

COMMENTARY

Expressive Inflection: Applying the Principles of Sergey Rachmaninoff's Performance in My Own Practice

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I. Abstract

The interpretative approach called *expressive inflection* ('intonatsiya' in Russian) is relatively unknown to the Western music tradition. However, the term was actively in use by Russian musicians and pedagogues in the early twentieth century. In this thesis, I explore Sergey Rachmaninoff's engagement with this approach demonstrated in his recordings through a practical portfolio of my own performance practice.

The purpose of this project is to consider possible applications of this method in performance today. The thesis offers a definition of expressive inflection in performance based on my own practical experience, informed by a consideration of writings of Rachmaninoff's contemporaries, recorded performances of Rachmaninoff and other pianists who practised this approach. As part of this work I also offer a brief historical background to the term expressive inflection as well as a brief overview of Rachmaninoff's pianistic career and recorded legacy.

Also in order to offer a broader picture of Rachmaninoff's performance style and present it in the context of Western tradition, a single chapter of this work has been devoted to Rachmaninoff-pianist's relationship with what may be called Romantic pianism. Here, more contemporary research on early recordings has been considered.

The portfolio of performances is accompanied by a commentary focusing on five case studies which focus on different applications of expressive inflection. For these studies I have chosen recordings of different works made by Rachmaninoff and the recordings of the same works produced by myself, as well as my own recordings of different works illustrating the ideas discussed in case studies and expanding them further. The choice of Rachmaninoff's recordings reflects my aim to incorporate various details of the approach in a comprehensive and convincing way. Within these studies, several topics have been considered: tempo fluctuation and micro-rubato as part of expressive inflection; expressive inflection as a tool in building imaginative framework of a piece; expressive inflection as a tool in structuring a work; and the ways in which interpretations evolve over time.

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I also thank my piano professor Vanessa Lata arche for helping to organise and for allowing me to curate The Rachmaninov Day at the Royal College of Music, which was an important step for me over the course of this work.

My special thanks to the RCM recording engineers for helping me with my practical portfolio, which involves recorded CDs and DVDs. Thank you RCM librarians for helping at the last stage of my project. Thanks a lot for your professionalism.

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III. Annotation Key

Arpeggiation: 

Dislocation:

- Early **E**
- Late **L**

Tempo Modification:

- Accelerando 
- Slowing 

Local stretching of Time: 

Rhythmic Alteration:

- Shorter **S**
- Longer **L**

Truncation:

- Added ***PP mf Adagio***
- Removed **X**

Added accents: 

Any remarks about more recent performances (e.g. Mikhail Pletnev's recordings, when they are compared with Sergey Rachmaninoff's ones, or my own).

Adagio

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Question

Sergey Rachmaninoff's recording legacy displayed a distinctive performance style, which I describe as expressive inflection. My project seeks to answer a single research question, namely: How might I apply expressive inflection in my own pianistic practice?

1.2. Research Method and Methodology

- To prepare a portfolio of piano performances in which I explore, through my own practice, expressive inflection in key Romantic, Classical and Baroque repertoire as well as selected works by Rachmaninoff.
- To accompany that portfolio with a commentary which includes five case studies focusing on specific impacts of Rachmaninoff's recordings on my own approach as well as my engagement with expressive inflection over the time.
- To offer a definition of expressive inflection observed primarily through Rachmaninoff's recorded performances, supplemented by writings by his contemporaries.

I will aim to extricate the broad principles of Rachmaninoff's playing and then create my own artistic vision of a piece where elements of Rachmaninoff's approach will be inserted. In order to do so I will use close listening (naked ear analysis) which will be reflected in my annotated scores.¹ However, my research

¹ For this purpose, I will use the following editions: F. Chopin. Complete Works for Piano. Ed. C. Mikuli, Vol.9: Sonatas. New York: G. Schirmer, 1895; F. Chopin. Complete Works for Piano. Ed. C. Mikuli, Vol.4: Nocturnes. New York: G. Schirmer, 1895; S. Rachmaninoff, S. Complete Works for Piano. Ed. P. Lamm and K. Igumnov. Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947.

method does not involve fixing and exactly reproducing the parameters of Rachmaninoff's recordings, but rather integrating the expressive principles that I observe in his recordings. As my focus is on artistic outcomes, rather than processes, I have not undertaken a strict autoethnographic approach. Nevertheless, I have used what might be called a 'self-reflective approach', for which reason I do not refer to a wide range of practitioners or recordings which would otherwise compromise the distinctiveness of my work. A similar qualitative approach without collecting a large data set is used, for example, by Jennifer Ronyak in her recent research 'Meeting Barthes at Fisher-Dieskau's Mill: Co-performance, Linguistic Identity, and a Lied', in which she focuses deliberately on one performance.²

Much recent scholarship has engaged with historic recordings of piano playing, for example Anna Scott and Maria Razumovskaya who also approached recorded material as part of their theses. Anna Scott employed a software-assisted approach to the recordings. In this case, the resources were used to fix the exact parameters of the recordings of a few pianists of Brahms's inner circle and then to create 'copies': to imitate the style of those recordings based on both close listening and technology-assisted analysis and then experiment with the style.³ Maria Razumovskaya, on the contrary, used a more 'traditional' approach in which she gathered metronome markings obtained by using a KORG metronome.⁴ She also offered annotated music examples. After considering the works mentioned above and the resources provided by CHARM,⁵ I decided not to use the software-assisted analysis in my work, as it is not my aim to gain an exact account of Rachmaninoff's recordings. This can also be justified by the fact that Rachmaninoff was prone to

R. Schumann. Robert Schumanns Werke, Serie 7: Für Pianoforte zu zwei Händen. Ed. Clara Schumann. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879; P. Tchaikovsky. The Seasons. Ed. L. Oesterle. New York: Schirmer, 1909; A. Schnittke, *Fünf Aphorismen*, (Hamburg: H. Sikorski, 1990).

² J. Ronyak, 'Meeting Barthes at Fischer-Dieskau's Mill Co-performance, Linguistic Identity, and a Lied', *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 34 no. 1 (2017): p.37-38.

³ A. Scott, "Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity" (Ph.D. diss., Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Faculty of the Humanities, Leiden University, 2014), p.213-248.

⁴ M. Razumovskaya, "Heinrich Neuhaus: Aesthetics and Philosophy of an Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., Royal College of Music, London, 2014).

⁵ For the reference see http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/analysing/p9_1.html (accessed 20.11.2013). CHARM, Centre for the History and Analysis of the Recorded Music, was established in 2004.

change his interpretative decisions with time, even if the concept was maintained (as will be discussed below). Therefore, if I were to capture the precise, clear picture of his recordings, it would only provide me with a one-dimensional, artificially fixed outlook of Rachmaninoff's performances. Also I am not concerned with offering a detailed map of a whole work; instead I will concentrate on particular phrases or bars to identify the general principles of expressive inflection or to give the description of certain interpretative decisions.

My own understanding of the term expressive inflection as observed in Rachmaninoff's recorded legacy is a thought-through 'pronunciation' of a musical text in performance, which is why I am exploring this research question through a performed portfolio. Expressive inflection is, in my opinion, potentially one of the most important and individual parts of a pianist's arsenal, as distinctive as the colour of a human voice. Consciously applying expressive inflection can have a transformative effect on performer's pianism, particularly on the performance of melody. It also affects many aspects of interpretation, such as rubato, articulation, touch and phrasing. Even a minute alteration in the use of expressive inflection can transform the character of an interpretation.

I aim to explore Rachmaninoff's performing style by examining the concept of expressive inflection or, in Russian, *intonatsiya* (intonation) as heard in his recordings. *Intonatsiya* (not to be confused with what is commonly known in English as 'intonation', i.e. playing or singing in tune) refers to a particular rhetorical approach which Rachmaninoff's generation of pianists frequently applied to their interpretation, as I will discuss further below. For the purposes of my thesis I will use the term 'expressive inflection' to avoid confusion in interpretation of the Russian term.⁶

Below are a number of observations that may help to explain the idea of expressive inflection as I understand it; they are based on my engagement with Rachmaninoff's recordings as well as the teaching methods of a number of Rachmaninoff's contemporaries, but are conceived as applications in my own practice:

⁶ The reader of this work is referred to Sergey Rachmaninoff's complete recordings, but for copyright reasons I could not include audio clips within this submission.

1. I attempt to treat the musical text and especially the melodic line as language and speech, with its own sentences, paragraphs, pauses, and descending and ascending levels of the voice. As in speech, there are points of greater and lesser importance in terms of the level of expression.
2. There is therefore a vocal principle behind the treatment of the melodic line. It is important to convey the difference between higher and lower notes, intervals or chords, as singers do. For example, the larger the interval, the more 'expressiveness' and tension it needs to convey.
3. There is also a harmonic principle behind the treatment of the melodic line. Phrases must be conceived in terms of tension and release. More melodically and harmonically dissonant sounds or intervals should be played more intensely, in terms of the sound volume, and vice versa.
4. Even technically demanding passages can be treated in this way in order to avoid an unpleasant 'mechanical' effect which might otherwise result.

To carry out the principles outlined above, I often apply what I call *micro-rubato*, a very minimal lengthening or shortening of notes. Though this approach does not seem to be commonly used by contemporary pianists (exceptions are discussed below), I find the tools it provides hugely effective. From the technical point of view, expressive inflection demands a highly trained ear capable of producing extremely refined gradations of sound, very flexible and sensitive wrists and fingers, and brilliant coordination. However, the applications of expressive inflection are not limited to moment-by-moment nuancing. Comprising the principles of speech and singing, expressive inflection can also be regarded as a tool through which to convey an imaginative framework of a piece. All the parameters of expressive inflection are always strongly connected with each other and with the concept of the piece, and can be seen as a unity. Finally, expressive inflection can be used to hold multi-movement large-scale works together.

1.3. Background to the Concept of 'Intonation' in Literature and Pedagogy

Vladimir Dahl's Russian dictionary (1881), defines the word *интонация*

(*intonatsiya*: intonation) as an accentuation of the voice on a word.⁷ By the second half of the twentieth century, the Russian definition of the word became much more complex. In 1981, the *Dictionary of the Russian Language* defined the word in three ways. Firstly, it was said to describe ‘tone, a manner of articulation/pronunciation, expressing the feeling of a speaker, his attitude towards the matter of his speech’. Secondly, in a linguistic context it signified ‘the rhythmic-melodic system of speech, the pattern of ascending and descending of the tone in pronouncing’. And thirdly, it referred to ‘precision of performance, clarity of a tone’.⁸ In my work I shall only focus on the first definition, the one with which musicians trained in Western Europe/the USA are arguably least familiar. Naturally, aspects of this approach are widely incorporated across current piano pedagogy, albeit not necessary under the label ‘*intonatsiya*’. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to establish the extent to which this approach is familiar in Western piano pedagogy, however, this would be an important route for future research, conducted through interviews with leading pedagogues.

It is not the subject of this thesis to explore the historical background to the emergence of expressive inflection in performance, however it is useful to have a quick overview of the leading figures whose ideas led to its genesis in this form. Alexander Serov (1820–1871), a Russian composer and a renowned music critic, was the first musician whose ideas eventually led to a more contemporary understanding of the term expressive inflection. In his writings, he attempted to formulate the connection between music and speech:

Musical poetry has at its heart a very special speech – very similar to human speech, but also quite different in many aspects. It is a specific organism with its own rules and special technique.⁹

⁷ ‘Особенно сильное ударение голосом на чем-либо’. V.I. Dahl [В.И. Даль], *Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка (Dictionary of Russian Language)*, Vol. 2, I-O (Moscow: M.O. Volf, 1881), p.45. All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

⁸ ‘Тон, манера произнесения, выражающая чувства говорящего, его отношение к предмету его речи; ритмико-мелодическая система речи, повышение и понижение тона; точность исполнения, чистота тона’. A.P. Evgenieva [А.П. Евгеньева], *Словарь русского языка (Dictionary of the Russian Language)*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Russkiy Yazyk, 1981), p.673.

⁹ ‘Музыкальная поэзия имеет своим органом речь особую, в основаниях своих весьма сходную с речью словесною, но во многом и существенно от нее отличную.

Serov came very close to the idea of a vocal nature of music. In his article '*Спонтини и его музыка*' (*Spontini and his Music*) he makes a statement about the importance of melody:

The lack of musical, melodic thought cannot prevent opera from creating the impression of coldness and tedium, regardless of the coherence of performance, the exactness of the declamation, and the brilliance and originality of the instrumentation.¹⁰

Alexander Dargomyzhsky (1813–1869) and Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881) both believed in the importance of unity of music and speech. Dargomyzhsky expressed it poetically as follows: 'I want a sound to express a word directly. I want the truth.'¹¹

Mussorgsky also stressed that it was important for music to be able to express words. In a letter to Michael Glinka's sister Lyudmila Shestakova in July 1868 he wrote:

Here is what I would like: for my characters to speak on stage as people speak in real life, and what's more, for the appearance and power of the characters' intonation, supported by the orchestra's formation of a musical outline of their speech, to achieve their aim directly. That is, my music should be an artistic reproduction of human speech in all its most subtle nuances, i.e. *the sounds of human speech*, as outward manifestations of thought and feeling, must, without exaggeration or

Там есть свои законы, свой организм, своя техника'. A.N. Serov [A.H. Серов], *Избранные статьи (Selected Articles)*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1957), p.152.

¹⁰ 'Отсутствие музыкальной, мелодической мысли не выкупается ничем, и никакой ум в отделке, никакая правда декламации, никакой блеск и новизна оркестровки не спасают оперы от холодности и скуки общего впечатления'. Ibid, p.375.

¹¹ 'Хочу, чтобы звук прямо выражал слово. Хочу правды'. A.S. Dargomyzhsky [A.C. Даргомыжский], *Избранные письма (Selected Letters)* Vol.1 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1952), p.53.

coercion, become music that is true and accurate, [that's to say] artistic, highly artistic... My music must be an imitation of human speech.¹²

The composer talks here about 'the sounds of human speech as an expression of human thought' (this correlates to an extent with the contemporary understanding of expressive inflection as a thought-through pronunciation or thought-through sound production).¹³ Finally, the critic Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906), arguably for the first time in music history, introduced the concept of expressive inflection as thought-through sound production.¹⁴

The concept of expressive inflection arguably played a substantial role in the development of pianistic performing style in the twentieth century in Russia. Though the Russian term *intonatsiya* had already been used in some works of Stasov in the nineteenth century, it was Boris Asafiev (1884–1949) who introduced the concept of *intonation* as a theory creating a strong link between musical elements, such as interval, motive, rhythm, and their content (emotional value).¹⁵ The theory also connects dynamic (linear) and fixed parameters in musical form. The concept is equally applicable to the analysis of compositional elements of music, as well as to the musical performance and the perception of the listener. It is only expressive inflection in the context of musical performance that concerns me within my thesis.

In the pedagogical writings of many musicians and teachers of that time, the term referred to the actual technical usage of expressive inflection in piano performance. This appears to have been an important part of the teaching approach of a number of influential Russian and Soviet pianists such as Elena Gnesina, Maria Yudina, Felix Blumenfeld, Konstantin Igumnov and others. They mention expressive inflection as an important tool through which to convey the

¹² A.A. Orlova, (*Mussorgsky's Works and Days: Chronicle of Life and Work*) (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1963), pp.159–160.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ V.V. Stasov [В.В. Стасов], "Искусство 19го века" ("The Art of the 19th century"), in *Избранные труды (Selected Works)*, vol.3 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1952), p.759.

¹⁵ E.M. Orlova, [Орлова, Е.М.], *Интонационная теория Асафьева как учение о специфике музыкального мышления. История. Становление. Сущность (Asafiev's Intonation Theory as a Study on Specifics of Musical Thought. History. Development. Essence)*(Moscow: Muzika, 1984), p.6, preface.

musical image of a piece performed. Heinrich Neuhaus's uncle Felix Blumenfeld (1863–1931) considered the 'vocal quality' of the piano sound to be the most important part of any pianist's arsenal. In his piano teaching, he demanded from his students an understanding of the 'tension of the intervals', so that a pianist could have 'a sensation of different melodic intervals in his fingers.'¹⁶

Konstantin Igumnov (1873–1948), who studied at the Moscow Conservatoire with Sergei Zverev, Alexander Siloti, Anton Arensky and Sergei Taneyev, the same professors who taught Rachmaninoff, argued that 'expressive inflection is the most important thing when learning a piece of music.'¹⁷ He also upheld the idea of similarities between music and speech. Referring to performance practice, Igumnov said: 'I would like music to be a "living speech" with all parts of it interchanging and corresponding with each other.'¹⁸ Igumnov believed that the meaningfulness of a performance depends on an ability to convey the inherent meaning of a piece. In his teaching approach he also considered the importance of so-called 'intonational points' or 'points of expressive inflection', 'the important points in every musical piece to which everything follows'.¹⁹ He suggested a student reveals these points not just by means of accents, but also by means of rhythmic changes, and lengthening or shortening the notes. This is the same method that I define as 'micro-rubato', which Rachmaninoff often used in his performance practice, and to which I will return below.

Elena Gnesina (1874–1967) treated melody as the basis of music, so the art of expressive inflection was one of the most important aspects of her teaching method.²⁰ She argued that even during practice a pianist should not play without

¹⁶ 'напряженность интервалов'; 'ощущение различных мелодических интервалов в пальцах.' L.A. Varenboim [Л. А Баренбойм], *О музыкально-педагогическом репертуаре // За полвека (On Musical-Pedagogical Repertoire// In Half-century)* (Leningrad: Sovetskyi Kompozitor, 1989), pp.47, 48.

¹⁷ 'Основным при изучении произведения я считаю интонацию.' A.V. Vitsinsky [А. В. Вицинский], *Процесс работы пианиста-исполнителя над музыкальным произведением (The process of Work of a Pianist-performer on a Musical Composition)* (Moscow: Klassika–XXI, 2003), p.32.

¹⁸ 'Я хочу, чтобы музыка была прежде всего живой речью... в которой все звенья находятся во взаимодействии, влияют друг на друга.' Ibid, pp.62–63.

¹⁹ 'Интонационные точки – это как бы особые точки тяготения, влекущие к себе'. A.A. Nikolaev [А.А. Николаев], *Мастера советской пианистической школы (Masters of the Soviet Piano School)* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1961), p.55.

²⁰ L.B. Bulatova [Л. Б. Булатова], *Педагогические принципы Е.Ф. Гнесиной (Pedagogical Principles of E. F. Gnesina)* (Moscow: Muzika, 1976), p.62. Elena Gnesina was one of the

‘thought-through pronunciation’²¹. In her approach, even the smallest detail of piano texture could become an extremely important clue to understanding a theme or sometimes the whole work. For example, when explaining Rachmaninoff’s way of treating the opening theme of his Third Piano Concerto (starting with an accent on D), she would talk about the role of this single note (a tonic) in the first theme and in the context of the whole piece. She would also comment on Rachmaninoff’s expressive inflection, in which some notes were made rhythmically and melodically more important and more articulated. She described this way of playing as ‘rhythmic springs’.²²

Gnesina suggested that a legato technique would be the basis of good expressive inflection. One of the most important principles in achieving a good legato was so-called ‘fluctuation of the hand weight’.²³ She also paid great attention to expressing intervals by taking extra time for larger intervals and changing the hand position.²⁴

Maria Yudina (1899–1970) thought it important to infuse not only melodic but also technically demanding passages with such expressivity. She also studied songs and romances with her students during her lessons in order to build a connection between music and song lyrics, and to inspire understanding of the importance of expressive inflection. Regarding her lessons, one of her students, Alla Maslakovets, recalled:

Basically, we were learning how to reflect the musical subtext in the most expressive way [...] We were learning to treat the piano as a singing instrument [...] Maria Veniaminovna taught us how to express every detail in long melodic lines and then how to connect separate

most influential figures in Russian musical life in the first half of the twentieth century. She studied in the Moscow Conservatoire with Vasilij Safonov (a teacher of Scriabin and Medtner), Ferruccio Busoni (briefly) and Paul (Pavel Yulievich) de Schlözer. One of the founders of the famous Gnessins’ School in Moscow, through Moscow Conservatoire circles, Elena became friends with Rachmaninoff, who dedicated his short musical ‘autograph’ – on a theme of EFG – the initials of Elena Fabianovna Gnesina.

²¹ ‘осмысленное произнесение.’ Bulatova, *op. cit.*, p.63.

²² ‘ритмические пружины.’ Bulatova, *op. cit.*, p.63.

²³ ‘переливание.’ Bulatova, *op. cit.*, p.64.

²⁴ Bulatova, *op. cit.*, p.65.

phrases into the whole form in the context of the whole piece.²⁵

Apart from these writings, a recently discovered collection of very early recordings made in Moscow shows that the ideas of expressive inflection can be identified in recordings of that time.²⁶ The recordings of Sergei Taneyev, Anton Arensky,²⁷ Elena Yesipova and Pavel Pabst show clearly that they endorsed the principles of expressive inflection. For example, in his recording of Mozart's *Fantasie in C minor K. 396*, Taneyev applies the same rhetorical devices as Rachmaninoff does in his recording of Mozart's *Sonata in A major K. 331*: rubato (albeit less obvious than in Rachmaninoff's recordings), expressing the melodic and rhythmic structure of the melody, and expressive treatment of the intervals in the melodic line.²⁸

In piano performance and practice today, there seems to be limited use of expressive inflection. The pianists Emma Lieuman and Ilinca Vartic, respectively Russian and Romanian, discuss expressive inflection in the context of piano technique.²⁹ Lieuman demonstrates some exercises aiming to help pianists to understand expressive inflection by means of which to 'hear' the 'tension' of the intervals within its strong connection with sound production and control of weight of a hand. Vartic talks about expressive inflection mostly in connection with the illusion of legato in piano performance. However, this is rare, and is not widely

²⁵ 'В основном занятия направлены были к максимально выразительному отображению подтекста в музыке [...]Мы учились владеть роялем как певучим инструментом[...]Мария Вениаминовна учила нас выразительной интонации каждого штриха в длинных мелодических линиях и затем логическому сцеплению отдельных фраз в цельную форму в рамках общего замысла.' S.V. Aksyuk, ed. [С. В. Аксюк, ред.] *Мария Вениаминовна Юдина. Статьи. Воспоминания. Материалы (Mariya Veniaminovna Yudina. Articles. Memories. Materials)* (Moscow: Muzika, 1978), p.141.

²⁶ *The Dawn of Recording: The Julius Block Cylinders* (Marston Records), 2008, 53011-2.

²⁷ Rachmaninoff studied composition with Taneyev and Arensky at the Moscow Conservatoire between 1888 and 1891.

²⁸ W. Mozart, *Fantasie in C minor K. 396*, S. Taneev (Marston Records), 1891/R 2008, CD 53011-2 (*The Dawn of Recording: The Julius Block Cylinders*), track 1 – for Taneyev; W. Mozart, *Sonata in A major K. 331*, S. Rachmaninoff (RCA Victor), 1919/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, disc 10, track 12 – for Rachmaninoff.

²⁹ Emma Lieuman, 'The Piano Well Pro School', *Piano School, Professional Piano Learning* (www.pianowell.com) (Accessed 14 January 2014); Ilinca Vartic, 'Piano Career Academy.com', *Piano Career Academy.com-Holistic Piano Coaching, Piano Lessons* (www.pianocareeracademy.com). (Accessed 14 January 2014).

reflected in the practices of modern pianists.

Also, as far as I understand it, there is a tendency today to use the term in a less 'technical' way, more as a description or characteristic of an actual artistic style of a performer. It may also correlate to the amount of expression or thought a pianist puts into his or her playing. In this context 'fullness of expressive inflection' or 'thoughtfulness of one's expressive inflection' can be found in use. In the following example, Russian musicologist Ludmila Kokoreva gives a description of Mikhail Pletnev's performance style:

The manner of (his) expressive inflection is quite diverse – from singing to speech-like. The rare depth of the expressive inflection makes the programme of Mikhail Pletnev's recital very intense.³⁰

Nevertheless, Rachmaninoff's tradition of expressive inflection seems to have influenced several pianists of the twentieth century. One of them is Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli who recorded Rachmaninoff's less well-known Concerto no. 4 op. 40. Another pianist who used this device was Rachmaninoff's friend Vladimir Horowitz, whose playing Rachmaninoff valued immensely.³¹ A more recent outstanding Russian pianist who follows Rachmaninoff's tradition is Mikhail Pletnev, who studied at the Moscow Conservatoire with Yakov Flier (a student of Konstantin Igumnov). Pletnev recorded Tchaikovsky's 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37 in 1994 for Virgin Classics (released in 2000),³² where he seems to use the same kind of micro-rubato as Rachmaninoff. There is also a live recording of Pletnev's performance of the whole cycle *Les Saisons* in which he allows even greater freedom in articulating the structure of the piece and reflecting all tonal changes.³³ This will be discussed below.

³⁰ 'Характер интонирования очень разнообразен – то напевный, но чаще – говорящий. Редкая содержательность интонирования делает чрезвычайно насыщенной программу концерта Плетнева.' L.M. Kokoreva [Л.М. Кокорева], *Михаил Плетнев (Mikhail Pletnev)* (Moscow, 2005), p.96.

³¹ S. Bertensson, *Sergei Rachmaninoff. A Lifetime in Music* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), p.371.

³² P. Tchaikovsky, *The Seasons, Six Pieces* op. 21, M. Pletnev (Virgin Classics), 1994/R 1995, CD 45042, track 17.

³³ Mikhail Pletnev, 'P. Tchaikovsky "The Seasons"' (audio recording of live concert), uploaded November 7, 2008, accessed July 14, 2014.

1.4. Rachmaninoff's Pianism

I will now explore how Rachmaninoff's expressive inflection (not just his 'melodic eloquence' and 'dramatic virtuosity'³⁴ or his 'unique rhythm'³⁵ which have been described as Rachmaninoff's most individual qualities by many prominent musicologists such as Grigory Kogan) makes his playing so individual. Today Rachmaninoff's reputation as one of the greatest composers and pianists of the twentieth century is undisputable. His pianistic career can be divided into two main periods: from his graduation from the Moscow Conservatoire in 1892 until his departure from Russia in 1917, and from 1918 to his death in 1943. During the first period Rachmaninoff gave 422 concerts in Russia and Europe. The second period started with a tour of Scandinavia and covered Rachmaninoff's most productive years in terms of concert activity. It included an impressive 1221 concerts, most given in USA and Europe.

His fellow pianists highly respected his pianistic genius. For Josef Hofmann he was 'a supreme artist'; for Vladimir Horowitz, 'surely the greatest of all pianists'; for Artur Schnabel 'the most fascinating pianist of them all since Busoni'; for Claudio Arrau 'one of the greatest pianists of all time and one of the very few truly worthy of immortality'.³⁶

When Rachmaninoff graduated in piano performance from the Moscow Conservatoire in 1891, Anton Rubinstein was a towering figure in the world of Russian and, arguably, European music. A protégé of Franz Liszt, and a founder of the Russian Musical Society and the St Petersburg Conservatoire, Rubinstein was widely considered to be the greatest pianist of his time.³⁷ As recounted by Mikhail Presman, 'He was so overwhelmingly popular that, if one said: "That is how Anton

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFLk_BBxNgQ&list=PLHmj_bvP76xFgg5Bu7LFKqh8B5HyqXqgt&index=1.

³⁴ B. Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1990), p.402.

³⁵ G.M. Kogan [Г.М. Коган], '___', in *Воспоминания о Рахманинове (Reminiscences about Rachmaninoff)*, ed. Apetyan, Z.A. [Апетян, З.А.], Vol.1 (Moscow: Muzika, 1988), p.435.

³⁶ Martyn, *op. cit.*, p.396.

³⁷ Martyn, *op. cit.*, p.367.

plays” or “That is how Anton says”, everybody would understand who he meant.’³⁸ Not long before his death Rubinstein played his famous cycle of Historical Concerts in Moscow, which Rachmaninoff was able to attend twice with other pupils of the class of Nikolay Zverev.³⁹ Rachmaninoff once told Oskar von Riesemann that: ‘[Rubinstein’s playing] gripped my whole imagination and had a marked influence on my ambition as a pianist.’⁴⁰

Presman also gave another important description of Rubinstein’s style: When he was playing, he created and created inimitably, like a genius. He often treated the same programme absolutely differently when he played it the second time, but, more astonishing still, everything came out wonderfully on both occasions.⁴¹

This comment suggests that Rubinstein was able to generate various distinct interpretations. It is very likely that this approach had a huge impact on Rachmaninoff’s pianism; he made further observations about Rubinstein’s playing:

The profound, spiritually refined musicianship which spoke from every

³⁸ ‘Популярность его была так велика, что выражения «так играет Антон» или «так сказал Антон» были совершенно естественными. Все понимали, что речь идет об А. Г. Рубинштейне.’ M.L. Presman [М. Л. Пресман], “Уголок музыкальной Москвы восьмидесятых годов” (“Moscow’s Musical Corner in the 1880s”), in *Воспоминания о Рахманинове (Reminiscences about Rachmaninoff)*, ed. Apetyan, Z.A. [Апетян, З.А.], Vol.1 (Moscow: Muzika, 1988), p.194.

³⁹ Nikolay Zverev (1832–1893) was one of the most famous and most respected piano teachers in Moscow, a pupil of Alexandre Dubuque (1812–1898) and Adolf von Henselt (1814–1889). Presman, who studied with Rachmaninoff in Zverev’s class at the same time, wrote that Zverev’s influence may not have been as significant as that of Liszt or Rubinstein, but he offered his students what they really needed at this stage. Most importantly, though, Zverev was extremely concerned with the musical education of his pupils.

⁴⁰ O. von Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff’s Recollections: Told to Oscar von Riesemann* (New York: Allen & Unwin, 1934), p.51.

⁴¹ ‘Играя, Рубинштейн творил, и творил неподражаемо, гениально. Исполнявшая им два раза одна и та же программа – в вечернем концерте и затем на другой день на утреннике – часто трактовалась совершенно различно. Но поразительнее всего было то, что в обоих случаях все получалось изумительно.’ M.L. Presman [М. Л. Пресман], “Уголок музыкальной Москвы восьмидесятых годов” (“Moscow’s Musical Corner in 1880s”), in *Воспоминания о Рахманинове (Reminiscences about Rachmaninoff)*, ed. Apetyan, Z.A. [Апетян, З.А.], Vol.1 (Moscow: Muzika, 1988), p.194.

single note and every single bar he played, and singled him out as the most original and unequalled pianist in the world [...] I remember how deeply affected I was by his rendering of the *Appassionata* [Beethoven's Sonata in F minor op. 57] or Chopin's Sonata in B-flat minor [op. 35].⁴²

Indeed, Rachmaninoff allowed himself great interpretative freedom when performing, virtually 'recomposing' some very well-known pieces (See below, for example, my commentaries on Rachmaninoff's recording of Tchaikovsky's 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37).

Rachmaninoff described his approach to interpretation in 1936 in an interview with Basil Maine in *Musical Opinion*:

Interpretation demands something of the creative instinct. If you are a composer, you have an affinity with other composers. You can make contact with their imaginations, knowing something of their problems and their ideals. You can give their works *colour*. That is the most important thing for me in my pianoforte interpretations, *colour*. So you can make music live. Without colour it is dead. The greatest interpreters of the past were composers in most instances. Paganini, so we understand, was a king of virtuosity. But he was a composer, too. Liszt and [Anton] Rubinstein; and in our time Paderewski and Kreisler. Ah! I know what you are thinking. But it doesn't matter. It makes no difference whether these are first- or fourth-rate composers. What matters is, they had the creative mind and so were able to communicate with other minds of the same order [...] The pianoforte of today [...] is a perfect instrument. True, I cannot sing on it as Kreisler sings on his violin. But I can do many other things on my piano that are beyond the power of the greatest violinists and singers. The piano is a perfect instrument.⁴³

It comes as no surprise that the two works from Rubinstein's repertoire that

⁴² Risemann, *op. cit.*, pp.51–52.

⁴³ B. Maine, 'Conversation with Rachmaninoff', *Musical Opinion*. Vol. 60 (1936), pp.14–15.

most affected Rachmaninoff became 'cornerstones of his own recital programmes':⁴⁴ Beethoven's Sonata no. 23 (*'Appassionata'*) op. 57 and Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35. In his famous recording of Chopin's work, Rachmaninoff directly follows Rubinstein's idea of playing the last movement of the sonata *attacca*, tying the Funeral March to the terrifying unison of the last movement.⁴⁵ Another of Rachmaninoff's ideas which may also have been based on Rubinstein's interpretation was the making of a gradual crescendo and diminuendo throughout the march, imitating the sound of a huge crowd of people approaching and then moving away. Rachmaninoff, however, never documented this observation.

Rachmaninoff's approach to expressive inflection was probably conditioned by his interest in singing. According to Tamara Grum-Grzhimailo, the composer would sing some of his melodies himself before playing them, in order to find the best way of playing, or to identify as closely as possible how singers might shape a melody.⁴⁶ Between 1897 and 1898, Rachmaninoff worked at the Mamontov Private Opera in Moscow, where he not only perfected his craft as a conductor, but also forged a lifelong friendship with the Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin. In 1904, he was offered a job as a conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre, which, for political reasons, he had to leave two years later. Working with professional singers in the theatre and, most of all, collaborating with Chaliapin had a huge impact on Rachmaninoff's performing style. According to Asafiev, Rachmaninoff absorbed principles of phrasing, breathing between the phrases and even thought-through pauses from Chaliapin.⁴⁷ Felix Blumenfeld also observed that 'Chaliapin instilled into Rachmaninoff the secret of spirituality of any interval'.⁴⁸

Rachmaninoff was also a great admirer of Russian folk songs. There is a very intriguing recording of a traditional song 'Белилицы, румяницы вы мои' ['Powder and Paint'] made by the Russian folk singer Nadezhda Plevitskaya with

⁴⁴ Martyn, *op. cit.*, p.368.

⁴⁵ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2 op.35*, S. Rachmaninoff (RCA Victor), 1930/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, CD 6, tracks 1-4.

⁴⁶ T.N. Grum-Grzhimailo [Т.Н. Грум-Гржимайло], 'Неотразимое обаяние пианизма Рахманинова' ('Irresistible Charm of Rachmaninoff's Pianism'), *Artsofart.com*, June 4, 2006 <http://art.sovfarfor.com/muzyka/neotrazimoe-obayanie-pianizma-rahmaninova> (Accessed 14 September 2014).

⁴⁷ V.V. Asafiev [В.В. Асафьев], 'Рахманинов' ('Rachmaninoff'), in *Избранные труды (Selected Works)*, vol.2 (Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1954), p.296.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 296.

Rachmaninoff on the piano in 1926.⁴⁹ Plevitskaya plays with the language, creating annotated accents, lengthening or shortening some syllables, almost creating a second rhythmic layer on top of the regular 4/4. There are quite a number of Rachmaninoff's recordings which show that he carries similar principles across to playing in other contexts, for example in his 1939 recording of his own Piano Concerto no. 3 op. 30, which has numerous accentuations and line shapings not evident in the score.⁵⁰ Rachmaninoff himself pointed out the obvious parallels between singing and the pianistic style of this theme: 'I wanted to "sing" the melody on the piano, as it is to be sung by singers, and to find the appropriate [...] accompaniment. That is all'.⁵¹

1.5. Rachmaninoff's Recorded Legacy

The series of developments of the sound capturing system initially introduced in the 1860s as well as an invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison (which was patented in 1878) led to the beginning of a new era in musical history - the sound recording era. Most recently, Robert Philip,⁵² Neal Peres da Costa⁵³ and Mark Katz⁵⁴ have engaged with this subject. From the perspective of today, as formulated by Philip, the recordings of that time are 'a partial representation of what the performers would have achieved in concert performance, adapted to suit the limitations of the recording machinery of the day'.⁵⁵ This means that, despite the inevitable limitations, these recordings can be considered an important historic document one can rely on. However, the limitations of the recording industry were

⁴⁹ Traditional, 'Powder and Paint', N. Plevitskaya, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1926/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, CD 7, track 18.

⁵⁰ Rachmaninoff, *Concerto no. 3 op. 30*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist), E. Ormandi, (RCA Victor), 1939/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, CD 1, tracks 4–6.

⁵¹ I.S. Yasser [И.С. Яссер], 'Мое общение с Рахманиновым' ('My Communication with Rachmaninoff'), in *Воспоминания о Рахманинове (Reminiscences about Rachmaninoff)*, ed. Z.A. Apetyan [З.А. Апетян], Vol.2 (Moscow: Muzika, 1988), p.370.

⁵² R. Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁵³ N. Peres Da Costa, *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 3–40.

⁵⁴ M. Katz, *Capturing sound: how technology has changed music* (London: University of California Press, 2010), p. 10–56.

⁵⁵ R. Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

indeed so significant, that all the performers had to adjust themselves to the limits.⁵⁶

By the beginning of the twentieth century a few means of sound recording had become available, namely: acoustic recordings, later, electric recordings and piano rolls or reproducing piano. Acoustic (pre-electrical) recordings relied on a transmission of sound vibrations via funnel to a sensitive membrane attached to a needle. The movements of a membrane then would make a sound line to a suitable medium – a cylinder (associated with the phonograph) or a flat disc (this process is associated with the gramophone, which was patented in 1888). The cylinder industry continued until as late as 1929, when it was replaced entirely by discs. Among the limitations of the acoustic recordings, there are not always satisfying quality of fixing dynamic shading, nuances and pedalling, as well as high level of noise.

Rachmaninoff made his first acoustic recording for Edison Company in 1919 on its 'Diamond Discs'.⁵⁷ A year later, however, he signed an exclusive contract with major Edison's competitor RCA Victor, for which he continued to work for 22 years.⁵⁸ Rachmaninoff continued making his new acoustic recordings until 1924. From 1925, the year when Victor made its first electrical recordings (microphone recordings), all Rachmaninoff's recordings were made electrical.

Piano rolls, in turn, represented a different system of recording, which enable one to record pitch, tempo, rhythm, dynamic level and pedalling by making perforations onto a paper roll. The roll could be then played back on a specially prepared piano. A few recording companies achieved great success and popularity by the 1920s, including Welte-Mignon, Aeolian and Ampico (American Piano Company). Despite this popularity, which was result of a considerably high level of quality in reproducing the sound, from today's perspective, the precision of recording dynamic level and pedalling is questionable. These levels were fixed as extra perforation and often edited by sound engineers. However, musicians

⁵⁶ Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

⁵⁸ A full account of Rachmaninoff as recording artist is listed in Barrie Martyn's *Rachmaninov: Composer. Pianist. Conductor* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1990), pp.453–497.

normally took part in the post-recording process.⁵⁹

Rachmaninoff made his first recording on piano rolls for Ampico in 1919. One of his pieces of choice was his famous Prelude op. 3 no. 2 in C-sharp minor, with which he had started his career as a concert pianist in 1892 for the Moscow Electrical Exhibition.⁶⁰ He went on to make another 34 recordings for Ampico.

Despite some limitations of the early recording technology mentioned above, the quality and method of recording, which were outstanding for the time, were generally approved of and highly appreciated by Rachmaninoff.⁶¹

Today most of the recordings have been remastered onto CD and the most valuable ones made for RCA Victor are represented by ten CDs. The whole collection represents a wide range of repertoire from the Baroque period (Bach, Daquin, Gluck, Handel) to twentieth-century music (albeit only Debussy).⁶² The preference in this collection is given to the composers of Romantic era. Surprisingly, the Classical period is not represented widely; there are only a few recordings of Beethoven: *32 Variationen über ein eigenes Thema* WoO80, 'Marcia alla turca' from *Die Ruinen von Athen* op. 113, and the Violin Sonata no. 3 op. 30 made in collaboration with Fritz Kreisler. There are also the first and the last movements from Mozart's Sonata no. 11 K. 331. At the same time, it is not a surprise that Rachmaninoff recorded quite a large number of pieces by figures who are now generally regarded as second-rate composers, but whose works were popular among most of the performers of Rachmaninoff's time. These include Ignacy Paderewski, Adolf von Henselt, Ernst von Dohnanyi, Leopold Godowsky, Vladimir Pakhman, Moritz Rosenthal and others. This bias towards Romantic repertoire has been represented to some extent within my own portfolio.

The largest part of the recorded output consists of Rachmaninoff's own works (more than thirty recordings including all the concertos for piano and orchestra). The second largest collection is works by Chopin, represented by Sonata no. 2 op. 35, Ballade no. 3 op. 47, Scherzo no. 3 op. 39, and a few waltzes,

⁵⁹ Da Costa, *op. cit.*, p.28–29.

⁶⁰ S. Bertensson and J. Leyda. *Sergei Rachmaninoff. A lifetime in Music* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), pp. 48–49.

⁶¹ Bertensson, *op. cit.*, p.265.

⁶² Despite the absence of the twentieth-century repertoire in Rachmaninoff's recording collection (except for Debussy), a few pieces by Ravel, Poulenc and Medtner were in Rachmaninoff's concert repertoire for years.

nocturnes and mazurkas. Out of all the pieces recorded by Rachmaninoff, the most significant and arguably most popular remain the recordings of his concertos and piano pieces, as well as Schumann's *Carnaval* op. 9 and Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35.

Rachmaninoff finished his recording career in 1942 with Liszt's transcription of Schubert's *Ständchen* D. 889 for RCA Victor.

2. Towards a Definition of Expressive Inflection

2.1. Rachmaninoff and Romantic pianism

An analysis of Rachmaninoff's recorded output shows that, stylistically, his piano playing can be seen as a bridge between two traditions: the 'old school' of Romantic pianism (Franz Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Ignacy Paderewski, Vladimir Pachman, Leopold Godowsky) and what might be understood as more 'modern' tendencies represented by Rachmaninoff's contemporaries Josef Hofmann and Benno Moiseiwitch through to the later generation of musicians represented by Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels. Kenneth Hamilton⁶³ and most recently Neil Peres Da Costa, in his book *Off the Record*, discussed the typical features of what might be understood as Romantic piano style.⁶⁴ For the purposes of my thesis I would like to offer a summary of these definitions, although a full description is not the focus of my work.

Romantic pianism is a performing tradition which was popular during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. One of the most important features of this style was a flexible and creative approach to interpretation, and a much greater freedom in the usage of certain types of pianistic devices. Most importantly, this freedom had nothing to do with artistic hedonism and it was not just a result of mere inaccuracies during the performances. It reflected a certain aesthetic of that style. The most typical features are:

1. Textual alterations

⁶³ K. Hamilton, *After the Golden Age. Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.30–32.

⁶⁴ Da Costa, *op. cit.*

2. Small scale tempo alterations and other forms of tempo flexibility

3. Dislocation (playing one hand after the other) and unnotated chord arpeggiation

Another important feature of the Romantic tradition was the fact that there was no antagonism between a performer and a composer simply because very often this was the same person; 'virtually all pianists were composers as well as performers.'⁶⁵ Taking this into account, it is easier to understand the reason for this flexibility and artistic freedom, so uncommon nowadays.

2.2. Textual Alterations

The recordings of some composers and pianists of the early recording era, as well as much written evidence from nineteenth-century musicians, suggest that the relationship between the score and the performance was quite different in comparison with most modern standards. To summarise the large range of evidence, at that time the score seemed to be understood as a general direction to a free journey in which one was supposed to respect the composer's ideas to such an extent as not to prevent a musician from being a free artist, and to create his or her own music concept of a piece. That was captured in the advice given by Anton Rubinstein to Josef Hofmann:

Just play first exactly what is written; if you have done full justice to it, and still feel like adding or changing anything, why, do so.⁶⁶

An extreme version of this attitude can be heard and seen in the recordings and editorial commentaries of Ferruccio Busoni.⁶⁷ He summarised his approach in the preface to his 1894 edition of Bach's *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, where he

⁶⁵ Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p.181.

⁶⁶ J. Hofmann, *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered* (New York: Dover, 1976), p.55.

⁶⁷ See for example a transitional section between Chopin's Prelude op. 28 no. 7 and Etude op. 10 no. 5 composed by Busoni as well as notational changes he made to the Etude. F. Busoni/ E. Petri, *Complete Original Recordings. Chopin, Bach, Beethoven, Liszt* (Pearl), 1922/R 1989, CD 9347. Alternatively - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qySy5TnXP7g>

makes the statement (in the context of Bach's style) that a broader arrangement or 'modernisation' of certain works does not violate the 'Bach style' and that the modern resources of the contemporary pianoforte should be welcomed.⁶⁸ Busoni, in fact, followed Franz Liszt in his idea of 'reinvention' or 'modernisation' of the works of great masters using the full capacity of modern instruments. Another tendency, which was quite opposite to free interpretation, was the one associated in the nineteenth century with the Leipzig Conservatoire and particularly with Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann-Wieck. This much more literal approach survived, interestingly, in the beginning of the twentieth century and can be found in Maurice Ravel's and especially Igor Stravinsky's thoughts on the idea of interpretation.⁶⁹ It is astonishing that despite the strictness in theory in terms of the way they both stood against the artistic personality of the musicians who performed their works, in their own recordings of their works both can be easily found 'guilty' of demonstrating some artistic 'freedom'.

Rachmaninoff's recordings demonstrate that, unlike the common practice of older generations of musicians who followed the Romantic tradition, he generally showed great respect towards the score, which will be discussed below. In this respect, he probably stands in the middle of these two extremes. Out of the whole range of recorded works, he made just a few small notational alterations, arguably to enhance the effect and character of the works as he understood them. These are in Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35 and Tchaikovsky's 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les saisons* op. 37. In the Finale of Chopin's Sonata, likewise in Tchaikovsky's 'Troika', Rachmaninoff puts additional figurations in the last bars of these works to increase the effect of a gradual disappearance and to mark the ending of the piece: in the Chopin, he repeats bar 74 and in Tchaikovsky bar 74 as well (Figure 1 and 2 respectively).⁷⁰

⁶⁸ J. Bach, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, ed. F. Busoni (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1894).

⁶⁹ 'I do not ask for my music to be interpreted, only to be played'. Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Maurice Ravel* (London: Dent & Sons Ltd, 1973), p.16.; 'Music should be transmitted and not interpreted, because interpretation reveals the personality of the interpreter rather than that of the author.' I. Stravinsky, *Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936; reprint ed., New York: Norton, 1962), p.75.

⁷⁰ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2 op. 35*, S. Rachmaninoff (RCA Victor), 1939/R 1992 CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 1-4; P. Tchaikovsky, 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons op. 37*, S. Rachmaninoff (RCA Victor), 1928/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 7, track 15.

Figure 1 Chopin Sonata no. 2 op. 35, movement four, bars 73–77.



Figure 2 Tchaikovsky 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37, bars 72–75.



Rachmaninoff's recording of Chopin's Nocturne op. 9 no. 2 can be regarded as a useful example, demonstrating his more modern approach in comparison with Romantic performance practices.⁷¹ Here, he follows the text directly without any alteration to the notes. Instead there are numerous tempo fluctuations, small rhythmic changes, dislocations and dynamic alterations, which will be discussed in more detail later. It is interesting to compare this recording with another one by a pianist from the Romantic tradition, namely a pupil of Karol Mikuli (who was in turn a pupil of Chopin), Raoul Koczalski (1884–1948). Koczalski here, perhaps drawing on the improvisatory structure of this nocturne, goes as far as to alter Chopin's original text, very often in bars with similar structure (bars 4, 14, 17, 24, 31, 34).⁷² (Figure 3 demonstrates an additional mordent and a chromatic scale in bar 4).

⁷¹ F. Chopin, *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2*, S. Rachmaninoff (RCA Victor), 1927/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 27.

⁷² F. Chopin, *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2*, R. Koczalski (Marston Records), 1938/R 2001, CD 53016-2, *The Complete Raoul von Koczalski*, disk 1, track 23. Alternatively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRmek8kADWA>

Figure 3 Chopin Nocturne op. 9 no. 2, bars 3–5.



2.3. Small Scale Tempo Alterations and Other Forms of Tempo Flexibility

In terms of listening, tempo modification has an enormous impact on how a performance is approached and perceived. This is probably where Rachmaninoff most clearly follows the traditions of Romantic pianism. This section will deal initially with large-scale tempo alterations before turning to more local rhythmic and agogic features. Robert Philip and, most recently, Neil Peres Da Costa (as mentioned above) dealt with this subject.⁷³ To summarise their thoughts, tempo modification was an essential part of any musical performance of the Romantic era, regardless of the differences between the artists and the schools they represented. Not only was this approach integral to performance practice, there is also substantial anecdotal evidence of the musicians – instrumentalists and composers – commenting on and explaining this method. Da Costa discusses a number of commentaries on tempo modification as an expressive device made by musicians and musicologists from Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach to Hugo Riemann.⁷⁴

Riemann's ideas are valuable in the context of my work, as his works were influential among the Russian musicians and musicologists during Rachmaninoff's time in Russia thanks to the translations of his main works.⁷⁵ In his book *Der Ausdruck in der Musik* he analyses the relationship between different expressive devices in music. When talking about micro-nuances, he suggests that 'the dynamic

⁷³ R. Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style. Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.9–43; Da Costa, *op.cit.*, pp.189–308.

⁷⁴ Da Costa, *Op. cit.*, p.263–304.

⁷⁵ A. V. Boyarkina [А. В. Бояркина], 'Переводы трудов Гуго Римана на русский язык' ('Russian Translations of Works by Hugo Riemann') in *Журнал Общества теории музыки (Journal of the Society of Music Theory)*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 2017), p.41–45.

main note of the phrase as well as certain harmonically important tones (suspension tones) have to be slightly lengthened'.⁷⁶ This agogic lengthening (or micro-rubato) is evidently a part of the performance style of Rachmaninoff's generation of musicians, and indeed Rachmaninoff himself. This type of rhythmic flexibility was a focus of many Russian pedagogues and musicians which I discussed earlier.

At the same time, we can observe a huge shift in perception and performance fashions around the beginning of World War Two, when the tendency towards maintaining the speed more consciously became more popular and rhetorical tempo alterations were perceived to be at odds with the taste of the time. Of course, all the authors mentioned above agree that modern performance trends suggest much greater control of tempo, regardless the style of the music performed, as well as a general avoidance of rhetorical rhythmic flexibility.⁷⁷ This is reflected in my Case Studies 2 and 3 where I compare Rachmaninoff to more modern recordings.

Rachmaninoff's tendency towards tempo fluctuation may seem odd or excessive from the point of view of a contemporary listener. This is especially true when it comes to his few recordings of Classical or Baroque music. (See, for instance, his recordings of *Tema con variazioni. Andante grazioso* and *Alla turca: Allegretto* (the first and the third movements) from Mozart's Piano Sonata no. 11 K. 331 and the *Sarabande* from Bach's Partita BWV 828 no. 4).⁷⁸ But such tempo modifications had a very particular function in the tradition of Romantic pianism. Da Costa suggests that 'late nineteenth-century written texts imply that tempo modification of various forms was considered an essential part of any musically satisfying performance'.⁷⁹

Da Costa's analysis shows that virtually all the early recordings of composers playing their own music, including Brahms, Debussy, Grieg and Saint-Saëns, demonstrate a considerable amount of tempo fluctuations not written in the

⁷⁶ H. Riemann, "Der Ausdruck in der Musik" ("Expression in Music", *Sammlung musikalischer vorträge*, Vol. 1, no. 50 (Leipzig, 1883), p.53.

⁷⁷ R. Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style. Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950* (Cambridge, 1992), p.36.

⁷⁸ W. Mozart, *Piano Sonata no. 11 K. 331, Tema con variazioni. Andante grazioso*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1919/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 10, tracks 12; W. Mozart, *Piano Sonata no. 11 K. 331, Alla turca: Allegretto*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1925/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings* Disc 5, track 3; J. Bach, *Sarabande from Partita no. 4 BWV 828*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1925/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 5, Track 1.

⁷⁹ Da Costa, *op. cit.*, p.288.

score. In this respect the recording of Brahms playing his Hungarian Dance no. 1 (made in 1889) is a particularly interesting case. Brahms here employs some tempo alterations to increase the character and effect of his dance by lengthening some notes and shortening or lengthening particular bars.⁸⁰

In Rachmaninoff's interpretation of his 'Humoresque' op. 10 no. 5 from *Morceaus de salon*,⁸¹ in bars 31–34 for example (see Figure 4 below), he lengthens the accentuated chords and plays the ending of the phrase in somewhat broadened manner, presumably to enhance the humorous effect.

Figure 4 Rachmaninoff 'Humoresque' op. 10 no. 5 from *Morceaus de salon*, bars 29–34.



Similarly, in Rachmaninoff's interpretation of his 'Polichinelle' op. 3 no. 4 from *Morceaux de fantasia*, some drastic unwritten tempo alterations enhance the humorous, playful side of the character of Polichinelle (namely, a large *accelerando* in bars 13–14).⁸²

⁸⁰ M. Musgrave, 'Early trends in the performance of Brahms's piano music', in *Performing Brahms. Early Evidence of Performance Style*, ed. M. Musgrave and B. Sherman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.304–308.

⁸¹ S. Rachmaninoff, 'Humoresque' op. 10 no. 5 from *Morceaus de salon*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1940/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 8, track 14.

⁸² S. Rachmaninoff, 'Polichinelle' op. 3 no. 4 from *Morceaux de fantasia*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1923/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 10, track 7.

Figure 5 Rachmaninoff 'Polichinelle' op. 3 no. 4 from *Morceaux de fantasia*, bars 9–16.



Also in the recording of the Prelude op. 3 no. 2 (which I discuss below as Case Study 1) Rachmaninoff uses tempo alteration to delineate the structure of his work.⁸³

Turning now to more local rhythmic and agogic devices, Rachmaninoff generally follows the notated rhythm with greater precision than some of the other pianists of the Romantic school do in their recordings, especially Paderewski or Leschetizky. Significant alterations can be heard, for example, in Leschetizky's recording of Chopin's Nocturne op. 27 no. 2 (1906, piano roll) in which he uses numerous dislocations and metrical rubato alterations.⁸⁴ At the same time, it has been observed that Rachmaninoff had a special relationship with rhythm.⁸⁵ Analysis of his recordings shows that Rachmaninoff's rhythm can be seen as a

⁸³ S. Rachmaninoff, *Prelude op. 3 no. 2*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1921/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 10, track 3.

⁸⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQY7ZVnKfI4>

⁸⁵ 'The rhythmic "snap", an extra accentuation of the beat, sometimes accompanied by a slight crescendo to it or by the clipping of the final note, or notes of a group preceding it, is one of his most characteristic hallmarks as a pianist'. Martyn, *op. cit.*, p.360.

special, expressive tool, which conveys extra information to the listener. Rachmaninoff's recording of his own Prelude op. 23 no. 5 is a typical example of how the pianist treats this rhythmic figure, which appears so often in his works.⁸⁶

Figure 6 Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23 no. 5, bar 1-3.



Rachmaninoff constantly accelerates this rhythmic pattern throughout the Prelude. This becomes even more obvious in the middle part of the first section of the work.

Figure 7 Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 23 no. 5, bars 17-19.



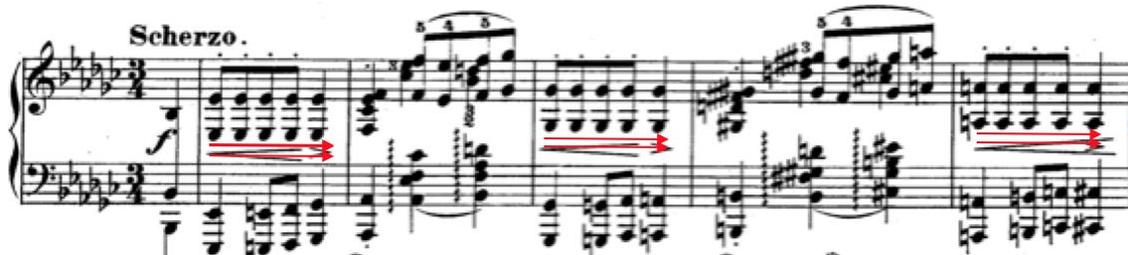
Compared to a rhythmically stricter performance of this work, for example Emil Gilels's interpretation of 1978, Rachmaninoff's compression of the rhythm brings another dimension to this music and suggests to the listener some parallels with his demonic *Symphonic Dances* op. 45, which were composed much later in 1940 and which also exploit the rhythmic figure mentioned above.⁸⁷ Interestingly, Rachmaninoff interprets the Scherzo from Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35 in a

⁸⁶ S. Rachmaninoff, *Prelude op. 23 no. 5*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1920/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 10, track 1.

⁸⁷ S. Rachmaninoff, *Prelude op. 23 no. 5*, E. Gilels (Naxos), 1937/R 2010, CD 8.112051, *Early Recordings. Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Medtner, Glazunov, Prokofiev*, vol.2., track 2. Alternatively: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXU7I_Yyi2Y.

similarly 'demonic' way. Here, the figure of four quavers is played with the same anxious rubato-accelerando and, in my view, creates the same demonic effect as in the Prelude.

Figure 8 Chopin Sonata no. 2 op. 35, movement 2, bars 1–5.



A similar idea of playing with the rhythm may be observed in Rachmaninoff's version of his 'Polichinelle' op. 3 no. 4. Unlike the Prelude, where the semiquaver rhythmic figure (see Figure 7) played the role of a mono-rhythm, in 'Polichinelle', Rachmaninoff distinguishes the rhythmic figure in bars 19 and 20 (Figure 8) from the following bars 21–23 (Figure 9) by employing a different style of rhythmic rubato.

Figure 9 Rachmaninoff 'Polichinelle' op. 3 no. 4 from *Morceaux de fantasia*, bars 17–20.



Figure 10 Rachmaninoff 'Polichinelle' op. 3 no. 4 from *Morceaux de fantasia*, bars 21–23.



In the first case he plays the whole section much faster and softer than the preceding material, presumably to create the illusion of small Russian bells ringing; whereas in the second figure he treats the semiquavers in the 'demonic' manner, similar to that of in his Prelude op. 23 no. 5.

The examples shown above demonstrate how closely micro-rubato and agogics (accents) are connected with each other. This connection becomes even more obvious when it comes to Rachmaninoff's pianistic *cantilena*. A pattern can be observed in Rachmaninoff's interpretation of slow *cantilena*-like sections of his music, summarised below:

- In most cases Rachmaninoff employs the principle of structuring the line by joining small motifs together and starting each motif with an accent even if it is not indicated in his score.⁸⁸
- Rachmaninoff's accents in *cantilena* in most cases involve lengthening of the notes.
- Rachmaninoff's scores and his recordings suggest more unusual ways of shaping the line, where weak beats are accented and lengthened at the same time.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ This very unusual way of expressing the melodic line seems to be Rachmaninoff's favourite way of articulating the structure of a piece. There are numerous examples of his approaching works in this manner: the Concerto no. 3, the main subject; the beginning of the 3rd movement, piano part; the Prelude in G-sharp minor, the beginning; the Prelude in G major; the beginning of the Concerto no. 4, piano theme; the slow variation in D-flat major piano solo from the Paganini Variations.

⁸⁹ This corresponds with Franz Liszt's suggestion: 'One should in such places give the first note of each group a little more than the exact time'. A. Walker, ed. *Living with Liszt: From*

This interesting approach, an example of a very strong fusion between rhythmic rubato (or micro-rubato) and accentuation, can be observed in Rachmaninoff's recording of his own second version of 'Mélodie' from *Morceaux de fantaisie* op. 3 no. 3.⁹⁰

Figure 11 Rachmaninoff 'Mélodie' op. 3 no. 3 from *Morceaux de fantaisie* (second version), bars 1–6.

Here the 8-bar-long melody is shaped as a chain of joint small motifs, each of which begins with an accent. In this 'chain', all strong beats are intentionally softer and longer than the weak ones. There is also an unmarked 'soft climax' on the top of the phrase g#. Interestingly, there are only a few marks in the score suggesting this method of playing (equal accents on E (weak beat) in the 1st bar and F# (strong beat) in the second bar), as well as a *diminuendo* in the second bar.

2.4. Dislocations (Playing One Hand After the Other) and Unnotated Chord Arpeggiations

the Diary of Carl Lachmund, an American Pupil of Liszt, 1882–84 (New York: Pendragon Press, 1995), p.129.

⁹⁰ S. Rachmaninoff, 'Mélodie' from *Morceaux de fantaisie* op. 3 no. 3, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1940/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 8, track 12.

Rachmaninoff generally avoids the device of dislocation between bass and melody as commonly used by pianists such as Leschetitzky or Paderewski. The above-mentioned recording by Leschetitzky of Chopin Nocturne op. 27 no. 2 is a wonderful example of an enormously excessive usage of dislocations, from the point of view of a modern listener.⁹¹ Instead, Rachmaninoff employs a subtler asynchronised playing between the chords and melody, or chord arpeggiation, which happens very often in the accompanying chord line in left hand (for example in his recording of Chopin's Nocturne op. 9 no. 2⁹² or in Chopin's Waltzes).⁹³

At the same time Rachmaninoff avoids the device, common for his time, of spreading the chords between the hands. For example, in Rachmaninoff's recording of Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35 there is only one spread chord in the development of the first movement (bar 119, Figure 15, p.45 of my work).⁹⁴ Rachmaninoff presumably intends to express here the poignancy of this harmony and generate extra tension (bar 119, Figure 15). On the other hand, in Tchaikovsky's 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37 (both above mentioned recordings will be considered below), Rachmaninoff ignores Tchaikovsky's original arpeggio in the beginning of the middle section.

To summarise the above-mentioned features, I have undertaken a brief comparative analysis of the recordings of Chopin's Nocturne op. 9 no. 2 made by three different pianists, namely Rachmaninoff (1927), Ignacy Paderewski (1930) and Maurizio Pollini (2005), presented in Table 1 below, where Paderewski represents Romantic pianism and Pollini the modern piano school.⁹⁵ The table

⁹¹ F. Chopin, *Nocturne op. 27 no.2*, Leschetitzky (Welte-Mignon Piano Roll), 1906/transfer by Denis Hall 2008, piano roll 1194, Alternatively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?.=YQY7ZVnKfI4>

⁹² F. Chopin, *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1927/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, track 27.

⁹³ F. Chopin, *Waltz op. 64 no.2*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1927/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 28; F. Chopin, *Waltz op. 64 no.3*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1927/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 29.

⁹⁴ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2 op. 35*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1930/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 1.

⁹⁵ F. Chopin, *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1927/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, track 27; F. Chopin, *Nocturnes*, Maurizio Pollini (Deutsche Grammophon), 2005/ R 2006 CD 4775718, track 3 ; F. Chopin, *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2*, I. Paderewski (Victor Company of Japan), 1930/1931, 78s ND-121(7416 A). Alternatively –<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQY7ZVnKfI4>

shows that some parameters clearly align Rachmaninoff's playing with the 'old school': the number of chord arpeggiations is approximately the same as in the recording of his older colleague Paderewski. At the same time, Rachmaninoff avoids dislocating the bass and melody; this avoidance has become characteristic of contemporary pianism, as heard in Maurizio Pollini's recording. This table also demonstrates that Rachmaninoff employs small rhythmic alterations. In this recording the alterations are represented mostly by changing rhythmic patterns of equal notes into dotted rhythms, often near an end of a phrase. This happens in bars 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8.

Table 1 Comparative analysis of performance techniques of Rachmaninoff, Paderewski and Pollini

	Rachmaninoff	Paderewski	Pollini
Dislocations(bass/melody)	0	Over each bar	1 (Bar 18)
Dislocations(chords/melody; chords arpeggiation)	Over each bar	Over each bar	0
Small-scale rhythmic alterations	Bars 1, 4, 5,7,8	Bars 1,4,5,7,8,9,13, 14,25,27	0

As is clear from the table, the number of Rachmaninoff's changes is lower than in Paderewski's recording (especially taking into account that there is a cut in the Paderewski recording between bars 16 and 23). This table is also a confirmation of my observation that Rachmaninoff's interpretative style can be seen as a bridge between Romantic and modern traditions.

2.5. Rachmaninoff's System of Notation

It is interesting that, in contrast to the enormous textural and musical complexity of his music, Rachmaninoff's style of notating the score seems rather too simple. On one hand, this offers greater potential freedom, but on the other, it creates difficulties for an interpreter of Rachmaninoff's works. Most importantly,

Rachmaninoff did not develop any special signs for zones of extra expressiveness, with which his music (and Rachmaninoff's own interpretation of it) is so full. As examples of more sophisticated attempts to reflect such zones, one might compare Liszt's very refined system of accentuation, Chopin's favourite staccato under a slur, or Brahms's "<>", a sign which he would use to mark a zone which required a special expressivity.⁹⁶ Such lack of instructions in Rachmaninoff's scores may have to do with composer's naturally modest character; more likely, he was also probably convinced that the musical score was just a 'plan' for a pianist, not a detailed prescription. The simplicity of Rachmaninoff's style of indicating the subtleties in the tone is especially evident in his early and middle period, until 1917. Later, after Rachmaninoff's move to Europe and finally to America, some significant changes to this approach can be noticed. It probably started slightly earlier, since in the score of Piano Concerto no. 4 op. 40 (the first version was composed in 1926), Rachmaninoff already developed slightly more nuanced accentuation marking. (See for example bar 87, and especially the group of bars 87–89 for the articulation in the legato chordal line).

Figure 12 Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto no. 4 op. 40 (piano part), bars 87–89.



At the same time, in some other cases and in zones with higher concentration of expressive energy, Rachmaninoff does not give any indication, as for example in the beginning of the above mentioned concerto (bar 7 onwards). Rachmaninoff's 'F' and '*pesante*' here help a lot, but it is still simply cannot describe the very sophisticated mixture of micro-rubato with his favoured strong accents in

⁹⁶ 'The sign <>, as used by Brahms, often occurs when he wishes to express great sincerity and warmth, applied not only to tone, but to rhythm also. He would linger not only on one note alone, but the whole idea.' Fanny Davies, 'Some Personal Recollections of Brahms as Pianist and Interpreter', *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, ed. Walter Cobett, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.182.

the beginning of each motif, as heard in his own recording of this work.⁹⁷

Figure 13 Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto no. 4 op. 40 (version for two piano), bars 87–89.

The image displays a musical score for Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 40, specifically bars 87-89. The score is arranged in two systems, each with two staves. The first system (bars 87-89) features Piano I (I) and Piano II (II). Piano I has a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. It begins with a fermata over a chord, followed by a series of chords marked with accents and the instruction 'pesante'. Piano II has a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a key signature of two flats. It starts with a fermata over a chord, followed by a series of triplets marked with 'sf m. d.' and 'f'. The second system (bars 90-93) continues the piece. Piano I has a treble clef and a key signature of two flats, featuring chords with accents and the instruction '(S)'. Piano II has a grand staff and a key signature of two flats, featuring triplets and the instruction 'sempre sforz.'. The score includes various performance markings such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

2.6. Rachmaninoff and Modern Pianism: Continuing the Tradition

Although some features of Rachmaninoff's playing may seem anachronistic today, a few pianists who are considered to be among the greatest musicians in the twentieth century applied Rachmaninoff's method, as already mentioned above. Below I will concentrate on some aspects of Mikhail Pletnev's artistic style. Out of all pianists mentioned in the context of Rachmaninoff's influences, Pletnev's

⁹⁷ S. Rachmaninoff, *Piano Concerto no. 4 op. 40*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1941/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 2, track 4.

pianistic style is probably the most interesting case study, as not only is he an outstanding living pianist who openly declares the huge impact of Rachmaninoff's recordings on him, but his relationship with Rachmaninoff as pianist is both interesting and complicated.⁹⁸ Pletnev never simply follows Rachmaninoff's ideas; he employs some of Rachmaninoff's typical stylistic features and makes them unique. In some cases, he even develops a few of Rachmaninoff's conceptual ideas, and creates his own unique interpretation based on Rachmaninoff.

Pletnev's performing style is also very interesting for the unusual usage of the rhetorical devices which were common among the pianists of the Romantic tradition: asynchronised playing, arpeggiation, small-scale changes (rhythmic rubato) and sometimes even large-scale changes can be identified in his studio and live recordings, for example in his live recording of Chopin's 24 Preludes op. 28 from The Great Hall of Moscow Conservatoire in 2004. Pletnev frequently offers wonderful examples of how impressive the modernisation and rehabilitation of older techniques, as well as what may be called recomposition, can be, especially if one is to compare it with a more 'neutral' performance style. I would like to demonstrate this by comparing his and Rachmaninoff's recordings of Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35 (Rachmaninoff made his recording in 1930 and Pletnev in 1997).⁹⁹ The examination of these recordings shows that, while offering a modern interpretation of the Sonata, Pletnev clearly bases it on Rachmaninoff's approach, including the usage of older devices.

Rachmaninoff's interpretation of Chopin's Sonata no. 2 op. 35 which was praised by critics of his time, may be considered one of his greatest achievements.¹⁰⁰ From my point of view, conceptually, we are dealing here to some

⁹⁸ 'I don't know a better pianist than Rachmaninoff. His music is not just a source of aesthetic pleasure to me. His music makes me stronger, it makes the things clearer. All the hustle of life suddenly disappears.' [Я не знаю пианиста, лучше, чем С.В. Рахманинов. Слушать его – для меня это не только источник эстетического удовольствия. Меня эта музыка укрепляет, она все расставляет на свои места. Вся суэта жизни куда-то отходит.] L.M. Kokoreva [Л.М. Кокорева], *Михаил Плетнев (Mikhail Pletnev)* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2005), p.68.

⁹⁹ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2 op. 35*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist) (RCA Victor), 1930/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 1–4 – for Rachmaninoff; F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2, Nocturnes, Barcarolle, Scherzo no. 2*, Mikhail Pletnev, (Virgin the Classics), 1989/R 1990, CD 5 61836 2, tracks 1–4- for Pletnev.

¹⁰⁰ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2 op. 35*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1930/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 1–4.

extent with a brilliant example of a recomposition. The general idea of this interpretation can probably be described (just as in Schumann's *Carnaval*) as enhancing the contrast between different poles: the tragic, vulnerable main theme and very broad, lyrical second one in the first movement; a 'devilish' scherzo and lyrical middle episode in the second movement; the tragic narrative of the March and extremely fragile and beautiful middle section in the *Marche funèbre*.

As in many other recordings, it is mostly Rachmaninoff's sophisticated accentuation, rhythmic springs and micro-rubato which articulate the whole drama. In the very beginning (bar 5 onwards), presumably, in order to save the dramatic energy for the culminating point in the development section, Rachmaninoff ignores Chopin's indication *agitato* or, to put it differently, he achieves the *agitato* effect by highly original means. Instead of giving his full power, he substitutes for this by minute exaggeration in accentuation of the accompaniment in left hand (extra accentuation of weak beats especially in bars 13-14) and a rhetorically accented first note in the melody (bar 5) (a characteristic device).

Figure 14 Chopin Sonata no. 2 op. 35 movement one, bars 1-14.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Here and below in this chapter, unnotations in the ovals illustrate M. Pletnev's interpretative decisions.

In the beginning of the development, Rachmaninoff uses all his rhetorical tools for a dramatic display of the 'demonic' side of the main subject. He expands further a contrast between a hammered main subject and the lyrical element, which in fact is a transformation of the opening octaves. All the section between bars 105 and 121 is interpreted freely in terms of tempo, dynamic level and articulation (see *ff* instead of Chopin's *p* in bar 105, the *crescendo*, indicated in bar 114, which Rachmaninoff makes earlier in bar 111; exaggerated accentuation of the motif in bars 105–107; 118, additional *ritenuto* in bars 119–120 and the asynchronised chord in bar 119).

Figure 15 Chopin Sonata no. 2 op. 35, movement one, bars 105–123.

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Sonata no. 2, movement one, bars 105-123. The score is annotated with red circles and arrows highlighting specific performance instructions and dynamics. Annotations include 'ritenuto' with arrows pointing left, 'mf' in a circle, 'dim' in a circle, 'sotto voce' with a circle, 'pp' in a circle, '[Adagio]' in a circle, 'FF', 'cresc.', and 'ppp' in a circle. The score shows three systems of music with treble and bass staves.

In the Scherzo, Rachmaninoff makes the most in terms of the heightening drama by compressing the rhythm, i.e. accelerating the sections of quavers (see also Figure 8 above). From bar 81 onwards, Rachmaninoff uses a sophisticated rubato (mostly lengthening the second and shortening the third beat) presumably to shape the line by that means and to avoid a repetitiveness of the structure.

Figure 16 Chopin Sonata no. 2 op. 35, movement two, bars 77–94.

The Finale, under Rachmaninoff's fingers, sounds closer to Arthur Rubinstein's description ('wind howling around the gravestones')¹⁰² than to Chopin's original 'the left hand unison with the right hand are gossiping after the March'.¹⁰³ Rachmaninoff's interpretation is full of subtle pedal effects, frightening *crescendi* and explosive accents not written in the score. To enhance the effect of disappearance of this mesmerizing image, Rachmaninoff also adds a couple of figurations before the last chord (see Figure 1).

Mikhail Pletnev's interpretation seems to be clearly based on Rachmaninoff's recording.¹⁰⁴ In the first movement the most striking similarities can be found in the way he deals with the first theme.¹⁰⁵ Pletnev also avoids the more obvious 'passionate' treatment of the theme. As in Rachmaninoff's version, his pedalling here is unusually modest and almost inaudible in the beginning, which perhaps reflects a more modern pianistic approach (See Figure 14, p.45 of my work).

¹⁰² D. Thompson, 'Courage, not madness, is the mark of genius', *Telegraph Blogs* (accessed 26 September, 2016) <http://www.webcitation.org/6Lgbv28s4>

¹⁰³ J. Huneker, *Chopin: The Man and His Music* (New York: Scribner, 1913), p.295.

¹⁰⁴ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2, Nocturnes, Barcarolle, Scherzo no. 2*, Mikhail Pletnev, (Virgin the Classics), 1989/R 1990, CD 5 61836 2, tracks 1-4.

¹⁰⁵ See also an alternative version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBE2B4n2E_Q

Furthermore, inspired by Rachmaninoff, Pletnev offers an unusual interpretation of the beginning of the development. He goes much further than Rachmaninoff in terms of tempo fluctuations and reduces the speed here completely to *Adagio*. There is also rhythmic rubato (generally speaking, Pletnev greatly lengthens the rests between the octaves in the left hand, while the octaves themselves seem to stay closer to each other) and strong accentuation. He also seems to use the sustaining middle pedal for the F# minor chord in the right hand, which is a very bold idea. The corresponding chords (bars 108–109 and further 116–117, 119–120) are played using an extremely soft touché (Figure 12).

Also just like Rachmaninoff, he plays the third and fourth movements without a break and adds the double octaves in the last two bars of the *Marche funèbre*. In the middle section of the second movement, (bars 81 onwards) Pletnev uses quite flexible micro-rubato. However, unlike Rachmaninoff, this section is full of ‘old school’ devices, such as dislocation and chords arpeggiation.

Such bold changes to Chopin’s text may seem controversial, but in Pletnev’s interpretation these bars evoke very unusual thoughts. The performer broadens one’s perceptions and leaves his listener inspired by this fresh, multidimensional Chopin, in which one might recall ‘fatal’ intonations of Tchaikovsky’s *Queen of Spades* or dramatic collisions in any of Mahler’s symphonies. Pletnev himself has a reputation as a distinguished composer and this also links him with Rachmaninoff.¹⁰⁶

This impression becomes even stronger after listening to Pletnev’s Finale of the sonata.¹⁰⁷ Just as in Rachmaninoff’s version, pedal, as well as unnotated articulation are the most important tools. Again, Pletnev goes still further than Rachmaninoff. To conclude, the ending of the Pletnev’s finale is designed in a way that is linked with Rachmaninoff’s version. Rachmaninoff repeats bar 78 twice; Pletnev adds something more intriguing. In the second last bar before the final *ff* he adds a ‘silent’ chord formed of the tones from the last unison figuration. This

¹⁰⁶ Kokoreva, *op. cit.*, pp.141-150.

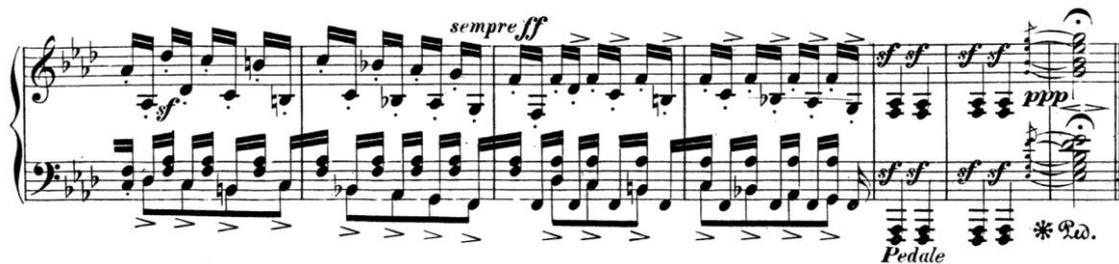
¹⁰⁷ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2, Nocturnes, Barcarolle, Scherzo no. 2*, Mikhail Pletnev, (Virgin the Classics), 1989/R 1990, CD 5 61836 2, tracks 1. Alternatively: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDI1H3nqj_w

recalls bar 36 of Schumann's 'Paganini' from *Carnaval* (Figure 17), which, in the context of Pletnev's innovative approach, sounds convincing.

Figure 17 Chopin Sonata no. 2, op. 35, movement four, bars 77–81.



Figure 18 Schumann Paganini from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 31–37.



The observations above show how a recording of a pianist from the earlier recording era could be used as inspiration for a modern interpretation. Interestingly, Pletnev's performance practice also contradicts some of Da Costa's conclusions on the suitability of Romantic era techniques in modern pianism.¹⁰⁸ Pletnev's example demonstrates that some of the devices which were indispensable to the Romantic school can still be successfully used, provided a performer possesses a refined musical taste and an authority. At the same time Pletnev's approach is clearly not the mainstream in performance practice today, where faithfulness to the score is still largely considered to be one of the noblest qualities in one's pianism.

¹⁰⁸ 'The abundance of recorded examples examined in this book reveals that many important pianists – including some revered virtuosi and pedagogues of the late Romantic era – made use of these techniques [dislocations, arpeggiations, metrical rubato, and various forms of rhythmic alterations]. But they did so in a manner that does not accord with current notion of tasteful interpretation.' Da Costa, *op. cit.*, p.309.

3. Contents of Performance Portfolio

The structure of my recording portfolio is based on Rachmaninoff's own preferences as presented in his recording collection. The emphasis is on Rachmaninoff's own music as well as core Romantic works, most of which were an essential part of Rachmaninoff's regular concert repertoire. Drawing on Rachmaninoff's collection also explains my decision to represent Classical and Baroque repertoire by only a few works. Rachmaninoff's love for lighter repertoire is also reflected in my portfolio, namely in the works by Tchaikovsky-Pletnev, Paderewski and Sibelius.

Practical Portfolio (CD and DVD Recordings):

<p>DVD1 (30 min) Rachmaninoff</p>	<p>Tracks 1-3: Preludes op. 3 no. 2, op. 32 no. 5, op. 32 no. 12 4. 'Lilacs' op. 25 no. 5 (transcription for piano) 5. <i>Polka de W.R.</i> (F.Behr-S.Rachmaninoff Lachtäubchen (Scherzpolka) 6,7. Etudes-tableaux op. 39 no. 2 and no. 5</p>	<p>RCM, 2014 St Mary Perivale, 2012 St Mary Perivale, 2012 Salle Cortot, Paris, 2015</p>
<p>DVD2 (58 min) Tchaikovsky Paderewski Sibelius Schubert-Liszt Brahms Scriabin</p>	<p>Tracks 1,2: 'Troika', (first 27 bars: version A, version B) 3. <i>Mélodie</i> op. 16 no. 2 4. 5 Pieces op. 76 from <i>13 Pieces for Piano</i>, <i>Valse-Triste</i> op. 44 Tracks 5-7: <i>Ständchen</i>, <i>Barcarolle</i>, <i>Erkönig</i> Tracks 8-10: 3 pieces from <i>Fantasien</i> op. 116 (nos. 2,3,4) Tracks 11-13: Etudes op. 8 no. 12, op. 42 no. 4, op. 42 no. 5</p>	<p>RCM, 2014 Philharmonia Concert Hall, Bydgoszcz, 2013 Paris, private concert, 2015 St Mary Perivale, 2012 Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow, 2012 Salle Cortot, Paris, 2015</p>
<p>CD3 (54 min) Schumann Schumann</p>	<p>Tracks 1-21: <i>Carnaval</i> op. 9 Tracks 22-24: <i>Fantasie</i> op. 17</p>	<p>Piano Recitals Series, Bath, 2012 Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow 2012</p>
<p>CD4 (70 min) Schumann Liszt Rachmaninoff</p>	<p>Tracks 1-8: <i>Kreisleriana</i> op. 16 9. <i>Après une lecture du Dante – Fantasia quasi sonata</i> S161/7 10. <i>Variations on a Theme of Corelli</i>, op. 42</p>	<p>Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow 2013 Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow, 2012 Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow, 2012</p>

<p>CD5 (34 min) Tchaikovsky- Pletnev</p>	<p><i>The Concert Suite 'Sleeping Beauty'</i></p>	<p>Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow 2013</p>
<p>CD6 (50 min) Rachmaninoff</p>	<p>Tracks 1-3: Sonata no. 2 (2012 version) 4. Sonata no. 2 (2016 version)</p>	<p>RCM, 2012</p>
<p>Chopin</p>	<p>Tracks 5, 6: Mazurkas: op. 67 nos. 3 and 4 (2015 version)</p>	<p>Salle Cortot, Paris, 2015</p>
<p>Chopin</p>	<p>7. Mazurkas: op. 67 nos. 3 and 4 (2016)</p>	<p>St Mary Perivale, 2016</p>
<p>DVD7 (34 min) CPE Bach</p>	<p>1. <i>Fantasia</i> Wq. 63</p>	<p>Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow, 2012</p>
<p>Schnittke Scarlatti</p>	<p>2. Aphorism no. 2 from <i>Fünf Aphorismen</i> 3. Sonatas: K. 20, K. 27, K. 24</p>	<p>RCM, 2014 University College, Tromso, 2013</p>
<p>Mozart</p>	<p>4. <i>Fantasia</i> K. 397</p>	<p>Rachmaninov Hall, Moscow 2012</p>

4. Case Studies

4.1. Case Study 1. Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 3 no. 2. Local Tempo Fluctuation (*Micro-Rubato*); Overcoming the Repetitiveness of the Structure

Expressive inflection might give an important clue in terms of understanding some peculiarities of Rachmaninoff's playing, including his unique micro-rubato and extremely flexible rhythm.¹⁰⁹ I include an annotated score of Rachmaninoff's own recording of his Prelude op. 3 no. 2 (1919).¹¹⁰ Annotations allocated inside the ovals illustrate my own interpretative decisions.

¹⁰⁹ A.A. Solovtsov [A.A. Соловцов], *C.B.Рахманинов [S.V. Rachmaninoff]* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1969), P.155.

¹¹⁰ S. Rachmaninoff, *Prelude op. 3 no. 2*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1919/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 7, track 9.

Figure 19 Rachmaninoff Prelude op. 3 no. 2, bars 1–13.

Prelude in C# Minor
Op. 3 No. 2

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873 - 1943)

M.M. ♩ = 38
M.M. ♩ = 38

M.M. ♩ = 70
M.M. ♩ = 56

M.M. ♩ = 104
M.M. ♩ = 104

Lento

ff

PPP

cresc.

mf

PPP

A number of rhetorical devices in this recording will be considered below.

1. In Rachmaninoff's hands, it is not just large intervals which receive a large stretch of time; even small intervals get that rubato stretch if they are deemed to be expressive, i.e. identified as an appoggiatura or other decoration or enhancement of the line.

2. Rachmaninoff conceives lines in terms of tension and release: bar 6 is nearly twice as fast as bar 5.
3. Shaping the melody necessitates the taking of as much time as necessary.
4. Repetition can be hastened as the material is expressively unchanged.

The score shows that in the groups of *lamento* motifs, the pianist generates tension and intensifies the *lamento* effect by lengthening the third quaver each time (bars 3, 4, 5). Where the interval is larger, Rachmaninoff holds back even more, almost putting a fermata on the top of each small motif (bars 5, 9). Hence this small motif gets its own special place and dramatic tension in the context of the whole drama of this prelude.

Compared to the second version of another piece from the same opus, 'Mélodie' op. 3 no. 3 (which will be discussed later), the texture of the Prelude is simple and relatively unvaried. This may explain why Rachmaninoff uses both drastic tempo changes as well as subtle rhythmic alterations; by the time of recording he had arguably already developed a more sophisticated style of performance than he had when the prelude was composed. Rachmaninoff appears to resist the very simplicity of his early work; by using a fluctuation of the rhythm and tempo, he overcomes its limitations and makes his artistic style more distinctive.

My Interpretation of the Prelude

Even the most superficial consideration of the Prelude shows that the opening three-note motif, a-g#-c#, plays an important role in structuring the work. In fact, it is repeated no less than eighteen times (including an inversion in bars 12, 13 and in similar bars in the recapitulation). The motif could be seen to signify obsession with an idea, possibly a symbolic idea of fate.¹¹¹ But from a pianist's point of view, this repetitiveness, along with a very slow tempo (*Lento*), might cause a lot of

¹¹¹ Rachmaninoff's 'obsession' with a similar motif, the *Dies Irae*, which appears in quite a few of his works, is well known. Yasser, in his 'My Communication with Rachmaninoff', devotes a large section of his work to the importance of this symbolic motif for the composer. Yasser, *op. cit.*, pp.356–359.

trouble. One must use the entire pianistic arsenal to find enough variation in the manner this motif is played throughout the piece, and balance between creating a bell-like, monotonous, 'magical' narrative with its octave doublings while at the same time performing this music with a good flow. When playing the Prelude, I use expressive inflection to solve this potential problem of repetitiveness of the texture.¹¹² At the start, the motif is repeated three times, followed by sequences. The sequences ascend and I show this by making a small *crescendo* within the melodic line (not changing the dynamics in chords). This is not marked by Rachmaninoff, but results logically in *mf* in bar 7. This subtle *crescendo* generates extra tension and helps to create a larger line.

But even within each motif-statement (a-g#-c#), I do not play the notes absolutely identically. In bar 3, for example, I put more emphasis upon the pitch a than on the following g#, and less on c# (bar 4), than on g#, creating a sensation of an inner swell and release. This in turn helps to overcome the repetitiveness and makes the octaves sound more unified. I do all of the above, assuming that higher intervals and tones need more tension and expression (see point 3 in my observations on page 2). Also, according to point 2 above, I slightly intensify the f-double sharp in bar 12 as definitely the strongest and most dramatic tone in the melodic line.

Similar to Rachmaninoff's approach, my reading conceives the dense accompanying line of the parallel chords in both hands in terms of tension and release, and intervallic structure. For example, in bar 5 the second chord is a fifth higher than the first one, compared to just a minor third between the similar chords in bar 3. The fifth between the chords in bar 5 will need more tension and expression than the third in bar 3; likewise, a fifth in bar 6 deserves more energy than that of bar 5. This can be approached differently. Rachmaninoff's solution here was to lengthen the second chord in each bar slightly more each time, intensifying the ascending direction of the sequence, and then compensating for this by shortening the interval between the first and second chords (bars 3–6). This shortening of the first chord may seem to be slightly out of style today. That is why, unlike Rachmaninoff and in accordance with my Point 3 of the above-mentioned

¹¹² DVD 1, track 1.

chapter, I prefer to make this fifth's stretch in bar 5 and higher in bar 6 even larger by taking extra time between these two chords. So, to summarise my ideas, in this Prelude I use expressive inflection in order to achieve what I believe to be the best possible shaping of the two main lines: the descending 'motif of fate' (parallel octaves) and groups of parallel chords. I mostly use dynamic gradations for the octaves and micro-rubato (lengthening or shortening of the notes) for the chords. By usage of these devices I believe I achieve a very strong sense of unity, variety and direction within this first section of the Prelude.

4.2. Case Study 2. Tchaikovsky 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37. Constructing an Image of a Piece

Another example to consider is Rachmaninoff's 1928 recording of Tchaikovsky's 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37b (1876).¹¹³ An earlier recording of this piece was made by him in 1920, but the differences between them are minor.

¹¹³ P. Tchaikovsky, 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1928/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, disc 7, track 15.

Figure 20 Tchaikovsky 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37, bars 1–31.¹¹⁴

November
(Troika)

M.M. ♩ = 78
M.M. ♩ = 72

[Sostenuto]

Allegro moderato.

legato

espress.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'November: Troika' from Tchaikovsky's 'Les Saisons' op. 37, covering bars 1 to 31. The score is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato.' and the performance instruction is 'legato'. The score is annotated with various markings: red circles around the tempo and metronome markings at the top; a red box labeled '[Sostenuto]' above the first system; red arrows and lines indicating phrasing and dynamics; yellow circles containing letters 'S', 'L', and 'S' in the first two systems; and red circles containing letters 'L' and 'S' in the third system. The word 'espress.' is written in the third system. The score ends at bar 31.

¹¹⁴ Annotations inside the ovals illustrate my own interpretative decisions.

15

19

22

25

28

Tchaikovsky included a short epigraph before each piece of *Les Saisons*. This was suggested by Nikolay Bernard, the editor of the St. Petersburg music magazine *Novellist*, who commissioned *Les Saisons*.¹¹⁵ For November Tchaikovsky chose ‘The Troika’, an extract from Nikolay Nekrasov’s eponymous poem:

Do not look at the road with anguish

¹¹⁵ “The Seasons”, *Tchaikovsky Research*, accessed 15 March, 2017, http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/The_Seasons

And do not hurry after the troika,
Banish sorrowful worry
Forever from your heart!¹¹⁶

However, the sadness, even fatalism of the verse contradicts the general character and the major key of the piece. In fact, most pianists overlook the importance of this epigraph, but as I see it, not Rachmaninoff. The idea of his interpretation seems to be that the actual ‘Troika drive’ starts at bar 28, rather than from the beginning, and then continues towards the end of the piece. In Rachmaninoff’s interpretation, the whole first section up to bar 28 becomes an idyllic, meaningful background to the ‘Troika drive’, perhaps a depiction of the middle-Russian steppes. To my mind, Rachmaninoff might wish to create here an image of his lost Russia that held so much value for him. (He once declared that after leaving Russia he left behind his inspiration).¹¹⁷ This nostalgic feeling is reflected well in his playing. Rachmaninoff puts all possible anguish and sorrowful worry into this seemingly ‘happy’ first section. Therefore, Rachmaninoff creates a much stronger connection between the epigraph and the opening section of ‘Novembre: Troika’.

While this reading represents just my own observations, it is interesting to consider how Rachmaninoff has achieved this effect. He does this by expressive inflection bordering on recomposition. Rachmaninoff’s interpretation of this work, with all the corrections and additional nuances, seems to me more artistically effective than stricter interpretations of this piece. First of all, Rachmaninoff ignores the indication *Allegro moderato* in the beginning, playing the piece almost

¹¹⁶ Translated by Anastasia Belina-Johnson. Here is the original Russian version:

*Не гляди же с тоской на дорогу
И за тройкой вослед не спеши,
И тоскливую в сердце тревогу
Поскорей навсегда заглуши!*

Nekrasov, Troika, 1846, etc. P. Tchaikovsky, *Complete Collected Works*, Ed. A. Drozdov, Vol.52 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1948), p.51.

¹¹⁷ ‘For seventeen years, since I lost my country, I have felt unable to compose [...] Certainly I still write music—but it does not mean the same thing to me now.’ Quoted from: Bertensson, *op. cit.*, p.216

twice as slowly as it is usually played.¹¹⁸ He also omits the staccato marks in the beginning of every bar and replaces the original accents from the middle towards the beginning of each motif (bar1 – accents on c#”, instead of e”, bar 2 – accent on g#, instead of c#”). Also, the E-major tonic chord on each third beat is played with a very subtle touch in *pp*, and a certain modesty in expressing the melodic line. Both create an idyllic or veiled atmosphere, which evokes a certain amount of sadness and nostalgia.

This becomes even more obvious in bars 7–8 when the key changes to the mediant minor. Rachmaninoff pays great attention to this modulation by articulating and holding back b’-d#”-b” in bar 7 and emphasising each appoggiatura in bar 8. This extra tension between the bright E major on the one hand and, on the other hand, the sadness and quality of restrained playing create a sense of ambivalence in Rachmaninoff’s interpretation. It becomes even more obvious in the recapitulation of the first section – the full E-major chords are given a hymn-like quality, but Rachmaninoff’s strong accentuation in the beginning of each motif suggests weeping.

Furthermore, there are two important features which can be identified in this recording in the way Rachmaninoff approaches the melodic line: the first one is micro-rubato. Robert Philip describes Rachmaninoff’s style as follows:

His rubato involves not just taking time for important phrases, but of lengthening individual notes and shortening others.¹¹⁹

Philip does not mention terms like ‘expressive inflection’ here, but he describes the phenomenon with which my research is concerned. However, he does not mention a further powerful device, namely Rachmaninoff’s unusual

¹¹⁸ P. Tchaikovsky, ‘November: Troika’ from *The Seasons*, S. Richter (BBC Legends), 1969/R 2002, CD 40822, track 6 – for Svyatoslav Richter; P. Tchaikovsky, ‘November: Troika’ from *The Seasons*, Alicia de Larrocha (Hispavox), 1962/R 1966, LP HH-278, track 6 – for Alicia de Larrocha; P. Tchaikovksy, *The Seasons* Op. 37b, I. Prunyi (Naxos), 1988/R 1989, CD 8.550233, track 11 – for Ilona Prunyi. In these recordings, the pianists play the first section of ‘Troika’ quite fast (MM= between 88 and 97, whereas Rachmaninoff’s average speed of the opening section is about MM=68.

¹¹⁹ R. Philip, ‘Pianists on Record in the Early Twentieth Century,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano*, ed. David Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.80.

accentuation. Rachmaninoff frequently starts with an accent, allowing him to build up the whole structure of a piece by joining together the short motifs in the melodic line.¹²⁰

Today such freedom of interpretation might be considered unacceptable. But only after a deep listening to this recording in conjunction with Tchaikovsky's score does it become clear how genuinely original and innovative Rachmaninoff's rendering is. My observations in the beginning of this chapter explain the logic of Rachmaninoff's freedom: drastic tempo fluctuations, intensification of the modulation into minor in bar 7, along with extra expressive accentuation of the beginnings of the chordal motives (starting from bar 18) and generally a much slower tempo than indicated in the score.

It is revealing to compare Rachmaninoff's interpretation of this piece with a much more conventional recording by another pianist, Alicia de Larrocha, made in 1963 for the Hipavox label.¹²¹ This 'correct' interpretation of 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37, in which the artist follows the composer's markings precisely, makes sense, of course. However, I would argue that Rachmaninoff's 'incorrect' interpretation is more memorable.

My Interpretation of 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37

I use Rachmaninoff's ideas of shaping the line to express its melodic and harmonic landscape; however, at the same time I aim to follow Tchaikovsky's markings as precisely as possible. Unlike Rachmaninoff, who, as I understand it, makes 'November: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37 a nostalgic symbol of old, lost Russia, I may not go so far; I just aim to create here an illusion of huge Russian spaciousness, and to capture the specific 'speaking' character of the melodic line.

¹²⁰ This unusual way of expressing the melodic line seems to be Rachmaninoff's favourite way of articulating the structure of a piece. There are numerous examples of his approaching works in this manner: the Concerto no. 3, the main subject; the beginning of the 3rd movement, piano part; the Prelude in G-sharp minor, the beginning; the Prelude in G major; the beginning of the Concerto no. 4, piano theme; the slow variation in D-flat major-piano solo from the Paganini Variations.

¹²¹ P. Tchaikovsky, 'November: Troika' from *The Seasons*, Alicia de Larrocha (Hipavox), 1962/R 1966, LP HH-278, track 6. Alternatively: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heZoX_E8c8U.

My first concern is tempo. It needs to be on the moderate side to allow a pianist to shape the melody and ‘pronounce’ the beautiful improvisatory passages, starting from bar 9. Secondly, from the technical point of view, an appropriate touch and colour for my interpretation can only be found by using the principles of expressive inflection. To express all the turns and changes in colour in this melody, I play it using extremely flexible and sensitive wrists, so that my hands can physically trace and articulate the melodic shape.¹²² Paradoxically, the wrists’ extreme flexibility and sensitivity can also help to sort out another possible problem in this piece – a slight rhythmic and melodic repetitiveness of the first section of ‘Novembre: Troika’ (compare my discussion of Rachmaninoff’s Prelude above). My idea here is that my hands will be able to create intuitively a micro-rubato, which will bring some freshness to this repetitiveness.

In the more improvisatory section (bars 9–17) I follow Maria Yudina’s suggestion to ‘express even technically demanding passages.’¹²³ Here I believe ‘pronouncing’ the passages, which are divided between both hands, will create a slightly more dreamy and improvisatory flavour than needed for the more ‘classical’ unison melody in the opening section.

In the chordal section (bars 18–28) I apply the same technical idea of expressive inflection as I did in the beginning of the piece: flexible wrists, and shaping of the line in connection with the ‘landscape’ of the chordal melody. Compared to the beginning, here I use the whole natural weight of my right hand to create the illusion of singing *legato* in the chordal line. I also apply here what Rachmaninoff liked to call, literally, ‘rooting the fingers into the depth of the keyboard’, pressing the keys very deeply with almost straight fingers.¹²⁴ This helps to bring out a very resonant sound.

Just like Rachmaninoff, I also use micro-rubato extensively throughout the whole first section. Also, in order to make the most out of the unison melody in terms of its singing nature, I tend to hold back the phrases subtly during the whole first section (until bar 28), especially where the melody reaches its highest points

¹²² DVD 2, track 2 (Version B). For more ‘correct’ interpretation see track 1 (Version A).

¹²³ See page 16 of this work.

¹²⁴ ‘Прорастание пальцев в клавиатуру’. L.M.Mozheiko [Л.М.Можейко], *The History of Russian Music (История русской музыки)* (Grodno: Grodnensky Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2012), p. 230.

(bar 2 – c#”, bar 3 – g#”, bar6 – c#”, bar 7 – b”). Around these points and especially near the modulation to the minor key in bar 7, I take time to generate extra tension, as well as between the notes of the minor sixth in bar 7, the largest interval so far in the melodic line. In this way I believe I can also convincingly express this beautiful modulation into G-sharp minor.

In the middle section, where I believe the actual Troika drive starts, I apply rhythmic springs, as described above.¹²⁵ This is basically a rubato with very quick and subtle tempo fluctuation. For example, in the beginning of bar 29, I hold back the tempo slightly just to express the sudden stop on the G major triad a little more, and then immediately compensate for this by accelerating the following semiquavers. Throughout this section and up until the very end of the piece my only concern is a good balance between a vocal approach in the melodic line in left hand and a differently expressive, almost ‘mechanical’ touch in right hand, imitating the Troika’s ringing bells.

¹²⁵ See page 17 of this work.

4.3. Case Study 3. Schumann *Carnaval* op. 9. Expressive Inflection and Structuring a Large-Scale Piece

Rachmaninoff's recording of Schumann's *Carnaval* op. 9 (1929) is one of the most famous, most original, and arguably most controversial interpretations of this substantial work.¹²⁶ In *Carnaval* we can identify at least three important groups of pieces, within the huge arch of 'Préambule' and 'Marche'. The first one is the masks, which came from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*: 'Pierrot', 'Arlequin', 'Pantalone' and 'Colombine'. The second group represents the characters based on then-living people: 'Estrella' (an image of Ernestine von Fricken), 'Chiarina' (who represents Clara Wieck), Chopin and Paganini. The third group of pieces consists of either dances or small scenes-pictures that provide a contrast or build the links between the pieces ('Valse Noble', 'Replique', 'Papillions', 'ASCH-SCHA (Lettres Dansantes)', 'Valse Allemande', 'Aveu', 'Promenade', 'Pause').

My observations of Rachmaninoff's performance reveal the logic of his interpretative decisions, including those cases when his playing might be considered controversial. First of all, *Carnaval* in Rachmaninoff's performance can be read as an allegory of human life in which the battle (explained by Schumann and pointed out in the title of the last piece 'Marche des "Davidsbündler" contre les Philistines') between the forward-looking artists, members of imaginary *Davidsbund* and those in favour of conservative ideas, the Philistines, is the general structural and philosophical idea. Through the cycle, this idea may also be seen as a collision between 'live' and 'mechanical' images, human characters and masks, and emotionally mature and superficial characters.

It is very easy from the point of view of a contemporary listener to criticise Rachmaninoff for some decisions which are unconventional today, such as the omission of all repeats, his freedom with rhythm and dynamics, and additional ideas in 'Sphinxes'.¹²⁷ I would like to argue that all these details in Rachmaninoff's interpretation are part of his concept of the piece and are artistically convincing.

¹²⁶ R. Schumann, *Carnaval op. 9*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist)(RCA Victor), 1929/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 5–26.

¹²⁷ Rachmaninoff creates his own version of 'Sphinxes', which pianists normally omit today. It is based on Schumann's score. He adds octave doublings and trills to Schumann's original breves.

And it is mostly expressive inflection that articulates the whole drama as well as shapes and builds the images of the small parts of the piece. He uses a rhetorically articulated rhythm, namely a contrast between rhythmic flexibility and absolute rhythmic precision, almost mechanical playing, as a means of articulating the structure of the piece. For instance, in order to set up a better link between the 'Préambule' and 'Marche', Rachmaninoff articulates the chords in a similar way: almost excessive emphasis on the strong beats, with shortened dotted semiquavers and lightened third beats, which gives the 'Préambule' a slightly caricature-like quality (first 24 bars of 'Préambule').

Figure 21 Schumann 'Préambule' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1-21.

The image shows a musical score for Schumann's 'Préambule' from *Carnaval*, op. 9, bars 1-21. The score is in 3/4 time and features a 'Quasi maestoso' tempo. It includes dynamic markings such as 'ff' and 'sempre ff', and performance instructions like 'Pedale'. The score is annotated with yellow 'S' marks above notes and green '>' and '<' marks below notes, indicating specific rhythmic or dynamic inflections.

Similarly, the opening of 'Marche' shows that the strong beats receive an excessive emphasis in Rachmaninoff's interpretation.

My analysis demonstrates that Rachmaninoff uses expressive inflection as a means to unite these groups of pieces through *Carnaval* and to create hidden links between them. A good example of setting up the contrast between different groups of masks is the contrast between 'Pierrot' and 'Arlequin'. Rachmaninoff intensifies this contrast by emphasising the repetitive rhythmical evenness of 'Pierrot' as well as by playing the 'primitive' repetitive motif, using an exaggerated touch (bars 3,

7).

Figure 22 Schumann 'Pierrot' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1–21.



In contrast, in 'Arlequin' Rachmaninoff's rhythmic fluctuation/micro-rubato is extremely effective in depicting this masque's playful and very artistic character, full of grimaces. Here Rachmaninoff applies rhythmic springs; he takes additional time before the accentuated second beats (bars 3, 5, 7) and accelerates in each alternating bar (bars 2, 4, 6, 8).

Figure 23 Schumann 'Arlequin' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1–9.



This effect, kind of an imitation of Arlequin's 'jumps', becomes even more pronounced in bars 25–32.

But probably the most interesting moment in this pair of pieces is in the last bars (from bar 40 onwards) of 'Pierrot'. The most important point here is *sf* in bar 46. Rachmaninoff makes the most out of this unexpected, almost theatrical moment. In his recording, this *sforzando* is emphasised by taking a bit of time (needless to say, an unmarked *accelerando* in bar 40 compensates for this) exactly in a way he does it in 'Arlequin'; and so he makes this tiny detail of Schumann's text

extremely subtle and effective in connecting this pair of pieces.¹²⁸

Figure 24 Schumann 'Arlequin' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 33–49.

My observations also explain the way Rachmaninoff interprets 'Chiarina', which contradicts Schumann's original indication *passionato*. Rachmaninoff seems to make little transformations here in order to position 'Chiarina' perfectly within the context of the expressive sphere of the other characters based on then-living people ('Eusebius', 'Florestan', 'Chopin', 'Estrella'). Thus, Rachmaninoff's inward-looking interpretation, rather than a more extrovert *passionato*, give this piece a more 'human', more sincere character. And it can be well justified as long as 'Chiarina' is believed to be a depiction of Schumann's beloved Clara. Rachmaninoff also slows down each time in the end of each of three periods (bar 7–8, 15–16, 23–24, and 39–40), intensifying it as well by an unmarked diminuendo and taking extra time for bigger intervals in the melodic line (bars 21, 22).

There is another very intriguing detail in 'Chiarina'. Rachmaninoff continues the *divisi* treatment of the melodic line where Schumann stops indicating it (probably for technical reasons, as one cannot really produce two octave lines in one hand), namely in bars 8–16 and 33–40. By creating this continuous illusion of *legato* in the second (lower) line, Rachmaninoff overcomes a certain mechanical

¹²⁸ Rachmaninoff uses the same means of joining the pieces in the end of 'Valse Noble', last four bars. Here just a simple *rallentando*, not written in the score, together with marked *diminuendo*, 'prepares' the intonational sphere of the following Eusebius.

repetitiveness in rhythm which becomes almost inevitable in octaves. Moreover, a huge *rallentando* and *diminuendo* (in contradiction with Schumann's *crescendo*, especially in bars 21–24) transform this piece into a very meditative emotional sphere.

Figure 25 Schumann 'Chiarina' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1–40.

Chiarina

(Passionato.)

The musical score for 'Chiarina' is presented in three systems. The first system (bars 1-6) begins with a tempo marking of 'And.' and a dynamic of 'f'. The second system (bars 7-12) features a 'legato' marking and dynamics of 'sf' and 'ff'. The third system (bars 13-20) includes a 'mf' marking and a dynamic of 'f'. Red annotations highlight specific melodic lines and dynamics throughout the piece.



This extra flexibility in rhythm and dynamic, as in ‘Pierrot’ and ‘Arlequin’, and the intensification of the singing nature of both pieces, pairs ‘Chiarina’ with the following ‘Chopin’ extremely well. In ‘Chopin’, the intonations of which seem to be similar to the middle section (bars 31–54) of the Third movement of Chopin’s Sonata no. 2 op. 35, Rachmaninoff applies a very similar micro-rubato to the one he uses in his recording of Chopin’s sonata and by doing that he makes Schumann’s quotation from the sonata sound even more obvious (melodic line in bar 3).¹²⁹

Figure 26 Chopin Sonata no. 2 op. 35, movement three, bars 31–35.



¹²⁹ F. Chopin, *Sonata no. 2 op. 35*, S. Rachmaninoff (pianist) (RCA Victor), 1930/R 1992, CD 09026-61265-2, *The Complete Recordings*, Disc 6, tracks 3.

Figure 27 Schumann 'Chopin' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1–6.

Chopin

The image shows a musical score for Schumann's 'Chopin' from *Carnaval*, op. 9, bars 1-6. The score is in 4/4 time, B-flat major, and marked 'Agitato'. It features a piano accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings (f, sf) and articulation marks (accents, asterisks). Above the right-hand staff, there are annotations: 'L L S S L (S)' in orange above the first measure, and 'L L S S (L)' in orange above the second measure. A red arrow points to the end of the second measure in the right hand.

As with previous two examples, I would like to compare Rachmaninoff's recording with another recording demonstrating a different interpretative approach, namely Artur Rubinstein's recording made for RCA Red Seal in 1961.¹³⁰ This recording, in my opinion, is an example of a very 'correct' reading of the score. Rubinstein does not seem to try to build any kind of rhetorically expressive links between the pieces or create any kind of extra layer in *Carnaval*. In 'Préambule', unlike Rachmaninoff, he plays the dotted semiquavers rhythmically very strictly, and his accentuation here (as well as in the last piece 'Marche') is arguably more careful than characterful. He also does not try to connect 'Pierrot' and 'Arlequin' by anticipating the image of Arlequin in the last bars of 'Pierrot'. In 'Chiarina' he follows Schumann's markings very precisely, though he does use some tempo fluctuation (see bars 5, 6, 10, 11, 12), When he repeats the middle section (bars 17–47), he creates, like Rachmaninoff, an intimate atmosphere. He does not seem to use extra resources (like Rachmaninoff's *ritenuto* in near the end of 'Chiarina'). Also his treatment of the melodic line in 'Chiarina' is not vocal.

As the discussion above has shown, in *Carnaval* expressive inflection allows the pianist to reflect precisely the tiny gradations in depicting an image of a single piece within the whole cycle, and a character this piece represents. It creates extra

¹³⁰ R. Schumann, *Carnaval* op. 9, Arthur Rubinstein (RCA Red Seal), 1953/R 2001, CD 63020, *Rubinstein Collection*, vol.20, tracks 1–21.

links between the pieces, joining them into groups, which is important when structurally shaping such a difficult work. It also helps reflect the general structural collision between the *Davidsbund* and the Philistines, masques and real characters, emotionally sincere and superficial characters.

My Interpretation of *Carnaval*

My goal is to find a similarly convincing way of presenting *Carnaval* as an allegory of human drama, where contrasts play a role in catalysing the drama. This contrast can exist in different ways: between Pierrot and Arlequin in the 'artificial' world; more sophisticatedly, between the emotional spheres of the human characters representing Schumann's dreamy (Eusebius) and ecstatic antithesis (Florestan); between the members of Davidsbund – Chiarina, Chopin, Paganini – and the more 'artificial' characters – Coquette, Estrella, Pantalone and Colombina.

I aim to present this drama with a more balanced approach to Schumann's score. My first major concern here is a balance between holding the cycle together and not losing any important detail in carefully depicting individual characters' pieces. It is mostly expressive inflection that I use to articulate the whole drama, as well as to shape and build the images of the small parts of the piece. Thus, I pay great attention to the way I connect the pieces: sometimes I establish melodic or rhythmic links, or highlight motivic or rhythmic similarities; sometimes I impose a direct contrast between the pieces (as between 'Eusebius' and 'Florestan', 'Chopin' and 'Estrella').

To begin with, I establish a connection between 'Préambule' and the final 'March', in which I follow Rachmaninoff's idea of using similar slightly caricature-like articulation, emphasising the first beats in each bars (which is in fact marked by Schumann in 'Préambule', bars 1–6).¹³¹ In 'Pierrot' I make a strong emphasis on the chord in the dominant near the end of the piece (bar 46) in a very theatrical manner, following Rachmaninoff in predicting Arlequin's grimaces.¹³² I also maintain the tempo (without Rachmaninoff's unindicated slightly excessive *accelerando* at the end), which, along with repeating the short motifs, evoke the

¹³¹ CD3, track 1, 0:00-0:43; track 21, 0:00-1:05.

¹³² CD3, track 2, 1:45.

necessary 'boring' quality of the character.¹³³ To make a connection between 'Arlequin' and 'Valse Noble', I play the last bar of Arlequin at exactly the same speed I start 'Valse'.¹³⁴ I apply a similar approach to connect 'Valse' and 'Eusebius': I set up the dreamy mood of 'Eusebius' by using an extremely gentle touch at the very end of 'Valse'. I also tend to finish 'Valse' at a tempo close to that of 'Eusebius' in order to establish a greater connection between them.¹³⁵ To make the world of 'Eusebius' even more dreamy, I use micro-rubato, especially in bars 2, 4, 6 and 17–20, taking extra time between the larger intervals and lengthening the top notes of the motifs.¹³⁶ In bar 25, towards the end I compensate for this excessive rhythmic fluctuation by playing almost strictly in tempo.¹³⁷

Figure 28 Schumann 'Eusebius' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 17–26.¹³⁸

The image shows a musical score for Schumann's 'Eusebius' from *Carnaval*, op. 9, bars 17–26. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Più lento molto teneramente.' and includes performance instructions such as 'rit.', 'pp', and 'strict, in tempo'. Handwritten annotations include yellow circles with 'L' and 'LL' above the notes, and a red circle with 'strict, in tempo' around the final bars.

In 'Coquette' and 'Estrella' I use rhythmic springs extensively to illustrate and make more obvious the artificial nature of these characters. For example, I make a sudden *accelerando* in bar 4, which allows me to take extra time just before the *ff* 'jump' in bar 5 and in bars with a similar pattern in Coquette).¹³⁹

¹³³ CD3, track 2, 0:00-1:51.

¹³⁴ CD3, track 3, 0:30-0:37.

¹³⁵ CD3, track 4, 1:02-1:10.

¹³⁶ CD3, track 5, 0:00-0:44.

¹³⁷ CD3, track 5, 1:09-1:35.

¹³⁸ Here and below in this case study, unnotations inside the ovals illustrate my own interpretative decisions.

¹³⁹ CD3, track 7, 0:08-0:12.

Figure 29 Schumann 'Coquette' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1–5.



Similarly, in 'Estrella', I apply a sudden *accelerando* in bar 2 and then slow down in bar 4;¹⁴⁰ I do the same in 'Coquette'. In both pieces, I generally use a very flexible, expansive rubato and a bright, 'open', slightly unpolished touch in order to achieve the almost caricature-like effect.

Figure 30 Schumann 'Estrella' from *Carnaval* op. 9, bars 1–8.



Following Rachmaninoff's approach, after the flexibility in tempo I mentioned above, in pieces such as 'Papillions', 'Pantalon et Colombine', 'Paganini' and 'Pause',¹⁴¹ a sudden stability in speed can be highly expressive. It has several functions: providing an important relief after the frightening 'Sphinxes', as in 'Papillions'; generating tension, as in 'Pantalone et Colombine' and in 'Paganini'; or accumulating energy before the final 'March', as in 'Pause'.

¹⁴⁰ CD3, track 13, 0:00-0:12.

¹⁴¹ CD3, track 9, 15, 17 and 20, respectively.

4.4. Case study 4. Rachmaninoff's Sonata no. 2 op. 36 and Chopin's Mazurkas op. 67 nos. 3 and 4. Transforming Interpretation over Time

The original version of Rachmaninoff's Sonata no.2 op. 36 was composed in 1913. However, in 1931 Rachmaninoff returned to this work to make the second, revised and reduced version of the sonata.¹⁴² For this case study my recordings of the second version will be considered. I will be using the Muzgiz edition of this work in my commentary.¹⁴³

This sonata represents a typical sonata cycle structure with the first movement written in a sonata form, the second in a simple binary form, and third again in a sonata form. However, it is also based on the idea of monothematicism, in which Rachmaninoff follows Liszt's ideas exposed in his Sonata in B minor S. 178 and *Après une lecture du Dante – Fantasia quasi sonata* S161/7. Most of the main themes as well as some episodes of this sonata are based on the initial chromatic descending motif.

My expressive vision of this work is based on revealing a structural collision, which was not obvious immediately, but which I discovered through a series of performances of the work. It is the expressive collision between chromatic descending motifs and more linear, diatonic melodies throughout this sonata structure which inspires my reading. From the imaginative point of view, I believe, this contrast may be seen as a collision between 'forces of good' and the opposite, 'demonic forces'. My idea is to play all the descending motifs, whenever they appear, with great expression, tension and care, using all available expressive resources. This is, however, not the easiest task due to Rachmaninoff's heavy, multi-layered textures with complex polyphonic lines that often require independent and sophisticated treatment in terms of sound, touch and the level of expressiveness.

The opposite to this is the world of more diatonic writing, represented for example, by 'bells' motifs in the beginning, the diatonic writing of the second theme (bars 39–50), and the melodic line of the movement two. These more 'positive'

¹⁴² Martyn, *op. cit.*, pp.320–323.

¹⁴³ S. Rachmaninov, *Sonata no. 2, op. 36*, ed. P. Lamm and K. Igumnov, Complete Works for Piano, Vol.2 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947), score.

images receive a different treatment. Here I use much more relaxed touch, but at the same time a flexible speed, which enables me to 'pronounce' clearly all passages and create more relaxing and 'spacious' atmosphere, more appropriate for the 'more positive' imaginative world. The examples of the combination of the two polar motifs can be seen in Figures 31a and 31b.

Figure 31a Rachmaninoff Sonata No. 2 op. 36, movement one, bars 1-4.

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2, Op. 36. The score is in 4/4 time and is marked "Allegro agitato". The piano part is shown in two systems. The first system covers bars 1-4, and the second system covers bars 5-8. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (f, ff, m.s., dim.), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (rit.). Annotations in red and blue highlight specific motifs: a red oval encircles a passage in the right hand of the first system, with labels "m.s.", "diatonic", and "'bells'"; a blue oval encircles a passage in the left hand of the second system, with a label "chromatic descending motif".

Figure 31b Rachmaninoff Sonata No. 2 op. 36, movement three, bars 7–20.

Allegro molto

ff

chromatic descending motifs

P cresc.

ff

diatonic motif

ff

1 2 3 1

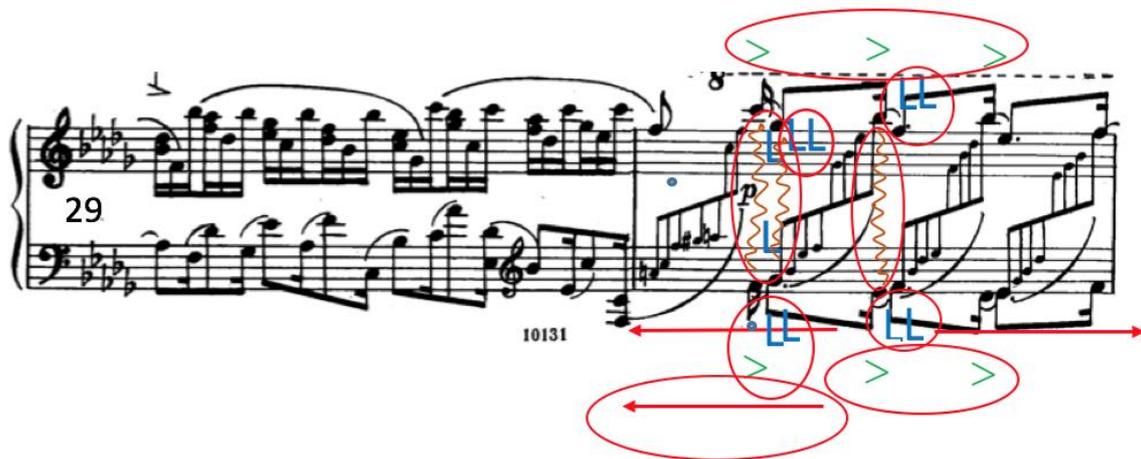
Unlike the Second Piano Concerto op. 18 or the *Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini* op. 43, in this sonata the pianist faces a less crystal-clear structure, which is full of improvisatory-like episodes, and much more epic, narrative-like passages. Consequently, it is more a performer's responsibility, on one hand, to unite the elements and episodes together, and on the other hand, not to miss the beauty of the work's momentum, and to be able to follow what I believe is Rachmaninoff's unique meditative and poem-like 'sense of time' exposed in this work.

In terms of textural features of this Sonata, likewise in many Rachmaninoff's preludes and the Piano Concerto no. 3 op. 30, here a performer has to deal with truly symphonic piano writing. Such style demands sometimes completely different technical approach towards different textural layers appearing simultaneously, like different orchestral instruments and often delivering contrasting musical images/characters. The difficulty here is not to 'bury' the

melody under the massive chordal lines or virtuoso passages, but instead to be able to express and ‘pronounce’ the melodic line clearly and in a variable way. Here is where expressive inflection is especially important in helping to deliver successfully and convincingly those episodes.

In relation to that, both my recordings of the sonata (made in 2012 and 2016) demonstrate a rich and refined usage of micro-rubato and rhetoric accents. However, for the 2016 recording I set out a goal to make it as spacious as possible in terms of timing, without losing control over the overall structure at the same time. This enabled me to establish more clearly the important structural collision mentioned above. This is especially evident around the second theme of the first movement. In the 2016 recording, the diatonic passages and, most importantly, the melodic top and bottom lines are ‘pronounced’ more clearly and in a more improvisatory manner than in the earlier recording. This also includes a more variable pacing of the notes in the upper melodic line (See Figure 32; CD 6, track 1, 1’15-1’27 - for the 2012 recording; CD 6, track 4, 1’27-1’43 - for the 2016 recording).

Figure 32 Rachmaninoff Sonata No. 2 op.36, movement one, bars 29–30.¹⁴⁴

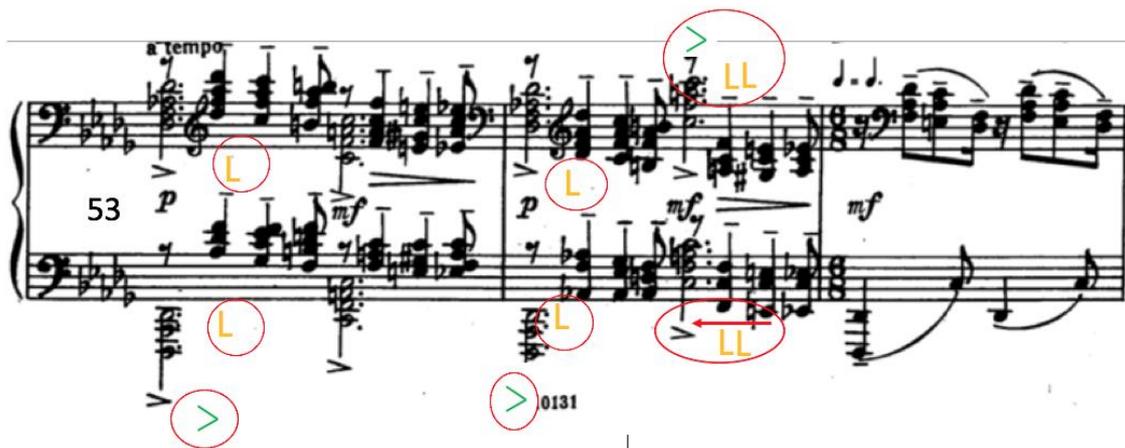


Also, in the 2016 recording the chordal theme (bars 53–54, Figure 33, CD 6, track 1, 2’57-3’08- for the 2012 recording; CD 6, track 4, 3’24-3’39 - for the 2016 recording) is designed differently by applying extra time between the lower and

¹⁴⁴ Here and below in this case study, unnotations in the ovals reflect my more recent interpretative decisions.

upper chordal lines, another aspect of expressive inflection which has deepened in my practice over the years. I also emphasise the left hand in the lower line to achieve the effect of a dark and penetrating bell-like sound and to oppose it to differently articulating 'smaller bells' in right hand. These important differentiations between registers mentioned above allow me to intensify the contrast between the two 'worlds'; in this case it is the diatonic 'large bells' on first and third beats and contrasting chromatic 'smaller bells' between in bars 53–54. (See Figure 33).

Figure 33 Rachmaninoff Sonata No.2 op. 36, movement one, bars 53–54.

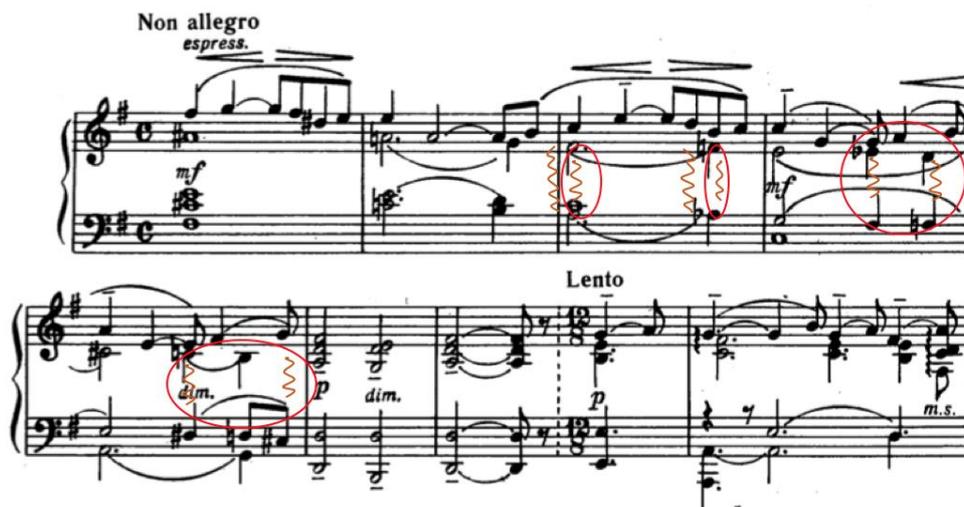


A broader micro-rubato and a more flexible treatment of the melodic lines are also evident in the later recording of the Second movement of the Sonata, which results in a more 'speaking' character of the phrasing. A good example of that is at the beginning of the second movement, namely, the first 15 bars (CD 6, track 2 0- 1'17 – for the 2012 version; CD 6, track 4 8'18-9'36 – for the 2016 version). Such a 'recitativo-like' treatment of the melodic and chordal lines, with more attention towards approaching harmonic and tonal shades and intervallic structure of the melody, involves a much more (compared to the early version) variable approach in terms of taking different amount of time between some notes in the melodic and bass line (bars 8–15). This is especially evident around the last chord in bar 8, where the arpeggiated chord is treated as part of the melodic line; and bar 9, where the taking time correlates with a larger interval in the melody (a fifth) (See bars 8–11 in Figure 34).

Figure 34 Rachmaninoff Sonata No.2 op.36 movement two, bars 5-11.

Apart from micro-rubato and differentiation in touch, I also apply asynchronised playing when dealing with heavy, multi-layered textures. I find this method especially helpful when it comes to delivering Rachmaninoff's symbolic 'motifs': descending scales or 'bells', over the heavy accompanying lines. Such treatment is more evident and, I believe, successful in my later recording of the Sonata. For example, slight asynchronisation helps to reveal the important, but not obvious, chromatic descending parallel lines (a reminiscence of the descending chromatic tones of the main theme of the first movement) which accompany the main line in the introduction of the movement two (Figure 35, bars 1-8; CD 6, track 2 0'0'25 – for the 2012 recording; CD 6, track 4 8'18-8'44 – for the 2016 recording).

Figure 35 Rachmaninoff Sonata no. 2 op. 36, movement 2, bars 1-9.



It also helps to draw out the chromatic tones in the chordal line and left hand, which would be hidden without such treatment (bars 10–11) and which is more evident in my later recording (Figure 36, bars 10–11).

Figure 36 Rachmaninoff Sonata no. 2 op. 36, movement 2, bars 5–11.



Another example, which I have chosen to show how my approach has been changing over the years, is the recordings of Chopin's Mazurkas op. 67 nos. 3 and 4 made in 2015 and 2016. I will use Chopin's pupil Carl Mikuli's edition to illustrate

my thoughts.¹⁴⁵ Despite short amount of time between the two recordings, they demonstrate noticeable differences in the approach. These differences illustrate better engagement with expressive inflection and more conscious usage of the resources this approach provides, which will be discussed below.

Chopin's Mazurkas, though not offering much to deal with from the technical point of view, are nevertheless arguably among the hardest piano works written by this composer. There are a few points here which need to be resolved in order to succeed in performing these works: to be able to find a unique approach in terms of the emotional world, or imaginative framework of each mazurka; to find a precise emotional atmosphere, one has to find the appropriate amount of rubato as well as any tempo fluctuation and other expressive tools, in order for them to deliver this emotional atmosphere of the mazurkas in the best way; to convey a specific 'Polishness' in Chopin's Mazurkas and deliver it through a characteristic rhythm, accentuation or articulation; and more specifically, to find out his own way of dealing with Chopin's frequent repetitions, to make the most of its expressive meaning.

Both my 2015 and 2016 recordings demonstrate engagement with the above-mentioned features. While the later recordings of the Mazurka op. 67 no. 4 shows (with minor exceptions) many of the same interpretative decisions, the 2016 recording of the Mazurka op. 67 no. 3 demonstrates significant conceptual changes. These changes arise from the principles of expressive inflection which I have dealt with thus far, namely: overcoming repetitiveness of the texture (Case Study 1), building an imaginative framework of the piece (Case Study 2), dealing with the structure of the piece (Case Study 3).

For the 2016 recording of Mazurkas I set out two specific goals. Firstly, I aimed to build a more musically convincing structure in terms of dealing with this work's repetitions and the second was to get the most out of the very characteristic rhythm and 'Polishness' character of the middle section (Figure 40, bars 33–40).

The first has been achieved by following: greater contrast than in the 2015 recording between the first section (bars 1–16) and its repetition (bars 17–32). In the later recording, I play the first sixteen bars deliberately using less expressive

¹⁴⁵ F. Chopin, *Mazurkas*, ed. C. Mikuli, Complete Works for Piano, Vol.2 (New York: G. Schirmer, 1894), score.

rubato than in the repetition. I also apply a slightly faster tempo than in the repetition, as well as deliberately simple phrasing (See Figure 37, CD 6, track 5 0-0'48 –for the 2015 recording; CD 6, track 7 0-0'58). This has been done in order to be able to take a freer approach in bars 17–32, using a flexible tempo, much softer dynamics and more accentuation and intensification, achieved by rhetorical slowing down and prolongation of selected notes around the harmonic turn in bar 21. Such deliberate accentuation of this moment has been done in order to distinguish this episode from a similar one in bar 5 (Figure 37 and 38).

Figure 37 Chopin Mazurka op. 67 no. 3, bars 1–9.

The image shows a musical score for Chopin's Mazurka op. 67 no. 3, bars 1-9. The score is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled '44.', covers bars 1-4 and is marked 'Allegretto. (♩ = 144)' and 'p rubato.'. The second system, labeled '5', covers bars 5-8 and is marked 'In tempo' and 'f'. The score includes piano and bass staves with various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is annotated with performance instructions and fingering numbers.

(the final crotchets of bars 34, 36, 38). This is demonstrated in Figure 40, CD 6, track 5 0'50-1'03 – for the 2015 recording; CD 6, track 7 0'58-1'11 – for the 2016 recording.

Figure 40 Chopin Mazurka op. 67 no. 3, bars 31–40.



Such contrast between expressive and deliberately 'inexpressive' styles of playing along with applying rhythmic springs, which I use to intensify original Chopin's accents in bars 34, 36 and 38, helps to bring out specific Polishness in this mazurka.

The overall picture, representing how my approach has been changing over the years, shows that in general it progresses towards greater freedom in terms of use of rhythmic rubato, articulation and rhetoric accents. It also demonstrates greater awareness of how these resources can be applied in shaping the structure of a piece.

4.5. Case Study 5. C.P.E. Bach Fantasia in F-sharp minor Wq 67 (1787) and Schnittke Aphorism no. 2 from *Fünf Aphorismen* (1990). Expressive inflection and non-Romantic repertoire.

My first engagement with expressive inflection arose from the assumption that this approach could only be suitable for interpreting the works of the Romantic repertoire. However, in this case study I will argue that expressive inflection can be used, even if with certain limitations, outside the Romantic period works.

As long as C.P.E. Bach's oeuvre is considered to be a part of an influential development in German literature and music, namely 'Sturm und Drang', one can easily discover a lot of parallels in his works with music written during the Romantic period, for high level of emotional expression, irregular meter and rhythm (there are no bar lines in half of this work, for example), many interrupted phrases, frequently occurring changes in style or texture. As long as C.P.E. Bach's style represents such diversity and freedom, the diversity and flexibility of expressive inflection in approaching the score can be appropriate as well.

While the title 'Fantasia' certainly implies a large element of freedom in structure of a piece, one can find in this work the obvious elements of a rondo form (or a structure similar to rondo). I identify two short sections which function as a refrain. There are six appearances of the first refrain (first two bars of this work, in different keys and slightly varied shape) and three of the second (the Largo sections) (Figure 41- the First refrain; Figure 42- the second). There are also improvisatory sections between the refrains; they either develop in an improvisatory manner the material being exposed in the refrains, or deliver contrasting movements.

When performing this work, and as in the other case studies, I concentrate on highlighting two aspects. The first one is establishing, as possible, the 'unity' between the refrains, the elements that hold together the structure. This, I believe, is important in order to create the 'zones of stability' within the very unstable structure of this fantasy. I shape these motifs by following harmonic and intervallic structure of the main line in the left hand: the dissonant chord on the third beat (Figure 41, CD 7, track 1 0-0'17) receives a little emphasis in both first and second bars of the first refrain.

Figure 41 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bars 1–2.¹⁴⁶

Fantasia in F-sharp minor

Transcribed and edited by Liam Hynes **Adagio** C.P.E. Bach
Wq 67

I apply the same approach to the second refrain: the ascending sequence of triplets becomes more articulated and gets extra time between the notes and slight increase in volume and an emphasis, when it reaches the highest melodic point. This is especially noticeable in the Largo section, where the second refrain appears as a chain of sequences, interrupted by the improvisatory passages (Figure 42, CD 7, track 1 4'40-5'17).

¹⁴⁶ For the purpose of my thesis, I will use the following score: C.P.E. Bach, *Fantasia in F-sharp minor* Wq 67, ed. L. Hynes, in Hynes, L. 'Fantasia in F-sharp minor Wq 67- Petrucci Music Library', 2013. Accessed February 10, 2018. Bach, C.P.E. Alternatively- C.P.E. Bach, *Fantasia in F-sharp minor* Wq 67, In *The Essential C.P.E. Bach*, ed. P. Cornelius (Los Altos: Packard Humanities Institute, 2014), score.

Figure 42 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bars 22-27.

I am also conscious about creating extra structure by linking the refrains with each other. In order to do so, I also pay great attention towards getting back to exactly the same tempo each time the refrain appears. Also, to establish the links between the refrains in the most successful way, I manipulate the dynamic level in order to create the illusion of a ‘continuous’ dramatic line, or narrative line between all six refrain appearances. I omit the original *pp*, which occurs in the Adagio section (fourth appearance of the initial refrain) and perform it in quite a dramatic manner, which reflects the dramatic collision in the previous section, based on the diminished seventh chord (bar 38) (See Figure 43, CD 7, track 1 6’21-6’38). In my interpretation, this fourth appearance of the refrain turns out to be an important dramatic point, receiving more emphasis than the other appearances of this theme. This in turn brings an important finale-like atmosphere to the last, fifth refrain, which I play quietly, following the original dynamic *pp* (Figure 44, CD 7, track 1 7’40-7’52); I also play quieter (more *pp* rather than just *p*) the last appearance of the second refrain, which is accompanied by an extensive unwritten *diminuendo* and *allargando* (Figure 45, CD 7, track 1 9’46-10’15). This also helps to deliver the illusion of a final phase in the dramatic line of both refrains.

Figure 43 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bars 39–40.

Figure 44 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bar 41e.

Figure 45 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bars 44–46.

The second idea I concentrate on when performing this piece is highlighting the elements which bring variety and freedom to the structure, i.e. which relate most closely to the idea of expressive inflection. These elements are: recitativo-like passages, which sometimes develop the ideas of the refrains, and are sometimes abruptly interrupt a more even texture (as it happens after the fifth refrain section in bars 41e–42a), where the more improvisatory passages of the second Allegretto section suddenly destroy the structural stability of the refrain); the unusually bold modulation sections (especially the modulation from C-sharp minor to E-flat minor in Adagio, bars 18-19) may also be considered 'destabilising' the form. All the improvisatory passages receive a flexible and expressive treatment. In the first improvisatory section (see Figure 46), which follows the initial exposition of the first refrain, I use recitativo-like micro-rubato to highlight the 'introductory improvising' nature of these passages.

Figure 46 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bars 1–3c.

Transcribed and edited
by Liam Hynes **Adagio**

Fantasia in F-sharp minor

C.P.E. Bach
Wq 67

The score consists of four systems of music. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a piano introduction marked *pp* and *mf*. The second system, labeled 3a, begins with a forte (*f*) section and includes a *ritenuto* marking. The third system, labeled 3b, continues the *f* section and includes a *ten.* marking. The fourth system, labeled 3c, concludes the section with a piano (*p*) section. Red arrows and wavy lines are used throughout the score to indicate performance choices, such as accents and dynamic changes.

In the first Allegretto section, I apply a more stable, rapid tempo as well as a touch which is suddenly very clearly articulated and accentuated, including accentuations which are not written in the score, in order to highlight this unusual and sudden change in texture and mood. To intensify this effect further, I also apply a *ritenuto* and dynamic softening before the start of the Allegretto section in bar 4a (see Figure 47).

Figure 47 C.P.E. Bach *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, bars 3h–4c.

The second part of this case study concerns repertoire of a different style: Schnittke's 'Aphorism no. 2' from *Fünf Aphorismen* for Piano.¹⁴⁷ This work, composed in 1990, is a set of five short solo piano pieces dedicated to Russian pianist Alexander Slobodyanik and Russian-American poet and Nobel Prize Laureate Joseph Brodsky. On the premiere of this cycle in New York in 1990 Brodsky's verses of were recited between the pieces, which were performed by the pianist A. Slobodyanik.¹⁴⁸

My 2012 performance of the second Aphorism has been chosen to demonstrate how a pianist can apply expressive inflection in the piece written outside the dominant Romantic style, i.e. one which operates outside a common practice notion of dissonance. My approach here links this performance, to an extent, with my recordings of Schumann's *Carnaval* op.9 and Tchaikovsky's

¹⁴⁷ 'Aphorism - a short clever saying which is intended to express a general truth'. E. Walter, *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.58.

¹⁴⁸ A. Schnittke, *Fünf Aphorismen*, (Hamburg: H. Sikorski, 1990), preface.

'Novembre: On the Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37. Despite atonal language, the form of this piece is quite straightforward, with clear motivic organisation. A short exposition (bars 1–13) of the contrasting elements is followed by a chorals-like section (14–22), which in turn is followed by a slightly varied repetition of the first section and a development section, which leads to a climax (bars 51–54). In the conclusion, the reminiscence of the chorale theme reappears. However, a close-listening of my recording reveals a more complicated way of approaching the score. In the recording, the piece falls into a structure, which is divided into three main types of texture (see Figures 48a, 48b): 1) emphatic staccato dissonances (circled in red); 2) linear texture and melodic lines (in orange); 3) choral or chordal lines (in blue).

Figure 48a Schnittke 'Aphorism no. 2' from *Fünf Aphorismen*, bars 1–9.

The image shows a musical score for Schnittke's 'Aphorism no. 2' from 'Fünf Aphorismen', bars 1-9. The score is in 3/4 time, marked 'Allegretto'. It features two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system has a treble clef with a 3/4 time signature and a bass clef. The second system has a treble clef and a bass clef. The score is annotated with red circles highlighting staccato dissonances and yellow circles highlighting linear texture and melodic lines. Handwritten notes include 'red 1st time' and 'blue'.

Figure 48b Schnittke 'Aphorism no. 2' from *Fünf Aphorismen*, bars 61–68.



I treat these three main types with regards to the above-mentioned differences in type of structure of the episodes. The tools I use to expose those features are as follows: highlighting or shadowing the intervallic structure of the motifs; micro-rubato; voice balancing; highlighting the registers. The above-mentioned tools, as it was explained before, represent expressive inflection.

Below is a table illustrating my artistic decisions in the form of a score map. It demonstrates a constant fluctuation between all the types, mentioned above, often within a very limited number of bars.

Table 2 Schnittke 'Aphorism no. 2' from *Fünf Aphorismen*.

STACCATO, emphatic	LINEAR, melodic line	CHORALE, chordal line
1-2		
	3-5	
6		
	7-10	
		11-22
	23	
24-27		
		28
29-30		
	(30)	
		31
32-33		
	34-37	
38-39		
	(39) 40-47	
		48-54
55		
		56
	57-60	
		61-68
	69-74	

From observation of the video, it is clear that all three different types of material correlate with different manner in my approaching the piano. The first type, sharp, brisk staccato, correlates with a strong, vertical attack, minimal wrist flexibility and a tendency to jump off the keys, rather than play down inside (Figure 48a, bars 1,2,6; DVD 7 Track 2, 0-0'14). This helps to achieve a 'robotic', inexpressive articulation, which does not highlight any particular pitch range within the texture.

In order to express the second type of texture, I use much more flexibly moving wrists and a predominantly smooth, horizontal movement of hands. Occasionally, as happens in bars 9 and 10 (DVD 7, track 2, 0'16-0'23), I apply a more extensive gesture, which can be described as a continuation of the melodic landscape beyond the keyboard and is bordering on conducting. I believe, this visual gesture helps to highlight the expressive nature of this moment, especially the question-mark-like ending of the phrase in bar 10. I also use slight gradations of micro-rubato, which help to reveal and highlight the intervallic structure, especially in bars 3-5 (Figure 49, DVD 7, track 2 0'4-0'14). This, in turn, again brings an additional melodic quality into this second type of this textural material.

The kind of technical approach, described above, links this case study with my interpretation of Tchaikovsky's 'Novembre: Troika' from *Les Saisons* op. 37. In both cases, I use flexibly moving wrists, horizontal movement and a deliberate creation or imitation of a melodic landscape (both musically and to some extent visually), which is a part of expressive inflection.

Figure 49 Schnittke 'Aphorism no. 2' from *Fünf Aphorismen*, bars 1–9.



As a tool for the third type of texture, I treat the chordal lines as though a choir is singing the separate lines. I pay a great attention in terms of controlling the evenness between the lines (as in bars 14-19; 61-68; DVD 7, track 2: 0'29-0'44; 1'51-2'04). Visually, this third type can also be characterised by modest, horizontal hand movements. However, in comparison with the second type, here I use less visually expressive, more 'focused', static and even slightly tense hand position. Compared with the manner I treat the first type of texture, here the lines receive much less different emphasis and top line is almost as projective as the other. That creates the illusion of choir singing and produces a great contrast to the treatment of the first and second elements.

I started off this thesis believing expressive inflection was only appropriate for Romantically inspired repertoire, because of its link to harmony, intervallic relationship and the expressive meaning of pitch. However, while presenting some potential difficulties, this case study shows the potential to apply expressive inflection in a wider context, based on texture rather than harmony or relationship between the intervals. So the notion of dissonance is changed. This case study also demonstrates that rather than this emerging from the notes, it is I as a performer, who constructs the context of the dissonance.

5. The recorded repertoire outside the commentary.

The other pieces which form my performance portfolio, but are not discussed in my case studies, are put together to illustrate further the principles, discussed in case studies 1–5 and can be listened to in that light. In this respect, DVD 1 and DVD 2 illustrate ideas which I focus on in case Study 1 and case Study 2 respectively. CDs 3–5 demonstrate an illustration of the thoughts I concentrated on in my case Study 3. CD6 and DVD7 in turn are part of case studies 4 and 5 respectively.

I will now give an account of how each individual recording presented in my portfolio was constructed. The illustration of the principles of tempo flexibility and micro-rubato in Rachmaninoff's works are presented on **DVD 1**. In all the pieces recorded on this DVD, written and unwritten tempo fluctuations can be observed. In many of Rachmaninoff's pieces recorded for this project, unwritten tempo fluctuations can be seen as logical addition to Rachmaninoff's original tempo flexibility indications. The examples of my following written tempo changes (with some occasionally added tempo nuances) can be observed in my recordings of Prelude in G major op. 32 no. 5, Prelude in G-sharp minor op. 32 no. 12, 'Lilacs' op. 25 no. 5 and *Polka de W.R.* (F. Behr-S. Rachmaninoff *Lichtäubchen* (Scherzpolka) (DVD 1, tracks 2–5 respectively). A larger number of unwritten tempo fluctuations can be found in Etudes in E-flat minor op. 39 no. 2 and A minor op. 39 no. 5 (DVD 1, tracks 6 and 7). In most of the above-mentioned cases and especially in the Etudes tempo changes, mostly in the form of micro-rubato, help to deliver singing nature of the melodic lines as well as distinguish them from busy accompanying textures.

The recordings presented on **DVD 2** illustrate how expressive inflection can be used in building an imaginative framework of a piece. All the examples demonstrate how a combination of a characteristic rhythm, rubato, micro-rubato, rhetorical accents and asynchronised playing can help in delivering a special and characteristic musical image of a piece. In Paderewski's *Mélodie* op. 16 no. 2 (DVD 2, track 3), a deliberately modest use of expressive inflection helps to deliver a simplicity and clarity of the melodic landscape, without losing its speaking character; it also creates a calm overall atmosphere. In Schubert-Liszt's *Ständchen*, *Barcarolle* and *Erlkönig* (DVD 2, tracks 5–7) and Brahms' Fantasies op. 116 no. 2, 3

and 4 (DVD 2, tracks 8–10) expressive inflection resolves the repetitiveness (especially in Brahms) and reveals the characteristic nature of the melodic and harmonic shape (Schubert-Liszt).

In the recording of Scriabin's Etudes op. 42 no. 4, 5 and op. 8 no. 12 (DVD 2, tracks 11–13) all the resources of expressive inflection are used to deliver the following: a sophisticated landscape with spicy chromatic tones in melodic and accompanying lines in Etudes in F-sharp major op. 42 no. 4 and in C-sharp minor op. 42 no. 5; a projection of the melodic line over a heavy accompanying line in left hand of Etude in C-sharp minor op. 42 no. 5; characteristically rhetoric dotted rhythm in right hand of Etude op. 8 no. 12.

Out of all the recordings presented in my portfolio it is in Sibelius' 5 Pieces op. 76 (Esquisse, Romanzetta, Arabesque, Linnaea, Harlequinade, Etude) from *13 Pieces for Piano* and *Valse-Triste* op. 44 (DVD 2, track 4), where expressive inflection plays a truly essential role in delivering the imaginative narrative of the pieces. In this recording, playing with all the above mentioned parameters of expressive inflection helps to deliver a truly characteristic imaginative context in each piece and in doing so - to successfully build a structure of the whole with its own unique climaxes and points of release. This is important given how repetitive, sometimes invariable and not always idiomatic piano writing is in Sibelius' *13 Pieces for Piano*. In this respect, the pieces might be seen as an example of how expressive inflection can be used in dealing with the sort of special difficulties one can face when interpreting music of miscellaneous character.

CDs 3–5 illustrate my dealing with the large-scale works and expand my case study 3. In these recordings, it is macro-links between the episodes or movements which make the structure of the whole work more stable, variable and interpretation more logically convincing. In my recordings of Schumann's *Fantasia* op. 17 (CD 3, tracks 22–24), *Kreiseriana* op. 16 (CD 4, tracks 1–8) and Liszt's *Après une lecture du Dante – Fantasia quasi sonata* S161/7 (CD 4, track 9), similar episodes in terms of character are treated in a similar manner, which helps to create extra links between them and consequently shape the structure of the whole. In *Kreiseriana* (as in Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor op. 3 no. 2, discussed in case study 1), expressive inflection is extremely helpful in artistic dealing with Schumann's repetitiveness of the textures, which otherwise might be

a potential danger for a performer.

In my recording of Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* op. 42 (CD 4, track 10) expressive inflection brings out a hidden dramatic collision between diatonic textures and melodies and, on the other side, chromatic lines, which has (similar to Rachmaninoff's Sonata no. 2 op. 36) a symbolic meaning in this work. The recording of Tchaikovsky-Pletnev's *Concert Suite from the Ballet 'Sleeping beauty'* (CD 5) illustrates my approaching the piece as a chain of characteristic pictures, carefully connected together (similar to the way I approach Schumann's *Carnaval*, which was discussed in case study 3). As in Schumann, in order to achieve the continuous dramatic narrative line between the dances, I pay great attention towards how the beginnings and endings of each piece correspond with each other, deliberately playing with rubato, touch and articulation.

CD 7. Scarlatti's Sonatas E major K. 20, in B minor K. 27, in A major K. 24 (CD 7, track 3) and Mozart's *Fantasia* K. 397 in D minor (CD 7, track 4) represent the other examples of the repertoire outside the typical Romantic framework, which I recorded for this project. In Scarlatti, like in C. P. E. Bach's *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Wq 67, one can find interpretational decisions arguably more typical for a performance of Romantic period music. However, here a more flexible Baroque structure allows me to bring out hidden 'Romantic' features in texture and structure of the sonatas. I apply expressive inflection to highlight this hidden romanticism and create a characteristic imaginative context; this includes taking extra time between the phrases, extra accentuation, micro-rubato and at times asynchronised playing. I use these devices to highlight the joyful 'naughtiness' in Sonata in E major K. 20; a nocturne-like romanticism in Sonata in B minor K. 27; as well as to depict an image of an overcrowded Venetian square in Sonata in A major K. 24. Unlike Scarlatti, my recording of Mozart's *Fantasia* K. 397 in D minor demonstrates a minimal use of flexibility out of all the recorded pieces. Yet, as in other recordings, here the expressive inflection is used in order to highlight the differences in pitch between the appearances of the main theme in different keys; as well as to deliver the contrast between the theme and improvisatory, recitative-like episodes. Also, in line with points 2 and 3 of my research methodology, on p. 11 of this work, a minimal micro-rubato as well as a few rhetoric accents help me in shaping the intervals in the melodic line of the *Fantasia*.

6. Conclusion

In this portfolio and commentary, I have attempted to demonstrate and explain my application of expressive inflection as I have observed in Rachmaninoff's recordings. Through this project, I have come to the conclusion that while expressive inflection is a distinctively Russian concept, and the term is uncommon within the Western tradition, it potentially has wider application. My commentary demonstrated that these elements of rhetorical approach, including Romantic devices, were practised by some musicians as well. Nevertheless, I would also argue that there are limitations to expressive inflection; for instance, it is probably less applicable to works which are not built around common practice harmony and notions of dissonance. Although this question could form the basis of future research. Throughout this thesis, especially the case studies as well as the engagement with my own recordings, I have gained a deeper understanding of my own relationship with the concept.

Going forward, I believe this research has wider potential, particularly as a pedagogical tool. I would like to explore whether the principles of expressive inflection might be used as a teaching approach at a conservatoire. In this respect it would be interesting to test whether teachers find the ideas useful and applicable as part of teaching practice. Similarly, I would like to test students' reactions in terms of whether expressive inflection can help to set up the imaginative concept of a piece as well as shape a structure and, generally, make one's playing more expressive. It would also be useful to see how other professional pianists respond to these ideas.

In order to do so I would aim to analyse a number of recordings made recently in the context of the written evidence/interviews given by the same musicians. These paths for future research are all intended to gain a deeper understanding of the historical evolution of expressive inflection, and to discover whether it can find a home within the modern piano school.

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