

Rachmaninoff's "Mustard Seed"

A Meaning of Triadic Strikes, in the End of "Études-Tableaux Op. 39"

Sadakatsu Tsuchida
Shokei-gakuin University
Sendai, Japan
sadakatsu2002@shokei.ac.jp

Abstract—A well-known work by Rachmaninoff "Études-Tableaux", Op. 39, is rather difficult for both performing, understanding and interpreting. The tonal plan is of special interest here: eight études, picture pieces, are composed in minor, and the last one is the only to be composed in major. The clue to understanding the final major is concealed in the "triadic strike", a special repeated rhythmic formula. Its genre and image content is not limited with the march character: if we draw an analogy with other works by Rachmaninoff (among others, with his two great concerti), it will be clear that the semantics of the triadic formula is rather extensive, it signifies various image motives and states: "determination", "doom", "victory"... Besides, the rhythmic scheme under study definitely refers to religious images, i.e. to the Trinitarian formula. It is important that the leading rhythmical formula is three times stated in three registers as if the Word repeated three times - "For my power is made perfect in weakness". This Word bears the faith of the composer himself: it holds a great power in it, like a mustard seed in the Biblical parable.

Keywords—*dramaturgy; intonation structure; rhythmic formula; leit-rhythm; leit-intonation; symbol; genre*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Lord compared the Heaven to a small mustard seed bearing a great power. "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt 17:20). Like a seed, the acts of the apostles can bring rich crops and sow the Christian faith around the world. The hopes of real creators are similar: their essence is faith in a mustard seed.

It seems that Rachmaninoff's works, like those by Bach, for example, contain many faith evidences. Sergei Rachmaninoff himself pointed out, "Love, bitterness, grief or religious feelings - all these make up the content of my music". In the interview given to "The Etude" magazine he emphasized, "A composer's music should reflect the spirit of the country he was born in, his love, his faith and thoughts" [1].

The Christian thoughts are clear not only in the poetic texts of the vocal works and in the very concept of Rachmaninoff's music (from dark into light) but also in numerous transformations of the leitmotif significant for the composer. The latter can be found in "Six Moments Musicaux" and "24 Preludes".

The rhythmic formula called "triadic strike" is widely known as Rachmaninoff's favorite rhythm. But there have not been any serious researches analyzing the Master's works from the point of view of the main leit-rhythm. At the same time it seems to be impossible to understand the mystery of the Russian classic's music without understanding it, as well as it is impossible to ignore the famous "fate motif" studying L. van Beethoven's style.

Therefore, in this article we will try to find out and analyze the principles of using the above-mentioned rhythmic formula, a typical code of Rachmaninoff's music, taking his "Études-Tableaux" Op. 39 as an example. Let us point out that the "triadic strike" is a sharp rhythmic motif of three repeated sounds. But in a broad sense the described formula may include different sounds (for example: C, D, C / C, D, E / etc).

II. THE MYSTERY OF ÉTUDES-TABLEAUX, OP. 39

Sergei Rachmaninoff composed his "Études-Tableaux" (Op. 39) in the difficult revolutionary period (1916-1917). The composition was first performed by the author himself in Petrograd, on February 21, 1917. In the end of the year the 44-year-old Rachmaninoff left Russia with his whole family. He could not even imagine that it was not a temporary parting, but a farewell to his motherland.

So, Op. 39 became the Master's last composition created in his native country. That is why the most attractive thing is the mystery of the "pictures" included, in particular, in the specific tonal plan and the role of the finale in the dramaturgy of the whole.

A. The Tonal Plan

The cycle consists of nine parts: eight of them are composed in minor (F, A, F-sharp, B, E, A, C, D), the ninth one is in D major.

A similar tonal plan is not common in the history of music: as a rule, the keys alteration is in accordance with the contrast principle - major gives place to minor etc. But minor colours were perhaps closer to Rachmaninoff's inner feeling, and a similar tonal organization can be found in Six

¹ By the way, we should note that the "fate motif" appears not only in the Fifth Symphony but also in other well-known works. They are, for example, the piano sonatas ("Appassionata", "Tempest", "Waldstein"), the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Violin Concerto, the Cello Sonata Op. 69, Quartets Op. 74, Op. 95, etc.

Moments Musicaux, Op. 16; four plays are composed in minor, two final ones are in major.

But the proportions in *Études-Tableaux* are different from those in *Six Moments Musicaux*: the minor is twice as long, while the major sound is half as short. Hence another perception of the tonal concept of the cycle.

So, let us try to answer the question: what is the dramaturgic role of the tonal plan in the famous work by Rachmaninoff?

B. *The Role of the Finale in the Dramaturgy of the Whole*

The fast major finale after eight minor parts brings back a well-known Japanese saying. However, it does not refer to “Kyushi ni issyo” but to “hassi ni issyo” (A play on words in the Japanese saying. “Kyushi hi issyo” literally means “One life after nine deaths”, i.e. an unexpected rescue after a long hopeless state; while “hassi ni issyo” is “one life after eight deaths”, but of course nobody says this). What is the meaning? What is the idea of Rachmaninoff’s cycle finale?

To solve the problem, let us analyse the whole work.

C. *The Image Contents of Études-tableaux, Op. 39*

Max Harrison pointed out that a pianist playing the opus has to have both highest technical skill and the ability to express the slightest aspects of different emotional states. But in spite of all the difficulties, *Études-Tableaux* have been among the most popular with musicians for many years [2].

Fumiko Hitotsuyanagi observed in his works that Rachmaninoff’s *Études-Tableaux* are a quintessence of his piano style. Moreover, the researcher implied not only the technical but also the meaningful aspect: the pre-stormepoch in the Russian history is reflected in it; he called the etudes a masterpiece telling about the trends of time without any words [3].

In a word, the work is very difficult for interpreting, both technically and in the philosophic aspect.

Since each etude starts with the initial four sounds of the famous “Dies irae” medieval sequence, some musicologists call it “A variation on the concealed Dies irae theme”.

The titles mentioned below (in brackets) were specified by the composer himself for Ottorino Respighi who was working over orchestration of some *Études-Tableaux* (1930). Rachmaninoff writes, “Maestro, let me give you some explanations concerning the secrets of the author’s conception, which, to my mind, will help you better understand the character of the “Etudes” and find the necessary colours for the orchestration” [4].

Thus, the author lets the arranger into the program of his works. But it is necessary to bear in mind that the time was challenging: many people including those who had left Russia were inclined to express their thoughts allegorically. That is why Rachmaninoff’s headings can throw light on the imagery of his plays only implicitly. The real meaning is revealed only at the close overview of the intonation structure. Here we should emphasize that the most common

motifs are the above-mentioned triadic strike (the leit-rhythm) and the initial sounds of “Dies irae” sequence.

- As the foundation of thematic organization includes streams of passages boiling like roaring waves. Meaning the well-known etude by Chopin, pianists whisper that it is a kind of “revolutionary etude by Rachmaninoff”. The thematic passage in the right hand conceals the “Dies irae” motif (the second half of the first bar: E-flat, D, E-flat, B).
- In his letter to Respighi Rachmaninoff called it “The sea and the sea-gull”. The transparent tune based on “empty” fourth and fifth steps sounds like a recollection of something distant and impossible. In the left-hand part, the “Dies irae” motif is almost continuous.
- The thematic material of the first bars is based on short melodies. Their variation repetition and strong beat and relatively strong beat accentuation impart the character of a worried pathetic statement to the music. The next phrase developing from the top source includes the motifs of “Dies irae” sequence (bars 5-6 etc).
- The intonation structure of this “picture” brings to mind the images of old dances: in particular, the elements of modality and polyphonic techniques of work allow to speak about the style of previous times. Here the rhythmic formula called the “triadic strike” appears repeatedly. In the middle sound of the initial theme, the notes of the “Dies irae” sequence can be distinguished upon closer examination.
- Is perhaps one of the most penetrating melodies in the works of the Russian classic. In the culmination zone the initial theme (the middle layer of the piano texture, left-hand part) is counterpointed with a number of chord phrases, which are called “an outcry of Russian village women” by Moscow conservatoire professor Voskresensky. That “outcry” conceals the “Dies irae” motifs, too.
- The composer called it “Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf”. Indeed, the dreadful “roar” of the initial passages is contrasted with light passages in the high register, as if the Little Red Riding Hood running away from the wolf. A distant variant of “Dies irae” appears in the theme development (bar 9), it also sounds in the middle part (the outlines of the medieval sequence gradually emerge from the ascending movement of the theme - after Poco meno mosso, bars 4, 5, 6 etc.). Then, little by little, the triadic rhythmic formula entwines with the music structure (after the tempo indication of Presto). One might suppose that the outstanding opus does not tell us about the fairy-tale characters, but about quite realistic revolutionary images and themes deeply felt and taken to heart by the composer...

- Funeral march” is one of favourite pieces of my conservatoire professor V. K. Merzhanov². The meaningful centre of the cycle, <the Funeral> is not that of a single person but rather of the whole country and its people. In the very beginning of the piece the author gives quite a rare remark: Lugubre (literally, darkly). And then (the first 13 bars): pesante (ponderously, emphatically), lamentoso (plaintively). The composer himself noted in his letter to Respighi, “So, the main theme is a march. The other theme is a choir song. In the part beginning with sixteenth notes in c-moll and further in es-moll I imagine a sprinkling, never-ceasing and despairing drizzle. The development of that movement reaches its climax in c-moll, it shows the church bells. At last, the finale is the initial theme or the march” [4].
- Aren’t they the church bells depicted by the artist in his etude-tableau, which smote Russia in reality, in 1916-1917?
- The theme is finished with the echo of the lamentoso theme.
- <Funeral march> is the only part of the cycle where there is neither “Dies irae” motif nor “triadic strike” rhythmic formula³.
- [No. 8] Its mood is clear sorrow, as if long-awaited peace after a long mourning. The upper layer of the texture also contains the transformed “Dies irae” motif. Later (the “a tempo meno mosso” part), the main rhythmic formula of the triadic strike emerges again after the passage descending from the top source (bars 58, 60), then it is in the conjunct ascending movement (bars 75, 77 and 78). The leit-rhythm, connected with interrogative intonation, will sound three more times in the final bars and then it will dissolve in silence.
- [No. 9] Starts with a thundering bell. The thematism of that part features the rhythmic formula under study continuously (about 115 times on the whole; if we call the motif of repeated sounds the “triadic strike” - 80 times). It is important that the balance between “Dies irae” and the “triadic strike” changes conversely from the point of view of dramaturgy and the cycle concept⁴.

In the first part of *Études-Tableaux* the “Dies irae” sequence sounded in the upper register, while the triadic strike was in the lower one. We will emphasize that the

² The Moscow Conservatoire professor V. K. Merzhanov kept persuading the author, “Sadakatsu, you must play this masterpiece”, because many pianists avoid playing the seventh etude-tableau, Op. 39.

³ A variant of the triadic strike is a repeated C-flat, the lowered main tone adding the element of sharp dissonance (the left-hand part, bars 14-19).

⁴ We will point out that the upper part is the most audible (clearly distinct for human hearing) in the musical texture having any number of parts. That is why the melody is often written in the upper part (by the way, for this reason we instinctively raise our voices addressing a person in a crowd).

sequence motif was mostly present in the context of passages and was of flowing character (the right-hand part), while the triadic strike was pointedly sharp and accentuated in the left-hand part, and reached the lowest tones of the piece (see *rallentando* (slowing down), bars 45-77). Such balance of powers did not change until the second half of the eighth part of the cycle, where the triadic strike appeared in the high register.

In the final part, “Dies irae” does not sound in the high register at all: the sequence motif appears here in the middle (bar 7) and low layer of the piano texture (bar 70)⁵. At the same time, the rhythmic formula of the triadic strike prevails in the high register. The intonation correlated with it is often based on repeated tone points (like three strong strikes), or is of ascending character (bars 7-13).

Thus, in the context of dramaturgy of the whole, the triadic strike rhythmic formula replaces the motif of medieval sequence. The intonational form of the *Tableaux* reveals the key idea of the Russian classic: death retreats face to face with the Lord’s power. There the traditional symbol of death is the “Dies irae” (the “Day of wrath”) sequence⁶, the triadic “affirmative” motif being an embodiment of the Divine.

Next to the tempo indication, “Allegro moderato”, there is “Tempo di marcia”. The author’s program subtitle (from the letter to Respighi) is “The Oriental March” “Fig. 1”.



Fig. 1. Rachmaninoff, *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39; No. 9.

It seems that the world of the East is primarily the world opposing the West, while it is known that the East includes both Japan and China. But Harrison states that the finale of *Études-Tableaux* does not have a single feature resembling oriental marches even remotely⁷.

The final part of the etudes under study rather reminds of another famous and often performed work by Rachmaninoff, the *Prelude in G minor*, Op. 23, No. 5. The triadic rhythmic

⁵ A distant echo, or rather an allusion to the famous sequence can be found in bar 94: the figure is similar on the whole, but the key initial tone is absent, that is why the motif becomes airy and dissolves in the multidimensional texture of the final episode.

⁶ By the way, Rachmaninoff interpreted “Dies irae” not only as a sign of death, but also as a symbol of evil spirits. In particular, he pointed it out in his letter to Mikhail Fokin, a choreographer, when the latter conceived the ballet performance of “Symphonic Dances” (the letter of August 29, 1937. [4]).

⁷ See about it: [5].

formula is also found in its thematism very often. The initial indication is also repeated: "Alla marcia" (literally, as a march. "Fig. 2")



Fig. 2. Rachmaninoff, Prelude in G minor. Op. 23 - No. 5.

These illustrations show that the triadic rhythmic formula is often connected with the march source in the works by Rachmaninoff. But the range of significance is not exhausted with it (especially concerning Études-Tableaux).

Since the above mentioned rhythmic formula plays one of the most important roles in the dramaturgy of Rachmaninoff's works, it is necessary to consider the cases of its application.

III. "THE TRIADIC STRIKE" AS A LEIT-RHYTHM IN RACHMANINOFF'S WORKS

First of all, let us give an example of the well-known Second Piano Concerto: the rhythmic formula under study appears in the final bars 8 "Fig. 3"



Fig. 3. Rachmaninoff. Piano Concerto No. 2 (the piano part).

The same concerns Piano Concerto No. 3 "Fig. 4":



Fig. 4. Rachmaninoff. Piano concerto No. 3 (the piano part).

Thus, the two masterpieces by Rachmaninoff are finished with the triadic strike.

On the ground that the "final chord" is significant in the works of any genre and style (literature, music, or theatre performance...), we can make a conclusion that the above-mentioned rhythmic structure is of special importance in the works of the Russian classic. Moreover, the examples of the leit-rhythm can be found not only in the codas but also in other parts of the concerti. For example, in the Second Piano Concerto the triadic strike appears at the turning point of the dramatic development (see the third movement of the

concerto). Escalation, numerous repetitions and transition of the main intonation from one part to the other (the winds - solo piano) prepare the introduction of the first theme.

At that, the harmonic framework of the theme is borrowed from the "bell" introduction to the concerto "Fig. 5"



Fig. 5. Rachmaninoff. Piano Concerto No. 2 (introduction).

Repetition of the harmony is naturally determined: the famous bell theme is filled with triadic motifs as if from inside. Its rhythmic structure is broken whereby a new shade of genre is highlighted, a march character. Such a transformation of the theme in the dramaturgy of the whole is connected with reinforcement of active and powerful agent. In other words, the "triadic strike" is again within the traditional Rachmaninoff's "from dark to light" concept (it is important that the theme of the third part is primarily in the high register).

The leit-formula is frequent in other parts of the concerto. For example, in the end of the third part development.

The triadic strike penetrates the texture of the Third Piano Concerto (except perhaps its second movement). The main rhythmic formula can be found:

- In the first movement (the first theme: the augmented triadic strike is the foundation of the rhythmic framework)
- In the first movement (the development, Alla breve: see the triadic motif in the trumpets - the rhythmic formula as a symbol of doom)
- In the third movement (penetrates the thematism, except the second theme only)
- In the third movement (in the culmination zone: see number 70, number 74, the trumpets part)

Besides the two above-mentioned great concerti, the triadic strike is in other works by the Master. Moreover, it is often the main motif (the cases when other themes are the main ones besides the triadic strike, are mentioned in the brackets):

- Prelude in G minor, Op. 23 - 5: the main motif
- Prelude in A minor, Op. 32 - 8: the main motif
- Étude-tableau in E-flat major, Op. 33
- Étude-tableau in B minor, Op. 39 - 4: the main motif
- Symphony No. 2, Op. 27. The second movement: the main motif

⁸ The triadic rhythmic formula can be read a little differently because of accent signs (illustrations 3, 4). However, we will point out that the essence of the rhythmic formula is the movement from the weak beat to the strong one. That is why the initial strong beat is often added to it. The latter fact does not change the character of the triadic strike, but rather makes it stronger.

- Symphonic Dances, Op. 45. The first movement: the main motif. (The third movement).
- Cello Sonata, Op. 19 (The first movement, the first theme. The coda)
- Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op. 22 (variation 9, from variation 21 to the coda)
- Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42 (variation 18)

So, the “triadic strike” appears in the thematism of a number of Rachmaninoff’s works⁹. The semantics of the triadic formula is rather extensive, it symbolizes various image motifs and states: “determination”, “doom”, “victory”... The dramaturgic meaning of the *Études-tableaux* under study could be denoted with the comprehensive formula of the “victory march”. However, a similar definition seems quite one-dimensional, especially taking into consideration the development of the intonation form preceding the march finale where the minor key played the leading role.

The contradiction is not removed with the well-known maxim by Rachmaninoff concerning his “Isle of the Dead” (Op. 29), that death precedes the life (see about it: [6]). The motif of resurrection seems to be just one of the image motifs in the finale of *Études-tableaux*: there are some other meanings. To define them let us follow the development of the triadic rhythmic formula again, in more detail.

IV. THE SOURCES AND THE MEANING OF THE TRIADIC STRIKE

A. The Sources

The sound repeated three times is explicable as a rule. These are SOS signals or knocking at the door: the regular pattern of the signal itself prove its intentionality. The messages rendered with a triple strike can be different, for example, “call”, “control”, “alarm”, “proof”, “approval” etc. Besides, an accidental triple sound usually fades (dim.), while the dynamics of the “triadic strike” is often of crescendo orientation. It is both the call to attention and manifestation of a force controlling man’s conscience. In other words, the “triadic strike” is an instantly readable signal calling to action and waking determination. And the work literally penetrated with the triadic rhythmic formula is introduced with the author’s remark “Tempo di Marcia” (“In march tempo”).

A march is not just a walk; it is a procession of the people united with a common feeling and keeping step. This procession reveals both the power of the people and their unity. What events are usually marches associated with? It is evident that they are warfares. The “triadic strike”, as a rhythmic formula of a signaling type (fanfare), has been performed by a military band since ancient times, often by drums or trumpets which had to raise the fighting spirits of

⁹ Please note that we have cited only a few themes from the works by Rachmaninoff.

the marching people. That is why we can find examples of the “triadic strike” in marches mostly. They are “Wilhelm Tell” by Rossini, “Rakoszi March” by Berlioz, “Royal March of the Lion” from “The Carnival of the Animals” by Saint-Saëns, “Military March” by Schubert (Op. 51), “Pomp and Circumstance Marches” by Elgar (Op. 51) etc.

Apart from marches, the “triadic strike” can be found, for example, in the toccata theme of Klavier Concerto No. 1 by Bach (in D minor), in the triumphant third movement of the famous Beethoven’s Fifth Piano Concerto, in the Russian dance, *trepak*, from “The Nutcracker” by Tchaikovsky. The techniques of using the rhythmic formula under study are somewhat close to those used in the works by Rachmaninoff. But the “triadic strike” is the most common in the works by the Master. It is based on repetition of the same tone in the movement from the weak beat to the strong one in the polonaise rhythm “Fig. 6”.

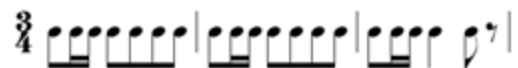


Fig. 6. Polonaise rhythm.

Polonaise is a Polish procession dance which had come from the popular environment into palaces and had been performed during grand ceremonies since the second half of the 16th century¹⁰. It is known that many composers wrote polonaises, starting from Beethoven and Schubert. But it was Chopin who had made the dance a symbol of heroic and chivalrous spirit of Poland [7]. In particular, among his polonaises there is “Military”, “Heroic” ones. The titles are certainly due to the character of music and its purpose - to sing the courage and to call to defending Motherland.

It seems that Rachmaninoff, as a maternal descendant of the general P. I. Butakov, understood the heroic character of Chopin’s pieces especially well. Besides, the Russian composer was deeply attracted to Chopin’s works on the whole, and had perceived much in the musical art through the intonation structure of the Polish Master’s compositions. It is especially interesting that both Chopin and Rachmaninoff preferred the cello after the piano being outstanding pianists. They both composed sonatas for the instrument (besides, both of them did not compose any violin sonatas¹¹).

The cello timbre is close to a male voice, that is why it is often called a male instrument. Perhaps there is a good reason that the “triadic strike” under study can be found in the cello works by both composers (examples: Chopin Introduction and Polonaise Brillante in C major for cello and piano, Op. 3. Rachmaninoff Cello and Piano Sonata, Op. 19 - one of the main motifs of the thematism in the first part, the coda of the third part).

¹⁰ Unlike the march, the polonaise has triple time signature. But their characters are somewhat similar: both are grand processions (in the wartime or at a palace ceremony) which were intended to raise patriotic spirits.

¹¹ They say that asked why he did not compose a violin sonata, Rachmaninoff answered, “But why should I? There is a cello, indeed!”

As we can see, the sources of the “triadic strike” can be considered from different sides. But the analyzed rhythmic formula is most often found in the march genre context.

B. The Spiritual Sources of the “Triadic Strike”. The Symbol of St. Trinity in Russian Christian Tradition and in Rachmaninoff’s Works

Considering the sources of the “triadic strike”, we cannot but touch upon the problem of Rachmaninoff’s Christian outlook. We should point out that as soon as the question is Russian culture, the famous icon, “The Trinity”, by Andrei Rublev is mentioned (the 15th century; see picture 1). It is the icon that is a symbol of the Russian Orthodox Christianity and Russian Christian art for foreigners.

“The Trinity” is the image of God revealed by the Christian doctrine. It is the symbol of the faith for the Russians to refer daily throughout the one-thousand year history of the Orthodox Christian Russia.

The dogmatics of the Orthodox faith had been in the flesh and blood of Serezha Rachmaninoff since his early childhood, and later could not but reflect in his works. The main thing is the belief in the Trinitarian but one God.

The Christian God, one but having three images, cannot be measured and comprehended with the measures of this world. At the same time, the postulate of trinity (“everything comes down to trinity”) is the key one in the Christian belief. And the idea of sobornost’, spiritual unity of people in the Christian faith, originates from the theory of God’s trinity. It seems that it is impossible to understand Rachmaninoff’s works without apprehension of the concept.

We will emphasize that since its very beginning Russia had not perceived the social doctrines born and tested in Europe (whether individualism or totalitarianism). The ideal of Russia praising harmony and universal unity is as gentle as the curve of the icon, particularly close to the soul as Rachmaninoff’s melody, and as magnificent as his harmony. By the way, this feeling is close to the perception of the Japanese people especially respecting collectivity. The only difference is perhaps in the presence or absence of belief in the very same Christ’s mustard seed.

The icon composition centre is the shape of circle uniting three winged pilgrims. This famous picture is copied endlessly; it can be seen in Orthodox temples and homes all over the world. It is a perfect pictorial image of harmony, love and truth.

Sergei Rachmaninoff was undoubtedly among the Russians praying in front of the icon. Like all Russians, he deeply felt the mystery and sanctity of the icon, and the Christian symbol of trinity together with it. (It is also important that the ancient male monastery founded by the Venerable Sergius of Radonezh (Rachmaninoff’s saint patron) is called the Trinity Lavra of St Sergius).

That is why the triadic rhythmic formula under study has deep religious roots in the works by Rachmaninoff: the triplicity is felt as a single whole, and is an allusion to the Primordial Trinitarianism.

The sound itself is a force flying through the air. That is why we say that the “triadic strike” expresses not only “determination”, “doom”, “victory” but also the Primordial Trinitarianism. The latter is reflected in the intonation, in other words it becomes the sound icon, a musical token of the Lord’s power.

“The triadic strike” is clearly and distinctly articulated in Rachmaninoff’s works. It carries a special light - the Creator’s word in praise of God. It is the composer’s confession and credo, in other words, his mustard seed draped in the form of musical intonation.

“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Mt 17:20). According to Apostolic Fathers’ writings, this “mountain” means any life obstacles and difficulties¹². The Lord also says about the mustard seed, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.” (Mt, 13:31-32).

The Lord does not demand the quantity, but the quality of the faith. The quality is the endless and the most difficult task of all the Christians, which was also understood by the deeply believing Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Among the famous statements revealing the Master’s credo, we can find the following, “A composer’s music should reflect the spirit of the country where he was born, his love, his faith and thoughts” [8]. It appears that the author of *Études-tableaux* was able to capture the main thing in three main sounds. His leit-intonation, like the Beethoven’s “motif of fate” which has become the token of unequalled human wisdom, is the symbol of imperishable human faith. That is why these two rhythmic motifs have penetrated into the souls of millions, giving them delight, power and tenderness (Examples: Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano concerto, etc)¹³.

V. THE SYMBOLIC EXPRESSION OF TRINITY IN RACHMANINOFF’S MUSIC

The symbolic expression of trinity in Rachmaninoff’s music can be found in particular in his “24 Preludes” (see Sadakatsu Tsuchida. *Russia and Rachmaninoff through the eyes of a Japanese musician: “Nauchnaya biblioteka” Publishing House*. M., 2016. Chapter 6/IV). In “24 Preludes”, the motif of “three notes” and the image connected with it are considerably transformed by changing the expressive device itself: the

¹² Interpreting the Scripture words the Orthodox Church must always turn to the Apostolic Fathers’ writings, resting upon the following word of the Apostle, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (Peter 2, 1:20-21).

¹³ One of the reasons why these motifs influence a person is that the rhythm is a primary dimension of music. And it is known that the original property is easier to remember, and therefore, its influence is stronger.

question is not the rhythm, but the melody and harmony. The triadic motif is emphasized in the culmination of the finale (Op. 32 - 13)¹⁴.

A similar method is used in the finale culmination of *Études-tableaux*, Op. 39, where the “triadic strike” is carried out in each part of the piano texture (with chords, in the parts of both hands). Moreover, “a triple trinity” can be seen here, because the “triadic strike” appears three times in three registers in the ascending movement.

Actually, there are many cases in the finale when the “triadic strike” is repeated three times. But the rhythmic formula has been repeated maximum: “3x3” until the culmination, and there has not been such a range as in the culmination zone comprising three registers: “3x3x3”.

The permanent time signature of the march finale of the *Études* is 4/4, which poorly corresponds with the triadic formula. But in the process of the form development the bars appear which can be figuratively called “incomplete” and “overflowing”, i.e. mixing the double and triple time. For example, such synthesis can be often seen on the average. But besides the culmination zone, the “triple time” bars cannot be found anywhere.

Thus, in the finale the “triadic strike” is similar to the bell announcing the Good News. In the culmination it is found three times in three registers - this is the final statement of the Creator confirming the faith in God’s power.

VI. CONCLUSION

Rachmaninoff composed a work spirited with a real faith in the period difficult for the country, connected in particular with abandoning the church. Eight minor parts are replaced with a light “bell-like” major in the final part of the cycle. As though the preceding sufferings are rejected in a moment in the name of confirming the only significant truth. The longer is the rain, the more blessed is the sun; the longer is the tunnel, the more dazzling is the outside light.

Rachmaninoff’s cycle can be called a musical expression of the Lord’s words, “For my power is made perfect in weakness” (Cor. 2, 12:9).

The opening remark of *Tempo di Marcia* also allows us to say that this is the march of the “triadic strike”. In other words, the sacred march is the sacred action¹⁵, swallowed tears and courage preserved no matter what.

¹⁴ In this piece (Op. 32 - 13), “the main theme making up a trinity of three notes becomes a three-part Trinity and is associated with a new dimension - the New Land” [9].

¹⁵ By the way, the Orthodox Church does not consider the military force an evil incarnate: it accepts self-defense. John the Baptist does not deny the militant force (Luke, 3:14). See “Three Conversations” by Soloviev. In the Western music, the warrior’s spirit and his force are depicted symbolically, as a “spiritual power”. For example: Liszt *Études d’exécution transcendant* “Wilde Jagd”. A traditional translation as “The Wild Hunt” is a mistake. The dictionary says, “Devils’ Troops” [10] or “The Troops of Dead Spirits”. And the Orthodox faith is a march from glory to glory, i. e. the life of the faith is an eternal march by itself.

It is no coincidence that Rachmaninoff chose the following Biblical lines as the epigraph to his First Symphony, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). Having given everything to the God, the creator suffers hoping for the supreme truth, for the forthcoming light of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the real knight living according to the law of Noblesse oblige¹⁶.

Therefore, the mystery of *Études-tableaux* is solved, their tonal dramaturgy becomes explicable.

The composer was feeling bitter about his separation from Russia. This can be confirmed by the fact that within ten years he had not written a single note after his *Études-tableaux*.

Opus 39 is Rachmaninoff’s present to his Motherland, a “mustard seed” that had been left by the great musician in his native land to sprout with full flower of Faith and Truth. The author’s title of “Oriental March” is perhaps well-considered, because according to a well-known concept, salvation of Russia is going to come from the East. In other words, the composer prophesied the native land’s resurrection after the revolutionary times, and announced the forthcoming Kingdom of Heaven.

Man is prone to blame the circumstances for his misfortunes. Indeed, the life metamorphoses can sometimes “press him down” and take his last forces away. However, the composer depicted light images in his *Études-tableaux* (though sometimes with dark colours “Lugubre” being extremely desperate): he understood that the real faith could overcome any circumstances. “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Mt 17, 20), this is the main idea of the famous Rachmaninoff’s work 17.

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¹⁶ The word for word translation is “The noble origin (gentlemanhood) obliges”. The figurative meaning is “The reputation obliges”, “the status obliges”. By the way, the latter one correlates with Harrison’s statement, “a performer has to follow the diversity of the emotion only”.

¹⁷ It seems that the attempted analysis of *Études-tableaux* can be interesting not only for musicologists or Rachmaninoff’s fans, but also for pianists. Very often, their authorial interpretations ignore the significance of the main leit-motifs, the “triadic strike” and *Dies irae*. At the same time, it is impossible to bring home the content of the famous Rachmaninoff’s work without differentiating the texture elements and proper highlighting the main leit-motifs. For example, in the *Étude-tableau* Op. 39 - 9 it is important to emphasize the triadic rhythmic formula after bar 75 by releasing the pedal before the second beat. Apparently, another work should be devoted to researching these and other problems of interpreting Rachmaninoff’s *Études-tableaux*.

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