Preludes and Sonatas Inspired by Chopin: A Survey of Piano Solo and Chamber Music from Chopin, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff

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Abstract
In the history of keyboard music, Chopin, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff are regarded as remarkable composers and great pianists straddling the boundary between the romantic and late-romantic genre. These three composers shared some Slavic heritage, and Chopin was the first western classical composer to imbue Slavic elements into his music. The aim of my dissertation is to explore how the music of the French-Polish composer Chopin influenced the two Russian composers Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. My survey of sonatas and preludes by these three composers highlights many instances of musical ideas inspired by Chopin. The specific comparisons I make are between Scriabin's and Chopin's 24 Preludes, the Chopin and Rachmaninoff Cello Sonatas, and Chopin's and Rachmaninoff's Piano Sonata No. 2. Clear connections and common elements include tonality, length, form, harmony, melody, accompaniment, texture, rhythm, demanding techniques, pedaling, balance and tone color. Scriabin's 24 Preludes, Op. 11 resemble Chopin's 24 Preludes overtly in number, length, and key. Both sets of preludes are distinguished by chromaticism, ambiguous chords, simple texture of accompanied melody, and wide-compass broken chords with wide arpeggios on the left hand. In addition, common features of the two sets of preludes include strict legato and fine, constant use of the sustaining pedals, a combination of highly expressive poetic cantabile melodies, including some in the inner voices, delicate pianissimo and improvisation-like dreaming. Likewise, in the second piano sonatas and cello sonatas, Rachmaninoff used the same key signatures as Chopin. The Rachmaninoff Fl sonatas feature tremendous development sections and brilliant codas, characteristic of the corresponding Chopin works. In fact, Rachmaninoff even revised the second piano sonata in order to more closely match Chopin's in length. Both the Sonatas for Cello and Piano by Chopin and Rachmaninoff contain wistful melodies supported by chromatic descent which mirror the melancholy of these two composers who never returned to their native homelands. I believe the profound influences of Chopin can be traced colloquial in the music of both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. These two Russian composers built upon Chopin to create their own personal styles in very different ways in their later works.

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Chopin’s famous 24 Préludes Op.28, in each key in the circle of the 5:th, inspired by Bach’s Preludes were at the time of publication something that many musicians proved sceptical to. “Préludes to what?” And still, these wonderful short miracles leave much to wonder about. Chopin left this great mystery to be figured out by ourselves. Or is it really possible that there is no pattern but just a set of wonderful small pieces, representing a certain mood or style? Chopin also wrote another longer Prélude, Op.45, and after his death, two more sketches were found published posthumously. A in-depth analysis by José Rodríguez Alvira of the Préludes Nos.4 and 8 can be found here