

Rachmaninoff's "Concealed Variation" Principle: Inspiration for  
Motivic Unity in his Preludes, Op. 32

By  
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### **Abstract**

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) is considered one of the greatest pianist-composers of the Late Romantic Era. Specifically, his twenty-four piano preludes stand as hallmarks of the Russian solo repertoire, inspired by the prelude cycles of Johann Sebastian Bach and Frédéric Chopin. Rachmaninoff's preludes are regularly performed today by students and virtuosos alike. The composer experienced early success with the release of his Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2. The international triumph of the piece followed him throughout his career and resulted in his exasperation over the work's popularity. During his middle period of composition Rachmaninoff completed his cycle of preludes by writing and publishing Op. 32 in 1910. The swift penning of this set displays remarkable continuity in motive, melody, harmony, and rhythm within the work. Since the release of the Op. 32 preludes, many musicians have noticed the similarities between Op. 32 and his early Op. 3, No. 2 prelude. In 2006, Rachmaninoff scholar Valentin Antipov revealed aspects of monothematicism within Rachmaninoff's cycles of piano pieces. He also conditionally proposed the twenty-four preludes as a cycle of "concealed variations" on Rachmaninoff's own Prelude in C-sharp minor. It is hardly possible to assemble an exhaustive listing of the compositional methods used by Rachmaninoff to obscure the Op. 3 theme. However, in this document I seek to support the claim that two distinct motives in Op. 32 are drawn from Rachmaninoff's universally acclaimed masterpiece, the Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2.

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Upon writing this dissertation, it is my privilege to thank many people who have helped me on this journey of listening to and analyzing this beautiful and worthwhile music of Sergei Rachmaninoff. When the year was 2006 and I busily applied to colleges for piano performance, my listening soundtrack included the first movement of Rachmaninoff's First Piano Concerto and his Paganini Variations. This music opened up a world of excitement and possibilities at the piano that I had never dreamt of in my studies and musical pursuits. Hearing the piano and orchestra blend or contrast was musical fulfillment at its finest to my young, enthusiastic ears. Now over a decade later, I am privileged and honored to analyze and write about the Russian composer that helped convince me, a piano enthusiast from Missouri, to pursue a career in music.

There are many people I would like to thank in my pursuit of this Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance. The first person I would like to thank is my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The second is my beautiful wife Natalie, who has sacrificed many hours on my behalf that I could pursue my academic and musical goals. If you haven't heard her sing, her musical talent, intelligence, charm, beauty, and diligence is universally appreciated by everyone who listens! I am a blessed man in being her husband. The next people I would like to thank in my pursuit of this doctoral degree are my parents, Larry and Debbie Young. Both hard-working, genuine people, they have invested a great deal of time, money, and energy to encourage me to achieve my pursuits. They are a blessing and positive influence on many people's lives, and I'm honored to call them my parents. My grandfathers, Dr. John Young and Charles Thurman, are also both inspiring men to whom I owe infinite gratitude.

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and dedication to her students in 2019 is practically the same as it was from 1999-2007. She has been an excellent influence in my life at the piano, and I am more and more grateful for her work. My applied piano professor, Dr. Karin Redekopp Edwards at Wheaton College, Illinois, provided a first-rate collegiate experience at the piano, where I learned healthy piano technique, the integration of Christian faith and teaching, positive affirmation, discipline, striving towards pianistic excellence, and developing a love for the piano literature that I carry today.

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## Introduction

Early in his career, composer/pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) became a popular sensation with the debut performance of his Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 2, No. 3 at the Moscow Electrical Exposition in 1893.<sup>1</sup> Rachmaninoff greatly admired Frédéric Chopin and began to contemplate writing another thirteen preludes after publishing the Op. 23 set in 1904.<sup>2</sup> He swiftly composed the Thirteen Preludes for Piano, Op. 32 in 1910 within nineteen days,<sup>3</sup> leaving his complete prelude output similar to Bach, Chopin, and Scriabin in quantity and representation of every major and minor key. He plainly recalls the three-note Motive A (A-G#-C#) and four-note Motive B (E-D#-D-C#) from the original Prelude in C-sharp minor.<sup>4</sup> The final prelude significantly quotes the early work but Motive A is altered so ingeniously that only the indoctrinated listener may discern the theme's origin.<sup>5</sup> Through my research, I plan to show the particular salience of Motive A (Example 2) and the additional presence of Motive B (Example 3) in overt or subtle form throughout the set of Rachmaninoff's *Preludes*, Op. 32. I will also propose that Rachmaninoff drew inspiration for Motive A in Op. 3, No. 2 from Chopin's Scherzo in C-sharp minor, Op. 39 (Example 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Sergei Rachmaninoff, ed. Howard Shelley. "Thirteen Preludes, Op. 32, Prelude in F major (1891), Prelude in D minor (1917)." (London: Hyperion, 1988), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Rachmaninoff, ed. Vladimir Ashkenazy. "24 Preludes; Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 36." (New York, N.Y.:London, 1995), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Sergei Bertensson, Jay Leyda, and Sophie Satina. *Sergei Rachmaninoff, a Lifetime in Music*. New York: New York UP, 1956), 413.

<sup>4</sup> Rachmaninoff and Shelley, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Rachmaninoff and Shelley, 6.

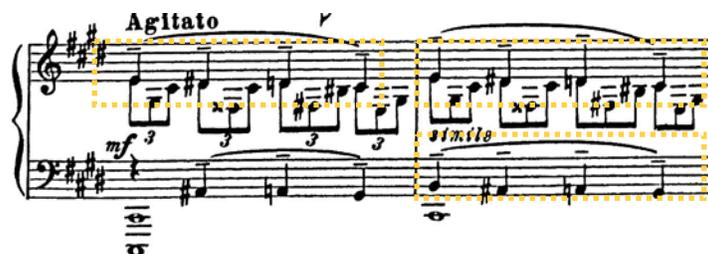
**Example 1: Chopin Scherzo,  
Op. 39, mm. 491–494 (C-B-E):**



**Example 2: Motive A: Prelude in C-sharp  
minor, Op. 3, No. 2, mm. 1-2 (A-G#-C#):**



**Example 3: Motive B: Rachmaninoff Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2, mm. 15-16 (E-D#-D-C#):**



Consideration of the “concealed variation” principle and motivic unity in Preludes, Op. 32 is triply important. First, it would enhance the pianist’s understanding of this sublime set of preludes and help establish a musical coherence and unity in performance of the complete set. Second, it would possibly draw greater engagement and critical listening from the audiences and listeners, regardless if they are acquainted with the work. Third, it would highlight the substantial influence of Frédéric Chopin on Sergei Rachmaninoff in a specific and original way.

## I - Early Biography and Career of Sergei Rachmaninoff

### I.1 - Early Biography of Sergei Rachmaninoff

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born March 20, 1873 under the Julian calendar at the estate of Oneg, to Vasili and Lubov Rachmaninoff. The older Rachmaninoff vaguely recalls at an early age playing four-hand piano pieces with his grandfather Arkady Alexandrovich, and being punished by listening to his father or mother play the piano while crouching disgracefully under the instrument. His maternal grandfather was a prominent military general, and acquired several estates, including Oneg.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, Sergei's father Vasili lost the four estates bought by his wife in public auction, and the family was forced to crowd into a St. Petersburg flat. Oskar von Rieseemann cites the abolishment of serfdom as a contributing factor to their financial ruin,<sup>7</sup> in addition to Vasili's lack of expertise about agriculture, and mismanagement and theft by the estate agents. Vasili's sister offered to take Sergei until his parents became settled, and eventually the family completely ruptured over the descent on the social ladder, leaving Sergei with little comfort other than visits from his grandmother.<sup>8</sup>

At the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1882-1885, Rachmaninoff was known for his shining musical aptitude coupled with laziness.<sup>9</sup> His broken home afforded him more freedom than appropriate, and he ambled casually through the city. Somehow, he found time for scoring high marks in music classes and abysmal marks for general subjects.<sup>10</sup> After committing fraud on

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<sup>6</sup> Bertennson, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Oskar von Rieseemann, and Dolly Rutherford. *Rachmaninoff's Recollections, Told to Oskar Von Rieseemann*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Bertennson, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Rieseemann, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Bertennson, 5.

his report cards, the mischief was discovered and his respected grandmother allowed him to remain on their country estate “Borrisovo” for the summer of 1884. These months in “God’s own world” were without doubt the happiest of Rachmaninoff’s childhood.<sup>11</sup> Rachmaninoff would drift in the River Volchov and listen to the Vesper bells peal over the serene countryside. This is notable to his Op. 32 set, as several preludes, including but not limited to Nos. 4, 10, and 13 contain reference to the familiar Russian bells that permeate his work. He would spend hours doing this, taking note of their peculiar, fascinating, ethereal voices.<sup>12</sup>

While living in St. Petersburg with his uncle, aunt, and siblings, his older brother Volodya would return from military school to St. Petersburg and fights would break out often. Sergei was accused by his uncle of being a “lazybones.”<sup>13</sup> Rachmaninoff would later cite his sister Yelena and her singing as influencing his musical tastes and style.<sup>14</sup> She would ask him to accompany her on piano with Tchaikovsky songs, therefore instilling in him a love of the composer's music, especially the song “None But the Lonely Heart.”<sup>15</sup> Tragically, Yelena passed away of anemia, shortly after being accepted at the Bolshoi Opera in Moscow.

Meanwhile, Rachmaninoff’s mother was at wit’s end about what to do with his musical future.<sup>16</sup> She contacted her cousin, Alexander Siloti, who was a favorite pupil of Liszt and had reaped great honors at the Musical Congress in Leipzig.<sup>17</sup> Siloti took personal responsibility for the boy and invited him to the Moscow Conservatory to study with his former teacher, Zverev.

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<sup>11</sup> Rieseemann, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Rieseemann, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Bertennson, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Bertennson, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Bertennson, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Bertennson, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Rieseemann, 36.

Siloti assured that this, combined with separating him from his family, would stamp “laziness” out of the boy.<sup>18</sup> His beloved grandmother drove him to the train station.

## I.2 - Moscow Conservatory and Early Career

In Moscow with Zverev, Rachmaninoff the musician was awakened. The severity of Zverev as a piano instructor, combined with his thorough sway over a student’s life and interests, gave Rachmaninoff a front-row seat to Moscow’s musical elite.<sup>19</sup> Rachmaninoff and two other boys, Maximov and Pressmann, arrived at Zverev’s house and entered, according to our subject, “a life full of discipline and serious study.”<sup>20</sup> Rachmaninoff later described Zverev as “unusually humane, fine, and noble-thinking man.” His teacher also ensured that his students received the finest cultural experience in Moscow, and therefore required their attendance at every good concert, opera, and performance by foreign celebrities.<sup>21</sup> Rachmaninoff’s character changed positively from a boisterous “lazybones” to a timid, aloof, restrained boy who worked industriously.<sup>22</sup> His hard work soon paid off: during his second year of study with Zverev, he achieved a Rubinstein Scholarship and performed in student recitals at the Moscow Conservatory.<sup>23</sup>

Rachmaninoff’s harmony and counterpoint teacher was Anton Arensky, a tasteful composer and pianist. The younger composer later conceded that Arensky’s harmony lessons were a tremendous help in his composition. After Zverev heard rumors of Rachmaninoff’s first composition (Study in F-sharp) he played the piece and evidently thought Rachmaninoff might

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<sup>18</sup> Bertenson, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Bertenson, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Rieseemann, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Rieseemann, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Rieseemann, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Max Harrison. *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings*. (New York; London: Continuum, 2005), 15.

well one day become a legitimate composer.<sup>24</sup> Because of this, he arranged for Rachmaninoff to study with and befriend Tchaikovsky. After Tchaikovsky awarded Rachmaninoff extraordinarily high marks at his composition examination, Rachmaninoff enrolled in Sergei Taneyev's composition course. The instructor held a shining illustration of manhood and musicianship.<sup>25</sup>

In Taneyev's opinion, music history began with the Dutch contrapuntal composers and evolved through Palestrina, Lasso, Bach (his favorite), Mozart and Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann, and straight to Tchaikovsky.<sup>26</sup> This could help explain Rachmaninoff's sturdy, polyphonic skills throughout his Preludes, as noted by a concert review by Yuly Engel in December 1911.<sup>27</sup> At this time Rachmaninoff broke completely with his piano instructor Zverev on less than congenial terms, but this allowed him the freedom to compose in his aunt Varvara's home in Moscow.<sup>28</sup> Rachmaninoff remained at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1891 to finish his free composition course with Arensky and hoped to win the highest honor at the Conservatory, the "Great Gold Medal."<sup>29</sup>

After completing his studies at the Moscow Conservatory, his life direction was not yet established.<sup>30</sup> His compositions enjoyed success within his school, but works needed public testing and his pianistic skills were considered excellent if not extraordinary. Rachmaninoff was fortunate to secure the publishing house A. Gutheil, through his former teacher Zverev (the two reconciled about the time of Rachmaninoff's graduation). Gutheil, having already secured Glinka, Balakirev,

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<sup>24</sup> Rieseemann, 56.

<sup>25</sup> Rieseemann, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Rieseemann, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Antipov, XVIII.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Norris. *Rachmaninoff*. 1st Am. ed. Master Musicians Series. (New York: Schirmer Books, Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Rieseemann, 75.

<sup>30</sup> John Culshaw. *Rachmaninov, the Man and His Music*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 29.

and Dargomizhky in his publishing catalogue, bought the publishing rights to Rachmaninoff's new opera, *Aleko*.<sup>31</sup> Soon after graduating and earning highest honors at the Conservatory, Rachmaninoff found from Tchaikovsky's input that Gutheil's offer was extremely generous, and began to teach piano lessons at the Konovalov estate while correcting proofs from Gutheil of his new opera, *Aleko*.<sup>32</sup> Production for his opera began after Lent in 1893, and he also accepted an invitation to perform at the Electrical Exposition in Moscow, where he presented Chopin's *Berceuse*, Op. 57, Liszt's transcription of Gounod's *Faust*, and a little (later significant) piece that he wrote in a flurry, *Prelude in C-sharp minor*, Op 3, No. 2.

It is here that we may digress from Rachmaninoff's biography to the musical influence of Chopin affecting the Russian Piano Tradition, and consequently, the piano preludes of Rachmaninoff.

### **I.3 - Chopin's Influence on the Russian Music Tradition**

To discern Chopin's influence on Sergei Rachmaninoff, it would be wise to examine the Polish composer's general influence on Russian art music. Chopin's appeal to music lovers in Russia was summarized by music critic Modeste Rezvoy in 1838: "Chopin saw completely new ways in the piano, and we do not find any of those harmonic delights in any of Chopin's predecessors. Chopin opened the new direction of piano playing."<sup>33</sup> The history of Chopin's music throughout Russia began early, when the composer was nineteen years old. Maria Agata Szymanowska, a Polish composer-pianist, first performed Chopin's music in Russia in 1829 and 1830.<sup>34</sup> In the 1830s and 1840s, there were artists who followed in Szymanowska's footsteps and

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<sup>31</sup> Harrison, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Bertenson, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Gennadi Moyseyevich Tsipin and Beatrice L. Frank. "Chopin and the Russian Piano Tradition." *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 38, (July 1995): 70.

<sup>34</sup> Tsipin, 68.

Chopin's music slowly but surely enjoyed more acclaim: Adolph Henselt, contemporary of Liszt and a respected pianist; Anton Goerke, teacher of Vladimir Stasov, Modest Mussorgsky, and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky; Hermann Laroche, contemporary of Tchaikovsky and professor at the Moscow Conservatory; none other than Franz Liszt included Chopin in his famous Russian concerts of 1842, 1843, and 1847.<sup>35</sup>

Other later Russian pianists who championed Chopin's compositions were Mily Balakirev, Nicolai Rubinstein, and Alexander Glazunov. Many literary sources can be found regarding the nature and interpretations of these pianists.<sup>36</sup> The primary driver and promoter of Chopin's music on the Russian concert stage was Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894).

Rubinstein defined the Russian national piano aesthetic, founded the Russian piano school, and delineated the aspects of those standards for the bulk of his compatriots and companions.<sup>37</sup> The heroic composer-pianist performed many of Chopin's compositions. On one occasion after performing the B minor Sonata, Op. 58, pianist Alexander Goldenweiser penned, "His playing of this left an imprint on my soul. The power, spontaneity and enchanting poetry merged into a single unity."<sup>38</sup> Rubinstein clarified the craft of Russian piano playing and dismissed sentimental aspects of amateur music-making. When Rubinstein retired from his musical career as a teacher and performer, Sergei Rachmaninoff entered the scene.

Anton Rubinstein's influence on Sergei Rachmaninoff was profound. When the younger composer was twelve years old, he was transfixed with Rubinstein's playing and remarked, "His playing gripped my whole imagination and had a marked influence on my ambition as a pianist."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tsipin, 71.

<sup>36</sup> Tsipin, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Tsipin, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Tsipin, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Riesemann, 49.

Rubinstein once dined at Zverev's home during Rachmaninoff's piano studies. While Rubinstein spoke at the dinner table, Rachmaninoff listened attentively to every word. In particular, he remembered Rubinstein's response to a question about the skill of a certain, professional, young pianist. Rubinstein ironically retorted, "Oh, well, everyone can play the piano nowadays..."<sup>40</sup> Rachmaninoff also recalled with fondness Rubinstein's historic Moscow concerts in the following year.

Rachmaninoff emerges respectfully among Russian contemporaries in his remarkable playing of Chopin's music; many performances have been recorded. Music composer and writer Boris Asafyev wrote that Rachmaninoff's playing of Chopin featured "patches of strict intellectual discipline." Asafyev wrote on Rachmaninoff's composing: "he created the life of melody in which the melodies of Chopin saturated his works with his courageously epic coloring and his special quality of song."<sup>41</sup> Another noteworthy statement by pianist Heinrich Neuhaus: "...in [Rachmaninoff's] playing of the Chopin sonata I seem to hear a mixture of the pale Balzac-like youth of the thirties and the broad Russian nature, an almost impossible stylistic antimony!"<sup>42</sup> It seems Rachmaninoff was significantly influenced by Chopin through the Russian school, both in his piano performances and compositions.

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<sup>40</sup> Riesemann, 50.

<sup>41</sup> Tsipin, 80.

<sup>42</sup> Tsipin, 80.

#### I.4 - Rachmaninoff's Early Admiration and Performance of Frédéric Chopin

As surveyed in Chapter 1, the influence of Frédéric Chopin on Sergei Rachmaninoff at a young age is assumed, given that the latter composer received a first-rate education in Western music from several prominent teachers. Specifically, there are several instances of Rachmaninoff's interaction with Chopin's works early in his education and career as a composer.

Rachmaninoff's first composition, the Scherzo in D minor for Orchestra is his earliest composition and reveals a clear, unsophisticated influence, not from Chopin but Felix Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>43</sup> Another early set of compositions that pay greater homage to Chopin's influence are his three Nocturnes, composed as a student between 1887-1888. These pieces owe their style to Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein, but their title certainly infers Chopin. A piece written around this time is the Romanze in F-sharp minor (1887).<sup>44</sup> Barrie Martyn notes that this early compositional effort evokes a Chopin nocturne in its melodic line. Lastly in 1891, Rachmaninoff completed his First Piano Concerto, Op. 1, which contains a repetitive element in the development and recapitulation sections of the first movement, reminiscent of Chopin's "Heroic" Polonaise in A-flat major, Op. 53 (Example 4).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Martyn, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Martyn, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Martyn, 51.

**Example 4: Comparison of Chopin’s “Heroic” Polonaise, Op. 53 and Rachmaninoff’s First Piano Concerto, Op. 1**

The image displays two musical excerpts side-by-side for comparison. The top excerpt is from Chopin's "Heroic" Polonaise, Op. 53, showing a piano accompaniment with a blue box highlighting a specific rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The bottom excerpt is from Rachmaninoff's First Piano Concerto, Op. 1, marked "Moderato." It shows a piano accompaniment with a blue box highlighting a similar rhythmic pattern in the left hand. Both excerpts are in the key of D major and 3/4 time.

In addition to Chopin’s compositional influences, there are also several records of Rachmaninoff performing Chopin’s work for family, examinations and public concerts. He performed masterpieces by Chopin at his grandmother’s Borissovo estate in the summer of 1885.<sup>46</sup> In the academic year of 1885-1886, Rachmaninoff was fortunate to hear the great Anton Rubinstein perform concerts in Moscow, where he was keenly riveted by the performance of Chopin’s Sonata in B minor.<sup>47</sup> Rachmaninoff also performed the first movement of this same sonata for his Conservatoire entrance examination in 1891, passing with honors.<sup>48</sup> Such high marks are notable when considering the Conservatory’s stringent demands on discipline and study.<sup>49</sup> Another instance of performing Chopin especially relates to Rachmaninoff’s premiere performance of his own Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2. As specified in Chapter 1, he performed Chopin’s *Berceuse* on the same concert on September 26, 1892 at the Electrical

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<sup>46</sup> Rieseemann, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Rieseemann, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Bertenson, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Rieseemann, 43.

Exposition in Moscow.<sup>50</sup> This implies that Rachmaninoff was quite at home interpreting the repertory of Chopin and Liszt before the Muscovite public. Lastly, Rachmaninoff released in the following year his *Seven Salon Pieces* for Piano, Op. 10.<sup>51</sup> Three pieces within the set, the “Nocturne,” Barcarolle,” and Mélodie” all borrow from Chopin in their character, title, and form, respectively. Due to the saturation of Chopin within Rachmaninoff’s musical education, it seems possible (yet uncertain) that he would incorporate Chopin’s piano writing into his own Op. 3 prelude.

## II - Analysis of Preludes, Op. 32

### II.1 - Rachmaninoff’s Conception and Composition of Op. 32 as Absolute Music

The piano cycle of 24 preludes (Op. 3, No. 2, Op. 23 and Op. 32) contains works which Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote over a long period of time totaling eighteen years. It is confirmed that the Prelude in C-sharp minor of 1892, from the outset of the composer’s creative journey, became the first item in the cycle.<sup>52</sup>

The piano prelude is a genre which Rachmaninoff began to master as a composer while still a conservatory student. We know his Prelude in E-flat minor of 1889, the *Preludiya* in D minor of 1889, and the Prelude in F major of 1891. The composer even turned to the prelude genre even after the cycle was completed: A piece of this title is included in the book of three miniatures for piano of 1917. A statement about this genre by the composer himself occurs in one of his interviews, which bears important influence on analysis of the works in question:

By its very nature the Prelude is absolute music, and it cannot be confined within the framework of program music or impressionistic music. Commentators have attributed all kinds of meanings to the Preludes of Chopin...Absolute music may suggest an idea or

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<sup>50</sup> Bertenson, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Martyn, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Sergei Rachmaninoff, ed. Valentin Antipov. *Critical Edition of the Complete Works*. (Moscow: Kassel; New York: Russian Music Publishing; Bärenreiter, Exclusive Worldwide Distribution & Subscription, 2005), XIV.

induce a mood in a listener, but its primary function is to give intellectual pleasure by the beauty and variety of its form. That was in fact the aim for which Bach strove in his amazing cycle of Preludes, which are a source of boundless delight for the musically mature listener. Their incomparable beauty will be lost if we try to find a reflection of the composer's moods in them. If we feel the need to perceive a Prelude in psychological terms, then we must understand that the function of a Prelude is not to portray a mood but to prepare it. A Prelude, it seems to me, is a form of absolute music intended to be performed before a more significant piece, or fulfilling the function of introducing some sort of action, which is of course reflected in its title.<sup>53</sup>

Besides pointing directly to the great masters (Bach and Chopin) whose successor Rachmaninoff was when he created his cycle of twenty-four preludes, his statement also notes the prelude's improvisatory nature and its character as preparatory to a more significant composition, by its emphasis on the intellectual element and the priority of craftsmanship in this genre of piano miniature.<sup>54</sup>

Rachmaninoff's words to some degree correspond with the written quality of the actual autographs of the twenty-four preludes. Antipov writes, "They all convey the appearance of clean copies in which the passages were written in a rapid, constant script accomplished as if in a fluid movement of the wrist. It seems as if the composer recorded the creative process of composition all at once, as if the Preludes were born under his pen in an instant in all their artistic integrity."<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, this notion is negated by other statements expressed by Rachmaninoff about the procedure by which he wrote a piano miniature:

A small composition may be an immortal masterpiece just as much as any large form. For instance, I often used to experience greater torments and encounter a larger number of problems when composing a small piano piece than when composing a symphony or concerto... When I write a small piece for piano I am entirely at the mercy of my theme, which has to be expressed briefly and precisely. Many places in my concertos and symphonies were written in one breath, whereas each one of my small pieces required special care and hard work... The most difficult problem confronting every creative artist, even today, is how to be brief and clear.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Antipov, XIV.

<sup>54</sup> Antipov, XIV.

<sup>55</sup> Antipov, XIV.

<sup>56</sup> Antipov, XIV.

To phrase it differently, had the composer meticulously written the development of his creative routine on paper, then his documents would have revealed a massive number of preliminary drafts or sketches. But gathering from Rachmaninoff's own remark, the early, concentrated process of building this collection of preludes existed almost exclusively in his own thoughts. As a result, no preliminary versions reflective of motive or structure – including earliest notations of the twenty-four preludes – have ever arisen in Rachmaninoff's documents.<sup>57</sup>

Regarding inspiration for Preludes, Op. 32, there is practically no primary evidence for the development of a compositional structure. As Rachmaninoff composed the entire opus within nineteen days, the lack of preliminary sketches increases the value of descriptions verbalized by the composer.<sup>58</sup> Recent scholarly work in 2006 by Valentin Antipov notes that Rachmaninoff deemed himself the “wandering musician” – exploring and establishing new boundaries as an artist – during this chapter in his life. This aspect is the distinguishing quality of the composer's output in the years surrounding Op. 32.<sup>59</sup> The neighboring compositions around this time are the *Liturgy of St. John Chrysotom*, Op. 31 for a cappella mixed choir, the Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30, and the symphonic poem *Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29. This middle period witnessed the musical depiction of topics originating in western Europe but long becoming universal.<sup>60</sup>

Antipov notes that previous analysis of motivic unity in Preludes, Op. 32 exist, particularly by himself, Barrie Martyn, and Oskar von Riesemann. Martyn notes the apparent use of Op. 3's Motive A inverted throughout the C major Prelude, Op. 32, No. 1. Antipov also observes that

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<sup>57</sup> Antipov, XIV.

<sup>58</sup> Antipov, XX.

<sup>59</sup> Antipov, XXIII.

<sup>60</sup> Antipov, XXI.

Martyn stops here in his monograph and does not attach any certain significance to Motive A throughout the cycle of twenty-four preludes.

At the point of Antipov's critical edition of the twenty-four preludes published in 2006, he seeks to advance the conjecture of a "concealed variation" principle, with the C-sharp minor Prelude as the variations' subject. I concur with Antipov and support the advancement of the "concealed variation" principle, particularly after studying and performing Preludes, Op. 32 in 2018. I also seek to extend this "concealed variation" claim to include not only Motive A (which Antipov cites) but also Motive B. Both motives originate from the C-sharp minor Prelude, and both motives can be found (some more conspicuously and proudly than others) in many preludes within the Op. 32 set.

I support this thesis because after studying these preludes during my studies at the University of Kansas, I memorized and performed them for my second Doctoral Recital on March 30, 2018. Therefore, I gained familiarity with Op. 32 on the physical keyboard and can pianistically feel Rachmaninoff's ingenious composition. Not only can one find the motivic unity here by listening or observing the score, but physically playing the pieces reveals a third way to discern these "concealed variations." In other words, the idiom and language of piano technique and placing the fingers on the keyboard reveals another layer of motivic unity. The way Rachmaninoff takes reputable music that he composed and weaves it into a newer composition is personally astounding. Preludes, Op. 32 also stands on its own merit as absolute music, even without knowing the motivic connection to his original Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2. This is another tribute to Rachmaninoff's brilliance in composition.

## **II.2 - Definition of Salience and Other Musical Terms**

Before delving into the motivic salience of Op. 3 within Op. 32, some tested analytical guidelines should be mentioned. I propose that Motive A and Motive B are *intertextual* features

of Rachmaninoff's piano preludes<sup>61</sup> *Intertextual* is defined as a feature that arises from relationships between works. (In this case, Chopin's Scherzo in C-sharp minor, Op. 39, and more importantly Rachmaninoff's Op. 3, No. 2 and Op. 32 Preludes). First, the quest for salience is significant in determining a feature of a composition or work of art. In this case, a "feature" is defined as a notable or characteristic part of something.<sup>62</sup> Regarding the mindful question "feature of what," I refer to Sergei Rachmaninoff and compositional motivic devices in his solo piano music. By salience, I refer to "a heightened attention that can arise due to either intratextual factors (such as phenomenal accent) or intertextual factors (quotation)."<sup>63</sup> In the examples of Rachmaninoff's Preludes, Op. 3, No. 2 and Op. 32, the proposed salient features are prevalent quotations of Motive A and Motive B.

Regarding salience and the notability of a musical feature, David Huron posits that a feature must have enough perceptually-pertinent properties in order to helpfully construct a distinctive feature definition (In our case, Motive A and Motive B).<sup>64</sup> One may counterargue here that distinctive features like Motive A and Motive B are just as prevalent in other prelude cycles, for example Chopin's Op. 28 Preludes. Chopin's cycle also contains descending bass lines and chromatic movement. However, Rachmaninoff's Op. 32 is unique and distinctive in that these motives reference his earlier work Op. 3, No. 2, and clearly in the first and last preludes within the set (C Major and Db Major). Because Rachmaninoff has bookended this opus with distinctive quotations of his earlier work, it appears only fair to investigate the occurrence of these motives throughout Op. 32. The parameters surrounding this present analysis within Op. 32 are as follows.

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<sup>61</sup> David Huron. "What is a Musical Feature? Forte's Analysis of Brahms's Op. 51, No. 1, Revisited," Music Theory Online 7, No. 4 (July 2001).

<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.01.7.4/mto.01.7.4.huron.pdf>, paragraph 7.

<sup>62</sup> Huron, paragraph 5.

<sup>63</sup> Huron, paragraph 18.

<sup>64</sup> Huron, abstract.

Generally Motive A is the more distinctive motive of the two; Motive B experiences fewer, notable quotations. First, the scale-degree position of each quotation will be noted: the original scale degrees of Motive A and Motive B are 6-5-1 and 3-2-b2-1, respectively. Second, the motives' rhythmic properties will be highlighted: Motive A originally falls on beats 3-4-1, while Motive B occurs on beats 1-2-3-4 (Motive B can give the illusion of occurring on beats 2-3-4-1 to the listener, which Rachmaninoff seemingly exploits to full effect in Op. 32). Third, the presence of parallel consonant motion over tonic pedal is a distinctive feature of the original Motive B. Lastly, other intratextual motives that permeate single preludes will be highlighted and paired alongside Motives A and B. The greater number of properties that exist with a certain quotation of either motive increases the salience of that motive. Conversely, the fewer amount of properties that lie with a possible quotation of Motive A or B within Op. 32 results in speculative, questioning language or absence from discussion altogether. The form of the Preludes, Op. 32 will be treated as ternary form (A-B-A). There are many outliers of Motive A and B that do not merit distinction. I propose in this thesis that Rachmaninoff's Motive A and Motive B in Preludes, Op. 32 are significant, salient features, both in intratextual presence and intertextual quotation and evocation.

### **II.3 - Analysis of No. 1 in C major**

The first Prelude in C major, Op. 32, No. 1 was written on August 30, 1910 and contains vivid, straightforward examples of Motive A and Motive B.<sup>65</sup> Clear features related to Op. 3 include the following: the exact scale degrees of Motive A contained in the bass line (b6-5-1, Example 5), parallel chromatic minor thirds and triads resembling Motive B (Example 3), the final parallel chromatic chords with Motive B, and the presence of the flat-2 chord (D<sup>b</sup>-F-A<sup>b</sup>) in mm. 24 and 31, like Op. 3.

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<sup>65</sup> Antipov, XVIII.

**Example 5: Prelude No. 1 in C major, Op. 32, mm. 1-2**

Motive A takes the permutation of  $A^b-G-C$ , which settles a half step below the original Motive A in Op. 3, No. 2. Similar properties include scale degrees and absolute pitch names ( $A-G-C$ , disregarding sharps or flats). This thematic transformation occurs in several different variants throughout this first Prelude. Measures 3-4 in the bass, mm. 6-7 in the treble, and measure 8 in the bass are similar variations of the initial Motive A. In m. 9, Rachmaninoff includes a varied extension of Motive A by affixing a  $B^b$  to its beginning ( $B^b-A-G-C$ ). The following examples are mm. 11-12 ( $B^b-A^b-G-C$ ), and mm. 14-15 in the treble (an exact transposition,  $E^b-D-G$ ).

A highly chromatic section dominated by half-steps follows in mm. 17-23, then the same extension of Motive A presents itself in mm. 23 in the top voice ( $B^b-A-G-C$ ). The high volume of chromaticism and contrapuntal writing present in this prelude is an indicator of Bach's Preludes and Fugues. This supports the Prelude's connection to previous composers.<sup>66</sup>

Rachmaninoff returns to quoting Motive A in mm. 26-27 in the bass, mm. 28-29 in the bass, mm. 32-33 in the treble, mm. 36 in the treble, and mm. 39-40 in the bass. Concerning Motive B's appearance in Prelude No. 1, there is an inversionsal quotation within the first two measures (Example 5), and a solid quotation in the final bars of mm. 36-41 (Example 6).

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<sup>66</sup> Antipov, XIV.

**Example 6: Prelude No. 1 in C major, mm. 36-41**

The image shows a musical score for Example 6: Prelude No. 1 in C major, mm. 36-41. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The right hand part features a melodic line with triplets and a fermata. The left hand part features a bass line with chords and a melodic line. The tempo markings 'poco meno mosso' and 'rit.' are present. A dashed orange box highlights a specific section of the music in the left hand, which is identified as Motive B in the text.

If Rachmaninoff referenced both Motive A and Motive B multiple times within three measures of this first prelude, then it appears he remained acutely aware of his Op. 3 Prelude as he quickly composed Op. 32 to complete his prelude cycle. Barrie Martyn also notes the similarity between the bass line in this opening C major prelude and the archetypal Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, both of these motives possess high potential for developmental possibility and versatility: Motive A contains a functional bass line movement within three notes that can be utilized in melodic, harmonic, and contrapuntal development, and Motive B shows chromatic movement within four notes that can be explored in the same ways, although not as distinctively.

Other feasible instances of Motive B in Prelude in C major are scattered throughout; however, their distinctiveness is quite low due to the chromatic writing and not worth mentioning here. Near the end of this prelude, Rachmaninoff highlights the parallel chromatic motion of Motive B, with descending, bell-like chords (Example 5). The scale degrees in the bass line match those of the original (3-2-b2-1). Within the Prelude in C major, Rachmaninoff deftly and capably writes a rhapsodic prelude to begin the Op. 32 set, and weaves Motive A and B throughout the piece, from the first to last measure.

<sup>67</sup> Antipov, XV.

## II.4 - Analysis of No. 2 in B-flat minor

Composed on September 3, 1910, this prelude contains more speculation regarding Motives A and B than the previous Prelude. The salient features of this piece include the parallel chromatic motion of Motive B above a pedal tone. Notice the inner voices Rachmaninoff writes in m. 1 (Example 7). These voices move mostly in descending half steps above an F in the bass. The composer also possibly begins Prelude No. 2 in F minor by quoting Motive A from the first anacrusis to m. 1.

### Example 7: Prelude No. 2 in B-flat minor, mm. 1-2

Motive A in this Prelude may be a direct transposition of the original, and appears throughout in several forms of varying intervals, and less distinction as a result. Another homage to Motive A is perhaps seen more consistently as accompaniment in the B section, beginning in rapid succession at m. 17 (Example 8).

### Example 8: Prelude No. 2 in B-flat minor, mm. 17-18

The transitional section to the returning A section in mm. 35-36 contains an extended transition with a virtuosic cadenza cascading from the treble to the bass. Besides the beautiful

pianistic writing of this passage, Rachmaninoff deftly develops the rhythmic motive particular to this prelude (dotted eighth-sixteenth-eighth note) and Motive B's parallel chromatic motion over the tonic pedal (Example 9).

**Example 9: Prelude No. 2 in B-flat minor, mm. 35-37**

Within the returning A section, a few motivic transformations take place, including immediately within the bass line. The 6-5-1 original scale degrees of Motive A in m. 38 recur repeatedly (D $\flat$ -C-F) within the bass line, and function as the motivic pedal point from mm. 37-42. While the rhythm does not match with the original Motive A, the scale degrees match in the modulated key of F Major.

### II.5 - Analysis of No. 3 in E major

Succeeding the tonally ambiguous Prelude in B-flat minor, this prelude opens with a clarion bell call in E major, and audacious octaves secure the tonality. The salient features in this prelude include rhythmic similarities to Op. 3 within mm. 2, 13, and 24. While Motives A and B are uncertain, other musical aspects of Op. 3 possibly arise: the eighth-note rhythm of Op. 3 appears conspicuously present in m. 2 (Example 10).

**Example 10: Comparison of Op. 3, m. 3 and Prelude No. 3 in E major, mm. 1-2**

Where the previous prelude toed the tonal line between the dominant F major and tonic B-flat minor, this prelude, composed on September 3, 1910, vacillates between the relative E major and C-sharp minor, with E major winning the tonal landscape. This is the first in the set that recalls the key of Rachmaninoff's early Op. 3 prelude, though not definitively. The earliest, uncertain glimpse of Motive A comes not in the first measure but in the accompaniment of m. 3 (C#-B-E, Example 11):

**Example 11: Prelude No. 3 in E major, mm. 3-4:**

Rachmaninoff cleverly maintains the relative major/minor ambiguity with Motive A in the left-and accompaniment, first placing it in E major (C#-B-E) within m. 3, then shifting the motive to the relative C-sharp minor in m. 4 (A-G#-C#). This would be the first, original scale-degree quotation of Motive A in Rachmaninoff's Op. 3 prelude. As the music leads to mm. 9-10, note the double four-note descending motive within the crashing chords in the treble and bass (Example 12). This could be a simultaneous, diatonic form, double quotation of Motive B:

**Example 12: Prelude No. 3 in E major, mm. 9-10:**

The extended coda section of the Prelude in E major draws attention to a supposed diatonic Motive B and almost certainly recalls a four-note motive from his Op. 23, No. 3 Prelude in D minor, written about seven years prior. Observe the two in comparison (Example 13):

**Example 13: Comparison of Op. 23, No. 3, mm. 1-2 and Op. 32, No. 3, mm. 50-51**

As mentioned before, this E major Prelude can be heard as an authoritative call of Russian bells, and the presence of the eighth-note rhythm from Op. 23, No. 3 is more distinctive than the presence of Motives A and B.

## II.6 - Analysis of No. 4 in E minor

As a heavyweight prelude of Op. 32, this prelude was completed on August 28, 1910 and emerges quickly as a standalone narrative that carries a wide range of musical characters and conflicting moods. Antipov describes the piece as reminiscent of a highly-extended folk or national scene in an opera.<sup>68</sup> The salient features of this piece relative to Op. 3 include the bass line

<sup>68</sup> Antipov, XXIII.

movement (tonic-mediant-dominant). In other words, the harmonic progression here of i-III-v matches the progression in Op. 3. Observe the two progressions side-by-side (Example 14)

**Example 14a: Op. 3, No. 2, mm. 5-7, harmonic progression i-III-v**

**Example 14b: Op. 32, No. 4, mm. 3, 7, 9, harmonic progression i-III-v**

In terms of our present analysis, this prelude stands out as an undertaking of greater complexity, in part because of the titanic nature of the work. Instead of relying primarily on past compositions, Rachmaninoff wrote this prelude as a development of its own, raw material. This prelude also contains a high number of diatonic scales rather than chromatic, which prevents certain quotations of Motive B.

Motive A is the first observed of the two in the accompaniment (B-A-D and C-B-E, Example 15). The salience of Motive A increases here by sharing the rhythmic placement with Op. 3. In other words, the final note of each Motive A occurs on the beat. Another salient feature is the similar scale degrees in the second quotation (6-5-1).

**Example 15: Prelude No. 4 in E minor, mm. 1-3:**

*Allegro con brio.* S. RACHMANINOFF, Op. 32, No. 4

The introduction of this Prelude extends until the *Piu vivo* marking at m. 27, where the pace quickens and the listener hears perpetual motion via eighth notes (F#-E-A, Example 16).

**Example 16: Prelude No. 4 in E minor, mm. 27-29**

*Piu vivo.* ( $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ )

In Example 16, Rachmaninoff subtly inserts the scale degrees of Motive A in mm. 28-29 (F#-E-A, 6-5-1). Curiously, this is the first rendition in the Dorian mode. This is not a unique occurrence, for the composer draws closer attention to this similar rendition in the following mm. 33-34 (Example 17).

**Example 17: Prelude No. 4 in E minor, mm. 33-34**

This Prelude is arguably the most complex within the set (more than the final Prelude), and as the B section progresses, Rachmaninoff aims for melodic development of long melodic and chromatic scales within the key of E minor. Also, his contrapuntal tendencies are fully on display in a four-part quartet. Throughout the B section (mm. 53-73), the composer ingeniously extends the E minor melodic and chromatic scales around the common tone of B. Notice in Example 17 how the lyrical melody continually returns to B after each scale degree within E minor. During this scalar section, examples of Motives A (E-D-G) and B (D-C#-C-B) can probably be heard scattered throughout (Example 18):

**Example 18: Prelude No. 4 in E minor, mm. 54-57**

Another salient, harmonic progression of i-III-v, similar to Op. 3, surfaces in the B section (Example 19):

**Example 19: Op. 32, No. 4, mm. 53, 57, 60, harmonic progression i-III-v**

Other instances of 6-5-1 quotations of Motive A within the B section are a mm. 60-61 in the bass (E-D-G), mm. 62-63 in the bass (C-B-E), and mm. 67-68 in the bass (G-F#-B). Motive B

quotations in this section are spotted above in Example 18 (D-C#-C-B) and m. 70 in the bass (E#-E-D#-C-double-sharp).

Throughout the climactic section of the returning A section, Rachmaninoff highlights not Motive A or B, but rather a rapid sequential circle of fifths progression in the bass line, and also the opening rhythmic motive. Suddenly, at m. 133 a probable repetition of Motive A occurs six times in quick succession (Example 20). The bass quotes Motive A once in A minor and five times in C major, and the scale degrees match Op. 3 (6-5-1), if the observer views those keys as tonicized in this passage:

**Example 20: Prelude No. 4 in E minor, mm. 132-138**

The image shows a musical score for the bass line of Rachmaninoff's Prelude No. 4 in E minor, measures 132-138. The score is written in 3/4 time and includes a piano (pp) dynamic marking. The bass line features a rapid sequential circle of fifths progression. Six instances of Motive A are highlighted with blue boxes. The first instance is in A minor, and the subsequent five instances are in C major. The scale degrees match Op. 3 (6-5-1).

There are many, minimally distinctive quotations of Motive A and B not mentioned here for a few reasons: the E minor prelude functions well as a standalone narrative and development, the quotations do not share enough salient features with Op. 3, and the piece is written diatonically, not chromatically, with rapidly shifting harmonic progressions.

### II.7 - Analysis of No. 5 in G major

Rachmaninoff's Prelude No. 5 in G major is an enduring, popular Prelude from the Op. 32 set. Valentin Antipov proposes that the work "reflects the summer state of Nature in blossom, as at the moment of solstice, calm and unwavering."<sup>69</sup> This piece was composed on August 25, 1910

<sup>69</sup> Antipov, XXIII.

alongside the following F minor and F major preludes. The salient features of this piece include the quotation of Motive A within the melody. opposite chromatic motion in the coda, possibly resembling Motive B. The quotations of Motive A are largely found throughout the lyrical treble melody and adapted to the major mode with similar scale degrees (6-5-1), beginning in the opening measures (Example 21):

**Example 21: Prelude No. 5 in G major, mm. 2-3:**

Throughout the piece, Rachmaninoff consistently inverts the perfect fifth interval upward as a perfect 4th in the melody. Although the treble plainly recalls this three-note motive, the opening left-hand accompaniment implies Motive A in the quintuplet accompaniment (Example 21). Since the composer studied strict counterpoint with the Russian symphonist and teacher Sergei Taneyev, he was acutely aware of the arrangement of musical themes inspired by the old polyphonists (inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion).<sup>70</sup> This supports the prevalence, and therefore salience of Rachmaninoff's employment and variation of Motive A and B in Preludes, Op. 32.<sup>71</sup> Rachmaninoff continues to relate a retrograde-inversion rendition of Motive A in mm. 7-8 (Example 22):

<sup>70</sup> Antipov, XVI.

<sup>71</sup> Huron, 3.

**Example 22: Prelude No. 5 in G major, mm. 7-8**

A quotation of Motive A can be observed within the bass melody. This specific motive shares scale degrees (6-5-1) and rhythmic placement (ending on downbeat) with Op. 3 (Example 23):

**Example 23: Prelude No. 5 in G major, mm. 9-10**

Although uncertain, Rachmaninoff could later exploit the retrograde-inversion Motive A in a virtuosic cadenza which suspends the steady Moderato tempo (Example 24):

**Example 24: Prelude No. 5 in G major, mm. 21-22**

Moving into the coda, the composer ingeniously places both of these motives into close proximity. Motive A here shares rhythmic and scale degrees with the original, and Motive B presumably shares chromatic motion over tonic pedal, although moving in opposite directions. The beautiful contrast here includes opposite chromatic motion (Example 25):

**Example 25: Prelude No. 5 in G major, mm. 34-35**

**II.8 - Analysis of No. 6 in F minor**

When we reach the sixth Prelude in F minor composed on August 25, Rachmaninoff reverses character and mood as the listeners progress into the middle pieces of the Op. 32 Preludes. The salient features in this prelude are the rapid repetition of the 6-5-1 scale-degree succession of Motive A within the accompaniment (Example 26), and the parallel chromatic motion over tonic pedal of Motive B (Examples 27 and 28):

**Example 26: Prelude No. 6 in F minor, mm. 1-3**

As the piece moves, Motive B appears visibly in the bass as a transposed quotation, with similar letter names ( $E_b$ -D- $D_b$ -C, Example 27):

**Example 27: Prelude No. 6 in F minor, mm. 16-18**

When the piece transitions from the B section to the returning A section, Rachmaninoff quotes Motive A in rapid succession in the right-hand accompaniment (Example 28):

**Example 28: Prelude No. 6 in F minor, mm. 34-36**

In the returning A section, Rachmaninoff again turns to Motive B via parallel chromatic motion over tonic pedal in F. Notice the similarity of chords and letter names to the original Motive B (Eb-D-Db-C, Example 29):

**Example 29: Prelude No. 6 in F minor, mm. 48-50**

Also, noteworthy yet unrelated to Motives A or B, in m. 60 Rachmaninoff ingeniously adds foreshadowing of the half-step toggle in the following F major Prelude via the last sixteenth-note

triplet (D $\flat$ -B-C-F). Seeing as the transition to Prelude No. 7 is merely modal, this allows for a seamless sharing of material between preludes.

### II.9 - Analysis of No. 7 in F major

Composed on August 25, 1910 alongside the G major and F minor Preludes, this piece energetically employs the minor second vacillation from Motive A. Salient features in this piece include beginning the Motive A descent on beat 2, Motive B's flat-second chord (G $\flat$  major), and Motive B's parallel chromatic motion over tonic pedal (Example 34). Notice in the opening measures, a half-step toggle around C in the bass. Rachmaninoff doesn't immediately begin with a quotation of Motive A, but rather highlights the half step, both in the bass in m. 1 (C-B-C) and the melody in m. 2 (F-G $\flat$ -F, Example 30).

#### Example 30: Prelude No. 7 in F major, mm. 1-3

The image shows the first three measures of the Prelude No. 7 in F major by Rachmaninoff. The score is in 3/4 time, marked Moderato, and begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The first measure shows a half-step toggle in the bass (C-B-C) and a melody in the treble (F-G $\flat$ -F). The second measure continues this pattern. The third measure shows a half-step toggle in the bass (C-B-C) and a melody in the treble (F-G $\flat$ -F). A blue box highlights the bass line in the third measure, showing the half-step toggle (C-B-C).

The A section progresses through m. 16, and the composer adds an ingenious half-step toggle in the bass (C-B-C) while simultaneously quoting a transposed Motive B in the treble (F-E-E $\flat$ -D, Example 31):

**Example 31: Prelude No. 7 in F major, mm. 11-13**

The image shows a musical score for Example 31, measures 11-13 of Prelude No. 7 in F major. The score is written for piano in treble and bass clefs. A dashed orange box highlights the right hand in measures 17-19, where Motive B is quoted in eighth notes. The bass line features a half-note toggle. Dynamics include 'p' and 'dim.'

When the prelude's B section arrives in m. 17 followed by an acceleration in m. 20, Rachmaninoff begins to quote Motive B in rapid succession, doubling the note speed to eighth notes (A $\flat$ -G-G $\flat$ -F). He also continually refers to the half-note toggle in the bass during this section (Example 32):

**Example 32: Prelude No. 7 in F major, m. 22**

The image shows a musical score for Example 32, measure 22 of Prelude No. 7 in F major. The score is written for piano in treble and bass clefs. A dashed orange box highlights the right hand in measure 22, where Motive B is quoted in eighth notes. The bass line features a half-note toggle.

To complete the Prelude, Rachmaninoff weaves an extended inversion of a gently ascending, descending chromatic line into the four-part counterpoint. For our purposes, clearer quotations of Motive B can be found in mm. 37-40 within the tenor line. The slurs group the four notes together, totaling four quotations of Motive B (the last two in Example 33):

**Example 33: Prelude No. 7 in F major, mm. 39-41**

In an ingenious touch of finesse, Rachmaninoff ends this Prelude by highlighting the half-step toggle from the opening and paves the road to the following Prelude in A minor by writing the octave-fifth reinforcement in F major between the melody and bass lines.

**II.10 - Analysis of No. 8 in A minor**

Composed the second of nineteen days on August 24, 1910, this Prelude contains many clear aspects shared with Motive A and B in the sixteenth-note accompaniment. The “concealed variation” in this Prelude contains two aspects. The first is the perfect fifth interval from Motive A, highlighted in the anacrusis to the first measure, and the second is the variation on the Motive A rhythm. This rhythm can be described as “short-short-long.” You will see the “short-short-long” rhythm of Motive A throughout this prelude. Notice the opening measures shown in Example 34, the descending figures quote Motive A repeatedly, while adding a triadic mediant harmony (A-G-E-C, etc., Example 34):

**Example 34: Prelude No. 8 in A minor, mm. 6-7**

Concerning Motive B in this Prelude, Rachmaninoff relies substantially on the secondary diatonic Motive B (refer back to Example 3) over the primary, chromatic Motive B. The B section of this prelude could range from mm. 26-36. Rachmaninoff possibly writes variants on Motive A (B-B $\flat$ -C, A-G-A, etc.) in the opening measures of the B section (Example 35):

**Example 35: Prelude No. 8 in A minor, mm. 26-27**

Contained in the cadenza of the B section, Motive B materializes in the cascading, chromatic fingerwork of the left hand that includes parallel chromatic motion except one whole step and one augmented second (G $\sharp$ -G-F $\sharp$ -E, F-E-D $\sharp$ -C, Example 36):

**Example 36: Prelude No. 8 in A minor, mm. 35-36**

In the coda section of Prelude in A minor, a succession of diatonic and chromatic renditions of Motive B takes place, allowing for variance in the piece's "concealed variations" (Example 37):

**Example 37: Prelude No. 8 in A minor, m. 43**

**II.11 - Analysis of No. 9 in A major**

Rachmaninoff composed this Prelude in A major early in Op. 32's inception on August 26, 1910, and immediately begins quoting a supportive, middle-voice accompaniment rendition of Motive A. The piece itself is one of the larger preludes in form and scope, succeeding two shorter preludes (F major and A minor). The "concealed variations" in this prelude likely are as follows: Motive A in the accompaniment (broken and blocked chords), and Motive B in the rolling bass line. The penultimate chord of the piece (Example 41) also contains the same pitch classes as the penultimate chord in Op. 3 (m. 60). The opening measures display a stealthy Motive A in the accompaniment (Example 38):

**Example 38: Prelude No. 9 in A major, mm. 1-2**

Another recurring motif solely within the Prelude is the rising diatonic scale played in octaves from the bass to treble registers. Rachmaninoff highlights a similar upward scale in the

following Prelude in B minor. As the piece progresses, the wave-like diatonic scale prevails, casting an oceanic paradise over the piece. A four-note, partly chromatic, inversionsal pattern of Motive B potentially springs up in the bass (C-D-D#-E, Example 39):

**Example 39: Prelude No. 9 in A major, mm. 28-29**



Finally, the piece ends brightly in A major, but not before Motive A emerges from the chordal cadence (F#-E-A, Example 40):

**Example 40: Prelude No. 9 in A major, mm. 54-58**

The image shows a musical score for Example 40, which is a piano accompaniment for two staves. The key signature is A major (two sharps). The music is in 3/4 time. The first staff has a 'f' dynamic marking, followed by 'dim.'. The second staff has a 'mf' dynamic marking, followed by 'dim.'. A blue box highlights a chordal cadence in the bass line of the final measure, consisting of the notes F#, E, and A. The piece ends with a 'pp' dynamic marking.

Overall, the Prelude in A major is a wonderfully, independent, rhapsodic piece but with fewer references to our “concealed variations” of Motive A and Motive B.

## II.12 - Analysis of No. 10 in B minor (*The Return*)

In this prelude composed September 6, 1910, we find the only programmatic reference confirmed by Rachmaninoff throughout the entire set of Preludes.<sup>72</sup> Although the information regarding the visual inspiration for this Prelude was not disclosed by the composer until the

<sup>72</sup> Antipov, XVII.

publication of Rieseemann's *Recollections*, Rachmaninoff confirmed that this piece was inspired by Böcklin's painting *The Return*.<sup>73</sup> Böcklin's work was a previous and future inspirational source for the composer, having driven the work for his aforementioned symphonic poem *Isle of the Dead*, Op. 29 and upcoming *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 33 and 39.<sup>74</sup> This also happened to enjoy the status of Rachmaninoff's favorite prelude, as confirmed by a conversation with Benno Moiseiwitsch. He had just performed Rachmaninoff's piece at his American debut in 1919, when Rachmaninoff asked him why he chose that piece. The result was that both performer and composer selected that prelude as their favorite.<sup>75</sup>

This prelude is one of the strongest cases of Motive B prevalence within Op. 32. Salient features of this piece reference Motive B and include the melody in m. 3-4 and similar passages (Example 41), the flat supertonic chord at the climax, and the distinctive parallel double-thirds over tonic pedal at mm. 57-60 (Example 45). The opening bars of Prelude in B minor recall the familiar Russian bells.

**Example 41: Prelude No. 10 in B minor, mm. 1-3**

Rachmaninoff reveals Motive B at the end of the opening phrase in mm. 3-4 (D-C#-C-B) with a fully chromatic rendition and again in mm. 7-8 (F#-E-E $\flat$ -D) with a mostly chromatic rendition. Once the B section begins, an extended melodic line draws upward, resulting in a

<sup>73</sup> Bertenson, 296.

<sup>74</sup> Rieseemann, 139, 237.

<sup>75</sup> Bertenson, 296.

gradual crescendo and buildup toward the thundering climax in m. 34. Another distant sighting of Motive A can possibly be gleaned from this section, via inversion. Notice the contour between the melody and accompaniment (B-C#-F#, Example 42), not unlike the prelude's opening:

**Example 42: Prelude No. 10 in B minor, mm. 21-22**

This texture and gradual crescendo intensify as the piece escalates to a thundering climax. Once the original tempo returns at m. 37, an inverted rendition of Motive A with similar intervals (second, fifth) surfaces (D-E-B, etc., Example 43):

**Example 43: Prelude No. 10 in B minor, mm. 37-39**

Rachmaninoff reaches the brilliant cadenza and ingeniously adds a condensed inversion and quotation of Motive A within each sextuplet (B-F#-E, F#-E-C#, etc., Example 44):

**Example 44: Prelude No. 10 in B minor, m. 47**

The cadenza ends and the brief A section repeats in m. 49. More convincing quotations of Motive B occur in the final bars of this momentous Prelude. Notice the highlighted figures below (D-C#-C-B, F#-E#-E-D#, Example 45):

**Example 45: Prelude No. 10 in B minor, mm. 57-60**

**II.13 - Analysis of No. 11 in B major**

Composed August 23, 1910, the same day as the following Prelude in G-sharp minor, these two were the first composed within the set. Perhaps this can draw attention to the relative major/minor relationship between the two, as well as prominent sightings of Motive B within both pieces. For example, Motive A in the B major Prelude could be revealed in the functional bass line, strictly on a harmonic basis. In the following prelude, Motive A can be observed in the linear, melodic entrance in mm. 2-3 (Example 46).

**Example 46: Prelude No. 11 in B major, mm. 1-4**

The harmonic content relies on the diatonic scale and less on the chromatic scale. The chorale-like chords penetrate the devotional, penitent character of this prelude. Rachmaninoff writes a couple, parallel, chromatic passages over tonic pedal with Motive B (D#-C-double-sharp-B#-B, Example 47):

**Example 47: Prelude No. 11 in B major, mm. 22-26**

For the remainder of this Prelude, Motive B could invert upward diatonically, although there are no more certain quotes like Example 46, and Motive A remains a less distinctive feature of this prelude.

## II.14 - Analysis of No. 12 in G-sharp minor

Composed August 23, 1910, alongside the previous B major Prelude, this is another early composition in the set and showcases Rachmaninoff's refined skill as a melodist. The recurring Russian bells in this piece are heard not in the clanging bass as the following Prelude in D-flat major, but in the shimmering upper register (Example 48):

**Example 48: Prelude No. 12 in G-sharp minor, mm. 2-4**

As the piece unfolds, Motive A continues to surface plainly in the melody (E-D#-G#, Example 48). Note the uncertain presence of Motive A (B-A#-D#, Example 49) and the four-note descending pattern that faintly echoes Motive B:

**Example 49: Prelude No. 12 in G-sharp minor, mm. 24-25**

Contained within the transition of Prelude in G-sharp minor from the B section to the returning A section is another rendition of Motive B that needs mentioning, neither strictly chromatic nor diatonic, but contained in the original C-sharp minor Prelude. This unique instance briefly treats D# as tonic, and appears as parallel chromatic motion over tonicized pedal, like Motive B (A-G#-F double-sharp-D#, Example 50):

**Example 50: Prelude No. 12 in G-sharp minor, mm. 32-33**

Moving to the final bars of mm. 47-48, the observer sees “concealed variations” of both Motive A and B. Motive A could maybe be found repeatedly in the shimmering bell-like passage in m. 46 (E-D#-G#), although this sighting is unclear (Example 51):

**Example 51: Prelude No. 12 in G-sharp minor, mm 46-48**

The final G# of Prelude in G-sharp minor transitions seamlessly to the following prelude in D-flat major.

**II.15 - Analysis of No. 13 in D-flat major**

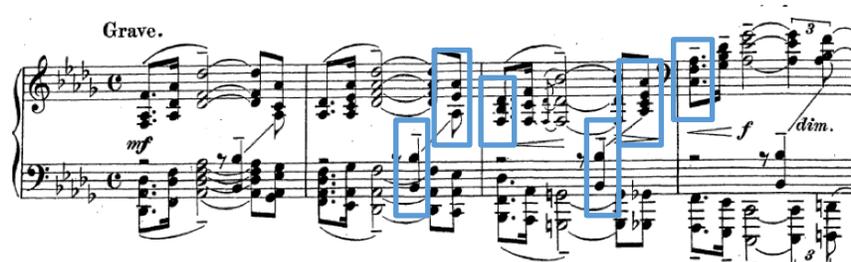
According to Valentin Antipov, the Prelude in D-flat major is “the arch-like completion of the entire integral and unified cycle of '24 Preludes' and simultaneously a kind of variation on the theme of the Prelude in C-sharp minor.”<sup>76</sup> The salient features of this prelude qualify as the sturdy base of Rachmaninoff’s “concealed variation” principle within Op. 32. These features include Motive A in mm. 1-2 sharing scale degrees (6-5-1) and the parallel minor 6th chords of Motive B over the climactic pedal in mm. 57-59. Secondly, the coda shines in its similarity to Op. 3’s coda. Also, this prelude references other preludes within this Op. 32 set. Specifically, No. 2 in B minor, No. 9 in A major, and No. 10 in B minor all earn quotations within this final D-flat major Prelude. The continuity of Rachmaninoff’s writing in his piano preludes reaches its peak in this final prelude as he merges new thematic material, quotations from Op. 32, and quotations from Op. 3, No. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Antipov, XVI.

Oskar von Rieseemann, the author of Rachmaninoff's recollections, was the first to point out the similarity between the initial theme of the original Op. 3 prelude and this final piece which completes the Op. 32 set.<sup>77</sup> Rachmaninoff's choice of key also carries significance as the completion of the entire twenty-four preludes, and the enharmonic parallel major of the original Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2.

This final Prelude asserts not merely Rachmaninoff's hints of his earlier work, but whole recollections. Both Motives A and B are distinctly referred and highlighted at the opening and middle sections, respectively. This work was the final chronological composition on September 10, 1910, five days before the publication of the set via A. Gutheil.<sup>78</sup> The observer of the score (and the acutely aware listener) can already observe Motive A in full with the tenuto markings (B $\flat$ -A $\flat$ -D $\flat$ , Example 52):

**Example 52: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 1-2**



Once Rachmaninoff wrote the middle section, a prominent development of Motive B occurs in the melody (Example 53). This distinction affirms the prevalence and salience of the original Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3 and presence of the two original motives in Op. 32. This final prelude develops Motive A and B beyond a reasonable doubt, even quoting them with the

<sup>77</sup> Sergei Rachmaninoff, Oskar Von Rieseemann, and Dolly Rutherford. *Rachmaninoff's Recollections, Told to Oskar Von Rieseemann*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934), 236

<sup>78</sup> Antipov, XVIII.

exact pitches (albeit with a modal change for Motive A). Motive B is quoted here exactly (E-D#-D-C#, Example 53) as the original.

**Example 53: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 21-22**

Musical score for Example 53, showing measures 21-22 of Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major. The tempo is *Meno mosso* and the dynamics are *ppp*. The score features a chromatic line in the right hand and a sixteenth-note accompaniment in the left hand. Motive B is highlighted with orange dashed boxes.

While the piece continues past the A major *meno mosso* section, the chromatic line of Motive B inverts and extends upward, in parallel chromatic motion (Example 54):

**Example 54: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 27-28**

Musical score for Example 54, showing measures 27-28 of Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major. The tempo is *Allegro* and the dynamics are *ff* and *mf*. The score features a chromatic line in the right hand and a sixteenth-note accompaniment in the left hand. Motive B is highlighted with orange dashed boxes.

During the B section, Motive A returns with the rhythm in diminution in the left hand, in original 6-5-1 scale degrees in the relative B-flat minor (Example 55):

**Example 55: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 31-32**

Musical score for Example 55, showing measures 31-32 of Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major. The tempo is *più vivo* and the dynamics are *sff* and *p*. The score features a chromatic line in the right hand and a sixteenth-note accompaniment in the left hand. Motive A is highlighted with blue solid boxes.

In another, brilliant merging of motives shortly before the returning A section, Rachmaninoff simultaneously quotes the original notes of Motive A (A-G#-C#) and the original notes of Motive B (E-D#-D-C#) with parallel chromatic motion in this virtuosic cadenza (Example 56):

**Example 56: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 37-38**

When Rachmaninoff reaches the returning A section of this final Prelude in D-flat major, the resulting fusion of Motive B (Transposition, A $\flat$ -G-G $\flat$ -F) and the opening, original motive from the prelude (D $\flat$ -A $\flat$ -D $\flat$ ) are showcased in this triumphant passage (Example 57):

**Example 57: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 42-43**

In the coda of this final Prelude, Rachmaninoff brings a third quotation from the coda of his original Prelude in C-sharp minor (Example 58):

**Example 58: Coda, Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2, mm. 55-62**

As established by previous musicological research,<sup>79</sup> m. 56 in the previous example and m. 56 in Op. 32, No. 13 (pictured in Example 58) begin with the same chordal progression that utilize C# as the common tone: A major and A half-diminished seventh chords. From there the two preludes part ways: the Op. 3, No. 2 Coda contains four additional chords (and quotes the Dies irae in the middle voice, A-G#-A-F#),<sup>80</sup> while the Op. 32 Prelude truncates the chord progression to two chords, and ends in the enharmonic Db major for a triumphant conclusion.

The Motive B quotation is in full effect in the Coda of the D-flat major Prelude (Example 59):

**Example 59: Prelude in D-flat major, mm. 56-57**

<sup>79</sup> Antipov, XV, XVI.

<sup>80</sup> Antipov, XVI.

It is important to take note of the final bars of Prelude in D-flat major, the Op. 32 set, and Rachmaninoff's cycle of twenty-four preludes. Notice in m. 62 the quotation of the final bar from Op. 3, No. 2 (Example 60), albeit in the D $\flat$  enharmonic equivalent and major mode. Therefore, with the final bar and chord Rachmaninoff further resolves the D-flat major prelude than its C-sharp minor predecessor.

**Example 60: Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, mm. 59-62**

The image shows a musical score for Example 60, which is the final section of Prelude No. 13 in D-flat major, measures 59-62. The score is written for piano in 2/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Grave'. The music features a series of chords and triplets. A blue box highlights the final bar (measure 62) in both the treble and bass staves, showing a chord that is an enharmonic equivalent of the final bar of Op. 3, No. 2.

**Conclusion - Resolving the Prelude in C-sharp minor and Completing the Preludes**

It is clear that Sergei Rachmaninoff composed his cycle of preludes intending to complete a twenty-four prelude cycle in the style of Bach, Chopin, and Scriabin. Many parallels, of which some have already been extrapolated, lie between Op. 32, No. 13 in D-flat major and the original prelude, concerning which Rachmaninoff experienced many mixed emotions throughout his career.<sup>81</sup> Further evidence of salience between the final Op. 32 D-flat major prelude and Op. 3, No. 2 is the number of measures: both pieces contains exactly sixty-two bars, according to the recent Critical Edition of Rachmaninoff's Complete Works. It is my sincere wish that in exploring and drawing out the motivic unity and "concealed variations" of this prelude set, more pianists

<sup>81</sup> Bertenson, 49.

will seek to engage these motives in performance of Op. 32 and display the intertextual, motivic unity between Rachmaninoff's works.

Rachmaninoff's piano preludes are invaluable to the solo piano repertoire. The memoirs of Oskar von Rieseemann credit them with eradicating the belief that a prelude is a modest piano piece. In this case, they are meticulously structured *tone-pictures*, geared more for the concert auditorium than the home.<sup>82</sup> The inherent plan of these preludes has long been suspected and observed by enthusiasts such as Rieseemann. The direct statements on the Preludes, Op. 32 by the composer himself have likely dampened the enthusiasm of aficionados and musicologists in determining the careful construction of these piano pieces. However, with the scholarly research undertaken by Valentin Antipov, the tight construction and musical ingenuity of Rachmaninoff's Preludes, Op. 32 will become more apparent to pianists who perform this masterpiece.

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<sup>82</sup> Rieseemann, 236.

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