to 28 affects the choice of the overall tempo in the opening of the sonata. Of all the recordings surveyed, Zhukov and Ashkenazy have the slowest opening; a slower opening is made possible by the shortening of the measure length at measure 21. Ashkenazy maintains relatively the same speed throughout measures 9-21, the right hand triplet eighth notes in the duple meter (measures 21) sustain the similar tempo as previous measures, but in measures 22 and 24 after the triplet material, the two quarter notes in the right hand are consistently cut short, compromising with the 3/8 times in the left hand (and the slowing down of the section starts at the end of measure 26 to the end of I²). On the other hand, Zhukov increases the speed by I² (measure 9), sustains the triplet tempo by shortening the measure length (where an eighth-note pulse is equal to a quarter-note pulse in measure 21), while the left hand (in 3/8 time) moves slightly ahead in comparison to the original tempo and then slows down at measure 25 where both hands share duple meter and the ritardando sustains to the end of I² (measure 28). Thus, neither the speed of the right-hand triplet nor the measure length is precisely maintained at measure 21, although the change in the speed of the former is slight and fits the gradual deceleration. According to Scriabin’s markings, the three eighth notes in the left hand of measure 21 are marked with tenuto signs. As discussed in Chapter 3, the tenuto marks often accompany the rubato indication, where it conveys a sense of broadening, and an emphasis of importance. It seems to point towards the gradual deceleration from measures 16 to 28. The following tempo graph (Table 5.2) shows the relationship of speed of I¹, I² (measure 9), the rhythmic dissonance in measure 21 and the resolution into duple meter in measure 25.

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23 The tempo shown in measure 21 is taken based on the melodic material in the right hand in duple meter (in quarter beat).
Table 5.2: Tempo graph of Op. 70 by different pianists: Sofronizky, Horowitz, Zhukov, Ashkenazy, Hamelin and Pletnev

The tempo graph (Table 5.2) shows the pianists in chronological order (with Sofronitzky being the oldest recording of the six and Pletnev the most recent). The variations of tempo in each section within the Introduction of Op. 70 in the older recordings convey a lot more freedom in comparison to that of the more recent recordings (such as in Sofronitzky and Horowitz’s recordings, the tempo is completely different in all four measures sampled, while in Zhukov, Ashkenazy and Pletnev’s, the tempo stays for at least two different measures sampled). In both Sofronitzky’s and Horowitz's recordings, the speed peaks at I² (starting measure 9) and it decelerates by measure 21. In Zhukov's recording, the tempo drastically increases in measure 9 and sustains through measure 21 (the similar sustained treatment is seen in Ashkenazy’s and Pletnev’s recordings, although their tempo in I¹ remains relatively close to I²), and the opening bears the slowest tempo of the entire Introduction. Hamelin's recording reveals an alternative reading of the tempo relation, where the opening is strikingly fast and the connection from
measure 20 to 21 shows an interpretation that sustains the triple meter feel throughout the ‘struggle’ of different meter between the hands from measures 21 to 24. The right-hand duple meter adapts to the left hand’s triple meter (the eighth-note pulse is maintained exactly in the left hand in measure 21), hence the graph shows the drop in the tempo starting in measure 21. It reflects the ‘correctness’ in the playing as an expectation from both performers and audience of the current generation. Another observation made from the study of the surveyed recordings reveals a sense of internal response by the earlier pianists to the renotation of the triplet in duple time: the triplet remains somewhat equivalent to the beginning, but a slower tempo occurs as a reaction to the shorter measure length.

In the second part of the secondary theme (S²), the motivic links from the previous themes continue to appear in different texture and layers, including the major and minor thirds, chromatic passages and the use of trills. As mentioned before in example 5.6, by the end of the secondary theme, all the motives are present within six measures. Even though the developmental character already persists throughout the second part of the secondary theme, the formal development section does not start until measure 116. There is some ambiguity about the boundary between the end of S² and the start of the development. The different reading of the form affects the interpretation of rubato pacing within measures 114 to 116 (see example 5.15).

24 By contrast, in Sofronitzky’s recording it was difficult to set an overall tempo to any particular section, since each measure bears a different tempo. Sofronitzky tends to speed up at the end of the phrase, for example, the tempo in measure 9 is around 106 per eighth note and three measures later in measure 12 it almost doubled that speed. In the more recent recordings, such as Hamelin’s, the tempo is extremely steady within each thematic section.
Example 5.15: Op. 70, measures 112-117

Double barlines are used every time the meter signature changes, but this also corresponds to the different thematic sections. In measure 113, the time signature changes to 2/8 instead of 3/8, and this new meter stays only three measures until measure 116 where it becomes I¹ theme in 9/16. If the assumption of the double barline and thematic change is correct, then the three bars (measures 113 to 115) function as a quasi-transitional material that belongs to neither the secondary theme nor the beginning of development. However, the thematic material in the top layer of measure 113 to 114 is a transformed I¹ theme that happens throughout the S² theme, which suggests the S² theme really continues at least until measure 114. In one possible interpretation, the eighth rest on the downbeat of measure 115 marks the end of the secondary theme with a clear break emphasized by the eighth rest. The remaining material of the measure (115) functions like a pick-up beat into the return of I¹ theme for the development section in measure 116. This reading is reflected in Sofronitzky’s, Horowitz’s and Zhukov’s recordings, where the pacing is treated similarly: they decelerate into the end of measure 114 and add a fermata on the eighth rest in measure 115. These gestures suggest that the eighth rest in measure 115 abruptly ends the secondary theme, while the chromatic sixteenth triplet belongs to the next formal section. On the contrary, Hamelin’s performance places the boundary between sections in
the downbeat of measure 116. In Hamelin’s recording, the pulse is kept all the way through until
the entrance of I¹ theme in the top layer in a much slower tempo.

Throughout the exposition and the development sections, the momentum and buildup of
dynamics often increases the intensity, but it quickly dissolves by either a *decrescendo, subito*
*p/pp* or *ritenuto* (see example 5.16).

Example 5.16: Op. 70, measures 100-102 and 124-131
The momentum is denied until measure 154, which marks the first climax of the sonata. The climax is prepared in only six measures. The intensity increases through the repetition of trills as the rate of trills becomes more frequent: from quarter note trill per measure to two eighth-notes trills per measure (see example 5.17). Here, Scriabin marks ‘more and more radiant’ and ‘molto crescendo’. While the dynamics increase, the melodic highpoint of each trill gradually declines until the arrival of the climax. The parameters of lower melodic register and the higher intensity of the crescendo create a ‘struggle’ scenario in the preparation of the climax.25

Example 5.17: Op. 70, measures 148-159

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Scriabin describes the trills as the ‘light’ and the ‘winged’ insects, the accumulation of ‘radiance’ is achieved through the trills in different octaves (C#5 to high C#6 in measures 148 to 149, and G5 to G4 in measures 150 to 151), like flashes of light. While the ‘molto crescendo’ possibly suggests a slight pushing forward, as the two parameters are often correlated in Scriabin’s music, the descent in the register dictates a sense of broadening rather than rushing into the culmination of the climax. The momentum and volume is then gained in measure 157 through the crescendo, and again, quickly dissolved into p in measure 158, and poco rit. in measure 159.

The texture of the first climax is very similar to variation III of the Andante movement in the Fourth Sonata Op. 30. In the Tenth Sonata, rhythmic dissonance is created by the quadruplet sixteenth chords in the middle staff against the upper layer in triple meter. While the preparation of the climax is extremely short, the first climax is also concise: only four measures (refer back to example 5.17). The repeated chords in the left hand are an ostinato, while the right hand soars in the high register for two and a half beats (sixteenth note per beat) before plunging down to the bass below the left-hand chords. The top layer of the climax derives from the end of I¹ material. This is the only instance where this section of the I¹ theme is employed again. The four-against-three rhythm is never resolved; in addition, the abatement phase of this climax is non-existent. The crescendo in the end of the climax in measure 157 only reaches a halt with the subito piano in measure 158, which brings the thematic material from the primary theme of the exposition and initiates part II of the development. Even though the climax provides a momentary outlet for the buildup of intensity, the approach and the lack of a subsequent

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26 Refer to Chapter 4, p. 101 for example 4.5i.
abatement phase is especially concise and abrupt. This treatment to the end of climax is consistent throughout the sonata.

The boundary between the end of first climax and beginning of the next section creates an interpretive challenge (refer back to example 5.17). In the six recordings surveyed, Sofronitzky and Zhukov both decelerate while crescendo into the end of the climax at measure 157. However, Sofronitzky moves directly into the next section without the change of the dynamic, while Zhukov holds a fermata on the last G⁰ of measure 157 and pauses before the start of measure 158. Both Hamelin and Ashkenazy perform accelerando into the end of climax. Although Hamelin pauses before the entrance of the next section, Ashkenazy takes almost no time going directly into the subito p. Lastly, Horowitz and Pletnev share a similar view of the connection between the sections, where both take the last measure of the climax much slower and instead of crescendo they decrescendo in its place flowing right into the next section. In this reading, the end of the climax arrives at the downbeat of measure 157, and the rest of the measure belongs to the new section. How a pianist interprets the preparation of subito p (if one follows the indication of the composer) is extremely personal and to a great extent depends on the acoustic of a particular concert hall or a recording studio (in which case it also depends heavily on the sound engineer). For a live performance in a large, resonant hall, in order to execute a subito p, more time may be needed until the previous accumulative sound dissipates, while in a smaller hall less time is required.

The next climax (measure 212) is the focal climax of the entire work. The preparation of this climax is created by the repetition of phrases that undergo ‘foreshortening’,27, which

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compresses the unit within each phrase. The thematic material derived from I² theme consists of two four-measure phrases (measures 192 to 199). In the next statement of the same thematic material Scriabin changes the phrase marking: instead of one single phrase marking over the four-measure unit, it spans over three measures instead. The thematic material in the latter two measures of each phrase unit is changed and the length of trill also increases as it becomes more prominent (measures 202 to 203, 206 to 207). Starting from measure 208, the phrase marking is further compressed into a two-measure unit (from measures 208 to 209); finally, it becomes a one-measure unit (in measures 210 and 211). In addition, Scriabin marks crescendo poco a poco continuously from measures 194 to 199 and measures 202 to 212 to set the trajectory of this climax. Starting in measure 192, the dynamic is ppp continued from the previous section, the first crescendo poco a poco achieves a mf in measure 200, while the next indication increases the dynamic to f in the beginning of the climax (in measure 212). In addition, the last measure before the arrival of the climax produces a series of chromatically rising chords (in measure 211). The shortening of phrase unit, the continuation of crescendo, higher melodic register (with octave doubling) and the rising trajectory typify this preparation of climax as a ‘surge’ scenario.

Scriabin describes the meaning of this climactic passage:

Here there is blinding light as if the sun has come closer. Here there already is that suffocation that one experiences in the moment of ecstasy. This was already present in its embryonic form in the fourth sonata, where there is also suffocation caused by radiant, the same flight and light.\(^\text{28}\)

\(^{28}\) Barany-Schlauch, “Alexander Scriabin’s Ten Piano Sonatas,” p. 175.
Example 5.18: Op. 70, measures 192-213
The second climax continues to increase the intensity and volume until the end, rather than arriving at a highest intensity at the beginning (which is the type of climax seen in the second movement of Fourth Sonata). The loudest point in Op. 70 occurs in the last measure of the climactic passage, in \textit{fff} (see measures 221 in example 5.19). Therefore, considering that the
highpoint of the climax is delayed until the end, the first arrival in measure 212 (even though it has reached the highest melodic point from the preceding passage) suggests a continuation of the momentum. The thematic material used in this climax is based on the secondary theme projected in an exalted manner. This is where the moment of ecstasy is achieved in the sonata. The texture of alternating chords between left and right hands resembles the trill motive that has been transformed throughout the sonata. The intensity of the trill is amplified by the density of the chords: at first, the left hand consistently has two-note chords against the right-hand layer, but by the last measure, the texture thickens and becomes four-note chords alternating between the hands. Horowitz’s recording reflects this interpretation by reserving the most ‘powerful’ and ‘radiant’ moment for the very end of the climax and the intensity persists into the trills where he elongates the length of measures 222 and 223 and follows the swells of the crescendo and decrescendo markings and abruptly dissolves into the P¹ theme in p. In Sofronitzky's recording, the intensity accumulated in the climax does not carry over into the trills (in measures 222 to 223); while there is no clear break between measures 221 and 222 (he holds the pedal down through the barline), the trills anticipate the volume and the Allegro tempo of the P¹ theme. Ashkenazy, on the other hand, shows an effort of maintaining the volume from the climax over the barline into the trills measures (and crescendo through the three sets of trills) and a clear pause between measure 223 and the beginning of Allegro in measure 224.
Example 5.19: Op 70, measures 220-221

The final climax of the sonata (measures 295 to 305) starts the same way as the second climax: with the energy building up using the thematic material of I² in rising sequence through the crescendo poco a poco into ff. The passage starts off with a phrase unit of four measures. In the last four measures (measures 302 to 305), thematic material of the third measure of the unit is replaced by an added rising sequence (measure 304), and the fourth measure is replaced by a
series of chromatically altered chords rising (similar to the climax in measure 211, refer back to example 5.18). The intensification of this passage is achieved through the alteration of pattern as well as the continuous crescendo until the beginning of coda where Scriabin marks subito pp in measure 306. In all three climaxes, the energy and intensity build up toward the end but quickly deflect by an abrupt dynamic diminution. In Sofronitzky's recording, measure 305 and 211 (the rising chords) conveys the similar broadening pacing. The first beat of the coda (in measure 306) creates a sense of arrival (in both the pacing and the continuation of the same dynamic) throughout the first measure of the coda, and gradually the dynamic dissipates starting in the next measure (in measure 308). Most of the surveyed recordings show no distinction of difference in the preparation of the second and the third climax (where it reaches f and ff respectively), except for Zhukov’s and Hamelin's recordings, which show more restraint and resistance in the final climax.

Instead of remaining triumphant through the coda, the beginning of the coda section starts with pp, creating an unexpected change of sound and character as heard in the previous climaxes. The endings of Scriabin’s late sonatas usually conclude in a very calm and subtle state and often reflect on the opening theme (such as Sonatas no. 9 and 10). In the sonatas of Scriabin’s middle years the climaxes are typically pushed toward the very end of the work, and these pieces finish off in a jubilant and glorious fashion. From sonatas six through nine, Scriabin favors a more delicate ending, often in a rising accelerando patterns that are considerably quieter than the rest of the piece (see example 5.20).
Example 5.20a: Sonata No. 6, Op. 62, measures 273-286

Example 5.20b: Sonata No. 7, Op. 64, measures 335-343
Example 5.20c: Sonata No. 8, Op. 66, measures 493-499

Example 5.20d: Sonata No. 9, Op. 68, measures 205-216
While the ending of the Tenth Sonata returns to the dynamics as the opening in *pp*, it lacks the last flourish with either a rising pattern or an increase of speed before the end (as shown in example 5.20 of sonatas 6 to 9). Contrastingly, the ending of Op. 70 creates a descending three-note pattern in addition to the rhythmic augmentation, making the ending of Op. 70 particularly unique (see example 5.21). This perhaps mirrors his Theosophical adaptation: Scriabin formulated his own ‘rule’ using a particular connotation commonly known to Theosophists:

0  Nothingness –Bliss  
1  I wish. I rise out of Original Chaos, the Primordial Ooze  
2  I differentiate the undifferentiable  
3  I differentiate. I begin to define the elements of time and space, the future of the universe.  
4  I reach the summit, and from there recognize that all is one  
0  Bliss-- Nothingness\(^\text{29}\)

Example 5.21: Op. 70, measures 360 to end
Summary

The Tenth Sonata showcases the marriage between the conscientious use of thematic transformation in a structurally balanced form, and the improvisatory character that it creates throughout the work. Op. 70 represents the synthesis of Scriabin's ideology with his particular musical language. Drawing inspiration from nature, the 'insect' sonata symbolizes the 'active' and the 'passive', or the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', which is an important juxtaposition of Scriabin's musical style. Traces of motivic links that are inspired by theosophy are also present, such as the motives of 'light', 'fanfare' and 'flight' represented through the use of trills, quick rising intervals and the ascending pattern of notes. The rubato interpretation in the Tenth Sonata utilizes the transformation of motivic cells (more extensive in the Tenth than the Fourth Sonata) with rhythmic and textural alterations producing layers of distinct sonorities. The momentum of pacing is largely determined by the structure and the connection between sections. The manner of interpretation shown in recordings from the early 1960s to the late 1990s reveals an astounding difference in rubato and pacing between thematic sections. In the older recordings, pianists tend to have more flexibility in the interpretation of speed relating to phrasing, whereas the focus of the more recent recordings seems somewhat 'calculated'.

The first climax creates a 'struggle' scenario, where the sense of arrival seems to coincide with the broadening in the pacing. The use of polyrhythm in the first climax creates the rubato effect that is similar to the reprise in the first movement of Op. 30. The following two climaxes create a 'surge' scenario, where all musical parameters show acceleration and intensification. The climaxes in the Tenth Sonata create interpretive challenges due to the lack of abatement phase
after the climax. Instead of decreasing the intensity level to show a sense of relaxation through either an acceleration or deceleration in one or more musical parameters, in Op. 70, the climaxes seem to end abruptly and are often marked by a sudden dynamic change at the entrance of the new thematic section that follows. The rubato pacing between the climaxes and the following thematic sections becomes a performance issue, regarding the extent of pause in preparing the sudden dynamic change. Most pianists in the surveyed recordings reveal accurate rendition of the score, while more extreme varieties of interpretation can be heard in the earlier recordings. The liberty of 'improvising' is ingrained in the performance practice of the turn of the twentieth century which has become almost extinct in the 'classical' music world.
Chapter 6

Conclusions

This dissertation examined the performance practice of Scriabin's music in the aspects of his rubato and climax tendencies as exemplified in Sonatas Nos. 4 and 10. The piano rolls recorded by the composer himself in the early 1900s have inspired a series of investigations into the composer's performance style, including the present one. Except for the actual sound produced when the piano rolls were recorded, the duration of notes, the exact timing of pedal use and length of notes were held by the fingers are all valuable information for the study of Scriabin's performing style. The comparison between the printed score and the actual performance points toward a certain style that is typical of the early twentieth century, but more specifically, the essence of Scriabin's musical style. These discoveries expose Scriabin's tendency of linking the crescendo with accelerando, or the decrescendo with ritardando. His use of rubato highlights the harmonic color, melodic and intervallic contour: he emphasizes the rising gesture with a sense of moving forward and then taking time with the descending melodic steps. The tempo fluctuation also accentuates the formal structure, indicating the end of a section, or a start of a new one.

As Scriabin became more absorbed in theosophy, his music takes on a different plane of meanings, representing his philosophical ideals. Especially toward the later works, the imagery is as vivid as the musical conception. Many particular intervals and their meanings reflect the influence of theosophy (documented in his notebooks), such as the descending minor ninth signified the "descent of spirit into matter", whereas the alternating whole tone step up and down
implied the "breathing in and out of Brahma (which is the Hindu god of creation).\textsuperscript{1} The recurring intervals found in Sonata No.4 are the interval of minor sixth while the motivic link in Sonata No. 10 is through the recurring interval of major and minor thirds and the use of trills. However, in both sonatas, the underlying chromaticism plays an important role in both the unique duality of his harmonic progression as well as embodying the expression of 'human sorrow', in a theosophical sense.

My study of Scriabin's marking of \textit{rubato} in his entire output reveals repeated indications of rubato on two particular melodic contours: one that includes a leap up and stepwise descent and the other that does the opposite (a leap down and stepwise ascent). The manipulation of tempo is adjusted according to the different intervals and the change of direction in the melodic contour. In addition, Scriabin often indicates tenuto signs that accompany the rubato markings, as seen in the Fourth Sonata. Both rubato and tenuto markings apply to the performance style, not only fluctuating the tempo, but when marked together, they imply a "lingering" touch on the keys resulting in a desired tone color. In the study of Scriabin's piano roll recordings, a missing and important piece of information is the tone quality, the imaginative sound that was praised extensively by the critics of his time. The player pianos also lack the 'magic' and the sensation one would expect from a live performance. Regardless of the imperfection of the reproducing pianos, the rhythmic aspect of the piano rolls does provide extensive clues to Scriabin's use of rubato. One of the challenges in interpreting Scriabin's music is the sense of separation from the written music to the actual performances. Most of the criticism of Scriabin's music lies in the

symmetrical periodic structure and the repetition of musical material. However, the piano rolls reveal that Scriabin seldom played what he wrote exactly. The flexibility of timing between the repetition of the same musical material transforms the predictable sequential recurrence into an improvisatory journey.

In order to understand further the distinct rubato pacing and how it affects the overall interpretation of Scriabin's music, tempo graphs were employed in this research. They outline the rhythmic pacing separately from the rest of the parameters of the experience of music, such as dynamics, articulations and tone colors. In Chapters 4 and 5, the analyses of Sonatas Nos. 4 and 10 are conducted, where passages were compared between a variety of historical and modern recordings. Overall, the interpretation from before the 1950s exhibits a generous sense of flexibility and is in a sense more 'expressive' than the modern interpretation. The earlier recordings seem to create contrast on a much more 'note-to-note' level. The tempo relations between the sections (such as the tempo shift between the primary and secondary themes) exhibit considerably more variations in the early recordings, while in the later recordings, the alteration is kept to a minimum. In addition to the interpretation of rubato in different recordings, rubato is also studied through score analysis in the respective chapters. In Op. 30, there is only one instance of rubato indication, but Scriabin utilizes the 'written-in' rubato effect identifiable through the variations of melodic and harmonic patterns. In Op. 70, while no indication of rubato is found on the score, the continuous freedom in the tempo is expected. As is evident from Scriabin's own recordings and the critics throughout his performing life, the rubato practice

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remains highly unpredictable in his playing and in his music, the sudden changes in dynamics as well as rhythmic pacing portraying different characters between sections.

The rubato pacing often increases the tension and correlates with the build up of climaxes within a work. Climaxes are understood as the structural highpoint within a movement or within an entire work. The different scenarios of preparation of climaxes can be associated with different rubato pacing. In Scriabin's Fourth Sonata, the lack of climax in the first movement conveys the ideal of 'improvisation' and results in more rhythmic flexibility. The consistent denial of climax in the first movement creates a stronger polarity to a 'cadential-type' climax, described as 'struggle' scenario in the end of the second movement. The placement of the climax at the very end is central to the narrative trajectory of Op. 30. Overall, the function of the climaxes in the second movement implies their structural relation between the movements and as mentioned before, foreshadows the single-movement form in all the sonatas after Op. 30. In the Tenth Sonata, there are three climaxes within the work. The preparation and abatement of the climaxes are extremely brief and compact; a great amount of tension builds up within a relatively small number of measures and dissipates almost immediately. The momentum of the recurring trills also contributes to the intensity created in the passages leading up to the first climax like 'flashes of light', while in the second climax, the trill effect is carried out through the alternating chords. The last climax resembles the second climax in the preparation, but it leads to a surprise subito pp of the coda.

Although rubato was documented already in the seventeenth century and has been discussed continuously since, the study of rhythm and pacing remains highly theoretical. Applied study of rubato analysis is rarely done. This study on rubato and climax in Scriabin's Fourth and
Tenth Sonatas will hopefully inspire further studies in the emphasis of flexible rhythmic pacing in modern interpretations. In this research, the comparison of the amount of rubato used in each recording is drawn. Each performance varies in the degree of tempo deviation within sections and between sections. While the older recordings tend to have more extreme use of rubato, and are deemed more desirable in the optimal interpretations of Scriabin's music, the perception of rubato from the listeners' point of view is not a focus in this study. However, the use of rubato often affects listeners' perception of musicianship and their understanding of drama and tension within a work. A few studies have ventured into the area of psychomusicology and music cognition, studying the effect of rubato, in the context of J.S. Bach and Mozart's music. These studies identify the 'medium' use of rubato as favourable, while the extreme use or the lack of rubato are deemed 'unmusical'. This finding, however, is done within the context of Baroque and Classical music. The research of application of rubato in Scriabin's music may benefit also from the point of view of listeners rather than performers alone.

The rhythmic freedom in any performance is attributed to the performers' personal tastes. However, what influences the artistic decisions of the performers may be linked back to the public's expectations and the influence of individual pedagogues. What is deemed a good performance of Scriabin's work in the context of rubato pacing and climax in the present generation differs greatly in comparison to the beginning of the twentieth century. The modern

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3 Research of rubato in other disciplinary studies include:


pedagogy of piano playing and interpretations is influenced greatly by Walter Gieseking and Karl Leimer's books: *The Shortest Way to Pianistic Perfection* and *Rhythmics, Dynamics, Pedal and Other Problems of Piano Playing*. They were published in 1935 and 1938 respectively. The idea of strict rhythmic playing is highly promoted:

> It is a known fact that strictly rhythmical playing is exceedingly effective... The carrying out of a strict rhythm is vitally important, because the character of a composition often hinge upon it... Only then, when the pupil is capable of carrying out single parts metronomically, will I show him the free style of playing...⁴

Most pedagogues would agree with this statement. It is a logical method of obtaining the ability to play in strict time before flexibility can be employed, and according to Gieseking and Leimer, "rhythmical liberties eventually develop without any effort of feeling". However, whatever the authors intentions were, the meaning of 'rhythmical' shifts from a musical one to a mechanical one, as a result of the dependence on the use of metronomes. As a recent study of the impact of the metronome observes:

> As this history of musical time, metronomes, and musicality uncovers, the very meanings and cultural values underlying "rhythm" and "tempo" have palpably changed since the twentieth century due to a heretofore-unacknowledged paradigm shift: a metronomic turn in which the once-innate musical "beat" became both conceptually and audibly mechanized.⁵

The freedom and liberty in pacing that is crucial to Scriabin's music, as well as in most Romantic works, lose their essence. Through my detailed examination of Scriabin’s Fourth and Tenth

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⁵ Alexander Evan Bonus, "The Metronomic Performance Practice: A History of Rhythm, Metronomes, and the Mechanization of Musicality" (Diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2010), xviii.
Sonatas with reference to recordings from the early twentieth century as well as Scriabin’s scores and piano rolls, I have outlined a range of possibilities for flexible rhythmic interpretation and hope to have offered some impetus for further research in this area and for practical applications in performance.
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