NIETZSCHE’S ORPHANS:
MUSIC AND THE SEARCH FOR UNITY
IN REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA, 1905-1921

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ABSTRACT

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Imperial Russia was in the throes of immense social, political and cultural upheaval. The effects of rapid industrialization, rising capitalism and urbanization, as well as the trauma wrought by revolution and war, reverberated through all levels of society and every cultural sphere. In the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, amid a growing sense of panic over the chaos and divisions emerging in modern life, a portion of Russian educated society (obshchestvennost’) looked to the transformative and unifying power of music as a means of salvation from the personal, social and intellectual divisions of the contemporary world. Transcending professional divisions, these “orphans of Nietzsche” comprised a distinct aesthetic group within educated Russian society. While lacking a common political, religious or national outlook, these philosophers, poets, musicians and other educated members of the upper and middle strata were bound together by their shared image of music’s unifying power, itself built upon a synthesis of Russian and European ideas. They yearned for a “musical Orpheus,” a composer capable of restoring wholeness to society through his music. My dissertation is a study in what I call “musical metaphysics,” an examination of the creation, development, crisis and ultimate failure of this Orphic worldview.

To begin, I examine the institutional foundations of musical life in late Imperial Russia, as well as the explosion of cultural life in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, a vibrant social context which nourished the formation of musical metaphysics. From here, I assess the intellectual basis upon which musical metaphysics rested: central concepts (music, life-transformation, theurgy, unity, genius, nation), as well as the philosophical heritage of Nietzsche and the Christian thinkers Vladimir Solov’ev, Aleksei Khomiakov,
Ivan Kireevskii and Lev Tolstoi. Nietzsche’s orphans’ struggle to reconcile an amoral view of reality with a deeply felt sense of religious purpose gave rise to neo-Slavophile interpretations of history, in which the Russian nation (narod) was singled out as the savior of humanity from the materialism of modern life. This nationalizing tendency existed uneasily within the framework of the multi-ethnic empire. From broad social and cultural trends, I turn to detailed analysis of three of Moscow’s most admired contemporary composers, whose individual creative voices intersected with broader social concerns. The music of Aleksandr Scriabin (1871-1915) was associated with images of universal historical progress. Nikolai Medtner (1879-1951) embodied an “Imperial” worldview, in which musical style was imbued with an eternal significance which transcended the divisions of nation. The compositions of Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) were seen as the expression of a Russian “national” voice.

Heightened nationalist sentiment and the impact of the Great War spelled the doom of this musical worldview. Music became an increasingly nationalized sphere within which earlier, Imperial definitions of belonging grew ever more problematic. As the Germanic heritage upon which their vision was partially based came under attack, Nietzsche’s orphans found themselves ever more divided and alienated from society as a whole. Music’s inability to physically transform the world ultimately came to symbolize the failure of Russia’s educated strata to effectively deal with the pressures of a modernizing society. In the aftermath of the 1917 revolutions, music was transformed from a symbol of active, unifying power into a space of memory, a means of commemorating, reinterpreting, and idealizing the lost world of Imperial Russia itself.
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The initial impetus for this project emerged during my undergraduate studies in piano performance at the University of Saskatchewan. As I studied the works of Aleksandr Scriabin, I was intrigued to learn that he remained an enigmatic figure. Why had he believed that music would usher in the end of the world, and what was the nature of his apocalyptic vision? What had his contemporaries made of his messianic claims? What sort of cultural and intellectual environment had nourished Scriabin’s seemingly megalomaniacal vision of his power to spiritually transform reality? How had his vision interacted with the political and social upheaval in the final years of the Russian Empire? These questions sparked my curiosity, and I found no sufficient answer in the existing scholarly literature. In this dissertation, I seek finally to answer these questions that were awakened so many years ago. Throughout the course of my research, I found that broader questions about nationality, identity and Empire were inextricably entwined with Scriabin’s life and work, and that musical life in late Imperial Russia offers a key to understanding the social and cultural turmoil of the early twentieth century itself.

Over the past seventeen years, my scholarly path has taken many twists and turns, which have both altered my understanding of this project and influenced my intellectual formation as a whole. For my early intellectual and musical formation, I am particularly indebted to Bonnie Nicholson and Walter Kreyszig, who encouraged me to think critically about music itself. Two years of master-degree study in piano performance at the Meadows School of the Arts (Southern Methodist University) were formative in shaping my approach to music, both as a performer and as a listener. From my piano instructor, Alfred Mouledous, I learned the delicate balance between emotional intensity
and intellectual rigor needed as a performer. My continued interest in Russia was supported by Carol Reynolds, who inspired me to pursue an MA in Russian and East European Studies. Under the guidance of R. C. Elwood, Joan DeBardeleben, Piotr Dutkiewicz, Marvin Glass, Andrea Chandler and Vladimir Popov at Carleton University’s Institute of European and Russian Studies, I immersed myself in the study of Russian history, politics and economics. Financial assistance from Carleton University and the Government of Ontario supported fifteen months of study at St. Petersburg State University, where I immersed myself in Russian language, culture and music.

For the past seven years, the Department of History at the University of Illinois has been my academic home. It is here that this project has developed into its final form: far more than a musical and intellectual biography of Scriabin, it became an analysis of the worldview of an entire social strata within the fraught context of late Imperial and early Soviet Russia. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my dissertation committee and supporting faculty members. My advisor, Mark Steinberg, has been unwavering in his support and enthusiasm for my work, while his critical perspective has been formative in shaping this project as a whole. Conversations with John Randolph on topics ranging from Imperial Russian society to philosophy, politics and the impact of music on human life have inspired new perspectives in my research. Mark Micale’s expertise on European cultural and intellectual history have immeasurably strengthened this project and helped me to avoid numerous pitfalls. Diane Koenker provided valuable feedback and encouraged me to explore more fully the social dimensions underpinning the musical world itself. In the Department of Music, Donna Buchanan has mentored me throughout my time at Illinois, introducing me to the insights and perspectives of ethnomusicology.
while supporting my specific scholarly interests. Her careful reading of the entire
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eliminated numerous errors and provided a broader comparative perspective within which
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approach to music and history. To be indebted to such a dynamic group of scholars is
itself a privilege, and my work has been immeasurably strengthened by their critique.

Research on this scale would have been impossible without financial and
institutional support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of
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which enabled numerous trips to Russia, as well as shorter research trips to New York,
National Library, the Russian State Library, the Russian Historical Library, the Russian
State Library of Art, the State Central Museum of Musical Culture (Glinka Museum), the
Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, the Russian State Historical Archive, the
Central State Archive of Moscow, the Institute of Russian Literature, the Aleksandr Gol’denveizer Museum, the Scriabin Museum and the Bakhmeteff Archive assisted me in locating materials central to my research. Librarians at the Performing Arts Reading Room in the Library of Congress and Richard Davies, archivist at the Leeds Russian Archive, offered invaluable guidance in tracking down materials that I otherwise may have overlooked. While assistance from all these individuals and institutions have made this work possible, I bear full responsibility for any mistakes or misinterpretations.

Friends and family have supported me throughout my academic journey. My parents, Karen and Archie Mitchell, have been unwavering in their love and support, both emotional and financial. My brother and his family (Matthew, Suzanne, Jamie, Pat and Terry) have all offered much needed encouragement. Lisa Larson, Kaila Larson and Darcy Lueke have provided a place of respite and calm in the midst of the writing process. Finally, my husband, Andrew Demshuk, has devoted endless hours to discussing, reading and commenting upon this project in all of its stages, from the first tentative beginnings to its current form. In thanks for his tireless devotion, I dedicate this work to him.
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td>Bakhmeteff Archive</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>The Birth of Tragedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>GARF</td>
<td>Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTsMMK</td>
<td>Gosudarstvennyi tsentral’nyi muzei muzykal’noi kultury (State Central Museum of Musical Culture)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRLI</td>
<td>Institut russkoi literatury i iskusstva (Institute of Russian Literature and Art)</td>
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<td>IRMO</td>
<td>Imperatorskoe Russkoe muzykal’noe obshchestvo (Imperial Russian Musical Society)</td>
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<td>LC</td>
<td>Library of Congress</td>
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<td>LRA</td>
<td>Leeds Russian Archive</td>
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<td>RGALI</td>
<td>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art)</td>
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<td>RMG</td>
<td>Russkaia muzykal’naiagazeta  Russian Musical Newspaper</td>
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<td>RGB</td>
<td>Rossiiskaia gosudarstevnniaa biblioteka (Russian State Library)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RGIA</td>
<td>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNB</td>
<td>Rossiiskaia natsional’naiabiblioteka (Russian National Library)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TsIAM</td>
<td>Tsentral’nyi istoricheskii arkhiv Moskvy (Central Historical Archive of Moscow)</td>
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND USAGE

Throughout the text, I have employed a modified form of the Library of Congress transliteration system. Proper names have been given in their most common English variant in the body of the text (Scriabin rather than Skriabin, Rachmaninoff rather than Rakhmaninov, Medtner rather than Metner). When cited sources are in Russian, the names appear in transliterated form in the footnotes (Skriabin, Rakhmaninov, Metner).

Prior to February 1918, Russia adhered to the Julian calendar, which, in the late nineteenth century, was 12 days behind the Gregorian calendar. Because 1900 was a leap year according to the Julian calendar (but not the Gregorian), from February 29, 1900 to February 1, 1918, the Julian calendar was 13 days behind the Gregorian. Unless otherwise noted, dates on Russian sources are given in the Julian style (Old Style), while European sources are given in the Gregorian style (New Style). In correspondence between Russia and Europe, both dates are generally given, as they were in the original sources. After February 1918, all dates given are in the Gregorian style. Unless otherwise indicated, all musical analyses and translations are my own.
INTRODUCTION: MUSICAL METAPHYSICS IN RUSSIA

Without music, life would be a mistake.
Friedrich Nietzsche

Only music is indispensible.
Aleksandr Blok

In January 1910, the Russian composer Vladimir Rebikov identified two kinds of music: music of the soul (Orphic) and music of the blood (Bacchic). Drawing on Greek myth, Rebikov recounted the tragic tale of Orpheus’ death at the hands of Bacchic worshippers, who tore him to pieces in their frenzy. With this brutal murder, Rebikov claimed that the music of the blood had destroyed the music of the soul. Humanity had lost connection with higher, spiritual strivings and thrown itself into the dissolute celebration of mere physical existence. This tragic prehistory set the stage for Rebikov’s vision of the future:

After many hundreds of centuries, Orpheus will be remembered. His lyre will be sought. His lyre will be found. And again the strings of Orpheus’ lyre will sound the victorious song of the soul in the hands of the resurrected god.

As had happened in ancient time, life would be transformed (preobrazit’sia) through the harmonies of Orpheus’ lyre, which would usher in a new world. Orpheus and his music would reawaken the higher, spiritual aspect of humanity that had been lost in the modern age. Yet for Rebikov, the mythical Greek figure was more than just a metaphor: Orpheus was destined to resurrect and return to humanity. One day soon, Orpheus would reunite

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3 Vladimir Rebikov, “Orfei i Vakkhanki: rasskaz,” RMG no. 1 (January 3, 1910): 6-15, here 13. This was the first of a series of short stories published by Rebikov. His particular views will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.
his scattered followers, awakening a deeper meaning for earthly existence than materialism and positivism could offer. At times, Rebikov even suspected that he himself might be this musical messiah.5

Rebikov’s world was marked by intense political, social and cultural turmoil. In the final years of the Russian Empire, inherited autocratic political structures and estate-based social groupings proved unable to cope with the rapid transformation of the country into a modern state with an increasingly urbanized and modernized population. Russia’s humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 and the subsequent series of revolutions, strikes and violence that engulfed the Empire from 1905 to 1907 made this failure apparent. Official responses to the unrest between 1905-1907 also served to sharpen nationalist divisions within the multi-ethnic empire. In the Baltic provinces, divisions between Germans, Estonians and Latvians were sharpened by German support for the Imperial regime in opposition to rural (non-German) populations demanding change.6 Increasingly exclusionary Russian nationalist rhetoric coincided with continuing attempts to forge a sense of a united Imperial identity.7 In general, it can be said that late Imperial Russia’s political and social groups were complex, fragmented and constantly fluctuating in ways that evade simple categorization.8 New modes of viewing the world


7 For an analysis of the conflict between creating a unified military and growing Russian nationalism, see Joshua A. Sanborn, Drafting the Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 20-131.

8 Abraham Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 12. Ascher’s account of the events between 1904 and 1907 offer the most comprehensive English
co-existed uneasily with older social and cultural patterns, causing mutual distrust and misunderstanding that exploded into violence in 1905.

The search for political and social transformation spilled over into artistic realms, shaping cultural production of the time. The reaction against positivism and materialist culture in Russian society had already begun to gather strength in the 1890s. In the wake of the unrest and violence of 1905-1907, philosophers, writers, journalists, teachers and politicians grew even more vocal in expressing their desire for a transfigured reality, marked by community rather than division. In the context of this fraught historical moment, artistic experimentation, the revival of idealist philosophy and a renewed quest for spirituality in Russian society all contributed to the emergence of a widespread search for unity (edinstvo). 9

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This call for unity was uniquely connected with music itself. In concert with philosophical and theological ideals that had evolved in the mid to late nineteenth century, Rebikov’s vision called for a future unified and transformed by music’s spiritual power. Contemporary society, it was believed, was in dire need of a musical savior, capable of overcoming the social and cultural divisions wrought by modern life and reviving the lost spiritual basis of humanity. Music was envisioned as a means of salvation from the disunity and chaos of modern life, and it was the role of a composer, a present-day Orpheus, to show humanity the path forward to a better life. In the midst of the tumult of the 1905 Revolution, Aleksandr Koptiaev expressed his longing for the one thing that could save Russia in this time of trouble: a composer. This St. Petersburg translator, composer and music critic awaited the appearance of a “musician-poet, who would, through glorious [musical] consonances, unite society in its war for a new and better order.” N. Suvorovskii was even more outspoken in his article on music published in the Symbolist journal Vesy, claiming that “Now the time of waiting for the Messiah has come.” Russia awaited a musical genius, a new Orpheus, who would take
up this prophetic vision and bring it to fruition, ushering in a new era of unity rather than division. This emphasis on music as Russia’s salvation had become so prevalent that in 1907, Symbolist writer Andrei Belyi complained: “these days they talk as if music were a religion.”

Music emerged as the ultimate embodiment of unity within the fragmented political and social context of Revolutionary Russia, a time stretching from outbreak of open revolt against Tsarist autocracy in 1905 through the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922. This messianic interpretation was built upon both a lengthy philosophical tradition as well as responses to immediate problems in contemporary Russian life. Historically, the concept of music has referred to organized physical sound produced by instruments of human construction (music instrumentalis) and, in the Pythagorean sense, a symbol of cosmic harmony, linked to the mathematical proportions that governed both motion in the heavens and earthly relations (music mundana; musica universalis). This idea of correspondence between the heavens and

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14 Boris Bugaev, “Protiv muziki,” Vesy no. 3 (March 1907): 57-60. Bugaev (better known by the pseudonym Andrei Belyi) was responding in part to a Wagner cult that had grown up among the Russian symbolists, of which he had, in his earlier days, been an ardent supporter. For an earlier, far more positive assessment of music’s place as the ultimate symbolist art, see Andrei Belyi, “Simvolizm, kak miroponimanie,” Mir iskusstvo no. 4 (1904): 173-196. For a discussion of the shifting relationship between the Russian symbolists and Richard Wagner, see Rosamund Bartlett, Wagner in Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 152-177; Magnus Ljunggren, The Russian Mephisto: A Study of the Life and Work of Emilii Medtner (Stockholm: GOTAB, 1994), 28-29. The concept of Kunstreligion gained popularity in early nineteenth-century Germany, and was particularly associated with Hegel. See Elizabeth Kramer, “The idea of Kunstreligion in German musical aesthetics of the early nineteenth century,” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005).

15 Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius’ (ca. 480-524) famously argued there were three different types of music: “music of the universe,” “human music” and “instrumental music,” with “human music” referring to “that which unites the incorporeal activity of the reason with the body,” “a union of the rational and the irrational.” Boethius, “Fundamentals of Music,” in James McKinnon, ed., Strunk’s Source Readings in Music History, vol.2 (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998), 27-33, here 30-31. In late Imperial Russian discourse on music, the second type of music (human music) received little attention. For more on these varying conceptions of music, see Joscelyn Godwin, Cosmic Music: Musical Keys to the
earth continued as a subtheme in the Romantic conception of the “music of the spheres,” and, parallel to the rise of Enlightenment thought, found continued support in esoteric and occult doctrines. A conjunction between these two images of music (music as artistic work, music as symbol of cosmic harmony) emerged with particular vividness in the late Imperial era. The first letter ever penned by poet Aleksandr Blok to his colleague Andrei Belyi in 1903 centered upon the latter’s apparent failure to define music’s true import. “Your face was hidden,” Blok wrote to Belyi, “at that very moment when it was time to state whether music was the ultimate or not the ultimate.” Most important, Blok insisted, was the question that Belyi had failed to answer: “What, ultimately, is music?” Blok suggested that Belyi was in danger of collapsing the concept of music as an art form with the concept of music as a symbol of the absolute. Belyi’s response to Blok’s critique voiced a problem that would haunt interpretations of music throughout the final years of the Russian Empire: it was virtually impossible to differentiate between these two concepts.

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16 Konstantin Zenkin contrasts the Pythagorean and the Romantic approaches to music, which he considers “polar opposites,” and which he argues are synthesized in A.F. Losev’s philosophy of music (published in 1927). See Konstantin V. Zenkin and Robert Bird, “On the Religious Foundations of A.F. Losev’s Philosophy of Music,” Studies in East European Thought 56, no. 2/3 (June 2004): 161-172, here 162. I contend that such a synthesis was a larger project of Silver Age culture as a whole; moreover, the two interpretations are not inherently contradictory, though they emerge as such in Losev’s final analysis. Losev’s rejection of the German Romantic model is a symptom of the general disillusion in musical metaphysics that gradually emerged after Aleksandr Scriabin’s death in 1915 (covered in detail in Chapter Nine).

17 For an analysis of the use of both images of music in Russian poetry from this time period, see L. Gerver, Muzika i muzikal’naia mifologia v tvorchestve russkikh poetov, pervye desiatiletiia XX veka (Moscow: Indrik, 2001), 16-30; V.N. Orlova, ed., Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi: Perepiska (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi literaturnyi muzei [1940]).

18 Blok composed the letter after re-reading Belyi’s 1903 article “Formy iskusstva” in which music is described in almost religious terminology. See Orlova, Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi: Perepiska, 3-4.

19 Rosamund Bartlett, Wagner and Russia, 150-153; Orlova, Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi: Perepiska, 3-4.
I argue that it was precisely due to the elision of these two images of music that a symbolic-mystical, quasi-religious musical metaphysics emerged in late Imperial Russia. In adopting this term, I am illustrating a worldview in which music served both as a symbol of a higher, spiritual realm, and as a created art form through which human reality might be transformed from a lower to a higher level of existence. Music became both a means through which to comprehend the world and a way to act upon it: a mystical path outside the boundaries of human reason. Within the increasingly fragmented society of Revolutionary Russia, music’s promise of unity held particular appeal. Musical metaphysics involved three distinct doctrines: first, a belief in music’s salvific task to resurrect a lost sense of unity in the world; second, a conceptual image of time in which “musical” or “messianic” time was contrasted with ordinary “calendar” time; third, an embracing of the role of the composer as a messianic figure (a new Orpheus) through whom music’s power would be brought to fruition.

Music’s Salvific Task: The Search for Unity

Underlying contemporary Russian discourse about music was a shared belief in its unique status as the quintessential symbol of unity. Drawing on the metaphysical interpretation of music voiced by Arthur Schopenhauer in The World as Will and Representation and echoed by Friedrich Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy, late Imperial Russians imagined that music served both as a symbol of unity that had been lost in modern society and as a means through which that unity might be regained. According to Nietzsche, “primordial unity” was embodied in the figure of the Greek god Dionysus and in the “spirit of music”. This Nietzschean entangling of music with the Dionysian image of unity carried over into Russian culture. A man heavily influenced by the philosophy of
Friedrich Nietzsche, Aleksandr Koptiaev claimed in 1900 that it was Nietzsche who had first voiced “the call of our epoch. . . the glove, thrown at the feet of those who doubt in the possibility of a Dionysian-musical culture.” With a rhetorical flourish, he asked: “Who will lift it?”

In the Russian context, the Dionysian concept of unity (edinstvo), gradually merged with two additional concepts: theurgy (teurgiia) and communality (sobornost’). Borrowed from the philosophy of Vladimir Solov’yev and developed extensively in the thought of Russian Symbolist poets, theurgy suggested the ability of art to transform reality itself, imbuing the fallen physical realm with a higher, spiritual significance. Sobornost’ was a concept derived from Orthodox theology and developed by Slavophile writers in the mid-nineteenth century. Sobornost’ suggested a communal or collective existence, a unity-in-multiplicity. All three concepts (edinstvo, teurgiia, sobornost’) elided in a late Imperial image of music: music was the ultimate, communal art form, which permitted collective experience or performance (as in choral song), and which had the ability to transform reality itself, both physically and spiritually. As the ultimate symbol of unity, music seemed the art form most capable of transforming the multiplicity of the physical world into a unified, more spiritual whole through collective creative action.


There are similarities between the themes that I highlight and the “Nietzschean Agenda” laid out by Rosenthal that evolved in Russia between 1890 and 1917. Rosenthal focuses on “new myth”, “new word”, “new man”, “new morality”, “new politics”, and “new science”. Nietzsche viewed unity as the end result that the creation of a “new myth” would achieve in German society, through overcoming the fragmentation of contemporary, individualistic society. “Genius” in the sense I use it was primarily a nineteenth-century construction, which, in the case of music, typically referred to the composer. As a visionary and prophet, this genius served as a symbol of Nietzsche’s “new man” who would speak a “new word”, thereby creating and ushering in a higher level of humanity. Since I focus specifically on music, the category of “genius” is particularly fraught with layers of meaning regarding the interrelation of the individual, the community and
This quest for unity offered consolation for a widespread fear that contemporary society was disintegrating, and provided a space in which Russia’s educated middle could actively and creatively engage in social and cultural life. Russia’s defeat in 1904 by the supposedly inferior Japanese dealt a shocking blow to claims of cultural and military superiority, while the ensuing revolution of 1905 demonstrated widespread discontent with the Tsarist regime. Although uprisings in cities and the countryside lacked political leadership or coordination, they pointed to the deep discontent felt across the social spectrum in Russia. Contemporary peasant society, under the impact of urbanization and greater mobility, was viewed as growing increasingly distant from the Christian and communal traditions of its past, leading many members of the educated classes to mourn the loss of “tradition” Russian values that the peasantry had once preserved. Concern that the “foundations (устой) of peasant life were crumbling” was expressed in relation to a wide range of activities, from the penny press to folk song. Disintegration and dissolution, rather than cohesion, seemed to be the modern trend. Musical “salvation” offered a solution not only to the eternal problem of the immortality of the individual soul, but to specific, historically defined concerns about contemporary Russian society. Musical creativity emerged as a means through which to combat the negative impacts of modernity on society itself.

“Calendar Time” and “Musical Time”

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the historical mission of the individual creative artist. My time period is slightly later than that offered by Rosenthal due in part to the absence of permanent journals devoted specifically to music prior to the 1894 establishment of RMG

The ways in which humans have conceptualized the passage of time and their place within it has varied in different historical epochs. As Reinhart Koselleck has demonstrated, “modernity” often meant a shift from an emphasis on cyclical, repeated time (embodied in tradition) towards progressive, linear time (a product of the Enlightenment). While revolutionary change of an entire system was unthinkable in the former paradigm, it became almost expected in the latter. I find that late Imperial Russians shared such a “modern” comprehension of time, but with a heightened sense of anxiety concerning the direction in which humanity was moving. Belief in the positivist models of progress came increasingly under question, while for many, traditional patterns of religious and spiritual belief failed to offer acceptable alternatives. A strong eschatological sense emerged, linked to the expressed need for salvation from current social and cultural crises.

Within this context, music served as a means through which differing ideas of time were conceptualized. Andrei Belyi emphasized that the Nietzschean temporal conception of “Eternal Return” was *musical* in its very essence. Aleksandr Blok wrote of “calendar time” and “musical time”, in which the former referred to the measurable, linear passage of time and the latter described the sudden transformation from one state to another through some type of revolutionary upheaval. A similar duality was later posited by theorist Walter Benjamin, who contrasted “historicism” (based upon the Enlightenment idea of progress and undifferentiated, homogenous time) and “messianic

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time” (the “here and now”, an objective break with the linear, progressive image of time in favor of the experience of historical significance in the moment). In all three cases, the emphasis was upon the ability to break out of or transcend the dominant, linear narrative of progressive evolution in time into a transfigured present.

Blok’s particular conceptualization of “calendar time” and “musical time” highlights the important, transformative significance granted to music in the context of Revolutionary Russia. Music itself offered a means through which to break out of the linear experience of human progress passed down from the Enlightenment and strengthened by positivism, in favor of a revolutionary transformation of reality itself. This ability became particularly important as skepticism about human progress itself grew, and the path that history was following came increasingly under question. Through examining music and the philosophical implications connected with it, we thus are able to approach a clearer understanding of the “futures past” of late Imperial Russia: the expectations and fears of the impending, cataclysmic change that underlay human experience in the time.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the anxiety present in Russian educated society’s response to the present age. Central to debate at the time was the trope of historical progress, emphasizing not just technological or scientific advancement, but also the spiritual development of all humanity from a lower to a more advanced phase of

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27 The phrase “futures past” is borrowed from Koselleck, Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time.
existence. Its parallel, *historical decline* or *decadence* emerged as an alternate interpretation of the path history was following. Hegelian philosophy had offered a complete logical account of the history of human civilization based upon the assumption that historical time told a story of unending progress (embodied in nature, art and human reason itself); in contrast, *fin-de-siècle* culture throughout Europe was criticized as representing, not the advancement forward of human civilization, but the decline and eventual collapse of Europe’s leading role, a reinvention of a cyclical conception of time in which civilizations rise and fall. Concern over the degeneration of contemporary society emerged in discourse focusing on human psychological and physical health.29

Anxiety about Russia’s place within Europe, together with concerns about the effects of a rapidly changing social structure upon Russian culture and life, transcended discussions about political, economic and social issues. *Music* – and the discourse surrounding it – provided an area in which contemporary dreams, hopes and anxieties were given voice. In artistic circles, the clash between these two opposing views of human history (progress or decadence, linear or cyclical) helped give strength to an understanding of art in general (and of music specifically) as a *transformative* or *theurgic* power, a means through which to break out of both the linear and cyclical conceptions of time into a transfigured present. Fyodor Dostoevsky’s famous claim that “Beauty will save the world” entwined with Friedrich Nietzsche’s equally famous statement that “it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified.”30

29 The image of historical decline was evoked in Max Nordau’s *Entartung* (1892), which was quickly translated into Russian. For more on the concern surrounding human decline and degeneration among liberal members of the human sciences in late Imperial Russia, see Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 13, 27-96; Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder c. 1848-c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Rather than seeing Hegel’s march of reason embodied in human history, or falling prey to the fatalistic forecasts that European culture was itself doomed to decay, both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche felt that humanity was in need of salvation from the present through an eschatological break with the past, a move from “calendar time” to “musical time”.

**Orpheus: The Need for a Musical Genius**

Because of the emphasis on music’s *theurgic* power and the transformative moment to be reached in “musical time,” the image of Orpheus as creative genius took on a particularly important role. The myth of Orpheus had its roots in ancient Greek mythology. Alternate traditions glorified him as a Thracian singer, “the father of song,” or the priest of the “mysteries of Dionysus”. His parentage itself was traced alternately to the Muse Calliope and Oeagrus, or to Apollo himself. Among the many tales surrounding Orpheus, the two most enduring were his ill-fated journey to the underworld to retrieve his wife, Eurydice, and his death at the hands of Thracian bacchantes. The single constant in these myths was Orpheus’ connection with *mousike*, the “art of the Muses”. Orpheus’ music was more than just an art form; it had an immediate impact on his listeners and upon the natural world itself. This Orphic power captivated the imagination of generations of European composers.

In the context of the Russian Empire, however, it found particularly vivid reinterpretation in the imaginations of Rebikov and his contemporaries.

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31 Though the nature of evil and the means of salvation differed for each man, the trope of salvation through art or aesthetic beauty was the same.

In late Imperial Russia, the composer was often envisioned as a prophet or, in extreme cases, a messianic figure. If music was truly the highest form of art, the underlying unity out of which the entire material world sprang, then the composer – the individual who controlled the art of giving order and harmony to sound – was, at least potentially, the ultimate prophetic visionary. Not limited to the manipulation of physical reality, the composer was uniquely connected with the ineffable, creating an art that was purely temporal in nature. Orpheus became a symbol through which the significance of the composer’s task was described.  

After 1905, the figure of the creative genius was increasingly envisioned as the individual who could bridge the gap between the elite and the people (narod). According to Symbolist writer Viacheslav Ivanov, this natural calling of the genius had been abandoned by modern artists, whose isolation from the narod was the “basic fact of the contemporary (noveishei) history of the spirit”. The modern creative genius (alternately referred to as the artist-poet) had failed in his mission to return and enlighten the “people” with the higher knowledge he had achieved. Instead he had remained on the heights, glorying in his own, secret knowledge. In contrast, the true Orpheus recognized his task to share his higher knowledge, however imperfectly, with the “crowd”. Only the genius could bridge the divide between the educated upper classes and the Russian narod, founding new myths through which society as a whole would continue to evolve.

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33 For a discussion of various composers ascribed this status in poetry of the time, see L. Gerver, Muzyka i muzykal’naia mifologiia, 30-52. The author discusses the image of Orpheus specifically in relation to Scriabin; in actuality, this figure was much more widely used.


35 Viacheslav Ivanov, “Poet i chern”, in Po zvezdam, 33-42, here 37.
It was out of these particular conditions that composers like Vladimir Rebikov, Aleksandr Scriabin and Fedor Akimenko emerged, genuinely viewing themselves as messianic figures. The same backdrop also influenced the comparably more modest personal visions of contemporary composers such as Sergei Rachmaninoff and Nikolai Medtner, who likewise believed in music’s unifying and transformative power. Finally, it is only within such a context that one can understand the appearance of “Nietzsche’s orphans,” members of a broader educated society who believed that the world could be transformed through music.

**Nietzsche’s Orphans: Creating an Aesthetic Public**

In assessing the final years of the Russian empire, recent scholarship has moved beyond simply charting the rise of the Bolshevik party to uncover a wide range of worldviews and perspectives among the many social, religious, ethnic and political groups. By featuring the distinct experience of Imperial peripheries and regional centers, it has become clear that the response to the trauma of war, revolution and social upheaval was strongly influenced by local identity as well as centralized Tsarist policies.36 Yet an essential group has remained neglected: the aesthetic public. An investigation of music and the discourse surrounding it reveals a body of individuals united, not by ethnic, religious or political affiliation, but through the voluntary participation in the shared enjoyment of music.37 By coming to know the aesthetic public, we gain new insight into

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the development of the emerging middle strata of society. While past scholarship has shown that late imperial Russian art patronage furthered the growth of a “quintessentially Russian” identity within Moscow’s urban public culture, an examination of the cultural practices surrounding music uncovers a different picture: attempts to forge a distinctly Russian identity co-existed with admiration for the Germanic musical and philosophical tradition, creating a context in which the ambiguities of modern identity were dramatically expressed. Particularly after the unrest of 1905, musical communities in the Russian Empire struggled to adjust to the constant flux of the emerging modern world. Concepts such as nation, class and political views were forged by the convergence of individual beliefs and desires with larger social and political developments, most notably the outbreak of war in 1914.

I employ the term Nietzsche’s orphans to refer to this aesthetic public within Russia’s educated society. Inspired by their reading of Nietzsche and other German Idealist philosophers, in combination with certain aspects of the Russian intellectual tradition, they sought to fashion a better world. Yet they were also orphans, feeling themselves at least partly alienated, both from Nietzsche’s ideas and from their own people (narod). Transcending professional divisions, this group included philosophers, poets, musicians and other members of the upper and middle strata of society who were bound together by a fervent belief that art in general (and music in particular) could transform the world. In a time when traditional religious belief (in the context of the Russian Empire meaning acceptance of the hierarchically structured Russian Orthodox

39 In a sense, Nietzsche himself was the first orphan, due to his later rejection of his youthful writings and of the emerging cult of Wagner.
Church) was coming ever more into question, artistic creativity acted as a surrogate form of belief. Within a group that transcended traditional boundaries of identity linked to professional roles or social origin, Nietzsche provided a shared vocabulary through which individuals discussed their views and conceptualized their potential actions. This is not to claim that they thought of themselves as a single group; in fact, divisions amongst them often seemed stronger than similarities. Nevertheless, their views and actions were shaped by shared assumptions about the world, Russia and the modern age.

At the same time that Nietzsche’s Dionysian interpretation of music inspired many of these individuals, two central questions in the philosopher’s thought alienated them from his conclusions. The roles of morality and national identity in contemporary life, both dealt with at length by the German writer, were not easily adapted to the Russian context. Nietzsche’s adamant amorality troubled many of his Russian orphans, who sought to reconcile his call for “myth-creation” with a specifically Christian worldview. For Russian readers who looked upon Nietzsche as a prophetic voice, the philosopher’s warning that “it seems scarcely possible to transplant a foreign myth with lasting success” seemed to contradict their own attempts to synthesize Russian and German traditions. In both questions of morality and of nation, music became a space in which to express contemporary concerns.

Nietzsche’s orphans not only longed for music’s positive transformative power, but feared its darker, amoral influence. In his short story “The Kreutzer Sonata,” Lev Tolstoi voiced anxiety about the influence of music upon human emotion, describing a jealous husband driven to murder under the influence of Beethoven’s violin sonata.

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40 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 125. The term “prophet” is borrowed from Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, who has argued: “in Russia, Nietzsche was perceived as a mystic and a prophet.” See Rosenthal, “Introduction,” in Nietzsche in Russia, 3-48, here 38.
Similarly, in his 1897 treatise “Chto takoe iskusstvo?” (“What is art?”), his own conflicting responses to music inspired his definition of art as the “infection” of emotion passed from composer to performer to audience.\(^1\) It was specifically music that “tormented him with its ability. . . to infect with its magic, its ability to carry a person off in spite of his will and endow him with some kind of emotions.”\(^2\) Because of the unpredictable nature of its influence, which rested purely on the type of emotions it evoked, “music became a sinful substance for him, intoxicating a person somehow and depriving him of his free will.”\(^3\) Similarly, Andrei Belyi noted in a 1903 letter to Aleksandr Blok that, while music was “closer than anything else to an insight of the otherworldly (zapredel’nyi),” that other world contained both “Good (dobro)” and “Evil (zlo)”.\(^4\) The same idea was voiced by composer and philosopher Konstantin Eiges, who argued that the “mystical” process involved in making music was a descent to a “lower realm,” which the true composer then transfigured into the “higher realm” of a musical work.\(^5\) Music was a potent force, but an unpredictable one. Its power could be turned toward either moral or immoral ends. This emphasis on morality distanced the Russian adoption of Nietzsche’s Dionysian power from its original prophet.

The recognized division between the educated classes and the narod that had emerged in late Imperial Russia was of immediate concern when read through a Nietzschean lens: Russian culture itself was in danger of dying if a new, unifying myth

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\(^1\) N. Gusev and A. Gol’denveizer, *Lev Tolstoi i muzyka* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1953) 5, 16. Tolstoi’s description of the power of art to “infect” audiences with the emotions of the creator echo contemporary application of the epidemiological model to crowd psychology by health professionals. See Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 131-164.


\(^3\) Sabaneev, “Tolstoi v muzykal’nom mire,” 122.

\(^4\) Belyi to Blok (January 6, 1903) in Orlova, *Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi: Perepiska*, 9

\(^5\) Konstantin Eiges, “Muzyka, kak odna iz vyshikh misticheskikh perezhivanii,”; Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki.” Eiges’ views are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.
was not founded for Russian society as a whole. While the Slavophiles had believed that
this new unity could be found in the Russian narod, in the late Imperial era, this idea
seemed increasingly far-fetched because rising industrialization had destroyed the
traditional link between the peasant and the village, and was interpreted as leading to the
breakdown of natural Russian peasant lifestyle and morality. It was the duty of educated
elites to protect Russian culture in order to better prepare Russia to face the emerging
world. The study and preservation of musical traditions was one proposed way through
which to counteract this, but music came up against a distinct problem: the musical
traditions and institutions in Russia were themselves heavily based upon foreign, German
models.

In nineteenth-century Russia, both philosophical thought and musical education
were dominated by German accomplishments. Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche
were standard reading for intellectually inclined Russians, while the music of Bach,
Beethoven and Wagner were generally considered the greatest representatives of the
European musical tradition. Music conservatories founded in St. Petersburg and Moscow
were modeled specifically on the Germanic model, making this the standard institutional
form in which professional musicians were educated. At the same time, Russian
educated society was ambivalent about the continued importation of foreign models of
thought and artistic expression. There was an increasing sense of the need for specifically
Russian culture, including models of philosophical thought and musical expression that
would be distinct from German (and other Western) models. Within this context, the
embrace of Nietzsche's ideas as a means through which to rejuvenate society was itself

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46 For a study of the “German” roots of the Russian musical conservatories and the contemporary debate
surrounding their creation, see Yuri Olkhovsky, *Vladimir Stasov and Russian National Culture* (Ann
problematic. Similarly, the continued reliance upon musical styles that were increasingly deemed “German” in origin was an issue of contention. In seeking to define their place within an increasingly nationalistic European context, Nietzsche’s orphans faced an unavoidable conundrum. These implicit contradictions serve as one of the central themes of this dissertation as a whole.

**Parameters of the Project**

This project focuses on the revolutionary years between 1905 and 1921: a time in which Russia continued to respond to the European-wide phenomenon of *fin-de-siècle* culture. I have chosen these dates based upon my observation that the way in which music was envisioned shifted drastically in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution. While earlier artistic expressions emphasized individuality and alienation from contemporary society (a trend comparable to tendencies throughout Europe), my research has demonstrated that, after 1905, the Russian emphasis on unity, once primarily focused upon overcoming the division between the rational and irrational aspects within the individual human mind, increasingly gravitated towards an emphasis on social unity, a means through which to overcome the divisions made apparent in a time of national upheaval. The choice of a closing date presented greater challenges because the musical metaphysics examined in this dissertation did not disappear in a moment; rather, a lengthy process of increasing disillusion can be traced among those who participated in creating this worldview. The first glimpses of this disillusion emerge in the midst of the Great War, but lingering traces of belief in music’s transformative power can be seen in

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early Soviet music projects.\textsuperscript{48} I ultimately settled upon 1921 as the end date because this coincided with the decision by the last of the composers highlighted in this study (Nikolai Medtner) to leave Soviet Russia for the West. The epilogue offers a glimpse into the late 1920s to reveal echoes of this worldview in the Soviet context.

This project focuses most extensively on musical and cultural life in the Russian Empire’s second capital, Moscow. My intention is not to continue the lengthy tradition of differentiating between Moscow and St. Petersburg compositional schools, but to define an intellectual and cultural approach to music across a wider social strata. The interpretation of music as a pseudo-religion was not limited to a single geographical area: musicians travelled extensively in the late Russian Empire, offering concerts in provincial centers as well as the cultural capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Similar views about music appear in local papers from Odessa, Nizhnyi Novgorod and elsewhere. However, the center of this movement was in Moscow, the “Third Rome” of Russian religious tradition, and the birthplace of a new movement in Russian folk and religious music in the late Imperial period.\textsuperscript{49} Moscow’s growing wealth from trade and industry spilled over into artistic and cultural realms, giving rise to a wide range of musical opportunities distinct from the Imperial realm of St. Petersburg.\textsuperscript{50} Moscow provided an environment within which alternate ideas about music could be voiced and then disseminated.

throughout the empire. As the traditional center of “Russian” ethnic identity, Moscow also provides a particularly interesting context within which to examine the effects of growing nationalist divisions within the musical world.

The choice of composers upon which to focus this study was dictated in large part by the sources themselves. The central role of Aleksandr Scriabin in the musical, artistic and philosophical life of late Imperial Russia made him an obvious figure from which to pursue the examination of the intersection of intellectual, musical and cultural beliefs in late Imperial Russia. Judging from the percentage of space in the musical press devoted to Scriabin in comparison to other composers, he served as the central artistic figure of his time. His central import in the final years of the Empire is paralleled by the relatively greater attention granted to him here: three chapters deal predominantly with his music, ideas and legacy.

Constant comparisons drawn between Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Medtner by contemporaries served as an initial impetus to examine the interrelationship of these three men more carefully. They shared striking biographical similarities. All were graduates of the Moscow Conservatory, where they studied in the same educational milieu with many of the same teachers. All three were pianist-composers who devoted much of their time to the active performance and support of their own compositions, combining the role

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51 This claim is supported by a brief scanning of articles in such pre-revolutionary journals as Muzyka and Muzykal’nyi sovremennik.
52 M. Gnesin, for instance, claims that the “war” between fans of Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Medtner was ideological (ideinoi) in essence. See M. Gnesin, “Tetrad s zapisiami vospominanii ob A.N. Skriabine,” RGALI f. 2954, op.1, no.204, ll.108-109. Emil Medtner intended in 1914 to publish a collection of essays comparing the three in order to contribute to this public discussion. See RGB f.167.17.31. For additional comparisons of Medtner, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, see Sabaneev, Vospominanii o Skriabine, 74-75; V. G. Karatygin, “Skriabin i molodye moskovskie kompozitory,” Apollon no. 5 (May 1912): 25-38; Iulii Engel’, “Taneev, Rakhmaninov, Skriabin,” Russkie vedomosti (November 30, 1910); Engel’, “Avtorskii kontsert N. Metnera,” Russkie vedomosti no. 274 (November 9, 1906); ibid., “Rakhmaninov i Skriabin,” Russkie vedomosti no. 90 (April 21, 1909); ibid., “Muzyka N. Metnera,” Russkie vedomosti no. 57 (March 11, 1911); ibid., “Kontsert A. N. Skriabina,” Russkie vedomosti no. 41 (February 19, 1913).
of performer and creator within one person. Each man became associated with a particular compositional style that served as an encapsulation of more general social tendencies and philosophical stances of the time. By focusing on each figure in turn, a better understanding of conflicting contemporary views is attained.

All scholars face the challenge of source availability and reliability. In studying musical life in Revolutionary Russia, two specific difficulties were unavoidable: Soviet reinterpretation of history in a Marxist vein and the re-inscription of nationalist interpretations onto what had been a fraught Imperial space. Many archival memoir accounts were compiled retrospectively in the Soviet context and often demonstrate personal attempts to provide a correct political veneer to past actions. When attempting to reconstruct philosophical or ideological views, this process of re-invention was a particular hindrance. Marietta Shaginian, once a close friend of the Medtners and passionate supporter of Rachmaninoff, had become an ardent Marxist by the time she wrote her reminiscences, leading her to re-envision her participation in the pre-revolutionary era from a more “politically conscious” stance. Leonid Sabaneev, initially one of Aleksandr Scriabin’s most passionate supporters, produced a range of writings on music that run the gamut from pseudo-mystical to Marxist in orientation, shifting with his own personal and political views. His 1926 defection from the USSR led Soviet scholars to label him a “white guardist”, though they could not entirely ignore his Soviet-era works. At the same time, many émigré accounts were often colored with a hue of

53 Margarita Morozova’s memoirs about the Medtners brothers and Scriabin were also composed during the Soviet era. See Margarita Morozova, “Vospominaniia o Metnere,” RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.11; “Vospominaniia o Skriabine,” RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.12.
55 Among Sabaneev’s writings dedicated to Scriabin are two monographs: Skriabin (1916, revised edition 1922); Vospominaniia o Skriabine (1925). Sabaneev’s shifting views are dealt with in detail in Chapters Five and Nine.
nostalgia mixed with virulent dislike of the Soviet regime. The multi-ethnic aspect of
Imperial Russia was generally erased in such accounts, replaced by a melancholic
celebration of eternally “Russian” music. This tendency was particularly notable in
relation to Nikolai Medtner, who was consistently identified as a “German” composer by
pre-revolutionary critics, but as an unquestionably “Russian” composer in the Russian
émigré community.56

Because of the questionable reliability of such retrospective accounts, extensive
use has been made of sources dating from the late Imperial period, including a wide array
of published journals and books as well as unpublished personal correspondences that
have not received sufficient scholarly attention. Musical works, together with audience
responses, have also served as a means through which to explore late Imperial views in
distinction to later re-interpretations. Political and social upheavals from 1917 to 1921
tore apart the world of Nietzsche’s orphans; their material traces were similarly scattered
across the Western Hemisphere, from Moscow and Petersburg to Paris, Leeds, London,
New York and Washington, D.C. Reconstructing an image of this lost world was possible
only through piecing together these surviving fragments.

Defining an Era: Revolutionary Russia

When dealing with the final years of the Russian Empire and early Soviet Russia,
scholars have employed a number of overlapping terms which are nevertheless not
synonymous: late Imperial Russia, Revolutionary Russia, fin-de-siècle Russia and the
Russian Silver Age. In keeping with recent trends, in my project I seek to de-emphasize

56 See for instance, T. Serikov, “Angel’ sobornoi muzyki,” GTsMMK f.132, no.5000; Richard Holt, ed.,
Nicolas Medtner: A Tribute to his Art and Personality (London: Dobson, 1955). This tendency was
paralleled in post-Stalinist Soviet analysis of Medtner’s music. See Z.A. Apetian, ed., N.K. Metner: stat’i,
materialy, vospominaniia (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1981).
1917 as the central historical moment in Russian history, focusing instead upon the
continuum of crises from 1905 to 1921 and after. Within this broader context, the
impact of the Great War looms large, as does Russia’s position within the larger
European experience. Nevertheless, the fundamentally transformative revolutions of 1917
that ushered in dramatic social and political change cannot be ignored. As I trace
discourse about music across the revolutionary divide of 1917, the term “Revolutionary
Russia” has proven to be far more appropriate than “late Imperial Russia” in referring to
the project as a whole. In employing this term, I understand “revolutionary” to refer, not
to a specific political event, but to the larger period of unrest and crisis that dominated
public life between 1905 and 1921. I have employed “late Imperial Russia” to refer to the
specific constellation of political and social groupings that existed prior to the revolutions
of 1917, “Soviet Russia” to refer to those that emerged after the October Revolution, and
“Revolutionary Russia” to refer to the entire time period between 1905 and 1921. The
term “Silver Age” I have employed sparingly, using it solely when referencing cultural
activities. Moreover, I seek to expand my analysis of cultural phenomena to questions
of identity and empire, themes that have generally not been central to scholarship on the
Russian Silver Age.

Scholars of the European fin-de-siècle have identified a widespread anxiety that

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57 This approach draws on the work of Peter Holquist, Making War, Forging Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) and Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation, who reassess the impact of the Great War in transforming Russian society and laying the institutional and ideological basis upon which the Soviet Union developed after 1917. Unlike these works, which focus primarily on political factors, I explore the influence of war on cultural activities, finding the emergence of an increasingly divisive nationalist sentiment.

58 While Catherine Evtuhov has sought to broaden the use of “Silver Age” to encompass “the complex of ideas, literature, art, philosophy and politics that together constituted the cultural explosion of those years,” I believe that “late Imperial”, “Soviet” and “Revolutionary” are terms that better capture the intersection between cultural activity and socio-political transformations of the time, changes that lay at the heart of my analysis. Evtuhov, The Cross and the Sickle, 3. My study also encompasses a slightly different time period than Evtuhov, who begins in 1890 and ends in 1922. The heightened tensions after 1905, rather than the emergence of an artistic style serve as the temporal delineation of my study.
dominated public discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This discourse transcended national borders, dealing with such basic human conceptions as time and space themselves. Historians of Western Europe have long been aware of the close connection between artistic phenomena, philosophical ideas, politics and social life. My dissertation brings scholarship on Revolutionary Russia in line with this trend, placing the Empire (or at least the European part thereof) firmly into the European cultural sphere. Examination of Russia’s unique experience also offers a corrective to much of this literature; while modernity and the fin-de-siècle have often been assumed to be informed by secular rather than spiritual ideals, it is clear in the Russian context that the quest for the sacred was deeply entwined in social and artistic responses to modernity.

In Russia, this moment of crisis extended well beyond the turn of the century. Whether the precise term fin-de-siècle is still applicable to the fears, anxieties and utopian dreams of Russians living in 1917 is debatable. That many of these concerns, first voiced throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century, continued to dominate public discourse in Russia for several decades of the twentieth century demonstrates that the fin-de-siècle spirit, regardless of the term one applies, found increasingly strident expression in the final years of the Russian Empire. This decadent, increasingly apocalyptic spirit was intimately connected with the political and social upheaval of the time.

In conjunction with this pervasive anxiety, Revolutionary Russia saw the rise of utopian dreams, hopes and expectations. Musical metaphysics, while responding to

fears about the modern age, partook in this parallel trend of optimism. Music itself promised a means of escaping from what Mark Steinberg has referred to as the “darkening landscape of modern time.”

Many of the persistent binaries that haunted intellectual and social life in Russia (individual and collective, sacred and secular, progress and degeneration, national and universal, thinking and being, ontology and epistemology, male and female, Apollo and Dionysus, Orpheus and Bacchus) paralleled musical discussions of consonance and dissonance, a binary to which music promised resolution. Theorists, regardless of their specific definitions of these terms, agreed that the conflict between consonance and dissonance were, in some manner, resolved in a musical work. Modernist composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Aleksandr Scriabin sought to transcend the very concept of dissonance, suggesting a resolution of binaries that had structured human society for generations.

Music offered the hope of resolving or transcending binaries themselves, thereby ushering in a new era of harmony.

The means through which music promised to overcome all binaries was through perezhivanie or “lived experience”. Russian philosophy in the late Imperial period centered on experience rather than theoretical knowledge; for many of my subjects, this emphasis was paralleled by a focus on the process of listening to a musical work.

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61 Mark Steinberg, Petersburg Fin de Siècle (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming 2011)
63 The connection between musical harmony and social harmony has ancient roots. The Greek word harmonia (“joining together”), began to be used in the 6th century B.C. to refer to “musical notes united in a system of concord, the act of tuning a musical instrument and to various musical modes.” In the 5th century B.C. it was also employed to refer to the stability and equilibrium of the polis (Greek city-state). Bundrick suggests that the concept harmonia was itself intimately connected to the foundation and evolution of democracy in Classical Athens. See Bundrick, Music and Image in Classical Athens, 11-12, 140-196.
64 “According to Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, the opposition between thinking and existence was caused by a philosophic malnutrition of sorts; philosophy must be nourished by two kinds of experience, scientific and mystical. Berdiaev grounded this argument in the philosophy of Nikolai Losskii, a Russian who “defended mystical empiricism.” See Michael A. Meerson, “Put ‘against Logos: The Critique of Kant and Neo-Kantianism by Russian Religious Philosophers in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,”
Related categories that underpinned public discourse on music were *nastroenie*, *chuvstvo*, *oshchushchenie*, and *perezhivanie*. Each of these terms was applied specifically to music, capturing an important aspect of musical metaphysics. *Nastroenie* (mood) was used to refer to specific spiritual states evoked through music. In contrast, *chuvstvo* (feeling) was a specific reference to an emotional state. *Oshchushchenie* (sensation) referred to physical sensation or material experience. *Mirooshchushchenie*, derived from *oshchushchenie*, referred to a non-rational attitude to the world, based on emotional states and physical experience. In contrast to other art forms, music had the unique ability to offer *lived experience* (*perezhivanie*) of moods, emotions and sensations through which humanity might be physically and spiritually transformed.\(^{65}\) Music did not simply express a static emotion or state of being, but was a transformative experience for the human spirit.

One of the central claims of this dissertation is that educated Russian society discovered a substitute for religion in music, seeking salvation from the disunity of modern life within musical practices. In making this claim, I use the term “religion” to refer to an organized belief system through which human existence is granted significance. I view music as a “pseudo-religion” or “substitute for religion” because there was no generally accepted creed or dogma through which music’s connection with the transcendent or sacred realm was stated. Drawing upon a wide range of philosophical

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\(^{65}\) These categories also underpinned specific musical compositions. See for instance, Nikolai Medtner, *Kartin nastroeniiia* (Mood Pictures), op.1; Vladimir Rebikov, “Rabstvo i svoboda,” *Muzykal’nopisikhologicheskai kartina*, op. 22. This emphasis on experience rather than logical argumentation has a lengthy history in Eastern Orthodox thought, which stressed the “experience of Christocentric communion with God.” The “mystical-ascetic pursuit of hesychasm,” aimed at the deification (*theosis*) of the practitioner that emerged in the fourth century was a particularly vivid expression of this. See Sergey Horujy, “Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the Birth of Russian Philosophical Humanism,” in Hamburg and Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830-1930* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27-51, here 28-30.
sources, Nietzsche’s orphans sought to ascribe meaning to life through musical practices; however, without an agreed upon system of signifiers and interpretations, the precise meaning of music was open to constant debate and reinterpretation. Despite claims that music was a unifying force, this lack of specificity impeded attempts to define the precise religious content of music, ultimately contributing to the collapse of musical metaphysics.

The artistic and literary trends emerging in Russia at this time have drawn significant attention from historians, literary scholars and musicologists, who have addressed specific stylistic characteristics, social circles and the institutional basis through which ideas were disseminated. Most literary and artistic studies have closely analyzed the connections between writers, artists and their financial supporters, but have dealt with the place of music within these circles only in passing. In contrast, musicologists have offered detailed hermeneutical readings of specific composers within the late Imperial context and Revolutionary contexts, but have not examined the broader worldview within which music was produced, performed and interpreted. The impact of Nietzschean ideas has received detailed treatment in the philosophical, historical and literary realms, and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal has shown that it was Nietzsche’s early writings, specifically *The Birth of Tragedy* that found the greatest resonance in Russia. However, the import of the wide dissemination of this most musical of Nietzsche’s works

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on the musical realm of Imperial Russia has not been examined in any depth. The so-called “Russian Religious Renaissance”, together with unorthodox spiritual searching in the form of experimentation with the occult, spiritualism and theosophy has been linked to a growing disillusionment with the convictions of positivism.69 Inherited from an earlier generation of Russian revolutionary activists, disappointment in the failure of revolutionary activism and positivism to transform reality penetrated political as well as cultural life. The rejection of positivist ideals was expressed by the embrace of the irrational in life and abandonment of realist aesthetics, while a rebirth of interest in German idealist thought and Orthodox theology emerged in the field of philosophical inquiry. My work deepens these fields of inquiry, offering the first extensive analysis of Nietzsche’s ideas within the musical realm, demonstrating their immediate connection with the spiritual searching of the age.

Though the theme of unity (edinstvo) has been touched upon in numerous works of intellectual and cultural history, it has not been the topic of extended analysis. This dissertation is the first extended attempt to uncover the silver thread of unity that runs throughout Revolutionary Russian culture. The longing for unity was a trademark of intellectual and spiritual life at the time, expressed by philosophers, poets, artists and musicians. Unity referred both to internal, spiritual unity and external, social unity, which had been shattered by the 1905 revolution. In philosophy, this was expressed by attempts to overcome the subject-object dichotomy that many Russian intellectuals believed had

been introduced by Kant’s philosophy. Socially, recognition of the growing chasm between educated society and the people (narod) led to attempts to reach out to the masses through artistic and educational activity. Music offers a particularly valuable lens through which to examine this quest for unity due to its philosophical interpretation as the most perfect embodiment of unity. Moreover, music’s ability to provide a shared, communal experience seemed to offer a means through which to refashion a unified society.

Though some attention has been paid to the importance of music within poetic and philosophical conceptions of the Russian Silver Age (particularly in relation to the literary movement known as Russian Symbolism), such scholarship has generally focused either on individuals or upon specific artistic genres rather than seeking to understand the time period as a whole. In offering a more synthetic approach to the age, this dissertation emphasizes these artistic realms as consisting of a close-knit social circle, connected as much by personal ties as by professional organizations. This argument both complicates recent scholarship focused on the emergence of professional spheres among Russia’s middling classes and supports historical scholarship demonstrating the isolation of educated society from the narod. I also bring under question the idea that music served simply as a means of personal escape from

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70 In Kant’s mature critical philosophy, experience was in fact the product of synthesis. In late Imperial Russia, however, Kantian philosophy was often blamed for introducing this division. See Michael A. Meerson, “Put’ against Logos: The Critique of Kant and Neo-Kantianism by Russian Religious Philosophers in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” Studies in East European Thought 47, no.3/4 (December 1995): 225-243.

71 The founding of the Peoples’ Conservatory in Moscow (discussed in Chapter One) is a particularly striking example of this larger trend.

contemporary problems in the late Russian Empire. If one engages with the worldview expressed by the actors themselves, it becomes apparent that many musicians were not only concerned with contemporary to events, but that they strove to bring about change in the manner they thought best suited to their abilities: musical education of the narod.\textsuperscript{73} The fact that these attempts ultimately failed to provide the desired result does not negate their importance for the time.

Methodologically, this dissertation seeks to offer new approaches to the study of both history and of music. From intellectual history, I have adopted the technique of analyzing the ideas, assumptions and worldviews of historical actors as a fundamental means of interpreting human actions and creative work. Reception history has served as a means through which to reconstruct widespread categories of thought and presumptions underpinning the ways in which contemporary critics and audiences interpreted music. In dealing with audience reception, it is not enough simply to examine original texts. Rather, the means of dissemination, as well as the intellectual assumptions that audiences brought to their interpretation of textual, visual and aural works, must be assessed. Recognizing the importance of social relations, I seek to place my historical actors within the specific contexts in which they lived and worked, as well as to examine the social and institutional connections through which works were created and performed. From musicology, I have adopted theoretical techniques centered on analyzing specific musical works. Building upon approaches developed in recent musicology, I approach music as

\textsuperscript{73} Catherine Evtuhov posits a similar approach to actual engagement with the ideas expressed by historical actors as a means to avoid the emphasis on 1917. See Catherine Evtuhov, \textit{The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1-20.
deeply embedded in cultural practice.\textsuperscript{74} Both as a practice, and as a field of discourse, I view music as a central way in which historical actors have conceptualized such issues as social transformation, time, modernity and national identity. I argue that music has not only reflected these processes; rather, it has played a key role in shaping them.\textsuperscript{75} Discussing, performing and listening to music served as a means of engaging in a contemporary discourse that extended well beyond the printed page. In Rebikov’s world, music was not merely an artistic form; it was philosophy, politics, social action and religion all in one.\textsuperscript{76} As a historian rather than a musicologist, I ultimately turn to music as a means through which to better understand Revolutionary Russian society.

In the study of music and culture, it has been my desire to bring under scrutiny the collapsing of the concept of “historical progress” with modernist compositional techniques in music. The assumption that “new” musical techniques are, by definition, more “progressive” and therefore “better” has led to a misunderstanding of the cultural significance of musical styles that utilize what is defined as a “traditional” aesthetic.\textsuperscript{77} For my subjects, the linear progression of human history was itself a problematic concept, tied into expectations and anxieties raised by modernization, urbanization and social upheaval that marked the final years of the Russian Empire. Placing musical techniques into this predetermined mould thus does violence to the intentions of its creators, a


\textsuperscript{75} This assumption underpins much recent scholarship in both historical musicology and ethnomusicology; however, historians have been slow to turn to the study of music as a source of historical information.

\textsuperscript{76} In Marietta Shaginian’s words, “In the circle in which I was born and raised. . . we considered music an essential part of all culture.” Marietta Shaginian, “Vospominaniia o S. V. Rakhmaninove,” in \textit{Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove} 2, ed. by Z. Apetian (Moscow: Muzyka, 1974), 94-164, here 94.

\textsuperscript{77} This assumption is a central cause of the relative dearth of theoretical study of the music of Sergei Rachmaninoff. For an example of this “progressive” approach to music, see Robert P. Morgan, \textit{Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America} (New York: Norton, 1991).
central problem to any study that claims historical accuracy.

Finally, I seek to broaden the study of musical phenomena beyond the familiar realm of nationalism. The role of music in constructing national identity, both in Russia and elsewhere, has been well documented in scholarship.⁷⁸ In his pioneering research, James Loeffler has demonstrated the troubled relationship between nationalist sentiment and the Imperial reality that confronted Jewish residents of the Russian Empire.⁷⁹ Drawing on his work, together with that of other scholars of Habsburg and Russian Empires, I seek to continue to refine our image of “Russian” (ruskii) music within an “Imperial” (rossiiskii) space through placing this growing nationalist discourse into the complex environment of the multi-ethnic empire from which it sprang. By investigating the changing status of figures like Nikolai Medtner, a native Muscovite with Baltic German heritage, I complicate the image of a growing nationalist discourse by examining conflicting concepts of “Russianness” (and its correspondent antithesis “Germanness”) in musical creations.

Chapter Breakdown

The dissertation opens with a general overview of the social institutions through which members of Russia’s educated society sought to enact music’s unifying power after the 1905 Revolution, focusing particularly upon a number of newly founded music journals and the 1906 creation of the Peoples’ Conservatory (Narodnaia konservatoriia). Despite the explicit objective of bringing musical education to the masses, I demonstrate

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that classical musical education never reached the common people, remaining instead the terrain of Russia’s educated urban population. Even in their explicit attempts to reach out to the lower echelons of society, Nietzsche’s orphans remained fundamentally disconnected from the reality of the lives of workers and peasants. After examining the broader development of musical society, I turn to a study of the intellectual foundations of musical life in late Imperial Russia in Chapter Two. Focusing upon central concepts in the development of a uniquely musical worldview (music, life-transformation, theurgy, unity, genius, nation), I examine the entwining of Nietzsche’s Dionysian image of music with the Russian intellectual tradition. Drawing upon both Nietzsche and the Christian-based worldview of Solov’ev, Nietzsche’s orphans struggled to reconcile an amoral view of reality with a deeply felt sense of religious purpose. This combination, uneasy from the outset, gave rise to a shared longing for the appearance of a musical “messiah” or “Orpheus” who would reunite divided society into a single whole and who would speak with a distinctively Russian voice. In Chapter Three, I turn to three lesser-known Russian composers, philosophers and journalists (Konstantin Eiges, Aleksandr Koptiaev, Vladimir Rebikov) to explore how the ideas of unity, creativity, genius and Russian identity were translated into specifically musical terms at this time.

From broad social and cultural trends, I turn to detailed analysis of the individual creative careers of three of Moscow’s most admired composers: Aleksandr Scriabin (1872-1915), Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951) and Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943). Chapters Four and Five examine Scriabin’s claims to be the contemporary Messiah; Chapter Six explores Nikolai Medtner’s vision of a unified synthesis of German and Russian cultural traditions; Chapter Seven investigates Sergei Rachmaninoff’s espousal
of a growing connection between Russian folk music, national identity and the Orthodox religion. Despite markedly different compositional styles, each man responded creatively to the shared search for unity that emerged within Russian society as a whole. Each style was given broader historical import by contemporaries, who interpreted musical expression within a conceptual framework built upon ideas of progress, nationalism and tradition: ideas that were themselves central to debates about Russia’s role within the European and world community in the modern age.

After examining the development of each man’s place in Russian culture of the time, the final chapters of the dissertation analyze the disintegration and ultimate collapse of musical metaphysics in Russia. While the outbreak of war in 1914 initially seemed to offer the perfect apocalyptic moment in which a musical Messiah might finally transform the world, realities of political, social and economic upheaval doomed this idealistic worldview: while increasing nationalist tensions served to alienate Nikolai Medtner and Sergei Rachmaninoff from their potentially Orphic roles for Russian society, Aleksandr Scriabin’s sudden death in April 1915 came to be interpreted as a sign of the spiritual defeat of Russia itself.

The dismal fate of those members of educated Russian society (obshchestvennost’) who survived the upheavals of revolution and war demonstrated disenchanted with the musical metaphysics they had once espoused. While certain aspects of social music-making continued into the early Soviet era in modified form, the philosophical underpinning that had once supported it was increasingly recognized as a dream, born in the upper echelons of society and disconnected from the narod it had sought to reunite. The dissertation closes by briefly over-viewing the post-revolutionary
ferment of musical metaphysics. I argue that, rather than being a symbol of a future, transformed society, music became a space of memory, a symbol of a lost world.
CHAPTER ONE: MUSIC AND SOCIETY IN REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA

The time of music and musicians has come. . .

[You] must experience (oshchushchat’) every gulp of air in your belly,
You must know everything yourself,
You must feel and learn everything for yourself.¹

In 1913, Ivan Mikhailovich Abramushkin sought to convince the Russian State Duma that “music is one of the mightiest means of acting on education (vospitanie), the development of feelings and character formation.”² In the eyes of this vocal teacher from the town of Aleksandria, the particular value of choral singing was its ability to “discipline” participants, to “train them in the ability to control themselves.” From the experience of choral song, “a shared task emerges, a friendship, that combines (slivat’) the will of every separate person into a single collective will.”³ This unifying vision of music compelled him to ask the Duma to require that all elementary (nachal’nyi) school teachers receive sufficient training to be able to teach singing. By bringing students together into a common chorus, he envisioned a means through which contemporary social divisions might be overcome. N. Ianchuk agreed with this role for music in an article for the journal Muzyka i zhizn’: “music is one of the highest cultural strengths, carrying humanity to moral perfection, to that moral harmony of humanity which lies at the base of music itself.”⁴ In a word, music was sobornost’: unity in multiplicity.

Many commentators in Revolutionary Russia developed the notion that music’s moral and unifying powers could save their country from the accursed problems of the modern age: social disintegration, cultural decadence, and despair. The immediate

² Ivan Abramushkin to Nikolai Findeizen (January 11, 1913), RNB f.816, op.1, ed.khr.155, l.7.
³ RNB f.816, op.1, ed.khr.155, l.8. Abramushkin included a quote from Nietzsche to underline his point: “In dance and song, Nietzsche says, a person expresses himself as a member of the highest universality (vseobshchnost’ ).”
⁴ N. Ianchuk, “Muzyka i zhizn’,” Muzyka i zhizn’ no. 1 (February 10, 1908): 2-5.
experience (perezhivanie) of music was imagined as a means to transform ongoing unrest and dissent among the narod into community, reshaping individual and social identities and providing a new basis upon which to build. This optimistic vision coexisted with anxiety about the “popular” music enjoyed by the lower classes, particularly chansons, chastushki and other forms of aural “pollution” from urban centers, which were said to promote dissolution and decadence, rather than a correct moral lifestyle. The need to control music, with all of its persuasive power, grew ever more pressing amid a burgeoning public sphere, whose opportunities for every manner of musical expression multiplied by the year. Contemporary discussions of music could never escape this conjunction of optimism and fear. This was the social and institutional milieu of Nietzsche’s orphans.

Print media (both text and music), concert life and education were the three pillars upon which musical metaphysics were developed, expressed and spread throughout the Empire. By the early twentieth century, a unified musical community was forming throughout Imperial Russia, built upon the institutional foundation of the Imperial Russian Music Society (IRMO) but developing a greater range of activity after government censorship eased in 1905. While this community established closer contact with the provinces, it was nevertheless centered in urban centers such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Recent scholarship has explored the emergence of an Empire-wide musical

community (allowing musicians ever greater opportunities to claim specialist status), but this is only part of the story. Internal divisions between specialists in the urban centers of European Russia and musicians in the provinces, harsh disputes even within these urban centers, rising interest in local and ethnic music traditions and the proliferation of non-State performance and educational opportunities gave rise to an increasingly polyphonic musical community across European Russia. While later chapters deal extensively with those composers (claimants to the lyre of Orpheus) who helped to produce contemporary musical discourse, this chapter addresses the thorny question of public reception: who were the audience members for this semi-mystical musical worldview? Who were the journalists who promoted their own ideas about (and interpretations of) music? Who were the educators who sought to spread their vision of music throughout the Empire? Who, in short, were Nietzsche’s orphans, and how did they envision their place in society?

To answer these questions, this chapter first describes the three institutional pillars of musical metaphysics (concert life, print media, education), and then closely analyzes the discourse surrounding two of the central binaries which musical metaphysics promised to overcome: consonance and dissonance (linked metaphorically to the place of the individual in the emerging modern world) and the division between educated society and the narod. Nietzsche’s orphans believed that music could overcome every potentially disunifying force in modern life; but in practice they failed even to agree upon which of these forces truly constituted the central problem of the age. This is vividly illustrated in the chapter’s final section, which showcases the Peoples’ Conservatory (Narodnaia

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8 On the growth of a Jewish musical identity in the Russian Empire in these years, see James Loeffler, *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the late Russian Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
Konservatoriia), an educational institution that became a testing ground for every Orphic hope and failure.

**The Three Pillars of Musical Metaphysics**

Though music was envisioned as a unifying force throughout the Empire, its potency depended upon the experience of local performance. Only in the realm of concert life could one experience (perezhivat’) the moods (nastroeniiia), emotions (chuvstva) and sensations (oshchushcheniia) that music was intended to express. In nineteenth-century Russia, state control over musical performances had hindered the development of concert life; state preference for opera had discouraged other forms of public performance except during the annual Lenten period, when opera itself was prohibited.⁹ A look at Moscow offers a case example of the dazzling array of concert opportunities made possible by the lifting of state restrictions by 1905. Here performances were arranged by a wide range of groups, including the IRMO, the Circle of Lovers of Russian Music (Kruzhok liubitelei russkoi muzyki, also known as the Kerzinskii Circle in honor of its founder), the Evenings of Foreign Music (Vechera inostrannoi muzyki), the Historical Symphonic Concerts (Istoricheskie simfonicheskie kontserty), the Evenings of Contemporary Music (Vechera sovremennoi muzyki), the Quartet Gatherings (Kvartetnye sobraniia) and the Evenings of the Symphonic Capella (Vechera simfonicheskoi kapelly), which focused on performances of music from the XV-XVII centuries.¹⁰ Performing spaces included the Great and Small Halls of the Moscow Conservatory, the Great and Small Halls of the

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⁹ For an overview of the control of concert life in Imperial Russia, see Sargeant, *Harmony and Discord*, 22-52.

Noble Assembly and the Hall of the Synodal School. More popular locations also began hosting musical concerts, including the Sokol’nicheskii Pavilion and the Pavilion of the Zoological Gardens. From 1909 onward, the city of Moscow itself took over the responsibility of organizing the Sokol’nicheskii concerts, with the express purpose of providing affordable, “cultured” entertainment to the middling social strata of Moscow.

Private concerts or salons were also hosted by individuals and institutional groups. The Society for Free Aesthetics in Moscow presented concerts by contemporary French and Russian composers at five out of a total of seventeen meetings held in 1910-1911. By the early twentieth century, Moscow offered a wealth of concert venues for its citizens ranging in price from 5 kopecks to 6 rubles, with an average range of 20 kopecks to 3 rubles. Organized musical performances were more accessible and available than ever before.

Concert activity in the provinces also grew exponentially, including performances by local artists as well as tours by orchestral groups and well-known soloists. The conductor and impresario Sergei Kusevitskii took his entire orchestra on a number of concert tours along the Volga River, stopping in such locations as Rybinskaia, Iaroslavl, Kostroma, Nizhnyi Novgorod, Kazan, Simbirsk, Samara, Saratov, Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan. Each Kusevitzkii performance featured a mix of compositions from the German and Russian schools, including Haydn, Beethoven, Schumann, Weber and Wagner, as well as Chaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Liadov,

12 TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed.khr.2798
14 5 kopecks was the stated amount for a ticket to a concert in Sokolnicheskii pavilion in 1909. See TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed.khr.2798, l.1.
15 RGALI f.727, op.1, ed.khr.38.
Glazunov, Scriabin, Stravinskii and Arensky. French music was represented only once: a lone piece from Debussy’s *L’enfant prodigue*.\(^{16}\) Orphic composer-musicians such as Rachmaninoff, Scriabin and Medtner also made concert tours to the Russian provinces (in addition to Europe).\(^ {17}\) The sense of a unified musical community, built primarily upon Russian and Germanic traditions, was thus carried throughout the Empire. This sense of a shared community was further developed by the contemporary press, the second pillar of musical life.

Music, in all its forms, was a topic of heated discussion in the late Imperial Russian press. This interest predated the revolutionary events of 1905. By the mid-nineteenth century, columns devoted to musical criticism had appeared in daily newspapers as well as literary and philosophical journals. By the late-nineteenth century, several periodicals devoted specifically to music had emerged.\(^ {18}\) At the turn of the twentieth century, Symbolist journals such as *Vesy, Novyi put’* and *Zolotoe runo* took the lead in advancing a metaphysical approach to the interpretation of music.\(^ {19}\) Similarly, *Trudy i dni*, founded by the Symbolist publishing house *Musaget* and edited by Emil Medtner, offered a regular column on “Wagneriana”. This musical focus among Symbolist journals continued through 1917, with periodicals such as *Apollon* not only discussing new musical trends, but hosting concerts given by local musicians.\(^ {20}\) Symbolist publishers also printed speeches by leading representatives of the musical

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\(^ {16}\) RGALI f.727, op.1, ed.khr.38.

\(^ {17}\) Interest in their performances is evidenced by a wide range of concert reviews in local papers.

\(^ {18}\) The most important music publication predating the 1905 Revolution was *RMG*.

\(^ {19}\) Eiges’ philosophical discussion of music’s purpose (discussed in detail in Chapter Three) was part of this trend, appearing in *Zolotoe runo*.

\(^ {20}\) See for instance V. Karatygin, “*Muzyka v Peterburge,*** Apollon* no. 6 (March 1910), 14-20. For programs of concerts hosted by the Petrograd journal *Muzykal’nyi sovremennik*, see RGALI f.993, op.1, ed.khr.103.
Inspired by the lifting of government censorship in the aftermath of 1905, new periodicals devoted specifically to music were founded in urban centers throughout the Russian Empire. While Russkaia muzikal’naia gazeta (St. Petersburg, 1894-1918) had striven to offer well rounded and balanced coverage of all types of music, these new journals generally targeted far more specific topic areas, ranging from the study of Orthodox chant or Russian folk song to contemporary trends in art music. Muzykal’nyi truzhenik (Moscow, 1906-1910) and its later incarnation Orkestr (1910-1912) sought to represent the interests of the average orchestral musician. Muzyka (Moscow, 1910-1916) and Muzykal’nyi sovremennik (Petrograd, 1915-1917) emerged as champions of new music. Muzyka i zhizn’ (Moscow, 1908-1912) approached music from a populist viewpoint. Finally Tserkovnoe penie (Kiev, 1909; renamed Staroobriadcheskaia mys’l, 1910-1916) sought to reinvigorate the Orthodox znamennyi chant tradition. Music and literary periodical editors had a growing interest in publishing correspondence from distant and provincial towns, fostering the interconnectedness of a musical community centered in European Russia’s urban spaces but also extending the conversation throughout the Empire. RMG, headquartered in St. Petersburg, employed two correspondents in Moscow and another in Kiev to provide regular accounts of local

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21 See for instance N. A. Briusova, Vremennoe i prostranstvennoe stroenie formy (Moscow: Skorpion, 1911). The original speech was given in Moscow on February 1, 1911.
22 These included Muzyka, Muzykal’nyi truzhenik, Orkestr, Muzyka i zhizn’, Muzykal’nyi sovremennik, Iuzhnyi muzikal’nyi vestnik, Tserkovnoe penie, and Baian.
23 RMG was edited by Nikolai Findeizen. For more on this paper, see M.L. Kosmovskaia, ed., N.F. Findeizen, Dnevnik 1892-1901 (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2004). Findeizen’s personal fond, including correspondence for RMG is housed in RNB f.816.
24 This dissertation is based on careful analysis of the following journals and papers: RMG, Muzyka i zhizn’, Muzyka, Iuzhnyi muzikal’nyi vestnik, Muzykal’nyi truzhenik, Orkestr, Muzykal’nyi sovremennik.
musical life.\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Apollon}, published in St. Petersburg, included regular articles on musical life in Moscow, Kiev, and St. Petersburg.\textsuperscript{26} Smaller urban centers were also given printed space for periodic descriptions of the local music scene.\textsuperscript{27}

Despite the wide range of journals and newspapers that published articles dealing with music, the vast majority of contributions were written by a relatively small group of authors.\textsuperscript{28} Many contributors to music journals also served as musical correspondents for conventional newspapers and literary journals. Leonid Sabaneev, a regular contributor to \textit{Muzyka}, also wrote musical commentaries for such papers as \textit{Golos Moskvy} and \textit{Rech’}. Vladimir Derzhanovskii, editor of \textit{Muzyka}, composed music criticism under the pseudonyms “Florestan” and “Arkel’” for the newspapers \textit{Utro} and \textit{Utro Rossii}. The particularly prominent St. Petersburg critic V. Karatygin wrote for papers ranging from the Symbolist journals \textit{Zolotoe runo} and \textit{Apollon} to the specifically musical publications \textit{RMG} and \textit{Muzykal’nyi sovremennik}. While composing for Symbolist journals \textit{Pereval’} and \textit{Zolotoe runo}, Boris Popov published commentaries in St. Petersburg’s \textit{RMG} and Moscow’s \textit{Muzyka}.\textsuperscript{29} The regular \textit{RMG} correspondent G. Prokof’ev submitted articles to \textit{Moskovskyi ezhenedel’nik} and \textit{Russkie vedomosti}. Because music critics were relatively small in number, a given journal’s overall political slant seldom corresponded to the

\textsuperscript{25} Most of the correspondence between \textit{RMG}’s editor, Nikolai Findeizen, and contributors to the newspaper is preserved in RNB f.816 (N. Findeizen).
\textsuperscript{26} Penned respectively by Vladimir Derzhanovskii (Moscow); Boris Ianovskii, Mnishek (Kiev); V. Karatygin, A.N. (St. Petersburg).
\textsuperscript{27} Boris Popov, after numerous unsuccessful attempts to serve as \textit{RMG}’s Moscow musical correspondent found his niche in providing accounts of local musical life in his hometown of Perm’. See RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1722. Similarly, V. Derzhanovskii began his journalistic career by submitting reviews to the Tiflis paper, after which he worked as the Tiflis correspondent for \textit{RMG} prior to moving to Moscow. See RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1344.
\textsuperscript{28} Sabaneev estimated that the prerevolutionary “musical world” of Russia did not exceed 10,000 individuals. This estimate was based primarily on the Moscow and St. Petersburg spheres. See Sabaneev, “Staryi Russkii muzykal’nyi mir” in \textit{Vospominaniia o Rossii} (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2005): 101-105.
\textsuperscript{29} In Popov’s case, this was a long process. See “Eolovy arfy,” \textit{Muzyka} no. 178 (April 19, 1914): 326-329.
political or social viewpoints espoused by a contributing critic. Nonetheless, music offered a means of social engagement in the contemporary world, one that bypassed the divisiveness of party politics. A shared commitment to the importance of music rather than official political views served to bring individuals together, creating an aesthetic public that consisted of diverse social and political leanings.

Discussions about music in the contemporary press were not limited to musical specialists. Following the tradition of the legendary Vladimir Stasov, most music critics had a strong educational background in the humanities or sciences in addition to extensive musical training. Leonid Sabaneev, one of the leading music critics of the day, was a mathematician as well as a musician. Refused admittance to the Moscow Conservatory in 1885, Vladimir Rebikov enrolled in Moscow University’s philological faculty, where he pursued a general education in philosophy, aesthetics and literature. Iulii Engel’ completed his degree in the Law Faculty at Kharkov University. Non-musicians also regularly contributed articles to music journals. Boris Schloezer had a background in philosophy rather than music, but emerged as one of Aleksandr Scriabin’s greatest proponents. Viacheslav Ivanov, a leading figure among the younger Symbolists, offered public lectures on contemporary composers. Regardless of professional credentials, everyone seemed to feel the ability and need to comment on music.

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30 BAR, Sabaneev Collection Box 1, “Zhurnalizm i rabota v gazetakh,” ll.1-2.
31 Some key members of this group included Viacheslav Karatygin, Evgenii Gunst, Leonid Sabaneev, Emil Medtner, Boris Popov, Ivan Lipaev, Vladimir Derzhanovskii, Grigorii Prokof’ev and Nadezhda Briusova. Sergei Taneev found Rebikov’s compositions too dissonant to admit him to the Moscow Conservatory. Rebikov never again sought musical training in Russia. See O. M. Tompakova, Vladimir Ivanovich Rebikov: Ocherki zhizni i tvorchestva (Moscow: Muzyka, 1989), 8. In a similar vein, Boris Asaf’ev, who would emerge as one of the central musical critics in the Soviet period, approached his study of music from a background in the humanities.
33 V. Ivanov, “Churlianis i problema sinteza iskusstv,” Apollon no. 4 (April 1914). The original draft is preserved in IRLI f.607, no.186. Ivanov’s public lectures on Aleksandr Scriabin are discussed in Chapter Nine.
Personal connections, a common belief that all of the arts shared an underlying interconnectedness and a sense of ethical mission spurred on this combination of specialists and amateur music lovers. In the 1909-1910 proceedings of the Society for Free Aesthetics (Obshchestvo svobodnoi estetiki) in Moscow, four of the thirteen meetings were devoted, in whole or in part, to musical performances or papers. These included a November 11, 1909 paper delivered by Nadezhda Briusova (sister of Symbolist poet Valerii Briusov) devoted to “the science of music, its historical path and present state,” and a February 10, 1910 concert in which Vladimir Rebikov performed his own works.  

The list of members from 1910-1911 tells the same story: prominent musicians, writers and visual artists interacted together on a regular basis. While the symbolist connections of composers Aleksandr Scriabin and Nikolai Medtner are well known, it is clear that engagement within a shared social space was a common experience for intellectuals from a wide range of fields. In her study of Sergei Bulgakov’s place in Russian Silver Age culture, Catherine Evtuhov has argued that, in order to “transcend the narrow definition of the Silver Age as an exclusively artistic and literary phenomenon, we must see these diverse currents in their interconnection.”

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36 RGALI f.464, op.2, ed.khr.9. See also RGALI f.1463, op.1, ed.khr.9, l.67-70.
38 Catherine Evtuhov, The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 10. Evtuhov argues that the separate identity of the Russian intelligentsia dissolved after 1907 (Evtuhov, 13). The fluid nature of this group is apparent in musical circles also. Despite the efforts of the IRMO to raise music from an amateur to a professional realm, the years after 1905 show, if anything, an increased interest from educated musical amateurs in discussing music's place in society.
examination of musical society in the Russian Empire, we similarly achieve a fuller understanding of the interrelationship between artistic, intellectual and social realms that the category of “professionalization” does not sufficiently capture. Social categories in late Imperial Russia were in constant flux, a fact that extends to musical society. 39

In music publishing, there was also collaboration between publishers and visual artists, who were often contracted to provide cover page designs. Ivan Bilibin, one of the regular cover designers for the Russian publishing house Jurgenson, was better known for his illustrations for Russian fairy tales. 40 The publishing world strengthened Russia’s connection with Western Europe also. In the early years of the twentieth century, Russian music publishers (including Jurgenson and Gutheil) relied on production centers in Germany so that Russian compositions would fall under European copyright law.

[Illustration A.1] Regular travel to Europe exposed Russian musical society to Western cultural life, encouraging intellectual synthesis rather than nationalist divisiveness. Music and musical discourse thus formed the heart of a public sphere which was conscious of broader social and cultural questions. Whilst encouraging RMG to commemorate the birthday of Lev Tolstoi in 1908, the Moscow music critic Grigorii Prokof’ev offered to pen an article on the relationship between music and Tolstoi’s philosophical ideas. 41 In founding the “Friends of Music Society” on April 25, 1909, Nikolai Findeizen declared that the group’s goal should be to unite professionals and amateurs into a single group for

39 Elise Kimerling Wirtshafter, Social Identity in Imperial Russia (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997); Edith Clowes et al, Between Tsar and People.
40 Viktor Kholodkov, “The Art of Music Cover Design,” The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, 11, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 68-91, here 73. Mstislav Dobujinsky, Evgenii Lanceray, Georgii Lukomsky, Kazimir Malevich, Aristarkh Lentulov and Grigorii Pozhidaev were also active in this realm. Music covers from this time also often borrowed illustrations from such journals as Apollon, Zolotoe runo, and Mir iskusstva. See ibid., 74-77.
41 Grigorii Prokof’ev to Nikolai Findeizen (June 21, 1908), RNB f.816, op.2, no.1749, l.11.
the discussion of music in contemporary life.\textsuperscript{42} Education was key to fostering discussion: the third pillar of musical metaphysics in late Imperial Russia.

Thanks to the educational efforts of the IRMO, more musicians emerged from the Russian provinces by the early twentieth century than previously; nevertheless, their formative training generally occurred in either Moscow or St. Petersburg. After coming to Moscow and attending the Moscow Philharmonic School (1895-1902), A. Maslov later edited \textit{Muzyka i zhizn’}.\textsuperscript{43} Building on his early musical education in his hometown of Tbilisi, Derzhanovskii attended the Moscow Conservatory between 1902 and 1903. Iulii Engel’ moved from Kharkov to enter the Moscow Conservatory in 1893.\textsuperscript{44}

In her examination of IRMO records, Lynn Sargeant has shown that music students tended to come from reasonably privileged family backgrounds. Moreover, the choice of instruments also varied according to family background: those with a higher social status were more interested in studying voice, piano and violin rather than orchestral instruments.\textsuperscript{45} The most notable institutions offering advanced musical education in Moscow after 1905, the Moscow Conservatory and the Musical Dramatic School of the Moscow Philharmonic Society, follow the same general pattern. In 1904, the students enrolled in the piano class at the Moscow Conservatory included 20

\textsuperscript{42} RNB f.816, op.1, ed.khr.213. As of April 26, 1909 there were 91 members. See RNB f.816, op.1, ed.khr.214.
\textsuperscript{43} Maslov (1876-1914) majored in both trombone and music theory during his studies. He was also secretary of the Musical Ethnographical Commission. See I. Sviridova, “Fol’kloristicheskie trudy A.L. Maslova,” \textit{Iz istorii russkoj muzykal’noj kul’tury: pamiatiAleksia Ivanovicha Kandinskogo}, Moscow: Moskovskaya gostudarstvennaia konservatoriia, 2002, 207. In 1900 he joined both the Ethnographic Society for Lovers of Natural Science, Anthropology and Ethnography and the newly formed Musical Ethnographic Commission. Maslov also co-edited \textit{Muzyka i zhizn’} with D. I. Arakchiev
\textsuperscript{45} Or those who at least aspired to belong to the middling groups of Russian society. See Lynn Sargeant, “A New Class of People,” 42, 49-51. Music also served as a means through which Jews sought upward social mobility within the Russian Empire. See James Loeffler, \textit{The Most Musical Nation}, 10, 18, 43-45, 95, 100.
meshchanin, 23 kuptsy, 8 nobles and only 4 peasants.\textsuperscript{46} The majority of students enrolled in the Musical Dramatic School between 1907 and 1916 cited meshchanin origins.\textsuperscript{47} At the same time, the number of students enrolled in musical institutions continued to rise consistently throughout the final years of the Russian Empire. From a class of 160 piano students in 1907-1908, the enrollment at the Musical Dramatic School rose to 342 in 1915-1916.\textsuperscript{48} Similarly, the class of violinists in 1907-08 numbered 30 students, while by 1915-1916, 66 students had enrolled. Graduates from such institutions served as music teachers in schools across Russia, as well as offering private instruction in both large and small urban centers.\textsuperscript{49} New music conservatories, schools and classes were founded at an even faster rate after 1906 than in the preceding forty-five years.\textsuperscript{50} Urban musical education was reaching into the provinces ever more visibly.

Gender divisions among practicing musicians demonstrate a striking paradox. Girls’ schools like the Catherine Institute offered musical education to their students, focusing extensively on piano and voice, a trend that continued in more advanced institutions: a disproportionate number of women were recorded in piano and voice classes at the Moscow Philharmonic School, while orchestral instruments and music theory/composition classes were dominated by males. For this reason, musical circles

\textsuperscript{46} RGALI f.2099, op.1, ed.khr.239.
\textsuperscript{47} RGALI f.2098, op.1, ed.khr.3.
\textsuperscript{48} RGALI f.2098, op.1, ed.khr.3.
\textsuperscript{49} Music classes were offered as part of the educational curriculum in the Catherine institute and other schools. See V. I. Adishchev, Muzykal’noe obrazovanie v zhenskikh institutakh i kadetskikh korpusakh Rossii. Vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX veka. (Moscow: Muzyka, 2007). These lessons were generally taught by students or graduates of the Moscow Conservatory, including Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Medtner.
\textsuperscript{50} According to statistical analysis offered by Lynn Sargeant, “Summary statistics on the [RMO] society between 1906 and 1914 indicate approximately fifty-six [RMO] branches, five conservatories, twenty-two provincial schools, and nineteen music classes.” Before 1906, the RMO had sponsored two conservatories and fifteen provincial music schools, and eleven provincial music classes. See Sargeant, “A New Class of People,” 45. The original statistics appear in TsGIA f.361, op.11, d.618, ll. 58-9 and 60-1; TsGIA SPb, f.408, op.1, d.538, ll.316-23 and 331-38. The additional three conservatories (after St. Petersburg and Moscow) were founded in Saratov, Kiev and Odessa.
incorporated a statistically larger number of female admirers and dilettantes, but few performers and no composers. The few female performers that appeared were almost exclusively pianists and singers.\footnote{Lynn Sargeant, “A New Class of People,” 48-54. Sargeant concludes that music was a field in which the battle for gender equality was waged. While some women did make independent careers as teachers and performers, it was nevertheless within a society in which “creativity” was generally defined as a masculine attribute.} Women might serve as an inspiration to creativity, but it was generally accepted that they themselves did not carry the creative spark. This idea seems to have been internalized by many women. The amateur pianist Olga Puni expressed many of these stereotypes in a 1921 letter to Sergei Rachmaninoff, claiming that she could not bear female pianists because they had “too little individuality,” “too developed an imitative ability” and “too little physical strength” to control a piano.\footnote{Olga Puni to Sergei Rachmaninoff (October 15, 1920); (January 12, [1921]), LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.} Orpheus, it seemed, could only be a male. Despite this, instrument-sellers specifically featured the image of a female pianist to advertise their wares in the pre-revolutionary press. Musical society was thus suffused with an obvious contradiction: though women were overrepresented among educated musicians and audience members, their role in public musical life was consistently downplayed. Contemporary advertisements highlighted this contradiction: Muzyka, a journal aimed at individuals striving to align themselves with the upper echelons of musical society ran inserts depicting a lone grand piano for sale. In contrast, general newspapers seeking to appeal to musical dilettantes favored the image of a female pianist, occasionally emphasizing the fact that their instrument was in fact a player piano, able to sound lovely regardless of who sat at the keyboard. [Illustration A.2]

In the mid to late nineteenth century, the establishment of musical education and
concert life had depended upon patronage from the Russian nobility and Imperial family. By the early twentieth century, rich merchants had largely taken on a role as financiers for musical endeavors. Savva Mamontov founded his own private opera company, employing the young talents of Fedor Chaliapin and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Timber magnate Mitrofan Beliaev established his own publishing house devoted exclusively to new Russian music, created the Glinka prize for new Russian compositions and gave Aleksandr Scriabin the financial means to devote himself entirely to musical composition. Margarita Morozova, widow of the wealthy Moscow merchant Mikhael Morozov, granted extensive financial support to Scriabin and Nikolai Medtner and opened her home to private concerts. Sergei Kusevitskii, himself a talented Moscow conductor and double-bassist, used his wife’s financial fortune to establish a private orchestra and the Russian Music Publishing House (Russkoe muzykal’noe izdatelstvo).

In contrast to the outlook of Imperial and noble patrons, the new financiers tended to emphasize the development of what might be considered ethnically Russian music. One of the driving forces behind Kusevitskii’s desire to found a publishing house was his sense that genuinely “Russian” music was not sufficiently available to musicians. The

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53 The relationship between the Imperial family and musical institutions is a central theme in Lynn Sargeant, *Harmony and Discord*.
54 For a recent study of Mamontov’s opera, see Olga Haldey, *Mamontov’s Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
55 For more on Beliaev’s role in late Imperial Russian musical life, see *Pamiati Mitrofana Petrovicha Beliaeva: sbornik ocherkov, statei i vospominanii* (Paris: Izdanie popechitel’nogo soveta dlia pooshreniya russkikh kompozitorov i muzykantov, 1929).
56 Margarita Morozova was also instrumental in funding the journals *Put’* (the result of the Moscow Religious-Philosophical Society, founded 1905, whose goal was “the philosophical rediscovery of Eastern Orthodoxy and of its applicability in the contemporary world”) and *Logos*, committed to the neo-Kantian tradition. *Logos* was published by *Musaget*, a Symbolist publishing house under the editorial direction of Emil Medtner. Representatives from both philosophical camps met at the Solov’ev Society gatherings, also hosted by Morozova. See Michael A. Meerson, “*Put’* against *Logos*: The Critique of Kant and Neo-Kantianism by Russian Religious Philosophers in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Studies in East European Thought* 37, no. 3/4 (December 1995): 225-243, here 226-227.
leading contemporary Russian music publishers Jurgenson and Gutheil published primarily Western European musical works. Mitrofan Beliaev, though devoted to publishing Russian music, offered lavish prints that were well outside the price range of many musicians. To capture the appeal to the Russian narod and accessibility Kusevitskii envisioned, the logo chosen for the Russian Music Publishing House was a musician-poet strumming a Russian gusli. [Illustration A.3] Score design was also simpler and more reasonably priced than Beliaev’s music. Kusevitskii’s claim for “accessibility” did not necessarily play out in life (for many years, he was the primary publisher of the arch-modernist Scriabin), but his emphasis on “Russian” music mirrored the growing nationalist mood of musical life.

Together with a growing number of professional and semi-professional musicians, a broader social group of educated Russians shaped discussions and debates about music’s significance in the modern age, thereby aiding in the construction of musical metaphysics. The intellectual realm of Nietzsche’s orphans was created through interactions between small groups of educated elites, both musical and non-musical, connected by personal ties and a shared educational background. They believed that music, through its focus on mood, emotion and experience rather than human reason, could provide a bridge from the contemporary world to a new one. Anxiety about the modern age, together with their mistrust of the common people (narod) shaped the direction that discourse about music followed. Widespread interest in questions of historical progress (embodied in musical consonance) and social unity (symbolized by

58 Jurgenson had close ties to the IRMO and was therefore associated in the minds of many with Imperial control over musical life. See Muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo P. Iuergensona v Moskve, 1861-1911 (Moscow: Iurgenson, 1911); Sargeant, Harmony and Discord.
59 Evtuhov similarly argues that the intelligentsia as a whole became more open and diverse at this time. See Evtuhov, The Cross and the Sickle, 8-9.
choral song) dominated conversation, shaping both musical composition and reception.

**Dissonant Binaries**

Across the geographical divides in European Russia, educated society discussed and performed music’s place within the modern world. Conceptualizations of both historical “progress” and social unity focused on internal/spiritual, rather than external/physical reality and expressed a deep-seated anxiety about contemporary life. Through its direct appeal to mood, emotion and experience rather than human reason, music was often seen as a means through which to escape from the existing world of chaos and uncertainty to a new one. For those uneasy with the apparent growth of individualism and materialism in modern life, music was envisioned as a space of spiritual and psychological progress, as well as greater societal unity.

The concept of human progress was widespread in late Imperial Russia: all humanity was envisioned along a historical time-line, with each generation surpassing the achievements of the former, both technologically and spiritually. It was the task of contemporary composers to respond to the new ideas and psychological interests of modern society, thereby helping in the creation of the “new, complete man”. 60 Music, it was believed, could express the higher spiritual and emotional forms from which a future, more advanced humanity would evolve. For this reason it was claimed that “the musical creation of our days is inspired above all with the consciousness that music is the spiritual (dushevnyi) life of a person.” 61 Historical progress in music was intimately concerned with the development of the human soul or psyche. The modern human psyche had been fractured by a dualist division that split human experience into rational thought and

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60 I. Knorozovskii, “Muzykal’nye zanetki,” Teatr i iskusstvo no. 11 (1909): 210-211.
irrational emotion. To create a more perfect humanity, emotions, feelings, and experience had to play a role in overcoming this division. Music, the quintessential language of emotion, “opens before us a realistic picture of the feelings (чувствования) of the new future man (новый будущий человек) and accustoms us, amid the prosaic conditions of contemporary life, to the spiritual life of the future.”62 Through its ability to express the emotional side of the human psyche, music gained the potential to overcome the dualist split in each individual soul and thereby usher in a new stage in world history.

In this musical evocation of human spiritual progress, the concept of “dissonance” permeated the modern human condition. Music critics Leonid Sabaneev and Boris Schloezer both emphasized that the increasing use of dissonant chords in contemporary music embodied the evolution of humanity’s increasingly complex soul (душа) or psyche.63 For Sabaneev, musical dissonance expressed the modern “shift in psychological center” occurring throughout Western culture.64 A chord’s “consonance” or “dissonance” could not be defined objectively; only the listener could determine whether a chord needed or did not need resolution. This alternation of tension (dissonance) and resolution (consonance) was connected with the depiction of psychological moods (настроение) or states of being. As humans evolved, new sounds were required to depict new states of being that had not existed for previous generations. In addition, Sabaneev argued,

62 Evgenii Braudo, “Музыка посля Вагнера,” 54. Braudo raised the issue of the emphasis on “internal” emotions in Germany and the lack of connection with the народ. See also Aleksandr Koptiaev, “Композитор-рабочий,” 8. Similar interpretations were offered of the impact of the actress Vera Komnissarzhevskiaia, who expressed the “new moods” of “modern life”. See Mark Steinberg, “Melancholy and Modernity: Emotions and Social Life in Russia Between the Revolutions,” Journal of Social History 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 813-841, here 818.
63 Sabaneev’s theories on musical dissonance appeared in Музыка and Музыкальный современник, while Schloezer’s were published in Apollon.
64 L. Sabaneev, “Эволюция гармонического соцерства,” Музыкальный современник no. 2 (1915): 18-30. L. Sabaneev used the term “psychological” dissonance in “К вопросу об акустических нововведениях гармонии Скрябина,” Музыка no. 16 (March 19, 1911): 369-370; ibid., Музыка no. 20 (April 16, 1911): 452-457. This was contrasted with the “acoustic” understanding of consonance, which Sabaneev argued was not relevant since it studied only stationary chords rather than the relationship between chords.
because human hearing had also evolved historically, chords that had once seemed
dissonant (thereby expressing heightened tension or a more agitated mood) seemed
harmonious to contemporary listeners. New musical means were required to express “old
moods” (nastroenie) that could no longer be effectively depicted with older musical
language.\(^{65}\) If a listener no longer recognized a sound combination as “dissonant”, that
sound was powerless to express the tension that the composer had originally intended.
New dissonant sounds had to be found to achieve similar psychological effects to what
had been accomplished by earlier music. As the human spirit grew ever more complex,
our conceptions of musical consonance and dissonance also evolved.

While agreeing with Sabaneev on the importance of dissonance, philosopher and
music critic Boris Schloezer offered a fundamentally different analysis of its meaning.
Dissonance, he claimed, was “becoming a goal in itself.”\(^{66}\) Just as earlier music knew no
other possibility than the shifting from consonance to dissonance and back, humanity had
known only two possibilities in its existence: either the endless cycle of striving to satisfy
desires (which would, after momentary fulfillment, only be replaced by new ones) or else
the denial of all desires and search for calm.\(^{67}\) Contemporary music, according to
Schloezer, embraced and expanded dissonance while minimizing consonance, thereby
expanding the process of change, striving and motion while minimizing moments of rest
or resolution. The fact that humans were able to find pleasure in this art suggested that a

\(^{65}\) For this reason Sabaneev argued that the works of Bach and Beethoven were increasingly foreign to

\(^{66}\) Boris Shletser, “Konsonans i dissonans,” 57. Schloezer explored the musical connection still further,
citing the changing nature of both cadences and rhythm. He argued that the plethora of uneven or tense
rhythms were now used to strengthen the impact of dissonant chords, while cadences had become ever
more extended and elaborate.

\(^{67}\) Boris Shletser, “Konsonans i dissonans,” 58. This is the same argument advanced by Schopenhauer.
“deep transformation has taken place in the human spirit over the last hundred years.”  

Process rather than achievement had become central. Lack of comprehension of new music derived from the fact that “psychological evolution moves forward very slowly, and at the same time as a small group of people, more or less consciously, develop in themselves different ideals of life, the vast majority have still not moved far beyond that level of development that they reached a hundred years ago.” In learning to appreciate new music, people would undergo a psychological assimilation and harmonization of these new developments of the human psyche. Modern humanity “does not need resolution of tension anymore, because we introduce (вносит’) harmony into tension itself, into movement and disorder, and we no longer search for another harmony in which this striving would be satisfied”. In short, the “deep rebirth of the human spirit” and embrace of process rather than goal had given rise to this victory of dissonance in music.

Despite their agreement over the symbolic importance of dissonance to modern humanity, Schloezer and Sabaneev offered fundamentally different interpretations over its philosophical import. For Sabaneev, former dissonances were now accepted as

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69 Schloezer disagreed with what he referred to as the “physiological” explanation of the resistance many listeners still showed to contemporary music, which claimed that audiences’ hearing was not yet developed enough to comprehend new consonant chords. In Schloezer’s view, if hearing was becoming sharper over time, this should have led people increasingly to hear dissonance in what they had previously considered consonance. In fact, he claimed, the opposite trend was apparent as the circle of consonances continued to expand and ever more dissonant chords became acceptable. This meant that in order to understand the complex beauty of modern music, it was not enough to develop one’s hearing; rather, it required “spiritual strength” to “step beyond normal consciousness in order to rise to the joy of free action.” If music used to “correspond to the ideal of normal consciousness, satisfying every striving and giving calm after excitement, it now contradic[ed] that idea, awakening in us only the play of desires, but never fulfillment.”

Boris Shletser, “Konsonans i dissonans,” 59-60.

70 Boris Shletser, “Konsonans i dissonans,” 59-60.

71 Boris Shletser. Schloezer’s conclusions about the nature of the modern human psyche were echoed by Nadezhda Briusova, who wrote in 1913: “the Will of human thoughts is expressed in one thing only – movement without a goal and without limit forward.” N. Briusova, “O ritmicheskikh formakh Skriabina,” RGALI f.2009, op.1, d.88, l.63. The idea of movement or “play” without an end goal was a trope that both Schloezer and Briusova found expressed in the music of A.N. Scriabin.
consonances, a development emblematic of humanity’s evolution to a higher level of comprehension. For Schloezer, dissonance remained dissonant; what had changed was humanity’s ability to accept dissonance on its own terms, which he equated with a Bergsonian embrace of the flux and change of the modern world. In hearing the same music, each man reached drastically different conclusions. Nevertheless, their shared emphasis on dissonance and human spiritual progress coincided with acceptance of modern music aesthetics: experimental harmonies, unusual scales and rhythms and abandonment of tonality were all connected with human spiritual evolution to a new level of existence. Those individuals who were sensitive to music were the forerunners of transformed humanity, which would introduce new “truths” and a transformed system of ethics upon which existence would be built. Music was a means through which to offer the experience of this new emotional state to a broader array of humanity. The internal conflict among Nietzsche’s orphans becomes even more evident among those who, while embracing music’s unifying and transformative role, rejected the modernist aesthetic itself.

One influential critic and musician who questioned the viability of modernist musical language was A. Maslov, editor of the journal Muzyka i zhizn’. In a 1906 letter to N. Findeizen, A. Maslov argued that the only true progress in music “has been closely connected with political revolution and with the renewal of the life of the narod. . . the successes of the agrarian workers’ revolution are also the successes of music.” For Maslov and others of similar mindset, music was fundamentally a means of popular engagement and social unification rather than spiritual progress. Its revolutionary message was not embedded in modern dissonances, but in its call for immediate social

72 Maslov to Findeizen (January 9, 1906), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1589, l.34.
change. *Muzyka i zhizn’*, devoted specifically to questions of Russian folk song and Orthodox church music, argued from its very inception for an approach that intimately connected music with social transformation: “The only thing that remains from old art is that which serves as the basis for new forms... the old art no longer acts on us as [as it once did] because it has lost its living connection with life, [which is] changing its forms.” Like Sabaneev, this author claimed that older musical forms no longer had the same effect on listeners that it had once had. Also like Sabaneev and Schloezer, music was viewed as the transformative force through which new emotions could be experienced by humanity, thereby laying the groundwork for developing new truths. The specific transformative task to which music was called differed, however. Here it was the overcoming of social divisions rather than individual spiritual development.

In Maslov’s view, modern music was confronted with an inescapable irony: it was destined to overcome the very social divisions within which it had developed. Music had evolved as part of the entertainment of the upper class, but must now be expanded in order to reach all people, regardless of socio-economic background. The “decline” that some people had commented upon in modern music sprang from the fact that it was distant from the needs and desires of society as a whole. In the past, art “was not divided into ‘low’ (*podlyi*) art and ‘high’ (*znatnyi*) art, but was all-national (*vsenarodnyi*) – even more than that, it was collective (*kollektivnyi*).” Modern music reflected the striving of one particular strata of society – the educated elite – but this division was something that must now be overcome. The “broad masses” had the same need for music as the wealthy

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74 N. Ianchuk, “Muzyka i zhizn’,” *Muzyka i zhizn’* no. 1 (February 10, 1908): 2-5.
(imushchye klassy).

Only through reuniting with the strivings of all society could music fulfill its proper role as an educational, civilizing and unifying force.

While such rhetoric shows the possible impact of Marxist theory, these interpretations of music nevertheless emphasized a philosophically idealist stance. Social divisions might be overcome through drawing upon collective human experiences and fusing them together into a greater whole. The inheritance of folk music, church song and the European classical tradition were equally emphasized as disparate parts of a greater whole. Contemporary composers were tasked to find a way to create new musical forms that no longer depended upon one particular tradition, but which fused the three together. The rejoining of these disparate heritages would create new, better forms of human life.

Such unification of disparate musical styles paralleled music’s broader power to overcome social divisions. Citing Wagner and Weber as examples of composers “inspired by the idea of Germanic unity (edinstvo),” A. Maslov saw in contemporary Russia “the same correspondence of cultural-social movements with progress in the realm of the arts [as is found in Germany]. Serfdom, having created two worlds of art, the despondently joyous folk song on one hand and false classicism followed by the romanticism of the highest social strata on the other... could not help but call forth new tendencies in intelligent society, with the goal of renewing the equal beginnings of life.” In other words, music was now following a path in which the isolated art of the privileged classes would be overcome by a new, more unified music that would speak to peoples of all social strata. This would not come about simply by a return to the old peasant songs of the past, but through the development of a new Russian musical style, uniting both elite

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While such an image of music’s social role had the potential to be interpreted as either universal or national in foundation, in practice Nietzsche’s orphans proved to be specifically concerned with the question of overcoming the divisions within Russian society. For all of its claims of universality, most journals devoted themselves primarily to questions of overcoming the divisions between the Russian “masses” and aristocracy. N. Kompaneiskii claimed that music had unique value for Russians, who were in need of greater creative energy in order to break free from their subjection to slavish conditions. Universal cultural progress could only be achieved on a national basis, and only music could overcome class division and forge a specifically “Russian” identity forged.

As will be shown in the coming chapters, the paradox of embracing the Germanic musical heritage of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Wagner (the “elite” musical tradition) while seeking a uniquely Russian voice (in the folk and Orthodox music traditions) became impossible to overcome in the heightening nationalist tension preceding the
Great War. The search for a synthesis of styles gained force through new societies devoted to the collection and preservation of “true” Russian folk music, whose “pollution” from “urban” musical styles prompted an even more extreme mission: not merely transformation of folk music by creative geniuses to fill the needs of the modern age, but the education of the narod itself in the proper meaning and understanding of that music, together with its spiritual and social task.

Performing Social Unity: The Peoples’ Conservatory

Two significant hurdles faced musical life in its attempt to transform society after 1905: musical education and concerts were prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of Russian workers and peasants; and the poorer classes had apparently lost the ability to distinguish good music from bad. That is to say, the ancient music of the narod would have a hard time facilitating spiritual rebirth in a society ever more “polluted” by popular interest in urban songs. In response to these problems, Nietzsche’s orphans genuinely sought to reach out to the people: a growing number of concerts offered cheap or free tickets; music education institutions sought to provide stipends to the most qualified students; public lectures devoted to music history, aesthetics and good taste aimed to educate the population; music libraries opened to provide greater access to the relevant literature; and, perhaps most striking of all, a Peoples’ Conservatory (Narodnaia konservatoriia) was founded in Moscow in the aftermath of the upheaval of 1905.

The Moscow Peoples’ Conservatory (or Musical Section of the Moscow Society of Peoples’ Universities) was established September 3, 1906. Its founding task was the

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82 German musicology continued to be influential on Russian musical thought in the late Imperial period. Iulii Engel' prepared a Russian translation of Riemann's musical dictionary, which was published by Jurgenson in the early 1900s. See I. Kunina, Iu. D. Engel’: Glazami sovremennika, 11.

83 RGALI f. 2099, op.1, ed.khr. 323, l.1; RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.3
“spreading of musical knowledge to as broad a range of the population of Moscow and Moscow province as possible, and to cooperate in this task within the boundaries of Russia.”  

Established as an autonomous organ of the broader Peoples’ University (with a separate board and election), it proposed to arrange general and special music courses, schools, concerts, and lectures; to publish music, books, brochures and teaching material; and to provide libraries, museums, music and instrumental equipment. Leading figures who founded and ran the Conservatory included A.A. Krein, Aleksandr Medtner, A. Gol’deneveizer, A. Maslov, N. Briusova, B.lavorskii, F. Akimenko, Iu. Engel’, N. Ianchuk, E. Lineva, S. Smolenskii and P. Karasev. In its first year, the Conservatory enrolled 627 students, 62 of whom were directly admitted to the second, more advanced course.

It was the Conservatory’s explicit purpose to expand musical education to the masses in order to create a more unified and moral social realm. In the words of A. Maslov, “music calls forth the harmony of feelings (chuvstva) between various distinct individuals and is a means of making the heart beat in sympathy, just as the strings of a musical instrument or the human voices sound in consonance. In other words, music is an instrument of social unity and agreement.” By offering musical training, it was argued, greater social cohesion might be achieved. This educational process was meant to foster spiritual development: just as the people needed education in the external, scientific

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84 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.3; RGALI f.2099, op.1, ed.khr.323, l.1. This statement was dated November 8, 1906.
85 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.5, 7; RGALI f.2099, op.1, ed.khr.323, l.1; RGALI f.2099, op.1, ed.khr.323.
86 TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed. khr. 3397, ll.118-120; TsIAM f. 179, op.21, ed. khr.2798; Iulii Engel’, “Narodnaia konservatoriia,” Russkie vedomosti no. 122 (May 7, 1906) in I. Kunina, Iu. D. Engel’: Glazami sovremennika, 166-168.
87 TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed. khr. 3397, l.59.
realm, they needed education in the internal, emotional realm. In the words of Nadezhda Briusova, one of the conservatory founders, “one of the most important tasks facing us teachers of the people, is to develop their internal realm, the realm of emotions.” Through the immediate engagement of song, the common people could be taught the value of collective creation, combining their individual voices into a more complex and unified whole. Creative, communal performance would further the internal life of the people and better prepare them for future historical and social developments.89

In light of its founding principles, it should be no surprise that the Peoples’ Conservatory focused almost exclusively upon choral singing as the basis of musical education.90 The individual ability to perform instrumental works only mattered in the educational program insofar as this was “necessary for the general musical development of students”. Briusova argued at length about the importance of developing the creative spirit of the Russian narod through active participation in folk choirs. In her mind, choral work would expose the narod to the immediate experience of collective synergy,91 whose highest possible achievement would be the creation of genuine “folk operas” (narodnye opery), in which each individual composed a unique part (napev). Each individual’s free creative potential would combine with all others into a single, collective whole.92

Yet the embrace of popular music education was haunted by a lingering anxiety

89 N. Ia. Briusova, “Muzyka dla naroda,” “Nasha narodnaia konservatoriia,” RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.86, ll.20-83. Similar ideals were expressed by Petersburg critic Koptiaev, who proclaimed “the people (narod) await us, thirsting for artistic culture. Pale, emaciated... they reach for us, in order that we might teach them hymns that will make it easier for them to ‘renounce the old world’! Yes, let intimacy perish! For a new, social music!” Koptiaev, “Kniga ob ‘intimmoi muzyki’,” Evterpe, 1-8, here 8.
90 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.93.
91 This assumption was shared by other members of the Peoples’ Conservatory, as the ongoing debate about the importance of offering classes on solo instruments demonstrates.
92 Briusova, “Muzyka dla naroda”, l.38. This idea, written before the revolution (1906-1916) was echoed by Briusova almost word for word in the early Soviet era. See Briusova, Zadachi narodnogo muzykal’nogo obrazovaniiia. Doklad, prochitannyi na Konferentsii Kul’turo-Prosvetitel’nykh proletarskih organizatsii.N. Ia. Briusova (Moscow: Narkompros, 1919), 9. These works, Briusova argued, could be based on either pre-existing or new texts (she suggested Russian skazki and Pushkin as possible sources).
about the *narod*. The organization of concerts for the masses had to proceed cautiously, warned Briusova, as the people had to be educated in the proper manner of responding to music; otherwise, exposure to high art would cause more harm than good.\(^93\) Perhaps not surprisingly, she reserved a leading role for the musical elite: “We leaders (*rukovoditeli*) must connect together all the compositions of all the authors.”\(^94\) In her mind, those who had founded the conservatory and taught music to the workers were “conductors of [the *narod’s*] musical creation.”\(^95\) A similarly paternal mentality mixed with anxiety was almost certainly behind the changing designs that graced the cover of *RMG* before and after the 1905 Revolution. From a folk-oriented logo evoking the idealized Russian *narod* (the banner through 1905), in January 1906, the journal adopted a simple design without any obvious symbolic connotation. In 1909, the logo was changed yet again, this time to an image that would surely have been dear to Rebikov himself: a musical lyre with flowers twining through its strings. [Illustration A.4] Musical elites like the founders of the Peoples’ Conservatory envisioned their role as educators to be the preparation of the *narod* for a modern moral reawakening: the promise of Orpheus.

By the seventh year of operation (1912-13), choral classes were offered in two raions in Moscow: Nikitskii raion (M. Bronnaia, d.15 in the Petrovsko-Tverskoe City School; B. Nikitskaia, d.11 in the Women’s stroitel’nye kursy) and Sukharevskii raion (Novaia Basmannia, d.9/10 in the Ol’khovskoe Men’s School). Students could study at

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\(^93\) Briusova, “*Nasha narodnaia konservatoriia*”, l.57

\(^94\) Briusova, “*Muzyka dlia naroda*”, l.38.

\(^95\) Briusova, *Muzyka dlia naroda*, l.38. Briusova held, nonetheless, that even such a high accomplishment as “folk opera” would not reach the level of “true musical drama,” which would include “all the voices of nature”. The *narod* would be exposed to such masterworks in the operas of Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin and other Russian composers. See Briusova, “*Muzyka dlia naroda*,” l.39. It was a small step for Briusova to translate these ideas into the Soviet demand for mass song immediately after the 1917 Revolution. On Briusova’s post-1917 career, see Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), esp. 22-23, 26, 30, 139-145.
the Peoples’ Conservatory for up to three years (all three years were offered in Nikitskii raion, only the first two in Sukharevskii raion) at a cost of 4 rubles per year for first and second year courses, and a variable sum the third year depending on the number of hours and students enrolled. Courses were open to both men and women once their voices had changed (generally not younger than 15-17). In the first two years, the classes met two times per week from 8-10 pm (demonstrating the genuine wish to appeal to workers). No prior musical knowledge was required of students when they enrolled, though they had to know how to read and had to possess some level of musical ability. By the second year, students were expected to know simple intervals, possess an elementary knowledge of music theory (scales, rhythm, measures), and be able to sing a simple melody from music at sight. Each year ended with a demonstration, and at the end of the third class, students would receive a certificate (*udostovereniia*).  

Divisiveness over the Conservatory’s mission was highlighted by the question of solo classes. When the program was established on November 8, 1906, it was decided that the Conservatory should strive to offer access to solo instruments and lessons to as many students as possible. On January 24, 1907, the decision was taken to give wider access to solo instrument instruction (followed by further discussion on January 31). The decision to broaden solo classes passed with minor changes on March 29, with the explicit understanding that these classes were intended to give a basis in music technique, NOT to develop virtuosity.  

96 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.50.
97 “The goal of solo classes is to give development to the most outstanding talents from the people and the impoverished (*neimushchie*) strata of the population, those for whom musical education would be very difficult or impossible to receive without the Peoples' Conservatory.” RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.41-42; RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.96; Ivan Lipaev to Iulii Engel (undated), RGALI f.795 op.1, ed.khr. 40.
majority of members of the Organizational Committee (and of Moscow Society of Peoples’ Universities) are convinced that the main task of the Peoples’ Conservatory is to offer choral classes as broadly and steadily as possible and that solo classes are thus far its secondary task.”

Solo classes continued to be offered, but the number of spaces was extremely limited.

Ironically, it was this very area, so problematic in the eyes of the Conservatory founders, that was most appealing to its students. In a series of questionnaires completed by students of the Vocal Conducting program offered by the Peoples’ Conservatory, nine respondents requested the possibility to study individual musical performance themselves, both instrumental and vocal. One male respondent specifically requested the opportunity to learn to play piano, while a female respondent voiced the same request, stating that she “lived a different life” when she heard music. Perhaps the most poignant request for such instruction was voiced by Iusiia Sokolova, who scribbled out a heart-felt request to her instructor, Nadezhda Briusova: “I can ask you only one thing: give me the ability to develop musically, at least a little bit, to allow me at least a small but active participation in singing and music. . . This question is the most painful for me. I cannot quietly listen to your lecture because every word of yours shows me my musical illiteracy, and awoke [sic] in me a thirst for knowledge. . . before me was the fateful question: why can’t I play myself, when I love music, when music sounds in my ears at home. . .?”

98 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.41 (1906-07 report).
99 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.150, l.42. In 1906, in contrast to 627 students in regular courses, only 56 students were registered in special courses. TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed.khr.3397, l.60ob.
100 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, l.18ob, l.43ob., l.50, l.51ob, l.56, l.29ob, l.26ob, l.44ob, l.18ob.
101 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, l.18ob; l.43ob.
102 RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, l.44ob.
This clash of expectations was also apparent as students adopted the Tolstoyan idea that music expresses the exact emotional state of the composer. They longed for the ability to properly interpret these emotional states for themselves and felt little guidance from Conservatory instruction, because it focused so heavily on choral singing and shaping a unified, communal spirit. One respondent complained: “for me personally, the ability to feel in music that which was felt by the creator of one or another musical work is most important. I think that it would be good if you performed for us one or another musical work and explained for us the feelings (chuvstva), the forms (obrazy), that the performance awakens in you or that were felt by the author.”\(^{103}\) Another student wrote that she desired to “listen to the meaning that music has played, plays and will play in the life of humanity,” adding critically, “in my opinion, you have little touched on this so far.”\(^{104}\) Students often demonstrated a striking disinterest in the communal focus of the Peoples’ Conservatory. When asked whether he or she could listen to an entire piece of music without losing focus, one student responded that it was only possible if the music “corresponds to my experiences (perezhivaniia), to the personal music in my soul (sobstvennaia muzyka v dushi).”\(^{105}\) For these students, music was a means of personal expression, not a tool for the moral and spiritual transformation of society.

Despite the stated goals of the Peoples’ Conservatory to provide musical education and guidance to workers, experience quickly demonstrated the gap between elites and the workers they hoped to reach. Perhaps the most striking discrepancy between the goals and the practical implementation of the Peoples’ Conservatory was in

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\(^{103}\) RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, l.34ob.  
\(^{104}\) RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, l.40ob.  
\(^{105}\) RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, l.44. In total, 25 respondents claimed the ability to do so, 12 said they could not, 4 couched their ability to do so in certain circumstances, one did not answer and one did not know.
the social origins of the students themselves. Though courses were held in the evenings to facilitate worker attendance, the requirement of basic literacy prior to commencing their studies drastically limited the number of potential students, while even the modest fee for classes was often prohibitively expensive. As a result, students tended to come from the universities and lower bureaucracy, with a decidedly low percentage of workers. The most striking difference from other musical institutes was the higher percentage of male to female students enrolled. Their primary interest was not in moral and spiritual transformation through collective creation, but the acquisition of musical skill, generally in solo vocal or instrumental performance. The helping hand that the educated class sought to extend to their impoverished brethren through the educational and unifying power of music met with little response from workers or peasants.

Imperial Russian musical society consisted of a small group of individuals connected by personal ties. Both professional musicians and amateurs with a Nietzschean-inspired sense of music’s mission collaborated in creating a shared image of music as a transformative force, able to overcome the contemporary problems of disintegration, alienation and uprootedness. Lack of agreement over the means of social transformation, the kind of music required and the symbolic meaning of music itself divided this intimate realm. At the same time, the discrepancy between the goals espoused by specialists in reaching out to the common people and the desires of those people with whom they interacted, demonstrated the insurmountable distance between Nietzsche’s orphans and their own children whom they sought to reach.

106 TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed.khr. 3397, l.60 (1906 report).
107 TsIAM f.179, op.21, ed.khr. 3397.
CHAPTER TWO: THE METAPHYSICS OF MUSIC

One who is unmusical will understand nothing.

Andrei Belyi

Music assumed an almost mythical significance in the aesthetic context of the Russian Silver Age. Perhaps more than at any other point in Russian history, in the final years of the Empire, members of the educated classes turned to music as a means of defining their relationship to the world around them. It seemed that the society and culture of the time were definable not only through words or ideas, but through sounds. Much of this discourse did not stem from musicians themselves, but rather from a broader intellectual, literary and cultural elite. Drawing heavily on the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, and increasingly exposed to the nationalistic myth-creation of Richard Wagner’s operas, contemporary Russian audiences embraced a dualistic vision in which music was not simply an art form, but a symbol of the metaphysical basis of life and an active force capable of transforming reality itself. They sought in music both the expression of an ideal, unified world that was absent in contemporary society and a transformative power that would bring this ideal world into existence. Music symbolized the visions, hopes, dreams and fears of Russian educated society.

The early twentieth century literary movement of Russian Symbolism tended to emphasize the metaphysical, almost magical qualities of music rather than address its specific auditory character. Writers and art theorists such as Viacheslav Ivanov, Andrei Belyi, Aleksandr Blok, Emil Medtner, and Vasilii Kandinskii were fascinated by music’s unique attributes: its existence in time combined with its apparent lack of physical form. Music existed in time, but not in space. It embodied the very essence

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1 Andrei Belyi, “Simvolizm, kak miroponimanie,” *Mir iskusstva* no. 4 (April 1904): 173-196, here 176. Though published in 1904, the work was composed in 1903. For an account of music’s important symbolic role in Belyi’s childhood (in opposition to the rationalist worldview espoused by his father), see Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii* (Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1930), 178-191. Belyi repeatedly described his father as “unmusical.”

of motion and process. It was eternally *becoming*. These attributes inspired poets and painters to attempt to imitate music in their own works.³ It should not be concluded, however, that the worlds of metaphysical music and audible music did not interact, nor that this theorizing about music’s symbolic importance had no impact on contemporary musicians. Nietzsche and Schopenhauer were both amateur musicians, Russian writers Andrei Belyi and Boris Pasternak toyed with musical composition prior to devoting themselves to literary careers, Mikhael Kuzmin was an amateur pianist⁴ and Emil Medtner undertook musical studies in adulthood under the guidance of his brother Nikolai.⁵ In fact, a complex dialogical process evolved between intellectual, musician and audience, within which music both inspired deeper reflection on society and life, and itself responded to the evolving views and desires of contemporary Russian society.⁶ In this way, music both shaped and was shaped by its cultural and historic context.

This chapter examines the “metaphysics of music” that emerged in late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia.⁷ After an opening discussion of the concept of “music” in both its European and Russian contexts, I examine four central motifs that played a central role in shaping music’s symbolic importance in Russia: *zhiznetvorchestvo* (life-creation), *unity*, *genius*, and *nation*. I trace the image of music as a unifying power from the thought of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche through the writings of Russian thinkers Vladimir Solov’ev, Lev Tolstoi, Viacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Belyi, highlighting

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³ Andrei Belyi wrote four literary “Symphonies”: First Symphony (1900), Second Symphony (1901), Third and Fourth Symphonies (1902). Bartlett, *Wagner in Russia*, 142. Kandinsky’s choice of titles, including “Compositions” and “Improvisations” suggested musical forms, as did many of the terms utilized throughout his theoretical writings, including “melodic”, “symphonic”, “harmony”, “discord”, “rhythmic”, “unrhythmic”. Moreover, Kandinsky argued in 1912: “both [dance and painting] must learn from music that every harmony and discord that springs from internal necessity is beautiful”. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Michael Sadleir (New York: George Wittenborn, 1947).


⁵ For a discussion of Belyi’s early experiments in music, see Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner in Russia*, 142-144. For a discussion of the role played by music in his childhood, see Steinberg, *Word and Music*, 37-40.


⁷ The term was suggested by an article in the periodical *Muzyka*, entitled “Music and Metaphysics”. See Ziegfried Ashkenazi, “Muzyka i Metafizika,” *Muzyka* no. 75 (May 5, 1912):396-402; *Muzyka* no. 76 (May 12, 1912): 412-416; *Muzyka* no. 78 (May 23, 1912): 462-465. Written in Munich in 1911, this column demonstrated the intimate connection that existed between German idealist philosophy and the Russian musical community at the time.
how these motifs were expressed. The concluding section looks at the increasingly blurred lines between art and religion and the idea of a “mystery,” expressed socially in the formation of a St. Petersburg “Order of Universal Genius Brotherhood” and theoretically in Sergei Durylin’s book *Vagner i Rossia*. The widespread phenomenon of this search for a “Mystery” serves as the basis for analysis in later chapters.

Contemporary Russian views on music incorporated aspects of German Idealist philosophy, European Romanticism and specifically Russian themes. Ideas about music stemming from the works of such German philosophers as Kant, Schelling, Schiller, Hegel and Schopenhauer had in turn influenced the world-views of composers from Beethoven through Wagner. In late Imperial Russia, Nietzsche’s writings in particular provided a philosophical metaphysics emphasizing music’s unifying and transformative power. Music was glorified for its ability to creatively transform the world through its unifying power and was intimately connected with a rejection of traditional value systems in favor of a free, joyful affirmation of life. I argue that in Russia at this time, this complex of ideas surrounding music imbued it with almost mystical or religious power as the ultimate unifying and collective form of art. A general focus on collective identity (inspired in part by Nietzsche’s Dionysian impulse) gained sway over a large number of Russia’s educated elite in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, an identity for which music seemed to provide the most perfect symbol. The figure of the creative genius, particularly the “genius-composer” increasingly took on the mantle of a prophet, priest or even spiritual Messiah, around whom society would reunite, ushering in a new phase of Russian and world history.

For each of the Russian figures discussed here, a sense of Russia’s unique, messianic role in human

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8 The choice of Vladimir Solov’ev and Lev Tolstoi was dictated by widespread references to both figures by Russian Silver Age intellectuals writing on music. I have chosen to focus on Ivanov and Belyi in examining the broader “intellectual” view of music held at the time due to the interest both men expressed in music, their personal connections with specific composers (Ivanov with Scriabin, Belyi with Medtner) and the fact that they offer the two most cohesive expressions of the theoretical basis of Russian Symbolism. For previous examples of the use of Ivanov to highlight the broader Symbolist world-view, see Michael Wachtel, *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition*; James West, *Russian Symbolism: A study of Vyacheslav Ivanov and the Russian Symbolist Aesthetic* (London: Methuen and Company, 1970). For a more general overview of the Russian Symbolist movement, see Avril Pyman, *A History of Russian Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

9 The Apollonian-Dionysian division posited by Nietzsche offered both a metaphorical language and a conceptual apparatus that gained great popularity as a means of cultural critique.
history existed uneasily alongside recognition of their indebtedness to German intellectual and cultural traditions, embodied in the figure of Nietzsche. This simultaneous connection with and alienation from the German philosopher was a trademark of Nietzsche’s orphans.

In assessing the impact of philosophical ideas, the question of reception plays a central role. Educated Russian society read Kant, Schopenhauer, Fichte and Nietzsche within a specific historical context, bringing their own presumptions, hopes and fears to bear on their interpretation of what they read. For Nietzsche’s orphans, it was the cultural critic of The Birth of Tragedy rather than the author of Also Sprach Zarathustra who was embraced as a prophetic figure. Nietzsche’s later rejection of Wagner was similarly minimized or ignored by his admirers in late Imperial Russia. Readers turned to philosophical texts in order to find solutions to what they considered the most pressing problems of modern life: the interpretation of music that they derived from their sources was based on a combination of interpretation (and misinterpretation) of the portions of texts that they read, glosses on those texts written by contemporary commentators, and their own preconceived notions. The construction of musical metaphysics consisted both of the transmission of older philosophical ideas and their creative reinterpretation in the context of late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia. This exegesis of ideas surrounding music is therefore based upon central themes that emerged in Russian discourse between 1905 and 1921.


11 On the different ways through which ideas were read and interpreted in Imperial Russia, see Jeffrey Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).


13 Aleksandr Koptiaev, discussed in Chapter Three, offers a particularly striking example of the concurrent embrace of Nietzsche and Wagner, despite his awareness of Nietzsche’s later rejection of the composer.
Music as Metaphysical Symbol

Music. . . gives the inmost kernel which precedes all forms.
Friedrich Nietzsche

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The metaphysical view of music that was widespread in late Imperial Russia can be traced directly to Arthur Schopenhauer’s interpretation of music in *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer raised music to the summit of artistic creation, arguing that “we can regard the phenomenal world, or nature, and music as two different expressions of the same thing”16 For Schopenhauer, music, unlike other art forms, was not tainted by relation to the phenomenal world. It did not attempt to represent any particular, individual idea or concept, but rather was “as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself is.” In short, music, like the entire phenomenal world, was “*a copy of the will itself.*”17 Schopenhauer accepted the idea espoused by Kant and Hegel (among others) that “genuine” music, unlike other art forms, did not portray specific concepts or ideas.18 For Schopenhauer, however, this was an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The lack of concrete concepts allowed music to express that which was inexpressible by other means. Rather than music being limited in its ability to convey human knowledge in its entirety, mere human knowledge was unable to conceptually express the realities that were depicted through music. Music was not “indistinct and vague” but was “in the highest degree a universal language.”19 This glorification of music’s universal nature as portraying something specific and distinct, yet outside the realm of conceptual knowledge (thus intimately connected with irrational intuition as opposed to rational knowledge), highlighted music as the quintessential Romantic art form, a view that was

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15 Nietzsche's interpretation of music shows the definite influence of Schopenhauer, whose analysis of music he quoted at length in *The Birth of Tragedy*. BT, 57-60.
17 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, I: 257.
19 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, I: 262.
extremely influential throughout the nineteenth century. Friedrich Nietzsche adopted Schopenhauer’s metaphysical interpretation of music’s essence, working it into his own aesthetic theory.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche viewed music as essentially an irrational and emotional force that preceded the logical division of the world into disparate entities and rational concepts. Nietzsche introduced Dionysus as the metaphorical representation of the fundamental unity underlying and preceding the phenomenal world (Schopenhauer’s “Will”). Music, Nietzsche argued, was the most perfect expression of the Dionysian (collective) impulse, and was, in its very essence, opposed to the Apollonian (individualizing) impulse. This dualistic division echoed Arthur Schopenhauer’s earlier division of reality into two aspects: representation and will. Attempts to use human language as a means through which to express music’s essence were destined to fail, as “language can never adequately render the cosmic significance of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the Primal Unity, and therefore symbolizes

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21 This metaphysical view of music based on German Romanticism was later rejected by Nietzsche. This rejection was a central theme in Nietzsche’s writings from *Human, All too Human* through *The Gay Science*. See Liébert, *Nietzsche and Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 156-163.

22 Nietzsche, *BT*, 1.

23 Nietzsche, *BT*, 7. *BT*, 3. Apollo was equated with the physiological experience of the “dream state” as well as with Schopenhauer’s world of representation (the phenomenal world, existing in innumerous individual entities embodied in time and space), while Dionysus was linked to the physiological state of “drunkenness” and to Schopenhauer’s concept of “will” (a single blind, striving impulse which is the essence of existence, not governed by the Kantian categories of time and space or the law of causality).

24 Schopenhauer's philosophy is based on a two-fold description of reality, inspired by Immanuel Kant. Schopenhauer divides the world into *phenomenon* (sensation) and *noumenon* (the thing-in-itself). So-called human “knowledge” of phenomenal reality is based on the “principle of sufficient reason” (the basis for assessment of relations between objects, which involves the application of the forms of causality, time and space). Schopenhauer defines the *noumenon* (the thing-in-itself) as Will — a dynamic principle, devoid of structure, which lies outside the principle of sufficient reason and of which we therefore can have no knowledge. Will ultimately underlies all our actions and is the true cause of them, despite the fact that contingent explanations, based on the principle of sufficient reason, may be given. “Representation” or the phenomenal world (sometimes translated as “Idea”) is itself nothing more than the “objectification of will”, that is, Will that appears to our perception in multiple forms. While Will itself is singular, lying outside the concepts of time, space and causality, it takes on multiple forms in its objectification in the phenomenal world.
a sphere which is beyond and before all phenomena.”  

Hence the original (1872) title of Nietzsche’s work, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*.

The main focus for both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche was music’s philosophical import. For Schopenhauer, the essence of human existence was suffering. In Schopenhauer’s view, the contemplation of art allowed the individual to momentarily step outside herself, forgetting her own misery. Music, as the highest embodiment of will (rather than merely a representation of the phenomenal world) bypassed the spatial representation of the physical world for the experience of Will itself. Nietzsche developed this unique role of music beyond the individual to apply to society as a whole. He argued that music, the purest expression of the Dionysian impulse in the creative realm, had a uniquely important role to play in reuniting an increasingly individualized and fragmented modern society. He argued that music alone offered a symbolic depiction through which individual suffering could actually be acknowledged and enjoyed.  

The pure Dionysian impulse would overwhelm an individual mind if expressed in its full force:

Can [a genuine musician] imagine a man capable of hearing the third act of *Tristan und Isolde* without any aid of word or scenery, purely as a vast symphonic period, without expiring by a spasmodic distention of all the wings of the soul? A man who has thus, so to speak, put his ear to the heart-chamber of the world-will… would he not collapse all at once?

The particular embodiment of the Dionysian impulse in a musical composition made it comprehensible to the human mind. In Nietzsche’s terminology, the Apollonian (individualizing) power would reshape the underlying Dionysian spirit into a formal structure that could be grasped by the limited individual listener. As an art form, music could thus present primordial unity within a form that allowed the

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27 Nietzsche, *BT*, 78.
listener to comprehend it without his destruction as an individual.\(^{28}\) This individualization of music’s expression of universal or primordial Will provided the symbol through which an individual could grasp and embrace life as it truly existed. A particular musical composition was thus a symbol through which the limited human mind could grasp the underlying essence of existence.

A similarly metaphysical interpretation of music’s import was offered by the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev, who, together with Nietzsche, was one of the primary intellectual influences on Russian Silver Age culture. Just as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had stressed music’s unique attributes, Solov’ev argued that music was the most “direct or magical” expression of Beauty in which “the deepest internal state connects us with the true essence of things and with the other world (or, if you like, with the ‘being in itself’ of all that exists), breaking through every conditionality and material limitation, finding its direct and full expression in beautiful sounds and words.”\(^{29}\) In Solov’ev’s rendition, “Dionysian Will” is thus replaced by “Being in itself”. This neo-Platonic aesthetic, including his view of music’s magical power, was adopted by Viacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Belyi, the two primary “theorists” of the Russian Symbolist movement in literature.\(^{30}\) Both Ivanov and Belyi repeatedly emphasized the central role that music held in contemporary life, combining ideas from Solov’ev and the Germanic tradition. Viacheslav Ivanov insisted that music was “the mightiest of arts,”\(^{31}\) and that the poet of the new age “will teach with music and myth.”\(^{32}\) Ivanov believed that this emphasis on music had been Nietzsche’s prophetic vision for humanity and, in fact, echoed back through time to the Hellenic philosopher Socrates, who shortly before his death “dreamed that a...
heavenly voice commanded him to study music,” though it was only in Nietzsche that this heavenly command was fulfilled.\(^{33}\) For Ivanov, music was a herald of the dawning new age, the symbol of the secret essence of life that had been lost in the modern age.\(^{34}\) Socratic reason had split humanity away from the life-affirmation central to Greek thought. A new, musical prophet was required to reunite society and give meaning to human existence again. This Dionysian spirit had to be discovered first in music, not in thought.\(^{35}\) Belyi similarly assigned music the highest position of all the arts.\(^{36}\) Because music had no form in the physical world (being composed purely of sound in time rather than possessing a physical, spatial component), Belyi argued, “music ideally expresses a symbol. For that reason, a symbol is always musical. . . [music] alters consciousness.”\(^{37}\) Belyi extended Nietzsche’s image of a musical composition serving as a symbol of Dionysian Will to all music. At the same time, his understanding of the significance of that symbol was less clear. Rather than making individual suffering comprehensible and acceptable (as Nietzsche argued), Belyi claimed that music “alters consciousness,” but was unable to define this transformation more specifically.\(^{38}\)

Despite this embracing of Nietzschean musical metaphysics, the question of music’s morality played a larger role in the Russian context than elsewhere. Music held no specific, moral import in the writings of either Nietzsche or Schopenhauer. On the contrary, both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had argued that the fundamental basis of human existence was individual suffering.\(^{39}\) Schopenhauer’s philosophy of art was focused on reducing the amount of suffering an individual experienced rather

\(^{33}\) Ivanov, “Nitsshe i dionis,” in Po zvezdam, 1-20, here 5.

\(^{34}\) Ivanov, “Simvoliki esteticheskikh nachal”, 31.

\(^{35}\) Ivanov, “Nittshe i dionis,” 5.

\(^{36}\) Belyi develops his image of music as a metaphysical symbol in his 1903 article “Simvolizm kak miroponimaniia”. See Belyi, “Simvolizm, kak miroponimanie”; Levaia, “Scriabin i simvolizm: vzgliad na iskusstvo,” in Skriabin i khudozhestvennye iskania XX veka, 9. Levaia notes a historical correspondence between the creation of Scriabin’s first symphony and Belyi’s early works, arguing that this is no mere coincidence. Ibid., 11.


\(^{38}\) Aleksandr Blok i Belyi: Perepiska, 3-4.

than pursuing any positive goal. Nietzsche sought to use art, particularly the transformative union of the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses, as a means by which humanity could overcome individual suffering and embrace existence, “for it is only as an esthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified.” Only art gave humanity the courage to look without fear into the horror of existence and transform that world into something beautiful and meaningful. The world had no moral import outside of the meanings created by humans. In contrast, Solov’ev’s philosophical interpretation of art in general and music in particular assumed a pre-existing, moral (and, by extension, religious) order. Beauty was, in Solov’ev’s mind, the physical embodiment of what, in its ideal form, was referred to as “good” (dobro) and “truth” (istina). It was “the best half of our real world, that half that not only exists, but deserves to exist.” Similarly, Ivanov’s ultimate rejection of Nietzsche was based upon the latter’s failure to step beyond his aesthetic interpretation of life to understand the spiritual basis underpinning human existence:

The tragic fault of Nietzsche was that he did not believe in the god that he uncovered for the world. He understood the Dionysian beginning as aesthetic and life as an ‘aesthetic phenomenon’. But that beginning is, first and foremost, a religious beginning. . .”

Ivanov criticized Nietzsche’s abandonment of Christianity, arguing that life was incomprehensible outside its religious foundation. For Ivanov, music was not a symbol of life-affirmation and value-creation in defiance of a meaningless reality. Rather, music embodied the underlying unity and coherence of a universe created by God. Nietzsche, Ivanov argued, had been an imperfect musical prophet, just as Nietzsche had found Wagner to be an imperfect musical Orpheus.

The undefined quality of music's relation to morality continued to trouble Andrei Belyi. Abandoning his previous, Schopenhauerian-inspired image of music in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, Andrei Belyi elided his critique of the lack of a moral basis in the musical philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche with a critique of “music” itself:

40 Nietzsche, BT, 17.
42 Solov’ev, “Krasota v pri rode,” in Filosofia iskusstva i literaturnaia kritika, 30-73, here 41-42.
They talk now as if music were a religion. At the same time, they forget that music ‘is about nothing’... Speaking of music as of the main root of religion (and religion focuses on questions of goals and values), teaches a musical, goalless, meaningless religion that fails of itself with its voiced absurdity.44

Belyi considered music’s lack of specific content problematic because “every honesty, every truth, every constancy in the direction of values is based upon the spoken word, the understanding of names, the completed acts.”45 Music, by contrast, was an act in process, in which clear, definable content was absent. Without a specific meaning, Belyi claimed, music was nothing more than a symbol of the degeneration of modern, bourgeois society.46

In late Imperial Russia, the image of music evoked both hopes and fears. While symbolizing the irrational, unifying impulse through which modern divisions could be overcome, it failed to clearly define the basis upon which the transformation might take place. In turning to music, Nietzsche’s Russian orphans sought the impossible: the reconciliation of Nietzsche’s vision of transforming society through awakening irrational, emotional impulses with a clearly definable moral structure upon which that new society would be built. It was within this search for more definite meaning that the connection of the “symbol of music” with concepts of zhiznetvorchestvo, unity, genius and nation should be understood. It is to a closer examination of these categories that we now turn.

**Zhiznetvorchestvo: Art as Theurgy**

*If only a few hundred people of the next generation get what I get out of music, then I anticipate an utterly new culture.*

Friedrich Nietzsche47

One of the central tenets of Russian Symbolist thought in the late Imperial era was the concept

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45 Belyi, “Protiv Muziki,” *Vesy* no. 3 (March 1907), 57-60.

46 Belyi identified music as “the most perfect form of contemporary art,” suggesting thereby that it embodied most clearly all the sickness of contemporary society and art. See Belyi, “Pis’ino v redaktsiiu,” *Pereval* no. 10 (August 1907): 58-60, here 59.

of art as means through which to transform or “create” life (zhiznetvorchestvo). This idea was immanent in Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy, though the philosopher did not adopt the same term as a means of conceptualizing the impulse, speaking instead of “overcoming” or “transforming” existence. In Nietzsche’s view, modern German culture and society had become too individualistic, losing touch with the underlying unity of existence, a trend that he identified as the triumph of Socratic rationality over both Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses. In contrast, Nietzsche argued that art gave humanity the courage to look without fear into the horror of existence and transform that world into something beautiful and meaningful. This process involved the overcoming of the individual through union with a greater whole. Both Apollonian and Dionysian art allowed the audience to step outside an individualized world-view to give meaning to human existence as part of a unified, transcendent whole. These two impulses had been united by the ancient Greeks in their tragedies, which Nietzsche considered “the objectification of a Dionysian state. . . not the Apollonian redemption in appearance, but, conversely, the dissolution of the individual and his unification with primordial existence.” It was through this momentary unification with primordial being that the “eternal joy of existence” was to be found. Art thus served to transform individual human life from unbearable suffering (caused by the meaninglessness of existence) to joyful affirmation of the world as it was. Value was assigned to existence through the creative act itself. Thus, Nietzsche’s image of the creative process was, at root, amoral.

Russian Symbolist thought often paired the idea of life-creation with that of artistic theurgy, a concept borrowed from the writings of Vladimir Solov’ev with deep theological implications. Solov’ev, like Nietzsche, stressed art’s transforming (preobrazhauushchii) power. However, for Solov’ev, human artistic creativity was intimately linked with the idea of “theurgy” or “divine action”: artistic creations

48 Nietzsche, BT, 89-90.
49 Nietzsche, BT, 8, 11, 56.
50 Nietzsche, BT, 27.
51 Nietzsche, BT, 60.
not only transformed, but spiritualized reality. Emphasizing the division between spiritual (eternally perfect) and material (existing) reality, Solov’ev saw in art an embodiment of Beauty that served as a link between these two realms. “Beauty” served to transfigure (preobrazhit’) material reality through the “incarnation (voploshchenie) of another, higher-than-material (sverkhmaterial’nii) element in it.”

Solov’ev imbued his aesthetic theory with a specific, Christian mission: the “transformation of physical life into its spiritual counterpart.” Thus, the transforming power of art was immediately connected with a moral goal: Beauty always worked to advance Truth (istina) and Good (dobro); indeed, beauty was “only the physical form of good and truth.” As Irina Paperno has observed, “the theological formulas that define the relations between the two natures of Christ (the inseparable union of the divine and the human; two natures united yet distinct and autonomous) are recognizable in [Solov’ev’s] aesthetic formulations.”

In Solov’ev’s vision, human history was an expression of the “eternal battle between the cosmic (harmonizing) beginning and the chaotic process of cosmogenesis.” This gnostic vision of reality emphasized the historical process, the gradual spiritualization (harmonization) of the material world over time and the deification of humanity itself (bogochelovechestvo). Art held an important place in this process as it symbolized the bringing of form to initial chaos and advanced the transformational process itself. Solov’ev associated moments of chaos with forms of destruction, death and evil. Thus, while Nietzsche started from an ambivalent view of the nature of reality itself, Solov’ev imbued reality and the historic process with Christian morality. It is hardly surprising that Solov’ev criticized Nietzsche for his abandonment of any religious, mystical basis for his philosophy, a critique that he extended to the first representatives of Russian Symbolism.

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57 Gaidenko, Vladimir Solov’ev i filosofiia serebrianogo veka, 80.
Notwithstanding Solov’ev’s critique of the Symbolist movement, his ideas, particularly his concept of *theurgy*, were central to the theoretical development of the younger Symbolists. Both Belyi and Ivanov envisioned a new art that would not merely represent, but transform (*preobrazhat’*) the world.\(^60\) Solov’ev had argued that contemporary European art had reached its highest development as pure art and now required the appearance of a new, theurgic art that would work to reunify the material and spiritual realms.\(^61\) Similarly, Ivanov prophesied the appearance of theurgic art,\(^62\) argued for the “internal oneness of Beauty and Good”\(^63\) and equated the true Nietzschean superman with Christ, claiming that Nietzsche’s failure had been his inability to reconcile his own visions with Christianity.\(^64\) Troubled by Nietzsche’s rejection of religion, Belyi also argued for an aesthetic that would return the divine spirit to the artistic creative process, claiming that “creativity, carried to its conclusion, directly turns into religious creativity: theurgy.”\(^65\)

For many of the Russian Symbolist writers, the German composer Richard Wagner served as a central figure in their quest for theurgic art.\(^66\) Although Belyi and Ivanov both admired Wagner, they were troubled by the same perceived shortcoming in his work: his failure to overcome the division between performer and audience. Thus, Ivanov claimed, although Wagner had awakened the active, “creative” principle in the audience, this creativity was still only “potential and latent.”\(^67\) “The crowd,” insisted Ivanov, “must dance and sing, must rhythmically move and praise God with words.”\(^68\) In Wagner, “the bridge between the stage and the audience has still not been overcome.”\(^69\) This division between performer and audience embodied the divisions between individual people and between art and life. True theurgic art required the transformation of the theatre audience into “genuine participants.

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\(^{62}\) Ivanov, “Kop’e afiny,” in *Po zvezdam*, 43-53.

\(^{63}\) Ivanov, “Simvolika esteticheskikh nachal,” 27.


\(^{66}\) For an overview of Wagner’s importance to the Russian Symbolists, see Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*; Rosenthal, “Wagner and Wagnerian Ideas in Russia”.

\(^{67}\) Ivanov, “Vagner i dionisovo deistvo,” in *Po zvezdam*, 65-69, here.66.

\(^{68}\) Ivanov, “Vagner i dionisovo deistvo,” 67.

\(^{69}\) Ivanov, “Vagner i dionisovo deistvo,” 69.
...into the living Dionysian body,” who would “create” rather than merely “contemplate”. Belyi similarly argued that the creation of theurgic art required movement beyond the merely external form of Wagnerian drama. It was internal “transformation through our experiences (perezhivaniia)” rather than theatrical depiction that was required to “show [us] the single, complete-in-itself path” No mere work of theatre would be able to bridge the gap between artistic representation and life. Only a work that stepped beyond artistic representation and reunited the realms of the spiritual and material, a work that allowed all people to experience and participate in (rather than just observe) would truly accomplish the goal of life-creation (zhiznetvorchestvo). Such a work would no longer be a work of art per se, but rather a “Mystery”: a collective, religious experience. While such theurgic art had not yet been accomplished, its realization lay in the near future. Solov’ev had predicted such a reunification of art and religion: “it is clear that the accomplishment of this task [of art] must coincide with the end of the entire world process.” Thus, this Russian interpretation of the “art of the future” envisioned not merely a new synthesis of art and life but the end of the currently existing world itself, and the dawning of a new era. For most of these writers, the end goal of this theurgic process could be summarized in one word: unity.

The Quest for Unity: the Modern Dionysus

Something never before experienced struggles for utterance... Oneness as the soul of the race, and of nature itself.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Perhaps the most influential symbol adapted by Nietzsche’s orphans to Russian society in the late Imperial period was the philosopher’s emphasis on unity as the final goal both of art and of life, a

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70 Ivanov, “Vagner i dionisovo deistvo,” 66-67. See also Bartlett, Wagner in Russia, 130-137.
71 Belyi, “Pesn’ zhizni,” 59.
72 Belyi, used Nietzsche’s “Spirit of Music” in referring to this. See Belyi, “Pesn’ zhizni,” 55.
73 Belyi hinted at this understanding of a “Mystery” that will “open to us in life” in “Pesn’ zhizni,” 59. For more on Belyi’s conception of mystical art and its potential embodiment in a “mystery play”, see Steinberg, Word and Music, 32-36.
75 Solov’ev, “Obschchee smysl iskusstva,” 83. The task Solov’ev had in mind was the complete correspondence of internal and external, the complete synthesis of internal and external realities.
76 Nietzsche, BT, 7.
central concern in The Birth of Tragedy. Nietzsche considered the Dionysian art of music to be the artistic embodiment of the “Primordial Unity” which underlay and preceded the phenomenal world. Dionysus was the unifying spirit, struggling to overcome the individualizing influence of the phenomenal world. Nietzsche argued that the sickness of modern German culture stemmed from a loss of this Dionysian, unifying force. Modern culture and society had become too individualistic, losing touch with the underlying unity of existence, a trend that Nietzsche identified as the triumph of Socratic rationality over both Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses. Tragedy had been the artistic means through which the Greeks were able to keep themselves in balance as it taught them “the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the prime cause of evil” and that art was “the joyous hope that the bonds of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness.” This emphasis on unity extended to Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek theatre itself. He insisted that in ancient Greek tragedy “a public of spectators, as we know it, was unknown.” Rather, there was a unity between creator, actor and spectator, reflecting the underlying unity of humanity. Theatre offered a symbolic embodiment and reinterpretation of primordial, Dionysian unity, recreated through the purifying lens of Apollo. Seeking a revival of the art of Greek tragedy in contemporary Germany, Nietzsche fixated upon the music dramas of Richard Wagner, who seemed to embody the rebirth of the Dionysian impulse in the modern world. For the young Nietzsche, Wagner was the Orphic figure who would reunify German society through his musical creations. In the philosopher’s eventual disillusion with Wagner, his recognition of the failure of the composer to fulfill this unifying task is apparent.

Nietzsche’s image of a unifying, Dionysian spirit found fertile soil in a country with a lengthy

79 Nietzsche, BT, 8, 56.
80 Nietzsche, BT, 35.
81 Nietzsche, BT, 25.
intellectual tradition focused on the concept of *sobornost’, “the quality of being in accordance with the unity of all, of the unity of humanity in God.”*82 The specific formulation of this abstract term has generally been linked to the philosophical tradition known as Slavophilism (particularly the writers Aleksei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevsky).83 The noun *sobornost’* was related to the adjective “sbornyi” (the Slavic translation of the Greek term *katholikos*, meaning “universal,” “whole,” “all-embracing,” and which was employed in the Nicene Creed to refer to the unity of Christian faithful in a single community) and to the noun *sobor* (alternately meaning “gathering”, “council”, or “cathedral”).84 The Slavophiles emphasized the collective nature of Russian peasant life as a unique cultural characteristic distinguishing Russia from Europe. This idea of a communal, unified people became inextricably linked with the image of Russia's unique national character and the emergence of its imagined future messianic mission.

Because of the specific political connotations connected with the term *sobornost’,* Vladimir Solov’ev coined the alternate idea of *vseedinstvo* (all-unity). In Solov’ev’s aesthetic thought, *theurgy,* the goal of art, was in fact the “active transformation (*preobrazhenie*) of reality for the goals of achieving positive or true all-unity (*polozhitel’noe vseedinstvo*).”85 In other words, theurgic art would reunite the physical and spiritual realms, ushering in a new era of unity and harmony. The term *sobornost’* was reintroduced into Russian philosophical thought by Sergei Trubetskoi, who sought to reintegrate Solov’ev’s idea of *vseedinstvo* with *sobornost’. Both terms were peppered throughout the theoretical writings of later Russian intellectuals, including Simon Frank, Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai


85 Gaidenko, *Vladimír Solov’ev i filosofia serebrianogo veka*, 82.
Berdiaev, Pavel Florensky and Viacheslav Ivanov. This fascination with unity took on a particularly pointed social agenda in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution.

The 1905 Russian Revolution shattered the idealistic complacency of Russia’s educated society ("obshchestvennost’"), inspiring a new search for ways in which art might have a measurable impact on contemporary life. As the gulf separating the common Russian people ("narod") from the educated few became clear amid the flames of Revolution, the question of music’s unifying role became ever more urgent. While the Russian Symbolist movement had initially stressed a more individualistic focus, many of its representatives rejected these individualistic aspirations in the aftermath of the Revolution and embraced a search for unity within society.86 Caught up in the spirit of the times, Belyi argued that the very structure of Russian society would have to be transformed before true collective creation ("sobornoe tvorchestvo") would become possible. In the current context, he argued, such an art was not possible. There were merely “individualists who dream of sobornost’, and individualists who do not dream of it. Collective creation is possible, but within the confines of the contemporary way of life, it is unachievable.”87 In contrast to Belyi, Ivanov believed that social restructuring would come about through art itself. While sobornost’ had once been conceived of as an inherent attribute of the Russian people, Ivanov argued that this unity was in danger of being lost in the modern era. The revolution and its aftermath had served to emphasize the division between the Russian people ("narod") and the educated classes.88 Ivanov believed that the gap between the elite and the narod would to be bridged not by political leaders, but rather by the “singer”, whose unique calling was to reunify society through the creation of new myths around which all people would combine. Building on Nietzsche, Ivanov

86 The emergence of “mystical anarchism” among members of the Russian Symbolist movement (Georgii Chulkov, Viacheslav Ivanov), though itself short-lived, expressed this shifting emphasis in the literary world. See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, “The Transmutation of the Symbolist Ethos: Mystical Anarchism and the Revolution of 1905,” Slavic Review, 36, no. 4 (December 1977): 608-627. The term sobornost’ was first employed by Aleksei Khomiakov, becoming one of the central concepts of Slavophile thought, though definitions of it varied. Vladimir Solov’ev abandoned the term sobornost’, adopting vseedinstvo in its stead. Sergei Trubetskoï revived the term sobornost’ in his work “Sobornaia priroda soznaniia.” Sobornost’ was then adopted and developed further by numerous contemporaries including Simon Frank, Sergei Bulgakov and Pavel Florenskii. See Noveishii filosofskii slovar (Moscow: Knizhniy dom, 2003).
87 Belyi, “Pismo v redaktsiiu, Pereval no.10 (August 1907), 58-60, here 59.
88 Viacheslav Ivanov, “Poet i chern’,” in Po zvezdam, 33-42, here 37.
emphasized the unifying, collective spirit of Dionysus as the path through which this division could be overcome. Russia’s current crisis was due to the singer’s neglect of his true calling and his over-emphasis on individualistic dreams and impulses. Thus, Ivanov mourned in 1906: “the crowd has lost its organ of speech: the singer.” A new, unifying figure was needed for Russia to overcome the societal divisions typical of the modern age: a musical Orpheus.

**Genius and the “New Culture”**

The image of a Russian musical genius, destined to mend the rifts in contemporary society, had deep roots in German idealist thought, but its most immediate expression was found in Nietzsche. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche called for the appearance of a “world-genius” in which both the Apollonian and the Dionysian impulses (the rational and the irrational) would be united. Nietzsche described this unity of impulses as “the union, indeed, the identity, of the lyrist with the musician” that existed as the central component of ancient Greek art. In the modern era, he called for a similar figure, described as the “music-practicing Socrates,” who would combine the rational and irrational impulses of humanity. Such a creative artist would provide a symbolic depiction of Dionysian unity through the embodiment of music’s essence in space and time, a process made possible through the Apollonian impulse that offered form and structure to inchoate unity.

While the image of Zarathustra and the “overman” has dominated popular understanding of Nietzsche’s philosophy, it is important to note that, for Russian society in the early twentieth century, it was the image of “genius” in *The Birth of Tragedy* rather than the “overman” that underpinned this

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89 Thus, music was the most perfect example of sobornoe art. See Bartlett, *Wagner in Russia*, 125.
90 Ivanov, “Poet i chern’,” 37.
91 The term “genius” has been problematized by music scholars in recent years. For an analysis of the constructed nature of the category of “genius” see Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). A more traditional, philosophically based explanation of the concept of genius is espoused in Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven and the Idea of Musical Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). In this dissertation, I seek to understand the meaning that “genius” had for those who employed the term in their discourse on music. Thus, rather than a deconstruction of the concept of “genius” or an argument for its philosophical validity, I seek to offer a hermeneutic explanation of the often conflicting ideas and assumptions underlying the use of this term in late Imperial Russia.
93 Nietzsche, *BT*, 55.
broader search for unity. Here, Nietzsche took great pains to differentiate between the figure of “genius” and individual identity. It was on this point that he challenged Schopenhauer, who argued that the lyrist or singer inevitably combined will-less knowing and subjective desire in their song. Instead, Nietzsche believed that the “self” of the lyric genius was “not the same as that of the waking, empirically real man” but rather the “truly existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things.” The individual, subjective “I” existed within the genius only as “‘non-genius’ . . . the whole throng of subjective passions and agitations directed to a definite object which appears real to him.” While both these components (genius and non-genius) co-existed, the individual, willing subject had no impact on the creative process as such, serving only as the individualized expression of the unified creative impulse, “the medium through which the one truly existent Subject celebrates his release in appearance.” For Nietzsche, the individual, subjectively existing human had no greater significance. The creative impulse, embodied in the figure of the genius, was immediately linked with the underlying, Dionysian essence — the primordial unity from which the entire phenomenal world had sprung. It was this expression of unity that was the “eternal essence of art.” In Nietzsche’s view, any understanding of art in general or music in particular as an expression of individual, subjective emotion was thus mistaken. The genius embodied the universal.

In Russia, Nietzsche’s image of a “music-practicing Socrates” who would unite the rational and irrational aspects of humanity elided with another figure borrowed from Greek mythology: Orpheus. The figure of Orpheus or, in Ivanov’s words, “the miracle of Orpheus” was evoked as a symbol of true

95 Nietzsche, *BT*, 15-16.
96 Nietzsche, *BT*, 14-15. Schopenhauer also claimed that “in the composer, more than in any other artist, the man is entirely separate and distinct from the artist,” emphasizing that the unifying and universal nature of the genius was also central to his conception of music. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: 260. Nietzsche’s distinction focused on what he considered to be Schopenhauer’s inconsistent development of the metaphysics of music. Schopenhauer had allowed the subject-object division to continue to exist when discussing the lyrist’s subjective experience of music as expressing individual pain and consolation in combination with will-less knowing. For Nietzsche, the aesthetic act by its very nature entailed the overcoming of this division, the rejection of individual experience for unity with the whole. Thus, Schopenhauer’s view on music’s connection with underlying human unity was valid, but the philosopher himself had failed to extend it far enough, allowing individual experience to color aesthetic responses to music.
97 Nietzsche, *BT*, 15.
98 Nietzsche, *BT*, 16.
theurgic genius, one who was able to transform material reality through art. This mythological symbol was regularly mixed with messianic imagery, further underlining the intimate connection between art and religion. Belyi argued that a theurgic approach to art required a creative personality (lichnost’) that served as a “temple of God in which God dwells.” Philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev echoed this image of a divine spark, housed within the individual creative genius, claiming that the role of the artistic genius was “another kind of sainthood.” Even more blatantly theological overtones were employed by Ivanov in his 1905 article “Vagner i dionisovo deistvo.” Ivanov emphasized Wagner’s important place as both the second founder (zachinatel’) of the new, Dionysian work (after Beethoven) and the “first forerunner (predtecha) of universal myth-creation.” Ivanov posed this glorious role as analogous to the relationship between John the Baptist (Ioann Predtecha) and Jesus Christ. With the image of the Baptist in mind, he proclaimed that “it is not the place of the founder to be the culminator, and the forerunner must diminish.” Just as the preaching of John had given way to that of Christ, Wagner would give way to a greater artistic visionary, who would bring theurgic art to fruition. In Ivanov’s view, this artistic figure would unite elements of Dionysus and Christ. This messianic genius of the future was symbolized in the figure of Orpheus. A modern-day Orpheus was required to unite the divided nature of contemporary reality, to reawaken memories of the spiritual essence of humanity, through sounding a new song on his lyre. Developing the Orphic myth even

100 The quote is from Ivanov’s diary. See Michael Wachtel, Russian Symbolism, 149. Compare Belyi, “Pesn’ zhizni,” in Arabeski (Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 1969, first published Moscow, 1911), 58. Ivanov argued for an interpretation of Scriabin as a theurgic artist or modern “Orpheus” after the composer’s death. See Ivanov, Skriabin (Moscow: IRIS-Press, 1996). The original book manuscript and drafts are held in RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.32 (“Vzgliad Skriabina na iskustvo”); f. 225, op.1, ed.khr. 33 (“Skriabin, kak natsional’nyi kompozitor”); f.225, op.1, ed.khr.38 (Skriabin: Sbornik statei); IRLI, f.607, n.179 (“Skriabin i dukh revolutsiia”).
102 Rosenthal, New Myth, New World, 60-63. Berdiaev’s central work dealing with creativity and genius was The Meaning of the Creative Act (Smysl’ tvorchestva: opyt opravdaniie cheloveka), written 1911-1914.
104 Ivanov, “Vagner i dionisovo deistvo” 65.
further, Ivanov claimed that the figure of Euridice was in fact a symbol of unity.\textsuperscript{106} Orpheus, then, was the figure who would resurrect this lost unity.

This messianic vision of genius was not universally embraced, however. In his analysis of Pushkin’s death, Solov’ev distinguished between the concept of “genius” and “person of genius”. He emphasized that the embodiment of genius in human form brought with it both the responsibility of a higher degree of morality than that required by normal humans and also (due to fallen human nature) the danger of failure in this task.\textsuperscript{107} It was possible for even a great genius to be mistaken or go astray, succumbing to the weak, human aspect of his personality. Such had been the fate of Pushkin. Tolstoi developed the question of an artist’s moral culpability even further. Defining art first and foremost in terms of its effect on the audience (its ability to “infect” others with the same emotion the artist experienced when creating the work), the question of art’s positive or negative effect could be solved only through reference to its impact upon the audience.\textsuperscript{108} A work of art was thus only as “good” or “moral” as the impact it had upon its audience. In this interpretation, the figure of genius could serve either Heaven or Hell, awakening both morally beneficial and destructive impulses in his audience.

Both Ivanov and Belyi argued for an immediate connection between the artistic genius and the Russian people (\textit{narod}). For Ivanov, the very emergence of the concept of an individual “genius” was a symptom of the divide between the people and the intelligentsia. In its purest form, Ivanov argued, “genius” was intimately connected with the collective identity of a people rather than with any individual.\textsuperscript{109} A similar idea was voiced metaphorically by Belyi in 1908:

\begin{quote}
We need a musical program of life, divided into songs (accomplishments (\textit{podvigi})), but we do not have a single song of our own. This means that we do not have our own spiritual form (\textit{stroi dushi}), and we – are not ourselves at all, but some sort of shadows, and our souls are the not-yet resurrected Euridice, quietly sleeping by the river of oblivion (Lethe). But the river is overflowing its banks. It will drown us if we do not hear the rousing song of Orpheus. Orpheus calls his Euridice.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106} Wachtel, \textit{Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition}. Ivanov connects the image of “Euridice” with “unity” in Ivanov, “\textit{Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstve},” RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed.khr.32, l.4.
\textsuperscript{107} Solov’ev, “\textit{Sud’ba Pushkina},” 275-276.
\textsuperscript{108} N. Gusev and A. Gol’denveizer, \textit{Lev Tolstoi i muzyka}, 19.
\textsuperscript{109} Ivanov, “\textit{Sporady},” in \textit{Po zvezdam}, 338.
\textsuperscript{110} Belyi, “\textit{Pesn’ zhizni},” in \textit{Arabeski}, 43-59, here 59. Elsewhere, Belyi used the figure of Orpheus as a symbol of the
It was the duty of a new, Russian Orpheus to awaken the people from their senseless slumber, uniting them into a single whole.

The Problem of the Nation

The question of the nation or narod was central to late nineteenth century thought throughout Europe. In Russia, anxiety about their relationship to European culture made the question of national creativity and self-sufficiency particularly delicate. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argued that historical periods in which folk songs were particularly dominant in a given culture were those “most violently stirred by Dionysian currents.”

This “primal and universal” melody of folk song served as the foundation of culture itself, the “the musical mirror of the world... the original melody.” For a culture to be healthy, Nietzsche argued, it needed myths derived from its own culture, its own folk-song. Attempts to import the products of foreign culture were almost always doomed to failure and led to the sickness of the culture into which they were transplanted.

While tragedy had served as an adequate artistic transfiguration of reality for the ancient Greeks, modern German culture needed to develop its own myths, not simply transplant Greek forms to German soil. This point was particularly clear, Nietzsche claimed, in music. It was impossible in the present day to enter into the full significance of Greek tragedy, because of the absence of music that had originally accompanied the spectacle. However, even if it were possible to fully resurrect Greek music, Nietzsche argued, “this musical superiority. . . would only have been felt by us had we been Greeks: for in the entire development of Greek music – as compared with the infinitely richer music known and familiar to us – we imagine we hear only the youthful song of the musical genius modestly intoned.”

Because modern culture, in Nietzsche’s mind, had developed music to a far greater degree than the Greeks had

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111 Nietzsche, *BT*, 17.
112 Nietzsche, *BT*, 17.
114 Nietzsche, *BT*, 61.
achieved, Germany would have to develop new music that would fulfill the same role in modern society as Greek music had in its time.\textsuperscript{115}

Having insisted on the importance of a rich tradition of folk music as a sign of the strength of the Dionysian impulse within a society, Nietzsche also claimed that the lack thereof suggested a broader cultural decline:

Considering this close relationship between music and myth, we may now in like manner infer that a degeneration and depravation of the one involves a deterioration of the other.\textsuperscript{116}

The young Nietzsche saw hope for the revival of German culture in the music dramas of Richard Wagner, an expectation that later turned to bitter disappointment (with Wagner coming to represent all the sicknesses of German culture).\textsuperscript{117}

Nietzsche’s emphasis on nation or \textit{narod} found a clear counterpart in late Imperial Russia. However, in the Russian context, \textit{narod} took on a specific class-based meaning. The \textit{narod} were the common Russian peasantry, believed to embody true Christian values in a contemporary, increasingly secular, world. Both Lev Tolstoi and Andrei Bely argued that true moral direction for Russia could spring only from the values of the \textit{narod}. Though both men found themselves drawn to the classics of the German musical canon (including Beethoven, Schumann and Wagner), they were nevertheless

\textsuperscript{115} Musically, Nietzsche was an inheritor of the German classical tradition (Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Wagner). The idea that this tradition was representative of “universal” musical laws and reflected human progress as a whole was widespread in the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. On Nietzsche’s musical preferences, see Silk and Stern, \textit{Nietzsche on Tragedy}, esp. 24-30; Georges Liébert, \textit{Nietzsche and Music}. In \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra}, Nietzsche called for the fashioning of a “new lyre” which was necessary in order to sing “new songs”. As Benson argues, “The implication is that these new songs are so different that they simply cannot be played on the old lyres. It is a new sort of music that goes along with a new sort of being.” Benson, \textit{Pious Nietzsche}, 181. This observation should not be taken as an argument that Nietzsche had an evolutionary, progressive view of humanity as such. Nevertheless, his argument that modern music was “infinitely richer” suggests an underlying assumption as to the progressive development of human artistry: modern life required entirely new music to capture its essence. The human soul had evolved beyond the expressive ability of music of the past. This standard trope was developed to a far greater degree in other thinkers.

\textsuperscript{116} Nietzsche, \textit{BT}, 90.

\textsuperscript{117} The relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner is analyzed in depth in Georges Liébert, \textit{Nietzsche and Music}; Silk and Stern, \textit{Nietzsche on Tragedy}. Nietzsche’s break with Wagner occurred in 1878; in 1888 he published \textit{Nietzsche contra Wagner: Out of the Files of a Psychologist}, in which he collected critiques of the composer, scattered throughout his earlier writings, into a single work. For a standard English translation of this work see Walter Kaufmann, ed., \textit{The Portable Nietzsche} (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 661-683.
deeply concerned about its moral content.\textsuperscript{118} Tolstoi had sought on numerous occasions to introduce members of the peasantry to this “high” art form, only to be generally disappointed in their lack of interest. From this he concluded that his enjoyment was thus a sign of his own debauched tastes, which “separated him from the narod.”\textsuperscript{119} Belyi similarly considered his enjoyment of classical music a sign of his own “degenerate” state.\textsuperscript{120}

For Tolstoi, folk music, the immediate expression of the “workers of all peoples,” remained the highest musical achievement. It was only this music that “is comprehensible to everyone; a Persian will understand Russian [folk music], a Russian – Persian.” In contrast, “no one will understand manorial lies. They themselves don’t understand it.”\textsuperscript{121} Similarly, Belyi argued that the only genuine, spiritual (sviataia) music was that of the narod, who were not yet infected by the ills of contemporary educated society:

And if the contemporary symphony in its very essence is not combinable with life, then only that which is sung by the narod is just. And of course the song of the laundress at her laundry weighs more heavily in the scales of goal and value than the unfathomable depths of Beethoven and Schumann.\textsuperscript{122}

The source for music’s specific, moral content (without which it could not have true metaphysical meaning) could only be rooted, Belyi argued, in its connection with the common people. This claim was in contrast to Solov’ev, who had emphasized the aesthetically defined concept of Beauty as the moral basis of art. Rather, for both Tolstoi and Belyi, it was music’s immediate connection with the common people that defined whether its content was morally sound or not.\textsuperscript{123} Morality was connected

\textsuperscript{118} Despite his rejection of classical music in this work, Tolstoi was well acquainted with Russian musical life of his day. His wife held a well-known “musical salon” through which “all our beginning artist musicians and almost all visiting foreign stars felt it their duty to pass”. L.L. Sabaneev, “Tolstoi v muzykal’nom mire” in idem., Vospominaniiia o Rossi, 119-131, here 120. First published in Sovremennye zapiski, 1939, no. 69. The fullest contemporary account of Tolstoys connections with the Russian musical world is to be found in the personal writings of his friend, the pianist-composer Aleksandr Borisovich Gol’denveizer. See A.B. Gol’denveizer, Vblizi Tol’stogo (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959); idem., Dnevnik I, II (Moscow: Tortuga, 1995). Excerpts from these diaries were originally published in M. Gershenzon, ed., Russkie propilei, vol .2 (Moscow: M. and S. Sabashnikovykh, 1916), 269-351.

\textsuperscript{119} N. Gusev and A. Gol’denveizer, Lev Tolstoi i muzyka, 35.

\textsuperscript{120} Belyi, “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu”, Pereval no. 10 (August 1907): 59-60.

\textsuperscript{121} N. Gusev and A. Gol’denveizer, Lev Tolstoi i muzyka, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{122} Belyi, “Protiv muzyki,” 60.

\textsuperscript{123} For this reason Konstantin Eiges (discussed in Chapter Three) distanced himself from Tolstoi’s definition of art. See Eiges, “Osnovnaia antinomiia muzykal’noi estetiki,” 123. Tolstoi’s ideas enjoyed a notable afterlife in late Imperial Russia,
with music’s closeness to the positive ideals of the narod, while classical music embodied the debauched tastes of the upper class. The envisioned Orpheus would be one who could speak with the genuine voice of the Russian narod.

While each of these concepts (zhiznetvorchestvo, unity, genius and nation) had precursors in German idealist tradition in general and Nietzsche’s writings in particular, the interpretations that emerged in late Imperial Russia were not merely a reiteration of the German sources. Rather, the Russian educated elite sought, both consciously and unconsciously, to translate Nietzsche’s vision of music's unifying power into their own historical context. This vision of music as a unifying power found particular resonance in a divided society in the midst of dramatic social and cultural changes. Entwined with a belief in historical progress and a messianic view of Russia's place in the world, music was viewed by many as the artistic form in which Russian culture would reach its highest fulfillment. The future of Russian music and Russian culture were intimately entwined.

Despite Nietzsche's widespread influence, his Russian audience was acutely aware of his German origins, and the need to adapt his views for Russian reality. These Russian “orphans of Nietzsche” struggled to combine the philosopher’s call for the creation of new, unifying national myths with their awareness of the unique heritage of Russian culture. Thus, several distinguishing characteristics in the Russian incarnation of the concepts of music, life-transformation, unity, genius and nation consistently emerge. The strong emphasis on the idea of sobornost’ rather than individuality which had a lengthy prehistory in Russian thought, together with an emphasis on the moral importance of the Russian narod and its intimate connection with religious (particularly Christian) experience distinguished the intellectual climate of late Imperial Russia. Russia, it was believed, had a unique role to play in human history. Orpheus could appear only in Russia, the last European country to maintain...
any connection with the lost organic unity of the past. It was the Russian people’s unique spiritual and moral power (what Dostoevsky had in mind when he referred to Russians as “carriers of God”) that would make the appearance of this transforming figure of genius possible. Thus Ivanov argued, “the potential for human deification (bozhdestvennost’) that slumbers in us has forced us to long for the tragic form of the Overman (sverkhchelovek), for the embodiment of the resurrected Dionysus in us.”

The ideas of Nietzschean life-transformation through art united with beliefs about Russia’s unique place in history, an emphasis on the Russian narod’s uniquely collective spirit, and educated-class fears about the increasingly fragmented nature of contemporary Russian (and European) society, creating a powerful symbolic vision of the future. Music emerged as the ultimate symbol of unity and spirituality, an antidote to the troubles of contemporary life. This point emerges in two examples taken from late Imperial Russia: the founding of the “Order of Universal Genius Brotherhood” (Orden vsemirnogo genial'nogo rebiachestva) in St. Petersburg in 1908, and the 1913 book Richard Wagner and Russia (Rikhard Vagner i Rossiia), by Russian Symbolist writer and editor Sergei Durylin.

**Art as Religion: The Search for a Mystery**

Creativeness is neither permitted nor justified by religion: creativity is itself religion.

Nikolai Berdiaev

In 1908, the journalist Vladimir Botsianovskii heard of the existence of a group in St. Petersburg called the “Order of Universal Genius Brotherhood”. After attending one of their “rituals” (obriad), he described it in detail to the readers of the journal Teatr i iskusstvo. This was no ordinary social club, but a group attempting to unite ideas of creative genius, art and religion into a single synthesis. While drawing heavily on traditional Christian terminology, many seemingly familiar terms were defined in surprising ways. The concept of God was central, but God was understood as

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124 Ivanov, “Nitsshe i Dionis,” 3.
126 Vladimir Botsianovskii, “U geniev,” *Teatr i iskusstvo* no. 22 (1909): 389-392. All following quotations are taken from this article.
“that which lives within us, that which we create and that which is created through us in an elemental burst, in genius creation, and that which will someday be created out of us.” “God” was the sum total of individual being (internal and external), both the individuals’ potential for creation and those creations themselves. The creative impulse was defined as “genius”, “the heavenly property of the soul,” which was “present in all people” and was equally possessed by all people. Genius was therefore not an individualistic concept, but a collective one. Despite this fundamental equality, genius “sleeps in the bosom of most people” who could only unconsciously guess at its existence within them. The “Holy Spirit” (Dukh sviatyi) was “belief in one’s own geniusness, in one's own messianism”. When filled with this belief, “even the lowest of people will create miracles”. Thus, the potential to transform life was inherent in every individual. Creative engagement with the world was not merely an enjoyable pastime, but a central part of life itself. While the ceremony was led by a “high priest” or, as members of the order referred to him, the “general procurator”, “genius” was an attribute inherent in every individual, and each member was referred to as a “genius”. The ultimate expression of genius was in creation, but this creation had a communal rather than individual aspect as the individual creation of every person would ultimately be part of a larger, “communal worship” (sobornoe služenie).

Although Botsianovskii admitted that he had no idea of the number of members of the order, he argued that its very existence was “characteristic of our time” and that numerous other, similar groups were forming throughout Russia. Echoes of more traditional forms of worship were strong in this ceremony of geniuses, specifically Orthodox and Catholic rituals A direct connection with musical creativity was also apparent. The single photograph included by Botsianovskii was of the “high priest” in charge of the rite, who alternated between speaking and playing his violin. His outfit was modeled after the traditional robes of an Orthodox priest, with the single exception of the violin held in his hand.

127 The gender distinction is not clear in this article; nevertheless, most other works devoted to the question of “genius” dating from this time define it as an active, creative, masculine entity, which women, by definition, did not possess. For this reason, I have chosen to use “he” in relation to the discussion of genius.
which completed his attire. This was not art as an isolated, aesthetic phenomenon, but a union between artistic creation, religion and life itself. The blurring of lines between religion and artistic creativity was complete. In the closing of the creed, members prayed, “may your prayerful address to God appear in creation: personal, individual and collective creation.” Genius and creativity were inherent parts of every individual, but were also that which linked one to a greater community. Communal (sobornyi) creative genius would transform and save the world.

The “Order of Universal Genius Brotherhood” demonstrates the partial adoption of the myth of a musical “messiah,” who would lead society towards an act of collective creation. This myth that grew in part from Nietzsche’s influence, but incorporated central concerns of Russia’s educated elite in the years prior to the 1917 Revolution. The “Order of Genius” glorified both the individual and the collective creative act. Rather than praying “to the God of Spirit and Truth,” as the Christian rationalists did, the order’s members were called to “pray to the God of Spirit and Beauty, because full truth is only in beauty”. The order posited the worship of “Beauty” as the highest truth and borrowed ritual trappings from religious ceremonies in the creation of what could be considered a new myth. This myth continued to grow over the next years as political and cultural tension with contemporary Germany continued to grow, ultimately finding even stronger expression in the 1913 writings of Sergei Durylin.

In his book *Wagner and Russia*, Sergei Durylin sought to create a prophetic work, one that incorporated many of the ideas examined in the previous section. Echoing Nietzsche, Durylin claimed that the purpose of art in contemporary society was the creation of new “myths” through which to bring meaning to human existence. Unlike Nietzsche, Durylin believed this task carried with it a

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128 This was a dramatic departure from traditional Orthodox ritual, which banned instruments of all kind from worship, but was a natural extension of the cult surrounding the art of music that emerged in Russia at this time.
129 Botsianovskii claimed that the “Order of Geniuses” was inspired by the theories of Vyacheslav Ivanov, whose “tower” in St. Petersburg was a central gathering place for Russian intellectuals of the time. For more on Ivanov and the evolution of symbolist theory, see James West, *Russian Symbolism*; Robert Bird, *The Russian Prospero: The Creative Universe of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2006).
130 Durylin first read a paper on “Wagner and Russia” at an evening gathering arranged through the publisher Musaget (founded by Emil Medtner), held at the house of sculptor Konstantin Krakht in 1911-12[?]. Durylin had joined Musaget in 1910, shortly after the publisher first opened. See Sergei Durylin, *V svoem углу* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1991), 11, 13.
specific, religious function. Durylin argued, “is wholeness, and mythic thought is wholeness of thought, the creation of wholeness itself.” It was this unity that had been lost in the contemporary age. For Sergei Durylin (as for Nietzsche, Ivanov and Belyi), Richard Wagner was a central figure pointing toward the future development of human society as a whole. Wagner’s unique importance, in Durylin’s interpretation, lay in his basis of myth-creation not merely in his own person, but in connection with the narod. Building upon Ivanov’s discussion of the division between the narod and the artist-genius in contemporary society (a division which could only be overcome through the creation of new myths), Durylin argued that the true artist should draw inspiration from the myths of the narod, which he would rework and return to the people in a new form. It was only through mutual interchange that an artist could “free oneself from the contemporary spirit” because “only the narod is eternally innocent.” No matter how great the individual artist, he was dependent upon the myth-creating potential of the narod from which he sprang.

It was this mutual dependence between the genius and the narod that spelled Wagner’s ultimate failure. While he was a forerunner of the true Dionysian artist, he “could not give the strength and wholeness (tsel’nost’) [of myths] to the German people of the nineteenth century, just as he could not himself receive from [the German narod] his own predisposition, his own predestination to that wholeness, strength and unity.” The reason for this disconnect, in Durylin’s analysis, was Germany’s loss of its Christian foundation. Contemporary Germany embodied the individualism and divided nature of contemporary life. Wagner’s importance for contemporary Russia stemmed from the fact that he “was the last German in whom the spirit of music was the spirit of Christianity.” While earlier

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131 Durylin called for “Symbolism as an artistic method, myth-creation as the fruit of art and religion as the living creative spirit of art.” See Sergei Durylin, Rikhard Vagner i Rossiia: O Vagnere i budushchikh putiakh iskusstva (Moscow: Musaget, 1913), 19.
132 Durylin, Vagner i Rossiia, 12. For responses, see Muzyka no. 187 (June 21, 1914): 417–418; Muzyka no. 172 (March 8, 1914).
133 Durylin argued that it was this aspect that differentiated Wagner from the earlier Romantics. See Durylin, Vagner i Rossiia, 22.
134 Durylin, Vagner i Rossiia, 7-8. Durylin’s choice of words (“Poet i chern’”) is a direct evocation of Ivanov’s earlier article by the same name.
135 Durylin, Vagner i Rossiia, 21.
136 Durylin, Vagner i Rossiia, 12.
German music (Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven) had been created on a Christian foundation, after Wagner’s death Germany “enter[ed] into a period of musical decline and broke with its tradition of religious-musical inspiration.” The new generation of German composers (Richard Strauss, Anton Bruckner, Max Reger) demonstrated the divisive, non-Christian orientation of contemporary German culture. This new German Volk “could not be placed in living connection with the great religious-musical spirit and Christian soul that great German music possesses.” While Wagner had succeeded in founding a pagan myth in the figure of Siegfried, his attempt to forge a Christian myth with Parsifal was a failure. This failure was due, not so much to the fault of Wagner, but to the inability of the German narod to offer a sufficient Christian basis for this type of myth-creation:

Siegfried, not knowing fear, not knowing sin, a child of the forest, a wonderful beast beyond sin, was the universally accepted, perfect and expected form of mythic thought of the victorious German narod. This is where Wagner’s poetry was truly heard not by a rabble (chern’), but by a sympathetic and unanimous narod. . . Siegfried is the most perfect pagan form in Wagner’s art. . . On the night [of the performance of] Siegfried, Bayreuth was a temple of the Mystery that the German narod most needs and the only one [they] now recognize.

Wagner’s German “Mystery” was fundamentally a pagan one, demonstrating that the German Volk was unable to respond to a Christian rather than a pagan “Mystery” (embodied in Parsifal). The creation of a true Christian “Mystery,” a task that Wagner had recognized but failed to achieve, was, in Durylin’s mind, a specifically Russian task:

There is one point that is most important for Wagner and us, in which no one is closer to him than we are. This is our unquenchable, growing thirst for religious art, the national (narodnoe) Russian and Christian mythic thought that is true to this day. It is the longing (toska) for a united Christian worldview (mirooshchushchenie) that never leaves us [and] which is uncovered in life, in thoughts, in art. Here it is our Russian right to think and speak of Wagner, here the indissolubility of the connection of the words Wagner and Russia is comprehensible.

Durylin cited the myth of the city of Kitezh as a specific example of the Russian narod’s deeply Christian view of the world. He suggested that this particular myth was ripe for artistic development by a Russian composer who would succeed where Wagner had failed, creating a true Christian and folk

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137 Durylin, Wagner i Rossiia, 13.
138 Durylin, Wagner i Rossiia, 14-15.
139 Durylin, Wagner i Rossiia, 14-15. Durylin echoed Solov’ev’s assessment of the character of Siegfried on several points.
140 Durylin, Wagner i Rossiia, 12-13.
141 Durylin, Wagner i Rossiia, 16.
“Mystery”. Rimskii-Korsakov’s opera based on the legend had been the only attempt thus far by a composer to combine the Russian folk and Christian tradition, but the composer had not truly understood the mission that lay ahead, and thus failed to become the “artist myth-creator” that Russia needed. Nevertheless, Durylin believed strongly that such a task would soon be fulfilled. Music, and specifically Russian music, would transform the world.

Postlude: Music and the Path to Unity

Music provided a powerful symbol of unity through which educated Russians could grapple with the increasing divisions they saw emerging in contemporary society, particularly in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution. However, music was envisioned not merely as a symbol; it was also considered a moral or ethical force, with the power to transform existing reality, uniting societal divisions that were growing increasingly evident. Music therefore could play an immediate and active role.

Nietzsche, as a visionary, provided the metaphysical basis for interpreting music’s symbolic meaning. His metaphysical interpretation of music as the ultimate Dionysian and unifying art appealed to intellectual traditions centered around both the Slavophile value of sobornost’ and a belief in Russia's messianic role in human history, as well as the Russian intelligentsia’s call for revolutionary change within society. This gave rise to a cultural milieu in which music was genuinely viewed not only as a symbol of a higher, metaphysical meaning, but as a means of salvation. The Orphic figure of the artist-genius was central to this process, with salvation envisioned as the creation of social, spiritual and cultural unity. This Russian concept of unity was endowed with moral, religious and national implications that were wholly or partially absent from Nietzsche's vision of a Dionysian unity. While this symbol of music was often evoked in discourse, specific questions about how the art form of music might actually be harnessed to fulfill such a theurgic function were left to the musical elite to address.

142 Durylin, Vagner i Rossiia, 25.
CHAPTER THREE: THE CHOSEN ONES

Often words are nothing and music is everything.
Fedor Akimenko

On November 22, 1909, RMG published an article by Kharkov composer Fedor Akimenko, entitled “Aphorisms of an artist” (“Aforizmy khudozhnika”). Heavily reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche’s writing style, it posed complex ideas in brief phrases that forced the reader to stop and muse over the implications of the statement. The following year, Akimenko sent a manuscript copy of the opening of his philosophical and mystical work, A Life in Art (Zhizn’ v iskusstve) to RMG’s editor, Nikolai Findeizen, hoping to continue to publicize his ideas on art. Unsure about how Findeizen would respond, Akimenko requested merely that the editor return the manuscript if he did not think it would be of interest to his readers. Findeizen, however, warmly acknowledged the work, publishing it soon after and requesting that Akimenko send him further philosophical works as well as a more detailed autobiographical statement and samples of his musical compositions. Findeizen believed that Akimenko’s ideas struck a chord that would find great resonance in contemporary Russian musical life.

Analysis of Akimenko’s articles bring to light several standard themes that reflect the broader intellectual trends discussed in Chapter Two: an emphasis on music’s theurgic power (its ability to raise humanity above mere material existence to a higher,

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2 Findeizen, editor of Russia’s longest-running periodical devoted to music, had a clear sense of the issues that most directly concerned his readers. The space devoted to Akimenko’s writings show that he considered these works to be of importance to a large number of his subscribers. See Akimenko, “Aforizmy khudozhnika”; Akimenko to Nikolai Findeizen (October 23, 1910), RNB f. 816, op.2, ed. khr. 1092, l.8; Akimenko to Findeizen (November 12, 1910), RNB f. 816, op.2, ed. khr. 1092, l.10; Akimenko, “Zhizn’ v iskusstve. Glava iz raboty” (October 1910), RNB f.816, op.3, ed.khr.2233. Findeizen also tried to convince Akimenko to let him publish the series of articles that appeared in RMG in a separate booklet. See Akimenko to Findeizen (December 28, 1912), RNB f. 816, op.2, ed. khr. 1092, l.23-24. Akimenko valued this work greatly, as demonstrated by his attempt to have his relatives bring it to him after he left Russia following the revolution. See Akimenko to Konstantin Matveevich, (1923-1924), RNB f.1, op.1, ed. khr.1, l.14, 15ob.
spiritual being), the central role of creative geniuses in this process (referred to by Akimenko as “chosen ones” or *izbranniki*), the image of art as religion, and the desire to spread music’s power to the “masses” of common people. These ideas were crowned with the image of a future era of unity and spirituality, ushered in by the power of music. The artistic process, in Akimenko’s view, incorporated all humanity, as a spark of genius slumbered in every individual, awaiting the creation of a great musical genius to awaken it. Through its ability to unify people through the active experience of emotions, music could unite all earthly dwellers and, Akimenko hinted, possibly even permit humans to comprehend beings from other planets.\(^3\)

Akimenko gave voice to a personal interpretation of a broader musical metaphysics that was shared by many contemporary Russian musicians. While the general themes touched upon by musicians were similar to those that were central to broader contemporary discourse about music, those with a more specialized knowledge of the art of music deepened their analysis of specific musical characteristics. This chapter seeks to expand our understanding of the image of music promoted by practicing musicians through close analysis of three men who, like Akimenko, were also active in its literary articulation: Konstantin Eiges, Aleksandr Koptiaev and Vladimir Rebikov.\(^4\)

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4 While Eiges wrote numerous articles devoted to questions in musical (and philosophical) aesthetics and their relation to contemporary life, Koptiaev’s views have had to be pieced together from a wide range of articles devoted to specific composers or musical institutions, translations and personal letters. In the case of Rebikov, most of the material has been drawn from a series of stories published in *RMG* and private correspondences.
Each of these men represented the Nietzschean-inspired musical metaphysics that developed in the major cities of the Russian Empire (including St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev). All three actively published in the periodical press of the day, addressing music’s connection with aesthetics and its relation to social life more generally. Each man was intimately acquainted with the writings of German idealist aesthetics (particularly Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Wagner) and sought to develop their own musical metaphysics by building upon these traditions, while drawing also on Russia’s unique intellectual tradition. As a composer-pianist, each man published his own compositions, performed concerts of his own works and maintained connections with musical educational establishments. Thus, all three strove to share their metaphysical view of music with a broader community, extending primarily to the “middling groups” of urban Russia in the final years of the Empire. Through examining the range of views depicted in the writings of these three men, we achieve a clearer image of the impact of musical metaphysics upon Russian society.

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5 Eiges studied, lived and worked in Moscow, while Koptiaev’s entire career was centered in St. Petersburg. Rebikov’s career, by contrast, took him from Moscow to Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Prague, Florence, Odessa and Yalta. See IRLI f.440, no.31; O.M. Tompakova, Vladimir Ivanovich Rebikov: Ocherki zhizni i tvorchestva (Moscow: Muzyka, 1989); William Henry Dale, “A study of the musico-psychological dramas of Vladimir Ivanovich Rebikov,” PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 1955. This image of music seems to have spread to provincial centers also. In addition to Akimenko, who was resident in Kharkov, music critic Boris Popov was involved in spreading similar ideas to readers in Perm, while composer V.V. Dianin expressed philosophical-mystical interpretations of his operas in a Nizhnyi-Novgorod journal devoted to local musical life. See Boris Popov to Findeizen, RNB f.816, op.2, no.1722; V.V. Dianin, “Vstuplenie k opere Buddha (Sakia-Muni),” Nizhegorodskiiia muzikal’nye novosti no. 1 (April 22, 1909): 1-4; idem., “Strakh sushechestvovaniia i uzhas smerti,” Nizhegorodskiiia muzikal’nye novosti no. 9 (June 10, 1909): 3-5.

6 Eiges and Rebikov published primarily in Moscow-based journals, Koptiaev in Petersburg ones. While Eiges and Koptiaev were active in offering lectures and publications, Rebikov gave concerts in addition to his publications.

7 The term “middling groups” is borrowed from Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West, eds., Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). For a closer look at the connection between music and the emergence of a Russian “middle class” see Lynn Sargeant, Harmony and Discord: Music and the Transformation of Russian Cultural Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Born respectively in 1866, 1868 and 1875, Rebikov, Koptiaev and Eiges were part of a generation for whom music was already clearly established as a profession.
The chapter begins by examining Eiges’ aesthetics of music, demonstrating how he further developed Solov’ev’s moral interpretation of artistic Beauty, culminating with a discussion of the “satanic” as well as the “sacred” side of music. I then trace Koptiaev’s embrace of Dionysian value-creation and his emphasis on the collective spirit of the Russian narod as the embodiment of future social goals. Koptiaev’s focus on the creative individual leads to a discussion of Vladimir Rebikov’s elision of musical creativity with Christianity, of Orpheus with Christ. This is followed by an examination of the realm in which the three men found agreement: criticism of contemporary Germany and an embrace of Russia’s future historic mission. The chapter closes with a closer examination of Vladimir Rebikov’s own attempt to create a “Mystery”: his 1911 composition Alfa i Omega (Alpha and Omega)

**Konstantin Eiges: Music as a Mystical Power**

Konstantin Romanovich Eiges (1875-1950) espoused a worldview heavily influenced by the musical metaphysics of both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, which he read through the neo-Platonic lens of Vladimir Solov’ev’s philosophy. In Eiges’ view, the Dionysian/Apollonian division inherent in both art and life would be overcome through the idea of Beauty. In Beauty, each opposing principle was synthesized into a third,

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unifying whole. Unity, for Eiges, was thus primarily understood as the overcoming of division between individuals and within the self, with little consideration of social divisions. In this sense, his analysis of music’s import paralleled those of Sabaneev and Schloezer, discussed in Chapter One.

Eiges granted music a mystical significance that was only implied in his intellectual predecessors. Like them, he insisted that music was the highest and most unique of all arts. Music did not simply “recreate reality or... bear some relation to a structure in the phenomenal world.”\(^9\) Rather, it was the “highest spiritual embodiment,”\(^10\) incarnating the “uplift into another, higher world.”\(^11\) Music (together with the highest achievements of lyrical poetry) was an art form that “immediately touched upon heavenly beauty, which has no relation at all to the phenomenal world, the world of representation.”\(^12\) Music was, as Solov’ev had argued, a “magical” art, which intuitively gave access to the underlying unity of existence.\(^13\) Eiges took this one step further, seeing in music one of the purest mystical experiences possible:

The secret of music cannot be achieved through reason, through concepts, but only in that transformed state, which may be called ‘musical mood’ (\textit{muzykal’noe nastroenie}) and which, together with contemplative and religious moods, may be counted as a mystical state.\(^14\)

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\(^9\) Eiges, “Muzyka i estetika,” 18. This is of course a reiteration of Schopenhauer’s analysis of music in contrast to other arts. For Eiges’ acknowledgement of this, see also “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 68-69, fn.

\(^10\) Eiges, “Muzyka i estetika,” 18. For Eiges, “musical mood” referred to “a particular transformation of the
For Eiges, music was an immediate, intuitive force that gave access to areas of mystical knowledge outside the realm of rationality.\textsuperscript{15} Such a state of existence could only be reached through the lived experience (perezhivanie) of music itself. “Musical mood” referred to the synthesis of the darker, Dionysian impulse, with the higher, Apollonian impulse into the higher, mystical realm of Beauty.\textsuperscript{16}

All art, Eiges claimed, had some degree of transformative power. If, after listening to a piece of music or contemplating a painting, the audience was left “in the same state, without receiving entirely new insight, without having become different,” the experience could not be considered artistic.\textsuperscript{17} An artistic work must, “in one way or another, influence our relation to the reality around us.”\textsuperscript{18} Through evocation of mood (nastroenie) genuine art “carries us outside the boundaries of the phenomenal world, lift[s] us above the earth.... to the other side of the world of will and representation.”\textsuperscript{19} This otherworldly experience was irrational at its base, reachable not through reason, but only through immediate intuition.\textsuperscript{20}
While all art had this ability to connect with a world outside phenomenal reality, it was specifically music that offered the highest, mystical level of artistic experience, due to its intimate connection with the unified, creative impulse underlying all existence. Musical mood (музыкальное настроение), Eiges argued, was something distinct from other artistic states, and which gave the purest experience of both unity and creativity. Musical mood emerged from that state of being referred to by Eiges as “will to sound” (волю к звукам): the striving of will to express itself in a specific, aural language, in combination with the form-giving (Apollonian) impulse of creativity.\textsuperscript{21} In this interpretation, the inchoate will of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer was assigned a goal: the striving for sound, most specifically musical sound.

Eiges’ concept of “will to sound” led him to take his interpretation of music as the purest embodiment of the unity that underlay all existence a step further than his German predecessors.\textsuperscript{22} Schopenhauer had begun his philosophical inquiry from the assumption that the first form of representation was the division of the world into subject and object, “I” and “not-I”, which was the starting point of all consciousness.\textsuperscript{23} Eiges argued that Schopenhauer had failed to take into account the fact that music itself had no physical embodiment in the phenomenal world. Music was unconnected with external, physical objects, existing in contrast to the individual, but was rather connected with the soul

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\textsuperscript{21} The influence of Schopenhauer’s concept of Will is apparent in this interpretation. Eiges sought to combine the inchoate striving of will with a particular kind of expression – aural embodiment in music (“will to sound”; volia k zvukam).

\textsuperscript{22} Eiges described music as “the spiritual (душевное) state of the Creator, the superhuman (сверхчеловеческое) being which is free from division into physical and psychological, external and internal worlds.” Eiges, “Osnovnyi antonomiiia muzykal’noi estetiki,” 125. This reference to the “superhuman” as an entity free from any sort of division is clearly reminiscent of Nietzsche’s Dionysus or “Primordial Unity”.

\textsuperscript{23} Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 78-80. Schopenhauer made a partial exception for the human body, in which internal and external experiences of the world unite, which Eiges acknowledged.
itself.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, like the individual human body, “musical representation in our consciousness is different from all other forms of representation. . . it does not relate to the external world, but is united with ‘I’.”\textsuperscript{25} In other words, music bridged the subject-object division, offering a potential means of synthesis.

According to Eiges, although the musical work functioned differently for composers, audiences and performers, the end result was the same: transcendence of limited individual existence in favor of communal experience. As a composer or creator of music, “sounds enter our consciousness, coming from some kind of internal depth, from the depth of the soul, and not through perception.”\textsuperscript{26} In this way, music directly united the individual composer with the underlying, Dionysian unity.\textsuperscript{27} In contrast, for a listener, music entered the consciousness through the external, aural faculties, thereby leading to a mystical transcendence of limited individual existence. Music brought together disparate individuals in a communicative act between souls, emerging from the composer’s immediate experience of the Dionysian unifying impulse, being embodied in physical sounds and then entering through the auditory faculties directly to the soul of the listener, lifting their experience outside the realm of the individual, without reference to concepts or objects existing in the phenomenal world.\textsuperscript{28} This interrelationship was most complex for the performer:

\textsuperscript{24} This interpretation rejects the physical study of acoustics and sound waves, a point which Eiges insisted upon on numerous occasions. See Eiges, “Muzyka i estetika,” 16-17; “Osnovnaia antinomiia muzykal’noi estetiki,” 122-123.

\textsuperscript{25} Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 80. Though Schopenhauer had made this observation in respect to the human body, Eiges argued he had failed to extend it to music.

\textsuperscript{26} Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 73.

\textsuperscript{27} Similarly, in the act of musical creation, the composer’s soul “leaves the confines of the phenomenal world, enters a ‘trance’, as musicians say.” (Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 86). In all three cases (listener, performer, composer) the experience of music involved an abandoning of one’s own individuality and union with a larger whole.

\textsuperscript{28} Eiges summarized this point in the following way: “Musical sounds are not only perceived by the soul, but come from the soul.” See Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 73.
A pianist must at the same time both hear those physical sounds, which he has under his fingers, and also experience these as ‘musical mood’, that is, as the representation of sounds and as ‘will to sound’. Every person who performs a musical work (for example on the piano) must forget about the world of physical objects and forces of nature, forget all ideas, large and small, and all feelings and moods experienced in concrete life, and focus all his consciousness, ideas and will on sounds alone.29

In performing a musical work, an individual experienced both the Dionysian impulse striving for manifestation (the will to sound) and also the aural experience resulting from music’s manifestation in sound, a combination that gave rise to music as mystical experience (musical mood). This emphasis on the unity of performer, listener and composer points to a widespread view that composer-pianists, who embodied multiple roles in one figure (such as Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Medtner), were the purest representatives of music’s unifying and creative impulse.

While Nietzsche had argued that artistic creativity gave meaning to human existence, Eiges was far more explicit in linking the creative process specifically with music. Music itself, he claimed, was “creative representation in its essence.”30 Utilizing Schopenhauer's dualistic division of reality, Eiges argued: “pure creation can only come from pure will.”31 All other art forms stemmed from “imagination, contemplation or representation of the world” and “thus repeat the existing external world.”32 In music, on the other hand:

the composition, the result of creativity, ontologically completely corresponds to the process of creation; in every finished musical work the process of inspiration is still fully awake, every defined music is not some form and not the physical product of creation, but the living striving (poryv) to higher being, the will to sound (volia k zvukam) itself.33

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33 Eiges, “Muzyka, kak odna iz vyshikh misticheskikh perezhivanii,” 56.
In other words, a musical work was, by its very nature, an embodiment of the creative process, without physical manifestation outside of its actual performance in time. A musical work had no predefined goal or intended result as it was not modeled after any existing object or idea in the phenomenal world. For this reason, music, like will, could not be predicted in any way; it was pure intuition and irrationality. All other arts repeated the physical world to one degree or another (with the partial exception of literature) and thus, in a strict sense, they did not create; rather, they offered a reinterpretation of existing reality. In contrast, music was not an object for contemplation, but was the embodiment of the creative process itself. Not even Nietzsche had argued so explicitly that a musical composition embodied the creative process. In this interpretation, the Russian Symbolist “art to life” (zhiznetvorchestvo) movement, in which an artistic work actually impacted the real world, reached a virtually unprecedented height. Through participation in music, an individual performed the creative process itself, uniting with other disparate beings in a single lived experience. However, together with this great power, the realm of music offered potential dangers: Orpheus could adopt either the guise of messiah or devil.

35 Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki,” 85. Eiges developed his argument most clearly against architecture, which, rather than creating from nothing, repeated the initial masses, heaviness and division into parts of the phenomenal world. He claimed that language also failed to create as it utilized words and concepts, themselves referring to the phenomenal world.
37 The “art to life” (zhiznetvorchestvo) movement argued that “art turned into ‘real life’ and ‘life’ turned into art; they became one. For the artist no separation existed between the ‘man’ and the ‘poet,’ between personal life (zhizn’) and artistic (creative) activity (tvorchestvo).” Irina Paperno, “Introduction” in Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, eds., Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 2-11, here 2. This artistic movement (part of Russian Symbolism) has received a good deal of attention from literary scholars. See Olga Matich, Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin de Siècle (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).
Orpheus: Savior or Satan?

In his analysis, Eiges emphasized that mysticism in general (and, by extension, musical mysticism in particular), could stem both from higher and lower impulses. “Lower mysticism” was “the mysticism of chaos, manifested as drunkenness, raving, the experience of horror, etc.” Eiges argued that the clearest manifestation of the “higher” mystical impulse was creativity (more perfectly embodied in music than any other art), while the “lower” mystical impulse found its purest expression in destruction. This classification of “higher” and “lower”, which demonstrates Eiges’ insistence upon an ethical feeling (irrational in nature, but serving as the basis for distinguishing between these levels), was a dramatic departure from Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy, which rejected the linkage of any ethical system to art. The composer embodied both the lower (“Dionysian”) and higher (“Apollonian”) mystical impulses.

Musical creation, Eiges argued, was distinctly different from other forms of artistic creation. While other artists were inspired by an object or idea in the phenomenal world, which “reflected heavenly beauty,” the composer “has a different character: strong excitement, leaning towards drunkenness, seizes him, when in the moment of inspiration he not only indefinably feels ‘the touch of another world’, but also as it were, enters into...

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38 Eiges, “Muzyka, kak odna iz vyshikh misticheskikh perezhivanii,” 54. Elsewhere, Eiges states a similar claim that “Inspiration is a creative impulse, the result of which must be reality. But as medieval philosophers have said: ‘chaos has not yet become reality.’ Chaos is thus the primordial aspect preceding the phenomenal world, with its multiplicity of forms.” (Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki”, 92).


40 This “ethical” stance brought Eiges closer to the aesthetic views of Vladimir Solov’ev, Pavel Florensky and Lev Tolstoi, though Tolstoi’s ultimate judge of ethical value was based on the narod or peasantry, rather than on any concept of Beauty. This division into “higher” and “lower” impulses is of central importance in understanding later interpretations of the “satanic” impulse in Aleksandr Scriabin’s music.

this other world with his entire soul and contemplates the transcendental, as a particular sound world-order in all its unearthly beauty.”42 In entering this other world, Eiges claimed that the composer experienced the pure ‘Dionysian’ state, “that form of drunkenness, which has in common with the musical mood only the destruction in consciousness of the boundaries between ‘I’ and ‘not-I’” which would seize the composer, “freeing him from his own, concrete ‘I’.” At this time “his will unites with ‘first-unity’”.43 While this direct experience of Dionysian unity distinguished musical creativity from all other artistic activities, it also made musical inspiration particularly dangerous, as the composer entered into a realm of “lower” mystical experience.

The experience of the “Dionysian” state was not a goal in itself for the composer, but served only as the inspirational basis, out of which music emerged as a higher, mystical experience. The initial chaos of the Dionysian impulse would be transformed by the composer's creative genius into the “crystallized musical phrases” of higher, mystical experience.44 True music expressed this transfigured reality rather than the lower, Dionysian impulse from which it emerged. “In other words,” Eiges argued, “musical creation needs the participation of the god Apollo, the god of correct, beautiful external form, as well as the god Dionysus... music is more than musical will.”45 The two gods were ultimately united by a third, higher god: the god of Beauty.46 Music that merely

42 Eiges believed that musical creation was distinctly different from other forms of artistic creation. See Eiges, “Muzyka i estetika,” 15-17.
46 Eiges used the term “Beauty” in its Platonic sense, as a form existing outside the phenomenal world. He claimed that both Schopenhauer and his disciples (Nietzsche and Wagner) had, through focusing on music’s relationship to Will (or the Dionysian impulse), failed to address music’s physical manifestation as an individual work of art. Eiges argued that since music combined these two impulses in service of higher Beauty, it was “as much representation as will” (Eiges, “Osnovnye voprosy muzykal’noi estetiki”, 80) and “combin[ed] in itself ‘subject and object’, ‘I’ and ‘not-I’” into a greater whole (Eiges, “Muzyka, kak odna iz vyshikh misticheskikh perezhivanii,” 55) Nietzsche did touch upon this very issue, explaining the
expresses” “that chaos which preceded it” failed in its higher purpose. If he failed in transforming Dionysian chaos into an ordered, mystical experience, the composer failed in his Orphic task. The composer-genius who entered into the lower, satanic realm for creative inspiration held a position of tremendous power and responsibility.

Aleksandr Koptiaev: Embracing Dionysian Turmoil

Aleksandr Petrovich Koptiaev (1868-1941) exemplified the viewpoint of a musician who denied the existence of aesthetic absolutes of any kind, embraced Nietzsche’s rejection of traditional values and sought to combine these with a conscious awareness of Russia’s divided social realm and historic, messianic mission. In the individual manifestation of a musical work as Apollo’s illusion of Beauty which made the immediacy of the Dionysian impulse grasable to the limited individual mind. Eiges used his critique as a way through which to bring back Beauty as a governing concept for music as an art form, in order to revive a base of absolute values and an independent realm for art. This demonstrates his indebtedness to Kantian and Platonic ideals, as well as the possible influence of the Orthodox theological tradition. See K. Eiges, “Vstupitel’nai stat’ia,” Artur Shopengauer: O suschchnosti muzyki, x-xv, for his critique of Nietzsche and Wagner. For a discussion of the relation of “Beauty” to Orthodox Christianity and its continuing importance among Russians otherwise inspired by Nietzsche, see Rosenthal, New Myth, New World, 16-17. For a similar stance in regard to music, see the discussion of Emil Medtner’s writings in Chapter Six.

Eiges was adamant that this transformation, rather than the expression of ideas, emotions or images was the true function of music. This was in keeping with Nietzsche’s emphasis on music’s transformative power and in opposition to alternate approaches to music that espoused either formal structure or specific ideas as the “content” of music. This “form” versus “content” debate surrounding musical aesthetics was a common theme in the late nineteenth century. For discussion of this debate that emphasizes the common philosophical heritage (namely German Romanticism and Schopenhauer) underlying both sides, see Carl Dahlhaus, The Idea of Absolute Music, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Charles Youmans, Richard Strauss’s Orchestral Music and the German Intellectual Tradition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 3-15.

Eiges’ interpretation would bear fruit in the aftermath following the unexpected death of a composer who had been lauded as Russia’s musical “messiah”: Aleksandr Scriabin. This is discussed in depth in Chapter Nine.

Koptiaev was a Russian composer, music critic, translator and teacher. From 1895, Koptiaev was active as a translator from German for RMG; the majority of these translations were drawn from Wagner's writings, which, together with Nietzsche's philosophy, had a decisive impact on Koptiaev's own aesthetic views. In 1905 he began teaching aesthetics in the musical courses of E.P. Rapgof in St. Petersburg. After 1917, he performed as a pianist, gave lectures, taught at the Petrograd Military Musical School and led concerts in workers clubs. See RNB f. 816, op.2, ed.kh. 1492, ll.1-4, 8,11,13,16. Koptiaev wrote articles for such pre-revolutionary periodicals as Severnyi vestnik, Ezhemesiachnye sochinenia, Teatr i iskusstvo, Nasha zhizn’, Sankt Peterburgskie vedomosti. A number of these articles were collected into three separate, published volumes: Muzyka i kultura (Leipzig: Jurgenson, 1903), Evterpe (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia
spring of 1900, Koptiaev presented a paper entitled “The Musical World-View of Nietzsche” at the Society of Musical Pedagogues in St. Petersburg, emphasizing what he considered an essential connection between Nietzsche's philosophical ideas and music. Familiar to readers of the RMG as a translator of German texts and commentator on the works of Richard Wagner, with this paper Koptiaev set out to demonstrate the central importance Nietzsche's ideas held for contemporary culture in general and music specifically. “In Nietzsche”, wrote Koptiaev, “above all else, a musician was concealed,” whose “strivings and ardor grew out of his passionate worship of music” and whose “general world view was, first of all, the world-view of a musician”. While philosophers had generally ignored this central aspect of Nietzsche's thought, most musicians had limited themselves to reading his commentaries on Wagner. Both approaches failed to grasp the true import of the philosopher's writing. Nietzsche, claimed Koptiaev, was the representative of an emerging Dionysian culture in which music would hold a particularly vital role.

Like Eiges, Koptiaev openly embraced the metaphysical view of music espoused by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Music was not merely the product of culture, but was its

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51 The speech was later published in the literary journal Ezhemesiachnyi sochineniiia, 2-3 (April and May 1900). At Koptiaev’s request, lengthy excerpts were also published in RMG no. 18 (April 30, 1900): 504-507; no. 19-20 (May 7, 1900): 538-539. See RNB f.816, op.2, ed.kh.1492, II.40, 43 (Koptiaev to Findeizen) for correspondence regarding the RMG publication. The entire paper was later published in a collection of Koptiaev’s articles on music as “Muzykal’noe mirosozertsanie Nitsshe,” Muzyka i kul’tura: sbornik muzykal’no-istoricheskikh i muzykal’no-kriticheskikh statei (Moscow, Leipzig: Jurgenson, 1903), 57-109. This book was still being advertised for purchase in music periodicals in 1912; see Muzyka no. 71 (January 28, 1912).


very beginning: that which created culture. Regardless of any errors that Schopenhauer might have made in his philosophical analysis of the world, he had been “right in one thing. . . [he] gave first place to music as an art immediately expressing World Will.” All other arts, in comparison to music, were mere representations or illusions. For this reason, music alone had the ability to overcome the failings of modern, rationalistic culture. The present age was one in which rational, Socratic culture, “the culture of knowledge rather than intuition,” had gained hold. For both men, only the “mysterious, hidden art” of music could provide the transformative impetus for recreating life on a fundamentally new basis. However, whereas Eiges had called for the development of a new culture based “not only on a scientific-theoretical, but also on an artistic-esthetic and tragic (religious) consciousness,” Koptiaev believed that the only means of rejuvenating human existence was through appealing to “Dionysian consolation”: the creation of new myths and value systems through which to give meaning to life.

To Koptiaev, music (understood as a creative process or impulse) was the most perfect artistic representation of Dionysian unity. Music was an active, creative force in which the unifying process itself was performed. This was true both on an individual and a societal level. Thus, for instance, the figure of the pianist-composer demonstrated a closer link with Nietzche’s “Primordial Unity” than a mere composer because he combined two distinct creative moments into an integrated whole:

The virtuoso-composer is the carrier of the creative, Promethean beginning in much greater degree than a “mere composer”. Does he not create twice: once before himself

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54 Koptiaev, “Muzykal’noe mirosozertsanie Nitsshe,” 106.  
and again before the crowd? Moreover, creating again at the piano and founding new artistic values, he completely burns with high ecstasy, which a cabinet composer would scarcely feel to the same degree.  

The virtuoso-composer fascinated Koptiaev both because of his redoubled creative impulse and because this unification of composer and performer into a single figure was itself symbolic of the highest achievement of the Dionysian impulse. Koptiaev argued that the true rebirth of the Dionysian cult would not be possible until the modern tradition of breaking apart musical roles was abandoned and unity re-forged. In Koptiaev’s view, it was the individuality of the composer, rather than mystical inspiration, that underpinned musical experience.

While Eiges, like Solov’ev, had been deeply concerned with the ethical question in his treatment of music aesthetics, Koptiaev fully embraced Nietzsche's rejection of traditional moral systems, claiming that “[music] is eternal motion, it is that which eternally strives somewhere, to heaven or to hell – it is all the same; it is unquenchable thirst, eternal, saintly unrest. . .”  

The Dionysian spirit, or “World Will,” of which music was the most perfect embodiment, had no eternal ethical value system underpinning it. Rather it was the absolute embodiment of the “hidden desire for life, the destroyer of good and evil, something unquenchable, hungering and greedy.”  Music was “the single artistic cult beyond good and evil” and, by extension, the musical

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59 A.P. Koptiaev, *Skriabin: kharakteristiki* (Moscow: Iurgenson, 1916), 9. Compare to Eiges’ interpretation of the pianist-composer. There is also a similarity in Nietzsche’s own understanding of music, which was shaped in part through his improvisations at the piano. Benson argues that “music also proves ecstatic for Nietzsche. It has the power to take us out of ourselves, allowing us both to see the world in a different way and also to transform us. Personally, Nietzsche experienced this *ecstasis* in his own improvising at the piano: when he improvised, it was often as if a frenzy overcame him.” Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, 173. Thus, it was in the act of playing that Nietzsche apparently experienced a transcendence of self. Benson’s reference to a “frenzy” is based on Nietzsche’s own description (in a letter to the conductor Hans von Bülow) of his experience while playing piano. Ibid., 173; 243.


genius was the creator or founder of new value systems, based on his own powerful individual personality. Musical action could have genuine impact on society, bringing with it change and even revolution through its development of collective unity among the Russian narod. But that process was governed, not by eternal values of Beauty or Good or Justice, but rather by the creative power of genius, who would create new values for society.63

Despite this seemingly individualistic focus, Koptiaev was also deeply concerned with the social aspect of musical life and the creative potential of the Russian narod. Since, Kopiaev argued, Dionysian culture was in essence social (obshchestvennyi), it would only be truly achieved when “the composer will be also the performer, when the present division into listeners and performers . . . fades into the realm of legend . . . only then will the antagonism between the Dionysian cult of community and the individualism of proud self-determining personalities be overcome.”64 Not only composers and performers, but audiences also would be reintegrated into the creative process of music making. Koptiaev warmly encouraged the formation of peasant orchestras and choirs as means through which the Russian folk (narod) could be actively engaged in the process of making music.65 Music was an area in which human activity could be fused into a communal act and existing divisions between classes overcome. He firmly believed that Russian society was undergoing an era that would usher in fundamental transformations

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63 This was the logic underlying Koptiaev’s claim that Aleksandr Scriabin was a superior composer to Wagner. While the latter was unable to come to terms with the amorality of the universe, the former rejected any sort of goal in exchange for the “heavenly, free play” of the universe. See A. Koptiaev, “Pevets ekstaza: A. Skriabin,” K muzykal’nomu idealu, 195-210, here 207. First published in Sovremennyi mir (October 1910).

64 Koptiaev, “Muzykal’noe mirosozertsanie Nitsshe,” 103-104.

65 See, for instance, Koptiaev, “Kompozitor-rabochii,” Evterpe, 8-12, first published in Nasha zhizn’, (September, 17, 1905); “Russkii krest’ianski orkestr,” Evterpe, 45-48, first published in Sankt Peterburgskie vedomosti (September 2, 1905); “Sud’ba khora”, K muzykal’nomu idealu, 210-211, first published in Khorovoe i regentskoe delo (October 1909).
in the very fabric of society. He placed his hopes for the future in the emergence of the unified, collective strength of the Russian people through the leadership of a musical genius. Thus, social unity lay at the basis of his musical metaphysics.

Koptiaev’s juxtaposition of the “composer” and the narod in his analyses demonstrates an underlying tension between his vision of a “musician-poet,” “Zarathustra” or “great personality” destined to unite society, and his strong emphasis on the collective Russian folk (narod). Koptiaev believed that this conflict between the “outstanding” individual and the crowd (tolpa) was a possible reason for Nietzsche’s fall into insanity, arguing that “perhaps one of the reasons for the spiritual (dushevni) disorder of the thinker was his idea of the impossibility of bringing together, even in the realm of thought, the Dionysian cult with proud individualism.” Since the Dionysian cult was, in Koptiaev’s own words “social” in its very basis, reconciling the two systems presented almost insurmountable obstacles. Nonetheless, Koptiaev's entire aesthetic system was heavily based on the concept of “genius”. It was the outstanding individual who would push humanity forward, showing the way towards a new, more unified society. The Russian narod, while imagined as part of the great chorus of the future and the most perfect material from which the Dionysian cult might be established, were repeatedly depicted by Koptiaev as requiring the leadership of the educated elite in order to find their true, collective musical voice. Thus, in recounting the story of a peasant orchestra founded in July 1902 in Shuvalovka (Peterhof district), Koptiaev began by describing the “artist-trombonist” Terekhov’s shock and dismay at the scenes of

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66 All great art works, Koptiaev claimed, “coincide with outstanding (vydaiushii) moments in social life” and are called to life by “moments of societal upsurges”. See Koptiaev, “Muzykal’noe mirosozertsanie Nietzsche,” 103.
68 Koptiaev, “Muzykal’noe mirosozertsanie Nietzsche,” 104.
69 Koptiaev, “Muzykal’noe mirosozertsanie Nietzsche,” 104.
“drunkenness and debauchery of the peasantry.” Feeling his heart tremble at such a sight, Terekhov wondered “how to help the poor, dark (temnye) people, how to breathe into them the lost spark of God?” Terekhov was eventually inspired by his acquaintance with self-taught musicians from the peasantry to form a peasant orchestra. This idea at first met with little success as “the peasants shunned and looked askance at the musicians who tried to begin conversations of them.” Interest gradually grew, thanks to the devoted efforts of Terekhov and, in the end, under the “ennobling effects of music” the “ecstatic, pleased faces of the peasants” who had given up drinking “took on a human form.” The educational/enlightening impact of the “artist-musician” on the “dark people” was here expressed with particular force, while the self-taught peasant musicians who helped Terekhov in his mission scarcely received mention. Similarly, while insisting that the “musicality of our people (narod) appears in the chorus,” particularly the “unique counterpoint of the folk chorus, with its podgoloski” and that well-developed choral traditions embody the “self-awareness of the folk mass” (samosoznanie narodnykh mass), Koptiaev nevertheless emphasized that choral music in Russia could never find its fullest flowering until it was “joined to the cry of the contemporary soul” by a musical genius. This contradictory stance was not unique to Koptiaev, but rather highlights one of the fundamental challenges that faced artistic elites who believed in music’s unifying impulse and sought to bring it to fruition. While desiring to awaken the creative impulse of the narod, they equally felt the need to direct and control that impulse. This contradiction would continue to haunt all of Nietzsche’s orphans.

71 A. Koptiaev, “Sud’ba khora,” 211. Similarly, Koptiaev claimed that, although Russian song was “miraculous gift” received from the Russian narod, it “await[ed] its new transformation” into Russian national repertoire at the hand of composers. See “Russkii krestianskii orkestr,” 48.
Like his contemporaries, the composer Vladimir Ivanovich Rebikov (1866 -1920) considered philosophy and art to be the leading forces in the process of human development. While philosophy “preced[ed] science and art,” art played a central role in spreading philosophical ideas. This was not done through the use of concepts, as true art was unable to express intellectual ideas. Rather, it was through art that immediate transformation of the human soul was possible. This was because the soul expressed itself, not through intellectual categories, but in emotions (chuvstvo) or moods (nastroenie). It was thus the immediate connection between emotions and the human soul that were of utmost concern to the composer. While emotions were the most immediate connection with the human soul, music was “the language of emotions,” the link between the human soul and the external world.

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72 Rebikov, “Moi put’,” RMG no. 48 (December 1, 1913): 1091-1092.
73 Rebikov was a Russian composer and writer on musical aesthetics. He was raised in Moscow, where he studied music in his youth at the Real’noe uchlishche of K. P. Voskresenskii and privately with N.S. Klenovskii. It was Rebikov’s interest in the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche that first drew him to travel to Austria and Germany in 1886. During two later sojourns in Germany (1891-92, 1896-97), he pursued musical studies with Oscar Iash, Teodor Miuller and Karl Meierberg (with whom he studied all of Richard Wagner’s musical dramas and writings on aesthetics). During his time in Vienna, Rebikov also attended lectures by philosopher and physicist Ernst Mach, whose theories helped to formulate his evolving aesthetic of art. His reading in philosophical aesthetics incorporated the writings of Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as Tolstoi and Solov’ev. See Tompakova, Rebikov, 8.
77 This was a point that the composer insisted upon time and again. Thus, in program notes from March 11, 1909, Rebikov stated “Music for me is only a means through which to communicate my feelings to the audience.” See Tompakova, Rebikov, 27-28; originally from “Programma vechera sovremennoi muzyki”. Similar statements were made directly in several articles written for RMG. See Gr. Prokof’ev, “Muzyka chistoi emotsii, (po povodu ‘vechera nastroenii’ iz proizvedenii V. Rebikova),” RMG no. 5 (January 31, 1910): 136-141; Rebikov, “V.I. Rebikov o sebe,” RMG no. 43 (October 25, 1909): 945-951; idem., “Orfei i Vakkhanki. Rasskaz,” RMG no. 1 (January 3, 1910): 6-15; idem., “Muzyka cherez 50 let,” RMG no. 1
Considering himself to be first and foremost a composer, Rebikov viewed music as “a means through which to awaken in the listener the feelings (chuvstvo) and moods (nastroenie) that I wish.”\textsuperscript{78} In positing such a view of music, Rebikov drew heavily on Tolstoi, echoing the writer’s very choice of words. Thus, Rebikov claimed: “There is one goal [in music]: to strongly communicate the feeling or mood (nastroenie) and infect (zarazit‘) the listener with it.”\textsuperscript{79} Compositonally, Rebikov experimented with new musical effects, seeking to find those that would always elicit the same emotion or mood in different audiences.\textsuperscript{80} This emphasis on music’s impact on the very souls of the audience highlighted the important place Rebikov granted to the composer, who served as the spiritual visionary or guide for the people.

Unlike Tolstoi, Rebikov did not conclude that modern forms of art and music were “degenerate.”\textsuperscript{81} On the contrary, he was one of the most outspoken proponents of the search for a new musical language as the means through which the creative genius would transform existing reality.\textsuperscript{82} Up to the present age in human history, Rebikov

\textsuperscript{78} V.I. Rebikov, (V.I. Rebikov o sebe), \textit{RMG} no. 43 (October 25, 1909): 945-951, here 945.
\textsuperscript{79} Rebikov, \textit{Muzykal’nyi zapisi chuvstva},” 1099. This is virtually the same definition offered by Tolstoi in \textit{What is Art}?: “Art is that human activity which consists in one man’s consciously conveying to others, by certain external signs, the feelings he has experienced, and in others being infected by those feelings and also experiencing them.” Lev Tolstoi, \textit{What is Art?} trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Penguin, 1995), 40. Rebikov specifically quoted from this work in epigraphs to his piano music. Also like Tolstoi, Rebikov envisioned the performer as secondary to the composer, with the task merely of allowing himself to be seized by the appropriate emotion while studying and performing a given piece. See Rebikov, “Muzykal’nyi zapisi chuvstva,” 1099-1100.
\textsuperscript{80} See, for example, “Programma vechera sovremennoi muzyki,” Moscow (March 11, 1909), cited in Tompakova, 27-28; also Prokof’ev, “Muzyka chistoi emotsei,” 137.
\textsuperscript{81} For an analysis of the connection between Tolstoi’s aesthetic views and the broader contemporary discourse surrounding the question of degeneration, see Olga Matich, \textit{Erotic Utopia}, 27-56.
\textsuperscript{82} For this reason, Rebikov viewed himself as the “father” of musical modernism. See LRA MS.696/F.71*, l.2ob.
argued, “music has not touched a huge psychological realm of moods (nastroenie) and vague feelings (oshushchenie), the communication of which is its true task.” Those feelings expressed “spiritual truth” (dushevnaja pravda), which could only be musically communicated through entirely new means. Music was not an end, but only a means through which existing reality would be transcended. The composer was the individual who would call these new emotional experiences into being, thus laying the foundation for a new world, which the broader audience would experience through the communicative power of music.

Rebikov’s vision of the creative genius placed great emphasis on the individual character of the artist. He was required to “listen to the voice of inspiration” in order to hear and give voice to “the song of the heart.” The source of this inspiration would come from within rather than without. For this reason, Rebikov emphasized that he seldom, if ever, exposed himself to the music of other composers, as this would interfere with his ability to hear the “song of the heart” within him. He explained the current problems in society with reference to the predominance of the “crowd” (tolpa) over the individual genius, the prophetic visionary with higher knowledge of the spiritual aspects of human existence. Despite this emphasis on individual creativity, the true goal of musical creativity was social: the overcoming of disharmony and the return of unity to the world. The “chord of Orpheus” represented for Rebikov the recreation of that unity through transcending the divided nature of the material world. Rebikov’s vision of

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84 Rebikov to Smolenskii, RGIA f.1119, op.1, no.158, l.22; Rebikov, “Muzykal’nyi zapisi chuvstva,” 1097-1098.
85 Rebikov to Findeizen (May 26, 1916), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1766, l.81; Rebikov to Smolenskii (n.d.), RNB f.1050, op.1, no.7, l.69ob.
86 One of Rebikov’s idealistic young men declares “People think that in [the differences between them] there is happiness. Down with partitions, down with difference! We are all people – and this sounds like victory.” See Rebikov, “Dialogi,” GTsMMK f.68, no.93, l.1.
music’s influence echoed the process of gradual spiritualization (or deification) of the material world voiced by Vladimir Solov’ev. He combined the Symbolist idea of life-creation (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), the figure of the creative genius-as-messiah, and a broad social mission, in which all musical audiences would both experience and respond to this musical evocation of a new spiritual order.  

In his literary work, Rebikov expressed a dualistic vision of reality as consisting of both material and spiritual aspects, for which Nietzsche’s Dionysian/Apollonian division served as a convenient metaphor. For Rebikov, these metaphorical symbols took on a gnostic meaning. He equated the Dionysian aspect of human existence with physical, material reality (the “music of the blood”), while the Apollonian was associated with the higher, spiritual aspect of humanity (the “music of the soul”). These symbols were first publicly employed by Rebikov in his 1909 short story “Orpheus and the Bacchanists” and further developed in his later writings.

“Orpheus and the Bacchanists” opens with a dialogue between the musician Orpheus and one of his disciples, in a question and answer sequence reminiscent of Plato. Through the conversation, Rebikov highlights the contradictory nature of the two types of music, “music of the blood” and “music of the soul,” connecting the former with the fallen, physical impulses of nature, and the latter with the higher mental and spiritual strivings of humanity. While the young disciple admits to feeling drawn to the music of the worshippers of Bacchus, he acknowledges that only the music of Orpheus awakens higher feelings within him, commenting to his teacher that “when your lyre speaks, I

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87 Rebikov was well-aware of the Symbolist movement in art, exchanging several letters with the poet Briusov. See Rebikov to Briusov, RGB f.386.100.11; Briusov to Rebikov, RGB f.386.72.23.

become better. . . I feel hope, strive towards the highest ideal; you know how the sounds of your lyre give me these feelings.” In contrast, the youth acknowledges that he does not hear “either goodness or hope” in the merely physical music of Bacchus.

This literary depiction represented the solution Rebikov found to his own spiritual crisis. Connecting the “word of the blood” to sexual attraction between men and women, Rebikov imagined such an existence to embody humanity’s enslavement to physical reality. This call of nature was what ensnared people from one generation to another in the same, imperfect reality. Romantic love ultimately killed the creative impulse in both men and women, replacing spiritual creation with physical creation, embodied in the birth of children. This was despite humanity’s longing for a more meaningful, spiritual existence, which could only be brought about through a refocusing on the spiritual rather than physical aspect. Such a view of reality is reminiscent of Nikolai Fedorov, who similarly called for the “resurrection of the fathers” through scientific creativity and advancement rather than the continuation of physical birth. However, for Rebikov (unlike Fedorov), salvation from the harsh rule of nature required a creative genius or messiah, who would, through music, bring a new, spiritual world into existence. This vision of the future was symbolized in the figure of Orpheus.

91 Rebikov, “Dialogi,” GTsMMK f.68, no.93. Thus, Rebikov describes the deterioration of the spiritual love between a male and female in which the husband came to see that “the entire goal and purpose of a woman’s life is the birth of children”, while his wife discovers that her husband will only come to love her again “because of their children”. Similarly, in another dialogue a husband upbraids his wife, blaming his love for her as the cause of his failure to make anything great out of his wife.
92 Nikolai Fedorov’s Filosofiiia obshcheego dela was posthumously published in Russia in 1906-1907. For more on Fedorov’s relation to Russian Silver Age culture, see Olga Matich, Erotic Utopia, 21-22. For a broader analysis of the relationship between sex and late Imperial Russian culture, see Laura Engelstein, The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).
It was through playing his lyre that Orpheus would transform humanity, silencing the “song of the blood” so that all living creatures would be lifted to a higher level of being. The art of music would transform reality from a material to a spiritual basis:

But suddenly, along the surface of the sea, along the coastal cliffs and meadows, a chord sounded from Orpheus’ lyre. And all the cries of passion in the air immediately stopped and grew silent. . . Everything stopped. Only the grass rustled under the feet of those human beings and wild beasts who were seeking Orpheus. . . a silence fell, similar only to that of lifelessness and death. A second chord sounded and everything and everyone froze, fell silent. The waves ebb and flow to the sand and around the rocks. The stars, having scattered glimmering sparks, fall at Orpheus’ feet. The chords sounded. . . Who heard them? No one heard them, yet everyone heard them. All were under the power of these sounds, all under the power of Orpheus’ feeling; it illumined all souls. All hearts were drawn to him, just as the leaves of a tree to the rays of the sun. People relived their lives, believing, loving, hoping, their minds drawn to an unapproachable ideal . . . Thus, the highest beginning, as if clothed in vestments of countless sparkling worlds reflecting in the sea, embraced both Orpheus and his hearers. All, even the Bacchantes, dreamed dreams, in which their present lives were strongly and mysteriously interwoven with visions foreign to this earthly life. All were transformed. A new world began.

In Rebikov’s vision, it was not music as an art form that drew all living beings to Orpheus, but the effect his music had on shaping and transforming the lives and experiences of those who heard him. Music was not art, but a salvific force.

For Rebikov, the mystical calling of the creative genius was immediately connected with the task of Christianity. Christ, like Orpheus, was the embodiment of the spiritual rather than physical side of human existence. The task of the creative genius or “minstrel,” in Rebikov’s vision, was to “catch, from time to time, particles of [Orpheus’] song.” He would “return [the song] to the people,” awakening their hearts to once again experience higher feelings. In this way, “[the people] will remember Orpheus through many centuries.” Rebikov later replaced the metaphor of the “song” with that of

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the “chord” of Orpheus. In both images, the task of the creative genius was similar to that of the prophet, keeping alive the message of God through sounding the chord (or song) in times of spiritual darkness. The calling of the composer was thus one that required spiritual and moral purity. “In order to create,” wrote Rebikov in a letter to fellow Russian composer Stepan Smolenskii, “you must have a soul that resembles a temple (khram). You must have a pure soul. Then you will see God.”

Building upon this connection, the image of the eventual triumph of Christianity through the Second Coming of Christ was echoed in Rebikov’s vision of the return of a musical Orpheus. Orpheus, like Christ, was put to death by those who had previously hearkened to his message. And like Christ, Orpheus would return. In the midst of their despair, Orpheus’ followers heard a “celestial voice” that commanded: “Weep not. Orpheus has not left forever. He will return to the earth again.” In Rebikov’s vision, the coming of Orpheus and the coming of Christ were elided into a single messianic figure.

Russia's Messianic Role

Despite individual differences in their specific adoption of musical metaphysics, each of these men shared a common view: Russia had a unique, messianic task to fulfill in the contemporary world. For all three, Russia was the country in which music’s Dionysian spirit was most likely to emerge. In contrast, contemporary Germany regularly featured in their critiques as the embodiment of the sicknesses of modern society: individualism, materialism and mechanization. Eiges claimed that the “living spirit of

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95 Rebikov, “Cherez 50 let,” *RMG* no. 7 (February, 1911): 187.
96 Rebikov to Stepan Smolenskii (n.d., 1898-1902), RGIA f. 1119, op.1, no.158, l.22.
music” had died in Germany. Rebikov similarly believed that contemporary German culture showed the cheapening of music’s power, through its performance in bars, clubs and other areas of moral degradation. This degrading of music’s power had also impacted the role of the creative genius in Europe. “Nowhere,” wrote Rebikov to Smolenskii, “are art and artists valued so little as in Europe (Thank God, that Russia is not ‘Europe’). . . geniuses [in Europe] have to be lackeys!” To Koptiaev, the history of Germany demonstrated a preoccupation with form, the purview of the Apollonian impulse. Seeking to salvage the two German figures with whom he felt intimately connected, Koptiaev remade Nietzsche and Wagner in a Slavic image. Thus, Wagner was a “Slav by character,” despite his ultimate shortcomings, while Nietzsche was unambiguously a “Polish thinker.”

98 K. Eiges, “Nauka o muzyke (po povodu lektsii Renchitskogo)”, Muzyka no. 154 (November 2, 1913): 725-729, here 725. This article was an attack on the emerging discipline of music theory, which, Eiges believed, was a sign of Russian imitation of impoverished German models, which posed a threat to the spiritual foundation of Russian music. Renchitskii’s response to Eiges’ critique, “V zashchitnu nauki o muzyke (po povodu stat’i K. Eigesa),” appeared in Muzyka no. 156 (November 16, 1913): 763-770. For a discussion of Eiges’ views from the perspective of the development of Russian music theory, see Ellon DeGrief Carpenter, “The theory of music in Russia and the Soviet Union, ca 1650-1950,” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 517-518. The fear of Russian imitation of imported Western ideas dates back to the Slavophiles. For a discussion of the politics surrounding “imitation” in Russia, see Susannah Rabow-Edling, Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism (New York: SUNY, 2006), 35-58.

99 Rebikov to Ivan Lipaev (April 1909), RGALI f. 795, op.1, ed.khr.31, l.2: 1909; Rebikov to Smolenskii (n.d. [1901-1909]), RNB f.1050, op.1, no.7, l.68. It should be noted that Rebikov’s critique was not aimed at the experimental compositional techniques of contemporary German composers, but rather the lack of attention given to music’s unique uplifting and unifying powers.

100 Rebikov to Smolenskii (n.d.), RNB f.1050, op.1, no.7, l.69ob. Ironically, this distaste conflicted with Rebikov’s personal experience, in which his own works found greater performance opportunities and acclaim outside of Russia. See Rebikov to Smolenskii, (n.d. [1898?]), RGIA f. 1119, op.1, no.158, l.1-1ob; Rebikov to Lipaev, RGALI f. 795, op.1, ed. khr.31, l.1 (March 24, 1909), l.2 (April 10?), 1909, ll.7-8 (n.d., [1909]), Rebikov to Smolenskii (March 16, 1909), RNB f.1050, op.1, no.7, l.73.

101 Koptiaev, “Skrabin: iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed,” 106. In Russia, on the other hand, there “was never a period of classical form and, generally, we . . . are formless. Earlier we were saved from form by the ideals of musical drama, but now we simply raise, on instrumental foundations, an altar to Dionysus. Believe me, in Russia something never before heard of is beginning.” Koptiaev, “Skrabin: iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed,” 108.


This emphasis on the inherently Slavic nature of both Nietzsche and Wagner was a common means through which Nietzsche’s orphans sought to lay claim to their creative works as part of Russia’s cultural heritage. Russia, not Germany, was the true inheritor of Nietzschean ideas. According to Koptiaev, while German composers had “passively responded both to Schopenhauer's musical ideas and to the ‘Dionysian ecstasy’ of Nietzsche,” their calling would “be expressed in Russian music in miraculous form.”

Eiges similarly argued that Russia had taken over the role of musical hegemony that Germany once held. Although readily embracing the Germanic musical canon of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schumann, he argued that, in the present era, “music composers of contemporary Germany (Richard Strauss) and his imitators... little understand their own purpose.”

All three men similarly recognized that the contemporary situation in Russian life was far from ideal. The problem with contemporary Russian music, Koptiaev argued, was the continued use of traditional musical language inherited from Western Europe, which lacked “that living connection between the work and the life of its creator or of the nation, such as existed in the aesthetic life of Greece.” This disconnect, hinted at by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, was viewed by Koptiaev as the central failing point of contemporary music in Russia. Furthering developing this view, Rebikov claimed that the

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104 Koptiaev, *K muzykal'nomu idealu*, i.
105 “The current blossoming of music (in the last 10-20 years) in Russia is comparable to its dawning in Germany in the previous century [... ] an entire galaxy of Russian composers is appearing, who more and more force Europe to listen to them. In the figure of Scriabin, hegemony in musical life is passing to Russia.” K. Eiges, “Dve poteri russkoi muzyki,” 18-22, here 19.
truest musical expression of the Russian character could be found only by turning to the
\textit{narod}.\footnote{Like Koptiaev, Rebikov believed that the problem with contemporary music in Russia lay in its slavish imitation of European musical traditions, particularly in the realm of harmony and melody. The true creative genius would seek to unite folk tradition with his own individual voice. Rebikov greatly admired the expression of “nationalism in art,” most clearly expressed musically in folk song. See Rebikov to Findeizen (June 12, 1911), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1765, l.151-52; Rebikov “Muzyka cherez 50 let,” \textit{RMG} no. 13 (1911), 131. Rebikov demonstrated an early interest in bringing educational opportunities to the Russian provinces, founding a local division of the IRMO in Kishinev in 1898. See RNB f. 816, no.1766, cited in Tompakino \textit{Rebikov}, 33. On nationalism in art, see Rebikov, “V.I. Rebikov o sebe,” 948; on folk music see Rebikov to Findeizen (June 12, 1911), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1765, l.151-52.} In a publication for \textit{RMG} entitled “Music in fifty years” (“\textit{Muzyka cherez 50 let}”), Rebikov expressed his vision of a future, nationally based (i.e. folk) musical art. In this story, Karpov, a graduate of the Moscow Conservatory, returned to the city of his youth after many years in the provinces. Having failed in his quest to make a life as a musician, Karpov eventually took a job as a petty bureaucrat in the provinces and lost touch with the development of musical trends in recent years. This setting gave Rebikov freedom to offer an elaborate exegesis of his own aesthetic ideals.

In the nineteenth century, argued one of Rebikov’s characters, Russian artists had “borrowed a new religion, ‘music,’ from the Europeans, and its gospels ‘from Bach, Beethoven, Verdi, Wagner.’ Once they had adopted these “gospels,” Russians had “believed that truth began to shine only there, in the West, and that we Russians could not give anything of our own. And we became, like all new converts, fanatics. We became more German, more Italian, than Germans or Italians themselves.”\footnote{Rebikov, “Muzyka cherez 50 let,” \textit{RMG} no. 7: 187.} In contrast, Rebikov envisioned the emergence of a new musical tradition in which composers would draw primarily from the folk elements of their own nation (\textit{narod}) rather than relying on the “foreign” harmonic structures of German and Italian tradition. In this way, the music of each country would serve as a more accurate representation of the spirit of its people (\textit{narod}). Rebikov’s vision went far beyond the external trappings of compositional
materials, however. He claimed that a synthesizing or unifying tendency (based upon national character) had begun to emerge in most European cultures at the start of the twentieth century. This character found expression in all the arts, music included. Thus, the Germans sought to express thought through music, the French, song. However, it was the Russian character that was most interesting to Rebikov:

[Russians] . . . wanted to carry music out of the boundaries of art and give it full scope and unlimited freedom. They wanted to make music unnoticeable to the ear and very noticeable for the heart and soul. They wanted to make music a guide for feelings and moods. They wanted to free music from theory, rules, instructions, laws. They wanted music to force people to feel, not to decide the question ‘do I like this or not.’ They wanted music, unnoticed by the listener, to seize his soul and force him to feel all that the author wanted. Rebikov referred to this Russian quest symbolically as the search for the “lyre of Orpheus,” the music that would awaken “feelings of belief, ideal love, hope in the souls of some, the striving towards ideals and unattainable beauty.” It was the task of Russia to rediscover this lost craft, thereby creating the emotional basis for a new world.

These visions of the importance of the Russian nation (narod) were deeply conflicted at base. In emphasizing the central role of the musical genius in creating unity, the creative role of the narod was unclear. In late Imperial Russia, the accusation of “individualism”, specifically connected with the ills of modern life emerged as the harshest critique that could be offered a composer. This conundrum, which, Koptiaev

110 Rebikov, “Muzyka cherez 50 let,” RMG no. 6, 151.
111 Rebikov, “Muzyka cherez 50 let,” RMG no. 6, 151-152.
had claimed, had driven Nietzsche to insanity, would continue to plague Nietzsche’s orphans.

The different worldviews of these three men underline deeper divisions that emerged in the musical community. Eiges held a neo-idealistic, ethical view of reality, in which musical works were ultimately a means of achieving insight into higher reality. Koptiaev embraced a progressive view of human history, in which the creative accomplishments of men of genius pushed humanity forward to an ever-higher level of existence.\(^{114}\) Rebikov sought to combine ethical and progressive images of music into his own synthesis of Christian and “Orphic” values. Despite these differences, all three men believed that Russia held a unique place in the contemporary world, providing the most perfect environment in which the Orphic power of music would be embodied. Because of its unique historical trajectory, Russia was expected to bring new harmonies to music and to culture, overcoming social divisions through appealing to an underlying unity that would be most perfectly embodied in the musical creations of its composers. Russia’s composers thus had a unique mission in human history. They were the “chosen ones” (izbranniki).

Postlude:

Rebikov’s “Mystery”: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

Born amid the chaos of the 1905 Revolution, but not completed until 1911, Rebikov’s *Alfa and Omega* captured his negative assessment of human nature, depicting the destruction of the earth through human arrogance and lust for power.\(^{115}\) Highly

\(^{114}\) This view existed uneasily with his desire for collective music-making by the Russian *narod* as a means of achieving greater unity.

\(^{115}\) The text was finished in 1908, but passed by the Russian censor only on February 23, 1911. See Rebikov, “‘Al’fa i Omega’. Misteriia. Libretto,” GTsMMK f. 68, no.136
symbolic in its use of imagery and musical expression, the works seems to have been intended as a warning to European audiences about contemporary cultural decadence and the loss of belief in God. It clearly demonstrates the sense of fear and despair that had begun to permeate through parts of Russian society in the final years of the Empire.\footnote{For an overview of the increasing anxiety seizing Russian society in the final years of the Empire, see Mark Steinberg, \textit{Petersburg Fin de Siècle} (New Haven: Yale University Press, Forthcoming 2011).}

The short operatic work is set in two acts, depicting the beginning and end of human existence. The opening scene is set in a forest, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. Lucifer is the first character to appear, complaining of his lack of an “instrument” or “creature” to use in his battle with the Creator. Rebikov’s musical depiction of this character emphasizes the darkness of his nature, associating him with a slow-moving orchestral theme based on an eleventh chord with a diminished root and making extensive use of tritones, both harmonically and melodically. The employment of the tritone, the interval most closely associated with “Satan” in Western musical tradition serves as a further symbolic representation of Lucifer:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{(3.1) Vladimir Rebikov, \textit{Al’fa i Omega}, Act I, measures 1-4\footnote{Vladimir Rebikov, \textit{Al’fa i Omega: Muzykal’no-psikhologicheskaia drama} (Moscow: Iurgenson, [1911]), 1.}}
\end{figure}

The man (\textit{mushchina}), by contrast, is heralded by a vigorous, dotted rhythm in the orchestra, expressing his thirst for knowledge of the world. He symbolizes the material side of humanity, the embodiment of “blind striving”, caught up in the physical world.
around him. “Maybe I will not find that for which I strive,” he acknowledges, “but nevertheless, I cannot stop striving.”

The woman (zhenshchina) is the third character who appears in Act One. She serves as the representative of the spiritual side of humanity, warning her male companion that Lucifer promises him everything except “happiness and eternal life”. She urges him to remain in the forest rather than follow Lucifer in pursuit of power over the world, a warning that goes unheeded by the man. The act closes with Lucifer leading both the man and woman out of the forest, the woman being unable to let the man leave without her. Musically, this development is depicted through the infection of the heroic male theme with the dark chords associated with Lucifer.

Act Two jumps ahead in time to the end of the world. The scene is set in Egypt, with a sphinx in the background and a blizzard half-covering what had once been a desert. Humanity, having been granted full power over the material world, has succeeded only in destroying it. The opening orchestral sequence brings to mind the slow tolling of a bell, with the interval of the tritone again strongly showcased in the lower register.

118 Rebikov, “‘Al’fa i omega.’ Misteriia. Libretto,” 1.3; idem., Al’fa i Omega (Leipzig: Jurgenson, 1911), 11.
119 Rebikov, Al’fa i Omega, 8.
Four characters appear in this act: Lucifer, Human (*Chelovek*), Death (*Smert’*) and Life (*Zhizn’*). The human, no longer split into material and spiritual aspects, mourns the fate of his kind:

Philosophers, where is the light of your minds? Religious founders, where is the fire of your love? Brilliant scientists, where are the traces of your discoveries? Artists, where are your creations? Immortal ones, answer! Where is your immortality?\(^\text{121}\)

Too late, humanity has come to understand that it is only through the experience of life itself that human existence has meaning and purpose. People mistakenly pursued power and wealth rather than the true teachings of Christ.

The final section of the work depicts the appearance of Death and then Life. Death announces her control over the earth as the last human dies at the feet of Lucifer. Amidst the darkness of this ending, the only shaft of hope comes when Life makes a brief appearance, promising to return at some future time, when the “tired sun” of the earth unites with a distant star that can be seen glimmering in the distance. At this time, Life promises, “It will once again become warm and light, the ice will melt, the darkness will vanish and again spring, love and happiness will return to the earth.”\(^\text{122}\)

\(^{120}\) Rebikov, *Al’fa i Omega*, 18.

\(^{121}\) Rebikov, “‘Al’fa i omega’. Misteriia. Libretto,” 1.5; idem., *Al’fa i omega*, 24. In the manuscript submitted to the censor, the reference to religious leaders has been crossed out in red.

\(^{122}\) Rebikov, “‘Al’fa i omega’. Misteriia. Libretto,” 1.6; idem., *Al’fa i omega*, 32-33.
words, Life slowly vanishes, the tolling bells of the opening return in the orchestra, the sun burns out and darkness covers the stage.

What are we to make of the symbolism of Rebikov’s “Mystery”? Far from the positive image of a musical messiah, ushering in a new era of life, we find here the depiction of the end of human life itself. To unravel this puzzle further, one must turn to Rebikov’s own image of the creative genius. While he associated the image of Orpheus with Christ, connecting both with the return of a more spiritual approach to life, he seems to have generally viewed his own role as somewhat less grandiose: that of a prophet rather than messiah. Noting what he considered humanity’s increasing decadence and connection to the material aspects of existence, he sought to evoke the horror of this way of living in his “Mystery”. Through Alfa and Omega, his audience would experience the actual emotions connected with the fall of humanity from grace. This lived experience, Rebikov might well hope, would galvanize people to reject the material striving for power over the earth itself and return to a purer, more Christian view of life.

At the same time, Rebikov (like many prophets before) could not disguise his own distrust and hatred of human nature as he saw it. Commenting on his depiction of humanity in Alfa and Omega, Rebikov wrote “Humanity was given over to Lucifer [in exchange] for the possession of knowledge and power. The subject is my own. This is my conviction.”

Rebikov remained skeptical that contemporary Russian society was ready to hear his message, commenting to musician Ivan Lipaev that “neither in Moscow nor in Petersburg is there any soil... for my art.”

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123 Rebikov to Findeizen (July 13, 1911), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1765, l.57. In the same letter, he commented on the All-Night Vigil he was composing, with choruses connected “to the first time of Christianity.”

124 Rebikov to Lipaev (n.d.), RGALI f. 795, op.1, ed.khr.31, l.6-6ob.
to hear snatches of the song of Orpheus’ lyre in the distance, was to bring this warning to a society too trapped in material reality to hear the lyre’s echo.\footnote{A similar subtext can be found in his other “musical-psychological works”, including two compositions (“The Antichrist” and “Life of Christ”) which the composer set to work on in the midst of the Great War. See A. Gorskii, “Rebikov,” Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 17-18 (December 1916), 115-120, esp. 117. Rebikov also had expressed interest in setting Dante’s “Inferno” to music, asking Valerii Briusov’s recommendation for the best verse translation. See Rebikov to Briusov (1913?), RGB f.386.100.11, l.16. None of these works were completed.}
CHAPTER FOUR: MUSIC AND SALVATION

A. N. SCRIBIN AS MESSIAH

I am God! I am nothing, I am play, I am freedom, I am life, I am the end, I am the height, I am God.

A. N. Scriabin

It is sinful for a Christian to listen to Scriabin... to pray for him is also sinful. One does not pray for Satanists. One anathematizes them.

A. Losev

In Christian tradition, Easter Sunday is the holiest day of the year. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is said to have embodied victory over the chains of death itself: the final and truest sign of Christ’s divinity. Throughout his life, the Russian composer Aleksandr Nikolaevich Scriabin (pianist, composer and self-proclaimed Messiah) had granted great symbolic significance to the fact that he shared Christ’s birthday (December 25, 1871/January 6, 1872). Scriabin’s widow, Tatiana Schloezer, tapped into this messianic imagery at her husband’s 1915 funeral, comparing her intense emotional suffering with Christ’s painful progression to his crucifixion, commenting “Every single moment . . . is Golgotha!” Later biographical tradition has made much of the composer’s death on Easter Sunday. Through this striking parallel, Scriabin’s death, as well as his life, seemed to symbolize his messianic status. This apparently fatal

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4 RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.2, l.84.
coincidence is all the more striking when one considers that, in 1915, Orthodox Easter was celebrated on March 22/April 4, while Scriabin died April 14/April 27. Thus, despite common claims to the contrary, Scriabin did not die on Easter Sunday, but several weeks later. The composer’s Easter Passion is a clear example of posthumous mythmaking.

Closer examination of Scriabin’s life and death shows that the myth-creation surrounding his name was even more powerful in the final years of the Russian Empire. Wide-spread calls for the creation of contemporary myths, heavily influenced by the ideas of Nietzsche and Wagner, found fertile soil in late Imperial Russia and Scriabin was arguably the figure in whom this tendency was most clearly embodied. In the months after Scriabin’s untimely death at age forty-three, this myth-making process intensified. Speeches, poems and articles devoted to the composer echoed a single refrain. Russia had lost its “greatest musical genius,” who was repeatedly referred to in religious terminology: “chosen one” (izbrannik), “prophet” (prorok), Lamb of God (agnts), “Orpheus” (Orfei) or simply “Messiah”. Russia had lost, not only a composer, but a spiritual figure of tremendous significance.

Scriabin’s funeral was a major event in Moscow, despite the fact that the country was in the grips of the Great War. Concerned about the crowds of people filling the small pereulok between Scriabin’s apartment and the church where his funeral was to be held, organizers issued tickets the night before the funeral to prevent overcrowding during the

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6 Orthodox and Western Easter coincided in 1915.

7 Most of these terms can be found in the issue of the journal Muzyka devoted to Scriabin’s death. See Muzyka no. 220 (April 26, 1915); for references comparing Scriabin to Orpheus, see Viacheslav Ivanov, Skriabin. Sbornik statei [1919]; RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.38; Leonid Sabaneev, Skriabin (Moscow: Skorpion, 1916). The use of the term “agnets” rather than “iagnenok” emphasizes the Church Slavonic root of the word, which corresponds to the Latin “agnus” and highlights a link with Christian tradition. The abbreviated form “agents” suggests the form that would appear on Russian Orthodox icons.
service. Nevertheless, both the church and the nearby side streets overflowed with people the day of the funeral and a crowd of thousands followed the coffin to its final resting place in Novodevichy Cemetery, only disbanding hours after the funeral.

Perhaps most tragically for his admirers, Russia’s musical Messiah had died in the midst of his life’s work, the composition of his Mystery (Misteriia), the work that was intended to bring about the unification of all humanity and, in a final moment of universal ecstasy, usher in the end of the world. The contrast between the composer’s grandiose vision and the commonplace nature of the illness leading to his death – blood infection – seemed to many to suggest supernatural intervention. Some of his followers interpreted Scriabin’s death as a “great sacrifice” (velikaia zhertva) demanded from Russia in atonement for the sins of an emerging modern, rationalistic culture which was no longer capable of sustaining the creative talent of human genius. In this interpretation, Scriabin (Russia’s contemporary “Lamb of God”), had been sacrificed on the altar of mechanistic and rationalistic culture. Just as human sin had been the cause of Christ’s crucifixion, Scriabin’s death was seen as heavenly punishment for the sins of society as a whole. A second common interpretation defined Scriabin as a latter-day Prometheus, who had sacrificed himself for the greater good of humanity, struggling to speak a new word that society was not ready to hear. According to this view, it was the task of those left behind to study Scriabin’s musical and philosophical legacy in order to uncover the “new

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8 RGB f.746.38.39, l.1.
9 RGALI f. 2954, op.1, ed.khr.1014, l.15; RGALI f. 2319, op.2, ed.khr.103. Many newspaper accounts describe a crowd of “mnogotysiachi” (“many thousands”).
10 Igor Glebov [Boris Asaf’ev], “Velikaia zhertva,” Muzyka no. 220 (April 16, 1915): 271-273. The details of Scriabin’s death were recorded by his friend, Dr. Bogorodskii, one of the attending physicians at his deathbed. See V. Bogorodskii, “Istoria bolezni A.N. Skriabina,” RGALI f.863, op.2, ed.khr.4.
11 Mark Meichik, “Nad mogiloi A.N. Skriabina,” Rampa i zhizn’ no. 16 (April 19, 1915): 4-5; A. Gorskii, “Etapy dukhosoznanija,” Iuzhniy muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 4 (May 1915), 2-6. This interpretation carried over into the “Scriabin as revolutionary” interpretation that became popular in the Soviet era.
word” he had introduced into modern culture. On a darker note, some contemporaries interpreted Scriabin’s untimely death as the result of the composer’s personal transgression, and as a symbol or warning from a higher, spiritual realm of existence. In this view it was argued that Scriabin, in his human weakness, had succumbed to individualism and pride, making him unworthy to fulfill his prophetic calling. Even in this interpretation all was not lost, however. Though Scriabin had died, his mission had not. Russia awaited a new Orpheus, one who would not succumb to the temptations of pride and extreme individualism that had led Scriabin astray. Intimately intertwined with all these interpretations was a contemporary version of Russia’s messianic mission.

Why did the death of a Moscow composer elicit such a dramatic response from a society caught in the grips of a bloody war and moving ever closer to revolution? What was it about Scriabin that inspired his contemporaries to spin messianic myths around his name both during his lifetime and after his death? I contend that this “Scriabin phenomenon,” or, as some less generous contemporaries defined it, “Scriabin psychosis,” was a particularly spectacular example of the musical metaphysics that emerged in late Imperial Russia. Scriabin both embodied this quest in his own music and worldview and served as a focal point for such claims in Russian society more broadly. For many, he was the incarnation of Orpheus, sent to bring harmony to a discordant world.

The mythical shroud surrounding Scriabin’s name has obscured a full understanding of Scriabin’s place within Russian society and culture. For most classical

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12 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 37-67; 74-84; RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.12, ll.85-86.
music audiences (steeped in the Western European tradition), Scriabin is a minor figure at best: the composer of several pleasant character pieces for piano and a handful of seldom-played orchestral works. While generally acknowledged by pianists as one of the masters of the instrument, his compositions fit uneasily into traditional stylistic divisions, ranging from “neo-Romantic” to “atonal”. While several of his earlier works have entered the standard repertoire (Etudes Op.2, No.1; Op.8, No.12, Piano Sonata No.3, Op.23), his late compositions (with the partial exception of such well-known works as Piano Sonata No.9, Op.68) are programmed rarely, giving an uneven representation of his compositional output as a whole. Similarly, in the Soviet conservatory tradition, all pianists were required to study the composer’s early piano etudes (Op.8, Op.42), but his later “modernist” works lay outside of standard performance repertoire.\(^{15}\)

This performance tradition contrasts sharply with the importance granted Scriabin by Western music theorists, who laud the harmonic innovations of his later works while dismissing or ignoring his early compositional language as undeveloped or traditional.\(^{16}\) Any consideration of his philosophical worldview has, until recently, been off-handedly dismissed in favor of a theoretical approach steeped in the formalist tradition of musical analysis.\(^{17}\) While recent musicological research has sought to provide a corrective to this neglect, little work has been done reintegrating Scriabin into a broader cultural and


\(^{16}\) This celebration of the “progressive” aspect of Scriabin’s compositional language has often gone hand in hand with the contradictory claim that the Russian composer’s influence on later musical styles was slight to non-existent.

intellectual context.\textsuperscript{18} Literary scholars and cultural historians have made some effort to incorporate Scriabin into studies of the Russian Silver Age, but these accounts generally focus entirely upon his philosophical writings, scarcely touching the composer's musical output.\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps most surprisingly, no attempt has been made to examine the troubled history of Scriabin’s reception by audiences in Revolutionary Russia.

Western disinterest in Scriabin’s philosophy was paralleled in the Soviet Union by an active rejection of what was considered the “bourgeois” idealist world-view upon which Scriabin’s ideas were founded as well as the “formalist” path that the Western musical avant-garde followed in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{20} Rejection of Scriabin as an “enemy of the people” alternated with attempts to recast him as a prophet of the revolution. Theoretical study of the composer’s late works was considered politically suspect, with Varvara Dernova’s groundbreaking study of Scriabin’s late compositional style waiting twenty years for publication.\textsuperscript{21} Even the most positive assessments of Scriabin’s compositional output contained mandatory dismissal of the composer’s philosophical idealism.\textsuperscript{22} While the collapse of the Soviet Union has brought with it an increased interest in writers and philosophers of the Russian Silver Age, the aura surrounding Scriabin as a Russian musical genius has continued to overshadow historical

\textsuperscript{20} This tendency is noted also by Tamara Levaia in Levaia, \textit{Scriabin i khudozhestvennye iskaniia XX veka}.
\textsuperscript{21} Varvara Dernova, \textit{Garmoniia Skriabina} (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1968). The book was a revision of her 1948 dissertation.
inquiry into the composer’s connection to a particularly tumultuous time in Russian history.  

In approaching Scriabin’s philosophy as a coherent system of thought in its own right, I argue against a wide-spread view of the composer found in English-language musical literature in which the composer is accused of extreme solipsism, egocentrism or even sheer insanity. In seeking to understand some of the more bizarre expressions of Scriabin’s thought, scholars have often fallen back upon highlighting one specific influence underpinning Scriabin’s philosophy. Such analysis is a far cry from extended examination of Scriabin's evolving system of thought in its own right. Soviet analysis of Scriabin's philosophical notebooks (a tradition that emerged soon after their initial publication) was generally conducted within a pre-established Marxist framework.

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23 Numerous publications by the Scriabin museum in Moscow tend to celebrate the “genius” of the composer and focus on biographical details of his life rather than analyzing broader historical questions. This is evidenced in a recent republication of Sabaneev’s Vospominaniia o Skriabine and Iurii Linnik’s paper, “Skrabi i Fedorov” given at the Fedorov Museum (Moscow) in Spring 2008 in which he argued for the applicability of Scriabin's Mystery for the present day.


25 Both Malcolm Brown (“Skrabi and Russian ‘Mystic’ Symbolism”, 19th-Century Music 3, no.1 (July 1979), 42-51) and Ralph E. Matlaw (“Scriabin and Russian Symbolism”, Comparative Literature 31, no.1 (Winter 1979), 1-23) have argued that Russian “mystic” Symbolism, particularly the ideas of Viacheslav Ivanov were a driving force behind Scriabin's own theories on art and life. Ann Lane (“Bal’mont and Skriabin: The Artist as Superman”) offers a similar analysis of intellectual influence, focusing on Nietzsche rather than Russian Symbolism as the initial source. The convenience of placing Scriabin’s ideas into a pre-existing framework, such as theosophy, Nietzscheanism or symbolism, has also served as the basis of analysis of the meaning embodied in Scriabin’s music itself. Richard Taruskin’s analysis of Scriabin's harmonic language is heavily based upon a speech given by Viacheslav Ivanov (Defining Russia Musically), while Simon Morrison’s examination of the text to Scriabin's Preparatory Act is interpreted with heavy borrowing from Helena Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine (Russian Opera).

26 Highlights of this tradition include Losev’s essay, “Mirovozzrenenie Skriabina”; I. I. Lapshin, Zavetnye dumy Skriabina (Petrograd: Mysl’, 1922); Igor Glebov [Boris Asaf’ev], Skriabin: Opyt kharakteristik (Petrograd: Svetozar, 1921) and most recently Sergei Fediakin, Skriabin (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia,
Shifting government policy towards “correct” aesthetics in music (in which Scriabin's mysticism and philosophical idealism had no place) resulted in a dearth in publications on this question between 1940 and 1990. Recent Russian interest in the Russian Silver Age has revived interest in Scriabin's philosophical ideas, though generally as part of a broader search for a uniquely “Russian” spiritual identity in the modern age. None of these interpretations has sufficiently explored the context in which Scriabin’s music and ideas took shape.²⁷ Scriabin's thought, while it encompassed a wide variety of sources, is best approached first on its own terms, separated both from later commentaries upon it, as well as from attempts to place it specifically within one or another system of thought.

In this chapter, I seek to draw back the veil obscuring Scriabin’s historical persona, analyzing the ways in which the composer’s personal myth interacted productively with contemporary social and intellectual concerns. After a brief biographical overview, I turn to a detailed analysis of the evolution of Scriabin’s vision of music and reality in the years between 1904 and 1915. Scriabin’s personal evolution

²⁷ The question of the context in which the extant sources were written is central. Many of the personal accounts of conversations with Scriabin were commissioned by the Soviet Government (NYPL, *MNX, Faubion Bowers, MS “Scriabin,” n.p., n.d., l.131), while the three published sources cited most often in secondary literature were all published after the composer’s death: Scriabin’s own philosophical notebooks (1919, Moscow), Leonid Sabaneev’s *Vospominaniia o Skriabine* (1925, Moscow) and Boris Schloezer’s study of Scriabin’s thought and life (*A. Skriabin: Monografiia o lichnosti i tvorchestve*, Berlin, 1923). The studies published by Schloezer and Sabaneev, while invaluable sources of information, must be approached with the understanding that they showcase the opinions and biases of the authors, both of whom were active participants in pre-Revolutionary musical and intellectual life. Scriabin’s philosophical notebooks present their own challenges. Compiled and edited by Tatiana Schloezer, the composer’s common-law wife, and her brother Boris Schloezer after Scriabin’s death, these notebooks were never intended by the composer for public consumption. During his lifetime Scriabin refused to show anyone the written fragments of text through which he worked out his ideas about the world, despite his openness in sharing his ideas with both friends and strangers in conversation (Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*, 42-43). These notebooks themselves have never been republished in Russia nor translated into English, though French and German translations exist: Alexandre Scriabine, *Notes et réflexions. Carnets inédits*, trans. by Marina Scriabine (Paris: Éditions Klincsieck, 1979); Alexandr Skrjabin, *Prometheische Phantasien*, trans. and ed. Oskar von Reisemann (Stuttgart: Verlaganstalt, 1924).
from a more individualistic world-view (reminiscent of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*) towards a collectivist image resonated within educated Russian society of the day, in which themes of life-creation (*zhiznotvorchestvo*) and the search for unity (*vseedinstvo*) were widespread.\(^\text{28}\) I conclude with an examination of the composer’s envisioned *Mystery*, the apocalyptic work of art that was to unite religion, philosophy and music into a higher synthesis, erase the division between listener and performer and usher in the end of the world. Scriabin's intellectual and creative evolution mirrors many of the central tenets of musical metaphysics that emerged at roughly the same time, placing the composer firmly within the cultural space of Revolutionary Russia. Perhaps more than any other figure, Scriabin was the Orphic hope for the future.

**The Formation of a Russian Musical Messiah**

Aleksandr Nikolaevich Scriabin was born on Christmas Day (December 25, 1871/January 6, 1872) in Moscow, Russia, to a military family of noble descent. His mother, a concert pianist and former student of famed piano pedagogue Theodor Leschetitksy, died shortly after her son’s birth, and his father, a lawyer, lived abroad for many years, working as a government official in the Constantinople. Scriabin was raised by his aunt, great aunt and paternal grandmother. His musical skills developed early in life and the young man was soon accepted as a private student by some of the most outstanding musicians of Moscow, including Sergei Taneev and Nikolai Zverev. In 1888, he entered the Moscow Conservatory, graduating in 1892 with a small Gold Medal in

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After graduation, he began his musical career as a concert pianist, touring throughout Russia and Europe, but a hand injury, together with an increasing desire to devote himself exclusively to composition, led him to accept a teaching post at the Moscow Conservatory in 1898. Disinclination for a teaching career, together with personal scandal, led Scriabin to abandon this post and move to Switzerland in 1904. After spending five years abroad in Europe and the United States, Scriabin returned to Russia in January 1909 for the Russian premiere of his Third Symphony and Poem of Ecstasy. The subsequent series of concerts were the talk of the contemporary Russian musical world. At the instigation of conductor, publisher and musical impresario Sergei Kussevitsky, Scriabin permanently settled in Moscow in 1910. After his return to Russia, he was active as a pianist-composer, giving frequent concerts of his own works in Moscow, Petersburg, and Kiev as well as in smaller cities in central Russia. While primarily a composer of piano miniatures, it was Scriabin’s few large-scale orchestral works, together with his evolving musical language and philosophical views that served as topics of heated debate amongst his contemporaries. After his return to Moscow, his fame grew steadily within Russia and by the time of his death on April 14, 1915, he was a musical celebrity with a devoted circle of admirers who passionately defended his search

29 Having learned that his colleague and classmate, Sergei Rachmaninoff, intended to graduate with a double major in composition and piano performance in four years rather than the requisite five, Scriabin insisted on pursuing the same course of action. However, his composition professor Anton Arensky disapproved of this plan and Scriabin graduated from the Moscow Conservatory without completing his compositional course of study.

30 This scandal was due to the composer’s affair with one of his students from the Catherine Institute as well as his affair with Tatiana Shletser. The scandal over Scriabin’s abandonment of his first wife, Vera Ivanovna (a talented concert pianist in her own right) and their children continued to plague the composer.


31 Letopis’ zhizni Skriabina, 167-172; Morozova,”Vospominiatiia,” RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.12, l.77-78; Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 24-34.

for a new musical language and the philosophical views that underlay this quest. For these followers, Scriabin was the contemporary embodiment of Orpheus and his music the path to a transformed future.

**Intellectual development**

Over the course of his brief life, Scriabin was exposed to a wide range of artistic, philosophical and social ideals that circulated through educated Russian society of the day. Though by all accounts the composer hated to read and seldom completed a book, he was constantly engaged in struggling to define fundamental aspects of human existence and would often launch into detailed philosophical conversations with near strangers, a pastime that, according to numerous contemporaries, the composer was surprisingly skilled at. He often lamented his lack of education in philosophy and sought a strong philosophical basis for his own views on music and art, joining the Moscow Psychological Society and attending conferences devoted to contemporary philosophical questions. An interest in mysticism and the occult became increasingly apparent in later years, but these ideas overlay a philosophical base heavily indebted to German Idealist philosophy, particularly the dialectical divisions of the world into “I” and “not-I”, *noumena* and *phenomena*, and the corresponding search to overcome these divisions in post-Kantian thought. The subjective idealism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte was a particularly strong influence on the composer as a potential path through which to overcome this division. Despite the obvious influence of the German Romantic

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34 As late as February 6, 1915, Scriabin attended a meeting of the Moscow Psychological Society, the leading philosophical society in the city. See GTsMMK f.31, no.714.

35 Fokht, “Filosofia muzyki Skriabina,” 203-207. Scriabin attended a 1904 conference in Geneva dedicated to Fichte’s philosophy. For a reproduction of the conference program, see A.I. Kandinskii, ed., *Aleksandr Nikolaevich Skriabin* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1979), 83. Mark Meichik similarly recounts how he began talking
tradition, Scriabin was not a rigorous or dogmatic interpreter of philosophical ideas, freely borrowing and interpreting from various systems to fit his own world-view. Over the course of his life, his personal interactions with such varied intellectual and literary luminaries as Sergei Trubetskoi, Georgii Plekhanov, Viacheslav Ivanov, Valerii Bal’mont, Iurgis Baltrushaitis, Fr. Pavel Florenskii, Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov exposed Scriabin to a wide range of conflicting philosophical ideals. These personal intellectual and artistic contacts, together with a lively interest in theosophy (a religious doctrine he first became acquainted with during his time in Europe), sporadic reading of philosophy, and almost daily meetings with a close-knit circle of acquaintances, were fundamental in shaping Scriabin’s own worldview. From this mixture of influences, he created his own interpretation of his Orphic role in the modern world. Consciously or unconsciously, the composer was responding to the challenge being voiced in his homeland.

Scriabin’s philosophical quest highlights the problematic nature of the reception of ideas. In particular, his interpretation of the ideas of Kant, Fichte and Hegel was reached primarily through reading the Russian translation of Kuno Fisher’s History of Philosophy and Iberverg-Geintse’s History of New Philosophy, rather than the words of the philosophers themselves. For this reason, his understanding of their claims was

with Scriabin about Kant at their first meeting. See Meichik, “Nad mogiloi A.N. Skriabina,” Rampi i zhizn’ no. 16 (April 19, 1915): 4-5. It should be noted that Scriabin’s interpretation of Fichte was not really an accurate reflection of Fichte’s philosophy. In “Some Lectures Concerning a Scholar’s Vocation,” Fichte suggested a way out of the trap of subjective idealism’s denial of externally existing beings similar to that which Scriabin himself ultimately reached. See Daniel Breazeale, ed., Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 144-184. I am grateful to John Randolph for bringing this point to my attention.

37 Lapshin, Zavetnye dumy Skriabina, 15.
38 Shletser, Skriabin, 26
39 Aleksandr Scriabin to Margarita Morozova (April 3/16, 1904) in A. N. Skriabin: Pis’ma, ed. by A.V. Kashperov (Moscow: Muzyka, 2003), 307-308.
shaped more by the emphasis on certain aspects of their thought that he imbibed from contemporary Russian and European society than from a full understanding or knowledge of their work. Having internalized the widespread image of human historical progress, he approached earlier philosophers as seekers along the same path that he followed, but whose place in history itself doomed them to a less complete understanding of the world than his own. For these reasons, the discussion that follows is not intended as an explication of the thought of these philosophers themselves, but of Scriabin’s interpretation of their work, which itself was influenced by the immediate social and cultural context of his day.

**Life Affirmation**

After a youthful exploration of Orthodox Christianity and its moral teachings, followed by an early fascination with the ideas of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Scriabin dramatically broadened his philosophical scope in the years between 1904 and 1906. At the same time as Nietzsche’s Orphans began to proclaim the immanent appearance of a Russian Orpheus, the importance of a unifying figure was fermenting in the mind of the Scriabin. This shift corresponded to greater musical experimentation in his compositions. Scriabin’s writings from this time show an acute awareness of the problem of human suffering in the world. The individual, Scriabin felt, was alone in the world, with no hope of salvation through belief in God or humanity. Like Schopenhauer, Scriabin acknowledged the world in which he lived to be a source of unavoidable suffering, brought about by unfulfilled desires. Rather than espousing a peaceful

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40 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 120-247, here 120-121, dated by editors as “written at 16 years old”. In his later life, Scriabin expressed little interest in traditional Christian theology. See Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*, 119-121.

41 Scriabin’s philosophical notebooks (dating from ca.1889 through 1915, with the bulk of material having been written between 1904-1906) show the composer to have been striving to develop a relatively rigorous intellectual framework through which to understand the world and his relation to it.
acceptance of the nature of reality and a surrendering of individuality such as had
Schopenhauer suggested, Scriabin, like Nietzsche, embraced a path of life affirmation. If
life had no meaning outside of what we assigned to it, this only made humanity’s struggle
against external obstacles all the more essential, as it was this very battle that gave
purpose to existence. The lack of ultimate “truth” existing independent of oneself,
Scriabin believed, should lead not to despair, but to a triumphant founding of new truths.
Together with this justification of life as it is, Scriabin emphasized the role of the teacher
or the prophet, whose mission it was to declare these new discoveries to all humanity. All
these sentiments were embodied in a text written by Scriabin around 1900 in which he
claimed that it was the experience of despair that taught an individual not to depend on or
believe in an externally existing God. 42 [Appendix Text 1] Eternal truths and values did
not exist. Nothing existed, in fact, apart from “that which [humans] themselves create.”
“Overcoming” the trials of life was only possible through individual creative activity.

Together with this emphasis on individuality, Scriabin was interested in
humanity’s ability to transform reality. The central role that art could play in this
transformative process was celebrated in Scriabin’s “Hymn to Art,” the text he set in the
choral finale of his First Symphony (1900). [Appendix Text 2] Here, Scriabin substituted
art for the “heavenly form of God” itself. 43 At this early stage of Scriabin’s philosophical
development, the role of art as a transformative power was interlaced with his emphasis
on the individual personality of an artist-creator. This combination was most clearly
expressed in Scriabin’s unfinished opera text, composed in 1903. The plot centered on a

42 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 121-122. Dated by editors as “ca 1900, the time of the First Symphony”.
Bowers claimed the text was written in 1894 and includes the title “What, Then?” which is not in the
43 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 122.
“musician-philosopher,” reminiscent of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, whose role it was to transform an old and stagnant society and give new meaning to life for humanity. This prophet-like figure spoke words of consolation, which echoed the message proclaimed in the 1900 text: every human must search for strength inside him- or herself and recognize the power of his or her own will. For this to come to pass, humanity needed to hear the prophetic voice of the “musician-philosopher”. Only then would these “slaves” recognize “how full life is” and “desire to flee from [their] shameful chains”. From humanity’s own “strong desires,” Scriabin’s musician-philosopher claimed, a “wave of happiness will immediately surge,” thereby overcoming the cycle of suffering in which they were caught. Only through recognition of the power of their own will could humans free themselves from their chains. And only through following the example of an individual genius-creator would humanity wake from the slumber of intellectual bondage in which it was enslaved.

Scriabin’s early philosophical views focused on life-affirmation, creativity and individuality. Life was given meaning only through struggle and overcoming of obstacles: it contained no inherent value outside of what meaning was given to it through action. This struggle required creative effort in order to battle against the turmoil of life. For this reason, art in general and music specifically was granted central importance, appearing as a surrogate for religious belief, which Scriabin claimed to have rejected at an early age. This creative struggle against the oppressive forces of life had to take place on an individual level. The great man was one who created meaning for his life

44 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 127-128.
45 For an assessment of Scriabin’s relationship to Christianity, see Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 119-121.
through active engagement in the world. These values of individual suffering and creative transformation carried over into the composer’s musical language at this time.

**Musical Dissonance and Individual Suffering**

Musically, Scriabin's early works fell within traditional harmonic language, with its fluctuations of tension and resolution, dissonance and consonance. Scriabin’s marginal notes in his copy of Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation* offer deeper insight into the symbolic meaning behind these harmonic devices. In Schopenhauer's words (underlined by Scriabin), “the irrational relation or dissonance becomes the natural symbol of that which contradicts our will, and, on the other hand, consonance or rational relationship (because it easily enters our perception) becomes a symbol of satisfied will.”

Further, “in the whole of music there are only two fundamental chords, the dissonant chord of the seventh and the harmonious triad, and all chords that are met with can be referred to these two. This is precisely in keeping with the fact that there are for the will at bottom only dissatisfaction and satisfaction, however many and varied the forms in which these are presented may be.”

Musical consonance and dissonance, in Schopenhauer’s interpretation, served to embody the human experience of unsatisfied personal longing (dissonance) and fulfilled desire (consonance), the two of which were in constant flux.

The two chords of which Schopenhauer writes are the primary building blocks of tonal music. Here is a “harmonious triad” (in C major):

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And here is a “dissonant chord of the seventh”:

All of the notes contained in these chords are derived from the C major scale, making the chords diatonic. The scale itself is asymmetrical, consisting of eight notes separated both by whole tones (a larger interval) and semi-tones (a smaller interval). Below is a C major scale, in which the appearance of the two semitone intervals have been marked:

All major scales follow an identical arrangement of whole tones and semi-tones, while minor scales have a slightly different arrangement. It is the specific arrangement of whole tones and semi-tones that defines their identity as major or minor.

In classical music theory, the “dissonant chord of the seventh” resolves to the consonant according to relatively strict rules of voice leading:

According to voice leading principles, the seventh note of the scale (the leading note) must rise to the next note (the tonic), while the seventh note of the chord (seven notes up from the base of the chord) must fall. In our present example, if we isolate these two notes, this motion looks like this:
Such movement is referred to as a “dominant” (dissonant) function moving to a “tonic” (consonant) function, arguably the single most important harmonic progression in classical music of the common practice era. Contained within the dominant chord is the interval of a tritone, the significance of which is discussed further below.

Musical harmony contains far more complex interrelationships than the duality described by Schopenhauer. It is varying degrees or levels of dissonance that give music of this time its particular expressive potential. In the words of Richard Taruskin, “whereas we cannot measure and therefore cannot experience the exact difference between yearning and longing, we can measure and experience the difference [within specific musical harmonies].” The technique of delaying resolution of a dissonant chord through an entire series of dissonances, a common technique by the nineteenth century, was famously employed by Richard Wagner as an aural symbol of sensual desire at the opening of his opera Tristan and Isolde. In this chord, final resolution is delayed to an almost painful degree as the initial dissonance resolves not to a consonance, but to another dissonance in a long chain.

The exploitation of varying degrees of dissonance was similarly a part of Scriabin’s evolving compositional language. The etude op. 42, no. 5 gives a clear example of how Scriabin manipulates dissonant seventh chords, postponing a clear move

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48 Taruskin’s exact quotation is “whereas we cannot measure and therefore cannot experience the exact difference between yearning and longing, we can measure and experience the difference between a Tristan chord and a French sixth, and between a French sixth and a diminished or dominant seventh.” Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically, 328. The precise analysis of these chords is not mandatory in giving a general overview of musical rhetoric.

49 For a more thorough treatment of the development of harmonic practice at this time, see William Kinderman and Harald Krebs, eds., The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).
to a triadic consonance in the tonic key until virtually the end of the composition.

Although the piece is in c-sharp minor, no clear cadence defining the home key is given at the start of the work. Instead, the etude opens with alternating major and minor seventh chords built on a chord with a weak functional role in defining the home key:

(4.6) Etude op. 42, no. 5 (harmonic reduction of opening)

Through opening the etude with an A7 chord, (built on the sixth note of a C-sharp minor scale) the listener is given no clear acknowledgement of the actual tonic of the piece.

Confusion only grows when the first genuine cadence that is given hints at a G-sharp minor rather than a C-sharp minor tonic. Dissonant tones continue to underpin the harmonic structure of the entire work, giving a sense of unease and restlessness to the piece. A clear statement of the tonic chord of C-sharp minor never appears until the final measures of the entire piece. Even the clarity of this final resolution is incomplete however, as Scriabin omits the third of the chord, the most important note in defining the mode (major or minor) of a piece.

While Wagner offered a clear definition of the home key of *Tristan and Isolde* after the introductory sequence discussed above, Scriabin postpones full resolution of tension throughout the entire etude. Rather than dissonance representing momentary suffering, the very basis of the entire work is movement from one dissonant to another, finding nothing more than brief moments of respite until the end of the work itself. This emphasis on dissonance rather than consonance ushered in the next era in Scriabin’s compositional development, in which dissonance is celebrated for its own sake.
Middle Period

There are times when everything that is left over and cannot be grasped in terms of musical relations actually fills me with horror and disgust.\textsuperscript{50}

Friedrich Nietzsche

In \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, Friedrich Nietzsche critiqued Schopenhauer’s metaphysical interpretation of consonance and dissonance, arguing that the latter’s interpretation had focused too exclusively upon individual experience rather than humanity’s collective experience of life. While Schopenhauer interpreted musical dissonance from the point of view of the individual listener, who equated dissonance with personal suffering (brought about through unsatisfied will) and consonance with the momentary satisfaction of will,\textsuperscript{51} Nietzsche believed that musical dissonance (like tragic myth) symbolized the struggle of humanity to find greater meaning underlying individual suffering in the world.\textsuperscript{52} One person’s suffering was, Nietzsche claimed, secondary to the development of collective human experience. In Nietzsche’s own words, “man” was “an incarnation of dissonance,”\textsuperscript{53} a physical embodiment of a moment of tension and discord that added necessary interest and beauty to life as a whole. For Nietzsche, dissonance in a particular piece of music provided a symbolic embodiment of the process of life-affirmation, accepting both the positive and negative traits of existence as it truly was.

Moments of discord (be they musical or individual experiences of suffering) were a


\textsuperscript{51} “The irrational relation or dissonance becomes the natural image of what resists our will; and, conversely, the consonance or the rational relation, by easily adapting itself to our apprehension, becomes the image of the satisfaction of the will,” Schopenhauer, “On the Metaphysics of Music,” 451.

\textsuperscript{52} Thus for Nietzsche, both music and tragic myth “convince us that even the ugly and unharmonious is an artistic game which the will plays with itself in the eternal fullness of its joy.” Also: “...this not easily comprehensible proto-phenomenon of Dionysian art becomes, in a direct way, singularly intelligible, and is immediately apprehended in the wonderful significance of musical dissonance: just as in general it is music alone, placed in contrast to the world, which can give us an idea as to what is meant by the justification of the world as an esthetic phenomenon.” Nietzsche, \textit{BT}, 89-90.

\textsuperscript{53} Nietzsche, \textit{BT}, 91.
necessary component of the beauty of the whole. In this way, the life of the individual was justified through its place within the whole. Thus, in Nietzsche’s mind, the importance of dissonance was not connected with individual experience (suffering and resolution) but with an aesthetic transformation of the experience of life itself, in which the individual dissonance of human life found its resolution within the whole.\textsuperscript{54}

These very questions of human subjectivity, individuality and life-affirmation increasingly occupied Scriabin in the years between 1904 and 1906, precipitating a transformation both in his philosophical thought and in his compositional style. One of the central concerns of his writings at this time was the relation of the subjective “I” to the external world.\textsuperscript{55} While Scriabin maintained his belief in the Nietzschean ideal of life-affirmation and the power of art to transform life, he began to question his own place within the larger world. This culminated in a shift away from extreme individualism and solipsism towards a collective view of human reality, predicated upon the question of the existence of other minds, independent to his own.

Exposure to more rigorously rationalistic systems of thought that challenged his extreme individualism (neo-Kantian idealism and Marxism) seem to have inspired Scriabin’s intellectual and compositional development at this time. Scriabin was

\textsuperscript{54} This issue of the symbolic meaning of dissonance is touched upon in Silk and Stern, \textit{Nietzsche on Tragedy}, 378-380. They conclude (without reference to Schopenhauer) that Nietzsche rejected the more traditional relationship of dissonance with suffering and consonance with resolution or pleasure, arguing that “it is dissonance itself that is keenly – painfully – pleasurable; and that painful pleasure is such as to create a longing to escape from the medium that is its source – to escape not into finite consonance, but into infinite silence.” Silk and Stern, \textit{Nietzsche on Tragedy}, 378-379. In contrast to musical aesthetics of the common practice era, which had argued that pleasure was achieved through the resolution of dissonance, pleasure was to be found in dissonance itself, which gave rise also to the longing to overcome existence as such. Silk and Stern cite Charles Rosen, \textit{Schoenberg} (London, 1976) as the source of this “classic” (though relatively simplistic) definition of musical dissonance. As discussed above, it was also formulated by Arthur Schopenhauer in “On the Metaphysics of Music,” 451.

\textsuperscript{55} The sections Scriabin focused on in his reading of Schopenhauerian and Kantian philosophy demonstrate his preoccupation with the question of the relation of the individual mind to the external world. See “Vypiski iz knig po filosofii s pometkami A.N. Skriabina,” particularly 177-179; 184-196.
introduced to neo-Kantian philosophy by Professor Sergei Trubetskoi, whose acquaintance he made sometime between 1895 and 1902.\(^{56}\) At the latter’s invitation, he joined the Moscow Psychological Society, a center of neo-Kantian thought, whose meetings he attended, in Boris Schloezer’s estimation, “quite regularly”.\(^{57}\) Trubetskoi recommended a number of introductory texts to Scriabin through which to begin his closer acquaintance with philosophy.\(^{58}\) After his departure from Russia in 1903, Scriabin continued to explore German Idealist thought, attending the Second International Philosophical Congress (which was dedicated in large part to the ideas of Johann Gottlieb Fichte), which took place in Geneva in September 1904.\(^{59}\)

At this time, Scriabin seems to have been particularly attracted to neo-Kantian discussion of the relation of individual consciousness to externally existing minds. Sergei Trubetskoi had himself sought to overcome what he considered to be the individualistic

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\(^{57}\) Shletser, *Skriabin*, 17-18. Schloezer misnamed the society the “Moscow Philosophical Society” and maintained that Scriabin’s own ideas were too distant from those of Trubetskoi for there to have been much genuine influence, though others have refuted this (see Morrison, *Russian Opera*). Malcolm Brown dates Scriabin’s acquaintance with Trubetskoi to “around 1898”. Malcolm Brown, “‘Scriabin and Russian ‘Mystic’ Symbolism,’” *19th-Century Music* 3, no. 1 (July 1979), 42-51, here 43. Morozova also claimed that Scriabin went to see Trubetskoi “often” and that he “oversaw Scriabin’s philosophical development”. RGALI f. 1956, op.2, ed.khr.12, ll.49-51. Like Scriabin, Trubetskoi was actively interested in the question of human consciousness and the relation between subject and object. See Randall A. Poole, “The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 2 (April 1999): 319-343, 320; 329-330. Unlike Scriabin, Trubetskoi put great importance on questions of ethics (the Good), See ibid., 333-338.

\(^{58}\) Scriabin later passed on this suggestion to Margarita Morozova, who studied piano with him. See RGALI f. 1956, op.2, ed.khr.12, ll.49-51. In preparation for understanding his philosophical system, Scriabin warned her in 1904 that “you must master Kant as soon as possible and become somewhat acquainted with Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.” See *Skriabin, Pis’ma*, 307. These texts included Paulson’s *Introduction to Philosophy*, Kuno Fisher’s works and Windelband’s *Course on Ancient Philosophy*. See RGALI f. 1956, op.2, ed.khr.12.

\(^{59}\) Morozova noted Scriabin’s interest in Fichte in 1904, though commenting that, as always, Skriabin interpreted him “in his own way” (*po-svoemu*). See RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed. khr.12, ll.60-61. A copy of the full program from the 1904 International Philosophical Conference with Scriabin’s comments is preserved in the Scriabin Museum in Moscow. Primary emphasis at this conference was given to the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. See St. Markus, “Ob osobennostiakh i istochnikakh filosofii i estetiki Skriabina,” *A.N. Skriabin, 1915-1940: sbornik k 25-letiiu so dnia smerti*, 194-196 for a discussion of the papers included at the conference and Scriabin’s comments about them.
foundations of German idealist philosophy through uniting German tradition with the
Slavophile concept of sobornost’. For Trubetskoi, sobornost’ (understood as a free
community of individuals eschewing personal goals for collective ones) was the
necessary connecting link between the individual and universal. Through sobornost’, the
individualistic tendencies of European thought would be overcome and striving for the
good of the individual and the good of the community would be united. Trubetskoi’s
sobornost’ contained a national and even messianic element: the Russian people, more
deeply Christian in their very essence than the secular West, were uniquely suited to
introduce this concept into Western thought. Scriabin later used the term sobornost’ in a
less nationally tinged manner, adopting it to describe the ultimate goal of his
planned creative work, the Mystery. At this point in his intellectual development,
however, it was the problem of overcoming the divide between the individual, isolated
mind and the external universe that was most influential for Scriabin.

Scriabin’s intellectual search received perhaps its most direct challenge in
discussions with Georgii Plekhanov, founder of dialectical materialism, in the months
following the 1905 revolution in Russia. The fundamental opposition of the worldviews
held by the two men left no real hope of resolution, but this connection was nevertheless

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61 Sabaneev claims that it was because of this mutual emphasis on sobornost’ that Scriabin had affection for
62 See R.M. Plekhanova’s reminiscences of this unlikely friendship in A.N. Skriabin, 1915-1940: sbornik k
25-letiui so dniia smerti (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1940), 65-
75. Plekhanov, having been delayed in returning to Russia after the 1905 revolution due to illness,
eventually travelled to Italy in 1906 to recuperate. He became acquainted with Scriabin in the resort town
of Bol’iansko (near Genoa, Italy) in February 1906 through a mutual friend, the social democrat Vladislav
Aleksandrovich Kobylianskii, whose wife, Ol’ga Osipovna Lunts, had been a student of Scriabin’s at the
Moscow Conservatory. Ibid., 65. Their meetings occurred in 1906-07. R. M. Plekhanova arranged a concert
of Scriabin’s music in the Geneva conservatory (June 30, 1906). See Fediakin, Skriabin, 547.
intellectually challenging to Scriabin and left a lasting impression on both men. The composer was wont to make particularly extreme idealistic statements at this time, once claiming to Plekhanov: “We create the world with our creative spirit, with our will... the laws of gravity do not exist for it. I could throw myself from this bridge and not hit my head on the rocks, but rather hang in the air through the strength of my will.” In response to this dramatic assertion, Plekhanov calmly suggested “Try it, Aleksandr Nikolaevich!” Though materialism was fundamentally foreign to Scriabin’s philosophical views, under Plekhanov’s influence the composer’s reading expanded to incorporate Marxist philosophy. In Plekhanov’s view, this exposure “while in no way having made him a supporter of historical materialism” nevertheless left Scriabin with a better understanding of the essence of the philosophy than most Marxists possessed.

A deepening understanding of the debates surrounding the relation of the individual to the external world in German idealist philosophy, together with Plekhanov’s materialist challenge to Scriabin’s personal convictions about the nature of art and of reality, inspired sustained introspection by the composer about his own philosophical views. The composer’s earlier goals of life-affirmation and transformation of life

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64 Plekhanova commented laconically that “the composer decided not to demonstrate this experience”. See R.M. Plekhanova, “Vospominaniia,” in A.N. Skriabin, 1915-1940: sbornik k 25-letiiu so dnia smerti, 65-75, 69. Lapshin cited a similar incident, describing Plekhanov’s response to Scriabin's view of the immediate connection between internal emotion and external events: “Oh, so it is to you that we are indebted for good weather, Aleksandr Nikolaevich.” See Lapshin, Zavetnye dumy Skriabina, 22.
65 Plekhanov, “Vospominaniia o Skriabine,” 119. Scriabin’s major objection to dialectical materialism, according to Plekhanov was “You Marxists cannot deny the meaning of ideology. You only explain the path of its development.” Similarly, R. M. Plekhanova argued that Scriabin’s interest in, and reading of, Marxism, served only to “check his idealistic world-view, to which he always remained true”, R. M. Plekhanova, “Vospominaniia,” 74.
66 Scriabin was reading Plekhanov’s writing “with pleasure” in 1906. See Tatiana Schloezer to Marietta Nemenova-Lunts (February 20, 1906), quoted in A.I. Kandinskii, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Skriabin, 93. Scriabin’s conversations with Plekhanov would leave a mark even in his “mystical” period, in which he considered the meaning of socialism to be when “materialization reaches its fullest measure”, the necessary
through art were no longer enough without a stronger philosophical basis that acknowledged the apparent multiplicity of the universe and that sought to offer more rigorous arguments for the idealist stance that he espoused. I turn now to an overview of the system that he developed in the years 1904-1906 in response to these intellectual challenges.

**Scriabin’s Search for a System**

*Epistemology/Ontology*

Intellectual historians maintain that epistemological questions received little attention in Russian philosophical thought, which tended to focus primarily on questions of ontology. This claim is born out in studying Scriabin’s philosophical notebooks, which focus less on issues of knowledge and more on questions of existence. Nevertheless, some type of epistemological basis, stated or unstated, underlies any ontological system. While the ultimate purpose of philosophical thought is generally aimed at determining the most appropriate path for human action in the world, that action must be based on the knowledge we have of it. But one cannot claim knowledge of the world without considering how we come by that knowledge and what its limitations are. Such epistemological questions occupied a large place in Scriabin’s notebooks at this time. In confronting them, Scriabin’s thought showed the influence of Kant and Fichte’s moment before the return to dematerialization. See Sabaneev, *Vospomnianii a Skriabine*, 123. In his analysis of Scriabin’s philosophical notebooks, Losev noted that “German idealism, especially Fichte” serves as an underlying model through which Scriabin sought to unite three opposing aspects of his thought (identified by Losev as “psychological solipsism”, “transcendental-logical immanence” and “philosophy of differentiated consciousness”). Losev, “Mirovozzrenie Skriabine,” 266. In the analysis that follows, I touch upon each of these areas of thought as they emerge in Scriabin's notebooks. However, I have avoided imposing philosophical terminology, trying to trace the development of his thought rather than place it within one or another system.

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subjective idealism, albeit in simplified form. In his 1904 notebook, Scriabin differentiated between our perceptions of the world around us and the external world itself, which gave rise to the content of our perceptions, arguing: “in every experience, there is content, which is given to us, and our perception of that content.” He went on to ask how we could conclude that these sensations that we perceive actually exist independent of our mind. There was, he concluded, no “bridge” between our subjective experience and external reality. We could only know our subjective experience of things, not the thing itself. This echoes Kant’s distinction between noumena and phenomena, between the Thing-in-itself and our perception of it. However, Kant had sought to define the limits of rational knowledge, placing the Thing-in-itself outside the realm of that knowledge. Scriabin, in contrast, drew a very problematic conclusion from this subjective stance, claiming: “If we can affirm everything only as subjective event, then it [everything] can be only as a result of our activity. Our singular and thus free and absolute activity.” With this, he leapt from an analysis of the limits of subjective, individual knowledge to a broad statement about the nature of reality. Our inability to achieve any genuine knowledge of the external world meant that the world simply did not exist outside of the individual active, creative mind. And if the world did not exist, it meant, by extension, that other minds, other individuals also did not exist. This problematic leap demonstrates that Scriabin, like many Russian intellectuals of his day

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69 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 132.
70 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 133.
71 Losev also notes the problematic nature of Scriabin’s claims at this point, labelling them the “conception of an extreme psychological solipsism.” See Losev, “Mirovozzrenie Skriabina,” 260.
had little interest in building a well-developed epistemological structure. His ultimate goal was not to understand the world, but to act in it.

Scriabin’s focus on the “subjective I” and his denial of the possible existence of a “Thing-in-itself” echoed the path followed by Fichte. Both men rejected the existence of a Thing-in-itself outside the active mind. However, by denying the existence of other minds, Scriabin found himself in an intellectual conundrum, from which he repeatedly tried to escape in his later writings. How could any philosophical system that was intended to encompass all of humanity be based on pure subjectivity? In seeking to solve this puzzle, he drew closer to the ideas of absolute idealists such as Plato and Hegel, who, while maintaining the priority of mind over material reality, offered a means to escape the syllogistic trap into which Scriabin had fallen. This intellectual trajectory becomes apparent when one studies Scriabin’s attempts to explain the nature of the world around him.

Beginning from a subjective idealist stance and denying the material world independent existence outside his mind, Scriabin initially viewed the universe as his own mental creation. The very categories of space and time, as well as all objects existing within them were his intellectual creations, brought into being by his active mind. Thus, to study reality ultimately meant to study his own consciousness, as the external world was really nothing more than a reflection of his consciousness at a given moment:

I affirm the world (universe) as a series of states of my consciousness (of my activity (creation)). . . to carry out an analysis of reality means to study the nature of my active consciousness, of my free creation.72

Scriabin’s reality began with the recognition of his individual desire for life and the creative activity to which this desire gave rise. Creation, for Scriabin, was equivalent to

72 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 160.
differentiation of objects in the world around him. Rather than simply perceiving or observing the external world, his mind created his surroundings through the process of differentiation. Before he began to observe and distinguish external reality, it simply did not exist. Because one object can only be made distinct through its relationship to another object, this act of creation or differentiation gave rise to a world filled with a multiplicity of objects:

To create is to differentiate. To create something means to limit one thing with another. Only multiplicity can be created. Space and time are the forms of creation, sensation (feelings) – its content.73

The universe that was founded by the individual’s creative actions was simply the physical embodiment of mental processes. Within this framework, history had no meaning as it was recreated every moment by the active mind. Past and future changed together with the changes that occur in the present moment. Two specific aspects of this train of thought should be noted as typical to the Russian intellectual climate of the time: Scriabin’s emphasis on creation rather than knowledge, and the interrelationship between the creative individual and the universe.

Scriabin's statement “to create is to differentiate” (sozdavat’ znachit razlichat’) suggests the direct influence, and ultimate rejection, of Kantian thought.74 The Kantian version with which Scriabin was familiar (the Russian translation of Kuno Fisher's interpretation of Kant) reads “to cognize is to differentiate” (poznavat’ znachit razlichat’, phrase underlined by Scriabin).75 According to Margarita Morozova, in 1904 Scriabin

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73 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 147.
75 “Vypiski iz knig po filosofii s pometkami A.N. Skriabina,”186.
often quoted the idea “to cognize is to differentiate,” suggesting that the formulation that appears in his notebooks was a later evolution out of this idea. The essential difference between Kant’s and Scriabin’s subjective idealism is embodied here. While both men emphasized the active mind as a central force in comprehending reality, for Scriabin it was not rational thought, but the act of creation that took center-stage. Scriabin was not concerned with the question of the relation of internal cognition to the external thing-in-itself; rather, the entire universe emerged out of a creative mental act. For Scriabin, action rather than being was thus the central category of existence. The ultimate goal was not to understand the world, but to create it. It is likely this distinction that led Scriabin to reject Kantian philosophy as overly narrow and confined. From this perspective, Scriabin’s focus on ontology rather than epistemology is fully comprehensible. If human creativity is the driving force in the universe, then knowledge of the existing world, by definition, takes second place. It is not through rational knowledge, but through creative energy that humans influence the universe.

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76 RGALI f. 1956, op.2, ed. khr.12, ll.60-61. Morozova connected this statement with Scriabin’s interest in Fichte: “I remember, that he often said that cognition (poznanie) is differentiation (razlichenie), the limiting (otgranichenie) of one from another, of I from not-I.”

77 Similarly, Lapshin notes that the fundamental difference between Fichte and Scriabin’s world-views is the latter’s focus on “esthetic creation” rather than “moral action” that grows out of the dialectical opposition between the subject and the object (the external world). Lapshin noted that in this emphasis on creativity, Scriabin drew close to the ideas of Shelling, Schlegel and Nietzsche. See Lapshin, Zavetnye dumy Skriabina, 21-22. This aspect of Scriabin’s thought is referred to by Losev as “the philosophy of differentiating consciousness”. See Losev, “Mirovozzrenie Skriabina,” 265-266. There are also marked similarities to Trubetskoi’s “differentiation of the Absolute,” that which gives rise to the world. See L. J. Shein, “Trubetskoj’s Weltanschauung,” 136.

78 This same observation is made by Fokht, “Filosofija muzyki A.N. Skriabina,” 204.

79 Fokht described Scriabin’s initial unwillingness to enter conversation with him, the composer having heard that he was a “Kantian”, a fear that Fokht dispelled with reference to Scriabin’s friendship with the late Sergei Trubetskoi, who was anything but a “narrow Kantian”. Fokht, “Filosofija muzyki A.N. Skriabina,” 202.
Scriabin’s emphasis on creativity echoes the transformative image of music that served as one of the fundamental tenets of musical metaphysics.\(^8^0\) Individual “creative activity” was similarly linked to the microcosmic-macrocosmic relation between the individual and the universe. In connecting these realms into an organic whole, a kernel of a broader worldview entered into Scriabin’s strongly individualistic thought. The creative genius of the artist and the external universe existed in a dialectical relationship. Scriabin’s ideas would gradually develop in this “organic” direction, despite the apparent solipsism that reduced external reality to a reflection of the composer’s own creative mind at this time. Whether in Russia or abroad, musical metaphysics found a willing disciple in Scriabin. Between 1904 and 1906 he grew more and more uncomfortable with his initial, individualistic affirmation, raising two concerns that ultimately led him to broaden his philosophical system beyond his own individuality: the question of the existence of other minds and the question of suffering in the world.

**Limits of subjectivity**

When discussing the existence of minds outside his own, Scriabin asserted that there was no logical reason to believe that they existed outside of his own subjective creation:

One can never leave the sphere of consciousness. Nothing can be affirmed or proposed outside the sphere of consciousness. The objection that there are other people, who also have consciousness, that are for us a closed, inaccessible sphere is wrong. For me, another person is a complex of my sensations and only in these experiences of mine does he exist for me.\(^8^1\)

But Scriabin found this view of reality ultimately unsatisfactory:

Such a situation seems at first very profitable for me personally. The universe is only a toy for my heavenly caprice. Only I exist, multiplicity seems to have been called forth

\(^8^0\) Berdiaev’s discussion of the central role of creativity appears in Nikolai Berdiaev, Smysl’ tvorchestva (Moscow: Folio, 2004).
\(^8^1\) “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 159.
with my creative imagination. I play. What horror to come to such a conclusion! I am alone! I play. But all this would be a terrible deception. A game without partners. A battle with mannequins, with the assurance of victory.\(^82\)

In seeking to avoid such an unpalatable conclusion, Scriabin proposed a closer analysis of the concept of “individual consciousness”. He argued that it was a grave error to conclude that nothing existed outside individual consciousness because individuality, by definition, required an Other against which it could be defined:

> For without the reality of multiplicity, there is not individual consciousness, which is a relationship to other individual consciousnesses and exists only as a relationship to them. . . And so it emerges that I not only cannot deny the external world, but I could not exist without it. My individual consciousness, which has relation to other individual consciousnesses, would cease to exist.\(^83\)

Thus, Scriabin concluded, the individual existed only as a result of his relationship to multiplicity. One could not exist without the other.\(^84\) It is instructive to compare this statement with Sergei Trubetskoi’s insistence that “all that exists is in some relation. . . Relation is the basic category of our consciousness and the basic category of being.”\(^85\)

Trubetskoi’s argument grew out of a desire to defend idealist thought from the trap of extreme subjectivism that he saw in German neo-Kantianism, with its “reductionist, immanentist tendencies” and neglect of the noumena (thing in itself).\(^86\) Scriabin’s definition of individual consciousness similarly depended on its relation to other, independently existing, individuals, showing a desire to step outside the subjective worldview in which he had ensnared himself.

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82 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 165-166.
83 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 166.
84 This conclusion echoes the trend noted by Randall Poole amongst Russian neo-Kantians, which, in opposition to German neo-Kantianism, strove to move away from the latter’s “phenomenalistic reduction of being to the immanent data of consciousness”. Poole, ”The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society,” 323.
86 For more on this, see Poole, ”The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society,” 330. The main distinction between Scriabin and the neo-Kantians is Scriabin’s lack of ethics.
Having found an argument that allowed the existence of multiplicity in the world, Scriabin considered the question of “consciousness” as such. Individual “consciousnesses” were differentiated, not by their form, which he argued were always identical, but in the specific content these consciousnesses contained. Consciousness as such consisted of two aspects: that which was experienced (the content) and the awareness of an unchanging “I” which experienced (thus existing outside of space and time). This awareness of a subject, the unchanging “I” was identical to all people: what changed was only the content of their individual experience. From this, Scriabin argued, there was really only a single consciousness, existing outside time and space. The multiple, individual embodiments of it within the universe were merely spatiotemporal embodiments of that single consciousness:

It is clear that this is not about the multiplicity of consciousness, but of one and the same consciousness, that is, generally of consciousness, being experienced by the multiple states vertically (in time) and horizontally (in space). . . the expression “individual consciousness” is conditional. One consciousness exists, individual consciousness is its nickname when it is experienced in a given moment and a given place.87

In short, humanity was united in a single, absolute consciousness, existing outside space and time. Individual consciousness was merely the form this consciousness took on within spatiotemporal limits.88

The second objection that troubled Scriabin in his solipsistic moments was the question as to why, if he was indeed the creator of the world and all the conditions existing within it, it was not arranged in such a way as to be most beneficial to him. His original explanation, dating from 1904, was relatively weak. Life, he claimed, would be unbearably dull if one experienced leisure and satisfaction at all times. Some amount of

87 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 167.
88 Trubetskoï (following Hegel) also used the term “absolute”.

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suffering was necessary in order to break the monotony of existence and make moments of pleasure that much more memorable.\textsuperscript{89} He was himself not entirely convinced by this explanation, however, and he returned to this question in 1906, after having imbibed much more of the doctrine of historical progress, both in its idealist and Marxist forms. He now turned the question around, asking what in fact these concepts of “consciousness” and “will” referred to. He concluded that, while the world was created by the action of his consciousness, which is free, his will, or desire to change the conditions in which he was located as an individual, was limited:

\begin{quote}
My mind is the carrier of the higher principle of unity of the universe and my will is the carrier (individual) of personal will. Consciousness, as the ability to conceptualize, does not belong to a single individual, it is universal.\textsuperscript{90}
\end{quote}

Thus, it was his individual will that rebelled against the condition that universal consciousness had placed him in. By differentiating between a single, universal consciousness shared by all, and multiple, individual wills, he believed that he had found the solution to this contradiction. His individual self was limited in time and space because it was a necessary condition for the free development of universal consciousness. The individual self suffered limitations of its desires for the good of universal consciousness. The existence of desire, or will, was thus an attribute of the individual rather than the universal.

In this depiction, the concept of two realms, the relative (existing in space and time and embodied in individual being) and the absolute (outside space and time, and singular in nature) also echoed Russian neo-Kantian thought. For Sergei Trubetskoi, the existence of individual consciousness “presupposes universal collective consciousness. . .

\textsuperscript{89} “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 146.
\textsuperscript{90} “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 191.
(sobornoe soznanie). . . and, in turn, collective consciousness presupposes absolute consciousness, cosmic reason. . . which gathers and unites by universal ties all separate minds. “91 At the basis of both views is an emphasis on stepping beyond the merely individual. The primary distinction between Scriabin and TrubetskoI is found at the level of TrubetskoI’s “sobornoe soznanie”, comparable to the “national” (narodnyi) aspect of human existence. Though of central importance for TrubetskoI (a point that connected him with his Slavophile predecessors), nationalism of any kind was rejected outright by Scriabin throughout his life. The composer went so far as to reject the idol of his youth, Chopin, claiming that the Pole, though of exceptional musical talent, had been “crushed by nationalism.”92

The individual, for Scriabin, was both a participant in universal consciousness and an embodiment of individual will for life, or desire. It was individual will, rather than consciousness, that caused one to suffer in the world. Scriabin maintained his earlier belief that suffering was caused by unfulfilled desires. However, it was through the struggle of individual wills to overcome their suffering (which occurred within space and time) that universal consciousness was able to develop. Individual suffering was therefore necessary for the development of universal consciousness. The situation in which an individual was located, however painful on an individual level, was desired and necessary for universal consciousness to continue its progress. This emphasis on the temporal

91 S.N. TrubetskoI, “O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia,” Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii vol.1 bk.1, 98, quoted in “TrubetskoI’s Weltanschauung,” 134. It seems that TrubetskoI also used racial conditioned theory in making the link (he uses the term sobornost’) between individual and group. See ibid., 135. However, TrubetskoI’s discussion of the “Absolute” is similar to Scriabin (its self-differentiation creates the world).
92 “A. Skriabin i I. Gofman o Shopene,” RMG no. 13 (March 28, 1910): 353-354. First published in the newspaper Utro Rossii. Scriabin claimed that in his youth, he would sleep with Chopin’s music under his pillow, a memory that was now peculiar to him. Scriabin’s followers, in contrast, would by and large show themselves more than willing to embrace a “slavic” identity for their idol, as will be explored in the next chapter.
aspect of human experience linked Scriabin’s thought to a predominant concept of linear human progress, shared by Hegelian and Marxist philosophy, as well as the religious/spiritual belief system of theosophy, which was gaining popularity throughout Europe at the time, and with which Scriabin first became acquainted in 1907.

“Progress” and “Genius”: The Path to Unity

Like other seekers of Orpheus, Scriabin’s ultimate goal was the achievement of a greater, all-encompassing unity (edinstvo) or community (sobornost’).³³ Scriabin’s summary of the life process mirrored Hegel’s dialectical process, in which opposites were overcome through temporal (historical) development. From thesis to antithesis to synthesis, Scriabin envisioned the history of the universe as a developing chain of a single consciousness, referred to alternately as Unity, God, and Absolute. Scriabin summarized the process as follows:

The conditions for the possibility of life are: 1) the existing order of things, 2) dissatisfaction with them and striving to achieve a new order, 3) accomplishment of goal.⁴⁴

This striving to achieve a new order was accomplished, according to Scriabin, through creative activity. Due to the difficulty of capturing the essence of his philosophical system in words, Scriabin often turned to sketches. One such sketch by the composer,

³³ Many philosophies and theologies throughout time have stressed the achievement of a similar goal. However, two important aspects of Scriabin’s system show the definite influence of nineteenth-century philosophical thought: his emphasis on historical development and the status granted to individual men of genius in humanity’s progress. The first of these aspects – the focus on human development over long periods of time – bears the distinct stamp of Hegelian philosophy, while the second shows traces of a range of philosophers, including Schopenhauer, Schelling, Schlegel and Nietzsche. Other commentators have also acknowledged this influence. See Lapshin, Zavetnye dumy Skriabina, 18-20; 22-23; Losev, “Mirovozzrenie Skriabina”.

⁴⁴ “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 170.
entitled “Schema of Evolution” demonstrates the composer’s interest in the dialectic development of humanity as it was embodied in history.95

According to Scriabin, the universe and everything within it emerged from an initial “Unity” or from “God”. In this unity, there was no differentiation, no space and time, no action, no individuality - in short, nothingness. Change was introduced into the equation through a blind striving towards freedom, newness, and individuality. Once this striving for newness appeared, it came into opposition, first with the static, undifferentiated unity that pre-existed it, and second, with other, separately striving wills, each seeking to escape the initial unity in a different manner. Metaphorically, Scriabin chose to describe “unity” as the “center” from which different parts strove to escape:

From the center, eternally from the center, (?) striving. And look – resistance is overcome – a mass of segments (chastnits) break away together with one main section. A new center, surrounded with a mass of segments identically striving from the center.96

In Scriabin’s view, historical progress was a cyclical process, with initial unity followed by a time of multiplicity and differentiation, which again returned to unity. This new unity was itself informed by the period of differentiation that preceded it, thus offering a higher synthesis than the previous one:

The history of the universe is the awakening of consciousness, gradual clarification, gradual growth. All moments of time and space find their true definition, true meaning, in the moment of completion.97

The belief of every epoch in human history corresponds to the fermentation of human consciousness in that epoch.98

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95 The composer’s very choice of words in the sketch (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) shows the influence of Fichte’s dialectical philosophy. The sketch is reproduced in St. Markus, “Ob osobennostiatkh i istochnikakh filosofii i estetiki Skriabina,” 209. Bowers includes a somewhat altered English version (Bowers, Scriabin, 67). For additional sketches by the composer, see “Zapisi A. N. Skriabina,” 156-157.
96 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 140.
97 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 163.
Such a temporal schemata immediately brings to mind Hegel’s development of the World-Spirit. Human existence was given a teleological thrust, ever striving to achieve higher levels of spiritual awareness. For Scriabin, this evolutionary or progressive schema was not limited to scientific advancements, but extended also into the realms of spirituality and ethics. For this reason, in Scriabin’s mind, miracles (chudo) as such did not exist; rather they were events that were outside the current range of human knowledge, but would be accessible in the future. Perhaps most controversial was the similar stance that Scriabin took on morality (nравственность). Taking murder as an example, Scriabin argued that though it was a sin in contemporary culture, “there were prior epochs, prior races, in which murder was, on the contrary, a moral good deed.”

For Scriabin, human progress and change were in themselves absolutes. This anti-ethical stance would prove to be the area in which he was closest to Nietzsche and most distant from his Russian orphans. It would also prove the moment of greatest schism between Scriabin and his followers.

While he was uncertain about the initial source of “will” or “striving”, Scriabin was clear in his explanation of the source of individual striving that continued to push historical development forward: “genius”. Like Hegel, Scriabin believed that historical development was pushed forward by individual genius, who embodied the desire for change and newness:

Every epoch has its own geniuses, whose point of departure in action was always the existing order of things, created by their predecessors.

99 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 59; 121-122.
100 Scriabin’s interpretation of music was also based on the concept of historical progress. In Sabaneev’s words, Scriabin viewed the development of music as “some sort of chain [advancing towards] contemporary life, that is to him.” See Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 101-102.
101 For more discussion of the question of ethics in Russian philosophy at this time, see Randall Poole, “The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society.”
While emphasizing the individual striving of the genius, Scriabin also maintained an image of genius as a collective entity:

The height of human consciousness at any given moment was that of the consciousness of geniuses. They provided the impulse (poryv) for change, as well as establishing a new center around which lesser people (the crowd) clustered, creating a new, more advanced unity. Other individuals were nothing more than “spray, the sparks of the consciousness [of genius].”  

Scriabin’s genius provided a new center around which lesser minds clustered, because the genius transcended the merely individual, embodying “all the tinges of feelings of different people and therefore hold[ing] the consciousness of all people contemporary to him.” The genius provided both the impetus for change and created a new center for human life.

The goal of history: Ecstasy

The transformation from an age of multiplicity to a return to Unity or Absolute Being would occur, according to Scriabin, through a moment of world ecstasy, which would bring space and time to an end:

Absolute being is not a single moment, it is all being, it is all-embracing, heavenly consciousness, which, at the same time, in time and space will be the final moment, the final boundary, will be the moment of radiating eternity.... The moment of ecstasy will stop being a moment (of time); it will swallow all time. This moment is absolute being.

Absolute being is the realization of the idea of God. Absolute Being is the moment of eternity.

Scriabin’s emphasis on ecstasy as the emotion through which multiplicity could be overcome and Absolute Unity achieved was influenced in part by the German Romantic

103 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 143.
104 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 155.
105 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 163-164.
writer Novalis, who had himself been inspired by Fichte.\footnote{In a marginal note, Scriabin commented that “Novalis reproaches Fichte for not making Ecstasy the basis of his philosophical system.” Bowers, \textit{Scriabin}, 58. Schlozer also noted the influence of Novalis on Scriabin, claiming that Viacheslav Ivanov introduced the composer to his writings (Shletser, \textit{Skriabin}, 317-318). Ivanov himself claimed that Scriabin was “not familiar” with the works of Novalis. See RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr. 38, l.22 (handwritten note).} Scriabin believed that the subjective, individual “I” would cease to exist in this moment of world ecstasy. The multiple material manifestations would vanish into single, Absolute Being. In Morozova’s words, Scriabin envisioned this moment “as world, cosmic unification of masculine and feminine beginnings, of spirit and matter. World Ecstasy was an erotic act, a blessed end, a return to Unity.”\footnote{RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr. 12, l.76.}

Much of the composer’s metaphorical language when describing the “ecstatic” moment was highly sexual in nature. While the eroticism of both his metaphorical images and musical performance indications is undeniable, the intent was not erotic fulfillment in a physical sense.\footnote{Scriabin’s “delicacy” in relation to sexuality was noted by several of his contemporaries. For Morozova’s comment to this effect, see RGALI f.1959, op.2, ed.khr.12, l.76. Mikhail Gnesin recalled that, after Scriabin’s 1911 concert in Rostov, Presman (a former colleague of Scriabin’s from the conservatory and, in Gnesin’s summation a “rude musician and person”) offered to take Scriabin to a brothel, an offer that shocked the composer and demonstrated “how little they understood the religious eroticism [of Scriabin].” See M. F. Gnesin, “Tetrad s zapisami vospominanii ob A.N. Skriabine,” RGALI f.2954, op.1, ed.khr.204, ll.102-103. Similarly, Sabaneev recalled that during his acquaintance with Scriabin the composer never showed the slightest interest in romantic intrigues, though rumors abounded that he had, in younger days, been the exact opposite. (Sabaneev, \textit{Vospominaniiia o Skriabine}, 79).} Rather, the sexual encounter served as the most obvious metaphor through which to depict the overcoming of isolation in the world through union with an external Other:

As a person in the moment of the sexual act, in the moment of ecstasy loses consciousness and all his organism in all its points experiences bliss, thus God-man, experiencing ecstasy, will be filled with universal bliss and burn up in fire.\footnote{“Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 189.}

When this moment of World Ecstasy was achieved, Scriabin believed that the very categories of space and time would disintegrate together with all differentiation in the world and even the world itself. Individual desires and striving would vanish and only a
single, unchanging consciousness would remain. The male/female duality was a metaphor for the “material” and “spiritual” planes of being, a division that was to be transcended.

Scriabin’s use of sex as a metaphor for the duality of the material world was common in late Imperial Russia. Symbolist writers sought to harness the creative energy that sex was believed to embody through enacting sexuality in numerous ways, ranging from complete sexual abstinence to orgiastic ceremonies and romantic “triangulations”. Russian philosophers, while agreeing on the central importance of the creative energy embodied in sexual activity, often reached fundamentally contradictory conclusions. Thus, while Nikolai Fedorov had called for the abandonment of physical reproduction in favor of scientific study aimed at the resurrection of the “fathers” of humanity, Vasilii Rozanov called for childbirth as the ultimate embodiment of God’s creative energy among humans. Inherent in all such views was a gendered image of reality in which the female aspect was identified with passivity, the material world and the “Eternal Feminine” and the male aspect with creative activity, genius and the spiritual realm. While a woman could represent the “world spirit” (Sofia) and incite creative activity, she herself was unable to create. Scriabin’s use of sexual images in his musical compositions similarly drew upon these gendered views of reality and creativity.

Although Scriabin had initially envisioned himself as the messianic figure who would usher in the moment of world ecstasy, this role changed as his thought...
developed.\textsuperscript{112} His individual role gradually lessened: though he remained a key figure in plans for the \textit{Mystery} (the work which consumed his attention in the final years of his life), he increasingly believed that he was unable to reach the goal of world ecstasy without the active participation of all individuals. His task was no longer to transform the existing world through his individual creative will, but to provide a center around which all humanity would congregate in order to collectively bring about world ecstasy, unity and the dissolution of space and time.\textsuperscript{113} Beginning from extreme individualism, Scriabin ultimately embraced an image of genius as an embodiment of collective consciousness. Thus, the mature Scriabin would later argue that “[Creativity] cannot be individual. There has to be a principle, there has to be unity. The play of chance — it is merely a ripple on the surface, about the base it must be general. Otherwise there is madness and chaos, the absence of a principle.”\textsuperscript{114}

This shift from individualism to collectivism took place through the incorporation of a dialectical model borrowed from German Idealist philosophy. This dialectical system, together with a long philosophical tradition linking music to the collective aspect of human combined to push Scriabin away from the extreme individualism of his

\textsuperscript{112} In early 1904 he wrote “I want to give the world pleasure, I want to take the world, as a man takes a woman.” See “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 139. This evolution from extreme individualism to collectivism was also traced by Boris Schloezer shortly after Scriabin’s death. See Shletser, “Ot individualizma k vseedinstvu,” \textit{Apollon} no. 4-5 (April-May 1916), 48-63, idem., \textit{Scriabin}, esp. 304-305.

\textsuperscript{113} “I used to think, when I was a sort of Nietzschean, such a superman, that I alone would do everything, that it was my personality that would complete everything. But really my personality (\textit{lichnost’}) is expressed in millions of other personalities, like the sun in the spray of waves. . . these drops of spray must be united, must be gathered into one personality - in this is the task, in this is the purpose of art. A single, communal (\textit{sobornaia}) personality will result.” Sabaneev, \textit{Vospominaniiia o Skriabine}, 288. Schloezer offered fundamentally the same analysis of Scriabin’s thought. See Shletser, “Ot individualizma k vseedinstvu,” \textit{Apollon} no. 4-5 (April-May, 1916); idem., \textit{Scriabin}, 304-305.

\textsuperscript{114} Sabaneev, \textit{Vospominaniiia o Skriabine}, 48. Schloezer offered a similar citation from Scriabin: “I will not be able to do anything alone, I need support. It is necessary for people to understand that the \textit{Mystery} is the life activity (\textit{zhiznennoe delo}) of everyone, it is a universal idea (\textit{vsechelovecheskaia zamysl’}), and not just my fantasy.” See Shletser, \textit{Scriabin}, 304-305.
youth. As one of Nietzsche’s Orphans, Scriabin ultimately found in this tradition an escape from solipsism and a justification of the importance of his creative mission for humanity as a whole. Through making this transition, Scriabin prepared himself for the Orphic task that seemed to await him.

Scriabin’s incorporation of an irrational moment of Ecstasy in which this higher synthesis was to be achieved drew him away from rational philosophical tradition. Once he had derived his philosophical approach in a rigorous enough form for his own satisfaction, he turned to more poetic and artistic means of expression, abandoning questions of ontology and epistemology for a new quest: a path through which to step outside space and time, outside the existing universe itself, outside everything that identified as subjective rather than absolute in its nature. Poetic sketches and metaphors increasingly supplanted attempts at logical argument, seeking a type of gnostic knowledge inaccessible to rationality. [Illustration A.6] The years after 1906 saw him increasingly turn in this direction, with the composer’s interest in the semi-occult, semi-rational belief system of theosophy comprising the most famous aspect of his intellectual exploration.

Founded by Russian émigré Helena Blavatsky, theosophy gained popularity in elite and middle class circles throughout Europe and North America in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. Scriabin became acquainted with Blavatsky’s central work, *The Secret Doctrine*, (in French translation) in 1905, a work

115 Schloezer argued that this was a result of the influence of “German Romanticism”. See Shletser, *Scriabin*, 318-319.
116 Morozova stated that during her acquaintance with Scriabin, she did not remember the composer reading any literary works, suggesting that he drew more on his own imagination than contemporary literature. See RGALI f.1956, f.2, ed. khr.12, II.50-51.
that had a central impact on the further development of his thought. In Blavatsky’s semi-rational, semi-mystical system, Scriabin discovered a conceptual language through which to express his own worldview, though his adoption of theosophy, like his adoption of any philosophical system, was partial at best. In particular, Scriabin adopted the terms “manvanatāras” and “pralayas”, referring to alternating periods of activity and passivity in the universe. Despite seizing upon this occult terminology, Scriabin remained disappointed in what he considered theosophy’s failure to give sufficient emphasis to the role of music in the world historical process. Perhaps the greatest difference between Scriabin’s philosophical system and theosophy was the importance that the former assigned to the moment of ecstasy. Theosophy is fundamentally a rationalist religious system that seeks to combine “truths” in various faith traditions and at various points in history into a single, evolutionary whole. While Blavatsky described a series of “races” of humanity that embodied ever-higher levels of human existence, there was no irrational or “ecstatic” moment through which the move from one race to the next occurred. As will be discussed below, Scriabin’s envisioned Mystery was intended as the creative enactment of just such an irrational, ecstatic experience. Nevertheless, Scriabin was convinced of the overall accuracy of Blavatsky’s work, and traces of theosophical doctrine emerged strongly in his later works, particularly with his choice of India as the country in which his final work, the Mystery, would be performed.

118 There is disagreement about the precise time of Scriabin’s interest in theosophy. This date is based on comments made by Scriabin in a letter to his wife, Tatiana Fedorovna. See A. N. Skriabin to T. F. Shletser (April 22/May 5, 1905), in A.N. Skriabin, Pis’ma, 367.
119 Scriabin freely adapted theosophical doctrine to his own worldview. See Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 50-55; Shletser, Skriabin, 20-24, 175, 192-197, 217, 324.
120 Schloezer, Skriabin, 20-23, 226-229.
121 I am grateful to Maria Carlson for clarification of this aspect of Theosophical thought.
122 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 82-83.
Throughout Scriabin’s philosophical notebooks and his later, mystical phase, a distinct continuity of thought can be identified in his emphasis on overcoming individual striving and creating unity. This would be achieved through the collective participation of all people in the creative process. Scriabin’s connection with the musical metaphysics of the time is apparent in the very terms he chose to express his task. As Mikhael Gnesin noted, after performing a new composition for colleagues, “[Scriabin often asked] ‘What do you feel here?’ When I said something once about entirely new harmonies in one of the excerpts, he said, as if correcting me, ‘New feelings’. This term was closer to him.”

Central to Scriabin was the search for new feelings (expressed musically) rather than new sound combinations. Through the shared lived experience (perezhivanie) of the sensation (oshchushchenie) of ecstasy, humanity would move beyond the limits of space and time, to a reunion with the Absolute. His search to create unity from disparate elements was perhaps most perfectly embodied in his 1911 orchestral work, Prometheus.

Prometheus: Music as Unity

Scriabin envisioned Prometheus as a musical composition that would dialectically combine opposites, leading to a higher unity. Both the musical language and the broader symbolism connected with this work demonstrate that goal. The cover design for the musical score (approved by the composer) depicted an androgynous figure, the unity of the masculine and feminine aspects. [Illustration A.7] The choir employed in Prometheus was similarly intended to demonstrate the union between instrumental and vocal music, while the composer abandoned the use of text altogether, thus not limiting

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123 Gnesin, “Тетрад с записями воспоминаний об А.Н. Скрябине,” 1.99. Sabaneev similarly recounted Scriabin demonstrating the Promethean chord and asking “It is an entirely new sensation (oshchushchenie), isn’t it?” Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 44.

124 For a discussion of Scriabin’s interpretation of the cover, see Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 68-69.
vocal expression to any individual human language.\textsuperscript{125} The symphony was intended to incorporate color (an early envisioning of a light display) as part of its artistic fabric. Each color had a specific philosophical concept assigned to it. In response to Leonid Sabaneev’s skepticism about this aspect of Prometheus, Scriabin emphasized that unity was the driving idea behind the entire work: “Why do you protest sound accompanying colour? There must be a Single Principle, everything must be brought to unity (edinstvo). Otherwise it is unthinkable, chaos, death. . . because of this there must be correspondence between colour and sound. It is necessary, otherwise it is unthinkable, there would be no principle, no unity.”\textsuperscript{126}

Scriabin’s most striking innovation in the work was his creation of a new harmony (the “mystic” or “Prometheus” chord),\textsuperscript{127} which replaced major-minor tonality as the harmonic foundation of the work. Scriabin argued that the fundamental aspect of the Prometheus chord was the fact that it offered synthesis of two basic aspects of musical language, melody and harmony, into a single underlying unity: “[The Prometheus chord] is melody and harmony at the same time. . . it is two sides of a single principle, a single essence.”\textsuperscript{128} The Prometheus chord served as the basis for both harmonic and melodic material throughout the composition, providing a single unity from which both emerged. Melody and harmony were nascent in the chord structure, expressed linearly in time (melody) and vertically in space (harmony). In this way, Scriabin

\textsuperscript{125} The choir sings entirely on open consonants.
\textsuperscript{126} Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 47.
\textsuperscript{127} The term “mystic” chord was coined by A. Eagleton Hull in 1916, while “Prometheus” chord was first used by Leonid Sabaneev. See Roy J. Guenther, “Varvara Dernova’s System of Analysis of the Music of Scriabin,” in Russian Theoretical Thought in Music, ed. Gordon D. McQuere (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 171, 214 n.15.
\textsuperscript{128} Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 47.
claimed, “harmony becomes melody and melody becomes harmony. There is no difference between melody and harmony, it is one and the same.”

Musically, Scriabin’s Prometheus chord was derived from scales that were symmetrical rather than asymmetrical in structure. The Western tonal system of music of the common practice period (in use since the seventeenth century) was constructed on the basis of two scales, major and minor, each consisting of an asymmetrical division of whole tones and semi-tones, which served to underpin conceptions of consonance and dissonance in musical harmonies. As Scriabin sought ways in which to create unity and minimize (and ultimately eliminate) the consonant-dissonance duality, he turned to the whole-tone scale (consisting entirely of whole tones) and the octatonic scale (alternating between semi-tones and whole tones), both of which offered greater intervallic symmetry than major-minor scales:

(4.7) Whole-tone scale

(4.8) Octatonic scale

The unique characteristic shared by these two scales is a symmetrical immobility, an absence of the musical relations of consonance and dissonance and the symbolic baggage associated with them. However, this was only the first step in Scriabin’s musical

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129 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 47.
embodiment of unity. In constructing the Prometheus chord, Scriabin combined pitches from both the whole-tone and the octatonic scale:

(4.9) Prometheus chord

Comparison of the pitches contained within this harmony with the whole-tone and octatonic scales above shows that the second note (d) is derived from the whole-tone scale, while the fifth note (a) is derived from the octatonic scale. The first, third, fourth, and sixth note are shared by both scales (c, e, f, a-sharp/b-flat). The Prometheus chord thus unites two different scales into a single whole.

Scriabin’s own descriptions of the Prometheus chord tended to focus on more symbolic attributes of the chord rather than its theoretical underpinnings. He believed that his union of melody and harmony overcame a historical divide between melody and harmony. In Scriabin’s words, “It was first in classical music that [melody and harmony] were separated. This was the process of differentiation, the falling of Spirit into Matter, until it became melody and accompaniment, like in Beethoven.” Scriabin envisioned his own task as a dematerialization of music, resurrecting its lost spiritual purity and oneness: “And now with us begins synthesis: harmony becomes melody and melody becomes harmony.”

By reuniting melody and harmony, Scriabin artistically overcame the Spirit/Matter divide that Platonism, Christian Gnosticism and Theosophy all held to be at the basis of the emergence of the universe from initial unity.

Through the use of a single chord as the source of both melody and harmony, Scriabin believed that the concepts of consonance and dissonance also lost meaning. Just

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130 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 47.
as melody and harmony were now derived from a single whole, traditionally consonant and dissonant intervals co-existed in the chord itself. Conflict and resolution (consonance and dissonance), the cornerstone of Schopenhauer’s explication of music, no longer served as the primary rhetorical means through which music progressed. The tritone, the most dissonant interval in classical harmony existed, eternally unresolved, within the Prometheus chord:

The musical significance of the tritone was connected to its symmetrical structure. The tritone bisects the octave in half and in itself contains the potential to resolve into multiple tonalities. It was this multi-faceted potentiality, rather than the actual choice of one or another resolution that seems to have made this interval particularly attractive to Scriabin.¹³¹ No longer two elements that were distinct by their very nature, traditionally consonant and dissonant intervals coexisted within the very musical material from which the piece developed. Scriabin argued that the very concept of “dissonance” thus lost its meaning and the Prometheus chord itself was to be regarded as “consonant”. Recognition of the higher unity embodied in Prometheus would require the listener not only to

¹³¹ This aspect suggests another reason for Scriabin’s preference of the octatonic and whole-tone scales. While major and minor tonalities contain within them one tritone, the whole-tone and octatonic scales contain, respectively, three and four tritones. Musical sketches show that Scriabin was experimenting with various transpositions and combinations incorporating tritone intervals. See GTsMMK f.31, no.106. For more extensive analysis of the Prometheus chord, see Richard Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically; Simon Morrison, Russian Opera; Varvara Dernova, Garmoniia Skriabina (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1968).
contemplate the unity of the whole, but also to physically experience (perezhivat’) or feel (oshchushchat’) it, through the act of listening.\textsuperscript{132}

In Scriabin’s mind, \textit{Prometheus} was still merely an initial artistic expression of the path he was seeking to follow: the return to unity and overcoming of the multiplicity embodied by the physical universe in space and time itself. Music as a mere art form was insufficient to accomplish this task. If one were to “return to initial being, to unite (slit’sia) with it, or, at least, join (priobshchit’sia) with it as the basic and initial action, then the path to it would have to be completely different, unusual and in some sense even secret and in any case, extraordinary. . .”\textsuperscript{133} The composer believed that such a path towards complete unity would soon be uncovered in his \textit{Mystery}.\textsuperscript{134}

\textbf{Scriabin’s Mystery: The Musical Apocalypse}

The symbolic unity of Scriabin’s Prometheus chord was a first step in this broader search for unity that culminated with Scriabin’s apocalyptic creative project that he entitled \textit{Misteriia} (Mystery).\textsuperscript{135} While never completed, the \textit{Mystery} was the driving force behind Scriabin’s creative work in the final years of his life. Despite its centrality to the composer’s thought, the \textit{Mystery} offers unique problems for scholarly analysis. First conceived as early as 1901, the imagined contours of the work changed together with Scriabin’s general shift away from an individualistic towards a more collective view of

\textsuperscript{132}Sabaneev, \textit{Vospominaniia o Skriabine}, 47.
\textsuperscript{133}B. Fokht, “Filosofiiia muziki A.N. Skriabina,” 206.
\textsuperscript{135}This connection between Prometheus and Scriabin’s \textit{Mystery} was propagandized at the time, both in concert programs and printed articles. One contemporary concert program referred to Prometheus as “a first attempt of that synthesis of art and factor of influence on our feelings, the realization of which is to be Scriabin’s \textit{Mystery},” (RGALI f. 2012, op. 5, d. 69, ll.36-40). In 1910, Sabaneev referred to Prometheus as a “symphonic summary of the \textit{Mystery}” (Sabaneev, “Prometei,” \textit{Muzyka} no. 13 (February 1911): 286-294, here 292). The composer himself claimed that “\textit{Prometheus} is already very close to the \textit{Mystery}.” Sabaneev, \textit{Vospominaniia o Skriabine}, 81.
the universe. In its mature form, Scriabin envisioned the *Mystery* as the communal act that would bring about the end of humanity (and the world itself) in a moment of collective ecstasy. Scriabin initially imagined the final world cataclysm as a great fire enveloping the world, but in later years moved away from this image, claiming that it was impossible to foresee how the end of space and time would come about.\(^{136}\) The final moment of humanity, though it would usher in physical death, was distinct from the Christian image of the apocalypse. Rather, it was a joyful vision in which original, Dionysian unity would be experienced in a moment of pure ecstasy, when the multiplicity existing in space and time would be overcome in a higher synthesis. Scriabin’s growing emphasis on the goal of universal unity was noted and approved of by contemporaries like Viacheslav Ivanov, who found in Scriabin a reaffirmation of his own belief in the unifying mission of art, which had been sorely tested by his 1910 polemic with Andrei Belyi over symbolist art.\(^{137}\) In Scriabin, Ivanov found the real life embodiment of Orpheus, for whom he had been waiting.\(^{138}\)

Amid the conflicting reports of the *Mystery* from Scriabin’s own writings and accounts from his acquaintances, certain general traits can be identified. Most striking is the continual emphasis on overcoming divisions of all kind in search of initial unity. The composer intended to combine music, dance, poetry, perfume, and color within a single work, as well as do away with divisions between composer, performer and audience.


\(^{137}\) Ivanov initially dismissed Scriabin as an “individualist”, a label he joyfully rejected upon closer acquaintance in 1910. See RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.32, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo.” Doklad na vechere-kontserte Skriabinskogo obschestva v Petrograde (December 1915).

\(^{138}\) According to Schloezer, Scriabin shared this vision: “Scriabin considered the myth of Orpheus, which he particularly loved, as an expression of the confused consciousness of humanity of ancient times of the mighty strength [of art]... Scriabin considered himself the first [artist], who after a long night had awakened and recognized his own might... he truly considered himself Orpheus.” Shletser, *Skriabin*, 252-254.
People would participate in more or less active manners, but there would be no passive listeners. In Scriabin’s view, the greatest failure of Wagner's opera-dramas had been the failure to overcome the most fundamental division: that of audience and performer. In contrast, Scriabin insisted that in his Mystery “there won't be any of these forms, these symbolizations and allegories... the footlights are a barrier between the audience and performers — they must be destroyed.” The choice of title linked the work conceptually with religious practice rather than with traditional artistic forms. In this view, art was not merely symbolic or representative, but had the central task of transforming reality itself.

The Mystery was to be performed in India over the course of seven days and would open with the music of bells, which would call people to this “final act.” Each of the seven days would be devoted to one of the human “races” of theosophical doctrine,

139 On Scriabin’s rejection of Wagner, see Shletser, Skriabin, 277, 279-284. V. Meierkhol’d also noted Scriabin’s rejection of opera, quoting the composer as having said “opera is nonsense (drian’). I don’t wish to have anything in common with opera, there should not (ne dolzho byt’) be opera theatre. Opera theatre is something horrible. It is disgusting (gadost’).” See V. Meierkhol’d, “Uchitel’ Bubus i problema spektaklia na muzyke” (Doklad, prochitannee 1 January, 1925), in A. V. Fevral’skii, ed., V. E. Meierkhol’d. Stat’i. Pis’ma. Rechi. Besedy, vol. 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968), 64-93. Meierkhol’d did not state the source of this reference.

140 Sabaneev, Vospominanit’ia o Skriabin, 103.

141 This goal was envisioned as a return to the previously existing unity between religion and art that had been lost in the modern age. Sabaneev specifically connects Scriabin’s dream of synthesis of the arts with ancient mystery-religious cult and church services. See Sabaneev, “Prometei,” Muzyka no. 13 (1911), 286-294, here 292. Scriabin’s absolute rejection of contemporary theatrical experimentation demonstrated that his concept was far closer to Symbolist ideas of life-creation (zhiznetvorchestvo) than to artistic representation. This point was acknowledged by Meierkhol’d, who argued in 1915 that Scriabin’s rejection of “theatre” in favor of his “mystery” was the underlying reason why his death received less response in the theatre world than in the literary and musical realms. See Meierkhol’d, “A.N. Skriabin,” Liubov k tre姆 apel’sinam, 1915 no. 1-2-3, 157.

142 Scriabin reportedly lamented that it wasn’t possible for the bells to sound from heaven itself (Sabaneev, Vospominanit’ia o Skriabin, 82). Sabaneev later claimed that Scriabin in fact believed that bells would be suspended from heaven. See Sabaneev, “Skriabin-myslitel’,” in idem., Vospominanit’ia o Rossii (Moscow: Klassika XXI veka, 2005), 64-70. For years, the composer had planned a preparatory trip to India to find an appropriate place for the Mystery to take place, though the trip itself was pushed back on several occasions. Before their friendship cooled, Scriabin attempted to convince Margarita Morozova to accompany him (RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.12, l.79). These plans proceeded furthest with Scriabin’s friend (later editor of the journal Novoe zveno) A.N. Brianchaninov (GTsMMK f.31, no.649-651; RGALI f. 46 op.8, ed. khr. no.61, l.177). In Scriabin’s notebook B there is a textual sketch of the outline of the Mystery preserved. See Morrison, Russian Opera, 202-203 for an English translation and transcription.
with the fifth day devoted to the current stage of human development.\textsuperscript{143} During this time, all humanity would “remember the best moments of its history,”\textsuperscript{144} reliving or re-experiencing (perezhivaia) those moments. Troubled by the theosophical claim that the current age was only the fifth age of humanity (which conflicted with his personal conviction that his mission was to bring about the end of humanity as such), and convinced that theosophy failed to assign sufficient importance to the role of art, Scriabin came to believe that through his Mystery, time itself (and, correspondingly, human evolution) would be sped up, with the last two ages of human evolution taking place on the sixth and seventh days of the Mystery.\textsuperscript{145} At the end of seven days, humanity itself would experience a moment of world ecstasy, symbolically expressed in the image of a “final dance” of all humanity, reuniting with God. This “involution”, “dematerialization”, or return to unity, would begin with “the contemplation of [musical] harmony. . . because [contemplation of harmony and dematerialization] are one and the same.”\textsuperscript{146}

To better understand the origins of Scriabin’s somewhat convoluted and totalizing vision, it is useful to refer back to his interpretation of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical analysis of music. In the moment of artistic contemplation, Schopenhauer had argued, we forget our individual existence. For Scriabin, it was through contemplation of musical harmony (itself experienced in time) that individual consciousness would be overcome and a return to unified or sobornyi consciousness would take place. Like the rest of Nietzsche’s orphans, the experiential component or lived experience (perezhivanie) was central for Scriabin. Unity could not be brought about merely through contemplation, but

\textsuperscript{143} The third were Lemurians, the fourth were Atlanteans. See Shletser, Skiabin, 299.
\textsuperscript{144} M. F. Gnesin, “Tetrad s zapisami vospominanii ob A.N. Skriabine,” 1.99.
\textsuperscript{145} Shletser, Skiabin, 301.
\textsuperscript{146} Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 42; 50.
only through shared experience and action. These actions and experiences were, first and foremost, spiritual rather than physical. Events in the physical universe, expressed in time and space were nothing more than echoes of this higher, spiritual process.  

Scriabin left behind at least one sketch of the building within which he envisioned the *Mystery* taking place. [Illustration A.8] It would resemble a temple, built as a semi-circle on the edge of a body of water, in which the reflection of the building would form a complete circle. Scriabin also talked about uniting architecture and dance, so that the architectural columns themselves would move, dissolving from solid matter into color. Nature itself was to be incorporated into the *Mystery*, which would extend beyond humanity to all living beings. The final intent was to bring about the union of material and spiritual realities as well as the union of all individuals. In short, it was intended to be the ultimate enactment of unity or *sobornost*, through which the physical world would cease to exist.

Such grandiose plans unquestionably overwhelmed Scriabin, and he temporarily abandoned his work on the *Mystery* in 1914, feeling that humanity was not yet spiritually prepared for this final act. He turned his creative energy instead to the so-called *Preparatory Act*, to be performed by a small circle of “initiates,” which would lay the groundwork for the universal, all-encompassing *Mystery*. Though he had envisioned the *Mystery* as being performed in a universal human language, Scriabin turned to

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147 Schloezer claimed that Scriabin believed that the experience of the *Mystery* would involve the “evolution of the individual psyche” or *lichnost*. See Shletser, *Skriabin*, 296.
148 Schloezer stated that Scriabin already had a clear vision of this temple (*khram*) between 1903-1906. He later imagined an entire “system of buildings,” the building of which would be part of the *Mystery*. By the end, according to Schloezer, Scriabin said little specifically about the building, talking instead of an “architectural dance.” See Shletser, *Skriabin*, 297-299.
149 Shletser, *Skriabin*, 299.

**The White Mass**

While a good deal of attention has been given to the musical drafts of Scriabin’s *Preparatory Act*, much less work has been given to uncovering the meaning connected to his late piano works, despite the fact that most of the music that Scriabin composed for the *Mystery* over the years ultimately found its way into these compositions.\footnote{Much of the symbolism employed by Scriabin in the *Preparatory Act* shows the definite influence of theosophy, a connection that has been examined in detail by Simon Morrison and will not be reiterated here. Of the late works, I focus on the “White Mass” sonata in part due to Sabaneev’s claim that this composition, together with the composer’s personal commentary on the work while playing it to his friends, provided a clearer encapsulation of the *Mystery* than any material more directly linked to that project. Sabaneev, *Vospominaniiia o Skriabine*, 134-135.} Thus, I conclude my analysis of Scriabin’s musical symbolism by looking at the composer’s adaptation of his Promethean chord in his “White Mass” sonata, op.64.\footnote{The nickname comes from Scriabin. See Sabaneev, *Vospominaniiia o Skriabine*, 135.}

The “White Mass” Sonata shows Scriabin’s principle of unity at work. While cast in single-movement form, this sonata (like all Scriabin’s piano sonatas from Op. 53 on) follows traditional sonata form in its use of two contrasting themes that are developed over the course of the piece. The “White Mass” opens with an evocation of bells, similar in conception to the bells that were intended to open the *Mystery*, calling all people of the
world to the “final act” of humanity. These harmonies are themselves derived from a variant of the Prometheus chord:

In the Op. 64 sonata, the D natural of the original Prometheus chord is lowered to a D flat. With this change of a single note, Scriabin is drawing his harmony entirely from the octatonic scale rather than combining the octatonic and whole-tone scales. The opening continues, based upon this same chord variant in different transpositions. In reduced form, the harmonic structure of the opening 10 measures is:

If we isolate the bass of each chord, the underlying harmonic movement consists of a series of transpositions by alternating major thirds and tritones:

156 Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*, 135. Sabaneev continued “[Scriabin] loved these bell sounds very much, which sounded under his hands as if from two separate planes, distant and far, so that not all the sounds were equally strong, but a part sounded very clear and real, while others were echoes, as if an echo of the first light.”
Since the octatonic scale is itself invariant when transposed by a tritone (i.e., contains the same pitches), this means that the two chords in measures 3-6 (where the bass note moves by a tritone) are actually derived from a single octatonic scale. If these two chords are considered together, we see that Scriabin has made use of the entire set of notes comprising the octatonic scale. Thus, the chord in measures 3-4 is: A flat, D, G flat, C, F, B double flat (A). The chord in measures 5-6 is: D, G sharp (A flat), C, F sharp (G flat), B, E flat. A brief comparison with the octatonic scale below will show that all of the pitches of the scale are accounted for between these two chords:  

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\text{(4.15) Octatonic scale starting on A flat}
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In conversation with Sabaneev, Scriabin explicitly described the harmonies resulting from the full use of notes of the octatonic scale in the “White Mass” as the “idea of sacredness” (ideia sviashchennosti). In this sense, the “sacred” was connected with the inclusion of every element of the scale: yet another means of musically evoking unity. Scriabin’s drive for harmonic embodiment of unity is found also in the transpositions at the interval of the major third (measures 1-4, 8-10). If we combine the

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157 The same instance recurs in measures 6-8.
158 Sabanev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 135. Analysis demonstrates that the two chords played by Scriabin were derived from a single octatonic scale starting on A. The chords given by Sabaneev are not reducible to a variant of the Promethean chord, but they nevertheless form a complete octatonic scale, suggesting that it was the scalar pattern rather than the intervallic structure of the chord that was central to the composer.
entire pitch content of the two octatonic scales that give rise to these chords, we have a complete version of yet another symmetrical scale: the chromatic scale. Thus, the octatonic scale underlying the chord in measures 1-2 is:

![Octatonic scale starting on C]

(4.16) Octatonic scale starting on C

If the pitches from this octatonic scale on C is combined with the octatonic scale on A flat underpinning measures 3-4 (given above), a chromatic scale results:

![Chromatic scale]

(4.17) Chromatic scale

The chromatic scale is of particular interest because it offers the most complete pitch set possible in tempered tuning, incorporating the entire breadth of the piano keyboard and every note in major-minor tonality. It unites every pitch in musical theory of the common practice period into a single whole. The symbolic fullness of this combination of pitches is only latent in the opening of the “White Mass” sonata, but it was further exploited by Scriabin in his *Preparatory Act*, suggesting that this particular aural embodiment of unity was of central importance to the composer in his compositional plans for his *Mystery*.

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159 Scriabin’s interest in the chromatic scale has been identified in particular with his sketches for the *Preparatory Act*, hailed as the first example of a twelve-tone chord, preceding Arnold Schoenberg’s experimentations in this realm. However, the underlying basis that brings Scriabin to this point is fundamentally different: for the Russian composer, it was the musical embodiment of unity and the transcendence of the temporal realm that led him to this harmonic discovery. The chromatic scale can also be derived from combining the octatonic and whole-tone variants beginning on the same note (the basis of the Promethean chord).
In concluding this discussion of the “White Mass” Sonata, we must briefly consider the second theme of the work, which (in keeping with traditional sonata form) is intended as a sharply contrasting mood. Scriabin considered this theme to embody “the full absence of feeling and lyricism”. It was, in short, “pure mysticism”: 160

![“White Mass” second theme (mystic)](image)

The underlying harmony of this second theme is an unadulterated version of the Prometheus chord, in which the implicit underpinnings of the whole-tone and octatonic scales are again combined in a single chord:

![“White Mass” second theme harmony reduction](image)

The theme of “pure mysticism” is thus the aural embodiment of the unity between two scales, brought about through the creative task of a musical Orpheus. Like the Mystery, the “White Mass” sonata ends with a “final dance,” uniting the composer’s themes of “mysticism” and “will” into a single whole. 162

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161 Note that the melody plays on the ambiguity of the harmony by incorporating an A natural into the melody, thus referencing the version of the chord deduced entirely from the octatonic scale and employed in the opening of the composition.
162 Scriabin’s use of leitmotifs, particularly the theme of “will” (itself derived from the “sword” theme in Wagner’s *Ring of the Nibelung*) is apparent throughout his compositions, but a close analysis of the symbolic association of these themes is beyond the scope of this study. For analysis of the inherent plot
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In his youth, Scriabin refused a request from Mily Balakirev, the founding figure of Russia’s “Mighty Five,” to perform the music of “someone else” (i.e., other than Scriabin) on the piano, stating simply “Je ne joue que Scriabine” (I only play Scriabin). With this statement, the young composer emphasized a unity between his creative roles as composer and as performer. This search for unity was the guiding force throughout Scriabin’s adult life. While he sought this goal through various philosophical and mystical paths, the role of music in creating this unity remained central. As his philosophical ideas matured and expanded, his artistic ideas did likewise. His envisioned Mystery abandoned the composer-audience division in exchange for what his contemporaries described as a “liturgical act” or return to the religious basis from which art had sprung. In this sense, Scriabin truly embraced the role, not merely of a composer, but of Orpheus himself.

archetypes of the sonatas, see Susanna Garcia, “Scriabin’s Symbolist Plot Archetype in the Late Piano Sonatas.” Many of these themes were discussed by Sabaneev in his numerous analyses of Scriabin’s music. RGALI f. 818, op.1, ed.khr.7, l.39.
Leonid Leonidovich Sabaneev (1881-1968) was a man of rare talents, combining youthful musical training at the Moscow Conservatory with an advanced degree in mathematics from the Moscow University. Employed initially as a lecturer on mathematics at the university, Sabaneev abandoned this first career to devote himself more completely to music, the art to which he was dedicated, heart and soul. Politics, current events and the problems facing the uneducated masses throughout the Russian Empire held relatively little interest for him at this time, but he was passionate in his devotion to music and its ability to transform human experience. He soon gained a reputation as one of the leading music critics of his day, writing reviews for such papers and journals as Golos Moskvy, Moskovskaia Gazeta, Zavtrak, Apollon, and Teatral’naia Gazeta. He also developed his own interpretation of musical theory and acoustics, composed music and sought to create a new musical instrument that would transcend...

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2 Regarding his dual life in the arts and sciences, Sabaneev commented “this basic dualism has remained with me throughout my life, and there have been many times when I myself did not know what I really was, a scientist or a musician.” Sabaneev entered the Moscow University at the age of 16 (due to his youth, he required special permission from Count Delianov, the Minister of Peoples’ Education). There he enrolled in the faculties of Physics and Mathematics and in the Faculty of Natural Sciences. At the same time he attended lectures in the historical-philological faculty. His doctoral dissertation was in the realm of pure mathematics, and he received the title of professor in 1918. He published four scholarly works on mathematics and five on zoology. At the same time, he began his musical education at the age of five, entering the Moscow Conservatory in 1890. He studied with Sergei Taneev, N. S. Zverev, and P. Iu. Shletser. Sabaneev’s first published compositions (his op.7 preludes for piano) appeared in 1909. After the 1917 Revolution, Sabaneev was one of the founders of the State Institute of Musical Sciences (GIMN). In 1922 he became a member of the Musical section of the Academy of Artists in Moscow and the president of the Association of Contemporary Music. In 1926, Sabaneev left the USSR for Paris, never to return. See V. Sabaneev-Lanskaia, “Leonid Sabaneev,” in L.L. Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Rossii (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2005), 224-227; RGALI f. 931, op.1, ed.khr.96; RGALI f.941, op.10, ed.khr.541.
3 Sabaneev wrote his first composition in 1902 and his first article on music in 1906. See V. Sabaneev-Lanskaia, “Leonid Sabaneev,” 225.
4 Sabaneev claimed retrospectively that he knew nothing about politics until after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. See Sabaneev, “Zhurnalizm i rabota v gazetakh,” BAR Sabaneev Collection, Box 1.
the keyboard instruments of the day. He was reputed to have an incredible memory, able to recall conversations down to the smallest detail. He lacked only one thing in life: an idol. He found this through his interactions with Aleksandr Scriabin.

In 1910, Sabaneev’s passing acquaintance with Scriabin deepened into a close personal friendship that transformed his entire life. For the next five years, he spent practically every evening in the company of the composer and his wife, Tatiana Schloezer, at their home in Moscow. At this time, Scriabin was actively promoting his philosophical ideas. Humanity, Scriabin believed, was not yet ready for the task he was to fulfill. Thus, he sought to create a group of devoted disciples, who would pass through a period of spiritual “preparation” (podgotovka) and cleansing in order to prepare them for their future task in the final act of humanity. Evening gatherings at his Moscow home thus held a dual purpose: in addition to providing a receptive audience upon which to test new compositions, Scriabin was able to discuss his philosophy with his followers in an intimate context, preparing them for the role they would ultimately be required to undertake in the performance of the Mystery.7

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6 Sabaneev describes his plans for such an instrument, which would incorporate a 53-note scale in “Novye puti muzykal’nogo tvorchestva,” Muzyka no. 55 (December 17, 1911): 1242-1248.

7 By 1910, the “inner circle” of Scriabinists (those who visited the composer practically every evening) included Leonid Sabaneev, Dr. V. V. Bogorodskii (“He had once been a social democrat, judging by his words, but he was now [in 1910] in the power of mystical speculation of a theosophical type, the sphere in which Scriabin also mixed”), Aleksei Aleksandrovich Podgaetskii (“a clean-shaven man of the actor type, with a crooked mouth and a bald head, but still young. . . ‘Manvantaras’, astral planes, Blavatsky - none of this ever ceased coming from his lips. . .After every three words he would rhetorically ask in French ‘N’est - ce pas?’”), N. V. Shperling (an artist, “always closed. . . always deep in some kind of visionary state. Scriabin loved him because he wanted to express the ineffable in painting, because of the passionately erotic pathos of his religiosity, which was in this very way close to Scriabin’s own”). Less frequent guests included N. Zhiliaev (passionate supporter of Scriabin’s music), L. Komis (composer), Aleksandr Krein (composer), A. Mogilevskii (violinist, premiering the violin solo in Poem of Ecstasy under Kussevitsky), the Gnesin sisters (musicians), Professor Aleksandr EDMUNDovich Mozer (a chemist who assisted in plans to create the “color” aspect of Prometheus), Princess Marina Nikolaevna Gagarina (sister of Sergei Trubetski, “a thin, pale woman of medium height with a face with no distinguishing characteristics, always very modestly dressed”) (RGALI f.1463, op.1, ed.khr.9, l.105), her sister Lermontova, Prince N. V. Gagarin, F. S. Akimenko (composer), Leonid Pasternak, Ivan Alchevskii (singer), Iurii Bal’trushaitis (Symbolist), Konstantin Bal’mont, and Viacheslav Ivanov. See Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine (Moscow: Muzykal’nyi sektor Gosudarstvennogo izdatel’stva, 1925), 37; 39-40; 41-42; 51-52; 57; 59; 72; 73; 109; RGALI f.1463, op.1, ed.khr.9, li.104-105; RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed.khr.183 (Sabaneev to Krein, June 2, 1913), l.2; Ol’ga Tompakova, A. N. Skriabin i poety Serebriannogo veka (Moscow: IRIS-Press, 1995); Del’son mentions such a group forming in 1909.
Priding himself on his “rational” worldview, this aura of mysticism surrounding the composer and his music could not but be distasteful to Sabaneev. Indeed, Sabaneev mocked Scriabin’s dreams of grandeur on numerous occasions, even referring to him ironically as “Messiah Absolutovich.” However, close analysis of Sabaneev’s memoir account of his friendship with the composer presents a far more complex picture, in which moments of belief struggled against his skeptical nature:

Just a bit more and, it seemed to me, that this madman (bezumets), for whom all was so clear and basic (printsipial’no), would soon turn out to be the single sane one, and all of us, tossed about by the waves of chaos and uncertainty, would be the insane ones, because we had not yet achieved this conviction in the existence of unity and principles (printsipial’nosti).

Observing Sabaneev’s own growing obsession with Scriabin’s Mystery, one of his friends warned him, “my dear, Scriabin has simply gone insane... if you continue to rack your brain [trying to understand his ideas], you yourself will go insane.” While Sabaneev’s personal connection with Scriabin was far more developed than many of the composer’s followers, this desire to understand and moreover to believe in Scriabin’s spiritual message was common. Margarita Morozova later wrote that “it was very difficult for me to believe in [Scriabin’s Mystery], it called forth a very complex battle in my soul.” Nevertheless, she found that “when he spoke, his eyes were so dreamlike, they sparkled with joy . . . what he said, those various thoughts and fantasies that were in him, and that belief in the victory of the creative strength of humanity opened some sort of unending horizon to me and I felt that the limits of my spiritual life expanded. This called forth such a lift (pod’em), such a desire to live and act, like I had never

8 Leonid Sabaneev to Aleksandr Krein [1914], RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed.khr.183. This is a play of words on Russian formal address, in which the first name and patronymic (second name, derived from the father’s name) are used.
9 Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 48.
10 Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 99-100.
experienced before then.”

To contemporary audiences, this desire for belief is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the Scriabin phenomenon.

Of course, not all of Scriabin’s contemporaries expressed such a positive view of his ideas. M.F. Gnesin recalled that, when listening to Scriabin explain his *Mystery* to a group of fellow Russians, “the philosopher-Hegelian [Ivan] Il’in leaned over to his neighbor and said ‘Nevertheless, what horrible nonsense!’” Moscow composer and critic N.S. Zhiliaev, who by 1907 considered Scriabin the “greatest contemporary composer,” pulled him aside after a private performance of his ninth sonata to offer a few words of friendly advice: “You’ve spent enough time on all this nonsense. Can’t you just write music?” Similarly, pianist A.B. Gol’deneveizer chose to forego any comment on the philosophical content of the same piece. Instead, he “said drily and in a professional, businesslike manner: ‘There are mistakes in the manuscript, Aleksandr Nikolaevich. I have corrected them.’” Other critics accepted Scriabin’s ideas only insofar as they provided creative inspiration for his music. Thus, while embracing Scriabin’s musical innovations, critic Viacheslav Karatygin begged “may God preserve me from searching for the ‘content’ of Scriabin’s ‘Divine Poems’ and ‘Ecstasies’ in the fog of Scriabinesque philosophy.”

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12 Morozova, “Vospominaniia o Skriabine,” l.49.
15 A.N. Aleksandrov, “Ob A.N. Skriabine,” RGALI f. 2748 op.1, ed.khr.142 (clipping from *Muzykal’naia zhizn’* 11 (1978): 19). The original manuscript is preserved in RGALI f.2748, op.2, ed.khr.62, ll.38-40. Aleksandrov described a visit to Scriabin’s house at which A.B. Gol’deneveizer, L.E. Konius, N.S. Zhiliaev and V. Bogorodskii were all present. Alexandrov claimed that, of those present, only Bogorodskii was a follower of Scriabin's “mystical” leanings.
17 V. Karatygin, “Molodye russkie kompozitory,” *Apollon* no. 11 (October-November 1910): 30-42, here 32-33. Iulii Engel’ was equally dismissive of Scriabin’s philosophy, commenting that music and philosophy cannot have a direct
of Scriabin’s music and creative vision to Russian cultural life of the time. Scriabin and his music were the focal point of Moscow musical life from his return to Russia in 1909 until his death in 1915.  

This chapter examines how and why Scriabin was able to capture the imagination of so many of his contemporaries and why his sudden death sent such a shockwave through society. I argue that Scriabin’s own emphasis on unity echoed a wider quest in contemporary society and that Scriabin came to stand as a symbol of human progress, of all that was positive and hopeful in contemporary life, an association that came to be interpreted more and more explicitly as a specifically Russian attribute.

Historical events, starting with the Great War, followed by two revolutions and an ensuing civil war fundamentally transformed Russian society. As the vast majority of Russian memoir accounts involving Scriabin date from the Soviet era, a certain distancing from the mystical and idealist basis of Scriabin's world-view is to be expected. Similarly, most émigré reminiscences emphasize how different the world appeared in this “pre-historical era” (doistoricheskii epokh), and the complex, shifting constellation of political loyalties and their connections with particular aesthetic values in the years after the revolution make it difficult to reach a clear assessment of contemporary views on Scriabin. The cult of Scriabin became intimately entwined with memories of a past world, which, for good or bad, was now lost


According to Engel’, interest in Scriabin was particularly intense in Moscow: “Nowhere, neither abroad nor in Russia have [Scriabin's] works drawn such tense attention as they have here.” Kunina, ed., Glazami sovremennika, 253-254. Del'son claims that Scriabin’s success was primarily a Moscow phenomenon. See Del'son, Skriabin: ocherkii zhizni i tvorchestva. (Moscow: Muzyka, 1971).

This includes repeated attempts to interpret Scriabin as a “materialist mystic”, which was in better keeping with Marxist ideology. See Boris Fokht, “Filosofia muzyki A.N. Skriabina,” in Skriabin: Chelovek. Khudozhnik. Mysliet’ (Moscow: Gosudarstvenny memorial’nyi muzei imeni A.N. Skriabina, 1994), 201-225, here 224-225; Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 115.

The term is borrowed from Leonid Sabaneev. See Sabaneev, “Zhurnalizm i rabota v gazetakh,” BAR Sabaneev Collection, Box 1, I.1.
forever. This chapter seeks to shed new light on this bygone era.

**The Calling of the Disciples**

“In the heavens of Russian music a new and mighty sun has been kindled... Scriabin”

Ivan Knorozovskii

Scriabin’s 1903 departure from Moscow amid public scandal and personal strife gave ample fodder for speculation. Rumors swirled in Russian musical society about the “decadent” young composer. It was whispered that his mistress, Tatiana Schloezer, had given birth in Paris “not to a little mouse or frog, but to some sort of unknown creature.” Mocking the sensuality embodied in the composer’s concept of “ecstasy,” his sexual indiscretions with at least one of his piano students and his well-known moustache, Boris Sabaneev (an organ professor at the Moscow Conservatory) referred to Scriabin’s work as nothing more than “whiskered music for debauched school-girls.” Other stories circulated, claiming that Scriabin was “planning to build some sort of cathedral in India. . . in the shape of a ball. . . on the ocean”, that he “planned to

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21 The following chapter has been constructed primarily from material from the prerevolutionary press, supplemented by personal letters and diaries whenever possible. Memoirs, both published and unpublished, have also furnished invaluable information, but have been read with an awareness of the Soviet context in which most of them were written.


23 In the years leading up to his precipitous departure, his music had received, at best, mixed responses from audiences. The 1902 premiere of his Second Symphony had been, at best, a qualified success. M.F. Gnesin didn’t find it particularly interesting (RGALI f. 2954, op.1, ed.khr. 204, l.96). Sergei Taneev, composition professor at the Moscow Conservatory and one of Scriabin’s former teachers, concluded that this symphony demonstrated “an absence of orchestration... [which] melds together that which should be separated by form,” a circumstance that gave the symphony “a very tiresome sound.” Sergei Taneev, *Dnevniki* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1981), vol.3, 22 (March 20, 1902). Taneev had attended a morning rehearsal of the symphony. For a description of the varying responses to Scriabin’s second Symphony, see Sergei Fediakin, *Scriabin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2004), 147-150.

24 Scriabin’s resignation from his teaching position at the Moscow Conservatory and Catherine Institute, publicly explained by his wish to devote himself exclusively to composition, occurred amid a romantic scandal with one of his young female students at the latter institution. His liaison with Tatiana Schloezer (soon to be the composer’s common-law wife) also began at this time. The final break with his first wife occurred in 1903. Margarita Morozova offered a candid depiction of the deteriorating relations between Scriabin and his first wife, as well as the composer's romantic intrigues. See Morozova, “Vospominaniia o Skriabine,” II.52-54. A copy of her memoir (excluding handwritten sections) appears in Fediakin, *Scriabin*, 503-535.

25 Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*, 43. Boris Sabaneev was an organ professor at the Moscow Conservatory and Leonid Sabaneev’s brother. His jibe may also have been intended to allude to the composer’s scandalous affair with seventeen-year-old Marusia, his piano student at the Catherine Institute in Moscow. Nevertheless, Boris later also became an admirer of Scriabin’s music, though he never became an intimate friend of the composer. See Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*, 71.
bring about the end of the world and that his music would play some sort of role in that end.”

Such stories were offered as proof that the composer was a “degenerate.” This notoriety served to cast a shadow over the composer’s musical works.

However, by 1908 Scriabin had found his own John the Baptist in the figure of Boris Fedorovich Schloezer, the composer’s brother-in-law and one of his most passionate admirers. Schloezer began to spread news of a “new” Scriabin, one whose music held real significance for contemporary society. His efforts coincided in 1909 with the composer’s first return to his homeland after six years abroad, a visit that coincided with the performance of his latest

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26 Sergei Taneev, a stalwart rationalist, stated simply that “[Scriabin] hopes somehow to unite philosophy with music. I don't understand how he will do it — and he doesn't know either... they say that he has undertaken [to bring about] the end of the world and become some kind of priest or prophet of a new religion.” Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 19-21


28 Boris was the elder brother of Scriabin’s second (common-law) wife, Tatiana Schloezer. The composer became acquainted with both brother and sister in either 1896 or 1902. See Morozova, “Vospominaniia o Skriabine,” 1,52-53; Shletser, A. Skriabin: Monografiia o lichnosti i tvorchestve (Berlin: Grani, 1923), 1-2. The intellectual relationship between the two men was particularly close. According to Leonid Sabaneev, “A.N. loved Boris Fedorovich very much for his devotion and continual desire to “explain” him to the broad public; he truly considered him his own preacher and, as it were, ‘prophet.’” Sabaneev further argued that many of Scriabin’s philosophical ideas were formed under Schloezer’s influence. See Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 167-169.


29 Boris Shletser, “A.N. Skriabin i ego muzyka,” Russkie vedomosti no. 42 (February 21, 1909): 4-5. Most music critics of the day accepted the intimacy between Schloezer and Scriabin as evidence of the reliability of Schloezer’s interpretation of the composer’s philosophy. To G. Prokofiev, “Scriabin’s clear participation in Mr. Schloezer’s conclusions” was apparent (G. Prokofiev, “Skriabinskaia nedelia,” RMG no. 10 (1909): 275-278), while Iulii Engel’ stated that he “looked upon [Schloezer's article] as an authentic self-declaration of the composer.” (Iulii Engel’, “Muzyka Skriabina,” Russkie vedomosti no. 44 (February 24, 1909): 7. Other critics, such as A. Maslov quoted from Schloezer’s writings, attributing them directly to Scriabin with no further comment. (A. Maslov, “Novei shee tvorchestvo A.N. Skriabina,” Muzyka i zhizn’ no. 3 (March 7, 1909): 2-4). Concern over the authority of the text as a representation of Scriabin’s own ideas emerged in the early Soviet period and has continued in the post-Soviet era. See O. Tompakova, “A.N. Skriabin i B.F. Shletser,” in Uchenye zapiski vol. 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi memorial’nyi muzei A.N. Skriabina, 1998), 180-192. This controversy is outside the bounds of my analysis of social responses to Scriabin’s music insofar as contemporary critics and audiences generally accepted the program as expressing Scriabin’s own views.
orchestral works: the Third Symphony (*Bozhestvennaia Igra*) and the *Poem of Ecstasy* (op.54). In addition to the two orchestral works, the performance marked the Moscow premiere of Scriabin’s Fifth piano sonata (op.53), performed by the composer himself. Due to the size of the orchestra and the complexity of the symphonic works, six rehearsals (rather than the standard two or three) were held, each one attended by more people, both musicians and non-musicians. The effect on educated Russian society was comparable to a bolt of lightening. These so-called “Scriabin weeks” left an indelible imprint on Russian musical life.

In an article published in *Russkie vedomosti* the morning of the first concert, Schloezer claimed that Scriabin’s works marked the beginning of a new cultural epoch, an idea that he acknowledged would be met with skepticism by those who didn’t yet believe that “a musician

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30 At this time, Scriabin was in Russia for a total of two months (January 14, 1909 to March 14, 1909). See M. Priamenikova and O. Tompakova, *Letopis’zhizni i tvorchestva A.N. Skriabina’,* 165; Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*, 24. The Third symphony was first performed in Petersburg under the baton of F. M. Blumenfel’d on February 23, 1908. The *Poem of Ecstasy* was first performed in Russia in Petersburg on January 19, 1909 under the auspices of the “Muzikal’nye novosti” society, conducted by G. I. Varlikh. See M. Priamenikova and O. Tompakova, *Letopis’ Skriabina*, 142-144, 165-166. By 1909 there were already devoted “Scriabinists” who collected scrapbooks of newspaper articles dedicated to the composer. See Vera Zviashyteva, “Stat’i i zametki o tvorchestve A.N. Skriabina,” RGALI f.1720, op.1, ed.khr.563. This notebook contains articles devoted to Scriabin cut from such newspapers as *Russkie vedomosti, Golos Moskvy, Utro Rossii* and *Rannee Utro*. The 1909 article by Schloezer is the first clipping in the notebook.

31 Scriabin published the Fifth Sonata while in Leipzig on his own money. See T. V. Rybakova, *Iz sikh volshebnykh mest* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi muzikal’nyi muzei imeni Skriabina, 2001), 43.


33 The term “Scriabin weeks” is borrowed from critical reviews of Scriabin’s 1909 trip to Moscow. See G. Prokofiev, “Skriabinskaia nedelia,” *RMG* no. 10 (1909): 275-277; Iu. Engel’, “Zavershenie ‘Skriabinskoi nedeli’,” *Russkie vedomosti* no. 47 (February 27, 1909), reprinted in Kunina, ed., *Glazami sovremennika*, 253. There were at least fifteen performances and two open rehearsals dedicated in whole or in part to Scriabin's music. These included three orchestral performances of the *Poem of Ecstasy* (one in Petersburg and two in Moscow) and four performances of the Third Symphony (twice in Moscow, twice in Petersburg). Scriabin performed numerous piano works in both Petersburg and Moscow (including a solo concert at the Society of Free Aesthetics, February 18, 1909). The journal *Apollon* held a “Scriabin evening” in St. Petersburg to which members of the artistic intelligentsia were invited (January 31, 1909). See V. Karatygin, “Muzyka v Peterburge,” *Apollon* no. 6 (March 1910): 20. Two of Scriabin’s former students, M. N. Meichik and M. S. Nemenova-Lunts, also performed solo concerts of Scriabin's piano music (including two concerts by Meichik in Kazan on January 31 and February 15, 1909). See *Letopis’zhizni i tvorchestva A.N. Skriabina*, 165-171. Inspired by this outburst of interest, Emil Medtner proposed the publication of a collection of articles on Scriabin and his views on art. See Skriabin: *Pis’ma*, 542-543.
might appear as the forerunner (predtecha) of a new era of history.”

Scriabin’s new works marked what Schloezer considered a period of “conscious free creation.” By “free creation” Schloezer meant “that experience of action as a creative goal.” In his newest works, Scriabin had abandoned the search for a goal in favor of the free celebration of existence itself. Most striking in this analysis was Schloezer’s claim that this was not the development of an isolated individual. Rather, “Scriabin’s entire life as an artist and thinker is the gradual development and recognition (osoznanie) of the experience that is basic for all humans.” For the majority of people, life “is an unconscious play of the interchange of creation and destruction, rising and falling,” despite the fact that “in the depths of the unconscious, all actions are free.” Humans mistakenly attributed causes to externally existing phenomena, when in fact they freely created the reality in which they found themselves.

Scriabin, according to Schloezer, had long lived under the same mistaken assumptions that all people shared, but had stepped beyond it to recognize the subjectivity of all values and of reality itself. In the Poem of Ecstasy, having recognized that there was no goal in existence except for constant play, Scriabin strove to express the “joy of free action”, the moment of “ecstasy” in music. Reminiscent of Hegel, Schloezer used the terms “universe” and “spirit” interchangeably, though in contrast to Hegel’s teleological view of historical development, he

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34 B. Shletser, “A.N. Skriabin i ego muzyka,” Russkie vedomosti no. 42 (February 21, 1909): 4-5. The Russian term employed by Schloezer, predtecha (“forerunner”) is the same word that is used in reference to John the Baptist. Schloezer first proposed the possibility of article on Scriabin’s Poem of Ecstasy to Nikolai Findeizen (editor of RMG) in a 1908 letter. See Shletser to Findeizen (January 11/24, 1908), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.2028.

35 Scriabin’s early music, which had depicted the struggle of the soul striving towards an absolute, was more accessible to most people than his more recent music because it was closer to their own life experiences. According to Schloezer, Scriabin’s Third Symphony still depicted the struggle of the individual soul in overcoming the barriers of life and achieving this free realization. It expressed “the evolution of spirit” freed from the “horrors of despair, from its past, full of secret forms and beliefs,” after which spirit “finally achieves affirmation of its own joyous heavenly ‘I’.” RGALI f.993, op.1, ed.khr.81, l.54.

36 RGALI f.993, op.1, ed.khr.81, l.55.

37 Boris Shletzer, “A.N. Skriabin,” RMG no. 5 (1908): 114-120; idem., RMG no. 6 (1908): 146-157; idem., “A.N. Skriabin i ego muzyka,” Russkie vedomosti no. 42 (February 21, 1909): 4-5. All three clippings are preserved in RGALI f.993, op.1, d.81, l.55. Schloezer quoted from his 1908 article in his 1909 publication while the program
further defined “Universe/Spirit” as “eternal creation without an external goal, without a motive, the heavenly play of worlds.”\(^{38}\) The moment of ecstasy would come when “spirit, having achieved the highest level of action, as if tearing itself away from the embrace of reasonability (tselosooobraznost’) and relativity, experiences its own essence to the end, [experiences] free action.”\(^{39}\) “Ecstasy” was “that absolute life, that moment of which Goethe's Faust also dreamed,” but with one important exception: “Scriabin wants cosmic ecstasy, so that the entire universe will experience that moment in unity.” Free action, in Scriabin’s world-view, was thus not the purview of an individual, but of an entire collective. For this reason, “ecstasy cannot be a personal, but only a collective creation.” The role of personality (lichnost’) was simply to depict the goal towards which all humanity was striving: “[Scriabin’s] vision of ecstasy was achieved only thanks to the unlimited tension of activity that lived within him: in others it must now become the stimulant of great desire.” The Poem of Ecstasy was itself only a hint to contemporary listeners of the great “freeing of spirit” that would come in the future through new creative works that would be the fruit of collective rather than individual creation.\(^{40}\) In Schloezer’s view, it was specifically this collective aspect of Scriabin's vision that distanced him from other cultural visionaries.

Schloezer’s articles, together with program notes he penned for the composer’s new works, introduced Russian society to a new man, one whose creative quest had transformed him and could transform others.\(^{41}\) Having identified the path of human development as a move

\(^{39}\) RGALI f.993, op.1, ed.khr.81, l.55.
\(^{40}\) Shletser, “A.N. Skriabin i ego muzyka,” 4-5.
\(^{41}\) The concert program offered Schloezer’s interpretation of the philosophical significance of both orchestral works, as well as analysis of primary musical themes and a brief poetic excerpt from the Poem of Ecstasy in reference to the fifth sonata. A copy of the concert program can be seen in RGALI f. 993, op.1, ed.khr.81, ll.54-57.
toward collective creation, Scriabin had returned to his homeland to share his vision with his fellow countrymen. As previously demonstrated, this emphasis on collective creation was widespread in Russia. Schloezer’s interpretation of the philosophical meaning of Scriabin’s music thus tied into a broader cultural trend interested in music’s ability to inspire the creative spirit and unite disparate individuals into a greater whole. The personality (lichnost’) of Scriabin was interpreted as an embodiment of the collective goal to which society as a whole was striving.

From the Russian premiere of Scriabin’s Poem of Ecstasy in 1909 through the composer’s death in 1915, “[he] was the most fashionable (modnyi) composer.” This success was particularly notable given the evolution of Scriabin’s musical language, which rapidly moved beyond traditional tonality towards the creation of complex harmonies of the composer’s own devising. Despite Schloezer’s philosophical gloss on the underlying meaning of these changes, this new compositional language potentially presented great difficulties to Scriabin’s contemporary audiences. Aleksandr Koptiaev, noting the difficulty of Scriabin's late harmonic language commented that “even a raving (iarii) Scriabinist will have to think if you ask him to name his favorite song by his god. . . thus, before us we have a popular composer, without popular songs.”

Debates in the Russian musical press of the day centered on the question: was Scriabin's music really the “music of the future” (muzyka budushchego)? This term was, of course, borrowed from Wagner, but its implications were clear. Russia was waiting for its own musical

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42 Vl. Botsianovskii’s article on the “Order of Universal Genius Brotherhood” (discussed in Chapter Two) was published in 1909, the same year as Schloezer’s second article on Scriabin.
43 L. F. Rybnikova, “O rabote v kontsertnoi organizatsii S. A. Kusevitskogo. Iz vospominanii” (1959), RGALI f. 2005, op.2, ed.khr.20, l.5. This reminiscence refers specifically to the events surrounding the premiere of Prometheus in March 1911.
embodiment of the unifying, myth-creating vision that had been prophesied by Nietzsche and had appeared in Germany with Wagner. Audiences were divided upon the question as to whether or not Scriabin was this awaited “Messiah”. Critics of Scriabin’s music have often been divided into separate camps, depending upon whether they focused primarily on his compositional language or philosophical ideas. However, in actual fact, both groups (whether discussing particular works by the composer or the philosophical ideas apparently expressed in them) shared a common underlying theme: discourse about Scriabin’s claim to be the creator of the “music of the future” centered on the question of sobornost’ and Russian identity itself.

The Russian narod was notably absent from the philosophical views of both Schloezer and Scriabin. Such a view may well have seemed dangerously unpatriotic to many of Scriabin’s Russian contemporaries, who, deeply concerned with the perceived gap between the narod and educated society in Russia, were committed to granting him the role of unifier of the Russian people. By 1908, Aleksandr Koptiaev believed that Aleksandr Scriabin was the contemporary “musician-philosopher” he had awaited. Unaware of the composer’s

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46 Nietzsche himself, of course, had disavowed this youthful vision.
48 Schloezer’s broader interpretation of human progress emphasized the spiritual development of individual human souls. While human history showed a gradual process of movement forward toward the collective ideal, each individual soul would fall at a different level of development along a vast spectrum. Shletser, “Konsonans i dissonans,” Apollon no. 1 (January 1911): 54-61. A similar argument, based specifically on musical language was made by Engel’, “Taneev, Rakhmaninov, Skriabin,” RGALI f.1720, op.1, ed. khr.563, ll.23-27 [Russkie vedomosti, (November 30, 1910)]. Schloezer’s 1923 monograph on Scriabin, in contrast, stresses the uniquely “Russian” characteristics of the composer.
49 Articles by Koptiaev devoted specifically to Scriabin, lauding him as the answer to Nietzsche’s call, were published in both 1908 and 1910 (Sovremennyi mir). The 1910 article was later reissued in a 1916 book, K muzykal’nomu idealu (Petrograd, 1916). Koptiaev first read a paper on Scriabin's music in 1899 at a gathering dedicated to “new art” in Petersburg, attended by Sergei Diaghilev among others. See Koptiaev, Skriabin: kharakteristiki, 7. After Scriabin’s 1909 trip to Moscow, Koptiaev entered into correspondence with the composer, requesting photographs of the composer for publication in Birzhevye vedomosti, the paper for which Koptiaev worked at the time. See A.N. Skriabin, Pis’ma, 523-524, 534-535, 541-42.
theosophical and mystical leanings. Koptiaev interpreted Scriabin’s music in a language heavily indebted to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. Here at last was the composer who would develop the emotional, ecstatic, collective, Dionysian side of music rather than its formal, Apollonian side. In contrast to Schloaezer’s apparent disinterest in specifically “Russian” traits, Koptiaev’s excitement over Scriabin’s mission as a musical Messiah drew heavily on a familiar image of “Russianness” that had emerged with the writings of the Slavophiles in the early nineteenth century. In contrast to European rationalism, Scriabin’s music embodied the irrational, emotional spirit of Russia: “To the devil with measured German music. . . [we are] not ashamed of our own, Slavic passion, and in a wonderful, Bacchic ecstasy, seizing each others’ hands, we remember again the great name ‘Scriabin’.” In Koptiaev’s view, Scriabin succeeded where Wagner had failed. While the great opera composer had been a “Slav in character,” he had abandoned the teachings of Nietzsche in his last work (*Parsifal*), returning to the embrace of a “neo-Catholic morality”. It was not a German, but the Slav Scriabin who “returns to music its elemental strength, its Dionysian beginning. . . as if in answer to the theory of Nietzsche. And as is well known, no one understood the essence of music so well as this Polish thinker.”

In a similar vein, Boris Popov (writing as Mizgir), in a 1909 *Golos Moskvy* article ostensibly devoted to Chopin’s hundredth anniversary, turned the reader’s attention to Scriabin.

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50 Koptiaev was unaware of this aspect of Scriabin’s thought in 1908, when he published his first article on the composer. Scriabin first explained his philosophy to Koptiaev in 1909, before Koptiaev published his second article in 1910. See Koptiaev, *Skriabin: kharakteristiki*, 59-60.
51 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” *Evetere: vtoroi sbornik muzykal’no-kriticheskikh statei* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia glavnogo upravleniia udelov, 1908), 100-109, here 101.
52 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 101.
53 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin” (iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 102. A similar claim was made in Koptiaev’s 1910 article: “[Scriabin is] the creator of his own understanding of ecstasy... answering the Dionysian spirit of Nietzsche; an artist fighting for a new artistic culture.” See Koptiaev, “Pevets ekstaza: A. Skriabin,” in *K muzykal’nomu idealu*, (Petrograd, 1916), 195, originally published in *Sovremennyi mir* (October 1910). Koptiaev consistently emphasized Nietzsche as a “Polish” writer, thus underlining a connection with the Slavic world.
Just as had occurred in Chopin’s time, “the mysterious future of music has stopped its fiery
tongue above the head of a Slav. . . one thing is unquestionable: the genius of Chopin has found a
worthy disciple (naslednik). And there is something prophetic in the fact that this disciple is a
Slav (slavianin) and lives in a time that is equally perilous for his homeland and just as far from
it. And through that connection (sblizhenie), through that consciousness of a higher unity
(edinstvo), the consciousness of a national unity, a blood unity, grows and strengthens. . .”\(^{55}\)

Popov’s imagery was inspired by the biblical narrative of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came
down upon Christ’s disciples in the form of tongues of flame. However, while the Holy Spirit
descended upon all the disciples in the biblical narrative, in Popov’s article, Scriabin was
uniquely called to be possessed by this fire. Not only did he \textit{individually} embody a higher unity
(just as the original disciples had \textit{collectively}), but that unity was specifically national and (in this
case) even biological in nature. The collective inspiration that Christ’s disciples had received
long ago was not possible in the modern age, a fact that defined Scriabin’s own unifying mission.

For the critics discussed above, Russia was the natural country for Nietzsche’s aesthetic
ideas to find fruition. Since Slavs were, by their very nature, “formless” (bezformlennyi), Russian
music, most completely embodied in the figure of Scriabin, gave the most adequate expression of
the Dionysian or elemental spirit in music. The essence of this spirit was found in its “character
of eternal languor, eternal striving towards something unknown, eternally unfulfillable.”\(^{56}\)

Scriabin was the musical harbinger of the message that had first been expressed by Nietzsche: a
rejection of existing norms and morals in life and the building of new ones. Koptiaev’s image of
Scriabin emphasized Russia’s unique, messianic role in contemporary culture: while Scriabin


\(^{56}\) Koptiaev, “Pevets ekstaza,” 206. A similar argument appears in Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (iz svobodnykh
muzykal’nykh besed),” 102. Here Koptiaev argued that other Russian composers, in contrast, had not succeeded in
bringing Nietzsche’s strong, victorious voice to the Russian people, either because of their obsession with foreign
compositional styles (Glinka) or because they embodied too “melancholy” a direction in life (Tchaikovsky).
was the product of a specifically Russian environment, his mission was universal. All nations required Dionysian rebirth, but it was Russia’s tragic conditions that had made possible the appearance of this genius. In Boris Popov’s words, “future Slavic art will be not only national, but will carry new discoveries to all humanity.”

The reason that the Dionysian spirit had found its most perfect expression in Russia (in Koptiaev’s view) was because of the country’s unique historical conditions. Scriabin had been formed by the immediate events of the “revolutionary storm” that had seized Russia: “Scriabin is both the cause and the result of the stormy, elemental movement of the past years.” Scriabin’s purpose, nevertheless, was not political in its narrow definition: Scriabin’s “revolutionary phrase is broader than that of the SRs: it is a general social transformation of life on the foundations of Beauty.” The “melody” to which Scriabin gave voice “seems to have carried away forever our realism, our narodnichestvo.” In place of the lower sphere of mere political activity, Scriabin’s music “rises to the heaven and falls back down to us in order to sing to our tired soul”. In Koptiaev’s view, Scriabin’s music itself contained the transformative message from the heights that Orpheus was entrusted to bring to the people.

Ironically, this new cultural discovery was best expressed through reference to German intellectual tradition. Scriabin, “the savior of music,” had discovered “the real musical Dionysian world, which Schopenhauer had conceptualized in a confused manner and of which Nietzsche had raved.” In his music, the “listener seems to actively participate in the creative

57 Koptiaev, “Pevets ekstaza,” 206.
58 [Mizgir], “Frederik Shopen i russkaia muzyka,” 3.
59 Koptiaev had in mind the 1905 revolution.
60 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (Iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 108-109; see also idem., “Pevets ekstaza,” 207, for further reference to the connection between Scriabin's musical style and the revolutionary upheavals of 1905.
61 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (Iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 108-109.
62 In his analysis of Scriabin’s importance for modern society, Koptiaev embraced Schopenhauer's idea of music as the only adequate representation of Will. See Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 103.
63 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 107-108.
In Scriabin’s music, Wagner’s error (his failure to overcome the divide between audience, performer and creator) was on the verge of being overcome as the listener, in experiencing Scriabin’s music, moved towards a more active engagement with the act of creation itself.

This “nationalist” interpretation of Scriabin's music drew on several standard tropes of Russian messianism. It embodied a higher, spiritual message, central both to the contemporary context Russians found themselves in, as well as speaking to broader humanity. In contrast to German rationalism (expressed in music as well as in thought), it was formless, giving sound to immediate, organic experience. In short, it was deeply “Slavic”. The Russian nationalist trope, rooted in the image of Moscow as the Third Rome, expanded by the Slavophiles in the early nineteenth century and canonized by Dostoevsky in his famous speech on Pushkin, was uniquely applicable to Scriabin: the composer’s very universality was itself a sign of his Russianness.

Connected to this dream of a collective musical spirit was an underlying concern about the gap between educated Russians and the *narod*. Scriabin’s music was a way through which this gap could be transcended. In this sense, the social aspect gained greater importance for Scriabin’s “nationalist” admirers than it had held for the composer himself. The same trend appeared among Scriabin’s detractors: rather than celebrating the collective aspect of Scriabin’s music, they repeatedly attacked what they claimed was his “individualism”.

One of the sharpest attacks on Scriabin's music in 1909 appeared in the pages of *Muzyka i zhizn’*, a journal with a self-declared goal of overcoming the division between “high” musical culture and the *narod*, a division, it was argued, that was a product of recent social history. Reviewing Scriabin’s recent concert, A. Maslov argued that there was a definite connection between the current period of “crisis” in Russian literary symbolism and the upsurge of similar

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64 Koptiaev, “‘Skriabin’ (iz svobodnykh muzykal’nykh besed),” 107-108.
ideas in music, a trend that Scriabin embodied. In the opinion of the author, this trend was far from positive.  

Maslov began his article with a metaphorical retelling of the fairy tale “The Emperor's New Clothes.” In the story, the court nobility had been too embarrassed or frightened to admit the truth to their ruler — that he was in fact naked, having been tricked by the clever ploys of a con artist. In Maslov’s telling, the courtiers themselves became so carried away with their own deception that they themselves forgot the untruth and, in the end, were deprived of reason. It was this story “with all its details” that “unwillingly comes to mind in connection with the appearance of the composer A.N. Scriabin on the musical horizon.”

To Maslov, Scriabin was symbolic of contemporary culture and the glorification of the individual, a trend that was the tragedy of the modern age itself: “What does the essence of this ‘music of the future’ include? . . . Developed vertical and horizontal sound combinations, caressing the ear, or thoughts (zamysli) containing some high moral or social ideals? Nothing of the sort. In deformed forms, in extreme short (iskrevlennyi) melodic themes with heady harmonies, sometimes cacophony, Scriabin transparently tells us about himself.” For Maslov, this accusation of extreme individualism was indeed a grave sin. The composer’s short melodic themes contrasted sharply with Maslov’s own study of folk song, with its emphasis on melody. Maslov claimed that Scriabin’s compositional failure stemmed from the philosophical ideas underlying his music, which were solipsistic in the extreme. Scriabin, Maslov argued, equated “‘Spirit and the universe,’ ‘Spirit and I (the author [i.e., Scriabin])’,” and finally “I [Scriabin] and God.”

There was no room for the Russian narod in such a narrowly individualistic worldview. For Maslov, the

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66 Maslov may have been inspired by a 1907 article by Vol’fing [Emil Medtner] that uses the same metaphor to describe the “typical” modern composer. See Vol’fing, “Modernizm i muzyka,” Zolotoe runo no. 3 (1907): 63-70, here 69.
69 Maslov, “Noveishei tvorchestvo Skriabina,” 3.
true “music of the future” had to “call us to a world of equality and free space.” The music of the future would provide understanding of “spiritual depression and passionate, ideal melancholy connected with the revaluation of life values,” emotions that would necessarily appear when searching for the truth and beauty of life.” It would, in short, lead to better understanding and sharing of peoples’ emotional experiences in facing the challenges of the contemporary age. In conclusion, Maslov argued: “We must, with disgust, turn away from the idea of cynical glorification (obozhestvenniiia) of personality (lichnost’), having nothing in common with healthy life.”

These critiques, leveled in Muzyka i zhizn’ against Scriabin were part of a broader critique of individualistic values occurring in Russian life. Symbolist poet Dmitrii Merezhkovskii inspired extended debate in the contemporary Russian press for his emphasis of personal freedom over patriotic feeling towards Russia. Scriabin’s detractors similarly emphasized the composer’s distance from the Russian people. D. Arakchiev mourned Scriabin's desire to carry the listener “to the other side of Good” in his Poem of Ecstasy, and expressed the wish that the unquestionably talented composer would “return to this side and talk in such a general-human language as his peers, for example, S.V. Rakhmaninov.” Even critiques focused ostensibly upon the composer’s musical language rather than his philosophical programs often fell back upon the charge that Scriabin’s art was fundamentally individualistic in nature. In the view of Grigorii Prokof’ev, offering his critique of the composer's 1909 concerts, Scriabin’s newest music stepped outside the realm of possible human comprehension. Prokof’ev argued that,

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70 Maslov, “Noveishei tvorchestvo Skriabina,” 3. The term obozhestvennie employed by Maslov is reminiscent of Vladimir Solov’ev’s philosophy, discussed in Chapter Two.


72 Muzyka i zhizn’ no. 3 (March 12, 1910). See also “Skriabin, publika i kritika,” Muzyka i zhizn’ no. 11 (November 11, 1910), 16-17.

despite the composer’s claims that there were no limits, his music exceeded physiological limitations: “Our hearing cannot perceive an unending set of dissonances, unresolved and moving from one to the next in an unending chain.”

This objection, though ostensibly based on the physical limitations of human hearing, was nevertheless also a critique based on what Prokof’ev perceived to be Scriabin’s overly individualistic style. Prokof’ev argued that a purely “chamber” tendency in Scriabin’s music was already noticeable in the Fourth Piano Sonata, whose fast tempo made it impossible for the listener to hear all the beauty of the harmonies employed since “only the performer could gradually make out the connections within the chaos and hear that which the audience could not hear.” Musical enjoyment, which should be a shared act between performer and listener, was here limited to the pianist. Matters were even worse in Scriabin’s Fifth piano sonata, where even the occasional consonances found in the Fourth Sonata were absent. Such music, while comprehensible to the pianist-performer, was unable to unite the listener with the performer in a shared experience. G. Prokof’ev, having assessed the difficulty of making sense of the steady stream of dissonances in Scriabin’s music, ended with the conclusion that at this stage in the development of human hearing, most people could only “recognize [Scriabin’s harmonies] while playing them on the piano.” Scriabin’s music was thus an intimate, experiential act, which could not move beyond the performer to envelop the audience in a shared experience.

For many, the conflict between the individual and collective aspects of Scriabin’s musical

actually highlighted Scriabin’s “error” in his latest compositional phase: his shift from expressing “experience” to depicting “world-view”: “I think that it does not have to be proven that music may and must express the experiences of the composer, but . . . it cannot, has not the strength, to embody his philosophical worldview.” Iulii Engel’ similarly disagreed with Schloezer’s assessment that Scriabin’s latest works were his most important. See Engel’, “Zavershenie ‘Skriabinskoi nedeli’,” in Kunina, ed., Glazami sovremennika, 253.


Prokof’ev, “Skriabinskie nedeli,” 277. This was in response to the 1909 Moscow performance of the Divine Poem, the Poem of Ecstasy and the Fifth piano sonata.
vision was physically embodied by Scriabin himself. There was an inherent contradiction in the figure of the composer who walked on stage in 1909 to perform his Fifth Piano Sonata, programmed alongside his two large-scale orchestral works. 77 While the composer’s dream was the creation of a work that would unite performers and listeners into a single, massive musico-religious act, in practice his music was heavily indebted specifically to the piano (an instrument traditionally connected with the drawing rooms of the upper classes), at which he composed almost exclusively. 78 While hardly surprising considering Scriabin's early musical training and plans for a career as a concert pianist, this fact existed uneasily alongside his grandiose dreams.

Most of Scriabin’s musical sketches for his Mystery evolved into short pieces for piano solo. This tendency is particularly striking when one considers the common idea (expressed by Symbolist writers like Andrei Belyi) that the highest musical achievement was the orchestral symphony, rather than solo works. The composer liked to consider his creations immensely complex and was even insulted by Leonid Sabaneev’s ability to arrange Prometheus in a four-hand piano reduction. 79 Not only did Scriabin focus extensively on the solo piano, but his very method of playing seemed to contradict his grandiose claims. It was commonly agreed that the composer’s pianistic skills, though of high calibre, were singularly unsuited to performance in large halls (in

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77 This contradiction was commented on specifically by Julli Engel’, who, after attending the concert, concluded that “[The fifth piano sonata] is in no way prekrasno”, stating that the composer was forced to seize upon the orchestra because of the limitations of the piano. Kunina, ed., Glazami sovremenniki, 249. Engel’ touched upon the contradiction between the desired effect of the composer and the actual perception of the music in relation to the Fifth Sonata and the orchestral Poem of Ecstasy. Both works apparently were connected to the same poetic inspiration (the composer's own text, published in Switzerland in 1906), but each of which had an entirely different effect.

78 In this, Scriabin was similar to Nikolai Medtner, who complained to Emil about his exclusive training on piano. Scriabin’s focus on miniature works for piano was likewise seen as a sign of his “individualism” and “insanity”. See P. Shepk, “A.N. Skriabin,” RGALI f.2012 op.5, ed.khr.69, l.49.

79 “Aleksandr Nikolaevich had, for some reason, a very exaggerated view of the difficulty of arranging his works for piano and was amazed and a bit distrustfully shocked when I promised to arrange [Prometheus] for piano solo. He thought that it would be impossible to arrange for fewer than ‘eight hands’. . . when I brought him the arrangement he was amazed that ‘it was possible to arrange for two hands’, and somewhat dissatisfied, as if he was insulted by the fact that it turned out that his composition was not so extremely clever and complex as he himself had expected,” Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 63.
distinct contrast to his greatly-beloved contemporary, Sergei Rachmaninoff). Complaints about the composer’s failure to impress in large performance spaces and assessments of his superior performance in *intimate*, chamber-hall atmospheres abound.\footnote{After the 1909 musical evening devoted to Scriabin held by the Petersburg journal *Apollon*, Karatygin commented that “[his playing] is impossible on the stage, but when you hear Scriabin in a room, he bewitches (околдовать).” See Karatygin, “Muzyka v Peterburge,” *Apollon* no. 6 (1910): 14-20, here 20. For similar claims, see Kunina, ed., *Glazami sovremennika*, 339-340; [Anonymous reviewer], “Opera i kontsert v Moskve,” *RMG* no. 10 (March 10, 1913): 253; Karatygin, “Peterburgskie kontserty,” *Apollon* no. 1 (January 1913): 61-62; [Unknown author], “Kontsert Skriabin,” *Rannee Utro* no. 289 (December 15, 1910); Sabaneev, “Kontsert Skriabina,” *Golos Moskvy* no. 289 (December 15, 1910); G. Konius, “Kontsert Skriabina,” *Utro Rossii* no. 326 (December 15, 1910), l.29-32; Iu[lii] E[n]gel, “Kontsert A.N. Skriabina,” *Russkie vedomosti* no. 290. Many of these clippings are preserved as part of RGALI f.1720, op.1, ed.khr.563, ll.28-37.} Such a state of affairs must have been at best confusing and at worst embarrassing to critics like Koptiaev, who had underlined the triumph of “social” over “intimate” music in Scriabin’s works specifically.\footnote{N. Cherkas sought to dispel at least one aspect of the growing myth around Scriabin after the composer’s death, insisting that, despite the composer’s great compositional talent, he had been “a bad pianist”. See N. N. Cherkas, *Skriabin, kak pianist i fortepiannyi kompozitor* (Petrograd: I. Fleitman, 1916), 24. Emphasis in original. While Cherkas’ claim may have been overstated, the general consensus reached by Scriabin’s contemporaries was that the composer, like his illustrious Polish predecessor Chopin, was an intimate, chamber (i.e. *individualistic*) performer rather than a concert (i.e. *collective*) performer.} Scriabin himself mourned this internal contradiction, commenting “how is it that I am preparing myself for a world role, but going out onto the stage in front of the public is always genuine suffering for me”\footnote{RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.12, ll.46-47.} The very act of performing his works in concert, while a necessary means through which to spread his “teaching” to the broader public, was in essence a self-imposed martyrdom. In this act, Scriabin envisioned himself as a Christ-like figure, crucified for the good of humanity.\footnote{Or, as Nietzsche himself had perhaps more accurately expressed, a “crucified Dionysus”. Reflecting upon Scriabin’s posthumous fame in 1916, N. Cherkas also adopted the metaphor of a martyr in reference to Scriabin. His popularity was, at least in part, an example of a common human tendency: “Having made their brother a martyr, [they] then bow to his greatness.” Cherkas, 8.}

Not all assessments of Scriabin as an individualist were negative, of course. Writing for the journal *Teatr i iskusstvo*, Knorozovskii argued that “Scriabin is the fullest and clearest expresser of the artistic strivings of our century” and that “not in any sectors of art have the sacred strivings of our contemporary epoch found as mighty an embodiment as in music in
general and the music of Scriabin in particular”. For Knorozovskii, the central striving of contemporary life was the search for *individualism*. Nevertheless, in this celebratory assessment of Scriabin’s individualism (which echoed Nietzsche’s Zarathustrian theme), the collective aspect was still clearly present. As a musical genius, Scriabin was fully understood by few, if any, of his contemporaries. This was a sign, not of Scriabin’s separation from the needs of society as a whole, but rather of society’s inability to fully understand the message that Scriabin’s music held for them. As time passed, and humanity reached a higher level of spiritual development, Scriabin’s music would become comprehensible to the general public. In this interpretation, Scriabin was cloaked in the veil of a prophet, proclaiming a higher truth to a humanity that was not yet advanced enough to understand. Despite his critique noted above, G. Prokof’ev ultimately held out a similar hope for Scriabin’s music: “It is more than likely that our hearing in the future will be able to make sense of the devilish stream of heady dissonances, but so far it can only perceive them in the calmer parts of Scriabin’s works or recognize them while playing them on the piano”. Thus, even among critics who adopted the interpretation of Scriabin as individualist, there was a strong undercurrent emphasizing the evolutionary and progressive role filled by artistic genius for humanity as a whole. It was not the composer’s mastery of traditional compositional forms, but his creative insight that served as the basis upon which he could act as a unifying figure.

If it was in fact true that humanity was evolving to the point of spiritual advancement in which people would be able to comprehend Scriabin’s music, he could serve not only as a

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85 Prokofiev, “Skrabinski nezdeli,” 277. A year later, reviewing pianist Mark Meichik’s performance of Scriabin’s Fifth piano sonata, Prokofiev concluded “there are people, to whom this wild music, comprised entirely of dissonances is spiritually close and comprehensible. It is possible that you will begin, not so much to understand as to value and even love it.” See Gr. Pr., “Teatr i muzyka,” *Russkie vedomosti* no. 228 (1910) [RGALI f. 1720, op.1, d. 563, l.4].
unifying national figure, but as an embodiment of human spiritual evolution or progress.

Whether he fulfilled this task as an extreme individualist, pushing development forward through the force of his own will, or whether he embodied a deeper understanding of collective humanity than average mortals was of secondary importance to the historical function that he filled as a creative genius. This evolutionary image of Scriabin and his music became one of the most widespread theoretical arguments in support of the composer. Concepts of musical dissonance and consonance, rather than being absolute, were themselves regarded as relative in nature. As humanity progressed spiritually, human hearing would develop to the point where many contemporary dissonances would come to be accepted as consonances, a fact that drove forward musical development. This progressive tendency in musical development was considered to correspond to humanity’s increasing understanding of natural phenomena. In this interpretation, individual musical composition, while intuitive in nature, developed in accordance with an existing cosmic order. The musical genius was intuitively aware of these naturally occurring laws, reinterpreting them for humanity in general, thereby pushing forward human knowledge. This argument, cloaked in a sophisticated musical theoretical structure, was developed most extensively by Scriabin’s second (and arguably most influential) disciple: Leonid Sabaneev.

**Scriabin’s “Prometheus” Chord: Spiritual Progress and Musical Unity**

Boris Schloezer’s prophetic utterances, connecting the growth of musical dissonance with Scriabin’s programmatic compositions and a historical, progressive vision of the “evolution of the human spirit,” while perhaps appealing to the predominantly literary audience of the journal *Apollon*, offered little of interest to those interested in the fundamental musical aspects of Scriabin’s art. While writers, philosophers and audiences might distract themselves with thematic “programs” and “interpretations”, for most musicians it was in the composer’s musical

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86 This is in contrast to Schloezer’s definition, which kept the absolute values of consonance and dissonance intact.
compositions that his claim to the title of “genius” would ultimately be decided. Specialistic musical circles awaited a visionary who would speak in their own language, based on solid theoretical analysis rather than philosophical musings.

Among academic musical circles, the purely “philosophical” aspect of Scriabin’s music initially called forth little more than skepticism and hostility. At the initial Moscow performance of the Third Symphony and the Poem of Ecstasy, Sergei Taneev sarcastically commented to those around him “Look! Six notes and. . . ‘the essence of the creative spirit is opened before us.’ What a pitiful image of the essence of the creative spirit one must have to be able to fit it into six notes!” This response was typical of many Russian musicians and critics, who chose to pass over discussion of Scriabin’s philosophical ideas and focus instead on his compositional language. However, even in this apparently “distinct” realm, the metaphysical image of music as a unifying force bore fruit in the writings of Leonid Sabaneev who (like the Apostle Paul centuries before) sought to offer a more systematized description of musical progress in which Scriabin and his musical innovations appeared as the highest embodiment of musical creativity and genius in the modern era.

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87 Serious musicians, by and large, expected a more rational and systematic account of specifically musical innovations. More than any other group, musicians were likely to approach Scriabin “only as a musician,” a worldview that outraged the composer. Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 74.


89 This includes such well-known and influential music critics of the day as V. Karatygin, Iu. Engel’, E. Gunst, G. Prokof’ev and N. Findeizen. This group generally prided itself on a more “rational” orientation in their approach to music, but they were equally under the sway of the concept of “progress”. N. Kashkin’s review of Scriabin’s 1909 concert recognized the composer’s “great talent, one of the most outstanding of our time” but chided him for the “raving, nanosnyi element” of his “wordy, though not particularly logical [sviaznykh] programs.” Kashkin, “A.N. Skriabin,” Russkoe slovo (March 14, 1909).

90 While Schloezer had served as the primary literary interpreter of Scriabin's music in 1909, by 1911 musical Russia was turning to the writing of Leonid Sabaneev for programmatic and theoretical interpretation. See for instance Engel, “Skriabinskii kontsert,” Russkie vedomosti no. 50-51 (March 3-4, 1911) in Kunina, ed., Glazami sovremennika, 309-316, here 310: “[Sabaneev’s article on Prometheus in the journal Muzyka] is in essence a statement of the opinions and views of Scriabin himself.” Sabaneev, while ultimately agreeing with many aspects of Schloezer’s interpretation, sought to explain the philosophical underpinning of the Third Symphony without
Sabaneev first proposed what would become his predominant interpretation of Scriabin’s innovative musical style in a series of articles that began appearing in 1910, the majority of which appeared in the Moscow-based journal *Muzyka.*\(^91\) The central focus of his analysis was Scriabin’s newest musical work, *Prometheus,* which premiered in Moscow in 1911, introducing Scriabin’s mystical project to a wider audience.\(^92\) Sabaneev argued that *Prometheus* had stretched the limits of traditional Western harmony to their breaking point, with a chord constructed entirely of fourths and tritones rather than the traditional triadic form. He then advanced two fundamental claims regarding this new chord. First, he argued that Scriabin, in building the chord, had intuitively used pitches that in fact derived from the natural overtone series. In Sabaneev’s interpretation, the opening chord of *Prometheus* (g, d-sharp, a, c-sharp, g, c-sharp, f-sharp, b) was directly related to the overtone series. To understand this claim, it is first necessary to understand the overtone series itself. Acoustically speaking, when a certain pitch sounds, it contains not only the main pitch that is sounded (the fundamental), but a series of other pitches that sound simultaneously in sympathy with the main pitch. This tendency, first identified...

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\(^91\) This journal, edited by Derzhanovskii, had the self-appointed task of exploring new musical trends, but soon gained a reputation as a publication run by Scriabinists. See “Prometei A. Skriabina,” *Muzyka i zhizn’* no. 4 (April 1911): 2-4. For Sabaneev’s own analysis of *Prometheus* see “Prometei,” *Muzyka* no. 1 (November 27, 1910): 6-10; “Sovremennie techeniia v muzykal’nom iskusstve,” *Muzyka* no. 4-5 (December 22, 1910): 85-88; “Prometei,” *Muzyka* no. 13 (February 26, 1911): 286-294. The opening chord of Prometheus is c, f-sharp, b-flat, e, a, d which Sabaneev demonstrated was built out of the 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 overtones. At Scriabin’s request, Sabaneev sent his article on *Prometheus* to British music critic Rosa Newmarch, which served as the basis for her English-language publications on the composer’s music. See Skriabin, *Pis’ma,* 595-596. Newmarch’s article appeared in “The Musical Times,” no. 854 (1914): 227-231. Sabaneev was commissioned by Kussevitskii to write program notes for *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Prometheus,* at which point he turned to Scriabin for an explanation of the content of these works. See Sabaneev, *Vospominaniia o Skriabine,* 77-84. At this time, Sabaneev first heard about Scriabin's *Mystery.*

\(^92\) Scriabin’s permanent return to Moscow in 1910 (at the instigation of conductor and musical impresario, Serge Kussevitskii) took place in conjunction with arrangements for the premiere of his newest musical work, *Prometheus.* With *Prometheus,* it was increasingly difficult for audiences to make sense of Scriabin’s musical language without reference to the underlying philosophical goals from which they emerged, a fact evidenced by repeated references to the composer’s planned *Mystery* in contemporary concert reviews of *Prometheus.* See RGALI f.1720, op.1, ed.khr.563: Iu[i][ii] Ef[nel’], “Skriabinskii kontsert,” *Russkie vedomosti* (March 3, 1911), II.39-44; Sabaneev, “Pered kontsertam: O ‘Prometee’ Skriabina,” *Golos Moskvy* (March 2, 1911), II.79-84.
by Pythagoras, is caused by sound waves of various sizes. These higher pitches (the overtones) are always relationally constant and thus definable scientifically. In the example below, the pitches of the overtone series (from a fundamental pitch of C) are given with the number below corresponding to their place within the series:

![Diagram of overtone series](image)

(5.1) Overtone series

The bracketed notes in the above example signify the pure overtones that have been altered in the system of tempered tuning. Thus, there is a discrepancy that exists between the pitches that sound as overtones and those that are acceptable in tempered tuning. First universally adopted for Western music around the time of J.S. Bach, this continues to be the standard tuning system employed for keyboard instruments such as the piano in the present day.

In his analysis, Sabaneev claimed that Scriabin’s Prometheus Chord was derived from the overtones 7-13, omitting 11:

![Diagram of Prometheus chord](image)

(5.2) Correspondence between overtone series and Prometheus chord

In this analysis, the echo of a well-known Romantic trope can be heard: the intuitive creative

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93 Brackets around a note indicate its imperfect tuning within the tempered system.
94 Sabaneev numbered the overtones by starting with the fundamental.
imagination of the individual genius reflected naturally occurring, objectively existing truths of nature. The microcosmic world of the individual and the macrocosmic universe corresponded. Sabaneev’s analysis has some merit, though the correspondence is not exact. The most obvious discrepancy arises in relation to the $10^{th}$, $12^{th}$ and $13^{th}$ overtones (F, A, B). As shown above, the notes F, A and B have been adjusted in tempered tuning from their natural equivalent. The natural harmonic pitch is slightly lower than its tempered equivalent.\(^\text{95}\) Scriabin’s music, when performed on tempered instruments, would therefore not actually sound the pure overtone series. This discrepancy would emerge as a key point of contention for Sabaneev’s early critics.

Sabaneev’s second claim touched upon the nature of the chord itself, which he argued should be considered a consonance rather than a dissonance and, as such, had no need to resolve.\(^\text{96}\) He pointed out that the Prometheus Chord incorporated all four “consonant” triads of classical music in itself: major, minor, diminished and augmented, combining them into a single unity:\(^\text{97}\)

\[\text{(5.3) Prometheus Chord}\]

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\(^{95}\) This was also the basis for Sabaneev’s analysis of “perfect”, “diminished” and “augmented” fourths in “Prometei’ Skriabina,” *Muzyka* no. 13 (February 26, 1911): 286-294, here 289.

\(^{96}\) See L. Sabaneev, “Prometei” Skriabina,” *Muzyka* no. 13 (February 26, 1911): 286-294. This analysis was picked up by other reviewers and music lovers. See for instance: Chernogorski, “Muzyka,” *Teatr i iskusstvo* no. 11 (March 15, 1915):190-191, who refers to Scriabin’s “harmony from the upper overtones as a self-sufficient, consonant harmony”; also A. Aleksandrov, “Iz pisem k roditeliam,” (March 16, 1911), RGALI f.2748, op.1, ed.khr.151, l.18.

\(^{97}\) Sabaneev, “Prometei’ Skriabina,” *Muzyka* no. 13, 290.
This inclusion of all four conventional consonant harmonies in a single chord pointed to the abandonment (or transcendence) of functional harmony, which involved the motion from one type of chord to another rather than their co-existence. Sabaneev further strengthened this claim by pointing to Scriabin’s omission of the clearest dominant function from the Prometheus Chord: the absence of G, the twelfth overtone. Musical modulation (movement from one key area to another) had previously been based on the circle of fifths, or movement through the dominant. By omitting the fifth (or dominant) note G from the Prometheus Chord, traditional movement between key areas was also abandoned by Scriabin. In Sabaneev’s interpretation, Scriabin was intuitively uncovering the natural laws of the universe, transcending previous (human imposed) limitations and achieving a higher degree of unity. Sabaneev’s theory met with the composer’s approval, who felt that it was in keeping with his “beloved ‘principle of Unity’.” For Scriabin, Sabaneev noted, “unity found between the paths of science and intuition was always particularly valuable.” As the composer himself stated, “it is always pleasant to me when scientific data corresponds with my intuition… it proves the justice of scientific data.” Taken with his own theory, Sabaneev insisted on exposing the composer to the sound of his Prometheus Chord on an instrument with pure acoustic (i.e. natural) tuning, hoping that it would further stimulate Scriabin’s creative exploration. Upon hearing the chord, Sabaneev claimed that Scriabin

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98 On this point, see Muzyka no. 4-5, 88.
99 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 114.
100 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 64; 114.
101 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 64.
responded: “Yes, it is the very sensation (oshchushchenie) that I need.” Science could prove intuition correct, thus demonstrating the underlying unity between the creative genius and the external world, but it did not lead innovation, which was introduced by the creative action of individuals. Though Sabaneev posed his interpretation of the Prometheus Chord as scientifically based, in actual fact it was heavily idealist in conception, a point that became clear in his insistence on the priority of individual creative genius (rather than natural acoustic laws) in music. Sabaneev, though priding himself on the title “positivist” given to him by Scriabin, would show this underlying assumption most definitively when pressured by those of a more genuinely positivist bent.

Sabaneev’s claims sparked a series of debates, ostensibly about music theory and the scientific analysis of Scriabin’s music, but intimately connected to broader questions about music’s relation to society and the external world. In this way, Scriabin’s compositional language, particularly the Prometheus Chord, was a central means through which musical evolution or “progress” in general was evaluated and discussed. One of the first to challenge Sabaneev’s claims was P. Karasev, a reader of the journal Muzyka.

In a letter to Muzyka, Karasev asked which tuning system Sabaneev had in mind while writing his analysis – the natural or the tempered. Sabaneev sought to offer a clearer delineation of his terms, dividing his response into two parts. First, he stated that he was using

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102 Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 64. Nonetheless (to Sabaneev’s disappointment), Scriabin showed little interest in exploring the other sound combinations of which the instrument (a fisgarmoniia) was capable. Though pleased with the idea that the science of acoustics supported the sound he had discovered in his Prometheus chord, Scriabin concluded that “I will always work by intuition” though “of course, the principle of unity demands that science and intuition correspond.” Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 63-64.
103 For the title “positivist” granted him by Scriabin, see Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 5.
104 This focus on Scriabin’s music as the central issue in Russian music theory after 1909 is noted also by Ellon DeGrief Carpenter, “The theory of music in Russia and the Soviet Union, ca 1650-1950” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 510.
105 The tempered scale, as discussed above, contains several pitches that have been slightly altered from the pure overtones. Karasev is thus asking whether Sabaneev is using this standard, altered scale, or a “natural” scale based on the use of the pure overtones.
the natural rather than the tempered system, since the overtone series had no connection with tempered tuning, a system based on compromising the pure overtones. But second, and of greater importance was his claim that the chord's “consonance” was based on a “psychological” rather than an “acoustic” definition. Sabaneev argued that a chord's “consonance” or “dissonance” could only be determined by the listener, who would either feel that the chord needed or did not need resolution. As the science of acoustics studied only static chords rather than their movement and relation to each other, it had no place in the discussion. This reply did little to satisfy Karasev, who responded in a second letter that the question was indeed about tuning. Delineating between theory and practice, he argued that Scriabin’s music could be experienced only by hearing it played (i.e., experiencing it) on different instruments and, therefore, in one or another tuning system. However, all performances of Scriabin’s music used tempered tuning. How could Sabaneev claim that the chord was consonant because of its basis on the natural overtone series, when the music was performed on traditional instruments and was thus experienced within the tempered system? Either Sabaneev wanted to claim that Scriabin’s music did not sound as it was intended to sound when it was performed (which would undermine the value of the concert performances taking place), or else his theory could not truly be applied to Scriabin’s music. As far as Sabaneev’s “psychological” interpretation of consonance and dissonance, Karasev maintained that while “no one could have the right to argue against the justice of that definition for you personally,” to accept it scientifically would open the door to rampant subjectivism, as it

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107 Karasev's argument is based on the idea that the version of Scriabin’s chord that an audience hears in performance is different than the chord as it would theoretically sound if played according to natural tuning. Since the ratio of intervals in tempered tuning have been modified, even if one accepts that Scriabin’s “Prometheus” chord is theoretically “consonant” within the natural overtone series, it would not be heard in this pure form but rather in an altered, impure and thus dissonant form when played by an orchestra or piano. Sabaneev in fact sidesteps this issue by falling back on the psychological response of the listener. Though he does not here acknowledge it, Sabaneev was in fact concerned by this issue, as is demonstrated by his later articles about the need to create new musical instruments not based on the tempered system.
would then come down to the opinion of the individual listener as to whether or not a chord was a dissonance and, correspondingly, whether it required resolution. The specter of individual relativism, Karasev intimated, loomed in Sabaneev’s theory. In his final, somewhat curt response, Sabaneev fell back on the question of evolution or progress in music. Listeners always made mental “corrections” for tuning errors during a performance and would do the same when listening to Scriabin’s music. Moreover, Karasev was obviously unacquainted with the fact that harmonic perception (vospriiatie) itself evolved. Sabaneev reiterated that no “objective” definition of “resolution” was possible because the idea that a particular chord was “dissonant” and required resolution was itself a subjective expectation on the part of the listener. The concept of “consonance” had shifted over time and Scriabin’s Prometheus Chord was the latest step forward in expanding that concept.  

Anyone who was unable to recognize this advancement was simply out of tune with the progressive trends of social life.

Karasev sought an objective definition of “consonance”, “dissonance” and “resolution” that could be linked to natural, unchanging laws and remained unsatisfied with what he considered the extreme subjectivism of Sabaneev’s theories. For Sabaneev, concepts like “consonant” and “dissonant” were the subjective judgment of the listener, but they sprang from the historical epoch to which he belonged. When one stepped back and examined the historical trajectory followed by music, a trend towards the gradual expansion of the concept of “consonance” was apparent. Scriabin’s music prophetically pointed towards the further development of music and those who were unable to hear this were less “advanced” than those

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109 Karasev was drawing heavily on the expanding field of acoustics for his understanding of musical language. See his reference to Helmholtz in Sabaneev, “K voprosu ob akusticheskikh osnovakh garmonii Skriabina,” 452.
who recognized Scriabin’s genius. Many of these claims were standard defenses raised by the artistic avant-garde in these years. But perhaps most interesting was Sabaneev’s idea that it was the task of the listener to mentally correct shortcomings in instrumental tuning. By assigning the listener a participatory role, Sabaneev extended the creative process itself beyond the composer, making the audience an active participant in musical creation. It pointed to a shared or collective creative process in which both the composer and his audience functioned in cooperation with natural laws governing sound. They were thus united through the experience of musical performance.

Sabaneev extended his theoretical analysis of Scriabin’s music into an entire exposition on the future development of music, the future of which, he argued, lay in “ultrachromaticism”. Sabaneev’s theories ultimately rested upon the image of the individual creative genius as the one who pushed humanity forward. This aspect came out clearly in a second debate, this time between Sabaneev and Arsenii Avraamov in the journal *Muzykal’nyi sovremennik*. Though both Avraamov and Sabaneev shared a view of music’s “progressive” nature, their interpretation of the role of the individual artist in general (and Scriabin in particular) differed dramatically. The debate began when Avraamov described an instrument prototype that would have the ability to play and sustain multiple sounds simultaneously while offering completely free intonation. Once an instrument capable of playing outside the diatonic system was created, “all these ‘acoustical’ considerations will enter into the plan of intuition and pure creation [according to] the measure of facility with the sound material of these new harmonic spheres”.

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110 This is a standard trope for Sabaneev. See Sabaneev, “O “Prometee” Skriabina,” *Golos Moskvy* (March 2, 1911), RGALI f.1720, op.1, ed.khr.563, ll.79-84.


Avraamov, however, the intuitive path that composers would find would be founded on “mathematical and psycho-physiological acoustics: the compass of future musical science.” “With these,” added Avraamov, “it will not be difficult to orient [oneself] in sound spheres of any level of complexity”\textsuperscript{113} Recognizing the crippling effects of modern disunity in music in which each composer sought his own individual path, Avraamov sought to replace the absolutes of the diatonic system with absolutes drawn from science: “What better source of unity [is there for music] than science?” he asked rhetorically.\textsuperscript{114}

For Avraamov, musical “progress” was “possible only insofar as general cultural progress of humanity increased the power of the artist upon the physical characteristics of his material.”\textsuperscript{115}

Thus, it was not the concepts behind art that progressed, but only the amount of control that the artist had upon the material that he used to embody his artistic thoughts. Musical “progress” for Avraamov was intimately linked to scientific understanding of acoustical laws governing music, which served as a basis through which to expand sound combinations. The tempered system of tuning and diatonic relation of notes would be overthrown for a more complex system that better corresponded to the full range of existing sound possibilities. Regarding Scriabin’s place in this process, Avraamov concluded that “the desire to see [Scriabin], at all costs, as some sort of anti-Bach, a destroyer of tempered tuning, a creator of a new system of tones, intuitively understanding the laws of evolution” was faulty in its essence.\textsuperscript{116}

Sabaneev passionately countered this attack on Scriabin’s position as musical visionary, responding that Avraamov was nothing more than a “scientist working with sound” who had

\textsuperscript{113} Avraamov, “Smychkovyi polikhord,” 51.
\textsuperscript{114} Avraamov, “Griadushchaia muzykal’naia nauka i novaia ego istorii muzyki,” \textit{Muzykal’nyi sovremennik} no. 6 (February 1916): 81-98, here 82. Avraamov argued that Scriabin’s music specifically would not benefit from performance on such an instrument. See Arsenii Avraamov, “Smychkovyi polikhord,” \textit{Muzykal’nyi sovremennik} no. 3, 44-52.
\textsuperscript{115} Avraamov, “Griadushchaia muzykal’naia nauka i novaia ego istorii muzyki,” 83.
nothing in common with “artistic contemplation.”” In Avraamov’s theory, Sabaneev claimed, Scriabin (together with Bach and Wagner) appeared as a “destroyer” (vreditel’) who had robbed music of its “purity”. In contrast, Sabaneev argued, the breaking away from the traditional diatonic system did not mean “a return to exact [intervalle] relations or to natural tuning.” Such a return was “artistically unnecessary and thus pointless” since “only a closer approximation [of natural tuning] is needed and desirable”.

The figure of Scriabin loomed large in this debate. Avraamov believed that contemporary music was divided and individualistic, each “warrior” struggling to dominate with his own style. To overcome this division, a new, unified basis was needed to replace the tonal system, which he believed science could best offer. The study of acoustics would found a new musical “Bible” around which composers could gather. This was a direct rejection of Sabaneev’s image of Scriabin as the highest embodiment of musical development. For Avraamov, no single individual was capable of serving as the unifying force. In contrast, Sabaneev argued that progress in music would not come about through scientific study, but through the figure of the individual creative genius, who intuitively combined control of changing musical language with an expression of his own historical milieu. Sabaneev concluded by attacking Avraamov for the very “logical” and “scientific” approach that he would later pride himself on in the Soviet era. “To approach art from the point of view of logic and ‘healthy thought’ (zdravyi smyslia),” Sabaneev argued, “is to not understand it at all, for art does not contain any kind of ‘healthy thought’ in it.”

Still under the sway of Scriabin’s messianic myth, Sabaneev argued, “before all else and after all else, music is secret and mighty magic.”

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117 Sabaneev, “Pis’ma o muzyke,” Muzykal’nyi sovremennik no. 6 (February 1916): 99-108, here 99. The attack appeared in the issue of Muzykal’nyi sovremennik devoted to the composer’s memory (which appeared several months after Scriabin’s death). Sabaneev responded in the following issue.

118 Sabaneev, “Pis’ma o muzyke,” Muzykal’nyi sovremennik no. 6 (February 1916): 99-108, here 104.

119 Sabaneev, “Pis’ma o muzyke,” 106.

120 Sabaneev, “Pis’ma o muzyke,” 99.
claim was as close as Sabaneev would ever come to an open avowal of a theurgic view of music.

Musical society was divided in its response to Sabaneev’s elaborate theoretical arguments in support of Prometheus. Commenting on the debate between Karasev and Sabaneev, the reviewer for Muzyka i zhizn’ suggested that Sabaneev's “psychological consonances” were best compared to children’s fairy tales: just as children could believe in stories without thinking that the characters in them were real, so could people accept Scriabin’s new harmonies if they weren't expected to accept them as “real” consonances.121 Sabaneev’s entire evolutionary concept of the development of human hearing, in this critic’s view, lay outside the realm of reality.

Nevertheless, most commentators were willing to accept Sabaneev’s claim that the chord derived from the overtone series, if not the theurgic and progressive interpretation underpinning it. One notable naysayer to Sabaneev’s claim was Vladimir Rebikov, whose opposition once again was based upon shared philosophical assumptions rather than musical differences.

Vladimir Rebikov had long held his own vision of music’s power to transform life and of his own role as a musical genius within that process. Though he claimed to have ceased listening to the music of other composers years ago, Scriabin’s sudden fame and the extensive debates surrounding the status of the Prometheus Chord attracted his attention. Recognizing in this chord a harmony of his own creation that he had first used years before, Rebikov set out on a personal campaign to claim Scriabin’s purported visionary insight into musical (and spiritual) development as his own.

Having read an article in RMG describing Scriabin as the “creator of fourth chords,” Rebikov immediately fired off a letter to the journal’s editor, Nikolai Findeizen, demonstrating

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121 “These fighters for the ‘ideas’ of Scriabin force one to believe in new consonances, but, before [these consonances] become psychologically true, one must deny true reality.” “Prometei A. Skriabia,” Muzyka i zhizn’ no. 4 (April 1911): 2-4, here 4.
that he had made use of such chords in his own music years earlier. Unconvinced that his claims had been sufficiently recognized (even after his letter was published in *RMG*), Rebikov continued to insist to personal and business correspondents that he was the true discoverer of Scriabin’s harmony based on fourths, pointing to similar harmonies both in his own music and in the music of Claude Debussy. He sought to demonstrate the evolution of the Prometheus Chord from among his own compositions, suggesting that Scriabin’s chord was just the continuation of the process embodied in his own music:

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(5.5)

[Rebikov, Op.16, no.2 (1900)]

(5.6)

[Rebikov: Bezdna (1904, Page 4)]

(5.7)

[Scriabin: Promethean Chord (1911)]

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The emphasis on musical intuition as the driving force pushing human progress forward, together

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122 Rebikov to Findeizen (December 17, 1914), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1766, ll.46-48, l.51. Rebikov also pointed out similar harmonies in Debussy.

123 Vladimir Rebikov to Anna Il’inichna, LRA, MS 606/F.71*
with an emphasis on the creation of “new feelings” was clear in Rebikov’s claims. He did not reject any of the trappings of musical or spiritual progress connected with the Prometheus Chord in contemporary discourse; rather, his objective was simply to be recognized as himself being the “father of musical modernism”. It was the very similarity between Scriabin and Rebikov’s views of music that led to the latter’s bitterness. The wrong composer was being recognized as the “finder” of Orpheus’ lyre.

Rebikov’s claim to be the true creator of this new, “mystical” harmony notwithstanding, it was Scriabin’s music and world-view that intrigued many of his contemporaries, both in Russia and abroad. In his music, it was believed, the sounds of their own future reverberated. However, the future towards which Scriabin’s contemporaries imagined themselves to be striving was ultimately shaped, not on the composer’s own vision of his Mystery, but by the hopes, desires and fears of his audience. In this sense, Scriabin truly came to serve as a symbol of the direction that educated society envisioned Russia to be moving. For this reason, the premiere of Prometheus caused a schism between Scriabin and some of his formerly most ardent supporters. Koptiaev, who a short time before had welcomed Scriabin as the incarnation of Nietzsche’s musical prophet was particularly disappointed. For Koptiaev, Prometheus was a step away from the collective vision that he believed Scriabin had found with his previous works. In his analysis of Scriabin’s pre-Prometheus musical language, Koptiaev had celebrated what he considered the formless, improvisatory nature of his music and the composer’s practice of delaying resolution of dissonance, which he connected with his definition of “Russian formlessness”. Such a

124 Vladimir Rebikov to Anna Il’inichna, LRA, MS 606/F.71*
125 “I assign great importance to the fact that Scriabin loves to draw out cadences... or strives to free himself from the slavery of cadences, giving eternal melody instead”. Koptiaev, “Pevets ekstaza,” 204. Elsewhere, Koptiaev similarly emphasizes the importance of Scriabin’s “freeing himself from the slavery of the cadence.” See Koptiaev, Skriabin: kharakteristiki, 45. In classical Western music, the cadence referred specifically to the chordal progression that ends a musical phrase, a movement from a dissonance to a consonance. Musical theorists classified cadences according to type (perfect, imperfect, deceptive) and the movement of voices within them was strictly controlled by a series of
compositional device was important because it showed that Scriabin was, perhaps unconsciously, freeing music from the “past influence of epoch, nation and place” that cadences expressed.\footnote{Koptiaev, “Pevets ekstaza,” 204. This analysis of the cadence is repeated almost word-for-word in Koptiaev’s 1916 biography, \textit{A.N. Skriabin: kharakteristiki}, 45, though Koptiaev here admitted that his nationalist reading was contrary to Scriabin’s own views.}

Focused so exclusively on his interpretation of the “music of the future” as an expression of immediate emotion (connected to the striving of will), Koptiaev was fundamentally disappointed by Scriabin’s continued harmonic development. Rather than delaying and prolonging cadences, thereby heightening emotional and dramatic tension, in \textit{Prometheus} Scriabin sought to do away with this dissonance-consonance interplay altogether. Again, his critique was couched in the language of individualism. Unlike Scriabin’s earlier works, \textit{Prometheus} did not “draw us with it,” but instead underlined the disconnect between audience and composer.\footnote{“Muzykal’naya kritika o ‘Prometee’,” \textit{Muzyka} no. 23 (May 7, 1911): 496-508, here 504. The original review appeared as A. Koptiaev, \textit{Birzhevie vedomosti}, no. 12215 (March 10, 1911).}

In this development Koptiaev saw, not the unifying figure of genius around which Russians could unite, but a great genius going astray and abandoning his task of speaking to the \textit{narod}. Similar critiques of \textit{Prometheus} were leveled by Schloezer and others, who felt that Scriabin’s compositional path was abandoning the Orphic mission of unifying and transforming Russian society.\footnote{N. Kurov, “Prometei,” \textit{Teatr} (March 6, 1911), preserved in RGALI f.1720, op.1, ed.khr.563, ll. 65-68.}

Other contemporaries interpreted Scriabin’s music and ideas as fundamentally positive in its effect on their lives. Music critic Iulii Engel argued that this “poet of God’s goodness” (Scriabin) could “through the strength of his internal concentration” not only cause others to “perceive the dream created by him as something real” but in fact could “infect others with it...
Such an observation was reflected in the responses of many of Scriabin’s friends to his music and worldview. Several of Scriabin’s immediate acquaintances actively supported his planned trip to India and planned to accompany the composer to find an appropriate place for the Mystery to be performed. Viacheslav Ivanov, disheartened by his “realization of isolation” in the crisis of literary Symbolism in 1910, found a new embodiment of his own collective visions in Scriabin. His blossoming friendship with the composer confirmed to him that such dreams were, perhaps, not futile. In Ivanov’s assessment, Scriabin’s “theoretical expression (polozhenie) of sobornost’ and of choral action. . . differed from my expectations (chaianie) only insofar as they were, for [Scriabin], an immediate, practical task.” In Ivanov’s assessment, Scriabin was specifically identified as the musical Orpheus, seeking to give voice to new, communal creativity.

This positive force was also experienced by Dr. V.V. Bogorodskii, who sustained himself from despair in the midst of a cholera outbreak in the southern part of the Russian Empire by reflecting upon his extensive conversations with Scriabin, whose acquaintance he had made in 1910:

I live in part through remembering the trip on the Volga. . . [remembering] you, dear Aleksandr Nikolaevich. . . our conversations. . . about truth. . . where is it? Which one of us is right? I would like to become better acquainted with your world-views. I am not at all acquainted with those tendencies that you represent. I have travelled a lot. [I have] been interested in many people. Many pass by – acquaintances come and go. But I have to admit that acquaintance with you remains a fact of great interest for me.

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130 Alfred Laliberte to Aleksandr Scriabin (September 27, 1910), GTsMMK f.31, no.704, l.2.
131 Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed.khr. 32 (December 1915); RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.38, l.10.
132 This was brought about by the sheer lack of interest in his 1910 conflict with Andrei Belyi over the future of Russian Symbolism. Viacheslav Ivanov discussed the larger significance of Scriabin’s envisioned Mystery at length after the composer’s death. See RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed.khr. 32 (“Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo”); RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed.khr. 40 (Rech’, posviashchennaia pamiati A.N. Skriabina); RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed.khr. 33 “Skriabin, kak natsional’nii kompozitor”; IRLI f.607, no.179 (“Skriabin i dukh revolutsii”); IRLI f.607, no.178. (“Iz chernovikov stat’i o Skriabine”). Three of these speeches were collected for republication as a monograph in 1919, which was never published See V.I. Ivanov, *Scriabin* (Petrograd: Alkonost, [1919]), RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.38.
133 GTsMMK f.31, no.648, l.1ob-2.
Scriabin’s personal friendship with Margarita Morozova had a similar impact. Struggling to adapt to her husband’s recent death, her relationship with the composer was the cornerstone in her search for continued meaning in life.\textsuperscript{134} Similarly, the composer’s private performances and the home of Princess Marina Nikolaevna Gagarina, though lacking much of the extravagance found in other late Imperial artistic circles, were marked by an unwavering seriousness of intent on the part of both composer and audience, a fact noted by the young poetess Nina Serpinskaia:

> It was clear that it was beyond the Princess’s means to provide a hot meal [at the concerts], and in the intermission tea with sandwiches and cookies was served. But the tone of the concerts was serious and content-filled. . . the hostess forgot herself and didn’t notice [the modest circumstances], while her inspired face and distracted gaze. . . invisibly led all the experiences of those gathered. With his music, Scriabin made everything around purer, deeper, more meaningful. Triviality fell silent and vanished. People who had grown cold, already unfit for any expansiveness in life, unwillingly opened themselves to the pathos of the author of the Poem of Ecstasy.\textsuperscript{135}

For all these contemporaries, Scriabin’s music offered a deeper emotional and spiritual experience than that available in everyday life. It was, in a sense, extraordinary.

For many, Scriabin symbolized the potential of a better life: music critics repeatedly emphasized the positive nature of Scriabin’s music as an overcoming of previous human limitations. It was argued that through rejecting the minor key (the traditional musical expression of sadness), Scriabin’s music embraced a bright future for humanity.\textsuperscript{136} Even the composer’s envisioned apocalypse was one that emphasized light and unity. While the concerns and divisions of the modern world needed to be overcome, the future appeared bright with promise.

With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, this vision of salvation seemed immanent.

\textsuperscript{134} When Scriabin (who generally disliked the role of piano instructor) attempted to bring their piano lessons to a close, Morozova burst into tears, telling the composer that these lessons were the only thing that gave her life meaning. Abashed by her emotion, Scriabin agreed to continue to teach her. Morozova, “Vospominaniiia o Skriabine,” ll.45-46.

\textsuperscript{135} Serpinskaia, “Memuary intelligentii dvukh epokh,” RGALI f.1463, op.1, ed. khr.9, l.105.

\textsuperscript{136} Scriabin’s musical innovations (including his reputed ‘transcendence of the minor’) were in fact part of a broader development in musical language over the preceding fifty years. See William Kinderman and Harald Krebs, eds., The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).
From a contemporary perspective, the appeal of Scriabin’s apocalyptic dream is difficult to grasp. In the context of the time, however, it is comprehensible. Feeling the lack of a unified society, Nietzsche’s orphans sought it in unorthodox places. Because of music’s specific physical qualities, it was viewed as the art form in which collective action could best occur. This, together with a widely shared view of music’s appeal to human emotion and underlying irrational impulses made it an ideal form in which unity might be enacted. Scriabin’s own artistic vision interacted productively with these broader concerns, culminating in the formation of a group of disciples: people who did not necessarily espouse his particular vision of the future, but who themselves longed for some kind of social and cultural transformation through music. In the end, as Leonid Sabaneev expressed poignantly, Scriabin became the “sort of genius that ‘I needed’”\(^{137}\): a musical genius who embodied the unifying aspirations of all Nietzsche’s orphans.

\(^{137}\) Sabaneev, *Vospominaniiia o Skriabine*, 34. A similar view was expressed in Aleksandr Brianchaninov’s April 2, 1916 speech to the Petrograd Scriabin society, reflecting on Scriabin’s death: “For many of us, Scriabin was a revelation (*otkrovenie*) specifically because he could realistically make us feel the unreal, other-worldly, horrible and bright, *which we experience in ourselves*, but which we do not understand and sometimes do not feel, due to the limited means of our perceptions.” A.N. Brianchaninov, “Neskol’no slov o zadaniakh skriabinskikh obschestv,” Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoie obschestvo. *Izvestiia* no.1 (Petrograd: 1916): 1-9, here 7 (emphasis added).
CHAPTER SIX: MUSIC AND NATION

THE MEDTNER BROTHERS AND THE MISSION OF ORPHEUS

In his youth, Nikolai Karlovich Medtner (1880-1951), a Moscow composer of Baltic German descent, developed a life-long habit of writing down in his musical notebook new melodic fragments and themes that occurred to him at moments of creative inspiration. These fragments served as the melodic basis of his compositions, which he then would weave together, creating the fabric of a musical work. However, by 1918, these musical motifs had acquired a far more sinister guise in a recurring nightmare that came to haunt the composer. Waking at night in a fever, he would see these musical fragments entering his bedroom, where they clustered together threateningly in a corner, mocking him with their sheer number and disunity. “In such cases,” his wife Anna recounted, “he would call out for help to drive ‘them’ away (it was always some kind of ‘them’). . . when he had almost come to himself, he continued to insist that ‘they’ had entered [the room] and were standing there in the corner, and that [I] hadn’t driven them away. . .”¹ Surrounded by these aural phantoms, he would cry out: “the whole point is unity. What shall I do with this multiplicity?”² Disunity and chaos seemed to have penetrated into the most personal spaces of Nikolai’s life. The very melodies that had come to him in moments of creative inspiration now haunted him. Already in 1917, Nikolai had felt a foreboding of this catastrophe, mourning to his friend, the philosopher Ivan Il’in that “I myself am filled only with the shadows of unfinished creations.”³ These musical fragments took on an independent existence, dwelling in a creative netherworld, neither fully formed nor able to fall silent. In his inability to weave them together into a musical composition, Nikolai saw the embodiment of his

³ Nikolai Metner to Ivan Il’in (July 12, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.4735, l.1ob.
failure to fulfill the true calling of the composer: transforming chaos and disunity into form through music.\footnote{Medtner believed that this transformation was the purpose of musical composition. See A.N. Aleksandrov, “Nezabyvaemye vstrechi,” in Apetian, ed., \textit{N.K. Metner: Stat'i, materialy, vospominaniia}, 94-104, here 99. In conversation with Sergei Rachmaninoff regarding Blok’s “The Twelve,” Nikolai further argued that no composer (or artist) should call forth chaos if he didn’t have power to calm it. See Anna Medtner, “Dnevnik-pis’ma A.M. Metnera,” in Apetian, ed., \textit{N.K. Metner: Stat'i, materialy, vospominaniia}, 213-239, here 218-219.}

In order to make interpretive sense of Nikolai’s nightmare, a broader understanding of the associations between music and society in late Imperial Russian life is required. At the turn of the twentieth century, the search for a musical Orpheus (a composer capable of reuniting a broken society) captured the imagination of many members of Russia’s educated society (\textit{obshchestvennost’}). Drawing upon Nietzsche’s vision of the Dionysian, unifying power of music, these Russian orphans of Nietzsche integrated his interpretation of contemporary life and music into a general discourse concerning the increasing divisions they saw emerging in modern society. In this way, the philosopher’s critique of nineteenth-century German culture was combined with a widespread sense of Russia’s unique historical purpose. While many of Aleksander Scriabin’s followers had turned to an image of societal unity based on shared ideals of human progress and Russian/Pan Slav sentiment (as demonstrated in previous chapters), such a basis was not universally accepted as the true path that music and society as a whole should follow.

Nikolai Medtner embodied an alternate view of cultural unity in response to the challenges of a rapidly modernizing society. His comparatively strict adherence to classical musical tradition interacted positively with the broader musical metaphysics of the day to create an alternate vision of musical salvation. In place of the emphasis on human progress and Russian nationalism that surrounded discourse on Scriabin, Medtner’s music provoked questions about the very meaning of concepts like progress, tradition and national identity. Due to his mixed
intellectual background (German and Russian), many of Nikolai’s supporters believed that he symbolized the unifying of Nietzsche’s “German” heritage with the purity of Russian spiritual life. In Nikolai’s art, Nietzsche’s orphans might find reconciliation with a father from whom they were separated by national attributes and Russia might take on its rightful role as the leader of a pan-European cultural transformation, reuniting the social and spiritual bonds shattered by modern life.

For all these Orphic expectations, Nikolai’s recurring nightmare, together with his personal papers and letters, expresses the worldview of a soul in conflict. After having participated in the creation of a view, widespread in late Imperial Russia, in which music was seen as both a unifying and salvific force, Nikolai was then forced to confront the collapse of his metaphysical worldview in the years between 1914 and 1921. While the impact of both the Great War and the 1917 Revolutions reverberated throughout educated Russian society, Nikolai felt them with particular keenness because he sought to unite the German and Russian cultural traditions in his own life and work. In the end, both his spiritual homelands were lost: war with Germany stifled Nikolai’s creative strength, causing him to increasingly doubt his own artistic calling, his self-imposed exile from the fledgling Soviet Union deprived him of his Russian motherland (rodina), and he discovered life in contemporary Germany to be as distant from his creative spirit as the experimental culture in Soviet Russia. His Orphic mission had failed, and Nietzsche’s Russian children found themselves orphans once again.

This chapter examines Nikolai Medtner’s place amid the vibrant cultural life of Silver Age Russia. I argue that his views on music were fundamentally shaped by the historical context in which he lived, leading him to embrace the Orphic image of the composer’s task in contemporary life. By selecting Nikolai Medtner as their emblem of unity, members of the
Russian cultural elite (led in part by the composer’s elder brother, the cultural critic and literary Symbolist Emil Medtner) chose an alternate artistic response to the problems facing contemporary Russia, one that rejected the chimera of progress for the re-establishment of eternal laws underpinning life and art. The spiritual truth and power embodied in Nikolai’s music, his supporters argued, might serve to transform existing reality into something higher, thereby overcoming the gap that existed between educated society and the narod.\(^5\) Put into the symbolic language of the time, Nikolai was the true claimant to the lyre of Orpheus, who would mend the divisions of Russian society and life through his music. It was the prospect of having failed in this unifying mission that haunted Nikolai after 1918. The plethora of musical fragments, huddled into a corner of Nikolai’s bedroom, embodied the disunity that he feared had triumphed in Russian culture and society. This failure was not an individual one, but the failure of an entire vision for a better future.

Like other composers, the reception of Nikolai Medtner’s creative output was interpreted through a broader intellectual shift occurring at the time: the emergence of an increasingly nationalistic (russkii) worldview in opposition to an imperial (rossiskii) one.\(^6\) The contemporary preoccupation with defining true musical “Russianness” was particularly striking in relation to the figure of Nikolai Medtner.\(^7\) While pre-revolutionary critics often dismissed Nikolai as a “German” composer, both Soviet musicologists and Russian émigré audiences later embraced the “fundamentally Russian” basis of his creative output. In contrast to such attempts to uncover

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\(^6\) See Jeremy King’s approach to a similar shift in the Habsburg Empire: “The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Beyond,” in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1949 to the Present*, ed. by Maria Becur and Nancy M. Wingfield (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2001), 112-152.

\(^7\) The “national question” existed in relation to earlier composers like the so-called “Mighty Five,” but the early twentieth century was unique in its emphasis on discovering what “true” Russian music was through ethnographic research. See Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (Yale University Press, 2008).
the innate “Germanness” or “Russianness” in Nikolai’s compositional style, I seek to uncover the worldview underpinning these categories in the late Imperial Russian context, connecting them with broader questions of music’s relationship to social and cultural life and ultimately with a growing nationalist discourse.\(^8\) I argue that Nikolai’s views do not fit comfortably into the emerging nationalist (russkii) discourse, embodying instead an “Imperial” (rossiisskii) ideal in which national elements served merely to add color to what he considered “universal” laws governing music and life. In the latter view, the fact that musical laws were themselves historically derived from Germanic musical tradition merely demonstrated the temporal discovery of absolutes, thereby negating the need to search for a uniquely “Russian” compositional voice.\(^9\) This view became increasingly distant from the realities confronting members of Russian educated society at the time, with growing national allegiances gradually replacing an older, Imperial image of musical citizenship that Nikolai had inherited.

This chapter is divided into three sections. After a brief biographical introduction to the lives of Nikolai and his influential elder brother Emil, I offer a close analysis of their philosophical worldview and its impact on Nikolai’s compositional style. The third section points toward the inherent problems that emerged as this worldview came to be branded with contradictory, nationalistic labels. The two brothers found themselves increasingly divided along the same nationalistic lines that their musical metaphysics had intended to overcome.

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\(^8\) Such an approach was suggested by Carl Dahlhaus, who argued that “it is possible to regard nationality... as a quality which rests primarily in the meaning invested in a piece of music or a complex of musical characteristics by a sufficient number of the people who make and hear the music.” See Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 91-92. My understanding of these terms is derived from extensive reading of the pre-Revolutionary musical press, including such journals as *Zolotoe Runo, Vesy, Pereval, Apollon, Trudy i dni, Muzyka, Muzyka i zhizn’, Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik,* and *RMG.*

\(^9\) Numerous musicologists have demonstrated the historical construction of German classical music as “universal” in nature. However, Nikolai Medtner embraced this vision of music, a view that affected his own aesthetic and creative decisions. Thus, regardless of the constructed nature of this definition of music, the historian must consider it as a serious factor in shaping the worldview in question. On the category of “German music” as inherently universal, see Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
Pages from the Lives of Two Brothers

“Emil Karlovich [Medtner] has a brother, Nikolai, who composes music. . . a wonderful pianist and composer. He is the creation of Emil Karlovich.”¹⁰ With this less than complimentary introduction, Andrei Belyi opened his Soviet-era account of his personal relationship with Emil and Nikolai Medtner. To the mature Belyi, Nikolai might very well have appeared to be the “creation” of his elder brother, Emil. Once Belyi’s close friend, mentor and publisher, Emil Medtner later became one of the writer’s harshest critics.¹¹ Emil Medtner was equally passionate as friend or enemy, and his eventual animosity towards Belyi was as strident as his initial support had been all encompassing.¹² Nikolai Medtner, with whom Belyi first became acquainted through Emil, stood partially outside this friendship and its bitter conclusion, but was unquestionably affected by it. It is within this charged atmosphere that Belyi’s initial embrace and subsequent dismissal of Nikolai Medtner must be understood. As early as 1903, Belyi had endorsed Nikolai’s music in the warmest terms, hailing the young composer not merely as a “creator” (sozidatel’), but as a “composer-theurgist” (teurg),¹³ singling him out as “possibly the

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¹⁰ Andrei Belyi, Nachalo veka (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1933), 89. Belyi attributed this actual statement to Petrovskii.

¹¹ The dispute between the two men ran its course in a series of polemical book publications, in which each author attacked the other’s personal worldview and scholarly reputation, as well as in ongoing philosophical and personal debates that extended beyond the two men to the broader educated circles in which they moved. See Emil Metner, Razmyshlenie o Gete (Moscow: Musaget, 1914); Andrei Belyi, Rudol’f Shteiner i Gete v mirovozzrenii sovremennosti (1917); this topic was a common theme in letters between Emil Medtner and Anna Medtner (LC Medtner correspondence).

¹² The story of the doomed friendship between the two men, together with its possible psychological basis, is explored in Magnus Ljunggren, The Russian Mephisto: a study of the life and work of Emil Medtner (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1994). See also Ada Steinberg, Word and Music in the Novels of Andrey Bely (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 38-40 for a discussion of the influence the Medtner circle had on Andrei Belyi’s musical taste. For a third-party assessment of Belyi’s friendship with Nikolai Medtner, see N. V. Shtember, “Iz vospominanii o N.K. Metner,” in Apetian, ed., N.K. Metner: Stati, materialy, vospominanii, 82-93.

¹³ Andrei Belyi, Arabeski, 373. Andrei Belyi, Zolotoe runo no. 4 (1906); ibid., “O teurgii,” Novyi put’ no. 9 (1903): 100-123, here 114. Belyi’s laudatory assessment of Nikolai echoes that given in his personal letters to Emil. See Andrei Belyi to Emil Medtner (November 17, 1902) RGB f.167, p.1, l.2; (April 9, 1903) RGB f.167, p.1, l.13. Excerpts from both letters appear in Nikolai Metner, Pis’ma, ed. by Z.A. Apetian (Moscow: Sovetski kompozitor, 1973), 42-43. Through his friendship with Emil, Belyi entered into an acquaintance with Nikolai, whom he continued to visit in Emil’s absence. See Metner, Pis’ma, 40, 46-47, 52. Belyi originally proposed to write an article
only Russian composer who affirms rather than destroys life,”¹⁴ whose music evoked that “flight of incommunicable (neskazannye) charms. . . that are appearing in the religious consciousness of our days.”¹⁵ Such extravagant praise was echoed by others members of Russia’s educated elite. In a series of passionate letters to the composer, Sergei Durylin insisted that Nikolai’s songs were “truly the key to life-creation (zhiznetvorchestvo) and [to] resurrection.”¹⁶ Within this context, Belyi’s subsequent interpretation of Nikolai’s place in late Imperial Russian culture as a construct of his elder brother demonstrates an attempt to deconstruct this earlier process of myth-creation in which he had taken active part. While Nikolai was not purely the “creation” of his brother Emil, the image painted around his name in pre-revolutionary Russia was deeply indebted to Emil’s active support of his musical talent.

To understand the “Medtner myth” as it emerged in late Imperial Russia, one must first recognize the constant and mutual influence that existed between Emil and Nikolai. Emil Medtner was a central figure in Russian Symbolism, though due to his limited literary output, he has generally been neglected in contemporary literary studies.¹⁷ His personal correspondence with many of the leading figures of the Russian Silver Age, his close friendship with Andrei Belyi, his founding of the Symbolist publishing house Musaget (and the related journal devoted to contemporary German philosophy, Logos), while often acknowledged, have seldom been the focus of extensive research. He was, moreover, one of the central musical critics of the day, publishing articles specifically devoted to music in numerous Symbolist journals, including

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¹⁴ Belyi, Arabeski (Munich:, Wilhelm Fink, 1969, first published Moscow, 1911), 373.
¹⁵ Belyi, Arabeski, 374.
¹⁶ Durylin to Nikolai Medtner, (February 5, b.d.), GTsMMK f.132, no.1942-43, l.1-1ob. Similarly, Durylin later wrote to Nikolai, “freedom! In one word, freedom is what we receive from you.” See GTsMMK f.132, no.1942-43, l.7 (April 21, b.d.).
¹⁷ One exception to this is Ljunggren, The Russian Mephisto. Emil Medtner is also briefly discussed in William Richardson, Zolotoe Runo and Russian Modernism, 1905-1910 (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986).
Zolotoe runo and his own journal, Trudy i dni. Many of these articles were collected into a 1912 book entitled Modernizm i muzyka (Modernism and music), generally recognized as one of the central critical works of the time devoted to music. Emil took care to separate his musical persona from his literary one, publishing all his musical writings under the name “Vol’fing,” a pseudonym derived from Richard Wagner’s Ring cycle and initially suggested by Andrei Belyi.

Nikolai Medtner, eight years younger than Emil, demonstrated prodigious musical talent at an early age, enrolling in the Moscow Conservatory at the age of twelve. While his parents did not approve of his choice of music as a profession, Emil took his side, and together the two brothers persuaded their parents of the wisdom of this choice. A similar situation occurred when, after graduation, Nikolai decided to abandon a promising career as a concert pianist and devote himself to composition. Such a career held little or no material promise in Imperial Russian society; moreover, the young Nikolai had majored in performance rather than composition at the Conservatory. Outside his immediate family, few even knew of his compositional activities. However, once again with Emil’s support, Nikolai prevailed upon his parents, and devoted himself to a compositional career. This would remain his primary focus throughout his life, with various stints as a music professor serving primarily as a means of financial support.

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18 While the important place of this book has been acknowledged on numerous occasions, there has been little attention devoted to examining it specifically.
19 Andrei Belyi, Nachalo veka. Emil himself explained the significance of the pseudonym in a 1932 letter to Sergei Rachmaninov: “Vol’fing is a pseudonym. The christening father of that pseudonym was Andrei Belyi, who was the editor of Zolotoe Runo in 1906, when I was invited to work there (of course not as a born (prisiazhnyi) musical critic, but [a critic] of aesthetics and literature in general. Not being a musician and being myself the brother of two musicians, I did not want to sign these articles about music with my own name. I was not able to think of my own pseudonym and I warned Belyi of this, asking him only to warn me ahead of time, what occurred to him. It seems that my first article in Zolotoe runo was about Wagner. From this came “Vol’fing” (Wolfing was the nickname of Sigmund). I did not object.” Emil Medtner to Sergei Rachmaninoff (Zurich, April 1932), LC Medtner correspondence.
20 Ironically, the year Nikolai enrolled in the Conservatory was the same year that both Scriabin and Rachmaninoff graduated. For a thorough account of Nikolai Medtner’s life and work, see Christoph Flamm, Der russische Komponist Nikolaj Metner (Berlin: Ernst Kuhn, 1995).
Whether Emil was initially aware of it or not, his close relationship with his younger brother extended to a shared love interest: Anna Bratenshi. Anna, the younger sister of Mariia Bratenshi (a schoolfriend of Nikolai and Emil’s sister Sofiia), was a trained violinist and singer with whom Nikolai became romantically involved while both were students at the Moscow Conservatory.\textsuperscript{21} However, a marriage between the two was not forthcoming, probably due in part to objections of Nikolai’s parents to the match (Anna was two years older than Nikolai). After Nikolai left for a concert tour of Europe, Anna and Emil grew closer, a relationship that was crowned by their marriage in 1902.\textsuperscript{22} While the personal details of Anna’s relationship with Emil remain unclear, Nikolai and Anna once again became romantically involved after the former’s return from Europe.\textsuperscript{23} Whether in order to avoid scandal or due to a deeply-felt personal connection, Emil, Nikolai and Anna lived together for the next six years, undertaking extensive trips to Europe as a threesome on numerous occasions. After Emil’s departure abroad to undergo psychoanalytic therapy with Carl Jung, he granted Anna a divorce in 1915. She and Nikolai celebrated their formal wedding in 1919.\textsuperscript{24}

Emil’s devotion of considerable time and energy to his younger brother’s prodigious musical talent was based on his conviction that music was the most important art form in the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item At this time, Nikolai had become engaged to someone else. His parents had discouraged his attachment to Anna, who was seemingly a more appropriate match for Emil. Martyn, \textit{Medtner}, 14-15.
\item Margarita Morozova cited a rumor that Emil’s relationship with Anna was purely platonic, a formal agreement by which he was able to “give” Anna to her true love, Nikolai, despite potential familial objections. She added that Emil never specifically told her this, but knowing his love for his brother and his own pessimistic view toward his own personal life, she acknowledged it as “possible”. See RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.11, ll.15-17. This interpretation has been generally favored by biographers of Nikolai Medtner, both in the Soviet Union and in the English-speaking world. A less self-sacrificing view of Emil’s relationship with Anna is suggested in the set of Goethe songs dedicated to Anna and Emil as a wedding gift by Nikolai. If read as a subjective, biographical document expressing Nikolai’s own feelings about the marriage, these songs suggest a deep-seated emotional torment. Similarly, Ljunggren suggests that Emi and Anna’s relationship was far from “platonic” in nature. Anna’s continuing close friendship with Emil was later given the latter interpretation by Emil’s fiancée, Hedwig. Anna’s continuing emotional intimacy with Emil is testified to by her voluminous correspondence with the latter, held at RGB and LC.
\item Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (June 7/20, 1920) [LC letter, reprinted in Metner, \textit{Pis’ma}, 185-187].
\end{thebibliography}
contemporary world. For the same reason, Emil took upon himself the task of serving as his younger brother’s intellectual guide in the realm of philosophy and literature, particularly in his interpretation of the German tradition (Kant, Nietzsche and especially Goethe). Emil claimed that the two European “souls” most closely related were the Russian and the German. In Emil’s interpretation of Nietzsche, they embodied the two creative aspects, Dionysian and Apollonian. Emil argued that Nietzsche’s aesthetics had been deeply misunderstood in Russia; the ecstatic, Dionysian (and Russian) side had been overemphasized at the expense of the formal, Apollonian (and German) side. For Nietzsche’s prophetic call to be fulfilled, a balance between Dionysian and Apollonian, between German and Russian natures, was needed. At the same time that he enjoyed his elder brother’s intellectual counsel, Nikolai served as Emil’s guide in the world of music, giving his elder brother lessons in music theory and composition. Thus, despite his acknowledged shortcomings in musical training, Emil developed strong views on contemporary musical life, shaped both by his brother’s creative talent and his own philosophical musings.

Due to the close personal relationship between Nikolai and Emil, any attempt to clearly delineate between their philosophical world-views faces obvious difficulties. In addition to the close artistic and intellectual interchange between the two brothers, Emil’s prodigious writing on Russian culture in the final years of the Empire contrasts with a very small literary output from Nikolai; his single attempt to clearly lay out his philosophical and aesthetic worldview (entitled *Muza i moda*) was published only in 1935, by which time the society and culture that helped produce most of his creative work had irrevocably vanished. Nevertheless, close study of Nikolai’s letters and personal papers demonstrate a remarkable consistency of thought.

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25 A self-defined “Germanophile,” Emil sought to extend his cult of Goethe to numerous Russian artists and intellectuals, including (in addition to Nikolai) Andrei Belyi, Sergei Bulgakov, Viacheslav Ivanov and Ivan Il’in. See RGB f.167.16.14.
26 RGB f.167.13.12, l.13.
27 As a result, most of his personal correspondence was carried out by his wife Anna, who for many years maintained an almost daily correspondence with Emil as well as with Nikolai’s other friends and family members.
throughout his lifetime; concepts in his 1935 book appear with almost identical terminology in letters dating from years earlier. Moreover, Emil Medtner’s own polemical series of articles on music, published in 1912 under the name *Modernizm i muzyka*, elicited the amazed observation from Sergei Rachmaninoff that the views expressed in this pre-revolutionary work were, in many respects, identical to those stated years later by Nikolai Medtner.28

Although Emil Medtner extensively developed his philosophical interpretation of music’s metaphysical meaning, he felt ill at ease dealing with specific questions of music theory or formal technique. It was in this realm that he deferred to the knowledge of his brother, Nikolai.29 By contrast, as a trained musician rather than a philosopher, Nikolai developed his ideas most explicitly in connection with his concept of the “initial melody,” leaving the broader theorizing of the significance of music and art to his brother. By combining both brothers’ interpretations, a well-developed philosophical aesthetic, dealing both with questions of compositional specifics and metaphysical symbolism, emerges.30 It is to closer analysis of their views on contemporary music and culture that we now turn.

28 This observation was linked in part to Rachmaninoff’s own changing aesthetic views. He had summarily dismissed Emil Medtner’s book when it appeared in 1912. However, reading Nikolai Medtner’s manuscript, he found many ideas that were markedly similar to his own views on art in the interwar period, prompting him to offer to publish the latter’s manuscript. See Emil Medtner to Sergei Rachmaninoff (November 2, 1931); (April 1932), LC Medtner correspondence. For Anna Medtner’s account of Rachmaninoff’s response to Nikolai’s book, see A.M. Metner: K istorii izdanii *Muza i moda*, GTsMMK, f.132, no.1789 (October 21, 1957). For a recent assessment of the Medtner brothers’ ideas on music, see Denis Lomtev, *Die Deutschen in der russischen Musikwissenschaft* (Lage: Robert Burlau, 2008)

29 Emil Medtner to Sergei Rachmaninoff (April 1932), LC Medtner correspondence.

30 In constructing this overview of Emil and Nikolai’s musical metaphysics, Nikolai’s views have been reconstructed drawing upon his book *The Muse and Fashion*, together with personal correspondences (both his own and those acquainted with him), personal notebooks, reminiscences by family and friends and his musical compositions themselves. The writings of his brother Emil have been used both in establishing the latter’s own philosophical views on music, as well as to flesh out ideas existing in Nikolai’s own thought, based on an understanding of the close intellectual relationship between the two men. Care has been taken to clarify main distinctions between the worldview of each man, most specifically in relation to issues of nationality. Nikolai’s views tended more toward a universal, Christian outlook, in contrast to Emil’s specifically national and ultimately racial interpretation of culture. These distinctions grew more obvious after the outbreak of the Great War, while by the end of his life Emil was an early supporter of Hitler, while Nikolai’s continued relationship with Russian émigrés, as well as with the Russian Orthodox Church in exile eventually led to his conversion to Russian
The Philosopher and the Composer: Music as Cultural Critique

*In the beginning was song* - Nikolai Medtner.\(^{31}\)

While both brothers had a distinct interpretation of music’s relation to contemporary life, it was Emil Medtner who voiced this connection most explicitly. As a cultural critic, Emil was convinced that music was the quintessential art of the modern age and that it was the musician’s task to guide contemporary spiritual and cultural life. Music was the area of cultural activity in which the divisions of modernity were most keenly felt, and where, it was to be hoped, these divisions could also be overcome. For these reasons, he actively sought to elicit contemporary debate over specifically musical questions, believing that debates over musical “modernism” would provide the basis for understanding the social and cultural ills plaguing contemporary Russia.\(^{32}\) In a 1907 letter to fellow Symbolist Ellis (Lev Kobyinskii), Emil claimed that “the question of new music seems to me to be one of the most important tasks of modern culture and,

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Orthodoxy, interpreted by other members of the émigré community as a sign of his fundamentally Russian, rather than German, roots.


\(^{32}\) Emil Medtner to Ellis (January 25-27, 1907), RGB f.167.6.1, l.1-1ob. Emil further complains about the lack of space in existing periodicals to introduce such a polemic, since “*Zolotoe runo* apparently has no intention of expanding its musical section.”, l.1ob. Emil further pursued his attempt to start a musical “polemic” with the 1912 publication of *Modernizm i muzyka* and was disappointed at the lack of published responses from musicians (who provided primarily oral feedback, with the exception of Leonid Sabaneev) and from literary figures (apart from Ivanov, Chudovskii and Shaginian). See Emil Medtner to Viacheslav Ivanov (December 25/12, 1912), RGB f.109.29.97, l.19ob. Emil sent out copies of *Modernizm i muzyka* to all his acquaintances in the musical world (including Scriabin and Sabaneev). On at least one occasion, he even handed out a copy to an unknown woman with whom he entered into discussion on music. See Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (1914) RGB f.167.25.28, l.51. For Sabaneev’s response to the book, which Emil had personalized with the message “to my respected opponent,” see Sabaneev to Scriabin (June 19-20, 1912), GTsMMK f.31, no.745, ll.1-1ob. Scriabin’s copy, with Emil’s dedication, is preserved in GTsMMK f.31, no.615: “To the great artist Aleksandr Nikolaevich Scriabin with a feeling of love and delight and in the name of that higher truth that unites us who think differently” (“Великому артисту Александру Николаевичу Скрябину с чувством любви и восхищения и во имя того высшего, что нас, разномышлящих, соединяет.”)
moreover, one of the sharpest, calling for immediate resolution in one way or another.”33 This was because “at the present time, not a single art suffers from such a sharp decline as music.”34 It was undoubtedly due to this broader interpretation of music’s significance that Emil struggled to learn basic music theory and often lamented his lack of skill in music, envisioning his “true” creative calling to have been that of a conductor. Recognizing his own failing in this area, he resigned himself to being, in Andrei Belyi’s words, a “conductor of souls,” directing the creative impulses of others, particularly his younger brother.35

Both Nikolai and Emil were in agreement on the ultimate aim of music: the artistic embodiment of a single, Absolute Truth, existing outside time and space, which gave rise to multiple incarnations in the temporal world. Music was both a path through which access to Absolute Truth could be achieved (through intuitive experience awakened by a musical work), and a symbol of the underlying unity that existed only in Absolute Truth (which lay outside the temporal, individualistic divisions of contemporary society).36 For both brothers, music thus served as a link between the temporal and eternal realms. But what sort of link did music provide? What precisely was its symbolic import? To determine this more precisely, we now turn to a closer examination of each brother’s interpretation of music’s symbolic significance.

**The Meaning of Music: Interpreting the Musical Symbol**

In his aesthetic worldview, Nikolai Medtner consistently granted music, particularly melody, a mystical, even metaphysical significance. One of the central concepts undergirding his

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33 Emil Medtner to Ellis (January 25, 1907), RGB f.167.6.1, l.1. Similarly, in the foreword to Modernizm i muzyka, Emil stated that his decision to write the book stemmed from his “certainty that the majority of specialists and amateurs were too easygoing (legkomyslenno) towards the darkening of contemporary musical and in part of all artistic consciousness”. Vol’fing [Emil Medtner], Modernizm i muzyka (Moscow: Musaget, 1912), ii.
34 Vol’fing [Emil Metner], Modernizm i muzyka, 84.
35 This account appears in Ljunggren, Russian Mephisto, 15. The original source is Belyi, Nachala veka, 92.
36 Nikolai’s concept of “initial melody” (a melody that embodied within itself all the potential musical compositions that could spring forth from it, thereby symbolizing the multiplicity within unity that was also the essence of Absolute Truth) fits here. Similarly, Emil viewed music as one potential path towards understanding the “Absolute Idea,” with the other potential path being that of rational inquiry.
interpretation of musical language was his idea of “initial melody” or “initial song,” an idea that grew out of his devotion to both Christian and Platonic metaphysics. In Platonic terminology, the “initial melody” was the absolute form of music, in which all imperfect, earthly music partook. Earthly music strove to approach this initial melody, but inescapably tied to the physical realm, it could never fully attain the pure expression of the Form of music. The remembrance of an initial, heavenly melody inspired composers to creative action as they sought to recall and give voice to the echo of it that sounded in their “internal hearing”. Just as in Plato’s cave metaphor, it was the duty of those who had been exposed to the bright light of day to return to the darkness of the cave in which their fellow humans were chained, in order to share with those less fortunate a shadowy reflection of the truth they had seen outside. This communication of higher truth took place, in Nikolai’s view, through musical composition. Musical creativity was based upon knowledge of this initial, mystical song, which was itself achieved through remembrance (in the Platonic sense) of the eternal. An individual composition was an attempt to mirror this initial melody, however imperfectly, in the temporal realm.

This initial melody served as the irrational parallel to what Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev had considered the rational biblical concept of logos. Both the initial melody and logos, like Platonic forms, existed eternally outside space and time. However, they served also as means through which spiritual insight could be gained. Initial melody and logos thus


39 This type of conceptualization of an initial, perfect form also formed the basis of nineteenth-century Christian bourgeois thought, in which the modern age was indicative of the degeneration of culture from an initially purer state. For more on this concept, see Karl Lowith, From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Richard Noll, The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement (1997).
represented two potential paths (irrational and rational) through which it was possible to access the realm of the Absolute. It was access to this divine realm that was the ultimate goal of all art, music included. The “initial melody” was thus a symbolic evocation or memory of the higher spiritual reality that existed outside the dualistic divisions of this world. Both rational and irrational human impulses were ultimately united in this higher, spiritual realm. In Nikolai’s own words, “Spirit is there, where thought feels, and feelings think.” Nevertheless, the path espoused by Nikolai was generally associated with irrational impulses and emotions rather than rational thought and analysis. The impact of Nikolai’s initial melody was immediate and intuitive rather than rational or cognitive, experiential rather than logical. Nikolai himself did not explore this relation in depth; nevertheless, he was acquainted with the views of his brother Emil, who explicitly analyzed the relationship between the rational and irrational paths to the Absolute.

The relation between rational logos and irrational melody was clearly expressed by Emil Medtner in his view of the “two paths” through which mystical insight into Absolute Truth (referred to by Emil as “Idea-truth”) was accessible to humanity. In Emil’s interpretation, the path of the creative artist and the path of the rational scientist both led ultimately to a moment of mystic insight into Absolute Truth, though each started from opposite paths. The artistic path led to “artistic-symbolic” mysticism, while the path of the scientist led to “theoretical-allegorical” mysticism. In a short hand sketch of this process, Emil laid out these dual paths as follows:

Belief in miracles
Religion
Myth and Mythology
Practical Causality in Mystery and Symbolism
Artistic creation
Symbolic mysticism
Mystical experience (perezhivanie) as internal experience (opyt)

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40 Nikolai Metner, “Zapisnaia knizhka: zapisi o muzyke,” GTsMMK f.132, no.4602, l.1ob.
41 Emil Metner, “Mif, misteriia, simvolizm i mistitsizm,” RGB f.167.19.24, esp. ll.7ob-12.
42 Emil Metner, “Mif, misteriia, simvolizm i mistitsizm,” RGB f.167.19.24, l.11
The two paths of “universalism” and “individualism” were united in Absolute Truth (Ideeia-istina) into a single whole, incorporating both.\textsuperscript{43} Different paths to that truth were possible, but truth itself was pre-existent and eternal, rather than a synthesis of dialectical opposites as Hegel had argued.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, Emil (drawing upon his interpretation of the significance of Goethe) argued, “dialectics have no place when there is pure Truth.”\textsuperscript{45} Nikolai similarly concluded, “the final goal of all paths is in essence always the same (odna).”\textsuperscript{46}

A striking evocation of Nikolai’s idea of initial melody and creative intuition is found in his first published composition, the “Prologue” for piano from his “Eight Mood Pictures” (op.1). Nikolai had found poetic expression of his conception of initial melody in Lermontov’s poem The Angel, a work that he granted almost literal significance and to which he returned throughout his life. In this poem, Lermontov described a “young soul” carried to earth by an angel to begin

\textsuperscript{43} E.K. Metner, “Zametki o kul’ture,” RGB f.167.18.14, l.29. Emil claimed that it was this unity of universalism and individualism that had found its highest embodiment in German art of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{44} Nikolai Medtner similarly dismissed Hegel’s dialectic, writing in one of his notebooks “Not everything that exists is real, and not everything that is real exists,” an obvious reversal of Hegel’s claim “that which exists is Real”. See Nikolai Metner, “O sushchestvuishchem i sushchestvennom,” GTsMMK f.132, no.4602, l.12ob. Emil nevertheless considered Hegel’s philosophical description of music to be more accurate than Schopenhauer’s, as it more accurately identified the balance of “form” and “content” embodied in a musical composition, while Schopenhauer virtually ignored “form” in his identification of music with World Will. See Emil Metner, “Muzyka” – listiki iz zapisnykh knizhek, vypiski iz prochitannogo, zapisi k sborniku “Modernizm i muzyka,” RGB f.167.19.28, l.12.\textsuperscript{45} E.K. Metner, “Mif, misteriia, simvolizm i mistitsizm,” RGB f.167.19.24, l.10ob.

\textsuperscript{46} N. Metner, “Zapisnaia knizhka: zapisi o muzyke,” GTsMMK f.132, no.4602, l.23ob.
its temporal existence. The song of heaven, heard by the soul while being carried to earth, “remained without words yet alive” in its memory so that, despite its struggles on earth it “could not abandon the sound of the heavens,” finding that in comparison to the perfect song of heaven, “the songs of the earth were dull.” The image evoked by Lermontov echoed Plato’s definition of true learning, which the latter considered to be an act of “remembrance”. Truth existed eternally, and the task of learning was merely to teach people how to remember that which their earthly incarnation had led them to forget. Nikolai’s very first piano composition, “Prologue”, bore the first two lines of the poem as an epigraph, suggesting the idea underpinning the work as a whole.

![Musical notation](image)

(6.1) Nikolai Medtner, “Prologue” from *Eight Mood Pictures*, op.1, no.1

Returning to the work eight years after its initial composition, he discovered that the melody of the piece actually matched the text of the poem virtually syllable by syllable. With minor revisions, he published a new version of the work as a vocal setting of Lermontov’s poem in 1909.

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48 Nikolai Metner, “Vosem’ kartin nastroeni”i” in *Sobranie sochinenii* vol.1 ed. by S. E. Pavchinskii (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1959), 17.
Lermontov’s entire poem was again quoted as an epigraph in *Muza i moda*, demonstrating Nikolai’s continued commitment to this ideal.\(^51\)

Though Emil and Nikolai each had a slightly different interpretation of the significance of the remembrance of the Absolute for contemporary human society, they agreed that the ultimate goal towards which human creativity and knowledge strove was ultimately the creation of *unity* (*edinstvo*). In defining his concept of the “initial melody,” Nikolai insisted on the importance of unity as the essence which music expressed. Thus he claimed, “the sound [of the initial melody] became for us the living symbol of unity and simplicity. Within it was included all complexity, all variation of human song.”\(^52\) The initial melody, which awakened remembrance of the higher spiritual realm, was thus both the symbol and the embodiment of unity. It embodied a forgotten spiritual existence, in which all human souls were united in a higher level of being, and which the strains of earthly music sought to evoke. At the same time, the initial melody served as the single source from which the multiplicity of musical languages in the temporal world sprang: “The first song, which sounded once in the world, left in the soul of humanity a single ‘living sound,’ and the sound of that song became the starting point for the

\(^{50}\) Nikolai Metner, “Angel” in *Sobranie sochinenii* vol.5 ed. by A. B. Gol’deneizer (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, 1961), 125-131, here 125.

\(^{51}\) Nikolai Metner, *Muza i moda*, 8.

\(^{52}\) Nikolai Metner, *Muza i moda*, 12.
harmonization of all other sounds amongst themselves.”\(^{53}\) Through combining Christianity and Platonic philosophy, Nikolai thus arrived at an image of musical creativity centered upon the concept of unity. This “mystical meaning” of the initial melody was inexpressible by other means. It did this by its symbolic import as well as its temporal embodiment of harmonization of opposites within a greater whole. In this way, music was more than just a symbol of this higher world. Musical creation served as a possible bridge between the imperfect, human realm and the perfect, spiritual realm, through its embodiment of unity within itself. Thus, while it had no meaning outside itself, musical language with its interrelationships between various musical components was nevertheless symbolic of the inherent unity of all humanity.

Emil Medtner similarly stressed the centrality of unity (edinstvo) as the driving force behind all human creativity, both rational and irrational, arguing, “the striving of reason (razum) for unity always leads to creation.”\(^{54}\) The very creative act of an artist or composer was a result of an underlying search for unity, a search that underpinned human reason itself. Moreover, Emil claimed, “salvation comes through creation.”\(^{55}\) Unity was not something that simply pre-existed in the world; rather, it needed to be recreated through the work of artistic and scientific geniuses. For this reason, the concepts of unity, salvation and creation were inseparably linked in Emil’s mind. “Salvation” became the search for unity through the act of creation: his own variant of “life-creation” (zhiznetvorchestvo).\(^{56}\)

Nikolai consciously took his understanding of this search for unity or “Absolute Truth” one step further than Emil. For Nikolai, the Absolute was itself commensurate with God. Moreover, there was a spark or remembrance of the Absolute that existed within all humans. The

\(^{53}\) Nikolai Medtner, Muza i moda, 23.


\(^{55}\) E.K. Metner, “Zametki o filosofii iskustva i psikhologii tvorchestva” (1915-1916), RGB f.167.13.1, l.15.

\(^{56}\) It should be noted that Emil seems to have felt a certain animosity towards the concept of “life-creation”, preferring to talk in terms of “culture creation” and the “power of art over life” (Emil Metner, Modernizm i muzyka, 160, 164).
underlying unity of thought and feeling “live[s] within us in the very depths of our soul. . . it is the root (korn’), uniting us with the first days of God’s creation. This is ‘reminiscence’ in Plato’s terms.”

As an immediate, intuitive path through which to draw closer to God, art (and specifically music) was, by its very nature, religious. The “religiosity” of art was related, not to the choice of subject matter, but to its underlying purpose: the balancing of feeling and thought. Nikolai argued that “the closer the balance between thought and feeling, the closer [one is] to the Spirit.”

Thus, through closely mirroring this balance through art, humanity could draw closer to the underlying unity connecting all humanity with one another and ultimately with God. In contrast to his younger brother, Emil remained virtually silent on the question of God, focusing his analysis instead upon the creative, myth-making activity of humans, which itself served as a means of unification upon what he, unlike his brother, considered a fundamentally national basis.

**Individual Genius, Musical Creativity and the narod: The Crisis of Modernity**

*The lyre of music has come untuned, not in itself, but in our [contemporary] imagination and consciousness*

Nikolai Medtner

Both Emil and Nikolai Medtner emphasized “eternal laws” that governed music and harshly condemned modernist compositional practices, seeing in them the artistic expression of the social ills of modern society: empty individualism, chaos and disunity. The brothers’ sense that modern humanity had lost touch with its spiritual foundation aligned them with many other contemporary social commentators, while their rejection of “modernism” and “progress” in music echoed a broader critique of visions of the “progress” or “evolution” of the human soul itself. For both Emil and Nikolai, such concepts as “consonance,” “dissonance,” and “tonality” were not relativistic descriptions of traditional musical language (as suggested by

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57 N. Metner, “Zapisnaia knizhka: zapisi o muzyke,” GTsMMK f.132, no.4602, l.1ob.
58 Nikolai Metner to Ivan II’in (April 19, 1924), GTsMMK f.132, no.791, ll.9-10
59 GTsMMK f.132, no.4602, l.1ob.
60 Nikolai Metner, *Muza i moda*, 2.
contemporaries), but absolute values, comparable to the spiritual values that contemporary society had rejected out of hand.

Although both brothers emphasized the role of human creativity, they dismissed the search for “newness” and “innovation” that was prevalent in musical modernism. Creativity, they insisted, was not synonymous with reckless individuality: it sprang from the underlying unity that existed between people. Without this shared basis connecting all people, Nikolai argued, artistic inspiration was impossible: “If we refuse to recognize the unity of the first theme of music, if we do not believe in its existence, in its inspiration, then we cannot believe in individual inspiration, that is, in true musical intuition.”⁶¹ In other words, individual creative action could not exist if there was no unified basis from which all human creativity sprang. Without unity, there was no way through which to judge the creative achievement of any artist because artistic creation was then merely, as Emil noted, the “unfettered development of individuality” rather than an attempt to approach Absolute Truth.⁶² Without this recognition of initial unity, human creativity was doomed to fragmentation and chaos. It was this tendency towards disunity, both brothers argued, that was most dominant in contemporary “modernist” music, embodied in the works of such composers as Max Reger, Richard Strauss and Vladimir Rebikov.⁶³

While Emil offered a polemical interpretation of the decline of contemporary music, Nikolai associated specific compositional techniques with a broader philosophical meaning. His chart of these relations demonstrates an approach to music heavily based upon idealist philosophy:

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Approximate Schema of the Basic Meaning of Musical Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Peripheral (tiagotenie)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Conceptualized sound (heard with internal hearing)</td>
<td>Performed or recorded sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time, musical plane (horizontal line of harmony, appropriateness of musical sounds)</td>
<td>Movement in time of all musical meanings and elements (vertical line of harmony, capacity of musical sounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tonic (basic note of scale, gamma, tonality)</td>
<td>Scale, Gamma, Tonality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Diatonic gamma (diatonicism)</td>
<td>Chromatic gamma (chromaticism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Consonance (interval)</td>
<td>Dissonance (interval)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tonic (base of triad)</td>
<td>Dominant (triad that is coordinate of tonality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tonalità</td>
<td>Modulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Prototypes of consonant chords - triads and their resolution</td>
<td>Prototypes of dissonant chords - seventh chords and their resolution and ninth chords and their resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Prototypes of chords and their resolution</td>
<td>Chance harmonic forms (suspensions, anticipations, passing, helping and pedal notes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Nikolai’s charts, there is a distinct correspondence between the realm of the eternal (the center) with traditional musical language denoting calm, rest and repose. In contrast, the realm of the temporal (the peripheral) is the realm of motion, dissonance and need for resolution. Thus, all forms of temporary dissonant notes and chords are placed in the right-hand side of the chart: a temporary disruption to the calm of the tonic, to which all music ultimately returns. Such an interpretation of the meaning of musical rhetoric was by no means unique to the Medtner brothers. An almost identical description of the function of tonic and dominant is found in Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, and this general understanding of musical rhetoric has been recognized as the predominant interpretation of tonal music of the common practice era. However, in the view of both Nikolai and Emil, these “eternal laws” had

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64 Nikolai Metner, *Muza i moda*, 13. Between points 6 and 7, Nikolai inserts the comment “The interrelationship of the tonic and dominant (like calm and motion) is the basic, simplest form of cadence and modulation. This interrelationship functions both in the simplest (shortest) building of forms and in the broadest drawing out of [form].” Ibid., 13. It should be noted that Nikolai did not stress specific voice-leading or harmonic progressions, but rather dealt fundamentally with the interrelationship between binary opposites, which were fused together in time in a musical work. Thus, he did not offer a cataloguing of “correct” and “incorrect” progressions, but rather sought to uncover the aesthetic basis upon which certain progressions appear more “correct” than others. He ultimately did not require the maintaining of the tonal system of the common practice era so much as an relational approach to music, in which a base (tonic) provides calm and repose and from which dissonant movement was permitted and comprehended as motion away from this base. It is thus “tonal” only in a loose sense.
been derived from musical practice itself, lay at the base of the music of all great composers and, *a priori*, immutably governed musical expression. Recognition of these laws was Platonic in essence: a remembering of what was eternally true and known to all. Musical modernism, by contrast, represented individualism at its most extreme and symbolized the disintegration of contemporary society. The modernist composer rejected the true nature of genius, whose task it was to unite rather than to divide.

This idea emerged as the latent underpinning of Nikolai’s analysis of the creative process itself. He considered melody to be the central building block from which music was created. However, drawing on his own creative experience, he did not consider melodic fragments to be of his own creation. Rather, they occurred to him unbidden, reminiscences of the initial melody existing outside time and space, the strains of which echoed in his own mind in moments of “inspiration”. Nikolai ascribed a similar creative process to all great composers. The procedure of revising musical themes or melodies demonstrated in the compositional notebooks of men like Beethoven were the product of the composer seeking a more precise embodiment of the melody that had come to his “internal hearing” in a moment of inspiration, rather than a conscious attempt to work out a structurally more perfect theme. The composer strove to creatively express his vision of the “initial melody”, the remembrance of which served as the source for his artistic inspiration, but which itself was an experience shared by all people. The collective heritage of musical compositions of the past provided the basis from which the “laws” governing music (that which helped composers draw closer to the “initial melody”) could be extrapolated and developed further. The rules governing music had not been created by a single individual, but were ultimately the collective creation of all humanity.

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Both Nikolai and Emil believed that these laws could be seen at work, not only in the compositions of past musical geniuses, but also in the creation of church chants and folk songs.\(^6^7\) In Emil Medtner’s view, the sign of a true musical “genius,” was his ability to express the internal essence of all his forerunners, restructuring the musical inheritance of folk song and church chant into a higher synthesis. These folk songs, Emil claimed, “have genuine meaning not in the quality of material, but as a regulator.”\(^6^8\) In his view, the “Mighty Five” had failed in their quest to produce a genuine “Russian” musical style, despite their outspoken claims of nationalism. They had fallen back on folk melodies to add external color, but failed to grasp the essence of the music. Composers of the emerging “modernist” school had abandoned even this nationalistic coloring; in seeking to create a new sound, they floundered in empty individualism. Both compositional approaches embodied a common problem of Russian society: isolation from the people (\textit{narod}). The great Russian composer of the future, in contrast, would recognize that he was “often more cut off from the \textit{narod} than representatives of educated society in other countries,” and therefore “a constant, real connection with [the \textit{narod}] will be necessary to him.” This connection would be internal rather than external, as “he will sing to himself his beloved melodies of the Motherland (\textit{rodina}), and very seldom use them as material.”\(^6^9\) Russian society would be reborn through the hidden spirit of the \textit{narod}, embodied in their folk song and synthesized through creative genius.

This interpretation of musical creativity was founded upon a fundamentally religious view of music itself. Both brothers emphasized the centrality of “belief” in music and creative “intuition” as the immediate recognition of the immutable laws governing musical art. Just as

\(^{6^7}\) Nikolai Metner, \textit{Muza i moda}, 23.
\(^{6^8}\) Emil Metner, \textit{Modernizm i muzyka}, 173.
\(^{6^9}\) Emil Metner, \textit{Modernizm i muzyka}, 173.

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faith in God required belief, so too did faith in music.\textsuperscript{70} The composer, like a prophet or priest, was a mediator between the divine and the human realms.\textsuperscript{71} The strongest creative genius could not compose if he were cut off or isolated from his spiritual community because an underlying spiritual connection between people was the source of musical creativity itself. The intimate spiritual connection between the individual composer and the common people (\textit{narod}) drew upon the eternal musical forms, passed down from one generation of composer to another. In the view of both brothers, composers who embraced the “fashion” of modernism abandoned their true calling, the harmonization of the two opposing impulses (central and peripheral) through eternal musical forms. The modernist rejection of musical laws became synonymous with the rejection of spiritual unity itself, an embracing of contemporary chaos rather than seeking to overcome the gap between educated society and the common people.

The true calling of the musical genius in the modern age was one of immediate cultural significance: to overcome the divisions wrought by modernity itself, a concern that was particularly acute in Russia in the years after 1905. This was the task that Emil foresaw for his younger brother, and that Nikolai sought to take on himself. As late as 1920, despite the catastrophic experiences of war, revolution and exile, Nikolai continued to insist, “I still want to overcome (\textit{popolnit'}) the break (\textit{probel}) of modernity and in that regard, I still believe that this is my primary calling.”\textsuperscript{72} His personal tragedy, his inability to fulfill this Orphic role, became

\textsuperscript{70} Nikolai Metner, \textit{Muza i moda}, 4.
\textsuperscript{71} An inherent tension exists in Emil’s violent rejection of “individualism” on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his insistence that “the theory of music, like every other art (if you leave to the side the physical and physiological laws related to it), is built upon the basis of the musical practice of the strongest artists.” See Emil Metner, “Sixtus Beckmesser Redivivus: Etiud o ‘novoi muzyke’,” \textit{Zolotoe runo} no. 2 (1907): 65-69, here 66. Here the Romantic cult of the individual genius existed side by side with a cultural critique rejecting the individualism and disunity of the modern era. The solution to this puzzle was found in the image of the musical genius as prophet, an interpretation shared by both brothers.
\textsuperscript{72} Nikolai Metner to Emil Medtner (June 7/20, 1920), in \textit{Pisma}, ed. by Z.A. Apetian (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973), 185-187, here 186.
clearer as the increasing anti-German sentiment that accompanied the Great War served to divide Nikolai ever more inexorably from his Russian compatriots.

**Germanness and Russianness: Nietzsche’s Orphans Confront their Dual Heritage**

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche warned of the dangers facing any nation that tried to create a “life-myth” on the basis of a foreign culture: “It seems hardly possible to transplant a foreign myth with permanent success without injuring the tree which may occasionally be sufficiently strong and healthy to eliminate the foreign element after a terrible struggle, but which must ordinarily consume itself in a languishing and stunted condition or in a sickly luxuriance.”\(^{73}\) For Nietzsche, the modern day “destruction of myth” was caused by a lack of national culture, the result of an overly rationalistic (Socratic) approach to life forced to “nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures.”\(^{74}\) This emphasis on national identity elicited support within Russia, but also presented the educated elite with a conundrum: Nietzsche’s orphans could not claim their intellectual heritage without rejecting their “Russianness,” yet by embracing Nietzsche, they were potentially guilty of destroying their own national myth through the adoption of a “foreign element”. Thus, while claims of cultural unity with the “folk” and the organic nature of art were standard aspects of the Romantic trope of music, common throughout late nineteenth-century Europe, these concepts were particularly fraught in late Imperial Russia, where questions of national identity were entwined with an awareness of Russia’s indebtedness to European thought and culture. This conflicting heritage was particularly evident in the thought of the Medtner brothers, who sought to embody a balance between the German and Russian influences in their own lives and work. While other Russian Nietzscheans could embrace aspects of Nietzsche’s thought, lauding him as a “Slavic” rather than a “German” thinker, this path was

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\(^{74}\) Nietzsche, *BT*, 85.
not open to the Medtner brothers, who were well aware of the contradictions inherent in their relationship both to Nietzsche and to his Russian followers.

The thought of Friedrich Nietzsche underpins the conceptual structure inherent in the Medtner brothers’ search for unity. Nikolai’s musical philosophy is heavily based on a series of dialectical pairings, the structure of which show the definite influence of Nietzsche, possibly filtered through the interpretive lens of his elder brother Emil. Nikolai’s dualistic breakdown of conceptual categories in *Muza i moda* find their ultimate meaning in a balance between the two, just as Nietzsche’s Dionysian and Apollonian impulses found their highest expression in the synthesizing nature of ancient Greek tragedy. Nikolai opposed what he considered the “center” with the “peripheral,” following this initial division with a more specific breakdown of the aspects associated with each. In keeping with his broader philosophical agenda, the “center” here referred to the Absolute, towards which humanity eternally strives, never able to achieve an exact replication in the temporal world, but driven by faith in its existence to eternally strive to move closer to this goal. The “peripheral” is that which is temporary and fleeting, but whose very existence is implicitly present (though not individually manifested) in the center:

Nikolai Medtner’s Chart of Opposites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Peripheral (inclination)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The being of song (<em>bytie pesni</em>), (the Spirit of music, its ineffable (<em>neskazannia</em>) theme)</td>
<td>Great musical art (the expressed song - its theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity (<em>edinstvo</em>)</td>
<td>multiplicity (<em>mnozhestvo</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity (<em>odnorodnost’</em>)</td>
<td>Diversity (<em>raznoobrazie</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation (<em>sozertsanie</em>)</td>
<td>Action (<em>deistvie</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration (intuition)</td>
<td>Craftsmanship (development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity</td>
<td>Complexity (harmonization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light (<em>svet</em>)</td>
<td>Shadow (<em>ten’</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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While the Nietzschean division underpinning Nikolai’s thought is implicit rather than explicit here,\textsuperscript{76} it becomes clearer when compared with a number of earlier philosophical sketches by Emil Medtner, who directly referenced the Apollonian/Dionysian parallel, linking them also with specific aesthetic approaches. Emil’s sketches show him testing the validity of different pairings, seeking to make sense of the world through a Nietzschean-inspired binary system. Some uncertainty in his choice of terminology is evident, such as his indecision over the choice between the terms “soul” or “spirit” in opposition to “body”. The strong influence of the German intellectual tradition in general is evident in Emil’s choice of terms, which shift back and forth between German and Russian. Most striking is Emil’s specific association of “German” with “Apollo” and “Russian” with “Dionysus”, a connection that underpinned his entire cultural mission and that had wide-ranging implications both for the two brothers and for contemporary responses to their espoused worldview.\textsuperscript{77}

The Medtner brothers used their reading of Nietzsche’s philosophy as an intellectual critique of prevailing trends in the modern age.\textsuperscript{78} This binary pairing of opposites, rather than any vision Nietzsche espoused of an “overman” able to create his own morality, served as the inspiration for both brothers’ critique of the modern age. Indeed, Nikolai argued that Nietzsche’s dismissal of Christian morality pointed to the pessimism and lack of teleology in contemporary life. In Nikolai’s world-view, the artist could not “create” morality from nothing; rather, he had

\textsuperscript{76} Nikolai offered no direct association with Nietzsche’s Apollonian/Dionysian division in \textit{The Muse and Fashion}. However, in earlier sketches for the book, he specifically stated that its purpose was to argue against “Apollonism and modernism,” which suggests that, whether acknowledged or not, Nietzsche’s categories were not far from Nikolai’s thoughts, even in the politically charged atmosphere of 1930s Germany. See Nikolai Metner, “Zapisi k Muze i mode,” GTsMMK no.4603, “K ‘muze i mode’: otryvki i raznye mysli”, separate envelope with “Zapisi N.K. Metner k Muze i mode” written on it, l.1ob. Here Nikolai states further that the goal of the book is to write about “God and religion.”


\textsuperscript{78} While also critical of contemporary German society, most of the discourse in which the Medtner brothers took part appeared in the Russian, not the German, press. The intellectual circles of both brothers (prior to Emil’s permanent departure abroad) were also predominantly Russian.
to learn to hear the “initial song” and seek to imitate it in his own work. The despair and spiritual anguish of the modern age could be overcome through incorporating Christian theology back into Nietzsche’s thought. Similarly, Emil sought to step beyond Nietzsche’s categories to analyze the broader cultural significance of such divisions in contemporary Russian life, though his conclusion was less religious and more nationally based than his brother.

The primary target of both brothers was contemporary Russian culture. They were both actively critical of the dominant “Dionysian” trope that was widespread in contemporary Russian discourse on music. They stressed that Nietzsche had in fact called for balance between the Dionysian and Apollonian aspects of humanity, not merely the embrace of Dionysian formlessness. Both Nikolai and Emil believed that “Absolute Truth” was accessible only through the unification of the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses into a single whole. This unification would symbolize the combining of the “universal” and “individual” impulses of the human spirit into a greater whole. Emil insisted that this unifying aspect in Nietzsche’s thought was absent from contemporary Russian interpretations of the philosopher’s cultural import. Instead, in the Russian reading of Nietzsche, Emil saw only a “tearing apart of Apollo and Dionysus,” which he dismissed as nothing more than “one-sided, ecstatic superstition.”

The figure of Dionysus was a central way in which Emil sought to interpret the ills of contemporary life. However, Emil’s precise definition of the Dionysian impulse was somewhat clouded at best, suggesting that his own cultural metaphysics were not fully consistent. He tended to elide musical “modernism” with “Dionysianism” (or, when speaking more explicitly,  

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79 This critique of Nietzsche was common in the Russian intellectual circles in which both Nikolai and Emil participated, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters. Nevertheless, both brothers were fascinated by Nietzsche. Emil spent years researching a biography of the philosopher, while Nikolai set a series of Nietzsche’s poems to music and was later intrigued by Nietzsche’s musical setting of a poem by Pushkin. For Nikolai’s correspondence with Emil over Nietzsche’s setting of Pushkin, see Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (June 1, 1924); Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (February 4, 1925), LC Medtner correspondence.

80 This trope is explored in greater depth in Chapters Four and Five.

“false Dionysianism”), then further collapsed these concepts into his cultural critique of the fragmentary nature of modern society in general and the Russian educated classes’ isolation from the people (narod) in particular. His personal dislike of such mystical movements as theosophy and anthroposophy, popular in contemporary Russian life, further fueled his critique of the lack of a central, unifying focus among his colleagues.

To the Medtner brothers, the lack of balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian forces came to signify modern life itself, bereft of the creative, unifying power that ties a culture together. Like many of his contemporaries, Emil linked this unifying impulse with the figure of Orpheus and the ancient “Orphic church” of Delphi. Building upon Nietzsche’s analogy, Emil interpreted his personal failure to master the art of music in a particularly dramatic fashion, highlighting his inability to act as a contemporary Orpheus. He vividly compared himself to the ill-fated Dionysus, torn apart by the Apollonian impulse to create, which existed within him, but which he was unable to bring to fruition. Instead of giving form to the creative impulse that dwelt within him through musical composition, the Dionysian impulse tore him apart, shifting from a unifying to a destructive (razrushitel’nyi) impulse. Ultimately, Dionysus seems to have

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82 When confronted by Viacheslav Ivanov for this lack of clarity in his book *Modernism and Music*, Emil acknowledged both his own lack of understanding of the “true” Dionysus and countered that his attack was aimed, not against the genuine, unifying Dionysian spirit that Ivanov embraced, but against the “false Dionysus” or “individualism” that he found in much contemporary thought and culture. Viacheslav Ivanov, “Marginalia,” *Trudy i dni* no. 4-5 (July-October 1912):38-45; Emil Medtner to Viacheslav Ivanov (September 29, 1912), RGB f.109.29.97, l.14ob-15.

83 The most extensive critique appears in Emil Metner, *Razmyslenie o Gete* (Moscow: Musaget, 1914).


85 Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (March 1915), RGB 167.24.50, l.2). This image seems to have been particularly beloved by Emil, who imagines himself as Dionysus on numerous occasions (Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (March 1915), RGB 167.24.50, l.2). It was specifically his lack of the form-giving, Apollonian aspect that Emil mourned. Thus, he complained in his diaries (and to Ivanov) that he was not “sozertsatelen” enough. This image was echoed in the writing of Andrei Belyi: “And like Dionysus descending into chaos to extract from there a musical sound, I too was rent asunder in such dissonances. . .”. Belyi, *Vospominanitii ob A.A. Bloke*, quoted in Steinberg, *Words and Music*, 140. In tandem with his own inability to bring unity to chaos, Emil seems to have envisioned in Nikolai the consummation of the unifying, creative genius - a vision that corresponded with Nikolai Medtner’s interpretation of the composer’s true calling, the creation of unity from chaos. Those who were unable to fill this task were not true musicians as Orpheus had been. A more systematic expression of this idea was given by Konstantin Eiges (discussed in Chapter Three).
become a symbol for Emil, both of the growing societal rifts in contemporary Russia and of his own psychological state, trapped between his “German” and “Russian” heritage. Emil was both “afraid of Dionysus” and equated himself and his fate with that of the Greek god of antiquity. The image of Dionysus, torn to pieces by the Titans, served as a reverse mirror image to that of the composer-genius, whose task it was to unify the rifts within society.\footnote{This multi-faceted image of Dionysus grows even more complicated with Emil’s apparent adoption of the elision of Dionysus and Christ that was espoused by Russian Symbolists like Ivanov. See Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (October 10-12, 1913/September 27-29, 1913), RGB f.167.25.27, l.4. In contrast, Emil also claimed that “in Christianity, Dionysus was replaced by Socrates,” clearly a negative development in his mind. See Emil Metner, “Apollon. Dionis. Sokrat,” RGB f.167.17.10, l.9.}

If Nietzsche’s philosophy provided the intellectual underpinning to the cultural critique of the Medtner brothers, the question of national identity offered a form through which the divisions of modernity could be overcome. It is at this point that the intellectual trajectories of Emil and Nikolai truly began to diverge. Emil claimed that a true, “organic” culture had to grow out of the “holy” base of culture, like “some ancient church napvey.”\footnote{Vol’fing [Emil Metner], “Boris Bugaev protiv muzyki,” Zolotoe runo no. 5 (1907): 56-62, here 61.} However, for Emil, the guiding light of culture was specifically national and, moreover, German rather than Russian in nature. Emil saw in German culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the purest embodiment of the unity of universal and individual human impulses that had yet been achieved.\footnote{Emil Metner, “Zametki o kul’ture,” RGB f.167.18.14, l.29. It is scarcely questionable that Nikolai’s own interpretation of German culture was developed under the influence of his brother. The influence of Wagner’s thought is also evident.} The figure of Goethe served as the ultimate role model for his image of a unifying genius. Since he viewed music as the quintessential contemporary art form, Emil also stressed the claim that music itself was intimately connected with Germanic culture, writing “for German culture, music has a meaning incomparably more fateful (rokovoï) than for the future of any other nation.”\footnote{Vol’fing, “Kaliustra v iskusstve: Etiud o ‘novoi’ muzyke,” Zolotoe runo no. 4 (April 1907): 64-72, here 72.} Under Emil’s guidance, Nikolai also studied the works of Goethe, discovering a
“passion for Goethe” as early as 1907. Like his brother, Nikolai drew a distinction between the perfect balance between “form and content” accomplished by Goethe and the “lack of form” that he felt while reading Russian poets like Tiutchev and Fet. However, whereas Emil’s gaze was focused on the German past, Nikolai sought to create a new unity between Germany and Russia, arguing that German artistic form and Russian spiritual life were closely interrelated. Thus, Nikolai observed, “is it not true, how much there is in common between German art and Orthodox religion?” In Nikolai’s view, German artistic forms were a worthy complement to the religious spirit of Orthodoxy (itself specifically linked with Russian culture). Through combining the best of both national cultures, one would draw nearer to the Absolute, which stood outside any national boundaries.

Emil offered his own vision of the path towards social and cultural unity. He focused on the narod as the defining essence that gave uniformity of values and culture to a people, arguing that “the most valuable [work] created in art in general and especially in music is immediately linked with the narod, stamped with the unrepeatable characteristics of a given race.” The connection with the people was, for Emil (as for many other Russian intellectuals), a central concern. It was the narod who would ultimately give rise to great art, through the inspiration their collective work would offer to individual geniuses, the figures in which “national” tastes were most purely distilled. Since such values were only poorly expressible in verbal form, other artistic forms (including music) were required to bring them to life. According to Emil, “individual” and “collective” were synthesized through artistic expression on a national basis. A proper view of this “impossibly wonderful Absolute” was possibly only through following the

90 Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (August 4, 1903), Pis’ma, 48-51, here 48.
91 Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (August 4, 1903), 48.
92 Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (August 4-5, 1903), Pis’ma, 48-51, here 50.
93 This demonstrates a movement away from earlier nineteenth-century nationalism, which emphasized language rather than music. For an assessment of the evolution of nationalism from language to music in German culture, see Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., Music and German National Identity.
national path, which would provide a corrective to individual error and serve as a unifying factor for large groups of people. The most “correct” artistic tastes (those drawing closest to the Absolute) arose not from an immediate attempt to distill the content of the Absolute, but rather from a national-racial basis. However, while many of his contemporaries glorified Russia’s unique role in history, Emil emphasized the importance of Germany’s cultural heritage, arguing that Russia was not yet advanced enough for new discoveries in the realm of music (and hence of culture per se). It was not enough for a figure of creative genius to appear in Russia; the narod itself had to be sufficiently developed for creative transformation and development to take place, a state of development they had not yet reached.94

While Nietzsche had been concerned about the possible negative impact of borrowing from foreign culture, Emil suggested that this was the very means through which Russia might advance more rapidly. He argued that “if a country does not have its own folk art (narodnoe iskusstvo), then it must be called to life, developing in the meantime the genuine art of another narod, as close to the given one as possible.”95 Since he further argued that the people closest to the Russian in spirit were Germans, the potential source of this borrowing for Russian culture was clear.96 Indeed, he explicitly argued that, because “Germanism” was “not narrowly national” it was “capable of fertilizing the sound creation of related peoples.”97 Thus, while glorifying in his younger brother Nikolai’s talent, particularly his dual image as both a “German” and a “Russian” composer in concerts held at Moscow’s Dom pesni, he nevertheless insisted that

94 Emil Metner, Modernizm i muzyka, 154, 158, 156, 157, 173-174, 249.
95 Emil Metner, Modernizm i muzyka, 154.
96 Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (June 1/14 1915), RGB f.167.13.12, l.13.
Nikolai was, in essence, “entirely German.” This was a theme that was developed by other contemporary writers and critics, though not always to Nikolai’s benefit. Perhaps the greatest distinguishing feature that can be identified between the philosophical views of the two brothers is Nikolai’s firm devotion to Christianity in contrast to Emil’s less-defined emphasis on an “Absolute”. In Emil’s case, this distinction further translated to an extreme emphasis on distinctions between people that was fundamentally racial and biological. Thus in Emil’s mind, music, the most significant form of contemporary artistic activity, was most immediately linked with the German people, while the greatest cultural villain of the age was the virtuosic Jew, whose lack of national attributes was poisoning contemporary life. Like Wagner before him (and in direct opposition to many of the Slavophiles around him), he envisioned Germany as the country in which the universal and individual tendencies had found their most perfect embodiment. While Nikolai did not actively counter his brother’s often anti-Semitic statements, he never embraced a similar type of cultural critique, focusing his attention instead on critiquing specific compositional tendencies and defining his true homeland as, first and foremost, the “country of music” with its own unique laws and requirements for

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98 Emil Metner, Modernizm i muzyka, 182-183.
99 Boris Popov claimed “In Medtner, there is too much German blood.” This “Germaness,” in Popov’s mind, was expressed in Nikolai’s use of traditional sonata form, his song settings of German poetry (specifically that of Goethe), his lack of “Dionysian” passion, and his “naked petit-bourgeois mentality” (goloe meshchanstvo), all markers of his German, rather than Slavic, nature. See Boris Popov, “Pis’ma o muzyke: Noiabr’skaiia rozy,” Pereval (November 1906), 61. Grigorii Prokof’ev mourned that Nikolai was not participating in the general musical evolution towards emotion taking place in the modern day. Similarly, Prokof’ev celebrated Nikolai’s turn to Russian language songs, identifying an immediate increase in the composer’s lyricism and melodiousness in these settings. See Gr. Prokof’ev, “O Metnere,” RMG no. 3 (January 20, 1913): 65-70; “Kontserty v Moskve,” RMG no. 9 (February 26, 1912): 217-218.
100 Nikolai Metner, Muza i moda; see also Nikolai’s program to the Sonata-Ballade, GTsMMK f.132, no.4606, “K rabote”; Michael Jones to Ira Prehn (January 23, 1990) LRA MS 1377/89, ll.1-1ob.
101 This is developed most explicitly in Vol’fing [Emil Metner], “Estrada,” Zolotoe runo no. 12 (December 1908), reprinted in Emil Metner [Vol’fing], Modernizm i muzyka, 87-122; also “Dom pesni,” Modernizm i muzyka, esp. 167-171. Emil’s interpretation of the “virtuosic Jew” was not uncommon among musicians. A similar view was expressed by Aleksandr Scriabin. See L. Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 242.
citizenship. Emil also stressed a more active, transformative role for the artist, claiming, “art strives for power over life.” Nikolai, by contrast, emphasized the inspirational aspect of art, through which a higher power shed light upon the darkness of humanity. It was his ability to do this, rather than any inherent Germanness that marked Goethe as a great artist in Nikolai’s mind: “The single path of enlightenment (osveshchenie) of our soul is to allow light to shine in it (?) and that is the path of Goethe.” However, with the increasing tension and anti-German sentiment leading up to the outbreak of the Great War, it was the intensely nationalist discourse adopted by Emil rather than Nikolai’s more “universal” vision that found widespread support in the final years of the Russian Empire.

The concepts of “Germanness” and “Russianness” that emerged in discussion between the two brothers were part of a larger contemporary discourse about national identity. The search for an authentic “Russian” musical identity at this time took on many forms, including the founding of balalaika orchestras (themselves modeled after the European orchestra), the collection of folk songs (together with a call to “ordinary people” to take active part in this process), and the search for a new, reinvigorated Russian choral tradition through the

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103 Nikolai Metner, Muza i moda, 4.
104 Emil Metner, Modernizm i muzyka, 160.
105 Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (between June 14/27 and June 22/July 5, 1913) Pis’ma, 146-147, here 147.
106 Moskovskaia muzykal’naia-ethnograficheskaia komissiia, O sobranii nrodnkh pesen i ob organizatsii pesennykh komissii (Moscow: T-va Riabushinskikh, 1914).
incorporation of folk music practice into Orthodox compositions. In seeking to define “Russian” music, contemporary musicians and audiences needed a clear reference point against which to establish themselves. “German” music, meaning the classical canon of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart together with the compositional techniques inherited from them, seemed to fill this contrasting role admirably. Within this context, Nikolai’s devotion to older compositional approaches took on an ever more problematic discursive meaning as this devotion came to be viewed, not as a recognition of “absolute” laws, but as a betrayal of his Russian heritage.

Transcending the Present: Emil’s “Mystery”

A shared characteristic of the musical metaphysics of late Imperial Russia was the belief in music’s transformative, unifying power. While specific interpretations varied, there was common agreement that the musical experience transcended individual human existence. As has been previously demonstrated, numerous writers and composers referred to this transformative, pseudo-religious experience as a “Mystery”. Not surprisingly, despite his critique of the “empty mysticism” of his Russian contemporaries, Emil Medtner had his own vision of a future “Mystery” in which the existing dualities of the temporal world were reunited. Emil’s vision deserves specific attention, both due to its unique attributes as well as the impact his vision had on his younger brother’s creative path.

Despite Emil’s glorification of Germany’s cultural path, this was a retrospective vision. Germany had once been the leading cultural power, but contemporary German culture and society (embodied in the music of composers like Richard Strauss and Max Reger) were guilty

107 On the rise of the “New Direction” school in church music, see Frolova-Walker, Russian Music and Nationalism, 226-300.
108 This interest in ancient “mysteries” was, moreover, widespread in fin-de-siècle Europe. Authors like Richard Noll have examined how interest in ancient “mystery cults” combined with contemporary trends (Nietzscheanism, Wagnerism, spiritualism, theosophy), creating renewed interest in re-enacting spiritual “mysteries” in the modern era. See Noll, The Jung Cult.
of the same individualistic impulses as the rest of Europe.\(^\text{109}\) Germany had once been the country in which folk song and art song (lieder) were most closely united, showing the unity between educated society and the narod; this also had been lost in the contemporary age.\(^\text{110}\) For this reason, like many of his more Russophile colleagues, Emil embraced the image of a “Mystery”: a transformative artistic experience that would change modern society itself. Deeply opposed to the “mysticism” and “pseudo-religion” of theosophy and anthroposophy, Emil counter-posed belief in a “true” Mystery: an internal, transformative experience. Once again drawing on Goethe, Emil dismissed the mystical searching of fellow Symbolists Andrei Belyi and Ellis, stating “within the bounds of my religion, which includes a genuine Mystery, there is no place for mysticism.”\(^\text{111}\) Emil argued for the necessity of an internal mystical experience as the means through which to create a bridge between external, temporal reality and Absolute Truth (Ideiia-istina). Central to Emil’s Mystery was the role of art and the creative genius of his own brother, Nikolai.

Emil believed that the task of the creative genius in creating a Mystery was twofold: first, he had to have the ability to himself experience this mystical transcendence, and second, he had to have the ability to “create myths,” the material for which should be drawn from his connection with the narod.\(^\text{112}\) The prerequisite for his own internal, mystical experience, and the ability to translate it into new myths for the people was, according to Emil, faith (vera). Without belief in the existence of this absolute, the creative artist would not be able to step outside himself in order

\(^{109}\) Variations of this argument appear in Vol’fing [Emil Metner], ““Sixtus Beckmesser Redivivus: Etiud o ‘novoi muzyke’,” Zolotoe runo no. 2 (February 1907): 65-69; “Modernizm i muzyka,” Zolotoe runo no. 3 (March 1907): 63-70; “Kaliustro v iskusstve: etiud o ‘novoi’ muzyke,” Zolotoe runo no. 4 (April 1907): 64-72; “Vagnerovskie festivali 1907 g. v Miunkhene: zametki nevagnerista,” Zolotoe runo no. 10 (October 1907): 50-57; ibid., Zolotoe runo no. 1 (January 1908); ibid., Zolotoe runo no. 2 (February 1908); ibid., Zolotoe runo no. 3-4 (March-April 1908); “Modernizm i muzyka,” Zolotoe runo no. 5 (May 1908); “Estrada,” Zolotoe runo no. 12 (December 1908). Several of these articles appear in slightly modified form in Vol’fing, Modernizm i muzyka.

\(^{110}\) Vol’fing [Emil Metner], ““Boris Bugaev protiv muzyki,”” Zolotoe runo no. 6 (June 1907): 56-62, here 60.

\(^{111}\) Emil Metner, “Mif, misteriia, simvolizm i mistitsizm,” RGB f.167.19.24, l.10ob.

\(^{112}\) RGB f.167.19.24, l.3ob-4.
to see the underlying unity of humanity. Without this ability to step outside himself, he would fail in his task of creating “new myths” for humanity; rather than creating symbols, he would create mere “figures” with no depth to them.\footnote{RGB f.167.19.24, l.3ob-4.} Emil’s stress on belief was similar to Nikolai’s claim that belief (\textit{vera}) was as essential attribute for a composer, though for the latter, this was belief in music rather than in the myth being created.\footnote{Nikolai repeatedly insisted that the “artist must believe in his art.” See Nikolai Metner, \textit{Muza i moda}, 50.} Emil’s requirement that the creative genius believe in the myth he was creating was translated, in Nikolai’s view, to an insistence on the “belief in music.” Without believing in the underlying laws governing music, the act of composition itself would have no meaning.\footnote{Nikolai Metner, \textit{Muza i moda}; ibid., “K ‘Muza i mode’: otryvki i raznye mysli”, GTsMMK f.132, no.4603, l.5; a similar idea in opposition to “revolution” in music is expressed in Nikolai Metner, “Zapis’: Rol’ revoliutsii v iskusstve kak ona predstavliaetsia mne” (April 1919), GTsMMK f.132, no.218.} This type of belief, Nikolai insisted, was, like belief in God, active rather than distant, leading to creative action. This recurring emphasis on “belief” as a driving force behind music points to the essentially religious nature granted to music by both brothers. While for Nikolai, belief in music and its function was central, for Emil, it was the ability of the genius to believe in the myth he was creating. In a sense, these views demonstrate the same underlying claim expressed in different terms. For Emil, a cultural theorist steeped in the language of Russian Symbolism, Wagnerism and Nietzschean philosophy, to speak in terms of “myth-creation” was natural, while for Nikolai, an active composer rather than a philosopher or theorist, belief in music itself took on the aura of a religious myth in which “initial melody” stood in as a parallel for biblical \textit{logos}, from which it was possible for humanity to stray.

These worlds of myth-creation and music combined in one of the most widespread aesthetic “mysteries” explored by many of the European cultural and intellectual elite at this time: pilgrimage to the annual Wagner festival at Bayreuth. By the early 1900s, this voyage had
become increasingly popular among the Russian educated classes, with guidebooks and travel accounts of the Bayreuth experience being published for general readership. In the Russian press of the day, Parsifal was regularly referred to as a “Mystery”. Limited to performance in Bayreuth until 1913, the only way for Russian Wagnerians to experience this latter-day “mystery” was through pilgrimage to the homeland of the “Master,” Richard Wagner. Like many of their contemporaries, Emil and Nikolai Medtner travelled to Bayreuth specifically to experience this Wagnerian Mystery. Emil’s account of their experience of Wagner’s final work, Parsifal, is heavily imbued with the language of ecstatic, mystical experience. In a 1912 letter to Margarita Morozova, Emil described the event:

It was there that the greatness of Kolia as a human (chelovek) became clear to me. In the solitary theatre garden, where he quickly ran after the end of the [second] act, I experienced with him one of the strongest and most wonderful moments of my life. We were entirely alone. I could not speak a word. Gasping from the unbearable excitement, he spoke words that were unbelievable in their depth and appropriateness and, I repeat, I could not decide where there was more greatness: on the stage or here in the experience that was so congenial that Wagner, if he had arisen from the grave, would have welcomed Kolia as a brother... this is the secret, brought about through art; this is the Mystery of communion (prichashcheniia) through art; this is true “theosophy.” I have in mind that transformation (preobrazhenie), that genuine ecstasy, which seized Kolia through Parsifal. How pitiful and humorous to me in that moment was Scriabin with his ecstasy, his Blavatsky and his Tatiana Fedorovna, and Bugaev with his theurgy, theosophy and Asa. What was pitiful and humorous to me was namely the academicism, the absence of true, genuine internal gestures in the ecstasy of both our friends, that gesture to which I was a witness listening to Parsifal and observing the enraptured Kolia.

Nikolai, while less effusive than his brother, similarly cited the trip to Bayreuth as the high point of their travels in 1912, writing that “the trip [through Germany] is very pleasant, but... the most

118 Emil’s choice of words refers specifically to the receiving of the Eucharist during Mass.
119 Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (September 8, 1912), RGB f.171.1.52b, ll.41-42. For another example of Emil’s criticism of the idea of a musical “Messiah” like Scriabin, see Vol’fing, “Muzykal’naia vesna,” Zolotoe runo no. 5 (May 1906): 69-72.
important journey we made was in Bayreuth, listening to Wagner. The impression was such, as if
it lasted not a week, but an entire eternity and as if we were not only in Bayreuth, but travelled
around the whole world, the whole universe.”

Of particular interest in this account is Emil’s emphasis on Nikolai’s place as Wagner’s
worthy successor. Nikolai, in Emil’s view, was the obvious continuer of the “true” musical
tradition: a tradition that was fundamentally Germanic. By 1913, Nikolai had become, in Emil’s
eyes, “simply the most perfect and strongest personality of our time,” an “entirely ancient
(antichnyi) person and at the same time, a Christian.” Nikolai was vested in Wagner’s
garments, to fulfill the task that the German composer had only begun to approach with *Parsifal.*
It was Nikolai who would complete the task that had been posed by fellow Symbolist Sergei
Durylin, who had called for the completion of Wagner’s task by a Russian composer. For this
reason, Emil regularly rebuked Nikolai for his “fear of Dionysius” and avoidance of large form
musical works; the next musical Orpheus would not compose piano miniatures, but grand
operatic or orchestral works. This was the task towards which he called Nikolai to turn his
energy.

In his analysis of the role of Wagner in contemporary culture, Emil offered a specific
definition of the “Mystery” of which he dreamed. For Emil, a “Mystery” was basically an
enactment in which the forms and/or allegories of myth-creation were brought to life. This
was an internal, rather than an external experience, similar to that which Nikolai experienced

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120 Nikolai Medtner to S.K. Saburova, (August 14/27, 1912), *Pis’ma*, 134-135.
121 Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (July 4, 1913/June 21, 1913) RGB f.167.31.12, l.2
122 See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of Durylin’s book. Emil was familiar with this work, noting in his
diary that he had completed reading it by late 1911. See RGB f.167.22.17.
123 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (December 4, 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.335, l.1ob.
124 Emil Metner, “Mif, misteriia, simvolizm i mistitsizm,” RGB f.167.19.24, l.7ob
with *Parsifal*. There were, moreover, two steps in Emil’s vision of the Mystery: first was the “Mystery” of the creative genius and the second was the “Mystery” in which the *narod* would accept the return of ancient myth. While holding out hope for the development of individual creative genius, he commented ironically that he did not foresee the latter “happening in OUR [i.e., Russian] culture.” His greatest hopes rested, not with Russian culture, but with the reviving of German culture.

For both Medtner brothers, the Great War would mark a tragic turning point in their vision of the musical regeneration of society. Emil himself, once Nikolai’s greatest supporter, would ultimately denounce his brother’s inability to fulfill the task that had been called to perform. Nikolai’s Orphic mission to reunite the divisions wrought within human society and culture in the modern age would ultimately shatter on the rocks of an emergent nationalist discourse and the reality of war.

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125 For definition of this as an internal experience, see Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova, RGB f.171.1.52b, l.41-42.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

THE UNWILLING ORPHEUS

I am a Russian composer, and my homeland laid its mark on my character and my views. My music is the fruit of my character; for this reason it is Russian music.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1941)

In 1921, Sergei Alekseevich Sundukov-Holms was struggling to adapt to life in Middletown, Connecticut. A native of Tula, he found it difficult to embrace small-town American life. His hardship was exacerbated both by loneliness (for he had left his family behind in Russia) and “shattered nerves” brought on by events preceding his emigration.

In Middletown, he gradually found his boredom (skuka) transformed into melancholy (toska) and ultimately to suicidal tendencies. On his frequent walks he looked for deep spots in the river where he might drown himself. Entering stores, he found himself searching for a revolver so that he might put an end to his sufferings. It was in this state of mind that he discovered an upcoming concert at New York’s Carnegie Hall featuring Sergei Rachmaninoff. He decided to “listen to Russian music” one last time before the end.

Sundukov-Holms had loved music since childhood and, in Tula had often “fallen to sleep to the sound of music: the song of nightingales in the garden, a good war orchestra in the Kremlin garden, the strum of a balalaika in the garden or song by harp, or

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2 This development demonstrates the full range of the Russian term toska as defined by Vladimir Nabokov: “[Toska] is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels, it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. . . a feeling of physical or metaphysical dissatisfaction. . . In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody or something specific, nostalgia, lovesickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom, skuka.” V. Nabokov in Alexander Pushkin, Eugene Onegin, trans. and commentary by Vladimir Nabokov, revised ed., 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 2:141, 337. Quoted in Mark Steinberg, “Melancholy and Modernity: Emotions and Social Life in Russia Between the Revolutions,” Journal of Social History 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 813-841, here 819. On the relationship between toska and suicidal impulses in late Imperial Russia, see ibid., 819-820.
there, far off in the distance, a harmonica, drum or choir.” In the present, such memories of his beloved Tula and of this “irretrievable happy time” (*nevozvratnoe schastlivoe vremia*) only plunged him deeper into depression. All of this changed on the evening of March 13, 1921, when he heard Rachmaninoff play at Carnegie Hall. In a letter of gratitude which he later wrote to the composer, Sundukov-Holms claimed that it was Rachmaninoff’s music that had saved him from his suicidal despair: “At your concert, my sorrowful thoughts dispersed and I received an easing of my melancholy. Returning to Middletown, Connecticut, I began to recover. Although I am not a musician, several [musical] motives remained in my mind for a long time and supplanted sorrowful thoughts.” Sundukov-Holms ended his reflections with a gesture to the composer’s uniquely national gifts. Through music, he claimed, Rachmaninoff “eased Russian spiritual suffering and gave them hope for a better future.” Rachmaninoff was a figure of salvation not only for him personally, but for all Russians.

Rachmaninoff emerged as a unifying figure for many Russians in the aftermath of the 1917 revolutions. Growing up in Moscow, E. Medvedova failed to understand the passionate affection her acquaintance, Colonel Stremoukhov, felt for Rachmaninoff’s music. In a 1935 letter to the composer, she wrote: “I quarreled with him: at that time, your compositions were incomprehensible to me and though I did not miss a single one of your concerts... I strove to prove that Tchaikovsky or Rimskii-Korsakov were higher than Rachmaninoff. But he waved his hand and said ‘Wait. Your heart will fall sick and you will understand Rachmaninoff,’ to which I answered, ‘Thank God, I am still healthy and wish nothing more.’” Looking back upon her youth from her present exile in Dresden, Medvedova admitted that only now could she grasp the significance of

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3 Sergei Sundukov-Holms to Sergei Rachmaninoff (January 2, 1933), LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.
Rachmaninoff’s music and that she found immeasurable joy in the thought that “Sergei Vasilevich Rachmaninoff exists, that he is recognized around the world, and that he is ours, Russian, a Muscovite.”

For Konstantin Bal’mont, the very act of writing to Rachmaninoff served as a means of conjuring his lost Moscow world. “When I write to you,” he mused in a 1925 letter, “in spirit I am in Moscow, in an overfilled hall, and your unerring fingers enchantingly scatter a diamond rain of crystal harmonies.”

Such widespread embrace of Rachmaninoff and his music after the rupture of war and revolution contrasts sharply with his status within the musical life of late Imperial Russia. While unquestionably one of the most popular performers of the time, many pre-revolutionary music critics dismissed his compositions as mere “salon music,” appealing to the low tastes of contemporary audiences. I argue that Rachmaninoff’s apparent embrace of the negative emotions of contemporary life, such as pessimism (pessimicheskie nastroenie), melancholy (toska) and grief, made his particular brand of musical “Russianness” problematic for Nietzsche’s orphans. The present-day Orpheus they envisioned was expected to overcome rather than to embrace the negative moods aroused by contemporary life. For those elites enthralled by Scriabin’s revolutionary musical language, Rachmaninoff’s “traditional” musical style seemed an insufficiently...
daring basis through which to restructure society.⁷ To K.A. Stel’, writing for *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik* in June 1915, “Rachmaninoff is entirely in the past, his ideals are not ahead [of us] but behind.”⁸ For those who, like Tolstoi or the Medtner brothers, acknowledged the existence of eternal, unchanging laws governing art, Rachmaninoff’s evocation of dark moods and refusal to engage in philosophical discussion seemed to contradict music’s moral calling to counteract the impact of modernity on human society.⁹ In fact, argued Vl. Serotsinskii, the combination of Rachmaninoff’s pianistic skills and pessimistic music had the ability “to carry away with him whoever he wishes (even against their will).”¹⁰ At the same time, the broader public’s embrace of Rachmaninoff was interpreted as a sign of the composer’s failure to penetrate the “deeper” secrets of music. Rather than educating the *narod*, his music seemed to pander to their basest desires.¹¹ By contrast, in the aftermath of the 1917 revolutions, Rachmaninoff’s musical expression of individual pessimism and grief combined with a sense of shared Russian identity, intimately connected with the Imperial world.

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⁹ On contemporary critique of journalists who encouraged rather than counteracted the ubiquitous of such negative moods in Russian public life between 1905 and 1914, see Steinberg, “Melancholy and Modernity,” 819-820.


Rachmaninoff’s music fulfilled its Orphic task in remembering this lost world, rather than by transforming an existing one. As a unifying figure, he embodied an idealized Russian past rather than offering a vision for a transformed future.

Emphasis on modernist compositional styles in the twentieth century have led to a general dismissal of Rachmaninoff’s musical importance among musicologists and music theorists until relatively recently. At the same time, the composer’s virtually unparalleled popularity among twentieth-century audiences has produced a proliferation of popular biographies, articles and recordings. Recent interest in the composer’s heritage has also grown in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, where his role as a genuine “Russian” composer has been celebrated through the creation of a statue in central Moscow, the restoration of his pre-revolutionary estate in Ivanovka and increasingly regular performances of his sacred choral works. A reassessment of the composer’s changing image, both before and after the revolutions of 1917, is long overdue. By repositioning Rachmaninoff within the broader historical discourse in Revolutionary Russia, I seek to offer a deeper understanding of his symbolic import amidst the dramatic upheavals of the twentieth century.

After a brief biographical overview, this chapter explores the attempts of poet Marietta Shaginian to offer an Orphic interpretation of Rachmaninoff’s music to contemporary audiences. This is followed by a discussion of the two defining aspects of Rachmaninoff’s musical style that contemporaries consistently acknowledged as “Russian”: the influence of Orthodox chant on his melodic style and his evocation of

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12 For a brief assessment of the state of scholarship on Rachmaninoff, see David Butler Cannata, “Foreword” in Rachmaninoff and the Symphony (Innsbruck: Studien, 1999), 13-16.
church bells. The chapter closes with an analysis of Rachmaninoff’s “failure,” both personal and musical, in the years prior to the Great War. Concern over Rachmaninoff’s “sad” and “pessimistic” music, itself viewed as an immediate expression of “the life of the Russian soul,” echoed a deep-seated anxiety about contemporary moods voiced by educated society more generally. \(^1\) At the same time, the composer’s unwillingness to engage in philosophical discussion limited the ability of contemporaries to grant positive symbolic import to his compositions. Despite the apparent connection between Rachmaninoff and the narod, evidenced by the composer’s popular appeal, evocation of Russian folk elements and “Slavic” nature (repeatedly noted by contemporary critics), many of Nietzsche’s orphans dismissed his music specifically because it answered the desires and needs of contemporary audiences too explicitly. Neither as an individual, nor as a musical genius, could Rachmaninoff meet the transformative ideal of educated society. It was only in the post-revolutionary era, after the disappearance of Imperial Russia itself, that Rachmaninoff emerged as an uncontested Orphic figure through offering a form of unity very different from that envisioned by Nietzsche’s orphans. It was as a space of national memory, rather than as an active transformative force, that Rachmaninoff would find his greatest role.

**Biography**

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was born in Semyonova, Russia into an aristocratic family. Due in part to financial difficulties, Rachmaninoff’s parents separated in 1882, after which he moved with his mother and siblings to St. Petersburg,

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\(^1\) On Rachmaninoff as an expresser of the contemporary “Russian soul”, see K.E., [Review of N. Medtner’s “Sonata-skazka” op.25, no.1], *Muzyka* no. 49 (November 5, 1911): 1084-1085, here 1085; *Muzyka* no.159 (December 7, 1913): 840. On the widespread concern about the melancholic spirit of contemporary public life, see Steinberg, “Melancholy and Modernity”.

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where he enrolled in the Conservatory. His poor work ethic culminated in his mother’s 1885 appeal to Aleksandr Siloti (professor in the Moscow Conservatory, former student of Franz Liszt and first cousin to Rachmaninoff), upon whose advice the boy moved to Moscow. Here he lived and studied with the famed piano pedagogue Nikolai Zverov, under whose guidance he found greater creative inspiration and developed an intense work ethic. Rachmaninoff continued his studies at the Moscow Conservatory and graduated with the Large Gold Medal (with a double major in piano performance and composition) in 1892. In addition to the influence of his teachers, Rachmaninoff was deeply affected by the music and personality of Piotr Tchaikovsky, who took a personal interest in the young composer’s career. His early success came to a traumatic end with the unsuccessful premiere of his First Symphony (op. 13) in 1897; devastated both by the poor performance and by the harsh critical response, he sank into a deep depression and composed virtually nothing for the next three years. Various attempts by his friends to revive his creativity came to naught. A visit to Lev Tolstoi at his estate Iasnaia poliana in January 1900, instigated by Princess Alexandra Liven, culminated with the writer’s query whether music like Rachmaninoff’s had any right to exist.15 It was under the guidance of Dr. Nikolai Dahl that Rachmaninoff ultimately regained his compositional ability through means of hypnotic suggestion.16 Subsequent years witnessed the composer’s growth in popularity, both in Russia and abroad. After a three-year sojourn in Dresden,

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15 Tolstoi’s essay, What is Art, completed in 1897, laid out the writer’s aesthetic views on music’s moral purpose, which clashed dramatically with the pessimistic mood (nastroenie), that he heard in Rachmaninoff’s compositions. See Gol’denevizer, “Rakhmaninov,” Apetian, ed., Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove vol. 1, 407 for an account of this meeting.

Rachmaninoff returned to Russia in 1909, quickly emerging as one of the central figures in Moscow musical life.

Rachmaninoff’s personality and intellectual inclinations contrasted sharply with both Aleksandr Scriabin and Nikolai Medtner. Unlike either of his contemporaries, Rachmaninoff demonstrated a clear disinterest in philosophical discussions of music and was openly hostile to the metaphysical significance granted to music by Emil Medtner.17

After his 1909 return to Russia, Rachmaninoff was active as a member of the IRMO, seeking to expand musical education into the provinces and working closely with the Imperial regime. Some contemporaries interpreted this connection as a sign of the composer’s conservative outlook and desire to maintain existing social divisions rather than to usher in change.18 Unlike either Scriabin or Medtner, Rachmaninoff also enjoyed great popularity among audiences from a wide array of social backgrounds.19 This success contrasted sharply with suspicion, hostility and outright dismissal from many of Russia’s most notable musical and intellectual elites. Supporters of Aleksandr Scriabin targeted Rachmaninoff as one of the leading figures of an aesthetic and philosophical worldview diametrically opposed to their own. If Scriabin’s embrace of a new harmonic idiom was indeed the aural embodiment of musical “progress” (the sounds that would usher in a new humanity), Rachmaninoff’s more conservative compositional style

17 Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (November 12, 1912), Literaturnoe nasledie vol.2 (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1980), 56-57. Here he referenced Medtner’s book Modernizm i muzyka, which the latter had sent to him in 1912.


19 A biography of Rachmaninoff was featured in the June 1908 edition of Muzykal’nyi truzhenik (no.6), a journal geared specifically towards working-class orchestral musicians. An interview with the composer appeared in April 1910 (Muzykal’nyi truzhenik no. 7).
seemed to deserve only derision. Rachmaninoff’s popularity was, it was argued, a result of the composer’s “salon” style of music and his technical virtuosity rather than the inherent power of his compositional output. Additionally, critics complained, his music was too “melancholy” in character, evoking emotions that, while popular among the unenlightened masses, would not assist in beginning a new stage of human development. Nonetheless, like both Scriabin and Medtner, Rachmaninoff’s compositional talents also drew passionate admirers, who sought to analyze his significance based upon the musical metaphysics of the time. The central figure in these efforts was Marietta Shaginian, a poet of Armenian descent. It is to an examination of her metaphysical interpretation of Rachmaninoff’s Orphic calling that we now turn.

Music’s Humanity: The Problem of the Individual (lichnost’)

In 1911, the poet Marietta Shaginian was a twenty-three year old student searching for a cause to which she could devote her life. First enthralled with the desire to be part of a “living collective,” she entered the Orthodox circle of M. Novoselov in 1907. However, disillusion soon set in as she found such a worldview to be a “dead, terrifyingly false world, formed upon the rejection of development and culture.” She then turned to teachings of Symbolist writer Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, inspired by his call for a “new church” and the combination of religious and revolutionary impulses in his thought. Once again, disappointment soon set in, when she discovered that “there was nothing real” within this group, only “self-deception” and “a parasitic existence”. Her third, and

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20 For discussion of the role of music in depicting the positive emotions that would usher in a new stage of human development, see Chapter One.
21 For a thorough account of Dmitrii Merezhkovsky’s ideas within the context of the Russian Silver Age, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).
until then most formative conversion, was her 1911 adoption of the Medtnerian brand of musical metaphysics.\textsuperscript{22}

By 1911, Marietta Shaginian had come to see the key to Russia’s spiritual transformation in music. While her romantic connection with Emil Medtner brought her into his immediate family circle, it was in the music of Sergei Rachmaninoff rather than Nikolai Medtner that she heard a vision of Russia’s future.\textsuperscript{23} Shaginian’s analysis of contemporary music voiced many of the general assumptions associated with the musical metaphysics of the time. Inspired by German idealist philosophy, she considered music to be the “valuable internal cement” that “unites” (spaivat’) all “ranks (chiny) of the universe.” In contrast to this unifying function, she argued that music in the modern age had come instead to serve as “a means of unhooking (rasseplenie).” This tendency was indicative of a broader social decline that “showed all the symptoms of center-evasion (tsentrobezhnost’).”\textsuperscript{24} Like her mentor, Emil Medtner, she claimed that contemporary music (particularly the work of the “highly talented Scriabin”) was symptomatic of the “air of corruption” of contemporary life and heralded a great catastrophe in the near future.\textsuperscript{25} However, despite Emil’s heavy-handed guidance, Shaginian turned, not to Nikolai Medtner, but to Sergei Rachmaninoff as the composer who would save humanity from this contemporary decline.

\textsuperscript{22} While in her Soviet autobiography she complained that it was the lack of a “collective” that she found lacking in this circle, her emphasis on the individual, human aspect was central at the time. Shaginian, “Avtoibografia,” RGALI f.1200, op.2, ed.khr.1. Born March 21, 1888 in Moscow into a family of Armenian descent, Shaginian attended the Historical-Philosophical Faculty of Moscow University. Her Masters’ work in Dresden was cut short by the outbreak of the Great War, after which she returned to her mother in Nakhichevan on the Don, where she taught aesthetics and the history of art at the local conservatory until the Sovietization of the Don region.


\textsuperscript{24} Marietta Shaginian, “S.V. Rakhmaninov (Muzykal’no-psikhologicheskii etiud),” \textit{Trudy i dni} no. 4-5 (July-October 1912): 97-114, here 100-103.

\textsuperscript{25} “We breathe in an air of corruption” (batsillami tlema i raspala). Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 102.
Shaginian’s personal acquaintance with Rachmaninoff began with a passionate letter to the composer in 1912, signed with the pseudonym “Re,” a reference to the musical pitch D.26 Here she turned to the composer as a possible cure for her own “illness” and sorrow.27 Rachmaninoff soon discovered the true identity of his correspondent, but found Shaginian to be a sympathetic and intelligent listener, both to his music and his concerns in life. He turned to her for recommendations of literary works suitable for musical setting and dedicated one of his romances to her: “The Muse” (based on a poem by Pushkin).28 Shaginian returned the compliment, dedicating her 1913 collection of poems, entitled Orientalia, to Rachmaninoff.29 Shaginian also sought to offer a broader, metaphysical interpretation of the composer’s music to contemporary audiences. In this way, she sought to take on the same prophetic role that Schloezer and Sabaneev offered to Scriabin and Emil offered to Nikolai Medtner.

In a 1912 article published in Emil Medtner’s journal, Trudy i dni, Shaginian set out her interpretation of Rachmaninoff’s Orphic mission. She contended that music was “the most human of arts.” The danger of modern music lay in the fact that composers who elected such a style had forgotten the human basis that made music accessible to all, including animals and children. The fact that modern music was growing less accessible to audiences was a symptom of its becoming less and less human in orientation, trapped between the mistakes of mysticism (collapsing the idea of God and human) and

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26 Shaginian’s first letter to Rachmaninoff was dated February 14, 1912. See Marietta Shaginian to Sergei Rachmaninoff (February 14, 1912) in Literaturnoe nasledie, vol. 2, 42-43.
27 Although Shaginian’s letters to Rachmaninoff are not extant, this is clear from Rachmaninoff’s response in which he requests “Write to me... what is wrong with you? With what are you ill and why does your letter evoke such a sorrowful impression?” See Literaturnoe nasledie vol. 2, 42-43. Shaginian again turned to Rachmaninoff for comfort from her “difficult life” (tiazhelo zhilos’) in 1913. See Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (March 10/23, 1913), Literaturnoe nasledie vol. 2, 59.
28 See Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (March 15, 1912), 43; (March 29, 1912), 44-45.
29 Marietta Shaginian, Orientalia (Moscow: Al’tsiona, 1913).
pantheism (collapsing ideas of animal and human). Sensing this dangerous tendency, Andrei Belyi had sought to denigrate music entirely in his article “Against Music,” but, Shaginian insisted, he had himself fallen into subjectivity in his critique, a fate caused in part by the inability of words to fully capture the essence of what music expressed. The true battle for music (and the future) would take place in music itself. In Russia, Shaginian contended, the struggle was led by two figures: Sergei Rachmaninoff and Nikolai Medtner.30 While suggesting that she recognized the importance of both composers, it was Rachmaninoff who emerged as the true hero in Shaginian’s analysis. The contemporary musical battle between “modernists” and “traditionalists” was not merely about aesthetic styles; rather, Rachmaninoff’s music voiced the cry of “the personality (lichnost’) of humanity that battles and defends itself, demanding for itself a human, fundamentally human scale.”31

The Russian term lichnost’ has been translated alternately as ‘personality,’ ‘individual’ or ‘selfhood’. As Derek Offord has noted, differing interpretations of the role of lichnost’ within Russian society underpinned political and philosophical distinctions within the nineteenth-century intelligentsia.32 However, in the years after 1905, the question of lichnost’ was increasingly connected with contemporary discussions about the changing nature of identity within the Russian Empire itself. Contemporary discourse fixated upon whether one’s relationship to central authority within the multi-ethnic empire should be defined according to individual characteristics (civic identity, citizenship) or collective ones (ethnic origin, religious affiliation). In this sense,

30 Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 103.
31 Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 103.
Shaginian’s emphasis on Rachmaninoff’s preservation of lichnost’ suggested a social and political worldview that would embrace and preserve the uniqueness of the individual within an emerging modern State. In keeping with the musical metaphysics of the day, lichnost’ would be protected and preserved through the non-rational medium of music rather than by potentially divisive rational delineation of legal rights. In this sense, the concept of lichnost’ in the final years of the Empire complicates earlier arguments of the inherent conflict between the individual and society.  

Once again, music promised to serve as a means of transcending binaries rather than intensifying them.

In her analysis of Rachmaninoff, Shaginian claimed that the composer’s music refused to abandon its humanity for the demonic chaos surrounding it. In this way, he demonstrated that “true” music (as opposed to modernist music) was less open to the destructive forces of the modern age than other arts. She identified two central aspects of Rachmaninoff’s musical style that differentiated him from modern music in general and from Scriabin in particular: dissonance and rhythm. Both of these aspects pointed to a worldview that embraced structure and order, the maintenance of individual identity (lichnost’) in a transitional (perekhodnoe) time of history.

Shaginian argued that Rachmaninoff’s restrained use of dissonance pointed to his human, individualistic direction. While Scriabin used dissonance for the “breaking of humanity, for the overcoming of the boundary of individual consciousness,” Rachmaninoff employed dissonance “only in order to more sharply (rezche) shade

34 Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 104.
(ottenit’) the human element, to affirm it face to face with world harmony.” Even in Rachmaninoff’s most dissonant moments, such as “the risky harmonies in the Liturgy (for example the ‘Holy Immortal’),” his conception of the relationship between God and human remained strong, “not leaving him even for a minute, so that even in prayerful song (molitvennoe pesnopenie), when the soul must blur in God, illuminated by Him – he [Rachmaninoff] still sees the human and God, one against the other, sees not the union (sliianie) of them, but their interrelationship.”36 In contrast to ancient Russian icon painters, who “achieve[d] holiness through the loss of individuality,” Rachmaninoff maintained his “human sensation” (chelovechooshchushchenie). The true calling of Orpheus was not to transcend the division between the human and the divine, not the process of deification of humanity (bogochelovechestvo) envisioned by Solov’ev, but rather the recognition of the unique status of humanity within God’s creation. Within this worldview, the preservation of the individual (lichnost’) was of central importance, and it was only Rachmaninoff’s music that genuinely preserved these boundaries.

Rhythm played a similar function to dissonance in Shaginian’s interpretation of music. It preserved individual personality, this time in relation to the animal impulses which exist within human nature. For Shaginian, rhythm was the “middle condition of the world,” the “alphabet of the language of God, lying between Alpha and Omega.”37 She rejected the claim that music began with rhythm, emphasizing instead that music could only begin with an idea. After this initial impetus, however, it was rhythm that made music accessible and comprehensible to its listeners. The crisis of the current, “‘transitional’ (as they love to call it) time is particularly strikingly expressed in the loss

of rhythm. . . we have lost rhythm not only in art (it is particularly noticeable in painting and in music), but also in society and in daily life (byt”). The danger that rhythm presented was its appeal to the animal instinct, rather than the human. Modern music, including Scriabin’s search for musical ecstasy, evoked this base desire. In contrast, Shaginian pointed to Rachmaninoff’s constant emphasis on the regularity (zakonomernost’) of rhythm as a sign of his recognition of its importance. It was this emphasis that gave particular “truth and hope” to his music, which, though “valuable in all times” was “now exceptionally needed and healthy. Listening to any of his pieces, one can trust ahead of time that it will not betray you, it will not fall into chaos.”

Despite her connection to the Medtners, Shaginian nevertheless embraced contemporary neo-Slavophile interpretations of national characteristics. She explicitly contrasted Rachmaninoff’s pure “Slavicness” with Medtner’s “Germanness”. While Nikolai Medtner was the greatest painter of images in music (a skill she connected with his “Germanism”), Rachmaninoff’s “tireless remembrance of the human (neustannoe pamiatovanie o cheloveke)” and his “subjectification’ of external phenomena” were “excellent marks of Slavicness.” While Medtner’s music depicted the external form or image, Rachmaninoff’s music used external images as symbols, through which he penetrated into the spiritual level of experience. In short, Rachmaninoff’s music was more human than anything either Scriabin or Medtner could compose. Ivan Lipaev echoed this interpretation in 1913, claiming: “in his music, Rachmaninoff contemplates

38 Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 108. In painting, the loss of rhythm is characterized by the conscious destruction of the laws of perspective, the abandonment of melody of lines, and the geometrization of lines (cubists).
40 Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 110.
41 Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 112.
42 She refers specifically to Rachmaninoff’s Isle of the Dead in this analysis. Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 112.
(sozertsat’) more than he depicts (zhiv opisat’).” In this tendency, Lipaev found evidence of Rachmaninoff’s central focus on the “soul of humanity” rather than searching for something beyond the human.\footnote{Iv[an] Lipaev, S.V. Rakhmaninov (Saratov: M.F. Tideman, 1913), 1,12.} In 1911, Vasilii Iakovlev similarly cited Rachmaninoff’s “deeply human” voice, in contrast to Scriabin.\footnote{Vasili Vasil’evich Iakovlev, S.V. Rakhmaninov (SPb: Tip. T-va p.f. “Elektro-tipografiia N.Ia. Stoikovoi,” 1911), 7.} Claiming that the division between secular (svetskii) and religious music was a result of “the alienation of the so-called intelligentsia from the people, which is the first sin of our existence,” Iakovlev argued that it was only in the music of Rachmaninoff (particularly the Third Piano Concerto) that the first glimpses of overcoming this division could be found.\footnote{Iakovlev emphasized that this was a peculiarity of Russian development, in contrast to the West. Iakovlev, S.V. Rakhmaninov, 1.} Comparing the musical style of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff in 1909, Iulii Engel claimed that Rachmaninoff’s music, though remaining “minor”, nevertheless “becomes healthier, simpler, more balanced,” while Scriabin’s compositions, while becoming more “major” also grew “more encumbered, more sickly refined.”\footnote{Iulii Engel, “Rakhmaninov i Skriabin,” Russkie vedomosti no. 90 (April 21, 1909), in Iu. D. Engel’: Glazami sovremennika, 261-263, here 261.} Underpinning such claims was a distinct ethical and religious consciousness, as well as a half-acknowledged anxiety regarding the potential chaos awaiting humanity should it transgress its human boundaries.

As recent scholarship has shown, the desire to make space for the individual (lichnost’) within religious, political and social life was a shared concern among such diverse groups as contemporary liberal philosophers, workers and the “middling groups” of Russian society.\footnote{Edith Clowes, Samuel Kassow and James West, eds., Between Tsar and People (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).} In a political realm in which the rights of the individual were a point of debate rather than a legal right, Shaginian’s claim that Rachmaninoff defended the
individual against destructive, assimilative tendencies, took on a political meaning. It was Rachmaninoff, rather than Scriabin or Medtner, who used his musical gift to protect the desires and needs of individuals, allowing them an independent existence. Ironically, however, Rachmaninoff’s very individuality hindered attempts by Shaginian and others to garb the composer in the robes of a prophet.

Russia’s Orthodox Soul

Although Rachmaninoff himself had a somewhat troubled relationship with the Orthodox Church,\(^\text{48}\) his music has often been cited for its evocation of Russian Orthodox spirituality. Two particular compositional techniques in particular served as symbolic representations of this faith tradition: the use of Orthodox chant melodies and the musical evocation of church bells. Placed into the historical context of late Imperial Russia, these sacred markers contain particular significance. The sound of both chant and bells surrounded most Russians in their daily lives. In his 1925 autobiography, Aleksandr Kastal’skii specifically cited bells and church music as two of the central musical impressions of his youth in prerevolutionary Russia, a memory echoed independently in accounts written by Russian émigrés.\(^\text{49}\) The final years of the Russian Empire witnessed a rebirth of interest in spiritual questions. While many of these strivings took on alternative (and often heretical) forms, the Orthodox Church also experienced a strong reform movement which served to distance it from its traditional support of the autocracy.\(^\text{50}\)

Together with this general questioning of Orthodox tradition, Orthodox music received

\(^{48}\) A conflict brought on by his decision to marry his first cousin.

\(^{49}\) A. Kastalsky and S. W. Pring, “My Musical Career and My Thoughts on Church Music,” The Musical Quarterly vol.11, no.2 (April 1925): 231-247, here 231; Mrs. Alma Elisabeth Bryan, “Girlhood memories”, LRA MS 1260/3, ll.5-6 (1961); Elizabeth Fen, “Remember Russia,” LRA MS 1394/739, 18 (1915)

\(^{50}\) Gregory Freeze, “Subversive Piety: Religion and the Political Crisis in Late Imperial Russia,” The Journal of Modern History 68, no. 2 (June 1996): 308-350.
new creative impetus, particularly in Moscow. The so-called “New Trend” in church music, initiated in large part by musical scholar Stepan Smolenskii, and continued by his assistant and disciple Aleksandr Kastal’skii, sought to combine new discoveries in both liturgical and folk music, connecting Russian folk music practices with Orthodox tradition. This trend was centered around the Synodal School in Moscow, where, under the guidance of Smolenskii and his students, the Synodal Choir developed into one of the world’s leading performers of sacred music by the early twentieth century.\footnote{Vladimir Morosan, \textit{Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia} (Madison, Connecticut: Musica Russica, 1994. First published 1984).} While research into Russian Orthodox music in the mid-nineteenth century had centered upon the Western, Gregorian tradition, Smolenskii sought to demonstrate that Great Russian (\textit{znamennyi}) chant had a unique historical trajectory, distinct from its Byzantine antecedent and closely linked to Russian folk music.\footnote{Alfred J. Swan, “The Znamenny Chant of the Russian Church: Part I,” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 26, no. 2 (April 1940): 232-243, here 234.} He claimed to have rediscovered the traditional patterns underpinning Great Russian chant, and published the first primer for reading the neumes in which \textit{znamennyi} chant was written in 1888.\footnote{Alfred J. Swan, “The Znamenny Chant of the Russian Church: Part II,” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 26, no. 3 (July 1940): 365-380, here 371-372; S. Smolenskii, \textit{Azbuka znamennogo peniia startsa Aleksandra Mezenta} (Kazan: Tipografiia Imperatorskogo Universiteta i Tipo-Litografiia N. Danilova, 1888). For a discussion of Smolenskii’s work and its precedents, see Marina Frolova-Walker, \textit{Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 226-300.} Emphasizing the communal (\textit{sobornyi}) nature of the Russian \textit{narod}, he argued that choral singing had been a specifically Russian innovation, in contrast to the “solo singing” of the Greek tradition.\footnote{S[tephan] Smolenskii, “Ob ukazaniiakh ottenkov ispolneniia i ob ukazaniiakh muzykal’no-pevchesikhh form tserkovnykh pesnopeni v kriukovom pis’me,” \textit{Tserkovnoe penie} no. 3: 65-83. See also RGIA op.1, no.12, ll.172-173. For more recent scholarship on the origins of Russian \textit{znamennyi} chant, see Joan L. Roccasalvo, “The Znamenny Chant,” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 74, no. 2 (1990): 217-241; Milos Velimirovic, \textit{Byzantine Elements in Early Slavic Chant: the Heirmologion} (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960).} His scholarship served as the basis for many “New Trend” composers in Moscow. As professor of Church Song at the Moscow Conservatory, Smolenskii’s
influence also extended across the liturgical divide to composers of secular music, including Nikolai Findeizen, Vladimir Rebikov, Iulii Engel’ and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Kastal’skii, appointed choirmaster of the Synodal Choir in 1903, continued Smolenskii’s path after his mentor’s departure for the Imperial Court Kapella in St. Petersburg. He sought to integrate compositional techniques, including the use of podgoloski (undervoices) from Russian folk music into his sacred compositional style. As Frolova-Walker has argued, such innovations owed more to Kastal’skii’s imaginative reinterpretation of folk techniques in a sacred context than to historical accuracy. They imbued the compositional direction of the “New Trend” with a distinct, nationalist agenda. Kastal’skii’s fame as a composer of sacred music in the early twentieth century made him a natural authority figure to whom Sergei Rachmaninoff turned when he decided to write a Liturgy.

Throughout his compositional career, Rachmaninoff showed a distinct interest in Orthodox chant tradition. His First Symphony (composed in 1896) employed Orthodox chant melodies as the basis for the main themes. The chant tradition that appears to serve as the basis for the opening theme of the Third Piano Concerto has elicited detailed analysis. But it was Rachmaninoff’s decision to write a Liturgy that most clearly showed his devotion to the Orthodox tradition. In 1910 (one year after Smolenskii’s death), he turned to Kastal’skii, writing: “I believe in you with my whole heart and will

56 For an analysis of Kastal’skii’s compositional development, see Frolova-Walker, Russian Music and Nationalism, 285-292.
strive to follow the path that you take and which belongs to you alone.” Their correspondence demonstrates Rachmaninoff’s desire to master an understanding of the various chant traditions underpinning Orthodox music in Russia. He asked Kastal’skii specific questions related both to the text and the musical style appropriate to the liturgy. Inspired in part by Kastal’skii’s advice and in part by his own musical intuition, the Liturgy was a qualified success. Rachmaninoff’s individuality, critics argued, shone too clearly through the music for it to be accepted as a liturgical work. In her defense of Rachmaninoff, Shaginian acknowledged that, due to moments of individual compositional style in the Liturgy, it would not “organically enter the Orthodox church at any time.” Nevertheless, she insisted that it was “the highest, deepest, and most wonderful (prekrasneishii) sample of theism that has ever existed in Russian music.” The general consensus surrounding the Liturgy was that it was ultimately a concert piece rather than a sacred composition, expressing Rachmaninoff’s personal belief rather than the spiritual depth of the Russian narod. As such, it was argued, it could not truly provide the unifying, collective impetus awaited by Nietzsche’s orphans. Rachmaninoff’s Liturgy was, ultimately, too individualistic.

The second direct connection made by critics between Russian Orthodox spirituality and Rachmaninoff’s music was the evocation of bells that appears in many of his works. An early example of this compositional technique is found in his Prelude in c-sharp minor, op. 3, no. 2. This work opens with the slow tolling of three notes (A, G-

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58 S.V. Rachmaninoff to A.D. Kastal’skii (June 19, 1910) in Literaturnoe nasledie vol. 2, 14-15.
59 Sergei Rachmaninoff to Aleksandr Kastal’skii (July 6, 1910), Literaturnoe nasledie vol. 2, 15-16, here 15.
60 This claim is covered in greater depth in Chapter Eight.
sharp, C-sharp) that provide the melodic basis of the entire piece. On top of this, a series of variations are built, gradually increasing in tempo, a style reminiscent of the ringing of Orthodox bells. The return of the opening three notes, now dramatically spread across the full range of the piano keyboard, marks the climax with the full volume of the tolling bells, after which they gradually diminish, ending with scarcely more than an echo (marked ppp).

The imitation of bells recurred throughout Rachmaninoff’s compositional career, both in piano and symphonic works. In his 1913 choral symphony *The Bells* (based on Konstantin Bal’mont’s translation of a poem by Edgar Allan Poe), the evocation of different types of bells symbolically depicts the different stages of an individual human life, from birth to death. This four-movement composition begins with the sound of silver sleigh bells (symbolizing birth and youth), followed by the golden bells of marriage, the bronze bells of fire alarm (symbolizing the destruction of individual hopes and

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62 Sergei Rakhmaninov, *Sochineniia dlia fortepiano* vol.1 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1975)
aspirations over the course of life), and ultimately the iron funeral bell.\textsuperscript{63} Even the seemingly joyful wedding bells of the second movement contain a sorrowful underpinning, as reference to the Latin \textit{Dies irae} (Day of wrath) chant emerges in the orchestral introduction to the movement:

(7.2) Dies irae chant, Aeolian mode

For Rachmaninoff, it was the opening motif of the chant that was of particular interest; many of his references to the chant contain only the first four-note sequence (the setting of the words “Dies irae”):

(7.3) Dies irae opening motive, starting on C

An echo of this opening four-note motif appears throughout the orchestral introduction to the second movement of \textit{The Bells}:

(7.4) Rachmaninoff, \textit{The Bells}, op. 38, Second movement, measures 22-23\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{63} This analysis is based on Martyn, \textit{Rachmaninoff}, 242-248.
This chant melody, which recurs in many of Rachmaninoff’s compositions, would take on an ever more sinister guise over time. In *The Bells*, it serves to remind listeners that, even at the moments of greatest joy, the inevitability of death lingers.

For those contemporaries drawn to the connection between Orthodox spirituality and the Russian *narod*, compositional techniques such as the use of chant and imitation of bells served as a clear demonstration of Rachmaninoff’s connection with the inherently religious nature underpinning Russia’s destiny in the modern age. However, for many listeners, the clearest, specifically Russian, attribute that Rachmaninoff’s music contained was not these aural references to Orthodox spirituality *per se*, but the mood of “pessimistic passion” (*pessimisticheskaia strastnost’*), “gloominess” (*mrachnost’*), sadness (*grust’*) and melancholy (*toska*) that his music evoked.65 This attribute proved to be particularly challenging to Nietzsche’s orphans, who awaited music’s positive transformative power in contemporary life. This tendency would ultimately undermine Rachmaninoff’s claim to the role of Orpheus.

**Pessimism: The Sickness of the Modern Age**

Historians have recently turned to the study of emotions as a “text that can yield meaning, as a subjectivity situated in time and place, and as a form of social practice with real causative effect in the world”.66 In the case of Russia, Mark Steinberg has argued that early twentieth-century Russians “viewed... emotions as signs to be read in order to diagnose the state of their society, culture, and polity.”67 Discussions of the melancholic,

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65 V. Val’ter, Untitled review, *Rech’* no. 44 (February 14, 1911): 3. Val’ter’s only complaint about Rachmaninoff’s “Isle of the Dead” was its *mrachnost’* and the fact that it did not give way to joy as in Beethoven. For *zataennaiia grust’,* see Gr. Prokof’ev, “Pevets intimnykh nastroenii (S. V. Rakhmaninov): opyt kharakteristiki,” *RMG* no. 26-27 (June 27-July 4, 1910): 588-593, here 589.
67 Steinberg, “Melancholy and Modernity,” 816.
pessimistic moods of contemporary life in St. Petersburg were ubiquitous in the contemporary press, mirroring a deep anxiety both about Russian society and the experience of modernity more generally.\textsuperscript{68} Critiques of the pessimistic nature of Rachmaninoff’s music show a similar concern about contemporary public mood (nastroenie), together with an underlying assumption that the true purpose of music should be to transform such negative emotions into more positive ones. Perhaps no composition better captures Rachmaninoff’s embrace of the darker topics of the age than his 1909 work, \textit{Isle of the Dead}.

Rachmaninoff’s return to Russia in 1909 coincided with the world premiere of his new symphonic poem, the \textit{Isle of the Dead}. The work was inspired by a black and white reproduction of the painting by Swiss symbolist Arnold Böcklin.\textsuperscript{69} The composer had previously incorporated the Dies irae melody into his compositions; however, this work showcased his first extensive use of its opening motif. The irregular rhythm at the opening (5/8), evokes the rocking of a boat rowing across the water towards the island, while the opening motive of the Dies irae chant provides the underlying harmonic structure. A second, contrasting section, which Rachmaninoff acknowledged to be symbolic of “life” in contrast to death, is shattered by the return of the Dies irae and the remembrance that human existence is fleeting. The piece ends as it begins, with the rocking 5/8 meter and an echo of the “life” motif, this time transposed into the minor: an acknowledgement of the ultimate victory of death over life.


\textsuperscript{69} Martyn claims that Rachmaninoff must have seen the reproduction in Paris in 1907, and only saw the original a year or two later in either Leipzig or Berlin. The original color painting made much less of an impact on the composer than the black and white reproduction. See Martyn, \textit{Rachmaninoff}, 204-206.
Much as Scriabin’s return to Moscow coincided with the premiere of his *Poem of Ecstasy*, *Isle of the Dead* was premiered immediately upon Rachmaninoff’s return to Moscow in April 1909, and performed three additional times in rapid succession. In 1910, Gutheil published a 4-hand piano reduction of the work, to permit study and performance at home. Its dark imagery and evocation of human life as a struggle against the inevitability of death influenced interpretations of the Rachmaninoff’s musical style throughout the final years of the Empire. Pessimism and despair, rather than ecstasy and hope, came for many to stand for the predominant mood (*nastroenie*) of Rachmaninoff’s works as a whole. In the rather harsh assessment of Leonid Sabaneev, “the sphere of [Rachmaninoff’s] emotion” was the “tragic helplessness of man,” and his compositions were the “music of an intelligent whiner (*intelligentnyi nytik*)”.  

Despite this view, critics were in agreement that Rachmaninoff was the most popular performer of the day. Sabaneev mused that it was Rachmaninoff’s wallowing in negative emotions that explained the “singular recognition” of his music among the “musical masses.” In Sabaneev’s mind, Rachmaninoff (like Tchaikovsky) composed music “deprived of the will of the subject, submerged in the reflexes of contemporary helplessness.” Contemporary Russians heard a reflection of their own will-less approach to modern life in Rachmaninoff’s music. “There are many such [people] in Rus’,” concluded Sabaneev darkly. In this way, Rachmaninoff’s music offered a unified image

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70 Martyn, *Rachmaninoff*, 209.
73 For contemporary references to Rachmaninoff’s popularity, see GTsMMK f.18 no.597, l.3; Gr. Pr[okof’ev], “Kontserty v Moskve,” *RMG* no. 51-52 (1913): 1204-1205
of the Slavic people, but one that centered on the prevalence of dark rather than optimistic emotions.

As demonstrated in earlier chapters, late Imperial Russian society was marked, both by hopeful expectation of a better future, and by anxiety about the present. Scriabin’s evocation of an ecstatic Mystery offered a means of transcending the fears of contemporary life, while Medtner’s music generally sought to evoke an underlying transcendent reality. However, late Imperial audiences often turned to music, not as a means of transforming their world, but as a way through which to express their own fears and anxieties. Music, it was believed, offered a way for an individual voice to find expression in the midst of changing social and cultural realities. For many, those emotions that needed expression were negative rather than positive in nature: fear, anxiety, toska and pessimism. Unsurprisingly, of the three composers highlighted in this study (Scriabin, Medtner, Rachmaninoff), the conducting students from the Peoples’ Conservatory cited only Rachmaninoff as a composer with whom they were acquainted and whose music they enjoyed.⁷⁶

In many ways, Rachmaninoff’s music seemed to echo the public mood (nastroenie) of the day. In the words of music critic Iurii Sakhnovskii, every piano piece of the composer depicted “a defined experience (perezhivanie) of the human soul.” Acknowledging that many of the moods (nastroenie) elicited by the composer carried a “clear stamp of pessimism,” Sakhnovskii claimed that this was only to be expected in the modern climate: “It is impossible to expect Mozartesque joy in life in the terrible epoch that we are living through,” he argued. Similarly, Georgii Konius observed that

⁷⁶ RGALI f.2009, op.1, ed.khr.17, ll.23, 26, 54. The most frequently cited composers were Beethoven, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Glinka and Rubinstein.
Rachmaninoff’s music demonstrated a tendency towards minor modalities and “mystical-solemnness” (*misticheski-mrachnyi*). In V. Karatygin’s assessment, it was not merely Rachmaninoff’s pessimism that made his music untimely. Rather, the critic suggested, the experiences (*perezhivanie*) offered by the composer’s music were limited to those that had long ago been outlived (*izzhit*)

Rather than blaming Rachmaninoff for failing to attempt to transform public mood, Gr. Prokof’ev reversed the direction of causality in a 1910 article, suggesting that Rachmaninoff’s music might not reach full flower as a result of the “tempo of our spiritual life”: the “fast change of societal moods (*obshchestvennoe nastroenie*)” might well make full development of Rachmaninoff’s lyrical style impossible. Whether Rachmaninoff’s music was a cause or a symptom of the pessimism of the age, critics agreed that it was immediately connected with contemporary life.

However, this embrace of pessimistic moods was not only an expression of anxiety about the modern age: it was intimately connected with Russian identity itself. In Sakhnovskii’s view, Rachmaninoff was a “clear and unique representative of his own, Slavic race.” A predilection for darkness, characteristic of Rachmaninoff’s compositional style throughout his life, also served as a marker of his “Slavic” identity. Most of his compositions drew on minor rather than major modalities (traditionally associated with melancholy rather than optimistic moods), a tendency that contemporaries also identified in Russian folk music. Nevertheless, the predominant

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77 Georgii Konius, GTsMMK f.18 no.597, l.3
80 Iur. Sakhnovskii, “Clavier-Abend S. Rakhmaninova” in GTsMMK f.18 no.597, l.3.
81 This sorrowful mood was particularly connected with the style of folk singing known as *protiazhnaia*. See Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 29-42.
sense among musical critics was that this pessimistic emphasis needed to be transcended rather than strengthened. In her letters to Rachmaninoff, Shaginian repeatedly encouraged the composer to turn his energy towards expressing “bright” rather than “dark” feelings, criticizing him for claiming that “bright tones do not come to me” and accusing him of embracing the opinion of contemporary critics, who described his music as pessimistic rather than optimistic in nature.\textsuperscript{82} Rachmaninoff acknowledged this tendency in himself, countering that these critics were perhaps more accurate in their opinion of him than Shaginian. He warned her that “you search for something in me that is not there, and want to see me as someone whom, I think, I can never be.”\textsuperscript{83} Thanking Shaginian for her laudatory article, he insisted, nevertheless, that she “exaggerated” his significance.\textsuperscript{84} His role was decidedly not that of Orpheus.

Unlike both Scriabin and Medtner, Rachmaninoff consistently rejected attempts to turn himself into a prophetic figure. His tendency towards depression and lack of belief in himself, dating from the failure of his First Symphony, continued to trouble him. On some level, Rachmaninoff desired to be able to embrace the Orphic role that Shaginian sought to thrust upon him. In a 1912 letter, for instance, he wrote: “Teach me to believe in myself, dear Re! At least [teach me to believe] half as much as you believe in me.”\textsuperscript{85} At the same time, he claimed that his “illness” (his lack of belief in himself), first sparked by the failure of the First Symphony, “sits on me firmly, and develops ever deeper over

\textsuperscript{82} Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (March 29, 1912). Shaginian claimed that Rachmaninoff had been influenced by the published critiques of Iurii Sakhnovskii, who had described Rachmaninoff as a “singer of the awful and the tragic” (pevets uzhasa i tragizma) in a recent article. Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (March 29, 1912) \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} 2, 44-45. See also Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (May 8, 1912), \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} vol. 2, 47-49, here 49, in which he attempts to adopt a brighter tone, writing on a “sunny, springlike evening,” setting a lamp to burn and shed light. Even here, Rachmaninoff’s tone shifted into a decidedly pessimistic voice as he describes all the things of which he is afraid.

\textsuperscript{83} Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (May 8, 1912), \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} vol. 2, 47-49, here 47.

\textsuperscript{84} Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (November 12, 1912), \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} vol. 2, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{85} Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (May 8, 1912), 47.
time.”  

His personal fears occasionally pressed upon him so strongly that he considered “completely giving up composition,” becoming instead a “public (prisiazhnyi) pianist, conductor or estate owner.”  

He accused Shaginian of trying to force him to become that which she already had nearby: Nikolai Medtner. In Medtner, he claimed, all the character traits that Shaginian sought in him were already clearly developed: youth, health, vigor and strength. Drawing directly upon the Orphic myth, he claimed that Medtner possessed “the weapon (oruzhie) of a lyre in his hands.” In contrast, Rachmaninoff argued, “I myself am spiritually sick, dear Re, and consider myself weaponless (bezoruzhnym) and also quite old.”  

The impact of war and revolution would only further convince Rachmaninoff of his personal insufficiency to fill such a role.  

An Unwilling Orpheus  

Marietta Shaginian ultimately abandoned her attempts to reshape Rachmaninoff into a messianic figure; instead she found her salvation in the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, which she embraced after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.  

Nevertheless, for Sundukov-Holms and many others, Rachmaninoff became the unifying and salvific figure they longed for in a transformed world in the aftermath of 1917. As the Orphic claims of Scriabin and Medtner dimmed, Rachmaninoff’s grew ever brighter. His personal desire to preserve the social customs and traditions of Imperial Russia in his own home coincided with the broader role assigned to him, both by Russian émigrés and former colleagues left behind in the Soviet Union.  

By embracing the role of benefactor

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86 Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (May 8, 1912), 48.  
87 Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (May 8, 1912), 48.  
88 Rachmaninoff to Shaginian (May 8, 1912), 48.  
90 Rachmaninoff’s willingness to provide material and financial assistance to émigrés of differing political persuasions as well as those still living in the Soviet Union angered some politically inclined individuals and groups. On August 19, 1921, Boris Brazol, writing on behalf of the Russian National Society (Russkoe
for an entire generation of Russians, Rachmaninoff became one of the quintessential symbols of the lost world of the Russian Empire. Much of the composer’s personal profit was spent in aid sent to impoverished émigrés in the West and to starving musicians, professors and friends in the East.91 His role as personal benefactor was valued as much for its spiritual as for its material benefits. To N. Aleksapol’skii, one of the many recipients of aid sent by Rachmaninoff to Soviet Russia, the most treasured part of the composer’s gift was that it had “moral value” at a time when “human life had become worth little in Moscow.”92 Similarly, Iurii Aikhenval’d, a former Moscow professor exiled by the Soviet regime in 1921, claimed that it was “not morally difficult” to accept money from Rachmaninoff, because he was one of the “living rays of Russian glory”. In this light, he wrote “It makes me happy to acknowledge that Rachmaninoff’s attention has stopped on me also. . . it is as if Music itself, her genius himself has benevolently come to me.”93

In the end, Rachmaninoff emerged as an unexpected Orpheus: rather than transforming the world, he and his music came to serve as a memory space for an entire generation of Russian émigrés. As the following chapters will demonstrate, however, this transformation was accompanied by personal loss. While his music became indelibly

91 Rachmaninoff even hired a personal secretary to ensure proper dispensation of aid, though he sometimes expressed concern that his gifts were so substantive that they endangered the well-being of his own family. See LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.
92 N. Aleksapol’skii to Sergei Rachmaninoff (June 19, 1922), LC Rachmaninoff correspondence
93 Iurii Aikhenval’d to Sergei Rachmaninoff (February 25, 1926); (January 20, 1928). Aikhenval’d was a former professor (or writer), exiled by the Soviet regime, who took up residence in Berlin. Rachmaninoff sent him gifts of 20 dollars on each occasion. See LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.
linked with a nostalgic image of old Russia, in time the trauma of war, revolution and exile from his homeland all but silenced his compositional voice.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{94} Rachmaninoff claimed on numerous occasions that his exile from Russia had destroyed his desire to compose. In a 1933 interview, he stated “since I lost my country I have felt unable to compose. When I was on my farm in Russia during the summers, I had joy in my work. Certainly I still write music – but it does not mean the same to me now.” In a 1934 interview he made a similar claim: “When I left Russia, I left behind me my desire to compose: losing my country I lost myself also. To the exile whose musical roots, traditions and background have been annihilated, there remains no desire for self-expression.” H.E. Wortham, “Interview with Rachmaninoff,” \textit{Daily Telegraph} (April 29, 1933); Norman Cameron, “The Composer as Interpreter,” \textit{The Monthly Musical Record} (November 1934), 201. Quoted in Martyn, \textit{Rachmaninoff}, 26-27. Nevertheless, the composer wrote six works after his emigration, including such major pieces as Piano Concerto no. 4 (op. 40, dedicated to Nikolai Medtner), \textit{Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini} (op. 43), \textit{Symphony No. 3} (op. 44) and the \textit{Symphonic Dances} (op. 45).
CHAPTER EIGHT: MUSIC AND THE GREAT WAR

The entire world is almost encompassed in fire. . . Thousands of innocent people perish. . . As if from the netherworld, a gloomy demon has flown on the wind to the surface of the planet.
Fedor Akimenko (composer), 1914

In 1914, war broke out across Europe. The early months of the war galvanized all levels of Russian society, creating a newly unified sense of purpose and identity that had been lacking in previous years. For many, the outbreak of war seemed to mark the end of one historical epoch and the beginning of a new one. Through the “Spirit of 1914,” internal divisions and conflicts were forgotten in an outpouring of patriotic emotion. The war was popularly hailed for its cleansing, purifying effect and the musical community was no exception. Nationalist rhetoric surrounding compositional styles, developed in the pre-war era, gained new import as the military conflict was given a specifically mystical interpretation in which music played a central role.

Although the Great War initially plunged Russia into struggle with the Austro-Hungarian empire, popular sentiment quickly singled out Germany specifically as the enemy. The popular press of the day repeatedly described “German bestiality” (nemetskoe zverstvo) and “German dominance” (nemetskoe zasile), uncovering the latter in a wide range of spheres, from economic to political to musical. Popular resentment of German success in farming, trade and sales found expression in waves of violence perpetrated against German citizens living in Russia, Russian citizens of German descent,

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1 F. Akimenko, “Iskusstvo i voina,” RMG no. 46 (1914): 835-837, here 835.
and anyone with suspected German heritage. Together with several German businesses, the German embassy in Petrograd fell victim to popular violence with the outbreak of war. Such pogroms were repeated at intervals, both on the home front and in the borderlands, culminating in the May 1915 riots in Moscow, in which German businesses were plundered, several people murdered and State authority broke down for a period of days. This incident had a direct and immediate effect on musical circles as the Moscow headquarters of music publishers Jurgenson and Gutheil were among those targeted, persuading the latter to sell his business to the recently established “Russian Music Publishers” and leave the country. Under pressure from the army leadership as well as popular sentiment, the Russian government gradually moved to repress the rights of German citizens and Russians of German descent, confiscating property, forcing resettlement of entire communities and removing legal rights.

For educated society, such anti-German sentiment conflicted with a lengthy tradition of admiration and borrowing from German intellectual and cultural tradition. While contemporary Germany had previously been a target of critique, the war raised the stakes considerably. To be Russian increasingly meant to not be German. Nietzsche’s orphans, finding themselves embroiled in a political and military conflict along broadly national lines, were caught between their embrace of aspects of German culture and their advocation of a uniquely Russian identity. Feeling betrayed by the country whose cultural and intellectual products they had so admired, they struggled to reconcile their own

4 For examples of anti-German articles aimed specifically against Russia’s internal German population, see, for instance, “Vopros o nasakh ‘vnutrennikh nemtsakh’,” Moskovskie vedomosti no. 27 (February 4/17, 1915); “Mery protiv nemetskogo zemlevladeniia,” Moskovskie vedomosti no. 29 (February 6/19, 1915):1; “Nemetskia i evreiskie ‘gumanisty’,” Moskovskie vedomosti no. 44 (February 24, 1915): 2; “Nemetskaia psikhologiia v Rossii,” Moskovskie vedomosti no. 179 (August 4/17, 1915): 1.

5 See Apollon no. 6-7 (August-September 1915): 101. The purchase was made for 300000 rubles.

6 For a detailed analysis of this process, see Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire.
cultural and intellectual heritage with the current military conflict. To be sure,
Nietzschean phrasing continued to appear in the press: the war, it was argued, “created
great upheavals and calls forth a revaluation of values, a revaluation both in the material
world and the spiritual world.”

However, such adoption of Nietzschean slogans sat uneasily with a population poised to reject the intellectual heritage of the enemy.

Countless public lectures, journal and newspaper articles and public opinion polls
focused on addressing this issue: what relationship should Russia have with creations of
Germany’s cultural and philosophical past? The answer was by no means clear-cut.

Debates about the degree to which Russia could lay claim to German cultural traditions
were particularly troublesome in the philosophical and musical realms, so much indebted
to the Germanic cultural heritage. While debate focused specifically on the figures of
Nietzsche and Wagner, the role of Russian composers and musicians in this world of
increasing national antagonism played an important part.

While the initial problem facing Nietzsche’s orphans was the reconciliation of
their cultural heritage with dreams for Russia’s future, military losses soon began to
dampen the initial optimism expressed throughout Russia. As the actual, material impact
of the war began to be felt, the first cracks in the imagined musical metaphysics of the
modern age began to appear. In retrospect, Leonid Sabaneev argued, the end of this world
came, not with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, but with the outbreak of war in 1914.

The impact of the war and the revolutions that followed in its wake would ultimately
encompass and overwhelm the musical interpretation of the world so carefully

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“Nekotorye motivy tvorchestva A. Skriabina,” Muzyka no. 214 (March 14, 1915): 169-172, here 171. A.
Gorskii paraphrased Nietzsche with his comment on Scriabin’s “Slavic, all too Slavic” melodies. See
8 Sabaneev, “Zhurnalizm i rabota v gazetakh,” 1.1.
constructed in previous years. As the basis for a unified society became ever less clear, increasing national sentiment rent asunder the symbiotic relationship between German and Russian heritage that had previously underpinned the musical metaphysics of the age. Unable to provide a unifying foundation in this increasingly centrifugal world that moved from war to revolution, the metaphysical image of music’s unifying power was ultimately deemed a failure. A musical Orpheus would not appear to save Russia in its time of distress.

Drawing together the individual biographies of Medtner, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin with the broader social and intellectual climate of the time, the next two chapters examine the impact of the Great War on the musical metaphysics that had developed in the Russian Empire. I begin this chapter with an examination of wartime rhetoric surrounding “German” and “Russian” cultures, as well as the role envisioned for music and musicians within this transformed space. I argue that the predominant sentiments expressed in the interpretation of the war from the perspective of Russia’s musical community was three-fold: the differentiation between acceptable and unacceptable intellectual/cultural heritage (“German” versus “Prussian”), the delineation of Russia’s salvific (and increasingly national) role in the current crisis, and finally, increased emphasis on the ethnic Russianness of musician-artists. Despite initial optimism and mystical interpretations of the war in which Russia was seen as the salvation for modern humanity, belief in music’s ability to actively transform society was increasingly strained by 1916. By the time of the Bolshevik seizure of power and nationalization of musical life, the social milieu that had made the formation of a transformative vision of music’s influence possible had already vanished into memory.
The later sections of this chapter examine how the creative work of each composer, as well as the reception of his work, was affected by these developments. Nikolai Medtner found himself increasingly alienated from even his closest circles of friends as anti-German sentiment paralyzed his creative potential, as explored in Section Two. Section Three focuses upon the premiere of Rachmaninoff’s *Vsenoshnoe bdenie* in 1915, which coincided with increased rhetoric connecting “Russian” “Imperial” and “Orthodox,” but his music itself failed to live up to contemporary expectations of a contemporary *Mystery*. Section Four follows the tumultuous path of Scriabin’s embrace of the significance of the Great War and his definitive transformation from a “universalist” to a “Pan-Slavist” in the minds of his followers.

**Section One**

**German or Prussian?**

With the outbreak of war, Nietzsche’s orphans found themselves forced to choose sides: they could retain the largely German intellectual genealogy upon which they had constructed their worldview, or they could partake in growing nationalist sentiment, which increasingly was expressed in anti-German tones. Anti-German sentiment did not necessarily lead to the rejection of all ideas and institutions associated with Germany, however. As Simon Frank suggested in a 1914 article published in *Russkaia mysl’*, Russians had to differentiate between the German “genius” of the past and current hostile relations. The solution reached by many was the adoption of an explicit contrast between modern-day “Prussia” and the cultural heritage of “Germany.”

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10 See Akimenko, “Iskusstvo i voina,” 835-836. A similar distinction had been voiced much earlier by Vladimir Solov’ev in distinguishing between German cultural and political nationalism. See V.V. Serbinenko, “The Russian Idea: Metaphysics, Ideology and History,” in *Social Identities in Revolutionary*
delineation was inspired in part by Vladimir Solov’ev’s interpretation of German political nationalism (in opposition to cultural heritage), it took on new urgency in the wartime context.\textsuperscript{11} It was claimed that “Prussian” belligerence was of recent origin, which it was necessary to distinguish clearly from the great (and universal) achievements of past German culture. While the latter could continue to serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary Russia, the former deserved only hatred. Vladimir Derzhanovskii, the editor of the weekly Moscow journal \textit{Muzyka}, claimed that “only several decades ago [Prussia] transformed [Germany] into a spiritual desert, on the soil of which had grown the false empty blossoms of [Richard] Strauss and [Max] Reger.”\textsuperscript{12} Derzhanovskii declared it the duty of all true Russian artists to preserve the great German humanist traditions of the past, while struggling against the materialistic, warlike culture of modern-day Germany. Moscow music critic Iurii Shamurin claimed that Prussia was a “spiritual desert” that had no art, song, religion or ideas; in short, nothing but brute strength.\textsuperscript{13} He contrasted this image specifically with “old Germany,” a “people of musicians, philosophers and poets.”\textsuperscript{14} A. Gorskii, seeking to analyze the essence of “Germanism” in music for readers of Odessa’s \textit{Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik}, emphasized the “spiritual” bankruptcy of contemporary Germany (i.e., Prussia), tracing a direct line from the ideas of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (specifically their rejection of God) to the

\textsuperscript{11} A. Moshchanskii, “Materialy po istorii russkoj literatury i kul’tury,” \textit{Russkaia mys’l} no. 12 (December 1914): 140-145.
\textsuperscript{14} Shamurin, “Sviataia voina,” 467.
present conflict.\textsuperscript{15} Writing for Petrograd’s \textit{RMG}, N.N. Fatov argued that Russia’s struggle was specifically against German militarism, but not against German culture, claiming that “there is no art of the enemy, no science of the enemy, but there is only science and art of a single (\textit{edinyi}) cultured humanity.”\textsuperscript{16} Peter Struve similarly sought to distinguish between the “old Germany” of “Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Fichte and Schelling” and the “creators of the 1914 war.”\textsuperscript{17} In all these cases, the rhetorical thrust was the same: through separating “cultural” Germany from the present-day military opponent, the values of the past could be preserved while embracing Russian patriotism in support of the war. The synthesis of German and Russian worlds could be preserved.

Such critique was not limited to nationalistic sentiment, posing Russia against Germany, but extended to an attack on many of the values and practices that had emerged in the modern age. Shamurin argued that it was not Germany alone that had fashioned “Prussia”, but that “all peoples spiritually created [Prussia].”\textsuperscript{18} While Prussia was, in Shamurin’s view, the birthplace of contemporary decay, all people and nations were equally guilty of adopting a “Prussian” worldview in their own lives and societies. For this reason, “in destroying Prussia, people will destroy a shameful page of their own past”: the development of materialism, capitalism, rude strength and “all the evils and devilishness of our century.”\textsuperscript{19} This connection of Prussia with all the evils of modernity found widespread acceptance. In an October 1914 speech to the Moscow Philosophical Society, Sergei Bulgakov similarly claimed that contemporary Germany was the most

\textsuperscript{17} Petr Struve, “Sud’ istorii,” \textit{Russkaia mysl} no. 11 (November 1914): 158-168, here 167.
\textsuperscript{18} Iu. Shamurin, “Sviataia voina,”. A similar claim about the problem of “I and us” being a universal challenge facing all humanity is expressed in Kor’, “Germanskaia ideia,” 46.
\textsuperscript{19} Iu. Shamurin, “Sviataia voina,” 466-467; 468.
“modern” nation in this sense.\(^{20}\) Music critic A. Gorskii echoed this general sentiment as late as 1916, claiming that Prussia’s desire for military dominance was simply the expression of all nations in the current age.\(^{21}\) Thus, these critics interpreted the problem of “Prussia,” not primarily as a military conflict, but as a confrontation with the darker forces of modernity itself, which all peoples, including Russians, were in danger of adopting in the modern age. “Prussianism” was not merely a German, but a universal human, and specifically modern, concern.

In contrast to “Prussia”, “Germany” symbolized a lost world of culture that had once inspired the greatest products of human creativity. “Germany” was the world of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Goethe and Kant, a world that Russian intellectuals and artists could continue to turn to for inspiration. In doing so, Russian cultural figures would, it was claimed, differentiate themselves from their contemporary opponents. “The tragedy of the German nation,” argued composer Fedor Akimenko, “is that its best representatives, especially in the highest expressions of Art, served their great service, however strange it may be, more to other nations and least of all touched the Teutons.”\(^{22}\) The German people had proven deaf to the great humanistic message expressed by its past geniuses. The task of correct interpretation had fallen to other nations, particularly Russia. Such views found expression in the general press also, as expressed in a letter from an anonymous writer in February 1915 to the newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti*, arguing that Germany had forgotten its teaching of humanism and human rights and that


\(^{21}\) Gorskii, “Germanizm i muzyka,” *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik* no. 5-6 (1916), 24.

\(^{22}\) Akimenko, “Iskusstvo i voina,” 836.
it had fallen to Russia (and other countries) to defend it.\(^\text{23}\)

Of course, not all contemporaries adopted this approach. Attacking the tendency of dividing the “Germany of culture” from the contemporary militarism of Prussia, V. Ern strove to make a direct connection from the philosophy of Kant to the current war.\(^\text{24}\)

Sergei Bulgakov admitted in his correspondence with Emil Medtner to a certain “Germanophobia” that extended not just to the current political situation, but to German culture as a whole.\(^\text{25}\) Similarly, E. Koltonovskaiia insisted that “in Germany no division or duality is observable. She is singularly and entirely militaristic \((\text{voinstvenn}a)\).”\(^\text{26}\) In relation to music specifically, a certain L. I-ov, responding to N.N. Fatov’s article “On the art of the enemy,” argued that all German cultural products should be avoided, as, in addition to the personality of their creator, the spirit of the German \(\text{narod}\), against which Russia now fought, was inherently present in each work. This German culture was alleged to be “organically opposed to ours, opposed to our moral ideal as it developed over a thousand years.”\(^\text{27}\) Since the current battle was truly about “the place of the two races in the history of humanity and culture,” it was not military strength, but rather the

\(^{23}\) Nabliudatel’, “Otvet na vozzvanie ‘k kul’turnomu miru’ predstavitelei germanskoj nauki i iskusstva,” \(\text{Moskovskie vedomosti}\) no. 26 (February 1/14, 1915): 1.

\(^{24}\) V. Ern, “Ot Kanta k Krupp,” \(\text{Russkaia mysl’}\) no. 12 (December 1914): 116-124. This argument was vehemently attacked by Simon Frank in the same issue. Frank pointed out that Ern nevertheless contradicted his extreme anti-German views in a public lecture given in November 1914, where he admitted the positive value of such thinkers as Goethe and Novalis. See Frank, “O poiskakh smysla voiny”, 130. Ern’s claim was also refuted by Nikolai Berdiaev, “K sporam o germanskoi filosofii,” \(\text{Russkaia mysl’}\) no. 5 (May 1915): 115-121, who claimed that he oversimplified the complex, metaphysical nature of the German spirit. In Berdiaev’s view, the true tragedy of modern Germany was the covering up of the irrational (the split between subject and object).


\(^{27}\) L. I-ov, “Po povodu stat’i ‘Ob iskusstve vragov’,” \(\text{RMG}\) no. 44 (1914): 782-785, here 784. I-ov was responding to N.N. Fatov’s article “On the art of the enemy”. See N. Fatov, “Eshche po povodu ‘Iksusstvo vragov’,” \(\text{RMG}\) no. 46 (1914): 843-845.
internal life of the narod that would decide the outcome of the war. In such a context, the author argued, hearing enemy music would make you take on foreign traits temporarily, thus betraying the cause of the Russian narod. Other public intellectuals sought to emphasize the lengthy tradition of anti-German critique that was to be found in Russian “prophets” of the past, including Vladimir Solov’ev and Nikolai Fedorov. However, while such distinctions show an important division in the way these thinkers conceived of “national spirit” (as something inherent and eternal or as part of a great historical process of development), both sides converged in their interpretation of the role that Russia was to play in the emerging conflict. Regardless of Germany’s past, Russia’s future task was clear: the overcoming of the divisive, modern spirit and creation of a new, less individualistic society. This task was embodied in the concept of a “Holy war” (sviataia voina).

Russia’s “Holy War”

While the modern age had seemingly ushered in nothing but destruction and division (raz’edinenie), the war, it was argued in 1914, was a moment of hope in a metaphysical sense. Of central importance for the future of humanity was the new basis upon which unification among peoples would take place. Russia could not merely defeat Germany by military might, as this would simply mark the shift of power from one people to another. Rather, Russia’s mission was to transform the spiritual basis of the world itself. Comparing the import of the current crisis with Christ’s crucifixion, Iurii

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28 L. I-ov, “Po povodu stat’i ‘Ob iskusstve vragov’,” 783. In his response, Fatov emphasized that he had taken the only position that a “Russian intelligent” could take, valuing everything of spiritual greatness, while rejecting the material; any other stance, he suggested, would make the Russian intelligentsia as bad as Germans. Thus, even within a more inclusive discourse, the importance of national belonging (being a true Russian) was of central import.
Shamurin envisioned the “birth of a new humanity, of a new life, of which it was impossible to even think before,” through Russian victory over German forces.31 Through Slavic intervention, the world would be transformed and “all will become brothers. Never before on the earth has such a flame of love and communality (obshchnost’) burned.” By “throwing off its petty concerns,” all humanity would emerge from the battle “united (edino) and wonderful!”32 Adopting a term beloved by Russian Symbolist writers, A. Koral’nik argued that “the life-creating (zhiznotvorno) idea does not exist in Germany today.”33 Invoking Nietzschean categories in his critique, he argued that contemporary German culture possessed “only ‘Aleksandrianism’, the repetition of old and foreign motives.”34 Turning Nietzsche’s critique on its head, Koral’nik claimed that, rather than a young, creative soul, the contemporary German soul was old and beyond the ability to creatively transform the world. Russia, in contrast, possessed a vibrant young soul full of promise. This image of an “old Germany” in contrast to a “young Russia” was adopted by many commentators of the day. The war itself was repeatedly lauded as a “holy war” by many commentators, envisioning Russia in the role of Christ and casting contemporary Germany (or Prussia) in the figure of the Antichrist.35

This new brand of Russian messianism found support throughout educated Russian society of the day. At the October 6, 1914 meeting of the Moscow Philosophical

34 A. Koral’nik, “Germanskaia ideia,” Russkaia mysl’ no. 12 (December 1914), 58-59. This use of “Alexandrianism” as a concept is clearly borrowed from Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy.
Society, a series of lectures were devoted specifically to this theme.\textsuperscript{36} Philosopher Evgenii Trubetskoï insisted that the current task facing Russia was “above peoples” (\textit{sverkhnarodnyi}).\textsuperscript{37} The Russian people were not fighting (and must not fight) for their own national benefit. It was specifically Russia’s unique relation to Christianity that gave hope for the transformation of the existing world: “The great happiness of Russia is found in this coinciding of national interest with ideals of just, Christian relations to other nations (\textit{natsional’nosti}). Her greatest international task is, at the same time, a higher moral and religious task.” This task was, in short, the “Christian resolution of the national question,” a task once envisioned by Solov’ev and now on the verge of being realized through Russian victory. Trubetskoï announced the appearance of a “new type of human in the process of rebirth,” which he interpreted as the greater purpose of the war itself. The “rebirth of Russia” was the very source of “that moral strength, which will be necessary for us in the foundational work after the war.”\textsuperscript{38} Similar emphasis on Russia’s uniquely Christian mission was widespread in contemporary commentary, both in liberal views mirroring those of Trubetskoï and in more openly Slavophile interpretations. In his paper “The Spiritual Meaning of the War” (\textit{Dukhovnaia smysl voiny}), philosopher Ivan Il’in sought, not entirely successfully, to combine a neo-Slavophile interpretation of Russia’s mission in the current war with a Hegelian-based interpretation of historical


\textsuperscript{38} [No author], “Lektsiia kn. E.N. Trubetskogo,” \textit{Rech’} no. 71 (March 14, 1915): 5.
Margarita Morozova’s belief in Russia’s universal, Christian mission inspired her both to host a series of intellectual meetings in her own home and to personally encourage Trubetskoï’s devotion to this task.

The question of nationalism and universalism (or cosmopolitanism) was a central issue discussed in public intellectual forums of the day. Although contemporaries made much of the division between the “universal” image of Russia’s salvific role expressed by such figures as Trubetskoï and the more narrowly “Slavophile” image embraced by others (such as Sergei Bulgakov), the underlying distinction, while important from an intellectual standpoint, had little impact in their overall analysis of the war and Russia’s role within it. Whether or not Russia was destined to be the savior of humanity because of innate national characteristics or because historical circumstances had lead to her present cultural identity, she alone had the ability to overcome the divisions of modern life. The synthesis between Russian nationalism and the assumption of her innately universal nature served, more and more explicitly, to push towards an exclusive rather than inclusive image of “Russianness”. This process, in which most of Russia’s educated class took part in the early days of the war, underpinned pre-existing views of national identity in music, giving what had previously been descriptions of alternate cultural and artistic practices new import. Music itself was a battlefield in which Russian spiritual victory was to be achieved over the German enemy.

Music and War

For a transcript of this paper, together with Anna Medtner’s comments on it, see LC, Medtner correspondence, Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (November 8, 1914), ll.1-8ob.

Morozova had been encouraging Trubetskoï to develop his theories in this area since at least 1909, calling it his “mission”. See Morozova to Trubetskoï (August 20, 1909), RGB f.171.3.2, l.42ob.

For many contemporary commentators, music expressed both the decline of German dominance and the birth of new, Russian creativity.\(^{42}\) Germany’s deterioration was allegedly embodied in the music of present-day German composers like Reger and Strauss. While such discourse echoed Emil Medtner’s earlier writings against German music of the time, it was increasingly used in a manner that Medtner himself would denounce. Both Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche came to symbolize the intermingling of musical, metaphysical and nationalist rhetoric in discussions of the war. The creative output of both these men could be embraced now only in part, and only through specific explanation.\(^{43}\) Wagner, once the darling of the Russian Symbolist movement, increasingly came to be interpreted in a negative light. In defining the militarism of modern Germany, Evgenii Trubetskoi turned to the music of Richard Wagner, particularly the *Ring of the Nibelung*, an allegorical embodiment of “Prussianism” that was embraced by many contemporaries.\(^{44}\) Solov’ev’s metaphorical adoption of the figure of Siegfried to symbolize contemporary Germany was also revived for rhetorical effect in many musical commentaries.\(^{45}\) Nor was rhetoric limited to lofty,
spiritual concerns. A. Kankarovich argued that Germany had lost, not merely economically, but also musically from the impacts of the war; in his view, the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth had been cancelled because it operated primarily on Russian money. Moreover, he argued, most concert halls, music stores and publishers in Germany had suffered, since Russians formed the most supportive market. Underpinning such claims was the assumption that only Russians truly appreciated the spiritual importance of arts such as music, which was lost on Germans.

In the early days of the war, many members of Russia’s musical community continued to emphasize the central, unifying role of their art in times of upheaval. Thus, N.N. Fatov insisted, “we must not forget the final goals of this war. It must bring us closer to the future brotherhood of nations (narody), and not to their division (raz’edinenie). We must destroy everything that interferes with that brotherhood, that disunites (razobshchat’) peoples, and all the more must we value that which enables unification. And truly is there anything that might unite people more than the fruits of spiritual culture, philosophical ideas, scientific discoveries, creations of art?” Several new musical journals actually began publication in the midst of the war. In 1915, the editor of the Odessa-based Izvstnyi muzikal’nyi vestnik announced that his paper was devoted to reuniting the “connections between cultured peoples” at a time when the entire world, shaken by the events of the war, seemed to have lost all unifying threads. Rather than focusing on the unification of people of various nations, the Petrograd-based journal, Muzikal’nyi sovremennik, also founded during the war, emphasized the role of music in

overcoming the societal divisions within Russia itself, which, argued the editor, had become ever more pronounced with the outbreak of war.49 Underlying such arguments was the assumption that music, as the most widespread of arts, was an expression of “universal human genius, universal spirit”, a claim in keeping with the universalizing discourse of musical metaphysics developed in the pre-war era.

However, while the idea of music as a positive, unifying force continued to be espoused in the Russian musical press, the interpretation of its fulfillment took on ever more nationalist hues. The synthesis between Russian nationalism and the acceptance of cultural products and ideas with “universal” significance had already led an uneasy existence in the years prior to the war. Amid rising nationalist tensions, it became increasingly difficult to advocate a universal, progressive view of human history and music without an explicit embrace of Russia’s messianic role within that process. In a 1913 series of articles dedicated to outlining the “national particularities of Russian music,” Iu. Kurdiumov argued that it was impossible for anyone to love “Russians, Germans and Tatars” equally, just as it was simply human nature to love one’s homeland (and, by extension, the art of that homeland), more. For this reason, a “universal” art was possible only upon a national basis.50 Russian composers, argued Kurdiumov, would, by their very nature, write specifically Russian music, so long as they deeply loved their country, sharing its dreams, beliefs, joys and griefs.51 Similarly, several authors expressed concern repeatedly that, although music in Russia “currently occupies one of

50 Iu. Kurdiumov, “O natsional’nikh osobennostiakh russkoi muzyki,” _RMG_ no. 13 (March 31, 1913): 322-326, here 323. Kurdiumov argued this was demonstrated by the examples of composers like Beethoven and Wagner, who were first and foremost German and only secondarily cosmopolitans. The series of articles appears in the following issues of _RMG_: no. 13 (March 31, 1913): 322-326; no. 14; no. 40: 856-858; no.41: 884-887; no.43: 953-960
51 And, Kurdiumov argued, so long as they “write only when inspired.” See Kurdiumov, “O natsional’nikh osobennostiakh russkoi muzyki,” 323.
the first places [in the development of culture (kulturnost’)’’], both in the range of its development, and in its content,” most music performed was of foreign origin.\(^{52}\)

Opponents of exclusivist national sentiment came ever more under attack for possible disloyalty to their homeland. In keeping with the above debates, and in correspondence with other boycotts of German products, public discussion quickly turned to the question of banning German music from Russian concerts. In early 1915, the newspaper *Rampa i zhizn’* posed two questions to its reading public: Would a ban on musical works of the nations battling against Russia be appropriate? If so, would such a ban harm the development of Russian music? While posing the issue as a question up for discussion, journalist M. Unigovskii made no secret of his own views, arguing that “in Rus’ we have enough of our own great purely Russian composers. . . being freed from the influence of the Germans, Wagners and Beethovens in the Russian spirit will appear among us, which have thus far, due to our love of everything foreign, not received their deserved attention.”\(^{53}\) The published responses covered the full spectrum of opinions, but a general boycott of German music was ultimately observed.\(^{54}\) German and Austrian musicians performing in Russia were also replaced by musicians from “friendly” countries such as Russia, Poland and France. In some cases, German and Austrian musicians were expelled or arrested.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{55}\) The ban seems to have started voluntarily and later culminated with government policy supporting the expulsion of enemy musicians. See Zritel, “Muzykal’nyi mir,” *Muzyka* no. 194 (October 25, 1914): 492-493; “Muzyka i voina,” *RMG* no. 2 (1915): 44-46. This process parallels broader trends noted in Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire.*
One of the most dramatic shifts in rhetoric in the musical community was shown by Leonid Sabaneev. Though he had repeatedly supported a universal and progressive, rather than national view of music prior to the war, increasing hostility between countries prompted a change in his own stance. In a 1915 feuilleton, published by the daily newspaper *Golos’ Moskvy*, he adopted a specifically nationalist vocabulary, arguing that German music had lost its hegemony in the world and calling for its replacement by specifically Slavic music, embodied in new, Slavic geniuses. A similar shift in stance was depicted visually on the cover of the Moscow journal *Muzyka*. While the journal’s logo had started out as a classical depiction of a musical score framed by two recorders (1910-1912), it was changed in 1913 to incorporate the ubiquitous image of a lyre. In 1914, the imagery shifted again, this time showing various Russian folk instruments, including a *gusli*. Most striking, however, was the logo adopted in January 1915: a lyre framed an upright sword, itself poised in such a way to form the shape of a cross. In this symbolic representation, the Orphic lyre, the sword of war and the Christian cross appeared in a single unity. The task of Orpheus, it seemed, was the holy war of Russia.

[Illustration A.9]

The increasingly fraught role of music found expression in a series of articles entitled “Germanism and music” by A. Gorskii, which appeared in 1915 in *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik*. Gorskii argued that, in order to understand the motivations of the German enemy, one must first study the creative output of both Nietzsche and Wagner. Accepting Vol’fing [Emil Medtner]’s claim that the accomplishments of the “German spirit” in music were the highest thus far (in contrast to Russia, where music was still a

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Gorskii argued that the music of Wagner, together with Nietzsche’s analysis of it, predicted the basis upon which Germany itself was developing. Wagner’s creation of Siegfried, Gorskii argued, had paved the way for future German actions, uniting them into a single, militaristic whole. Almost certainly drawing upon Sergei Durylin’s analysis of Wagner’s significance in *Vagner i Rossiia* (in addition to Solov’ev), Gorskii offered a dire analysis of the effect of Wagner’s music on the German people. Wagner had been the first to see that the “bright hopes for a wonderful, indefinably-distant future” were doomed to failure due to the lack of “immediate general-human actions in the present,” an analysis expressed symbolically by the death of the Gods in Wagner’s *Ring* cycle. In contrast, *Parsifal* was not an “embodiment of the German spirit, like Siegfried, but only a shadowy projection. . . the final mystery of Wagner is a dying mumble”. Caught between the two visions of the future Wagner had embodied in these works, Germany was left with only two options: “to suffer and die quickly or to suffer and die slowly.” The path of war was the embodiment of Germany’s embrace of the hero Siegfried, the path to which they were called by Nietzsche in his later writings. However, Gorskii darkly reminded his readers, Siegfried had not been able to forestall the destruction of Valhalla and the death of the Gods; rather, all had died together. While all nations were striving towards “all-human, all-general confluence (*vsechelovecheskoe, vseobshchoe sliianie*)”, each nation offered a different basis upon which such unification would take place. Gorskii’s analysis left little doubt over what

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58 A. Gorskii, “Germanizm i muzyka,” *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik* no. 6 (June 1915), 6-7.
59 A. Gorskii, “Germanizm i muzyka,” *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik* no. 12-13 (1915), 3-4; no. 5-6 (1916), 23.
60 A. Gorskii, “Germanizm i muzyka,” *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik* no. 5-6 (1916), 24-25.
61 According to Gorskii, the “hero” figure of Siegfried was not Wilhelm II (as Vladimir Solov’ev had claimed), but Nietzsche himself. A. Gorskii, “Germanizm i muzyka,” *Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik* no. 12-13, 4). The reference is to Solov’ev’s poem “Drakon”, which was dedicated to “Siegfried” (Wilhelm II).
form unity would take under German domination. Thus far, Gorskii’s interpretation of German philosophy and culture aligned well with the Slavophile image embraced by Bulgakov and Ern, who connected specific attributes with one or another “nation”, seeing the eternal oppressor and the salvation of all humanity in the innate natures of, respectively, the German and Russian narod.

Nevertheless, Gorskii was far too committed to contemporary musical metaphysics to condemn Nietzsche’s ideas and Wagner’s music to complete infamy. Like Durylin, Gorskii insisted that Wagner was never “truly German” and, moreover, that the symbolic import of Parsifal held a second, “hidden liturgy” (skritaia liturgiia) in addition to the more obvious pessimism and embrace of death that Nietzsche had recognized. This gnostic message, encripted in Parsifal itself (as well as, Gorskii suggested, the thought of Nietzsche), had not been understood by the German narod, but had fallen to the Russian narod to comprehend. In short, there was a third option. Rather than death, “humanity might be saved and might save the whole world.”

Russia had “felt” this truth but, Gorskii argued, it was not enough to feel it. It must be brought to pass. It could not be realized by Germany, as there was no longer any young, creative strength left in Germany that could unite them on any other path than war and destruction. In short, there was no musical genius left in Germany to offer a new, unifying vision to supplant that of Wagner’s. In freeing music from “German dominance,” humanity itself would be freed from the militaristic path selected by the German narod. This task would fall to a Russian.

Most striking in Gorskii’s analysis is not what was said, but the underlying

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categories through which he interprets the significance of music. Although Nietzsche is
demonized as the “true” Siegfried, the figure who has led Germany on its militaristic path
through his concept of the “Will to Power,” Gorskii continued to make use of
Nietzschean categories in his conception of music itself. Music remained the irrational,
elemental, unifying force envisioned by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy, able to
regenerate human society and save it from the divisions of modern life. No German
composer had been able to fulfill Nietzsche’s calling and, Gorskii believed, a Russian
composer must take up this task. Unable to fully embrace Nietzsche’s (or Wagner’s)
prophetic vision as openly as Russian music critics had before the war, Gorskii found
himself in an unresolvable conundrum. The Russian and German intellectual traditions,
which had melded in the formation of the musical metaphysics of early twentieth-century
Russia were unable to dialectically resolve the contradictions wrought by the physical
manifestation of violent warfare. Growing nationalist sentiment offered a potential
solution, but would require the abandonment of the very source of inspiration for this
irrational, musical conception of reality. This was the contradiction that Nietzsche’s
orphans faced throughout the war.

While the need for a unifying genius grew ever stronger, the delineation of a
musical language within which such a composer could express himself grew increasingly
vague. Iu. Kurdiumov had faced this difficulty in 1913, when he sought to define what a
genuinely national sound in Russian music would be, leading him to fall back on vague

64 The analysis is, by and large, comparable to that offered by Sergei Durylin two years earlier, with the
additional urgency brought on by war. See Durylin, Rikhard Vagner i Rossiiia (Moscow: Musaget, 1913).
This work is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.
65 While implicit in this series of articles, Gorskii made this claim evident in other articles. See Gorskii,
Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 15-16 (November 1916): 100-104; no.17-18 (December 1916): 115-120.
claims about organic wholeness: “in questions of art, including music, there are no exact
criteria. . . . anyone who does not feel that the oznachennaiia theme of Borodin is purely
Russian, cannot be helped by any kind of judgement (rassuzhdenie).”66 Gorskii’s idea of
a “hidden liturgy” contained in Wagner’s music posed the question less in terms of
specific compositional techniques and more in the sense of a shared, communal spirit
amongst the Russian narod. However, the idea of a single, unified narod had itself
become increasingly questioned in the years leading up to the war. While Shamurin
continued the familiar claim that Russia’s Christian mission was led by the narod itself,67
other commentators, such as Evgenii Trubetskoi, insisted that the spirit of the narod had
to be “resurrected.” This implicitly suggested that the Russian narod itself had begun to
fall prey to the disunifying and secular trends dominant in modern life, an idea that had
been voiced in the musical context also. New genres of folk music, such as the
chastushki, had, in the years before the war, been targeted as an example of the spread of
urban and modern values into the Russian countryside, symbolizing in turn the
disunifying and secular trends dominant in modern life. Such concerns seemed to be
forgotten in the uplighting surge of enthusiasm (pod’em) that accompanied the start of the
war. In assessing the impact of the war on Russian folk songs, N.I. Privalova insisted that
the “creative strength” of the Russian narod had not been expended, pointing specifically
to the creation of wartime chastushki as an example of the spiritual creative strength of
the Russian narod.68 While emphasis on the active, transforming role of musical genius

68 N. I. Privalova, “Kak otrazilas’ voina v sovremennoi russkoi narodnoi pesni,” Muzyka i penie no. 2 (1914): 3; no. 3 (1914): 2-3. Nevertheless, Privalova also granted great influence to the organizations
continued unabated, this went hand in hand with a growing sense that only a strong national spirit could provide a suitable foundation for new creativity. Russian folk songs were an obvious way in which a composer could intimately connect with the narod, but the emphasis upon the internal, spiritual expression of Russian sentiment, together with the inability to specifically delineate what the external characteristics of such a music would be, left external signs of this connection between national genius and narod up for debate.

Section Two

The Medtner Brothers and the Problem of “Germanness”

*All Germans are our enemy! Our countersign and slogan must be one alone: ‘Down with the German yoke!’*

*Moskovskie vedomosti*, May 10, 1915

“Why cannot Germans and Russians be close? They might have been close.”

Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner, October 22-25, 1914

For the Medtner brothers, wartime developments were devastating. In addition to destroying their hopes of forming a new cultural synthesis by combining German and Russian cultures, the war caused a personal crisis in the creative work of both men and drove an insurmountable wedge between the brothers. Geographically separated by war, Emil and Nikolai discovered fundamental differences in their worldviews that would never be overcome. While Emil ever more stridently defended the strength and power of “German” culture, Nikolai, together with his wife Anna, grew increasingly critical of German atrocities committed in the war. At the same time, both brothers interpreted the war as a direct expression of their personal failure to unify human society through

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69 “Vil’gel’m ili germaniskii narod?”. *Moskovskie vedomosti* no. 106 (May 10/23, 1915).

70 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 22-25, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence
creative action. For the Medtners, the war heralded not just the end of their dream of unification of cultures through the art of music, but the end of their intellectual and creative collaboration.

Analysis of the Medtners’ response to the war complicates our understanding of the ways in which “patriotism, citizenship, and membership in the nation” were connected during the war. Melissa Stockdale has argued that active patriotism (meaning direct participation in the war effort) served as a determinant of membership in the Russian national community. In the case of musicians, this argument becomes more complicated. Although none of the three composers actively took up arms, it was Nikolai’s ethnic background, combined with his aesthetic preferences that served to exclude him from an emergent, more narrowly defined, sense of nation.

The outbreak of war found Emil Medtnar travelling in Germany, where he was arrested and imprisoned for a brief period of time. Upon his release, having given his word to German authorities not to return to Russia, he ultimately settled in Switzerland, where he underwent psychoanalysis with Carl Jung. Though distant from family and friends (as well as living outside both his homelands), Emil acknowledged that such an arrangement was the best he could have hoped for: “Only in a neutral country,” he wrote to a friend in Russia, “could I come to terms with my shock [at the war], while in Moscow I would have gone crazy. . . for me personally THIS war is the most horrible event that I could possibly imagine.” He was unable either to eat or to sleep at night,

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72 See Anna Metner to Emil Metner, (undated [before August 18] 1914), LC Medtner correspondence.
74 RGALI f.1956, op.2, ed.khr.11, l.42; Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova, RGB f.167.13.12, l.7-12. See
granting the war cosmic significance. Voraciously reading any Russian-language newspaper he could find for news, Emil was enraged and disgusted by the openly anti-German sentiment expressed in the pages of such papers as *Russkoe slovo*, often expressing his distaste savagely in letters to his Russian acquaintances. Distant from family and friends, he allowed his tormented thoughts to dwell upon images of betrayal, both real and imagined, by his former companions in Russia, including Viacheslav Ivanov, Nikolai Zhiliaev, Grigori Rachinskii, Sergei Bulgakov, Andrei Belyi, Marietta Shaginian and others.

In Russia, news of the war’s outbreak prostrated Nikolai, leaving him creatively “paralyzed” and unable to compose. Anna feared for both his physical and mental health. He awaited a call up for active military service with dread, a concern that would

also Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (July 20-August 2, 1914), Metner, *Pis’ma*, 159: “You know that for me Russia and Germany are my two homelands, equally beloved. This is why this, in the full meaning of the word, fratricidal war is for me the most horrible event of my life”.

Emil Metner to Nikolai Metner (June 8, 1915), GTsMMK, no.326, l.12ob; on his loss of appetite, inability to sleep and shock at war, see Emil Metner to Margarita Morozova (June 14/1, 1915), RGB f.167.13.12, ll.11-12. Emil identified this war as the beginning of the period referred to by Nietzsche as the “period of classical wars”. See Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (June 13, 1914, new style), RGB f.167.13.12, l.7.

Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 29-31, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.1-1ob; Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (November 13, 1914, new style), RGB f.167.13.12, ll.7-9.

See Sergei Bulgakov to Emil Medtner (May 19, 1915), RGB f.167.13.21; Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (November 13, 1914), RGB f.167.13.12, ll.7-8 (about lies in Russian papers); Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (September 21/8, 1915), RGB f.167.25.10, ll.24-25; Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (Zurich, May 16/3, 1915), RGB f.167.25.1 l.2.

Anna commented “neither Rachmaninoff nor Kolia are able to compose. Kolia tries every day to start something, but in vain. Instead, he has spent the last month reading newspapers.” Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (August 24-26, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.1-2ob; Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (September 25-28, 1914), ll.2-2ob, LC Medtner correspondence; “Kolia so inexpressibly suffers from this war that I at one time was afraid for his health.” Anna Medtner to Emil Metner (September 25-28, 1914), ll.1, LC Medtner correspondence; “He cannot in any way accept the war. It is painful to look at him.” Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner, (October 15-17, 1914), ll.2, LC Medtner correspondence; “[Kolia] can’t manage to finish [his new sonata], I think that it is because he started it before the war, but now everything is different. . . but he cannot give it up unfinished.” Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (January 9, 1915), ll.2-2ob, LC Medtner correspondence; Kolia is in an “entirely confused state (*rasteriannoe sostojanie*)”. The war takes all his strength. He even sought advice from Il’in about what to do.” Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 29-30, 1914), l.3ob.
recur throughout the war. Nikolai also experienced with full force the chimera of public opinion in Russia, which turned ever more violently against Germans, both externally and internally. Repeated outbreaks of violence, targeting German business owners, shocked and dismayed the composer. Nikolai and Anna soon found themselves caught up in the wave of anti-German sentiment. Their personal correspondences with Emil were regularly read by the Russian okhrana, who placed the family under observation in order to determine their level of loyalty to the Russian State. On a more personal level, many of his former intellectual colleagues embraced a neo-Slavophile interpretation of the war, which Nikolai found difficult to fathom. The meeting of the Moscow Philosophical Society on October 19, 1914 at the home of Nikolai’s former piano student and patroness, Margarita Morozova, included a series of papers on this theme by such intellectual luminaries as Viacheslav Ivanov, Simon Frank, Sergei Bulgakov and Evgenii Trubetskoï. Nikolai, who was in attendance, was deeply stricken by the anti-German sentiments expressed at this meeting, as he was by Morozova’s accusation that his failure to enlist in the army demonstrated a lack of patriotic feeling. Witnessing first-hand the

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80 Nikolai was freed from service in August 1914. By September 1915, he was placed in second riad. He was finally freed from all military service in the fall of 1916. For the history of Nikolai’s military assignments (and fears), see Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (undated [before August 18] 1914); (August 22, 1914); (undated [before September 4-5, 1914]); (September 28-October 3, 1914); (January 11, 1915); (September 10-21, 1915); (September 13, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence.  
81 In a 1914 letter, Anna Medtner similarly describes a crowd threatening stores of German poddannykh to Emil Medtner. See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 13-14, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence.  
82 GARF f.102 O.O. 1915 g. op.245 d.165, T.3, ll.65-66. The report is dated July 25, 1915. Emil’s continued presence in Switzerland increased suspicion. Anna repeatedly expressed concern that Emil’s letters were being read by the censor. See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (September 28-October 3, 1914; November 21-22, 1914; May 29, 1916; June 20-24, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence.  
83 N. K. Metner, Pis’ma, 156-159.  
84 These talks were published in Russkaia mysl’ no. 12 (December 1914).  
violence of the May 1915 Moscow riots, Nikolai despaired.\footnote{Nikolai Medtner to Ivan Il’\textquoteright in (May 30, 1915), GTsMMK f.132, no.4730. For more evidence of Nikolai’s mental state as a result of the war, see Nikolai Medtner to Ivan Il’\textquoteright in, (January 7, 1916), GTsMMK f. 132, no.4732, l.2.}

In addition to such concerns, Nikolai also found himself the unlikely target of his elder brother’s anger. In his written correspondence with Nikolai and Anna, Emil lashed out repeatedly against his beloved younger brother and former wife, accusing both of having abandoned the values that they had previously found in German culture and art. In response to a particularly virulent attack, Nikolai begged Emil to believe that “everyone, with whom we talk (Il’in, Kiselev, Zhiliaev, Nilender and many others) know with whom Russia fights and suffers deeply from it” and that “everything that I once loved, I still love now to tears. . . events have changed nothing in me, apart from the shock which they have called forth in me and which have (momentarily, one must hope) paralyzed my compositional ability.”\footnote{Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner [November 8, 1914], \textit{Pis’ma}, 156-159 (GTsMMK f.132, no.1826-1841, ll.3-7); Ibid., (February 2, 1915), Metner, \textit{Pis’ma}, 160-161 (GTsMMK, f.132 no.1826-1841, ll.9-10); Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (November 8, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence l.1ob. Anna similarly emphasized the connection of thought between Kolia and Emil. See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 22-25, 1914); (October 29-31, 1914); (June 10-12, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence.}

Anna seconded Nikolai’s words on multiple occasions, accusing Emil of being unjust.\footnote{“Why do you think that we relate unjustly [to Germany]? Our relation to Germans has not changed one iota, either in me or in Kolia.” Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (December 7-9, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence l.2-2ob. Anna continued to demand clarification of the “differences of viewpoint” that Emil claimed to observe between them. See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (December 12, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.1ob-2.} At the same time, she attempted to soften some of the anti-German sentiment expressed by his former friends and colleagues.\footnote{See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 22-25, 1914); (November 1-2, 1914); (November 4-7, 1914). LC Medtner correspondence.} However, for both Anna and Nikolai, the savagery of the war also brought into question some of the pro-German ideals imbibed from Emil. Thus, in September 1914, Anna wrote a particularly troubled letter to her former husband:

Both for Kolia and for me it is necessary to talk of [the war] with you now. How are
some of the actions of the Germans to be explained? Their behavior toward the Belgians? Why shoot women and children? This [information] is not from Russian papers, but from letters written by Belgians. In general, much needs to be explained and understood in order to accept. I cannot deny my own love for Germans and for this reason suffer terribly from such questions. . . Is contemporary Germany truly right? . . . Believe me, my dear, that in German papers too, not everything is printed.90

Torn between her love of German culture, so deeply instilled by Emil, and love of her homeland, Anna continued to express her concerns and doubts to Emil. In response to his description of a concert in which Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde was performed, she wrote, “when I read what you had experienced and how you listened to Tristan and Isolde, I openly wept. But remember, how you yourself agreed that Germans must be resurrected (vozrodit’sia), that Germans were now in decline. Both you and Kolia often said this when you were troubled by many of their contemporary trends (pravlenie).”91 Nikolai also insisted that his brother be more balanced in his assessment of German atrocities, rather than placing full blame on Russian chauvanism.92 Either unwilling or unable to respond productively to such criticism, Emil fell back increasingly on a pro-German platform, insisting, “race is almost everything. And there is nothing higher than the German race.”93 No path forward was possible for any people, Emil insisted, except through embracing the accomplishments of the German spirit. German victories on the battlefield served only to demonstrate that Germans “battle like they write symphonies.”94 Such claims, far from gaining Emil the support of his friends and family, pushed only towards greater alienation from them. Nor did they offer Emil anything but empty consolation. Whether Germany or Russia were ultimately victorious, his hopes

90 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (September 25-28, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.1ob-2.
91 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (September 28-October 3, 1914), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.2-2ob. See also Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 3-18, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence, 1.1ob.
92 See for instance Nikolai Medtner Emil Medtner (February 2, 1915), GTsMMK, f.132 no.1826-1841, ll.9-10; Nikolai Metner, Pis’ma, 160-161.
93 Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (September 21/8, 1915), RGB f.167.25.10, l.11.
94 Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (June 20/7, 1915), RGB f.171.1.52b, ll.58-59.
were lost, as both countries focused on “destruction of the enemy” rather than victory.\footnote{Emil’s critique of anti-German sentiment expressed in the Russian press had focused specifically on the fact that discussion centered on “destruction” of Germany and Austria and not of victory over them.” See Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (September 21/8, 1915), RGB f.167.25.10, l.26. He later noted the same tendency in the German press.} This despair was most poignantly expressed in his rejection of music, formerly his most beloved art.

Over the course of the war, Emil developed an almost pathological fear of music. For Emil, music had been a symbol of hope for a better future, one in which the faults of the modern age would be overcome. As his hope for a rebirth of the human spirit, united into a pan-European identity (itself based on German culture) was slowly extinguished by the war, his despair extended to all aspects of his existence. His turmoil, caught between hope and despair, was expressed with particular poignancy in a June 1915 letter, inspired by a performance of Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis in Zurich. In a letter to Nikolai, scribbled onto the program book of the performance itself, Emil reflected on the significance of the quartet of singers, who came from Holland, Budapest, Paris and Basel:

> The quartet is composed of two neutral countries and two “enemies”. Only in Switzerland can people still live who feel themselves to be “Europeans,” because here all languages are in (too) friendly harmony.\footnote{Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (June 8, 1915), GTsMMK f.132, no.326, l.3.}

However, the harmonious “European” spirit that Emil found in Switzerland, captured in grand performances like Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis had lost the immanent promise of an immediate rebirth of modern society. This musical embodiment of a unity that Emil had failed to create brought little pleasure in the midst of war. Indeed, listening to music increasingly became a physical torment to Emil.\footnote{Ljunggren suggests that Emil suffered from Ménière’s disease, a disorder that affects the inner ear. See Ljunggren, The Russian Mephisto.} In the same letter, Emil endeavored to explain this conflict, writing that “I must avoid music and yet I am unable to forget it. . .
music seems to me the greatest suffering because I did not study it as I should have."  

Entwined in this statement were Emil’s own sense of guilt and responsibility at the tragic losses wrought by war and his ardent belief that music should have provided a means through which to bring about greater unity between the peoples of Europe rather than conflict. Music itself was now transformed for Emil into a symbol of a failed vision, the loss of which made the sound of music itself unbearable and yet precious because of the associations it roused. Admitting defeat, Emil lapsed into a near-suicidal state, claiming “no kind of hope, either for recovery of health or of anything else good in life is left to me. I waited too long, it is clear that I am fated to lay my body in the grave, unmoving but alive. Of Moscow I think with the greatest horror and repulsion; all my past stands before me like the icy breath of death.”  

This despair became strongest in relation to the music of his own brother, to the point that Emil was no longer able to bear listening to Nikolai’s music, despite attempts at reassurance that he valued it as much as ever.  

Emil expressed his feelings more openly in a letter to Anna:  

Kolia’s music deeply upset me and I must tell you directly that I do not expect anything more from him, that is, nothing great... it is not because he is insufficiently talented, but because of life and the dead-end (tupik) of his situation.  

Nikolai’s musical failure was intimately connected, in Emil’s view, with the war between Russia and Germany, the ultimate failure of their attempts to unite German and Russian cultures.

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98 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner, GTsMMK f.132, no.326 (June 8, 1915), ll.11ob-12ob, emphasis added. For further discussion of Emil’s paranoia of music, see Magnus Ljunggren, The Russian Mephisto: A Study of the Life and Work of Emilii Medtner (Stockholm: GOTAB, 1994), 83, 112.  
99 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (June 8, 1915), GTsMMK f.132, no.326, l.12-12ob.  
100 Thus, in November 1915, Emil wrote to Nikolai that “my soul always remains with your music, however difficult and smutno it is to me.” Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (November 13, 1915), GTsMMK f.132, no.328.  
101 Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner, RGB f.167.25.10, l.25 (1915). Nikolai responded to Emil’s need to “live apart” in a letter dated November 10, 1915, reassuring his brother that any arrangements he needed to live more comfortably (and to prevent their separation) would be made. See Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (October 27-November 10, 1915), GTsMMK f.132, no.1826-1841, ll.17-19, Pis’ma, 164-165.
As war conditions continued to deteriorate for Russia throughout 1915, a similar sense of desperation crept into Nikolai and Anna’s lives. In Anna’s view, Nikolai’s inability to write music was caused, not by lack of creative vision, but by human failing. It was not Nikolai’s inspiration that was paralyzed: melodies continued to occur to him. Thus, it was not the “internal lyre” that had come untuned (i.e., his creative inspiration), but Nikolai himself. In Anna’s words, there was “a terrible battle with his own heaviness (tiazhest’),” preventing him from using all the creative material that was within him. These were the melodies that piled up, unused, in Nikolai’s notebooks, and which, by 1918, would begin to haunt even him even in sleep. While Emil and Nikolai had never envisioned Anna as part of the creative basis of their work (she served more in the guise of inspiration than creation), she too suffered from a sense of creative paralysis from the effects of the war. She complained of the “melancholy (toska) from life” that had seized her and of her failed desire to “build something in life,” feelings that swelled into a conviction that she had no “talent for life,” nor desire for a different one.

In the months that followed his avowal of Nikolai’s failure, Emil wavered between hope and despair. In a final attempt to resurrect his failing mission, Emil emphasized throughout late 1915 and early 1916 that salvation from the present age would come through the creation of myth. This task, as Nietzsche had claimed, was fundamentally Dionysian in nature. Emil pushed Nikolai to complete the piano concerto

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102 Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (November 10, 1915), Pis’ma, 165.
103 The term rasstroennyi is used by Anna Medtner in reference to Kolia’s state of mind. See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner, LC Medtner correspondence (June 7-8, 1916), l.2ob.
104 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner, LC Medtner correspondence (June 7-8, 1916), l.2ob.
105 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (February 20-22, 1916); (May 22-26, 1916); (June 2, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence.
106 “I live as before; I already expect nothing from life,” Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (September [14] 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.333, l.2
on which he was working, insisting that the content of the work should be “theurgic”. He further sustained his insistence that Nikolai should turn his attention to the writing of an opera. His emphasis on Nikolai’s need to keep composing at all costs continued through early 1917, with Emil advising Nikolai to continue to compose regardless of external distractions, even if he had to do so at night and with the use of stimulants. “If you do not now throw yourself into the embrace of Dionysus,” Emil intimated to his brother, “you are doomed to fail, despite all your ‘genius.’” Perhaps most telling, Emil advised Nikolai to abandon the fugues, sonatas, pianism – in short, the formal, Germanic basis - of his early works. Instead, he advised Nikolai, “it is time for you to turn to myth, because a fairy tale (skazka) is only a weakened moralized and rationalized myth, fit for childish souls in the period of the decline of Christianity.” Emil’s meaning was evident: Nikolai’s focus on composing small-scale piano compositions, many of which were entitled “Fairy tale” (Skazka) was insufficient to the task on hand. Not piano music, but an opera or musical drama with life-transformative, mythic force was required in the current age. The figure of Wagner hovered clearly in the background, the symbol of the path that Nikolai must take.

Emil’s focus on opera was connected to his vision of the end of the war. At this time, Emil believed, “very great artists, thinkers and heroes (podvizhniki) will appear”. He envisioned Nikolai as one of these artist-geniuses, whose work would transform the basis of human society itself. These people would, of necessity, have an intimate

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108 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (December 22/9, 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.336, l.2ob. The concerto in question was Nikolai’s first piece with orchestra. Begun in 1914, it was not finished until 1918 and premiered that spring. See Nikolai Metner, Pis’ma, 173.
109 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (January 1-7, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no. 337.
110 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (January 1-7, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no. 338.
111 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (January 1/14, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no. 339, ll.2-2ob.
112 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (December 4, 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.335, l.1ob.
connection with the narod (and thus, in keeping with Nietzsche's conception, the Dionysian basis) from which they sprang and upon this basis would create a new, pan-European human identity. Emil’s momentary rebirth of enthusiasm was connected with a rediscovery of the power of folk song, specifically Swiss ones, and the universal, supranational identity that he imagined was embodied in such music.\footnote{After attending a choral concert of folk songs of “barbarian origins,” Emil wrote to Nikolai that “the appearance of Beethovens and Schuberts is entirely understandable, because even a genius is nevertheless an ant and without the collective withers away. . .while within he still more brightly shows his genius”. Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (February 25/12, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.341, l.1. In 1916, Emil attended a club (apparently in Zurich), where folk songs were sung, not just German-Swiss, but also Italian-Swiss. Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (September 24/11, 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.332, ll.1-2ob. Nikolai found these comments “extremely interesting.” See Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (December 4, 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.335, l.1ob.} Tormented by the hatred awakened by war in both of his homelands (Germany and Russia), Switzerland seemed to Emil the truest expression of his vision of the Europe of the future, in which different peoples would live together in harmony as pure and exquisite as the musical harmonies sounded in such folk songs.

Fixated on his own vision, Emil was dismissive of one of Nikolai’s most cherished dreams: the creation of a cycle of piano pieces that would be based on those melodies that he had collected in his musical notebook over the course of many years. Emil’s offhand rejection of this plan sparked an unusually passionate response from his younger brother, who snapped back that “as far as musical drama is concerned, unfortunately I was born with only one head and therefore do not intend to imitate the two-headed Wagner.”\footnote{“And finally, if that form of cycle, of which I have dreamed my entire life, having in mind a large part of my own material, seems conditional, it can scarcely be more so than opera, that most conditional (and at the same time most flourishing) [art form],” Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner (June 13, 1916), GTsMMK f.132, no.1826-1841, ll.27-29, Pis’ma, 167-169.} Emil’s embittered response was to send Nikolai a postcard with an image of Wagner in which he critiqued Nikolai’s inability to recognize the composer’s true import. He ended with the conclusion that their differing viewpoints demonstrated
that the two of them now “looked at things from opposing sides,” making the brief, yet pointed observation that “you are closer to Tolstoi now than to Goethe.”\(^\text{115}\) Such an accusation, seemingly simple, contained a wealth of innuendo that requires closer examination to understand in full.

Tolstoi’s openly hostile response to Wagner’s *Ring of the Nibelung* in his article “What is Art?” was well known to both brothers. For Emil, Tolstoi’s greatest downfall was his strictly moralistic approach to art, disallowing any possibility of “life-creation” or transformation outside of a strict, moral viewpoint. This conflict between Wagner’s myth-creation and Tolstoi’s assertion of an absolute moral code was a dichotomy that haunted the world of all Nietzsche’s orphans: the conflict between an amoral, transformative image of the world and a sense that Russia’s true identity was deeply entwined with Christian, specifically Orthodox, morality.\(^\text{116}\) The war served to provide a more specifically nationalist gloss to this dichotomy, linking the amoral, materialistic, modernizing and divisive impulses of contemporary society with a militaristic, “Prussian” identity, while the ideals of universalism, morality and community came more and more to underpin the mythical idea of the “Russian soul”. Two separate nationalist discourses mutually reinforced each other. Thus, to openly espouse Wagner without rejecting the “Prussian” identity that, it was believed, hovered close by his nationalist works (such as the “Ring” cycle), was to reject “Russianness” itself. In a country at war, this was tantamount to treason. Nikolai’s identity as a “German” composer could scarcely withstand the reinterpretation of these identities (Russian, German) along increasingly

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\(^\text{115}\) Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (b.d. [1916]), GTsMMK f.132, no.348. Emil began his critique semantically, arguing that Wagner is not “an artist (ein Kunstler), but THE artist (der Kunstler).”

\(^\text{116}\) For Tolstoi, this moral code was not specifically connected with the Russian Orthodox church (his conflict with institutionalized religion is well-known). However, for many educated Russians at this time, the image of a pure, Orthodox, Russian peasant identity remained strong.
exclusive, nationalistic lines. As a “German universalist” identity ever more gave way to a “German exclusivist” model, both brothers found themselves trapped within discursive categories that became ever more polarized.  

As the full scale of the war became evident, Emil’s distress, embodied in his response to music, grew ever greater. He noted, ever increasingly, that public discussion, both in Germany and in Russia, did not center on “victory” over the enemy, but on their “destruction”. This was not the harmony-in-unity that he had envisioned. While Emil’s ears continued to pain him, he argued that the fundamental problem was not physiological; rather, it was the judgment of “reason, which is just in its protest against music: not in general, but for me. I cannot write any more about music.”

By March 1917, Emil declared that “there is but one alternative left to me - to abandon music (and especially Kolia’s music) entirely; otherwise I will lose my mind,” while by June 1917, he stated simply “I hate music with all my heart.” He had, he claimed in a letter to Nikolai, moved from “music” to “anti-music” and now found himself in the “final

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117 For the claim that German music in the nineteenth century was assigned a “universalist” identity that began to shift increasingly towards an “exclusivist” model, see Bernd Sponheuer, “Reconstructing Ideal types of the ‘German’ in Music,” in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. by Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). I argue that in Russia this universalizing image became entwined with an Imperial outlook, in contrast to the increasing nationalism in Germany.

118 “[L]istening to these [German-Swiss and Italian-Swiss folk] songs, one longs ([toskuer]) for a future Europe, when everything will become Switzerland, when each will remain himself and at the same time a part of the great European whole. We of course will not live to see this. But that we unconsciously want this... is shown by that feeling that is experienced when true elements (folk songs for instance) of different races and tribes come together in soprikosnovenie.”

119 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (July 22/9, August 3, August 8, September 27/14, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.345, l.6ob.

120 Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (June 30, 1917), RGB f.167, op.1, kart.25, ed.khr.21. Cited in *Russian Mephisto*, 126.
action”: the fragmentation, rather than the unification of Europe.121 His cultural quest had failed.122

The war also shifted interpretation of the import of Nikolai’s music, a development that had already been hinted at in the pre-war years. As anti-German sentiment became ever greater, the composer's acknowledged “Germanic” traits were open to greater criticism. In a 1913 article devoted to the music of Nikolai Medtner, music critic Gr. Prokof’ev emphasized Nikolai's creative heritage (predominantly Germanic), his “untimeliness”, and his failure to connect with contemporary society. In the composer's devotion to form and “strictness” in an age that was ever more concerned with the abandonment of form for free emotional expression, Medtner showed himself increasingly unable to strike a balance between his “Slavic” and “German” temperaments, the only path that made his works generally accessible to contemporary audiences. Prokof’ev held out hope, nevertheless, that Medtner had not yet ended in his creative development, suggesting that an embrace of “general human” principles would require the greater development of his Slavic, rather than German, character traits.123

Prokof’ev sought to define the correct path that Nikolai should follow were he truly to fill the prophetic role of the artist, giving voice to “universal human” concerns in a framework accessible to his audience. Without this ability to communicate with his

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121 Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (July 22/9, August 3, August 8, September 27/14, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.345, l.7.
122 Emil was still concerned as late as 1917 that his depression would negatively impact Nikolai’s creativity. See Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (June 11, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.344; Emil Medtner to Margarita Morozova (June 14/1, 1915), RGB f.167.13.12, II.13-15. By 1919, Emil would complain that there were “no musical impressions” at all. See Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (January 14, 1919) GTsMMK f.132, no.4795, l.2. The war, with its demands, had silenced music, both spiritually and physically.
123 Gr. Prokof’ev, “O Metnere,” RMG no. 3 (January 20, 1913): 65-70. The works that Prokof’ev noted for their uniquely successful balance of “German strictness” and “Slavic lyricism” were op.8 (Skazki), Difiramby (op.10), Sonata-Triad (Sonata in d-moll).
listeners, Prokof’ev argued, creative work lost its purpose.\textsuperscript{124} The work that Nikolai was called to fulfill in the modern age was the expression of specifically Dionysian sentiment, an aspect that, as we have seen, came to be ever more connected with the “Slavic soul”. Prokof’ev’s critique was itself prophetic, if not for Nikolai’s music, then for its reception among his close friends. As his noted “German blood” became ever more a hindrance, his music was championed more and more for its “Russian” nature.\textsuperscript{125} This trend is apparent in the composer’s relationship with two important literary/philosophical figures in the immediate pre-war context: the philosopher Ivan Il’in and the symbolist Sergei Durylin.

Ivan Il’in, a convinced Hegelian and rising star in the Russian philosophical community, had first become acquainted with Nikolai’s music in April 1913, at which time it made a deep impression on him.\textsuperscript{126} Falling under Emil’s influence at this time, Il’in’s praise of Nikolai’s music echoed Emil’s cultural interests as he heralded Nikolai as “the only continuer of German music.”\textsuperscript{127} By early 1914 however, Il’in had already come to view the “Germanness” of both brothers as a hindrance rather than a benefit. Noting Il’in’s turn to what he considered a “slavophile” outlook, Emil wrote to Marietta Shaginian that, “[for Il’in], the basic shortcoming of both me and Kolia is that we are

\textsuperscript{124} G. Prokof’ev, “O Metnere,” 68.
\textsuperscript{125} The phrase “German blood” is Boris Popov’s. See Popov, “Noiabr’skiia rozy,” Pereval no. 2 (December 1906), 58-61.
\textsuperscript{126} Il’in’s acquaintance began shortly after his return to Moscow from Berlin in spring 1913, where he had lived since 1911. See Ivan Il’in to Emil Medtner (1913-1914), RGB f.167.16; Magnus Iungren, “Ivan Il’in pishet Nikolaiu Metneru,” in Vladimir Solov’ev i kul’tura Serebrianogo veka, ed. by A.A. Takho-Godi, E.A. Takho-Godi (Moscow: Nauk, 2005), 606-613. Like the Medtners, Il’in was a descendent of both German and Russian ancestors. Emil considered Il’in part of “their” circle by June 1913. On their growing intimacy, see Ivan Il’in to Emil Medtner (April 3, 1913), RGB f.167.16.14, l.1; Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (April 21/May 5, 1913), RGB f.167.25.26; Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (November 17/30, 1913), RGB f.167.25.27, l.2; Emil Medtner to Nikolai Medtner (14/27 June 1913), GTsMMK f.132, no.4789.
\textsuperscript{127} Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (May 14/27, 1913), RGB f.167.25.26, l.14.
Germans. . . Kolia is better than me because he is more Russian.”

In Emil’s absence during the war, Nikolai spent ever more time with Il’in, turning to him for guidance in the midst of his creative paralysis, though their natures did not allow for an easy personal relationship. Nevertheless, Il’in became a devoted advocate of Nikolai, seeing him as the purest embodiment of a specifically “Russian creative genius,” one that “seeks the world’s healing”.

Sergei Durylin similarly became acquainted with Nikolai’s music in 1910, shortly after beginning collaboration with the publishing house Musaget, founded by Emil Medtner. While Durylin’s relationship with Emil was strained, he established a closer friendship with Nikolai, envisioning in the latter the embodiment of Pushkin’s “genius of pure beauty.”

Durylin heralded Nikolai’s music as the truest expression of the Russian spirit in music, claiming further, “you resurrect Pushkin and Tiutchev. I cannot better and more clearly express that which I and many others receive from your music, and [what] I in particular receive from your letters. It is freedom. This, in one word, is what we receive from you.”

Living 120 versts from Moscow, and only able to “remember” Nikolai’s songs, Durylin wrote that they continued to “beat in my soul, like a pure key of life-creation.”

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128 Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (March 1/14, 1914), RGB f.167.25.28, l.140. In conclusion, Emil summarized that, in Il’in’s view, “Germany is finished, it will perish, it is dead. . . Il’in clearly hates Goethe.” Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (March 1/14, 1914), RGB f.167.25.28, l.140.
129 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (July 9-10, 1916), LC Medtner Correspondence. On Ivan Il’in’s relationship with Nikolai Medtner, see Magnus Iunggren, “Ivan Il’in pishet Nikolaiu Metneru.”
132 Sergei Durylin to Nikolai Medtner (April, [19--]), GTsMMK f.132, no.1942-1943, l.7-7ob.
133 Sergei Durylin to Nikolai Medtner (February 5, [19--]), GTsMMK f.132, no.1942-43, l.1-1ob.
Nikolai’s life-creating art became increasingly entwined as the war progressed. This conviction gradually spread to other supporters of Russia’s salvific mission. By March 1916, Evgenii Trubetskoi considered Nikolai to be “the only pure composer now.”

Such admiration went hand in hand with a redefinition of the composer as embodying Russian (or Slavic) rather than German attributes, a shift that would continue after the war.

Despite the changing national allegiances attributed to Nikolai by his admirers, the composer himself sank ever deeper into depression. All too aware of Emil’s former admiration, now turned to bitter disappointment, he begged Il’in not to pin the title of genius upon him. “I am not at all a genius, not a real person,” he wrote to Il’in:

Real people are life-persistent (zhizneuporny). . . I never considered myself to be [a genius], but it seemed to me sometimes that there were some people who compared me (proravnivat’) to one. My words are only something of a challenge (vyzov) to these people. Geniuses are the most real, and untalented people are always phantoms. I am deeply a phantom. . . I myself am not yet fully created (nesozdan) because every person must create himself, and I have not yet done this and probably will not do it. . . I am filled only with the shadows of unfinished creations.

Nikolai’s disappointment at his own inability to fulfill the role of “genius” that was placed upon him by others is palpable. However, even more striking is Nikolai’s conclusion, in which he rejected the very idea of geniuses or “real people” as central forces in shaping the world:

But I am forgetting myself. I did not want to talk only of myself at all. I hate slogans, I consider them the most harmful thing in the world, but now I want to rectify the slogan of life-persistence. . . down with ‘real people’! Everything must be accepted, forgiven and loved! We are all guilty and devilishly equally guilty! Let the devil take none of us! Only

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134 Sergei Durylin to Margarita Morozova (1915), RGB f.171.1.18, ll.1-4.
135 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (March 4, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence.
136 This shift from emphasizing Medtner’s “German nature” to his “Russian nature” was noted by Soviet scholars, who criticized pre-revolutionary critics for failing to recognize Medtner’s use of Russian folk melody in his works. See Z.A. Apetian, “Vvedenie,” N.K. Metner: stat’i, materialy, vospominaniiia (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1981). Apetian locates this “shift” in critical interpretation of Medtner in the late 1920s.
137 Nikolai Medtner to Ivan Il’in (July 12, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.4735, ll.1-1ob.
one party must exist, the party of guilty people, devilishly, equally guilty people, and the entire world must belong to this party.\footnote{Nikolai Medtner to Ivan Il’in (July 12, 1917), GTsMMK f.132, no.4735, l.2.}

Exhausted by the divisions wrought by war, tired of being claimed both as a “German” and as a “Russian” genius, Nikolai espoused the abandonment of all such divisions.

Section Three

Rachmaninoff and the All-Night Vigil

While Nikolai Medtner’s Germanic background grew increasingly problematic, Sergei Rachmaninoff’s generally recognized “Slavicness” seemed to offer the synthesis of Russian musical creativity that the war demanded. Here was a genuinely Slavic composer, both drawn to the unique strains of Orthodox music in his compositional output and able to bridge the divide between the intelligentsia and the narod.

Rachmaninoff’s rapid composition of his All-Night Vigil (Vsenoshchnoe bdenie, Op.37), written between January and February 1915, seemed to answer the demands of war. Some critics suggested that here at last was the genuine, Orthodox Mystery that Russia awaited. Such an expectation had been voiced in relation to Rachmaninoff even before the war. In 1913, G. N. Timofeev had argued that it was Rachmaninoff, rather than Scriabin, who was drawing closest to the creation of a genuine Mystery. Timofeev claimed that Mystery Plays or Mysteries (Misterii) had first appeared in the early centuries of Christianity, when Europe was still close to the ancient world and its tragedies.\footnote{G. N. Timofeev, “Liturgiia S. V. Rakhmaninova,” [1913], RNB f.773, op.1, ed.khr.52, l.1.} In Russia, due to the ban on depicting Christ, dramatic elements had never found such a large role in religious ceremony as in Western Europe. This tendency, Timofeev argued, was changing in the present day, a fact that was particularly notable in the recent compositions of Sergei Rachmaninoff. Unfortunately, Timofeev claimed,
Rachmaninoff had been unable to maintain the “church style” throughout his *Liturgy*, though the composer nevertheless was generally successful in offering a prayerful mood (*molitvennoe nastroenie*) and even religious ecstasy.\(^\text{140}\) It might well be hoped therefore that the composer’s next exploration of Orthodox music would have even greater consequences.

The outbreak of war evoked explicit calls for a religious musical *Mystery* in the press. In the midst of what he referred to as this “unusually cruel and bloody war,” musicologist A. V. P[reobrazhenskii] called for the heightening of the “religious mood” (*nastroenie*) of the *narod* and army. He suggested renewed effort in spreading “books of saintly writing and religious-moral content” among the masses, the “organization of conversations and sermons,” and the “creation of singing choirs and pilgrim circles.” Perhaps of greatest import among these many activities, he suggested, was “the staging of old and new mysteries (*misterii*) and ritual church processions in our capitals, cities and even in large villages.” These mysteries would serve to establish a “solid foundation for our folk village theatre, where, following the mysteries, high-moral plays with secular subjects and stagings will appear.”\(^\text{141}\) In a similar vein, Mariia Brianchaninova offered a particularly striking variant of the idea of a communal act or “mystery” that could unite Russian society spiritually in the midst of war. In a 1915 article for the journal *Novoe zveno*, she cited a daily practice in England that had begun with the declaration of war. “Every day at 12pm,” Brianchaninova claimed, “a bell sounds and all the British people, in one communal act, lift their brief but passionate prayer to the Tsar of Tsars, to the Father of all humanity.” How much more powerful, Brianchaninova continued, would it


\(^{141}\) A. P[reobrazhenskii], “Religioznye misterii,” RGIA f.1109, no.12, ll.2ob-3.
be if the “God-carrying people” of Russia followed this spiritual example. Only Russians could truly understand the “mystical meaning and strength of this totality of prayerful moods (sovokupnosti molitvennykh nastroenii).” Interpreting the significance of the war as the spiritual struggle between “good and evil,” “bright strength with dark” and “Russian against German,” she called for Russian bells to “sound at 12pm in all the cities and villages of our vast Motherland, uniting in a single communal prayerful act all the passionate, but as yet separate prayers, sent from millions of souls to the throne of the Highest one.”¹⁴² In addition to the clear sense of Russia’s messianic calling, underlying Brianchaninova’s call was the assumption that the enactment of a communal moment of prayer would have immediate and visible impact on physical reality.

Such tendencies were also connected with a growing sense of national unity awakened by war. In September 1914, for instance, the Holy Synod “instituted a form of memorialization new to the Russian Church in wartime when it decided that all churches in the empire would celebrate a weekly requiem (panikhida), for the duration of the war.”¹⁴³ Though Brianchaninova herself was an admirer of Scriabin, for many Russians, it was Sergei Rachmaninoff, rather than Scriabin, who seemed poised to offer the first (and ultimately the only) completed musical composition to fulfill these expectations: his *All-Night Vigil*, first performed in March 1915.

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¹⁴² M. Brianchaninova, “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” *Novoe zveno* no. 43 (October 18, 1914): 1128-1129. In his editorial comments, Brianchaninov drew attention to the inherent value of such a mystical call, arguing that “such positive-psychological currents will offer, through unseen, but felt (oshchushchaemymi) paths, great help to our heroes in the decisive minutes of their heroic acts (podvigi) for the good of humanity.” See A. Brianchaninov, “Zvenia zhizni,” *Novoe zveno* no. 43 (October 18, 1914): 1119-1123, here 1120.

¹⁴³ Melissa Stockdale, “United in Gratitude: Honoring Soldiers and Defining the Nation in Russia’s Great War,” 465. Similarly, in April 1915, the Russian Society for Remembrance of Soldiers of the Russian Army Whol Fell in the War against Germany, Austria and Turkey was formed, serving to give a “larger, enduring, national meaning” to the death of individual soldiers. Ibid., 466. The national significance attached to Scriabin was thus part of a broader trend.
In contrast to his earlier Liturgy, critics were lavish in their praise of Rachmaninoff’s All-Night Vigil. At last, it was claimed, the composer had succeeded in capturing the necessary mood, both of Orthodox worship, and of the needs of the contemporary age. Iurii Sakhnovskii, writing the day before the premiere, argued: “it is possible that Rachmaninoff has never yet approached so close to the narod, to its style, its soul, as in this work.” With the All-Night Vigil, Sakhnovskii claimed, Rachmaninoff broke out of the “narrow confines of lyrical pessimism, so characteristically reflecting the state of spirit of our intelligentsia of the last decade.”

In this work, at long last, Rachmaninoff had found the true voice of the narod, leaving behind the anxiety and pessimism of Russian educated society. Similarly, Gr. Prokof’ev claimed that, unlike the Liturgy, there was no hint of the “worldly” (svetskii) composer left in the All-Night Vigil. A. Kastal’skii, with whom Rachmaninoff had corresponded on the question of church music, similarly cited the composer’s “careful attitude” to his use of old church napevy. Though not all critics agreed with this assessment (G. Ch., writing for Moskovskie vedomosti, argued that, while the composition was a fine concert work, it did not capture the prayer and “other-worldliness” of church music), there was nevertheless a general consensus that here at last Orthodoxy and Russianness had found adequate expression in a musical composition that might unite listeners in a single communal act of prayer in a particularly tumultuous historical moment. The All-Night Vigil was premiered on March 10, 1915 in Moscow by the Synodal Choir, with additional

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144 Iur. Sakhnovskii, “Vsenoshchnoe bdenie S.V. Rakhmaninova,” GTsMMK f.18 no.597, l.8. (Clipping from Russkoe slovo)
145 GTsMMK f.18 no.597, l.8.
performances March 12, 27, April 3, 9. All the performances were marked by enthusiastic audience response.\textsuperscript{148} It seemed possible that Rachmaninoff’s musical *Mystery*, envisioned by Timofeev, had at last found expression.\textsuperscript{149}

The *All-Night Vigil* is a musical setting of texts taken from the All Night Vigil ceremony of the Orthodox Church. The ceremony combines the three canonical hours of Vespers, Matins and First Hour and is intended to precede Sunday services (Sunday eve) or important liturgical feast days. Rachmaninoff was one of several composers who turned to this genre in the late Imperial period, when a revival and reinvention of Russian Orthodox musical tradition dominated the work of an entire circle of composers connected to the Moscow Synodal School. What made Rachmaninoff’s composition unique was the rapturous reception accorded to it amid the heightened tensions wrought by war. Musically, Rachmaninoff’s *All-Night Vigil* was based on three types of chant melodies: Greek (drawn from Byzantine tradition), *znamennyi* (drawn from Russian chant tradition) and Kievan (drawn from Ukrainian chant tradition).\textsuperscript{150} Each setting was based either on one of these three melodic traditions or on a melody of Rachmaninoff’s own composition, itself imitating the chromatic, stepwise movement of Orthodox chant. As Martyn has observed, despite the use of various chant traditions, the work as a whole

\textsuperscript{148} A. Kastal’skii, “Vsenoshchnoe bdenie” S.V. Rakhmaninova”; [no author], *Russkoe slovo* no. 78 (April 7, 1915): 6
\textsuperscript{149} Antonii Ieromonakh similarly lists Rachmaninoff (and not Scriabin) among the “great Russians” in his 1916 article “Misterii v ikh proshlom,” *Izvestnyi muzikal’nyi vestnik* no. 1-2 (1916): 3-4.
demonstrates a remarkable unity of style, centered upon the constant repetition of the chant melody with endless variations in setting.\textsuperscript{151}

\begin{center}
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\end{center}

(8.1) Sergei Rachmaninoff, \textit{All Night Vigil} no.1, “Priidite, poklonimsia”: Original Melody\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image2.png}
\end{center}

(8.2) Sergei Rachmaninoff, \textit{All-Night Vigil} op.37, no.2, “Blagoslovi, dushe moia”: Greek chant\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{151} Martyn, \textit{Rachmaninoff}, 255. This technique is common to most Russian Orthodox Church music as well as Russian folk music practice.


\textsuperscript{153} The use of a harmonic pedal together with a solo voice is indicative of the Greek chant style.
Particularly striking to audiences of the time were the demands placed on the bass singers, exemplified by the ending of the fifth prayer (“Nyne otpushchaeshi”), which called for a low B-flat, an extremely low range indicative of the Russian vocal tradition of *basso profundo*. Requiring several such basses for the performance, Rachmaninoff tested the limits of the Moscow Synodal Choir.

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In this work, Rachmaninoff once more drew on the musical skills of A. Kastal’skii, director of the Moscow Synodal Choir and one of the leaders of the New Trend in Orthodox music. The composition as a whole was dedicated to Stepan Smolenskii, Rachmaninoff’s former instructor in Orthodox song at the Moscow Conservatory. In combining the use of all three chant traditions, together with his demonstrated mastery of this musical style in creating his own melodies, in the *All-Night Vigil*, Rachmaninoff seemed to embody the synthesis of numerous folk and religious traditions of the Empire into a single voice, raised in a unified prayer to God. This was the true calling of Orpheus: to give voice to the salvific mission of the Russian *narod* through synthesizing folk musical tradition into his own individual style.

Despite the popular success of his *All-Night Vigil*, Rachmaninoff failed to uphold the banner of Orpheus, due to individual fears that poorly coincided with the salvific needs of the time. In 1914, during a concert tour to England, Rachmaninoff had first been struck down by a morbid fear of death.\(^{156}\) The outbreak of war sank Rachmaninoff into a

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deep depression. The composer, who previously had little interest in the philosophical
discussions of his colleagues, now finding himself directionless, was often drawn to such
conversations.\textsuperscript{157} In contrast to his own “terrible mood: melancholy and melancholy,”
Rachmaninoff found Nikolai Medtner’s “certainty” (\textit{uverennost‘}) admirable.\textsuperscript{158} After
completing the \textit{All-Night Vigil}, he was unable to compose any other works in subsequent
months.\textsuperscript{159} Although, like many of his colleagues, Rachmaninoff was active in offering
performances devoted to the war effort, the shadow of death hung constantly over the
composer. Marietta Shaginian, witnessing Rachmaninoff’s depression, noted that the
composer’s mood was far darker than she had ever observed before and even noted tears
in the composer’s eyes during conversation.\textsuperscript{160} Echoing Medtner’s obsession with his
creative failure, Rachmaninoff claimed despairingly, “I still have in me a need for
creative work, but the desire to bring it out, the ability to bring it out – all this has gone
forever!”\textsuperscript{161} His creative imagination, while not silenced, was increasingly drawn away
from the music of church liturgy to the “dark strength” of the \textit{Dies irae} chant and to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Rachmaninoff’s negative mood after the outbreak of war, see Rachmaninoff to Z. A. Pribytkovyi (January 8, 1915), \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} vol. 2, 78.
\item On January 11, 1915 (in the midst of composing the \textit{All-Night Vigil}), Rachmaninoff attended an evening
dinner at the Struve’s, where conversation focused almost exclusively upon the war and the German
people. Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (January 11, 1915), LC Medtner Collection. For accounts of similar
evenings that Rachmaninoff attended at this time, see Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (February 1-2, 1915),
LC Medtner Correspondence. Before the war, Emil Medtner, in an outburst of hostility, referred to
Rachmaninoff’s “empty-headed conversation” in a letter to Marietta Shaginian. See Emil Metner to
Marietta Shaginian (March 31, 1914), RGB f.167.25.28, l.36.
\item Rachmaninoff to A.B. Gol’denveizer (June 22, 1915), \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} vol. 2, 81-82; Anna
Medtner to Emil Medtner (1914-1915), LC Medtner correspondence. Anna Medtner became increasingly
critical of Rachmaninoff’s inability to withstand even such tribulations as Wagner had faced. See Anna
Medtner to Emil Medtner (July 22-23, 1915), LC Medtner Correspondence.
\item B. S. Nikitin, \textit{Sergei Rakhmaninov: Dve zhizni} (Moscow: Znanie, 1993), 95.
\item Marietta Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” in \textit{Vospominaniia o Rakhmaninove} 2, ed. by Z. A. Apetian
(Moscow, 1988). For an English translation, see Martyn, \textit{Rachmaninoff}, 262. The meeting took place in
May 1916 at the spa town of Essentuki in the Caucasus.
\item Martyn, \textit{Rachmaninoff}, 262. Similarly, in a letter to Aleksandr Gol’denveizer, Rachmaninoff claimed
that “I will come to life, if my work moves forward. But now I am only half alive.” See Rachmaninoff to
Gol’denveizer (June 22, 1915), \textit{Literaturnoe nasledie} II, 81-82. At this time, according to Shaginian’s
account, Rachmaninoff admitted to envying Nikolai Medtner’s “purposeful and fulfilled life”. See Martyn,
\textit{Rachmaninoff}, 262; Shaginian, “Rakhmaninov,” 151-152.
\end{enumerate}
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images of death and destruction. It was this chant, rather than Orthodox melodies, that would dominate his op. 39 *Etudes-tableaux*, composed in 1916.

**Section Four**

**The Great War and the Nationalization of Scriabin’s *Mystery***

While the war had dealt a paralyzing blow to the creative output and vision of Nikolai Medtner and thrown Sergei Rachmaninoff into deep depression, Aleksandr Scriabin, in contrast, joyously heralded the outbreak of war. Just as work on his *Mystery*, the composition through which he intended to usher in the end of the world, was moving forward, he believed that the military conflict suggested that all nations were preparing for the next stage of human history. In a letter to his friend Aleksandr Nikolaevich Brianchaninov, the editor of the recently founded journal *Novoe zveno*, Scriabin outlined his personal view of the mystical significance of the war. Most people, he argued, were unable to understand the true significance of this time of upheaval. History was “unconsciously” being created by “people capable of new understanding... who have thus far stood on the side of social life”, i.e., creative artists. In this time of war, these individuals had to unify in the “founding of new forms and the solving of new, synthetic

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162 Disheartened by events, Anna Medtner gloomily observed to Emil that, in fact, Scriabin’s vision of a coming cataclysm seemed more and more accurate. See Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (February 28, 1915), LC Medtner correspondence, l.1. On Scriabin’s initial embrace of the war, see also Nikolai Medtner to Emil Medtner, (November 8, 1914), GTsMMK f.132, no.1826-1841, ll.3-7, cited in Metner, *Pis’ma*, 157; Leonid Sabaneev, *Scriabin* (1916), 56. Theosophists and symbolist writers like Ivanov, Baltrushaitis and Bal’mont also initially embraced the war as a unifying moment for Russian society. See Maria Carlson, “No Religion Higher than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Ben Hellman, *Poets of Hope and Despair: The Russian Symbolists in War and Revolution* (Helsinki: Institute for Russian and East European Studies, 1995).

163 Scriabin, “O sviazi politiki s iskusstvom (pis’mo k izdatelui kompozitora-mistika A.N. Skriabina),” *Novoe zveno* no. 49: 1294. The letter is dated Moscow, November 24, 1914. An English translation was included, apparently an attempt to strengthen connections with Russia's ally, England. See *Novoe zveno* no. 49: 1305. This letter was picked up and reprinted in numerous other publications, receiving a much wider circulation than *Novoe zveno* itself enjoyed. Viacheslav Ivanov voiced a similar interpretation to Scriabin’s in his speech to the Scriabin Society shortly after the composer’s death. See Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” Doklad na vechere-kontserte Skriabinskogo obshestva v Petrograde (December 1915), RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.32, l.1.
tasks.” The war was itself nothing more than a physical expression of a higher, spiritual battle. A new historical era was dawning, in which differentiation and isolation were to be replaced by a new, higher unity. Scriabin felt that the “educational significance of war” lay in exposing these underlying, spiritual strivings, to society in general. Audiences, Scriabin argued, were thirsting for an art that was more than art: a collective act that could mystically transform life itself, through bringing disparate elements into a greater whole.164

Though the composer’s personal philosophy left no place for the nationalist vision of Russian messianism, deteriorating political relations and the popular response to the nationalist cry to protect the Motherland made his universalist approach to music and life increasingly problematic. And whether intentional or not, his decision to have his letter published in Novoe zveno had the result of placing his own ideas within a passionately pan-Slav political context. Novoe zveno trumpeted its preference for Slavic peoples, arguing that the only rational way to improve the human condition was to focus “first [upon] the good of Russia itself, then the good of Slavs, to whom the Russian people belong, then the good of Europe, from the culture of which humanity feeds and only then the good of all humanity.”165 On the pages of Novoe zveno, it was argued that the unity of all Slavic peoples was required in order to counteract German aggression. The collective, Slavic soul was in a desperate battle for survival with “Prussian” individualism and militarism. While such an ideological stance would seem to hold little in common with Scriabin’s unabashed rejection of nationalism of any type, there were two main points in which this pan-Slav ideology and Scriabin’s philosophy coincided: the image of human

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history as fundamentally progressive (the rejection of absolutes) and the idea of struggle between human “races”. These two points provided a basis upon which Scriabin’s followers sought more and more to redefine his image as Slavic, rather than universal.

Novoe zveno specifically identified Scriabin as the embodiment of the “Russian Wagner” so longed for by his contemporaries. In an extensive review of Wagner’s Parsifal (performed in Moscow’s Narodnyi dom), Eduard Stark called for the creation of a specifically Russian version of Wagner’s “mystery”.166 This assessment was elaborated upon by an editorial footnote added by Brianchaninov, who stated “as we know, A.N. Scriabin has already been working for more than two years on a Mystery, a task incomparably broader than the legend of Parsifal.”167 Stark’s review echoed the widespread expectation of a composer who would express the Russian narod’s message for humanity and, under Brianchaninov’s guidance, the reader was led to the conclusion that Scriabin was in the process of creating this very work. This image of Scriabin’s unique importance in expressing Russian culture’s unifying quality was further developed in later issues. Articles in other journals seconded this increasingly Slavophile interpretation of Scriabin’s significance.168

Together with his focus on war as a sign of the world’s immanent transformation, Scriabin’s compositional style underwent further evolution in the final year of his life. Two of his works (Poeme “Vers la flamme”, op.72; Prelude op.74, no.2) demonstrate this evolution away from an image of motion and dance to one of stillness and, ultimately, death itself. The Promethean chord had sought to overcome the opposition between

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consonance and dissonance and melody and harmony, synthesizing them into a single chord. However, in overcoming these oppositions, which lay at the very base of classical musical rhetoric, Scriabin also undermined the harmonic rhythm of underpinning the music. Movement from one harmony to another (in which the various harmonies are connected in a functional relationship) is a means through which classical music is given a sense of linearity or temporality. By eliminating the concept of progression from one chord to another, the temporal motion within Scriabin’s late musical works was undermined. Stillness, or motionlessness, was itself a symbolic overcoming of the motion and action inherent in life. By overcoming musical motion, life itself would be overcome.

“Vers la flamme” shows clear use of various techniques aimed at destroying all sense of temporality. Once again, the basis of the composition is the pure Prometheus chord (specifically associated after the composition of the “White Mass” Sonata with mysticism), but of particular importance to this analysis is the question of harmonic movement and its role in transcending time. While most music contains clearly defined rhythmic patterns that underpin the music, in this work Scriabin eliminates any sense of rhythmic pulse through his extensive use of cross-rhythms. After a very slow, sparse opening consisting of an exposition of the Promethean chord in various transpositions, tension builds through chordal patterns of increasing speed within which the listener struggles to define a regular rhythm. In this way, the sense of the linear passage of time is itself erased from the music:
The question of motion takes on even greater import in the Prelude op.74, no.2. While Scriabin had previously equated “stillness” or lack of motion with *unity* (in opposition to the multiplicity of the phenomenal world), in his late works he equated stillness specifically with *death*, seeking in this short prelude to musically embody the stillness and motionlessness of death itself. Scriabin’s friend, Leonid Sabaneev recounted the eerie sensations to which his first hearing of the prelude gave rise:

> [Scriabin said] “this prelude [contains] the impression that it will last entire centuries, as if it will eternally sound, for a million years. . .” There was truly a strange, terrifying (*zhukoe*) impression in me from this. . . music, which strangely did not resemble his early creations. In it I saw a contemplativeness (*sozertsatel’nost’*) that [Scriabin] had never had before, some sort of strange, languorous spirit. [It was] already not dissolution in erotic caresses, but something else, in which there was an element of uncanniness. . . “What is it?”- “It is death. It is death, as an appearance of the feminine, which leads to all-unification (*vossoedinenie*). Death and love. . . In [this composition] there is already no element of fear of [death]. It is the highest calm, white sound. . .” “This is not music,” I said to him, “it is something else. . .” “It is the *Mystery,*” he replied softly. 170

Leaving aside the question of the reaction of Scriabin’s acquaintances to this work, analysis of the musical language shows the continued use of many of the techniques discussed above. In addition to the now-familiar use of a variant of the Promethean

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169 Aleksandr Skriabin, Poème *Vers la flamme* (Moscow: Iurgenson, n.d. [1914])
chord,\textsuperscript{171} this aural embodiment of motionlessness is strengthened by the bass line, which consists of two alternating fifth chords, a tritone apart:

![Musical notation]

(8.7) Scriabin, Prelude op. 74, no. 2 ("Death")\textsuperscript{172}

By limiting harmonic movement almost entirely to the interval of the tritone, Scriabin eliminates any trace of functional relations within his work.\textsuperscript{173} The final cadence of the piece ends on a seventh chord, Schopenhauer’s symbol of “dissonance,” now stripped of its need to resolve. In overcoming time, Scriabin sought the transcendence of life itself, with its pleasures and pains. His moment of “ecstasy,” rather than embodying human eroticism was here associated with the cessation of human existence itself. Ecstasy preceded and ushered in death. This final step was to take place in the Mystery, with the “Preparatory Act” serving as the initial introduction to this grand ritual. Throughout late 1914 and early 1915, Scriabin worked tirelessly on bringing the “Preparatory Act” to completion, a task that would remain incomplete at his death.

By early 1915, war weariness began to spread throughout society as the mortality rate of soldiers continued to rise. Just as wartime victory had been consistently connected

\textsuperscript{171} It should be noted that the harmony employed in this piece is neither the Promethean nor the “White Mass” chord. While derived primarily from the whole tone scale and constructed on intervals of the fourth, this chord defies clear analysis.

\textsuperscript{172} Lev Oborin and Yakov Milshtein, eds., \textit{A.N. Skriabin: Polnoe sobranie sochineniia dlia fortepiano}, vol.3 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1953).

\textsuperscript{173} A 1914 sketch for the prelude show that Scriabin originally conceived of the bass line more in terms of traditional harmonic relations, with the F sharp-C sharp chord alternating with B sharp G, thus emphasizing B sharp as a possible leading note pushing for resolution to C sharp. In the final version, C natural replaces B sharp, thus highlighting the tritone motion in the bass. See GTsMMK f.31, no.81, l.1.
with musical creativity at the outbreak of conflict, growing critique of social and cultural conditions was often entwined with a critique of music’s unifying power as the war dragged on. The painter Nikolai Ul’ianov, once an intimate of Aleksandr Scriabin, captured his own growing disillusion with the war and his own previous worldview in a description of his first return from the front in 1914:

I stopped to spend an evening at a place I knew, where V. Ivanov, Baltrushaitis, Bal’mont and Scriabin gathered. They wanted Scriabin to play something, but couldn't decide [what]. Then Bal'mont began to read his verses. I thought: all the same... absorption in themselves and all the same fiction of “searching”... What is happening in the world? Or is it to me alone that something seems to be happening? No, that cannot be, something definitely is happening... How is it that ladies in all homes are sewing laundry for soldiers and making bandages... and Scriabin... what is he thinking about? I did not even try to talk to him. What could we have talked about? Me, a soldier of the 55th reserve battalion, who must return tomorrow to the front, to people sleeping on straw and jumping up with fright at the cry of their officer?

After his experiences in battle, Ul’ianov perceived a fundamental disconnect between the circle to which he had once belonged, with its mystical dreams of musical theurgy and social unity and the real life experiences of many of his countrymen. This same sense of alienation, specifically linked with disillusion with the musical metaphysics that he had once embraced is found in a letter from the music critic N. Abaza-Grigor’ev to Aleksandr Koptiaev. Abaza-Grigor’ev wrote to his old companion from the front, from “a completely different world, [one of] pistols, blood and fire.” He mused that “not considering my organic connection with music, I cannot say that I even miss it. It is true that there is too little time left over here for anything other than the most elementary work for self-preservation. But what is to be done? Here all values are different.”

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175 Abaza-Grigor’ev to A.P. Koptiaev (August 6, 1916), RNB f.371, op.1, ed.khr.1, ll.2ob-4. By March 1916, Evgenii Gunst was called up to military service, which he considered his “state duty” (gosudarstvennyi dolg) although he found it impossible to continue his prior journalistic activities on
Sabaneev likewise found the otherworldly atmosphere and the joy with which Scriabin had welcomed the outbreak of war increasingly distasteful and began to absent himself from the regular evening gatherings he had once attended faithfully.  

Viacheslav Ivanov also found himself growing increasingly distant from Scriabin’s vision in the final months of 1914. In conversation with a shared acquaintance, Ivanov commented “this Mystery, for which I am helping [Scriabin] write the text . . . will it ever be finished? We can’t manage to agree, we think differently, [our ideas] separated from the very beginning.” This disagreement apparently weighed heavily on Ivanov, as he added ominously “Something bad is happening to [Scriabin], a heavy spiritual discord (razlad).” The mystical worldview, so painstakingly constructed by its members, had begun to fragment under the strain of harsh reality. 

However, the figure of Scriabin still held a salvific influence among his admirers. For several months after his first return to Moscow in 1914, Ulianov continued to feel cut off from the world to which he had once belonged. After finally receiving his release from the army, Ulianov sought out his former friends once again. Stopping in at a café near Kuznetskii Bridge in Moscow, Ulianov espied Viacheslav Ivanov: 

I hadn't hoped to see him there – but there he sits, as before, but not alone. Who is with him? I see only the back of a person . . . Maybe I should leave? Uncertainly I search [him] out, sitting in the tobacco smoke.

The person sitting with Ivanov was Scriabin himself. Unable to find words to express his emotions, Ulianov mutely showed the two men his release card. Even now, Ulianov’s music. See Evgenii Gunst to Nikolai Findeizen (March 21, 1916), RNB f.816, op.2, no.1324, l.38; (May 27, 1916), ll.40-41; (October 23, 1916), ll.44-45.  

176 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 296-299.  

177 RGALI f.2022, op.1, ed. khr.90. In Ul’ianov’s recollection, Ivanov used the term “Mystery” rather than “Preparatory Act,” which was a common tendency. There was widespread knowledge that the composer was working on a “Mystery”, while his focus on the more easily accomplishable “Preparatory Act” was less well known.  

178 RGALI f. 2022, op.1, ed.khr. 90.
wartime experiences weighed heavily upon him, separating him from the world to which he had once belonged. In his recollection, only Scriabin was able to bridge the divide between what he had once been and what he now was:

My meeting with Scriabin. . . returned me not only to my profession [of painting], but more than that – returned me to life. . . specifically he, out of all my friends and ‘models’, [he] alone now interested me, and called me to action!

Such a deep connection was scarcely embodied in the words Scriabin spoke at this meeting. Confused about how to respond to Ulianov’s sudden appearance, Scriabin asked when they would start work on his portrait (Ulianov had previously intended to paint a portrait of the composer), adding with some embarrassment that, naturally, such work would begin only when Ulianov had forgotten “all that.”

Ulianov subsequently began preparatory sketches of Scriabin, but the “great and complex inner strength” of his subject made the intended portrait a difficult undertaking. In a few months, however, Scriabin would be dead: both Ulianov’s painting and the composer’s *Mystery* would remain unrealized dreams. The final chord from Orpheus’ lyre would be one of unresolved dissonance rather than unity.

The impact of the Great War had dramatic repercussions for the Russian Empire as a whole. While Nietzsche’s orphans had initially embraced the social transformation that, it was believed, would be wrought by war, the reality of the wartime experience served to undermine the very worldview they had created. Their inability to find a coherent philosophy upon which they could all agree became shockingly apparent as the effects of the Great War began to be felt. Former disagreements about such questions as

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179 The meeting took place December 12, 1914.
180 Ulianov’s unfinished pencil sketch of Scriabin is stored in GMM A.N. Skriabina, OF 26097/389. It has been published in Muzei A.N. Skriabina, *Uchenie zapiski*, Vypusk chetvertyi (Moscow: Sorek-polegrafia, 2002), 149.
musical style gained great significance as the existing political, economic and social structures were strained to the breaking point. The Revolutions of 1917, together with the social and political upheaval accompanying it, would ultimately sweep away the final fragments of the broken vision of Nietzsche’s orphans.
CHAPTER NINE: THE DEATH OF THE MESSIAH

Scriabin was a prophet. He was Orpheus on the edge of a new epoch. He was, perhaps, that forerunner, whose head was mystically cut off at the moment when he proclaimed the path to new forms of salvation.

Aleksandr Brianchaninov, April 18, 1915.¹

My soul wilted at the threshold of revelation. Here the terrible secret of the Great Mystery was communicated. Here the wrathful spirit of earth’s grandeur sacrificed the FIERY LAMB for the salvation of the grieving.

And a great silence fell...

Pavel Polianov, April 15, 1915.²

By April 1915, Russia’s hopes for a quick military victory had faded. While Scriabin’s death on April 14 coincided with a momentary lull in Russian losses, the situation grew ever bleaker in the months that followed. In April, General Mackensen launched a fierce offensive against the Russian Third Army (stationed between Cracow and Gorlitz), which, over the course of the next five months, resulted in the deaths of approximately one million Russians with another million taken prisoner.³ By the summer of 1915, it had become apparent to critics of the old regime that the military high command was beyond the control of the Imperial government, which strengthened critique of the existing regime. Russian territorial losses continued to mount: Austrian troops reconquered Galicia, seizing Przemysl on May 20 and L’vov on June 9, while Warsaw, Ivangoord and Brest-Litovsk fell to German troops in late July. By August 1915, General N.I Ivanov, the commander-in-chief of the southwestern front, began to make preparations for the evacuation of Kiev.⁴ Military losses were accompanied by an ever-growing tide of refugees (both voluntary and forced) from the western regions of the

³ Peter Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 19.
⁴ Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking, 19-20.
Empire.\textsuperscript{5} The effects of the war were felt ever more strongly in Moscow; a journalist for 
*Utro Rossii* described the city as a “giant hospital” by July 1915, while Petrograd
witnessed an even greater influx of displaced persons.\textsuperscript{6} Amid the trauma of a failing war
effort, massive population displacement and increasing critique of the Tsarist regime,
Scriabin’s followers sought to make sense of what was, to them, an even more
devastating tragedy: the death of their Messiah.

Scriabin’s unexpected demise in April 1915 plunged his followers into confusion
and disarray. The public outburst of grief and his dramatic funeral procession, in which
those following the casket spontaneously raised their voices in a unified song of
mourning, marked the moment of greatest coherence among his contemporaries, both
supporters and detractors.\textsuperscript{7} However, the symbolic import of the event was felt well
beyond the days of mourning. Scriabin had seemed to point towards a future in which
humanity had progressed to a new level of development, spiritually as well as socially.

With his death, that progressive vision came increasingly under question. Within a reality
crippled by war, his followers struggled to invest his death with meaning. Just as the

\textsuperscript{5} Up to one million Russian subjects, the majority of whom were of Jewish or German origin, were
deported from the Western borderlands during World War I. See Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the
Jews: Mass Deportations, Hostages and Violence during World War I,” *Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July
2001): 404-419, here 404; Peter Holquist, “Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of


\textsuperscript{7} “The participants [of the funeral procession] formed an improvised chorus, performing Easter hymns
(*pesnopeniia*) and “Eternal rest” (*Vechnaia pamiat’*) throughout the journey to the cemetery. The further
the procession went, the more the choir increased, the more tuneful became the song. By the gates of
Novodivichii Monastery, the choir of participants already numbered a thousand voices. And this mighty
choir united with the choir of the monastic cloister who were meeting them. After the litany by the sacred
gates of Novodivichii Monastery, the procession set out for the new cemetery while singing “Eternal rest” . . .
for a long time [after the burial] the people did not disperse. They awaited speeches. But it seemed that no
one wanted to break the governing silence. Only at 5pm did the many-thousand crowd begin to leave the
funeral was also published. See V. P. Nekrasov, “Slovo u groba A.N. Skriabina,” *Muzyka* no. 220 (April
26, 1915): 290-292. For a recent assessment of the symbolic import of Scriabin’s death, see Robert Bird,
“Imagination and ideology in the New Religious Consciousness,” in *A History of Russian Philosophy,
1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, ed. by G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 266-284, esp. 281-284.
composer had been increasingly heralded as a “Russian” musical prophet, his death was interpreted as being indelibly linked with the fate of Russia in the modern age. Both Scriabin’s supporters and opponents among Russia’s educated classes sought to define the hidden significance of this tragedy with specific reference to Russia’s place in the world.8

Scriabin’s followers were committed to maintaining the creative voice of their greatest representative, despite the hardships of war. Already on April 28, 1915, a meeting was held at the Petrograd home of Aleksandr Brianchaninov (the editor of Novoe zveno) with the intention of discussing the “mystical significance of Scriabin’s death.”9

The months after Scriabin’s death witnessed the founding of a “Scriabin fund” (dedicated to supporting Tatiana Schloezer and her children, left nearly penniless by Scriabin’s death)10, two Scriabin Societies (based in Moscow and Petrograd),11 a series of public concerts and papers devoted to the composer’s music and worldview,12 multiple journal

8 The unique significance of Scriabin’s death becomes clear when compared with the death of Sergei Taneev in summer 1915. Though several music journals ran articles devoted to Taneev, there was no comparable “mystical” significance assigned to his death. Taneev, ironically, died of pneumonia brought on by a cold that he caught while attending Scriabin’s funeral.

9 “Mistiko-filosofskii otdel,” Novoe zveno no. 17/69 (May 2, 1915): 8-11/2040-2043. This mystical narrative can be considered to begin with Novoe zveno’s announcement of Scriabin’s death, in which the journal cover displayed a full-page photograph of the composer underpinned by a scriptural reference to John 5:30: “‘My judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but that of my Glorious Father…’ The greatest of our earthly contemporaries, carrying amongst humanity the name Aleksandr Nikolaevich Scriabin has parted from this earthly life (rasstat’sia s zem’noi zhizn’iu).” The announcement was accompanied by Brianchaninov’s article “Pod penie ‘Khristos Voskrese!’,” written April 16, 1915. See Novoe zveno no. 15 /67 (18 April, 1915): 1, 2-3.


11 Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoe obschestvo, Izvestiia no. 1 (Petrograd, 1916); Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoe obschestvo, Izvetiia no. 2 (Petrograd, 1917); Muzyka no. 246 (1916): 123; RMG no. 28-29 (1916): 991; RGB f.746.38.39; RGALI f. 993, op.1, ed.khr.108.

12 For a complete list of events commemorating Scriabin the year of his death, see M. Priashnikova and O. Tompakova, Letopis’ zhizni i tvorchestva A. N. Skriabina (Moscow: Muzyka, 1985), 239-251.
and newspaper issues devoted to assessing his significance,\textsuperscript{13} a committee devoted to the editing and publication of the text and music to his “Preparatory Act”,\textsuperscript{14} the appearance of several books devoted to examining Scriabin’s music and legacy,\textsuperscript{15} and the composition of numerous poems and musical works dedicated to Scriabin’s memory.\textsuperscript{16} Analysis of the discourse in these disparate sources demonstrates that three primary explanatory narratives emerged seeking to explain the significance of Scriabin’s death: the \textit{Promethean narrative}, the \textit{Messianic narrative} and the \textit{Satanic narrative}. Each interpretation was tied to a larger vision of Russia’s place in human history. The development of these three narratives demonstrated not merely grief at the death of a great artist, but a growing crisis of belief in Russia’s musical metaphysics and imagined messianic mission.

The “Promethean” narrative emerged almost immediately after the composer’s death. In an article for the newspaper \textit{Rampa i zhizn’}, dated April 19, 1915, the pianist Mark Meichik insisted that “[Scriabin] did not die, he was taken from us... through Scriabin’s music, we were able to see much that humanity is not intended to know... he

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Muzyka} no. 220; \textit{Muzykal’nyi sovremennik} no. 4-5 (December 1915-January 1916); \textit{RMG} no. 17/18 (April 26, 1915). Several of the individual articles from \textit{Muzykal’nyi sovremennik} appeared subsequently as separately bound publications: V. Karatygin, \textit{Element formy u Skriabina} (Petrograd: Sirius, 1916); Iu. Engel’, \textit{A. N. Skriabin: Biograficheskii ocherk} (Petrograd: Sirius, 1916); Iu. Engel’, ed., \textit{Perechen’ sochinennii A. N. Skriabina} (Petrograd: Sirius, 1916); M. Nemenova-Lunts, \textit{Otryvki iz vospominanii ob A. N. Skriabina} (Petrograd: Sirius, 1916). Many poems dedicated to the composer were also published at this time.

\textsuperscript{14} The committee formed for gathering and editing Scriabin’s unpublished musical compositions included Gr. Prokof’ev, A. Gol’denveizer, E. Gunst, N. Zhilaev, S. Rachmaninoff and L. Sabaneev. See G. Prokof’ev to Nikolai Findeizen (May 2, 1915), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1749, 1.18. On the problems faced by those searching for the text and music to the “Preparatory Act” see Evgenii Gunst to Nikolai Findeizen (August 1, 1915), RNB f.816, op.2, no.1324, 1.23.


\textsuperscript{16} B. Ianovskii wrote a “Prelude funebre” dedicated to Scriabin’s memory. See Ianovskii, “Khronika,” \textit{Iuzhniy muzykal’nyi vestnik} no. 5 (May 1915): 10-11. The same article announced that Rachmaninoff had begun work on a large-scale composition to be dedicated to Scriabin. For a contemporary summary of the various events, see E.M. Braudo, “Skriabinskii gud,” in Petrogradskoe Skriabinsko Obschestvo, \textit{Izvestiia} 1, 10-16. For a more recent summary, see \textit{Letopis’ zhizni Skriabina}, 239-251.
daringly wanted to carry humanity to the very realm of the Gods and for that reason had to die!”

Like Prometheus, Meichik claimed, Scriabin had sought to bring his greater insight to lowly humanity and had endured punishment for that daring. Perhaps most striking in Meichik’s account is the underlying need for a greater, spiritual significance for life, together with the fear that such meaning might not exist. He argued that one must believe in Scriabin’s Promethean task because, if the composer’s death were mere chance rather than fatal destiny, “it would be impossible, impermissible to live!” The specter of a world in which tragedy had no coherent significance, in which the creative genius of a human could be brought to naught by uncaring Nature, was too terrifying for Meichik to permit. It had to be that Scriabin’s very “daring” had doomed him to be carried away from this world.

Despite Meichik’s vehement rejection, Scriabin’s death raised the possibility that human struggle might, in fact, have no greater meaning. The threat of such meaninglessness, both in Scriabin’s death and in the larger sacrifice of the thousands of human lives lost to war at this time, was felt by all of Scriabin’s contemporaries. It was this half-acknowledged fear that drove many of Scriabin’s admirers to symbolic and metaphysical interpretations of their idol’s death. Mulling over the significance of Scriabin’s death, one of his followers recoiled at its potential pointlessness:

17 Mark Meichik, “Nad mogiloi A.N. Skriabina,” Rampa i zhizn’ no. 16 (April 19, 1915): 4-5. The same issue of Rampa i zhizn’ reprinted Scriabin’s letter to Brianchaninov about the significance of the war, insisting that after the composer’s death, his prophetic worlds had “particular significance” (osobo znachenie). See “A.N. Skriabin o voine,” Rampa i zhizn’ no. 16 (April 19, 1915): 6-7. For a similar assessment of Scriabin as Prometheus, see Sergei Iabolnskii, “Gore” in Russkoe slovo no. 85 (April 15, 1915). Meichik’s Soviet-era analysis of Scriabin’s significance (like most of his contemporaries) emphasized Scriabin as a symbol of the historical epoch and distanced himself from such ideology. See Mark Meichik, A. Skriabin (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1935).

18 Meichik, “Nad mogiloi,” 4-5. The image of humanity’s Nietzschean struggle against nature to “affirm life” in spite of the limitations of the physical world, embodied in the figure of Prometheus, received increased support in the early Soviet era. See for instance Anatolii Lunacharskii, “O Skriabine,” Kultura teatra no. 66 (1921).
What is this? Can it be that in actuality our life, with all its expectations and efforts towards some kind of Light and Goodness is nothing but an evil and stupid joke? If, at this time, Russia could lose, with such apparent ease, such a person, then from whence comes the conviction in [Russia's] providential mission, that it will find and give to Humanity a new word of Synthesis? If not now, when the old has clearly rotted, and the Russian narod has demonstrated with the blood of its sons the saintliness of its love for the collective of the Brotherhood of the Fatherland (Bratstva Otechestva), then when?  

Prometheus, a symbol of man’s rejection of the law of the gods was an appropriate figure not merely for Scriabin, but for all Russians who struggled to wrest spiritual meaning from the absurd senselessness of death. The search for meaning in modern society, itself connected with the undermining of traditional societal, cultural and religious values, grew particularly strident amid the realities of war and the failure of musical metaphysics. This sense of failure emerged clearly in two alternate interpretations given to Scriabin’s fate: the Messianic narrative and the Satanic narrative.

The “Messianic” narrative adopted a similar image of Scriabin as a great visionary to that which appeared in the “Promethean” narrative. However, in this variant, Scriabin’s “prophetic,” “messianic” or “Christ-like” role was explicitly developed.

Humanity itself was unready for, or unworthy of, the visions he had brought. In this

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19 [Unknown author], “Scriabin kak simvol,” IRLI f.289, op.7, ed.khr. 69, l.10.
21 These two images overlap in commentary from the time. Brianchaninov argued that as a Promethean figure, Scriabin had expressed the “hidden secrets of our soul” in his “strange and unexpected harmonies,” for which he paid, “like Prometheus, with the torments of a confining chain and with his life.” See Aleksandr Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov o zadaniakh skriabinskikh obschestv,” in Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoe obschestvo, Izvestiia no. 1 (Petrograd, 1916), 1-9, here 7-8. Compare also the emphasis on Scriabin’s “daring” in Viachaslav Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed.khr.32, l.7: “I see in his death the clear meaning of the spiritual reality of his impulse (poryv) and exploit (podvig), however vague his conscious possession of the final meaning of that which he so fire-ishly called forth. He gave Fate a daring demand: ‘either complete the cleansing renewal (obnovlenie) of the world now, or there is no space for me in this world’, and Fate answered ‘die and renew (obnovit’) yourself. Such imagery appeared extensively in the issue of the journal Muzyka dedicated to Scriabin (Muzyka no. 220, published April 26, 1915). Scriabin’s death was announced in the previous issue of Muzyka: “Nad
narrative, Scriabin was described as a sacrificial lamb, whose death was required to compensate for the sins of contemporary, rationalistic and utilitarian society. The modern world, it was argued, had lost connection with higher, spiritual values. The ultimate failing was not Scriabin’s, but rather that of contemporary society. 

Pavel Polianov expressed these ideas with vivid metaphysical symbolism in his article “The Lamb” (Agnts). Scriabin’s life and ideas were depicted as resounding music, “like the bugling of silver trumpets” and as a “distant voice” that awakened Polianov from the grayness and alienation of the world in which he lived. Scriabin’s message awakened in him the thirst for a higher, spiritual realm, his true home (rodnoe) in contrast to the dark and isolated world in which his physical body existed. Polianov’s Orphic image of Scriabin’s power gave way to the specter of a fiery altar upon which the composer was immolated and a “great silence” that fell upon the earth. In this closing vision, he saw the figure of History rise up from the mist (tuman) that had descended over the world.

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23 Scriabin’s Mystery “could not easily be realized in the current conditions of human habits of thought and established custom of people specializing in separate sectors. The very idea of the common source of all arts, to which the totality of strength of all thinking and feeling must belong, is still far from recognized as a sovereign and pressing necessity, even by those whom, it would seem, must be most prepared for it.” Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 4-5.

24 Polianov, “Agnts,” 271. Brianchaninov also raises the question of Scriabin having been needed as a...
Scriabin’s message, History itself had intervened. Boris Schloezer was even more explicit in his use of imagery, linking Scriabin with the sacrificial narrative of Christ himself.\(^\text{25}\) Boris Asaf’ev expressed the same idea in more rational terms, arguing that “[Scriabin] was one of those who, with his creativity, thirsted and desired to bring about (vozvestit’) the coming (prishestvie) of the Kingdom of the spirit to the world earlier than it is fated to come about,” an idea echoed by other commentators.\(^\text{26}\)

If Scriabin was envisioned as the new Christ, his mission could be none other than the unification of peoples not by force, but by religious conviction, an act comparable to the founding of a new, universal church, a parallel that was expressed by several of his followers.\(^\text{27}\) Contemporary society suffered from the “the eternal wound caused by our egotistical materialistic anarchism,” which failed to answer the spiritual needs of humanity.\(^\text{28}\) As a “prophet”, “son of God,” “magician,”\(^\text{29}\) or “chosen one,” Scriabin had recognized the “spiritual demands” of the epoch: the “religious synthesis of all strivings, of the spiritual and emotional nature of contemporary humanity.”\(^\text{30}\) In response, he had

\(^{25}\) “With the years, the consciousness of his own sonness (synovstva) rose in Scriabin, that is, [for] his calling, for in the being of the son, the individual, the Father called himself to suffering, death and resurrection.” Shletser, “Ot individualizma k vseedinstvu,” *Apollon* no. 4-5 (April-May 1916): 48-63, here 62-63.

\(^{26}\) Glebov [Asaf’ev], “Velikaia zhertva,” 273. E. Bogoslovskii concluded similarly that “humanity must wait a long time; perhaps many thousands of years for the creation (osushchestvenie) of a Mystery in the form in which Scriabin dreamed (grezit’sia).” See E. Bogoslovskii, “Pamiati togo, kem my byli zhivi,” 281-286, here 284. Evgenii Braudo also claimed that Scriabin’s music, “would only be accessible to a new generation, raised on sound-ideas, still unclear to our mind and imagination, but already felt (oshchushchaemyi) by the most advanced musical actors of the contemporary world.” See Braudo, “Muzyka v Petrograde: Skriabinskie dni,” *Apollon* no. 8-9 (October-November 1915): 116-118, here 116.

\(^{27}\) Boris Schloezer wrote “Only religious unification (ob’edinenie) of people is possible: only a church (khram) is universal (vseleinskii).” Shletser, “Ot individualizma k vseedinstvu,” 62. See also “Skriabin kak simvol,” 16; Ob’iavleniia Komiteta po sboru pozhertvovanii v fond “Venok A.N. Skriabinu,” IRLI f.270, op.3, ed.khr.32 [1915-1916].

\(^{28}\) Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 7.

\(^{29}\) “Skriabin kak simvol,” 12.

brought the possibility for “new religious forms,” or a “new humanity.”  

With his death, it was left to his followers to decipher the path that his ideas and creations instructed them to follow.

It was for this purpose that Scriabin societies were founded shortly after Scriabin’s death in both Moscow and Petrograd. Remembering that Scriabin had been loath to consider himself “merely” a musician, the societies strove to unify “researchers, admirers and continuers of [Scriabin’s] work” under a single umbrella. They defined themselves as mystical-religious, rather than musical, organizations. Particularly active in the Petrograd and Moscow Scriabin societies were Viacheslav Ivanov, Iurgis Baltrushaitis, Aleksandr Brianchaninov, Boris Schloezer, Princess Mariia Gagarina and others. While their work was to incorporate close examination of Scriabin’s musical compositions in their entirety (which, Ivanov suggested, might already contain the elements of the Mystery), it would also encompass consideration of the works and ideas that Scriabin had not succeeded in bringing to full fruition: the text and music of the Preparatory Act. For this reason, a committee was organized to edit and prepare the

31 “Skriabin kak simvol,” l.6.
32 Leonid Sabaneev initially served as one of the main figures of the Moscow Scriabin Society, as well as the secretary of the committee. S. Makovskii, Boris Schloezer, V. Karatygin, Prince Kakuatovyi and E. Braudo were all members of the Petrograd Scriabin Society. See “Vmesto predislovia,” in Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoe obshchestvo Izvestiia no. 2 (Petrograd, 1917), 3. At the early meetings, Viacheslav Ivanov read aloud the text of Scriabin’s “Preparatory Act” and offered his own interpretive gloss. See Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine.
33 A.N. Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov o zadaniakh skriabinskikh obshchestv,” in Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoe obshchestvo Izvestiia no. 1, 1-9, here 3-4.
34 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (April 16-20, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.2-2ob. Anna was particularly upset that Nikolai and Rachmaninoff were both general members rather than “honored members” and had therefore to pay a fee. Ibid., l.2.
35 Ivanov suggested that perhaps “all the magical music of the second half of Scriabin’s creativity is already a ‘preparatory act,’ leading us to the threshold of a certain Mystery, which must, according to the mystic himself, not be his own personal creation, not even a work of art, but an internal event in the soul of the world, being imprinted with the accomplished fullness of time and the birth of a new human.” See Ivanov, RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed. khr. 32, l.2.
textual and musical remnants for publication in the near future. Just as Christ’s disciples had been sent out to bring his message to all humanity, so Scriabin’s friends must not remain closed in their intimate circle, but “consciously go forth into the broad arena,” and preach to the masses (tolpa).37

The Scriabin Societies embraced Scriabin’s idea of “unification (ob’edinenie)” or “communal ripening” (sozrevaniia) of the idea of a “universal art” (vseiskusstvo) and its “harmonization with religious and social experience,” both “individual and socio-political.” Only in this way, they claimed, could humanity be saved from the depths to which it had fallen.38 Brianchaninov pointed to the rapidity with which Scriabin’s “strange and unexpected harmonies” had gained popularity as a demonstration of the fact that “they had lived and been born to life in our psychology before [Scriabin].”39 Ivanov seconded the call for art’s unifying, religious mission: art would move humanity from the realm of the “real” to the “more real,” shifting from Symbolic representation of a higher realm to the enactment of it.40

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36 The text was intended to “appear in print at the end of 1916, together with a volume of commentary by his closest friends.” See Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 7. Brianchaninov discussed the mission of the Petrograd Scriabin Society in detail beginning on 8. Similarly, the author of “Scriabin kak simvol” wrote: “The religious-mystical meaning of Scriabin’s creations oblige a religious-mystical relation to them. In the ‘commentary to the Preparatory Act,’ an attempt at such an approach will be made without pretension to exhaust or even describe in full measure the contours of the boundlessly immense subject of this discovery.” For this reason, the author refused to discuss the meaning of Scriabin for the “spiritual evolution of the entire world of <humanity>,” “Scriabin kak simvol,” ll.1-2, 13. An early draft of the Preparatory Act (different from the published version) is preserved as “Tekst Predvaritel’nogo deistviia,” IRLI PHII, op.1, no.1917 (corrections by M.O. Gershenzon).


40 Musing upon the significance of Scriabin’s “theurgic will” and his “religious will,” Ivanov argued that in striving to move from “real to more real,” Scriabin stepped far outside the bounds of Symbolism; rather than the “uncovering of the more real in the real,” he sought “the transformation of the real to the more real.” In short, Scriabin strove to “transform art from phenomenological and psychological to ontological and then to world beginnings (voznikonoienie) and destruction.” Viacheslav Ivanov, “Dva chtenia o Skriabine,” IRLI f.607, no.178, ll. 6ob-7ob. According to Robert Bird, Ivanov also strove to bring about a literary rendering of Scriabin’s Mystery in his “literary trilogy” Chelovek: “In Chelovek, Ivanov tells the story of creation as the fall of Lucifer (the principle of “I am” from divine being (“I AM”). Derived from
Truly, Scriabin was himself a symbol. He granted the world the covenant (zavet) that henceforth no other art than prophetic, that is, an art uniting us with being itself, would exist.\textsuperscript{41}

Such an approach did not mean that all of Scriabin's work and ideas should be embraced equally. It was only in certain places that “Scriabin, like His great forerunners expresses those cosmic beginnings and gives that unique new musical-religious language” that was essential to the development of humanity.\textsuperscript{42} Due to his untimely death, Scriabin had not offered the final revelation; rather, he had merely “set ajar the door and showed [to us] what the active and mystical meaning of music might be.”\textsuperscript{43} The task of the Scriabin societies was to continue Scriabin’s work until such time as his successor should appear.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{War and Russia’s Messianic Calling}

\textit{The strivings of Scriabin are a moment of universal self-definition of the national Russian soul.}  
Viacheslav Ivanov, April 14, 1916\textsuperscript{45}

\textit{With the death of [Scriabin], close not to me alone, but to the entire [Russian] people (narod), the fullness of life of that people is destroyed and a part of its life dies.}  
B. Ianovskii, May 1915\textsuperscript{46}

Just as the war had been framed as Russia’s messianic mission against the

Lucifer, cut off from God, man struggles to assert himself until he recognizes within himself the imprint of God and says to him ‘Thou Art.’” Ivanov premiered the poem at a March 30, 1916 meeting of the Religious-Philosophical Society. Bird, “Imagination and Ideology,” 283.

\textsuperscript{41} Viacheslav Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina,” (Fall 1915), Skriabin. Sbornik statei [1919]. RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.38, l.36ob [handwritten pages]. A. Gorskii echoed the same thought: “If the minds of people begin to get used to the idea that old, isolated art has outlived its age, then [art] is not symbolic, already not only signifying. Rather it is almost finally and truly effectively time to unite the world of the unseen with the seen, tones and sounds with rays and colors. With this the beginning of a truly new art will be laid, which will use all the wealth of existing scientific technique for the fulfillment of its task: to build a bridge between time and space.” Gorskii, “Etapy duhoshoznanija,” 6.

\textsuperscript{42} “Skriabin kak simvol,” 1.13

\textsuperscript{43} Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 7. Brianchaninov claims the term “vseiskuststvo” was first employed by E. Braudo.

\textsuperscript{44} “Scriabin . . . is a prophetic phenomenon (iavlenie) of the future. . . Scriabin has departed, but Scriabin’s work remains. Scriabin has died, but Scriabin’s task has, as it were, been born to a new life. Scriabin has fallen silent, but Scriabin’s creations sound in us louder than during his life. . . However great Scriabin was, he was, of course, limited. But unendingly deep and multi-faceted is that idea, which he embodied amongst us.” Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 1.

\textsuperscript{45} Ivanov, “Natsional’noe i vseleskoe v tvorchestve Skriabina,” 61.

militaristic culture of contemporary Prussia, Scriabin’s death was interpreted within this framework. His disciples viewed the war as the great turning point, “not only in the sphere of the external forms of international and socio-political life,” but in the “general process of the symbolic treason of the German narod,” their rejection of universal, human and spiritual values in exchange for the shallow materialism of the modern age.47

Scriabin’s followers were outspoken in their need to explain the composer’s views on the war itself, assigning to him the widespread German/Prussian dichotomy discussed in Chapter Eight. Scriabin, it was claimed, had “seen in the creed (verouchenie) of Germanism a reactionary strength, which had to be broken by the strength of new truths, the knights of which we had proclaimed ourselves, standing for the defense of the rights of the weaker nations (narodov) and for Slavicism as the psychic (psikhcheskii) justification of our great power, like a material crucible, from which, from the path of cleansing from Prussianism, Russia would turn with new strength to the synthetic conjugation of West and East.”48 This vision was combined with a passionate embrace of Kant, Hegel, Wagner and Nietzsche and indignation at the “failure of the most forward-thinking of the [Russian] intelligentsia to recognize the great goal of this ‘bloody cleansing.’”49 Moreover, his followers claimed, Scriabin had identified “individualistic tendencies” that worried him in Russia’s allies.50 Russia alone could provide the communal, unifying impulse that would lead to a successful outcome of the spiritual

48 “Skrabin kak simvol,” 1.15. See also Shletser, “Ot individualizma k vseedinstu,” 62.
49 “Skrabin kak simvol,” 1.16. The author goes on to cite Scriabin’s complaint that Nietzsche had been misunderstood during the war: “Nietzsche despised the ‘contemporary idol,’ the sanctified State (obozhestvlennuiu gosudarstvennost’), which <makes> us all, like the Germans, substitute internal values for external-bourgeois morality of mediocrity and vulgarity. He was pitiless, but [pitiless] like Christ who drove out the merchants from the temple with lashes (plet’mi). Zarathustra left the mountain because he loved people and wanted to teach them to be pitiless, not to the weak around them, but to the weakness inside us!”
50 Shletser, “Ot individualizma k vseedinstu,” 62; “Skrabin kak simvol,” 1.15
battle, physically embodied in war.\textsuperscript{51}

After the war, claimed Scriabin’s followers, a new era of humanity, one based on “creative synthesis” rather than “disunifying analysis” would dawn.\textsuperscript{52} In leading the way to this new era, both the Russian \textit{narod} and Scriabin had a central role to play: “Russia must not only accompany, but [must] be the forerunner (\textit{predshestvovat’}) of the revolution of the material way of life . . . In the boundlessness of his tasks, the boldness of his denials and in his spiritual independence from the commonplace, Scriabin was the most Russian of Russians.”\textsuperscript{53} Seeking to reconceptualize the meaning of Scriabin’s \textbf{Mystery} for the readers of the \textit{Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik}, A. Gorskii envisioned a shift from German values, centered on the tragic fate of the individual human to the religious communality (\textit{sobornost’}) of the Russian people:

The \textbf{Mystery} can be understood as a path from tragedy to liturgy, from division to unity, from the reedy song of a lonely hero, weakly standing against Fate, to a general act, gradually abolishing the “fatal” battle between human and cosmic strength. The \textbf{Mystery} is a Tragedy already ashamed of itself and a Liturgy not yet recognizing itself.\textsuperscript{54}

It was, in short, an act of passage from one reality to another, the shift from the “real to the more real,” described by Viacheslav Ivanov.

\textsuperscript{51} Viacheslav Ivanov “Natsional’noe i vselelskeo v tvorchestve Skriabina” (April 14, 1916), RGALI f.225, op.1, d. 38, ll.38-62.

\textsuperscript{52} Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 5-6. He continued: “At the end of the war, when its terrible effects will be seen, this demand [for creative synthesis] will be imperative, for some even unbearably burning.” See also Ivanov, “Scriabin i dukh revolutsiia,” (October 24, 1917), 63-72, here 70-71: “The phenomenon of Scriabin is one of the most important witnesses of that famous turning point, taking place in the spiritual consciousness of contemporary humanity. . . the creative accomplishments of Scriabin and, in no less measure, his ideas (\textit{zamysly}) that did not reach embodiment, are a great event in the general life of the spirit.” Ivanov’s handwritten autograph is in IRLI f.607, n.179. Similar ideas appear in Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” Doklad na vechere-koncerte Skriabinskogo obshestva v Petrograde (December 1915) RGALI f. 225, op.1, ed,khr. 32, l.1. Ivanov gave this latter speech in Petrograd in December 1915, in Moscow in January 1916 and in Kiev in April 1916.

\textsuperscript{53} “Scriabin, kak simvol,” l.10. As evidence of this, the author cited the support that Scriabin had received from Russians, in contrast to the struggle faced by Wagner in Germany. See Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{54} Gorskii, “Etupy dukhsoznaniia,” 4-5. This idea was quoted virtually word for word by B. Ianovskii in a paper given at a concert dedicated to Scriabin’s memory. See B. Ianovskii, “O Skriabine,” \textit{Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik} no. 8-9 (August 1915): 3-5, here 3.
Such interpretations of the purpose of Scriabin’s Mystery bear little in common with the composer’s own vision, in which the Mystery would usher in the end of the world itself. Instead, for Scriabin’s disciples, the Mystery came to stand for the transformation of human society for which they themselves longed. In a 1915 article devoted to the significance of Scriabin’s art, Schloezer argued that artistic creativity might have an immediate and measurable effect on the physical world, citing both the “psychological” impact of music (the transmission of certain moods, impacting the actions of humans) and direct “physical” impact (through sound vibrations acting on the physical consistency of objects). Though the impact of sounds on the physical world had often been demonstrated in its destructive (razrushitel’nyi) sense, Schloezer emphasized instead the possibilities of an “organizing and systematizing energy of sound combinations” that might be used for a “constructive, creative goal”. Such an image of Scriabin’s art was far removed from the composer’s envisioned destruction of the world.55 The “Messianic narrative” thus reiterated that the spiritual transformation ushered in by war, Russia’s messianic mission and Scriabin’s “Russian” identity were inextricably entwined.56

Scriabin’s death, combined with worsening wartime conditions, suggested that Russia’s messianic task had been pushed off into an indistinct future. Within this postponement there lay an immanent danger. If the future “synthesis of West and East through Russia,” expressed in the figure of Scriabin, were not brought to pass in “new

55 Boris Shletser, “O deistvennom iskusstve (Smert’ A.N. Skriabina),” Novoe zveno no. 17/69 (May 2, 1915): 8-11/2040-2043, here 9/2041. The paper was originally delivered at the April 28 gathering at the home of A.N. Brianchinov to discuss the “mystical significance” of Scriabin’s death. Ibid., 8/2040.
forms of religious ecstasy,” then, warned his followers, “Humanity will perish in reckless self-destruction, envy and every evil.”

Scriabin’s death had brought into question the victory of his vision. However “fantastic” Scriabin’s plans might have seemed, they had been possible amid conditions of a “great massive uplift to a new international truth,” a “thirst to cleanse the Church from those who trade in blood and the merit of having trusted to the devil of Statehood,” and a “craving for new religious forms of drawing near to the Governing and Unachievable (nepostizhimyi) Principle,” all of which were expected to follow after the end of the war. In such a situation, humanity would have awakened to the “consciousness of the necessity of a New Testament,” which would have been filled by Scriabin’s “Preparatory Act”:

Around him would have arisen a Church, like around a “Threshold” for the accomplishment of the final Mystery: the willful separation from the material realm of those whose unification [would achieve] the active mystical realization of the New Church of Idealists; those who would not [consciously] understand, but who would have spiritually understood, that Idea rules over facts, not only in the microcosm, but in the macrocosm, and that religion, being an expression of cosmic energy, henceforth could not be only an atavism of formula and ritual, but must express the willful striving for the otherworldly by the conscious, creative, human, and liturgically organized masses (tolpa).

Instead of leading in the founding of a new church, Scriabin had died. With him, it was feared, had died the possibility of fulfilling his task of saving humanity from the modern age: “And so he was taken from us, carrying off with him the key of the door that already seemed open, which heavily and roughly slammed shut behind Him and left us here without hope, but only with cries of wild horror in our ears and in our hearts.”

A more definitive exposition of the wartime distortion of the musical metaphysics embraced by

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57 “Skriabin, kak simvol,” I.10.
58 “Skriabin, kak simvol,” I.6. The author argued that advanced Russian thinkers were more in tune with Scriabin than Germans were with Wagner and that, had he not died, Scriabin would have been ready to perform the Preparatory Act by 1920. “Skriabin kak simvol,” I.7. Aleksandr Krein similarly claimed that Scriabin had been equal to completing his Mystery. See Krein, “Vechnaia pamiat’,” 289-290.
Nietzsche’s orphans can scarcely be imagined than this.

This reified atmosphere was not amenable to all of Nietzsche’s orphans. P. Shepk complained of the “Scriabin hysteria” that had seized the composer’s admirers after his death and harangued them for the “damage” they caused both to Scriabin’s memory and to the listening public.  

Nikolai Medtner was among those who attended the early meetings of the Scriabin society, but disgusted with the “philosophical terms poured upon a single note,” “the impure Russian language of Boris Schloezer,” and the “undefined cloudiness” of Baltrushaitis, he abandoned the first annual meeting without staying to hear the musical portion. D.S. Shilkin, who attended two meetings of the Scriabin society, raised his voice in critique of this mystification of art in which Scriabin received “more praise than the founders of religions.” Finding his voice ignored or silenced in private meetings, he sought, like Scriabin’s followers, to reach a broader audience, publishing his critique in a Petrograd brochure that appeared in May 1916. A year after Scriabin’s death, K.A. Kuznetsov, writing for the readers of Russkaia mysl’, insisted that he had been a great composer, but nothing more. His death had not ushered in a new Mystery or the transformation of life his disciples awaited.

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60 P. Shepk, “A.N. Skriabin,” [Unknown newspaper], RGALI f.2012, op.5, ed.khr.69, l.49.
61 Anna Medtner to Emil Medtner (April 7-14, 1916), LC Medtner correspondence, ll.2-2ob. Sabaneev and Gol’denveiser were scheduled to perform. Note the latent critique of Schloezer’s “Russianness” contained in the letter, though the philosopher had, like the Medtner brothers, been born and raised within the Russian Empire.
63 Commenting on Shilkin’s brochure, the poet Maksimilian Voloshin dismissed it as a “rationalist” attack on the mystical worldview of their circle, unworthy of further critique. Maksimilian Voloshin to Julia Fedorova (May 22, 1916), RNB f.1000 (Sop. III), op.3, ed.khr. 1540, l.1. Julia had apparently sent Voloshin the brochure and asked his opinion of it.
and Sabaneev in their articles for *Muzykal’nyi sovremennik*. The divisions among Nietzsche’s orphans were growing ever more obvious.

**Scriabin as Satanist**

_The death of Scriabin left an impression on me... my peer has died; a Luciferian has died... What is he before and after death, where there is no vanity? This is so incomprehensible, that the greatest and most sinful secret thoughts approach with unheard steps..._  
Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner, May 16/3, 1915.  

_The answer to much in Scriabin’s life and in his creative tragedy lies in Satanism._  
Leonid Sabaneev, 1916.

[Sabaneev] gives such a violent shape to Scriabin, that we who knew him had to turn away with horror and indignation from this piously drawn, unwilling caricature of one of the most fiery and most genius idealists and servants of the Spirit on the Russian earth... According to Sabaneev, Scriabin is one of Satan’s craziest egoists and priests... This is said by Brutus. And Brutus is an honorable man... Viacheslav Ivanov to Aleksandr Brianchaninov, May 12, 1916.

On the day of Scriabin’s funeral, while gazing despairingly at the grave of his friend, Leonid Sabaneev was approached by Fr. Pavel Florenskii, priest, philosopher and occasional visitor at Scriabin’s evening gatherings. With lowered eyes, Florenskii informed Sabaneev that, although Scriabin had not completed the _Mystery_ of which he had dreamed, Florenskii himself had experienced a vision in which he had learned that Scriabin’s final goal would come to pass in another thirty-three years.  

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66 Evgenii Gunst expressed growing distaste for the mysticism surrounding Scriabin’s name. While Findeizen asked Gunst to write an article on Scriabin for RMG in August 1915, Gunst at first delayed work and, at the beginning of October declined, finding that recent events surrounding Scriabin’s name and legacy had so troubled him that “I simply haven’t the strength to do anything connected with the deceased A.N.” See Evgenii Gunst to Nikolai Findeizen (August 1, 1915), RNB f.816, op.2, no.1324, l.24; (August 21, 1915), l.25; (September 9, 1915), l.31-32; (October 8, 1915), ll.33-34.

67 Emil Medtner to Anna Medtner (May 16/3, 1915), RGB f.167.25.1, ll.1-4, here l.1.

68 Sabaneev, _Skriabin_ (1916), 72.

69 Viacheslav Ivanov to Aleksandr Brianchaninov (May 12, 1916), in Petrogradskoe Skriabinok obshchestvo, _Izvestiia_ no. 2, 18.

upon Florenskii’s conviction, Sabaneev concluded that he had been correct, at least in part: standing before Scriabin’s grave, Florenskii had a foreboding of his own death in the Soviet gulag in 1948.71 From a universal act, encompassing all of humanity, Scriabin’s Mystery was reduced to the personal fate of one man in a transformed world. Factual or not, Sabaneev’s account of Florenskii’s vision provides insight into the musician’s own shifting attitude towards Scriabin and his Mystery. Rather than ushering in a new era of humanity, Scriabin’s unfinished Mystery had come to symbolize the death of hopes and visions once held by Nietzsche’s orphans. This disenchantment with Scriabin would soon erupt into bitter innuendos and accusations as Sabaneev, Scriabin’s most beloved disciple, was transformed in the eyes of Scriabin’s followers into a Judas figure. The accusations leveled by Sabaneev were themselves part of a broader process taking place, marking a growing disenchantment with the Orphic vision of music that had dominated in the years prior to the war. Connected with the disappointment over music’s inability to act as a unifying factor in the face of the war and with worsening social conditions, this third, “satanic” narrative emerged as a reinterpretation of Scriabin’s role within the “Messianic” narrative. In this view, Scriabin’s own personal weaknesses had made him ultimately unable to fulfill the Christ-like role to which he was called.

71 There is a discrepancy of dates in Sabaneev’s varying accounts, in which he refers either to “thirty-two” or “thirty-three” years. In the present analysis, this variation is of little import. Recent research has shown that Sabaneev’s assessment of Florenskii’s date of death is incorrect; Florenskii was executed in 1937. See Peyton Engel, “Florensky: Background,” in Russian Religious Thought, ed. by Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson, 91-93.
Leonid Sabaneev’s disappointment in Scriabin began to manifest itself before the composer’s death. After the outbreak of war, his evening visits to Scriabin’s house came to an end as work and the events of daily life distanced him psychologically from the mystical circle of the composer. On a visit to Nikolai and Emil Medtner, Sabaneev expressed his growing disappointment. Emil attacked Scriabinism “as a violation of spirit,” while Nikolai drove home his argument that “progress” and “evolution” did not exist in music, both concepts which were mainstays in Sabaneev’s interpretation of Scriabin’s significance. In response, according to Emil, Sabaneev did not put up any genuine argumentation. Emil concluded, “Sabaneev apparently begins to be disappointed in Scriabin and betrayed him the entire time [of his visit], as Bugaev usually does. He said that the Mystery will never be created, that Scriabin writes bad (durnye) verses, that Scriabin has [lost?] his talent, that Scriabin is primitive and schematic in architectonics.”

While such meetings were private affairs, Sabaneev voiced his early disappointment in a half-ironic tone in the pages of the journal Muzyka (once the dominant voice in the Scriabin camp) shortly after the composer’s death. Sabaneev noted that even “many who never believed in [Scriabin’s] Mystery found his death strange; in the depths of their souls they doubted and, perhaps, in secret shared his dream of a great miracle (chuda)”.

His own disappointment, half-admitted, crept in shortly after: “Messiahs died and were resurrected. But where is that plan, in which the resurrection took place? . . . Scriabin, at any rate, ‘did not fulfill his promise (obeshchaniia).’”

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72 Sabaneev, Vospominaniia o Skriabine, 299.
73 Emil Medtner to Marietta Shaginian (April 24-26/May 7-9, 1914), RGB F.167.25.28, l.49.
Sabaneev’s distancing of himself from Scriabin’s mysticism in a December 1915 lecture devoted to the composer was noted by M. Glinskii, who complained that the critic scarcely discussed the Mystery at all.\textsuperscript{76}

The true bombshell in Sabaneev’s relationship with Scriabin’s memory fell with the 1916 publication of his book Skriabin. Within the context of a lengthy analysis of the composer’s life and work, Sabaneev leveled several claims that aroused the anger and scorn of Scriabin’s followers.\textsuperscript{77} Most notable among these were his harsh critique of the extant text of the “Preparatory Act” and his association of Scriabin and his art with Satanism. It had been agreed among the members of the Scriabin societies to refrain from discussion of the content of the “Preparatory Act” prior to the publication of the text, an agreement disregarded by Sabaneev in publishing his monograph.\textsuperscript{78} Not only did Sabaneev flout this promise, but he added insult to injury by openly describing the intricate content of Scriabin’s future Mystery and claiming that the composer had been unable to complete his task due to personal failures.\textsuperscript{79}

To the modern observer, much of the animosity roused by Sabaneev’s book, as well as Sabaneev’s charge of Satanism, might well appear peculiar. Within the context of the time, Scriabin’s followers took Sabaneev’s critique as a direct affront to their prophet.

\textsuperscript{76} M. Glinskii, Untitled review, RMG no. 51-52 (1915): 831-832.
\textsuperscript{77} Responses to Sabaneev’s book were published in Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoе obschechestvo, Izvestiia no. 2 (Petrograd 1917).
\textsuperscript{78} V. Lermontova “Pis’mo Leonidu Sabaneevu,” in Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoе obschechestvo, Izvestiia no. 2, 7: “At that time, when Scriabin’s friends had bound one another with the promise not to speak or to write of the text of the ‘Preparatory Act’ before the time had arrived to publish it, you hurry to throw onto the market not only your assessment of it, but consider it possible to write of that, which, according to your own words, Scriabin informed you of in a circle of a few, in a lowered voice, like a great secret. And how you write of your conversations, what horrible untruths you create from that information…” On the immanent publication of the Preparatory act, see also Brianchaninov, “Neskol’ko slov,” 7.
\textsuperscript{79} Evgenii Gunst gave this same promise. See Evgenii Gunst to Nikolai Findeizen (August 1, 1915), RNG f.816, op.2, no.1324, 1.23. On Sabaneev’s agreement not to publicly discuss the “Preparatory Act,” see V. Lermontova, “Pis’mo Sabaneevu,” 7.
Nor did Sabaneev dismiss such beliefs out of hand; in fact, he acknowledged the prevalence of a “contemporary mystical consciousness” centered around an “apocalyptic idea” from which Scriabin’s *Mystery* “organically emerged.” Even more striking, he argued, “from many sides it is difficult to object to the Scriabinist schema of the world process,” in which he saw echoes of a broader “cosmology of occultism.” The composer’s greatest failure, Sabaneev argued, was not the irrationality of the idea of the *Mystery*, but rather his own individualism and pride, expressed by the idea that HE would be the one to give the world the *Mystery*, an idea that Sabaneev defined as “satanic by its very essence.” It was not the apocalyptic idea *per se*, but rather Scriabin’s individualism and self-aggrandizement that Sabaneev condemned as “satanic,” a critique that echoed the charges laid against contemporary Germany and which would be taken up by other contemporaries.

Central to understanding this “satanic” narrative is the idea of art (and music’s) morality, an issue central to the Russian reception of Nietzsche himself. In this light, it is useful to return to a brief consideration of Konstantin Eiges’ articles on aesthetics,

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80 Sabaneev, *Skriabin* (1916), 63-64.
81 The trend of satanism, Sabaneev argued, was popular at the time and Scriabin unquestionably imbibed it from the “mood of the epoch”. However, “while Satanism was merely the inspiration for artistic imagination for many, it was more than this for Scriabin.” Sabaneev, *Skriabin* (1916), 72-73. For Sabaneev’s critique of Scriabin’s excessive pride, see Sabaneev, *Skriabin* (1916), 63-67, 72-73, 75, 81, 83-84. In discussing Scriabin’s idea of the “active beginning” or the initial impulse from which creativity springs, Sabaneev connected it with the figures of Lucifer, Prometheus, Satan, or Ariman. This active impulse “flees from the center,” thereby creating the material world, materialization and differentiation. The role of the “new Orpheus” was to bring about respiritualization, a return to center and an overcoming of the material world. Sabaneev, *Skriabin* (1916), 42-47, 57. Sabaneev cited Scriabin’s untimely death as evidence that he overestimated his earthly lichnost’. For more on the widespread use of satanic symbolism in late Imperial Russia, see Kristi A. Groberg, “‘The Shade of Lucifer’s Dark Wing’: Satanism in Silver Age Russia,” in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 99-133.
82 A. Losev, “Mirovozzrenie Skriabina,” in A. Losev, *Strast’ k dialetike* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990), 256-301. Viacheslav Ivanov’s passionate defense of Scriabin against accusations of “individualism” was, at the same time, a defense against the claim of “Satanism” and the intellectual baggage accompanying it. See Ivanov, “Rech’, posviashchennaia pamiati A.N. Skriabina na vechere v Bol’shom zale Konservatorii” (April 19, 1920), RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.40, II.1-2.
discussed in Chapter Three. Building upon Nietzsche’s concepts of the Dionysian and
Apollonian impulses, Eiges had argued that the composer’s task was to “enter into the
other world,” experience the pure Dionysian state, and then transfigure the chaotic reality
thus experienced into sound. Such an image of the composer’s task brings to mind the
figure of Orpheus, adopted by Sabaneev, Schloezer, Ivanov and others as an appellate for
Scriabin himself. In contrast to Nietzsche, Eiges assigned this Orphic (or Apollonian)
moment a specifically moral significance. The transformation of chaos (lower mysticism)
into form (higher mysticism) was the *creative moment*, most perfectly embodied in music
itself. The composer who failed to shift from the experience of Dionysian chaos to
Apollonian creation of form was trapped in what Eiges labeled “lower mysticism”.
Sabaneev drew similar divisions, though rather than the “Dionysian” and “Apollonian”
terms adopted by Eiges, he focused upon the difference between active force and
mystical “contemplation” (*sozertsanie*), arguing that the former was the realm of the
artist and the latter that of the mystic. Scriabin, while full of the active impulse of the
artist, had entirely lacked the contemplative ability of the mystic (in Eiges’
conceptualization, the Apollonian moment or “higher mysticism”), required to make
sense of the meaning of mystical experience. To this point, Sabaneev’s critique of
Scriabin corresponded well with Eiges’ philosophy: Scriabin, due to his individualistic
dreams, had been unable to escape from the Dionysian chaos into which he had entered.
His task of transfiguring his experience into crystallized musical sound had failed. As

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83 Sabaneev adopts the term “Orphic path” to refer to Scriabin’s collapsing of religion and art into a single
sphere. See Sabaneev, *Scriabin* (1916), 68; Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” RGALI f.225, op.1,
ed.khr.32, l.2.
84 Sabaneev, *Scriabin* (1916), 78: “Not for a single minute did Scriabin have the appearance of a person of
a spiritual path. He was a living artist, enveloped in his own dreams, without patience to even explore the
practice of the occult in any depth.”
Sabaneev argued, “[Scriabin] perished, throwing his last challenge to the world, having overestimated his theurgic might. He perished like the ancient Icarus, burned by the rays of eternal Light.”85 Misled by his individualism, Scriabin “did little to divide elements of Satanism from those of Saintliness; white from black magic; he denied evil in principle, considering it all part of a single expression of activity.”86 Led astray by his visions in the Dionysian depths, Scriabin became lost and confused, “and he took the flickering light of the astral subconscious for the sun of Inspiration.”87 Rather than transfiguring reality, he had been seduced by his individualistic dreams. For this reason, Sabaneev, argued, even Scriabin’s purest music contained moments of “black magic”.88 Scriabin’s death, Sabaneev claimed, was the required “sacrifice” of a soul who had transgressed against God, and from whom penance was required to expiate his sins.89 Within this analysis, the question of morality in art reverberated strongly, a question with which, until recently, Sabaneev had been little concerned.90

Among the suggestions raised by Sabaneev in his 1916 book was the possibility that Scriabin’s failure did not in itself mean that this mystical vision of the world had come to an end. It was possible to recognize Scriabin’s failure, yet hold out hope for another artist to appear who might not fall prey to the same individualistic impulses.91 A. Gorskii had embraced this idea of a second Orpheus even before Sabaneev’s book appeared, demonstrating that Scriabin’s vision, if not his individual personality, still held

86 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 68-84.
87 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 74-75.
88 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 68.
89 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 65-67.
90 This critique is comparable on several points with Pavel Polianov’s shifting views on Scriabin. By late 1915, Polianov, while continuing to espouse a Slavophile image of music, specifically rejected Scriabin (together with Beethoven) as a “cold European rationalist.” See Pavel Polianov, “Dva litsa,” Muzyka no. 223 (September 12, 1915): 333-337.
91 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 65.
power. On the one-year anniversary of Scriabin’s death, Gorskii published the first of a series of articles devoted to exploring this possibility. After citing at length Boris Schlozezer’s article “O deistvennom iskusstve” from the previous year, Gorskii, while agreeing with Schlozezer’s claim that music might have a measurable impact on the physical world, offered his own conclusions that differed fundamentally from Schlozezer. Altering his own views of a year ago, Gorskii argued that Scriabin had failed to fulfill the task to which he was called due to his own personal “unpreparedness” for the spiritual discoveries he made. This failure was due to the composer’s intellectual weakness, as, Gorskii claimed, Scriabin had not thought through his ideas to their logical conclusions. He had lacked the “conscious recognition” of his task that was required before theurgic transformation might occur. From this, it followed that “it is possible to complete the task, taken up by Scriabin in our [current] conditions; at any rate, the death of Scriabin in no way serves as an argument against this possibility.” While Gorskii eschewed direct discussion of “Satanism,” he strongly emphasized the theurgic concept of transforming reality through art, borrowed from Vladimir Solov’ev. Scriabin’s failure had been an individual one, but another artist might still complete the task. Gorskii’s choice fell upon Vladimir Rebikov, in whose “musical-psychological dramas” and concept of music’s

92 Like Sabaneev, Schlozezer raised the possibility that Scriabin might have been too spiritually “weak” for the completion of the Mystery, but that “others might come” and complete it. Gorskii picked up on this hint and developed it further. See Shletser, “O deistvennom iskusstve,” 2043.

93 Gorskii, “Okonchatel’noe deistvo,” Izuznyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 7-8 (April 1916): 35-38, here 38. These ideas were developed further in two articles arguing that Rebikov would fulfill Scriabin’s unfinished task. See Gorskii, “Rebikov,” Izuznyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 15-16 (November 1916): 100-104; “Rebikov,” Izuznyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 17-18 (December 1916): 115-120. Gorskii considered Rebikov to have a more coherent and complete conscious grasp of his ideas of a new world than Scriabin, an aspect he considered necessary for an artist-theurgist. He claimed that Rebikov followed Solov’ev’s ideas, but developed them further than Solov’ev himself had done in his “Story of the Antichrist.” Gorskii cited Rebikov’s greater conceptual understanding of his mission, his Christian worldview and his familiarity with the ideas of Solov’ev as evidence of the latter’s preparedness to take on this task. This analysis was based on Gorskii’s reading of Rebikov’s libretto for his new work, “Antikhrist” and vision of his forthcoming “Life of Christ,” without any familiarity with the music composed for these works. See Gorskii, “Rebikov,” Izuznyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 15-16, 103.
direct impact on human emotion, he saw the “conscious recognition” of the Christian mission of Russian art in the modern age.⁹⁴

Gorskii’s vision was expressed without taking into account the impact of the war on Vladimir Rebikov himself, however.⁹⁵ While Rebikov had envisioned the coming of Orpheus (a figure he elided with Christ) as an event of the near future in his 1910 article “Orpheus and the Bacchanists,” the impact of the war left him ever more disenchanted. Reflecting upon the significance of Christ’s birth in the midst of the Great War, Rebikov defined the present age as the “victory of the material [realm].” While insisting that at some future point in time, humanity would once again remember Christ’s teachings, he observed that such a time would come to pass perhaps only after another twenty thousand years.⁹⁶ The reason for this, Rebikov hinted in a 1916 article for RMG, was that the “song of the spirit” had grown weak in the modern age, becoming increasingly infected by the “song of the blood.”⁹⁷ Rather than the spiritual realm transfiguring the material realm, the material world had invaded and polluted the spiritual. Shocked by German barbarity in the war, Rebikov held out little hope for a return to Christian spirituality in the near future.⁹⁸ In a personal letter to Findeizen, he continued to insist that “other, great times will come,” but added disconsolately, “I will not live to see them. Orpheus has not come yet, but he will come.”⁹⁹ Rebikov had ceased to believe, both in his own creative mission,

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⁹⁴ See also the image of Rebikov expressed in the journal Svoboda i zhizn’: izhyni organ svobodnoi tvorcheskoj mysli 9 (May 28, 1917). Preserved in RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1766, ll. 86-89.
⁹⁵ Gorskii’s interview with the composer dated from 1914. See Gorskii, “Rebikov,” Iuzhnyi muzykal’nyi vestnik no. 17-18, 116. By 1916, Rebikov was far less positive in his outlook.
⁹⁶ Rebikov, “1915 let tomu nazad rodilsia chelovek” (December 25, 1915), GTsMMK f.68, no.102, l.2ob.
⁹⁸ This development was building prior to the war. In a 1914 letter to Vitelad Iodko, Rebikov wrote “What have [people] done with the teachings of Christ. . . Life is in darkness.” See Rebikov to Iodko (January 27, 1914), RGALI f. 2954, op.1, ed.khr. 1031.
⁹⁹ Rebikov to Findeizen (May 26, 1916), RNB f. 816, op.2, ed.kh. 1766, ll. 80-81, here l.81ob.
and in the immanent transformation of the world into a better place. Orpheus’ lyre would not soon be found.

Sabaneev’s satanic interpretation of Scriabin’s individualism began to find more outspoken supporters as the war dragged on. In a December 1916 article for the journal *Russkaia mysl’*, Sergei Bulgakov turned his attention to the question of human creativity, theurgy and Luciferianism. He saw in the “Scriabin phenomenon” the failure of the present age to properly understand the function of art or its potential dangers.100 Pure art, Bulgakov argued, cannot have an impact on the physical world itself; rather it creates its own parallel world of Beauty.101 For this reason, Bulgakov claimed, the true goal of art was to approach the Platonic form of pure Beauty as closely as possible, disconnected from the material world.102 The potential danger facing the artist, was that he might be seduced by the “material aspect of art,” leading him, either consciously or unconsciously to seek for his art to have a definable relation to the material world. In such a case, art would take on an aspect of “artistic magic”:103

Possessing the strengths of this world and its charms is possible not only with machines and chemistry, but with sounds or colors, just as moving its physical foundations is thinkable not only with dynamite, but with music, some rhythms of which may possibly destroy, similar to an electric current. Unnoticed by the artist himself, he might make a substitution and turn his art into a kind of artistic magic. This seduction of magic always existed for art, but it received particular meaning in the contemporary age, as the magical relation to nature itself strengthens or, more accurately, is reborn.104

100 Bulgakov, “Iskusstvo i teurgiia: fragment,” *Russkaia mysl’* no. 12 (December 1916): 1-24, here 24. Bulgakov attended some of the meetings at Scriabin’s home following the composer’s death and was familiar with the “Messianic narrative” taking shape in those circles. See Sabaneev, *Vospominanitia o Skriabine*, 314. He also participated in the first meetings of the Scriabin society, along with Berdiaev, Ivanov, S. Bulgakov, N. Berdiaev, Iu. Baltrushaitis, B. Shletser, V. Bogorodskii, V. Briusov. See RGB f.746.38.39.

101 Bulgakov, “Iskusstvo i teurgiia,” 3. Bulgakov defined actions that have a physical impact on the world in terms of “economic materialism,” linking this to “craft” rather than “art”. A synthesis between the two only existed, according to Bulgakov, before the fall from the Garden of Eden. Ibid., 6.


103 Bulgakov, “Iskusstvo i teurgiia,” 4. He cited “orchestral color” as an example.

104 Bulgakov, “Iskusstvo i teurgiia,” 5.
The idea that “art must not only be consoling, but active; not symbolic, but transformative” had been “recognized with particular strength in the Russian soul,” a fault which he placed on Dostoevsky’s claim that “Beauty will save the world” and Solov’ev’s concept of “artistic theurgy”. For Bulgakov, “theurgy” was “the action of God in the world, though accomplished in humans and through humans,” exemplified in acts like the Eucharist. In contrast, he defined “sofiurgy” as the “action of humans, accomplished through the heavenly strength of Sophia (sofiinost”). While God had granted certain theurgic power to humans, they could not simply seize these powers for their own ends. The attempt to do so would lead instead to a mixing of heavenly and earthly realms, the seductive charms of the occult and, ultimately, to satanism. Thus, for Bulgakov, true art would serve its purpose in its quest for the Platonic form of Beauty, but not in Scriabin’s dreams of world-transformation.

Sabaneev’s final assessment of Scriabin, like Bulgakov’s, showed deep disillusionment with the concept of “Orphic art” itself:

[Scriabin’s “Orphic path”] brought him to that to which it brings everyone, for this path is not the Path to Light. Immersion solely in the elements of art never leads to the path of mystical consciousness, for too many threads connect art with lower planes, with the material and the astral worlds. Art cannot rise higher than the realm of emotions and mixed realms. It only awakens the shadows of higher realms through reflection. . . this magical operation of great geniuses has nothing in common with the path of Light and inspiration. It is only the seductive and mighty echoes of earthly Satanism. Neither Scriabin nor Wagner was a priest of God, but they were both great bewitching wizards, stirring up the strength of the astral plane/ether (astral).
This outcome, Sabaneev insisted, was “a necessary consequence of the fact that they were artists. . . They identified shadows with higher reality and the dream of their own individuality with the light of the highest Inspiration (Ozareniiia). In this analysis, Sabaneev suggested, the very calling of an artist predefined his fall into Satanism.

Bewitched by dark forces, Scriabin had only been able to “desatanize” himself (a goal towards which he began to strive in his last years) through sacrificing his art and his life itself as penance for his sins.

The members of the Scriabin societies in both Moscow and Petrograd were adamant in rejecting Sabaneev’s book, claiming that his slander had made their own task of spreading Scriabin’s true meaning even more difficult. With particular virulence, V.N. Lermontova, a member of the Moscow Scriabin Society, wrote to Sabaneev, “If you truly took Scriabin as you claim, then it becomes unclear why you maintain the image of a passionate friend and admirer. . . [I unwillingly ask myself], what convinced you to

109 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 78.
110 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 78, 83-84: According to Sabaneev, Scriabin was not a “mystic”: “there was too much activity in him.” He lacked the “contemplative” ability so central to true mystics. He was, rather, an “artist, a great exorcist of the Orphic plan…. [Scriabin’s] path was not the path to mystical sacralization (posviashcheniiia), but the prelude of a person searching and lost, a wanderer who had fallen where he did not wish. . . he was a pure heart and soul… wandering in the astral forest. Great in strength, but not sophisticated in knowledge, this wizard (volshebnik) awakened those elements, which for us appeared as magical art, but in the flame of which he burned up, as a spiritual personality – to the next life. Mystically born, he did not experience the second consecration: mystical baptism. But there was a threshold to him. At that moment when he, already on his death-bed, realized that his daring was destroyed, when all his dream, all the idea of his life perished from a seeming randomness, from absurdity, at that moment, the moment of cleansing Golgotha arrived and he was prepared for further consecration – that crazy, saintly and satanic in searching, centrifugal in wanderings, Spirit…. Many felt that his spirit was pardoned and that the great sacrifice was accepted.”
111 In June 1916, the former secretary of the Petrograd Soviet of the Scriabin Society, S. K. Makovskii formed an editorial committee, including V. G. Karatygin and Boris Schloezer in order to speed up the publication, both of the Moscow letters and of speeches given by V. Karatygin, Prince K. K. Kakuatov, Boris Schloezer and S.K. Makovskii and E.M. Braudo at the May meetings of the Society. Published responses to Scriabin's book included speeches and/or letters by Tatiana Schloezer, V. N. Lermontova, M. N. Gagarina (predsedatel'nitsa), Vladimir L. Nosenkov, Vladimir Bogorodski, Viacheslav Ivanov (chairman in Petrograd), A. Brianchaninov, Boris Schloezer. Though intended for publication in Fall 1916, the issue did not appear until 1917. At this time, they promised to publish the remaining speeches once they were received, which appears to have never happened. See “Vmesto predisloviia,” 4.
write [this book]. . . are you yourself a convinced Satanist, an admirer and follower of the Great Sorcerer?" An anonymous “admirer of the memory of A.N. Scriabin” similarly suggested that Sabaneev was “in the power of the ‘obsession’ which, in his opinion, Scriabin suffered from, and [is] in the same need of that ‘desatanization’ that, in his words, began in Scriabin in the final period of his life.” Aleksandr Brianchaninov, in a letter to Viacheslav Ivanov heralded the immanent publication of the text of the “Preparatory Act” as a moment of truth for Scriabin’s followers: “At the end of the year, the ‘Preparatory Act’ will appear in print, and then not only those having ears to hear, but those having eyes will see how far Sabaneev is from the correct understanding of Scriabin’s true meaning in the evolution of Russian mystical thought in his pitiful attempts to belittle the significance of that great literary work.”

Focusing on critiquing Sabaneev’s argumentation rather than leveling personal accusations, Boris Schloezer dismissed Sabaneev’s critique of “Orphism” in art with the claim that, by its very definition, art was a “transfiguration of reality.” Being creative, rather than destructive in nature, artistic creation was in essence a form of “white magic,” incapable of containing darker forces. Such activity could never be anything other than spiritual.

The Scriabin societies envisioned their task to be the reinterpretation of Scriabin within a Russian messianic narrative. Within this context, Dr. Bogorodskii wrote of the “deeply religious personality (lichnost’) of Scriabin,” while Vladimir Nosenkov

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113 “From an admirer of the memory of A.N. Scriabin,” Petrogradskoe Skriabinskoe obshchestvo, Izvestiia no. 2, 15.
116 This assessment is based on a careful reading of their critiques of Sabaneev.
117 V.V. Bogorodskii, “Nechto o knige Sabaneev,” in Izvestiia no. 2, 10-14, here 10.
offered a personal testimony to Scriabin’s spiritually beneficial impact on his own life, writing “to me personally, with his words and to a certain level with his sounds, Aleksandr Nikolaevich awakened in me not a taste for a “Black Mass”, but for a long-slumbering striving towards God. He prepared the destruction of the stubborn rationalism and religious skepticism that had, it seemed, always and wholeheartedly possessed me... How could a Messiah of the devil turn even one person towards God?”

Ivanov developed the connection between Scriabin and Christianity more explicitly, claiming that the composer had been in the process of undergoing an “internal cleansing and penitential internal experience” that was leading him back to the recognition of Christianity:

A convicted, conscious Christian Scriabin was not yet, but the name of Christ he unendingly praised; he untringly sought and craved for, he firmly believed in Christ as the universal Word, served him in his own way... L.L. Sabaneev... did not only suspect Scriabin of Satanism, but [he suspected] all theurgy, or, as he expresses it, the “orphic path.” He would preserve his personal opinion, if even the most ancient Christian martyr, arising from the catacombs, were to tell him that Orpheus is truly a symbol of Christ.

Here in brief exposition is the vision of the Scriabin Societies as a whole: Scriabin was reinterpreted as a seeking Christian, whose theurgic task was to bring about the messianic mission of the Russian people. After a brief exchange of letters, Sabaneev, finding himself to be considered a heretic by Society members, withdrew from the

119 Ivanov to Brianchaninov, Izvestiia no. 2, 20. Similarly, Ivanov argues that Scriabin’s “ubermenschness” was “sobornost’” and that, unlike Nietzsche, Scriabin believed in God. See Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” (Fall 1915) RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.32, l.14; Ivanov, “Vzgliad Skriabina na iskusstvo,” RGALI f.225, op.1, ed.khr.38, ll.36ob [handwritten portion].
organization. Together with this, his efforts to organize and prepare the musical remnants of the “Preparatory Act” came to an end.

Disenchantment with their own vision as the external world pressed ever harder on its members soon brought the Scriabin Societies themselves to an end. In closing her letter to Sabaneev, V. Lermontova expressed the hope that “a great number of letters, articles and papers“ would soon appear from Scriabin’s friends and admirers, debunking the false “verbal legend” upon which Sabaneev’s book was based. Such a hope was not to be fulfilled: the reality of war, with the deterioration of material conditions that accompanied it, postponed the publication of the letters from the Moscow Scriabin Society for over a year. In the meantime, a number of speeches presented at the meetings denouncing Sabaneev were lost in the archives of the intended publisher. When approached to supply copies of their papers for publication in 1917, V. Karatygin, Prince K.K. Kakuatov, S.K. Makovskii and E.M. Braudo chose to ignore the request, perhaps distracted by wartime conditions, or unwilling to continue to support views they had expressed a year (and a lifetime) ago. In the end, Boris Schloezer was the only member of the Moscow society to provide a copy of his speech. When the text of the “Preparatory Act” was finally published in 1919, rather than including essays by various members of Scriabin’s disciples offering their own reminiscences of the composer and interpretation of his work, the text was introduced by a lone historical essay on the evolution of

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120 Ivan Lipaev claimed that the “hooligan” Sabaneev had been expelled from the society. See Lipaev to Findeizen (January 25, 1917) RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1547, l.57ob.
122 V. Lermontova “Pis’mo Sabaneevu,” 7.
123 “Vmesto predislovia,” Izvestiia no. 2, 4.
Scriabin’s idea for composing the work, penned by Schloezer.\textsuperscript{124} The Scriabin Societies were ultimately victim both of external circumstances and internal implosion. Unable to agree over the multi-faceted significance of Scriabin, admirers of Scriabin-as-composer found themselves sidelined from the organization, while the mystical dreams of his most passionate admirers were disappointed by the tumult of their times.

**The “Black Mass” Sonata: Satanic Summoning or Spiritual Cleansing?**

Within the Satanist narrative, the place of Scriabin’s Ninth Piano Sonata (op. 68), the so-called “Black Mass” loomed large.\textsuperscript{125} In the *Muzyka* issue devoted to Scriabin’s death, a full page was devoted to a facsimile of the first page of the composition’s autograph. [Illustration A.10] In the same issue, B. Iavorskii singled out the “Black Mass” as the embodiment of Scriabin’s late style. While Iavorskii had claimed that Scriabin’s influence was central in the spiritual development of the Slavic people, he believed that this positive influence came to an end with the “Black Mass” and following works because, he claimed, Scriabin had lost his connection with the *narod*.\textsuperscript{126} The “Black Mass” served as a point of reference for other posthumous commentators as well.

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\textsuperscript{124} For many, the text of the “Preparatory Act” did not live up to its mystical promise. Maksimilian Voloshin, when approached by Brianchaninov to write an article on the text of the “Preparatory Act” declined, citing his lack of knowledge of music in general (and Scriabin’s music in particular), together with what he considered the excessive wordiness, literary “primitiveness” and “lack of logic” he found in the text. See M.A. Voloshin to Aleksandr Nikolaevich [Brianchaninov] (undated), RGALI f.102, op.1, ed.khr.10.

\textsuperscript{125} The Ninth sonata (op.68) was completed in Moscow in 1913. See Evgenii Gunst, *A.N. Skriabin i ego tvorchestvo*, 45. The nickname (unlike the “White Mass,” named by Scriabin himself), seems to have been suggested by Dr. Bogorodskii. See Sabaneev, *Vospominaniiiia o Skriabine*. In his 1916 book *Skriabin*, Sabaneev claimed that Scriabin himself thought of its nickname. See Sabaneev, *Skriabin* (1923), 56.

\textsuperscript{126} Iavorskii argued that this was not cause for grief; rather, it was the fate of all geniuses, who served their task on the stage of world history and, having fulfilled it, passed out of historical memory. This paper was first delivered on April 15, 1915 in the Beethoven studio and later read on April 22, 1915 in a meeting of the Historical division of the Musical-Theoretical Library on the ninth day after Scriabin’s death. An abbreviated version of Iavorskii’s speech was republished as Iavorskii, “Skriabin,” in *A.N. Skriabin: Sbornik statei k stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia* (1872-1972), ed. by S. Pavchinskii (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973), 35-40.
In describing the potential mystical impact of music immediately after Scriabin’s death, Boris Schloezer acknowledged the existence of both “white magic” and “black magic”. While the former was associated with creation, the latter was, by definition, a destructive force. In proving his point, Schloezer referenced the dual natures of Scriabin’s Seventh and Ninth Piano Sonatas, respectively nicknamed the “White Mass” and the “Black Mass”. In relation to the “White Mass,” Schloezer claimed:

Scriabin always felt when performing [the Seventh Sonata] that its action was not limited to the shock of the entire spiritual (dushevnyi) and physical organization of the listener, but that something took place... that some kind of strengths were called to action, descending down on us, that something in the world changed with this performance, that an event occurred, the influence of which nothing could wash away. The sacred, religious character of this sonata’s mighty call, the perception of mysterious sounds always demand[ed] a massive tension, because it was physically difficult to even breathe in that discharged air (razriazhennom vozdukhe). The importance, the serious, I would say even somewhat dangerous [act] he accomplished at that moment was felt and understood by the composer himself. Scriabin only played that sonata when he felt himself extraordinarily full of spiritual energy. “It is like I see,” he would then say, “that with the charm of these sounds I tear away some kind of curtain, that with my command some kind of barrier falls away.” In this sense, Scriabin more than once showed the preparatory meaning of the Seventh Sonata.127

Sabaneev offered for the Ninth Sonata a similar explanation to Schloezer’s account of the Seventh Sonata, claiming: “Playing [the Ninth] Sonata, [Scriabin] felt that he himself became a dark sorcerer (chernyi sviashchennodeistvuiushchii), an evil magician and [that he] awakened something vicious, some kind of willful gloomy element.”128 In relation to this, Sabaneev claimed that Scriabin had felt special fondness for the piece, a fact that concerned the composer.129 From Sabaneev’s perspective, the reason for this fondness was clear. “Being a mystic by aspiration,” Sabaneev argued, “[Scriabin] was nevertheless a great artist before everything and his artistic fantasy was able to stir not only the bright

127 Shletser “O deistvennom iskusstve,” 2042.
128 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 32-33.
129 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 73. This claim was passionately refuted by Tatiana Schloezer. See Tatiana Schloezer, “Otzyv,” in Izvestiia no. 2, 5.
form of the Mystery, but the dark colors of black magic (tainodeistviia). As an artist, Scriabin was unable to distinguish between white and black, thereby exposing the blindness of all art to questions of morality. For Scriabin’s other admirers, the significance of the “Black Mass” was much harder to define. What might have forced Scriabin, mused Shletzer, “following the completion of the victorious bright Rite of Salvation (obriad ko spaseniuiu), to suddenly summon the devil and again to allow him to enter us and allow darkness and destruction to seize us, albeit for a moment?”

According to Gorskii, writing shortly after Scriabin’s death, “the final remnants of the mystical gloom (mrak) and horror of the black magic of division (raz’edinenie) was poured by Scriabin into his Ninth sonata.” With this work, Gorskii claimed, the author spiritually cleansed himself, driving out the demons of darkness (besy t’my) and preparing for the “great act” he was about to fulfill. Of striking interest is the fact that both Shletzer and Gorskii agreed with Sabaneev on the “negative strengths” called forth by the music. The fundamental debate was whether or not Scriabin’s musical evocation had maintained power over these forces, or whether they had ultimately destroyed the composer. The debate over the interpretation of the “Black Mass” thus served as a microcosm of the broader Satanist debate. We now turn to a brief examination of the musical content of the work.

The “Black Mass” sonata opens with a simple four-note theme, marked legendaire:

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130 Sabaneev, Skriabin (1916), 33.
132 Gorskii, “Etapy dukhosoznaniia,” 6. This idea was also picked up and repeated by B. Ianovskii. See Ianovskii, “O Skriabine,” lzuznyi muzikal’nyi vestnik no. 8-9 (August 1915): 3-5, here 4-5.
This theme is remarkably comparable with the theme of “Death” that was utilized by the composer in his Prelude op. 74, no. 2. In both cases, the central aspect of the motive is a downward chromatic scale, suggesting a thematic correspondence between the two works:

The harmonic structure upon which these themes are based were the same ones employed by Scriabin in the musical sketches for the “Preparatory Act”.¹³⁵

This continuity is important in examining the composer’s own understanding of the function of the concept embodied by this harmony. For Scriabin, concepts such as “black” and “white” or “good” and “evil” were not absolutes; rather, they were the

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¹³³ Lev Nikolaevich Oborin, and Yakov Isaakovich Milststein, eds., *A. N. Skriabin: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii dlia fortepiano* vol. 3 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1953).

¹³⁴ Oborin and Milststein, eds., *A. N. Skriabin: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3.

temporal expression of active impulses that pushed from initial unity to differentiation (in the material world), back to unity. Part of a cyclical process, both aspects were therefore equally necessary. In this sense, the continuity of harmonic language employed in the “Black Mass” Sonata, the “Death” Prelude and the sketches of the “Preparatory Act” make logical sense. From differentiation, Scriabin sought to move to unity through the theurgic power of music. From this perspective, the potential conflict in Scriabin’s “Black Mass” Sonata was that the composer might be evoking the forces that lead to differentiation rather than unification. Such a process might be ill timed when the current striving of the world was towards unity, but was not evil per se.136

Nevertheless, Scriabin’s followers were committed to an interpretation of his musical symbolism based upon a pre-eminently moralistic conception of the universe. For this reason, the narrative of the “Black Mass” was interpreted as a battle between good and evil forces, in which the victory of one or the other was ultimately a sign of Scriabin’s success or failure as a visionary. By extension, this defeat or victory was itself symbolic of Russia’s future fate. Within this context, it is useful to examine the narrative structure of the sonata more thoroughly, with reference to the interpretive meaning the musical language evoked among his contemporaries.

The second motive appears in measures 7-10, and was identified by music critic Evgenii Gunst in 1916 as a “mystical incantation” (misticheskoe zaklinanie):

![Mystical Incantation Motive](image)

(9.3) Scriabin, Black Mass “Incantation” motive

136 If Sabaneev was accurate in his claim that Scriabin was confused as to why he had written the “Black Mass” sonata, it would suggest that the composer was also unable to completely adopt the image of himself as a prophet bringing unity to the world, but saw himself as controlled by external forces.
Together, the opening “death” harmony and the “incantation” motive can be considered to constitute the first theme.\(^{137}\)

In classical sonata style, Scriabin offers a second, contrasting theme, defined by Gunst as “a pure, radiant dream”:

\[\text{avec une langueur naissante}\]

Over the course of the development (starting in measure 68), Gunst argued that the second theme became “poisoned” by the first, thereby suggesting that the pure, spiritual dream has become infected by dark forces.\(^{139}\)

\[\text{avec une douceur de plus en plus caressante et empoisonnée}\]

\(^{137}\) Gunst, *A.N. Skriabin i ego tvorchestvo*.

\(^{138}\) Oborin and Milshtein, eds., *A.N. Skriabin: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3.

\(^{139}\) “The development. . . gives a picture, amazing by its strength, of the poisoning of the dream, pure in itself, but made unclean by the dark strength of magic,” Evgenii Gunst, *A.N. Skriabin i ego tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Iurgenson, [1916]), 46.

\(^{140}\) Oborin and Milshtein, eds., *A.N. Skriabin: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3.
The culmination of the piece is a wild dance, once again based upon the first theme, and which parallels the “dance” idea employed in the “White Mass” Sonata (and, by extension, the envisioned dance that was to serve as the culmination of the *Mystery* itself):

![Musical notation]

(9.6) Scriabin, “Black Mass”: “Dance” sequence and final appearance of opening theme

This moment is of particular interest in analyzing the varying interpretations of the sonata’s symbolic meaning. For Gunst (and apparently for Sabaneev), this “nightmarish dance” embodied the “culmination of the dark forces,” growing “faster and faster” before vanishing as the “Rite of Black magic” draws to a close and the piece ends with a repetition of the opening motive, giving a cyclical effect to the sonata as a whole.

In contrast to this victory of darkness, Gorskii insisted that the sonata’s ending

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141 Oborin and Milstein, eds., *A.N. Skriabin: Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3.
showed Scriabin’s personal cleansing of negative forces and his spiritual preparation for the composition of the final Mystery. Schloezer, writing immediately after Scriabin’s death, similarly concluded that “the end of the [Black Mass] sonata is freeing: the unclean [spirit] is scattered,” but nevertheless admitted a moment of personal doubt: “but is it definitively scattered? Was the magician able to master and again to deprive reality of the terrifying enemy that he called forth? Did they not remain there, close to him, these negative strengths, wounded, weakened, but nevertheless active? Did they not negatively impact his body, his spirit, reducing their strength, preparing with this the final catastrophe? We cannot answer that question now. Later… who knows.”

In his first throes of grief, Brianchaninov had voiced the fear that the death of Scriabin had in fact symbolized the loss of the war in the spiritual realm. In a similar sense, the “Black Mass” Sonata could be interpreted as symbolizing (or calling forth) the victory of “darkness” rather than “light” in the spiritual realm. The symbolic meaning of the sonata, like Scriabin’s death, was open to diametrically opposing interpretations, leaving more questions than answers.

In the end, Scriabin’s life and music were both “open symbols”. While the composer’s followers struggled to define the significance of his work and his death amid a darkening modern landscape, Scriabin’s goal of creating unity shattered into a fractious reality, where varying interpretations of the future vied for dominance. Rather than

142 Shletser, “O deistvennom iskusstve,” 2042. As evidence supporting his argument that Scriabin was in fact victorious over the “dark forces” he had awakened with the Black Mass sonata, Schloezer pointed to the composer’s continued work on the cleansing message of the “Preparatory Act”. However, considering that the composer died without having completed this work, Schloezer’s argumentation must have rung hollow to at least some of his contemporaries.

143 Brianchaninov, “Pod penie Khristos Voskrese!,” 2406
serving as a symbol of synthesis, the composer served as a point of division.\textsuperscript{144}

Nietzsche’s orphans would not find Dionysian unity through Scriabin’s apocalyptic vision.

**Mourning Russia and the Messiah:**
Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Études-tableaux, op. 39

After Rachmaninoff’s return to Russia in 1909, Scriabin’s contemporaries often pitted the two composers against one another. Allegiance to one was considered to mean rejection of the other’s compositional style, as well as the values that were believed to underpin that style. Embrace of one man’s compositional voice went hand in hand with an acceptance of a general worldview connected with his music: progress (Scriabin) or lyrical pessimism (Rachmaninoff). With the impact of war, Scriabin’s death and the growing disenchantment with his vision among his followers, it was Rachmaninoff’s language of musical melancholy that gradually gained predominance in expressing the mood of the time. A particularly vibrant example came from none other than Leonid Sabaneev, whose adulation of Scriabin and dismissal of Rachmaninoff in 1910 inverted into an embrace of Rachmaninoff and rejection of Scriabin after 1917.\textsuperscript{145}

Rachmaninoff was deeply affected by Scriabin’s sudden death in April 1915. Over the following year, he performed a series of concerts across European Russia devoted

\textsuperscript{144} This development was expressed with particular vehemence in Losev’s 1921 article on Scriabin. As Rosenthal notes, “In this essay, Skrjabin is almost a surrogate for Bolshevism.” See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, “Losev’s Development of Themes from Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*,” *Studies in East European Thought* 56, no. 2/3 (June 2004): 187-209, here 193.

exclusively to Scriabin’s music. Additionally, his compositional impulse, paralyzed after the creation of the *All-Night Vigil*, once again found outlet in the writing of a set of songs of Russian poetry (op. 38) and a set of nine piano etudes (op. 39). It is to the latter of these that we turn our attention.

The op. 39 etudes-tableaux were the final musical works composed by Rachmaninoff before leaving Russia in December 1917. Written between 1915-1916, most of these pieces were premiered by the composer in late 1916. They offer the final musical glimpse of Rachmaninoff’s rapidly disintegrating world. Two musical elements that recur throughout the set of etudes hold particular relevance to the time in which Rachmaninoff was writing: the consistent use of the *Dies irae* melody in each piece and the evocation of the *iurodivy* theme from Modest Mussorgsky’s opera *Boris Godunov*.

The opening motive from the *Dies irae* appears in each etude in various guises; sometimes it is the central motive around which the piece is constructed, while at other times it adds a dark undertone to the main theme. In the second etude (in A minor, published 1917), the chant serves as a bass *ostinato* (repeating over and over) against which the entire composition unfolds:

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146 Even in these concerts devoted to Scriabin’s memory, the composer’s supporters were ruthless in attacking Rachmaninoff’s performance of their idol’s work, claiming that he turned Scriabin’s mystical otherworldliness into earthly, material sounds. The two composers themselves were far less antagonistic than their followers. After youthful competitiveness, Scriabin scarcely acknowledged Rachmaninoff’s existence as a composer, though the two worked together on various committees. In contrast, Rachmaninoff, while disliking Scriabin’s late compositional style, recognized his colleague’s creative talent, even conducting Scriabin’s piano concerto in 1911 (with Scriabin playing the solo part).

147 Rachmaninoff’s op. 38 songs include settings of recent Symbolist poets. These texts were selected through the active help of Marietta Shaginian, who personally selected poems for the composer to consider and explained the literary and musical significance that she saw in each work.

148 Eight of the nine op.39 Etudes-tableaux (c-moll, a-moll, fis-moll, h-moll, es-moll, a-moll, c-moll, D-dur) were premiered on December 5, 1916 in the Theatre of K.N. Nezlobin. See RGALI f.2985 op.1, ed.khr.624, II.30-32. Fourteen pieces, from both op. 33 and op. 39 were performed by Rachmaninoff in solo concerts in Moscow on December 11 and December 19, 1916. Etude-tableau op. 39, no. 2 bears a 1917 date, but a version of the piece was performed in the December 5, 1916 concert.
The chant also weaves its way into the upper voices at climactic moments:

In contrast to the overwhelming presence of the Dies irae in etude-tableau no.2, its appearance is far more muted in etude-tableau op. 39, no. 5 (E flat minor). Here its statement appears as part of a cadential flourish centered around the tonic of E flat minor:
The *Dies irae* chant emerges in these final works of Tsarist Russia as a constant leitmotif, underpinning the fate of Scriabin, musical metaphysics and Imperial Russia itself.

Equally striking in these études is Rachmaninoff’s musical references to the *iurodivy* (holy fool) in Modest Mussorgsky’s opera *Boris Godunov*. The *iurodivy* is a traditional figure in Russian literature and history: a mentally handicapped “fool” who, through the grace of God, has greater insight into human life than his more intelligent and powerful contemporaries. In *Boris Godunov*, the *iurodivy* accuses Boris of murdering the Tsarevich (the child Dmitrii) in order to seize power in Russia during the tumultuous Time of Troubles (*smutnoe vremia*). However, the *iurodivy* also foresees and mourns the fate of Russia itself in a poignant lament. In the 1908 setting of Mussorgsky’s opera, this moment appears in the fourth act, in combination with an armed uprising of peasants in the forest near Kromy. The theme receives its fullest development at the end of Act Four, Scene one. Here the *iurodivy* sings the following words:

\[
\text{Flow, flow bitter tears,} \\
\text{Weep, weep, Orthodox soul!} \\
\text{Soon the enemy will come,} \\
\text{And darkness will fall.} \\
\text{Black darkness, impenetrable darkness.} \\
\text{Sorrow, sorrow to Rus!} \\
\text{Weep, weep, Russian people,} \\
\text{Hungry people.} \quad \text{152}
\]

The central melodic cell leading into the main theme is a falling minor second, from F to E natural, a traditional musical evocation of sorrow, but here used to particularly vivid effect:

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152 Leites’, leites’, slezy gorkiiia/Plach’, plach’, dusha pravoslavnaia!/Skoro vrag pridet/I nastanet t’ma/Temen’ temnaia, ne progliadnaia/Gore, gore Rusi!/Plach’, plach’ russkie liud’/Golodnyi liud’
(9.10) Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov*, Act IV, scene I\(^{153}\)

It is this falling minor second that Rachmaninoff similarly employs in measures 97-102 of the second etude-tableau. Here the theme appears (marked *forte*) in the left hand at a climactic moment in the piece, in combination with a bell-like, repeated f natural above:

(9.11) Rachmaninoff, *Etude-tableau* no. 2 in A minor, op. 39\(^{154}\)

The falling minor second is also a central element in the *Dies irae* chant, but its particular setting here, including the use of the same pitches (F – E) as Mussorgsky, suggests a close relationship with the *iurodivy* lament.\(^{155}\) As Rachmaninoff was well acquainted with the score of *Boris Godunov*, the similarity between these two motifs can scarcely have escaped him. The continued presence of G sharp in the Rachmaninoff etude also evokes the E major chord immediately preceding the opening of the lament. Another reference to the *iurodivy* lament appears in etude-tableau op. 39, no. 6 (also in A minor).

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155 Malcolm Brown identifies the use of the four-note opening of the *Dies irae* chant, as well as reference to Mussorgsky’s *iurodivy* lament in Miaskovsky’s Sixth Symphony, composed in 1923. He also cites Khatchaturian’s Second Symphony, composed in 1943, with a program based on the 1914-1918 war, which incorporates the *Dies irae* chant in the third movement. See Malcolm Brown, “‘Dies Irae’: Some Recent Manifestations,” *Music and Letters*, 49, no. 4 (October 1968): 347-356, here 348-350.
Here, it is the closing rather than the opening that is evoked:

(9.12) Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov*, Act IV, Scene 1

While the rhythm and tempo in the etude-tableau no.6 has been altered, the general harmonic outline from Mussorgsky’s original is preserved:

(9.13) Rachmaninoff, *Etude-tableau* op. 39, no. 6 (A minor)

Etude-tableau op. 39, no. 6 was originally composed as op. 33, no. 4, but the composer withdrew it from this earlier set and included it as part of op. 39 in his publication of this

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157 Lamm and Igumnov, eds., *S.V. Rakhmaninov: Polnoe sobranie sochineniiia*, 78.
set in 1920, perhaps recognizing its closer connection with these later works.\(^{158}\) The connection of the *iurodivy* lament and the *Dies irae* chant, which recur throughout the op. 39 etudes-tableaux, while reflecting melodic and harmonic elements present in earlier works, also suggest a close connection with the traumatic events of war and revolution. In these works, Rachmaninoff mourned the death of the “Russian” world in which he had been raised and which he loved.

In an interview with musicologist Josef Yasser, conducted fifteen years after his emigration, Rachmaninoff discussed his understanding of the *Dies irae* chant.\(^{159}\) He claimed that, more than a melody, the chant contained a “dark strength” (*temnaia sila*) that had a real, discernable impact on its listeners. Echoing earlier claims about Scriabin’s “Black Mass” Sonata, Rachmaninoff suggested that the *Dies irae* itself might awaken negative powers, not only in himself, but in anyone who heard it. While Rachmaninoff offered these reflections years after composing the *Isle of the Dead*, the *Bells* and the op. 39 etudes-tableaux, they suggest a lingering echo of the musical metaphysics of the late Imperial period: unable to provide a unifying melody or harmony to save society, his final compositions instead enacted the chaotic forces that would tear his world apart.

**The Coming of the Mystery?**

On the night of October 24, 1917, Vladimir Lenin set in motion a series of events that would culminate, in the early hours of October 25, 1917, with Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd. That same evening in Moscow, Viacheslav Ivanov gave a speech

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\(^{158}\) The piece was performed in Moscow on November 16, 1915 as part of Rachmaninoff’s solo concert, together with five other etudes-tableaux from op.33. See RGALI f.2985, op.1,ed. khr. 624, l.20-21.

devoted to the question of “Scriabin and the Spirit of Revolution.”\textsuperscript{160} Ivanov claimed that Scriabin had seen the war as the beginning of a new epoch in which humanity was on the verge of passing into a new level of being. Scriabin was a true embodiment of the “Russian idea,” seeking consciously to create conditions for its triumph. In conclusion, noted Ivanov,

> If the revolution we are living through is truly the great Russian Revolution, the much-suffering and painful birth of the “independent Russian idea,” the future historian will recognize in Scriabin one of its spiritual perpetrators and, in the revolution itself perhaps, the first measures of his unfinished \textit{Mystery}. But this is only in that event if, gazing back from afar over the time we have lived through, he will truly be able to say not only ‘the earth was formless and empty and darkness lay over the abyss,’ but also to add: ‘and the Spirit of God moved over the waters,’ of that [revolutionary time], which appears to us, his contemporaries, to be the turbid gaze of formless chaos.\textsuperscript{161}

Ivanov concluded with the suggestion that the Revolution might in fact be the first step in Scriabin’s \textit{Mystery}.\textsuperscript{162} As subsequent events showed, the Russian Empire had entered the throes of violent transformation, though not of the type envisioned by any of Nietzsche’s orphans.

\textsuperscript{160} Viacheslav Ivanov, “Skriabin i dukh revolutsii” (October 24, 1917), RGALI 63-72; the handwritten draft is preserved in IRLI f.607, n.179. See RGB f.746.38.39, l.4.

\textsuperscript{161} Ivanov, “Skriabin i dukh revolutsii.” The February 1917 Revolution was greeted warmly by most of Nietzsche’s orphans. See for instance Matvei Presman to Nikolai Findeizen (March 22, 1917), RNB f.816, op.2, ed.khr.1741, l.32.

\textsuperscript{162} Ivanov, “Skriabin i dukh revolutsii,” 63.
EPILOGUE: REVERBERATIONS

“Why am I so sorrowful? . . . I loved you once.”
“I loved you once,” repeats the piano,
And a chord sobs, “Everything has vanished forever.
Everything has vanished without return into the unending distance.”

And I am sorrowful today . . . I loved you once . . .
I loved you once . . . My love is pitiful to me.
Is it really forever? Really without return?!
“Forever, without return,” answers the piano.

A. Gornostaev, “By the Piano”¹

The turmoil of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Russian Civil War and the early
years of Soviet power marked the collapse of the messianic view of music. Harsh physical and
social realities undermined faltering belief in the idealistic world-view that had once inspired
Nietzsche’s orphans. Over the following years, they experienced a general disillusionment with
music’s messianic mission (together with an accompanying emphasis on individual rather than
collective musical experience). Their conceptualization of historical time shifted from an
eschatological to a more linear basis and, for many, music emerged as a space of memory
through which to reflect on their past. These three processes often existed side by side, shaping
the way in which individuals interpreted their own past. Music, once a source of spiritual hope
and transcendence, continued to be evoked, but came to be imbued with darker symbolism
reflecting failed hopes and dreams.

Disillusion: the End of Musical Metaphysics

The sense of disillusionment already apparent in the aftermath of Scriabin’s death
deepened after the October 1917 Revolution into a sense of loss and betrayal. While the role of
music in the emergent Soviet society would be debated, contested and recreated in the coming

¹ A. Gonorostaev, “U roialia,” Iuzhnyi muzikal’nyi vestnik no. 3-4 (1918), 15.
months and years, the failure of music’s salvific mission was already apparent.\(^2\) For those who had believed, in whole or in part, this failure dealt a blow comparable to a loss of religious faith. By early 1918, those musical journals that had survived the early months of the revolution increasingly published articles and poems that were heavy with a sense of disillusionment and loss.\(^3\) Ironically, such textual sources often claimed words were insufficient to give voice to their emotions, and turned instead to musical imagery. One particularly popular image that emerged in these final issues was the figure of a lone pianist, abandoned by a friend or loved one (or having suffered some other unidentified tragedy) and unable to express emotions by means of words. Instead, he or she reflected by means of the piano on the inability to recover from this loss. In an untitled poem by E. Gertsog, published in RMG in 1918, we find the following verse:

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Quiet, my friend. We will not speak a word. . .
Of my oppressed heart - Do you hear?
The piano cries. And again we understand:
Fate will not return our former joy.
Quiet my friend. . . Let the chords of the piano
Extinguish the last light in my soul
Let my heart groan from torment and sorrow
Quiet, my friend. . . we have no more words.\(^4\)
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While mere words were insufficient to capture the emotional anguish suffered by the author, music emerged as a symbol through which such emotions could find expression. However, rather than uplifting, these emotions were unutterably dark. Nor was this image limited to expression in poetry. N.I. Sizov, a former piano student of Medtner, described his life in similar terms in 1924: “They ask me ‘And what do you call ‘life’?’ I am silent. I am silent and I play [piano]. There is


\(^3\) The process of nationalization of musical institutions, including publishing houses and journals was virtually complete by mid-1918. Among those journals that continued to appear in the early months of 1918 were *Iuzhnyi muzikal'nyi vestnik* and *RMG*.

nothing to do. Simply not die soon. . . yes, and see the ocean.” For some, music emerged not as a means through which to make sense of such emotions, but as a symbol of all that was wrong in pre-revolutionary society. Reflecting on his earlier life from emigration in Paris, Leonid Sabaneev commented in a letter to a former colleague:

I remember our “old, other” specialties. Truly the sun rose and set in a single [musical] composition. Only here [in emigration] did I understand that this was only hypnosis and delusion, that our musical slavery was a small dead-end in a large world. For this reason, I now have a skeptical and angry relationship to the musical sphere. . . What good are these universal perspectives (mirovye perspektivy), which never offer any sort of happiness, but only a thrashing of nerves and a spoiling of life?

Sabaneev here voiced the resentment and bitterness at music’s failure that was shared by many. In Russia’s hour of greatest need, Orpheus had not returned.

The Death of Musical Time

After the revolutionary upheaval, the concept of time also shifted. The duality between “historical time” and “musical time” evoked in late Imperial Russian culture all but vanished. If the Great War had initially seemed a moment in which musical metaphysics might transform the world, in the aftermath of war and revolution it seemed apparent that the historical process of modernization, fragmentation and mechanization, rather than spiritual regeneration, had proven victorious. An eschatological sense, captured in the image of “musical time” had been almost tangible in the final years of the Russian Empire. Within the post-revolutionary context, such hopes and dreams seemed, at least in Sabaneev’s words, “old-fashioned”. Musing upon an unexpected letter received from his former acquaintance and fellow Scriabinist, Dr. Bogorodskii, Sabaneev reflected on his former associates:

In general, it must be admitted that all of them are “strange” somehow, and they appear not old, but extraordinarily antiquated (ustarelyi). Their opinions, their entire character. . . I am convinced that if I met Scriabin himself, he would also seem old-fashioned.

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5 N. I. Sizov to Nikolai Medtner (September 17, 1924), LC Medtner correspondence, l.3.
6 Leonid Sabaneev to Aleksandr Krein (January 5, 1928), RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed.khr.183.
7 Leonid Sabaneev to Aleksandr Krein (256 1929), RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed.khr.183.
Confronted with a figure from his past, Sabaneev was scarcely able to recognize his former self. Modernity had wiped away all possibility of stepping outside the ever-accelerating historical flow of time. While Sabaneev had once lauded the concept of “progress,” in the aftermath of war and revolution, he suggested that this rupture had in fact destroyed the very essence of human creativity. The imminent, long-awaited “musical time,” the revolutionary break with an outlived past, had ultimately trapped them in a linear historical narrative in which music itself had become obsolete: ⁸

In general, the world strives for simplification and for the destruction of feelings and sensations, for the hygiene and sanitation of ordinary life. The life of the future (byt’) will be hygienic, not artistic; there will be comfort, wonderful water closets and wash basins, good cars and airplanes, but [the future] will be weak in music and artistic work; it will not be needed. It might very well be that music in general will be forbidden, as a destruction of quiet and hygiene, and really that is not so bad, if you consider... THAT art, with which we lived and with which previous generations lived, will be destroyed by the atrophy of corresponding organs of feelings. And it is already being destroyed. This process is STRONGER in Europe than in Russia, but with us it has appeared and will appear still more clearly. Now we must give up music and start on other, more contemporary and timely (svoevremennyi) work; we must be engineers, pyrotechnicians, pilots, and designers. Music is an ANTIQUATED world, OLD-FASHIONED in itself, like poetry (which, it is apparent, HAS ALREADY ENDED). So, forward, to the construction of hygienic water closets... ⁹

While the religions of Scriabin and of music now seemed “antiquated” and “untimely,” the momentum of historical events pushed humanity ever forward. There was no point in resisting, Sabaneev claimed; rather, one must learn to adapt and embrace the era in which one found oneself. There was, in short, no longer any hope of salvation through human action.

The vision of a life-transforming Mystery, a quasi-religious eschatological act that would bring the current stage of history to an end, was perhaps chimerical from the very outset. Most fervently embraced in the musical world, the idea of a Mystery inspired a generation of artists and musicians, but ultimately proved unattainable. After the Revolution, it lingered on as a

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⁸ Many of these same ideas were expressed by Sabaneev to a British audience in 1928. See Leonid Sabaneev, “The Destinies of Music,” trans. by S.W. Pring, The Musical Times 69, no. 1024 (June 1, 1928): 502-506.
⁹ Leonid Sabaneev to Aleksandr Krein (May 25, 1929), RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed.khr.183.
physical trace in unfinished manuscripts, doomed to languish in archives or to be resurrected as a historical curiosity, cut off from the historical context in which it made coherent sense. Whether in the Soviet Union or in the West, the mid-twentieth century did not provide an amenable space for such musical imaginings. In the Soviet Union, attention focused on the transformation of physical rather than spiritual reality, while the drive to transform the world through music in the West dissipated in an environment focused on individual rather than communal expression. For Sabaneev, from a work envisioned to end the world, unify all peoples of Europe, and resurrect humanity, the concept of the Mystery was transformed into a composition that he himself worked on “for himself” and in his spare time. Unable to completely give up his “monastic” vision of his “duty to humanity,” he nevertheless admitted that his attempts were “untimely” and of no use to the contemporary age. The unfinished sketches for his “Apocalypse” were abandoned in an archive after the composer’s death, uncatalogued and forgotten, a physical remnant of a world that had long ago ceased to exist.

**Remembering a Vanished World: Music as a Site of Memory**

Together with these losses, music was given a new function: it emerged as a site of memory through which the Imperial Russian world could be evoked, remembered, experienced and mourned. In reflections back on the pre-revolutionary era, music often emerged as a space connected with a vanished world, a space of memory rather than action. Remembering his lost home in the midst of the Russian Civil War, Evgenii Trubetskoi’s memory was immediately

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10 In emigration, while grandiose enterprises like Scriabin’s Mystery were politically more possible, they suffered from lack of interest. Such compositions as Ivan Vyshnegradskii’s “Den bytiia,” or Nikolai Obukhov’s “Kniga zhizni,” while continuing a tradition of mystical exploration in the musical realm attracted relatively little attention in comparison to Scriabin’s Mystery. See D. Vyshnegradskii, “Moi otets Ivan Vyshnegradskii,” in *Uchenye zapiski*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi memorial’nyi muzei A. N. Skriabina, 1998), 195-200; Alla Bretanitskaia, ed., *Ivan Vyshnegradskii: Piramida zhizni* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2001).

11 Leonid Sabaneev to Aleksandr Krein (January 5, 1928), RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed. khr. 183.

12 LC Sabaneev collection. Sabaneev referred to his “Mystery” in his letter to Krein. See RGALI f.2435, op.2, ed.khr.183.
drawn to images of his family’s country estate of Akhtyrka. However, not only were these memories visual, incorporating well-known spaces, but they were aural:

When, with closed eyes, I remember [Akhtyrka], it seems to me that I not only see it, but hear it. Literally every path in the park sounds, every grove, lawn or bend in the river; every place is connected with a particular motive, has its own unique musical form, inseparable from the visual form.  

This interpretation was shared by intellectuals on both sides of the political divide and across social and ethnic divisions: whether in Soviet Russia or as an émigré in the West, music increasingly came to stand for the final years of a doomed culture and society, one in which spiritual belief had still been possible. For Genrikh B. Sliozberg, one of the most important Jewish political figures of the prerevolutionary era and a member of the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party (the Kadets), the music that he heard in his childhood spent in the Lithuanian shtetl of Naliboki continued to sound vividly in his memory years after the Tsarist Empire had ceased to exist.  

It is important to note that such memory work is highly selective and creative. The memory of Russia that was constructed was an idealized space, without tension, violence or strife; in short, a more perfect world than that in which Nietzsche’s orphans now found themselves.

Scriabin was a central symbol of this lost world. This development was already underway in 1915, when a music critic suggested, “in [Scriabin’s] music we found ourselves. He was the aggregate of the nervous searches of our time.” 

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14 James Loeffler, The Most Musical Nation, 113. For more on Sliozberg, see Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 325-329.


16 Iulii Engel’, “Pamiati A. N. Skriabina,” Russkie vedomosti no. 85, April 15, 1915.
even clearer. Reflecting back on his youth, writer Boris Pasternak dubbed the final years of the Russian Empire “the era of Scriabin,” while the Marxist Georgii Plekhanov argued that “Scriabin’s music completely expressed the mood of a very notable part of our intelligentsia in a famous period of its history. . . he was flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone, not only in the realm of ‘emotions’, but also in the realm of philosophical inquiries and ‘strivings’ possible in the conditions of time and environment.” Leonid Sabaneev reflected that Scriabin was, for better or for worse, “entirely the product of that environment. . . which commanded the intellectual heights of Russian society before the war.” From a universal, progressive voice in the musical world, Scriabin was transformed into a symbol of Imperial Russia.

Pierre Nora has argued that sites of memory (lieux de mémoire) emerge when the original, lived tradition has ceased to exist. The attempt to recreate a musical tradition is clear in the founding of the Russian Conservatory in Paris, run by émigrés from the musical community of Imperial Russia. Established on July 15, 1926, the Conservatory was intended to “give Russian émigrés the possibility to receive musical instruction under the direction of professors from their own country” and to “allow the French (and foreigners in general) to study systematically and completely the Russian art of music, which has developed considerably in recent years.”

17 Ralph Matlaw, “Scriabin and Russian Symbolism,” Comparative Literature 31, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 1-23, here 1. Infatuated with the composer’s innovative musical language, the young Boris Pasternak did not dream of a future as a writer, but rather yearned to become a composer like his idol, Scriabin.
18 G. V. Plekhanov, “Iz vospominanii ob A.N. Skriabine,” in Literatura i estetika (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958), 116-120. 
19 Sabaneev, Vospominaniiia o Skriabine, 6. Sabaneev’s subsequent fate, first as a member of the Soviet government and later as an exile abroad, colored his reminiscences of Scriabin with the melancholic air of lost youth. See also Mark Meichik, A. Skriabin (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1935), 34. Meichik also distanced himself from the “mysticism” of the time. See ibid., 3.
20 There were of course still attempts to define Scriabin as a “revolutionary,” but even in this context, he emerges as a revolutionary only in relation to the cultural context of which he was part. See for instance Anatolii Lunacharskii, “O Skriabine,” Kultura teatra no. 66 (1921).
22 Université Populaire Russe: Section Musicale Conservatoire, “Statuts de la société denommmée Institut Musical Russe a Paris (conservatoire Russe),” BAR Gunst: Printed material
Among the founders were representatives of the Imperial Russian musical world from Petrograd, Tbilisi (Nikolai Cherepnin), Nizhnii Novgorod (Evgenii Gunst), Rostov (Nikolai Kedroff), Moscow (Boris Schloezer) and Odessa (Cecile Lwovski). It was hoped that the Russian Conservatory would be able to perpetuate the tradition of Russian music that had only recently emerged, passing it on to future generations. However, the lack of new compositional voices more suited to the contemporary age, together with the gradual loss of a uniquely Russian musical identity among émigrés ultimately doomed the Conservatory to oblivion.

Perhaps no composer offers a clearer example of a “site of memory” than Sergei Rachmaninoff. Among Russian émigré circles, he was embraced as the very incarnation of the Russian nation (narod), whom tragic fate, in the form of the Bolshevik Revolution, had dealt a violent blow. Rachmaninoff, it was claimed, personified the very essence of Russia in his music and person. In a 1930 letter to the composer, his admirer Ilia Britain claimed, “for us Russians, you are not only our pride, our genius. You are a symbol of Russian creativity, of Russian culture.” For others, Rachmaninoff’s music continued to evoke the lingering memory of the musical metaphysics that had dominated pre-revolutionary discourse. In 1938, Evgenii Brant still considered Rachmaninoff to be “the only [contemporary composer] who might have the strength to write the symphony The Victory of Good over Evil.” Brant offered a detailed description both of this symphony and its moral task: the salvation of humanity from the ills of modern life. “It seems to me,” he wrote to Rachmaninoff, “that our world is now located at a crossroads – it

“Statuts de la société dénommée Institut Musical Russe a Paris (conservatoire Russe)”

Ilia Britain to Sergei Rachmaninoff (December 5, 1930), LC Rachmaninoff Correspondence. Similarly, Mikhael Aleksandrovich Bakunin, writing on behalf of CILACC (Centre International de Lutte Active contre le Communisme), praised the composer’s performance at a Paris concert, claiming that, through the strength of musical genius, “in two to three days [you] create a unity (edinenie) of Russian hearts,” which others would strive fruitlessly for years to achieve. See Mikhael Bakunin to Sergei Rachmaninoff [Undated], LC Rachmaninoff correspondence. See also Duchess Elena Altenburg to Sergei Rachmaninoff (November 6, 1921), LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.
rolled to the abyss, but it already feels that the business of God’s world is to renounce evil and again take the path of good (dobro), in order, in the end, to unite with God… In my opinion, this is the theme that awaits is resolution (razreshenie) in music.”

Rachmaninoff, Brant hoped, might still fulfill this Orphic mission.

Rachmaninoff’s failure to continue composing after his self-imposed exile was often blamed upon the loss of his homeland and the inspiration he drew from it rather than as a result of the grueling concert schedule he undertook. He became an iconic figure to which many Russian exile groups turned for financial and moral support in their undertakings. This image was lampooned by Soviet writers Il’f and Petrov in their 1937 work Odnoetazhnaia Amerika: “Rachmaninoff, as we were told by a composer-acquaintance, sits in the green room (artisticheskaia komnata) and tells jokes before going out on stage. When the bell rings, Rachmaninoff rises from his seat and, assuming the great sorrow of a Russian (rossiiskii) exile on his face, goes onstage.”

For his emigre audiences, however, Rachmaninoff offered a temporal and artistic space within which they could remember their lost world. This image came to be embraced in the Soviet Union as well when Rachmaninoff showed active support during the Second World War.

Memory of this lost Imperial world was evoked musically as well as symbolically by Nikolai Medtner in a series of pieces composed between 1919 and 1920: the “Forgotten Melodies” (Zabytye motivy).

Like many of his colleagues, Medtner was troubled by the upheavals following the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917. Family illness, including the

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25 Evgenii Karolvich Brant to Sergei Rachmaninoff (November 7, 1938), LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.
26 The composer himself remained cautious about being associated with any political platform. See Boris Brazol (Russkoe natsional’noe obshchestvo) to Sergei Rachmaninoff (August 19, 1921), LC Rachmaninoff correspondence.
27 Ilf and Petrov, Odnoetazhnaia Amerika (Moscow: Khudozhestvennais literature, 1937), 148.
28 This tendency has continued with the collapse of the Soviet Union, with statues, museums and new books focused on Rachmaninoff appearing in Russia.
29 First conceived in 1916, they were completed by Medtner primarily at Bugry during 1919 and 1920. There are three cycles of pieces entitled “Forgotten melodies”: op. 38, op. 39, op. 40.
death of his mother, fear over Emil’s fate (from whom nothing had been heard for over a year),
the arrest of his brother Karl as a “counterrevolutionary” and the appropriation of the family
business by the new government estranged the composer from the emerging Soviet world.
Because the role of music in the new State was to be decided by government officials in
coordination with musical specialists, Medtner, together with most of his musical acquaintances,
was co-opted by for his professional knowledge. Medtner found himself involved in the
restructuring of musical education as part of Narkompros.30 However, the social world in which
the unifying, metaphysical image of music’s mission had developed was itself destroyed. The
social realm in which philosophers, literary figures, musicians and other members of the
intellectual elite had interacted, divided as it was by conflicting worldviews, was shattered and
reconfigured into circles of professional influence.

From the outset, Medtner found himself at odds with his new role, both in style and in
essence. He was annoyed by the bureaucratic formality expressed in an official letter sent by
Konstantin Eiges, the new Chairman of the Musical Division of Narkompros, when such
meetings had previously been arranged in a more personal manner.31 Philosophically, he felt
alienated by the rhetoric of class warfare and the division of students of music into “amateurs”
and “professionals” that was advanced by his colleague, Nadezhda Briusova. In contrast to the
approach lauded by Briusova, in which amateurs and professionals would receive different
musical educations (the former focusing upon proper listening and the latter on actual music
making), Medtner continued to insist that only a single approach to musical education was
possible for specialists and amateurs alike.32 He wished to be of use to this new society, but

30 The Conservatories were nationalized in 1918.
32 GTsMMK f.132, no.217, l.1ob-2. Philosophically he found himself at odds with many of the ideas that his
colleague Nadezhda Briusova strove to bring about, specifically the ideas of the “collective,” which he saw as
because many of his most preciously guarded beliefs came under attack, Medtner struggled to find how. He scribbled out his musings onto random pieces of paper:

I feel called to fulfil my duty to society... In general, there are few composers, and I feel myself not to be the least of them. I teach. But who is going to write new music?... Rachmaninoff and Scriabin have long ago already occupied the position of inaccessibility. I demand that I be allowed to compose. I am also a pianist.  

In this new world, Medtner felt, his creative mission was stifled. The loss of the musical creativity of the immediate pre-revolutionary years was evoked with specific reference to the losses of Scriabin, who had died, and Rachmaninoff, who was inaccessible to this new society because of his December 1917 emigration from Russia. In the summer of 1919, Medtner’s musical creativity again found voice, not in the song of transformation or myth-creation that had once been envisioned by his elder brother, but in one of remembrance and mourning.

Two central concepts evoked in the “Forgotten Melodies” deserve close attention. The first of these is the symbolic significance of the title itself, together with the title of the first piece of the cycle, the “Sonata-Reminiscence”. As discussed at the opening of Chapter Six, in 1918 Medtner began to be haunted by musical motifs that had not been used in his compositions: themes that had been set aside, abandoned in the midst of the upheavals of war and revolution, but to which he returned in the summer of 1919, ready to give voice and structure to them. In its Platonic sense, the idea of “remembrance” is related to this idea of forgetting: the initial...
melody, the song of heaven, echoes in the souls of all humans in half-remembered, imperfect form. Medtner believed these melodic fragments were themselves an echo of that first, heavenly melody which served as the inspiration of all earthly music. In returning to these melodic themes that had waited too long to be given voice, Medtner felt he was finally fulfilling his duty as a composer, performing an act of remembrance, evoking the heavenly realm in the earthly one. However, within the fraught political context of the day, Medtner’s act of remembrance also had a more immediate connotation: the evocation of a world of dreams and hopes, shattered by the reality of war and its aftermath. Just as for Trubetskoï, the memory of that lost world was intimately linked with musical motives.

The entire cycle is based around the use of a melodic motif that serves both as an important musical component within each piece and as a thematic link between various pieces in the set. I refer to this melody as the “theme of remembrance”. This is the melody that begins the entire cycle, first appearing as the opening of the “Sonata-Reminiscenza”:

![Musical notation](image)

The melody itself is simple, opening with a series of four repeated notes on E. Interest is

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maintained through the harmonization, which wavers between an A minor chord (the tonic key) and a suggested E minor (the natural dominant of A minor). Through maintaining the A as a pedal note throughout and by avoiding the raised leading note (G sharp) in the opening, the melody avoids sharp dissonance and thus has no strong need to resolve. This helps to impart the opening melody with a wandering, directionless sense. Throughout its statement, the melody remains firmly rooted in its tonic key, giving it a complete, self-contained character: a musical motif that, like a remembered image or event, is sufficient unto itself, without immediate connection to the surrounding material.

The most obvious example of a comparable cyclical use of a melody is Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in which the composer consistently returns to a “walking” melody, evocative of moving from one painting to the next at an art exhibit. In a similar sense, Medtner’s “reminiscence” theme suggests a reflective act taking place. However, unlike Mussorgsky, Medtner remains firmly grounded in the sonata form for the first piece of the “Forgotten Melodies”. The opening melody, serving as both the opening and closing of the piece, is elided into this form, appearing in the dominant key (traditional for first themes in sonata form) immediately before the development section (measures 152-167), and returning at the end in its tonic key of A minor (measures 414-429). Such devotion to formal structure, so often acknowledged by Medtner’s contemporaries as a sign of his “German” nature, together with the motivic use reminiscent of a specifically “Russian” work, is suggestive of the composer’s own place between worlds.

The final statement of the “reminiscence” motive appears in the final piece of the cycle, “Alla reminiscenza,” here in transfigured form. Rather than wavering between A minor and an implied E7 (as in the opening), the melody is definitively placed in A major. Here,
interest is maintained through the introduction of cross-rhythms, which serve to lift the melody out of its linear motion, giving a sense of transcendence:

(10.3) Alla reminiscenza, “Transfigured” reminiscence theme

While the opening “reminiscence” motive is universal in its apparent symbolism, the second theme of the “Sonata Reminiscenza,” which also serves as a recurring melody throughout the cycle, is striking in its apparent connection to the lost Russian world that it strives to evoke. The melody itself, similar to Rachmaninoff’s Etudes-tableaux of 1916, contains a direct quotation of the Dies irae chant:

(10.4) Dies irae chant, Aeolion Mode

For Medtner, just as for Rachmaninoff in his Etudes-tableaux, it was the opening motive of the chant that was of particular interest:

(10.5) Dies irae opening motive, starting on C

This motive appears (with slight tonal adjustments) in the top voice of the right hand in measures

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The harshness of the quotation is itself softened by Medtner’s harmonization of the melody, in which he interprets the opening pitch as the third of A minor. This motive also appears in many guises throughout the cycle. Below is an example of the motive’s appearance from the fifth piece of the set, “Night Song”:

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39 In doing so, Medtner introduces an F sharp rather than the G natural that would be in the exact quotation of the *Dies irae*.
The *Dies irae* quotation also appears in the final piece of the cycle, titled “Alla reminiscenza” (*Kak by vospominaniia*). In the example below, it appears in the top voice of the left hand chords:

In this final piece of the set, Medtner adds yet another layer of musical symbolism. In addition to his quotation of the *Dies irae* chant melody and his own “theme of reminiscence,” the closing of the cycle evokes the sound of Russian church bells:

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Through evoking the *Dies irae* chant in combination with his own “theme of reminiscence,” and the lingering echo of church bells, Medtner captured his memory of a lost Russian world and its ultimate fate, as well as hope for the continuation of the eternal ideals that had been part of it.

For A. Aleksandrov, describing his first experience of these works in concert in a letter to his parents, it was the “timelessness” and absence of any “specific contemporaneity” that drew his admiration.\(^{43}\) The “Forgotten Melodies” were both mournful and contemplative: the composer’s temporal liberation from the melodies and memories that haunted him.

\* \* \* 

**The Passing of Orpheus**

*The world now is not for music.*

Leonid Sabaneev to Alexander Krein (January 5, 1928)

1927 was not an easy year for Volodia N.\(^ {44}\) His life had, for the last period of time “become very chaotic in all ways.” By early May he had sunk into a deep depression, losing himself “both morally and materially,” unable to pay his debts or see any way of continuing his existence. The few rubles he was able to scrape together were soon squandered on alcohol, a temporary balm of forgetfulness with which to blot out the misery of his life. He had no reason to expect anything better on the afternoon of May 6, as he stood on Arbat Street in Moscow, waiting for the arrival of streetcar no.4. His thoughts churned. He wondered if he would have enough money left to pay for the cross he had ordered for Vasilii’s grave.\(^ {45}\) Though he had given a down payment, he had not yet managed to pay off the remaining balance and place the cross on the grave, a failure that nagged at him continually. He stood and debated whether to put aside

\(^{42}\) Gedike, ed., *N. Metner: Sobranie sochineniiia*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1960), 133.

\(^{43}\) See A. Aleksandrov, RGALI f.2748, op.1, ed. khr.151, ll.93-94. He was speaking specifically of Medtner’s *Sonata reminiscenza* and *Sonata tragica* in a letter written between 1919 and 1921. Medtner would return to the use of the *Dies irae* melody in his final Piano Quintet (published posthumously).

\(^{44}\) I have not yet fully identified the individual who wrote this letter, but he was closely connected with a member of the Rachmaninoff family and a former student of the Moscow Conservatory.

\(^{45}\) Volodia’s connection with Vasilii is not further identified, suggesting a close relation.
money to pay off the debt, or squander it in another haze of drunken forgetfulness. His thoughts led from one dark reflection to another:

I thought about how tragic that desire for the “cloud,” [that desire] for forgetfulness, was in my life, how unnecessary and, at the same time, how necessary. I thought about how I was alone, about how for the last while my life has been in essence only a battle with the horrible weight of loneliness, how that loneliness gradually depressed me and held victory over me in the sense of my “fall,” my “omission” (opuskaniia). . . the phrase occurred to me: “loneliness leads either to the creation of very great things, or to drunkenness.” I waited for the streetcar. I stood and thought of my own petty (mel’kaia) life, of its distortedness, nothingness, normality (budnichnost’). I unconsciously saw that streetcar no. 4, which I had to take, drew near. And I was already ready to leave the sidewalk and go to the rails.  

At this moment, however, Volodia experienced an epiphany, the essence of which he struggled to put into words that evening in a letter to a friend:

And suddenly. . . suddenly, on the carriage passing nearby, upon which I looked mechanically, I saw a familiar face. At first I did not even understand whose face it was, only that it was familiar, and that it was [a face] with which something great was connected. . . Medtner was seated in the droshky, in a soft grey hat and some kind of soft, dark coat. . . His face was unusually harmonious. He looked a bit up, as if dreaming or deeply thinking of something and moved the fingers of his hands, laying on his knees, as if playing on a piano. Clearly he was far in that minute from his surroundings. He saw nothing around him and probably did not realize that he was travelling along the Arbat, in a carriage in Moscow. . . And when I understood that this was Medtner, that it was truly he, truly he, when I had consciously understood that it was he, when I had taken pleasure in that face, in his entire figure, in his fingers, picking out [musical notes] on his knees with his fingers – at that moment I understood, that the thoughts I had just been having of my life were only some sort of useless part, that my life [existed] at the same time as his life, that he was going somewhere now, while I was also standing here and thinking of myself, just as he, perhaps, was now thinking of some sort of new, great work of his, the notes of which he picked out with his fingers. And suddenly in a moment, in myself something became clear (ozarilos’): “Everything is one, everything is unity!” (vse odno, vse edino)

In this moment of ecstatic recognition, Volodia recognized in Medtner’s uplifted face not merely the individual composer, but the embodiment of musical genius itself: Beethoven and Wagner shone forth in Medtner. At the same time Volodia felt a connection between his own experience and those audiences, long dead, who had lived at the same time as these previous greats:

Yes, yes! Beethoven, Wagner! Who else? I don’t know. It was not a similarity of features, it was a similarity of spirit, which is expressed in external features of the body! Yes, yes, it seemed to

46 LC Medtner correspondence, Letters from Serge Conus, (May 7, 1927), ll.1-3.
47 LC Medtner correspondence, Letters from Serge Conus, (May 7, 1927), ll.1-3. The letter is a typed copy of the original, suggesting that Conus forwarded a copy of a letter in his possession to Nikolai Medtner.
me that sometime and somewhere Beethoven travelled thus in a carriage. Yes, yes, of course, he very much resembles Beethoven… and also that uplifted face, that bent chin told me that Wagner might have travelled thus along the streets of Leipzig, and those who met him in the same way [as I had] and loved him in the same way [as I had], might have been similarly happy, as I was. Yes, it was both Beethoven and Wagner! It was Nikolai Karlovich Medtner, who travelled in that carriage, dreaming of something, perhaps of his new, great musical themes, not suspecting that nearby stood a man entirely submerged in the shadow of the ordinariness of his life, [a man] who, with his appearance alone, [Medtner] had carried away to the realm of his thoughts and, at least for a moment, lightened [this man’s] life almost to ecstasy.  

For a moment, Volodia vividly felt the contrast between his previous and present life. Awakened by this vision of Medtner, Volodia’s former dreams of unity and coherence, of salvation, were reawakened. For a moment, he completely forgot himself. He struggled against the urge to cry out to Medtner, to run after his droshky, to somehow express to this vision the power he still had. But reality soon set in: what difference could any of it make? Would he not simply appear a madman, yelling after strangers in the street?

I wanted to find out where he was going, to follow after him, but… I could not do it. How? Travel in a carriage behind him on his very heels? For what purpose? Run after his droshky? Oh, life always presents these obstacles of reality now. I did nothing. I only missed my streetcar no. 4, but before my very eyes, the droshky of Nikolai Karlovich turned onto Nikolo-Peskovskii alley (pereulok) and vanished.

I did only one thing: a minute after I had lost him from view, I crossed Arbat and went to the corner of Peskovskii alley. Yes, yes, the droshky, the carriage, and Medtner sitting in it had not been a phantom: I saw in the depths of the alley the body of the droshky and the protruding grey hat. . . “Yes, it is he, it is definitely he who passed by,” was all I could say, and still added, as was done in the early years with Chaliapin: “Oh, why am I not the cab that he took and upon which he now sits!” I got on the streetcar and left.

In his letter, Volodia defines his life in a series of harsh binaries: the ordinariness of daily existence (*budichnost’*) is repeatedly connected with his isolation and aloneness, as well as with smallness, pettiness and spiritual depression. Lacking any greater purpose, he can do nothing more than long for the “fog” of forgetfulness. This desperate state is momentarily forgotten with the sudden appearance of a vision of genius, embodied in the figure of Nikolai Medtner. To Volodia, Medtner represented music, creative activity, unity and his past life. At first, Volodia

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48 Letter from Serge Conus (May 7, 1927), ll.1-3.
49 Letter from Serge Conus (May 7, 1927), ll.1-3.
found himself unable to believe in the reality, not of Medtner as a physical being (he had been aware of the composer’s 1927 concert trip to Russia), but of the symbolic meaning entangled with the composer: a vision of unity between peoples, of a higher, spiritual purpose. But the vision of Medtner was fleeting. The “obstacles of reality” prevented Volodia from following his first, wild impulse. The ordinary demands of life proved too strong. He allowed Medtner to pass by unacknowledged, caught the next streetcar and returned home. The unifying power of music, once so all encompassing, could now do no more for him than awaken the memory of his youthful dreams. Shaken by his experience, haunted by memories of a former, brighter life, Volodia found himself unable to sleep that night. He sought solace in writing a letter to a friend and colleague, with whom he had once shared dreams of music’s transformative and salvific power:

Medtner, music, Sergei Ivanovich [Taneev], our young years – where are they all? Are they really always with us? Oh, I have completely lost myself in my own life and already believe in almost nothing. I want to say a lot, but to whom? Isn’t it all the same? Only the death of a person says something to those around him.  

For Volodia, the vision of Medtner served temporarily to awaken a sense of who he had been and, upon reflection, the transformation that had taken place within him over the previous ten years. His specific reference to his loss of belief demonstrates the sacred aspect that had been ascribed to music. While he once believed in music’s transformative, unifying power (and, by extension, the underlying thread of humanity connecting all people), he closed his letter with a cry of alienation and despair. Longing to communicate with someone, he acknowledged the futility of any attempt. In the end, he suggested, the only means of genuine communication between people was through death. Running out of words, he ended the letter simply: “It is 4am. I am tired. Come and see me sometime.”

50 Letter from Serge Conus, (May 7, 1927), ll.1-3.
This account captures, in a particularly poignant manner, the loss of faith in music’s spiritual power experienced by many of Nietzsche’s orphans after the tumult of war and revolution. It was clear that the world had changed, transfigured into something unrecognizable from their prerevolutionary dreams. As the chasm between expectation and reality grew ever clearer, this disillusionment and sense of failure was repeatedly expressed in relation to music’s symbolic import. Before the Great War, music had filled a mythical, or sacred role in Imperial Russian society. It was viewed as a means through which society and humanity could be transformed, offering a means through which to reflect and act upon the future. Although the particular meaning of music might be given various interpretations, ranging from universal to nationalistic, it maintained an immediate, active power. Rather than a means of reflection, music was envisioned as acting in the world. As these messianic visions were crushed, first by the reality of war and by the death of Scriabin, the continued existence of the old world itself was brought into question. Regardless of political views, the experience of war and revolution was a continuum of violence, trauma and dramatic change from which it was impossible to emerge unscathed. Reflecting back on his previous life, Emil Medtner captured the immeasurable gulf between past and present worlds in 1932, claiming “from the time I abandoned Russia (June 1914), I began to distance myself from music both internally and externally.” Thus he concluded, “While Vol’fing still lives in Modernizm i muzyka. . . he no longer actively exists in me.”

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51 Emil Medtner to Sergei Rachmaninoff (April 1932) LC Medtner correspondence.
CONCLUSION

Over the decade before the First World War, members of Russian educated society could sense that they were on the brink of an historical change of epic proportions. In both their personal and social lives, an overwhelming array of conflicting dualities seemed to intensify by the year: individual/collective, national/Imperial, consonance/dissonance, progress/tradition, intellectual/emotional. Music, and the discourse surrounding it, promised a means of surmounting these contradictions, offering a new synthesis of thought and action as well as a source of meaning in a changing world. Music was viewed as art, philosophy, social activism, moral force and religious practice. By taking music seriously as a source of historical knowledge, we gain access to the uncertainties and possibilities of this fraught moment in time, a moment in which the future alternately beckoned enticingly and threatened imminent disaster.

Music can help us to understand how Europeans in general sought to confront the emerging modern age; at the same time, it serves to illustrate how Russians did so within their unique historical context. The revolution of 1905 with its subsequent violence and unrest undermined the traditional social structure of the Empire. Within this stark political context, the need for unity was urgent; nevertheless, growing nationalist tensions, both within the Empire and with its neighbors, made the adoption of music as the quintessential symbol of unity problematic. Music, like philosophy, had an intimate connection with German cultural traditions, a relationship made increasingly difficult by Germany’s rising status as a great political and military power within Europe. As the great power rivalry intensified, Germans within the Russian Empire came to be viewed with increasing hostility, and once compatible Imperial and national identities became
increasingly problematic. With the outbreak of war in 1914, the tension between national belonging and imperial citizenship reached the breaking point. In the aftermath of the 1917 revolutions, the vision of music’s transformative and salvific power was replaced by a sense of nostalgia for an idealized “Russian” past: an enshrining of the very world which Nietzsche’s orphans had once sought to transcend.

Like other forms of artistic expression, music supplied a collective venue for discussion about the changing shape of modern life: social fragmentation and division, along with disenchantment with older political structures. However, while literature or art were responding to modernity, music offered the possibility of collective creative action, through which new moods (nastroenia) and emotions (chuvstva) could be enacted, thereby changing the nature of society itself. In listening to music, the concept of life-creation (zhiznotvorchestvo) had immediate power and significance. Not merely a form of artistic expression, music generated a means for social activism, through which educated Russians could either counteract the forces of modernity or seek to harness them in the creation of a new society. Historians who examine the place of music in Revolutionary Russia rightly observe anxiety and pessimism in the contemporary popular press. Yet the “public mood” (obshchestvennoe nastroenie) was not simply a cause for concern; many of Nietzsche’s orphans believed that, through music, they could manipulate the public mood and counteract the imagined degeneration of the lower classes. Through music, they believed they would transform the existing social order into something more just and equitable.

Despite the recent upsurge of interest in the role of religion and the sacred in Imperial Russia, the place of music as a sacred space has not yet received the attention it
deserves. Sacred experiences were not merely textual; they involved the participation of all the senses, most notably sound. Because of its immediate power to evoke emotions and mystical experiences, music promised to provide the transformative sacred encounters for which late Imperial Russians longed. Time and again, contemporary sources testified to an elision between musical and mystical experience. Music offered a particularly powerful way through which human life might achieve transcendent meaning. In religious or sacred musical moments, unity and collective experience emerged with particular force. A power which far surpassed the bounds of established religion, music offered contemporary Russians a new language in their search for transcendent meaning.

Music was also the artistic form most immediately connected with time; as such, it illustrates how time itself was alternatively conceptualized at a different point in history. For Revolutionary Russians, modernity brought with it a crisis of belief in the idea of historical progress. Depending upon how individual composers manipulated time in their musical works and how the listening experience itself potentially broke down the linear passage of time, audiences found new means through which to conceptualize time itself. Music gave particularly vivid expression to the idea of a revolutionary, messianic or even apocalyptic moment. Contemporary discussions repeatedly contested which direction time could move, but one thing was certain: the world as it was could not continue. From the lyre of Orpheus, a new world would come: perhaps a leap forward to a new state of existence, perhaps a return to an older system, but never continued entrapment within the inexorable linear passage of human history. Competing visions of
a musical *Mystery* offer glimpses into how Nietzsche’s orphans hoped to overcome historical time and what sort of world they envisioned would follow.

On an individual level, I offer new insight into three of Nietzsche’s most prominent orphans, whose identities were forged by the cauldron of their day. Aleksandr Scriabin’s ideas (however untenable they might strike us today), emerged from and resonated with his times, generating the “Scriabin phenomenon”: contemporaries’ passionate admiration and belief in the composer, which transformed to agony and despair at his untimely death. Nikolai Medtner, today either forgotten or lauded as a “Russian” composer, illustrates the conflicted nature of national identity which hounded so many of his contemporaries. Sergei Rachmaninoff, once dismissed as a mere performer of salon music, was reforged into the ultimate “Russian” composer, an embodiment of old Russia for the Russian émigré community after the Bolshevik revolution. Each composer’s music and Orphic mission spoke in different ways to the complexity of social and cultural life at the divide between the late Imperial and early Soviet eras.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, an ongoing process of oversimplification and Russification has obfuscated the very forces which tore apart the idealized vision of Nietzsche’s orphans. Evincing the real and measurable socio-political impact music sustains in contemporary life, new interest in the immediate pre-Revolutionary era has stimulated an explosion of research and concert performance devoted to each of the three leading Orphic composers. While as a musician I find this resurgence of interest thrilling and overdue, as a scholar I am deeply concerned by the symbolic baggage with which much of this revival has been linked. Seventy-four years of
Soviet rule has erased many of the less savory elements of the Imperial era from public memory and idealization of the Imperial past is a popular way to envision Russianness and Russia’s place in the world today. This idealization has been accompanied by an upsurge of Russian chauvinism, in which the multi-ethnic aspect of that Imperial past is overlaid with a veneer of Russian nationalism. Scriabin, Medtner and Rachmaninoff have all been reinterpreted as genuinely “Russian” composers in a lost “Russian” world. Writing about a very different form of musical memory, Shirli Gilbert has argued that “music is not only itself a subject of historical memory, but also a vehicle for the transmission of memory.” By viewing these men and their creative work as inherently Russian, the significance of their music and its meaning is employed in support of this growing nationalist project. By resituating these men and their music within the context of the time in which it was produced, I emphasize the constructed, fragmented and fluctuating nature of identity, national and otherwise. This direct engagement with the past on its own terms serves as a useful check to the process of erasure and re-inscription that characterizes the politics of memory in contemporary Russia.

In Hendon Cemetery in North London one can still visit Nikolai Medtner’s final resting place. The tombstone is inscribed with an Orthodox cross and a scriptural quotation from John 15:5: “Without me, you can do nothing,” a phrase that Anna Medtner claimed was particularly dear to Nikolai throughout his life. The composer’s name, in both Russian and German, is carved above the cross, with his birth date

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2 Anna Medtner described the process of planning Nikolai’s tombstone together with the Il’ins when she visited them in Switzerland after her husband’s death. The tombstone was designed by Dobuzhinsky, who followed Anna’s desire that it not be “gloomy” (*mrachnyi*). See LRA MS 1377/61 (November 15, 1952), l.10b; LRA MS 1377/64 (January 15, 1953), l.3. Anna ultimately returned to Moscow after Nikolai’s death to assist in the publication of Nikolai’s creative work in the USSR. See LRA MS 1377/71-78 (1957-1962).
appearing below the Russian rendition and his date of death below the German. The spelling of “Nicolas” rather than “Nikolaus” or “Nikolai” is, however, French rather than German or Russian in form. In death, as in life, Medtner found himself caught between multiple worlds. Born in Russia, his self-imposed exile took him first to Germany and then, amid the growing tensions preceding the Second World War, to England. This obscure site of commemoration continues to symbolize the synthesis and unity of ethnic identities rather than the violence and hatred that has marked much of the twentieth century. In a small pot at the base of the tombstone a few flowers struggle to survive. Closer inspection reveals that this is more than a simple container for flowers, however. Inscribed on its side, once again in Russian and German spelling, is the name “Emil Medtner”. Absent any consoling scriptural reference or images, his birth and death dates (1872-1936) stand in stark contrast to Nikolai’s grave. [Illustrations A.11-A.12] Bound to one another even in death, Nikolai and Emil were yet worlds apart, both in their differing philosophical outlooks, and through their mutual exile from their homeland. In this quiet corner of London, the irony of Nietzsche’s orphans finds full expression. Once, they imagined that they had the power to transfigure society itself. Ultimately, they were swept up, powerless, in a maelstrom generated by all the forces of their day. The identities they had sought to carve out for themselves were overwritten by history, as the world itself transformed into something very distant from what they had envisioned. The twentieth century brought unprecedented ethnic violence, hatred and discord– not unity.

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3 The Russian script itself is pre-revolutionary rather than the revised orthography introduced by the Bolshevik regime.
APPENDIX

Section 1: Illustrations

Illustration A.1

Advertisement for scores of A.N. Scriabin’s new compositions (op.59-63).
Outlets listed are located in Berlin, Moscow and St. Petersburg.
Source: RMG no.2 (1913), 61.

Illustration A.2

Advertisement, “German i Grossman”
*Muzyka* no. 107 (July 8, 1912)
Illustration A.2 (cont.)

Advertisement “Steinway and Sons”

*Muzyka* no. 107 (July 8, 1912)

“How can I be a pianist, if I can’t read music?”

Advertisement, I. F. Miuller
Illustration A.3

Cover Page for Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *String Sextet*, published by Russian Musical Publishers. The *gusli* player appears at the top middle of the design.

Source: Leeds Russian Archive
Illustration A.4

Cover Illustration, 1894-1905, *Russkaia muzykal'naiia gazeta*

Cover Illustration, 1906-1908, *Russkaia muzykal'naiia gazeta*

Cover Illustration, 1909-1918, *Russkaia muzykal'naiia gazeta*
“U geniev,” Teatr i iskusstvo no. 22 (1909), 390.
A.N. Scriabin, Philosophical sketch
Source: M. Gershenzon, ed., Russkie propilei vol. 6 (Moscow: M. and S. Sabashnikov), 156
Aleksandr Scriabin, Prometheus
(Moscow: Edition Russe de Musique, 1911)
Illustration A.8

A.N. Scriabin, Sketch of Mystery temple
Source: M. Gershenzon, ed., *Russkie propilei* vol. 6 (Moscow: M. and S. Sabashnikov), 156
Illustration A.9

Cover Logo, Muzyka, 1910-1912

Cover Logo, Muzyka, 1913
Illustration A.10

Muzyka no. 220 (April 26, 1915), 280.
Illustration A.11

Tombstone, Nikolai Medtner
Hendon Cemetery (March 2010), photograph by author
Illustration A.12

Tombstone, Emil Medtner
Hendon Cemetery (March 2010), photograph by author
Section 2: Scriabin Poetic Texts (English Translation)

Text 1

To be an optimist in a real sense, one must suffer despair and conquer it. Not by my own wish have I come into this world. Well, what then? In tender youth, in the full illusion of hope and desire, I delighted in radiant charms and awaited revelation from Heaven; but it came not. Well, what then? I sought eternal truth from people, but alas! they knew it even less than I. Well, what then? I sought eternal beauty, and did not find it. Feeling faded, like flowers scarcely in bloom. The radiant day was replaced by cold, rainy night. I sought comfort in a new spring, in new flowers, but did not find it; it was only the striving to replace something, to bring back what was lost, to remember what was already experienced. In the life of every person there is only one spring. How people rush to distance themselves from that enchanting deception, from these heavenly visions! Finally I sought comfort in memories, but I became accustomed to them, that is, I lost them. What then? Whoever you might be, who mocked me, who flung me into darkness, who enraptured me so as to disappoint me, who gave in order to take, who showed kindness in order to torment – I forgive you and do not grumble against you. I am after all still living, I still love life, love people; I love them because they suffer because of you. I go to tell them of my victory over you and over my self, I go to speak, so that they will not place their hope in you and will await nothing from life apart from that which they themselves create (sozdat’). Thank you for all the horrors of your torture, you showed me my own unending strength, my unlimited might, my invincibility, you gave to me triumph (torzhestvo).

I go to tell them, that they are strong and mighty, that there is nothing to grieve for, that there is no loss! That they should not be afraid of despair, which alone can give birth to genuine victory. Strong and mighty is he, who experienced (ispytat’) despair and defeated it.

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2 Also “poplatit’” (pay), “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 121.
O, heavenly form of God,
Purest Art of harmony!
To you we amicably bring
Praise of rapturous feeling.

You are the bright dream of life,
You are the celebration, you are the repose
Like a blow, you bring to people
Your bewitching visions.

In that gloomy and cold hour,
When the soul is full of confusion,
In you a person will find
Living joy of consolation.

You are strength, having fallen in battle,
Miraculously called to life,
In a tired and sick mind,
You give birth to thoughts of a new order.

The feelings of a boundless ocean,
You give birth to in an admiring heart,
And the best songs of songs
Your priest sings, inspired by you.

Rule all-powerful on the earth
Your spirit free and mighty,
You are raised by humanity
To accomplish the greatest praiseworthy achievements.

Come all people of the world,
Let us sing praise to Art!

Praise to Art!
Eternal Praise!

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3 “Zapisi A.N. Skriabina,” 122.
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