



Konstantin EIGES

PIANO MUSIC

THEME AND VARIATIONS, OP. 36

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Jonathan Powell, piano

THE PIANO MUSIC OF KONSTANTIN ROMANOVICH EIGES

by Jonathan Powell

Konstantin Romanovich Eiges was born in the small town of Bogodukhov, approximately 50 kilometres north-west of Kharkov, the son of Roman Mikhailovich (or Ruvim Manasiyevich) and Sof'ya (Shifra) Iosifovna Eiges. His father (1840–1926) was born in Vilnius and was a doctor and a member of the minor (in Russian 'personal') nobility.¹ Konstantin (born 8/16² June 1875) was one of ten children, several of whom achieved prominent or at least respectable careers: Vladimir (1877–1949) was a mathematics professor and philosopher, Yevgeniy (1878–1957) a doctor, Aleksandr (1880–1943) a mathematician, and specialist in the works of Chekhov (alongside whom he is buried at Novodevichi Monastery in Moscow), Nadezhda (1883–1975) a teacher, Iosif (1887–1953) a *littérateur*, pianist and musicologist, Veniamin (1888–1956) an artist, and Yekaterina (1890–1958) a poetess and librarian (and girlfriend of Sergey Yesenin). Konstantin was to become the father of composer Oleg (1905–92),³ and painter Sergei (1910–44, killed at the front near Vitebsk). Sergei's nephew, the writer Sergei Volchenko, has done much to keep the Eiges name alive and has published numerous articles on various family members.⁴

In 1905 Konstantin graduated simultaneously from the Medical Faculty of Moscow State University and the Moscow Conservatoire. In the latter (which he entered in 1900), he had studied counterpoint with Taneyev, composition with Ippolitov-Ivanov and Adolf Yaroshevsky.⁵ He was a classmate and friend of Nikolay Zhilyayev;⁶ they attended composition classes together, having both

¹ In pre-revolutionary Russia this non-hereditary rank was created by Peter the Great with the aim of weakening the exclusivity of the nobility by admitting to it people from other classes.

² Soviet Russia moved from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar only in 1918, and so dates are often given as 'New Style' and 'Old Style', the latter around a week or so 'later' than the former.

³ The composer of some twenty symphonies, Oleg Eiges' output is yet to be fully evaluated; during his lifetime his work was highly regarded by Roslavets, Feinberg and Anatoly Alexandrov.

⁴ Many of these are to be found on the website http://kassandrion.narod.ru/str_kompoz.html.

⁵ Adol'f Adol'fovich Yaroshevsky (1863–1910/11) had been a student of Pavel Pabst and taught at the Moscow Conservatory from 1898. Eiges later dedicated a waltz for two pianos to his memory (published posthumously in 1952), and taught in the music school bearing his name. Yaroshevsky had been recommended as a teacher by Rachmaninov.

⁶ Russian musicologist, editor and composer (1881–1938), highly influential in the propagation of high quality, often modernist music. Murdered by the Soviet regime under a trumped-up spying charge.

received a stipend from the same source. In his memoirs of these years, the poet Andrey Bely remembers visits to the Conservatoire where he would meet 'Grechaninov, Medtner, (G.) Conus, Zhilyayev, Yavorsky, Eiges, Sabaneyev' and others.⁷ Eiges also travelled abroad during these years: by 1908 he had already impressed upon Zhilyayev (then spending early summer in Brixen, in the Süd-Tirol) the beauty of the Swiss Alps.⁸ In 1911 he also travelled to Finland.⁹

Having presented the cantata *Pesn' o veshchem Olege* ('Song about the Oleg the Wise') as his graduation work, during his early professional years, Eiges made his name as a critic and writer with articles and reviews appearing in journals including the highly influential journal of Russian Symbolism *Zolotoye runo* ('The Golden Fleecce').¹⁰ He was also active as a pianist and teacher; Aleksey Stanchinsky¹¹ studied the piano with him during two separate periods. Eiges was one of numerous musicians who gravitated around Pavel Lamm during the 1910s and '20s.¹² These figures included other composer-pianists such as Alexandrov, Feinberg and Goldenweiser and pianists such as Oborin and Neuhaus, as well as composers from both older and younger generations including Catoire, Myaskovsky and Shebalin. This circle became rather well-known by the 1920s; the musicians would gather in Lamm's flat (which was actually situated within the premises of the Moscow Conservatoire), listen to and discuss new music, often performed by participants in Lamm's own four-hand arrangements of both Russian and western orchestral music.

⁷ A. Bely, *Mezhdru dvukh revoliutsiy* ('Between Two Revolutions'), Khudozhestvennaya literatura, Moscow, 1990, p. 213.

⁸ In a letter dated 4 May–22 June 1908 to their student Alexey Stanchinsky (cf. note 11, below), Zhilyayev wrote: 'Особенно прекрасное впечатление на меня произвели Швейцарские Альпы – это действительно волшебное (слову этому я научился у Кости Эйгеса)' ('The Swiss Alps made a particularly fine impression on me – in fact quite heavenly (I learned about this from Kostya Eiges)', quoted in I. Barsova (ed.), *Nikolay Sergeevich Zhilyayev: trudi, dni i gibel'* ('Works, Days and Death'), Muzika, Moscow, 2008, p. 82.

⁹ O. Eiges, 'Iz vospominaniy: vospominaniya ob otse K.R. Eigesa' ('Reminiscences about my Father'), ed. S. Volchenko, in M. Lidsky (ed.), *Volgograd – Fortepiano 2004*, Volgograd, 2004, p. 238.

¹⁰ 1905 saw the publication in Moscow of *Osnovniye voprosi muzikal' noy estetiki* ('Fundamental Questions of Musical Aesthetics'), and a collection of essays entitled *Stat' i po filosofii muziki* ('Articles about the Philosophy of Music'), some previously published, was brought out, again in Moscow in 1912. He also supplied an introduction to the first Russian translation of Josef Hofmann's book *Piano Playing* (McClure, New York, 1908; Russ. trans. Moscow, 1911). Other writings include 'R. Vagner i yego khudozhestvennoye reformatorstvo' ('Wagner and his Artistic Reformation'), published in *Russkaya Misl'*, vi (1913), pp. 56–68, in addition to reminiscences of Rachmaninov and Taneyev.

¹¹ Aleksey Vladimirovich Stanchinsky (1888–1914), Russian composer of original, highly polyphonic works including two sonatas (and one juvenile sonata-movement) and several preludes in canonic form. He suffered from mental illness and his death is shrouded in mystery.

¹² Pianist, critic and musicologist Pavel Lamm (1882–1951) was a highly influential figure on Russian music during the first half of the 20th century. As an editor, he supervised complete editions of Musorgsky and others.

During the early Soviet era Eiges participated in several of the many new activities and institutions that quickly evolved around artistic life: during the immediate post-Revolutionary years, attempts to bring art to a mass audience were all the rage, and Eiges lectured on music at workers' clubs. But he was also involved in the new order at the highest administrative strata: in 1920 he was appointed head of the department of Special Music Education in the music department (until that year headed by the unlikely figure of Artur Lourié) of NarKomPros, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, and was appointed chairman of the committee for the reform of musical education.¹³ His teaching activities continued throughout his career: positions he held include Director of the Yaroshevsky Music College (Moscow, 1919–26/27), head of philosophy at the State Institute of Musical Science, professor of music theory at the Moscow Central Pedagogical Correspondence Institute (1939–41), at the Sverdlovsk Conservatory (1941–43),¹⁴ at the Higher Academy of Military Conductors in Moscow (1944), and at Shchukin School of the Vakhtangov Theatre (1944–46). He died in Moscow on 2 December 1950.

Like Medtner and Rachmaninov, the composers to whom he felt closest aesthetically, Eiges' chief area of creative work was piano music, and like them he also wrote a number of songs (to texts by Blok, Heine, Lermontov, Nietzsche, Pushkin and others). Although he only produced one orchestral work, *Metel'* ('The Snowstorm'), he differed from his contemporaries and, perhaps taking a leaf from their teacher's – Taneyev's – book, wrote a good deal of chamber music, especially in his later years, including two piano trios (1906 and 1946, the latter in memory of Taneyev), a String Quartet, a Piano Quartet (1947), a Piano Quintet (1948), and sonatas and other works for both cello and violin with piano.

According to the composer's son Oleg, Konstantin's

creative process – partly according to my father's own account, and partly through my own observation – was thus. Usually, during the entire preparatory period of composition things would come into his head at night, at a time of occasional sleeplessness (from which he didn't usually suffer), or during a walk, or even during a tram ride. As he himself said, a motif which he particularly liked would start to turn around in his head. This was a good sign that the thing would work. After this, my father would play on the piano the nascent fragments for some time. However, musical thought often came into being right

¹³ This umbrella organisation was the brainchild of the highly cultured playwright Anatoly Lunacharsky and it oversaw, nurtured and supported artistic endeavour of the widest possible breadth – from the ultra-modern constructivist to the preservation of Russia's pre-revolutionary nineteenth-century heritage – until the rise of so-called proletarian culture. The inevitable public clashes of the late 1920s and early '30s between Lunacharsky's liberal pluralism with the left doctrinaire ideologues resulted in the formulation of Socialist Realism and the effective end of the artistic freedom of the early Soviet era.

¹⁴ Eiges was presumably working in this important Ural centre during World War Two because of the government policy of evacuating artists and other professionals from Moscow, Leningrad and other exposed cities.

during the time of improvisation. It occasionally happened that my father would set aside for a long time some material in the process of being formed and return to it some years later for development.¹⁵ Sometimes, a piece would mature immediately, and time was spent only on detailed working out, usually at the piano [...].¹⁶

The music on this disc represents all phases of Eiges' musical life – from beginnings rooted in the late nineteenth century, through a period of heady late Romanticism, mysticism and flirtation with modernism (one he shared with many Russian colleagues during the 1910s and '20s), and finishing with a rejection of the latter phase and a return to a type of Russian classicism in the 1930s and beyond. Like a host of Russian pianist-composers that embraces the well-known – Rachmaninov, Skryabin, Medtner (whom Eiges knew well) – as well as the more obscure (Alexander Goldenweiser, Leonid Nikolayev and the highly individual Stanchinsky), Eiges emerged as a professional musician at the turn of the twentieth century. Like them, he had received his training and first musical experiences in the 19th, and this is borne witness by his first pieces. Perhaps predictably, *Kukushka* ('The Cuckoo'), Op. 2, heard on this disc 16, inhabits a world in which the genial elegance of Lyadov, early Skryabin and the other *Belyayevsti*¹⁷ coexists with the influences of Arensky,¹⁸ Taneyev and other Moscow musicians whose presence must have loomed large in the corridors of the Conservatoire during Eiges' student years there. Replete with bird-calls echoing through the eerie stillness of the Russian forest, *Kukushka* was ostensibly written for domestic consumption but makes few technical concessions to the performer. There are only a few nature-inspired forerunners written in nineteenth-century Russia;¹⁹ it is the spirits of Grieg and Schumann which hover in the distance here. Eiges obviously remained fond of this work as he grew older: an expanded version of it for two pianos under the title 'V lesu' ('In the Forest') forms part of his *Suite pastorale*, Op. 20, published in 1926.²⁰

¹⁵ This practice is also apparent in the manner in which he reused material from earlier pieces.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*, pp. 237–38.

¹⁷ A collective term for the composers published by Mitrofan Belaïeff (or Belyayev), many of whom were inclined towards salon miniatures in a watered-down nationalist style.

¹⁸ Oleg Eiges (*ibid.*, p. 239) states that 'my father loved Arensky's piano works and played some of them rather often. The suite *Près de la mer* [Op. 52], *Bigarrures* ('Пестрота') [Op. 20], and the *Barcarolle* [Op. 36, No. 11] were in his repertoire'.

¹⁹ Arensky's 'Le Ruisseau dans le forêt', No. 15 of the 24 *Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 36, is an obvious point of reference. Its tonality (G major) and triplet accompanimental figure (which is very similar to that used by Eiges in the central section of *Kukushka*) strongly suggest the influence of the older composer. Arensky's own 'Kukushka', Op. 34, No. 2, is quite a different matter, being a sprightly minuet. Another example can be found in the suite *Près de l'eau* by Blumenfeld. From an earlier era still, but specifically ornithological, Henselt's 'Si oiseaux j'étais' (the sixth of the 12 *Études Caractéristiques*, Op. 2) and Leschetizsky's 'Les deux alouettes' (the first of his *Two Pieces*, Op. 2) would certainly have been known by the piano students of the Moscow Conservatoire during Eiges' time there.

²⁰ Two further versions for piano, two-hands, exist: as part of *Lesnaya skazka* ('Forest Tale'), Op. 42, and as part of a collection of

Although *Kukushka* places Eiges' beginnings firmly in the nineteenth century, it is in the *Dix Préludes*, Op. 8, that one senses his immersion in the musical culture of the *Serebraniy vek*.²¹ With penumbral, chromatic colourings, tragic and ecstatic moods, they are also transitional works. They bear the dedication 'to the memory of Adol'f Yaroshevsky', who died at the end of 1910, but it is possible that the collection was composed over a number of years. The second [5] and ninth [12] both come close to the numerous miniatures of Skryabin's middle period with their wide-ranging melodic lines, harmony based on dominant ninth and eleventh chords and subtle voicing of supporting lines. Nos. 5 [8] and 6 [9] offer respite with a partial return to the pastoralism of *Kukushka*, and in the tenth prelude [13] the spirit of Rachmaninov looms large, particularly in the expansive lyricism of the middle section. Here it's not just the sheer length (fourteen bars) of the melody that recalls Sergey Vasilievich: Eiges uses sequences and voicings in the harmonisation that are familiar in Rachmaninov's works of the decade.²² Filigree arpeggiated accompaniment that surrounds melody – often both played by the right hand – is a common feature of three of the preludes, and it is a texture to which Eiges returns to repeatedly in later pieces. The writing for the left hand is at times equally complex, being composed of a rising chordal triplet figure that starts on the last quaver of the group,²³ and this texture is frequently enhanced by a counter melody in the tenor.

The *Two Skazki*, Op. 12, were written in Moscow in 1914.²⁴ The genre – meaning 'tale' – had been first applied to piano music by Eiges' friend Nikolay Medtner (1879/80–1951) in 1904 to his 2 *Skazki*, Op. 8. As another student of Taneyev, it's possible that Eiges may have first encountered Medtner at the Moscow Conservatoire, but the latter graduated in 1900 at the prodigious age of twenty, five years before his older contemporary. Equally likely is the possibility that the two were introduced by their mutual friend Zhilyayev at a soirée at the Morozov mansion,²⁵ perhaps encouraged to visit by Margarita Morozova²⁶ who cultivated the company of writers, artists and musicians in the outrageous Moorish palace not far from the

children's pieces, Op. 45.

²¹ 'The Silver Age' of Russian culture (a follow-up to the 'Golden Age' of Pushkin *et al.* at the beginning of the nineteenth century) is usually associated with the decades around the turn of the twentieth century and Russian Symbolism in particular.

²² In fact, Eiges acknowledged 'Rachmaninov's great and beneficial influence', citing the Second Piano Concerto as a particular favourite (O. Eiges, *loc. cit.*, p. 238).

²³ This figuration is ubiquitous in Skryabin's early work – in, for example, the first movement of the Second Piano Sonata.

²⁴ But not published until 1920, by the State Music Publishers.

²⁵ It is known that Zhilyayev met Medtner there; cf. Barsova, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁶ Margarita Kirillovna Morozova (*née* Mamontova, 1873–1958) was the wife of Mikhail Abramovich (cf. note 27, p. 7). She founded the Moscow Religious-Philosophical Society and was a close friend and piano pupil of Skryabin; she also studied with Medtner and inspired poetry by Andrey Belȳ.

Conservatoire.²⁷ According to Oleg Eiges, his father 'had great sympathy with Medtner, as a musician and as an artistic personality. They met up rather often'.²⁸ Although the first of Eiges' *skazki* [1] starts modestly enough, the central section demonstrates a significant development in rhythmic sophistication: as the tale approaches its dénouement he opposes groups of 4 semiquavers against 6, then 5 against 6, then 5 against 4, 7 against 6, and finally 5 quavers against 6 in a series of huge chords before a whole-tone *quasi glissando* brings the music to a temporary halt. The second tale [2] more than hints at Eiges' admiration for Wagner: as the music subsides after the climactic moment, there is more than a glimpse of the dying embers of the 'Magic Fire Music' at the close of *Die Wälküre*.

Two of the **Four Pieces, Op. 14**, bear the year 1913, the Etude written in Moscow, the Romance in Yaroslavl'; the collection is dedicated to the composer Julius Isserlis (1888–1968). A child prodigy, Isserlis graduated from the Moscow Conservatoire aged only sixteen, and having been a student of Taneyev's (around 1900–4) he surely knew Eiges from those years. Isserlis dedicated the first of his Ten Preludes, Op. 2, to Eiges. The Etude [8] does not address any specific technical issue; rather, it presents problems of balance, texture, projection and articulation. A descending chromatic line underlies the harmony; melodies make only fleeting appearances. The Romance [9] is one of Eiges' most lavish inventions, with its extravagant counterpoint and piquant harmonisations recalling some of Godowsky's most inspired moments. In conjuring up the resigned daydream of the *Poème* [20] Eiges again resorts to complex combinations of pulses (already 5 against 3 in the first bar); its particular flavour of bittersweet wistfulness is found also in the piano miniatures of Georgiy Catoire and Georgiy Conus. In the *Canzonetta* [21] imitation of a strumming guitar accompanies a long melody; the trills and fioratura which take the guitarist's place in later verses again testify to Eiges' skill as a colourist with an excellent ear for texture.

Oleg Eiges recalled that

work on the *Sonata-Poème* No. 1 took place during the summer of 1915 at the dacha at Saltikovka.²⁹ Because we hadn't had our own instrument moved to the dacha, father used a neighbour's. He worked every day, not feverishly but systemically – mostly during the first half of the day, not allowing himself

²⁷ At Vozdvizhenka Street 16, close to the metro station Arbatskaya. It was built in 1895–99, designed by architect Victor Mazyrin to a commission from the millionaire Arseny Abramovich Morozov (1873–1908). The family fortune had been made in cotton mills starting in the early nineteenth century by Savva Vasilyevich Morozov (1770–1862) and his sons. Their descendants include Arseny, his brothers Ivan (1871–1921) and Mikhail (1870–1903) leading collectors of the visual arts (the former also a director of the Russian Music Society through his friendship with Vasily Safonov, director of the Moscow Conservatoire), as well as Savva Timofeyevich (1862–1905), patron of the Moscow Arts Theatre.

²⁸ *Loc. cit.*, p. 239.

²⁹ Probably Saltikova, near Balashikha in the Moscow Oblast', only twenty kilometres from the centre of the capital.

pleasures like going for a stroll. The material of this sonata had started to mature earlier, and when he played me fragments of the future sonata, which pleased me very much, I was proud of them. When he got on with putting the finishing touches to the work, things moved very fast, and the piece was completed in about two weeks.³⁰

Single-movement sonatas became the norm in Russia during the second and third decades of the twentieth century with numerous examples by the likes of Myaskovsky, Alexandrov, Feinberg and others. The first examples (not including single movements that were probably intended as parts of larger works but abandoned) date from the previous decade with examples from Skryabin³¹ and Medtner,³² which would have been well known to Eiges. Although many composers created structural dynamism through contrasts in tempo between themes, Eiges maintains what is essentially the same tempo (*moderato*) throughout the work [3] until the coda (marked *allegro vivace*). Instead, contrast is achieved by harmonic means. The first subject is completely diatonic and thus harmonically largely static; melodically it consists of repetitions of an arch-shaped motif. During its initial statement lasting some fourteen bars, no pitches extraneous to the scale of A major are heard until the leading note is flattened in order to modulate to the subdominant key. In the transition that follows, keys change abruptly with little preparation, with material appearing in blocks of harmony. Nonetheless, chromatic voice-leading gradually makes its presence felt, and it is this (lending the harmony a fluid nature) and long melodic lines that characterise the second subject.

The writing of the whole work is highly polyphonic; and calls to mind not only similar textures in Medtner's piano works, but also those of Stanchinsky: Eiges may have been one of few to see the latter's manuscripts not only as they were being written (as he was his piano teacher) but also during the years immediately following his death in 1914.³³ The ecstatic finale must surely be one of the finest of its type to come out of Russia during these years, rivalling better-known examples by Skryabin and Medtner in its virtuosic exultation. The work certainly found a distinguished admirer soon after completion: Oleg writes that

³⁰ *Loc. cit.*, p. 238.

³¹ His Fourth Sonata of 1903 is nominally in two movements, but they are played without a break, with the first acting as an introduction to the second; the single-movement form of the Fifth Sonata of 1907 was one he employed for all subsequent works in the genre.

³² Medtner started work on his *Sonaten-Triade*, Op. 11 – a group of three single-movement works – in 1904, completing the series only in 1911.

³³ Much of Stanchinsky's output features extended diatonic passages – indeed, there are some pieces in which no accidentals are used and chromaticism plays no part, quite unlike the current trend in Russia at the time.

of all contemporary composers, my father most of all loved Rachmaninov, whom he had the pleasure of knowing personally, and with whom had a few piano lessons in his youth. [...] My father gave Rachmaninov [a copy of] his First Sonata,³⁴ and himself played it to him. Rachmaninov liked this sonata very much, as well as the composer's performance. In return, Rachmaninov gave to my father an inscribed copy of his *Etude-tableau* in B minor.³⁵

Eiges' writing reached an apex of contrapuntal ingenuity and harmonic clarity in the first of his two *sonata-poèmes*; in the *Deux Poèmes*, Op. 19, he explored what for him were the limits of dissonance, highly extended chromaticism and synthetic chords. The designation *poème*³⁶ was first used as a title for a piano work in Russia by Skryabin³⁷ who applied the name to miniatures and larger works alike, either on its own, or with a qualifier.³⁸ Many other composers – usually those musically influenced by Skryabin – followed suit: there are examples by Alexandrov, Dobrowen, the brothers Aleksandr and Grigori Krein, Lourié, Prokofiev and Roslavets, among others. Although the title of Eiges' first – 'Poëma-Idilliya' [14] – may suggest a pastoral ambience not far removed from *Kukushka*, the music is constantly shifting and restless; highly complex in all respects, it builds over its duration to a massive apotheosis. In the 'Poème mystique' [15] Eiges creates a scale that uses both flattened and sharpened thirds, and a sharpened seventh (so parallel to, but in effect quite unlike, Skryabin's experiments) and then works with variants of this mode;³⁹ he contrasts this type of harmony with diatonic and chromatic passages. The excess of the two *poèmes* sits comfortably alongside many modernist works of the 1910s written in the wake of Skryabin, in both technical-musical and philosophical-spiritual senses.⁴⁰

In the *Two Poèmes*, Op. 19, Eiges took what was initially a miniature form and inflated it to create a pair of works that together last some nine minutes; in the *Sonate-Poème No. 2*, Op. 28, he contracts the

³⁴ This copy must have been manuscript, as the work was not published until 1922.

³⁵ *Loc. cit.*, p. 238. The étude in question is Op. 39, No. 4. This meeting must have taken place in 1916 at the earliest since this étude was not composed before then.

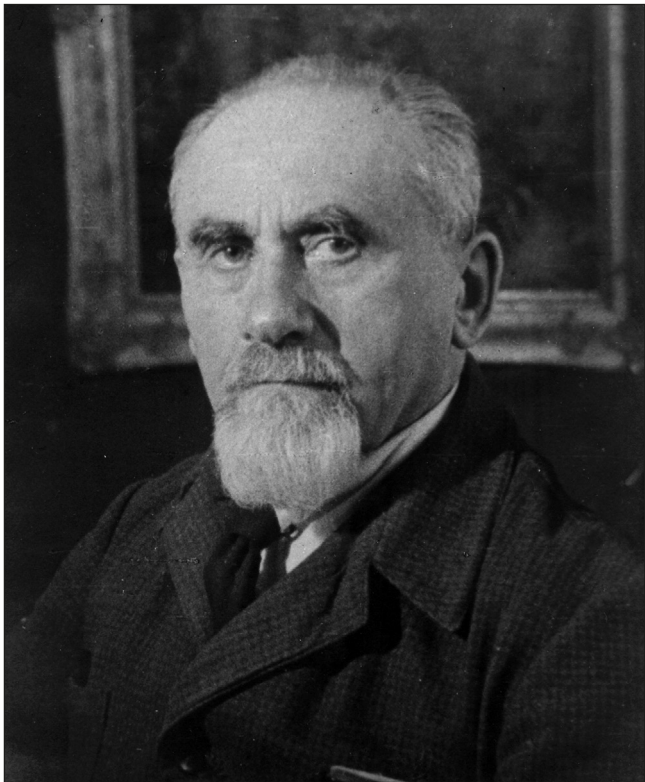
³⁶ Often used in French as well as the Russian поэма; many publishers including Beliaev and Jürgenson produced bilingual cover-pages for their editions.

³⁷ With his *Deux poèmes*, Op. 32, written in 1903.

³⁸ Such as the *Poème tragique*, Op. 34, *Poème fantasque*, Op. 45, No. 2, or *Vers la flamme: poème*, Op. 72.

³⁹ The first bar of p. 12 of score employs a scale with not only possesses double thirds but also perfect and sharpened fifth degrees, for example.

⁴⁰ Oleg writes (*loc. cit.*, p. 239) that 'in Skryabin's work my father found a preponderance of harmonic rather than melodic beauty, especially in the later pieces. They interested my father very much, even though he found them somewhat "one-sided". He learned the 9th Sonata from memory [...]. He knew Skryabin personally only slightly, but heard him [play] many times, sometimes even in intimate settings'.



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one-movement form he used in its predecessor to produce a highly condensed work of seven minutes ^[17]. Although the slow chords of the introduction have something of the heady mysticism of the *poèmes*, the first theme has an almost Classical regularity; here Eiges freely juxtaposes his own scales (C harmonic minor with a raised fourth) with more traditional harmonies. The steady rhythmic flow and melodic symmetry of much of the writing recalls Schumann or even Mendelssohn, but ever-present are Eiges' characteristic use of counterpoint and freely varied chromatic harmonisations. The second subject is perhaps his most felicitous melodic creation; the effect is glowingly lovely in its appearance in the tenor with arabesques taken by the right hand. Even though Eiges' output as a whole is contrapuntal, nowhere is the influence of his teacher the master-polyphonist Taneyev so evident as in the development section of this work: here, the first subject is pared down to motifs that are subjected to a series of canonical treatments. The coda of this sonata is as stormy and unrelenting as its predecessor's was bright and optimistic; probably written in the later 1920s⁴¹ – with difficult times coming for Russian musicians and Jews – this mood is perhaps not to be wondered at.

In his *Second Sonata-Poem* Eiges had to some extent retreated from the opulent – some might say decadent – world of the works of the 1910s; the **Theme and Variations, Op. 36** ^[22], written in Moscow in 1933,⁴² represent a further aesthetic retrenchment, back to the music of his youth in Tsarist Russia. Such nostalgia for earlier days, combined with a desire to avoid public censure for excesses of modernism and, in some cases, a real desire to cultivate a type of 'Russian Classicism' in music was not uncommon in the early 1930s among composers who in the previous two decades had been adventurous or even experimental. Eiges, though, even at his most daring, had always been a conservative and for him this shedding of modernist clothing may equally have had interior motivation.⁴³ The *Theme and Variations* is a highly enjoyable and effective concert piece, firmly in the tradition of similar works by Glazunov, Lyadov and Blumenfeld.⁴⁴ As in previous works, subtle counterpoints and piquant chromaticisms abound, while Eiges' textural inventiveness is unabated.

⁴¹ The work was published in 1930, jointly by the State Music Publishers (GosIzdart) and Universal Edition, Vienna. Many works by modernist Russian composers gained international circulation due to this venture by Emil Hertzka, director of Universal from 1907 until his death in 1932. He visited Russia in 1927, but the collaboration was short-lived, petering out in the early 1930s due to the increased pressure felt by modernist composers in Russia.

⁴² The work was published by GosIzdart in 1936, under the editorship of Zhilyayev.

⁴³ In the work of other composers – for example, the avant-gardists Mosolov and Roslavets – the change is understandably far more dramatic.

⁴⁴ Glazunov's *Theme and Variations, Op. 72* (1901), Lyadov's sets on a theme of Glinka, *Op. 35* (pub. 1895), and on a Polish theme, *Op. 51* (pub. 1901), and Felix Blumenfeld's *Ballade en forme de variations, Op. 34* (pub. 1903), are all forerunners of Eiges' work.

Jonathan Powell is a pianist, composer and writer on music. He studied the piano privately with Denis Matthews and, for a longer period, Sulamita Aronovsky. He took a music degree and doctorate in musicology at Cambridge University, where he also taught.

Recent orchestral engagements include Brahms' Second Concerto under Leoš Svarovsky and the Slovak State Philharmonic in Košice and Levoča, Liszt's *Malédiction* with the Kyiv Soloists and the Slovak Sinfonietta in Kyiv and Žilina, Field's Second Concerto in Kyiv, Finnis's Second at the Moscow Conservatoire and Rachmaninov's Third in Ivano-Frankivsk. He has also appeared at numerous contemporary music festivals, among them Borealis (Bergen), Musica Nova Helsinki, Space (Bratislava) and Huddersfield.

Broadcasts include work for the BBC, Radio Netherlands and two live concerts for the Festival Radio France Montpellier. Other recent highlights were concerts in the Prague Philharmonia, the Filarmoniya in Kyiv and the Rachmaninov Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire.

He made his debut in the Purcell Room in London aged twenty with a programme of Ives, Nancarrow, Ferneyhough and Finnis. In 2003 he played Sorabji's *Opus clavicembalisticum* in London, following it with performances of the same work in Helsinki, St Petersburg and elsewhere. 2009 saw him perform Skryabin's ten sonatas in one evening for the first time – a feat he repeated in Moscow, London, Kiev, Brno and elsewhere. He spent much of 2012 touring with Albéniz's *Iberia* and Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*, as well as introducing audiences in Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine to the music of Aperghis, Murail, Radulescu, Tiensuu and a host of younger composers. In 2013 he celebrated Alkan's bicentenary with a series of performances of his solo concerto across Europe, and gave the premiere performances of Sorabji's Sixth Piano Symphony. In September 2014 he played Sorabji's *Sequentia cyclica* at the Musica Sacra festival in Maastricht, broadcast by Radio Netherlands, followed by an eight-concert tour of the USA featuring three further performances of this work, as well as lectures and masterclasses in Seattle, Denver, New York and Chicago.

He has a particular interest in music of the early twentieth century, including that of Skryabin and other Russian modernists, not to mention Busoni, Enescu, Ives, Szymanowski and others. As



Photo: Keith Page

a chamber musician, he has worked with the cellist Rohan de Saram, the violinist Ashot Sarkisjan, flautist Matteo Cesari, and sopranos Svetlana Sozdateleva, Irena Troupova and Sarah Leonard. He has worked with many of today's most prominent composers, such as Ambrosini, Ferneyhough, Finnissy and Staud; he has also commissioned many new works.

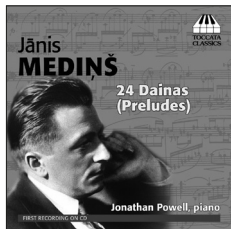
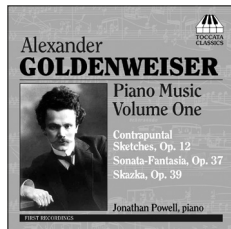
As a recording artist, he has worked with a number of different labels, among them Altarus, ASV, Convivium, Danacord, Largo, NMC, Piano Classics and Toccata Classics. Some CDs are devoted to contemporary music (such as the piano sonatas of John White and solo and *concertante* works by Morgan Hayes); others focus on previously unrecorded works of the late-Romantic era and golden age of pianist-composers (Blumenfeld, Goldenweiser and so on). During the 2000s he also made a groundbreaking series of recordings of the music of Sorabji for Altarus.

Jonathan Powell is in demand for master-classes and as a lecturer; in the last years this work has taken him to the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, the Janáček Academy in Brno, the Syddansk Musikkonservatorium in Esbjerg, Oxford University, Kirovograd in Ukraine, the Hogeschool in Ghent and the Conservatorio Luigi Cherubini in Florence. He was also the chairman of the jury for the first Ukrainian competition for amateur pianists (2013).

He is a self-taught composer – he has recorded several of his own works for BBC broadcasts and has received performances by the London Sinfonietta, the Arditti Quartet, Valdine Anderson, Darragh Morgan and Nicolas Hodges, among others. His articles on many aspects of Russian music appear in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*; other articles appear in journals in a variety of countries, on such subjects as Alkan, Felix Blumenfeld, Samuil Feinberg, Väinö Raitio and Sorabji

His website can be found at jonathanpowell.wordpress.com.

Jonathan Powell on Toccata Classics





Recorded in the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, Oxford, 22 and 23 August 2012

Producer-engineer: Adaq Khan

With thanks to Svetlana Grekova, Malcolm Henbury Ballan, Keith Page, David Shields, Veniamin Smotrov, and Sergey Volchenko.

Booklet essay: Jonathan Powell

Cover photograph courtesy of Sergey Volchenko

Cover design: David M. Baker (david.baker@me.com)

Design and layout: Paul Brooks (paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com)

Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0215

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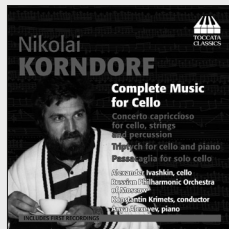
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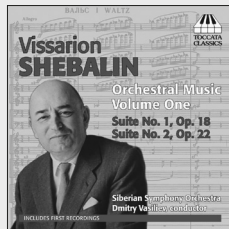
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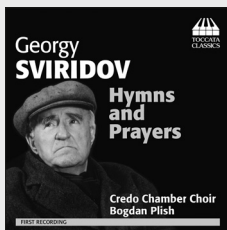
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