

PRELUDE IN C SHARP MINOR

Op. 3, No. 2

By

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF



St. Louis

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PRELUDE IN C SHARP MINOR

Biographical Sketch—Sergei Vassilievich Rachmaninoff

Born in the Government of Novgorod, Russia, April 1, 1873

SERGEI VASSILIEVICH RACHMANINOFF is a pianist of repute, and one of the most talented of the younger Moscow school of composers. At the age of nine he entered the Conservatory at Petrograd, where he made the piano his chief study. In 1885 he went to the Conservatory at Moscow where he studied the piano with Zvierev, and afterwards with his cousin, Siloti. He studied theory and composition with Taneiev and Arensky. The musical influences of Moscow are clearly evident in his works.

Rachmaninoff made his first success as a composer by his pianoforte pieces, especially by the Preludes, which have almost established a new form of composition for the instrument. Several of his songs and pianoforte pieces, notably the famous Prelude in C# minor, have attained immense popularity.

He has also written operas, some remarkable pianoforte concertos, and an interesting orchestral poem, "*The Island of the Dead*."

Poetic Idea: From the *fortissimo* statement of the opening motive to the *pianissimo* chords at the close, there is an atmosphere of mystery, and sometimes even of tragedy. The first Section of thirteen measures may be likened to the solemn processional of some ritualistic ceremony; but in contrast, the chromatic sequential phrases in the second Section (mm. 14-42) are almost frantic in their mad onward rush. The return of the solemn melody in the third Section is in a triumphant mood—a mood of grandeur and power, as if illustrating the inevitable survival of some great and mighty truth.

The *Coda* (m. 55 to the end) seems to suggest reflection and mystery, and to ask a question—a question that is left unanswered.

Method of Study: The fingering of the chords in the first Section should be carefully studied, for *legato* chord-connection and phrasing depend largely upon correct fingering. These chords are to be played with both hands exactly together, and are not to be arpeggiated. The only instances when it is necessary to "leap" in both hands from the melody note to the chords, are on the first beats of mm. 51 and 53.

Special attention is called to the unusual fingering in mm. 12 and 13; this is the only possible fingering for a correct interpretation of the "moaning" of the *legato* A \sharp -G \sharp in the right-hand part:



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In the second Section, mm. 14-42, the keys forming the broken chords must be covered by their proper fingers, in order to ensure correct hand-shape for each chord position.

Interpretation: The first descending motive of three *fortissimo* tones should be given very slowly, in fact, twice as slowly as what follows. These tones epitomize the mood of the whole composition.

It will be noticed that in the first thirteen measures a sombre melody is carried in the bass and played by both hands, while a second melody (in eighth-notes) floats above—sometimes ethereally, but later, as in mm. 6-7, becoming more intense. The chords in the first half of mm. 2-3 skip upward a minor third, but in m. 4 there is an upward interval of a fifth in the same kind of passage; to accentuate this larger leap, the G# in the right-hand part should receive an added impulse. (See also mm. 8-9.)

The chromatically altered D₄, on the second half of the third beat of mm. 2, 3, and 8, and on the second beat of m. 10, also requires a slight accent.

It is advisable to somewhat accelerate the tempo in mm. 6 and 10; this acceleration will be very effective if it is not exaggerated. The pedal indicated at m. 6 produces a slightly blurred harmonic background that is quite in keeping with the character of the Prelude.

The agitated second Section should work up to the tremendous climax beginning in the middle of m. 35, where the triplet chords are hammered out for seven and a half measures with all possible force.

The return of the solemn melody in m. 45, although in slower tempo, brings with it no diminution of force. The eighth-note melody, which at first "floated" above in three-voiced chords in each hand, is now stressed in four-voiced chords in each hand, while the double octaves state the majestic theme with the tone of a full orchestra. Almost the entire range of the keyboard is covered in four-staff notation.

Mm. 49 and 53 are slightly accelerated, as were mm. 6 and 10 in the first Section.

In the *Coda* (beginning at m. 55) the voice *next* the top voice of the chords in both right and left hands gives the harmonic color to these chords, which are so peculiarly Russian in character.

Mm. 60-61—the last faint reiteration of the unanswered question—must be given *pianissimo*.

Glossary

Sergei Rachmaninoff	pronounced	Ser-gay' Räch-män'-in-öff	
Novgorod	"	Nôv'-gô-rôt	
Zvierev	"	Své'-ër-ëf	
Siloti	"	Sî-lôt'-î	
Taneiev	"	Tän'-iä-ëf	
Arensky	"	A-rën'-skî	
<i>martellato</i>	"	mär-tëll-ä'-tô	(strongly marked)
<i>pesante</i>	"	pě-zän'-të	(impressively; heavily)

10 11 12 13

ppp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

Agitato $\text{♩} = 88-100$

14 *mf* 15 16 *cresc.*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

17 *dim.* 18 *mf* 19

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

20 21 *cresc.* 22

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

23

24 *dim.*

25 *cresc.*

26

27 *ff*

28

29

30 *dim.*

31

32

33

34 *cresc. ed accel.*

martellato

35 *fff* 36 37

38 39 40

41 42 43 *fff* 44 *fff*

rall.

Tempo primo

RIGHT HAND

45 *fff pesante* 46 *fff*

LEFT HAND

45 *fff pesante* 46 *fff*

R. H.

L. H.

47 48 49 *ffff*

47 48 49 *ffff*

R. H.

L. H.

50 51 52

50 51 52

R. H.

53 *dim.* 54 *dim.* 55 *mf*

L. H.

53 *dim.* 54 *dim.* 55 *mf*

ped. *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.*

R. H.

56 57 58 59 60 61 *ppp*

L. H.

56 57 58 59 60 61 *ppp*

ped. *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.* *ped.*

Recitation Questions on "Prélude in C Sharp Minor"

1. What is the nationality of Rachmaninoff? Where did he receive his musical education, and under what masters?
Ans.

2. In what form of musical activities has he established a reputation?
Ans.

3. What is the poetic idea of this composition?
Ans.

4. What are the technical problems involved in the first Section? What in the second Section?
Ans.

5. What is the significance of the first three notes? How should they be played?
Ans.

6. What effect is produced by holding the pedal in m. 6?
Ans.

7. How should the second Section be played?
Ans.

8. What is the difference between the accompanying chords in the first Section, and those at the return of the melody in m. 45?
Ans.

9. What should be the effect of the double-octave theme in this part?
Ans.

10. How is the necessary harmonic color given to the chords in the *Coda* (from m. 55)?
Ans.

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