

1990

A Study of Musical and Extra-Musical Imagery in Rachmaninoff's "Etudes-Tableaux", Opus 39.

Raymond J. Gitz

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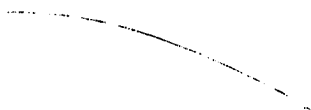
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**A study of musical and extra-musical imagery in Rachmaninoff's
"Etudes-Tableaux", opus 39**

Gitz, Raymond J., D.M.A.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1990

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A STUDY OF MUSICAL AND EXTRA-MUSICAL IMAGERY IN
RACHMANINOFF'S ETUDES-TABLEAUX, OPUS 39

A Monograph

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

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December 1990

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Alumni Professor Jack Guerry for his invaluable guidance and support during the preparation of this monograph. The integrity of his scholarship continues to serve as an inspirational model. I am also very grateful to Professors Daniel Sher, Wallace McKenzie, Griffin Campbell, Milton Hallman, and Sidney Garrett for their time spent in examining this monograph and for their helpful suggestions for improving it.

Many people have contributed to the completion of this project. Special appreciation is expressed to Alexandra Shikhris for translating Russian sources used in this study and for sharing her knowledge of Russian culture and custom, to Dr. Daniel Weilbaecher for his valued advice and patient assistance in the preparation of this manuscript, and to Madelyn Tribble for her keen insights and unswerving support. For their encouragement and help, I extend sincere thanks to Jerry Zachary, Sidney J. Mazerat III, Brian Eschette, Bruce Tribble, Dr. Alphonse Landry, Joan Landry, George Van Hoose, Philip Weber, Martha Trinko, Dr. Gerald F. De Luca, Steve Chambers, and Terrence E. Young, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

The nine Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39 (1916-17) for piano solo are the last important works written by Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) before his exile from Russia in 1917. The use of the word "Tableaux" in the title suggests an association with pictures, paintings, or scenes. Although the composer often wrote under the external influence of extra-musical sources, he rarely revealed them. This study examines the musical and extra-musical imagery which influenced Rachmaninoff's compositional style as observed in op. 39, the most important elements being the Dies irae from the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead, Russian chant, bell sonorities, and paintings by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). In addition, Rachmaninoff's love of nature and of his homeland is reflected throughout the study, and an explanation is given for the dark, somber sentiment that permeates many of the etudes.

INTRODUCTION

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) wrote two sets of Etudes-Tableaux, op. 33 (1911) and op. 39 (1916-17). Written in the shadow of the death of his friend Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), the nine Etudes-Tableaux of op. 39 are the last important works for piano written by the composer before his exile from Russia in 1917.¹

These etudes mark a distinct development in Rachmaninoff's career as a composer. Persistently chromatic, his harmonic formations are complicated and sophisticated with varied use of altered chords and bold digressions within a given key. Irregular barring and chant-like melodies pervade these pieces. As a whole, op. 39 fully explores the pianist's and the instrument's capabilities and shows Rachmaninoff's ability to crystallize perfectly a particular mood or sentiment.

Extra-Musical Imagery

The use of the word "Tableaux" in the title of these etudes suggests an association with pictures, paintings, or scenes. Although Rachmaninoff often wrote under the external influence

¹Except for transcriptions of various composers' works and a cadenza to the Second Hungarian Rhapsody of Liszt, the Variations on a Theme of Corelli, op. 42 (1931) is the only work for solo piano written by Rachmaninoff after 1917 (Robert Threlfall and Geoffrey Norris, A Catalogue of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff [London: Scolar Press, 1982], 212-13).

of extra-musical sources, he rarely revealed them. In his biographical study of the composer, Oskar von Riesemann² states that many of the etudes take their origin from the paintings by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901).³ Unfortunately, only two examples are cited by Riesemann and the details are somewhat garbled. While recognizing that two of the op. 39 etudes (nos. 1 and 8) were inspired by Böcklin's paintings, Robert Matthew-Walker states: "The 'tableaux' are not first and foremost 'pictures' in the manner of Musorgsky but are rather successors to Chopin's Ballades in that they permit poetic interpretation whilst at the same time being composed entirely from musical (and also technical) ideas."⁴ These etudes may also be viewed as miniature tone poems. Perhaps the orchestral tone poem, with its colorful images, suggested to Rachmaninoff the term "tableaux" to describe these works.

Sometimes the inspiration for the etudes was taken from pictures of real life or from fairy tales. This became apparent in

²Oskar von Riesemann, Rachmaninoff's Recollections Told to Oskar von Riesemann. Translated from the German by Dolly Rutherford (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934), 237.

³Rachmaninoff had already established himself as a successful tone-painter in his symphonic poem The Isle of the Dead, Op. 29 (1909), after Arnold Böcklin's famous painting of the same name.

⁴Robert Matthew-Walker, notes to the recording of Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux, performed by Howard Shelley (Hyperion A66091, 1983), 2-3. In addition to his illustrated documentary of Rachmaninoff's life and times (under the name Robert Walker), he has supplied extensive notes for the complete discography of Rachmaninoff's music for solo piano recorded by the English pianist Howard Shelley. In the interest of consistency, this author will be referred to as Walker for the remainder of this paper.

1930 when Rachmaninoff supplied programs to the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi, who orchestrated five of the Etudes-Tableaux⁵ for Serge Koussevitsky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Until then, Rachmaninoff had been careful to conceal the programmatic content of these compositions, and in his letter to Respighi he revealed only cursory programmatic details for all but one of the etudes (op. 39, no. 7).⁶ Although the descriptions are suitable, it is unfortunate that Respighi did not take advantage of Rachmaninoff's offer to develop his explanations as to the character of these etudes more fully.

In his study of Rachmaninoff's etudes, Mark Genrikhovich Aranovskii suggests additional literary and visual sources of imagery for several of the etudes, including The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) for op. 39, no. 9.⁷

Musical Imagery

Musical as well as extra-musical sources of imagery have influenced the character of the op. 39 etudes, the most

⁵Four of the five Etudes-Tableaux orchestrated by Respighi are from op. 39: No. 2 in A Minor (the Sea and Seagulls), No. 6 in A Minor (the tale of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf), No. 7 in C Minor (a funeral march), and No. 9 in D Major (an oriental march).

⁶See Rachmaninoff's letter to Respighi (January 2, 1930). Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 262-63.

⁷Mark Genrikhovich Aranovskii, Etiudy-Kartiny Rakhmaninova. [Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux] (Moskva: Muzgiz, 1963), 138-39.

significant of which is the composer's lifelong fascination with ecclesiastical chants, especially the *Dies irae*. Walker states, "Op. 39 can also be perceived as a hidden set of variations on this composer's idée fixe, the Dies irae, parts of the plainchant being quoted directly in all nine studies, particularly obviously in the first five."⁸

The asymmetrical and rhythmic formation of the motives and phrases shows the influence of Russian church music on the style of these etudes; in addition, bell sonorities, so loved by the composer, appear frequently throughout the opus.

The purpose of this study is to examine both the musical and extra-musical imagery in Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39, thereby casting further light on the composer's creative process and the essential character of these works. Musical scores have been examined carefully from an analytical and pianistic viewpoint; however, since the primary scope of this paper is linked to the specific stylistic elements mentioned above, a minimum of traditional musical analysis is presented. Alexandra Shikhris has translated Russian sources of particular relevance to this study.⁹

⁸Walker, Shelley recording of the Etudes-Tableaux, 4.

⁹Alexandra Shikhris, a pianist and teacher in the New Orleans area, received her M.A. degree in Music in 1977 from the Odessa Pedagogical Institute of Ushinsky, Russia.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ETUDES-TABLEAUX AND THEIR PLACE IN RACHMANINOFF'S OEUVRE

Having already completed his cycle of twenty-four preludes with the publication of the Thirteen Preludes, op. 32 (1910), Rachmaninoff began a new series of piano pieces in the late summer of 1911. The [nine] Etudes-Tableaux, op. 33 were completed during August and September, while the composer was staying at the Ivanovka estate.¹

The original 1914 edition of op. 33, published by A. Gutheil, Leipzig, announced nine pieces:

No. 1	Allegro non troppo	F Minor
No. 2	Allegro	C Major
No. 3	Grave--Meno mosso	C Minor
No. 4	Allegro	A Minor
No. 5	Moderato	D Minor
No. 6	Non allegro--Presto	E-flat Minor
No. 7	Allegro con fuoco	E-flat Major
No. 8	Moderato	G Minor
No. 9	Grave	C-sharp Minor

¹ Ivanovka was the family estate in the state of Tambov, approximately 330 miles southeast of Moscow. Rachmaninoff and his family frequently stayed at Ivanovka, for it offered the repose that he required for composing.

However, only six were actually issued at that time [nos. 1, 2, 6-9]. In later reprints of op. 33, Gutheil even tried to suppress the previously advertised nos. 3, 4, and 5.²

Rachmaninoff withdrew three of the etudes before turning the manuscript over to the printer. The C Minor and D Minor etudes (nos. 3 and 5) were scratched off a check list of his compositions submitted to him by Boris Asafiev, and Rachmaninoff wrote in the margin: "The deleted ones lie in my desk. They will not be published."³ Also discarded at this time, the A Minor etude (no. 4) was later rewritten in 1916 and incorporated (as no. 6) into the second set of Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39. This etude is discussed with the op. 39 set.

The C Minor and D Minor etudes remained unpublished until after Rachmaninoff's death. They were discovered in Russia in 1947 and published by the Moscow State Publishing House in 1948.⁴ These previously unpublished etudes are now included as part of Rachmaninoff's op. 33. Walker thinks that there is "some justification for believing the first publication is better: heard as a

²Robert Threlfall and Geoffrey Norris, A Catalogue of the Compositions of S. Rachmaninoff (London: Scolar Press, 1982), 105.

³Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, Sergei Rachmaninoff (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 173.

⁴See Publishers' Note to the Authentic Edition of Sergei Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux (London: Boosey and Hawkes, Inc., 1985), 4.

set of six, as originally published, there is a greater cohesion than in the now usually heard set of eight."⁵ In his notes for Howard Shelley's 1983 recording of the etudes, Walker further states that "the six as originally published give the impression of a Schumannesque organic unity, akin to the procedures of Schumann's *Études Symphoniques*: there are melodic-cellular connexions between the six which the C minor and D minor do not share."⁶

Material from the C Minor and D Minor etudes of op. 33 can be heard in other works by the composer. Perhaps this was Rachmaninoff's reason for withdrawing them from this opus. The tranquil second section of the C Minor etude (in the parallel major key) contains material which is subsequently quoted at the close of the Largo of the Fourth Piano Concerto, op. 40.⁷ The D Minor etude opens with a reference to the First Piano Sonata, op. 28 (1907), and gives a foretaste of the song Krisolov, op. 38, no. 4 (1916).⁸

⁵Robert Walker, Rachmaninoff: His Life and Times (Neptune, N. J.: Paganiniana, 1981), 70.

⁶Walker, notes to the recording of Rachmaninoff's Etudes-Tableaux, 4.

⁷The Fourth Concerto was first sketched as early as 1914, completed in its first version in 1926, and finally rewritten as late as 1941-42 (Threlfall/Norris, 106).

⁸Geoffrey Norris, Rakhmaninov (London: J. M. Dent, 1976), 88. Walker states that the D Minor etude is actually based on discarded material from the first movement of the First Piano Sonata. Rachmaninoff deleted fifty measures from the movement at the suggestion of Konstantin Igumnov, the pianist who gave the sonata its public premiere (Walker, notes to the Shelley recording, 3).

During the period from 1911 until 1916, when Rachmaninoff began work on his second set of Etudes-Tableaux, he composed two works important to this study, for they contain musical imagery which also appears later in the etudes of op. 39. The first of these works is The Bells, for Orchestra, Chorus and Soloists, op. 35 (1913), which is based on Konstantin Balmont's Russian translation of the poem by Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849). This text was ideal for Rachmaninoff as it provided him with the opportunity to unite two of his favorite sources of imagery (bells and the Dies irae) with his preoccupation with fate and death. The second work is Vespers (All-Night Vigil), op. 37 (1915), for four-part unaccompanied mixed chorus, which incorporates chants of the Greek and Kiev rites as well as Znamenny chants.⁹

During 1915-16, the specter of death figured prominently in Rachmaninoff's life and influenced the writing of his op. 39 etudes. A sequence of unhappy events began with the sudden demise of his friend Scriabin, who died of blood poisoning on April 14, 1915. Rachmaninoff and Serge Koussevitsky (1874-1951) gave a series of memorial concerts for the benefit of Scriabin's family.¹⁰

⁹For additional details see Threlfall/Norris, 120. The Russian word znamya ("sign" or "symbol"), referring to the original notation of the chant melodies, is the source of the term znamenny, which is used to identify the collective body of Russian chant. Alfred J. Swan, Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folksong (London: John Baker, 1973), 29-38.

¹⁰Bertensson/Leyda, 197. Koussevitsky had purchased the Gutheil music publishing firm in 1914, thereby becoming Rachmaninoff's publisher and copyright holder. In 1924 he went to the United States as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, an appointment he retained for 25 years.

Then, having developed pneumonia after attending Scriabin's funeral, Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915), a former professor of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, died in less than two months, succumbing to a heart attack. Deeply moved by his death, Rachmaninoff sent a letter to the Editor of Russkiye Vedomosti, an action which clearly shows his veneration for his beloved teacher. An excerpt from that letter reads:

Sergei Ivanovich Tanayev is gone--composer, teacher, the most scholarly musician of his time, a man of rare originality, of rare spiritual quality, Moscow's musical leader, maintaining this high position with unwavering authority until the end of his days.¹¹

These personal blows heightened Rachmaninoff's obsession with the fear of death and perhaps contributed to the somber and often severe mood of the op. 39 etudes. Marietta Shaginian (1888-1982) has recalled his dark mood during his visit to her in Nakhicheran during the summer of 1916; she quoted the composer: "It's impossible to live while one knows one must die after all. How can you bear the thought of dying?"¹²

¹¹For a translation of the complete letter see Bertensson/Leyda, 192-93.

¹²Marietta Shaginian, a young poet, began her friendship with Rachmaninoff in 1912 when she sent a fan letter to him signed "Re." This attracted the composer's attention, for "Re" or "D" minor was a frequently used key for his compositions. Their acquaintance lasted until 1917, and their frequent correspondence sheds light on the composer's deeper and more contemplative thoughts. A liberal-minded intellectual, Shaginian became one of Russia's most important authors after the revolution. Her literary knowledge benefited Rachmaninoff in selecting texts for songs. For additional information see Anne Simpson, "Dear Re: A Glimpse Into the Six Songs of Rachmaninoff's Opus 38," College Music Symposium 24 (Spring 1984), 97-106. Shaginian's entire description of Rachmaninoff's visit can be found in Bertensson/Leyda, 198-99.

Because of a severe pain in Rachmaninoff's right temple, his doctor sent him to the Caucasus for several weeks for the mineral waters and baths.¹³ During this time, his father arrived at Ivanovka in order to spend several months with the family. When Rachmaninoff returned to Ivanovka in mid-August of 1916, he found that his father had just died of a heart attack.

These three deaths, coupled with the events of World War I, were soon to be compounded by the greatest upheaval of his life--the 1917 Revolution. By the end of 1916, Russia's internal affairs were in chaos. The country was gripped by strikes and there was growing popular discontent with the Tsar. In his biography of the composer, John McCabe suggests that Rachmaninoff was by no means unsympathetic to the need for great changes in government (in 1905, he had signed a manifesto calling for "basic reforms"), but, at the same time, he became deeply suspicious of the motives of some of the revolutionaries. Rather than becoming involved in an uprising which he felt might replace bad government with worse, Rachmaninoff devoted himself to the composition of the second set of Etudes-Tableaux, which was to be his last and most ambitious set of piano works.¹⁴

¹³Bertensson/Leyda, 199. Nikolai Bazhanov states that the pain was in Rachmaninoff's right wrist. Nikolai Bazhanov, Rachmaninov. Translated from the Russian by Andrew Bromfield (Moscow: Raduga, 1983), 248.

¹⁴John McCabe, Rachmaninov (Sevenoakes: Novello, 1974), 22-23.

The Nine Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39 were completed during 1916-17 and published in 1917:

No. 1	Allegro agitato dated 5/18 October 1916, Moscow	C Minor
No. 2	Lento assai	A Minor
No. 3	Allegro molto dated 14/27 October 1916, Moscow	F-sharp Minor
No. 4	Allegro assai dated 24 September/7 October 1916, Moscow	B Minor
No. 5	Apassionato [sic] dated 17 February/2 March 1917, Moscow	E-flat Minor
No. 6	Allegro dated 8/21 September 1911, Ivanovka revised 27 September/10 October 1916, Moscow	A Minor
No. 7	Lento lugubre [tempo not in MS]	C Minor
No. 8	Allegro moderato	D Minor
No. 9	Allegro moderato, Tempo di Marcia dated 2/15 February 1917 ¹⁵	D Major

Concerning the extent of the rewriting of the Etude-Tableau op. 33, no. 4 (now no. 6 in op. 39), Threlfall and Norris explain: "the Moscow editors are silent: the final version, however, has all the

¹⁵These dates are listed in Norris, 187-88. Confirmation for the beginning dates of composition may be found (as well as the site of composition) in Threlfall/Norris, 124. These authors state that although nos. 2, 7, and 8 are undated on the manuscripts, they are doubtless contemporaneous.

technically advanced features, pianistic, harmonic and rhythmic, which differentiate op. 39 from any earlier solo piano pieces by SR."¹⁶

Critical reaction to these pieces was very favorable. On November 29, 1916, Rachmaninoff performed several of the etudes in Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg), including the E-flat Minor (no. 5).¹⁷

The critic of Russkaya Muzykalnaya Gazeta enthusiastically wrote:

In the Etudes, opus 39, Rachmaninoff appears in a new light. The soft lyricist begins to employ a more severe, concentrated, and deepened mode of expression. We noticed a dramatic mood, in the E-flat minor étude, and even a demoniac one in F-sharp minor, the best of the group! Some significant change has taken place in this interesting creative talent, and we shall doubtless witness new vistas that are thus opening to the composer of Francesca and The Miserly Knight.¹⁸

Shortly thereafter, eight of the etudes were performed by the composer in Moscow, again including the E-flat Minor (no. 5). On December 5, 1916, Yuli Engle reviewed the performance in Ruskiye Vedomosti:

¹⁶Threlfall/Norris, 125.

¹⁷Threlfall/Norris point out the discrepancy between this performance (November 29, 1916) and the date of composition on the manuscript (17 February/2 March 1917), 124.

¹⁸This translation of Tyuneyev's review (December 11, 1916) appears in Bertensson/Leyda, 201.

These are lovely pieces, independent of their performer even when he is Rachmaninoff himself (though always more captivating in his performance, I'm sure). Seven of the eight are in a minor key.... A new feeling hangs suspended over the entire opus. In one the shadows are faint (2, A minor), in another a break can be seen through heavy, heavy clouds (5, E-flat minor), but nowhere do we find happiness, calm ease.... Yet throughout them all, life pulses, saying in sound what has to be said, and saying it beautifully.... The most attractive of the group is probably that in B minor--a wonderful piece, somewhat "humoresque," sharply rhythmic.¹⁹

The first complete performance of opus 39 was given by Rachmaninoff on February 21, 1917 in Petrograd.²⁰

In March of 1917, personal troubles and the uneasy political situation in Russia caused the Tsar to abdicate in favor of his brother, the Grand Duke Michael. The following day, the Grand Duke himself abdicated, ending the 300-year reign of the Romanoff dynasty. On March 26, Rachmaninoff gave a charity recital in Moscow to help the sick and wounded of the army. He contributed his fee to the cause, writing the following note: "Free artist S. Rakhmaninov donates to the needs of the free army the fee for his first concert in his free country."²¹

¹⁹This excerpt from Engle's review is taken from Bertensson/Leyda, 201-2. In listing Rachmaninoff's performance of these eight etudes, Threlfall and Norris suggest that the omitted etude was no. 9 in D Major. This, however, is at odds with Engle's statement that "seven of the eight are in a minor key."

²⁰Threlfall/Norris, 124.

²¹Norris, 54. Norris points out that this doesn't necessarily indicate Rachmaninoff's acceptance of the new regime. He also states that although the original letter has never been found, the text was published in Russkiye Vedomosti.

Unable to work in this restless atmosphere, Rachmaninoff realized that the only course for him was to leave Russia. At this time he received an invitation to play in Stockholm and was able to obtain visas for his family to travel with him. They left Russia on December 23, 1917, never to return.

Except for a few musical drafts for piano, the Nine Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39 were the last pieces written by Rachmaninoff before his exile from his homeland.²² Fifteen years would separate these etudes from his final work for solo piano, the Variations on a Theme of Corelli, op. 42.

As the Russian critic observed, the etudes of op. 39 revealed significant changes that had taken place in Rachmaninoff's style. In these works the composer seems to be less concerned with melody than with experiments in texture, rhythm, and sonority--all in the service of creating a particular mood or sentiment. Peter Donohoe states: "From the Thirteen Preludes Op. 32 onwards one notices a tendency to suppress overtly romantic melodies, to increase the floridness of accompanying passage-work, and to develop a

²²In November 1917, Rachmaninoff composed three short pieces for piano. The dark first work in D Minor (untitled) was published posthumously in 1973 as "Prelude." The second work (B-flat Major) was titled "Oriental Sketch" when it was published in 1938. Jascha Heifetz later transcribed this piece for violin and piano (1945, published in 1947). The third work (A-flat Major) was titled "Fragments" and was published by Theodore Presser in The Etude (1919). Threlfall/Norris, 153-54.

progressively more brittle, abrasive and unpredicable [sic] harmonic language."²³

In op. 39 one can still occasionally find the luscious romanticism of his earlier style (E-flat Minor, no. 5), but Rachmaninoff's harmonic formations are now more complex and sophisticated with increased chromaticism and technical brilliance. Overall, these etudes rival the works of Scriabin and Prokofiev in their "modernism." The tableaux for these miniature tone-poems are examined in chapters two and three through an investigation of the musical imagery which influenced Rachmaninoff in composing his Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39.

²³Peter Donohoe, "Serge Rachmaninoff," notes to the Authentic Edition of the complete Etudes-Tableaux (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1985) 2.

CHAPTER 2

MUSICAL IMAGERY: DIES IRAE

Dies irae, the sequence from the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead, has attracted numerous composers of secular music who have utilized the plainsong's ability to arouse listeners with feelings of terror and dread. Death, the fear of death, the supernatural, and the nocturnal were popular themes in nineteenth century romanticism, and composers sought to tap the rich symbolism which became associated with the Dies irae following Hector Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique (1830).¹

Attributed to Thomas of Celano (d. circa 1250), the text of the Dies irae graphically portrays the Day of Judgment. Thought to have grown out of a rhymed trope to the responsory Libera me, the poem began to be included in the Requiem Mass in Italy from the fourteenth century. The verse 'Dies illa, dies irae' begins with the same melodic phrase as the sequence.² The familiar plainsong

¹Malcolm Boyd points out that Berlioz must claim priority in the secular use of the Dies irae and adds that the composer quotes "a good deal more of the plainsong in the finale of the 'Symphonie fantastique' than has generally been recognized...." Malcolm Boyd, " 'Dies Irae': Some Recent Manifestations," Music and Letters, 49 (1968), 347.

²John Caldwell, "Dies irae," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), V, 466. According to Susan Woodard the authorship of the Dies irae text has long been disputed, reflecting the traditional rivalry between Franciscan and Dominican Orders. Susan Woodard, The Dies Irae as Used by Sergei Rachmaninoff: Some Sources, Antecedents, and Applications, (D.M.A. document, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1984), 4.

melody is principally known to us through secular quotation of only the first two phrases (or less) of the Dies irae:



Example 1. Sequence, Dies irae. First two phrases.

In many instances, only the first four notes of the chant are sufficient to constitute quotation.³

Biographers of Rachmaninoff often allude to the composer's preoccupation with death. His own words attest to this (see Chapter 1, p. 9), and this explains in part his fascination with the Dies irae. In her document on Rachmaninoff's use of the Dies irae, Woodard further explains that beyond supporting a personal concern for the mysteries of death, "the Dies irae served Rachmaninoff's literary programs, his musical designs, his sardonic wit, and his remarkable portrayals of triumph and redemption."⁴

Although there is a profusion of Dies irae quotations in Rachmaninoff's compositions, many of them may have been unconscious references. In order to understand Rachmaninoff's use

³Boyd, Music and Letters, 347; Woodard, 95.

⁴Woodard, 1.

of the medieval chant, it is important to establish his exposure to it through his conducting, performing and transcribing the works of others. It is very likely that these activities influenced his compositional process.

Woodard discusses three prototypical works which contain considerable use of the Dies irae motive:

Hector Berlioz' Symphonie fantastique (1830)

Franz Liszt's Totentanz (1849)

Modeste Musorgsky's Night on Bald Mountain (1867).⁵

One of Rachmaninoff's earliest encounters with the Dies irae occurred in 1886, when he arranged Tchaikovsky's Manfred for piano duet as a surprise for his teacher Nikolai Zverev (1832 or 1833-

⁵Woodard, 30-42. Rachmaninoff conducted Berlioz' Symphonie fantastique for the 1912 season debut of the Moscow Philharmonic (Woodard, 32). He had heard the Berlioz work as early as 1910 in a performance with Gustav Mahler and the New York Philharmonic (Bertensson/Leyda, 164). Liszt's Totentanz, a set of thirty continuous variations (based on the Dies irae) for piano and orchestra, was performed with Rachmaninoff as soloist in the United States in 1939 (Woodard, 39). He conducted the work with his teacher and cousin, Alexander Siloti (1863-1945), as soloist in 1902 and 1904 (Robert Palmieri, Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninoff. A Guide to Research [New York: Garland Publishing, 1985], 87). Rachmaninoff frequently included Musorgsky's Night on Bald Mountain on programs he conducted beginning as early as 1905 (Bertensson/Leyda, 110). Originally entitled St. John's Night of the Bare Mountain, the work was revised by Rimsky-Korsakov, who orchestrated the present version of the work (Night on Bald Mountain) following Musorgsky's death (Woodard, 39). I have not been able to trace a literal statement of the familiar Dies irae motive in this work, although there are four-note rhythmic motives which suggest it. Gerald Abraham proposes that the witches' dance (introduced at measure 79) was in all probability unconsciously derived from the second phrase of the chant (Gerald Abraham, On Russian Music [New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970], 84-85; cited in Woodard, 40).

1893).⁶ Also, at least two additional compositions employing the Dies irae were in Rachmaninoff's repertoire:

Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 3 in G Major, op. 55 (1884)

Saint-Saëns's Danse macabre, op. 40 (1874).⁷

Through his conducting and piano performance, it is clear that Rachmaninoff was very familiar with the Dies irae motive and its potential. Analysts and commentators have become increasingly aware of his use of the plainchant in his compositions. Although Rachmaninoff often employed the entire first phrase of the chant, he was particularly attracted to its initial four-note fragment. Richard Freed states that the Dies irae "was to figure prominently in virtually all the composer's major works, from the First Symphony of 1895 to the Symphonic Dances of 1940."⁸ In their catalogue of Rachmaninoff's compositions, Threlfall/Norris comment that with his complete output before us, we can view his oeuvre "threaded through by the old chant Dies irae."⁹

⁶Zverev gave Rachmaninoff the opportunity to play the work with Matvei Pressman for Tchaikovsky in c. December 1886 (Bertensson/Leyda, 14). Published in 1886, this programmatic symphony contains a reference to the Dies irae in the finale. The unpublished Rachmaninoff transcription is lost (Palmieri, 22).

⁷Palmieri, 80, 90. Rachmaninoff played an arrangement of Danse macabre for two pianos with Aleksandr Borisovich Gol'denveizer in 1900. No date is listed for his performance of the Tchaikovsky.

⁸Richard Freed, notes to the recording of Rachmaninoff's Prince Rostislav (Vox Prima MWCD 7126).

⁹Threlfall/Norris, 16.

Prior to composing the Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39, Rachmaninoff had used the Dies irae in several important works including:

Symphony No. 1 in D Minor, op. 13 (1895)

Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, op. 27 (1906-07)

Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, op. 28 (1907)

The Isle of the Dead, op. 29 (1909)

The Bells, op. 35 (1913).¹⁰

Through many of these earlier compositions, Rachmaninoff gradually absorbed the Dies irae motive (four-note fragment) into his style. In addition to obvious references to the chant, there are many variants and derivatives that show the composer's skill at transformation. His motivic usage often includes sequential treatment.

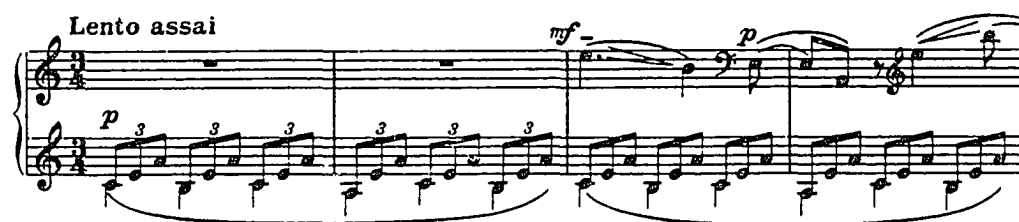
In her investigation of Rachmaninoff's use of the Dies irae, Woodard examined his quotational technique in works of "known intention" in order to establish criteria against which to judge more abstract examples. She concluded that the following criteria facilitate an understanding of Rachmaninoff's ability to supply his music with extra-musical implications:

1. four notes from the chant may constitute quotation

¹⁰Op. 13: Threllfall/Norris, 59. Op. 27: Patrick Piggott, Rachmaninov Orchestral Music (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1974), 31; also David Rubin, "Transformation of the Dies irae in Rachmaninov's Second Symphony," The Musical Review 23 (1962), 132-36. Op. 28: Woodard, 44-48. Op. 29: Woodard 49-52; also Piggott, 16-20. Op. 35: Woodard 53-57.

2. acceptable quotation may include intervallic alteration
3. suspected quotation may be verified retroactively, upon observation of substantial evidence.¹¹

The only etude from op. 39 discussed in Woodard's investigation is no. 2 in A minor.¹² This etude has the most clearly observable references to the Dies irae. The quarter notes in the left hand outline the opening four-note motive in the key of A minor:



Example 2. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, no. 2, mm.1-4.

There is a strong resemblance between this etude and the Isle of the Dead. Both works are in the same key and employ an undulating

¹¹Woodard, 95. Woodard states that by delaying the confirmation of his use of the chant's motive within a composition, Rachmaninoff illustrates his fondness for implication. Also, she claims that suspected quotation of the Dies irae can be verified ("retroactively") by a clear statement of the chant motive, usually found near the end of the composition. Woodard, 52, 70.

¹²Woodard, 73-74. The musical example is labeled incorrectly as Op. 32, No. 4.

ostinato, which suggests water; the descending figures above the ostinatos have an intervallic similarity.¹³

Walker believes that the entire opus can be perceived as a hidden set of variations on the Dies irae: "parts of the plainchant [are] quoted directly in all nine studies, particularly obviously in the first five."¹⁴ Using the criteria established by Woodard, I have examined the op. 39 etudes and have confirmed the presence of the Dies irae in all nine studies. Although Walker believes that the plainchant is stated more obviously in the first five studies, I have found that the Dies irae motive appears with greater frequency in the last four etudes than in etudes nos. 1, 4 or 5.

The influence of the plainchant pervades the entire opus but the composer uses great discretion in verifiable aural recognition of the Dies irae. Having absorbed this chant motive into his compositional style, Rachmaninoff may even have been unconscious of many of these quotations.

The following examination of the op. 39 etudes is presented to illustrate the presence of the Dies irae in these studies and to substantiate the possibility of the opus being at least an "unconscious" set of variations on the plainchant.

¹³Woodard, 74; Threlfall/Norris, 125. The water association is confirmed by Rachmaninoff in his letter to Respighi (see Introduction, p. 3, n. 5).

¹⁴See Introduction, 4.

No. 1 in C Minor:

In this turbulent and stormy etude, the chant motive can be found in the bass (mm. 41-42) before the return of the etude's opening material:

[*Allegro agitato*]



Example 3. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in C Minor, op. 39, no. 1, mm. 41-42.

Pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy confirms the quotation of the *Dies irae* in m. 41.¹⁵ Structurally, these quotations set up the return of the etude's wildly propulsive opening figurations and forewarn the listener of the cataclysmic chordal climax to come. This is the only appearance of the *Dies irae* in this study, as if the composer were implying his theme for a set of hidden variations to follow in the remaining etudes.

¹⁵Vladimir Ashkenazy, notes to his recording of Rachmaninoff's "Concerto No. 2, Op. 18" and "Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39, Nos. 1, 2, 5" (London CS6390), [n.d.]. Ashkenazy also points out the *Dies irae* motive in the other two etudes on this recording. In addition to his performance of these three etudes, he has made two recordings of the complete opus: London CS6822, 1973, and London 417 671-2, 1985-86.

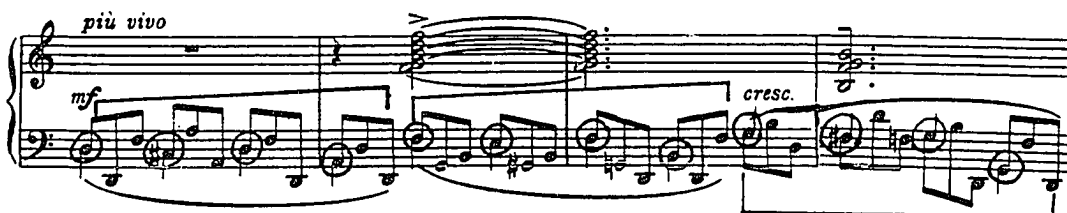
No. 2 in A Minor:

Throughout this etude, the Dies irae motive is interwoven in the triplet accompaniment. This four-note motive is not always clearly delineated with double-stemmed notes as in the opening (see Example 2, p. 21), and there are many examples of intervallic alteration:



Example 4. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, no. 2, mm. 64-67.

Modified sequential treatment of the altered motive occurs in the next example, and this four-measure unit (mm. 76-79) is then extended sequentially in the measures 80-83:



Example 5. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, no. 2, mm. 76-79.

The falling two-note motive is employed by Rachmaninoff to suggest the first three notes of the plainchant; all four notes of the Dies irae motive appear in the top voice (mm. 61-62):

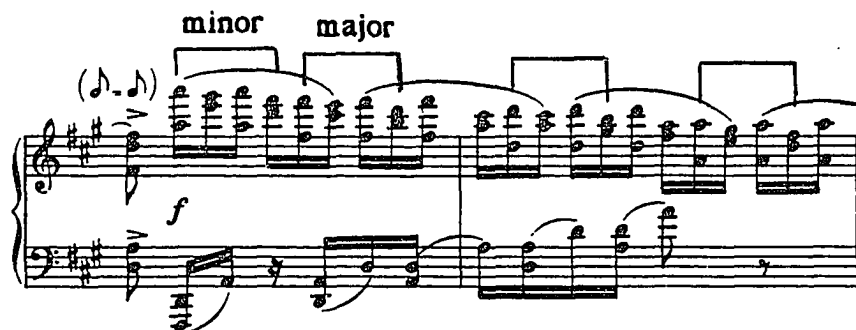


Example 6. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, no. 2, mm. 61-63.

Also, hidden in the texture of Example 6, the four-note motive is stated in the first two beats of measures 61 and 63 (E, D#, E, C#).

No. 3 in F-sharp Minor:

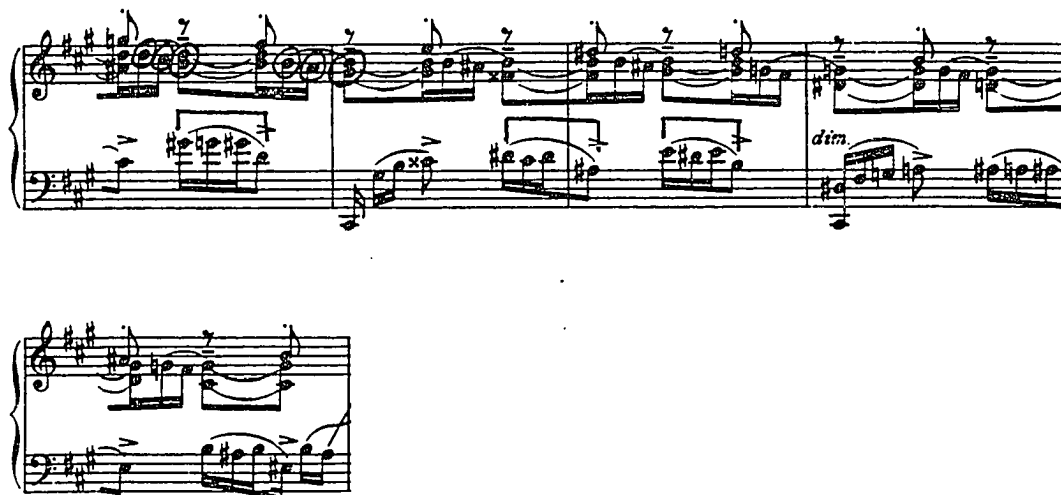
The Dies irae motive occurs throughout this etude and helps contribute to the "devilish" quality noted by several of the work's commentators. The minor intervals of the four-note motive are occasionally transformed to major as in the second statement of this excerpt:



Example 7. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in F-sharp Minor, op. 39, no. 3, mm. 5-6.

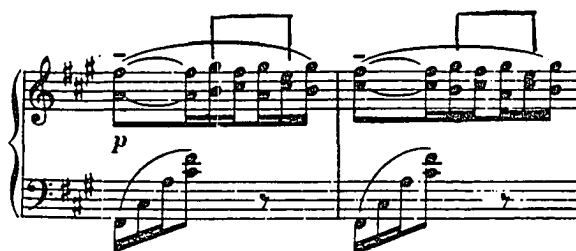
In a transitional passage, the plainchant can be viewed at two different levels. In the bass, there are variants of the four-note motive which contain an alteration of the final interval, and in the

treble, there are "compact versions" of the four notes, where the third and fourth notes are heard simultaneously:



Example 8. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in F-sharp Minor,
op. 39, no. 3, mm. 122-26.

Even the opening melodic material can be considered as being derivative of the Dies irae. This can be seen most clearly in one of its own variants, which is identical with the "major" variant of the Dies irae:



Example 9. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in F-sharp Minor,
op. 39, no. 3, mm. 132-33.

With so many transformations of the four-note motive, positive identification becomes increasingly difficult.

No. 4 in B Minor:

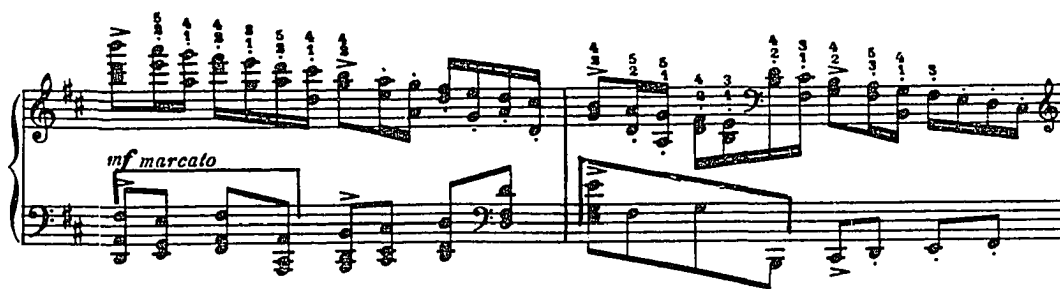
The plainchant does not dominate the texture of this toccata-like etude, but a reference to the motive can be found before the final cadence of the study's first section. Here there is a delay of the motive's fourth note:

[Allegro assai]



Example 10. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in B Minor, op. 39, no. 4, mm. 11-12.

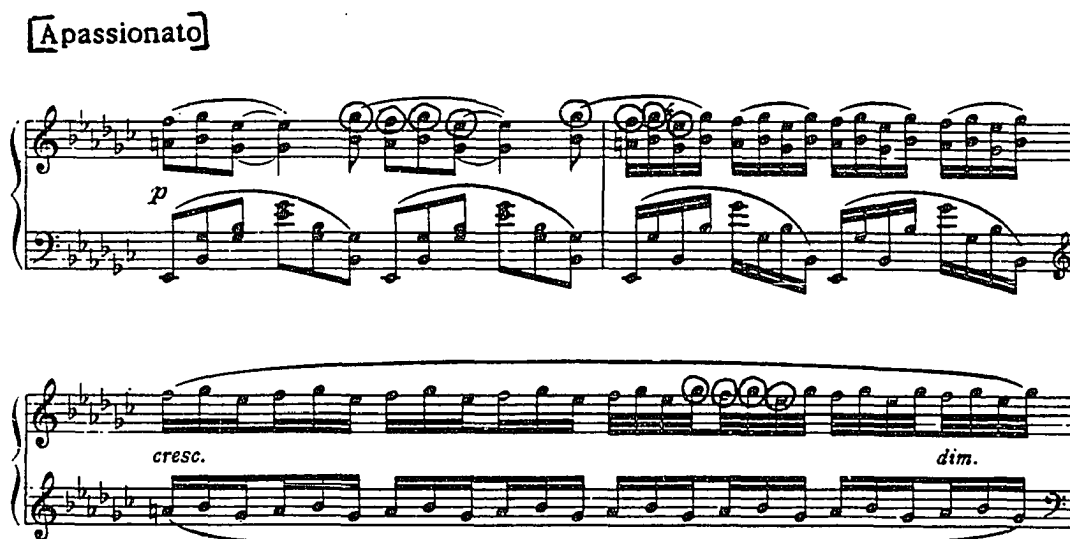
Other possible suggestions can be found hidden in this study, including this one enmeshed in bell-like sonorities:



Example 11. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in B Minor, op. 39, no. 4, mm. 54-55.

No. 5 in E-flat Minor:

Considered perhaps the finest of all the Etudes-Tableaux,¹⁶ this study returns to Rachmaninoff's earlier style of composition: there are long melodic lines and a distinctly passionate romanticism. After a gigantic climax wherein the ardent opening melody returns, there follows a resigned and peaceful closing section in the major key. The transition section leading to this close contains a repetition of the Dies irae motive, which is somewhat disguised by its metric placement:



Example 12. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in E-flat Minor,
op. 39, no. 5, mm. 70-72.

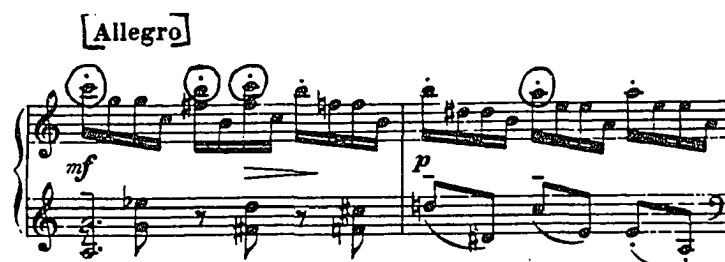
There are faint suggestions of the four-note motive in the soft closing measures of this etude. In the opinion of Vladimir

¹⁶Robert Threlfall, Sergei Rachmaninoff: His Life and Music (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1973), 43.

Ashkenazy, these references do not bring tragedy into the music but rather a sense of fate.¹⁷

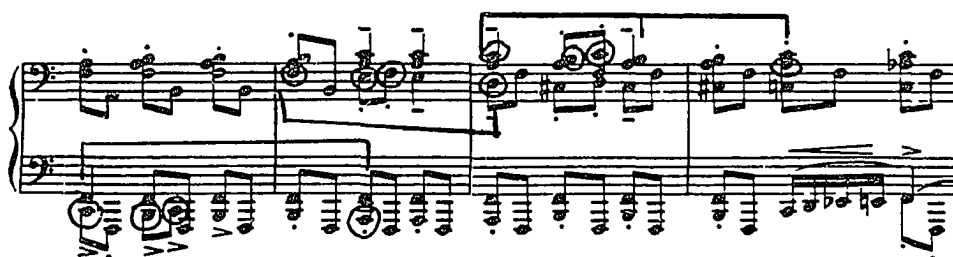
No. 6 in A Minor:

Extensive but subtle use of the *Dies irae* is present in this savage etude which, according to Rachmaninoff, was inspired by the tale of "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf" (see Introduction, p. 3, n. 5). Quite often there is a delay of the motive's fourth note:



Example 13. Rachmaninoff, *Etude-Tableau in A Minor*, op. 39, no. 6, mm. 9-10.

This variant is used imitatively in the following example where it appears three times in rising voices:



Example 14. Rachmaninoff, *Etude-Tableau in A Minor*, op. 39, no. 6, mm. 39-42.

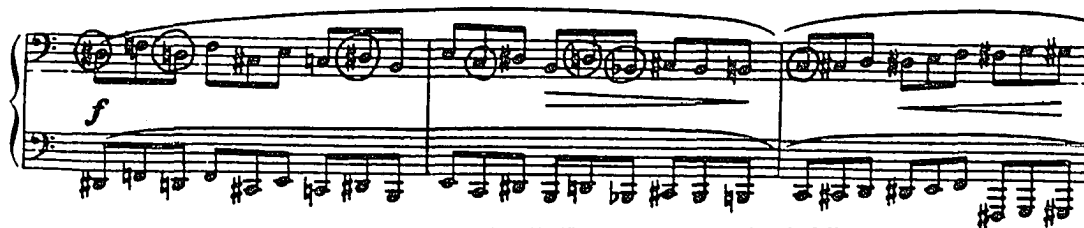
¹⁷Ashkenazy suggests this in notes to his recording (London CS6390), also pointing out that this is true of the finale of the Third Symphony, where the *Dies irae* appears in "one of the most joyful pages of Rachmaninoff."

In the manic gallop of the presto section, there are clearer quotations of the plainchant:



Example 15. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, no. 6, mm. 61-63.

The entire first phrase of the Dies irae can be extracted in the highly chromatic phrase at the close of this etude:



Example 16. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in A Minor, op. 39, no. 6, mm. 115-117.¹⁸

No. 7 in C Minor:

In this lugubrious etude, which illustrates the influence of Russian chant on Rachmaninoff's writing, the Dies irae is often obscure, creating the impressionistic, nightmarish quality of this funeral scene.¹⁹

¹⁸When quoting the first phrase of the Dies irae, Rachmaninoff sometimes omits the final note, which is a repetition of the seventh note (see Example 1, p. 17). This occurs in his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, op. 43 (Variation 10, mm. 368-72).

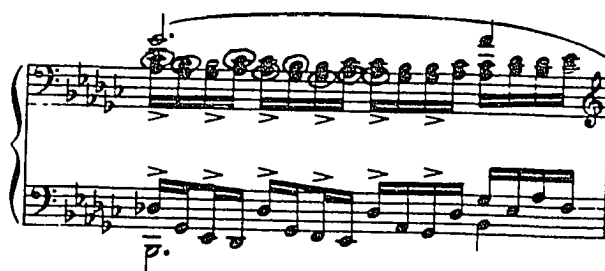
¹⁹In his letter to Respighi (January 2, 1930), Rachmaninoff gave an extended program for this etude, which he claims is a funeral march: "Let me dwell on this a moment longer. I am sure you will not mock a composer's caprices. The initial theme is a

The Dies irae motive with an altered fourth note is implied throughout the opening march:



Example 17. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in C Minor, op. 39, no. 7, m. 1.

All eight notes of the plainchant's first phrase are suggested in the successive thirds of the "drizzling" E-flat minor section (see p. 30, n. 19):



Example 18. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in C Minor, op. 39, no. 7, m. 43.

march. The other theme represents the singing of a choir. Commencing with the movement in 16ths in C minor and a little further in E-flat minor a fine rain is suggested, incessant and hopeless. The movement develops culminating in C minor-- the chimes of a church. The Finale returns to the first theme, a march." Cited in Bertensson/Leyda, 263.

In the mighty pealing of bells at the climax of this etude, the aura cast by the Dies irae can still be felt (the second note of the chant's first phrase is missing):



Example 19. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in C Minor, op. 39, no. 7, mm. 89-91.

No. 8 in D Minor:

This barcarolle-like study begins with a variation on the opening theme from the etude no. 3. It is also identical with the "major" variant of the plainchant (see Example 9, p. 26):



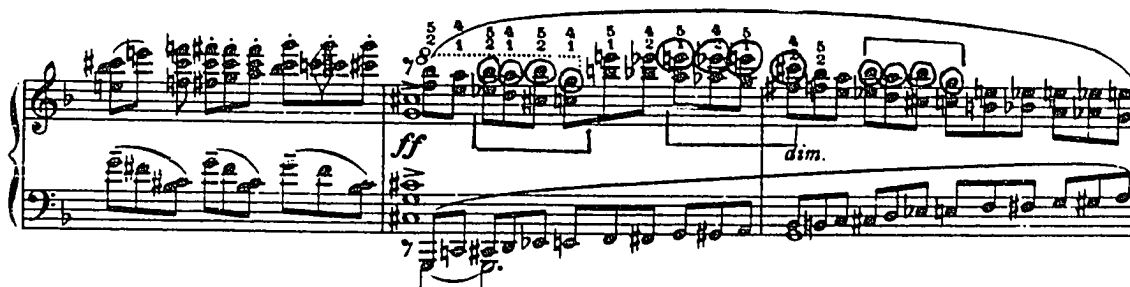
Example 20. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in D Minor, op. 39, no. 8, mm. 1-2.

Sequential treatment of the four-note motive can be observed throughout the opulent harmonies of this next passage, which is also permeated by briefer suggestions of the plainsong:



Example 21. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in D Minor, op. 39, no. 8, mm. 43-48.

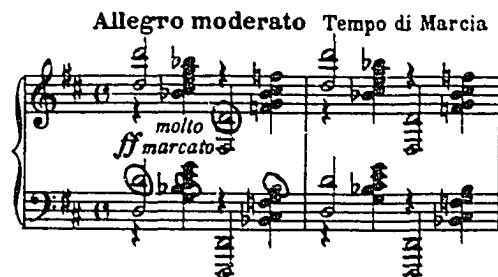
The motive heard in m. 48 is then repeated three times (mm. 49-51). In the agitated section that follows, the Dies irae's ominous association can be felt:



Example 22. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in D Minor, op. 39, no. 8, mm. 55-57.

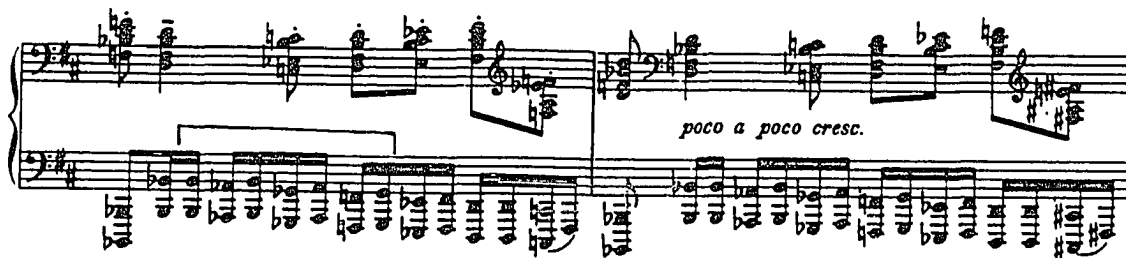
No. 9 in D Major:

In the opening of this march-like etude, the Dies irae motive is exclaimed by powerful alarm bells:²⁰



Example 23. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in D Major, op. 39, no. 9, mm. 1-2.

In the only major-key study of op. 39, a "major" variant of the motive's first phrase (seven notes) can be found. The plainchant seems to be shedding the gloom of the Dorian for the brightness of Ionian:



Example 24. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in D Major, op. 39, no. 9, mm. 73-74.

²⁰Aranovskii refers to the "alarm" bells in this etude, 38. Bazhanov states that "Rachmaninoff found within himself the strength to conclude [his somber cycle of piano works] in the stirring and joyful key of D Major." Bazhanov describes Rachmaninoff's performance of this etude: "The D-Major study rang out like an alarm-bell. The chandeliers seemed to flare up, illuminating the hall with blinding light. People began to rise from their seats and at the final commanding and triumphant notes they rushed in a flood towards the stage" (Bazhanov, 251).

The Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39 are indeed threaded through by Rachmaninoff's idée fixe, the Dies irae. A final observation about Rachmaninoff's use of this plainchant is pertinent to this study. In 1931, Joseph Yasser enthusiastically reviewed Rachmaninoff's first public performance of his new work for solo piano, the Variations on a Theme of Corelli, op. 42, but Yasser pointed out the composer's error in crediting Corelli with the theme.²¹ In conversation with Yasser on the day after this article appeared, Rachmaninoff expressed strong interest in the Dies irae. Yasser recollects:

But the "Corelli problem" was, for Rachmaninoff, only of secondary importance in our conversation....

He began to tell me that he was then very much interested in the familiar mediaeval chant, Dies Irae, usually known to musicians (including himself) only by its first lines, used so often in various musical works as a "Death theme." However, he wished to obtain the whole music of this funeral chant, if it existed (though he wasn't sure of this); he would be extremely grateful for my help in this matter, for he had not time for the necessary research.

He also asked about the significance of the original Latin text of this chant, and asked some questions as to its history--particularly as to fixing an approximate period for its origin--without offering a word of explanation for his keen interest in this....²²

²¹Yasser, in Novoye Russkoye Slovo (New York), November 10, 1931. See Bertensson/Leyda, 278. This theme is actually the famous folia. Yasser (1893-), organist and musicologist, was the author of the treatise, "A Theory of Evolving Tonality" (New York, 1932), and a friend of Rachmaninoff.

²²Pamyati Rakhmaninova, a collection edited by M. V. Dobuzhinsky (New York, 1946). Cited in Bertensson/Leyda, 278.

Encouraged by his conversation with Yasser, Rachmaninoff began his next opus, Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, op. 43, which is a "conscious" set of variations on the Dies irae as well as on the Paganini theme. In 1937, the composer supplied the choreographer Michael Fokine with a program for this work:

Consider the Paganini legend--about the sale of his soul to the evil spirit in exchange for perfection in art, and for a woman. All variations on the Dies Irae would be for the evil spirit. The whole middle from the 11th variation to the 18th--these are the love episodes. Paganini himself makes his first appearance at the "Theme" and, defeated, appears for the last time at the 23rd variation--the first 12 bars--after which, to the end, is the triumph of his conquerors....²³

Perhaps the recurrent virtuoso element in the op. 39 Etudes-Tableaux can be attributed to Rachmaninoff's association of the Dies irae with the Paganini legend.

²³The complete letter to Fokine is cited in Bertensson/Leyda, 333. Fokine's ballet, "Paganini: Fantastic Ballet in Three Scenes," was performed in 1939 at Covent Garden (Threlfall/Norris, 139).

CHAPTER 3

MUSICAL IMAGERY: RUSSIAN CHANT AND CHURCH BELLS

In addition to the Dies irae of the Roman Catholic church, the chants of the Russian Orthodox church had an important influence on Rachmaninoff's melodic style. As a young boy, he accompanied his maternal grandmother, Madame Boutakova, to services where the choral singing and the sound of church bells greatly impressed him. These sources of musical imagery would have an important influence on Rachmaninoff in the writing of his Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39.

By 1873, Rachmaninoff's father had squandered most of the family fortune, including four of their five estates. In 1882, the Oneg estate near Novgorod also had to be auctioned, causing the family to move to an unattractive, crowded flat in St. Petersburg. The incompatibility between his parents increased, which resulted in Vasili Rachmaninoff's abandoning his family.

During these difficult years, Sergei's greatest pleasure was the annual winter visit from his maternal grandmother.¹ After returning from visits to the St. Petersburg churches with her,

¹Bertensson/Leyda, 4-5.

Rachmaninoff would sit at the piano and play the chants they had just heard; his grandmother always rewarded him with a coin for his performance.²

Riesemann quotes Rachmaninoff's recollection of the St. Petersburg years:

My grandmother was very religious and attended regularly the different churches of the city. She always took me--her favorite--with her. We spent hours standing in the beautiful St. Petersburg churches: St. Issac's Cathedral, the Kasan Cathedral, and other old places of worship in all quarters of the town. I took less interest in God and religious worship than in the singing, which was of unrivalled beauty, especially in the cathedrals, where one frequently heard the best choirs of St. Petersburg. I usually took pains to find room underneath the gallery and never missed a single note. Thanks to my good memory, I also remembered most of what I heard. This I turned into capital--literally--by sitting down at the piano when I came home, and playing all I had heard. For this performance my grandmother never failed to reward me with twenty-five kopeks, and, naturally, I was not loath to exert my memory for such a consideration, as twenty-five kopeks meant a large sum to an urchin of ten or eleven.³

²Bertensson/Leyda, 4-5.

³Riesemann, 33-34. There is much controversy concerning Riesemann's book, Rachmaninoff's Recollections. Reviewing the work shortly after its publication, Gerald Abraham dismissed the book for four reasons: careless proof-reading, poor translation for which the translator was not always to blame (translated from the German manuscript by Dolly Rutherford), too many inaccuracies, and chaotic transliteration of Russian names. Abraham explicitly states that "from a documentary point of view it is very unsatisfactory" (Gerald Abraham, "Review of Books," Music and Letters, 15 [July 1934], 273-74). Alfred and Katherine Swan discuss Riesemann's book in their 1944 article, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences." While disputing some of Riesemann's statements, they believe that the book is indispensable for the Russian period of Rachmaninoff's life (Alfred Swan and Katherine Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences," Musical Quarterly 30 [January 1944], 10). In their biography of the composer, Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda describe Rachmaninoff's reaction after receiving the proofs of Riesemann's biography: "The first shock was to see the title: Rachmaninoff's Recollections. Rachmaninoff's indignation at this unwarranted liberty mounted to anger when he found that the proofs contained long passages supposedly said by him about himself. Especially infuriating was a chapter in which Rachmaninoff praised himself and his work. Though he found himself accurately quoted on many episodes of his youth and musical career, he could not tolerate the several embroidered

During Sergei's second vacation from the St. Petersburg Conservatory, his grandmother bought a small farm at Borisovo, near Novgorod, where the family spent happy times very similar to the life they had enjoyed at Oneg. In addition to fostering that deep love of nature which became an important element in his work, the summers in Borisovo provided an opportunity for Sergei and his grandmother to visit nearby convents and churches in order to hear the chimes and choirs.⁴

Riesemann describes Borisovo as embedded in endless meadows, fields, and woods, by the Volchov River which flows into Lake Ilmen:

Vesper bells from neighboring Novgorod drifted over the peaceful countryside. These bells . . . they were lovelier than all else. The boy would spend hours in the boat, listening to their strange, impelling, utterly unearthly voices. Did he dream then that he would, one day, immortalize the peal of Russian church bells in his music?⁵

and invented quotations in which he was made to judge and explain his compositions" (Bertensson/Leyda, 299). After Riesemann suffered a severe heart attack, Rachmaninoff financed major revisions in the work that he deemed necessary, including most of the offending chapter of self-praise, and even furnished "an ambiguously phrased letter that Riesemann could print in the book as an 'endorsement'" (Bertensson/Leyda, 300). Rachmaninoff's efforts to have the title changed were unsuccessful.

⁴Bertensson/Leyda, 6.

⁵Riesemann, 37. The church bells in the St. Sophia Cathedral of Novgorod were incorporated by Rachmaninoff in his Fantasia for two pianos, op. 5 (his first two-piano suite).

In his unpublished memoirs, the composer states:

All my life I have taken pleasure in the differing moods and music of gladly chiming and mournfully tolling bells. This love for bells is inherent in every Russian. One of my fondest childhood recollections is associated with the four notes of the great bells in the St. Sophia Cathedral of Novgorod, which I often heard when my grandmother took me to town on church festival days. The bellringers were artists. The four notes were a theme that recurred again and again, four silvery weeping notes, veiled in an everchanging accompaniment woven around them. I always associated the idea of tears with them. Many years later I composed a Suite for two pianos, in four movements, each developing a poetic motto. For the third movement, prefaced by Tiutchev's poem, "Tears," I knew at once the ideal theme--and the cathedral bells of Novgorod sang again. In my opera, The Miserly Knight, I used the same theme to express the tearful entreaties of the unfortunate widow who pleaded with the baron to spare her child.⁶

It is interesting to speculate that Rachmaninoff's attraction to the Dies irae is linked with his interest in these bells. The four notes described in the above quotation correspond to the pitches B-flat, A, G, E-flat and it is certainly possible that the pitch combination B-flat, A, B-flat, G (Dies irae motive) occurred, "veiled in the everchanging accompaniment."

The influence of Russian chant and church bells continued throughout Rachmaninoff's life and became manifest in many of his compositions. Through the following examination of his use of Russian chant and bell sonorities in some of his main works, we can

⁶Quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 184. According to Bertensson/Leyda, these unpublished fragments are the only memoirs by Rachmaninoff. Originally in Russian and translated into English under the composer's supervision, they were prepared in 1931 for an American journalist whose planned biography was not realized (Bertensson/Leyda, 387). Rachmaninoff also told Sophia Satina, his cousin and sister-in-law, that the "Tears" movement was inspired by the bells tolling during a funeral at the Novgorod Monastery (Bertensson/Leyda, 58; Threlfall/Norris, 45).

better understand the influence of these sources of musical imagery on the etudes of opus 39.

Fantasia for two pianos (First Suite), op. 5 (1893):

In addition to the third movement ("Tears") which is mentioned on p. 40, this work needs to be noted because of its fourth movement in which the chant "Christ is risen" is introduced as a counter-theme to the insistent Easter bell motive.⁷

When Rachmaninoff played the work with Felix Blumenfeld for Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg in 1893, the latter told him: "All is fine, except that at the end, when the chant of 'Christ is risen' is heard, it would be better to state it first alone, and only the second time with the bells."⁸

First Symphony in D Minor, op. 13 (1895)

The themes of this symphony (see footnote 10 for a possible exception) are based on traditional chants of the Russian Orthodox church taken from the Octoechos.⁹ In his discussion of this

⁷Threlfall/Norris, 45.

⁸Alfred and Katherine Swan, "Rachmaninoff: Personal Reminiscences," 177; quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 61. According to Rachmaninoff, he responded: "And Why? In reality it always comes together with the bells." Although he did not make the change suggested by Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff states that he later realized how just the criticism had been (Bertensson/Leyda, 61).

⁹Bertensson/Leyda, 67. Riesemann confirms the source of the chants as the Octoechos, 98. Alfred Swan states that the Octoechos contains the longer canticles as well as some shorter heirmoi "listed in the form of eight (octo) domains that underline the entire body of the Znamenny chant, each domain consisting of a set of characteristic sound

symphony, Patrick Piggott explains that Rachmaninoff took small melodic cells from the Octoechos and "[welded] them into themes suitable for symphonic development. The same few motifs are used in all four movements of the symphony, and they give it a unity which is certainly a virtue, though the listener is inclined to tire of them before the end is reached."¹⁰

Later in this chapter, I will show a similarity between themes of this symphony and the Dies irae as used by Rachmaninoff in the etudes of op. 39.

Concerto No. 2 in C Minor for piano and orchestra, op. 18 (1901)

Piggott draws a connection between the finale of the Second Concerto and an earlier work written for the Russian church. In 1893 Rachmaninoff composed a Sacred Concerto (Motet) for four-part unaccompanied mixed chorus. The first section of the work is said to be largely based on a motive that is identical to the opening theme of the piano concerto's finale.¹¹

patterns by which the echoe (Octo-echos) are recognized" (Alfred Swan, Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folksong [London: John Baker Ltd., 1973], 34). Swan states that although the term Octoechos is Byzantine, the musical nature of the canticles is purely Russian.

¹⁰Piggott, 24-25. Piggott also states that the second subject of the symphony's first movement is not derived from the formulas of Russian church music. The chromatic, quasi-oriental character is "far removed from the diatonicism of the Octoechos chants." Alfred Swan confirms that Znamenny melodies are strictly diatonic and that no chromatic steps are to be found in any of the canticles (Alfred Swan, 37).

¹¹Piggott, 46. The sacred concerto is a distinctive feature of Russian Orthodox church music. This concerto by Rachmaninoff ("O Mother of God perpetually praying") was performed on December 12, 1893, by the Synodical Choir in Moscow (Threlfall/Norris, 175; A. Swan, Russian Music, 150). According to Piggott the work

Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, op. 27 (1907)

Like the First Symphony, this work begins with a motto theme which recurs throughout the entire symphony and which, with its step-wise movement, might also be derived from a Russian Orthodox chant.¹² In some of Rachmaninoff's compositions, chant-like passages occur with bold displays of masterly bell-ringing. Piggott describes a section of the final movement's development section as one of the most remarkable passages in all of Rachmaninoff's oeuvre:

It is as if a thousand bell-towers were ringing out a clamorous celebration of some great religious or national occasion. The sound of bells had a perennial fascination for Rachmaninoff and often echoed in his music, but in no other work, with the exception of his choral symphony The Bells, written a few years later, did he equal in originality and excitement this strange passage.¹³

Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, op. 30 (1909)

The long opening theme of the concerto's first movement, which is played by the soloist in octaves (one note in each hand), bears a remarkable resemblance to one of the ancient chants of the Russian Orthodox church. The research of musicologist Joseph Yasser has shown that the familiar opening theme of this concerto was "preconditioned by the presence in Rachmaninoff's mind of another, shorter--and much simpler--theme of which he was

was not heard again in the composer's lifetime and remained unpublished until 1955. Threlfall/Norris also list a 1972 publication date.

¹²Piggott, 30.

¹³Piggott, 34-35.

completely unaware. This was the old Russian orthodox chant which at least on one ritual occasion is associated with the words "Thy grave, O Saviour, guarded by warriors, etc."¹⁴

After becoming aware of the connection between Rachmaninoff's theme and the chant, Yasser wrote to Rachmaninoff at his Swiss retreat, asking him to answer the following questions regarding the initial exposition of the concerto's theme:

(1) Had the opening theme of your third piano concerto been borrowed consciously, at least in part, from Russian national (secular or liturgical) sources? If so, what precisely were these sources and to what extent was your theme reworked in comparison with the original?

(2) If your theme represents, to your knowledge, a completely independent creation, had you made a conscious attempt to give it a folkloric character? Or perhaps a liturgical character? Or a character combining both elements that is native to some Russian spiritual folk tunes? If not, did you find nonetheless that your theme had acquired any of these characters? If so, which one specifically and in what measure?

(3) If, however, in your opinion the theme does not display any common traits with folkloric or liturgical musical styles, have you preserved any of their unutilized variants--written or from memory? If so, do these variants suggest any inclination on your part to alter or otherwise improve the basic melodic profile of your theme in its final stage, especially in regard to its underlying mode? . . . In fact, the entire history of this theme from its inception would be most interesting for my purposes.¹⁵

¹⁴Joseph Yasser, "The Opening Theme of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto and its Liturgical Prototype," Musical Quarterly 55 (July 1969), 315. Yasser points out that this chant has been used unchanged in the vesper services of the famous Kievan-Petchersk Lavra (Abbey on the Caves) since it was founded in the 12th century. A detailed analysis and comparison of the two melodies is presented in this article (pp. 315-24).

¹⁵Yasser, 324-25. Yasser explains that he intentionally refrained from mentioning the crucial chant theme in order to maintain "a maximum of scholarly objectivity."

In addition to answering Yasser's questions, Rachmaninoff's reply, dated April 30, 1935, contains interesting information concerning the various influences that had been experienced by Russian composers in their creative work--folkloric, liturgical, conscious, unconscious, etc.¹⁶ In response to the three questions, Rachmaninoff replied:

(1) The first theme of my 3rd Concerto is borrowed neither from folk song nor from church sources. It simply "wrote itself"! If I had any plan in composing this theme, I was thinking only of the sound. I wanted to "sing" the melody on the piano, as a singer would sing it--and to find a suitable orchestral accompaniment, or rather one that would not muffle this singing. That is all!

(2) Thus, I aspired to impart neither a folk song nor a liturgical character to this theme. Had that been so, I would doubtless have "consciously" maintained the mode, not admitting the C-sharp, but keeping the C natural throughout. At the same time I realize that this theme has, involuntarily, taken on a folkish or ritual character. I have mentioned such a possible influence above. . . .And, finally:

(3) Somehow I cannot recall any variations that would display hesitation on my part in choosing the melodic turns of this theme. As I have said: the theme "wrote itself" easily and simply! This eliminates the possibility of any "creative history" for the theme! Did you speak yourself of the "unconscious"?¹⁷

Although it is certainly possible that Rachmaninoff intentionally borrowed or imitated Russian chant melodies (as well as the *Dies irae*), the composer himself may not always have been

¹⁶The complete English translation of Rachmaninoff's letter can be found in Bertensson/Leyda, 311-12.

¹⁷Bertensson/Leyda, 312; Yasser, 325-26. Yasser concluded that Rachmaninoff was at least aware of the contributory assistance of liturgical or folkloric elements while he was actually engaged in shaping the concerto's theme. He also deduced that Rachmaninoff must have been acquainted with the prototype chant theme long before the third piano concerto was composed in 1909. Ample time would normally be required for the chant melody to gradually fade from Rachmaninoff's conscious memory into his subconscious mind and subsequently emerge as the concerto theme (Yasser, 327-28).

consciously aware of the influence that chant had on his compositional style.

Liturgy of Saint-John Chrysostom, op. 31 (1910)

Unlike the Vespers, op. 37, the musical material of the Liturgy appears to contain no direct reference to chant and thus is completely original.¹⁸ Alfred J. Swan states that in composing his first major work for the Church, Rachmaninoff sought the advice of Alexander Kastalsky (1856-1926) on various liturgical and musical points. Swan writes:

Though taking Kastalsky's replies fully into account, he steadfastly went his own creative way. Unsure of the authenticity of some of the traditional melodies, he wrote new ones in a liturgical style mainly his own; but the taste with which he tempered his own secular manner to suit the usage of the service is truly remarkable.¹⁹

The Bells, op. 35 (1913)

This work, which was briefly discussed in Chapter One (see p. 8), is in four movements: 1. The Silver Sleigh Bells, 2. The Mellow Wedding Bells, 3. The Loud Alarm Bells, 4. The Mournful Iron Bells. From the troika bells of Moscow in the opening movement to the deep tolling bells in the exquisitely sad final movement, Rachmaninoff

¹⁸Threlfall/Norris, 101.

¹⁹A. Swan, Russian Music, 173. Alexander Kastalsky was a Russian choral conductor and composer. In 1910 he became director of the Synodal School in Moscow and principal conductor of the choir. In 1923, he was appointed professor of choral singing at the Moscow Conservatory.

was extremely successful in making the bells vibrate with human emotion.²⁰

Vespers, op. 37 (1915)

Of the fifteen movements of Opus 37, ten use traditional chants from the Octoechos.²¹ In Rachmaninoff's letter to Yasser (see Chapter 3, p. 45), the composer referred to his original movements of Vespers as "conscious counterfeit."²² According to Stephen Prussing in his dissertation "Compositional Techniques in Rachmaninoff's 'Vespers, Opus 37'," the "conscious counterfeit" is very convincing:

For had not Rachmaninoff specifically named the source of the chant (Greek, Znamenny or Kiev) at the head of each movement, one would be hard put to start research into its origins. One might say that it comes as no surprise that a talented composer, after studying Znamenny chant, could closely imitate it; it is part of a composer's stock-in-trade to know styles that intimately. But it remains a mark of Rachmaninoff's affection for the chant that he did it so well. He proceeded melodically by step and very small skips, avoided metric symmetry and repeated motifs quite in the chant tradition.²³

²⁰Bell sonorities figure prominently in many of Rachmaninoff's works for solo piano. In the very next work, Sonata No. 2 in B-flat Minor, op. 36, one can hear thundering bells in the conclusion of the development section of the first movement. Elsewhere in this sonata as well as in many of the preludes, bell-like effects can be heard.

²¹Threlfall/Norris, 120. Movements 1, 3, 6, 10, and 11 are entirely original; 2 and 15 incorporate chants of the Greek rite; 4 and 5 of the Kiev rite; and 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 14 Znamenny chants. A detailed explanation of the sources of the Russian liturgical chant can be found in Alfred J. Swan's Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folksong, pp. 29-38.

²²Bertensson/Leyda, 312.

²³Stephen Prussing, "Compositional Techniques in Rachmaninoff's 'Vespers, Opus 37'," Ph. D. diss. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980), 38. In their notes for this opus, Threlfall/Norris point out that "the two Urmotive of the Dies

The rhythmic freedom achieved by Rachmaninoff in the writing of this opus manifested itself in the numerous measures which do not conform to the given time signatures.

Also, the second half of the ninth movement of Vespers would later reappear in the third movement of Rachmaninoff's final work, Symphonic Dances, op. 45 (1940), as if the composer were reminiscing about the Znamenny chant he loved so much.²⁴

From this brief investigation it becomes clear that Rachmaninoff incorporated the chants of the Russian Orthodox church and the sound of church bells in many of his compositions (sacred and secular). In his Vespers, op. 37, he was able consciously to duplicate the style of the chant so that it was indistinguishable from the authentic Znamenny melodies. Some compositions were intentionally based on Russian chant (First Symphony, op. 13); in other works (Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, op. 30), the chant served as a catalyst at the subconscious level.

Rachmaninoff's boyhood experiences accompanying his grandmother to Orthodox services laid a foundation for a lifelong love of choral singing and church bells. In his published

irae, the descending second and descending third, coalesce and appear simultaneously as they outline the waving harmonies of the Nunc dimittis, no. 5" (Threlfall/Norris, 120).

²⁴Rachmaninoff's indication "Alliliya" in the manuscript of op. 45 is at the point corresponding to the entry of that word in the Vespers, op. 37 (Threlfall/Norris, 146; see also Norris, Rachmaninov, 109).

recollections of Rachmaninoff, Alexander Goedicke (1877-1957) characterizes his fellow musician:

He loved church singing and frequently, even in the winter, got up at 7:00 a.m. and, hiring a carriage in the darkness, usually drove to the Androniev monastery in Taganka (near Moscow). There in semi-darkness, he would stand in the huge church for the entire liturgy listening to the old "severe" chants from the Octoechos performed by the monks singing in parallel fifths.²⁵

Twenty years after leaving his homeland Rachmaninoff, in discussing the Philadelphia performances of The Bells, sighed: "I have an affinity for bells. Whenever I hear deep-throated bells I think of Russia."²⁶

These sources of musical imagery (Russian chant and church bells) influenced and enriched the composition of the Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39. The influence of chant on Rachmaninoff's compositional technique can be found in the asymmetrical and rhythmic formation of the motives and phrases as well as in the large number of measures that do not conform to the given time signatures.

Rachmaninoff does not supply a time signature for the Etude No. 4 in B Minor. Of the etude's 61 measures, 8 are in 2/4, 25 are in

²⁵Alexander Goedicke, "Memorable Meetings," translated from the Russian by Alexandra Shikhris, in Vospominania o Rakmnaninove [Reminiscences of Rachmaninoff], ed. Z. Apetian, (Moskva: Muzyka, 1967), Vol. II, 13. Goedicke goes on to say that it could well happen that in the evening of the same day Rachmaninoff would go to a concert and from there to the restaurants Yara or Strelina where he would stay until after midnight listening to the singing of the Gypsies.

²⁶This quote appears in Bertensson/Leyda, 328.

3/4, and 28 in 4/4. Similarly, all the remaining etudes in the opus have measures which do not conform to the given time signature. Etude No. 2 in A Minor, which was revised from the earlier set of etudes (op. 33), has only two non-conforming measures. Etude No. 7 in C Minor, which has a tableau depicting the "singing of a choir" and the "chimes of a church," has the largest number of non-conforming measures (62 out of 109), a fact that would seem to confirm the influence of chant on Rachmaninoff's style.²⁷ It is interesting to note that the measures of all the op. 33 etudes conform to the time signatures. Apparently, after having worked so closely with Znamenny chant in the Vespers, op. 37, Rachmaninoff was much freer with meter in opus 39.

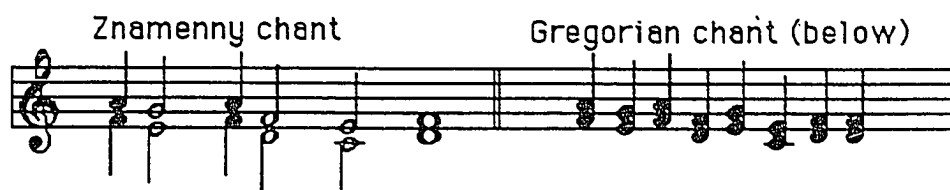
In describing the development of Rachmaninoff's musical language, Robert Threlfall mentions three characteristics which pervade op. 39: "irregular barring, freer harmonic relations and chant-like melodies."²⁸ As seen in Chapter Two, the Dies irae motive and its variants can be found in these chant-like melodies. A brief examination of Rachmaninoff's use of Znamenny chant in the creation of his First Symphony will help to illuminate the presence of Russian chant in the op. 39 etudes.

²⁷See Chapter Two, p. 30, n. 19, for Rachmaninoff's extended program for the Etude No. 7 in C Minor.

²⁸Robert Threlfall, Sergei Rachmaninoff, His Life and Music (London: Boosey and Hawkes, Inc., 1973), 43.

Symphony No. 1 in D Minor, op. 13 (1895)

There is a strong resemblance between the Znamenny chant which inspired the themes of the First Symphony and the Gregorian Dies irae. In his dissertation on compositional techniques in Rachmaninoff's Vespers, Prussing represents the relationship as follows:



Example 25. Comparison of the Znamenny chant and the Gregorian Dies irae.²⁹

The first movement of Rachmaninoff's First Symphony, known to be based on traditional chants of the Russian Orthodox church (see Chapter Three, 41-42), grows out of this slow introduction:



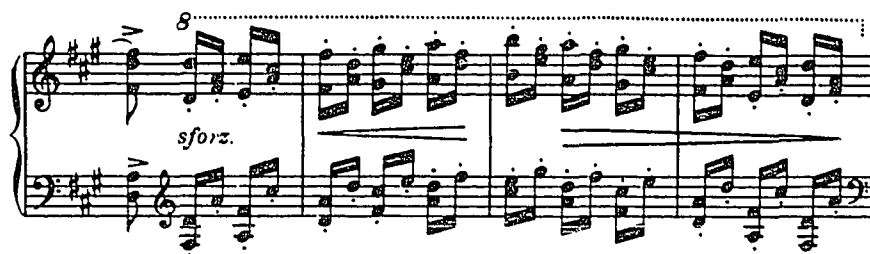
Example 26. Rachmaninoff, Symphony No. 1, First movement, mm. 1-5.³⁰

²⁹Prussing, Example 1, 29.

³⁰Quoted in Piggott, Example 5, 25. In his discussion of the symphony, Piggott states that although it is easy to hear the sound of a solemn ecclesiastical chant in the (b)

examples in Chapter Two have a metric placement which makes audible identification almost impossible. A comparison of the differing accentuation between the two chants in Example 25 (p. 51) suggests that in such instances chants from the Octoechos were the principal conscious or unconscious influence.³²

Rachmaninoff's love of the sound of church bells is manifest in all nine of the op. 39 studies. Bell sonorities can be detected throughout the funereal Etude No. 7 in C Minor and become most clearly evident at the intense climax of the work, mm. 89-102 (see Example 19, p. 32). Although often only implied in the texture, another example of bell sonorities in this opus can be found in the Etude No. 3 in F-sharp Minor:



Example 28. Rachmaninoff, Etude-Tableau in F-sharp Minor, op. 39, no. 3, mm.93-96.³³

³²In addition to the obvious references to Russian chant in the First Symphony, the Dies irae can also clearly be heard in the closing trombone chords of this work.

³³This passage occurs sequentially in mm.101-104.

In addition to the bells at the opening of Etude No. 9 in D Major (see Example 23, p. 34), the martial conclusion effectively employs the peal of the Russian church bells:



Example 29. Rachmaninoff, *Etude-Tableau in D Major*, op. 39, no. 9, mm. 91-97.

CHAPTER 4

EXTRA-MUSICAL IMAGERY

Rachmaninoff used extra-musical sources for compositional inspiration, but he rarely revealed them. In an interview with David Ewen, he explained:

When composing, I find it of great help to have in mind a book just recently read, or a beautiful picture, or a poem. Sometimes a definite story is kept in mind, which I try to convert into tones without disclosing the source of my inspiration.¹

Writing about the Etudes-Tableaux, Aranovskii claims that the composer chose this new title for his piano pieces (instead of Preludes), because there was "a further development of poetry and pictures in his music."² Yet Rachmaninoff was reluctant to reveal the programmatic content of these compositions, and little is known about extra-musical sources which may have served as a stimulus

¹David Ewen, "Music Should Speak from the Heart," Etude 59 (December 1941), 804. Quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 156. In his biography of the composer, Nikolai Bazhanov claims that Rachmaninoff would stand for hours at a time in Moscow bookshops, leafing through albums of engravings and reproductions. This "incoherent and disorderly sequence of visual impressions . . . at times led quite unexpectedly to a lucky find." Bazhanov, 204.

²Aranovskii, 21 (translated from the Russian by Alexandra Shikhris). Aranovskii feels there was a degree of reliance on poetry and pictures beginning with the Moments musicaux, op. 16, increasing through both sets of Preludes (op. 23 and 32) and the Etudes-Tableaux, op. 33, and culminating in the op. 39 etudes.

for the creation of these etudes.³ Before investigating extra-musical imagery in the op. 39 etudes, it is helpful to examine further the composer's symphonic poem The Isle of the Dead, for this is one composition which Rachmaninoff openly acknowledged to have had a direct connection with the work of another artist.⁴

The Isle of the Dead, op. 29 (1909)

The inspiration for The Isle of the Dead was a painting of the same name by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901). The original version (1880) of this painting, which now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, depicts an island in a dark sea with awesome cliffs and towering cypress trees. Doorways in the rock suggest catacombs. A single oarsman rows a small boat toward a grim portal in the shoreless island. A coffin, guarded by a solitary figure shrouded in white, lies across the bow of the boat.⁵

³However, as mentioned in the Introduction (p. 3), Rachmaninoff did supply Respighi with cursory programmatic details for some of the etudes.

⁴ Piggott, 16-17. Rachmaninoff privately disclosed the literary basis of his First Sonata for piano to the pianist Konstantin Igumnov, who gave the premiere performance of this work. After a performance of the Sonata in Leipzig, Igumnov visited the composer in Dresden and was told by Rachmaninoff "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 Mephistopheles (in the exact order of Liszt's 'Faust' Symphony)." Quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 153 (from "Iz arkhiva K. N. Igumnova," Sovietzkaya Muzyka, No. 1, 1946).

⁵During a visit to Florence in 1880, a recently widowed German woman, Frau Berna, asked Böcklin for a painting on the theme of bereavement. In The Isle of the Dead, painted in April and May 1880, the artist symbolized Frau Berna's loss. A German art dealer, Fritz Gurlitt, titled the work Die Toteninsel, by which it has always been known. This information, as well as the following notes, is provided by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: "The painting soon became one of Böcklin's best known

Nicolas von Struve, Rachmaninoff's Dresden friend, first suggested the Böcklin painting as a subject for a symphonic poem. In the summer of 1907, Rachmaninoff had seen a black and white reproduction of The Isle of the Dead in Paris, and later he viewed versions of the original painting in Leipzig and Berlin.⁶

In two different interviews, Rachmaninoff makes statements about his op. 29 that give us valuable insight into his creative process. In an interview with B. K. Roy, he observed:

I was not much moved by the color of the painting. If I had seen the original first (he actually only saw lighter replicas of the original painting), I might not have composed my Isle of the Dead. I like the picture best in black and white.⁷

Certainly, the subject of the painting was ideally suited to the composer. Piggott expounds:

In Böcklin's gloomy atmospheric picture [Rachmaninoff] found everything he needed: sombre shadows; a sense of the presence of death

works. He executed four replicas: the first, from 1880 (Kunst-museum, Basel) has the dark tonality of the initial version; the three later works, from 1883 (National Gallery, Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany), 1884 (location unknown), and 1886 (Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig), are lighter in color though equally dramatic in feeling."

⁶Bertensson/Leyda, 156. Rachmaninoff completed the symphonic poem on April 17, 1909, in Dresden and dedicated it to Nicolas von Struve. Threlfall/Norris, 93.

⁷Basanta Koomar Roy, "Rachmaninoff is Reminiscent," Musical Observer 26 (May 1927), 16; Bertensson/Leyda, 156. According to notes provided by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the replicas of the original painting in Leipzig and Berlin were "lighter in color." Having seen the original Die Toteninsel in New York, I believe it is likely that Rachmaninoff would have been greatly impressed with its sumptuously dark coloration.

and of the mysteries beyond it; even the suggestion of a striking and unusual rhythm, ready made for him, in the slow, regular dipping of Charon's oars as he ferries the departing soul over the dark waters of the Styx on the start of its journey into the unknown.⁸

In an excerpt from another interview, Rachmaninoff reveals his love of nature and its effect on his art:

My composing goes slowly. I go for a long walk in the country. My eye catches the sharp sparks of light on fresh foliage after showers; my ear the rustling undernote of the woods. Or I watch the pale tints of the sky over the horizon after sundown, and they come: all voices at once. Not a bit here, a bit there. All. The whole grows. So The Isle of the Dead. . . . When it came, how it began--how can I say? It came up within me, was entertained, written down.⁹

Böcklin's influence on Rachmaninoff extended beyond The Isle of the Dead. When Benno Moiseiwitsch made his American debut in 1919, he included the Prelude in B Minor (op. 32, no. 10) on his program. At that time both he and Rachmaninoff agreed that this was their favorite of the Preludes. When they met again in 1933, Moiseiwitsch discussed his conception of this work with the composer, and "both were amazed to learn that Moiseiwitsch's

⁸Piggott, 17. Piggott adds that Rachmaninoff's music "carries the listener beyond the range of the Swiss painter's art," and emphasizes "that it was not so much the quality of Böcklin's painting which stimulated Rachmaninoff as its subject."

⁹This interview is quoted by Irving Kolodin in The International Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 9th ed., eds. Oscar Thompson/Robert Sabin, (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1964), 1726. Cited in Bertensson/Leyda, 156.

mental picture and Rachmaninoff's actual source were the same painting--'The Return' by Böcklin."¹⁰

Paintings of Böcklin served as the source of inspiration for at least two of the Etudes-Tableaux. Riesemann states: "Many of these take their origin from Böcklin's paintings: No. 8, Op. 39 (G minor), can be traced back to Morning. No. 1, Op. 39 (F minor), to The Waves."¹¹

Riesemann's comment has led to much confusion. First, the Op. 39, No. 8 etude is in D minor not G minor. The Op. 33, No. 8 etude, however, is in G minor. The question arises as to whether Riesemann incorrectly stated the key or the opus number of the etude.¹² Second, the Op. 39, No. 1 etude is in C minor not F minor. Although there is still confusion due to the fact that the first etude of Op. 33 is in F minor, the painting's title ("The Waves") does not

¹⁰ Bertensson/Leyda, 296. This is affirmed by Benno Moiseiwitsch in "Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1873-1943," Gramophone 20 (May 1943), 169-70.

¹¹ Riesemann, 237. See Chapter 3, p. 38, n. 3 for a discussion of the controversy surrounding Riesemann's book, Rachmaninoff's Recollections.

¹² Threlfall /Norris interpret Riesemann's statement to mean that the Op. 33, No. 8 etude in G minor was inspired by Böcklin's painting Morning, 106. Walker states that the painting inspired the Op. 39, No. 8 etude in D minor, 80. Although both of these etudes are related in character, I believe that the painting's title suggests the glimmer of hope found in the op. 39 etude. The placement of this etude after the lugubrious funeral march (Op. 39, No. 7) is particularly effective.

relate to the march-like, military bounce of the Op. 33 etude. Also, the Op. 39, No. 1 etude opens in the key of F minor.¹³

Although Rieseemann claims that "many" of the etudes were inspired by paintings of Böcklin, he only cites the examples mentioned above. There is also difficulty regarding the titles of the paintings supplied by Rieseemann. Hans Börger (1921) gave a possible explanation:

As a rule the master refused to give specific titles to his paintings. The current titles stem mostly from art-dealers or his circle of friends and admirers. . . . He was confident that the concept guiding his work would become intelligible without the aid of picture-titles.¹⁴

I have been unable to locate a painting by Böcklin with the title "Morning," but I have discovered a painting with the word "Waves" in its title. Im Spiel der Wellen (At Play in the Waves) depicts two innocently seductive Nereids (sea nymphs) that are soon to be joined by imposing Centaur-Tritons eager for lustful amusement. Perhaps this is the painting Rachmaninoff associated with the op. 39 etude.¹⁵

¹³In notes to the Authentic Edition of the complete Etudes-Tableaux, Peter Donohoe confirms the ambiguity of the etude's tonality until the final cadence. Threlfall, Norris, and Walker agree that the etude in question is Op. 39, No. 1, despite the fact that Rieseemann listed the key incorrectly.

¹⁴Hans Börger (translated by Thomas Bourke) is quoted in Böcklin, Hans Dollinger, comp. (Munich: F. Bruckmann KG, 1975), 77.

¹⁵In 1913, Max Reger (1873-1916) composed Four Tone Poems after A. Böcklin, op. 128. The second movement of this suite is Im Spiel der Wellen; the third movement is Der Toteninsel (The Isle of the Dead). It is certainly possible that Rachmaninoff heard or knew of Reger's composition, and that he investigated the other paintings by Böcklin which inspired Reger's tone poems.

There is a kinship between Böcklin and Rachmaninoff. In their respective fields, they blended fantasy with reality and impressionism with romanticism. Both men generally avoided programmatic titles for their works and were more concerned with evoking a mood than telling a story. Also, the sensual and the spiritual often merge in their artistic creations.

Rachmaninoff was reluctant to reveal any extra-musical program for his etudes. After playing the six Etudes-Tableaux of op. 33 in Boston (Feb. 22, 1919), the composer was questioned by a critic concerning the programs for the etudes. Rachmaninoff responded: "Ah, that is for me and not for the public. I do not believe in the artist disclosing too much of his images. Let them paint for themselves what it most suggests."¹⁶

Nonetheless, as we have already seen, Rachmaninoff did supply Respighi with programs for four of the Op. 39 etudes. Koussevitsky asked Rachmaninoff to select a group of his Etudes-Tableaux to be given to Ottorino Respighi for orchestration (Koussevitsky's firm, Editions Russes de Musique, published the commissioned

¹⁶Bertensson/Leyda, 218, 395. Quoted from the Boston Herald, February 23, 1919. Even as late as 1940, Rachmaninoff would reiterate the same sentiment in an interview which he gave the New York World-Telegram concerning his new (and final) composition, the Symphonic Dances: "A composer always has his own ideas of his works, but I do not believe he ever should reveal them. Each listener should find his own meaning in music." Bertensson/Leyda, 361, 400. Quoted from E. Arnold, New York World-Telegram, January 8, 1941.

orchestrations, and Koussevitsky conducted the first performance by the Boston Symphony in 1931). Bertensson and Leyda state that this proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by Rachmaninoff: "By January 2, 1930, he personally entered the negotiation with Respighi, writing to him directly. [Rachmaninoff] had chosen five Etudes-Tableaux, from Op. 33 and 39, works whose programmatic contents he had been careful to conceal since their composition; but now these programs might be useful to Respighi."¹⁷

The following excerpt from Rachmaninoff's letter to Respighi gives us a glimpse into the programmatic content of these etudes:

Will you permit me, Maître, to give you the secret explanations of their composer? These will certainly make the character of these pieces more comprehensible and help you to find the necessary colors for their orchestration. Here are the programs of these Etudes:

The first Etude in A minor [Op. 39, No. 2] represents the Sea and Seagulls. [This program was suggested by Mme. Rachmaninoff.]

The second Etude in A minor [Op. 39, No. 6] was inspired by the tale of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf.

The third Etude in E-flat major [Op. 33, No. 4] is a scene at a Fair.

The fourth Etude in D major [Op. 39, No. 9] has a similar character, resembling an oriental march.

The fifth Etude in C minor [Op. 39, No. 7] is a funeral march.¹⁸

¹⁷Bertensson/Leyda, 262. These authors point out: "Previously, others had attempted to translate the color of Rachmaninoff's pieces into orchestral color, but no one had yet orchestrated his own favorite piano works, and Respighi seemed an ideal choice." A selection of orchestral arrangements and transcriptions of Rachmaninoff's works written by others can be found in Palmieri, 60-62.

¹⁸Rachmaninoff's entire letter to Respighi is quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 262-63; cursory programmatic details are given for all but one of the etudes (op. 39, no. 7). The extended program for this etude is given in Chapter 2 (p. 30 n. 19) of this study.

Said to represent the Sea and Seagulls, the Etude in A Minor (op. 39, no. 2) resembles the mood depicted in another painting by Böcklin: Calm at Sea (1887). In this picture, a seductive sea nymph lies across a rocky platform in the sea; three seagulls have perched near her tail. Neils von Holst (1974) describes this figure as the "prototype of the 'femme fatale' demonically intensified."¹⁹

In part two of his essay on the Etudes-Tableaux, Aranovskii gives a description of each of the etudes, at times suggesting extra-musical sources which bear a resemblance to specific works.²⁰ He believes that Rachmaninoff's love of nature and sympathetic perception of the Russian landscape are reflected throughout these study-pictures.²¹ In his history of Russian-Soviet music, Bakst confirms that many of Rachmaninoff's compositions are outstanding for their power to arouse "imageries of nature."²² According to Bakst, the imagery of Russian antiquity expressed by some of the

¹⁹Niels von Holst (translated by Thomas Bourke) is quoted in Böcklin, 57.

²⁰The Op. 39, No. 3 etude is compared to the painting In Blue Space (1918, Tre'iakov Gallery, Moscow) by the Soviet artist Arkadii Rylov (1870-1939). The Op. 39, No. 8 etude is thought by Aranovskii to evoke a mood resembling several of the Russian landscape paintings by Isaak Levitan (1860-1900): Vesper Chimes (1892), Summer Evening (1900), and Golden Ples (1889).

²¹Aranovskii, 22-23. Aranovskii states that the composer was more concerned with representing the feelings which are inspired by nature than with a literal representation.

²²James Bakst, A History of Russian-Soviet Music (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1966), 253. Bakst quotes Boris Asafiev: "In Rachmaninoff's music and performance are inherent the breath of Russian spring, the awakening of nature, the vernal rejoicing which captures the soul during the powerful overflow of Russian rivers in flood-time." From B. V. Asafiev, Izbraniye Trudi. Rachmaninov. Moscow, 1954. Vol. 2, p. 311.

Etudes-Tableaux "reflects impressions which [Rachmaninoff] experienced in his childhood, when he lived on his mother's estate not far from the ancient city of Novgorod."²³

Nikolai Bazhanov believes that the best description of the first eight etudes of Op. 39 can be found in a "nocturne" by the Russian lyric poet, Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev (1803-1873):

Why moan, why wail you, wind of night,
With such despair, such frenzied madness?
Why is your voice now full of might,
Now piteous and tinged with sadness?²⁴

The final etude in the joyful key of D major reflects Rachmaninoff's optimism for a better future. I agree with Aranovskii that the words spoken by Trofimov in Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard crystallize the sentiment of this study:

I have a foreboding of happiness. I see glimpses of it already. . . . Here is happiness--Here it comes! It is coming nearer and nearer; already I can hear its footsteps.²⁵

²³Bakst, 252. He further adds that Rachmaninoff's imagery is similar to the imagery of Russian antiquity in Rimsky-Korsakov's operas Pskovityanka (The Maid of Pskov) and Sadko, The Guest from Novgorod.

²⁴This poem, translated by Irina Zheleznova, appears in Bazhanov, 251.

²⁵This quote from the conclusion of Act II of Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard (translated by Constance Garnett) can be found in Six Complete World Plays and a History of World Drama (New York: Globe Book Company, 1963), 435. The D Major etude remained in Rachmaninoff's repertoire and received numerous performances. Palmieri, 77-78. Bazhanov's description of Rachmaninoff's performing this etude can be found in Chapter 2 of this study (p. 34, n. 20).

Shortly after writing the op. 39 Etudes-Tableaux, Rachmaninoff made the decision to leave Russia; he and his family left for Sweden via Finland on December 23, 1917, never to return²⁶. In his biography of the composer, Victor Seroff states: "Economics and politics were vistas to which his innocent intellect never reached; and closed within himself as a rebel against fate, he did not have the stamina to stand up under the chopping down of the 'Cherry Orchard,' as it were, and to witness the disappearance of the last remnants of his world." However, Seroff believes that unlike Mikhail Glinka, who spat on the ground when he was leaving Russia ("May I never see this accursed country again!"), Rachmaninoff would have liked "to kneel down and kiss the soil of his native country, which was dearer to his heart than anything in the world."²⁷

²⁶Victor Ilyich Seroff, Rachmaninoff (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 181.

²⁷Seroff, 182. Seroff credits Riesemann with first making this comparison in Rachmaninoff's Recollections (see Riesemann, 188).

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that musical and extra-musical imagery influenced the compositional style as well as the essential character of the Etudes-Tableaux, op. 39; the most important elements in Rachmaninoff's iconography are the Dies irae, Russian chant, bell sonorities, and paintings by Böcklin. However, a few questions remain regarding the extent to which the composer consciously utilized the Dies irae motive.

While Threlfall and Norris state that Rachmaninoff's oeuvre is "threaded through by the old chant Dies irae" (see p. 19) and Woodard finds the chant's motive in numerous compositions of the composer, Malcolm Boyd believes that in most cases it is impossible to be certain whether Rachmaninoff intended a reference to the Dies irae or not.¹ Although I agree with Walker's observation that op. 39 can be perceived as a hidden set of variations on the Dies irae, it is my opinion that many of the allusions to the plainchant were not consciously intended by the composer. Due to the many transformations of the four-note motive and the similarity between the Gregorian Dies irae and the Znamenny chant used by Rachmaninoff in his First Symphony, positive identification of the

¹Malcolm Boyd, "'Dies irae': Some Recent Manifestations," Music and Letters 49 (1968), 353. Because Rachmaninoff usually quotes only the first four notes of the plainchant, Boyd maintains that "the possibility of a mere coincidence seems very strong indeed." Although most writers on Rachmaninoff's music recognize the Dies irae in The Isle of the Dead, Boyd claims that even this composition is only a borderline case (353-356).

Dies irae is frequently difficult; nevertheless, references can be found in all nine of these studies. By the time Rachmaninoff composed his op. 39, he had absorbed the Dies irae motive and the influence of Russian chants into his compositional style much in the manner that Bartók assimilated the folk songs of Hungary.

Another question arises as to what extent the pianist should emphasize the presence of the Dies irae in a performance of these etudes. Metric placement of the motive often requires that the quotation remain hidden, but the plainchant could be highlighted in certain circumstances in recognition of the symbolism associated with it. In a performance of Brahms' Intermezzo in E-flat Minor, op. 118, no. 6, Rachmaninoff could not resist emphasizing the initial theme which strongly resembles the Dies irae. In a review of his New York recital given on February 19, 1927, pianist Olga Samaroff wrote:

Rachmaninoff has a curiously complex personality. Reserved and inscrutable as a man, he is singularly frank and simple as a pianist, presenting music with a magnificent pianism and imposing general mastery, but with a sometimes almost matter-of-fact directness, as in the E-flat minor Intermezzo of Brahms.

This destroys, in my opinion, the mystery and "half-lights" which under the fingers of a Gabrilowitsch seem to form the underliably characteristic note of the piece. Brahms clearly indicated the establishment of this general mood in the opening section of the said work by marking the first four measures "piano," "sotto voce" and the repetition of the phrase beginning at the fifth measure pianissimo in the treble with a triple pianissimo in the bass. Mr. Rachmaninoff played all these measures forte

or mezzo forte, thus throwing a clear, decisive light on the outlines of the music.²

Pianists should be cautioned that emphasizing the Dies irae motive in the Etudes-Tableaux might create similar unwanted and disturbing exaggeration.

Finally, I would like to address the melancholia that gripped Rachmaninoff for much of his life and contributed to the dark, gloomy sentiment found in many of the op. 39 etudes. In 1932, the composer received a letter from Walter E. Koons requesting a definition of music. Rachmaninoff replied:

What is music? How can one define it?

Music is a calm moonlit night, a rustling of summer foliage.

Music is the distant peal of bells at eventide!

Music is born only in the heart, and it appeals only to the heart; it is Love!

The sister of Music is Poesy, and its mother is Sorrow!³

In the above description, there is reference to several of the sources of imagery which influenced Rachmaninoff and an explanation of the underlying pathos in much of his music. He believed that music should be the product of the composer's complex personality and the sum total of his experiences:

²Quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 247-48. Samaroff's review appeared in the New York Evening Post, February 20, 1927 (Ibid., 396).

³Quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 291. The draft of this letter is in the Rachmaninoff Archive, now deposited at the Library of Congress (Ibid., 397).

A composer's music should express the country of his birth, his love affairs, his religion, the books which have influenced him, the pictures he loves. ...Study the masterpieces of every great composer, and you will find every aspect of the composer's personality and background in his music.⁴

Rachmaninoff's love of nature and of Russia remained absolute throughout his life, and in the op. 39 etudes he eloquently expresses the very depth of that love.

⁴Rachmaninoff, interviewed by David Ewen (1941), 804. Quoted in Bertensson/Leyda, 368-69. Rachmaninoff states that he has no sympathy with the composer who produces works according to preconceived formulas or theories: "[Music] should not be arrived at mentally, tailor-made to fit certain specifications--a tendency, I regret to say, all too prevalent during the past twenty years or so."

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VITA

Raymond Gitz was born in New Orleans in 1947. He received the Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees (1970, 1972) in piano performance from the University of Southwestern Louisiana where his studies included work with Edgar Davis and Madelyn Tribble. In 1976 Gitz studied with James Dick as a member of the Young Artists Program of the International Festival Institute at Round Top, Texas. Gitz began his doctoral work at Louisiana State University in 1979 where his studies in piano performance were with Daniel Sher and Panayis Lyras.

Since 1973 Gitz has served as a faculty member at Our Lady of Holy Cross College in New Orleans. He also holds a part-time position at Loyola University and has taught previously at Tulane University. A member of numerous local, state and national music organizations, he currently is president of the New Orleans Music Teachers Association and chairman in Louisiana for the MTNA-Yamaha High School Auditions. In 1989, Gitz co-founded the first New Orleans International Piano Competition and served as co-chairman; he is artistic director for the third annual NOIPC to be held in 1991. In addition to presenting solo, duo, and lecture recitals, Gitz is an adjudicator for numerous festivals and competitions.

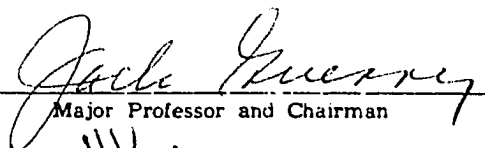
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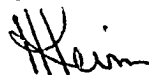
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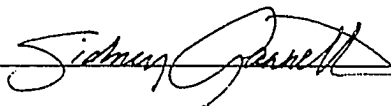
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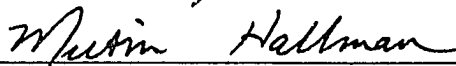

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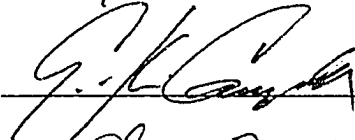


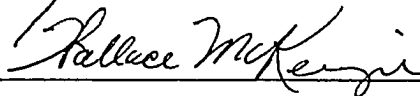
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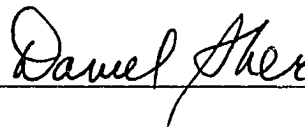
EXAMINING COMMITTEE:











Date of Examination:

November 14, 1990