A Performer's Guide to Sergei Lyapunov's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No.1, Op.4

Irina Cunev
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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A PERFORMER’S GUIDE TO SERGEI LYAPUNOV’S
CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA NO. 1, OP. 4

A Written Document

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by
Irina Cunev
B.M., Moldova State University of Arts, 2001
M.M., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2006
May 2015
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ABSTRACT

This document is intended to contribute to the ongoing study of Sergei Lyapunov’s work by focusing on his First Piano Concerto, a brilliant work that was once highly esteemed, but which has been unjustly neglected over the years. The main purposes of this study and the accompanying public lecture-recital are threefold: 1) to provide a historical background and to discuss major music trends that shaped Lyapunov’s style, along with biographical information about the composer’s life, 2) to provide a specific descriptive analysis of key stylistic elements utilized in the concerto and 3) to provide a detailed discussion of pianistic techniques used by the composer. These goals are aimed at providing a practical guide for the performer who wishes to achieve a thorough understanding of this complex work.
INTRODUCTION

Sergei Lyapunov’s Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat minor, Op. 4, is a landmark work that displays many tendencies present in Russian music at the close of the nineteenth century. Lyapunov belongs to a generation of composers who came of age during an era between the emergence of the Mighty Handful (Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin) and Tchaikovsky from a slightly earlier time, and “the radical composers such as Scriabin, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich” ¹ who would help shape Russian music in the twentieth century. As a composer, he didn’t demonstrate much interest in the new trends that developed during his lifetime; his style is more a reflection of various stylistic characteristics in Russian music of the late nineteenth century as opposed to the innovative directions taken by the more progressive composers of the twentieth century.

Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto possesses a wide range of expression and is an example of a complex work that is influenced by Russian folk materials, which is typical of the era. It also makes significant technical and interpretive demands on the pianist. Although the piece is an earlier work in Lyapunov’s output, it demonstrates an established style that remained essentially unchanged throughout his lifetime, showing an early commitment to a specific artistic path.

This document is intended to contribute to the ongoing study of Lyapunov’s work by focusing on his First Piano Concerto, a brilliant work that was once highly esteemed, but which has been unjustly neglected over the years. The main purposes of this study and the accompanying public lecture-recital are threefold: 1) to provide a historical background and to discuss major music trends that shaped Lyapunov’s style, along with biographical information about the composer’s life, 2) to provide a specific descriptive analysis of key stylistic elements

¹ Edward Garden, Liner Notes, Lyapunov: Piano Concertos 1&2; Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes, Hyperion CDA 67326, 2002, compact disc.
utilized in the concerto and 3) to provide a detailed discussion of pianistic techniques used by the composer. These goals are aimed at providing a practical guide for the performer who wishes to achieve a thorough understanding of this complex work.

Following this introduction, Chapter One will provide background information on the establishment and development of musical trends in Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that had a major influence on Lyapunov’s own musical choices. Relevant biographical details will highlight the composer’s conservatory training that exposed him, in particular, to the Liszt piano tradition, thereby shaping his own pianistic style. Attention will also be given to the influence on Lyapunov exerted by the New Russian School led by Balakirev and the so called “Mighty Handful.” Chapter Two will contain a descriptive analysis of Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto, with particular attention paid to its place and significance in the development of the Russian piano concerto genre and how he adapts some novel achievements of Western masters, Liszt in particular, in the concerto genre in matters of form, development of thematic material and treatment of the piano. Chapter Three will focus on pianistic and performance issues, specifically the various technical demands and interpretive challenges that confront the performer who wishes to understand and master this daunting work. Chapter Four will present a brief conclusion with recommendations for further reading and study.
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Musical Trends in Russia During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The abolition of serfdom in 1861 brought revolutionary changes to the cultural life of Russia. The former dominance of Western European traditions in the arts gradually gave way to an increased interest in a national heritage, which resulted in a growing demand for its wide promotion and national recognition. Russian artists began to display a greater sense of national identity along with an increased range of emotional expression. The turn of the nineteenth century was characterized by a particularly intense emotional tone in the arts. Lyricism manifested itself most completely in music, which was often regarded as the most lyrical of all the arts.\(^2\)

The first piano factory appeared in Russia in 1810, but was accessible only to aristocratic families. By the middle of the century however, the instrument’s popularity and accessibility began to expand beyond the wealthy. Acclaimed European keyboard artists toured the country, sparking an interest that helped propel the rapid advancement of Russian pianism. Two dominant stylistic trends were key in shaping the emerging school of Russian pianism: one, the lyrical style associated with composers such as John Field and, more importantly, Frederic Chopin; another, the virtuoso tradition of piano performance and composition associated with both Chopin and Franz Liszt.

Irish composer John Field settled in St. Petersburg in 1803, where he enjoyed an active performing and teaching career. The influence of Field’s teaching methods and productive compositional career on generations of Russian composers cannot be overestimated. Among those who came under his influence were Alexander Gurilev, Laskovsky, Alexander Dubuque

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(who was later Balakirev’s teacher and whom the younger Russian musician credited with whatever technical skills he developed) and his famous pupil Mikhail Glinka, who is regarded as the founder of Russian classical music. The lyricism of Field’s melodies, the distinctive widely-spaced arpeggiated contour of the left hand accompaniments of his nocturnes, his virtuosic pianism and certain structural innovations found in his seven piano concertos inspired many of the leading composers of the first half of the nineteenth century, both in Western Europe and Russia. The fugato section in the finale of Field’s Second Piano Concerto might have influenced Balakirev to incorporate a similar developmental device in his Concerto in E flat. Tchaikovsky’s Concert Fantasia Op. 56 has a similar two-movement design to Field’s Third Concerto. Also, Field’s Fifth and Seventh Concertos greatly impacted Villoing’s Piano Concerto Op.4, which in turn influenced generations of Russian composers embarking on the task of writing in the piano concerto genre.3

Beginning in 1842, the “Lisztomania” that swept across Europe had a major influence on the formation of a distinctly Russian piano school. Liszt’s Russian concert tours in 1842-43 had a “galvanizing effect on Russian audiences and musicians.”4 His innovative compositional language and his virtuosic performance ability – demonstrating unprecedented technical skill and a manner of treating the instrument that Russian audiences had never heard – were thrilling. Liszt’s novel teaching methods also won quick recognition across Europe and Russia. Students schooled in his approach were in high demand in Russia, such was the level of fascination with his style.

As a result of these developments two divergent streams, one nationalist and the other influenced by Western Europe, began to affect Russian cultural life. Not only did these rival

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camps shape Russian music, they left an indelible imprint on music internationally. Indeed, the creations of composers such as Balakirev, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov gained worldwide popularity, establishing Russia as a cultural leader.

The nationalistic path in music pioneered by Mikhail Glinka was in large part a reaction to the overwhelming dominance of Western European culture in Russia during the early nineteenth century, resulting in a desire to create a distinctly Russian school of composition. This impulse is associated most prominently in the music of a group of amateur musicians who have been labeled the so called Moguchaia kuchka or “Mighty Handful” who were active in St. Petersburg between 1856-1870.

The Mighty Handful was led by Mily Balakirev and also included César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin. The aesthetic adviser of this group was the well-known music critic Vladimir Stasov. Despite their relative lack of formal training, all the members were exceptionally gifted composers who, inspired by Mikhail Glinka’s earlier efforts, shared similar ideas and passions about forming a distinctly Russian national style in music. In contrast to his predecessors who used folk melodies as themes that were in turn grafted onto existing Western forms, Glinka developed a new direction in Russian compositional style, which Robert Ridenour described in his book:

“[...] Glinka, however, attempted to create an original musical language from authentic folk music or, more often, invented themes that mimicked the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic idiosyncrasies of Russian popular song. In doing so, he pushed beyond the conventional boundaries of harmony and form that the most advanced Western composers of his day were just beginning to expand and created a personal style marked by daring harmonies, dynamic and flexible rhythms, and bright, pure orchestral colors. This was the innovative style Balakirev accepted as the hallmark of authentic Russian national music.”

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6 Ibid., 76.
Also, it is important to mention that for Balakirev and his group the “Russian national style” was not limited to Russian composers and Russian folk material. Just as Glinka’s music demonstrates the composer’s fascination with the folk heritage of other nations, Balakirev’s circle also expressed deep interest in Serbian, Spanish, Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian, Persian, far East (“oriental”) and other folk traditions. The Mighty Handful favored programmatic music as well, as was common with most radical musical romantics, such as Schumann, Berlioz, and Liszt.”

In contrast to the New Russian School represented by the Mighty Handful, an artistic trend that reflected a more Germanic approach while also emphasizing the performance traditions of Liszt and Chopin was emerging. Led by the great pianist and composer Anton Rubinstein, who met both Liszt and Chopin during his own tour of Paris in 1841, this particular trend was highlighted by what Rubinstein felt was the necessity of establishing a more professional level of musical training in Russia. Through the support and involvement of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, Rubinstein helped found the Russian Musical Society, which opened multiple branches throughout the country dedicated to providing musical training to the nation’s most gifted students. In 1862 the branch in St. Petersburg was formally recognized as the first Russian Conservatory with many prominent western European musicians appointed as professors. Four years later Anton’s brother Nikolai Rubinstein stood at the opening of a second Russian Conservatory in Moscow, where among its first appointed professors was Piotr Iliich Tchaikovsky, a recent graduate from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The establishment of conservatories provided a solid foundation for the training of future generations of Russian

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composers and performers. As Boris Asaf’ev noted, it marked “a progression of Russian musical life from dilettante to professional.”

The differences in musical philosophy between the Rubinstein camp and the Mighty Handful resulted in the founding of the Free Music School “as a rival to the Rubinstein’s conservatory.” Regardless of the intense disagreements between the two camps and the highly charged emotions that built up, the efforts of both were valuable in moving Russian musical culture forward. Indeed, the generations of gifted Russian composers and performers who emerged in the late nineteenth century were the direct result of the work done by these two schools. In Lyapunov’s life and work, one can trace a mixture of influences, but with a decided final shift toward Balakirev’s camp.

Lyapunov’s interest in the compositions of the new Russian school and his friendship with Balakirev had a decisive influence on his artistic development. His artistic maturity coincided with times of political turbulence in Russia – two revolutions, a civil war and World War I all had major influence on the arts in his country. Moreover, these political and social events further aggravated the artistic controversy between followers of the nineteenth century Russian classic style (both of Rubinstein’s and that of the nationalist composers) and the emerging new trends of modern radical composers like Scriabin, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and others. Lyapunov preserved the ties with the classic direction and created a number of notable compositions following the lead of Glinka and the Mighty Handful composers.

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Biographical Information

Born on November 18th, 1859 in the Russian city of Yaroslavl, Lyapunov showed his musical gifts at a very early age. His mother, who was also a gifted pianist, became Lyapunov’s first piano teacher. After learning the basics of sight-reading, his first substantial piece was Liszt’s transcription of the Overture to William Tell by Rossini, which his mother often played in their home. Needless to say, even a simplified arrangement made by his mother was too difficult for the child. Nonetheless, it was his first acquaintance with the composer, whose compositional and pianistic style became a life-long fascination of Lyapunov.

After his father’s death in 1870, Lyapunov and his family moved to Nijni Novgorod where in 1873 he attended the music classes in the newly opened branch of the Russian Musical Society. Upon the recommendation of Nikolai Rubinstein in 1878 Lypunov was accepted to the Moscow Conservatory. He was first admitted into the piano class of V. I. Villborg, and two years later transferred to the class of Karl Klindworth, Villborg’s former teacher and himself a former pupil of Liszt.

Lyapunov was introduced to Liszt’s teaching methods and covered an extensive repertoire of the most technically demanding works of the piano literature. When Klindforth left the conservatory and moved to Berlin, Lyapunov continued his studies with another former student of Liszt, P.A. Pabst. Of all these, Lyapunov valued Karl Klindworth the most. He later dedicated his monumental Sonata in F Minor op. 26, composed between the years of 1906 and 1908 to his beloved and highly respected teacher. It comes as no surprise that this work had many similar traits with Liszt’s Sonata in B minor S.178, such as high levels of virtuosity,

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10 Onegina, “Fortepiannaya muzyka,” 16.
orchestral treatment of the piano, melodic transformation used for the purpose of creating structural unity, and of course its groundbreaking four-movements-in-one form.

Unfortunately, Lyapunov’s composition studies at the Moscow Conservatory left him dissatisfied. Since his time at the gymnasia in Nijnii Novgorod he dreamed of studies with Tchaikovski, whom he considered an eminent master of Russian music. To Lyapunov’s disappointment Tchaikovski was not as strong a teacher as he was a composer. Also, Lyapunov’s personality and musical tastes didn’t match with those of S. I. Taneyev, his other professor of composition. It was during his years in the conservatory that Lyapunov showed an increased fascination with the works of composers who represented the New Russian School, specifically the members of the Mighty Handful led by Balakirev. Borodin’s *Bogaty* Symphony and Balakirev’s *Islamey* left a particularly lasting impression on the young musician. This led to Lyapunov’s increasing disappointment with the composition faculty of the Moscow conservatory and its Western-oriented approach. He was increasingly drawn to the opposing philosophies of Balakirev’s group, which became more influential on his own musical style.

In 1883, after graduating from the conservatory, Lyapunov met Balakirev in person, an encounter that started a life-long friendship and collaboration between the two composers. Balakirev persuaded Lyapunov to move to St. Petersburg. There, under Balakirev’s guidance, Lyapunov started working on his First Symphony in B minor (an important part of Balakirev’s teaching method was to have his students compose a symphonic work), marking the beginning of Lyapunov’s acquaintance with Balakirev’s style, which strongly influenced his entire creative output. Moreover, through Balakirev the composer became personally acquainted with the other members of the Mighty Handful.

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Lyapunov’s talent as a brilliant virtuoso pianist was widely recognized by the acclaimed critics and artists of his time, as evidenced by numerous articles and concert reviews. It is therefore not surprising that Lyapunov’s preferred medium of expression was the piano. Although he left an extensive compositional legacy of over 70 opera in many genres including symphonic, sacred and chamber music; more than 40 opera involve the piano. Here he explored a variety of genres ranging from small scale works to large compositions such as his two Piano Concertos and his *Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes* for piano and orchestra. As is evident from the list of his works, Lyapunov favored instrumental music. Notable exceptions are the songs for voice and piano that often use folk materials. Lyapunov was a well-known folklorist and a member of the Russian Geographical Society. With colleague F. M. Istomin he was commissioned to travel to remote regions of Russia to collect and record folksongs. This expedition resulted in the publication of “Songs of Russian People” by the Society in 1899, and also in Lyapunov’s publication of his two volumes of songs accompanied by piano.

Although he established no new artistic trends, Lyapunov enjoyed the respect and acclaim of his contemporaries, both as a performer and a composer. His compositions were warmly received by the public, and received positive reviews from the critics of his time. His first public appearance as the conductor of his Scherzo in F Major for orchestra, performed at the Moscow Conservatory in 1883, was praised by S. Flerov in the local newspaper “Moskovskiyie Vedomosti.” But it was in his piano music that his style manifested itself to the fullest. Some of his piano works are considered his best compositional achievements. One of his well-known compositions in the solo piano repertory that enjoys some popularity with pianists and attracts interest from musicologists is his set of the *Twelve Transcendental Etudes* Op.11 dedicated to the

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memory of Liszt. Both the extreme levels of virtuosity required of the performer as well as certain details of compositional style mimic Liszt’s style to some degree. Nonetheless, the originality of the musical language in Lyapunov’s etudes is undeniable, demonstrating the composer’s close ties with New Russian School principles and traditions.

Significantly, his First Piano Concerto, Op. 4, which was completed in 1890 and dedicated to Balakirev, received a prestigious Glinka prize in 1904 as one of the best new Russian compositions. Funded by Mitrofan Beliaev, additional Glinka prizes went to Rachmaninoff for his Piano Concerto No. 2, Scriabin for his Third and Fourth Piano Sonatas, Arensky for his Piano Trio in D Minor and Taneyev for his Symphony in C Minor. Lyapunov’s Concerto drew considerable interest from the leading pianists of his time. After its debut on April 8, 1891 with Balakirev as conductor and I. A. Borovka as soloist, the piece was performed by other acclaimed Russian pianists such as A. Horowitz, V. Scriabina, K. Igumnov and others.

In 1908 Lyapunov succeeded Balakirev as a director of the Free Music School in St. Petersburg. After the death of his mentor, Lyapunov completed some of Balakirev’s unfinished works and orchestrated his mentor’s most celebrated work, the “Oriental Fantasy” Islamey in 1912. This work was previously orchestrated by Alfredo Casella in 1907, but it is Lyapunov’s orchestration that enjoys the most popularity as it is more practical and playable for the orchestra as opposed to the highly demanding work by Casella.

Between 1910 and 1923, the composer taught piano and composition at the Petersburg Conservatory. Due to the uneasy political situation in Russia following the revolution, his unwillingness to renounce his religious views in favor of the atheist regime of the Soviet Union

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forced him to emigrate to Paris in 1923. The circumstances surrounding his emigration are omitted in most of the sources written before the downfall of the Soviet Union due to the censorship of the regime. According to M. L. Lukachevskaya, “Lyapunov’s figure of the churchwarden of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin church at St. Petersburg Conservatory was deeply hostile to the ideologists of the Soviet Union... [As a result of the tribunal on the church affairs, during which Lyapunov remained faithful to his religious beliefs,...] the composer was deprived of the rights to teach and thus of the means of supporting his extended family.”¹⁵ He left his fatherland on the pretext of a European concert tour. In Paris he continued his musical career with renewed strength, which unfortunately was ended in less than a year by a sudden heart attack which caused his death.

CHAPTER TWO: LYAPUNOV’S FIRST PIANO CONCERTO OP. 4

The place of Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto in the development of an emerging genre of Russian Piano Concerto

Lyapunov’s monumental First Piano Concerto represents a significant contribution to the history of the piano concerto in Russia. Despite being seldom performed today, it enjoyed wide public acclaim and appreciation during Lyapunov’s lifetime. In his book, Shifman refers to the correspondence between M. Balakirev and A. A. Petrov, in which Balakirev discusses Lyapunov’s Concerto as well as his Symphony as “monumental compositions, promulgation of which will present an invaluable input into the music literature…”

For a better understanding of this work’s value it is useful to consider the development of the concerto genre in Russia at the time of its composition. With the exception of A. Villoing’s piano concerto, recognized as the first such work in the genre by a Russian composer, Anton Rubinstein’s five piano concertos (written between 1850 and 1874) are considered the first works of value, paving the way for future developments. Despite their heavy stylistic reliance on Beethoven, Liszt and Mendelssohn, these compositions served as study material and models for his near contemporaries. Notably, Rubinstein’s Fourth Concerto in D minor, Op. 70, was a major influence on Tchaikovsky’s brilliant Piano Concerto No. 1. In addition, Balakirev’s Piano Concerto in E-flat was influenced by Rubinstein’s Second Concerto, in particular the use of fugal elements. It is interesting that Balakirev did not complete this work, which he started in 1861, leaving it to Lyapunov who finished it in 1910, the year of Balakirev’s death.

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16 Shifman, S. M. Lyapunov, 42.


Taneyev’s attempt in the piano concerto genre was unsuccessful, and was aborted after harsh criticism from his contemporaries. Arensky’s Piano Concerto in F minor op.2 from 1882, although leaning heavily on Chopin’s concertos and lacking musical individuality, had a more favorable fate. It was included in the teaching repertoire at Russian conservatories and was performed by such well-known Russian pianists as Pabst, Goldenweizer and Ginsburg. \(^{19}\) Rimsky-Korsakov’s concerto, first performed in 1884, is often praised for its masterful treatment of folk material, successful balance between the soloist and the orchestra, and idiomatic writing for the instrument. Curiously, Rachmaninov disagreed with this assessment, while finding Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto, which contains many awkward passages for the soloist, idiomatically written for the instrument.\(^{20}\) The works of these Russian composers gives us some idea of how the concerto genre had progressed up until the point when Lyapunov began his own first concerto.

Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto was completed in 1890, predating the masterpieces of his near contemporary Rachmaninov and later compositions from the Soviet era by Prokofiev and others who solidified the Russian approach to the genre. Lyapunov’s concerto features a sure grasp of orchestral composition combined with a deep knowledge of both the piano’s sound capacities as well as virtuoso keyboard technique. In addition, the musical ideas are of high aesthetic quality.

While writing for the orchestra did not pose problems for experienced Russian composers of this era, the piano/orchestra combination, with its particular aesthetic considerations and balance issues, was a challenge for most, Rimsky-Korsakov being a notable exception with his Piano Concerto. In Lyapunov’s concerto the piano part, which is successfully integrated into the

\(^{19}\) Norris, “The Development of the Russian Piano Concerto,” 105-110.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 119-120.
orchestral setting, is highly virtuosic, occasionally quite “showy,” but always idiomatic for the player. Wide stretches throughout the composition seem to indicate that it is intended for performers with large hands, but all the figurations and chords fit naturally under the fingers. Even the key choice, E-flat minor, tends to be a comfortable choice from a physical standpoint. Although the piece at times resorts to excessive use of sequences and cadenza-like passages, which were very characteristic among composers of this era, the musical ideas themselves are nonetheless inspired and lyrical. Another strength of the piece is the equal importance of soloist and orchestra in the presentation of thematic material. The orchestra is far from subordinate, as was the case in many of the works of Lyapunov’s predecessors. In addition, despite the strong influence of Liszt, Lyapunov’s musical ideas are distinctively his own, unlike the derivative nature of the passagework and melodic content of Rubinstein’s and Arensky’s concertos.

The issue of balance between soloist and orchestra, a weakness in many Russian concertos of the era, is not evident in Lyapunov’s work. Lyapunov displays an excellent sense of timbral and registral specifics, and even when the orchestral tutti is at full volume, the piano part is not submerged. It cuts through because of the composer’s expert knowledge of the proper technical setting for the pianist, an aspect of the piece that will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

**Descriptive Analysis of Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto**

Lyapunov spent more than three years working on his First Piano Concerto. The compositional process presented many challenges for the young composer; especially difficult was the choice of formal structure for the piece. Initially conceived as a composition structured in a traditional multi-movement form, after two years of work and struggle with a projected middle section *Andante* as suggested by Balakirev, Lyapunov decided to go with a one-
movement sonata allegro form with cyclic elements following Liszt’s new trends. Liszt’s innovative “double function” structures, in which elements of a multi-movement plan are folded into a single movement that resembles traditional sonata allegro form, proved best for Lyapunov in his first concerto. He also turned to it later in other large-scale works such as the Second Piano Concerto in E Major, the Violin Concerto in D Minor, and his monumental Piano Sonata in F Minor, of which the composer was particularly proud and considered one of his best works. The unsuccessful Andante was replaced with a lyrical Adagio non tanto episode in the unrelated key of D Major that serves as a Secondary Theme zone.

It should be noted that the one movement sonata allegro form of Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto is not divided into clear sections that could be perceived as internal movements as is the case in Liszt’s models. The orchestral interludes that are based solely on the opening theme of the concerto and which are inserted between each important section of the concerto act as recurring refrains, causing the structure to resemble a large Sonata rondo form. Lyapunov’s desire for dramatic impact is further reinforced with the choice of “mirror” recapitulation, where the Primary and Secondary subjects are stated in reverse order, which when looking at the entire piece reveals an overall arch-like design:

Introduction / Exposition (Primary Theme/Secondary Theme) / Development / Recapitulation (Secondary theme/Primary Theme) Coda.

The extended introductory section of the concerto is presented primarily by the orchestra. In contrast to Liszt’s concertos in which the piano enters at the beginning of the piece, Lyapunov delays the soloist’s entrance until roughly the midpoint of the introduction where it takes over the presentation and development of opening material from the orchestra. Overall, the
introduction has a somewhat unusual structure compared to the traditional orchestral exposition. It is clearly divided into three sections, each of them with distinctive thematic functions.

The first section of the introduction presents the basic thematic material for the entire concerto. The opening phrase features two basic motives (Motive A and Motive B as shown in Example 1 below). These motives assume more independent roles as the piece progresses, reappearing separately or in interaction with each other in more polyphonic textures, as well as undergoing extensive development in both orchestral interludes and connecting sections of the concerto.


 Allegro con brio. M.M.  = 152

The noble, stately opening theme is presented in low register unisons. Its character recalls the image of Bogatyr, a godly hero of Russian folklore that is a recurring theme in Russian music and arts of the time. Interestingly, it suggests a reference to the opening of Borodin’s Second Symphony, the so-called Bogatyr symphony that Lyapunov admired, which also begins with a robust orchestral tutti unison statement. (See Example 2 below.)
Similar to Borodin’s Symphony, Lyapunov’s concerto opening theme statement is immediately juxtaposed with the contrasting material presented by the two lyrical motives that form the basis of the Primary and Secondary Themes of the concerto.


The second section of the introduction in Lyapunov’s concerto is concerned with the development of the two introductory motives that are now combined in a polyphonic texture in the orchestra. (See Example 4 below.)
The final eight measures of the orchestral introduction features an orchestral crescendo based on dominant harmonies, preparing for the grand entrance of the soloist.

The soloist’s entrance is marked Capriccioso, and displays the obvious influence of Liszt in its virtuosic, cadenza-like setting that exploits the entire range of the keyboard. Another notable Liszt-like feature is the use of rapidly alternating chord structures.

Example 5: Lyapunov, Piano Concerto Op. 4, Introduction, mm. 64-68.

The thematic material of this section is derived from the opening motives of the introduction, which are developed further in this cadenza passage that is actually the culmination of the long introduction. It is harmonically unstable, undergoing numerous tonicizations. Several
sequential passages culminate in a strong dominant preparation reinforced by an arrival on a B-flat 7 chord containing an augmented fifth, enhanced by a fermata then followed by more cadenza material that finally resolves in the home key of E-flat minor, effectively signaling the beginning of the Primary Theme area of the exposition.

The Primary Theme that enters in m. 93 features a simple, beautiful melody imbued with longing qualities that evoke the spirit of authentic Russian folk songs. It unfolds over an arpeggiated left hand accompaniment that owes much to the nocturne style of Field.


Lyapunov’s use of the registral and timbral possibilities of the piano is masterful in this work. The initial statement of the Primary Theme is given to the piano solo and presents a single melody line at a dynamic level of $p$. For the second statement of the theme, Lyapunov expands the piano setting by shifting the melody to a higher register, increasing the dynamic level and
adding octave doublings and chordal textures while bringing the orchestra back in. The combination of registral and dynamic contrasts was a favored tool of Lyapunov’s, enabling him to achieve an expanded texture to reinforce certain climactic points in the piece.

An orchestral interlude marked *Piu animato: Tempo I* follows beginning in m. 186. Characterized by a sophisticated polyphonic texture, Lyapunov displays his mastery of imitative, and in particular, canonic techniques. The solo piano episode *Andantino* beginning in m. 230 with its clearly defined mood change provides an effective preparation for the appearance of the Secondary Theme.

The Secondary Theme, marked by a tempo change to *Adagio non tanto*, features a sophisticated, lyrical melody. Its poetic sensibility suggests the influence of Russian folk music.


The theme extends to m. 313, followed by a closing section that brings back material from the introductory theme. An extensive solo cadenza brings the exposition to a close.

Although the opening theme as initially presented is an unmistakable unifying element, the most important dramatic facet of the piece is Lyapunov’s use of thematic transformation in
treat the Primary Theme. As it appears in the development section (m. 320 at Allegro moderato e maestoso), the pensive character heard in its initial presentation by the piano gives way to the majestic character as executed by the orchestra in the lower registers, paired with virtuosic piano figurations that span a wide range of the keyboard. The theme is presented in a vertical chordal texture, thus intensifying the almost solemn grandeur of the section. (See Example 8 below.)

Even though the section begins with a strong suggestion of B-flat Major, it is characterized by tonal ambiguity and an occasional tonicisation of D minor, as suggested by the A7 dominant chord in m. 334.

In the recapitulation, the Secondary Theme (beginning in m. 523) is restated in its original character and is followed by an intense orchestral interlude marked Allegro con brio: Tempo I, where the orchestral texture features a rumbling tremolo effect on a dominant pedal with other instruments playing material from the opening theme. The piano thickens the texture with its entrance in m. 642, characterized by virtuosic martellato figurations, all while the dominant pedal continues and the tension builds, effectively preparing the grand return of the Primary Theme for its final statement in m. 666. The theme is presented in a vertical chordal disposition just as it was in the development section, but now unfolds as a massive, triumphant tutti in a firm E-flat major key. This marks the emotional climax of the piece. Marked Poco meno mosso: Grandioso, the piano supports the orchestral theme with powerful ascending octave passages (see Example 9 below).

Allegro moderato e maestoso. M.M. $\text{J} = 132$

Primary Theme
It is perhaps easy to understand that by reversing the order of the main subjects in the recapitulation, Lyapunov was able to execute his intended dramatic concept for the piece more effectively, ensuring the proper placement of the work’s most climactic event.

Following a brief episode, a brilliant coda in E-flat major begins in m. 718, bringing the concerto to its jubilant conclusion. Here, Lyapunov combines the initial introductory Motive A in the orchestra part with a four-note fragment from the Primary Theme stated by the soloist. (See Example 10 below.)

Motive B reappears in the orchestra during the final *stringendo* passage, combining with piano octave passages that bring together the two most important melodic ideas in the piece, adding strength to its climactic conclusion.
By choosing a one-movement form, characterized by the arch-like design created by the reversed order of theme presentation in the recapitulation, and through an economy of musical material development, Lyapunov shows an obvious desire for compositional unity in this work. To be sure, the composer does struggle at times in sustaining momentum in this and other large-scale works. The frequent alternation of seemingly isolated sections and the frequent piano cadenza passages can make the piece seem fragmented at times. Nonetheless, it is still a very effective piece. Perhaps this relative difficulty with large forms explains his shift to smaller scaled works later in his career.

In the First Piano Concerto the performer can benefit greatly by becoming familiar with the piece’s overall formal design and internal structural features. The pianist should strive for maintenance of momentum, careful shaping of phrases and avoiding an over-indulgence in the virtuosic aspects of the piece. Despite the occasional structural weaknesses in what was a young composer’s early but enthusiastic work, it is a brilliant piece with high aesthetic value, is worth study and quite enjoyable to perform.
CHAPTER THREE: PIANISTIC ASPECTS IN LYAPUNOV’S CONCERTO OP. 4

Lyapunov believed that the most important aspect of any performance is a realization of the composer’s concept of the piece, as Lyapunov’s former student Zinaida Shandarovskaya recalls in her memories about the years of study with him (1910-1916) at the St. Petersburg conservatory. Those precious recollections are preserved in the archives of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, and were published for the first time in 2012 by musicologist Olga Onegina. The article contains invaluable first-hand information about Lyapunov’s teaching and performing philosophy, and is particularly relevant to the discussion of the performance aspects of his First Piano Concerto. According to Shandarovskaya, “he [Lyapunov] considered, that the good performance is impossible, if the performer doesn’t understand the meaning of what he is playing.”¹ The first step towards grasping the concept of the piece is the analysis of the piece’s formal structure, which in turn leads to a better understanding of how the thematic material is developed within the formal framework, aspects of which were discussed in Chapter Two.

Equally important is developing an understanding of how Lyapunov treats the piano, which is decisive in determining the performer’s overall technical approach. His treatment of the piano, demonstrated not only in this concerto but also in many other keyboard works, might fall into the following broad categories: 1) orchestral conception of the instrument, 2) prevailing virtuosic technical demands, and 3) lyrical elements.

Orchestral conception of the piano

Lyapunov treats the piano “as an instrument of extraordinary dynamical and coloristic capacities”² following the traditions of Liszt, who transformed the overall conception of the

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piano, inventing new technical devices that opened new sound possibilities and thus achieved a true orchestral sonority. To achieve a sort of monumental “tutti” effect, Lyapunov often writes passages that span multiple registers of the keyboard either simultaneously or that unfold over short time spans. The opening piano statement is a case in point, where the passage from m. 64 to m. 68 spans almost the entire range of the keyboard while focusing on motive A from the introductory theme, stated here in martellato chords that alternate between the hands. This is followed by motive B executed by octaves in the left hand accompanied by arpeggiated right hand figurations moving in contrary motion.

Example 11: Lyapunov, Piano Concerto Op. 4, Introduction, mm. 64-72.

This reliance on wide-ranging registers of the keyboard is a signature feature of Lyapunov’s writing, employed throughout the piece in the piano cadenzas in particular, but also the passagework that accompanies the orchestra’s presentation of thematic material. Also, the widely spaced arpeggiated figures in the left hand that accompany right hand melodies cover large spans of the keyboard. Lyapunov’s orchestral concept of the piano requires from the
performer a refined sense of the specific timbral qualities of different instruments, individually or
grouped in sections, as well as the ability to imitate their articulation.

The *martellato* section that prepares the grandiose return of the Primary Theme in the
recapitulation at m. 642 is clearly designed to imitate the string tremolos that preceded it in mm.
635-641, and are thus heard as a continuation of the texture rather than the beginning of a new
episode.


Here the pianist should attempt to achieve a “murmuring” tremolo effect. Important
consideration should be made regarding the phrasing and structuring of the dynamics in this
episode in order to avoid excessive heaviness of sound as well as unnecessary physical fatigue. The chords placed on the downbeat of every other measure (with one exception) indicate the intended phrasing. They should serve as a springboard followed by immediate relaxation of the wrist. The performer should retain a one-beat-to-the-measure feeling to ensure the proper momentum of this section.

Beginning in m. 555 Lyapunov stratifies the piano texture for the purposes of imitating contrasting instrument groups. Right hand figurations imitate chime-like carillon sounds, presenting a beautiful, crisp background for the unfolding melody of the Secondary Theme in the left hand that suggests wind instruments, in effect joining in dialogue with the actual wind and string players. (See Example 13 below.)

The imitation of the church bell sound is very common in Lyapunov’s music, as he was a deeply spiritual person. In fact, bells are the only musical instruments allowed in Russian Orthodox Church services. There are a number of sections in the concerto invoking this distinct sonority. One that stands out is found in a cadenza-like short section before the Secondary Theme returns in the recapitulation (mm. 510-523). Despite the distinctive dominant chordal stroke in the orchestra and obvious cadenza nature of the solo brilliant passage work that follows, the composer chose not to notate the section in small notes (his signature writing for cadenza sections). Rather, he constructed it in a way that it is interpreted as the continuation of the previous virtuosic passage-work, and is intended to gradually bring down the agitated energy of the previous section. The three measures of the quiet yet distinct chime carillon marked morendo e ritardando creates a beautiful, peaceful effect, and conveys a clearly defined mood change that prepares the entrance of the Secondary Theme in m. 523. (See Example 14 below.)
Lyapunov’s acute sense of the timbral and registral capacities of the keyboard enables him to achieve a successful balance between orchestra and soloist. Both parts are equal partners in the process of thematic development and neither is overshadowed by the other. A representative example of this sure sense can be observed starting in m. 666, where the Primary Theme is recapitulated in powerful tutti chords by the orchestra while the piano accompanies in ascending double octaves. The result is a piano part that cuts easily through the massive
orchestral sonorities without unnecessary effort on the part of the player. (See Example 15 below.)

Example 14: Lyapunov, Piano Concerto Op. 4, Development, mm. 517-523.

Other examples can be heard in both the exposition and recapitulation during presentations of the Secondary Theme, where the soft chords in the strings and woodwinds do
not obscure the intricate broken chord figurations in the left hand, thus achieving clarity of sound and allowing the expressive nature of the figurations to project.


**Virtuosic Piano Writing**

Lyapunov’s virtuosic piano writing is influenced by both Liszt and Balakirev, who himself was a distinguished performer and who frequently turned to Liszt for inspiration, both as a composer as well as a teacher. As can be observed in Liszt’s and Balakirev’s piano compositions, a prominent characteristic in Lyapunov’s piano writing is the equal technical
demands he places on each hand. In the concerto there is an extensive use of passage and octave work for both hands, redistribution of thematic material between hands, as well as demanding, widely spaced arpeggiated figurations in the left hand that serve as rich background to melodic material in the right and which requires highly developed flexibility of the wrist. Representative examples occur in the exposition (mm. 93-132 and mm. 258-308) and recapitulation (mm. 528-546).

Lyapunov’s piano works seem to be written for performers with rather large hands, as evidenced by the frequent octave passages as well as widely-spaced broken chord figurations. Even so, the writing is idiomatic for the instrument and is quite accessible to those with smaller hands as long as the player possesses advanced technical facility. The player with smaller hands will be required to employ extra wrist flexibility and to exercise caution in certain passages where over-stretching the palm could create tension and a loss of mobility. Care should be taken to find appropriate points of relaxation.

As described previously, Lyapunov frequently employs martellato style octaves or chords using alternating hands. He also employs a more typical octave unison doubling texture, for example as a bravura accompanying line to the orchestral recapitulation of the Primary Theme, beginning at m. 666, as well as the closing passage of the piece. Even though both techniques require considerable stamina, the composer demonstrates a thorough knowledge of how the hands work. In Example 17 below, note the arpeggiated figures, distributed between the hands that follow a burst of octaves, thereby allowing the pianist some physical relief by using alternating muscle groups – arms and shoulders for the octaves, fingers and wrists for the arpeggios. If the performer is attentive to these physical details, a successful performance is more likely.
Another type of octave technique employed by Lyapunov in his concerto is “Liszt octaves”, an innovative technical device that quickly became very popular, where the hands alternate pairs of octaves while the thumbs provide melodic direction. Balakirev himself often used this effective tool in search of more powerful sonorities. Lyapunov employs this technique in developing motive B of the Introductory material, which occurs after the Primary Theme statement both in the exposition and the development section of the concerto. The octave segments are evenly alternated by the wide broken chord figurations, as shown below:
The thumbs in this passage act as pivots and should provide clarity of articulation to ensure the delivery of the important notes of the motive, which sound primarily on every half beat of the measure. If the damper pedal is used, it should punctuate the rhythmic nature of the passage and allow the motive to be transparent. In addition, considering the extended length of these types of sections, the performer should shape dynamic levels carefully to prevent the sequences from becoming monotonous and the overall momentum from stalling.

Both arpeggiated and broken chord figurations are integral parts of Lyapunov’s style. Although he employs typical linear arpeggios, broken-chord figurations are more frequent. In most cases he enriches the arpeggios or broken chords with added notes, which in turn increases the technical difficulty.

Simple linear arpeggios are few. Arpeggios with additional melodic implications are often used to conclude cadenzas. However, the most extended and technically challenging arpeggiated passage begins in m. 320, signaling the beginning of the development section. The added notes create wide vertical intervals for the pianist – sixths and fifths – that require quick hand position changes and which, in long passages, can become tiring. The performer should
maintain a feel of one-beat-to-the-bar, keeping the arm in a somewhat lifted position in order to avoid excessive heaviness and hampered rhythmic flow.

For Lyapunov, broken chord figurations are more common than standard arpeggiations, and are one of the most prominent features of his emerging style in this piece. Intricate broken chord figurations are found throughout the work and are his preferred accompanimental texture. It might occur simply in the left hand while accompanying a right hand melody, or in both hands while creating a lush background to an orchestral melody. (See Example 20 below.)

Left hand figurations typically involve large interval stretches covering a wide span of the keyboard. The orchestra in these instances is either not playing or is scored thinly, allowing the details of the piano part to be heard. Lyapunov often provides fingerings for the most challenging parts of the figurations. The fingering suggestions are well thought out and often present the most comfortable solutions. However, at times they seem intended for larger hands and require either fingering changes or extra flexibility from the performer with a smaller hand. (See Example 21 below.)
The cadenza passages in Lyapunov’s concerto suggest a clear Liszt influence. Those sections are notated in small notes in Liszt’s style and can be characterized more as outbursts of virtuosic harmonic figurations rather than carriers of thematic development. Unlike Liszt’s unmeasured cadenzas, Lyapunov’s are carefully calculated. Dotted lines suggest implied bar lines, providing the performer with rhythmic and phrasing focus. (See Example 22 below.)

Scalar passagework is rare in this concerto. Chromatic scales alternating with arpeggiated figurations do appear in the flamboyant virtuosic section (mm. 490-510) leading to the recapitulation of the Secondary Theme.

**Lyrical Writing**

Liszt’s virtuosic piano style and his innovative formal experiments – in particular his search for new ways of achieving structural unity through such devices as thematic transformation – were very influential among Russian composers of the late nineteenth century. Lyapunov, however, does not aim to simply copy Liszt; rather, he adopts Liszt’s innovations as tools to use in search of his own personal modes of expression.
Lyricism is at the core of Lyapunov’s compositional style and is a prominent feature of this concerto. Although he was a follower of the late Romantic traditions and the aesthetic principles of the Russian nationalistic compositional school, Lyapunov finds the roots of his lyricism in Russian folk music. He rarely quotes pre-existing material directly, but rather creates new material inspired by the modal, intervallic and rhythmic structures of actual folk melodies. His use of the natural minor mode, the frequent juxtaposition of major and minor keys and the basic melodic style in this concert create an unmistakable Russian sound.
The melodic themes in this concerto are lyrical in nature, and are each characterized by a clear motivic structure. In the Introductory and Secondary Themes this trait allows him to easily break the melodies down into fragments for developmental purposes. On the other hand, in the case of the Primary Theme it helps him avoid cadential predictability, creating a seemingly endless, often asymmetrical, melodic line that is often typical of Russian folk songs. In the characteristic lyrical section shown below, the performer should note three important details that are characteristic of Lyapunov’s writing. First, the composer is meticulous in outlining the individual phrase components with slurs. A second more subtle detail is the composer’s tendency to enhance the octave melody with full chords that function as gravitational points within the phrase. Finally, the peaks of longer melodic stretches are marked with “hairpins” that indicate the desired dynamic shape.


Lyapunov typically provided meticulous performance instructions in his score, as he wanted the performer to have a clear understanding of his intentions. By nature he was very modest, responsible and scrupulous in all his actions. His teaching philosophy stressed the importance of the performer achieving the composer’s concept of a given piece. He had little
patience with performers who took excessive liberties with the score, considering this a
distortion of the composer’s intentions. He required that his students study scores thoroughly and
implement all details indicated by the composer. According to Shandarovskaya, Lyapunov
reiterated that “the most difficult – is to see everything what is written by the composer, and to
execute [it] exactly the way the composer wants.” 23

Thus, it is not surprising that when it comes to his own compositions including this
concerto, Lyapunov meticulously notates all the details necessary to give a clear picture to the
performer of his intentions.

He places great importance in tempo indications and often includes metronome markings.
Each section that involves a change in character carries a descriptive title or suggestion in an
attempt to indicate not only tempo but also the desired dramatic shift. For example, he marks the
second Primary Theme statement Allegro moderato e maestoso, whereas the its final statement is
noted Poco meno mosso: Grandioso, thus the change in character is clearly indicated. Overall,
Lyapunov’s piano score contains a large amount of performance instructions that affect all areas
of technical and interpretive concerns.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Along with his other two compositions for piano and orchestra – the Second Piano Concerto in E Major, Op. 38, and The Rhapsody on Ukrainian Themes, Op. 28 – Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto is characterized by its symphonic scale and the haunting lyricism of its themes, unmistakably evoking the Russian folk music spirit. This is in keeping with trends that New Russian School composers were establishing in this genre.

Lyapunov’s distinctive virtuosic style was greatly influenced by Liszt and Balakirev. In fact, Balakirev, the dedicatee of Lyapunov’s First Piano Concerto, closely followed Lyapunov’s work on the composition, giving a great deal of advice, also editing the finished work, and ensuring its debut in a Free School of Music concert in 1891.

This enthusiastic work by a composer at the very dawn of his career is filled with youthful energy and inspiration. It demonstrates certain techniques and tendencies that Lyapunov would revisit throughout his life, and which received further development in the works of later generations of composers. Among these tendencies is Lyapunov’s inclination to search for new ways to unify formal structures by adapting older models, much as Liszt did. Another central characteristic is his highly idiomatic piano writing. Being a brilliant pianist himself who had mastered a large amount of demanding piano repertoire during his conservatory studies, Lyapunov demonstrated a profound knowledge of the instrument’s capacities as well as the physical abilities of the virtuoso performer. Also important is the fact that Lyapunov’s concerted works marked a shift in philosophy in piano music from that of merely showcasing a performer’s technical skills to that of creating virtuoso works whose level of dramatic expression was imbued with high aesthetic qualities.
Lyapunov’s legacy remains somewhat in the shadows. Although not all of his works are of high quality which can be said of most composers, his First Concerto is a composition that deserves to be brought back to light. His legacy has recently attracted the interest of scholars not only in Russia, but also abroad, with common agreement among them that relative neglect of his music is undeserved. The main archival material of Lyapunov’s legacy is located in the Department of Manuscripts of Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. It has been carefully collected and preserved by Lyapunov’s daughter, Anastasia Lyapunova, who dedicated her musicological career to the legacy of her father. Over her lifetime she collected and studied her father’s compositions, established a chronology of his life and work, organized his correspondence with other Russian and foreign artists – all with the intention of eventually writing a monograph dedicated to her father’s work. Unfortunately, the monograph was not finished as death stopped her work in 1973.

The ban that was placed on all Lyapunov’s works and his reduced status in general, mentioned by V. Goriashina and Lukachevskaya in their articles, was a result of charges of insubordination to authority made against him during the revolutionary tribunal on church affairs in 1922. Following this he emigrated to Paris, after which his legacy in Russia was virtually obliterated. Thus, it is not surprising that the very first biographical information about Lyapunov appeared in London in 1936, in a compilation of articles dedicated to a number of well-known

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Russian composers and published by D. Abraham and M. D. Calvocoressi.\footnote{Michael D. Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham, Masters of Russian Music, New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1944.} An article about Lyapunov that included his correspondence with Balakirev was published by his daughter in 1950 in the magazine “Sovyetskaya Muzika”,\footnote{Lyapunova, Anastasiya. “S. M. Lyapunov. Pis’ma M. A. Balakireva k S. M. Lyapunovu” [S. M. Lyapunov. Letters of M. A. Balakirev to S. M. Lyapunov]. Sovetskaya Muzyka, No. 9 (September 1950): 90-95.} marking a reintroduction of the composer to the public. It was followed by extensive research by Shifman in 1953 and culminated in Olga Onegina’s thorough study in 2010 of Lyapunov’s entire musical legacy as part of her dissertation research. Lyapunov’s piano compositions continue to attract the attention of western scholars, in particular the composer’s set of 12 Transcendental Etudes dedicated to the memory of Liszt. Two commercial recordings featuring Lyapunov’s concerted works for piano and orchestra – Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 and Rhapsody on Ukranian Themes - are currently available, one on the Hyperion label featuring Hamish Milne, pianist (BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra; Martyn Brabbins, conductor), the other on the Naxos label with pianist Shorena Tsintsabadze (Russian Philharmonic Orchestra; Dmitry Yablonky, conductor). Both have received enthusiastic praise by both listeners and reviewers.

This document is intended to contribute to the ongoing research into Lyapunov’s legacy, and specifically to make the case for his beautiful First Piano Concerto, which due to a combination of circumstances has remained in the shadows and out of the public eye for over 100 years. The historical and biographical information offered in this study are for the benefit of the individual who desires a better understanding of the roots of Lyapunov’s style. The basic formal analysis and discussion of the various technical demands are presented as aids to the performer who is interested in grasping the essential concepts behind the First Piano Concerto. It
is hoped that these basic considerations will provide some navigational tools necessary for the pianist in crafting a high quality performance of this work.
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VITA

Born in Republic of Moldova, Irina Cunev graduated from Moldova State University of Arts with a degree in piano performance, teaching and accompanying. After completing her studies she served as a full time piano instructor and a staff accompanist at the State Liceum of Music “Stircea” in Chisinau, Moldova. In 2002 she was invited to serve as a full-time piano instructor in Liu Ning Piano School in Shenyang, China, making solo appearances in Shenyang Conservatory of Music and Dalian University, China. In 2004 she moved to Louisiana where she completed her Master’s degree in piano performance at the Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, while working extensively in the field of accompanying and teaching. Irina Cunev is currently a staff accompanist at Southeastern Louisiana University, and a Doctoral student at the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, in the studio of Dr. Willis Delony.