



Leonid SABANEYEV

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

SONATA, OP. 15, IN MEMORY OF SKRYABIN
PRELUDES AND OTHER MINIATURES

Jonathan Powell

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDING

LEONID SABANEYEV, POLYMATH AND COMPOSER

by Jonathan Powell

Leonid Pavlovich Sabaneyev¹ was a well-known naturalist and hunter. Aged only 26, he published a work on the fauna of the Ural region; five years later, his most widely read book appeared – *The Fishes of Russia: The Life and Hunting of our Freshwater Fishes* (1875).² He also founded the popular journal *Nature and Hunting, The Hunters' Gazette* and the Moscow Hunting Club. Descended from a noble family of Tatar origin, he was *Stallmeister* (or equerry) to Tsar Alexander III, with whom he had been friendly before the latter's accession. His passion for nature had taken him across Russia, and also to Tibet and Indonesia. He corresponded with Darwin, Turgenyev and Albert I, Prince of Monaco, founder of the Oceanographic Institute in Paris. With his wife Yuliya (of French descent), he had two sons: Boris Leonidovich (1880–1917), later professor of organ at the Moscow Conservatoire³ and the composer of a few works for his instrument, and Leonid Leonidovich (1881–1968). Both boys were educated at home by teachers from the Tsarevich Nikolay Lyceum; having finished his studies at the age of sixteen, Leonid required special permission from the Minister of Education to enter the University of Moscow early. Enrolled in two faculties – Physics-Mathematics and Natural Sciences – he went on to complete a doctorate in pure mathematics (in 1905) and by 1918 was a full professor. He also somehow found time to attend lectures on history and philology. In later years he published several works on mathematics and zoology. Simultaneously with his scientific education he undertook musical training: he studied the piano with Nikolay Zverev⁴ and later with Paul de Schlözer,⁵ whose

¹ Born in Yaroslavl' in 1844, died in Yal'ta in 1898.

² Рыбы России. Жизнь и ловля наших пресноводных рыб.

³ His students there included Joseph Yasser (b. Łódź 1893, d. New York 1981), who later emigrated to the USA where he had a distinguished career as an organist as well as publishing highly speculative works on intonation and microtonal tuning systems, most notably *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (New York, 1932).

⁴ Nikolay Zverev (1832–93) had studied with Field's student Alexander Dubuque and with Adolf Henselt before Nikolay Rubinstein invited him to teach at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1870. His students often lived in his own house and were subject to very strict practice-regimes. He undertook the cultural education of his students along the broadest lines, taking them to theatres, taking an interest in what they read, and inviting leading cultural figures of Moscow to open evenings at his home. His students included Alexander Goldenweiser, Konstantin Igumnov, Sergey Rachmaninov, Alexander Siloti and Alexander Skryabin.

⁵ Paul (or Pawel) de Schlözer (or Shletzer) (1841 or 1842–1898) was a Polish pianist of German origin whose *Étude*, Op. 1, No. 2, in A flat has been recorded and performed widely. His authorship of this single opus (nothing other than this pair of études

niece and nephew (Tatyana and Boris) would, like Leonid, form the core of Skryabin's intimate circle a decade or so later. He also studied harmony, counterpoint and composition with Taneyev, thus linking him in training to so many of his contemporaries including Skryabin, Medtner and Rachmaninov. He also later took some lessons in composition and orchestration from Rimsky-Korsakov. So by his early twenties, Leonid Sabaneyev *was*, like his father, a scientist, but also a pianist and composer; he would later remark that 'this basic dualism stayed with me for the rest of my life, and there were many times when I really did not know whether I was a scientist or a musician'.⁶

Sabaneyev took to Wagner in his teens, during a period when the latter's work was probably discussed more by the artists and writers of Russian Symbolism than it was by Russian composers; Wagner was later the subject of Sabaneyev's first published monograph.⁷ But it was his interest in the music of Skryabin which perhaps had the biggest impact on Sabaneyev's life and future reputation. His monograph, appearing in 1916, was one of the first dedicated to the recently deceased composer;⁸ the later *Reminiscences of Skryabin*⁹ assured Sabaneyev's name in music history even during the long period when his own music was not performed; after Sabaneyev's emigration in 1926 his name was dirt in the USSR, but even then Soviet Skryabin scholars begrudgingly acknowledged the importance of Sabaneyev's account of the last five years of the composer's life (often with accompanying criticism).¹⁰ Along with the de Schloezeres – Boris and Tatyana – the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov and a few others,¹¹ Sabaneyev was one of the intimate circle around Skryabin during the period 1910–15, i.e. from the time of completion of *Prometheus* until his death. According to his daughter, Sabaneyev became

bears his name) has been questioned; it has been suggested that he won the manuscript from Moritz Moszkowski in a card game, and published the pieces as his own (cf. Dmitry Feofanov (ed.), *Rare Masterpieces of Russian Piano Music*, Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, introduction, p. ix).

⁶ B. Sabaneev-Lanskaya, 'Vospominaniya' (2004), in L. L. Sabaneyev, *Vospominaniya o Rossii*, Klassika-XXI, Moscow, 2005; online at www.belousenko.com/books/memoirs/sabaneev_vosp_o_rossii.htm (accessed 10 August 2015).

⁷ *Рихард Вагнер и синтетическое искусство* ('Richard Wagner and Synthetic Art'), Moscow, 1914.

⁸ He was preceded only by Lipayev's 1913 work, by Yevgeny Gunst's *Скрябин и его творчество* (Moscow, 1915) and Viktor Karatigin's monograph (Petrograd, 1915).

⁹ *Воспоминания о Скрябине*, Gosizdat, Moscow, 1923.

¹⁰ His other writings about Skryabin include: 'Prometheus von Skrjabin', *Der blaue Reiter* (Munich, 1912); *Скрябин и явление цветного слуха в связи со световой симфонией 'Прометей'* ('Skryabin and the Phenomenon of Sound Colour in connection with his Colour Symphony "Prometheus"'), Petrograd, 1916; and 'Scriabin and the Idea of a Religious Art', *The Musical Times*, lxxii (1931). He also was the editor of a collection of Scriabin's letters (Moscow, 1923).

¹¹ These include Prince Trubetskoy, the poets Baltrušaitis and Baľmont, and musicians such as Goldenweiser, Alexander Krein and Yevgeny Gunst.

a great friend of Skryabin, he visited his house almost daily, and became very close with him as a composer and mystic, calling him 'his idol and friend'. Both composers often sat up late into the night. And Skryabin, who loved and respected Leonid Leonidovich, initiated him in his innermost musical and theosophical ideas.¹²

Soviet historical musicologists made sure that if Sabaneyev's name was to be remembered at all after his emigration, it would be for a notorious incident in which he reviewed a concert which didn't take place. The Moscow premiere of Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* was to have taken place on 12 (25 New Style¹³) December 1916 but was cancelled because the large number of orchestral players required could not be found since many musicians had been called up to the front. Sabaneyev was clearly not aware of the cancellation (which seems strange, as many of his colleagues would presumably have been hoping to hear the work) and the following day published a review in the pamphlet *Новости сезона* ('News of the Season'). At this stage, Prokofiev's music was antipathetic to Sabaneyev, who responded predictably to the 'performance', bemoaning the

demand for barbaric music [...] which is so easy to write [...]. First Igor Stravinsky specialised in supplying barbaric compositions. Now his successor has appeared, in no way inferior in his barbarism – Prokofiev. It's hard to argue against their artistic position. [...] So I will not vilify the suite; on the contrary, I would say that it's magnificent barbaric music, there's none better [...].

In January of the following year, Prokofiev published in two journals a retort consisting of three points:

1) I've never conducted in Moscow [Sabaneyev had written that the composer conducted]; 2) My Suite was never performed in Moscow; and 3) That the reviewer could not have even been acquainted with the score, because the only manuscript copy is in my hands.¹⁴

News of the Season apparently dispensed with Sabaneyev's services after the scandal broke,¹⁵ and Prokofiev enjoyed referring to the incident for the rest of his life, but nonetheless conceded that Sabaneyev would

¹² B. Sabaneev-Lanskaya, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Russia used the Julian Calendar (= 'Old Style'), which had been abandoned in most of Europe by 1600, until 1918, when it adjusted its dates to the Gregorian calendar (= 'New Style'). In the nineteenth century, the Julian calendar was behind the Gregorian by twelve days; from the end of February 1900, the discrepancy increased to thirteen days.

¹⁴ On 17 January in both *Muzikal'nyy sovremennik* and *Rech'*.

¹⁵ Igor Vishnevitsky, 'Отменённый московский концерт и «рецензия» на него Сабанеева' in *Сергей Прокофьев, документальное повествование в трёх книгах* (31.10.2008), at <http://www.topos.ru/article/6480> (accessed on 19 September 2015).

almost certainly have written the same review had he been present at a performance.

Sabaneyev's career as a critic and musicologist seems to have hardly been dented by the Prokofiev incident, and an impressive series of works followed during the early Soviet era, including *Claude Debussy*, *The Music of Speech: Aesthetical Research*, *The Psychology of the Musical-Creative Process*, *Maurice Ravel: Description of his Creative Work and Biographical Sketch*, *The Studies of Chopin in Relation to the Law of the Golden Section*, *The Jewish National School in Music*, *The History of Russian Music*, *A General History of Music*, *What is Music?*, *Music after October*, *Modern Russian Composers* (published in New York and London in 1927) and *Aleksandr Abramovich Krein*.¹⁶ It's probable that his memoirs of Skryabin, Taneyev, Grechaninov and his accounts of early-1920s musical Moscow¹⁷ will represent his most lasting legacy as a writer.

Meanwhile, his first compositions had appeared in print in 1902 thanks to interest from the prestigious Moscow publisher Jürgenson, who continued to issue Sabaneyev's works (from Op. 1 to Op. 11, Op. 13, and also the early *Quatre Préludes* without opus number) until the dissolution of the firm soon after the 1917 revolution. In 1923 the music department of Gosizdat continued where Jürgenson had been interrupted with the sets of miniatures Opp. 12 and 14, the Sonata, Op. 15, inscribed 'In Memory of Skryabin' (of which 1000 copies were printed, something of an extravagance given the cost and improbability of widespread performances), and the *Etude-Nocturne*, Op. 16, all of which had been written in the previous decade. The composition of the large-scale Sonata for Piano, Violin and Violoncello was started in 1923 and occupied Sabaneyev for over a year; the Chaconne for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 21, also appeared in 1924; a Sonata for violin and piano of 1925 appears to be the last composition project of any size he completed in the Soviet Union.

In 1926 Sabaneyev left the Soviet Union, taking his wife and young daughter to Paris. There he worked at the Conservatoire Rachmaninoff, which then specialised in continuing the music-teaching traditions of Tsarist Russia. His students included the Swedish composers Dag Wirén and Gösta Nystroem. He continued to be active as a writer, contributing articles mostly on contemporary music to

¹⁶ *Клод Дебюсси* (Moscow, 1922); *Музыка речи. Эстетическое исследование* (Moscow, 1923); *Психология музыкально-творческого процесс*; *Искусство* (1923) No. 1; *Морис Равель. Характеристика его творческой деятельности и очерк его жизни* (Moscow, 1924); 'Этюды Шопена в освещении закона золотого сечения. Опыт позитивного обоснования законов формы', *Искусство* (1925) No. 2; *Еврейская национальная школа в музыке* (Moscow, 1924; translated into five languages); *История русской музыки* (Moscow, 1924; German translation: Leipzig, 1926); *Всеобщая история музыки* (Moscow, 1925); *Что такое музыка* (Moscow, 1925); *Музыка после Октября* (Moscow, 1926); *Александр Абрамович Крейн* (Moscow, 1928).

¹⁷ His article on Nikolay Roslavets appeared in the short-lived journal *Sovremennaya muzika* in March 1924, and one on Sergey Yevseyev in the next issue. The book *Modern Russian Composers* contains essays on, among others, Feinberg and Myaskovsky.

journals such as *The Musical Times* and *The Musical Quarterly*; more books followed, including a memoir of Taneyev¹⁸ and *Music for the Films: A Handbook for Composers and Conductors*.¹⁹ His ballet *L'Aviatrice* (composed in 1928) was produced at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1930; other compositions of this later period include *Épopée tragique*, Op. 22, for orchestra, *Variations on a Theme of Scriabin*, Op. 23, a symphonic poem *Flots d'azur* (1936), and a Passacaglia and Fugue for piano (started in 1925 but finished only in 1939). His émigré years were chiefly preoccupied with a *magnum opus*, the *Apocalypse Ioanis Apostoli*, a huge score of some 512 pages requiring ten vocal soloists, two choirs, organ and a vast orchestra.²⁰ During his time in Paris Sabaneyev was able to meet such luminaries of French music as Ravel, Florent Schmitt and Milhaud as well as foreign visitors such as Hindemith. Other émigrés, among them Glazunov, Medtner and Grechaninov, were visitors to the family home. In 1933 he moved with his family to Nice, where he wrote scores for the film studio Gaumont. During his last years he wrote articles for journals of the Russian diaspora such as *Russian Thought* (based in Paris), *The New Russian Word* and the *New Journal* (both New York) and *Bridges* (Munich).²¹ He died on 3 May 1968 in Cap d'Ail and was buried in the Russian Orthodox cemetery in Nice.

The Music

All the music in this recording was written between 1902 and 1915, i.e., in the immediately pre-Revolutionary, late Tsarist era. All except the last work – the Sonata 'In Memory of Skryabin' – are miniatures and it is worth noting that piano miniatures of various types – preludes, impromptus, *poèmes*, *skazki*, album-leaves, etc. – were produced in prodigious numbers in Russia during this period, while the (usually single-movement) piano sonata was very much in vogue in the early Soviet era, a development that can be linked to the prominence of Skryabin's influence during these years. Thus the shift in 1915 – instigated by Skryabin's death in that year – in Sabaneyev's focus on miniatures to the writing of a huge single-movement sonata is prophetic, presaging the development that Russian piano music in general was on the point of making.

The musicologist Aleksandr Maksimenko divides Sabaneyev's output into two main periods – 1902–17 and 1924–68 – separated by a six-year transition during which he wrote very little.²² The first

¹⁸ С. И. Танеев. Мысли о творчестве и воспоминании о жизни, Tahir, Paris, 1930.

¹⁹ Pitman, London, 1935.

²⁰ The manuscripts of many later works were donated to the Library of Congress by the composer's daughter, Vera Sabaneyev-Lanskaya, in 1973.

²¹ Publication titles: *Русская мысль*, *Новый Русский Журнал*, *Новый Журнал* and *Моста*.

²² Aleksandr Maksimenko, *Музыкальное творчество Л. Сабанеева: к вопросу стиля и периодизации* ('The Musical Legacy of L. Sabaneyev: Questions of Style and Periods'), unpublished, p. 2.

period, though almost exclusively devoted to piano miniatures, did contain one larger chamber work – the *Trio Impromptu*, Op. 4 – and it culminated with the Sonata. In a review of the Trio, Konstantin Saradzhev actually encouraged the composer to ‘express his individuality in some larger forms, such as chamber works, piano sonata, or orchestral compositions’.²³ The second period, on the other hand, was almost exclusively devoted to larger works, and it culminated with the *Apokalypsis*. The works of the second period remain in manuscript and are yet to be fully investigated.

Sabaneyev studied music in the last days of the nineteenth century and thus made his first steps as a composer in a world where the stylistic mores of Glazunov, Arensky and Rimsky-Korsakov were the foundations of the common musical language. During the next decade-and-a-half, Sabaneyev and erstwhile classmates reared on the Classics and late Romanticism were confronted by a series of ‘shocks of the new’, coming not only from abroad – as the music of Debussy, Schoenberg and others was brought to Russia – but also from home, thanks to the likes of Skryabin, Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Like many of his contemporaries, Sabaneyev entered the heady first decade of the twentieth century and was seduced by the music of Skryabin, many of whose stylistic features became absorbed into a type of Romantic modernist *lingua franca* that prevailed in some form in Russia until the end of the 1920s. This common language was informed as much by Wagner, Liszt and especially Chopin as it was by Taneyev, Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov, and just as Russian Symbolists were cognisant of their debt to Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, so were these Russian composers open to the new influences of Debussy, Grieg, Ravel and even Schoenberg. A mystical, ecstatic and brooding Symbolism was the backdrop to literary and painterly circles in early twentieth-century Russia and these moods find their musical expression in much of the work of Sabaneyev, just as they do in the music of Skryabin, Medtner, Catoire, Alexandrov, Blumenfeld, Dobrowen, Alexander and Grigory Krein, Stanchinsky, Konstantin Eiges and Georgy Conus.

Right from the outset, Sabaneyev’s piano-writing proclaims itself assertively, with bold gestures and rich harmonies in the heroic opening of the Prelude, Op. 1, No. 1 [1]. Here one hears that the composer favours – like Skryabin – the anacrusis as a motif, and that he constructs melodies by reiterating and varying smaller motivic cells. The whole range of the keyboard is in almost constantly in use, though effective contrast is made at the opening of the middle section by retreating to the lower half of the instrument. The surging chromatic scales in the left hand, as well as the rising waves of the arpeggio in the final moments recall Liszt of the *Ballades* and *Légendes*.

It’s perhaps needless to say that Sabaneyev’s proximity to Skryabin had a considerable impact on

²³ Konstantin Saradzhev, ‘Сабанеев, Л. 4 прелюдии оп. 2, 2 прелюдии оп. 3 для ф-п’, *Музыка* (1910) No. 1, 27/xi, p. 28, quoted in Maksimenko, *op. cit.*

Sabaneyev's own musical language: although the Prelude, Op. 2, No. 1 [2], was written early in the 1900s and he got to know the greater composer well only in 1910, it actually takes material of one of Skryabin's preludes (Op. 11, No. 10) as a starting point, transforming the original 6/8 metre into a compound one, and exchanging the tonality of C sharp for A minor. This work diverges from its model or source of inspiration in many ways, chiefly in the richness of harmony and the use of extreme contrasts (for example, a low *ppp* chord followed by *f con disparazione* a quaver later). As with many of Sabaneyev's miniatures, this prelude covers a large canvas in a short space of time. With the Prelude, Op. 2, No. 4 [3], the listener enters a land of dreams – repeated over the seven-page duration of the piece, the rhythmic *ostinato* in the right hand has a hypnotic effect; but the increasingly complex rhythmic properties of the left hand gradually cloud the texture, just as the multi-hued harmonies become more piquant, barely obscuring muted clarion calls. The Prelude, Op. 3, No. 2 [4], shows how Sabaneyev – like many of his Russian contemporaries – formed contrapuntal sequential passages from motivic cells, using changes of harmony and texture rather than melody to propel the music. The innocuous opening of the Prelude, Op. 5, No. 2 [5], belies its turbulent prolongation in which the initial plaintive mood is transformed into epic tragedy.

Sabaneyev's known piano output contains nine *poèmes* and his use of the title was almost certainly prompted by Skryabin, who composed no fewer than nineteen such pieces. The *Poème*, Op. 6, No. 1 [6], inhabits a legendary, darkened world – here one hears for the first time the complex, post-tonal harmony that characterises much of Sabaneyev's subsequent work; chords which are at once tonal-sounding but which also possess an eerie, bell-like sonority abound.²⁴ The *Feuille d'album*, Op. 7, No. 2 [7], is one of composer's most inspired creations; beginning *carezzando*, *fantastico*, the performance directions of the opening are straight out of Skryabin's lexicon – *languido*, *molto lento*, *vogliamente*, *misterioso*, *sonnambuco* and so on. Sabaneyev's super-abundant piano writing soon outdoes that of his mentor, with the melody kept hovering in time as cascades of filigree are cast around the outer reaches of the keyboard. The *Feuille d'album*, Op. 9, No. 1 [8], by contrast, is strikingly terse, its opening gesture taken impulsively to its conclusion in a matter of seconds.

Notable for its use of cross-rhythms between the hands, the Prelude, Op. 8, No. 2 [9], is again full of dynamic contrast and dramatic gesture. Starting a triplet, arpeggiated accompanying figure in the left hand on the final quaver (rather than the first) was a favourite device of Skryabin, Lyadov and many

²⁴ One of Sabaneyev's seemingly favourite colours is produced by simultaneously employing the sharpened seventh, and both minor and major third degrees of a common chord, but with the minor element transposed up an octave. Such an example can be found in the middle of bar 2 of the piece, on a C bass (C-G-E-C flat-E flat). Later in the piece he creates chords by combining two minor triads a semitone apart: for example, C sharp-F sharp-A-F natural-A flat-C natural (etc.) on the second page.

others; here the resulting sensation of shifting emphasis is heightened by the placing of the melody in syncopation with the main beat. The *Prélude*, Op. 9, No. 4 [10], on the other hand, retains not only a simple rhythmical character throughout but also a tonic pedal for all but six of its 25 bars. Of the Op. 10 set of preludes, the second [11] is a troubled barcarolle, again hovering uneasily between conventional tonality and more distant territories, and the fifth [12] conjures images of an ecstatic, crepuscular daydream. In contrast, the sixth [13] is severe and funereal, demonstrating Sabaneyev's gift for creating narrative trajectory from modest resources. The eighth and final prelude of the set [14] returns to the atmosphere of the prelude from the Op. 9 group; Sabaneyev clearly held an affection for this work as he re-used the material a few years later in his *Melodiya*, Op. 19, for violin and piano.

Sabaneyev's Sonata, Op. 15 – marked on an inner page 'In Memory of Skryabin' – is cast in three large sections. The work opens, *Commodo* [15], with the anacrusis already familiar from Sabaneyev's miniatures and also present in many of Skryabin's sonatas (for whom they represented a kind of *appel* or summons).²⁵ From this stillness emerges a theme (E–G–B–C sharp–D) that is soon linked by an auxiliary motif to a falling phrase – these shapes are then combined in a *più mosso* which, after a climactic point, dissolves into a *più lento* section marked *dolce, fantastico*; here, the auxiliary motif and falling phrase are further elaborated before being enunciated in emphatic octaves at the end of this section. The next section opens *misterioso* [16] with a new theme, before the others re-appear, this time accompanied by roulades of fourths (similar to those found extensively in Skryabin's seventh and eighth sonatas). Bell sounds soon predominate as the music drifts into voluptuous arabesques (marked *crystallin*), before the section culminates in a passage of searing intensity and orchestral sonority, with *tremolando* chords spread across the entire range of the keyboard. The final panel of the triptych [17] marks a return to the music of the opening but with the *misterioso* theme appearing first rather than last. Fragments of a grotesque march are heard before the music seemingly evaporates, becoming increasingly spare and transparent. Its first (and only) publication, in 1924, is prefaced by quotations – both musical and literary – from Skryabin's sketches of his *Predvaritel'noye deystvo* or *Acte préalable*, a vast synaesthetic work for chorus, orchestra and a large number of other performers that Skryabin intended should be heard in the foothills of the Himalayas. I believe that the first modern performance of Sabaneyev's Sonata may have been the one I gave in the Conway Hall in London, on 4 November 2000; a subsequent one was given by the Spanish pianist Abel Sanchez-Aguilera in the Skryabin Museum in Moscow on 26 September 2014. Sanchez-Aguilera writes that of Sabaneyev's works 'the most significant and ambitious is his sonata [... which] consists of one single, extended movement,

²⁵ For a full and convincing discussion of the plots of Scriabin's late sonatas, cf. S. Garcia, 'Scriabin's Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas', *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 2000), pp. 273–300.

tightly organized thematically around a few generating motives.²⁶ Maksimenko designates this work ‘the culmination of the first period devoted to piano music, and the beginning of the transition to the second period.’²⁷

A century after his death, it’s perhaps easy to underestimate Skryabin’s centrality in Russian culture at the time of his death. During the last ten or so years of his life, Skryabin was regarded as ‘the acknowledged leader of the modernist faction in Russia,’²⁸ and even during his prolonged stay in Europe (1904–9) he was regarded by his contemporaries as ‘a glamorous, somewhat legendary figure.’²⁹ Boris Pasternak spoke of ‘the young art of Skryabin, Blok, Komissarzhevsky’; ‘it was so forward-looking, so gripping and original.’³⁰ By the time of his death, Skryabin’s following was such that his funeral has been described as ‘the most fashionable event in Moscow for years.’³¹ Bell sonorities – ubiquitous in Skryabin’s late work – predominate in Sabaneyev’s searingly apocalyptic tribute to the composer who for the ‘poets and thinkers of the Russian avant garde [...] had been a prophet, his art a revelation.’³² Sabaneyev takes Skryabin’s model of the single-movement sonata and expands it more than two-fold over a half-hour canvas; furthermore, the ‘plot’ Skryabin employed in his later sonatas is more than alluded to in Sabaneyev’s work. After all, the younger composer was one of the very few who was party to the secret, metaphysical content of these pieces: of his Ninth Sonata, Op. 68, Skryabin related to Sabaneyev that the second subject represents ‘a drowsy sacred object³³ and around it/her [are] evil spells.’³⁴ Of the climax in his recapitulation (*alla marcia*) Skryabin remarked: ‘This is the procession of evil forces, like a dream or a nightmare [...]. The sacred object is profaned – there is something *very mediaeval* in the mood there, isn’t there?’³⁵ Analogous points can be pinpointed in Sabaneyev’s work: the *misterioso* theme [15] strongly corresponds to Skryabin’s feminine subject (especially with its pairs of semitones separated by a minor third), while the *estatico* passage in the

²⁶ <https://abelsanchezaguilera.wordpress.com/2014/09/13/recital-at-the-scriabin-memorial-museum-september-26-2014/> (accessed 21 September 2015).

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁸ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition*, Oxford University Press, London, 1996, p. 794.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 791.

³⁰ Quoted in Faubion Bowers, *The New Scriabin: Enigma and Answers*, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1974, p. 96 (source unknown).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³² Richard Taruskin: ‘Scriabin and the Superhuman: a Millennial Essay’, *Defining Russia Musically*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and London, 1997, p. 308.

³³ In Russian the noun rendered as ‘sacred object’ is of feminine gender

³⁴ ‘Дремлющая святыня [...] И кругом ее злые чары’ [...]. Sabaneyev: *Vospominaniya o Skryabine*, p. 162.

³⁵ ‘Это – шествие злых сил, такой сон, или кошмар [...]. Оскверненная святыня – тут это что-то очень средневековое в настроении, правда?’. Sabaneyev, p. 163.

recapitulation (at 5:19 in track [17]), with its pounding, repeated chords, is certainly evocative of Skryabin's march to the scaffold in his Ninth Sonata. Like Skryabin, Sabaneyev creates contrast and tension by alternating the use of extended dominant harmonies with chords underpinned by tritones. Furthermore, textures range from the highly dense, multi-layered to the sparse single pitches that echo through the silences of the final pages; Maksimenko has pointed out that 'the quasi-orchestral textures heard in some of the early miniatures become a defining feature of the larger, mature works (be they for solo piano or ensemble), starting from the *Sonata in Memory of Scriabin*'.³⁶

For all the closeness of Sabaneyev's sonata to its models, Sanchez describes it as 'original and highly significant on its own'.³⁷ Larry Sitsky describes it as 'unquestioningly [*sic*] significant', 'acoustically original' and 'one of a handful of major works of stature from that time for the piano'.³⁸

³⁶ *Op. cit.*

³⁷ *Loc. cit.*

³⁸ *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant Garde*, Greenwood Press, Westport (CT), 1994, pp. 297 and 299.

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 Scriabin'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.



Photo: Keith Page

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 a chamber musician, he has worked with the cellist Rohan de Saram, the violinist Ashot Sarkisjan, the flautist Matteo Cesari and sopranos Svetlana Sozdateleva, Irena Troupova and Sarah Leonard. He has also 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.



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