

Akademia Muzyczna im. Krzysztofa  
Pendereckiego w Krakowie

Instrumental Faculty  
Department of Piano

**Yanlong Zhang**

EXPRESSION OF PIANO SONATAS  
AS A REFLECTION OF STYLISTIC CHANGES IN WORKS  
ALEXANDRA SKRIABIN

Doctoral thesis written under the direction of  
prof. dr. hab. Gajusz Kęska

Kraków 2023



*ALEXANDER NIKOLAIEVITCH SKRIABIN (6 I 1872–27 IV 1915)*

## List of contents

Introduction.....	4
I. Skriabin and his ten piano sonatas.....	5
1.1. Skriabin’s artistic career .....	5
1.2. The three stages of Skriabin's creation .....	7
1.2.1. Musical style and expression of individual creative ideas in the early stage of creativity .....	8
1.2.2. The period of exploration and formation of mysticism in the middle stage.....	8
1.2.3. Reflection on mysticism in the late stage of creativity.....	9
1.3. The essence of ten piano sonatas of Skriabin .....	10
II. Personalized development of composing techniques and methods .....	16
2.1. Harmony in the early stages of creativity .....	16
2.1.1. Chord superimposition.....	16
2.1.2. Chord alternated.....	17
2.1.3. Chord chromatic progression.....	19
2.1.4. Neapolitan chord.....	20
2.1.5. Presence and application of mystical chord.....	21
2.2. Characteristic features of Skriabin’s harmony in the middle and late stages of creativity .....	27
2.3. Melody and scale .....	28
2.4. Composition structure.....	32
2.4.1. Merger under construction.....	35
2.4.2. Towards complexity and structural liberation in the late stage of creativity.....	37
2.5. Tonal system.....	38
2.5.1. Early creative stage.....	38
2.5.2. Middle and late stages.....	42
2.6. Rhythm and beat .....	47
III. Philosophical background.....	54
3.1. The germination of philosophical thought.....	54
3.2. The influence of philosophical thought on Skriabin.....	56
3.3. A new look at Skriabin's music .....	63
IV. Executive issues.....	66
4.1. Sound extraction method .....	66

4.2. Pedalization.....	71
4.3. Tempo and rhythm processing.....	79
4.4. Performance tips and comparisons of pianists' performances.....	81
V. Summary.....	85
Bibliography.....	88

## **Introduction**

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Russian music scene was full of talented and outstanding artists active not only locally, but also internationally. At that time, Russian music developed on two levels, one of which was focused on the inheritance and continuation of Western romantic traditions. Together with Sergei Prokofiev, Anton Rubinstein and others, Piotr Tchaikovsky led composers following this path. The second creative camp was the Russian National School, in which Mily Balakirev and other members of the "Powerful Bunch" worked dynamically. Scriabin's work, both pianist and composer, did not fit into the mainstream music in Russia, especially due to his distinctive creative style and expressive artistic temperament. His music slowly broke out of earlier, traditional patterns and gradually went beyond the framework of romantic music. The style gained the name of unique, being the beginning of new genres of the 20th century. Many of his special creative techniques inspired people in the process of transformation from romantic style to contemporary music. They played a significant role not only in the development of Russian, but also European music.

Scriabine left behind a rich legacy of works created throughout his life. The most important of them are more than two hundred piano pieces and five symphonies. In his compositions from the early, middle and late period of his work, one can sense large stylistic differences, which make it difficult to attribute the creation of these works to the same person. In particular, his late works are often not obvious and cause a sense of consternation in the recipient. An example of such works created in all stages of his work is the ten piano sonatas, which comprehensively represent the evolution of Scriabin's musical thought and compositional style. Therefore, in the following dissertation I focused on exploring the mentioned works in terms of stylistic changes, analyzing elements such as harmony, melody, used rocks, tonal arrangement, rhythm or philosophical foundations of a given composition. I have summed it up in personal implementing recommendations.

## **I. Skriabin and his ten piano sonatas**

### **1.1. Skriabin's artistic career**

6th January 1872 year in Moscow, Alexander Skriabin was born in a rich Russian family. His father was a diplomat by profession, while his mother was an outstanding pianist, who after graduating from the Moscow Conservatory of Music successfully gave concerts on Russian and European stages. Unfortunately, Alexander died shortly after she was born. The father immediately took up work abroad and entrusted the care of the child to his aunt and grandfather. The young Skriabin was a musical genius. His aunt, treating him as her own child, fully aware of the boy's talent, took care of his musical education. Thanks to her and her connections in the Moscow upper class, the seven-year-old boy was introduced to the founder of the Russian School of Piano, as well as to the then director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music – Anton Rubinstein. Asked to listen to Skriabin's play and work, after a few minutes, being impressed, he concluded that the boy had a promising future ahead of him. At the age of thirteen Skriabin entered the Moscow Music Conservatory. There was also a two-year younger boy in his class. He also in the future was to conquer the musical world, and his name was Sergei Rachmaninov. Like Debussy and Ravel, they were both designed to be inscribed in the history of Russian music.

Although Skriabin's composing skills were not yet sufficiently mature in his student years, his genius made the compositions still "in school languages". The only thing Skriabin was concerned about was the size of his hands, covering only an octave on the keyboard. As he delved into playing, he unfortunately felt more and more limitations. During exhausting exercise, his right hand was injured. Fortunately, he met an outstanding doctor on his way, thanks to which he quickly got into shape. During convalescence, he practiced his left hand and wrote a series of exercises devoted to it. This moment initiated an interesting and wonderful form of creation, because the collection became an inspiration for later works on the left hand of Prokofiev and Ravel. The fact that in many works the left hand part is technically more difficult has become a characteristic feature of Skriabin's works.

At that time he also drew inspiration from Chopin's nocturnal and Liszt's symphonic poem: the genre of the work depended not only on its construction, but also on the musical content contained therein. Traditional ones such as roundo, sonata or concerto have to develop and process the content, but shorter, flexible genres can fully express the composer's fascination with poetry and sensitivity to it. Skriabin believed that the language of music was like poetry in its true nature, so piano and symphonic poems were added to his music. In these two genres, rigorous motif changes were replaced by a "misty poetic mood", which became the main value of these genres. Piano poems were definitely innovative, fresh, while the nostalgic beauty of symphonic poems moved the audience of older generations. Based on this statement, in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia of 1973 edition Skriabin is described as "a great musical innovator creating incomparable beauty".<sup>1</sup>

After the hand was healed, Skriabin continued to perform. His performances of Mozart and Chopin's works were extremely delicate, subtle and sophisticated, which was written in the memory of this generation. At the beginning of 1904, Skriabin, already husband and father, meets a young girl. Two months later, he leaves his wife and children and moves with his new partner to a small apartment on Nikolai Peskovsky street no 11. Currently, it houses the National Museum of Skriabin Remembrance, where you can see, among others, the Bechstein piano and the conductor's desk, at which Skriabin used to stand when composing. His work in the history of music begins with early romanticism and ends in the middle period of expressionism. After this move, the last period of the composer's work began: mysticism. The apartment in question has become a frequent place of philosophical meetings of Moscow thinkers. back then. It talked about beliefs and studied innovations related to their specific issues. Topics such as eschatology or the existence of supernatural power constitute a creative style called mysticism. Based on this, Skriabin dared to introduce two significant innovations to his work: the turn towards atonality and the synesthesia of color. His "super-chords" consisting

---

<sup>1</sup> Y. Chen, *Skriabin and His Ten Piano Sonatas*, „Journal of Central Conservatory of Music”, nr 1/2018, p.113.

of four consecutive steps blurred the sense of tonality, and the concept of assigning each sound to a specific color was considered the most in-depth exploration of musical colors.

In the spring 1915 year Skriabin suddenly began to feel pain on his lip, and the doctor initially concluded that it is just a scratch. However, the pain became unbearable and after a few days Skriabin consulted another doctor in his apartment. This time, the doctor concluded that the wound and pain were caused by a cancer, heralding a fatal disease. It is said that in the last days of his life Skriabin often sat alone at the window, playing his ten sonatas.

## **1.2. The three stages of Skriabin's creation**

Skriabin's work is divided into three stages. There are huge differences between early and late, and the middle stage is a time to explore and form his own style.

### **Early stage (1886-1903)**

- three *Sonatas*: no. 1 op. 6, (1892-1893); no. 2 op. 19, (1892-1897) and no. 3 op. 23, (1897)
- two *Symphonies*: no. 1 op. 26, (1899-1900); no. 2 op. 29, (1901)
- twelve *Etudes* op. 8 (1894-1895)

### **Middle stage (1903-1908)**

- *Sonatas*: no. 4 op. 30, (1903); no. 5 op. 53 (1908)
- Eight *Etudes* op. 42 (1903)
- *Symphony* no. 3 op.43 *Le Divin Poème* [The Divine Poem] (1903-1904)

### **Late stage (1909-1915)**

- the last five *Sonatas*: no. 6 op. 62, (1911); no. 7 op. 64, (1911); no. 8 op. 66 (1912-1913); no. 9 op. 68 (1912-1913) and no. 10 op. 70, (1913)
- Three *Etudes* op. 65 (1912)

- *Symphony no. 4 op. 54 Le Poème de L'Extase* [Ecstasy Poem] (1905-1907) and *Symphony no. 5 op. 60, Prometheus, Poem of Fire* (1909-1910)

### **1.2.1. Musical style and expression of individual creative ideas in the early stage of creativity**

At this stage, Skriabin's oeuvre was greatly influenced by his admiration of Chopin's oeuvre. Regardless of the characteristics of the melody of harmony or style, as well as the tonal system, one can sense a liking for Chopin's music, and thus there are forms such as the etude, prelude, mazurka, waltz or impromptu regularly present in Chopin's work. In this lyrical temperament full of Chopin's poetry, the works of this stage discover broad melodic lines typical of Russian music. However, these features present in native music were developed as in the case of Rachmaninov's work, but gradually disappeared in works from the middle and late stages of Skriabin's work.

The works of this period are full of youthful enthusiasm, tenderness of life's fantasy. The three sonatas are kept in the traditional form, although they present unstable mood, changes in rhythms, as well as a description of the mental state, which already shows tendencies for consequences in later works. His first piano sonata was composed when he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory. In this piece, there is still consternation and uncertainty, and the whole is full of contradictions.

### **1.2.2. The period of exploration and formation of mysticism in the middle stage**

In 1903 year old Skriabin resigned from the position of professor at the Moscow Conservatory of Music to focus on creation, thus entering the peak stage of his work. At this stage, regardless of form, content or performance skills, it is quite clear to depart from Chopin's inspirations. It is also the time in which Skriabin's philosophical thought develops and evolves. Under the influence of Georgia Plekhanov, Skriabin explored Marxist philosophy, but never abandoned his idealistic worldview. Also due to his contact with theosophists, as an introvert with a reserved and egocentric personality formed in the early years, he gradually entered the mystical path – in the philosophical aspect. At that time he was close to self-worship, convinced that the outside

world was only a pure product of subjective spiritual activities, and therefore he entered the path leading to God, with which he was to be connected by his own creation.

Skriabin sought to express his philosophical vision of the world through music, so he decided to include philosophical issues in his works. His compositions show strong influences of religion and philosophy, among others, we can hear Fryderyk Nietzsche's concepts firmly rooted in the world view of the time, under which Skriabin was influenced. The composer began his musical search by exploring harmony, which gave the works a "mystical and fleeting sound"<sup>2</sup>. Many works from this period were given abstract, mystical and philosophical titles, such as *Poème Tragique* [Tragic Poem] op. 34, *Poème Satanique* [Satan Poem] op. 36.

In terms of composing procedures Skriabin remained in constant focus on harmony and its exploration, resulting in a "mystical chord", also called "Promethean", composed mainly of quarters. Harmonic search began the late stage of the composer's work, which can be traced by comparing his fourth and fifth sonatas. They show some differences, and their styles differ significantly from each other, gradually getting rid of the allurements of both romantic and those derived from Russian traditions.

### **1.2.3. Reflection on mysticism in the late stage of creativity**

After Skriabin completed his fifth sonata, his style gains maturity and his works take on strong influences of mystical sensations and esotericism, giving the artist more scope to express his own musical expression. Later works tend to the idea that art can "connect the emotion", and that mystical influences and philosophical proportions are even more exposed in them. The composer believed that there was an original connection between art and religion, so he tried to create a "miraculous drama" in order to combine music with religion, philosophy and other arts. In his V Symphony, also known as *Prometheus: Poet*

---

<sup>2</sup> M. Yanovitsky, *Interpretation of Skriabin's Piano Works*, trans. by Y. Zhang and Q. Cai, Shanghai Music Press, 2009, p. 12.

of Fire, he sought to discover the relationship between music and color, which was to be helped by a colorful keyboard, which was designed to combine auditory and visual experiences. His last five sonatas, written in 1911-1913, show clear philosophical tendencies, developing and reflecting the idea of "miraculous drama", filled with mystical influences. For example, in *Sonata* no. 6, the composer adds terms to the expression "gloomy as the devil", expressing a dark, terrifying and diabolical atmosphere. It also contains hints suggesting mystery, such as: "strong sense of mystery", "suppressed enthusiasm" or "forming dream".

Skriabin's later works are full of extreme and even "full of fanaticism" with an emotional charge that goes beyond the expressive norms recognized in music, forming an indescribable mystical image. It is a trance vision and mystical delusion, depicting different states, images and abstract, unclear style. The formative factor here becomes freedom in the selection of creative techniques, departure from the traditional structure, unobtrusive musical language, and above all focus on the harmonic factor and abandoning thematic work. The rhythm, harmonic consequences and the construction of the consonants) are extremely unique and complex. The composer gives up the use of chords of tertiary structure, introducing his unique, composed of quarters. Skriabin put all five sonatas from the late stage of his work into one-piece forms. There are no tonal markings in them, they are tonally ambiguous, full of grotesque sound structures, often included in arbitrary and sudden rhythmic systems, accompanied by intricate melodic lines against the background of mystical chords.

### **1.3. The essence of ten piano sonatas of Skriabin**

Of all Skriabin's ten piano sonatas, the first, second and third represent his early musical style, still following the romantic tradition. The fourth and fifth are experimental works in which the composer takes steps away from tradition. Other compositions from this series are an expression of the artist's own style.

*Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6 (1892-1893), Composed in academic times, it was full of Chopin style and longing for life. The piece reflects a typically romantic way of writing full of octaves and chords, contrasting

themes and motifs reflecting passion and passion. In Scriabin's private notes, there is a provision that this sonata should express: "1. Goodness, ideal, truth, purpose on the other hand; 2. Desire, defeat, despair, rebellion against the gods; 3. Discovering the inner ideal, rebellion, freedom; 4. Foundations of freedom to learn; 5. Religion"<sup>3</sup>.

*Piano Sonata in g minor* no. 2 op. 19 (1892-1897) begins with a fantasy chanted by a gloomy main theme and a rough supplementary theme. In the second part, "storm of sounds" symbolizes regret over fate. Dark and sad colors reflect Scriabin's slowly forming style. The composer explains the content of the song as follows: "The introduction describes a quiet, peaceful night on the south coast, and in part of the processing you can hear the storming waters of the ocean depths. The central part, held in E major, is to reflect the moon caressing the ocean. The second part of the sonata (Presto) depicts scenes of a vast storm.

*Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 3 op. 23 (1897), Also known as the "State of Mind", it is the longest of all sonatas. This composition is a kind of narrative poetry. Each of the four parts expresses four different emotions: pathos, necessity/urgency, sadness, passion/devotion/passion. In 1896's summer Scriabin began to exhibit unnatural behavior, such as constantly wearing white gloves, stopping opening windows, sitting in the dressing room for a very long time or being suspicious. He also showed symptoms of having multiple personalities. This piece was created during this period, and the titles of its parts are undoubtedly a reflection of Scriabin's thought. In the composer's personal notes to the dramatic part of Allegro there is a description "a liberated and turbulent spirit quilts into the abyss of pain and struggle with enthusiasm"; The Allegretto of the second part of the sonata is "false, momentary, unreliable stability... the longing to forget everything...". In the third part, Andante reflects "tender and melancholic feelings... vain wishes, unspoken thoughts...". The fourth part – Presto – is "beating the heart in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Y. Li, *Music Bubble* - Volume 2, Pekin 2000, p. 547.

whirlwind of passion"<sup>4</sup>. With this work, Scriabin's fully unique creative style is created. It is full of polyphony, rehearsals, has a pathetic and deeply majestic character. These features distinguish the composer's work and build the core of his style already in early compositions. Sonata no. 3 already has a new ideological and expressive tone, clearly distinguishes itself from works from the early period of the composer's and pianist's creative search, being at the same time the beginning of a further phase of creative development.

*Piano Sonata in F flat major* no. 4 op. 30 (1903) is the most popular. Of the whole cycle, it is the last of Scriabin's tonal and multi-part sonatas, and also closes a stage to which Scriabin will not return, directing his next steps towards mysticism. Compared to the third sonata, two factors play a special role in this work: polytonality and atonality. This time Scriabin is in love and his music clearly shows the influence of Wilhelm Richard Wagner. This piece consists of two parts, basically a prelude and a main part. Scriabin describes the rising sounds from the theme of the first part as those "fighting for the ideal of creation", while the melodic material of the second part as "fatigue after effort"<sup>5</sup>.

*Piano Sonata* no. 5 op. 53 (1908) is the first atonal sonata announcing the official entry of Scriabin the mystical stage of his work. This piece is also the most difficult considering its technical requirements. Miniature roundabout, the first and second theme often jumping between each other, the most popular and theatrically attractive in terms of performance. The composer called this sonata an "ecstatic poem", because it shows the same character and philosophical assumptions as *Le Poème de L'Extase*. The footnote at the beginning of the sonata reads: "I call you to awaken, O mystical Power! Immersed in the dark depths! O God, creator of the young embryos of life, I bring you courage."

---

<sup>4</sup> H. Zhang, *European Music History*, Shanghai 1983, p. 433.

<sup>5</sup> Y. Li, *Music Bubble* - Volume 2, Pekin 2000, p. 548.

*Piano Sonata* no. 6 op. 62 (1911) takes listeners into a fantastic world of strange colors, sometimes dark, sometimes blinding/dazzling, sometimes agitated, empty or echoing. This composition subtly expresses the relationships of the inner "me". According to Scriabin's notes, it is "like a ray of light penetrating the most secret spheres of the human soul." The first part presents two musical themes depicting two personalities. Scriabin describes the former as "deep meaning of mystery" or "suppressed enthusiasm", while the second topic is "formed dream".

*Piano Sonata* no. 7 op. 64 (1911), also known as the "White Mass", it was Scriabin's favorite sonata, who considered it "sacred", describing it also as the one full of "atmospheric fragrance, belonging to the mystical world". In the following part of the note we read: "Please listen to this quiet joy". Igor Strawiński heard this sonata with his own ears performed by the composer during his visit. The track starts in the bass register, gradually passing through the middle register, finally reaching the highest register, where you can hear the tremolo tremolo of the highest notes. In the passages between the appearance of the themes, the composer asks that their sound refer to the state of "angelic sensual joy", that they be "very pure, very delicate", so that they can reflect the state of "sensual bliss".

*Piano Sonata* no. 8 op. 66 (1912-1913) was basically saved as the last. In the category of artistic concept, the sonata reflects Scriabin's most memorable ideas from his late stage of creation – the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. In this composition you can even hear the sounds of water or insects. Uncreated, sprawling scenes, spilling like a biblical flood, completely change the world. Scriabin interprets this piece as follows: "the sounds used in counterpoint are completely harmonized here". They are not a typical Bach counterpoint, but are in harmony with each other."<sup>6</sup>

*Piano Sonata* no. 9 op.68 (1912-1913), so-called The Black Mass is a typical sonata from the late period of Scriabin's work. This composition,

---

<sup>6</sup> Also there, p. 548.

relatively short and technically sophisticated, is characterized by many changes in the layer of rhythm and harmony. In this one-part sonata, the repeatability of certain sounds is the main theme – in the introduction we hear a theme based on a falling semitone movement, giving the melody a mystical character. In the space of the piece, the texture thickens and repeated sounds become more and more "neurotic" and intense, creating various forms and moods, striving for culmination and dazzling explosion, after which quite unexpectedly returns the delicate motif and atmosphere from the beginning of the sonata. In this piece Scriabin contains all the dark aspects of his life, also highlighting the presence of spiritual debauchery. Sonata no. 9 becomes a search for a mystical aura and the exact opposite of Sonata no. 7. This is how the composer describes it: "If the seventh sonata talks about driving away demons, then in this sonata everything is about their summoning, their return to debauchery, evil, black magic."<sup>7</sup>.

*Piano Sonata* no. 10 op. 70 (1913) is considered one of Scriabin's best works. Her style is much more relaxed and improvised, very technically demanding, and the complex structure of the song and special expression are breathtaking. The creator in this composition wanted to give the impression of the forest. The tenth sonata is an attempt to depict the musicality of living nature. Scriabin gives each of the six themes the title: "Very clean and transparent", "hidden but delighted", "brightly trembling/vibrating", "full of emotions", "almost ecstatic", "ecstatic and tender". The music creates a dense and cloudy atmosphere and gives the listener the impression of sudden lights, outbursts of emotions, but also hidden enthusiasm, peace, strength and delicacy. In Scriabin's music we always find diversity and multitude of moods and their changes – from joy, through fear, light, darkness, happiness, evil, ecstasy, mystery, etc., just as he himself manifested exclusive but coexisting emotions. In his notes we read: "I am free, I am alive, I am a dream/dream, I still bury my desires, I am happy, I am full of arrogance and desire, I am nothing"<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> F. Bowers. *Scriabin, a Biography*, New York 2011, p.244.

<sup>8</sup> Y. Li, *Music Bubble* - Volume 2, Pekin 2000, p. 548.

Under the main motif of vibrato lies emptiness and decadence typical of mysticism. The default subject of his work, "I", seems to be at the threshold of the time gate. Here life and death, pain and pleasure have blurred boundaries.

## II. Personalized development of composing techniques and methods

### 2.1. Harmony in the early stages of creativity

The technique of harmonisation in Skriabin's early sonatas is largely based on the harmonic categories of the 19th century and develops in parallel with the harmony of the romantic style. It is influenced by the work of Chopin and other contemporary artists. Although the first three sonatas still oscillate around the harmony of major minor, they already show strong individual characteristics. An example of harmonic innovation is the use of a large number of distorted and strongly overlapping chords in order to amplify clashes between dissonances and create "complications" of sound.

#### 2.1.1. Chord superimposition

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Skriabin's Piano Sonata in f minor, Opus 6. The tempo is marked 'Allegro con fuoco' with a metronome marking of M.M. ♩. = 104. The score is in 9/8 time and features complex chord superimposition and dissonance. The first system shows measures 1 and 2, with a dynamic marking of *f*. The second system shows measures 3 and 4, with a dynamic marking of *sf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingering numbers (e.g., 1, 4, 5, 13, 14).

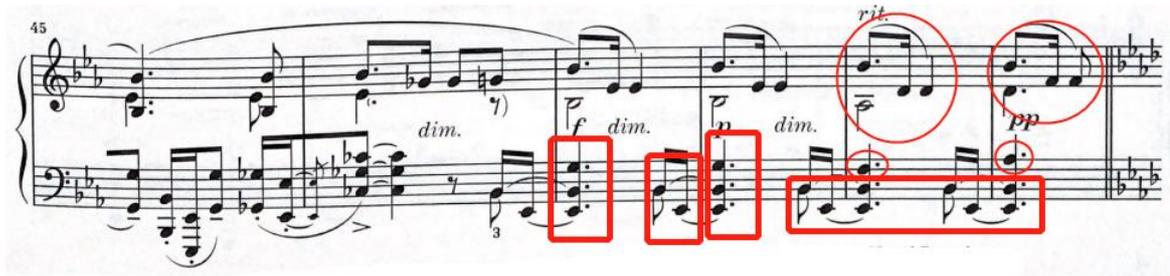
**Example 1.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, I mov., bars 1-5.

The first example is measure 2. and 4. the first part of *Sonata* no. 1, in which the original dominant changes into a sub-mediant by splitting the chords into the first factors, thus the harmony acquires the characteristics of tonic in the first overturn/chord with sex, which results in a change of sound. The presence of a tonic and a sex chord in a vertical arrangement, where sounds follow each other in a third interval, is one of Skriabin's composing techniques.

A complex chord is one in which two different chords overlap. It is one of the basic composing tools in contemporary music. The two chords that make up

a complex chord must represent different functions and have as few common sounds as possible to differentiate the higher and lower structures of the resulting harmony<sup>9</sup>.

In Scriabin's third sonata there are still many complex chords, mainly to present more complex harmonic colors and sound effects.



E flat Major:

		D	D
T	T	T }	T }

**Example 2.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 3 op. 23, II mov., bars 45-50.

The second example is a fragment from the second part of Sonata No 3, namely the bars 47-50, in E flat major. 47. and 48. the beat, as shown in the example, is based on tonics, and the harmonic core is marked in the notes with a rectangle. Then in 49., along with ritardando, the sound material changes both in terms of divisions (transformation from the beginning and middle), and harmonic system, i.e. there is a chord composed of tonics and a dominant placed on it. To be more precise, the upper chord would originally be a septim dominant, marked in notes with a circle. Two consonants representing two different harmonic functions collide here, which results in the appearance of tension in the music. After the harmonic layers created in the space of two bars, there is an exposition of a new theme and tone, which introduces the material for further processing.

### 2.1.2. Chord alternated

<sup>9</sup> X. Liu, *On Compound Function, Compound Chord and Tonal Superimposition*, „Journal of Shenyang Conservatory of Music”, red. Y. Xinsheng, no. 1/1983, p.16-23.

"As long as the original function of the chord is left and not gone beyond the limits of its tonality, all progression in scale is changed to semitone progression, so it seems to be elevated. This is an altered (distorted) sound, hence the chord's name"<sup>10</sup>. The subdued dominant (originally the sixth degree of output tone) and the seventh degree subtony with an alternating tertiary septim dominant (fourth degree of output tone) are commonly used by Scriabin.



B Major:

DVII7/D    <sup>b</sup>3DVII/D

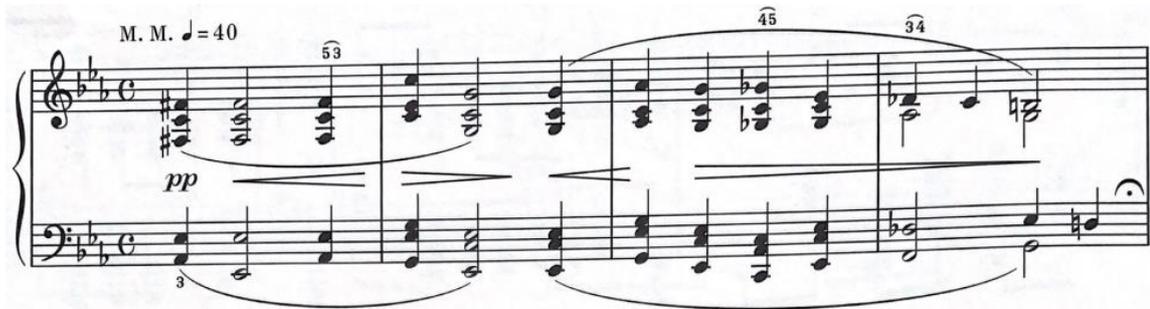
**Example 3.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 3 op. 23, III mov., bars 4-7.

Example 3 is bars 4-7 *Sonata* no. 3. With the transition from gis to g in the middle layer, the chord changes from a septic dominant to a septic dominant with reduced tertiary. This treatment for many can be confusing due to the appearance of C with a double cross, sounding as D, which is the seventh degree of septic dominant. Scriabin's idea was to make semitone progressions through the c sharp – c re-sharp – d sharp line, so he had to change D to c re-sharp to make the whole course more clear. Traditional harmonic solutions appear in solutions and the sound leading the septic dominant dissolves into the dominant. This is a more traditional approach, and Scriabin's meticulousness in the use of harmony is also evident.

The use of the alternated V degree in the place of the septic dominant in an important setting, i.e. at the beginning and end of the passage, is one of the most exposed compositional techniques in Scriabin's works. Due to the dissonant middle of the dominant chord – the appearance of an increased

<sup>10</sup> I. Sposobin, *Harmony Tutorial*, trans. by Min Chen, Shanghai 2003, p. 308.

quarter interval – we do not hear a sound common to the tonic and the chord consists of alternated sounds of the output tone. Thanks to this, the sound effect is enriched, the tension is amplified, and in addition, a unique sound effect is created.



**Example 4.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, II mov., bars 1-4.

Example 4 is the beginning of the second part of *Sonata* no. 1. In the notation, instead of the dominant of the initial tone, there is a dominant inserted with increased sexta (or D9 without prime and lowered quinta inserted into G major), aimed at building tension according to the principles of traditional harmony. In this chord, due to the content of two dissonant intervals: increased sex (A flat - F sharp) and increased quarter (C - F sharp), the sound of the septic dominant is weakened, giving the parts a lighter hue full of "bright" colors from the very beginning. At the same time, this chord does not dissolve into the dominant, on the contrary, it turns to tonic (in the second overturn), which may not be very functional, but gives a more diverse and rich sound, introducing the listener to a state of liberation and a sense of unpredictability.

### 2.1.3. Chord chromatic progression

The chromatic technique allows you to broaden the knowledge of tonal and harmonic relationships, introduces altered sounds and enriches the palette of consonants. In Scriabin's three early sonatas, chromatic progression of chords can be heard almost everywhere.

Meno mosso  $\text{♩} = 84$

22

26

rit.

**Example 5.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, I mov., bars 22-29.

In the above example we see a side theme of the first part of *Sonata* no. 1. As the melodic line continues to go down, the lowest chord sounds also go in this direction, remaining in semitone progression (from median – third degree – tone to fifth degree dominant in this section).

28

cresc.

30

cresc.

dim.

p

ppp

**Example 6.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, III mov., bars 28-32.

This situation appears again in bars 29-31 of the third part of *Sonata* no. 1. As you can see in the example 6., starting from the sound of b – a quarter of the chord in F minor – through B, C, D flat, D, E flat, E, F, F sharp, up to the bar 31., where the tonic in c minor appears in the second overturn.

#### 2.1.4. Neapolitan chord

**Example 7.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, II mov., bars 26-30.

One of Scriabin's favorite treatments was the use of a chord built on the lowered second stage as a temporary tonic (supertonic with lowered second stage). In the second part of *Sonata* no. 1 in C minor (Example 7.), the composer introduces a Neapolitan chord instead of a tonic. It sounds like a lead to the key of D major, moving from the cool sounds of C minor to the bright and warm consonance of D major.

### 2.1.5. Presence and application of mystical chord

#### a) Mystic chord construction

Scriabin's harmonic language was subject to many changes from the early-romantic style to his own harmonic system in the middle and late period of his work. It is, among others, the diatonic scale that Debussy often used, so shocking to the musicians of the time, that led Scriabin to search for new harmonic solutions. He found his sound and mystical effect in a chord consisting of a sequence of quarters. In the research conducted so far by music theorists, it is this harmonic structure created by Scriabin, based on successive quarts, that is called the "mystical chord".



**Example 8.** Building a mystical chord.

The structure of the "mystical chord" is not a functional form, but only an organization of sounds superimposed on each other at intervals of quarters, also called the "Promethean chord", as can be seen in the example 8. The chord's name derives from its frequent use in the V Symphony of Scriabin entitled Prometheus, Poem of Fire. This work is marked in Scriabin's work as defining his creative maturity and unique language of harmony. In this respect, his *Piano Sonata* no. 6 and no. 7 are also worth mentioning.

The described chord consists of "basic four-tone layers" as well as "layers of moving sounds"<sup>11</sup>. These basic "four-tone layers" consist sequentially of the increased quarter, the reduced quarter and the increased quarter. The layer of moving sounds" is still dominated by overlapping quarts, but it is possible to obtain new colors through semitone changes in the chord.

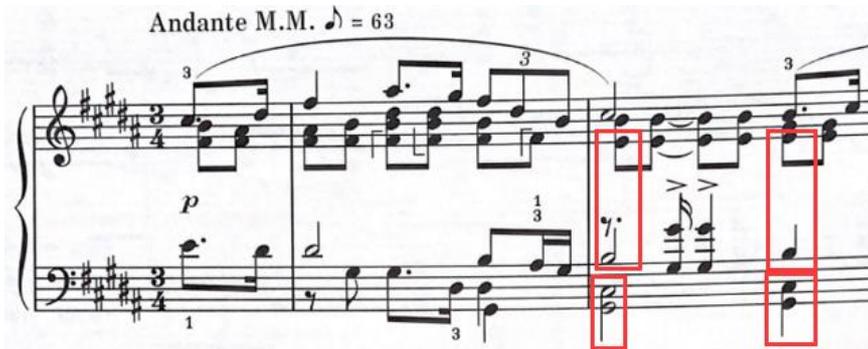
The mystical chord differs in structure and sound from the traditional trio, and its dissonant intervals such as the increased quarter, the reduced quarter, the minor septima or the grand nona create an unstable and dissonant nature of the chord, creating a new kind of musical tension and sound effect. Its presence leads to endless changes in color, and also enriches the overall color of the song. Although it is strongly dissonant and shows many differences to the traditional major scale, it has its features, because among its components there is a great third determining the mode.

## **b) Early forms of mystical chord**

---

<sup>11</sup> X. Hu, *The Birth and Reproduction of Special Chords: An Analysis of the Late Scriabin Harmony*, „Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music”, ed. H. Zhong, no. 1/2002, p. 25.

Skriabin liked himself in intervals of a second and a quarter, so in his first works you can hear the effects of his harmonic experiments based on these harmonies.



**Example 9.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 3 op. 23, III mov., bars 1-2.

In example 9. We can see that the bars 1-2 of the third part of *Sonata* no. 3 and the harmony of the second bar in particular are based on the septic chord of Gis major with the great septic, but its setting clearly indicates a conscious desire to build a quartet chord.



**Example 10.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 3 op. 23, I mov., bars 1-3.

In the first three bars of the first part of Sonata No 3(example 10), we notice the composer's tendency to use structures of vertically overlapping sounds in the quartet. This is particularly evident in 3. where the four notes (C sharp - F sharp - B - E) reflect the character of the base layer of a four-note mystical chord that stands out significantly from traditional harmonies. Skriabin very subtly combines melodic lines based on quarts, applying the progression from Cis to Fis and thus revealing to the listener his liking for this interval. The tonal function of this whole passage is preserved only by holding the dominant (quince) chord in the bass, and by following the quince

of repeated prima (tonics). Although the functional bass base remains the main core for further harmonic processing, it is the superposition of the quarter in the chord in the context of the chord superstructure that becomes a turning point in the development of Skriabin's works."<sup>12</sup>

**Example 11.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata F sharp Major* no. 3 op. 23, I mov., bars 17-23.

The first part of *Sonata* no. 4 shows a more typical use of the mystical chord. In example 11. both chords marked in the rectangle, "B flat - D - E - A flat - C" and "C - E - F sharp - B flat - D", are septim dominants with reduced quintessence. Alteration of the quinta causes the appearance in the chord of two quarters increased. By rearranging the order of sounds, you can get two chords "B flat - E - A flat - D - C" and "C - F sharp - B flat - E - D". Although the organization of sounds is not entirely based on the basic structure of the mystical chord, its characteristics are determined by two tritons created by lowering the quinta in the septic dominant. This clarifies the relationship between the mystical chord and the septic dominant with the lowered quinta.

<sup>12</sup> W. Wang, *Research on Skriabin Harmony*, Shanghai 2012, p. 25.

**Example 12.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major no. 5 op. 53*, bars 263-270.

*Sonata no. 5* also contains many harmonic elements arranged and arranged in triton relations, as can be seen in bars 264 and 268 of example 12.

### c) Use of the mystical chord

As Skriabin's harmonic language has undergone significant transformations in his later compositions, such as *Sonata No 7* and *Sonata No 9*, the mystical chord often becomes the basis for the organization of sounds throughout the work.

**Example 13.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in G Major no. 6 op. 62*, bars 1-4.

In the example 13 from *Sonata no. 6*, the mystical chord appears in the theme of the first bar – in the structure "G - C sharp - F - B - A flat".

**Example 14.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 7 op. 64, bars 1-2.

In *Sonata* no. 7, the theme of the exhibition (bars 1-8) consists of two musical sentences. In the second movement, as indicated by Example 14, a complete form of a mystical chord appears (sounds C - F sharp - B flat - E - A - D flat).

**Example 15.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 8 op. 66, bars 1-5.

*Sonata* no. 8 in turn – Example 15 – Scriabin uses a mystical chord at the beginning, it is visible in the structure: “A - D sharp - G - C sharp - F sharp - B - E”.

**Example 16.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 5-7.

In *Sonata* no. 9, a sequence based on a mystical chord is shown in consonance “D flat - G - C flat - F - E flat”, going through “B flat - E - A flat - D - C”, “G - C sharp - F - B - A”, and then to “E - A sharp - D - G sharp - F sharp” - Example 16.

## 2.2. Characteristic features of Scriabin’s harmony in the middle and late stages of creativity

The use of harmony as a form-forming element in Scriabin's later works acquires a new quality. It changes the function from only vertical/chord to sequential/horizontal. The melody breaks away from the traditional tonal concept and is closely linked to the harmonic system centered around mystical chords. As the composer himself writes: "Harmony is a melody, and melody is harmony. For me there is no difference between harmony and melody"<sup>13</sup>.

The mystical chord seems to be more diverse. As Cergai Serebkov writes: "G, H, F is the constant skeleton of the mystical chord, also these three sounds are not subject to any changes like the septic dominant without a quinta. Based on this foundation, further sounds can be added at will, they can be altered, they can also be recorded enharmonically, so it is possible to use all twelve semitones."<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> P. Sabbagh, *The Development of Harmony in Scriabin’s works*, Universal Publishers, USA 2003, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> C. Serebkov, *Modern Harmony Language Problems*, tran. by J. Xue, Shanghai 1959, p. 12.

In his late compositions, in order to modify traditional functional relationships in harmony, Scriabin turns the connections between the quartet and the quintet into chords with the help of a minor third, which became a popular compositional procedure of the time.

The image shows a musical score for Example 17, consisting of two staves: a piano part (left) and a right-hand part (right). The piano part begins at bar 105 with a *pp* dynamic and a *poco cresc.* marking. The right-hand part starts with a *mp* dynamic and ends with a *p* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, slurs, and fingering numbers (1-5) for both hands. The piano part features a descending sequence of chords, while the right-hand part features a sequence of chords with a descending third progression.

**Example 17.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 105-107.

This is particularly evident in the example of 17., in bars 105-107 *Sonata* no. 9. The progression of the melody is dominated by a continuous sequence of minor thirds, the harmonic movement is also based on a descending third progression, and the tonality in turn consists of four progressions that form a cycle composed of minor thirds in twelve tones. In a sense, this method is modeled on the late-Romantic approach to harmony, introducing the tonality of the third degree (or third tone), and also shows the idea of the aftermath of small thirds in works from the late period of his work.

Scriabin also uses techniques based on non-functional harmony. It creates a sound factor, completely out of line with the harmony of function and chords of the major minor system, based on a chromatic system, which affects the shape of the melodies of the pieces throughout the work, as can be seen in the example of a six-tone structure „Gis - H - Dis - Fis - Ais Cis”. Although this structure differs from the mystical chord, it is the source of sound material for the themes and reflects a kind of tonality.

## 2.3. Melody and scale

### a) Early Chopin melodies

In Scriabin's early sonatas we find a conscious reference to Chopinowski's style and its integration. The side theme of the first part of *Sonata* no. 1 and

the theme of the middle part of the third part, which replaces the rondeau of the sonata, are two examples of melodies inspired by the Chopin style. The character of these melodies is similar to the theme of *Nocturnu op. 9 nr 2* by Fryderyk Chopin.



**Example 18.** Comparison of themes of *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6 of A. Scriabin with a theme of *Nocturne in E flat Major* no. 2 op. 9 of F. Chopin.

Comparing these three melodies from example 18, we will notice that they all show a similar, complex pulse, based on eights contained in the three-piece meter. Just as in Chopin's *Nocturne*, the phrase begins here with an eighth prebeat, followed by a four-value note – of the same height, there are three melodies that follow together in descending progression. Also the rhythmic arrangement of these melodies is similar to Chopin's song.

### b) Fragmentaryczne melodie ze środkowego i późnego okresu

In the middle and late period of his work, the melodic element in Scriabin's sonatas is almost banal and as if unfinished/carried away. There is no more musical continuity, which makes music difficult to understand and lack clarity. This treatment is also considered a mystical element of the composer's works.



**Example 19.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in G Major* no. 6 op. 62, bars 1-4.



**Example 20.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in G Major* no. 6 op. 62, bars 39-43.

In *Sonata* no. 6 Scriabin mainly uses melodies to create a mystical atmosphere. The first topic (Example 19) is marked with "a strong sense of mystery" and "with restrained enthusiasm". This information appears every few bars. Only at the introduction of the second theme does the composer insert a new annotation (Example 20) "dream taking shape".

At the beginning of *Sonata* no. 7 (Example 14), short, torn melodies indicate that Scriabin's musical language is enriched with new means of expression, and his techniques are increasingly innovative. In his sonatas, by moving away from symmetry and repetition, he gets rid of unnecessary parts in favor of stronger exposure of melodic groups full of energy and tension.

### **c) Semi-tonal scale**

The semitone scale, also called the chromatic scale, contains a multitude of colors. It blurs the boundaries between seven diatonic scales and alternated sounds, and reduces the contrast between major and minor tones, giving the opportunity to create new sound effects – somewhat chaotic, hazy and mystical. Undoubtedly, this is one of the most important treatments for obtaining a mystical atmosphere in the composition.

The image shows a musical score for Example 21, consisting of two systems of piano and bass staves. The first system starts at bar 120 with the tempo marking 'Meno vivo' and a dynamic of 'pp accarezzevole'. It features a melodic line in the right hand with a five-fingered scale and a bass line with a five-fingered scale. The second system starts at bar 123 and includes tempo markings 'molto rall.' and 'a tempo'. The right hand has a melodic line with a three-fingered scale and a bass line with a five-fingered scale. The score includes various dynamic markings such as 'm.g.' (mezzo-giochiato) and 'm.d.' (mezzo-dolce), and tempo markings like 'rall.' (rallentando).

**Example 21.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 120-125.

In *Sonata* no. 5, the extensive chromatic scale is combined with melodic progression, giving the work a mystical character to the limits of its possibilities, as shown in the example 21.

#### **d) Diatonic scale**

The mystical chord, which has been discussed many times in the dissertation, consists of two layers of "the basic quad-sound layer" and "the layer of moving sounds". In *Sonata* No 7 this first layer of mystical chord derives from three diatonic scales:

- First tonal area of exposure and reprisal: A flat - B flat - C - D - E - F sharp;
- Second tonal area of exposure and reprise: E - F sharp - G sharp - A sharp - B sharp - C re-sharp;
- Closure of exposure and reprisals: D flat - E flat - F - G - A - B;

The image shows a musical score for Example 22, consisting of a single staff with a treble clef. It features a chromatic scale construction, which is a sequence of notes moving stepwise through all twelve chromatic degrees of the scale. The notes are: A flat, B flat, C, D, E, F sharp, G sharp, A sharp, B sharp, C re-sharp, D flat, and E flat.

**Example 22.** Chromatic scale construction.

Of these three diatonic scales, the two rocks from the first and second area of the "basic four-tone layer" and the diatonic scale, constructed from the sounds of the closure area of the "basic four-tone layer", comprise a complete chromatic scale, as shown in the example 22.

#### e) Skriabin's scale



**Example 23.** Construction of the Skriabin's scale.

The Skriabino scale consists of the basic sounds of a mystical chord, and its simplified version is shown in the example 23. It is based on the use of chord sounds built of vertically superimposed increased quarters, this time represented in a horizontal arrangement. In theory, it is also a series of eight to fourteen sounds. In other words, the mystical chord is a series of eight to fourteen sounds organized in a quarter arrangement.

### 2.4. Composition structure

Skriabin's ten sonatas differ in structure: those from the early period of his work are multi-part, while later – already one-part. This transformation strongly influenced the sonata as a musical genre, changing its hitherto classical form. The one-piece Skriabino sonata is more extensive than the classical sonata, is characterized by a more relaxed structure, and the musical material becomes more complex and mysterious. In this structure, it is the coherence and logic and richness of musical connections between the different parts that expand the potential of sonata as a form. The process of transformation of this genre in Skriabin is illustrated by comparisons of his compositions from different periods of his work.

<b>Table I.</b> Construction of each part of the sonata form on the example of the first three <i>Piano Sonatas</i> of Scriabin				
	I Part	II Part	III Part	IV Part
<i>Piano Sonata</i> no. 1	Sonata form	Compound ternary form	Rondo sonata form (use interpolation part as development part)	Compound ternary form
<i>Piano Sonata</i> no. 2	Sonata form	Compound ternary form on the principle of sonata form		
<i>Piano Sonata</i> no. 3	Sonata form	Compound ternary form	Ternary form	Rondo sonata form

The three piano sonatas from the early period mentioned in the above table show a multi-part structure. Among them, the first and third parts of Piano Sonata No 1, two parts of Piano Sonata No 2, and the first and last parts of Piano Sonata No 3 show the construction of a sonata form or a sonata roundabout, or are based on the principles of the construction of a sonata form. There are also differences in the construction of the classical sonata form per se: "the fast part – free – Menuet or Scherzo – Sonata or the form of the Sonata Rondo at a fast pace".

For example, the form of Piano Sonata No 1 is based on the traditional four-part structure. Temps in individual parts are shaped as follows: fast –

slow – fast – slow, which basically differs from the traditional form. As a rule, the last part of the classical sonata is kept in a joyful and lively character – usually in the form of a roundabout. In this composition, the last part, described as "Funebre", is in slow motion. The first part shows the characteristics of sonata form, referring in its structure fully to the form of traditional sonata. The exposition consists of four parts: first tonal area, coupler/modulation, second tonal area, coda. In the processing the main theme is expanded, and the side theme, the coda material and part of the reprise are maintained in the tone of the second tonal area – F major.

The second part is based on a complex three-part structure, in which the first part is a return form with reprisals, the middle part consists of two parallel developing phrases and their processing, while the reprisals refer to the first part. As in the first part of the sonata, the sound material here is based on the key of C minor at the beginning, but ending in C major.

In the third part there is a form of sonata roundabout, in addition, part of the processing contains material that did not exist before, which makes the contrast of the musical mood clear. In the part of the reprise, modulation is omitted, there is a direct transition to the next key. In addition, the third and fourth parts are connected to each other. The latter, and even the theme of the third part, does not end in the main tone, and the coda appears in the dominant tone, which serves as a preparatory role for the introduction of the fourth part.

The structure of the fourth part resembles that of the second part and also exhibits the features of a three-part structure, and each part is in the form of ABAB+coda. Finally, the sound material returns to the initial tone, being an echo of the first part. The third and fourth parts are inseparably connected. The first is a sonata rondo typical of classical sonatas. In conclusion, the structure of this sonata can be described as a three-part coda. The third part seems to be the last one.

The second Sonata stands out in terms of structure from the group of three sonatas of the early period. Its two parts show the influence of sonata form, but there is a clear juxtaposition of emotional opposites between them: peace and considerable movement. The musical character of the first part differs from the

assumptions of the traditional sonata and the contrast between the main and secondary theme is greatly weakened. This treatment, present in Scriabin's works, reflects the wide use of the same structures in the expression of different musical themes. He also points out that both in these and later works Scriabin's relationship and pairing of themes in terms of character is subject to considerable weakening.

*Piano Sonata* no. 2 also shows attempts to use sonata form to show themes of different emotional hues: two parts of contrasting musical nature and different tempos. This treatment extends the use of binary form, in which parts stand in opposition to each other, and also helps to improve the tonal structure of the song. There are no contraindications in the area of interpretation of musical themes when it comes to presenting strong conflict or dramatic sound contrasts. It can also be used to describe and present different aspects of topics with a specific color and meaning. Constant exploration of this concept aims to present the function of the sonata form as a constantly living form, exploring thematic material, so that it can manifest more musical connotations and expand its thematic potential. It was in Scriabin's later piano sonatas that this point of view played a significant formative role.

#### **2.4.1. Merger under construction**

##### **a) Changes in the structure of the sonata in the middle period of his work**

Sonata from the middle period of Scriabin's work slowly deviate structurally from the traditional pattern. In *Piano Sonata* No 4 there is a trend to combine parts. The first part of *Sonata* no. 4 is an introduction to the second part. *Sonata* no. 5, on the other hand, has a strictly one-piece structure.

*Sonata* no. 4 is Scriabin's last sonata, in which one can distinguish parts – in this case two. However, compared with the second part of the sonata, the first part of which is based on the three-part form, cannot be treated on an equal footing with it in terms of scale and musical themes. The second part is the core of the whole sonata, while the first serves as an extensive introduction – an introduction. Thus, the sonata described does not have a traditional multi-part structure. This one of the composer's last "bows" towards multi-part forms was a transitional and breakthrough moment in Scriabin's work, which was

then on the verge of a complete transformation of style, ultimately and fully occurring within the one-part form.

*Sonata* no. 5 is the first sonata with a one-part structure, consisting of exposition, processing and reprise. The general breakdown into these parts is shown in the table below.

<b>Table II.</b> Composition of Piano Sonata <i>in F sharp Major</i> no. 5 op. 53	
Introduction 1-12 bars	
Exposition part 13-156 bars	First tonal area I 13 -46 bars
	First tonal area II 47 -95 bars
	Transition 96 -119 bars
	Second tonal area 120 -139 bars
	Close 140 -156 bars
Development part	157 -328 bars
Recapitulation part	329 -456 bars

The innovation of this sonata is manifested in the use of double themes. The formal structure is literally regular, with each part having almost the same number of bars.

#### **2.4.2. Towards complexity and structural liberation in the late stage of creativity**

All of the five one-part sonatas from this period are characterized by extensive structure, are complex and give a lot of freedom in terms of interpretation and implementation of changes resulting from the use of new compositional techniques and musical ideas. The introductions to Sonata No 8 and No 10 resemble that of Sonata No 4, and the main part of the sonata also consists of exposition, processing and reprisals within the themes, representing the sonata form, but the whole is contained in one elaborate, complex and extensive structure.

*Sonata* no. 9 was the composer's favourite sonata. It is also distinguished by its very regular construction. The general formal outline of the sonata is presented in the table below:

Table III. Construction of <i>Piano Sonata</i> no. 9 op. 68	
Exposition part 1 -68 bars	First tonal area 1 -19 bars
	Transition 20 -34 bars
	Second tonal area 35 -59 bars
	Close 60 -68 bars
Development part	69 -154 bars
Recapitulation part	155 -209 bars
Coda	210 -216 bars

In the sonatas of Scriabin's late period, there is even a multi-thematic aspect. The Example in *Piano Sonata* no. 10 distinguishes five themes, three of which appear in the introduction. They're all developed in the processing part. The musical structure is more complex and the content enriched.

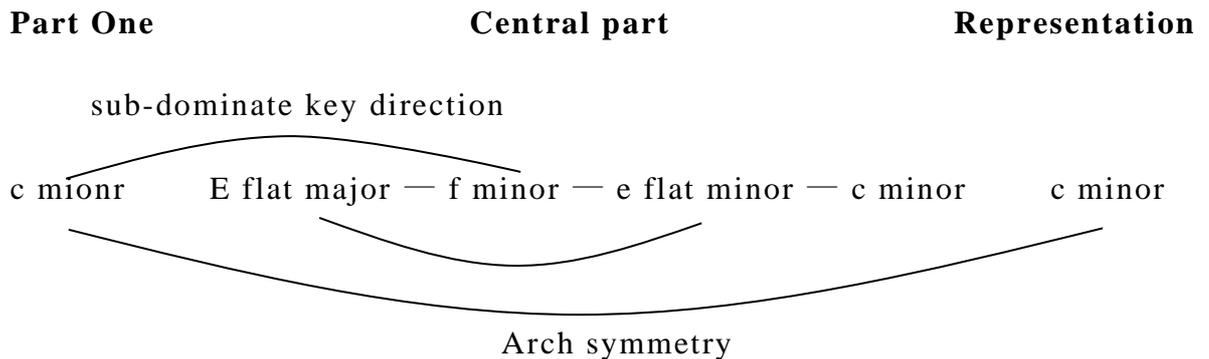
## 2.5. Tonal system

### 2.5.1. Early creative stage

Skriabin's first three sonatas are still based on the traditional major/minor tonal system. On the example of their tonal arrangement, you can notice some repetitive rules, which I will describe in the following paragraphs.

**a) Arch symmetry**

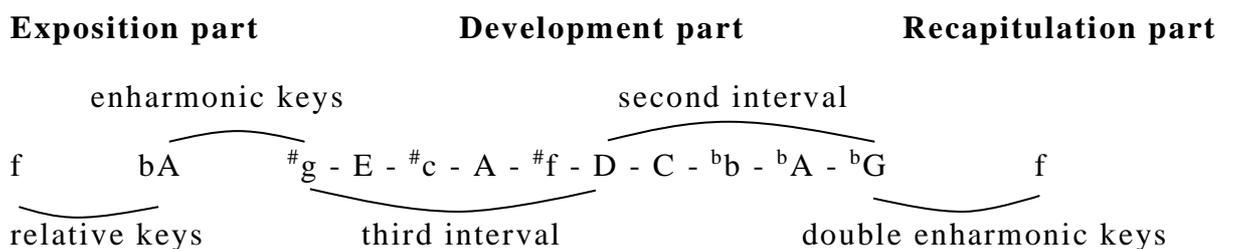
Tonal system based on the so-called Arch symmetry", presented on the example of the second *Piano Sonata* no. 1:



As you can see in the example above, this section focuses on the key of F minor, which is in the middle, and the surrounding keys are arranged symmetrically in the order of C minor, E flat major, E flat minor, E flat minor. The main key of C minor first leans towards the dominant key, towards its derivative of the major key – E flat, then turns towards the subdominant key – F minor, creating a tonal relationship "tonic - dominant - subdominant - dominant", so that the tonal arrangement of this part fully reflects the perfection of the classical form of beauty.

**b) Direction of "tonica - dominate -sub-dominate -tonica"**

Tonal layout arranged according to the principle of "tonica - dominate -sub-dominate -tonica" direction, like the first movement of *Piano Sonata* no. 1 as illustration below:



Looking at the tonal arrangement of the first part of the sonata, the sounds contained in the first tonal area of the exposition belong to related tones, which pass from tonic to subdominant tones. At the place where some of the exposition and processing meet, the tones undergo an enharmonic transformation. At the beginning of the part of the processing, a movement falling between the tones is visible, taking place in intervals of thirds, which may symbolize the dusk, "sinking" of the Romantic era. In the final part of this part, the interval relationship between the tones changes – this time their relations in descending motion are based on the interval of a second to finally enter the part preparing for the transition to reprisal. In this way, the tonal relationship between processing and reprisal follows the classical rules and represents a traditional transition from Subdominant to Tonic. The tonal arrangement of this part represents the standard logic in the context of the sonata tonal arrangement. On the other hand, the use of Ges major, on which the finale of the processing is based, and F Major – intonating reprisals, suggests the need to look for more modern stylistically solutions.

### **c) Tonal centres**

In three piano sonatas from the early period of his work, and among them also in the second two-part sonata, the composer tried to outline the tonal arrangement. Comparing the tonal area of the Piano Sonata No 2 with the traditional sonatas of a three-part structure, one can distinguish common features, presented in the table below.

Table IV. Construction of <i>Piano Sonata in g minor</i> no. 2 op. 19							
I movement				II movement			
Exposition part		Development part	Recapitulation part	Exposition part		Development part	
I tonal area	II tonal area		II tonal area	I tonal area	II tonal area	I tonal area	II tonal area
Tonica key	Dominate key	Stay in the dominant key and wait for the enter of tonica	Sub-dominate key	Tonica key	Dominate key	Tonica key	
Key of tonica-dominate field			Key of sub-dominate direction	Key of tonica-dominate field			
I movement			II movement	III movement			
Tranditional multi-movement Sonata							

From the analysis presented above in the table it is clear that Skriabin in this two-part sonata concentrated the full tonal process of the multi-part form,

and what is more, even though the sound material is also concentrated and combined, it forms the overall outline of the cyclic form. It could be said that it was an attempt to integrate and concentrate the traditional multi-part structure.

### **2.5.2. Middle and late stages**

#### **a) Tonal arrangement in a mystical chord system**

Since the creation of Piano *Sonata* no. 4, Scriabin's musical language has clearly changed. In the seven sonatas from the middle and late stages of his work, a new kind of chord based on a "non-tertiary structure" does not fit into the traditional tonal system, thus being a breakthrough element in the tonality known so far. It does not show a tendency to merge and strive for the initial tone, as it should work according to traditional schemes. The tonal stability" of the second tonal area is significantly weakened and there are frequent transitions to the reprise part in the form of continuous harmonic changes. This trend is more evident in *Sonatas* no. 5, no. 6 and no. 7. *Sonatas* no. 9 and no. 10 are based on chords with a "non-tertiary" structure and exhibit the characteristics of a tonal echo in their forms, which as a result also deviates from the traditional harmonic system. In Scriabin's sonatas, which weaken the harmonic functions and characteristics of the major minor system, the concept of "tonality" according to the principles known from the classical form of sonata, is captured by deeper relationships between the trebles. Despite the use of innovative techniques, the tonal arrangement still shows the principles used so far in sonatas.

#### **b) Tonal arrangement of "compasses"**

The so-called tonal arrangement of "compasses" refers to the process of presenting themes in the sonata. The tonal position does not follow the logic of the scheme: "main tone – subdominant tone – main tone – main tone" in order to refer to the first and second tonal areas of the exposition and the reprise part. Instead, one can see the beginning in the first tonal area of the exposition, and then in the part filled with the waving movement of the musical material, in the reprise only the subject of the second tonal area returns already in the initial tone, creating a kind of "tonal echo" phenomenon.

13 Languido *pp dolciss.* *con sord.* *pochiss.* *con voglia*

10 *poco cresc.* *dim.* *pp* *poco cresc.* *dim.*

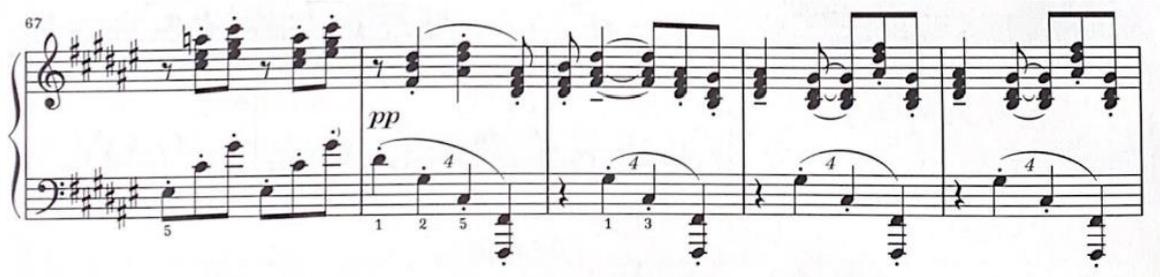
**Example 24.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 13-24.

Example 24. We see the first tonal arrangement from the *Piano Sonata* no. 5 (bars 13-46), based on the note of dis minor with the tone of the lyric scale intoned in the introduction.

47 Presto con allegrezza *pp* *cresc.* *poco* *a* *poco*

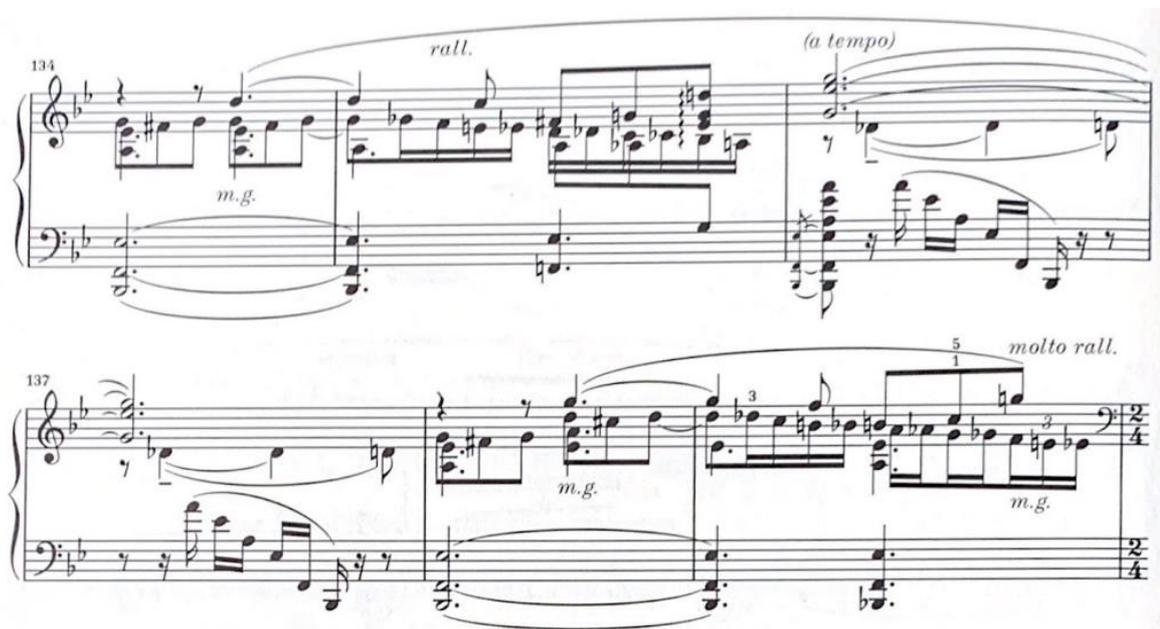
52

**Example 25.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 47-56.



**Example 26.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 67-71.

The first tonal area, also present in 47 - 52 bars (example 25), is based on six chord notes: G sharp - B - D sharp - F sharp - A sharp - C sharp. The chord C sharp - G sharp - D sharp - B held in the bass underlines the foundation of the second major key - F sharp major. From bar 68, (Example 26.) the harmonic structure in the bass is transformed into the chord F sharp - C sharp - G sharp - D sharp. The basis of this chord is still the F sharp sound, which emphasizes the characteristics of the output tone. Nevertheless, the basis of this harmonic structure is the mentioned six sounds G sharp - B - D sharp - F sharp - A sharp - C sharp.



**Example 27.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 134-139.

The "tonality" of the second tonal area (bars 120-139) shown in example 27. From time 134. is represented by a set of sounds: B falt - F - A - B - E, remaining in the key of B flat major. The relationship between the tertiary increased with the first initial note and the fourth decreased with the second

major note is formed. The latter emphasizes the interval relationship between tonic and dominant in the first output pitch.

In the reprise part, the first tonal system II is used again, and its treble structure is the same as in the exposition part, but this time based on the chord: C sharp - E - G sharp - B - D sharp - F sharp. The bass base maintains the B sound, providing support for the E tonic. The tone of the second tonal area is E flat major, being here in an enharmonic relationship with the first tonal area I of the exposition, thus achieving again the impression of a tonal echo through the combination of I and II areas. The tonal relationship between the exposure part and the reprise is presented in the table below:

<b>Table V.</b> Composition of <i>Piano Sonata in F sharp Major</i> no. 5 op. 53				
Exposition part			Recapitulation part	
First tonal area I	First tonal area II	First tonal area I	First tonal area II	First tonal area I
D sharp	F sharp	B flat	E	E flat

It is clear from the table that, although the first tonal area II is re-used in part of the reprise, the key role in the structure is played by the tone of the first tonal area I and the second tonal area of the exposure. The relationship of sex reduced between the sounds of Dis and B basically forms here an enharmonic relationship of pure quince, typical of subdominant and tonic tones. Fis major in the first tonal area of II and B major in the second tonal area of the exposition reflect the character of the sonata's initial tonal tone. Finally, in the reprisal part, the initial tone returns in a new enharmonic version. As a whole, the sonata presents the tonal arrangement in the form of "compasses".

**c) Tonal echo through "note-row"**

In *Piano Sonata* no. 7, the tonal arrangement of exposure and reprise is shown in the table below, in which the reprise key is one second greater than the output key:

<b>Table VI.</b> Construction of <i>Piano Sonata</i> no. 7 op. 6					
Exposition part			Recapitulation part		
First tonal area	Second tonal area	Close	First tonal area	Second tonal area	Coda
C	G sharp	F	B flat	F sharp	E flat

In this case, nothing appears in the form of a "tonal echo" and the tonal area moves only by the said second great down for each of the areas. In *Piano Sonata* no. 7, this treatment is closely linked to the structure of the "mystical chord", "four-tone layer" of this chord, showing the tonality of each theme derived from three diatonic scales:

First tonal area of exposition and recapitulation: A flat - B flat - C - D - E - F sharp;

Second tonal area of exposition and recapitulation: E - F sharp - G sharp - A sharp - B sharp - C re-sharp, (alternative enharmonic formulation E - F sharp - A flat - B flat- D);

Code of exposition and recapitulation: D flat - E flat - F - G - A - B.

He analysis of the above diatonic scales clarifies the picture of the enharmonic relationship between the first and second tonal areas. Despite the differences in tones, it manages to achieve the effect of "tonal echo".

## 2.6. Rhythm and beat

Skriabin's extensive search for both classical literature, his participation in religious rites and theological discussions inspired the creation of a new concept of rhythm closely linked to frequent changes in tempo, which was to be a means of expressing a mysterious atmosphere in the works.

### a) Rhythm and pulse complexity

The multiplicity of complex rhythmic structures (polymetry) complicates and obscures rhythmic uniformity. Complex and irregular rhythms constantly build a tense atmosphere.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is titled "Presto M. M. ♩ = 132" and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. It features a complex rhythmic structure with multiple groups of notes per measure, creating a polymetric effect. The second system includes dynamic markings for *cresc.* (crescendo) and *dim.* (diminuendo). The notation is dense and intricate, characteristic of Scriabin's style.

**Example 28.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, III mov., bars 1-5.

Example 28 presents a fragment of the third part of *Piano Sonata* no. 1, in which the sounds are grouped three on each of the four measures in a takta. The melody is performed in the rhythm of quarters on the strong parts of the bar – the first sounds from each group, creating a rhythm like in meter 4/4. The left hand begins the phrase with a prebeat on the last eighth of the group of twelve, thus creating a rhythmic disturbance for the right hand part.



**Example 29.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in g minor* no. 2 op. 19, II mov., bars 19-20.

In the second part of *Piano Sonata* no. 2, as shown in the example 29, the role of the right hand is twofold: the composer inserts a melodic line between the sounds, placing it on every second note of the trio, which is to be emphasized by the performer. The trio pulsation in the right hand intertwines with the part of the left hand, conducted in quarters, creating a 3:2 rhythmic relationship with alternating accents between the voices.

There are also many complex rhythmic patterns in the V Sonata, which are presented below:

<b>Table VII.</b> Rhythmic schemas of <i>Piano Sonata in F sharp Major</i> no. 5 op. 5	
Compound rhythm	Numbers of bars
Five-to-two	3、 5、 7-8、 159
Three-to-two	47-58、 58-79、 87、 208-210、 225-226
Three-to-four	437-439

There are also such rhythmic structures as quartets, quintols, three-to-five divisions (3:5) etc..

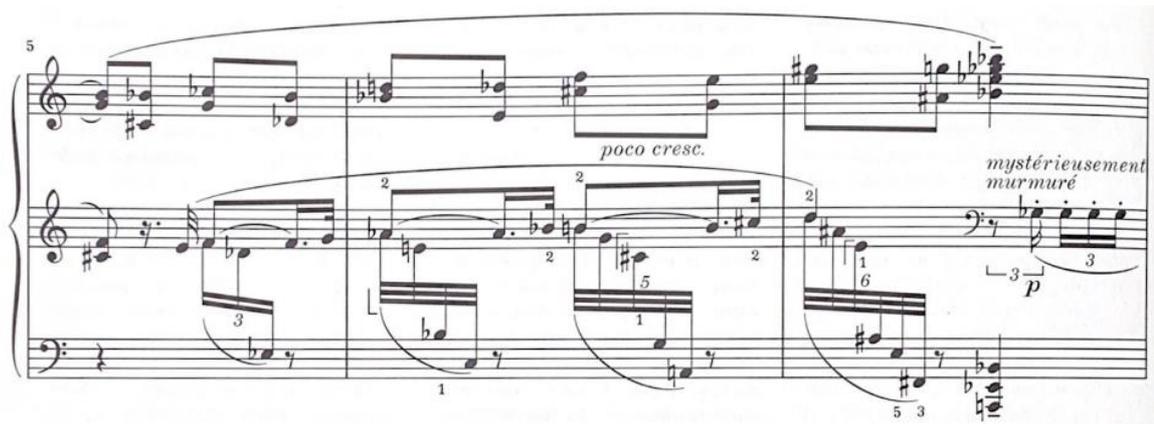
#### **b) Polyrhythmic groups/Rhythmic development**

Being influenced by Chopin's rubato, Scriabin liked the use of numerous polyrhythmic groups in melodic lines. For example, in the side theme of the first part of *Piano Sonata no. 2*, such combinations will appear: quintols and triols, triols and sextols, quintols and sextols, septols and octols. At the same time, the composer introduces modifications in the aforementioned groups by using dots in triolas and quintolas and pauses in irregular groups.

The image displays a musical score for Example 30, consisting of two systems of piano and treble clefs. The first system (bars 32-34) shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with an accompaniment. The treble clef has markings for '1' and '4' above the notes, and a '3' below the notes in the second measure. The bass clef has markings for '2/4' and '2/5' below the notes. The second system (bars 35-37) shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with an accompaniment. The treble clef has markings for '4', '5', '4', '3', and '5' above the notes, and a '3' below the notes in the third measure. The bass clef has markings for 'pp' and 'espress.' below the notes. The score is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature.

**Example 30.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in g minor no. 2 op. 19, I mov.*, bars 32-37.

This is illustrated by Example 30., where in the first part of *Piano Sonata no. 2* the original trio rhythm is changed to an eight quartet, then to a quintola in 32-33 bars, and finally to a sextola in 34 bars. In the final part of the second tonal area, the left hand part follows the aforementioned rhythmic progression and the sounds are also included in groups from quartets, through quintols, to sextols, pushing the coda part with a very dynamic accompaniment. This kind of decoration of both melody and accompaniment introduces endless impulses and fantasies to the piece, reflecting the stylistics of the described composition.



**Example 31.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 5-7.

Another example taken from *Piano Sonata* no. 9 (Example 31.) are 5-8 bars, in which the gradual "densification" of irregular rhythmic groups is visible. They enrich the music with a "mysterious illusion", thus weakening the balance between sentences and symmetry of form.

**Example 32.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 205-209.

In the example 32. The melody, presented in quintolas, instead of following the three pulse, continues to develop, which completely destroys the principle of pulsation based on the strong part of such, introducing a kind of refreshment. In the space of this quintola there is also another irregular group in the second voice, giving the rhythmic structure a unique character.

**Example 33.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata no. 8 op. 66*, bars 172-179.

In *Piano Sonata no. 8* – Example 33. – a combination of duos and quartiles is visible. At 173. The quartet replaces the last three values in the takta, slightly blurring the shape of the original rhythmic drawing.

In general, the introduction of irregular rhythmic groups in Scriabin's piano sonatas is considered the most extensive procedure to break the use of traditional rhythmic schemes. Instead of simply dividing each measure into specific irregular groups of the same length, Scriabin adds pauses and ligatures, giving the groups a certain "torn" and "unbalanced" sound, which also emphasizes the mystery in his works.

### c) Differentiated metric markings

In the *Piano Sonata no. 5*-metre is constantly changing – in its processing it changes up to fourteen times. These changes are presented in the table below:

**Table VIII.** Metric relationships in creation *Piano Sonata in F flat Major* no. 5 op. 53

Bar	Material	Time signature
157-165	Introduction	2/4
166-184	First tonal area I	5/8
185-190	First tonal area II	6/8
191-198	Transition and first tonal area II	6/8
199-206	Close and second tonal area	6/8 - 5/8 - 6/8 - 5/8 - 6/8
207-210	First tonal area II	6/8
211-218	Transition and first tonal area II	6/8
219-227	Close and second tonal area	6/8 - 5/8 - 6/8 - 5/8 - 6/8
227-246	First tonal area II	6/8
247-250	Introduction	2/4
251-262	First tonal area I	1/2
263-280	First tonal area I and close	6/8
281-304	Close and second tonal area	2/4 - 6/8 - 2/4 - 6/8 - 2/4
305-328	Close	6/8

In Scriabin's sonatas, metric markings are no longer tools for regulating rhythm, but for regulating phrases. Scriabin leaves the comfort zone of closing phrases in bars and uses musical sentences shaped like full paragraphs to get the opportunity to fully express his emotions. This diversity of metric designations reflects the "savagery" of Scriabin's idea, which concerns freedom in the creation of artistic message.

### **III. Philosophical background**

#### **3.1. The germination of philosophical thought**

The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries is a time of frequent international conflicts, deepening economic crisis, fierce market competition, spreading wars and turmoil in the Western world. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, European society underwent drastic changes and capitalism entered a period of its imperialist boom. Various capitalist contradictions began to emerge, including large-scale socialist production and narrow means of production, or the contradiction between the emerging imperialist states and the old colonial countries. Moreover, social groups have been clearly delineated and even fuelled by their differences, which is perfectly illustrated by the example of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In order to alleviate conflicts and maintain themselves on the world market, some of the imperialist states mobilized their troops and began to expand and prepare for fighting, resulting in World War I. During this time, numerous socialist groups and political parties were formed in many countries, whose main aim was to promote and develop the workers' movement and finally to organize the proletarian revolution.

In the face of a society full of contradictions, the polarization of the petty bourgeoisie gained strength, and so many respected writers and artists fell into pessimistic and negative moods. Many philosophical schools were born at that time, including Neo-Hegelism and Machism (at the end of the 19th century). In the West, popular philosophical trends at that time were Nietzsche's idea of superman or will of power, as well as Schopenhauer's voluntarism. At the beginning of the 20th century, "the intuitionism of the French philosopher Bergson and the psychoanalysis of the Austrian doctor – Freud – enjoyed great popularity in Europe and also had a significant influence on literature and art, being the ideological source of trends such as expressionism and surrealism and other literary aesthetics.

With the disruption of the prevailing principles of social life in Europe and the emergence of various schools, both literary and philosophical, people were overwhelmed with scepticism and negative attitudes towards traditional concepts and moral and ethical values. These moods also influenced the work

of composers who, unable to find peace of mind and emerge from the general state of depression, attempted to search for the "kingdom of heaven" through the assumptions of pantheism, Schopenhauer's philosophy or Catholic Cecilianism. Ultimately, this led to the emergence of various modernist solutions in music.

Some of the creators, who are in opposition to tradition per se, directed their activities towards inner experience, introspection, appreciating the intuition and action of the subconscious, as well as discovering the mysteries of the spiritual sphere. They believed that "being/I" was the only reality, and personal intuitive images and own feelings were fully true. In the music of these artists we can hear extensive use of atonality and multi-component dissonances, distorted and complicated rhythms, and even abstract, almost mathematically calculated interval changes, whose task was to express the "unconventionality of being". In this perspective, truth, goodness and beauty ceased to exist, all life became a deformation, lost meaning and so far the praise of values. The traditional concept of total and functional harmony also ceased to matter, resulting in losing balance in music. In addition, some composers – still adhering to classical and romantic traditions – absorbed modern compositional techniques and tried to truly reflect the contrasts and conflicts of everyday life, thereby creating new styles, techniques and genres. Emerging creative tendencies or already dominant trends of a given period inspired composers in creating works. It happened that they were influenced by different schools, and their works exhibited characteristics of different genres. Composing achievements of this period initiated the development of many styles and techniques in the Western music world.

The Western literary trend of decadent thought and numerous idealistic philosophical branches also played their role in the transformation of Russian music at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. At that time, Russian society was very diverse and the political situation was uneasy. Many significant events took place in the history of the country, which also echoed in Russian culture and art. Many artists fell into depression and were unable to cope. Tired of trying to escape from reality, people, looking into the future through the prism of hopelessness, made attempts to liberate their minds, to experience

freedom in their hearts. Worship of heroism and other ideological products took second place, while the main point of reference became works expressing the connection with religion, space, irrationality and ideas focusing on inner thought. In the history of Russia, religion has been one of the cornerstones of the nation's spirit. During this period, religious thought took on a special significance and was firmly rooted in human hearts. In addition, express progress in the field of science has spawned a mass of new theories and fresh knowledge strongly affecting human perception. Dmitry Merezhkovski thus describes the mentality of the Russian people at the time: "People have never felt such a need for faith in their hearts before, when they saw that they could not trust their minds. In this pathological and insoluble conflict, in this tragic relationship, the unprecedented freedom of thought and the audacity of denial contain the most characteristic elements of the need for what is "mystical""<sup>15</sup>.

As a pianist and composer, Skriabin lived in the darkest and most restless times of Russian history. For the representative of the proletariat, inter-class contradictions were very acute. Life in an imperialist society with a strong feudal tone caused the rising resistance, which put the proletariat in a dangerous position. The outbreak of the revolution in 1905 year and the reality after its failure, as well as the emergence of various trends in literature and philosophy of Western Europe, had a direct impact on Skriabin and his creative process.

### **3.2. The influence of philosophical thought on Skriabin**

At the turn of the century Skriabin experienced many social systemic, social and philosophical upheavals, as well as transformations of artistic forms. All these phenomena strongly influenced the musical creation of Skriabin, who not only became a pioneer of modern music at the beginning of the 20th century, drawing on the tradition of romantic music, but was also perceived as a phenomenon of Russian culture of that period. The primary reason for his

---

<sup>15</sup> Y. Wang, *The Spirit of Music in Russian Symbolist Literature*, Beijing 2001, p. 23.

uniqueness was his extraordinary love and in-depth study of philosophy, which formed his strongly individualistic philosophical view of idealism and mysticism, which became the foundation for developing his own musical style.

Skriabin grew up in an environment full of indulgence and lack of discipline, which resulted in his lack of decisiveness and criticism, as well as his growing egoism and enormous hypersensitivity. His egocentric character led to a fanatical worship of Schopenhauer's voluntarism, as well as Nietzsche's superhuman philosophy. *Piano Sonata* no. 3, called the State of Mind by Skriabin, was to convey these ideological trends in its content.

The composer's encounter with religion, philosophy and mystical ideas was accidental, but it became a turning point in his life. The composer gradually expanded his horizons in this field. In 1903 years Skriabin joined the "Moscow Philosophical Society", founded by Sergei Trubetskoy, focusing his interests around Greek philosophy and mythology. His works from this period began to express the holiness and aura of the philosophical spirituality of the world.

In 1904 Skriabin lived in Switzerland, Geneva, Paris, New York, Brussels and several other cities, exploring his philosophical knowledge – mainly the works of Nietzsche, Kant, Ficht, Schillinger, Hegel. His curiosity in this subject grew every day. The main point of interest became the "universe" and the concept of "absolute" – in other words, a spiritual principle which he considered "holiness" in the human world. On the one hand, philosophical considerations deepened his faith in the spiritual concept of man, and added faith in the fact that man with his hard work ensures victory on the path of the ideal. On the other hand, however, they encouraged the composer to solve existential problems using theoretical concepts, to construct a somewhat unrealistic "model of the world" of his art, although it was not so simple, because his life experience seemed to fall outside any theoretical concept. In fact, the presence of a free spirit, the awakening of new forces and the significant development of human nature were all that deeply influenced Skriabin. Philosophical lectures, seminars or debates were for him a process of "ideological stimulation", and what fascinated him the most was the insatiable

desire to seek the truth about the world and man. The ethical nature of art, in which the composer strongly believed, was also strongly linked to this need. Moreover, philosophy – thanks to its inspirations – enriched his repertoire. Scriabin was deeply fascinated by mystical philosophy, and at the same time he also became acquainted with Marxist writings, and his meeting with Georgi Plekhanov in 1906 year became a very interesting event. As Plekhanov recalls: "When I met Scriabin in Polyask, he had no idea of Marx's views. I then drew his attention to this philosophically significant trend. A few months later we met again in Switzerland and I noticed that although he was not a proponent of historical materialism, he already had a good idea of its essence and was able to apply this doctrine better than many of the "hardened" Marxists I know."<sup>16</sup>. Of course, in his philosophical quest Scriabin remained an artist. During this time he composed mainly his III and V Symphonies, as well as the IV and V Piano Sonata. Among these works is the IV Symphony – Poem of ecstasy becomes the most representative form of this period. It is somewhat a continuation of the previous symphony entitled Divine Poem, hence the composer continues to use the symbolic title to emphasize his philosophical thoughts and views, or to understand the concept of "ecstasy".

The title given to *Piano Sonata* no. 5 refers to the verse of the Ecstasy Poem: "Mystical power, I call you, spirit of the creator buried in deep darkness, cowardly seeds of life, I call you, courage to move." Verses referring to "mystical power", "the spirit of the creator buried in deep darkness", and "cowardly embryos – the source of life", all reflect Scriabin's love for "life" and his desire for "life" at that time.

Later, already under the influence of mysticism and theosophy, Scriabin showed a greater interest in the philosophy of idealism, still exploring theories of voluntarism and superman. He believed that only the spirit could attain eternal life, and only art could lead man to the supreme kingdom. Immersed more and more in the "mystical" spirit, his personality cult brought him to

---

<sup>16</sup> Y. Keldish, *Soviet Music Encyclopedia – Biographies of Famous Western Musicians*, Shanghai 1992, p. 327.

madness. Combined with the idea of "total art" (or "synthesis of arts"), Scriabin hoped to become superhuman by creating a mystical, all-encompassing world of music that would combine nature, the universe and God.

In the last few years of his life, the composer's creative thought has become more complicated, and his musical creation has been strongly influenced by idealism and mysticism. During his greatest worries, he was relieved by planning and writing religious dramas. During his stay in Moscow, his reputation grew. He often gave concerts, and each of his performances was a great event of the artistic world. His followers have grown. An increasing number of pianists included Scriabin's works in their repertoire, including Sergei Kusewicks, who published and also performed Scriabin's works in a sophisticated way, including symphonic ones.

Each of Scriabin's late compositions shows an individual style, but together they form a coherent, not very large group of paintings, most of which refer to religious ideas. Such are his late Sonata from No 6 to No 10; Symphonic poems such as *Masque [Mask]* and *Etrangete [Alien]* (op. 63) or *Vers la flamme [To the flame]* (op. 72) and dances such as *Flammes sombres [Dark flames]* (op.73 nr 2). These paintings are also fully shown in *Piano Sonata no. 7*. His philosophical thought present in *Piano Sonata no. 9* stems mainly from the mystical and theosophical experiences he experienced.

There are four main streams of philosophical thought that inspired Scriabin:

#### **a) Nietzsche's philosophy of superman**

The superman, proclaimed by Nietzsche, is a person who builds a different system of values with new perspectives for the world, as well as a completely different view of life based on the claim that "God is dead, and all traditional moral culture must be re-evaluated". The superman has a completely new morality, which is different from that of the traditional and understood per se. He is the person who can best demonstrate the will to live, which is characterized by the most abundant creativity, as well as an individual strong and resistant to the problems of everyday life. It is also someone who

overcomes his limitations, weaknesses, fully believes in himself and dominates the mediocrity. He is a determinant of truth and morality, a creator of norms and values. The superman is free, selfish and self-sufficient. Faced with humanity's greatest pain and greatest hope, it grows in an unfavorable environment. Hatred, jealousy, stubbornness, harshness, greed and violence give him strength. This model created by Nietzsche is not humble, banal, weak or powerless, but full, rich, great and complete in its essence.

### **b) Schopenhauer's voluntarism**

Schopenhauer believed that the whole phenomenal world was nothing but a representation of the will, and that the root of existence and the driving force of the whole is the will to survive, which is the foundation of human life. He also emphasized that scientific research is to satisfy needs and desires, while art directly refers to the essence of being outside the world of phenomena, thus dominating science. Of the many works, Schopenhauer professed music as the strongest and deepest, because, as he claimed, other arts express only rationality, and music directly objectifies and depicts the will.

### **c) Mysticism**

The origin of the word "mysticism" in Greek roots and derives from the verb "myein", meaning "close" or more precisely "close your eyes". The reason for closing your eyes is disappointment in reaching truth and knowledge from the phenomenal world through sensory experiences. However, mysticism does not abandon the search for truth, but only advocates the closing of the eyes of the body, encouraging the opening of the eyes of the mind, so as not to allow the turmoil of the phenomenal world to be distracted. He leads to return to his "I" to achieve truth and knowledge through the process of mind meditation.

Mysticism also refers to a "religious idealistic vision of the world", which promotes direct communication with any gods or supernatural beings in order to learn the mysteries of the universe. This trend also applies to any theory that suggests conclusions outside scientific or logical knowledge, even based on unspoken mystical means.

Plekhanov thus referred to Skriabin personally: "The argument you have made to me is in its form purely mystical. You mentioned many times that you read and studied Marx and Marxism. It is a pity that what you read did not affect you in any way and you still remain a hopeless idealist-mystic."<sup>17</sup>. Plekhanov's words made it clear that the concept of mysticism was deeply rooted in Skriabin's heart. Although the composer understood Marxist theories, he remained an ardent mystic at heart. This concept was also transferred to his work. His compositions were more faithful to his own feelings prevailing in classical music trends at that time.

#### **d) Theozophy**

The name also comes from the Greek language – the words "Theos" and "sophia" mean "sacred knowledge". The assumption of this trend was to find answers to fundamental questions about life: "who am I, where do I come from, where am I going, what is the soul, what is the origin of the universe, what is the nature of divinity – knowledge". The founders of this mystical and theological school called the Theosophical Society were the Russian aristocrat Helena Bławacka and the American Henry Olcott.

Theosophists "is a religious philosophy, leaning towards mysticism. Although the contents of theosophical schools differ from each other, they share one common characteristic – the confession that spiritual reality exists in the human soul and that it is possible to come into direct contact with it through intuition, meditation or listening to revelation. He understands the wisdom of God, and then he can gain insight into the mysteries of nature and his inner world.

Skriabin studied many of Helena Bławacka's publications. Theosophy gradually became an inspiration for the composer's later works. Bławacka was the author of many books devoted to this philosophical trend, but one – dark and unclear, also considered a masterpiece of the genre – the Secret Doctrine

---

<sup>17</sup> R. Yu, General History of Western Music, Shanghai 2001, p. 332.

(also known as the Secret Doctrine) was particularly liked by Skriabinowska and devoted a lot of attention to it.

One of the examples chosen from this book is the description: "When Satan awoke, he realized that he had found a space full of pleasant music sent by God", "Occasionally, infinite thoughts, sacred eternity"<sup>18</sup>. Such mysterious fragments, not distancing themselves from the descriptions of the devil and God, particularly intrigued Skriabin. His head was still occupied with cosmic, mystical and hypothetical images, which were strongly "imprinted" in his work. Writer Lenoid Sabaniev wrote in his book that 'The Mystery Doctrine of Belavatica has become Skriabin's Bible, and it is difficult to understand how Skriabin came so close to mysticism. It also became clear that Skriabin's mystical beliefs are inextricably linked to Bławacka's thought and work.'<sup>19</sup>.

The idealism of mysticism and theosophy led Skriabin to an absolute belief in the power of mind and spirit, as well as to a fantasy of being one with God. Mystical beliefs and their depressing character absorbed the composer both mentally and physically. When Skriabin entered the mystical path, he began to see music as a mystical, religious ceremony. In later years he also planned to create a mystery combining elements of music, dance, scents and light effects. The planning process of this spectacle included his endless predictions about the "mystical world". Skriabin often emphasized in his late sonatas the concept of "mystery", the task of which was to bring man closer to dealing with restless and fleeting supernatural forces. At the turn of the century Skriabin presented to his audience a completely new kingdom of mystical themes, which were definitely different from the so far known romantic love theme.

Being influenced by these philosophical trends, Skriabin developed a subjective awareness of his own "self". He believed that the outside world was the product of subjectivity, the material world would eventually be destroyed,

---

<sup>18</sup> Helena Blacatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Theosophical publishing Company 2006, p. 582.

<sup>19</sup> Lenoid Sabaneff, *The Memories of Skriabin*, „Russian Review” 1966, p. 263.

and the spiritual world would remain forever. Seeing the savior in himself, the composer began to devote himself to "ideal power" and his own "essence" and all he wanted was to express and create his own "self". He saw God in him. In his philosophical journal he wrote: "I am God! I am being, I am air, I am game, I am freedom, I am boundary, I am God!"<sup>20</sup>. He saw his music as filling the universe with joyful sounds, as a religion through which people can achieve spiritual liberation and enter the world of bliss. He also often wrote: "I am free, I am alive, I am a dream, I am tired, I still bury my desire, I am happy, I am arrogant in my enthusiasm, I am nothing...". These sentences show the ambivalence of Scriabin's nature, which, on the one hand, is lost in his creation filled with divinity, euphoria and ecstasy, and on the other hand, becomes the main driving force for creating his unique style exclusively devouring arrogance.

### **3.3. A new look at Scriabin's music**

The composer's work has become unique and a phenomenon not only in Russian musical culture, but also worldwide. As the creator, he seems to go deep into the successive layers of the earth, down to the core, to the deepest abyss, in which hides an undiscovered cornerstone, a shining diamond. This precious jewel he presents in all his works, even the smallest<sup>21</sup>.

Scriabin's music has an exciting, tense, peculiar and moving mood that does not present any concrete picture of the world of things, but abstract philosophical thoughts: antiquity and modernism, the old and the new, Russian and Western European thought. The complementarity of these different cultures, as well as the mystical philosophical implications give wide opportunities for the formation and development of a musical style. As Plekhanov wrote: "His music is very spiritual. In its emotionality it fully

---

<sup>20</sup> R. Yu, *General History of Western Music*, Shanghai 2001, p. 333.

<sup>21</sup> H. Neuhaus, *The records of Neuhaus's talking about music – Anthologies of reflections, memories and diaries*, Shanghai 2003, p. 273.

reflects the epoch of revolution and shows the perspective of idealist and mystic."<sup>22</sup>.

This phenomenon was unique among Russian artists of the period. Although Skriabin's philosophical ideas at the time were unacceptable, gradually, with the development of society and progress, they penetrated into music. His work, filled with a philosophical charge, gained understanding and listening among subsequent generations. It can be said that Skriabin left us with a sense of victory, the power of a man full of fantasy and arrogance, and the vastness of his artistic legacy. Outstanding music theorist Boris Asafjev said: "Skriabin's music is an unrestrained and deeply human force, leaning towards freedom, joy and fun. Full of insatiable mood accompanies full of tension – his music also exists as a living witness to the beautiful ideals of his time filled with "explosive" and exciting cultural phenomena"<sup>23</sup>.

In all ten piano sonatas Skriabin elegantly expresses magic, deep sadness, tragedy, demonism, struggle, fanaticism, freedom and other emotions, as well as artistic concepts of the kingdom of heaven. These elements also present in his symphonies are a clear proof of the consistency of his peculiar stylistic message. The uniqueness of Skriabin's musical thought leads to innovations in playing technique, language and musical form, as well as in the form of musical expression. Against the background of the ever-growing romantic trend, Skriabin's work is very complex and exhibits romantic, impressionist, expressionist and realistic features. At the same time, the aesthetics of some of his compositions have a lot to do with the assumptions of Impressionist schools that emerged later. In turn, the influences of expressionism represented by Schoenberg are also felt in several of Skriabin's later works. The following features express the developed structure of his works: complex harmonic language, irregular and varied rhythms, original "mystical chords", techniques of pantonality, polytonality, expanded tonality and the use of chromatic scale.

---

<sup>22</sup> Rozalia Plekhanova, *Memoir – Anthologies of A.N.Skriabin*, State Music Press 1940, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> A. Sinyaver, *Outline of Russian Music History*, trans. by Xiang Liang, Shanghai 1947, p. 49.

All these elements also greatly influenced the further development of new music.

"Mysticism" and its philosophical message certainly enriched Scriabin's composing and performing style, and certainly distinguished him from the ranks of his contemporary pianists and artists. Although his music appeared often in the post-World War I environment, in parallel with the works of neoclassical artists such as Prokofiev, it nevertheless became the object of attacks from fellow musicians. This resulted in the decline in popularity of Scriabin's work in the 1930s and the almost complete disappearance of his work from the music scene, limiting its dissemination.

So today it is also worth looking at Scriabin's musical creations again. Vladimir Ashkenazi said, "No one knows if Scriabin's music was a figment of his imagination. I don't think she's not under her influence. Nor can it be said that one has to understand his intricate philosophy in order to understand his music, but understanding his thoughts can give a deeper understanding of his music. Look what drives Scriabin and you will no longer separate the composer from the philosopher who creates such beautiful music. It contains a unique idealism and his works are almost perfect."<sup>24</sup> It is only by learning about his philosophical background based on idealism and mysticism that one can better understand, study and analyze his music, which so enriches art, expands artistic competence, creates new methods of expression, and also gives an invaluable contribution to the musical language.

---

<sup>24</sup> R Laredo, *Alexandra Scriabin*, Piano Art Magazine 2002, p. 29.

## IV. Executive issues

Skriabin as a pianist, despite having an amazing ability to control a broad musical narrative, attached great importance to the precise implementation of the smallest details. For Skriabin, sound was the most important quality in music, and each passage was treated as an individual animated being. Skriabin's ability to pedal in a variety of ways definitely distinguished him from his contemporary performers, and at the same time opened up new sonic possibilities unknown so far in the piano world. His playing style grew from improvisation and exceptional technical skills. This incredible combination of these two elements manifests itself mainly in the performance delicacy or the use of full-tension rhythms. This distinguished Skriabin significantly from many famous artists at the time. He was not tempted by fast tempos or the power of the game, but by a passion for creating music, which is evident to be the essence of expression present in his works and becomes a means of expressing himself.

### 4.1. Sound extraction method

Artur Rubinstein recalls one of Skriabin's observed performances: "When (his hand) slipped quickly on the keys, the movement of his fingers gave the impression of an accelerating spider. When Skriabin wanted to bring out a deep sound, his wrists dropped low, dipping his fingers into the keyboard. He skillfully controlled his fingers and achieved various sounds – sharp, delicate and rich, with little effort.”<sup>25</sup>

#### a) Ways to extract sound in the early and middle stages of creativity



<sup>25</sup> B. Sun, "The Unity of Divinity and Humanity" of Skriabin and his Harmony Techniques, „Journal of Shenyang Conservatory of Music”, red. Y. Xinsheng, no. 4/1998, p.12.

**Example 34.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, bars 101-103.

Skriabin's early works were mainly a continuation of the assumptions of the Russian piano school. The melody came to the fore, but it was dominated by chord columns. It was a procedure characteristic of Russian music from that period, which required a great deal of commitment and work and strength of arms while playing. Two bars before the part of the reprise in *Piano Sonata No 1* (Example 34.) a continuous octave movement in the Russian style, requires the use of force of both the whole arms and the whole body.

Melodic lines and cantilene are technically demanding, especially for the fifth finger. For example, in *Piano Sonata No. 1*, forte dynamics occur to a large extent. To avoid heavy playing and inconsistency in melodic phrases, it may be effective to use more wrist movement to give better direction and speed to the fingers.

**Example 35.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, I mov. bars 123-124.

**Example 36.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, bars 22-24.

However, in the second tonal area of the reprise (Example 35.) the texture is much denser than in the second tonal area of the exposure (Example 36), so be careful not to beat the sound. In this case, an important role is played by the fifth finger of the right hand, whose task is to outline the melody line against

the background of the softer part of the other sounds, creating a sonic contrast in the first tonal area.

Musical score for Example 37, showing piano and right-hand staves. The tempo is marked *Languido*. The right hand features *pochiss.* (pississimo) markings over sixteenth-note patterns. The left hand is marked *pp dolciss.* (pianissimo dolcissimo) and *con sord.* (con sordina). The piece changes from 5/8 to 4/8 and then 6/8 time signatures.

**Example 37.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major no. 5 op. 53*, bars 13-18.

Musical score for Example 38, showing piano and right-hand staves. The tempo is marked *Presto con allegrezza*. The right hand features complex rhythmic patterns with various fingering numbers (1-5) and accents. The left hand has a steady bass line with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic.

**Example 38.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major no. 5 op. 53*, bars 47-51.

Musical score for Example 39, showing piano and right-hand staves. The tempo is marked *Con luminosità*. The right hand features dense chordal textures with *ff* (fortissimo) dynamics. The left hand has a melodic line with *m.d.* (mezzo-dolce) dynamics. The piece concludes with a *Sempre* marking.

**Example 39.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major no. 5 op. 53*, bars 413-422.

In Skriabin's works from the middle stage of his work there is still a strong contrast of sound, which requires the performer to use different methods of sound extraction and articulation. In the first tonal area of the *Piano Sonata* no. 5 (Example 37.) it is recommended to keep your fingers in touch with the keyboard (stick-on-key style) for greater control over the intensity of the sound. In the first tonal area II (Example 38.), it is recommended to play with strong/hard foreheads and strong hands, so that in combination with the wrist, you can fully control long chord jumps. In the example 39. a situation is shown where the requirement is to stretch the hand and a more direct method of "pushing" the music towards the climax.

### b) The way of playing under the influence of mysticism

Skriabin, immersed in "mysticism", also develops a new appreciation of "sound", and shapes opinions in the field of strong playing and realizes that forte play can also be delicate. Taking into account Skriabin's concept of sound, I would like to quote the statement: "The composer himself touches the keyboard with sensitivity during the game, and all sounds seem to float in the air, to be a floating gesture."<sup>26</sup>.



**Example 40.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 1-4.

Thus, in the performance of Skriabin's later work, the method of holding fingers close to the keyboard during the game became very popular. *Piano Sonata* no. 9 contains expressions such as "legendary/mythical, mysterious". In order to achieve this effect, the fingers should be placed on the keyboard at all times, as in bars 1-4 (Example 40), to achieve a gently drawn melody, creating

<sup>26</sup> D. Dubal, *Reflections from the Keyboard*, Schirmer Trade Books, New York 2000, p. 209.

a decrescendo for each group of five notes while maintaining a balance of weight.

**Example 41.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata no. 9 op. 68*, bars 5-10.

Complementary motifs in bars 8-10 (Example 41) also play an important role, where the image of "dark power" is presented, which scrolls through the whole piece. Another interpretative term *mystérieusement murmuré* is to reflect mysterious whispers. Triols appearing here should not be played selectively, as this could disrupt the general concept of phrase continuity. The articulation should not be too "literal" here. Choosing the method of playing close to the keyboard helps to effectively realize and increase the sense of weight of the music and its depth.

The image displays a musical score for Example 42, consisting of two systems of piano and violin parts. The piano part is written in bass clef, and the violin part is in treble clef. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, trills, and dynamics like *sf*, *pp*, and *poco*. The first system covers bars 23-28, and the second system covers bars 26-31. The score is annotated with fingerings and articulation marks.

**Example 42.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 23-28.

In the case of the realization of fragments strongly concentrated in texture with vibrato, as in bars 24-27 (Example 42.), it is worth to have an idea of a "vibrating dialogue with the devil". The performer should feel that he is able to grasp the group of sounds in his hand and carry out the sequences with full control so as not to destroy the mysterious atmosphere/aura built up in the space of the song.

#### 4.2. Pedalization

Scriabine undoubtedly became famous as a master in the use of pedaling. His teacher, Vassily Safonov, described the technique in this regard: "The way the Scriabin pedals allows the instrument to breathe", "Why you always look at his hands, you should look at his feet"<sup>27</sup>.

The pedal has become a very important instrument in Scriabin's piano music. Its diverse use is often necessary to create open, stretched, distant,

<sup>27</sup> B. Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, thum. Nicolas Slonimsky, California University Press, Berkeley 1987, p. 326.

dreamy sound layers, accompanied by bright colors, to ultimately create mysterious and diverse sound effects.

**a) Pedal forte**

When the melody develops into a broad phrase and harmony remains unchanged, the use of a long pedal can contribute to a more coherent presentation of the whole musical sentence, as well as maximize the fullness of color harmony.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, piano and treble clef. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The piano part starts at measure 75 with a dynamic of *cresc. ed accel.* and features a long, sustained pedal point in the bass. The treble part has a melodic line with a long phrase starting at measure 76, marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *sfz*, *sf*, and *(sfz)*. There are also performance markings like *cresc. ed accel.* and *ff*. The piano part has a long, sustained pedal point in the bass, which is emphasized by the *sfz* and *sf* markings. The treble part has a melodic line with a long phrase starting at measure 76, marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *sfz*, *sf*, and *(sfz)*. There are also performance markings like *cresc. ed accel.* and *ff*.

**Example 43.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, III mov., bars 75-76.

In section 76 of Piano Sonata No 1 (Example 43.) it is possible to use a pedal from the third to the eleventh measure. Although the third falls on a strong part of the beat, the pedal horn here emphasizes the bass base in the left hand, and also enhances the chord's tone.

Presto con allegrezza

**Example 44.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 47-61.

In the bars 47-60 V Piano Sonata it is possible to play on one pedal per beat mainly thanks to the harmony. Considering staccato articulation, the pedal can be released to the fifth measure in 48-50, 54-56, as well as to the second measure of 52-58. When playing a melody that develops along with crescendos, the degree of pedal pressure can vary from shallow to deep.



**Example 47.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 183-185.

Example 47. the harmony of the 183. also gives the ability to maintain pedaling throughout the beat, thanks to which the tremolo is sonically extended.

### b) Pedal *sostenuto*

**Example 48.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in f minor* no. 1 op. 6, III mov., bars 1-5.

The theme of the third part of the Piano Sonata No 1 appears in the first version, in the articulation staccato (Example 48.), without the use of pedals. From the fifth bar, where again we see the subject in the quarter interval in the high register (this time no longer staccato), it is possible to use this type of pedaling. In groups of three in the left hand part, I recommend pressing the pedal on the first note and releasing it on the third to contrast this part with the 1-4 bars.



**Example 49.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, bars 111-114.

In bars 113-114, 128., 130-136 of *Piano Sonata* no. 9, the motifs are short and the harmony changes quite often. During their playing you can use a short pedal, as shown in bars 113-114 in example 49. Press the pedal well at the same time with your left hand and take it off with the movement of removing the last note in the right hand part to the second measure in the takt. It is worth repeating the procedure on the following measures – third and fourth.



**Example 50.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 408-416.

There is also a type of short pedaling to amplify the accent, as can be seen in the 409-416 bars of *Piano Sonata* no. 5 (Example 50.). The pedal is used for four accents.

### c) Pedal *una corda/piano*

For Scriabin, the use of the pedal is a "regeneration of light", which he considered to be the spirit of music. Depending on whether the pedal is used or

not, as well as how, it has a huge impact on the tone, its quality and the sound of the piano. Particular attention should be paid to the left pedal, which over time played an increasingly important role in expanding the timbre and changing the sound quality. In order to combine the unique sense of light and color, as well as the rich color changes Skriabin so sought, the use of the left pedal becomes subtle, delicate and complex.

Allegro. Impetuoso. Con stravaganza Opus 53

The image displays a musical score for the first eight bars of the introduction to the fifth piano sonata by Alexander Scriabin. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system covers bars 1 through 4, and the second system covers bars 5 through 8. The music is in F sharp major and 2/4 time. The tempo and mood are marked 'Allegro. Impetuoso. Con stravaganza'. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *sfz*, *sotto voce*, *f*, and *p*. It also features articulation like trills and accents, and specific pedal markings including the left pedal (8) and the right pedal (S), with instructions like 'con sord.' and 'senza sord.'. The notation shows a complex interplay of textures, with a prominent bass line and a more active right hand.

**Example 51.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 1-8.

In the Introduction to the Piano Sonata section No 5 – Example 51. – the right pedal emphasizes the lingering tremolo effect and restless bass line, and the left pedal not only allows you to control the entire section in the lower dynamic layer, but also smooths and softens its sound. With the appearance of the consonance of the increased quarter and the grand second, a unique, mysterious mood is created. From the eighth bar, in which the pedal is released, the contrast to the previous phrase is clearly marked.

**Example 52.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major no. 5 op. 53*, bars 96-103.

In bars 96-103 *Piano Sonata no. 5* – Example 52. – The differentiation of sound through the use of both left pedals shows two different musical images suggested by the descriptions "poignant" and "struggling insecure".

**Example 53.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata no. 9 op. 68*, bars 69-79.

Scriabin uses the *pp* dynamic designation for most passages in *Piano Sonata no. 9*. The contrast can be achieved by sticking fingers to the keyboard to reduce unnecessary movement, but it can also be fueled by using the left pedal to achieve a more mysterious character. In example 53. use of the left

pedal accompanies the descending melody in bars 69-74. It can be played in bars 75-76, where the "devil whisper" appears.

### 4.3. Tempo and rhythm processing

In works from the early creative period there are not too rapid changes in pace. In later works, such as *Piano Sonata* no. 5, the tempo and meter are often changed. Metrics should be carefully followed, and it is also important to find a common pulse for effective change of pace.

The image shows a musical score for Example 54, consisting of two systems of music. The first system is labeled 'Allegro fantastico' and starts at measure 140. It features a 2/4 time signature and dynamic markings of *p* (piano), *molto accelerando e cresc.* (much accelerating and crescendo), and *f* (forte). The second system is labeled 'Presto tumultuoso esaltato' and starts at measure 144. It features a 6/8 time signature and a dynamic marking of *p*. The score includes various rhythmic notations such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, along with fingerings like 3, 1, and 5.

**Example 54.** A. Skriabin, *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, bars 140-144.

In bars 140-144 of *Piano Sonata* no. 5, the first two measures of measure 6/8 constitute a common pulse with the preceding measure 2/4, which I present in the example 54. Also the change of pace from Allegro to Presto complements the change of the pulse and the character of the pace.

The rhythmic variability in Skriabin's later works aims to create a sense of freedom and imbalance in music, hence, for example, in bars 44-57 of *Piano Sonata* No 9, the metric designations change as follows: 4/8, 3/8, 4/8, 5/8. Often there is also an executive description of rubato.

Rhythm is at the core of his works, and its most faithful reproduction requires extraordinary control. To present more clearly the possibilities of implementing rhythmic structures, they can be divided into two groups:

#### a) Processing of vertical rhythmic combinations

Exercise of independence and unity of left and right hand work is a basic issue in the case of vertical rhythmic combinations, and their special form are polyrhythmic systems and heterogeneous groups in left and right hands. Intertwining rhythmic systems in periods of time" – such a notation often

appears in Scriabin's works. In the case of polyrhythmic structures, one way to practice is to divide the part, as in the case of learning polyphonic parts of a piece, so as to show the exact relationships between trios, quartets and sextols. The second way is to play the high and low parts "with respect" of the middle part of the melody, paying special attention to the right hand. The most important aspect, apart from precision, is not to perform the rhythmic layer in a mathematically calculated way, but to conduct phrases smoothly in the melody line. In his book *On Piano Performing Art*, H. Neuhaus mentions that "the arithmetic method of playing polyrhythmic structures such as 11 on 7, 5 on 9 etc. is not applicable, especially in Scriabin's music". So in a phrase of this type, to better emphasize the stability of rhythm between parts, you can follow the rhythm of the melody.

In the case of rhythmically inconsistent structures, caused by the "shaking" arrangements of both hands (bars 183-186 of *Piano Sonata no. 9*, Example 47), it is difficult to combine the pulsation of trios, dominated by even, two-part groups of the high voice and four-part middle voice. At the same time, it is necessary to realize different rhythmic groups in the voices, still thinking about the tasks of the right and left hand.

### **b) Processing of horizontal rhythmic combinations**

The sense of rhythm and its changes is a key issue in the case of horizontal rhythmic combinations in Scriabin's compositions, which are expressed in the form of numerous rhythmic changes and combinations of rhythmic schemes.



**Example 55.** A. Scriabin, *Piano Sonata no. 9* op. 68, bars 8-10.

A commonly used scheme is the trio, which in principle does not cause difficulties in execution, but its modified version brings some implementation

challenges, as shown in Example 55. (bars 8-10 *Piano Sonata* no. 9). In the first phase of the exercise it is necessary to familiarize yourself with the rhythm scheme visually and audibly and practice precise rhythm reproduction. Then you can afford to match this structure to the melody line. In addition, juxtaposing groups with increasing number of notes, as in the case of trios and quartets, is aimed at creating an accelerant effect. When designing this kind of sequence of rhythms, the composer brought to the piece an uneven, but specific element of rhythmic beauty.

#### **4.4. Performance tips and comparisons of pianists' performances**

Below is a short list of renowned artists and often also researchers of Skriabin's works:

- Władimir Sofronicki (1901-196) – a world-renowned expert in the performance of Skriabin's works. His interpretations are considered to be among the best in the field of interpretation and reproduction of the characteristic features of this composer's style.
- Vladimir Horowitz (1903-1989) – recorded 16-preludes, 3-etudes and three *Piano Sonatas* (no. 3, no. 5 and no. 9) by Alexander Skriabin. Unfortunately, there is no edition of the entire series of sonatas in his performance. His understanding of Skriabin's works is absolutely complete and profound.
- Vladimir Ashkenazi (1937-) – has recorded a full series of Piano Sonatas, and his interpretations belong to the group of representative ones.
- John Ogdon (1937-1989) – one of the most important promoters of Skriabin's music. His performances capture the opposites and contrasts of Skriabin's music, as well as the maximum "momentum" of performance.
- Hakon Austbo (ur. 1993) – one of the most respected scholars of Skriabin's works, who also recorded the entire series of Piano Sonata. In 1990's in the Netherlands he made the premiere of the "colorful part" of Prometheus.

Analyzing Skriabin's works in the context of performances by outstanding pianists is one of the effective ways to understand his music. Taking as an example the Piano Sonata no. 9, the differences in the approach of several

masters to the first tonal area, the connector and the second tonal area give a clear picture of the performance idea and inspire.

#### **a) First tonal area**

In the first phrase (bars 1-4), when it comes to the power of play, Sofronci's and Austbo's performances consistently follow the suggestion of playing *pp* highlighted in the score, while Ashkenazi, Horowitz and Ogdon raise the dynamic level to the piano. There are also differences in the tempos – Austbo and Ogdon are 100's, while Sofronicki and Ashkenazi opt for a moderate tempo, and Horowitz, as the only one among them, uses the slowest tempo. In terms of rhythm, the Aszkenazi stands out in this group of composers, who in the first movement delays the second note slightly, emphasizing the meaning of the first. Austbo, in turn, introduces *ritardando* before the fourth and fifth bars. Everyone also uses legato articulation. In terms of sound quality, Ashkenazi and Ogdon tend mainly to care for the beauty of sound, while Horowitz focuses primarily on expression, immersing himself in a state of contemplation, sometimes indifference. The way of accentuating is another aspect in which Sofronicki and Horowitz emphasize the first measure in such a way, while the others emphasize the latter.

In the second phrase (bars 5-7) Sofronicki maintains the dynamics of Mr. Aszkenazi, Ogdon and Austbo in turn in *mp*. Horowitz and Sofronicki introduce *crescendo* to build tension in this motif. In terms of style, Horowitz and Austbo present a type of strong, dramatic cantilever. Ashkenazi and Sofronicki's style is more "provocative", and Ogdon, in turn, presents purity and singing. In the implementation of textures Horowitz, Ogdon and Ashkenazi emphasize the middle voice. Sofronicki and Austbo, on the other hand, also focus on the middle voice, without extinguishing the sound of the highest voice.

In bars 7-10 Austbo and Ogdon remain in piano dynamics, Ogdon in turn in 10. So goes to *pp*. Horowitz and Sofronicki start this passage in *mp*, and Sofronicki, like Odgoń, uses 10. The dynamics of *pp*. Ashkenazi approaches this passage slightly differently, starting in *mf*, passing through *diminuendo* in 8. And *mezzopiano* in nine, to ten. Finish with piano dynamics. In the rhythmic context, Austbo and Ogdon's performance of the theme is very firm. Sofronicki,

on the other hand, plays it rubato – just like Horowitz, who focuses on the freedom of performance and focuses on the weaker parts of the bar, using a syncopated technique of articulation under a melodic line similar to staccato. The rhythmic performance of Ashkenazi and Horowitz is exciting – stylistically they present expressive, dramatic recitatives, with Ashkenazi playing without much contrasts, and Horowitz's dynamic changes and free strokes are clear. Ogdon and Austbo are very literal in their recitals, which give the impression of being played "dry". Sofronicki's style is contemplative, without the use of a pedal.

### **b) Connection**

In the space of the connection, in bars 20-34, Horowitz and Ogdon use a fast crescendo, leading precisely through bar 23. to the 24-hour accent. Sofronicki and Austbo are guided by the principle of a holistic, extensive crescendo, which in Horowitz and Ashkenazy's subject begins only at 23°C. Ogdon and Ashkenazi enter the forte dynamic ceiling in 32-33 bars.

In the context of rhythm Horowitz, compared to other performers, still approaches the material quite freely. A vibrato at 24-o'clock. is stretched and lasts much longer than it appears from the score. Ashkenazi starts 23. rubato beat, while subsequent bars are maintained at a stable pace. Austbo refers to the previous tempo and plays hard, and vibrato is not as pronounced as Horowitz. Strong sounds with Sofronicki are also fast and compact. Ogdon's performance resembles Ashkenaz's version in pulsation.

In the sound category Sofronitsky, Austbo and Ashkenazi perform the theme in a clear way, while Ogdon and Horowitz create a kind of "blurred" sound effect. Ashkenazi and Sofronicki's style focuses on expressive recitation, while Horowitz, Ogdon and Austbo enter Oriental, Arabic stylistics. Invoicing Ashkenazi clearly emphasizes the highest voice in the right hand, Ogdon presents two topics of the left and right hand, and Horowitz puts extreme voices in the foreground. Sofronicki distinguishes the middle voice, still leaving the highest voice clear. Austbo's emphasizing the right hand theme.

### **c) Second tonal area**

In the second tonal area Austbo, like Sofronicki and Horowitz, precisely implements the text. Ashkenazi, in turn, starts in mp, and clock 37. performs piano in dynamics and introduces crescendo in 39. Ogdon begins this part in pp.

Austbo applies fewer changes to the weak parts of the beat. At Sofronicki, these places are treated quite flexibly, with changes in pace. Ogdon in 41. takcie emphasizes the jump to the high register, after which he slows down the pace in the next theme. Ashkenazi realizes this passage in a different way – entering the high notes, he introduces ritardando, which gives the falling motif a coherent form. Then he introduces ritardando and diminuendo in 41. Yeah, yeah. Horowitz, on the other hand, still refers freely to rhythmic structures and extinguishes the movement on the ritardand, using "sticky" legato.

In the context of the style Sofronicki, Ashkenazi and Horowitz play in a way that reflects the vocals, Austbo adds sound effects to his singing performance, and Ogdon plays in a completely "symphonic" way.

Looking at the implementation of invoice layers, Ogdon emphasizes motifs based on seconds intervals and gradually moves away from the previous matrix. Sofronicki and Ashkenazi refer very literally to the content of the score, and Austbo "breathes" in pauses. Horowitz mainly focuses on drawing the melody of the theme.

As one can conclude from the performance analysis, there is no single right model for Skriabin's music. Playing his works cannot be characterized by a specific, strictly defined mood or idea, which was a constant practice in classical and romantic music. In this case, it is necessary to turn to the category of mysticism, which, although it is the main element causing difficulties in understanding the composer's work, constitutes the absolute basis for understanding his works. These works, in turn, leave the pianist a great freedom of meaning and interpretation, so it is worth playing them and exploring their uniqueness in various performance ways.

## V. Summary

Skriabin's stylistic transformation, from the romantic forms in the early stages of creation to the modern, innovative style contained in later works, marked the history of music of the early 20th century and exerted a strong influence on ideological trends in music. These changes result from the composer's direct experiences of his "mystical self-worship" and obsession with philosophy and religion. This is particularly evident in later works, which were created under the strong influence of mystical and theosophical philosophy. Thanks to this, Skriabin's music also acquired mysteries and highly individualistic features, such as unpredictable directions in melody, complexity of rhythms, rich and dense texture and harmony or varied orchestration. All these elements reflect Skriabin's extraordinary imagination and his unprecedented creativity.

The process of creating a series of piano sonatas falls on the entire artistic career of the composer-pianist. Both their quantity and quality play an important role in his artistic output. At a time when symphonic poems were more popular than chamber music, and composers preferred fantasies and ballads, pushing the form of sonata to the background, it was quite a novelty to create a new face of sonata with complex structure and rich musical content. Skriabin never gave up on creating a sonata as a genre with a compact musical logic and a strong intellectual charge, which ultimately reflected his struggles and thoughts about his own destiny and purpose in the music he created, as well as the search for the true meaning of life.

I notice a constant creative process in the composer's sonatas. For example, the first three of them present relatively clear musical images. Although they are still steeped in the European romantic tradition, their emotional anxiety and expressed mental state indicate the direction of interpretation. The fourth and fifth sonatas are pieces that are almost halfway along the creative path, which leads to the creation of Skriabin's unique composing and performing style. At that time he had already turned firmly towards religious mysticism. From then on, his works were supposed to reflect "extreme ecstasy and mystical artistic concept". Sonatas from six to ten are fully mature pieces, ultimately characterized by a unique, creative style. Their music is very abstract. The reason for this change is the reflection of philosophical and

religious thought in music, which was also supposed to convey the mysterious, ideological fantasy of the creator.

In order to express the insightful musical content and abstract philosophical thoughts Skriabin constantly explored new technical possibilities and incorporated them into his sonatas. In many aspects, the artist treats harmony and sound as the foundation of his subsequent works, creating a "mystical chord", which also changes the concept of tonality. It even leads to its disintegration, which introduces innovation in the composing world and sheds new light on the development of contemporary music. In its forms, he uses short, "spastic" phrases to replace romantic melodies, and introduces complicated and irregular rhythmic structures aimed at building tension and introducing a sense of trance. Complex metric designations, expressive symbols and executive guidelines outline the direction of internal changes, reflections and search for one's own "self". All these elements make Skriabin a precursor to symbolism and a composer-pianist who opened the door to a new era in music – the era of contemporary music.

It's hard to study Skriabin's music in depth. This kind of work, based on subjective idealism and mystical philosophical thought, tries to get rid of the influences of traditional thinking about music. Immediately after World War I the composer managed to enter the music scene of the world of that time and become an unprecedented sensation on the music market, but with the emergence of neoclassicism in 20th century music the popularity of Skriabin's music and his time passed. It can be said that the artist's work was even denied and almost forgotten, which severely limited its dissemination. Nevertheless, Skriabin has enriched his musical heritage by expanding its spectrum and creating new methods of expression thanks to his creative activities and spirit of innovation.

It had a decidedly incomparable influence on later musical literature. Karol Szymanowski, as one of the "fathers" of Polish contemporary music, is one of the master's imitators. We can also observe visible influences of the piano mystic in Strawiński's work – in the melody of the Firebird some "mysterious" inspirations can be heard. Living at the turn of the 19th and 20th

centuries, Scriabin managed to build a bridge connecting the music of late romanticism with modernist music, as well as rationalism with irrationalism. His compositions are gaining and will gain more and more interest and understanding, as they are absolute masterpieces of music that go beyond the time frame and belong not to any era, but to the past, present and future at the same time.

## Bibliography

1. Blawacka H., *The Secret Doctrine*, Theosophical publishing Company, New York 2006.
2. Bowers F., *Skriabin. Dover Publications*, New York 2011.
3. Keldish Y., *Soviet Music Encyclopedia – Biographies of Famous Western Musicians*, People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 1992.
4. Laredo R., *Alexandra Skriabin*, Piano Art Magazine, Beijing 2002.
5. Li Y., *Music Bubble – v. II*, Huaxia Publishing House, Beijing 2000.
6. Liu X., *On Compound Function, Compound Chord and Tonal Superimposition*, red. Y. Xinsheng, Journal of Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Shenyang 1983.
7. Neuhaus H., *The records of Neuhaus 's talking about music – Anthologies of reflections, memories and diaries*, People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2003.
8. R. Yu., *General History of Western Music*, Shanghai Music Press, Shanghai 2001.
9. Sabaneeff L., *The Memories of Skriabin*, Russian Review, Moscow 1966.
10. Sabbagh P., *The Development of Harmony in Skriabin 's works*, Universal Publishers, Florida 2003.
11. Schloezer B., *Skriabin: Artist and Mystic*, trans. by Slonimsky, California University Press, California 1987.
12. Serebkov C., *Modern Harmony Language Problems*, trans. by J. Xue, Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, Shanghai 1959.

- 13.Sinyaver A., *Outline of Russian Music History*, trans. by X. Liang, Shanghai Times Press, Shanghai 1947
- 14.Sposobin I., *Harmony Tutorial*, trans. by M. Chen, People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2003.
- 15.Wang W., *Research on Skriabin Harmony*, People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2012.
- 16.Wang Y., *The Spirit of Music in Russian Symbolist Literature*, Beijing National Library, Beijing 2001.
- 17.X. Hu., *The Birth and Reproduction of Special Chords: An Analysis of the Late Skriabin Harmony*, red. H. Zhong, Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music, Wuhan 2002.
- 18.Yanovitsky M., *Interpretation of Skriabin's Piano Works*, trans. by Y. Zhang and Q. Cai, Shanghai Music Press, Shanghai 2009.
- 19.Zhang H., *European Music History*, People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 1983.

## **List of tables**

**Table I.** Construction of each part of the sonata form on an example the first three *Piano Sonatas* of Skriabin, p. 33.

**Table II.** Composition of *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, p. 37.

**Table III.** Construction of *Piano Sonata* no. 9 op. 68, p. 38.

**Table IV.** Construction of *Piano Sonata in g minor* no. 2 op. 19, p. 41.

**Table V.** Construction of *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op. 53, p. 45.

**Table VI.** Construction of *Piano Sonata* no. 7 op. 64, p. 46.

**Table VII.** Rhythm Schematics of *Piano Sonata in F sharp Major* no. 5 op 53, p 48.

**Table VIII.** Metric relationships in creation *Piano Sonata in F flat Major* no. 5 op. 53, p. 52