

Nocturne op. 9 no. 2 for the Left Hand **by Alexander Scriabin**

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Abstract: *This paper dwells on one musical miniature of great value of all time that A. Scriabin, a post-romantic composer, wrote for the piano. Starting from a Russian folk song, he dedicates to his instrument a piece full of lyricism, reflecting his spiritual unrest. From the structural point of view, the nocturne (as a part of his Chopinian series of works) is like a tripartite lied followed by a Coda. We distinguish between two sections with ample sound changes mirroring the composer's search for developing the specific possibilities of the piano and for multiplying its colouristic resources. By the end of the first section, it becomes much broader in the sound area. In this piece for the left hand we find more or less classical proportions. It is not just an extremely interesting and expressive one, but also difficult in terms of piano virtuosity.*

Keywords: *Scriabin, nocturne, left hand, piano.*

1. Introduction

Over time, the creative genius has pushed composers to seek out and find innovative methods through which to achieve new, unusual pianistic forms. Among them, piano works for the left hand occupy a special place, a number of eminent composers creating works of great value.

Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin is among them, nocturne op. 9 no. 2 for the left hand being composed at a time when the piano composer could not use his right hand because of the excessive piano study.

"Concert pianist of distinction and gentility, Scriabin dedicated to his instrument most of his work, out of 74 de opuses, 67 being piano pieces." (Iliut 1998, 21).

His creation, which includes only two fields: piano music and symphonic music" (Iliut, 1998, 20), was initially impregnated by the Chopinian spirit... „one of the participants at Scriabin's debut in his double quality as a pianist and composer

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saying that one could believe that a suitcase with Chopin's edited works has been found..." (Iliut, 1998, 32).

Besides, "his works up to 1903 (the year of Piano Sonata no.4) bear witness to the immense influence of the piano writing of Chopin and Liszt..." (Grove, 2001, 3).

2. Alexander Scriabin – *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2 for the Left Hand* (1894)

The nocturne is part of the Chopinian series of works. "They are graceful, lyrical pieces; full of personality, aristocratic, in no way a Chopin imitation" (Schonberg, 1997, 495). We note the intense (never sentimental) lyricism that reflects the spiritual unrest which, in our opinion, makes the nocturne affiliate with the most valuable works of its gender of all time.

„Hypersensitive, endowed with a wonderful sense of fine perception and an unusual ability to penetrate reality. in creation and interpretation, Scriabin is a lyric..." (Iliut 1998, 32). The starting point was a Russian folk song entitled *Dreaming under the birch*.

3. Analysis of *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2 for the Left Hand*

The work has the structure of a tripartite lied followed by a Coda. The tonality is D flat Major, which is introduced when the nocturne is interpreted preceded by the prelude for the left hand, by the cadence on C sharp Major with which it ends.

The theme of section A is a double-exposed period, tonally opened on the dominant, consisting of two motif phrases, each with the dimension of two measures. The classical proportions are dictated by the structure of the folk song that the composer does not want to modify in this first exposition. (Figure 1)



Fig. 1. A. Scriabin - *Nocturne op. 9 no. 2*, measures 1-8

With the second exposition, changes occur in the sound area; it becomes much broader, by using melody duplication at a distance of a decima and by adding octaves to the bass comments. (Figure 2)



Fig. 2. A. Scriabin - Nocturne op. 9 no. 2, measures 9 – 16

Section B begins in A flat minor, with the first phrase exposing twice the same motif consisting of the gradual movement of small seconds climbing step by step the chromatic scale. (Figure 3)



Fig. 3. A. Scriabin - Nocturne op. 9 no. 2, measures 17-20

The second phrase starts from D flat minor with the same chromatic musical motif. The movement in melodic octaves of the bass prepares the sixth leap through

which the melodic peak culminates, wrapped in the chord of F flat Major. Small seconds, interrupted by the reverse movement of the bass, describe a descending melodic line that turns to the delicate transparency of the dominant chord – to A flat major that happens in the ornamented passage of the cadence. (Figure 4)

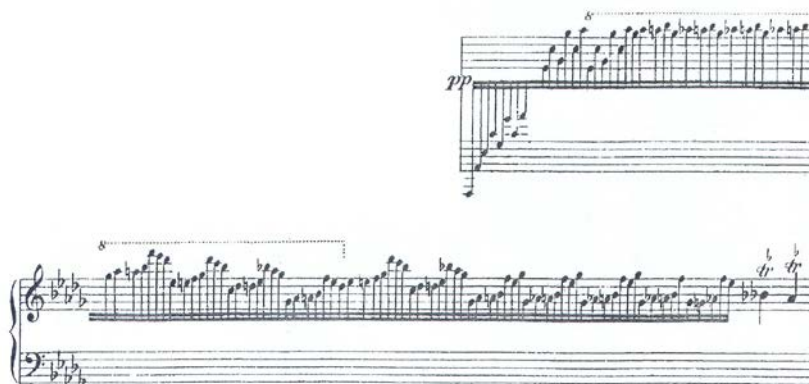


Fig. 4. A. Scriabin - Nocturne op. 9 no. 2, measure 27

The resumption of the A presents the first period unchanged. The tonality mutation leading to the cadence on the D flat tonic happens in measure 40.

The theme is presented again, this time in a coda that, in the extent of 14 measures, is sequencing the main motif.

Arpeggios combined with thrills envelop the sounds that strengthen the tonality. (Figure 5)

Fig. 5. A. Scriabin - Nocturne op. 9 no. 2, measures 51-53

The chaining of the last arpeggiate chords makes short references to the minor relative, and the Vth step down on which the crown rests leads to the ending in D flat Major arcuated between the extreme sounds of the registers. (Figure 6)

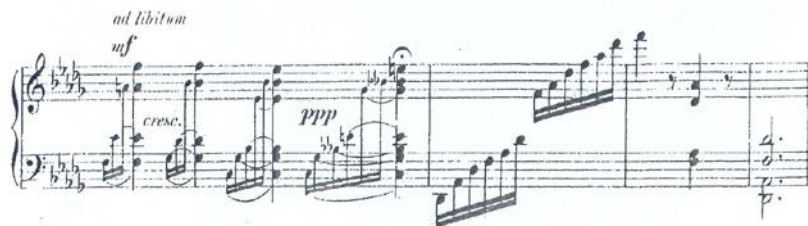


Fig. 6. A. Scriabin - Nocturne op. 9 no. 2, measures 54-57

4. Conclusions

„Specialty literature places Scriabin in the area of post-romanticism” (Goiti 2009, 8), an idea supported by the fact that most of his works belong to a special category in instrumental creation – the instrumental miniature – developed mostly during the romantic epoch and manifested in particular in correlation with the piano, the favourite instrument of the epoch, which brings, in the context of the intimate atmosphere of the salons, new instrumental genres, approached in an original manner (as we know, the miniature genre excelled in the Chopinian creation).

„These musical genres, characteristic to Chopin’s creation – Scriabin’s beloved composer – had been in the attention of Russian composers for a very long time” (Mihailov, 1972, 26). Usually, “the early pieces are romantic, fresh and easily accessible...” (Harvey, 2000), however, the nocturne for the left hand is not only a creation of great beauty and richness of emotional content but also an extremely interesting one, also difficult in terms of piano virtuosity.

The piano, “which most influences musical composition...” (Chartier 1969, 98), so affordable for polyphonic, polydynamic and polyrhythmic combinations, inspired Scriabin to search and find innovative methods for both the development of the specific possibilities of the instrument, and for the multiplication of its colouristic resources. “Scriabin was short in stature; his delicate physique may well have lain behind the lack of bombastics in his playing. The small stretch of his hand – little more than an octave – informed his writing for the instrument ” (Grove 2001, 223), the writing of the nocturne reflecting the above.

It is a piece with technical challenges and ample sound changes that asks the pianist for skill, clarity and finesse. Expressivity procedures of the interpretive manner such as articulation, pedaling, dynamics are of great importance, their role and significance being found even higher due to the voluntary limitation of the pianistic apparatus.

Of course, piano literature for the left hand does not enjoy the same interest as a whole. It should be noted that a very large number of less valuable musical works alternate with works of great value that have defeated time and entered the great gate of music, as is, undoubtedly, the case of nocturne op. 9, no. 2 by A. Scriabin.

5. References

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