

BEYOND FAUST: HOW LISZT'S SONATA IN B MINOR, S.178

PROVIDED A MODEL FOR RACHMANINOFF'S

SONATA NO.1 IN D MINOR, OP.28

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ABSTRACT

The Sonata No.1 in D Minor, Op.28 is one of Rachmaninoff's most neglected major works with comparatively few recordings in existence compared to his Piano Sonata No.2 in B-flat Major, Op.36. Rachmaninoff completed the work in 1908 and performed it for only five years before removing it from his repertoire in favor of his Second Sonata. The First Sonata has long been viewed through the lens of it being a programmatic work based on the story of Faust, as explained by the composer to pianist Konstantin Igumnov who gave the premiere.

What has been overlooked in scholarly research on the sonata is its resemblance to Liszt's Sonata in B minor, S.178. Scholars have recognized that Rachmaninoff's First Sonata follows the same programmatic sequence as Liszt's *A Faust Symphony in three character pictures*, S.108, but all commentators have missed the striking similarity to the B Minor Sonata.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Liszt's Sonata was understood as having a program associated with the story of Faust although Liszt never confirmed this. Rachmaninoff did not publicly reveal a program for his First Sonata and was reluctant to reveal it to Igumnov although every subsequent writer has viewed the sonata exclusively in the light of the Faust narrative.

This document examines some of the techniques Rachmaninoff used in the composition of his First Sonata. Chapter one provides a brief introduction to the sonata and gives context to the work including the difficulties Rachmaninoff had in bringing it to fruition. Chapter two gives an overview of the Liszt Sonata's historical context and shows how Liszt decided to break with

formal traditions in its composition. The central theme of this document is in chapter three, where there is evidence shown of direct modeling in Rachmaninoff's First Sonata in the *Allegro moderato*, and Rachmaninoff was strongly influenced by the Liszt Sonata in the subsequent movements. Chapter four demonstrates how Rachmaninoff modeled his Concerto in F-sharp Minor, Op.1 on Grieg's Concerto in A Minor, Op.16, which sets precedent for him borrowing structural and thematic ideas from other composers.

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LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example 1: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.1-4.....	8
Example 2: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.1-3	9
Example 3: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.7-13	9
Example 4: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.8-20.....	10
Example 5: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.32-43.....	11
Example 6: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.17-27	12
Example 7: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.45-48.....	13
Example 8: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.32-39	14
Example 9: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.69-77.....	15
Example 10: Liszt Sonata in B minor mm.105-108	16
Example 11: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.89-95	16
Example 12: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.153-160	17
Example 13: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.138-139.....	18
Example 14: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.156-161.....	18
Example 15: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.172-175.....	19
Example 16: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.225-231.....	20
Example 17: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.323-324.....	21
Example 18: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.1-4.....	22
Example 19: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.339-346	23
Example 20: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement mm.7-12	24

Example 21: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.21-23	24
Example 22: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.415-420	25
Example 23: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.26-35	26
Example 24: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.1-3.....	27
Example 25: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.19-22.....	28
Example 26: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.43-57.....	28
Example 27: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.77-80.....	29
Example 28: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.95-98.....	30
Example 29: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.137-140.....	31
Example 30: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.155-159.....	31
Example 31: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.161-166.....	32
Example 32: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.177-186.....	33
Example 33: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.493-505.....	34
Example 34: Rachmaninoff Concerto, Op.1, first movement, mm.1-7	36
Example 35: Grieg Concerto, Op.16, first movement, mm.1-3.....	36
Example 36: Rachmaninoff Concerto, Op.1, first movement, mm.32-33	36
Example 37: Grieg Concerto, Op.16, first movement, mm.31-32.....	37
Example 38: Rachmaninoff Concerto, Op.1, third movement, mm.1-2.....	37
Example 39: Grieg Concerto, Op.16, third movement, mm.1-4.....	38

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF EXAMPLES	vi
CHAPTER 1: RACHMANINOFF SONATA IN D MINOR, OP.28	1
CHAPTER 2: LISZT SONATA IN B MINOR, S.178.....	5
BACKGROUND	5
PROGRAMMATIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE LISZT SONATA.....	6
CHAPTER 3: RACHMANINOFF SONATA IN D MINOR INFLUENCED BY LISZT	8
FIRST MOVEMENT	8
SECOND MOVEMENT	22
THIRD MOVEMENT	27
CHAPTER 4: THE SONATA IN CONTEXT OF RACHMANINOFF’S OTHER WORK	35
MODELING IN THE FIRST PIANO CONCERTO.....	35
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	39
REFERENCES	41

CHAPTER 1: RACHMANINOFF SONATA IN D MINOR, OP.28

Sergei Rachmaninoff's (1873-1943) Sonata No.1 in D minor, Op.28 is one of his most neglected major piano works. There are currently only fifty-one commercially available recordings of the first sonata, most of which have been released since the year 2000¹. In comparison, there are 154 currently available recordings of the second sonata, many of which were made in the twentieth century². Rachmaninoff performed the piece for only five years, and the first recording wasn't made until 1968 by John Ogdon (1937-1989). Rachmaninoff thought the quality of the work to be "dubious" and it received a cold reception during his lifetime. Despite the number of recordings issued in the last fifteen years, the sonata is still not often performed live. This is undoubtedly due to its difficulty and length. The first sonata is a technically awkward piece, which is unusual for Rachmaninoff, who understood the possibilities and limitations of the piano.

In 1906 Rachmaninoff moved to Dresden and worked on four compositions, including the first sonata. In December 1906, Rachmaninoff wrote to Nikita Morozov (1864-1925), a theory teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, to request his guidance on rondo form. In the letter, Rachmaninoff described his idea for the sonata, and a draft was completed by February 1907.

¹ Presto Classical Online Catalogue "Browse: Rachmaninov – Piano Sonata No.1"
<https://www.prestomusic.com/classical/works/69786--rachmaninov-piano-sonata-no-1-in-d-minor-op-28/browse>

² Presto Music Online Catalogue. "Browse: Rachmaniov -Piano Sonata No.2"
<https://www.prestomusic.com/classical/works/69786--rachmaninov-piano-sonata-no-1-in-d-minor-op-28/browse>

Dissatisfied with the work even at that stage, Rachmaninoff wrote to Morozov that the sonata was:

Absolutely wild and indeterminately long - about 45 minutes, I think. I was lured into such a length by the program...that of three contrasting types from one outstanding literary work. Of course, there will be no program given, although it does begin to occur to me that if I revealed the program, the sonata would be clearer.³

Although the sonata is long, it is not “absolutely wild.” In fact, a close analysis will reveal that it is tightly structured. Despite the great length of the piece, Rachmaninoff continued presenting the work in public. Rachmaninoff performed the sonata for a group of friends in Moscow, including the pianist Konstantin Igumnov (1873-1948). Overwhelmed, Igumnov asked Rachmaninoff when the work would be printed, and in 1907 the composer sent a copy to Igumnov. The pianist later wrote about Rachmaninoff’s request for his opinion, saying:

[Rachmaninoff asked me] to send him in Dresden my opinion of it, particularly as to its suitability to the piano. This request was flattering, but in some degree it did leave me at a loss... I called on Leonid Nikolayev to examine the sonata with me; [and] a series of comments was composed. For a long while I had no word from Rachmaninoff, and I began to be afraid that the comments had been somewhat tactless.⁴

Although usually somewhat sensitive to criticism, Rachmaninoff was not offended by Igumnov’s suggestions, and he subsequently edited the sonata. It is difficult to imagine that the version of the sonata we have today was edited by the composer, since it is still colossal in size. Nevertheless, Igumnov received a revised version of the sonata in 1908. Reminiscing on reading the revised version for the first time Igumnov said:

It was apparent that the most essential part of my comments had been taken into consideration by the author. A considerable part of the recapitulation in the first

³ Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist and Conductor* (Vermont: Scholar Press, 1990), 188

⁴ S. Bertensson and J. Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (New York, NYUP, 1956) 143

movement had been recomposed, shortening it by more than 50 bars; some cuts had been made in the finale, mostly in the recapitulation, about 60 bars. Changes of treatment were made only in the finale... The sonata was played publicly for the first time in my concert of Rachmaninoff works, in Moscow on October 17, 1908.⁵

Not everyone was as excited by the sonata as Igumnov, and the Moscow premiere suffered from a lukewarm reception. The concert attracted criticism from Yuri Engel (1868-1927). Engel praised the sonata for its form and structure but commented on its length and its lack of a clear melody when he wrote in the influential publication *Russkiye Vedomosti*:

The “peak” of the concert was a new piano composition of Rachmaninoff... This new sonata is musically complex and quite intricate in its pianism.... It was difficult for the listener to free himself from an impression of dryness.... The new sonata appeals with its mastery of form, its abundance of interesting details, just as, for example, do the [second] piano concerto and the cello sonata, but it does not have their freshness of fantasy, nor comparable thematic inspiration. Besides, in it Rachmaninoff can occasionally be heard repeating himself - which would be no calamity if these repetitions were “in a finer edition”, but this one cannot say.⁶

In fairness to Engel, the length of the first sonata makes it hard for audiences to digest it in one sitting. It’s a piece that, unlike the preludes or the more melodically inspired second concerto, requires repeated hearings and some level of analysis to fully appreciate its complexities. Indeed, the complexities of the sonata were perhaps in part responsible for Rachmaninoff abandoning his melodic sensibilities while attempting to work to a particular model. Perhaps Rachmaninoff was correct in that revealing the program would have helped illuminate the sonata to the public. However, in maintaining silence about the program, Rachmaninoff was echoing Franz Liszt (1811-1886) who gave no program for his own Sonata in B Minor. That said, Rachmaninoff did reveal the program to Igumnov, who wrote:

⁵ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 152.

⁶ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 152.

I learned from him that when he composed this sonata he had Goethe's *Faust* in mind, and that the first movement corresponds to Faust, the second to Gretchen, and the third, to the flight to Brocken, and Mephistopheles⁷

This follows the same sequence as Liszt's *Faust Symphony*. Some commentators have said that Rachmaninoff abandoned the idea of a program for this sonata, but Rustem Hayroudinoff refutes this idea citing Rachmaninoff's disclosure to Igumnov.⁸ There is no evidence to suggest Rachmaninoff abandoned the program of his first sonata, but only that he abandoned the sonata itself. Rachmaninoff was never to return to the Faust legend for further inspiration in other compositions.

⁷ Bertensson and Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music*, 153.

⁸ Rustem Hayroudinoff, *Rachmaninoff Sonatas Recording Sleeve Notes*, 2017
<https://onyxclassics.com/docs/ONYX4181long%20note.pdf>

CHAPTER 2: LISZT SONATA IN B MINOR, S.178

Background

The manuscript of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor bears the completion date of February 2, 1853. Preliminary sketches of the opening motif date from 1851 and a sketch of the *Andante sostenuto* from 1849, but the bulk of the compositional work was done during 1852. After the sonata was published in 1854, he sent a copy to his friend, Louis Köhler (1820-1886), with a letter saying:

For the present I allow myself to send you my sonata, which has just been published at Härtel's. You will soon receive another long piece, Scherzo and March, and in the course of the summer my Years of Pilgrimage Suite of Piano Compositions will appear at Schott's..... With these pieces I shall have done for the present with the piano, in order to devote myself exclusively to orchestral compositions...⁹

For Liszt, the sonata was the pinnacle of his piano works up to that point, and it was also a statement on how the future development of sonata form should progress in the post-Beethoven era.

Carl Czerny (1791-1857), in his "Practical Method of Composition" codified nineteenth century sonata form into what became the standard model.¹⁰ Czerny stated that a first movement should be in two parts. The first part should consist of a first subject, a modulation, a second subject, and an essential close in the modulated key. The second part should be the development

⁹ Kenneth Hamilton, *Liszt: Sonata in B minor* Cambridge, (CUP 1996), 2.

¹⁰ Czerny, Carl. *School of Practical Composition* London: Robert Cocks and Co, 1848, 33.

of the first subject or a new subject modulating through several keys until the return of the opening material in the original tonic, truncated to close the movement. Liszt regarded this formulaic approach as laziness and was not interested in conforming to this model. There was precedent for Liszt's new sonata form in works by other composers. According to Mark Tanner (1963-), Liszt's Sonata in B Minor belongs to the tradition of the Viennese Fantasia, citing the Fantasy in D minor, K.396 and Fantasy in C minor, K.397 by Mozart and Schubert's Fantasy in F minor, D.940 in which sonata movements are compressed into a unified whole¹¹.

Liszt was also influenced by Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* of 1822. The overarching form of the *Wanderer Fantasy* is sonata form although the four movements are based on only one single theme and conjoined to form one single movement. Liszt's admiration for the *Wanderer Fantasy* led him to orchestrate it as a piano concerto, and his Sonata in B Minor follows a similar model.

Programmatic Interpretations of the Liszt Sonata

Although Kenneth Hamilton (1963-) and Alan Walker (1930-) both agree that the matter of whether a program exists or not is settled by Liszt's silence on the matter, other writers over the years have looked for clues from within the score.¹² Paul Merrick (1946-) believes that the Liszt Sonata has a religious theme, and he connects this to the story of Faust¹³. Leszek Polony (1946-) also believes that the program of the Liszt Sonata is a religious one and states that the Hungarian pianist Tibor Száz (1948-) believes that the Grandioso theme is based on the

¹¹ Mark Tanner, *The Power of Performance as an Alternative Analytical Discourse: The Liszt Sonata in B minor*, University of California Press, 2000, 174

¹² Alan Walker, *Reflections on Liszt*, Ithaca (Cornell UP, 2005), 128

¹³ Paul Merrick, 'Teufelsonate': *Mephistopheles in Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor*. *The Musical Times* Vol. 152, No. 1914 SPRING 2011 pp7-19 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23039952>

Gregorian Good Friday hymn *Crux Fidelis*.¹⁴ Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) nicknamed the Liszt Sonata the “*Faust*” Sonata and superimposed the structure of the Faust symphony onto it for his interpretation of the work. The *Faust Symphony* and the Liszt Sonata both share an almost identical theme, leading others to take the view that the sonata traces the characters of Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles.

It is likely that Rachmaninoff was aware of the Faust interpretation of the Liszt Sonata. Since Rachmaninoff also knew the *Faust Symphony*, he’d have certainly noticed the similarities in thematic material between the two works. Rachmaninoff performed the Liszt sonata many times throughout his career, but never recorded it. Perhaps Rachmaninoff felt there was some significance in Liszt not revealing a program for his sonata to the public since Rachmaninoff often had enigmatic extra-musical inspiration for his own compositions.

¹⁴ Leszek Polony, *The ‘Faust’ or ‘Lucifer’ Sonata? On Liszt’s idea of programme music as exemplified by his Piano Sonata in B minor*, Krakow, Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology 13, 2013

CHAPTER 3: RACHMANINOFF SONATA IN D MINOR INFLUENCED BY LISZT

First Movement

A close look at Rachmaninoff's Sonata in D Minor reveals many similarities to the Liszt Sonata. Elements of structure, style, and even thematic material can be traced back to the Liszt Sonata. Despite a major structural difference between the two works, the influence of the Liszt Sonata on Rachmaninoff's Sonata No.1 ranges from some textural similarities to direct modeling.

The opening motif of the Rachmaninoff sonata is a four-measure phrase in the bass register: The notes D-A-D, followed by a V7-i cadence. This fifth motif, shown in Example 1, is a cornerstone of the work. The Liszt Sonata opens with a similarly ominous motif which is shown here in Example 2. The three staccato G octaves in the bass register which are followed by a scale introduce one of the main themes of the work. In both sonatas the opening motif is repeated three times and interrupted the third time.

Example 1: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.1-4

Allegro moderato ($\text{♩} = 78$).



The musical score shows the first four measures of the piece. The tempo is marked **Allegro moderato** with a quarter note equal to 78 beats per minute. The key signature is D minor (one flat). The time signature is 4/4. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bass line starts with a half note D, followed by a quarter note A, and a half note D. The treble line has a half note G, followed by a quarter note A, and a half note D. The piece concludes with a V7-i cadence in the final two measures, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.

Example 2: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.1-3

Lento assai



p sotto voce

In measure 8 as shown in Example 3, Liszt uses a rising octave figuration, all on G, to introduce what some have called his Faust motif since there is an almost identical motif in the *Faust Symphony*. Rachmaninoff, in measure 10 of his sonata, uses a short D minor arpeggio with chromatic passing tones to lead to the second theme at measure 15. Rustem Hayroudinoff calls this the sigh motif, and it is shown here in Example 4¹⁵. This introduction of the second theme follows an identical plan to the Liszt sonata.

Example 3: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.7-13

Allegro energico.



¹⁵Rustem Hayroudinoff, *Rachmaninoff Sonatas Recording Sleeve Notes*, 2017
<https://onyxclassics.com/docs/ONYX4181long%20note.pdf>

Example 4: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.8-20

In both sonatas, this second theme is repeated three times in three different registers. Liszt in his sonata then introduces what Merrick calls the Devil motif,¹⁶ whereas Rachmaninoff interrupts the tonality by the inclusion of three measures in E-flat major. In both pieces, the openings form an operatic scena, with the number three holding significance in their opening material.

Measures 32-43 of the Rachmaninoff Sonata have arpeggiated figurations in the left hand with a short melodic motif in the right hand. Then follows a scale played in chords rising to a climax at measures 43 and 44. This is similar in terms of both texture and structure to measures 17-27 of the Liszt Sonata, which have similar short melodic configurations followed by a chordal scale. Example 5 shows clearly that Rachmaninoff constructed this whole passage using a similar passage from the Liszt Sonata, shown in Example 6, as the model for its composition.

¹⁶ Merrick: 'Teufelsonata': *Mephistopheles in Liszt's B-minor Piano Sonata*

Example 5: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.32-43

Tempo precedente.

p

p

poco a poco cresc.

V

Example 6: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.17-27

p agitato *p >* *p >*

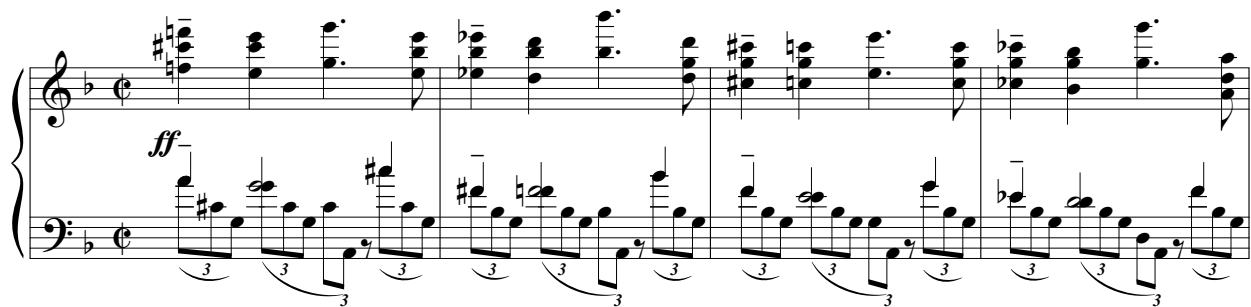
cresc.

più cresc. *ff*

54

The direct modeling between the two pieces ends at measure 44, although the influence of the Liszt sonata is still present. In measures 45-58 Rachmaninoff indirectly echoes Liszt's Faust theme by using a similar rhythmic motif and similar large intervals. Example 7 shows this theme clearly. Although the rhythm is varied the presence of large intervals and the dotted rhythm shows that this is based on Liszt's Faust theme. The melodic contour in measures 45-48 of the Rachmaninoff is similar to measures 32-33 of the Liszt Sonata, shown in Example 8. This is not the only time in the Rachmaninoff Sonata that he borrows actual thematic material from Liszt, but it is one of the more obvious, and one which an audience of educated musicians may have noticed at the time of the sonata's premiere although not even Igumnov commented on the similarities. It may have been that knowing Rachmaninoff was sensitive to criticism, friends and contemporaries were wary of mentioning similarities lest he feel they were accusing him of plagiarism.

Example 7: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.45-48



Example 8: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.32-39

The musical score for Example 8, Liszt's Sonata in B minor, measures 32-39, is presented in a grand staff format. The key signature is B minor (two sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is marked *sempre f ed agitato* and *marcato*. The right hand (treble clef) features a series of chords and eighth-note patterns, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a driving eighth-note accompaniment. The piece concludes with a final chord in the right hand.

In measure 73, shown in Example 9 Rachmaninoff introduces a theme resembling a Russian orthodox chant. Hayroudinoff refers to this as the motif of God, but here it will be referred to simply as the chant motif, and it is directly preceded by a descending scale¹⁷. In the Liszt Sonata, the corresponding passage is the Grandioso theme at measures 105-114 shown in Example 10. This is where Liszt introduces the Crux Fidelis plainchant, which is preceded by a

¹⁷ Rustem Hayroudinoff, *Rachmaninoff Sonatas Recording Sleeve Notes*, 2017
<https://onyxclassics.com/docs/ONYX4181long%20note.pdf>

descending scale. This Crux Fidelis is a cornerstone motif of the B Minor Sonata, and it recurs at several crucial points in the piece. In much the same way, Rachmaninoff's chant makes several return appearances throughout his sonata.

Example 9: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.69-77

mf *dim.*

Moderato (♩ = 60).

rit. *p* *mf*

rit. *dim.*

Example 10: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.105-108

Rachmaninoff's first variation of the chant occurs at measure 89 shown in example 11, where it is transformed into a more lyrical melody. This romanticized version of the theme with its accompaniment in triplets bears resemblance to Liszt's transformed Devil theme, shown in example 12. At measure 153, this short motive is augmented and dressed in more sentimental clothing. Here, both Rachmaninoff's and Liszt's melodies follow a similar contour and have a similar accompaniment.

Example 11: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.89-95

Example 12: Liszt: Sonata in B minor, mm.153-160

The musical score for Liszt's Sonata in B minor, measures 153-160, is presented in two systems. The right hand (RH) plays a melodic line marked *cantando espressivo*, featuring a series of eighth notes and a triplet. The left hand (LH) provides an accompaniment of triplets and sixteenth notes, marked *l'accompagnamento p*. The score concludes with a *poco rit.* marking and a *pp* dynamic.

The greatest surprise in the Rachmaninoff sonata is in measures 138-154. The left hand is written in two separate voices, with the attention drawn to the chromatic inner line. However, the notes E-F#-D-E-D# follow the same melodic contour as Liszt's Faust motif, used in his B minor sonata and Faust Symphony. In example 13, the Faust motif can be seen clearly in the left-hand. In drawing our ear to the chromatic line, Rachmaninoff has coded the motif, lending the chromatic inner line an association to Faust. This motif occurs twelve times with identical voicing throughout measures 138-155. Through measures 138-171 there are two other allusions to Liszt's Faust motif: 1) the descending scale motif and 2) the appearance of the descending scale motif in two voices a seventh apart, mirroring the first interval of Liszt's Faust motif. Example 14 shows how Rachmaninoff uses all three different themes together in a contrapuntal style which although broad and dense shows economy of material.

Example 13: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.138-139

Musical score for Example 13, Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.138-139. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano (*p*) and *leggiero* marking. The right hand plays a melodic line with triplets, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

Example 14: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.156-161

Musical score for Example 14, Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.156-161. The score is in 3/4 time and features a *Più vivo.* marking. The right hand plays a melodic line with a *cresc.* marking, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment with triplets. The score includes a *f* (forte) marking and a *cresc.* marking.

Measures 172-196 shown in example 15 cause the development section to sound disproportionately long, although Rachmaninoff is economical with the thematic material. Here, Rachmaninoff uses only the chant motif, the descending scale motif, and the fifths motif. The thematic transformation used by Rachmaninoff here is in the Lisztian tradition since Liszt only used four motifs in his Sonata in B Minor. The same three motifs are developed in measures 196-224 with the apex of the passage being the E-flat minor chord at measure 212, shown in example 16. There follows a slow chromatic ascent to F minor which then modulates to D-flat major at measure 225. Next begins a development of the “hidden” Faust motive by way of a diatonic line in the left hand. The continual use of the chant motif throughout the development, in different forms, recalls Liszt’s different treatments of the Crux Fidelis theme in the B minor sonata. Rachmaninoff’s treatment of his Chant theme isn’t directly modeled from the Liszt sonata in the same way as other passages have been, but the constant recurrence of the motif is in a compositional style most associated with Liszt. Of course, the religious element of Rachmaninoff’s Chant theme also reminds us of Liszt L’Abbé.

Example 15: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.172-175

The musical score for Example 15 consists of two staves. The upper staff is the right hand, and the lower staff is the left hand. The time signature is 3/2, and the key signature has one flat (B-flat major). The tempo is marked "Tempo I." The right hand part features a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes, often beamed in groups of six, with slurs and accents. Dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *dim.* (diminuendo). The left hand part features a descending scale motif in the bass line, with slurs and accents. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic.

Example 16: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.225-231

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The right hand features a melodic line of eighth-note triplets, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment of chords. The second system continues the triplet patterns, with the right hand moving to a more active eighth-note triplet line. The third system is marked *ff* (fortissimo) and features increasingly complex and dense triplet patterns in both hands, including some with grace notes and slurs. The score concludes with a final chord in the right hand and a fermata in the left hand.

At measure 239 the recapitulation begins with the chant melody being stated in its original form and then follows in a standard manner, which is to say it follows the norms of nineteenth and early twentieth century sonata form. At measures 323-324, the opening fifths motif is reintroduced, this time with an anacrusis of a dotted quarter note on E and an eighth on D. Hayroudinoff calls this version of the Fifths motif the Gretchen motif, and its appearance here unifies the first and second movement.¹⁸ Further strengthening that unity is the triplet figuration, which slows down towards the end of the first movement and begins the second movement. Although this does not create a single movement structure, the unity created is reminiscent of Liszt's single-movement form

Example 17: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, first movement, mm.323-324

¹⁸Rustem Hayroudinoff, *Rachmaninoff Sonatas Recording Sleeve Notes*, 2017
<https://onyxclassics.com/docs/ONYX4181long%20note.pdf>

Second Movement

In choosing to use a traditional three-movement form for his sonata, Rachmaninoff avoids copying the structure of the Liszt Sonata, yet the influence of the B Minor Sonata is still present. While the first movement shows a struggle with the form, the second movement is more consistent with Rachmaninoff's style. Rachmaninoff's other works are more melodically driven. His two sets of Preludes, Op.23 and Op.32, and two sets of Etudes Tableaux, Op.33 and Op.39 use a similar kind of motivic structure, but these motives are arranged into shorter phrases with a faster harmonic rhythm. Even in some larger works such as the Concerto No.2, Op.18, the arrangement of the motives and harmonic language is more in keeping with the style of the shorter works. In the outer movements of the First Sonata, the motives are arranged into much longer phrases and use a much broader harmonic rhythm, which contributes to its extraordinary length.

Example 18: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.1-4

The musical score for the beginning of the second movement of Rachmaninoff's Sonata, Op.28, is shown in Example 18. The score is in 3/4 time and marked 'Lento' with a tempo of quarter note = 56. The right-hand part begins with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a series of triplets. The left-hand part begins with a descending fifth motif. The dynamics are marked *pp*, *un poco cresc.*, and *mf*.

The Lento continues with a rhythmic motif from the close of the first movement, as shown in example 18. Over the opening triplets continued from the first movement, the left hand has the fifths motif in a descending pattern before the entry of the Gretchen motif at measure 8. By opening the second movement with a continuation of the closing material of the first movement, Rachmaninoff is alluding to the single movement structure of the Liszt sonata. This is the only time in Rachmaninoff's output that one movement opens in the same way as the

previous one closes, and the triplet motion provides a structural integrity to the entire work. In the Liszt sonata the Andante sostenuto at measure 331 can be viewed as an inspiration for Rachmaninoff's Gretchen motif. Rachmaninoff's Gretchen motif has similar rhythmic inflections with its lilting dotted rhythm. A comparison of examples 19 and 20 shows the clear similarity between the two passages. Although Rachmaninoff places an accompaniment figuration under his Gretchen motif, the inflection of the line is similar to Liszt's. When viewing the Liszt sonata through the lens of Cortot, measures 339-346 may be viewed as the Gretchen motif of the work, and it is in fact simply an inversion of the Faust motif.

Example 19: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.339-346

The image displays a musical score for Liszt's Sonata in B minor, measures 339-346. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 339-342, and the second system covers measures 343-346. The key signature is B minor (two sharps: F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The notation includes treble and bass staves for both systems. The first system features a melodic line in the right hand with a dotted rhythm and a triplet of eighth notes, and a bass line with a similar triplet. The second system continues the melodic line with a fermata over the final note of measure 345, followed by a final cadence in measure 346. The instruction *poco riten.* is written below the bass staff in measure 345.

Example 20: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.7-12

The musical score for Example 20 is in 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows measures 7-9. The bass line features a series of triplets (3) and a sextuplet (6). The treble line has a sustained chord in the first measure, followed by a melodic line starting in the second measure. The dynamic marking *mf* is present. The second system shows measures 10-12. The bass line continues with triplets (3) and a sextuplet (6). The treble line has a melodic line with a triplet (3) in the final measure. The dynamic marking *cresc.* is present.

Rachmaninoff further develops the programmatic theme of his work by placing Gretchen and Faust in duet with each other. He does this by using the coded chromatic version of the Faust motif, with the chromatic counter melody borrowed from measure 138 of the first movement. Example 21 shows the chromatic line in the tenor voice which recalls Faust, while Gretchen's motif is placed in the soprano line.

Example 21: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.21-23

The musical score for Example 21 is in 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows measures 21-22. The bass line features a series of triplets (3). The treble line has a sustained chord in the first measure, followed by a melodic line starting in the second measure. The dynamic marking *p* is present. The second system shows measure 23. The bass line continues with triplets (3) and a sextuplet (6). The treble line has a melodic line with a triplet (3) in the final measure.

From measures 415-432 of the Liszt sonata, there is a sequence of scales, derived from the opening motive of the piece. Rachmaninoff also used two scalar passages in the second movement. In measures 26-31 there is a slow-moving scale which is notated in half notes tied to quarter notes. After, there are faster moving scales in eighth notes from measure 32-35, and these appear in the parallel passage of the recapitulation at measures 121-135. Shown here in example 22 is the beginning of the scalar passage from the Liszt Sonata, and in example 23 is parallel passage from the Rachmaninoff Sonata.

The B section of the slow movement is where Rachmaninoff allows himself to compose in his most romantic, sentimental style. This is in sharp contrast to the more austere passages of the outer movements, and it bears a striking resemblance to his second piano concerto. The thematic transformation established in the first movement is present here since the whole passage is a variation on the Gretchen motif.

Example 22: Liszt Sonata in B minor, mm.415-420

The musical score for Example 22 is in B minor and 3/4 time. It consists of two staves: a piano part and a bass line. The piano part begins with a half note chord (B2, D3, F#3) in the right hand, followed by a scalar passage of eighth notes. The left hand has a half note chord (B2, D3, F#3) followed by a series of quarter notes. The score includes dynamic markings: 'dim. (molto eguale)' and 'pp'.

Example 23: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, second movement, mm.26-35

poco a poco cresc.

dim.

f

dim.

Third Movement

Liszt's *Andante sostenuto* from his Sonata leads into a short fugue. Rachmaninoff, however, opens the third and final movement of his sonata, the *Allegro molto*, with a short, Lisztian octave passage and saves his use of a fugal passage for later in the movement. In the opening measures of the third movement, Rachmaninoff places a short three note pick-up before two measures of double octaves. The double octave passage is shorter, as shown in example 24, but the three note pickup echoes Liszt's three note pickup in measures 41-44 and measures 541-544. Additionally, Rachmaninoff's octaves allude to the virtuosic octave section that appears in measures 56-79 of Liszt's B Minor Sonata.

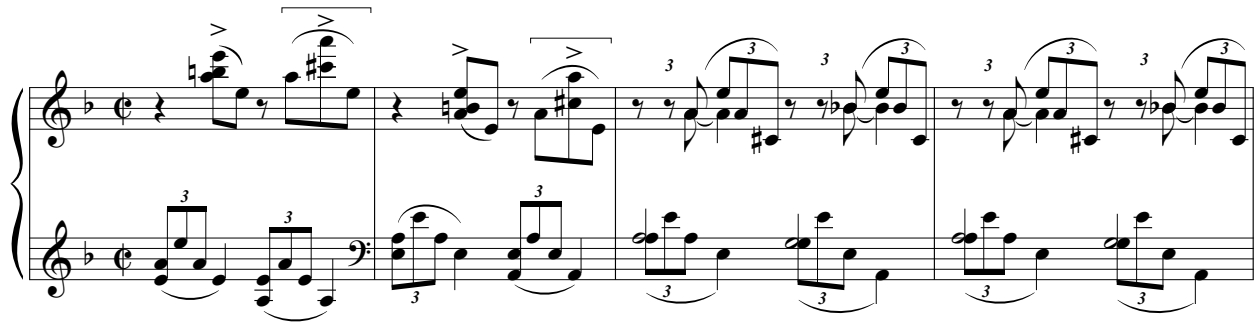
Example 24: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement mm.1-3

Allegro molto (♩ = 100).

ff marcato

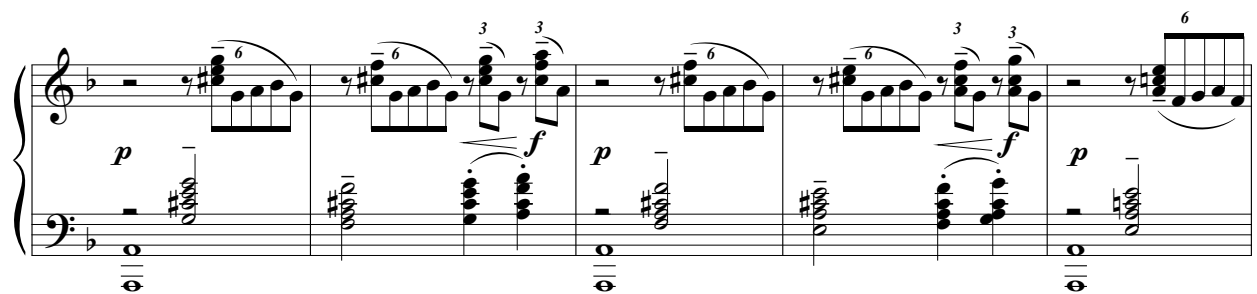
The triplet figuration continued from the previous movements forms the rhythmic basis of the third movement. The first of the melodic motifs used in the movement is the scale figuration. A partial quotation of Liszt's Faust motif appears in measures 19-22 in the right hand, which can be seen in example 25. The last two eighth notes are over a major sixth, which is an unusual figuration in piano music. Dropping down to the A instead of the E would have been more practical, but a major sixth on the piano is identical to a diminished seventh, which is the opening interval of Liszt's Faust motif. The fifths motif from the opening also appears in the bass during these measures.

Example 25: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.19-22



In measures 43-58 a seemingly new motif appears, but upon closer inspection, it reveals itself to be an amalgamation of two motifs from the first movement - the sigh motif and a diatonic version of the counter melody from the Faust motif. In example 26 the left-hand chords are playing a version of the sigh motif introduced in the first movement. In this version of the sigh motif, the smaller intervals are evocative of the accompanying inner voice of the Faust motif shown in example 13. The right-hand triplet figuration in example 26 strengthens the association with that passage from the first movement and is further evidence of Rachmaninoff's use of the kind of thematic transformation found in the Liszt Sonata.

Example 26: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.43-57



The fifths motif appears as thematic material during measures 69-80. It appears first in E-flat major in measures 69-72, and in A major, the dominant, in measures 77-78. Measures 79-80 close this the exposition with the chant motif appearing as four low A half-notes. Here, the fifths motif takes on a hunting call quality, which helps to give the movement its sense of drive and

urgency. Here shown in example 27 is the fifth motif A major, as it transitions into the Chant motif.

Example 27: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.77-80



At measure 81, Rachmaninoff introduces the Dies Irae theme in conjunction with the chant motif which provides the counter melody. It is difficult to find a work by Rachmaninoff in which the Dies Irae plainsong is not present, since the theme haunted him all the way through his career from the Prelude in C-sharp Minor, Op.3 No.2 to the Symphonic Dances, Op.45. The Dies Irae is presented in Gretchen's rhythm, but the addition of a rest before the sixteenth note gives the motif a darker and more urgent feel than its presentation in the second movement. In this passage, the Dies Irae is combined with the descending scale motif which also serves as its harmonization. In measures 95-98 this material turns into a short canon reminiscent of the fugue in the Liszt Sonata. Example 28 shows the Dies Irae canon with the descending scale motif and the transformed Gretchen rhythm. This passage has a demonic and mischievous energy to it as it shows the transformation not just in the thematic material itself, but in the characters of Faust and Gretchen, as their story moves from the physical realm into the underworld.

Example 28: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.95-98

The musical score for Example 28 is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 95 and 96. The right hand begins with a piano (*pp*) and *leggiero* texture, playing a melodic line with slurs and accents. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, also with slurs and accents. The second system shows measures 97 and 98. The right hand continues the melodic line, ending with a cadence in E-flat major. The left hand continues the rhythmic accompaniment, with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking in measure 98.

The material in measures 99-112 is based on the V7-i motif from the first movement, and it is as an extension of the Dies Irae. In Measures 113-116 the chant motif is transformed into the scale motif. Additionally, at measure 116 there is a cadence in E-flat major which leads into the sigh motif, but this time it is transformed into a figuration similar in style to Liszt's Mephisto Waltz No.1.

Rachmaninoff, famous for his soaring melodies, faced criticism for having no obvious melody in his first sonata. At measure 137, shown in example 29, Rachmaninoff introduces a soaring melody in the form of the scale motif. This is not a sentimental moment but instead maintains a sense of urgency due to the continuation of the triplets underneath, giving the sense that we are still on the journey to the Brocken Mountain.

Example 29: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.137-140

The musical score for Example 29 shows two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major) and a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a melodic line marked *cantabile* and *mf*. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains complex rhythmic patterns, including sextuplets and triplets. Dynamics include *mf*, *dim.*, and *p*.

The melodic line continuing into measures 155-160, shown in example 30, transforms into the chant motif with chromatic inflection, and at measures 161-168, the chromatic line in half-notes is derived from the chant motif as well as the chromatic version of the Faust motif, shown in example 31. This entire passage features complex counterpoint, and the way in which Rachmaninoff utilizes thematic transformation, seemingly creating new themes from the material is highly reminiscent of the Liszt sonata.

Example 30: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.155-159

The musical score for Example 30 shows two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major) and a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a melodic line marked *p* and *cresc.*. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*.

Example 31: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.161-166

In measure 177, as seen in example 32, the mood becomes contemplative and questioning. The Gretchen motif reappears at measure 180, and at measure 189 the sigh motif from the first movement appears in its original form in E-flat minor. The wide intervals in the bass recall Liszt's Faust motif, and the Gretchen motif continues in the soprano, with the triplet motion propelling the music forwards. This sequence repeats in F minor in measures 218-240. From measure 241, it threatens to repeat again, but this time it is interrupted. In repeating the same passage three times and having an interruption on the third iteration of the passage, Rachmaninoff is recalling the first movement, which in turn was modeled on the opening passage of the Liszt Sonata even if the phrases here are much longer than these other passages. The development continues through measures 244-267 in the "danse macabre" style, and a full statement of the Dies Irae plainsong in the bass in measures 264-267 heralds the movement's recapitulation.

Example 32: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.177-186

Un poco meno mosso.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano introduction with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a decrescendo (*dim.*) leading to a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system shows the piano introduction with a piano-piano (*pp*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. The piano part features a series of chords in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The bass part features a rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a series of chords in the left hand.

The coda begins at measure 445 and continues with the Dies Irae plainchant in the tenor voice. At measure 473, the first movement material returns which reflects how Liszt closed his sonata with its opening phrases, and therefore the First Sonata becomes fully cyclic. This was not the first time Rachmaninoff explored a cyclic structure in a long work. The entire Symphony in D Minor, Op.13, is germinated from a single motif which is similar to that found at the opening of the third movement of the First Sonata. The Dies Irae chant is used extensively in the First Symphony, and it was perhaps this continual use of the same thematic material which led to the Symphony falling out of popularity in Rachmaninoff's lifetime. The Concerto No.3 in D Minor, Op.30, also features a cyclic structure and seems to be in many ways closely related to the sonata. The opening theme of the concerto can be heard throughout, hidden in small motivic figures all the way through each movement. The finale of the concerto features a similar kind of drive to the finale of the First Sonata. In the concerto, the first movement cadenza reappears in the third movement just before the coda, and the coda itself with its huge sonorous chords is similar though not identical to the chant motif as it appears in the First Sonata, particularly the

iteration of it at the end of the third movement of the sonata. In the sonata, a cadenza-like figure in sixteenth notes leads a restatement of the chant melody, as seen in example 33, at measure 493 to the end with the sonority reminiscent of the Russian Orthodox Church bells that permeate so much of Rachmaninoff's music.

Example 33: Rachmaninoff Sonata, Op.28, third movement, mm.493—505

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system is marked "Meno mosso." and "fff molto marc." and the second system is marked "Tempo precedente." and "fff". The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and a prominent bell-like sonority.

CHAPTER 4: THE SONATA IN CONTEXT OF RACHMANINOFF'S OTHER WORK

Modeling in the First Piano Concerto

There is precedent for Rachmaninoff borrowing structural and motivic ideas from other composers. Barrie Martyn argues that the concerto which most influenced Rachmaninoff's First Concerto was the Grieg Concerto. Rachmaninoff heard his cousin, teacher, and former student of Franz Liszt, Alexander Siloti (1863-1945) practicing the Grieg Concerto at Ivanovka in 1890 and was clearly enamored with it.¹⁹ It only takes a cursory glance at each work to see that Rachmaninoff was paying homage to Grieg in his Op.1. The modeling is clear from the outset with the similarity of the openings of each concerto. Both concertos open with a cadenza in the piano cascading down in octaves punctuated with chords, which is similar to the Liszt E-flat Major Concerto and the Schumann Concerto. Rachmaninoff's opening is more expansive than Grieg's, and the more chromatically informed harmony is in keeping with Rachmaninoff's late romantic style. The similarities between the two concertos are clear from a comparison of examples 34 and 35 which show that Rachmaninoff rather blatantly copied the Grieg when composing his First Concerto.

¹⁹ Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, 49.

Example 34: Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto, Op.1, first movement, mm.1-7

Vivace
Orchestra

ff marcato

Piano Solo

ff

Example 35: Grieg Piano Concerto, Op.16, first movement, mm.1-3

Allegro molto moderato (♩ = 84)

Orchestra

Piano Solo

pp

ff

poco rit.

In both concertos, a steady, singing first subject appears in the orchestra, which is then repeated in the piano. This takes place before a faster second subject appears marked vivace in the Rachmaninoff and animato in the Grieg. A comparison of opening of these two passages can be found in examples 36 and 37, which shows the similarity in the structure of the two concertos.

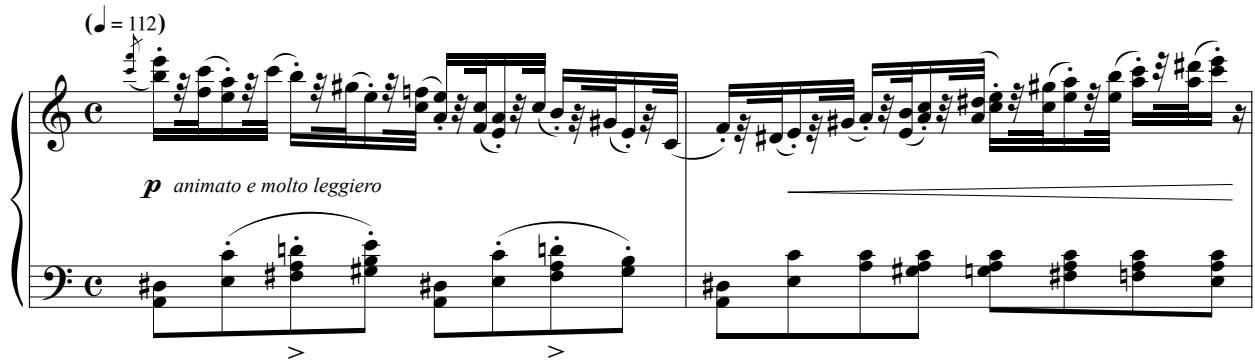
Example 36: Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto, Op.1, first movement, mm.32-33

Vivace
leggero

m. g.

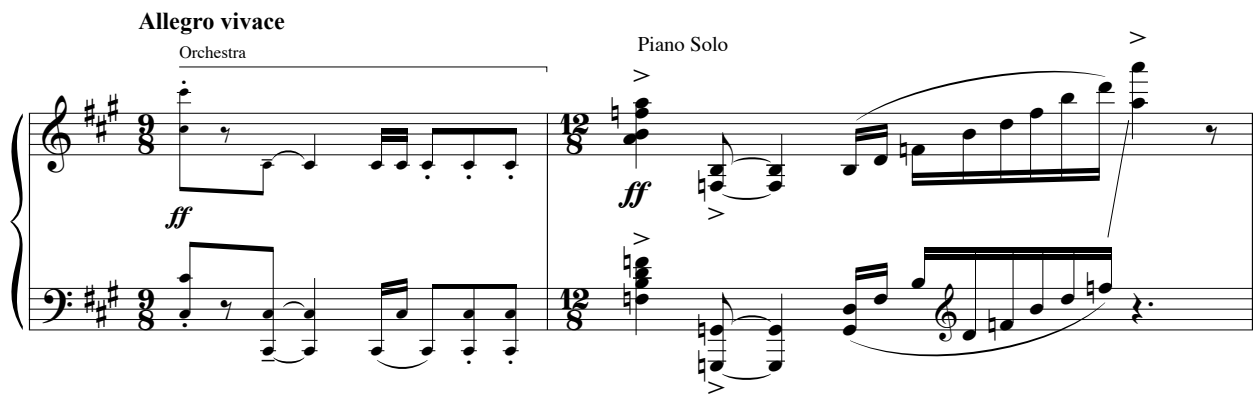
p

Example 37: Grieg Piano Concerto, Op.16, first movement, mm.31-32



The second movement of Rachmaninoff's first concerto diverges from the Grieg model, which is to be expected since as we have seen with the modeling in the sonata, Rachmaninoff was not interested in merely copying another composer when he was paying homage. The third movement returns to the Grieg model with the opening material of the Rachmaninoff being a variation of the Grieg. The opening figurations in each concerto are almost identical, with Rachmaninoff placing the two cascading chords before his arpeggiated flourish, whereas Grieg's come after, shown here in examples 38 and 39.

Example 38, Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto, No. 1, third movement, mm.1-2



Example 39. Grieg Piano Concerto, Op.16, third movement, mm.1-6

The image shows a musical score for the first six measures of the third movement of Grieg's Piano Concerto, Op. 16. The score is in 2/4 time, key of D major, and tempo 'Allegro moderato molto e marcato' (♩ = 108). It features an 'Orchestra' part and a 'Piano Solo' part. The piano solo begins with a trill marked '13' and 'ff', followed by a melodic line marked 'fz'.

Another important similarity between the two concertos is the B-section of the third movement. In each work, a virtuosic and rhythmically informed outer section gives way to a slow, melodic and lyrical theme with a gentle accompaniment, giving the impression of a calm break in a storm. In both concertos the emotional effect is the same, although in the Rachmaninoff, being composed later in history, everything is larger and more virtuosic than in the Grieg. It's noteworthy that the first pianist to play Grieg's concerto in public was Franz Liszt.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

When Rachmaninoff was composing his First Sonata, he turned to Liszt for inspiration. This is evident in the first movement from the direct modeling. The opening of the sonata follows the same pattern as the Liszt Sonata, but Rachmaninoff manages to avoid producing a mere facsimile of the Liszt. In choosing a traditional three-movement structure for his sonata, Rachmaninoff has disguised the influence of the Liszt Sonata so much that it has previously been overlooked. Although the influence of Liszt remains in the second and third movement, Rachmaninoff still allows his own stylistic idiom to come to the fore. The second movement, depicting Gretchen, belongs to the world of the Second Piano Concerto, especially in the middle section which resembles the development of the concerto's second movement. The third movement at times seems wandering and lacking in structure due to its extreme length, but upon closer examination, it displays an economy of thematic material with its tightly weaving themes. In this sense, the third movement is perhaps most like the Liszt Sonata, which was also criticized for its length.

Despite some of Rachmaninoff's difficulties with the First Sonata's structure, the work has some beautiful moments, and even considering the modeling, Rachmaninoff has produced a work that is quite original. It's unclear why the work was absent from the standard repertoire for

so long, but perhaps if Rachmaninoff had kept it in his repertoire or had his friend and colleague Vladimir Horowitz (1903-1989) had recorded it, perhaps it would have maintained steady popularity throughout the twentieth century.

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